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A Symbolist under Soviet Rule: Sologub's Late Poetry

Что для рабочего клуба
выросло из Сологуба?
Majakovskij (1955, XII, 151)

Most literary critics mark the end of Russian symbolism by 1910 – and they have good reason to do so. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that literary epochs do not end abruptly and that history of literature is a construct of theoreticians who are forced to structure their topic into chapters. As a consequence, a writer whose development does not correspond with comfortable "isms" often falls out of the neat schemes of the academic administration of literature. A case in point is Fedor Sologub, who after the "end" of Russian symbolism continued to produce Symbolist poetry until his death in 1927. His entire work appears to be so consistent that Xodasevič spoke of him as a poet without any evolution (1939, 168; cf. Aničkov 1923, 81). This view was shared by Blok and Gumilev who complained about the endless repetitions in Sologub's poems (1960, VIII, 152; Lavrov 1989, 165); Kornej Čukovskij went so far as to maliciously characterize Sologub's work as "preservation of expired inspirations" (1964, VI, 347).

However, such an interpretation may be too simplistic. The first attempts at a periodization of Sologub's poetry were undertaken only in the 1970's and stem from the Structuralist School of Tartu. Minc and Pustygina identified 7 periods in Sologub's work (1975, 150 f.):

1. 1890's: a grotesque view of provincial reality which includes both nightmares and ideals.
2. beginning of the 1900's: a romantic conception of two worlds, which distinctly splits the real from the ideal.
3. 1906-1907: active mythmaking and creation of a personal myth (Don Quixote)
4. 1908-1909: ironic destruction of his own myth
5. 1910-1913: Attempt at overcoming Symbolist aesthetics and approach to expressionism (Andreev) and ego-futurism (Severjanin)
6. 1914-1917: Patriotic plays and stories during the war
7. 1918-1926: Attempted return to the symbolistic myth

Sologub could already look back on a lengthy evolution with both successes and failures when he entered the last decade of his life. By then, Sologub was the well known author of five novels, seven volumes of verse, twelve plays and more

than ninety stories. His works had been collected in two editions (12 vols. [Sirin] 1909-1912; 20 vols. planned, 16 vols. published [Šipovnik] 1913-1914 [Lauer 1986, 291]). Given Sologub's versatile production in all genres (with its notorious artistic shortcomings), it is interesting that he concentrated his literary production in the 1920's almost exclusively on poetry.¹ In assessing this phenomenon, one should take into consideration, that already Sologub's debut was dominated by poetry. His return to this genre may be seen as a confirmation of his original literary element.

This paper is an attempt to characterize Sologub's late poetry and to demonstrate the continuities and the discontinuities which can be observed in his work after the revolution. Three aspects will be discerned: poetic form, characteristic topics and textual devices.

Sologub's late poetry has long been neglected both in Western and in Russian criticism.² The reason for this is obvious. After the revolution, Sologub published eight slim volumes of poetry, the last of which appeared in 1923. But the published poems include only a small – and not even representative – part of Sologub's literary production after the revolution. Most of Sologub's late poetry has been made available to the reader only in the editions of Minna Dikman (Sologub 1975), Gabriele Pauer (Sologub 1989) and Margarita Pavlova (1997).³ Apart from the political situation, there were also private reasons which kept Sologub from acquainting his readers with a representative choice of his texts. Sologub's late years were overshadowed by an event as traumatic as equalled perhaps only by his beloved sister's death in 1907. On September 23, 1921, the poet's wife Anastasija Čebotarevskaja committed suicide. Sologub fell into a deep and long lasting depression which eventually triggered prophecies about his own death.⁴ In a note probably from 1922 he wrote: "Умру 16 марта 1928 года. Через 339 недель после 23 с. 21 г. Возможно, ошибка дней на 40." (Pavlova 1989, 172) And he also knew the cause of his death: "Я знаю точно, от чего умру. Я умру от декабрита. [...] Декабрит ... болезнь, от которой умирают в декабре ..." (Fedin 1967, 133) This second annunciation contradicts to a certain degree the first, but taken together they match the facts pretty exactly: Sologub died on december 5, 1927.

