

Ilona Svetlikova¹

ORPHISM AND THE CINEMA: NOTES ON ANDREI BELY'S PETERSBURG²

The novel *Petersburg* (1913–1914) is constructed like a film: rapidly changing episodes, the use of “ruptures”, chapter titles in capital letters which sometimes imitate the style of silent movies.³ What does this accentuated similarity mean? Yuri Tsivyan, author of the best text on *Petersburg* and cinema, suggests that the presence of allusions to cinema within the novel are due to the fact that, for Bely, the cinema was “a clotting agent of the city’s elements, like a car or a tram”.⁴ The novel is about St. Petersburg. This is why the author used cinematic material, which, in his imagination, was closely associated with city life.

Such reasoning can be complemented by examining the role of Orphism in *Petersburg*.⁵

1. The second volume of Bely’s memoirs contains the following: “I catch myself wandering through fields, tanned, hirsute and gesticulating wildly above a ravine like a conductor rushing around the rostrum with a baton: the trumpets, French horns, kettle drums and violins are subordinate to him. It’s as if stones were dancing before my eyes. How can people not follow my rhythm? A dreadful conceit! I excuse myself because, it seems, the idea of Orpheus, of the new commune, was in the air [...]”.⁶

¹ The text is translated by Ruth Addison.

² National Research University – Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg; my study has been supported by Russian Science Foundation (RSF), project 16-18-10250.

³ On Petersburg and cinema, see primarily Yuri Tsivyan, *Istoricheskaya retseptsiya kino: Kinematograf v Rossii. 1896–1930* (Riga: Zinatne, 1991), 216–238 (and other pages according to the index; on the use of “breaks in Bely’s novel see 132); Tatiana Nicolescu, *Andrei Bely i teatr* (Moscow: Radiks, 1995), 125.

⁴ Tsivyan, op. cit., 229.

⁵ On Orphism in Bely and the symbolists see primarily E.V. Glukhova, “Ya, samozvanets, ‘Orfei’...” in *Vladimir Soloviev i kul'tura Serebryanova veka. K 150-letiyu V.I. Solovieva i 110-letiyu A.F. Loseva* (Moscow: Nauka, 2005), 248–254; Lena Silard, “‘Orfei rasterzannyi’ i nasledie orfizma” in Lena Silard, *Germetizm i germenetika* (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo Ivana Limbakha, 2002), 54–101.

⁶ Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka*. Podgotovka teksta i komment. A.V. Lavrova (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1990), 289–290.

After the chapter “Correspondence with Blok”, which ends with Bely’s memory of himself as an unlucky Orpheus,¹ comes “The Cinema”, which mostly concerns the events of the “confused autumn” of 1903. Here the cinema, as is often the case with Bely, is a synonym for confusion and chaos (“a incoherent film, which distracts me”²). The transition from Orpheus to the cinema is based on Bely’s idea of Orpheus the exorcist of chaos leading to the legend of the voyage of the Argonauts (Bely is referring to the so-called “Argonauts circle”). Recalling his claims on the role of Orpheus, Bely describes chaos which he could not overcome. We will attempt to show how the “idea of Orpheus”, ironically mentioned in his memoirs but conceptualised by Bely with more seriousness at the beginning of the 1910s than in the early 1900s, defined the cinematic look of his main novel.

2. The most important material for examining the Orphic theme in *Petersburg* is the article “Orpheus”, which was published in the first issue of the journal *Trudy i dni*. It consists of two parts (in fact, two separate articles), written by Vyacheslav Ivanov and Bely. Its purpose is to present the eponymous series by the publishing house Musaget on mystical literature (or that which was considered as such³).

In one of the darkest passages of “Orpheus”, Bely writes about the “opening up of secret symbolism” which takes place in “the depths of the human soul”: “[...] the awareness of the highest symbols of creativity transforms them into real symbolism. [...] [Apollo Musagetes], transformed into Orpheus, begins to breathe and live within him: the stony mask of art melts away and the cold marble is given movement, as Orpheus makes the stones of the idols move”.⁴

Elsewhere, Bely calls Orpheus that feeling which gives life to dead thoughts.⁵ Here the subject is the same: Orpheus is an emotional experience which gives “cold marble” movement, i.e. meanings and symbols which are dead without him.

¹ The final sentence of the chapter “Correspondence with Blok” reads: “Tanned, bearded, not recognising myself, I was an impostor playing the subject of “*Not That One*”, the poem I had just written in the summer”. (Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka*, 290; Bely’s italics). Elsewhere in the book, Bely writes of himself as “the impostor, ‘Orpheus’” (316). The image of Orpheus the impostor also appears in *Petersburg* (see below).

