

## Chaos, Language, and Logos: How the Poet Participates in the Creating Activity of the Word in the Thought of Andrey Bely

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### Abstract

Andrey Bely was an important member of the Russian symbolist movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This essay presents a summary of the development of his ideas regarding the origins of image and symbol in poetic language. For Bely language organizes chaos. The poet finds images in the internal world of dreams. Music has an organizing power beyond that of language, which language attempts to imitate. Under the influence of Vladimir Solovyov he looked to the union of Divine Wisdom or Sophia with the Eternal Logos as the principle behind symbolic images. Later, under the spell of Rudolf Steiner, he found the source of inspiration in the eternal dwelling of the Logos from which the human ego descends into flesh. The task of the poet is to recover the memory of the time before he left the realm of the Logos and to return to that realm by participating in Christ's ascent to the Cross. The autobiographical novel *Kotik Letaev* gives an account of recovering memory from before birth and the need to be joined with Christ crucified.

### Keywords

“Russian symbolism”, Bely, “order and chaos”, Logos, “poetic image”, Solovyov, Steiner

“Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.”  
Lewis Carroll

Andrey Bely,<sup>1</sup> pseudonym of Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev (1880-1934), was one of the leading Russian symbolists of the early twentieth century. His significant essays, poetry, novellas, and novels

<sup>1</sup> The name is variously transcribed as Bely, Biely, Belyi, Belyj. In this essay I follow the Library of Congress convention of citation and transliteration.

appeared between 1900 and 1923. Apart from his novel *Petersburg* outside of Russia his work has been known mostly to specialists in Russian literature, semiology, and Russian religious trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In all ways he was an original, striving to unite a theory of the creative power of language, symbolic images, and the origin of these symbols in the world of the Logos, which the poet-artist encountered in dream and memory. These elements were all bound together by music, which Bely regarded as the necessary intermediary between the phenomenal world that the artist confronts and the noumenal world in which the images dwell.

Bely's theory of poetic language reflects his wide-ranging reading of philosophy and literature. His earliest influences included Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the Russian mystic Vladimir Solovyov. As he developed, he incorporated ideas from theosophy,<sup>2</sup> which he first encountered somewhat skeptically in 1901 and finally embraced in 1908. In 1912 he met Rudolf Steiner and came under the influence of his refashioned theosophy known as anthroposophy.<sup>3</sup> Bely incorporated Steiner's ideas into his developing theories of the nature of poetic images and symbols. These are especially evident in Bely's autobiographical novel *Kotik Letaev* (1915, published 1922) and the parallel 1923 novel *The Baptized Chinese Man*.

Bely's thought cannot be completely summarized in a short essay. His fiction, which I will only briefly touch on, is difficult to translate, yet serves as an illustration of his ideas. However, some persistent themes stand out. The purpose of this article is to introduce the general readership in the English-speaking world to Bely's theory of symbolism and poetic creation by tracing its development during the most fertile period of his creative activity between 1900 and 1920. In his early work he sought the origin of symbolic images in the artist's own interior world. Solovyov provided him with the key to the noumenal world by seeking access to the world of the Logos through Divine Wisdom. After his conversion to anthroposophy he sought access to the world of the Logos through training memory to recover the previous lives of the ego.

<sup>2</sup> Theosophy usually refers to an occult philosophical system based on Buddhist and Hindu themes and promoted by the Russian Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891).

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) broke with theosophy to found his own occult school in Dornach, Switzerland. See Owen Barfield, "Listening to Steiner", *Parabola* 9.4 (1985), pp. 98-99 for a concise summary of Steiner's thought. For a discussion of Steiner's influence on Bely see John D. Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 37-53.