¹ Exceptions are the stories "Carica poceluev" (1921), "Sočennye dny" (1921), "Baryšnja Liza" (1923), the novel *Zaklinatel'nica zmej* (1921), and the dramas "Uzor iz roz" (1920), "Straž velikogo carja" (1922).

² The only exception is Evelyn Bristol's article on "Fedor Sologub's Postrevolutionary Poetry" from 1960.

³ M. Pavlova (IRLI) is currently working on a complete edition of Sologub's poetry which amounts to 2500 poems.

⁴ Dobužinskij relates that Sologub always layed a place for her at his table until her body was found the next spring (1987, 276).

1. Poetic form

To date, only Sologub's early poetry has been formally studied (Lauer 1986). For the period between 1884 and 1892, Lauer describes a very correct use of meter and rhyme with a strong preponderance of the iambic tetrameter. About 27 % of Sologub's early verse is written in this meter (210). In his late poetry, this tendency will even be stronger. By stressing this classical meter, Sologub approaches the preferences of romantic poets: Puškin, Lermontov and Baratynskij wrote more than 50 % of their poetry in iambic tetrameter.

Similarly, Sologub tends in his late poetry to use only exact rhymes which are basically grammatical rhymes (Bristol 1960, 421). This phenomenon contrasts not so much with Sologub's use of the rhyme in his early poetry but rather with the development of Russian poetry in general during this time. Sologub never really accepted the innovations which were brought into Russian versification by Axmatova, Cvetaeva, Majakovskij and Mandel'stam.⁵ The only field of experimentation that Sologub allowed himself in his prerevolutionary poetry was the length of lines. The most extreme example is perhaps a 10-foot trocheic meter from "Lunnaja kolybel'naja" (1907). To compensate for the length of the lines, Sologub makes a clear cesura after the fourth trochee. Moreover, he uses only one rhyme ("–nu") for the whole poem:

Тихий ангел встрепечется, улыбнется, погрозится шалуну,
И шалун ему ответит: "Ты не бойся, ты не дуйся, я засну".
(Sologub 1975, 344)

Another device that occurred relatively often in Sologub's early poetry is the opposition between long and short lines in the same poem. A well known example is the opening poem from the cycle "Zvezda Mair" (1898):

Звезда Маир сияет надо мною,
Звезда Маир,
И озарен прекрасною звездою
Далекий мир. (Sologub 1975, 217)

In his late poetry, Sologub renounced these special patterns. The only irregularity that may be observed is the ironic use of compound rhymes.

Родился бы я на Мадагаскаре,
Говорил бы наречием, где много а,
Слагал бы поэмы о любовном пожаре,

⁵ It is also interesting to analyze the respectful and at the same time detached attitude of the avantgarde poets towards Sologub. Mandel'stam sees Sologub as the last epigone of decadent Russian poetry (1993, II, 293, 407 f.); for Cvetaeva, Sologub is an old "barin" who is exclusively occupied with his own personality (1994, IV, 9).

О нагих красавицах на острове Самоа. (Sologub 1921b, 17)

In the 1920's, Sologub still loved puns, but they do not occur as often as in his early works (Schmid 1995, 232). However, he advised the young poet Elena Dan'ko to write onomatopoetic poems in the style of his own "Ljubov'ju legkoju igraja" (1901):

Он посоветовал мне написать по стихотворению на имя каждого цветка и для лилии взять звуки "ел", "ал", "ала", цитируя свое – "белей лилей, алее лала, была бела ты и ала". (Dan'ko 1992, 212)

There are few phonetic poems in Sologub's own late poetry. However, an interesting poem from 1926 plays with homonymic, but not homophonic forms, namely with the different accent in some words in the nominative plural and the genitive singular (dóma, domá; góroda, gorodá; mésta, mestá):

Привыкли говорить мы "дома",
Но вспомним разные дома,
Где жили мы. Как нам знакома
Вся эта злая кутерьма! (Sologub 1975, 485)

2. Characteristic topics

Most striking in Sologub's late poetry is the recurrence of religious motifs which to a certain extent contradicts his position in the 1900's. In his early works, Sologub had expressed a total negation of the Christian idea of resurrection:⁶

