

**The Symbolic Structure of Andrei Bely's *Pervoe Svidanie*:
Echoes of Wagner and Steiner**

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Bely's 1921 long poem *Pervoe svidanie* (First Meeting) has often been lauded as one of his most successful -- and accessible -- works in verse. In it the mystical insights which inform all of Bely's work are located within a detailed and convincing historical setting and social milieu, while the obscurity into which Bely's imagination often leads him is to a large degree tempered by the poem's rigorous commitment to form.¹ The poem clearly has deeply serious purposes in relation to the spiritual education of its hero, and is explicitly connected in both Prologue and Epilogue with the revelatory symbolism of the Pentecost, yet at the same time it retains a lightness of touch and a humour which prevent it from becoming a dry philosophical or religious tract.

Pervoe svidanie has been the subject of several critical articles, and many of its numerous difficulties have been elucidated by Nina Berberova's commentary on the text.² Nevertheless, there are aspects of this highly complex work which remain to be substantively addressed. Two main approaches can be identified in the existing literature. First, critics have been inclined to explore the autobiographical sources of the poem: the self-portrait of Bely the student, his relationship with the Solov'ev family, his initiation into the complementary worlds of science and mysticism, the sublimation of Bely's friendship with Margarita Morozova into the portrait of Nadezhda Zarina. Bely's evocation of the material and spiritual world of the pre-revolutionary Moscow of 1900 was particularly attractive to commentators writing nostalgically in emigration, who found in it a compelling vision and perhaps a vindication of their own youth.³ Parallels have also been drawn between *Pervoe*

svidanie and other autobiographical or semi-autobiographical works of Bely, notably his second *Symphony* and his trilogy of memoirs *Nachalo veka, Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii* and *Mezhdv dvukh revoliutsii* (The Beginning of the Century, On the Border of Two Centuries and Between Two Revolutions), which in many respects cover similar ground, though at considerably greater length and in stylistically very different terms. Discrepancies between the chronology of *Pervoe svidanie* and Bely's known life, on the other hand, are one factor that has led L.K. Chursina to characterise Bely's poem as 'memuary v stikhakh' (memoirs in verse) in emulation of Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*.⁴

The other major focus of critical attention has been on formal aspects of Bely's writing in the poem, and in particular musical parallels with its compositional structures. Simon Karlinsky, for example, has made a good case, in the light of Bely's known interest in music and musical theory, that like the four early prose works explicitly labelled 'symphony', *Pervoe svidanie* is underpinned by a conception of symphonic form.⁵ The transposed musical device of counterpoint has also been identified in the patterns of repetition contained in Bely's poem.⁶ Other writers have paid particular attention to questions of rhythm and rhyme, always noteworthy in Bely's writing because of his theoretical interest in this area and his particular urge to creative improvisation.⁷ Beyond fairly superficial attempts to elucidate *Pervoe svidanie* in the context of its textual relationship to Solov'ev's 'Tri svidaniia' and the theme of Sophia, however, very little attention has so far been paid to broader questions concerning the symbolic structures of Bely's poem, its intertextuality, metaphors and images and the light they throw on the overall conception of the poem and on the major theme of spiritual development and growth which it embodies.

This article examines two particular elements that inform the symbolic structure of *Pervoe svidanie* and investigates how they combine to further Bely's thematic aims. The first of these is the Wagnerian concept of leitmotiv; the second is a view of spiritual education

derived substantially from theosophical and anthroposophical thought and particularly from the ideas of Rudolf Steiner. The two intersect in the colour imagery that Bely employs in his poem, which becomes not only a major source of its emotional and structural unity, but also a vehicle for the integration of the poem's realist and symbolic impulses.

