It is significant that Losev uses both terms, but in different ways. He sees myth as a personal form (lichnost'naia forma) as the title of a chapter in his Dialectic of Myth suggests, but sticks to the term samost' when he discusses Classical aesthetics or Western literature on Plotinian. Poets of the Silver Age also differentiated between them: Symbolists were more interested in the connection between the word and lik lichnost', whereas the more secular Futurists were preoccupied with samovitoe slovo (the word devoid of meaning and practical usefulness).

This terminological difficulty by no means destroys Seifrid's argument; it rather supports his major idea that the word and self are interconnected. It merely shows that the synthesis of Russian religious thought with Western philosophy was a process hampered not only by external (political) circumstances, but also by internal causes - the resistance of the Russian language to serve this project in a terminologically consistent way.

As a whole, The Word Made Self is a magnificent book. The broad spectrum of disciplines it covers recommends it not only to Slavists specializing in Russian poetry or the culture of the Silver Age, but to a large group of scholars outside Russian studies: historians, historians of literature and culture, as well as scholars of philosophy, theory of literature, and religious studies. In it, they will find detailed and invaluable information on the period and its major representatives. The book thus accomplishes two aims at once: it brings Russian contributions to philology, usually considered arcane and exotic, out of their native language into the reach of the world at large, and it demonstrates once again how complexly intertwined are Russian secular and spiritual categories.

Ksana Blank


Erotic Utopia is a fascinating, well-written book that contributes much to the research on the many connections among philosophy, popular thought, medicine, life, and art in turn-of-the-century Russia. Writing in a lively and engaging style, Olga Matich examines the crucial role played by questions of gender, the body, and sexuality in the lives and works of some of the era’s most influential thinkers.

Tolstoy's use of physical details is well known; Matich links his use of synecdoche to many scenes of vivisection and dissection in his works and argues that his focus on the severing of body parts, into which he draws the reader, shows his “growing desire to eradicate sexual desire” (p. 30). She then examines “The Kreutzer Sonata” in the context of Tolstoy’s later advocacy of total celibacy, even within marriage.

Vladimir Solov'ev also promoted complete celibacy, but as a means of stopping history and bringing about the transfiguration of the body. His utopian vision, Matich shows, was informed by a “strange brew” (p. 61) of sources such as Darwin, occult and parapsychological works, and the New Testament. She examines the many paradoxes of Solov'ev's stance, including the vast distance between the myth of Solov'ev the as-
etic monk and the reality of Solov’ev the womanizer and author of obscene verse. Like Tolstoy, Solov’ev places a great emphasis on parts, and fetishism is important for an understanding of his thought.

Solov’ev exerted a tremendous influence on Aleksandr Blok, to whom Matich dedicates two chapters. In the first she examines Blok and those who gathered around him at his Shakhmatovo estate: Sergei Solov’ev, Andrei Belyi, and Liubov’ Dmitrievna Mendeleeva. She delves into Blok’s union with Liubov’ Dmitrievna, comparing the Symbolist view of Blok’s “ideal marriage” (p. 97) to the reality of Blok’s venereal disease and fears about his place at the end of a degenerate blood line, fears reflected in the theme of vampirism in Blok’s poetry (he read Stoker’s Dracula in 1908). The younger Symbolists saw Liubov’ Dmitrievna as the incarnation of the Eternal Feminine, but Matich deconstructs this myth and reveals her to be a sensual woman unhappy with the role thrust upon her. As with Tolstoy and Solov’ev, for Blok and his circle the distance between ideal and physical reality becomes a major source of frustration.

Matich’s second chapter on Blok treats his myth of history; she sees his interest in history as a means of escape from biology as destiny and from his fear of degeneration. She examines in particular the figures of Cleopatra and Salome (with special attention to John the Baptist’s severed head) and their importance for Blok. Matich’s ability to dig deeply and find relevant intertextual echoes especially shines in this section, as she discovers a wide range of West European and Russian literary and art works that influenced Blok in his creation of the myths of these femmes fatales.

Zinaida Gippius perhaps best embodies Symbolist zhiznetvorchestvo, the erasing of the boundaries between life and art. Her enigmatic gender and unconventional love affairs were based on Solov’ev’s erotic celibacy, while her marriage to Dmitrii Merezhkovskii had many parallels with that of Vera Pavlova and Lopukhov from Chernyshevskii’s What is to be Done? (one of Matich’s many intriguing findings is that many of the tropes from the generation of the 1860’s are reworked by the Symbolists). As an alternative to the traditional procreative family, Gippius and Merezhkovskii posited the celibate triple union, whose erotic energy would be channeled into the transfiguration of life. Matich documents their turbulent efforts to establish such a ménage à trois with important figures of the era and draws parallels with similar efforts undertaken by Viacheslav Ivanov and his wife Lidiia Zinov’eva-Annibal, a reminder of the significance of zhiznetvorchestvo for Russian modernism. Gippius played a key role in the Religious-Philosophical Meetings that took place from 1901-1903, the subject of the next chapter, at which representatives of the clergy and intelligentsia debated aspects of the body, sex, celibacy, and marriage. Matich shows how many aspects of contemporary decadent discourse made their way into the positions of both sides.

In stark contrast to all the thinkers discussed previously, Vasilii Rozanov was the epoch’s “keeper of the procreative flame,” close perhaps to the Tolstoy of War and Peace (p. 238). In People of the Moonlight Rozanov describes Christianity as self-castrating and leading to homosexuality; to its denial of life he favorably compares Judaism as life-affirming. Matich explores Rozanov’s case study of a Hungarian surgeon who fantasized that he turned into a woman and concludes that Rozanov exhibits a male “vagina envy” (p. 253). In The Jews’ Olfactory and Tactile Relationship to Blood, published not long after People of the Moonlight, Rozanov replaces his earlier interest