The Water of Life and the Life of Water: the Metaphor of World Liquescence in Russian Symbolist Poetry, Art and Film

Dissertation

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Abstract

The Symbolist period in Russian culture emphasized intense cross-pollination and hybridization of the arts. The purpose behind these “poetics of blending” was to show the existence of a spiritual world beyond physical-material reality and that the boundaries between them were not insurmountable. In my dissertation, I claim that this vision of the creative process as pursuing various strategies of blending draws on the overarching metaphoric conceptualization of our world, and the human domain as its integral part, as not “solid,” but “fluid matter.” I employ conceptual metaphor and blending theory approaches from the field of cognitive linguistics to account for the following: how three interactive arts of the period – poetry, painting and film – use the metaphor of world liquescence in their attempts to transcend the material world – realia – and to reach spiritual reality – realiora.

The concept of world liquescence reveals itself not only in the choice of water as a physical substance present in the space of a given poem, canvas or film. The Symbolist arts with their close attention to the inner depths of the human psyche attempt to capture and symbolize the slightest stirrings of the soul through the domain of water and very often introduce this element through the plasticity of music. The “endless” Wagnerian melody reveals itself in poetry through protracted poetic meters and specific types of
rhyme as well as various phonetic and semantic devices; in painting it is “endless, monotonic, impassive line without angles;” in early filmmaking it is the use of movement vs. stasis, special lighting effects and long takes, including (extreme) close-ups of a person’s face. In this connection we can also speak about moving water as a traditional metaphor for time: thus the introduction of music as a temporal element into both the temporal art of poetry and the spatial art of painting marks an attempt to convey its flow in both a congenial dynamic art and in a less congenial static art; film blends both temporal and spatial dimensions, and thus reveals time’s liquescence in both modes.

My focus is on the following three artists of the period: the poet Konstantin Bal’mont, the painter Viktor Borisov-Musatov and the film director Evgenii Bauer. All three rely on blending artforms traditionally considered incompatible. They therefore offer rich materials for the conceptual integration and hybridization approach.
Dedication

Dedicated to water – our mother element
Acknowledgments

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I rejoice in the thought that I am related to my mother, Kira, and my grandmother, Yulia, not only by blood but, above all, by spirit. What helped me to move forward in my personal and academic life is their boundless faith in my path.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Дума за думой, волна за волной -
Два проявления стихии одной.
Ф. Тютчев

Воды, ветры, горы, деревья даны нам,
чтоб понять человеческую душу,
скрытую глубоко-глубоко...
М. Цветаева

Равны все музы красотой,
Несходство их в одной одежде.
Е. Баратынский

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1 One thought after another, one wave after another - / Two manifestations of one element. (F. Tiutchev). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Russian are my own. Literary texts are presented both in the Russian original and in translation; Russian academic sources are given in translation only.
2 Waters, winds, mountains, trees are given to us / to understand the human soul / hidden deep deep inside ... (M. Tsvetaeva).
3 All the muses are equal in their beauty, / It is only their garb, which distinguishes them. (E. Baratynsky).
1.1 Contribution to the Field

My dissertation on the metaphor of “liquescence” in the Symbolist culture of the Silver Age pursues these goals: to make a contribution to the development of conceptual integration or blending theory, which grew out of conceptual metaphor theory, as initiated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson and mental space theory by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner; to contribute to a better understanding of Symbolist aesthetics by pointing to its modal-genre permeability which goes beyond that of the operatic Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk concept which combines art modes rather than merges them; to present an analysis of the vital role of metaphor as thought-concept in this process of “overflow” and fusion; and to demonstrate how “total permeability” is manifested in the interaction of poetry, painting and silent film by analyzing selected both verbal and visual texts.\footnote{I use the term “text” as the structuralists and semioticians understand it: everything can be a “text,” be it a verbal, visual, musical or conceptual entity.}

That Russian Symbolism cultivated hybridization in the tradition of Wagnerian concepts of the “total work of art” is of course not a new discovery. What I demonstrate however is the extent to which “fusion” was cultivated and how the concept of “world liquescence” became the paramount metaphor of blending strategies. Symbolism cultivates the “spilling over” and “overflow,” the “seeping in” and “saturating” - in short “liquescence” as its metaphoric matrix. This dissertation began as linguistic research and developed as it was enriched by data from literature, art and film into a “cultural blend.”
It is thus a “hybrid” of linguistic approaches to literary, painterly and filmic materials and a traditional “close reading” approach to literature and the visual arts.

In sum, this dissertation implements the conceptual-metaphorical principle of world liquescence as its modus operandi in approaching interacting art forms within the historical-cultural context of Russian Symbolism, which emphasized synthesis of the arts based on the idea of genre and media fluidity. One of the aims of the dissertation, as already mentioned, is to demonstrate the necessity of studying the metaphor of world liquescence in multimodal, rather than just purely verbal, manifestations. Very little existing scholarship (with the exception of works on different instantiations of the “liquescence” metaphor, such as, for example, “emotion is a huge mass of moving water”)\(^5\) pays sufficient attention to mapping out the complexity of the relationship between people and liquescence as overlapping mental spaces with innumerable culturally specific inferences in the blended space.

1.2 Approach

The approach I use in my dissertation is based on the major tenet of Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson, namely that “metaphor [is] not a figure of speech, but a mode of thought” (Lakoff, 1993:210). This theory presupposes that metaphor can occur in other modes than language alone. The idea of metaphorical

ubiquity was later further developed within the framework of Conceptual Blending Theory as laid out by Fauconnier and Turner (1994; 1998). Based on these major theoretical frameworks, my dissertation takes a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of liquescence as a culturally specific embodied metaphor. The conceptual metaphor of world liquescence, like all conceptual metaphors, emerges from the human capacity to establish mental connections between human beings and the physical world of nature.

The analysis of the conceptual blend HUMAN IS LIQUID/HUMAN EMOTION IS LIQUID in my dissertation supports Lakoff and Johnson’s claim that ultimately all our reasoning about abstract concepts, such as, for instance, human emotions, has its roots in the nature and functioning of our body. Embodied schemata are considered the quintessential material for structuring abstract concepts via metaphors. There is thus an over-arching metaphor that can be rendered as MIND IS BODY (Lakoff & Johnson, p.37). The dissertation looks at how conceptualization of human emotion as liquid builds on viewing the human body as a body/vessel of water (like the sea or the ocean contained by the boundaries of shores and bottom) and how water is ascribed gendered human characteristics when a natural element is personified according to the gender the word naming it has in Russian. Rivers, for instance, acquire very different cultural connotations depending on the grammatical gender of their names: the Volga is most definitely a “mother.” The analysis thus uncovers the feminine and masculine aspects of water as an element.

The work by Lakoff and Johnson has strongly impacted recent metaphor research, in which the focus is shifting from exclusively verbal texts to multimodal expressions of
metaphor across various material carriers, modes and genres. Since cognitive linguists have become increasingly convinced that metaphor is not only a central aspect of literary/poetic language but also central to thought, metaphor may be treated as a key to an individual’s and/or group’s perceptions of and attitudes to reality, in other words cultural specifics. In my dissertation I explore a prominent kind of metaphorical blend in the Russian language that merges aspects of input spaces (as proposed in Blending Theory - BT⁶) or aspects of source and target domain ontology (as they are understood in Conceptual Metaphor Theory – CMT⁷) – people and nature, in which the human domain is conceptualized in terms of an elemental power, in this case, water. The Blending Theory approach builds on, but also makes up for the inadequacies, of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which merely superimposes one domain onto the other. While CMT views the metaphorical personification of water (ascribing human-like agency to this natural force) as a converse instance of the mapping that presents people in terms of

⁶ A basic unit of cognitive organization in BT is the “mental space” representing particular scenarios, which are structured by the given domains. BT’s spaces include two or more input spaces (that are analogous to the target and source domains in CMT), a generic space and the blended space. A new meaning here is created through the juxtaposition of the familiar material. A conceptual blend displays the relationship between input mental spaces and inherits partial structure from each input space; it develops ‘emergent’ content of its own by way of combining the elements from the inputs.

⁷ According to conceptual metaphor theory, metaphorical links between two domains – source domain and target domain - can be presented as the formula TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN. Lakoff and Johnson claim that the conceptual mapping between two domains is asymmetrical in nature: the metaphorical expression profiles a conceptual structure only in the target domain and does not work the other way round. That is why Lakoff and Turner argue that metaphors like ‘PEOPLE ARE MACHINES’ and ‘MACHINES ARE PEOPLE’ are two different mappings. Even when the mapping appears to be bi-directional, the mappings go in different directions, and different things get mapped (Lakoff and Turner (1989:132) cited in Croft and Cruse (2004:202)).
liquid, BT considers it as another instance of the same metaphorical blend. The metaphor under study is exemplified by conventionalized linguistic expressions existing in the Russian language, and their cognitive significance is grounded in the human experience, history and culture of the people (cf. Croft & Cruse, 2004:195). Some metaphors are not limited to a single culture, but the frequency of the metaphor type may be culturally specific, as liquescence of the human domain is for Russian culture. The metaphorical blend in question is the result of two asymmetrical tendencies: a universal anthropocentric worldview (Trim 2007:30), which presents the world through the prism of human experience, and a tendency to view a human through the prism of the surrounding world (Krasnykh, 2004). I look at how input spaces (in the terminology of BT) or source and target domains (in the terminology of CMT) become juxtaposed in the blended space. I also provide and explore novel verbal-visual poetic extensions of this metaphorical mapping, since they help to better understand its nature.

In my analysis of the conceptual metaphor HUMAN IS LIQUID I follow Grady et al. (1999), who propose that conceptual blending theory (BT), as laid out by Fauconnier & Turner (1994; 1998) and conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), as presented by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), are “largely complementary” with the implication that “the conventional conceptual pairings and one-way mappings studied within CMT are inputs to and constraints on the kinds of dynamic conceptual networks posited within BT” (1999:120). This approach provides maximally versatile theoretical tools to describe the mapping in all its depth.

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1.3 Illustration of Concepts

The fruitfulness of this approach can be shown by the example of two possible mappings between the domain of people and the elemental domain: WIND IS A PERSON (personification of the natural element) and HUMAN IS WIND (or A HUMAN EMOTION IS WIND). These two mappings offer an example of another extension of the blend that fuses human and elemental ontologies which helps us understand how important the role of nature in general and natural elements specifically (especially, air and water) is in the Russian collective consciousness. My example (1) is taken from a short story, which personifies Wind, as a naughty youth, a hooligan, a lone rambler following an old poetic tradition:

(1) Ветер гулял себе по долинам, да по холмам, тормошн прелую траву, срывал осенние листья и шляпы с прохожих, мешал целоваться влюбленным, вертел рукава мельниц. (Р. Полухин)

The wind roamed the valleys and hills, pulled at rotten grass, tore leaves off trees and hats off the heads of passers-by, interfered with kissing lovers, spun the arms of mills. (R. Polukhin).

In the metaphor HUMAN IS WIND, emotion is presented in terms of gusts, squalls, rushes and blasts. This mapping functions in such expressions as those given in (2) – (4):

(2) порывы души
‘[spontaneous] movements of the soul’ (literally, ‘gusts of the soul’)

(3) в порыве радости/ любви/ страсти = любви

‘in a burst of joy/ love/ passion’ (literally, ‘in a gust of joy’)

(4) благородный порыв

‘noble impulse’ (literally, ‘noble gust’)

(5) быть обуреваемым сомнениями/ страстями/ дурными мыслями/ предчувствиями

‘to be a prey to doubts’ (literally, ‘to be buffeted by doubts/passions/evil suspicions/presentiments’)

In the conceptual metaphor WIND IS A HUMAN, the focus is on the unpredictability of the wind, its inherent characteristics rather than changeable emotions; this element is presented as if it were a rowdy person or even a hooligan; in HUMAN IS WIND, the foregrounded quality is spontaneity and sudden changes (‘movements’) of emotion in (2) – (4). In other words, the inferences in the two mappings are different since the epistemic and ontological correspondences are not the same in WIND IS A HUMAN as in HUMAN IS WIND.

In Russian cultural perceptions, the emotions in (2) – (4) come from within the soul, which is perceived to be Divine in the Russian Orthodox tradition, integral with and inalienable from the human domain. Here we can see why HUMAN SOUL can metonymically stand for HUMAN and vice versa.⁹

⁹ Hence, we have dusha naseleniia (‘soul’ referring to ‘serf’). According to Vasmer, the expression calques Middle Greek ψυχαι ανθρωπων (‘slaves,’ literally ‘souls of people’).
Expressions (2) – (4) describe sublime feelings and emotions and have a positive connotation. By contrast, in (5) the emotion conceptualized as wind is portrayed as attacking or upsetting people. It is located outside the soul, and its source is the domain opposite to the domain of the Divine. Although these emotions (doubt, premonition, passions) also come from within a person, folk consciousness estranges and detaches their genesis from the human domain. This assumption is supported by the strictly negative connotations of these expressions. While ‘passion,’ as a synonym to ‘love,’ is a manifestation of the Divine, ‘passions’ as compulsion are spawned by the opposite power (cf. bremia strastei chelovecheskikh – ‘human bondage’ to ‘passion’). The only example known to me where “human passions” are conceptualized in terms of gusts of wind is found in Pushkin’s Evgenii Onegin (XXXIII), but the way the metaphor unfolds makes it obvious that this ‘emotional gust’ ultimately does not entail anything positive (6).

(6) Нет, никогда порыв страстей,
Так не терзал души моей.

No, passion’s impulse never has
Brought so much torment to my soul.
(Translation by H.M. Hoyt)

It is interesting to observe the asymmetry between the two mappings in the way they are translated from the Russian source into the English target language. While there is nothing problematic in the rendition of (1) from Russian into English, it is impossible to provide literal translations of (2) – (4), since the target domain of human emotions in
English-speaking culture is conceptualized in a different way from Russian-language culture.

The multidimensional character of the mapping suggested by the complex relationship between the human and natural domains, demonstrates that this metaphor involves a richer blending of structure than just image-schematic correspondences between these two domains (as posited by CMT). This metaphorical mapping appears to draw on all the complexity of our cultural experience and should be viewed as a multifaceted conceptual domain, or a blend, involving diverse and overlapping mental spaces: nature (Input Space I) and people (Input Space II) in BT terms.

Human culture is subsequent to nature; nevertheless, we conceptualize nature through the prism of our cultural experience (N.G. Krasnoiarova, 2006). The two input spaces appear to work as mirrors put one in front of the other: what we find in the blended space is an almost infinite number of reciprocal reflections or “hybrids,” which owe their origin and existence to both the natural and the human worlds. The “mirrors” metaphor applied to the “nature” and “human” mental spaces examined here, in my view, best reflects the non-arbitrary nature of their correspondence.

Below I provide a detailed linguistic analysis of a metaphorical blend, which fuses “human” and “wind/storm” ontologies, in order to show the workings of the approach that integrates conceptual metaphor and blending theories. This approach is intended to uncover the underlying mechanisms behind the cross-mappings of HUMAN

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and NATURE domains. The following example - a one-line poem by the contemporary Russian satirist and poet Vladimir Vishnevskii - illustrates this mirror-like character of the “nature-human” conceptual metaphorical blend. In his one-liner quoted below, a novel conceptualization of events is realized through the imaginative process of meaning construction. This shows how conceptual integration theory (as defined by Fauconnier and Turner) can account for the revitalization of a conceptual metaphor by using linguistic means.

(8) ...и женщина, как буря, улеглась…

…the woman as/like a storm settled down… (Literally, … the woman as/like a storm lay down…)"

The essential point of this one-liner is lost in translation, a factor which supports the notion of cultural specificity in metaphorical blends. In Russian, the verb *lech* ‘to lie down’ is used to denote both the action of a human being putting herself/himself into a horizontal position on a bed, sofa or floor and as the end-phase of a storm before it has completely calmed down; thus the verb combines with the nouns ‘woman’ and ‘storm’ in equally valid collocations. The verb *ulech’sia*, which is used in the joke, means ‘lie down’ (when applied to the HUMAN domain) along with ‘calm down’ or ‘settle down’ (when applied to EMOTION or NATURAL ELEMENT domain) and has the connotation of achieved comfort. It sounds more humorous than the neutral *lech*, which has only the one meaning of to ‘lie down’. Vishnevskii’s one-liner thus requires the construction of a blended space that contains a “female-storm” or “stormy-female” hybrid, containing both
some female human properties and some natural-elemental ones. The Russian conjunction *kak* yields two meanings: *podobno* (‘similar to’) and *v kachestve* (‘in the role/capacity of’), both of which co-exist in the one-liner. Vishnevskii usually reads his one-liners from the stage. Their primarily oral genre requires the listeners to come up with their own meaning construals, which could yield either one reading or, ideally, both of them simultaneously. The syntax of the written form of the line, where the comparison is marked by the commas, suggests that *kak* appears in the meaning ‘similar to;’ cognitive grammar accounts for the ambiguity of the construal and allows more than one interpretation in addition to the “archetypal” one. Thus the blend, entailing an amalgamation of elements, makes the realization of the meaning “in the capacity of” equally justifiable as “like” in the constructed space.

In the process of blending, cognitive models are combined in a network of mental spaces. Conceptual integration networks can consist of two or more input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space. In example (8), the input spaces are the “woman” space and the “storm” space, each of which only contains information about their restricted domain. The generic space includes a very schematic representation of a structure common to all spaces involved. In the above example, the generic space contains a representation of the end-point of an action with a participant having undergone some change in her state.
The grammatical information in the generic space is also very important for a language like Russian, where nouns are marked for gender. Both nouns – buria (‘storm’) and zhenshchina (‘woman’) - are feminine, which accounts for why only buria (‘storm’ (fem.)) and not, say, uragan (‘hurricane’ (masc.)) works for this blend. The blended space encloses the structure from both input spaces selectively and develops its own emergent structure. In (8), the blended space involves characteristics of a storm metaphorically mapped onto a description of human female behavior and vice versa. At the same time, a verb describing an action performed by a human being is applied to a storm, thereby imputing agency to it, which reduces the agency of the human in the blended space.
The equation of a woman with a storm in (8) reveals an abundance of correspondences between the two conceptual spaces. The events in both input spaces are caused by a conflict of some sort: a clash of hot and cold air masses in the elemental space and a clash of egos in the human conceptual space. As we can see, the blend activates that part of the “woman” conceptual space that overlaps with a conceptual space of “sexual relationship” within a bigger space of “human relationships.”

There are a number of verbs in Russian that can describe the manner of action of both a storm and a human (woman) in terms of the sounds produced: *plakat’* (‘to cry’), *vyt’* (‘to wail’), *stonat’* (‘to moan’), *revet’* (‘to howl’, ‘to roar/rage’), *shumet’* (‘to make noise’), *utikhnut’* (‘to quieten down’, ‘to abate/subside’). The aftermath of a major storm includes broken trees, upset cars and unroofed houses. Even without extreme displays of fury, such as upsetting furniture and breaking china, a person’s agitation could be detrimental to the surroundings. Venting powerful emotions can be described in Russian with an idiom involving the imagery of a roof torn off - *kryshu sorvalo* - which equates the force of emotion with the force of a storm. And, in addition, both a storm and a person’s emotion can come and go suddenly.

We may observe that the “elemental event” input space conflates the participant with an event. It explains why the woman in (8) receives the status of an elemental event in the projected space. The phase of quiet after the storm in the “nature” space

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11 An example of the HUMAN/STORM blend which foregrounds the element – female storm, ‘buria’ – can be found in the poem “Zimnii vecher” (‘Winter evening,’ 1825) by A. Pushkin: *Buria mgloiu nebo kroet, / Vikhri snezhnye krutia; / To, kak zver’, ona zavoet, / To zaplachet, kak dita…* (‘The storm is covering the sky in gloom, / Spinning the snowy whirlwinds; / Now it howls like a beast, / Now it cries like a child…’).
corresponds to the phase of peace and reconciliation in the “relationship” space. In metaphorical blends, the element in the blended space is connected to each of the input spaces, which, however, do not have equal status as topics. \(^{12}\) In other words, they are marked by asymmetric topicality: “one of the inputs is topical and the other provides the means of reframing the first for some conceptual or communicative purpose. These are respectively the target and source inputs of the metaphor (Grady et al, 1999:116).”

Although personification of the element seems to be an equal part of the novel poetic blend in (8), it is clear that “woman” and not “storm” is the actual topic here. The inference in the blended space is thus that the unpredictability, spontaneity and wildly uncontrolled character of an elemental phenomenon are ascribed to female nature. While the perfective aspect of the verb seems to signal definiteness of the topic (“the woman” or “the particular woman the author knows”), the inference in the blended space is generic, or can be applied to all women. Due to this, the joke, put in concise poetic form, evokes a keen response from the audience, who sees in it a reflection of their own experiences.

This new imaginative use of the mapping is understood instantly because WOMAN IS AN ELEMENT (ELEMENTAL FORCE) is a fixed part of the Russian conceptual-cultural system. While the metaphor WOMAN IS STORM is based on a conventional conceptualization, it is also related to more fundamental metaphorical mappings, such as EMOTION IS MOTION, ARGUMENT IS WAR IS STORM, EMOTIONAL IS DOWN, IS SUBJECT TO CONTROL OR FORCE IS DOWN. In this extension of the metaphorical blend we observe both literal and metaphorical motion downwards. On the

\(^{12}\) In linguistic terms, the topic (or theme) of a sentence is what is being talked about, and the focus (rheme or comment) is what is being said about the topic.
physical plane, it is lying down; on the metaphorical plane, it is yielding, letting the other participant take control over the situation.

The Vishnevskii one-liner thus serves as a good example of blending, which is an inherent feature of humor (Coulson). According to Arthur Koestler (1964:51; cited in Coulson) humor often involves the unlikely combination of related structures. Similarity of structure is emphasized by the juxtaposition of scenarios belonging to, at first sight, “incompatible” conceptual domains; thus in (8), the scenario of an elemental event unfolding is combined with a term more associated with a human lying down and getting comforted after a period of unrest. This action, in its turn, evokes a bedroom frame, which in fact is the key element adding richness of meaning to the one-liner. Coulson cites Freud’s observation that “joking provides a relatively safe arena for expressing socially unacceptable utterances. Blending and the cognitive abilities that support it are crucial in this respect by enabling us to frame taboo topics in terms and domains which are not taboo.” Hence in (8) the conjunction i (‘and’) at the beginning of the phrase and the suspension points framing the one-liner suggest both a preceding and a following episode; they leave both endpoints of the story open to interpretation.

As Coulson points out, not any combination of frames results in a comic effect. Even though the metaphorical structure in (8) is absolutely identical to that in (9), the humorous charge of the latter (although still present) is much weaker, probably because it does not enable us to reframe a taboo topic:

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In the example discussed above, I have demonstrated how the kind of mapping that fuses together elements of human and elemental ontologies works. I have also indicated what linguistic tools I will further apply to my analysis of the multimodal instances of the metaphorical mapping in question, which appear in verbal and visual texts.

The Russian language abounds in instances of the conceptualization, which blends water and human domain ontologies. This general categorization, central to my discussion, I suggest, could be broken down into the following major categories:

- **EMOTION IS LIQUID:** *ispityvat’ zhazhdu emotsii* (‘to experience thirst for emotion’); *upivat’ sia schast’em/toskoi/zhalost’iu k sebe* (‘drink in/revel (in) happiness/sorrow/self-pity’);

- **EMOTION IS A SWEEPING AND OVERWHELMING WAVE** a) COMING FROM OUTSIDE: *Menia zakhlestatnula volna gneva/chuvstv* (‘A wave of anger/feelings swept over me’); *On ne khotel pokazvat’ nakhlyuvshikh na nego chuvstv* (‘He didn’t want to show that feelings overcame him’); b) RISING FROM WITHIN *Vo mne podnialas’ volna gneva* (‘A wave of anger rose up in me’);

- **EMOTION IS A BODY OF WATER:** *brosit’ sia v puchinu chuvstv* (literally, ‘to throw oneself into the deep of feelings’); *brosit’ sia v omut (s golovoi)* (literally, ‘to throw oneself into the whirlpool (head first)’);
- HIGHLY EMOTIONAL STATE IS AN OVERFLOW OF LIQUID: *polovod’e chuvstv* (‘deluge of feelings’); *vuplesnut’ chuvstva* (‘splash out feelings’); *izlit’ dushu* (‘to pour out one’s heart/soul/to unburden one’s heart, to unbosom oneself’);

- HUMAN/HUMAN SOUL/HUMAN EMOTION IS A BODY OF WATER: *Ona volnuetsia pered ekzamenom* (‘She is agitated/nervous before the exam. Literally: She is rising in waves’); *Ee dush volnuetsia* (‘Her soul is in a state of ferment. Literally: Her soul is rising in waves’); *V tikhom omute cherti vodiatsia* (‘Still waters run deep’. Literally, ‘Devils thrive in a quiet slough’);

- CROWD IS WATER: *liudskoi potok* (‘a human stream’); *Vskore tolpas vuplesnulas’ na trotuar i zaprudila mostovuiu* (‘Soon the crowd splashed out onto the pavement and flooded the roadway.’);

- MENTAL PROCESS IS WATER: *potok myslei/soznaniia* (‘stream of thought/ consciousness’).

As these instances of the mapping/blending across human and water domains show, Russian cultural consciousness encompasses a broad variety of emotion, both positive and negative, which is expressed in terms of the element “water.” As is to be expected, there are mapping differences between Russian and English and these are particularly clearly manifested in the conceptualization of self-pity. In Russian self-pity is conceptualized as drinking a liquid which is bitter, yet enjoyable, as in *upivat’sia zhalost’iu k sebe* (‘revel in self-pity,’ literally: drink in/imbibe self-pity like some nectar). Other instances include grief, sorrow and yearning. In the Russian mapping shown above, a human being is conceptualized as a container to be filled with “liquid” emotion, whereas in the English concept of *wallowing in self-pity*, self-pity is understood as a
liquid substance (quite possibly mud, which would make the person indulging her/him/self a “pig”) constrained by some form of container in which the soul bathes. In sum, in Russian we have an instance of blending emotion and liquid, whereas in English, emotion is extracted from the human realm and projected onto outer reality. In other words, the inferences in the culturally specific blended spaces are different: there is a negative attitude toward self-pity encoded in the English language, and a positive, even enjoyable, aspect derived from the negative emotion found in Russian consciousness and, hence, language.

One of the instantiations of the metaphorical mapping/blend in question is what Lakoff and Turner call Image Metaphor, i.e. “more fleeting metaphors, which involve not the mapping of the concepts (e.g. LIFE IS A JOURNEY) but rather the mapping of images (1989:90).” In our case it is innumerable cross-mappings between the physical images of a person and those of water in its various states and forms. As an example of such mapping Lakoff and Turner consider a poem from the Indian literary tradition, where “the image of the slow, sinuous walk of an Indian woman is mapped onto the image of the slow, sinuous shimmering flow of a river. The shimmering of a school of fish is imagined as the shimmering of the belt (90):”

Now women-rivers
Belted with silver fish
Move unhurried as women in love
At dawn after a night with their lovers.
(The Peacock’s Egg, p.71)
As Lakoff and Turner point out, “a source image” – in our case water – “can be mapped onto a target domain in order to create an image of the target domain (94).” For example, the phrase *moi mysli – voda gorných rek* (‘my thoughts are like the water of mountain rivers’), maps our image of clean and transparent water onto the domain of thought, which is abstract and therefore does not inherently contain an image. Intuitively, this equation seems appropriate because of our knowledge of the source and target domains. Water moves uninterruptedly as a mass; we conceptualize thinking as an uninterrupted process. Just as a stream of moving water has a certain force and speed, so thoughts can be quick and forceful. The most important physical properties of water are measured on the scale of “clean/dirty” and “clear/opaque;” thoughts are usually qualified for their purity or sinfulness, and clarity, as opposed to vagueness and obscurity.

The metaphoric image-mapping HUMAN IS WATER or WATER IS A HUMAN “works in just the same way as all other metaphoric mappings - by mapping the structure of one domain onto the structure of another,” to employ Lakoff’s and Turner’s terminology, where “the domains are mental images.” Image-structure includes both part-whole structure and attribute-structure. In images, part-whole relations are relations such as those between a roof and a house, or between a tombstone and a grave. Attribute-structure includes such things as color, intensity of light, physical shape, curvature, and, for events, aspects of the overall shape, such as continuous versus discrete, open-ended versus completed, repetitive versus not repetitive, brief versus extended. It is the existence of such structure within our conceptual images that permits one image to be mapped onto another by virtue of their common structure (90).”
This tenet of Lakoff’s and Turner’s theory can be illustrated by personification of water and bodies of water as people, a type of imagery which is traditional in Russian culture. Speaking about personification these authors say, that “the power of poetic composition to create complex new ideas from simpler conventional ideas reveals itself in especially clear form in personification – metaphors through which we understand other things as people.” In this case it is the “river” conceptual space that receives the status of the topic in the blended space whereas the “human” input space provides the means of reframing the “water” space for some conceptual and communicative purposes. Conceiving of a river as a mother, with the extension to step-mother, or as a father with the extension to step-father is “simple, immediate and natural, because these conceptualizations arise as a consequence of composition from other more basic conceptual resources (Lakoff and Turner, 1989:72 – 73).”

Rivers are traditionally personified in many cultures, and are ascribed properties based on the experiences of human beings about themselves. Rivers have us’t’e (‘estuary’, from usta ‘mouth’), and rukav (‘tributary’, literally, ‘sleeve’). They roll their waves - katiat svoi volny; roar and moan in bad weather - revet i stonet (Dnepr shirokii)\(^\text{14}\); they can ‘stand’ ice-bound - reka stoit, skovannaia l’dom. The word ‘river’ is feminine in Russian, wherefore grammar suggests the conceptualization of rivers in general as women and loving mothers giving food and care to their children:

\(^{14}\) The opening line of a famous folk song about the Dnepr.
A river is often personified as a physically and spiritually mature female and is ascribed the characteristics of a good mother – unconditionally loving, caring and feeding her children - in Russian cultural contexts. The nourishment that the ‘female’ river gives to people is either direct (water, fish) or indirect (flooding the fields, to nourish them and ensure later good harvest). As we can see this personification metaphor focuses only on the feeding/nourishment aspect of mother-child relationship and its other possible scenarios are left outside of the picture.

Since river names can be both feminine and masculine, human features are assigned to them according to their grammatical gender: the Volga, for instance, is feminine, and the Don is masculine. In Russian culture, these two rivers are conceptualized as respectively mother and father: matushka and batiushka are gentle and respectful forms of address to parents and the two rivers are often addressed in this way in folkloric texts. Not always are the “parents” entirely benevolent, however. Given the specifics of Russian grammar, the mapping unfolds two gender-specific scenarios.

In scenario A, the Volga is a beautiful and mighty woman, full of strength and life; as a true mother she nourishes her children, the people living along her banks:

Volga-matushka, kormilitsa.

Volga-mother, nurse
Volga – *ruskaia krasavitsa.*

Volga, a Russian beauty.

Volga – *mat' vsekh russikh rek.*

Volga, mother of all Russian rivers.

In scenario B, the unnatural mother, the stepmother of numerous Russian folkloric tales, appears. In the folk consciousness, a river, which causes damage and destruction is conceptualized as a stepmother, who intentionally harms her stepchild out of hate and jealousy. Jealousy pertains especially to a stepdaughter who is perceived as a rival for the love of the husband, or the rivalry is caused by the stepmother’s own child being stupid and ugly. The following example speaks about the tragic consequences for the city of Koz’modom’iansk, in folk speech called “Kuz’ma,” in the aftermath of building a hydroelectric power plant and dam on the Volga:

Река, которая на протяжении многих столетий была источником благосостояния Кузьмы, его кормилицей, Волга-матушка в одночасье сделалась вдруг Волгой-мачехой, из ласковой превратилась в немилосердную. Город может уйти в небытие - утонуть.15

The river, which used to be the nurse and source of well-being for Kuz’ma, over the course of centuries, its Volga-mother, suddenly turned into Volga-stepmother,

15 http://www.kuzma.ru/interest.htm
changing her mien from gentle to merciless. The city could sink into oblivion – literally drown.

The fact that it was human agency, which caused the damage to the city does not change the perception of mother turned into stepmother. In beliefs of the Cossack people living in the Don river valley, the Don is married to the steppe, which is also conceptualized as a mother; their union gives good harvest:

«Дон-батюшка» - так называли его казаки, кормильцем величили тихий Дон. И впрямь оплодотворят щедрые воды Дона степь, и родит она богатый урожай на радость казакам и в прибыток их хозяйствам.¹⁶

“Don-the good father” – that’s how the Cossacks called him, glorifying the Quiet Don as a breadwinner. And, indeed, the Don’s generous waters do impregnate the steppe (steppe, ‘step’, is feminine in Russian), and she gives abundant harvest to gladden the Cossacks making their households prosperous.

*Don-batiushka* (‘the Don-the Father’) is conceptualized as a provider like mother-Volga, but as emerges from the excerpt above, the ‘masculine’ river scenario, alongside with parental characteristics, such as nourishment (but not nursing), implies facilitating the conception of new life. This illustrates a common European perception of rivers as “generative powers and givers of seed” (Onians, 1951:230).

The examples of the personification of rivers demonstrate how important folklore and folk-consciousness are for “unpacking” of the conceptual metaphor. Below I will

¹⁶ [http://soch.ref.by/essays/essays/5677.html](http://soch.ref.by/essays/essays/5677.html)
elaborate on Symbolism’s fascination with folklore and its quest for the “primitive,” hence “true,” sources of culture.

1.4 Structure

The dissertation has a simple structure – “transparent as a drop of water.”

The Introduction presents the sections entitled CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD - APPROACH - ILLUSTRATION OF CONCEPTS – in the sequence and as developed above. This sequence is followed by the current STRUCTURE section, which introduces the three main chapters. It continues with SELECTION CRITERIA and with a section substituting for the traditional SURVEY OF LITERATURE entitled THE CULTURAL SOURCES OF SYMBOLIST METAPHOR POETICS. This variant of a literature survey has been necessitated by the fact that there, to my knowledge, is no secondary literature dealing with Symbolist texts where metaphor is presented from multi-medial conceptual metaphor and blending theories perspectives. This does not mean naturally that secondary literature beyond conceptual metaphor/blending theory has not been studied and used in the dissertation. As my BIBLIOGRAPHY shows many works on Symbolist and Romantic literature, poetics, and folklore have been consulted for the first chapter. Works on Russian painting, especially the “new painting” of the turn-of-the-century by both Russian and American specialists have been referred to for the third chapter and the fourth chapter on film has also a rich literature on which I have drawn for my ideas and

interpretations. Presenting scholarship on folklore, romanticism, *fin de siècle* aesthetics and philosophy as sources of symbolist poetics in both the verbal and visual arts, especially metaphor, I have, however chosen a slightly different form of dialogue with previous literature than the debate with works in the same field. I have chosen to discuss some of the major concepts which have been important to my research of liquescence in Symbolist art and presented their relevance to my specific study.

This SURVEY section discusses, for example, the concept of “oceanic feeling” (which contrary to a wide-spread notion was not a term invented by Freud, nor a concept he accepted) as a primeval consciousness retained by humanity to this day. It also addresses folklore and myth as an important source for Symbolist poetics. Again contrary to a wide-spread view that Symbolism is refined to the point of perversion (which is but one aspect of the movement), the school also cultivated a commitment to the culture of the people, developing their own neo-Slavophile brand of *narodnost’*. The poetics of cyclicity is of vital importance to Symbolism and in this sphere I rely on David Sloane’s important work on the “dynamics of the cycle.” A scholar who revolutionized the study of the poetics of Symbolism is Zara Mints and her “model of the Symbolist world,” its Romantic verticality (which may well combine with cyclicity) is another source of ideas for my dissertation. Many other scholars are cited in the introductions to each chapter.

The dissertation ends, as usual, with CONCLUSIONS. These are however followed by an APPENDIX on Khlebnikov’s early poetry and the liquescence metaphors used in it. The reason for including this “extraneous” piece is to show that liquescence metaphors were not unique to Symbolist poetics, but “spilled over” into the other “currents” of
poetry at the time, such as the “Budetlianstvo” of Khlebnikov. His poetry offers excellent examples of the merging of the arts in his version of Futurism, the Budetlianstvo just mentioned. In Khlebnikov’s case, the merger is of the word and of the delicate colors of the aquarelle,

Before I start my SURVEY section of this STRUCTURE section, I briefly present some of the main threads of the three chapters in which, against a background of cultural contexts and interaction, I present three individual artists from the spheres of poetry, painting and film of the Silver Age.

The Introduction is thus followed by Chapter 2, entitled “Symbolist Poetry and Conceptual Metaphor. Konstantin Bal’mont” It deals with novel poetic extensions of the pre-existing metaphorical mapping found in the 19th century in the poetry of the fin de siècle focusing on the poetry of Konstantin Bal’mont. The daring imagery of Symbolist Silver Age verbal art saw metaphor as a vehicle to transcending the here and now, and it built on, as well as enriched, the metaphoric inventory of the Russian language with novel poetic extensions of conventional metaphors. Having presented “world liquecence” as the mother metaphor of Russian Symbolist poetry, I examine how the metaphor which presents the human domain in terms of liquecence functions in a poetic cycle by Konstantin Bal’mont, focusing on several poems of that cycle in great detail. I show what devices the poet employs as he draws on pre-existing mappings codified in conventional linguistic expressions, which conceptualize the human soul, especially the feminine aspect of the poet’s soul, in terms of liquecence and fluidity. Poetic cycles were prevalent in Symbolist poetry and one reason for this might well be that it draws on
the idea of a natural, specifically, a water cycle. Cyclicity, fluidity and “musicality” are the hallmark of Bal’mont’s art, as it is of several of his contemporaries, some of whom are also discussed in this chapter which begins by providing the aesthetic-philosophical context of Bal’mont’s individual contribution. The conceptual metaphor of world liquescence serves as a segue to the painterly art of Viktor Borisov-Musatov, where cyclicity as a part of liquescence metaphor likewise plays a prominent role. **Chapter 3** is devoted to this painter and contains a contextualizing discussion of new trends in Silver Age painting and their hybridization with the arts of poetry, cinematography and photography.

**Chapters 3** and **4** on the metaphor of world liquescence in painting and film respectively, both deal with non-verbal modes of communication, which by definition do not have the “is” or “is like” formula at their disposal to signal a metaphorical identity relation between the given entities in the given context. The question that arises here is by what devices the similarity between the entities – people, their emotions and water - is conveyed.

**Chapter 3**, entitled “Symbolist Art and Conceptual Metaphor,” looks at how the concept of world liquescence reveals itself not only in the choice of water as a feature of landscape or as a physical substance in some other context on the canvas. Here, I look at how the fluidity of outlines and the flowing contour of human movement, which on the physical plane externalizes the covert “movements of the soul,” serve to relay liquescence of the human domain. The art of the Silver Age with its close attention to the inner depths of the human psyche attempts to capture these “movements of the soul”
through studies of the domain of water as well as the introduction of this element through the plasticity of “music.” Two major canvases by Viktor Borisov-Musatov are examined in detail to demonstrate how the rhythmical arrangement of bodies, for example, potential circularity and other “non-framing” devices transcend the barriers of different modes of art.

