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NIKOLAI ZABOLOTSKY'S UTOPIAN VISION

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Coming of age as he did after the Revolution, Nikolai Zabolotsky (1903-1958) may rightly be seen as the first great Soviet poet. At the same time, given his early poetry, it would be accurate to consider him the last Russian modernist. Such disparate perceptions of the poet all too often have taken on a political tinge: in the West Zabolotsky is touted as an innovator compromised by the years he spent in the labor camps; while in the Soviet Union he is admired as heir to the 19th-century philosophical tradition--a poet who in his later verse overcame the "errors" of his early, experimental ways. Neither view is sufficient. Rather, the heart of Zabolotsky's poetry may be found where his modernist and traditionalist impulses intersect, in his poetry of the 1930s. Specifically, the three long poems, "Torzhestvo zemledeliia" (The triumph of agriculture) (1929-30), "Bezumni volk" (The mad wolf) (1931) and "Derev'ia" (The trees) (1933), reveal the quintessential Zabolotsky, retaining much of the verbal experimentation of his early poetry even as they anticipate the philosophical meditations of his late years. And given the era in which these poems were written, it is not surprising that they should express utopian ideals.

In fact, as one who benefitted personally from the opportunities presented by the new Soviet regime, Zabolotsky was enthusiastic about the promise of a truly progressive society. Yet as a provincial who remained close to the land, he felt ambivalent about many of the new policies. While Zabolotsky's poetic ideas generally coincided with official canons--though never merely parroting them--the more deeply he considered the leading questions of his day the more his philosophy developed independently. Zabolotsky's work of the 1930s is often contradictory and ambivalent, but not in the simplistic way that Stalin's literary henchmen cast it.<sup>1</sup> His evolving

ideas culminated in a highly personal vision at the end of "The Trees," which goes beyond anything that submits to political criticism. This vision represents the fullest expression of Zabolotsky's utopian idea:

*Tak nad zemlei obrazuetsia novaia ploskost':  
Snizu--zhivotnye, vziaвшie v lapy derev'ia,  
Sverkh--odni vertikal'nye zvezdy.  
No ne smolkaet zemlia. Uzhe dereviannye devochki  
Pliashut, ronიაia griby v muraveinik,  
Priamo nad nimi vzletaiut derev'ia-fontany,  
Padaia v vozdukh gigantскими chashkami struek.  
Dale stoiat derev'ia-bitvy i derev'ia-grobnitsy,  
List'ia ikh vypukly i barel'efam podobny.  
Mozhno zdes' videt' voznikshego snova Orfeia,  
V dudku poiushchego. Chistoiu listvernoi grud'iu  
Zdes' okruzhaiut pevtsa dereviannye zveri.  
Tak voznikaet istoriia v gushche zelenykh  
Starykh lesov, v kustarnikakh, iamaх, ovragakh,  
Tak obrazuetsia letopis' drevnykh sobytii,  
Nyne zakovannykh v list'ia i dlinnye such'ia.  
Dale derev'ia teriaiut svoi ochertan'ia, i glazu  
Kazhutsia to treugol'nikom, to polukrugom--  
Eto uzhe vyrazhenie chistykh poniatii,  
Derevo Sfera tsarstvuet zdes' nad drugimi.  
Derevo Sfera--eto znachok bespredel'nogo dereva,  
Eto itog chislovykh operatsii.  
Um, ne ishchi ty ego posredine derev'ev:  
On posredine, i sboku, i zdes', i povsiudu.*

Thus above the earth a new plane is formed:  
Below--the animals, having taken the trees in their paws,  
Above--only vertical stars.  
But the earth does not fall silent. The wooden girls  
Are already dancing, dropping mushrooms into an anthill.  
Directly above them the fountain-trees fly up,  
Their giant cups of spray falling in the air.  
Further on stand the battle-trees and tomb-trees,  
Their leaves swollen like bas-reliefs.  
Here one can see Orpheus arising again,  
Singing on his pipe. With pure, leafy breast  
The wooden beasts surround the singer.  
Thus history arises in the thick of the old  
Green forests, in the bushes, pits, ravines;  
Thus the chronicle of ancient events assumes a form,  
Now shackled in the leaves and long boughs.  
Further on, the trees lose their outlines, and to the eye  
Appear now as triangles, now semicircles--  
This is already the expression of pure conceptions,  
The Tree of the Sphere reigns here over all others.  
The Tree of the Sphere is the sign of the infinite tree,

It is the sum of numerical operations.  
Mind, do not seek it among the trees:  
It is among them, and to the side, and here, and everywhere.

Even for those well acquainted with Zabolotsky's poetic world, this passage appears enigmatic. To fathom the meaning of these lines, as well as their significance for all of Zabolotsky's work, it is necessary to retreat in time and spirit to 1929, when Zabolotsky began work on the first of his long poems, "The Triumph of Agriculture." And by tracing the progression of his thought through the poems that follow, insight can be gained into the strangely harmonious world portrayed in "The Trees."

In "The Triumph of Agriculture," Zabolotsky abandoned the NEP-era city he had so vividly portrayed in his 1929 collection, *Stolbtsy* (Scrolls), and turned his attention to the countryside and collectivization. The countryside, at any rate, was what he knew best. Just as his neophyte imagination had been struck by the city with its constantly shifting faces, so now Zabolotsky turned back with fresh eyes to the land and the tumultuous changes taking place where he'd been born. He brought a wealth of detail and a highly developed sense of play to the serious questions about nature that he was debating philosophically. The result is a highly intellectual, yet extraordinarily animated poem with dramatic personae ranging from a dilapidated plough to an anxious bull, each of which expresses a keen view of the new world being created by man.

But to Zabolotsky's misfortune, the spirit of play so prevalent in "The Triumph of Agriculture" was largely misunderstood by the critics,<sup>2</sup> who chose to perceive the poem as an arrogant satire of Stalin's agricultural policies. What's worse, they perceived it as a breach of faith on the part of Zabolotsky who, as a Soviet poet, was expected to uphold and glorify his homeland. Such

catchwords as "class enemy," "bourgeois," and "formalistic" appeared in the reviews with frightening frequency, given the fate of others who fell from official grace. Yet Zabolotsky's intentions in the poem were far from satirical; indeed "The Triumph of Agriculture" may be interpreted as a paean to the new age of collective farming.

How is this discrepancy between intention and interpretation to be explained? It is not enough simply to accuse the times, when words had to be chosen carefully lest they be misconstrued. Rather, the problems Zabolotsky encountered lie more in the poetic devices he used, which lent themselves easily to misapprehension. His poems are rife with images of a carnivalesque and grotesque nature, and by definition, these images contain a certain degree of derision. It was this secondary satirical element in the poetry that was so widely misunderstood--whether willfully or not--to be dominant. Because the long poems all express ambiguity as a mark of the poet's own conflicts, which are resolved only in the final stanza of "The Trees", they rendered Zabolotsky vulnerable to attack.

"The Triumph of Agriculture" is a utopian poem depicting a world in which the sufferings of animals will cease and the plight of mankind be alleviated. In eight parts, the poem progresses from a view of contemporary society, full of struggle for humans and animals alike, to a vision of a transformed world where machines have taken over the labors previously borne by living beings. Zabolotsky's utopia develops from the Prologue, which begins with a vision of nature in wild disorder. Here a stream, instead of babbling, is "mad," and trees "stagger." By the end of the poem, however, nature has been tamed, and the rural village exudes a pastoral bliss--not unlike Khlebnikov's futuristic yet primitive vision of transformed society in "Ladomir." A parallel temporal



progression carries the poem from evening and gloomy night to the dawn of a new day--and the dawning of a new society.

