

LITERATURE

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BELYJ'S *SEREBRJANYJ GOLUB'*:

GOGOL' IN GUGOLEVO

Literary critics and historians have repeatedly referred to the unmistakable influence of Gogol' on the prose fiction of Belyj. Nowhere in Belyj's works is this influence more apparent than in his *Serebrjanyj golub'*.¹ Published in book form in 1910, the novel provoked a variety of critical opinions which were widely disparate in their assessment of the work, but unanimous in their recognition of Belyj's imitation of Gogol's literary devices. For example, V. L. Rogačevskij, who lamented the seeming decline of Belyj's talent in *Serebrjanyj golub'*, as compared with that in Belyj's *Simfonii*, complained: "у Андрея Белого в этой повести постоянное желание писать под Гоголем. Получается сплошная пародия на юмор Гоголя, на его лирические отступления, на его гиперболы."² Zinaida Gippius, on the other hand, was more favorable impressed by Belyj's use of style:

Хочу отметить, главным образом, интересные перегибы стиля, его взлохмаченность, метанье, срывы и подъемы. Смещения очень неожиданные; иногда кажется, что есть подражательность, -- Гоголю, например, но это не подражательность, а скорее какая-то стилизация чистого "русского" пафоса ("О, Русь! ..." и т.п.).³

A similar conclusion has been expressed by Močul'skij in his Belyj monograph, "вся ткань романа Белого расшита сложными узорами, заимствованными у Гоголя."⁴

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While almost all critics of Belyj's prose have noticed in *Serebrjanyj golub'* a continuation of the Gogolian tradition in Russian literature, none have attempted to examine the possible motivation or to explain the significance of that imitation. Only Belyj himself, in his alter ego as literary critic, has provided more than a cursory comparison of the novel with the works of Gogol'.⁵ This lacuna in Belyj scholarship accounts in part for the failure to discover one important key to reading the novel, a key contained in Belyj's own essay, "Gogol'," first published in *Vesy*.⁶ Contemporaries of Belyj also overlooked this clue while reviewing the novel in 1910, either because they were unaware of or unimpressed by the concurrent appearance of the article and the novel, which was originally serialized in the same journal during 1909.

One should recognize that the year 1909 was a decisive turning point in the life and art of Belyj. As he himself noted in a letter to Ivanov-Razumnik, the year was a transitional period in which hope and new enthusiasm for the future replaced the despair of the immediate past.⁷ In his private life, Belyj made the acquaintance of Asja Turgeneva who, as his constant companion and eventually his wife, was instrumental in leading him to Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy. At the same time, he was involved with an investigation of rhythm in verse which revolutionized Russian poetics, a study of mysticism and an essay on Gogol' intended for the one-hundredth jubilee celebration of Gogol''s birth. In addition to his other interests, Belyj devoted considerable time to *Serebrjanyj golub'*, which was begun in Bobrovka during January of 1909, but which coincided for a time with his work on the Gogol' article.⁸ Belyj's renewed attention to the theme of Gogol', reflected in the simultaneous work on both the article and the novel, resulted in a unique relationship between the two. The article provides the most accurate description of Belyj's conception of Gogol''s life and art at a time when he was engaged in the creation and composition of his so-called Gogolian novel. As such, stylistic, structural and compositional elements in *Serebrjanyj golub'* can be compared to those significant features which Belyj ascribed to Gogol''s prose. Moreover, the article introduces a previously unnoticed interpretation of the novel: namely, *Serebrjanyj golub'* as a twentieth century version of Gogolian reality, a world of Gogol''s images, geography and characters reconstructed by Belyj through his own Symbolist perception of Gogol''s art and how this world is intended to accommodate Gogol' himself.

In his article, Belyj stands in awe and amazement before the miracle of Gogol''s exciting and innovative images: "Что за образы? Из каких невозможностей они созданы? Все перемешано в них: цвета, ароматы, звуки. Где есть смелее сравнения, где художественная правда невероятней? (G, p. 95). Even among the Symbolists, who, according to Belyj, are most closely allied to the style and spirit of Gogol', not a single writer can equal his inimitable mastery. At the same time, there is an ironic twist to Belyj's rhetorical question and an implied challenge to himself and fellow writers, for it is in the polyphonic, polychromatic opening of Belyj's own novel that the reply is made. Here at last is one not only willing to compete with Gogol', but one hoping to equal or surpass the master's achievements in prose style.

