

ANDREI BELOBORODOV AND ITALY

Andrej Shishkin

Russia's Silver Age was greatly indebted to the wave of Italophilia which affected the works of the most diverse writers, including Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, Viacheslav Ivanov, Mikhail Kuzmin, Maksimilian Voloshin, Nikolai Berdiaev, Vasilii Rozanov, Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandel'shtam, Boris Zaitsev, and Pavel Muratov. Encounters with the Italian "Elysium" served both as the inspiration for art and as the symbol of physical death and spiritual immortality.¹ Viacheslav Ivanov was speaking for many of his contemporaries when he declared: "Love for Italy is an indicator of cultural loftiness. One can judge the character of an age by the way it loves Italy and what it chooses to love in her".² This was the context from which emerged Andrei Beloborodov (1886-1965), one of the most original Russian artists to have devoted his work to Italy. For various reasons Beloborodov's legacy has remained neglected and forgotten until quite recently. Now he is beginning to be recognized as a major contributor to the complex relationship between Italy and Russian culture.³

¹ "I find the idea of a trip to Italy quite possible," wrote Kuzmin in his diary on 31 December 1934, foreseeing his impending death; M. Kuzmin, *Dnevnik 1934 g.* (St Petersburg 1998) 145. As Gleb Morev notes, the idea of the sacred end of a life-path is here linked to the image of the entrance to paradise and immortality; Gleb Morev, "Kazus Kuzmina," *Ibid.* 23-24.

² *Russko-italianskii arkhiv*, Trento 1997, 503. See also P. Deotto, *In viaggio per realizzare un sogno. L'Italia e il testo italiano nella cultura russa* (Trieste 2002).

³ Cf. Н. В. Зайцева. История интерьеров Юсуповского дворца в контексте развития русского дворцового интерьера. СПб. 2003 (диссертация); Д. В. Иванов. Русский архитектор и художник Андрей Белобородов // Наше наследие 71, 2004; А. Пайман. Белобородов в Риме // *Ibid.*; А. Шишкин. Русский палладианец в Италии:

Beloborodov himself wrote of his early Italophilia:

The world of painting was always linked for me to my dream of Italy, and when in the days of my youth my countryman and, later, friend Pavel Pavlovich Muratov published his remarkable book *Images of Italy*, I responded to it most vitally. I was especially impressed by the concluding phrase: 'Italy is what it is worth living for.' This was a blow to my heart and an impulse for the formation of the 'Italian backbone' which fuses all of my art.⁴

From 1904 to 1915 Beloborodov was at the Academy of Arts, and it was here, in the Petersburg of the 1900s, that the young Beloborodov's "dream of Italy" took concrete form, thanks to his study of the writings of the classic Italian masters in the leading book collections of the northern capital and to his close attention to Petersburg's post-Palladian architecture. He was especially enamoured of the architectural legacy of G. Quarenghi, who is well represented in St Petersburg and the Russian provinces. It was this apprenticeship with a great Italian architect and his reverential study of his legacy which set the course of the great career which opened up before Beloborodov in pre-revolutionary Russia.

The decisive moment was Beloborodov's speech at the Petersburg Society for the Protection of Antiquities on 7 December 1912. Here he spoke of the Zavadovskii Palace, built by Quarenghi in Chernigov province, which had severely deteriorated by the early twentieth century. In the course of 1911 and 1912 Beloborodov performed extensive measurements of the palace and compiled detailed plans and sketches of it. He planned to issue the entire work as a book, but the First World War prevented him from realizing this plan. Still, the project led to Beloborodov's "discovery" for Petersburg high society, and he received commissions for interior design work and later for the construction of mansions for Countess Bobrinskaia, the Obolenskiis, Serebriakova, Count A. Bobrinskoi, and Feliks Iusupov. Beloborodov's most prestigious commission came in 1913, when he was asked to design the public halls at the Cabinet of His Royal Highness at Anichkov Palace.