Chapter 4, entitled “Film of the Symbolist Period and Conceptual Metaphor,” is devoted to silent film of the Symbolist period and specifically the films of Evgenii Bauer. The choice of early film for this kind of analysis has proven to be the most fruitful one: silent era films provide multiple examples of multimodal metaphor (since they involve not only moving images but also intertitles). Early films present experiments devoted to finding filmic equivalents of verbal metaphor. The film and metaphor scholar Mats Rohdin points to specific devices, such as superimposition, as one possibility for creating liquescence effects. As part of a dissolve this device is particularly interesting since the method itself employs liquescence as a meta-metaphor. Bauer was not a formal member of the “Symbolist School” which did not include film, but the aesthetics of his films builds on the Symbolist poetics developed in the poetry and visual arts of the time: establishing the connections between the earthly and heavenly spheres (or between the world of the living and the world of the dead who exist “somewhere else”). The trope of the Eternal Feminine is of decisive importance to this film director with all the liquescence effects this entails.

The over-arching theme of the dissertation thus develops the connotations of the “water metaphor” in the major media and genres of Russian Symbolism up to the October
Revolution. There is no chapter on fluidity and music, but music is of course the medium of fluidity and, as already stated above, its metaphoric impact on all other media is a decisive factor of Symbolist aesthetics. The experimental Silver Age, which sought to reconcile (i.e. fuse) contradictions (such as refinement and primitivism, cosmopolitan tendencies with narodnost’ and many others) and which promulgated the fluidity of art forms to achieve their ideal synthesis (the “total and totally interactive work of art”), valued metaphor and symbol above all other elements of poetics as the ideal vehicle for the mystical (i.e. blended) vision of the world they embraced. They shared the notion that synthesis achieved by the “overflow” of one art form into another offered the only paths to at least an intimation of their complex and uniquely individual interpretation of a world they perceived in highly dualistic terms, which they wanted to blend.

The SURVEY is preceded by a brief SELECTION CRITERIA section. The SURVEY of CULTURAL SOURCES follows. Chapters One, Two and Three are followed by the CONCLUSION, and the dissertations ends with the APPENDIX.

1.5 Selection Criteria

The Silver Age artists selected for closer study are: the poet Konstantin Bal’mont (1867 - 1942), the painter Viktor Borisov-Musatov (1870 - 1905) and the film-director Evgenii Bauer (1865 - 1917). The chronological borders involved are the 1890s and up to World
War I.\textsuperscript{18} The reason for choosing these artists for close analyses of their works in terms of liquescence is not only their significance and importance as innovators and great artists, but also their shared aesthetics and poetics, specifically their borderline position between the verbal and the visual and their emphasis on the synthesis of various art forms. Their “poetics of fluidity” was not primarily determined by the sheer abundance of water imagery in their oeuvre, but rather by their “oceanic consciousness” – a concept I discuss below. Briefly put, this “feeling” is manifested in their poetics of “liquescence” and “fluidity” in the widest sense. “Reaching beyond” by transgressing boundaries is the ultimate underlying principle in their portrayal of human nature and its aspirations to reach beyond itself to “higher manifestations” of this very nature; it is in liquescent nature that they find what they seek: the dissolution of boundaries, which is the foundation of their quest for transcendence.

THE CONCLUSIONS summarize my findings and suggest future lines of research in the sphere of conceptual metaphor/blending theories and their usefulness in delineating cultural specifics in a variety of time periods and national cultures. In regard to “findings,” my analysis of three interconnected media has shown that each of them borrows each other’s techniques to designate that borderlines are illusory. On the thematic-philosophical level this notion implies that even the borderline between the seen and the unseen is permeable. The duality of the world is an a priori assumption for Symbolism, as is its overcoming through contact and fusion. Liquescence is the path to

transcendence from the empirical world to “another.” Understanding the essence of life as the path a realibus ad realiora, as V. Ivanov famously put it, the multi-medial poems, paintings and films analyzed in my dissertation, embody the idea that interpenetration and transgression of borderlines merge the two worlds of “reality” and “more than reality.” Overcoming this duality creates a world where beauty is made manifest and the confining laws of reality are overcome. In sum, the three artists’ contributions to the notion of the “total work of art” mark a series of important strategies for how to overcome the limitations of media and genre. Iconically, their “widening” shows the possibility of expanding the borders of the (im)possible also in metaphysical spheres (I nevozmozhno vozmozhno (‘And the impossible is possible,’ Blok (“Rossiia” (‘Russia,’ 1908)). Their artistic accomplishments provide evidence in support of conceptualization, which blends human and water ontologies. These accomplishments also show the path to other glorious accomplishments of transcendence.

In regard to the contribution my work could make, I believe that it could be helpful for cognitive science, anthropology, sociology, and virtually all the humanities. The principle of “world liquescence” is pivotal to our cognition, i.e. to our awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all the elements of life, for which my dissertation offers a theoretical grounding. Such awareness is essential for our understanding of the modern world with its emerging discourses of fluid gender, national, and ideological identities and boundaries. In other words, the theoretical approaches to multimodal manifestations of conceptual metaphor could be applied to any domain of human activity for the purposes of enhancing mutual understanding of cultural specifics.
THE APPENDIX, which has no direct connection to Symbolist art, has been added to demonstrate that this movement was not the only one to develop liquescence metaphors at the time. In this independent piece, I show liquescence to be a prominent feature of Velimir Khlebnikov’s (early) Futurist poetry. I argue that his poetry borrows techniques from the visual art of watercolor or aquarelle. The point of this mixing of two art forms, as always when liquescence is involved is to show the intertwining, fusion and connectedness of all that exists.

1.6 Survey of Cultural Sources

Since my dissertation adopts an innovative approach to metaphoricity within the established field of metaphor studies (there are no direct predecessors to my approach as applied here), a traditional SURVEY of LITERATURE section with an overview of the ideas previously dominating the field is not quite applicable in my case. Instead, I discuss some concepts of metaphor which preceded contemporary conceptual approaches to metaphor and which “were based primarily on the idea of fixed meanings” (Trim, 2007:13). They viewed metaphor as a trope of the poetic language, and as a central element of the learning process (through establishing correspondences between the known and the less known) and of meaning. In other words, the domain of metaphor was language alone. Linguist Michael Haley gives an overview of metaphor definitions from Aristotle through Jakobson, from Sapir to Peirce, and points to tree elements that a definition of metaphor is based on, and which is common to all their approaches:
similarity, duality and cross-predication (1988:8 – 9). In other words, the focus in these approaches was on the surface representation or form of metaphor, not the underlying structure. This is an approach, which, for example, was adopted by the Russian philologist Viktor Zhirmunskii (1891 – 1971), who understood metaphor as a “change in verbal semantics on the basis of similarity.”19 Until relatively recently, the theory of metaphor looked at linguistic actualizations – or the “dynamic bringing the quality the two referents share into sharp existential focus” (10). Russian linguist Aleksandr Potebnia (1835 – 1891), for instance, studied the process of what he called the “objectivization” of thought in language.20 The Russian Formalists, especially Viktor Shklovskii took great exception to Potebnia’s intellectualizing theories. Thus Shklovskii asked if Tiutchev’s image of a flash of lightening as “the dialogue of two deaf-mutes” really made this natural phenomenon “clearer” to a reader of Tiutchev’s poetry (Erlich, 1981:97). The Formalists with their theories of art as a channel for restoring the perceptibility of reality must be seen as an important forerunner to modern theories of the metaphor. This fact has not been sufficiently registered by Western metaphor theorists.

Innovative approaches to metaphor theory emerged in certain fields of psychology, in the 1970s, when the emphasis from the sphere of semantics, which deals with fixed meanings, shifted into the sphere of cognition or the individual mind. According to this viewpoint, “meaning definition is related to individual perception of the

environment and not to a totally independent and fixed notion of semantics” (Trim, 2007:13).

The Lakoffian model, which I apply in my dissertation, came out as an extension of the above-mentioned breakthrough findings in psychology. It views metaphor as a network of conceptual structures underlying human thought, and hence capable of being expressed not only via language alone but through various other domains of human activity as well. What had previously been labeled a fresh poetic metaphor (as opposed to a conventional everyday idiom) was now viewed as a novel poetic extension of existing conceptualizations. The conceptual blending theory added the understanding of metaphor as a subconscious process of fusing mental frames as part of routine reasoning.

Modern conceptual metaphor and blending theories best account for the unique artistic developments of Symbolism. They provide tools to most productively unpack (in cognitive terms) or distill (in liquecent terms) the intricate structural components of the metaphorical blends created by Symbolist thought and their manifestations in verbal and non-verbal art forms. I will start my discussion of Symbolist poetic extensions of the metaphor of world liquecence with a discussion of poetic language – the domain where metaphor studies have a long established history.

My focus in this SURVEY of the literary and other cultural sources of Symbolist blending practices, i.e. its all-pervasive poetics of liquecence, is on works that have been important to the study of Symbolism from a variety of perspectives, including the history of the movement, discussion of its techniques, aesthetics, and worldview, as well as monographs on individual artists, especially the ones I deal with in detail. Below, I
discuss the cultural sources that suggested approaches to the Symbolist “texts” I analyze that would integrate conceptual metaphoric blending, schemata of world liquescence encoded in myth and folklore, and the staples of Symbolist aesthetics.

As a point of departure, I adopt several approaches developed by Howard Isham, an art historian and musicologist, which he uses in his studies of visual art. In this sphere, he applies the concept of “oceanic feeling” to account for the profusion of water imagery in European painting of the Romantic age, and this term and concept has roots in myth, as he discusses. Following the major cognitive linguists, who also look for the sources of metaphor in folklore, since “the cognitive model of our conceptualization of the environment in the creation of metaphor suggest the similar processes are in operation all the time” (Trim, 2007:4),21 I trace the routes of metaphoric developments “from concrete to abstract” (Sweetser, 1990:28) in Russian and Slavic folkloric sources.

Interest in folklore arose in the Romantic era driven by nationalism in its search for the sources of the national self-awareness, language and culture. That is why Romantic aesthetics is to be looked at in depth as the antecedent of Symbolist aesthetics, which also drew inspiration from folklore; following the Romantics, Symbolists likewise believed, it harbored a lost wisdom. Symbolists also followed the Romantics in their

21 As an example of such a metaphor pervasive throughout different periods of literature, Trim cites LIFE IS A JOURNEY as conceptual metaphor. “It involves a process by which the hero of the story leaves the ordinary world, enters the world of the supernatural in which he has to fight all those intent on the destruction, and then returns to his own world to try and help his people with the knowledge he has gained” (2007:6). A very similar conceptualization can be found in Russian folklore as well, for example in the stories where a hero sets off on the quest for maturity and enters the world of Baba Yaga to obtain some magic artifacts that would help him upon his return back to “Russia.” Elements of the Russian Folktale were classified by V. Propp in his monograph Morphology of the Folktale (‘Morfologiia skazki,’ 1928).
“vertical” vision of LIFE IS A JOURNEY conceptualization, which offered a source-path-goal schema to transcendence from the earthly to the celestial spheres. Horizontal journeys belong to this world, vertical journeys (in either the direction UP or DOWN) to “other worlds.” Another major component of this SURVEY is a discussion of the staples of Symbolist poetics, such as “musicality,” cyclization and the pursuit of the unattainable and boundless, which allow for establishing metaphoric links between people and water.

1.6.1 “Oceanic Feeling/Consciousness” as the Underlying Substratum to the Art of the Period and as the Concept Unifying the Artists Selected.

The concept of “oceanic feeling” is one of the main elements shared by the three artists chosen for detailed analysis. The term refers to an intuitive cognizance of the inherent liquecence of the human domain and was popularized through Sigmund Freud’s use of the term. Isham’s monograph The Image of the Sea. Oceanic Consciousness in the Romantic Century (2004) gives the definition and etiology of the term “oceanic feeling” (das ozeanische Gefühl). The scholar informs us that the term describing this mystical feeling of eternity first appeared in print in the opening chapter of Sigmund Freud’s Das Unbehagen an der Kultur (1930), translated into English as Civilization and its Discontents. There, Freud quotes, but, – contrary to a wide-spread notion, - does not share, the opinion of the French writer Romain Rolland (1866 – 1944), who in a letter of December 5th, 1927, to Freud, insists that the true source of religious sentiments is found in a peculiar feeling, “which he [Rolland] himself is never without, which he found confirmed by many others, and which he may suppose is present in millions of people.”
He goes on to say that “it is a feeling that he would like to call a sensation of eternity, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded – as it were, oceanic” (Isham, xx). Isham finds the source of Rolland’s concepts in a passage from the French author’s biography of the nineteenth-century Indian yogi Ramakrishna. In *The Life of Ramakrishna*, first published in Paris in 1929, Rolland discusses the concept of “that mystic oceanic sensibility” that the yogi claimed was present in all human beings. He quotes the passage below from Ramakrishna’s writings.

I belong to the land of rivers...Now of all rivers the most sacred is that which gushes out eternally from the depths of the soul and from its rocks and glaciers. Therein lies primeval force and that is what I call religion. Everything belongs to this river of the soul, flowing from the dark, unplumbed reservoirs of our Being…. From the source to the sea, from the sea to the source, everything consists of the same Energy, of the being without beginning and without End.²²

The conceptualization above comes from a culture very different from the Russian; it, nevertheless, or therefore, exemplifies the universality and perennial character of the “human world is water” notion. Symbolist liquescent metaphoricity, thus “forms part of a long-term supra-cultural symbol” of the world as a fluid matter that can “re-occur at different historical and literary periods” (Trim, 2007:5). Konstantin Bal’mont, for example, aspired to capture this sensation of eternity by conjuring up unlimited and unbounded space in his cycle *In Boundlessness* (‘V Bezbreznosti,’ 1895)²³ via liquescent metaphor. For that matter, Symbolist art embraces that “oceanic

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²³ In the 1917 edition of this cycle, the subtitle *Voices of Nature* (‘Golosa prirody’) was added to the main title (Markov, 1988:44).
endlessness,” that is found in the multiple instantiations of the creation myth across the world.

Writing about the poetic “sea complex” (‘poeticheskii kompleks moria’), V.N. Toporov speaks about the “psycho-physiological” component of poetic texts, the study of which would help resolve questions of the interdependence of culture and nature, the “pre-culture” substratum of poetic language and the problem of the “reconstruction” of the psycho-physiological structure of the poet’s mind through the texts s/he produces. According to Toporov, this “sea complex” does not only derive from descriptions of the sea in folk poetry, which also employs the “sea theme” in order to depict something for which the sea or water imagery is only a conduit. He calls it the “sea code” of a “non-sea” utterance. In other words, the sea as an element, or even a principle of this element, serves as a metaphor for something that exists both in the sea and beyond it, above all in the human realm. Toporov also points out that this metaphor could be labeled “hackneyed,” since it re-appears with great frequency in texts by different authors from different epochs with but little variation. He arrives at the conclusion that the secret of its “popularity” is in its being “organically” ingrained in the psycho-mental structures of any author’s mind and the minds of his/her intended audience; it is so “popular,” because this metaphor is largely reflective of and dependent on certain archetypes. Our experiences of the sea and the marine world are reflected in a paradoxical semantic structure, which conceptualizes the boundless in terms of the bounded and the eternal through the temporal (1995:577 - 579). Symbolist art as a successor to Romanticism, also sought to uncover the most intimate relationships between man and nature. Both epochs were more
open to these “deep sources” than rationalistic epochs such as the Classicism of the 18th century and the positivist Realism that preceded the poetic Renaissance of the Silver Age.

This “oceanic feeling” or “poetic sea complex,” according to Toporov (577), reflects the mythological conception of Creation, which in its turn communicates prenatal “encounters” of the fetus when it is floating in amniotic fluid. The fetus and, earlier, the egg are in a state of recurrent rocking back and forth, as if amid a (to them) vast expanse of water. Subconsciously, a future human being experiences a feeling of infinity and perceives itself as a part of it. Results of these non-sensor exposures may be reproduced in recurrent dreams involving a large volume of water and a feeling of floating on waves.

Toporov particularly focuses on the cosmogonic Creation myth in Vedic and Hindu tradition, which in allegorical form encodes collective memory about conception. It speaks about life spreading from the “world egg,” a “golden fetus,” which freely floated in the waters of the primeval ocean. The “world egg” appeared as a result of two waves’ collision with each other, which could be metaphorically equated to their “coitus.” According to a different version, Pradzhapati, the Creator, impregnated the egg, which gave birth to two golden cups – semi-spheres, prototypical of the Earth and the Sky. The main goal of the golden egg is to settle down and get attached to something steady in order to prove fertile (584).

Toporov argues that such recurrent references to the image of the sea and water in literary texts is an unconscious reconstruction of pre-natal experience. The purpose of the cosmogonic myth is not only in relaying memory about conception, but also in helping to live through moments of crisis by finding a point of rest (585).
Russian Symbolism was impacted by Vedic philosophical tradition and the connection between the two was emphasized by such prominent Symbolist writers as Andrei Belyi, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, Konstantin Bal’mont, Viacheslav Ivanov, and Valerii Briusov (according to A.M. Alekseev-Apraksin). The Vedic Creation myth discussed above is echoed, for instance, in a Russian Symbolist artist Pavel Kuznetsov’s paintings devoted to the issues of birth, motherhood, and water as the locus of life and life as a water cycle, such as his *Birth* (‘Rozhdenie,’ 1906 – 1907) and the Fountain Series. According to Kuznetsov scholar Peter Stuples, “the entire canvas creates a self-substantiating myth not associated with any established symbology” (1989: 58) however.

The term “oceanic feeling” used in this dissertation refers to the profusion of conceptual metaphoric blends which fuse water and human domains, a blend that is reflected in the Russian language. It is not linked to Freudian theory (see the discussion above). Water as an emblem of cosmic liquescence is part of wider Indo-European and universal notions connecting water, life, and the soul. The idea of the cosmic unity of the soul and sea and the oceanic origins of the human race is reflected, for instance, in the etymology of the German word for soul – *Seele*, which comes from *der See/die See* (‘lake’ and ‘sea’, respectively) (Wandruszka, 1979:213) or in the homonymy of the

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25 An illustration to the Vedic Creation myth can also be found in a painting by Czech Symbolist artist Frantisek Kupka *The Beginning of Life, The Water-Lilies* (1900 – 1903). In the center of this picture is “a human fetus or embryo in its amniotic sac, further attached via a cord to a “bubble” which encloses a bud or blossom. These orbs hovering over the luminescent surface of the pond suggest an evolutionary chain, linking human and plant form, and even while they are miniature planets, a broader association between the microcosm of the first stages of individual life and the macrocosm of the evolution of the cosmos” (Kupka, Kosinski and Andel, 1997:39).
French words for *mother* (‘mère’) and for *sea* (‘mer’). Images of the sea and water and the impressions they leave on human consciousness were registered in the heritage of different cultures at different times, and entered the poetry of the most diverse nations (Isham, 2004: xix). Symbolist poetics, just like Romanticism before it, insistently encodes the “sea” or “water” element in conceptualizations of human beings, their souls and emotions. It was European Romanticism, which activated the folkloric substratum in language that was linked to “oceanic boundlessness.”

The “oceanic feeling” survives as “a useful phrase to describe a variety of ways that human beings expressed belief in the oceanic dimension of the soul” (Isham, 2004:399). It is organically ingrained in our consciousness because the human soul contains within itself a sense of our world’s most characteristic feature - its oceanic plenitude, which is the most all-pervasive of its natural characteristics and which we instinctively acknowledge as our place in nature. It provides the basis for our spiritual outreach into the unknowable.

Folklore and ethnographic research, as conducted by, for example, Aleksandr Afanas’ev, Vladimir Shuklin, Stephen Norwik and Vladimir Toporov, supports the findings of cognitive scientists and metaphor scholars, such as Eve Sweetser, Raymond Gibbs and Richard Trim. They have argued for universality of cognitive processes in both synchronic and diachronic aspects, and claimed that the roots for the metaphoric conceptualizations present in modern art should be sought in folklore and myth. The three artists of the Symbolist period whose oeuvre I closely analyze share the oceanic dimension of human cognition as the underlying structure of their art.
1.6.2. Folklore as a Source for the Conceptual Metaphor of World Liquescence and Symbolist Metaphoricity

The significance of folklore for Symbolist poetics and aesthetics is two-fold. Firstly, a theoretical point is in order. According to cognitive linguist Eve Sweetser, folklore is an important source of metaphor. She has argued that the development of metaphorical meaning “proceeds from concrete to abstract” (1990:29) and originates within our embodied experiences later acquiring abstract meanings (see also Gibbs et al., 2004). The human body, for instance, is used “as a structural template” to understand and describe emotions: a physical sensation of physical pain, for example, is routinely extended to the experiences of emotional suffering: dusha bolit, a serdite plachet (‘the soul aches, and the heart is crying’). The character of multiple cross-mappings between NATURE and HUMAN conceptual domains, however, could be best accounted for with the help of the conceptual blending model: people’s cognition of their own human

26 She writes, for instance, that the statement “physical brightness is conductive to cheerfulness” offers an example of how … this transition from concrete to abstract points to the “inseparability of physical sensation from emotional reaction, or of emotional state from concomitant physical change… the Mind-as-Body metaphor is very probably motivated by correlations between our external experience and our internal emotional and cognitive states” (28 – 30).

27 “Although some metaphysical poetry contains metaphors without embodied grounding, many instances of poetic metaphor and conventional speech express recurring patterns of embodiment … Our only strong claim is that a significant aspect of metaphoric language is motivated by embodied experience.” (Gibbs, Jr R. W, Lima P. L. Costa, and Edson Francozo. “Metaphor Is Grounded in Embodied Experience.” Journal of Pragmatics. 36.7 (2004). Print. (1208)).


29 The title and refrain of a song by Mikhail Shufutinskii.
domain in terms of the surrounding world and their engagement in a personification of nature occurs simultaneously, and results in different inferences in the same blended space. These are the cognitive processes reflected in folklore.

Secondly, as the prominent Russian Symbolism scholar Zara Mints points out, turning to folklore, national myth and ritual is an important characteristic of the poetics of Russian Symbolist writers and artists. Their quest for the primeval sources of human experience and search for “ultimate truth” led them to the study of folklore and ancient myth. There they found motifs and themes they could incorporate into their texts transforming them to suit the needs of their artistic practice. This approach doubled the symbolism of the symbolic text: the folkloric images did not only carry inherent folkloric input connected with the archaic myth, but simultaneously became signs of folk consciousness, national character and language. This multiplication of symbolism accompanied, according to Viacheslav Ivanov, the movement of symbolist art towards narodnost’ and “myth” (Mints, 2006).30 The folk were seen as carriers of “dionysiac elementality” and as a “cleansing flood,” that – with the help of poets and artists in touch with the soul of the folk – would create a synthesized world without barriers, a world of total empathy and fluid relations. This partly political, partly utopian, partly Nietzschean (the Poet as Overman) vision was undoubtedly inspired by folklore as well. The revolutionary poet (and Bal’mont was one of the more radical) was the spokesman of the

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folk and as such he also delved into the “ancient truths” the folk had accumulated, i.e. into myth and folklore. He did so very much in order to rejuvenate his own creativity.\footnote{These observations about national folklore as a source of inspiration for the Symbolists are found in the fundamental work \textit{Poetics of Russian Symbolism} (‘Poetika Russkogo Simvolizma’) by Zara Mints and Nikolai Bogomolov (2004).}

The Symbolist proclivity for metaphor in general, and its conceptualization of the physical world as a liquescent entity in particular, are based on the movement’s understanding of nature as a procreative and animated force. This notion originates from primeval pantheistic attitudes to nature and, having entered the realm of culture, at this time yields the symbolist concept of “World Soul” or “Anima Mundi” (‘Dusha mira’), in its turn derived from Neo-Platonism. The Symbolist blending of synchronic and diachronic time structures (Mints, 2004:69-71) foregrounds metaphysical liquescence as the sacrosanct part of the natural water cycle, the fundamental principle of physical existence.\footnote{A staple of Symbolist aesthetics, it is specifically Vladimir Solov’ev’s “World Soul” (linked to “God’s Wisdom, Sophia” in other works), which connects all phenomena across artificially imposed borders and is the cornerstone of creation, space, time and mechanical causality (‘osnova tvoreniia, prostranstva, vremen i mekhanicheskoi prichinnosti’) (Solov’ev, \textit{Rossiia i vseleskaia tserkov’} (‘Russia and the Ecumenical Church,’ 1908)). The latter reveals the metaphoric essence of the surrounding world as full of innumerable correspondences, (including those between nature and the human domain) and allows for their blending. It also understands every event as an amalgam of its past, present and future, where the past and future states of a phenomenon are innate “doubles” of its present state. This conception of time derives, among other sources, from the Nietzschean understanding of earthly existence as “eternal return.” Thus, the diachronic structure of reality also emphasizes the fluid nature of time and views it as abiding by the
laws of natural cycles (exemplified by water cycles), not linear development. The poetics of leitmotifs is analogous to “eternal returns” and the poly-cultural orientation of the Symbolist text, which we find in the deep structures of “neo-mythological” culture, harmonize well with the structures of myth.

The “history of metaphors of nature” (also the title of the eponymous book by Stephen A. Norwick)\(^\text{33}\) in general and “the image of nature as a great flux” (as Norwick calls it) in particular can be traced through virtually all the national folkloric traditions from the advent of humanity. Folk tradition, as encoded in folk poetry and tales, envisions water as the primordial element of life – all life originates from it; it embodies the primeval chaos and the beginning of the world. It stands in opposition to the stable and static domain – Earth. The sea in the Russian folk consciousness is a generic personified image of water. In the Russian myth-poetic tradition the ocean and sea are represented as a joint construct of the *okean – more* (‘ocean – sea’) (Shuklin, 1995:84 - 85). According to Afanas’ev, rain clouds appeared to the ancient Arians as heavenly wells: the word *utsa* (‘well’) is used in Vedic texts in reference to clouds. The sky itself in ancient folk belief was a big water depository and was referred to as an ocean hanging over people’s heads; hence, there evolved ideas about the heavenly bodies floating or “swimming” across the firmament. In Russian magic spells, *okean – more* means “the sky,” which is obviated by the context in which it is used (1994:120 - 130). Indo-European languages reflect how the conceptualizations of the aether were transferred to it from the domain of water. For example, in Russian clouds “float across the sky” (‘oblaka

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plyvut po nebu’) and air moves in “streams” or “currents” (‘vozdushnye techeniia/potoki’) and so forth.

The ancient Slavs were influenced by the Vedic conceptualization of water as an element with healing and regenerative powers. Its purifying qualities were used as a medicine for illness and as a prophylactic means against evil spells. Various rituals, such as weddings and seasonal celebrations, included references to water as to embodiment of health: Bud’ zdrov(a), kak voda! (‘Be as healthy as water!’) (Afanas’ev, 1994:189).

Spring floods were looked at as a vehicle for the deceased to get to Paradise, as an awakening of nature after the “winter death.” They coincided with Easter, when the portals of Paradise, according to folk belief, are opened to all who died on those days (150 – 151). Even the myth of the Biblical Great Flood, according to Afanas’ev, is a metaphor for the rebirth of nature in spring (165).

The commitment to folklore so typical of Russian Symbolism was prepared by the neo-Romantic and proto-Modernist artist Viktor Vasnetsov (1848 – 1926) and the so-called “Abramtsevo circle” of the late 1870s, which he was close to. This circle was founded in the early 1880s, and supported by the Russian mercenary family of the Mamontovs, who saw themselves as patrons of the arts. It included, Mikhail Vrubel’ (1856 – 1910), Vasilii Polenov (1844 – 1927), and Ivan Bilibin (1876 – 1942). The interests of this circle reflected the widespread aspirations of the Russian contemporary intelligentsia to rediscover the native past, to study Russian folkloric tradition, arts and crafts, and to develop and preserve them for the posterity. The activities of the circle included staging playwright A.N. Ostrovskii’s fairytale verse-drama “The Snow Maiden”
(‘Snegurochka,’ 1873) written under the influence of the folkloric tales collected by
Aleksandr Afanasiev (1826 – 1871), the illustrations for which were made by
Vasnetsov.\textsuperscript{34}

The position of Borisov-Musatov in painterly art is close to that which Viacheslav
Ivanov occupied in poetry – that of directing the “new wave” of art and placing emphasis
on poetry. Ivanov is one of those who stepped away from the “literary style” and started
to implement ancient Russian and European folkloric themes, like in his poem “The
Calling of Bacchus” (‘Vyzyvanie Vakkha, 1906). Contemporary language seemed trite
and banal to the Symbolists and they strove to substitute it via folkloric and mythic
sources, with what they saw as “real” people’s speech. This did not hinder them from
creating a very subtle poetic language taken from sophisticated literary sources. The
result was a blend. Archaisms of both folkloric and religious sources created one such
blend, aimed at conveying the ancient unity between the prophetic poet/artist and the
narod. The ultimate purpose of this blending is a breakthrough from the ephemeral poetic
“ivory tower” into the sphere of the collective soul or anima mundi, which did not mean
that ivory tower poetry was not written as well. Ironically, Viacheslav Ivanov, in spite of

\textsuperscript{34} Vasnetsov’s paintings involving folkloric themes – \textit{Alenushka} (1881), \textit{Three Tsarevnas of the Underground Tsardom} (‘Tri tsarevny podzemnogo tsarstva,’ 1884) and \textit{The Hero-Knights} (‘Bogatyri,’ 1898) became precursors to Modernist and Symbolist developments, and the mural, Borisov-Musatov, for example, longed to create he saw as a new form of
“folk-art.” In his \textit{Sirin and Alkonost. The Song of Joy and Sorrow} (‘Sirin i Alkonost. Pesn’ radosti i pechali,’ 1896) and \textit{Gamaiun, theProphetic Bird} (‘Gamaiun, ptitsa veshchaia,’ 1895), Vasnetsov approaches Russian mythology in a metaphoric way. These
developments served as a segue between the Realist and Symbolist traditions in Russian
art.
his search for the primeval sources of art and commitment to myth, is one of the most erudite and inaccessible poets of Symbolism.

The cross-mappings between the water and human domains acknowledge a profusion of direct correspondences between them. Thoughts and feelings about water as metaphor for an encompassing liquescent reality permeated the consciousness of the Silver Age artists, a consciousness they thought they found in ancient civilizations and other cultures they wanted to connect with through myth and symbol.

1.6.3. “Liquescent” Developments in Symbolist Literature and Visual Arts and their Underlying Principles

The metaphor of world liquescence was central to science (physics, chemistry and agriculture), of the Romantic era, the Naturphilosophie which impacted Symbolism deeply, not least through Solov’ev. Toporov and Isham among many other scholars have singled out and examined the historically determined and “cultural” version of the “sea complex” that took shape in European Romantic poetry, and is represented in it by such names as Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Baudelaire, Mickiewicz, Pushkin, Baratynskii, Tiutchev and others. Isham explores the “sea complex” not only in literature and poetry but also in music and the visual arts of the “Romantic century” (2004). Romantic poetry and art abound in descriptions of the “real” sea; Romantic poetry even codifies specific “sea” poetics. Attributes of the sea as a natural phenomenon – large, boundless, mighty, and boundless, i.e. freedom-loving in HUMAN terms – can easily be
made into signs of various semantic matrices (simile, metaphor, parallelism, allegory, symbolism, and so forth). These “sea qualities” can be used to substitute the image of man, often the poet himself, who is in many cases placed in between the sea below and the sky above as inside a certain frame (Toporov, 1995:578).

The continuity between Romanticism and Symbolism is manifested in the shared interest in folklore and folkloric literature: in these schools it becomes incorporated into the worldview broadened by territorial expansions and empowered by scientific discoveries, which connects the physical world and the world of a dream via spiritual transcendence. In Russia, the very rediscovery of Romantic poets, such as Pushkin and Tiutchev, marked this very continuity. It will be remembered that politically radical Realists had “banned” the very idea of politically non-involved poetry for their vision of “committed” art. The “rehabilitation” of Pushkin, Tiutchev and Fet and their poetic, as opposed to political, narodnost’, established a link previously not seen, or rather denied during the anti-aesthetic phase of radical-revolutionary Realism. To the “rediscoveries” of Silver Age modernism belongs the renewed attention to prose writers such as F.M. Dostoevskii and L.N. Tolstoi as well. One of the most notable works performing that revaluation was Merezhkovskii’s Dostoevskii and Tolstoi (1900 - 1901) in which he established the famous dichotomy of the Seer of the Spirit and the Seer of the Flesh and the need to develop a synthesis of their respective “visions.” The material in this sphere is very rich and I therefore limit myself to a couple of “sea poems” rediscovered by the Symbolists.
Pushkin’s “To the Sea” (‘K moriu,’ 1824) exemplifies a romantic approach to the “sea complex.” Here, the sea is both the object portrayed and the author’s interlocutor, a close friend. Pushkin draws on the long established tropes of personification of the natural elements conventional in folklore, as well as the Romantic notion of the close bond between the Poet and Nature. On the one hand, the reader views the sea as a part of objective reality and also compares it to Napoleon – Kak ty, mogushch, glubok i mrachen; Kak ty, nichem neukrotim. (‘Like you, powerful, deep, and dark;/ Like you, indomitable (by nothing)’); on the other hand, we understand through the other epithets that the author longs to identify with the sea’s freedom, pride and insubordination (‘svododnaia (stikhiia), gordaia (krasa), svoenravnye (poryvy)’). He is doomed to stay on the shore, however, unable to join the mighty watery element. What he intends to do instead is to embrace the sea as part of his own soul (‘toboiu poln’) and to carry it within himself, to his exile in the “forests and silent deserts.” In Pushkin’s Romantically constructed biography (the Romantics already before the Symbolists engaged in ‘life creation’), the exiled poet bids farewell to the Black Sea before embarking on the second phase of his exile in Russia.

While in Pushkin’s poem there are motifs of political rebellion, Fedor Tiutchev’s “As the Ocean Embraces the Globe…” (‘Kak okean ob’emlet shar zemnoi…,’ 1828 – 1830), maps the element on the most private sphere of human life – dreams; as the poem progresses, the domain of dreams becomes the elemental ocean itself. The Romantic vision of man as placed between the earth under his feet and the sky above his head receives a twist: the star-studded firmament is mysteriously looking upwards from the
ocean depths (‘Nebesnyi svod, goriashchii slavoi zvezdnoi, / Tainstvenno gliadit iz glubiny…’) in which it is reflected while simultaneously being above the scene. The poem fuses the outside and the inside worlds into an image-schema of the sphere enclosing a person within the ocean-sky blend, making him its integral part. The water as element here, thus, is used to map out the interior of the human soul as a liquescent cosmic entity embracing the whole universe. This type of mirror imagery is prevalent in Symbolism with its cult of the “two abysses” (Merezhkovskii). Undoubtedly Fet’s poem “On the Haystack on a Southern Night” (‘Na stoge sena noch’iu iuzhnoi,’ 1857) is one of the “program poems” which inspired this notion. Stanza three exemplifies liquescence as its peak, emotionally and artistically: 

Ia l’ nessia k bezdne polunochnoi,/ Il’ sonmy zvezd ko mne neslis’?/ Kazalos’, budto v dlani moshchnoi/ Na etoi bezdnoi ia povis. (‘Was I racing towards the midnight abyss, or were the hosts of stars racing towards me? It seemed as if I were held in a mighty hand suspended above this abyss.’)

On the one hand, Symbolism experienced the powerful impact of folklore and myth, and on the other hand, there was the receptivity to the most sophisticated and cosmopolitan trends of contemporary art as well as the impact of rediscovered Romanticism. The links between Romanticism and Symbolism are also carried out via “music” as “the most exemplary embodiment of art” (‘samoe obraztsovoe voploshchenie iskusstva’) according to Roman Jakobson, in other words, by their shared commitment to the fluid and elusive art form, which more than any other is devoid of “denotation” or fixed meanings. One of the major features of Romantic verse that impacted Symbolism,
is its “striving to be transformed into music.” German Lieder composition with its numerous “Songs without Words” (F. Schubert) undoubtedly set a precedent for the cult of “melodiousness” in Symbolist verse and its metaphorical variants in other art forms, for its suggestive, elusive and “non-mimetic” essence. Bal’mont’s poetry, for example yielded more songs than that of any other twentieth century Russian poet, but other Symbolist poets also provided rich materials. Since like water, music “flows” (and like verbal art is linear), the Wagnerian principle of the endless melody and fluid integration of art, is central to my analysis of the musicality and, hence liquescence, of Bal’mont’s poetry. It is, however, also central to the paintings by Borisov-Musatov and it is in this “transfer” of music to the visual arts that the contribution of conceptual metaphor theory lies, a contribution my dissertation relies on and develops. This and many other artists of his generation consciously relayed “musicality” to this static art (Kochik, 1980:42). Borisov-Musatov theorized this aspect in his letter to Aleksandr Benois (1905), which I quote in full in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 2 I have a fuller discussion of the links between Romanticism and Symbolism, using a comparative analysis of liquescence techniques in two poems by Afanasii Fet (“Shepot, robkoe dykhane…” (‘A Whisper, a Timid Breath…’ , 1850) and “Fantaziia” (‘Fantasy,’ 1847)), and Konstantin Bal’mont (“Prizraki” (‘Ghosts,’ 1895).

Chapter 3 elaborates on how Romantic aesthetics are reflected in paintings by Viktor

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Borisov-Musatov on both the conceptual level and that of subject matter. And it was not only classical music which impacted Silver Age Culture. The tempo of the contemporary tango craze affected the rhythm of film-maker Bauer’s moving images, infusing them with “a specific melancholy mood,” as Tsiv’ian defines it (1996:209).37

Another important aspect of the Symbolist aesthetics of liquefaction is their preference for the cycle. Rather than gathering a “collection” of poetry, poets of that period very consciously created larger units which created coherence by their inner dynamics. Although cyclization was widely practiced in Russian poetry since the 18th century (Sloane, 1988), Russian Romanticism and Symbolism wrote cycles both with increased frequency and with a new emphasis on its “dynamics” to use David Sloane’s term from his book Aleksandr Blok and the Dynamics of the Lyric Cycle (1988). The “dynamics” of the Symbolist cycle consist of a greater fusion of the parts with the whole, of greater fluidity between the separate poems, continuity and intensified interaction between them. With their emphasis on the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk (the total work of art), and hence on liquefaction, blending and fusion, the Symbolists would naturally take frequent recourse to this form. Cycles were written by Briusov, Blok, Viacheslav Ivanov and numerous other poets of the period, not least Bal’mont whose cycle In Boundlessness (‘V Bezbrezhnosti,’ 1895) is discussed in Chapter 2.

There are obvious correlations between the verbal genre of the poetic cycle and the painterly architectonics of Borisov-Musatov art (Chapter 3). The appeal of the cycle to the Symbolists is obvious: a poetic cycle, like a (water) natural cycle, via a path of

transformations (from water to mist to rain) returns to its beginnings, but enriched with the experience of the past. This enriched return to beginnings may lead to the creation of “open spiral circularity,” which may be seen as eternal return but on a qualitatively new level. In any case Sloane’s study of the cycle (as well as that by Borowec (1991) and Grossman (1985), which rely on Sloane’s discoveries) as an important art form of the Silver Age has been important to my study of cyclicity and circularity, as well as the extension of the circle, the spiral, in the culture of the *fin de siècle*. The above mentioned monographs adopt an in-depth semiotic approach to contextual and intertextual interactions within a cycle, the tension between which “constitutes the precondition essential for generation of meaning in a cycle” (Sloane, 1988:22), which, hence, could be viewed as practicing blending on the conceptual level inherent in the genre. The very “context of the cycle encourages the reader to make tentative associations up and down the columns as well as experiment with different horizontal arrangements” (38).