Both Parts 1 and 2 of the poem express the vague longings and fears of the peasants and the animals, though the animals emerge as far wiser and more sensitive. Huddled in a shed, they are the first to witness a utopian vision. In the midst of the nighttime gloom and their despair,

*Kazalos',--prorvan mir dvoinoi,  
I za oblomkom tkanei plotnykh  
Prostor otkrylsia goluboi!*

The binary world, it seemed, was pierced;  
Beyond a shred of dense tissues  
A light blue expanse spread open.

This blue expanse introduces Khlebnikov into the poem: light blue is a recurrent color in his poetry and is associated with creative power.<sup>3</sup> Khlebnikov's sad fate--to lie buried and half-rotten in a forgotten churchyard--is related in Zabolotsky's poem by a visionary bull. But as if to spite the physiological process of putrefaction, the poet's artistic creation, "The Tablets of Fate," hover above him "undecayed," "the wise witnesses to his life." These "Tablets" proclaim a utopia of freedom and equality which Khlebnikov calculated by a complex system of numerology. Zabolotsky took Khlebnikov's prophetic ideas to heart, if not his numerology. In fact, he once claimed that a single line from "Ladomir" served as his inspiration for "The Triumph of Agriculture":<sup>4</sup> *"Ia vizhu konskie svobody i ravnopravie korov."* (I see equine freedoms and equality for cows.) The expanse of blue sky that appears here serves the animals as a prophesy of Khlebnikov's vision. And this vision would seem to be realized at the end of Zabolotsky's poem, where the sky is awash in Khlebnikov blue:

*Krest'iane, sytno zakusiv,  
Gazety dlinnye chitaiut,*

*Tot--breet borodu, krasiv,  
A etot--bukvy sostavliaet.  
Mladentsy v glinianye dudki  
Dudiat, razmazывaia griaz',  
I vecher tsveta nezabudki  
Plyvet po vozdukhу, smeias'.*

The peasants, having eaten well,  
Read long newspapers.  
That one, handsome, shaves his beard,  
While this one does his alphabet.  
Smearing dirt,  
Infants toot on their clay pipes,  
And evening the color of a forget-me-not  
Floats through the air, laughing.

As we shall see, however, even this apparently guileless stanza is not without ambiguity.

The long poems of the 1930s are striking for their manifestation of Zabolotsky's poetic dialogue with a number of visionary thinkers. While Zabolotsky's discourse with Khlebnikov is not surprising, given his avowed admiration for the latter's poetry, his attraction to a number of scientists is more unusual. First among these is Nikolai Fedorov, the father of "philosophical cosmism."<sup>5</sup> Fedorov propounded a world view based on a reverence for ancestors; and his ideas were set forth in the posthumously compiled *Filosofia obshchego dela* (Philosophy of the common cause).<sup>6</sup> Fedorov promised a new era of immortality and universal peace which, despite its future vision, had a retrospective orientation, based as it was on a cult of ancestry. Immortality could be accomplished through the resurrection of one's ancestors, an act that would serve to reawaken a feeling of kinship among men and recreate a fraternity of mankind with universal consciousness. Such dreams of unity and harmony attracted Zabolotsky,<sup>7</sup> finding reflection in his writings. Indeed, Part 4 of "The Triumph of Agriculture," entitled "A Battle with the Ancestors," is purely Fedorovian in spirit.

Fedorov believed that the greatest happiness possible for mankind lay in exceeding the earth's mortal boundaries and creating an immortal universe. And he worked out the means for attaining this utopian state through scientific calculations culminating in the actual resurrection of the past in the form of mankind's ancestors. This physical resurrection--the crux of Fedorov's belief--also presented the greatest problem, for resurrection necessarily entailed the eradication of death. Puzzling out this task led Fedorov to develop his theories on the regulation of death; his ideas are echoed by Khlebnikov in "Ladomir," where "*smert' smerti budet vedat' sroki*" (the death of death shall govern over time).

Fedorov postulated that "until the time comes when man can literally recreate himself out of the most primal substances--atoms and molecules--he will be unable to live in all environments and take on all forms"<sup>8</sup> demanded by those environments. Only through re-creation will the cosmos become accessible to man. This concept, basic to Fedorov's philosophy, was eagerly adopted and developed years later by Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, who preached unobstructed travel though time and space, and whose writings Zabolotsky came to know and respect.

Obviously piqued by such ideas, Zabolotsky brings two opposing forces into conflict in "The Triumph of Agriculture": a Soviet soldier, representative of the future and all that is rational; and ancestors, representatives of the past and all that is emotive. The soldier believes that only he can carry the world toward a bright future. What he fails to understand is that the very fact of the ancestors' presence is already highly utopian and futuristic. He cannot fathom the Fedorovian concept of universal immortality characterized by the resurrection of past generations of dead.

Thus he cries to the ancestors:

*Proch'! Molchat'! Dovol'no! Ili  
Rasstreliaiu veskh na meste!  
Mertvetsam lezhat' v mogile...  
Ia zhe, predkami netronut,  
Budu zhit' do samoi smerti!*

Off with you! Silence! Enough! Or  
I'll shoot all of you on the spot!  
The dead should lie in their graves...  
But I, untouched by ancestry,  
Shall live until my very death!

The soldier seems to personify Fedorov's idea that progress is directly opposed to resurrection because it presumes the superiority of one generation over the last.<sup>9</sup> The passage is of particular interest for its reflection of Zabolotsky's own ambivalence. Even though the soldier, as an agent of reason, stands for all that is farseeing, Zabolotsky suggests that he is unable--and unwilling--to fathom what representatives of the dead past know; thus he will be deprived of a deeper, secret knowledge. Had the soldier read Fedorov, he would realize that he could ensure his own immortality by helping to restore the ancestors to life. But even as Zabolotsky brings the ancestors to life, he plays them off against the soldier in such a way as to make them appear rather silly. Thus the passage results in ambiguity.

Although both the soldier and the ancestors appear slightly ridiculous in their intransigence, it is clear that the ancestors held a special appeal for Zabolotsky. He was particularly excited by the idea of their possible existence outside the known limits of time and space. For Zabolotsky, however, extratemporal existence does not necessarily entail physical resurrection, and in this he departs from the Fedorovian formula. In Zabolotsky's utopia there would seem to be no room for actual living ancestors with all of their emotional baggage; instead, he brings his ancestors to life

through nature, creating a union of man and environment in which the essential particles comprising man take on other forms at his death, lodging in trees and rocks, in rivers and streams.

Like Fedorov, Zabolotsky abhorred the oblivion brought on by death. But whereas for Fedorov the only means of eliminating oblivion was a literal rejuvenation of past generations, the task for Zabolotsky was less formidable. He sought only to bring the dead back to *apparent* life--that is, to recognition on the part of living generations--not to a literal one. Thus man will be recreated through the workings of nature, as Khlebnikov is in "The Triumph of Agriculture":

*Tak chelovek, otpav ot veka,  
Zarytyi v novgorodskii il,  
Prekrasnyi obraz cheloveka  
V dushe prirody zaronil!*

Thus this man, separated from his age,  
Buried in the Novgorod silt,  
Let fall into the heart of nature  
The splendid image of a man!