Андрей Белобородов // Вестник истории, литературы и искусства, 2005; Eugénie von Collande. "Le nouveau château de Caulaincourt et son architecte André Beloborodoff", Mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Paris IV Sorbonne, 2003/2004.

⁴ "Nabrosok k avtobiografii", Ivanov Family Archive, Rome. The first edition of *Obrazy Italii* appeared in 1911-1912.

In 1915 Beloborodov completed the course at the Academy of Arts first in his class. His graduating project was the architectural design “A university with four faculties in a capital city”. He used Raphael’s “Athenian Academy” from the Vatican as his inspiration. The diploma, signed by Empress Mariia Fedorovna (in her capacity as the president of the Academy of Arts), granted him the title “Artist-Architect”, and his winner’s medal, the Prix de Rome, gave him the privilege of continuing his education in Rome as a pensioner of the Academy for four years.

The events of 1917 interrupted all of Beloborodov’s architectural projects in Petersburg, and he chose not to collaborate with the Soviet regime. On 1 February 1920 he reached Finland by crossing the frozen Baltic Sea by foot. On 29 February of the same year the “Special Committee for Russian Affairs in Finland” issued him a Russian passport. He was aided by the documents he brought with him, testifying to the fact that the Academy of Arts had sent him abroad in 1915.

Feliks Iusupov immediately found Beloborodov an important commission: designing the sets for the “Blue Ball”, a charitable function in support of Russian and British refugees from Soviet Russia, which took place on 7 July 1920 at the Albert Hall in London. Two decades later Feliks Iusupov recalled:

I examined with wonder the designs invented and realized by my friend the architect. His magical imagination turned the old Albert Hall into a fairy-tale garden. Thin blue hangings hid the large organ and, pinned with garlands of roses, draped the boxes. The stage was framed by an archway of roses, and cascades of blue hydrangeas. The light was filtered through bouquets of roses which decorated the candelabras, crowned with blue ostrich feathers, and the beam of the projector, directed onto the dancers, was like the moon on a summer night. <...>

The ball was interrupted at midnight when Anna Pavlova was met with long ovations. The ballerina hovered like a blue bird in a pagoda with a golden roof which was set up at the centre of the stage.⁵

In the autumn of 1920 Beloborodov took up residence in Paris and soon set off for his first trip to Italy. In a draft of his autobiography he wrote:

I stayed on in England for several months (executing a project for an open-air theatre for the great ballerina [Pavlova] in “Swan” park), but this was a mere episode, a temporary hiatus, a stage in my journey to the Promised Land. And

⁵ Prince Felix Youssouppoff, *En exil* (Paris 1954) 23, 24.

finally I was in Rome, on a crystal-clear sunny day in October 1920, and my dreams finally began to take real form. From this moment I began the extensive work of my life which continues to this day and which, I hope, will continue to the end of my days: a cycle of my images of Italy, her *paesaggio architettonico* <...> My studio from then until 1934 was in Paris, but every year I spent many months in Italy, trying to imprint its endlessly variable countenances.

Beloborodov executed drawings in Rome, Frascati, Venice, Verona, Vicenza, Florence, Siena, San Gimignano, Sicily, and on the Amalfi coast. On one of his Italian trips the artist became close to the poet Viacheslav Ivanov and his family. The first works of the Italian cycle were exhibited at the 1921 Autumn Salon in Paris, and in May 1923 Beloborodov opened a large exhibition "Italy", including ninety pieces. Andrei Levinson published an admiring review of the exhibition, and pieces were purchased by Sergei Kusevitskii, Lev Bakst, and Anna Pavlova⁶. The "immortal" Henri de Régnier visited the exhibition on 13 July and honoured the Russian artist with the essay "Invitation to a Journey" for the catalogue of his next exhibition in the spring of 1924.

