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ALEKSANDR BLOK'S *THE TWELVE*: THE TRANSFORMATION OF *COMMEDIA* *DELL'ARTE* INTO AN EPIC

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1. Introduction

Arguments spanning an entire spectrum of generic possibilities have been posited with respect to Aleksandr Blok's *The Twelve*: that it is a traditional epic, that it is a verse drama without demarcated utterances, that it is a concatenation of lyric poetry—a lyric cycle of sorts—and finally, that it is a combination of all of the above. In this article I revisit the issue of *The Twelve*'s genre, reconsidering previous scholarship on this matter in light of Blok's own plans for the poem. Although *The Twelve* incorporates many literary forms that preoccupied the poet throughout his career, one particular medium emerges as dominant in this text. After Blok envisions the work in both a lyric and dramatic vein, he ultimately chooses to write a "*poema*" in many of its traditional manifestations.

Much of the scholarship on *The Twelve* categorizes the work, directly or indirectly, as a verse drama. This point of view is certainly justifiable: it is indeed permeated with the conventions of a play. In his article on the structure of *The Twelve*, Efim Etkind points out that the text's exposition functions according to the rules of drama: "not narrating, but showing."¹ M. F. Pianykh observes that the *poema* is organized as a play: a prologue, five acts, and an epilogue (cited in Dolgoplov 1979, 47). Anatoly Gorelov devotes an entire chapter of his book to the significance of Blok's experience with drama for *The Twelve*. He draws parallels between Blok's earlier dramatic works, such as *The Nightingale Garden*; *On Love, Poetry, and Service to the State. A Dialogue*; *The Stranger*; *The Rose and the Cross*; and *The Show Booth*, and his later *poema*. Apparently, Blok's contemporaries also felt that *The Twelve* was well suited to theater. There were various dramatizations of it in the 1920s. At one point Meyerhold attempted to stage *The Twelve*, which he intended to present along with Blok's plays *Ramses* and *The King in the Square* (Orlov 170–71, 212 fn. 32).

The direct echoing of *The Show Booth* in *The Twelve* is by far the favorite
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topic in the scholarship on the *poema*. Sergei Gorodetsky was the first to point out that it is yet another variation on Blok's beloved theme of a harlequinade (81). Subsequently, Sergei Hackel sketched the main parallels between the two works in a subsection of his book, "'The Twelve' as *Commedia dell'arte*" (58–59). In his article on *The Twelve*, Edward Stankiewicz points to Blok's strong interest in popular plays, puppet-theater, and film. Boris Gasparov and Yury Lotman comment on the element of "зрелищная культура [entertainment culture]," low theater forms, and film in *The Twelve*.

In another article Boris Gasparov expands on the traditions of a show booth to examine connections between popular theater and Blok's *poema* (Gasparov 1994). Similar to Etkind's claim of the poem's dramatic exposition, Gasparov argues for *The Twelve*'s overriding dramatic principle of presenting action through the characters' utterances, concluding that the poem tends toward theatricality both in structure and in its references to other theatrical works.

Reviewing such scholarship on the *poema*, one question immediately comes to mind. Given *The Twelve*'s general orientation toward the dramatic, why did Blok still choose to write a *poema* and not a play? I propose that the element of the dramatic in *The Twelve* is more important as a point of departure rather than as an end result. At the time of *The Twelve*'s composition, the poet appears to search for an idea that is at the core "epic" for him, and juxtaposes this "epic" principle to a "dramatic" one continuously in his articles and journal entries and, at times explicitly, within the *poema* itself.

While working on *The Twelve*, Blok developed a plan for a drama on the life of Jesus. Blok's notes on this project suggest that his intention was to create a political allegory on contemporary revolutionary reality. An important referent at this time for the poet was Ernest Renan's *The Life of Jesus*, in which Jesus is treated as an historical figure. For Renan, the February revolution of 1848 was a religion in the making. This philosophy is close to Blok's own turn to history, in which the poet detects the outlines of his own inspired vision. This vision is no longer confined to an isolated image of the Beautiful Lady, but, rather, is found in every aspect of the world that surrounds him. As history becomes a larger player in Blok's thinking, he searches more and more for a way of expressing his vision outside of lyric poetry or drama. It is important to keep in mind that the play on the life of Jesus ultimately did not materialize. The *poema* on contemporary reality, on the other hand, was finished with remarkable speed (in three and a half weeks).

Despite the fact that Blok struggled to develop a plan for a drama while working on *The Twelve*, this text is an epic poem, and self-consciously so. Not only does *The Twelve* satisfy the conventions of the *poema* structurally, it comments on these conventions almost explicitly. It is significant that many scholars of the poem, despite its utter uniqueness, regard it as a traditional representative of the epic genre. Leonid Dolgoplov claims that Blok wrote an epic almost unbeknown to himself. The reason for this oversight on the

poet's part, the critic asserts, is twofold. On the one hand, Blok became accustomed to thinking of *The Twelve* as a cycle of short poems. On the other hand, he associated his epic ambitions solely with his work on *Retribution* (1979, 99–100). I will argue that this return to the epic idea was more intentional for Blok than Dolgoplov imagined.

Before examining Blok's personal intuitions for the generic parameters of the *poema*, however, let us briefly address the question of what is assumed by the term in the early twentieth century. Epic poetry is certainly no longer defined in terms of its eighteenth-century recipe, which includes a formulaic beginning incorporating the topos of humility, an objective, third-person narration, and an elevated subject-matter and lexicon. Identifying the categories of epic poetry is, needless to say, significantly more complex than describing fixed forms such as a sonnet or a rondeau. In the twentieth century, the ambiguous term "lyric *poema*" begins to subsume everything that is long and in verse. The term is first used by Belinsky (328) for a type of Romantic narrative poetry. Zhirmunsky, in his *Bairon i Pushkin*, uses the terms "Romantic *poema*" and "lyric *poema*" interchangeably. Dolgoplov, in his book on Blok's *poemy*, as well as Markov in his article "K voprosu o granitsakh dekadansa v russkoi poezii (i o liricheskoi poeme)," argue that a "lyric *poema*" is rooted in Romantic narrative poetry. In turn, Aliakrinsky and, more recently, Efim Etkind (1997b, 299–300) suggest that the fundamental element of "lyric *poema*" is the transfer of action from the external to the inner realm. According to this definition, "lyric *poema*" includes such disparate works as Mayakovsky's *Cloud in Trousers*, Akhmatova's *Requiem*, and Pasternak's *Leutenant Shmidt*, none of which continue the tradition of nineteenth-century "Romantic *poema*" exclusively.

