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Myth — History — Utopia: Vladimir Sorokin's *Ledianaia trilogiia* and Daniil Andreev's *Roza Mira*

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It is often considered that the novel *Lëd*, when published in 2002, marked a new stage in Vladimir Sorokin's writings. The previously prevalent conceptualism and stylizations along with the writer's trademark ironical stance now gave way to a focus on the story.¹ This development was commented by Sorokin himself in an interview where he also stated that this was a novel "about the quest for a lost spiritual paradise" (о поисках утраченного духовного рая).²

Although the novel originally was published as a finished work, the mythological creation developed in the novel did not loosen its hold of the writer but kept evolving. Furnished with a prequel *Put' Bro* in 2004, the trilogy was completed in 2005 with the final part *23 000* included in one-volume publication simply entitled *Trilogiia*. However, the second edition from 2008 was renamed to *Ledianaia trilogiia*, which should be considered as the final text.³ Within this new context the properties of the original novel have changed.

I would like to argue that Vladimir Sorokin in his *Ledianaia trilogia* has created a spiritual and mythological concept that on crucial points is very much indebted to the Russian mystic Daniil Andreev and his religious-philosophical work *Roza Mira* (The Rose of the World).

Sorokin's work not only draws on the imagery of *Roza Mira*, but also on Andreev's attempt to create a meta-historical and Utopian structure in order to reach beyond history itself and its problematic relationship to human ethics. By establishing a position outside history, contemporary life and history can be projected and problemized. However, whereas Andreev took on a larger historical perspective, Sorokin focuses on the Soviet and post-Soviet historical development.

The story of the trilogy unfolds against a background of a mythological concept of 23 000 rays of a "Primordial Light" (Изначальный свет), that shone in the universe and created planets until they suddenly by mistake were transformed into organic forms of life on planet Earth. Through evolution they became humans and were later on scattered across the planet. However,

¹ For an analysis of different periods in Vladimir Sorokin's writing, see: Dirk Uffelmann, "Lëd tronulsia: The Overlapping Periods in Vladimir Sorokin's Work from the Materialization of Metaphors to Fantastic Substantialism", in Ingunn Lunde & Tine Roesen (eds.), *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Slavica Bergensia 6). Bergen, 2006, pp. 100-125.

² Boris Sokolov, *Moia kniga o Vladimire Sorokine*. Moskva: AIRO, 2005, p. 129. My translation, *M.Å.*

³ *Ledianaia trilogiia* is slightly rewritten and should therefore be seen as supplanting the previous version *Trilogiia*. It could also be noted that the development of the trilogy was made through three different publishing houses. Whereas *Lëd* was published by Ad Marginem, *Put' Bro* and *Trilogia* came out on Zakharov, while the final version is the product of Astrel'.

remnants of the Primordial light reincarnate and lie dormant in the hearts of 23 000 chosen ones. These hearts can only be awoken by ice from the core of the Tunguska meteorite that fell in Siberia in 1908 as it also contained this light.

Through the larger part of *Lēd* we follow the search for new members of this Brotherhood of light (Братъя Света), and their subsequent awakening. The narrative is structured on the threshold between reality and myth through the contrasts between three protagonists' everyday life in Moscow, characterized by darkness, anxiety, violence, criminality and abuse, and their new life with the brotherhood after their hearts have been awoken. This Utopian realm is, contrary to the outside Moscow locality, characterized by light, harmony, respect, and love.

The quest for a new spirituality to unite a world torn apart by revolution, repression and world wars concerned the Russian thinker, poet, and mystic Daniil Andreev in his masterpiece *Roza Mira* (1950-1958). Daniil Andreev and his legacy belongs, to quote Mikhail Epstein, "to those historiosophical and cosmosophical movements of Russian thought which synthesize natural sciences, social utopias in a kind of occult superknowledge that claims the power to transform the world".⁴ In Andreev's writings there is, in particular, a discernable connection to Russian religious thinkers such as Vladimir Solov'ëv, Nikolai Berdiaev, Pavel Florenskii and Sergei Bulgakov.⁵

