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The Father-Son Drama: *Peterburg* As the Key to the
Works of Andrej Belyj

Russian cultural life abounds in distinguished father-son pairs. Some, like the writers Sergej and Ivan (as well as Konstantin) Aksakov, for example, were active in the same branch of art. Often their respective fields were different: music and painting in the case of Aleksandr and Valentin Serov, painting and literature in the example of Leonid and Boris Pasternak, literature and film as exemplified by Arsenij and Andrej Tarkovskij. In other instances one of the pair represented science and the other art. Vasilij Šervinskij was a prominent endocrinologist, while his son Sergej was a poet. The writer Aleksandr Gercen's son Petr became a well-known oncologist. Or sometimes both were scientists—the psychiatrist Ivan and the helicopter designer Igor' Sikorskij, or the geologist Vladimir and the historian Georgij Vernadskij.

The writer Andrej Belyj (Boris Bugaev) and his mathematician father Nikolaj Bugaev represented a constellation of their own. Both achieved European fame—Belyj, of course, eventually more than his father—but in their case it was a question of a fundamental conflict between art and science. Moreover, both Bugaevs—with their diametrically opposed world views and political convictions—had pretensions of being philosophers. Belyj's extreme narcissistic bond with his father created the conditions for the exceptional drama that underlies his entire oeuvre. He was fused with his father, and—like his hero in *Peterburg*—does not seem to have been able to draw a clear boundary between their identities.¹

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¹ See *Peterburg*, ed. L. Dolgopolov (Leningrad 1981), 109: "Nikolaj Apollonovič otca svoego kak by čuvstvenno znal, znal do mel'čajišich izžibov, do nevjnatnych

He wrote in order to come to terms with his inner duality. All of his works in various genres—prose, poetry, drama, philosophical essays, memoirs, and literary scholarship—essentially bear reference to one and the same person: an absent-minded mathematical genius with a profoundly original view of reality.

Nikolaj Losskij's history of Russian philosophy devotes a separate little chapter to Belyj's father and his Leibniz-influenced so called monadology. Bugaev was the man behind the "Moscow school" that elevated mathematics to a philosophy of life. The world and all of its components—each individual monad—is developing toward perfect and total harmony. "The foundation of life and of the monad's activity is ethical: the final goal of the monad's activity is to transform the world into an edifice of art."²

The essential opposition dividing the Bugaevs runs between the father's positivism and the son's mysticism, the father's extreme right-wing, nineteenth-century social views and the son's twentieth-century outlook, which was revolutionary both politically and artistically. Although there were points of contact between the absolutism of the one and the utopianism of the other, the gap between their world views was a yawning abyss. Because two mixed identities could not co-exist within Belyj's being, for his own psychic survival he had to force one of them out. He was surrounded by paternal projections, and he was capable of expressing endless relief each time a surrogate father departed this life.³

drožanij nevyrazimejšich čuvstv; bolee togo: on byl čuvstvenno absoljutno raven otcu; bolee vsego ego udivljalo to obstojatel'stvo, čto psihičeski on ne znal, gde končaetsja on i gde psihičeski načinaetsja v nem samom duch senatora."

² N. Losskij, *Istorija russskoj filosofii* (Moscow, 1991), 186–87. [Nikolay Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (London, 1952), 162.] See also I. Svetlikova, *The Moscow Pythagoreans. Mathematics, Mysticism, and Anti-Semitism in Russian Symbolism* (New York, 2013), especially Chapter 1: "Origins of the Moscow 'School': N. V. Bugaev," 14–49.

³ Cf. my discussion of this internal battle for psychic territory in "The Son's Liberation from the Father: On the Epilogue to *Peterburg*" in *Paraboly. Studies in Russian Modernist Literature and Culture in Honor of John E. Malmstad*, ed. N. Bogomolov et al. (Frankfurt am Main, 2011), 153–62.

