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#### THE RECEPTION OF GNOSTIC PHILOSOPHY IN THE NOVEL BY LEONID LEONOV «PYRAMID»

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#### *Abstract*

The article proposes a model for analyzing one of the most significant Russian novels of the twentieth century in terms of reception and transformation of the gnostic ideological paradigm. The final novel of the great and still not fully appreciated classic of the twentieth century Leonid Leonov is a synthesis of several philosophical traditions, the leading of which is undoubtedly the gnostic. The study's authors understand Gnosticism, not primarily as a certain dogmas or theses system associated with a particular set of names and localized in time and space, but rather as a certain mindset, a mindset parallel Christian gnosis canonical and alternative to it. In this sense that we can speak of the reception of gnostic motives by Leonov, who, of course, was not a gnostic philosopher in the full sense of the word, but the whole course of his powerful thought, his artistic picture of the world was consonant with this great flow of European culture. The main focus of the article is on the model of the world «Pyramid», the structure of the «Dymkov universe», examining elements of Gnostic models perceived by Leonov and transformed by him into something unique and occupying a very special place in Russian literature of the past century. The image-concepts of the Pleroma, the Void, the Demiurge, the Gnostic cosmogony, the relationship of good and evil as elements of the structure of the Gnostic world are considered.

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**Keywords:** Gnostic motifs, images of time and space, tradition, reception, Russian prose of the twentieth century, Leonov.



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## 1. Introduction

Religious and philosophical experiments of the early twentieth century led to the emergence of theosophical tradition in Russian literature, which for many, already in the Soviet era, was not only the foundation of the world, but also a source of creativity. The decisive role in the creation of a new philosophy was played by Gnosticism, which originated at the beginning of our era, in the atmosphere of the struggle of ideas, so characteristic of Russian modernism. Most vividly represented in the works of V. S. Solovyov, the doctrine was also reflected in the works of such writers and poets as A. Blok, A. Bely, K. D. Balmont, Z. N. Gippius, D. S. Merezhkovsky, V. Ivanov, G. V. Ivanov, V. Ya. Bryusov - and in many ways brought up by the Silver Age- Leonid Leonov.

Despite the overwhelming influence of ideology, in the literature of the Soviet period one can also find works in which the author artistically interpreted the philosophy of the Gnostics, using it as a clue to the driving forces of history. Appeal to the doctrine, traditionally understood by the church fathers as heresy, could be justified by the domination of atheism, which resulted in the weakening of the influence of Christian dogma.

The creative figure of L. M. Leonov embodies an entire literary era. In the novel-obsession «Pyramid» the author not only sums up his life, but also reflects on what the Soviet state was striving for and came to. The death of prominent members of the intelligentsia, the closure of temples and the triumph of natural-science knowledge over faith caused the collapse of Soviet society. Working under conditions of strict ideological and aesthetic normalization, defined by the concept of «social realism», L. M. Leonov, nevertheless, sought an explanation for what was happening at the level of super-existence, referring to the plots describing events long before the beginning of human history.

## 2. Problem Statement

The actualization of the problem under investigation occurred in the second half of 1994, when the journal «Our contemporary» opened the new heading « The world of Leonid Leonov » in honor of the 95th anniversary of the writer. The section combined various materials on the works of L. M. Leonov, among which one can find an analysis of the gnostic myths in the final novel. The article by O. Ovcharenko (Ovcharenko, 2004) provides valuable information about literary influences, as well as about the sources to which the writer directly referred. The credibility of the material is indicated by the fact that the author of the article is the secretary of L. M. Leonov, so that the information is presented «first hand ».

The writer confesses: « I read Dante in the gymnasium ... I love him, I believe in the circles of hell, I see dads there, in general, all of them together. This is my foundation. But I rethought it in my own manner » (Ovcharenko, 2004). Reconsideration occurred at the level of cosmogony, in the problematic field of which such issues as the nature of good and evil, the essence of man, the origin of the world, etc.

