JOHN E. MALMSTAD

The Mystery of Iniquity: Kuzmin's "Temnye ulitsy rozhdaiut temnye mysli"

There can be little doubt that the name Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin (1872–1936) would be near the top of any list of important twentieth-century Russian writers neglected both in and outside their homeland. Even though he was regarded as an original and major poet by writers as diverse as Briusov, Blok, Gumilev, Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva, and Pasternak, Kuzmin still awaits rehabilitation in the Soviet Union and rediscovery in the West. There are some signs of a partial rehabilitation in Soviet Russia today,[1] but the chances for a full rehabilitation—a major publication of his works—are slight. Obstacles to a Western rediscovery exist as well. Clichés die hard and perhaps no harder than in literary history. Kuzmin himself must share part of the blame for the major one. By writing the article "On Beautiful Clarity" he unwittingly gave critics and literary historians the tag for comments on his verse.[2] That the article is about prose and that Kuzmin chose not to republish it in his one volume of collected essays is ignored. If we add to this the characterization of the poet as an overly refined epicurean, a writer of "slightly [!] perverse sensuality" whose "piquant charm" delighted in stylization and Biedermeier effects, and the inevitable praise for the *Alexandrian Songs* (1906)—the accepted critical image of the poet is complete.[3] Kuzmin, then,

1. Elena Ermilova called for study of Kuzmin in a short article in *Literaturnaia Gruziia* (no. 7, 1971), which concentrated on Kuzmin's poetry of the 1920s. Tsvetaeva's memoir of Kuzmin, "Nezdeshnii vecher," appeared for the first time in the Soviet Union in the same issue. Gennadii Shmakov, a young Leningrad critic and translator and the only authority on Kuzmin in the Soviet Union, has done much to bring about a renewed interest in Kuzmin. His most recent article, "Blok i Kuzmin (Novye materialy)," in *Blokovskii sbornik*, no. 2 (Tartu, 1972), is an excellent introduction to the poet's life and works.

2. "O prekrasnoi iasnosti: Zametki o proze," *Apollon*, 1910, no. 4, pp. 5–10.

3. The quotations are from Avrahm Yarmolinsky's introduction to *An Anthology of Russian Verse, 1812–1960* (New York, 1962), p. xxxviii. The sections on Kuzmin in Mirsky and in Renato Poggioli, *The Poets of Russia, 1890–1930* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), are representative of the same views. For a detailed discussion of Kuzmin's

This is an expanded and revised version of the paper delivered at the Northeastern Slavic Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies on May 7, 1971, in Montreal. Simon Karlinsky, Robert Maguire, and Vladimir Markov made many valuable suggestions for revision, but I must express special thanks to Gennadii Shmakov, without whose help it would never have been written.

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is meant to be the poet of "beautiful clarity." Therefore, with perverse critical logic, any work which cannot be placed under this rubric is either ignored altogether, declared "untypical," or dismissed as an unsuccessful attempt at imitating alien poetic styles.

Although the characterization outlined above is hardly accurate even for the poet's early verse, more distressing certainly is that nearly everything written by Kuzmin after 1918 must be included in the "untypical" category. This explains the virtual critical boycott of his four final collections of verse and many poems of his early period as well, such as the third section ("Vozhatyi") of his first book of verse, *Seti* (1908). Were critics to end a summary of Gogol's works with a discussion of his "Dikanka" stories or disregard anything written by Pushkin after 1830 (which Pushkin's contemporaries in fact did), the absurdity of such an approach would be obvious. But critics in the West have performed an analogous service for Kuzmin for almost fifty years.[4] Although it may be premature to speak of a revival of Kuzmin, one hopes it is not too late to call for it, or, at the very least, for a more accurate picture of his poetry.

Almost any of Kuzmin's poems written in the 1920s could serve to destroy the cliché of "beautiful clarity." I have chosen one from the poet's final volume of verse,[5] not only because it is unusually difficult even for Kuzmin's late poetry, but because an examination of its background, the subject of this paper, reveals in a particularly vivid way the problems faced by future critics of Kuzmin's verse. This final collection is little known in the West (when the editors of volume 5 of *Vozdushnye puti* published one of its cycles, "Panorama s vynoskami," the cycle in which the poem under discussion appears, they did so under the mistaken impression they were printing it for the first time) and is a bibliographical rarity in Western libraries. The text of the poem is therefore printed on the following page in its entirety.[6]

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critical reputation in Russia and the West see Vladimir Markov's article on Kuzmin's poetry in volume 3 of *The Collected Poetry of M. A. Kuzmin* (in Russian), ed. J. E. Malmstad and Vladimir Markov (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1974).

4. A. Korneev, the author of the entry on Kuzmin in the *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia,* vol. 3, p. 875, has a better record than his Western counterparts. After outlining the standard clichés, he adds that Kuzmin's late works were more and more characterized by "caricature, the grotesque, devices of so-called *ostranenie*" and "modernist tendencies close to surrealism."

5. *Forel' razbivaet lëd: Stikhi, 1925–1928* (Leningrad, 1929). Three thousand copies were published.

6. I have not used the text published in *Forel' razbivaet lëd* but that printed in 1927 in the Leningrad literary miscellany *Koster*. In *Koster* the text matches exactly an autograph of the poem I examined in Leningrad. The *Forel'* version contains one clear misprint (*persianka* instead of *persiianka* in line 2) and two probable errors: *stalkivaiut* instead of *stalkivaet* in line 11; *nelomlennaia* instead of *ne lomannaia* in line 33. The title also differs in *Forel'*: "Temnye ulitsy rozhdaiut temnye chuvstva."