Еще, и еще в синюю бездну дня, полную жарких, жестоких блесков, кинула зычные клики-целеевская колокольня. Туда и сюда заерзали в воздухе над нею стрижи. А душный от благовонья Троицын день обсыпал кусты легкими, розовыми шиповниками. И жар душил грудь; в жаре стеклятели стрекозиные крылья над прудом, взлетали в жар в синюю бездну дня, --туда, в голубой покой пустынь. Потным рукавом усердно размазывал на лице пыль распаренный сельчанин, тащась на колокольню раскатать медный язык колокола, пропотеть и поусердствовать во славу Божью. И еще, и еще клинькала в синюю бездну дня целеевская колокольня; и юлили над ней, и писали, повизгивая, восьмерки стрижи (SG, I, 9).

The passage is almost a compressed compilation of stylistic devices singled out by Belyj as being particularly characteristic elements of Gogol''s narratives.⁹ There is an abundance of alliteration ranging from mellifluous *n*'s (синюю бездну дня) to cacophonous *n*'s жарких, жестоких блесков, кинула зычные клики целеевская колокольня), and assonance (благовонья Троицын день . . . легкими, розовыми шиповниками). Words and phrases are repeated to achieve parallelism, and often this repetition is extended to encompass basic roots of words, ex. жарких, жар; душный, душил; колокольня, колокол. This instrumentation is not merely repetitive, rather it acquires a newly enhanced and expanded function. Belyj's prose is sound amplified by symbols; the author applies a fresh coat of paint in the form of symbolism to

the primer of Gogol's images. Thus, the already oft-mentioned *бездна* develops into a recurring leit-motif, foreshadowing the doom of Pëtr Dar'jal'skij, the novel's protagonist; the sweaty sleeve (потным рукавом) and the copper tongue (медный язык) will later find echoes in Suxorukov the coppersmith (медник), at whose hands the hero will die. The martins (стрижи) are the first inhabitants of Belyj's symbolic aviary which grows to include even a Gogol'-bird.¹⁰ The author establishes a complex pattern of repetition which serves as an element of rhythm and organization creating a marked spatial orientation in the work.¹¹

By manipulation and intensification of Gogol's devices, Belyj succeeds in reconstructing a Gogolian atmosphere and world. Močul'skij goes so far as to assert that in Celebeevo, "мы сразу же узнаем гоголевский Миргород."¹² In this symbolic twentieth century world bounded by Celebeevo on the east and Lixov on the west, (the toponyms being in themselves, obvious symbols), lies the receding ravine (пологий лог) of the scheming carpenter, Kudejarov, and Gugolevo, where the hero Dar'jal'skij begins his fictional existence. Belyj notes in his article that the inhabitants of Gogol's literary world are "not people, but radishes" ("не люди, а репки") (G, p. 99). In Belyj's own novel, Fëkla Eropegina is not a "duckling" but a "dumpling" ("не тетеха она -- лепеха") (SG, I, 87). This novel geography of the "dusty and the dirty" ("пыльные и грязные") is reminiscent of Gogol's own unforgettable "thick and thin" ("толстые и тонкие"). Belyj chooses the following as a typical example of Gogol's male characters: "Вот у нашего заседателя вся нижняя часть лица баранья, так сказать..." (G, p. 98). Belyj employs a similar image in his own novel; however, he replaces the horizontal perspective with a vertical one and increases the extent of the grotesque in the figure of Mironič Kudejarov:

Не лицо -- баранья, обглоданная кость; и при том не лицо, а пол-лица; лицо, положим, как лицо, а только все кажется, что половина лица; одна сторона тебе хитро подмигивает, другая же все что-то высматривает, чего-то боится все; друг с дружкой разговоры ведут: одна это: "я вот, ух, как!" а другая: "ну-ка, ну-ка: что -- взял?" (SG, I, 42).