## The Power of Language to Create by Imposing Order

For Bely meaning in language emerges from the chaos of meaningless sounds and language itself creates reality (see his 1909 essay *Magiia slov* ["The Magic of Words"]), so that alteration of sounds, for example, puns or simple word play, brings something new into existence. Vowel and consonant sounds evoke a synesthetic sense of colors and images. People are constructed like language and from language: since meaning and form are indivisible, identity may switch as meaning does in a pun. In the autobiographical novel *Kotik Letaev* the adult Kotik through memory connects learning language with bringing order to the chaos out of which his young self becomes an individual.

In his fiction Bely put his theory into practice, trying to represent the chaos of sounds resolving into order. Meaning can shift with shifting sounds, as when we hear a pun and are caught between two conflicting meanings. Indeed, puns are a way of altering the world. The loss of the ability to make puns can indicate that an individual is slipping back into primordial chaos. In his novel, *Petersburg*, the elder Ableukhov is an inveterate punster. A sign of his growing dementia is his inability to make puns; having lost the power to create new realities he is awash in a sea of sounds out of which he can no longer bring meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Creating order out of chaos appears under different aspects in Bely's fiction. One of the best ways Bely shows this fluidity of language is through a young child's learning to speak. The child experiences sounds whose meanings flow in and out of one another. The child's mind may interpret the referent of a word differently from the adult's and may associate the new signified with colors and images (compare Proust's madeleine dipped in a tisane). In the autobiographical novel *Kotik Letaev* (1915, published 1922), we see the infant Kotik trying to navigate a world of sounds, fascinated by the relationship set up between similar sounds and unrelated words.

We can look at only one example from that novel of the interplay of words and images.<sup>5</sup> Kotik's first clear memory is of meeting a lion in a playground, the image of which is impressed on him even before that of his parents and relatives. He remembers hearing someone say "The lion (*Lev*) is coming." (*Lev* in Russian means both Lion and the man's name Leo.) The "lion" in turn is associated with a yellow sandy circle in which children are playing. Many years later a comrade tries

<sup>4</sup> A work full of neologisms and word plays makes translation difficult: four translations of *Petersburg* have appeared in the last fifty years.

<sup>5</sup> I have used the text for *Kotik Letaev* as reprinted in Andrei Belyi, *Staryi Arbat* (Moskva: Moskovskii Rabochii, 1989), pp. 428-578. Unless otherwise indicated all translations from the Russian are my own.

to persuade him that he did not see a lion (*lev*) but a Saint Bernard named Leo (*Lev*).

In the course of the narrative across three sections of Chapter One images of the yellow sun, the yellow sandy playground, the yellow mane of the lion all coalesce (Chapter One *A Labyrinth as in a Dream*, §§ “The Lion,” “Twenty Years Later – Thirty-Two Years Later,” “All the Same”). After insisting to his comrade that he did indeed see a lion, Kotik remarks that at the time of the conversation he was reading “Zarathustra.”<sup>6</sup> At the end of the section “All the Same” he remembers associating four people with the four symbols of the Evangelists: human, bull, eagle and lion. The lion makes a final appearance in chapter four with the visit of Leo Tolstoy, who visits Kotik’s father. When he hears the name *Lev Tolstoy*, Kotik wonders what a fat lion is (*tolstyĭ* means “fat”). Kotik remembers that when the old man took him in his lap, he identified Tolstoy’s beard with a lion’s mane. In this way the image expands from a child’s first memory of a dog to include the sun, a sandy circle, a lion’s yellow mane, Mark the Evangelist, and a Russian novelist, all the associations reinforcing one another.

*Kotik Letaev* is the product of Bely’s becoming an adept in anthroposophy. But his appropriation of Steiner’s thought built on earlier attempts to describe the poet’s encounter with the world of symbols.