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ТЕМНЫЕ УЛИЦЫ РОЖДАЮТ ТЕМНЫЕ МЫСЛИ

Не так, не так рождается любовь! 1
Вошла стареющая персиянка,
Держа в руках поддельный документ, —
И пронеслось в обычном кабинете
Восточным клектом сладостное: — месть! — 5
А как неумолим твой легкий шаг,
О, кавалер умученных Жизелей!
Остановился у портьер . . . стоишь . . .
Трещит камин, затопленный весною.
Дыханье с той и с этой стороны 10
Непримиримо сталкивает искры . . .
Имагинация замкнула круг
И бешено спласталась в голове.
Уносится тайком чужой портфель,
Подносится отравленная роза, 15
И пузырьками булькает со дна
Возмездие тяжелым водолазом.
Следят за тактом мертвые глаза
И сумочку волною не качает . . .
Уйди, уйди, не проливалась кровь, 20
А та безумица давно далеко!
Не говор — шопот, эхо — не шаги . . .
Любовь сиротка, кто тебя калечил?
Кто выпивает кровь фарфорных лиц?
Благословение или заклятье 25
Исходит волнами от тонких рук?
Над девичьей постелью в изголовьи
Висит таинственный знакомый знак,
А колдовские сухожилья Винчи
Люциферически возносят тело, 30
И снова падают природой косной.
Где ты, весенняя, сквозная роща?
Где ты не ломанная дико бровь?
Скорей бежать из этих улиц темных:
Поверь, не там рождается любовь! 35

(1926)

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DARK STREETS BEGET DARK THOUGHTS

No, this is not the way love is born! 1
An aging Persian woman entered,
Holding in her hand a forged document,—
And something sweet — vengeance! — reverberated
In an ordinary office like an Oriental [eagle's] shriek. 5
And how implacable is your light step
Oh, partner of Giselles tormented to death!
You stopped at the portière . . . and there you stand . . .
The fireplace, lit in this spring [weather], crackles.
Breathing from this and that side 10
Causes sparks to clash irreconcilably.
"Imaginatio" has closed the circle
And in a frenzy has been flattened in the mind.
Someone else's briefcase is secretly sped away,
A poisoned rose is offered, 15
And retribution like a heavy [deep-sea] diver
Sends bubbles up from the bottom.
Dead eyes follow the [conductor's] beat
And the little purse does not bob on the waves . . .
Please go, please go, no blood was yet shed, 20
And that madwoman is already far away!
Not conversation — whispers, an echo — not footsteps . . .
Love, the [poor] orphan, who has been maiming you?
Who drains the blood from porcelain faces?
Is it a blessing or an incantation 25
That emanates in waves from [those] thin arms?
A mysterious familiar sign hangs
At the head of the maiden's bed,
And magic-working sinews of Da Vinci
Sweep the body upward Lucifericallv 30
And let [it] fall again like inert nature.
Where are you, vernal grove quite open to the eye?
Where is the eyebrow not yet wildly arched?
Flee in haste from these dark streets:
Believe me, that is not where love is born![7] 35

7. This translation aims at conveying nothing more than as literal a meaning as possible. It can hardly, for example, convey the oddity in the Russian context of words like *imaginatsiia* and *liutsifericheski*. Andrei Bely's use of "Liutsifericheskim putem" in the poem "Mag" in *Urna* (Moscow, 1909) is the only other use of this word in the form of an adjective or adverb I am aware of in Russian poetry.

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It is a strange, even weird, yet powerful poem, reminiscent of a highly compressed drama. It is also clearly a kind of monologue (the several examples of direct address) or reminiscence: at the beginning of the poem the poet tries to describe (not without irony) some terrible event of the past to which he reacts with horror, slipping into a kind of delirium, only finally to recoil in disgust. This quality of nightmarish fantasy recalls the German Expressionist film. In fact, there is something almost cinematic about the poem itself.

One can imagine entering a theater while a silent film is being shown. There are no direct sounds in the poem (unless it be in line 22), only the exclamations of the "narrator," the metaphor of line 5, and the implied sound of the verb *bul'kat'* of line 16, which is a visual image as well. Even the implied subject of the sentence in lines 4 and 5 is omitted, and instead, much like a film title, there is only the word "vengeance" (*mest'*). One enters to find the film in process (in black and white—no colors are mentioned, but the only possible one would be white, in the image "porcelain faces" in line 24), with only a title, the opening line of the poem, on the screen. We are then immediately plunged into an action about which we know nothing. Who, for example, is the "aging Persian woman" who plays such a sinister role in the poem? What follows is a swift, almost jerky series of actions like the seemingly disconnected frames of a motion picture, spliced together with little attention to chronology but conveying a consistent tonality or mood of horror.

The frequent use of three dots to punctuate these abrupt shifts is also reminiscent of a cinematic device which was much used in early silent movies, as the narrator of Nabokov's *Despair* sarcastically points out: "In the meantime . . . (the inviting gesture of dots, dots, dots). Of old, this dodge was the darling of the Kinematograph, *alias* Cinematograph, *alias* Moving Pictures. You saw the hero doing this or that, and in the meantime . . . Dots—and the action switched to the country. In the meantime . . . A new paragraph, please."[8] There is even the illusion of a "frame shot" of two heads facing each other at the fireplace. But the emphasis is primarily on movement (in a poem of thirty-five lines there are, not counting participial forms, twenty-six verbs, the majority of which stress movement), interrupted by warnings and rhetorical questions. If the first nineteen lines of the poem appear to tell some kind of story, distorted and disconnected though it is, the remaining lines are a kind of reverie or nightmare in the mind of the narrator, a series of "quick cuts" in which harshly contrasting pictures appear with great rapidity. The poem then concludes with a final warning to the audience. Nothing in the poem is explained, nor is it the poet's desire or task to give an explanation of the action. As a result, there is something puzzling, even mysterious, about

8. Vladimir Nabokov, *Despair* (New York, 1966), p. 54.

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the poem (why, for example, the ballet references?) ; and this impression is not dispelled by re-reading.

Perhaps the comparison of the poem with the German Expressionist film might seem fanciful or "impressionistic." But after first reading the poem and being struck by its cinematic qualities I learned of Kuzmin's collaboration on the production of several Expressionist dramas in Leningrad, and also of his intense interest in the German films of the 1920s. There are several references to such films or reminiscences of them in Kuzmin's verse of this period, including several in his final collection of poems.[9] The question of the poem's connection with Expressionism (or, because of the dreamlike quality, with Surrealism, which was yet another of Kuzmin's interests in this period), lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, the general question of Kuzmin's relation to Expressionism deserves careful study in the future.

The poem itself is structured around a series of sharp juxtapositions of vocabulary and imagery and abrupt changes of time and place. There is even one use of the odd second-person direct address in line 8. Little or no attention is paid to the transitions of good "storytelling" or the rules of formal logic. The effect is sinister and deliberately grotesque, particularly because of the unexplained and seemingly demonic intrusions into reality, which are central to the concept of the grotesque as it is now understood.

