

*Source Studies*

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**On an unknown draft notebook  
in the literary heritage  
of Alexander N. Scriabin**

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**Abstract.** This article presents a draft notebook of literary sketches by Alexander N. Scriabin, associated with the early stages of his work on *Mysterium*. The materials in this notebook, which were not included in the well-known publication of the composer's literary legacy in *Russkie Propilei* (1919), indicate that Scriabin began creating texts for *Mysterium* (which later evolved into the *Preliminary Action*) not in the final years of his life (1913–1915), as previously thought, but much earlier. Based on one of the composer's letters, it can be argued

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that this process should be correlated with the creation of the *Poem of Ecstasy*, i.e., no later than 1908. During these years, the composer was developing a general philosophical conception of the universe and a system of concepts and categories reflecting their relations and interconnections. This conception, in the *Mysterium* project, was intended a priori to manifest in the action of certain symbolic images, and in this notebook, Scriabin first sketches such leading image-symbols of the mystical action. Their characteristics are interspersed with philosophical texts, helping to clarify the semantic and dramaturgical significance of these symbols

**Keywords:** Alexander N. Scriabin, composer's literary heritage, *Mysterium*, *Preliminary Action*, textual studies

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*Источниковедение*

Научная статья

**О неизвестной черновой тетради  
в литературном наследии А. Н. Скрябина**

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**Аннотация.** В статье представлена черновая тетрадь литературных эскизов А. Н. Скрябина, связанная с начальным этапом его работы над Мистерией. Материалы этой тетради, не вошедшей в известную публикацию литературного наследия композитора в «Русских пропилеях» (1919), свидетельствуют о том, что Скрябин приступил к созданию текстов Мистерии (переросших затем в замысел Предварительного Действа) не в последние годы жизни (1913–1915), как это определилось в литературе о нем, а гораздо раньше. На основании одного из писем композитора можно утверждать, что этот процесс должен быть соотнесен со временем создания «Поэмы экстаза», то есть не позже 1908 года. В те годы у композитора происходит формирование общей философской концепции мироустройства и системы понятий и категорий, отражающих их отношения и связи. Эта концепция

в замысле Мистерии должна была *a priori* воплотиться в действие неких образов, и в данной тетради Скрябин впервые обрисовывает такие ведущие образы-символы мистериального действия. Их характеристики перемежаются с философскими текстами, помогающими уяснить смысловые и драматургические значения этих символов.

**Ключевые слова:** А. Н. Скрябин, литературное наследие, Мистерия, Предварительное Действо, текстология

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### *Introduction*

The literary heritage of Alexander Scriabin is one of the most vivid documents of Russian culture at the turn of the 20th century. Its pages capture the philosophical motives of the era, both eschatological and creative, and the spiritual quests of its most talented and sensitive representative, who developed a unique vision of the world order.

As is well known, this was a time when Russian culture saw a curious intertwining of “spiritual decadence and moral-religious renaissance, philosophical mysticism and historical pragmatism, apocalyptic moods and life-building goals, individualistic demands and dreams of collective unity, universal idealistic utopias and revolutionary projects for the transformation of contemporary Russian reality” [1, p. 125].

Scriabin was deeply concerned with the philosophical problems of spiritual renewal and the reorganization of the contemporary world. He believed in the power of reason and consciousness, which, in his view, encompass the entire universe and, possessing creative power, are capable of renewing and recreating the world. In his early years, the composer had a particularly strong need to put his thoughts on paper, even if he repeatedly returned to the same questions and formulations. He wrote on loose sheets and kept entire notebooks. “Thought lives its own life,” noted Aleksandr V. Mikhaylov in an essay on Heidegger, “and the philosopher chooses a special path of reasoning... If the philosopher chooses a familiar logic of reasoning, does logic not then dominate his thought? And once the path is chosen, is the philosopher not at its mercy?”<sup>1</sup> In this respect, the logic of Scriabin’s reflections appears remarkably coherent and consistent.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mikhaylov, A. V. (1990). *Martin Heidegger: Man in the World*. Moskovsky Rabochy, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> “The power of Scriabin’s thought, like that of his musical language, can only be grasped in its dynamic development,” notes one of the most recent publications on the composer’s work [2, p. 11].

*On the Publication of Scriabin's Literary Heritage*

Scriabin's philosophical path, which led him to the concept of *Mysterium*, is reflected in the sixth volume of *Materials Relating to the History of Russian Thought and Literature – Russkie Propilei*, prepared for publication in 1919 by the Russian cultural researcher Mikhail O. Gershenzon.<sup>3</sup> This edition generated enormous and lasting interest. Over the years, it has become a cornerstone of scholarship, serving as a source for numerous articles, monographs, and films, both in Russia and abroad (recent works include, e.g., [3; 4; 5]). No serious scholar of the composer's work, or historian of Russian culture, philosophy, and aesthetics at the turn of the 20th century, has overlooked these materials.

A comparison of the *Russkie Propilei* publications with the surviving sources shows that Gershenzon carried out meticulous work with Scriabin's manuscripts, deciphering and systematizing them. Through these materials, one can trace the formation and development of the composer's aesthetic-philosophical views and the creation of literary texts for the *Poem of Ecstasy* and *Preliminary Action*.