² Andrei bely, *Nachalo veka*, 291. “Instead of life, the cinema; instead of feelings, chaos” (Andrei Bely, *Arabeski* (Moscow: Musaget, 1911), 51); “the disjointed cinema” (Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka*, 18); “Without connection, without aim, without dramatic meaning, the dying souls gently pours its images over us; symbolism is a number of cinematographic associations, incoherence is the meaning of Blok’s drama” (Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka: Berlinskaya redaktsiya (1923)*. Podgotovka teksta i komment. A.V. Lavrova (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2014), 545. On the perception of early films as a disconnected conglomeration of episodes, see Yuri Tsivyan, “K genezisu russkogo stilya v kinematografe” in *Wiener slawistischer Almanach* vol. 14, 1984, 264.

³ V.O. Nilender’s translation of *Fragments of Heraclitus* (1910) was published in the series *Orpheus*. On the link between Heraclitus and Orphism, see below.

⁴ Andrei Bely, “Orfei”, *Trudy i dni*, 1, 1912, 66 (author’s spacing).

⁵ Andrei Bely, *Arabeski*, 58.

This quote should be placed alongside an excerpt from the chapter "The Guest" from *Petersburg* (the Bronze Horseman appears to the hallucinating terrorist Dudkin):

The metal Guest, glowing beneath the moon with a thousand-degree fever, now sat before him burning, red-purple; now, annealed, he turned a dazzling white and flowed towards the inclining Aleksandr Ivanovich in an incinerating flood; in complete delirium Aleksandr Ivanovich trembled in an embrace of many poods: the Bronze Horseman flowed with metal into his veins.¹

The hallucination gives Dudkin the ability to make "stone idols" move (the visit of the metal Guest).² Apollon Apollonovich, against whom Dudkin plots, and Peter the Great embody one and the same principle, that of state power based on European rationalism (to be more precise, as for Bely the state is more an emblem than an independent theme, the power of European rationalism). The Bronze Horseman, who flows into Aleksandr Ivanovich's veins, repeats the words about Apollo transformed into Orpheus: "the stony mask of art melts" (literally, the monument to Peter the Great; in the novel the "stoniness" of the senator [Apollon Apollonovich], his "stony eyes", "stony gaze", "stony face", the "stony mass" of his head, etc.³), beginning to "breathe and live" in Dudkin. After Lippanchenko's murder, Dudkin becomes the living image of the Bronze Horseman.

This excerpt allows us to note that Dudkin (the fruit of Apollon Apollonovich's thoughts) plays the role of Orpheus in the novel (according to a common version of the myth, he is Apollo's son) or that of an impostor who has taken on the task of Orpheus, which is beyond him.⁴

3. It should be noted that Bely was interested not only in the figure of Orpheus but in the Orphic tradition as a whole. In particular, the traces of this interest can be found in the collected articles *Symbolism* (1910). In his comments on the article "The Meaning of Art", Bely retells the so-called "rhapsodic" Theogony. This is the beginning of his retelling: "time, ether and chaos are the basis of everything real".⁵ Time (Chronos) is the first of the first

¹ Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.

² I was unable to find a source from which Bely could have taken the notion of Orpheus setting statues in motion. It is possible that the idea appeared in connection with his (simultaneous) work on the novel.

³ On the motif of the animated statue in the novel, see E.G. Melnikova and V.M. Paperny, "Mednyi Vsadnik v kontekste skul'pturnoi simvoliki romana Andreyia Belogo 'Peterburg'", *Blokovskii sbornik VI. Blok i ego okruzhenie* (Tartu, 1985), 85–92.

⁴ "Orpheus": the Dionysian disembodiment of the world's formation" (Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka: Berlinskaya redaktsiya*, 607). For more detail on Orphic elements in the image of Dudkin, see Ilona Svetlikova, "Prazdnost' i svoboda ot vremeni: kommentarii k romanu Andreyia Belogo 'Peterburg'", *Die Welt der Slaven* (in production).

⁵ Andrei Bely, *Simvolizm* (Moscow: Musaget, 1910), 546. "At the beginning there was Time (Chronos), Ether and endless Chaos" (Sergei Trubetskoy, *Istoriya drevnei filosofii*, part 1 (Moscow, 1906), 52. Trubetskoy's book was based on a course of lectures which Bely had attended at university (Andrei Bely, "Material k biografii" in Andrei Bely, *Avtobiograficheskie svody: Material k biografii; Rakurs k dnevniku; Registratsionnye zapisi; Dnevnik 1930-kh godov* (Literaturnoe nasledstvo, vol. 105), edited by A.V. Lavrov, et al (Moscow, 2016), 352.

principles. The primacy of time in this version of Orphic Theogony matches the key role played by time in *Petersburg*. Regardless of the fact that the plot of the novel has nothing in common with that of Theogony, such correspondences are hardly accidental. It is difficult to surmise that senator Ableukhov, the main character in the novel, happens to be Chronos without any link to Orphism, which was an important part of Bely's thought at that time.

