

On the Crossroads of Science, Philosophy, and Literature: Andrey Bely's *Petersburg*

Elizabeth Kosakowska

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ABSTRACT

ON THE CROSSROADS OF SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE: ANDREY

BELY'S *PETERSBURG*

Elizabeth Irene Kosakowska

The radical developments in science at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries greatly influenced the general perception of the universe, contemporary discussion of the cultural crisis, and Modernist literature in Russia and the West. My work examines the importance of those groundbreaking scientific discoveries to Andrey Bely's Modernist novel, *Petersburg*, which reflects both his thorough knowledge of science and his desire to find a solution to the cultural crisis of his era. I discuss his novel in the view of his geometrical model of universal and human evolution, which he described in two lesser known essays written in 1912: "The Line, the Circle, the Spiral—of Symbolism" and "Circular Movement." Taking these essays as my point of departure, I examine *Petersburg's* scientific imagery, namely thermodynamics, psychology, and astronomy, in order to demonstrate the scientific basis of Bely's vision of the universe and his presentation of it in his novel. I also give special consideration to the schools of thought that shaped Bely's view of universal and human development. My analysis of Bely's interest in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, Solovyov, Nietzsche, and Steiner suggests that Bely's creative fusion of elements of those philosophical ideas led to the formulation of his own unique vision of the universe. I view ambiguity and uncertainty as the main feature of this vision and argue that they characterize the Modernist, dynamic view of the universe. By analyzing Bely's major novel from a scientific point of view, which has been heretofore neglected by scholars, I hope to uncover a new layer of meaning in

Petersburg. I believe that this approach will prove fruitful as a means of illuminating not only Bely's *Petersburg*, but also all of his artistic oeuvre.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my husband, Sanjive Vaidya. My project would have never been completed without his tremendous help and support.

Introduction

Andrey Bely's most accomplished work, *Petersburg*, can be viewed from many perspectives, but I believe that we can achieve the fullest understanding of this novel by regarding it as symptomatic of its epoch. In my dissertation I propose to examine *Petersburg* as a uniquely revealing window into the era which was scientifically, artistically, and culturally unprecedented.

Scientific discoveries at the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries dramatically transformed our perception of reality. Modern physics replaced the stable, static, and predictable Newtonian universe with a fragmented, relativistic, and dynamic cosmos. This led to a fundamental change in humankind's view of reality, which in turn transformed all of Western culture, including both visual arts and literature. Writers began to experiment with narrative space and time in order to express their altered perception of reality. The Western Modernist novel, liberated from the limits of time and space, became a theater of fantasy, a landscape of the unconscious, where the fantastic mingled with the real, and external space turned into a projection of internal, psychological processes. Russian writers were similarly affected by scientific and philosophical changes, but developed quite distinctly from their Western counterparts, due to the Russian political situation, the mingling of the native Russian tradition with Western ideas, and the interpretation of scientific discoveries by Russian scientists.

In order to comprehend Russian Modernism one needs to examine the scientific and philosophical developments that so transformed both the general worldview and artistic sensibilities. In the nineteenth century, the mathematical and physical sciences remained firmly entrenched in Euclidean geometry and Newtonian laws. Euclidean geometry was based on

Euclid's five postulates, which determined that space was three-dimensional, homogeneous, and isotropic. The Newtonian laws rooted in this system described space, motion, and time as absolute and unchangeable categories. Consequently, physical reality was perceived to be an exact, continuous, and static entity. Absolute space contained solid and opaque objects, while absolute time was universal for all regardless of their position in the universe.¹ These axioms, based on experimental data gathered from observable, physical reality, remained unquestioned and uncontested for centuries.

One of the most significant elements of the scientific revolution at the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries lay in its movement away from the experimental method (which had governed pre-Einsteinian science) and towards theoretical inquiry. This switch in the direction of scientific thought — from observation to theoretical induction — revealed an entirely new picture of the universe: no longer certain, stable, and continuous, it became relative, fragmented, and incessantly changing.

Geometry was the first field to question absolutism in the physical sciences, with a theoretical argument disproving the singularity of Euclidean geometry. Three mathematicians, Nikolay Ivanovich Lobachevsky, Johann Bolyai, and Friedrich Bernhard Riemann, independently disproved the Euclidean Fifth or Parallel Postulate.² The first proof of the existence of diverse geometries and spaces arrived with the work of the Russian mathematician Nikolay Lobachevsky, who made his discovery independently of Western science. In “On the Principles of Geometry” (“О началах геометрии”; 1829), Lobachevsky disproved Euclid's Fifth

¹ For a description of the state of science at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

² For an in-depth discussion of the non-Euclidean geometries of Riemann, Lobachevsky, and Bolyai, see Max Jammer, *Concepts of Space: The History of Theories of Space in Physics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 127-215.

or Parallel Postulate; he thus devised a geometrical system of a doubly curved space and created a non-Euclidean geometry of space. A few years later, in 1832, a Hungarian scientist, Johann Bolyai, discovered a non-Euclidean, curved space similar to Lobachevsky's. While Lobachevsky's and Bolay's geometries described open spaces, Bernhard Riemman described a non-Euclidean, closed, spherical space in 1854.

While these three scientists did not negate the validity of Euclidean geometry, they constructed equally universal and rigorous geometrical systems, thereby proving that Euclidean geometry was only one of many possible systems, and described only one possible type of space. Euclidean axioms ceased to be perceived as absolute descriptions of physical reality. The existence of conflicting geometrical truths meant that geometry was true only in relation to an arbitrary system of postulates, and that no method existed for deciding which of the several systems was true. Moreover, non-Euclidean geometries suggested that there is nothing in space itself that justifies any definite metrics or geometry. Space is amorphous and its properties depend on the metric system we choose to apply. Geometry's self-evident nature, hitherto credited to Euclidean axioms, turned out to be illusory. Once the fundamentals of the physical sciences were proven arbitrary, this undermined all scientific absolutes, including Newtonian definitive space, motion, and time. The existence of several geometric systems in place of a single geometry destroyed the governing idea of one physical space and opened the door to speculation about a variety of spaces with different physical properties.

The next discovery (still experimental in nature) that undermined the stability and continuity of the universe came from thermodynamics. After Robert Mayer formulated an optimistic First Law of Thermodynamics, stating that "energy can be neither created nor destroyed" (*Remarks on the Forces of Inorganic Nature*, 1842), William Thomson (later Lord

Kelvin) devised the Second Law of Thermodynamics (1851), proclaiming a “universal tendency in nature to the dissipation of mechanical energy.”³ He argued that all energy will eventually be transformed into the heat of uniform temperature and all natural processes will cease. In other words, something is always lost when heat is used to produce mechanical work; Rudolph Clausius labeled this principle “entropy” in 1865.⁴ This discovery undermined the belief in continuous life on Earth, but such hope was restored by Herbert Spencer in his *First Principles* (1867). Although Spencer was mainly a natural scientist, he was also well versed in mathematics; by combining the First Law of Thermodynamics with biological evolution, he arrived at the theory of consecutive cycles of condensation and the idea that energy could dissipate indefinitely without any loss. There would then be a sequence of “alternate areas of Evolution and Dissolution,”⁵ always the same in principle, but never the same in concrete result. This idea introduced the multiplicity of modes of being, which indirectly undermines scientific absolutism and prepares the ground for understanding the universe as a multitude of diverse physical properties.

Since all the new discoveries emerged as a result of theoretical speculation rather than experimental observation, theory acquired a more prominent role in scientific inquiry. Ernst Mach, although still a proponent of experimentation, was the forerunner of the new philosophy of science. In *The Science of Mechanics* (1883), Mach became the first scientist to criticize the validity of the famous Newtonian bucket experiment as a proof of the existence of absolute

³ William Thomson, “On a Universal Tendency in Nature to the Dissipation of Mechanical Energy,” *Philosophical Magazine* 4 (1852): 304; cited in Stephen Brush, “Thermodynamics and History,” *Graduate Journal* (University of Texas) 7, no. 1 (1967): 494.

⁴ Brush, “Thermodynamics and History,” 479.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 515.

space, motion, and time.⁶ Mach came up with his own theories that allowed several different modes of experiencing time and space.⁷ While rooted in psychology rather than physical science, his differentiation of established axioms eventually led to the rigorously scientific disproof of absolutes in the physical world. Even more significantly, Mach's understanding of science's goals called positivistic methodology into question. He viewed knowledge of the world in terms of sensations and their interconnectivity.⁸ Changes in physical phenomena thus depend on changes in the relationships between them, and scientific inquiry consists of observing such changing connections. This constituted a momentous, if still not definitive, transformation of scientific methodology. In Mach's view no sensation could be entirely absolute and independent of others. His method pointed away from observation and towards theoretical speculation, and initiated the revolutionary idea of nature as relative, not absolute.

Non-Euclidean geometries, Mach's scientific philosophy, and the final acceptance of atomism after Lord Rutherford's construction of a planetary model of the atom in 1911 ultimately led to Albert Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (1905) and General Theory of Relativity (1916). These theories put a definite end to our perception of reality as stable and absolute, and determined that abstract science is the source of scientific epistemology. The chief merit of Einstein's theories lay in his recognition that when we study our universe, we are part of this system and consequently subject to illusions and contradictions produced by this system — relative motion and gravity. The Newtonian observer becomes an Einsteinian active participant.

⁶ For Mach's criticism of the Newtonian bucket experiment, see John T. Blackmore, *Ernst Mach: His Work, Life, and Influence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 84-100.

⁷ Blackmore, *Ernst Mach*, 47-67.

⁸ Mach's definition of sensation is somewhat vague. For an explanation of this term in Mach's philosophy see *ibid.*, 331.

Einstein also proved the multiplicity of space and time and the theoretical possibility of entering various realities created by that multiplicity. The relativity and changeability of our system became even more apparent with Einstein's discovery that matter is actually energy at rest. Hence what we perceive as solid and unchangeable matter is really composed of various states of energy that can be changed under specific conditions.⁹ These discoveries, combined with Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen's 1895 discovery of X-rays, completely erased the centuries-long perception of the universe: what was stable became changeable, what appeared absolute was now relative, static became dynamic, and opaque became transparent.

The development of quantum physics presented a further challenge to established philosophical views of the nature of the universe.¹⁰ When Max Planck proved that energy exchange occurs not continuously but in discrete chunks, the continuous nature of the universe became less certain. Niels Bohr's model of the atom replaced Rutherford's, which had been based on classical mechanics. According to Bohr, classical mechanics could not explain the atom's stability; he maintained that electrons, upon changing their energetic state, are "free to choose" the position they will occupy within the atomic structure. Hence we cannot establish with certainty an electron's position; it can only be determined by the laws of probability. Yet the idea of probability as a governing law undermines causality, the foundation for understanding the universe. Further attempts at defining the trajectory of the electrons engendered even more radical conclusions. In "Research on the Theory of Quanta" (1924), Louis de Broglie argued that the electron has characteristics of both the wave and the particle. Since all matter is built of

⁹ For a very accessible account of Einstein's theories, see Nigel Calder, *Einstein's Universe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982).

¹⁰ For a discussion of the development of atomism up to quantum physics see Bernard Pullman, *The Atom in the History of Human Thought*, trans. Axel Reisinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

atoms, which are composed of electrons, all material things must logically possess the same dual nature.

The unprecedented number of simultaneous scientific discoveries created an urgent need for a new philosophy that could account for a new understanding of physical reality, grapple with the philosophical tradition, especially Kant's legacy, and create a revised philosophy of science. Virtually all of these new scientific discoveries were achieved in the abstract, theoretical realm. One of the most important aspects of the new philosophy of science was its recognition of mathematics as a source of epistemological novelty and not simply a tool for experimentation. In Gaston Bachelard's words, a "new scientific mind"¹¹ began to emerge, based on the belief that mathematical inventions and sophisticated scientific instruments collaborate to reveal realities hitherto unknown and unanticipated by traditional philosophy. In this new philosophy of science, immediate reality becomes a pretext for scientific thought rather than the object of knowledge. Actual knowledge is to be found in the mathematical realm, which reveals the relations hidden behind what we observe. It is thus the inductive power of mathematics that permits the discovery of a "set of permanencies," a noumenal hidden behind the phenomenal world.

Despite the abundance of different names and internal disputes, most of the new philosophical schools were neo-Kantian; they defined themselves as idealistic and willingly adopted Kantian methodology. However, they challenged Kant's a priori categories, his "thing in itself," undetectable by human sensation and unknowable to human reason. The two main neo-Kantian schools of thought were associated with academic centers in Marburg and Baden. The former, led by Herman Cohen and including Paul Natorp and Ernst Cassirer, emphasized

¹¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The New Scientific Spirit*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984).

epistemology and logic, while the latter, which included Wilhelm Wildenband, Heinrich Rikert, and Ernst Troeltsch, concentrated on issues of culture and value.¹² Although different in focus, they both attempted to create a rigorous scientific system that would account for the recent, broadening knowledge of the universe.

The new philosophy arose in response to contemporary scientific discoveries, but it also reflected the cultural crisis of the fin de siècle throughout Europe. By 1900, the optimism of the older generation rooted in materialistic positivism was being replaced by the pessimism and disenchantment of the younger generation, whose members criticized the impact of industrialization, and viewed liberalism as a rigid and even repressive form of government. Nineteenth-century ideas came under attack, such as utilitarianism, economic individualism, and the survival of the fittest. All over the continent, thinkers denounced contemporary culture for having a deadening influence upon the individual's creative life. Artists and thinkers as diverse as Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, Charles Baudelaire and Gustave Flaubert, Henrik Ibsen, and Berthold Brecht, asserted that the era's materialism and self-interest threatened individual spirituality and morality. Max Weber, in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), showed how economic individualism, which had once performed a positive role, had degenerated into a stifling system of rationalism and statism. In his words, those caught within this system were "specialists without spirit and sensualists without heart," dominated by mechanical habit and routine, unable to escape the "iron cage" of their own making.¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas offered the most direct critique of society: he denounced Christian values and

¹² For an in-depth analysis of neo-Kantian movements, see Klaus Christian Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner, 1958), 181-82.

the Christian God, and proposed a new Godless society governed by the moral law of the *Übermensch*. Although Nietzsche's statements shocked many people, his ideas also inspired thinkers of the time to grapple with the cultural crisis. At the center of the era's cultural polemics stood the division between man's material and spiritual needs, and the problematic dominance of the former.¹⁴

All these divergent phenomena — the new science, neo-Kantian philosophy, and the anti-positivist cultural crisis — helped foment an artistic revolution during this era. Art became a membrane that reflected both scientific discoveries and the cultural crisis, and transformed them with its own particular vibrations through the landscape of artistic creation. In Western literature, the novel turned away from realism and towards new narrative forms reflecting the new perception of the universe as dynamic and uncertain. As José Ortega y Gasset noted, the “novel today is an art of figure rather than adventure. Art does not *report* the world, but *creates* it.”¹⁵ In particular, artists tackled the organization of space. Joseph Frank argues that the Modernist novel rejects traditional temporal structure and moves towards spatial forms: instead of sequential unfolding, the narrative creates extra-temporal associations and juxtapositions.¹⁶ Joyce's *Ulysses*, for instance, presents a multitude of references and cross-references regardless of time sequence, and consequently portrays all levels of Dublin and its inhabitants simultaneously. Instead of a single narrative space, Joyce depicts a coexisting multitude of spaces, which, when viewed all together, create a complete picture of actuality. Proust's

¹⁴ For a discussion of the fin-de-siècle cultural crisis, see James A. Winder, *European Culture Since 1848: From Modern to Postmodernism and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 71-93.

¹⁵ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings* (New York: Scribner, 1956), 83.

¹⁶ Joseph Frank, “Spatial Form,” in *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 58.

Remembrance of Things Past, although taking time as its main subject, similarly spatializes its narration in order to present the wholeness of reality, which contains diverse, non-sequential spaces. The narrative thus attempts to depict the transcendental moments that reveal the essences of things, including their past. While the novelistic methods of Modernists vary, their goal remains the same: to portray a dynamic universe where time and space exist in multiplicity and interact with each other. This evokes not only the scientific reality, but also the speed, confusion, and psychological loss of the individual, as experienced in modern society.

The “two faces of things” is very pronounced in the works of Robert Musil, who “attempted to find a literary analogue to Ernst Mach’s relativism.”¹⁷ His novel *Young Torless* depicts the hero’s confused realization of the limits of rationalism. All events, people, and places appear to Torless as doubles, sometimes reflecting the orderliness of the everyday, while at other times revealing the inexplicable and horrifying essence lying behind apparent normalcy. Torless resigns himself to this dual — rational and irrational — nature of physical reality and the human mind, but cannot achieve inner peace or even acceptance. Musil’s later work, *The Man Without Qualities*, continues to explore the lack of faith in reality as a stable value-system. Musil states his skepticism at the beginning of the novel, in an ironic exposition that questions the possibility of faith in the contemporary world:

But if there is such a thing as sense of reality ... then there must be something that one can call a sense of possibility ... the sense of possibility might be defined outright as the capacity to think how everything “just as easily” can be ... Such possibilarians live, it is said, within the finer web, a web of haze, imaginings, fantasy and the subjunctive mood ... When one wants to praise these poor fools, one sometimes calls them idealists. But obviously all this only covers the weak variety, those who either cannot grasp reality or are so thin-skinned that they have

¹⁷ Ibid., 54.

to dodge it, in other words, people in whom the lack of the sense of reality is a real deficiency.¹⁸

Upon reaching Russia, these radical scientific, philosophical, and cultural ideas from the West encountered the particularities of Russia's own changing perception of the universe. Of the many factors influencing Russian's unique situation, the development of native science played a large role. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian Symbolists sought to reawaken the mystical tradition embedded in Russian Orthodoxy.¹⁹ One of the defining elements of its epistemology was its embrace of intuition and rejection of the philosophical position, which considered "abstract logical capacity as the only organ for comprehension of Truth."²⁰ Intuition was seen as the deepest, truest kind of knowledge, which encompassed philosophy, theology, mathematics, and aesthetics. This notion erased hitherto distinct boundaries between particular disciplines of knowledge. Orthodox mysticism embraced the notion of the interconnectedness between the divine and physical realms. Metaphysical meditation, contemplation of icons, and artistic creation were viewed as venues allowing brief but unmediated contact with the divine.

Mystical doctrine created the foundation for "organicism," which posited the interconnectedness of all world phenomena, and shaped the consciousness of Russian artists and the religious elite. Vladimir Solovyov, the most influential Russian religious thinker of that era, further developed organicism by calling for the synthesis of theology, philosophy, experimental science, and art, with the ultimate goal of "all embracing unity of being itself." He believed that

¹⁸ Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, trans. Eithne Wilkins (London: Picador Classics, 1979), 12.

¹⁹ For more information on this subject, see James P. Scanlan, "The New Religious Consciousness: Merezhkovsky and Berdiaev," *Canadian Slavic Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 17-35.

²⁰ James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan, and Mary Barbara Zeldin, eds., *Russian Philosophy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 43.

the interdependency of all forms of cognition would lead to a non-fragmented understanding of the world. Vasily Zenkovsky labels this mystical Orthodoxy an “orthodox ontologism,” in which “the knowing is not separated from the known and faith informs cognition.”²¹

The new scientific developments in both Russia and the West had tremendous metaphysical implications for Russian thought and art, for it posited the interconnectedness of human cognitive faculties, thereby strengthening the concept of organicism. In Russia, the search for a theoretical, quantitative approach to reality in order to find a truer, unseen reality made this new science into a kind of mysticism: like the mystical search for the noumenal, science seeks a hidden “blueprint” of our reality. This comparison is only seemingly paradoxical. The idea that theoretical conceptualization might illuminate the unknown can be regarded as a new attempt to probe the realms beyond observable reality. This idea was put forth by diverse thinkers such as the mathematicians Nikolay Bugaev and Pavel Nekrasov, the philosophers Aleksandr Vvedensky and Sergey Trubetskoy, and the priest/scientist Pavel Florensky, to name just a few. The difference between the mysticism and new science lies in the fact that science attempted to uncover the noumenal through reliable, scientific methods, while mysticism relied only on intuitive and spiritual means of inquiry.

Both the new science and neo-Kantian idealism aimed to create a philosophy that could enter the “realms beyond the phenomenal” by means of verifiable, mathematical methods. With its renewed interest in Orthodoxy, Russian contemporary philosophy focused on the problem of scientifically proving the existence of the noumenal realms, so as to verify the mystical tradition embedded in Orthodox faith. Consequently, Russian neo-Kantians focused on moving beyond

²¹ V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George L. Kline (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), 1:196-97.

Kant to find an answer outside the boundaries of conventional philosophy. This led to the incorporation of religion and aesthetics into the theory of knowledge. This Russian insistence on creating a new *critical* philosophical system was exemplified by Sergey Bulgakov, in *From Marxism to Idealism (От марксизма к идеализму; 1903)*:

At the entrance to the temple of philosophy now stands guard a theory of knowledge from which each philosophical doctrine must receive a residence permit. The permanent significance of Kant in the history of philosophy lies in the fact that, after him, metaphysics . . . must be critical; in other words, each philosophical teaching must be prepared at the outset to provide an intelligent answer to the question of the nature of knowledge itself.²²

The merger of faith, philosophical idealism, and theories of knowledge characterized the works of leading Russian neo-Kantians such as Aleksandr Vvedensky and Sergey Trubetskoy. Vvedensky originated the concept of a “metaphysical sense,” which is not yet discovered but must exist, since we have a strong sense of what lies beyond the limits of experience. In *Of Boundaries and Signs of Animation (О пределах и признаках одушевления; 1892)*, Vvedensky analyzes the phenomenological question: how can we be certain of the existence of mental activity in other people? In the absence of any proof, we can only assume that we are projecting our own mental processes onto the minds of others.²³ Yet Vvedensky argues that our “metaphysical sense” equips us with the belief (if not the certainty) that others possess mental lives similar to ours. His “metaphysical sense” refers also to other metaphysical concepts, in which we believe without evidence. One such concept is the idea of God. Sergey Trubetskoy also regarded both belief and creativity as cognitive faculties. He proposed the

²² Sergei Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1903), 198. All translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.

²³ Aleksandr Vvedenskii, *O predelakh i priznakakh odushevleniia* (St. Petersburg: Tip. V. S. Balasheva, 1892), 51-62.

interconnectedness of all existence through human consciousness and suggested that this makes it possible for the human mind to know “things in themselves.” In *The Basis of Idealism* (*Основы идеализма*; 1896), he differentiated artistic revelation from religious revelation; the former allows the artist a glimpse into the essence of things.²⁴

Most significantly, the Russian neo-Kantians, unlike their Western counterparts, placed particular emphasis on the idea of time and space. Kant had proclaimed these to be a priori categories, antecedent to all experience, and constituting the frame of all our experience. Time and space thus represented the limitations on our knowledge. Russian thinkers were particularly vexed by this limitation, since knowledge of the noumenal and phenomenal realms lay at the heart of their metaphysical search. At this vital juncture, science proved it possible to go beyond Kantian limitations. With Lobachevsky’s discovery of non-Euclidean space, Russian neo-Kantians gained a solid foundation for the existence of multiple spaces, which logically abolished Kantian absolute space. These non-Euclidean geometrical systems also rendered these spaces accessible to cognition by describing their properties.

The importance of this discovery for Russian neo-Kantians — the scientific postulation of the simultaneous existence of diverse spaces — cannot be overestimated. It supported the neo-Kantians’ desire for a philosophical system connecting metaphysics and science, and it validated the mystics’ belief in the coexistence of the noumenal and physical realms. It also implied the possibility of accessing the noumenal, a possibility so far claimed only by mystics, and regarded skeptically by proponents of rational thinking. It is no surprise that Lobachevsky became a central figure for Russian neo-Kantians. In a speech at the first meeting of the Philosophical Society of Saint Petersburg University (1889), Vvedensky called Lobachevsky a

²⁴ Sergei Trubetskoi, *Osnovy idealizma* (Moscow: Put’, 1896), 214-16.

pillar of modern philosophy and described his work as groundbreaking for the theory of knowledge.²⁵

Besides Lobachevsky, other Russian scientists also influenced the contemporary scientific climate. Perhaps the most important scientific institution of the era was the Moscow Mathematical Society, founded by and led for nearly thirty years by Professor Nikolay Bugaev, Andrey Bely's father. The society's members worked on various scientific problems, but focused their attention on the question of space. Although inspired by Western discoveries, Russian mathematicians concentrated on solving their own native concerns, namely the connection between the finite and infinite realms.²⁶ For this reason Russian scientists took a particular interest in Georg Cantor, a somewhat obscure German mathematician who worked on the nature of infinity even before scientific discoveries made it a credible endeavor. Cantor, who was very well-known and popular in Russian scientific circles,²⁷ was particularly interested in the theory of numbers, and developed the idea of number sets, hoping that this would lead him to an understanding of the nature of infinity. Through his set theory he was able to prove that there are different orders of infinity, smaller and larger. His goal was to find the order and number of

²⁵ Catherine Evtuhov, "An Unexpected Source of Russian Neo-Kantianism: A. Vvedensky and Lobachevsky's Geometry," *Studies in Eastern European Thought* 47, nos. 3-4 (December 1995): 245-58. For more information on Russian neo-Kantianism see: Evgenii Vozdinskii, *Russkoe Neo-Kantianstvo kontsa XIX i nachala XX vekov* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1966).

²⁶ The theories of Bugaev as well as other members of the Moscow circle can be found in *Matematicheskii Sbornik*, a journal issued by the society. For a discussion of the issues discussed above, see: *Matematicheskii Sbornik, izdavaemyi Moskovskim matematicheskim obshchestvom* 25 (Moscow, 1904-1905): 829; P. Nekrasov et al., "Rechi, proiznesennyye v zasedanii Moskovskogo Matematicheskogo obshchestva 16 marta 1904 g. S pribavleniem rechei N. V. Bugaeva: 1) Vvedenie v teoriu chisel; 2) Matematika i nauchno-filosofskoe mirosozertsanie" (Moscow, 1905).

²⁷ Amir D. Aczel, *The Mystery of the Aleph: Mathematics, the Kabbalah, and the Search for Infinity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 76-83.

all infinities, from the basic to the Absolute, which he regarded as the realm of God.²⁸ Cantor failed to define the consecutive infinities, but he did prove the existence of more than one. His scientific approach to metaphysical questions foreshadows the connection between science and metaphysics, which later became one of the main directions in science.

Bugaev also devoted his life to his own theory of numbers, which he called arithmology. Inspired by Georg Cantor, Bugaev's theory describes the connection between the discrete and the continual, the finite and the infinite. His colleague, Pavel Nekrasov, applied the theory of numbers to geometry, envisioning space as a geometrical entity, which consists of three dimensions of "ordinary space" and probability. The number of its dimensions is $n+1$, a formula that recalls Cantor's order of infinite sets, only translated into the categories of space. Like Cantor, Nekrasov aimed to arrange multiple spaces into a comprehensive order so as to establish the interdependence and hierarchy of spatial dimensions. His theory states: "In multi-dimensional space conceived as an objective space ... there moves a subjective space of the same nature. This means that everything that takes place in the physical world is under the influence of the intellectual (spiritual) world."²⁹ We can see that Russian mathematicians followed their own scientific path, namely a quest to penetrate the realms beyond physical space, so as to reach the ultimate truth, either in the spiritual or scientific sense.

Ultimately, it was Pavel Florensky who played the most significant role in seeking a connection between transcendental and phenomenal realities. He was a priest turned mathematician, whose interest in science was dictated not by Western discoveries (although he

²⁸ For a full account of Cantor's life and work see Michael Hallet, *Cantorian Set Theory and Limitation of Size* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); and Aczel, *Mystery of the Aleph*.

²⁹ Cited in Lena Szilárd, "Mathematics as Utopia by Florenskij, Belyj and Zamiatin," in *Hungaro-Slavica*, ed. P. Milosevits et al. (Budapest: Elte Szláv Tanszékcsoportja, 1997), 305.

was familiar with them), but by his religious inclinations, which led him to seek a scientifically based system that would account for both the phenomenal and noumenal realms. In mathematics Florensky saw the “formal possibility of the theoretical basis of universal metaphysical interpretations of the Cosmos” (the idea of discreteness, theory of functions, of numbers).³⁰ He considered the question of space to be essential in understanding the world:

A culture can be interpreted as the activity of the organization of space. In one case it is the space of our life-relationship, and then the corresponding activity is called technology. In other cases this space is mental, or imaginary, an imaginary model of reality, and the reality of this organization is called science and philosophy. Finally, a third category lies between the first two. Its space or spaces are visible like the spaces of technology and do not admit intervention from outer life — like the spaces of science and philosophy. This organization of space is called art.³¹

For an Orthodox mystic such as Florensky, the scientific description of the relation between visible and invisible reality was the most significant aspect of the new, non-Euclidean geometry. This preoccupation constitutes the essence of all of Florensky’s works, be it on the subject of art, religion, or science. His examination of paintings by Raphael, El Greco, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and others (*Opposite Perspective* [*Обратная перспектива*]; 1919), concentrates on the laws governing the relationship between visible things (“this reality”) and the imaginary world (“that reality”). Florensky wished not merely to describe the two realms, but also to transcend the world of Kant and Euclid, and to enter the reality beyond it. In *Iconostasis* (*Иконостас*; 1922), Florensky explores Freud’s theories on the space-time of wakefulness and dreams. As Freud notes, we experience the time of dreams quite differently from wakeful time: what seems to us to be years in dream-time takes only hours, or even minutes when measured

³⁰ Ibid., 301-326.

³¹ Pavel Florenskii, *U vodorazdelov mysli* (Moscow: Put’, 1919), 134.

according to wakeful-time. Dreams are also often related to external causes, which can propel the entire chain of events in a dream. Florensky takes as an example the ringing of an alarm clock, noting that the ring in the dream (which comes at the end of a series of visions) occurs simultaneously with the ring of an actual alarm clock (which causes the whole series of visions). Since in the dream the real cause of the vision (the ring) appears not at the beginning but at the end, Florensky's theory of the imaginary allows him to conclude:

In dreams time is flowing, and it is flowing ever faster towards the Present, against the movement of time in waking consciousness. Time is turned inside out, and this means that its concrete images are also turned inside out. And so we pass into the field of imaginary space.³²

Florensky clearly defines the imaginary realm in *Imaginaries in Geometry (Mnimosti v geometrii; 1922)*, a work devoted entirely to the geometry of the universe. Florensky takes as his point of departure Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity, which states that at a speed close to that of light time slows down; if we were able to travel faster than light, time would run backwards, and we would start moving into the past, but with a reversed order of events. While Einstein considered this to be sheer fantasy, since it is impossible to move faster than light, Florensky builds his entire theory on this possibility. He states that at speeds higher than that of light, time goes backward and traveling bodies become turned inside out as they enter the imaginary realm. Florensky viewed this realm as a "teleological world," the realm of final causes and hence, the noumenon. Most important to this work is Florensky's "scientific" proof of the possibility of entering the noumenal realm: it can happen in dreams, during revelatory

³² Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andreev (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 34-35.

contemplation of icons, or through artistic inspiration, all of which are characterized by the reverse flow of time.

This integration of modern science into the Russian mystical tradition was not the only phenomenon that defined the intellectual climate of the time. The cultural crisis of the West also manifested itself in Russia and was transformed by Russia's unique cultural and historical identity. Until the end of the nineteenth century, positivism was the dominant philosophy in Russia. As in the West, Russian positivism was governed by rationalism and empiricism, but the Russian version differed in its connection to populism, a set of political ideas and activities intended to represent ordinary people's needs. Since the 1860s the Russian intelligentsia had been preoccupied with utilitarian ideas of social progress that were expected to solve all of Russia's social problems, and these ideas penetrated every aspect of life, including art. However, by the 1890s, it became clear that utilitarianism could not solve social problems, and that its materialistic focus had led to the neglect of human spiritual and emotional needs.

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, Russian artists and intellectuals began seeking a new philosophy that would cultivate man's non-materialistic desires. Although united by the same goal, these thinkers were divided as to how to achieve it. The older generation of philosophers, including Nikolay Berdyaev, Sergey Bulgakov, and Petr Struve, stressed the idea of political reform. They were ready to accept economic growth regulated by ethical norms, which, they believed, would best suit Russian social conditions and gradually lead society towards modernity. In contrast, both the first and second generation of Symbolists, such as Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Vasily Rozanov, Andrey Bely, and Aleksandr Blok, were influenced by Western literature and philosophy (Nietzsche in particular), and advocated a

complete break with positivism.³³ They called for the creation of a new, idealistic society based on spirituality, beauty, individuality, and freedom. As Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak states: “The Russian Symbolists differed from their Western precursors in that they did not perceive art as art-for-art’s sake, but rather as theurgy, a path to higher Truth, even to faith.”³⁴

In addition to the radically new science and the cultural crisis, Russia’s political upheavals transformed the art of the era. The political unrest that led to the 1905 revolution was interpreted especially by the Symbolists as the impending apocalypse prophesized by Vladimir Solovyov; this infused the cultural movement with mystical overtones. However, subsequent disappointment in the revolution caused some intellectuals to abandon Christianity and seek other sources of spirituality, notably in theosophical and anthroposophical teachings.

The event that finally severed the Russian intelligentsia from its Western counterpart was the 1917 revolution. Despite its predominantly political character, the revolution also engendered the idea of creating a completely new culture representing a new class order. The fact that the new culture was to serve the proletariat, which had hitherto been excluded from Russian cultural life, had tremendous consequences for contemporary writers. It replaced the familiar, educated audience with masses of workers, who were mostly illiterate and were unfamiliar with pre-revolutionary Russian literature and its issues. Consequently a gap appeared between writers and their audience, and the goals of literature changed drastically: from a discussion with the reader to the education of the reader, from themes important to the writers to working-class concerns. A definite break with all aspects of Russian pre-revolutionary life was

³³ Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal and Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, eds., *Revolution of the Spirit: Crisis of Value in Russia, 1890-1924* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 20.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

seen by the new governing powers as a necessary first step in this process. In this “first hour” of the new reality, Russian thinkers and artists were forced into a radical break with tradition: they were faced with the challenge of creating a brand new society, founded on Marxist philosophy and modern technology, which was still merely a futuristic, utopian vision for their Western counterparts. In regard to the Russian revolution Crane Brinton states: “Events were telescoped together in a shorter period than in any of our revolutions.”³⁵ The new merger of metaphysics and science provided a tool for contemplating the big questions concerning the cause of these events, the shape of the new society, and anxiety about cultural discontinuity.

The novels of that era well exemplify the use of “scientific metaphysics” to frame the cultural and political shift. It could be argued that the major Russian Modernist novels — Andrey Bely’s *Petersburg* (*Петербург*; 1914), Evgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (*Мы*; 1921), Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita* (*Мастер и Маргарита*; 1929), and Yury Olesha’s *Envy* (*Зависть*; 1924) — are all organized around the space and time continuum; their authors manipulate this continuum so as to contextualize Russian actuality within their particular visions of the universe. The major point of these narrative endeavors is not to assess the new reality but to depict Russian reality as one stage in an ever-changing, dynamic universe. The dynamic character of the space-time continua imbues these authorial visions with optimism, for it presupposes a continuity with the past and suggests that post-revolutionary reality is part of a universal process. This view was much more psychologically and philosophically acceptable than the idea of complete discontinuity with the past and the redirection of the future along incomprehensible paths. The use of science as a basis for these artistic universes reflects

³⁵ Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952), 219.

Modernist optimism regarding the union of modern science and metaphysics, and the possibility of discerning the organization of the cosmos.

Andrey Bely was without doubt one of the most talented and charismatic writers of his era, in both Russia and Europe. His greatest achievement, *Petersburg*, is not just an example of Modernist style comparable with the achievements of Joyce and Proust, but more important, it presents Bely's unique vision of the universe, which accounts not only for his native Russian circumstances, but also encompasses the overall European political and cultural mood. Bely's intellectual curiosity and creative mind allowed him to synthesize virtually all the influential cultural trends of his time into his unprecedented, dynamic vision of the fluctuating, ever-changing, new world. In *Petersburg*, his aim was not to consciously create a new universal model, yet in this work he created a unique fusion of the science, philosophy, and political events about which he cared most deeply. In his often haphazard combination of seemingly exclusive schools of thought, scientific trends, and his own idiosyncratic spirituality, the individual becomes public, the public becomes political, and the political becomes first philosophical and then cosmological. However, the dynamic ambiguity of Bely's work does not allow for a definitive interpretation of his model. Instead he obliges his reader to constantly reevaluate the events depicted in the novel, thus allowing the reader to experience firsthand the relativity and uncertainty of reality. *Petersburg* does not describe but rather reenacts the newly discovered changeability and ambiguity of the universe.

Andrey Bely's *Petersburg* has attracted tremendous amount of critical attention virtually from the time it was written. The reason for this critical interest in the novel lies in its terrific complexity which invites the possibility of looking at it from multiple perspectives. The novel has been examined in variety of ways: as Bely's evaluation of his artistic development, a

reflection on the political and social situation of Bely's times, an example of Modernist writing technique or even as an illustration of anthroposophical philosophy. As I was getting acquainted with the body of scholarship regarding *Petersburg*, I noticed that no matter the approach, the abundant scholarship on the novel seems to have one characteristic in common, namely the search for Bely's philosophical and artistic system of beliefs.

My approach to *Petersburg* is quite different. I perceive the novel from the perspective of the scientific revolution from the end of nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries and particularly from the point of view of the changes in the worldview it created – from stable, absolute and unchangeable universe to fluid, dynamic and uncertain matter. In my opinion it is this new perception of the universe that constitutes the core of *Petersburg*. The basis of my approach rests on the fact that Bely, a scientist, more than other writers of his time, was inspired by the scientific revolution and translated its discoveries which led to a new worldview into literary form. Therefore he managed to create a literary analogue to the emerging new worldview initiated precisely by “new science.”

In my work I will attempt to elucidate Bely's view of universal and human evolution, which he described in two of his lesser known articles: “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral – of Symbolism” (“Линия, круг, спираль – символизм; 1912”) and “Circular Movement” (“Круговое движение”; 1912). I will argue that *Petersburg* can be interpreted as an embodiment of Bely's dynamic worldview. In the course of my work, I plan to investigate the cultural, philosophical, and political concerns that Bely addresses in his universal model, and to examine how he weaves them together with scientific imagery. I will also try to demonstrate that his use of science, such as thermodynamics, psychology, mathematics and astronomy,

validates his model of the universe, framing it as a concept with scientific basis, not just as an unfounded, philosophical musing on the nature of the universe.

In chapter one I will examine the philosophical sources that comprise Bely's universal model, and attempt to elucidate his method of combining them into a unified cosmic vision. I will also describe the worldview that he presents in two of his essays, including his thoughts on the role of humankind in universal evolution. This chapter will serve as a basis for my discussion of *Petersburg* as an embodiment of Bely's dynamic worldview. Further on, in section one of chapter two, I will discuss Bely's vision of his era, which in *Petersburg* he presents as a circle of dead cultural dogma. Section two of the same chapter will show how Bely broadens the meaning of the 1905 revolution to that of universal upheaval, which he viewed as the only means to overcome that dogma. I will pay special attention to the thermodynamic imagery, which, to my mind, conveys the dynamic character of the impending universal changes. In the same section I will also explain the crucial roles that the main characters play in *Petersburg*. The third section of chapter two will describe the event illustrating the universal upheaval — the Tsukatovs' ball. All of chapter two thus attempts to clarify Bely's view on the ways to change the cultural status quo, and sets the stage for my ensuing discussion of the characters' actions.

In chapter three, I examine the novel's characters and their implied ability to change the status quo. I will begin by explaining why I consider Dudkin the most capable character in the novel although he is unable to effect any changes in the universe of *Petersburg*. Chapter four will focus on Apollon and Nikolay Ableukhov — the two other main characters, who are ill equipped to break the ossified cultural dogma. Chapter five will examine both Ableukhoffs in the context of Bely's fascination with anthroposophy. This chapter will illustrate Bely's

reinterpretation of universal and human evolution in the context of Steinerian cosmological doctrine, and will aim to demonstrate Bely's conviction that universal changes are imminent.

Throughout my dissertation I will point out Bely's simultaneous assertion and subversion of certain philosophical concepts. This will underscore the dynamic and relativistic character of Bely's view of the universe, which, I believe, constitutes the only guiding principle in understanding this terrifically complex text.

Three main versions of Bely's *Petersburg* exist: the original edition, published in Moscow in 1914, the abbreviated edition, published in Berlin in 1922, and the final, much changed edition, which first appeared in Berlin in 1928 and was then reprinted in Russia in 1935. Since the 1922, 1928, and 1935 editions were edited considerably, and large parts of the religious imagery were removed, I will base my work on the first, 1914 version of the novel. In my opinion, the 1914 version most fully demonstrates Bely's Modernist style as well as his multifaceted thematic concerns. This version best serves my analysis, which focuses specifically on the Modernist vision of the universe and the means of its verbal expression.

Chapter 1: Bely's Vision of Universal Evolution

Among the many literary genres practiced by Andrey Bely, his theoretical essays provide scholars with the greatest challenge. Most of these were compiled in three volumes: *Symbolism* (*Символизм*; 1910), *The Green Meadow* (*Луг зеленый*; 1910), and *Arabesques* (*Арабески*; 1911). Almost all critics agree on the difficulty of detecting any logical philosophical system in Bely's theoretical works, and this is troublesome for readers of Bely's fiction as well.³⁶ The ever-changing trajectory of Bely's philosophical views prevents readers of Bely's essays from creating a clear image of Bely as a thinker, while this also hampers readers of Bely's fictional writings, because his fiction is deeply embedded in his overall theoretical vision of the universe.

Petersburg serves as the most vivid example of Bely's attempt to project his divergent theoretical concepts onto a fictional work. Abundant in diverse and elusive philosophical references, the novel is almost incomprehensible without access to a clear explanatory system. Since even Bely's philosophical essays do not provide such system, the reader, lacking any certain assessments of Bely's thought, remains in the dark as to the meaning of his fiction. Even specialists on Bely, who are well versed in his theoretical writings, find it difficult to offer readers any assistance in interpreting his fiction. As the Bely scholar Steven Cassedy observes:

Any reader of *Symbolism* cannot help being struck by the wide divergence in Bely's approaches to various topics in aesthetics and criticism. One's initial response is to wonder whether the author of these essays was the victim of some

³⁶ For a discussion of this problem as well as an attempt at finding unity in Bely's oeuvre see especially Steven Cassedy, "Bely the Thinker," in *Andrey Bely: Spirit of Symbolism*, ed. John E. Malmstad (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 313–35; Steven Cassedy, "Bely's Theory of Symbolism as a Formal Iconics of Meaning," in Malmstad, ed., *Andrey Bely: Spirit of Symbolism*, 285–312; J. D. Elsworth, "Bely's Theory of Symbolism," and "Bely and Anthroposophy," in *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 7–37 and 37–55; Konstantin Mochulsky, *Andrey Bely: His Life and Works*, trans. Nora Szalavitz (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1977); Nina Berberova, "A Memoir and a Comment: The 'Circle' of Petersburg," in *Andrey Bely: A Critical Review*, ed. Gerald Janecek (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978), 115–20.

immense confusion. In sharp contrast to such an essay as “The Emblematics of Meaning,” where Bely’s purpose is to abandon science in favor of an apparently metaphysical world view, stands the essay on rhythm and metrics, where Bely overtly proposes an “exact” science of aesthetics.³⁷

J. D. Elsworth notes that, in Bely’s essays: “It is not at all uncommon for a staid philosophical argument to break off without warning into a passage of visionary nature.”³⁸

Bely’s challenging shifts of tone are made more complex by his use of diverse genres within a single critical essay. A philosophical treatise may be interrupted by a narrative section which borders on the novelistic genre, just to turn into authorial musings resembling a memoir. Bely’s article “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral – of Symbolism” (“Линия, круг, спираль – символизма”) perfectly exemplifies Bely’s use of such shifting genres. A possible introduction to the novel suddenly turns into authorial memoirs, and is then transformed into a philosophical essay interrupted by authorial personal commentaries on the philosophical stances he presents.

Both Cassedy and Elsworth agree that these difficulties paradoxically stem from one constant in Bely’s worldview: his deep belief in the dualistic — noumenal and phenomenal — nature of the universe and his insistence on creating a scientific, critical philosophical system. Cassedy notes that Bely “hesitated between two conflicting world views, one metaphysical, the other secular and formalistic.”³⁹ Elsworth uses Bely’s article “The Crisis of Consciousness and Henrik Ibsen” (“Кризис сознания и Генрик Ибсен”; 1910) to demonstrate the paramount importance of this contradiction in all of Bely’s thought:

And a man of our age ... after studying mystics ... after all flights into mysteries of feelings starts reading Cohen’s and Husserl’s books, in which the mystery of

³⁷ Cassedy, “Bely the Thinker,” 316.

³⁸ Elsworth, “Bely’s Theory of Symbolism,” in *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, 7.

³⁹ Cassedy, “Bely the Thinker,” 313.

knowledge consists in killing all that is lively in feelings ... for it is considered as pollution of knowledge.

А человек наших дней ... после изучения мистиков ... после всех полетов в мистерий чувств, принимается за книги Когена, Гуссерля, где мистерия познания заключается в том, чтобы убить все чем живо чувство ... рассматривается как возможность загрязнения познания.⁴⁰

Elsworth's and Cassedy's conclusions illustrate the problems facing all scholars of Bely's work, namely, a search for consistency in Bely's lifelong task, which was to create a system that would preserve both the transcendental and the phenomenal. Despite Bely's knowledge of and interest in "new science," very few Bely scholars have examined his works in the light of the cultural trend that made such an impact on early twentieth-century Russian thought — the penetration of science into the realm of philosophy and the implications of this for the noumenal/phenomenal dualism.⁴¹ A close look at Bely's *Petersburg* — especially his unification of science with philosophical trends — reveals that the new scientific discoveries are an indispensable lens for interpreting Bely's work. I do not claim that tracing mathematical thought in his works will allow us to uncover Bely's complete and stable philosophy — it does not exist. Yet, by tracing the development of Bely's model of the universe we can see the paramount beliefs and conflicts that shaped his vision.

The fact that no special critical attention has been given to this approach to Bely's works is no doubt due to the fact that, with the exception of two lesser-known articles, Bely's theoretical works comment neither on the importance of contemporary scientific discoveries for the perception of the universe, nor on the growing excitement over the potential to bridge the

⁴⁰ Andrei Belyi, "Krizis soznaniia i Genrik Ibsen," in *Arabeski* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1969), 11.

⁴¹ A notable attempt to include science in an interpretation of Bely's works was made by Zoia Yurieva, in her book *Tvorimyi kosmos u Andreia Belogo* (St. Petersburg: Studiorum Slavicorum Monumenta, 2000).

divide between reason and feeling. Perhaps the first critic who noted the influence of this trend on Bely's works was Lena Szilárd:

Having reached their thematic and structural conceptualization already in the *Second* and *Third Symphonies*, [scientific theories] became so characteristic to the motifs and structure of *Petersburg*, *Kotik Letaev*, *Return to Homeland*, *Notes of an Eccentric*, and *Moscow*, that all of Andrei Belyi's fiction should be regarded as an invasion of mathematics into the twentieth-century novel.⁴²

Since Bely's literary career developed simultaneously with the emergence of this new cultural trend, it is possible that he himself did not fully realize the extent to which it shaped his own literary output.

It should not be surprising that the son of a mathematician and a student of natural sciences "took the finding of science as his starting point for establishing links with art and aesthetics."⁴³ Bely filled the entire "University" ("Университет") chapter of his memoirs, *On the Border of Two Centuries* (*На рубеже двух столетий*; 1929), with memories of his scientific interests and searches:

Intrigued by one theory or another, I would search for facts; in the course of my search I would make my way into laboratories; infuriated by attitudes towards the cell, I took note of the theories of Weismann, Butschli, Altman and others ... I am fascinated by the kinetic theory of gases ... and I surprise Umov with a paper on "The Tasks and Methods of Physics" ... A month later I am devoted to Mendeleev's System.

Интересуясь той или иною теорией, я искал фактов; в поисках их попадал в лаборатории; разъярясь в отношениях к клетке, я прислушивался к теориям Вейсмана, Бючли, Альтмана и других, ... я увлекаюсь кинетической теорией газов ... удивляя Умова рефератом "Задачи и методы физики" ... проходит месяц, и я отдан мыслям о системе Менделеева.⁴⁴

⁴² Lena Szilárd, "Andrei Belyi i P. Florenskii," *Studia Slavica Acad. Sci. Hung.* (Budapest) 33, nos. 1-4 (1987): 236.

⁴³ Olga Muller Cooke, "Bely's 'Moscow' Novels and Zamyatin's *Robert Mayer*: A Literary Response to Thermodynamics," *Slavonic and East European Review* 63, no. 2 (April 1985): 195.

⁴⁴ Andrei Belyi, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii*, introd. Georgette Donchin (Letchworth, UK: Bradda Books, 1966), 405.

Bely describes his dual interest in science and art through the metaphor of a pair of scissors: one blade represents his father's scientific influence, and the other, his mother's fascination with art. Klavdia Bugaeva, Bely's second wife, emphasizing the same duality in Bely, writes that his creative impulses and intellectual speculations took place in a chemistry laboratory.⁴⁵ She adds that Bely's interest in science was so deep that his knowledge of Niels Bohr and Rutherford equaled that of a specialist.⁴⁶ As Simon Karlinsky states, "No other twentieth-century poet has Bely's grasp of physical and mathematical sciences."⁴⁷ The thought of creating a bridge between science and art was always a guiding light in Bely's scientific research and literary undertakings: "Having composed my thoughts about necessary facts, having familiarized myself with 'Energetics,' I am beginning to look for the principle of energetics in the transformation of art forms ... the modification of some undefined whole; my thoughts are working on space-temporality, on the study of a subject not yet taught to students; somewhere a presentiment of the principle of relativity is stirring" ("Составив мысли о нужных фактах, ознакомившись с 'Энергетикой,' начинаю искать энергетический принцип в трансформе форм искусства ... модификация некоего не данного целого; мысль работает над понятием время-пространство, над изучением предмета еще не преподанного студентам; где-то копошится предчувствие принципа относительности").⁴⁸ In his search for a principle that unites science and art, Bely focuses on the new science of thermodynamics, and even more significantly, feels a

⁴⁵ K. N. Bugaeva, *Vospominaniia o Belom*, ed. John E. Malmstad (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Ivana Limbakha, 1981), 322.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁴⁷ Simon Karlinsky, "Symphonic Structure in Andrey Bely's 'Pervoe svidanie,'" *California Slavic Studies* 6 (1971): 61.

⁴⁸ Belyi, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii*, 406.

premonition about the discovery of relativity; this testifies to his knowledge of the newest scientific discoveries. Much more significantly, his preoccupation with the transfer of energy and his developing thoughts about relativity will shape his overall vision of the universe.

It was also during his university years, in the 1890s, that Bely began to apply mathematical models to his artistic theories: “I was keen to find ‘x’ in the parts of the subsequent equation; I expressed a change in life’s rhythm as an equation; ‘symbolism’ was that equation” (“Чуткость моя – в попытке ощупать ‘икс’ в членах составленного уравнения; изменение жизненного темпа было мною составлено, как уравнение; ‘символизм’ был уравнением этим”).⁴⁹ It was not until 1912, however, that Bely wrote two articles, “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral — of Symbolism” and “Circular Movement,” which connected science and art in his geometrical vision of the universe. The mathematic and philosophical underpinnings of this vision were the result of a long creative process during which Bely reinterpreted and consolidated philosophical views on the subjects that concerned him the most: the dualistic view of the world, and the search to find a connection to the realm beyond visible reality.

Like the majority of philosophers of his era, Bely was preoccupied with a vision of human history, and his model of the universe is based on this vision. In his article “The Crisis of Consciousness and Henrik Ibsen,” he asserts that the crisis of European civilization expressed itself in an acute awareness of humanity’s fundamental dualities.⁵⁰ Bely names five divisions from which men suffer, the main one being between rational and intuitive responses to the world. Bely implies that, while both responses are valid, no viable way to link them has been found, so

⁴⁹ Ibid., 398.

⁵⁰ Belyi, “Krizis soznaniia i Genrik Ibsen,” 161–211.

that man has been forced to choose between them. One of the main themes of Bely's creative oeuvre became the search for an artistic means to connect the two.

Bely's desire to resolve this fundamental split in mankind led him through a variety of seemingly contradictory schools of thought and philosophical trends. Each of these represented more than a whimsical intellectual indulgence: each inaugurated a new, intensely felt, spiritual phase, which offered Bely a new standpoint from which to reevaluate his earlier assumptions. Bely's model of universal evolution is thus a unique philosophical construct which he molded into his own vision of the universe using diverse sources. The elements of different schools present in his thinking should be seen as the sparks that kindled the development of Bely's own unique vision. However, Bely's vision of evolution did not result from methodical design; the sheer scope of his philosophical references proves that Bely chaotically assembled different ideas, spontaneously adapting them to yet another fusion. He is not a philosopher building a grandiose rational model, but a creative thinker who melds diverse philosophical influences in an innovative way, uncovering unexpected potentials in each school of thought that inspires him.

Bely's initial search to resolve cosmological, cultural, and individual contradictions led him to the Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov. Bely was essentially a member of Solovyov's household as of 1893, when the two families became neighbors. As Bely writes in his memoirs, "Opening myself up at the Solovyovs I was coming to terms with myself ... [The Solovyovs'] apartment became like a small window into life for me" ("Я же, выкладывая у Соловьевых себя, договаривался и с собою самим ... Мне квартира [Соловьевых] явилась как форточка в жизнь").⁵¹ Given this close connection with the Solovyov family during Bely's formative years, it is not surprising that Solovyov's teachings colored Bely's views throughout

⁵¹ Andrei Belyi, *Nachalo veka* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 147-48.

his entire philosophical development. Around 1900, like many a young Symbolist at the beginning of his career, Bely was particularly interested in Solovyov's mystical philosophy: the immediate anticipation of the Apocalypse, the coming of the Antichrist, and the glorious appearance of the Kingdom of Christ on Earth.⁵² Solovyov expressed these ideas in *Three Conversations* (*Три разговора*; 1910), written towards the end of his life, when he abandoned his optimistic idea of creating God's Kingdom on Earth and became preoccupied with his apocalyptic vision regarding contemporary culture's impending doom.

Yet Bely was not a staunch proponent of Solovyov's philosophy; for one thing, Bely was not a devoted believer in Russian Orthodox Christianity. As early as 1905, Bely published an essay, "God is with Us" ("С нами Бог"),⁵³ in which he rejected all organized religion because it operates according to set dogmas. Bely viewed anything based on dogma — whether art, philosophy, or thought in general — as static, dead, and erroneous, and he believed that all dogma must be eradicated for humanity to achieve spiritual and intellectual progress. Bely agreed with Solovyov's view on how the Apocalypse would occur in the modern world, but he characteristically transformed the principal apocalyptic agents from religious figures into philosophical visionaries, and saw the struggle between good and evil as a struggle between monistic and dualistic philosophies. Bely regarded the outcome of the struggle, the Solovyovian Kingdom of Christ, as the overcoming of the split between matter and spirit, and not necessarily a union with the God of Orthodoxy.

It was natural for Bely — a Symbolist — to discount monistic philosophy. One threat to Bely's dualistic theory was the nihilistic monism of Arthur Schopenhauer, who greatly

⁵² J. D. Elsworth, *Andrey Bely* (Letchworth, UK: Bradda Books, 1972), 22-23.