Here only an "image," Khlebnikov comes to life several years later in Zabolotsky's "Yesterday, Pondering Death" as the birds "sing" him by the water's edge. Through Zabolotsky's resurrectional procedure, the poet has become an indivisible part of nature, living on within it.

Despite his misgivings, Zabolotsky intended to laud progressive society in "The Triumph of Agriculture," and therefore he could not allow the ancestors to prevail. As they silently disappear, a huge storm arises, signalling the nascency of a new life. Morning comes with the passing of the storm; the sun, "the red atom of resurrection," rises. And it is at this imminent point in the poem that Zabolotsky presents the essence of his early utopian vision, formulated in the soldier's marvellous dream:

Korovy, mne prisnilsia son.  
Ia spal, ouchinoiu zakutan,  
I vdrug otkrylsia nebosklon  
S bol'shim zhivotnym institutom.  
Tam zhizn' byla vseгда zdorova...

....

Ia dale videl krasnyi svetoch  
V chertoge umnogo vola,  
Korov zadumchivoe veche  
Reshalo tam svoi dela.  
Osel, nad nimi gogocha,  
Bezhal, bezumnoe urcha:  
Rassudka slaboe rasten'e  
V ego zhivotnoi golove  
Siialo, kak proizveden'e  
Po vidu blizkoe k trave.  
Osel skitalsia po goram,  
Glodal chugunnye kartoshki,  
A pod goroi mashinnyi khram  
Vydel'yal kislorodnye lepesyki.  
Tam koni--Khimii druz'ia--  
Khlebali shchi iz sta molekul,  
Inye, v vozdukhie visia,  
Smotreli, --kto s planet priekhal.  
Korova, v formulakh i lentakh,  
Pekla pirog iz elementov  
I pered neiu v banke ros  
Bol'shoi khimicheskii oves.

....

Zdes' uchat babochek trudu,  
Uzhu daiut urok nauki--  
Kak delat' priazhku i sliudu,  
Kak shit' perchatki ili briuki.  
Zdes' volk s zheleznyim mikroskopom  
Zvezdu vecherniuiu poet,  
Zdes' vol, zachityvaias' Popom,  
Nazad vo vremeni plyvet...

Cows, I had a dream.  
I was sleeping, wrapped in sheepskin,  
When suddenly the horizon opened  
And I beheld a large animal institute.  
There, life was always healthy...

....

Next I saw a red torch  
In the hall of a wise ox.  
A pensive council of cows  
Was deciding its affairs.  
Chortling over them, an ass  
Ran about, rumbling madness:  
In his animal's head  
The frail growth of reason

Shimmered like a product  
Close to grass in appearance.  
The ass wandered through the mountains  
Gnawing cast-iron potatoes,  
While under the mountain a mechanical temple  
Isolated tablets of oxygen.  
There, horses--friends of chemistry--  
Ate a cabbage soup of one hundred molecules,  
While others, hanging in the air,  
Watched to see who'd arrived from other planets.  
A cow in formulas and tapes,  
Baked a pie of elements  
And before her in a jar grew  
Great chemical oats.

....  
Here they teach butterflies labor,  
They give grass snakes a lesson in science--  
How to make yarn and mica,  
How to sew gloves and pants.  
Here a wolf, with an iron microscope,  
Sings the evening star,  
Here an ox, reading Pope,  
Flies backwards in time...

Zabolotsky quoted this dream in its entirety in a 1932 letter to the astrophysicist Tsiolkovsky, Fedorov's ideational descendant. Zabolotsky had only recently encountered Tsiolkovsky's writings,<sup>10</sup> and he was surprised and thrilled by the degree to which his ideas coincided with the elderly scientist's. He immediately requested all of Tsiolkovsky's privately published brochures.<sup>11</sup> But even as Zabolotsky applied many of Tsiolkovsky's ideas to his poetry, he persistently retained his own vision, becoming neither the dogmatist nor the mad theorist Tsiolkovsky had.

Like Fedorov, Tsiolkovsky did not limit his vision to the confines of the earth, or even of our solar system. He believed in the power of man to overcome the boundaries imposed by time and space and to settle freely throughout all solar systems of the universe, inhabiting all sorts of planets. Tsiolkovsky recognized the need for man to adapt to new environments in order to survive. To do this, man must embark on a program of perfectivization, by

which would come to rule the natural world around him through science and technology. This task would be monumental, since nature for Tsiolkovsky comprised an uninterrupted continuum extending well beyond our own conceptions of time and space and embracing all of creation from the most minute particles to the grandest expanses.

Zabolotsky's universe likewise was not constrained by existing laws. In fact, he took Tsiolkovsky's ideas a logical step further, creating in his poetry newly perfected species not simply of humans--as Tsiolkovsky theorized--but of animals and plants. Even the progression of Zabolotsky's poetry may be seen as following a pattern of universal perfectivization: the "infant world" (*mladenets-mir*) of "The Triumph of Agriculture," born in torment, is the last to endure the suffering of birth. Each world that follows in the later poetry has already been perfected to a degree. The Chairman in "The Mad Wolf" affirms Tsiolkovsky's law:

*Veka idut, goda ukhodiat,  
No vse zhivushchee--ne son:  
Ono zhivet i prevoskhodit  
Vcherashnei istiny zakon.*

Ages pass, the years go by,  
But all that's living is no dream:  
It lives and surpasses  
The law of yesterday's truth.

Furthermore, the society of wolves, born well after the infant world in "The Triumph of Agriculture," already realizes that the future of life is not limited to earth alone, but extends into the cosmos as well:

*My, volki, nesem tvoe vechnoe delo  
Tuda, na zvezdy, vpered!*

We wolves will carry your eternal cause  
Ever forward, to the stars!

Unlike the sterile cosmos envisioned by Tsiolkovsky, Zabolotsky's



universe boasts abundant species of animals and plants. Whereas Tsiolkovsky's utopia is populated by a bland, perfected race of people, Zabolotsky's has a slew of eager animals and plants. And whereas Tsiolkovsky destroys in order to create new life, Zabolotsky transforms without complete destruction, attempting to recreate the existing world in new terms. Therefore, in "The Triumph of Agriculture," life continues in the village even after a tractor--symbol of the new life about to ensue--roars into the valley. The only evident casualty is the old plough. With the arrival of the tractor, a modern life based on technology unfolds, as prophesied by the soldier's dream. Once the tractor replaces the plough, a new mode of agriculture triumphs.

Unexpectedly, however, the final vision of achieved utopia in "The Triumph of Agriculture" is not technological; rather, it returns the reader to a scene of pastoral bliss.<sup>12</sup> While the peasants now are indisputedly modern--beardless, some read "long newspapers" with aplomb--the reverberating image is that of the infants gaily tooting their primitive clay pipes as a bright blue evening descends, floating laughing through the air. This ending disturbed Zabolotsky's critics, who expected a strong, blunt statement in favor of collectivization. It was not enough that over the course of the poem many of the requirements for the new Soviet society had been met: machinery replaced outdated wooden equipment; a *kolkhoz* (collective farm) was successfully organized; peasants became literate; and a high level of contentment was attained by all.