The thrust behind the phrase "lyric *poema*," however, points in the right direction. In the twentieth century the genre of *poema* comes to be regarded as a combination of two opposing impulses in poetry: lyric and epic. A great number of narrative poems are reducible to this configuration, regardless of the century in which they were written. For instance, *The Lay of Igor's Campaign*, an early East Slavic monument of a heroic epic, contains this opposition clearly. It captures the principal components of epic poetry: an event in history, protagonists who put public interests before personal happiness, and heroic battle scenes, all interspersed with lyric laments. Although the distinction between the two basic categories of poetry—epic and lyric—is not always clear in practice, in theory each category carries with it very specific expectations. The lyric poem is atemporal and often lacks spatial coordinates; it is a subjective, private utterance. Epic verse, on the other hand, is a public genre, often associated with the execution of a "социальный заказ [social order]." But more importantly, while lyric poetry as a rule presents a contextless private utterance, epic poetry sets that private utterance against some type of background.

An essential element in the genre of the *poema* is an individual voice grounded in a concrete time and space. Hence, the primary source of tension in this type of poetry is between an individual and his/her larger context, between the private and the public. To return to Blok's *poema*, S. M. Broitman's article provides an important disclaimer that helps us to differentiate *The Twelve* from the more experimental *poemy* of the Silver Age: *The Twelve* strikes many readers as a more conventional epic precisely because it presents what Broitman terms an "individual relationship to an epic state of the world" (32). Many *poemy* of the Modernist period do away with this balance: they either reduce the element of the individual and present a sweeping panorama of a historic event itself (e.g., Pasternak's *The Year 1905*, Mayakovsky's *War and the Universe*) or, alternatively, amplify the lyric ("lament") component at the expense of a larger backdrop (e.g., Mayakovsky's *The Backbone Flute*, Tsvetaeva's *Poema of the End*).

Let us summarize this relationship in *The Twelve*: we are presented with a private tragedy set against a public backdrop. Petka is split between his personal concerns and his "civic"-mindedness. As a revolutionary, he has to suppress his pangs of conscience, as well as his pining for lost love. But the goal of the present analysis is not to dwell on the intersection of the private and public spheres in *The Twelve* per se. This issue is plainly revealed on the text's surface without further investigation. My task, instead, is to examine the intuitions that guided the poet in his movement from "lyric isolation" specifically to the *poema*, as opposed to the other literary form that occupied the poet at the time, i.e. drama.²

2. Blok's Conception of the Lyric, the Dramatic, and the Epic

Before turning to the issue of genre in *The Twelve*, it is important to examine Blok's attitude toward the three denominations of poetry: the lyric, the dramatic, and the epic. Blok felt that writing in the genre of the *poema* would enrich his own poetry with something that it sorely lacked. The vaguest of lyric poets, he saw the *poema* as a force that could impart structure to his work. In regard to his verse epic *Retribution*, the poet wrote in his diary (1911): "Надо план и сюжет [it needs a *plan* and a *plot*]" (emphasis in the original, 7: 96).

If epic verse is an organizing impulse, then lyric poetry for Blok is an impulse of madness. In his article "On Lyric Poetry," he refers to the lyric poet as caught in a "vicious circle," "walled off" from the larger world (5: 134), and calls lyric poetry an "intoxicating drink." One can infer from these pronouncements that the poet envisioned the external world as the source of organization or structure in general. But more importantly, it is the epic idea that provided the poet with a way out of an isolating inner life that he began to associate exclusively with the lyric elements in poetry.

When it comes to drama, Blok follows in the tradition of previous thinkers

who place the literary form somewhere between the lyric and the epic. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche suggests that drama is a combination of two impulses: to produce tragedies and dramatic works, the frenzied state of lyric poetry (Dionysus) has to be touched by the calmness of epos (Apollo). In his ruminations on drama, Blok comes closest to Belinsky's assessment of it. Belinsky asserts that in drama the lyric and the epic worlds merge, as do the subjective and the objective, history and the present moment. In practice, however, the lyric element often outweighs the epic because of the drama's inherent emphasis on individuality. After all, Belinsky observes, in drama external events are propelled by characters' personalities (296). In a similar way, Blok both places the form somewhere between the two extremes and, at the same time, insists that modern drama has all but succumbed to the lyric principle: "в наше время лирика покоряет драму [in our time, lyric poetry dominates in drama]" ("On Drama" 5: 171). This trend manifests itself in the drama's shift of focus to "the inner depths of human consciousness" (ibid.). It is significant that in *On Love, Poetry, and Service to the State. A Dialogue* (4: 61–71), Blok presents the illogical, anti-civic position of lyric poetry (which is shown to eclipse concerns of public duty) in a dramatic form.

Because the lyric far outweighs the epic in modern drama in Blok's estimation, drama becomes just as disconnected from the external world as a subjective lyric. In "On Theater" [1908], Blok observes that drama is removed from reality in yet another way. Blok's conception of theater as a form that is closed onto itself corresponds to his notion of the lyric "vicious circle." Possessed by the lyric forces of incantation, Blok sees theater as an expression of a creative personality first and foremost. It is an expression of artistry and, with it, artificiality: "Театр изобличает кощунственную бесплотность формулы 'искусства для искусства' [...]. Ибо театр—это сама плоть искусства [The theater betrays the blasphemous immateriality of the formula 'art-for-art's-sake' [...]. For theater is itself the art's flesh and blood]." He calls "dramatic art" an "uprising against the flesh" (5: 270).

This idea of drama's dissociation from the external world is presented in the introduction to his collection of plays (*The Show Booth*, *The King in the Square*, and *The Stranger*), published in 1907. Here, Blok observes that his dramas are utterly infused with lyric elements. He uses the term "lyric" and "dramatic" interchangeably, discussing the plays as if they belong to the realm of lyric poetry exclusively. Moreover, the poet declares that "lyric poetry does not belong to those spheres of art that teach one how to live" (4: 433). In turn, to expose oneself to lyric poetry—and, by extension, to drama—is to fall under its spell and to be forever lost to the outside world.

An important component of being under the spell of lyric poetry is an obsession with the artistic process itself. In Blok's plays, this obsession is taken to an extreme degree as the characters are reduced to an artistic product. In other words, the artist's world becomes populated with masks and theatrical

symbols. Blok uses theater to stress the artificiality, the “stagy” features of his “бесплотные [disembodied]” characters in the 1907 collection.