According to the plan, the compositional «Pyramid» was supposed to, like the «Divine Comedy», be built on the symbolism of a number: three parts and an epilogue. Dante contrasts Lucifer, who personifies the evil of the world, the human race as a divine creature. In L. M. Leonov, the problem of the relationship of man to the forces of Good and Evil is solved in a slightly different plane, to which the Book of Enoch, read by the writer in 1973-1974, contributed. The book of Enoch as the main source of the ideas of the

«Pyramid» is noted by a number of researchers as in (Slobodnyuk, 1998; Ovcharenko, 2004; Khrulev, 2010).

L. M. Leonov joined the gnostic legends in various ways: through the kabbalist of M. O. Gershenson, who advised the writer, in particular, when writing the story «Leaving Hama», his relative Anthroposophist Margarita Sabashnikova, etc. S. L. Slobodnyuk discovered in the «Pyramid», the ideas of the Russian mystic P. D. Uspensky, as well as references to the doctrine «Tertium Organum» (Slobodnyuk, 1998).

A. A. Dyrdin argues that the plot about the angels and «daughter of men» L. M. Leonov could borrow from the first Christian writers Origen, Tertullian, Athenagoras of Athens. The researcher excludes the fact of acquaintance of the writer with the Qumran text of the Book of Enoch, otherwise LM Leonov hardly left without attention the central idea of justifying the Creator (Dyrdin, 2004).

The mysticism of artistic thinking of L. M. Leonov is manifested in the early works of the writer. The apocryphal literature, which little Leonid read aloud to his grandfather, left in him the impression of the miraculousness of life, reinforced by the holy trembling at the moment of the manifestation, when a thunderstorm caught the child alone in the field. The writer gave this childhood memory to his father, Matthew, the hero of the «Pyramid» (Leonov, 1994).

However, the mysterious vision did not bring up a meek novice in L. M. Leonov. Even in the youthful poem «Earth», a gnostic plot is described depicting the theft of the Earth by the Devil. «And God has become old-fashioned at the top / Under the pressure of changeable anxieties, / mocking the smile of God», - L. Leonov writes, leaving some bewilderment about how human history will end (Leonov, 1994). «Satan is trying to hide from God and at the same time persuades the stolen Earth to die with him» (Prilepin, 2010). It remains unclear, what at the end of the poem does God grin?

A similar theme is developed in the stories «Hama's Care», «Petushihinsky Prolog». In the latter, allusions to the characters of F. M. Dostoevsky, who acquire characteristics opposite to the original in the work of L. Leonov, function in an original way. For example, the boy Alyosha, apparently ascending, as Z. Prilepin remarks, to Alyosha Karamazov, in a dream who gained faith in the immortality of the soul (the head «Kana Galilee»), unlike the prototype, sees in his dream the cold emptiness found in the chest instead of the promised Human Joy (hint of a bathhouse with spiders from «Crime and Punishment»).

The formation of the ideological core of the «Pyramid» was played by the decisive role of L. M. Leonov, who, as the writer himself stated, will never be published (Krylov, 1995). However, V. P. Krylov suggests that this is the story «In the Centuries», published in the Arkhangelsk newspaper «Northern Morning» in 1919. «The heroes of the story - nine of them - are the inhabitants of outer space, the distant forerunners of the angel Dymkov traveling in the universe from the «Pyramid». The story has some characteristics of the menippea (the genre of the novel by A. Kazintsev) ambivalent structure. Cosmos is Top and Bottom is a tavern, where the tragic action of the story unfolds: «And we -are nine of us, the first aliens from the gloom of universal symphonies to this tavern». The tragedy of the heroes is that in the interstellar spaces they squandered the youth, beauty and joy of everyday life, «burned» there. «In the tavern, heroes are mummers hiding in tuxedos and cylinders» (Krylov, 1995).