In his memoirs, Belyj candidly describes his feelings of delight upon finding his father lifeless in bed one early morning in 1903.⁴ The schizoid element in his personality generated an impulse to rid himself of the person he loved most of all and whose love he incessantly craved. This dilemma supplied him with inexhaustible material for his art, but he also wrote to avoid breaking down. It is not for nothing that his characters are constantly on the verge of psychic collapse and yearn for the haven of the mental clinic.

Belyj had to build up an ideology and aesthetics of his own to shield himself from his father and assert his own integrity. First he was a Symbolist, with the visionary dreamer Vladimir Solov'ev as his alternative paternal figure and guiding star. Then he became an Anthroposophist, with his "Master" Rudolf Steiner in the same role. His Symbolist works early in the century were inspired by Solov'ev's philosophy and poetry. His subsequent "Anthroposophical" writings were similarly influenced by Steiner, in their later phase in a Soviet materialist context. One important factor, of course, was that Steiner claimed to be practicing science. Although Solov'ev and Steiner were connected with an immaterial dimension of life, however, Belyj's relationship to them as well needed to be dramatic--as long as they continued to physically exist, that is. Belyj's Symbolist writings were born in earnest at the very turn of the century out of the liberation that followed upon Solov'ev's highly symbolic death in the summer of 1900. Belyj had had a complicated meeting with him not long before. The Anthroposophical period, which was crowned by a 350-page monograph on Steiner and a number of Anthroposophical allusions incorporated into the memoirs published in the Soviet Union, drew new inspiration from the Master's death in 1925.⁵

The irreconcilable clash of views between father and son climaxed in the 1905 Revolution. Nikolaj Bugaev had by that time

⁴ Belyj, *Načalo veka*, ed. A. Lavrov (Moscow, 1990), 276.

⁵ On the special significance of Nikolaj Bugaev and the «Moscow school» of mathematics for Belyj's Steinerian survey *Istorija stanovlenija samosoznajuščeju duši*, see L. Silard, «'Novaja matematika' i 'filosofija matematiki' v Istorii stanovlenija samosoznajuščeju duši: aspekty aritnologii i kombinatoriki,» *Russian Literature* LXX: I/II (2011), 137–57.

been dead for two years already, but his world was still there. It is symptomatic that 1905 is the setting of Belyj's magnum opus *Peterburg*, which centers on a father-son conflict that is both incorporated into the overarching political drama and skillfully transposed into the echo chamber of the Russian literary tradition. There in the novel he had a unique opportunity to live out his psychic trauma and perhaps ultimately achieve a partial release that allowed him to move on to a retrospective phase in which, first in a literary and eventually more and more in a documentary form, he recreated his life. His father is obviously the hub around which all this autobiography revolves.

It has been said that Marcel Proust's prose—especially *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which began publication in 1913 at the same time as the tripartite *Peterburg*—is at bottom a gift of love to the author's mother. The description also seems to fit Belyj, for his work is ultimately addressed to his father and paternal substitutes as an attempt to appease them. Communication between Bugav Sr. and Jr. had for natural reasons been blocked, and through his art he was trying, posthumously as well, to talk to his father.

In 1902 Belyj debuted with his experimental prose poem *Simfonija (2-ja, dramatičeskaja)*. There, just after Solov'ev's death, a young Moscow seer thinks that in his glowing heavenly visions he beholds "the Woman Clothed with the Sun" from Revelation giving birth to the savior of the world, who is perhaps the seer himself. His lofty expectations—which hark back to Belyj's own mystical intoxication in the spring of 1901—have their origin in the prophecy that Dostoevskij communicated to Solov'ev to the effect that Russia was in a special union with this particular apocalyptic promise.⁶ Belyj concealed himself behind a pseudonym to protect his father, to whose reaction he was understandably hypersensitive. The elder Bugaev's only comment after he read the work was a gruff "Pročel-s."⁷ What more could he say? The Symphony was an affront to everything he stood for. His entire academic circle took exception to it, regarding both its fantasies about world trans-

⁶ "Tri reči v pamjat' Dostoevskogo" in V. Solov'ev, *Izbrannoe* (Moscow, 1990), 105–06.

