

Title: “Он спал и Офелия снилась ему”: The Recurrence of the Ophelia Image in Blok’s Poetry

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Aleksandr Blok wrote a series of poems about Ophelia early in his career, before he became famous. His choice of Ophelia was not unusual. Many other artists and writers used Ophelia in their works both before and after. Moreover, in the panoply of Blok’s female characters, Ophelia seems to occupy a minor role. The image of the drowned Shakespearean heroine does, however, reappear in his famous cycles about the Прекрасная дама and the Незнакомка. Even though Blok does not explicitly reference her, certain attributes and features of Ophelia are used as symbols. We recognize her in the Прекрасная дама poems through her liminality, her connection to nature (especially water), and the element of ambiguity that surrounds her. In the Незнакомка cycle, Blok continues to reference the Ophelia mythology he has constructed. Instead of referencing specific symbols that represent Ophelia, however, he describes the heroine as if she *is* Ophelia. Thus, the Незнакомка at times assumes the face of Ophelia for the poet and the ethos of the two heroines blend together.

This paper examines the central role Ophelia seems to play in Blok’s poetic imagination and suggests a reassessment of the evolution of his lyrical poetry. Although her presence in Blok’s later poems is obscured, the character of Ophelia appears to be ingrained in Blok’s poetic vision. Ophelia is not merely a stage in the development of Blok’s feminine but instead constitutes a pattern for the following poems. Blok writes the Ophelia poems and moves on, but throughout his career, while creating and recreating his central female characters, he continuously returns to the original, Ophelia, who permeates all the others. Ultimately and essentially Ophelia is a problematic muse, but her ambiguity and potentiality assure her place in the framework of Blok’s poetic imagination.