is credited with fathering the school of ornamental prose. At the same time, the function of playing with language brings out ideas which are central to Belyj's texts as a whole. For instance, Koževnikova deduces that the governing principle in Belyj's final novels is the principle of 'смешное смешение,' resulting in the following general rule: 'слово, утрачивая устойчивость, отчетливость, приобретает смысловую разнонаправленность, совмещая несоединимое'(213).

There are so many insights in this book that stay with the reader. To list them all would be impossible, however, here are just two: 1) No matter how diversified and experimental Belyj's prose, no matter how many phases he traversed, he returned again and again to the same system of imagery, the same theme and ideas; 2) There are no boundaries between his poetry and his prose. One comes away from reading this book ever cognizant of the sheer virtuosity of Belyj's technical devices. By the time he wrote the final novels, he burdened his works with such excess of design: there a re too many parodies, too many digressions, too many neologisms -- the final decaded of creativity is a veritable cornucopia of baroque exuberance. This is "literature for literature's sake," as Koževnikova cites Ejxenbaum: 'конечно, роман (Москва) Белого — событие огромной литературной важности, которое можно приравнять только к какому-нибудь научному открытию. (...) Это уже не просто 'орнаментальная проза' — это совершенно особый словесный план, это своего рода выход за пределы словесных тональностей - нечто по основным принципам аналогичное новой музыке. (...) проза эта, насыщенная новообразованиями и всевозможной словесной игрой, кажется абсолютно в себе замкнутой — абсолютным словом'(192-3).

One hopes that Язык Андрея Белого goes through a second printing, as the

first run bore no more than 500 copies, precious few for the scholars whom it will benfit, the students of Belyj, as well as the students of stylistics and poetics. Belyj scholars owe a great deal to Nina Koževnikova, for over the years she has single-handedly devoted her life's work to a very difficult topic. She modestly concludes her book with a call to study the language of countless other works by Belyj that remain untapped, namely, his memoirs, travelogues, scholarly treatises, letters and essays.

Andrei Bely, The Christened Chinaman, translated, annotated and introduced by Thomas R. Beyer Jr, Tenafly, N.J. : Hermitage, 1991. xix, 187 pp. $12.00, paper.

(Review by Rolf Hellebust, University of Calgary)

A book like Kreščenyj kitaec demands a disillusioned translator -- no naive assumptions about a happy balance of readability and literalness; no qualms about what must be jettisoned to make the thing float. Thomas Beyer introduces his translation of Belyj's autobiographical novel by making his aims quite explicit. The neologisms are to stay. The fastidious counterpoint of repeated words and phrases stays, as does the concern for etymology. Beyer tends not only towards a word for word rendering: his translation is often root for root. (Thus, because rod- means gen-, "blagorodica" becomes "Deogenetrix," "blagorodnyj" - "genteel," the neologism "srebrerodie" - "silvergentleness," and so on.) The syntax is to stay - as far as possible. The idiosyncratic punctuation as well. The prose rhythm, however, is to go. So is eurythmy (of course). Most importantly, the readability of the English version is to be sacrificed again and again - either in deference to the unreadability of Belyj's original, or to meet the above goals of faithfulness to etymology, syntax, punctuation etc.

Here, in other words, the typical disclaimer of the translator's preface ("Ultimately Bely must be read in the original and so this translation is but a bridge..." (xviii)) is no mere cliché. One might argue with Beyer's Nabokovian literalist approach: how many readers (if they are not reviewers) will actually use his work as a crib? Is it possible to read anything but an intralinear translation without occasionally forgetting that it is a translation, and without at least subconsciously requiring that it stand on its own as a coherent artistic text?

Nevertheless, we must judge Beyer by the criteria he himself has set. The most provocatively unbeautiful thing about Beyer's effort is his insistence on rendering the

same word (and, to a lesser extent, the same root) in precisely the same way, wherever it occurs in the novel. The injury to meaning is sometimes fatal: the idiomatic "takim obrazom" will never work as "in this image" (16), despite the important connotations of the word "image" in the novel. On the other hand, Beyer is entirely justified in offering "flying mice" (101) for "letučie myši" in a context where Belyj's only obvious motivation for mentioning bats is his attraction to the motifs of "flying" and "mice."

Beyer knows what he is doing. At the least, it is hard to catch him out with an unintentional mistranslation. The same applies to his treatment of syntax and punctuation. Beyer is limited by his target language in his attempts to reproduce the strangeness of Belyj's syntactic inversions; but he does his best. He should perhaps be more sensitive to the limits imposed by English on punctuation. Beyer correctly retains what would appear strange in either language (this applies to many of Belyj's dashes), but also keeps elements (e.g., the obligatory Russian comma in fromt of subordinate clauses) which have little significance in the original, and only serve to distract the English reader.