Important is also seeing the genre of the cycle from the point of view of its internal organization “which would make a cycle an organic whole”\(^{38}\) and not only an external, “graphic” form. The concept of organic unity, which is important to Symbolist aesthetics links up with the genre of the cycle very logically – and organically. Simultaneously with the appearance of Bal’mont’s cycle *In Boundlessness*, the concept of boundless space was explored in the realist art of the nineteenth century by such artists as, for example,

Isaak Levitan and Arkhip Kuindzhi. I explore their impact on Symbolist visual art in greater detail in Chapter 3.

The Introduction has presented the folkloric, cultural, linguistic and anthropological foundations on which Conceptual Metaphor and Blending theories base their main premises, and which the subsequent chapters are guided by in the analyses of specific texts. As already stated, the three subsequent chapters trace the same conceptual metaphor in a highly sophisticated period, but one which has not lost its links with the ancient past.
Symbolist aesthetics is particularly interesting from the point of view of Metaphor Study, since its structure presents an intricate metaphorical mapping or blend in itself. It reveals the same part-whole structure of the image metaphors as that, which exists between symbol and myth, where the symbol is a “condensed myth” (‘svernutyi mif’). As Viacheslav Ivanov put it: *К символу [...] миф относится, как дуб к ореху* (‘… myth relates to symbol as an oak to the acorn.’) (cited in Mints, 2004:70). Blok, in a Baudelairean vein, saw the world as full of correspondences (‘vse polno sootvetstvii’) (cited in Mints, 2004:69). In sum, Symbolists saw similarities and contiguities rather than differences; they preferred mergers and analogies to discreteness and contrasts.

Mints emphasizes the significance of both the synchronic and diachronic structures in the reality perceived by the Symbolists and as reflected in their poetics. To them, “reality” reveals the metaphoric essence of the surrounding world full of innumerable correspondences, including those between the natural and human domains, which is the factor that allows for their blending. Their poetics understands every event as an amalgam of its past, present and future, where the past and future states of a phenomenon are innate “doubles” of its present state. This conception of time derives
from the Nietzschean understanding of time as “eternal return.” Thus, the diachronic structure of reality also emphasizes the fluid nature of time abiding by the laws of water cycles, not linear development. The poetics of leitmotifs is analogous to “eternal returns” and the poly-cultural orientation of the Symbolist text, which we find in the deep structures of its “neo-mythological” culture; it harmonizes well with a mythic perspective (Mints, 2004:71).

The Symbolist understanding of all of nature as permeated by a live and procreative force originates from primeval pagan and pantheistic attitudes to it. This understanding of the surrounding world suggests an unlimited, all-pervasive spirituality (‘bespredel’nuu odukhotvorennost’ vsego’) (Bal’mont, cited in Mints, 2004:69). Life was equated with spirit or soul animating all material forms, a concept akin to Henri Bergson’s élan vital.

In my work, I argue that these principles form the foundation of Symbolist poetics determining its interface as a “fluid” artistic movement built on the principles of world liqueescence and uncovering the fluid nature of reality via metaphor/metaphorical blending. Metaphoric transfer and conceptual blending underlie the very nature of Symbolism, which looked for correspondences across realities (there were at least two realities in their dualistic world view). The movement was preoccupied with breaking away from physical reality and reaching out to the highest spiritual reality not seen by human eyes, but one more real than tangible reality – a realibus ad realiora39. This motto

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39 From the real to the highest reality is an aphoristic motto put forward by Viacheslav Ivanov, one of the theoreticians and leaders of Russian Symbolism. It admonished the Symbolist artist to move from visual (concrete) reality to the “more real” reality of the
proposed by Viacheslav Ivanov as a staple of Symbolist aesthetics can be considered a Symbolist anticipation of Eve Sweetser’s formula of meaning development from concrete to abstract discussed in the Introduction. Cognitive scientist Ortony agrees that metaphor “is a very effective device for moving from the well-known to the less well-known” (2001:17). In the context of Symbolism, the strong emotive force of metaphors due to their vividness, which “extends to all sensory modalities as well as to emotive power” (17), allows a shortcut \textit{a realibus ad realiora}, or from perceptual reality to emotional experience. Since human experience reveals spatio-temporal continuity it “at once underlies and necessitates the use of metaphor in…communication” (11). In other words, metaphor is supposed to ensure an imperceptible transition from one state to another: \textit{a realibus ad realiora}, in Symbolist terms. Besides, metaphor “enables the predication by transfer of characteristics which are unnamable” (14). This property of metaphor enables the artist to intimate concepts of intangible reality or \textit{realiora}.

Establishing correspondences between the heavenly and earthly spheres largely accounts for the overwhelming importance that Symbolists attached to metaphor and symbol. This quest for similarity (captured by metaphor), seen as supporting the vision of a unified cosmos, also inspired the quest for an intersection of the arts where one art form would metaphorically stand for another. In terms of cognitive linguistics this “intersection” of the arts presents a conceptual blend, where inputs from individual arts or conceptual spaces are juxtaposed in order to yield new original emergent contexts – novel poetic extensions of traditional conceptualizations enriched by the infusions from unseen, to the innermost essence and idea of the material world. (V. Ivanov. “Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme.” \textit{Rossiiskaia virtual’naia biblioteka}. Web. 26 Nov. 2012.)
contiguous art forms.

The Russian Symbolists of the first generation were strongly impacted by French Symbolism, as has been amply demonstrated by, amongst others, Georgette Donchin. A programmatic poem by Charles Baudelaire (1821 - 1867) “Correspondences” (‘Correspondances,' ca. 1852 – 1856), which became influential in Russia, praises metaphor as a central device in Symbolist stylistics. Konstantin Bal’mont translated it into Russian in 1912. The main idea of the poem is that material reality perceived through the senses is full of tokens or tangible representations of something abstract, of signs pointing to higher realities. Thence, nature is full of correspondances between smells, colors and sounds. The second stanza in Bal’mont’s translation of Baudelaire’s poem applies a liquescent term slivaiutsia (‘flow together, blend’) to the sounds produced by the modern densely populated metropolis. This liquescent principle is further mapped onto the “live/spirited unity’ of all earthly colors, flowers and aromas” (‘Так в edinenii nakhodiatsia zhivom/ Vse tony na zemle, tsvety i aromaty’) in the next two lines. Nature, in other words, appears to be a fluid experiential continuum where visual, aural and olfactory perceptions draw on the same source, the liquescence of matter, and can selectively project their properties into the metaphorical blend when juxtaposed in the

40 “Соответствия”: Природа - дивный храм,/ где ряд живых колонн/ О чём-то шепчет нам невнятными словами,/ Лес тёмный символов знакомыми очами/ На проходящего глядит со всех сторон./ Как людных городов созвучные раскаты/ Сливаются вдали в один неясный гром,/ Так в единении находятся живом/ Все тоны на земле, цветы и ароматы./ Есть много запахов здоровых, молодых,/ Как тело детское, – как звуки флейты нежных,/ Зелёных, как луга.../ И много есть иных,/ Нахально блещущих, развратных и мятежных,/ Так мускус, фимиам, пачули и бензой,/ Поют экстазы чувств и добрых сил прибой.
Another Symbolist tenet inaugurated by French Symbolism, was formulated by the poet Paul Verlaine (1844 - 1896), who established correspondences between poetry and music. This “blend” was proclaimed in the famous opening line “Music above all” (‘de la musique avant toute chose’) of his poem entitled “Poetic Art” (‘Jadis et Naguère: Art Poétique,’ 1874). Donchin points out that Verlaine’s call (together with Baudelaires’s *Correspondances*) enjoyed “enormous popularity in Russia” (1958:91), having been “introduced and already propagated by Briusov in the 1890’s” (103). “For Verlaine, music was above all vague, allusive, flexible, the ideal medium for the expression of those half tones, those suggestive moods of which the new poetry was to consist,” Donchin writes (103). She argues that the Symbolist obsession with music “was the result of the chance encounter of three events: firstly, Wagner’s combination of music and libretto in opera; secondly, an extension of verbal experiment especially marked by the end of the century; and thirdly, the realization that poetry is somehow connected with an emotional activity and in that sense, closer to music than to any other branch of art” (106). Verlaine’s poem advocated a non-verbal spiritual progression, suggested by the aesthetic use of words where denotation was de-emphasized by the use of sound orchestration. The poet also expressed his preference for the incorporeal arts of hearing over those of sight, in other words, for music over painting. The poet Konstantin Bal’mont, discussed in detail below, made musicality the hallmark of his verse.

Not only poetry moved the semantics of sound orchestration to the forefront however, but so did painting as well in the sense of promoting “musical” suggestiveness.
In Chapter 3, I explicate how Wagnerian musical principles affected the painter Borisov-Musatov and discuss his impact on Russian Symbolist painting. To give but one more example from the “amalgamation” of the arts and the kinship with nature as the matrix of metaphor in all the arts, the French composer Claude Debussy (1862-1918) overtly expressed the affinity he perceived between music and natural elements, such as air and water. In agreement with Verlaine’s views, he stated: “I love music passionately. And because I love it, I try to free it from barren traditions that stifle it. It is a free art gushing forth, an open-air art boundless as the elements, the wind, the sky, the sea. It must never be shut in and become an academic art” (quoted in Shapiro, 1981:268). French literary Symbolism directly inspired him both as a composer and as an active participant of the cultural scene. The term “open-air,” which he uses, also points to his involvement with the visual arts and the school of Impressionism, which advocated painting in natural settings rather than the confined studio. *En plein air* (‘open air’) painting had its adherents in Russia as early as the second half of the nineteenth – beginning of the twentieth century. Its appearance is connected with such artists as Vasilii Polenov, Isaak Levitan, and others whose oeuvre was important for certain developments in Symbolist art discussed in Chapter 3. In sum, Russian Symbolism was part of an all-dominating pan-European trend of “blending poetics.” It integrated the “doctrines” of French Symbolism, adopted the practice of the new Wagnerian music, and embraced the ideas of Nietzsche. As has often been pointed out, The Russian Silver Age was cosmopolitan to the core, while also developing its own native cultural roots.

Symbolism as an artistic movement drew on the wealth of cultural heritage
accumulated by individual arts then – of poetry, music, and painting. Following Proust’s example, it activated all senses, including the sense of smell, which had played a relatively minor role in previous literature. Synthesis, or synesthesia, was the keyword in all branches of the arts and in a broad range of national cultures since it was seen as the means to find a unique spiritual path to transcendence. The tropes of metaphor and symbol chosen by many Symbolists as the major vehicle for this synthesis seen as leading to transcendence emphasize and express Symbolism’s liquescent nature.

2.1 Konstantin Bal’mont and the Symbolist Genre of the Poetic Cycle

Огонь, Вода, Земля и Воздух - четыре царственные Стихии, с которыми неизменно живет моя душа в радостном и тайном соприкосновении. Ни одного из ощущений я не могу отделить от них и помню об их Четверогласии всегда.

Вода - стихия ласки и влюбленности, глубина завлекающая, ее голос - влажный поцелуй.

Вода нежнее Огня, оттого что в ней женское начало, нежная влажная всевоспринимаемость.

(К. Бальмонт. Из записной книжки. 1904) 41

41 Fire, Water, Earth and Air – these are the four regal Elements./ my soul invariably cohabits with in joyful/ and secret contiguity./ I cannot separate any sensation/ from them and always remember/ about their Quadrovocality… Water is the element of kindness and love,/ enticing depth, its voice/ is a wet kiss…
Konstantin Bal’mont (1867-1942) is one of the first important Symbolist poets coming to the fore at the turn of the century. Together with Valerii Briusov, he ushered in the “new poetry” and enjoyed a “scandalous” popularity in the 1890s - quite in accordance with their aesthetic program, in which épater les bourgeoisie was an important strategy for both art and the creation of the personal image or zhiznetvorchestvo (‘life creation’). This feature has often been ridiculed, but it stands for more than attracting attention. It is part of the aesthetics of liquescent fusing, in this case, of life and art, and beyond that of Symbolist theurgy, which saw art as the means to transform nature by fusing them into a single whole. Those who ridiculed épatege apparently forgot that Symbolist zhiznetvorchestvo was entirely in the tradition of similar Romantic practice (Mints, 2004:398).

By the mid-eighteen nineties, the time of the publication of his first poetic lyrical cycle entitled “Under the Northern Sky” (‘Pod severnym nebom,’ 1894), Bal’mont had declared himself a proponent of the new Decadent-Symbolist movement identifying with Water is more delicate than Fire, because it possesses/ the feminine, the tender/ moist all-receptivity. (K. Bal’mont. From My Notebook. 1904. In Bal’mont, Konstantin D. Polnoe Sobranie Poezii i Prozy v Odnom Tome. Moskva: Al’fa-Kniga, 2011. Print.)

42 “Symbolist poetry […] is an art that strives to merge with reality, to become reality itself” (Paperno, 1994:21).

43 “Symbolists’ concern for integrity and the context a lyric aggregate provides for the individual poems,” according to Borowec, contributed to the development of the Cycle as a Symbolist poetic form in the mid-1890s (1991:283). In view of the structuredness of Bal’mont’s “collections” of poetry, I will use the term “cycle” for the works I discuss, although “book” or “collection” is used by most critics. In Boundlessness, according to Borowec, should in fact be viewed as one of the very first Symbolist lyrical cycles. In quotations from Bal’mont scholars analyzing In Boundlessness I will preserve the term they use, be it “collection,” “volume,” or “book.” For example, Sloane, speaking of Bal’mont and Briusov, says that “their collections established norms of cyclic technique both for their contemporaries and for the generation that followed” (1988:105). V. Markov, A. Pyman and L. Budnikova label In Boundlessness a “book” (‘kniga’).
The contemporary critic Lev Ellis (Kobyinskii), however, calls the “special innovations and specific ‘decadent’ techniques and forms” of Under the Northern Sky “rather minor elated” and more “truly Romantic.” He noted the impact of Afanasii Fet, Fedor Tiutchev and Percy Bysshe Shelley, with just a few “strange previously unseen shades” marking a new departure. Ellis points out that Bal’mont’s gradual transition from Romanticism to Symbolism, which “turned into an endless line of half-shades, hues and musical nuances” was not just a literary but above all an internal, personal metamorphosis, which impacted the course of his whole life (1996:48-51). Mints sees Bal’mont as a typical Decadent in his behavior, as his zhiznetvorchestvo focused on the constant enactment of the role of a “demon-poet” who believes neither in good nor in evil, but only in beauty and all things exotically outlandish. Unlike other decadents, such as, for example, French poet Arthur Rimbaud, Bal’mont did not externalize his inner self but lived according to someone else’s Romantic prescriptions (2004:398). In her interpretation then, Bal’mont often put up a show, acting “the demonic poet,” while his real-life personality was shy and far from self-confident. His real “self” shines through his metaphoric poems about nature, which I analyze below.

The distinction between “Decadence” and “Symbolism” is often too sharply drawn, in my view, certainly in Bal’mont’s case. The term “Decadent” is usually applied to the “first generation” of the new poets whose “decadence” largely consisted of their rejection of civic poetry in favor of individualistic themes. This was shocking to a previous generation which had grown up on Nekrasov’s “A poet you need not be, but a
Decadence also launched urban poetry in Russia and the glorification of and fascination with the artificiality of modern civilization, which is one of its major themes. Much of Briusov’s poetry, with its “electrical moons” on “long stems” (street-lamps; from the poem “Twilight,” “Sumerki,” 1906) and other urban paraphernalia, is “Decadent” in the sense that it was written by a poet of the first generation and because it subordinates nature to culture. Bal’mont is of course one of the early new poets, and in this sense a “Decadent,” but his realm is usually nature and not the asphalted city. If there is a “Decadent” note to Bal’mont’s poetry, it is his extreme Narcissism, often noted by his detractors. Egocentricity, was however, hardly alien to the “Symbolists” proper nor was urban poetry. The distinction is a matter of emphasis during various phases of what should be seen as one Symbolist movement, as Hansen-Löve has argued (1999:115). Like the aesthetics of the entire movement, the terms “Decadent” and “Symbolist” are liqueulent and I therefore use them interchangeably.

One reason for Bal’mont’s joining the new literary movement of Decadence-Symbolism was undoubtedly that the new poetry, “imported” from France, allowed for the uninhibited exploration of “musicality.” Like his French predecessors, Bal’mont, often called “the Russian Baudelaire or the Russian Verlaine” (Orlov, 6), explored the suggestiveness of sound, going quite a few steps beyond the sound orchestration of the Romantics. He saw sound harmonies as revealing “music’s resonant, sonorous, fully-sonorous and mysteriously-resonant beauty” (quoted in Donchin, 1958:109). His

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44 N.A. Nekrasov, “Poet and Citizen” (‘Poet i grazhdanin,’ 1856)
contemporaries fully acknowledged his innovative continuation of this romantic heritage (above all Fet’s. Andrei Belyi, for example, observed: “In the musical lines of his poetry there sound to us Chopin’s graceful melancholy and the grandiloquence of Wagner’s chords – radiant jets burning above the abyss of chaos” (1994:369). Cultivating “melodiousness” and onomatopoeic effects was not the main purpose of Bal’mont’s “sonorous” verse, but rather the creation of a multiplicity of meanings fused into one “stream.” He credited himself for innovative developments in poetic sound orchestration, even identifying with materiia stikha (‘fabric of verse’) in one of his programmatic poems: Ia - izyskannost’ russkoi medlitel’ noi rechi, Predo mnoiu drugie poety – predtechi, Ia vpervye otkryl v etoi rechi uklony, Perepevnye, gnevnye, nezhnye zvony. (‘I am the refinement of Russian slow-paced speech./ All other poets before me are just precursors./ I was the first to discover deviations in this speech./ Sing-song, wrathful, gentle jingles.’ 1901) (2004:372 - 373). Note that the enrichment of his native language with which he credits himself includes a linkage of sound and semantics: a series of emotions are carried by the “slow-paced” Russian language broad enough to include opposites such as tenderness and wrath. There is even a faint echo here of previous well-known characterizations of the Russian language (natural in view of the fact that the poet mentions his predecessors) such as Turgenev’s famous hymn in his Poems in Prose (‘Stikhotvoreniiia v proze,’ 1878 – 1882) to “the great, powerful, righteous, and free Russian language” (‘velikii, moguchii, pravdivyi i svobodnyi russkii iazyk’). As we note however, these predecessors are but “precursors” and “forerunners.” Regarding

45 I.S. Turgenev, “The Russian Language” (‘Russkii iazyk,’ 1882)
Decadence and Symbolism, in this statement of bravado and narcissistic self-admiration, there is a “Decadent” note.

Exalting sound, Bal’mont had a skeptical attitude to the image, even though Belyi discovered painterly qualities in his verse: “His colors are suffused with the delicate exquisiteness of Botticelli and Titian’s flamboyant gold,” he wrote (1994:369). The reason for Bal’mont’s skepticism is that he believed that relying too heavily on “painting” in poetry went hand in hand with undesirable clarity and delimiting mimesis. Presumably he was speaking of realist art, apparently not perceiving that contemporary painting was striving for “musicality” too, and that his own liquescent poetry was closely allied to other liquescent art forms, notably Borisov-Musatov’s paintings. Certainly there is a profusion of “painterly” liquescence (the aquarelle) in his early poetry (as well as his poetry in general), which therefore offers ample material for examining his verse in terms of liquescence. Bal’mont worked within the pantheistic Symbolist canon, striving to grasp the essence of the surrounding world through introspection and communication with the “world soul.” Fusing natural and human ontology, he contributed to the development of novel poetic extensions of the metaphorical blend.

Il’ia Erenburg belongs to those who noted Bal’mont’s “extreme egocentricity” (Orlov, 6). His remark “But having crossed all the seas and having traversed all the roads, he did not notice anything else in the world except for his own soul” (‘No preplyv vse moria i proidia vse dorogi, on nichego v mire ne zametil, krome svoei dushi’) (I. Erenburg, cited in Orlov, 1969:10) is clearly ironical about Bal’mont’s focus on the
However critically meant, this remark aptly characterizes the narcissistic focus of Bal’mont’s poetry, which explores nature within the self, or the boundless via the bounded. His early poetry abundantly exemplifies fluid interactions between the human and elemental realms and generates extensions of the metaphorical blend, which fuses natural and human domains. In other words, “narcissism” is more than concentration on the ego - it is a creative/artistic exploration of the macrocosm through the human microcosm.

Mints points out that as a Decadent, Bal’mont internalized Dostoevskii’s idea about beauty being able to save the world. He “absolutized beauty,” the critic claims. This may be true, but not so much in a Dostoevskian-religious sense, but, rather, because, in his opinion, it allowed one to see the “otherworldly diversity and depth of the material world.” He reconciled the “here” of the material world and the “there” of the intuited other one by creating “a specific lyrical landscape genre where ethereal symbolic beauty emerges through the elements of the earthly landscape” (1994:372), as, for instance, in the opening poem of his cycle In Boundlessness (‘V Bezbreznosti,’ 1895), and most of the poems in this cycle. Perceiving the creative act as a mystery, Bal’mont considered himself a demiurge, or a creator equal to God. The lyrical landscapes of the poems discussed below certainly show the Poet as Creator.

46 Attestation to this characteristic of Bal’mont’s can also found in his contemporary Andrei Belyi’s notes about him: “He did a good job explaining Slovatskii to me in Paris, but, most probably, he explained only himself to me.” (‘Khorosho iz”iasnial on mne v Parizhe Slovatskogo, no, veroiatnee vsego, iz”iasnial lish’ sebia,”) (1994:374).
47 From the novel The Idiot (Part 3, Chapter 5).
2.1.1 *In Boundlessness* (‘V bezbrezhnosti’)

*In Boundlessness* is Bal’mont’s second poetic cycle published in 1895. According to Orlov, it was “unanimously” received as typical of “unhealthy” *fin-de-siècle* literature, marked by “vagueness of thought, absence of principles, utmost egotism and a flaccidly pessimistic treatment of life” (Korobka, cited in Orlov, 1969:26). This assessment, apparently, still has its adherents. Thus A. Hansen-Löve sees “nihilistic” signs of universal emptiness in this cycle and characterizes its lyrical persona as pursuing an “aimless” life path (1999:115). Bal’mont scholar Larisa Budnikova shows that the poet himself completely disagreed with this assessment: he considered his new cycle to be marking not his decline but the beginning of his ascension to true spiritual insights and as the first step in his quest for life’s ultimate meaning. The poet, playfully alluding to the titles of his first books, wrote that his literary path “began under the Northern sky, but inevitably, because of his thirst for the anhedral and the Boundless, approached the blissful Light, the Fire, the victorious Sun, after long wanderings through deserts and abysses of Silence.” ([tvorchestvo] nachalos’ pod Severnym nebom, no siloi vnutренnei neizbezhnosti, cherez zhazhdu bezgrannogo, Bezbrezhnogo, cherez dolgie skitania po pustynnym ravninam i provalam Tishiny, podoshlo k radostnomu Svetu, k Ogniу, k pobeditel’nomu Solntsu’).  

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Budnikova traces the genesis of the concept behind the title to an image in Fet’s poem “Gornoe ushchel’e” (‘A Mountain Canyon Kak budto iz deistvit’nosti chudnoi/Unosishsia v volshebnuu bezbrezhnost’ (‘As if from wonderful reality/ (You) speed away into fairytale-like boundlessness’). In his article “In the Name of Tiutchev” (‘Imeni Tiutcheva’) written in Paris in 1924, Bal’mont himself wrote: “…the word Boundlessness was first introduced into Russian verse by Fet” (slovo Bezbrezhnost’ bylo vpervye vvedeno v russkii stikh Fetom” (Bal’mont, 2007:234). It was, apparently, a favorite with Fet as it is also found in another poem, “Press closer, come closer to me!” (‘Tesnee i blizhe siuda!’ 1883): Puskai i bezbrezhnost’ sama/ Ot nas zagoritsia ogniami (‘Let boundlessness itself/ Burst into flame, lit by us’) (1982:269). As Budnikova has pointed out, Bal’mont draws not only on Fet’s trope, but also on that developed by his admirer Vladimir Solov’ev. For the latter bezbrezhnost’ was a metaphor for the sky, which in Romanticism represents eternity, transcendent spirituality and harmony, as it also does in Symbolism. In the final poem of the cycle Bal’mont makes it perfectly clear that he uses the word in the Solov’evian sense of “the eternal sky,” which he also calls “a realm of miracles” (‘mir chudesnyi’). Bal’mont’s celestial bezbrezhnost’ is also mapped onto earthly-human expanses, however, specifically the sea, which, in its turn, offers the image of the human soul and its passions: V pustyne bezbrezhnogo moria (‘In the desert of the boundless sea’) or Tvoia zastenchivaia nezhnost’ -/ V zemle sokrytyi vodopad,/V nei strasti dremliushchei bezbrezhnost’ (‘Your bashful tenderness -/ (Is) a waterfall hidden inside the earth,/ In it (there is) the boundlessness of slumbering passion,’
“Triolety”). The last poem makes plain that “drowning in boundlessness” has its distinctly erotic aspect.

I have focused on Bal’mont’s early cycle *In Boundlessness*, as it exemplifies the major tenets of Symbolism’s liquescent aesthetics. By the time he wrote this cycle, the poet had transcended romantic poetics, widely employing water imagery and water metaphor for his explorations of ‘The World Soul’ through the poet’s *landshaft dushi* (‘landscape of the soul,’ or ‘inner world’) and the metaphoric interactions between a person and the reality perceived by that person. Besides, the cycle *In Boundlessness*, and especially its first poem “Through My dreams I Attempted to Catch Fleeting Shadows” (‘Ia mechtoiu lovil ukhodiashchie teni’) became programmatic for the Symbolist movement as a whole, as it epitomized the Symbolist aspiration to represent the boundless through the bounded. Lev Ellis wrote that the title of the cycle, *In Boundlessness*, fuses the most extreme aspirations of the European Romantics and modern Symbolists, who endeavored to “symbolize” the outer world – and to find the eternal in the temporary and the echoes of infinity in the terminal and relative” (‘simvolizirovat’ vneshnii mir – i naiti vechnoe vo vremennom, a v konechnom i otnositel’nom – otzvuki beskonechnosti’) (Ellis, 1996:71). The poem conceptualizes the poet’s spiritual ascension from earthly to celestial spheres in a *a realia ad realiora* upward movement conceptualized as climbing an endless staircase. Since this ascension has as its goal progression from spiritual darkness (associated with the bottom of the staircase) to clarity (associated with the higher regions, opening up to the endless vistas
of mountain summits and above them, the sun), one of the conceptual spaces that could be activated in this connection is the upward motion inside a body of water - from the dark depths to the surface. The poet himself suggests such a concept in his earlier poem “Struia” (‘The Current,’ 1885), in which he speaks of a dank, foul-smelling well of stagnant waters. This is the image in the first stanza, but the second and last one counters this image with that of a “silvery current” rising and breaking through layers of contaminated waters. It does so “timidly” at this stage but it is only a matter of time before this vertical movement will gather the momentum of the Prologue poem of In Boundlessness.

I will start my exploration of liquescence in Bal’mont with a general discussion of symbolic water landscapes and proceed with an analysis of the iconically represented water vistas in the cycle. The symbolic “waterscapes” embrace all dimensions: the ocean, as well as the pond, the dried-out well, and the moor. Iconicity can be found in the description of the steppe, covered with swaying feather grass replicating the movement of waves. Bal’mont’s universe is often saturated with silence and muteness, which submerges living things and feelings – it is an under-water-world. His water thus may stand for spiritual-emotional stagnation but it can also reveal itself as a repository for memory. The poems quoted below are from Part Two of the cycle – which is entitled “Love and Shadows of Love” (‘Liubov’ i teni liubvi’) and forms a kind of “sub-cycle.” They include multiple examples of “liquecent” semantics, presenting a world of sinking

49 The image of Jacob’s ladder (one of the sources for Bal’mont’s inspiration) is famous in art. See, e.g., Michael Wilman’s Jacob’s Ladder (1691); also William Blake’s (1800)
and rising. I have marked this vertical axis indicated by verbs of falling and rising by capitals.

In the cycle as a whole Bal’mont subordinates the chronology of the timeline to the verticality of the Symbolist axis. The bottom of a body of water usually corresponds to the past; it is the repository of the forgotten, the locus of oblivion (let us remember that SUNK IN LETHE means DROWNed in oblivion). We encounter quite a few instances of lexical items with the semantics of sinking. These are invariably connected to words such as fog and mist, which stand as visual equivalents of the aural (non-) perceptions of muteness and silence. These concrete images metaphorically stand for the abstract concept of oblivion. Thus, the whole abstract concept of human memory is presented on a (vertical) scale UP/DOWN through the water imagery and the dimensions of the body of water: DOWN IS OBLIVION/SUPRESSION OF MEMORY whereas UP IS REMEMBERING/ MEMORY MAINTENANCE/RETURN OF MEMORY. Thus, mental states (in this case, oblivion) correspond to locations (in this case, the bottom of a body of water). As CMT declares, STATES ARE LOCATIONS, while the processes correspond to actions. Thus, SINKING IS FORGETTING and MOVING UP IS REMEMBERING, as in the poem “Feather Grass” (Kovyl’) where Bal’mont speaks about the “sunken” past, which - when remembered - reemerges above the hills (‘utonuvshee minuvshee/ Voznikaet nad kurganami). In “Feather Grass” we are not dealing with a body of water but the wide steppe, covered with feather grass, which is iconically linked to the sea.
Throughout the cycle, the author makes multiple connections between the depths of his soul and the watery depths of his spiritual landscape, between the domains of the private and subconscious, on the one hand, and the underwater regions, on the other. The leitmotif of the connection between the two domains is always accompanied by the metaphorical motion upwards, toward the water’s surface, toward the sunlight, toward the unattainable star, toward God - a movement which often remains but a striving toward the goal without reaching it. The conceptual metaphors UP IS GOOD and DIVINE IS UP account for this metaphorical upward motion: the poet’s striving for attainment of divinity within himself, and, ultimately, immortality. In the final poem there is a triumphant achievement however as the poet (with his Beloved) seems to overcome gravity, flying “beyond the boundaries of bounded realms/ Into the abysses of luminous Boundlessness,” in other words into the endless sky (‘Za predely predel’nogo/ K bezdnam svetloi Bezbrezhnosti!’). The final poem returns the reader to the Prologue poem, which predicted this transcendent journey, thus contributing to the interconnectedness of parts and the whole that is the hallmark of cyclicity.

Before this triumphant ending, predicted in the Prologue poem of the cycle, the poet often places the locus of his spirit at the very bottom of a dark and opaque body of water. Water, the depths of which mutes all sounds, is simultaneously his natural environment, his refuge and his prison. Water in Bal’mont’s poems is often stagnant and impenetrable to the sun-light and it constricts free movement. The water images he paints here - a stagnant pond, a putrid, waterless well, a moor - are all-pervasive in the cycle, along with the images of the ocean and iconic water vistas. The poet also envisions his
soul as an underwater plant anchored to its waterbed. It strives upward to the surface and
the sun, but usually does not reach them. If it does, then it does so only to die soon after,
as in the poem “The Evening Light has Faded” (‘Vechernii svet pogas’), where the lily
“shamefacedly dies” (‘stydlivo umiraet’) when the Morning Star appears. By using this
complex metaphoric blend the poet conveys to his reader his frustration arising from his
inability to make his poetic voice heard and to reach out to his fellow humans. His
frustration with his creative impotence seems to stem from his own conceptualization of
not only his surroundings as stagnant waters but also his own soul as a body of water
with no fresh current flowing and revitalizing it. The implication in the blended space is
that movement is as essential to the living soul as a current is to keeping water pure; the
opposite entails spiritual catalepsy/lethargy equated to the opaqueness (visual),
immobility (kinetic) and foul smell (olfactory) of stagnant water. Examples of the vertical
axis of Bal’mont’s model of the world discussed above follow:

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Гулкий звон разрастается, стонет,
Заунывным призывом заучит,
И в застывшем безмолвии тонет,—
И пустынная полночь молчит.
“Day after day steals away timidly…” (‘Den’ za dnem uskol’zaet nesmelo…’)

***

Мы шли в золотистом тумане,
И выйти на свет не могли,
Тонули в немом Океане,
Как тонут во мгле корабли.
И мы бесконечно тонули,
Стремяся от влаги к земле -
И звезды печально шепнули,
Что мы утонули во мгле.
   “We were moving in the golden mist” (‘My shli v zolotistom tumane…’)

***

Прилива жадного кипучее волненье
Окутало меня. За легким ветерком
Наклынула гроза, и силою теченья
Я схвачен, унесен, лежу на дне морском.
Я в Море утонул. Теперь моя стихия -
Холодная вода, безмолвие, и мгла.
Вокруг меня кишат чудовища морские.
   “Late” (‘Pozdno’)

***

И как будто кто-то тонет
В этой бездне мировой,
Кто-то плачет, кто-то стонет
Полумертвый, но живой.
   “Frost Patterns” (‘Moroznye uzory’)50

_In Boundlessness_ presents the following structure: the introductory poem

“Ukhodiashchie teni” (‘Disappearing shadows’),51 and three sub-cycles entitled: “Beyond the Boundaries,” “Love and Love’s Shadows,” and “Between Night and Day” (‘Za predely,’ ‘Liubov’ i teni liubvi,’ and ‘Mezhdu noch’iu i dnem’). The three sub-cycle parts of the cycle could be viewed as corresponding to a SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema,

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“one of the most fundamental schemas governing human conceptualizing with regard to sense-making” (Johnson 1993; Turner 1996). Dutch metaphor scholar Charles Forceville, claims that “this schema is often used to structure the concept of the JOURNEY (involving a starting point, trajectory and destination); by extension it shapes our understanding of what constitutes a PURPOSEFUL LIFE (initial problems or ambition, actions, solution or achievement) and STORY (beginning, middle, end)” (2006:241). A poetic cycle consisting of poems brought together by an over-arching idea under one title and arranged in sub-groupings maps well onto the idea of the conceptual integration network with which blending theory works. Hence, each of the poems, which can be viewed as an input space projecting its content into the integration network of one of the three parts and each part as well, contribute their emergent content as input into the conceptual integration network of the cycle In Boundlessness seen as a whole. The overall structure of the cycle may be viewed as a “super-cycle” containing several smaller sub-cycles.

There are other elements, which could be viewed as input spaces projecting their content into that of the entire cycle. The cycle In Boundlessness, as well as each of the three sub-cycles within, is preceded by an epigraph. Each epigraph adds to the reader’s understanding of each of the sub-section and of the cycle as a whole.

The epigraph preceding the introductory poem comes from Fedor Dostoevskii’s The Brothers Karamazov (‘Brat’ia Karamazovy,’ 1880) in which Bal’mont quotes Zosima: Zemliu tselui i neustanno nenasytimo liubi, vsekh liubi, vse liubi, ishchi vostorga i isstupleniia sego. (‘Kiss the earth and love it tirelessly and insatiably, love everyone,
love everything, seek this delight and ecstasy.’). The idea of universal love for all creation when read in the context of Bal’mont’s cycle is akin to the vision of love as a boundless ocean or as *sliianie* (‘merger/ amalgamation/ coalescence/ integration’) of drops of water, each of which already carries the whole ocean in itself, as each water drop is equally capable of reflecting God. The epigraph designates the vector along which the development of the whole cycle is realized. Simultaneously, the idea of love as liquid points to the genesis of life as emerging out of the ocean or an indeterminate sea of potentiality, or the quantum vacuum from which the universe developed. Physicists have now confirmed that apparently matter is actually no more than fluctuations in the quantum vacuum. All the incarnations of matter presented in the cycle - including water, its aggregate states, and even the solid element of earth - thus, emanated from the same source, and it takes only a fluctuation to transform one form into another.

Although the epigraph is taken from Dostoevskii, Tolstoi too may be evoked here. His Pierre Bezukhov in *War and Peace* presents his worldview of love as a merger. In his dream, he sees a liquid globe, which consists of myriads of water drops trying to merge in

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52 One of the illustrations of this idea is given by Rumi (1207 – 1273), a thirteenth-century Persian (Tadjik) poet, Islamic jurist, and theologian: *You are an ocean in a drop of dew,/ all the universes in a thin sack of blood,/ What are these pleasures then,/ these joys, these worlds/ that you keep reaching for,/ hoping they will make you more alive?* (Jalal and Barks, 2003:63). In the nineteenth century Arthur Conan Doyle (1859 – 1930) rationalized the same conceptualization in his novel “A Study in Scarlet” (1886) in the following way: “From a drop of water a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other” (Doyle, 1986:26).

order to expand and be able to reflect God to the fullest extent.\textsuperscript{54} The metaphor of world liquescence, which subsumes all human experiences, accounts for the poet’s conceptualization of love as the most powerful human experience that encompasses the whole spectrum of emotions that knows “no bounds.”

The first part of the cycle, “Beyond the Boundaries” (‘Za predely’), is preceded by two epigraphs. One of them is taken from Part One, “Night, of \textit{Faust} by J.W. von Goethe and it is the Earth Spirit who speaks: 

\begin{quote}
\textit{Vechnost’ dvizhen’ia -/ Oblast’ moia,/ Smert’ i rozhden’e./ Tkan’ bytiia.}\textsuperscript{55} (‘Perpetual motion -/ Is my realm,/ [as are] Death and birth,/ The very fabric of existence.’). As is clear from the quoted passage, Goethe connects the two poles of the sea complex – life and death or birth and rebirth, which, via perpetual motion, together weave the fabric of earthly existence. The epigraph offers a variation on the theme of “not despising earth,” since, however hidden, this element too has its dynamics and is a vital part of a universal cycle. It may appear to be nothing but solid matter, but earth too is mobile and open to “liquescence.” As the poet himself indicates, the world is incomplete if all four elements are not included. In the first part of “Beyond the Boundaries,” the reader is presented with the SOURCE of life on Earth, the

\textsuperscript{54} Глобус этот был живой, колеблющийся шар, не имеющий размеров. Вся поверхность шара состояла из капель, плотно сжатых между собой. И капли эти все двигались, перемещались и то сливались из нескольких в одну, то из одной разделялись на многие. Каждая капля стремилась разлиться, захватить наибольшее пространство, но другие, стремясь к тому же, сжимали ее, иногда уничтожали, иногда сливались с нею… В середине Бог, и каждая капля стремится расшириться, чтобы в наибольших размерах отражать его. И растет, и сжимается, и уничтожается на поверхности, уходит в глубину и опять всплывает.

\textsuperscript{55} Bal’mont’s translation of a passage from “Night” of Goethe’s \textit{Faust} was published in journal for “lovers of Russian philology,” \textit{Pochin} (‘Pochin: sbornik obschestva rossiiskoi slovesnosti,’ 1896:45 - 50).
water of the boundless ocean. It is also iconically represented in the images of the steppe and the desert - the opposite of the ocean, but as boundless: *velichie pustyni mirovoi* (‘grandiloquence of the world desert’), *skitan’ë v pustyne zemnoi* (‘wandering in the earthly desert’), *pustynia tishiny* (‘the desert of silence’). While the ocean represents the beginning and continuation of life, the desert stands for death and the end of an Earth abandoned by Water. The desert is the reverse of the ocean, a realm that failed in its search for another “consciousness” and remained incomplete. But even the Ocean may prove sterile, as it does in the poem “At the remote Pole” (‘Na dal’nem poliuse’), which is analyzed in detail below. It is only in the *coniunctio oppositorum*, the fusion of opposites, that life springs up. When Earth and Water meet, the result is the verdure of Edenic gardens: *Predchuvstviem buri okutan byl sad./ Sil’nei zastruilsia tsvetov aromat.* (‘The garden was shrouded in the premonition of a storm./ The aroma of flowers began flowing more intensely’), *Slyshno, kak starye sosny shumiat,/ Slyshen gvozdiki nochnoi aromat.* (‘The rustling of old pines is audible,/ The aroma of nocturnal carnations is felt.’). What we see in the last line is the synesthesia of auditory and olfactory perceptions. *Slyshat’ zapakh* (‘to “hear” a smell’) is a conventional conceptualization codified in the Russian language. In the context of the Symbolist search for correspondences as material for the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, this metaphorical blend presents integration of conventional idiomatic usage and philosophical ideas that the Symbolist Bal’mont expressed in his poetry.