### Music, the Language Before Language

Before a word is ever uttered, there is music. And music for Bely remained the primary form of expressing the inexpressible. The 1906 essay *Princip formy v èstetike* (“The Principle of Form in Aesthetics”) was Bely’s first extended consideration of the importance of music for symbolism. In this essay he observes that music deals with reality itself, abstracted from the empirical. Time is the substantial formal element of music. The word, by contrast, is an intermediary between the temporal and spatial forms of art. The artist creates poetry by combining these formal conditions of music and art, but poetry’s weakness is that the word can be only an intermediary in time of a timeless reality. Poetry’s strength is that it can represent not only

<sup>6</sup> The images of lion and child are taken from the beginning of the first of Zarathustra’s speeches in Nietzsche’s *Also sprach Zarathustra*: “Three transformations of the spirit do I name to you: how the spirit becomes a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child.” Zarathustra goes on to explain that the camel bears great spiritual burdens; the lion has power to create freedom for itself for a new act of creating, and to say a holy “no” even to duty; and the child enjoys innocence and forgetting, a new beginning and a first motion, uttering a holy “yes”.

the form of images but also their changing state (“The Principle of Form” §2).

Music reveals what lies hidden by the empirical world by removing the covering formed by the visible. The images of poetry necessarily limit the rhythmic freedom of music so that the musical theme becomes myth. In this way poetry regards the phenomenal musically, re-presenting to us this blanket which covers an inexpressible secret soul, but the myth distances pure art from its musical origins (“The Principle of Form” §3, “Poetry”).

Bely strove to recreate in his prose and poetry a language that would express everything that music expresses.<sup>7</sup> He blurred the distinction between poetry and prose and attempted to re-create the effects of music in his use of language. Meaning would be created by the word as music and the poet would open up the way to transcendence through the meaning expressed simply in the sounds of music. The images called forth by music are ideal. Music by being a purely temporal form expresses symbols that touch us at the very depths of our being and deepens everything, however lightly it may touch it (“The Principle of Form” §3 “Music”). Music creates motifs which evoke moods without images but analogous to what moods the images create (motifs create what the contemplation of images creates). “A musical motif combines various pictures of analogous mood; it contains as it were an extract of all that is significant in those pictures. The language of music is a language that unites.”<sup>8</sup> Music is the trunk of art; poetry is the crown that branches out in all directions (“The Principle of Form” §3, “Poetry”).<sup>9</sup>

Music is the entrance into hidden worlds. The narrator of *Kotik Letaev* remembers:

“Toys are—chords; we walk on the chords: by means of the chords we enter: *into hidden rooms* of meaning. Raisa Ivanovna and I fearlessly opened all the doors; and—we went through all the *sound rooms*; the doors opened for us . . . (*Kotik Letaev*, Chap. 5, §“Myth”).

The ultimate language is the music of the spheres. The narrator of *Kotik Letaev* remembers that he lived with the music of the spheres before his conception and subsequent birth. Music taught him to

<sup>7</sup> He called his earliest prose works “symphonies.” His *Second Symphony* “*The Dramatic*” (1901) is made up of short sections that depend on the interaction of images across the text, so that seemingly disparate sections are actually united and enriched by one another, much in the way that Wagner used leitmotifs.

<sup>8</sup> Andrey Bely, *The Forms of Art* (translated by John Elsworth; Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), pp. 177-178.

<sup>9</sup> Or, as Ada Steinberg puts it, “Whereas polyphony in music is the blending of *several* voices into a *single* whole, in poetry the *poetic word* seems to *branch out* ... it requires lapses of time” (*Word and Music in the Novels of Andrey Bely* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982] p. 156).

“grow” stories. For Kotik the search within produces the realization that he lived before he was born. (*Kotik Letaev*, Chapter 5, “Impressions.”)