⁵³ Andrei Belyi, "S nami Bog," in *Grif* (almanach), ed. Sergei Alekseevich Sokolov (Moscow, 1905), 193.

influenced Bely's generation. Bely read Schopenhauer's *The World as a Will and Representation* (1819) in 1896, even before he became engaged with Solovyov's philosophy.⁵⁴ Schopenhauer's theory of the World Will, blindly renewing itself for all eternity at all levels of existence with no possibility of transcendence, strongly influenced Bely. When combined with Solovyov's belief in the revelation of the transcendent through imminent Apocalypse, Schopenhauer's eternal return became embodied in the figure of the Antichrist, who, according to Solovyov, would appear first and then lure humanity towards evil.⁵⁵

Bely's equation of nihilism and Biblical evil exemplifies his creative fusion of diverse philosophies. In his writings Bely creates an unexpected, fruitful union between such philosophically distant sources as Schopenhauer and Solovyov, which opens up new ways to interpret both sources. We find such a fusion in Bely's earliest writings, when he was still vacillating between literature and science as a career path. In his early work, *The One Who Came* (*Пришедший*; 1896), he describes monks infected with Schopenhauerian pessimism who lack faith in God's prophecies and expect nothing but the empty, eternal return. Although they regain their faith at the end, the philosophy of eternal return is associated with the Antichrist's deceit. This reflects both Bely's philosophical interpretation of the religious theme and his anxiety concerning the Apocalypse: if humanity succumbs to the false prophet, the Apocalypse will not occur.

The theme of the false prophet as nihilist runs through all of Bely's *Symphonies*. These works vividly illustrate Bely's vacillation between faith in the union of the phenomenal and

⁵⁴ Roger Keys, introduction to *The Dramatic Symphony*, by Andrey Bely (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), 12.

⁵⁵ Vladimir Solovyov, "Kratkaia istoria Antikhrista," in *Tri razgovora*, in *Sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg: T-vo Prosveshchenie, 1915), 10:89.

noumenal, and fear of tumbling into the nihilistic abyss of eternal return. In the *First Symphony* (*Первая симфония*; 1900), Bely describes a Schopenhauerian kingdom of darkness and fog — a sleepy existence passed from parents to children. He identifies this realm of eternal return as the realm of the Antichrist. Years pass without hope of awakening, as successive kings and knights fall in their attempts to fight the eternal night. Yet at the very end of the narration a Christ-like figure appears, who announces the end of darkness. His prophesy is fulfilled by the appearance of the Eastern star, which symbolizes the imminent Apocalypse, and the arrival of a new kingdom of light. This conclusion underscores Bely’s belief in eschatological events, which will ultimately conquer nihilism and unite the phenomenal and transcendental realms.

In the later works of this cycle, however, Bely’s strong beliefs waver, and he conveys his doubt and hope through mathematical models, constituting his first use of science in a literary work. Bely adopts a model similar to that of Pavel Florensky, who, in *The Imaginary in Geometry*, uses the Möbius strip to depict the relationship between phenomenal and noumenal realms. At the point of connection between the two — the bend of the strip — one is turned upside down and finds oneself in the noumenal realm. Bely knew Florensky long before the publication of the latter’s works. They became friends in 1903 when Bely began hosting meetings of the “Аjaxes” (“Аяксы”), a group of students who shared an interest in theological questions (in addition to Bely, its members included Vladimir Ern, Pavel Florensky, and Valentin Sventitsky).⁵⁶ Bely documented his interest in Florensky’s ideas in his memoirs:

The whole essence is in Florensky ... His original thoughts lived in me ... As I listened to him he was winning me over: in his dying voice he murmured about

⁵⁶ Belyi, *Nachalo veka* (1990 ed.), 298. Although Bely himself does not provide the year of these meetings, the footnote in this edition of his memoirs places them in 1903. The exact date of the meetings that took place between Bely, Florensky, and others is given in Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius. The Tragic and Unknown Life of Russia’s Da Vinci* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 36.

models for the “n” dimension constructed by Carl Weierstrass, and about Hegel’s stupid infinity, and the finite infinity, the mathematics of Georg Cantor.

Вся суть – во Флоренском ... Оригинальные мысли его во мне жили ... По мере того как я слушал его, он меня побеждал: умирающим голосом, он лепетал о моделях для “n” измерения, которые вылепил Карл Вейерштрасс, и о том, что-где есть бесконечность дурная, по Гегелю, и бесконечность конечная, математика Георга Кантора.⁵⁷

Bely’s “spiral” construction, with the universe as a reversed curve, might have had another source — namely, Dante’s depiction of hell; Bely read the *Divine Comedy* while in high school (in seventh grade) and returned to it during his university years.⁵⁸ Florensky’s model of the universe, as presented in his *The Imaginary in Geometry*, is based on Dantean cosmic geometry, which describes the universe as a non-Euclidean, curved, closed space. This kind of space was discovered by Bernhard Riemann in 1854, when new geometric discoveries disproved the existence of an absolute, Euclidean space. Florensky thus argues that non-Euclidean space was known already in pre-Renaissance times. Florensky’s model of the universe might have influenced young Bely, although the question of this influence remains open. At the time when Bely was writing his *Symphonies*, Florensky was still under the influence of Georg Cantor. Florensky and Bely discussed the noumenal realm in 1904, but they became estranged that same year due to Florensky’s entrance into the Theological Academy and his embrace of Orthodox Christianity, which Bely rejected.⁵⁹ Florensky then abandoned his plan to review Bely’s *Symphonies*. Moreover, Florensky’s first publication, *The Pillar and Ground of Truth (Столп и утверждение истины; 1914)*, written during the period of his religious doubts,

⁵⁷ Belyi, *Nachalo veka* (1990 ed.), 299.

⁵⁸ Belyi, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii*, 289, 315.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 48-53.

dealt with the “justification of God,” not with mathematical theories. That same year Florensky began giving lectures on the Ancient World, but only in 1917 did he design a course on “Reverse Perspective” which initiated his search for a link between the pre-Renaissance image of the universe and the new scientific discoveries in geometry.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Florensky’s biographer, Avril Pyman, notes that Florensky came up with the idea for *The Imaginary in Geometry* when he chanced upon “an unpublished university paper he had been working on while still a student at the Mathematical Faculty in 1902.”⁶¹ Since the paper has since been lost, we cannot determine the extent to which Florensky influenced Bely and vice versa. Whatever the case may be, Bely’s *Second and Third Symphonies* present a geometrical model virtually identical with that of Dante’s *Inferno*.

The *Second Symphony* lacks the optimism of the first. It also marks Bely’s transitional period, in which he slowly sheds his belief in the Apocalypse as a means of salvation and starts employing a mathematical model, which proposes a different solution to entrapment in the eternal return. The hero of the *Second Symphony* (1902), Sergey Musatov, is a leader of Moscow’s mystics and believes in the coming of the Apocalypse. He sees signs of the Apocalypse on the Moscow streets: a woman veiled in white and her little boy, who is said to be ruler of the world. But when the woman turns out to be a society lady and her child a little girl, Musatov’s eschatological dreams collapse, and he begins to doubt the existence of the transcendent.

At this point in his intellectual and artistic development Bely clearly identifies nihilistic philosophy as the source of evil. While drunk, Musatov experiences a hallucination in which a

⁶⁰ Ibid., 91, 117.

⁶¹ Ibid., 129.

mysterious “they” bring him to a room occupied by two strange individuals, who inexplicably appear to be authorities on the mysteries of the universe. They assure Musatov that the only truth is that of eternal return. By the end of the conversation, however, they sprout horns, confirming that they embody evil. The downfall of the protagonist, a believer in the coming Apocalypse, is shown when he turns upside down, but Bely mocks the seriousness of the geometrical model of the universe: “drunken Musatov slipped and tumbled head-over-heels, parodying European civilization.”⁶² Bely’s mockery of cosmic mathematical models reflects his uncertain assessment of science’s ability to address spiritual concerns. As Anton Kovach has noted, many of Bely’s humorous satirical effects in the work are “achieved at the cost of a considerable laceration” in Bely’s own carefully crafted portrait of the universe. Kovach regards this work as “the best portrait of the author’s split personality,” in that it “dramatizes Bely’s hesitations about his own quest.”⁶³

Evgeny Khandrikov, the main character in the *Third Symphony*, also called *The Return* (*Возврат*; 1905), is hurled into a new terrestrial incarnation and finds himself in a realm governed by the Schopenhauerian law of eternal return. The setting is Moscow at the beginning of the twentieth century. Khandrikov’s dreams reveal to him that evil forces are trying to entrap him in eternal return, but he escapes with the help of a psychiatrist, Doctor Orlov. The manner of his escape is particularly important: Khandrikov sets sail on a lake, the surface of which seems to meet the sky. He makes an upside-down turn and, although he seems (to any earthly observer) to be drowning, he finds himself in the heavenly realm above, looking down at the people on the

⁶² Andrey Bely, *The Dramatic Symphony*, trans. Roger and Angela Keys (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), 134.

⁶³ Anton Kovach, *Andrey Belyj: The “Symphonies” (1899-1908)* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1976), 169.

now inverted lake. This was no suicide, as the last part of the work confirms,⁶⁴ but a successful escape to the eternal, transcendental realm.⁶⁵ The *Third Symphony* treats mathematical theories without irony: Solovyovian, apocalyptic themes are completely absent, replaced by science as the path to the transcendental realm. Furthermore, in contrast to the *First Symphony*, which unfolds in the unidentified past in an unknown place named only “northern fields” (“северные поля”), the main action of the *Second* and *Third Symphonies* is set in Moscow at the beginning of the twentieth century. By framing the metaphysical issues of the era in literary form, Bely transfigures his preoccupation with the physical/spiritual gap into a hope for cultural transformation, which will allow both worldviews to be accounted for and scientifically justified.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Bely’s *Second* and especially *Third Symphonies* is their geometrical model of the universe, which is essentially identical to the geometry of Dante’s *Inferno*. The *Inferno* describes the journey that Dante and Virgil take through the nine circles of hell. After reaching the bottom, the realm of Lake Cocytus and Lucifer, the poets turn upside down and start their ascent while continually moving forward:

I clasped his neck, as he commanded me.
 ...
 took hold of the shaggy fur on the devil’s side
 and climbed down clump by clump ...
 ...
 I thought we came back towards hell again.
 ...And he: “You think we are still where we have been,
 on the other side, where I took hold of the hair
 of the evil worm who gnaws the earth from within.
 As long as I climbed down, you were still there.
 When I turned myself, you were where the halves divide,

⁶⁴ This is Roger Keys’s interpretation. See Roger Keys, “Bely’s Symphonies,” in Malmstad, ed., *Andrey Bely: Spirit of Symbolism*, 40-42.

⁶⁵ Andrei Belyi, *Chetyre simfonii* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971), 117-21.

at the center that draws all weights from everywhere.”⁶⁶

After arriving safely on the surface of the Earth, they find themselves in Florence, the exact place from which they departed. The elliptically-shaped inferno is thus a closed space. The same can be said about the space of the *Third Symphony*: Khandrikov turns upside down in the lake and finds himself in exactly the same place, only in a different realm. Consequently, Bely follows Dante’s geometrical model of the universe. This is tremendously significant, since in so doing Bely indicates what Florensky verbalized much later, namely, that new scientific discoveries validate the pre-Renaissance image of the universe. The space both authors depict is a non-Euclidean, Riemannian, curved space. Thus Bely justifies in his fiction the claims of contemporary scientists, including Florensky, that medieval mystics had foreseen the geometry which only twentieth-century scientists proved to be true.

There is no direct proof that Bely knew Riemannian geometry, but we can probably assume that he did since he was well-versed in contemporary scientific discoveries. His use of non-Euclidean geometry in the *Third Symphony* might also have originated in his conversations with Florensky, who, as a mystic and mathematician himself, was particularly interested in proving the validity of pre-Renaissance science. While Bely only depicts Dantean space, Florensky states directly that it exemplifies Riemannian curvature:

And so: constantly moving forward in a straight line, and having turned only once while traveling, the poet arrives at the same place where he started ... This means that the surface along which Dante moves is such, that movement forward in a straight line along it, with one turn, brings one back to the point where one began ... Clearly, such a surface 1) contains closed straight lines, and is a Riemannian space.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Michael Palma (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), XXXIV: 69-75, 105-111.

⁶⁷ Pavel Florenskii, *Mnimosti v geometrii* (Munich: O. Sagner, 1985), 44.

This description was published only in 1922, but the aforementioned paper, which Florensky wrote in 1902 and most likely discussed with Bely, might have contained the seeds of Florensky's discovery and influenced Bely's *Third Symphony*. However, for all practical purposes, it was Bely who first published a literary work spatially organized around non-Euclidean geometry. This exemplifies another of Bely's characteristic fusions: he bends scientific discoveries so as to illustrate his philosophical views, thus revealing an unexpected point of view as well as the potential for uniting science and philosophy. This dynamic creation of new constellations of ideas is perhaps the most vivid characteristic of Bely's approach, and possibly represents the only constant in his otherwise ever-changing mode of thinking.

Bely's theory of cultural history was also indebted to Friedrich Nietzsche.⁶⁸ Bely became familiar with Nietzsche's ideas in 1899, and later described this as a great discovery: "Since the fall of 1899 I live in Nietzsche; he is my repose, my moments of intimacy, when I put aside textbooks and put aside philosophies and give myself completely to his intimations, his sentences, his style, his turns of phrase" ("С осени 1899 года я живу Ницше; он есть мой отдых, мои интимные минуты, когда я, отстранив учебники и отстранив философии, всецело отдаюсь его интимным подглядам, его фразе, его стилю, его слогу").⁶⁹ He remained a great admirer of Nietzsche throughout his life, and carried the philosopher's books with him everywhere.⁷⁰ What Bely admired most in Nietzsche was the latter's tragic courage, for Nietzsche denied the existence of the metaphysical realm and advocated the "eternal recurrence" that Bely rejected. Bely saw Nietzsche as the epitome of a great man who, despite

⁶⁸ On Nietzsche's influence on Russian thought see Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche in Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁶⁹ Belyi, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii*, 465.

⁷⁰ Andrei Belyi, "Krugovoe dvizhenie," *Trudy i dni*, nos. 4-5 (July-October, 1912), 57.

his wisdom, tragically fell victim to the nihilistic Antichrist.⁷¹ Yet Nietzsche's notion of the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy fit well with Bely's own thinking about culture and cosmological processes.

In his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871), Nietzsche states that "art derives its continuous development from Apollo and Dionysius."⁷² Apollonian art is the art of appearances and representation, which gives form and clarity to reality, making it palpable to us. Dionysian art, on the other hand, forces us to face the chaos and terror of the chthonic depths of reality. Nietzsche asserts that "these two tendencies walk side by side, usually in violent opposition to one another, inciting one another to even more powerful births."⁷³

Bely broadened the scope of the Apollo-Dionysius dichotomy to include the entire arena of culture. He began interpreting historical development as the alternation between Apollo and Dionysius. Once culture establishes equilibrium between its Apollonian and Dionysian principles, it achieves a static state and ossifies into a dead shell. At that point the Dionysian leap destroys dead forms and creates new ones, through a higher spiritual ordering of both principles.

In Bely's view, a spiritually superior organization of culture will arise from a closer connection between the rational and irrational aspects of human nature, represented by the Apollonian and Dionysian principles, which he sees as cosmological. Following Nietzsche, he regards our rational and instinctual sides as the two channels of human learning: our rational self

⁷¹ Bely's entire essay "Krugovoe dvizhenie," is devoted to the greatness of thought and the tragic fall of Nietzsche.

⁷² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. A. Golffing (London: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1956), 113.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 115.

permits us to learn about phenomenal reality, while instinct gives us access to the transcendent.⁷⁴ Nietzsche's philosophy helped Bely create an epistemology that would account for our ability to reach the transcendental realm behind the material. Nietzsche's two channels of learning resolved Bely's long fight with Kantianism — and his search within neo-Kantianism for a scientific validation of the human ability to see beyond the phenomenal.⁷⁵

Considering the political atmosphere in Russia at that time, it is not surprising that Bely interpreted the Dionysian upsurge as a reassertion of Solovyov's views of the Apocalypse. Like Nietzsche, Bely saw nineteenth-century European culture as dead, and he viewed expectations of revolution both as a Dionysian upsurge and a tangible fulfillment of prophecies of the Apocalypse.⁷⁶ In the general spirit of high hopes and excitement, Bely, like Solovyov, insisted that revolution is a spiritual act, even if its participants do not recognize it as such.⁷⁷ In his essay "Social Democracy and Religion" ("Социал-демократия и религия"; 1907), Bely argues that while the social democrats founded their plans for an ideal state upon economic statistics, their impulse to transform existing society was essentially ethical and therefore spiritual.

However, disappointment over the failure of the 1905 revolution shook Bely's beliefs in the apocalyptic meaning of social revolution, and it cast serious doubt on Solovyov's vision of the Apocalypse, which, as the *Second Symphony* shows, was already problematic for Bely. This doubt contributed to Bely's departure from Christian teachings and to his desire for a spirituality

⁷⁴ Andrei Belyi, "Okno v budushchee," in *Arabeski* (Moscow: Musaget, 1911), 140.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of Bely's life-long struggle with Kantian philosophy see Cassedy, "Bely the Thinker," 313-16.

⁷⁶ Andrei Belyi, "Apokalipsis v russkoi poezii," in *Lug zelenyi* (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1967), 222-47.

⁷⁷ Nikolai Valentinov, *Dva goda s simvolistami* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1969), 65-66.

unencumbered by the limitations of any particular faith. However, Bely did not abandon Solovyovian philosophy altogether, only its mystical aspects, particularly those concerning the Apocalypse. Solovyovian notions of theurgy, by contrast, became an essential component of Bely's vision of evolution, although Bely gradually modified his views of Solovyov's ideas, just as he did with all the philosophical concepts that influenced him. While Solovyov understood theurgy as humanity's attempt to overcome the duality between God and his creation, Bely, who did not subscribe to the idea of God understood in the context of Christianity or any other organized religion, thought of theurgy as humankind's self-transformation leading to the unification between the phenomenal and the transcendental. Here "transcendental" refers to the realm of spirit as understood in theosophical terms: the universal spirit to which all religions ultimately refer.

Bely's understanding of theurgy was also influenced by the Nietzschean concept of self-overcoming, a goal of the *Übermensch* discussed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which Bely considered one of the "eternal books" ("вечные книги") that would transform man and his environment. What appealed to Bely in the Nietzschean concept of the *Übermensch* was that it signifies the rejection of traditional norms and the creation of new values, which will lead to a new society. This echoes with Bely's desire to transform contemporary culture, and secularizes Solovyovian theurgy as a concrete cultural force.⁷⁸ Yet, since Bely's ultimate vision of the new society lies in the connection between the phenomenal and transcendental, Nietzsche's repudiation of the transcendental prevented Bely from accepting the entire concept of the *Übermensch*. Bely's theurgy combines Solovyov's teachings with both theosophy and the

⁷⁸ Bely's discussion of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* can be found in his article from 1908: "Fridrikh Nitszhe," in *Arabeski* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1969), 60-91.

concept of the *Übermensch*, three philosophical concepts that are so different they virtually exclude one another. This again exemplifies Bely's chaotic synthesis of diverse sources and his ability to improvise and transform his views.

Bely's philosophical concerns reveal the trifold nature of his thinking: it is cosmological in his attempt to gain access to the transcendent; it is cultural in his assertion that contemporary culture must evolve to a higher spiritual level; and it is individual in his desire to resolve the split between rational and spiritual elements of human experience. The unification of the noumenal and the phenomenal underlies his thought in all three areas. The philosophical system that appeared to offer a logical connection between the cosmological and the human, and strove to reconcile the spiritual and the material, was Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy. Bely discovered Blavatsky's theosophy in 1901, and read Steiner's works in 1909, but did not initially distinguish them from the writings of other theosophists, whom he regarded skeptically for their lack of a clear epistemological methodology. Only in 1912, when he met Steiner personally, did Bely devote himself thoroughly to the study of anthroposophy, and he spent two years in Steiner's anthroposophical colony in Dornacht, Switzerland.⁷⁹

Steiner's philosophy is based on a dualistic worldview. It asserts that spirit is the source of matter and not the other way around, and that humanity's evolution is tightly connected with that of the universe. Man holds within him the clues to understanding cosmic mysteries. Human earthly evolution is seen as the evolution of human consciousness, which, when elevated to the appropriate level, will reveal the workings of the universe. Cosmic and human evolutions are interconnected and they both lead to a non-physical, spiritual state. Steiner gives the details of this process in his two-fold doctrine: cosmic evolution spirals through seven stages of the Earth

⁷⁹ Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, 37-55.

(he names them after the heavenly planets), and individual egos evolve through these same stages by way of karmic incarnations.⁸⁰

Anthroposophy greatly appealed to Bely, because it linked humanity to universal processes and allowed Bely to unify his cosmological and cultural theories. If humanity is part of cosmic evolution, then history becomes the story of the evolution of humanity's consciousness; the sequence of civilizations, the emergence of different nations, and contemporary cultural and political problems all fall into the category of spiritual development. Moreover, Steiner insisted on scientific means of achieving cosmological knowledge. As much as he shared with mystics a belief in the reality of spirit, he rejected their assertion that thought is opposed to spirit. Instead he proposed a "scientific" means of reaching the noumenal realm. His method united the two realms by using meditation to activate long-dormant soul-organs of perception, which function just as our sensory organs do, but in the realm of the transcendental.⁸¹

The absence of methodological sloppiness and the supposedly scientific rigor of Steiner's teachings appealed to Bely's scientific side. Moreover, Steiner, like Bely himself, believed that humanity had reached the stage of its evolution where man is divided between faith and reason. Steiner stated that the next phase was imminent, and that man's true spiritual path lay in the very scientific knowledge that had led to this impasse. This coincided with Bely's own belief in the possibility of connecting the transcendental and physical, rational and irrational; it seemed to provide a mathematical validation for his own philosophical views. The dynamic character of Steiner's views also appealed to Bely's own lively treatment of his philosophical sources.

⁸⁰ A. P. Shepherd, *A Scientist of the Invisible: An Introduction to the Life and Work of Rudolf Steiner* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954).

⁸¹ Rudolf Steiner, *An Outline of Occult Science* (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1972), chap. 4, "Cognition of the Higher Worlds," 255-347.

As Bely was attending Steiner's Basel lectures in 1912 and working on *Petersburg*, he wrote two articles, "The Line, the Circle, the Spiral — of Symbolism" and "Circular Movement," in which he compiled diverse sources and arrived at a geometrical model of the universe as a mathematical illustration of his philosophical search. In the first of these articles, Bely posits two common ways of looking at the world: circular and linear. The first is represented by decadents who see human experience as a succession of intensely experienced moments, and the second by evolutionists who see human development as a succession of stages guided by predictable laws. Bely argues that neither of these views describes the whole of human experience, for evolutionists deny that anything can be known beyond experience, and decadents have no control over experiential intensity and therefore no synoptic vision of Truth. For Bely, a revelatory experience could be a way of glimpsing Eternity (he uses the term Eternity interchangeably with Truth) only if it were the sum of all past and future experiences, but then one moment would include all moments, and that could only be a vision of Being itself. Thus both views divorce themselves from Eternity and are essentially circular: "Once motion acknowledged itself as a circular motion, it also acknowledged that it — the motion — does not exist. There is only immobility; and a symbolic expression of immobility is immobility of thought" ("Раз движение себя признало движеньем по кругу, то оно признало, что его, движения, нет. Есть одна неподвижность; и условное выражение неподвижности — в неподвижности мысли").⁸²

In his second article, "Circular Movement," Bely equates circular movement with death, understood as eternal return. He labels Nietzsche's philosophy of eternal return a lie, asserting: "We accepted Nietzsche and all of his idiosyncrasies. This means that Nietzsche was the germ

⁸² Belyi, "Liniia, krug, spiral' — simbolizma," *Trudy i dni*, nos. 4-5 (July-October, 1912): 13-15.

of our illness, but could have been the germ of our health” (“Ницше приняли мы; и все странности Ницше мы приняли. Это значит: Ницше был бациллою нашей болезни, а мог быть бациллой здоровья”).⁸³ In other words, humanity accepted Nietzsche’s teaching in its entirety, without separating the truth from the falsehood. As a result, what could have been a philosophy breaking the circle of dogma became yet another school of thought which only strengthened the dogmatic circle.

Having described the contemporary cultural and spiritual situation as a deadly circle of eternal return, Bely then asserts that “nevertheless Eternity exists, although its meaning lies ... beyond all existing meanings” (“тем не менее Вечность есть, хотя ее смысл лежит ... за пределами всех существующих смыслов”).⁸⁴ He views the spiral as a geometrical model of the universe, which accounts for both the phenomenal and the transcendental, and shows the way out of the deadly circle of repetition and towards the transcendental. As Bely points out, the spiral is a circular line — a figure combining linear and circular modes of thought.⁸⁵ The idea of reconciling circular and linear development into a spiral is in itself quite common, so it can hardly be called Bely’s innovation. Even Lenin and Plekhanov spoke of the spiral as the geometrical portrayal of historical and social development, basing their argument on the Hegelian triads of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.⁸⁶ However, Bely’s vision does not acknowledge strict oppositions but instead emphasizes the fluidity and intersection of various

⁸³ Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 68.

⁸⁴ Belyi, “Liniia, krug, spiral’,” 15-16.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸⁶ Lenin read Hegel in 1913, and wrote the part of his *Philosophical Notes* entitled “Conspectus of Hegel’s ‘The Science of Logic’” in 1914-15. Plekhanov discussed Hegel in his 1905 “On Two Fronts: Collection of Political Articles.” See Cliff Slaughter, *Lenin on Dialectics: Introduction to The Philosophical Notebooks of Lenin* (New York: Labour Press, 1962), 1-32.

concepts. He does not consciously construct a model; he achieves it by compiling diverse philosophical concepts.

The entire point of the spiral is that it does not create closed circles. In Bely's view, this is due to the spiral's original and fundamental feature — the dot: “The spiral comes out of a dot; its line circles around a line coming out of a dot and runs along widening circles” (“Спираль исходит из точки; линия ее, крутясь вокруг линии, проведенной из точки, бежит на расширяющихся кругах”).⁸⁷ As we look towards the unwinding spiral, we see a circle and a dot, the dot being a geometrical representation of the imaginary axis extending from the original point starting the spiral. These two geometrical elements in Bely's model describe the universe at a given point in its evolution: we are moving along the circumference of the circle, which demonstrates a certain level of universal and human evolution. But in order to evolve towards Eternity, we have to leap towards another level, represented by the next circle, located closer to the spiral's top. In order to make this leap, one needs to enter the dot, the geometrical origin of the spiral — the point connecting the lowest point of evolution with Truth or Eternity. “In a dot, the line of evolution is compressed” (“В точке – сжатая линия эволюции”),⁸⁸ Bely says, implying that a dot is not simply a fixed point, but also the opening in the circle, which permits us to progress: “In this circle there is only one place where ... the spiral does not completely close the circle” (“в этой окружности только есть одно место где ... спираль не совсем замыкает окружность”).⁸⁹ Why? Because the dot represents the “primal moment”: in geometrical terms it is a dot from which the spiral begins and which appears in every consecutive

⁸⁷ Belyi, “Liniia, krug, spiral’,” 17.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

circle through an imaginary line drawn from it inside the spiral. In terms of evolution, it is a moment touching Eternity, the moment encompassing in itself all past and future moments.

In Bely's words, "That opening in the dogma includes in it also the dot of the first moment where Eternity and time met ... for an instant" ("Тот разрыв окружности догмата включает в окружность и точку первого мига, где Вечность и время соприкоснулись ... на миг").⁹⁰ In other words, it is a point that allows any particular phase of evolution — inevitably ossified by dogma — to renew itself and enter another evolutionary state. That moment, an opening in a circle of one evolutionary stage, is always present, for it represents constant principles of evolutionary movement. This becomes vitally important when a current cycle of evolution is completed. In Steiner's terms, it is a point when planetary spirits go into a state of rest (Pralaya), from which they emerge onto the next level of planetary development. Since man is a microcosm of the universe, he must do the same.

Although Bely does believe in the reincarnation of the spirit, he departs from a strictly Steinerian model, or to be more precise, focuses on issues only suggested by Steiner. By introducing the Dionysian leap, he ascribes a more active role to man: in order to break free from dead culture, man must dive into the "primal source," the geometrical dot signifying his primordial, Dionysian nature. Only a Dionysian leap can liberate humanity from the circle of dead thought, so as to create new thoughts that will elevate us to the next circle on the spiral. The Dionysian leap, not mentioned by Steiner, places man in a central position in Bely's model and requires of him not only heightened consciousness, but also additional qualities needed for the dangerous leap. Bely encourages humanity to take that step: "Up, up! This time — along a

⁹⁰ Ibid.

spiral!” (“вверх, вверх! На этот раз – по спирали!”).⁹¹ He describes the leap into man’s primordial self as a descent into an active volcano, where one can gain access to life-sustaining elements, but can also lose oneself and fall into unfathomable depths.⁹² This compilation of Steinerian doctrines and the Nietzschean Dionysian-Apollonian opposition, mediated by Bely’s own view of humanity’s central role in evolution, underscores the fact that Bely does not consciously construct a model of the universe, but instead dynamically transforms diverse sources in order to create his unique vision.

The Dionysian leap is simultaneously the absolute height and ultimate low of humanity, just like Bely’s dot, which stands at the very bottom of the spiral, but whose axis runs through all the spirals of evolution up to Eternity. In order to leap to the top, instead of falling down the evolutionary spiral, one must possess one primary virtue: a union of thought, will, and emotion. Bely inscribes into his spiral an equilateral triangle that portrays the qualities that man needs to evolve: “Man in that circle is a dot ... the triangle is inscribed into a man with one corner in his head, one in his heart, and one in his arm: we carry the triangle, we move the triangle with thought, feeling, and will” (“Человек в том круге есть точка ... треугольник вписан и в человека: углом в голову, углом в сердце и углом в руку: треугольник мы носим, треугольник мы движем мыслью, чувством и волею”).⁹³

Human qualities thus translate into geometrical values as well. Each of them signifies a line or circle, and only the presence of all three results in a spiral, or the internal triangle required in order for man to evolve. As Bely states in “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral — of Symbolism”:

⁹¹ Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 68.

⁹² Ibid., 72-73.

⁹³ Belyi, “Liniia, krug, spiral’,” 19.

“The philosophy of the moment is a heart ripped out of the chest and running straight ahead” (“философия мига – вырванное из груди и вперед побежавшее сердце”), while “the philosophy of dogmatism is thought ripped out of the mind” (“философия догматизма – мысль, вырванная из мозга”).⁹⁴ The first represents the line, the second — the circle. In the absence of either, or in the absence of a connection between the two: “Our will ... escapes our heart and mind; and in the mechanics of life ... its golden sunlight becomes indeed a yellow desert” (“Наша воля ... от того-то и вырвалась из головы и из сердца; и в механике жизни ... золотой ее солнечный свет стал воистину желтой пустыней”).⁹⁵ Consequently, the connection between heart and mind not only places us on the evolutionary spiral, but equally important, it directs our will, so that it may serve us in the task of evolution. In order to achieve this vital connection between all parts of his psyche, man must transform himself through theurgic activity. As Bely states in “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral — of Symbolism”: “The only human deed is the deed of deification: the act of unification in God of oneself and others” (“единственным человеческим делом есть действие обоготворения: действие соединения в Боге – себя и других”).⁹⁶ Given that Bely’s understanding of theurgy fuses Solovyov’s teachings, theosophy, and the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, this statement describes Bely’s way of thinking: a chaotic fusion of diverse, even contradictory philosophical thoughts, resulting in fundamental ambiguity. This ambiguity will become apparent in my analysis of his novel *Petersburg* – the embodiment of his universal vision of evolution.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 20.

By merging his version of theurgy and the Nietzschean Dionysian leap, Bely goes beyond the parallelism between human and universal evolution implied in Steiner's doctrine and replaces it with a close connection between the two, in which man plays a central role. Man's theurgical work allows him to develop his individual spirit and makes him cognizant of the workings of the universe; this brings him closer to Eternity as he realizes that he is a part of it. Since his spirit is now connected to its universal source and his consciousness is aware of universal evolution, he can steer cultural development towards Eternity, towards the dot symbolizing the opening in each circle of the spiral. Man's spiritual development thus constitutes the key to the entire process of cultural evolution. If man is not connected to Eternity, he is not aware of universal processes and cannot realize them on the cultural level. But awareness is not enough: man still has to possess appropriate qualities — Bely's "triangle" — in order to enact evolution by successfully taking a Dionysian leap. In this way, cultural evolution depends entirely on man's spiritual evolution: "The transformation of the reality outside us depends on the transformation of the reality within us" ("Преобразование реальности вне нас зависит от преобразования реальности внутри нас").⁹⁷

Steiner's philosophy should be seen as a frame that Bely fills with his own content. Since Bely regards cultural evolution as the equivalent of universal evolution, and since this occurs on the phenomenal, visible plane of reality, man's internal development becomes a requirement for closing the gap between the phenomenal and transcendental. This centrality of man differentiates Bely's model from Steiner's doctrine. Knowledge of anthroposophy cannot lead to a full understanding of Bely's model, since Bely bends Steiner's general principles to suit his own purposes. Bely's vision of evolution as a part of a universal process may be based on

⁹⁷ Andrei Belyi, *Simvolizm* (Moscow: Musaget, 1910), 3.

Steiner's philosophy, but his interpretation of this philosophy is rooted in his own views. More of those ideas will become apparent later in my analysis of *Petersburg*.

Bely's vision of the universe thus differs here from the one presented in his *Second* and *Third Symphonies*. I would suggest that this reflects a change in Bely's approach to his own concepts. At the beginning of his writing career Bely tried to work out a definitive design of the universe, perhaps influenced by Florensky's desire to prove the similarities between the pre-Renaissance vision of the universe and non-Euclidean geometry. Later he abandoned this attempt, and created an ever-changing cosmic vision instead of an authoritative, definitive model of the universe. Perhaps this is why Bely uses a spiral, which is a stock figure employed by numerous thinkers for a variety of concepts. Bely's point is not to propose another view on the structure of the universe, but to express its constantly changing nature.

Nevertheless, the similarities between Dante's and Bely's models of the universe can still be detected on the symbolical level of both works. As Yury Lotman argues in his article "The Journey of Ulysses in Dante's *Divine Comedy*," the spatial architecture of Dante's work has an ethical meaning: "In the Dantean system, space has a meaning. Every spatial category has a particular meaning."⁹⁸ In other words, each geometrical space has a symbolic meaning. In the *Divine Comedy*, the more the symbol loses its true content and becomes more conditional and less absolute, the more distanced it becomes from the truth of Eternity and the more it becomes a lie. As Lotman explains:

The deeper one descends from the heights of God's Love and Truth, the more the absoluteness of the union of expression and content weakens ... Violation of true

⁹⁸ Iurii Lotman, "Puteshestvie Ulissa v 'Bozhestvennoi komedii' Dante," in *Statii po semiotike i tipologii kultury* (Tallinn, Eston.: Alexandra, 1992), 450.

unions is worse than murder, for it kills Truth and appears as a source of Lie in all its infernal essence.⁹⁹

It is in the last circle of hell that movement stops completely, since the greatest of sinners — traitors — are frozen in Lake Cocytus. In opposition to the sinners' immobility is Dante's movement along the spiral, which turns into a flight along a straight line up to the Earth's surface, to Florence.

Dante and Bely employ the symbolism of space in similar ways. Bely views contemporary culture as dead because words have lost their meaning and become empty symbols:

Listen carefully. Not one airborne word will enter your hearing: a sharp-winged verb will not rise. Here the word slouches. Strangely somehow a dull word splashes across from a little heap to a little heap.

Прислушайтесь. Ни одно летучее слово не пересечет ваш слух: острокрылатый глагол не встанет. Слово здесь ползает. Клякло как то прошлепает тускловатое слово от кучечки к кучечке.¹⁰⁰

Bely sees his culture as a lie, precisely because words have lost their meaning. This lie is expressed in geometrical terms as a circle, which, as we have seen, Bely equates with immobility. This is why he urges men to undertake the Dionysian leap, which will renew dead culture by moving the spiral of evolution to its next level. Significantly, this Dionysian leap resembles Dante's descent into hell. Although both actions are described as downward movements, towards Dionysian chaos in Bely's case and towards the center of sin in Dante's case, their ultimate significance has the meaning of upward movement, towards Eternity. The Dionysian leap elevates the universe closer to the Spirit, while Dante's journey creates moral

⁹⁹ Ibid., 453.

¹⁰⁰ Belyi, "Krugovoe dvizhenie," 51.

renewal. During his journey through hell Dante recognizes and rejects sin, and returns to Florence morally rejuvenated.

The similarities in Dante's and Bely's symbolic perceptions of space, as well as the lie governing this perception, suggest that Bely is drawn to the Medieval Christian interpretation of the universe, despite his secularization of his model and his rejection of the Christian God. Given the similarities between Bely's and Dante's symbolism of space, the "lie" — understood as the meaninglessness of words — seems to be the main cause for the dogmatic state and spiritual death of culture. We will see in chapter two that, in the absence of meaningful words (the truth), culture not only doesn't progress towards the Spirit, but returns to its previous, less spiritually advanced forms. Therefore, just as in the Medieval perception of the world, the lie is the main "sin" of the modern world and the truth appears to be the only way to further the connection with the transcendent and breathe new spirit into dead cultural dogma. In both *Inferno* and *Petersburg*, only the unmasking of the lie, represented by the descent to the earth's primordial core, can rejuvenate the human connection to the noumenal realm. In Dante's case it is the lowest circle of hell, the seat of Lucifer, while for Bely it is the primordial, Dionysian chaos. In both instances, the truth is recovered through experience of the irrational, even evil side of human nature, and not through its rational aspect, which craves a connection with the spiritual realm, the ultimate good.

This means of individual and cultural spiritual rejuvenation sheds a new light on both works, namely, their deep connection with pre-Christian Dionysian rites. This connection indicates the persistence of certain modes of human behavior and demonstrates the duality of human nature (evil and good), as well as the creative and rejuvenating power coming from the tension of this duality. Bely was well acquainted with Nietzsche's theory regarding the creative

energy emerging from this tension, and so Bely consciously recognizes the Dionysian leap as necessary for cultural renewal; Dante, meanwhile, seems to intuitively feel it. Seen from this perspective, the connection between Dante's and Bely's means of achieving spiritual rejuvenation adds a deeper dimension to Dante's work. The similarities in the symbolic treatment of space in both works reveal hidden nuances in both models of the universe.

Circling back to the question of influences on Bely's evolutionary model, we can see that he gradually abandoned his belief in Solovyov's apocalyptic teachings in favor of the Nietzschean concept of the *Übermensch*. Now Bely insists that the Dionysian leap will open the next level only if men decide to take the dangerous plunge. There is no external agent to elevate humanity to the higher spiritual level, no Biblical event that could effect cultural and universal change. Man becomes the sole active agent who can bring about the change. The Dionysian leap is seen as a judgment of human readiness — both spiritual and mental — to progress, but not as the last and final judgment understood in religious terms.

This is not to say that Bely abandoned all of Solovyov's teachings — Solovyov's ideas run through Bely's entire creative oeuvre. Bely's philosophy of evolution still aims for a connection with the transcendental, but his is a secular philosophy that accounts for emotions as well as reason. In this way, Bely separates the transcendental from its religious context, secularizes it, and presents it as an aspect of human experience that can be studied through unconventional, but still scientific methods. It appears that Bely wishes to demystify the transcendental because his assumption that the revolution of 1905 would cause a Solovyovian Apocalypse was proven wrong. Characteristically for Bely, however, this stance is not as definitive as one might expect. He still seems drawn to the apocalyptic interpretation of revolutionary movements. Despite his disillusionment after 1905, he greets the 1917 revolution

enthusiastically and sees it again as a materialization of Biblical prophecies. In his poem “Christ has risen” (“Христос воскресь”; 1918), he portrays the country’s suffering in Biblical terms: it is Russia’s crucifixion after which the country will be resurrected in a new cultural form. By contrast, his essay “Revolution and Culture” (“Революция и культура”; 1917) interprets revolution as a new stage in the process of cultural evolution. Bely’s vacillation between apocalyptic religiosity and rational secularism creates a constant tension in his thinking. Mystical elation tempered by realistic disillusionment engenders an ironic stance towards mysticism and a renewed interest in rational philosophy — this battle characterizes Bely’s lifelong search for a system to combine rationalism and mysticism.

During his search for a philosophy that would account for both the phenomenal and noumenal realms, Bely encountered various ideas that he believed might create such a system. His initial enchantment with Solovyov’s religious, apocalyptic teachings gradually gives way to a more secularized spirituality represented by Nietzsche and Steiner, and finally to the scientific means of arriving at his own philosophical system. Bely’s *Third Symphony* marks a decisive point in his philosophical development, when he seems to depart from Solovyov’s apocalyptic vision, and turns to science to resolve the division between emotion and reason, which, in Bely’s view, creates cultural stagnancy. Yet Bely perceived each new philosophy through the prism of Solovyov’s teachings. This explains many apparent inconsistencies in Bely’s views. Bely lived through different philosophies with the utmost intensity, choosing only those elements that corresponded to his sensibilities. The final product of his search, his model of universal and human evolution, fuses the elements of those divergent philosophies into a unique system representing Bely’s own vision of the universe.

Chapter 2. *Petersburg*: The Dramatization of Bely's Vision of the Universe

Section One: *Petersburg* — The Last Period of the Universal Evolutionary Phase

In his novel *Petersburg*, Bely dramatizes the events of the 1905 revolution in order to reassess his former, apocalyptic view of the revolution and to explore his new view of the universe. Bely presents his picture of the universe cautiously, as a working theory in progress, rather than a final answer to universal questions. He frames the action of *Petersburg* within a cultural space that seems like a circle of repetitions: the image of circularity starts in the Prologue and continues throughout the entire text. This implies that contemporary culture lies on the lowest ring of Bely's evolutionary spiral.

At the beginning of the novel, Bely depicts Petersburg as the product of Peter the Great's creative mind; thanks to him, "in those distant days, out of the mossy marshes rose high roofs and masts and spires, piercing the dank greenish fog in jags" (p. 18)¹⁰¹ ("в те далекие дни вставали из мшистых болот и высокие крыши, и мачты, и шпицы, проникая зубцами своими промозглый, зеленоватый туман"; p. 16).¹⁰² Peter's act of creation thus owes its existence to human thought. Since Bely rejected the Christian God, we can understand this order of creation — from mind to material world — as a reference to Steiner's philosophy, which asserts the primacy of spirit over matter. Bely thus views the creation of Petersburg as a dynamic moment initiating the new — and first — phase in human and universal evolution.

¹⁰¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Bely's novel are from Andrey Bely, *Petersburg*, trans. David McDuff (London: Penguin Books, 1995).

¹⁰² The text of the quotes in Russian is from Andrei Belyi, *Peterburg* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Respublika, 1994).

In terms of Bely's geometrical model, Peter's founding of Petersburg represents the dot in the middle of the circle — a life-giving moment as opposed to a dogmatic circle. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Bely explains in “The Circle” (the final section of his article “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral — of Symbolism”), that every dogma (a circle) has a dot in the middle which represents the onset of this dogma, when it was a dynamic, creative reality.¹⁰³ Bely associates this same idea with Petersburg in the Prologue to his novel: “Petersburg ... does appear — on maps: in the form of two small circles, one set inside the other, with a black dot in the center” (p. 4) (“Петербург ... оказывается – на картах: в виде двух друг в друге сидящих кружков с черной точкою в центре”; p. 5). Thus in one sentence he depicts the city as the product of a creative act which has become ossified because the values present at its inception have become outdated.

This cultural ossification is suggested by the motif of circularity that runs through all levels of the novel, arguably until its end.¹⁰⁴ Virtually all critics who have written about *Petersburg* have commented on this aspect of it. Scholarly reactions to the novel's circularity vary from J. D. Elsworth's exasperated statement (“It would take an apocalypse to destroy the charmed circle that Bely has constructed”¹⁰⁵) to the interpretation of the novel as a circle of surveillance where everybody is a detective spying on everybody else.¹⁰⁶ Some critics view *Petersburg's* circularity as the expression of the age-old controversy concerning Russia's nature

¹⁰³ Belyi, “Liniia, krug, spiral’,” 17. All translations from Russian essays are mine unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰⁴ The notion of *Petersburg* representing a circle of dead culture was first introduced by Robert A. Maguire and John E. Malmstad in their article “Petersburg,” in Malmstad, ed., *Andrey Bely: Spirit of Symbolism*, 96-144.

¹⁰⁵ Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, 105.

¹⁰⁶ Olga Matich, “Backs, Suddenlys, and Surveillance,” in *Petersburg/Petersburg: Novel and City, 1900-1921*, ed. Olga Matich (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 31-55.

as Western or Eastern;¹⁰⁷ others see the novel's circularity as a compilation of literary allusions to a culture that cannot overcome its previous cultural achievements.¹⁰⁸

In the Prologue, a tautological series of questions, answers, and definitions create a circle from which there is no escape: "Let us expatiate at greater length on Petersburg: there is a Petersburg, or Saint Petersburg, or Peter ... On the basis of these same judgments, Nevsky Prospect is a Petersburg Prospect" (p. 4) ("Распространимся более о Петербурге: есть – Петербург, или Санкт-Петербург, или Питер На основании тех же суждений Невский Проспект есть петербургский Проспект"; p. 5). This is probably a good place to note that the humorous wit palpable in this passage and in the entire Prologue foreshadows the narrator's tone throughout the novel. He describes the most serious events and ideas using parody and irony. Elsworth argues that these literary devices, so prolific in *Petersburg*, undermine the nineteenth-century, realistic tradition, since they do not allow the reader to have a naïve and clear response to the characters.¹⁰⁹ While I agree with his argument, this subversion represents only one of humor's many functions in Bely's novel. Humor also allows Bely to distance himself from the events and to present his ideas as propositions instead of truths. Moreover, comic devices serve as a tool for judging both his past philosophical beliefs and present convictions. Humor's important role in *Petersburg* is its revelation of the full scope of human experience. The mixture of parody and seriousness embodies the true nature of life, in which experiences are never one-dimensional. In fact, it is "because" rather than "despite" humor that Bely manages to depict the full spectrum of human existence. For example, Dudkin, one of the novel's major characters, is

¹⁰⁷ Leonid Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman "Peterburg"* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988), 280-82.

¹⁰⁸ For a list of works interpreting the circularity of *Petersburg* in this way see footnote 12 in this chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, 93.

tragic and complex, yet this does not undermine the hilarious aspects of his delirium; on the contrary, it presupposes them. The same can be said of Stepka, a hero transported to *Petersburg* from Bely's earlier novel, *The Silver Dove* (*Серебрянный голубь*; 1910). This naïve peasant's apocalyptic views are simultaneously revelational and nonsensical. The half-serious tone does not erase the seriousness of the situation, but rather underscores its complexity. However the most significant role of parody and satire in *Petersburg* is their subversion of proposed by Bely philosophical visions of the universe. In my further analysis of the novel, I will try to demonstrate how the comic devices abundantly employed by Bely underscore his dynamic and relativistic view of the actuality.

Returning to the theme of circularity, the image of the city as a paper mill (first mentioned in the Prologue) suggests that Petersburg only exists through words: “From here ... surges and swarms the printed book; from here ... speeds the official circular” (p. 4) (“оттуда ... несется потоком рой отпечатанной книги; несется ... стремительно циркуляр”; p. 5). With his use of the word “circular” (“циркуляр”), Bely links Petersburg to the circularity of dead culture. Petersburg is presented as a place of dead words and meaningless decrees rather than the heart of a dynamic empire: words have lost their vital meaning, as is clear from the formulaic language used in the Prologue, echoed later in the novel in Apollon Apollonovich's inane puns (“baron” – “harrow” [“барон – борона”]; in Russian “барон” means “baron,” while “борона,” which means “harrow,” could be confused for the wife of a baron). Bely depicts the city as a bureaucratic factory producing masses of irrelevant papers which only create the illusion of an efficiently operating empire. This image is personified by the Senator, Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, who heads a “very important Institution,” and who is described as the overseer of a paper mill, rather than a statesman:

In the Government Institution Apollon Apollonovich spent hours in the review of the document factory: from the radiant center ... flew out all circulars to the heads of the subordinate institutions. (p. 51)

В Учреждении Аполлон Аполлонович проводил часы за просмотром бумажного производства: из воссиявшего центра ... вылетали все циркуляры к начальникам подведомственных учреждений. (p. 47)

The decrees he produces are not simply ineffective and unnecessarily complex, but even damage the state to whose management they should contribute:

Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov ... sits in his office while his shadow ... trashes the fields ... whistling, it carouses in the spaces of Samara, of Tambov, of Saratov ... crops grow thin and the cattle rot. (p. 363)

Аполлон Аполлонович Аплеухов ... сидит у себя в кабинете в то время, как тень его ... бросается в полях ... гуляет в пространствах – самарских, тамбовских, саратовских ... от нее худеет посев; скот – гниет. (p. 340)

Sometimes these circulars do not even reach the provinces, for Apollon “is not on top of things ... The arrow of his circulars does not pierce the provinces; it gets broken” (p. 364) (“не поспекает ... И стрела его циркуляра не пронизает уездов: ломается”; p. 341).

Bely underscores his mockery of Apollon with references to the Senator’s preference for closed spaces. While Peter the Great imagined his city as a “window to Europe,” an opening of isolated Russian culture to Western thought, both the Senator and his son, Nikolay, are afraid of open space — the very premise on which the city was built — and they prefer small, closed-in spaces: carriages, offices, studies. By locking their studies, they both construct a confined universe separate from external reality, which represents a reversal of Peter’s idea of openness:

Concentrating himself in thought, Nikolay Apollonovich was in the habit of locking his work room: then it began to seem to him that both he and the room ... were transformed ... from objects of the real world into intelligible symbols of purely logical constructions ... he felt his body being poured into the “universe,” that is, into the room. (p. 48)

Сосредоточиваясь в мысли, Николай Аполлонович запирает на ключ свою рабочую комнату: тогда ему начинало казаться, что и он, и комната ...

перевоплощались ... из предметов реального мира в умопостигаемые символы чисто логических построений ... он чувствовал тело свое пролитым во “вселенную,” то есть в комнату. (p. 42)

This obvious caricature of Peter’s founding act — “And having thus displaced himself, Nikolay Apollonovich would become a truly creative being” (p. 48) (“И сместив себя так, Николай Аполлонович становился воистину творческим существом”; p. 42) — creates a miniscule, artificial universe in which all is predictable, controlled, and stationary. The small size of Nikolay’s creation is also the cause of its destruction — the servant’s knock causes Nikolay’s world to disappear. Thus Petersburg, envisioned by Peter the Great as an avatar of openness, turns into a claustrophobic set of small, locked places with opaque windows. Bely stresses this transformation by using images of luster and shiny wax in his depictions of the Senator’s house, the dignitaries’ uniforms, and the Emperor’s glistening palace. This superficial gloss is not the glow of a thriving culture, but merely a lingering reflection of a dead culture. The sun, a life-giving source, cannot penetrate the narrative universe, but is merely reflected, and hence another circle is created. This inability to absorb the sun’s rays suggests that Petersburg is a world of shadows, a theme that I will discuss later in this chapter.

Petersburg’s loss of cultural vitality is underscored by the circular repetition of “Apollon” in the first name and patronymic name of the novel’s main character, Apollon Apollonovich. This also alludes to the Nietzschean opposition between the Dionysian and Apollonian phases. The Senator’s house evokes the latter, static phase since it contains classical sculptures and a reproduction of a neoclassical painting by Jacques-Louis David. However, for Bely, the “ideal of stasis” is represented not by ancient Greece, but by ancient Egypt. As he states in “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral,” “If Classicism were really unchangeable, its emblem would obviously be not Venus but ... a pyramid” (“Если бы классицизм был бы подлинно неизменен, то

эмблемой его уж конечно бы служила не Венера, а ... пирамида”).¹¹⁰ The pyramid shape calms the Senator in moments of emotional distress: “At times, for hours on end, he would lapse into an unthinking contemplation of pyramids, triangles ... cubes and trapezoids” (p. 21) (“Он, бывало, подолгу предавался бездумному созерцанию: пирамид, треугольников ... кубов, трапеций”; p. 17). Moreover, Apollon Apollonovich is frequently likened to an Egyptian statue. When sitting at the ball, his legs rest perpendicularly to the carpet, his knees form a ninety-degree angle to his legs, and the movements of his hands are perpendicular to his chest: Apollon “looked like an Egyptian depicted on the rug — angular, broad-shouldered, despising all anatomical laws” (p. 193) (“казалась написанной на ковре фигуркою египтянина — угловатой, плечистой, презирающей все правила анатомии”; p. 180). Apollon, who personifies the state itself, represents the “ideal” cultural stasis. This implies that Petersburg is not simply the end of one era, but also the last phase in all history, which has completed a full circle by recreating its initial forms in modern culture. We can deduce from these images as well as from Bely’s statement quoted earlier that Bely views Ancient Egypt as the first period in human and universal evolution since he portrays the initial cultural forms as Egyptian. Hence the city represents not only the end of Russian, but of all Western culture.

The image of a repetitive, closed cycle of evolution applies not just to the city itself, but also to its residents. The endless circulation of people on Nevsky Prospect is mentioned both in the Prologue and throughout the novel, either in repeated statements: “and the circulation moved: over there, from there” (p. 19) (“и шла циркуляция: там, оттуда”; p. 16); or in repeated variations of terms: “bowlers, feathers, service-caps; service-caps, service-caps, feathers; cocked hat, top hat, service-cap, scarf, umbrella, feather” (pp. 20, 24, 53, 61, 131) (“котелки, перья,

¹¹⁰ Belyi, “Liniiia, krug, spiral’,” 56.

фуражки; фуражки, фуражки, перья; треуголка, цилиндр, фуражка, платочек, зонтик, перо”; pp. 17, 21, 45, 52, 125). This linguistic circulation underscores the circulating movement of the people, and their metonymical description suggests increasing speed. Yet, at the same time, it diminishes and fragments them by listing only parts of their attire. As the action progresses, human anatomy becomes fragmented and flattened until people are portrayed as centipedes, a much lower life-form:

Bears, moustaches, chins ... shoulders, shoulders, shoulders were flowing ... here a myriad of legs was running ... There were no people on Nevsky Prospekt, but there was a crawling, howling myriapod there ... It has been moving along the Nevsky for centuries ... and nothing changes it. (p. 282)

Бороды, усы, подбородки ... протекали плечи, плечи, плечи ... тут бежали многие ноги ... Не было на Невском проспекте людей; но ползучая, голосащая многоножка была там ... Здесь по Невскому она пробегает столетия ... и ничто ее не сменяет. (p. 261)

This reversal of evolution visually illustrates Bely’s ideas, as outlined in both “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral” and “Circular Movement,” namely, that dead culture feeds on its own “dead thought” and “waste,” and therefore produces disfigured or lower life-forms.¹¹¹

Bely develops the same theme in relation to earlier stages of Russian literature, drawing parallels between his characters and the heroes of Pushkin, Gogol, and Dostoevsky, and hence underscoring the circularity of a culture that cannot evolve beyond its past achievements.¹¹² The similarity between Bely’s characters and their literary predecessors implies that the former are

¹¹¹ Ibid., 16; Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 68.

¹¹² Such parallels have been mentioned by virtually all critics of *Petersburg* and interpreted as one of the chief manifestations of circularity governing the novel. See for example: Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman*, 188-210; Maria Carlson, “The Silver Dove,” in Malmstad, ed., *Andrey Bely: Spirit of Symbolism*, 60-95; Maguire and Malmstad, “Petersburg”; Samuel D. Cioran, *The Apocalyptic Symbolism of Andrej Belyj* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 160-80; Nina Berberova, “A Memoir and a Comment,” 115-21; Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov, “Peterburg i ‘Peterburgskii tekst’ russkoi literatury,” in *Peterburgskii tekst russkoi literatury: izbrannye trudy* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2003), 7-118. Nietzsche’s influence on Bely is evident throughout *Petersburg* since both the structure and the actions of its inhabitants are circular.

derivative and disfigured caricatures of the originals. In this way, both their complexities and conflicts acquire strong parodic overtones. Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov is resurrected as Nikolay Ableukhov, who undergoes interrogations similar to those to which his prototype was subjected in *Crime and Punishment*. However, unlike Raskolnikov, Nikolay is unable to act: his crime — involvement in a revolutionary party — is only circumstantial, and he bitterly regrets it. His nervous instability leads to his compliance with the interrogator who is easily able to elicit information from him. The only “criminal act” he dares to commit, dressing as the Red Domino, is interpreted by the news-hungry press as a revolutionary statement, while in fact it is an inane attempt to rekindle romantic interest in a woman who herself is a parody of Liza, the heroine of her favorite opera, “The Queen of Spades.”