In the following years Beloborodov's work was exhibited in Berlin, Belgrade, Rome, Venice, and Copenhagen. He was written about not only in the Russian émigré press, but also in *Le Figaro*, *Vogue*, *Illustration*, and *Dedalo*. His fame was confirmed by the Paris exhibition in May 1929 in the gallery of Jean Charpentier, which displayed thirty views of Rome and Roman villas in addition to gardens and palaces in the environs of Rome (Tivoli, Frascati, Caprarola) and colour engravings for books on Rome and the Bay of Salerno which he was preparing. Critics noted the unique character of his artistic world: "Detached from his epoch, united with the one he reproduces, he has left *time* and become higher than 'dates'", Prince S. M. Volkonskii concluded regarding the 1929 exhibition.⁷ Similar thoughts are encountered in the review of Henri de Régnier for *Le Figaro*:

We find Rome at once alive and true, which in order to be true does not need the presence of man; 'eternal,' it does not need the 'ephemeral'.⁸

⁶ *Zveno* 4 June 1923.

⁷ S. M. Volkonskii, "Rim Beloborodova", *Poslednie novosti* no. 2986, 1929.

⁸ Henri de Régnier, "Promenade dans Rome," *Le Figaro* 15 May 1929. In 1961 Beloborodov included this text as an introduction to his album of Roman *vedute*.

Falling out of the contemporary age, Beloborodov's works were treasured by a narrow cosmopolitan circle of aristocrats, patrons of the arts, and major diplomats. Beloborodov collaborated with Maurice Paléologue, the former French ambassador to Tsarist Russia, a member of the French Academy (like Henri de Regnier). Together they issued *Rome: notes d'histoire et d'art*, which was illustrated with fifty-two of the Russian artist's engravings. This edition for the few had a print-run of only sixty copies.⁹ The artistic publication *Golfe de Salerne*, which Beloborodov compiled together with Paul Valéry, appeared only in 1951 with a print-run of twenty-five copies.¹⁰ Beloborodov also received architectural commissions from the Count R. de Rougemont, the Countess de Castri, Countess E. Shuvalova, and Prince Iusupov. He also received a remarkable and important commission from Gérard de Mustier-Caulaincourt, which deserves a special digression for here the fate of an émigré architect became intertwined with the attachments and antipathies of old Europe, which everyone thought had passed into history.

The Countess's great-grandfather was Napoleon's Over-Stalmeister A. Caulaincourt, the French ambassador to St. Petersburg from 1806 to 1811. Conducting a rather independent diplomatic policy, Caulaincourt became close to Alexander I and won his personal trust and sympathy. One can see from Tolstoy, who captured the collective memory of the Russian nobility, that Caulaincourt was perceived by the society of the capital city against a backdrop of general fascination with France and the French (see *War and Peace* vol. 2, part 3, chapter 15). When the troops of the anti-Napoleonic coalition entered France, the Tsar made a special arrangement so that the ancient family castle of the Caulaincourtes, located one hundred kilometres from Paris, remained unharmed. The Cossacks even dug an artificial lake in front of the castle. All of these circumstances were known to Count and Countess de Moutier-Caulaincourt when they addressed the Russian architect with the idea of re-building the castle, which had been utterly destroyed by German troops in the First World War.

Beloborodov's work on the construction, interiors and furnishing of the castle was completed in the summer of 1934 and evoked considerable interest. The French journal for contemporary architec-

⁹ Maurice Paléologue, *Rome: notes d'histoire et d'art* (Paris [1930]).

¹⁰ *La golfe de Salerne. Treize bois originaux de Bélioborodoff introduits par un texte inédit de Paul Valéry* (Paris-Rome 1951).

ture *La Construction Moderne* printed nineteen photographs of the castle in a special issue dated 30 December 1934. Writing in *Le Figaro* on 27 July 1934 Jean-Louis Vaudoyer noted that, if earlier French and Italian architects acquainted Russia with the style of Mansart and Sansovino, now a Russian architect had built in France a palace in the Palladian style of eighteenth-century Petersburg. A. N. Benois wrote a major article about the castle for the Russian émigré newspaper *Poslednie novosti*.¹¹ At the present time the French art historian E. von Collande is working on a detailed history of the new castle.

