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Kabbalah, Judeo-Masonic Myth, and Post-Soviet Literary Discourse: From Political Tool to Virtual Parody

MARINA APTEKMAN

In the nineteenth and especially in the twentieth century, literature in Russian society often played a role that in Western society was occupied by the media. For generations of Russians, literature, not the mass media, was the primary source of knowledge that shaped their views of the world, as well as of mythologies that painted the future of their nation. The freedom of the press brought by the end of communism resulted in circumstances in which literature suddenly lost the informational and prophetic functions that had been accorded to it since the eighteenth century. As Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen recently noted,

The revolution wrought by the Word, it turned out, was either an illusion or reversible: either way it was no revolution at all. In all likelihood, the rush on information was largely a result of something the regime and the intelligentsia had, not very consciously, been cooperating on for years: inflating the role of words. All [literature] was rationed, and *samizdat* and *tamizdat* were all the sweeter for being a forbidden fruit. But, [as it became available to all,] for many people a brief taste of it was enough to satisfy their curiosity. [Literature lost its prophetic function], the government cut funding for all scholarship, the publishing houses began closing or attempted to adjust to the new market. The old system of perks for writers, artists and others dwindled. The Word suddenly [became] cheap.¹

In Russia, the prophetic role of the writer made literature socially powerful enough to create the popular mythologies that in the West are typically created by the media.

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¹Masha Gessen, *Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia after Communism* (London, 1997), 17–18.

These literary mythologies became so embedded in the popular mind that the political media easily could adopt them and falsely present them to their audiences as reality. “The new Russian mythology,” Svetlana Boym recently observed,

operates at the level of very simple myths and manipulates real emotions and needs. Roland Barthes defined a modern myth as a type of speech that transforms ideology into “second nature” which makes the ideological or political message pass for an authentic and ingenuous one. A myth always lacks an ideological meaning (*deideologizirovan*); usually it does not even have one author. However, it has a lot of interested sponsors, and thus it easily unites the true natural essence with a definite political or ideological symbolism.²

Thus it is that after the fall of the Soviet Union the media inherited the prophetic function formerly assigned to literature, and now they actually create mythologies for literature; in an interesting reversal, it is literature that is left to borrow from media mythologies and subsist upon them.

In the history of Russian literature the 1990s will be remembered as a period of total transmutation of all aesthetic, ideological, and ethical paradigms. This transformation was characterized by a radical change in the comprehension of literary codes, by a reinterpretation of the role of the writer, and the appearance of a new type of reader.³ This literary situation led to the strong popularity of postmodernist trends. The appearance of the earliest postmodernist texts in Russia, such as *Moscow to the End of the Line* by Venedikt Erofeev, can be traced to the early 1970s. However, until the late 1990s postmodernism remained mostly an underground phenomenon, and although some critics tend to regard such writers of “late socialism” as Liudmila Petrushevskaja and Tat’iana Tolstaia as postmodernists, it was definitely in the 1990s that postmodernism became the dominant literary trend in Russia. It has already been widely observed that a postmodernist text by nature is always secondary and plagiarist. It is formed out of allusions, quotations, and references to other texts, well known to an average reader, which it employs widely and often mocks. One of the most common definitions of postmodernism is “the rejection of grand narratives,” which implies the undermining of any presence, origin, or Truth, that is, any kind of “transcendental signified.” Postmodernism denies reality, and therefore, as Mikhail Epshtein states, “the world of secondary natures and relative reflections becomes more primary than the world of the so-called initial reality.”⁴ John Barth defined postmodernism as “literature of exhaustion” that replaces the original literary discourse with a parody of or commentary on an existing text. Yet postmodernism is interested not so much in a text per se as in the literary and social mythologies that have been created by previous literary works. It exploits the myths of the past and the present while it constructs its own virtual reality based on these myths and eventually, by parodying and mocking them, deconstructs them.⁵

²Svetlana Boym, “Stil’ PR,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 29:3 (2003), via <http://nlo.magazine.ru/dog/tual/tual88.html> (March 20, 2006; parenthetical dates following URLs indicate last viewing).

³Svetlana Timina, “Sovremennyi literaturnyi protsess,” in *Russkaia literatura XX veka v zerkale kritiki*, ed. Svetlana Timina (St. Petersburg, 2001), 19.

⁴Mikhail Epshtein, *Postmodern v Rossii: Literatura i teoriia* (Moscow, 2000), 15.

⁵For more on the history of postmodernism in Russia see *ibid.*

Post-Soviet Russian postmodernist works exploit various literary mythologies: the Soviet mythology created by the books and films of the Stalin and Brezhnev eras, the intelligentsia myths created by the Thaw generation, and the literary clichés produced by the Golden and Silver ages of Russian literature. Yet, in a society as highly politicized as post-Soviet Russia, postmodernist authors are also interested in political myths that have been created by the media and have been popularized in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period. Some of these myths arose in this era, while others were centuries old but have been revived. Among them, the myth of the Judeo-Masonic kabbalistic conspiracy is probably among the most popular and widespread. Post-Soviet postmodernist literature has adopted this mythology from the political press of the national-patriotic parties. It has played with it, ridiculed it, and deconstructed it, diverting it back into the literary space, into the space of virtual reality, a space of falsification for the sake of falsification, that is, for the sake of a literary game. This article deals with this particular myth's transmutation into virtual reality in two literary works that intentionally or inadvertently signify, in my opinion, the dead-end of the paranoid interpretation of Kabbalah in anti-Semitic mythology: Alexander Prokhanov's *Mr Geksogen* and Vladimir Sorokin's *Ice*.

THE JUDEO-MASONIC MYTH: SOURCES AND PREREQUISITES

The myth of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy and the evil powers of the magical Kabbalah originated in the right-wing press of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first connection between Jews and Freemasons appeared in 1806, in a text written by an army officer, J. B. Simonini, who attempted to draw readers' attention to "the Judaic sect which, in close alliance with Freemasons, is preparing the way for Antichrist."⁶ This idea enjoyed little currency in the first half of the nineteenth century, becoming widespread only in the second half of the century, particularly in the 1880s, and especially in France. Although earlier authors, such as Simonini, definitely asserted the link between Freemasons and magic, the connection of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy idea to the ideas of the Jewish mystical tradition known as Kabbalah appeared only in the late 1860s.

Since the mid-nineteenth century kabbalistic philosophy has been the subject of numerous speculative studies, which sometimes result from simple ignorance but sometimes also stem from the general confusion between the two types of Kabbalah: the original Jewish philosophical teaching, and its later magical adaptations. The so-called magical Kabbalah, although it was sometimes used in a Jewish milieu, did not derive from the Jewish mystical tradition but rather from the Christian interpretation of Kabbalah that had been developed during the Renaissance as part of the general magical and occult discourse of this era. The central idea of the original Jewish Kabbalah is based on the concept that the process of Creation is an emanation of the Divine Light, which is coming to Earth through ten stages (*sefirot*) of Creation. In this theological system God manifests himself not as a person but rather as an endless substance, which reveals itself to humans

⁶Quoted in Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York, 1981), 27.

through these ten stages. Kabbalah regards the Creation as a linguistic and numerological process, asserting that each letter in Hebrew represents a number that corresponds to a particular physical or spiritual quality of God, and claims that the Divine Light manifests itself in the form of the divine word, *Logos*.⁷ Kabbalah believes that the power of large numbers can restore to the world the unity it lost after Adam's fall. The occult adherents of the concept, the magicians and alchemists of the Renaissance, were interested particularly in the linguistic part of the kabbalistic doctrine of the Creation. They reduced kabbalistic teaching to the idea that if one takes letters as a secret code of creation, by manipulating them one eventually can find the original divine word for an object, and, with its help, obtain power over the object or even create it anew. Magicians and alchemists called Kabbalah "the secret knowledge," one which they alone possessed. However, this "secret knowledge" was widely propagated in a number of manuscripts, which later became very popular among German Pietist mystics, German Romantic writers, mystically inclined Masonic adepts, and generally educated European intellectuals, and this helped to disseminate the idea of Kabbalah as a type of Judeo-Masonic magical tradition.

The first nonfiction text that made a direct link between Kabbalah, Freemasonry, and Jews as sorcerers and allies of Satan appeared in 1866. *The Jew, Judaism, and the Judaization of Christian Peoples* was written by a Henri Roger Gougenot des Mousseaux, a French political writer who was convinced that the world was falling into the grip of a mysterious body of Satan-worshippers, whom he called "kabbalistic Jews."⁸ Mousseaux regarded Kabbalah in much the same way as his medieval Christian predecessors. He considered it to be a secret and demonic religion, a systematic cult of evil, established by the devil at the very beginning of the world. He identified the first adepts of this cult as "the sons of Cain." Then Kabbalah was adopted by the Chaldeans, and in due course they passed their secret to the Jews. In later days the Gnostics, the Manichaeans, and the Assassins also practiced this cult; the latter had transmitted the diabolic folklore to the Templars, who handed it on to the Freemasons. But at all times the Jews had supplied the Grand Masters, the highest Masonic authority. Des Mousseaux claimed that the cult centered on the worship of Satan, the chief symbols of which were the serpent and the phallus, and that its rituals included erotic orgies of the wildest kind. He was also certain that by murdering Christian children the Jews in particular were able to acquire magical powers. According to des Mousseaux, the mysterious messianic figure of the "King of Jews" was actually Satan, who through the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy had been preparing the way for the arrival of the Jewish Antichrist. Although *The Jew, Judaism, and the Judaization of Christian Peoples* was the first text to posit a direct link between Freemasonry, Jews, and Kabbalah, during the 1860s and 1870s a large body of pamphlets and books on the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy was produced in Europe, and especially in France. In the 1880s many of these Western pamphlets on Judeo-Masonry were translated and published in Russia, and original Russian works on the subject of Judeo-Masonry started to appear at approximately the same time.