However, not all of his manuscripts were included in the edition. When describing the history of *Preliminary Action*, Boris de Schloezer mentions three additional manuscripts besides the published sources. The first is a small pocket memorandum book with brief pencil notes (conventionally labeled index A<sup>4</sup>). The other two are draft notebooks; one was started in the summer of 1913, when Scriabin began work on the text of *Mysterium* (notebook B<sup>5</sup>). The second notebook (C<sup>6</sup>) was started in the summer of 1914, when the *Preliminary Action* project came to the forefront.<sup>7</sup> These notebooks are of unquestionable interest to researchers: some texts are in prose, clarifying the dramaturgical sense of specific situations, while others contain explorations of rhymes and verse forms.

<sup>3</sup> Scriabin, A. N. (1919). *Zapisi* [Writings], with introduction by B. de Schloezer. In M. Gershenzon (Ed.). *Russkie propilei* [Russian portals] (Vol. 6, pp. 97-247). M. & S. Sabashnikov. See also Nicholls, S. & Pushkin, M. (2018). *The Notebooks of Alexander Skryabin*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup> The location of the document is unknown.

<sup>5</sup> Scriabin, A. N. *Draft notes for the text of Preliminary Action*. Alexander Scriabin Memorial Museum (MMS) MF 1280.

<sup>6</sup> Scriabin, A. N. *Notebook: Notes on Preliminary Action*. MMS MF 1278.

<sup>7</sup> See A Note by Boris de Schloezer on the *Preliminary Action* (1919). In M. Gershenzon (Ed.). *Russkie propilei* [Russian portals] (Vol. 6, pp. 99-119). M. & S. Sabashnikov, pp. 102, 114. Also A Note by Boris de Schloezer on the *Preliminary Action* (2018). In S. Nicholls & M. Pushkin (Eds.), *The Notebooks of Alexander Skryabin* (pp. 31-48). Oxford University Press, pp. 32, 43.

The most intriguing fact is that the archive of the A. N. Scriabin Memorial Museum in Moscow contains yet another fairly extensive notebook which Schloezer does not mention. All the manuscripts listed by him are dated 1913–1914, associated with work on *Mysterium* and *Preliminary Action*, whereas this previously unmentioned notebook, containing materials for *Mysterium*, belongs to a much earlier period, approximately no later than 1908, and possibly earlier. This dating is based on a letter from the composer to Margarita K. Morozova, dated 15 (28) June 1908, in which he wrote: “I have advanced the text of *Mysterium* considerably: I am already putting on the finishing touches.”<sup>8</sup>

#### *History of the Draft Notebook ‘The Gift of Anna Mozer’*

A natural question arises: why does Schloezer not mention this notebook? Most likely, he was unaware of its existence, and when Scriabin’s manuscripts were sorted after his death, the notebook was missing from the archive. A clue to its fate was found on the frontispiece, where a faint pencil note, clearly written by a museum employee, reads: “*The Gift of Anna Mozer | Lima (Peru).*” (Illustration 1)

Anna Mozer was the last wife of Alexander E. Mozer, a close acquaintance of the Scriabin family. Mozer, a talented chemist and accomplished photographer, was known for implementing Scriabin’s idea of a home color circle and for taking several photographs of the composer, including the famous image capturing Scriabin after completing the score of *Prometheus*. After working in Russia in the early post-revolutionary years in organic chemistry, Mozer moved to Switzerland in the late 1920s and emigrated to Lima (Peru) in 1940, where he died in 1958. When and how Scriabin’s notebook came into Mozer’s possession is unknown; it is possible that the composer gave it to him personally.<sup>9</sup> In the Museum’s accession records, it is documented as being present in 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Kashperov, A. V. (Ed.). (2003). A. N. Scriabin: *Pisma [Letters]*. Muzyka, p. 508.

<sup>9</sup> Scriabin generally parted with his manuscripts quite freely and never sought to collect them. For instance, after the publication of the *Poem of Ecstasy* score, the Fifth Sonata, and his piano pieces Op. 56, 57, and 58, he gifted the autographs to his student, the Canadian composer and pianist Alfred La Liberté. La Liberté’s widow, Madeleine La Liberté, later donated these manuscripts to the museum in Moscow in 1972.