Also, in the commentary on the article "The Forms of Art" there is a detailed footnote regarding mysteries. Bely mentions Orphic hymns (his information on the mysteries and Orphism came mainly from Vyacheslav Ivanov, who believed that Orphics played a particular role in the history of the Eleusinian Mysteries¹). Referencing N.I. Novosadsky's book *Orphic Hymns* (1900), Bely noted the syncretism typical of the hymns, "the identification of gods with each other (Hecate with Artemis, Nyx with Cypris, Protogonus with Priapus, Pan with Zeus)".² Bely had already "glued together" the characteristics of various prototypes in his "Symphonies". However, he would not use this method so persistently and with such virtuosity until *Petersburg*. In one of his mythological incarnations, the senator is Apollo and Saturn and Chronos.

4. Dudkin arrives from the islands like a "bluish shadow"³ and several times throughout the novel is called a "shadow". Playing the role of Orpheus, he who is able to make dead matter move and bring the deceased Eurydice back to life,⁴ Dudkin is no more than a "shadow". The same logic can be found in the choice of "Dudkin" as his family name. Like Orpheus, who played the lyre, a stringed instrument, Dudkin, the "son" of Apollo, is a pianist (the keyboard of his "executive apparatus" serves "the agitatedly inclined masses which are stirred by social instincts"⁵), but he chooses a family name based on a wind instrument similar to the Dionysian flute [*dudka* in Russian]. Bely was following Greek mythology: "The rivalry of two gods [Apollo and Dionysius] is embodied within the cultural and religious sphere in the antagonism of two types of music – wind and strings. A number of myths include the attempt to glorify the cithara and belittle the flute, for example the myth of Marsyas".⁶

¹ On Orphism in Vyacheslav Ivanov's research, see Philip Westbroek, "Dionis i dionisiiskaya tragediya. Vyacheslav Ivanov: filologicheskie i filosofskie idei o dionisiistve", dissertation, 2007, 65–75.

² Andrei Bely, *Simvolizm*, 523; N.I. Novosadsky, *Orficheskie gimny* (Warsaw, 1900), 102–103 (see also 65, 76).

³ Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.

⁴ See also the image of Orpheus the revolutionary in Bely's article "Green Meadow" (1905), where Eurydice is sleeping Russia, "bound by the hell of death": "Orpheus goes to hell in vain in order to wake her" (Andrei Bely, *Lug zelenyi* (Moscow: Musaget, 1910, 5).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶ Vyacheslav Ivanov, "Ellinicheskaya religiya stradayushchego boga. Fragmenty verstki knigi 1917g., pogibshei pri pozhare v dome Sabashnikovykh v Moskve (publikatsiya N.V. Kotreleva)" in Aeschylus, *Tragedii*, translated by Vyacheslav Ivanov (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), 345. On the motif of rivalry between wind and string instruments in *Petersburg* and the resemblance of Lippanchenko to Marsyas, see Robert Mann, "Apollo and Dionysus in Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*", *Russian Review*, 4 (57), 1998, 519.

A similar dialectic produces the constructive principle of *Petersburg*. The senator Ableukhov, who embodies the source which is an enemy of the revolution, is a descendant of Shem,¹ which unambiguously points to his secret revolutionary nature: Bely's political views were close to those of the extreme right, who believed that the Jews were the instigators of the revolution. Furthermore, Ableukhov is related to the "red-skinned peoples".² In a conversation, Omry Ronen noted that this can be compared with A.V. Nikitchenko's diaries, which denounced "red-skinned liberals".³ The senator's passion for geometry indicates that he is both a conservative and a freemason.⁴ Nikolai Apollonovich's interest in Kantianism and in the idea of Kant as an "Aryan" philosopher underlines the "Semitic" motive behind the thoughts and actions of the senator's son.⁵

There are many similar examples. It is unlikely that the accent on this type of dialectic is simply a consequence of Bely's intellectual style or a fear of provocation, which formed part of his keen interest in the subject of provocation. In his book on Orphic hymns, Novosadsky notes – and Bely will go on to note – that they contain traces of Heracliticism.⁶ Novosadsky was not the only source thanks to whom Bely's contemporaries saw a link between Orphism and Heraclitus. V.O. Nilender's translation of *Fragments of Heraclitus* was the first book published by Musaget in the series *Orpheus*. In his commentary, Nilender notes: "Heraclitus enthusiastically clothes his metaphysics in the language of the mysteries, which Clement of Alexandria expresses in saying that Heraclitus robbed Orpheus".⁷ Sergei Trubetskoy, one of Bely's main sources on Greek philosophy, also wrote about how Heraclitus was influenced by the Greek mysteries.⁸ Trubetskoy found traces of Orphism in Heraclitus's

¹ Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.

² Ibid.