While Beyer may recall Professor Letaev - the mathematician father of the hero of The Christened Chinaman - in the obstinate rigor of his approach (he even used a computer to keep track of word repetitions), he also shows, in the manner of Kotik Letaev's musician mother, a surprising degree of poetic sensibility. He feels the Joycean exuberance of the lyrical descriptions:

...and Mama, bending over the black and slit box, has withdrawn her look into the whitetoothiness of the keys; I see: a bracelet jumps glitteringly from her small little hand; an earring diamondizes in a lilaceous spark...(25)

Beyer, who is known for his scholarly work on the psychological element in The

Christened Chinaman, is also good at capturing the playful sexual subtexts that filter through the dual consciousness of Belyj's child/adult narrator. Even the outrageous translation of "dubonosnaja dylda" as "oakenosed dildo" (134) (in a description of the Letaev's lanky, woodcarrying servant) can be understood - if not forgiven - in this way.

One peripheral criticism: Beyer's extensive endnotes offer too much biographical information on famous mathematicians (who are no more than names in Belyj's text) and on other figures (Beethoven, Venus, Adam, etc.) whom any reader of this novel is likely to have heard of - and too little in more relevant areas: e.g., Belyj's mysticism (why does Ahura Mazda have a chapter named after him?), or his Russian literary intertexts (don't the repeated references to Antonovka apples have something to do with Bunin?). And there is no excuse for the lack of page references.

In general, however, Beyer is to be commended for his service to Belyj scholarship, in making a difficult work more accessible. Since this translation was published, the original novel has finally been reprinted in Russia (Panorama, 1992), which should also help to increase scholarly interest. The book is not Belyj's best. It is a work of great formal subtlety; but the novelist seems so enthralled by the mystical significance of his mainly autobiographical contents that he presents this significance as axiomatic, without exploring it in any depth on the page. In this way, The Christened Chinaman almost appears as a sketch for the earlier masterpiece Petersburg, which takes much of the same material and gives it a universal resonance. Indeed, its echoing of the themes of Petersburg probably constitutes the major selling point of The Christened Chinaman, and one which certainly justifies its translation into English, despite its evident weaknesses.

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Work in Progress

The following is the preliminary draft of what, it is hoped, will eventually form a chapter in a book by Stephen Hutchings on Russian Silver-age fiction. The book is provisionally entitled 'Icons of the Ordinary: Everyday Life and the Semiotics of Anti-Plot in Russian Silver-Age Fiction.' In addition to a theoretical chapter and a section treating the cultural origins of the phenomenon of byt, 'Icons of the Ordinary' will include analyses of the work of Čexov, Sologub, Belyj, Rozanov and Remizov. The author cautions that the Belyj material is still very much in "raw" state and is undoubtedly marred by infelicities of style and content that have yet to be corrected. The final version will probably look rather different. Readers may also be hindered by the fact that the analysis has been removed from its context within the project as a whole for the purposes of inclusion in ABSN. (The Belyj chapter will form the first of three chapters making up the study's final section.) Some references and linkages may therefore be unclear. Nonetheless, comments and suggestions for improvement will be welcomed and may be directed to the editor at the address listed on the inside front cover of the current issue.

"The Poet, the Child and the Apartment: The Struggle With Byt in Belyj's Kotik Letaev and The Christened Chinaman"

We must recreate everything and in order to do this we must create ourselves. And the only slope on which we may still clamber is ourselves. At the summit our "I" awaits us. Here is the answer for the artist if he wishes to remain an artist but not cease to be a man, he must become his own artistic form. (Andrej Belyj)

An icon is not a portrait but a prototype of the future man-within-the-church. (Eugene Trubetskoi)[1]

Introduction: The Self in Belyj's Aesthetics

It is no coincidence that the texts to be considered in the final section all fall under the rubric of autobiograpy. The analysis in each chapter so far has culminated in considerations of the category of self. Čexov and Sologub each understood that the transcendence of byt as the reifying effects of the anonymous other must involve a shift away from the territory on which that other is written - from literature (which, in its modern variant, remains in thrall to an anonymous, alienated readership), and from fiction (which deals in the abstractions of plotted roles).