In the following section we will see that the music that arises from within allows the artist to see what is not in nature, what Orpheus was able to call forth by his music. Music gives direct expression to absolute reality and has a relation to the unindividuated common core of experience.<sup>10</sup> Music is the language behind all language, calling forth new forms into the world of reality.<sup>11</sup>

### How Symbols Arise

Language, then, is the means by which we order the chaos around us. Within the artist’s *I* is hidden the chaos of the world. As he sees his own *I* reflected in the phenomenal world, he encounters the contradiction of the world of reality and the world of art (*Smysl iskusstva* [“The Meaning of Art”] §6, published in 1907).<sup>12</sup> The symbol arises from the artist’s psychological makeup, his sensitivity to language, and what he perceives to be the sources of his poetic inspiration. These considerations are governed by Bely’s own philosophical preconceptions.<sup>13</sup>

The creative process itself calls forth images which are life-transforming thought, which Bely calls “symbolization” in his 1904 essay *Èmblematika smysla* (“The Emblematics of Meaning”).<sup>14</sup> The artist does not derive an image from imitation of the external world, but rather from imitating what he finds in his internal world, and calls it like a phantom into the real world. The symbol that can be derived from inside can lead us into the world of dreams, which then may be revealed as more real than what we think of as reality. The artist can transform creation by uniting the external and internal worlds and building new forms which are humanity and the world transfigured: the transformation of external reality depends on the

<sup>10</sup> See Elsworth. *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> The composer Aleksandr Scriabin (1872–1915), a follower of theosophy, tried to create in music what Bely did with words and images. See Maria Carlson, ‘Fashionable Occultism: The World of Russian Composer Aleksander Scriabin’, *The Journal of the International Institute* 7 (2000), pp. 1, 18–20.

<sup>12</sup> *Smysl iskusstva* [“The meaning of art”] §5 in Andreï Belyï, *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie* [“Symbolism as interpretation of the world”], (Moskva: Respublika, 1994), pp. 119–120.

<sup>13</sup> See Amy Mandelker, ‘Synaesthesia and Semiosis: Icon and Logos in Andrej Belyj’s *Glossalolija* and *Kotik Letaev*’, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 34 (1990), p. 172 and Elsworth, *Andrey Bely*, pp. 7–36.

<sup>14</sup> *Èmblematika smysla* in Andreï Belyï, *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie*, pp. 25–82.

transformation of the inner reality. The symbol represents an act of creation, the “process of passing objective reality through experience and thus endowing it with meaning.”<sup>15</sup>

Bely takes up the question of how the artist creates his symbols in his 1908 essay *Simvolizm* (“Symbolism”).

Two types of symbolic modes encounter us in the history of the arts; two myths personify for us these paths; these myths appear in images: the first is the image of bright Helios (the Sun), illumining with a magic torch, so that images of this world are shown with utmost distinctiveness; the other mode is the that of Orpheus the musician, who rhythmically forces inanimate nature to move, – Orpheus, who calls a phantom, i.e., a new image, into the world of reality, something not found in nature; in the first way the light of the work only enlightens what had already been a given in nature; in the second way the power of the work creates that which is not in nature.

In images given by nature the sounds of the Eternal are heard by the artist; nature for him is the real and authentic embodiment of the symbol: nature, and not fantasy – a forest of symbols; immersion in nature is the eternal deepening of the visible . . . The artist produces the eternal in forms given by nature . . .<sup>16</sup>

The enchantress Lorelei is at the heart of each type of nature. She offers the artist the power to become tsar of the world, to be the lawgiver of life. So Fate in the form of chaos conquers the tsar. The Lorelei has swallowed up the artist’s “I” and alienated the artist from him-/herself. The artist is no longer the creator. However, “I” is not in the giving of the law. The artist’s “I” is in the work itself.

The artist who wants to escape from this path that leads to the destruction of his art may choose another way.

The artist does not want to see what surrounds him, because in his soul the voice of the Eternal sings; but the voice – without words – this is the chaos of the soul. For the artist this chaos is chaos which “gives birth”; in conformity to the law of his inner nature he sees his death, there, in the nature of what is seen – an evil fate lies in wait for him. From the depth of the unconscious he is closed off from nature by a curtain of fantasy; he creates fantastical images (shadows), which are not encountered in nature. He is fenced in from the world of existence by a world of fantasy.

