**Bely, Andrei (БЕЛЫЙ, АНДРЕЙ) (1880-1934)**

A leading theorists and representative of the “second wave” of Russian Symbolism, Andrei Bely (1880-1934) was a writer of prose, poetry, literary criticism and memoirs. Music and philosophy first interested Bely as is evident in his four prose *Symphonies* (1902-1908)and a collection of poetry, *Gold in Azure* (1904). Following the failed 1905 Revolution, Bely’s poetry became more pessimistic. The mystical enthusiasm of his early poetry was replaced by images of disillusionment in two later collections: *Ashes* and *The Urn* (both 1909). In 1910, Bely published his first novel, *The Silver Dove*, yet it was his second, *Petersburg* (1916), which is considered to be among the finest novels of the twentieth century. Bely’s remaining prose works were much less successful. At the end of his life, Bely was under increasing pressure by Soviet officials to re-remember elements of the modernist movement. As a result, Bely’s memoirs are highly unreliable, but fascinating as examples of cultural coercion in the Soviet Union. Today, Bely is remembered as one of the principal voices of Russian Symbolism at its inception and then one of its main apologists after the movement was no longer in fashion in the Soviet Union.

**Timeline of Bely’s life and most significant works:**

**1880:** Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev was born in Moscow to a prominent intellectual family.

**1902:**Published his *Second Symphony, the Dramatic*, under the pseudonym Andrei Bely so as not to embarrass his father, a respected professor of mathematics.

**1903:** Organized a literary circle called *The Argonauts*. The group would publish two collections of their literary works three years later.

**1904:** Published *The Northern (First) Symphony* and a collection of poems *Gold in Azure*.

**1905**:Published *The Return*, *Third Symphony.*

**1907:** Began to openly quarrel with prominent Symbolist theorists in the journal *The Scales*.

**1908**: Published *Goblet of Blizzards*, *Fourth Symphony.*

**1909:** Published two collections of poems: *Ash* and *The Urn*; Met Asia Turgeneva, the grandniece of the famous Russia Realist writer Ivan Turgenev.

**1910**: Published two collections of Symbolist criticism and theory: *Symbolism* and *Green Meadow* and his first novel *The Silver Dove*.

**1911:** Published another collection of critical essays,*Arabesques*; Travelled with Turgeneva through Sicily, Tunis, Egypt and Palestine.

**1912:** Married Turgeneva;Became a devotee of Rudolph Steiner’s anthroposophy.

**1914:** Along with Steiner and his followers, moved to Dornach, Switzerland; In March, married Turgeneva (again) in a civil wedding in Switzerland.

**1916**: Published his Symbolist novel *Petersburg*; Returned to Russia from Dornach without Turgeneva.

**1917:** Began writing his next novel, *Kotik Letaev*, based on his early childhood, which was published as book in 1922.

**1921:** Separated from Turgeneva; Went to live in Berlin; Moved by the unexpected death of his friend and fellow Symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok, began to write his first memoir *Reminiscences of A.A. Blok* (1922).

**1923:** Returned to Russia after living abroad.

**1926:** Published two volumes of his Moscow Trilogy: *The Moscow Eccentric* and *Moscow Under Siege*.

**1927**: Published another novel *The Baptized Chinaman*.

**1930:** Published the first of his memoir trilogy,*At the Border of Two Centuries*.

**1931:** Married Klavdiia Nikolaevna Vasil’eva; Published the third book in his Moscow Trilogy: *Masks*.

**1933**: Published the second of his memoir trilogy, *The Beginning of the Century*.

**1934**: Published the third of his memoir trilogy, *Between Two Revolutions*; Died in early January.

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| Andrei Bely (1880-1934) was a leading theorist and representative writer of the “second wave” of Russian Symbolism, along with Aleksandr Blok and Viacheslav Ivanov. Russian Symbolism was mainly known for its poetic attempts to evoke the phenomenal (spiritual) world, rather than to depict the noumenal (or terrestrial). Symbolists believed that there was a more ideal world that paralleled our present reality and through a language of symbols, they could induce this spiritual world. A writer of prose, poetry, literary criticism and memoirs, Bely was one of the principal voices of Russian | Photograph of Bely (1904) |

Symbolism at its height and then one of its main apologists after the movement was no longer in fashion in the Soviet Union.