However, one should not confuse Blok's pronouncements on the present state of theater with his assessment of dramatic potential in general. In “A Letter on Theater” (6: 273–75), the poet argues for state support of theater on the grounds that, in its essence, theater can enlighten a society spiritually and morally. In this piece, Blok expresses ideas that are completely contrary to his previous statements on his own plays, claiming that drama is the type of art that is closest to life (6: 273). Instead of its present state of fracture, it has the ability to resolve the art/life dichotomy.

Yet this vision of theater belongs to the future. The contemporary theater, in Blok's view, is very far from life in its artistic exhibitionism and artifice. It is curious that the poet, instead of attempting to realize the dramatic form's “true” intentions, turns to another literary form altogether to bridge the art/life gap. It is precisely the epic genre that offers the poet a cure from dramatic “бесплотность [immateriality].” In his *poemy*, rather than foregrounding the creative individual personality, the poet envisions himself as surrendering to the spirit (the “music”) of his age. In Blok's epic attempts, he deals directly with the larger world, leaving the isolation of the inner world behind. Looking back on his state of mind at the time of his work on *The Twelve*, the poet writes: “‘Двенадцать’ — какие бы они ни были — это лучшее, что я написал. Потому что тогда жил современностью [*The Twelve*, regardless of how it turned out, is the best thing I have ever written, because at that time I lived in the present]” (3: 629). Note that the poet sees his orientation toward contemporary events (“современность”) as a higher state in his poetic development.

The best illustration of working with the traditional categories of the epic genre is found in Blok's “Foreword” to his unfinished *poema*, *Retribution*. To reiterate, the genre of the *poema* is especially suited to present the opposition between the individual and his/her larger context. It is significant that Blok chooses the genre for this exact purpose, i.e. for delineating his characters against the backdrop of the age: “Каждая глава обрамлена описанием событий мирового значения; они составляют ее фон [Every section is framed by descriptions of events of universal significance. They constitute its [the *poema*'s] background]” (3: 297). Furthermore, the individual sphere is presented in a relationship antagonistic to its historic “background.” Blok imagines human experience as propelled by a tug-and-pull dynamic between these two poles (individual versus historic). One pole exerts pressure on the other until the latter is depressed to an extreme and has nowhere to go but to spring back and take its “retribution” on the former:

Тогда пришлось начать постройку большой поэмы [...]. Ее план представлялся мне в виде концентрических кругов, которые становились все уже и уже, и самый маленький круг, съезжившись до предела, начинал опять жить своей самостоятельной жизнью, распирать и раздвигать окружающую среду [...]. (3: 297)

I was then forced to begin the composition of a long *poema* [...]. Its structure appeared to me in the form of concentric circles, which became progressively narrower. The smallest circle, having shrunk to an extreme, once again began to live its own independent life, to grow and press on its surroundings.

In the next paragraph Blok assigns clearer features to the main participants of this process. The two concentric circles turn out to be an individual element and larger forces of history, one in opposition to the other:

Словом, мировой водоворот засасывает в свою воронку почти всего человека; от личности почти вовсе не остается следа [...]. Но семя брошено, и в следующем первенце растет новое, более упорное; [...] таким образом, род, испытавший на себе возмездие истории, среды, эпохи, начинает, в свою очередь, творить возмездие; последний первенец уже способен огрызаться [...]; он готов ухватиться своей человеческой ручонкой за колесо, которым движется история человечества. (298)

In a word, the world whirlpool sucks into its funnel almost the entire person. Almost no trace of individuality is left [...]. But the seed is planted, and in the next first-born there grows something new and more resilient; [...] in this fashion, a family that personally experienced the retribution of history, the milieu and the epoch, begins for its part to take retribution. The last first-born is already able to talk back [...]; he is ready to grab onto the wheel that propels the history of human kind with his small human hand.

The first/last “first-born” refers to a single segment in this process rather than to the ultimate beginning and end of history. In other words, this dynamic repeats infinitely in a circular fashion.

Retribution marks an important generic turn in the poet’s development. Blok’s works of the early to middle period are characterized by lyric cycles (*Verses about the Beautiful Lady*, *Crossroads*) and by dramatic works. In the middle to late stages of his career Blok turns more and more to the epic idea and its implicit imperative of a larger world, with its possibility to envision a greater unity for modernity, presently fractured into lyric fragments.³ The genre of the *poema* seems to facilitate Blok’s move from problems of individual creativity to the principles of human history, and to place the two extremes in a close relationship to each other. The possibility of synthesis is addressed most directly in Blok’s “Foreword” to *Retribution*: “трагическое сознание неслиянности и нераздельности всего — противоречий непримиримых и требовавших примирения [a tragic awareness of the disjunction and inseparability of all things — of irreconcilable paradoxes that demand reconciliation]” (3: 296). It should be noted that, in the introduction to his “lyric dramas,” Blok also talks about capturing the contradictions of a “contemporary soul” (4: 434–35). However, at the same time, he admits the dramatic texts’ inability to offer a solution to such questions: “А вся сложность современной души, богатой впечатлениями истории и действительности, расслабленной сомнениями и противоречиями [...] — разве можно описать всю эту сложность [The entire complexity of the modern soul, rich with reactions to history and reality, weakened by doubts and contradictions [...]] — is it really possible to de-

scribe all this complexity?]" (434). It is only in the "Foreword" to his *poema* that Blok hints at the possibility of indeed capturing all the intricacies of modern man in a single work.

Blok suggests that the roots to such integration lie in historic reality. He lists the events that correspond to the *poema*'s inception as forming "единый музыкальный напор [a single musical flow]" (3: 297). The crisis of Symbolism, the deaths of Tolstoy, Vrubel, and Kommissarzhevskaja, are placed side by side with the assassination of Stolypin and the railroad-workers' strikes in London. For Blok, fancies of artistic isolation now seem to pale in comparison to this panoramic picture.

3. From *The Show Booth* to *The Twelve*

Let us now observe how the categories discussed above are played out in *The Twelve*. For all of the formal and thematic affinities with Blok's earlier "lyric dramas," what is genuinely new in *The Twelve*, i.e. what Blok's dramas lack, is precisely what the genre of the *poema* offers: a historic backdrop. *The Twelve* is a rethinking of an old theme and a reevaluation of artistic values on a larger scale.

The dramatic love intrigue of *The Show Booth* is not difficult to discern in *The Twelve*. In brief, both works are structured around a love triangle, with a conspicuous correspondence of the characters' names (Columbine/Katka, Pierrot/Petka). Pierrot/Petka lose the girl to their respective competitors (Harlequin/Vanka). Finally, the female object of rivalry either falls down (in the play) or is struck down and lying in the snow (in the poem). Note, however, that my intent in this section is to examine the play's function in this particular *poema* rather than to outline the points of contact between the two works.