During the Second World War Daniil Andreev was conscripted into the army (as a noncombatant), but was, after returning to civil life, arrested in 1947, accused of a terrorist plot against Stalin and anti-Soviet propaganda and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment. It was during his incarceration in Vladimir Central prison that he began to hear voices that dictated *Roza Mira* to him. Released in 1957 he lived for another two years, enough to organize and complete the manuscript, which remained unpublished until 1991 when the first complete edition of *Roza Mira* was published by Prometei.⁶ However, it had circulated in *samizdat* copies long before that, and this was the form in which Vladimir Sorokin allegedly first got to read it.⁷

Roza Mira is a complex work where Andreev addresses a wide range of social, moral, environmental, historical and theological questions. Structurally, it is divided into twelve books on separate topics. These include: a biographical part, explanations of his metahistorical methodology, detailed elaborations on the metacultural structure of the world, analyses of Russian history, along with apocalyptic visions. Since the collapse of the Soviet regime left a metaphysical vacuum, the publication was timely and lent Andreev's work a ready audience upon publication. Therefore, it could be argued, it has rather become a phenomenon of the post-Soviet culture, a means of looking at the Soviet era from "outside".⁸

In Andreev's eclectic religious thinking, there is a discernable Gnostic affinity, as is there in

⁴ Mikhail Epstein, "Daniil Andreev and the Mysticism of Femininity," in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 325.

⁵ Svetlana Semënova, "Pis'mena o preobrazhenii mirom," *Daniil Andreev v kul'ture XX veka*, Moscow: Mir Uranii, 2000, p. 80. See also: Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, p. 9.

⁶ Epstein, p. 328.

⁷ See: Vladimir Sorokin, "Vstrecha," *Snob*, [<http://www.snob.ru/selected/entry/17100>] (Accessed 17 Aug. 2010).

⁸ See: Igor' Kondakov, "Daniil Andreev v istorii russkoi kul'tury," *Daniil Andreev v kul'ture XX veka*. Moscow: Mir Uranii, 2000, p. 75.

Ledianaia trilogiia.⁹ Keywords such as "Light" and "harmony" in a metaphorical and mystical sense, as well as the central idea of illumination of the true essence of things through an inner process that Sorokin's Brothers of the Primordial Light experience are essential in Gnostic writings.

However, the artistic representation of this experience in *Ledianaia trilogiia* has more in common with Daniil Andreev's imagery than with most Gnostic texts. This is particularly the case as concerns the function and the mystical properties of the heart. For the Brotherhood in *Ledianaia trilogiia* it is the heart that conceals the true nature of things and has to be awoken. The ritualistic beating with the Tunguska ice seems to be effective only if accompanied by the repetitive incantation "говори сердцем". And indeed, something does start to speak from inside the heart of the chosen ones.

According to Daniil Andreev the path to knowledge about the hidden reality occurred through an inner process of communication that he described in a similar manner:

Разговаривали ли они со мной? Да. Слышал ли я их слова? И да, и нет. Я слышал, но не физическим слухом. Как будто они говорили откуда-то из глубины моего сердца.¹⁰

Moreover, this tongue is not of this Earth. In Andreev's visions as well as in the awakening of Sorokin's brothers and sisters of the Primordial Light are the messages conveyed in a cosmic language. What Andreev calls "Светоязык" (p. 163) has a strikingly resembling equivalent in Sorokin's use of "язык Света", or, interchangeably, "язык Сердца".

Сердца наши стали говорить между собой. Это был язык сердец. Он соединял их. Это было *блаженство*. Никакая земная любовь, прежде испытанная мною, не могла сравниться с этим чувством. Сердца наши *говорили* неведомыми, им одним понятными словами. Сила Света в каждом слове. Радость Вечности звучала в них.¹¹

Thus, the whole spiritual ideal that Sorokin creates in *Ledianaia Trilogiia* is enacted through the heart. The next quotation is from *Roza Mira*, but it could just as well have been from Sorokin's trilogy were it not for the prison setting. In this description by Andreev we find representations of almost every emotional aspect in the rebirth of the members of Sorokin's brotherhood.