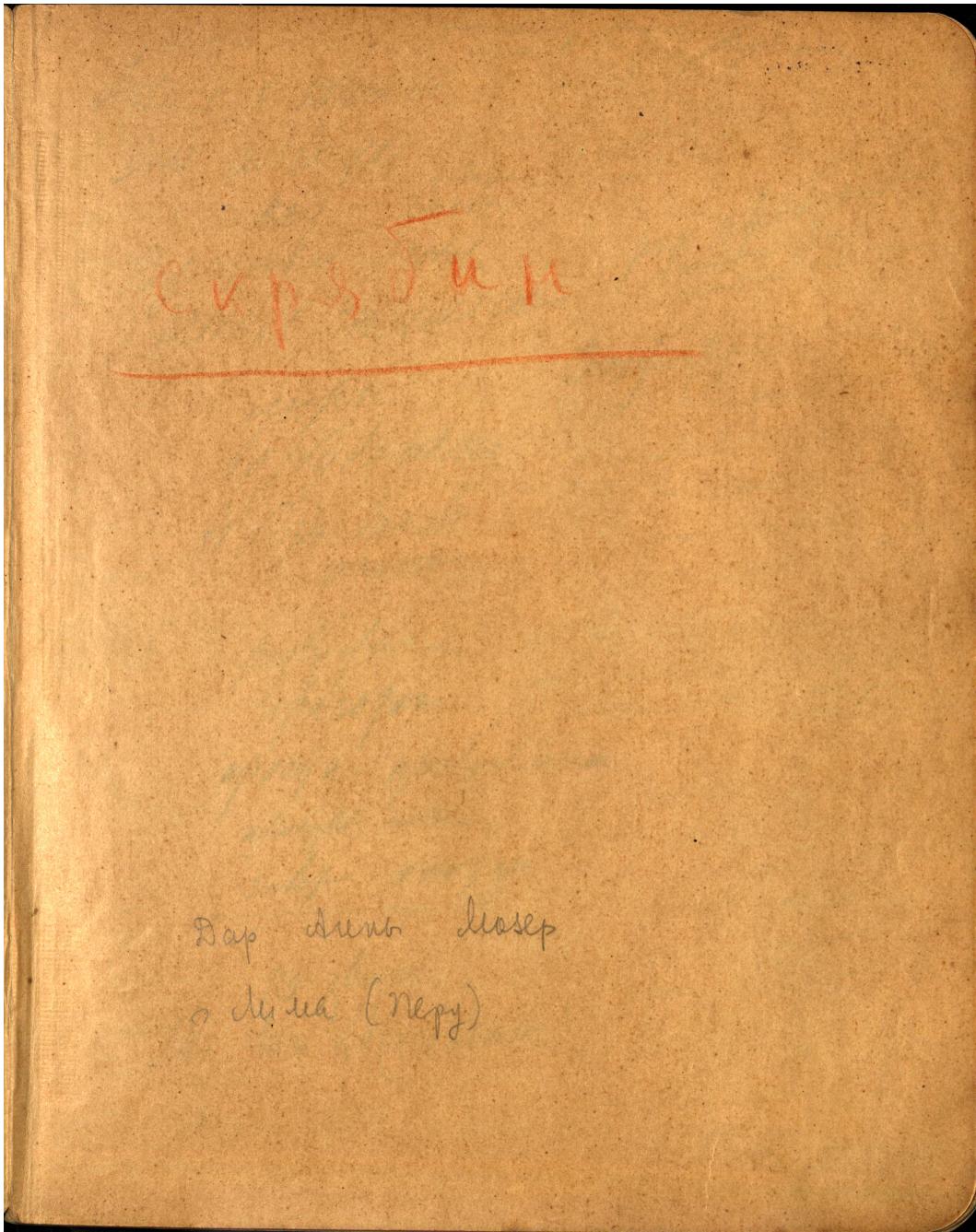


Illustration 1. Alexander Scriabin. *Notebook of Poetic and Philosophical Sketches* ("The Gift of Anna Moser"). Alexander Scriabin Memorial Museum  
MF 1585. Frontispiece

The Scriabin manuscript collection in the archive contains 305 inventory numbers, with this notebook listed as number 304, indicating it was a relatively late acquisition.<sup>10</sup>

### *Main Themes of the Draft Notebook*

This notebook is of particular interest, as its materials allow us to refine our understanding of certain key features of Scriabin's creative process. Recent scholarship, especially the work conducted during the preparation of the new *Complete Works of Scriabin* (completed in 2021 by the Alexander Scriabin Memorial Museum and *Muzyka* Publishing House), has significantly expanded and enriched these insights.<sup>11</sup> In the notebook under study, texts related to *Mysterium* are interspersed with philosophical notes, which imbue the emerging symbols of the work with specific meaning. Anticipating the seven-day cycle of *Mysterium*, Scriabin identifies seven stages in the formation and transformation of the Universe:

Emergence  
Division  
Proliferation  
Synthesis  
Intoxication  
Transformation  
Destruction

Of these seven stages, only three are reflected in the notebook's surviving materials. The stage of *Emergence* is preserved in fragmentary sketches on the first pages, which later evolve into a generalized poetic form:

O life!  
O dance of the universe  
dance of love  
From non-being you arise  
by the power  
of your emergence  
You are born into chaos →

<sup>10</sup> Scriabin, A. N. *Notebook of Poetic and Philosophical Sketches*. MMS MF 1585.

<sup>11</sup> The principal textual problems involved in publishing Scriabin's legacy are outlined in the article [6].

and from its abysses  
you soar  
to the heights  
of all-encompassing consciousness  
that radiates peace<sup>12</sup> (Illustration 2)

“In this process of becoming, of emergence,” Scriabin explains on one page of the notebook, “the opposition is expressed between being and non-being. Activity, ascent – nothingness, rest, indifference. Emergence itself is the link that exists between being and non-being.”<sup>13</sup>