It is clear that the poem is a kind of narrative (Kuzmin's thinking, in all periods of his art, always seems close to a world of narratives). Something has happened in the poem, apparently a murder, which has shocked the poet, but we are unsure how, why, by whom, or even to whom. When we finish the poem we are left with no meaning other than a sense of horror and desolation at what for the poet seems to be the mystery of iniquity, a kind of violation of life which is hardly understandable and therefore something from which one must flee in outrage. We have a strong impression of several basic emotions or passions starkly expressed. Their formal association, not any obvious theme or subject, states the poem's meaning and creates the emotional potential to which we respond. If the "poem must resist the intelligence almost successfully" (Wallace Stevens), this one does so with great success indeed. An examination of the cycle in which the poem appears offers some hints at a more specific meaning.[10] Kuzmin refers in the cycle and in the collection

9. An earlier work entitled *Mary's Tuesday* (*Vtornik Meri*) of 1921, a puppet show in verse "for live or wooden puppets" (*dlia kukol zhivykh ili dereviannykh*) is also extremely cinematic. E. F. Gollerbakh noted this in his review of the play in *Kniga i revoliutsiia* (no. 12, 1921, p. 42). He called it a "cinematographic film" (*kinematograficheskaia fil'ma*).

10. The motif of escape or flight which appears in the poem occurs in several other poems of the cycle, which concludes with a voyage. Another theme in the cycle is loneliness and the poet's ability to conquer it, possibly by means of his poetic fancy. This

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as a whole both to incidents in his own life and to friends or acquaintances. Although frequently camouflaged, these incidents offer important clues. The problem is, of course, to recognize them. In the case of this poem, the story behind it is as fascinating and mysterious as the poem itself.

On Wednesday, June 18, 1924, the following brief notice appeared on page 4 of the morning edition of the Leningrad daily, *Krasnaia gazeta*, under the title "The Death of a Dancer" ("Gibel' artistki"):

> On Monday, June 16, around five P.M. a motor boat belonging to the second labor collective had an accident. In the boat were engineer Klement, A. Iazykov, E. Goldshtein, I. Rodionov, and Lidiia Ivanova, a dancer of the Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet [the former Mariinsky]. All the passengers, who had set off from the Anichkin Bridge, were going downriver when they noticed that the motor had become seriously overheated. They began trying to cool it off, and, engrossed in this task, they failed to notice that the passenger ship *Chaika*, bound for Kronstadt, was moving toward them. The ship collided with the boat and knocked all its passengers into the water. A tugboat of the State Baltic Steamship Line arrived on the scene and managed to save three of the passengers (Iazykov, Goldshtein, and Rodionov), but engineer Klement and the dancer Lidiia Ivanova were lost. The bodies of the victims have not yet been found.[11]

In the evening edition of the same newspaper Kuzmin published an article about the young dancer's death. Three issues of the journal *Zhizn' iskusstva* contained lengthy pieces about Ivanova, including one by its eminent ballet critic Akim Volynsky (pseudonym of Akim Flekser, 1863–1926), an early champion of Russian "modernism" well known before the Revolution for his literary and art criticism.[12] It was he who had knelt before Ivanova in admiration after one performance. It is clear that although very young and at the

complements the theme of the past, which is connected with the motif of lost friends and the memory of them, a frequent theme of Kuzmin's verse in the twenties. These themes are most frequent in the cycle's five titled poems. The theme of love predominates in the three poems of the cycle entitled "Vynoski." Therefore, the use of juxtaposition underlies the cycle as a whole as well as individual poems.

11. The famous Anichkov Bridge which crosses the Fontanka Canal at Nevsky Prospekt was colloquially known in Leningrad as the "Anichkin Bridge." Another account of the accident (in *Zhizn' iskusstva*, no. 26, 1924) mentions the Anichkov Bridge and identifies Iazykov as an official of the former Mikhailovsky Theater, Goldshtein as the administrator of the Studio of the "Akdrama," Rodionov as a sailor, and Klement as an "instructor," not an engineer.

12. No. 26 (Ivanova's portrait was on the cover) contained the article by Volynsky, an obituary by Gvozdev, and a paragraph describing Ivanova's death. No. 27 contained an article entitled "Lidochka Ivanova" by Nik. Nikitin and "Pamiati Lidii Ivanovoi" by "G. M-v." No. 28 featured various brief articles on the incident under the heading "K gibeli L. Ivanovoi."

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beginning of her career, Ivanova was regarded by the leading ballet authorities and enthusiasts of Leningrad as one of the most remarkable and talented recent products of a school which had produced the finest dancers in the world. That her death made a tremendous impact is obvious not only from the large number of articles in the press but from the general tone of shock, bewilderment, and extreme pathos in them. This reaction was somehow unexpected in a city which had suffered the loss of so many major writers and cultural figures, from both death and emigration, since 1917.

Kuzmin's article, entitled "Two Elements" ("Dve stikhii"), is one of his least successful journalistic efforts.[13] It shows clear signs of being written in haste. Kuzmin is obviously very moved by Ivanova's death, but is unable to control the rhetoric which becomes at once so sentimental and so elevated that it degenerates into a kind of *esteticheskii pafos* (the reverse of the more common Russian *grazhdanskii pafos*, but no less unpleasant). Kuzmin was struck by the irony of a dancer whose "element" was the air, dying in the grasp of an "element" so hostile to it—water. He quotes an inscription which Ivanova had written on a photograph of herself: "I would like to disappear, fading away in the air like the sounds of my beloved Tchaikovsky." That she got her wish, but in a way she could never have expected, was particularly terrible to Kuzmin. The "child of the ballet," who was such a perfect representation of an "organic" tie to nature, seemed fated to die in harmony with the elements, but the "harmony" of her "disappearance in a natural element" remained both "incomprehensible and mysterious," and the central notion throughout the article is expressed in the words *taina* and *tainstvenno*. It is the mysterious quality of this strange intersection of two lines, two elements, which puzzles Kuzmin.

On a more prosaic level, however, there is certainly something odd about the journalistic accounts of Ivanova's death. Kuzmin does not directly allude to this, although his brief article does contain hints that the circumstances of her death were strange beyond the paradox which he elaborates at length. There are obvious questions raised even by the bare account in *Krasnaia gazeta* (the translation is clearer than the original, which is extremely vague and elliptical). Friends with considerable sailing experience have told me that collisions with larger boats represent a very real hazard for beginning sailors, who tend to underestimate the speed of larger craft. Yet how could all five people in the small boat have been so involved in working on the motor that none noticed the approach of what was after all a large passenger ship? It is difficult certainly to imagine Ivanova being engrossed in such a task. Furthermore, the weather that day was perfect. One wonders also why some of the

13. *Krasnaia gazeta* (vechernii vypusk), June 18, 1924, no. 135, p. 3. All quotations, unless otherwise identified, are from this article.