Autobiograpical writing came to be central also to the development of twentieth-century western art.[2] Here, too, we should express no surprise. By its nature, autobiography highlights the "private things of life," those myriad everyday occurrences which come incrementally to determine the autobiographical subject's intimate sense of self. The very point of such writing is to reveal to a vast, unknowing public the secret dramas (beneath an ocean of mundaneness) to which only the private self has access.[3] Thus, autobiographical production represents the quintessence of the semiotic project which has daily life as its internal model: that of

bridging the rift disjoining particular (private) from universal (public). But by the same token, it becomes the faultline along which that project splinters apart as artists begin to doubt its validity. The autobiographical novel has, significantly, proved highly popular among practitioners of postmodernist metafiction in which the artistic "game" of life is to cast the self into an infinite regress (masks of masks of masks) with no outlet to the world of others. John Barth's claim in his most recent work that "[t]his is not the story of my life, but it is most certainly a story thereof" is emblematic of the point that this trend has reached.[4]

The argument I shall make in Section 3 is that the version of metaliterature espoused in early twentieth-century Russian (pseudo)autobiography celebrates neither the primacy of the self in literature, nor the literariness of the self in life, but rather attempts to fashion a form of creativity in which the distinctions between literature and life, art and the everyday, self and other are rendered invalid. In a sense, it eschews metaliterary status altogether, and could be more accurately described as converting the metatextual probings discussed in Section1 into text proper, actualizing metatext as žizn' .

I begin with Andrej Belyj, aspects of whose symbolism come close to meeting the requirements of the new form of creativity. (The influence on theurgical symbolism of Orthodox thought which furnished a vocabulary for part of this study's criticial framework is not without relevance.) For example, Belyj's early formulations of the nature of aesthetics reveal a readiness to transcend the traditional dichotomy between utilitarian and purist views of art: "[A]rt ceases to be a self-sufficient form. But it cannot on the other hand be made to serve utilitarian ends. Instead, it is becoming the pathway to a more essential type of cognition, namely religious cognition".[5] He conceived art as an integral part of religious meaning; without artistic creation, the ultimate truth of religious life - the incarnation of heaven on earth - becomes

unattainable. Art itself is responsible for the continual creation of religious truth: "To use the language of religion, creation leads us to an epiphany, or actual manifestation of the deity. The World Logos takes on the Image of Man."[6]

Belyj recognized that an art which creates a hitherto unmanifested truth (rather than one which transcribes an existing one) will tolerate no disjunction between artist and artwork. As the proclamation that provides this chapter with its epigraph suggests, true aesthetic activity cannot be anything other than a discourse of the self.[7]

Others have pointed out that all Belyj's prose narratives are essentially fictions of the self - perpetual reworkings of the father-son relationship that defined his childhood.[8] But, despite the dazzling innovations they display, the fact that these are fictions, and that the subject around which they revolve is the autocentric, autobiographical self is symptomatic of Belyj's failure to accomplish the radical break with previous literary models required by theurgy. As Roger Keys has intimated, Petersburg represents the biggest step in this direction with its self-ironizing narrative voice and its attempt to present itself in the form of a monstrous "brain-game" (mozgovaia igra) taking place in the depths of an unidentifiable super-consciousness.[9] But the novel's unambiguous fictionality confirms that even at the height of his powers Belyj has yet to match rhetoric with concrete achievement. The most intractable problem derives from the theorist's insistance on artistic creation as a unique form of activity with the potential to affect the spiritual reality upon which impinges, to constitute rather than reflect the world in which it situtates itself.

Belyj's theory delineates several levels of creativity - each with an aesthetic component, roots in a non-aesthetic reality, and the power to harness the aesthetic element to the task of transforming that reality. The initial levels coincide with stages in the development of human consciousness - the acquisition of language and the

formation of the self:

> Creation has certain definite forms through which it passes...Primitive creation is...the unity of rhythmic movements in the primordial chaos of feelings. And the first act performed by creation is the naming of contents. In naming contents we turn them into things. In naming things, we transform the formlessness of the chaos of contents into a series of images. We unify these images in a single whole. The wholeness of images is none other than an 'I'.[10]

For Belyj, the very process by which we cognize both the world and our selves partakes of the aesthetic:

> Chaos, once experienced, ceases to be chaos. When we experience something, it is as though we were allowing these contents to pass through us. We become the image of the Logos, which organizes chaos. We give chaos an individual order. This order is by no means a logical order. It is the order of the flow of experienced contents in us...This type of cognition is not cognition, it is creation.[11]

The later stages of his theory project the aesthetic function further beyond its traditional sphere of influence into the realm of ethics, bringing art close to the status of a universal theory of human experience which looks towards attainment of the long-awaited state of Godmanhood:

> The symbolic image of experience, extracted from the soul... gives us... the artistic symbol. The attempt to give life to this complex unity, in order that the symbol may begin to speak the language of human acts, leads to a yet more complex unity, namely the unity of the religious symbol. This is accomplished in such a way that the artist himself and those surrounding him become artistic forms. Forms of conduct then appear as a form of artistic creation of life, and the aesthetic symbol becomes an image of content. The indivisible unity of form and content here is religion. Moreover, the religious symbol, that is the beautiful

life of man , which is taken as the norm of all behaviour, takes the unity of human nature and turns it into the dualistic image of the God-Man . Thus we arrive at theurgic creation.[12](emphasis added)