Having created another world, a better one, the artist sees that the world of existence is constructed according to the image and likeness of this world; nature is a bad copy of the world, but it still just a copy. The Lorelei still wins. For the classical artist she becomes the nature of the visible; for the romantic she turns into the nature of

<sup>15</sup> Elsworth, *Andrey Bely*, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> *Simvolizm* [“Symbolism”] in *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie*, pp. 336-337.

consciousness. In each case the artist is cut off from himself. There is only one way out of the dilemma caused by opposing dualities.<sup>17</sup>

“The word of consciousness must have flesh. The flesh must have the gift of speech.

The word must become flesh. The word become flesh is a symbol of the work and the authentic nature of the thing. Romanticism and classicism in art – a symbol of this symbol. The two paths of art flow together into a third: the artist must become his own proper form: his innate “I” must merge with his work; his life must become artistic.

He himself is ‘the word become flesh’. The existing forms of art lead to the tragedy of the artist: victory over tragedy is the preexistence of art in the religion of life.

There the artist becomes like mighty Atlas, holding up the world on his shoulders.<sup>18</sup>”

Art is necessarily symbolic and any given class of symbols is religious because the artist unites the observed world with what he experiences by cognition (“The Meaning of Art, §5). We will consider below how Bely’s early insistence that the word become flesh and joined with the artist’s ego provided the entrance into the world of mythic images.

### The Eternal Logos, Source of the Symbolic Image

For Bely the goal of poetry was to find the face of world unity and universal truth expressed in the face of the muse. The goal of religion was to en flesh that truth.<sup>19</sup> Somehow the artist must find a way of accessing the mythic images that lie behind the chaos of the world. Art and artistic intuition are the bridge between the noumenal and phenomenal.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Bely blames Kant specifically for this duality in “The Emblematics of Meaning” §3. Bely saw a need to overcome the duality that Western man experiences in perception and thought and used Steiner to extend his earlier theory of the symbol in artistic creation. We divide what is perceived from what is conceived, we separate object and idea. Dualisms pervade our experience and disrupt our inner life as the rational and non-rational aspects of our engagement with the external world are in conflict. Analytical thought sees the world according to mechanical models. The result is a dislocation of inter-human relationships (“The Emblematics of Meaning,” pp. 30-32). In his *Second Symphony* one of the characters is driven insane by reading Kant. In *Petersburg* there are frequent references to Kant (whose name is deliberately confused with Comte), whom Bely holds responsible for the breakdown of the relationship between Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov and his son.

<sup>18</sup> *Simvolizm*, p. 338; see also “The Emblematics of Meaning” §6.

<sup>19</sup> *Apokalipsis v rusškoj poëzii* [“The Apocalypse in Russian Poetry”], (1905), in Andrei Belyi, *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie*, p. 411.

<sup>20</sup> See Hilary Fink, “Andrei Bely and the Music of Bergsonian Duration”, *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 41 (1997), p. 289.



Already in 1904 he had written that

... creative activity in its first stage is fetishism: all substances are things in themselves; they burst inside my soul; as things in themselves, the substances are of my making; when I experience the primary substance, I say "I am"; when I experience the substances one after the other, I say, "God is"; speaking thus I create myth; from myth is born history; the first contemplation of chaos is time; contemplation of the contents as things in themselves is space ("The Emblematics of Meaning" §19, p.74).

In his pre-Steinerian work Bely maintained that the symbol that can be derived from inside can lead us into the world of dreams, which then may be revealed as more real than what we think of as reality. The novella entitled *Vozvrat* ("The Return"), the third of Bely's "symphonies", starts with a scene set on an unnamed island where a child is playing under the tutelage of an old man. The child encounters various folkloric creatures including the strange Tsar Wind, who serves as a dark companion. The old man prepares the child for a descent into the material world, telling him that in time of need he will be aided by an eagle. In the next scene the chemistry student Khandrikov awakens from a dream, the scene just described. In a long descent into madness he encounters both the psychiatrist Orlov, the "eagle" protector (the name is derived from the Russian word for "eagle"), who is forced to leave him at a crucial point, whereupon the professor docent Tsenkh, who has the same characteristics as the Tsar Wind, pushes him to suicide by drowning. Drowning becomes the means of rebirth into eternity as the child is welcomed back by the old man from what we mistakenly think of as the real world and real life.<sup>21</sup>

In all these early works Bely is searching for the source of symbols inside himself. Somehow the word with which he creates is related to God's word, but where do we encounter it? In the world of dreams?