Я воскресенья не хочу,
И мне совсем не надо рая, –
Не опечалюсь, умирая,
И никуда я не взлечу. (Sologub 1975, 244)

Also pagan metaphysics were rejected: In a poem from 1895, the idea of metempsychosis was imagined as a nightmare; the sentence "live again!" came as a condemnation (Sologub 1975, 156 f.). Moreover, Sologub gave expression to a decadent satanism which was fashionable among Russian symbolists⁷ (see e.g. the

⁶ See also the conception for the drama "Volja k bessiliju": "И никто не воскреснет. И не надо воскресенья. Оно – утешение для слабых." (RO IRLI, F. 289, op. 1, N. 540)

⁷ See also the French memoirs of Vera Hartevelde who remembers Sologub as a frequent guest at the "Brodjačaja sobaka": "Il y venait souvent avec sa femme ou quelques amis. Je ne me rappelle pas de ses traits car il m'arrivait presque toujours de le voir du dos, et s'est son crâne chauve et brillant qui attirait toute mon attention. Il a écrit beaucoup de vers, mais malheureusement je ne me souviens que d'une strophe, caractéristique pour ce temps-là,

January issue of *Zolotoe runo* (1907) which was dedicated entirely to diabolic themes):

Когда я в бурном море плавал
И мой корабль пошел ко дну,
Я так воззвал: "Отец мой, Дьявол,
Спаси, помилуй, – я тону." (Sologub 1975, 278)

The first signal for a radical turn in Sologub's religious thought can be found in the opening poem to the collection *Nebo goluboe* (1921), which was written in 1917:

"У тебя, милосердного Бога,
Много славы, и света и сил.
Дай мне жизни земной хоть немного,
Чтоб я новые песни сложил!" (Sologub 1975, 409)

This poem is by no means ironic but rather articulates Sologub's growing resignation in respect to his former dream of an aesthetic transformation of the world. He wrote explicitly in a poem from 1922: "Я сам закон игры установил / И проиграл [...]." (1975, 461) Sologub was well aware of the change in his religious thought. In a poem from 1922, he restituted his devoteness towards God:

Как я с Тобой не спорил, Боже,
Как на Тебя ни восставал,
Ты в небе на змеиной коже
Моих грехов не начертал. [...]

Но я в бунте был покорен
Твоим веленьям, вечный Бог. (Pavlova 1997, 374)

This poem is part of the cycle "Anastasija" which is dedicated to Sologub's deceased wife Anastasija Čebotarevskaja. The main theme of this cycle is resurrection which corresponds with the Greek literal meaning of Čebotarevskaja's given name.⁸ Already in a poem from 1920, Sologub formulated his new belief in resurrection in the Christian sense: "Воскреснет Бог, и мы воскреснем [...]." (Pavlova 1997, 94) In another poem from the cycle "Anastasija" Sologub entered into a dialogue with the personified "resurrection" that bears the traits of his wife.

Я – Воскресение! Во мне огонь великий! (Pavlova 1997, 375)

'Prions un peu – au bon Dieu comme au diable.'" Columbia University, BAR Gen Ms Coll Hartevelde, 38 f.

⁸ Sologub also played with other names, cf. a poem about Vjačeslav Ivanov (1975, 331).

The logic behind Sologub's solemn affirmation of resurrection is the following: His wife's death cannot be final – therefore the idea of resurrection which is inscribed into Anastasija's name must be real. This argumentation can be read as a continuation of Sologub's own poetic myth. In his poem "Kanon besstrastija" from 1920, Sologub stated programmatically the higher reality of writing compared to reality itself:

Все ясно только в мире слова,
Вся в слове истина дана.
Все остальное – бред земного
Бесследно тающего сна. (Sologub 1975, 419)

Literary creativity makes even the visual perception of the world superfluous. In a statement from his last years, Sologub insisted on the advantages of physical blindness:

Зрительными впечатлениями живет тот, у кого внутри пустота.
Дрянные людишки. Да я могу всю жизнь просидеть в комнате
без окон, не видя ни одного человека, ни солнца, ни природы (от
природы тошнит), и мой внутренний мир будет от этого только
богаче. Неужели внешний мир может соперничать в богатстве с
тем, что я вижу в воображении, с теми прекарными образами,
которые я творю? (Dan'ko 1992, 220)