Встречи случались и днём, в людной тюремной камере, и мне приходилось ложиться на койку, лицом к стене, чтобы скрыть поток слёз захватывающего счастья. *Близость одного из великих братьев вызывала усиленное биение сердца и трепет*

⁹ For an analysis of Gnostic motifs in *Lēd*, see: Andrei Levin, "Sokrovennyi Lēd: Manikheiskie i gnosticheskie motivy v romane V. Sorokin 'Led'," *Setevaia Slovesnost'*, [http://www.netslova.ru/ab_levin/led.html] (Accessed 20 July 2010).

¹⁰ Daniil Andreev, *Roza mira*. Moscow: Eksmo, 2006, p. 89. Henceforth referred to as *Roza Mira*.

¹¹ Vladimir Sorokin, *Ledianaia Trilogiia*. Moscow: Astrel'/AST, 2009, p. 91. Italics in the original. Henceforth referred to as *Ledianaia trilogiia*.

торжественного благоговения. Другого всё моё существо приветствовало тёплой, нежной любовью, как драгоценного друга, видящего насквозь мою душу и любящего её и несущего мне прощение и утешение.¹²

The family metaphor (*brat'ia*), the beating heart, love, happiness, the transparency of the soul, and the crying (which in Sorokin's case is repeatedly referred to as "the heart's crying" (плач сердца), along with the sincerity and non-carnal intimacy bear a striking similarity to the blessed state of the brothers in *Ledianaia trilogiia*.

The mythological realm, as metaphorically represented by light and the heart, is used in both works to elaborate on the concept of love. In stark contrast to these manifestations of truly desirable relations and emotions stand the depictions of the ordinary and flawed day-to-day life where love is reduced to sex, and sex is reduced to humiliation. In Sorokin's case this is represented in the Moscow scenes in *Lëd* where he does not spare the reader the details of an enormous emotional void, in comparison to which the realm of the Brotherhood indeed could be perceived as desirable.

People lead a flawed life because they cannot love. Through *Ledianaia trilogiia*, this is one of the pivotal points in the Brotherhood's critique of humanity. And even here, in their critique, there is a striking resemblance of the critique as posed by Daniil Andreev.

Against the concept of true love — "божественный голос любви" in Andreev's words, or "настоящая божественная любовь" in Sorokin's — stands the earthly, carnal love, which is depicted in an almost similar manner. The most frequent words, repeated over and over again, by both writers are "страсть" and "похоть", and while Sorokin's protagonists dismiss human love as merely "жажда обладания чужим телом" (p. 398), Andreev sees its utmost manifestation in "садизм и сексуальное людоедство" (p. 781). Perhaps surprisingly, it is Andreev and not Sorokin who talks about sadism and sexual cannibalism, but those concepts are certainly not alien to Vladimir Sorokin's poetics. As concluding remarks, Andreev and Sorokin depict human carnal love as:

<i>Roza Mira</i> :	«Величайшая мерзость» (p. 562) ¹³
<i>Ledianaia trologiia</i> :	Величайшее зло (p. 399)

However, the perhaps most important function of Sorokin's mythological construct is to create a position to review the Soviet and Russian 20th century history from outside.¹⁴ Deconstruction and mocking Soviet and totalitarian myths have been recurring themes in his works, but in *Ledianaia trilogiia* Sorokin applies a somewhat different strategy. It is quite likely that Sorokin felt a strong

¹² *Roza Mira*, p. 88. (Italics are mine).

¹³ Andreev here quotes Vladimir Solov'ëv.

¹⁴ For an analysis of totalitarian discourses in *Ledianaia trilogiia*, see: Mattias Ågren, "Den totalitära myten: Vladimir Sorokins *Trilogija*", in Ingunn Lunde & Susanna Witt (eds.), *Terminal Øst: Totalitære og posttotalitære diskurser*. Oslo: Spartacus, 2008, pp. 75-87.

kinship with the ideas expressed in Daniil Andreev's writings. Even though written in prison during the last years of Stalin's rule and the first years of de-Stalinization *Roza Mira* is a surprisingly frank account of the horrors of revolution, terror and world war, and particularly a very sharp critique of the image of Stalin himself.

Daniil Andreev poses his critique from the perspective of his metahistorical outlines and insights. This meta-historical approach is repeated by Sorokin, where the inner enlightenment unveils human history in its entirety.

