

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

ProQuest Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600

UMI<sup>®</sup>



Personality and the Awareness of God in  
Zinaida Gippius's Theory of Androgyny

by Liam Robinson,  
Department of Russian and Slavic Studies,  
McGill University, Montreal.

March 2001

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and  
Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
degree of Master of Arts.

Copyright © 2001 by Liam Robinson



**National Library  
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

**The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.**

**The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.**

**L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.**

**L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.**

0-612-70316-9

**Canada**

## Personality and the Awareness of God in Zinaida Gippius's Theory of Androgyny

Zinaida Gippius's literary works are striking for the development of the theme of androgyny.

Chapter One examines the major Russian Symbolist intellectuals in their treatment of androgyny, which was animated by a desire to transfigure the world. Gippius's treatment of androgyny was at odds with the prevailing theory because it was not based on the defeminization of humanity.

Chapter Two addresses Gippius's reconstruction of Symbolist androgyny theory and explains the rejection of gender-based motivation in her metaphysical system by its orientation toward personality and an awareness of God.

Chapter Three shows how she used her poetry and prose to advance her belief that a perfect, androgynous love could reunite humanity with God. While Gippius's prose describes the search for this type of love, her poetry deals with it as a lyric experience.

The religious motivations of Gippius's redefinition of Symbolist androgyny indicate the need to re-evaluate the place of Orthodox Christianity in the evolution of Russian Symbolism.

## La Personnalité et la conscience de Dieu dans la Théorie de l' Androgynie de Zinaïda Gippius

L'aspect le plus marquant de l'oeuvre littéraire de Zinaïda Gippius est son développement du thème de l'androgynie.

Le premier chapitre examine l'androgynie comme une des grandes tendances littéraires et philosophiques du mouvement Symboliste russe, étant animée par le désir de transfigurer le monde et de réunir l'humanité avec Dieu. La théorie de Gippius sur l'androgynie est radicalement différente de celle de ses contemporains, puisqu'elle n'était pas basée sur la stricte déssexualisation des femmes.

Le deuxième chapitre analyse cette reconstruction radicale de la théorie de l'androgynie et l'explique par le refus de Gippius de sexualiser son système métaphysique, et propose que ce refus soit fondé sur deux éléments centraux de sa philosophie: sa conception de la personnalité et la prise de conscience de Dieu.

Le troisième chapitre examine comment Gippius a utilisé sa poésie et sa prose pour démontrer sa croyance qu'un amour androgyne est parfait, et qu'il peut réunir l'humanité avec Dieu. Ainsi, la prose de Gippius reflète sa recherche de ce type d'amour, et sa poésie en reflète l'expérience lyrique.

La motivation religieuse de la théorie de l'androgynie avancée par Gippius démontre la nécessité d'un second regard sur la place de la Chrétienté Orthodox dans l'évolution de la pensée Symboliste russe.

## Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Introduction.....                          | 1   |
| Chapter One: Androgyny in the Intellectual |     |
| Context of the Silver Age.....             | 10  |
| Chapter Two: Androgyny in the              |     |
| Metaphysics of Zinaida Gippius.....        | 36  |
| - Freedom.....                             | 42  |
| - Equality.....                            | 45  |
| - Love.....                                | 48  |
| - Loyalty.....                             | 53  |
| - Death.....                               | 56  |
| - Time.....                                | 61  |
| - The Transcendental Mystery of Sex....    | 65  |
| - Androgyny and Gippius's Metaphysics.     | 77  |
| Chapter Three: Androgyny in the Works      |     |
| of Zinaida Gippius.....                    | 79  |
| - "You - are you".....                     | 86  |
| - Poetry.....                              | 95  |
| - "The Eternal Feminine".....              | 97  |
| - "Sonnet II".....                         | 98  |
| Conclusion.....                            | 104 |
| Bibliography.....                          | 109 |

## A Note On Transliteration

The transliteration system used in this dissertation is the Simplified Library of Congress Transliteration system, except when citing from another source, where the system used in the source is maintained.

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to recognize and thank Professor Laura Beraha and Ms. Lynda Bastien, both of the Russian and Slavic Studies Department of McGill University for their invaluable contributions, much needed and much appreciated help on all aspects, technical and scholarly, of this dissertation. The author would also like to recognize the tireless efforts of Mrs. Alice Denny Robinson, who is able to find things the author did not know he needed until he received them, and who is an endless source of encouragement. The author would like to signal his appreciation to Perter Robinson and Michelle Tisseyre for their constant support. Finally the author wishes to signal his appreciation to Emmanuelle Larose and Nahella Robinson for their love, patience and support throughout the production of this dissertation. Without them the author would be completely lost.

## Introduction

The Russian cultural explosion that lasted from the late 1880s to the end of the 1920s produced such a wealth of literary innovation that it has come to be known as the Silver Age of Russian literature. The cultural flowering of the Silver Age was dominated by the rise of Modernism. Among the earliest major Modernist trends to develop was Symbolism. One of the most important writers in the Symbolist movement was Zinaida Gippius. Despite a relatively brief flurry of academic interest in the 1960s and 1970s, Gippius's contributions have been largely ignored in the study of twentieth-century Russian literature. The analysis of Gippius's works has been led by a few distinguished scholars, including Temira Pachmuss and Olga Matich. Gippius is virtually invisible in the study of the Symbolist movement in Russian Modernism. By contrast, other poets, such as Gippius's contemporaries Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva are regularly anthologized and studied as major actors in Modernist aesthetic development.

As a poet, Zinaida Gippius is the equal of these two great younger contemporaries. As a historical phenomenon, she is probably more important than either of them. One of the guiding spirits of the entire Symbolist movement, and a pioneer of the turn-of-the-century religious revival among the liberal intelligentsia, a revival that had incalculable consequences for twentieth-century Russian culture, Gippius was also a remarkable early theoretician and practitioner of androgyny and psychological unisex, who rejected the traditional male/female roles as early as the 1890s. (Karlinsky, 1-2)

Symbolism has been described as the search for ultimate truths, the quest through art for the true God, based upon the philosophies of Nietzsche, Ibsen, Dostoevskii, Tiutchev and Vladimir Solov'ëv (Pachmuss 1971, 1). The Symbolist movement was an essential aspect of the cultural metamorphosis of Russian society between 1890 and 1910. The belief in art as a link to higher and better realities, to God, was essential to Symbolism. This belief led artists to reject the civic literature produced by their forebears. The Russian Symbolists considered it unhallowed, completely sundered from the Symbolist quest for direct contact with the divine.

There were many variations in the religious substance of this quest, and different artists and philosophers conceived of the divine reality in different ways, many of which diverged sharply from Russian Christian Orthodoxy. Fëdor Sologub conceived of divinity as related to the diabolical, and was a Satanist. Vasilii Rozanov tried to combine the traditional Christian God with a naturalistic glorification of sex. At the core of Gippius's and her husband Dmitrii Merezhkovskii's religious philosophy, as elaborated in Merezhkovskii's 1911 "Open letter to Berdiaev" and in Gippius's *Vybor?* [The Choice?, 1929], was a belief in the Holy Ghost as the *feminine* incarnation of God in the Christian Trinity. This belief, although not endorsed by the Orthodox Church, was a one of several variations on the dogmas of Russian Orthodox Christianity that aimed for a new type of Christian faith in a new Christian society. Berdiaev's rejection of the universality of God and his theory of divine creative power existing independent of God was nevertheless combined with devout Orthodoxy (Clarke 1950, 88-9). Rozanov accepted the

Orthodox conception of God while rejecting the Orthodox Church's guardianship of communion with God (Rozanov 1911, 22-30). Gippius and Merezhkovskii sought a new sublime Christian society as the expression of Russia's destiny to save the world through the reunification of all Christian churches. The metaphysical aspect of Symbolism, its quest for direct contact with the Divine, was one of the main motive forces in the development of Symbolist philosophy and aesthetics. Pachmuss identifies Gippius as one of the spiritual leaders of those Symbolists who sought to realize a sublime human society, united with God and all people through love, within their lifetimes (Pachmuss 1971, 15). This situates Gippius squarely at the centre of the philosophical and theological development of the Symbolist movement, but her activity went beyond merely preaching to the converted.

Zinaida Gippius has been credited with initiating and perpetuating the religious revival among the members of the St-Petersburg intelligentsia (Karlinsky, 2). The main agency of this *rapprochement* between the intelligentsia and the Church was the Religious Philosophical Meetings, which brought together the members of the literary and intellectual elite with the highest members of the Church hierarchy from November 1901 to April 1903. These meetings were of "indisputable value" in the intellectual history of Symbolism in Russia, and were at the root of the increasing accomodation between the Orthodox Church and the intelligentsia that characterized Russian Symbolism (Pachmuss 1971, 127). Gippius was the main organizer of these meetings, and their impact can be largely attributed to her diligence in convening them, and publishing their proceedings in the journal *Novyi put'* [The New Road] (*ibid.*, 131).

Gippius's two major thematic concerns were religion and the blurring of traditional gender lines in literature, both of which had a major impact on the literary and intellectual landscape of the Silver Age. Karlinsky singles out Gippius as a pioneer of androgyny, in the sense that she deliberately blurred gender lines and rejected traditional sexual roles as early as the 1890s (Karlinsky, 2). Although the theme of overt sexuality had surfaced periodically throughout the history of Russian literature in both high culture and popular "boulevard" culture, Gippius's sexual thematic marked a radical departure from the norm.<sup>1</sup> The traditional binary opposition of dominant male and submissive female was maintained even in such works as Mikhail Kuzmin's openly homosexual novella *Kryl'ia* [*Wings*] and in Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal's 1907 lesbian romantic short story "Tridsat' tri uroda" [Thirty-Three Abominations]. Kon argues in his seminal 1995 book *The Russian Sexual Revolution* that Russian society and literature were replete with hidebound sexual traditionalists, who frowned upon all departures from sexual orthodoxy, even variations of sexual position. Sex and eroticism had an important role to play, but only within the confines of private life. They were not the subject of public discussion (Kon, 31). Only after Tolstoi introduced the 'sexual question' in 1890 through the novel *Kreitserova sonata* [The Kreutzer Sonata] did sex become a topic of public discourse, and still only in terms of a strict division of what is male from what is female.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Engelstein 1992, 360-76 for an in-depth examination of sexual issues in boulevard culture in Russia.

<sup>2</sup> As Kon observes, only the artistic elite deviated in their art or lifestyle from traditional sexuality. See Kon 1995, p. 34.

Gippius's androgynous sexual thematic was expressed in her writing throughout her career, such as the poem *Serenada* [Serenade, 1897] and the 1927 short story *Ty - ty* [You - are you]. It discarded this traditional, binary opposition of male and female in favour of a single trans-gender position, in which behaviour and identity were independent of socialized gender roles. A personality was not limited to the attributes of either gender, but rather was formed of varying proportions of male and female characteristics. This trans-gender position, usually expressed by her use of masculine verb forms in the first person, is usually seen as an expression of Gippius's desire to write as a human being, not 'only' as a woman.<sup>3</sup> I will argue that the androgynous aspect of Gippius's works that resulted from her desire to write from a non-gendered position is an expression of her metaphysical and religious belief systems, as well as a reflection of contemporary intellectual trends.

In *Androgyny: Towards a New Theory of Sexuality*, 1977, June Singer writes of "the ideal of true androgyny, in which the masculine elements and the feminine elements of the psyche are fused, and not confused" (Singer 1977, 91). Warren Stevenson defines androgyny as the "imaginative union of the two sexes" (Stevenson 1996, 143). Gippius developed a theory of androgyny that recognised every individual as fundamentally, if not necessarily consciously, bi-sexual (Pachmuss 1971, 92). The individual had to develop his or her inherent androgyny in order to

---

<sup>3</sup> Olga Matich establishes this at length in her article "Zinaida Gippius and The Unisex of Heavenly Existence" by showing that Gippius sought androgyny as a solution to the human suffering that she felt was caused by humanity's division into two genders. Therefore she attempted to write from a single point of view that would encompass the entirety of human experience, and wrote "kak chelovek" [as a person] which is grammatically masculine in Russian. See Matich 1974.

attain a state of absolute freedom from artificial constraints imposed according to nominal gender. Furthermore, Gippius sought the creation of physical androgyny as much as spiritual or intellectual androgyny, and in the creation of a perfectly bi-sexual being she saw the recreation of man in the Divine image and the transfiguration of the world.

The treatment of the androgyny theme in Gippius's literary and religious writings creates an interesting departure from the traditional binary model of sexual relationships in Russian literature. This aspect of Gippius's writing becomes even more important when it is studied as an integral part of her religious philosophy. Before Gippius, any sort of sexual deviance was treated, even by 'deviants' such as the openly homosexual Kuzmin and the openly lesbian Zinov'eva-Annibal, as something that was somehow immoral, and destructive.<sup>4</sup> Gippius integrated all sincere forms of love and sexuality into her androgynous ideal as part of her religious philosophy, and made androgynous love, that is emotional and physical love unfettered by gender roles or social censure, an essential step towards absolute goodness and salvation in the person of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Gippius developed her belief system throughout her life and was constantly revising it to reject any aspects that had proven false. She also had the moral courage to

---

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the lesbian relationship in Zinov'eva-Annibal's "Thirty-three Abominations" ends in suicide for the protagonist and a return to conventional heterosexuality for the object of her affection.

<sup>5</sup> See Matich 1974, for an overview of Gippius's treatment of androgyny.

live according to her beliefs, even at the risk of exile and separation from the Church in which she so fervently believed (ibid ., 103-213). As a Symbolist, Gippius subscribed to the idea that art, particularly poetry, was the essential conduit to a higher plane of existence. The artist was blessed with the ability to catch glimpses of these higher truths through his or her art, and to share them with the world. This belief lead Gippius to dedicate her life, not to art, but rather, like many other Symbolists, to the recreation of the world. She strove to make it pure in order to participate fully in the higher plane of existence. This dissertation will examine Gippius's cultural environment and metaphysical system as the motivating factors behind the most striking aspect of her literary works, her ground-breaking treatment of androgyny.

I will argue that the theme of androgyny that flows through Gippius's religious and metaphysical thought and her literary works was a product of both internal and external influences. Gippius's ideas were shaped by the general trends of the intellectual environment of the Silver Age. Her metaphysical system elaborated and personalized these ideas, and put them into action. Gippius's metaphysical system was based upon her conception of the individual personality and the awareness of God. These two metaphysical tenets acted as the foundation of her belief system, which was fundamentally religious in nature. Gippius's system of metaphysical concepts works in an integrated fashion and it lead Gippius to view the Androgyne, the physically and spiritually bi-sexual being, as the true image of God (ibid ., 92). Gippius believed that the Androgyne was the human form as it was originally created, as it existed in Paradise before the Fall. The

concept of the Androgyne as humanity's original form goes back to Plato's *Symposium*, and was one of the major features of Silver-Age thought (Matich 1979, 165-66). The idea of an original androgynous form is present in Rozanov's 1903 *Liudi lunnogo sveta* [People of the Moonlight], in Berdiaev's central concept of "God-Manhood", in Solov'ëv's "Smysl liubvi" [The meaning of love] and in Fëdorov's desexualisation of humanity to attain divinity (Naiman, 238-65). Gippius believed that a return to the divine androgynous human condition was the solution to the contradictions of Christianity, between the world of matter and the world of spirit. She conceived of the Androgyne as the divine state through which the world would be transfigured, united with God for eternity (Pachmuss 1971, 92-4).

Gippius developed the theme of androgyny in her poetry and prose by adopting a male first-person persona, or mask. It functions throughout Gippius's literary works to express her religious ideal of the Androgyne. However, an interesting dichotomy exists in the treatment of androgyny in Gippius's writings. Literary criticism, diaries, letters and essays were used as a forum to explain her religious and philosophical concepts of the Androgyne. However, fictional prose and poetry do not include a definitive treatment of the religious philosophy behind her belief. Rather, Gippius develops the theme of androgyny in her fictional prose and poetry as an expression of the quest for perfect, sublime love here on Earth. This love is androgynous in nature because it operates beyond animalistic sexual attraction, on the level of a perfect love that includes both body and soul in a search for God. In Gippius's belief system, sublime love on Earth is an essential step on the path towards the creation of the

Androgyne because it would approximate God's love, joining individuals with God, and recreating them in their original form as eternal, bi-sexual images of God. Gippius's literary theme of androgyny describes the earthly quest for this perfect love, which operates independently of gender but requires an active sexual component. To attain this love Gippius's metaphysics requires that the individual be aware of God and be a personality, rather than just an individual human animal. The awareness of God and the obligation of personality form an integral part of Gippius's development of her theme of androgyny on the theoretical and practical levels, and form an important aspect of the originality of her intellectual contribution to the Silver Age and of her underappreciated, but nevertheless real, importance in the evolution of Russian Symbolism.

## Chapter One

### The Cultural Context Of The Silver Age

To understand the originality of Gippius's ideas and their cultural basis, it is important to look at the ideas of the major philosophers of her time. It is impossible to claim that Gippius's ideas are particularly important or revolutionary without comparing them to major contemporary intellectual trends. Given my concentration on the question of the evolution of Gippius's treatment of androgyny, a brief discussion of the main philosophical positions that relate to the development of the concept of androgyny in Silver-Age Russian culture is pertinent. Therefore I will look at some general trends in the intellectual current of the Silver Age, and at the ideas of Nikolai Berdiaev, Vasilii Rozanov and Vladimir Solov'ëv, prominent Silver-Age thinkers, in contrast with Gippius's theories. Berdiaev and Rozanov were Gippius's peers, and active participants in the Religious and Philosophical Meetings, who exchanged ideas with her frequently. Gippius also knew Solov'ëv and regretted his death in 1900.<sup>6</sup> By looking at the prevailing attitudes on androgyny and the related subjects of God, sex and the composition of humanity, I will show that while Gippius operated essentially within the main intellectual tendencies of her time, she was not content to accept

---

<sup>6</sup> This paper will not touch upon the ideas of Dmitrii Merezhkovskii in contrast with those of his wife, Gippius. As a married couple, and more importantly as life-long partners in their attempt to create a new church to transfigure the world, any fruitful differentiation of their ideas would need to be too extensive to fit into the scope of this study. It has been suggested that they collaborated on all the works that Merezhkovskii signed during the fifty-two years of their marriage, so it would be impossible in the restricted space available to differentiate their various contributions to Merezhkovskii's work. Pachmuss states that Merezhkovskii never published anything unless Gippius approved of both its 'outward form and inward content', and suggests that many of Merezhkovskii's ideas were supplied by Gippius (Pachmuss 1971, 59).

others' ideas blindly. Instead, she reshaped them to fit her own philosophy.

The understanding of androgyny that found the widest acceptance in the Symbolist movement was predicated upon unconsummated eroticism as the source of energy that would permit humanity collectively to transcend death by reclaiming divine androgyny sometime in the future. The individual could not attain divine androgyny, and androgynous love tended to exclude heterosexuality as earthly, compared to divine homo-erotic, platonic love (Matich 1994, 27-32). Furthermore the divine Androgyne is typically personified by recognizably male figures such as Christ, Adam before the Fall, and God. Their androgynous nature seems to be based upon the absence of any female principle at all, rather than any true combination or union of the masculine and feminine aspects of humanity (Naiman, 263). In general, the Symbolist interest in androgyny reflected a desire to resolve the sexual differentiation of humanity (Matich 1979, 165). In pursuing this goal the major philosophers of the age rejected sexual desire and all things related to the female sexual experience as animalistic and incompatible with the divine androgynous state. Gippius's concept of androgyny differed from the general Symbolist understanding in that it was based upon a real glorification of sex that did not denigrate or exclude female sexuality. Gippius believed that the individual could physically and spiritually attain the divine androgynous state now, and that the method to attain this state was through actual engagement in sex as an expression of sublime love in the presence of God. Whereas the Androgyne was generally understood to reflect Divinity divested of humanity's 'animalistic' female side, Gippius theorized that the Holy Trinity was predominantly female,

composed of God and Christ as equally male and female, and of the Holy Ghost as purely feminine. This is a far cry from the Androgyne-as-Humanity-divested-of-all-female-and-sexual-aspects that found credence in the Symbolist mainstream, and is more than just a creative adaptation of a popular contemporary idea. Gippius's female-inclusive Androgyne reveals a fundamentally different worldview that presaged the great social upheavals of the sexual revolution.