At the height of his fame Beloborodov moved to Rome. In November 1934 an exhibition of his work opened at the mansion of countess Pecci-Blunt (120 pieces), and in December of the same year in Milan at Skopinic gallery. Beloborodov's fame and recognition was helped by the official Vatican newspaper *Osservatore romano*, which reproduced six of the artist's pictures in large format (the newspaper's editors were wholly independent of the Italian regime, located as they were within the sovereign Vatican state). The visitors' album of Beloborodov's exhibitions in Rome includes the signatures of luminaries such as Andre Grabar and N. Sharov. The artists featured include N. Lokhov, G. Sheltian, Prince Sergei Shcherbatov, Sergei Ivanov, Alexandre Benois, B. Falileev, R. Brailovskaia, A. Trofimov, Sergei Makovskii, and Eric and Irina Prenne. Others include the composer Aleksandr Grechaninov, Olga Resnevich-Signorelli, prof. Nikolai Ottokar, Viacheslav Ivanov and his family, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii and Zinaida Gippius, N. Alekseev, Tat'iana L'vovna Sukhotina-Tolstaia, M. N. Semenov, Prince Vladimir Volkonskii, Grand Duke Roman, Iu. Shleifer-Rat'kov, E. Anan'in, Nikolai Liubimov, and Pierre Pascal. Italian notables included critic Mario Praz, the artist Giorgio de Chirico, the composer Ottorino Respighi, and the futurist poet T. Marinetti.

The circle of Beloborodov's patrons was largely comprised of the old Roman elite – the families Orsini, Aldobrandini, Barberini, Piccolomini, Doria Pamphili, and Borromeo – and the international diplomatic corps, including the diplomatic representatives to the Vatican from Great Britain (D'Arcy G. Osborne), France (F. Charles-Roux and V. d'Ormesson), Peru (Misbela), Brazil (M. Nabuko), Switzerland (Ch. de Bavier), and German (U. von Hassel).¹² Another generous and

¹¹ *Poslednie novosti*, no. 4839, 23 June 1934.

¹² U. von Hassel was executed by Hitler in 1944 for participating in the Resistance.

demanding client was frequently the Swiss Maurice Sandoz, a wealthy philanthropist and author of twenty-five books of prose and poetry who in the breadth and grandeur of his projects is somewhat reminiscent of Feliks Iusupov.

In Rome the artist continued his friendship with Viacheslav Ivanov and his family, including his constant “co-inquirer” Ol’ga Shor. Their friendship lasted many years. Once the poet signed a visitors album: “Il fedele ammiratore dell’artista Venceslao Ivanov” – “A true admirer of the artist, Viacheslav Ivanov”. The poet’s daughter attests that Ivanov “valued and loved” Beloborodov.¹³

Beloborodov’s only notable compromise with the Italy of the 1930s was his exhibition “New Monumental Rome”, which opened at the Rome Museum on 13 December 1937 and included sixty pieces. At that time Mussolini had completed a series of major urban renovations in the Eternal City, some of which were appreciated. In the words of Lidiia Ivanova, the poet’s daughter: “There was created a new via dei Fori Imperiali, linking Piazza Venezia to the Coliseum, which was a truly regal alley revealing to the viewer the heart of ancient Rome; and the inimitable via del Mare around the base of the Capitolium”.¹⁴ Beloborodov captured this newly open city with its grandiose, empty perspective closed off by the Coliseum, with its ancient temple in construction scaffolding, and its reconstructed Renaissance-era piazza.¹⁵

Italian critics of the 1930s sought to present Beloborodov as an interpreter and even illustrator of the ideology of the “second empire”, although this ideology was poorly suited to the desolate silence and nostalgic solitude which critics noted in his pictures. Beloborodov had little regard for the politics and ideology of Il Duce; he was merely recording moments in the life of the Eternal City.