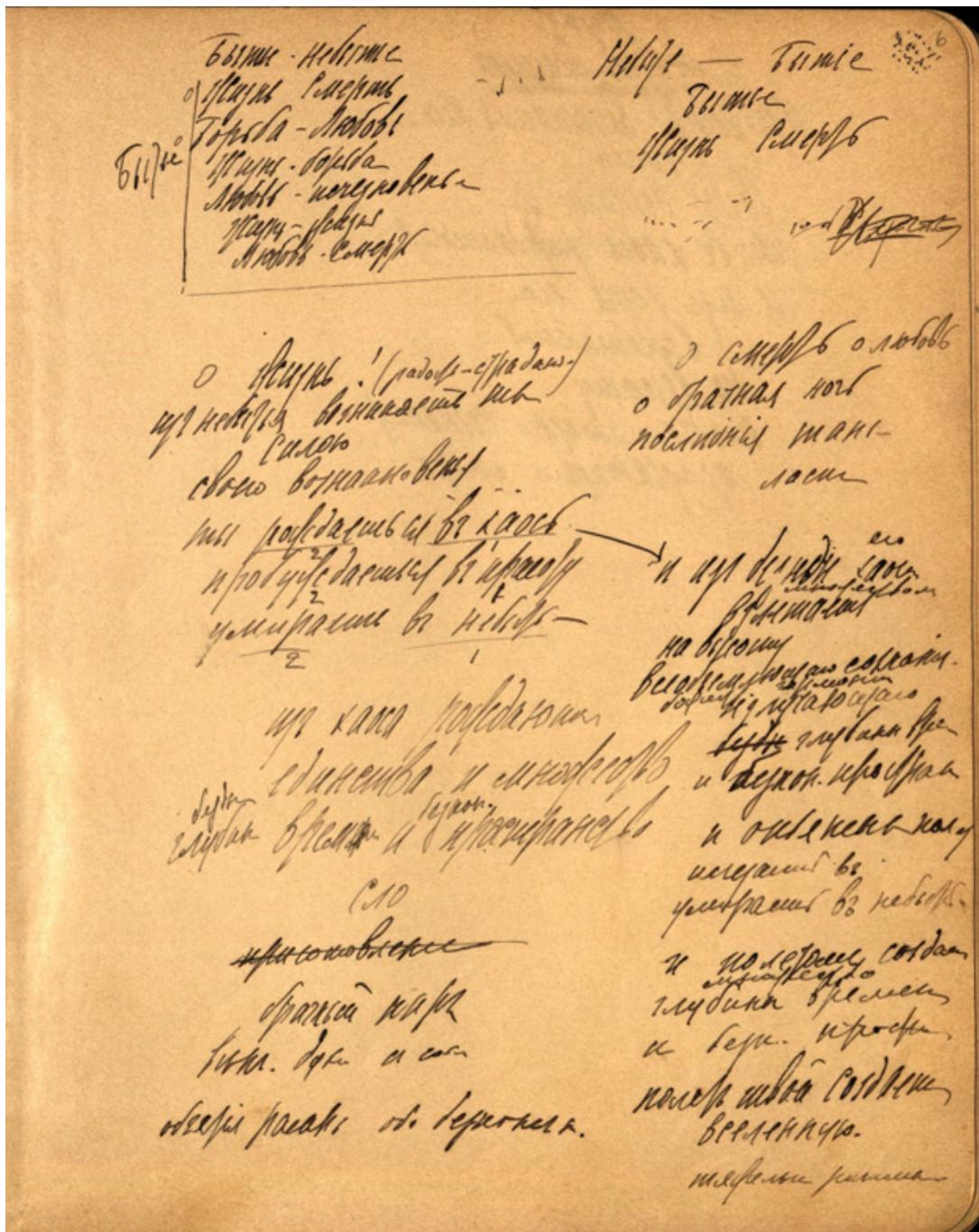
It is likely that such a general philosophical proposition could have been poetically articulated in *Mysterium* by an unnamed narrator. The creative imagination of the composer reconstructs the work itself only in its second stage – *Division*. Here, the images of the “acting” symbols begin to take shape, giving rise to the narrative’s initial conflict. This is manifested in the dialogue between Light (symbolizing a reflection of divine consciousness) and the realm of White Rays – Death, together reflecting the inseparable dilemma of being and non-being.

This episode represents a crucial stage in the development of the *Mysterium* concept. In the draft notebook under discussion, it appears in its first outlines, forming the work’s central semantic core: the figure of Death emerges as a product of Light’s imagination and dream. (“I am born in the rays of your dream,” Death tells Light.) To reach this dream, Light must first assume a material form, then overcome the “abysses of life, colorful worlds” which themselves are the product of the hero’s creative act. “They are in you, in your power,” Death responds to the question of how to find these worlds. “You must create them; you create them by your desire... to unite with me. Look into your own wanting, direct your attention inward, and you will discern these worlds.”<sup>14</sup> This episode is repeatedly elaborated and developed in subsequent entries, including in other draft notebooks.

<sup>12</sup> Scriabin’s poetic texts, as is customary in the works of Symbolist poets, are cited with all their distinctive features preserved, including the deliberate violation of punctuation and free arrangement of poetic lines.

<sup>13</sup> Scriabin, A. N. *Notebook of Poetic and Philosophical Sketches*. MMS MF 1585, P. 26 rev.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P. 11.