The key difference between the two treatments of the same triangle can be formulated along the artifice/reality dichotomy. Recall Blok's definition of drama as an "uprising against the flesh," which is explicitly played out in the stock torments of the "caricaturishly unlucky Pierrot" and his "cardboard bride." It has been argued that the main actors of *The Twelve* are caricaturish and unidimensional as well.⁴ However, arguments to the contrary can also be found in the scholarship on the *poema*. The very fact that the characters of this *poema* do not easily conform to a particular schema underscores their multifariousness (or at least undermines theories of their unidimensionality). The possibility of seeing something more than a vaudeville-like flatness in Katka, Vanka, and Petka is especially pronounced when one compares the *poema* to *The Show Booth*. *The Twelve*'s background of historic reality almost by necessity contributes to the fleshing-out of its protagonists.

Scholars who argue this point of view cite Blok's letter to the illustrator of his *poema*, Yury Annenkov:

Это—не Катька вовсе: Катька—здоровая, толстомордая, страстная, курносая русская девка; свежая, простая, добрая—здорово ругается, проливает слезы над романами,

отчаянно целуется [...]. Рот свежий, “масса зубов”, [...] (может быть, без бабочки). “Толстомордость” очень важна [...]. Папироски лучше не надо (может быть, она не курит). Я бы сказал, что в маленьком рисунке у Вас неожиданный и нигде больше не повторяющийся неприятный налет “сатириконства.” (8: 514)

This is not Katka at all. Katka is a healthy, chubby-faced, passionate, snub-nosed, Russian gal: fresh, simple, good-natured. She curses a lot, cries over novels, kisses with desperation [...]. Her mouth is fresh, full of teeth, [...] (maybe there is no bow tie). The chubbiness of her face is very important [...]. Don't draw her with a cigarette (maybe she doesn't smoke). I would say that in your small drawing there is an unexpected and unpleasant coating of Satyricon-ism that is not repeated anywhere else.

The illustrator makes the common mistake of superimposing the caricature qualities of characters from *The Show Booth* onto those of *The Twelve*. From this follows Annenkov's overly simplistic assumption that, if she is a prostitute, she must smoke. Blok's disagreement with this representation betrays his intention to move away from representing his characters as stock figures in *The Twelve*. It is apparent from Blok's response to the illustrator that Katka was not meant to conform to a well-defined comedic prototype. Not only is she not flat, she is literally “chubby-faced.”

The “maybes” in Blok's description of Katka (“maybe she does not smoke,” etc.) imply a certain degree of autonomy on the part of the character with respect to the author. Recall that the theme of characters' subordination to the author comes up overtly in *The Show Booth*. The “author's” voice breaks into the play in several places to complain that his characters are taking artistic liberties and rewriting the lines assigned to them. From Blok's letter to his illustrator it is obvious that no such assumptions of artistic control are made when it comes to Katka's character. In *The Twelve*, the poet seems to catch glimpses of his heroine, suggesting that she already exists independently of him. Though often characters (especially “extras”) in *The Twelve* are presented in the style of *The Show Booth*, i.e. by referring to their most typical feature (for instance, the bourgeois's warm coat, the poet-prophet's long hair, the priest's gaudy cross, the revolutionaries' rifles, etc.), another way of conjuring up a visual image also occurs in *The Twelve*. In many places, the characters and their motions are presented in streaky detail, such as Katka's up-turned head, the birthmark on her left shoulder, etc. The idea behind this type of representation is to evoke the rest of the body by a single detail or motion, i.e. metonymically.

Though one cannot deny that metaphoric representation plays a large role in the poem (e.g., the symbol of an old dog for the old world, etc.), metonymy also has an important place in the poem's character portrayals. This device, in turn, creates the illusion of an object's existence independent of the author's imagination, its three-dimensionality. Roman Jakobson explains the difference between metaphor and metonymy precisely along the continuum of imagination-based versus reality-based subject matter. The metaphoric pro-

cess, he asserts, dominates in the literary schools of Romanticism and Symbolism, while metonymy belongs to the "Realist trend" (111). A seemingly random detail presumes the presence of a larger context. In fact, it is the randomness itself that suggests that everything else, important or not, is also part of the scene.

According to Jakobson, not only is metonymy found more often in a "realistic" text than metaphor, but the former also suggests a character's place in a concrete context. The synecdochic details create a chain of contiguous relationships that tie the character "to the setting in space and time" (111). Jakobson's favorite example of this technique is from Tolstoy, but he also mentions in passing the lyric/epic dyad that is directly relevant to the present discussion. More specifically, Jakobson claims that "in Russian lyrical songs [...] metaphoric constructions predominate, while in the heroic epics the metonymical way is preponderant" (111). Given the historic epic's claim to validity (a claim that in the eighteenth century is formalized into a demand for verisimilitude), it makes sense that the notion of metonymy should be a principal element of the epic genre.

Another important implication of metonymy for this discussion is that it suggests immediate observation of the external world. In the play, Blok borrows stock characters from the distant sixteenth-century Italian street theater, and then further cloaks them in artifice to the point of Columbine's literal collapse into cardboard. Although it is true that *The Show Booth* is aimed at contemporary mysticism, and that *commedia dell'arte* is revived by the Russian and French Symbolists and made to feel modern, Blok finds it difficult to address his times in this form, unmediated by allegory and symbolism. The theater of masks and puppetry for the most part becomes synonymous with the ideas of pure art in the Modernist period. Even if *The Show Booth* deals with Blok's contemporary reality, it does so through a filter of theatricality. In *The Twelve*, on the other hand, the poet depicts an event that occurs before his eyes, in the spirit of the verisimilitude of epic verse. The fact that the representation of reality in Blok's time is understood no longer as a calm ordering of images and actions by a distant narrator (as it is, for instance, in an eighteenth-century epic), but rather as Modernist confusion, does not preclude us from regarding this confusion in the text indeed as traditional epic verisimilitude of sorts.

The epic nature of *The Twelve* also manifests itself in the ultimate primacy of an externally motivated plot over a character's inner world. In Blok's "lyric dramas," this formulation is reversed. Perhaps it is precisely this type of pigeonholing of the dramatic form in Blok's mind that does not allow him to pursue his play on the life of Jesus beyond his preliminary plans for it: contemporary theater is too self-indulgent and egocentric to deal with larger categories. Instead, it is the genre of the *poema* in which Blok continuously chooses to depict his times. Though the poet's goal in *The Twelve* is to sug-

gest the covert universal forces behind the revolutionary fervor of the time, this goal is achieved by way of depicting the atmosphere of the concrete event itself, and the love conflict that is engendered by it. As Irene Masing-Delic points out, it is the concrete events in history that make the merger of the mere *realia* and the genuine *realiora* (the world of reality and that of inspired vision) possible (195).