By the close of the fierce 1930s Beloborodov decisively shifted the subject-matter of his works. Now, on the eve of world conflict, his pictures completely lose their link to the contemporary world. In March 1939 he exhibited twenty-five works from a new cycle which

¹³ Lidiia Ivanova, *Vospominaniia. Kniga ob ottse* (Paris, 1990) 291.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 252.

¹⁵ Following the exhibition of 1937 the Museum of Rome, which houses the richest collection of artworks created in the Eternal City from medieval times to the twentieth century, acquired fifteen of Beloborodov’s works. They can be viewed on the website of the museum at: <<http://www.museodiroma.comune.roma.it>>.

showed fantastically beautiful and abandoned cities, immersed churches against a mountainous background, a tower half-buried in the earth, the ruins of remarkable buildings, rising water and desolation. The series is entitled “Grande Isola” – “the Grand Island” – and this symbolic title automatically evokes associations with the immersed island of Atlantis, irrevocably lost to the world. In a series of pictures Beloborodov freely used images of classical Roman architecture such as the ruined Coliseum, the Arch of Titus, or the pyramid of Caius Cestius. It is difficult to decide whether this is an “imagined Italy” or a nostalgically envisioned “Promised Land”, lost by an émigré.

For this exhibition Beloborodov published a “Guide to the Grand Island”, where he discussed his mythological conceit:

From the earliest times the Greeks discovered a Grand Island at the centre of a sea, reminiscent of the Mediterranean which to this day preserves many monuments of Hellenic culture. Their Roman heirs founded many cities there, especially in a broad and fertile valley; later, after a geological cataclysm, it became a vast lake. The natural cataclysm cut the ancient fertile valley off from civilization for many centuries, but many of its monuments remained almost untouched, while others were partially destroyed or immersed in water. With time the population became a tribe of shepherds, and the island was concealed by a dense fog. There followed another long period of darkness, and only at the dawn of modernity did the fog lift. Italian ships began to visit the Island and bring it their arts and customs. In a short time the island became a fertile land and achieved a high level of civilization.

In the dark period, between the two times of blossom, the Roman and the Italian, Byzantine ships once made it through the fog and came upon the island by accident. However they fled in fear of the gloomy spectacle of a world under the sway of the furious natural forces. What they saw remained ingrained in their memory so deeply that it can be seen in Byzantine mosaics and drawings, especially in the depiction of mountains.¹⁶

Beloborodov exhibited new pictures from the cycle “Grande Isola” in 1940, 1941, 1943, 1945, 1947, 1953, and 1955. His “post-apocalyptic” visions (in the words of a French critic) received sub-

¹⁶ A. Beloborodoff, *Guida della Grande Isola. Estratto dall'Elenco delle opere per la mostra di un gruppo di artisti stranieri residenti a Roma alla Galleria di Roma. Marzo 1939.*

stantial notice in the press, eliciting articles from such major Italian art critics and historians as Mario Praz, Marco Spaini, and Corrado Alvaro. Viacheslav Ivanov's statements on the cycle also appeared in an Italian newspaper. The reviews were mixed, and sometimes diametrically opposed. It is worth citing some of the readings and interpretations which sought to extend the meaning of Beloborodov's cycle in words.

One of the first to respond to "Grande Isola" was Alexandre Benois, who visited the Rome exhibition in 1939. Focussing on the tragic moment of the cycle for its émigré author, Benois compared the world of "Grande Isola" to that of Imperial Petersburg:

Everything impresses with its grandiose scale, its vast planning and the harmony of proportions. Colonnades, temples, shrines, mausoleums, bridges, theatres, palaces, more colonnades, triumphal arches, terraces, garden pavilions, and even state institutions – all of these alternate as one casts one's gaze over the picture, and the charm of this mute and static grandeur is not lessened by the fact that, stepping over the marble tiles of the streets or swimming the canals in utter solitude, we meet not a single living soul. Everything is miraculously kept in order, as if prepared for some festival, but there is no populace; this desolate morbidity only increases the impression that it is some miraculous dream, now sweet, now "inclining towards nightmare.