The negation of reality which leads like a leitmotif through Sologub's entire work acquires in the 1920's a political dimension as well. Sologub stood with his aestheticism aloof from politics. On May 7, 1926 the poet wrote the following quatrain into V.V. Smirenskij's album:

Какое б ни было правительство
И что б ни говорил закон,
Твое мы ведаем властительство,
О светозарный Аполлон! (Сехnovicer 1933, 7)

The official Soviet perspective on Sologub for 70 years basically referred to statements like this. However, Sologub's declaration of his indifference to the Soviet social experiment was not his last word. Sologub explicitly deplored that the low Soviet materialism penetrated everything, even the pure realm of poetry. Sologub described the corruption of his aestheticism in drastic terms which are rarely found elsewhere in his work:

Стих, как прежде, не звучит.
Нужен новый реквизит.
Струи, трели, роци, дали,
Свиньи грязные сожрали. [...]

И на сладкий аромат
Навонял советский мат.
Прелесть песни соловьиной
Облита теперь уриной. (Pavlova 1997, 162) ⁹

Sologub responded to the calamities of the new regime in different ways. Already in mid November 1917, the people's commissar for education Anatolij Lunačarskij asked the Petrograd organization of artists "Sojuz dejatelej iskusstv" to endorse the new regime. Sologub, at the time president of the literary section of this organization, tried to take a cautious stance. In order to get governmental funding, he suggested that "Sojuz dejatelej iskusstv" would work within the commissariate for education [при наркомпросе], but retain its formal independence. Understandably enough, Lunačarskij modified this proposition and established ideological control over the organization which would disappear by fall 1918 anyway (Eimermacher 1994, 106).

Sologub was well aware of the importance of an independent literary organization. One of his first actions after the revolution was to found together with his wife and N.S. Gumilev a writer's association with the goal of helping needy authors. "Sojuz dejatelej xudožestvennoj literatury" had considerable success in the first months of its shortlived existence: Within a few weeks after its foundation in March 1918, about 40 writers joined the association; after one year it had 170 members (Širmakov 1958, 456). But when the patron of the association was expelled from Soviet Russia and the financing through Narkompros was suspended, the association lost its attractiveness and disappeared in August 1919

⁹ Cf. also the following poems:

В Совдепе

Муза, как ты истомилась
Созерцаньем диких рож!
Как покорно приучилась
Ждать в приемных у вельмож!

Утешаешься куреньем,
Бутишь шутки, сердце сжав,
Запасись еще терпеньем, –
Всякий путь для музы прав. (May 24, 1920, Сехnovicer 1933, 8)

Дурачок, ты всем нам верь –
Бепчет самый гнусный зверь. –
Хоть блевотину на блюде
Поднесут с поклоном люди,
Ешь, и зубы им не щерь. (August 31, 1926, Сехnovicer 1933, 20)

(473).¹⁰ Later, beginning in 1924, Sologub took over various posts in another writer's association, "Sojuz leningradskix pisatelej".

Sologub's administrative activities did not improve his uncomfortable situation. Material problems are documented for instance in a letter which probably dates from 1918: Sologub asked the local Soviet authorities to provide a pair of galoshes for his wife (Keda 1993, 159). Things were not better in the literary field: Sologub's texts were censored (Eimermacher 1994, 112), his name became synonymous with oldfashioned and outdated writing.¹¹ Lunačarskij characterized him in a letter to the Central Committee from July 16, 1921 with harsh words: "Кто такой Сологуб? Старый писатель [...] самым злостным и ядовитым образом настроенный против Советской России." (Gor'kij 1998, 130) The official stance towards Sologub is also mirrored in Brjusov's speech "Včera, segodnja i zavtra ruskoj poëzii" which he held at the "Dom Pečati" in 1922: "О ряде других [декадентских поэтов, U.S.] можно сказать только то, что они что-то писали, похожее на их прежние стихи, только слабее и бесцветнее ... в этом ряду приходится назвать и Федора Сологуба." (Ivanov 1960, 289) Under these circumstances it is astounding that even in 1926 Sologub's novel *Melkij bes* was republished with a print run of 5000 copies (Vladislavlev 1928, 237).¹² The new edition has to be seen against the background of the important resolution of the Central Committee from June 18, 1925, which for a short period created a relatively moderate climate for non proletarian writers. The decisive sentence that allowed the republication of *Melkij bes* acknowledged the importance of literary traditions: "For the very reason that the party sees in the proletarian writers the future ideological leaders of Soviet literature, it has to fight in all respects a careless and disparaging attitude towards the old cul-