As Belyj understood, fiction (distinct from, and free of responsibility for the real) is ill-equipped to achieve such grandiose aims. It is for this reason that, inspired by George Steiner's anthroposophy, he devoted the post-Petersburg segment of his career to a vast pseudo-autobiographical project (or epopée as he called it) of which Kotik Letaev and The Christened Chinaman are part.[13]

Commentaries dealing with Belyj's autobiographical art tend to focus on its relationship to anthroposophical teaching. The periods of Kotik's life described, each culminating in images of the boy as Christ, are seen as artistic transcriptions of Belyj's notion of his own spiralic progress towards spiritual perfection. The autobiographical factor is most clearly perceived in the position of the adult narrator (who begins Kotik Letaev with a soliloquy from a mountain slope which is known to have produced similar impressions on Belyj).[14] The plots, though based on events from Belyj's childhood, are artistic renditions of those happenings, memories reconstructed according to the mould of the ideal anthroposophical life-journey. Andrej Belyj re-imagines himself as Kotik Letaev. It is this framing of more or less fictionalized (anthroposophized) child by more or less autobiographical narrator which is seen as being at the root of the basic paradox (and, for most, failure) of Belyj's enterprise. On one hand, he is claiming a measure of autobiographical authenticity for his recollections; the narrator is a contemporary Russian writer remembering incidents from his childhood.[15] On the other hand, the need to give expression to those memories in anthroposophic vocabulary leads to absurd situations such as a description of the moment of birth from the baby's point of view. It is the contradiction

involved in the self-conscious autobiographical subject's attempt to convey impressions from his pre-linguistic infancy which causes the reader most difficulty.[16]

The portrayal of the novels as artistic idealizations of anthroposophical teaching (or factual accounts of anthroposophical experience) sidelines the question of the theurgical reconception of aesthetics attempted in the theoretical writings. What, we might wonder, happened to the radical reformulation of the relationship between art and reality attempted in Belyj's symbolist tracts? What if we take Belyj at his (earlier) word and view them as works in which "the creator becomes an artistic form", the artistic symbol "speaks the language of human acts," and, conversely, "forms of conduct appear as artistic creations of life"? What, then, of the relationship between (autobiographical) reality and (artistic) creation, adult narrator and child hero, Andrej Belyj and Kotik Letaev? These are among the questions which will guide my analysis below.

Kotik Letaev and The Christened Chinaman are set in the archetypal locus for twentieth-century Russian everyday life: the urban apartment. Frequently noted by Belyi, the theme of everyday life's connection with the apartment can be traced throughout his novels.[17] It also features in his memoiristic writings as a key element in his world-view.[18] Since I propose to treat the texts i) in the context of the writer's creative theurgy, and ii) in terms of the role accorded to routine existence in the new form of autobiography that such creativity brings in its wake, it seems appropriate to use this link as a point of entry.

I first look at the apartment as object of depiction. I show how its topology is associated in turn with i) intimacy, creative interaction and the incarnation by self of other, ii) the capitulation of self to anonymous other, and iii) the construction of a shell of idiosyncratic selfhood (or čudačestvo) with which to combat that other's invasive

influence. Next, I turn to the relationship between depicting subject and object of depiction - and thus to the complex disposition of levels delineating child-hero from adult-narrator, empirical child and authorial persona. I argue that Belyj's narrator adopts the buffoonery of his father (the adult-as-child) and the musical sensibility of his mother (the child-as-adult) as creative strategies of his own, inducing a multi-levelled and dialectical "spindling" together of object and subject, childhood and adulthood, depicted byt and depicting artist. The result is Kotik Letaev as Christ - Belyj's Child-man - a metatextual figure who, by analogy with the Dostoyevskian Godman, reattains Christlike innocence by assuming and overcoming the burdens of sin, reason and consciousness. It is in the relation between text (Kotik as literary hero) and metatext (Kotik as unity of life and art), rather than between autobiographical fact and fictional image that contradictions undermining Belyj's enterprise in Kotik Letaev assert themselves. In the final section I clarify the two-way, iconic movement traced in Belyj's narratives and, drawing on the writer's imagery, express it in terms of energy released from within a shell essential to the meaning to which that energy gives embodied form. This formula is applied to the question of plot in Kotik Letaev and in The Christened Chinaman where, contrary to conventional wisdom, I believe that Belyj achieves a partial resolution to the problems encountered in the earlier novel. I shall argue that Belyj exploits aspects of iconic logic to engage in a dynamic process that rewrites byt as myth and "re-familiarizes" the alienating abstractions of the routine, enabling the space of the apartment to become once more a site of creative intimacy between son and father, child and man, self and other.