⁷ Belyj, *Načalo veka*, 227

formation and its fragmented modernist style as scandalous and decadent.

When his father's heart condition worsened and he died within a year, Belyj obviously thought it had been caused by what he calls in his memoirs the "bomb" he had hurled into "the professors' Moscow."⁸ At the funeral he felt he was outright being accused of murder.⁹ In his mind's eye this experience seems to have been associated with the revolution that was soon to follow. This, then—a son's infernal conspiracy to murder his autocratic father afflicted with serious heart disease—is the starting point for the plot of *Peterburg*.

In the fall of 1901 Belyj had begun working on his third symphony, *Vozvrat*, which was even more firmly rooted in prose. Here for the first time he tackles the father issue. Evgenij Chandrikov is a student at Moscow University—just like Belyj at this time, there under pressure from his father, who attempted to steer him toward science. Chandrikov causes a scandal at his doctoral defense when he challenges the head of his institution, the crude positivist Docent Cench, and openly calls into question the laws of empiricism and causality by relativizing the world beyond chemical formulae and asserting both its immeasurable expanses and its catastrophic potential. He is forced to flee from Cench to the security of a diagnosis of mental illness at a clinic where the gentle and empathetic psychiatrist Orlov, a father figure of the opposite type, takes charge of him. After what appears to be a suicide he is returned to an eternal existence in the great cosmos, where he is a child playing on the seashore, protected by an old man who is Orlov—only in a different dimension. Thus the two irreconcilable paternal images meet.

Vozvrat was published in final form in 1905, just before the Revolution, where Belyj took an active part with (his father's) Browning revolver in his pocket as barricades were being built in front of the university. The year 1905 was important in another respect as well. It was then that Albert Einstein formulated his prin-

⁸ Belyj, *Na rubeže dvouch stoletij*, ed. A. Lavrov (Moscow, 1990), 348.

⁹ Belyj, *Načalo veka*, 276.

principle of relativity, thereby creating the basis for an entirely new view of reality that is anticipated, as it were, in Chandrikov's scientific provocation.

Shortly after his father's death Belyj wrote the short prose work "My ždem ego vozvraščenija," in which a "brother" and a "sister" faithfully await the return in a new guise of a venerated prophet who had suddenly disappeared. The vanished "old man" displays to an equal degree features of Vladimir Solov'ev and Nikolaj Bugaev. At about this time Belyj was paying excited visits to the graves of the two men, which were located near each other in the Novodevichy Cemetery. There he had ethereal visions in which he seemed to meet them. Already in his debut work there were satirical hallucinations—these as well were characteristic of Belyj—in which Solov'ev was glimpsed next to his grave and as an apparition announcing the advent of a new age as he hovered over the roofs of Moscow.

Where was Belyj's mother in all this? She was important, although her role can in no way be compared with his father's. Belyj's poetic adoration of Holy Sophia, the feminine Soul of the World whom he with such catastrophic consequences wanted to see incarnated in Ljubov' Blok, the wife and object of his fellow poet's cultic verses, had, of course, a great deal to do with his maternal syndrome. Petersburg was not only the Bloks' but also his mother's city, and it was there she dreamed of fleeing when marital problems climaxed in Belyj's childhood. As he confronted the events of 1905 Belyj had pinned his "Sophian" hope to the tsarist capital, and that is also where his dreams were shattered. All of this emerges in *Peterburg*. Already *Vozvrat* provides a hint as to the eventual trivialization of his expectations about the Russian manifestation of "Her," the Mother of the World, the Bearer of the Savior. Chandrikov has a wife by the name of Sof'ja who bores him.

From outside Russia after the collapse of the Revolution, Belyj wrote the story "Adam," which explicitly focuses on the theme of patricide. The markedly Christlike eponymous protagonist sets fire to the family estate, killing his father. As Adam describes the arson, it is a revolutionary act intended to liberate his soul and save Russia, for his expansive father threatens to completely suffo-

cate him. Remarkably, his father's swollen belly suggesting pregnancy also arouses associations with a child-bearer, so that in the absence of Adam's mother he assumes both parental roles. He claims he wants to fill the earth, at the same time that the son for his part wants to create new life through his revolutionary act. Some of the father's idiosyncrasies—the odd delight he takes in killing cockroaches to the accompaniment of loud curses, for example—he shares with Nikolaj Bugaev. Like Chandrikov, the patricide ends up in a mental hospital. A footnote states that his notes were written there.