Separately, of course, the importance for Bely of both Wagner and Steiner is well known. Wagner's impact on the entire modern movement was immense. The synaesthetic impulse of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the privileging of inner vision, suggestiveness and myth over realist character development and plot, and above all the use of leitmotiv to 'intensify the quality of the feeling by repetition, unifying the various parts of the composition and relating the various parts of the whole', to use Raymond Furness' formulation,⁸ were embraced in Russia as throughout the rest of Europe, and certainly played their part in the development of Russian Symbolism.⁹ Bely first heard Wagner's music in 1898, and he as much as anyone, with his characteristic enthusiasm, and encouraged by his friend the musicologist Emil Medtner, incorporated Wagnerian ideas into his own vision. During the early 1900s, indeed, Bely was often inclined to view the world at large through a Wagnerian lens, casting himself or Blok, for example, as Siegfried, and variously Blok's wife Liubov' Dmitrievna or Margarita Morozova as Brünnhilde.¹⁰

Like many of his contemporaries Bely drew extensively on musical structures and devices in his mythologised interpretations of the world and his organisation of literary space.¹¹ Wagner specifically was a strong influence from an early stage and a Wagnerian concept of dramatic music appears to have inspired Bely's attempts to translate musical form into literary terms in his four 'Symphonies'.¹² Leitmotiv in particular has been identified as a major structural device in these early works, and the specific form it takes has been linked explicitly with Wagner in that typically an initial theme or image, originally linked with a concrete object, by virtue of repetition and variation, gradually acquires a more abstract

nature and is transformed into a symbol.¹³ Roger Keys has examined what he sees as the varying success of leitmotiv in each of the four Symphonies, making the similar point that ‘In a successful work of art, symbolic meanings, such as those implied through the use of leitmotif, will overlie empirical ones, but they will not falsify or contradict them; the symbolic will thus be motivated by the empirical and will at the same time raise the empirical to a higher level of abstraction that comprehends it’.¹⁴ Moreover, as Ol’ga Tielkes has noted in the context of Bely’s Fourth Symphony, his use of leitmotiv is characterised by an instability of meaning and an accumulation of associations, which inform his account of changes in the characters to which they adhere.¹⁵ Taken together these accounts correspond quite closely to the description of Wagner’s leitmotifs given by, for example, John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus: ‘the themes and motifs are increasingly varied, taken apart and merged with or transformed into each other and ... move gradually closer together or further apart as they are modified’; they are ‘a means ... of linking what is seen and spoken with what is not seen and spoken’.¹⁶ Just as (to cite an extreme example) Wagner’s Nature motif, which in *Das Rheingold* (The Rhine Gold) expresses growth and origin, is inverted in *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods) to represent decline and destruction, so, for example, do the numerous motifs which Bely employs in his fourth Symphony change in meaning as they are repeated and recombined.¹⁷ After the Symphonies Bely continued to experiment with and refine the leitmotiv system in his novels, as for example with the repeated imagery of birds in *Serebrianyi golub’* (The Silver Dove), or of geometrical shapes in *Peterburg* (Petersburg).¹⁸ At a more abstract level, the same insistence on the symbolic, emotive or mystical power of repetition is clearly apparent in the analysis of the values of individual vowels, consonants and consonant clusters in Bely’s half-poem, half-essay, *Glossolaliia*.

To date very little work has been done to identify the use or trace the development of leitmotiv in Bely's verse, although Bely himself hinted at its importance.¹⁹ Yet if Gerald Janeček is correct in his evaluation of Bely's poetic technique, this may prove to be an area fruitful for research not just in the narrative poems, where the imperatives of plot suggest *prima facie* that the use of leitmotiv is at least practicable, but also in the lyric poetry: 'Bely's fundamental compositional process,' he writes, 'is one of repetition of words and phrases and a building of complexities by developing associations with these units as they intertwine themselves in the fabric of a text'.²⁰ The main interest, from this point of view, would be not in Bely's poems as such, but in his poetic books.