*Illustration 2.* Alexander Scriabin. *Notebook of Poetic and Philosophical Sketches* (“Gift of Anna Moser”). Alexander Scriabin Memorial Museum MF 1585. L. 6

Finally, yet another key stage of the *Mysterium* action received its initial outline in the draft notebook *The Gift of Anna Moser*: the stage of Multiplication – birth of the multitude, of life, symbolized by waves. In this notebook, the image appears only in sketch form, in several lines of verse (*Illustration 3*):

Transparent waves  
Of ethereal caress  
You give yourselves to one another  
Tenderly in passion  
Filling all things  
With your love  
One upon another  
You surge  
Now consuming  
Now shattering  
Aroused by struggle  
Enraptured by play  
From the divine heights  
Into the abyss [falling headlong]<sup>15</sup>

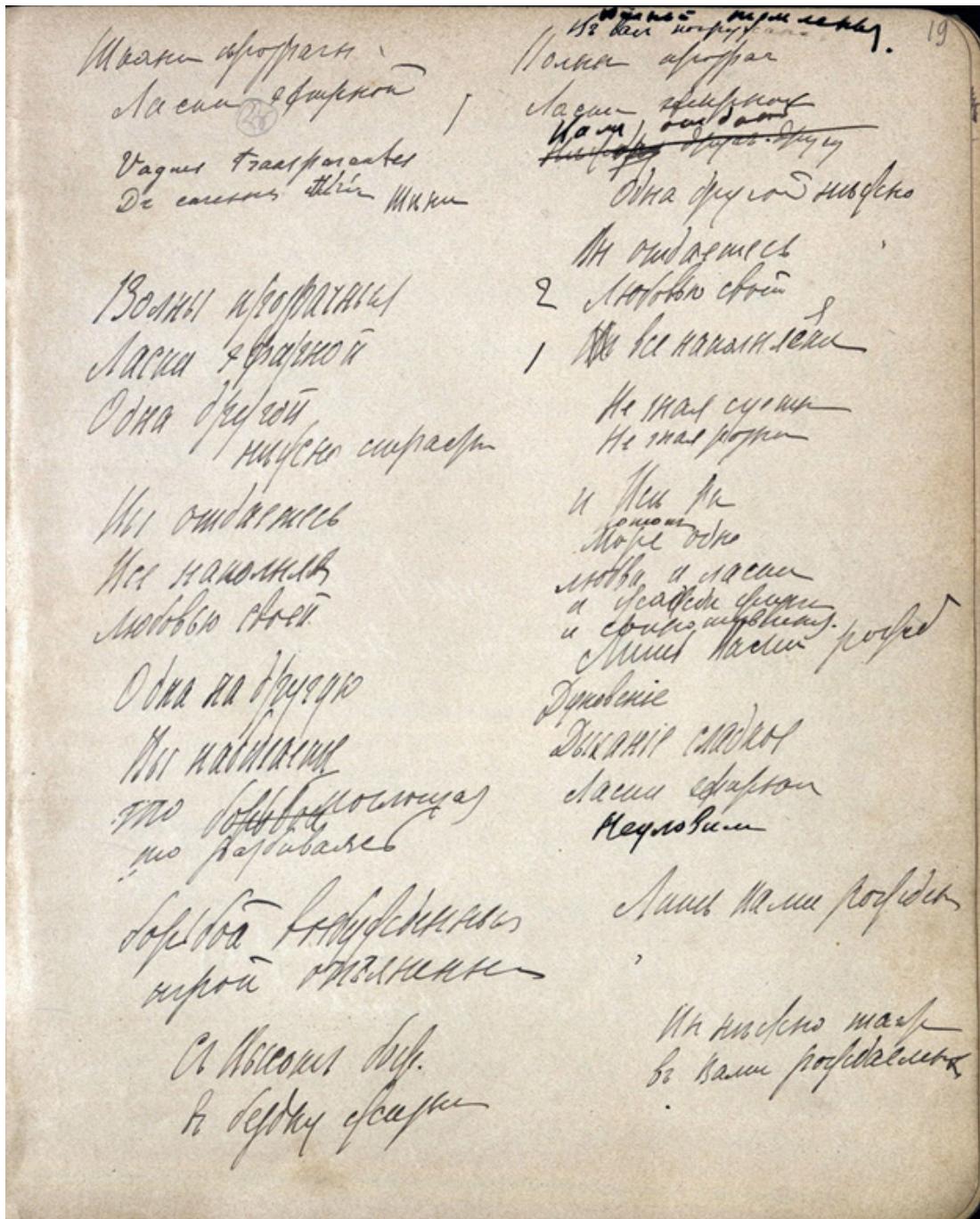
In Notebook *B*, where work on *Mysterium* resumed in 1913, the composer sets out in prose a detailed account of the dramaturgical function of the symbol of the waves.<sup>16</sup> This function is explained in the monologue of the One, who foretells the fatal degeneration of the pure souls that arise and plunge from the divine heights into the abysses of life. Notebook *B* differs from the other draft notebooks in that it contains a tentative plan for partially distributing the concrete events of *Mysterium* across the days of its realization (these days are given corresponding headings), and the monologue of the One fits precisely into the sequence of events placed in the section *Third Day*.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, Scriabin kept notes in Notebook *C*, intended for “polishing the details,” for searching for poetic forms. Typically, the initial sketches of texts were written in a quick, hurried, untidy hand, but anything that had passed through a stage of reflection and acquired a more stable verbal form is written out in all the notebooks in large, neat handwriting.

<sup>15</sup> Scriabin, A. N. *Notebook of Poetic and Philosophical Sketches*. MMS MF 1585. P. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Scriabin, A. N. *Notebook: Notes on Preliminary Action*. MMS MF 1278. P. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. P. 5.