⁷For a detailed study of Kabbalah see Gershom Sholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1991). See also Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1981).

⁸Henri Roger Gougenot des Mousseaux, *Le Juif, le judaïsme et le judaïsation des peuples chrétiens* (Paris, 1866).

The Revolution of 1905 activated strong anti-Semitic feelings in Russia and led to the emergence of political groupings that identified themselves as “the Right.” In October 1905 the most radical right-wing political group, the Union of the Russian People, also known as the Black Hundreds, was founded in an attempt to rally the masses against liberals and revolutionaries through its anti-Semitic propaganda.⁹ At the same time, the right-wing press also targeted Freemasonry as a breeding ground for potential revolutionaries.¹⁰ In such an atmosphere, a mythical Judeo-Masonic conspiracy that united mystical fears with strong anti-Semitic tensions found an increasing number of readers.

The most popular Russian anti-Semitic text, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which did a great deal to popularize the theory of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, directly reflected the mystical and revolutionary fears of the time. Scholars are still arguing about who the real author of the *Protocols* was, as well as about the original goal of the forgery. However, most scholars accept that the pamphlet probably was produced by the Russian secret police (Okhrana), with the help of the chief of the Russian secret police in Paris, Petr Rachkovskii, and two Russian spies, Ivan Manusevich-Manuilov and Matvei Golovinskii. The *Protocols*' three main themes included a critique of liberalism, an analysis of the methods by which Jews would achieve world domination, and a description of the universal Jewish world-state to be established.¹¹ The first edition of the book appeared in 1902 as an attachment to Sergei Nilus's book, *The Great in the Small, or the Antichrist as an Approaching Political Possibility*.¹² Nilus was a liberal journalist who spent more than a decade in France, where he gambled away his inheritance, and finally returned penniless to Russia. He then traveled around Russia on foot, lived within various monasteries, and ended up becoming a religious writer and Orthodox mystic. Contemporaries noted that Nilus suffered from an obsessive fear of the approaching Apocalypse and the coming of the Antichrist. A friend of Nilus related in his memoirs that,

in his bedroom, Nilus kept a trunk that he called “a museum of the Antichrist.” He was so obsessed with the idea of the Antichrist that he read everything that was in any way connected to this subject. In his trunk he kept collars, boots, badges, and even some kitchen utensils, on which he believed he saw the sign of Antichrist. He was so certain about the sinister presence of the Antichrist everywhere that even I myself was filled with this irrational fear.¹³

Although the *Protocols* did not mention Kabbalah or kabbalistic magic as a part of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, both Nilus in particular and anti-Semitic opinion in general soon made this connection, combining ideas from the *Protocols* with popular contemporary

⁹Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1986), 28.

¹⁰*Masonstvo* (St. Petersburg, 1911), 24.

¹¹Delevsky, *Protokoly Sionskikh Mudretsov: Istoriia odnogo podloga* (Berlin, 1923), 9.

¹²*Ibid.* For the original see Sergei Nilus, *Velikoe v malom ili Antikhrist kak blizkaia politicheskaia vozmoshnost'* (Sergiev Posad, 1902). Contemporaries described Nilus as a person who rejected all modern culture and science, was actively against modern religious ideology, and held in particular favor the Old Believers. According to one of his friends, Nilus argued that only in the tradition of the Old Believers could one still see the true faith not influenced by modern science or secular culture.

¹³*Ibid.*, 107.

occult books. For example, a third edition of the *Protocols*, published by Nilus in 1911, was enriched by the knowledge he gained from the occult books he ordered from a famous Moscow store just for this purpose. On the cover of this edition Nilus placed a picture of the King from the Tarot deck with the heading, "Here is the face of the Antichrist."¹⁴

The "kabbalistic Judeo-Masonic organizations" were just a myth, created by members of the Okhrana and the Union of Russian People, since even the possibility of such an organization as a "Judeo-Masonic union" was rejected by both the mystical and the political Masonry of the time. However, this myth, which did not gain much popularity outside right-wing political circles prior to the events of 1917, became quite widespread in the years following the Bolshevik Revolution. Until 1917 only the most extreme right-wing Russian political groups considered the *Protocols* authoritative or authentic. However, the Revolution and Civil War gave birth to a powerful new myth. The believers in the existence of "Judeo-Bolshevism" not only rescued the *Protocols* from obscurity but indeed proved to be the most effective basis for their spread and perceived truthfulness.¹⁵ Following the Civil War, Russian emigrants brought the *Protocols* to Western Europe, where the Nilus edition served as the basis for translations starting in 1920.

Several factors, then, played a role in the creation of the Judeo-Masonic myth. On the one hand, it seemed the possible participation of political Masons in the February events had played some role. The interest of the mystical Masons of the prerevolutionary years in the occult and, in particular, in such subjects as the occult interpretation of Kabbalah, seemed suspect too. On the other hand, the existence of such texts as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and the actual events of the October Revolution helped to make plausible the anti-Semitic propaganda promoted by the White Army and later reactionary émigré circles. Thus, in the popular mind, the occult, the Kabbalah, the Jews, and the Freemasons merged, rendering believable the almighty Masonic kabbalistic conspiracy.

Until the 1970s the Judeo-Masonic myth did not play a serious role in any Soviet political anti-Semitic campaign. Because the émigré press united Bolsheviks and Freemasons, the Communist government did not wish to associate itself with a "Masonic conspiracy" propagated by reactionary émigré forces. Moreover, to say that the February Revolution had been prepared by Judeo-Masons would have contradicted the Communist ideological interpretation of the Revolution as having been created by the masses rather than by certain political groups.¹⁶ The first semi-official efforts to revive the Judeo-Masonic myth can be seen in the anti-Zionist publications of the early 1970s, for example in V. Begun's *The Crawling Counterrevolution*, T. Kichko's *Judaism and Zionism*, E. Evseev's *Fascism under a Blue Star*, and similar books, mostly produced by the reactionary

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵The most celebrated of these forgeries was a document supposedly found on the dead body of a Jewish Bolshevik commander, Aaron Zunder. The text contains a large number of parallels to the *Protocols* and ends with: "Be cautious and silent. We ought to have no mercy for our enemy. ... War and class struggle will destroy all treasure and culture created by the Christian people. Our power in Russia is now unlimited" (quoted in Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 16).

¹⁶For such a Soviet and Communist perspective on the role of Freemasonry see Aron Avrech, *Masonry i revoliutsiia*, (Moscow, 1990).

publishing house Molodaia gvardiia.¹⁷ Of course, these books never suggested any connection between the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy and the Revolution; rather, they broadly discussed such issues as a “worldwide capitalist Judeo-Masonic conspiracy” and “the chauvinist ideology of such Zionist books as the Talmud and the Bible,” and they argued that the U.S. president was a puppet whose every step was controlled by Jewish oligarchs. The expression “Jewish conspiracy” was rarely used in these publications, rejected in favor of the term “Zionism.” However, in contrast to the generally accepted meaning of Zionism as the movement to build a Jewish state in Palestine, Soviet “anti-Zionists” meant by the term “the supposed Jewish and American conspiracy to establish Jewish world dominion.” As for the sources, it is not difficult to recognize that most of the evidence used by Soviet anti-Zionists to prove the existence of the Zionist conspiracy came from the writings of such Black Hundreds’ ideologues as Alexei Shmakov and Nilus.¹⁸ The early Brezhnev period was also marked by the appearance of the dissident “patriotic” movement—a small closed circle of “New Right” intellectuals, strongly interested in mysticism and esotericism. It initially clustered around the so-called Russian Party, created in 1966, and then around *Veche*, the “journal of the loyal patriotic opposition” established in 1971 and edited by Vladimir Osipov. As much as Brezhnev’s government officially opposed Zionism, it still refrained from openly anti-Semitic publications; therefore, a number of the writings produced by the Russian Party, as well as by those who gathered around *Veche*, were considered non-Marxist and appeared only in the *samizdat* press. Among these works, for example, we can name Valerii Emel’ianov’s pamphlet *Who Stands behind Jimmy Carter and the So-Called Euro-Communists*, which was addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist party but never officially published. The pamphlet zealously insisted on the danger of the almighty organization of Masons and Jews seeking world supremacy that stood behind U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Emel’ianov sought to expose the Talmud and the Bible as promoting Jewish world supremacy and declared all Jews to be potential Masons taking secret orders from the Zionist government.