If Orwell's *Animal Farm* depicts a model community in which all animals are equal, then Zabolotsky's "Triumph of Agriculture" demonstrated 16 years earlier a similar community which, unlike Orwell's, does not go awry. The "freedom and equality" proclaimed by Khlebnikov are achieved at the end of

Zabolotsky's poem, as an ass "sings freedom in the barn." All of the characters have become equal--human, animal and plant alike. A horse converses with cabbage while an old man explains philosophy to a dog. Yet the problem of the poem's ambiguous ending remains. Despite the advances of science, death remains unconquered--burdock "sings a dirge" over the grave of the plough. Furthermore, the final image of the evening laughing over the new world attests to the omnipotence of nature and its eternal cycles which, Zabolotsky admits, will continue to prevail over man--no matter what progressive schemes he may impose. Thus, while Zabolotsky succeeds in presenting a utopian vision in "The Triumph of Agriculture," he does not yet manage to effect the soldier's dream. Man has brought order to nature through his technology. But nature remains inherently chaotic, laughing amused at man's attempts to control it.

Of course, Zabolotsky never set out to battle *against* the forces of nature, as did Fedorov and Tsiolkovsky with their invading armies of scientists. His was a gentler vision; he sought instead to effect a beneficial interrelationship between man and his environment, the mutual dependence of man and nature. If Zabolotsky's critics were unhappy with his depiction of a new and progressive world, neither did the poet consider that "The Triumph of Agriculture" perfectly portrayed the scientific achievement in harmony with nature's laws that he envisioned. Zabolotsky's vision was still incomplete; and like the animals populating his poem, he could not yet fully articulate his ideas, even if he felt them keenly.

Zabolotsky's struggle to develop his ideas into a coherent philosophy is reflected in a number of poems written after "The Triumph of Agriculture," in which he treats the theme of mutual dependence. Zabolotsky shows that whereas

nature can still be aided by man, as it was in "The Triumph of Agriculture," man can now learn how to pattern his own life by observing the natural world around him. He need only be receptive to new ideas and willing to observe. Zabolotsky's keenest observer of nature proves to be the Mad Wolf, the eponymous hero of his second long poem.

Cast by virtue of species into the animal kingdom, the wolf aspires to an upright spine and the concomitant knowledge it will bring once he can direct his gaze upward, toward the cosmos. Not quite human, yet more than beast, the wolf in his very first lines declares his occupation as observer of the world around him, certain that the stars will reveal to him the secrets of life and the future of wolves on earth: "*Ia, zadrav sobaki bok,/Nabliudaiu zvezd potok*" (Having mangled a dog's flank, I observe the course of the stars.)

The cosmic vision is important here, as it was in Zabolotsky's first long poem. In its philosophy, "The Mad Wolf" may be seen as an intermediate stage between the ambiguous utopia depicted in "The Triumph of Agriculture" and the vision of perfect utopia expressed in "The Trees," which followed two years later. As a creative work, "The Mad Wolf" is the most accomplished of Zabolotsky's long poems of the 1930s,<sup>13</sup> with its felicitous blend of the typically Zabolotskian elements of humor, meditation, and the grotesque. The poem stands as proof that despite the critical attacks against him, and despite his partial retreat into children's literature, Zabolotsky dared to write poetry that ran contrary to the ever more carefully prescribed canons for Soviet literature.

In seemingly paradoxical fashion, Zabolotsky presents an orderly picture of future society by means of broken rhythms, erratic rhymes, strange lexicon, and opposing views. He depicts a utopia congruent with the Soviet model,

where members of society work together under the leadership of a wise chairman. The poem coincides, too, with current Soviet dicta in its enthusiasm for the "NTR" (the scientific and technological revolution)<sup>14</sup> and in its lack of compassion for the old order left behind. Even the Marxist idea of the perfectability of man through socialism may be discerned in the poem. But despite these orthodox views, "The Mad Wolf," like "The Triumph of Agriculture," is highly unorthodox in its execution. While allegory is instructive even under socialism, "The Mad Wolf"--with its old order represented by a sluggish bear and its progressive new society comprised of singing wolves instead of humans--certainly challenged prevailing literary dogma. It is not surprising that "The Mad Wolf" was only published seven years after Zabolotsky's death.<sup>15</sup>

"The Mad Wolf" relates the story of a lone visionary determined to discover for himself and reveal to posterity the secrets of the universe. At its simplest level of interpretation, the poem may be seen as a Marxist fairytale; and in keeping with the fabulous subtext, this visionary also happens to be a wolf. Over the course of the poem, the wolf progresses from a feral state to a higher, more perfect one, in the process sacrificing himself as much as any proletarian hero would. Zabolotsky dramatizes the wolf's singlemindedness of purpose as he experiences both failures and successes in his quest for knowledge.

In the time frame of the poem, 10 years elapse between Part 1, which takes place in the forest, and Part 2, where the Mad Wolf is already living in a stone hut, having abandoned his den. He wears clothing and has long since mastered the art of writing; over the years he has gained much knowledge, and now he describes the experiments he has pursued ever since achieving upright

posture. The wolf has attempted to overcome the prevailing laws of nature by effecting transformations between the realms of animals and plants. Although now old, he is not yet ready to give up his quest. One last task remains: the wolf wants to fly. He is confident that he will succeed in this, his greatest challenge.

Part 3 introduces into the poem new characters who make up a society of wolves, heir to the Mad Wolf's dreams. Led by a wise chairman, these younger wolves assemble in the forest to honor the Mad Wolf on the anniversary of his death. They are not enthusiastic about this ceremony. Students, engineers, doctors, and musicians, the young wolves are eager to get on with the transformation of the forest and see no point in dwelling on the past. Their chairman, however, solemnly reminds the assembly of the importance of the Mad Wolf's revolutionary vision. Without his heroism, they all would be still languishing in the primeval forest instead of building new bridges and social structures. The poem ends with a panegyric to the Mad Wolf and his dreams.

While the ideas and utopian ideals expressed in "The Mad Wolf" are stirring, the poem succeeds not merely because of its fairytale Marxism. Zabolotsky polemicized his own contradictions in the poem, engendering a sense of universality that gives the poem unexpected breadth. He goes beyond a standard depiction of a revolutionized populace to embrace a truly visionary belief in the importance of innovation and art for society.

The heart of the poem lies in its implicit expression of the kinship among the realms of all living things. Aware of these intrinsic connections, the Mad Wolf seeks to create new forms of life. His experiments reflect Zabolotsky's attraction to the idea of free and effortless movement throughout all of the animate and inanimate realms of the universe, and in describing

them, the poet gives expression to a truly grotesque vision:<sup>16</sup>

*Ia otkryl mnozhestvo zakonov.  
Esli rasten'e posadit' v banku  
I v trubochku zheleznuiu podut'--  
Zhivotnym vozdukhom napolnitsia rasten'e,  
Poiavitsia na nem golovka, ruchki, nozhki,  
A listiki otsokhnut navsegda.  
Blagodaria moei dushevnoi sile  
Ia iz rasten'ia vospital sobachku--  
Ona teper', kak matushka, poet.  
Iz odnoi berezy  
Zadumal sdelat' ia verbliuda,  
Da vozdukhu v grudi, kak vidno, ne khvatilo:  
Golovka vyroslo, a tulovishcha net...*

I've discovered a multitude of laws.  
If you sow a plant in a jar  
And blow on it through an iron tube--  
The plant will fill with animal air,  
A small head, arms and legs will appear on it,  
And its leaves will wither for good.  
Thanks to my spiritual strength<sup>17</sup>  
I cultivated a dog from a plant--  
Now it sings like a mother.  
Out of a certain birch tree  
I planned to make a camel,  
But evidently I hadn't enough air in my chest:  
A head grew, but no body...