¹⁰ Towards the end of the existence of "Sojuz dejatelej xudožestvennoj literatury" there seem to have been dissonances even between the founders. On June 23, 1919 Sologub wrote to Gumilev: "Повторяю еще и то, что для меня непонятно, почему Ваша подпись была под одним или несколькими документами, исходившими от Совета С.Д.Х.Л., в которых я не могу не видеть тенденцию к устранению меня и Анс. Н. Чеботаревской от участия в делах того самого союза, в учреждении которого мы с нею принимали наиболее деятельное участие." (OR RGB, op. 45, ed.xr. 44)

¹¹ Among the few who defended Modernist poetics still in the 1920's were A. Gornfel'd and G. Čulkov. Mentioning Sologub, Gornfel'd put forward the importance of phantastic literature (1924, 159), and Čulkov wrote unambiguously: "Только символическое миропонимание позволяет нам разгадать тайный смысл событий и достойно встретить будущее России." (1922, 125)

¹² Later Soviet editions of the novel were published only in 1933 and 1958. In both cases, the foreword gave an official reading and cited the following statement by Lenin: "Внуки наши, как диковинку, будут рассматривать документы и памятники эпохи капиталистического строя." – The print run of the 1926 edition may seem high, but it has to be compared to the print runs reached by officially acknowledged Soviet writers: In the first ten years after the revolution Dem'ian Bednyj had a total of 2 millions of books printed, Maksim Gor'kij and Aleksandr Neverov each about 1 million (Vladislavlev 1928, 25).

tural heritage and equally towards the specialists of the literary word." (Eimermacher 1994, 508)

In 1921, Sologub desperately tried to get an exit visa from the Soviet authorities.¹³ In a letter to Lenin, Sologub wrote:

И по происхождению и по работе я – член трудового народа; сын портного и прачки, я 25 лет был учителем гор[одского] уч[илища] [...]. Я не имею намерения заниматься политикою, т.к. считаю это слишком ответственным и сложным делом, – я никогда не состоял ни в какой партии. (Сехновіцер 1933, 5)

The destination of Sologub's emigration undoubtedly would have been Paris. In a poem from February 1921 he wrote in an ambiguous formulation:

Отчего ж, душа-рабыня,
Ты на волю не летишь, [...]
На размах аэроплана,
В громыханье поездов, [...]
В край невинный, вечно вешний,
В Элизийские поля? (Sologub 1975, 434 f.)

It is very telling that the Soviet commentary to this text explains the Elysian fields as the mythological place of the dead (Sologub 1975, 627) and does not point to the Champs Élysées in Paris – a significance that is reinforced through the mentioning of the modern means of transportation.

After several complications – Bal'mont had just emigrated to France and deprecated the Soviets from there – the Sologubs eventually obtained permission to leave, but on the eve of their departure, Čebotarevskaja threw herself into the Neva (Ходасевич 1939, 176 f., Gor'kij 1998, 130 f.). Sologub stayed in Russia and commented on the state of the nation in poems politically not fit for publication, notably in a cycle of antisoviet fables (1925) (Pavlova 1997, 168-179).

Depicting the misery of art under Soviet rule, Sologub had in mind not only the political power as an anonymous entity but accused Lenin personally. In a poem from 1926 he called him a "despot" and a "tyrant" (Pavlova 1997, 147). Already on the occasion of Lenin's 51st birthday in 1921, Sologub wrote a spiteful poetic pamphlet against the leader of the revolution: "Топор широкий не отрубит / Его преступной головы [...]" (Pavlova 1997, 101). In 1922, Sologub included a poem about "Ioann Groznyj" – written back in 1898 – in his volume "Koster dorožnyj" – and in this context the historical poem can be read as a clear allegory on Lenin:¹⁴

¹³ Téffi (1993, 93) in Paris received a dramatic letter from the Sologubs: "Умол. помочь похлопоч. визу погибаем, будьте другом добр. как были всегда Сол. Чебот.".