Blok's description of Katka to the illustrator of his *poema* points to a way of reading her that is in sharp contrast to her counterpart in the play. Those who argue for the character's flatness overlook the simple notion that Katka is the very flesh of this world. Corporeality is the essence of her way of life. She is the opposite of both of the epitaphs that describe Pierrot's beloved, neither "cardboard" nor "a bride." An anonymous *SEEJ* reviewer wonders whether Katka's bourgeois lifestyle might not be another version of cardboard flatness. In my reading of the text, her bourgeois pleasures are inextricable from her fleshliness. The bourgeois lifestyle that Katka enjoys by choosing Vanka over Petka are defined by the material world: she acquires things in exchange for her flesh. While the play is built on the cliché of Pierrot's poetic longing for his unattainable Columbine, the main thread of action in the *poema* is propelled by realized (attained) corporeal desires. Katka's profession is about the realization of these desires; Petka murders her precisely for this reason. Moreover, the reader is repeatedly reminded of her fleshliness. Her body parts are constantly referenced: teeth ("Зубки блещут жемчугом [Her teeth sparkle pearly-white]" (3: 351)), scars on her neck and chest ("У тебя на шее, Катя, [...] / У тебя под грудью [...] [On your neck, Katka, [...] / Under your breast [...]]" (352)), legs ("Больно ножки хороши [You have such nice legs]" (352)), eyes ("В огневых ее очах [In her fiery eyes]" (354)), a birthmark by her right shoulder ("Из-за родинки пунцовой / Возле правого плеча [On account of the crimson birthmark / By her right shoulder]" (354)), and her head ("Простреленная голова! [Her shot-through head]" (353)). Her digestive system ("Шоколад Миньон жрала [She gobbled up Mignon chocolates]" (352)), her ability to be scarred and, ultimately, killed, address the physiology that is lacking in her dramatic counterpart. As the twelve guards leave the murder scene, Katka's body is referred to as "падаль" (353), the decomposing corpse of an animal. Recall that Columbine collapses because she literally turns out to be flat ("Ах, подруга свалилась ничком! / Не могла удержаться сидя! [Oh, my lady fell face down! / She could not hold herself up in a sitting position]" (4: 15)). Cardboard does not bleed and is incapable of decomposition. Katka's fall is diametrically opposed to Columbine's in its violence and gore. She is lying in the snow, with her head shot through with a bullet, dead and decomposing.

The scene of Katka's murder conjures up the red of blood as it is contrasted against the white of the snow. The only other time that color is referred to in the otherwise black and white imagery of the poem is in the blood-red flag

that Christ carries.⁵ Note that in *The Show Booth* the same three colors are present. Pierrot's costume is white with red buttons, Columbine appears in white, two lovers at a masquerade are dressed in black and red, in the last scene Death is wearing white, and, finally, there is the bleeding buffoon. The appearance of blood on stage turns out to be a theatrical ploy in *The Show Booth*, in the form of cranberry juice ("Помогите! Истекаю клюквенным соком [Help! I'm bleeding cranberry juice]" (4: 19)). The actors collapse into their craft, representing the act of artistic representation itself (recall Blok's definition of theater as "incorporeal" and "art-for-art's sake"). This make-believe blood is contrasted with the "real" bleeding that has "real" consequences (i.e. death) in *The Twelve*.

All of Blok's thoughts on drama share a single idea: the current condition in which the genre finds itself is best suited for the exploration of lyric disconnectedness and "the tortures of an isolated soul" ("переживания отдельной души" (4: 434)). Note that individual lament is precisely what is denied in *The Twelve*, especially for a male character. In the spirit of Pierrot, Petka begins to pine for love lost ("Ох, товарищи родные, / Эту девку я любил [Oh, my dear comrades, / How I loved that gal]" (3: 353)). The difference between these literary doubles is in essence generic. Pierrot is forever locked in his first-person utterance. *The Show Booth* ends with him standing on stage, melancholy and alone: "Пьеро задумчиво вынул из кармана дудочку и заиграл песню о своем бледном лице, о тяжелой жизни и о невесте своей Коломбине [Pierrot pensively took out a flute from his pocket and began to play a song about his pale face, about his difficult life, and about his bride, Columbine]" (4: 21). The repetition of the reflexive pronoun in this stage direction contains the very essence of Pierrot. His literary mask is that of eternal *self*-pity. The figure of Pierrot is typically represented with a painted tear on his face. Though Petka's monologue on the loss of his beloved has the potential to follow in Pierrot's footsteps, the important difference here is that Petka's lament is uttered in the presence of others, who in turn remind the reader of the poem's historic setting. These others pull Petka out of his melancholy stupor by interrupting his lament abruptly. The "times" triumph over individual pain: "—Не такое нынче время, / Чтобы нянчиться с тобой! [These are not the times / To fuss over you!]" (3: 354).

Pierrot's solitary pining is often associated with artistry and especially poet-hood. As evident in his final monologue, his flute-playing is inextricably tied to his private tortures of love. In turn, in the Silver Age of Russian poetry, the flute begins to be used more and more frequently as a symbol for artistic creation itself.⁶ Meyerhold's staging of Blok's play makes an explicit connection between the figure of Pierrot and the bitter, yet splendid, isolation of poetry, of art that is doomed to be misunderstood. In Meyerhold's interpretation, the play becomes a voice for the crisis of the artist in early twentieth-century Russia.⁷

Artistry is such an important element in *The Show Booth* that Blok finds a way to incorporate the “author’s” voice in a genre that is formally not equipped to handle it. The “author” constantly breaks into the play to remind the viewer/reader of its artifice. Ironically, *The Twelve*, executed in a genre that has ample room for the strong presence of a storyteller (compare Pushkin’s *poemy*), makes virtually no use of this possibility. Indeed, the theme of authorship is altogether suppressed. Blok’s voice is obscured by intonations of folk songs, which are, by definition, authorless. The source of direct speech is often unidentifiable and is not always punctuated with quotation marks. In addition, the mere quantity and ideological diversity of fragments of reported speech disperse the author’s voice. We cannot pinpoint the author’s perspective on this revolutionary whirlwind or assign him to any one of the characters caught up in it.⁸