In the poem “The Island of Flowers” (‘Ostrov tsvetov’) from the same sub-cycle, Bal’mont brings together three elements that interact in their boundless liquescence,
merging in the limited space of the island: *Nad nim - prostor Nebes,/ Krugom – pustynia Moria,/ Na nem zelenyi les/ Shumit, priboiu vtoria.* (‘Above [the island] is the vastness of the Skies,/ Around it is the empty Sea,/ Upon it a green forest/ Rustles echoing the roar of the surf’). The notion of the merger or continuity between such seemingly incompatible frames as air, sea, earth and forest draws on the Baudelairean idea of the living (liquevent) unity of all the varieties of earth, flowers and aromas (‘Tak v edinenii nakhodiatsia zhivom/ Vse tony na zemle, tsvety i aromaty’); it also foreshadows Velimir Khlebnikov’s theorizing about “variables, with the changing of which the blue color of a cornflower […] , permanently changing, going through unknown to us, people, breakdown areas, will turn into a cuckooing sound or into a child’s cry, will become this sound” (‘Tak, est’ velichiny, s izmeneniem kotorykh sinii tsvet vasil’ka […] , nepreryvno izmeniaias’, prokhodia cherez nevedomye nam, liudiam, oblasti razryva, prevratitsia v zvuk kukovaniia kukushki ili v plach rebenka, stanet im.’ (Khlebnikov, 1990:15)).

The ocean is also felt in the spread and amplitude of the silence and darkness covering the earth at night: *nochnaia tish’ rastet i vse rastet* (‘the nocturnal silence keeps expanding’), *rastet, gusteet mrak* (‘the darkness grows, thickens’). As a logical consequence, this oceanic plenitude finally pours over into the human domain to map out the boundlessness of emotion: *zhazhda naslazhden’ia* (‘thirst for pleasure’), *V more otchaian’ia, v temnuiu bezdnu muchen’ia/ Broshus’ na samoe dno!* (‘Into the sea of despair, into the dark abyss of torture/I will throw myself down to the very bottom’), *V nenasytnoi trevoge zhivu’* (‘In insatiable anxiety I live’). Blending the domains of extremely negative human emotions (despair, torture, anxiety) and a huge mass of water
represented by the ocean results in a culturally specific inference in the blended space: when juxtaposed with the mental space of water the negative emotion receives a “positive” twist. Becoming liqueascent, this emotion now constitutes, like water itself, the essence and “spice” of life; exploring its depths, one explores life and one’s own self in all depth as well.

I mentioned above that there are two epigraphs to this cycle. The second is by Bal’mont himself: Vospominan’e granichit s raskaian’em (‘Remembering is akin to remorse’). It intimates a blend of memory as inventory of feelings and of remorse as their emotional coloring. It invokes the theme of emotional memory as sorrow about the transience of all things, which entails the impossibility to realize the full potential of the situation: the moment something passes and becomes a memory is the moment one later remembers with vague regret. Fused in the blended space of part two, that can also be viewed as the path component in the conceptual source – path – goal schema the two epigraphs allow for the following inference: love no matter how transient, is the only path to the ultimate goal of life – breaking through to the boundlessness of ad realiora. “Love and Love’s Shadows” shows the path to the only goal that makes life purposeful: only love (not necessarily sexual-procreative) or fusion with another human being and with another consciousness makes self-realization possible and it alone gives a feeling of being involved in universal human experience. In this part of the cycle, full of empirical and metaphorical water vistas, love is the main element of the world; it is the liquid element, which is truly boundless inasmuch as it knows no borders. The other epigraph preceding part two is from a sonnet by Dante and is given in the original Italian without
translation (one of the reasons for that absence could be Bal’mont’s idea that love as a universal human experience does not require translation): *Amore e ’l cor gentil sono una cosa.* (‘Love and the noble heart are one and the same’). Here we deal with a metaphorical blend where the blended components are the unbounded emotional experience and the locus assigned to it within the human body, the heart, a bounded physical object. Hence there is another attempt to express the boundless through the bounded, or to explain the less familiar (and less concrete) – love, as a largely irrational phenomenon via the less unfamiliar and more tangible, a physical organ we feel and hear as a part of our bodies. This idea of love as a liquescent spiritual and physical merger again creates a connection between the quotation from Dostoevskii (the epigraph for the whole cycle) and the ideas of the second part of the cycle.

The very title of the third part, “Between Night and Day” (‘Mezhdu noch’iu i dnem’) signifies liminality and inbetweenness. Preceded by an epigraph from Goethe, the line “Immer weiter…” (‘Further and further’), it demonstrates that the goal of purposeful existence is not stasis but that eternal motion (as so triumphantly celebrated in the Prologue poem) which alone can carry us beyond the boundaries of the habitual into “boundlessness.” *Nenasytnaia miatezhnost’* (‘insatiable rebelliousness’), *zhazhda schast’ia* (‘thirst for happiness’), *neizvestnaia krasota*, (‘unknown beauty’) – these propel the Poet into new dimensions. The final poem of this part celebrates this kind of “overcoming” in its opening lines: *Za predely predel’nogo,/ K bezdnam svetloj bezbrezhnosti* (‘Beyond the boundaries of the bounded,/ To the abysses of shining boundlessness’). The third part of the cycle does not close the circle, but shows the goal –
realms beyond this one where the metaphysical boundlessness of new creative epiphanies await the poet. The same effect is vividly demonstrated in a painting by Viktor Borisov-Musatov entitled *The Reservoir* (‘Vodoem,’ 1902), where the painter “unlocks” the enclosure of the pond and thus delineates a path for the creative dreams of the participants that lead to the implied goal – spiritual infinity. Earlier I quoted Bal’mont’s distrust of painting as an overly mimetic art, but the painters of the new school were immersed in “boundlessness” too.

\[\text{Figure 2. The Cycle In Boundlessness}\]

Figure 2 in graphic form presents the fluid cyclical (circular shapes) and at the same
time open (blurry borderlines of each of the constituent parts and the cycle as a whole) structure of the cycle *In Boundlessness*. The blurry borderlines of each of the parts demonstrate how each of them is a fluid input into the blend the cycle presents as a whole. The graph also visualizes the idea that each of the parts is like a ripple on the face of the boundless ocean, emerging from it and then dissolving in it again.

2.1.2 Detailed Interpretations

I will now examine several poems of *In Boundlessness* in depth. I chose poems which show the author’s conception of cyclicity particularly well and which offer good illustrations of how the metaphor of world liquescence transforms the verbal-literary cycle into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This metaphor operates as a poetic trope, as a musical leitmotif and as a “painterly” background.

I start my detailed discussion of selected poems with one from the first part of the sub-cycle “Beyond the Boundaries,” the poem entitled “At the Far-Away Pole” (‘*Na dal’nem poliuse*’), which I quote in full:

На дальнем полюсе, где Солнце никогда
Огнем своих лучей цветы не возрождает,
Где в мертвом воздухе оплоты изо льда
Безумная Луна, не грея, освещает,-

В пределах Севера тоскует Океан
Неумирающим бесцельным рокотаньем,
И, точно вспугнутый, крутится ураган,
И вдалль уносится со вздохом и с рыданьем.
На дальнем полюсе, где жизнь и смерть - одно,  
Момент спокойствия пред вечером подкрался: -  
Все было ярким сном лучей озарено,  
И только Океан угломо волновался.  
Но вот застыл и он. Была ясна вода,  
Огнистая, она терялась в пространстве,  
И, как хрустальные немые города,  
Вздымались глыбы льдов - в нетронутом убранстве.

И точно вопрошал пустынный мир: «За что?»  
И красота кругом бессмертная блистала,  
И этой красоты не увидал никто,  
Увы, она сама себя не увидела.

И быстротечный миг был полон странных чар, -  
Полуугасший день обнялся с Океаном.  
Но жизни не было. И Солнца красный шар  
Тонул в бесстрастии, склоняясь к новым странам.

The overarching idea of the poem is that nature cannot become aware of itself without the presence of human consciousness; human consciousness is pivotal to nature. Implied is also the idea that human consciousness needs nature to find a mirror image of itself. This explains such epithets as “aimless” (in stanza two where the ocean expresses its lack of purpose bestsel’nym rokotan’em), “mute” (as in stanza four where we find “mute cities” of ice) and “untouched” (also in stanza four where “undefiled and passionless” beauty reigns). It also explains why the light of the dusking day cannot achieve union with the ocean and is unable to impact this polar nature between life and death, why it does not procreate life and why the sun departs for other realms in the last stanza. Although the Ocean and other natural forces in the poem are endowed with agency, they are “soulless” and limited to mechanic movement. The poet emphasizes
that the beauty of this pristine landscape goes unobserved in the absence of human participation in its existence.

This poem is saturated with a futile “oceanic feeling” characteristic for the major part of the cycle In Boundlessness, except for its finale which brings a decisive shift of mood. The very title draws on the conceptualization of the universe as a boundless expanse, which is both enticing and frightening to the poet. He paints a picture of the primeval ocean undiscovered by human consciousness and therefore not fully “existing.” According to the anthropocentric worldview, man is the measure of all things. While the landscape is not marked by human presence - except for the poet imagining it there is no one around - nature in general, and the element of water specifically, is frequently personified in the cycle. The reader becomes aware of the whole scene because the poetic model of the world in the cycle is one based on the Nietzschean-Symbolist concept of “eternal return.” This model enables the poet to envision the supra-temporal mythic chronotope where the present moment condenses both past and future events: the very personification of nature contains a harbinger of the “future” of this landscape when it will become populated, or a reflection of its past.

It is the non-present then, from which the landscape is observed by human consciousness. Through the “magic crystal” of his imagination the poet maps his own emotions onto the ocean: his Ocean toskuet neumiraiushchim bestsel ’nym rokotan ’em (‘is expressing his eternally melancholic mood by aimless roaring’); it ugriumo volnuetsia (‘is gloomily agitated’), because the poet too feels “unobserved” and finds no response. Therefore, the “aimlessly roaring ocean,” although personified, is paradoxically lifeless,
as the consciousness of the metaphorical blend - a real/human “other” – is not present. This shows that the true “oceanic feeling” becomes possible only in the presence of shared experience – when nature and man meet.

The whole cycle operates along the Symbolist vertical, which deploys the following conceptual mappings: DIVINE IS UP/MORTAL IS DOWN. The picture is more complex and intricate than the one offered by the Baudelairean correspondances, however. Thus, on the level of the ocean, we have a state of being that is neither life nor death. And on the level of the setting sun, we have an impotent source of life. The sunlight cannot penetrate the realm of non-consciousness. The Symbolist vertical is partially realized with the sun descending to the level of the ocean but the downward movement proves incapable of stirring its frozen waters into life. Thus, nature cannot fully exist without being part of the life of mankind, nor can an individual fully realize himself in isolation. The poet who sees his own isolation in that of the ocean is fortunate in one respect however: at least he can map his world onto nature – in this case mapping his own lack of full self-realization.

In addition to the personal symbolism of this poem, there is also a universal one. The poem tells us that the northern ocean at the remote pole is isolated from the other elements of nature, such as earth and fire. There is no earth to “impregnate” in this region of polar ice and isolation. Here no Edenic island gardens will flower under the benevolent “fire” of the Sun. Contact, fusion and blending is the sine qua non of ALL creation. Thus nature itself teaches man that icy solitude is the opposite of the creation of Life and Art.
The Ocean is nothing without Earth, and Earth is a desert without the Ocean and both need the Fire of Light to thrive. Once mankind knows this, having learnt it from nature, it can salvage unconscious nature from itself. This is the theurgy that both the Decadents and the Symbolists envisioned as a supreme artistic task.

The poems “Marsh Lilies” (‘Bolotnye lilii’) and “Underwater plants” (‘Podvodnye rasten’ia’) could be visualized as decorative murals, where the lilies the poet describes create ornamental vignettes similar to those used in Art Nouveau screens and other items. Since the water is stagnant or absent (as in the well of the first poem) these poetic murals do not reflect a flow of time, however, but rather its immobility.

Bal’mont’s waterscapes in the two poems mentioned are constrained both horizontally and vertically; although they hint at the presence of life, they are sooner decorative stylizations, imitating real life.

Let us now look at each of the two poems in more detail, starting with “Marsh Lilies:”

Побледневшие, нежно-стыдливые,
Распустились в болотной глушь
Белых лилий цветы молчаливые,
И вокруг них шелестят камыши.

Белых лилий цветы серебристые
Вырастают с глубокого dna,
Где не светят лучи золотистые,
Где вода холодна и темна.

И не манят их страсти преступные,
Их волненья к себе не зовут;
Для нескромных очей недоступные,
Для себя они только живут.
Проникаюсь решимостью твердою
Жить мечтой и достичь высоты,
Распускаются с пышностью гордою
Белых лилий немые цветы.

Расцветут, и поблекнут бесстрастные,
Далеко от владений людских,
И распустятся снова, прекрасные, -
И никто не узнает о них.

In this poem we find a pond, the water of which is “cold and dark.” It seems like a hostile place, and it is no wonder that the white lilies are endowed with such epithets as *poblednevshie* and *nezhno-stydlivye* (‘having gone pale’ and ‘gently bashful’). Their muteness matches the muteness of the environment (‘belykh lili tsvety molchalivye’).

Not only is the water “cold and dark,” but it is also “thick.” The thick of dark water serves as a natural barrier between the lilies and worldly passions and agitations: *I ne maniat ikh strasti prestupnye,/ Ikh volnen’ia k sebe ne zovut* (‘Criminal passions are not luring them,/ Agitation is not stirring them’). The word *volnen’ia* can be equally applied to the state of the water and the sphere of human emotions, as we already have seen many times. The moment the poet mentions *volnen’ia* is pivotal for the poem, since it serves as a connector between nature and the human domain. Here, we understand that the poet speaks about his most intimate emotional experiences, inaccessible to immodest eyes (*dlia neskromnykh ochei nedostupnye*). He establishes connections between the deep and stagnant water and the depth of his soul. The immobility of the water surrounding the lilies marks not only the invalidity of the poet’s surroundings but also the lack of spirituality within the soul: the lilies, as well as the poet himself, or perhaps, more
precisely that which is best in him – his creativity, his poetry - live only for themselves
\((dlia sebia oni tol’ko zhivut)\).

Thus Bal’mont creates a complex picture of his psyche where the container – a
body of water - metonymically stands for the substance contained in his soul and its
qualities, and vice a versa. The mapping also extends to his broader milieu, the society of
which he is a part. We may therefore infer that the poet regrets that no one will ever learn
about the beauty and chastity of the lilies, which represent his spiritual beauty, hidden by
murky waters. He seems to blame this fact on the stagnant water, or society, but as we
know, lilies are firmly rooted to the bottom of the pond where they grow and unable to
float to the surface. In fact, their weak stems follow even the slightest stirring of the
waters they find themselves in. It is therefore their own weakness they should “blame”
for their invisible existence. They seem to realize that. If in the beginning of the poem the
lilies are described as \(molchalivye\) (‘silent’), in the penultimate quatrain they are referred
to as \(nemye\) (‘dumb/mute’). The epithet \(molchalivye\) presupposes a choice of mode of
expression - to speak or not – but \(nemye\) points to a quality that cannot be changed. For
whatever reason the silent lilies have become mute, their state cannot be changed (any
longer). The epithet \(nemye\) cancels the intention expressed in the lines \(Pronikaias’
reshimost’ iu tverdoi/ Zhit’ mechtoi i dostich’ vysoty\) (‘Imbued with firm determination/
To live by dreams and reach the heights’). The failure to live up to their dream is
foreshadowed in the imperfective aspect of the verbal adverb \(pronikaias’\) (‘being
imbued’) as it shows the action accompanying the main one as unfolding but incomplete.
The contradiction between \(pronikaias’\) and \(tverdoi\) strikes the reader by the actual
impossibility of the oxymoronic linguistic cliché, which uses the “water metaphor”: one cannot possibly be imbued by/saturated with something firm/solid. So, the “firm determination” of the lilies zhít’ mechtôi i dostîh’ vysotty (‘to live by dreams and reach for the heights’) turns out to be no more than their “vain magnificence” (pyshnost’ gordaia). Their dispassionate demeanor matches the vanity of the lilies. Most of the interactions of the lilies with their liquid environment are relayed with the help of negations: gde ne svetiat luchi zolotistye (‘where golden rays do not shine’); I ne maniat ikh strasti prestupnye./ Ikh voln’ia k sebe ne zovut (‘Criminal passions do not lure them’); I nikto ne uznaet o nikh (‘And noone will learn about them’). These create a stark visual effect of contrast between the dark impenetrable background of water and the tender silvery whiteness of the lilies. The epithet besstrastnye (‘dispassionate’) applied to lilies serves to connect the negativity of the liquid environment and the negative qualities innate in the lilies themselves: molchalivye, nemye, besstrastnye. Just like the Ocean in the poem discussed above, they are not “complete” in the absence of another consciousness; the lilies, or the poet’s soul, crave recognition to become fully alive. The picture is complicated however by the intimation that the lilies are themselves to blame for not “reaching the heights,” although our common knowledge about lilies suggests that it is absolutely normal for these plants. Therefore, blaming them for lack of the strength to realize their dreams and advance along the vertical, the poet purposefully promotes the comment (human characteristics) into the position of the intended topic (lilies) in the blended space.

The lily symbolizes lunar and feminine qualities. Therefore, we discern quite
clearly Bal’mont’s Symbolist strategy of blending the nocturnal, the internal and the feminine via liquecent imagery. He does not, however, endow water per se with feminine qualities. Water serves him as a prototypical mirror, which allows him to narcissistically lament his exquisite, yet unnoticed beauty.

The third poem I will analyze in some detail is the sonnet “Underwater Plants” (‘Podvodnye rasten’ia’):

Подводные растенья
1. 
На дне морском подводные растенья
Распространяют бледные листы,
И тянутся, растут как привиденья,
В безмолвии угрюмой темноты.
2. 
Их тяготит покой уединенья,
Их манит мир безвестной высоты,
Им хочется любви, лучей, волненья,
Им снятся ароматные цветы.
3. 
Но нет пути в страну борьбы и света,
Молчит кругом холодная вода.
Акулы проплывают иногда.
4. 
Ни проблеска, ни звука, ни привета,
И сверху посылает зыбь морей
Лишь трупы и обломки кораблей.

The sonnet “Podvodnye rasten’ia” offers a variation on the theme of “Bolotnye lilii,” further reinforcing the symbolic clash between the aspirations of the underwater plants and their constricting habitat. The upward longing of the plants for the world of unknown heights (mir bezvestnoi vysoty, in the second quatrain), which is described
through their dreams about aromatic flowers, love, (sun) rays, and agitation (*im sniatsia aromatnye tsvety, Im khochetsia liubvi, luchei, volnen’ia*), is counterbalanced by the downward movement of the *trupy i obломki korablei* (‘corpses and debris of ships’), which the rippled seas (*zyb’ morei*) sends to the plants from above in the second tercet. In the metaphor of the sea as a sender, we can discern the notion of Fate sending events someone’s way. Ironically, the events are devoid of action, contrary to the metaphoric conceptualization EVENTS ARE ACTIONS (Lakoff and Turner, 1989:144). The events themselves are not real, because they are deprived of animation just like the life of the underwater plants secluded in their underwater *terem*. The metaphor DOWN IS MORTAL is brought to its extreme here, as “mortal” speaks about potential death, while the corpses and debris drifting down from the surface present images of the finality/completeness of death’s triumph. The sonnet structure effectively brings out the ironical clash between aspiration and reality.

Bal’mont’s poetic vision operates along the Symbolist vertical axis, but in his case this axis does not always connect the Earth and the Sky; in most cases, the nocturnal sky lit with stars is beyond the reach of those at the bottom and even on the surface of the body of earth-bound water. In the poems discussed here Bal’mont is not a daring poet reaching for the skies, but an “underwater” hermit, who confines himself to his solitary underwater kingdom. Stagnant water is a hostile element in the poet’s poetic world, conveying his feelings of suffocation, frustration, lack of daring, and his existential fear in the face of real life. It also delineates his task: to transform the waters of stagnation and death into the water of life.
2.1.3 Iconicity

Let us now examine yet another poem from Part Two of *In Boundlessness*: “Feather Grass” (‘Kovyl’). Here, in addition to the Symbolist vertical axis, we find the iconic representation of liquescence without liquid; liquescence is instead represented by feather grass in motion evoking sea waves. It should be noted that feather grass is particularly slender and easily moves with the wind obeying its slightest impulse.

Ковыль

И. А. Бунину

1.
Точно призрак умирающий,
На степи ковыль качается,
Смотрит Месец догорающий,
Белой тучкой омрачается.

И блуждают тени смутные
По пространству неоглядному,
И непрочные, минутные,
Что-то шепчет ветру жадному.

И мерцание мелькнувшее
Исчезает за туманами,
Утонувшее минувшее
Возникает над курганами.

Месец меркнет, омрачается,
Догорающий и тающий,
И, дрожа, ковыль качается,
Точно призрак умирающий.

Toporov points out that boundlessness and oscillation serve as common denominator for the concepts of the sea and steppe. The visual-acoustic image-motif STEPPE IS SEA cognitively infects the individual with the undulating rhythm of the sea.
The embodied cognition of steppe as sea evokes a sense of the boundless, as well as the physical sensation of rocking on waves. This motion develops into the complex emotional experience of the Creation stored in the subconscious mind (1995:580).

Addressing his poem to Ivan Bunin (1870 - 1953), Bal’mont draws on the latter’s poem by the same title, written in 1894 and devoted to the memory of Prince Igor’s campaign. Below is Bunin’s poem:

Ковыль

Что ми шумить, что ми звенить
dавеча рано предь зорями?

(Сл. о Пл. Игор.)
1
Что шумит-звенит перед зарею?
Что колышет ветер в темном поле?
Холодеет ночь перед зарею,
Смутно травы шепчутся сухие, —
Сладкий сон их нарушает ветер.
Опускаясь низко над полями,
По курганам, по могилам сонным,
Нависает в темных балках сумрак.
Бледный день над сумраком забрезжил,
И рассвет ненастный задымился. . .
Что шумит-звенит перед зарею?
Что колышет ветер в темном поле?
Холодеет ночь перед зарею,
Серой мглой подохнули балки. . .
Или это ратный стан белеет?
Или снова ветет вольный ветер
Над глубоко спящими полками?
Балмонт писал о мгновении, когда ветер качает ковыль.

Не ковыль ли, старый и сонливый,
Он качает, клонит и качает,
Вежи полевецкие колышет
И бежит-звенит старинной былью?

2
Ненастный день. Дорога прихотливо
Уходит вдаль. Кругом все степь да степь.
Шумит трава дремотно и лениво,
Немых могил сторожевая цепь
Среди хлебов загадочно синеет,
Крежат орлы, пустынный ветер веет
В задумчивых, тоскующих полях,
Да тень от туч кочующих темнеет.
А путь бежит... Не тот ли это шлях,
Где Игоря обозы проходили
На синий Дон? Не в этих ли местах,
В глухую ночь, в яруках волки выли,
А днем орлы на медленных крылах
Его в степи безбрежной провожали
И клектом псов на кости созывали,
Грозя ему великою бедой? —
Гей, отзывись, степной орел седой!
Ответь мне, ветер буйный и тоскливый!
... Безмолвна степь. Один ковыль сонливый
Шуршит, склоняясь ровной чередой...

Without referring to the specific historic event, Bal’mont’s “Feather Grass” unfolds the abstract notion of mnemonic evocation of the past with the help of the image of the feather grass in meditative movement. The undulating feather grass in its turn comes to embody the “dying” apparitions of the past: *Tochno prizrak umiraiushchii,/ Na stepi kovyl’ kachaetsia.* In Bunin’s poem, the feather grass motif is more directly linked to the notion of eternity. The feather grass is the last image appearing at the end of each
of the two parts of the poem which presents an abandoned battlefield where action once unfolded, but which now is dead and motionless. The “old and dreamy” feather grass marked by its wind-incited oscillatory-bending motion - *kachait, klonit i*

*kachait...kolyshet; shurshit, skloniaias’ rovnoi cheredoi* (‘oscillates, bends and oscillates.../ Flutters; swishes, leaning smoothly’) evokes the image of the sea with its eternal movement. Via this iconic image of eternity Bunin links the historic moment of the heroic past to the present by a direct quotation from *The Song of Igor’s Campaign* (‘Slovo o polku Igoreve’): *Chto mi shumit’, chto mi zvenit’/ davecha rano pred’ zoriami?* (What dins unto me, what rings unto me?/ early today, before the effulgences’ 56). He introduces history by evoking the tale of past glory (starinnaia byl’).

Balmont is less concerned about history and more about the fusion of times. This is why he focuses on the image of feather grass as sea-waves and that of the steppe as a boundless space, like the sea; the metaphor is further amplified by the abundance of water as an element in the context of Balmont’s entire cycle. The whole scene, except for the whispering shadows, seems completely mute. The silent heaving of the waves is rendered by the quivering feather grass, the image of which frames the poem in a circular structure. The ring-structure, where the poet in the last stanza rephrases the first and here also re-employs the title image of the poem, carries the reader back to the opening image of the poem as if on the crest of a wave - a wave that pushes away from the shore but then inevitably is pulled back at regular intervals.

56 Translation by V. Nabokov (1960).
Phonetically, the repetitive pulse of the sea is expressed by means of alliteration and consonance – *kovyl’ kachaetsia* (‘feather grass quivers’), *mertsanie mel’knuvshee* (‘twinckling flickering’), *mesiats merknet, omrachaetsia* (‘the crescent wanes away, darkens’), *voznikaet nad kurganami* (‘appears over the burial mounds’) and internal rhyme – *utonuvshee minuvshee* (‘submerged past’). The orchestration of the poem, written in prolonged, paeonic meter with the stress on the third syllable (a variation of the trochaic meter), imitates the undulating rhythms of waves. Bal’mont like the other Symbolists, experimented with meter and is said to be the first poet in the history of Russian verse to use paeons of this type.

The poem is infused with the semantics of prolonged/dreamy iteration that creates the “rhythmic image” of quivering water: *(drozha) kachaetsia* (‘tremblingly wavers/ quivers’), *shepchet* (‘whispers’), *mertsat* (‘flickers/ twinkles’); this rhythm is presented against the background of yet another of Bal’mont’s boundless (*bezbrezhnye*) spaces (*prostranstvo neogliadnoe*) – the steppe. The wavering of the feather grass is matched by the indistinct flickering glimmer (*mertsanie mel’knuvshee*) of ghostly lights on the marshes. The verbs *ischezaet* (‘disappears’), *merknet* (‘fades/ wanes’), *omrachaetsia* (‘darkens/ clouds over’), and verbal participles *dogoraiushchii* (‘burning down’), *taiushchii* (‘melting away’) and *umiraiushchii* (‘dying’) denoting gradual changes of state of being – notably that from ghostly being to non-being – serve to give the “second wash of paint” to the verbal texture – a vague, fuzzy and diffuse one. It serves as background to the main action depicted by the iterative verbs.
As already stated, the water theme is evoked in this poem in its connection with the theme of memory, where the Symbolist vertical serves as a scale of remembering and forgetting. The only direct reference to water we encounter in the poem is utonuvshee (minuvshee) (‘sunken/ submerged (past’)). Contrary to the metaphor FORGETTING IS DOWN the once submerged past appears above the burial mounds. According to Toporov, the sea presents an antinomy, which always refers to two opposite poles – death, and deathlessness (1995:587). The former is represented in the poem by the image of ancient burial mounds and the latter – by upward motion. The iconic liquescence Bal’mont employs in the poem marks the Symbolist eternal return and explains why the submerged past can resurface. In this instance, the return marks the conviction that the past is forever preserved and “reflected” in the present moment.

Although water as a real substance is not present in “Feather Grass,” unlike in the three poems discussed earlier, it produces a much more liquescent impression than the water presented there, because of the prosodic, phonetic, semantic and structural devices employed. In my discussion of the intimate connections between Borisov Musatov and contemporary Symbolist poetry, I will return to Bal’mont’s iconic employment of the “water principle” in the programmatic poem of his cycle In Boundlessness – “Through My dreams I Attempted to Catch Fleeting Shadows.” There the poet speaks about his spiritual ascension to the celestial spheres in terms of climbing a steep staircase that reaches into boundlessness. I believe that repeated returns to already discussed poets and artists in new contexts is in keeping with the entire principle of liquescence and that it therefore may be reflected in its structure also.
I return to the “waterless” poem “Feather Grass.” It produces the impression of a watercolor due to the dominating and frequently repeated semantics of vanishing and dissolving, which stands for fading and dying. I suggest that the poem can be visualized as a splashing out onto paper already saturated with liquid paint, where the later additions made via the same technique run over and soak into the paper. The feather grass is defined by gentle strokes made with the thin tip of the same brush that already produced generous washes. The possibilities of visualizing “liquescent” poetry in terms of watercolor will be discussed in the Appendix devoted to liquescence in Velimir Khlebnikov’s verse. There I give a detailed analysis of how Khlebnikov’s oceanic feeling is revealed mostly in the poems where water is present only in the form of the iconic principle of liquescence and fluidity.

Further conceptual correlations between Bal’mont and Bunin in their iconic representations of liquescence are found in Ivan Bunin’s “I remember – [it was a] long winter evening...” (‘Pomniu – dolgii zimnii vecher…,’ 1887), in which the poet remembers his inability to fall asleep once as a young boy. His mother advises him to evoke the image of birch trees rustling in the wind and a field of rye undulating slowly and smoothly; this visualization would evoke the rhythm of waves and lull the child to sleep: Vspomni, kak shumiat berezy,/ A za lesom, u mezhi,/ Khodiat medlenno i plavno/Zolotye volny rzhi! (‘Remember how birch trees rustle,/ And [how] behind the forest, by the field boundary,/ Slowly and smoothly/ Golden waves of rye undulate!’).
2.1.4 Interactive Connections

The next poem from In Boundlessness entitled “Apparitions” (‘Prizraki’) has been selected for analysis because it serves as a fluid link between poetry and visual art. Borisov-Musatov has a canvas with the same title and of similar liquescent quality. I also analyze how a poem by Afanasii Fet enters into this equation and how CMT and BT account for the complexity of the metaphors that fuse human and water ontologies. In the section on the art of Borisov-Musatov, I will return to the links between the poem and the painting Apparitions (‘Prizraki,’ 1903) and how liquescence is marked in both of them.

Bal’mont’s “Apparitions” establishes a link between Bal’mont and Borisov-Musatov via the title and the imagery. The poem clearly impacted the painter and challenged him to emulate the strategies from another medium and to demonstrate that painting is fully capable of transcending mimetic constraints. The setting is a landscape at twilight or a moonlit night - a time particularly conducive to liquescence effects because of the indistinct light and shifting shadows. Both Bal’mont and Musatov may have been inspired by a shared source: I. S. Turgenev’s story Apparitions (‘Prizraki,’ 1864). It tells of the encounters of an earthly man and a ghostly “alien” woman across the threshold of a dream. A pale and semi-transparent woman called Ellis flies the hero to various places on moonlit nights holding him in her embrace. It is notable that all these swift flights are accompanied by detailed descriptions of the atmosphere – misty, damp and liquescent.

The two texts are also connected via Fet, a poet important for Bal’mont, as already mentioned. The poem “Fantasy” (‘Fantaziia,’ 1847), from which Turgenev chose the two lines of the epigraph to his story Apparitions: Mig eshche... i net volshebnoi skazki, / I
dusha opiat’ polna vozmozhnym. (‘One more instant… and the fairy tale is gone./ And the soul is again full of [hope that ] the possible [may become real].’) offers a variation on the theme of nocturnal trysts also dealt with in the famous verbless poem “A Whisper, a Timid Breath…” (“Shepot, robkoe dykhan’e…,” 1850) which I discuss in connection with Bal’mont’s poem “Apparitions.” A strong Turgenevian influence is felt in Borisov-Musatov’s painting Apparitions as well as some other of his paintings, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. Links among Turgenev, Bal’mont, Musatov and film director Evgenii Bauer will also be discussed in Chapter 4. I quote Bal’mont’s “Apparitions” and Fet’s “A Whisper, a Timid breath…” in full below and provide a comparative analysis.

K. Bal’mont. “Apparitions”

Шелест листьев, шёпот трав,
Переплеск речной волны,
Ропот ветра, гул дубрав,
Ровный бледный блеск Луны.

Словно в детстве предо мною,
Над речною глубиною,
Нимфы бледною гирляндой
обнялись, переплелись.
Брызнут пеной, разомкнутся,
И опять плотней сожмутся,
Опускаясь, поднимаясь,
на волне и вверх и вниз.

Шепчут тёмные дубравы,
Шепчут травы про забавы

57 “Fet the Verbless” (‘Fet bezglagol’nyi’) is the title of an article by Mikhail Gasparov (1997:21 - 32), in which he analyzes Fet’s poetical blending of space and emotion via the word (‘kompozitsiiia prostranstva, chuvstva i slova’).
Этих бледных, этих нежных
обитательниц волны.
К ним из дали неизвестной
Опустился эльф чудесный,
Как на нити золотистой,
на прямом луче Луны.

Выше истины земной,
Обольстительнее зла,
Эта жизнь в тиши ночной,
Эта призрачная мгла.

A. Fet. “A Whisper, a Timid Breath…”

***

Шёпот, робкое дыханье,
Трели соловья,
Серебро и колыханье
Сонного ручья,

Свет ночной, ночные тени,
Тени без конца,
Ряд волшебных изменений
Милого лица,

В дымных тучах пурпур розы,
Отблеск янтаря,
И лобзания, и слёзы,
И заря, заря!

The first stanza of Bal’mont’s poem ”Apparitions” contains only nominative constructions, just like Fet’s poem “A Whisper, a Timid Breath…” The scene here becomes rapidly filled with intense activity, however, as nouns containing action are introduced – shelest, shepot, pereplesk, ropot, gul, blesk (‘rustle,’ ‘whisper,’ ‘splash,’ ‘murmur,’ ‘rumble,’ ‘brilliant light’). Nomination, the naming of phenomena, precedes the appearance of verbs, so the nominative constructions suggest a time when the word
and action were one; in other words, nominative utterances are endowed with illocutionary force. Nomination transforms verbs into states with no terminal point: the picture painted in the first stanza therefore evokes an impression of eternity, of recurrence of myth. Borisov-Musatov’s paintings communicate the same impression of a world of innocence, or a world seen through the innocent eyes of a child.

The image of the river’s waves quietly splashing against each other comes only third in the string/succession of fluid images but its appearance is foreshadowed by the quiet liquecent sounds of rustling and whispering. Gradually the more complicated activity becomes the monotonous and homogeneous, thus more fluid sound of a rumble, which in its turn “flows” into brilliant light – the change that signals a turning point from aural to visual perceptions. This transition via the reference to the moonlight that signals the Symbolist transition *a realibus ad realiora* - from the real to the true higher reality - prepares the reader for the perception of the imagery seen as if through the veil of a childhood dream – the nymphae dancing in the river’s waves.

Just as the folktoric motifs intertwine with the theme of childhood, the garland of nymphae embrace and intertwine with each other and ride on the waves. This imagery paints the whole world as primordial, heathen and innocent. The memory of happy childhood spent in oneness with nature is evoked through the imagery of water, which in its turn imparts a corresponding liquecence to surrounding nature. In the two middle double-quatrains the motion along the Symbolist vertical axis connects the riverbed with the water surface (upward motion) and the Moon and the water surface (downward
movement). The upward motion in water has already been discussed above as a device that Bal’mont uses to evoke the theme of emotional memory.

Pale and transparent, the nymphs are the poet’s visions of the unattainable ideal, which is vyshe istiny zemnoi (‘higher than earthly truth’) and obol’stitel’nee zla (more seductive than evil’) – beyond good and evil in other words. This confirms the idea that Bal’mont speaks about the world before the Fall of Man – the state to which he would like to return.

The images of nymphs could be directly mapped onto the women in the “procession paintings” by Borisov-Musatov where their movement through the landscape and their interactions invite associations with an intricate ritualistic dance. The fluid outline of the whole procession invokes the particular shape and contour of waves.

Bal’mont’s poem, especially in its opening stanza, clearly alludes to Fet’s “A Whisper, a Timid Breath….” In this poem we can see a similar rendition of the intimate emotion via the images of nocturnal nature, water and nominative constructions containing action: Shepot, robkoe dykhan’e,/ Treli solov’ia,/ Serebro i kolykhane’/ Sonnogo ruch’ia (‘A whisper, a timid breath,/ warble of a nightingale,/ Silver and swirling/ of a dreamy spring’).

The basic meter of Fet’s poem is the trochee, which Bal’mont’s “Apparitions” also uses. The number of syllables in Fet’s poem varies across the lines in every quatrain, however: there are eight in the first and third lines and five in the second and the fourth. The first line of every quatrain has either three or four stressed syllables, with some unrealized stresses; in the third line only two syllables out of eight are stressed, with the
first stress falling on the third syllable. The “unfulfilled” feet produce the effect of a suspended tempo. The shorter lines display a regular stress pattern on the first and on the fifth syllables, except for the last line *I zaria, zaria!* (.‘And the dawn, the dawn!..’), where the stress falls on the third and fifth syllables. These shifts in the meter create an undulating rhythm, which iconically marks the movement of the emotional waves exchanged by the two lovers whose rendezvous is not explicitly described but is shown through a series of impressionistic image-splashes. The more prolonged the meter the more fluid is the splash, the deeper is the immersion into the emotion, which maps on the emotional pulse of the tryst.

Fet’s liquecent chronotope provides the background for a rendezvous in the course of which the poet observes how the nocturnal shadows transfigure, as if by magic, the face of his beloved, and presents the changes in a liquid series of images that melt into each other. The third quatrain suggests that these magic facial changes occur because of the interplay of shadows in the moonlight as well as the intense multifaceted emotions the couple shares: *i lobzaniia, i slezy...* (.‘and kisses, and tears... ’). The quatrain includes an ecstatic outburst of emotion when lovers see the dawn – *I zaria, zaria!* (.‘And dawn, dawn!.. ’), which signifies the beginning of a new day and the beginning of a new phase in the couple’s relationship. For the poet the face of his beloved presents a blend of all the emotions he has observed in her during the magic-filled night; his own emotions flow into this fluid blend as he sees what is happening to his partner through the lens of his own emotional state. He loves the familiar face in all of its fleeting manifestations, yet perceives it as a whole. Here we observe what Mark Turner calls “mental packing” or
“conceptual blending,” in which clashing mental frames (in our case, contradictory emotions - simultaneous laughter and tears, for instance) contribute to an organizing frame for the blend that includes parts of each of those organizing frames. The process results in an emergent structure of its own (Turner, 2006).