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men were saved through the quick aid of the rescuers and why the only woman perished. She might have been struck by the boat itself, and thus instantly drowned, but no account makes mention of this. Moreover, she was an excellent swimmer. The most surprising aspect of all the accounts is precisely the lack of detail about the accident. There are even some blatant contradictions: the version given in *Zhizn' iskusstva* (no. 26) states that Rodionov was lost too. Confusion and panic at the time of the accident could partly explain this, but given the enormous importance attached to the event, it does seem odd that much more care was not taken to establish the precise causes and circumstances. That such questions puzzled others is clear from the fact that the "vodnoe otdelenie" of the GPU was called in to conduct an investigation and the "delo o gibeli L. Ivanovoi," as it was called in the press, was expected to be turned over to a special commission and then to a prosecutor. Nikitin's article on the accident, for example, definitely blames Ivanova's fellow passengers for her death and implies that their conduct was suspicious and should be investigated. But if such a thorough investigation occurred, nothing was reported about it, and after the articles in *Zhizn' iskusstva* were published the issue disappeared from the press. Even the body itself was never found—which is certainly peculiar—and it is clear from the accounts in the press that no serious effort was made to find it. One may object with some justice that such speculation about Ivanova's death is purely idle and that even if prompted by the lack of details, it can be largely "explained" by the lack of concrete information surrounding many unexpected events. Nevertheless, an air of mystery lingers. We have here a strange footnote in the history of the Russian ballet.

Some time ago in Leningrad I had a conversation about Kuzmin's verse with a distinguished scholar and critic who has long admired him. He remarked on the difficulty of understanding many of the late poems because the biographical events which inform them have been intentionally disguised by the poet. As an example he asked my opinion of what he considered one of Kuzmin's finest late poems, the one under discussion here. Having replied that I indeed considered it remarkable but baffling, he persisted in his "interrogation." Was I aware of its actual background? The obvious answer was no. His reply that the death of Lidiia Ivanova was the background astonished me. Though the ballet references and the death by drowning were now clear enough, little else seemed to fit, given the accounts of the death published in the press. He then related a story so startling that even in the context of the terrible events of the twenties it seemed incredible. Because it was a matter in which the secret police were involved, it was certainly not a topic to raise in possible discussions with anyone who had known Ivanova before her death and who remained either in or out of the Soviet ballet world.

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Fortunately there was someone in the West who knew Ivanova very well, was familiar with the circumstances of her death, and was eager to discuss them. George Balanchine, ballet master and cofounder of the New York City Ballet, was a classmate and friend of Ivanova's at the Imperial School of Theater and Ballet. He partnered her often in the brief ballets and concert numbers which he choreographed in the early twenties in Leningrad, and he had chosen her as one of four dancers to accompany him on a tour of Western Europe in the summer of 1924. The tiny company, known as the Soviet State Dancers, was to include Balanchine himself as well as Nicholas Efimov, Tamara Geva, Alexandra Danilova, and Ivanova. The group, along with three singers and a conductor, had planned a short tour during the summer vacation period of the Mariinsky. They learned of Ivanova's death only the day before their exit visas arrived. Balanchine well remembers his shock on hearing the news, as well as the apprehension of the group that their visas would not be granted. Too many Soviet cultural figures had left the country on temporary visas never to return, and the government was increasingly wary of granting such visas. The group did, however, leave in late June 1924, only to be summarily called back a few weeks later. The conductor and singers returned, but the dancers decided to remain in the West.

Balanchine was thus in a position to know the circumstances of Ivanova's death as well as the many rumors which circulated following it. In fact, he talked briefly with one of the other passengers in the boat and witnessed the search for her body by divers, which he remembers as having been very perfunctory. Although his account of her death differs in several details from that of my Leningrad informant who had heard of it in ballet circles, both accounts agree on the most important details: Ivanova had been murdered, and the murderer was a member of the GPU or had connections with it. Like many young actors, actresses, and dancers, Ivanova was frequently invited to attend elegant parties and receptions after performances. These receptions were organized by certain members of the GPU who liked to surround themselves with talented performers from the former capital, especially if they were both young and attractive. (This account of the "weakness" of the first generation of young Chekist and GPU members for the arts and "high life" has also recently been described in the first volume of the memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelshtam.) Despite the policies of the NEP, food of any kind was still scarce in Leningrad. Balanchine himself recalls that the sight of plain rolls and butter sitting unguarded on the tables of the ship that took his dancers from Leningrad to Stettin was so beautiful that they almost wept. Ballerinas, despite their ethereal presence on the stage, expend enormous energy, and the lavish displays of food on the tables of the GPU receptions were a temptation few could resist. Balanchine was often invited to these

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affairs, but soon stopped attending. Not only did he find the company too sleek, contented, and above all dull, but he frankly feared them and believed that regular attendance might be dangerous, because in the drunken finales to many of the evenings, things were said which no one outside the GPU could safely afford to hear.

Ivanova, although warned by friends not to attend too many of the evenings, was a frequent guest, and even numbered several members of the GPU among her more ardent admirers. Balanchine firmly believes, as do several other members of his staff who were in Russia at the time, that when Ivanova applied for her visa with other members of the company she in effect signed her death warrant. She was not only familiar with the luxurious way of life of some members of the GPU, a style hardly in keeping with the carefully cultivated image of selfless ascetics tirelessly working for the proletariat, but she might well have known other confidential matters. There was no reason to believe she would discuss such matters in the West, but had she done so it would certainly have proved embarrassing to certain persons in the Leningrad GPU apparatus. Balanchine's account of her subsequent murder differs in no way from that of my Leningrad informant. She was invited on an outing on the Neva by someone connected with the GPU. The boat was then deliberately steered into the larger passenger ship, and in the confusion following the collision the young woman was somehow killed. There was the one perfunctory search for the body, but further efforts to locate it were forbidden, despite the pleas of Ivanova's father, and the body was never found. Balanchine remembers that many persons knew of the murder and that there were many rumors about the accident, but Ivanova's friends realized that nothing could be done. The GPU was hardly an organization against which public charges could be brought. Moreover, it was conducting the investigation of her death. Balanchine and his friends could do nothing. Once they reached their decision to remain in the West, they decided that with families still in Russia it would be dangerous to raise the issue in the émigré press.[14]

The main features of Balanchine's account have recently been confirmed in the memoirs of his first wife, Tamara Geva. She writes of Ivanova's association with "questionable characters" and quotes Nicholas Efimov as saying that Ivanova was "close to all the Communist biggies. . . . She's in the know about everything. I sometimes think she knows too much. It isn't healthy."[15] The night of the accident Balanchine, Efimov, Geva, Danilova, and Ivanova were to perform at a Leningrad park. When Ivanova did not appear they grew apprehensive and decided to find her. They were stopped by a man

14. In Bernard Taper's biography, *Balanchine* (New York, 1963), the incident is referred to as a "mysterious accident" (p. 72).