The father as child-bearer, the son as child-bearer. In an article on Nietzsche written at almost the same time as "Adam," Belyj notes that the philosopher's dethroning of the "old God" seems to have borne a child. This is an allusion to *Also sprach Zarathustra*, in which the prophet speaks about the necessity of giving life to the new like a woman.¹⁰ Belyj wonders whether Christ, at the moment when he accepted the Father into his soul, might have transformed the latter into his own child.¹¹ This is a recurring thought of his: when the son puts an end to the father's power and appropriates his place, the father is transformed from a stifling tyrant into an almost helpless progeny that is at the same time a reflection of the son's rebirth. This experience may have to do with the fact that Belyj—as noted in his memoirs—witnessed an entire generation of fathers enter into a kind of second childhood toward the end of its life. His description of his father's final period suggests beginning senility.

Belyj's symphonies and stories and even poetry—which sometimes contained an overarching plot element embedded in a larger suite—can be viewed as preliminary work for the novels. The first of these was with *Serebrjanyj golub'* (1909), where in the middle of the Russian revolutionary process the Symbolist poet Petr Dar'jal'skij is ensnared by and perishes at the hands of the diabolical sect leader Kudejarov, a new Cenchr. Dar'jal'skij dreams of a re-

¹⁰ *Also sprach Zarathustra* in F. Nietzsche, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. VI: 1, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin, 1968), 200, 358.

¹¹ "Fridrich Niče" in Belyj, *Simvolizm kak miroponimanie*, ed. L. Sugaj (Moscow, 1994), 184.

born nation, a child Messiah whom the sect will bear forth in keeping with the Biblical prophecy about “the Woman Clothed with the Sun.”

The following year, 1910, Belyj began sketching out his tour de force *Peterburg*. Soon he was laying bare his wounds, boring deeper than ever before into his most intimate dimension—what his friend and confidant Ėmilij Metner called a ruthless “self-disrobement” and act of exposure.¹² The initial impetus came from Tolstoj’s death, which deeply shook the entire nation. As a child, Belyj had met Tolstoj in his own home, sat in his lap, and been invited to the writer’s Moscow residence. As usual, he reacted euphorically to the departure of this massive paternal figure from the physical sphere. In what he himself described as a downright apocalyptic experience,¹³ the structure of the novel assumed embryonic form and soon solidified during his encounter with the Sphinx at Giza outside Cairo. It was as though the Sphinx expressed his own dual being.

There are certain parallels between Belyj and Sigmund Freud. It was just then, in 1910, that Freud coined the notion “Oedipal complex.” Already in January he had begun treating his new patient from Odessa, Sergej Pankeev, and during the next few years—not without help from Dostoevskij and parallel with Belyj’s work on the novel—he would dig down to the bottom of the so called “Wolf Man’s” psyche and expose a father syndrome of an ambivalence much like Belyj’s in which love and hatred were fused together. In Freud’s view this stratification of conflicting emotions was an archaic vestige in the Russian soul, so it was only natural that he should choose a Russian for his principal “research object.”¹⁴

During 1911–1913 Belyj wrote *Peterburg* in 20 places in five different countries, farther and farther away from Russia. His encounter with Rudolf Steiner as he was in the middle of the novel

¹² Metner’s “diary letter” of 17–23 April 1914 to M. Šaginjan (RGB, f. 167, op. 1, kart. 25, ed. chr. 28).

¹³ Belyj, *Tragedija tvorčestva* (Moscow, 1911, Letchworth, Herts., 1971), 7–9.