On a purely textual level, scholars agree that the signature of Blok’s style is demonstratively missing in this *poema*. Dolgoplov observes that *The Twelve* is permeated with the imperative mood that is otherwise absent from Blok’s poetic style. Furthermore, imperatives in the poem often attain the status of disembodied slogans (150). This blatant suppression of a creative agent in the *poema*, the type that is represented by the solitary Pierrot and the “author” in *The Show Booth*, is essential in transposing the otherwise individual creative process onto the masses.⁹ Pierrot escapes into his art after losing his love. In his case, art is a surrogate for personal happiness. Petka’s surrogate for love, on the other hand, is the Revolution. Instead of picking up a musical instrument (in *The Show Booth*, Pierrot plays both a guitar and a flute), Petka picks up a rifle. Yet, at the same time, this instrument of destruction also produces a sound that approximates music. The sound of a shooting rifle is incorporated into the meter of the text. It runs through the text as a poetic/musical refrain. Petka escapes from his misfortune into the “musical flow” of external events. The idea of putting an end to artistic isolation is posited explicitly as Petka is jerked out of his tragic monologue by his comrades-in-arms. The sound that Petka emits from his instrument is not the solitary one of a flute or a guitar. He joins an entire procession of a new type of artistic prophecy in the form of the barbaric, communal world orchestra. It seems as if, moving away from the idea of recreating the soul from within, which will in turn project change onto its environment, Blok considers the possibility of positing the context itself as a catalyst. The Red Guards are guided by brute instinct as much as the agents of the old world are. The difference is that, unbeknownst to themselves, blindly and even hostilely, they stumble upon a cause of universal significance. In other words, the elemental forces of history do not require a new type of man to carry them out. But once a human being is sucked into this “whirlwind,” he/she cannot come out of it unchanged. This question is radically reconsidered along the epic genre’s traditional categories of individual versus background, the latter imposing change on the former (and not the other way around).

The Twelve's appeal to direct one's inner pain outward is in sharp contrast to the play's finale. The insertion of a historical backdrop into the old love triangle substantially changes the *poema*'s dynamic. The Red Guards call on Petka not only to turn away from his splintering grief, but also to join the masses in destroying precisely that element of the old world that insists on isolation. It is a call to partake in a shared reality, not a private one. More generally, Blok has been known to associate art forms with specific stages of social development. For instance, in his article "The Downfall of Humanism," the poet argues that the bourgeois cult of individualism engenders art forms that are destined for self-destruction.

Since the genre of the *poema* is inherently equipped to explore the interaction between an individual and his/her context, it is understandable why Blok turns to it as he attempts to redefine the artist's role in the contemporary world. I should note, however, that the categories of a foregrounded individual set against a larger backdrop are certainly not always clear-cut in this *poema*. As discussed above, scholars disagree on the very possibility of seeing an individual, or individuated, presence in the *poema*. As for the background, even its status as "concrete" or historical has at times been disputed. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that such categories are not always so absolute, and ought to be considered in the context of Blok's own development. For instance, in relation to *The Show Booth*'s place of action—the supposed Petersburg that is postulated as a mere abstraction—the Petrograd of *The Twelve* is infinitely more concrete.

Thus far I have considered the contrastive parallels between the play and the *poema* in the sphere of foreground (i.e. individual actors). At this point I would like to turn to the striking differences between the two texts' components of background. *The Show Booth*'s setting is markedly artificial. It opens up with the following stage direction: "Обыкновенная театральная комната с тремя стенами, окном и дверью [An ordinary theatrical room with three walls, a window and a door]" (4: 9). An enclosed space is suggested from the outset, in which the actors are physically protected from the elements. It is curious that, one page into the play, the "author" tells us that this was not his intention: "Спешу уверить, что этот актер жестоко насмеялся над моими авторскими правами. Действие происходит зимой в Петербурге. Откуда же он взял окно и гитару? [I want to assure you that this actor has brutally mocked my author's rights. The action takes place in Petersburg in the winter. So where did he get a window and a guitar?]" (4: 10). The original intention, winter in Petersburg, turns out to be impossible in the protected environment of the stage.

This intention is realized only later, in the *poema*, whose action is set almost entirely in open space. The outside elements literally violate and constrict the characters' actions. They have to struggle with the snow, wind, and ice. The poem opens precisely with the idea of outside pressing down on the individual: "Черный вечер, / Белый снег, / Ветер, ветер! / На ногах не стоит

человек [Black evening, / White snow, / The wind is blowing and blowing! / A person can't keep on his feet]" (3: 347).

The inside/outside opposition points to the essential difference between the genres of the two texts. Just as Petka turns away from personal torments and disappears into the marching masses, and just as the author/narrator disperses himself into the larger picture he presents, the dramatic love triangle is forced out into the open air and subjected to meteorological and historical whirlwinds alike. The love conflict loses its immediacy when it is set against the forces of the outside world. There are rare references to enclosed spaces in the *poema*, but when this type of space is evoked, it is associated with the bourgeois values of undisturbed personal comforts. For instance, the lines "—А Ванька с Каткой — в кабаке [...] / У ей керенки есть в чулке! [Meanwhile Vanka and Katka are in a pub [...] / She has Kerensky banknotes in her stockings]" (350) are diametrically opposed to the lines that immediately precede it, "Тра-та-та! / Холодно, товарищи, холодно! [Tra-ta-ta / It is cold, comrades, so cold]." The scene at the pub is presented through the eyes of the Red Guards, cold and angry, from the outside looking in at Katka's and Vanka's merriment. Several sections later, Katka is presented in an intimate space suggestive of a bedroom, once again through the eyes of the cold and enraged Petka: "В кружевном белье ходила — [...] С офицерами блудила [You wore lacy undergarments — [...] You fornicated with officers]" (352). The "bourgeois" caught outside at the crossroads ("буржуй на перекрестке") attempts to escape the elements by burying his nose in his collar (348).

The play and the *poema* share an important thematic element of a procession. In *The Show Booth*, Pierrot's isolation is emphasized precisely by his inability to join the procession of couples. In his first monologue, he asks: "Сквозь улицы сонные / Протянулась длинная цепь фонарей, / И, пара за парой, идут влюбленные, [...] Где же ты? Отчего за последней парой / Не вступить и нам [Through sleepy streets / Stretches a long chain of streetlights, / And, couple after couple, lovers march, [...] But where are you? Why don't we join in after the last couple]" (4: 10). As a rule, Pierrot's addressee, the beautiful lady, is absent. His utterances are meant to be observed by the audience; they are *not* intended to reach their immediate addressee (Columbine). Petka's most private thoughts, on the other hand, are never spoken in isolation. His romantic longing finds an immediate response. While the nature of Pierrot's procession of lovers, by definition, excludes an unpaired individual, Petka, having murdered his romantic partner, is welcomed with open arms into the rows of gun-carrying men.