Although the idea of the existence of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy had been indirectly referred to in the official press as early as the 1970s, it was never directly promoted until the years of late socialism. It was only in the late 1980s that Dmitrii Vasil’ev, the leader of the first officially recognized Russian patriotic organization, Pamiat’, made the theme of Jewish world conspiracy part of his organization’s public repertoire.¹⁹ Glasnost unleashed a certain freedom of speech that allowed reactionaries as well as democrats to enunciate their ideas publicly, to find the necessary target audience and let authors and audience engage each other. As a result, beginning in the late 1980s Pamiat’ openly advocated the idea that Jews and Masons were guilty of the destruction of Russia through the Revolution, the elimination of the Orthodox Church, and the murder of

¹⁷V. Begun, *Polzuchaia kontrrevoliutsiia* (Minsk, 1974); Trokhym K. Kichko, *Judaizm I sionizm* (Kiev, 1968); Evgenii S. Evseev, *Fashizm pod goluboi zvezdoi* (Moscow, 1971).

¹⁸Semyon Reznik, *The Nazification of Russia: Anti-Semitism in the Post-Soviet Era* (Washington, DC, 1996), 39.

¹⁹Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements* (Armonk, NY, 2001), 41.

Tsar Nicolas II and his family. The supporters of the “patriotic” organizations and the “New Right” were now finally able to promote their ideas, and so they did, in numerous booklets and pamphlets, such “thick” literary journals as *Nash sovremennik*, *Molodaia gvardiia*, *Kuban'*, and *Moskva*, as well as in the newspaper *Literaturnaia Rossia*. After 1991, when the Soviet archives were finally opened, many works that belonged to the authors of the Union of Russian People also were reprinted and became widely available.²⁰

The writers active in the patriotic movement ranged from such well-known dissident patriotic figures as the editor-in chief of *Moskva*, Leonid Borodin, and such well known somewhat dissident “village prose” writers like Viktor Astaf’ev, to the literary critic Vadim Kozhinov and the poet Stanislav Kuniaev, known primarily for their activities in the patriotic movement.²¹ Suddenly all these writers, though very different in their views, became united by the same idea: the danger of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy that aimed to destroy their country. At the same time, the government, in its desire to move away from the Communist past, adopted the policy of promoting and supporting religious revival. Unfortunately, religion, and the Orthodox Church in particular, became a “moving force” of Russian reactionary nationalism.²² The “patriots” believed that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 had destroyed the Church in order to destroy the Russian national spirit, and they considered the Black Hundreds of the early 1900s to be heroes who had tried to preserve Russian religious and national values.²³

However, in the early 1990s the neopatriotic organizations, now mostly known under the name “the Browns,” went through a certain crisis. In 1992 the most radical members of Pamiat' left the society and created their own organization, simply called the Black Hundreds. Others eventually joined or formed different groups, such as the National Bolshevik party or the Russian National Union. This resulted at least in part from the fact that in the early 1990s Russia entered a period of serious economic and political instability. In this situation some members of Pamiat' abandoned their previous anti-Communist beliefs, stopped blaming the Communists for the destruction of Russia, and began reproaching the new government for the destruction of Soviet Union. Quite oddly, in the minds of a new generation of nationalists, the so-called Red-Browns, the imperial glory of prerevolutionary Russia merged with the glory of an imperial Soviet Union. “The reds and the browns differed on what Russia should be,” John Bushnell observed, “but they had common enemies: the West, the Jews and the democrats—and they believed those enemies had by devious means seized power in order to destroy Russia.”²⁴

This odd mixture of reactionary Orthodox and reactionary Communist ideologies, combined with a very strong anti-liberalism and anti-Semitism—which originated around

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Reznik, *Nazification of Russia*, 145.

²²Mikhail Agursky, “Fundamentalist Christian Anti-Anti-Semitism in Modern Russia,” *Religion, State and Society* 20:1 (1992): 51–54.

²³Judith D. Kornblatt, “Christianity, Anti-Semitism, Nationalism: Russian Orthodoxy in a Reborn Orthodox Russia,” in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex and Society since Gorbachev*, ed. A. M. Barker (Durham, 1999), 417.

²⁴John Bushnell, “Paranoid Graffiti at Execution Wall,” in *Consuming Russia*, 398.

1992 and continues to flourish—with some minor changes, up to the present day, is in one respect an innovation. I believe that the term that best describes the anti-Semitism of the neopatriots is “metaphorical anti-Semitism.” In contrast to the ideology of the original Black Hundreds, which targeted real Jews, the Browns and the Red-Browns of recent years are targeting a metaphorical, mythological Judeo-Mason, whom they regard as a demonic enemy of Russia. This demonic Jew has very little in common with Jews as an ethnic group or nationality, or Judaism as a religion. In fact, the neopatriots could define every liberal and democratic reformist in Russia as a Judeo-Mason, from Chubais and Yeltsin to Galina Starovoitova and Mikhail Khodorkovsky. This version of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy differs in complex ways from the earlier, directly anti-Semitic version that was popularized by the Union of Russian People in the 1900s and adopted by Pamiat’.

This strongly metaphorical view of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy had one odd consequence. While the Kabbalah was often mentioned in the reactionary anti-Semitic literature of the early twentieth century, and was sometimes evoked in official and dissident Soviet “patriotic” writings, it was never the dominant issue until the 1990s.²⁵ In the minds of the Browns and the Red-Browns, Kabbalah appears as a symbolic, esoteric, demonic teaching that is opposed to the homogeneous spiritual doctrine of Christianity and, therefore, the Russian national spirit. The kabbalistic myth that was introduced in the first decade of the twentieth century has “ripened” and “matured” in the literature of the last decade of the twentieth century. The neopatriots have reprinted in paper and electronic format a large body of long-forgotten articles from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were devoted in particular to Kabbalah and Freemasonry. They have also produced a vast number of original articles and pamphlets on this subject. The belief that the Kabbalah is a Judeo-Masonic demonic doctrine is a common denominator for an otherwise diverse Russian nationalist movement.

THE JUDO-MASONIC MYTH IN PATRIOTIC LITERATURE

The extreme anti-Semitic views of the nationalists can be seen not only in their essays and articles but also in the poetry published by various nationalist groups. Oddly enough, literature plays an important role in the views of the Orthodox nationalists, who claim that they are “among the last of those who remember the social nature of literature.”²⁶ There is no doubt that these authors are not great poets; actually, we can hardly attribute any literary value to their work. Their poetry, presented under various organizational pseudonyms, such as “Sons of the Motherland,” on the website of the Union of Orthodox Brothers, is called “The Poetry of Russian Resistance” (*Poeziia russkogo soprotivleniia*). It disseminates in pseudopoetic form the same ideas and perspectives we have mentioned

²⁵For the nationalist interpretation of Kabbalah and its audible connection with Judeo-Masonic conspiracy in the writings of the early twentieth century nationalist authors see, for example, A. S. Shmakov, *Mezhdunarodnoe tainoe pravitel'stvo* (Moscow, 1912), 146–86. The full text of the book is available at <http://web.archive.org/web/20041021010619/oprichnina.russkie.com/masonstvo/shmacov/index.htm> (March 20, 2006).

²⁶Stanislav Kuniaev, a speech at the annual contest of the Union of Russian Writers, The Central House of Writers, Moscow, 2001, in *Zavtra*, June 17, 2001.

above. For example, a poem devoted to Moscow laments the occupation of the Russian capital by Judeo-Masons and bemoans that:

Россия в горестной тревоге.	Russia is in grievous alarm,
Кац разошелся не шутя,	Katz has really gone wild,
Азартно строит синагоги,	He is recklessly putting up synagogues
Жидовской лысиной блестя.	His bald kike head gleaming.
Сплошная Каббала в рекламе,	The ads are full of Kabbalah,
И душегубы тут и там,	And murderers are everywhere.
Воздвигнут храм, но внутрь храма	The churches are open, but their doors are closed
Нет входа праведным сердцам.	To those with righteous hearts.

Another “poet” presents contemporary Russia as a wasteland, transformed by Jews and Masons into an enormous cemetery in which they perform their demonic kabbalistic magical rituals. He regards the Black Hundreds as the only potential liberators of Russia from this demonic occupation:

Всюду жидомасонские перлы.	Judeo-Masonic frauds are everywhere,
Их создатели Фридман и Берман.	Produced by Friedman and Berman in cahoots
Только ветры московские дуют,	As soon as Moscow winds are blowing
И жида на Кладбище колдуют.	The kikes work their magic in the cemetery.
Затянула Россию в сеть Каббала!	Kabbalah has caught Russia in its poisonous web,
Но весна наступает, святая пора!	But Spring is coming, the Holy Era of the Resurrection,
Я поднял ледоруб, я иду со двора.	I am leaving my house with an ice pick and a banner.
Поднимается черное знамя.	The black banner is flying in the Moscow wind.
Разгорается русское пламя!	Russia is aflame and its fires are spreading.

The “poetry of Russian resistance” manages to combine Orthodox imagery typical of Black Hundreds (an ice pick, a black banner and the Holy Spring) with obscure occult images of “kikes” performing magic at the cemetery and such attributes of “new Russian economy” as advertising billboards that are supposedly taken by Jews to promote their “kabbalistic” beliefs. The image of a magical and kabbalistic Jewish net thrown upon Russia is also constantly repeated. For example, another poem by the same author advises the readers “to raise the holy banner and cut through the kabbalistic web” if they do not want “to burn in the flames that pierce through the pentagram”

Так поднимай святое знамя
И рви ты каббалистов сеть.
Из пентаграммы рвется пламя.
Ты тоже хочешь в нем сгореть?