Several general characteristics of the Silver Age of Russian culture play an important role in defining the development of androgyny as a literary theme and a spiritual pursuit for Symbolists. Because androgyny is a concept that reaches into many different aspects of life and philosophy, it is necessary to look beyond a simple survey of which thinkers developed which aspects of androgynous theory. Rather we must look at the 'why' of androgyny in the Silver Age, to see if there are common concerns that led to this solution to the problem of transfiguring the world. If androgyny is revealed as a common idea for Silver-Age thinkers, what goals do they pursue under its aegis? This will reveal the originality of Gippius's metaphysical concern with androgyny, and will permit a better understanding of her literary treatment of this idea by establishing the intellectual context in which she developed the theme of androgyny.

Despite the crisis of faith that was so instrumental in starting the artistic and intellectual revival of the period (Pyman 1994, 1), several aspects of traditional Russian Orthodoxy played an important role in contemporary thought. Chief among these are the concepts of *sobornost'* and *theosis*, the desire to transfigure the world.

*Sobornost'*, an essentially untranslatable term that Clarke identifies with ecumenity, and explains as a combination of unity among all people of action and purpose with individual freedom (Clarke 1950, 24), is a central tenet of the Russian Orthodox faith and accounts for the lack of any Russian Orthodox Church official individually invested with the religious infallibility of the Roman Catholic Pope.

*Sobornost'* suggests freedom and unity in love, a combination of liberty and order which results from the indwelling of Christ by the Holy Ghost in those who are baptized (ibid., 23).

*Sobornost'* secures the freedom of the individual while maintaining the unity of the church as a whole. The result is that the Orthodox Church as a collective entity is infallible. The idea of freedom within unity is very important to the intellectual climate of the Silver Age, and is also at the root of the Symbolist desire to create a sublime global society in which everyone would unite to participate, yet at the same time remain free. Solov'ëv made *sobornost'* a key part of his philosophy. Berdiaev, as essentially a faithful Orthodox Christian, included *sobornost'* as a fundamental aspect of his study of Christianity (ibid., 23-30). Gippius accepted the Orthodox concept of *sobornost'*, but she projected its boundaries beyond the Russian Orthodox Church to embrace all of the various types of Christianity. Ultimately she sought to unite all of humanity by creating a new ecumenical church that would bring about the transfiguration of the world through the united effort of all personalities (Pachmuss 1971, 103-65). Gippius conceived of *sobornost'* as the unified intent and action of all humanity in a sustained and free quest for communion with Christ. Gippius differed

from her contemporaries in the inclusiveness of her conception of *sobornost'*, seeking unity with all of humanity in *Christ*, rather than only with those people who were Christians.

Within the Silver-Age intellectual movement, and particularly in its Symbolist manifestation, *sobornost'* is combined with another important aspect of Russian Orthodoxy: the transfiguration of the world. In "Svoboda i dukh," [Freedom and the Spirit, 1935] Berdiaev states:

[W]e find at the very heart of Orthodoxy these three things: faith in the resurrection, the festival of Easter and a real expectation of the transfiguration of the world (Berdiaev, "Freedom and the Spirit," 354, qtd. in Clarke 1950, 24).

Clarke explains that the expectation of transfiguration is based upon the Orthodox idea of *theosis*, making man divine in the transfiguration of the cosmos (ibid., 24). These Orthodox ideas were adopted by the thinkers of the Silver Age, and made into central tenets of the Symbolist movement. Pyman explains the confluence of traditional Orthodox religious concepts and the basic ideas of Symbolist philosophy as the reaction to a moral collapse and ensuing crisis of faith in the last half of the nineteenth century. Pyman indicates that there were two responses to this crisis, a negative one and a positive one. The negative reaction can be summed up by the rise of individualism and moral degeneracy as represented by the Decadent movement (Pyman 1994, 2-3). The positive reaction to the crisis of faith led through the philosophical and scientific conquest of nature, to questions beyond material dominance over the world. In addressing these questions, thinkers came to an acceptance of tragedy as something beyond scientific or philosophical control, existing in a

state of lawlessness. By accepting the existence of tragedy, Silver-Age thinkers eventually returned to the acceptance of some moral imperative based on faith. Their new faith was based on either tragic courage, existential choice or a return to Christ (ibid., 2-4). Gippius followed this line of philosophical development. Her earliest poetry was decidedly decadent, characterized by the themes of immobility, loneliness and desolation subsumed in a desire for death. Her art and philosophy changed radically between 1899 and 1905, when she took up her religious quest to create a true church to reunite all of humanity through a new Christianity.

The moral imperative accepted by Symbolists was an activist version of the Orthodox goal of *theosis*, the transfiguration of the universe by uniting this world with the 'other world' of spiritual existence. Building on traditional Orthodox *sobornost'*, the Symbolists sought transfiguration as a goal for all of human society, achieved through the free and orderly participation of all people in the Christian Church. They added to these Orthodox ideas the belief that artistic inspiration could act as an opening to the 'other world.' This gave artists a particular privilege and responsibility: to act as mediators between the unenlightened masses and the spiritual realm. However even this was not an entirely new idea, for it closely resembles the Orthodox belief that all religious writing was actually accomplished by God directly. At the moment of writing the writer was just an instrument of God's will. The religious revival of the Silver Age combined a renewed faith with the incorporation of the ideas of Orthodox Christianity into the Symbolist aesthetic philosophy. The Silver-Age thinkers and artists who accepted these ideas were not bound by the strictures

of Church dogma, and they stretched these Orthodox Christian concepts beyond the confines of the Church. Gippius stretched the tenets of *sobornost'* and transfiguration more than most of her contemporaries, linking them to a vision of androgyny that celebrated sexuality in all its forms, and that combined the physical and the spiritual aspects of humanity in the quest to reach God.

An aspect of Russian culture that was particularly active in literature and philosophy during the Silver Age was misogyny. Lev Tolstoi launched the 'sexual question' with "Kreitserova sonata" ["The Kreutzer Sonata"] in 1890. Kon notes that eroticism was considered an important aspect of private life in Russia up until the advent of the sexual question (Kon 1995, 31). As in most European cultures, eroticism and sexual relations between men and women in Russia were acceptable within marriage, with the primary justification being procreation. The debate on the sexual question changed this radically. "The Kreutzer Sonata" contained a blanket rejection of marriage as a sexual union, arguing its fundamental immorality as a physical relationship based upon animal emotions (ibid., 31). In a cultural and philosophical milieu that equated the feminine and the sexual, this rejection of sexuality is tantamount to the rejection of the entire female experience.<sup>7</sup> In the context of a growing crisis of morality and faith the 'sexual question' touched off a debate that would bring philosophers to question the nature of love and sex, leading to the artistic and philosophical cult of Eros. In general, it was only metaphysical eros that they hailed,

---

<sup>7</sup> Berdiaev's "Smysl tvorchestva"[The Meaning of the Creative Act, 1916] is one example of the Silver-Age equation of the female with the sexual.

not actual physical sex (Engelstein 1992, 394). Gippius initially accepted this sexless cult of sex, and throughout her life advocated childlessness. However, as we shall see below, she eventually came to the conclusion that actual physical sex was the best way to unite humanity and God.<sup>8</sup>

The other major aspect of the 'sexual question' was the emancipation of women (Kon 1995, 39). Naiman argues that every aspect of Russian culture in the Silver Age denigrated femininity and womanhood. The advent of the Symbolist ideal of the Eternal Feminine, which permitted a vague and fleeting glimpse into the higher realm of existence through contact with an unknown woman who elicits a feeling of love and beauty, in no way reduced this. Naiman maintains that the Eternal Feminine was as much an attack upon womanhood and female sexuality as the general contempt in which 'feminine verse' and women's writing were held. He argues that, like 'feminine verse' and the contemporary philosophy that rejected childbearing and women's existence as spiritual beings, the ideal of the Eternal Feminine served only to objectify women through their femininity and silence their voices (Naiman 1993). According to Naiman, Russian culture in the Silver Age rejected femininity as an animalistic existence dominated by sex and reproduction. To attain a divine, spiritual existence, humanity had elevate itself above the animalistic level of sexual reproduction, because childbirth was an admission of mortality. The rejection of femininity played an important role in the development of androgyny in the Silver Age, because it focused the need to eliminate procreation on the abolition of sexual differentiation. In general this meant the elimination of

---

<sup>8</sup> See the section below on the transcendental mystery of sex for a full treatment of this question.

the feminine aspect of humanity (ibid., 259). Made bestial under the domination of her own sexual existence, woman was considered unable to form a harmonious union with man. On the other hand, men were seen as essentially spiritual beings, largely separated from their external sexual organs (ibid., 262). Berdiaev, Solov'ëv and Gippius opposed childbirth as a surrender to nature, an admission of the inevitability of human decay and death and the failure of the individual to attain perfection. Berdiaev's "Smysl tvorchestva" [The Meaning of the Creative Act, 1916] states that:

woman is the cosmic global carrier of the sexual element, of all that is elemental in sex. The natural-procreative element of sex is the female element (Berdiaev 1916, "The Meaning of the Creative Act," 226 qtd. in Naiman 1993, 262).

Naiman contends that the abolition of procreation, or the abolition of sex is equivalent to advocating the abolition of womanhood in a society that identifies woman entirely and exclusively with sex and reproduction (Naiman 1993). The entire concept of androgyny as a resolution to sexual conflict and a return to a divine state can be read as the manifestation of a desire to be rid of womankind altogether, in a backlash against women's emancipation (ibid., 263). The idea of Paradise as a necessarily woman-free environment was not peculiar to those members of the intellectual elite who felt threatened by women and were horrified at sexuality. Naiman points out that religious utopians in Russia, such as the sect lead by Kornei Kalamarchuk in Ukraine up to 1925, also espoused ideas that fundamentally rejected the reproductive aspect of female sexuality (ibid., 255-56, 271-74). While the aesthetes of the Symbolist movement and philosophers of the Silver Age

have little enough in common with the uneducated peasants, monks and would-be prophets who populated the religious utopian movements, there are similarities in their treatment of female reproductive sexuality, and in their religious fervour for the transfiguration of the world. Both groups saw complete female sexuality, which necessarily includes pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, as incompatible with a sublime human society on earth united with God.

It should be noted that this misogynistic philosophical environment did not stop the development of a vibrant and viable female literary tradition during the Silver Age. The proliferation of women's literary voices and of female literary pioneers was so pronounced at this time that Rosenthal argues that the Silver Age was in fact the Golden Age of women's literature in Russia (Rosenthal 1992, 32). During this period a female poetic tradition was created where none had existed before, finally gaining broad publication and some measure of critical recognition from the male literary establishment (*ibid.*, 32-5). Women were openly and vocally participating in the literary sphere "which became the basis of women's substantial participation in the cultural world" in the early twentieth century (*ibid.*, 33).

However, Rosenthal acknowledges that female participation in the world of literature during the Silver Age was neither full, nor fully accepted. She notes that the female Golden Age was dominated by poetry, with prose largely neglected, and the female-written novel almost non-existent (*ibid.*, 42-3). Furthermore, the range of subjects that could be broached by women and taken seriously by the male literary establishment was quite limited. Acceptable

'women's writing', such as the poetry of Mirra Lokhvitskaia, dealt with love, sensuality, motherhood and domesticity (ibid., 37). The male literary establishment formed critical expectations of women writers based upon this kind of 'female' subject matter, and divergence from it was met with perplexity and resistance. Rosenthal suggests that Gippius's use of male pseudonyms for literary criticism and philosophical essays, and her literary use of masculine and androgynous personae were strategies to circumvent the critical strictures placed upon women's writing, because she did not write the way "that women were supposed to write" (ibid., 39). The limited range of acceptable 'female subjects' reflects the philosophical place of women in Russian Silver-Age culture. The female field of intellectual competence was restricted to matters of sexual or reproductive nature presented in a concrete, visual fashion (ibid.). Gippius's political, religious and philosophical writing, which included the 'female theme' of love, went far beyond the confines of acceptable women's writing, and was not always well received. "The negative reaction to her poetry often stemmed from critics' expectations about what is proper subject matter for women's poetry" (ibid.).

Matich establishes that the Modernist artistic elite adopted various strategies aimed at creating a lifestyle that would offer alternatives to the traditional political and social activism of the pre-Modernist generations. These 'life-strategies' included radical departures from the sexual and marital norms of Russian society. Among the most common of these strategies were tripartite marriages that were either celibate or contained some aspect of active homosexuality or lesbianism. The most pertinent example of a celibate triangular marriage is the twenty-year ménage-à-

trois of Gippius, Merezhkovskii and Dmitrii Filosofov which lasted, on and off, from 1900 to 1920. An example of the sexually active triangular marriage is the relationship between Viacheslav Ivanov, Lidiia Zinov'eva-Annibal and Sergei Gorodetskii. Life-strategies were aimed at the realization of the aesthetic principles and philosophies advocated by the artists, together with the rejection of accepted social norms (Matich 1994, 49). By adopting specific life-strategies, the intellectual elite of the Silver Age, including Gippius, sought to make their lives, their art and their philosophy into a single cohesive unit.

The solution to the problem of bringing about the transfiguration of the world was a major preoccupation for many thinkers, prompting similar conclusions among many Symbolists. Berdiaev, Solov'ëv, Gippius and Ivanov were among those who concluded that in resolving the disharmony of human gender differentiation, humanity would return to its original divine condition. Each of these thinkers had his or her own ideas about how the divine androgynous state could be reached, and what it really meant. Nevertheless, there is a striking similarity in their ideas.

Nikolai Berdiaev believed that to transfigure the world humanity must attain individual freedom for all its members and to this end personality, the self-awareness of each individual, must first develop. Berdiaev considered the concept of personality to be the basis of Christianity, the worship and recognition of the divine personality of Christ (Slaatte 1997, 21). Berdiaev's definition of personality begins with the recognition of an "other," a being that is not the self; this latter construct can include God, the divine Other (ibid., 21). Berdiaev defined personality as the self as it is expressed, and the self in

the process of change (ibid., 3-4). According to Berdiaev, an individual must communicate his or her experience of his or her own condition, must evolve, learn and grow. If that individual does not do these things, then he or she does not have a personality, and cannot recognize the self or the other. This precludes the possibility of joining with God because the individual cannot recognize God's existence. The individual without a personality is hardly different from an animal.

Berdiaev considered the personality to be separate from both body and spirit but formed by them together as a unique phenomenon. He wrote:

"My body enters into the make-up of me, it is a constituent part of my personality, I am not a bodiless spirit" (Berdiaev "Nachalo i konets" [The Beginning and the End] 1928, 65).

Berdiaev sought to resolve the separation between man and God by recreating a spiritual condition like that achieved by Christ, whom he saw as the divine combination of God and Man. Following Solov'ëv, Berdiaev believed that by approximating Christ, man would become the Man-God, united with God, and Christ the God-Man (Clarke, 93). United with God as a spiritual being, man became eternal and sexuality would disappear with the need for reproduction.

Berdiaev rejected sexuality and the body as elements of nature, which he considered the antithesis of freedom and personality.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Berdiaev accepted Otto

---

<sup>9</sup> Although Berdiaev's "The Meaning of the Creative Act" apparently glorifies sex and condemns asceticism, he only glorifies it to the extent that it fits his redefinition: "In the depths of sex, the creative act must conquer birth, the individual personality must defeat the species, and union in the spirit must triumph over natural union occurring in flesh and blood. This will be possible only with the appearance of a new, creative sex [androgyny], with the revelation of the creative

Weininger's idea, set out in *Sex and Character*, 1904, of the human personality as fundamentally bi-sexual, seeing this as further proof that the sexual differentiation of humanity was spurious and based only on an animalistic propagation of the species (Naiman 1993, 263). As the divine image, man is a free creator, with access to the same chaotic creative source as God, the primal abyss, or *Ungrund* (Clarke 1950, 96). Art is the human answer to the divine call to create, beauty entails the deification of the world. Most importantly, the goal of the individual person as creator is not his or her personal salvation, but the transfiguration of the world for all (ibid., 97-8). The kingdom of God is to be realized on earth through art; and it is to be established for all people, not just the artist. The collective aspect of this quest for transfiguration leads us back to Orthodox *sobornost'*, wherein reaching an androgynous state was proof of successful, active *theosis* through the divine creative artistic process (Balasubramanian 1970, 44).

Berdiaev did not arrive at the androgynous solution by himself. Neither did Gippius. In fact both were inspired by Vladimir Solov'ëv. Solov'ëv's philosophy was based upon the differentiation of man from all other animals; it freed man from the domination of nature (Naiman 1993, 257). Solov'ëv thought that man existed on three levels: animal, social and divine. Procreative sex could occur only on the animal and social levels, but not on the divine level. Only by infusing sexuality with the divine could man become immortal (Solov'ëv, "Smysl liubvi" [The Meaning of Love],

---

mystery of man as a sexual being" (Berdiaev, "The Meaning of the Creative Act," 237, qtd. in Naiman 1993, 260). Berdiaev's conception of sex that neglects the physical act and rejects childbearing as an act of creation can hardly be called a glorification of sex. Eric Naiman argues this point convincingly in his article, cited above.

527, qtd. in Naiman 1993, 257). To accomplish this deification of sex Solov'ëv turned to androgyny:

The path of the highest love, perfectly uniting male and female, spirit and flesh ... is the union or mutual cooperation of the divine with the human, a process of Godmanhood (Solov'ëv, "Zhiznennaia drama Platona" [The Drama of Plato's Life], in *Sochineniia*, vol 2: 619, qtd. in Naiman 1993, 259).

This process, although explicitly sexual in nature, was based upon *unconsummated* erotic potential. The energies created by eroticism were to be diverted away from sexual activity and towards transcendence, giving man the power to unite with God (Matich 1994, 27). Sexuality thus conceived could make man physically immortal and divine, but the birth of each child proved that man had not yet united with God: "As long as man reproduces like an animal, he will die like one" (Solov'ëv, "The Meaning of Love", 522, qtd. in Naiman 1993, 257).

Despite a conception of the process of transfiguration that reconciled male with female and the human with the divine, Solov'ëv was seen to reject the idea of a feminine aspect of God as false and pernicious (Rozanov, "People of the Moonlight," in Roberts 1978, 142). Solov'ëv's version of the androgynous ideal rejects femininity because it does not recognize any representation of the female principle in God, and excludes the female concept from divinity.

Solov'ëv predicated the transformation of Man entirely upon *sobornost'*, since only the combined efforts of all of humanity could bring about the Androgyne as a real state of human existence. The Androgyne was to be created by the united efforts of all of humanity to attain union with God through a perfect union between the 'male' spirit and the

'female' flesh. I will call this *process-sobornost'* because it refers to the unity of human action as a process for creating union with God by reconciling human sexual differentiation. Once attained, union between God and humanity in the divine form of the Androgyne would create a new *sobornost'* between the sexually unified humanity and God. I will call this *result-sobornost'*. In terms of reaching a state of unity with all of humanity to attain the Androgyne ideal, and a state of union with God, both *process-sobornost'* and *result-sobornost'* reflect Solov'ëv's rejection of the female as part of the solution to transfiguration.