15. Tamara Geva, *Split Seconds* (New York, 1972), p. 312.

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who came to tell them about the accident. He warned them not to ask any questions and to stay out of the whole business. The man was obviously from the secret police.

The young dancers were not, however, deterred. They went to the harbor and found the captain of the ship that had run into the boat carrying Ivanova. They questioned the extremely agitated man. Evasive and suspicious at first, he blurted out the story under their persistent questioning, relating that the accident was not his fault, that the small boat had been steered deliberately at his ship despite repeated warnings, and that as soon as the boat was struck someone had let ropes down for three of the men. As for Ivanova:

> "She fell into the water and was sucked under the boat into the propellers."
>
> Suddenly, his eyes glimpsed something beyond us and deadened into a stare. His tone changed. . . . He pushed us away and slammed the door.[16]

When they left, they noticed that the mysterious man who had brought them the news of Ivanova's death was outside watching them intently. Geva adds:

> The mystery of Ivanova's death was never unraveled. Every attempt to investigate it was promptly squelched, with a warning to lay off the subject. Although it was officially ruled an accident, remembering the ropes ready for the three men, reason insisted that it was a premeditated crime. It was whispered that she had been in possession of some secret that represented a threat to the three men. Yet why was it necessary to simulate an accident in such a dangerous manner? One was forced to assume that the three men were afraid of being caught at it—afraid of someone higher up.[17]

The differences between Geva's account and those of Balanchine and the newspapers (three men in the boat instead of four, for example) may be explained by the fact that she heard of it only from the ship's captain, or perhaps it was a slip of her (or his) memory.

The version told by my Leningrad informant differs in one respect, although it is an important one that touches on the motivation for the crime. In

16. Ibid., p. 319.

17. Ibid., p. 320. Geva's account and those of Balanchine and my Leningrad informant establish the probability that Ivanova was murdered. But they remain *theories* and secondhand accounts. Even though faked "accidents" were a speciality of the secret police (see Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, New York, 1968), reasons for skepticism remain, chief among them the great risk for the murderer himself which such an accident represented. Ultimately, of course, objections are of no importance in analyzing the poem: What is important is that rumors circulated about the death and that Kuzmin believed and used them in his poem.

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Balanchine's and Geva's accounts the murder is a simple liquidation; in the other, the murder is the result of a personal vendetta in which the famous ballerina Olga Spesivtseva is pictured as the principal organizing force. It was she, this version insists, who conceived an unnatural hatred and fear of the young Ivanova as a potential rival and therefore plotted with her lover, a member of the GPU or a man with connections in it, to remove the young dancer. She encouraged her lover to pay court to Ivanova in order to lure her on the fatal boating trip to murder her. It is a fascinating if repellent story, but one which Balanchine and other Russian members of his staff at the New York City Ballet—quite properly, I believe—reject as utterly fantastic. It is significant surely that they never heard even the slightest rumor of this kind. Of course, it could be objected that they left Russia almost immediately after the incident. But the ballet world is a comparatively small one, and it seems improbable that they would have heard nothing at all about something that extraordinary. Furthermore, Balanchine maintains that the idea that Spesivtseva could regard Ivanova as a rival is highly unlikely. Spesivtseva was at that time at the height of her career, and Pavlova and Karsavina were her only possible rivals. Ivanova, although much admired and with a very promising career before her, had hardly begun. If there was any rivalry at all, it was between Ivanova and her classmate Danilova.

How then can the story be explained? It is not, I think, very difficult. The world of the ballet is often presented or thought of (sometimes with good reason) as a web of intrigues, alive with plots, counterplots, machinations, and above all rumors about the supposed existence of such plots. Balanchine himself helped foster such a view in his ballet "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" (an integral part of the musical comedy *On Your Toes*), in which a *premier danseur* plots the murder of a potential younger rival. Furthermore, a certain Boris Kaplun (brother of the publisher Kaplun-Sumsky) was rumored at the time to be Spesivtseva's lover, and he was one of Zinoviev's closest associates. This must have seemed to offer further damning "evidence" in the eyes of those willing to believe the story. And Spesivtseva's departure for Europe in the spring of 1924 must have seemed equally suspicious to some.

Kuzmin was an avid ballet enthusiast. One of his close relatives had been connected with both the theater and the ballet, a fact he alludes to in the poem "My Ancestors" ("predannye s detstva iskusstvu tantsev").[18] He wrote several ballets himself and had many friends in the ballet world. Balanchine remembers the great interest that Kuzmin showed in the dances he created for the stage production of Ernst Toller's Expressionist classic, *Hinkemann* (known in English as *Brokenbrow*, in Russian as *Eugen Neschastnyi*), for

18. *Seti: Pervaia kniga stikhov* (Moscow, 1908), p. 4.

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which Kuzmin wrote the incidental music in a style Balanchine recalls as reminiscent of the music of Kurt Weill. Kuzmin would certainly have heard any rumors about Ivanova's death and may well have believed them. That the story of Spesivtseva's involvement is very likely untrue is beside the point. What is significant is that Kuzmin used it when writing the poem. In fact, his poem is a virtual retelling of the story. We may ask if Kuzmin did not elaborate on the rumors to create his own version. My Leningrad informant specifically denied this. Yet Kuzmin had written the following in his article on Ivanova:

> But no matter what explanations might come up, as long as man's reason has not become obscured, or his heart hardened, he will not be able to reconcile himself with this accident of chance. If one is not to be a fatalist . . . there is no way one can push aside the questions: what for, why, for what reason? Receiving no answer from the mute, cloudless sky *dark thought* [*temnaia mysl'*, my italics] itself, getting hopelessly lost in monstrous chimeras, creates answers. But what do we know about monsters, about chimeras, and about life itself, which is pregnant with more monsters than is our imagination.

Whether Kuzmin invented the story we shall certainly never know. As he wrote of Ivanova's death, there is no answer: "The mystery remains a mystery" ("Taine—taina").