*Illustration 3. Alexander Scriabin. Notebook of Poetic and Philosophical Sketches ("Gift of Anna Moser"). Alexander Scriabin Memorial Museum MF 1585. L. 19*

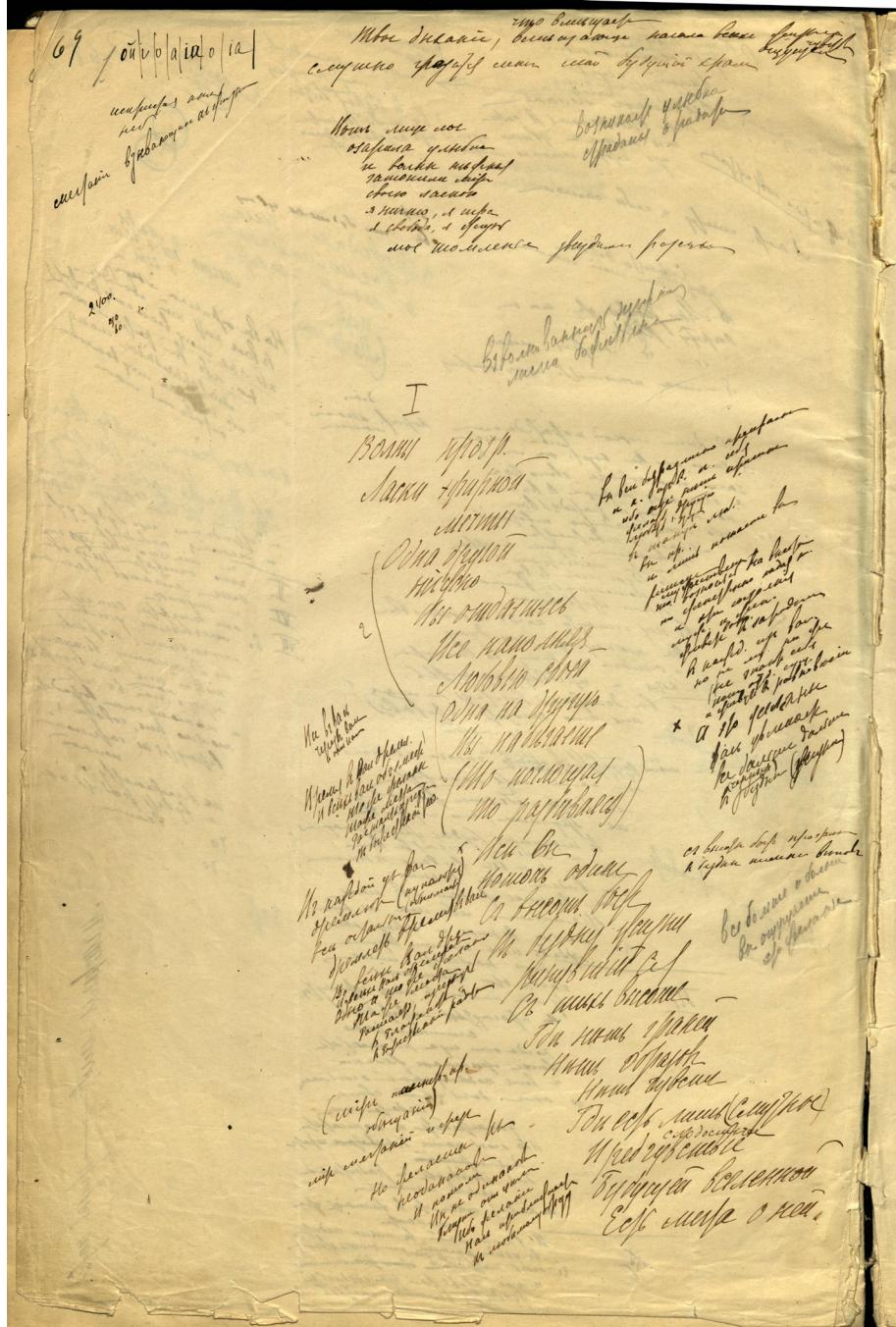
In Notebook C, the version of the wave-text already taking shape in the 1908 sketches is set out exactly in this way: beautifully arranged in a descending visual staircase. It is more poetic and somewhat expanded (*Illustration 4*):

Transparent waves  
Caresses of ethereal dream  
To one another tenderly  
You give yourselves  
Filling all things  
With your love  
One upon another  
You surge  
Now consuming  
Now shattering  
For you are a single flow  
From those heights  
Into the abyss of life  
Rushing headlong  
From those heights  
Where there are no boundaries  
No images  
No feelings  
Where there is only a vague  
Presentiment  
Of the future universe  
A dream of it<sup>18</sup>