The wolf's breath--the "animal air"--by which he infuses his animal spirit into the spiritless plant, causes the plant to take on beastlike characteristics. The plant becomes a dog, though hardly an ordinary one. This dog neither howls nor barks, whimpers nor bays. Instead it "sings like a mother,"<sup>18</sup> an attribute embracing not only human physical characteristics, but psychological ones as well: the act of mothering; the singing of lullabies. Thus in the wolf's experiment the entire spectrum from plant life through animal to human life is traversed.

Significantly, the crucial element in these experiments is neither the equipment nor the procedure, but the spirit--an ineffable factor at best. The wolf's experiment succeeds only because of his "spiritual strength." And

precisely this strength is lacking in his second attempt as he fails to turn a birch into a camel and creates a monster instead. Zabolotsky's implication here is clear: without a guiding spirit behind it, science will not succeed, for finally the creative spirit is the crucial determinant.

In his quest for knowledge, the wolf is a truly Faustian figure who "wants to know the scope of the universe." In one of his most hopeful, yet least successful experiments, he digs a hole in the ground, sticks his leg in it up to the knee, and stands there for 12 days and nights, hoping to take root and become a plant. He suffers greatly in this sacrifice to the cause of science: "*Ves' otoshchal, ne pivshi i ne evshi*" (I wasted away, not drinking or eating). The colloquial tone of the wolf's words belies the exalted aspirations behind his experiment, but the implicit comparison to a saint only makes his activity seem the more absurd. In his posture, the wolf is like the *stolpnik* or stylite Saint Simon, an ascetic who lived for 35 years on top of a pillar to mortify his flesh and gain redemption. But unlike Saint Simon, the redemption the Mad Wolf seeks is less for himself than for the other beasts of the forest; he is, after all, the "*vol'chei zhizni reformator*" (the reformer of wolves' lives). In his search for truth and his self-maceration, the Mad Wolf may be seen as a kind of furry Christ figure, determined to devote his whole life to the betterment of his kind: "*A ia ot moego dushevnogo perezhivan'ia/Ne otkazhus' ne v koei mere!*" (But I will not in any measure/Renounce my life of the spirit!)

It is in Part 3 of "The Mad Wolf" that Zabolotsky asserts his utopian idea as it has developed from "The Triumph of Agriculture," drawing not on scientific theories this time, but on his own heritage of Russian literature. As the wolves honor the Mad One on the anniversary of his death, different

groups come forward to tell of their accomplishments. In a song particularly resonant with literary associations, the wolf-engineers relate how they will "build a bridge to the far shore of earthly happiness." A "coachman in a glass hat" will lead them across this bridge, singing:

*Gai-da, troika,  
Energiu utrot-ka!*

Giddap, troika,  
Energy three-fold!

The idea of a bridge as a symbol of earthly happiness can be traced back to Gogol's *Dead Souls*, where Manilov's dreams of happiness focus on the construction of a bridge. And in the song's lyrics one can recognize the implicit equation of the new Soviet industrial state with Gogol's famous characterization of Russia as a troika speeding ahead. Furthermore, the glass hat of this modern-day coachman who inexorably leads the wolves to happiness recalls the numerous glass utopias in Russian literature, popular ever since Vera Pavlovna's dream in Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?*: Dostoevsky's Crystal Palace, Zamyatin's glass dome, Khlebnikov's city of glass in "Ladomir." Glass constructions figure, too, in Mandelstam's "Kontsert na vokzale" (Concert at the station) (1921), where he describes the Pavlovsk Railway Station, juxtaposing "the station's sphere of glass" (*vokzala shar stekliannyi*), "the glass forest of the station" (*stekliannyi les vokzala*), and its "glass vestibule" (*stekliannye seni*) with the steam engine as a symbol of progress through industry. Echoing Mandelstam's vision of a "glass forest" is the Chairman's picture of a glass building in the forest, which he presents in his final speech: "*Ia zakryvaiu glaza i vizhu stekliannoe zdanie lesa.*" (I close my eyes and see a glass building in the forest.) This final image of a happy future reverberates with all of its accumulated utopian associations



from Russian literature. But, significantly, the wolves' utopia is not merely symbolic: in the palpable image of a constructed building in the forest it becomes concrete, moving beyond the realm of the abstract to the possible and real.

Compared with the utopia portrayed in "The Triumph of Agriculture," the newly achieved happiness of the wolves in "The Mad Wolf" shows progress. Through his attempt at flight, the Mad Wolf has brought about the harmonious society based on scientific knowledge that was still only a dream in "Triumph's" Animal Institute. Having grasped the secrets of the universe--"*Ia ponimaiu atmosferu!*" (I understand the atmosphere!)--and hence of life, the Mad Wolf is no longer afraid of death, and in Zabolotsky's world, this is a crucial development. Nor is the Mad Wolf's legacy--the efficient new society of wolves--marked by ambiguity as it was in the infant world of "The Triumph of Agriculture." Instead we find true socialist optimism: a progressive community of industrious workers guided by a farsighted chairman. In fact, the song of the student-wolves:

*My novyi les segodnia sozidaem.  
Eshche sovsem ubogie vchera,  
Pered toboi my nyne zasedaem  
Kak inzhenery, sud'i, doktora*

Today we are building a new forest.  
Completely wretched only yesterday,  
Before you now we gather  
As engineers, judges, doctors

echoes the Russian version of "The International," the proletarian hymn. The impact of the current slogan, "We Are Building Socialism," is felt in this second long poem by Zabolotsky, where he has abandoned many of the inherently satirical elements of his earlier verse in favor of a more organized pattern of imagery.

Yet even as he presents a utopian-cum-socialist vision seemingly standard for the times, Zabolotsky invests his poem with another layer of meaning. Of primary importance is the fact that the hero, the wolf, is called "mad," for in this epithet lies a key to Zabolotsky's idea. What Zabolotsky finally is exploring in "The Mad Wolf" is the visionary component of species development--the relationship between madness and creativity.<sup>19</sup> As a believer in dreams, the Mad Wolf is a vessel of creativity and a symbol of creative power. And he does seem truly mad in his occupation, lying on his back with his legs in the air, composing songs about why his neck is not vertical. The Mad Wolf, in fact, may be seen as a latter-day *iurodivyi* or "fool in God," continuing a tradition in Russian life and letters whereby simpletons who play the fool are at the same time endowed with divine wisdom and the gift of prophecy.

In the figure of the Mad Wolf, who is either wisely mad or madly foolish, Zabolotsky advocates the importance of the iconoclast in any society, implying that the visionary is often the one who best can see the world for what it really is. Given the growing precariousness of Zabolotsky's situation (three reviews from 1933 termed his poetry *iurodstvo*<sup>20</sup>), "The Mad Wolf" could well be interpreted as a defense of the poet's own verse. It is precisely his willingness to believe in--not just pay lip service to--the less rational parts of the mind that distinguishes Zabolotsky even as he espouses socialist ideals. For him, the success of any new society has more to do with the visionary element than with the canonical or organizational virtues; hence his enthrallment with Tsiolkovsky. And hence the Mad Wolf, in his struggle against the prevailing laws of the universe, is a highly Zabolotskian figure who refuses to surrender his dreams. Through his actions, a new and better

society is achieved. But as the Chairman warns the wolves, even their progressive society must continue to revere the wolf's vision--must in itself be visionary--in order to continue to progress.