By being intentionally “conservative” in their literary style, the national-patriotic poets declare their opposition to the avant-garde and postmodernist poetic forms typical for the currently popular Stanislav Lvovskii, Linor Goralik, and Dmitrii Kuz'min—whom the nationalist authors also label as Jews. Some of the main features of the “poetry of Russian resistance” is the use of lofty words and word formations (such as the stress on the “и” in the word “кладбище”), extreme pathos, and indirect borrowings (and blatant plagiarism) from famous nineteenth- and twentieth-century poems. However, when these “conservative” short pieces are extended to some fifty pages, the reader may well gradually

become convinced that s/he is dealing not so much with plagiarism as with parody, which, much in the manner of postmodern works, has pronounced that the author is dead and has replaced the original literary discourse with a parody on it. Such reactions certainly may arise when a reader happens upon one of the most pathos-laden poems of “Russian resistance” and notes that it starts with a line borrowed from the Jewish poet Osip Mandel'shtam:

Мы живем под собою не чуя страны.
Захватили Россию повсюду жиды!

We do not feel our country under our feet.
All of Russia is taken by Jews.

The authors also show very little knowledge of the proper meaning of Jewish terms, which sometimes results in hilarious conclusions. For example, another anonymous poet completes his description of the supposedly glorious day when Jews will finally leave Russia by pronouncing that Jews will

потянутся в дали, где лает лиса
И кричат на закате незримые птицы
И пойдут, проклиная, туда, где маца
На крови христианских младенцев
клубится.

leave for the woods where foxes will bark
For the woods where invisible birds cry at sunset
For the places where *matza* wreathes on the blood
Of the innocent murdered Christian
infants.

Matza is made out of pure water and flour and is as hard as a stone; it could scarcely “wreath,” like smoke, over the blood of Christian infants—blood out of which, as the poet believes, *matza* is prepared. Of course, the authors presenting their masterpieces on the website “The Poetry of Russian Resistance” would never even think of defining themselves as postmodernists: it is the result, not the intent, that turns out to be pure postmodern texts.

The Orthodox nationalists seem convinced that every Jewish symbol is based on kabbalistic symbolism, including the national emblem of the Jewish Autonomous Region, commonly known as Birobidzhan.²⁷ The “presence” of this symbolism provides them with indisputable evidence that Jews and consequently Masons are linked to Satan and aim to destroy Russia with evil magical powers. Thus, since they believe that esotericism is always used in the Masonic Lodges for political purposes, they regard any Masonic order to be simultaneously esoteric and political.

However, it is quite obvious from the works of the national-patriots that in their search for an “enemy” of Russia they accuse not a “real Jew,” and certainly not a “true Mason,” but an allegorical and even metaphysical “Judeo-Mason,” which actually and ultimately means “a member of the liberal intelligentsia.” As previously noted, while the historical Black Hundreds were also passionately antiliberal, they were also truly anti-Semitic. In contrast, the neonationalists accuse the entire Russian intelligentsia of being Judeo-Masonic. One of them, Boris Bashilov, even calls the Russian intelligentsia “a Masonic Order per se.” He argues that the “Order of the Russian Intelligentsia” purposely adopted the mystical teaching of Kabbalah as a tool in their struggle against monarchy,

²⁷Egor Holmogorov, <http://www.livejournal.com/users/holmogor/783216.html> (August 12, 2004).

religion, and—oddly enough—“the sun of Russian poetry, the national Russian poet Pushkin, whom the Judeo-Masons killed without mercy.”²⁸

This kind of “metaphysical” interpretation of Kabbalah and the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy in Russia is developed most expressively in a staggering six-hundred-page work by a well-known nationalist Orthodox writer, Viktor Ostretsov, whose *Masonry, Culture, and Russian History* is based entirely on the connection between Kabbalah, Freemasonry, and the Russian intelligentsia.²⁹ While Bashilov believes that the Judeo-Masons killed Pushkin, Ostretsov is sure that most Russian writers, including Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, and even Dostoevsky, were corrupted by Freemasonry. The only exception was the literature of the circle of the Black Hundreds. At first glance, Ostretsov would appear to be a true anti-Semite. However, his book actually does not target Jews—his argument is much more ambitious. Ostretsov completely denies any positive Western philosophical influence on Russia, since he believes that modern Western philosophy derives from Jewish teachings. He even labels Peter I a secret Jewish convert. He is certain that “all European philosophy can be defined as one endless commentary on kabbalistic teachings. Thus, the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy lies at the heart of all Western philosophical thought.”³⁰

Both Ostretsov and Bashilov can be called radical Orthodox nationalists. However, neither Bashilov nor Ostretsov is against Kabbalah because they are “zoologically” against Jews, but rather because they are against all liberals and Western-oriented members of the intelligentsia. Ostretsov, for example, considers the Western world anti-Christian and demonic, and for him being demonic equates to being kabbalistic and Talmudic. A different interpretation is seen among members of another nationalist group, the National-Bolsheviks, and especially in the works of their most famous writer, Alexander Dugin.³¹

In fact, in the development of his argument Dugin eventually arrives at the same ideas that we have already seen in Bashilov and Ostretsov; namely, that the unstoppable decline of Western civilization, in its very decline, is poisoning Russia. He believes that the destructive influences of the modern world are associated primarily with globalism, liberal democracy, materialism, and atheism, which have supplanted the conventional capitalism of the “third estate.” He purports to understand all these tendencies as secularized forms of Jewish mystical doctrines and in particular as a secularized version of Jewish kabbalistic eschatology. However, Dugin regards the problem of Jews and Russians not as a struggle between religion and reason but as an esoteric struggle. Orthodox nationalists like Ostretsov oppose the mystical nature of Russian Orthodoxy to the

²⁸Boris Bashilov, “Pushkin i masonstvo,” in *Istoriia russkogo masonstva* (St. Petersburg, 1995), 14:13.

²⁹Viktor Ostretsov, *Masonstvo, kul'tura i russkaia istoriia* (CITY, YEAR).

³⁰Bashilov, “Pushkin i masonstvo.”

³¹Alexander Dugin is the most prolific writer among contemporary Russian nationalists. Formerly a member of Pamiat', he left the organization in order to establish his own group, the National-Bolshevik Party (NBP), with a famous Russian writer, Eduard Limonov. However, in a few years he left the NBP too, as a result of a conflict with the less anti-Semitic and more revolutionary radical Limonov. Dugin introduces himself as “a metaphysician, conspirologist and an expert in sacred geography.” He is a devoted believer in the concept of Eurasia, which originates in the writings of early twentieth century Russian philosophers such as Nikolai Trubetskoi. He is editor-in-chief of three literary and philosophical journals: *A Dear Angel*, *Hyperborean*, and *Elements: A Eurasian Review*.

Kabbalah, which they consider simultaneously magical and rationalistic. Although “magical and rationalistic” certainly sounds oxymoronic to the reader, Ostretsov regards the two terms as deeply linked to each other because the roots of modern rational science lie, in his mind, in the alchemical or occult activities of medieval and Renaissance scholars. By contrast, Dugin regards world history as a constant struggle between two eschatological teachings, black and white, evil and good: a metaphorical Atlantis versus a metaphorical Eurasia. He believes that Kabbalah is a cornerstone of this struggle, since for him Kabbalah represents Atlanticism, while Russian mystical esotericism represents Eurasianism. Dugin declares that Judaic esoteric eschatology regards the end of the world as a Jewish victory in the ancient struggle of Jews against non-Jews, and that the concept of this struggle is presented most fully in Kabbalah. Thus kabbalistic mysticism is unerringly connected to ethnic and nationalistic issues.³²

However, while Ostretsov and the Orthodox nationalists plan to strike at the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy with the power of Orthodox Church, Dugin believes that a conspiracy can be destroyed only by another conspiracy. He has, therefore, created an elaborated scheme of “conspirology”: in his words, “the idea of Judeo-Masonic conspiracy undoubtedly corresponds to deep unconscious archetypes of very remote and diverse human communities, which constitute the ‘conspirological instinct’ at its source.”³³ Thus, in order to suppress and to overcome this conspiracy, one should organize and build an even stronger conspiracy.

THE INTENTIONAL AND UNINTENTIONAL POSTMODERNISTS: THE FINAL DECONSTRUCTION OF THE JUDEO-MASONIC MYTH

The image of a struggle between an evil conspiracy and a good one became the plot of *Mr. Hexogen*, a novel written by one of the most prominent writers of the Red-Brown camp, Alexander Prokhanov. Prokhanov is a follower of the most unreconstructed Communist ideology and the leader of the Red-Brown political camp. He is a passionate anti-Semite, and, until recently, a writer whom only his own allies had taken seriously.³⁴ *Mr. Hexogen*, however, has completely changed his literary status. Not only has it become extremely popular (with a press run of fifty thousand copies!) but it has also provoked numerous controversies. As literary journalist Michel Ryklin said at a roundtable held at the publishing house Ad Marginem in 2003, “Prokhanov’s book has to be discussed since it touches the aspects of Russian life that we cannot ignore.”³⁵ Oriented not toward the

³²Alexander Dugin, “Metafizika natsii v Kabbale,” in his *Konservativnaia revoliutsiia* (Moscow, 1995), 281.

³³Cited in Vadim Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* (Jerusalem, 2002), 39.