Bely's first contact with theosophical literature came in 1896, two years before his introduction to Wagner's music, when he read Helen Blavatskaya's *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan*,²¹ but it was not for some time that Bely became fully engaged with the occult study of the basis of religion which comprises theosophical thought. He sought out Rudolf Steiner in 1912, believing he might be able to explain certain mystical experiences which Bely and his wife had both undergone, and spent several years in Steiner's entourage first in Munich and then at Dornach.²² Bely eventually broke with Steiner in 1921, not long after the composition of *Pervoe svidanie*, but even after the split Bely remained very closely engaged with anthroposophy, as Steiner's branch of the theosophical movement had become known.²³ Rosamund Bartlett has noted that Bely's initial conversion to anthroposophy was attended by a surprising number of Wagnerian associations. The first of the visions which originally impelled Bely to seek Steiner's help occurred at Monreale in Sicily, which was where Wagner completed his work on *Parsifal*. The second was linked with a series of Wagner operas performed by Bayreuth singers that Bely heard in Brussels. And it was after a performance of *Götterdämmerung*, which Bely had persuaded himself would contain an elucidation of the mystery, that he made the final decision to visit Steiner.²⁴

One of the central beliefs of anthroposophy is that through assiduous study and careful training it is possible to attain ‘the unfolding of certain vistas of the supersensible world to [one’s] spiritual perception’.²⁵ For its adherents the purpose of life itself is the cultivation of perception, a continuous process of initiation into the soul and spirit worlds which exist beyond the human body, but knowledge of which is essential to a true understanding of the human place in creation. The notion of ‘quest’ implied here accords well with the conception of Symbolism expressed in Bely’s early essays -- in particular the idea, derived from Solov’ev, that poetry recreates the image of the world-soul, or Eternal Feminine, and thereby prepares for the reunification in the human consciousness of the world-soul with the divine Logos.²⁶ It also, incidentally, has a Wagnerian echo in the legend of Parsifal and the Holy Grail, which was both the subject of a series of lectures given by Steiner in 1913 and 1914, and a frequent point of reference in Bely’s own writing of the 1910s.²⁷

That Bely was thinking of both Wagner and anthroposophy at the time he wrote *Pervoe svidanie* is suggested superficially by a number of allusions scattered throughout the poem, and intended partly no doubt to capture from 1921 the spirit of the year 1900. For example, the juxtaposition of Hindu and Christian symbols which is particularly noticeable at the beginning of the poem recalls the eclectic and unifying impetus of theosophical thought. Repeated references to eagles, lions, oxen and bulls (18-21, 721-3) recall both the evangelists and the theosophical elaboration of ancient symbols. The word ‘theosophy’ itself appears on one occasion (1274). The description of the music played at the concert in Part 3 of the poem, with its references to Norns, Wotan’s ravens and the sound of the French horn, links it clearly with Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* (868-74).²⁸ The ‘rudokopnyi gnom’ (miner gnome) who appears in the first line of the Prologue evokes simultaneously the dwarfs of the Ring cycle and the theosophical personification of the element earth, which is contrasted with the potentialities of Pentecostal fire, described a few lines later (1, 29).²⁹

On a deeper level the Wagnerian and anthroposophical impulses in *Pervoe svidanie* intersect in the colour imagery which pervades the poem. Bely is well known to have been keenly interested in colour, as his 1903 essay, 'Sviashchennye tsveta' (Sacred Colours) attests, and his willingness to use colour imagery to evoke particular emotional states or to reinforce particular philosophical positions is evident enough in the mystical force given to azure and gold in his first book of verse, *Zoloto v lazuri* (Gold in Azure, 1904). Here, the blue and gold of the title refer on one level to the summer sky and ripening corn of the Russian countryside, but they are also the traditional colours of icon painting and relate symbolically to Christ and to the Holy Wisdom.³⁰ In Bely's symphonies and novels too colour is regularly and systematically used to similar effect; in his preface to the 1931 novel *Maski* (Masks), indeed, Bely went so far as to compare himself to Wagner in his attempts at synaesthesia and to refer to his own use of colour as 'musical leitmotivs'.³¹ Tielkes has considered in some detail the ways in which characters and their doubles in the Fourth Symphony are distinguished by different combinations of colour motifs, referring to different aspects of their mytic persona. For example, the mystic anarchist, Adam Petrovich, is characterised by azure, gold and red, but red, linked with the notion of suffering on the cross, is present only in those manifestations of Adam Petrovich which relate him to Christ.³² In *Peterburg*, the dominant colours red, black and green are used in different combinations to embody the theme of apocalypse and stagnation in relation to the principal characters.³³