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| The son of a famous professor of mathematics, Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev took the pseudonym Andrei Bely for his creative works so as not to embarrass his father, the Dean of the Natural Science Faculty in Moscow. Music and philosophy first interested Bely as a young man and these interests were evident in his four prose *Symphonies* (1902-1908)*.* Under the influence of the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, Bely and the other young Symbolists of his group (who called themselves | The ancient Argonaut  summons to follow,  he calls  on a golden  horn:  “To the sun, to the sun, those who love freedom,  We shall whirl away into the blue  ether!..”  Stanza from “The Golden Fleece” (1903) |

Argonauts) began to see the historical process as a movement toward the reunification of the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. This influence was particularly evident in Bely’s first collection of verse, *Gold in Azure*, which was published in 1904. Yet, Bely’s jubilant anticipation of a final reunification resulted in significant disappointment when the Revolution of 1905,

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| Bely’s *Ashes* (1909) | which did not result in substantive state reforms, failed to fulfill the apocalyptic promise of the Symbolists’ expectations. Soloviev had argued that the Antichrist would precede the arrival of Sophia, a figure representing the divine wisdom of God, which would necessitate a battle of apocalyptic proportions. As a result of Bely’s disappointment, his next two collections of poetry in 1909, *Ashes* and *The Urn*, were much more pessimistic. The mystical enthusiasm found in Bely’s golden sunset was |

replaced by images of disillusionment and devastation, illuminated by a frigid twilight.

In 1910, Bely published his first novel, *The Silver Dove*, the story of a young poet who joins a primitive mystical sect and is murdered when he does not sire the new redeemer with one of their female members. Bely’s next prose work, *Petersburg* (1916), is considered to be among the finest novels of the twentieth century. Set in St. Petersburg, a group of revolutionaries entrust a young student to assassinate his father, a high-ranking government official, with a bomb in a sardine can. Playing upon St. Petersburg’s long cultural history as a demonic and cursed city, Bely also alludes to Russia’s historical ruptures (Tatar-Mongol Yoke; Peter the Great’s forced

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| Bely’s *Petersburg* (1916) | Westernization; failed and impotent intellectuals; etc.), in order to condense all of these cataclysmic associations into the disastrous year of the 1905 revolt. The ever-increasing cultural and historical tensions of the novel seem to be leading to an apocalyptic explosion that will not only destroy the father and the corrupt, geometrical capitol city, but possibly Russia itself. Yet, like the disillusionment felt in 1905, the explosion proves ineffectual and disappointing. Bely’s next two novels, *Kotik Letaev* and *The Baptized Chinaman*, which were autobiographical in nature, as well as his Moscow trilogy (*The Moscow Eccentric*, *Moscow Under Siege* and *Masks*) were much less successful prose works and are often given less scholarly attention |

than his Symbolist masterpiece, *Petersburg*.

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| From Bely’s *Petersburg* (1916)  Petersburg, or Saint Petersburg, or Pieter (which are the same) actually does not belong to the Russian Empire. And Tsargrad, Konstantinograd, (or, as they say, Constantinople), belongs to it by right of inheritance. And we shall not expiate on it.  Let us expiate at greater length on Petersburg: there is a Petersburg, or Saint Petersburg, or Pieter (which are the same). On the basis of these same judgments, Nevsky Prospect is a Petersburg prospect.  Nevsky Prospect possesses a striking attribute: it consists of a space for the circulation of the public. It is delimited by numbered houses. The numeration proceeds house by house, which considerably facilitates the finding of the house one needs. Nevsky prospect, like any prospect, is a public prospect, that is: a prospect for the circulation of the public (not of air, for instance). The houses that form its lateral limits are hmmm… yes: …for the public. Nevsky prospect in the evening is illuminated by electricity. But during the day Nevsky Prospect requires no illumination.  Tr. Robert A. Maguire and John E. Malmstad | Portrait by Leon Bakst (1905) |

Just as important as Bely’s prose and poetry were his numerous publications as a theorist of the Symbolist movement. At various times, he was a devout Nietzschean, Solovievan, Kantian, Schopenhauerian and theosophist, but so too were most of the other modernists, so Bely’s texts offer an interesting depiction of the intellectual discourse of the time. In 1907, various factions of the Symbolist movement began to openly quarrel amongst themselves and Bely ardently defended his theoretical and aesthetic positions against prominent theorists like Georgy Chulkov and Viacheslav Ivanov in the journal *The Scales*. During the period 1902-1911, Bely attempted to establish a definitive theory of Symbolist poetics that were eventually published in three collections of essays, *Symbolism*, *The Green Meadow* and *Arabesques*. In 1912, Bely became a devotee of Rudolph Steiner’s anthroposophy while living abroad. Steiner’s theory of violent transitional periods within a cosmic evolution, clearly appealed to Bely’s former philosophical longings for an apocalyptic upheaval that would reunite the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds. After a break with his wife, Asia Turgeneva, Bely returned to Russia in 1918. During the next three years, Bely, Blok and Ivanov participated in the journal, *Alkonost* (a bird in Slavic mythology), the last attempt to bring the major Symbolists together. It was here that Bely published his *Reminiscences of A.A. Blok* shortly after his friend’s untimely death in 1921.