[...] The similarity to the great Vicentin [i.e. Palladio] elicits something "Petersburgian" in all these endless perspectives and squares. The stone masses of our dethroned capital, mostly thanks to Quarenghi, Starov, and to a lesser extent Tomon, Rossi and Zakharov, also display the same spirit of Palladianism – the spirit of severe but fine desolation. Everything is full of the same majesty as in Beloborodov's "Isola" [...] Is not Beloborodov's fantasizing a kind of self-consoling, a kind of hymn to everything that formed him, nurtured him, instructed him and "founded" his art?¹⁷

If Benois found emigration from imaginary Russia to be the source of Beloborodov's work, then his old Roman friend G. de Chirico demonstrated a completely different understanding of the Russian artist's cycle.

Beloborodov's special artistic world is Mediterranean to the highest degree, like the loneliest corners of the world of Friedrich Nietzsche. In the transparent, quiet atmosphere of Platonism Beloborodov creates his architectural compositions, perspectives, ideal dwell-

¹⁷ Aleksandr Benua, "Vystavka A. Ia. Beloborodova", *Poslednie novosti*, 14 April 1939.

lings, and that lyrical element which issues from palaces, cities, monuments, arches, towers, bridges, when they are created by architectural poets.¹⁸

Another perspective is evident in the sharply original review of Milanese writer Angela Zucconi, which concludes by reproducing a conversation about the cycle by Corrado Alvaro and Viacheslav Ivanov. Their views are dialectically opposed and artfully contrasted, and their counterpoint leads the interlocutors to important statements regarding culture and memory:

How do the ruins and untouched palaces interrelate in the fantastic history of Grande Isola?

For Corrado Alvaro the ruins are an image of what will one day occur to the streets of a major city. By contrast, for Ivanov these ruins give birth to a city by affirming the triumph of art over time, beauty over death, and idea over corrupt matter. For the former, the Grande Isola is an image of the condemned city, a prophecy of the coming of a new barbarism; for the latter, it is a calming image of regeneration. For Alvaro the artist is conquered, while for Ivanov his is the conquerer. For the first the ruins are like phantoms, while for the latter they are simply “beautiful”. For Alvaro the squares and streets of the city are a memory, while for Ivanov they are a promise. For Alvaro nature is indifferent to the drama of man’s peripeteia, while Ivanov sees that sun and light serve to console and reinvigorate the calm sadness of the ruins. For Alvaro even the clouds are nothing other than the remains of a cataclysm in the heavens, while for Ivanov they are divine heralds. For Alvaro the water is a dispassionate mirror of this world, while for Ivanov the water is rushing to restore the very buildings in the depths of its reflection, helping them to express what they can no longer say.¹⁹

After the Second World War Beloborodov completed plans and projects he had begun earlier. In 1948-1950 he built a palace for Maurice Sandoz in a small park on the minor Aventine hill, a hundred metres from the ancient wall with which emperor Marcus Aurelius surrounded Rome, and less than a kilometer from the Termini of Caracalla. Beloborodov’s mansion, executed in Palladian style, is therefore

¹⁸ Giorgio de Chirico, “Andrea Beloborodoff alla finestra”, *Gazzetta delle arti*, 24-30 March 1947.

¹⁹ Angela Zucconi, Gli abitatori della Grande Isola: interpretazione di un grande artista // *L'Avvenire*, 12 Febbraio 1941.