In "The Mad Wolf," Zabolotsky identified the components of his harmonious universe; now all that remained was to set them in an equation of perfect balance. During the years following "The Mad Wolf's" completion, Zabolotsky continued to seek an harmonious balance between inspiration and reason. And in doing so, he became increasingly occupied with problems of form. While form is as integral to the poet's art as, say, composition is to the painter's, form for Zabolotsky represented more than just a vessel into which he could pour his words. What interested him beyond the inherent modes of poetry was *created* form: a meaningful pattern he could discern through his art, both for itself and as an analogy for finding order in the universe. Several of his poems from 1932 address the search for significative form. In "Predosterezhenie" (A warning), for example, Zabolotsky uses the metaphor of a house--a substantial, lasting structure--to express the idea of inspired and rational thought united, through form, to yield meaning:

*Soediniv bezumie s umom,  
Sredi pustynnykh smyslov my postroim dom.*

Having united madness with intellect,  
Among empty thoughts we shall construct a house.

This house is not merely figurative, however. It implies a dwelling, full of life, which the more neutral "building" could never convey. Furthermore, the actual conformation of the house is of great importance to the poet, for that is where meaning resides.

Zabolotsky's conception of form as the connecting link between two poles of thought (*bezumie*, *um*) finds its highest expression in the conclusion to his

final long poem, "The Trees," where the poet distinguishes geometric shapes among the trees of the forest:

*Dale derev'ia teriatut svoi ochertan'ia, i glazu  
Kazhutsia to treugol'nikom, to polukrugom--  
Eto uzhe vyrazhenie chistykh poniatii,  
Derevo Sfera tsarstvuet zdes' nad drugimi.  
Derevo Sfera--eto znachok bespredel'nogo dereva,  
Eto itog chislovykh operatsii.  
Um, ne ishchi ty ego posredine derev'ev:  
On posredine, i sboku, i zdes', i povsiudu.*

Further on, the trees lose their outlines, and to the eye  
Appear now as triangles, now semicircles--  
This is already the expression of pure conceptions,  
The Tree of the Sphere reigns here over all others.  
The Tree of the Sphere is the sign of the infinite tree,  
It is the sum of numerical operations.  
Mind, do not seek it among the trees:  
It is among them, and to the side, and here, and everywhere.

Recognizing these forms--semicircles, triangles, parallelograms--is an act of inspiration; but the ordering process itself--the very fact of their mathematical description--is an act of reason or rationality. Thus, in his ultimate vision of pure forms, Zabolotsky makes the two modes of thought compatible, divining a solution to his quest.

However, the abstract refinement of the poet's thought remains confounding. "The Trees" is a highly conceptual poem, much less plotted in comparison to the preceding narrative poems. In a Prologue and three parts, it addresses the familiar Zabolotskian theme of the mysteries of the universe and man's place within it. The seeker of knowledge in this case is Bombeev, who invites the multifarious woodland trees to join him for a celebration at his home beyond the forest. In the midst of their revelry, the forest warden suddenly arrives, and the trees begin to cry in fear and anguish. The warden is very angry at Bombeev for daring to disrupt the order of his forest and luring away the trees. He urges the trees to follow him back to the forest,

and by Part 3 of the poem, they have returned to their orderly lives. All at once the entire forest breaks into song, and amid the melodies that are heard, a new order begins to take shape, one that is characterized by new planes and forms.

How is one to fathom this highly mathematical vision and relate it to the rest of Zabolotsky's art? While earlier poems hint at the direction in which Zabolotsky was heading, "The Trees" itself does not prepare the reader for this final arcane vision. Zabolotsky's "Notes to the Long Poem 'The Trees'," however, discovered among his papers,<sup>21</sup> provide a clue to his creative thought. These notes consist of the following two citations:

An amount of matter equal to the weight of the earth's crust may, by force of multiplication, be created in insignificant, not geological time, as long as the external environment does not impede this process. Cholera vibrio and *bakterium coli* can yield this mass of matter in 1.6-1.75 days... One of the most slowly multiplying organisms--the elephant--can yield the same amount of matter in 1300 years... Of course, in reality no single organism ever yields such amounts.<sup>22</sup>

Thine enemies are thine own ideas, which rule in thy heart and torment it constantly; they are the whisperers, the slanderers, the opponents of God, who continually disparage the prevailing order of the world and try to restore the most ancient laws. In darkness they eternally torment themselves as well as those who agree with them, seeing that nature's governance over everything is not in accordance with their demonic desires or their murky conceptions, but rather according to the highest counsel of our Father, which has endured sacrosanct through yesterday and today and which will continue throughout all the ages. Those who do not understand malign the configuration of the heavenly orbs; they criticize the quality of the earth and fault the sculpting by God's most sage right hand of the animals, trees, mountains, rivers, and grasses. They are not satisfied with anything; according to their unhappy and ridiculous ideas, the world needs neither night nor winter, old age nor labor, hunger nor thirst, sickness nor most of all death: what good are they? Oh, our meager knowledge and understanding!<sup>23</sup>

At first glance, these extracts would seem to have little in common. Indeed, their authors--a 20th-century Russian biochemist and an 18th-century Ukrainian mystical philosopher--are differentiated by more than the centuries

they lived in. Yet Zabolotsky obviously sensed a kindred idea in their writings, which he sought to express poetically in "The Trees." This poem verbalizes Zabolotsky's preoccupation with defining man's place in nature, and in both Vernadsky and Skovoroda he recognized an attempt to formulate the grand design of the universe, to clarify its prevailing order. For Vernadsky, with his interest in biogeochemistry (the living nature of the earth in its atomic aspect), all theories were necessarily grounded in science, while Skovoroda's conception of the three interrelated worlds comprising Creation<sup>24</sup> proceeded from the premise of divine ordination. Yet a common concern with order links Vernadsky and Skovoroda across the centuries. Furthermore, neither man was conformist in his views: Vernadsky used data more often extrapolative than purely scientific to expound his theories; while Skovoroda's religious teachings frequently defied Church doctrine. Zabolotsky's perception of them as mavericks only added to their appeal, just as the heterodoxy of Tsiolkovsky and Fedorov had attracted him earlier.

Vernadsky wrote his *Biosphere* in 1926, years after hearing Élie Metchnikoff's famous Parisian lectures on immortality and the possibility of the prolongation of life.<sup>25</sup> Like Tsiolkovsky, he focused on the small particles of creation--the atoms and isotopes--in order to uncover the larger mysteries of life. But while both scientists professed a belief in hylozoism,<sup>26</sup> Vernadsky did not acknowledge any spiritual basis to life, seeing the cosmos as manifest solely in matter and energy.<sup>27</sup> Through his work on the evolution of the biosphere, he developed the idea of the noosphere, an era of reason brought about by labor and scientific thought. He believed that man could participate in the natural historical process by exerting control over nature, by "humanising" it (*ochelovechenie*) in his terms. Man's activity

would eventually manifest not just physical strength, but geologic strength as well: he would no longer be limited by the constraints of time.