³ A.V. Nikitchenko, *Zapiski i dnevnik (1826–1877)*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1893), 13. For Nikitchenko, "redskins" were the embodiment of barbarism and the lack of "any understanding of duty, justice and the law, especially the law" (ibid., 500).

⁴ On the ideological undertones of the motif of geometry in the novel, see Ilona Svetlikova, *Moscow Pythagoreans: Mathematics, Mysticism, and Anti-Semitism in Russian Symbolism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁵ Ilona Svetlikova, "Kant-semit i Kant-ariets u Belogo", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 5 (93), 2008, 62–98.

⁶ Andrei Bely, *Simvolizm*, 523. N.I. Novosadsky, *Orficheskie gimny*, 54–56, 80–81. Bely focused on the Pythagorean and Stoic elements of the Orphic hymns, noted by Novosadsky (*Simvolizm*, 523; N.I. Novosadsky, *Orficheskie gimny*, 53–56, 77–80, 81–99). Pythagoreanism was extremely important for *Petersburg* (see Ilona Svetlikova, *Moscow Pythagoreans*). The echoes of Stoic teachings in the novel, indirectly via Bely's sources on antique philosophy, require further examination.

⁷ *Fragments of Heraclitus*. Clement of Alexandria writes literally "took much from Orpheus" (παρ' Ὀρφέως τὰ πλεῖστα εἴληφεν; Strom. VI, 2.27.2).

⁸ Sergei Trubetskoy, *Metafizika v drevnei Gretsii* (Moscow: Mysl', 2010), 224, 248–249, 251.

teachings.¹ According to him, the Heraclitic dialectic involved “a hidden unity, which occurs as a result of the visible struggle between opposing elements and origins”.² The “hidden unity, which occurs as a result of the visible struggle between opposites” is an exact description of the logical basis of the novel: for Bely, the revolutionary struggle is “a visible struggle of opposites” or an imaginary struggle: the terrorist is like the senator; the senator is like the terrorist; they are fighting against themselves. Considering Bely’s interest in Orphism and Heraclitus’s involvement in its context (of which Bely was aware), we can cautiously suggest that the accent on this type of dialectic was connected with its supposedly being part of the Orphic tradition.

5. In the preface to his famous book *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (1935), W.K.C. Guthrie wrote that his work will raise suspicions among those “who have learned to read and appreciate classical literature without ever acquiring a specialist’s interest in matters of religion, and who since their sixth-form days have felt an unsatisfied curiosity, not to say exasperation, on reading in their commentaries or hearing from their teachers that this or that passage in one of the great writers, Plato or Pindar or Virgil, is a reflection of Orphic doctrine. ‘This passage is Orphic’, runs the simple comment, and the student is left wondering whether or not his understanding of the text has been helped by the vague associations which the note calls up, and if not, whether his own or the commentator’s stupidity is to blame”.³ Guthrie suggested that academics were no less likely to be suspicious, having “more than once been given excellent grounds for believing Orphism to be nothing more than a field of rash speculation on insufficient evidence”.⁴ We are writing of an epoch which formed a similar relationship to Orphism.

In calling their series of mystical literature *Orpheus*, the Musaget group displayed the same “pan-Orphic” views as Salomon Reinach, who gave the name *Orpheus* to his history of religion (1909): from his point of view, there were Orphic elements in all religions.⁵ In a similar way, the “Orphics” at Musaget saw in Orphism the common dominator of the entire mystical tradition.⁶ In addition, as both Bely and Ivanov saw religious and mystical experi-

¹ Sergei Trubetskoy, *Istoriya filosofii v drevnei Gretsii*, 51. On the defining role of Orphic mysticism in the history of Greek mythology: *ibid.*, 55 (Heraclitus is among the philosophers named as influenced by it). Also, W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (London: Methuen & Co, 1952), 224–231.

² Sergei Trubetskoy, “Uchenie o Logose v ego istorii: filosofsko istoricheskoe issledovanie” in Trubetskoy, *Sochineniya* (Moscow: Mysl’, 1994), 57.

³ W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, vii.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ On Reinach’s “pan-Orphism”, see Guy G. Stroumsa, “The Afterlife of Orphism: Jewish, Gnostic and Christian Perspectives”, *Historia religionum. An International Journal*, 4, 2012, 139–140. Reinach’s work was published in Russian in its entirety in 1910 (later other translations of the first book were published: in 1913, edited by I.I. Tolstoy and in 1919, edited by A.E. Yanovsky).