Bely's thinking on colour was inspired of course by a wide variety of different sources, including significantly Goethe's treatise on the subject, Kandinsky's essay *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (On the Spiritual in Art, 1911), the ideas on synaesthesia espoused by the French Symbolist poets, and the thinking of Russian mystics such as Vladimir Solov'ev. Theosophical theories of colour, particularly those of Rudolf Steiner, also contributed substantially to the development of Bely's ideas.³⁴ Steiner gave physical shape to his theories

in the dance form he called eurythmy, where movement, gesture and colour all combined to represent the ‘supersensible’ world, and in the design of his study centre at Dornach, the Goetheanum, where the colours of the decoration were intended to facilitate a ‘contemporary striving for the spirit’.³⁵ Bely cannot have seen this completed building as it was not opened for use until 1920, after he had left Dornach, but he was certainly familiar with Steiner’s intentions and indeed assisted in the early stages of its decoration.³⁶

An examination of the main symbolic outline of *Pervoe svidanie* from the perspective of its colour imagery will show a combination of the technique of leitmotiv and a theosophically based account of spiritual development in which empirical and symbolic meanings are successfully aligned and in which meanings gradually evolve. Bely does not rely exclusively on any one particular schema for linking ideas with colours, but draws eclectically on several traditions, adapting them somewhat to the material circumstances of his historically grounded subject.³⁷ Although the ideas of Steiner himself are of considerable importance, perhaps the closest semantic parallel to Bely’s colour scheme in *Pervoe svidanie* is that shown in the illustration of ‘the astral body of the developed man’ or ‘seeker after the higher truth’ presented by the theosophist leader C.W. Leadbeater in his book *Man Visible and Invisible*.³⁸ This shows several strong bands of colour: the lower part of the body is green, the middle pink and the upper body blue. The head appears in a circle of gold surrounded by a rim of white, while above this at the top of the picture is a narrow band of purple.

Part 1 of *Pervoe svidanie* is devoted chiefly to description of the young Bely and his simultaneous education in the physical and mystical sciences. His initial description links him firmly with the colours green and white:

И я – не гимназист: студент...
Сюртук – зеленый, с белым кантом;
Перчатка белая в руке (56-8)

And I'm – no high-school student: a collegian...
My frock coat – green, with piping – white;
A white glove in my hand.

The colours of the Russian student uniform also have their symbolic values. Green of course is a perennial indicator of new growth, and Leadbeater associates it with adaptability.³⁹ For Steiner, moreover, it represents 'the lifeless image of the living', that is to say, the physical body in isolation from spirit and the soul.⁴⁰ The accompanying, but subsidiary presence of white, for Bely the symbol of completeness, and for Steiner 'the soul's image of the spirit',⁴¹ suggests the student's potential for gaining the absolute. In the course of Part 1 white increases in importance and its specific semantic associations gradually expand from the worldly to the spiritual. Embodied in certain cosmetics that are mentioned -- 'poudre Simon' and Atkinson's White Rose perfume – white accompanies Bely's introduction to the social education of the dance floor (61-4), which is, perhaps ironically, juxtaposed to his yearning for initiation into the ascetic traditions of Buddhism (65-72). The combination of green and white is repeated in later descriptions of the student or of his learning experience: both as a repetition of the original phrasing -- 'Perchatka belaia v ruke; / Siurtuk zelenyi: s belym kantom' (242-3; A white glove in my hand; / A frock coat -- green: with piping – white) -- and in a metaphorised form calculated to illustrate the growing pains of the education experience:

Дышал граненый мой флакон;
Меня онежили *уайт-розы*
Зеленосладкие, как сон,
Зеленогорькие, как слезы (234-7)

My cut-glass flacon breathed perfume;
White Rose caressed me,
Sweet green, like a dream,
And bitter green, like tears.

A classroom scene is similarly associated with the two colours: 'Tak shumom molodym, zelenym,-- / Menia oveiala vesna; / [...] Tak belostvol'nye berezy / Drozhat' (157-8, 165-6;

Thus with its young, green noise, -- / Spring wafted over me; / [...] Thus are the white-trunked birches / A-trembling).