¹⁴ Freud’s letter of 19 October 1920 to Stefan Zweig in *Briefe 1873–1939* (Frankfurt am Main, 1960), 332.

proved artistically decisive, for the Theosophist/Anthroposophist represented a new spiritualized paternal surrogate, a new Solov'ev, and to some extent a new—self-fostering—Tolstoj in his life. The tension with Steiner as he followed him on his international lecture tours gave constant nourishment to the Oedipal intrigue. It was while Belyj was listening to Steiner for the first time in the spring of 1912 that Nikolaj, with a half-conscious flick of his finger, turns on the timer of the bomb that is to kill his father. Set to explode twenty-four hours later, from then on the ticking mechanism came to reflect what Belyj called his "Steineriad," which climaxed in the fall of 1913 amid an Ibsenesque Norwegian mountain landscape. There in the intensely charged interaction between him and the lecturer in Kristiania and Bergen he felt he had undergone a messianic rebirth, and it is this experience that proved the finale of the novel with its paradoxically satirical material.

In 1905 the son, philosophy student Nikolaj Ableuchov, has secretly promised terrorists that he will blow up his father, Senator Apollon Ableuchov. He later forgets all about his promise, and when early in the novel the bomb thrower Dudkin approaches him with the oily contraption wrapped in a dirty bundle, he refuses to acknowledge his commitment. Ultimately he is forced to admit to himself that he is a potential patricide. As the bomb nervously ticks away in the yellow house (Russian for "madhouse") he shares with his father since his mother ran off, he savors the bloody details of the murder. Ableuchov Sr. is thoroughly contradictory—at once both autocratic and eccentric. As has often been noted, on the surface he resembles Konstantin Pobedonoscev, the reactionary Ober-Prokurator who plunged Russia into darkness during Belyj's childhood and until the 1905 Revolution, when he was finally forced from office. On a deeper level, however, Apollon Ableuchov possesses not a few of Nikolaj Bugaev's many idiosyncrasies. He is a dogmatic, mathematically linear positivist who aspires to freeze the entire nation, yet in his conversations with his son he comes across as clumsily yearning for contact. To the extent that the two do converse, they consistently misinterpret each other. Where one looks to Comte for his model, the other admires Kant. In Russian the philosophers' names differ by a single vowel, and

they miss even that. Thus Belyj's Oedipal conflict is shown in a carnival mirror.¹⁵

The plot climaxes when the bomb explodes one morning in the yellow house. The increasingly shrunken and decrepit father escapes injury and flees into the toilet. Previously Nikolaj has had the remarkable sensation that the bomb is ticking in his own swelling stomach. We are told that he—like all the Ableuchovs—suffers from flatulence. What the text in various ways also suggests is that he is pregnant and that soon, racked by convulsions, he will give birth to a child, namely the father-oppressor transformed into his little son. Thus the detonation of the bomb has connotations of both death and birth. Dressed in his nightgown, Nikolaj falls to his knees outside the toilet door and declares his love to his father. This, of course, is half of the truth in the drama. Immediately before this passage he is compared to a wet nurse desperately trying to save a little toddler entrusted to her care who has wandered out into the busy roadway. After all this Nikolaj falls ill with nervous fever and flees both city and country and even European civilization. Like Belyj before him, he travels to Egypt, where he is seen sitting for hours on end contemplating the Sphinx. It is not until his father dies that he can return to Russia, for he has realized that they cannot exist in the same physical space. Now, in the final section of the epilogue, he seems to have matured into a bearded man with a new dignity. He has Christlike features. Perhaps he has to some little extent managed to establish a personal free zone.

The concluding chapter in the 350-page memoir about Rudolf Steiner that Belyj wrote just under fifteen years later devotes its more than forty pages to an attempt to comprehend his Norwegian psychodrama with his teacher of "spiritual science."¹⁶ It is quite evident from this account that it was this episode that provided the foundation of the climax of the novel. Belyj had the

¹⁵ On Nikolaj Bugaev's significance for *Peterburg* cf. also «The Pythagoreanism of the Moscow 'School'» in Svetlikova, *The Moscow Pythagoreans*, 134–60.