“entra muros” – within the walls. As far as I know, Beloborodov thus became the first and so far only Russian architect to have earned the honour of building within the historical centre of the Eternal City. His work was highly valued, receiving reviews with such titles as “One of the Most Beautiful Palaces in the Ancient City”, “The Magic of the Renaissance in a Contemporary Palace”. Beloborodov’s success is attested to by de Chirico’s and Mario Praz’s shared desire to commission from him palaces for themselves in the neo-classical style. In 1959, in the Roman district of Monte Mario (already outside of the ancient walls) Beloborodov built the mansion villa Gacomaniella.

In his final years Beloborodov decided to publish an album of his pictorial “images” of the Eternal City. Almost all of the originals, including the most successful and renowned Italian *vedute* (such as the cycle “Grande Isola”) were inaccessible, having been purchased and placed in private collections. The *veduta* of the Egyptian obelisk immersed in the shadow of the Basilica of St Peter, which had been praised by Prince Sergei Volkonskii in 1929 and reproduced in the 1934 in *Osservatore romano*, was in the collection of Maurice Sandoz; the grand perspective of the Imperial Forum crowned with the Coliseum belonged to the heir to the Greek throne Christopher. Of the hundreds of views of Rome and its environs which the artist had created over his entire life he chose and engraved twenty-four *vedute*. In the main these were “historical” engravings, recording the city before the reconstructions and restorations of the twentieth century. Mario Praz entitled his review of the book “Lost Rome”.²⁰

The book was completed in collaboration with an old friend Dimitri Ivanov, son of the poet Viacheslav Ivanov, known in his own write as a writer and journalist who published under the pseudonym Jean Neuvecelle.²¹ Dimitri Ivanov compiled a “guide,” an imaginary stroll through the Eternal City along the artist’s chosen route. The guide ended with a passage on the special artistic world of Beloborodov and on his fate, which began on the banks of the Neva:

The Rome the artist has shown us is both true and imaginary, unreal and yet scrupulously exact at the same time. It is empty. Just as if throughout the ages men had never set foot on this mysteriously chosen soil, in this city justly

²⁰ Alcibiade [Mario Praz], “Roma perduta”, *Paese Sera*, 16 February 1962

²¹ Andrea Beloborodoff, *Ventriquatro vedute di Roma, presentate da Henri de Régnier, con una breve Guida di Jean Neuvecelle* (Roma, 1961). This edition is in three languages: French, English, and Italian.

called Eternal. While today still people flock there from every part of the world, – pilgrims going in procession from the Colosseum to the Basilicas or athletes celebrating the Olympic feasts in the ancient or modern stadia.

The artist, however, is not concerned with human beings. A secret bond connects him with the City itself, with the perishable yet immortal substance of which it is made and which he makes use of it to create in his mind and on his canvases, other cities, imaginary and fantastic.

Let us take advantage that the Rome of Beloborodoff is depopulated. In these streets without life, in these parks where only water and stone speak, one single footstep, one single voice needs sound, your own. The images you have seen are those of remembrance. Your own memories could bring them to life when Rome will be for you but vanished presence, the past. Unless won over for ever like the author of these paintings, you too decide to take up residence on the Gianicolo hill, in narrow rooms overlooking a tiny garden clinging to the slope. Though he remains faithful to the past flowing Neva on whose banks he started in his youth as a painter, engraver and architect, he here continues painting and engraving both real and imaginary architecture.

Beloborodov did not live long after the book's release. He witnessed the rise of a new artistic age which appeared inconsonant with his own work. Now, forty years after his death, we can finally appreciate how Beloborodov's work united various strands of twentieth-century culture, including the dream of the Russian Silver Age about Italy, the homelessness of the Russian emigration, its remarkable blend of Russianness and universality, its solitude, the inevitable tension between a turn towards the non-existent past and the actual modernity of the West; the political fragmentation of Europe, and the triumphant unity of Memory and Culture, which are capable of finding (in the words of Viacheslav Ivanov, the coryphaeus of the Silver Age) the higher reality within transient things – “realissimum in realibus”.

(Translated from the Russian by Robert Bird)