The forward motion of the guards is a prominent leitmotif in *The Twelve*. Note that it takes on the same features as the march in *The Show Booth*, moving through a nocturnal Petersburg street illuminated by a row of streetlights. At the end of the play, the image of an illuminated procession reappears in the form of "факельное шествие [a torch procession]" (4: 19), headed by Pier-

rot's rival, Harlequin. It is curious that Harlequin, though reduced to a theatrical mask, also yearns to step out into "the world" and breathe its air: "О, как хотелось юной грудью / Широко вздохнуть и выйти в мир! [...] Здесь живут в печальном сне! [...] Иду дышать твоей весною / В твоё золотое окно! [Oh, how I wanted to breathe in deeply with my youthful chest and to step out into the world! [...] Here one lives in a melancholy dream! [...] I am coming to breathe in your spring / Through your golden window]" (4: 20). He compares the place of his present dwelling to a dream. Ironically, though, the world outside the window turns out to be just as make-believe and artificial. The stage directions read: "Прыгает в окно. Даль, видимая в окне, оказывается нарисованной на бумаге. Бумага лопнула. Арлекин полетел вверх ногами в пустоту [He jumps into the window. The distance, visible through the window, turns out to be painted on a piece of paper. The paper tears. Harlequin falls, head first, into the void]" (4: 20). Harlequin is constrained by the walls of a theater. The view through the window, a suggestion of the outside world, turns out to be yet another flat symbol that leads merely to a different place on the same stage.

The representation of space in *The Twelve* sharply differs from that in *The Show Booth*. First, the *poema* turns the distribution of the outer/inner space of the play inside-out: while the actors of the play are inside looking out, the characters of the *poema* are outside looking in. Another important difference between the treatment of setting in the two texts involves the visual perspective. Just as the characters in the *poema* are "fleshed out" in comparison to the play, so is the space of action. In the play, the "distance" turns out to be drawn on a flat piece of paper. The notion of "даль [distance]" in the *poema* is, conversely, of utmost importance. It is a key element both thematically and structurally. Dolgoplov argues that the distance in *The Twelve* is felt more as a temporal category, having to do with the process of history (1979, 76). The poem integrates three time periods: the soon-to-be past of the old-world figures, the present tense dominated by the destructive force of the guardsmen, and the future represented by Christ. The march into the distance is a symbolic march into the future.

Most critics interpret this temporal element of space in the spirit of Dolgoplov, i.e. figuratively. It is just as important, however, to see these spatial relations literally. The protuberant representation of space in the poem is suggested by the recurring geometrical images of whirlwinds (cone-like, three-dimensional shapes) and the refrain "вперед, вперед! [forward]." The final verses emphasize the idea of depth. The procession is moving not *across* a particular terrain, but *into* it ("Вдаль идут державным шагом [They march in stately fashion into the distance]" (3: 358)). The suggestion is that the procession of twelve is heading into a three-dimensional distance, not a flat representation of it on a piece of paper. In section twelve of the poem, there is an emphatic repetition of the spatial categories of depth, the

words “in front of” and “behind”: “ветер с красным флагом / разыгрался впереди,” “Впереди—сугроб холодный,” “Позади—голодный пес,” “Впереди—с кровавым флагом, [...] Впереди—Исус Христос [At the head [of the procession] the wind began playing with the red flag,” “Ahead, a cold snow-drift,” “Behind, a hungry dog,” “Ahead [of the procession], with a bloody flag [...] Ahead [of it] is Jesus Christ]” (358–59).¹⁰

Boris Gasparov, in the spirit of his argument that *The Twelve* is a re-creation of *The Show Booth*’s “carnival moments,” insists that historical concreteness in the poem, as in the play, is lacking (7). He supports this view by noting that the city remains unnamed in the poem, and observes that the only detail to orient the poem in time and space is a banner with the words “Вся власть Учредительному собранию [All Power to the Constituent Assembly]” (3: 347). Gasparov reads this detail symbolically: the Constituent Assembly’s only meeting was on January 5, toward the end of Christmastide, the holiday of popular carnival processions in the Russian Orthodox tradition.

In addition to its metaphoric value, one cannot underestimate the significance of this banner for situating the poem’s action in an exact moment in history. It is just as important to read the banner, “All Power to the Constituent Assembly,” in Jakobson’s terms, for its synechdochic qualities (e.g., if a nose is mentioned, the existence of the rest of the face is assumed). This assumption of literal historic space encouraged Annenkov to draw in a concrete street address (Rybatskaia 12) in the background for one of his illustrations to the poem. Though the city remains unnamed in the *poema*, it is possible to narrow down the place of action not only to Petrograd, but also to a specific street in Petrograd. Conversely, the fact that the city is named in *The Show Booth* does not make it “real” in the least. The cold, the whirlwinds, and the snowdrifts in the *poema* are undeniably rich in symbolic potential. However, they are just as important in situating the characters in a historic moment and real space.

Sergei Hackel asserts that the poem is indeed rich in details that he describes as “meteorological, sartorial, financial, musical, linguistic, military, social, psychological, and legal” (49). He points out that Blok was so committed to reproducing the details of the time realistically that he removed the line “Юбкой улицу мела [You swept the streets with your skirt]” because, as he later realized, the skirts in 1918 were no longer worn long enough to sweep the ground. Here we see a concern for the concrete superseding that for the symbolic: “to sweep the streets with one’s skirt” was a common figure of speech for a streetwalker and hence fraught with symbolic potential.

The emphasis on real space and a concrete historic background in *The Twelve* contrasts well with *The Show Booth*’s pointedly artificial, ahistorical setting. This play belongs to Blok’s early period. Even though several of Blok’s subsequent dramas are set in a specific historical period, the symbolic there still outweighs the concrete. Blok’s various attempts at addressing di-

rectly a historic moment in which he lived never quite materialized in his plays, neither before nor after the writing of *The Twelve*. Most of Blok's dramatic endeavors remain mere allegorical throwbacks to remote places and times. One such example is his 1919 work, *Ramses*, subtitled "Dramatic Scenes from the Life of Ancient Egypt." Blok's crowning achievement in the dramatic form, *The Rose and the Cross*, written in 1912 and first staged in 1920, deals with the French Middle Ages. In contemplating the reasons for setting his drama in the thirteenth century, Blok comes to the conclusion that he "is not yet ripe for the depiction of contemporary life" (4: 563). Nevertheless, Blok's constant desire to work with Stanislavsky indicates his intention to produce something in the "realistic" tradition. Blok presented *The Rose and the Cross* to Stanislavsky, who agreed to stage it only reluctantly and ultimately never finished the project. The play finally premiered in the Kostrov City Theater in 1920. S. M. Bondi, in his short introduction to this particular production, discusses the play's "rejection of realism" and its focus on the actors' craft itself (cited in Blok 4: 593). This emphasis on the artifact is reminiscent of Blok's "lyric dramas" of the early period.