Apollon Ableukhov strongly resembles Karenin from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Like Karenin, he is a strict and uncompromising husband who has lost his wife to another man, and has been left with a son with whom he cannot communicate. He also has large, greenish ears, another similarity to Karenin (this was the feature that so bothered Anna Karenina in her husband's appearance). Linguistic links underscore the similarity: the Senator's last name, “Аблеухов,” contains the Russian word “ухо” (“ear”). Yet while Karenin appears as an authoritative figure, Apollon's authority is only superficial both in his household and in the state, which seems propelled by its own habitual circular movement. He does not have the will or courage to influence its affairs. Apollon also bears many characteristics of the Russian literary type coined by Gogol in his short story “The Overcoat” (“Шинель”), an official Petersburg clerk with an overblown sense of importance, called an “особа” (“person”): Gogol's wretched heroes have been transformed into an older man whose only sense of self-importance comes from his glorified position as head bureaucrat.

Dudkin is another *Petersburg* character who evokes figures from classic Russian literature; his encounter with the satanic Shishnarfne has been compared to Ivan Karamazov's conversation with the devil in Dostoevsky's work. The similarity of his and Ivan's situations, as they both succumb to evil powers, implies that Dudkin is merely a replication of Ivan, and hence can add nothing new to the grand, eternal fight between good and evil. Dudkin's lecherous interest in a young female student ("курсистка") links him to Svidrigailov from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Unlike Svidrigailov, Dudkin does not act on his impulses, yet the connection between them proves that humanity is not progressing, but has merely stalled on the same spiritual level. Bely's diminishment of his protagonists seems to indicate modern culture's deterioration. In fact, modern culture is not even rotting — which would suggest an organic process — but is only an old, mummified corpse, falling apart piece by piece.

Petersburg cannot create new values, because in the cosmos of Bely's novel it constitutes the final stage of cultural development, which closes the circle between the beginning and end of history. Innumerable repetitions over the centuries have erased the coherence of intellectual discourse. The fundamental distinction between positive and negative values, the opposites on which each culture rests its value system, does not exist in *Petersburg*. This becomes clear in the conversation between the Senator, a proponent of August Comte's positivism, and his son, Nikolay, who represents a "new" philosophical trend — Neo-Kantianism. During their argument, the philosophers' names become confused (in Russian, their names sound particularly similar) and the dispute obliterates any differences between the two:

"Cohen is a major representative of European neo-Kantianism."

"You mean Comtianism?"

"No, Kantianism, papa."

"Kan-tia-nism?"

"Exactly."

"But didn't Comte refute Kant? You are taking about Comte?"

“Not about Comte, papa, about Kant.” (pp. 123-24)

.....
 “Comte ... yes, Kant.”

“Коген, крупнейший представитель европейского кантианства”

“Позволь – кантианства”

“Кантианства, папаша”

“Кан-ти-ан-ста?”

“Вот именно”

“Да ведь Канта же опроверг Кант? Ты о Конте ведь?”

“Не о Конте, папаша, о Канте!”

.....
 “Кант ... Да: Кант.” (pp. 118-19)

The characters' inability to distinguish between the philosophers causes the two opposing belief systems to merge into one, signaling a complete confusion of values.

This confusion spreads to all levels of the novel. The cultural distinction between East and West collapses when Lippanchenko, the leader of a corrupt revolutionary party, states that every Russian has Mongol blood, and when Shishnarfne, a Persian citizen, calls Petersburg “our capital,” and describes himself as a “citizen of the world.” The collapse of oppositions is further underscored by the union of the tragic and grotesque, of mystical revelations and hilarious banalities. Further highlighting the confusion of the narrative universe is the fusion between the revolutionary party members and the secret police: the two opposing groups infiltrate one another to the point that they appear to constitute one entity. Lippanchenko, a major revolutionary figure, turns out to be a provocateur working for the secret police. Morkovin, claiming to be a secret agent on some occasions, turns out to be a party member on others. As a result, the chief representatives of opposing movements — Lippanchenko and Apollon Ableukhov — seem to head the same political organization.

The Senator's son, Nikolay, despite his leanings towards the revolutionaries and opposition to his father, nonetheless considers himself to be a member of the aristocracy and

shares more with his father than he cares to admit. Other relationships between “sons” and “fathers” similarly turn out to be opposites only on the surface. Dudkin murders his ideological father, Lippanchenko, once he is convinced of the latter’s treachery, but by doing so he commits a terrorist act and hence continues the legacy of his “father.” The city itself, a “child” of Peter the Great, attempts to renew Peter’s ossified creation through revolution. Yet, since the revolutionary movement is infiltrated by the secret police, the revolution becomes a state provocation rather than true destruction of reigning dogma. This is underscored when Lippanchenko, a double agent, gives the order to kill the Senator and stirs up the revolutionary movement, most likely merely to squash it. The revolution thus becomes an affair conducted by the State, which draws another circle in *Petersburg*.

The main romantic attachments in the novel are similarly circular. Sophia Petrovna and Nikolay conduct their affair based on false perceptions of each other: Nikolay sees Sophia as Angel Peri, an unattainable femme fatale, while she perceives him as Herman, the hero of her favorite opera, Tchaikovsky’s “The Queen of Spades.” Their relationship is a circle based on illusion. Sophia Petrovna and her husband, Sergey Likhutin, live a lie in which the husband ignores his wife’s infidelities, perpetuating the circle of deceit. Anna Petrovna and Apollon Ableukhov repeat the story of Anna and Alexey Karenin, but while the Tolstoyan couple broke the circle by separating from each other, Anna Petrovna returns to her husband and reestablishes a loveless marriage. For Lippanchenko and Zoya Zakharovna, the revolutionary movement is the basis for their relationship, and the corruption of that movement is underscored by the falseness of their appearance: Lippanchenko has dyed hair, a sickly, viscid appearance, and wears false jewelry, while Zoya Zakharovna wears a lot of makeup, perfumes her house to cover her unpleasant breath, and speaks Russian with a foreign accent. She is also well aware of

Lippanchenko's infidelities. Thus their relationship moves in political and personal circles of deceit. In this way every level of the novel moves in sterile circles, lacking the creative tension that results from unresolved oppositions.

The rotation of the sterile circle throughout the novel reflects a larger, universal circularity, which implies that culture is dead. In *Petersburg*, the foggy city occupies a dubious location — on the border between the worlds of the living and the dead. Bely likens the Neva to Lethe, and the evil Shishnarfne later states this comparison more directly: “Our capital city ... belongs to the land of spirits” (p. 344) (“столичный наш город ... принадлежит к стране загробного мира”; p. 300). The city's inhabitants are strange, shadowy creatures, who can take on a human form or dissolve into the fog. The image of Petersburg as an unusual place with strange effects on people seems like a continuation of the traditional portrayal of the city in nineteenth-century Russian literature.¹¹³ However, shadows have a particular meaning in Bely's philosophy: they represent eternal return. Zarathustra mistook a shadow for reality, causing his fall and preventing his ascent towards Eternity. In his article “Circular Movement,” Bely focuses on Nietzsche's tragic mistake: like Zarathustra, Nietzsche confused reality with shadows and proclaimed a philosophy of eternal recurrence. In his article, Bely also warns against the ease with which an individual or a culture can fall into eternal recurrence: repetition is easy and familiar, while ascent is uncomfortable.

By presenting Petersburg as a land of shadows, Bely implies that it is a universe of eternal recurrence, where everything has already happened; both the culture and the individuals

¹¹³ For a discussion of the Petersburg literary tradition see: Toporov, “Peterburg i ‘Peterburgskii tekst’ russkoi literatury”; M. G. Kachurin, G. A. Kudurskaia, D. N. Murin, eds., *Sankt-Peterburg v russkoi literature: izbrannye statii* (Moscow: Mekhasik, 1996); Iurii Lotman, “Peterburg,” in *Statii po semiotike i tipologii kultury* (Tallinn, Eston.: Alexandra, 1992); Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

in it are trapped in a cycle of endless repetitions and condemned to a “living death.” Apollon, for example, creates Dudkin, a mere shadow, out of his own mind. Dudkin then metamorphoses from shadow to “real” person, but his development is also circular: he is another incarnation of Evgeny, the hero of Pushkin’s *Bronze Horseman*. Like his predecessor, he perishes indirectly as a result of Peter the Great’s actions. Spiritually dead individuals, through their “cerebral play,” thus beget dead ideas which continue the circle of return. Conversely, people can also turn into shadows. Shishnarfne, whom we first encounter as a “real” person, turns into a shadow that infiltrates Dudkin’s body and causes Dudkin to remember the “terrible act” he committed in Helsingfors (the nature of which is never revealed to the reader, but which forever links him to evil). This evil act took place during Dudkin’s “Nietzschean period,” when he subscribed to the nihilism that Bely identifies as evil. Dudkin’s connection with evil is irrevocable, as is demonstrated by his murder of Lippanchenko, which pushes him back into the realm of eternal return. In other words, shadows enter living bodies and transport them to the dead world of nihilism. The circle of shadow-body transformation is completed. Throughout the novel, Bely equates modern decay with nihilism, and suggests that the universe of *Petersburg* represents the last phase of human cultural development. His text thus implies that the dogmatism of Russian society includes all of Western culture too, and that his philosophical ideas (which identify ossified culture with eternal return) have a universal scope.

The novel’s philosophical perspective is underscored by the geographical description of the city, which is divided between the islands and the mainland. The islands are not considered part of the city proper; on more than one occasion, the narrator indicates that the islands are only superficially attached to the city and to Russia itself:

The inhabitants of the islands are numbered among the population of the Russian Empire; the general census has been introduced among them ... the island

resident ... considers himself a citizen of Petersburg, but he, a denizen of chaos, threatens the capital of the Empire in the gathering cloud. (p. 24)

жители островов причислены к народнонаселению Российской Империи; всеобщая перепись введена и у них ... житель острова ... считает себя петербуржцем, но он, обитатель хаоса, угрожает столице Империи в набегающим облаке. (p. 17)

Accordingly, the main action of the novel takes place on the mainland, in the very center of the city located between the Winter Canal, Senate Square, the Gagarin and English Embankments, and the Nikolaevsky and Troitsky bridges. As Leonid Dolgoplov notices, this is the classical part of the city, representing Petersburg in its “golden age,” the Petersburg of grand palaces and even grander architectural monuments to imperial power.¹¹⁴ This is a representation of the old culture whose high point occurred in the nineteenth century.

This specific location is pointedly depicted as an infinite universe. A nameless clerk finds himself lost on Nevsky Prospect as he “circulated into the infinity of prospects, overcoming infinity ... in the infinite stream of others exactly like him ... he ran from one infinity into another” (p. 17) (“циркулировал в бесконечность проспектов, преодолевал бесконечность ... в бесконечном токе таких же, как он ... Из одной бесконечности убегал в другую”; p. 14). Then he finds the brink of this universe on the embankment where “there was the end of the earth and the end of infinity” (p. 18) (“был и край земли, и конец бесконечности”; p. 15). Dudkin similarly notes, when looking at the Neva, that “there, there was the limit of the earth and the end of infinities” (p. 94) (“там был край земли и там был конец бесконечностям”; p. 83). By rendering Petersburg spatially infinite and circular, Bely frames his philosophical ideas within geometrical parameters: the current state of culture is universal and it occupies the lowest ring of human evolution.

¹¹⁴ Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman*, 317.

This is the position of contemporary culture at the opening of the novel, but as Bely states in his article “Circular Movement,” modern culture stands between the underworld of eternal recurrence and the ascent towards Eternity. *Petersburg* is not simply a recreation of this evolutionary precipice; its entire action takes place within it. The precipice is Bely’s Dionysian moment, when the circle opens, allowing ascent to a higher circle of the spiral. By situating his narrative within this model, Bely appears to frame the events of 1905 in the context of his new philosophical ideas, thus offering a reassessment of his former beliefs.

An atmosphere of anxiety and suspense emerges at the outset of *Petersburg*, when dead culture is linked to imminent revolution. The initial image of a Browning gun, which Apollon believes to be circulating among the islands’ inhabitants, is transformed into the actual bomb that Dudkin delivers to Nikolay. Later, isolated objects and individual acts grow into revolutionary meetings and city-wide demonstrations, but the concrete elements of the plot do not account for the pervasive sense of impending apocalypse.¹¹⁵ The apocalyptic imagery elevates the political events to a universal level. The description of the dark sky in the first chapter exemplifies this: “Having described a funeral arc in the sky, a dark ribbon, a ribbon of soot, rose from the chimneys; and it trailed off into the waters” (p. 50) (“Описав в небе траурную дугу, темная полоса копоти высоко встала от труб паровых; и хвостом упала в Неву”; p. 43). The beginning of the second chapter elaborates on the mystical nature of the political unrest:

¹¹⁵ The theme of the Apocalypse in *Petersburg* has been discussed by a number of literary critics. For the most notable examples of this discussion see: Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, “Revolution as Apocalypse,” in Janecek, ed., *Andrey Bely: A Critical Review*, 181-93; Cioran, *Apocalyptic Symbolism*, 112-60; Timothy Langen, *The Stony Dance: Unity and Gesture in Andrey Bely’s “Petersburg”* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 53-71; David M. Bethea, “Aspects of the Apocalyptic Plot in the Age of Symbolism: Blok, Bely, and the Poetics of Revelation,” in *Christianity and the Eastern Slavs*, vol. 3, *Russian Literature in Modern Times*, ed. Boris Gasparov et al., California Slavic Studies 18 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 161-80.

Those were foggy days, strange days: Noxious October marched through Russia, in the north; and he hung rotten fog on the south ... Those were foggy days, strange days: the icy hurricane was coming upon us in clouds of tin. (p. 86)

Дни стояли туманные, странные: по России на севере проходил мерзлой поступью ядовитый октябрь; а на юге развесил он гнилые туманы ... Дни стояли туманные, странные: ледяной ураган уже приближался клоками туч, оловянных и синих. (p. 74)

The otherworldly character of approaching events is vividly underscored by the inexplicable sound: “Have you ever slipped off at night ... to hear the same importunate note ‘oo’? Oooo-oooo-ooo: such was the sound in the space. But was it a sound? It was the sound of some other world” (p. 87) (“выходил ты по ночам ... чтобы слышать неотвязную, злую ноту на ‘у’? Уууу-уууу-уууу: так звучало в пространстве; звук – был ли то звук? Если то и был звук, он был несомненно, звук иного какого-то мира”; p. 76). The transmundane nature of coming events implies their enormous magnitude. Since the apocalyptic imagery is connected with revolutionary unrest, the revolution loses its merely human dimension and becomes a vehicle for universal change.

Yet expectations of the impending apocalypse are juxtaposed with Bely’s humorous depiction of the revolutionary spirit as youthful excitement, a fashionable trend, or a mere hobby. A crowd of students eagerly engaging in political events is described as

the studying youth of the higher educational establishments, sporting an abundance of foreign words: “social revolution.” And then again “social evolution” ... And then again “revolution-evolution.” They argued about one thing alone. (p. 75)

молодежь высших учебных заведений, щеголявшая обилием иностранных слов: “социальная революция.” И опять-таки: “социальная эволюция” ... И слышалось: “революция – эволюция.” И опять “революция – эволюция.” Все только об одном спорили. (p. 61)

The students’ endless discussions and their confusion of terms reveal their immaturity, so that they appear to be mere enthusiasts, more excited at displaying their radical views than by real,

productive action. Bely reinforces this depiction of the revolutionary movement as nothing more than an intellectual fad by linking it to Sophia Petrovna, who instigates and hosts the meetings; she takes part in all sorts of gatherings just to follow current trends. Sophia Petrovna's exaggerated intellectual ambitions and poor grasp of serious philosophical concepts constitutes a vivid satire of one group of revolutionary enthusiasts — politically active women. She attempts to read Henri Bergson and Annie Besant, but, not having the slightest understanding of either of them, she combines their names into one, Anri Bezanson (“Анри Безансон”). Her visits to spiritual séances go hand in hand with her reading of Marx and participation in political gatherings. Each time she opens a book, she falls asleep, and her eagerness to go to meetings is motivated either by a desire to see her love interest or by boredom. The fact that Bely gives her the name “Sophia” ironically links her to Solovyov's Sophia, the Divine Wisdom of God.¹¹⁶ The juxtaposition of Sophia Likhutina's silliness and Solovyov's vision of the Holy Sophia as ultimate wisdom both parodies Solovyov's religious concepts and illustrates the author's self-irony, since Bely was a staunch proponent of Solovyovian teachings during the 1905 revolution.

Another revolutionary, Varvara Evgrafovna, although apparently dedicated to the cause, is just a sentimental student who imagines her beloved, Nikolay, as a true revolutionary forsaking his aristocratic origins and giving himself entirely to the revolution. Her perception of the cowardly Nikolay as a hero, as well as her girlish poetry dedicated to him, indicates that she too interprets revolution as a romantic endeavor rather than as a serious social cause.

Yet another type of revolutionary in the novel is the “revolutionary connoisseur” or “in general, a protester” (“так вообще протестант”), who

¹¹⁶ For a discussion of the concept of Holy Wisdom, see Samuel D. Cioran, *Vladimir Solov'ev: Knighthood of the Divine Sophia* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977).

strode on long legs; he was pale and fragile ... today he was walking with the most enormous gnarled stick; if my protester were to be placed in one pan of the scales, and his gnarled stick to be placed in the other, then the said implement would without doubt outweigh the protester.¹¹⁷ (p. 107)

шагал на длинных ногах; он был бледен и хрупок ... он сегодня шагал с преогромною суковатую палкою; если бы положить на чашку весов моего протестанта, на другую же чашку весов положить его суковатую палку, то его орудие без сомнения, протестанта бы перевесило. (p. 95)

This satirical portrayal of a progressive member of the intelligentsia from earlier Russian literature (Turgenev's characters come to mind) turns him into a cliché, a revolutionary champion who attaches himself to any cause as long as it involves protest. An apparent counterpart to the “revolutionary connoisseur” is “a working fellow, shaggy-headed individual — in a hat that had been brought from the bloodstained fields of Manchuria” (p. 115) (“субъект рабочий, космоголовый – в шапке, завезенной с полей обогрелной кровью Манджурии”; p. 94). Although this individual's participation in the bloody Russo-Japanese war (a partial cause of the 1905 revolution) elevates the revolutionary group to a serious status, this is immediately undercut by the speech of “a representative of the lumpen-proletariat” (“представитель люмпен-пролетариата”) whose interests the revolution is supposed to represent. A drunk “working man” (“рабочий”) assures the participants in a meeting: “No, I am not drunk, comrades” (p. 138) (“Нет, я не пьян тва-рры-шши”; p. 123) and proposes: “And that means that this bourgeoisie ... how can you work, work ... One single word; grab his legs and into the water with him; that's to say ... strike!” (p. 137) (“А значит, на эфтого самого буржуазия ... так стало быть, трудишшса, трудишшса ... Одно слово: за ноги евво да в воду; тоись ... за-ба-сто-вка!”; p. 124). No one truly understands the cause, no one has a concrete plan, and the meeting turns into empty public euphoria.

¹¹⁷ Translation is mine.

While the satirical depiction of the revolutionaries undercuts the seriousness of the apocalyptic imagery, the most pointed attack on a biblical interpretation of revolution lies in Bely's introduction of Stepka, a young, uneducated peasant, who comes to Petersburg from the countryside in search of work. At first glance he seems to be a prophetic "holy fool," spreading the message of Apocalypse, which, he believes, is already evident in his village, Tsebeleyevo. Equipped with the Book of Revelation, abstaining from drinking and smoking, and spreading the prophecies of "learned people" ("мудрые люди") from his province, he becomes a kind of mentor to Dudkin. But the ambiguity of Stepka's message is clear to those familiar with Bely's earlier novel, *The Silver Dove*. Stepka's village is the seat of a demonic sect of Doves, who represent a mockery of the Apocalypse, inasmuch as they take its message literally. They try to produce a child, and then proclaim him to be "the child with the iron rod," whose appearance, according to the Book of Revelation, represents the Second Coming and the Last Judgment. The doubtful allegiances of the sect — it is unclear whether they worship divine or Satanic powers — suggests that Stepka is possibly a Satanic figure. Since Bely views Satanism as the sign of a false prophet who lures even the greatest minds into eternal return, Stepka's "religious" teachings may foreshadow the trap into which Dudkin finally falls. Dalrinsky, a nobleman from *The Silver Dove* whom Stepka regards as a man of learning, becomes involved with the sectarians; they try to use him to conceive a child with a peasant woman, also a sectarian. Stepka's relation of the events is unreliable, however. Dalrinsky not only does not join the sect, but perishes in his attempt to escape the Doves. Therefore the source of apocalyptic messages is a sectarian of dubious allegiance and an uneducated peasant, whose only knowledge of events is colored by their sectarian interpretations as well as distorted by his own obvious misinterpretations. In this way Bely demonstrates that the Biblical interpretation of the

revolution is based on misguided rumors from distant provinces, where the news from Petersburg is processed into homespun mysticism, possibly contaminated by Satanism.

Stepka's "knowledge of the world" not only satirizes apocalyptic views, but also portrays the overall confusion of the times and the characters' propensity towards mixing things up. This is exemplified by the questions posed both by Matvey (the "yard keeper" ["дворник"] of the house where Dudkin and Stepka live) and Dudkin himself, and then answered by Stepka:

"It was tobacco and vodka that started it all; and I know who it is makes people drunkards: it's the Japs!"

"And how do you know?"

"... From count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy- have you had occasion to read his booklet 'The First Distiller'? ... and that's what those people near Petersburg said, too."

...

"And what will happen to Petersburg?"

"Just what's happening now: the Chinamen are building some sort of idol-worshippers' temple!"

...

"And Stepka, what will happen?"

"What I heard was that first of all there will be killings, and after that universal discontent; and after that all kinds of diseases – pestilence, famine, and also, the cleverest people say, all kinds of agitations: the Chinamen will rise up against one another; the Mohammedans will also get very agitated, only it won't work out."

"Well, and what after that?"

"Well, all the rest of it will happen at the end of 1912 ... There's a certain prophecy, sir: a sword will be raised against us ... and the victor's crown will go to the Japs: and then again there will be the birth of a new child." (pp. 131-32)

"От табаку да от водки все и пошло: знаю то, и кто спивает: японец!"

"А откуда ты знаешь?"

"... перво сам граф Лев Николаевич Толстой – книжечку его 'Первый винокур' изволили читать? ... да еще говорят те вон самые люди под Питербургом"

...

"А с Петербургом что будет?"

"Да что: кумирню какую-то строят китайцы!"

...

"А что, Степка, будет?"

"Слышал я: перво-наперво убиения будут, апосля же всеопчее недовольство; апосля же болезни всякие – мор, голод, ну а там, говорят

умнейшие люди, всякие там волнения: китаец встанет на себя самого: мухамедане тоже взволнуются оченно, только эта не выйdet.”

“Ну а дальше?”

“Ну все протчее соберется на исходе двенадцатого года ... одно такое пророчество есть, барин: вонмемде...на нас клинок...но что венец японцу: и потом опять – рождение отрока нового.” (pp. 102-3)

This mixture of political language, scandals from the yellow press, unreliable rumors (from uncertain sources such as “the cleverest people” [“умнейшие люди”]), and indirect quotes from the Bible juxtaposed with their homespun mystical misinterpretations, creates a sense of complete confusion, disorienting characters and readers alike. Thus Bely uses comic devices (such as satire and parody) not only to poke fun at high expectations of the 1905 revolution and serious political attitudes, but also to depict the overall chaos and uncertainty of the time. This uncertainty and suspicion, so vividly represented by Stepka, spreads to the entire novel and all its characters, making it impossible to discern who is who, what is real, and what is the product of misinformation or the protagonists’ hallucinations. As Roger Keys aptly puts it:

By comparison with the *Silver Dove*, *Petersburg* signals an even greater shift towards ambiguity and irony with all that this implies for the possibility of embodying supra-empirical meanings, whether positive or negative. From the opposite pole from the authorial world ... is the utterance lacking all authority, the novel offering so many possible perspectives that it ends up by seemingly lacking any.¹¹⁸

The duality of characters and events creates a sense of relativism and imbues the novel with an inherent dynamism.

Bely does not spare himself in his satire of religious interpretations of the revolution, perhaps most vividly exemplified by the bomb designed to kill the Senator. Bely utilized the bomb’s explosive potential as a major metaphor in his earlier, more visionary essays. In

¹¹⁸ Roger Keys, *The Reluctant Modernist: Andrei Belyi and the Development of Russian Fiction, 1902-1914* (Oxford: Caledon Press, 1996), 225.

“Apocalypse in Russian Poetry” (“Апокалипсис в русской поэзии”; 1905), influenced by Solovyov, Bely explores the relationship between art and religion, and the idea of art as “theurgy.” He asserts the religious nature of the creative act, in that it can transform reality and prepare men for a new form of community. Bely compares art to a bomb whose explosion will destroy contemporary, dead culture, thus permitting the emergence of a new, spiritual society. In *Petersburg* Bely obviously parodies his own previous views in his depiction of the bomb made by the “irresponsible” revolutionary party. The bomb’s apparently cataclysmic power is undercut by its description as a pitiful, homemade mechanism in a prosaic sardine can, delivered in a simple handkerchief. This transforms the visionary apocalyptic explosion into an angry child’s wishful thinking, further emphasized when the almost senile Apollon plays with the bomb, mistaking it for a toy — a music box. The bomb’s ineffectiveness and the insignificance of its explosion further suggest Bely’s self-irony: he has turned his earlier prophetic ideas into the arrogant, self-aggrandizing utterances of an overenthusiastic youth.¹¹⁹

Bely’s satire of both his own beliefs and Solovyov’s teachings clearly reflects his disappointment in the 1905 revolution, which was supposed to embody the imminent Apocalypse. But Bely does not entirely reject his prior views. While still viewing revolution as a way to break the cultural impasse, he also indicates his disillusionment in the 1905 revolution, which he had expected to have a mystical, universal meaning. Bely’s disappointment in the revolution leads him to doubt the veracity of his prior philosophy, which provided him with a reference point in his search for universal knowledge. Without rejecting the possibility of universal knowledge, he hopes to revise the direction of his search. He continues to affirm his

¹¹⁹ For an in-depth analysis of Bely’s usage of parody which underscores Bely’s self-parody, see Ada Steinberg, “On the Structure of Parody in Andrej Belyj’s *Peterburg*,” *Slavic Hierosolymitana* (Jerusalem) 9 (1977): 113-27.

belief in the universal-human connection, transcendence of the physical, access to the noumenal, and universal and human evolution; we see this in the famous address to Russia:

Great will be the turmoil; the earth will be cleaved; the very mountains will come crashing down because of the great shaking of the earth, and our native plains will be made everywhere humped ... In those days all the peoples of the earth will come rushing from their places; there will be great strife — strife without precedence in the world. (p. 129)

Великое будет волнение; рассетется земля; самые горы обрушатся от великого труса; а родные равнины от труса изойдут повсюду гробом ... Бросятся с мест своих в эти дни все народы земные; брань великая будет — брань небывалая в мире. (p. 98)

Bely does not, however, explain how this will come about, either through revolution or universal upheaval. His description suggests a spiritual event, but in the light of his vivid parody of apocalyptic beliefs this interpretation remains speculation. Yet Bely does call for a new battle between East and West (which would rearrange Eastern and Western elements into a new culture), by evoking the names of the places where Russia battled Eastern Empires: “There will be, there will be — Tsushima! There will be, there will be — a new Kalka! ... Kulikovo Field, I wait for you!” (p. 126) (“будет, будет — Цусима! Будет — новая Калка ... Куликово поле, я жду тебя”; p. 98).¹²⁰ Bely’s words thus imply his desire for a return to the beginnings of culture, the revision of those beginnings, and the building of new values.

Section Two: Petersburg on the Brink of the Dionysian Leap

We have seen that Bely questions the Biblical, apocalyptic interpretation of the revolution, yet he still seeks a renewal of dead culture and believes in a connection between

¹²⁰ The battle of Tsushima virtually decided Russia’s loss in the Russo–Japanese war; Kalka is the place where Kievan Rus’ was defeated by the Mongol Empire; Kulikovo Field is the site of Dmitry Donskoy’s victory over the Golden Horde.

universal and human development. This is exemplified by his attempts to reinterpret the 1905 revolution as a Dionysian upsurge that precipitates a return to primordial chaos in order to renew the dead world with life-giving energy. It is to this end that he presents his reader with the mathematical projection of his worldview. Robert Mann similarly argues that the revolution in *Petersburg* is a Dionysian moment: “Both Dudkin and Nikolay are swept away on the violent, Dionysian wave that has engulfed Russia. Both find themselves trapped inside the terrorist movement, both sacrificial victims of Dionysian bloodbath.”¹²¹ However Mann does not view the Dionysian upsurge as a life-renewing force, but as an outbreak of the irrational, which leads to the overall destruction of culture. In my reading of *Petersburg*, the Dionysian moment is a creative act aimed at a break with outmoded dogma.

The creative force in *Petersburg* is personified by Peter the Great, who arrives in Petersburg when the revolutionary unrest begins. Since his arrival coincides with the onset of turmoil, the political events appear as cosmological occurrences which might destroy dogma. This is suggested by the depiction of strange, almost otherworldly phenomena in the city, exemplified by inexplicable sounds. The idea that Peter the Great’s arrival embodies a Dionysian upsurge is underscored by the red sun that sets fire to all of *Petersburg*’s universe:

Above the Neva an enormous and crimson sun ran ... and from the window panes a golden, flaming reflection cut through everywhere; and from the tall spires the radiance flashed like rubies. All the usual weights — both indentations and projections — were slipping away into a burning ardor ... The rust-red palace began to run violently with blood ... On that memorable evening all was aflame ... while all the rest, that did not enter the flame, darkened sluggishly. (p. 167)

Над Невой бежало огромное и багровое солнце ... от стекол оконных прорезался всюду золотопламенный отблеск; и от шпилей высоких зарубился блеск. Все обычные тяжести — и уступы, выступы — убежали в горящую

¹²¹ Robert Mann, *Andrei Bely's "Petersburg" and the Cult of Dionysus* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1986), 48.

пламенность ... Яростно закровавился рыже-красный Дворец ... В этот памятный вечер все пламенело ... все же прочее, не вошедшее в пламень, отемнялось медлительно. (p. 149)

This expanded, red sun transforms the city's elements into fiery, crimson shapes and implies a link between Peter's arrival and the revolution. The city appears as an overheated, red space on the brink of explosion. The enlarged sphere of the sun also hints at the thermodynamic imagery that will gradually dominate the novel and which testifies to Bely's use of new science. The discoveries in the field of concentration and dissipation of energy were among the first scientific findings of the end of nineteenth century. By using thermodynamic imagery, a science based on constant changes, Bely not only suggests that his evolutionary model is scientifically justified, but also, more significantly, conveys its dynamic character, based on energy exchange.

Peter the Great appears in the novel long before his famous statue comes to life; the frequent mentions of boats on the Neva as early as chapter one imply Peter's presence because of his traditional association with the sea (he was educated at the Dutch Naval Academy, had a lifelong interest in the Navy, and has been often described as a seaman.) Several characters notice a boat on the river during their wanderings through the city. Nikolay, looking at the river from a bridge, contemplates a boat that is causing the waves to rise up against the embankment: "And the Neva seethed, and cried desperately there with the whistle of a small steamboat that had begun to hoot, smashed its shields of water and steel against the stone bridge-piers" (p. 55) ("И бурила Нева, и кричала там свистком загудевшего пароходника, разбивала свои водяные, стальные щиты о каменные быки"; p. 43). Dudkin, returning home from the Ableukhovs' house, sees a tiny light on the water, probably coming from a sailor's cigarette: "From the captain's bridge a bright point of light shone sparkingly; perhaps it was the glow from the pipe of the blue-nosed bosun" (p. 127) ("с капитанского мостика искрометнее

проблистая и светила точка; может быть, трубочный огонек сизоносого боцмана; p. 99). Anna Petrovna, looking out the window of the Ableukhovs' house, sees similar lights on the water: "In this melting greyness there suddenly ... emerged lights, lights, tiny lights filled with intensity and rushed out of the darkness" (p. 179) ("В этой тающей серости проступили вдруг ... огоньки, огонечки наливались силой из тьмы"; p. 151). Boats accompany the characters at decisive moments in their pursuits.

The connection I am suggesting between the boat and the arrival of Peter the Great is strengthened by the strange, phosphorous light emitted by the boat with each appearance. Dudkin sees in the night sky: "A turquoise breach ... towards it through the storm of clouds flew a stain of burning phosphorus ... for an instant everything flared: waters, the chimneys, the granite ... the Horseman's brow, the bronze-laurel crown" (p. 127) ("Бирюзовый прорыв ... навстречу ему полетело сквозь тучи пятно горящего фосфора ... на мгновение все вспыхнуло: воды, трубы, граниты ... Всадниково чело, меднолавровый венец"; p. 99). This strange phosphorescent light comes from a boat turning in the middle of the river. Nikolay sees a similar light while he waits for Sophia Petrovna: "Swarm upon swarm they [clouds] rose above the Neva waves, and when they touched the zenith ... from the sky the phosphorescent stain hurled itself upon them" (p. 64) ("рой за роем они [тучи] восходили над невской волной, а когда они касались зенита, то ... с неба кидалось на них фосфорическое пятно"; p. 51). Finally, the narrator himself verifies this strange presence: "A kind of phosphorescent stain, both misty and deadly, rushed across the sky; the heights became misted by a phosphorescent sheen; and this made the iron roofs and chimneys gleam" (p. 62) ("Какое-то фосфорическое пятно и туманно, и мертвенно проносилось по небу; фосфорическим блеском протуманилась высь; и от этого проблистали железные крыши и трубы"; p. 49).

The phosphorescent light, which is emitted by both the boats and Peter the Great's statue when it comes to life, hints at the connection between the two images of Peter that appear in the novel — destructive and creative. These two aspects of Peter the Great are deeply rooted in the Russian literary tradition. His attempt to westernize Russia split Russian intellectuals into two groups: those who perceived his actions as a great achievement, and those who saw them as the eradication of true Russian culture in the name of alien Western models. Petersburg, a city that Peter established on the hostile ground of the Northern marshes, became a symbol of his actions. Unlike other major cities in Russia, which grew naturally and had no pre-conceived blueprints, Petersburg was the first city built according to a specific plan, based on Western urban structures. Peter moved the capital of the empire to Petersburg and initiated a well-organized system of bureaucratic laws and regulations. Russians thus perceived the city as an embodiment of man's creative power and victory over nature, but also as an artificial product of human ambitions, whose climate and bureaucracy adversely affect its inhabitants. These ambivalent reactions to Peter's reforms were strongly reflected in Russian literature for centuries. The image of both Peter and his creation, Petersburg, acquired a mythological magnitude.

The myth of the city and its creator has been in existence since the eighteenth century, when major poets such as Gavriila Derzhavin and Mikhail Lomonosov composed works praising Peter and Petersburg. However, Pushkin made the largest contribution to Peter's myth in his narrative poem, *The Bronze Horseman: A Petersburg Tale* (*Медный всадник: Петербургская повесть*; 1833), which transforms Peter's image from a straightforward, celebratory one into an ambiguous symbol of both creation and destruction. In his depiction of the Neva flood of 1824, Pushkin focuses on the fate of a young man, Evgeny, who goes mad after losing his fiancée. The juxtaposition of one man's personal tragedy and the undisturbed, stern statue of Peter the Great

underscores the ambiguity of Peter's creation: it portrays Peter as an ambitious but cruel creative power that disregards the sufferings of individuals in its wake. Most significantly, Pushkin's narrative poem establishes the symbolic nature of Falconet's statue of Peter the Great. When Evgeny, having gone mad, raises his hand to the monument, the latter comes to life and pursues the young man through the streets. From that time on, Peter's statue acquired a particular meaning in Russian literature. No longer just a monument, it became an incarnation of Peter himself, an almost magical figure through which Peter still holds power over his creation, Petersburg.¹²² Pushkin saw a dubious symbolism in the statue's very shape: it stands on a colossal stone, while the horse rears back, as if preparing to jump from the cliff. In one of the most famous stanzas in Russian literature, Pushkin asks: where is Peter leading his country, to its renewal or to its annihilation? In addition to establishing a double image of Peter, Pushkin also depicted Peter as a captain leading the ship of his country. This image is particularly visible in Pushkin's poem "My Genealogy" ("Моя родословная"; 1930).

Bely characteristically shapes the mythology of Peter the Great to fit his own purposes, transforming Peter's image as a seaman into the Flying Dutchman, the hero of Wagner's opera, who eternally circles the seas, cursed to sail without ever reaching land. In the literary idiom of *Petersburg* his endless voyages imply eternal return. Peter's statue, on the other hand, reveals him to be a dangerous, but positive, creative power. Bely stresses the two contradictory images equally. As we will see later in this chapter, the statue, coming to life, destroys the Apollonian masks of *Petersburg's* inhabitants, and reveals their true, Dionysian selves; by extension, he also

¹²² For an in-depth discussion of the symbolism of the statue of Peter the Great see: Roman Jakobson, *Pushkin and His Sculptural Myth*, trans. John Burbank (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

reveals the dead dogma of contemporary culture. Yet the first chapter introduces the opposite image of Peter — the Flying Dutchman, a portent of doom in sailors' lore:

On his shadowy sails the Flying Dutchman flew towards Petersburg ... in order here to erect by illusion his misty estates ... from here the Dutchman lit the hellish lights of the drinking dens for two hundred years, so the Orthodox folk flocked and flocked into these hellish drinking dens, carrying a foul infection. (p. 19)

на теневых своих парусах полетел к Петербургу ... чтобы здесь воздвигнуть обманом свои туманные земли ... адские огоньки кабачков двухсотлетие зажигал отсюда Голландец, а народ православный валил и валил в эти адские кабачки, разнося гнилую заразу. (p. 16)

In the context of the novel the image of Peter the Great as a Flying Dutchman doomed to eternal sailing implies the evil of recurrence, which turns the city and its inhabitants into lifeless, shadowy phantoms by spreading a “foul infection” (“гнилую заразу”). Peter’s Satanic side — his power to trap people in his illusions — turns him into a false prophet, a figure familiar in Bely’s oeuvre, who lures people into the trap of a shadow existence, with no hope of attaining transcendence. These two simultaneous yet opposing images of Peter mark him as a Dionysian power, which can be destructive or creative, depending on the wisdom of those under its influence: men may perish in the Dionysian depths or emerge from it successfully to overcome dogma and move evolution to its next level. Consequently, the entire universe of *Petersburg* finds itself on the brink of either destruction or renewal. The first chapter’s epigraph (from *The Bronze Horseman*) underscores Peter’s arrival as a Dionysian moment, indicating that the novel will portray the “terrible time” (“ужасная пора”), which in Pushkin’s poem refers to nature’s destructive power (embodied by the flood). In the context of Bely’s novel, this “horrible time” is the time of revolution and Dionysian upsurge, which in Nietzschean philosophy is an “overflowing” of humanity’s irrational side. While this overflowing can be dangerous, it can

also lead to rebirth. The novel examines the characters' abilities to engage in such a Dionysian leap.

Bely emphasizes the fact that the city is about to escape the dead circle of repetitions by depicting Petersburg as a "dot." As we have seen, the dot in Bely's universal spiral represents the break in the circle, the "primal moment" when culture is regenerated and escapes from deadly repetition. Bely's geographical manipulations in *Petersburg* collapse the city's plane into a single dot. People choose routes to get to places that could not possibly get them there, and the main sites in the novel regularly change their locations; critics have often interpreted this as Bely's attempt to de-concretize Petersburg, to make it a symbol of any modern city.¹²³ But a closer look at the geographic inconsistencies reveals that Bely collapses Petersburg locations to the east and west, north and south, thus transforming the city into a dot located at the Admiralty building.

Foreshadowing these dislocations is a conversation between Apollon and his servant in the subchapter of chapter one, entitled "Northeast" ("Северо-восток"), which describes the organization of the Ableukhov household according to compass points. The importance of these compass points to his household management is underscored by the fact that his staff can recite the details by heart. Yet the author himself seems to make a "mistake": the title of the subchapter is "Northeast" ("Северо-восток") while the gloves requested by the Senator are located in the Northwest: "Try to wait a moment, your excellency, sir: you see, we keep the gloves in the wardrobe: Shelf B – Northwest" (p. 13) ("Потрудитесь, ваше высокопревосходительство, обождать-с: ведь перчатки-то у нас в шифонерке: полка б е –

¹²³ This interpretation was first proposed by Dolgoplov and has been accepted by virtually all critics discussing the novel. See Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman*, 317-28.

северо-запад”; p. 11). This description of the household and the exchange between Apollon and his servant establish the importance of compass directions and, at the same time, draw our attention to the lines along which Bely will perform his spatial manipulations.

The first of these manipulations concerns the yellow building where the Senator lives. Throughout the novel, its location switches from the English Embankment to the Gagarin Embankment. At the beginning of the novel, when the Senator leaves his house to go to the office, his house is clearly located on the English Embankment, northeast of the Admiralty, since upon exiting, he sees the Nikolaevsky Bridge. His path to the office (located on Nevsky Prospect) confirms this location: he passes by St. Isaac’s Cathedral and a statue of Emperor Nicholas I (located on St. Isaac’s Square) and, finally, walks onto Nevsky Prospect. This description is, however, undermined by the route Dudkin takes to the Ableukhovs’ house the same morning. Dudkin starts from the Seventeenth Line on Vasilievsky Island and crosses the Nikolaevsky Bridge, which should have taken him directly to the Senator’s house. Yet he finds himself on Nevsky, as if going to the Gagarin Embankment, located northwest of the Admiralty building. Now the Ableukhovs’ house is located on the Gagarin Embankment, and this is confirmed by Dudkin’s route from the Ableukhovs’ back to his own house on Vasilievsky Island: he passes the Troitsky Bridge on the Winter Canal, and sees in front of him Senate Square and beyond it St. Isaac’s Cathedral. This progression can only mean that he is coming from the northwest, and proceeding east, to the Nikolaevsky Bridge.

The switch in the location of the Senator’s domicile from northeast to northwest is also mentioned when Nikolay is sitting on Moika Street, at the entrance of Sophia Petrovna’s house, and sees the shadow of a woman crossing the Winter Canal as “she quickly ran away from some yellow house on the Gagarin Embankment” (p. 64) (“убегала поспешно от какого-то желтого

дома на Гагаринской набережной”; p. 51). The yellow building is of course the Ableukhovs’ house and the woman is Varvara Evgrafovna, Nikolay’s admirer. But the route Nikolay took to this house suggests that he started from the English Embankment, for he passes a “three-storeyed building with its five white columns” (p. 62) (“трехэтажное здание о пяти своих белых колоннах”; p. 49), the same house he passed while accompanying Likhutin on his way home from Nevsky. If Nikolay were coming from the Gagarin Embankment, he would not have passed Nevsky. A final example occurs after the ball, when both Apollon and Nikolay seem to be heading to the Gagarin Embankment to go home, but end up at the English Embankment. Nikolay, after descending from the Nikolaevsky Bridge, sees the Admiralty and Senate Square, with Peter the Great’s statue on his right as he goes up the Embankment, but then takes a cab and passes the Admiralty building on his left, meaning that he is going in the opposite direction, to the English Embankment. Apollon similarly heads home to the English Embankment passing the same Admiralty building on his left. These switches in location do not happen haphazardly, but in a uniform way along a northeast-northwest line in relation to the Admiralty. This maneuver compresses all four compass directions into a single dot, located at the Admiralty.

Bely achieves a similar effect with his description of Sophia Petrovna’s and Varvara Evgrafovna’s route to their meeting. Their path is described in great detail, including not only the sites they pass, but even which side of the street they are on. Yet such a route does not actually exist. First they walk along the Moika; the Winter Garden is to their left, as well as the canal on Moika River; in front of them they see Pantelemon’s Church. Behind them they see the stones of the embankment. It looks as if they are going towards the Troitsky Bridge, to the northwest of the Admiralty. But this assumption is undermined by the fact that they can see the house with five white columns described twice in the novel as located on Nevsky, near Moika

Street. Then they pass St. Isaac’s Cathedral on their left, which is located to the east of the Admiralty. By going in the northwest direction, they find themselves to the east of the Admiralty and finally end up on the Embankment where they can see both the Winter Palace and the Troitsky Bridge; yet these sites are located to the northwest of the Admiralty. At no point is there a mention of the two turning back or making a circle around the Admiralty — a move that would in any case be illogical if they were going towards the Troitsky Bridge. Bely simply collapses the sites from the northwest and northeast of the Admiralty, thus again condensing the expanse of the city into a single point — a dot.

Furthermore, the meeting is supposed to take place across the Troitsky Bridge, that is, on the Petersburg Side. Yet the meeting that Varvara Evgrafovna and Sophia Petrovna wish to attend seems to be a meeting described earlier in the novel, which supposedly took place in the University building on Vasilievsky Island. The depictions of the two meetings are virtually identical, which suggests that this is one and the same event. The meeting on Vasilievsky Island includes the following description:

What was being said was that in this place and that place and this place there already was a strike; that in this place, in that place and in this place a strike was being prepared, and so they ought to strike — here and here: to strike right at this very place; and — not to budge! (p. 125)

речь шла о том, что и там-то, и там-то, и там-то уже была забастовка; что и там-то, и там-то, и там-то забастовка готовилась, потому-то следует бастовать — здесь и здесь: бастовать на этом вот месте; и ни с места! (p. 97)

Virtually the same description, word for word, is used for the meeting that Varvara Evgrafovna and Sophia Petrovna attend: “The people were going to strike — in this place, in this place and this place: were going to strike right here, in this very place: and — not to budge!” (p. 156)

(“бастовали и там-то, и там-то, и там-то, когда бастовали вот тут — и ни с места!”; p. 124).

Bely repeats entire sentences when describing the immense crowd at the two meetings and he

underscores the fact that both meetings take place on the fourth floor. The first description directly mentions the “fourth floors” (p. 153) (“четвертые этажи”; p. 94), while the second notes that a young man attempts to take part in a discussion “from the height of the fourth step” (p. 156) (“с высоты четырех ступеней”; p. 124). Finally both descriptions note the “detachment of Orenburg Cossacks” (“отряд оренбургских казаков”) waiting nearby (pp. 96, 125). If the two meetings are in fact one and the same, Bely has achieved another spatial manipulation, by folding up Vasilievsky Island and the Petersburg Side, located respectively to the northeast and northwest of the Admiralty, into one single location. The opposite points of the compass again become one point.

Bely further collapses a plane into a dot by dislocating two bridges: the Troitsky, to the northwest of the Admiralty, and the Nikolaevsky, to the northeast of the Admiralty. As Nikolay returns from his meeting with Morkovin, he seems to cross the Troitsky Bridge. The name of the bridge is never stated, but the narrator describes it with the same detail that is characteristic for the Troitsky Bridge throughout the novel: “Oh, great bridge, shining with electricity! ... I remember ... over your damp railing ... I too lent at night: a moment — and my body would have flown into the mist” (p. 291) (“О, большой, электричеством блестящий мост! ... Помню я ... через твои серые перила ... ночью я перегнулся; и миг: тело мое пролетело бы в туманы”; p. 218). This description partially corresponds to that of the Troitsky Bridge found in the first chapter: “Higher up ... there, where by day the heavy stone bridge threw itself across — enormous clusters of diamonds showed strangely misty” (p. 63) (“Выше ... там, где днем перекинулся тяжелокаменный мост, -- бриллиантов огромные гнезда потуманились там”; p. 51). The Troitsky Bridge is also the place where Nikolay attempts suicide in a fashion similar to that of the narrator, for he too “on that night leaned over the railings” (p. 55) (“тою ночью

перегнулся через перила”; p. 43). These similarities leave no doubt that it is the Troitsky Bridge that Nikolay crosses on his way home from the ball. But of course, this conclusion is illogical, for he is returning from Vasilievsky Island and hence should be taking the Nikolaevsky Bridge. Moreover, after descending the bridge he finds himself near Senate Square, a place near the Nikolaevsky, but not the Troitsky Bridge. In this way, two more locations collapse into a single one, and consequently the city’s spatial plane is compressed into a dot.

This dot represents a geometrical rendition of the Dionysian moment, and its location — at the Admiralty — geometrically embodies the “heart” of this universe. Yet the appearance of the menacing dot also plays another role in the narration: it underscores crucial moments in the lives of the major characters and in the narrative itself. We can see this by examining another spatial feature of the novel: the spires of the Admiralty and the Fortress of SS. Peter and Paul, which the principal protagonists repeatedly view at crucial moments in the action. First, the Senator sees the Admiralty’s “golden needle” (“золотая игла”) just after he has noticed Dudkin’s eyes on Nevsky, an event that not only distresses him, but also marks the inception of the novel’s action. Later, when Nikolay recalls the promise that the party gave him, he too sees the spire, only from the other side: “Into the greenish swarm stretched a spire ... from the Petersburg Side” (p. 55) (“в зеленоватый рой убежал шпиц ... с петербургской стороны”; p. 43). Right before entering a café to give Dudkin the fateful letter for Nikolay, Lippanchenko, in his persona as a shadowy double agent, also “looked absent-mindedly at the spire of Peter and Paul” (p. 47) (“посмотрел рассеянно на петропавловский шпиц”; p. 35). Nikolay, right before exposing himself as the Red Domino to Sophia Petrovna and the police agents, gazes at the spire yet another time. His act infuriates Sophia and leads to her decision to deliver the letter asking him to kill his father. Meanwhile the secret police, upon uncovering the Red Domino’s

identity, have the ammunition to play a double game with both Nikolay and his father. Finally, Dudkin, who rarely notices any physical reality, sees the spire as he hides in the garret, minutes before a fateful visit from Peter the Great: “And scarcely visible, the golden Admiralty soared into the sky like an arrow” (p. 371) (“едва зримое, побежало в небо стрелой золотое Адмиральтейство”; p. 315).

The spire — either that of the SS. Peter and Paul Fortress or that of the Admiralty — thus becomes particularly visible and ominous at the most intense moments of intrigue. On the evening of the Tsukatovs’ ball (in many ways a central event of the novel), the Senator finds out who the Red Domino is, Nikolay is informed of the party’s order, and the true selves of the Petersburg elite are exposed. At the moment of all these revelations the spires, so far mentioned separately, become one inflamed point: “and from the tall spires the radiance flashed like rubies” (p. 172) (“и от шпицев высоких зарубинился блеск”; p. 149). Right before Nikolay’s conversation with his father, when Nikolay has a chance to explain his party involvement, he sees similarly blinding spires, reflecting the sun: “At that moment the sun looked in through the windows, the bright sun cast there, from above ... rays ... illuminating spires” (p. 259) (“В этот миг в окна глануло солнце, яркое солнце бросало там сверху ... светочи ... освещая шпицы”; p. 230). This conversion of two spires into one needle palpably ties up all the narrative planes of the novel and all the locations where separate events take place. The progressively hotter image of the spires reveals both the imminent climax and the gradual approach of the Dionysian moment. Above all, the spires represent in clear graphic terms the “core” of Bely’s model. As he states in “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral,” the dot, the point of opening in the circle of evolution, is really a compressed line representing the axis around which the circles of evolution rotate. This axis is present within each coil of the spiral and it represents a point of

connection with the “primal source,” the dot out of which the spiral originated. This “primal source” is the irrational Dionysian moment, which must be entered in order to shed the dead shell of Apollonian appearances.

The spires create a straight line extending from the city into the sky, and therefore seem to represent the axis in Bely’s model. They also underscore the dual nature of the Dionysian upsurge — it is both the lowest and highest point of evolution: the lowest, because the universe is at the end of its evolutionary cycle, and the highest, because it taps into a “primary moment,” the dot that permits escape from the dead cycle. This duality also implies the danger of leaping into the “primary source.” In geometrical terms, it is a leap to the bottom of the evolutionary line, into irrational, primal life. Although this leap may unearth new values and allow evolution to progress, it may also cause death in the irrational abyss. As Bely puts it in “Circular Movement,” “On the bottom of the active volcano there is coal, sulphur, nitre — all the most useful materials; only they cannot be mixed together: after all, having mixed them — we are standing over gun powder” (“на дне действующего вулкана уголь, сера, селитра – полезнейшие продукты; только вместе их все не следует смешивать: ведь мешая их, мы – над порохом”).¹²⁴ In the same article Bely discusses the dangers of Dionysian depths in the context of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Those ascending the mountain risk confusing the top with the bottom, and might fall, like Zarathustra, into the shadowy world of eternal return. In *Petersburg*, the Dionysian moment’s dual nature, conveyed through spires, is elucidated in Shishnarfne’s conversation with Dudkin, when Shishnarfne likens Petersburg to the Netherlands, the world of shadows.

¹²⁴ Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 73.

By describing Petersburg as a realm of shadows Bely inscribes his narrative into Petersburg's literary myth, principally introduced into Russian literature by Gogol and Dostoevsky. In his cycle of stories devoted to Petersburg, Gogol depicts the city's peculiar atmosphere, which deceives its inhabitants in unexpected ways. The characters in his stories "Nevsky Prospect" ("Невский проспект"; 1836) and "The Nose" ("Нос"; 1836) mistake the city's shadowy images for reality. Dostoevsky further develops this theme in "The Double: A Petersburg Poem" ("Двойник: Петербургская поэма"; 1846), showing how Petersburg transforms people into shadowy creatures. Although often humorous, these portrayals of Petersburg bear a serious message: it is a place where no one's identity is safe, a city whose mysterious powers lead people to live in a state of delusion, usually with dire consequences. However, Bely transforms the city's traditional myth to serve his purposes. Shishnarfne claims that Petersburg is a place "where the plane of this existence touches against the spherical surface of the immense astral cosmos" (p. 385) ("касания плоскости этого бытия к шаровой поверхности громадного астрального космоса"; p. 302). Here the city becomes the location where the deadly circle of return can be broken.

The novel is shaped by these questions: will someone try to break that circle, who will it be, and what is required? The entire action is framed by this elaborately constructed Dionysian moment, and this also underlies the novel's central issue — the quandary of characters faced with the irrational. However even the approaching Dionysian moment, and its significance as a point of renewal, is not free from ambiguity. The arrival of Peter the Great in Petersburg, which on the surface appears to indicate the approaching Dionysian moment, is undercut by carnivalesque undertones. As Bakhtin describes the most important aspects of carnival:

The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during the carnival time was of particular significance ... all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the

town's square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age ... such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit.¹²⁵

This union of people of diverse backgrounds is evident in the political meetings throughout *Petersburg*, which attract people of different social classes and professions: students, intelligentsia, progressive women, workmen, veterans of the Russo-Japanese War, clerks, revolutionary connoisseurs, and even aristocrats such as Nikolay. The participants and their relationships are presented in a grotesque tone, constituting another carnivalesque reference.