In the chapter on Borisov-Musatov, who may well have had Fet’s poem in mind while creating his painting, I will demonstrate how the artist symbolically/metaphorically presents this riad volshebnykh izmenenii milogo litsa (‘a series of magic changes of the beloved face’) via a process opposite to blending, i.e. that of “unpacking” the blend. The painter shows every individual instance of emotion as it develops via individual female figures moving in space, each of which comes into fluid interaction with the others.
In Chapter 2, I dealt with the verbal manifestations of the conceptual metaphor HUMAN IS LIQUID/ HUMAN EMOTION IS LIQUID, i.e. with metaphorical linguistic expressions which conceptualize the human domain in terms of water. They were examined as a key to the early poetry of Konstantin Bal’mont.  

Zoltán Kövecses, a Hungarian scholar who works at the intersection between language and mind, culture and emotion, echoes Lakoff and Johnson’s claim that “metaphor [is] not a figure of speech, but a mode of thought” (Lakoff, 1993:210): “if metaphors are primarily conceptual, then they must manifest themselves in other than linguistic ways… and be realized in many other areas of human experience,” he states,

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58 So that sound and color may cry out with meaning./ so that a tendency may be sonorous and colorful. Andrei Belyi.
59 Velimir Khlebnikov’s poetry, which displays markedly painterly effects, offers another illustration of fluid approaches across the verbal-poetic and the visual painterly-film media discussed in my dissertation. The chapter on Khlebnikov appears in the Appendix to the dissertation.
also treating these manifestations as “realizations of the conceptual metaphors” (Kövecses, 2002:57) on a par with verbal ones. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to showing how the conceptual metaphor manifests itself in nonlinguistic media such as painting and film.

My discussion of Silver Age pictorial art focuses on the prominent *fin de siècle* painter Viktor Borisov-Musatov (1870 – 1905). My choice of this artist is determined by the following considerations. First, as Rusakova points out, Musatov (along with Mikhail Vrubel’) is one of the originators and founders of the “newest” Russian art of the twentieth century. He introduced Symbolist break-through discoveries in the area of syncretism visually representing the metaphysical aspects of human nature in painting. His oeuvre offers a full range of devices to visualize “musicality” (and, hence, liquescence and fluidity of the human emotional domain) transcending the restrictions of his medium.

Second, Musatov clearly shares an affinity with the poets of the Symbolist school, not least Bal’mont. A comparative analysis of their works shows striking parallel developments in the devices of cross-pollination of art forms – painterly devices in poetry and poetic means in pictorial art. In this chapter, I primarily look at how the underlying principle of fluidity and plasticity acts across media with their unique expressive means and how it is revealed in specific stylistic features, such as form, shape, color, sound and motion. Following the Symbolist concept of eternal recurrence this chapter returns to Bal’mont’s poetry in order to further reestablish its liquescent ties with Silver Age visual

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60 Affinities between them were pointed out by Rusakova (1966), Budnikova (2006), Dunaev (1993), and Nekliudova (1991).
art and through the latter with contemporary fellow-poets and writers (Valerii Briusov) on deeper conceptual levels. Ultimately, the art that united them all was music, since like liquid, music “flows.”  

In the visual art of the time, the premise of water’s musicality and music’s liquescence is vividly represented in the work entitled *Piano Keyboard/Lake* (1909) by the Bohemian Symbolist painter František Kupka (1871 - 1957). His art reflects his theories of motion and color and explores the relationship between music and painting in a symbolic fashion. Kupka, for example, superimposes the short vertical bands of color of the surface plane onto “waterscape” painting and thus cues the viewer into identifying a metaphorical blend of “water” and “music” ontologies. The inference, which emerges from this blend, is “the inherent musicality of water.”

The disintegrating piano keys merge with the landscape in the background of the painting; they acquire its color scheme and dissolve in that space. At the same time, they form the vertical axis giving the main impetus to the painting. Borisov-Musatov in his painting *Reservoir* achieves a similar “musical” effect: he maintains the vertical axis of the elliptical composition with the help of tree trunks reflected in water. Music in its connection with water (both “flow”) evokes emotions, which we often speak about in “water-terms.”
Rusakova’s observation that Musatov is the first Russian visual artist whose paintings “cannot be turned into a literary narrative with a clear-cut sujet” is very important (1995:181). The painter does indeed strive to visualize the emotional sphere and the “movements of the soul” in a metaphoric way via the liquecence and fluidity of matter and is indifferent to mimesis of outer reality. For this reason Musatov introduces malleability of shapes and outlines, which substantiates the Symbolist focus on the liquecence of the human domain, the soul in particular. Musatov’s most famous canvases - The Reservoir and The Emerald Necklace - are discussed in terms of liquecence and spirituality below. The water element in the artist’s oeuvre is pronouncedly feminine.

3.1 Musatov and his Liquescent Symbolism. Predecessors and Influences

Several critics of Musatov’s (from now on I will use the shorter version of his name) oeuvre have pointed to his liquecent qualities as an artist, his contemporary fellow-Symbolist Andrei Belyi and the Soviet art critic Ol’ga Kochik among them. In his obituary of Musatov entitled “Rozovye girlandy” (‘Rose Garlands,’ 1906), Andrei Belyi juxtaposes Musatov and his contemporary artist Konstantin Somov (1869 -1939) in these shared liquecent terms. Without dwelling on what Belyi says about Somov, I will concentrate on how Belyi conceptualizes Musatov’s soul in liquecent terms as vechno poiushchii dushi vodomet (‘eternally singing water jet of the soul’) thus conflating music.

62 Published in the Symbolist journal “Zolotoe runo” (‘Golden Fleece’), #3, pp. 63 – 65.
and water ontologies. His next observation adds one more element to this blend – Musatov’s “femininity” (‘Musatov zhenstvenen’). Belyi extends his liquescent portrait of Musatov further, speaking of him as that diaphanous entity which “softly glides on the meadows of the soul, leaving the dew of memories” (vlazhno skol’zit na lugakh dushi, ostavliaia rosu vospominanii). Belyi, in other words, presents Musatov’s artistic personality in the form of a conceptual blend, which fuses water, music, femininity and emotional memory without limiting himself to discrete definitions: berega ego (Musatova) tvorchestva ne opredelilis’ dlja nas (‘the boundaries of his oeuvre have not assumed a definite shape for us’). This summarizing observation establishes connections between Bal’mont’s artistic conceptual path as delineated in his poetic cycle In Boundlessness and Musatov’s oeuvre: in both cases, creativity “is water” transcending its confines, or, in Symbolist terms, art has unlimited potential. Kochik echoes Belyi and Symbolist aesthetics when she speaks of Musatov’s fizicheskoe pogruzhenie v prostranstvennuiu, svetovuiu, vozduhuiu sredu i chuvstvennoe rastvorenie v nei (‘physical immersion into the ambiance of space, light, and air and his sensuous dissolving in it’) (1980:213).

According to Rusakova, the main point of contact between Musatov and the Symbolists on the thematic-emotional level is his constant poetic agitation and the elegiac character of his oeuvre. In keeping with the romantic notion that the past is poetic and the future enticing but the present dull, the Symbolists too shunned the present for either the past or the future, or both. Musatov’s preference was for the past which he saw as the time distinguished by refinement of feeling and subtlety of mood conveying the most
delicate stirrings of the soul in its longing for transcendental harmony. Musatov’s art was in tune with Valerii Briusov’s understanding of Symbolism as a means to express “the new essence of life” with a new language and to poetically intimate those fleeting moments of the poet’s complex inner life that would dissolve and disappear if not fixed in some artistic medium, be it words, paints or images.

Musatov’s Symbolism is less philosophical and less melancholic than most Symbolist poetry, however. His creativity is devoted to the myth of the artist as a being privileged to enter a special world open only to him - because he is open to it. He poeticized this world in his canvases, watercolors and drawings. He also “documented” his fantasy in the numerous photographs he took of his female models by way of preparation for a major painting. He dressed his models in eighteenth-century and Biedermeier costumes and placed them into the atmosphere of Russian “nests of the gentry.” Musatov and Bal’mont shared a love for Turgenev’s poetical evocations of the Russian countryside, as evidenced in Bal’mont’s poem “Pamiati Turgeneva” (‘To Turgenev’s Memory,’ 1893) discussed below and in Musatov’s letters (see below).

Although he did not immerse himself in questions of Silver Age epistemology and other abstract ideas, Musatov embraced the creative atmosphere of Symbolism and shared its cult of the outstanding creative personality. One idea that Symbolism emphasized and was close to him also was the desirable synthesis of all the arts with music as the main art form. Like his predecessors, Arkhip Kuindzhi (1842 – 1910) and Isaak Levitan (1860 – 1900) who represented a lyrical tradition in later nineteenth century Russian painting, however different their subjects and psychological attitudes
toward nature, Musatov shared “their awareness of the deeper, symbolic essence of the surrounding world, which all the arts [of the time] were attempting to capture” and which he equated with the force of music, Bowlt observes (2008:207).

Bowlt refers to the painting Above the Eternal Tranquillity (‘Nad vechnym pokoem,’ 1894) by Levitan as an artwork that anticipates Musatov’s lyrical visions and that is in tune with Bal’mont’s perception of life as a boundless and ever-expanding space. In this painting, Levitan evokes the endlessness and melancholic serenity of the Russian landscape as if through a wide-angle lens capturing changing cloud formations and aquatic reflections (2008:205). Here Levitan does what Musatov will proclaim to be the staple of his own painterly system also: the “endless melody,” which in painting is expressed with the help of “endless, monotonic, impassive line, without angles.” In Levitan, this line is presented by the outline of the distant shore of a vast river expanse, which is merging with the horizon. The image of a mighty river is a very emotionally charged cultural icon. Rivers, as discussed earlier, have been conceptualized as life routes, givers of nourishment and procreative forces in Russian culture. Its dominating presence in the space of the painting creates the effect of taking the river and the emotions associated with it out of the pictorial frame and pouring them over its frame (or “brim”) into the emotional world of the viewer. In the chapter devoted to liquescence in Bauer’s Symbolist cinema I comment on how the director’s use of the close up of a human face creates a similar emotional effect on the audience.63

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63 A similar effect was widely employed by Soviet avant-garde cinema when a train or ship “flowed” from the screen over to the audience, becoming part of their space.
Another strong impact upon the lyrical painters of the Symbolist era was made by the works of Kuindzhi with their “brilliant and refractive light, strong horizontal structure, and panoramic space,” as well as “the audacious spectral contrasts and light effects of his epic landscapes,” Bowlt observes, adding that Kuindzhi’s artistic techniques are important for understanding how nature in general and water in particular, function in Musatov’s oeuvre. “In using nature expressively rather than narratively, Kuindzhi imbued his art with a sense of timelessness,” the critic writes (206; the italics are mine). Notable is the vocabulary Bowlt chooses to discuss “timeless” time in these painters: he conceptualizes it in terms of liquid saturating the fabric of an artistic work.

The abstract concept of timelessness forms a counterpart to the abstract concept of boundlessness (‘bezbrezhnost’). The juxtaposition of the two concepts in blended space allows us to understand timelessness as both arrested moment on the canvas and as “unbounded time,” “pouring” along, across and through the canvas - beyond its physical frame. Bowlt opines that Kuindzhi’s art “… abstracted or synthesized the natural world so that his epic landscapes, devoid of human figures, come forth as the ultimate distillation of nature herself and of the divine energy “dispersing into infinity,” i.e. as neither narratives nor protocol, but as images of mood and states of mind” (Bowlt, 2008:206 - 207). The direct implication of Bowlt’s idea is that there is an interface between fluid time-space and the human psyche, both being essentially liquecent.

Musatov expressed his cult of music as a fluid “connector” of the arts in a letter to the artist and art critic Alexandre Benois in these terms:

The endless melody, which Wagner found in music, is also present in painting. This melody is in the lugubrious, northern landscapes of Grieg, in the songs of the medieval troubadours, and in the Romanticism of our native, Russian Turgenevs… In frescoes this leitmotif should correspond to line. Endless, monotonic, impassive, without angles. It could only be expressed on big expanses like walls.”

This idea reflects the old notion of the innate connections between music and architecture often referred to as “music solidified in stone.” He also embraced the ideas of Puvis de Chavannes, a contemporary French painter, who saw the ultimate goal of pictorial art in the “spiritualizing of walls” (Kochik, 1980:205).

Russian influences blend in Musatov with the impact of classical and contemporary European art. Since contemporary European art had “discovered” Japanese art, this discovery left its traces on Musatov’s art as well. During his sojourn in Paris in 1895 – 1898, the artist assimilated Renaissance painting, especially Sandro Botticelli’s compositional principles and treatment of female beauty, which emerges clearly in Musatov’s later oeuvre. He was also impacted by contemporary French Impressionism and Symbolism. Under the influence of Puvis de Chavanne and Les Nabis, a group of Post-Impressionist avant-garde artists, Musatov became interested in turning a painting

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66 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, quoted in Peter Eckermann’s Conversations with Goethe (1829): “I call architecture frozen music” (‘Baukunst eine erstarrte Musik nenne’). Goethe’s aphorism paraphrases the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos (556 - 469 BC): “Painting is silent poetry and poetry is painting that speaks.” [The phrase was also used by Friedrich von Schelling, in Philosophie der Kunst (1842): “[Architecture] is music in space, as it were a frozen music.”]. Britannica. Web. 5 May 2012.
into a mural that would decoratively *represent* rather than *portray* reality as a harmonious unity of all its elements (Rusakova, 1995:189).

While in Paris, Borisov-Musatov shared the boundless enthusiasm for *Japonisme* that dominated the European artistic scene of the late nineteenth century, as briefly mentioned. Western art first discovered the Japanese in the form of *ukiyo-e* prints. These prints form the main artistic genre of Japanese woodblock prints and paintings produced between the 17th and the 20th centuries. They feature landscapes, historical tales, theatrical and other urban entertainment and pleasure quarters. On the visual thematic level, Musatov’s paintings borrow the motif of the procession of people interacting with each other while moving through a landscape. By reproducing these patterns the artist draws on the metaphoric conceptualization of *LIFE AS A JOURNEY* and *TIME AS A FLOW OF LIQUID* that is part of Japanese and world art. These two universal schemata when blended with one of the central concepts of Japanese art of nature as ultimate truth and Musatov’s idea of the liquecent “unity of man and nature” (Kon’shina, 2004), allow us to see the symbolic landscape as the “sea of human potentiality” across which emotional waves rise and wane. Also the portrayal of female figures engaged in silent interaction with each other and the nature around them has left distinct traces in Musatov’s art.

The idea of musicality in painting correlates with such components as rhythm and

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67 Japonism, or *Japonisme*, the original French term, was first used in 1872 by Jules Claretie (1840 – 1913) in his book *L’Art Francais en 1872* and by Philippe Burty (1830 – 1890) in *Japanisme III. La Renaissance Literaire et Artistique* in the same year. “Japonism” may be considered a general term for the influence of the arts of Japan on those of the West, but in France *Japonisme* is also the name of a specific French style (Ives, 1974).
tempo, which are achieved by: the organization of the pictorial space, the architectonics of composition, logical balance between lines and forms, choice of color scheme in a certain “confluent,” harmonic mode; the choice of means to convey light with the help of combinations of color, repetition as a compositional principle, manifested in the rhythmic character of lines, alternation of forms, and harmony of color. They are coordinated to achieve the musical effect the painter sought and they become predominant in his later oeuvre. The implementation of these painterly principles allows Musatov to portray the tangible physical world not only mimetically (as analogy to its visible parameters), but also to convey its inner organizational patterns - its essence.

Symbolist poetry with its extreme subjectivity, its concentration on the reverberations of the moment and its skeptical attitude to linear sequence and causality, is ill-adapted to narrative. The Symbolist poem tends to consist entirely of a theme and its variations and modifications. It is held together not by plot or chronology, but by an underlying emotional structure which may be termed mood, or “music” in a metaphorical sense. As my analysis of Bal’mont’s cycle In Boundlessness demonstrates, Symbolist poetry lacks a logical structure and sharply demarcated boundaries, being “liquescent.” Like water, which can fill any shape and form, the poetry of Symbolism fills in the space of form with its liquecent content, which presents an amalgam of intense emotionality and lyrical evocations of memoryscapes. It may do more than fill any form, however, since it may merge forms themselves, creating new forms.

In this respect the oeuvre of the later Musatov becomes markedly Symbolist. He is the first Russian artist whose paintings cannot be turned into a verbal narrative,
certainly not into a narrative with a social or moral message. They must be experienced in their entirety: they convey a stream of emotion that floods the attention of the viewer and comes into fluid interaction with readers’ emotional condition. This increasingly lyrical aspect of his painting is connected to the disappearance of male figures from his paintings after the cycle of canvasses which include *Autumnal Motif* (‘Osennii motiv,’ 1899), *Garmoniia* (1900) (‘Harmony’), and *Motif without Words* (‘Motiv bez slov,’ 1900). The all-pervasive female presence in his paintings becomes symbolically marked: the artist begins to explore the Feminine as a symbol and as a natural element, which for him is closely connected with the element of water.

Symbolist artistic explorations of the work of art as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total artwork embracing multiple art forms, involve such aspects of the painting as color, shape, motion and space in order to evoke such non-spatial categories as time, sound and music in visual art. Eliciting the temporal element in the spatial art of painting the artist invariably invokes the fundamental underlying element of water with its musical fluidity. Water traditionally stands as metaphor for time with its everlasting flow; by invoking music the painter draws on its underlying fluid representation which appeals to our most rudimentary schemata. These are ingrained in our consciousness and predetermine our self-perception as integral elements of the natural/water cycle including birth, death and rebirth.

I will now turn to close analyses of selected works by Musatov especially examining how liquescence effects are achieved in them. I will also embed these works
in the wider context of the Russian fin de siècle and trace their fluid interactions with other artistic works within the domain of painting as well as across media.

3.1.2 Two Paintings

Two of Borisov-Musatov’s central and most Symbolist paintings are The Reservoir (‘Vodoem,’ 1902) and The Emerald Necklace (‘Izumrudnoe ozherel’e,’ 1903-1904). They mark a watershed in his evolution as a Symbolist painter, entailing new approaches to the architectonics of painting. They triggered “tectonic shifts,” in other words, significant transformations, in Musatov’s visual representation of the human psyche and its emotional sphere. My analysis of the two paintings in their wider synchronic and diachronic contexts shows that Musatov’s “water-motif” from being a landscape feature carrying certain symbolic meanings in The Reservoir turns into the very principle underlying “musical” painting in The Emerald Necklace. In the later painting there is no body of water at all – only the liquescence of the human domain.
Figure 4. V. Borisov-Musatov. *The Reservoir*. (1902 – 1903)

Figure 5. V. Borisov-Musatov. *The Emerald Necklace* (1903)
In *The Reservoir*, water is physically present within the pictorial space. In *The Emerald Necklace* it is only intimated in the form of an underlying principle of fluidity. *The Reservoir* is a realistic painting in the sense that it portrays two real women, Musatov’s fiancée and sister, in a poetic but “real” setting. In *The Emerald Necklace* we deal with symbols in the form of female figures presented within a Symbolic landscape. Juxtaposing the architectonics of the two paintings, Rusakova notes: “*The Reservoir* presents a static and self-contained system (an assertion I am disputing below); *The Emerald Necklace* offers an example of a painting as a mobile system – the principle Musatov adopted as a result of his search for the pictorial/graphical means by which to express movements of the soul” (1995:218). Musatov’s choice of exclusively female figures in both paintings indicates that to this artist water and human liquescence in a wider sense are closely related to the Feminine, and even the Eternal Feminine of the Romantic-Mystical tradition which Symbolism made its own.

In *The Reservoir*, Musatov chooses an angle that allows him to solve the painterly problems of composition and color to convey complex meaning. The high angle from which the scene is surveyed allows for a metaphoric blend of the two, or even three, backgrounds of the picture - the trees, the pond and the sky. By presenting the trees and the sky as a topsy-turvy reflection in the pond, it maintains the vertical axis in the elliptical composition of the painting where the enclosure is created by the postures of the two female figures and the rim of the reservoir. The multiple layers constituting the background correspond to the multiple layers of meaning that may be inferred from the painting and transformed according to the changing backdrop. By presenting the trees,
the skies and the clouds as reflected in water, the painter suggests that he sees the world in terms of circularity and recurrence, as verticality and correspondence, and hence, as a structure full of deeper meaning than linear surface reality shows. His “land-soul-scape” is presented through the prism of “lyrical” emotion.

The use of water as a background to the two seated female figures also serves as a trigger mechanism for what may be termed the “oscillating contour” in the otherwise static picture. The “liquid principle” of the composition conveys a certain tension in the silent dialogue of the two women. Arguably, it resembles the tension of the push and pull of the gravitational forces, which affect the ocean tides. The figure facing us communicates that she is on the same wavelength as the “dreamer” behind her who seems to respond and “relay” her emotions to the universe. The enclosed space created by the postures of the female figures is counterbalanced by the open ellipsis of the pond. This contrast is further reinforced by the reflection of a large clearing in the sky that shows the path for the emotional flow emanating from the sitting girl immersed in reverie. It suggests the unbounded and unlimited distance, which metaphorically stands for a dream. Kochik observes that the representation of the trees via their reflection in water reinforces their unreal and imaginary quality and that the viewer of the painting therefore is transported into dream space (1980:138). “The artist has chosen an unusual angle which leaves the horizon beyond the canvas out of sight, interpreting the pictorial space as unified and not separated by a visible or intimated horizon thereby merging the foreground with the background,” Rusakova observes. She thus underscores the fluidity of the painterly planes presented in the picture (1995:218). Kochik expresses a similar
idea with the help of a “water” term: “the painter evokes space without destroying the flatness of the composition.... The viewer’s experience of the space and surface blend (‘slity’) (1980:139).” She uses another liquecent term in her discussion of movement in the circular composition of the canvas stating that the movement segues (‘peretekaet’) from the upper part of the oval to its lower end” (p. 140). The elliptical shape of the composition in her opinion limits the viewer’s gaze and makes it follow the circular path over and over again (ibid.). I would argue that it is the water imagery with the sky reflected in it that breaks the circularity of the composition and suggests a “dream path,” as discussed above. While the flat surface aspect of the composition limits the gaze, the distance it merges with sets the imagination free. The female images thus appear to be mapped directly onto water, both as flat surface and unlimited distance in the pictorial space, which clearly suggests the presence of metaphor. The painting thereby refers us to the aspiration of Silver age artists to express the boundless through the bounded. What we deal with here, however, is not just the one-way mapping of the type FEMALE IS WATER or WATER IS FEMALE, but a multidimensional metaphorical blend where the several fused layers of meaning create an intricately balanced amalgam of nature, femininity, fluidity and emotion. Rusakova underscores that the “monumentality of the canvas is determined by the precise balance of masses, well thought out linear rhythms, generalized and laconic color scheme (218),” which can be considered a physical manifestation of the metaphorical balance mentioned above. The presence of water reflecting the sky suggests a complex metaphor of “plunging into emotion” cum a simultaneous “soaring on its wings.”
While in *The Reservoir* water both suggests and underscores the dream state and lyrical emotions experienced by the two female characters telling the “story of Soul,” water is present only as an underlying principle of fluidity in *The Emerald Necklace*. In *The Reservoir* water as a landscape feature serves much more important functions than mere background to the spiritual event depicted through the two women, but it is nevertheless part of a concrete setting. In *The Necklace* non-represented water conveys the artist’s poetics to the viewer, based on the notion of musicality. In this sense *The Reservoir* presents a transitional stage in employing water as a metaphor for emotional states and movements of the soul. As in previous Realist painting, water is part of the physical landscape, but carries symbolic overtones as an element in the “landscape of the soul.” In Levitan’s *Over the Eternal Tranquillity*, water (the river) is mainly a feature of the landscape without marked symbolic overtones, except for the Russianness of the landscape and its folkloric implications of the river flowing into “oceanic eternity.”

Going even further back in the history of Realist landscape painting, we see rivers which are rivers (for example in Repin’s *Volga Barge Haulers* (‘Burlaki na Volge,’ 1870 -1873)) and what is foregrounded is the story of labor and future revolt.

In *The Emerald Necklace*, Musatov’s “endless Wagnerian melody” is foregrounded; its architectonics is quite different from that of *The Reservoir*. Musatov called *The Emerald Necklace* the most “pagan” of his paintings, with “pagan” being synonymous to “pantheistic,” or manifesting God in *all* of nature (Rusakova, 1995:225). This all-embracing, diffuse and fluid vision of God may well underlie the poetics of *The Emerald Necklace*. It is a painting which evokes the potential of going beyond the limits
of the canvas into the boundlessness of infinity. Presenting a procession of women moving in a direction leading to a space beyond the canvas resolves the composition of the painting as a stream of unidirectional movement. Musatov’s ultimate goal was to turn his procession paintings into freeze-like murals, which would take the whole perimeter of a wall. The movement in *The Emerald Necklace* develops from an unseen point of departure towards an unseen goal both being outside pictorial space. The viewer witnesses a certain segment of the procession, but cannot see either its emergence or its end. That is why the movement produces the impression of being endless or “boundless” as in Bal’mont’s ascension to the celestial spheres in the introductory poem in his cycle *In Boundlessness*, 1895). Bal’mont too qualifies as a “pantheist” who praised beauty in nature, as a manifestation of the divine, and the human passions which partake of natural life (Mints, 2004:180).

The idea of music in painting correlates with such components as rhythm and tempo created by: the organization of the pictorial space, the architectonics of composition, the logical balance between lines and forms and the choice of a color scheme that conveys dynamic light effects. Repetition as a compositional principle manifested in the rhythmic character of lines, alternation of forms, and harmony of color becomes a predominant device in Musatov’s later works. This system of repetitions lets him express what he sees not only mimetically, but also metaphorically as he conveys as reality’s inner spiritual structures.

*The Emerald Necklace* offers a complex mosaic of symbols. The title refers to a concrete object – the necklace worn by one of the women but also to the decorative
pattern of the oak leaves above the women’s heads. Six female figures are depicted in slow motion from the left side of the canvas to the right. They symbolize the movements of the female soul, or the female aspect of the soul, its feelings and moods: the expressions on the women’s faces are those of sorrow, melancholy and emotional numbness in the first of the series but they gradually turn into cheerfulness and quiet confidence in the later ones, and finally, with the last visible female figure, culminate in an ecstatic outburst of emotion directed at something hidden from our sight by the constraints of the canvas. Arguably the series of women in the procession are emotional hypostases of one face rather than individual women. This interpretation (which can accommodate others) is confirmed by the fact that the study for the picture contains the names of the sitters but that, in the final picture, the faces lose all similarity with their real-life models and even lack individualizing traits. It is one face we see in different moods.

In the poetry chapter, I discussed A. Fet’s poem “A Whisper, a Timid Breath…” and ‘the series of magic changes in the Beloved’s face’ (*riad volshebnykh izmenenii milogo litsa*) via the process of blending various frames: the Poet’s and the Beloved’s male and female consciousness and the contradictory emotional states experienced by them when they declare their love. Musatov’s painting is a visual-symbolic representation of this kind of event, or rather chain of events. Expressing the same idea with the means of a different medium requires the activation of a completely opposite cognitive-creative process. In poetry, one face undergoes a series of magical transformations, changing from one to another in linear time. In the spatial art of painting, the same issue is resolved via a
process opposite to blending, usually termed the “unpacking” of the blend. The painter shows every emotional phase via an individual female figure moving in space, each of which comes into fluid interaction with the others. Fet’s lovers are most likely physically remaining in one place whereas their souls are engaged in intense fluid dynamics. Musatov depicts his female figures as moving through space and expresses emotions with the features of their faces, bodies and gestures; he also employs gradations of color to capture the gradations in the changing emotion. For Musatov, the soul is feminine. His young women may therefore be taken to represent the blended consciousness (and its temporal states) of both lovers. Alternatively, we have the changing consciousness of a person in love going through the phases of doubt and fear through to the conviction that her/his love is requited. We do not have to see the painting as an “illustration” to Fet’s poem, but rather as an experiment in “translating” one medium into another. Therefore, to say it once more, one interpretation does not exclude other possibilities.

The landscape in Musatov’s The Emerald Necklace” symbolically presents the emotions which the psyche, depicted through the procession of women, is immersed in. Via the blending of organic motifs - oak leaves and dandelions - it encompasses the contradictory nature of the human emotional domain. The depth of the emotion and its fundamental significance for human life is emphasized by the symbolism of the oak which points to something deeply rooted, steady and eternal, like a genome – a repository of human memory and an inventory of human characteristics. The dandelions convey simultaneously the transience of human physical existence on earth and the impermanence and volatility of emotion.
The contrast between these seemingly incompatible themes is further reinforced visually via the clean-cut rhythmic outlines of the oak leaves and diffuse shapes of the dandelions, which together form a rhythmic pattern, like an undertone or counterpoint for the main melody. Their outlines remind of a spectrogram. The dandelions strive upwards; the oak leaves on their branches hang down counterbalancing the upward motion. One of the inferences in the resulting blended space could point to the tensions between tradition and innovation, fundamental human instincts and more changeable modes of expression which are culturally and socially conditioned.

Stasis appears to be the source of movement in those of Musatov’s paintings where the composition is constructed around a female procession. There are several such paintings, for example, *A Walk at Dusk* (‘Prokulka na zakate,’ 1903), *A Spring Fairytale* (‘Vesenniaia skazka,’ 1904 – 1905), and *Autumn Evening* (‘Osennii vecher,’ 1904 – 1905). The metaphor that “transforms a static schema into a dynamic one” is FORM IS MOTION, “in which a form is understood in terms of the motion tracing the form” and a static form is understood as a dynamic motion (Lakoff and Turner, 1989:142).”

As a Symbolist work, *The Emerald Necklace* named after its eponymous symbolic object, could be considered a metaphor for the total work of art, which views artistic strategies from different art forms as fluid and attempts to fuse them to create the effect of total perception and comprehension. A necklace is made up of beads and their arrangement creates its unique total look, just like the choice of artistic elements is essential to the distinctive shape of an artwork. A necklace is a circular object displaying
the circularity and cyclicity so favored by the Symbolists. The Wreath (‘Venok,’ 1903 - 1905) is the title of one of Briusov’s collections of poetry, and the word (also in the form venets (‘crown’)) belongs to the favorites in the Symbolist lexicon. It has associations to Christ’s “crown of thorns” and the Poet’s laurel wreath which may turn into a “crown of thorns,” as in Briusov’s famous “To the Poet” (‘Poetu,’ 1907). A wreath symbolizes the Nietzschean “eternal return” and the Symbolist artist’s ability to see in the present the incarnation of a phenomenon both as it was in the past and will be in the future. Apart from representing the idea that “a work of art is a wreath placed over the void of death” (Bowlt, 2008:202), its circular shape intimates the notion of life as an ever-repeating cycle in which birth, death and rebirth eternally recur. Musatov’s The Reservoir

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68 The theme of the wreath as the symbol of the complete circle or cycle of life is the last theme of Musatov’s art, its culmination. The artist intentionally concludes his oeuvre with a canvas titled Cornflower Wreaths (‘Venki Vasil’kov,’ 1905). One wreath is complete and it is the central image of the painting; the other is still incomplete and thus intimates renewal and rebirth, the beginning of a new life cycle. The complete wreath marks the artist’s personal awareness that his life cycle has run its course. The artist’s gaze is directed into the boundless sky, following the path along which he is going to return to the “sea of potentiality” from which his life rose as a wave into which it will dissolve… The unfinished wreath is suspended in space as if waiting for the current that will raise it up again as a new wave in the “sea of potentiality.”

Figure 6. V. Borisov-Musatov. Cornflower Wreaths (1905)
artistically represents this very idea, as do many others of his works. The Symbolist notion of cyclicity is based on the pattern of liquid turning to vapor, vapor to air, and air condensing and returning to liquid. Water constantly changes but never disappears, only assuming new forms, as existence itself does. A necklace of precious stone does not change states however, thus representing another very Symbolist notion: that of the work of art being able to capture the moment and turn it into something lasting. Briusov’s poem “Sonnet to Form” (‘Sonet k forme,’ 1895) embodies this idea of the fleeting and changing turning into the “diamond” of perfect form. The moods of the women depicted are evanescent, but the painting, like an emerald necklace, is ”forever.”

The color-scheme of the emerald, a beryl, corresponds to that of water: it is usually light green and translucent just like the water of a river or a lake that allows the rays of sun to be refracted in it. It has several other hues at its disposal, however, ranging from yellow-green to blue-green, also colors of water. “Water,” interestingly, is an archaic term that refers to the combination of color and transparency in gemstones and it is used hierarchically: on top is “first water” (“gem of the finest water”), then come “second and third water” and last is “bye water.” The gems are assessed according to the same criteria as color and light in painting, for example, “saturation” (the quantity of color in a gem which translates into the color’s vividness or dullness) or “scintillation” - a function of the gem’s facets (the breaking up of light into tiny constituents). The color scheme of Musatov’s painting corresponds to that of the emerald. Since cracks often occur in minerals it is traditional to fill them in with oil or gums, which can result in changing the color of the stone to white or brown. These colors are present in Musatov’s
painting as is the full palette of greens. The emerald is of course a mineral, and hence, unlike flowing water, static, but then painting is static too. Both transcend their immobility in the hands of the artist-craftsman who can suggest motion through form and light; they also transcend it in the eye of the beholder who is an active participant in the appreciation of art, adding his/her unique perspective to this static art. Interpretative dynamics endow a picture with changeability.

As already stated, the emerald encompasses the color scheme of river waters penetrated by the rays of the sun: from blue-green to yellow-green. When a ray of light hits the gem, it is refracted throughout the substance where it breaks down into the full color spectrum, the numerous facets of which spread in all directions. Most of the rays then return to the eyes of the observer in the form of iridescent/versicolored sparks. This variability of light patches is called play of light (‘igra sveta’) by jewelers. Rusakova has suggested that the color scheme of sunlight refracted in water is one, which is shared by artists from the Saratov region on the Volga. According to her, they form a distinctive sub-group among the modernists which is referred to as “The Volga artists.” What unites them is their love for the sun light, sometimes dazzling, sometimes seen as if

69 The information on the qualities of the emerald is taken from the website of The Urals Diamond Exchange (Ural’skaia almaznaia birzha’). 29 April 2012. Web.
70 The information on the qualities of the emerald is taken from the website Emerald World 29 April 2012. Web.
71 Rusakova’s observation is in tune with Marc Chagall’s thoughts about the interconnectedness between the artist and his birthplace, “Every painter is born somewhere, and even though he may later respond to the influences of other atmospheres, a certain essence – a certain ‘aroma’ of his birthplace clings to his work… The vital mark these early influences leave on us is, as it were, the handwriting of the artist.” (Marc Chagall on Vitebsk (“my sad and joyful town”) from Wullschläger, Jackie. Chagall: A Biography. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. Print. p. 9).
through fog or immersed in water; they also share a preference for the color azure, sometimes diffuse, sometimes bright blue, like “the waters of the great river on the banks of which they were born and grew up (1995:230).” The group’s favored color scheme, incidentally, is an archetypically Symbolist one. Belyi’s first collection of poetry is entitled *Gold in Azure* (‘Zoloto v lazuri,’ 1903) and this title became a kind of manifesto for the *mladosimvolisty* (‘younger Symbolists’).

Whatever the main source of his color schemes, Musatov used this very color combination with gradations from emerald green to olive and yellow-green in his *The Emerald Necklace*, adorning his painting with the decorative patterns of the oak leaves and the play of sunrays on the lawn. The formation of the “moving” women evokes associations to a slow rolling wave, and the convoluted pattern of the oak leaves above and the diaphanous waves of dandelions below suggest the ripples a wave sends across a water expanse.

The emerald is the sacred stone of the goddess Venus and is hence associated with love, beauty and fertility; it is said to bring its wearer wisdom, faith and hope. These are the spiritual destinations which the Human Soul – the central heroine of all Musatov’s paintings - is supposed to achieve. In the Middle Ages the emerald symbolized loyalty; an emerald amulet was worn in order to preserve chastity and virtue. The color of the

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72 Maurice Denis, a French Symbolist painter Musatov admired, wrote in his essay “Definition of Neo-Traditionalism,” “Remember that a picture, before being a battle horse, a nude, an anecdote or what not, is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order,” (1890).
emerald symbolizes harmony. Musatov could have chosen the emerald to symbolize the harmony of the Symbolist work of art as a unity blending the most diverse elements.

Associated with the goddess Venus, the *Emerald Necklace* creates allusions to Sandro Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* (c.1486). In this painting, the goddess of love emerges from the emerald-green-blue sea. Through the symbolism of color – green is the color associated with spring and youth – Musatov’s painting also evokes associations to yet another Botticelli painting *Primavera* or *Allegory of Spring* (c.1482). Botticelli’s art was one of the major influences on Musatov. The two paintings just mentioned are also similar compositionally to the “procession” paintings by Musatov. Not only are they centered on the motif of the Eternal Feminine, but they also arrange female figures in meaningful rhythmical patterns.

As already indicated, this complex canvas allows for several interpretations and various types of emotional responses. The cumulative effect the painting can produce on the viewer despite the seeming tranquility of the scene is that of unexplainable uneasiness or even anxiety. It could also be sorrow for something that cannot be realized or longing for something that cannot be reached. Compositionally these reverberations are created by the “central” figure shifting away from the center of the painting, her body moving forward but her glance and, as we can surmise, her emotional memory, cast backwards, to the past. Painful attachment to the past and fear of the future are overcome only in the last figures of the procession. The tensions created by the opposite directions of past and future set the composition slightly off balance, which resonates with the viewer’s emotional state. Kochik sees the effect of uneasiness as achieved by the color-scheme:
although green usually stands for spring, youth and joy, the abstract symbolism of color can be transformed by a complex symbolism of the specific artwork. For example, vague apprehension is engendered in the viewer by the combination of “exciting” bright emerald color with a more “sluggish” olive color as well as “anxious” blue-greens. The interaction of green shades is further complicated by the presence of such “twilight” colors as purple and mauve. The escalating motion in the picture corresponds to the accelerating tempo in music, while interplay of light and dark spaces in the picture and cool and warm colors can be associated with rhythm. In this analysis too, the climax reached with the last visible figure in the canvas is a transition to a major key.

A number of devices in the painting serve to create metaphorical motion, ensuring flexibility and plasticity. The procession builds momentum to gradually invade the total space of the painting. The artist brakes, inhibits and even temporarily turns the movement back, after which it continues to develop along the designated horizontal vector. The elements counteracting the movement create a complex picture of slow determined progression towards the culmination, of persistence in the pursuit of the goal. There is another metaphor at play here that, according to Lakoff and Turner, enables our understanding of “static scenes as agentive motions” (which pictures are), when combined with FORM IS MOTION: EVENTS ARE ACTIONS (1989:144).

Movement through space metaphorically implies movement in time. Flowing water has always been used as a metaphor for time. As it is only present in the painting in the form of the underlying principle, the flow of time is depicted by the flowing lines of the movement of the figures. We thus perceive the passage of time as parallel to the
vector of the movement in the picture. As mentioned repeatedly, movement in Musatov’s processions has the potential of continuation beyond the constraints of the canvas. The picture frame does not constitute the terminal border of the painting, as it just designates a borderline between the seen and the unseen.