Despite the opinion of some researchers about the heretical beginnings of the «Pyramid», others are inclined to consider Leonov as a «purely Orthodox person. In his office hung a portrait of St. Ambrose of

Optina, he deeply honored the saints Sergius of Radonezh and Seraphim of Sarov. <...> When Leonov dictated to us episodes related to ... reflections of Loskutov Sr., he called them «Matthew's heresy» and even feared that touching gnostic knowledge threatened him with burial alive in a state of lethargic sleep, as he thought it happened to Gogol » (Ovcharenko, 2004). In any case, it can be argued that his world view «could not fit» into canonical Orthodoxy.

### **3. Research Questions**

The problem of the reflection of the ideas of Gnosticism in the novel by L. M. Leonov «Pyramid» was of interest for many researchers. So, O. Ovcharenko identifies the key motifs of the ideological and artistic content of the «Pyramid» novel: reflections on the origin of people, the struggle between good and evil, Lucifer's falling away from God, thoughts about the end of history and the transition to a new form of life, the image of a creator hero (1994) . V.P. Krylov singles out the theme «Good and evil» as the leader in all the works of L. M. Leonov (Krylov, 1995). G. Murikov writes about the writer's acquaintance with the Gnostic tradition, naturally reflected in the novel, S. L. Slobodnyuk calls the novel «The Pyramid» an analysis of the triumph of a« life-rejecting beginning» (Slobodnyuk, 1998). A. A. Dyrdin refers to the representatives of the Manichaean doctrine of Shatanitsky and Shamin, who are convinced of the equality of Good and Evil. Comparing the works of L. M. Leonov and D. S. Merezhkovsky, A. G. Lysov asserts the common gnostic sources of the artistic concept of the authors' world. A. L. Kazin, having studied the philosophy of Shatanitsky, concludes that the substitution of the logic of the feeling of love underlies heresies, in particular Hermeticism and Gnosticism.

A review of sources confirms the relevance of studying Gnosticism in the novel «Pyramid» by L. M. Leonov. Researchers consider the motives of the Gnostic doctrine on the basis of a comparative analysis of the works of L. M. Leonov and the Silver Age writers within the ideological and philosophical content of the novel, however, in no other source the artistic world of the work is, in which, in our opinion, there are elements of the gnostic pattern. First of all, it refers to the structure itself « the universe according to Dymkov»

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main goal of our work is to analyse the gnostic novel by Leonova «Pyramid», which allows to identify the main trends in the development of European culture, which determine its way from the beginning of the first millennium before the unexpected at first glance transformations tradition in the work of the Soviet writer.

### **5. Research Methods**

The study uses the mythopoetic method, since the analysis involves deciphering traditional mythological schemes and models underlying the «neo-mythological text», a method of motivational analysis, and a comparative historical method aimed at comparing the three systems of Gnosticism development - Russian literature of the Silver Age, which formed Leonov as a writer and thinker, Soviet prose and contemporary Russian literature (Ivanova, Kubyshkina, Serebryakov, 2017).

The theoretical basis of the study is the works devoted to the analysis of the historical background of the emergence, as well as the identification of central motifs and images of Gnostic teachings (among them, for example, the work of A. F. Losev (Losev, 1991); studies that establish a connection between Gnosticism and other philosophical systems (Afonasin, 2008); works on separate mystical teachings, such as Martinism, Freemasonry, Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism, Manichaeism, devoted to the problem of the picture of the world, including the question of the artistic picture of the world. Not all of them were directly reflected in the bibliography of the work, but they formed the research paradigm.

## 6. Findings

The world of « Pyramids» is a multidimensional space with many « loopholes» in parallel realities. In the general plan of the novel, the gnostic conception of the concept of double-world, with this transcendent being represented as a closed world, accessible only to the heroes of the novel involved in the mysteries. The heroes of the « Pyramid» repeatedly express their guesses about the multidimensionality of space, which are confirmed by the angel Dymkov. Matvey Loskutov: «...It is difficult to admit such a kind of preliminary space as absolute emptiness, so that it is as irrational as it fills, because a cellular universe with many identical universes, the imaginary disproportion of which is explained by the purely promising effect of distance from one another, because in expanding volume without a center there is no such fine so that even smaller but equal does not fit in it » (Leonov, 1994).