People are pushing, stepping over one another, shouting:

And subjects kept barging and barging, shaggy hats and young ladies: body barged into body; nose flattened against back; the small head of a pretty female gymnasium pupil squeezed against one's chest, while at one's feet a second-form boy cheeped; under pressure from behind, an outrageously extended nose was pierced by a hat-pin, and there too a chest was threatened with puncture by the perforatingly sharp angle of an elbow ... steam hung in the air ... and everyone barged, everyone struggled. (p. 156)

И все перли да перли субъекты, косматые шапки и барышни: тело перло на тело; на спине расплюснулся нос; грудь теснила головка хорошенькой гимназисточки, а в ногах попискивал второкласник; под давлением в чью-то прическу здесь ушел не в меру протянутый нос ... там же грудь грозил проломать острый угол от локтя ... стоял в воздухе пар ... и все перли, все бились. (p. 123)

The overall chaos, noise, heat, and confusion, combined with the phosphorescent lights coming from boats, passing cars, and the bright red sun, complete the carnivalesque aspect of the scene. Therefore the most momentous event in the novel, which is supposed to signify the inception of an epochal event — the Dionysian upsurge — acquires a mood of uncertainty, which prevents the reader from knowing how to interpret it: as a serious event or as a momentary, carnivalesque

¹²⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.

occurrence. This ambiguity may be viewed as Bely's way of distancing himself from his own evolutionary theory, so as to portray it as a proposition rather than an ultimate truth. Even more significantly, it underscores the uncertainty of Bely's era, caused by new science and the cultural crisis. In this new universe nothing is one-dimensional, and nothing can be taken for granted or believed in wholeheartedly, because the relativity and uncertainty of the incessantly changing, dynamic world dictates the constant adjustment of one's worldview.

Joan Neuberger proposes an interesting view on the revolutionary unrest in *Petersburg*. In *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914*, she compares Bely's depiction of revolutionary unrest to Futurist street performances aimed against bourgeois society:

Andrei Bely articulated the fragmentation of culture and its consequences better than anyone in his great symbolist novel *Petersburg*, and he used hooligan motifs (among many other techniques) to do so. Set in October 1905, *Petersburg* captured the bewildering insecurity and uncertainty of public life, partly through continual shifts in tone and perspective, but also by describing a city whose open spaces had become dangerous, unfamiliar, and ominously swollen by the "human myriapod."¹²⁶

Neuberger interprets these revolutionary meetings as a kind of street performance in which the public is not separated from the actors, so that the streets feel unsafe. These unconventional performances abolish well-established modes of behavior and threaten the "public," creating a sense of discomfort and even fear among the unsuspecting passersby. This uneasiness also hints at the carnivalesque overtones of these meetings.

Bely focuses on the characters who have access to the transcendent as the only agents able to bring about the new phase of universal evolution. Apollon, Nikolay, and Dudkin emerge as individuals crucial to the Dionysian upsurge which I describe in section three of this chapter.

¹²⁶ Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 56.

In the case of both Ableukhovs this access is represented by their astral journeys, when their conscious minds escape through the breach in their heads into cosmic infinity, an eternal, Steinerian realm of the Spirit which gave birth to matter and which leads man towards higher spiritual development. Although Dudkin does not have the direct access to the transcendental available to the Ableukhovs, he does have an intuitive sense of eternity, for he describes his soul as “universal infinity” (“душа моя точно мировое пространство”).

The Ableukhovs’ connection with the transcendental has existed their entire lives, as will be explained in chapter five. The Senator experiences his opening while in a half-awake state:

Sometimes ... before the very last moment of daytime consciousness, Apollon Apollonovich, as he went to sleep, would notice that all the threads, all the stars ... made a corridor that ran away into immeasurable distances ... he would feel that this corridor which began from his head, i.e. the corridor, was an infinite extension of his own head, the crown of which suddenly opened — an extension into immeasurable distances. (p. 165)

Иногда ... перед самой последней минутой дневного сознания Аполлон Аполлонович, отходящий ко сну, замечал, что все нити, все звезды ... строили из себя коридор, убегающий в неизмеримость ... чувствовал он, что коридор тот – начинается от его головы, т.е. он, коридор, -- бесконечное продолжение самой головы, у которой раскрылось вдруг темя – продолжение в неизмеримость. (p. 138)

A similar opening to the infinite is available to Nikolay, who is very much like his father. In Nikolay’s case, this is described as the emergence of “Nikolay Apollonovich number two” (“Николай Аполлонович номер второй”), an “unconscious” Nikolay:

From time to time ... he (like Apollon Apollonovich) was assailed by ... an exceedingly strange condition: as though everything that lay beyond the door was not what it was, but something else ... Imagine merely that beyond the door there was nothing, and that if one were to fling the door wide open, then the door would open on an empty, cosmic immensity. (p. 297)

от поры до поры ... на него нападало (как и на Аполлона Аполлоновича) одно странное ... состояние: будто все, что было за дверью, было не тем а иным...Вообразите лишь, что за дверью – нет ничего, и что если дверь

распахнуть, то дверь распахнется в пустую, космическую безмерность. (p. 238)

While the Ableukhovs have neither control nor understanding of the cosmic infinite, and thus enter it randomly, Dudkin, the most spiritually advanced character in the novel, seems to have acquired his connection with the transcendental through his individual searching, including his pursuit of occult science. When Nikolay comes to Dudkin after having experienced his Dionysian moment, the revelation of Truth, Dudkin says:

There are schools of experience where these sensations are deliberately provoked ... There are: I can tell you with certainty, because the only friend I have – and he is a close friend – is there, in those schools; the schools of experience transform your nightmare by means of hard work into a harmonious accord. (p. 317)

Есть школы опыта, где ощущения эти вызывают сознательно ... это я говорю вам уверенно, потому что единственный друг мой и близкий – там, в этих школах; школы опыта ваш кошмар претворяют работою в закономерность гармонии. (p. 269)

This implies that Dudkin acquired his spiritual enlightenment through anthroposophical exercises of his subconscious, which Bely regarded as a valid if not the only way to acquire universal truth; therefore Dudkin can glimpse the falseness of the ossified universe. He confesses to Nikolay that “my soul is exactly like universal space” (p. 115) (“душа моя, точно мировое пространство”; p. 88), and goes on to link his garret to the cosmic infinite. Located at the top of the house, composed of “four perpendicular walls” (“четыре перпендикулярных стены”), the garret is a strange space where “everything is all wrong — objects are not objects: here I have reached the conviction that the window is not a window; the window is a slit into immensity” (p. 116) (“все не то – предметы не предметы: здесь-то я пришел к убеждению, что окно – не окно; окно – вырез в необъятность”; p. 89). Later on, when he receives a visit from Shishnarfne and Peter the Great, he regards them as hallucinations caused by his poor physical

health. The fact that Dudkin may be hallucinating does not contradict the revelatory nature of his visions. In the novel's ambiguous universe, where the characters' rational minds cannot reliably assess the reality around them, these hallucinations may be the source that provides the truth about reality and the dogma that governs it.

All three characters are in a semi-conscious state when they enter the infinite: for the Senator it is a dream within a dream, for Nikolay, a "semi-dream state" ("полусонное состояние"), and for Dudkin, hallucinations. As Bely wrote in "The Line, the Circle, the Spiral": "Eternity cannot be experienced" ("Вечное не может переживаться").¹²⁷ The state between dream and wakefulness allows a character to see past and future, to glimpse the essential Truth, because he ceases to "experience the experience." Thus our subconscious contains the Truth, which comes to the surface when our conscious is less alert.

This implication that our subconscious contains the entrance to the transcendental is a clear reference to Florensky's description of attaining the noumenal while our subconscious is active during sleep.¹²⁸ Bely and Florensky met in 1903 and became rather reluctant friends; their relationship did not extend beyond one year. At the time of their first meeting, Florensky had already started considering the subconscious as a possible channel to Eternity.¹²⁹ Bely's view of the subconscious also owes something to Sigmund Freud, but as mediated by Steiner's view of psychoanalytical science. Steiner's method of reaching Truth by meditation and achieving "higher states of consciousness" is a reinterpretation of Freudian theories. While Freud claimed that the subconscious as revealed in dreams holds the keys to self-understanding, Steiner stated

¹²⁷ Belyi, "Liniia, krug, spiral'," 14.

¹²⁸ Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. Donald Sheenan and Olga Andreev, introd. Donald Sheenan (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 61.

¹²⁹ Pyman, *Pavel Florensky*, 31, 45, 47.

that meditation elevates our levels of consciousness so we can see not only our true selves, but also cosmic evolution. In both cases, however, it is our subconscious that holds the key to the Truth. Bely, who apparently knew at least some of Freud's work, was definitely aware of Freud's theories through Steiner's teachings.¹³⁰ As Steiner's pupil, Bely accepted Steiner's version of the Truth contained in our subconscious. More important than Bely's particular allegiances is his belief that our irrational, uncontrollable side (or "heightened consciousness" in Steiner's words) provides access to the Truth. In this sense our subconscious is our Dionysian side, the emergence of which threatens our Apollonian conscious lives.

However, the significance of Apollon and Nikolay to the novel does not result from their actions, since they are not responsible for the progression of the action, at least not intentionally. On the contrary, they avoid revolutionary events either because they represent the political status quo (in Apollon's case), or because they cannot define themselves or their allegiances (in Nikolay's case). Their significance to Bely's model lies rather in the fact that they connect the personal, cultural, and universal layers of the narrative and thus represent the interconnection of the human and the universal.

Apollon is the head of a dysfunctional household described as follows:

In the lacquered house the storms of life passed noiselessly; but ruinously did the storms of life pass here none the less ... like a stream of poisonous fluids from a hoarse gullet did they rend the air: and some kind of cerebral games whirled in the consciousness of the inhabitants like dense vapors in hermetically sealed boilers. (p. 12)

В лакированном доме житейские грозы протекали бесшумно; тем не менее грозы житейские протекали здесь губительно ... из хриплого горла струей ядовитых флюидов вырывали воздух они; и крутились в сознании

¹³⁰ Judith Wermuth-Atkinson makes a very compelling argument that Bely in fact did read Freud's work and was rather well acquainted with Freud's theories. See Wermuth-Atkinson, "Cerebral Play: Andrey Bely's *Petersburg* as a Novel of European Modern" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2007), 10-14.

обитателей мозговые какие-то игры, как густые пары в герметически закупоренных котлах. (p. 11)

Despite the family's problems, Apollon Apollonovich, his son Nikolay, and his wife, Anna Petrovna, are determined to maintain the dangerous illusion of normalcy. Even after Anna Petrovna leaves and Apollon becomes estranged from his son, the situation does not change, since father and son pretend everything is normal and are unable to talk openly about the situation. The description of Apollon's household is again conveyed through thermodynamic imagery. This testifies to Bely's use of scientific imagery not only in reference to his mathematical view of the universe, but in virtually all aspects of the novel. As we will see later in this chapter, this reflects the fact that thermodynamics coincides with Bely's philosophical views on the functioning of the universe in general.

Apollon's household parallels and intersects with the surrounding dead culture, since Apollon is a prominent member of the government. His familial problems assume political meaning for his son, who is involved in a terrorist political party, and is ordered to murder his father. The patricide becomes a political act, meant to destroy not only the old culture, but also a spiritually dead family. In this way the human and cultural layers of the conflict are connected.

The relationship between Dudkin and Lippanchenko suggests a similar interdependence. Their bond appears familial because Lippanchenko acts as both guardian and father figure to Dudkin. This "family" constellation is completed by Lippanchenko's long-time companion, Zoya Zakharovna, who acted as a mother to Dudkin in Helsingfors. As in the Ableukhov household, family problems here include infidelities as well as suspicions between the "son" and the "father." Dudkin resents Lippanchenko for causing Dudkin's isolation and the loss of his personal identity to that of the legendary "Elusive One," a revolutionary persona created by Lippanchenko. Thermodynamic imagery again signals the growing tension between the two, as

Dudkin comments: “It is difficult to live ... like myself, in a Torricellian vacuum” (p. 115) (“Трудно жить ... как я, в торичеллиевой пустоте”; p. 80). Both their personal conflict and its resolution have political ramifications, since Dudkin and Lippanchenko belong to the same revolutionary party. But while Dudkin is a loyal, though somewhat disillusioned member, Lippanchenko is an agent provocateur, a secret police agent. Dudkin’s murder of Lippanchenko thus has both personal and political consequences.

The description of both families’ dysfunctional nature initiates the thermodynamic imagery which develops throughout the novel, but it also underscores one of the novel’s major themes, namely the inability of the main characters to take action. In familial settings this inaction is caused by the characters’ uncertainty regarding the real states of their households, and this indecision in turn causes the characters to harbor suspicions of one another. Dudkin, who suspects Lippanchenko of treachery but has no proof of it, is instinctively disgusted by the latter’s physical appearance. The Senator, who suspects his wife of infidelity and his son of revolutionary activity, escapes his household and devotes himself to his career. Both Lippanchenko and the Senator are groping in the darkness, tormented by the doubts and mistrust that paralyze them. This sense of being lost, not knowing who is who and what is what, will play a very important role in the development of characters and events in the novel.

The interconnection between different layers of the novel is enhanced by the simultaneous return of characters representing different narrative strands. Peter the Great returns two centuries after establishing the city, Dudkin emerges from his garret after two years of hiding, Nikolay emerges from his study after two years of self-imposed isolation to resume his affair with Sophia Petrovna, which ended two months earlier. Meanwhile, Anna Petrovna also returns from Spain after her two-year affair with Italian singer has ended. I will discuss the

meaning of the number two or two and a half associated with the characters' absences in chapter five. For now, suffice it to say that all these characters (especially Peter the Great, Nikolay, and Dudkin) are crucial players on every level of the text. Their reappearance suggests that the Dionysian moment, or the fundamental resolution of conflicts, is imminent. In this way, all layers are interconnected, and the novel becomes a realization of Bely's dot, offering escape from the dead stage of evolution.

All the "channels" connecting the main characters to the Truth — the breach in the Senator's cranium, the open door in Nikolay's mind, and Dudkin's heightened subconscious — remain dormant until revolutionary unrest brings Peter the Great back to the city. Once this occurs the main heroes leave their "hiding places," establish contact with the external world, and are awakened to the transcendental. This awakening is depicted (characteristically for *Petersburg*) through thermodynamic imagery. Each one of the three main characters experiences a crimson sphere in his chest, dilation of his eyes, or blood pulsing in his temples. Such experiences are triggered by external events that shatter the characters' illusion of security.

At the very beginning of the novel, as the Senator is riding in his carriage to his office, he sees Dudkin, in whose eyes he recognizes "the same immensity of chaos from which by the nature of things the foggy, many-chimneyed distance and Vasilevsky Island surveyed the senator's house" (p. 35) ("ту самую бескрайность хаоса, из которой исконно сенаторский дом дозирует туманная, многотрубная даль и Василевский Остров"; p. 22). At this moment Apollon realizes that the revolutionary unrest, which he had believed to be at a safe distance, has penetrated the Imperial district and threatens his sense of security. This causes his heart to grow into a crimson sphere: "His heart began to thump: and expanded, expanded, expanded; in his breast there came into being the sensation of a growing, crimson sphere that was about to

explode and shatter into pieces” (p. 34) (“сердце забилося; и ширилось, ширилось, ширилось; в груди родилось ощущение растущего, багрового шара, готового разорваться и раскидаться на части”; p. 22). Later, when Apollon realizes the connection between his son and a *raznochinets*, he suffers a migraine, which causes him to feel “that his head was six times larger ... and twelve times heavier than it ought to be” (p. 46) (“будто его голова в шесть раз больше ... и в двенадцать раз тяжелее, чем следует”; p. 32).

Nikolay experiences similar physical sensations when he is faced with a reality he does not want to acknowledge. Dudkin’s visit and Lippanchenko’s letter force him to remember a promise he gave to the revolutionary party, which he has long since regretted: to kill his own father. The fear of being asked to fulfill his promise makes Nikolay feel an “uneasy heaviness” (“беспокойную тяжесть”), which causes blood to flow to his face and throb in his temples. Like his father, Nikolay suffers from migraines, and feels his chest expand when faced with the reality he had hoped to escape. Upon receiving the party order, Nikolay’s heart begins to hurt, and “in the place where his heart was, a spark flared ... with frenzied swiftness it turned into a crimson sphere: the sphere expanded, expanded, expanded; and the sphere burst” (p. 222) (“в месте сердца, всыхнула искорка ... искорка с бешеной быстротой превратилась в багровый шар: шар – ширился, ширился, ширился; и шар лопнул”; p. 187). Even Dudkin, who is apparently most aware of both the political and universal significance of the situation, experiences similar sensations. At the moment when the Senator looks into Dudkin’s eyes, the latter’s eyes dilate, for he is shaken by the sight of a person whom he believes he will assassinate. His head fills with “fiery spheres” (“огневые шары”) which he wants to escape by walking around the city and getting drunk.

Despite their violence, these images suggest that the characters still have a chance to break out of the shell of fallacy. Bely's thermodynamic imagery becomes clearer if examined in the light of his vision of the universe: he seems to view the universe as a thermodynamic mechanism in which the difference between levels of heat causes the liveliness of culture. This is a scientific rendition of the tension between Dionysian and Apollonian elements, apparently the only philosophical idea to which Bely remained faithful. The scientific expression of this philosophical precept determines the novel's overall dynamic character. Once this tension disappears, culture becomes ossified. This scientific view of society is evident already in the *Third Symphony*, in which a thermodynamic model implies a thriving societal organism. The protagonist, the scientist Khandrikov, expresses this idea when discussing society's development: "In thermodynamics the efficiency of heat is determined by the difference between the heat and the condenser. Work stops when there is an equal amount of heat here and there" ("В термодинамике работоспособность тепла определяется разностью между очагом и холодильником. Работа исчезнет с равномерным количеством тепла здесь и там").¹³¹ In "Circular Movement," Bely also suggests that pulsation is a vital aspect of both people and society. Yet even this "constant" in Bely's philosophy is subverted when Khandrikov states: "The most exact science is the most relative" ("Самая точная наука – наука самая относительная."¹³² As much as *Petersburg* is governed by the thermodynamic imagery that conveys Bely's scientific outlook, the notion of relativity undermines this outlook and introduces an element of uncertainty into the singularity of Bely's vision of the universe.

¹³¹ Andrei Belyi, "Vozvrat," in *Chetyre simfonii* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971), 80.

¹³² Ibid., 84.

In *Petersburg*, thermodynamic images of heart expansion and pulsating blood indicate the same idea of vitality. While the Senator, Nikolay, and Dudkin experience these sensations, they are open to the Dionysian moment, spiritually “alive,” and hence have an opportunity to break evolution’s dead circle. During their involuntary glimpses of reality, they experience both pressure and fear of explosion, which suggests a shattering of Petersburg’s stagnant culture. In combination with the other thermodynamic images mentioned above (growing pressure in the Ableukhov household, the revolutionary party, and the city itself), these images dominate the narrative universe. As revolution emerges in the city-universe, which represents its Dionysian moment, Truth comes to the surface, and external and internal pressure intensifies. The expanding red spheres within the main characters, their individual Dionysian moments, will explode (Bely described the Dionysian upsurge as an active volcano) unless they release the pressure: the Senator experiences the expansion of his heart more frequently, Dudkin’s nightmares begin to occur essentially every night, and the “uneasy heaviness” in Nikolay’s mind intensifies after his conversation with Dudkin. Bely thus shapes his philosophical view of evolution by using scientific laws (both physics and psychology) in the imagery of his novel. In this *Petersburg* perhaps represents Bely’s most vivid merger of science and philosophy.

Bely links thermodynamic imagery to psychology in an additional way, by correlating the expanding spheres within the characters to the ticking of an actual bomb meant to kill Apollon. This parallel transforms the external, mechanical explosion into an internal eruption of the subconscious. Since the subconscious carries the Truth, while the bomb built by provocateurs represents something false, the parallel between the internal and external realms reveals that the “real” bomb is within, not outside, the characters, and by extension within man in general.

Section Three: The Tsukatovs' Ball: A Culmination of the Dionysian Upsurge

The scope of the revolution gradually broadens as the novel unfolds. Bely reveals his view of the unrest as a Dionysian upsurge by linking it to Peter the Great, who personifies both destruction and creativity and can be seen as the embodiment of the Dionysian wave. The thermodynamic imagery also frames the revolution within Bely's universal model, thereby diminishing the political and underscoring the cosmic. This Dionysian upsurge exerts enormous external pressure on the leading characters, in parallel to the growing internal pressure, represented by the crimson sphere. Despite the reader's expectations, the appearance of the ominous sphere over the city, which parallels the internal crimson spheres, is not connected with a revolutionary event, but with the Tsukatovs' ball.

The opening lines describing the ball are hyperbolic and hence humorous — “Who does not remember the evening before the memorable night? Who does not remember the day's melancholy flight to rest?” (p. 161) (“Кто не помнит вечера перед памятной ночью? Кто не помнит грустного отлетания того дня на покой?”; p. 149). This humor evokes the expectation that the ball will result in a long-awaited resolution of the intrigue between Sophia Petrovna and Nikolay. Sophia Petrovna, at least, imagines this resolution as a tragic affair on the scale of her beloved opera, “The Queen of Spades.” The humorous depiction of the Tsukatovs' ball sets this supposedly epochal Dionysian moment up for potential mockery. Here Bely again oscillates in his portrayal of the Dionysian upsurge: on the one hand, it could be a renewal of outmoded culture, but, on the other, it might turn out to be only an attempt at change that gets lost in the overall chaos. The answer to this question is far from a foregone conclusion.

The most vivid manifestation of the ball's embodiment of the Dionysian upsurge (and thus also of Bely's universal model) resides once again in thermodynamic imagery. We have

already seen how such imagery connects all the parts of the universal mechanism. Here, too, waves of heat, pulsing blood, and expansion dominate the imagery. The heat is particularly underscored: the one consistent image from the beginning is that of the huge chandelier emitting so much heat that nothing can ease it. With the arrival of the first guests, the door opens to reveal “the brightly lit ballroom” (p. 178) (“добела освещенный зал”; p. 152). Soon after, the chandelier in ballroom is again mentioned: “There in the distance burned the azure globe of an electric chandelier” (p. 179) (“Там в дали горел лазоревый шар электрической люстры”; p. 153). As the dances begin, the “shimmering light of the azure electric chandelier” (p. 182) (“трепетный свет лазоревой электрической люстры”; p. 155) spreads into the drawing room. With the progression of the ball, the light and heat intensify; the dance floor is described as an “impossibly brightly lit room” (p. 185) (“донелзя освещенной зал”; p. 157). Bely continuously remarks on the “electrical sphere” throughout the entire scene. The intense heat again produces the pressure of pulsating blood, which reddens the dancers’ bodies. Bely foreshadows this overheating of the ball’s participants in his description of the girls whose “marble-white little shoulders in an hour or two should become red and covered with perspiration” (p. 178) (“мраморно-белые плечики через час, через два должны были разгореться румянцем и покрыться испариной”; p. 152). Soon after, from the waltzing pairs “separated this or that girl covered with light and with a flushed little face” (p. 187) (“вырывалась то та, то эта покрытая светом девочка, с разгоревшимся личиком”; p. 166). Gradually all participants are likened to flashing, fiery sparks:

There stood two rows of dancers, floating away into the delicately blinded gaze in transfusions of mother-of-pearl pink, *gris-de-perle*, heliotrope ... at the slightest movement there a scaly spine flashed; everywhere now one could see flushed arms, fingers, uncontrollably playing with the laminae of fans, coarsening blotches in the white velvet, rising and falling *décolletages*, and cheeks that were quite crimson. (p. 191)

Там стояло два ряда танцующих, уплывая в нежно слепнувший взор переливами перламутро-розовых, гридеперлевых, гелиотроповых ... при малейшем движении искрилась там чешуйчатая спина; всюду виднелись теперь покрасневшие руки, безотчетно игравшие пластинками веера пальцы, заглубевшие пятна в белых бархатах, колыхавшихся декольте и ланиты, вовсе пунцовые. (p. 168)

This and other descriptions of dancing couples suggest that the chandelier's heat is increasing the energy in the room. The Senator checking his pulse, Nikolay's pupils expanding, the abundance of the color red — all these thermodynamic associations create a parallel between the surging subconscious of these individuals and the upsurge of irrationality in the city.

There is another, more surprising parallel between the depiction of the dancers and that of the cosmic space that the Senator and Nikolay enter in their dreams: the same swirling of sparks, varied shapes, and rapid movement that becomes a whirlwind of shapes, colors, and incandescence. This similarity not only strengthens the parallel between the characters and the city, but also underscores the fact that the ball is a kind of collective dream, a universal Dionysian moment, which reveals the true character of the city just as the characters' dreams do. All levels of society are present at the ball: the cultural and aristocratic elite, the governing power represented by the "landed gentry" ("земство") official, the representatives of all political forces exemplified by the "professor of statistics," the "editor of the conservative press," the "director of an Institution," "journalists," "a demagogue and anti-Semite," and finally the Senator himself. The proponents of revolution are also there, represented by the hired masks, who start singing about the unrest in the city.

Allusions to pre-Christian, pagan events further suggest that the ball represents a Dionysian leap. The narrator implies a parallel between the ball and Russian Yuletide

(“Святки”), which takes place between Christmas and Epiphany, and includes divination, cross-dressing, and other ritualistic events:

It had to be said that Liubov Alekseevna was surprised; after all it was not Christmas; but such, evidently, were the traditions of her charming husband that for the sake of dancing and children’s laughter he was prepared to break all the statutes of the calendar. (p. 183)

Удивляло, признаться, Любовь Алексеевну; как-никак святок не было; но таковы видно, были традиции милого мужа, что для танцев и детского смеха он готов был нарушить все уставы календаря. (p. 152)

This little remark is of huge consequence, for, as Baranova states in her book *Russian Holidays* (*Русские праздники*): “Yuletide’s orientation towards genesis ... brings about the traditional notion of Yuletide as a spatial-temporal dot, in which the past, the present and the future are connected.”¹³³ This aspect of Yuletide corresponds to Bely’s Dionysian leap, where the past, present, and future meet in primordial times, in the dot at the bottom of the spiral. As we recall from chapter one, Bely states: “In a dot — the line of evolution is compressed” (“В точке – сжатая линия эволюции”), meaning that the dot contains all evolutionary stages, and hence the past, present and future.

Bely’s allusion to Yuletide also conveys an ironic implication concerning the events at the ball. As O. G. Baranova points out, Yuletide is a period of intense matchmaking in both the countryside and urban society.¹³⁴ And as we read in the novel, the Tsukatovs’ home was “the neutral place for meetings” (“нейтральным местом встреч”) where

cunning Liubov Alekseevna ... conceived a desire to direct the meetings of the most varied persons; here meetings took place between: a *zemstvo* official and a civil service official; a publicist and the director of a government department; a

¹³³ O. G. Baranova, *Russkii prazdnik: Prazdniki i obriady narodnogo zemledel'cheskogo kalendaria* (St. Petersburg: Isskustvo-SPB, 2001), 509.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 511.

demagogue and a Judophobe. This house had been visited, and even lunched in, by Apollon Apollonovich ... in the indifferently cordial drawing-room more than one conjuncture was woven and unwoven. (p. 184)

хитрая Любовь Алексеевна ... возымела желание дирижировать встречами самых разнообразных особ; здесь встречались: земский деятель с деятелем чиновным; публицист с директором департамента: демагог с юдофобом. В этом доме бывал, даже завтракал, и Аполлон Аполлонович ... в безразлично радушной гостиной сплетались и расплетались не раз не одна конъюнктура. (p. 155)

Obviously the matchmaking which takes place during Yuletide has nothing to do with politics. However, this matchmaking is not organized around the feelings of future couples, but around the financial resources of possible marital candidates. Bely's ironic parallel between political coteries and matchmaking implies that political alliances created at the Tsukatovs' house aim not to help the common welfare, but only to further the interests of the parties involved.

This particular ball is no exception to the Tsukatovs' customs, for one of its goals is to bring together the liberal and conservative parties. As the narrator explains:

The supporters of, so to speak, gradual, but at any rate thoroughly humane reforms, shaken by the thunder of this terrible avalanche, suddenly in fear began to draw closer to the supporters of the existing norms, but did not make the first move; the liberal professor had taken it upon himself, in the name of the common weal, to be the first to step across a threshold which was, so to speak, a fateful one for him. (p. 184)

Сторонники, так сказать, постепенных, но во всяком смысле весьма гуманных реформ, потрясенные громом этой страшной лавины, вдруг испуганно стали жаться к сторонникам существующих норм, но встречного шага не делали; либеральный профессор во имя общего блага первый взялся перешагнуть, так сказать, для себя роковой порог. (p. 155)

But since Apollon "despised compromises" ("презирал компромиссы"), he refuses to enter into any talks with the liberal party, and hence "the marriage" does not take place. This "coming together" of the opposite parties, as the narrator describes it, is "not fundamental but rather conditional, temporarily brought about by the rumbling of the avalanche of mass meetings that

was descending on everyone” (p. 184) (“не коренное, а условное, временно вызванное грохотом на всех налетевшей митинговой лавины”; p. 155). The parallel between Yuletide matchmaking and political alliances as “not fundamental, but conditional” suggests Bely’s belief that the political parties’ attempt to unite is motivated only by a desire for self-preservation, which blocks the Dionysian movement. The professor of statistics, a representative of a liberal party, is described ironically:

From his chin hung a ragged yellowish beard, and on to his shoulders fell, like thick felt, a mane that had never seen a comb. One was struck by his lower lip, which looked as though it were falling away from his mouth. (p. 184)

с его подбородка висела желтоватая клочкастая борода, и ему на плечи, как войлок, свалились не видавшие гребня космы. Поражала его кровавая, будто отпадающая ото рта губа. (p. 155)

His animal-like appearance is matched by Apollon’s almost two-dimensional, Egyptian-like figure:

Apollon Apollonovich had sat like a stick, erect ... perpendicularly ... on the multicolored Bukhara rug rested his thin, little legs ... forming lower parts which below his kneecaps made ninety-degree angles with the upper parts ... Apollon Apollonovich looked like the figure of the Egyptian that was depicted on the rug. (p. 193)

Аполлон Аполлонович восседал, будто как палка, прямой ... перпендикулярно ... в бухарский пестрый кавер оперлись его тощие ножки ... образуя нижние части, которые с верхними составляли под коленными чашками прямые, девяностоградусные углы ... Аполлон Аблеухов казался написанной на ковре фигуркою египтянина. (p. 179)

In this way Bely depicts representatives of both parties as figures from past evolutionary stages, unable to effect significant evolutionary change.

Since there is nothing to stop the Dionysian moment, it progresses towards the breaking of Apollonian appearances and the revelation of Dionysian truth. Bely portrays this process through the removal of the guests’ masks, alluding to Nietzsche’s view of masks. Virginia

Bennett writes: “For Nietzsche, masks represent the illusions created by the dream world of Apollo to shield the spectators from the harshness of reality or from outbreaks of Dionysian chaos. He calls them ‘Apollonian appearances in which Dionysus objectifies himself.’”¹³⁵ Since the ball is attended by representatives of all political, cultural, and revolutionary circles, it represents the novel’s universe. Therefore the revelations that occur after the guests remove their masks can be interpreted as concerning the universal Truth.

We earlier saw the Dionysian upsurge reaching its peak with images of intense heat. This thermodynamic imagery is further developed through the red color that comes to dominate the ball. Upon entering, the Red Domino “drew his satin cape over the lacquered tiles of the parquet floor, like a floating crimson ripple of its own reflection” (p. 181) (“повлекло свой атлас по плитах паркета плывущего пунцовеющей рябью собственных отблесков”; p. 158). The participants in the ball become red from the heat: “Now everywhere one could see hands becoming red ... *décolleté* ... everywhere crimson” (p. 209) (“всюду виделись теперь покрасневшие руки ... декольте ... вовсе пунцовые”; p. 163). When he arrives at the ball Apollo sees “red dancing shoes” (“красные тряпки”).

This abundance of red signifies that the Dionysian upsurge has reached the guests: Apollonian façades explode and reveal the Dionysian images behind them. Looking in the mirrors, which suddenly lose their opaqueness to reveal the onlooker’s true self, the Senator sees a reflection of his real self:

Quickly he got up and was about to run to the next room ... but from there, from the room, a clean-shaven little high-school student, dressed in a tight-fitting frock coat and trousers, came flying up to him at top speed ... on closer inspection the

¹³⁵ Virginia Bennett, “Esthetic Theories from *The Birth of Tragedy* in Andrey Bely’s Critical Articles, 1904-1908,” in Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche in Russia*, 161.

clean-shaven little high-school student turned out to be Senator Ableukhov. (p. 243)

быстро он встал и хотел пробежать в соседнюю комнату ... но оттуда, из комнаты, быстро, быстро к нему подлетел бриненький гимназистик, затаенный в сюртучную пару ... бритенький гимназистик при ближайшем осмотре оказался сенатором Аблеуховым. (pp. 181-82)

Dancing masks even more pointedly reveal to Apollon the true picture of himself underneath his customary Apollonian mask. Considering himself a knight in the service of a great empire, as portrayed on his coat of arms, Apollon recently dreamt that he was a miniature knight whose sword melts and who is unable to fend off an approaching monster. He tries to suppress the meaning of his dream, but its images are reflected in the masks, and give him an uneasy feeling. He senses, rather than consciously recognizing, the truth about himself:

The images that fled there had a kind of repulsive touch that shocked him personally ... somewhere over there ... quickly the ballroom was traversed by the dried-up little figure of a knight and the flashing blade of the sword ... the contours of his greenish ears standing out ... and when ... a one-horned creature flung itself at the little knight, with its horn it broke off the knight's luminous phenomenon; in the distance something clinked and fell to the floor in the likeness of a beam of moonlight. (p. 225)

там мелкающие образы имели какой-то отвратительный привкус, поражавший лично его ... где-то там ... быстро зал пересекала сухая фигурочка рыцарька с лезвием сверкавшим меча ... выделяясь контурами зеленоватых ушей ... а когда ... на рыцарька кинулось однорогое существо, то рогом оно обломало у рыцаря светлое явление; что-то издали дзанкнуло и на пол упало подобием лунного лучника. (p. 165)

Suddenly, the powerful Senator's insignificance is revealed to all: they see him as "not a dignitary — but a little chicken" (p. 231) ("не сановник — а цыпленок"; p. 171). The unveiling of the masks continues as Lippanchenko, dressed as a Spaniard, recognizes Sophia Petrovna in the costume of Madame de Pompadour. Indecently proposing they spend the night together, he says: "You are not a noble lady: you are a sweetie-pie" (p. 231) ("Вы не барыня — вы душканчик"; p. 171). This encounter also reveals his lecherous and lowly character.

The unmasking extends to all the people present at the ball. As the masks are lifted, people match the images they represent with the faces behind them. And so, also via mirror reflection, the Red Domino is recognized as Nikolay when, overcome with the letter's content, he lifts his mask. This revelation creates turmoil during which people remove their masks, letting others see the true characters beneath:

Everyone became frightened ... from under the mask of a two-headed monster ... one could hear a frightened and familiar voice ... and Leib Hussar Shporyshev recognized Verhefden's voice. (p. 229)

затревожились все ... из-под маски двуглавого монстра ... слышался встревоженный и знакомый голос ... И лейб-гусар Шпорышев узнал голос Вергефдена. (p. 169)

At this point the frightened guests leave with an uneasy feeling, long before the ball was supposed to end.

The complete exposition of the truth happens when the hired masks, who represent the general public and whose identities we do not know, sing a song that comments on the revolutionary unrest and hints at the overall chaos in the city:

No law at all these days,
There is no law of emergency,
But anyone can commit
A terroristic act (p. 233)

Но нет законодательства,
Нет чрезвычайных правил
акт террорический
Свершает ныне всякий (p. 173)

The song underscores the revolution's universal, Dionysian character. The color red, which, according to the Senator, is "an emblem of the chaos destroying Russia" ("эмблема Россию губившего хаоса"), also signifies blood, like the Red Domino's costume: "as if an unsteady pool of blood were running from parquet to parquet" (p. 211) ("как будто лужица крови

побежала с паркетика на паркетик”); p. 158). But Apollon makes the most direct parallel between the revolution and the ball:

For him, the dancing of red clowns turned into dancing of a different, bloody sort; this dancing, like all dancing, as a matter of fact, began in the streets; this dancing, like all dancing, continued beneath the crossbeam of two not unfamiliar pillars ... if one permits this apparently innocent dancing here, it will of course continue in the streets. (p. 264)

Пляски красных паяцев для него обернулись в иные, кровавые пляски; пляски эти, как впрочем, и все, начинались на улице; пляски эти, как все, далее продолжались под перекладиной двух небезызвестных столбов ... допусти только здесь эти с виду невинные пляски, уж, конечно, продолжатся эти пляски на улице. (p. 179)

As we have seen, the ball’s thermodynamic imagery implies the growing pressure of the Dionysian upsurge. The allusions to the revolution during the ball perform a double function. On the one hand, they define the ball as a Dionysian moment, for Bely originally viewed the 1905 revolution as an irrational upsurge; he reminds us of that fact through his satirical, but not dismissive, depiction of the revolution’s universal nature. Conversely, by placing the revolution within the framework of the ball’s revelation of truth — from individual to familial to political and universal — Bely portrays it as a broader movement, not limited to politics. This link between the ball and the revolution is suggested by the Senator’s perception cited above: he notes that “dances” from the streets penetrated to the ball, but in the next sentence he reverses his thoughts, stating that dances at the ball may spread into the streets. This strengthens the idea of revolution as a Dionysian upsurge, and the ball as an upsurge of the irrational.

The “unmasking” of Nikolay Ableukhov deserves special attention. Like everybody else at the ball, he lifts his mask, and the Red Domino, which the popular press had associated with general unrest, is recognized as the Senator’s son. This unmasking suggests yet another connection between the revolutionary party and the State, and thus the corruption of the leading

revolutionary party. Even more significantly, Nikolay himself, unlike other people at the ball, becomes his mask: “And the charred countenance turned into a black mask, while the fires that baked his body turned into red silk. He had now truly become a buffoon, an outrageous and red one” (p. 198) (“и обугленный лик превратился в черную маску, а пекущие тело огни – в красный шелк. Он теперь воистину стал шутом, безобразным и красным”; p. 160).

Reading *Petersburg* in the context of Bely’s philosophical writings, we may view Nikolay’s identification with his Red Domino mask as an indication that he has gained an identity or glimpsed his unconscious. Up to this point, he is depicted as a young man without any definitive qualities: he reads Kant, but is interested in Eastern philosophy; he has abandoned his studies, is estranged from his father, and toys with revolutionary ideas; he seems to either love or hate Sophia Petrovna, depending on his mood. None of what he does or thinks constitutes a coherent, well-formed identity. Upon entering the ball, Nikolay, like everybody else gathered there, experiences a dream-like state, in which the truth about himself is revealed:

He had himself forgotten; forgotten his own thoughts; and forgotten his hopes; had reveled in his own predestined role: a godlike, impassive creature had flown off somewhere; there remained a naked passion, and the passion had become poison. (p. 198)

Сам себя он забыл; забыл свои мысли; и забыл упования; удивился собственной, ему предназначенной ролью: богоподобное, бесстрастное существо отлетело куда-то; оставалась голая страсть, а страсть стала ядом. (p. 160)

The mask Nikolay wears at the ball allows him to break through the mask of his everyday life. For the first time, he sees his true identity. This interpretation is supported by Nikolay’s *commedia dell’arte* costume. In both the French and Russian symbolist traditions, *commedia*

dell'arte masks symbolized the mask-wearer's unconscious.¹³⁶ Bely's allusion to this tradition exposes the Dionysian moment in Nikolay, who is usually restrained and un-sensual, and feels disgusted at the mere sight of copulating animals. In this instance Bely "links commedia dell'arte masks with Nietzsche's view that masks hid the chaos and Dionysian sensuality in man which could burst forth unexpectedly."¹³⁷

Although the Dionysian moment awakens Nikolay's subconscious and reveals his sensual nature, it only turns him into a laughable buffoon. The next morning, frightened by the impending confrontation with his father, the sensual Harlequin is diminished to Petrushka, a clown deeply rooted in native Russian tradition, a puppet who "says" what others tell him to say and what they want to hear.¹³⁸ When Nikolay enters his house, the mirrors reveal him to be Petrushka:

And all the mirrors began to laugh, because the first mirror ... now reflected the white, as if flour-covered, countenance of Petrushka ... at once mirror threw the reflection to mirror and Petrushka was reflected in all the mirrors. (p. 304)

и все зеркала засмеялись, потому что первое зеркало ... отразило белый, будто в муке, лик Петрушки ... тотчас зеркало перекинуло зеркалу отражение; и во всех зеркалах отразился Петрушка. (p. 226)

In accordance with his Petrushka-like appearance, Nikolay says what he thinks his father wants to hear: he explains away his Red Domino costume as an innocent mask, just part of a game with his friends. By multiplying the mirrors reflecting Petrushka's image to the point that they seem omnipresent, Bely implies that Nikolay is not yet an adult capable of critical thinking. This

¹³⁶ Robert Storey, *Pierrot: A History of the Mask* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 122-25.

¹³⁷ Bennett, "Esthetic Theories," 166.

¹³⁸ Petrushka is a character from Maslenitsa, a Russian folk holiday celebrated during the last week before Lent. Maslenitsa was a holiday simultaneously bidding farewell to winter and welcoming spring. Popular during its celebration were parades of minstrels, including clowns, mummers, acrobats, etc. Petrushka was one of the minstrels often portrayed as a puppet.

interpretation is strengthened when Apollon recalls his son as a young boy, whom he would dress as Petrushka and to whom he sang:

Silly little simpleton
Kolenka is dancing
He has put his dunce-cap on —
On his horse he's prancing. (p. 306)

Дурачок-простачок,
Коленька танцует:
Он надел колпачок,
На коне гарцует. (p. 228)

However strong the correlation between the ball and the Dionysian upsurge may be, the events still contain a good measure of ambiguity, created by the carnivalesque and grotesque depiction of the ball. With the exception of the young people, the participants in the ball are portrayed in a grotesque way: the Senator appears as an Egyptian figure; the professor representing the liberal party is presented in exaggerated terms and resembles an animal more than a human being; the “editor of a conservative newspaper” (“редактор консервативной газеты”) is depicted as “a rather fat man whose face was unpleasantly pitted with smallpox ... the lapels of his frock-coat stuck out impossibly, because he has pulled his frock-coat tight over his belly, which was of respectable proportions” (p. 179) (“Толстоватый мужчина с неприятно изрытым оспой лицом ... донелзя оттопырился отворот его сюртука, от того, что он перетянул свой живот почтенных размеров” ; p. 153). Even the hostess, Lyubov Alekseevna, is depicted in grotesque terms as “a lady of forty-five with a puffy face that fell on her corset-supported bosom in a double chin” (p. 179) (“сорокапятилетняя дама с одутловатым лицом упдающим на корсете подпертую грудь своим двойным подбородком”; p. 153). The interactions between the guests are equally grotesque. Apollon is squeezed between the editor, “a liberal son of a priest” (“из либеральных поповичей”), whom he suspects of having smelly

feet, and an economist with whom he does not want to interact. A general atmosphere of uneasiness, due to the difference in political views and official ranks, permeates the drawing room. The carnivalesque atmosphere is enhanced by elements of commedia dell'arte (Nikolay's Red Domino costume) and cases of mistaken identity (Nikolay does not recognize Sophia Petrovna, while she does not recognize Lippanchenko).

Scandalous improprieties, a crucial element of the carnivalesque, also abound during the ball.¹³⁹ The Red Domino, a revolutionary symbol, is unmasked as Nikolay, the son of the important state official, Apollon. Apollon himself views the dancing youth as potential revolutionaries. And finally, the long awaited masks shock everyone with their revolutionary song. These scandals link this ball with the one depicted in Dostoevsky's *The Devils*. The literary event preceding the ball in Dostoevsky's work is a carnivalesque scene, where the lowly crowd mixes with respectable citizens, resulting in grotesque situations and an overall feeling of impropriety. The parallel between the Tsukatovs' ball and the fête from *The Devils* is most vividly underscored by the "literary quadrille" entitled "Honest Russian Thought" and presented during the evening part of the fête. In Dostoevsky's novel, the masked figures performing in front of Governor von Lempke portray the honest Russian press as a suppressed figure in handcuffs. Their performance enrages the governor and other officials and the fête ends in scandal. Bely's allusion to the fête in *The Devils* highlights the carnivalesque elements of the Tsukatovs' ball in *Petersburg* and undermines its significance as a Dionysian upsurge: what seemed like a moment of imminent epochal changes is riddled with ambiguity.

¹³⁹ Improprieties were also a characteristic element of the carnival tradition. See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 53.

At the end of the Tsukatovs' ball, it seems that the Bronze Horseman, the statue of Peter the Great, comes to life and chases all the major characters with the clicking sound of his horse's hooves: Sophia Petrovna hears the sound while riding in her carriage, the Senator hears it in his wanderings around town, and Nikolay is followed by the statue itself after his meeting with the double agent, Morkovin. Since Peter the Great represents the irrational creative force in the novel, his appearance endows the ball with the seemingly unmistakable meaning of a Dionysian upsurge: it reveals the truth about individuals, families, and all of society, and undermines the individuals' own illusions. Virtually all the main characters feel a sudden internal rupture, which erases their conscious perceptions and allows them a fresh look at their lives, untainted by their habitual thinking. The thumping hooves of the Horseman's stallion echo the breaking of the dead shell which had encased them. In Sophia Petrovna's experience:

Her whole life fledted past, and her whole life sank away ... those were the pieces of her life falling away as they plunged towards some bottom. As though some metal horse, clopping resonantly on the stone, were trampling the past behind her back. (p. 203)

Вся жизнь промелькнула, и упала вся жизнь ... слетая в некое дно, упали куски ее жизни ей. Точно некий металлический конь, звонко цокая в камень, у нее за спиной порастапывал отлетевшее. (p. 176)

Apollon, who experiences a similar rupture when he finds out about Nikolay's actions, and hears a similar thumping of hooves after he leaves the ball, is also overwhelmed by his new understanding of the true state of his life:

And it seemed to him now that he was hated ... Who was it he intended to live together with? His son? His son was the most dreadful scoundrel. With the ordinary man in the street? The ordinary man on the street was going to ... He had once intended to spend his life with Anna Petrovna ... Anna Petrovna had gone away — yes, sir, gone away! (p. 274)

И ему показалось теперь, что его ненавидят ... С кем же вдвоем располагает он жить? С сыном? Сын ужаснейший негодяй. С обывателем? Обыватель

собирается ... Некогда располагал он прожить свою жизнь с Анной Петровной ... а, ведь, вот: Анна Петровна уехала. (p. 202)

Finally, Nikolay feels a spark in his heart while reading the fateful letter and the spark “turned into a crimson sphere: the sphere expanded ... and the sphere burst: everything burst” (p. 222) (“превратилась в багровый шар: шар ширился ... и шар лопнул: лопнуло все”; p. 187).

At that moment, he, too, glimpses the truth, to discover that his life and its philosophical basis are empty:

Nikolay Apollonovich glanced at the recent past in consternation, and found it simply uninteresting ... The flock of thoughts ... flew away from the center of consciousness, but there was no center of consciousness; before his eyes was the gateway, while in his soul there was an empty hole. (p. 223)

Николай Аполлонович с изумлением окинул недавнее прошлое и нашел его просто неинтересным ... Стаи мыслей ... слетели от центра сознания; но центра сознания не было; перед глазами была подворотня, а в душе – пустая дыра. (p. 186)

However, even this apparently unmistakable sign of Dionysian upsurge — the revelation of truth about individuals’ lives caused by Peter the Great — is not free from uncertainty. Right after Sophia Petrovna hears the thumps of a powerful horse and seems to see a Bronze Horseman, she stops musing about her life and sees a fire squad driven by a horse:

And when she turned around, she was presented with the spectacle: the outline of the Mighty Horseman ... At this point Sophia Petrovna came to her senses ... “What’s that over there – a fire?” Sofia Petrovna asked turning to a cab driver. “It seems to be: they were saying the islands were on fire...” (p. 203)

И когда она обернулась, ей представилось зрелище: абрис Мощного Всадника ... Тут Софья Петровна очнулась ... “Что это там, пожар?” обратилась Софья Петровна к извозчику. “Да как будто пожар: сказывали – горят острова...” (p. 176)

The uncertainty concerning the source of the thumping hoofs, as well as Sophia Petrovna’s “coming to her senses” as if from a dream, undermines the seemingly obvious image of Peter the

Great crushing the Apollonian masks of the ball attendees and revealing their real selves. This ambivalence as to Peter's supposed chase of the characters makes it difficult for the reader to interpret these events. They could be viewed as a Dionysian breaking of Apollonian masks, but they may also be interpreted as the characters' hallucinations caused by the ball. Sophia Petrovna is shaken by her realization that she has just delivered a letter to Nikolay ordering him to kill his father, thus involving herself in potential patricide. The Senator also undergoes a psychological shock, discovering that his son is his prospective assassin. Finally, Nikolay, who just received a letter ordering him to kill his father, is in a state of nervous instability to the point that his legs give way beneath him. Therefore the Dionysian revelations may be interpreted as the characters' hallucinations caused by psychological stimuli. This ambiguity creates a dynamic narration where nothing can be taken for granted and every straightforward interpretation of the events leads to a dead end.

Although the expositions that occur during the ball may be interpreted as breaking the Apollonian façade and depicting the Dionysian moment, they do not touch the major conflict: the plan to kill the Senator. Another series of revelations occurs at the ball, which do not reveal spiritual or philosophical truths, but resolve the novelistic intrigue. Apollon is informed by Morkovin, who admits to being a double agent, that the Red Domino is his son. Nikolay gets the letter that confirms his worst fears — the party is demanding he fulfill his careless promise. During his conversation with Morkovin, Nikolay also realizes that the secret police have infiltrated the revolutionary party to its core. Lippanchenko notices that the letter has been delivered to Nikolay and hence that the secret police's provocation has been initiated.

It is, however, on the day following the ball that all threads of the plot come together, when Nikolay, frightened and hoping to be released from his promise, runs to see Dudkin.

During their conversation Dudkin finds out the truth about the party and realizes that he has been fooled by Lippanchenko, who promised him that the package he delivered to Nikolay was only for safekeeping. He also learns about the fateful letter containing orders to kill Nikolay's father. They discuss Nikolay's promise, and Dudkin remembers that Lippanchenko stated directly that the party would refuse such an offer: "Aleksandr Ivanovich remembered ... that the person had told him ... however, that the Party had one option left: to refuse the offer" (p. 304)

("Александр Иванович вспомнил ... что особа тогда говорила ... одноко, что партии остается одно: предложение отклонить"; p. 255). At this point Dudkin is still sure of the revolutionary movement's honesty, and he assures Nikolay that if the party took his offer seriously "then you would fall...in the opinion of the Party" (p. 304) ("вы упали бы тогда...во мнении партии" (p. 255). Then Dudkin discovers that the party has been infiltrated by the secret police, and that there exists an "Unknown One," who is apparently supervising Dudkin and who has been contacting Nikolay for some time. Dudkin then begins to doubt the party, which explains the inexplicable, almost physical disgust he always felt towards Lippanchenko.

In order to obtain an explanation concerning the letter and the "Unknown One," Dudkin goes to Lippanchenko's house where he realizes the truth about the party and Lippanchenko himself. Dudkin sees that Lippanchenko used flattery to distract Dudkin from the party's actual dealings:

"So what? What am I: nothing...I am only a submarine; but you are our battleship" ... Nonetheless, the person had chased him off to the garret: and having chased him off to the garret, had hidden him there. (p. 328)

"Что-ж? Я – что: ничего...Я всего лишь подводная лодка; вы у нас – броненосец" ... тем не менее она его загнала на чердак: и, загнав на чердак, там запрятала. (p. 280)

Now that the politically provocative order (asking Nikolay to kill his father) has been delivered, while Dudkin, the only true believer in the revolution, has been safely hidden in the garret, Lippanchenko changes his tactics and accuses Nikolay and Dudkin of being double agents. For Dudkin this conversation reveals Lippanchenko's true nature, and hence this is yet another unmasking. Dudkin is the most spiritually advanced character, the most cognizant of humanity's cultural evolution: he can see Lippanchenko's essence behind the revolutionary mask:

So a close analysis of the monstrous head revealed only one thing: the head was the head of a premature child; someone's puny little brain had been covered before its time with fatty and bony growths ... (take a look at the skull of a gorilla). (p. 337)

Так внимательный разбор чудовищной головы выдавал одно: голова была – головой недоноски; чей-то хиленький мозг оброс ранее срока жировыми и костяными наростами ... (посмотрите на череп гориллы). (p. 279)

The image of the true Lippanchenko, which Dudkin sees, is that of a mentally-limited, sub-human creature, who cannot understand reality and serves as a tool of the dogmatic State. After this unmasking, Dudkin, like other characters in the novel, also receives a suspicious visit from Peter the Great in his garret and has an apparent revelation concerning his life.

Through their encounters with Peter the Great, or perhaps due to strong psychological shocks, all the principal characters experience the unmasking of reality and are pressed to act: Nikolay has to find a way to refuse the party's order without being imprisoned by Morkovin as a criminal; the Senator needs to protect himself from a plot against his life; Dudkin must find out the real nature of his party and save Nikolay from the political provocation in which he has unwittingly involved him. As we have seen, only action that results in movement on individual, personal, cultural, and universal levels allows the evolutionary mechanism to progress. The main characters constitute the links that interconnect all these narrative levels, and their actions are crucial, affecting the resolutions of several important plot lines.

From this point on, the main characters occupy a central place in the narration, which previously focused on past events. The union of disconnected narrative lines implies the heroes' need to act, which in turn quickens the action, a fact underscored by the clicking of the party's bomb. On the most obvious level, these actions concern the revolution. Since revolution embodies the Dionysian moment, the actions of the main characters will decide the outcome of this moment: they will either move the universal spiral or allow the old dogma to continue.

As I have suggested in this chapter, in *Petersburg* Bely looks back at his youthful philosophical beliefs, while also presenting his new view concerning universal and human development. His depiction of the city reflects his belief that current culture is the last phase of an evolutionary circle, which is now repeating forms from its inception. Moreover, Bely portrays his hopes for the 1905 revolution in a new light, different from Solovyov's apocalyptic teachings. He presents it as a Dionysian moment, a dot in his spiral of evolution, which might move the dead circle of cultural dogma to its next level. He thus endows the historical events with a universal dimension. However, the ambiguity which permeates virtually all aspects of the novel does not permit a straightforward interpretation. Constant uncertainties as to the interpretation of events suggest that Bely wishes us to see his evolutionary model as a proposition rather than an established truth. The ambivalence also alludes to the new, incessantly changing world. Although Bely's model presupposes the movement towards the higher spiritual development of man and universe alike, and this movement depends on humanity's readiness to make a successful Dionysian leap, it remains far from certain that any of the characters will be able to achieve this goal.

Chapter 3: Dudkin's Role in Bely's Vision of Universal and Human Evolution

Section One: Dudkin as a Nietzschean Character

Dudkin, although part of Bely's universal mechanism, differs considerably from Apollon and Nikolay Ableukhov. As I suggested in chapter two, the Ableukhoffs have access to the spiritual realm, which is represented by the "breach in their heads" through which they glimpse the transcendental. The red spheres growing within their chests, which become larger and more frequent as the novel progresses, represent the surges of their subconscious knowledge of the spiritual sphere, which intrudes on their conscious when they receive external stimuli related to their subconscious knowledge.

Dudkin, by contrast, has no direct connection to the noumenal realm; his knowledge of evolution comes from his subconscious, understood as a scientifically verified part of the human psyche. As discussed in chapter two, Bely regards the human subconscious in a Freudian/Steinerian sense — as an area of human experience which can potentially uncover the truth of reality, and which, when exercised according to anthroposophical science, can elevate human consciousness to a higher level of awareness of both reality and the realm of the spirit. I would suggest that Dudkin's heightened awareness of ossified culture results from such exercise, for in his conversation with Nikolay he mentions "schools of thought" with which he seems very familiar. This seems to place him above Apollon and Nikolay in terms of his awareness of cultural dogma. This is not to say that Dudkin's knowledge is entirely conscious: he is torn between his subconscious and his conscious state. When he is conscious, his awareness of truth is impeded by his corrupt party colleagues and other dubious characters. Later in this chapter I will examine the reasons why Dudkin cannot entirely trust his subconscious.