⁶ Guthrie noted the tendency to use the term “Orphic” for all manifestations of mysticism in Greek religion (W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, ix).

ence as the root of culture, the Orphic tradition was considered to be a source of the latest cultural values. Ivanov, like Guthrie's teachers, surmised that only knowledge of Orphism could provide the key to "the world outlook of Pindar, Aeschylus and Plato".¹

6. At the basis of religious "pan-Orphism" lay the idea of the historical link between Christianity and Orphism which, as Guthrie put it, was a subject of "endless speculation", to which Ivanov paid tribute in his research into Greek religion.²

In order to comment on *Petersburg*, it is useful to consider the European context of interest in "Christian" Orphism. Developing Fritz Graff's observations on the link between this interest and Kulturkampf in Bismarck's Germany (the similarity to Greek religion allowed for Christianity to be considered as a historical phenomenon, supporting the striving for a Christianity which was free of official institutions), Guy Stroumsa – based on materials about French Catholicism post-1905 (after the separation of church and state) – came to the conclusion that a particular interest in Orphism appeared as a result of the discussion of the relationship between official religion and personal religious experience. The Orphic tradition attracted those who found the latter more valuable.³

There was a similar situation in Russia. In discussing the Orphic interests of the Musaget group, one must consider the problem of the interrelationship of church and state.⁴ "The catacomb-like image of Orpheus as a Christian symbol is also our symbol",⁵ wrote Bely. In commenting on his words, one must refer to his article "Leo Tolstoy and Culture" (1912), which ends with a call to leave for the "catacombs":⁶ the flight and death of Tolstoy, who had been excommunicated, was a stimulus for discussion of the church-state; the "catacomb image of Orpheus" symbolised spiritual freedom.

In order to locate the variations on this theme in *Petersburg*, it is necessary to make a number of comments regarding Musaget's "Orphic" line.

7. There were "two separate lines" at Musaget: the philosophical, which was embodied in the journal *Logos*; and the mystical, in *Orpheus*.⁷ They were in conflict, but not so much because the philosophers looked down on mysticism and the mystics despised philosophy, but because, in that ideological

¹ Vyacheslav Ivanov, "Religiya Dionisa", *Voprosy zhizni*, 7, 1905, 152.

² W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 261. On Orphism and Christianity in Vyacheslav Ivanov see primarily Lena Silard, "'Orfei rasterzannyi' i nasledie orfizma", 58–61; see also E.V. Glukhova, "Ya, samozvanets, 'Orfei'..."

³ Guy G. Stroumsa, "The Afterlife of Orphism", 154–155.

⁴ Lena Silard, "'Orfei rasterzannyi' i nasledie orfizma", 59.

⁵ Andrei Bely, "Orfei", 66.

⁶ Andrei Bely, "Lev Tolstoi i kul'tura" in *O religii L'va Tolstogo* (Moscow: Put', 1912), 171.

⁷ Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka: Berlinskaya redaktsiya*, 607. On Musaget, see primarily M.V. Bezrodnny, "Izdatel'stvo 'Musaget': gruppovoi portret na fone modernizma", *Russkaya literatura*, 2, 1988, 119–131. M.V. Bezrodnny, "Iz istorii russkogo germanofil'stva: izdatel'stvo 'Musaget'" in *Issledovaniya po istorii russkoi mysli: Ezhegodnik za 1999 god* (Moscow: OGI, 1999), 157–198.

context, philosophers and mystics were rivals. The pivot for Musaget's programme was the problem of culture. Interest in this problem was closely connected with the German orientation of the publisher: culture occupied a very important place in German intellectual life at the turn of the century. At first it was intended to name the publishing house *Kultura* [Culture], while *Logos* was not simply a philosophical journal, but one dedicated to the philosophy of culture.

Articles which set out the ideological platform of *Orpheus* and *Logos* were not so much about mysticism and philosophy as their place within culture. Vyacheslav Ivanov and Andrei Bely, who represented *Orpheus*, pointed to the fundamental cultural significance of religious and mystical experience; Fyodor Stepun, of *Logos*, attributed the same significance to philosophy. However, each side attempted to demonstrate not only the superiority of their field over that of their opponent, but their superior knowledge of the latter's field, a superiority due to one's being part of the "main core" of culture, i.e. philosophy (*Logos*) or mystical insight and religious traditions (*Orpheus*). Accordingly, in Stepun's article cautioning against the Orphic hymns sounding like "the tempting songs of fascinating sirens", we find a most clear formulation of the paradigmatic role allotted to Orphism at Musaget: "For every people wishing to achieve the orbit of genuine culture, it is endlessly important to direct one's inner hearing to the sacred hymns of Orpheus, i.e. to feel the effective, concrete, mystical link with the sacred place of eternity".¹ For this reason, Ivanov stresses that authentic *Logos* comes from Orpheus: "Mystic Musaget" is Orpheus, the sun of dark places, the logos of deep, internal, experimental knowledge. Orpheus is a creative word which moves the world; and he signifies God the Word in early Christian symbolism. Orpheus is the source of order in chaos; the exorcist of chaos and its liberator in order. To invoke the name Orpheus means to call the heavenly, organising strength of *Logos* into the darkness of the last depths of personality, which cannot re-actualise its own existence without this: *fiat lux*".²

As a result of this conflict, if not from the very beginning, Bely began to perceive *Orpheus* as the "nucleus" of Musaget.³ Accordingly, Orphism became key for *Petersburg* for two reasons, which overlap: due to the significance which Bely attributed to the Orphic tradition as such; and due to the significance that it gained during the polemic with *Logos*. During work on the novel, the former was strongly coloured by the latter.