Solov'ëv's equation of the female with the flesh, distinct from the exclusively 'male' spirit, limited the role of female humanity in the "process of Godmanhood." Women were essentially excluded from any true union with God because contact had to be mediated through the 'male' spirit, with a God that admitted no female aspect. The *process-sobornost'* envisaged by Solov'ëv relegated women to a secondary role because they were barred from direct contact with the spiritual realm of God. Furthermore, the failure of *process-sobornost'* to unite with God was linked to each individual instance of fulfilled female sexuality in the form of childbirth. Childbirth proved that humanity had not yet united with God because it was proof both that the human race still needed to be perpetuated, and because it continued the differentiation of humanity into male and female sexes. Childbirth is also destructive of the unity of human purpose and human action central to *process-sobornost'* because it denies any outside purpose or action, and associates the uniquely female aspect of physically fulfilled, individual sexuality with failure to transfigure

the world. In childbirth a woman's sex limits her to an individual specificity: her experience of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood are attached to her as a physically distinct individual, and her physicality is modified by that experience. By bearing a child, a woman is excluded from the unity of *process-sobornost'* because she becomes individually marked as unable to attain unity with God or the state of divine androgyny. By contrast, a man's role in childbirth in terms of fulfilled male sexuality is largely anonymous: he is physically and spiritually unaltered by the pregnancy and birth, and is superfluous to the entire process as a sexual experience. His ability to participate in *process-sobornost'* is unaffected because he is not specified, physically or spiritually, as sexually reproductive and therefore is not separated from the united effort of all of humanity towards transfiguring the world.

*Result-sobornost'*, the unity of God and humanity, is a rejection of any further female participation in the human experience of the Androgyne as a divine state. Solov'ëv's rejection of any female aspect of God eliminates the possibility of direct contact between the purely physical female and the purely spiritual divinity. No real union between God and the female can exist because there is no point of contact, the relationship must be mediated by the male who has both a spiritual aspect and is a reflection of the male component of God. When *result-sobornost'* is attained, fulfilled female sexuality will disappear with humanity's temporal need to reproduce. When the physical sexual reproduction that defines the female aspect of humanity disappears, so will the female aspect itself disappear, for it will have no physical reason to exist and never had any spiritual existence to begin with. Solov'ëv's version of human transfiguration is dependent on the idea

of *sobornost'*. It defines both the condition necessary to unite with God, and the nature of the union with God once humanity has attained the divine state of the Androgyne. However, Solov'ëv's vision was not an activist one. Individuals alone could not attain the divine state of the Androgyne, so the transfiguration of the world had to wait for the enlightenment of all people (Matich 1994, 27). Some of Solov'ëv's followers, including Gippius, were not willing to be so patient.

One thinker to contradict the idea of the transfiguration of the world through the creation of the Androgyne was Vasilii Rozanov. In works such as "People of the Moonlight," 1903 and "Tëmnyi lik" [The Dark Face, 1911], Rozanov argued that the world was already transfigured and that man had already achieved a sublime state. Existing in the worlds of both spirit and nature, the individual approximated God's original act of creation in sexual intercourse and childbearing, so there was no need to reconcile human sexual differentiation. Rozanov believed that humanity existed in a state of divine creativity because parents create both the bodies and the souls of children (Rozanov, "People of the Moonlight," in Roberts 1978, 106). Rozanov's concept of God and the transfigured state of man were explicitly anti-Christian, because he believed that Christianity was built entirely on love of Jesus, to the exclusion of all other things that could inspire, particularly human love, art and joy (Rozanov, "The Dark Face," in Roberts 1978, 25).

Rozanov glorified sex and the sexual differentiation of humanity, seeing this division in God as well. In "People of the Moonlight" Rozanov describes God as existing in two parts: a purely male principle, the Creator of the

World, and a purely feminine principle, the Eternal Feminine (Rozanov, "People of the Moonlight," in Roberts 1978, 74). Like Berdiaev, Rozanov conceived of Christ as an androgynous being, but unlike Berdiaev he defined androgyny as the absence of sex rather than the combination of the sexes (ibid., 93). For Rozanov this was neither good nor desirable. The sexless nature of Christ only reinforced his belief that Christianity is driving the world towards universal death. Because it worships only the sexless Christ, Christianity rejects joy and life as unhallowed. True Christians could only find divinity in sorrow and the ultimate sorrow, death, because Christianity rejects everything that is not of Christ (ibid., 32-36). Rozanov believed that world was holy as an emanation of the Flesh of God the Father, and therefore life, flesh and sex were all holy (ibid., 30). Seeing no need to transfigure the world or reconcile the sexes, Rozanov rejected the Silver-Age quest for the Androgyne as an affront to human sexuality as a divine creative force.

Despite his rejection of androgyny as a method for transfiguring the world, Rozanov still incorporated the androgynous principle into his conception of the composition of the personality and the soul. In Rozanov's view the soul had a dual origin: half from the father and half from the mother, suggesting a mixed gender content. Furthermore, Rozanov asserted that all people were androgynous as children, and that only at puberty did they become truly sexually differentiated. However people who are 'spiritually homosexual', in Rozanov's understanding people who feel no attraction for the opposite sex and no inclination towards sex in general, remain androgynous throughout their lives (ibid., 128-29).

Rozanov's conception of androgyny is based on the idea that each individual's sexual identity exists on a double continuum, from most male to most female and from least male to least female. Normally a heterosexual man with characteristics in the "most male" category will also have characteristics in the "least female" category. Homosexuals will have characteristics that are usually found among the opposite sex. Those people with characteristics at the neutral points between most male and female and least male and female have no interest in sex. They are what Rozanov described as spiritual homosexuals, or androgynous people (ibid., 65-92). Rozanov defined asceticism and the rejection of childbirth as symptomatic of spiritual homosexuality, and so not pertinent to the sexually active public at large. This constitutes a rejection of both androgyny and the desire to reconcile the sexes that is entirely consistent with Rozanov's view that the world is already transfigured and that man is already in a state of divine grace.

Zinaida Gippius's ideas on androgyny, God and the nature of humanity certainly fit in with the intellectual trends of her time. Her metaphysical system is generally seen to have been based in large part on Solov'ëv's ideas about love.<sup>10</sup> The concept of *sobornost'* and the desire to transfigure the world can be seen in Gippius's work through her twenty-year struggle to establish an ecumenical church that would inwardly embrace Orthodoxy, while outwardly rejecting affiliation to any established church. Aside from the Religious-Philosophical Meetings and the publication of their proceedings, Gippius set up religious circles,

---

<sup>10</sup> Among others, Pachmuss and Naiman have both noted the relation between the ideas of Gippius and Solov'ëv, particularly with regard to love and sexuality. See Pachmuss 1971, 63-64, and Naiman 1993, 264.

patterned on her triangular marriage to Merezhkovskii and Filosofov, among her friends and relatives, wrote a liturgy for her new church and celebrated mass. The goal of Gippius's Church of the Third Testament was to unite all of humanity in God's love (Pachmuss 1971, 103-165). To this end she sought to recreate humanity in God's image. Just as universal union in love within a single church would bring God's kingdom to earth, so too could the individual person be remade into the living image of God on this earth, at least for a time.

Engelstein attributes the Silver-Age obsession with eroticism to the development of extreme individualism (Engelstein 1992, 375-76). For Gippius, this extreme individualism is reflected in part in her belief that through an act of transporting intimacy, ideally sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, undertaken with the goal of reaching God, a couple in love could physically and spiritually recreate the image of God here on earth (Pachmuss 1971, 86-87). In this divine union, ephemeral though it was, two individuals could unite to form the Androgyne, a single concrete incarnation of the perfect balance of male and female elements that recaptures humanity's original divine form as the image of God, the bi-sexual Supreme Being (ibid., 92-95). Gippius's conception of the couple in love briefly becoming the Androgyne in the presence of God reveals a multi-layered understanding of *sobornost'*. A small group or a couple may attain *sobornost'* and through it attain a temporary state of the divine Androgyne in union with God. For this state to become universal and eternal, all of humanity must unite behind the single purpose of creating a union with God in the present. For the world to be permanently transfigured there must be universal *sobornost'*, unity of purpose and

action in the desire and method of reaching God among all people. Gippius, like other modernists, sought union with God by remaking humanity in God's sexually unified image, the Androgyne.

The idea that God contained both the male and female principles was shared by Gippius and Rozanov. It was based upon Weininger's conception of humanity as fundamentally bi-sexual. Gippius's religious ideal of the Androgyne resembles Berdiaev's development of androgyny in that both recognize a fundamental bi-sexuality in the natures of God and the human individual. However Gippius's conception of the Androgyne and the process for creating it were in no way dismissive of sex, nor were they hostile to the principle of active female sexuality. This does not mean that Gippius endorsed procreative sex; on the contrary, she considered childbirth to be destructive of the personality, the individual's awareness of self as a unique entity. The loss of personality formed a terrible barrier in her quest towards God. Despite her rejection of childbirth, female sexuality is an active and equal participant in the idealized sexual union that can recreate the loving couple in the form of the Androgyne.<sup>11</sup>

Man must understand and accept only three central ideas as the basic realities of life - the idea of his androgynous nature, the idea of the spirit and the flesh being blended in him, and the idea of his

---

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that the expression of love that created the Androgyne in the presence of God was not limited by Gippius to heterosexual intercourse. Gippius is on record as stating that love between two men could achieve the same transcendent state, but in the sexual expression of homosexual love the inequality of the partners would destroy that transcendence and reduce them to the level of animals (Gippius, *Contes D'Amour* qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 91). Gippius seems to have a very limited idea of homosexual intercourse, apparently believing that only one partner could feel sexual pleasure and transcending intimacy in any given sexual encounter. This would make the partners unequal and therefore unable to achieve a state of perfect love in and through God.

likeness to God. Man must also be aware that his androgynous state, the mysterious blending of the Masculine and the Feminine, also underlines the whole structure of the universe (ibid., 93-4).

Gippius regarded androgyny as a divine state, and saw God as Divine Father and Mother. In an interesting departure from the modernist desire to find sexual unification in the divine, conceived as gender-unmarked masculine, Gippius believed that the Holy Ghost was the Virgin Mary, the embodiment of the pure feminine principle "in Whose Divinity motherhood and Virginity are merged" (Gippius 1953, 111). The recognition of a purely female aspect of God which included the procreative aspect of female sexuality is a radical divergence from contemporary Silver-Age thought. Gippius's departure from the misogyny of her Silver-Age peers in her philosophical treatment of androgyny indicates an important difference in the underlying thought system which shaped her ideas.

Gippius's rejection of Silver-Age misogyny was predicated on her belief that the transfiguration of the world would be brought about by the Holy Ghost, which she believed was the embodiment of the pure feminine principle (ibid., 105). Gippius recognized the feminine principle in divinity, not only as an equal part of a bi-sexual whole, as in the case of God and Christ, but as a legitimate and viable concept independent of masculinity. Gippius's conception of the Holy Ghost as pure feminine principle admits the potential superiority of the feminine over the masculine, which does not exist as a pure principle in Gippius's religious philosophy.

Gippius participated in the Silver-Age trend of constructing a life-strategy to realize her philosophical

and aesthetic principles. The philosophical position against childbearing that Gippius inherited from Solov'ëv was realized in Gippius's life-strategy: she initially insisted on childlessness in her own life and among her peers, and advocated celibacy to ensure the childless condition (ibid., 90). However, as she refined and elaborated her religious views she came to view sexual intercourse as an illuminated merging of physical and spiritual love, and as the best way to approximate God's bi-sexual condition and his perfect love. This belief formed the basis of her attempt to achieve what she called the 'Mystery of the Two,' the zenith of intimacy in a couple before God. She also sought to experience the 'Mystery of the Three,' a universal sublime love beyond the confines of the traditional romantic couple that was symbolized by the love of the couple for a third person (Gippius, "Liubov' i krasota" [Love and Beauty, 1925]). Gippius accomplished this through a three-way union with her husband, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, and with Dmitrii Filosofov over a period of seventeen years. As a life-strategy, the practice of *de facto* polygamy was fairly common in the Silver Age; whether celibate or consummated, these marriages were usually short-lived (Matich 1994, 49). Throughout their life as a threesome Gippius, Merezhkovskii and Filosofov continued to work on their common cause of creating a new universal church. Despite Gippius's self-avowed penchant for physical luxury and sexual desire, theirs remained a celibate union, concentrated upon their religious task and struggling to find the rituals of intimacy that would permit them to experience these 'Mysteries.' Like many of her contemporaries, Gippius condemned lust or desire as animalistic, and was opposed to sexual gratification for its own sake. Sex found value in her eyes only as a way to reconcile the spirit and the

flesh in a unifying act of love in the presence of God.

Gippius was well known for pursuing an androgynous lifestyle as part of her religious and philosophical thought. In her 1998 article "The Fashioning of Zinaida Gippius," Jennifer Presto writes that Gippius created a contextual androgyny about herself by repeatedly contravening gender norms of behaviour and dress, and in her literary activity. In the late 1890s Gippius was famous for attending St Petersburg's literary salons dressed as a man. In Paris in the 1920s and 1930s she dressed, in an exaggerated feminine style, as a femme fatale. She extended this kind of gender ambivalence to her sexuality, claiming a string of infatuations with both men and women. In her triadic marriage with Merezhkovskii and Filosofov, she dominated her male partners, reversing the traditional conjugal behaviour. Gippius also used several male pseudonyms to sign her literary criticism, the most common being Anton Krainii, Lev Pushchin and Kommerad German. Presto argues that Gippius played with her gender identity to create a context of gender uncertainty which contributed to the development of Gippius's trans-gender position. This allowed her to act completely free of the social strictures that limited every woman's accepted field of competency.

The general trend of Gippius's thought was not radically different from that typical of the Silver Age, nor were her concerns and solutions for those concerns particularly original. Nevertheless, Gippius did develop her own original version of these general intellectual tendencies. It is within her original versions of ideas common within the Symbolist movement, particularly her female-friendly concept of androgyny and God that we find the value and uniqueness of Gippius's philosophy in

relation to the external influences of other Silver-Age thinkers.

## Chapter Two

### The Fundamental Metaphysics of Zinaida Gippius

Metaphysics is defined as the branch of philosophy that seeks to explain the nature of being and reality, beyond what the physical sciences can teach us. Presently, the most complete system for understanding the thought of Zinaida Gippius is set forth in the works of Temira Pachmuss. The scholar identifies seven fundamental metaphysical concepts that traverse and animate Gippius's works and act as essential guidelines in understanding Gippius as a thinker and as a writer. These metaphysical constructs are: freedom, equality, love, death, loyalty, time and the transcendental mystery of sex. Pachmuss defines and codifies these concepts more systematically than Gippius herself ever did, largely because Gippius was an holistic thinker, who elaborated her thought system as an entirety rather than as a collection of different parts. Nevertheless, Pachmuss's work is important and relevant because it identifies those concepts that, together, formed the unity of Gippius's intellectual and spiritual outlook. However, Pachmuss does not recognize that these seven metaphysical constructs are indicative of two metaphysical bases that define Gippius's thought system, her worldview and ultimately her writings. These bases are the human personality and awareness of God. They animate and underwrite Gippius's thought and Pachmuss's seven metaphysical constructs. Together with Pachmuss's seven metaphysical concepts, they form a system of thought that accounts for the original aspects of Gippius's philosophy, including her female-friendly treatment of androgyny.

The concept of the human personality, as a metaphysical basis, is of crucial importance to Silver-Age thinkers because it is what distinguishes a true individual from an animal that walks upright. Berdiaev was perhaps the most important thinker on the question of the human personality in relation to God and nature, and we can see some important similarities between him and Gippius on this subject. His definition of personality can be summed up in three essential points. First, the personality is a unique phenomenon created by the body and the soul (Balasubramanian 1970, 46). Second, he defined it as "the self, expressed (to another personality) and in the process of change" (Slaatte 1997, 3-4). Third, personality is at the heart of man's link to God, as both are personalities, and man is a divine creator, like God, because they share a freedom from blind natural compunction in their actions (Clarke 1950, 95-7).

Gippius seems to have agreed with Berdiaev on the essentials of the human personality, but, typically, she had her own version that differed in several important ways. Gippius agreed that the body and the soul combined to make a personality, but she was much more concerned with the importance of uniqueness, seeing it as personality's essential, and very vulnerable, attribute.<sup>12</sup> She also accepted Berdiaev's definition of the personality as the self, expressed and in the process of change, but she focused much more on the importance of self-knowledge within this definition. Emphasizing conscious motivation based upon some eternal ethical principle, she agreed *holus bolus* with Berdiaev that personality was the integral link

---

<sup>12</sup> Please see the section below on the transcendental mystery of sex for a fuller discussion of Gippius's views on the fragility of the personality, particularly in relation to motivations originating in the body versus those that arise from spiritual factors.

to God which separated man from animal. Perhaps the most striking feature of Gippius's conception of the personality is its fragility. As we shall see below, Gippius was constantly concerned with the destruction of personality through the loss of its uniqueness.

For Gippius the personality was the ultimate expression of the uniqueness of each individual; anything that detracted from this uniqueness, any unconscious commonality or typicalness of motivation or action devoured the personality, reducing the individual from a unique entity to a featureless member of a category.<sup>13</sup> The importance and uniqueness of the personality is central to works such as the 1927 short story "Ty - ty" [You- Are You], in which the attraction created between personalities overcomes all barriers, even the revelation of a transsexual deception.<sup>14</sup> The loss of personality, of uniqueness, was a kind of spiritual death to Gippius. She saw it as a loss of humanity, that is, the loss of the individual's subjective existence, or self-awareness, eliminated any possible contact with and recognition from other personalities, including God. Without a personality the individual cannot partake of the community of personalities that permits the expression of the self:

---

<sup>13</sup> I will cover this aspect at length below, but some brief examples here may be pertinent: personality accounts for Gippius's marked antipathy to childbearing. She believed that, as an action or experience in which all women were essentially the same, or typical, childbearing destroyed the uniqueness, the personality of the individual. Childbearing equates various personalities through the commonality of its experience, and this commonality destroys the uniqueness of the individual, making them merely part of a category or, as Pachmuss puts it, a "type" (Pachmuss 1971, 90). She took the same view of sexual intercourse as a product of physical desire without the sublime motivations of love and the quest for God.

<sup>14</sup> Please see the section below on Gippius's prose for a detailed discussion of "You- Are You" and other stories, and how they relate to personality.

If [the individual] has no truth, or if he does not even understand its basic meaning, then... I, not believing in his 'I', involuntarily cease to regard him as an 'I' (Z. N. Gippius, letter to G. V. Adamovich, October 3, 1926, qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 76).

Gippius refers to "truth" here not as veracity, but rather as an eternal guiding principle, an internalized code of ethics that the individual consciously follows and elaborates. A person without such a "truth" cannot claim freedom from nature's dominance because an individual who does not control or understand his motivations is like an animal, a slave to his natural urges. Unconscious action, or the absence of conscious self-definition and self-understanding, destroys the personality to the point where other personalities no longer recognize his existence as a self-aware being. Gippius asserted that an individual is aware of the existence of his or her own personality. In "Liubov' i krasota" [Love and Beauty, 1925] she wrote: "since you are... a personality, you preserve it [the uniqueness of the personality] everywhere, you reveal it, bringing it to light and embodying it" (Gippius 1925). Without this awareness, human beings remain "in their primitive condition, can only adhere to the physical law of nature" (Pachmuss 1971, 85). The conviction that the unenlightened human does not have the uniqueness requisite of personality equates him with lower orders of life that lack self-awareness. Driven by natural imperatives alone, the unenlightened individual is excluded from the essential Symbolist quest for the divine transfiguration of humanity. Gippius conceived of personality as based on self-awareness and an awareness of the existence of a divine being. The awareness of God was expressed by a constant, conscious

striving towards spiritual perfection: "[Y]ou can attain the immortality of your personality if you implore God's help"(ibid., 75). The transfiguration of humanity, on the individual level, was based on making each unique individual personality eternal. If the individual is unaware of the self or of God then he cannot have a personality because he is not free from nature and death.