Dunya tells about his mystical journey to director Sorokin: «—So what did you find there? - Different, depending on which page to open: the desert, the mountains are high, and once a solid sea without edges approached the very threshold » (Leonov, 1994).

Dymkov refutes what he saw in the planetarium model of the cosmos, while revealing the similarity of the universe according to Dymkov with Matvey's assumptions about the structure of the Universe: in large space, everything is « strung together on a common circle, and the scale value is determined by ... the prospect of removal. ... in the case of unlimited immersion into the bowels of the atom, you can reach the starting point through a suite of universes » (Leonov, 1994). Many worlds with a similar structure intersect with each other, revealing a porous structure « like soap suds» (Leonov, 1994).

The opponent of Dymkov, leading light of all sciences, Shatanitsky explains the process of the angel's descent to the earth, using scientific terms: "... concentrating in terrestrial dimensions, galactic longevity takes on the appearance of immortality, and a coherent creative potential becomes the gift of miracle-doing» (Leonov, 1994).

So, the other-worldly reality is characterized by multi-layered, built-in modes of being into each other, which suggests the presence of deep levels in such a model. In the gnostic monument Pistis Sophia a similar concept of the universe is presented, according to which absolute knowledge, the secret of being hidden in the deepest part of the universe. At the same time, the characteristics of distances and length refer not so much to the real *topos* as to the spiritual space of the initiate. However, this is the main difference between material being and transcendent being - the inapplicability of earthly laws to the structure of other worlds.

According to the monument, Jesus tells the disciples about his journey in the Secret Spaces, where everything is relative: the starting point of the path becomes the end, the surrounding outer area is at the

same time as the inner area, and the fullness of the secret place turns out to be emptiness. «It was the same after Jesus had risen from the dead, he spent eleven years talking with his disciples and teaching them only to the places of the first commandment and to the places of the first secret, which is inside the veil, which is inside the first commandment, that is, the twenty-fourth secret out downward are those (twenty-four secrets) that reside in the second Space of the first secret, which is above all secrets ...»; « I came out of this first mystery, which is the final mystery, namely the twenty-fourth »; « That is why they thought about this mystery, that she is the perfection of all perfections and that she is the head of the All and that she is all Completeness, for Jesus told his disciples: "This mystery - one that surrounds all of what I have told you all of the day when I met you, to the present day" - that is, why the disciples thought that nothing is within this mystery » (Pistis Sophia, 1773).

Thus, the spatial sign of the mutual transition of the external to the internal, lower to the upper, empty to full, is actualized.

The scientific substantiation of the design of spiritual emanation given by Shatanitsky also evokes associations with the concept of the world order of P. A. Florensky, reflected in his treatise «Imagination in Geometry». «In the same place of space we can arrange four points: two - on the outer sides of the plane and two - on the inner. All points (real, half-visible, half-visible and imaginary) form one complex point, which can be depicted as a pin passing through the entire thickness of the plane and emerging on its reverse side. So, you can literally design moving DEEPER into the plane of the real sphere - the sphere of the imaginary, from the rational sphere - the sphere of the irrational».

Of course, the transition of the body from one reality, acting according to its own laws, to another, with perfect other hidden mechanisms, will lead to changes in the characteristics of the object. In the picture of the world of P. A. Florensky there is a division of the cosmos into three spheres (the region of earth movements and phenomena, the division of Heaven and Earth, the region of celestial movements). It is on the border of Heaven and Earth «the body loses its length, passes into eternity and acquires absolute stability. Is this not a retelling in physical terms - signs of ideas, according to Plato - flawless, unchangeable, eternal essences? <...> or ... is it not a heavenly host, - contemplated from the Earth as a star, but alien to earthly properties? ».