Elsewhere in the chapter white or its equivalent is shown to include within it other colour and therefore gnostic possibilities, which are thus linked with Bely's potential spiritual growth. In a mocking account of the 'world myth' in which the gods descend to earth to visit human women and incidentally to transfer knowledge from the heavens to the earth, the divine azure associated with them has been subsumed into the silvery glow of the moon. This appears as an equivalent of the gods in the modern, scientific age, penetrating the shadows and effecting a synthesis of rational and mythological belief (99-156).

In another passage, looking at the endless possibilities before him, Bely compares himself to the Dalai Lama confronting the abyss: '--Kak Dalai-Lama molodoi / S belogolovykh Gimalaev, --' (218-19; As if I were the youthful Dalai Lama / Out of the hoary Himalayas). The whiteness of the snow here again suggests the potential for spiritual growth. Elsewhere, a reference to the Curies' experiments in atomic physics leads to an association with imperial and mystical purple (203-9), while a summary of the progression of Bely's student days contains a whole spectrum of colour images, each redolent with possibilities, but linked together through the all-embracing white of the snow storm -- an image which will recur later in the poem in connection with revelatory experience:

Июнь – серьгою бирюзовой;
Сентябрь – листвою золотой;
Декабрь – пургой белоголовой.
О, лазулитовая лень,
О, меланитовые очи!
Ты, колокольчик белый, -- день!
Ты, колокольчик синий, -- ночи! (227-33)

And June – with turquoise earring;
September – with its golden leafage;
December – with a hoary blizzard.
O lazulitian laziness,
O those melanite eyes!

You, little whitebell, are – the day!
You, little bluebell, are – the nights!

If the focus of Part 1 is the young Bely as student, in Part 2 it moves rather to his principal mentors, the various members of the Solov'ev family. The image of the snow storm is picked up and repeated, now representing a state of spiritual turmoil from which escape is readily provided: 'Byvalo: plamennaia v'iuga; / I v nei -- proslezhennaia stez'" (270-1; And I recall: a flaming blizzard; / And there would be – a beaten path).⁴² As Mikhail Sergeevich Solov'ev opens the door and leads Bely out of the snow and into his own domain his image is suffused with mystical gold:

Лучистым золотистым следом
Свечи указывал мне путь,
Качаясь мерною походкой,
Золотохохлой головой,
Золотохохлою бородкой, --
Прищурый, слабый, но живой (285-90)

By golden, luminescent
Candle track, he shows the way;
In rhythmic gait he rocks
His golden-tufted head,
His golden-tufted beard, --
Eyes squinting, weak, and yet alive.

These last three lines are repeated later in almost identical form (417-19) when characterising Mikhail Sergeevich, and his conversation is also linked with sparks and the colour blue (301-6, 346, 415, 688), a combination Leadbeater links unequivocally with heightened spirituality.⁴³

The colour that is the most consistently associated with Mikhail Sergeevich, or at least with his physical surroundings is 'biskr', that is 'bistre', light brown or dark beige, apparently a fashionable colour in interior decoration in the early 1900s.⁴⁴ Mikhail Sergeevich is depicted three times in identical words as speaking from a bistre-coloured chair: 'Mikhal Sergeich povernetsia / Ko mne iz kresla tsveta "biskr"' (299-300, 413-14, 685-6; Mikhal

Sergeevich turns to me / From his bisque-coloured chair), and the wallpaper in his apartment is also described as 'biskr' (344). This repetition suggests that the colour's literal meaning is to be overlaid with a mystical or symbolic value, and indeed 'zheltoburyi' (yellow-brown) is defined in 'Sviashchennye tsveta' as a sign of awakening, an emblem of the first light piercing the gloom⁴⁵. This colour then provides an appropriate background to the awakening of the student Bely. Moreover, although the colour does not appear to match exactly -- and the difficulty of determining exactly what colour is meant across three languages and eighty years of distance should also not be underestimated -- it is tempting to draw a functional parallel between Bely's 'biskr' and the 'peach-blossom' of Steiner's essay on colour. Steiner defines 'peach-blossom' as 'the living image of the soul', that is to say, the reflection of the inner world of the soul in the physical world.⁴⁶ In this light Mikhail Sergeevich then represents a higher stage of psychic awareness than the student Bely, his world being characterised by the colour of the soul, rather than the colour of the physical body alone.