¹⁴ The same holds true for a sentence in Sologub's fairy tale-drama "Straž velikogo carja" (1922) which can be read as an allusion to the actual political situation: "Если умрет

Сжигаемый пламенной страстью,
Мечтатель, творец и тиран,
Играя безмерною властью,
Царил на Руси Иоанн. [...]

А просто, – он был неврастеник,
Один из душевно-больных.
В беспутной глуши деревенок
Таится не мало таких. (Sologub 1965, 51)

Sologub drew a meaningful distinction between Russia and the young Soviet union: The new Soviet regime is no more than a mere administrative system, whereas Russia has a holy body which is being tortured.

Writing about Russia, Sologub once again introduced the theme of "resurrection": Under Soviet rule, Russia is nearly dead ("Россия чуть жива", Pavlova 1997, 100), but there will be a time when the old saint Rus' will be resurrected once more (Sologub added a political hint: as a monarchy) ("Русь ожила опять в блистающей короне.", Pavlova 1997, 140). In this sense, Sologub continued his patriotic writing, which had found an unpoetic and propagandistic expression during World War I in the volume "Vojna" (1915, Sologub 1965, 5-37).

In the cultural context of Soviet Russia, Sologub stood completely alone – not lastly because he insisted stubbornly on his old themes to the very end. In the 1920's, Sologub imagined himself in the familiar persona of Don Quixote (Sologub 1975, 432, 436, 438, 462, 465, 489), he preached again the union of "Love" and "Death" (Sologub 1921a, Pavlova 1997, 103, 376), and he sang anew of "Eros" and the "Holy Flesh" (Pavlova 1989, 179).¹⁵ Even Sologub's "trade mark", his infatuation with bare feet, is not missing in his late poetry (Sologub 1989, 113, 126).¹⁶

Sologub's rejection of the official literary trends culminated in his extravagant volume of pastoral poems "Svirel'" (1922). Under circumstances that were far from pastoral, the publication of such poetry had to be considered as an act of civil disobedience. And in fact, Sologub's booklet was hailed in a review which probably coincidentally remained unpublished as a counterweight to the "factory" poetry of the time (Pavlova 1997, 431).

справедливый царь, ему может наследовать владыка жестокий, и от его злобы погубнут тысячи людей, ему подвластных, и вся страна превратится в пустыню." (Sologub 1922, 37)

¹⁵ For Sologub, this last point had a real meaning. The sculptress Elena Dan'ko, his last (unrequited) love, relates that Sologub understood her talking about her habit of taking sun-baths as an invitation to sexual intercourse and tried to break into her apartment.

¹⁶ In a poem from 1920, Sologub even makes a bitter joke about bare feet: When Soviet schoolboys stole his boots, he was forced to walk without shoes. (Pavlova 1997, 92 f.)

3. Textual devices

One of the most interesting textual devices typical of Sologub can be seen in his literary borrowings. In the memoirs of Vladimir Smirenskij, who was Sologub's personal secretary in his last two years in the Leningrad branch of the Russian Writer's Union, this theme occurs several times. Smirenskij reports for instance Sologub's definition of genius, which is exactly opposed to the position of formalist theory:

Гениальные поэты только и занимаются подражанием и перепевом. А оригинальные образы и формы – создают только слабые поэты. И это естественно. Зачем человеку – как грибу питаться неорганическими соединениями, над чем-то думать, что-то изобретать? Надо обирать предшественников поэтов – самым бессовестным образом. (Smirenskij 1997, 407)

As a shining example of such artistic theft, Sologub mentions Lermontov (407)¹⁷ and calls Russian literature in general one big plagiat (405).

