

Title: Distilling Symbolism's Essence: Ellis and the Return of *Russkie simvolisty*  
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In 1910, Ellis [Lev Kobylnskii] published the first history of Russian Symbolism. While its title clearly nods towards the three booklets heralding the movement's inception fifteen years previously, Ellis's *Russkie simvolisty* represents a distinctly new method of explicating Symbolism. His goal is synthesis and his audience need not be intimately acquainted with Russian Symbolism to extract a meaningful understanding of the movement's theory and practice from Ellis's account. His study is devoted to three Russian Symbolists – Bal'mont, Briusov, and Bely – whose careers he outlines and whose books he rereads. Ellis constructs his synthetic depiction of Russian Symbolism by explicitly establishing the connections that would have been implicit to a Symbolist reader. He renders Russian Symbolism more generally accessible and comprehensible and solidifies its historicization within the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, but not without doing violence to the texts and authors under examination.

As I will demonstrate with an informed and contextualized discussion of his *Russkie simvolisty*, Ellis's unified Symbolism aligns itself with the needs of a reader seeking a retrospective, fully synchronic definition of Symbolism. This is not the typical reader of Symbolist poetry, and thus Ellis must refashion an explication of the movement by breaking free from its well-cultivated insularity. Consequently, Ellis approaches Symbolism as a concretely historical literary phenomenon. Ellis quite simply reads the major works of the major Russian Symbolists. However, his readings are informed by his intimacy with the Symbolist worldview, his experiences as a Symbolist journal critic, and his Apollonian intentions to supply a transparent description of Russian Symbolism. The end result of Ellis's disentangling the various threads of two decades of Russian Symbolism is an enticingly (and, I argue, deceptively) orderly schematization of the movement. This talk will reveal not only the means by which Ellis created a literary history out of Russian Symbolism, but also the implications of his doing so on the act of reading and understanding its primary works.