There is another way of making the flow of time visible in a work of visual art, and Musatov uses it, employing the very texture of the canvas and a specific painterly technique. He consciously creates what may termed a special faktura using the actual materials of the painting: in spite of multiple layers of color, the texture of the canvas is still seen in places. Sometimes the artist even uses the light-ocher canvas itself as a major color or as a shade to the color of the paint. The visibility of the canvas fabric makes the viewer hesitate as to whether the images on the canvas percolate through the canvas toward him or from another unseen dimension, filtering through the canvas away from us to disappear on the other side of it. The thin fabric of the canvas materializes the point where time becomes visible and also disappears. It becomes a point of contact between non-existence and existence, or between the material world of people and the immaterial world of the spirit.
Thus the canvas designates the borderline between the present (seen to us) and past or future (unseen, on the other side of the canvas). The motif of the duality of the world is typical for Symbolism with its \textit{a realia ad realioram} motto. The Emerald Necklace embodies the idea of a work of art being a borderline or a point of contact where the two realities reveal their fluidity by merging or transgressing into each other’s realms. In sum, Borisov-Musatov’s contribution to the notion of the “total work of art” marks a series of important painterly discoveries. These, in their turn provide support for the kind of conceptualization, which blends human and water ontologies.

In his \textit{Emerald Necklace}, Musatov also seems to apply principles of Oriental philosophy and art, which see the pivot of activity in inactivity and consider pulling back as building impetus for pushing (just like a tsunami wave). The decorativeness of Musatov’s paintings has roots in traditions of Oriental art and the artist picked up Oriental philosophical ideas while studying Japanese prints in Paris. As already mentioned, Musatov, while in Europe, became interested in Asian art and quite possibly
in Asian philosophy as well (Kon’shina, 2004).

3.2 Musatov’s Symbolist paintings and Japanese art

The similarities between Musatov’s procession paintings and Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodcuts may be discerned on two levels: the surface level, or the level of imagery and theme, and the deeper conceptual affinities that Musatov shared with the Japanese *ukiyo-e* artists. On the surface level the correspondences are striking: many *ukiyo-e* prints depict women in interaction with each other; one can clearly trace similarities in composition and rendering of movement, as well as the idea of some form of dialogue - not necessarily verbal - between women placed in the same pictorial space. Female images in the portraits of Kitagawa Utamaro (1753 – 1806), one of the central artists of the genre whose affinities with Musatov have been pointed out (e.g., in Kon’shina, 2004), were praised for “achieving a subtle, delicate representation of transient moods and fleeting psychological states” (Kobayashi, 1993:68). Musatov’s mode of delineating female beauty also seems to be impacted by *ukiyo-e* prints since his women, like those found there, may be called “modest and limited in scope . . . by Western standards.” His symbolic, seemingly “reduced” female images, however, just like Utamaro’s beauties “possess the kind of universality that transcends historical and national boundaries and demand a sincere aesthetic response” (Kobayashi, 69). Another parallel could be seen in how Utamaro “attempted to bring the realism of *ukiyo-e* . . . to such traditional landscape themes as “flowers and birds” and “grass and crawling creatures” (Kobayashi, 83). In a
similar way, Musatov shows a person as an organic part of nature in fluid interaction with all its elements, such as light at various times of day, vegetation and architecture which has been made part and parcel of the symbolist landscape.

From the Western point of view, Utamaro’s beauties convey the exoticism of traditional Japan, distant from the nineteenth-century European scene both in space and time. For the Japanese viewer of the nineteenth century, Kobayashi claims, “eighteenth-century Japan has become forever a distant foreign country.” (69). Similarly, although rendered via familiar cues – typical Russian vegetation and architecture - Musatov’s landscapes appear defamiliarized and detached as they view the past of the artist’s own native land through the lens of the exotic and the unattainable. The mental space he creates in his pictures presents a blend of what he absorbed and internalized as foreign and distant in terms of both space and time.

Beyond physical similarities between the paintings of women by Musatov and women in *ukiyo-e* prints, there are connections on a deeper conceptual level, which draws on Japanese aesthetics and religious philosophy underlying the art of *ukiyo-e*. Two religious traditions dominating the spiritual life of Japan are Shinto and Buddhism; they affect the outlooks on life and nature in Japanese culture. With its emphasis on the wholeness of nature and its celebration of the landscape, Shinto sets the tone for Japanese aesthetics. In the Buddhist tradition, all things are considered as either evolving from or dissolving into nothingness. This “nothingness” is not an empty space, however. It is,
rather, a space of potentiality. The metaphor of the sea best explains the essence of this concept: “If we take the sea as representing potential then each thing is like a wave arising from it and returning to it. There are no permanent waves. There are no perfect waves. At no point is a wave complete, even at its peak. Nature is seen as a dynamic whole that is to be admired and appreciated” (Koren, 1994:85).

In the two major paintings from Musatov’s mature period analyzed above we can see the application of these principles. The Emerald Necklace presents one of such “waves” – a wave of emotion arising from the “sea” of “emotional potentiality” or the whole “arsenal” of human self-expression. As has been shown, the procession in the picture is devoid of a concrete narrative, and appears from nowhere specific and continues into nowhere specific. The reason why it does not disappear completely for the viewer, is because the painting represents (in the tradition of Les Nabis I mentioned above) the development of the viewer’s emotional state (in the form of a human procession) which evolves across the individual liquecent emotional landscape while s/he is contemplating a work of art; it rises from within our consciousness and dissolves therein again. The crest of a wave - its peak from which a breath-taking perspective opens up – stands for ecstasy in the domain of emotion, when one can fully realize one’s creative potential and experience life in all its splendor.

The Reservoir applies the same principle, the only difference here being the perspective along which this emotional wave emerges and wanes between the two women. The water is used as a scaffold to ease our comprehension of it as a “sea of

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potentiality” which accounts for the genesis of the emotional wave. The wave oscillates here in between the two women and even the open contour of the pond suggests the potentiality of the emotion to go beyond artificially enforced constraints.

Another “Japanese” theme that could be viewed as running through Musatov art and the two paintings discussed in particular is the attitude called *nasake* or *mono no aware*, often translated as “a refined sense of the sadness of things” and used to describe the awareness of impermanence, or transience of things, and a gentle sadness (or wistfulness) at their passing. Such works by Utamaro as *Revealed Love* and *Contemplative Love* from the series “Great Love Themes of Classical Poetry” reveal this mood. Kobayashi, the Japanese author of a monograph about Utamaro, calls it a “uniquely Oriental emotional quality that pervades traditional Japanese culture” (1993:30). “Refined sadness” over the disappearance of a culturally superior and subtler past is exactly what has been said to be the dominant mood in Musatov’s works (Rusakova, Kochik, and others). His predilection for “Turgenevian” young women set against the background of dilapidated dreamy estates testifies to his regret for a refined culture that will not remain anywhere but in his art. This bittersweet sadness poured across the space of a canvas or mural generates an emotional wave symbolically captured in the form of a female procession in so many of Musatov’s works.

Musatov’s processions embody earthly transience, as images of beauty and youth evoke thoughts about their opposites: decay and decline and conversely, decay and decline open the path for renewal. A painting such as *The Emerald Necklace*, thus, draws on the metaphorical conceptualization of life as a journey: the images of the young
women may stand for both agents of the journey as well as its starting point due to their young age. They are “things in bud;” their motion through the landscape corresponds to a transition to a peak. Beyond that peak there is another descent, but in this picture we move upward. The metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY activated here inevitably entails all the elements of the journey including going with the flow or determined motion to the goal and, inevitably, its end, or, in organic terms, “decay.” On the symbolic level, Musatov’s paintings do express a bittersweet awareness of the decay of a refined and doomed culture, embodied by the dilapidated estates of the Russian gentry. Beauty, Musatov intimates, is in this transience, i.e. in all the possible (physical) manifestations of matter.

The faces of the young women in The Emerald Necklace also express this transience: that is why they are sometimes seen as “blank,” devoid of individual traits and feminine beauty in traditional terms. This superficial understanding of what Musatov’s young women represent, or of the de-individualized women of Japanese prints, indicates a non-discerning gaze, which cannot perceive beauty in the “imperfect, impermanent and incomplete.” Things in decline, just as things in bud, show a great sense of miyabi (“elegance,” “refinement,” “courtliness”), according to Japanese aesthetics - as if awareness of the changes time refines the one aware of them.

The procession of young women through the park landscape stirs the whole panorama of the painting into motion. Kochik demonstrates how all the elements of the composition become subjected to the motion instigated by the moving human procession, are exemplified by Autumn Evening (‘Osennii vecher,’ 1905), a watercolor sketch for a
mural Musatov did not manage to realize in his life time. Due to the color scheme of blues and greens prevalent in Musatov, the landscape blends with a water- or underwater-scape, which triggers associations to the sunken past, which emerges above the burial mounds (‘utonuvshee minuvshee which voznikaet nad kurganami’) of memory, just as in Bal’mont’s “Feather Grass” discussed in the previous chapter.

Through the association with the poem and via the contiguity between the vegetation, the steppe grass and the sea, before our mental eye, the decaying estates of the Russian gentry are transformed into the symbolic fluid terrain of memory, which, like the “sea of potentiality” encompasses all the memory of the place including its future. Physical manifestations of human presence in the topos – architecture and people - are just “waves” arising from this “sea” and dissolving in it to rise again at certain intervals in a different shape. Most of them destroyed or changed beyond recognition by neglect throughout Russia’s turbulent twentieth century, these nests of the gentry in Musatov’s canvases continue to emanate the sense of transient beauty. Having physically dissolved in space and time and rendered invisible in the physical Russian landscape, thank to Musatov’s canvases they continue to affect the viewer emotionally as they dissolve in our liquecent emotional landscape as well becoming an integral part of it.

Since Musatov envisioned his procession paintings as potential murals, which would flow along the whole perimeter of a building, this potential circularity stands for the perpetual motion, where the endless motion would intersect with, or stand for, boundless space. This feature of the procession paintings creates a point of contact with Bal’mont’s concept of spatial boundlessness, which stands for infinite spiritual
development I discussed in the previous chapter. Transience thus does not entail
disintegration and disappearance, but presupposes boundlessness of existence and, as is
demonstrated in the appended sub-chapter on Velimir Khlebnikov, a capability of life to
“extend beyond its outline” and protech’ into a new dimension.

3.3 Symbolist Painters and Poets. Synesthesia and Cross pollination

In this sub-chapter I examine how certain aspects of Musatov’s paintings and the
painterly “water principle” he cultivated correlate with that found in Bal’mont’s poetry. I
also discuss how the genre of the Symbolist poetic cycle as represented by Valerii
Briusov’s Me eum esse (1896 – 1897) correlates with the visual art of the epoch. In other
words, in this sub-chapter I focus on how verbal art uses its means to evoke the “water
principle” via color, shape, motion, space, time and the music of “sound orchestration,”
and how it creates its own “emerald necklace.”

Movement in Musatov’s “murals,” i.e. paintings with the potential of being
developed into murals, unfolds along the horizontal vector as if trying to take over, or
“flood,” the whole perimeter of a wall, becoming “boundless.” Horizontality of
movement may seem to contradict the main tenet of the Symbolist modeling of reality,
which operates on the vertical axis that connects the earthly and celestial worlds. I hope
to show that this contradiction does not exist as verticality and horizontality meet in
infinite space.

The vertical axis is presented in Konstantin Bal’mont’s programmatic poem “In
My Dreams I Captured the Fleeting Shadows,” which opens his cycle In Boundlessness from 1895, examined in Chapter 1. There the poet describes the spiritual experience of reaching the heights of his inner self by ascending the steep and shaky stairs of a symbolic tower.74

The poem is about the calling of a poet, or any artist, his spiritual growth and the creative process. Comparing two painterly and one poetic text by Musatov and Bal’mont respectively, I will demonstrate how they employ the same basic metaphor of liquescence.

74 Possibly there is an allusion to Ibsen’s The Master Builder (Norwegian: ‘Bygmaster Solness’) here.
as the underlying principle of their “architectonics.” Although water is not visibly present in Bal’mont’s just cited poem, the title of the cycle that this poem opens draws on our conceptualization of the world as a boundless water expanse with no shores in view: the Russian word bezbrezhnost’ (‘boundlessness’) clearly refers to something that “has no shores/banks” (‘bez beregov’), as already stated. I am not the first to note the affinities between the poet and the painter. Avril Pyman, for example, has compared Bal’mont’s poetry with Musatov’s canvases and watercolors. She specifically sees the two artists’ works as united by Turgenevean themes and moods. Bal’mont has a longish poem about Turgenevean country estates and one of Musatov’s paintings that the scholar may have had in mind, specifically, could be Apparitions (‘Prizraki,’ 1903). This painting displays delicate pastel shades without any primary colors to convey the wavering transparency of the “phantoms” in the picture. The poet, likewise, uses “nuances only” in his “To Turgenev’s Memory” (‘Pamiati Turgeneva,’ 1893): the pond is “half-overgrown,” the rustle of leaves is “just” audible, the “enamel moon” shines “faintly” and its beam “scarcely” trembles. Just as the artist indicates ghostly figures by a few impressionistic brush strokes, making no attempt to offer realistic portraits, so, in the poem, Bal’mont suggests the presence of elusive beings by “someone’s” melancholy whispering, by “someone’s regret for something” and, dimly glimpsed at a distance, an aerial flutter of imaginary women: “Elena, Masha…etc.,” in other words, Turgenev’s heroines with their simple, melodious Russian names. Pyman’s points are all well-taken. In this sub-chapter I would like to add some more facets of “liquid interaction” between the poet and the painter.
Both artists poeticized old gentry estates then. Just like Musatov, Bal’mont regretted that the idyllic world of the rural gentry was about to decline and in 1893 he wrote the elegy dedicated to the memory of I.S. Turgenev, which Pyman discusses. I quote an excerpt from it:

Figure 8. V. Borisov-Musatov. *Apparitions* (1903)

Дворянских гнезд заветные аллеи.
Забытый сад. Полузаросший пруд.
Как хорошо, как все знакомо тут!
Сирень, и резеда, и эпомеи,
И георгины гордые цветут.
Затмилась ночь. Чуть слышен листьев ропот.
За рощей чуть горит луны эмаль.

И в сердце молодом встает печаль.
И слышен чей-то странный, грустный шепот.
Кому-то в этот час чего-то жаль.

Liquescence is a natural corollary of the motif of ghosts, be these ghosts emanations of the past or another world. The painting by Musatov bearing the title
"Apparitions" suggests this liquescence connection between the title, the central figure and the landscape through which the ghostly figures move in fluid motion. The picture is a vivid example of how liquescence conveys emotions, in this case a profound nostalgia.

The painting depicts the palace on the estate Zubrilovka, which the artist visited in the late autumn of 1902. In Musatov’s days it belonged to the city of Saratov, and it is now in the Penza region. The building has survived to the present day, presenting a ghostly sight, as only its carcass remains. Musatov’s sister recalls that the painting was inspired by the pale colors of dying autumnal nature and the grey melancholy weather of the season (Shilov, 2000).  

Figure 9. The Zubrilovka Estate now

The time when phantoms reportedly appear is twilight, when objects start to lose...

75 Musatov's sister, Elena, reminisced, “Late Autumn in Zubrilovka carried my brother away with its pale shades of the colors of the dying nature... Around the house where he painted our portraits on sunny summer days, the colors were already elegiac, greyish, everything harmonizing with the dark autumnal sky, overcast with clouds. The house seemed to have frozen together with the vegetation surrounding it. All this infused my brother with the mood for the painting Apparitions... He explained to us. As far as I remember, he said that, together with the end of the abandoned estate, “everything started to disappear into the past,” just like the moving phantom-like female figures in the foreground.”
their clear-cut outlines due to the changing quantity and quality of natural light. The color scheme and the general twilight mood of Musatov’s painting is that of a late autumnal day threatening rain. The colors are subdued and flowing into each other via the pervasive grey of the imminent rain and the darkness it brings. The corresponding psychological tension is the liminal state between Autumn and Winter, fine weather and rain, day and night, the ambivalent vagueness of which suggests flux as an existential constant. On the emotional plane, it is the state between resignation and tears, the experience of nostalgia even before the past is gone: the sad anticipation of what will come.

The elemental and hence emotional instability finds its correspondence in the architecture: the shape of the building in the background reminds of a semitransparent vision and not of a solid structure. The tall columns of its façade create elongation; its windows have started to lose their shape, as if they were melting. The whole structure, somewhat like Poe’s “house of Usher,” produces an impression of a liquid changing its state to that of gaseous vapors, creating the impression that the whole structure is going to either evaporate or dissolve in space once the last ghostly inhabitant is gone. The movement of the female figures – the one in the center of the composition and the one vanishing beyond the constraints of the canvas (we see only her voluminous skirts) - starts on the building’s stairs which are flanked by statues of women: the supposedly white (but actually greyish) statues lining up on both sides of the staircase look like phantoms extending their arms in silent appeal to the woman in the center of the canvas sadly walking toward but obviously past the viewer. Thus the movement in the painting
occurs along a serpentine-like path, which mimics the outlines of the blurry paths on the ground, muddy from the rain. The ghostly women against the background of the ghostly statues on the stairs invite associations to Bal’mont’s ukhodiashchie teni (‘disappearing shadows’) which he is trying to catch with his “net” of dreams (‘mechtoiu lovil’). While Bal’mont’s dominating mood in his poem is that of achievement, Musatov’s mood is clearly elegiac: he is attempting to grasp the fleeting shadows of the past, but their diaphanous bodies seem to pass through his fingers like water; hence, their movement seemingly toward but ultimately past the viewer.

Apparitions as an entity, resulting from fusing folkloric conceptions, imagination, mood and weather conditions, may be seen as conceptual blends. However, when we compare Musatov’s Apparitions to those of Bal’mont’s from the cycle In Boundlessness (the poem of the same title was discussed in Chapter 1), the same image-blend yields different inferences in the blended spaces. The viewpoint appears to be the decisive factor here: Bal’mont recounts his childhood sensations of being part and parcel of nature in his interactions with river nymphs; he perceives himself as an input to this blend. In Musatov’s painting the viewpoint is that of a person aware of life’s transience; he feels he is already close to the end of his earthly existence – hence he is more detached and observant, although maintaining the sensation of oneness with nature. He is aware of the inevitability and imminence of his “floating away” together with the ghosts to their realm and becoming one of them. His painting is an attempt to suspend in time the moment of leaving, while Bal’mont in his poem attempts to suspend the sensation of oneness.

The representation of movement in Bal’mont’s poem, as well as in Musatov’s
“procession” paintings is similar to the iconic portrayal of sea waves in their ceaseless motion: running against the shore, receding, and pushing forward again. Iconicity of the sea has already been analyzed in Bal’mont’s poem “Feather Grass.” In Musatov’s painting, iconicity is shown through the different postures of the female bodies, which together form the fluctuating oscillatory outline of a movement that is reminiscent of a sea wave. Bal’mont’s poem produces a similar effect with the help of repetitions of certain word combinations where the line that follows picks up the ending of the previous one: *Ia mechtoiu lovil ukhodiashchie teni,/ Ukhodiashchie teni pogasavshego dnia* (‘My dreams captured the disappearing shadows,/ Disappearing shadows of the waning day’).

The reinforcement of certain segments via repetition sounds like a mantra, which intensifies the sacred meaning of the utterance. The main push and pull mechanism of the poem is set into motion by the central motif of escaping/vanishing and catching/grasping. The poet’s desire to capture a shadow stands for the longing to comprehend or embrace with his mind’s eye the boundless and mysterious ocean of life in order to return to his true self and spiritual origins. Here, we again observe the mechanism of the “sea complex” at work, which expresses Symbolist aspirations to flee from rationalism to the pagan roots of existence. Reenactment of the Creation myth and prenatal experiences, which involve a subconscious memory of rocking on the waves of the ocean or amniotic fluid, enables one to “return to the beginning” or “go back to innocence” in order to be born anew with fresh and untroubled perceptions.

The way Bal’mont describes the process of his “return via ascension” (cum transcendence) is applicable to Musatov’s vision of the creative process. The poet
activates all the devices at his disposal: motion, time, color scheme, shape, outline and light. The rhythm of the poem corresponds to the rhythm of physical ascension along the steep staircase, with every stress marking a new step seen as a small but meaningful achievement. In Musatov, the horizontal motion represents very much the same. In his linear procession, motion stands for the soul opening up, developing its spiritual faculties and preparing to transcend to the spiritual heights beyond the constraints of the canvas; it designates a spiritual path, which is similar to the path of a river through a landscape. Bal’mont’s motion stands for opening up the creative potential of his soul; it is more challenging, as the poet has to resist the pull of gravity, but both artists move towards the same goal even when choosing seemingly different paths: “the painter’s path of a river through the landscape,” and the poet’s “fountain jet path” of vertical ascension.

Bal’mont conceptualizes his dreams as a net with the help of which he catches “the shadows of the disappearing day,” so metaphorically he speaks about the ability of a poet to capture the moment, i.e. to stop time, to condense experience (like liquid) within the fleeting present moment. Musatov also attempts to tame time’s uncontrollable flow with the help of arrested motion. His works reflect this quality of time as a “prolonged moment” or “condensed experience.”

The “ukhodiashchie teni” (‘disappearing shadows’) in Bal’mont’s poem also stand for the artist’s memories, which he wants to preserve not only for himself but also for posterity. This is a goal Musatov too attempted to accomplish in his art. Influenced as a child by tales of bygone days about the abandoned parks and pools overgrown with weeds of “gentry nests,” where the furniture was covered in sheets and the portraits of
past generations hung on the walls, he devoted the main part of his works to uncovering the “secret” life of the women living in such estates (Shilov, 2000). Musatov wanted to “capture dreams” about the lost past and the forgotten harmony of the human and natural realms which he believed once existed. These dreams usually take the form of pensive young women who live in distant estates shadowed by the foliage of old parks.

Musatov’s metaphor of the emerald necklace can be applied to Bal’mont’s “Disappearing shadows.” His climbing upwards step by step on the staircase path to the heights of spiritual growth are his gem-beads, or rosaries, the beads-steps of which he counts as if in meditation. His spiritual work of catching shadows-ideas, dispersed into the thin air, is akin to the craft of a jeweler who collects minerals, polishes them, trying to reveal their inner potential, and finally puts together a unique bijoux. He makes “mute” pieces of beryl - the sounds and colors of his poem – fluidly interact with each other in order to create his own endlessly flowing Wagnerian music.

The sound patterns of Bal’mont poem with its interplay of voiced and voiceless consonants underscore the contrast of light and dark that he describes as seen from the poet’s elevated position “above the worldly bustle”. These sound patterns also create the music of celestial spheres – with a soft major tune and resonant cords emphasizing its main points. The same principle is put into the distribution of light and dark, where the “soft” light spots created by soft voiceless consonants stand for expanses, such as nebesa, vys’ (‘skies,’ ‘hight’) and “dark” voiced resonant sounds designate outlines and masses, for example, dremliuschchik gor (‘dreamy mountains’). These alternations of symbol-laden sound patterns constitute the leitmotif of the poem. It is paralleled by the lexico-
syntactic repetitions in each quatrain. The poem as a whole demonstrates the application of Wagnerian principles, which Musatov employed in his art. It also actively borrows media used by the visual arts in order to affect the reader’s or listener’s emotion and intellect in the most effective way.

Bal’mont’s ascension in the poem epitomizes Symbolist movement along the vertical, which could be paralleled with the movement of the water in a geyser or a fountain. Both this vertical water-path and horizontal flowing of water occur in nature and are valued equally. In Hindu spiritual teachings, which Bal’mont was quite familiar with, spiritual processes are largely described as energies flowing within the human body in terms of a water-current. The spiritual body of a person is envisioned as transfused with innumerable energy channels, called “nadas,” along which energy flows like water along a riverbed. The literal meaning of “nadi” is “flow” or “river.” The sensations during a meditation when the corporeal energy, or Kundalini, awakens and starts its upward movement is described as “an upward flowing current of energy.” It culminates in a sensation of the “energy fountain” bursting out of the top of a person’s head, when the Kundalini reaches the top chakra, Sahasrara. The spiritual experience of a nirvana-like state, which follows is referred to as “dissolving in the ocean of world consciousness.”

The ascension of Bal’mont’s lyrical hero metaphorically stands for the ascension of consciousness or creative energy in a fountain-like movement along the central

According to Indian-American Bal’mont scholar (and OSU graduate) Susmita Sundaram, the poet’s cultural philosophy was centered on “India as a cultural partner in the synthesis of Russian elemental spirit and Indian wisdom that he envisioned for the future” (2004:ii – iii).
channel within the spiritual body. Bal’mont does not specify the shape of the ladder he is climbing to the heights of his consciousness and to creative enlightenment, but if we equate this process to the ascension of the Kundalini, we can picture the ladder as an upwardly directed spiral, which just like the Kundalini longs to straighten up into infinity. The light that the poet sees above the summits of the dreamy mountains is also the summit of the fountain spurt. This light is a physical manifestation of the energy stream coming through the chakras of the spiritual body during a meditation, which is often spoken of and depicted in the form of a lotus with thousands of petals, when a meditating person “loses his individuality in the ocean of the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and becomes one with the Lord or Supreme Soul.”

3.4 Liquescence in visual art and its correlations with the genre of the poetic cycle

Symbolists revived the cycle as an established poetic form at the turn of the century. The conception of the lyrical cycle as a fluid poetic form derives from the concept of the natural cycle, pivotal to the domain of water. Scholars of cycles by Bal’mont and Briusov emphasize that they “established norms of cyclic technique both for their contemporaries and for the generations to follow” (Sloane, 1988:105). According to the Briusov specialist Joan Grossman, cyclization in the Symbolist period reflected the tendency towards larger lyrical foci when organization on thematic-generic lines was enriched by a broad unity of poetic mood, a psychological unity. The cyclic form also reflected the Symbolists’ vision of history, as well as human life, as a cyclical process. For Briusov, for example, history
was a certain pattern embroidered on the canvas of life, as he declares in his poem

“Krugami dvumia” (‘By Two Circes,’ 1921): Dnei, nochei, let, stoletii kanva, / Gde uzora
dary ne dodeiany. (‘The canvas of days, nights, years, centuries, / Where the gifts of the
pattern are not finished.’) The idea of life as a combination of recurrent patterns could be
paralleled to the decorativeness of Symbolist (Musatov’s) paintings with their specific
rhythm and composition where all the repeated elements are subordinated to the creation
of a harmonious whole.

The visual arts and poetry of Symbolism vividly demonstrate how important
fluidity across the boundaries of verbal and visual modes were to its practitioners. This is
one reason why the creation of a cycle, as supposed to a random collection of separate
units, occupied them. Musatov dreamt of creating endless friezes encircling buildings,
which would epitomize the “endless Wagnerian melody.” The same idea underlies the
lyrical cycle in poetry. A fluid line aiming at reaching its own point of departure (as a
serpent trying to bite its tail) is the foundation of the lyrical cycle as a form. As Borowec
states, the cycle “contains both a sequential dimension – the succession of individual
poems – and a cyclic one – in the repetition of elements in the poems and the ultimate
closure of the whole” (1991:10).

A poetic cycle is a certain compositional arrangement of poems united by a
central idea into a larger coherent work. The notion of context is very important for the
understanding of individual poems within a cycle, which means that their
interconnectedness and interdependence create poems immersed in the fluidity of
multiple oscillating meanings.
The fluidity of the cyclic form is also determined by the dual nature of individual poems as both text and context (Borowec, 1991:3-4), or, in other words, as conceptual blends and inputs to other blends simultaneously. If we speak about individual portraits within a bigger painting they can also be treated as texts within a context of the painting but also they, in their turn, create or contribute to creating a context for the other portraits in the picture. Every individual mood in Musatov’s *Emerald Necklace* is perceived not as a mood on its own but as a gradation of a larger emotional development, all of them creating a fluid emotional continuum. In other words, we read every poem following another in the cycle through the transparent lens of the previously read one and inevitably merge them together/juxtapose them in the blended space. This premise maps out the very genre of the lyrical cycle as metaphoric in nature, and thus as inherently liquecent. Potentially the number of inferences we have in the blended space (via interactions of the poems) is infinite, as meanings of individual poems may blend with any other individual poem or their groupings, as well as with the context of the cycle as a whole.

The cycle is an open form in terms of its size as the number of poems in it is undetermined. This characteristics also contributes to perception of a lyrical cycle as a liquecent form, the boundaries of which because of its fluid nature cannot be set. If there were set boundaries, they would “splash over,” “leak through,” or “wash them away.” The same principle is put into the basis of Musatov’s procession paintings, which have a tendency to “leak” beyond the constraints of the canvas and thus continue their existence independently of both their author and the viewer. Each of the young women is connected with others in the space of the canvas, but they do not seem to form a closed group: their
postures and movements invite the viewer’s imagination to add other figures, which would mark the potential for unexpected, but organic, development permeating the painting. The same principle applies to Musatov’s Reservoir; where cyclicity is hinted at by the postures of the two women involved in a private dialogue and the cyclic shape of the pond they are sitting by. At the same time, as has been demonstrated, the cyclicity becomes broken by the implicitly present boundless distance into which one of the young women in the painting peers. The conclusion I arrive at is that the cycle is a form that only aims at its point of departure but never actually reaches it, which speaks to its boundless nature, to its being part and parcel of the sea of potentiality.

Bal’mont and Briusov approached the cyclic form from different perspectives, as readers and scholars have noted. The first impressionistic view of them suggests that they both implement the principle of fluidity but in seemingly divergent ways, by employing the paradoxicality of the water-principle: elementality, boundlessness and amorphousness in Bal’mont (water as a primeval ocean, water as a splash) and the structured flow and circularity of water when this element is put in the service of man in Briusov. While in Bal’mont, water is a ruling element in its primordial form whose operational laws are incomprehensible, in Briusov, it is the element whose mystery has been resolved and its power tamed. The characteristics that Sloane gives to Bal’mont and Briusov as composers of cycles are instrumental for my research. Castigating Bal’mont’s cycles as largely a failure,77 a judgment with which I disagree, Sloane nevertheless correctly

77 According to Sloane, Bal’mont included “in his collections poems that were either inferior by themselves or only marginally relevant to the groupings he created. Many of
perceives his poetry in fluid terms:

“What distinguishes Bal’mont’s best cycles is their concentrated system of imagery – typically a group of related motifs will be repeated to the point of saturation (italics are mine) and acquire contextual meanings which unify the various poems... This technique is most evident in Bal’mont’s nature cycles, beginning with “Za predely” in “V Bezbrezhnosti”... Underlying this meticulous, strictly architected design is a rather fluid, impressionistic orchestration of motifs, which are less signs of objective realia than emotive gestures... The allegorical cosmology that interconnects Bal’mont’s different books is the index of larger, supracyclic design which the poet envisioned for his work (105 – 107).”

It is also noteworthy that Sloane analyzes Briusov against the background of Bal’mont, although in the beginning he almost dismisses the latter as a writer of cycles. This observation supports the idea that could be expressed in terms of a figure-ground relationship: we usually understand a certain order as the opposite of chaos. If we transfer this dichotomy onto the water domain, we can say we can cognize a water stream following a certain path only when we know the properties of water as an element. In other words, Bal’mont as a creator of cycles is as important for this study as Briusov. Bal’mont’s “supracyclic design” also speaks to the liquecent concept of boundlessness that underlies Bal’mont’s poetic worldview. Value judgments may be left aside in this context.

The opposition of water as a primordial element versus water as an orderly unidirectional stream is especially vividly manifested in Bal’mont’s cycle In Boundlessness, where the powerful image of the primeval ocean serves the liquecent

his collections, therefore, give the impression of being almost amorphous in design, unhoned and capriciously edited” (1988:105).
fabric connecting all the parts of the cycle. Briusov’s cycles which I discuss below are different. In Bal’mont’s cycle, the rumble of the ocean is also discerned in the rustling of reeds (“Reeds” (‘Kamyshi’)) and in the mute meditative movements of the underwater plants (“Underwater Plants” (‘Podvodnye rasten’ia’)); it is discerned in the chomping of the morass (“Swamp Lilies” (‘Bolotnye lilii’), in the swaying steppe grass (“Feather Grass” (‘Kovyl’)), and even in its opposite – the desert (“Desert” (‘Pustynia’), where image of the ocean is evoked by contrast (dryness) and similarity (vastness). The point of view the poet chooses is also important for our understanding of how Bal’mont envisions himself as an “inflow” into this world in flux. Several poems give the perspective from, or as if from, the bottom of water (“Swamp Lilies,” “Underwater Plants,” “Ocean” (“khrania na dne dushi nadezhdy blednyi svet”), “Apparitions,” “Sounds of the Surf” (‘Zvuki priboia’), “Sea Bottom” (‘Morskoe dno’), “Fogs” (‘Tumany’)). The lyrical “I” of these poems cannot be extracted from their fluid universe; it presents a viewpoint of innocence unaware of its own existence, as it does not single itself out of the primeval Ocean. The lines from the poem “At the Faraway Pole” (‘Na dal’nem poliuse’) - I etoi krasoty ne uvidal nikto,/ Uvy, ona sama sebia ne uvidala (‘And noone saw this beauty,/ Alas, it didn’t see itself’) speak to this idea. When we read the cycle through the prism of the first introductory poem “I Grasped the Disappearing Shadows with my Dreams” (‘Ia mechtoiu lovil ukhodiashcie teni…’), we understand that the poet by way of his ascension to celestial spheres grows spiritually by returning to innocence, to the beginnings. Thus he attempts to complete the circle, but only with the purpose of starting another, qualitatively new convolution.
Sloane sees the main characteristics of Briusov’s cycles as “more deliberately formulated, architected from beginning to end as if according to a well-defined structural principle.” The scholar praises Briusov’s “analytic tendency” against the background of Bal’mont’s “largely unregulated spontaneity.” He acknowledges the integrity of the form in both poets, however; in Bal’mont it is found “on the level of motif and mood, in Briusov, it is usually on the level of theme, sometimes style and genre… If Bal’mont’s cycles sometime seem amorphous and unfocused, Briusov’s err in the opposite direction, becoming at times almost schematic (1988:109).”

Below, I examine how Musatov’s compositional principles segue into those of a poetic cycle and correlate them with concrete cyclic manifestations in Bal’mont and Briusov. The procession of women on Musatov’s paintings epitomizes fluidity and interconnectedness of the various moods and emotions into one poetic whole of the picture. The motif of female procession as a metaphor for the movement of the soul that culminates in Musatov’s Emerald Necklace is also present in his paintings A Walk at Dusk (‘Progulka na zakate,’ 1903), Spring Tale (‘Vesenniaia skazka,’ 1904 – 1905) and Autumnal Evening (‘Osennii vecher,’ 1904 – 1905). The two latter works exist only in the form of preparatory watercolor sketches for friezes/mural projects that Musatov never realized in his lifetime. Musatov’s heroines are devoid of individual traits: their faces are characterized by blurry features (‘razmytye cherty’) and have a dreamlike quality. They represent certain moods rather than personalities, hence there is no central character in the paintings. These fluid characteristics let us perceive the whole procession as a wave of emotion where each woman represents a certain point in its development. In the same
way Briusov’s early cycles, such as *Me eum esse*, do not have an autobiographical “lyrical hero” to act as the focus. Just as Musatov uses motion through space as a metaphor for the movements of the soul, Briusov treats love in various keys and varied poetic forms, as the organizing core of his work, instead of presenting a set of themes (and “messages”). The underlying organizational structure of Musatov’s painting is based on the metaphor that conceptualizes movement through different states of the psyche as movement through a landscape. It coincides with Briusov’s vision of a poetic corpus as the chronicle of the poet’s spiritual path (‘put’). Each poem corresponds to a particular phase of the poet’s artistic development and manifests the stages of his inner growth. In other words the whole emergence, development and completion of the cycle can be presented in terms of a wave arising from the sea of potentiality and subsequently dissolving in it.

Grossman states that Briusov in theorizing the cycle as a poetic form laid special stress on the relation of the author’s arrangement of the poems (not identical with the chronological order of composition) and the inner contours of the poet’s spirit. She cites Briusov who states that the goal of poetry is in “giving aesthetic pleasure,” which “consists in an innumerable series of moods which can be evoked only by poetry (not by life)”. *Me eum esse* unfolds the developments within the poet’s soul over the previous year and makes a statement on his present beliefs and current goals in art. It contains a foreword and thirty-six poems arranged in six cycles: “New Legacies” (‘Novye zavety’), “Visions” (‘Videniia’), “Wanderings” (‘Skitaniia’), “Love” (‘Liubov’), “Intimations of Death” (‘Veian’e smerti’) and “Journeying, or En Route” (‘V puti’). Grossman claims
that as a whole *Me eum esse* is an exemplar of the kind of close-fitting organization of theme and imagery that later became general practice among modern Russian poets. Briusov’s conception of a book of poems as a unified structure served eminently well as a vehicle for spiritual autobiography. The cyclization of this book represented Briusov’s consciousness of having completed a cycle of experience, which demanded expression in a tightly unified form.

The same observation could be applied to the Musatov’s “procession” paintings, such as *Izumrudnoe ozherel’e*. Every female figure in Musatov’s painting represents a certain mood, which is an extension of the previously experienced emotion, explains the appearance of the following one, and is placed in a certain sequence in their procession. Together they also build a story of the artist’s soul and give projections of its future developments. Accordingly, every poem in a poetic cycle, in Briusov’s vision, should occur in a certain place as its meaning would become clear only in a certain context or environment, and only when read in a certain order. These “intuitive-logical” connections allowing for the themes to segue into one another uncover the fluid character of a lyrical cycle as an art form. Just as Musatov organizes his female figures in groups, united by contiguous (e)motions, so Briusov organizes a certain number of poems in subgroups with their own titles within a cycle. This structural design of both Musatov’s “procession” paintings and Briusov’s poetic cycles contributes to the creation of a certain rhythm in both the poetic and emotional flow.

The emotions that the female figures represent are evident from their postures and facial expressions; their groupings re-present the *development* of the adjacent
psychological states with a certain emotional *dominanta* privileging a certain emotion. This may be paralleled with the dominant lyrical mood of a cycle, groupings of poems, or mini-cycles within the cycle. Poems sharing a title could be grouped into “cycles” as well, even when published at different times and in different collections of poetry. Grossman gives a detailed description of how the poems interact within sections of a given cycle and how sections interact with each other. The scholar also comments on the specific treatment of meter, noting that Briusov creates variations in the rhythms dominating the cycle. Here we can observe the same mechanisms as Musatov used in his “procession” paintings to develop movement and put it forward as a metaphor for the movement of the human soul.

One of one of the mini-cycles, entitled “Visions,” the second mini-cycle in *Me eum esse*, is presented by Grossman in some detail. I would like to include here discussion of “Visions,” because, thematically and structurally, this cycle is very close to Musatov’s paintings. The cycle is made up of six poems: “Spring” (‘Vesna’), “Along the Boulevard” (‘Na bul’vare’), “An Instant” (‘Mgnovenie’), “In Mourning” (‘V traure’), “Disgrace” (‘Pozor’), and “Branches” (‘Vetvi’). In the first poem, “Spring”, a young girl scratches initials on a frosted window and apparently waits for someone, clearly a “prince” of the imagination, or perhaps someone she knows. She believes in any case that there is another world of roses and a distant spring beyond the one she sees through the window, but it is not clear if she “knows” that this is so or only wishes it were so. The delicate parallelism of the poem’s couplets intimating dream and reality is full of suggestion, and its highly melodic quality, created by assonance and use of liquids,
reinforces the lyrical mood. The second poem, “Along the Boulevard,” is also built on a
“here/there” opposition. Here a young prostitute dressed all in white walks timidly along
a fashionable boulevard with downcast eyes. Observing her, the poet has a moment of
intuitive insight into the tragedy of her situation. He and his companion stand abashed on
the noisy boulevard, as if struck by a vision of beauty about to be besmirched by life.
They realize that it is only “there,” in the realm of art, that beauty may be preserved, and
the poet gives the young prostitute the gift of his poem, although she will never know
about it. The next poem, “An Instant,” is a companion piece. It also portrays a
momentary apparition, but now in no concrete setting. Both poems are written in tercets,
which underlines their relationship. However, “An Instant” is a symbolic version of
“Along the Boulevard.” Where the first female figure passes timidly with a lowered gaze,
“her” glance in the second poem is more dazzling than a thousand stars. Beauty is here
not clad in timid white but shines with “diamond brilliance.” The poet now cries out
Umrite, umrite, slova i mechy! (‘Die, die, words and dreams!’), as he realizes that no
words can capture the emanation from realiora, but he confirms that realiora reconciles
with realia.