In the explanation of Shatanitsky, practically the same process is described, but in the opposite direction: in the conditions of physical being, the spirit grows heavier, slows down its movement and gets stuck in matter. «... they [angels] will soon become stuck and stuck in the earthly, incommensurably densest medium » (Leonov, 1994).

In the model of the world in « Pyramid», the gnostic opposition of « fullness - emptiness» is also actualized. The transcendental worlds, the envoy of which is Dymkov, with their integration of modes into each other, the depth of the levels of being, reveal the fullness of multidimensional spaces by other worlds and collectively create integrity.

The Earth being, in which the leading light of all the sciences of Shatanitsky acts, is subordinated to the cult of scientific knowledge, which is discrete, violating the unity of being through analysis. Among the people, Dymkov squints « from the habit of tying together a lot of the physical laws that compose us» (Leonov, 1994).

Contrary to the stories of the angel Dymkov about micro- and macro-time (where in the first case whole epochs are placed in the smallest units of measurement, and in the second «in one of the second segments the eternity allotted to us»), earth concept of time coincides with the linear movement gnostic model creation to its endpoint (Leonov, 1994).

The idea of macro-time coincides with Plato's gnostic statement about time as a movable image of Eternity, as imitation of infinity by the inept Demiurge, who places large time periods on discrete segments.

In the novel, the gnostic category of the instant as a transitional state from the real world to the unreal is also found: «At full acceleration, breaking through into their irrational state through the famous taboo of speed, matter at that imaginary moment ... reads the silence of the cosmos. ... when going through zero, a similar metamorphosis should be packed in a kind of abstract instant, which thousands of human generations will easily » (Leonov, 1994).

In this case, the instant here is equal to the mathematical zero, separating the coordinates of two worlds.

The difference between the concept of the earthly and transcendental time lies in the fact that, in Dymkov's view, the development of civilizations and endless worlds is carried out in a circle, Shatanitsky, on the contrary, is convinced of a single final being of the universe. According to Dymkov, who grants hope for salvation to mankind, «... at the heart of things is cyclical repetition ... <...> the whole mechanics of the Universe comes down to the ordinary swing of a pendulum, with a clear pulse which guarantees elastic constancy, that is, the material strength of a machine, and its phase state is measured by stage-different age of a never-dying Universe» (Leonov, 1994).

«Spirit of denial» Shatanitsky claims: «...humanity approached the finale of its modest eternity, which for believers will be a fiery apotheosis of the Doomsday » (Leonov, 1994). Shatanitsky expects that general turmoil in an era of repression and total control will lead to universal disillusionment with former ideals and beliefs and will force humanity to choose a new worldview based on unbelief.

The idea of the luminary should be embodied with the participation of father Matthew Loskutov and angel Dymkov. The value that Matvey represents for Shatanitsky lies in his service to God: the apostasy of the priest would irrevocably undermine the authority of faith, further alienating the doubting humanity from the Most High: the apostasy of the priest would irrevocably undermine the authority of faith, further alienating the doubting humanity from the Most High. Yielding to the temptation of earthly life, the angel Dymkov should become a «defector», which also, according to Shatanitsky's plan, should disrupt world harmony.

But only for this purpose does Shatanitsky strive to make Dymkov a «defector»? In th «Pyramid», a gnostic phrase is shed that sheds light on the idea of the luminary: « No one loves God more than the devil, for only the outcast has been able to comprehend the amount of loss that has befallen him» (Leonov, 1994).

Perhaps Shatanitsky is looking for a way to quickly resolve the forces' eternal confrontation (according to Enoch, this will happen after the self-destruction of mankind), because he wants to eliminate Dymkov as the last hope for the salvation of people.

