

**Pathological Patterns in Belyj's Novels:
'Ableuxovy-Letaevy-Korobkiny' Revisited
Abstract by Olga Muller Cooke**

Shortly after reading Belyj's novel, *Moscow*, in 1926, Vladislav Xodasevič concluded that every novel written by Belyj represented a variation on one pervasive theme, namely parricide. Indeed, Xodasevič was the first to discern the source of the conflict between fathers and sons in Belyj's own life. Belyj's fictional fathers, Ableuxov of *Petersburg*, Letaev of both *Kotik Letaev* and *The Christened Chinaman* and Korobkin of *Moscow* have begotten sons who are all driven by lust. Lust, according to Xodasevič, is the motive force that leads the progeny, Nikolaj Apollonovič, Kotik Letaev and Mitja Korobkin, to their respective "crimes."

Closer inspection of Belyj's novels, however, reveals a slightly altered paradigm in the relationship between geneology and criminality. Parricide is thematically and structurally sustained only in *Petersburg*. In Belyj's most confessional, and thus autobiographical, novels, *Kotik Letaev* and *The Christened Chinaman*, the child-narrator is a casualty in a tug-of-war battle between a brilliant mathematician-father and a frivolous mother. Belyj unabashedly incorporated scenes from his own childhood in this middle period of creativity and fashioned a narrative world in which the primal scene constitutes the child's "crime," particularly in *The Christened Chinaman*. Rather than focus on the father figure, Kotik Letaev dwells in length on the threatening mother figure.

In *Moscow*, although the theme of parricide is hinted at, albeit faintly, it is father-daughter incest

that informs the novel. Thus once again Xodasevič failed to see yet another manifestation of family pathology and the manifold ways in which Belyj depicted violations of societal taboos. Nevertheless, Xodasevič rightfully found the common denominator of Belyj's novels in connections between blood ties and crime. Indeed, his rich evaluation of repetitive patterns in Belyj's novels provides the groundwork for further study.

Presented on February 21, 1987 at the University of California-Davis Symposium on Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis. This article will be part of a forthcoming collection, *Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Daniel Rancour-Laferrrière (Amsterdam: John Benjamins).

Andrej Belyj: A Bibliography 1985-1986

Compiled by Julian Graffy

(N.B. Some materials from before 1985 have only recently come to my notice and are included here.

Some materials from 1985 were included in last year's bibliography.)

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II. Translations

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News from the Front

Prof. Boris Christa of the University of Queensland informs us that he is presently doing research on Belyj's "Rhythmists' Circle."

Prof. Paul Mitchell of Miami University offers us the following variation of the Rolaids "How do you spell relief?" commercial:

Question: "Anna Petrovna (Ableuxova), how do you spell relief?"

Answer: "I spell relief R-O-U-L-A-D-E-S."

From Washington University Prof. Milica Banjanin writes about presenting a paper: "From Fact to Fiction: the Role of the Red Domino in Andrei Bely's *Peterburg*" at the 24th annual Central Slavic Conference at Oklahoma State University, October 18-19, 1985. The longer version of this paper was recently published by *Russian Language Journal*.

Prof. John Kopper of Dartmouth College is working on a book, based on his dissertation, on the structural similarities between family and metaphor in the works of Kafka, Nabokov and Belyj. The book will contain chapters on both *Peterburg* and *Kotik Letaeu*, and cast glances at *Kreščenyj kitac*.

From Middlebury College Prof. Thomas R. Beyer, Jr. notes that he recently completed four months of research at the University of Heidelberg on Andrej Belyj and his Berlin period (1921-1923). He has edited and introduced the collected poems of Vera Osipovna Lourie (Lur'e), who knew and at one time loved Belyj in Berlin. Another essay on the Berlin House of the Arts and Writers' Club, in both of which Belyj played a central role, will also be forthcoming from the Arno Spitz Berlin Verlag this spring. While in Germany Prof. Beyer was asked by Lev Kopelev to contribute an article on Belyj and the Germans for a forthcoming collection about Russian poetic expressions and impressions of Germany.