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| Photograph of Bely (1913) | During an extended stay in Germany, Bely became increasingly anti-social, if not hysterical, and his relationship with Steiner cooled. In late 1923, Bely returned to a very different Russia that no longer held in high regard Symbolism’s mystical and, at times, decadent theology. In an attempt to avoid conflict with Soviet officials, Bely settled down to write his Moscow trilogy and, more importantly, his memoirs. In reading these, one must keep in mind that Bely was under increasing pressure in the late 1920s to re-remember events, literary allegiances and participants to stay on the right side of official cultural policies. |

As a result, *At the Turn of the Century*, *The Beginning of the Century* and *Between Two Revolutions* are highly unreliable as memoirs, but fascinating as examples of cultural coercion in the Soviet Union. For Bely, they were a final attempt to rescue his generation from extinction and provide an explanation for Symbolism that the Soviet generation could understand and, possibly, respect.

**References and Further Reading:**

Alexandrov, Vladimir. (1985). *Andrei Bely: The Major Symbolist Fiction.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Explores Bely’s conception of Symbolism and how it evolved from his early experimental prose narratives into his major novels.

Elsworth, J. D. (1972). *Andrey Bely.* Letchworth: Bradda Books LTD.

Short, informative biography of Bely.

-------. (1983). *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Elucidates Bely’s theories of Symbolism and his intellectual relationship with anthroposophy, in order to examine each of his novels.

Keys, Roger. (1996). *The Reluctant Modernist: Andrei Belyi and the Development of Russian Fiction, 1902-1914.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Positions Bely within the larger tradition of Russian prose fiction, while paying specific attention to his philosophical and literary influences.

Maslenikov, Oleg A. (1952). *The Frenzied Poets: Andrey Biely and the Russian Symbolists.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Examines the origins of the Symbolist movement, Bely’s maturation as a Symbolist and his relationships with its leading figures.

Mochulsky, Konstantin. (1977). *Andrei Bely: His Life and Works.* Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis.

Bely’s first biographer, Konstantin Mochulsky (1892-1948) incorrectly uses the author/poet’s autobiographical and literary statements as reliable fact. Still, even with this problem, Mochulsky’s monograph contains perceptive insights into Bely and his milieu.

**Major works:**

**Poetry:**

Zoloto v lazuri (*Gold in Azure*) [1904]

Pepel (*Ashes*) [1909]

Urna (*The Urn*) [1909]

Kristos voskres (Christ has Risen) [1918]

Pervoe svidanie (The First Encounter) [1921]

Glossalaliaa: poema o zvuke (Glossalaliaa: A Poem about Sound)[1922]

**Stikhi o Rossii (*Poems about Russia*) [**1922]

**Vozvrashchenie na rodinu (Returning Home)** [1922]

**Posle razluki:** Berlinskii pesennik (*After the Parting: A Berlin Song-book*) [1922]

**Prose:**

Simfoniia, 2-ia, dramaticheskaya (*Second Symphony, the Dramatic*) [1902]

Severnaya simfoniya (*Northern* *Symphony*) [1904]

Vozvrat, 3-ia simfoniia (*The Return, Third Symphony*) [1905]

Kubok metelei, 4-ia simfoniia (*Goblet of Blizzards*, *Fourth Symphony*) [1908]

Serebrianyi golub’ (*The Silver Dove*) [1910]

Peterburg (*Petersburg*) [1916]

Kotik Letaev (*Kotik Letaev*) [1917-18]

**Korolevna i rytsari (*The Princess and the Knights*)** [1919]

Kreshchennyi kitaets (*The Baptized Chinaman*) [1921]

Zapiski chudaka (*Notes of an Eccentric*) [1922]

**Putevye zametki: Sitsiliia i Tunis (*Travel Notes: Sicily and Tunis*) [**1922]

Moskovskii chudak (*The Moscow Eccentric*) [1926]

Moskva pod udarom (*Moscow under Siege*) [1926]

Maski (*Masks*) [1931]

**Criticism / Theory:**

Lug zelenyi (*Green Meadow*) [1910]

Simvolizm (*Symbolism*) [1910]

Arabeski (*Arabesques*) [1911]

Tragediia tvorchestva: Dostoevskii i Tolstoi (*The Tragedy of Creation: Dostoevskii and Tolstoi*) [1911]