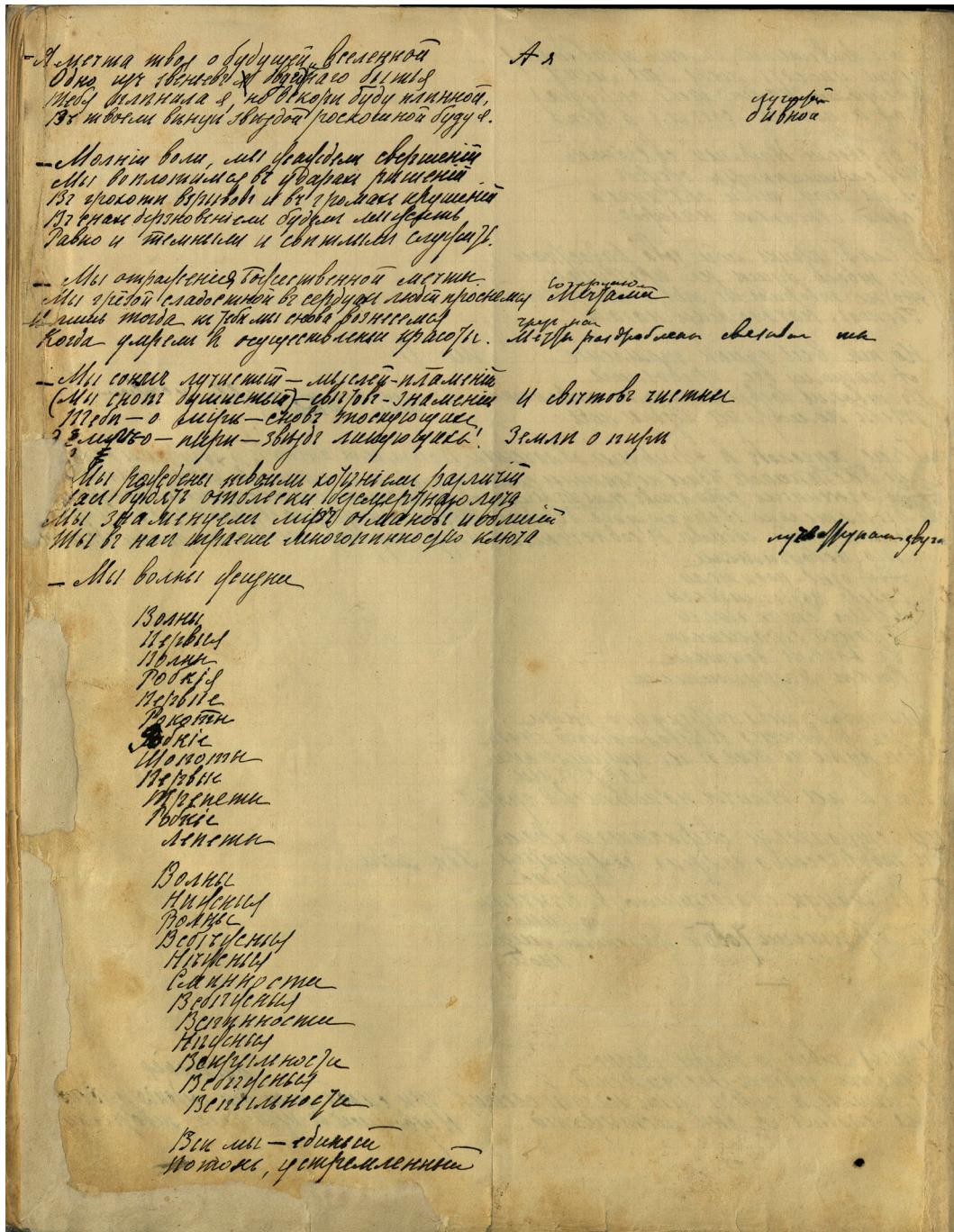
In the final completed text of *Preliminary Action*, Scriabin removes the specifying circumstances (the fall from the heights into the abyss of life), and introduces repetitions of words and phrases that paint a dynamically expanding movement – the birth of the multitude, of life (*Illustration 5*).

Thus, Scriabin gives rise to a specific circle of images-symbols, and gradually, this circle expands. A conditional world is created, one that lives its own life; this process is a clear subject of consideration within the framework of synergetics, an interdisciplinary scientific field that studies the patterns and principles of self-organization in nonequilibrium systems – a line of inquiry already undertaken by Andrey I. Bandura using the material of Scriabin's harmony [7].

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. P. 69.



*Illustration 4. Alexander Scriabin. Notebook: Notes on Preliminary Action.*  
Alexander Scriabin Memorial Museum MF 1278. L. 69



*Illustration 5. Alexander Scriabin. Draft Notebook. Preliminary Action. Poetic Text. Scriabin Memorial Museum MF 1. P. 56 rev.*

Another poetic fragment from the Anna Mozer notebook draws attention, marked by a stamp of intimate, confessional quality:

Night descends  
Like a black abyss  
Here comes the night.  
Have the courage to look into its depths,  
to plunge into this abyss of suffering and horror,  
have the courage to endure this night.  
Master this night, and the monsters  
will obediently come to serve you.  
Agree with no one, and thus  
stir each one, stir yourself!  
Be creation through negation  
Be struggle!  
Create everything by denying everything.<sup>19</sup>

It is difficult to say to what extent this text is directly related to the action of *Mysterium*. Most likely, it is an authorial monologue addressed to himself. Its conclusion (the final three lines) echoes a thought that repeatedly appears in Scriabin's personal reflections on his own purpose. In emotional and psychological tone, the text resembles Scriabin's writings from 1904–1906, a difficult period of mature awareness of his creative and life priorities. "Sapere aude! Have courage to make use of your *own* understanding!",<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant wrote in 1784, translating the famous maxim of Horace. In the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, having cast aside all doubt, Scriabin affirms his resolute intention to create *Mysterium*. The exultant sound of the *Poem of Ecstasy* proclaims this volitional surge. The notebook in question also concludes with texts written in large, clear handwriting on the final pages, reading like exhortations to himself:

I am nothing  
I am only what I create  
To live I want  
To act and triumph I want<sup>21</sup> (Illustration 6)

<sup>19</sup> Scriabin, A. N. *Notebook of Poetic and Philosophical Sketches*. MMS MF 1585. P. 22 rev.–23.