Other members of the Solov'ev family are also associated with repeated colour epithets, which again imply the application of symbolic as well as literal meanings. Mikhail Sergeevich's son Serezha, Bely's close friend, is described twice as 'goluboglazyi gimnazistik' (365, 395; a blue-eyed high-school boy), an indication not only of his physical characteristics, but also of his psychic intuitions. He is elsewhere called 'providets i poet' (393; a seer and a poet) and the mystical penetration of his eyes further emphasised:

Глаза – пророческие гулы,
Глаза, вперенные в закат:
Выходишь в Вечность... (439-41)

Your eyes – prophetic rumblings,
Eyes fixed steadfastly on the sunset:
You go into Eternity...

And later:

Глаза, открытые без меры,--
В междупланетную ледынь,
Свои, расширенные сини
Бросают (470-3)

Your eyes, immeasurably open,--
Fling into the interplanetary open spaces,
Their blue, dilated irises.

In the middle of Bely's account of the Solov'ev family is a description of the Novodevichii Monastery, which exhibits a similar colour patterning. Here the base colour is pink, again very close to Steiner's 'peach-blossom' and noted by Bely in 'Sviashchennye tsveta' as a colour of transition and promise.⁴⁷ The Novodevichii was a place imbued with particular spirituality by Bely -- and became of course the last resting place of Vladimir Solov'ev. The pinkness of the monastery walls is referred to several times and reflected metonymically in its other attributes: 'Ogromnyi rozovyi sobor' (491; The huge and pink cathedral), 'Gde oblak rozovyi skvozit' (511; Where clouds are rosily transparent), 'V lilovo-rozovyi levkoi' (515; In rosy-lilac gillyflowers).

The portrayal of Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ev himself, whose thought on one level so conspicuously underlies *Pervoe svidanie*, and whose work was a major influence on the spiritual development of the student Bely, in Part 2 of the poem is not so clearly associated with particular colour images. The 'eternal mystic', in the last year of his life at the time *Pervoe svidanie* is set, nevertheless receives a detailed characterisation (579-676). Against the repeated metaphor of the snowstorm, now suggesting the creative confusion in Bely's as yet unformed mind (571-5), the dominant image associated here with Vladimir Sergeevich is fire, betokening inspiration and insight. A repeated motif is his flashing eye:

Войдет, и – вспухнувшим зрачком
В сердце ударится, как пулей (590-1)

He would come in, and – with a flashing eye
Would hit men's hearts, as with a bullet

Он – угрожает нам бедой,
Подбросит огненные очи (630-1)

He – threatens us with a disaster,
And casts his fiery eyes around.

This is given correlatives in both the physical and spirit worlds by reference to magnesium flashes, electromagnetism and the Hindu god Agni:

Так в ночи вспыхивает магний;
Бьет электрический магнит;
И над поклонниками Агни,
Взлетев, из джунглей заогнит (634-7)

Magnesium thus flashes in the night;
Or an electromagnet pulsates;
And flaring over Agni's worshippers,
The flames rush forth out of the jungles.

And the phenomenon is linked explicitly to the pentecostal revelation by the naive assertion of Serezha Solov'ev to his uncles' ruminations on the apparent signs of approaching apocalypse that the Pentecost shall and will be recreated: 'V otvet na derzosti takie, -- / V Moskve ustroim Dukhov den'!' (660-1; In answer to such impudence / We'll organize a Holy Spirit Day in Moscow). Vladimir Sergeevich, however, does not answer him, walking off instead into the snowstorm.