Why the story attracted Kuzmin is another matter. Equally horrible crimes had occurred since 1917 about which he had written nothing, yet he chose to write about this one. There are several important reasons. In the article on Ivanova's death he gave the following description of the ballet:

> The realm of the classical ballet is an altogether special one, comparable to no other, rather abstract and as it were out of time. It is a land where feelings, passions, sufferings, and death are so infused with light, so transfigured, that there is no room for naturalistic horrors, frenzied mirth, the orgiastic which shatters all forms and boundaries. . . . There are no words, because what kind of words could correspond to this unearthly action. Both joy and pain, love and death glide past, like shadows off clouds, like reflected rays of light from hidden mirrors.[19]

19. Kuzmin's view of the ballet is remarkably similar to that of W. H. Auden, another admirer of the dance, who wrote in an article entitled "Ballet's Present Eden": "Ballet time . . . is a continuous present; every experience which depends on historical time lies outside its capacities. It cannot express memory, the recollection of that which is absent, for either the recollected body is on stage and immediate or it is off and non-existent. . . . Since suffering, as human beings understand it, depends on memory and anticipation which are alien to the medium, it may be said that nobody suffers in ballet: if they did, their movement would become unbalanced and ugly. . . . In other words, all real ballets take place in Eden, in that world of pure being without becoming and the suffering implied by becoming" (souvenir program for New York City Ballet production of *The Nutcracker*, 1954, unpaginated).

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For Kuzmin, Ivanova was not only totally a creature of this special world ("Ditia baleta") but because of her youth (she was not yet twenty) also a virtual child and the embodiment of innocence, a "deva-rebenok, nevesta." Certainly she was not meant to know "passions, jealousy, envy, vengeance, and irreparable outbursts" ("nepopravimye vspyshki"). These were for others, and yet she was trapped by just such feelings and destroyed by them. She is contrasted with other ballerinas of whom he writes: "One may be a great dancer with a first-class technique but violate the law of ballet with a tragic or pathological turn." Neither "tragedy nor sickliness, vain coquettishness, or unbridled passions" were characteristic of Ivanova's dancing. But they were for others, and thus they destroyed her. Although Kuzmin specifically says he will mention no names, only one famous ballerina would have occurred to readers at that time, for Spesivtseva, despite her very great artistry (and there is no doubt that she was one of the greatest dancers of this century), was sometimes criticized in the early 1920s for an excessive, even "pathological" (the term was used by her critics), emotionalism in her otherwise perfect dancing, especially in *Giselle*. (On the other hand, her admirers liked exactly this quality in her dancing of the heroine in *Giselle*.)

Ivanova's murder was therefore in part a grotesque violation of the perfect art form she so naturally and innocently embodied, a conception which helps explain the poem's weird blend of prosaic reality and the magic world of the ballet—into both of which intrude extreme emotions and frightful images. As Kuzmin wrote: "Memory even with a harrowing exertion is unable to connect a summer sky, a summer day, the summer water on that fatal day with the stage of the former Mariinsky Theater, with the music, scenery, auditorium, applause, and the leaps of Ivanova. With her world, the pure world of ballet, without any fatal stigma, without catastrophes, pathologies, and any ominous secrets except the secret of art. . . ." More important, however, and most terrible surely for Kuzmin, it was love, or rather feigned love, which was used to ensnare the victim. In Kuzmin's world, love is man's most perfect means of entry into an ideal world, a world both purely spiritual and physical. To Kuzmin it is love that binds man both to nature and to God, and it is art which is perhaps the most perfect expression of this bond.

In his poetry and prose Kuzmin frequently expresses this movement to God and perfection in the realized metaphor of a journey. From the beginning, we find the image of wings; and as the poetry develops, this journey is more and more commonly, and quite logically, seen as a movement upward (for example, in the collection *Paraboly*, images of flight—*vzlët, polët, letuchii*—appear insistently, and the image of wings occurs nine times). This notion is seen in poems on the themes of love, art, and the soul, very often in a combina-

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tion of all three themes. The first poem that Kuzmin wrote specifically about the ballet ("Balet" in *Glinianye golubki*) connects it with love (the image of Cupid), and in the little-known long poem "The Birth of Eros" ("Rozhdenie Erosa") the newly born god leaps ecstatically upward.[20] At his birth the world, formerly entangled in chaos, joyously orders itself into the dance of the planets ("khorovodit khod planet") and in Kuzmin's subsequent verse the zodiac, an emblem of an ordered and joyful world for him, is a favorite image and the dance the perfect earthly expression of this universal harmony, "an arena of measure."[21]

Kuzmin develops similar ideas and images in the magnificent long poem "The Stairway" ("Lesenka"), in which the *khorovod* upward and the dances of Fokine, as well as the perfection of the Platonic ideas, are represented as being moved forward and inspired by love. Everything advances toward this sacred goal:

> Мы путники: движенье — обет наш,
> Мы — дети Божьи: творчество — обет наш,
> Движенье и творчество — жизнь,
> Она же Любовь зовется.
> Движенье только вверх:
> Мы — мужчины, альпинисты и танцоры.
> Воздвиженье![22]

Therefore, this crime corrupts both art and love. It is hardly surprising that the fate of the young girl who for Kuzmin personified the art of the ballet, whose very nature it was to know the "giddy joy of leaving the ground in a springing leap" and yet whose murder was achieved by a betrayal and perversion of the emotion she ideally represented, should have moved Kuzmin to write one of his most powerfully dramatic lyrics. Two years after the event the horror of the crime was still vivid in his mind, because it violated what was central to his sense of life. The rhetoric he was unable to control in the article on her death—the sense of bafflement which creates both mental and linguistic confusion—is masterfully handled in the poem itself, and elevates the emotion to an expression of a more universal mystery.

The poem makes no outright expression of this emotion, but instead compresses it radically and masks the major actors under disguises. It opens with a bald statement of the theme. Spesivtseva enters in line 2 as an "aging Persian woman." This may appear strange, but it is easily explained if one looks at photographs of her taken at the time. Makeup emphasizes her fine high

20. *Nezdeshnie vechera: Stikhi, 1914–1920* (St. Petersburg, 1921), pp. 125–29.

21. The poem "O, zavtrak, chok!," no. 3 of the cycle "Severnyi veer" in *Forel' razbivaet lëd*, p. 44.

22. *Paraboly: Stikhotvoreniia, 1921–1922* (St. Petersburg and Berlin, 1923), p. 108.