Alhough (particularly at the conclusion to my analysis) I remain attentive to differences between the two works, for much of the chapter, and for reasons that will be apparent, I treat them as a unity.[19] Illustrations of a number of points are therefore drawn with minimal distinction from either novel, or from both. My analysis is

throughout supported by references to Belyj's non-fictional memoir On the Border of Two Centuries which I find essential to a meaningful treatment of my theme.

The Place of Byt in Belyj's Life

One has always to bear in mind that Belyj's memoirs were written under the conditions of an emerging totalitarian state, forcing the writer to recast the impressions which form the subject of his reflections along lines acceptable to Stalinist orthodoxy.[20] Even allowing for the adjustments which must be made to the value we place on Belyj's assertions, we are left in little doubt as to the crucial role played by byt in the evolution of his philosophy. The word itself (as well as derivatives from it - bytovoj, bytik, bytovik etc.) recurs so many times that the reader is led to conclude either that the manuscript was prepared in haste, or that the phenomenon itself developed into an obsession of gigantic proportions.[21] Without refuting the first conclusion, the prominence of the bytovoj theme in Belyj's fiction lends weight to the second.

It is easy to understand why Belyj should tie his notion of byt to his father's generation, and to the place with which it was inextricably linked - the professorial apartment:

> [H]alf destroyed by ... our fathers, the children of the border between the centuries destroyed that byt to the finish, that byt which had seemed as hard as stone and so strong.[22]

> Mathematicians...turned out to be the most thickly-set bytoviki imaginable, which in my language meant : boring people, deprived of imagination in practical life; byt in life is taken by a mathematician fully "on hire", like a piece of furniture...It is felt by that part of the body which is opposite to the head; byt is like the sense one has of the "behind" regions of the torso...(71);

[T]he theme of the end is immanent to my development; it is imbued with the theme of another end: the end of one of the professorial apartments, a typical one however, for in it is the end of byt, the end of the century. (97);

The association between byt and "life's musty trivia" is made repeatedly, allowing Belyj to establish the apartment as the phenomenon's primary locus:

[T]he pessimism I experienced carr[ied] the potential energy of grand actions in rejection of the little deeds of the apartment; in the apartment was the ash of words; beyond the windows was the storm...my pessimism was the pessimism of an experiencing of the apartmental odor. (379)

Belyj subdivides the apartment along "ideological" lines, referring to an inner haven available to him to him during his youngest years and characterized as a child's world of fantasy and imagination:

[I]n my imagination the nursery was the inner world, and the living room was the outer world - almost the Arbat...Crawling across into the living room, I stepped into the apartmental byt...As a child I thrust myself into this byt and, frightened by it, I flee from it; I climb back into my burrow, back into the nursery. (177)[23]

He stresses that, when referring to his father's generation, he is blaming not particular individuals but an environment (sreda) whose emblem is the apartment: "And so, it is not they who are guilty, but the apartment, interwoven with al the other apartments: it is the professorial environment and the professorial apartment , not ours in particular, but the arithmetically average apartment of a professor" (445).

We need only look at two of the definitions of byt that Belyj gives to confirm that we are dealing with the complex of qualities encountered in previous chapters:

Staticness, prejudice, routine, vulgarity, limited horizons, - that's what I carried away at the border of the two centuries from the byt of an average Moscow professor; and in the average of averages, something far from average was dissolving. (41);

Cariatyd-likeness, stoniness, unchanging stagnation spoiled our life; everything that changed changed a long time ago, in Alexander the Second's time. (107-08)

To the familiar mix Belyj adds his own, philosophical ingredient by equating byt in life with analytical positivism in thought:

[T]he epoch which gave birth to us was static; we were in those years the striking force of dynamism; our fathers being analysists, turned analysis into a dogma; we, who gave ourselves up to fluid process were dialectics. (200);

From here...dates my struggle for the emancipation of facts from their stabilization in mechanicism and positivism. (449)

I cried out from within the empiricism of byt : is this life, our life, my life? (105)

Belyj developed the bytovoj theme into a point of reference against which he defined his life, his creative thought and his art:

I always sensed the border of the centuries between me and byt . (199-200);

In front of me stood nothing more and nothing less than a program to carry out a revolution against byt ...an ambush against a thousand-year old culture, which had been blown out into a thousand-year old sclerosis. (436)

A.S. Petrovskij, standing "at the border," always stressed to me: spiders, sneezes, dust and rot cannot be washed away with the light cloth of the rejuvenation of byt , but only by the burning of that byt to ashes. (442)