¹⁶ *Vospominanija o Štejneru* in Belyj, *Rudol'f Štejner i Gete v mirovozzrenii sovremnosti. Vospominanija o Štejneru*, ed. I. Lagutina (Moscow, 2000), 493–532.

sense of becoming one with Steiner, as though he had outmaneuvered him and assumed the “Master’s” place. He underwent a guilt-ridden rebirth as a Russian Messiah figure, with Steiner reduced to a vulnerable little nursling. He writes that “narcissists,” sexually perverted persons, would doubtless be inclined to misinterpret such experiences.¹⁷ Elsewhere he admits that the entire overwrought drama belied his sexual identity: he found himself transformed into a pregnant woman who was delivered of a child — Steiner, the reader is given to understand, had in some way impregnated him.¹⁸ These, he claimed, were his “most significant experiences,” a life-determining moment of initiation that he immediately lowered to slapstick and bathroom farce in the novel.¹⁹ Thus the highest interacts dialectically with the lowest. Perhaps the parodic transformations into prose were the unavoidable complement of the demanding tension in the initiatory rite; perhaps in light of this background the great novel about the Revolution was bound to end in anal humor.²⁰

Before the explosion Belyj in fact lets a real patricide take place in the novel. The bomb thrower Dudkin is fatherless. He has replaced his non-existent father with Nikolaj Lippančenko, the destructive head of the terrorist movement and kin to Cench and Kudejarov, who bears the same first name as Belyj’s father (and the hero of the novel). Dudkin gradually becomes aware of the nihilistic purport of Lippančenko’s activity. He chooses to rebel against the leader, who thus far has controlled him almost hypnotically. At the end of the penultimate chapter he commits his own patricide, some details of which mimic Nikolaj Ableuchov’s Oedipal fantasies. And what is Lippančenko busy doing during his last mo-

¹⁷ Ibid., 518

¹⁸ Belyj, untitled text fragment in A. Lavrov, “Rukopisnyj archiv Andreja Belogo v Puškinskom Dome,” *Ežegodnik Rukopisnogo Otdela Puškinskogo Doma na 1978 god* (Leningrad, 1980), 59.

¹⁹ See especially Belyj’s letter (with illustrations) of 1–3 March 1927 in Belyj / Ivanov-Razumnik, *Perepiska*, ed. A. Lavrov and Dž. Malmstad (St. Petersburg, 1998), 501.

²⁰ See my articles “Apophysis in *Peterburg*” and “The Mystery of Birth in *Peterburg*” in *Twelve Essays on Andrej Belyj’s Peterburg* (Gothenburg, 2009), 23–31, 139–49.

ment of life? Like Adam's father and Belyj's father before him, killing cockroaches. What happens to Dudkin? He loses his mind. He thinks that he is Peter the Great as the morning after the bloody night he is found "beside himself," sitting astride his victim, his mustache pointing phallically upward and his arm extended in megalomaniac identification with the Bronze Horseman who rules over the spectral city atop his plinth on Senate Square.

In this passage Belyj may have been living out a homosexual rape fantasy. Like him at his father's death, the madman riding his "father" is in a state of euphoria. Belyj's psyche may have harbored impulses to simultaneously murder and rape the paternal authority he embraced with such immeasurable love. The same words in the ecstatic horseman scene are used in the memoirs to describe his rapturous encounter with his father's corpse: people who entered the bedroom in "in the morning" found the whole thing "strange."²¹

After finishing *Peterburg* Belyj was exhausted and ashamed. Steiner seemed inaccessible: his relationship with the "Master" did not recover until the latter's death in 1925, when, as Belyj himself put it, he understood him for the first time "*i — navsegda*."²² The brilliant novel, however, was a fait accompli.

It must be noted that Belyj often referred to *Peterburg* as his "child."²³ He appears to have perceived a mystical connection between the peculiar sensations during meditation of bodily convulsions that he used in the novel, the mysterious labor pains he felt in Norway, and the uninhibited joy of writing—in brief, his inner "bomb," the imaginary baby, and the book that was taking shape. In fact, it sometimes seems as though he was inclined to regard his novel of patricide as his child with Steiner, although the latter was unable to understand it or even become acquainted with the text.