³⁴Aleksandr Prokhanov, *Gospodin Geksogen* (CITY, YEAR). Prokhanov belongs to the “old” Soviet generation of “official” and politically correct Soviet writers. During the 1980s he served as editor-in-chief of *Sovetskaia literatura*, which was oriented toward a Western readership, and, as a journalist, covered the Soviet war in Afghanistan extensively. After the fall of the Soviet Union he became a leading figure in the Communist party that remains in opposition to the current regime. Prokhanov actively participated in the revolt of the Red-Browns against Yeltsin’s government in 1993, officially supported Yeltsin’s reactionary opponent, Makashov, and started two national-patriotic Communist newspapers, *Den’* and *Zavtra*.

³⁵See <http://anthropology.rinet.ru/drupal/node.php?id=56>.

usual target audience for Communist literature, senior citizens, but rather towards the young generation, the novel created a scandal in literary circles, especially after it received the prestigious National Bestseller literary prize in 2002. It is no exaggeration to say that *Mr. Hexogen* can be considered one of the most provocative literary works of the post-Soviet decade. "Prokhanov is as fashionable now as absinthe," Russian *Vogue* declared in the summer of 2002.³⁶

Based upon the adventures of an ex-KGB general Beloseltsev, *Mr. Hexogen* is an anti-Semitic and antidemocratic "conspirological" novel which, as Rykhlin notes, steps out of the most bizarre fantasies of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which the author considers an authentic Jewish text.³⁷ The popular critic Lev Danilkin called it "a novel about Putin, the Moscow mayor Luzhkov, the Moscow explosions, the struggle of the secret Order of the KGB versus the secret Jewish World Order, and, more than anything else, about butterflies."³⁸ The term "hexogen," until recently used only by a small circle of biochemists, suddenly became familiar to the majority of Russians after the explosive substance was used in the notorious blasts in apartment buildings in Moscow and Volgograd in 1999. Prokhanov, like his ideological opponent, the famous liberal oligarch Boris Berezovsky, believes that the explosions were caused not by Chechen terrorists, as the official version of events would have it, but by the Russian government via the secret police. Prokhanov claims that the ongoing destruction of Russia was put in motion by a Jewish conspiracy led by the marionette President Yeltsin and his depraved daughter, Tat'iana. This conspiracy left Russia in the hands of Jewish bankers and reduced the Russian nation to depravity, constant humiliation, slow death. However, a new group that plans to bring down the president and put Mayor Luzhkov's protégé in the Kremlin has even bigger plans. It intends to turn Russia into a colony of Israel and the United States called "New Khazaria." As Prokhanov writes,

The country for which the Mayor was hurriedly preparing Russia was New Khazaria, a Jewish Russian state. The future sovereign of the country, chosen by the Mayor, looked like a Semitic and devilish Adonis (*krasavets*) in a crown adorned with horns, dressed in crimson clothes. The Mayor knew that the day would come when this new sovereign would enter his city in a chariot, led by the two winged horses from the emblem of the gas station Shell, escorted by half-naked boys from the famous erotic theatre of Roman Viktiuk. He would enter the city, and the Mayor personally would lead him to the Kremlin's Uspensky Cathedral, which, by this time turned into a new synagogue, would become the place of his glorious coronation.³⁹

Prokhanov clearly identifies this new sovereign with the Antichrist. The demonic nature of the Jewish conspiracy supported by the Mayor can also be seen in the depiction of the annual ball given by the Jewish media-oligarch Astros (read "Gusinsky"). The ball takes place in the "Russia" concert hall. The concert hall, although it really exists in

³⁶*Vogue* (Russia) (June 2002): 34.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Lev Danilkin, "O 'Gospodine Geksogene,'" *Afisha*, 2002, no. 4:41.

³⁹Prokhanov, *Gospodin Geksogen*, 6, at www.geksogen.ru/g1-7-9.html (March 20, 2006).

Moscow, has no doubt been chosen with symbolic purpose: it is evident that the Jewish oligarchy intends to take over Russia just as it takes over the “Russia” concert hall. The Jewish nature of the ball, called “The Stars of Russia,” is announced right on the façade, “with billions of little six-pointed stars,” and “with letters that had a telling slant to the left, and thus bore—just slightly, but unmistakably—a resemblance to some kabbalistic inscriptions.”⁴⁰ Prokhanov portrays the ball as a demonic Sabbath, with a baboon playing jazz on a white grand piano, gorillas with trumpets on the stage, and a master of ceremonies in a black tuxedo who resembles the Satan of *The Master and Margarita*.⁴¹

The occult, Judeo-Masonic, and apocalyptic nature of the present ruler of Russia is announced finally by an old proletarian who shares his prophecy with Beloseltsev and announces that “the demonic serpent with 666 coils lives in the underground metro tunnel under the fashionable ‘Metropol’ hotel near the Kremlin and hypnotizes Yeltsin to make him shoot innocent people.” According to the proletarian, “the Jews had murdered the tsar, but Stalin killed the Jews. Stalin knew the secret of the serpent and prophesied Masonic danger, but no one believed him. Stalin is a saint, and his victory over Jews is sacred. From his victory a new Russia should be born, but the old Russia will never end—you cannot understand this by reason, just listen to what your heart tells you.”⁴²

The political views that Prokhanov presents in *Mr. Hexogen* are obvious. “The problems of contemporary Russia,” he has his protagonist declare, “derive from the fact that Russian people prefer slow extinction while listening to the sweet voices of the gay singers from the ‘Na-Na’ pop group instead of taking a pitchfork and burning down Jewish bankers’ mansions.”⁴³ It is also evident that Prokhanov uses the term “kabbalistic” (and “Kabbalah”) without any knowledge of or interest in its real context—it is just a label, a “hate word.” In this sense, the ideology of Prokhanov’s novel is typical of the “anti-kabbalistic” ideological discourse of the national-patriotic camp in general. What distinguishes Prokhanov’s novel from run-of-the-mill Russian anti-Semitic literature is the fact that the novel was published by the aesthetically provocative and liberal Russian publishing house Ad Marginem, known for its pronounced postmodern tastes. Ad Marginem had previously published such famous leaders of Western postmodernism as Foucault, Kristeva, and Derrida, as well as such Russian adepts of the genre as Vladimir Sorokin, and therefore always found itself in opposition to the national-patriotic camp. The majority of the Russian intelligentsia seemed surprised by such a choice. But the novel immediately won many supporters, including the popular Russian critic Lev Danilkin, who has explained that while “Ad Marginem does not specialize in communist literature” or have any interest in “detective stories,”

⁴⁰Ibid., 4.

⁴¹Ibid., 6. Compare to: “White-teeth smiles were everywhere. On the stage behind the tulips, a monkey jazz band now ranted and raved. A huge gorilla in a black tuxedo with a trumpet in his hand was conducting as he danced ponderously to the beat. Two baboons with leonine manes were playing grand pianos, and these pianos were drowned out by the thundering, squealing and banging of saxophones, violins and drums” (Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* [New York, 1995], 231).

⁴²Prokhanov, *Gospodin Geksogen*, 8.

⁴³Ibid., 24.

it published Prokhanov's novel not for its content but rather for its surrealist style, its shocking metaphors, and its hallucinatory passages that seem to have been written by a bohemian drug addict rather than by an elderly communist author. This novel positions Prokhanov as a socialist realist who suddenly got on LSD, or a Tolstoy who had discovered the power of heroin. The novel, therefore, created a symbiosis that has never existed: a merger of the radical Red-Brown left with the intellectual avant-garde.⁴⁴

Similar ideas were expressed by the young literary critic Dmitrii Olshansky, whose provocative views caused an outcry and produced a heated discussion among critics and writers in the press as well as on the Internet.⁴⁵ Olshansky went as far as to compare Prokhanov's mystical symbolism to that of E. T. A. Hoffman and the Russian Symbolists Andrei Belyi and Fedor Sologub, and at the same time argued that Prokhanov's literary style also reflects that of the American literary generation of the 1960s, especially that of writers like Hunter S. Thompson, with its stress on radical activism and drug culture.⁴⁶ In contrast, the detractors of Prokhanov's novel argued that his metaphors are poster-like, false, hysterical, pathetic and devoid of aesthetic or literary value.⁴⁷ Although I disagree with Prokhanov's ideological platform as well as with the praise expressed by such radical critics as Olshansky, I tend to agree with Danilkin. I believe that Prokhanov's novel is very different from the literature usually found on the national-patriotic websites. Its language is indeed poster-like; however, this feature of Prokhanov's novel is comparable to the poster-like Futurist literary style of the Russian avant-garde of the early 1920s. It is metaphorical, esthetically provocative, and, yes, quite hallucinogenic.⁴⁸ It constructs a reality in which the Church of St. Basil changes its place on Red Square every night, returning to its proper spot in the morning; in which a dead Lenin guards the Kremlin from the underground beast that disguises itself as the Moscow metro system; in which the editor-in-chief of *Moscow News*, Evgenii Kiselev, turns into a cell phone; and in which Boris Nemtsov is transformed into a dog and Putin becomes a rainbow. It is the dream of a psychotic, an extreme cocktail of sex, blood, excrement, and power, and this type of literature is the sort favored by the super-fashionable and ultra-radical Ad Marginem.

⁴⁴Danilkin, "O 'Gospodine Geksogene.'"

⁴⁵See, for example, the archives of Dmitry Olshansky's online journal at www.livejournal.com/users/olshansky (April–July 2002).