Gippius linked personality to a recognition of humanity's essential bi-sexuality. Basing her ideas on the work of Otto Weininger, Gippius believed that there was no man or woman, only, as Weininger put it, the male condition or the female condition:

Any individual, 'A' or 'B', is never to be designated merely as a man or a woman, but by a formula showing that it is a composite of male and female characters in different proportions (Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 8 qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 92).

Gippius too understood bi-sexuality or androgyny as a divine state, where male and female elements were harmoniously blended: "she recognized in God the bi-sexual Supreme Being" (Pachmuss 1971, 92). With an androgynous divine model, striving towards God necessarily includes a recognition of the striving towards androgynous inner harmony. Ultimately, Gippius is concerned with the importance of maintaining and developing the personality as an essential attribute in the quest towards God.

Gippius's concept of the awareness of God includes the traditional notion of faith, but goes far beyond it. For Gippius, an adherence to Christian beliefs was essential, because she considered that personality was the basis of Christianity (Gippius, letter to Greta Gerrell, July 13,

1935, in Pachmuss 1972, 562).<sup>15</sup> The concept of the awareness of God surpasses simple faith, for it required that each person commit to an individual and unique quest towards a living communion with God. This is what Gippius referred to as a personality having 'his or her own truth,' meaning an individual path to God, and an understanding of that path. This quest required of Gippius that she recognize God as the cause and source from which the universe flows, and the destination towards which everything moves. All of Gippius's metaphysical constructs represent different aspects of God's involvement with humanity. Gippius's concept of Freedom, for example, actually idealized the free, conscious enthrallment to God.<sup>16</sup>

Gippius was able to reconcile her belief in Weininger's bi-sexual humanity with the Christian concept of 'man in God's image' by recognizing God as a bi-sexual deity despite the Christian dogma of a decidedly male God the Father. Her radical deviations from accepted Christian belief in no way hindered Gippius's faith as a devout and practising Christian. Because Gippius had a thorough understanding of her own 'truth,' she was free to build a metaphysical system that could reconcile her self-perception as a Christian with her radical conception of God. Gippius conceived of awareness of God as creative of,

---

<sup>15</sup> The integral texts to Gippius's letters to Greta Gerrell and many others are published in the original French and Russian in Pachmuss *Intellect and Ideas*, 1972. For the sake of convenience I have used the translations provided in Pachmuss 1971 for direct quotes where they are relevant.

<sup>16</sup> I will treat this question in depth later. However it should be pointed out that in Pachmuss's chapter on the metaphysical underpinnings of Gippius's work, every major aspect of her thought system is described as originating in God and coming to humanity through Him. See Pachmuss 1971, 57-102.

and essential to the maintenance of the personality. Those things that elevate an individual towards God, such as sex when it is glorified as a religious and personal mystery for communion, become destructive of personality when God is withdrawn from the equation.

All of Gippius's metaphysical constructs and philosophical beliefs are functions of her conceptions of the human personality and awareness of God. Within Gippius's philosophy, personality and awareness of God constitute the underpinning of every major belief, and their inevitable product is Gippius's concern for androgyny, as both require the acceptance of the bi-sexual nature of the individual, and a constant effort to attain the bi-sexual equilibrium of God. The personality and the awareness of God are separate but complimentary in Gippius's metaphysics, and they rely on each other for meaning, in that personality without God is impossible, and God without personality is unattainable, and worse, unknowable. The recognition of these two concepts as the metaphysical binary core of Gippius's thought and writing necessitates a complete reappraisal of her metaphysics. It also requires the elaboration of a new understanding of Gippius's works, particularly with regard to the essential characteristic of androgyny.

### **FREEDOM**

As Pachmuss points out, freedom was one of the first ethical and philosophical concerns to occupy Gippius as a thinker. As early as 1893 Gippius conceived of freedom as an aspect of self-control and self-knowledge. In *Contes d'Amour*, one of her literary diaries, she wrote on December 15, 1893:

Freedom, my thoughts of you are the most beautiful of all my thoughts. Now I shall be able to suppress the burning pain in me caused by insults; I shall be able to emerge, invulnerable and free, from its ashes  
(Gippius qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 57)

Freedom was initially the ability to liberate one's self from the pain inflicted by others. However this limited view of freedom was later developed into the willful and deliberate enthrallment of the individual personality to Christ in divine love.

There must be freedom, yet it must be transformed into the supreme subordination. Such a form of freedom is as yet inaccessible to us... But let us first develop a feeling of obligation toward our flesh, toward life, and an anticipation of freedom toward the spirit and religion. At that moment when life and religion (or the flesh and the spirit) are actually merged, become one whole, then our feeling of obligation toward the flesh will by necessity touch upon religion, since it will be by that time merged with our anticipation of freedom. And then both of them, in turn, will form one integral whole - that superior freedom which we do not as yet know, but which was promised to us by the Son of God, Who said: "I have come to make you free"  
(Anton Krainii [pseud. Gippius] qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 57-8).

Gippius's conception of freedom operated on essentially two levels. The first was on the level of the individual as a personality, that is through self-awareness and self-control. In *Contes d' Amour* on November 17, 1897 she wrote :

I know the way towards Freedom. One cannot attain Freedom without truth. This truth must be as straight

as a line in mathematics. It is Freedom from people, from everything of human nature, from my own desires, from Fate (Gippius, *Contes d' Amour*, November 17, 1897, in Pachmuss 1971, 58).

Gippius recognized implicitly that freedom was the conscious maintenance of personality. Those things that limit freedom, the natural and unconscious desires and actions of everyday life, are the same things that destroy personality. Freedom allows the individual to control his or her actions and motivations, escaping the passive acceptance of fate. By becoming truly self-determinant the individual approximates God's state, independent of nature.

Freedom was based on the participation of God in the liberation of the individual. Gippius believed that Christianity offered humanity the opportunity to know the highest form of freedom, which is attained when an individual can exercise free will and yet remain completely obedient to God (Pachmuss 1971, 58). To be free a personality must recognize that freedom comes from God, and that God made humanity in his own image. Within this understanding it is possible to see obedience to God, "free enthrallment, that is, free love" of God (*ibid.*, 58), as the ultimate expression of freedom. The person who freely follows God is actually following the perfect image from which he or she was created. Following God is essentially following a perfect, divine version of that individual personality. "One must love oneself as one loves God, for it is the same whether one loves God or oneself." (Gippius, *Contes d' Amour*, November 17, 1893, qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 58). Gippius believed that each personality was capable of sustaining a "Divine Spark," a living part of God, so that not only is the individual made in God's image, he or she is actually a part of God.

## EQUALITY

Pachmuss has represented Gippius's concern for equality in very egalitarian terms:

Believing that freedom and equality were interrelated, Gippius emphasized them everywhere - in human relations, in society, and in religion. Even in her manner of addressing people she liked equality.... She accepted "ty" and "tu" only with her close friends, and only on a reciprocal basis, although several of them were thirty years younger" (Pachmuss 1971, 59-60).

Pachmuss's portrayal of Gippius's concept of equality as egalitarian ignores several important elements of Gippius's philosophy, and one of the primary aspects of Russian Symbolism. Russian Symbolism is predicated on the belief that there exists a higher level of existence that is closed to humanity due to our imperfection. This higher plane of existence is the source of artistic inspiration, and artists are uniquely and specially endowed with the ability to glimpse and interpret the world of the spirit. Their perception of spiritual reality sets artists apart from the masses, who are unable to perceive the higher reality. This conception of the world rejects the notion of universal equality among human beings, since some are closer to communion with God than others. As a Symbolist, Gippius adhered to this conception of the world and of artistic reality. Gippius's particular interpretation of this Symbolist tenet was that religion, art and life were all interrelated:

The artistic inspiration can come only from religious clairvoyance and mystical exaltation. God

is the Creative Spirit and Love; He created the world out of His Love. The poet can partake of the Divine Glory by virtue of his artistic intuition. He can recapture the echo of the ultimate reality and transmit it, through his artistic medium, to the uninitiated as an active spiritual force. Thus the poet can give back in full measure the love out of which he was born (ibid., 75).

The divine inspiration of art and the Symbolist understanding of the role of the artist militate for an elitist understanding of the world, because they place the artist closer to God than the average person. Furthermore this conception of the world makes the artist the conduit through which knowledge of the higher reality passes. This aspect of Symbolist philosophy mitigates the claim that Gippius had a universal notion of equality, because it attacks the concept of basic equality among all individuals before God.

The basic Symbolist rejection of universal equality was complemented in Gippius's case by her belief that the all-important personality. Like Berdiaev, she conceived of the personality as superior to, and distinct from, the soul, and she believed that it was not universal. Not only could a wide variety of activities deprive you of your personality, but the parameters defining personality were such that not everyone had the possibility to develop one. As we have seen above, personality depends on a number of intellectual characteristics including the Awareness of God, self-consciousness, self-control, and the striving towards androgynous inner harmony to create a spiritual likeness to God. Those without these intellectual characteristics had no personalities, no uniqueness. Those who acted out of instinct, such as women who bore children,

or people who engaged in sexual intercourse because of physical excitement rather than out of a mystical drive to reach God, were reduced to the status of 'types,' not individuals.

Perhaps the most graphic demonstration of Gippius's anti-egalitarianism was her view of Bolshevism. The Bolshevik regime, 'The Kingdom of Beast-People' as she called it, "denied the human personality and the Russian spiritual and cultural heritage" (Pachmuss 1971, 199). By denying the personality, "Bolshevism meant slavery - physical, systematic extermination of the spirit and all that distinguishes man from animal" (Pachmuss 1971, 199). By denying the status of humanity to those who, by her definition, had no personality, Gippius effectively rejected the unqualified universal concern for equality that Pachmuss has attributed to her.

This analysis of Pachmuss's representation of Gippius's conception of equality should not be interpreted to mean that Gippius rejected equality altogether. Within her definition of personality Gippius was in fact extremely egalitarian. In *Opravdanie svobody* [A Justification of Freedom] 1924, Gippius defined equality as the "equivalence of every personality" (Gippius 1924, 303 qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 197). For personalities, Gippius demanded equality in all things, even in kisses. She conceived of equality as closely related to freedom, and therefore closely linked to God. Just as freedom came from and through God, equality was based on the equal opportunity of each individual to reach the highest point in his or her personal evolution towards God (Pachmuss 1971, 197). Gippius actively sought the day when all humanity would be able to embark upon this evolution towards God, all would be equal before Him and in

their freedom to strive towards Him. However, she recognized that not every individual was sufficiently aware of his or her own self and God for such united action, and thus recognized that all people were not equal.<sup>17</sup> She rejected the concept that all people were equal regardless of their personalities, believing rather that it was their personalities, and not their shared basic humanity, nor their common bi-sexual nature, that made them equal. Gippius's conception of equality therefore has a strong element of universality in that everyone has the potential capacity to develop a personality, and that everyone has a personal evolution towards God that he or she may follow once he or she has developed his or her personality. However this equality remains latent and inactive until the personality is developed.

### LOVE

Love is the most important of Gippius's metaphysical constructs, and appropriately, it is also among the most revealing of the importance of personality and of the awareness of God as the foundation of her concern for androgyny. For Gippius, love was a very complex idea that went very far beyond the traditional ideal of romantic love between individuals, and strangely, rejected filial love as

---

<sup>17</sup> I make a full analysis of Gippius's religious beliefs below, but here it should suffice to point out that the entire orientation of her religious activism was towards to creation of a sublime Christian society within her own lifetime. She wanted to realize heaven on earth by recreating the Christian church such that everyone could experience the higher reality of God directly. See Pachmuss 1971, 103-65.

too limited.<sup>18</sup> Essentially Gippius believed that God was love, and as part of God, love was the basis of all human and divine relationships. The reason for love was to unite all people with God. Gippius understood real love, or *vliublënnost*,<sup>19</sup> as a unity, a wonder, an imperishable quality and an other-world-ness that implied the immortality of the spirit and the eternity of spiritual existence (Pachmuss 1971, 63). These ideas are reflected in "Slova liubvi" (Words of Love, 1912):

*Liubov', liubov'... O dazhe ne eë-  
Slova liubvi liubil ia ne uklonno.  
Inoe v nikh ia chuial bytie,  
Ono neulovimo i bezdonno...*

*Zhivut slova, poka dusha zhiva.  
Oni smeshny - oni neobychainy.  
I ia liubil, liubliu slova,  
Prorocheskoi oveiannye tainoi.*

Love, love... Oh, not even love-  
I loved unflinchingly love's words.  
I sensed another existence in them,  
Elusive and unfathomable...

Words live while the soul lives.  
They are droll - they are extraordinary  
I loved, and continue to love, the words of love,

---

18. Gippius's ideas on filial love will be discussed below. In short she felt that within filial love there was an impassable barrier that made any real connection between personalities impossible. This barrier was the absence of *Eros*, or erotic potential, from the relationship. Gippius believed that love encompassed both the spiritual and the physical. Since the possibility of physical love is excluded from the parent-child relationship, she felt that true intimacy, and therefore true knowledge of a person, was impossible. The potential for physical love represented by *Eros* was essential to every love-based relationship, including the relationship with God. See Gippius 1909,165; and Gippius 1931, 153.

Imbued with prophetic mystery.

Gippius felt that love was the basis on which to build universal equality and freedom. Recognizing that the individual, even with a personality, was unable to return God's infinite and perfect love in equal measure, she conceived of all people as slaves (*ibid.*, 61). This slavery diminished in relation to the individual's ability to approximate God's love, since by striving towards God's perfect and infinite love, the individual became freer. Gippius rejected temporal authority as illegitimate since it was not based upon God's love. She asserted the eternal nature of God's authority on earth based on humanity's inability to return God's love in equal measure (*ibid.*). The exception to this rule was the artist, whose divine inspiration allowed him or her to "partake of the Divine Glory" and thus become an active spiritual force that returns God's love in full measure (*ibid.*, 75). This does not free the artist from God's authority because the state of perfect love is transitory for the artist, and it is dependent on God's love.

Like Vladimir Solov'ëv, Gippius conceived of love as a state higher than rational consciousness that can make the temporal personality, meaning the enlightened individual, aware of self and God, sublime (*ibid.*, 63). Gippius believed that real love or '*vliublënnost*' forged the personality, personal love, meaning the love relationships of the individual, and society at large into an inseparable unity. Love was the bridge that connected each personality to every other personality and permitted their recognition and understanding, so every relationship is based upon love. Eros is essential to love, and was therefore present in every relationship. Gippius believed that eros activated

physiological, emotional and spiritual aspects of love simultaneously within the individual, and that it is different from lust, which operates solely on the physiological level (Pachmuss 1971, 64). In this conception of love every relationship is essentially sexual in nature because the state of *vliublënnost'* is the combination of physical and spiritual love. The erotic aspect that Gippius ascribed to every relationship shows Gippius's belief that love was based upon the potential of both physical and spiritual intimacy. Given the need for at least the potential of physiological intimacy in any relationship that could be defined as based on real love, the parent-child relationship is seen as still-born because erotic potential is excluded at the outset. Gippius recognized no opposition between the spirit and the flesh, because both were integral to the individual as a complete entity (ibid., 64). Gippius believed that attaining the state of real love could resurrect the divine and immortal image of God in mankind. This was the true goal of human life. It was an impossible goal, but the attempt was ennobling, because experiencing real love was the same as reaching God.

There is an apparent contradiction in Gippius's conception of love, which she believed was stronger than anything including faith. How can love be the key to transfiguring the world uniting with God, if it exists independently of belief in God? In a letter to Mark Vishniak dated January 7, 1924, she wrote: "Faith - any kind, not just my paltry faith, great faith - is always weaker than Love." (Gippius, her capitals, letter to Mark Vishniak qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 65) She even went so far as to propose that faith is a product of Love, inferior, incomplete and transitory, compared to the complete unity

and eternal nature of love. In a letter to Greta Gerrell dated October 21, 1938 she wrote:

Faith is not the primary thing. Love is. Love does not come from Faith: one can believe in God, and yet not Love Him... I am unable to say that I believe at all times in my little Thérèse [Saint Thérèse de Lisieux], but I love her. And if this love is true, then there is faith in it, too, without it being noticeable ...

Faith exists in all love (qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 65).

This conception of love suggests that it exists independently of the awareness of God. It does not. Gippius bases the superiority of love on the intrinsic inconstancy of faith. Love is eternal and immutable whereas faith is necessarily changeable since it is based upon the acceptance of something that cannot be proven. However, Gippius did not conceive of God as an unprovable phenomenon; she did not base her awareness of God on faith, but on concrete knowledge, on observable fact:

I seek God, God Who is Love, since this is the Way to Truth and Life... From Him, in Him, to Him - here begins and ends all my understanding of solution and oblivion, and of the attainment of each kind of Love toward everything and everybody, and of the sun, which should thaw the lake [of hell] (Gippius, letter to D. Filosofov, July 16, 1905 qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 65-6).

God's existence was empirically proven to her every day through artistic inspiration, the existence of love, freedom, and personality.

Gippius's belief that love is greater than faith does not detract from my identification of the awareness of God as a metaphysical basis of her philosophy because the experience of love is based upon personality and the awareness of God. Without these prerequisites the

individual is unable to recognize the divine source and reason for love, nor is he sufficiently self-aware to experience the transcending nature of love. Real love can only exist in a situation of equality, in which each person participates fully. Any inequality reduces love to an animalistic level bereft of spirituality.<sup>19</sup> Thus conceived, love is based upon personality as the foundation of equality, and on the awareness of God, which expands love beyond the merely physical. The quest for love that Gippius saw as the goal of life can be described as a conscious choice to reach God and other personalities, and to recognize the mystical, higher plane of existence. Gippius's concern with love was based upon the belief that everyone had the potential to recognize love and to participate in the quest towards God that would bring perfect love to the world. However, only personalities, equal and aware of themselves and God, could actually participate in this quest.

### **LOYALTY**

Gippius conceived of loyalty as a manifestation of love on earth (Pachmuss 1971, 75). Although it is one of the simplest concepts in Gippius's metaphysics, it is nonetheless an important one. Loyalty should not be confused with fidelity, the forswearing of other partners in an exclusive relationship. Rather, she conceived of

---

<sup>19</sup> The importance of equality in both the physical and spiritual aspects of love is explained in *Contes d'Amour*. For Gippius, the importance of equal participation in the physical act of love cannot be over-stated. She cited the physical aspect of homosexual love to illustrate the importance of equality in elevating love to a sublime level: "Homosexuality in its sexual form must be terribly ridiculous: it is precisely in the sexual act of two homosexuals that their *inequality*, so insulting between a man and a woman, comes here to the surface in its entirety and is created unnaturally. In this kind of relation two (otherwise) equal people, who could search together for real love, remain only like two animals" (Gippius qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 91).

loyalty in love as the honest preservation of love between two people regardless of other relationships. Gippius defined loyalty as a manifestation of love, so a deficiency in loyalty represented a deficiency in love. Since love was the agency through which God worked on earth, and through which personalities worked towards God, faithlessness is indicative of a deficiency of personality and of awareness of God. In a letter to Mark Vishniak dated 3 March, 1931 Gippius wrote:

Your slogan is 'loyalty in politics', whereas mine is 'loyalty in everything'... You say: 'Loyalty to truth and people,' whereas I say: 'First loyalty to truth and then, *within this truth*, loyalty to people.' One *must* not permit a betrayal of truth in order to attain loyalty towards others (Vishniak 1954, 207).