The differences between Dudkin and the Ableukhovs are underscored in the novel's very structure. While the "awakening" of the Ableukhovs' subconscious comprises the novel's most crucial motif, and the narration revolves around them, Dudkin, who previously experienced this awakening (although we are not informed when or where), seems to occupy the periphery of the narrative. He appears only in the opening and closing chapters and during the climax. The advanced awareness that emerges from his subconscious is underscored by the location of his residence. He is the only character living on the islands, which represent a hothouse of ideology threatening the imperial part of the city. The revolutionary nature of the islands and their inhabitants is underscored by the Senator's thoughts on his way to the Important Institution:

He did not like the islands: the population there was industrial, coarse; a human swarm of many thousands plodded its way in the mornings to the many-chimneyed factories; and now he knew that the Browning circulated there; and a few other things as well. (p. 19)

островов он не любил: население там – фабричное, грубое; многотысячный рой людской там бредет по утрам к многотрубочным заводам; и теперь, вот он знал, что там циркулирует браунинг; и еще кое-что. (p. 17)

The narrator also ironically "warns" the residents of Petersburg against the islanders:

O Russian people, Russian people! Do not let in the crowds of gliding shadows from the islands! Fear the islanders! They have a right to settle freely in the Empire: it is evidently for this purpose that black and grey bridges have been thrown over the waters of Lethe to the islands. They ought to be pulled down ...
Too late ... (p. 25)

О, русские люди, русские люди! Вы толпы скользящих теней с островов к себе не пускайте! Бойтесь островитян! Они имеют право свободно селиться в Империи: знать для этого чрез летийские воды к островам перекинуты черные и серые мосты. Разобрать бы их ...
Поздно ... (p. 21)

As we have seen, Bely implies that the revolution is a Dionysian surge, so the fact that Dudkin lives on the revolutionary islands suggests that he is subconsciously aware that contemporary culture is ossified.

Several aspects of Dudkin's character hint at his link to Nietzsche and Zarathustra (in "Circular Movement" Bely treats the philosopher and his character interchangeably): Dudkin's superiority over other characters, his location on the Islands, and, perhaps most significantly, his awareness that culture is dead. Bely considered Nietzsche the greatest genius of his time, since in Nietzsche's final work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the philosopher exposed modern culture's sterility and indicated how to destroy it.¹⁴⁰ Nietzsche influenced Bely's ideas on both universal development and cultural evolution, while Nietzsche's idea of the *Übermensch*, mediated by Steiner's notion of self-development, influenced Bely's view on how to overcome dogma. Yet Bely considered Nietzsche a *fallen* genius, who ignited people's minds but denied the existence of the spiritual world with his philosophy of eternal return and his new morality based on the *Übermensch*. It is fitting that Bely's novel, which exposes cultural dogma and portrays humanity as responsible for evolution, confers a significant role on Nietzsche, who first addressed these issues and, in his *Zarathustra*, attempted to portray the man able to resolve them.¹⁴¹

Although Bely emphasizes Dudkin's connection with Zarathustra, Dudkin is not an exact copy of the Nietzschean hero. Despite Bely's fascination with Nietzschean philosophy (his article "Circular Movement" is devoted to Nietzsche and Zarathustra), Bely characteristically uses parody to distance himself from Nietzschean thought, presenting it as a means to overcome dead culture, but not as the ultimate answer. In *Petersburg* Bely moves beyond the great admiration of Nietzsche that he displays in his essays, and depicts Nietzschean philosophy as significant but not the only philosophical solution to the questions he raises in his novel.

¹⁴⁰ This view was expressed by Bely on various occasions, but the exact words come from his *Tragediia tvorchestva: Dostoevskii i Tolstoi* (Moscow: Izd. G. A. Lemana i S. I. Sakharova, 1911), 34.

¹⁴¹ To the best of my knowledge, the only critics who have noted the Dudkin-Zarathustra connection are Robert Maguire and John Malmstad, in their article "Petersburg," in Malmstad, ed., *Andrey Bely: The Spirit of Symbolism*, 125.

Bely links Dudkin and Nietzsche at the very beginning of the novel in his description of Dudkin's appearance: he is introduced as "a stranger with a little black mustache" ("незнакомец с черными усиками"), a clear allusion to Nietzsche's characteristic moustache. Yet Bely also parodies the Dudkin-Zarathustra connection: the description of Dudkin's "little mustache" ("усики") mocks Nietzsche's formidable facial hair. This metonymy characterizes Dudkin throughout the novel. Bely also underscores the Nietzschean connection when Dudkin says to Nikolay: "I was a desperate Nietzschean. We are all Nietzscheans ... you too are Nietzschean, only you will never admit it" (p. 91) ("я был отчаянным ницшеанцем. Мы все ницшеанцы ... и вы ницшеанец, только вы в этом никогда не признаетесь"; p. 84).

What links Dudkin to Zarathustra is not his philosophical knowledge of Nietzsche, but the close connection between Dudkin's subconscious and conscious, which the narrator indicates in one of Dudkin's first appearances, after he leaves the bomb at Nikolay's apartment:

Aleksandr Ivanovich's repeated observation had long ago led him to the thought that the tranquility of his night quite simply depends on the tranquility of the day he had spent: only what he had experienced in the street, in the little restaurants, in the tearooms had he brought home with him of late. (p. 115)

многократные наблюдения Александра Ивановича давно привели его к мыслям о том, что спокойствие его ночи так и прямо зависит от спокойствия проведенного дня: лишь пережитое на улицах, в ресторанчиках, в чайных за последнее время приносил он домой. (p. 97)

This passage indicates that Dudkin's subconscious immediately interprets all external events he experiences. After Dudkin tells Nikolay about his uncertainty concerning his real identity, Dudkin again has his recurring nightmare: "In these dreams ... he invariably remembered a most senseless word, seemingly a cabbalistic one, but in actual fact the devil knows what: *enfranshish*." (p. 106) ("в этих снах его ... ему вспоминалось бессмысленнейшее слово, будто бы каббалистическое, а на самом деле черт знает каковское: *енфраншиши*; p. 87). As

we will see, *enfranshish* is an anagram of Shishnarfne, an evil persona who imprisoned Dudkin in Helsingfors. Whenever exposed to external stimuli that relates to eternal return, Dudkin experiences dreams which reveal to him the true state of contemporary culture, but in distorted words and images. These dreams indicate that Dudkin, like Zarathustra, possesses a more heightened awareness of cultural dogma than the other characters. Dudkin's subconscious is so intertwined with his conscious that it reveals to him the truth hidden behind the Apollonian appearances of reality. By contrast, the Ableukhovs' surges of subconscious are disconnected from their conscious states and discarded without being examined.

Dudkin also experiences Dionysian upsurges, the leap into the irrational self when one views the truth hidden behind the Apollonian façade. As discussed in chapter one, Bely believed that man achieves awareness of universal evolution only after achieving his own Dionysian moment of self-knowledge. We are not informed when Dudkin's Dionysian upsurges took place. However, his conversation with Nikolay concerning "schools of experience" (implying occultist centers) implies that he was already familiar with occultist even before his stay in Helsingfors. We can infer that he became aware of dogma prior to his Helsingfors period and that this led him to preach Nietzscheanism in Helsingfors. He underscores his Dionysian experience in his conversation with Nikolay. When Nikolay confesses that he experienced such a state in his dream, Dudkin implies that he has experienced something similar: "Remember, earlier, when I visited you, with the little bundle ... You didn't understand me at all that time" (p. 289) ("Помните, давеча, как я у вас был, с узелком ... вы тогда меня не поняли вовсе"; p. 265). Then he explains to Nikolay that what he just went through was

a real shock from life, and the blood rushed to your brain; that is why in your words one can hear the pulsation of real blood ... it's a genuine experience of Dionysus: not verbal, not literary of course. (p. 289)

настоящее потрясение жизни и кровь бросилась к мозгу; оттого в словах ваших слышно биение подлинной крови ... подлинное переживание Диониса: не словесное, не книжное, разумеется. (p. 265)

The “real, not literary” (“подлинное, не книжное”) experience of the Dionysian energy clearly links Dudkin with Zarathustra, who also experienced Dionysian moments of creative madness on top of his mountain.

The parallel between Dudkin and Zarathustra is further underscored in the description of Dudkin’s residence.¹⁴² The narrator devotes much attention to the stairs leading to Dudkin’s top-floor room. It is this staircase that Dudkin fears most, for at night it is transformed into a dark path filled with dangers which must be conquered:

The staircase! Threatening, shadowy, damp ... from every door – a disastrous silence was expanding on him ... and without measure, without cease the unknown cretin there swallowed his own spittle ... there were terrible, unfamiliar sounds, all woven from the hollow groaning of the ages ... some kind of black outline ... kept running for all it was worth – at his heels, on his tracks. (p. 276)

Лестница! Грозная, теневая, сырая! ... изо всех дверей вон – ширилось погубительное молчание на него ... и без меры, без устали неизвестный там губошлеп глотал свои слюны ... были страшные, неизвестные звуки, все сплетенные из глухого стенания времен ... А какое-то черное очертание ... что есть мочи бежало – по его пятам, по его следам. (p. 249)

This dangerous path evokes Zarathustra’s climb to the top of the mountain, during which he has to struggle to overcome perilous encounters and uncertainties impeding his ascent.

However, the correlation between Dudkin’s residence and Zarathustra’s mountain is immediately subverted by the narrator’s description of the actual staircase, which Dudkin imagines as a mysterious and dangerous passage to his garret. During the day it turns out to be an ordinary, dirty, back entrance, where the residents of the building do their house chores:

¹⁴² Maguire and Malmstad, “Petersburg,” 133.

On a grey weekday it is peaceful, everyday; down at the bottom a hollow banging reverberates: that is someone chopping cabbage ... railings, doors, stairs; on the railings: a cat smelling, half-torn, worn-through carpet ... The stairs? They are strewn with cucumber rinds, splashed with street dirt and eggshells. (p. 277)

В серый будничный день она мирна, обыденна; внизу ухают глухие удары: это рубят капусту ... перила, двери, ступени; на перилах: кошкою пахнувший, полурванный, протертый ковер ... Ступени? Они усеяны огуречными корками, шлепиками уличной грязи и яичною скорлупой. (pp. 249-50)

Dudkin's climb up his "mountain" turns out to be a parody of Zarathustra's ascent. The dark shadows and strange sounds are merely the motions and rumblings of his neighbors, which his mind transforms into mysterious apparitions. Bely's parody indicates that Dudkin, despite his similarities to Zarathustra, is not a great prophet; he has not achieved complete enlightenment. Although he is more aware of ossified culture than other characters, he does not have Zarathustra's visionary insight. Dudkin may also be suffering from mental illness, one manifestation of which is his persecution mania. However, the parody of Dudkin's similarity to Zarathustra does not contradict the connection between the two. Bely's imagery asserts and subverts the same concepts, and this heightens the novel's dynamic ambiguity.

Dudkin and Zarathustra have much in common, including the paradoxes of their habitats. Maguire and Malmstad note that "the 'habitation' functions in the novel as the equivalent of Zarathustra's mountain: it is the place to which Dudkin 'ascends' from the 'abyss' of the city, the place where he has his major visions and comes to understand ... the meaning of his life and the course of the action he must follow."¹⁴³ It is also the place where, like Zarathustra, Dudkin succumbs to the false prophet, Shishnarfne, who convinces him of the truth of eternal return. Dudkin's residence paradoxically represents both an ascent and a fall, both the highest heights

¹⁴³ Ibid., 126.

and the lowest lows, and this is aptly indicated in Dudkin's description of it, when he likens his room, "my dwelling place on Vasilievsky Island" ("мое обиталище на Васильевском Острове"), to "universal space" ("мировое пространство"), an unbounded space of freedom and free will. Yet he also complains: "It's hard to live ... like me, in Torricelli's vacuum" (p. 92) ("Трудно жить ... как я, в торичеллиевой пустоте" (p. 80). The airy freedom of heightened awareness is combined with airless imprisonment by a false prophet. This shows the tragedy of both Dudkin and Zarathustra, namely their ability to ascend above dogma, and their eventual fall when they succumb to the teachings of the prophet of eternal return.

Characteristically, Bely uses Dudkin's external features to indicate his role as Zarathustra. Dudkin's association with images of smoke, ashes, and shadows link him to the realm of eternal return, and imply that he, like Zarathustra, is a dead star: his occasional glowing and expanding are the last sparks flaring among the ashes. For instance, Bely frequently emphasizes Dudkin's cigarette smoking and ashes. During his visit to Nikolay, Dudkin's incessant smoking produces "greyish tobacco streams and twelve crushed cigarette butts" ("синеватые табачные струи и двенадцать смятых окурков"), and Dudkin spills cigarette ashes all over the place, a detail not stated directly, but underscored by his apologetic, "My fault ... would you give me an ashtray?" (p. 86) ("Виноват ... не позволите мне пепельницу?"; p. 74). Similarly, at Lippanchenko's house, the conversation with Zoya Zakharovna is interrupted by seemingly superfluous references to ashes from Dudkin's cigarettes:

"You scattered ashes all over my table cloth"
 "I am sorry ..."
 "Never mind, here you have an ashtray." (p. 302)

"пеплом мне засыпали скатерть"
 "Простите ..."
 "Ничего: вот вам пепельница." (p. 276)

The smoke that seems to veil Dudkin alludes to his relationship to the realm of shadows, and he is also directly described as a shadow. He initially emerges as a shadow of the Senator's "cerebral play" ("мозговая игра"), and his very appearance resembles that of a shadow. In his first description of Dudkin, the narrator underscores his "bluish" ("синеватый") complexion. Dudkin also casts a shadow, as indicated when Nikolay says to him: "So this is where you cast your shadow on Russian life – the shadow of the Elusive One" (p. 93) ("Вот откуда бросаете вы на русскую жизнь тень – тень Неуловимого"; p. 89).

A hint at the identity of the false prophet who lured Dudkin into the realm of eternal return is contained in Dudkin's dreams, and also occurs in his waking moments through the mysterious word "enfranshish" which repeatedly comes to his mind:

In these dreams he was always surrounded by some sort of ugly eastern faces ... these ugly faces invariably left the same nasty impressions; with their nasty eyes they kept winking at him; but what was most astonishing of all was that at this time he invariably remembered a most senseless word, seemingly a cabbalistic one, but in actual fact the devil knows what: *enfranshish*. (p. 91)

в этих снах его обступали все какие-то хари ... эти хари неизменно носили тот же пакостный отпечаток; пакостными своими глазами все подмигивали ему; но что всего удивительнее, что в это время неизменно ему вспоминалось бессмысленнейшее слово, будто бы каббалистическое, а на самом деле черт знает каковское: *енфраншиши*. (p. 87)

This word, which Dudkin cannot decipher because it is hidden deep in his subconscious, hints that something or somebody is preventing Dudkin's "ascent," despite his involvement in the movement supposedly aimed at the destruction of ossification. This word, described as "cabbalistic" and "satanic," and which haunts Dudkin even in his conscious state, alludes to Dudkin's evil oppressor. Dudkin's dreams reveal the truth, since "enfranshish" is a distorted version of Shishnarfne, an evil character who governs the party and who has enticed Dudkin to commit the "terrible" act that led to Dudkin's fall. Thus Dudkin is not presented in the novel as

a Zarathustra on his way up, but as a *fallen* Zarathustra, who, fooled by the Dwarf (much as Dudkin was fooled by Shishnarfne), confused his direction and started descending the mountain, thus becoming imprisoned by the lies of the evil Dwarf, a proponent of eternal return.

The fact that Dudkin's dreams are populated by Eastern faces refers to another element of Bely's philosophy: the relationship between Eastern and Western elements of Russian culture, and their role in the future of both Russia and the world. Like many intellectuals of his era, Bely was preoccupied with this issue. *Petersburg* was meant to be part of a trilogy about East and West, whose first part was Bely's *Silver Dove*, and whose last part was never written. As Bely wrote in his memoirs *Between Two Revolutions* (*Между двух революций*; 1930), the trilogy was to describe the thesis and antithesis of "two Russias, between which lies an abyss" and point the way towards a synthesis and renewal of cultural values.¹⁴⁴ Maria Carlson notes: "The emphasis of the first volume [*Silver Dove*] falls on the blindly destructive Russia of the east ... the second volume, *Petersburg*, emphasizes the cold, lifeless Russia of the West."¹⁴⁵ But Maguire and Malmstad argue that in *Petersburg* the east-west relationship is not shown as a real antithesis: by the time Bely was working on *Petersburg*, the concept of Mongolism "was no longer strictly eastern as far as Bely was concerned. It now subsumed all that was non-creative — that is stagnation and repression — and was a part as much of West as of East."¹⁴⁶ Judith Wermuth-Atkinson, on the other hand, believes that "to Bely, the Europeanizer, the Turanians of the east were opposed to the Aryans of the west. Like many others, he believed that the ancient goal of the east was to shower the modern times 'with a hail of invisible bombs' and to destroy the very

¹⁴⁴ Andrei Belyi, *Mezhdv dvukh revolutsii* (Chicago, IL: Russian Language Specialties, 1966), 46.

¹⁴⁵ Carlson, "Silver Dove," 60-61.

¹⁴⁶ Maguire and Malmstad, "Petersburg," 116.

foundation of Western culture.”¹⁴⁷ I tend to concur with Maguire and Malmstad’s conclusion.

In *Petersburg* most characters contain Eastern blood, and the differences between them are based on their attitude towards cultural dogma rather than geographic orientation. The Mongol faces in Dudkin’s dreams can be interpreted as Dudkin’s mental illness fueled by Stepka’s teachings, rather than an exposition of Bely’s beliefs concerning East and West.

Despite Bely’s depiction of Dudkin as a fallen Zarathustra, this does not nullify Bely’s belief that Nietzsche was the first philosopher who publicly declared the deadly nature of current culture. According to Bely, Nietzsche played a crucial role in initiating the destruction of cultural dogma and hence the process of universal evolution. Therefore, Nietzsche’s role is equally important in Bely’s geometrical rendition of cultural and universal events. In “The Tragedy of Creative Work: Dostoevsky and Tolstoy” (“Трагедия творчества: Достоевский и Толстой”; 1911), Bely describes Nietzsche as “the greatest artist in Europe” who “throws his bomb at us — *Zarathustra*.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, Nietzsche planted a seed of change in the minds of his contemporaries. The importance of the bomb in *Petersburg* will be discussed in chapter five. Here I would like to stress its parodic usage. Earlier I suggested that Bely’s preoccupation with Nietzsche, so apparent in his essays, is tempered in *Petersburg*. Comparing “The Tragedy of Creative Work” to Dudkin’s actions in the novel, we clearly see this change. Dudkin, in his role as Zarathustra, delivers to Nikolay the bomb meant for assassinating the Senator. Yet this bomb is a parody of the one described in the article. Poorly made, delivered in a simple handkerchief, it is completely inefficient and merely causes a small fire in the Ableukhovs’ house. Bely seems to mock his own enchantment with Nietzschean philosophy. As with Bely’s

¹⁴⁷ Wermuth-Atkinson, “Cerebral Play,” 33.

¹⁴⁸ Belyi, *Tragediia tvorchestva*, 15.

use of humor in general, parody does not negate its subject, but rather exposes the comic aspects of tragic or serious events. Here it implies Bely's self-parody of his own infatuation with Nietzsche, but it does not negate Dudkin's role as an igniter of the other characters' minds.

Dudkin's role in Bely's evolutionary machinery is that of an instigator of change in other people. As I suggested in chapter two, Peter the Great personifies the Dionysian upsurge and universal force, while Dudkin signifies mankind's role in the evolutionary process. The Dionysian upsurge creates the circumstances allowing culture to evolve, but it is up to men to act upon that moment. In Bely's evolutionary model, Peter's appearance causes the expansion of natural elements, while Dudkin's appearance seems to ignite Bely's thermodynamic machinery within the characters.

Dudkin's first appearance causes expansion in the other protagonists, which signifies the Dionysian upsurge of the truth-revealing subconscious. On the first day described in the novel, the Senator meets Dudkin's stare on Nevsky Prospect and experiences "the feeling of a growing crimson sphere" (p. 26) ("ощущение растущего, багрового шара"; p. 22). Dudkin thus ignites the Senator's internal Dionysian upsurge, and Apollon's subconscious surges then appear with increasing frequency. Similarly, Dudkin kindles the emergence of Nikolay's subconscious, expressed by the same thermodynamic imagery, when he delivers the bomb to the Ableukhovs' house. Nikolay does not realize the content of Dudkin's package until he reads the letter ordering him to kill his father: at this point he, too, experiences inner expansion: "a spark flared ... with frenzied swiftness it turned into a crimson sphere" (p. 202) ("вспыхнула искорка ... искорка с бешеной быстротой превратилась в багровый шар"; p. 287).

My argument concerning Dudkin's role as igniter of the Ableukhovs' subconscious is paradoxically strengthened by the fact that this is not the first occurrence of such an experience

for either the Senator or Nikolay. Following Apollon's reaction to Dudkin, the narrator declares that the Senator suffers from "enlargement of the heart" ("расширение сердца") which, in the context of Bely's thermodynamic model, suggests that Apollon has been experiencing internal expansion — meaning subconscious surges — prior to encountering Dudkin. Similarly, Nikolay's internal expansion after discovering the bomb evokes memories of his childhood, when he felt similar expansions caused by nightmarish visions of a rubber ball, Pep Peppovich Pep, which entered him and started expanding inside his body. Nikolay links his childhood nightmare and his feeling when hearing about the bomb, implying his long-forgotten ability to reach his spiritual, truth-bearing self. While Nikolay shuts out his spiritual insight by simply forgetting his childhood experiences, Apollon tries to explain it away rationally: he interprets the physical symptoms of his emerging subconscious as a medical condition. The Ableukhovs' previous experiences of expansion here represent their dormant ability to access the transcendental. Dudkin's significant role is to ignite the truth in those who have intuitive access to it, but who suppress it because they cannot bear the truth. This links Dudkin to Nietzsche, whose thoughts "were transformed ... into universal unrest" ("пересуществились в ... волнение мира") and who "raised ... a luminous sword" ("распылал ... световой меч").¹⁴⁹

Dudkin's role is also underscored on a structural level. His appearance initiates the main intrigue and he attempts to resolve it at the end. His only encounter with Apollon increases the latter's fear of revolution and his suspicions of his son's involvement, which strengthens the Senator's resolve to protect the state and to refuse negotiations with the liberal party at the ball. The bomb that Dudkin hands to Nikolay enables the secret police to initiate its provocation, to turn Nikolay's frivolous dressing as the Red Domino into a political statement, and to put him in

¹⁴⁹ Belyi, "Krugovoe dvizhenie," 52.

a position where he has to choose between killing his father and being arrested. These two main plots come together at the ball, where Nikolay learns the content of the package, Apollon's suspicions about his son are confirmed, and the party members are seen to be working for the police. In other words, the truth about multiple narrative threads is revealed: about the relationship between the father and son, the nature of the state, and the powers manipulating the revolutionary movement. The Dionysian moment reaches its decisive point: all characters must face the reality behind appearances and make decisions. When they are unable to do so, Dudkin shows up again and attempts to unravel the web of intrigues. In other words, Dudkin initiates the intrigues leading to the Dionysian upsurge in other characters, then leaves so they can experience it firsthand, and finally returns when they are unable to act upon it. However, his final leap into the Dionysian upsurge, which aims at destroying the circle of repetitions, leads only to its continuation. Dudkin thus plays the role of Nietzsche, whose ideas ignited people's minds, but who was fooled by the false prophet. The cycle of cultural dogma continues.

Section Two: Dudkin's Encounter with Shishnarfne

Dudkin's connection with Zarathustra is thrown into vivid relief on the night following the Tsukatoys' ball, when the Dionysian upsurge reaches its climax and the truth about all the main characters is revealed. Yet, while everyone else becomes cognizant of the falseness of their lives, Dudkin's realization concerning his own entrapment in the circularity of dead culture reveals the very reasons for this entrapment. As we remember, in "Circular Movement," Bely stated that Zarathustra fell in order for us to learn from his experience and not repeat his mistakes: "Zarathustra perished from returning in order that we, the witnesses of his death, do not return" ("Заратустра погиб от возврата для того, чтобы мы, свидетели его смерти, не

возвращались”).¹⁵⁰ The climax of the novel, Dudkin’s conversation with Shishnarfne, can be seen as a reenactment of Zarathustra’s meeting with the Dwarf; thus Dudkin’s fall demonstrates the reason for both Nietzsche’s fall and the state of eternal return in which man finds himself.

Shishnarfne comes to visit Dudkin the night after the latter’s visit to Lippanchenko, during which Dudkin’s suspicions of the party leader reach their peak. During this visit Shishnarfne is also present but Dudkin does not see him: Dudkin can only hear Shishnarfne’s loud, off-tune singing:

The most important thing was the voice: the voice that began to sing somewhere; the voice was completely cracked, impossibly loud and sweet, and moreover the voice had an impermissible accent. (p. 281)

Сила ... в голосе запевавшем откуда-то; голос был совершенно надорванный, невозможно крикливый и сладкий; и при этом: голос был с недопустимым акцентом. (p. 272)

Shishnarfne’s off-tune, heavily accented singing accentuates the corruption of the party, just as Lippanchenko’s and Zoya Zakharovna’s physical appearances, which I discussed in chapter two, evoke their falseness. When Dudkin asks Zoya Zakharovna about the singer, she responds: “What? Don’t you know? ... No, of course you don’t ... Well, then I may as well tell you: it’s Shishnarfiev — he has made himself at home with us all” (p. 282) (“Как? Вы не знаете? ... Да, конечно: не знаете ... Ну, так знайте: Шишнарфиев, — он со всеми нами освоился”; p. 273). Dudkin has a vague memory of the name — “he had heard the name somewhere” (“Где-то фамилию слышал”) — but since his conscious mind suppresses the memory of Helsingfors, he cannot recall who Shishnarfne is, nor can he discern in Shishnarfne’s name a variant of enfranshish, the anagram that haunts him.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 71.

Shishnarfne's evil nature is fully disclosed during his visit to Dudkin. First he says: "I am leaving in the daytime, but will be back at twilight" (p. 341) ("Я днем уезжаю, приезжаю же с сумерками"; p. 300). When asked about his residence, he answers: "I am a cosmopolitan: why, I have been in both Paris and London" (p. 341) ("Я космополит: я ведь был и в Париже, и в Лондоне"; p. 300). Finally, he openly admits that he is a resident of the realm of shadows, which in the novel suggests eternal return. Moreover, he adds: "Our spaces are not like yours; there everything flows backwards" (p. 344) ("Наши пространства не ваши; все течет там в обратном порядке"; p. 303). This can be interpreted as an allusion to Florensky's model of the universe, in which everything in the noumenal realm occurs in the opposite direction to that of phenomenal reality. However, as I mentioned in chapter one, Florensky did not publish his *Imagaries in Geometry* until 1922 and it is not certain if Bely knew his model before that, during their friendship in 1903. More significantly, the idea of the reverse order in the noumenal realm probably could not have occurred to Florensky before Einstein published his Special Theory of Relativity in 1905, for in his description of his model of the universe, Florensky clearly states that the "switch" to the transcendental appears "at a speed greater than light."¹⁵¹ The concept of such a speed was not known until Einstein developed his Special Theory of Relativity. We can conclude that Bely uses the concept of reverse movement in its popular, folk meaning as a magical movement used especially in the Middle Ages to conjure evil powers.¹⁵² In Bely's evolutionary model, movement towards the noumenal plane goes upward along the rings of the spiral. In "Circular Movement," he encourages his readers to go forward: "Up, up –

¹⁵¹ Florenskii, *Mnimosti v geometrii*, 56.

¹⁵² Lotman, "Puteshestvie Ulissa," 449.

this time along the spiral!” (“вверх, вверх! На этот раз – по спирали!”).¹⁵³ Backward movement opposes the process of evolution and signifies movement down the evolutionary spiral, deeper into cultural ossification. Shishnarfne’s description of the realm of shadows as a place where things flow backwards proves that it is a realm of evil and eternal return. Shishnarfne’s motive for visiting Dudkin is precisely to convince the latter of the “truth” of eternal return.

At the beginning of his visit, Shishnarfne reminds Dudkin, who still cannot recognize his visitor, about their first meeting in Helsingfors. Upon Shishnarfne’s insistence, expressed in the repeated question, “Do you remember?” (“помните?”), Dudkin finally recalls what he was blocking from his memory, namely his preaching of Nietzschean philosophy in Helsingfors:

He had recalled that at that period he had had occasion to develop a paradoxical theory about the necessity of destroying culture, because the period of obsolete humanism was over and cultural history now stood before us like weathered marl. (p. 348)

Помнится, в этот период пришлось ему развивать парадоксальнейшую теорию о необходимости разрушить культуру, потому что период изжитого гуманизма закончен и культурная история теперь стоит перед нами как выветренный трухляк. (p. 297)

In this phase Dudkin propagates the positive and ingenious part of Nietzschean philosophy. Bely employs here the ironic phrase, “most paradoxical theory” (“парадоксальнейшую теорию”), to underscore the ingenuity and novelty of Nietzschean thinking.

Dudkin also presents himself as a thinker who bases his opinions on opposites; as he preached in Helsingfors: “All the phenomena of contemporary reality were divided by him into two categories; symptoms of an already obsolete culture and signs of a healthy barbarism” (p. 348) (“Все явления современности разделялись им на две категории: на признаки уже

¹⁵³ Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 68.

изжитой культуры и на здоровое варварство”; p. 297). In Petersburg, he still holds to a worldview based on contrasts. He tells Nikolay: “Everything in the world is based on contrasts” (p. 97) (“Все на свете построено на контрастах”; p. 84). Bely warns his reader against such thinking in “Circular Movement”: “We think in contrasts. The thought of a line evokes in us the thought of a circle” (“Мы мыслим контрастами. Мысль о линии вызывает в нас мысль о круге”).¹⁵⁴ Zarathustra, like Dudkin, thinks in contrasts and this is apparently why the Dwarf can fool him. In his article, Bely notes that Zarathustra expected a lie from the Dwarf, whom Bely describes as “nibelung,” meaning “mist” or “cloud,” in other words, a force aimed at misguiding Zarathustra. When the Dwarf declares his famous statement, “Everything straight lieth ... All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle,”¹⁵⁵ Zarathustra tries to combat it with the truth of a straight line: “Must not whatever *can* run its course of all things, have already run along that line? Must not whatever *can* happen of all things have already happen, resulted, and has gone by?”¹⁵⁶ After uttering these words, Zarathustra realizes that linear thinking leads to circular thinking and the “truth” of eternal return dawns on him. At this point he starts to descend from his mountaintop.

Dudkin is similarly a linear thinker who thinks in terms of contrasts. In Helsingfors, Shishnarfne, just like the Dwarf, provokes Dudkin by asking him about Satanism. Dudkin, who had just announced the death of contemporary culture, including its spirituality, replies with his opposite-based thinking: “Christianity is obsolete: in Satanism there is a crude fetish worship, that is, healthy barbarism” (p. 348) (“Христианство изжито: в сатанизме есть грубое

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Modern Library, 1958), 174.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 175.

поклонение фетишу, то есть здоровое варварство”; p. 297). Like Zarathustra, Dudkin pays an immediate price for mistakes in his thinking. He is whirled into interplanetary spaces, where he commits a “vile act” (“гнусный акт”), which is normal “over there,” but is abominable from the human perspective. The nature of this “vile act” is never specified, but since it happened right after Dudkin’s endorsement of Satanism, it can be assumed to be Satanic in nature.

However, Dudkin, a linear thinker, repudiates his theories and the act itself. He considers his unearthly “little deed” (“поступочек”) as no more than a dreadful dream:

It was especially loathsome to hear a reference to a theory he had abandoned; after his dreadful Helsingfors dream, he had manifestly realized the connection between this theory and Satanism; he had rejected all that as an illness. (p. 312)

Особенно гнусно было выслушивать ссылку на им оставленную теорию; после ужасного гельсинфорского сна связь теории этой с сатанизмом была явно осознана им; все это было им отвергнуто, как болезнь. (p. 301)

Dudkin thus views his Helsingfors period as something then and there, not here and now.

Shishnarfne convinced him of the “truth” of circularity and eternal return. Moreover, he intends to convince Dudkin that he belongs to this realm and that there is no escape from it. The crux of the matter is that Shishnarfne is not entirely wrong. As we have seen, Dudkin represents a *fallen* Zarathustra who has embraced the “truth” of eternal return. His very name offers a clue to his state. When Shishnarfne comes to visit him, he calls Dudkin by the name “Gorelski” (“Burning”), although his real name is “Pogorelski” (“Burnt out”), and Dudkin is just his pseudonym. This slight difference in Dudkin’s last name alludes to Bely’s thermodynamic imagery: Dudkin is no longer burning with spiritual energy, but burnt out, an image that evokes ashes. Bely thus depicts Dudkin as a shadowy persona who belongs to the realm of eternal return. However, Dudkin, a linear thinker, buries the memory of everything that happened in Helsingfors. The reason he cannot solve the anagram “enfranshish,” and cannot remember the

origins of his sickness, instead blaming it on his solitude, is because he thinks in opposites and sees his Helsingfors past as something that is long gone and unconnected to his present situation.

Dudkin's conscious and subconscious finally merge during Shishnarfne's visit, for Shishnarfne revives Dudkin's recollection of his radical cultural theories and link to evil in Helsingfors. But even when faced with the irrefutable facts, Dudkin does not want to acknowledge them. In the first part of his conversation with Shishnarfne, Dudkin describes his recollection of past events in the passive voice. The word "it was remembered" ("помнится") is used several times when Dudkin remembers his activities in Helsingfors, as if an outside power forced him to commit evil. He even tries to convince Shishnarfne that his participation in the realm of the devil was involuntary, that he contracted his "illness" by drinking Petersburg water. Shishnarfne responds: "No, sir ... with water you swallow bacteria, and I am not a bacteria" (p. 352) ("Нет-с ... с водой проглатываете бациллы, а я – не бацилла" (p. 301). In other words, Shishnarfne states that evil is not something that one can "contract" involuntarily, but only through a willing and conscious action. Only after Shishnarfne mentions that Dudkin "has a passport" to the realm of shadows, which he received after "the act," does Dudkin's truthful subconscious finally enter his conscious, and he employs the active voice: "At this point before Aleksandr Ivanovich a veil was suddenly rent: he remembered everything clearly ... He had done it. By doing so, he united himself with them" (p. 354) ("Тут внезапно перед Александром Ивановичем разверлась завеса: все он вспомнил отчетливо ... Это он совершил. Этим-то и соединился он с ними"; p. 303). Now Dudkin consciously acknowledges what his subconscious has been telling him: that his illness is not of a physical, but rather of a spiritual nature, and it results from his belonging to the evil realm of eternal return.

Shishnarfne's mission is not simply to remind Dudkin of his previous acts, but to convince him of the circularity of eternal return from which there is no escape:

As a matter of fact, you are registered with us there: all you have to do now is to complete a final passport application; this passport is made out inside of you; you will sign it yourself by means of some extravagant little action, for example.” (p. 354)

Впрочем, вы у нас там прописаны: остается вам совершить окончательный пакт для получения паспорта; этот паспорт — в вас вписан; вы уж сами в себе распишитесь, каким-нибудь экстравагантным поступочком, например.” (p. 303)

By stating that Dudkin already belongs to the realm of eternal return, Shishnarfne behaves just like the Dwarf, who tricked Zarathustra. He presents Dudkin with the “truth” of circularity, assuming that Dudkin will try to oppose it with linear thinking. In fact, he is right. Dudkin, a linear thinker, attempts to break the circle of eternal return by killing Lippanchenko, the person who “imprisoned his will.” He believes this will free him from eternal return. The similarity of his reasoning to Zarathustra's is underscored by the fact that Dudkin arrives at his decision at the top of the house, in the garret, which evokes the mountaintop where Zarathustra was fooled by the Dwarf. By committing murder, Dudkin not only repeats the circle of terrorism, but also entraps himself in the circularity of eternal return, just as Shishnarfne had suggested by mentioning the “extravagant act.” The implied victory of Shishnarfne and evil circularity is symbolized by the cockroaches crawling over the face of Dudkin, who sits on Lippanchenko's corpse as if he were mounting a horse. When Dudkin first hears Shishnarfne's singing, he imagines him to be a man with cockroach-colored eyes. The cockroaches who tramp in victory over Dudkin's body thus may represent Shishnarfne.

As real as Shishnarfne may seem at the beginning of his visit with Dudkin, during their conversation he changes from a three-dimensional person into a two-dimensional contour on the

window pane, a speck of soot, and then finally just a sound coming from Dudkin's own throat.

When they discuss Dudkin's relation to the realm of shadows, Dudkin seems to be alone:

Had my panic-stricken hero been able to look at himself from the side at this moment, he would have been horrified ... he would have seen himself clutching at his stomach and bawling with effort into the absolute emptiness in front of him. (p. 355)

Если бы со стороны в ту минуту мог изглянуть на себя обезумевший герой мой, он пришел в ужас бы ... он увидел бы себя самого, ухватившегося за живот и с надсадой горланящего в абсолютную пустоту перед собою. (p. 303)

This scene serves as another example of Bely's use of parody, which allows Bely to portray one of the major agents in his evolutionary model as a proposition rather than a definite statement.

Parody aside, the encounter suggests that Shishnarfne is another of Dudkin's hallucinations, and this is corroborated later in the text. Upon entering his room with Shishnarfne, Dudkin encounters Stepka sitting with the prayer book that Dudkin wanted him to bring. Despite Dudkin's insistence, Stepka leaves. Yet the next day Stepka claims that he has not seen Dudkin in two days. Moreover, Zoya Zakharovna, who was in close contact with both Dudkin and Shishnarfne in Helsingfors, seems to think that the two have never met. Finally, during his visit to Lippanchenko, Dudkin does not actually see Shishnarfne, but only hears his singing. It is only when Shishnarfne presses Dudkin's memory that Dudkin recalls his interaction with Shishnarfne in Helsingfors.

However, dreams and hallucinations appear to be the moments in *Petersburg* when the subconscious reveals the truth to the protagonists. Several critics have thus interpreted the dreams and hallucinations in the novel, most unequivocally Maguire and Malmstad: "The dream is one of those moments when time past and future is revealed, when a character glimpses an

essential truth about his situation because his consciousness loses control.”¹⁵⁷ Lubomir Dolozhel more indirectly but similarly suggests that dreams in *Petersburg* are revelatory experiences: “Bely links the existence of the visible city to the ‘invisible point’ of its center. Thus at the very beginning of the text, the fundamental opposition in the semantic base of the novel is introduced: the opposition between *visible* and *invisible* worlds.”¹⁵⁸ Dolozhel here implies that the characters’ experiences are not limited to the visible world, and that the powers that control the universe may intervene in human affairs by revealing the noumenal reasons for mankind’s phenomenal experiences. Elsworth interprets the dreams and hallucinations in the novel as occult powers that interfere with human lives: “The occult, which made only a fleeting appearance in *Silver Dove* ... is much manifest in Bely’s second novel. Not only are there several scenes in which the characters, particularly Dudkin, are confronted by occult visitors, but it is thus suggested that the entire system of relationships in the novel is governed by baneful powers.”¹⁵⁹ Finally, Leonid Dolgopolov sees *Petersburg* as a meeting of the noumenal and phenomenal realms and states that Bely sees man not in the struggle between visible and invisible forces, but

in a broader perspective – located on the border of two spheres of existence, two worlds, two “systems” of experience – the sphere of daily life and the sphere of existence. In other words he saw [man] on the border of the empirical, materially tangible world, which is given to us in sensory experience, and the world of existence, grandiose and independent of any empirical influence, comprehensible only through categories of the universal-historical or Nature-philosophical kind.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Maguire and Malmstad, “Petersburg,” 118.

¹⁵⁸ Lubomir Dolozhel, “The Visible and the Invisible *Petersburg*,” *Russian Literature* 7, no. 5 (September 1979): 466.

¹⁵⁹ Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, 100.

¹⁶⁰ Dolgopolov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman*, 6.

The revelatory aspect of the hallucinations is reinforced by the facts: Dudkin was indeed in Helsingfors; his detailed memory of his Nietzschean teachings indicates that these events actually happened, but were suppressed by his conscious mind. Dudkin's association with Zarathustra and his heightened awareness further suggest that his hallucination is revelatory. Yet this interpretation is undermined by the possibility that his memories are mere projections of his fears. This coexistence of two possible explanations of his hallucination creates an uncertainty, underscored by Dudkin's apparent mental illness, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Bely describes Dudkin's mistakes in geometrical terms. As we remember from chapter one, Bely inscribed in his model of universal development a triangle that represents the qualities necessary for a man to successfully perform a Dionysian leap: a lively connection between head, heart, and hand, which signify mind, feelings, and will. On the surface, Dudkin possesses all these qualities. Through his Dionysian upsurges he is in touch with his emotional self; once connected with his subconscious, his reason allows him to see the dogma hidden behind the cultural façade; and he possesses a will, the readiness to act in order to break ossification. In terms of Bely's triangle, the crucial thing missing in Dudkin is a meaningful connection between his reason and his heart; the absence of this connection in turn misguides his will. As Maguire and Malmstad note, Bely uses a Tolstoyan technique, the so-called "marking device," as shorthand to characterize his heroes:

Bely is dramatizing the extremes of the division of the modern self, as a conflict, projected into reality, between different selves or parts of a missing totality ... each character is endowed with one or two striking physical traits that are highlighted again and again ... Each person in the crisis phase of modern life, is dominated by one part or aspect.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Maguire and Malmstad, "Petersburg," 113-14.

Bely's description of Dudkin's first appearance focuses on his hands, which — following Bely's model — represent his will: “With one hand then he gripped the staircase railing, while his other hand ... described in the air a nervous zigzag” (p. 23) (“Одной рукой он тогда ухватился за лестничные перила, а другая рука ... описала в воздухе нервный зигзаг”; p. 18). Indeed, Dudkin is the most active character in the novel. He initiates the plot by delivering the bomb to Nikolay; he leaves his hiding place to solve Nikolay's moral conundrum regarding the party order; and he undertakes the only decisive action in the novel by killing Lippanchenko. However, his will, due to the disconnection between his feelings and his mind, is misguided. Although the “zigzag” that Dudkin's hand draws in the air opposes the lines and circles representing outmoded culture, the movement of his hands is described as momentary and “nervous,” rather than decisive, and hence does not genuinely oppose the dogmatic circle. Dudkin is overwhelmed by emotion, which makes it impossible for him to reason clearly. In terms of Bely's triangle, Dudkin represents the “heart torn away from the chest and running ahead” (“вырванное из груди и вперед побежавшее сердце”),¹⁶² a man guided by emotions and not tempered by reason. This characteristic represents a line. Because Dudkin is a linear thinker, he cannot propel Bely's spiral, but instead prolongs dogmatic circularity, since in Bely's geometrical model a linear movement leads to a circular one.

Section Three: Dudkin's Mental Illness and Its Consequences for Reading the Novel

The revelatory nature of Dudkin's hallucinations is strongly undermined by Dudkin's developing mental illness. The critics mentioned above who argue that Dudkin's hallucinatory states are revelatory seem to ignore Dudkin's state of mind. Other critics see him as a man

¹⁶² Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 74.

whose experience of reality is distorted by his mental condition.¹⁶³ Milica Banjanin states that “Dudkin has been suffering from persecution mania which continues in his dreams”¹⁶⁴ while Timothy Langen even considers him a “murderous maniac.”¹⁶⁵ However, none of these critics elaborates on Dudkin’s mental illness; they only mention it in passing as an obvious fact.

The connection between Dudkin and Zarathustra, although significant, is only one aspect of Dudkin’s character. Dudkin also functions in the novel as a protagonist in his own right with his own psychological makeup. A former Nietzschean, he has become involved in a dubious political party whose leader, Lippanchenko, he distrusts. He has been “imprisoned” by Lippanchenko in a garret, which he does not leave for weeks, supposedly because he might be recognized by the police patrolling the streets. His human contact is limited to his conversation with Stepka, the yard keeper, and Lippanchenko, neither of whom reliably represent political, social, cultural, or spiritual reality. Following his disenchantment with Nietzscheanism, Dudkin searches for a path to serve his spiritual needs. One such path is anthroposophy; another is in his reading of the Apocalypse, Gospels, and patristic writings. He tells Nikolay: “I am reading the history of Gnosticism, Gregory of Nissa, Ephraem Syrus, and the Apocalypse” (p. 95) (“я читаю историю гностицизма, Григория Нисского, Сирианина, Апокалипсис”; p. 83).

¹⁶³ Many critics have discussed Dudkin’s slipping into madness. See for example: Mochulsky, *Andrey Bely: His Life and Works*, 148-72; R. E. Peterson, “Andrei Belyi’s Third Symphony: Return or Demented Demise?” in *Russian Literature and Criticism: Selected Papers From the Second World Congress for Soviet and Eastern European Studies*, ed. Evelyn Bristol (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1982), 167-75; Lena Szilárd, “Poetika simvolistskogo romana kontsa XIX – nachala XX v. (V. Briusov, F. Sologub, A. Bely),” in *Problemy poetiki russkogo realizma XIX veka*, ed. G. Makogonenko (Leningrad: Pizatel’, 1984), 265-84; E. G. Starikova, “Realizm i simvolizm,” in *Razvitie realizma v russkoi literature*, ed. U. R. Fokht (Moscow: Literaturnaia mysl’, 1974), 165-246. Dudkin’s madness has also been interpreted in anthroposophical terms. See Vladimir E. Alexandrov, *Andrey Bely: The Major Symbolist Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 100-153.

¹⁶⁴ Milica Banjanin, “Of Dreams, Phantoms, and Places: Andrey Bely’s *Petersburg*,” *International Fiction Review* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 99.

¹⁶⁵ Langen, *Stony Dance*, 107.

Dudkin is clearly torn by uncertainties concerning the political and spiritual paths he has chosen. On the one hand, he is involved in the plot to kill the Senator, but is not certain as to the honesty of the party that concocted this revolutionary action. On the other hand, he pursues opposing paths toward spiritual enlightenment — anthroposophy and traditional Orthodoxy — without any certainty as to which is right for him. His only guides in these processes are Lippanchenko, who is corrupt, and Stepka, a pseudo-mystic of dubious commitments. In his complete isolation from the external world, Dudkin can trust neither his conscious nor his subconscious, and he is gradually losing his mind in the dark maze of his life.

Dudkin's growing insanity is implied from the beginning of the novel. After a period of seclusion, he leaves his garret to meet Lippanchenko. Because of his sick mind, he interprets the conversations he hears on the street as commentaries on the terrorist action he is about to perform:

“Do you know?” came from somewhere to the right ...

And then to the surface again came:

“They are going to...”

“What?”

“Throw...”

There was a whisper from the rear.

“Who at?”

“Who, who,” came an echoed whisper from afar; and then the dark suit spoke:

“Abl...”

And, having spoken, dark suit moved on.

“At Ableukhov?!”

...

But the stranger stood still, shaken by all he had heard:

“They're going to?”

“Throw?...”

“At Abl...”

...

While all around the whisper began:

“Soon...”

And then again from the rear:

“It's time...*pravo*, indeed it is...”

The stranger heard not *pravo* (indeed) but *provo-* and himself completed the word:

“Provocation?!” (p. 35)

“Вы знаете?” пронеслось где-то справа ...

И потом вынырнуло опять:

“Собираются...”

“Что”

Зашушало сзади

“Бросить...”

“В кого же?”

“Кого, кого,” – перешুকнулось издали; и вот темная пара сказала.

“Абл...”

И сказавши, пара пропала.

“В Аблеухова?!”

...

Но незнакомец стоял, потрясенный всем слышанным:

“Собираются?...”

“Бросить?...”

“В Абл...”

...

А кругом зашепталося:

“Поскорее...”

И потом опять сзади:

“Пора же...”

И пропавши за перекрестком, напало из нового перекрестка:

“Пора...право...”

Незнакомец услышал не “право” а “прово-”; и dokonчил сам:

“Прово-кация ?!” (pp. 23-24)

What Dudkin hears are the voices in his own mind, the worries that have been preoccupying him: is the planned act a revolutionary action or a provocation by the party, which he suspects of collaboration with the secret police? His disturbed mind projects his own uncertainties onto other people’s conversations and therefore he is under the impression that the entire city is talking about the planned assassination. Duped by Lippanchenko’s flattery and in the absence of any other information, Dudkin is also certain that the entire city knows him as a great revolutionary, the Elusive One:

Suddenly my stranger’s sensitive ear heard behind his back an ecstatic whisper:

“It’s the Elusive One!”

“Look – it’s the Elusive One!”

“How brave he is!...”

And when, unmasked, he turned his island face, he saw steadily fixed on him the little eyes of two poorly dressed female students. (p. 35)

Вдруг чуткое ухо моего незнакомца услышало за спиною восторженный шепот:

“Неуловимый!...”

“Смотрите – Неуловимый!”

“Какая смелость!...”

И когда, уличенный, повернулся он своим островным лицом, то увидел в упор на себя устремленные глазки двух бедно одетых курсисточек. (p. 25)

Dudkin’s confusion is vividly underscored during his political discussion with Nikolay, when Dudkin switches his position from one side to the other. First he claims that he is in control of the party, only to admit a few minutes later that “a person” (“особа”) imprisoned him in a garret and has total control over his soul. His truthful utterances revealing awareness of cultural dogma are mixed with repetitions of Lippanchenko’s crude Nietzscheanism. First Dudkin states that all men are ill because they live in the realm of eternal return, echoing Bely’s own opinion (as seen in Bely’s “Circular Movement”):

Of course you are nervous. And of course you will say “A normal nervous experience, only to a higher degree.” Yes, the normal nervous experience will be to a heightened degree, so heightened that only the nervous sensation will appear real, and everything else, which is not nervous, will become an emptiness over which you will hang. It will be that emptiness which will quickly separate from your feet, in order to hit your skull.

Вы, конечно, нервны. И, конечно вы скажете: “Обычное нервное ощущение – только в усиленной степени.” Да, обычное нервное ощущение будет в усиленной степени, столь усиленной, что нервное ощущение только и будет реально, и все иное, не нервное, будет вот пустотою над которой повиснете вы – тою вот пустотою, которая с быстротой оторвется от ног, чтоб ударить с размаху ваш череп.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 55.

This statement testifies to Dudkin's awareness of cultural ossification. Yet, immediately afterwards he utters a misguided vision of Nietzscheanism, which he heard from Lippanchenko:

Well, so it's like this: for us Nietzscheans, the masses ... the masses who are inclined to agitations ... turn into the apparatus for the execution of ideas... in which people ... are the keyboard on which the fingers of the pianist ... fly freely. (p. 96)

Ну так вот: для нас, ницшеанцев, агитационно настроенная ... масса ... превращается в исполнительный аппарат идеи ... где люди — клавиатура, на которой пальцы пьяниста ... летают свободно. (p. 84)

Consequently, Dudkin's statements represent a mixture of truth from his subconscious and utterances concocted by his sickly mind. This testifies to Dudkin's slip into madness.

The narrator also details the symptoms of Dudkin's sickness quite straightforwardly:

The more he spoke, the more there developed in him a desire to talk even more: to the point of hoarseness, of astringent sensation in his throat ... sometimes he would talk to the point where afterwards he experienced genuine attacks of persecution mania: emerging in words, they continued in dreams. (p. 103)

Чем более он говорил, тем более развивалось в нем желание говорить и еще: до хрипоты, до вяжущего ощущения в горле ... иногда он договаривался до того, что после ощущал настоящие припадки мании преследования: возникая в словах, они продолжались в снах. (p. 87)

Even Dudkin himself feels that he is in poor health, but he attributes it to physical rather than psychological causes. After a particularly intense period of drinking and experiencing nightmares, he thinks:

It was all – fever ... I ought to take some quinine ... And some strong tea ... And I ought also to – strictly stay off vodka ... Not read Revelations ... not go down and see the yard keeper ... And also those talks I've been having with Stepka: I shouldn't talk to Stepka. (p. 298)

Это все – лихорадка ... Мне бы хинки ... Да крепкого чаю ... И еще бы мне – строгое воздержание от водки ... Не читать Откровение ... Не спускаться бы к дворнику ... Да и эти беседы с проживающим у дворника Степкой: не болтать бы со Степкой. (p. 247)

On the day before his nocturnal “revelatory” hallucination, the visits of Shishnarfne and Peter the Great, Dudkin experiences particularly strong psychological stimuli. He wakes up after a nightmare in which Peter the Great chases him through the streets of Petersburg, and then finds Nikolay, who is beside himself with fear and anger, in the yard. It is the morning after Nikolay received the party order and was “interrogated” by Morkovin. Dudkin learns from Nikolay certain disturbing facts which deepen the confusion of his already strained mind. He finds out that the secret police have completely infiltrated his party, that the mysterious party member called the “Unknown” (“Неизвестный”) has been in touch with Nikolay while Dudkin was hidden in the garret, that Lippanchenko was one of the guests at the Tsukatovs’ ball (which suggests that Lippanchenko is a secret police agent), and that Nikolay, not Dudkin, was ordered to commit a terrorist act. All this information seems to confirm Dudkin’s suspicions concerning the party’s corruption of the party and Lippanchenko’s treachery. His conversation with Lippanchenko, whom he immediately visits to clarify the “confusion,” turns this suspicion into certainty. However Dudkin’s diseased mind equates corruption with the “cabbalistic” word “enfranshish” and therefore he feels that he has fallen under the infernal power of evil.

Dudkin’s persecution mania reaches its peak on his way home from Lippanchenko’s. He has long felt the danger awaiting him on the dark staircase:

The same thing was still going on: *they* were keeping an eye on Aleksandr Ivanovich ... he had seen a man whom he did not know coming down the staircase, and the man had said to him: “you are connected with Him...” ... But in the evening, on the third-floor landing, Aleksandr Ivanovich has been seized by some kind of arms and shoved against the railings, in a manifest attempt to push him — there, down there. (p. 354)

Дело было в том же: Александра Ивановича *они* стрegli ... он увидел сходящего с лестницы неизвестного человека, который ему сказал: “Вы с Ним связаны...” ... Но вечером на площадке третьего этажа Александра Ивановича схватили какие-то руки и толкали к перилам, явно пытаясь столкнуй – туда, вниз. (p. 293)

This time he thinks that he sees two silhouettes awaiting him on the landing, but it turns out that Shishnarfne has come to visit him. We have seen that their conversation turns out to be imaginary: Shishnarfne turns into soot and Dudkin discovers he is talking to himself. In the light of Dudkin's mental illness, any interpretation of his "revelation" during his meeting with Shishnarfne seems rife with uncertainty. Since Dudkin remembers his experiences in Helsingfors and admits that he blocked this memory from his mind, Shishnarfne's revelation could be interpreted as valid. Dudkin's hallucination could also validly be interpreted as a revelation because he is continually associated with shadows and ashes, which symbolize the realm of eternal return. However, this reading is undermined by Dudkin's nightmares in which he is chased by various infernal figures and even by Peter the Great. One can only conclude that the meeting between Dudkin and Shishnarfne is ambiguous. Since their encounter illustrates Bely's interpretation of the reasons for Zarathustra's fall – his linear mode of thinking — this ambiguity also undermines Bely's beliefs regarding the reasons why man cannot overcome cultural dogma: the fact that man thinks in linear or circular terms rather than connecting these two modes along Bely's evolutionary spiral.

Dudkin's vision of Peter the Great seems more clearly to be a mere product of Dudkin's tormented mind. Dudkin has just discovered that he has been fooled by Lippanchenko and he feels guilty for involving Nikolay in the provocation. It could be argued that his anger produces a vision of Peter, who empowers Dudkin to take revenge on Lippanchenko and liberate himself. However, as Dolgopolov notes, the world of *Petersburg* lies on the boundary between the noumenal and phenomenal realms, which meet and influence one another within the novel. Seen from this perspective the reality of Peter's appearance is not out of the question. Was Dudkin's sudden realization that he is an incarnation of Evgeny a true revelation brought about by a figure

belonging to the extra-sensory realm, or just a projection of his desire for some kind of certainty? It is impossible to determine an unequivocal interpretation. Bely's entire point is to expose his audience to ambiguous, continually changing circumstances, so that the reader must constantly reevaluate his/her perspective. Bely's reader is like a participant in Einsteinian reality: his sense of what is real and what is false depends on the particular frame of philosophical references of a given moment. Bely lets his reader experience the relativity of the new, ever-changing reality firsthand.