Rudol’f Shteiner i Gete v mirovozzrenii sovremennosti (*Rudolf Steiner and Goethe from a Contemporary Point of View*) [1917]

Revoliutsiia i kul’tura (*Revolution and Culture*) [1917]

Sirin uchenogo varvarstva (*The Siren Bird of Scholastic Barbarism*) [1918]

**Na perevale (*At the Divide*)** [3 volumes: 1918-20]

O smysle poznaniia (*On the Theory of Cognition*) [1922]

**Poeziia slova: Pushkin, Tiutchev, Baratynskii, V. Ivanov, A. Blok (*Poetry of the Word*)** [1922]

Ritm kak dialektika i “mednyi vsadnik” (*Rhythm as Dialectic in The Bronze Horseman*) [1929]

Masterstvo Gogolia (*The Mastery of Gogol*) [1934]

**Memoirs:**

Vospominaiia ob A.A. Bloke (*Reminiscences of A.A. Blok*) [1922]

**Odna iz obiteley tsarstva tenei (*In the Kingdom of the Shades*)** [1924]

Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii (*On the Border of Two Centuries*) [1930]

Nachalo veka (*The Beginning of the Century*) [1933]

Mezhdu dvukh revoliutsii (*Between Two Revolutions*) [1934]

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Figure 1. Photo 1904. <http://images.google.ca/imgres?q=andrei+bely+1904&hl=en&biw=1024&bih=691&tbm=isch&tbnid=upWOuJ0BWbTxmM:&imgrefurl=http://www.photographersdirect.com/buyers/stockphoto.asp%3Fimageid%3D2545718&docid=FMPGOAQvxc0SGM&itg=1&imgurl=http://img3.photographersdirect.com/img/262/wm/pd2545718.jpg&w=371&h=500&ei=HTUkUK_-GOizigLewYHoAw&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=328&vpy=130&dur=3011&hovh=261&hovw=193&tx=115&ty=134&sig=118242156809064459849&page=1&tbnh=162&tbnw=125&start=0&ndsp=18&ved=1t:429,r:2,s:0,i:76>

Figure 2. Cover *Аshes* <http://images.google.ca/imgres?q=андрей+белый+пепель&hl=en&biw=1024&bih=691&tbm=isch&tbnid=AumudBsiEXunxM:&imgrefurl=http://kvartira-belogo.guru.ru/bibliography/viewtext.php%3Fdirname%3Dpepel1909%26offset%3D0%26book_id%3D21&docid=5CgJZI0hPaJczM&imgurl=http://kvartira-belogo.guru.ru/bibliography/pepel1909/images/1.jpg&w=758&h=1024&ei=mTUkUIPiBYmdiQLMtIGICw&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=226&vpy=166&dur=686&hovh=261&hovw=193&tx=115&ty=122&sig=118242156809064459849&page=1&tbnh=153&tbnw=116&start=0&ndsp=17&ved=1t:429,r:1,s:0,i:75>

Figure 3. Cover *Petersburg http://images.google.ca/imgres?q=андрей+белый+петербург+1916&num=10&hl=en&biw=1024&bih=691&tbm=isch&tbnid=N5ixJntyC9\_3EM:&imgrefurl=http://www.livelib.ru/book/1000495482&docid=7t0Id3LLj-YahM&itg=1&imgurl=http://j.livelib.ru/boocover/1000495482/l/9971/Andrej\_Belyj\_\_Peterburg.jpg&w=200&h=305&ei=AzYkUPugCMSSiAK8zYCYAw&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=429&vpy=156&dur=600&hovh=243&hovw=159&tx=69&ty=126&sig=118242156809064459849&page=1&tbnh=181&tbnw=119&start=0&ndsp=16&ved=1t:429,r:2,s:0,i:79*

Figure 4. Portrait by Leon Bakst <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrei_Bely>

Figure 5. Photo 1913 http://images.google.ca/imgres?q=андрей+белый+1913&hl=en&biw=1024&bih=691&tbm=isch&tbnid=UygBBK9WqWVVHM:&imgrefurl=http://belousenko.com/wr\_Beliy.htm&docid=7\_19tsX5wVKX4M&imgurl=http://belousenko.com/books/Beliy/bugaev.jpg&w=200&h=255&ei=YzYkULLqGsjpigK\_mYHQCg&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=836&vpy=376&dur=2249&hovh=204&hovw=160&tx=93&ty=163&sig=118242156809064459849&page=3&tbnh=145&tbnw=126&start=38&ndsp=21&ved=1t:429,r:10,s:38,i:225