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cheekbones and very large eyes; these features led critics and admirers to comment on the unusual "Eastern look" of her face. In 1924 Spesivtseva was only twenty-nine and would dance for many years more, but in the ballet world this marks the approach of "old age" and is the time for a career to peak. The adjective "aging" is therefore justified.[23] She enters holding a forged document, a denunciation perhaps, the first sinister note, the first hint of both evil and falseness, and one which suggested the Cheka or GPU to several readers to whom I showed the poem. The image, although never specifically explained, furnishes part of the motivation for the plot which follows. This eerie scene, which takes place in a perfectly "ordinary office," culminates in the metaphor of the "Oriental shriek," the cry for vengeance of the hysterical woman which is presented as a kind of elemental force by the use of the verb *proneslos'*. The metaphor suggests the fierce birds of prey used by Eastern peoples in hunting. By extension the metaphor also indicates that the prey will be both helpless and innocent, the victim of a desire for "sweet revenge," which is the motive for so many of the blood feuds associated with the peoples of the Near East and the Caucasus.

Lines 6 and 7 introduce the fellow conspirator. These dense lines suggest many things, among them the light but implacable step of a man stalking a prey which is unaware of any murderous intent. The image of the "cavalier" is not only the first ballet reference (the ballerina's partner and, of course, the "partner" in the crime) but alludes both to the fact that the man had associations with dancers and to the rumor that Spesivtseva encouraged her admirer to pay court to Ivanova. The reference to *Giselle*, the classic ballet treatment of the theme of betrayed love, is clear (the first line of the poem could well serve as the subtitle of *Giselle*). The plural is deliberately strange (the use of a plural where a singular is expected is a favorite device in Kuzmin's late verse), but appropriate. Both ballerinas had danced in the ballet, Ivanova as one of the Wilis, Spesivtseva in the title role, one of her most famous, and the cavalier in this case has paid court to one and will pay court to the other. The plural may also be used, because it is meant to stand for both the ballet's heroine and the Wilis, all "tormented" young women, "martyrs" of false love, who have committed suicide (some by drowning) when betrayed in love and are thus condemned to exhaust themselves forever in a dance of seduction and love which becomes in the end a dance of death. The conspirators now consider how to remove the rival as they circle around the fireplace. The burning fireplace reference "dates" the inception of the plot and suggests

23. Taper reports that Balanchine refused to take the twenty-seven-year-old Danilova into a company he was forming because she was "too old" (*Balanchine*, p. 144). She was, in fact, just reaching her peak as a dancer and would enjoy deserved fame for more than twenty years after that, but she was too old for the company Balanchine had in mind.

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further the luxury of the office which is heated even though it is spring. The sparks of the fire also parallel the evil thoughts blazing in the imaginations of the plotters, a Satanic image made even more sinister by the use of the strange and ugly sounding *imaginatsiia,* a word not found in any Russian dictionary, but essential here because the expected *voobrazhenie* has too many positive overtones for this situation.[24]

Lines 14 and 15 present two of the plans the conspirators conceive. They may accuse the victim of theft, perhaps of a briefcase containing secret documents, a common enough trap, or offer her a poisoned rose, a bizarre touch, but a likely reference to killing the ballerina as she dances the famous "Rose Adagio" in act one of *Sleeping Beauty,* in which the four suitors of Princess Aurora each present her with a single rose (poisoned flowers are also used to dispose of a rival in Scribe and Legouvé's play, *Adrienne Lecouvreur,* but there the women are rivals in love and the heroine is an actress). In lines 16 and 17 the poem moves, with no preparation and with a significant time lapse, from the realm of the plotters' fantasy to the results of their crime, which is never directly seen. The sudden time switch contributes to the sense of strangeness, as does the extremely intricate metaphor of line 17, which was undoubtedly suggested to Kuzmin by the actual divers who looked for the body as well as by the breath of the victim rising to the surface as she herself sank below it.

The fact of the death is stated in the next line (18). It is clear that the victim is a dancer, as the dead eyes follow the conductor's beat. The image of the handbag is the first mention of the victim being a woman, and may possibly refer as well to the fact that the body was never found. Since Ivanova was drowned, no blood, of course, was spilled in her murder (line 20). And line 21 is a deliberate reference to Spesivtseva, who had gone to Europe before the crime was committed. The reference to her as a madwoman is also, unfortunately, accurate. She suffered from ill health as early as 1920, was also rumored to be mentally unstable, and was well known for her strange behavior. Thus the expression "madwoman" harmonizes with the poem's picture of the woman as one virtually possessed (*besheno* in line 13, *diko* in line 33) and was prophetic as well. During the early thirties Spesivtseva became increasingly incapable of performing because of obvious mental illness, which grew more serious until finally, like Nijinsky before her, it ended her career and confined her to a mental institution.

But now (line 22) there are only rumors of how the young girl died, only echoes of her dancing. Lines 23 and 24 move, again with no transition, to an explanation of the poem's first line and, in part, to an explanation of its title.

24. Kuzmin may also be using the term in a specifically occult or alchemical sense. See notes to this poem in volume 3 of *The Collected Poetry of M. A. Kuzmin* (in Russian), cited in note 3.

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In this frightful place the beautiful pale faces of young girls are drained of life by killers and maniacs. These creatures, like vampires, ensnare their victims through a simulation of real love, which is thus both mutilated and like an orphan in this terrible place. The next two lines, perhaps the most haunting in the entire poem, return to the crime itself. They question whether the young girl curses or blesses her murderers and the world as she now lies in the water, her delicate fingers stretched upward, rocked back and forth by the waves. The lines also evoke the fluttering arms of the dancing Wilis, under the magic spell of their dread queen, and Giselle herself, who succeeds in protecting her lover from their vengeance and blesses him before returning to her grave.