Like their male counterparts, female personages in Gogol's stories are equally vulnerable to caricature and exaggeration,

as Belyj wonders "Неужели женщины нет, а есть только баба, или русалка . . ." (G, p. 101). *Серебряный голубь* exhibits the same polarity in the female roles characterized by Katja, the young and attractive Russian maiden who first charms and enchants Dar'jal'skij, and Matrëna Semënovna, the "pock-marked old hag" ("баба рябая") who lures him away from his beloved beauty. The reader to whom Belyj gradually introduces the remaining *dramatis personae* of his novel, experiences, on the literary level, a growing sense of *déjà-vu*. Baroness Todrabe-Graaben, Father Vukol Golokrestovskij, Count Gudi-Gudaj-Zatrubinskij, Prince Čikilizar and finally Čizikov are clearly the descendants of Čičikov, Count Odnorozovskij-Čementinskij and the Georgian Prince Čipxaixilidzev, all from Gogol's *Мертвые души*. The extraordinary fact is not so much that such persons exist in the author's literary imagination, but that, "Гоголь заставляет это зверье или репье (не знаю, как назвать) танцевать мазурку, одолжаться табаком и даже более того, -- испытывать мистические экстазы, . . ." (G, p. 99). Belyj's own dusties, dirties and dumplings are no less ludicrous when one recalls Father Vukol's intoxicated war dance or Ivan Ogdn' and his exorcising incantations during the services of the Dove Brotherhood.

Through this Gogolian-Belian nightmare land passes Pëtr Dar'jal'skij, "мой герой", in Belyj's words.¹³ The prototype for Dar'jal'skij has been traditionally identified as Belyj himself.¹⁴ A close comparison of the hero with the image of Gogol' in Belyj's article reveals another interpretation: Dar'jal'skij is Gogol'. In the early pages of the novel Dar'jal'skij is described as "'суконное рило'" "'рилом', выражаясь просто, была и не суконная вовсе, а, так сказать, 'бархатная': . . . загорелое лицо с основательным носом, . . ." (SG, I, 28). One is here reminded of Vladimir Nabokov's assertion that in all of Gogol's stories "the nose is the beau."¹⁵ Beyond the very superficial level of comparison (both Dar'jal'skij and Gogol' are writers whose first literary attempts are failures, Dar'jal'skij resides in Gugolevo), there is a maze of words, phrases, images and incidents applied to Gogol' in the article, which can be matched with similar, and sometimes identical, passages in the novel. The novel then, on one plane, is an artistic representation and expansion of themes contained in the essay. In his examination of Gogol's tragic journey through life, Belyj supplies an effective plot summary of his own novel; conversely, the novel is a fictional interpretation

of Gogol's moral quest outlined in the article. The parallels begin in early childhood as Belyj quotes Gogol':

"Вам, без сомнения, когда-нибудь случалось слышать голос, называющий вас по имени, который простолюдины объясняют тем, что душа стосковалась с человеком... Я помню, что в детстве я часто его слышал..." (G, p. 105). Dar'jal'skij is visited by a similar song -- or voice, howl, call, as it is alternatively characterized by Belyj in both the article and the novel -- "Еще я пугался с первых мгновений жизни; . . . спервых еще детских дней сладкая песня, но и песня насмешливая, ты мне и на заре звучала, и во тьме..." (SG, I, 128). As if to underline for the unwary reader the significance of the relationship to Gogol', Dar'jal'skij in the same utterance conjures up the vision of Gugolevo. Likewise filled with fear, yet irresistibly drawn to discover the meaning of the distant voice, Gogol' embarked upon a spiritual pilgrimage, "куда нельзя вступать без определенного оккультно разработанного пути, без опытного руководителя;" (G, p. 107). In his anxiety, he turned to a succession of others for assistance in his search; unfortunately he chanced upon Father Matvej as his source of inspiration: "что мог сделать о. Матвей? Он не мог понять Гоголя. Самый кроткий и доброжелательный человек, не глядящий туда, куда, глядел Гоголь, мог бы лишь погубить его" (G, p. 108). Petr, who also yearns for inner harmony and the cosmic unity promised by the "song" seeks guidance in the person of Kudejarov (the name is derived in part from кудесник), a simple carpenter and spiritual leader of the Doves. Dar'jal'skij's trust is similarly misplaced as he belatedly concludes that Kudejarov will destroy him. Three times the hero echoes Belyj's sentiments on Father Matvej: "Знаешь ли ты, что столяр замышляет меня погубить?" (SG, II, 167, 172, 176).