Between 1913 and 1916 Blok again tries to write within the parameters of Stanislavsky's realistic theater. A play about an impoverished Russian merchant, *A Ridiculous Man*, in the spirit of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, does not go beyond the planning stages. Another play, *Song of Fate*, which occupies Blok from the time of its conception in 1907 to his reworking of it in 1918, is set in contemporary Russia. It is specifically aimed at the Moscow Art Theater, but this time is met with Stanislavsky's outright rejection. In one of his responses to the play, Stanislavsky writes: "Almost every time I am bothered by the fact that the play takes place in Russia. What for?" (quoted in Blok 4: 580). Stanislavsky's question—why Russia?—picks up on the secondary role and the ultimate interchangeability of the place of action in *Song of Fate*. This relegation of history to the level of an abstraction follows Blok through all of his dramatic experiments. One critic refers to Blok's use of historical settings in his dramatic works as "macro-" or "meta-historic," arguing that even localized periods in Blok's plays stand for wide-ranging generalizations (Nevolina 221). The critic adds that history in Blok's dramaturgy remains in the realm of the lyrical, underscoring the eternal and individual as opposed to the specific (222). As in Blok's dramas, in his lyric verse historical settings are used to emphasize the eternal and the recurring (consider the 1908 lyric cycle "On The Field of Kulikovo," as well as the 1918 poem "The Scythians").

4. Conclusion

While pointing out affinities between *The Show Booth* and *The Twelve*, Hackel notes that the earlier play is insufficiently complex to carry national, political, and social themes (59). The present analysis continues this line of

thought by focusing on the change of the genre itself. *The Twelve* and *The Show Booth* are excellent contrastive pairs, illustrating what happens to the same basic subject matter once it is remolded into a different form. The idea of genre figures prominently as Blok turns to the traditional dramatic love triangle and attempts to liberate it from its artifice, to open it up to the larger world, to equip the old plot to handle these national, political, and social themes. Puppetry proves inadequate for questions that go beyond an isolated artistic psyche. Hence, show-booth motifs are equally inadequate as an interpretive tool for the *poema*, if one seeks to move beyond mere points of contrast and comparison between the play and *The Twelve*. The characters in the *poema* do not periodically fold over and hang on chairs, as they do in *The Show Booth*. On the contrary, they carry out a mission of cosmic importance, if often only blindly. *The Show Booth's* major themes, individual isolation and escape into an individual artistic process, are demonstratively left behind by the procession that marches into the distance under the “bloody banner” (“с кровавым флагом”) that suggests something more “real” than a theatrical prop. Blok’s prejudice that drama is governed by lyricism follows Blok’s dramatic experiments, in one way or another, to the end of his career. In the case of *The Twelve*, however, the inherent feature of the genre of the *poema* itself, its concrete spatial and temporal coordinates, enables the poet to deal with issues that are missing in a dramatic form, at least in the poet’s estimation of its contemporary condition. Even if one reads the procession of the twelve men at the end of the *poema* as an ethereal symbol, a recurring generalization, an image of leading a mystical Russia into certain spheres of higher (or lower) *realiora*, Blok produces a work that is about the concrete starting point on the way to those intangible spheres: the specific city of Petrograd and the events that unfolded there in revolutionary Russia.

NOTES

I would like to thank Michael Wachtel for his comments on earlier versions of this article and two anonymous *SEEJ* reviewers for many useful suggestions.

- 1 Dramatic structure figures prominently in Etkind’s conception of the *poema*. According to him, *The Twelve* presents an encircled composition in terms of the three basic categories of poetry: the epic, the dramatic, and the lyric. The outer circle is epic, with the suggestion of an increasingly larger world in the opening and closing sections of the *poema*. The next circle inward is lyric, i.e. the incorporation of folk songs and first-person utterances. The central parts of the poem (6 and 7) present the main action by way of dramatic conventions (1997a).
- 2 Note that the present analysis is confined to issues of genre. In this paper I am interested in the poet’s choice to address his times in the genre of the *poema*, not in his attitude towards the events themselves. Questions of Blok’s stance on the Russian Revolution in *The Twelve*, his possible identification with any one character or any one political side in the *poema* — whether such questions can be answered at all on the basis of the text — lie beyond the scope of this article.

- 3 Blok's earliest direct attempt at a *poema* was his 1906 *Night Violet* (*Ночная фиалка*). Only two years later did he begin to think about composing a more monumental work in the genre.
- 4 Boris Gasparov, for instance, claims that the influence of puppetry extends not only to the plot of the *poema*, but also to the treatment of its characters. In his article co-authored with Yury Lotman, the critics argue that echoes of the silent movie in the poem contribute to its "infantilism" or "primitivism." This, in turn, leads to an "anti-individual" representation of the characters ("анти-личность" 59).
- 5 See Gasparov and Lotman's article on the cinematographic motifs of black-and-white in *The Twelve*.
- 6 For a discussion of the flute as a metaphor for art in Silver Age poetry, see Etkind 1997b, 297–98.
- 7 See Anna Lisa Crone for an in-depth discussion of Meyerhold's production of *The Show Booth*.
- 8 An anonymous *SEEJ* reviewer suggests a parallel between the absent narrator of *The Twelve* and the filmic, documenting presence/absence of a camera man in the spirit of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*.
- 9 In his 1919 article, "The Downfall of Humanism," Blok puts forth this new vision of collective authorship and artistic personality that taps into the larger world. This trend, the poet claims, will replace the European humanist tradition that currently emphasizes the individual (6: 111–15).
- 10 Annenkov's illustrations to *The Twelve* (reprinted in the English translation of the poem by Jack Lindsay) are very telling. The spatial relations are represented by the layering of angular shapes and the predominance of diagonal lines, which suggest an idea of depth. In none of the illustrations do the twelve walk in a horizontal line (which would create an impression of flatness, as if traversing the stage). The sketch of Katka's murder is most emblematic of the three-dimensional perspective (on page 41). She is lying with her head in the foreground, and the rest of her body disappearing into the picture. It should be recalled that Blok actively corresponded with his illustrator. He approved of these illustrations with great enthusiasm, except for the one misguided depiction of Katka discussed earlier.

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