This understanding of loyalty had a profound effect upon Gippius's conception of personality. On October 3, 1926 she wrote to G. V. Adamovich: "My judgment of a human being is laconic. Only one thing is important for me: is he loyal to his own truth, or not..." (Gippius, qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 76). As we have already seen, the lack of understanding of one's own truth destroys personality, but the absence of loyalty is seen as an active movement against love and God. This should not be taken to mean that Gippius saw any moral or ethical change as a betrayal of God. Gippius distinguished between '*izmena*' (infidelity) and '*izmenenie*' meaning 'change'. Gippius understood '*izmena*' as deception, betrayal and departure from the truth, while '*izmenenie*' did not have these negative connotations. Interestingly, she felt that women were more prone to faithlessness than men and that even their most casual, natural and unconscious changes could develop an element of "treason"

over time (Pachmuss 1971, 76).<sup>20</sup> The importance of loyalty was demonstrated in her poem *Strannik* (The Wanderer, 1938), in which St. Peter allows a sinner to enter heaven despite his many sins, because of his loyalty in love:

*O, starik! V izmene  
Ia byl nevinen na zemle!*

*Pust' eto mne i ne v zaslugu,  
No ia liubvi ne predaval.  
I ei - ni zhenschine, ni drugu -  
Ia nikogda ne izmenyal.*

Oh , aged one! On earth  
I was guiltless of deceit!

Let it not be considered a virtue,  
But I did not betray Love.  
I never deceived Love -  
Neither a woman, nor a friend.

Gippius believed that the betrayal of love was the worst manifestation of faithlessness (ibid., 77). The betrayal of love amounted to a betrayal of God and of the personality's quest towards God. By remaining loyal a person actively participates in God's love.

---

<sup>20</sup> This is a rather surprising attitude from an author who was famous for rejecting judgments and associations based on gender distinctions (Pachmuss 1971, 17), even more so given her preoccupation with androgyny as the perfect person in God's image, and with equality. However, Gippius did not advocate a conception of equality based upon the current, post-feminist ideal of absolutely identical traits and abilities between the sexes, so it is only natural that some differentiation should occur in her conception of the sexes. This does not mean that this is a trivial topic though, given the importance of loyalty in Gippius's metaphysics, and the paucity of references to gender in relation to the ability to strive towards love and God. This is an excellent avenue for further research.

## DEATH

Death was one of the major thematic concerns of Gippius's poetry, and it plays an important role in her metaphysical system. As Pachmuss points out, Gippius had an ambiguous attitude towards death, sometimes viewing it as the ultimate path to God through which everyone must pass, and sometimes as the ultimate enemy of God and humanity, because it is the opposite of life. This latter view became dominant late in her life as she felt her own death approaching, but as late as 1930 she wrote in a letter dated January 9 to G.V. Adamovich "I think only too often of death, of my own, of course: I cannot help dreaming of it, of this desired peace"(qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 69). This understanding of death as a final respite from the conflict and suffering of life was quite long standing. In 1921 in a diary entitled *Korichnevaia tetrad'* [The Brown Notebook] she wrote at length about death, her lack of fear of it, and of its redemptive quality. In describing an hallucination in which she felt herself to be in contact with events and people from "beyond" she wrote:

In this perspective the sins of other people become so insignificant and so unreal, whereas my own sins weigh down heavier; their outlines become sharper and their essence becomes more serious. What is of actual significance in death is precisely this sudden change, which is terribly striking, yet inexpressible; during this hallucination even my hatred for the Bolsheviks disappears, because in death there can be no hatred. It does not mean that I "forgive" them anything. Far from it! But I believe that they could not have achieved anything without "divine connivance." For this I could perhaps have censured God *from here* [from earth], but definitely not *from there* [from Heaven]... I

do not want to desire death; I shall begin to desire to die when my time is near (Gippius, her italics, qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 69-70).

Gippius's positive attitude towards death reflected a belief that it frees a person from their negative aspects, including the ability to hate, to reprimand, and to sit in judgment over others, while it increases self-awareness and self-control. This view of death is ultimately liberating and death becomes naturally desirable as it approaches. Gippius's wish to die found expression in some of her earliest poetry and it has lead scholars such as Irina Kirillova to classify Gippius as a decadent poet.<sup>21</sup> Kirillova describes Gippius's early work as a poetry of despondence and alienation, driven by a conception of the body as corrupt. The soul is at a spiritual impasse between the pleasures of her own sinful imperfection and her desire to overcome her sinfulness with divine help.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> The decadent period in Russia lasted roughly from the mid 1880s to a the late 1890s and was characterized by the themes of alienation, isolation, Satanism and a strong desire to experience a higher plane of existence, but without any activist or participatory notion about how this could be brought about. One solution that they found was to view death as the mechanism for entering the higher reality.

<sup>22</sup> Kirillova describes the metaphysical concern with sin and the thematic concerns of immobility, alienation and isolation as central to Gippius's early verse, and identifies a fascination with evil as a major aspect of Gippius's poetry. She argues that melancholy or bleakness was of growing importance throughout Gippius's poetry, and that it came to be the dominant theme and an important contributor to its individuality. In Kirillova's opinion the bleakness and melancholy that characterized Gippius's earliest works is in fact caused by the spiritual aridity that is suffered by the alienated and isolated individual. This isolation is born out by the fact that in Gippius's early verse there are only two active figures: the poet and the Devil. Death is rarely directly treated in her early poetry, but is present by implication as the ultimate isolation, the ultimate stillness, as in *Osen'* (Autumn, 1893). This interpretation of Gippius's conception of death as the final isolation is not entirely at odds with Pachmuss's analysis of Gippius's early conception of death as a final liberating rest. However it does not recognize Gippius's belief that death was a path to God and an entrance to a new community of spiritual existence, which Pachmuss demonstrates. This omission may indicate another phase in the development of Gippius's conception of death, or merely a difference of opinion, but it offers an interesting avenue for further research. See Kirillova 1970, 174-94.

Gippius's conception of death as a merciful release from the rigours of life into the realm of God seems to have coexisted with an apparently irreconcilable fear of it, as on February 8, 1922 in *The Brown Notebook* she described herself as "agonizingly afraid of death." In a letter to Greta Gerrell dated June 18 1935, Gippius wrote:

I believe... in the Angel who calls death the 'Enemy'... To accept one's death, not to be afraid of it is nothing; it is more praiseworthy to fight against it with all the weapons and means possible, external as well as internal, if only for the love of others who would suffer so much from our death. If it comes anyway, it is then that one cannot doubt God's will (Gippius, qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 70).

This belief gradually took over her previous conception of death, and she came to see death as the Enemy of God and humanity created by the Devil. She explained this idea in a letter to Greta Gerrell dated October 20 1936, (published in Pachmuss 1972, 589-90) in the following terms: death was created by the devil because it was the cause of the suffering on which the devil thrives. As death and suffering were not part of God, humanity must fight against them side by side with God.

Another aspect of death which moved Gippius against it is wrapped up in her understanding of the construction of the personality. Gippius believed that the personality was comprised of more than the soul, that it was inseparably linked with the living individual human body. The uniqueness of the personality was based upon the uniqueness of the body as well as of the soul. Death was the enemy of humanity because it was the physical destruction of the individual. The physical destruction of the body was to be

opposed because the immortality of the personality, though possible, was based upon appropriate preparation of the spiritual consciousness during life. The soul cannot evolve and grow without the body to make it a complete personality. When the body dies, the soul would eventually perish if it had not evolved into a personality during the lifetime of the body. A complete personality could survive the death of the body if it was properly prepared, acquiring "a profound understanding of life, death, and God in whom life and death are united" (Pachmuss 1971, 74). Death is the enemy because it destroys the human animal's ability to develop into an individual spiritual personality capable of immortality. Furthermore, the destruction of the body is incompatible with the transfiguration of the world, because the entire physical aspect of love is destroyed with corporeal life.

These two conceptions of death are based upon personality and the awareness of God. Although death comes to all creatures, it is feared only by creatures that are sufficiently self-aware to acknowledge their own mortality. The prospect of death is only of devastating importance in its negative incarnation because it destroys the personality. It can therefore rob a person of his or her potential immortality by destroying the body before the personality can sufficiently develop to recognize God and self, and attain a state of real love. The destruction of the body blocks the formation of the spiritual personality, and prevents the individual from merging with God. If the spiritual personality is attained, it can be saved and made eternal and one with God through love. In this way the negative conception of death as the Enemy of God and humanity is based upon personality and the awareness of God.

The same is true of the positive conception of death. Death can only be a way for the individual to be reunited with God if that individual is aware of God. Gippius believed that God's gift of freedom is what permits us to suffer and die by our own decisions and imperfections, and to decide freely to return to God:

God permits this suffering not because He wants this conversion - He does not want to use these means - no, but because He is the God of Freedom. He loves His creatures, wants them to be free in all things. Their suffering saddens Him; even more - He suffers with us, ... He pities us, but He never changes what He has done, never takes back His gifts; He has made us free (Gippius, letter to Greta Gerrell, October 20, 1936, in Pachmuss 1971, 70-71).

The ability to use this freedom to return to God is predicated on Gippius's understanding of the individual as a personality: self-aware, having a Truth, and aware of God. In both positive and negative conceptions of death, the defining factors in the concern with death are the awareness of God and personality. Depending on which view of death she espoused at any given moment, death could either lead to God or it could be the enemy of God and humanity, but in either case it exists in direct reference to God. Equally, death can give the individual spiritual personality access to the higher reality, or it can destroy the body and end the development of the individual personality. In either case death is important only in its effect upon the individual personality. As Pachmuss put it:

Her wish to die echoes the Christian concept of death as salvation from the putrefaction of organic matter. Another Christian desire, the determination to

transcend temporal and empirical reality, compelled her to accept life in all of its manifestations as a salvation from the finality of death. Gippius's eagerness to die may be interpreted as a craving to be reunited with God; her will to live as a passionate desire to remain on earth for the Second Coming of Christ (Pachmuss 1971, 71).

### **TIME**

Time is one of the more complex metaphysical concepts that Gippius expounded. She believed that it was the medium in which the personality must use love to strive towards spiritual perfection and God. Gippius's metaphysics of time found expression mostly in her poetry, particularly in "Eternité frémissante" (1938), and so is more open to interpretation than most of her other metaphysical concepts, which she expressed in letters and essays, as well as in poetry. In this poem Gippius elaborates the relationship between time and love which will unite humanity and eternity, transfiguring the world:

"Eternité Frémissante" (1938)

V. S. Varshavskomu

*Moia liubov' odna, odna,  
No vse zhe plachu, negodia:  
Odna, - i tem razdelena,  
Chto razdelennoe liubil ia.*

*O Vremia! Ia liubliu tvoi khod,  
Poryvistost' i raznomernost'.  
Liubliu igry tvoei polet,  
Tvoiu izmenchivuiu vernost'.*

*No kak ne poliubit' ia mog  
Drugoe radostnoe chudo:  
Bezvremen'ia zhivoi potok,  
Ogon', dykhanie "ottuda"?*

*Uvy, razdeleny oni -  
Bezvremennost' i Chelovechnost'.  
No budet den': sov'iutsia dni  
V odnu - Trepeshchusshuii Vechnost'.*

To V. S. Varshavsky

My love is one,  
But nevertheless I weep, indignant:  
One - and yet it is divided,  
Because I love what is split apart.

Oh, Time! I love your passage,  
your impetuosity and change of tempo.  
I love your games in flight,  
your fickle loyalty.

But how could I not come  
To love another joyous miracle:  
The living stream of eternity,  
The flame and the breath "from Beyond"?

Alas, they are divided -  
Infinity and Humanity.  
But a day will come: the days will be entwined  
Into one - Everlasting and Pulsing Bond.

(Translated in Pachmuss 1971, 77).

Gippius's other metaphysical concepts represent either  
a goal for the personality to attain or something for it to

strive against. As the medium in which the personality plays out his or her attempt to unite with God, time is different from the rest of Gippius's metaphysical system. As a medium of action it is neither constant nor universally important:

You must not think that resurrection has to do with the end of the world, and that until then the dead are quite dead. This error is due to our not being able to think about the category of Time, whereas the dead pass into another order where Time no longer exists, where everything that was to be is already accomplished (Gippius, letter to Greta Gerrell, July 24 1938, in Pachmuss 1971, 73).

Time is not constant, and for those who have already died, it no longer exists as a medium of spiritual perfection.

In addition to the relativity of the existence of time, time also operates in a fashion that humanity cannot perceive directly, and is not organized in a regular sequence, as it is commonly perceived by humanity. Gippius's conception of time was based upon the belief that ultimate spiritual reality could only be perceived by spiritual intuition (Pachmuss 1971, 80). Gippius discriminated between "real time" and "physical time." "Physical time" was just a system for measuring the passage of events. "Real time" was made up of the passage of "real events" based on spiritual reality perceptible only to the irrational intuition. These "real events" were interrelated and unique, and physical time was unable to reflect either of these attributes, instead presenting each and every moment in time, whether "real" or not, as an isolated static phenomenon (ibid., 81). Gippius saw "real time" as a single continuous stream of events, each one evolving from the ones before it but in itself unique. This makes "real

time" a creative force, in that each event is more than just the product of its antecedents. Furthermore a causal relationship is implied between the perception of "real time" and artistic inspiration, which Gippius believed was a perceptive flash into the higher reality of God, which we may also term "real time."

Gippius conceived of time as one of God's two most important gifts to humanity, along with love. She felt that it was the conjunction of love and time that would unite humanity with the eternal.

Love 'saves' the human soul; it elevates the Spirit. Time, or 'the living stream of Eternity,' 'the flame and the breath from Beyond', makes it possible for man to develop his capacity for love (ibid., 78).

The development of this capacity, which requires time as a medium, also requires suffering as an impetus for spiritual development:

Following Dostoevskii, [Gippius] saw the purpose of human life as man's voluntary submission to spiritual torment. Suffering brings about self-knowledge, which in turn leads him to moral and spiritual perfection (ibid., 79).

Time is the medium in which the individual experiences suffering, learns to accept it and grows towards God.

The ability to perceive 'real time' and to develop the capacity to love, depends on developing a personality because spiritual intuition is the only means of 'real' perception. Spiritual intuition is the particular province of the individual personality because it requires self-awareness and awareness of the higher reality of God. Like artistic inspiration, the perception of "real events" is possible only if the individual actively strives towards

God, and recognizes him- or herself as a reflection of that higher reality. Only the self-aware and self-controlled personality can recognize suffering as the path to self-knowledge and spiritual perfection, and voluntarily submit to it. Fostering the ability to love inevitably brings the individual closer to God, but only the individual personality is able to use time in this way.

### THE TRANSCENDENTAL MYSTERY OF SEX

Gippius's conception of sex is extremely complex, and at times apparently contradictory. There are several underpinnings to Gippius's approach to sex and sexuality that must be defined in order to understand the importance and impact of Gippius's sexual philosophy. Gippius's conception of sex was tied up with her understanding of the meaning of life and the nature of love. She felt that life is meant to be used in the individual's search for God and spiritual perfection. Love was the method of this search, and a more perfect approximation of God's love brought one closer to God. To approximate God's love the individual must develop the capacity for universal love, and express this sublime love of another individual through love for God. This love must find unique expression for each couple as a private and personal ritual or mystery of intimacy that strives towards God and the higher reality. This mystery of intimacy joins the two individuals into a single complete spiritual entity, while allowing them to preserve their individual personalities. It should be noted that any action by the couple could become this ritual of intimacy, provided that it permitted an ecstatic state of love and that through it the couple could strive towards God. In her article "Liubov' i krasota" [Love and Beauty, 1925] she wrote:

Every 'two' must have their own mystery of intimacy, which is entirely unique and is found, or is in the process of being found, by these two people for their exclusive use... Whether it is the sexual act (without childbearing), or some other form of intimacy which can overwhelm you instantaneously, is not important. For it is the mystery of the 'two,' of every couple, of the two-eternally-one, because it is precisely here that we approach Eternity (Gippius 1925, qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 84).

Gippius eventually came to believe that the ideal form for this ritual must be sexual intercourse because it created both spiritually and physically the closest possible human approximation of the bi-sexual image of God, balancing the male and the female:

In the sexual act, which results in the formation of the perfect unity of two individuals, each attains completion. The sexual act can, therefore, be regarded as an act of creation - one creates in oneself and in one's beloved the image of God and restores both to an absolute unity (Pachmuss 1971, 87).

Gippius's conception of human relationships was based upon indivisibility as represented by the Holy Trinity and symbolized by the number three (ibid., 82). She elaborated a system of numerology that represented the entire range of sublime human relationships, and as we shall see below, a numeral representation and explanation of androgyny and the composition of humanity. All relationships are sublime and 'real' when they operate around the concept of indivisibility as represented by the Holy Trinity. To deny the universal indivisibility that links everything together is to deny God, and destroy personality. Indivisibility is embodied by the Trinity, and founded upon the supreme love

of God. It is also the ultimate result of 'real' love on earth, for the mystery of the three is the creation of universal love, universal unity through God's love. In her 1896 poem "Liubov' odna" [Love is One] Gippius expressed the indivisibility of love: "I liubim my odnoi liubov'iu ... Liubov' odna, kak smert' odna" [And we love with one love ... Love is one, as death is one]. Through this indivisible love the individual becomes part of the universal unity of humanity (Pachmuss 1971, 64). Therefore to deny indivisibility is to deny God and love, which in turn denies the personality of the individual, who in turn finds himself or herself ignorant of God and unable to recognize love.

The key to understanding Gippius's conception of sublime relationships lies in her use of the numerals *one*, *two* and *three*. *One* represents the individual personality, enlightened and elevated by awareness of self and of God. *Two* represents the couple in its relationship as a quest for real love and God. *Three* represents the relationship between the individual, the couple and all of humanity, mediated by God. Each of these relationships is based upon love, where the love for God permits all other kinds of love: self-love, love for another and love for all.

Gippius's concept of sex in relation to the 'mystery of the two,' or the ritual of intimacy that could elevate and transform a couple into the image of God, is twofold, and operates in relation to personality. Her negative view of sexual congress is based upon coitus as a typical act that destroys personality and is devoid of its spiritual aspect. Within Gippius's conception of unglorified sex, the motivation, the act and the result, childbearing, were all

destructive to personality because each of these aspects of sexual activity were naturalistic, unconscious, and lacking any active quest for God. The pursuit and practice of mere sexuality reduced every participant to a common denominator. Lust is "typical and generic," it "reveals a lack of individuality"(Pachmuss 1971, 83). Gippius saw lust as the imposition of sex on humanity and linked it to death (ibid., 85). Like death, lust is an enemy of love because it can move the individual to betray love.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, like death, lust leads humanity away from God into the power of the Devil because it steals love's ideal expression but denies love itself. Gippius was concerned that lust "might gain the upper hand in human relations at the expense of the divine and miraculous feeling of genuine love" (ibid.).