8. Sergei Gessen's article "Mysticism and Metaphysics" was published in the first issue of *Logos*. To a reader interested in mysticism and indifferent to neo-Kantianism, the article was bound to seem an insolent "invasion" of foreign territory. A similar reaction was anticipated from those who were involved in philosophy, but far from neo-Kantianism. Possibly the most

¹ Fyodor Stepun, "Logos", *Trudy i dni*, 1, 1912, 72.

² Vyacheslav Ivanov, "Orfei", *Trudy i dni*, 1, 1912, 68.

³ Andrei Bely, *Nachalo veka: Berlinskaya redaktsiya*, 608. See also Georgy Nefediev, "Ital'yanskie pis'ma Andrey'a Belogo: rakurs k 'Posv'yashcheniyu'" in *Archivio Italo-Russo II*, edited by D. Rizzi and A. Shishkin (Salerno, 2002), 119–120.

irritating and simultaneously weak part of Gessen's article concerned the aims of philosophy: "The liberating role of philosophy as a formal science of values [...] is that it delimits separate fields of science, reconciles disagreements that are a result of metaphysics introducing a particular point of view in to the general and, in this way, removes problems arising from the incorrect statement of the question, within which metaphysical thought struggled helplessly. This is the 'policing role of philosophy' of which Kant spoke".¹ Answering Gessen in his book *The Philosophy of Freedom*, Nikolai Berdyaev called Kant's philosophy "police philosophy".² Bely reacted to the position of *Logos* in a very similar way. Many years later, he compared the formalists with "Kant's policemen",³ an image drawn from the memory of the past polemic with the neo-Kantians, i.e. the philosophical "formalists" of *Logos*.

From the point of view of "philosophical policeman" Fyodor Stepun, Bely's philosophical endeavours and his attempt in the collected articles *Symbolism* to formulate the basis of the symbolist world view were the actions of a dilettante.⁴ Bely responded with the article "Cranes and Tomtits": "The first lyric poet was, of course, a dilettante: he did not attempt to show that he was just a poet. Perhaps the last poet will completely forget to think about his poetic purity. He will sing only of that which his dilettante's soul desires. Today he will sing us a system, tomorrow a song, the next day a prayer. And those of us who are grateful to the singer will forget on which shelf we should place that which he has sung".⁵ The article was signed with the pseudonym Cunctator. For Bely, the polemic with *Logos* was like a war with encroaching barbarians.⁶ And they were not simply barbarians, but, in the context of Musaget, the worst kind: Jews, who were perceived as entirely alien to culture and a danger to it.⁷ "Isolated, the princes of Aryan culture perish, defeated by the evil arrows of the barbarians who surround them" wrote Bely, describing the course of "military action" in the above-mentioned article "Lev Tolstoy and

¹ Sergei Gessen, "Mistika i metafizika", *Logos*, 1, 1910, 127. Immanuel Kant, *Kritika chistogo razuma*, translated by N.O. Lossky (Moscow: Nauka, 1998), 40.

² N.A. Berdyaev, "Filosofiya svobody" in Berdyaev, *Filosofiya svobody. Smysl' tvorchestva* (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 19.

³ Andrei Bely, *Ritm kak dialektika i "Mednyi Vsadnik"* (Moscow: Federatsiya, 1929), 40.

⁴ F.S. [Fyodor Stepun] and Andrei Bely, "Simvolizm", *Logos*, 1, 1910, 281.

⁵ Cunctator [Bely], "Zhuravly i sinitsy", *Trudy i dni*, 1, 1912, 84.

⁶ "Carthaginian razors" are mentioned in connection with encroaching barbarism in "The Crisis of Life" (Andrei Bely, *Na perevale* (Berlin/St. Petersburg/Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Z.I. Grzhebina, 1923), 48). For Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who to a great extent defined Musaget's ideology, the Carthaginian wars – within the framework of the racial concept of history – were fought between "Semites" (Carthaginians) and "Aryans" (Romans) and were one of the defining moments of "Aryan" culture (Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, 10th edition (Munich: Verlagsanstalt F. Bruckmann A.-G., 1912), 161–164).

⁷ Boris Bugaev, "Shtempelevannaya kul'tura", *Vesy*, 9, 1909, 72–80. On the anti-Semitic phobias of Bely within the context of Musaget, see primarily Mikhail Bezrodny, "O 'yudoboyazni' Andreyeva Belogo", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 28, 1997, 100–125.