Sologub endows the notion of "plagiarism" with a clearly positive connotation. This should not be misunderstood as a call for epigonal writing, but rather as a plaidoyer for intertextual creativity. In the 1920's, Sologub put his theory at several occasions into practice: He wrote new versions of "Evgenij Onegin" (1989, 121-124) and of Lermontov's demon (1975, 484). This kind of intertextuality can also be discerned in Sologub's plan for a lyrical drama about twins ("Bliznecy" 1926, Dan'ko 234) which is modeled on Shakespeare's comedy "The Two Gentlemen of Verona".

New for Sologub in his last period was not so much the use of plagiat as such but rather its programmatic affirmation. Already in 1910, the literary critic Red'ko accused Sologub of plagiarism, pointing to his borrowings from Hawthorne and from a French popular writer named de Saussay.¹⁸ Another case in point is Sologub's imitation of stories with children-heroes by Osip Dymov

¹⁷ In fact, Ėjxenbaum elaborated in his monograph on Lermontov (1924) on the plagiats of the young poet.

¹⁸ These accusations were probably justified. Sologub reprinted the adaptation from Hawthorne ("Sneguročka") later in his collected works with an indication of its origin; de Saussay's books were in Sologub's personal library (Šatalina 1997, 468, 474, 496). In 1910, Sologub wrote in a letter to the critic A.A. Izmajlov: "В Б[иржевых] В[едомостях], как и в некоторых других органах печати, были записки о совершенных мною плагиатах. На эти сообщения я не отвечал в печати, да и не собираюсь отвечать. Эти обвинения совершенно несправедливы; если я у кого-нибудь что и заимствую, то лишь по правилу 'беру свое везде, где нахожу его'. Если бы я только тем и занимался, что переписывал бы из чужих книг, то и тогда мне не удалось бы стать плагиатором, и на все я накладывал бы печать своей достаточно-ясно выраженной литературной личности." (Schmid 1995, 24)

who in 1906 frequented Sologub's "Sundays" (Pjast 1997, 84) and whose books were in Sologub's personal library (Šatalina 1997, 446, 472, 498). At the time, Sologub did not respond to these accusations, but after the revolution the idea of a writing community of ingenious poets (amongst which Sologub unconditionally ranked himself) became an artistic credo that he fervently advocated in private discussions as well (Dan'ko 1992, 222).

A very special case of literary borrowing which often appears in Sologub's late poetry is self-quotation. In a dense form, this technique may be observed in a poem from 1926:

Людьми весь город обмурашен,
Которые скопились здесь. [...]

Бесстыдно он опролетарен,
Полуразрушен, грязен, груб.
В веках жестокий век подарен
Тебе, плененный Сологуб!

Но все же ликуй: вот Навьи Чары,
Тяжелых снов больной угар, –
Ты эти предсказал кошмары,
Где Передонов – комиссар! (Sologub 1989, 125)

In this poem, Sologub uses keywords from his own texts to achieve a satirical effect. But hermeneutically, the present case is not the most interesting one.

Sologub lives very much in a textual world. As a consequence, real life is devaluated and often described as delirium [бред], whereas a higher reality can be reached only in art. Most clearly, Sologub formulates this point in his last published essay "Poëty – vajateli žizni" (1922). He announces a different kind of revolution, a poetic revolution which will lead – very much in Bakunin's sense – to a creative destruction of human civilisation:

Но самая эта оторванность искусства от жизни показывает то, что жизнь томится в оковах истлевающего быта. [...] И если жизнь уж очень запрямится, не захочет поддаваться чарам чрезмерно своевольного для нее искусства, то произойдет, наконец, полное крушение быта, культа, мифа. Рушится вся наша цивилизация, и мы вступим в совсем новую жизнь. Какая она будет? Не спрашивайте об этом у политиков, спросите поэтов. (Sologub 1991, II, 213)

To maintain his very private system of reference (what Minc and Pustygina call "myth"), Sologub is forced to produce new texts which constitute an alternative world. In 1898, Sologub had created his legendary planet "Mair" and the land

"Ojle" as a vision of uncorrupted life.¹⁹ In 1922, this theme again appeared in a poem – together with a textual reference to Sologub's story "Zemle zemnoe":