Just as the lustful motivation of unglorified sex destroys individuality, so does unenlightened sexual intercourse. Unenlightened, generic sex destroys the uniqueness of the individual and of the couple; it destroys the unity of the 'two.' Each 'one' in the couple revolts at this attack on his or her individuality, and develops a desire to be unfaithful, to seek real love in someone else (Gippius, "Liubov' i mysl'" [Love and Thought], 1925). By accepting this level of sexual experience, the person's individuality or personality effectively ceases to exist. By betraying love as this naturalistic level of sexual experience encourages, the individual betrays God. This conception of sex initially lead Gippius to reject sexual love entirely, and only in the early 1900s did she begin to conceive of the possibility of sublime sexual activity. She could accept "love and sensuality only if it were possible

---

<sup>23</sup> As we have seen in the section on loyalty, Gippius considered that the betrayal of love was the most heinous form of human infidelity.

to change them into a new, different kind of love, as well as into a new infinite sensuality" (Gippius, *Contes D'Amours*, qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 85).

The result of sexual congress, childbearing, was of particular concern to Gippius, to the point that she advocated celibacy and childlessness among her friends and followers. Gippius saw childbearing as the result of sex based upon human considerations rather than on spiritual compatibility and the quest for God's love. Gippius rejected childbearing as an act of creation because it was not dependent on love, only on biology (Pachmuss 1971, 90). Despite the Biblical command to go forth and multiply, Gippius conceived of God allowing sex and childbearing only as an unavoidable fact of life. Gippius accepted the view of St. Paul when he allowed marriage and sex within marriage "not as a command, but only as a concession" (1 Corinthians, 7-6). She was convinced that with the further evolution of humanity childbearing would disappear, and with it, except for some occasional and insignificant lapses, the sexual act would disappear as well:

[W]hen procreation is no longer desired, it will be abolished. With the abolition of procreation, the sexual act will also disappear of its own accord - not by any law, but because of its becoming an unlawful state (Gippius, *Contes D'Amour*, August 16, 1899 qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 90).

Gippius did not believe that procreation was the product of sex as a holy force of creation, but rather a simple biological imperative that was separate from God and love because it could operate without them.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> As we shall see later, the product of sexual action as a force of holy creation was the Androgyne as the image of God created in the union of two individuals during sex as the mystery of the 'two'.

In its positive aspect sex offered the most perfect way to approximate God's love and image on earth in that it combined the spirit and the flesh in the search for communion with God. Gippius saw sex as the best method of attaining the mystery of the 'two.' Unlike carnal lust, the acceptable sexual act did not threaten individuality but rather increased it in the combination of spirit and body that was the result of glorified sex. Gippius believed that:

[T]he mystery of the two is a broader concept than sex. This mystery may include sex but it definitely cannot be identified with it. On the other hand, sex itself is broader than old and present concepts of it: it is a part of our spirit, our soul, and our flesh (Gippius, letter to D. Filosofov, in Pachmuss 1971, 84).

Sex is glorified, and acceptable, only as a part of the effort to reach God, only through the mystery of the 'two.' Within the mystery of the 'two' sex takes on an entirely new aspect. As a spiritual quest towards God, sex becomes not only acceptable, but divine:

Sex is holy because God is the Creator of sex. Sexual love may lead to salvation by restoring the lost unity of two individuals, by raising them to one ideal and absolute individuality (Pachmuss 1971, 86).

Sex in this case no longer destroys individuality because it is not driven by lust and it does not pursue procreation. It unites the body and the spirit, representing Heaven and earth.<sup>25</sup> Gippius believed that the

---

<sup>25</sup> Several of Gippius's novels and short stories express her belief that sex as a spiritual mystery brought actual contact with God on earth. In the 1902 novel "*Sumerki Dukha*" [*The Twilight of the Spirit*] the hero Shadrov says to his beloved Margaret: "through the dark power of your love you will reach His light, if you surrender the whole of your being to an experience of love." (Gippius 1902, 199-200) The heroine of the short

creative event in the glorified sexual act was the physical and spiritual creation of a single perfect human being, in whom the male and female characteristics of the couple were perfectly balanced. This was the Androgyne that Gippius idealized.

Gippius believed that love was the basis of every relationship, and that sex was an aspect of all love. The ideal method of this glorification was the sublime sexual act in the mystery of the 'two' which united body and spirit in the striving towards God. Because love is the basis of all potentially sublime human relationships they must have a sexual aspect in order to include the body as well as the spirit. This belief lead Gippius to consider the parent-child relationship as limited and lacking sublime potential because it precludes any sexual aspect. The absence of erotic potential makes it impossible for filial love to approximate the sublime love of God. The parent-child relationship is a "completed, definite and impersonal relationship [in the sexual sense]..." (Gippius 1909, 165, qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 90). The *a priori* exclusion of any sexual aspect of a relationship means that the relationship can never enter into God's perfect real love, because it precludes physical and spiritual unity between people. The belief in the parent-child relationship as essentially crippled and possibly God-less may have aggravated Gippius's stance against childbearing.

Gippius's understanding of real love as always containing an element of sexuality extended beyond the conventional heterosexual couple to recognize homosexual

---

story "Sliskom Rannie" [Born Too Early, 1902] refuses the proposal of the man she loves because she feels unable to complete their love physically, and she sees this as a barrier to unity in love.

relationships as potentially sublime in their love. The erotic aspect of same-sex relationships was not limited to practising homosexuals; according to Gippius it existed in every relationship based upon real love:

Heterosexuality is not of such importance for two people in love with one another, as is usually thought: every human being can, in the natural course of things, love another human being sublimely

(Gippius, *Contes D'Amour*, qtd. in Pachmuss 1971, 91).

Gippius's conception of love was such that any relationship that had a potential or active dimension of sexual activity was capable of developing into the sublime love that approximated God's love and his image. The sexual aspect of love, far from limiting the expression of the mystery of the 'two,' in fact plays an important role in the movement of Gippius's metaphysics towards a solution to the problem of transfiguring the world, in the form of the divine-human Androgyne.

The last element of Gippius numerological system was the numeral '8' as a graphic representation of the androgynous nature of every individual, and as an essential aspect of the attainment of idealized love. Following the ideas of Otto Weininger as set out in *Sex and Character*, 1904, Gippius conceived of the individual human being as composed of both female and male components, united without harmony or symmetry (Pachmuss 1971, 92). The disparate sexual composition of the individual is represented by the numeral '8': the lower, larger loop in the figure represents the dominant sexual component and the smaller, upper loop represents the recessive sexual component. For a man, the larger loop would be masculine and the smaller loop would be feminine. For a woman the situation would be reversed. The relative size of the loops is different for

each individual, as the component ratio of masculine and feminine characteristics varies for each person. Since each person has masculine and feminine components, no one is composed of exclusively masculine or feminine attributes.

Gippius accepted Weininger's idea that sexual attraction and love is based on the individual's attempts to form a unity with another individual. Gippius believed that this unity was based on the individual finding someone with a "correspondingly-reversed" sexual composition (Gippius, "Love and Thought" 1925). The gender components in an individual are attracted to opposite components of equal value in a partner. A man with a large masculine component and a small feminine component will be attracted to a woman with a feminine component equal to his masculine one, and a masculine component equal to his feminine one. Their '8's' must be mirror images for the potential of personal love to develop (Pachmuss 1971, 93). It is only with a person whose gender components are equal and opposite to his own that a person can create a unity of spirit and body that is the basis of real love (ibid., 92).

Lack of harmony combined with lack of equality formed the essential barrier between God and man. Gippius believed that both God and Christ were beings of perfect bi-sexuality, in which masculine and feminine components were harmoniously united and balanced. She came to this conclusion based upon her acceptance of Christian doctrine that God and Christ were a single, perfect unity. Divine bi-sexuality and the notion of humanity created in God's image are accommodated in a conception of the supreme being as father and mother in one. God had to include the masculine and feminine principles, because they were realized in the human gender differentiation (ibid., 92).

If women were purely feminine and men purely masculine, two possibilities existed. The first possibility is that God has a definite gender, and created only one gender in his image, meaning that the other, bereft of any link to God, was necessarily demonic. The second possibility is that God is bi-sexual, and able to create both genders, but neither of them would truly be God's image, as each lacks the representation of half of the gender components of God. If the single gender composition is rejected as incompatible with man's creation in God's image, then both men and women must be essentially bi-sexual, like God. Their bi-sexuality is not perfect or balanced. They are sexually differentiated, because they exist in this imperfect material world, and must perpetuate the species in order to be able to continue to strive towards God.<sup>26</sup> A conception of God that recognizes an equal and essential female principle is a radical departure from the general trend of the Silver Age. As we have seen, Berdiaev's conception of divinity did not accommodate the feminine aspect of God, while Solov'ëv rejected it outright. By insisting that both God and Christ were masculine and feminine in equal proportions, Gippius granted the ultimate recognition of the value to the female element in humanity, and to femininity itself.

In an interesting departure from her conception of the androgynous nature of God and Christ, Gippius identified the Holy Ghost as a purely feminine phenomenon. If we are

---

<sup>26</sup> The bulk of this argument is very similar to that put forward by Vasilii Rozanov in his article 1911 "Liudi Lunnogo Sveta" [People of the Moonlight]. The major difference between Rozanov and Gippius on this point was that Rozanov rejected the basically demonic or un-Godly nature of the world, and considered it to be God's other child. Gippius made a definite distinction between the material world of everyday existence and the higher world of spiritual existence. Despite a pronounced philosophical antagonism between the two, they did have some fundamental points of agreement. Most relevant in this case is their agreement on the bi-sexual nature of God and Christ. See Rozanov 1911, 39 - 194.

to use the same logic that brought Gippius to the conclusion that God and Christ were bi-sexual beings, then the Holy Ghost, as a full and equal member of the indivisible Holy Trinity, should be bi-sexual as well. This is not the case. Gippius equated the Holy Ghost with The Virgin Mary "in Whose Divinity motherhood and virginity are merged" (Gippius, "Iskusstvo i liubov'" [Art and Love, 1953], 111). By identifying the Holy Ghost as the Mother of God Gippius hoped to "synthesize" God the Father and God the Son (Pachmuss 1971, 105). Gippius believed that God and Christ were essentially spiritual beings, but that the Holy Ghost represented the resolution of all irreconcilable dualities by being the Holy Ghost and the Holy Flesh, the union of the earthly and the divine (ibid, 105). Divine Motherhood was the only way to unite the divine and the earthly at the global level, just as the formation of the Androgyne during the sexual act transfigures the individuals in a love relationship. This is striking given Gippius's repeated attacks on earthly motherhood. It is a rather glaring inconsistency in her philosophical system, and it would appear to contradict everything that she advocated in her conception of the creative potential of human sexuality. The apparent contradiction does not stand up under scrutiny. Gippius objected to childbearing as a result of sexual intercourse that is able to operate in the total absence of love and of God. As a mechanical result of sex, childbearing is not a creative act in the spiritual sense. She saw the creation of the Androgyne during sex as a spiritually creative act precisely because it depended on love and God for success. Seen in this way, the Holy Ghost as divine Mother is logically coherent with Gippius's conception of sex and her rejection of childbearing, because the Holy Ghost as Holy Spirit and Holy Flesh combined operates entirely on the basis of divine love and

as an integral part of God.

The existence of the Holy Ghost as the pure feminine principle within the indivisible unity of the Holy Trinity raises an interesting question about the true equality of the sexes in Gippius's metaphysics. God and Christ are perfectly balanced bi-sexual beings, but the Holy Ghost is entirely feminine, making the sum of gender components unequal within the indivisible unity of the Holy Trinity. This is deceptive because although perfect balance of gender components is desirable in the mystery of the 'two,' it is irrelevant to the mystery of the 'three.' The role of the Holy Ghost in Gippius's system of belief is to bring about the transfiguration of the world, to realize the mystery of the 'three' for all of humanity. Gippius believed that attaining a state of universal love between all people was an essential step towards the transfiguration of the world. The universal love of the 'three' is the love of all of humanity through the love for God. Therefore gender balance is not important, real love is. It is significant within the context of Silver-Age misogyny that Gippius believed that the feminine aspect of divinity will accomplish God's will and reunite humanity with God in an ultimate unity.<sup>27</sup> It demonstrates that Gippius conceived of gender equality in terms so absolute that quantitative equality is no longer necessary. The importance of femininity does not detract from the importance of the masculine principle, because both are present in every human. The inequality of gender principles

---

<sup>27</sup> Solov'ev ascribed a similar function to his female aspect of divinity, The Eternal Feminine. However, Gippius's full integration of the feminine into all aspects of the Christian Trinity, including the purely feminine composition of the Holy Ghost, is an innovation of a different order, because it flies in the face of the Silver-Age tendency to resolve the problem of human sexual differentiation through complete segregation of sexes, or through the elimination of the female gender. See Naiman, 1993.

in the Holy Trinity does not reduce the equality of the sexes because the unity of the Trinity is based on sublime universal love which operate regardless of gender. Although the gender attributed to the Holy Ghost is of itself not problematic, it is an important departure from the general trend of Silver-Age philosophy, and demonstrates a decidedly pro-feminine position in Gippius's theory of androgyny and in her philosophy in general.

### **METAPHYSICS AND ANDROGYNY**

The culmination of Gippius's metaphysical system was the desire to attain an androgynous state. The metaphysical concepts in Gippius's works which Pachmuss has identified all point towards the resolution of a single problem: spiritually and physically reuniting humanity with God within her lifetime. Each of these concepts serves either to identify an essential part of the process of transfiguring humanity, or to define an aspect of humanity that somehow resembles the divine. Freedom, equality and loyalty were essential characteristics of humanity through which our likeness to God manifested itself. Love and sex as a transcendental mystery were the mechanisms through which the world could be made divine. They operated in the medium of time and were opposed by death. These metaphysical concepts were erected upon the bases of the human personality and the awareness of God and all together they lead to Gippius's famous concern for androgyny, and its expression in her art. Gippius saw God as a bi-sexual Supreme Being who desired reconciliation with humanity because He/She loves us perfectly. The individual human who is sufficiently aware of self and of God to generate a personality strives to recreate the likeness of God in him- or herself in order to achieve that reconciliation through

an approximation of God's perfect love. To recreate the likeness of God, the individual must be aware of God's bisexual nature, and must recognize his or her own similar composition. The individual must seek to transcend the sexual differentiation imposed by temporal reproductive necessity, and reach a state where all love, both physical and spiritual, is universal and oriented towards an eternal union with God. This state of universal love in God's image was the state of androgyny, which Gippius pursued in her philosophy and in her art.

### Chapter Three

#### Androgyny in the Poetry And Prose of Zinaida Gippius

Zinaida Gippius is perhaps most famous for developing the theme of androgyny in her poetry. This was most commonly expressed by the use of masculine verb form and adjectives to create a masculine lyric persona, or ego, to use Gove's terminology, in her poetry (Gove 1978). In a survey of over 280 poems representing the entire length of Gippius's career, Gove found 166 which contained a singular first person ego. Eighty-five of these poems, or fifty-one per cent, left the gender of the ego unspecified, while an additional fort-five per cent, or 75 poems, used masculine grammatical markers to identify the lyric persona. Of the remaining six poems with a female ego, one, "Muchenitsa" [Martyr, 1904] has the female gender of the ego implied by the title of the poem, but no internal signs of the ego's gender. "In five of the six poems with a feminine first person, the speaker is clearly not the ego but a *dramatis persona*" (Gove 1978, 381). Gove makes a distinction here between the authorial voice, that is the ego, and the *dramatis persona*, which is an artificial mask that disguises the authorial ego. The use of a masculine authorial voice is not confined to her verse; it is also a common feature of her short stories and novels. Pachmuss identifies Gippius's desire to

write poetry not just as a woman but as a human being... According to Hippius, a woman can be, and must be, first of all a human being; she may be a woman only after having established herself as a human being (Pachmuss 1971, 17).

Besides Gippius's desire to write as a human being, 'kak

*chelovek*, ' which is grammatically masculine in Russian, Gove identifies several other factors that contributed to Gippius's adoption of a masculine authorial voice in her creation of gender ambivalence:

Undoubtedly, besides this explanation [her desire to write as a human being, not only as a woman] by the author, which lies in the realm of social psychology and personal 'politics,' subconscious psychological motivation played a large part in the gender switch (Gove 1978, 380).

Gove goes on to identify Gippius's "tormented, intellectualized sexuality - expressed in an insistent spiritualization of love and an idealization of the Androgyne" (Gove 1978, 380) as aspects of Gippius's gender play in her art. Gove identifies a link between the development of the theme of androgyny that is so well known in Gippius's writing, and her religious and metaphysical pursuits, which informed all of her actions. As in her metaphysics, Gippius's development of androgyny in her art is predicated upon personality and an awareness of God. This holds true for both fictional prose and poetry, but as we shall see, the treatment of the androgyny theme is not identical in these literary genres. However the confluence of literary and metaphysical androgyny is an important part of the gender bending life-strategy that Gippius followed.

In general terms, Gippius's development of androgyny in literature is part of her quest for sublime love beyond the limitations of gender, sexual orientation and cultural norms of male/female behaviour. Gippius deals with this quest more openly in her prose than in her poetry, and does so through various means. Her prose clearly defines the nominal gender of the authorial voice, and the gender of others in the story as perceived by the narrator. The

question of androgyny is developed in her prose through the description of her characters as more or less physically and intellectually androgynous, and free of social gender norms of behaviour. Gippius's poetry works in a very different manner. As we have seen above, Gippius wrote most frequently in one of two ways. Either she avoided gender marking altogether, or she assumed a masculine authorial voice. Both of these aspects contribute to the development of the androgyny theme in her poetry. On the one hand Gippius creates a poetry that can operate entirely outside the social limitations and expectations attached to gender from a single trans-gender position. On the other hand she created a poetry that deliberately rejects the limited position of a Silver-Age woman writer by assuming the identity of a male ego. Both of these strategies develop an androgynous authorial voice because in both cases they are associated with an identifiably female author who was renowned for her gender-ambiguous lifestyle.

The development of androgyny as an idealized human state in Gippius's art goes beyond the content of the poems themselves, and is influenced by the intellectual context of Gippius as the writer, and of the Silver-Age reader. As Jennifer Presto explains, Gippius's gender play, both in her lifestyle and in her literary activity was well known, forming a context of gender ambiguity (Presto 1993, 58-75). This context favours the development of the theme of androgyny because it explodes the socially conditioned gender expectations of the reader. The reader is aware of the real gender of the author and of her philosophical pursuit of an androgynous ideal as a religious goal for transfiguring the world. The reader is also aware that the author has assumed a nominally male identity, or an identity from which all gender markers have been expunged,

in her art and that she has done so before in her life and art, both by cross-dressing and by assuming male pseudonyms. Furthermore, Gippius's 'male mask,' to use Diana Lewis Burgin's term, was hardly opaque. Innokentii Annenskii's 1909 essay "O sovremennom lirizme" [On Contemporary Lyricism] states "The masculine mask of [Gippius's] remarkable lyrics could hardly deceive a single attentive reader" (Annenskii, "On Contemporary Lyricism" 1909, 12, qtd. in Burgin 1993, 186). The masculine authorial voice, either explicitly assumed through the use of masculine grammatical markers, or presumed for a non-gendered authorial voice in Russian, which Gove argues attributes male gender to all voices not marked 'female,' is not opaque because the positions and attitudes related by the authorial voice do not correspond to a male point of view. Interestingly, the attitudes and opinions do not correspond to a purely female point of view either. In the 1917 poem "Vsia" [All of You], the lyric voice proclaims his love to his "Sweet faithful, Promised Bride of the ages... Earth, my joy." The metaphor of the earth as bride is only partially realized, capable of giving "A caress, unexpected, soothing an unquenchable hurt..." but not given an anthropomorphic form. The lyric persona proclaims his love for all of his "Only One" after describing her in terms of lemon and beech groves, distances, spectral Corsica and rose-tinted dawns, never in a human form. This leaves us somewhere in between the sexes, given the Silver-Age understanding of how men and women think. Naiman's analysis of Silver-Age philosophy leads us to expect a male writer to evoke a definite, individual spiritual identity related to the Earth, similar to Aleksander Blok's "Beautiful Lady." A more modern view would lead us to expect a fully realized metaphor from a male author, with imagery linking the description of the Earth to the

physical description of a woman. Equally, in terms of the expectations of the contemporary reader towards a Silver-Age female poet, one would not expect the use of the metaphor of the Earth as a bride, which entails a sexual interest in the Earth as a female being, but rather as a mother or sister. From a modern point of view, we tend to expect some empathic exploration or experience of the emotional state of the "bride." However none of this is forthcoming. Rather, the lyric persona states:

I love all of you, my Only One,  
You are all mine, mine!  
We shall be resurrected together, beyond the  
mysterious border,  
Together- both you, and I!