Culture”, in which Tolstoy appears in the role of a dilettante who has fallen victim to modernity, poisoned by the spirit of Semitic methodology.¹

The polemic against *Logos* was led by Bely “under the sign of Orpheus”. Orphism, in Bely’s imagination, was a combination of religious and mystical experience, art and philosophy, and represented that “catacomb” to which it was necessary to flee from the “strictly ruled city” of modern culture, overseen by “Kant’s policemen”: “Walking along street A, I will never reach street B; revealing myself like an artist, I create valuable art works in conditions where it is impossible to create philosophical values. In the universally recognised city of culture there are a number of parallel, unconnected streets – art, science, philosophy – and rarely permitted passages from one street to another, but there are no squares at which the streets meet”.² In *Petersburg*, Shem’s descendant, senator Ableukhov, dreams that a “mesh of parallel prospects” will spread across the world.³ We note that in describing the senator’s dream, Bely calls him a “man of state”: it is not simply Ableukhov who floats above the “black cube” of the carriage in his “geometric” dreams, but a “man of state”.⁴ This is not an accidental term. In the article “Stamped Culture”, Bely maintained that “Jews are by their nature men of state” (“any true breath of Aryan culture is non-state, free, rhythmic”).⁵

Consequently, Orphism is part of the struggle not only with state religion, but also with “Semitic” neo-Kantianism, in which Bely saw the philosophical equivalent of state violence. The Orphic tradition, as a banner of this struggle, takes on racial connotations. Furthermore, Bely may have based his ideas on Vyacheslav Ivanov’s notions of “the struggle of the Aryan spirit for freedom of religious creativity”⁶ and of Orphism as an “Aryan” weapon in that struggle: “If Christianity were to merge with Orphism, the religion of the Aryans would be saved”.⁷

It is symptomatic that the image of Apollo transubstantiated with Orpheus-emotion in the article “Orpheus” (see above) – bearing in mind that it is about Musaget’s mystical series – was evidently prompted by Houston Stewart Chamberlain (or by Chamberlain as quoted by Emily Metner): “Mysticism is a mythology restored from symbolic images to the field

¹ Andrei Bely, “Lev Tolstoy i kul’tura”, 170.

² Ibid., 160.

³ Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p. In the article “Lev Tolstoy i kul’tura”, the “modern cultural ideal” is defined as a mesh of parallel prospects” (163).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Boris Bugaev, “Shtempelevannaya kul’tura”, 77–78.

⁶ Vyacheslav Ivanov, “Religiya Dionisa”, 141.

⁷ Ibid., 142. This requires separate comment, connected, in the main, with racial views of the so-called “feeling of nature”. From the point of view of our theme, the only important point is the direct reference to the “Aryan” nature of Orphism. Following Ivanov, Bely suggests a parallel between Orphism and Indian religion (Vyacheslav Ivanov, “Religiya Dionisa”, 132; “Andrei Bely. Vyacheslav Ivanov” in *Russkaya literatura XX veka. 1890–1910*, edited by S.A. Vengerov, vol. 3, book 8 (Moscow: Izd. T-va “Mir”, 1918), 129).

of internal experience and feelings".¹ The scene where Dudkin-Orpheus-emotion is "fused" with the metal Guest literally – like a nightmarish hallucination – embodies the racial notion of mysticism and mystical emotion (because, for Chamberlain, only "Aryans" can access mystical experience). We recall Bely's letter to Razumnik Ivanov-Razumnik of 12 (25) December 1913 in which he states that *Petersburg* "depicts in symbols the places and times of the unconscious life of distorted mental forms" and that "the true location of the novel is the soul of a person who does not feature within it, who is overburdened with intellectual work, and the characters are mental forms which have yet to reach the threshold of consciousness".²

9. Evidently, Bely wrote *Petersburg* while directing "[his] inner hearing to the sacred hymns of Orpheus" (see above). The main character in the novel is an Orphic Chronos, "glued together" through syncretism with Saturn and Apollo. The Heraclitic dialectic, perceived as a philosophical development of Orphic mysticism, corresponds to the distinctive dialectic which pervades the novel. It is a hopeless, fatal, "pagan" dialectic.³ The exception is the dialectic move used in the construction of the Ableukhov coat of arms: the unicorn [*edinorog*] goring a knight represents the fate [*rok*] of heroes⁴ and is also a symbol of Christ.⁵ The coat of arms of the main characters contains a cypher for the source of danger and how to avoid it: the author plays the traditional role of Orpheus, the herald of Christ.