From the new Steiner colony in Dornach, which was quite obviously suffocating him, in 1915 Belyj fled to various havens around Switzerland and there began his autobiographical series of

²¹ Belyj, *Peterburg*, 387, *Načalo veka*, 276.

²² *Ibid.*, 507.

²³ See, for example, Belyj's letter of 26 December 1912 to Ivanov-Razumnik in *Peterburg*, 502.

novels. In the first of these, *Kotik Letaev*, he portrayed what had occurred between the ages of three and five — imagined memories of his birth, followed by his feverish attainment of consciousness as he remembered it, then the family drama, in which his mother feared he might develop prematurely when he prowled about his father's study. He continued with *Kreščenyj kitaec*, in which the conflict at home becomes even more intense and the image of his father acquires increasingly sharper contours during the subsequent years. Simultaneously with the publication of *Kotik Letaev* in 1917 he had produced the story "Tog," set in the period following the February Revolution, which points forward in time. The central character is the yogi Korobkin, who is an amalgamation of features drawn from both Bugaevs (as well as from the eccentric philosopher Nikolaj Fedorov). This suggests that something had happened, that after *Peterburg* Belyj had begun in some way to constructively internalize his father.

During the 1920s and the early 1930s he wrote the suite of novels *Moskva/Maski*, which in certain respects varies the themes of *Peterburg* but sets the action further back in time to just before the 1917 Revolution. Here the rebellious son's role has shrunk, while the father — Professor of Mathematics Korobkin, integrates features of Bugaev Sr. and Jr., much like his yogi predecessor. Belyj wrote his extensive memoir trilogy at about the same time. His father is the central figure in the first part, where a detailed sixty-page portrait is followed by 140 pages in which he represents the entire generation of professors. Here it is clearer than ever that something has changed. Belyj transforms the reactionary into a revolutionary and obstinate rebel against the petty bourgeois mentality and narrow-minded humdrum, or "byt," of the age. His father's rock-hard conservatism is softened. His extensive portrayal emphasizes his eccentric whims and partial aloofness—features closely related to Belyj's own personality.

Belyj does try to deal with the enormous role his father played in his life, but he is never able to penetrate the schizoid core of his own being. He summarizes: "strannaja svjaz' suščestvuet mež nami, a raznoglasija vse uglublajutsja; no, čem stanovilisja glubže oni, tem strannee drug k drugu, skvoz' nich my vlečemsja, i vper-

jajas' drug v druga, kak by bormoča: Ja ponjat' tebja choču,/Temnyj tvoj jazyk uču" — the last lines here borrowed from Puškin's "Stichi, sočinennye noč'ju vo vremja bessonnicy."²⁴

The father must remain a riddle. He could be rugged and awkward and yet at the same time, Belyj stresses, the most sensitive person he had ever known. His implacable demand for meticulous precision in both science and art, his elevation of mathematical harmony to a world view, his alienation from anything that could not be reduced to an equation—all this was difficult to endure. Still, Belyj is forced to admit: "Ego vlijanie ogromno: v soglasijach, v nesoglasijach, v rezkich mirovozzritel'nyh schvatkach i v žeste taimoj, gorjačej ljubvi on pronizyval menja dejstvenno; sovpaden'e vo vzgljadach i daže polemika s nim opredeljali krug moich interesov; s nim ja sčitalsja — v detstve, otročestve, junosti, zrelym mužem."²⁵

Seldom has any one person been able to set such a stamp on a significant body of literature. Bely's life was a drama. The Siamese twin with whom he clashed was at the same time his opposite. The struggle resulted in great art, one of the most essential works of twentieth-century Russian literature—a formidable 500-page novel that rises to the modern equivalent of *Brat'ja Karamazovy*.

Translated by Charles Rougle

²⁴ Belyj, *Na rubeže dvuch stoletij*, 51.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.