Keeping in mind this notion of byt as the core of an entire belief system, we now turn

to the manner in which it functions in the two works where the concept is most clearly tied to the apartment.[24]

Life in the Place of Byt : Stage One

If one is to attach any credence to the experiences depicted in Kotik Letaev , the importance of the apartment predates Belyj's interest in philosophy (and, thereby, its associations with the negativity of byt). It predates even his acquisition of consciousness. [25] Belyj uses the topography of the apartment to concretize the images of his pre-conscious life.The rooms and corridors surrounding the infant provide him with his sole means of perceiving the experiences preceding, and immediately succeeding his birth, the filter through which they must pass in order to be made available to his developing consciousness:

> [A]ll is in me, I am in all...Such are my first moments...Then - ...gloom... began to crawl from me; sensations separated from my skin...the skin became for me like a vault: such is the way we perceive space; my first impression of it is that it is - a corridor...Rooms are - parts of the body; they have been cast off by me; and - they hang over me, in order to fall apart on me afterwards.[26]
>
> The external world distinctly intruded as an apartment, - that is, that - which fell away from me and on which dreams volatilized, adhering as wallpaper to the sheltering rooms. (37)

The apartment furnishes a primitive system of differentiation: a way of experiencing difference from the surrounding world. Rooms have doors; corridors lead from one place to another. They designate the border between self and other.

The same features serve to conceptualize the state of transition between the temporal world into which he has been born, and the timeless cosmos from which he

emerged:

Passages, rooms, corridors remind us of our body, prototypify our body to us...they a re the organs of the body...of the universe, the corpse of which is is the world visible to us; we have cast it off ourselves: and outside of us ithas congealed. (21)

The compartmentalizing capacity also make of rooms an apparatus for expressing the division and subdivision of meaning within the mythic world of pre-consciousness:

[F]rom the luminaries are laid out: images and the semblances of rooms; these are the rooms of the cosmos; these are mysterious rooms; this is the church transposed to beneath my eyelids; Papa appears there for a second; he is running through the rooms towards me: he nods, like the memory of something; and he forms a passage - into another world. (83)

These same qualities enhance the apartment's role as facilitator of passage between the realms, and of progress into the world outside:

-Passages, rooms, corridors, rising up toward me in the first moment of consciousness, transfer me into the most ancient era of life: into the cave period: I experience the life of black voids. (21);

For me the road of life has been extended: through the stove pipe, the corridor, through the form of our rooms - into the Trinity-Arbat Church...(60)

The obvious question as to whether these images amount to anything more than an adult's metaphor for pre-linguistic, infantile experiences is answered when Belyj points out that the experiences are themselves memories (of another primal plane of being), and that memories of any kind are transformations:

The transfiguration by memory of the previous is the genuine reading: of the universe not ours, standing

behind the previous; the impressions of childhood years are - flights into the never-having-been; and - nonethelesss essential; the beings of other lives have now mixed themselves in with the events of my life. (81)

From whichever temporal viewpoint we observe them, the rooms, corridors, etc. are always already transfigurations of something preceding them. [27]

The apartment is integrated into the theory of language implicit in Kotik Letaev. Rooms and corridors are bounded spaces which delimit and control the flow of chaotic "meaning" in which the pre-conscious Kotik is immersed. The apartment simultaneously halts the flow of meaning and enables it to be experienced. In so doing it preserves elements of both the flux that it bounds and of the unique act of creativity accomplished in expressing the concept. The process by which the words (rooms) of one's family are made one's own, filled with cosmic meaning and transformed in dynamic synthesis is depicted repeatedly:

...the words are imprinted on my soul in a hieroglyph unknown to me...and understanding of the world is not fused with the words about the world....Explanation is the recollection of consonances; understanding is - their dance...the live-flowing lightscript of lightning bolts is - words; and the pulsations are meanings; the live-flowing lightscript of words chases into sleep. It chases into rooms of meaning: a concept (the mental perception of a word) is the lightscript of fractioned rhythm; it branches out like the Tree; and it ignites with the sparkle of images...but the pulse rhythm of the sparkles is - my own, beating in the realm of the dance of rhythm and reflected in an image, like the memory of memory. (84-86)

One example is found in Kotik's account of how he accomodates the word "professor" to a mythic recollection from the other universe:

[T]he old deliria would rise up: a 'professor' himself is a sounding into another universe where all is still

molten...he dashes along...as the old woman used to dash; the old woman is his wife -...a professor's wife. Very often a professor is - an old man . (104)

The last sentence reveals how the repeatable concept "professor" belonging to Kotik's parents (concepts must, by definition be repeatable in different contexts) is assimilated to an individualized mythic recollection belonging exclusively to Kotik.