What Daniil Andreev described as a: "Внутреннее событие ... связанное как бы с панорамой всего человечества и с переживанием Всемирной истории как единого мистического потока...",¹⁵ Sorokin's protagonist Bro experienced thus: "И увидел я сердцем историю человечества."¹⁶

In his "quest for a lost spiritual paradise" Sorokin benefitted from the meta-historical possibility as a device made possible through Andreev's Utopian work, and I believe that it was precisely this possibility that he deemed demanded further elaboration. The prequel to *Lěd, Put' Bro*, could be seen as development in this direction. As a first-person narrative, it stands out from the rest of the trilogy. It tells the story of Snegirëv, the first brother whose heart was awoken. Snegirëv was born in 1908 and his autobiographical tale about his way to illumination has striking similarities to the (also autobiographical) second book of *Roza Mira*. Apart from being first-person narrations, the two tales are told in the same matter-of-fact tone, span over roughly the same decades of Soviet history and make the same kind of historical comments on major events and famous Bolshevik politicians.

While Daniil Andreev pursued a spiritual renewal and, ultimately, the redemption of mankind, the mythological concept developed in Sorokin's trilogy has a problematic consequence. By predestination, there is no room for man. The Brotherhood wants to be rays of light once more, but this transformation will also bring about an apocalyptic end of the world.

И двадцать три тысячи братьев и сестер вновь обретут друг друга. И когда найдется последний из двадцати трех тысяч, вы встанете в кольцо, соедините руки, и двадцать три раза ваши сердца произнесут двадцать три слова на языке Света. И Свет Изначальный проснётся в вас и устремится к центру круга. И вспыхнет. И Земля, эта единственная ошибка Света, растворится в Свете Изначальном. И исчезнет навсегда.¹⁷

Even in this apocalyptic vision Sorokin is seemingly influenced by *Roza Mira* where the end of the world is envisioned as:

Будет подан знак о том, что наступает время соединения всех оставшихся в живых братьев Света в одной точке на поверхности земли. Преодолевая все препятствия, сто

¹⁵ *Roza Mira*, p. 82.

¹⁶ *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, p. 183.

¹⁷ *Ledianaia Trilogiia*, pp. 85-86.

или двести верных соберутся воедино, и последний из верховных наставников возглавит их. В Откровении Иоанна это место названо по-еврейски — «Армагеддон».¹⁸

The free will, which for Andreev was a most important redeeming force, plays no role in Sorokin's trilogy until he introduces two new protagonists in the third part *23000*, an American woman, Ol'ga Drobot, of Russian-Jewish descent and a Swede, Björn Wassberg. With their introduction, Sorokin re-inscribes human ethics, and by this alteration of the picture he presents a new perspective from which the brotherhood can be viewed from outside. However, the spiritual superstructure of the brotherhood does not stand this test, and the anticipated Apocalypse means the end, not of mankind, but of the Brotherhood of the Primordial Light.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately the fate of the world, and of mankind, lies in the will of choice. This was central to Andreev's vision. It is also what is missing in the deterministic and excluding concept of the Brotherhood of Light, which Vladimir Sorokin created in *Lëd*.

The experiment of the search for a spiritual paradise that Vladimir Sorokin made in *Lëd*, was heavily (though perhaps to some extent unconsciously) indebted to Daniil Andreev's Utopian concepts in *Roza Mira*, both by the use of metaphorical constructions, and the metahistorical approach as a device. However, while a Utopian text was used to unhinge history in order to pursue an ethical perspective in *Roza Mira*, Sorokin's project was marked with ambiguity.

Thus, as Sorokin's initial novel was expanded into a trilogy, this development underscored the indebtedness to Daniil Andreev, and perhaps this affinity is a key to understanding why the concept of the Primordial Light kept its hold of the writer, up to the point when he realized that he had completely written off the role of man and, as a consequence, needed to destroy his own spiritual concept.

Still, this destruction was possible only by the re-inscription of man. Through two truly positive — and truly human — protagonists, something which has not been a defining feature in Vladimir Sorokin's poetics, the endeavour to pursue a spiritual renewal may still not have been in vain.

¹⁸ *Roza Mira*, p. 784.