Belyj concludes that Gogol's failure to find proper inspiration is largely his own fault, because he did not undertake any serious study of alternative philosophies, especially the mystical literature of the Orient. Dar'jal'skij commits a similar error when he rejects the assortment of cabalistic writings recommended to him by his friend Smidt. This omission is all the more serious when one realizes that Belyj was infatuated with the writings and mystical teachings of Minclova while writing both the article and the novel. The mystery which Gogol' was unable to discover, according to Belyj, is love: "Гоголь знал мистерии восторга, и мистерии ужаса -- тоже знал Гоголь.

Но мистерии любви не знал. Мистерию эту знали посвященные; и этого не знал Гоголь; не знал, но заглядывал в сокровенное" (G, p. 109). Love also eludes Dar'jal'skij, who flees from Katja to Kudejarov and Matrëna Semënovna, the mother mistress of the Doves. Yet even in his relationship with Matrëna, his inability to love is expressed by the infertility of the hero who is unable to beget a physical Dove Child. In this regard Dar'jal'skij exhibits the impotence of Gogol' alluded to in Belyj's assertion: "Характерно, что мы не знаем, кого из женщин любил Гоголь, да и любил ли?" (G, p. 101). This life without love is, according to Belyj, the essential factor in Gogol's despair and subsequent destruction of his own self:

имел Гоголь видение, Лик, но себя не преобразил для того, чтоб безнаказанно видеть Лик, слушать зов Души любимой, . . . И лик, виденный Гоголем, не спас Гоголя: . . . От него убегал Гоголь. . . . Это -- тень чудного лица, которое, несмотря на то, что оно -- чудное, ужасало Гоголя всю жизнь: это потому, что мост любви, преображающий землю, рухнул для Гоголя и между Ликом Небесным и им образовалась черная, ревущая бездна. . . . Бездны боялся Гоголь, но смутно помнил (не сознанием, конечно) что за "бездной этой" (за миллиардами верст и лет) милый голос, зовущий его: не пойти на зов не мог Гоголь: пошел -- и упал в бездну: мост любви рухнул для него, а перелететь через бездну не мог Гоголь; он влетел в нее, вылетел из мира . . . (G, pp. 111-12).

The Dove Child, the "wonderfully youthful countenance," (лик), appears to Dar'jal'skij suspended above the same бездна.¹⁶ Like Gogol', the hero is unprepared for the sacred image; the short-lived ecstasy of the vision quickly terminates in пляска.¹⁷ By his rejection of Katja's love and his subsequent insubstantial affair with Matrëna, Dar'jal'skij instigates the series of events which bring about his own death. He recognizes the dangers only too late: this world and its inhabitants are on the verge of destroying him; he attempts to flee, but his efforts are in vain. Suxorukov, the strongarm enforcer of the Doves, murders Dar'jal'skij, who thus exits from this fictional world of the novel.