The world for me is a fairy tale; the child's 'I', putting itself under a mysterious command, creates mythology; a world emerges; its history emerges; in the way the myth arises as an act of creation. Theogony gives birth to cosmogony; "*Theos*" appears as "*Kosmos*". Chaos has established all aspects of religion, all aspects of reality, all aspects of the subjects of reality.

At the pinnacle of creation the child's 'I' already contains in itself a seething sea of substances. It acknowledges its own creation; it becomes the Logos.

<sup>21</sup> There is no English translation of the work, but there is an excellent French translation by Christine Zeytounian, published as Andreï Biely, *Le Retour* (Paris: Ed. Jacqueline Chambon, 1990).

Only from the heights of logical cognition is the view of chaos opened up, giving us the right to experience chaos; chaos becomes the criterion of reality.

A new world is brought into being by a change of meaning. Furthermore, he claimed, we can be transformed into the principle of language itself:

... As soon as we begin to experience [chaos], it seems to us as though the world is full of 'gods, demons and spirits;' chaos experienced already ceases to be chaos; as we experience it, it is as though we let these contents pass through us; we become the image of the Logos that organizes chaos; we give to chaos our individual order ("Emblematics of Meaning", §19, p. 74).<sup>22</sup>

Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900) helped Bely put these ideas onto a theological footing. The world soul as the Eternal Feminine that pervades all humanity and in union with the Logos will join human consciousness and humanity itself to the Eternal.<sup>23</sup> Order is discovered to be the creative process engendered by the uniting of feminine Divine Wisdom or Sophia with the masculine Eternal Logos in the creative process. Poetry recreates this image of the feminine.

As we descend the staircase of creative works we see that symbolic unity in theurgical work is the Face of Divinity itself; the Symbol gives its emblem in the face and name of the Living God; in theurgy this Face is the emblem of value. The feminine element of religious creation ... is symbolized in the image of the Eternal Feminine, Sophia or the Heavenly Church; all aspects of theurgical creation should be oriented toward cognition in the theurgical scheme and regarded in their relation to the symbols of Sophia and Logos.

... The religious Symbol of the Son is reflected in the aesthetic work in the image sometimes of Apollo (the form of the image) and sometimes of Dionysus (the content of the image); the image of Sophia-Wisdom is reflected in the aspect of the Muse; the relationship of the Muse to Apollo in aesthetics is the relationship of the feminine principle of theurgical creation (Wisdom) to the masculine (the Face of the Logos) ("The Emblematics of Meaning" §16, p. 65).

<sup>22</sup> "The unity that does not create [Brahma] is identifiable with the first Logos. From the first Logos issues the second Logos (form – metaphysical unity, Purusha) and every kind of substance (Prakriti); from the second Logos issues the third Logos, identifiable with the norm of cognition (Mahat) and with the world soul" ("The Emblematics of Meaning," §13, p. 59).

<sup>23</sup> Solovyov relates his encounter with the eternal Feminine in his long poem *Tri svidaniya* ("Three Meetings"). Bely includes Solovyov in his discussion of this image in Russian poetry from Pushkin to Blok in "The Apocalypse in Russian Poetry". Bely further acknowledges Solovyov's influence in his 1922 autobiographical poem *Pervoe svidanie* ("First Meeting").