Section Four: The Intertextual Correspondences of Dudkin's Character

In addition to Zarathustra, Bely links Dudkin with several characters from the Russian literary canon, especially with those from Dostoevsky's works. These characters seem to share one specific trait: they try to break the Christian moral code and to live their lives based either on a different system of values or no values at all. This appears to be Bely's attempt to introduce Western philosophy (especially Nietzsche's) onto Russian soil, and to find a new spirituality for modern man, who is lost in the uncertain, new universe. Like Bely's novel, Dostoevsky's works, especially *Crime and Punishment* and *Brothers Karamazov*, are informed by questions about the moral code best suited to humanity. Dostoevsky was influenced by Solovyovian religious philosophy,¹⁶⁷ at least in the later part of his life, which constitutes another link between Dostoevsky and Bely.

One of Dudkin's most prominent characteristics is his isolation in his garret. His seclusion is supposedly imposed on him by Lippanchenko, who fears for Dudkin's safety on the

¹⁶⁷ Rudolf Lord, "Dostoevsky and Vladimir Solov'yov," *Slavonic and East European Review* 42, no. 99 (June 1964): 417.

Petersburg streets, since he is an escapee from Siberia. Dudkin's solitude seems to allude to Nietzsche's behavior: unable to stand the crowds, Nietzsche isolated himself in the Alps. However this parallel is undercut by Dudkin's confession to Nikolay: "You know ... Loneliness is killing me" (p. 92) ("Знаете ... Одиночество убивает меня"; p. 80). Dudkin's "entrapment" in the garret where he ponders philosophical questions links him more strongly to Raskolnikov from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov considers performing a deed that makes logical sense: to kill a greedy moneylender living a useless life, and use her money for better causes. Although the murder seems rationally justified, it is perceived by Raskolnikov as an act that can only be performed by a genius, which foreshadows Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*, who has the power to overcome conventional morality. Like Dudkin, Raskolnikov lives in isolation; he conceives his plan to murder the moneylender in his garret, going outside to quiet his mind in the tavern only after he experiences nightmarish dreams. Similarly, Dudkin runs into the streets to avert his mind from his troubling nightmares and suspicions:

He must start striding again, keep striding, striding away: until his strength was exhausted completely, until his brain was completely numb and then flop down at the table of an eating house, so that he should not dream of murky phantoms. (p. 296)

Надо вновь зашагать, все шагать, прочь шагать: до полного истощения сил, до полного онемения мозга и свалиться на столик харчевни, чтоб не снились мороки. (p. 250)

This similarity between Dudkin and Raskolnikov suggests the problem of seeking truth while in isolation from society's moral codes. In his allusions to Dostoevsky, Bely implies that the philosophy based on the Nietzschean *Übermensch* does not fulfill man's spiritual needs, for it appeals only to logic and not emotion. Eventually Raskolnikov forgoes logic and follows his irrational consciousness: in the spirit of true Christianity he confesses to his fellow men, feels sincere guilt, and accepts punishment, which restores his spirituality and inner peace.

Dudkin also rejects Nietzscheanism, but cannot find a new religion that suits his spiritual needs. He does, however, acknowledge these needs and realizes that the soul is more important than logic. Right before murdering Lippanchenko, Dudkin says:

“My soul ... my soul – you have gone away from me ... Respond, my soul: I am wretched ... Before you I will fall with a life torn apart ... Remember me: I am wretched.” (p. 427)

“Душа моя ... душа моя, — ты отошла от меня ... Откликнись, душа моя: бедный я ... Перед тобою паду я с разорванной жизнью ... Вспомни меня: бедный я.” (p. 386)

However, unlike Raskolnikov, Dudkin does not have any reliable spiritual guidance, and so perishes in madness. Dudkin’s demise underscores Bely’s uncertainty as to which spirituality is appropriate for humanity in the new, ambiguous world. In contrast to Dostoevsky’s faith in the Christian God, as displayed in *Crime and Punishment*, Bely seems torn between his inclinations towards Solovyovian teachings and his search for a new spirituality free of dogmatic rules. Bely’s references to Dostoevsky and indirectly to Solovyov, who influenced Dostoevsky’s religious thought, seems like an effort to import Western philosophy into Russian culture through the prism of both thinkers’ religious beliefs.

Another link between *Petersburg* and *Crime and Punishment* further illustrates Bely’s thoughts on Nietzscheanism; in this case the association is between Dudkin and Dostoevsky’s Svidrigailov, who also foreshadows the Nietzschean *Übermensch*. Svidrigailov devotes his life to pursuing his sexual desire for preadolescent girls, and Dostoevsky hints that he might have committed a murder and indirectly caused a suicide. Similarly, Dudkin’s drinking bouts result in a strange sexual excitement:

After the alcohol a shameful feeling also instantly appeared: for the leg, no, sorry, for the stocking on the leg of a certain ingenuous female student, which had nothing whatever to do with her herself; there began apparently quite innocent

little jokes, giggles, smiles. It would all end with the same wild and nightmarish enfranishish dream. (p. 98)

За алкоголем являлось мгновенно и позорное чувство: к ножке, виноват, к чулку ножки одной простодушной курсисточки, совершенно безотносительно ее самой; начинались невинные с виду шуточки, подхихикивания, усмешки. Все оканчивалось диким и кошмарным сном с енфраншиш. (p. 87)

Dudkin's sexual behavior is a possible allusion to Nietzsche's well-known encounters with prostitutes, but more specifically evokes the Dudkin-Svidrigailov connection. Since Bely builds a chain of connections to Dostoevskian characters in *Petersburg*, each association evoking the others, Russian readers are more likely to associate Dudkin's strange sexual impulses with Svidrigailov, not with Nietzsche.

Svidrigailov is in fact a double of Raskolnikov; Svidrigailov's beliefs serve as a contrast to Raskolnikov's. While Raskolnikov appears as a theoretician (and thus foreshadows Nietzsche), because his actions are based on a theory he overheard, Svidrigailov does not follow any theoretical system; he does what brings him pleasure and operates according to his own sense of good and evil. Since Svidrigailov does not believe in God, his conscience is clear; he believes that he is paying his dues here in the earthly realm. He is thus another proto-Nietzschean, who does not seem to require any system of values besides his own. It is only when his feelings are awakened through his love for Dunya that he decides that the time has come to pay his dues and commits suicide.

Dudkin does not act on his lecherous desires. Whenever he feels these desires he has nightmares that evoke *enfranishish*, the anagram of the supposed devil's name, which implies that he subconsciously sees the evil in his sexual longings for young girls. This difference between Svidrigailov and Dudkin seems to indicate that, unlike Dostoevsky, Bely does not consider it possible that a man could merely fulfill his physical desires without emotion. In his article "The

Crisis of Consciousness and Henrik Ibsen,” for instance, Bely presupposes mankind’s inherent need for the love of a fellow human being, and rejects Dostoevsky’s proposition of an emotionless existence.

Bely’s depiction of characters who challenge existing morality testifies to his struggles with Nietzsche’s rejection of human morality and its main pillars, love and pity. This again indicates the persistence of Solovyovian philosophy as reflected in Bely’s Dostoevskian characters and in Bely’s attempt to integrate Western philosophy into Russian religious thought. In *The Meaning of Love*, Solovyov states that love, the conscious sacrifice of one’s selfish ego for the sake of another being, is the only way to progress towards the Divine, in other words towards human evolution.¹⁶⁸ Simultaneously, he characterizes isolation as the destruction of the soul: “Asserting himself apart from all that is other, a man by that very act divests his own authentic being of meaning, deprives himself of the true content of existence, and reduces his individuality to an empty form.”¹⁶⁹ Hence Solovyov sees love as the most important aspect of human evolution and regards separation from others — in other words, absence of love — a form of spiritual degeneration. Solovyov also characterizes Nietzschean philosophy as an aberration in the natural universal process of evolving towards God.

Bely broadens Solovyov’s views on love by referring to Dostoevsky’s thoughts on the connection between love and society. As Lyudmila Parts convincingly argues, in *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky “presents pity and/or compassion as the most important Christian

¹⁶⁸ Vladimir Solovyov, *The Meaning of Love* (New York: International Universal Press, 1947), 16-24.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

virtue.”¹⁷⁰ She concludes that, for Dostoevsky, pity is a necessary element for a community in its progress towards God and “social cohesion is impossible without it.”¹⁷¹ In fact it is Sonya, the personification of pity, whose love and compassion saves Raskolnikov. Svidrigailov shows pity for Dunya by letting her go, but does not receive pity from her in return, and hence perishes.

Although Bely does not speak directly about the importance of love in society, his novel suggests these issues indirectly but powerfully. The universe of *Petersburg* is strangely devoid of love. The romantic relationships between the characters vary from mere lust to a loveless marriage to haphazard unions in no way resembling true love. In this loveless and compassionless universe, there are only two incidents of pity that save its recipients. After Sophia Petrovna’s faith-rejuvenating encounter with the Christ figure at the ball, the White Domino, she returns to her husband, who pities her and forgives her infidelities. Her “confession” “saves” both of them from cultural dogma, since Likhutin leaves his officer’s post after the ball and they disappear from the Petersburg universe. Passing their house, Nikolay sees only the “dark windows” (“темные окна”) of their apartment. Another instance of pity is Dudkin’s for Nikolay: Dudkin relieves Nikolay of his promise to the party and offers to resolve the dilemma. Nikolay, like Sophia Petrovna, therefore escapes eternal return, for in the Epilogue we see him in Egypt. Yet no one pities Dudkin; he thus perishes in a Dionysian leap. All others remain in the culturally ossified universe.

The Dudkin-Shishnarfne encounter introduces another set of issues through its allusion to another literary encounter with the devil — that of Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov. The

¹⁷⁰ Lyudmila Parts, “Christianity as Active Pity in *Crime and Punishment*,” in “Dostoevsky and Christianity,” special issue, *Dostoevsky Studies*, n.s., 13 (2009): 67-71.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

similarity between the two literary episodes again brings up the question of God's relation to the individual and society. The affinity between the two characters starts long before their meetings with the devil. As Rudolf Lord notes, Ivan's article on ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction is based on Solovyov's concept of Free Theocracy in which he describes "a free society which would arise by historical-dialectical synthesis of the political and economic spheres resolving themselves naturally in Church."¹⁷² Ivan rules out the existence of such a society. He does not accept Christian morality and he sees the Church not as a Solovyovian mystical realization of Godmanhood, but as a man-made, theocratic state. As a humanist, he believes that any changes in society can be enacted by men only. But as the devil (who appears to him and who represents his deep thoughts) points out, Ivan does not believe in men's ability to create a society without Christian morality and governed only by human laws. Consequently, Ivan finds himself caught between two models: the Free Theocracy that he rejects and the Godless society whose realization he doubts. This leaves him almost no choice but to live by his own morality based on logic and rationalism. In this respect Ivan's character can be interpreted as a prototype of the Nietzschean man.

Dudkin, on the other hand, attempts to become an *Übermensch* and to live according to his own moral rules. In other words, he tries to enact the Nietzschean Godless society. He describes his former self as a "desperate Nietzschean" (p. 93) ("отчаянным нитшеанцем"; p. 84). But Nietzscheanism leads him to involvement with the devil, and so he abandons it:

After his dreadful Helsingfors dream, he manifestly realized the connection between this theory and Satanism; he has rejected all that as an illness. (p. 423)

¹⁷² Lord, "Dostoevsky and Vladimir Solov'yov," 417.

после ужасного гельсингфорского сна связь теории этой с сатанизмом была явно осознана им; все это было им отвергнуто, как болезнь. (p. 300)

In a way he exemplifies Ivan's theory that man is not strong enough to live by his own moral rules and that he needs a higher moral authority guiding his life. Although Dudkin still belongs to the Nietzschean movement, this is only because he has blocked his subconscious, which knows the true evil of this movement. On his own, he attempts to find a new set of spiritual beliefs by reading the Gospels and theosophical literature. In this respect he is similar to Ivan: he exists in the spiritual space between Christian society and Nietzscheanism.

By juxtaposing Ivan Karamazov's spiritual views with Dudkin's, Bely presents his reader with two models of society proposed by the philosophers who influenced him the most: Solovyov and Nietzsche. Yet he emphasizes that neither of these models has been realized. While the plot of *The Brothers Karamazov* unfolds in the Dostoevskian Christian community, the universe of *Petersburg* is entirely void of Christian institutions. This peculiarity suggests Bely's belief that contemporary society lacks a reliable system of spiritual beliefs and that man has been left to his own devices in spiritual matters.

This state of affairs is alluded to through the parallel between Dudkin and Ivan, and also stated indirectly in the text. On the day after Nikolay receives the party's order, he runs into the street, not knowing where to turn for help. Without realizing it, he runs "into the vestibule of the university (where the chapel is)" (p. 445) ("в переднюю университета [где церковь]"; p. 320). The chapel is closed, so he decides to go see Dudkin. In other words, Nikolay seeks a resolution to his dilemma in two existing systems of beliefs: the Church and Godless Nietzschean philosophy. However, neither offers Nikolay a satisfactory answer. God is absent in his moment of need and Dudkin, the Nietzschean, commits murder in his attempt to help Nikolay, which only

prolongs dogmatic culture. Bely implies that neither existing philosophy can solve man's moral dilemmas, yet he stresses the human need for spirituality: his novel is permeated with spiritual questions, and Bely oscillates between Nietzschean and Solovyovian religious concepts in order to comprehend the spiritual nature of the next evolutionary phase.

The problems Bely encounters in his attempt to define the spirituality for that transitory phase are exemplified by the fates of Ivan and Dudkin. Ivan is visited by the devil because he feels guilty for his part in his father's murder. Similarly, Dudkin feels intense guilt for involving Nikolay in the political provocation: "Today he had been guilty of betrayal. How had he failed to realize that? For he had undoubtedly been guilty of betrayal: out of fear, he had let Nikolay Apollonovich fall into Lippanchenko's hands" (p. 432) ("Сегодня он предал. Как он не понял, что предал? Ведь несомненно же предал: Николая Аполлоновича уступил он из страха Липпанченко"; p. 308). The fact that both characters, supposedly atheists, feel both guilt and the moral necessity for action underscores Bely's belief in man's need for a spiritual moral code. However, Bely implies that neither of the proposed spiritual systems fulfills this need. Ivan Karamazov, despite his disbelief in Christian morality, bends his own rules and behaves like a true Christian: he confesses his guilt in order to save his innocent brother Dmitry. Dudkin, on the other hand, feels pangs of Christian consciousness right before murdering Lippanchenko, and senses that he is committing a mortal sin, yet he nonetheless commits murder. Neither of these actions — Christian or Nietzschean — saves the character who acts. Ivan ends up unconscious and will likely lose his mind, while Dudkin becomes insane after the murder. Bely presents his reader with two scenarios — one in which God's moral rules are satisfied and one in which the Nietzschean *Übermensch* follows his own moral rules — and demonstrates that neither works.

He thus rejects both Solovyovian and Nietzschean spiritual models, but does not propose a replacement and leaves unresolved the question of spirituality in the new evolutionary phase.

Interestingly, Bely does not include anthroposophy in his discussion concerning spirituality for the new society. There may be several reasons for this omission. In the minds of the intellectuals of the time anthroposophy was not separated from theosophy, which was considered a small, obscure cult, a fashionable trend rather than a serious spiritual search. More significantly, anthroposophy does not propose a concrete image of God, instead offering an abstract Spirit that includes the gods of all religions; this would be unlikely to appeal to Russians, who have been conditioned to perceive God as a tangible being. The anthroposophical practice of individual search for the connection with the Spirit is also at odds with the Russian emphasis on religious community. Bely's exclusion of Steinerian teachings might also reflect his personal relationship with Steiner, which ended in a falling-out before *Petersburg* was finished. Bely might be suggesting that Steiner's ideas are worthy of individual exploration, but will not work as a basis for society's new spirituality. This argument is reinforced by the fact that Bely's later novels and dramas, while retaining Steiner's cosmology, abandon Steinerian spiritual doctrines.

Dudkin is perhaps the most complex character in Bely's *Petersburg*. I would argue that he synthesizes Bely's most pressing concerns. His association with Zarathustra reflects Bely's preoccupation with Nietzsche's philosophy (the fallen genius), while Dudkin's gradual descent into madness underscores the uncertainties embedded in Nietzsche's philosophy and the state of modern man lost in the new, ever-changing universe. On the other hand, Dudkin's parallels with Dostoevskian characters express Bely's struggle with Solovyovian philosophy, which informs virtually all of Bely's artistic output. Most significantly, the endless ways of interpreting

Dudkin's character vividly exemplify the new Modernist dynamics, based on ambiguity, uncertainty, and the multifaceted perception of seemingly unambiguous events; this prevents the reader from forming definitive interpretations or from perceiving reality as a static phenomenon.

Chapter 4: Apollon and Nikolay Ableukhov

Section One: The Psychology of Apollon and Nikolay Ableukhov

Apollon Apollonovich and his son, Nikolay, occupy a central position in the novel. Unlike Dudkin, they are present in every chapter, appear at the center of the intrigue, and connect all the seemingly independent plots. Yet strangely enough, neither Apollon nor Nikolay are active characters; on the contrary, their most striking characteristic is their passivity. Unlike Dudkin, they do not act, but are acted upon. Although they stand at the center of the action, they do not actively participate in it and do not attempt to influence the events. In this respect they constitute the dead center of the tornado that tears apart the universe of the novel.

As we have seen in Dudkin's case, the psychological verisimilitude of *Petersburg's* characters is just as important as the ideas they represent. Vladimir Alexandrov notes that "Bely's presentation of his characters' psychology is overwhelmingly convincing and extraordinarily nuanced." Yet Alexandrov also qualifies this conclusion: "But to deny a metaphysical basis for the psychological dimensions of the work is to decapitate Bely by ignoring the organizing principle behind his conception of psychological states."¹⁷³ Judith Wermuth-Atkinson expresses a similar view, placing the characters' psychology within a metaphysical frame. Although she emphasizes Bely's knowledge of Freud and Jung,¹⁷⁴ she also asserts that "trying to analyze this text without realizing its deep connection to anthroposophy would be as fruitless as trying to understand Dante's *Divine Comedy* without any knowledge of

¹⁷³ Alexandrov, *Andrey Bely: The Major Symbolist Fiction*, 108.

¹⁷⁴ Judith Wermuth-Atkinson, *The Red Jester: Andrei Bely's "Peterburg" as a Novel of the European Modern* (Berlin: Lit Verlag GmbH, 2011), 6-23.

Christianity.”¹⁷⁵ The scholarly insistence on linking the characters’ psychological traits with metaphysical elements¹⁷⁶ is not surprising, given that Bely creates new constellations of meaning by fusing different narrative levels. However, if we view the novel’s characters as mere representatives of ideas, we run the risk of imposing a rigidly symbolic or allegorical meaning on this deeply ambiguous work. The ambiguity stems in part from this very fact: the protagonists are depicted simultaneously as individual human beings and as representatives of Bely’s philosophical vision.

The Ableukhovs’ passivity is emphasized by their psychological reactions to their circumstances. Apollon’s familial situation is described as a “hermetically sealed container, filled with thick steam” (p. 12) (“густые пары в герметически закупоренных котлах”; p. 11). This perfectly evokes the atmosphere of the Ableukhov household, which lacks honest communication between family members. Every troubling situation is hidden behind the pretense of a well-functioning family. Even the romance leading to the departure of Apollon’s wife, Anna Petrovna, does not lead to an open conversation between father and son; the estranged father and son act as if nothing important had occurred.

The reason for this situation seems to lie in the very onset of Apollon’s marriage:

And – he remembered a girl ... a swarm of admirers; among them ... Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, now a state councilor and – a hopeless sigher after the ladies.

And – the first night: horror in the eyes of the female companion who was left with him – an expression of revulsion and contempt hidden by a submissive smile ... on one of those nights Nikolay Apollonovich was conceived — between two different smiles: between a smile of lust and a smile of submissiveness; was it any

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁷⁶ A variety of critics have proposed this view of the novel’s characters. See for example: Langen, *Stony Dance*, 46-48; Olga Matich, introduction to *Petersburg/Petersburg: The Novel and the City*, ed. Olga Matich (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 25-31; Adam Weiner, *By Authors Possessed: The Demonic Novel in Russia* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 138-89.

wonder that Nikolay subsequently became a combination of revulsion, fear and lust? They would have had to immediately set about educating the horror ... But instead they inflated it ... they had each run away from the horror; Apollon Apollonovich – to direct the fate of Russia; Anna Petrovna – to gratify her sexual urge with Mantalini; Nikolay Apollonovich – to philosophy ... their domestic hearth now turned into a desolation of abomination. (p. 412)

И – вспомнилась девушка ... рой поклонников; среди них ... Аполлон Аполлонович Аблеухов, уже статский советник и – безнадежный вздыхатель.

И – первая ночь: ужас в глазах оставшейся с ним подруги – выражение отвращения, презрения прикритое покорной улыбкой ... в одну из ночей зачат был Николай Аполлонович – между двух разнообразных улыбок, между улыбками похоти и покорности, удивительно ли, что Николай Аполлонович стал впоследствии сочетанием из отвращения, перепуга и похоти? Надо было бы тотчас же им приняться за совместное воспитание ужаса ... Они же его раздували ... поразбежались от ужаса; Аполлон Аполлонович – управлять российскими судьбами; Анна же Петровна – удовлетворять половое влечение с Манталини; Николай Аполлонович – в философию ... их домашний очаг превратился теперь в запустение мерзости. (pp. 367-68)

The initial hypocrisy of the marriage cannot be completely hidden behind a façade of normalcy; both husband and wife simply try to avoid the uncomfortable situation. Nikolay, on the other hand, becomes a nervous child who turns into an unstable adult; like his parents, he avoids facing domestic problems and troublesome situations by lying.

The overall familial deceit creates an atmosphere of suspicion where everybody grapples in the darkness, trying to maneuver the situation with nothing to guide them but speculation.

This pattern continues even after Anna Petrovna leaves with the Italian singer. Father and son continue to avoid facing the facts by disguising the real issues with casual conversations:

It was with instinctive cunning that Nikolay Apollonovich had begun to talk about Cohen; a conversation about Cohen was a most neutral conversation; with this conversation *other conversations* were gotten out of the way; and any kind of explanatory scene was postponed (from day to day – from month to month). (p. 128)

Николай Аполлонович с инстинктивной хитростью заводил речь о Когене; разговор о Когене был нейтральнейший разговор; разговором этим снимались прочие разговоры (изо дня в день – из месяца в месяц). (p. 119)

The mention of “other conversations” (“прочие разговоры”) implies the discussion of both Anna Petrovna’s departure and Nikolay’s strange behavior. After his mother leaves, Nikolay quits his university studies, and then rarely leaves the house, doing nothing but reading Kant. Although Nikolay and his father were close when Nikolay was a child, they are now completely estranged; Apollon suspects his son of involvement in revolutionary activities while Nikolay thinks of his father as a cruel man interested only in climbing the governmental ladder. They continue their pattern of avoiding uncomfortable questions and honest conversation. The web of suspicions builds to the point where both secretly accuse each other of being a scoundrel:

In his office Apollon Apollonovich came to the conviction that his son was an arrogant rogue: thus ... papa everyday committed upon his own blood and his own flesh ... an act of terrorism. (p. 126)

Сидя в своем кабинете, Аполлон Аполлонович пришел к убеждению, что сын его отпетый мошенник: так над собственной кровью и над собственной плотью совершал ... папаша некий ... террористический акт. (p. 117)

Nikolay perpetrates the same “terrorist” act on his father when he thinks of Apollon as a complete scoundrel.

The atmosphere of suspicion and uncertainty between father and son is underscored when Apollon questions the servants about Nikolay, in order to get a sense of what his son is up to:

“Mm...Listen...”

...

“How, as a matter of fact, yes – is he getting on...getting on...”

“?”

“Nikolay Apollonovich”

“Passably, Apollon Apollonovich, his honor is well”

“And what else?”

“It’s as before: his honor is pleased to shut himself up and read books”

...

“Then his honor paces around the room, sir”

“Paces about – yes, yes ... And ... And? How?”

...

“Reading, pacing ... I see ... Go on”

“Yesterday his honor was waiting for a visit from someone”

“Waiting? For whom?”

“A costumier, sir”

...

“Hm-hm ... What was that for?”

“I suppose that his honor is going to the ball” (p. 16)

“Мм ... послушайте”

...

“Что вообще – да – подельывает ... подельывает ...”

“?”

“Николай Аполлонович”

“Ничего себе, Аполлон Аполлонович, здравствуют”

“А еще?”

“По-прежнему: затворяться изволят и книжки читают”

...

“Потом еще гуляют по комнатам-с”

“Гуляют – да, да ... И ... И? Как?”

...

“Читают, гуляют ... Так ... Дальше?”

“Вчера они поджидали к себе ...”

“Поджидали кого?”

“Костюмера”

...

“Дм-дм ... Для чего же такого?”

“Я так полагаю, что они поедут на бал” (p. 14)

Nikolay undergoes a similar “interrogation” when his father, after seeing Dudkin on the street and labeling him a dangerous *raznochinets*, sees Dudkin visiting Nikolay. But Apollon cannot elicit any concrete information from Nikolay and he suspects that Nikolay is lying when Nikolay claims Dudkin is his university friend. Apollon thus descends further into his suspicions concerning his son’s political allegiances. Without any proof of Nikolay’s politically subversive activities, Apollon cannot prevent them, nor can he be assured his son is not a revolutionary. He is in constant fear concerning both his son and the revolutionary unrest threatening the State.

Apollon's uncertainty about his son's strange behavior may be the reason for his dream, often interpreted as a revelatory experience. During his semi-conscious astral travels, he encounters a Mongolian, whose face resembles Nikolay's, and who declares: "There are neither paragraphs nor regulations now!" (p. 142) ("уже нет теперь ни параграфов, ни правил!"; p. 139). This Mongolian seems to represent revolutionary chaos, possibly serving as Bely's allusion to Solovyov's well-known idea (expressed mainly in *Three Conversations* [*Три разговора*; 1900]) that the East represents chaos and barbarism, and the West symbolizes order and civilization. For Apollon, revolutionary politics signify chaos and disorder. As we have seen, Apollon perceives inhabitants of the islands, whom he suspects of revolutionary activity, as "denizen[s] of chaos [which] threatens the capital of the Empire" (p. 18) ("обитател[и] хаоса [который] угрожает столице Империи"; p. 17).

This Mongolian dream occurs after Apollon's chance encounters with Dudkin, both on the street and in Apollon's own house, which cause Apollon to worry that his son is involved in revolutionary activity. The Senator's dream might thus represent a psychological projection of his biggest fear, since in the dream Nikolay advocates radical political change. If Apollon's anxiety explains his dream, then the nightmare might not be revelatory. In this way the characters' psychological responses undermine the metaphysical implications. There is no way to determine if Apollon experienced a revelatory encounter or simply had a dream-projection of his anxiety. Once again this results in dynamic ambiguity: as we have seen elsewhere, one point of view contradicts another, and the reader is encouraged to experience firsthand the new uncertainty of the universe. Nothing can be taken as definite; instead, all values and judgments are relative, their meaning depending on the perspective from which we look at them.

The characters' psychological disorientation, which paralyzes their will and causes their passivity, is vividly underscored by the symbiosis between the secret police and the underground revolutionary movement, two apparently opposing organizations, supposedly aimed at destroying another. This confuses the protagonists and even leads to their hallucinatory states, for instance when the secret agent Morkovin tries to explain his identity to Apollon:

“Why is my last name Voronkov, when I am really called Morkovin?”

“Precisely ...”

Well, you see, Apollon Apollonovich, it's because I live there on a false passport”

...

“And my real lodgings are on the Nevsky.” (p. 221)

“Моя фамилия Воронков, тогда как я на самом деле Морковин?”

“Вот именно ...”

“Так ведь это, Аполлон Аполлонович, потому, что там я живу по фальшивому паспорту”

...

“А моя настоящая квартира на Невском.” (p. 190)

In another case, Lippanchenko's double identity is mentioned when Sophia Petrovna and Varvara Evgrafovna are on their way to a political meeting. While Sophia Petrovna knows him as Lippanchenko, Varvara Evgrafovna recognizes him as a Greek merchant from Odessa, living in her house under the name Mavrokordatov. Even the reader is never provided with Lippanchenko's real name. Dudkin is also an assumed name, since Aleksandr Ivanovich's real name is Gorelski or Pogorelski. Therefore nobody knows who represents the party and who the state, because the two appear as one power aimed at squashing the real revolutionary movement, which is never shown in the novel. Bely thus projects the characters' individual confusion onto a political level, and their personal uncertainty acquires a broader scope of universal perplexity.

As I discussed in chapter three, this overwhelming confusion, created by police infiltration of the revolutionary party, causes Dudkin's final psychological breakdown, and makes Nikolay even more nervous and unsettled. After the ball, Morkovin follows Nikolay and

insists on having a drink with him in a dingy Island café. Their conversation turns into an interrogation of Nikolay, which is aimed at frightening him into killing his father; at this point Morkovin reveals his double identity:

“Ah, so you’re in government service?”

“Yes, in the secret police.”

“Come, my dear fellow, why do you clutch at your chest with an expression as though you had a most dangerous and secret document there...”

...

“After all, it’s not as if I were going to interrogate you ... don’t be afraid, my little pigeon: I’ve been appointed to keep an eye on the secret police by the party ... And there is no need for you to be so alarmed, Nikolay Apollonovich: I do assure you, no need at all.” (p. 321)

“А вы служите?”

“Да, в охранке ...”

“Что это вы, мой родной, ухватились за грудь с таким выражением, будто там у вас опаснейший и секретнейший документ...”

...

“Я, ведь, кажется, вас не собираюсь допрашивать ... Не пугайтесь, голубчик: в охранное же отделение я приставлен от партии ... И напрасно вы, Николай Аполлонович, растревожились: ей-Богу, напрасно.” (pp. 214-15)

Despite Morkovin’s assurance that Nikolay has nothing to fear, when Nikolay asks what will happen if he doesn’t comply with the demands of the party, Morkovin replies:

“I will arrest you...”

“You? Arrest me?”

“Do not forget that I ...”

“That you’re a conspirator?”

“I am an employee of the secret police; as an employee of the secret police I will arrest you.” (p. 323)

“Я вас арестую”

“Вы? Меня? Арестуете?”

“Не забывайте, что я ...”

“Что вы конспиратор?”

“Я – чиновник охранного отделения; как чиновник охранного отделения, я вас арестую.” (p. 217)

The conclusion of the conversation is as ambiguous as its beginning. Neither Nikolay nor the reader knows where Morkovin's loyalties lie — with the party or with the secret police. He has power over Nikolay both as a party member and as a secret police agent. Even more significantly, he leaves Nikolay no choice in the matter of murdering of his father: Nikolay will be arrested whether he commits murder or not. Nikolay's uncertainty as to the course of his action and his resulting passivity make perfect sense: he is doomed no matter what he does.

Nikolay's psychological paralysis may also lead to his apparent revelation. On the day after his conversation with Morkovin, Nikolay, exhausted, half-drunk, and frightened, falls into a semi-conscious state and has a "vision" of his anthroposophical heredity and of killing his father, identified as Saturn. As was the case with his father's dream, Nikolay's "revelation" could be convincingly interpreted as his psychological reaction to the events of the previous night, the dream projection of his fears. His "revelation" is ambiguous, and there is no conclusive proof of either interpretation: did Nikolay experience a revelation, or did he simply have a nightmare caused by psychological stimuli on his unstable mind? The characters' psychology thus adds another layer of ambiguity to this already ambiguous novel.

Section Two: Apollon and Nikolay Ableukhov as Representatives of Dominant Philosophies

Alongside their portrayal as individuals with particular psychological traits, Apollon and Nikolay also represent contemporary philosophies — Evolutionism and neo-Kantianism — which, although apparent opposites, are viewed by Bely as equally ineffective for cultural evolution. The psychological passivity of both Ableukhoffs underscores Bely's view of the nature of governing schools of thought and therefore illustrates philosophical reasons behind the

cultural status quo. In this way Bely adds a philosophical meaning to the characters psychology and creates a broader configuration of his vision of the evolutionary process.

Apollon Apollonovich, an older man, is predictably a proponent of Evolutionism, which had its heyday in the second part of the nineteenth century. This science-based philosophy postulated that the logical and mathematical treatment of empirical data is the only source of true knowledge in the social and natural sciences. Assuming that society operates according to preordained laws, just like the physical world, Evolutionists attempted to discover these laws, and believed that by following them they could create a just and humanitarian society. Thus they regarded societal progress as part of the natural evolutionary process unfolding in all of nature. Although Apollon is not a philosopher, he is very interested in philosophy and, as the narrator informs us in the Senator's curriculum vitae, he even taught philosophy before he became a statesman. His affiliations with positivist philosophy are stated throughout the novel. While his son, Nikolay, was still a young boy, Apollon encouraged him to read works by John Stuart Mill, a representative of the Evolutionist school. In his old age, Apollon still views Albert Comte as a leading philosopher of the era and seems unaware of neo-Kantianism. During an attempt at dinner conversation with his now estranged son, he confuses Kant with Comte and states that "Kant was refuted by Comte" ("ведь Канта же опроверг Конт"), adding that "Kant is not scientific" (p. 124) ("Кант не научен"; p. 118). The Senator's philosophical beliefs seem more like a matter of habit than true convictions, for the times when "he had read much and to the end" (p. 126) ("многое дочитывал до конца"; p. 120) are long gone and his impressive library is covered in dust.

Nevertheless Apollon considers himself an active propagator of progress and a true humanitarian. During the brief familial reconciliation after Anna Petrovna's return, he resumes his philosophical conversations with his son and preaches humanitarianism:

I told them all: no, promoting the import of American sheafing-machines is not such a trifling matter; there is more humanitarianism in it than there is in blowhard speeches ... All the same, we need humanitarian principles; humanitarianism is a great cause, achieved through much suffering by such intellectuals as Giordano Bruno, as ... (p. 510)

Я им всем говорил: нет, способствовать ввозу американских сноповязалок, - не такая пустяшная вещь; в этом больше гуманности, чем в пространных речах ... Все-таки, гуманитарные начала нам нужны; гуманизм – великое дело, выстраданное такими умами, как Джордано Бруно, как ... (p. 418)

Ironically, the Senator is known for his long speeches (“Russia knew Ableukhov by the excellent expansiveness of the speeches he gave” (p. 14) [“Аблеухова знала Россия по отменной пространности им произносимых речей”; p. 9]), and his work, which he views as service in the name of progress, is only a glorified bureaucratic post creating nothing but piles of papers:

At the Institution Apollon Apollonovich spent hours in the review of the document factory: from the radiant center ... flew out all the circulars to the heads of subordinate institutions. (p. 59)

В Учреждении Аполлон Аполлонович проводил часы за просмотром бумажного производства: из воссиявшего центра ... вылетали все циркуляры к начальникам подведомственных учреждений. (p. 47)

Since Apollon's directives get lost in the Empire's complex bureaucratic maze, his work is actually futile. If his orders do reach the provinces, they only impede progress. Because he denies the country's economic reality, Apollon's decrees stifle the vitality of countryside. He does nothing to better the life of the citizens, and his humanitarian ideas are mere empty talk.

Similarly, Apollon has no control over his private life. His wife left him for an Italian singer and he is estranged from his son. Instead of confronting his familial situation, he hides

behind a strict daily routine, which offers him a semblance of order. His domestic life is thus an artificial edifice covering a complete absence of sincere relationships:

In the lacquered house the storms of life passed noiselessly; but ruinously did the storms of life pass here none the less: not with the events did they thunder: they did not shine purifyingly into hearts like arrows of lightning; but like a stream of poisonous fluids from a hoarse gullet did they rend the air. (p. 12)

В лакированном доме житейские грозы протекали бесшумно; тем не менее грозы житейские протекали здесь гибельно: событиями не гремели они; не блистали в сердца очистительно стрелами молний; но из хриплого горла струей ядовитых флуидов вырывали воздух они. (p. 11)

Apollon's most prominent feature is his huge, greenish ears, and he is frequently compared to a bat. The clerks at his Department, for example, call him "a bat" ("непопырь," "летучая мышь"; p. 46). This is an obvious allusion to Apollon's real-life prototype, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, a reactionary Russian statesman. Leonid Dolgoplov quotes depictions of Pobedonostsev that appeared in the major underground newspapers after his death.¹⁷⁷ Although almost all of them compared Pobedonostsev to a predatory bird, none used the exact term "bat." Bely's close friend, Aleksandr Blok, uses a similar image of Pobedonostsev in his long poem "Retribution" ("Возмездие"; 1811): "Pobedonostsev spread his owl wings over Russia ("Победоносцев над Россией/ Простер совиные крыла").¹⁷⁸ However, in this novel so abundant with anthroposophical allusions, the Senator's nickname probably has an additional meaning, since bats have an occultist connotation: the bat signifies a being that dislikes seeing the true nature of things and would like to flit past everything, thus embodying the fear of seeing

¹⁷⁷ Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman*, 260-62.

¹⁷⁸ Aleksandr Blok, "Vozmezdие," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 8 tomakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960-63), 8:58.

something one does not want to see.¹⁷⁹ This aptly describes Apollon. Both at work and at home, he refuses to face reality and pretends that everything is in order. The price he pays for this attitude is constant anxiety and the “enlargement of his heart” (“расширение сердца”).

The Senator’s fear of anything new that might disturb his belief-system is perhaps embodied most clearly in the way he deals with his “second space,” the spiritual realm he enters before falling asleep. Since he wants to control all aspects of his conscious life, he tries to forget his inexplicable dreams:

Apollon Apollonovich, going to sleep, remembered at that instant all the earlier inarticularities ... in a word, he remembered all that he had seen the previous day before going to sleep, so as not to remember it again in the morning. (p. 142)

Аполлон Аполлонович, отходящий ко сну, в то мгновение вспоминал все былые невнятности ... словом, он вспоминал все, что видел он на кануне пред отходом ко сну, чтоб снова не вспомнить поутру. (p. 137)

In the evenings he reads *Plane Geometry (Планиметрия)*, so as to replace his dream images with geometrical figures he can logically comprehend:

In a centre of the desk lay a textbook “Planimetry” ... Before retiring for the night, Apollon Apollonovich usually spent time turning the pages of this little book in order to calm the recalcitrant life within his head for sleep, in the contemplation of most blissful outlines: parallelepipeds, parallelograms, cones, cubes and pyramids (p. 310)

посередине же стола лежал курс “Планиметрии” ... Аполлон Аполлонович перед отходом к сну обычно развешивал книжечку, чтобы чтобы сну непокорную жизнь в своей голове успокоить в созерцании блаженнейших очертаний: параллелепипедов, параллелограммов, конусов, кубов и пирамид (p. 231)

In other words, Apollon only tolerates phenomena that can be explained by human reason.

Although he has access to the spirit world (unlike all other characters except his son), this

¹⁷⁹ Rudolf Steiner, *Harmony of the Creative Word: The Human Being and the Elemental, Animal, Plant and Mineral Kingdoms* (East Sussex, UK: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2001), 81-85.

“empiricist” wastes this opportunity, too afraid of what he might discover about himself and the realms beyond the physical universe.

For instance, as we have seen, Apollon dreams of a fat Mongol resembling Nikolay, who advocates overthrow of the old order. This message from Apollon’s subconscious, which is either a revelation or a psychological reaction to his fear of Nikolay’s revolutionary activity, confirms Apollon’s fears concerning the state of the country and his son. Since this is more than Apollon cares to know, his conscious mind escapes his body:

This Apollon Apollonovich was unwilling to grasp ... Here a scandal took place ... the wind whistled Apollon Apollonovich’s consciousness out of Apollon Apollonovich ... This consciousness now turned back, emitting from itself only two sensations ... they sensed some kind of form ... filled to the brim with sticky and stinking filth ... The consciousness opened its eyes, and the consciousness saw the very thing it inhabited: it saw a little yellow old man. (p. 167)

Этого Аполлон Аполлонович понять не желал ... Тут случился скандал ... ветер высвистнул сознание Аполлона Аполлоновича из Аполлона Аполлоновича. Аполлон Аполлонович вылетел через круглую брешь в синеву, в темноту ... Это сознание теперь обернулось назад, выпустив из себя только два ощущения ... они ощутили какую-то форму до краев налитую липкою и вонючею скверною ... У сознания открылись глаза и сознание увидало то самое, в чем оно обитает: увидало желтого старичка. (p. 140)

As Maguire and Malmstad observe, the journey of the Senator’s consciousness during his double-dream resembles his daily journey to the water closet, and other characters see Apollon as a yellow old man.¹⁸⁰ This observation enhances our understanding of Apollon’s fear: he would rather rot in the sewer of his life than take any action that could change his circumstances.

The only time Apollon attempts any action is at the end of the novel. The morning after the ball, where Apollon discovers the plot against his life and his son’s participation in it, and when his career is virtually over, Apollon, half-mad, begins to dust his library. His frantic

¹⁸⁰ Maguire and Malmstad, “Petersburg,” 118-19.

gesture signifies his pitiful attempt at reviving his philosophical principles in the face of impending danger. This is an allusion to Bely's views on Evolutionism. In "The Line, the Circle, the Spiral," Bely declares: "Evolutionism is the dust of collapsed edifices" ("Эволюционизм – пыль рухнувших зданий").¹⁸¹ The Senator's action seems like the impulse of an old man who has lost his importance in society and has been pushed aside. Soon afterwards Apollon gives himself over to the motionless contemplation of his life and accepts the fact that his political career is over. Later on the same morning, he visits his wife, who, abandoned by the Italian singer, has returned home. Yet the reconciliation between the two lacks any soul-searching or clarification, merely indicating a return to the old status-quo. From this point on, Apollon is portrayed as an old man on the brink of dementia.

As we may remember from chapter one, Bely described Evolutionism in geometrical terms as a line. Apollon is the only character whose preferences for particular geometrical figures is emphasized. We have seen that he reads *Plane Geometry* to calm his nerves before sleep. In his carriage, on the way to work, he contemplates his favorite shapes:

Planned regularity and symmetry calmed the senator's nerves ... By a harmonic simplicity were his tastes distinguished. Most of all did he love the rectilinear prospect ... After the line of all the symmetries it was the figure of the square that brought him the most calm. He was in the habit of giving himself up for long periods of time to the insouciant contemplations of pyramids, triangles, parallelepipeds, cubes, trapezoids ... As for the zigzag line, he could not endure it. (p. 19)

Планомерность и симметрия успокоили нервы сенатора ... Гармонической простотой отличался его вкус. Более всего он любил прямолинейный проспект ... После линии всех симметричностей успокаивала его фигура – квадрат. Он, бывало, подолгу предавался бездумному созерцанию: пирамид, треугольников, параллелепипедов, кубов, трапеций ... Зигзагообразной же линии он не мог выносить. (p. 17)

¹⁸¹ Belyi, "Liniia, krug, spiral'," 20.

Apollon's fondness for simple, Euclidean geometrical figures reflects his desire for life to be scientifically explicable, logical, and predictable. He wishes that the entire Earth, even the Universe, were divided into such simple figures and therefore logically comprehensible and controlled by reason. While in his carriage the Senator wishes

that the whole spherical surface of the planet would be gripped by the blackish-grey cubes of the houses as by serpentine coils; that the whole of the earth squeezed by prospects would intersect the immensity in linear cosmic flight with a rectilinear law. (p. 19)

чтобы вся сферическая поверхность планеты оказалась охваченной, как змейными кольцами, черновато-серыми домовыми кубами; чтобы вся, проспектами притиснутая земля, в линейном, космическом беге пересекла бы необъятность прямолинейным законом. (p. 17)

The image of “serpentine coils” (“змейные кольца”), an allusion to the serpentine body of Chronos, the Greek god of time, expresses Apollon's desire for the world to be completely comprehensible and predictable. He wishes to “freeze” the world in logic and eradicate all that intrudes on his scientific viewpoint. He thus fears zigzag lines, for they cannot be scientifically measured or logically explained. His hatred for the Islands stems from the same fear of the inexplicable. He wishes for a stagnant, static world, an unchanging status quo.

However, as Bely states, “The line of evolution is always only a circle – the philosophy of evolution is torn into – the philosophy of dogmatism” (“Линия эволюции всегда лишь окружность: философия эволюции разрывается в – философию догматизма”).¹⁸² Such is the case with the Senator's philosophy. His love for straight lines results in a dogmatic circle. Since he is part of the ruling government and his decrees circulate throughout Russia, he stands at the forefront of the dogmatic circularity of the novel. Furthermore, he also accepts state repression. At the ball, after discovering Morkovin is a secret-police agent, Apollon thinks:

¹⁸² Ibid., 14.

What can one do about it: the existence of such figures in a time of transition and within the bounds of strict legality is a sad necessity; and yet all the same, necessity. (p. 236)

Что поделаешь: существование подобных фигур в переходное время и в пределах строгой законности – необходимость печальная; и все же – необходимость. (p. 190)

Similarly, when watching the quickly moving legs of the dancing couples, the Senator recalls the execution of revolutionaries:

The convulsions of the dancing legs put him in mind of a certain regrettable (though unavoidable) measure for the prevention of state crimes. (p. 221)

а конвульсии танцующих ног вызвали в его представлении одну печальную (неизбежную, впрочем) меру для предотвращения государственных преступлений. (p. 179)

The Senator's participation, even if indirect, in the persecution of people who represent different ideas illustrates his closed-mindedness, which does not permit the existence of other worldviews. In their fear of annihilation, even supposedly humanitarian ideologies become ossified into dogma and destroy all that endangers their *raison d'être*. Apollon's use of the word "sad" ("печальный"), when combined with criminal oppression, ironically undermines the humanitarianism he claims to propagate. Bely here uses irony to condemn the Senator's philosophy because it is based on logic and disconnected from emotion; Bely's critique is also aimed at any school of thought that doesn't link these two sides of human experience.

The philosophy of Evolutionism divorces thought from feeling, so Apollon is guided only by logic and has no place for emotions. This is underscored by the description of his house, which is presented as the extension of Apollon's head instead of the locus of his emotional life:

The lackey was going up the staircase ... And it has steps – as soft as convulsions of the brain ... Behind the slammed door there turned out to be no drawing-room: there turned out to be ... cerebral spaces: convulsions, grey and white matter, the pineal gland ... the bare walls were only ... the occipital, frontal, temporal and sincipital bones belonging to the respectful skull. (p. 45)

Лакей поднимался по лестнице ... На ней же – ступени: мягкие, как мозговые извалины ... За захлопнутой дверью не оказалось гостинной: оказались ... мозговые пространства: извалины, серое и белое вещество, шишковидная железа ... голые стены были ... затылочной, лобной, височных и теменных костей, принадлежащих почтенному черепу. (p. 32)

The only time the Senator takes interest in his personal life is when he divides his household according to the points of the compass. He ignores the real issues concerning his family's emotional state, or approaches them with cold logic. If any feeling arises in Apollon's heart, he pushes it away, by breaking pencils bought especially for this purpose.

As we remember from chapter one, Bely's model of evolution includes a triangle connecting the human heart (feelings), head (mind), and hand (will); only a vital connection between these three faculties can empower a man to make a successful Dionysian leap and move the evolutionary spiral to its next level. Apollon lacks such a connection: his head is divorced from his heart, and he represents what Bely calls "thought torn out of the brain" ("мысль вырванная из мозга"),¹⁸³ which in the novel is exteriorized through the image of a head. For this reason the Senator's metonymical representation is, besides his huge ears, his head, which is emphasized in almost every description of him. When Apollon gets up in the morning, we first see his head; when he rides to work in his carriage, Dudkin sees his head; while Apollon is at work, Bely focuses on Apollon's head and his employees' heads. Therefore, Apollon's Evolutionism represents a dogmatic circle that must be overcome so as to enter a new cultural phase.

Since the Senator represents the ossified culture that Bely decries, his philosophy is depicted in gruesome terms. In "The Line, the Circle, the Spiral," Bely writes that thought

¹⁸³ Ibid., 22.

separated from feeling turns “the organism of experience” (“организм переживания”) into “a bone covered by skin” (“костью обтянутой кожей”), and describes such a state as “old, already buried antiquity” (“старая, уже погребенная старина”).¹⁸⁴ When the Apollonian masks are removed to reveal the characters’ true natures, the Senator appears to Morkovin as a “ruin” (“развалина”) and to Nikolay as a skeleton in a tuxedo. Images of death accompany Apollon throughout the novel: we see this in the references to Pushkin’s poems (“To Ezersky” [“Езерскому”], “Lycée” [“Лицей”]) and in Apollon’s remembrance of his dead colleague, Konstantin. The narrator also informs his reader about the Senator’s death long before the end: “The Institution exists. In it is Apollon Apollonovich: more correctly, was, because he is dead” (p. 457) (“Учреждение – есть. В нем есть Аполлон Аполлонович: верней ‘был’, потому что он умер”; p. 339). As discussed in chapter two, Bely likens Apollon to an Egyptian, and Bely viewed Egyptian culture as the first evolutionary period. Apollon’s philosophy is portrayed not just as old, but ancient and long dead.

In contrast to his father, Nikolay is a proponent of neo-Kantianism, a modern philosophy. Although comprised of various schools of thought, neo-Kantianism can generally be defined as a movement that challenged Kant’s epistemological a priori categories and attempted to prove that “the thing in itself” can be known. Neo-Kantians, influenced by new scientific discoveries, believed that theoretical conceptualization could explain previously unknown or unexplained matters. Conceptualization replaced Evolutionism’s empiricism, and the new philosophy, calling itself “scientific transcendentalism,” challenged the materialism of its predecessor.

More than any other character, Nikolay is defined by his dedication to philosophy: he is the Philosopher of *Petersburg*. Other characters consider him a genuine thinker and seek

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 14, 22.

opportunities to talk to him. Morkovin is glad to meet the “young philosopher” (“молодой философ”), and even Dudkin, a well-read person, confides his philosophical uncertainties to Nikolay. Since his youth Nikolay has had philosophical conversations with his father; even after their estrangement, he talks to his father about the new philosophy represented by Cohen. His identification as a Philosopher is emphasized by the description of his study:

The study was furnished with oak shelves that were tightly packed with books ... a careful hand could at one time completely conceal from the gaze the content of the shelves, at another reveal rows of black leather bindings that were speckled with the inscription: Kant ... and there was a handsome bust ... of Kant, of course. (p. 62)

Кабинет был уставлен дубовыми полками, туго набитыми книгами ... заботливая рука то вовсе могла скрыть от взора содержимое полочек, то, наоборот, обнаружить ряды черных кожаных корешков, испрещренных надписами “Кант” ... и прекрасен был бюст ... разумеется, Канта же. (p. 40)

However, the motives behind these philosophical conversations shed doubt on Nikolay’s supposed wisdom. Morkovin’s reference to Nikolay is an instance of mockery reminiscent of Porfiry praising Raskolnikov’s intelligence in Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. While Raskolnikov is an intelligent young man able to withstand the “psychological method,” Nikolay seems like a nervous child, frightened of the consequences of his immature act. Morkovin’s desire to speak with Nikolay is motivated not by interest in philosophical debate, but by his wish to push Nikolay into terrorism. His reference to Nikolay as “a young man of exceptional gifts” (“молодой человек исключительных дарований”) seems like flattery but actually represents a sadistic cat-and-mouse play, aimed at trapping Nikolay. Dudkin, on the other hand, admits that he talks to Nikolay out of loneliness and lack of contact with educated people. Nikolay pays scant attention to his conversation with Dudkin and does not offer his own philosophical views.

Nikolay’s dinner conversation with his father is another example: their philosophical discussion is just a pretext for avoiding discussion of family troubles. As I mentioned earlier,

Nikolay talks to his father about Cohen only because “Cohen was a most neutral conversation” (p. 128) (“разговор о Когене был нейтральнейший разговор”; p. 119). Nikolay’s philosophy is thus depicted as a “safe,” strictly academic matter that can be used to avoid difficult situations and sincere conversations. Neo-Kantianism thus seems disconnected from life and unable to replace obsolete Evolutionism. This point is underscored by the conclusion of Nikolay and Apollon’s “philosophical debate.” As we have seen, the Senator confuses the names of Kant and Comte (they sound very similar in Russian), and says: “Comte ... Yes: Kant” (p. 132) (“Конт ... Да: Кант”; p. 119). This erases the difference between these supposedly opposed philosophies, making neo-Kantianism seem like a mere addendum to Evolutionism rather than as a new school of thought.

The parodic description of Nikolay’s study also implies that his philosophy lacks new values. The ubiquitous presence of Kant in the study mocks the neo-Kantian obsession with reviving old philosophy. But this parody is not for the sake of laughter alone; it also makes an important point. The abundance of thick, academic, leather-bound books devoted exclusively to eighteenth-century philosophers evokes an outdated library, while Kant’s bust gives the study the appearance of a museum rather than the workplace of an innovative mind. This impression is magnified by the mouse, which Dudkin notices while visiting Nikolay. In “Circular Movement,” Bely writes: “But cultural creativity ... lies not in protection; the protective branch of creativity is a museum: in the museum creation becomes covered with dust and is eaten by mice” (“Но культурное творчество ... не в охране; охранное отделение творчества – музей: в музее творимое покрывается пылью и съедается мышью”).¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 70.

We have seen that the Ableukhovs' house seems like a classical museum, so the appearance of the mouse turns Nikolay's study into a "branch" of this museum. Nikolay's philosophy, while supposedly new, thus seems like a mere repetition of the old. Since Nikolay spends most of his time in his museum-like "study" ("кабинет"), his philosophical ideas are isolated from contemporary reality, and Bely emphasizes Nikolay's absence from public life. Nikolay has left the university; he has no employment and no close friends. The only social circle he frequents is Sophia Petrovna's pseudo-intellectual "salon." Even his visits to her house are motivated by his romantic interest in the hostess, not by a desire for meaningful intellectual exchange. If he leaves the house at all, it is not to mingle with the crowd and find out about the current political or cultural situation, but to stroll aimlessly and daydream.

Some critics have suggested that Nikolay represents a symbolic link between the revolutionary Islands and the reactionary mainland because he so often appears on bridges.¹⁸⁶ I would argue that his lingering on bridges suggests the opposite, namely his disconnection from the cultural and political life of *Petersburg*. Suspended above the crowd, he does not observe life, but instead stares motionlessly overhead. Lost in his daydreams, he even fails to see the object of his affection, Sophia Petrovna, approaching the bridge where he is standing:

Standing on the bank of the Neva, somehow dully staring into the green, or rather, no – letting his gaze fly away to where ... above the white walls of the fortress ... the spire of Peter and Paul stretched towards the sky ... All of her stretched out to him ... But again, again he had not noticed her. (p. 157)

он стоял как-то тупо уставившись в зелень, или нет, - улетаая взором туда ... откуда над белыми крепостными стенами ... протянулся под небо ... Петропавловский шпиг. Вся она протянулась к нему ... Но он – он опять ее не заметил. (p. 126)

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Dolgoplov, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman*; and Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*.

Nikolay's disconnection from the world is further underscored by the frequent mention of his near-sightedness. He is often described as looking for his glasses, without which he cannot see things beyond his narrow circle. He leads a dream-like existence animated only by his ambiguous love affair and solitary studies, neither of which is fruitful or promising. The philosophical treatises he supposedly works on never see the light of day.