Prof. Helen Muchnic wrote an article on Belyj for Scribner's literary encyclopedia, *European Writers: the Twentieth Century*, which is due to appear soon.

From the University of California at Berkeley Prof. Robert Hughes reminds us of his forthcoming publication of Xodasevič's parody of Belyj's symphonies, with a lengthy article on their relationship. Look for it in the Paris *Vestnik*.

Prof. Olga Cooke of Texas A&M University has received a Summer Research Grant from Texas A&M to pursue her research on a book entitled, *The Grotesque in Andrej Bely's Novels*. She is also

preparing an article on Osip Mandelstam's poem-cycle devoted to Belyj.

Prof. John Malmstad of Harvard University is presently conducting research in the Soviet Union for his biography of Belyj. The collection, *Andrei Bely: Spirit of Symbolism*, of which he is the editor, is now scheduled for publication late in the spring of 1987.

Several newsy items from Maria Carlson, who has been our principal "ambassador," while residing in Moscow for over six years and mediating with all the Soviet "Belovedy." While we are sad to report that Dr. Carlson has left USSR, let us happily add that she will be on the Slavic faculty of the University of Kansas as of August 1987. As one of her colleagues reported upon hearing that she is leaving Moscow, "I don't know what we will do about keeping in touch with the developments there when she is gone." Here are the most recent news from Dr. Carlson: 1) A reliable source in Moscow says that a new "postanovka" of *Peterburg* has been ordered by one of the Moscow theatres and is now in the writing process 2) The long-awaited Lesnevskij edition of Belyj's essays will be out in 1987, A. Belyj, *Problemy tvorčestva. Stat'i, vospominanija, publikacii. Sbornik* (Moscow: Sov. pisatel', 1987). 3) A volume of *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* devoted to Belyj is slated for the future.

Prof. Amy Mandelker, presently of Hunter College and soon to join CUNY, informs us about her book in progress on Russian Modernist poetic theory, which will contain a chapter on Bely: "I am working on a larger study of Russian modernist theories of poetic language from 1880-1932, with special reference to the problem of sound symbolism (slovesnaja instrumentovka) and musicality or synaesthesia in the arts. In my work, I integrate the literary and linguistic theories of the Russian modernist literary movements (Symbolism, post-Symbolism, Futurism and Formalism) with a survey of contemporaneous and subsequent scholarly and experimental research into sound symbolism as a linguistic and psychological phenomenon. In the chapter on Belyj, I hope to provide a comprehensive summary and assessment of his thought on this topic, and to demonstrate the profound importance of his seminal contribution to this field of investigation."

From Prof. Roger Keys of the University of St. Andrews comes news that Grove Press will issue the translation of *The Dramatic Symphony. The Forms of Art* sometime in the spring. Two of his reviews (on Dagnar Burkhardt's *Schwarze Kuben - roter Domino...* and Steven Cassedy's *Selected Essays of Andrey Bely*) appeared in *Scottish Slavic Review*, No. 7 (Autumn 1986), 129-131.

Victor B. Fedjuschin writes from West Germany about his two forthcoming books, which include interesting Belyj materials, one a collection entitled *Andrej Belyj*

— ein Symbolist als *Anthroposoph* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987); the other, *Theosophie, Anthroposophie und die Russen. Eine geistige Wanderschaft* (Dornach: Philosophisch-anthroposophischer Verlag, 1987).

Nadya Peterson (1956 Escarpa Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90041) has several copies of her husband's recently published volume, *The Russian Symbolists: An Anthology of Critical and Theoretical Writings*, ed. Ronald E. Peterson (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), which she is offering at the reduced rate of \$20 each. Here is a brief selection from a review of this anthology: "An excellent addition to the body of works on Russian literature, which offers in one volume and, for the most part, in English translation for the first time a collection—chronologically arranged—of the best-known and most representative essays by Russian Symbolists on Symbolism." (*Choice*, January 1987).

Berkeley Slavic Specialties (P.O. Box 4605, Berkeley, CA 94704) is providing for Belyj Society members a 20% discount on the purchase of Belyj's *Gibel' Senatora (Peterburg)*. *Istoricheskaia drama*, ed. John Malmstad, Berkeley, 1986.