Gippius's trans-gender activities, literary and behavioural, were common knowledge among the intellectual elite of the Silver Age. They were so pervasive in her art that they form an integral part of the Silver-Age reading of Gippius's works, even if the metaphysics behind the theme of androgyny are not fully explained in every literary work. Androgyny is a culturally embedded aspect of her work, and it may be seen as an inter-textual constant that rejects gender norms *a priori* because it was a recognized aspect of Gippius work and lifestyle.

It is important to establish the difference that exists between Gippius's religious ideal of the Androgyne and the theme of androgyny as developed in her literary works. The Androgyne, as understood by Gippius, was a return to the original perfect human form, the divine image of God. This divine image reconciled the human division by gender and was a perfectly balanced union of male and female aspects of human nature made into a single, whole

being by love before God. It, for lack of a better pronoun, was physically and spiritually immortal, formed by two perfectly matched people in a transcending ritual of intimacy, ideally sexual intercourse, striving through their love for each other towards a loving reunion with God and Christ, and through them a reunion with all of humanity.

The androgynous theme developed in Gippius's literary works was quite different. It does not usually seek to define the entire process of creating the Androgyne, nor does it usually spend much time defining the Androgyne in relation to God and humanity. The artistic expression of androgyny in Gippius's works usually operates within the religious ideal of creating the Androgyne, but only represents a particular part of the process, the quest for sublime love. This quest is an essential part of the ideal of the Androgyne because finding the partner with whom sublime love is possible is the unavoidable prerequisite for personal transfiguration by creating the Androgyne. The lyric persona of a poem or the protagonist of a story is of necessity a personality according to Gippius's definition, for he or she is self-aware, and cognizant of the nature of love. The awareness of God is implicit in the perception of the nature of love because for Gippius true love was inseparably linked with God. Whatever his or her sexual orientation, whoever or whatever the object of his or her love is, the authorial voice perceives love as a transcending experience.

The love relationships that Gippius writes about in her poetry are either unconsummated or impossible to consummate, forcing the relationship to exist on an idealized level of purely spiritual love (Gove 1978, 385).

This holds true for a certain number of short stories, but it is usually, as in the case in "Perlamutrovaia trost'" [The Pearlhandled Cane, 1927], because of conflicting desires and unrequited emotions. The narrator goes to visit his closest friend, Franz, who is engaged to be married, yet nurses a passion for his estranged lover Otto. The wife of the closest neighbour, Clara, loves and desires Franz, but the feeling, though acknowledged, is totally unrequited. The narrator, Martinov, is infatuated with Nino, one of the servants, and yet is drawn to love a young english girl called Ella. The physically unconsummated nature of all these loves gives a pure, shining spirituality to the emotional turmoil besetting each character. Other stories, such as "Ty - ty" [You - Are You, 1927], do not contain physically consummated relationships simply because they end before consummation takes place, but the love that is presented is a transcending one, striking like a bolt of lightening and completely changing the way the characters experience the world. Some stories, such as "Chto eto takoe?" [What is this?, 1927] contain a sexually consummated relationship between the hero and his fiancée, but only as an impediment to another unsuccessful love relationship between the hero and his fiancée's youthful mother. It is impossible for the hero, Martinov, to reconcile the spiritual and physical aspects of both of these relationships, so he abandons both, and goes abroad.

As Gove points out, the love that is sought in Gippius's poems, and I would add in her prose, is one that is universal and sublime, loving the object of affection in every possible way and in every possible state of being (Gove 1978, 384). Gippius's 1907 Sonnet II of "Tri formy soneta" [Three Types of Sonnets] states "Ia cherez vse, skvoz' vse - tebia liubliu" ["Through everything, across

everything - I love you"], in "Sashen'ka" [Little Sasha, 1927] Gippius describes the male protagonist's love for a young man studying at university as "hopeless rapture" (Gippius, "Sashen'ka" in Pachmuss *Selected Works*, 1972, 177). Yet the declaration of this hopeless and unrequited love turns Sashen'ka from suicide at the penultimate moment. In Gippius's 1902 novel *Sumerki dukha* [The Twilight of the Spirit] the love between the hero, Shadrov, and the heroine, Margarita, is entirely spiritual. The protagonists are only able to love each other through their shared love of God. This mediated love exists through and for God/Christ, and is brought about by God to allow the two lovers to reach Him, not each other (Gippius, "The Twilight of the Spirit" in *Tret'ia kniga rasskazov*, 1902, 198-200). Gippius equated God with love, so to seek love is to seek God (Pachmuss 1971, 65) and the ability to experience and seek God is an essential part of personality.

#### "You- Are You"

The collection of short stories "Memuary Martinova" [Memoirs of Martinov, 1927] contains some of Gippius's most important prose. Although "The Pearlhandled Cane" is the best known of these stories, and, according to Pachmuss, one to which Gippius attached particular importance (Pachmuss 1971, 272), other stories are more interesting in their treatment of androgyny. In the short story "You - Are You" the theme of androgyny is particularly well developed in relation to love and personality. It is set in Nice, France, where Ivan Martinov, a young Russian intellectual from a family of intellectuals, is recovering from a serious illness which has given him the youthful appearance of a somewhat lanky twenty-year old. The burgeoning strength of his returning health has given him a feeling of

being rapturously in love with the world in general but with no one person in particular. His love becomes fixated upon one person during a chance encounter in a restaurant, where he meets a beautiful, slender young woman named Marcelle, going to a masked ball. He is sent into an immediate rapture of love which is apparently reciprocated. They leave the restaurant together, embrace and go directly to his hotel room. Along the way, Marcelle claims that she has loved him for some time, even though Martinov insists that he has only ever seen her before in his dreams, and that they had never met before that night. At the hotel, Marcelle hides behind her costume mask, and they proceed to Martinov's room, where it is revealed that Marcelle is actually a man. Marcelle's real gender has no impact whatsoever on the love that Martinov feels, and the story ends as he states "Marcelle, don't be afraid... Don't think. isn't it really all the same? Isn't it really all the same, if you - are you?" (Gippius, "You - Are You," in *Pachmuss Selected Works*, 1972, 226).

The theme of androgyny is developed in this story on several levels and the questions of love and personality play an important role. First there is Gippius's use, as in her poetry, of a male persona in the first person in what appears to be a typical story of love at first sight, with a twist at the end that presages more contemporary treatments of androgyny such as the movie *The Crying Game*, 1992. Marcelle's nominal gender is another facet of this level of development of androgyny. The attitudes and motivations displayed by these two characters provide another level on which Gippius challenges the validity of conventional ideas on masculine and feminine behaviour. This story also rejects the Silver-Age understanding of women as physically dominated by their nature as sexual

beings bereft of spirituality. Marcelle, who is read as a woman for the entire story, is motivated by her transcending love for Martinov, yet there is never any question of the domesticity or procreative penchant attributed to female sexuality in Silver-Age thought. By developing a love story in which masculinity and femininity are so interwoven, Gippius demonstrates her philosophical belief that a sublime love, which has the potential of creating the divine Androgyny by uniting two people, can exist between any two people regardless of gender or social norms of behaviour. By creating a situation in which physical and spiritual love operates independently of gender, Gippius demonstrates that people who can attain a state of androgyny here on earth have the potential of transfiguring themselves and ultimately the world.

The question of Marcelle's real gender, despite 'her' almost entirely successful masquerade as a woman, is the most openly developed aspect of androgyny in this story. 'She' is described in feminine terms throughout, and more importantly in terms that tend to exclude any presumption of masculinity, emphasizing small stature, slenderness, frailty and youthful girlishness clad in pink. Even after 'she' has been revealed to be a man Gippius still uses feminine pronouns to describe 'her':

By this single second of my hesitation she understood that I understood. Her delicate body quivered in my arms, her eyes opened and immediately shut again (ibid., 226).

However, Gippius gives some clues to the denouement of the story by avoiding all mention of incontrovertibly feminine physical attributes in Marcelle's description. Persistent references to 'her' slenderness and youth, to the point that Martinov wonders what he would do if he met 'her' with

'her' governess on the beach, imply that 'she' has no breasts and slender boyish hips, even though 'she' claims to be sixteen years old, well into puberty. 'She' has "dark, closely cropped, wavy hair," another indication of ambiguity, whereas long hair would tend to confirm Marcelle as genuinely female. Martinov is surprised to discover that she is in fact quite tall, only slightly shorter than he is (ibid., 222).

What little makeup she wears "seemed to have been applied purposely, in jest" (ibid., 221). This caricature implies that Marcelle is wearing a second mask beneath the pink velvet one she has brought for the masquerade ball. Her insistence on wearing the mask any time she is in close proximity with Martinov, when there is too much light, or when they go to his hotel implies that she is hiding something. Marcelle also insists that she has seen Martinov often, knows which hotel he lives in and she knows that he goes by the name Gianino, the Italian equivalent of Ivan. At their very first meeting Marcelle declares her obsession: "I have known you for a long time, for a long time... I have loved you. You are my beguin"<sup>28</sup> (ibid., 223).

Martinov rejects this as impossible, swearing that this was their first meeting, yet he is haunted by a feeling of familiarity about her. Martinov justifies the recognition that he feels when he looks at Marcelle by claiming to have dreamed of her, but the revelation that she is really a man implies that they may well have met before in some transitory fashion. This is strengthened by Marcelle's refusal to let Martinov see her face too clearly. Marcelle's insistence on wearing 'her' mask in the hotel suggests that 'she' is not unknown in the hotel. However,

---

<sup>28</sup> *Béguin* is a French word meaning the object of passion or love (*Le Petit Robert: Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* 1979, 174).

Gippius does not provide any further information on this point.

The question of androgyny and the importance of gender is further developed by the inversion of socially acceptable gender behaviour in the story. Marcelle approaches Martinov and proposes that they meet outside, whereas turn-of-the-century etiquette would require the man to take the initiative. In fact Marcelle takes the initiative throughout the entire story, controlling the tempo of their physical interaction, hailing a limousine and initiating their kisses, while Martinov is so besotted by love that he forgets that he has a car of his own right next to the restaurant where they met. Martinov, for all of his professed passion, for all "the blood rushing violently through [his] temples" (ibid., 225) is not the instigator of their relationship, nor of their physical intimacy. Her repeated statements of long-held love for him imply that he is the one being pursued, which is traditionally a female role in a relationship. Even if we accept Marcelle as a woman, this story rejects the social limitation of women in the quest for love. If we look beyond Marcelle's masquerade as a woman, and look at Gippius as a woman writing this story, we see traditional gender roles rejected throughout the story, in favour of behaviour that does not recognize gender at all as a factor in the quest for a love relationship. This conception of love circumvents the misogyny of Silver-Age social and philosophical conventions entirely, with its blanket rejection of gender as a guiding factor in human behaviour, and in the pursuit of sublime love.

The Silver-Age understanding of female sexuality plays a role in the development of androgyny in this story.

Naiman argues that Silver-Age Russian culture and philosophy generally took a very negative view of femininity. This was particularly true for the Silver Age interpretation of the sexual nature of men and women. Men were seen as largely separated from their external sex organs, and were considered to be essentially spiritual beings. The internal nature of women's sex organs lead Silver Age thinkers to conceive of women as entirely dominated by them, going so far as to consider that women, by their very nature, were permanently copulating with everything in their environment (Naiman 1993, 262). Female sexuality's confinement within the body lead Silver-Age thinkers like Berdiaev and Solov'ëv to believe that women's sexual experience dominated their entire beings and relegated them to an entirely sensuous existence bereft of spirituality (ibid., 262-4).

This misogynistic aspect of Silver-Age philosophy can be used to expand Gippius's treatment of androgyny in this story. Gippius blurs the lines of contemporary theory of sexual division by extending to Martinov the internalized, whole-body sexuality attributed to women. Martinov experiences the emotional and physical aspects of love with his entire body, in the "feminine" way, not with any specific part of his body, in the "masculine" way. "Again these kisses, these unusual 'first' kisses, which melted my entire body" (Gippius, "You - are You," 225). Gender ambiguity is thus established for both characters, suggesting that they each approach Gippius's ideal of balance and reconciliation of gender attributes within the individual. These two characters seem to be compatible, with complementary gender attributes which together form a complete unity. They demonstrate how Gippius's numerology can be applied to her art by showing how the gender

composition of one individual, represented by the numeral '8,' can find complementary opposite gender attributes in a partner regardless of actual gender. For example the nominally male Martinov's 'feminine' attributes such as hesitation and passivity are complimented by the nominally female Marcelle's 'masculine' attributes such as initiative, and activity. Their respective physiques also reflect a complimentary similarity, in that they share a slender, asexual body-type, while conserving the expected 'masculine' advantage in size and solidity of Martinov relative to Marcelle's shorter, frailer 'feminine' physique.

The physical descriptions of both characters avoid attributes that can be seen as very masculine or very feminine. Both characters are essentially physically androgynous, having neither the virile muscularity that is typically definitive of masculinity, nor the curvaceousness that is typically idealized as femininity. Martinov and Marcelle are remarkable for their slenderness, their lack of secondary sexual characteristics: Martinov lacks the hirsute virility and physical dominance of the idealized male animal, Marcelle lacks all female characteristics linked with maternity as well as the traditionally idealized characteristics of soft, yielding, feminine voluptuousness. These androgynous attributes of the body are all disguised as youth, but the persistent avoidance of all physical aspects of definite masculinity and definite femininity reflect the Silver-Age rejection of human sexual differentiation. Furthermore Martinov's and Marcelle's physical androgyny illustrate the particular concerns for balanced gender characteristics, and the rejection of the procreative aspects of sex that inform Gippius's philosophy of androgyny as an essential part of sublime love.

The development of love as a part of the theme of androgyny is important in that it provides the link between the characters and the implied search for God that inhabits all of Gippius's works. In the same way, the search for love also establishes the characters as personalities, opening the possibility of transfiguration and the quest for God. Martinov's experience of love, particularly his ecstatic feeling of being in love with the whole world, which becomes centered in the person of Marcelle, is interesting because it touches upon Gippius's ideal of universal love, a love for all of humanity. The Silver-Age concern with *sobornost'* is present through Gippius's conception of love as a gift from God. The tacit approval of society that permits the protagonists the freedom to meet and fall in love in such a remarkable way, along with the unity of purpose in their attempt to find love, can be seen as a reference to the kind of universal *sobornost'* that could eventually transfigure the world. Those united by love have achieved a kind of *sobornost'* within their romantic relationship, and are in effect united by God. Within Gippius's personal metaphysics it can be argued that an individual in this state approximates God's love, thereby moving closer to a sublime existence. This would account for the rapturous state that Martinov finds himself in as his convalescence draws to a close:

I still felt every day new strengths were developing and increasing within me and that, parallel to them, a joyful gaiety was growing in my body... I was in love- oh, of course - only I didn't know with whom. I still hadn't decided, and in the meantime I was in love with everyone (*ibid.*, 219).

Despite Martinov's strong physical attraction to Marcelle, love is distinctly separate from passion in this story: "A

double exhaustion - love and passion, disunited and somehow in a mutual struggle within me - deafened and blinded me"(ibid., 223). Tenderness and love defeat passion in their struggle for control over Martinov. This can be seen as the triumph of the personality over animal carnality, of the spirit over the unenlightened flesh. The triumph of love elevates their later physical interaction, because it is based upon a transporting ecstasy of love which involves the entirety of each person.

Indeed this was 'she,' the only one who was pleasing to me in her entirety; that is, not just something about her, but all of her - to all of me. I say 'was pleasing,' but this is a trite expression, for every fibre of my body was attracted to her, to her tall slender body (ibid., 225-6).

Although this passage may seem to indicate the primacy of physicality in the relationship, under closer analysis it reveals just the opposite. The physical nature of the attraction is given free rein only after the relationship has established itself as based upon love, not lust. As we have seen, Gippius's conception of the personality included the body as formative of the uniqueness of each person; she glorified sex as the best path to God. What she rejects in her metaphysics, as in this story, is the loveless animalism that occurs when sex is co-opted by lust. The level on which the attraction operates indicates that this is more than mere lust. Every aspect of Marcelle is deliriously, painfully attractive to every part of Martinov, and this love is based upon the uniqueness of her personality, regardless of the deceptiveness of her gender. Martinov loves her because she is who she is, not because of what he thought she was, a woman. Because their love is based on the spiritual compatibility of their personalities

rather than on the attraction between their bodies, the revelation of Marcelle's true male gender has no impact upon their physical attraction and love whatsoever. The success of the androgynous message in this story is based upon its orientation on love and its foundation in the attraction between personalities rather than bodies. By developing her theme of androgyny in a way that discredits socially determined gender behaviour, Gippius rejects the Silver-Age conception of woman as a purely sexual animal, passively copulating with her whole environment. Instead, she describes an experience of love that on one level inverts traditional gender roles in courtship, and on another explodes gendered behaviour entirely by the revelation that both characters in the story are male.

### **Poetry**

Gippius's treatment of androgyny in poetry differs in some ways from that in her prose. Although it still operates basically as a narrative of the quest for sublime love, it is couched in different terms. Here androgyny is generally much more of a first-person phenomenon. As Gove points out, the vast majority of Gippius's gendered poems, including her love lyrics, are written using a male lyric persona (Gove 1978, 381). Gove reveals that those poems which speak through a male lyric persona to a female listener fulfil, at least superficially, the expectations of a love relationship created by the poetic tradition of the male-authored love lyric with a female love object (ibid., 383). Gippius's poetry also follows poetic tradition in the relationships between a male lyric persona and male listeners or lyric objects, which operate on the levels of spiritual relations, or social equality rather

than on the level of a romantic relationship between fundamentally unequal men and women (ibid., 383). Gove also points out that for those poems with unspecified gender of the ego, gender could often be attributed based upon literary form, such as the traditional use of a male ego and a female alter in love lyrics (ibid., 389). A typical example is the 1897 poem "Seranada" [Serenade], which has a female alter, or object, and uses a love lyric form, which suggests a male ego, even if the authorial gender is not specified in the text. Another factor which tends to influence the implied gender of the ego is the cultural rejection of homosexuality in Russia. Gove argues that this aspect of Russian culture tends to create a presumption of a heterosexual relationship wherever it could, to the exclusion of textually-possible homosexual relationships (ibid., 391).

Some of Gippius's poems contain what Gove calls "gender-marked androgyny of ego/alter," referring to the poetic voice of the author, and the poetic object. This means that the gender of the ego or the alter is specified as simultaneously male and female. Gove argues that these poems, such as "Vechnozhenstvennoe" [The Eternal Feminine, 1938], are the

poetic expression of Gippius's ideal of androgyny, and put into sharp focus her conscious exploration of the possibilities for poetic deployment of sex and gender polarities and her desire for their reconciliation (Gove 1978, 393).