Lines 27 to 31 are the most difficult to relate to any "realia." A "mysterious familiar sign" certainly suggests a crucifix, and lines 29 to 31 seem at first glance to indicate the sinister forces of death, imaged in terms of the anatomical drawings of Leonardo, which carry the body away in a movement suggesting the up and down pulse of the waves, to decay in an inert nature. Such a reading, however, very likely involves a misreading of the strange adverb *Liutsifericheski.* Western readers, with the Miltonic conception of the Prince of Darkness firmly, even hypnotically, in mind, tend always to think of Lucifer in purely infernal terms. Yet Lucifer is not only the fallen angel but (and it is a much more ancient identification) also the morning star and identifiable with Venus. In this guise the image thus suggests magic, enchantment, and mystery more than evil, and the adjective *koldovskie* is therefore proper. Kuzmin, who frequently used alchemical and occult imagery in his poetry in the 1920s, probably had this rather than the Christian meaning in mind, for in alchemy Lucifer is often symbolic of magical transformation and enchantment. He is also considered essential for art in many occult writings. Understood in this way lines 29 and 30 may be a further reference to the ballet in the framework of Kuzmin's special conception of it as a world of magic and love, itself in Kuzmin the greatest transformational power. The sinewy arms of the male dancer, recalling the drawings of Da Vinci, effortlessly raise the ballerina into the air in that magic detachment from the earth and the power of gravity known only to the dancer, and thus for Kuzmin perform an act symbolic of the transformational powers of art.[25] This magic moment cannot, however, be prolonged indefinitely; art cannot save the innocent girl from the evil plotters,

25. Again compare Auden's (see note 19) similar view of the ballet: "No character in a ballet can grow or change in the way that a character in a novel changes; he can only undergo *instantaneous transformations* from one kind of being to another. . . . In its dazzling display of physical energy, on the other hand, the ballet expresses, as no other medium can, the joy of being alive. *Death is omnipresent as a force of gravity over which the dancers triumph; everything at rest is either a thing,* or it is asleep, enchanted or dead" (italics my own).

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and she must fall back to the earth, to death and decay in a "kosnaia priroda." Like the up and down movement of the waves which rock her dead body, she must ultimately return to the bottom of the sea to decay (a pattern which may relate specifically to the famous Da Vinci drawing of a man circumscribed in a circle with arms simultaneously raised up and at rest at his sides).[26] With this in mind the image of a crucifix hanging above the bed is clearer as well: only Christ could undergo the torments of death yet escape physical decay and remain outside the laws of rising and falling, life and death which the dancer in a moment of art can approximate, as gravity itself seems conquered. Such a reading of these five lines (27 to 31) also fits the poem into an overall theme of the cycle in which it appears. For it is a cycle dominated by the theme of magic and transformation as represented by the power of art or memory, an opposition between Spinoza's "natura naturans et natura naturata" (the title of the cycle's first poem, which helps explain the meaning of "kosnaia priroda"), the active creative process and the passive product of that process, God and the world, essence and incident. Despite episodes like the one presented in this poem, the poet's faith in this magic power of art and memory continues: the poem that comes after our text in the cycle is entitled "Dobrye chuvstva pobezhdaiut vremia i prostranstvo."

The concluding lines call for a return to natural, uncorrupted emotions in the image of a grove in early spring ("skvoznaia" because there are as yet no leaves on the branches), a season traditionally associated with the birth of love and in this sense much used by Kuzmin in his verse, and in the image of the face of an innocent girl at peace, her features undisturbed by any savage or unnatural passion. Such emotions are impossible in this corrupt place, where love itself is impossible. One can only flee from these "dark" (that is, sinister) and, metaphorically, incomprehensible streets.

Such a discussion raises certain questions. The obscurity of modern poetry is much commented on. The reasons for it, however, are as varied as the poets themselves. In part it is motivated by the very nature of poetic language, especially as used by contemporary poets. There are other important reasons. Censorship in this case is insufficient to explain the distortion and camouflage which are so extensive and which turn the poem into a virtual code.[27] It is

26. In occult terms the Da Vinci drawing represents man the microcosm. Interestingly enough, the same Volynsky who was Petrograd's leading ballet critic had written a well-known book on Da Vinci in 1899 (reprinted in 1909). This association may have suggested the image to Kuzmin. Moreover, Kuzmin was certainly aware of the early Russian Symbolist view of Da Vinci as some kind of magician. For example, Merezhkovsky in his poem "Leonardo Da Vinci" (first published in 1895 in *Severnyi vestnik*, a journal edited by Volynsky) calls the artist a *kudesnik*, and as late as 1916 Balmont wrote of the artist, "I mag — o kazhdoi taine bytiia / Sheptal, ee kachaia" (in the poem "Leonardo Da Vinci," *Sonety solntsa, mëda i luny*, Moscow, 1917).

27. In *Forel' razbivaet lëd* one poem was, in fact, removed by the censor, undoubtedly

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rather a question of method, a process of deliberate "distortion" of reality which is not only central to this poem but is the very essence of the intricate poetic method developed by Kuzmin to express his increasingly complex view of the world. Because of the multiple inward shifts, much of Kuzmin's poetry of the twenties must remain partly inaccessible. Like most modern art it belongs to a one-man culture which, as it became more and more integrated, became more estranged from shared ideas.

Such obscurity, such "indirect communication," is no caprice of the poet. But, we may ask, is the obscurity in any way an "earned" one? In this case surely the method and the resulting difficulty are essential to the poem. It is the *mystery* of iniquity to which the poet reacts—the mystery of innocence and love violated which he remembers and which he attempts to understand. It induces questions which are posed and dramatized in the poem, but the answers to them remain unknowable. They are, ultimately, obscure, and it is this sense which the poet wants to communicate to his reader and to which he asks the reader to react. As such, the poem is a perfect illustration of Wallace Stevens's brilliant maxim: "The poem is the cry of its occasion, part of the *res* itself and not about it." Therefore, some things remain "mysterious" in the text. This has necessitated the hypothetical nature of much of the discussion of the poem's relation to the background, be it fact or legend, which informs it. Certainly Spesivtseva's appearance in the poem as an "aging Persian woman" can only be partially made clearer by reference to the "realia" behind the text. The portrait is a deliberate caricature which in turn supplies further images.

If the background, essential to the critic or literary historian trying to decipher the text and place it in a total context, can explain the literal meaning of many lines, it cannot explain their poetry. The poem's power and ability to move a reader depends precisely on how open he is to the suggestive images which make it up. If a reader limits his reading of the poem to the background, he will cheat only himself, not the poem. The background is not, however, unimportant or unhelpful in illuminating the text. Furthermore, analysis of the poem on the basis of the background points not only to the artistic method underlying the text but also to the larger question of how "reality" becomes art. The information, no doubt, remains an historical footnote, but such footnotes may prove one of the most fruitful and fascinating areas for future investigation of the rich poetic legacy of Kuzmin's late verse.

because of its open reference to the Kronstadt uprising. It appears only as a row of dots. The text can be found in the notes to the cycle "Severnyi veer" in volume 3 of *The Collected Poetry of M. A. Kuzmin* (in Russian).

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