The theory that Dar'jal'skij is a reincarnated Gogol',

a thesis apparently confirmed in the article, does not necessarily contradict the prevailing view of Belyj as the hero's prototype. Rather, the more comprehensive view of the hero as an image of both Gogol' and Belyj is a direct continuation of Belyj's own unceasing efforts to indicate the unique affinity and even identification of the two authors. This inseparability as it were of the two is revealed in *Masterstvo Gogol'ja* by the juxtaposition of surnames and pseudonyms to arrive at the formula "Belyj-Janovskij (Bugaev-Gogol')."18 The author's intention in *Serebrjanyj golub'* is hinted at in the passage: "воскресение мертвых, брат, -- в памяти, в духе перво-наперво будет: придут с нами покойнички полдничать, друг; (SG, I, 81). Through memory and artistic imagination Belyj resurrects Gogol' for a day, for his novel. The author strolls through his own symbolist Gogolian world with his hero and literary mentor. The author, however, deserts his companions at the abyss; Belyj refuses to repeat the mistakes of Gogol' and Dar'jal'skij. Belyj discovers the mysteries of love in his own Katja (Asja Turgeneva), and together they delve deeper into the secrets of life not with the carpenter Kudejarov but with the master builder of the future Goetheanum, Rudolf Steiner. Thus, Belyj asserts his independence while at the same time deriving from his association with Gogol' the claim that he is the legitimate successor of the Gogolian tradition in the twentieth century. As Belyj, nearing the end of his life, concluded: "Полагаю, что сказанного достаточно, чтобы видеть: проза Белого в звуке, образе, цветописии и сюжетных моментах -- итог работы над гоголевскою языковвою [sic] образностью; проза эта возобновляет в XX столетии "школу" Гоголя".19

NOTES

1. Andrej Belyj, *Serebrjanyj golub'*, *Vesy*, Nos. 3-12 (1909). The novel was reprinted in 1910, 1917 and 1922. I have taken all quotations from the 1922 Berlin edition reprinted in the series *Slavische Propyläen*, No. 38 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967). References from the novel in the text will be identified by the letters "SG."
2. V. L. Rogačevskij, review of *Serebrjanyj golub'*, in *Sovremennij mir*, No. 9, Part II (1910), 170.

3. Anton Krajnyj [Zinaida Gippius], "Razočarovaniya i predčuvstvija (1910 god)," *Russkaja mysl'*, No. 12, Part II (1910), 181.
4. Konstantin Močul'skij, *Andrej Belyj* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1955), p. 158.
5. Andrej Belyj, *Masterstvo Gogol'ja* (1934; reprint ed., Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Slavische Propyläen, No. 59, 1969), pp. 297-309.
6. Andrej Belyj, "Gogol'," *Vesy*, No. 4 (April, 1909), pp. 69-83. The article was reprinted in Belyj's collection *Lug zelenyj* (Moscow, 1910), pp. 93-121, which is available from the Johnson Reprint Corporation, New York. All citations are from this edition and are followed in the text by the letter "G."
7. Belyj's letter to Ivanov-Razumnik dated March 1, 1927, in *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, XV, 1-2 (Jan. - June, 1974), 49.
8. Andrej Belyj, *Meždu dvux revoljucij* (1934; reprint ed., Chicago: Russian Study Series, No. 60, 1966), p. 364.
9. "Gogol'," pp. 117-121.
10. *Serebrjanyj golub'*, II, 203. "Гоголем выступал рассторонный лавочник; . . ." The phrase is an example of word play in the novel. The basic meaning is "to strut about" derived from the "golden-eye" (Gogol") bird; but there is, of course, the clever allusion to Gogol' in the Gogolian novel.
11. For a full discussion of this concept see Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1963), p. 13.
12. *Andrej Belyj*, p. 157.
13. George Reavey in his translation of Belyj's *Serebrjanyj golub'* (*The Silver Dove* [New York: Grove Press, 1974]), often translates Belyj's phrase as "our hero" which is indicative of the dual nature of his own translation. Comments on the unreliability and omissions in Reavey's translation are contained in my review, *Slavic and East European Journal*, XVIII, 4 (Winter, 1974), 441, 442.
14. More recently John D. Elsworth (*Andrej Bely* [Letchworth, England: Bradda Books, 1972]), p. 65, has identified Dar'jal'skij as Sergej Solov'ev.

15. Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol*, corr. ed. (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 3.
16. *Serebrjanyj golub'*, II, 154. Note that the entire passage containing Dar'jal'skij's vision of the Dove Child is omitted in the English translation.
17. cf. *Serebrjanyj golub'*, II, 157 and "Gogol'," p. 100.
18. *Masterstvo Gogol'ja*, p. 298.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 309.