Vernadsky's vision of man as ultimately immortal and autotrophic seconded Tsiolkovsky's; and in Vernadsky, Zabolotsky found another favored Soviet scientist whose views often coincided with his own, though both their inspiration and expression were obviously different. Vernadsky studied space in terms of its symmetry and geometry, seeking "a common language between philosophy and science."<sup>28</sup> Time and space were not mere concepts for him, but actual entities composed of matter and energy.<sup>29</sup> Zabolotsky likewise sought to unite science and philosophy in his art; his high regard for both Lomonosov and Khlebnikov had much to do with the ways in which they merged the two in their poetry. But while Khlebnikov invoked the geometer Lobachevsky's name to describe his mathematical paradise in "Ladomir," Zabolotsky's vision in "The Trees" does not rely on names for its portrayal. Rather, his utopian idea, while remaining abstract as a concept, takes on palpable physical form as the forest changes in appearance. Thus, as a "new plane" of existence ruled by the Tree of the Sphere arises, his philosophy comes to be expressed in terms of science.

Because spheres have no point of beginning or end, The Tree of the Sphere is an "infinite tree." And as the symbol of Zabolotsky's utopia, this tree represents the idea that man can go beyond the limits of time and space, into infinity, through his activity and interaction with nature. This poetic proposition follows both Tsiolkovsky and Vernadsky, though only to a degree, because finally Zabolotsky does not seek to dominate nature, but rather to discover its inherent forms and work within them.

Because Zabolotsky's new world stands as a microcosm of the larger sphere

we inhabit, his vision can be seen not only as the mark of the union man has achieved with nature, but also as a sign of history in the making, part of the dialectical process:

*Tak vznikaet istoriia v gushche zelenykh  
Starykh lesov, v kustarnikakh, iamaKh, ovragakh,  
Tak obrazuetsia letopis' drevnikh sobytii,  
Nyne zakovannykh v list'ia i dlinnye such'ia.*

Thus history arises in the thick of the old  
Green forests, in the bushes, pits, ravines;  
Thus the chronicle of ancient events assumes a form,  
Now shackled in the leaves and long boughs.

The trees in the forest contain and reflect the sum of world experience, and now that nature is able to participate in the making of history, its range is endless. Therefore Zabolotsky's utopia in "The Trees" does not face the same limitations as the newly created worlds in "The Triumph of Agriculture" or "The Mad Wolf." By investing the image of the Tree of the Sphere with all of the critical features of this new world, Zabolotsky causes the tree to become far more than just the "sum of numerical operations": it represents nothing less than boundless possibility.

At a different level, this tree also reflects a certain "perceptual experience" (*chuvstvennyi opyt*)<sup>30</sup> on the poet's part: that moment of insight into nature which Vernadsky believed could come about only through man's close involvement in its processes. It is precisely this insight that brought Zabolotsky to his new awareness of the forest as composed of geometric forms. Beyond its mathematical aspect, Zabolotsky now recognized in the Tree of the Sphere the solution to nature's great secrets: it incarnates the essential mystery of life. Thus the Tree of the Sphere becomes the scientific correlative to pantheism, this poet's counterpart to God. And it is here, in the intersection of the scientific realm with the spiritual, that Zabolotsky



found the correspondence between Vernadsky and Skovoroda.

Like Vernadsky several centuries later, Skovoroda placed great stock in the moment of insight which, he believed, would lead to an understanding of one's place in the universe and thence to happiness. But for Skovoroda, at least initially, this act was more inwardly directed than it was for Vernadsky. He summed up his idea in two simple words: "*Znai sebe*" (Know thyself).<sup>31</sup> From a knowledge of himself man would progress to a knowledge of the world; and in perfecting himself, he would be perfecting the world. Skovoroda argued that the perfected world cannot remain within man alone; he is obliged to transmit whatever he learns. This idea, fitting nicely as it does within the 20th-century context of man bringing his knowledge to bear on nature, of helping it to evolve, had particular resonance for Zabolotsky.

Perhaps most appealing to Zabolotsky was Skovoroda's conviction that even inanimate things possess a soul. The soul, in fact, is the crucial component of all living things, the determinant of life, as Zabolotsky himself implied in the Mad Wolf's experiments:

*Bez dushi trava--seno,  
Derev'ia--drova,  
Chelovek--trup.*<sup>32</sup>

Without a soul grass is hay,  
Trees are firewood,  
Man is a corpse.

Zabolotsky concurred that form alone is not sufficient to yield life; there must be something beyond it. And in postulating what that provenance might be, Zabolotsky approached the problem of form from a new angle. A number of poems attest to his belief in the importance of form for uniting thoughts to yield meaning; any form or structure devoid of meaning is inherently empty and lifeless. For Zabolotsky, the element that gives life--the equivalent to

Skovoroda's soul--is, quite simply, art. In "Iskusstvo" (Art) (1930), he equates this necessary component with inspiration. It is the creative impulse, then, that finally distinguishes life, even as form molds it to provide meaning. And man is duty bound to bring meaning to bear on the universe, whether he serves as the agent of a divine spirit (Skovoroda) or of an artistic one (Zabolotsky).

Both "The Triumph of Agriculture" and "The Mad Wolf" close with descriptions of a new and better world that has come into existence. "The Trees" is no exception, and in accordance with Tsiolkovsky's law of perfectivization, this world is the finest of all: indeed, it is not merely a world, but a "new plane of existence," a higher reality than has ever before been known. This new reality is characterized by the complete integration of science and art, the poles of the rational and the inspired. Zabolotsky weaves the attributes of a modern consciousness into a fabric of poetic archetypes, for the basic myths of poetry--such as problems of life and death--are repeated in "The Trees" even as they are glossed with a contemporary sheen. Thus Zabolotsky subtly affirms that in spite of its many benefits, science can never fully replace art: the forest warden who triumphs in bringing the trees back to the forest where he can continue to classify them can do so only after being exposed to Bombeev's chaotic world. He is able to execute only what others have discerned before him. In this respect Zabolotsky's visionary wolf was the necessary precursor who lay the inspired foundations for the warden's orderly world.

Zabolotsky's revelation at the end of "The Trees" demonstrates that he came to understand the order of the universe through his discovery of the inherent harmony in trees and their forms. And in his process of discovery,

he perceived the spirit that lies beyond all the associations he previously could make. If his poem remains elusive at the end, it is because what he saw cannot finally ever be demonstrated, only intuited. Zabolotsky set no smaller task for himself than to describe the indescribable. Just as the ancient Hebrews used the Tetragrammaton to avoid desecrating the Lord's name even as they praised it, so Zabolotsky encoded a system of abstract geometric symbols to represent the great and ineffable spirit he had discerned. His refusal to identify this spirit precisely implies a reverence for it, for naming would be a travesty, a reduction at the least. Zabolotsky realized that any attempt at specificity would automatically impose limits on that which he perceived as limitless; denomination would only serve to contain the infinite. If his reluctance to specify led to a certain reconditeness in his poetry, it is up to those who follow to retrace Zabolotsky's steps and heed his clues in order to understand his design.

Zabolotsky's vision, in acknowledging the pervasive spirit behind life, is original for its expression not so much of the tangible, as of the intangible. He discerned what is essential and true, and it is this recognition that brings universal happiness, the longed-for utopia. Just as Skovoroda believed that contentment could be attained through a recognition of the presence of God in everything, so Zabolotsky found his "kingdom of God" in the Tree of the Sphere: "It is among [the trees], and to the side, and here, and everywhere." By allowing his intuitive nature to guide his intellect, by balancing reason with inspiration, Zabolotsky opened himself to this ecstatic vision.