Земное все отдать земле
Спешишь в истоме тления.
Откройся, светлая Ойле,
Страна соединения! (Sologub 1975, 458; see also 424; Pavlova 1997, 123)

It is not by chance that Sologub conjured up his old fantasies in his late poetry. Under Soviet circumstances, reality became increasingly unacceptable to the poet, and Sologub tried to retreat into his private world of dreams. However, this escape was anything but only positive; it came as a very ambiguous and even dangerous strategy, and – what is most significant and at the same time often overlooked – Sologub was well aware of this fact. A private myth can easily turn into a delusion – this process is actually the very topic of Sologub's novel *Melkij bes* (1907). The protagonist Peredonov suffers from megalomania and sinks gradually into an individual and exclusive world of horror. The demonic sign of Peredonov's loss of reality is "nedotykomka", a grey ghost that whirs around him.²⁰

Sologub found himself in his last decade in the same situation as Peredonov.²¹ Also Sologub's self-centeredness in his last years was parallel to Peredonov's personality: "[...] он [sc. Sologub, U.S.] стал говорить, что Сологуб – великий писатель, что его будут читать через сто лет." (210; cf. Sologub 1991, 249).) He wrote without an audience; actually also his implied reader is a phantastic creation. In a poem from 1926, only small demons listen to the poet's stories:

Сатанята в моей комнате живут.
Я тихонько призову их, – прибегут. [...]

Почитаю им порой мои стихи
И услышу ахи, охи и хи-хи.

Скажут мне: "Таких стихов не надо людям,

¹⁹ It was exactly this concept that was chosen by the Acmeists in their manifestos to attack symbolist poetics: "Звезда Маир, если она есть, прекрасна на своем месте, а не как невесомая точка опоры невесомой мечты." (Gorodeckij 1913, 46)

²⁰ The exclusively private character of "nedotykomka" becomes especially clear in Sologub's dramatization of his novel, where he writes in the stage directions: "Недотыкомка [...] существующая только в воображении Передонова. [...] Каждый раз, как она является, все на сцене становится как бред [...]." (Sologub 1988, 9)

²¹ Sologub always rejected the identification of himself with Peredonov made by some critics. However, it is interesting that Sologub in his last years commented again on the problem: "А ведь большому писателю всегда приходится протащить своих героев через себя. И Бекспир протащил через себя короля лира, и я, конечно, протащил через себя Передонова." (Dan'ko 1992, 211)

А вот мы тебя охотно слушать будем".

Да и проза им занята и мила:
Как на свете Лиза-барышня жила,

Как у нас очаровательны печали,
Как невесты мудрые Христа встречали,

Как пути нашли в Эммаус и в Дамаск,
Расточая море слез и море ласк. (Sologub 1975, 492 f.)

Sologub's late poetry can only exceptionally be read as an artistic encoding of surrounding reality. By quoting himself, Sologub rather turns a given textual world – his own symbolist myth – into a higher abstraction, as it were into a text of second degree.

Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Sologub saw his ultimate justification in his writings. In 1919, a year that was most hostile to the idea of a heavenly paradise which might compete with the communist paradise on earth, Sologub ascribed to his literary production not only an aesthetic, but also a religious, and even redemptive dimension:

Когда меня у входа в Парадиз
Суровый Петр, гремя ключами, спросит:
"Что сделал ты?" – меня он вниз
Железным посохом не сбросит.

Скажу: "Слагал романы и стихи,
И утешал, но и вводил в соблазны,
И вообще мои грехи,
Апостол Петр, многообразны.

Но я – поэт". И улыбнется он,
И разорвет грехов рукописанье,
И смело в рай войду, прощен,
Внимать святое ликование. (Sologub 1975, 414)

The last decade of Sologub's work represents a unique case in Russian literary history, because it documents Symbolist writing under Soviet conditions. Along with the Communist ideology, Sologub rejected the emerging literary movements like Futurism or Proletkul't. In the 1920's his own poetry gained a new, almost classical strength. Literature became a private refuge for him – and even this conception implied a political message: Sologub wanted his poems not to be understood by millions (as the official literary doctrine would have it), but wrote them as a kind of liturgy to himself.

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