But it is necessary for us to change the way in which we think about and understand the world. By the time he reflected on the way we think in his 1916 *O smysle poznanija* (“On the Meaning of Cognition”), Bely had been under Steiner’s influence for several years. In a wide-ranging discussion we find him proposing that just as we understand the whole plant not as an entity grasped in a moment of time but in its totality from seed to germination to flower and decay, so the whole of reality is grasped by a combination of perception and thought. In the act of thinking man participates in a universal process.<sup>24</sup> When we truly understand the totality of our own lives, we find that we contain the entirety of the process by which the cosmos has come into being, including our own individual world. We are then in touch with the source of the mythic images.

Therefore, the source of poetic images is the mythic archetypes that the artist discovers within himself or herself. These images in turn are memories from the Eternal dwelling of the Logos and Sophia. For Steiner Buddha showed by his life that man is the Logos and returns to the Eternal at the death of the body; in Jesus the Logos itself becomes a human being.<sup>25</sup> Bely’s artist now has direct access to the Eternal, where all ideal images abide, so that “we become the image of the Logos that organizes chaos.” (“Emblematics of Meaning” §19, p. 73). Bely was attracted by Steiner’s idea that the Spiritual essence of man, the ego, resides in an eternal world of the spirit between its successive incarnations. It does not enter the body immediately upon birth but some time between the second and third year. Once descended it loses contact with the spiritual world. The task of man is to recover the memory of what we experienced before we lost the memory of our eternal origins.<sup>26</sup> The adult confronts the child in us through memory and probes the remembered child’s memory back to the beginnings. Through the association with past experience music makes recollection possible.

<sup>24</sup> Bely refers to Goethe’s *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen* (1790), to which Steiner had introduced him.

<sup>25</sup> “Osiris, Buddha, and Christ” (1902) in Robert A. McDermott, ed., *The Essential Steiner: Basic Writing of Rudolf Steiner* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984; r. Edinburgh: Floris, 1996), p. 184.

<sup>26</sup> ‘The soul must awaken in itself the ability to recall representations related to the spiritual world.’ *The Case for Anthroposophy, being extracts from Seelenrätselfn by Rudolf Steiner, selected, translated, arranged, and with an Introduction by Owen Barfield* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1970), p. 50.

“True consciousness is recollection.”<sup>27</sup> The adept in anthroposophy trains memory to penetrate back beyond childhood to the experience of the soul in the Eternal, where he encounters the music of the spheres:

The transfiguration by memory of what came before is, in fact, a reading of the universe which stands behind ours. The impression of childhood years – only flights into what never at any time has been; and – nevertheless exists; existences of the lives of others were now mixed in with events of my life; likenesses of what had been for me are vessels with which I ladle up the harmony of a cosmos beyond compare. Such is *memory of a memory*; it is rhythm; it is the music of the sphere, of the land – where I was before my birth. Memories surrounded me. A memory – music of a sphere; and this sphere – the universe; impressions – memories are mimicries of my life in the land of rhythms, where I was before my birth (*Kotik Letaev*, Chap. 3, “An Impression”).

There is one more step for the artist. He must confront the light of the Eternal Logos in himself. In the 1904 work he saw that the boundary of unification with the Person becomes the boundary of experience; in the personal “I” the eternal “I” is experienced (“The Emblematics of Meaning” §14, p. 60). So man in the act of thinking participates in a universal process. Under the influence of Steiner Bely finds a way to effect this unification, by returning, through memory, to that world of the Logos, whence we all come and which we all have forgotten.

Bely interprets the beginning of John’s gospel to mean that the life in the Word is the indivisible integrity of world and thought. “The cosmos is the Word pronounced through Thought.” The cognitive act must be intuition, “which images internally the light which intersects the light of the world and the light of thought. This light is inspiration” (“The Meaning of Cognition” §20, pp. 57-58). As we confront the world we must look on it not as a datum to be classified but rather as the object of our sensory and cognitive perception working together.

We penetrate matter: penetration in the light of cognition is ‘I’, but ‘I’ am not this ‘I’: this ‘I’ is ‘I in me’. ‘I, the light in me’. And this Light is a lamp for the world” (“The Meaning of Cognition” §21, p. 59).