<sup>20</sup> Kant, I., & Wood, A. W. (1996). An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment? (1784). In M. J. Gregor (Ed.), *Practical Philosophy* (pp. 11–22). Chapter, Cambridge University Press, P. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Scriabin, A. N. *Notebook of Poetic and Philosophical Sketches*. MMS MF 1585. P. 50 rev.

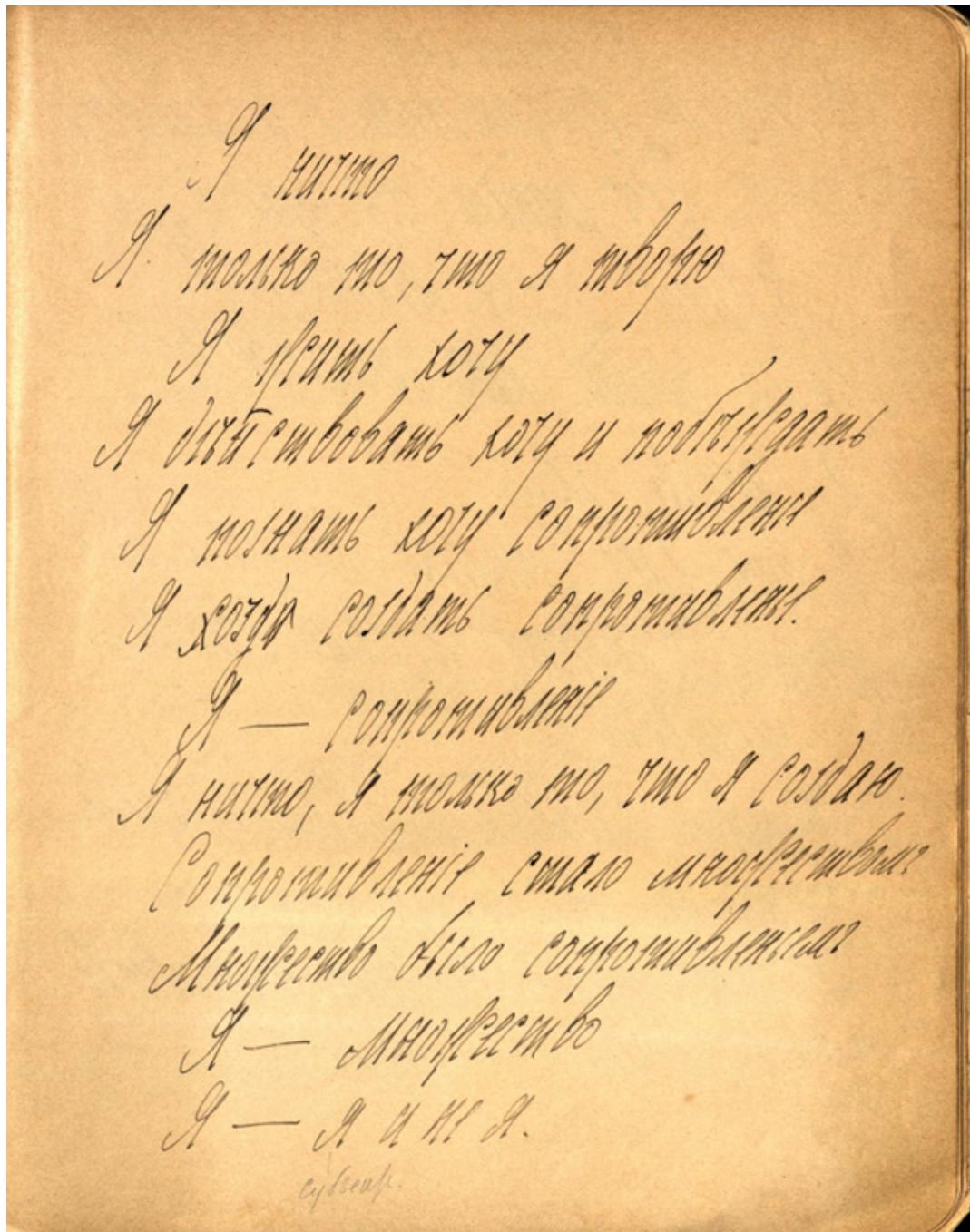


Illustration 6. Alexander Scriabin. Notebook of Poetic and Philosophical Sketches (“Gift of Anna Moser”). Alexander Scriabin Memorial Museum MF 1585. P. 50 rev.

### Conclusion

Thus, the particular significance of the 1908 notebook lies in the fact that it records the transformation of certain philosophical, purely abstract categories into artistic images-symbols. A natural process occurs, one precisely characterized by Kant: “However exalted the application of our concepts, and however far up from sensibility we may abstract them, still they will always be appended to image representations, a whose proper function b is to make these concepts, which are not otherwise derived from experience, serviceable for experiential use. For how would we procure sense and significance for our concepts if we did not underpin them with some intuition...?”<sup>22</sup> Precisely this process found its first embodiment in the Anna Mozer notebook.

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<sup>22</sup> Kant, I. (2018). What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking? In A. Wood, & G. di Giovanni (Eds.), *Kant: Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: And Other Writings* (pp. 3–16). Chapter, Cambridge University Press, p. 3.

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