⁴⁶Dmitrii Olshanskyii "Ot Geksogena do Galiutsinogena," *Vremia MN* (April 5, 2002).

⁴⁷See, for example, Bakhyt Kenzheev, "Lobstery s Borneo ili Khoroshii pisatel' Prokhanov," *Russkii zhurnal* (June 14, 2002); Olga Slavnikova, "Ia odinokii chelovek v literature," *Moskovskie novosti* (May 28, 2002); Aleksandr Roife, "Moda na Bunt," *Knizhnoe obozrenie* (May 17, 2002); or Oksana Timofeeva, "Son o Goriszhei rodine," *Sinii divan*, 2002, no. 1.

⁴⁸As an example of Prokhanov's use of metaphor: "Огромные мягкие ягоды, косматые чешуйчатые ананасы, дымчатые гроздья винограда. Арбузы с вынутыми ломтями дышали красной мякотью, начиненной черными блестящими семенами. Дыни, как золотые луны, источали свечение. Блюдо плавало за окном, и хотелось протянуть вилку, поддеть рассыпчатую долю арбуза, схватить цепкими пальцами тяжелую гроздь винограда. В голове Белосельцева вставало светило, окруженное воспаленной зарей. Храм за окном парил в мироздании. Разноцветные лучистые солнца. Синие туманные луны. Планеты, окруженные кольцами. Серебряные спирали галактик. Дышали, струились, источали радуги в проблеске комет, метеоров. Неведомый мир выплывал из черной дыры, приближился к теклам, раскачивался в безвоздушном пространстве, разбрасывая разноцветные перья сияний" (*Gospodin Geksogen*, 27).

The novel is also characterized by dark occult motifs, mysticism, and esotericism, and by a strong “conspirological plot”—all of which are strongly favored by post-Soviet Russian postmodernism.⁴⁹

Lev Pirogov, another contemporary Russian critic, believes that the major force that produced Prokhanov’s novel lies in the clash of two ideologies, Soviet and post-Soviet, that was typical of the literary scene of the 1990s. As he says, “at the frontier where these two ideologies meet each other, they create a purgatory space, inhabited by wild beasts and allegorical creatures. They are a product of this frontier, just as the gargoyles of the gothic cathedrals were born at the border of the secular and the sacred.”⁵⁰ I disagree with Pirogov. I believe that Prokhanov’s personal literary mythology derives from the conspirological mythology created by his political allies, and especially from the half-pagan, half-Orthodox conspirological mythology of his close friend Alexander Dugin. However, placed in the literary context of the late 1990s, Prokhanov took this mythology to the extreme. The textual world of Prokhanov employs all the surrealistic “fears” of the national-patriots, together with their irrational beliefs in the power of the Orthodox Church, pagan superstitions, or a resurrected Lenin to save them and their country from “the kabbalistic demonic Jews.”⁵¹ Prokhanov did not intend to undermine the Judeo-Masonic mythology. On the contrary, he tried to present it in the most appealing way! However, unlike his fascist peers, who remain reactionary not only in their views but also in their literary stylistic preferences, Prokhanov strove to add a modernist, even surrealist flavor to the idea of Jewish and Kabbalistic danger. He wanted to present his political enemies as mythological monsters and did not notice that the combination of current political matters with an extravagant surrealistic imagery could not help being hilarious. Personally, I do not think that this was Prokhanov’s intention, but—quite unexpectedly—this novel by one of the last remaining Communist writers has become one of the most provocative postmodern works of the last decade; or at least it was so interpreted by the critics, and their opinion retroactively made it so.

Again, I would like to stress that I would never claim that it was Prokhanov’s intention to write a post-modernist novel. Prokhanov’s work has oddly succeeded in adding literary shine to populist fascist paranoia exemplified by the “poetry of Russian resistance” quoted above and can be easily compared with them—both *Mr. Hexogen* and the poems could be termed “unintentional postmodernism” on some level. However, the extremely poor literary quality, “conservative” style, and too obvious and uncreative plagiarism of these patriotic poems prevented them from laying claim to any literary fame outside of a small circle of Russian nationalists. On the contrary, Prokhanov’s surrealist metaphors and avant-garde style produced a work that, while pronouncing the liberal establishment to be demonic, actually fit the literary tastes of this establishment surprisingly well. Instead of seeing a

⁴⁹See, for example, Viktor Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota* (Moscow, 1996); Vladimir Sorokin, *Goluboe salo* (Moscow, 1999); or Boris Akunin, *Azazel* (Moscow, 2000).

⁵⁰Lev Pirogov, “Zhitie Beloseltseva,” *Ex Libris* (June 27, 2002).

⁵¹The idea of Lenin’s resurrection, which can be traced to the occult philosophy of Nikolai Fedorov and the establishment of the Lenin cult, actually became quite popular during the 1990s, especially among the Communist-oriented postmodernist young writers. See, for example, Il’ia Masodov, *Cherti* (Tver’, 2003), available at <http://www.gothic.ru/literature/modern/prose/masodov/teufel.htm> (March 20, 2006).

grim but prophetic voice that tried to warn Russian readers of a Judeo-Masonic danger, many perceive Prokhanov as a political and esthetic extremist who stands against the cultural mainstream, in the same way such famous postmodern authors as Vladimir Sorokin and Victor Pelevin do. The Judeo-Masonic conspiracy of Prokhanov's novel, with an apocalyptic beast under the Kremlin, mass-media oligarchs with kabbalistic occult powers, and doomed but courageous KGB officers, comes across as a hallucination, the nightmare of a drug addict, and is taken to the point where it just cannot be taken seriously, thus proving its inability to present the Truth of Grand Narrative. Therefore, in spite of the many concerned voices that argue that the ideological program represented by Prokhanov's novel may have the most serious political consequences, it seems that, while trying to dramatize the existence of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, the author, apparently unintentionally, actually deconstructed it. Indeed, in spite of the hyperbolic accusations that have been applied to Jews by followers of anti-Semitic ideologies throughout the centuries, I found astonishing Prokhanov's belief that Ziuganov has never succeeded in the elections because Jews have produced a fleet of giant rats who sit inside the election urns and eat all the polls submitted for Communists.

When exploring the use of Communist symbolism and ideology in post-Soviet postmodernism, Mikhail Epshtein noted that "a revolutionary thesis that is driven to excess or extremity suddenly turns into an antithesis" and that "the surplus of the quality that this thesis attempted to negate and oppose suddenly starts to govern the thesis and to dominate it. Thus the surplus of the quality ironically turns this quality into an illusion, and reality becomes illusory when it turns into hyper-reality."⁵² Epshtein declares this irony to be the central dialectic of postmodern literary ideology. I believe that it can also be applied directly to Prokhanov's novel. In *Mr. Hexogen*, conspirology, the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, and the danger of dark powers planning to take over Russia are presented so excessively that they become "hypertrophied reality," that is, a self-referential postmodern text. A conformist Soviet Socialist Realist and official Communist author becomes in his new novel an adherent of Fedorov's theory of the resurrection of the dead and ancient Egyptian occultism, which KGB officers created by his hallucinogenic imagination oppose to the demonic, kabbalistic occult theories of Judeo-Masons. These revived occult theories are developed in the secret labs of the KGB to resurrect Lenin, who is and will be the only true Savior of injured and humiliated Russia. When the magical solution of Lenin's resurrection is finally found, he will arise from the dead "to overthrow those evil messengers of the demonic mysticism of Kabbalah that rule in the Kremlin nowadays, and to triumph over the apocalyptic beast."⁵³

However, Ad Marginem's attempt to employ and deconstruct the national-patriotic Judeo-Masonic kabbalistic myth went further than publishing Prokhanov's novel. Right at the time when *Mr. Hexogen* hit the shelves of Moscow bookstores, the publishing house released a novel by the leading (and most scandalous) postmodern writer of the last decade, Vladimir Sorokin. Sorokin's new novel, *Ice*, was completely devoted to the subject of a Gnostic, and apparently kabbalistic, conspiracy. The moment it arrived in bookstores

⁵²Epshtein, *Postmodern v Rossii*, 31.

⁵³Prokhanov, *Gospodin Geksogen*, 12.

it became a hit and, like *Mr. Hexogen*, became the subject of numerous discussions and arguments. Indeed, these two novels can be described as the two most scandalous works of the Russian literary scene of the early 2000s.

The publication of any novel by Sorokin immediately produces a strong wave of violent, critical responses. Sorokin has been very popular in Russia since the mid-1990s, and his popularity is due largely to the controversial and often shocking issues he exploits in his works, which often present alternative interpretations of Soviet reality, including, for example, a homosexual relationship between Stalin and Khrushchev, or sexual intercourse between Hitler and Svetlana Allilueva. However, *Ice* differed strongly from Sorokin's earlier works and bewildered its readers, to a large extent because its esoteric plot has confused most of its audience. *Ice* tells the reader of the existence of a strange sect, whose members call themselves "the brothers of lost light." One of the brothers describes to a novice the history of the sect, telling him that the fraternity consists of the primordial people, the children of the divine light that appeared prior to the creation of the world. These divine children existed in their primordial state as 23,000 rays of the divine light. However, in the process of Creation they were mistakenly trapped in material shells and turned into humans. When this happened, the material shell obscured their heavenly spirit, and therefore they were no longer able to listen to their divine hearts, which had let them communicate directly with the Deity.⁵⁴ The only way to identify a lost brother or sister is to beat his or her chest with a piece of astral ice from the remains of the famous Tungus meteorite. If they belonged to the descendants of the "original 23,000," their hearts would start to speak and they would return to their primordial state and regain their lost mystical personal connection with the Deity, the divine light, and their other brothers and sisters. The members of the sect regard the rest of humanity as "meat machines" who do not deserve to live. Thus, in order to find new brothers, they beat the potential members' chests with huge hammers made of sacred ice: ordinary people simply die, while those who belong to the lost tribe start speaking the language of the heart.