As in Gippius's prose, these poems deal with personality, and love, but it is important to note that this love exists beyond the normal scope of earthly matters, with the divine. "The Eternal Feminine" gives expression to Gippius's desire to attain her religious ideal of the

Androgyne, to become it. Gippius details the experience of attaining absolute unity within herself and with the Eternal Feminine, the Holy Ghost that will bring about the transfiguration of the world. Gippius desired an eternal union with God through a merging with the Eternal Feminine. She wrote: "*S kakim ozaren'em novym / Slit' Eë bytie?*" ["With what new illumination / can I merge (with) Her being?"] establishing her desire to unite with the Eternal Feminine on the level of regular existence through a new awakening of her personality. This awakening is linked to the lyric persona's awareness of its own androgynous composition, and that this is a reflection of the bi-sexual nature of God:

*Vechnozhenstvennoe, 1938*

*Kakim mne kosnut'sia slovom  
Belykh odezhd Eë?  
S kakim ozaren'em novym  
Slit' Eë bytie?  
O, vedomy mne zemnye  
Vse tvoi imena:  
Solveig, Tereza, Mariia...  
Vse oni - Ty Odna.  
Molius' i liubliu... No malo  
Liubvi, molitv k Tebe.  
Tvoim-tvoei ot nachala  
Khochu prebyt' v sebe,  
Chtob serdtse tebe otvetchalo -  
Serdtse - v sebe samom,  
Chtob Nezhnaia uznavala  
Svoi chistyï obraz v nem..  
I budut puti inye,  
Inoi liubvi pora.  
Solveig, Tereza, Mariia,*

*Nevesta-Mat'-Sestra!*

Eternal Feminine, 1938  
With what word am I to touch  
Her white garments?  
Through what new illumination  
Can I merge with Her being?  
Oh, I know all thy  
Earthly names:  
Solveig, Thérèse, Mary...  
All of them art thou Alone.  
I pray and love... But love and prayers to thee  
Are not sufficient.  
Malely and femalely thine from the beginning  
I want to subsist in myself,  
So that my heart will respond to thee -  
My heart in its very self,  
So that the Tender One will recognize  
Her pure image in it...  
The time then will arrive for new paths,  
For a new love,  
Solveig, Thérèse, Mary:  
Bride-Mother-Sister!

(Translated in Pachmuss 1971, 105-6).

This passage establishes the realized existence of the Androgyne as both male and female. The relationship is based upon mutual recognition of the personalities of the lyric persona and the Eternal Feminine and communication between them. It may be seen as a loving relationship, based upon the communication between the hearts of the androgynous lyric persona and the divine feminine lyric object. This is further supported by the concluding verse that names the Eternal Feminine as "*Nevesta-Mat'-Sestra!*"

["Bride - Mother - Sister"], identifying a relationship of love that includes the aspect of sexuality by identifying the Eternal Feminine with a bride. The knowledge of God that is integral to Gippius's concept of androgyny is established in two ways. First the Eternal Feminine is identified as "Solveig, Tereza, Mariia... Vse oni - ty Odná" [Solveig, Thérèse, Maria ... All of them art thou Alone], a group of holy women, including the mother of God. Second, the Eternal Feminine is the unity of these women, a unity of the feminine principal which Gippius's identified as the third member of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Ghost, "in Whose Divinity motherhood and virginity are merged" (Gippius 1953, 111). It is in relation to this divine entity, and through it that the lyric persona as a personality can experience androgyny and support Gippius's metaphysics. The treatment of the experience of a love relationship with the divine rejects gendered behaviour and any inferiority of women, because the ego experiences the love equally in his or her male and female aspects.

Although I would agree that these poems are very important in the construction of Gippius's poetic androgyny theme, they are not the only expression of androgyny, nor even the most common. The larger category of male-lyric persona love poems is of particular significance in Gippius's development of androgyny in her poetry. This type of poem is more common and therefore more representative of Gippius's poetry, and of the development of the androgyny theme. "Sonet II" from "Tri formy soneta" [Three Types of Sonnets] is typical in that it uses a male lyric persona with a female lyric object and deals primarily with sublime love between two earthly individuals.

*Sonet II*

*"Ja vse tvoji ukloni otmechaiu*

*Kogda ty zla, ia tikho ytomlën  
Kogda ty padaesh' v zabvennyi son  
S toboiu ravnodushno ia skuchaiu.  
Tebia, unyluiu, brezglivo preziraiu  
Toboi, neschastnoi - gordo ogorchen  
Zato v glubokuyu vseгда vliublën  
A s devochkoiu yasnoi - igraiu.*

*I kazhduiu izmenchivost' ia dliu  
Mne ravnosviaty vse tvoi mgnoveniia  
Oni vo mne - edinoi tsepi zven'ia.  
Terzaiu-li tebia, il' veseliu  
Vliublënnosti li chas, il' chas prezpren'ia  
- Ia cherez vsë, skvoz' vsë - tebia liubliu."*

(Published in Gove, 1978, 384)

#### Sonnet II

I celebrate all your inclinations  
When you are wicked, I am quietly weary  
When you fall into some forgotten dream  
With you I am indifferent and bored.  
Dejected, I fastidiously disdain you  
With you, wretch, I am proudly aggrieved  
And yet, deep down, always in love  
And I am only playing with that bright girl.

I prolong every fickleness  
And your every instant is divine to me  
In me they are all unique links of a chain.  
If I torment you, or cheer you  
With an hour of belovedness, or an hour of scorn  
Through it all, across all, I love you.

The androgynous aspect of this poem is latent, in that

the gender play in the text follows the established love lyric norm of male ego and female alter, nominally adhering to traditional gender norms, but it excludes all differentiation of action based on gender. Supposedly 'feminine' gender characteristics such as fickleness and passivity are shared, as are traditionally 'male' characteristics, including intellectualization, and aggression. When the female alter is wicked, the male ego docilely submits. The male lyric persona can torment the female lyric object or cheer her, love her or scorn her, but he does not lose her.

The concept of androgyny is also developed in the contextual gender play which is based upon the knowledge of the poet as a woman. By creating a doubt about the reliability of the male identity of the ego, and the meaning of that identity, Gippius simultaneously creates doubt about the veracity of any attributed or assumed gender of personae in her poetry. The alter is read as female and treated as female, but the doubt exists. This doubt serves to alienate the reader and the action of the poem from conceptions of love that presume behaviour and attraction based on physical gender alone.

In the place of a love based upon physical differentiation, we have an elaboration of a complete love which, as Gove puts it, delineates "the speaker's love as one that loves the beloved in all the states and aspects of being and of the love experience" (Gove 1978, 384). This analysis of the meaning of love in this poem speaks to Gippius's belief that love is the basis of all human interaction, and that it unites people at the highest spiritual level. As we have seen above, Pachmuss defines Gippius's conception of love as unchangeable, unique,

everlasting and transfiguring. It is also higher than rational consciousness (Pachmuss 1971, 63). These aspects of love are important if we are to understand "Sonnet II" as a statement of the sublime love that can lead to the religious ideal of the Androgyne.

The love portrayed in this poem is not merely the fairy-tale love in which people live happily ever after. Rather it is a love that recognizes human frailty and changeability, but does not itself change. Love may torment or cheer the beloved, but if it is what Gippius called 'real love' it will be eternal. The love in this poem also envisages an absolute freedom, for it permits the beloved to be wicked, dejected, or preoccupied with daydreams and the lover to be weary, aggrieved and even disdainful. These things do not impede love; they merely provide wider experiences of what love is. The development of this type of love, which we may qualify as sublime due to its eternal and unchanging nature, is an important aspect in the treatment of androgyny in this poem. This love approaches perfect androgynous love because it touches upon all aspects of the relationship, and because it exists entirely outside of gender roles and differentiated physical sexuality. The experiences of love that are related in the poem contain no mention of physicality or desire, only a deep and constant spiritual love. Furthermore, there is no reference to attraction based upon physical attributes. This implies both equality and personality, in that the animal aspect of love is completely set aside. The spiritual love in this poem, and in the rest of Gippius's love lyrics, is the essential precursor to the transcendental mystery of intimacy in which the Androgyne may be created in a quest for God. This is the importance of the androgynous theme as it is developed in Gippius's

poetry: it defines the evolution of the necessary type of love that may lead the individual and the couple eventually to be able to create the religious ideal of the Androgyne, and in so doing transfigure the world.

## Conclusion

### Androgyny and Gippius's Metaphysics: The Causal Relationship.

Beyond Gippius's hesitation to give a strict definition of the difference between our world and the 'other world,' and underpinning all her perceptions of dualities is a single fundamental duality: the individual personality and God. Everything that Gippius professes is predicated on the awareness of the individual as a unique personality, as distinct from other similar beings, and the awareness of God, as fundamentally separate from the individual. It is the resolution of this duality that drives all of her philosophy and works. Her desire to find a way to resolve this separation is at the root of her advocacy of the creation of the Androgyne. This desire was not unique to Gippius. The motivations behind it, particularly the Orthodox Christian desire to transfigure the world, and the solution of the Androgyne, were important parts of the general intellectual trends that defined the Silver Age of Russian literature. The philosophical problem addressed by the Russian Symbolists was not unique. The desire to return to paradise in a state that reconciles the gender division of humanity stretches right back to Plato's *Symposium*, and it informed the British Romantics in their quest for the Sublime.<sup>29</sup> Physical and psychological androgyny as manifestations of an enlightened individual's personal fulfilment is a recurring theme in the works of Virginia Woolf and Rose

---

<sup>29</sup> See Warren Stevenson, *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996.

Macaulay among others.<sup>30</sup> These two aspects of Gippius's development of a pro-feminine androgyny point to important cross-cultural intellectual trends in Western thought, and set Gippius apart from her Russian contemporaries.

In Silver-Age Russia the development of the theory of androgyny developed in a decidedly misogynistic way, but Gippius's treatment of androgyny in her metaphysics and in her fictional writings departs from this trend. Gippius's development of a desire to attain an idealized androgynous state was the result of both external intellectual influences, and internal philosophical motivations.

The seven metaphysical constructs identified by Pachmuss, when seen as based upon personality and awareness of God explain Gippius's arrival at the androgynous solution to the problem of transfiguring the world. Freedom, God's gift to humanity, is the basis of individual action towards God by the enlightened individual. Equality has a central position because it is her belief in the equality of personalities, regardless of their gender, that defines her concept of the composition of the Androgyne and of the process for creating it. Gippius's metaphysics of love and loyalty lead to an androgynous ideal because they operate independently of physical gender, on the spiritual level. On the physical level, as revealed by her belief in the transcendental mystery of sex, love accomplishes its task of transfiguring the world by resolving the sexual differentiation of humanity by sublime sexual, ideally heterosexual, intercourse oriented towards God. Loyalty is important as an essential aspect of love, and we may regard the androgynous union as the ultimate form of loyalty,

---

<sup>30</sup> See Jeanette N. Passty, *Eros and Androgyny: The Legacy of Rose Macaulay*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988.

creating an eternal perfect union that requires absolute love and loyalty to exist. Death plays a role in the development of Gippius's androgyny theme because it is the enemy to be defeated. Gippius's conception of death is rooted in humanity's natural existence, which Gippius defined primarily with regard to reproduction and sexual differentiation, connected with the loss of humanity's original, divine androgynous form. Even the positive view of death which Gippius espoused early in her life, as the universal portal to God through which everyone must pass, is rejected and resolved by her ideal of the Androgyne. Androgyny is a way to transfigure the world, make humanity physically and spiritually eternal, united with God here on earth, thus denying even the positive role of death as a path to God. Time, as Gippius's medium for the action of love and the quest for God is related to androgyny in its dual nature. Physical time is linked to the animalistic world that is ignorant of God, and so is rejected as incompatible with personal perfection of the spirit. Real time, which denotes a series of spiritual events, is accessible only to those who are on the road towards androgyny, on the quest for God through love.

Gippius's metaphysics, and its foundation upon personality and individuality lead her to formulate her ideas of androgyny based on her conception of humanity as the image of God. This theme was pursued throughout her creative writing, and it consistently supports the importance of personality and the awareness of God in her expression of androgyny in poetry and prose. These two concepts are at the root of Gippius's rejection of traditional gender roles and characteristics, and lead her to desire a form of androgyny that glorified the male and the female principle.

The literary expression of androgyny is systematically related to the quest for sublime love that Gippius felt would lead the individual towards a transformation into the divine Androgyne. It is essential to differentiate the religious and literary concerns with androgyny, because they are not interchangeable. The religious ideal of the Androgyne is the ultimate human goal, a state of unity with God and with all of humanity. The literary theme of androgyny describes an essential part of the process of creating the Androgyne, finding sublime love on earth. The theme of androgyny is developed differently in poetry and prose. Gippius's androgynous poetry falls into two categories, love lyrics where androgyny is developed through an earthly male ego, and poems that contain textual references to a divine androgynous ego or alter. Both of these types of poetry deal with the individual experience of sublime love, while Gippius's prose deals more with the process of searching for the sublime in various love relationships, such as Martinov's burgeoning affair with Marcelle in "You - are You," and the romantic menagerie in the "Pearl-handled Cane."

The Orthodox Christian ideals of *sobornost'* and *theosis* lead the thinkers of the Silver Age to develop a theory that would reconcile the world of the spirit with the world of the flesh. The crux of that theory was androgyny as a state of sexless divinity which would reunite humanity with God by disposing of death and cleansing humanity of all that these thinkers understood to be female. Somehow, the religious source of these ideas is generally overlooked in the study of the Silver Age, and they are usually credited to Solov'ëv. This creates a

particular problem in the study of the devoutly religious writers of the Silver Age, including Zinaida Gippius. The true influence of their religious convictions is essentially unstudied, and the sources of their philosophical ideas come into question because the basic tenets of Symbolism have been at least partially attributed to philosophers rather than to age-old religious doctrines. What other Orthodox Christian concepts have deeply influenced the Russian Silver Age, without being studied specifically as the religious ideas of an organized Church? Does this shed any new light on the anti-religious backlash that characterized the late-Modernist period in Russia, and later, the Soviet era? These questions deserve further study, and raise the possibility of a reappraisal of Silver-Age philosophy and literary theory. The further study of Zinaida Gippius, and other artists whose deep religious convictions illuminated their work, can shed light onto these questions, precisely because Gippius's art was inextricably linked with her religious beliefs. Furthermore, her application of a female-friendly and sexually empowering vision of androgyny, *theosis* and *sobornost'* in her artistic and religious endeavours can present an invaluable cross-sectional view of the influences and motivations of the Silver-Age from a different, and largely ignored, perspective.

## Bibliography

Balasubramanian, R.

- 1970     *The Personalistic Existentialism Of  
          Berdiaev. Madras: University of Madras  
          Press.*

Berdiaev, Nikolai

- 1928     *"Nachalo i konets" [The Beginning and the End],  
          Brewster, Mass: Smith Publishing.*

Burgin, Diana Lewis

- 1993     *"Laid out in Lavender." In Sexuality and  
          the Body in Russian Culture ed. Jane Costlow  
          Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles. 177-203.  
          Stanford: Stanford University Press.*

Clarke, Fielding

- 1950     *An Introduction to Berdiaev. Glasgow: Glasgow  
          University Press.*

Engelstein, Laura

- 1992     *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search  
          for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia.  
          Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.*

Gippius, Z.N.

- 1902     *"Sumerki Dukha" [The Twilight of the Spirit] in  
          Tret'ia Kniga Rasskazov, St-Petersburg.*

- 1908 [Anton Krainii, pseud.] "Khleb zhizni" [The Bread of Life]. In *Literaturny Dnevnik: 1899 - 1907*. St-Petersburg.
- 1909 "Iz dnevnika zhurnalista" [From the Journalist's Diary], *Russkaya Mysl'*.2:155-73.
- 1924 "Opravdanie svobody" [A Justification of Freedom]. *Sovremennye Zapiski*. 22:293-315.
- 1925 "Liubov i mysl'" [Love and Thought]. *Poslednie Novosti*. 1585.(Paris).
- 1925 "Liubov' i krasota" [Love and Beauty]. *Poslednie Novosti*. 1591. (Paris).
- 1927 "Sashen'ka." In *Selected Works of Zinaida Hippus*. Edited by Temira Pachmuss. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 175-81.
- 1927 "You - are you." In *Pachmuss Selected Works*, 1972. 219-26.
- 1931 "Arifmetika liubvi" [The Arithmetic of Love]. *Chisla*. 5:153.
- 1953 "Isskustvo i liubov'" [Art and Love]. *Opyty*. 1:107-16.

Gove, Antonina Filonov

- 1978 "Gender as a Poetic Feature in the Verse of Zinaida Gippius." In *American Contributions to the Eighth International Congress of Slavists*,

vol.1, ed. Henrik Birnbaum. 379-407. Columbus:  
Slavica Publishers.

Karlinsky, Simon

- 1980 "Who was Zinaida Gippius?" In *A Difficult Soul*. By Vladimir Zlobin. 1-21. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Kirillova, Irina

- 1970 "Zinaida Gippius - A Decadent Poet: A Short Introduction To Her Early Verse." In *Gorski Vijenac: A Garland of Essays Offered to Professor Elizabeth Mary Hill* ed. R. Auty, L.W. Lewitter and A. P. Vlasto. 174-94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kon, Igor S.

- 1995 *The Sexual Revolution in Russia*. New York: The Free Press.

Matich, Olga

- 1974-75 "Zinaida Gippius and the Unisex of Heavenly Existence." *Die Welt der Slaven*. 19-20:98-104.
- 1979 "Androgyny and the Russian Religious Renaissance." In *Western Philosophical Systems in Russian Literature* ed. Anthony M. Mlikotin. University of Southern California Series in Slavic Humanities, no. 3:165-176. Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press.

1994 "The Symbolist Meaning of Love: Theory and Practice." In *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism* ed. Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman, 24-50. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Naiman, Eric

1993 "Historectomies: On the Metaphysics of Reproduction in a Utopian Age." In *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*. eds. Jane Costlow, Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles, 255-76. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Pachmuss, Temira

1971 *Zinaida Gippius: An Intellectual Profile*. Urbana: Southern Illinois University Press.

1972 *Intellect and Ideas in Action: Selected Correspondence of Zinaida Gippius*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

1972 *Selected Works of Zinaida Hippius*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Passty, Jeanette N.

1988 *Eros and Androgyny: The Legacy of Rose Macaulay*. London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Presto, Jennifer

1998 "The Fashioning of Zinaida Gippius." *Slavic and East European Journal*. vol 42:1:58-75.

Pyman, Avril

- 1994     *A History of Russian Symbolism*. Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press.

Rosenthal, Charlotte

- 1992     "The Silver Age: Highpoint for Women?" in *Women and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union*. ed. Linda Edmondson, 32-47. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rozanov, Vasilii

- 1978     "People of the Moonlight." Translated by Spencer E. Roberts. In *Four Faces of Rozanov: Christianity, Sex, Jews and the Russian Revolution*. ed. Spencer E. Roberts, 39-194. New York: Philosophical Library.
- 1978     "The Dark Face." Translated by Spencer E. Roberts. In *Four Faces of Rozanov: Christianity, Sex, Jews and the Russian Revolution*. ed. Spencer E. Roberts, 22-38. New York: Philosophical Library.

Singer, June

- 1977     *Androgyny: Towards a New Theory of Sexuality*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.

Slaatte, Howard

- 1997     *Personality, Spirit and Ethics: The Ethics of Nikolai Berdiaev*. American University Studies series V, 181, New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Stevenson, Warren

- 1996     *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime*.

London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Vishniak, M.

1954 "Z. N. Hippius v pismakh." *Novy Zhurnal*  
XXXVII:181-210.