A similar pairing occurs between the first and the fourth poems, “Spring” and “In
Mourning.” Again, the stanza form is parallel – four couplets – though the meter differs.
In the first two couplets of each poem, a grieving female figure is juxtaposed to a glimpse
of another reality, which she dimly senses, if at all. The problem is left unresolved in the
first poem, but the fourth offers the solution we have been led to expect: art is capable of
catching and reconciling both the brilliant heaven and the thoughts of sadness; art lives
forever. The final lines containing the solution serve as epigraph for the section and no doubt were intended as its climax. The fifth and final poem in a sense stands apart in the cycle, though its heroine is yet another young prostitute. The “here/there” opposition so prominent elsewhere in these five poems is here only hinted at: the young girl seems a captive in her bright red gown and vulgar surroundings. But her dream of a blue firmament and green leaves makes her also a figure of trapped innocence and beauty “desecrated” in the Dostoevskian tradition. More than the other four poems this one shows how Briusov made meaning dependent on the poem’s position in the cycle. Anthologized, this would be merely a somewhat naturalistic lyric with a sentimental slant; capping the cycle “Visions,” it brings forward the meanings of these visions collectively. The female figure in all of her guises is seen to embody beauty. She is the poet’s Muse – the term was not too old-fashioned for Briusov – straining to escape the corrupting influence of temporality and taking ultimate refuge in the eternal. The moments of vision in which the poet now and then glimpses her essence are foretastes of eternal love.

In sum, the interactions of the poems in Briusov’s cycle resemble those of Musatov’s pictorial female figures. The poetic cycle is the same “emerald necklace” whose individual beads are arranged in a harmonious order. These poems could also be visualized or metaphorically presented as females immersed in different moods; they “hold hands” with these poems that depict similar emotions or “gesture” their affinity and empathy to the others; some “feel” alienated despite their intimate connections with the others, others do not. Just like Musatov’s female protagonists, the poems are full of
intense inner life and movement and “music.” If read aloud, their resemblance to music would emerge even more clearly. Indeed, declamation was a popular art form of the times. In other words, the poetic cycle contributes to the Symbolist idea of creating Wagnerian endless music in poetry.
The syncretic and experimental Silver Age offered the ideal environment for the new art of cinematography. As an art form that uses various media, it was only natural that it too strove to create the total work of art and it did not hesitate to use both new and borrowed means to achieve this goal. As part of the eclectic Silver Age culture, it incorporated tropes and techniques from a broad array of traditional art forms, most obviously from theater, but clearly the written word (in silent film) and the framed image were used as well and so was music, at least as part of the space in which film was shown. Film borrowed widely from contemporary literature for its plots; from art for its settings, and from theater for its acting styles, but it also developed its own arsenal of expressive means.

The appearance of the first Russian movie theater and the form the new art assumed in Russia was determined by the specifics of the country’s topography and climate conditions: the difficulty of overland travel for the most part of the year led to the original decision to make a “floating electrical theater” in 1906. It was called Sten’ka Razin and was supposed to travel down the Volga like its namesake. Unfortunately, it burned down before its first cruise. While this instance could be seen as a chance factor not allowing for connections between film and water, the very choice of route the cinema
dealers chose for presenting films to their audiences indicates the objective significance of rivers and water in Russian culture. In the historical conditions of the time, rivers - in addition to facilitating life, giving nourishment and traditionally connecting the past and the future as a metaphor for fluid time - acquired one more function: to promote cultural development and technical progress in the arts.

The Russian cultural scene at the time when film entered Russia in the 1900s was dominated by Symbolism, even though Realism had not lost its grip. Realism itself was however strongly impacted by Symbolism, even when antagonistic to that movement. Bunin’s eroticism and Gor’kii’s anarchic tramp-milieu represented a Realism that was lyrical and heroic-romantic respectively. The very new medium of cinema was perceived as part of what was new: the aesthetics of Symbolism with its emphasis on the enigmatic and mysterious as well as the Realist involvement in social issues.

The first Russian film, entitled *The Don Cossacks* and produced by the Pathé Brothers, appeared in 1908 (before, there had been some documentary footage of the Romanovs and their activities). It became very popular with home audiences. The majority of the early film productions were adaptation of Russian classic texts by A. Pushkin, M. Lermontov, and Dostoevskii. Cinematic visualizations of historic events and folk song recitals also had wide appeal.

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78 The first Lumière film, *The Kingdom of Shadows*, was shown in Russia in 1896.
79 French businesses founded by brothers Pathé in 1896 which soon became the world’s largest film equipment and production company.
4.1 Early Russian silent cinema as liquescent art

In the above historical sketch of cinema’s appearance and development in Russia, I have relied on Yuri Tsivian’s book *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception* (1994). Another aspect of his work that I now turn to is the fact that his terminological use of the “water” metaphor fully supports my view of the medium as a liquescent art form. Actually, one of the meanings (4) of the word *medium* according to *The Oxford American Dictionary* is ‘liquid (e.g. oil or water) with which pigments are mixed to make paint’.

The way the Russian native speaker Yuri Tsivian who writes in English uses Russian lexical items deserves a separate paragraph. Speaking about cinema he uses a number of terms, such as “osmosis,” “refraction,” “diffusion,” “saturation,” etc., which have a primarily concrete (biological or chemical) meaning and a subsequent metaphoric-liquescent one.

Tsivian, for example, describes the reception of early cinema by contemporary audiences as one which relied heavily on the settings in which films were shown. He emphasizes that for the early patrons of the cinema the experience of watching film was complemented by the *atmosphere* of the location; the cinema experience was an amalgamation of the two. The specific atmosphere in the cinemas was very much created by the ether-oxygen ‘saturators’ which lighted the auditorium and quickly overheated, raising the temperature in the viewers’ space. The screen image, seen through the vapors emanating from the saturators and the heat in the room, soon became blurred, as if seen in a steamy bathhouse.
Another dominant feature of the “mysterious” atmosphere in cinema halls, according to Tsivian, was “the darkened auditorium,” which “coupled with the silence of the characters on the screen and the black-and-white quality of the image, might bear associations with the depths of the ocean or subterranean world.” The scholar quotes Robert Musil who, in his view, best renders this atmosphere: “Mute as a fish and pale as an underground creature the film swims in the pool of the barely visible [Stumm wie ein Fisch und bleich wie Unterirdisches schwimmt der Film im Teich des Nursichtbaren’]” (1994:18).

Films were presented in continuous performance and a viewer could enter the cinema at any point of time during the film show, which factor contributed to placing the film “among the ranks of natural phenomena.” It appeared as a “text in itself,” which the viewer observed as an “elemental” event unfolding in front of his eyes. Since city life was one of the recurrent themes in film of the Symbolist period, the viewer came in contact “with the city condensed into cinematographic text (Tsivian, 1994:39).” The scholar thus twice employs the “water” metaphor, as he singles out certain aspects of the new art. First, he presents the film narrative as an elemental stream, which can be observed at any given moment but cannot be stopped, reversed or otherwise interfered with. This understanding of the film text draws on the same concept as Wagnerian “endless melody,” as something that corresponds textually to the “endless celluloid strip on which it was recorded” (Tsivian, 1994:10). It was also embedded into the esthetics of art nouveau with its “biomorphic style that favored organic forms and was itself based on

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patterns of natural growth” (9). Second, Tsivian activates the image of the city as a liquid that can be thickened by reducing water content by heating. The resulting image and implication is thus “the city is a fluid entity that may undergo a change via a chemical – physical process.”

Although early cinema does not provide examples of the bold metaphor-creating montage (montazh) which is so typical for the 20’s, several observations of Tsivian’s about the origins and nature of Russian silent film are nevertheless relevant to the study of conceptual metaphor. He compares the research involving cultural perception of early cinema by contemporary audiences to the task “of a Rorschach psychologist: to summarize and interpret the recurrent associations and fixed ideas that each culture reads into the ‘moving smudges’ of the early cinema” (1994:3). The mental image of the early cinema as “moving smudges” suggests the idea of cinema as enigma, in need of deciphering and interpretation. It also suggests shapelessness and fluidity, as if cinema were something yet to be brought out of its “primeval” state. We can indeed speak about cinema in general and the early cinema in particular, as a “fluid” art form not only in terms of its initially ever-changing shape but also in terms of an art form, which employs the idea of world liquescence and eternal return as its underlying principles.

Another feature of the early cinema is relevant to our study: speaking about the tropes of film reception Tsivian pays particular attention to the perception of cinema as a mirror in the first years of its existence. “Familiar faces on the screen (of well-known actors or one’s own face seen on the screen in the case of famous people, such as Aleksei Tolstoi or Leonid Andreev) would evoke the motif of doubles and duality with the traditional accessories of magic mirrors and haunted portraits” and entail mystical fear
(1994:4). These motifs can be traced back to the myth of Narcissus who used a pond as a prototypical mirror to look at his reflection; they were also embedded in culturally conditioned responses.

The third important point that Tsivian makes in his study of early cinema reception in Russia is that appearance of cinema as a new art form was embedded into the dominant cultural framework of Symbolism, which “absorbed” cinema and “made it part of its vocabulary” (5). He argues that cinema of the Symbolist period subsumed one of its prevalent cultural patterns, the so-called ‘myth of St. Petersburg,’ which was “created by Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevsky in the nineteenth century… and in the early twentieth century became a favorite reference point for Russian Symbolist writers, to whom the ending of the world and the swamp-like instability of seemingly solid reality were of special interest as literary motifs” (7). In other words, the public perceived both the city built by Peter the Great and the nascent art of cinematography as something ephemeral due to its intrinsic liquescence.

Tsivian points out that “Russian aesthetic thought in the age of Symbolism was still dominated by a fundamental axiom on the nature of art as formulated by the German Romantics: that art is a living organism.” “Living” and “organic” were the two key words used to express the highest praise for a product of the creative imagination.” This idea “was reinforced by the aesthetics of art nouveau, the most influential style in pre-First-World-War Russia. Fascinated by Darwin’s excursions into the depth of the biological
past, *art nouveau* artists created a biomorphic style that favored organic forms and was itself based on patterns of natural growth.”

4.2 Metaphor in Film

Zoltán Kövecses asserts that “films may be structured in terms of conceptual metaphor” and that a large part of the profession of acting involves learning “how to act out certain conceptual metaphors.” For example, some “physical symptoms can be seen as “enactments” of conceptual metaphor” (2002:57 - 58). Critic and filmmaker Trevor Whittock believes that film should “widen the employment of metaphor by seeking to discover where and how metaphors may be legitimately attributed to films” (1990:3). He starts off with a discussion of metaphor as primarily a linguistic phenomenon, which, as he claims, leads to “many objections to the [very] notion of cinematic metaphor ” (20), objections he does not acknowledge as valid. Whittock emphasizes that “the filmic metaphor is created by the film image being related to another through editing and by mediating between the artist’s perception and the spectator’s co-creation of it; it is encapsulated within the very film image itself due to framing, composing, pacing, sound, rhythm, tonalities; the filmic metaphor is more than the spectator’s perception of the film image: it draws on his prior experience of the objects themselves, and requires his active “co-operation” (29 - 31). Following J. Mitry, a French Film theorist, Whittock comes to the conclusion that “film images acquire meaning through their citing in a carefully

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controlled system of implications. That is, the signification of the film images depends more on the artistry of the organization than on the formal rules of a strict syntax – more on a developing rhetoric than on a fixed grammar… The fundamental language of film, such as it is, is the “language” of artistic composition itself” (33). He underscores that although, “initially, signification was defined as the component of an image’s meaning acquired through the context in which the image is placed, an image…may also acquire signification by the manner in which it is presented (34).” Whittock concludes, that “signification becomes the basis for a metaphor within an image because a tension that demands a figurative resolution has been set up” (35).

Mats Rohdin, a Film and Conceptual metaphor scholar, in his article “Multimodal Metaphor in Classical Film Theory from the 1920s to 1950s” discusses the questions of identification and interpretation of film metaphor understood as “a deviation on the surface level.” His analysis of the classical film theory writings yields the following classification of formal characteristics, which “cue the spectator in identifying the film metaphor:”

- **Superimposition** (part of a dissolve) - “a transition between two shots during which the first image gradually disappears while the second image gradually appears; for a moment the two images blend in a superimposition;”\(^{82}\)

- **Verbal image** is a “filmic expression building on a verbal expression (metaphor, cliché, pun, or proverb), which it visualizes literally;”\(^{83}\)

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- **Montage** – juxtaposition of different objects or things within the story world (diegesis) or non-diegetic;

- **Cinematography** – the camera set-up, which includes camera angles, camera lenses creating perspective distortions, distance of framing, and so on;

- **No formal characteristics on surface level** – i.e. no explicit deviations on the surface level from a realistic motivation. The interpretation is based on different contextualizations which underpin the metaphoric interpretation, such as the wider context of the director’s films, thematic elements, stylistic expressions, graphic correspondences, and so on (2009:405 – 419).

My analysis of “water” metaphor in early Russian film is going to trace these characteristics while uncovering their unique applications in Bauer’s distinctive style.

The Silver Age artists who wanted to create the *Gesamtkunstwerk* saw film with its means to create liquescence, fluidity and transparence as the given medium for revealing the interaction between the material physical world and the invisible spiritual world, or the point of contact between the two in the human domain. There may have been a certain impact from photography in this quest for “higher reality.” Its Greek name means “writing with light” (which was translated as *svetopis’*) and, spiritualist circles were fond of using photography to “prove” the existence of ghosts, by superimposing picture on picture thus capturing “ghostly” appearances. Roland Barthes explains the “supernatural”

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potential of photography by its physical properties: “The photograph is literally an *emanation* (italics are mine) of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, … will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed” (1981:34). These dynamics were central in early cinema’s explorations of film techniques as well.

4.3 Evgenii Bauer

The leading film director of the period, Evgenii Bauer (1865 – 1917) was well known for his ability to capture the most imperceptible movements of the soul via moving camera images (Zorkaia). He shared this ability for registering these spiritual “vibrations” with Borisov-Musatov, who depicted the movements of the soul with static painterly means, but making them dynamic. Bauer creates an effect of openness and merging similar to that achieved by Borisov-Musatov in his medium, thus achieving painterly effects in his dynamic medium.

Bauer, one of the most prolific directors of the Russian silent cinema, was trained as an architect, worked as a portrait photographer and master set designer for the *Aquarium*, a Moscow night club, where the first motion picture in Russia was shown

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(McReynolds, 2000:126). Bauer’s artistic style was praised for its painterliness, which resulted from his involvement with the aforesaid visual arts. Bauer is credited with developing “a uniquely Russian cinema characterized by its preference for psychological rather than action-oriented stories” (McReynolds, 2000:135). The director shared the aesthetics of Symbolism and Art Nouveau, and my analysis of Bauer’s films below will trace the links connecting his oeuvre with Konstantin Bal’mont’s poetry and paintings by Borisov-Musatov. These links were cursorily pointed out in film criticism (e.g. Grashchenkova, 2011), but there is much room for adding concrete detail to general statements. Among these is the centrality of female characters or the motif of the Eternal Feminine in Bal’mont, Borisov-Musatov, and in Bauer. Linked to this theme is the theme of Love that crosses all borderlines, and in general, the preponderance of emotion and mood over action. Another point of contact between the artists is their affinity with Turgenev’s “impressionistic and … pre-symbolist aesthetics” (Boele, 2010:266). Melodrama, as a product for mass consumption, is the dominant genre of Bauer’s films. While the genre could be seen as appealing to a female audience, Symbolist aesthetics would hardly rank it highly on the scale of aesthetic values; it would rather be considered a genre opposite to high art. However, as McReynolds points out, melodrama “proves to be very close to Symbolist aesthetics with its emphasis on the unseen and the emotional…by trafficking in feelings lying beneath the surface reality,

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85 This centrality of the feminine in cinematic narrative soon translated into women becoming the main consumers of film, or perhaps it was their “centrality to film audiences which gave them a unique role in the development,” of the cinematic narrative (McReynolds, 2000:121).
melodrama employs non-verbal means to convey what words, so critical to realism, were inadequate to tell” (2000:132).

Conceptual spatiality or bezbrezhnost’ mapped on to the domain of the emotional and spiritual, declared by Konstantin Bal’mont and developed by Viktor Borisov-Musatov, is in Bauer materialized via mise-en-scène filled with objects. The director creates a sense of unending depth, shimmering through texture and structure on-screen by building staircases which extend beyond the frame, for example. It is within these carefully arranged conditions that Bauer blurs the boundaries between “things” and “people” arranging movement of bodies surrounded by objects and things to a particular rhythm (DeBlasio, 2007:672).

Early Russian film is characterized by the physical immobility of its actors and its long “pauses” in regard to action development. These features originate from the psychological school of acting created by Stanislavskii who preferred characterization to plot dynamics and often relied on “pregnant” pauses. Bauer discovered his own unique means to delineate the movements of the soul, however. He employs painterly techniques and his architectural-photographic skills to build his deep-focus mise en scènes with the help of arches, columns, furniture items and contrasting fabrics, for example, deep black velvet with transparent “wavy” tulle. The interior design becomes a “trigger,” which sets the viewers’ emotional vision in motion and provides venues for the psychological tension to build momentum. To show movements of the soul via otherwise static actor-figures, Evgenii Bauer revolutionizes the use of the close-up as a powerful tool to portray the slightest stirrings of emotion. In Bauer’s films, the close-up was frequently anticipated by a tracking shot that explored expanses or “Bauer’s signature never-ending
spaces (DeBlasio, 2007:685).” These techniques are prominent in the Bauer films I discuss in this chapter, the very titles of which - *The Twilight of a Woman’s Soul, After Death* and *Daydreams* – introduce emotionality, liminality, and diffuse outlines which, as we have seen so many times by now, signal liquescence when applied to the human domain.

Evgenii Bauer worked in the cinema for only four years, between 1913 and 1917, until his death of complications related to pneumonia. He left behind a rich legacy of more than seventy films, each of which presents the history of a soul as a liquescent feminine domain.

4.3.1 *The Twilight of a Woman’s Soul* (‘*Sumerki zhenskoi dushi,*’ 1913)

*The Twilight of a Woman’s Soul* presents the story of Vera, a young upper class woman, whose idealized vision of humanity and lack of real life knowledge lead her to bitter discoveries, disillusionment and even crime. Together with her mother, she visits the slum quarters of the city to bring food to the needy. Unaware of the lewd intentions of one of their beneficiaries’ (Maksim), Vera goes alone to his den to which he has summoned her, pretending to be ill. Instead of a sick man, she encounters a rapist. Vera kills Maksim to avenge her outraged honor. Undiscovered, she slips away. A year later Vera marries but when she confesses her past to her husband, he turns away from her. Vera leaves for abroad where she becomes a famous singer; meeting her again at the peak of her career and allure her husband pleads with her to return. When she refuses, he commits suicide.
As the film foregrounds a female protagonist, I will center my discussion on
liquescence as a female element and the female as a liquescent universe. As already
mentioned, the title of the Bauer film is a blend of cross-mappings between the domain of
the feminine and a phenomenon of the natural world – twilight, to be specific. As in
Borisov-Musatov’s painting *Ghosts* (‘Prizraki,’ 1903), and in Bal’mont’s poetry and
Turgenev’s lyrical prose, twilight is associated with life’s transience and is thus
“liquescent.” Natural settings acquire fluidity with the light transiting to darkness,
blurring the outlines of objects and elements of the landscape. Twilight creates optical
illusions and a sense of the illusoriness of all earthly existence. The blended space of the
twilight realm intimates that a woman’s soul is marked by a mysterious changeability.

We first meet Vera, sitting motionless in her room behind transparent tulle
curtains. They delicately flutter in the breeze, so the heroine is seen as if through a
slightly undulating water surface. The intertitles inform us that Vera feels lonely in her
luxurious surroundings. Via the physical environment reminiscent of a fairytale
underwater kingdom, Bauer renders the intimate world of Vera’s soul. This *mise en scène*
follows the scene of a reception her mother is giving at their affluent house. Vera’s
solitude and immersion in the ambiance of her private thoughts and inner emotional
sphere are juxtaposed to the atmosphere of her mother’s genteel salon, its opulence
emphasized by the abundance of tropical plants. The contrast is created by intercuts with
the modest interior of Vera’s room. While the camera invites the viewer to participate in
the salon scene via the bright lighting of the *mise en scène* and placement of the actors in
the foreground, Vera is distanced from us. We are unwittingly coerced into voyeurism,
looking at her as if from an ambush, through the dark space in the foreground, which
delineates the borderline between the audience and the realm of virginal femininity. Vera is quietly secluded from a dangerous world like a pearl inside her shell. Garden flowers in vases put on tall stands, their dark silhouettes evocative of underwater plants with undulating long stems, create a stark contrast with the brightly lit tropical plants of the parlor, her mother’s realm; they seem to guard her domain from unwanted intrusion.

As if awoken from a dream by the servant’s invitation to join the guests, Vera steps from behind the gossamer curtain out of the “underwater regions” of both her room and her reverie towards the viewer into the “twilight” zone, we have just observed her through. For a moment she becomes a part of this liminal world – her silhouette is now as dark and flat as the flowers framing the mise en scène. Here, in order to show the transition of the “pearl” from her shell into the real world, Bauer introduces another source of light - bright daylight coming through the window. Vera pulls aside a dark curtain and casts a glance out of the window. We surmise the “boundlessness” and the push- and-pull energy of the outer sunlit world via the expression on her face and movements of her body: she perks up like a wilted flower that now is bathed in light as she slightly leans forward toward the brightly lit scenery, as if trying with her mind’s eye to reach the outer limits of this boundless space. She then withdraws into the interior, her head inclined sideways as if in awe of the fathomless perspectives of life. The day-light flooding her figure stands for the heroine’s infusion with joyful anticipation of her journey through what she perceives to be the “ocean” of real life, her dress gleaming as scales on a fish. We have some intimation already at this stage then of misfortune: mermaids entering the world above water rarely fare well (Andersen). Vera does not pick up any warning signals, of course. She, still in her daydream, seems to enact the final
poem of Bal’mont’s cycle *In Boundlessness* in this joyous scene. Unlike the heroine of
this poem she has no Lover to accompany her, but perhaps she is dreaming of one, only
to have her dreams crushed, as the audience soon will learn. Her anticipation however
“matches” Bal’mont’s flight into *boundlessness*:

За пределы предельного,
К безднам светлой Безбрежности!

В ненасытной мятежности,
В жажде счастья цельного,

Мы, воздушные, летим
И помедлить не хотим.

И едва качаем крыльями.
Всё захватим, всё возьмём,
Жадным чувством обоймём!

Дерзкими усилиями
Устремляясь к высоте,
Дальше, прочь от грани тесной,

Мы домчимся в мир чудесный
К неизвестной
Красоте!

Tsivian comments on this particular scene: “Bauer believed that frames of mind
like Vera’s lonesome mood in the shot where we first see her sitting in her room come
out better when cued by light and ambience than acting. He put this gauze between Vera
and us to make her figure look vague and distant.” He then “lets the floodlight model her
face with a silver rim. The style of lighting is very unusual: here Bauer is interested more
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in penumbra rather than contrast, or rather in combining the contrast lighting with partial shades. … Bauer is trying to write in light and shadow the eponymous metaphor “twilight of a woman’s soul.”

There is indeed always a connection between the water theme and the theme of twilight as a time when one part of the day seamlessly flows into another and shapes lose their solidity. Symbolist art displays the same quality of continuity and unnoticeable shape-shifting across verbal and visual modes. The filmic image-metaphor of the soul as a twilight zone that Bauer creates through penumbra and chiaroscuro seems to flow out of Bal’mont’s poems, which in their turn, provide embodied experiences of the swaying underwater gloom verbally. Vera confined in her “twilight underwater” realm reminds of Bal’mont’s underwater plants and marsh lilies, which are attached to the ground under water and the heroine of Bauer’s films is likewise firmly tied to the conventionalities of her class, which imposes the luxurious yet artificial constraints of a terem existene on

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86 Yuri Tsivian’s commentary to a DVD collection of Bauer’s films in (Bauer, 2003).
87 Над дне морском подводные растенья
Распространяют бледные листы,
И тянутся, растут как привиденья,
В безмолвии угрюмой темноты.

Их тяготит покой уединенья,
Их манит мир безвестной высоты,
Им хочется любви, лучей, волненья,
Им снятся ароматные цветы.

Но нет пути в страну борьбы и света,
Молчит кругом холодная вода.
Акулы проплывают иногда.

Ни проблеска, ни звука, ни привета,
И сверху посылает зыбь морей
Лишь трупы и обломки кораблей.
young aristocratic girls. Just like Bal’mont’s lilies, she lives by a dream to reach the heights (‘zhit’ mechtii i dostich’ vysoty’; to live by a dream and reach the heights). Bauer’s heroine, like Bal’mont’s lily, “blossomed and faded” (‘rastsvela i poblekla’) in her first youth. Vera becomes famous and is desired at the end of the film, but it is as a result of bitter experiences, not because of her spiritual beauty.

The underwater world as a metaphor for upper-class women’s seclusion and emotionally superficial lives is ironically juxtaposed in Bauer’s film with the city’s under(water)world of poverty and moral degradation. The continuity between the two realms is established via the automobile ride that Vera and her mother take from the luxury of their home to the inferno of the city slums. The camera shows the viewer that the slum dwellings are situated literally below the ground level. It focuses on a dirty window, which is the only source of poor lighting in a cellar-room, and through which only the feet of passers-by can be seen. The location of the room places its destitute inhabitants literally in a twilight zone, the metaphoric implications of which are that they exist on the borderline between human and animal conditions. This twilight state evoked in different circumstances ironically echoes the twilight Vera resides in – her liminal space between reality and dreams, between material and spiritual realms.

In this underground den in the style of Gor’kii’s pothouse in the play The Lower Depths (‘Na dne,’ 1901 - 1902), men sit around an improvised table downing tumblers of liquor, thus reaching for the poor man’s paradise, in their own way of “liqueescence.” As in Blok’s poem The Incognita (‘Neznakomka,’ 1906) we have a travesty of Symbolist transcendence, even though the milieu of the poem is petty bourgeois rather than proletarian. When the two women come in, the men swiftly remove the traces of their
scanty feast and pretend to be overjoyed at the arrival of their benefactresses. While Vera and especially her mother envision their activity as that of “cleaning the contaminated wells of poverty,” the men sneer behind their backs. The scene presents a collision of two worlds: one outwardly proper, but marred by hypocrisy, and the other both morally and physically putrid, perhaps because the “pure” upper classes had gained their moral “superiority” at their expense, through their ruthless exploitation of the working classes. In conceptual terms we have a juxtaposition of two incompatible frames: two social groups occupying the extremes of society meeting in the blended space of this scene. It presages the tragic result of this naïve attempt at blending. The factory apprentice Maksim, whom the two ladies visit shortly after, is to be Vera’s rapist and he too is reaching for “transcendence” with the help of a bottle of vodka. Seen from a larger perspective, the film predicts the near future of the Revolution, when the lower classes are going to obliterate or subsume aristocratic culture. The message is certainly not one-sided: it is not a “dirty” world that will destroy a pure one, but an exploited world that encounters a hypocritical one which pretends to be pure, but whose “goodness” is limited to the panacea of welfare rather than actual sharing of privilege. Vera is the innocent victim of both.

Both daydreaming and nocturnal dream visions are closely linked to liquescence in Bauer. For example, Vera has a dream in which she sees the poor people she and her mother tended to during the day. For this scene, Bauer introduces the blue color filter, which, via superimpositions, dissolves various images into each other. They “invade” the intimate space of her bedroom, intermingling and merging in Vera’s half-asleep and half-conscious state in the blue liquescent ambience of her dream. Once fully awake, Vera
feels her intimate connection with the poor people and realizes that her life’s calling and her path to transcendence is to help them. This is quite in the style of a line of Turgenev heroines, beginning with Elena and ending with the hymns to Vreška and other self-sacrificial heroines in the writer’s Poems in Prose. The motif of transcendence realized via liquefying imagery is further reinforced by Vera’s reflection in the mirror. It suggests a path to a more perfect space of realiora, where she would be able to realize her potential for good.

Vera’s blue dreams in her virginal abode are intercut with Maksim’s “blue dreams” in his lair in the next scene entitled “Vera’s beauty enchanted Maksim.” The young man is shown daydreaming about Vera through the same blue-color filter. Although they are placed in shared blended space, the inferences in this blend are quite different for each of the characters. While Vera’s desire to “merge with the people” is inspired by high altruistic ideals, the down-to-earth Maksim desires to “merge” with Vera sexually. Vera’s lofty goals are inspired by Russian intelligentsia ideals of “going to the people” and becoming closer to the folk (narod) seen as the keeper of ancient wisdom and ultimate truth. This is a populist ideology, which found many adherents in Symbolist circles, as it fits well with the Symbolist concept of returning to one’s beginnings and the notion of existence as a natural (water) cycle. Maksim’s dreams are stimulated by vodka, however; a half-empty bottle is invariably part of the setting in which he appears. His facial expression is invariably lascivious.

The film indicates that drunkenness is a social and moral problem. For the poor, inebriation is the only means by which to cross boundaries into “another” world. Unfortunately, “another world” is not a better world. In The Twilight of a Woman’s Soul
alcohol is shown as a vehicle and facilitator for social, moral and physical transgression: the crude worker Maksim rapes the refined aristocrat Vera, and this act is foreshadowed when he penetrates into her room through an open window leaving her a note about his fake illness. The motif of alcohol evokes the dream-motif, articulated earlier in the film via liquecent ambience (Vera’s maidenly dreams of future love): Maksim’s sexual fantasy is realized in terms of imbibing liquor. Two extensions of the “aquatic” metaphor set off each other: Vera’s dream is crushed when set against brute reality and Maksim’s dream, a much more prosaic one, comes true.

The scene where Maksim stealthily gets inside Vera’s room through the window while she is asleep retains the same dreamy blue filter as during her daydream-scene. Again, we see the room through the transparent tulle curtain slightly wavering in the light night breeze, which creates the impression of an “underwater” kingdom. The director connects the privacy of the maidenly bedroom to the interior of her soul via the metaphor of underwater regions and twilight marking the domain of the spiritual, internal and feminine. Maksim’s breaking into it through the window displays a breach of privacy in a

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88 Drunkenness is shown as a danger across social hierarchies. The motif of inebriation as a facilitator of border crossing and various types of mixing is also developed in Eduard Pukhal’skii’s film Antosha Ruined by a Corset (‘Antoshu korset pogubil,’ 1916), for example. There, a bon vivant called Antosha spends a night merrily in the company of his friends and party girls, one of whom accidentally leaves her corset behind in his flat; the subsequent discovery of this item of clothing by Antosha’s wife ruins his marriage. The border crossing on the relationship level starts with toasts to “brotherhood,” the ritual of which involves linking of arms in an embrace of sorts. The gender/sexual transgression is shown via cross-dressing: the men and women exchange their hats and coats. The drunkenness of the upper classes, however, is seen in more humorous terms than is the case with lower class alcoholism.
both physical and metaphoric sense and foreshadows the rape scene in Maksim’s shabby room which soon follows.

After Maksim has raped Vera, he orders her to hand him a glass of vodka, which he empties in one gulp. Inebriated, he revels in his power over a woman, which feeling in Russian would be rendered in liquefied terms: upivat’ sia vlast’iu nad zhenshchinoi.

Bauer shows how alcohol consumption releases the lower classes’ primitive views of gender relations. To force a woman to have sex is for Maksim as easy as to empty a glass of vodka. To his mind, the glass full of “good dear water” (vodka) is a woman. Velimir Khlebnikov employs this metaphor to refer to lovemaking amidst tall grass in his poem “Caresses…” (‘Lasok…’, 1916): Ia vypil vas polnym stakanom (‘I indulged in you as in a glass-full of water’). Maksim drains Vera emotionally by destroying the high ideals she embraced; to avenge herself, she kills Maksim when he is in his drunken stupor. Here, Bauer seems to parody the Symbolist Femme Fatale, who kills her lover after having satisfied her carnal thirst. The point of the parody would be to express compassion and empathy for his heroine. He shows that a real-life woman is far more complex than the Femme Fatale cliché. Vera, an upper-class girl, has little in common with that decadent image even though her avenging action superficially resembles it.

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89 This attitude was even theorized during the first years of the Soviet State and was known under the name of “The glass of water theory” (‘Teoriia stakana vody’). According to it, “to have sex” should be “as uncomplicated an act as drinking a glass of water.” Love and marriage were scorned as “remnants of bourgeois ideology.” A. Lunacharskii in his 1927 article “Molodezh i teoriia stakana vody” (‘Youth and the glass of water theory) debunked these ideas as undermining the moral foundations of Soviet youth (A. Lunacharskii. O byte. L., 1927. Print.)

90 See the Appendix.
4.3.2 *After Death* (‘Posle smerti,’ 1915)

*After Death* is another important film of Bauer’s. It again focuses on the “liquescent” female soul and its tragedies. The story is of the young actress, Zoia. She falls in love with the scientist Andrei, who comes to see her perform. When she realizes that her love for him is unrequited, she commits suicide. Only after her death does Andrei realize his own infatuation with her as her apparition starts haunting his dreams. Here Bauer, just as Musatov in his paintings, explores the thin borderline between the visible and the invisible, the physical world and the realm of the spiritual and the fluid interactions across the two spheres.

This film is interesting as a product of Silver Age aesthetics for several reasons. It establishes a link between Bauer, Borisov-Musatov and Bal’mont via Turgenev and the motif of emotional memory evocation. *After Death* is a screen adaptation of one of Turgenev’s late fantastic stories, “Klara Milich” (1883). The “delicate poetry” of Turgenev’s maidens living in decaying Russian country estates found its nostalgic representation in Borisov-Musatov’s paintings; the same motifs resonate in Bal’mont’s long poem “To Turgenev’s Memory” (‘Pamiat Turgeneva,’ 1893). Bauer, as a promoter of a new art form, was preoccupied with finding cinematic analogues to Turgenev’s subtle poetic representations of human (female) nature (Boele, 2010:254 – 255). The director succeeded in conveying the writer’s lyricism with cinematic means, which to a

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91 Bauer preserves this lyrical key in his conceptualization of Zoia, the filmic counterpart of Turgenev’s Klara Milich, even though Klara actually does not represent the type of the “Turgenevean girl.” Forceful Klara who approaches Aratov in quite an “unwomanly” fashion and who, after her death, virtually “rapes” him (Andrei in the film), “pulling” him into her other world (unless Aratov imagines it all). Zoia is a pure, delicate and overly emotional young girl, however.
great extent draw on painterly techniques, such as those pioneered by Borisov-Musatov. The theme of fluid emotional interaction between ghosts and live people across the threshold of the two worlds, via dreams and reminiscences, resonates across the oeuvre of all three artists. It is not fortuitous that three of their works have the same title: Apparitions/“Apparitions” (‘Prizraki’).

These three works are: Turgenev’s story (1864), which thematically anticipates his “Klara Milich” written a decade later in a more Gothic key; Bal’mont’s poem from the cycle In Boundlessness where he expresses nostalgia for his childhood, as the time when he could freely mix with mermaids frolicking in river waters. The poet claims that this fantasy life is vyshe istiny zemnoi,/ obol’stitel’nee zla,/ eta zhizn’ v tishi nochnoi,/ Eta prizrachnaia mgla (‘higher than earthly truth,/ and more seductive than evil,/ this life in the quiet of the night,/ This illusive mist’); and Musatov’s painting (1903), which communicates a mystery and conveys a vague feeling of grief and loss via the mournful ghostly figure moving towards the viewer on the canvas. These are the very motifs epitomized in Bauer’s film After Death.

The main hero, the scientist Andrei, is presented to the viewer via intertitles as a man “pure in soul and body” whose imagination is ruled by the image of his dead mother. Bauer uses this posthumous connection to introduce the motif of communication across the two spheres – the world of the living and the realm of the dead.92 In a point of view shot, i.e. a shot conveying his perspective, he meditates under a large lavishly framed photographic portrait of his mother hung on the wall above the mantle-piece. The

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92 This is another departure from Turgenev’s text, where Aratov does not mourn his long-dead mother in any excessive way.
elevated position of the picture, most part of which is above Andrei’s head, establishes the relationship between the son and his deceased mother: he looks up to her literally and metaphorically. She is the woman of his life with whom he has a strong spiritual bond across the threshold of death. This emphasis on transcendence places Bauer’s film firmly into the Symbolist context and establishes continuity across Symbolist genres and media via metaphor. The scene establishes the trope of looking up as the visual metaphor for connecting to the realiora spheres which were more real in Symbolist perception then the mundane physical world “below.” Thus, looking up in the context of the film equates breaking through into the unseen but more real dimensions of existence, intuited in emotional life or dreams.

Taking his cue from Turgenev, Bauer makes photography the path for Andrei to enter this unseen world. Aratov established contact with the dead Klara with the help of a stereoscopic photograph, and so does Andrei. As has been shown in the Musatov chapter, photography can be a liquescent art, which allows for emotional communications across the spheres when its potential as “writing with light” is extracted: in the process of developing an image on paper it emerges as if from within or behind it. (Later in the film, when Andrei falls in love with dead Zoia, Bauer has his Andrei project her picture on the wall where his own reflection is and thus put both of them in the shared space where the living and the dead can blend.) The scene of Andrei’s meditation under his mother’s portrait cuts to his dimly lit study/photo lab where he is shown to be developing a photograph in a tray filled with water. His deep emotional connection to his mother demonstrated in the previous mise en scène intercut with him immersing photographic paper (or the transparent negative film) into liquid, suggests his immersion into the liquid
realm of emotional memory. The viewer may surmise that the mother’s portrait had been taken by Andrei himself. He then holds the paper against light and looks at it intently as if trying to see through it into an invisible realm. The sequence pins down the intimate interrelation between photography, emotion, memory and water in a uniquely Symbolist key. Looking up while seized by a deep emotion, contextualizes the Symbolist aspirations to reach *Za predely predel’nogo, / K bezdnam svetloi bezbrezhnosti!* (‘Beyond the boundaries of the bounded, / to the depths of brightly shining boundlessness!’).\(^9^3\)

Yuri Tsivian, sees “the Russian (cinematic) product” as “preoccupied with feeling,” paradoxically emphasized via the immobility of the actors. The stronger the feeling, the more immobile the actor was supposed to be, pausing “as long as s/he could” to demonstrate the intensity and profundity of the emotion portrayed. The actor was supposed to “out-immobilize” his static surroundings, by making the atmosphere “vibrate.” The chiaroscuro ambiance of black and white film proved to be a versatile expressive tool in creating subtle shades of feeling. It contributed to achieving the liquecent emotional effect of characters being “immersed in their own private pain” (Tsivian, 1990:17 – 18).