The notion of lost Light has been reflected not only in the kabbalistic but also in the Gnostic tradition.⁵⁵ However, several details in the description of the sect suggest that it is not Christian Gnosticism but Kabbalah that influenced Sorokin's interpretation of the theory of the lost Light. Gnosticism lacks the linguistic and numerological concepts that are extremely important to kabbalistic mysticism, and in particular it lacks the belief in the power of large numbers that is essential for both Kabbalah and Sorokin's novel. According to kabbalistic doctrine, the first man created by God, Adam Kadmon, differed greatly from the material human being as we imagine him, resembling instead a crystal

⁵⁴Vladimir Sorokin, *Led* (Moscow, 2001), 211–13.

⁵⁵Some Gnostic heresies regarded the Creation of the material world as a mistake. According to their doctrines, the Creation was a result of the emanation of the eternal Light that existed before Creation. By the act of Creation parts of the Light were separated from their source and placed in a hostile environment. Therefore, Gnosticism regards material life as a cage in which the sparks of the Divine Light are imprisoned in their human bodies. They are constantly unhappy and looking for a way to return to their Creator. On their religious views see, for example, Jonas Hans, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston, 1958).

vessel full of Divine Light. Up to the moment of the Biblical Fall, the first material human and his spiritual ego, Adam Kadmon, had been united as one. God and Man had existed in close harmony, and Man knew all the secrets of the divine world. The fall of Adam changed this situation. The Evil forces from the underworld ascended into the world of *sefirot*, and, under pressure, the vessel broke into a million pieces, each of which contained a spark of the divine light. Adam Kadmon was destroyed, and corporeal man lost his eternal life and great knowledge. The exile from Paradise is regarded in Kabbalah as an allegorical exile from unity with God. Since the soul of Adam may be seen as the original human soul, which contained all the souls of mankind, at the moment of birth each human heart receives a small piece of the crystal vessel of Adam Kadmon with one spark of the Divine Light inside. Therefore, the primary aim of Man should be to rekindle this spark in the hope of bringing himself back to the source of Divine Light and reuniting with God. This process of human restoration, called *tikkun* in Hebrew, will be successfully completed when 600,000 kabbalists come together, and it will result in a universal restoration that will put an end to the existing material world.⁵⁶

Russian critics already have noted the parallel between this theory and Sorokin's novel. Il'ia Kukulin, for example, has argued that "*Ice* is a modern remake of the kabbalistic teaching of the divine Light, the primordial man Adam Kadmon, the universal restoration known in Kabbalah as *tikkun*, and the heavenly emanations."⁵⁷ Kukulin also points out that "the practice of mystical communication with God and one's fellow brothers was popular among Polish Hasidic Jews, whose teaching was significantly influenced by Kabbalah."⁵⁸ Kukulin briefly notes that the novel develops a genre very popular in much of modern intellectual literature: the conspiracy plot based on an "alternative" reading of reality, that is, a reality that might happen in other circumstances but never actually does. However, Kukulin does not really establish a connection between Sorokin's adaptation of this genre and the kabbalistic esoteric plot of the novel. He also does not point out that the kabbalistic allegory of Adam Kadmon constitutes the central allegory of mystical Masonic symbolism.⁵⁹ Sorokin, in contrast, is unquestionably aware of the importance of this kabbalistic concept in Masonic ideology. Many of the features of the "brothers of the lost light," as well as its ideology, reflect Masonic symbolism. For example, the name of the most important member of the brotherhood is Khram, a name that refers the readers to the Masonic Temple. We should also keep in mind that in Masonic terminology initiates were usually called "those who are looking for Light." Sorokin's description of the moment when brothers are united in a spiritual consolidation through an act of "true brotherly

⁵⁶See Gershom Sholem, *Kabbalah* (New York, 1978), 37.

⁵⁷Il'ia Kukulin, "Every Trend Makes a Brand," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 56 (2002), via <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2002/56/kuk1.html> (March 20, 2006). It is worth noting that the concept of Adam Kadmon has been used in several postmodernist works, among which the most famous is probably Molovan Pavic's *The Dictionary of Khazars*.

⁵⁸Kukulin, "Every Trend Makes a Brand."

⁵⁹See, for example, Konstantin Burmistrov, "Kabbalisticheskaia ekzegetika i khristianskaia dogmatika: Evreiskaia mistika v uchenii russkikh masonov kontsa VIII veka," *Solnechnoe spletenie* 18–19 (2002), 151. See also Marina Aptekman, "The Origins of Kabbalistic Symbolism in the Poetry of Semeon Bobrov," *Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia Newsletter*, 2003.

love,” which comes from their hearts rather than sexual feelings, is also very close to the description of Masonic meditation in some of Masonic texts of the eighteenth century.⁶⁰

As has already been suggested, Sorokin is a provocative author interested in alternative interpretations of reality. Thus it is imperative to question why Sorokin has suddenly decided to exploit kabbalistic and Masonic motifs in his work. I believe that it is not Sorokin’s personal interest in esoteric theories that led him to write *Ice*. On the contrary, Sorokin is not interested in esotericism per se, but in an alternative interpretation of the myth of a kabbalistic Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, one of the most provocative and popular myths of the 1990s. Indeed, Sorokin’s popularity derives largely from his ability to react to the political or cultural issues that, at a given time, dominate the “official” intellectual situation, and to interpret these issues in his own way. I believe that in this context Sorokin’s book, published by the same Ad Marginem that published Prokhanov’s novel, is at least partially a postmodern interpretation of the Judeo-Masonic kabbalistic myth, and that it mocks the form this myth acquired in the literary activities of national-patriotic writers in the 1990s.

In his novel, Sorokin generates a number of clear links to this myth, and especially to its interpretation in the media and the literature of the national-patriots. He employs many stereotypes of the discourse developed by the anti-Semitic groups of the 1990s. For example, when one of the characters, after being beaten with an ice hammer, shares what happened to him with a friend, he tells him that he has been attacked by a strange sect, probably the Masons. The friend responds by advising him to remember that “there are no simple Masons, only Judeo-Masons, since all their lodges are controlled by Jewish oligarchs.” He also tells him that “before the twentieth century Jews used Masons as puppets to realize their plans, and now they use politicians too. It is very easy to recognize a Judeo-Mason: they all have a tattoo on their dicks in the form of a Star of David and the number 666.”⁶¹ We can see that the members of the sect have no respect for Russian national identity, nor for Christianity, and that they do not consider Orthodoxy a valid religion: “This girl had a cross on her breast, and they took it and tore it off and threw it right into the mud.”⁶²

The eventual goal of the sect is to find all 23,000 missing brothers and sisters, which, once accomplished, will result in the complete destruction of the present world. In pursuit of this goal, sect members rise to the highest ranks of the official Soviet organs of power: military institutions, political organizations, and undoubtedly even the KGB.⁶³ In a revelation quite in the tradition of the post-Soviet nationalist press, we learn from Sorokin that the best time for the fraternity started after the breakup of the Soviet Union, since during the 1990s its members were finally able to get secure positions in the government, banks, and media. Moreover, just as the nationalists claim, the most important Russian oligarch, who came to business from an academic institution (which evidently points to the ex-academic Boris Berezovsky), is also a member of the sect.⁶⁴

⁶⁰Mikhail Vaiskopf, *Siuzhet Gogolia: Morfologiia, ideologiia, kontekst* (Moscow, 1993), 19.

⁶¹Sorokin, *Led*, 41.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 186.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 222.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 279.