## Notes

1. See, especially, reviews by V. Ermilov, "Iurodstvuiushchaia poeziia i poeziia millionov," *Pravda*, June 21, 1933, and E. Usievich, "Pod maskoi iurodstva," *Literaturnyi kritik*, 1933, no. 4, pp. 78-91. Significantly, both reviewers used some form of the word *iurodstvo*--folly its possessors claimed was divinely inspired--to characterize Zabolotsky's verse.

2. The most scathing review appeared in *Stroika*, where Anatolii Gorelov called Zabolotsky "one of the most reactionary poets" who made a "mockery of the most difficult labor of changing the countryside." Gorelov, "Raspad soznaniia" (The collapse of consciousness), *Stroika*, 1930, no. 1.

3. Barbara Lönnqvist, *Xlebnikov and Carnival. An Analysis of the Poem "Poet"* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1979), p. 109.

4. See Zabolotsky's article, "Stat'i 'Pravdy' otkryvaiut nam glaza," *Literaturnyi Leningrad*, April 1, 1936.

5. S. G. Semenova, "Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov (Zhizn' i uchenie)," *Prometei*, 1977, no. 11, p. 87. Fedorov also was known as the "Socrates of Moscow."

6. Nikolai Fedorov, *Filosofia obshchego dela*, V.A. Kozhevnikov (ed.) and N. P. Peterson (2nd ed.), Verny 1906/Moscow 1913, (rpt. Westmead, England, 1970), vols. 1 and 2.

7. While it has not proved possible to substantiate that Zabolotsky actually read Fedorov, it is reasonable to assume that he knew the philosopher's work. For one thing, Fedorov's ideas were a common topic of discussion among the intelligentsia in the 1920s [George M. Young, Jr., *Nikolai Fedorov: An Introduction* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland Publishing Co., 1979), p. 185], and one contemporary of Zabolotsky recalls that it was possible to find Kant, Leibnitz, and Fedorov's *Philosophy of the Common Cause* in Leningrad's second-hand bookstores (G. Petrov, "Leningradskii Peterburg," *Grani*, 1953, vol. 18, p. 40). The Futurist poets, whom Zabolotsky avidly read, were well-acquainted with Fedorov's teachings, having rediscovered the philosopher for themselves. Mayakovsky in particular reflected Fedorovian ideas in his poetry; and Khlebnikov's dream of mastering time to save mankind from death has much in common with Fedorov. At any rate, thoughts of conquering death were in the air in post-Revolutionary Russia. Even if Fedorov's direct influence on Zabolotsky is difficult to establish, the context is certainly there.

8. N. Fedorov, *Filosofia obshchego dela*, vol. 1, p. 421.

9. For Fedorov's ideas on progress see *Filosofia obshchego dela*, vol. 1, pp. 18-23.

10. Nikolai Zabolotsky, letter of January 7, 1932, in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1972), p. 235.

11. These brochures, all published in Kaluga where Tsiolkovsky lived, include "Monizm vselennoi" (The monism of the universe) (1925), "Budushchee zemli i chelovechestvo" (The future of the earth and mankind) (1928), and "Rastenie budushchego. Zhivotnoe kosmosa. Samozarozhdenie" (The plant of the future. The animal of the cosmos. Spontaneous generation) (1929).

12. In his late years Zabolotsky revised the poem--as he did much of his early verse--omitting the last stanza and thereby ending the poem on a less ambiguous note.

13. According to Zabolotsky, "The Mad Wolf" was Pasternak's favorite poem of his. Reported in Natalia Roskina, *Chetyre glavy* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1980), p. 84.

14. For a broad discussion of NTR and Soviet poetry, see A.V. Makedonov, "O nekotorykh aspektakh otrazheniia NTR v sovetskoi poezii," *NTR i razvitie khudozhestvennogo tvorchestva* (Leningrad, 1980), pp. 97-117. While the term generally is applied to the mid-20th century, Makedonov loosely dates the beginning of the NTR as 1905 when Einstein's theory of relativity was published. I am using the term in its broader application here.

15. In Nikolai Zabolotsky, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1965).

16. Here I follow Wolfgang Kayser's definition of the grotesque as a confusion of categories. See his *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968). The transformation of the plant into an animal in the wolf's experiment recalls the close relationship between plant and animal forms in the early carvings found in Italian caves that were first dubbed "grotesque."

17. I have translated *dushevnaia sila* as "spiritual strength," although *dusha* properly refers to the soul, not the spirit. In the Russian religious and philosophical tradition the two are not synonymous.

18. This strange simile also appears in "Poema dozhdiia" (A poem of the rain), written in the same year. This shorter poem, with its questing wolf and skeptical snake, expresses in more rudimentary form many of the ideas developed in "The Mad Wolf."

19. This relationship has often been noted. Wolfgang Kayser, for one, writes: "... from an early date, insanity, quasi-insanity and dreams were used to define the source of creativity." Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, p. 184.

20. E. Usievich, "Pod maskoi iurodstva," *Literaturnyi kritik*, 1933, no. 4, pp. 78-91; V. Ermilov, "Iurodstvuiushchaia poeziia i poeziia millionov," *Pravda*, June 21, 1933; and Mikhail Golodnyi, "Poetu iurodivykh," *Krasnaia nov'*, 1933, no. 9, pp. 85-6 (a parody of Zabolotsky's verse).

21. Nikolai Zabolotsky, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, p. 381.

22. Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky, "Biosfera v kosmose," *Biosfera: Izbrannye trudy po biogeokhymii* (Moscow: Mysl', 1967), p. 260. The limiting factor, of course, which Vernadsky fails to mention, would be the availability of the resources (food) for growth of these organisms. They do not create this mass, but merely convert it from one form to another.

23. Grigorii Savvich Skovoroda, "Razgovor piati putnikov ob istinnom schastii v zhizni (Razgovor družheskii o dushevnom mire)," *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Mysl', 1973), pp. 337-8.

24. For more on Skovoroda's philosophy, including a useful bibliography, see Joseph T. Fuhrmann's essay, "The First Russian Philosopher's Search for the Kingdom of God," *Essays on Russian Intellectual History* (Austin, 1971), pp. 33-72.24.

25. Metchnikoff (1845-1916), a professor at the Pasteur Institute, was considered an expert in the science of life. For an explication of his ideas see *The Nature of Man: Studies in Optimistic Philosophy* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1910) rpt. 1977.

26. I. A. Kozikov, *Filosofskie vozzreniia V.I. Vernadskogo* (Moscow: Izd-vo moskovskogo universiteta, 1963), p. 48.

27. I. A. Kozikov, *Filosofskie vozzreniia*, pp. 33-34.

28. V. I. Vernadsky, "Problema vremeni v sovremennoi nauke," *Izv. AN SSSR, OMEN*, 7th ser., 1932, no. 4, p. 573.

29. I. A. Kozikov, *Filosofskie vozzreniia*, p. 54.

30. I. A. Kozikov, *Filosofskie vozzreniia*, p. 59.

31. Grigorii Skovoroda, "Razgovor o tom: Znai sebe," *Sochineniia v stikhakh i proze* (St. Petersburg, 1861), pp. 55-138.

32. Quoted in I.I. Rostovtseva, *Nikolai Zabolotskii: Opyt khudozhestvennogo poznaniia* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1984), p. 97.