To show “movements of the soul” via an otherwise static actor-figure, Bauer revolutionized the use of the close-up (Boele, 2010; Morley, 2010) as a powerful tool to portray the slightest stirrings of emotion. As already mentioned, Bauer’s close-ups were frequently anticipated by a tracking shot that explored expanses. *After Death* features a six seconds long extreme close up of the heroine’s face (preceded by a deep focus shot),

\[^9^3\] These are the opening lines in the final poem of Konstantin Bal’mont’s cycle *In Boundlessness.*
which embodies the idea of portraying movement through stasis. This close up has been analyzed from various perspectives in critical literature. My analysis will build on the idea of how a static close up uncovers movements of the soul, based on our understanding of the soul as a liquecent entity. Bauer uses close up to epitomize Zoia’s despair when she sees that Andrei had left the theater after her performance.

The scene is presented via a deep focus *mise en scène* with rows of chairs in the foreground occupied by people waiting for the performance to start. The stage shown from the stalls is equipped with a piano and adorned with exotic plants. The backstage is decorated with heavy drapes, which let the heroine out on stage through a narrow opening. The drapes cover unseen and hence mysterious space, which also could be seen in terms of underwater regions. Unlike the tracking, or dolly shot, in which the camera moves while the picture is being taken, in the theater scene the deep focus *mise en scène* makes the viewer’s eye do the tracking instead. The montage that cuts between such a shot and a close up thus cues the spectator to identify a metaphor: the face which appears on the screen after the “space exploration” shot projects the idea of profundity and boundlessness; the effect of elementality emanating from Zoia’s face is strong. The concept of boundlessness in its turn is part of the “sea complex,” or the rudimentary schemata, which account for our perceptions of the world, and the human domain in terms of water.

For several seconds we observe Zoia performing an emotional monologue from the stage, in the beginning of which she looks up, her eyes wide-open and her gaze unfocused. Via shot reverse shot technique and a subjective camera, Bauer shows Andrei’s transfixed gaze at Zoia from below, as she is naturally elevated above him on
the stage. Bauer thus establishes continuity between son–mother “vertical” interaction and Andrei’s realization that it can be replaced by a relationship with a living woman, in this case, Zoia. He as it were superimposes the transparent photographic negative of his mother’s image onto Zoia’s face. The two frames juxtaposed in the blended space of Andrei’s consciousness prove to be incompatible; the resulting inference is that his infatuation is wrong as it makes him betray the memory of his mother. This explains Andrei’s rejection of the living Zoia and his lethal lovesickness after her death.

The psychological effect a close up produces on the audience is different from the viewer’s reception of a painted portrait. David Denby, a New Yorker art critic, in his discussion of the disparity, notably uses an abundance of fluid terms. “Seen properly, the best early movies were a revelation, particularly the sight of actors in close-up - filling a screen fifty feet or more across the diagonal, they presented a new landscape of flesh that astonished viewers. Faces that large might have appeared on billboards, but they didn’t move - they didn’t tremble like a field of grain or surge like the sea. Roland Barthes comments on the moment in cinema when “capturing the human face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre, when the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced”” (2012). These observations can, without reservation, be applied to the close-up of Zoia’s face at the peak of her silent appeal to Andrei. The nature of the cinematic medium allows it to “tremble like a field” and “surge like the sea” while overwhelmed by emotion. We perceive that the actress makes a slight movement forward as if to stop Andrei, which is enough for her emotion to segue through the screen towards the viewer. As her yearning gaze cannot reach Andrei’s reciprocal
gaze - he is no longer there - it comes into fluid emotional interaction with the 
compassionate gaze of the viewer. In a few magic instants it is as if her face emerges with 
increasing clarity through invisible, but intuitively perceived fabric before it dissolves 
again in the darkness, foreshadowing the fatal outcome of the heroine’s infatuation. The 
darkness the actress’s face merges into demonstrates her total submergence in emotions 
she cannot control and which subsequently lead to her tragic end. The actress’s face so 
close up on the screen inevitably enters the intimate space of the viewer. Although Bauer 
was not the first to use close up as a cinematic means, he was definitely one of the first to 
employ it to epitomize psychological tension and inner conflict in the absence of physical 
movement on the screen (the face occupies it in its entirety). The emotion emanating 
from the actress’s wide open eyes can be described in fluid terms in Russian (using a 
loanword): *fluidy* is what in English is termed ‘emanations’; it designates an abstract, but 
perceptible, “flow” or “aura” that issues from a person. The Russian term in many cases 
marks reciprocity of emotional involvement. Such reciprocity, I argue, arises between the 
expressive face on the screen and the viewer, resulting in what I would term “emotional 
osmosis” across the screen. In biology, osmosis is the result of diffusion of two solutions 
of different concentration across a semi-permeable membrane. Transferred to the cinema, 
it is the screen which functions as a membrane. A similar effect is achieved in Musatov’s 
*The Emerald Necklace* and other paintings where the images seem to “percolate” through 
the texture of the canvas. The blending of real and imaginary spaces occurs via dreams. 

There are two prominent nocturnal dream sequences in the film. One is the scene 
where Zoia’s ghost comes to Andrei, who, too late, has realized his love for her. Within 
the limitations of the silent black and white cinema, Bauer manages to find means by
which to show fine distinctions between the real and the imaginary, for example, with
the help of different color filter. The director employs the blue color filter in shooting
Andrei’s bedroom to mark the sphere of the private, the subconscious and the imaginary,
which by contiguity is associated with underwater regions. The change of color filter
signals the hero’s transition into the world of his dreams, where he meets with Zoia’s
ghost. In After Death, the transition from the real space of the bedroom to the dreamed-up
space is made by the camera cutting to an open field of wheat slightly swaying in the
light wind. Andrei sees Zoia’s ghost, clad in a light white shroud-like tunic; the
psychological effect of slow, almost floating motion is achieved by Zoia’s moving out of
the depth of the scene towards Andrei. Zoia’s ghost arrives as if on the crest of a wave,
her own figure being the source of light. The lighting suggests she has emerged out of
thin air and is about to dissolve in it. In a slow prolonged motion Zoia beckons Andrei
with her waving sleeve to follow her back into the field or rather into the sea of light –
into boundless space. Subsequently, she moves away from us; the camera now represents
Andrei’s viewpoint and invites the viewer to identify with him as he follows Zoia as if
enthralled. With flowers woven into her loose hair she brings to mind imagery, which
blends Shakespeare’s Ophelia with the Russian folkloric rusalka, a drowned suicide who
lures men into drowning. Choosing the name Zoia, life, for his self-destructive heroine,
Bauer connects the two poles, life and death. This opposition, as was mentioned above, is
central to the sea-complex of a non-sea utterance. It is not surprising to the viewer that
the dead Zoia now appears as if alive in Andrei’s dreams, given the quasi-oceanic
settings.

The second dream sequence involves the audience more intensely into the
transcendent emotional experience. Andrei sees himself in the same field again, but this time he is lying in the field facing the audience. The scene is framed to only show his upper body as he is placed very close to the edge of the screen. He thus enters the intimate space of the viewer although his gaze is directed above and beyond the audience. Zoia appears from the same distance from behind him, and although Andrei does not see her we understand that he discerns her presence. Conveying intense agony, she stretches out her arms covered by a shroud-like tunic over Andrei’s head. We understand that their respective gaze is directed into the boundless distance but at the same time so intensely inward-looking as to convey the boundlessness of the emotion they share. Both are facing our way and although they are peering into the distance, past and beyond our heads, we as audience can empathize with and become intimately involved in their emotional struggle. This positioning of the characters on the screen in relation to the audience in the theater places it inside this liquid space of unrestricted emotionality. If, in the case of the heroine’s face looking directly at the viewer we can speak about emotional osmosis, then in the scene just described, the audience find themselves sharing the same physical space and becoming immersed in the emotion of transcendent longing for unattainable love.

4.3.3 *Daydreams* (‘Grezy,’ 1915)

Bauer made another film in the same year. The psychological romantic drama *Daydreams* is based on a novel by the Belgian Symbolist writer Georges Rodenbach
(1855 – 1898) entitled Bruges-the-dead (‘Bruges-la-Morte,’ 1892). Bauer adapts it to Russian reality. The central character of the film, Sergei Nikolaevich Nedelin, who mourns his young wife’s untimely death, unexpectedly meets her “living portrait” or uncanny double, the actress, Tina Viarskaia. Nedelin does not notice that there is no genuine inner resemblance between Tina and Elena, merely a superficial physical likeness. When Nedelin realizes that the vulgar Tina desecrates his memories of the pure Elena, he kills her.

The opening mise-en-scène features the deceased Elena, adorned by flowers, on her deathbed; she looks like Shakespeare’s Ophelia in pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist paintings. The inconsolable husband cuts a plait off her hair to remember her by. Evoking the water theme, the episode juxtaposes two contradictory frames – forgetting or

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94 The novel was also turned into the opera Die tote Stadt (‘The Dead City,’ 1903) by Erich Korngold.
95 Ophelias were painted by John Everett Millais (1851 – 1852), Alexandre Cabanel (1883), Lucien Levy-Dhurmer (1900) and Odilon Redon (1905) as floating on water. Ophelia by Paul Steck (1895) is shown sinking, in a “vertical” painting the length of which exceeds its width considerably.
96 From the Rodenbach text, it becomes evident that Bauer follows the writer in his conceptualization of the dead woman as Ophelia: “In the line of the canals, he was better able to see and hear her again, to discover her Ophelia face floating along, to listen to her voice in the high-pitched distant song of the carillon.” It is also clear, that for Hughes (Nedelin, in Bauer film) his dead wife and the city of Bruges, built near the sea and crisscrossed by a network of canals, blend, forming a gelid liquecent unity communicating morbidity: “Equally beautiful and beloved in its former days, the city was the virtual incarnation of Hughes’s own loss. Bruges was his wife, while she was Bruges. This was Bruges-la-Morte, the dead city, entombed in its stone quays, the arteries of its canals chilled to death at the cessation of the great heartbeat of the sea” (2007:24). Since the action in the film takes place not in Bruges but presumably in Moscow, the water theme, or water as a “substitute character” for the dead woman, does not play such an overt role as in the novel. The lyrical-elegiac mood, however, is preserved. Another prototype for Bauer could be found in Svidrigailov’s dream about the dead girl with flowers in her wet hair, possibly a suicide, and possibly someone who killed herself because she was wronged by the dreamer Svidrigailov. He dreams this dream within a dream the night before his own suicide.
sinking into oblivion (the metaphoric implications of drowning) and maintaining emotional memory, metaphorically conceptualized as rising to the surface (cf. the analysis of Bal’mont’s poetry). Nedelin’s determination to preserve the memory of his wife cancels the inference of forgetting. It instead foregrounds the inference that Elena has floated away into a different dimension beyond the threshold of death but will come back on the tidal wave of memory when Nedelin looks at the strand of hair in his possession. The philosophical assumption of the duality of the world presupposes the possibility of a return from the world of the dead back to life in the consciousness of the mourning person; this indeed happens to the startled Sergei when Elena “reappears” in front of him “under the name” of Tina Viarskaia. Tina is indeed very like the dead wife physically (the same actress plays both women) but not spiritually. The opening image of the film embedded into the Symbolist aesthetics of “duality” (life presupposes death and vice versa), thus, encapsulates the implication of the inevitable return, which sets the development of events along the Symbolist vector connecting the worlds of people and spirits. The contemporary viewer immersed in the aesthetics of Symbolism must have surmised that Nedelin was predestined to transcend to the realm of his deceased wife; the story provides the path to this goal – via another woman.

The deceased wife’s presence is ubiquitous in the space of Nedelin’s house. Her portraits facing the viewer from the walls look like mirrors, which reflect a living woman. This woman could in fact be part of the viewing audience: we can intuit her presence among us, or we can identify and hence merge with her. Nedelin, immersed into this ambiance of living memory, is shown via point of view shots, but it is the point of view of his dead wife. Elena’s omnipresence via –her images and the plait kept in a transparent
glass box creates the setting for Nedelin’s daydreams about her. His unfocused gaze of a grief-stricken lover reveals his fluid transition into a dream realm facilitated by the flow of emotional memory.

The conceptualization of memory as uncontrollable flow continues to unfold as the protagonist takes a stroll along the street, still completely immersed in memories and dreams. He transitions out of his house, which is infused with the memory of Elena, into the street as if on the crest of an emotional memory wave, which was first set off metaphorically inside his house by the memorabilia in it. This flow is simultaneously a vehicle and a path for the hero to reconnect with his loved one. We see Nedelin solitary drifting past the shops along the pavement shadowed by the awnings above the shop windows. The penumbra created in this manner stands for the twilight domain of emotional-sensuous memory. This transfer is further reinforced by the art nouveau décor of the shop windows: their biomorphic motifs mimic underwater vegetation, while their glass windows reflect and simultaneously distort the surrounding reality. The cityscape is transformed into a translucent and transient vision. This “altered” ambience suggests that in the protagonist’s mind objective reality merges with his subjective perception of it channeled through the emotions that overcome him and act as a catalyst for this “chemical reaction.” It is at this stage that Nedelin sees the young actress, Tina, who resembles his wife, or rather “becomes” his wife in his warped psyche. He turns around to follow her, as if in an attempt to turn back the memory flow and “grasp the disappearing shadow.” In his perception Tina now merges with or segues into Elena. This process is shown via cinematic dissolves. Merged into one form, the two women now present a blend, rather than doubles. The moment of recognition, when Tina passes by
Nedelin can be conceptualized in terms of a sweeping wave of emotion "hitting” him: he leans against a street-lamp pole and covers his face with his hand for a moment as if trying to protect himself from this sudden surge of emotion and wipe away any delusions. It is at that very moment that he enters their realm.

Nedelin goes to the theater to see the operatic play *Robert the Devil*, which combines elements of opera and ballet and in which Tina dances in the central role. In the theater scene we are shown how she rises from the grave together with other “dead” women and performs a silent dance in which she stretches her arms out to the audience. It is in this scene that the “merger” between the dead Elena and the living Tina is consolidated in Nedelin’s consciousness: he rises from his seat and paying no attention to the other people in the audience stretches his arms out to the actress. Their gestures mirror each other, but while he experiences the transcendent sensation of love regained, she just continues to act. Overwhelmed with emotion, Nedelin begins to pursue Tina.

Nedelin gains entrance to Viarskaia’s house where his dream to reconnect with Elena via Tina, or transcend to the realiora woman via a living one, comes true. The actress is lying on an ottoman immersed in reverie, when Sergei, with a bouquet of white roses, enters the scene through a door placed in the back of the mise-en-scène. The flowers serve as one more cue to the protagonist’s state of mind, which allows for the blending of Tina and Elena. In the opening scene, we saw Elena adorned by white flowers lying on her death-bed and white flowers is what he brings Tina whom, as we learn in the end, he murders. The intertitles show Nedelin’s exclamation about Tina being a “living portrait of Elena.” To increase the likeness Sergei undoes her hair, which flows down her shoulders. The viewer is reminded how important the plait of Elena’s hair is for
Nedelin. Tina’s flowing locks entrance him; we see an expression of bliss transforming his features. He does not see Tina’s facial expression however, her eyes betraying scheming and calculation. Tina’s cunning strategies for seducing Sergei evoke associations to a *rusalka*. The *rusalki* of folklore lure men into their watery depths to drown them in order to avenge their own unhappy love. This *rusalka* of the modern metropolis deceives for monetary gain.

Nedelin and Tina join their lips in a kiss, which act, in Russian, presents the two actants in liquecent terms. *Slit’sia v potselue* literally means “to flow together/interflow/merge/blend in a kiss.” It maps water ontology onto people overcome by erotic emotion. The idea of individual and reciprocal dissolving in emotion as well as deliquescing with each other is prepared by the ambience of Tina’s veranda where she is lying on her ottoman dreamily immersed in her own reverie. A slowly rocking tree branch in the upper right corner of the screen is not only indicative of the placement of the scene in the open air – it draws on what Toporov calls the “sea code” of a “non-sea” utterance. Here we can see the principle of the “sea element” at work: the rocking branch with its leaves slightly stirring serves as a metaphor for something that exists beyond the physical realm of water in the human realm of stirred emotions. Toporov claims that when we look at the foliage of the trees above us we reconnect with the rocking of the waves. The finale of the scene and its transition into the next one is made via “dissolving” the kissing lovers in a “black out” which is supposed to convey a state of mind close to loss of consciousness or a *puchina chuvstv* (literally, ‘abyss full of troubled waters, metaphorically, ‘abyss of feelings’) into which at least one of the lovers sinks. This immersion serves the purpose of establishing continuity between the scenes. In the
next shot Nedelin “emerges” sitting in his room (full of his wife’s portraits) in a state which could be understood as transcendence to a world invisible to us, but more real for the protagonist than surrounding reality; he is in the realiora space where he finally reconnects with his beloved Elena. His upward directed gaze, a motif we have previously encountered in Bauer films, indicates that it is not just a pleasant reverie about the past amorous encounter he is immersed in, but the experience of Symbolist transcendence which results from the blending of the desired and the real.

This moment does not last however as Nedelin is forced to see the discrepancy between Elena and Tina. After breaking up with Tina, justly considering her to be unworthy of his love, his gaze is once more directed upwards in the scene where Elena’s apparition visits Sergei. Shaken by the encounter with the apparition of his dead wife, he sinks into another “black out” dissolve, but then swings from death back to life again: in the next shot he “emerges” walking down a garden path embracing Tina. This oscillation from one woman to another shows his inner struggle and the difficulties he has in merging the two realities once he has seen the unworthiness of Tina. “Life” still has a powerful pull on him, however.

The final “break-up” between Nedelin and Tina comes when the actress in a fit of jealousy starts to mock Sergei’s attachment to his dead wife. She grabs the braid taken from the dead woman’s hair and kept in loving memory by Nedelin and dances around the room with it. Elena “watches” this scene from her portrait; her apparition appears before Nedelin and for a few instants merges with Tina in a point of view shot. There follows a short struggle, which ends with Nedelin strangling Tina with the braid, which she had thrown around her neck as a boa. This murder seems to be not only as his own
personal act of revenge, but also his wife Elena’s. Her apparition had several times appeared before Nedelin, apparently encouraging him to punish the impostor who had tried to take her place and mocked her memory with her irreverent handling of a memorabilia sacred to her mourning husband. The scene marks a symbolic break through, now from the world of the spirits into our reality.

In sum, the three Bauer films discussed in this chapter demonstrate what McReynolds calls “the revolutionary capability of movies to disrupt temporal and spatial sequences, to carry spectators around as if on some magic carpet not just through time and space but also through the characters’ conscious and unconscious” (2000:128). In other words film as a medium is well suited to represent the Symbolist notion of the world’s duality and liquescent boundary transgression. Early cinema’s interest in the human psyche tallies with contexts exploring the boundless via the bounded, and the highest reality of realiora through the human domain. Certainly Bauer’s art seamlessly merges with Symbolist aesthetics in any media.
Conclusion

Зеркало в зеркало, сопоставь две зеркальности, и между ними поставь свечу. Две глубины без дна, расчлененные пламенем свечи, самоуглубляются, взаимно углубляют одна другую, обогащая пламя свечи и соединяются им в одно. Это образ стиха. Две строчки напевно уходят в неопределенность и бесцельность, друг с другом несвязанные, но расцвеченные одной рифмой, и глянув друг в друга, самоуглубляются, связываются, и образуют одно, лучисто-певучее, целое. Этот закон триады, соединение двух через третье, есть основной закон нашей Вселенной. Глянув глубоко, направивши зеркало в зеркало, мы везде найдем поющую рифму.

Константин Бальмонт.

Mirror against mirror, confront two reflectivities, and place a candle in between. Two depths without bottom, colored by the flame of the candle, will self-deepen, and mutually deepen one another; they will enrich the candle flame and join together becoming one. This is the image of verse. Two lines, melodiously, are departing for indefiniteness and aimlessness; they are not connected but steeped in the same color by the rhyme; they look into each other and self-deepen, connect and form one luminous-melodious whole. This law of the triad, this connection of the two through the third element, is the fundamental law of our Universe. Looking deeply, pointing one mirror into the other mirror, we will everywhere find a singing rhyme.

Konstantin Bal’mont

My analysis of the three interactive media within Russian Symbolism has demonstrated that, no matter how innovative they are in their metaphorization, they “live by” the metaphors deeply ingrained in our human cognitive structures. As CMT and BT have

shown, primary structures of human psychology, including pre-natal ones, are reflected in the langue as concepts in image form. As such they are translatable into other “languages,” or codes. Symbolist aesthetics made wide use of this transferability, formulating their discoveries in this realm in artistic terms, such as Baudelaire’s, Verlaine’s, and Wagner’s “manifestos.” While my dissertation contributes to the existing discourses on conceptual metaphor and its multimodal uses, it has added several facets to the existing framework: it has traced the origins of the metaphoric blend fusing human and water ontologies, central to Symbolist poetics, in folklore and their manifestations in everyday language; it has analyzed the novel poetic extensions of the conceptualization in the poetry of Russian Symbolism exemplified by a poetic cycle by Bal’mont; it applied the theoretical framework from the field of cognitive linguistics to paintings by Viktor Borisov-Musatov and to films directed by Evgenii Bauer. It has also traced manifestations of the metaphor of “world liquescence” in the non-verbal media of painting and silent film in detail. It is by applying the principles of liquescent aesthetics that the dissertation further reinforces the vision of film as one of the important Symbolist arts although it was not considered as such by contemporary artists and audiences. I have also been able to draw innovative parallels between poetry and painting and demonstrated how “music” invisibly shapes all the arts of the times. I believe I have also been able to “rehabilitate” the poetry of Bal’mont, pointing to its consonance with the liquescence metaphor.

The arts of the Symbolism do not only conceptualize the human world in terms of water with its emphasis on the fluidity of all things, including apparently solid matter, but also implement the “water principle” in their treatment of the creative process itself. They
do so emphasizing liquescent interosclusion (interpenetration) of life and art forms and establishing spatio-temporal continuity across genre (Romanticism – Symbolism – Futurism). The dissertation has thus added to the existing spatial “geometric” dimensions of Symbolism that included a “vertical” connecting the here (earth) and there (celestial spheres) and the “circle” (they favored the wreath as a symbol of eternal return) by the notion of parallel lines meeting in “boundlessness,” an idea launched in Lobachevsky’s geometry and of course in Dostoevskii’s *Brothers Karamazov* (as Ivan explains it). In this “irrational” sphere, space and time seamlessly flow into each other. Velimir Khlebnikov adopted this idea, uniquely combining them with his orientation toward the folkloric roots of culture. He believed that a person is the intersection of these dimensions, being that “boundless space” and model of the universe which reflects it in the human microcosm, the same way a water drop reflects the ocean. His vision of world liquescence is very close to that of the Symbolists.

The dissertation has shown that the pantheism of the Symbolists and their striving to merge various national traditions as well as the notion that space and time are manifestations of the “oceanic feeling” is one of the factors which explain the extraordinary cultural fruitfulness of the Silver Age. This “blend” reveals itself in the individual experience of eternity and is perceived as the boundlessness of space and the inter-connectedness of all things on earth and cosmic spheres. The same pertains to the relationship between the visible and tangible, and the invisible, spiritual realities, which create a fluid continuum. Symbolist aesthetics could embrace these complexities by ignoring hard-edged borderlines and instead introducing the blurred contours of fusion.
The concept of the world’s duality is a cornerstone of Symbolism, which envisions our capacity to transcend the empirical, ascending to a grasp of the essence of life, following the trajectory *a realia ad realioram*. The poet Bal’mont, the artist Borisov-Musatov, and the film director Bauer whose oeuvre I have analyzed here posit the work of art as a borderline or point of contact, where those two worlds of the merely real and the truly real reveal their fluidity by merging or transgressing into each other. This duality establishes a blurry balance between the palpable and the ineffable, realism and symbolism. In sum, the three artists’ contributions to the notion of the “total work of art” mark a series of important discoveries across time, media, and genre. These discoveries, in turn, posit a conceptual unity between human and water ontologies.

Finally, the approaches I have used to bring these facets of Symbolist art out are inspired by CMT and BT as has been emphasized throughout the dissertation. In my view these are approaches which are extraordinarily fruitful when dealing with non-discrete cultural phenomena. Silver Age Culture is a “text” that as yet has barely been read in the terms of Conceptual Metaphor. Their application to it is bound to add innovative facets to a period much written about but far from exhaustively explored, especially in the area seen as its dominant: the metaphor.
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Appendix A. Khlebnikov’s Watercolors

*Iz kliuva sochitsia pesn’ li, polia li.*

1908

From the beak there exudes a song or perhaps it’s fields.\(^98\)

1908

Khlebnikov’s verse displays the poetic dominanta of world liquescence.\(^99\) It encompasses conceptualization of living matter, as well as time, as fluid substances, which percolate through and into each other. For Khlebnikov, liquescence means mutual permeability of all matter: the Earth and the Sky – *Zemlia uronila / Na lazurnye vody nebes / [...] tu penu...* (‘Earth overturned / Onto the azure waters of the Skies / [...] that foam…’); water and human feelings – *struina reka moei toski* (‘a purling stream of my melancholy’); water and human body – *chelo ozera* (‘forehead of the lake’); water and human life: *I v zhiznoem sebia my lili...* (‘And we poured ourselves into the life pool…’).

In the following poem about the ‘thee sisters’, *Neum’* (‘Little Mind’), *Razum’*

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\(^98\) Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Russian are my own.
\(^99\) The Khlebnikov poems selected for analysis are from the period 1904 – 1916; they are quoted from Volume I of Khlebnikov’s *Collected Works* (Khlebnikov, V. *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*. Moskva: IMLI RAN, “Nasledie,” 2000).

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(‘Great Mind’) и Bezum’ (‘No Mind’), dance is presented as a medium, “percolating through” which human bodies merge with each other and nature. “Gentle hands” and “gentle legs” account for the absence of hard-edged outlines, and for the presentation of bodies as “blurring” into each other and fusing with the spatiotemporal background: Ruki neznye svilis’, / Nogi neznye vzvils’, / vse krugom splelos’, svolos’, / V viazkoi manne rasplylos’ (‘Gentle hands entwined, / Gentle legs took flight, / Everything merged, twined, blurred in viscid manna,’ 1907). Visual and aural perceptions in Khlebnikov often extend into each other: color can gradually turn into sound percolating through invisible filters. In an autobiographical note (‘Avtobiograficheskaia zapiska’), the poet wrote:

Так, есть величины, с изменением которых синий цвет василька (я беру чистое ощущение), непрерывно изменяясь, проходя через неведомые нам, людям, области разрыва, превратится в звук кукования кукушки или в плач ребенка, станет им (Khlebnikov, 1990: 15).

There are variables, with the changing of which the blue color of a cornflower (I am speaking about a pure sensation), permanently changing, going through unknown to us, people, breakdown areas, will turn into a cuckoo’s cuckooing sound or into a child’s cry, becoming this sound.

Khlebnikov’s neologisms, based on new morphological combinations and various forms of paronomasia, include metaphors of the liquecent permeability of matter, such as the saturation of a body with time. In the following example, it is a bird which undergoes metamorphosis. Khlebnikov names it vremir’. The word vremir’ conflates
vremia (‘time’) and snegir’ (‘bullfinch’). The liquescence of these birds collectively, as a flock, as well as their fusion with time, is expressed through the sound of their song, which, as all music, has a temporal implication/component: Staia legkikh vremirei! [...] V serdtse vkhodish’, kak volna (‘A flock of light timefinches! [...] [You] enter the heart like a wave’).

Khlebnikov’s oceanic feeling is revealed in his abundant use of water imagery as applied to the human soul and time. It contributes to the perception of his poetry as watercolor. The poet’s commingling of time and space, visual and auditory perceptions, the action and the doer of the action, observed by R. Jakobson (Ivanov, 2000:53), allows us to envisage his watercolors as made in a wet in wet technique. Protekaiushchaia raskraska (color extending beyond outline), a technique ascribed to Khlebnikov’s visual painting (Markov, 1968:36), presupposes the methodical repetition of the same color or shade, which demonstrates ‘the movement of color’, its fluidity. Protekaiuschaia raskraska is first found in Russian icons as a distinctive artistic trend; it is there manifested by glaring highlights, which extend beyond the outline of the saints’ clothes and merge with the background (Tarasov, 1992). In Khlebnikov’s ‘visual-verbal painting-poetry,’ color extends beyond outline in all four dimensions of his poetic space: length, width, depth and time. The interplay of the positive and negative spaces in watercolor creates the atmospheric perspective, which stands as a metaphor for time in visual art. A close analysis of Khlebnikov’s visual painting in terms of watercolor “disproves” Jakobson’s assertion that, “while time has been made ideographic in painting by

100 “Positive space” is an art term denoting the space filled with color; “negative space” is created by painting the area around a form instead of the form itself, which is left blank.
presenting it in terms of physical space as an artistic convention, the poetic language is still resistant to appropriation of time and space as its forms” (Ivanov, 2000:38).

The poet’s vision of time is metaphysical: his universe persists across space and time rather than exists “beyond them” (Ivanov, 2000:195). We can observe Khlebnikov’s first attempts to amalgamate space and time in his famous poem “Boboebi” (1908-1909) (Khlebnikov, 2000:198), which paints a portrait with sounds that function as color. The poet uses painting as spatial art and synthesizes it with sound, which, like music, is a temporal art. The liquescence of the human image is underscored by the poem being sung. The meter imitates the rhythm of waves rolling onto the shore, which movement underscores the fluidity of the facial features, referred to in the poem:

Бобоеби пелись губы,  
Вээоми пелись взоры,  
Пиээо пелись брови,  
Лиээй пелся облик,  
Гзи-гзи-гээо пелась цепь.  
Так на холсте каких-то соответствий  
Вне протяжения жило лицо.

Khlebnikov considered “Boboebi” to be one of his major “short works,” which employed “painting by sound.” In his poetic pursuits, he was guided by C. Baudelaire’s ideas about correspondences between sounds and colors, also reflected in A. Rimbaud’s sonnet “Vowels.” In 1922 the poet wrote:

Еще Малларме и Бодлер говорили о слуховых соответствиях слова и глаза, слуховых видениях и звуках, у которых есть словарь. <…> Б имеет ярко-
Mallarmé and Baudelaire had already spoken about sound correspondences between word and eye, aural visions and sounds, which have a dictionary of their own. ... B is of a bright red color, hence, lips are bobeobi; veeomi is blue, hence, eyes are blue; piieo is black.

The following poem, “Gody, liudi i narody...” (‘Years, people and peoples…,’ 1916) (Khlebnikov, 2000:379), was Khlebnikov’s tribute to the 100th anniversary of Gavriil Derzhavin’s death. It clearly shows that the poet unites people and time by the idea of liquescence. The flexibility of nature, presented as “an elastic mirror,” which reflects the movement of human ‘streams of water’ through flowing time, pertains to the world’s primal origin in water.

The poem is in dialogue with the perception of time in Derzhavin’s last poem “Reka vremen v svoem stremlen’i…” (‘The river of times in its flowing…’), which the poet wrote three days before he died. Derzhavin reportedly was looking at the map entitled “Reka vremen ili emblematicheskoe izobrazhenie sovremennoi istorii” (‘The river of times, or the emblematic depiction of modern history’), which was hanging on the wall of his study (Khlebnikov, 2000:523).
Derzhavin foregrounds the destructive aspect of water presenting time as a cataclysmic force. Khlebnikov implicitly polemicizes with his predecessor by laying emphasis on the undulatory nature of time (‘volnovoia priroda vremeni’) (Davydov), a concept he favored. According to this concept, time develops in cycles, and between these cycles there is a pre-determined number of days, or years. Since poetic language marks a deviation from the linguistic norm and conventional visual perception, it is able to convey this unique concept; Khlebnikov lets his reader perceive the present moment as a simultaneous locus of both past and future.

There are two more possible subtexts for the Khlebnikov poem mentioned in the notes to his Selected Works. These are D. Merezhkovskii’s novel Iulian Otstupnik (‘Julian the Apostate,’ 1895) and an ancient Alexandrine text Fiziolog (‘Physiologos,’ 2-3 century AD), a collection of articles about animals and stones. One of Merezhkovskii’s characters, the Neoplatonist Iamvlikh [Iamblichus], likens the world, the sun and the stars to a seine. He observes that the world strives toward, but cannot grasp God, just like a moving seine cannot hold water: Chemu upodobliu etot mir, vse eti solntsa i zvezdy? Seti upodobliu ikh, Zakinutoi v more. Set’ dvizhetsia, no ne mozhet ostanovit’ vodu; Mir khochet, no ne mozhet ulovit’ Boga.
In *Fiziolog*, the world is presented as sea and people as fish, who become entrapped by demons into a net of baneful and evil desires: *More zhe – ves’ mir, a ryby - liudi. [...] rybaki zhe – eto besy. Set’ zhe – eto paguba i l’stivye vozhdeleniia...* (Khlebnikov, 2000:524).

As we can see, Khlebnikov uses pre-existing ancient conceptualizations in order to convey the idea of commingling and interpenetration of natural elements: water, people and time. Water is a prototypical mirror. Mapping the image of a mirror onto nature, the author suggests that water is the substance of life. Permeability is the most important quality that allows water to persist through time and space and to circumvent obstacles. Most prominent consonant sounds in the Russian word for “mirror” (‘zerkalo’) are “liquids” - /r/ and /l/. The whole poem is permeated by this liquid consonantal imagery. The sound pattern of the poem suggests that Khlebnikov’s water is not stagnant or polluted, but primordially pure and transparent; the clusters of voiced consonants create the image of a cheerful and boisterous water flow. The poet draws on our traditional conceptualization of time as water and hence a moving entity: time is flowing through space as a water stream flows through a landscape. The poem shows that in our consciousness, people individually and collectively (as ethnos), time and water belong to the same conceptual area. This metaphorical conceptualization of people as water, which persists through space and time, emerges in such conventional expressions as *liudskoi potok* (‘stream of people’), *utechka mozgov* (‘brain drain’) and others. The human world and nature appear to be mirrors put one in front of the other: as a result we can observe an almost infinite number of reciprocal reflections, or cross-mappings, between the two

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domains. For example, a verb of motion from the human domain *ubegaiut* (‘run away’) in the poem is applied to water and then water imagery is immediately mapped onto the human domain. Since people and time are like water, it is justified to equate them. Time, as a category of human reality, becomes tangible at the points of contact with the human domain.

The second part of the poem, in just three lines on the verbal level and a single watercolor wash on the visual plane, grasps the unity of human life and the Cosmos. The image of a “seine made of stars” suggests that people are subject to the cosmic tides caused by the combined effects of the rotation of the Earth and the gravitational forces exerted by the Moon and the Sun. So, the seine in the poem corresponds to the tide as a pulling force. The image of the seine made of stars makes the abstract idea of gravitation very visual. A seine is a net, the ends of which are drawn together to encircle the fish: the metaphor entails that human beings are entrapped in the mystery of life cycles and have to yield to cosmic rhythms.

The next excerpt is taken from the poem “Lasok…” (‘Weasels…,’ 1916),

which was initially entitled “Oshibka smerti” (‘Death’s mistake’). Water imagery in this

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101 This translation of the first word in the poem is the one given in the Commentary to Volume I of Khlebnikov’s *Collected Works*. In folk belief, a weasel can act as a witch, a shape shifter, who is able to turn into a maiden (2000:524). The word *lasok* is ambiguous, however: although it could be understood as the genitive plural form of *laska* [weasel] followed by a reference to these animals’ chests seen amidst grass, it can also be interpreted as an elliptical construction with the meaning of ‘caressing [someone’s] breasts amidst grass,’ as it is followed by a clear reference to a woman the poet loves. Homonymy, which merges two senses in one word, plays for the watercolor effect, so all-pervasive in Khlebnikov. This type of homonymic pun is also found in the title of the famous manifesto *Sadok Sudei*, which may mean either [trap for judges] or [hatchery of judges].
The sound pattern of the poem reflects Khlebnikov’s views on sound symbolism, which he presents in his article “Perechen’. Azbuka uma” (Catalogue. The alphabet of the mind, 1916). According to Khlebnikov, the recurrent /zh/ sound communicates the idea of independent movement and accounts for the concept of inherent liquescence, as in Russian words zhidkii (‘liquid’), zhivoi (‘lively’), zhabry (‘gills’), zhaba (‘toad’), zhazhda (‘thirst’). The poet underscores the equation between water and time by the example of the intrinsic connection between zhdat’ [wait] and zhazhdat’ (‘have thirst for/be desire’):

Ж – свобода двигаться независимо от соседей. Отсюда жидкй и живой, и все около воды: жабры, жаба, жажда. В древнем рассудке между водой и
вре́мением (прошедшим) прозябну́а черта равенства. Отсюда родство жёдать и жаждать (2000:524).

Zh – [marks the] freedom to move independently of neighbors. Hence, liquid and live, and everything [that is] by the water: gills, toad, thirst. In the ancient mind, a line of equation stretched out between water and time (the past). Hence, the kinship between wait and have thirst for/desire (2000:524).

The poet’s reference to the “watery” woman he loves and drains in one gulp to quench his thirst, illustrates, on the one hand, the traditional conceptualization of humans and human feelings as water and liquid, and, on the other hand, emphasizes the female nature of fluidity and ever-shifting water. The combination of water imagery with the image of a clock again points to the metaphysical connection between time and water. This interplay is made even more complex as clocks here obviously stand for human eyes, which, are conceptualized as the mirror of the soul in the Russian tradition: glaza – zerkalo dushi. A ‘mirror image’ is also present in a “shield of purling pine needles”, because a shield, with its polished metallic surface, can also serve as a mirror. Russian khvoia (pine needles) is a mass noun (‘sobiratel’noe sushchestvitel’noe’), which allows to present needles as a liquid substance or a mirror. Hence, this poem also conceptualizes nature as a “flexible mirror”. According to Toporov, an evergreen pine tree is a symbol of immortality and eternal rebirth. Behind this symbol, there is always the antinomy of the sea, which connects the two poles: life and death. Such conifers as a fir tree (used for the symbolic Christmas tree), a cedar, a larch, are incarnations of the “world tree” or “tree of life”, but at the same time, they are attributes of funeral rites, symbolizing “life falling off” (1995:587 - 591). This makes the final image of the excerpt clear: “striking the
shield of purling needles” serves to mark a point where the life cycle has made a full circle. It presents a transition from the world of the living to the world of the dead as a natural event. The image of a young woman’s open eyes, “blue clocks” filled with the water of life, is intercut with “old women’s eyes closed tight,” i.e. life and youth symbolism is juxtaposed to the imagery of ageing and death. The abundant presence of water in the poem helps to draw the following inference: as in a hydrological cycle, when water at some point turns into vapor, death does not presuppose complete disappearance, but only a change of state. Thus, a human life, to use a watercolor metaphor, “extends beyond its outline” and protekaet into a new dimension.

The idea of the world’s duality and the two worlds’ mirroring each other in nature, which, I have closely examined above, is central for Khlebnikov and the Symbolists, so closely united by their pantheistic vision of the Universe. It is also fundamental for the understanding of metaphor as the central human cognitive ability to relate the physical and the metaphysical through personal experience and empirical observation, as well as spiritual revelation.