Despite Nikolay's commitment to philosophy, in the outside world he is not committed to anything. In a time of serious political turmoil, he does not take a stand. Instead he makes a promise to the revolutionary party on a whim, in a highly charged emotional moment when he is rejected by Sophia Petrovna. What on the surface seems like a serious political stance is in fact a desperate act of doubly displaced emotional injury: hurt by Sophia Petrovna, he directs his anger towards his father, against whom he feels a latent resentment, and finds an outlet for it in his promise to the party. He then almost immediately regrets his promise and forgets about it. When reminded of his thoughtless action, he attempts to get out of his commitment. Nikolay's absence of political or cultural views is elevated to the level of parody. The red domino he wears to entice Sophia Petrovna is used by the press to foment unrest, and becomes, without Nikolay's knowledge, a symbol of revolution. In this way Nikolay is unwittingly pulled into political events in which he takes no interest. Nikolay's lack of commitments is not limited to the public sphere, but also includes his personal, emotional life. He is not sure whether he loves or hates his father, and cannot decide about his feelings towards Sophia Petrovna; there seems to be no one in his life for whom he has unequivocal, strong feelings.

The only world in which he thrives is his study, artificial and isolated from outside events. Immersed in his philosophical inquiries, Nikolay feels not only in control, but at the center of the universe:

Concentrating himself in thought, Nikolay Apollonovich was in the habit of locking his workroom: then it began to seem to him that both he and the room ... were instantly transformed from objects of the real world into the intelligible symbols of purely logical constructions ... Having locked himself in ... he felt his body being poured into the “universe” that is, into the room; while the head of his “body” was displaced into the electric lamp’s pot-bellied light bulb under the coquettish shade. (p. 63)

Сосредоточиваясь в мысли, Николай Аполлонович запирает на ключ свою рабочую комнату: тогда ему начиналось казаться, что и он, и комната ... перевоплощались мгновенно из предметов реального мира в умопостигаемые символы чисто логических построений ... Запершись на ключ ... он чувствовал тело свое пролитым во “вселенную,” то есть в комнату; голова же этого тела смещалась в головку пузатенького стекла электрической лампы под кокетливым абажуром. (p. 42)

This description mirrors the depiction of Apollon’s office, where Apollon also feels like the center of the universe, but there is an important difference between the two. Although Apollon’s work does not help the country and even impedes its progress, at least he is engaged in real-world events. Nikolay’s universe, on the other hand, is a parody of real life. Its scope is limited to one room, and the enlightening ideas he creates are diminished to the lightbulb under the lamp shade. Bely underscores the artificiality of Nikolay’s philosophy:

But scarcely had Nikolay Apollonovich succeeded this day in putting away from him the trivia of day-to-day existence, and the abyss of all kinds of obscurity, called world and life, ... than obscurity again bursts into Nikolay Apollonovich’s world; and in this obscurity consciousness of self got shamefully stuck. (p. 63)

Но едва удалось Николаю Аполлоновичу сегодня отставить от себя житейские мелочи и пучину всяких невнятных, называемых миром и жизнью ... как невнятность опять ворвалась в мир Николая Аполлоновича; и в невнятности этой позорно увязло самосознание. (p. 41)

Nikolay’s identity only exists in his artificial world. He treats life as a chaotic and unnecessary sphere of existence, a secondary realm of uncertainty that intrudes on his “real” life of strictly controlled logical concepts. This discontinuity between life and ideas renders the latter a philosophy of nonexistence. This is exactly how Bely defines nonexistence in “The Line, the

Circle, the Spiral”: “Contemporary philosophy ... should assert itself as a nonexistent philosophy of nonexistence” (“Современная философия ... себя должна утвердить как несуществующую философию несуществования”).¹⁸⁷

In the same article, Bely criticizes neo-Kantianism by labelling it hermaphroditic:

The movement of philosophical modernism is a circular movement; here consciousness impregnates itself: it is hermaphroditic. The neo-Kantian as a collective entity is composed of separate sharp and quite smart people, is exactly such a strange thing: a mixture of a young man with an old one – not a child, not a man, but a repulsive little boy, castrated before puberty and surprised that his beard is not growing.

Движение философского модернизма – движение круговое; здесь сознание оплодотворяет себя самого: оно – гермафродитно ... Новокантианец коллективно составленный из в отдельности взятых остроумных и вполне разумных людей, есть именно такое чудовище: смесь младенца со старичком – ни ребенок, ни муж, а гадкий мальчишка, оскопившийся до наступления зрелости и потом удивившийся, что у него не растет бороды.¹⁸⁸

Nikolay too is described in hermaphroditic terms. He is described as a man of below average height, which Dudkin notices while talking to him after the ball; he has an “impossibly tiny waist” (“чрезвычайно тонкую талию”); his body is scrawny (“In the costume of Adam, Nikolay Ableukhov was a little stick” (p. 516) [“Николай Аполлонович в костюме Адама был палочкой”; p. 432]); he has poor luck with women and does not have children.

Nikolay also seems suspended between childhood and adulthood. On several occasions the narrator mentions his blond hair, which, as he assures us, can be seen only in children:

Nikolay Apollonovich was ... in a tartar skullcap; but had he taken it off – there would have appeared a cap of white flaxen hair ... it was rare to encounter hair of such a color in a grown man; this hair color, unusual for adults, is frequently encountered in peasant infants – especially in Belorussia. (p. 63)

¹⁸⁷ Belyi, “Liniia, krug, spiral’,” 16.

¹⁸⁸ Belyi, “Liniia, krug, spiral’,” 56-57; Eng. trans. here from Maguire and Malmstad, “Petersburg,” 123.

Николай Аполлонович был ... в татарской ермолке, но сними ее он, – предстала бы шапка белольняных волос, омягчала холодную эту, почти суровую внешность ... трудно было встретить волосы такого оттенка у взрослого человека; часто встречается этот редкий для взрослого оттенок у крестьянских младенцев – особенно в Белоруссии. (p. 41)

This description undercuts the image of a mature scholar, instead implying that Nikolay is a child with interests unnatural for his age. When he has to face reality, he longs for the nursery, where he thinks he belongs. Even his treatment of Sophia Petrovna, his love interest, is immature: the tricks he uses to get her attention cause her to call him “a little boy” (p. 148) (“мальчик”; p. 136). The signs of Nikolay’s physiological immaturity suggest that his philosophy, too, is the childish, still-born creation of an underdeveloped mind. Concocted in separation from the real world by this man-child, neo-Kantianism loses credibility as a healthy, new philosophy that could oppose the reigning, ossified thought and move Bely’s spiral of cultural evolution.

Nikolay’s emotional immaturity also discredits his philosophical system. He appears as a person without identity, and this is underscored by the constant changing of his costumes. Although no longer a student, he dons the uniform of one; playing the role of a rejected lover, he dresses as the red domino; meeting Dudkin after the ball, he wears an Italian coat and fancy Italian hat. Even during his leisure time at home, he poses as an oriental man by wearing a Bukharian coat and skull cap. Perhaps the most vivid example of Nikolay’s lack of identity is in the ball scene: Nikolay is the only participant who assumes the identity of his costume. Wearing the red domino, he realizes that he does not love Sophia Petrovna. The same garb, his red domino, becomes the Red Domino created by the press as a revolutionary symbol, for it is at the ball that he receives the letter ordering him to kill his father.

In fact Nikolay seems to become less and less of a real person over the course of the novel, and slowly turns into a puppet controlled by others. Towards the end of the novel, while at Likhutin's apartment, Nikolay is handled by his host like a puppet:

Sergey Sergeyevich shoved the broad-brimmed hat and flying coat straight into the room ... under the broad-brimmed hat and under the folds of the flying cloak the owner of the clock, Nikolay Apollonovich, flew too ... the second lieutenant was dragging his way across the rugs and parquetry with a winged victim.

“Ттт” his heels went, as they dragged across the rug; and the carpet was covered with little wrinkles. (p. 487)

Сергей Сергеевич пропихнул широкополую шляпу и разлетевшийся по воздуху плащ прямо в комнату ... под шляпой с полями и под складками разлетевшегося плаща разлетелся в ту комнату и обладатель плаща, Николай Аполлонович ... подпоручник по коврам и паркетам влачился с крылатою жертвою.

—“Тррр” – волочились по ковру его каблуки; и ковер покрылся морщинками. (pp. 365-66)

Nikolay's gradual loss of identity to the point where he becomes a puppet is a result of his confrontation with the reality outside of his study. A master of the universe while inside, he cannot function in the outside world. His logical faculties seem to have developed at the expense of his psychological growth. His philosophy thus appears as an abstract system with no connection to and hence no influence on real life.

Nikolay's immaturity is further implied by his cowardly inability to take responsibility for his actions. During Morkovin's "interrogation," Nikolay is unable to withstand the "psychological method" and is easily tricked into revealing his association with the revolutionary party. This allusion to Porfiry Porfirovich's interrogation of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* vividly underscores Nikolay's naiveté and ineptitude, for his behavior contrasts with Raskolnikov's composed reaction to the "psychological method." Unlike Raskolnikov, Nikolay has not committed any crime and never intended to fulfill his capricious promise. Yet Nikolay allows Morkovin to paint him as a terrorist. The fact that Nikolay is considered a

dangerous revolutionary, although he is just the frightened victim of his own thoughtless whims, turns his “interrogation” into a parody of the investigation of the real crime that Raskolnikov committed deliberately and out of sincere philosophical beliefs. Parody diminishes Nikolay, portraying him as a mischievous child who has to pay a serious price for his frivolous behavior in the adult world. Nikolay behaves childishly in other ways as well. After he receives the order to kill his father, he begs Dudkin to relieve him of his promise. He has an affair with the wife of his best childhood friend. In the presence of his father he behaves like a little boy and reenacts situations from his childhood that used to please his parent: to avoid serious conversations about the family situation, he steers the conversation into safe topics.

Furthermore, Nikolay is an incessant liar. We are told that he has been lying since his childhood, and he continues lying in adulthood. Even if the truth is obvious, as when Likhutin tells Nikolay that he knows about Nikolay’s promise, Nikolay still denies his involvement. Although Nikolay’s intellectual inquiries are devoted to logic and reason, they have no effect on his behavior, which is guided exclusively by his desires. Therefore Nikolay acts only on whims, and lies out of fear when faced with the consequences of his behavior. Bely associates this split between logic and emotions, between bookish intelligence and real wisdom, with neo-Kantianism, which does not connect the different aspects of human experience. He describes a neo-Kantian as “incredibly well-read and brainy” (“чрезвычайно начитан и мозговит”), but “a complete idiot” (“совершеннейший идиот”) in real life.¹⁸⁹ This description fits Nikolay to a tee.

In his analysis of Nikolay, J. D. Elsworth quotes Bely’s opinion of neo-Kantianism, in which Bely underscores the “disastrous consequences of an over-estimation of neo-Kantian

¹⁸⁹ Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 57.

literature; the philosophy of Cohen, Natrop, Lask has an effect on one's feeling of the world, and produces in one a split into hardness and sensuality."¹⁹⁰ Elsworth applies this opinion to the depiction of Nikolay in the novel, in particular the split of his personality into a hard, God-like persona and a slimy frog. He argues that they represent respectively the hardness and sensuality to which Bely refers in his essay. Elsworth adds that Nikolay's sensuality is unhealthy. While I agree with Elsworth's interpretation of Nikolay's character in light of Bely's statement above, I question Elsworth's conclusion as to the unhealthiness of Nikolay's sensuality. In my opinion, Nikolay's sensuality is perfectly normal, but simply immature. It is the sensuality of a pubescent boy just discovering his own sexuality; unable to control it yet, he feels completely in its power. His lack of control over his sexual impulses is demonstrated by his behavior towards Sophia Petrovna. After she teases him he cannot hold his desires at bay and tries to kiss her:

Nikolay Apollonovich could hold out no longer: all of his hopes and passions of many days rushed to his head (Nikolay Apollonovich dropped her on the sofa in a struggle). (p. 87)

Николай Аполлонович не выдержал: вся многодневная его безысходная страсть бросилась в голову (Николай Аполлонович в борьбе ее уронил на софу). (p. 65)

The strength of Nikolay's new desires as well as his inability to control them is further demonstrated by his attempt at suicide following Sophia Petrovna's rejection. I would argue that by "sensuality" Bely does not mean unnatural desires, but rather uncontrolled emotional cravings resulting from devotion to a philosophy that does not allow for human feelings. Such neglect stunts emotional growth, including sexual desires, which erupt uncontrollably in the absence of emotional maturity. Thus Bely depicts Nikolay as a child acting on desires unmitigated by

¹⁹⁰ Andrei Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1923), 299; trans. and cited by Elsworth, in *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, 95.

reason. Moreover, by comparing Nikolay (in his moments of ardor) to a frog, Bely alludes to anthroposophy. In Steinerian teachings, the frog is connected with the lower parts of the human body, which develop after the formation of the head, and belongs to the realm of man's astral body, representing human desires uncontrolled by reasonable ego.¹⁹¹ Nikolay's depiction as a frog connotes his desire-driven nature. Anthroposophists consider such people to be underdeveloped human beings, for their ego, which tempers desires, is still not developed. Steiner includes in this group children as well as animals, and Nikolay is likened to both a child and an animal. After his meeting with Likhutin, during which Nikolay suffers minor injuries, Nikolay resembles an animal:

In his wet, crumpled cloak, limping slightly ... and he was coughing; and he was – panting ... and rugs fluttered ... truly, truly: Nikolay Apollonovich looked lame, hunchbacked, and – as though he had a little tail. (p. 503)

В мокрой, измятой накидке он, прихрамывая взлетел по ступеням ... и он кашлял; и он – задыхался ... и – трепался лоскут ... право, право же: выглядел Николай Аполлонович хромоногим, горбатым, и – с хвостиком. (p. 401)

This depiction of Nikolay also associates him with the devil: he is lame, hunchbacked, and has a tail. This is another instance of Bely's use of parody. Nikolay, presented throughout the novel as an immature and selfish child given to excessive lying, is parodied as a little, pitiful devil, who has just received a thrashing from Likhutin precisely for his lies. The depictions of Nikolay as animal and child merge to create an image of a naughty, devilish boy.

Yet, however harshly Bely may speak against neo-Kantianism in his essays, in *Petersburg* he seems to forgo his vitriolic criticism. Bely's depiction of Nikolay, the prevailing representative of neo-Kantianism in the novel, is mostly parodic, and lacks the acerbity marking

¹⁹¹ Steiner, *Harmony of the Creative Word*, 91-93.

the portrayal of other characters, especially the corrupt party members. Nikolay's actions often turn into comedy: he frequently trips over his garments or falls down, turning serious situations into humorous scenes. When Dudkin brings the bomb to the Ableukhovs' house, Nikolay tries to greet him with proper solemnity, but the scene instead becomes pure slapstick comedy:

Nikolay Apollonovich conceived the design of moving downstairs in order with dignity, in the Ableukhovs' manner, to lead into the lacquered house the punctilious guest ... But to his annoyance, one of his fur slippers jumped off ... Nikolay Apollonovich stumbled on the steps; and in addition he let the stranger down: in the assumption that Nikolay Apollonovich, in an excess of his usual obsequiousness, was rushing down towards him ... the stranger with the small black moustache rushed in his turn towards Nikolay Apollonovich. (p. 94)

Николай Аполлонович вознамерился двинуться вниз, чтоб достойно, по-аблеуховски, ввести в лаковый дом ... гостя; но, к досаде, его меховая туфелька соскочила с ноги ... Николай Аполлонович на ступеньках споткнулся; и вдобавок он подвел незнакомца: предположивши, что Николай Аполлонович в порыве обычной угодливости бросится к нему вниз ... незнакомец с черными усиками бросился в свою очередь к Николаю Аполлоновичу. (p. 70)

As a result of Nikolay's clumsiness, a somber meeting that he dreads, because he is afraid Dudkin will ask him to fulfill his promise, seems like the long-awaited reunion of two best friends. This undercuts the seriousness of the situation and suggests that Nikolay is a clownish figure unable to handle serious endeavors, even if he intended to do so.

Nikolay conducts his love life in an equally clumsy manner. Dressed as a red domino, he attempts to entice Sophia Petrovna to continue their affair, but the sudden appearance of a policeman interferes with his plans. Another slapstick scene ensues. The policeman chases Nikolay, Nikolay trips, and his mysterious garment turns into a clown costume: the fake beard is now on his back, the mask is atop his head, and the domino flies behind him, revealing his student uniform. The serious love intrigue is thus transformed into a silly, schoolboy prank. The narrator's emphasis on the particular blond hue of Nikolay's hair, characteristic for a child but

not an adult, constantly reminds the reader that Nikolay is an immature youth merely posing as an adult. His movements are described as “clumsy” (“косолапый”), which evokes a fairy-tale animal, the “clumsy little bear” (“мишка косолапый”). The association between Nikolay and the lovable, clumsy bear erases any menace from his erratic behavior, and creates an image of a well-meaning but fatuous figure, who belongs in the nursery rather than in the world of adults.

Bely also uses Nikolay as a stand-in for Bely himself. Almost every aspect of Nikolay’s life contains allusions to Bely’s. Nikolay’s preoccupation with Kant suggests Bely’s similar, youthful obsession. Steven Cassedy, citing Bely’s memoir *The Beginning of the Century* (*Начало века*; 1929), states that Bely at twenty-one “had already come to be so closely associated with Kant, that his friends used to form puns from the names Bely ... and Kant.”¹⁹² Cassedy also notes that Kant became a permanent feature of Bely’s thought and quotes Bely’s statement from the same memoir: “In July 1903, in the guise of a struggle with Kantianism, I immersed myself in it thoroughly. And Kantianism, having become my very atmosphere, proceeded to poison me like a lyric poem would.”¹⁹³ Bely was also devoted to neo-Kantianism: in *The Beginning of the Century*, Bely mentions his six-year immersion in Heinrich Richter’s neo-Kantian philosophy.¹⁹⁴ Bely’s description of Nikolay serves as an example of self-irony:

Nikolay Apollonovich was an enlightened man; Nikolay Apollonovich had not devoted the best years of his life to philosophy in vain ... for the philosopher, the source of perfection was Thought; God, in a manner of speaking or Perfect Law ... And the law-makers of the great religions expressed their laws in figurative forms. (p. 314)

¹⁹² Cassedy, “Bely the Thinker,” 313.

¹⁹³ Andrei Belyi, *Nachalo veka* (Moscow, Leningrad: 1933), 257; trans. and cited by Cassedy, in “Bely the Thinker,” 314.

¹⁹⁴ Belyi, *Nachalo veka* (1990 ed.), 24.

Николай Аполлонович был человек просвещенный; Николай Аполлонович не бессмысленно посвятил философии свои лучшие годы жизни ... для философа источником совершенства была Мысль: так сказать, Бог, то есть Совершенное Правило ... Законодатели же великих религий разнообразные правила выражали в образной форме. (p. 238)

This depiction of Nikolay's beliefs resembles Bely's own early philosophical ideas. In his 1905 article "Apocalypse in Russian Poetry" ("Апокалипсис в русской поэзии"), Bely writes: "The goal of poetry is to find an image of a muse and to express in this image the unity of universal truth. The goal of religion is to embody this unity" ("Цель поэзии – найти лик музы, выразить в этом лике мировое единство вселенской истины. Цель религии – воплотить это единство").¹⁹⁵ The parody of Nikolay's philosophy reveals Bely's ironic view of his own past.

The depiction of Nikolay's love life also contains Bely's autobiographical references. Nikolay's attempt at suicide, by jumping from the Troitsky Bridge after Sophia Petrovna rejects him, evokes Bely's own suicide attempt after Lyubov Blok rejected him. Several pages after the description of Nikolay's attempt, the narrator digresses:

Oh, great bridge, shining with electricity! Oh, green waters seething with bacilli! I remember a certain fateful moment; over your damp railings I too lent on a September night: a moment and my body would have flown into the mists. (p. 298)

О, большой, электричеством блестящий мост! О, зеленые, кишасщие бациллами воды! Помню я одно роковое мгновенье; чрез твои серые перила сентябрьскою ночью я перегнулся; и миг: тело мое пролетело б в туманы. (p. 218)

Nikolay's suicide attempt here becomes another self-ironic memory of Bely's impetuous youth. Bely's parodic portrayal of Nikolay as an easily swayed, passionate youth suggests not just Bely himself, but also his entire generation in the years of their young adulthood: all the young Symbolists and their often misguided preoccupations. Nikolay's conclusion after his Dionysian

¹⁹⁵ Belyi, "Apokalipsis v russkoi poezii," 230.

moment thus could apply to Bely's literary peers: "Everything, everything must be shaken off, forgotten, everything, everything must be learned again, as it is learned in childhood" (p. 415) ("Надо было все, все – отрясти, позабыть, надо было – всему, всему – опять научиться, как учатся в детстве"; p. 322). Nikolay is the only major character to escape the circle of eternal return, however, and perhaps this indicates Bely's faith in his generation's ability to move the evolutionary spiral to its next phase.

Faith notwithstanding, Nikolay is unfit to enact the movement of Bely's evolutionary spiral. Nikolay's philosophy lacks a meaningful connection between thought and feelings. His instincts and desires are disconnected from his thought. Nikolay thus appears as a "brainless idiot." In terms of Bely's triangle, which states that a man can successfully make a Dionysian leap and destroy dogmatic culture only if he has a lively connection between his head (mind), heart (feelings), and hand (will), Nikolay represents not just the disconnection between feeling and thought, but also primitive instincts not yet formed into mature feelings. He is not associated with any geometrical figure, but remains directionless. As discussed previously, Maguire and Malmstad convincingly argue that Bely uses a Tolstoyan "marking device" to exteriorize his characters' main traits, ascribing to them one particular physical feature. In Nikolay's case, it is his lack of arms. Almost every description of him reinforces this. While standing on the bridge, "Nikolay Apollonovich ... presented a rather ridiculous figure: tightly wrapped in the greatcoat he appeared stooping and somehow armless" (p. 64) ("Николай Аполлонович ... представлял собой довольно смешную фигуру: запахнувшись в шинель, он казался сутулым и каким-то безруким"; p. 43). His arms seem to serve no purpose. Greeting his father, "Nikolay Apollonovich felt his daily confusion: his two completely unnecessary arms hung down on both

sides of his waist” (p. 131) (“Николай Аполлонович ощутил ежедневное замешательство: у него свисали с плечей две совершенно ненужных руки по обе стороны туловища”; p. 116).

The uselessness of Nikolay’s arms, in the context of Bely’s triangle, suggests his lack of will, in contrast to the mobility of Dudkin’s hands, which represent his strong will. The implications of Nikolay’s armlessness are reinforced by his indecisiveness and passivity. He can’t decide about his feelings for Sophia Petrovna or his father, and he gives a meaningless promise to the party; yet he takes no action to resolve these dilemmas. Instead, he continues his affair with Sophia Petrovna and prolongs the status quo of his relationship with his father to maintain the pretense of harmony; meanwhile, when faced with the consequences of his promise to the party, he runs to Dudkin for help. Since Nikolay represents neo-Kantianism, his armlessness also implies the uselessness of this philosophy in the process of cultural evolution.

Since two of the main characters — Apollon and Nikolay — represent two governing philosophical systems, their inactivity suggests the ineffectiveness of those philosophical schools. In terms of Bely’s evolutionary model, they represent the obsolete circle in which *Petersburg* is caught. Bely presents both Evolutionism and neo-Kantianism as responsible for the stagnancy of this evolutionary phase: Evolutionism opposes Bely’s desire to link the noumenal and phenomenal realms, while Neo-Kantianism does not offer any meaningful opposition to the preceding system. Bely sees the two movements as similar in that they cannot further cultural evolution, as he states in “Circular Movement”:

Let’s recall: the last tension of the blinking instantaneous dot is the tension to expand from a frog to a bull; let’s remember Krylov’s fable: in it, the frog bursts out. As we have seen the philosophy of evolution also bursts into the philosophy of dogmatism. Spenser is torn apart due to the tension and the torn Spenser — is in Cohen. And together with the torn Spenser evolutionary Modernism should burst out into the completeness of Classicism.

Вспомним: последнее напряжение мигающей точки мгновения – напряжение расширится из лягушки до вола; вспомним басню Крылова: лягушка там лопается. Лопается, как видели мы, и философия эволюции в философию догматизма. С напряжения разрывается Спенсер; и разорванный Спенсер – в Когене. И с лопнувшим Спенсером эволюционирующий модернизм должен лопнуть в законченность классицизма.¹⁹⁶

The similarity between these two supposedly opposite philosophies is underscored in the novel by the similarities between Apollon and his supposedly very different son, Nikolay. Their physical appearance, movements, work habits, and even their likes and dislikes are virtually identical. In opposition to them stands Dudkin, the proponent of Nietzschean philosophy, which Bely regarded as the only new, revolutionary school of thought. Although Dudkin himself falls, it remains to be seen if he is able to ignite a spark of the new in the old thought.

¹⁹⁶ Belyi, “Krugovoe dvizhenie,” 15.

Chapter 5: Bely's Mythology of Human and Universal Evolution

Section One: Apollon and Nikolay as Steinerian Saturn and Jupiter

Since Apollon and Nikolay represent current reigning philosophies, they play a central role in Bely's evolutionary model: their ineffective beliefs show us which philosophical schools are upholding dogma and impeding evolution. The Ableukhovs' importance extends to both the cultural and universal levels of Bely's evolutionary design. As we have seen, the Ableukhovs are the only characters in the novel with an innate access to the transcendental realm. The opening in their heads permits their consciousness to embark on astral journeys. Since Bely based his evolutionary model on Steinerian teachings, we can infer that his depiction of the transcendental realm as a cosmic expanse refers to anthroposophical cosmology. In fact, Apollon and Nikolay are associated with Saturn and Jupiter: Steiner viewed these planets as the first spiritual stage and future phase of the universe. Bely uses both Steiner's cosmology and other diverse allusions to associate these characters with anthroposophical evolutionary stages.

A short summary of anthroposophical cosmology will clarify how Bely bends it to his own purposes. According to Steiner, universal and human evolution goes through seven stages: Saturn, Sun, Moon, Earth, Jupiter, Venus, and Mars. These names refer to the Earth's developmental phases leading to higher spiritualization. Each stage consists of seven evolutionary circles, called ages, and each age goes through seven developmental stages, named epochs. For example, the Earth phase of development consists of seven ages: Polaris, Hyperborea, Lemuria, Atlantis, post-Atlantis (which is our present time), and two more ages still to come and hence unnamed. All these ages go through seven circles of development. Our time, the post-Atlantis age, has already gone through the epochs of Ancient India, Ancient Persia,

Egypt, and Greece-Rome. We are now in the fifth epoch and still have two more to go through until we reach a new age. A recapitulation of the previous stage, but on a higher spiritual level, occurs at the onset of each new evolutionary stage. In between all the stages, ages, and epochs of universal evolution a pause takes place, called Prayala, during which the universe, connected with the Spirit, becomes more spiritualized in preparation for the next phase. This universal evolution corresponds to individual evolution. After death, the individual soul relives its previous incarnations in order to learn from them, and then becomes united with the Spirit in preparation for its next incarnation. While the universe is always reincarnated on a higher spiritual level, individual reincarnation is subject to the laws of karma.¹⁹⁷ Characteristically, Bely does not subscribe to all of Steinerian evolutionary theory, but only chooses elements that suit his own views of historical, cultural, and universal evolution.

The character most vividly and consistently associated with cosmic imagery is Apollon. Besides his huge, greenish ears, his main physical features are his large eyes “surrounded by black-green orbits” (p. 10) (“окруженные черно-зеленым орбитами”; p. 10), and his head, described as “boldness shining like a wax” (p. 127) (“как лак сиявшая лысина”; p. 107). These physical features resemble the globe of a planet. This initiates a series of cosmic motifs throughout the novel. The Senator has always had a keen interest in the stars. During Nikolay’s youth, Apollon tries to acquaint his son with the stars:

The tender father would lead the little boy over to the window and raised his fingers to the stars:

“The stars are far away Kolenka: it takes a pencil of rays more than two years to travel from the nearest star to the earth.” (p. 191)

¹⁹⁷ For a more detailed description of Steiner’s cosmology, see Roy Wilkinson, *Rudolf Steiner: Aspects of His Spiritual World-view* (London: Temple Lodge Publishing, 1993), vol. 2; Rudolf Steiner, *An Outline of Occult Science* (London: Theosophical Pub. Society, 1914), chap. 4.

нежный отец подводил к окну мальчугана, поднимал палец на звезды:
 “Звезды, Коленька, далеко: от ближайшей звезды лучевой пучок
 пробегает к земле два с лишним года.” (p. 120)

We also see Apollon’s interest in heavenly bodies elsewhere: on the way to work, “he calculated the intensity of the light that was perceptible from Saturn” (p. 32) (“высчитывал силу света, воспринимаемого с Сатурна”; p. 21). Apollon’s interest in Saturn hints at the later revelation: Nikolay, in a dream, realizes that “his father was Saturn” (p. 351) (“отец был – Сатурн”; p. 242). That is not to say that Apollon is a planet; Saturn represents the first evolutionary stage in Steinerian cosmology, so the Senator is associated with that first phase. This broadens our image of Apollon. We have seen him as a government official overseeing dead dogma, and as a proponent of the outmoded philosophy upholding this dogma. His identification with Saturn expands his image to a cosmological level: from a representative of earthly powers impeding universal evolution, he develops into the first stage of the cosmic evolutionary process.

Since the Senator is not just a private figure, but also an important government official leading the country, his identification with Saturn implies that the Earth is in the grips of its previous phases of development. Cosmological imagery reinforces this suggestion. At the beginning of the novel, when Apollon is on his way to the office, the narrator describes the crowds on Nevsky Prospect as a planetary system:

Welded together by the mirage the stream was disintegrating within itself into the elements of a stream: element upon element flowed by; perceptibly to the mind each was withdrawing from each like a planetary system from planetary system; neighbor was here in the same approximate relation to neighbor as that of a pencil of ray from the celestial vault to the retina of the eye, conveying to the center of the brain along the telegraph of the nerves a troubled, stellar, shimmering message. (p. 32)

Спаянный маревом сам в себе поток распадался на звенья потока: протекало звено за звеном; умопостигаемо каждое удалялось от каждого, как система планет от системы планет; ближний к ближнему тут находился в таком же приблизительном отношении, в каковом находится лучевой пучок

небосвода в отношении к сетчатой оболочке, проводящей в мозговой центр по нервному телеграфу смутную, звездную, промерцавшую весть. (p. 20)

This passage is followed by the depiction of the Senator's means of communicating his orders:

The aged senator communicated with the crowd that flowed before him by means of wires (telegraph and telephone); and the shadowy stream was borne to his consciousness like tidings that calmly flowed beyond the distances of the world. (p. 32)

С предтекущей толпой престарелый сенатор сообщался при помощи проволок (телеграфных и телефонных); и поток теневой сознанию его предносился, как за далями мира спокойно текущая весть. (p. 20)

The juxtaposition of the light penetrating the planet and the Senator's orders penetrating the masses, both described as telegraph/telephone lines, suggests that Apollon imagines that he is a cosmic power transmitting directions to the Earth's inhabitants. However, as we have seen, his decrees are inefficient and often do not reach their intended recipients. He is also described as "very old" ("престарелый"). The cosmic imagery and the Senator's age suggest that Earth is still, however superficially, under the control of powers representing its previous stage of development.

The next paragraph identifies Apollon as a saturnine power: at that moment he contemplates Saturn. Moving from literary to scientific imagery, Bely here describes the Senator as a Newtonian force keeping Earth in its gravitational power:

Here, in the office of the lofty Institution, Apollon Apollonovich was truly growing into a kind of center ... Here he was a point of radiating energy, an intersection of forces ... Here Apollon Apollonovich was a force in the Newtonian sense; as the force in the Newtonian sense is, as you probably do not know, an occult force. (p. 68)

Здесь, в кабинете высокого Учреждения, Аполлон Аполлонович воистину вырастал в некий центр ... Здесь он являлся силовой излучающей точкою ... Здесь Аполлон Аполлонович был силой в ньютоновском смысле; а сила в ньютоновском смысле, как верно, неведомо вам, есть оккультная сила. (p. 46)

The identification of Newtonian laws as an occultist power points to anthroposophy, although the reason for this is beyond the scope of this work. What is important for our analysis is that the reference to anthroposophy unifies the cosmological images associated with the Senator under the umbrella of Steiner's evolutionary model. Steinerian theory is evoked in the initial mention of Apollon's interest in celestial bodies, the hints at his connection with Saturn, his identification as Saturn in his son's dream, and in the Newtonian power that he thinks he exerts over the Earth. Bely also describes the Senator's head as Earth during the revelatory dream when Apollon's consciousness flies from the opening in his cranium:

Apollon Apollonovich flew out through the circular breach into the blueness, into the darkness, like a golden-plumed star; and, having flown sufficiently high above his head (which seemed to him like the planet Earth), the gold-plumed star ... disintegrated into sparks. (p. 158)

Аполлон Аполлонович вылетел через круглую брешь в синеву, в темноту, златоперной звездой; и взлетевши достаточно высоко над своей головой (показавшейся ему планетой Земля), златоперная звездочка ... разлетелась на искры. (p. 140)

All the cosmic images imply that saturnine powers control the Earth, which is still in the Steinerian first stage of evolution. However, allusions to Apollon's ineffectiveness as a State official subvert this idea, instead suggesting that these saturnine powers are illusory and about to be overthrown. Nevertheless, the outmoded evolutionary stage is still officially in power, which is also implied by the novel's vaporous foggy imagery. Steiner believed that Earth's matter went through various stages of formation before its solidification, while remaining in gaseous form.

By asserting and subverting the image of the Senator as Steinerian Saturn, Bely depicts the current era as the beginning of the end of this phase: having completed the entire circle, contemporary culture is now repeating its beginning. We have seen that Bely, unlike Steiner, regarded the Egyptian era as the first epoch of human earthly development, and that Bely

frequently likens Apollon to an Egyptian figure, most vividly at the ball. Apollon appears as both Saturn, the first stage of universal development, and an Egyptian, the first epoch of human development. Bely thus implies that humanity is at the bottom circle of his spiral. By emphasizing specific numbers, Bely places the events within a precise cosmological context. He portrays the 1905 revolution as what he hoped it would be: the onset of the new stage of universal and human development.

According to Steinerian theory, humanity is now in Earth's fifth (post-Atlantic) age, and in its fifth epoch. Steiner believed that a period of 2160 years separates one epoch from another.¹⁹⁸ In Bely's novel, we find repeated references to a period of two and a half years, or as Bely frequently puts it, "a little over two years" ("два с лишним года"). Bely also often employs the numbers five and zero in relation to his characters. Except for the Senator's age (sixty-seven), there are no other numbers in the novel. We find a hint of the meaning of these numbers in the scene where Apollon shows young Nikolay the stars, saying: "It takes a pencil of rays more than two years to travel from the nearest star to the earth" (p. 132) ("от ближайшей звезды лучевой пучок пробегает к земле два с лишним года"; p. 120). This scene endows the number two and a half, or a bit more than two, with a cosmological meaning, creating an additional association with Steinerian theory. We can infer that two and a half signifies the period of time between two epochs of human development. Simple calculations support this interpretation.

We have seen that Steiner's theory places our current era in the fifth epoch of the post-Atlantean age of the Earth; thus it is significant that the Senator began his job five years ago: "Five years had now passed since Apollon Apollonovich rolled up to the Institution as the junior

¹⁹⁸ Wilkinson, *Rudolf Steiner*, 1:42.

head of the Institution: over five years had passed since that time!” (p. 34) (“Пять лет уж прошло с той поры, как Аполлон Аполлонович подкатил к Учреждению безответственным главой Учреждения: пять с лишком лет прошло с той поры!” (p. 22). Bely underscores the importance of the time period with the repeated phrase “five years” and the emphatic exclamation mark. In the context of the novel, five equals two epochs of human development; by referring to the period that began five years earlier, Bely positions the novel in the Egyptian era and associates the beginning of Apollon’s career with the first epoch of human development.

While the number five refers to the inception of the novel’s universe, the number two and a half signifies changes within the novel’s universe, which Bely sees as a movement to the next stage of development. The main characters have undergone several changes precisely two and a half years prior to the present moment in the novel:

For two years now Nikolay Apollonovich had not risen before noon. Two and a half years before that he had woken up earlier: had woken up at nine o’clock, at half past nine appearing in a tightly buttoned-up uniform jacket, for the family imbibing of coffee.

Two and a half years ago, Nikolay Apollonovich had not paced about the house in a Bukharian robe ... two and a half years before Anna Petrovna, Nikolay Apollonovich’s mother and Apollon Apollonovich’s spouse, had finally abandoned the family hearth, inspired by an Italian artist. (p. 51)

Два уже года Николай Аполлонович не поднимался раньше полудня. Два с половиной ж года перед тем пробуждался он ранее: пробуждался в девять часов, в половине десятого появляясь в мундире ... для семейного распивания кофея.

Два с половиною года назад Николай Аполлонович не расхаживал по дому в бухарском халате ... два с половиною года назад Анна Петровна, мать Николая Аполлоновича и супруга Аполлона Аполлоновича, окончательно покинула семейный очаг, вдохновленная итальянским артистом. (p. 40)

It has also been two and a half years since Dudkin arrived in Petersburg from Helsingfors, abandoning his Nietzschean ideas and becoming interested in theosophy.

Two and a half years signifies the span of time between cultural epochs, thus taking us back to the previous epoch, the Greco-Roman period. Although leading intellectuals of that era regarded Classicism as a dead cultural period, Bely disagreed: he considered Ancient Egypt, not Ancient Greece, to be a dead culture that reappears in modern times.¹⁹⁹ Bely was not a proponent of classical culture: in “The Line, the Circle, the Spiral,” he argues that classical art, as the art of the past, belongs in a museum.²⁰⁰ Yet in the same article he views this period as a small step towards cultural evolution, since he finds a spark of inspiration in Greco-Roman art:

In the Venus de Milo we observe symptoms of evolution: in it evolution can be seen, in comparison to ... the Cheops Pyramid.

If Classicism were really unchangeable, its emblem would be not Venus but a pyramid.

В Венере Милосской наблюдаем мы симптомы эволюционности: в ней видна эволюция по сравнению ... с Хеопсовой пирамидой.

Если бы классицизм был бы подлинно неизменен, то эмблемой эго уж конечно бы служила не Венера, а ... пирамида.²⁰¹

Thus Bely regards as “classical” the unchanging, truly dead Egyptian culture, not the actual Greco-Roman era.

These numerical manipulations serve as Bely’s playful way of underscoring and unifying his abundant references to classical culture: they are encoded in Apollon Apollonovich’s name and house, in the references to the Venus de Milo, and other details. They serve as palpable indication of changes that happen within the characters. The period of two and a half years prior to the present time of the novel signifies the characters’ impulses to change the status quo and take small steps towards evolution, a slight movement away from dogma. Both Dudkin and

¹⁹⁹ Belyi, “Liniia, krug, spiral’,” 15.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Nikolay are connected respectively with revolution and dogma, so the changes they undergo relate to Bely's universal spiral. Since the main characters experienced changes two and a half years earlier, the action of the novel is placed in the fifth epoch of the post-Atlantean age of Earth's evolution. Bely repeatedly identifies the time of the novel as November of 1905, when the main characters come out of their "hiding" and enter public life: Dudkin leaves his garret and delivers the bomb to Nikolay; Nikolay is forced to enter the political fray after receiving a letter ordering him to kill his father; Anna Petrovna returns to her family in Petersburg after she has been rejected by the Italian singer.

A third major character also appears at this time: Peter the Great. I earlier proposed that he represents a universal Dionysian moment, when evolution to the next level is possible. Peter's possible significance as a Dionysian agent is represented by thermodynamic imagery. Indeed, the entire universe of *Petersburg* is depicted as a big red sphere which becomes hotter and hotter to the point that it is about to explode. The same thermodynamic imagery is associated with the main characters. They experience the expansion of red spheres in their chests, which represents their irrational, Dionysian side. The Dionysian upsurge is caused by the growing revolutionary unrest. The revolution of 1905 is thus presented as a Dionysian moment permitting the leap to the next evolutionary epoch.

By placing the 1905 revolution in the context of Steinerian cosmology, Bely achieves several goals. He presents the events of that era as he saw them in his youth, when he expected the revolution to be a Solovyovian, apocalyptic event, and he also explains why it did not turn out to be so. In anthroposophical cosmology, the apocalyptic event taking us to the next age of development is to take place in the seventh, not the fifth, epoch of the post-Atlantean age. At the same time, Bely uses Steinerian cosmology as a justification for his high hopes. By portraying

the present as the next epoch after the Greco-Roman era, during which evolutionary movement did occur, he validates his expectations of further evolution during the next epoch, the present. Bely's implication that the outcome of the revolution depends on Dudkin and Nikolay further elucidates the failure of the 1905 revolution. As we have seen, Dudkin represents a Nietzschean figure caught in the cycle of eternal return, while Nikolay represents neo-Kantianism, which brings nothing new to counter Evolutionism. Therefore neither character can bring about the next, higher epoch. Bely uses his main characters to suggest that neither of the leading philosophies of his era can break dogma and initiate evolutionary development. Although we are at the point where the next epoch should arrive, Bely implies that humanity is not ready for that next phase. Since Bely believes that mankind is in charge of enacting evolution, man's inability to do so ultimately impedes universal evolution.

Anna Petrovna plays a different role in the cosmological context of the novel. Although not a main character, she initiates changes in Nikolay by leaving her loveless marriage. Her act unleashes Nikolay's dormant hatred for his father and emboldens him to separate himself from Apollon: the pretense of a well-functioning family has been broken. In cultural terms, Anna Petrovna's act frees Nikolay from his father's Evolutionism and allows him to embark on his own philosophical search. However, when her romance has ended, Anna Petrovna does not progress, but attempts to return to the past. She returns to Petersburg, hoping to be taken back by her husband. However, her attempt to restore the status quo fails after the bomb explodes in their apartment. This implies a positive message: the past cannot be restored, and whatever lies ahead is a progression, even if the next evolutionary stage seems far away.

Bely reveals Nikolay's importance through imagery of expanding gas. We have seen that the dominant image in the first part of the novel is that of the expanding red sphere, which

denotes the subconscious in a Freudian-Steinerian sense — as the truthful sphere of human existence, but also as a sphere where connection with the Spirit occurs. While minor characters at the ball experience revelations, Nikolay’s Dionysian true self is awakened. When Nikolay rereads the party letter after the ball, the shock causes his subconscious to explode:

And here, in the darkness, in the place where his heart was, a spark flared ... with frenzied swiftness it turned into a crimson sphere: the sphere expanded, expanded, expanded; and the sphere burst: everything bursts. (p. 222)

и тут, в темноте, в месте сердца, вспыхнула искорка ... искорка с бешеной быстротой превратилась в багровый шар: шар – ширился, ширился; и шар лопнул: лопнуло все. (p. 187)

The bursting of the red sphere signifies the outburst of Nikolay’s subconscious, since immediately afterwards he experiences his Dionysian moment, which apparently reveals his heredity and awakens his etheric body. He describes this moment to Dudkin:

“It was as though a bandage had been removed from all my sensations ... There was a stirring above my head – you know? My hair stood on end: I understand what that means; only it wasn’t that – not my hair, because one stands with one’s head exposed ... it was my whole body, standing, like hair – on end: it was bristling with little hairs; and my legs and my arms and my chest – they were all as if made of invisible fur that was being tickled with straw, or like this too: as if one were getting into a cold bath of Narzan mineral water and there were little bubbles of carbon dioxide on one’s skin – tickling, pulsating, racing – faster and faster.” (p. 332)

“Будто слетела какая-то повязка со всех ощущений... Шевелилось над головой – знаете? Волосы дыбом: это я понимаю, что значит; только это не то – не волосы, потому что стоишь с раскрывшимся теменем ... все тело было, как волосы, - дыбом: ошевелилось волосинками; и ноги и руки и грудь – все, будто из невидимой щерсти, которою щекочат соломинкой; или вот тоже: будто садишься в наразнную холодную ванну и углекислота пузырьками по коже – щекочет, пульсирует, бегают – все быстрее, быстрее.” (p. 264)

Bely underscores the meaning of Nikolay's experience by using Dudkin, who has already experienced a Dionysian moment and is familiar with theosophy, to explain to Nikolay that this is a Steinerian awakening of the soul:

“Nikolay Apollonovich, it's just your sensations that appear strange to you; it's just that you've been sitting too long with Kant in an unaired room; you've been struck by a tornado – and you've started to notice things about yourself: you have listened carefully to the tornado and you have heard yourself in it ... Your states of mind have been described in variety of forms; they are the subjects of observation, of study ... But the more suitable term would be a different one: the pulsation of the elemental body. This is precisely how you experienced yourself; under the influence of a shock the elemental body within you gave a perfectly real shudder.” (p. 336)

“Это вам только, Николай Аполлонович, ощущения кажутся странными; просто вы до сих пор сидели под Кантом в непроветренной комнате; налетел на вас шквал – вот и стали вы в себе замечать: вы прислушались к шквалу; и себя услышали в нем...Состояния ваши многообразно описаны; они – предмет наблюдения, учебы... Но более соответственным термином будет термин иной: пульсация стихийного тела. Вы как именно пережили себя; под влиянием потрясения совершенно реально в вас дрогнуло стихийное тело.” (p. 268)

In Steinerian theory, the human body has a three-fold nature: it possesses physical, astral, and etheric bodies which correspond to man's material nature, his desires (linked to the astral realm), and his life, which animates the other two bodies.²⁰² Nikolay has a physical body, and his astral journeys during a semi-sleeping state prove that he possesses an astral body, but he has so far lacked an etheric body, which is life itself. Until Nikolay undergoes his Dionysian moment, he leads a sleep-like existence in his lifeless study. The Dionysian moment signifies Nikolay's awakening from his lifeless existence, his real birth.

Nikolay's “birth” is accompanied by the feeling of expanding gases within him; from then on the novel is dominated by images of expansion within Nikolay and his father. Right

²⁰² For a detailed description of Steiner's theory of the three-fold nature of the human body, see Wilkinson, *Rudolf Steiner*, 23-45.

after his Dionysian moment, Nikolay recalls his recurring childhood nightmare of internal expansion caused by his swallowing a ball, Pepp Peppovich Pepp:

In his childhood Kolenka suffered from delirium; at night a small elastic ball would sometimes begin to bounce in front of him, made perhaps of a rubber, perhaps of *the matter of very strange worlds*; the elastic ball, as it touched the floor, made a quiet lacquered sound: pep-peppep. Suddenly the ball, swelling up horribly, would assume the perfect semblance of a sphere-shaped little gentleman; and the fat gentleman, having become an agonizing sphere, kept getting bigger and bigger ... And Nikolenka, altogether in delirium, would proceed to shriek idle, nonsensical things – always about one and the same: that he too was becoming round, that he too was round zero. (p. 310)

В детстве Коленка бредил; по ночам иногда перед ним начинал попрыгивать эластичный комочек, не то – из резины, не то – *из материи очень странных миров*²⁰³; эластичный комочек, касаясь пола, вызывал на полу тихий лаковый звук: пепп-пеппеп. Вдруг комочек, разбухая до ужаса, принимал всю видимость шаровидного толстяка-господина; господин же толстяк, став томительным шаром, - все ширился, ширился ... А Николенка, весь в бреду, принимался выкрикивать ... все о том, об одном: что и округляется, что и он круглый ноль, все в нем нолилось. (p. 231)

Nikolay's childhood nightmare, in which he feels like a ball made of "a matter of very strange worlds" ("материи очень странных миров"), hints that he may represent more than just a mere youth. Later we discover that he has been expanding his entire life. While explaining his Dionysian experience to Dudkin, he says: "It seems to me that I swell up all over, that I've been swelling up for a long time, perhaps for hundreds of years" (p. 331) ("Мне кажется – весь-то пухну, весь-то я давно пораспух: может быть сотни лет, как я пухну"; p. 264). He later elaborates on the revelations he had in his semi-sleep state:

"It was as though I had a revelation that I was growing; I was growing, if you know what I mean, into immeasurability, traversing space ... and then the growing stopped (there was simply no more room left for growth anywhere, into anything); but in this fact, that it was ending, in the end, in the conclusion – there it seemed to me, was some kind of another beginning." (p. 335)

²⁰³ Italics are mine.

“Будто какое-то откровение, что я – рос; рос я, знаете ли, в неизмеримость, преодолевая пространство ... и уже приканчивался рост (просто расти было некуда, не во что); в этом же, что кончалось, в конце, в окончании, - там, казалось мне, было какое-то иное начало.” (p. 267)

During his dream-like state, Nikolay also feels that something is turning inside him: “The dreadful contents of Nikolay Apollonovich’s soul whirled restlessly (in the place where his heart ought to be), like a humming top” (p. 312) (“Ужасное содержание души Николая Аполлоновича беспокойно вертелось [там, в месте сердца], как жужжавший волчок”; p. 243). Finally, he feels that his expansion enters Saturn’s orbit:

But it did not torment him; something else did: his old sense of delirium.

“Pepp Peppovich ... Pepp ...”

It was he; swelling into colossus, from the fourth dimension he was penetrating the yellow house ... and his soul was becoming a surface: yes, a surface of an enormous and rapidly growing bubble, swollen into Saturn’s orbit. (p. 490)

Но его ... иное терзало: старое, бредное чувство.

“Пепп Пеппович...Пепп...”

Это он, разбухая в громаду, из четвертого измерения проицал желтый дом ... и душа становилась поверхностью: да, поверхностью огромного и быстро растущего пузыря, раздутая в сатурнову орбиту. (p. 420)

Nikolay’s “birth,” which occurs during his Dionysian moment, is followed by his childhood memory of expansion and his realization that he has been unknowingly expanding his entire life. This expansion is not just normal physical growth, as becomes clear when the cosmic imagery becomes more prevalent, both in Nikolay’s own description of his revelations, and in the narrator’s depiction of Nikolay’s post-revelatory impressions. The equation of the growing ball from his childhood, Pepp Peppovich Pepp, with Nikolay’s present expansion implies that Nikolay is a continuously growing gaseous body and that his expansion is the growth of a new

planet: he feels gas expanding within him and “a humming top” (“жужжавший волчок”) in place of his heart.²⁰⁴

Cosmic imagery links Nikolay’s expansion to Steinerian cosmology: his cosmic growth can be interpreted as the onset of a new evolutionary stage, since one of the revelations of his Dionysian awakening is the possibility that his father represents Saturn, the first phase of Steinerian evolution. According to Steiner, the stage of cosmic development following Saturn is the Sun. However, Bely implies that the present era, the fifth epoch of the post-Atlantean age, is still in the fading, saturnine stage. Bely thus overlaps the saturnine stage with the fifth epoch. The next phase following the Earth, according to Steiner, is Jupiter: Nikolay’s growth can be interpreted as the Jupiter stage of evolution. The mythological imagery associated with

²⁰⁴ At the time of Bely’s university studies and up to the second part of the twentieth century, the most widely accepted theory for the formation of the planets was Emanuel Swedenborg’s, as formulated in the early eighteenth century. This theory (known as the nebular hypothesis) states that stars form in big and dense clouds of molecular hydrogen. Eventually matter coalesces into dense clumps, collapses (according to the Newtonian Law of Gravity), and then forms stars. There is always a great deal of gas around new stars, which spins around in the form of a disk. This gas then coalesces and forms into planets around a star. Many of these planets end up being gas giants, like Jupiter and Saturn. The formation of cold gas giants happens when planets are far away from the star, beyond the so-called snow line. The inner part of these planets keeps growing but at some point they begin to accumulate gases, such as hydrogen and helium, and these gases “stick” to the central core according to the gravitational law. This is a very slow process and takes millions of years. This accumulation of gases stops when the gases run out, and the end result is a gas giant like Jupiter or Saturn. Swedenborg’s Nebular Hypothesis was based on Newtonian-Kepler physical laws of mechanics. Although the details of the creation and death of stars and planets were not known, these processes were inferred from the Newtonian Laws which substantiated Kepler’s description of our solar system. For more information about Swedenborg’s Hypothesis and giant planets see: Patrick Irwin, *Giant Planets of Our Solar System* (New York: Springer, 2003), 22-37, 47-54; A. I. Eremeeva, *Vydaiushchiesia astronomy mira* (Moscow: Kniga, 1966), 169-73. A detailed description of Russian astronomers’ work on Jupiter and Saturn can be found in B. A. Antonov, ed., *Ocherki otechestvennoi astronomii* (Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1992), 433-44. For a good general description of the development of astronomy in Russia see V. V. Sobolev, *Istoriia astronomii v Rossii i SSSR* (Moscow: Ianus-K, 1999), 7-39.

Although Bely was not an astronomer, he was somewhat acquainted with astronomy through his youthful friendship with an astronomy professor, Vitold Karlovich Cherkasky, and Cherkasky’s assistant, P. K. Shternberg, who later described the properties of Jupiter’s “Red Spot.” In his memoirs Bely describes his visit to Cherkasky’s observatory and Cherkasky’s explanations of the planets (*Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii*, 235-38). During the period of his vacillations concerning his future career, Bely also participated in Professor Zograf’s geography classes, which included meteorological observation in Moscow University’s astronomical observatory (*Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii*, 405-408). Furthermore, Bely could easily supplement his general knowledge of astronomy with his in-depth knowledge of physics and Newtonian Laws. Moscow University’s astronomical department focused on astrophysics, rather than astrometrics, as was also the case with Petersburg’s Pulkovo Observatory (Konstantin Ivanov, *Nebo v zemnom otrazhenii* [Moscow: Teritorii budushchego, 2008]).

Nikolay's revelation reinforces this connection. In Greek mythology Saturn was one of the Titans, who after receiving a prophecy that one of his children would overthrow his reign, devoured the first five of his children. His wife, Ops, hid the sixth of their children, Jupiter, and saved him from death. Jupiter eventually poisoned his father and took over his reign.²⁰⁵ In Steinerian cosmology, Jupiter is the sixth stage of universal and human evolution.

This view of Nikolay as Jupiter is also supported by the gas imagery connected with his father. As Nikolay feels the expansion of gases, Apollon, the saturnine stage, begins to lose them. Before the Dionysian moment at the ball, the imagery connected with Apollon was also that of the expanding red sphere. We are also told on several occasions that he suffers from hemorrhoids. His ailment paradoxically reinforces his vitality, since the blood pulsating in his veins connotes life. However, the events of the ball mark a dramatic change in his career and in the imagery associated with him. As we remember, Nikolay absent-mindedly lifts his Red Domino mask during the ball and unveils his identity. The scandal ends the Senator's career:

Within twenty-four hours ... Apollon Ableukhov swiftly flew down the rungs of his civil service career ... People said later that the cause of it was the scandal with his son ... Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov was in no uncertain terms struck off the list of candidates for a government post of exceptional importance. (p. 498)

В двадцать четыре часа ... Аполлон Аполлонович Аблеухов стремительно полетел со ступенек служебной карьеры ... Говорили в последствии, что тому причинно послужил скандал с его сыном ... Аполлон Аполлонович Аблеухов был решительно вычеркнут из кандидатского списка на исключительной важности ответственный пост. (p. 342)

Since Apollon was the leader of the old cultural dogma, the saturnine stage, Apollon's loss of his post marks the end of this stage; the change in imagery associated with Apollon underscores this.

²⁰⁵ Kathleen N. Daly, *Greek and Roman Mythology A to Z*, rev. Marian Rengel (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 115-16.