Bely saw himself as Orpheus from the age of the Argonauts. Dudkin, an imaginary Orpheus, is deliberately referred to as "my shadow",⁶ that of the author. One of the similarities between Dudkin and the author is the claim to the role of Orpheus. In a letter to Metner written in February 1913 (in the final period of work on the novel), when Bely was splitting everything he had written into small chapters, he wrote: "[...] it's necessary to *melt down* the chapters into the atomic rudiments of what I have written and fuse them again".⁷ "Melt down" [*rasplavlyat'*] is the verb which is used in the article "Orpheus":

¹ Russian State Library, Ф. 167.17.8 Л.6 (underlined by Metner: "Mystik ist Mythologie, zurückge- deutet aus den symbolischen Bildern in die innere Erfahrung des Unaussprechbaren" (Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, 694). See also "Mystical experience as an imageless (taking place within the individual soul) phenomenon" (Emily Metner, "Wagneriana. Nabroski k kommentariyu", *Trudy i dni*, 4–5, 1912, 35).

² *Andrei Bely and Ivanov-Razumnik. Perepiska* (St. Petersburg: Atheneum-Feniks, 1998), 35.

³ Bely perceived modernity as deeply pagan (see "Lev Tolstoi i kul'tura", 165, 166, 170). On the pagan features of Heraclitus's philosophy, i.e. on the fatal character of the world process in his philosophy, see Sergei Trubetskoy, *Metafizika v drevnei Gretsii*, 229–230.

⁴ See Ilona Svetlikova, "Andrei Belyi o ritme 'Mednogo vsadnika'", *Revue des Etudes Slaves* (in production).

⁵ S.D. Cioran, *The Apocalyptic Symbolism of Andrej Belyj* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1973), 150–151; Maria Carlson, "The Ableukhov Coat of Arms" in *Andrey Bely Centenary Papers*, edited by Boris Christa (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1980), 157–170.

⁶ Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.

⁷ "Iz pisem A. Belogo" in Andrei Bely, *Peterburg* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2004), 516 (Bely's italic).

Orpheus-emotion “melts down” dead symbols (also in the later work “Aaron’s Rod”: “the content of feelings melts down objectness”¹). As demonstrated earlier, the corresponding passage of “Orpheus” has something in common with Dudkin’s hallucination (the “shadow” of Bely, the imaginary Orpheus), in which the metal Guest melts into him. It seems that this verb – which in this context may invite comparison with Heraclitic fire – appears here because Bely saw his work on the novel as that of a new Orpheus, the guardian and successor of the Orphic tradition. In the phrase “to *melt down* the chapters into the atomic rudiments of what I have written and fuse them again” one can find Vyacheslav Ivanov’s logic for Orpheus’s calling: “the exorcist of chaos and its liberator in order” (see above). “Melting down” liberates chaos and “fusion” harmonises or “exorcises” it.² In dividing the novel into short chapters, naming some of them in the style of silent film captions and, accordingly, creating the effect of “the chaos of cinematic associations”,³ Bely acted like Orpheus, the “liberator” of chaos.

The similarity of *Petersburg* to cinema takes on a new sense. Cinema had meanings which allowed it to be used to create a modern Orphic myth. In Bely’s imagination, the cinema was connected not only with a chaos with Orphic connotations but also with death.⁴ At the beginning of the 20th century, cinemas were compared to the “kingdom of the dead” and images on the screen were called “shadows”.⁵ The leitmotif of shadows in *Petersburg*, which reinforces the similarity of the novel with cinema, gives it the characteristics of a modern Orphic katabasis.⁶

¹ Andrei Bely, “Zhezl Aarona”, *Skify*, 1, 1917, 155.

² The internal monologue of Dudkin, or perhaps of the author himself (such ambiguity is characteristic), which ends with an address to the Sun as protection against approaching chaos (Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*, translated by David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p.), can evidently be read as the language of the author-Orpheus, who has carefully studied Vyacheslav Ivanov (“Andrei Bely. Vyacheslav Ivanov”, 141; we propose a more detailed analysis of this excerpt in the book about *Petersburg*).

³ Andrei Bely, *Stikhotvoreniya i poemy*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg/Moscow: Gumanitarnoe agentstvo “AkademicheskiiProekt”, Progress-Pleyada, 2006), 179.

⁴ See also Andrei Bely, *Arabeski*, 46, 53; Bely, *Nachalo veka. Berlinskaya redaktsiya*, 545–546.

⁵ Yuri Tsivyan, “K genezisu russkogo stilya v kinematografe”, 265, 270–271; Tsivyan, *Istoricheskaya retseptsiya kino: Kinematograf v Rossii. 1896–1930*, 22, 69–70. *Petersburg*’s central motif of Plato’s Cave or a gnoseological prison also motivated the transformation of the characters into shadows and the novel into something akin to cinema (on this motif, see Evgeny Soshkin, *Gipogrammatika. Kniga o Mandel’shtame* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015), 72–87; Ilona Svetlikova, “Prazdnost’ i svoboda ot vremeni”).

⁶ This idea was prompted by Omry Ronen’s article “Katabasis” (see Omry Ronen, *Zaglavyya: Chetvertaya kniga iz goroda Ann*).