The stage when Kotik begins his initiation into language is an idealized time, a point at which he is accorded access to the world of others through the words and concepts they use, yet is able to inject into them that which is peculiarly his and derives from his experience in the pre-conscious universe: "The content is mine; I filled everything with it" (186). The true "meaning" of concepts is not the dead clichés associated with their habitual usage, but the creative synthesis which takes place when this mutual interillumination is accomplished and myth (cosmos) is made to pulsate within word (room). When this transitional stage is about to end Kotik complains: "I feel the impossibility of living in this way; concepts are not burgeoning with meaning...and my cosmos - the realm I was before my birth - stands for me as a grey, stone house with columns and empty-eyed windows" (187).

The apartment serves to bring inside the outside world of professors, the Arbat, Moscow etc., so that Kotik can inflect them with his own "meaning." Like language, whose action it mirrors, it occupies a liminal status on the boundary between self and other. The apartment belongs, like Kotik's identity, half to his inner self, and half to the outside world of others in which the concept "I" originates:

Who here is "I"? I is-not I is - not Kotik Letaev! (132);

The 'it' was not mine; but to me it was as...in me, even though 'outside': Why 'this'? Where? Is not 'it' really Kotik Letaev" 'Where is I?' How is it so? And why is it that for 'it' 'I' is not 'I'? (166)

The apartment is thus linked with creativity, and with art in the transfigurative sense that Belyj gives the term in his symbolist theories. If entry into language is itself the essence of creativity ("others" ' concepts burgeoning with "my" meaning), then it is logical that a work of verbal art should likewise consist of creative acts which transfigure the experiences they recall. Rather than indicate the failure of Belyj's enterprise, the narrator's constant use of phrases such as "if I had been able at that time" corresponds to the notion of memory as creation anew :

If I had been able at that time to tie my concepts about the world together into one, a cosmogony would have resulted. Here it is: - the Kosiakov house, my Papa and all the Leo Tolstoys there are - seem eternal to me...everything...flies by in a haze. (106)[28]

The separation of the "I" from itself, the experiencing of consciousness on the border between self and outside world and the accompanying need to re-express one's experience of oneself on a higher plane can be understood as providing the impulse behind the writing of the novel :

the spiral arrangement...sums up in me impressions of a strengthening thought, growing in spirals...It seemed to me: there was nothing inside: all on the outside: had sprouted, emanated - it exists, dances and spins; 'I' is 'not-I'...I am - with the spirit: I am - in the spirit. (204)

Entry into the life of the apartment and its everyday routine (like entry into language) need not necessarily bring surrender to the abstractions of the outside world and loss of human contact. It may instead mean creative interaction and "icon-making."[29] More than signs containing the image of their own meanings (the sense of the term familiar to semioticians), icons must also be grounded in intimate exchange between self and

other as "I" to "Thou", allowing for the incarnation of self (God) in other (man) and the corresponding reenactment by self (now man) of other (now God) in a bi-directional movement in which both elements are at all times preserved (the iconic Christ).[30]

When Kotik perceives his father's algebraic "x" ' s as little Dachsunds on paper he is merely assimilating his father's "word" to his own childish visions, without establishing for them any common, identifiable meaning (70). Though the linking of the word '"Dachsund" to the exclamation "tak-s" uttered by his father while performing equations produces some vaguely motivated associations (i.e. generates a modicum of shared meaning), Kotik remains isolated in his nursery. When, however, he inflects the paternal concept "Moscow" with a meaning that is intimately his, yet conveys an impression which his father (and all "fathers") might share - he is performing an iconic act of embodiment, incarnating the infantile "meanings" of the cosmic flux in the fallen world of men to produce... poetry ! He is also moving from the enclosed world of the nursery into the liminal space of the apartment walls:

I look out of the windows all the time...rrr...rrr..rrr - from a carter's wheel, from a droshky...; a little dog would also be scratching his hairless back against the drainpipe...Sidewalks, asphalts, parquets, firewalls, dead ends - form a huge heap; this heap is the world; and they call it Moscow...the window vents open into it...The termination of our apartment is a blank wall; if one were to knock a breach in it, then a deluge would gush out...and 'Moscow' would be filling up...like a water barrel. (97-98).