On the morning after the ball, the imagery of flowing blood and expansion is replaced by imagery of escaping gas. Apollon makes constant trips to the water closet where he “loses” his gases, and frequently uses charcoal tablets, which help him to absorb some of the escaping gases. This imagery is augmented by the fact that Apollon begins to age rapidly and inexplicably after he learns of Nikolay’s revolutionary actions. Both Morkovin and Nikolay suddenly see Apollon as very old, and Morkovin calls him “a ruin” (“развалина”). The day after the ball, when Apollon abandons his professional duties, his employee comes to his house and views him the same way: “The deputy director ... now respectfully bowed to this round-shoulder ruin ... Suddenly this grey ruin ... leaped swiftly to its feet” (p. 497) (“Вице-директор ... почтительно теперь наклонился перед этою сутуловатой развалиной ... Вдруг эта седая развалина ... стремительно привскочила”; p. 355). The narrator also describes Apollon as impossibly old:

And the man in his sixties became some kind of a man a thousand years old; with a strained effort that bordered on shrillness, this grey ruin began forcibly to squeeze from itself a little pun. (p. 499)

И стал шестидесятилетний – тысячелетним каким-то; с надсадою, переходящей в крикливость, эта седая развалина принялась насильственно из себя выжимать каламбурик. (p. 346)

Both the depiction of the Senator as losing gases and rapidly aging, and the title of this section of the novel (“He ceased steering” [“Он винтить перестал”]), suggest cosmological imagery. Bely thus frames the changes happening to Apollon in the context of Steinerian cosmology. In Nikolay’s semi-dream, his father is portrayed as a dying celestial body: “Everything was falling on Saturn; the atmosphere outside of the windows was growing dark, growing black ... everything was turning in reverse” (p. 334) (“Все падало на Сатурн; атмосфера за окнами темнела, чернела ... все вертелось обратно”; p. 242). This description of dying Saturn combines the astronomical image of a dying celestial body with the Steinerian

vision of an ending evolutionary stage. In astronomical terms, Saturn, having stopped turning, loses its centrifugal force: the matter in surrounding gases falls towards its center, while the gases themselves escape its orbit.²⁰⁶ However, its reversed turning indicates that we are not witnessing the death of the planet, but the end of this evolutionary stage. In anthroposophical cosmology, the ending evolutionary phase passes through the spiral of its previous stages (which can be seen as a reverse movement) in order for the universe to “recall” its previous experiences and learn from them before it proceeds to Prayala, during which it is reunited with Spirit.²⁰⁷ Bely’s astronomical imagery supplies the scientific backbone for his philosophical view of the universe, but it also plays an even more important significant role in the novel. While the first part of *Petersburg* is dominated by thermodynamic imagery, its second part is guided by an opposing image: escaping gases caused by lack of energy. Bely thus depicts the ending of an evolutionary phase through a scientific representation of dissipation of energy: Nikolay cannot sustain his growth because he lacks a strong center of gravity, and Apollon loses gases because he has lost his gravitational center. In this way Bely bases his vision of the universe on the laws of condensation and dissipation of energy.

After the bomb explodes in Apollon’s apartment, he is likened to a dead planet. In the epilogue he retires to a village where he is writing his memoirs:

A small, round-shouldered figure has appeared – in warm felt boots, mittens ... its fur collar is raised; a fur hat is pulled down over his ears ... The little old man is scribbling his memoirs, so they may see the light in the year of his death. (p. 502)

²⁰⁶ Since the processes accompanying the birth and death of planets were mostly inferred from Newtonian Laws in Bely’s era, this interpretation is plausible.

²⁰⁷ Steiner, *Outline of Occult Science*, chap. 4.

Сутуловатая показалась фигурка – в теплых валенках ... приподнят меховой воротник; меховая шапка надвинута на уши ... Старичок строчит мемуары, чтоб в год его смерти увидели свет. (p. 425)

This description of Apollon as a diminutive “little old man” (“старичок”) in winter, taken in the context of the cosmological imagery, suggests that he is the shrunken, cold center of dead Saturn. The fact that he is writing his memoirs underscores this interpretation, for in Steinerian cosmology Saturn is the planet of memory.²⁰⁸

Yet one should be cautious about interpreting Nikolay as a growing new stage of evolution, the Steinerian Jupiter. Although growing, Nikolay is not becoming a new planet. The image of growth occurring inside Nikolay is followed by images of his bursting:

Nikolay Apollonovich stood outside the window and thought ... But no sooner had a moment advanced ... than it somehow, smartly spreading in circles, turned slowly into a cosmic, swelling sphere, this sphere was bursting; his heel was slipping away into universal voids: the time traveler was hurtling, he knew not where or into what, plunging down, perhaps, into universal space. (p. 441)

Николай Аполлонович стоял у витрины и думал ... но едва мгновение наступало на него ... как-то прытко раскинувшись по кругам, превращалось в космический, разбухающий шар; шар этот лопался; пята ускользала в мировое пустоты: странник по времени рушился, неизвестно куда и во что, низвергаясь, может быть, в мировое пространство. (p. 319)

In astronomical terms, a new planet cannot be born if it lacks a stable center and is too weak to exert enough centrifugal force to accumulate gases.²⁰⁹ Bely's astronomical imagery suggests

that Nikolay is a new planet unable to sustain its growth because he lacks a strong center.

Although Nikolay experiences an awakening during his Dionysian moment, he does not acquire a defined identity and remains a puppet-like figure. During the final encounter between Nikolay and Likhutin, for instance, Nikolay denies his role in the plot, and Likhutin angrily throws him

²⁰⁸ Wilkinson, *Rudolf Steiner*, 2:1-14.

²⁰⁹ Irwin, *Giant Planets of Our Solar System*, 22-37.

like a puppet. During Nikolay's meeting with his mother, whom he has not seen in over two years, he bursts into tears, which implies that he is still an immature child. As discussed earlier, Nikolay is portrayed as an immature youth, whose philosophical convictions are divorced from reality. As we have seen, Bely's depiction of Nikolay has autobiographical undertones, extending to Bely's entire generation. Nikolay's inability to transcend dogma thus represents Bely's view of his own generation, which he considers too immature to enact the movement of his evolutionary spiral.

Nikolay's growth into a gaseous ball is also associated with the party's bomb. Nikolay wakes from his semi-conscious dream to discover his head resting on the sardine tin containing the bomb. He begins to feel as if he has swallowed the bomb and become a bomb himself.

Explaining his semi-conscious experiences to Dudkin, Nikolay says:

“Simply the devil knows what — I swallowed it; do you understand what that means? I became a bomb walking on two legs with a repulsive ticking in my belly.” (p. 382)

“Просто черт знает что – проглотил; понимаете что это значит? То есть стал ходячею на двух ногах бомбою с отвратительным тиканьем в животе.” (p. 263)

Bely's depiction of the new planet unable to sustain its development thus overlaps with the image of the bomb prepared by the “irresponsible party.” This serves as another commentary on Bely's hopes for the 1905 revolution. In his youth, Bely believed the revolution would be an apocalyptic bomb initiating a new developmental stage. Instead, the revolution turned into a non-event which did not change the status quo. Bely underscores the insignificance of the 1905 events with the bomb's explosion: the primitive, weak explosives only create a hole in the Senator's house and start a small fire, which is immediately extinguished by firemen. Except for a brief mention in the newspapers, it has no other consequences.

Bely also underscores the revolution's irrelevance on the cosmological level. Although Apollon, the saturnine stage, retires from his government post, he is immediately replaced by the vice-director of the Institution, another old man representing the same dogma:

A quarter of an hour later, in a tightly buttoned uniform with a drawn-in waist, the grey-haired deputy director with the star of Anna on his chest was already giving orders; after another twenty minutes, he bore a countenance freshly shaven and young with excitement around the halls.

Thus was the event of indescribable importance achieved. (p. 463)

Через четверть часа, в наглухо застегнутом вицмундире с обтянутой талией седовласый вице-директор с аннинской звездой на груди уже отдавал приказания; через двадцать минут свежесбривший и волнением молодеющий лик проносил он по залам.

Так совершилось событие неопикуемой важности. (p. 358)

The irony in the last sentence indicates the complete insignificance of this event that was supposed to be of great consequence. Not only the Institution, but the entire universe of *Petersburg* remains unchanged, still caught in the circle of eternal return. The narrator hints at this with an apparently insignificant utterance at the very beginning of the novel. While describing the streets of Petersburg, he mentions the “hum of yellow-red tramcars” (p.17) (“гул желто-красных трамваев”; 15), only to correct himself later on by saying:

As a preliminary, and inaccuracy that has crept ought to be corrected; the blame for it belongs not to the author, but to the author's pen: at this time tramcars were not yet running in the city. (p.17)

Предварительно следует исправить вкравшуюся неточность; в ней повинен не автор, а авторское перо: в это время трамвай ещё не бегал по городу. (p. 15)

The narrator's seemingly innocent “mistake” actually relays significant information, telling the reader that the universe of *Petersburg* exists beyond the time described in the novel.

Nevertheless, Bely presents his contemporary era as a period in which universal changes are brewing, communicating this message through Nikolay. Cosmic imagery dominates the

depiction of Nikolay's expansion, endowing the bomb, also associated with his growth, with a particular meaning. In Steinerian cosmology, the last, seventh epoch of the Earth's development was to end with an apocalyptic event taking the universe and humanity to the next developmental phase.²¹⁰ By mingling references to the bomb with cosmic imagery, Bely imbues the bomb with a new meaning. Nikolay is not only a bomb concocted by the party, but also an apocalyptic "bomb" signifying the arrival of the next evolutionary phase. Although Nikolay does not become a new cosmic entity, his internal growth transports him to cosmic expanses, however briefly. These voyages differ from his regular, semi-conscious astral journeys: they occur while Nikolay is fully conscious, and he is not simply a passive observer, but crashes into the cosmos in the form of a celestial body that fails to stabilize. His experiences of growing and bursting reveal him to be a prematurely forming, new cosmic entity, a new evolutionary phase. He is a "traveler in time" (p. 432) ("странник по времени"; p. 319); thus he is an active part, not just a spectator, of the planetary infinities which signify the realm of Spirit.

Nikolay's last experience of expansion suggests his nature as a celestial body even more strongly:

It was he; swelling into a colossus, from the fourth dimension he was penetrating the yellow house ... Nikolay Apollonovich felt distinctively cold, winds wafted against his forehead; after that, everything began to burst. (p. 487)

Это он, разбухая в громаду из четвертого измерения проникал желтый дом ... Николай Аполлонович отчетливо холодел, в лоб ему веяли ветры, всё потом лопалось. (p. 420)

The references to the cold and the blowing winds imply that his experiences represent the creation of a cold, gaseous planet, such as Jupiter. Although he does not actually become

²¹⁰ Wilkinson, *Rudolf Steiner*, 2:6-14.

Jupiter, this implies the future evolutionary stage of this “traveler in time.” His growth and bursts imply humanity’s potential for moving further along Bely’s evolutionary spiral.

Nikolay’s otherworldly experiences suggest inevitable changes in the near future, as underscored by his suddenly developing internal convictions. When Dudkin says that everything will return to the previous status quo after the bomb is tossed in the Neva, Nikolay replies:

“No, it will not come back, it will not become, it won’t ... ”

He sadly dodged the rushing couples; sadly he sighed, because he knew: it would not come right again, it would not, it would not – not ever, ever! (p. 331)

“Не вернется, не станет, не будет ...”

Он тоскливо обел мимо бегущие пары; он тоскливо вздохнул, потому что он знал: не вернется, не станет, не будет. (p. 267)

The repetition of the words “it will not come back, it will not become, it will not be” suggests that Nikolay’s internal awakening, caused by his revolutionary involvement and his entrance into real life, is irrevocable; he cannot return to the status quo. Since Nikolay represents Bely’s generation in its youth, the irreversibility of his awakening connotes the awakening of the entire young generation and implies Bely’s belief that universal changes are soon to come. This sheds a new light on Bely’s perception of the 1905 revolution. Although he presents it as a huge disappointment, since he expected it to elevate humanity to a new phase, he still views it as an awakening experience: it created youthful hope for changes. And once hope has been awakened, there is no going back to the status quo.

Bely indicates his belief in imminent universal change again through numbers, which, as we have seen, refer to Steinerian cosmology. During his expansion, Nikolay feels as if he were rounding up and taking the form of the number zero: “The dreadful content of his soul – a round zero – was turning into an agonizing sphere” (p. 312) (“ужасное содержание души – круглый

ноль – становилось томительным шаром”); p. 243). The memory of his childhood expansion indicates that then, too, he felt as if he were becoming the number zero:

And Nikolenka, altogether in delirium, would proceed to shriek idle, nonsensical things – always about one and the same: that he too was becoming round, that he too was round zero, that everything in him was becoming round zero. (p. 297)

А Коленька, весь в бреду, принимался выкрикивать праздные ерундовские вещи ... что и он округляется, что и он – круглый ноль; все в нем нолилось – нолилось – нолл. (p. 231)

While describing his experience of expansion to Dudkin, Nikolay himself says:

“Instead of my sense organs I had a ‘zero’ sense ... The whole absurdity was, perhaps, only that the sensation was a sensation of zero minus something – five, for example.” (p. 331)

“в месте органов чувств ощущение было ‘ноль’ ... Вся нелепость была, может быть, только в том, что ощущение было – ощущением ‘ноль минус нечто’, хоть пять, например.” (p. 267)

Bely thus presents Nikolay in terms of Steinerian cosmology: Nikolay’s subconscious connection with the spirit world informs him that he is the beginning of the new evolutionary epoch, the number zero. But Nikolay, unaware of Steiner’s cosmology, is confused as to the meaning of his experiences. It is Bely who reveals to us that the time for a new evolutionary epoch has not yet come. Since we are in the fifth epoch of the post-Atlantean age and still have two epochs to pass through before the new stage begins, and since the time between two epochs is signified by the number two and a half, the description of Nikolay as zero minus five signifies that he represents a new evolutionary stage, but two epochs away from the realization of his mission. This again implies Bely’s thoughts concerning his entire generation, which he portrays as not yet ready to change the status quo, but awakened and hence on its way to do so.

After Dudkin leaves, Nikolay longs for his childhood, for he must learn everything anew:

Nikolay Apollonovich wanted to return ... to the nursery, because he had realized: he was a small child.

Everything, everything must be shaken off, forgotten, everything, everything must be learned again, as it is learned in childhood. (p. 451)

Николаю Аполлоновичу захотелось ... в детскую, потому что он понял: он - малый ребенок.

Надо было все, все – отрясти, позабыть, надо было всему, всему – опять научиться, как учатся в детстве. (p. 322)

This need to return to the beginning and relearn all the stages of maturation clearly corresponds to Steiner's concept of Prayala, a state of rest between universal stages and human reincarnations, when both the universe and individual souls relieve their previous incarnations in order to learn from them and to enter a spiritually higher phase. Indeed, Nikolay does enter a state of rest: after a long sickness he travels to Egypt, the first epoch of evolution. There Nikolay immerses himself in studies of the past:

Nikolay Apollonovich ... is studying in the museum at Bulaq. The "Book of the Dead" and the writings of Manetho have been interpreted wrongly; here, for the searching eye, there is a wide expanse. (p. 503)

Николай Аполлонович ... занимается в булакском музее. "Книгу Мертвых" и записи Манефона толкуют превратно; для пытливого ока здесь широкий простор. (p. 426)

Manetho was an Egyptian who lived around 300 B.C. and who wrote three books of "Egyptian Memoirs" which described Egyptian history from the reign of King Menes to that of King Nectanebo II. "The Book of the Dead," on the other hand, is a modern name for what the Egyptians called "Spells for Coming Out by Day"; it contains magical spells which the deceased recite to wake from death and join the gods.²¹¹ Nikolay thus behaves exactly like a soul in Steinerian Prayala: he studies the beginning of evolution to learn from it. His readings of the

²¹¹ Reginald Engelbach, ed., *Introduction to Egyptian Archaeology* (Cairo, Egypt: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1946), 197 and 12, respectively.

Egyptians' magical spells may be interpreted as his own preparation for the next, spiritually higher phase. His studies bring him to the conclusion that current culture is dead:

Nikolay Apollonovich has vanished in Egypt, and in the twentieth century he relives Egypt; all culture is like a moldering head: everything has died, nothing has remained. (p. 503)

Николай Аполлонович провалился в Египте; и в двадцатом столетии он проводит - Египет, вся культура, - как эта трухлявая голова: все умерло; ничего не осталось. (p. 426)

Most significantly, Nikolay begins to change and abandons his studies of Kant ("Kant? Kant has been forgotten" (p. 503) ["Кант? Кант забыт"; p. 426]). Instead of separating himself from the world of the living, he learns the history of this world. The subject of his studies suggests that Nikolay might now connect his learning with real life.

His extended studies of the past bring about his maturation as he sheds his former passivity. In contrast to his previous futile attempts at writing a philosophical treatise, he finishes a monograph on Duaf:

"You say he's finished it?"

"Yes, he is putting his papers in order."

Nikolay Apollonovich had finally brought his monograph to an end.

"What is it called?"

"The monograph is called 'On the instructions of Duaf.'" (p. 503)

"Говорите, окончил?"

"Да: приводит в порядок бумаги."

Николай Аполлонович наконец монографию свою довел до конца.

"Как она называется?"

"Монография называется ... *О письме Дауфсехруты.*" (p. 426)

"The Instructions of Duaf," one of the best known examples of early Egyptian writing, contain Duaf's instructions to his son, Pepi, who is about to leave home and embark on the next period

of his life, his education.²¹² In his letter to Pepi, Duauf describes various professions, underscoring their advantages and disadvantages in order to direct Pepi in choosing his profession. He concludes by saying that knowledge is the best tool in life. But Duauf's letter also contains broader advice pertaining to life in general. He instructs his son about his diet, his behavior as a mature man in society, and the modes of thought that shape the mature man. Duauf writes: "But he that acteth according to the understanding of another, he hath no success."²¹³ Later he continues: "Make a friend of a man of thy generation."²¹⁴

The fact that Nikolay chooses to analyze this text, which concentrates on the proper way to live, suggests that he is undergoing internal changes. Having abandoned his academic studies of Kant, he begins to connect with real life. His internal maturation is underscored by his external appearance. When he returns to Russia, there is no sign of his previous childishness, which was symbolized by his blond hair; instead he appears as a mature man:

A golden, wedge-shape beard had changed him strikingly; while a lock of perfect silver stood out distinctly in the cap of his hair; this lock had appeared suddenly ... His voice had grown coarser, while his face was covered in sunburn; his speed of movements was gone. (p. 503)

золотая, лопатообразная борода разительно изменила его; а шапка волос выделялась отчетливой совершенно серебряной прядью; эта прядь появилась внезапно ... Голос его погрубел, а лицо покрылось загаром; быстрота движений пропала. (p. 426)

Significantly, Nikolay does not return to Petersburg, which represents the old dogma, but settles in his deceased father's village, where he oversees the work on the fields of his estate.

²¹² Adolf Erman, ed., *The Ancient Egyptians: The Source Book of Their Writings*, trans. A. M. Blackman (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 67-72.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 68.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

The Epilogue does not contain any signs of brewing changes or anticipation of impending cosmological events. Instead it conveys an evolutionary stagnancy. Yet beneath the surface a crucial event is occurring, implied by the fact that Nikolay reads Skovoroda, an eighteenth-century Ukrainian religious philosopher. Skovoroda's name appears for the first time in the penultimate sentence of the novel and indicates Nikolay's new mode of thought. As Aleksandr Lavrov demonstrates in his article "Andrey Bely and Grigory Skovoroda" ("Андрей Белый и Григорий Сковорода"),²¹⁵ Bely became familiar with Skovoroda through the monograph *Grigory Savvich Skovoroda: Life and Teachings* (Григорий Саввич Сковорода: Жизнь и учение), published in 1912 by Vladimir Ern, a religious philosopher and follower of Solovyov.²¹⁶ Lavrov suggests that Bely was acquainted with Skovoroda even earlier. Already in 1908, still in his neo-Kantian phase and contributing to the neo-Kantian journal *Logos* (Логос), Bely argued with Ern's article on Skovoroda, which was published in the journal *Northern Lights* (Северное сияние) and entitled "Russian Socrates" ("Русский Сократ").²¹⁷ Ern also published an article devoted to Skovoroda in the journal *Moscow Weekly* (Московский еженедельник) in 1910. This article, entitled "Some Things about Logos, Russian Philosophy, and Science" ("Нечто о Логосе, русской философии и научности"),²¹⁸ was most likely also known to Bely, who at that time still actively contributed to Moscow journals. Bely had also

²¹⁵ Aleksandr Lavrov, "Andrei Belyi i Grigorii Skovoroda," *Studia Slavica Acad. Sci. Hung.* (Budapest) 21, nos. 3-4 (1975): 395-404.

²¹⁶ Vladimir Ern, *Grigorii Savvich Skovoroda: Zhizn' i uchenie* (Moscow: Put', 1912); also cited in Lavrov, "Andrei Belyi i Grigorii Skovoroda," 395-404.

²¹⁷ Vladimir Ern, "Russkii Sokrat," *Severnoe siianie*, no. 1 (November 1908): 64; cited in Lavrov, "Andrei Belyi i Grigorii Skovoroda," 395.

²¹⁸ Vladimir Ern, "Nechto o Logosie, russkoi filosofii i nauchnosti," *Moskovskii ezhenedel'nik*, nos. 29-32 (July 24-Aug. 14, 1910); cited in Lavrov, "Andrei Belyi i Grigorii Skovoroda," 396.

known Ern personally since 1903, when Ern was part of the “Ajaxes.”²¹⁹ Later on, the two kept in touch, as Bely describes in his memoir *The Beginning of the Century*.²²⁰ As Lavrov points out, Ern’s monograph on Skovoroda was a subjective look at the Ukrainian philosopher, whose thoughts Ern bends to match his own view on culture in general and Russian philosophy in particular, which were in turn influenced by Solovyov. Lavrov writes:

In a monograph on Skovoroda Ern consistently develops the basic position of his philosophy — the idea of crisis in European thought, which has chosen the path of rationalism, “*renunciation in principle of Nature as Creation*,” and which turned nature into “*a soulless mechanism*”; to be fruitful, on the other hand, he considers trends in Russian religious philosophy based on the logism of Eastern Christian speculation. It is Ern’s conviction that Skovoroda stands at the origins of this philosophical tradition.²²¹

Bely, who knew Skovoroda’s philosophy essentially through Ern’s monograph, must have felt an affinity with Skovoroda’s views as presented by Ern. Bely believed that the cultural crisis manifested itself most vividly in the split between man’s feelings and mind. After his journey to Sicily, Tunis, and Egypt in 1910-11, Bely, disappointed by Western civilization and convinced that the East represented dead culture, wrote:

I am returning ten times more Russian; five-month-long relations with the Europeans, these walking butchers of life, made me *very* angry: thank God, we are Russians — *not Europe*; we need to hold our non-Europeanism in high esteem.

Возвращаюсь в десять раз более русским; пятимесячное отношение с европейцами, этими ходячими палачами жизни, обозлило мне *очень*: мы,

²¹⁹ Pyman, *Pavel Florensky*, 36-37. Bely founded the “Ajaxes” group in 1903; these young students met regularly to discuss theological and spiritual questions.

²²⁰ Belyi, *Nachalo veka* (1990 ed.), 495.

²²¹ Lavrov, “Andrei Belyi i Grigorii Skovoroda,” 396.

слава Богу, русские – не Европа; надо свое неевропейство высоко держать.²²²

In another letter, Bely elaborates on his thoughts on Western culture:

European culture was invented by Russians; there are civilizations in the west; the western *culture* in our sense of the word *does not exist*; such culture in the beginning stage exists only in Russia.

Культуру Европы придумали русские; на западе есть цивилизации; западной культуры в нашем смысле слова нет; такая культура в зачаточном виде есть только в России.²²³

It does not seem surprising that Bely turned to native philosophy at the time of his heightened sense of the crisis in European culture, especially since Ern's monograph on Skovoroda was published almost exactly at the time of Bely's return from his journey.

As Lavrov points out, Bely must have been taken with Ern's description of Skovoroda's philosophy as being inseparable from his life. Ern writes:

He who studies the life and teachings of Skovoroda is truly affected by the exceptional *integrity* of his nature, the complete *unity* of his spiritual self. His life is the best illustration of his philosophy, and his philosophy — the great speculative interpretation of his life. The profound wisdom of the theory and its practical implementation in life are organically combined in Skovoroda. He is as natural as the ancients. He lives as he thinks, and thinks as he lives.²²⁴

Ern's description of Skovoroda's philosophy must have been influenced by the fact that, in the spirit of the "emulation of Christ" ("подражание Христу"), the 44-year-old Skovoroda, equipped only with the Bible, left his home and started his wanderings through Ukraine and

²²² Bely to A. M. Kozhebatkin, April 12, 1911, CGALI, f. 53, op. 3, ed. khr. 11; cited in Lavrov, "Andrei Belyi i Grigorii Skovoroda," 398.

²²³ Bely to M. K. Morozova, April 1911, GBL, f. 171, kart. 24, ed. khr. 1b; cited in Lavrov, "Andrei Belyi i Grigorii Skovoroda," 398.

²²⁴ Ern, *Grigorii Savvich Skovoroda*, 26; also cited in Lavrov, "Andrei Belyi i Grigorii Skovoroda," 401.

Russia, which lasted until his death.²²⁵ For Bely, who saw the current cultural crisis as the result of contradictions within man, such unity of thought and life must have held a great appeal. The fact that Bely held on to this conviction throughout his life is demonstrated by his model of evolution. As we remember, contrary to Steiner's cosmology, Bely regarded man as responsible for the movement of the spiral to its next, more spiritually advanced, circle. Bely underscored the fact that in order for man to make a successful Dionysian leap, all three of his major faculties — his mind, heart, and will — must be connected. In other words, man's thoughts must reflect his feelings and he must possess the will to live by his convictions. None of the characters in *Petersburg* can move the evolutionary spiral because they lack such a connection.

We have seen that Nikolay lacks the most crucial connection, between life and thought: his feelings are still on the level of desires and his neo-Kantian philosophy is divorced from life, especially when compared to Apollon's Evolutionism and Dudkin's Nietzscheanism. Moreover, as Bely underscores in his essays, Nikolay's belief-system is a philosophy of non-existence, which Bely illustrates by Nikolay's dream-like life and his separation from reality. However, unlike Dudkin and the Senator, Nikolay is described as a very young man, a representative of Bely's generation in its youth, whose identity had not been formed yet. This characterization is extended to the cosmological level, where he is depicted as a young planet, a new stage of evolution whose time has not come, but which contains the potential for further development. Seen in this context, Nikolay's awakening, his abandonment of neo-Kantianism, and his studies of evolutionary epochs can be interpreted as his final maturation. These processes are implied by his reading of Skovoroda, a philosopher who resolved man's internal contradictions, which Bely considered the cause of the cultural crisis. Therefore, although on the surface the Epilogue lacks

²²⁵ Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. Kline, 1:56.

the anticipation of great, impending, external events, it suggests the internal maturation of man, who is the “engine” of Bely’s evolutionary machinery. That is not to say that Bely found the ultimate resolution to his philosophical concerns in Skovoroda’s teachings. He knew the Ukrainian philosopher only through the writings of Ern, a follower of Solovyov, who placed Skovoroda’s philosophy in the context of Solovyov’s teachings. The reference to Skovoroda in the novel, and the interpretation of his philosophy as the ultimate resolution of man’s split between life and thought, should be seen as another of Bely’s returns to Solovyov’s teachings, namely, his doctrine of theurgy.

Section Two: Dudkin’s Role in Bely’s Evolutionary Cosmology

My analysis of Bely’s views on the present state and future development of humanity and the universe would not be complete without an examination of Dudkin’s role. As I argued in chapter three, Dudkin is tightly associated with Zarathustra and Nietzsche himself. While Peter the Great ignites *Petersburg*’s natural elements as a Dionysian force, Dudkin kindles the truth-revealing subconscious of Apollon and Nikolay. Both processes are depicted with thermodynamic imagery. Significantly, Nikolay’s internal explosion of a red sphere, which indicates the entrance of his subconscious into his conscious occurs when he realizes that Dudkin’s package contains the bomb:

Now it all came back to him: the conversation, the bundle, the suspicious visitor, the bleak September day, and all the rest. Nikolay Apollonovich distinctly remembered how he had taken the little bundle, how he had shoved it into the writing desk ... and here, in the darkness, in the place where his heart was, a spark flared ... with frenzied swiftness it turned into a crimson sphere: the sphere expanded, expanded, expanded; and the sphere burst. (p. 262)

Тут припомнилось все: разговор, узелок, подозрительный посетитель, сентябрьский денек, и все прочее. Николай Аполлонович явственно вспомнил, как он взял узелочек, как его засунул он в столик ... и тут, в

темноте, в месте сердца, вспыхнула искорка ... искорка с бешеной быстротой превратилась в багровый шар: шар – ширился, ширился, ширился; и шар лопнул. (p. 187)

Nikolay's Dionysian moment and expansion then follow, signifying both the attempted creation of a new planet, Jupiter, and the revolutionary party's bomb. Dudkin ignites Nikolay's "birth" but also brings the bomb, a tool of political provocation whose success would drive this universe deeper into dogma. Dudkin's double-edged action illustrates Bely's view of Nietzsche's contradictions: on the one hand, Nietzsche exposes the deadness of our culture and advocates man's self-improvement in order to overcome it, but, on the other hand, Nietzsche believes in eternal return and thus denies the possibility of evolution.

After receiving Lippanchenko's letter, Nikolay visits Dudkin, who promises to deal with the matter and urges him to throw the bomb into the river. After his visit to Lippanchenko and his revelatory hallucinations, Dudkin decides to kill Lippanchenko, the mastermind of the provocation. The murder is described as follows:

Against the background of the completely green, as if vitriol-colored wall ... stood a little figure ... Lippanchenko went thudding in his bare feet in the direction of the door, but went, belly and breasts, smack into the door ... at this point he was pulled backwards; a hot stream of boiling water splashed his bare back ... falling on the bed, he realized that someone had cut opened his back ... And from there something hissed mockingly — it was gases because his belly was sliced open. (p. 499)

На фоне совершенно зеленой и будто бы купоросной стены ... стояла фигурочка ... По направлению к двери Липпанченко протоптал босыми ногами, но животом и грудями он с размаху расплющился на двери ... тут его рванули обратно; горячая струя кипятка полоснула его по голой спине ... падая на постель, понял он, что ему разрезали спину ... И оттуда что-то такое прошипело насмешливо – газы, потому что живот был распорот. (p. 392)

Bely's depiction of Lippanchenko's death in terms of the release of gases links Lippanchenko to Apollon, the dying Saturn. Lippanchenko's demise implies the demise of dogma itself. The

imagery of expanding gas also links Lippanchenko's death with the bomb. Dudkin's act can thus be interpreted as the destruction of the real bomb, Lippanchenko, who instigated the provocation so as to prolong dogma. The "detonation" of the Lippanchenko-bomb does not destroy dogma, but it prevents the universe of *Petersburg* from diving deeper into the dogmatic circle. Most significantly, Dudkin frees Nikolay from his promise and saves him from destruction: otherwise Nikolay would have become a tool in the hands of dogmatic power or been sent to jail, denounced by Morkovin as a terrorist. Dudkin thus enables Nikolay's escape from the novel's universe. In terms of the novel's cosmology, Dudkin's act enables the development of the new evolutionary phase: Nikolay escapes the realm of eternal return and continues his maturation. Since Dudkin is a Nietzschean character, this suggests that Nietzsche's philosophy put humanity on the track leading to its evolution. As Bely states in "Circular Movement," "Zarathustra perished from his return in order for us, witnesses of his death, not to return" ("Заратустра погиб от возврата для того, чтобы мы, свидетели его смерти не возвращались").²²⁶ Viewed in terms of Bely's theoretical writings, Dudkin's (and by extension, Nietzsche's) fall into madness is the ultimate sacrifice in the name of progress. Both the fictional character (Dudkin) and the real person (Nietzsche) ignite the minds of the new generation, illuminate the path to transformation through internal development, and perform a self-destructive act that demonstrates the fatal consequences of eternal return.

Dudkin's actions also seem to comment on the relationship between East and West and its role in universal and human evolution. Scholars have disagreed regarding the presentation of this issue in *Petersburg*. I agree with Maguire and Malmstad, who state that the East-West relationship is not portrayed in *Petersburg* as a real antithesis, and convincingly argue that by the

²²⁶ Belyi, "Krugovoe dvizhenie," 71.

time Bely began to work on his novel, the concept of Mongolism “was no longer strictly eastern as far as Bely was concerned. It now subsumed all that was non-creative — that is stagnation and repression, and was a part as much of West as of East.”²²⁷ J. D. Elsworth affirms this view and frames the issue within the context of Bely’s anthroposophy. Elsworth points out that Steiner’s evolutionary doctrine is accompanied by his theory of recapitulation, which states that each new stage of universal development must first recapitulate its previous phases before it can advance to the next. On the cultural level this means that the present contains all the cultures of the past. Elsworth argues that Bely’s concern with cultural history was influenced by Steiner:

[Bely’s] notions of East and West are thought of not in a geographical sense, but as shorthand designation of ideal attitudes whose interaction can be seen to give specific definition to particular cultural periods. Nevertheless they correspond, of course, to attitudes conventionally associated with Oriental and Occidental cultures.²²⁸

I believe that Bely’s own writings reinforce Elsworth’s conclusion:

I don’t understand the division into “east” and “west” ... “Here, here is the east,” you will move a step away and will say: “west”; you will move four steps away and say: “east” ... Is Zarathustra east or west? In a geographical sense, he is east, but in fact he is obviously “west” ... Zarathustra is a sunny, humanitarian light and a confirmation of personality in it ... and of course Kant is a founder of China.

Не понимаю я деления на “восток” и на “запад” ... “Вот, вот — восток,” отойдешь на шаг, скажешь: “запад”; отойдешь на четыре шага, и — “восток.” ... Заратустра — восток или запад? Географически он восток, а, по правде сказать, он — конечно же “запад” ... Заратустра: солнечная гуманная ясность и утверждение личности — в ней ... и, конечно, Кант учредитель Китая.²²⁹

²²⁷ Maguire and Malmstad, “Petersburg,” 16.

²²⁸ Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, 43.

²²⁹ Andrei Belyi, *Na perevale* (Berlin: Izdatel’stvo Z. I. Grzhebina, 1923), 52-53.

In *Petersburg* Bely vividly presents the East and West as the powers of stagnancy and progress. During Nikolay's revelatory semi-dream, he describes the destruction of Europe as the the "Mongolian cause." His Turanian ancestor responds:

—The task has not been understood: instead of Kant, it ought to be: The Prospect.
—Instead of value it should be numeration: by houses, floors, and rooms for time everlasting.

—Instead of a new order: the circulation of the citizens of the prospect – regular, and in a straight line.

—Not Europe's destruction, but its inalterability. (p. 363)

—Задача не понята: вместо Канта – быть должен Проспект.

—Вместо ценности – нумерация: по домам, этажам и по комнатам на вековечные времена.

—Вместо нового строя: циркуляция граждан проспекта – равномерная, прямолинейная.

—Не разрушение Европы – ее неизменность. (p. 241)

The Turanian's description of the "Mongolian cause" implies that Bely views the relationship between East and West as a struggle between stagnation and progress. The depiction of Nikolay as a Turanian who must continue the "Mongolian cause" into the present also suggests that Bely places the East-West issue at the very beginning of human history and interprets it as a struggle that humanity has faced since the beginning of its existence.

Nevertheless, the choice of the Turanian as Nikolay's ancestor presents Mongolism in the context of Steinerian theories concerning the development of human races. According to anthroposophical teachings, Turanians were the fourth Atlantean race, whose members possessed direct contact with the spirits but misused their powers to satisfy their personal desires.²³⁰ They began to worship Ahriman, the Spirit of Darkness who preached the superiority of material existence. After Atlantea's fall, the Turanians arrived in Persia, whose inhabitants followed

²³⁰ Rudolf Steiner, *Cosmic Memory: Prehistory of Earth and Man*, trans. Karl E. Zimmer (West Nyack, NY: Rudolf Steiner Publications, 1959), 54-55.

Zoroaster (also called Zarathustra), an “initiate” who preserved direct contact with the Spirits of Light, which guided people towards spiritual evolution. The struggle between the two races was a struggle between the spiritual and materialistic sides of human nature. Zoroaster conquered the Turanians, who dispersed throughout Asia, and so spirituality won over materialism. This signifies the victory of man’s spirituality over his stagnant, materialistic tendencies.²³¹

By depicting Nikolay as the incarnation of an ancient Turanian, and by associating Dudkin with Zarathustra, Bely places the interaction between his two main characters in a Steinerian context. This extends the meaning of Dudkin’s actions to Mongolism. In his semi-conscious state, Nikolay discovers he is an ancient Turanian bomb aimed at the destruction of the West, which signifies the stagnancy impeding progress. On a factual level, the bomb appears as the party’s tool to prolong dogma and end the unrest, which represents humanity’s attempts at evolution. Since Dudkin frees Nikolay from the promise to kill his father, and destroys Lippanchenko, the real bomb threatening evolution, Dudkin acts as Zarathustra, conquering the dark powers of stagnancy. Thanks to Dudkin, Nikolay does not kill his father. Instead, freed by Dudkin from eternal return, and thus from Mongolism, Nikolay escapes his heredity, preventing Mongolism from spreading to the next generation. Although eternal return still exists and dogma still rules *Petersburg*, Nikolay’s escape indicates that progress is brewing on the periphery. Bely thus interprets Nietzschean philosophy as the onset of universal and human evolution. The spiral of his evolutionary model has not moved yet, but the impulse for this movement is present.

My analysis of Apollon and Nikolay Ableukhov demonstrates their multifaceted significance in the novel. They simultaneously represent troubled individuals, the governing philosophies of Bely’s time, and the cosmological stages of human and universal development.

²³¹ Wilkinson, *Rudolf Steiner*, 1:3-6.

These three apparently different roles are in fact tightly connected. By representing current philosophical schools, they embody humanity's present modes of thought. Their cosmological significance frames these modes in a broader context and comments on the current state of human development. Thus Bely presents his era as a phase in an ongoing evolutionary process. By elevating Evolutionism and neo-Kantianism to a cosmological level, Bely connects human reality with cosmological reality; his evolutionary model seems like a process occurring in reality rather than an artificial concept divorced from the actuality of Bely's era. By realizing his evolutionary model in his present reality, Bely portrays current events as cosmological processes with a significance reaching far beyond his own era. On the other hand, by depicting the Ableukhovs' psychological responses to their concrete political, social, and private circumstances, Bely underscores the dynamic ambiguity of his model and presents it as a possibility, not a fact.

Although the connection between Dudkin and Zarathustra is similarly riddled with ambiguity and subverted by irony, Bely does not abandon it. Dudkin's Zarathustra-like role is to ignite the minds of the characters able to change status-quo, and this is extended to Bely's cosmic mythology, which includes the issue of the East-West relationship. Since Bely views the East-West contrast as a battle between stagnancy and evolution, and Dudkin is again portrayed as Zarathustra conquering the stagnant powers, Dudkin's role as a Nietzschean figure in the novel is reaffirmed. This underscores Bely's belief that, despite fatal flaws in Nietzsche's philosophy, he still was the greatest thinker of Bely's times, the only one who saw the ossified state of the universal culture and attempted to overcome it.

Conclusion

In this work my goal has not been to “decipher” Bely’s *Petersburg* by finding a principal message hidden behind its complex structure, since I do not believe such a singular message exists. The abundant scholarship on the novel demonstrates that *Petersburg* can be analyzed from different points of view, and each one brings something new to our understanding of the work. Bely’s novel has been variously interpreted as a reflection on contemporary political events, on the centuries-long dispute concerning Russia’s cultural location between the Occident and the Orient, or on the state of culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Alternatively the work has also been regarded as a salient example of a Modernist text or an anthroposophical novel, or simply as Bely’s evaluation of his own artistic past. No matter which perspective a critic takes, he or she aims to find a unifying principle guiding this meandering text.

Although I do not believe in the existence of one unifying principle in *Petersburg*, I do believe that science can serve as a guiding principle for this apparently completely disconnected narrative. Since Bely employs predominantly thermodynamics, a discipline whose very core is changeability, I suggest that dynamism and relativity constitute the only constant in *Petersburg*. I do not propose this as the only possible interpretation, but I believe that it offers a fruitful perspective, not only because other critics haven’t attempted it yet, but also because it uncovers a new layer of meaning in *Petersburg*.

If we view the novel as the projection of Bely’s view of the universe, this elucidates the dynamic relationship between its multifarious elements: universal, philosophical, political, and cultural. Politically engaged characters represent different political stances. Political events embody broader philosophical disputes, and thus reflect the debate between ossified Positivism

and meaningless neo-Kantianism on the one hand, and Nietzscheanism mediated by Solovyovian teachings on the other. This dispute is in turn presented in Steinerian cosmological terms and portrayed as a history of cosmic and human evolution. The characters and local events thus stand for the cultural and historical controversies of Bely's era. Parody and irony, meanwhile, subvert all the reader's assumptions, introducing the element of relativity into Bely's work.

Bely depicts his evolutionary model not as an arbitrary authorial vision, but as one governed by scientific laws. His references to thermodynamics, psychology, and astronomy reveal the scientific foundation that underlies individual, political, cultural, and cosmological events. In this way Bely emphasizes that his evolutionary model is a scientifically valid concept, not merely an unreliable, philosophical speculation.

I would further suggest that this scientific viewpoint applies not just to *Petersburg*, but also to all of Bely's novelistic output. My discussion of Bely's *Symphonies* in chapter one demonstrated that this approach was already present in his earliest works. After reaching its peak in *Petersburg*, this scientific emphasis continued in his later novels. An argument can be made that Bely's later major novels and dramas — *Kotik Letayev* (*Котик Летаев*; 1916), *Notes of an Eccentric* (*Записки чудака*; 1922), *Moscow* (*Москва*; 1926), and *Masks* (*Маски*; 1932) — similarly focus on science as the dynamic principle underlying the new worldview.

Kotik Letayev is devoted to the narrator's recollection of his early childhood up to the age of four. The novel contains numerous allusions to anthroposophical doctrine, regarding the recapitulations of the past that occur when the soul is newly incarnated during childhood's pre-verbal phase. However, this Steinerian doctrine is presented not as an arbitrary proposition, but as scientifically justified. The thermodynamic images of the narrator's exploding subconscious, and the spirals and tubes through which Kotik crawls during his maturation, evoke Bely's model

of universal and human development. Since the narration moves from the child's intuitive memory of the prehistoric age to his conscious apprehension of present culture, Kotik's development can be interpreted as another of Bely's attempts to portray historical processes through his kinetic evolutionary model.

Notes of an Eccentric, on the other hand, is written in the present tense and describes the narrator's journey from Switzerland to Russia, passing through France, England, Norway, and Sweden. Bely himself took this journey while returning home from Steiner's colony in Dornach, Switzerland. This novel is also permeated by thermodynamic imagery, but relativity governs its structure. The narrative is dominated by the image of a bomb, which refers both to the narrator's internal, tortured state of mind, and to World War I's apocalyptic destruction of the present world. However, unlike in Bely's previous novels, these images do not promise either cultural evolution or the narrator's individual renewal. This work instead focuses on the duality of destruction. The narrator vacillates regarding the nature of the war — is it a sign of a new, emerging, cultural stage, or simply of mankind's misguided use of science to destroy the universe? He similarly vacillates regarding the meaning of his sojourn in Dornach, uncertain if it was the right direction to take. This uncertainty is underscored by his arrival in Bergen, which he visited three years earlier, before his spiritual education in Steiner's colony. Bergen seems to represent the next spiral in Bely's evolutionary model: the narrator experiences spiritual enlightenment and the world appear to be undergoing cultural and historical evolution. However, the narrator's ambivalence regarding these changes undermines the validity of the means he has chosen to move to the next phase. Therefore *Notes of an Eccentric* marks Bely's doubts concerning his view of universal evolution and it places scientific relativity at the foreground of his philosophical views.

In Bely's drama *Moscow*, we see particularly clearly his ambivalence concerning thermodynamics as the basis for his worldview. Like many thinkers of his era, Bely seems to feel threatened by the concept of entropy, which was introduced by the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Therefore he presents scientific laws as potentially ruinous for humanity: since entropy means the dissipation of energy indispensable for life, the impending destruction of the universe is unavoidable. The imminence of this destruction is implied by the characters' disfigured forms and moral decay. However, Bely's next drama, *Masks*, can be interpreted as an antithesis to *Moscow* in that it depicts the same characters spiritually renewed by love, which is presented as a cosmic, psychic force able to conquer the entropy governing the physical world. The two dramas taken together represent Bely's doubt and faith in science. The first one presents the concept of entropy, while the second is informed by Spencer's thermodynamic theory, which argues that the universe goes through cyclical periods of energy dissipation and concentration. This concept neatly fits Bely's kinetic model of universal and human evolution. First, the ossified culture has to be destroyed, then the influx of new energy will create a renewed culture that is evolutionarily superior to the previous one.

Scientific approach to cultural and historical development initiated by Bely exerted a great influence on other authors. In fact, it can be argued that the use of science established a specific idiom for Russian literature which flourished in the Modernist era and reemerged later in postmodernist works. Virtually all major Russian novels of Bely's time are organized around spatial scientific models. I would suggest that this feature represents a specifically Russian usage of new science in order to find meaning in the post-revolutionary reality.

Evgeny Zamyatin's novel *We* depicts a totalitarian state that is threatened by a hidden movement to overthrow it. The novel consists of two separate realms — one is a highly

developed civilization that has established almost complete control over its citizens and imprisoned them within walls that separate them from the world; the other realm, located beyond the wall, is portrayed as an almost wild state of human existence. The two realms signify the two stages of societal development: the ossified culture that has degenerated into a totalitarian state, and the new, emerging culture which possesses a strong energy destined to replace the old society's spent vital powers. Zamyatin's novel is based on a dynamic model of the universe, which is governed by alternating periods of ossification and renewal. Once society exhausts its creative energy, entropy sets in, and a new revolution is needed to restore the lost energy. Zamyatin's vision of evolution presupposes the idea of repetitive revolution, and is a reinterpretation of the thermodynamic theory of energy: societal development is governed by cycles of condensation and dissipation of energy. Similarly to Bely's *Petersburg*, Zamyatin uses thermodynamic imagery to depict the cultural states of the two societies. The dominating image is that of the sun. Always the same, hidden behind the clouds and spreading a cold, bluish light in the totalitarian society, it shines brightly and almost blindingly in the new, still clandestine society which is destined to replace the political and cultural dogma of totalitarianism. Associated with the life-giving sun are other thermodynamic references like the boundless, free energy of the inhabitants of the new society, lush, almost tropical greenery which are opposed to the lifeless automaton-like creatures of the old state living in the bare, cemented space. In this respect Zamyatin's vision of evolution is similar to Bely's, in that it uses science to justify his belief in society's continual renewal.

By contrast, Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *Master and Margarita* conveys a more subtle optimism. Constructed according to Florensky's model of the universe, the Mobius strip, Bulgakov's work depicts the relationship between the phenomenal and noumenal realms.

However, while Florensky focuses on the switch from the phenomenal to the noumenal, Bulgakov illustrates the switch from the noumenal realm (viewed as the era of Jesus Christ) to phenomenal reality (seen as the new communist regime). In his portrayal of the crucifixion Bulgakov highlights the role of Pontius Pilate, whose cowardice is presented as a teleological reason for both the transition from noumenal to phenomenal reality and the existence of the unjust and oppressive communist system. However, since Florensky's model presupposes the possibility of multiple entries into the noumenal realm, the novel's final message is somewhat optimistic: once there appears someone brave enough to oppose the injustices of the communist system (Bulgakov still believed that this someone would be Stalin), there will be another switch, this time to the noumenal realm, where society will be governed by truth and justice.

The title protagonist, the Master, who wrote a true account of the events of the crucifixion which underscored the cowardice of Pontius Pilate and for which he was jailed in the insane asylum, is liberated from the phenomenal realm and, together with his faithful mistress, Margarita, taken to the transcendent. However, he does not depart without leaving a "pupil," Ivan Bezdomny, a writer serving the regime, who did get a glimpse of the noumenal. Not only did Bezdomny stop writing politically correct poems, but began having "melancholy" spells which even tranquilizers dispensed by his wife do not cure. Therefore the work of the Master which uncovered the reason for the continuation of the totalitarian regime, the cowardice of those in power, is not lost and forgotten, but lives in at least one creative mind. This faint knowledge of truth allows the hope that the phenomenal reality - current, politically and culturally oppressive state- will eventually produce a brave individual, who, like the Master, will oppose the governing system and thereby open the cross-over zone to the noumenal, which in the novel equals just and free society.

While Zamyatin's and Bulgakov's universal models represent an energetic vision of the universe that holds hope for changes within the communist system, Yury Olesha's novel *Envy* (*Зависть*; 1924) offers a static vision of society without hope for change. Olesha's novel is based on two spaces, one enclosing the other. The larger and expanding space, which represents the new system, gradually marginalizes the smaller space of pre-revolutionary reality, which is finally reduced to an inconsequential corner of the new reality. This smaller, older reality is portrayed not as a force opposing the communist sphere, but rather as an uncreative, decaying reality doomed to disappear. As in the novels discussed above, scientific references play an important role, but in Olesha's novel these allusions underscore the lack of hope for change. In *Envy*, the new regime uses its scientific knowledge to increase its strength, while the marginalized "opposition" constructs a supposedly magical machine, Ophelia, believed capable of destroying the new regime. But the homemade Ophelia proves to be a parody of the new science: at its trial run it simply falls to pieces. Thus *Envy* marks a loss of optimism and depicts the new reality as a thriving entity that devours everything standing in its way.

The endurance of scientific themes is demonstrated by Venedict Erofeev's postmodern novel *Moscow-Petushki*. Erofeev also uses the Mobius strip as a spatial organization for his work, but his depiction of the noumenal and phenomenal realms reflects a harsher and more pessimistic worldview. The narrator is trying to get from Moscow to the nearby town Petushki, where his girlfriend lives. Petushki represents not only a noumenal realm separate from Moscow, but also a state of intoxication. On the morning of his departure, Venechka, the narrator, becomes gradually more and more drunk. While intoxicated on the train, he sees and talks to God and the angels, who are depicted in parodic terms. After missing his stop, he gradually sobers up and finds himself back in Moscow, in the phenomenal reality where the

public-order squad beats him up. Therefore the noumenal realm is the realm of complete intoxication, which allows one not to glimpse the transcendental, but to separate oneself temporarily from harsh phenomenal reality. This new image of the transcendental is so far removed from its original meaning as to suggest the author's disbelief in its existence. The noumenal becomes anything that separates one from the physical world, while the phenomenal suggests the spiritual death and horrors of daily reality.

When comparing Russian Modernist novels to their Western counterparts, one discovers significant differences in their responses to both the new scientific discoveries and the cultural crisis. While James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Robert Musil, Thomas Mann, and Franz Kafka (just to name a few of the major authors of the era) all focus on man's inability to find a place for himself within the new reality, the Russian Modernists discussed above advocate a more active approach. Instead of merely depicting the problem of internalizing the new reality, they seek ways to cope with it. Consequently Western and Russian Modernists use science in their works quite differently. In Western works, science appears as a cause of confusion and even fear, while in Russian works it offers a means to orient oneself in the new reality. This topic would be well worth exploring in the context of a broader analysis of Russian Modernism's relation to the West.

Another theme worth exploring in both Russian Modernism and its contemporary European context is spirituality: it would be fruitful to examine the differing approaches to this topic in light of the new, kinetic view of the universe. As I have suggested in this work, Bely himself finds this issue problematic. He vacillates between a Nietzschean Godless society based on a morality established by man himself, and an anthroposophical spirituality which encompasses all religions in the image of the universal Spirit. Bely also continually circles back

to the traditional Christian God represented by Solovyov's philosophy. Given that the main problem of the cultural crisis was man's unfulfilled emotional and spiritual needs, it would be interesting to examine how other writers — both Russian and Western — dealt with this problem and to see if they arrived at any solution more precise and defined than Bely's. Unsurprisingly, in Russia's post-1917 social and political reality, the question of spirituality was, at least on the surface, eradicated by the new, anti-religious, Marxist ideology, which in itself can be viewed as an attempt to build a Nietzschean Godless society. However, the works of novelists such as Bulgakov, Zamyatin, Olesha, and even Erofeev, are similar to Bely's in their depiction of the human yearning for spirituality and the importance of fulfilling mankind's irrational, emotional needs. In this respect the writers who followed Bely still struggled with the same question he did: which kind of spirituality would be appropriate for the new era? Similarly to Bely, they do not seem to find an answer to this question. Western writers appear to regard traditional Christianity as a spiritually dead institution, but do not seek a new spirituality with the same intensity that Russian writers do. Instead, they often propose psychology as a new religion. The heroes of both Kafka and the Polish writer Bruno Schulz are particularly preoccupied with probing their own psyches and finding the answers to spiritual and emotional needs in the newly emerging science of psychoanalysis. This Western preoccupation with psychology stands in contrast to the Russian insistence on finding a "true" spirituality which is seen in the Russians' continual attempt to connect with realms beyond physical reality.

Finally, Bely's unique use of Modernist uncertainty and ambiguity deserves special attention. In his influential article, "Spatial Form," Joseph Frank shows how the Western Modernist novel replaces linear, temporal, narrative progression with a tendency towards

spatialization, as embodied by the depiction of simultaneous narrative events.²³² This feature also characterizes Bely's *Petersburg*. Its events are not portrayed in a linear temporal fashion, but rather seem to accumulate in a disorganized manner, to the point that it is hard for the reader to understand the sequence of the events. Yet Bely's use of simultaneity is different from that found in other works, in that he combines it with an overwhelming sense of ambiguity, which underlies all his proposed ideas and makes it difficult to interpret virtually any situation in the novel. We find, of course, such ambiguity in other Modernist novels (both in Russia and the West), but in those works the ambiguity often indicates uncertainty concerning postwar and postrevolutionary reality, and implies either fear or resignation in the face of the unknown. In contrast to such characteristically Modernist ambiguity, Bely's work instead sparks the reader's curiosity by presenting events kaleidoscopically, with constant changes that oblige the reader to continually reevaluate events, characters, intention, and meaning. This accounts for the novel's highly energetic nature. In fact, unlike other Modernists, Bely uses ambiguity to express the new dynamism of modernity, and thus illustrates a newly emerging worldview engendered by the era's scientific discoveries and cultural crisis. He suggests a new perception of the world where nothing is certain and everything is a matter of informed guesswork at best. This worldview seems to suit Bely's own sensibility, based on his own constant reevaluation of his philosophical and scientific interests. It would be useful to explore further how other Modernist authors deal with the overwhelming uncertainty of their era and the new, dynamic vision of the universe. If one could discover other novelists for whom, as for Bely, the new reality and ambiguity presented exciting, creative opportunities, then one could speak of two paradigms in the Modernist artistic world, based precisely on divergent responses to the new, uncertain reality.

²³² Frank, "Spatial Form," 46-78.

The thematic issues that *Petersburg* elicits are as multifaceted as the novel itself. They open up new areas of scholarly inquiry which lead far beyond the problems of Bely's era and continue to the present day. For instance, the continuous encroaching of science onto literature has become more and more apparent. The continually changing view of the universe also makes it difficult for writers of our era (similarly to Bely and his contemporaries) to create stable points of view within this ever changing reality. The crisis of values in postmodernist literature testifies to the fact that the cultural crisis has not been resolved since Bely's era. Most significant, the relativity so apparent in Bely's *Petersburg* has come to dominate our worldview and, just as in the case of *Petersburg*, it makes any definitive judgment impossible. In this respect Bely seems to be the first writer who pinpointed the major problems of postwar reality and therefore his *Petersburg* has as much significance today as it had in his own times.

Bely's significance lies not simply in his ability to generate new thematic concerns that remained relevant far beyond his own era. Equally important, if not more so, is his unique treatment of these issues, a treatment incomparable to that of any other writer. Bely's kinetic and charismatic fusions of divergent schools of thought, which present his critics with almost insurmountable dilemmas in interpreting his works, single him out as one of the most creative and unique writers of our times. He is impossible to categorize or pigeonhole into any specific literary trend because of his dynamic thought-process and his interweaving of diverse sources. The exact character of Bely's literary persona also eludes us: his use of parody, irony, satire, combined with the overwhelming ambiguity, makes it impossible to discern any guideline for interpreting the totality of his literary output. The vast body of scholarly criticism on his prose and poetry can merely limit itself to finding the isolated influences that helped shape Bely's works, while the entirety of his writings escapes a unified interpretation. Bely thus remains a

creative enigma and the reading of his works involves the constant discovery of unexpected aspects of this charismatic literary personality.

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