The new « religion» of Shatanitsky will become «frenzied denial» as «revenge for the rejection» of the fallen angel to God. This faith should «arouse interest in the opposite camp».

The origins of the confrontation between the forces of Good and Evil, L. M. Leonov finds in the Apocrypha of Enoch, according to which the Devil turned to God with the words: «How could you create creatures out of fire to subdue creatures of clay? » (Leonov, 1994).

Jealousy of Shatanitsky, whose surname evokes quite definite associations with Satan or Shaitan, reveals a demiurgic principle in his hero. The Gnostic Demiurge feels envy and hatred for the First Man created by him, in whom the forces and archons have invested their best qualities, making it an excellent creation towering over Yaldabaof. In John's apocrypha, the archons throw the first man into captivity of matter in order to avoid undesirable rivalry.

In the «Pyramid», the outcome should be a quarrel started their reconciliation by «spontaneous combustion of human flesh » (Leonov, 1994). The doubting Matvey believes in such an outcome, «having seen enough of the horrors of Russian life, » Shatanitsky longs for such a fate for humanity. (Leonov, 1994)

An unequal distribution of forces is evident in the world of the novel by L. M. Leonov - Shatanitsky clearly feels his superiority, planning to make a revolution in the celestial hierarchy. The hero plays the role of a Demiurge who organizes the world of atheistic Soviet society in accordance with scientific achievements, leaving no room for one last hope — a miracle. «The very notion of a miracle that degenerated before our eyes, although sometimes used in everyday life, but mainly in relation to the successes of science and technology, kitchen utensils and washing powders » (Leonov, 1994).

If you recall the statement of M. Heidegger that the image of God is enclosed in the temple, then in the artistic world of the Pyramid in the 30 years of XX century, when temples were closed everywhere, and church services were banned, God was on the outskirts. This is confirmed by the Old-Fedoseev cemetery with a dilapidated church, where the family Loskutovs lives. The sacred place where a person communicates with the Higher Forces has been driven out to the periphery. The center of the Soviet world became the cult of statehood and science. In such socio-political conditions, the Gnostic motif of a transcendent God, distant from humanity and not entering into his life on earth, is actualized.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, in the novel« Pyramid», the model of space-time relations contains the following elements of the gnostic teaching:

The gnostic image of the transcendent True God is actualized. In the novel, the Demiurge Shatanitsky is contrasted to the silent God, spreading in society pessimistic expectations of the end of the world, based on scientific knowledge and leaving no chance for salvation. Hatred Shatanitsky to humanity is explained by the legend from the Apocrypha Enoch, according to which it was man who caused the universal discord between Good and Evil.

Angel Dymkov, the messenger of the transcendental worlds, is opposed to the earthly ruler Shatanitsky. Both heroes are convinced of the multidimensional structure of the universe. The multi-layered and built-in modes of being in each other suggest the presence of deep levels in such a model. The Gnostic source Pistis Sophia portrays a model of the world similar to that presented in the novel «Pyramid»: the dialectic of external / internal, initial / final, full / empty is reflected in the angel's view of the universe as a « soap suds» with many interpenetrating dimensions.

The scientific substantiation of Shatanitsky regarding the transition of spiritual emanation into the conditions of physical existence contains many references to P. Florensky's treatise « Imaginations in Geometry», which presents a three-part model of the universe (the area of earth movements and phenomena, the section of Heaven and Earth, the area of celestial movements). Appearing in the third area, the object acquires the state of eternity and the absolute, the Platonic « futile essence».

Dymkov sees the world in the integrity and development of the universe is like a cycle. The scientific views on reality spread by Shatanitsky make the world discrete and debunk the latest evidence of the presence of the divine principle among people - the phenomenon of a miracle.

Contrary to the angel Dymkov's stories about micro and macro time (where in the first case whole epochs are placed in the smallest units of measurement and in the second «the earthly concept of time coincides with the gnostic model of the linear movement of the universe to its final point»).

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