Without concrete "I" -"You" exchange (and the liminal space of the apartment to facilitate it), iconic meaning will either be swallowed up by the anonymous abstractions of the outside world, or degenerate into the infantile self-indulgence of the nursery.[31] In his memoirs, Belyj specifically refers to symbolism in terms of the creative reorientation by the nursery (self) of the words of the living room (others):

The boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the one dividing the nursery from the living room was a little corridor; there was as yet no difference between the Arbat and the living room. [I]n my efforts to unite the nursery with the rooms beyond...I was already a symbolist; explanation was for me a myth, built on metaphor; I hear the phrase "he fell into a faint". And immediately I have a dream: the floors of the nursery have split apart and I have fallen into the unfamiliar rooms underneath which are called "a faint". (182)[32]

The idealized image of the apartment as the ground for creativity did not recede after Belyj had passed though the trauma of estrangement from his parents and into the hostile realm of byt. In his memoirs he describes the sense of joy felt on discovering in Mixail Solov'ev's apartment (situated beneath his own, now despised dwelling) a second home, an apartment as apartments should be - intimate, welcoming, conducive to human contact and collective myth-making:

I received the impression of a cosy 'underwater kingdom' when I went down to the floor below our apartment: in our place it was mundane, and the furniture stands just like it does in everyone else's place, and the professors sit just like they do everywhere else; whereas here everything was...fairy tale-like, nice and unsusual...I had got myself a second home. (344-45);

I was once and for all torn away from the deadly underground; in my relationship with Ol'ga Mikhailovna [Solov'eva] I had begun to acquire my own language which was 'our language', the language of conversation with Sereža and Ol'ga Mixailovna...And I began to speak in the special jargon of the apartment: I formed and made witticisms with this jargon: the language of my 'Symphonies' came about...The most valuable thing in that relationship was: its outcome - collective, nameless creativity: that was just the way that myths used to come about in ancient times: our conversations and games were myth-creations. (353-6)

Sergej Mixailovič was in many ways protected from the claws of 'the end' of the century by exceptional parents, and by the exceptional atmosphere of his home whose byt was not byt but a hole in byt, or an

escape out of byt . (441)

Life in the Place of Byt : Stage Two

The reader of Kotik Letaev keenly senses the transition between the time when I-Thou relationships predominated, and the period of Kotik's slow capitulation to an anonymous "They" - characterized by the demise of creative intimacy. The point corresponds to Man's ejection from Eden into the corrupted world of temporality. Late in the novel, the narrator mentions how, shortly after the disappearance from his nursery of a favorite nanny, his father would come to read the biblical tale of Adam and explain the significance of the Tree of Knowledge:

> Papa came again; he bowed over my forehead...and he read: about Adam, paradise, Eve, the tree...my Tree of life was covered with flowers; the golden apple matured; and look: it flew around; as old Adam was, - I have been driven out; Poliksena Borisovna has been driven out of Trubnikovsky lane...(188-89)

This Fall coincides with Kotik's final assimilation into language. Part of the price to be paid for Knowledge, and for subordinating oneself to the language of Fathers is the loss of intimacy with one's real father. The tragedy is dramatized when the boy bemoans the disjunction between his dual identities:

> [W]hat this thing is, is - mathematics; my papa is a mathematician.
> - "He's not like me: he's like his father!" This seems abnormal to me: and a strange world is raised up in me - out of me: it invades in me - my very self. -
> - How so?
> Who here is "I"? I is not I: I is not Kotik Letaev! - what this thing here is is a prematurely developing mathematician. (132)

Kotik suffers the trauma of having his identity forcibly integrated into the alien world of mathematicians. He is no longer Kotik Letaev, but rather a miniature Professor Letaev. The laws of mathematics, its arbitrary symbols are now his. Byt is nothing less than capitulation to the word of the other. In his memoirs Belyj uses mathematical images when characterizing the corrupting influence of abstract societal norms:

[I] saw nothing and heard nothing but... cold, stony , generalities...One could speak of an arithmetically average apartment, the arithemetically average word, the arithmetically average spirituality; and here it is - the arithmetically average apartment - smoke-filled, dusty, sneezy... the arithmetically average word is dumb, generalized and stale... (447)

However, his attitude to mathematics is far from exclusively negative. Some have seen in his intellectual project a life-long attempt to synthesize art and science (the respective discipines of his mother and father); his role in initiating the science of metrics, and his use of mathematical formulae to explain his symbolist theories are two examples of the fruits of these efforts.[33] Elsewhere, Kotik expresses respect for the explanatory potential of true mathematical creativity, and profound affection for the father who has been taken away from him and replaced by Professor Letaev. The villain is the sreda which has infiltrated the apartment and installed the false ambiance of mathematics as formalistic dogma:

- my Papa is - the mathematician Letaev; and Papa is - my Papa: only mine, no one else's; the mathematician Letaev cannot be the Papa of anyone on earth; he is - Papa to me; and why is it that my Papa is - the mathematician Letaev. Am I really the guilty one? (91)

Taken to an extreme, such abstraction turns both the world of mathematicians, and