<sup>27</sup> Carol Anschuetz, “Recollection as Metaphor in *Kotik Letaev*”, *Russian Literature*, 4 (1976), p. 350. She identifies the locus classicus for the concept of recollection in Plato’s *Meno*, 81c-d (“The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue and about everything; for as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things, there is no difficulty in her eliciting, or as men say, “learning”, out of a single recollection, all the rest . . . for all inquiry and all learning is but recollection.”)

By letting the eternal light that was the Word permeate his very being, he finds a way beyond the earlier mythic image of God created by the contemplation of the empirical world.

For Steiner Christ opened up the way for us to be individually aware of our origins from and return to the Eternal. “The central form in evolution, that is, of the painful emergence of a subjective and specifically ‘human’ consciousness out of that original participation in the phenomenal world which the myths reflect, and its advance to man’s final participation in that world as an individual free spirit, was the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.”<sup>28</sup> For Bely we are all part of the Logos and in union with Divine Wisdom we return to the Logos’s dwelling in the Eternal. “The Meaning of Cognition” concludes with Bely’s triumphant affirmation that the divine within the individual is where we meet Christ, who is born in us, who is our “*T*” and whose death makes possible the birth of the new.

This cry of ours [‘Remember me Lord’] turns into another: ‘Not “*T*” – but Christ in me.’ In Christ we die. But in this death occurs the rending of the veil in the Temple: our personal ‘*T*’ is the veil: behind the veil are we ourselves, risen in the Spirit and Truth. We are born in God. In Christ we die. And we rise in the Holy Spirit. The three moments of cognition are a Trinity. The cognitive act reflects it (“The Meaning of Cognition” §22, p. 63).

What Bely takes from Steiner in this regard is that just as the past is revealed in memory so the future is revealed in imagination. The poet thereby “embodies all time in one moment – and thus transcends time and self.”<sup>29</sup> The young Kotik, who is a stand-in for Bely, acquires language to articulate recollected pre-natal experience, but having learned language he unlearns recollection.<sup>30</sup> The adult Kotik uses language and the symbols created by language to reach back to primordial beginnings of the individual, the human race, and the cosmos itself, a return to the paradisaical beginnings of humanity.<sup>31</sup> At the end of the novel Kotik sees himself fulfilling his destiny by being joined with Christ on Calvary – with the Logos he will be reunited with the Eternal.

Bely began with a quest for the underlying symbols by which we define and understand the world. These were encountered in the world of dreams. Music can draw the artist on by unveiling the covering that language places over the world in which images

<sup>28</sup> Barfield, “Listening to Steiner”, p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Molnar, *Body of Words: A Reading of Belyi’s Kotik Letaev* (Birmingham Slavonic Monograph no. 17; Department of Russian Language and Literature, University of Birmingham, 1987), p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> See Elsworth, *Andrey Bely*, p. 130.

<sup>31</sup> Carol Anschuetz, “Recollection as Metaphor”, p. 353; Samuel Cioran, “The Eternal Return: Andrej Belyj’s Kotik Letaev”, *Slavic and East European Journal* 15 (1971), p. 35.

reside. Nevertheless, the poet must use language, and by language the poet organizes the chaos that is within each new-born human being, creating a world of experience that is ever shifting but rooted in the eternal Logos. By uniting himself with the Logos the poet can inspire others to seek the inaccessible world of our beginnings. In the end Bely saw all his writing as an expression of that encounter. His use of symbolic images was to make the Eternal Logos present in the written word and to draw the reader into that encounter.

We do not have to accept Bely's mysticism in order to appreciate his struggle to get behind language, to uncover the fabric of perceived reality in order to find the very source of all artistic creation. This original writer shows us what it is like to ask the age-old question of where poetic inspiration comes from and to stand in wonder before the vast untapped world of the Eternal that he wants to open up inside every one of us.

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