However, although everything that Sorokin describes fits perfectly into the nationalist picture of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, his story constantly deconstructs the nationalist myth. First of all, the most famous disseminators of the myth of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy in the twentieth century were the Nazis. Yet in Sorokin's story Nazis are among the most devoted participants of the sect. Moreover, the members of the sect always have blond hair and blue eyes, characteristics of Slavic or Aryan, rather than Jewish, heritage. The readers of *Ice* will also inevitably sense a parodic tone in the book, for example, when they notice that the act of spiritual love is usually performed on a bed or in a jacuzzi. The reader is also likely to be puzzled by the fact that the majority of the newly obtained brothers and sisters are either criminals or prostitutes. However, it is the final sections of the books that offer evidence that Sorokin is deconstructing the myth rather than supporting it. Here we learn of a new alternative medical treatment called "ice," which was created by famous scientists who discovered the ice from the meteorite, learned about its magical qualities, and started to produce it artificially. The treatment, administered free of charge to 250 people initially chosen to try it, consists of a miniature ice-hammer that automatically beats people's chests until they experience a mystical catharsis, which leads them into a spiritually purified emotional state. In this part of the novel, Sorokin initially leaves us confused about the meaning of this new treatment, which is described to us not by the author or by members of the sect, but by various narrators who have tried it. Therefore, readers are left to follow their own ideas. We can choose to believe an old movie director who is certain that the ice is a new form of cinema that is able to enter the soul of any human and stop hatred in the world, or a woman who thinks that this treatment is a door to true spiritual freedom. Or we can follow the notion of an unemployed Communist who argues that this ice is the creation of bloodthirsty Judeo-Masons who "lead us into deception with their kabbalistic tricks. They want to make us passive so that they can occupy us with the troops of the fucking UN and make us all speak English."⁶⁵ On the other hand, we can clearly see that the ideological mythology of the sect never has a practical application: the reader never witnesses a real transformation of the world, but only hears about it from various sources, which seem to be either opinionated or untrustworthy. I agree with the young Russian critic Maria Bondarenko that "Sorokin's novel is not an esoteric teaching but the synthetic image of one, in which a mass culture's mythology obtains a corresponding mythical esoteric teaching."⁶⁶ As a result, "a mass-culture esoteric mythology, such as a kabbalistic Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, which is usually employed in nationalist literature such as Prokhanov's novel *Mr. Hexogen*, turns into a postmodernist game and becomes an object of parody."⁶⁷

While most of *Ice* no doubt fits the parameters of the postmodernist game, the last pages of the novel present a surprising conclusion. On these pages a small child finds a piece of ice in a box of the new alternative ice remedy. The boy does not know about the healing powers of the ice, nor has he been educated about the consequences of the Judeo-Masonic or any other kind of conspiracy. He starts doing what any child would do:

⁶⁵Ibid., 296.

⁶⁶Kukulin, "Every Trend Makes a Brand."

⁶⁷Ibid.

playing with the ice. Suddenly, the novel's destructive discourse comes to its final and completely harmonious stage. Moreover, we suddenly realize why, in presenting the process of "spiritual transformation," Sorokin usually depicts criminals or prostitutes. The Gnostic kabbalistic myth is suddenly transformed into a Christian mythological discourse: a thief, a whore, and a child are the first to understand its foundations. Therefore, we can say that Sorokin's novel does two things simultaneously: first, it presents the kabbalistic mythology in its political context, and second, it completely deconstructs this context. He reproduces all the features of a classic picture of a Judeo-Masonic conspiratorial sect, with an ideology based on kabbalistic teaching, that tries to destroy the modern world for its own purposes. However, the aims of the sect turn out to be completely different from what the political interpreters of this myth usually present to their readers. Their aim is not to destroy the world in order to have power over it, but to bring it back to its lost harmony, its unity, and its *origin*. Therefore, the aim of the sect is, in fact, the kabbalistic *tikkun*, universal restoration. In such a reading, the novel actually contradicts the postmodernist concept of the rejection of grand narratives, discussed at the beginning of this article. Postmodernism undermines the presence of any "transcendental signified," whether it is in the form of an origin, utopia, or Truth. But Sorokin's novel, while deconstructing the myth of a destructive Judeo-Masonic kabbalistic conspiracy, suddenly transforms it into a Christian spiritual utopian allegory, and actually makes an effort to resurrect the original mystical kabbalistic symbolism of the linguistic and Messianic powers of large numbers and the lost Divine Light. It seems that the author places this attempt in the center of his newly developed poetic and literary ideology and offers it as a refuge for those who want to move away from the cynicism of postmodernism to a belief in the necessity of linguistic virginity—from postmodernist games back to the primitive monological narrative and to the existence of the original mystical, as well as literary, Truth. Sorokin's new novel, *The Way of Bro*, actually serves as an example of this new literary ideology.⁶⁸ The novel, designed as a prequel to *Ice*, indeed suppresses Sorokin's earlier conceptualist and postmodernist games with a "classical" monological narrative and, at the same time, develops and extends the neomystical interpretation brought forward by the last chapter of *Ice*. Such an interpretation can actually be supported by the fact (which puzzled many critics) that *The Way of Bro* was published not by Ad Marginem, which is known for its postmodern and scandalous literary interests, but by the Zakharov publishing house, which is known, on the one hand, for its long cooperation with Boris Akunin, the author of the most famous Russian conspiratorial thrillers of recent years, and, on the other hand, for its conservative literary tastes. As the publisher recently stated in an interview regarding his newly established cooperation with Sorokin, "Ad Marginem put Sorokin on the level of Prokhanov. We are going to put him on Prince Viazemsky's level." As for Sorokin himself, he explained his new direction in the following way: "Ad Marginem publishes a book if it knows for sure that the book will produce a scandal. I am tired of scandals. I want to get back from scandal to literature."⁶⁹ On the

⁶⁸Vladimir Sorokin, *Put' Bro* (Moscow, 2004).

⁶⁹See <http://www.litwomen.ru/print.html?id=1712> (March 20, 2006). For more on Sorokin's new novel see also <http://www.svoboda.org/11/cult/0904/11.091804-1.asp>; <http://www.topos.ru/cgi-bin/article.pl?id=2746>; and http://exlibris.ng.ru/subject/2004-09-16/1_sorokin.html (all last viewed March 20, 2006).

other hand, many critics noted that Sorokin's new novel is intended for a broad readership rather than for narrow literary or intellectual circles—just as Akunin's novels are—and that, therefore, it may be regarded as a fantastic conspirological thriller rather than a work of postmodernist intellectual prose.⁷⁰

Sorokin's *Ice*, like Prokhanov's *Mr. Hexogen*, subverted the reader's expectations in a surprising and unexpected way. The pro-Communist writer Prokhanov, known for his Socialist Realist style and pro-Soviet conservative views, used typically "Soviet" and "patriotic" poster-like and pathos-filled techniques and metaphors, but still unintentionally produced a novel that many regarded as a radical and scandalous postmodernist work. Simultaneously, an established guru of postmodernism, Vladimir Sorokin, while deconstructing the Judeo-Masonic myth in an apparently postmodernist style and exploiting typically postmodern techniques, created a book that actually opposes the ideology of postmodernism.

This leads me to believe that in the Russian literature of the late 1990s one of the most vivid and popular political mythologies of the twentieth century, the myth of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy and its alleged relationship to the Kabbalah underwent a striking transformation. A popular stereotype that had been used as a political myth eventually began to be exploited at the boundary of two literary styles: that of the "conspirological" thriller and the fantasy story. As a result, a political discourse placed in the boundaries of a literary genre was deconstructed and reduced to a postmodern text, a "kabbalistic conspirological fantasy," and, concurrently, deprived of its political substance. We should also note here that in the works of the late 1990s and the early 2000s the nationalistic interpretation of the Kabbalah started gradually to be replaced by an interest in the teachings of contemporary Western Jewish kabbalists, such as Rabbi Michael Laitman and Rabbi Judah Berg.⁷¹ By the time Laitman's teachings reached Russia in the late 1990s, the Russian artistic elite was already well informed about the nationalistic interpretation of Kabbalah and was curious about the popularity of neokabbalistic mysticism in the West. The popularity of Laitman's teachings in Russia was predetermined in part by the fact that Laitman, although he gained his celebrity status in the West, was born and raised in Leningrad, which he left for Israel in 1972, already in his thirties. Therefore, it is no surprise that Berg's multivolume *The Power of Kabbalah* and Laitman's *Kabbalah: The Secret Teaching* were on the list of the top ten bestsellers of 2003 and 2004.⁷² In this

⁷⁰The postmodernist interpretation of the "Ice" novels, which now includes not only *The Way of Bro* but also the third and the final part of the trilogy, *23,000*, was directly undermined by Sorokin himself who claimed in several interviews that he is now parting ways with conceptualism (see *EX Libris NG* [April 14, 2005]). A discussion of whether Sorokin's statements are true, or whether he truly has managed (or genuinely attempted) to get rid of his postmodernist style, is too broad for this particular article.

⁷¹These propagandists have successfully popularized a simplified version of kabbalistic doctrine among secular Jews and non-Jews in the United States and Europe, and have won such celebrity followers as Gwyneth Paltrow, Elizabeth Taylor, Demi Moore, and most of all, Madonna. The Kabbalah Center in Los Angeles, although it has existed since 1970, really became popular among Hollywood celebrities in only the mid-1990s. In fact, the "E" entertainment channel recently aired a program devoted to the popularity of this New Age version of Kabbalah in Hollywood.

⁷²According to the polls given by the popular review of books *Knizhnoe obozrenie* (March 22, 2004).

context we can even comprehend why a magazine published by the fancy Moscow fitness club World Class recently devoted a series of articles to the importance of kabbalistic philosophy in fitness.⁷³

It is still difficult to predict whether the neomystical interpretation brought forward by the last chapter of *Ice* and developed further in *The Way of Bro* will come to dominate the Russian literary scene, or whether the word “Kabbalah” will remain for the majority of Russians a stereotypical “hate word.” More likely it will either fully transform into a kind of “fantasy” esotericism or become part of the alternative New Age discourse, rather like yoga, or some other *comme il faut* subject of glamour magazines. However uncertain the answers to the questions raised, the mystical kabbalistic allegory has become a part of Russia’s literary and philosophical history, a part of its cultural mythology, a part of the so-called “Russian question,” and a part of the role the writer plays in answering this question. Thus, this allegory will be present in Russian literary and cultural disputes until this specific question is answered. As superfluous as this may sound, I believe there still is time for a decisive response to appear.

⁷³See Olga Slutsker, “Mir fitnessa,” *World Class* (August 2004).