Part 3 of *Pervoe svidanie* contains the mystical and emotional climax of the poem filtered through the evocation of a symphonic concert, and here the mystical values of the colours acquire precedence over their physical correlatives. There are multiple intersecting colour motifs, but the dominant colours are red, blue and yellow or gold. These colours have already been seen in earlier parts of the poem as suggestive of revelation -- in the image of pentecostal fire or the attributes of members of the Solov'ev family. In Steiner's work they are defined as 'lustre colours', embodying the active essence of the body, soul and spirit respectively.⁴⁸ Bely's description of the crowd as it waits for the concert to begin is suffused with red, suggesting both its physical and worldly nature in contrast to the ethereal Sophia-

Zarina who is about to appear, and -- in view of Bely's association of red with apocalypse in 'Sviashchennye tsveta' -- revelatory change.⁴⁹ The audience notably contains a red-faced professor's wife (785, 'bagrovaia professorsha'); the programme sellers are wearing red waistcoats (798); and the musical experience itself acquires in anticipation a red quality (714). The opening stanzas describe the effect of music in general on individual listeners in terms of a change of colour either to gold or to blue: 'Ta, zvukovaia, -- zolotaia; / I etot -- kamen' lazulit' (726-7; And this one, she is sound-filled, golden; / And that one is a stone of lazulite). One woman (whose description foreshadows Zarina) is carried in her imagination into the blue infinity of ages; another is visited by a gold-haired titan (729-46).

Zarina is described twice. The first time, as she arrives at the concert hall, she is portrayed in colours of promise, primarily pink: she is lit up like the sunrise (820-1, 'Ona proidet -- ozarena: / Ognei zarnei, neopalimei...') (She'd pass by -- illuminated: / More fiery, unburnable than sunrise...)); her face is suffused with a mysterious pink glow (832-3, 'A tainyi rozovyi ogon' / Perebegaia po lanitam' (But a mysterious, rosy fire, / Moving across her countenance)); her dress and shoulders are called 'palevyi' (straw-coloured), which may be taken here as an equivalent of pink. The second description constitutes the climax of the entire poem as the epiphany of the music coincides with a moment of occult revelation in Bely's vision of Sophia. This considerably longer portrait repeats many of the phrases associated with Zarina previously, including the reference to pink (1003-6). But now she is much more definitely associated with blue. Her gaze, pursuing the music, is of lapis lazuli (999-1000). Her eyes, in a phrase deriving ultimately from Lermontov, but repeated as a motif in Solov'ev's 'Tri svidaniia', are azure tinged with fire, just as Mikhail Sergeevich Solov'ev's eyes were in Part 2:

Так из блистающих лазурей
Глазами полными огня,

Ты запевающею бурей
Забриллиантилась – в меня (1011-14)

Thus from the sparkling azures
With eyes so full of fire,
A storm embarking on its song,
You have begun to diamondize – at me

The effect of Zarina's gaze on Bely is to illuminate him entirely in the azure of mystical perception:

Ты на меня сходила снами
Из миротворной тишины:
Моей застенчивой весны
Оголубила глубинами;
И мне открылась звуком бурь
Катастрофической цевницы
И милоглазая лазурь,
И поцелуйная денница:
Ее, о время, -- опурпурь! (1019-27)

To me you have descended in my dreams
Out of the pacifying silence:
You've coloured blue the depths
Of this my bashful spring;
And by the sound of storms
And by the catastrophic panpipe,
A lovely-eyed azure was disclosed to me,
And the caressing Morning Star:
O Time, -- enpurple it!

The last line of this passage provides a glimpse of a further colour of revelation, purple, identified by Bely in 'Sviashchennye tsveta' and apparent at the top of the 'astral body of the developed man' presented by Leadbeater.⁵⁰

The fourth and final part of *Pervoe svidanie* is on one level a recapitulation as Bely ponders on the mystery that has been revealed to him. At first as he walks the streets of Moscow he fears being overwhelmed by darkness (1134-57), both literally by the shadows of the buildings and theosophically by primeval chaos (1215-17) and by the residual forces of the primitive lost continent of Lemuria, to which he refers (1138, 'I mnitsia: temnye lemury' (It seems to me: dark lemurs)). But these thoughts are gradually dispelled by the recollection

of Sophia-Zarina, as the lines describing Bely's vision of her are with minor variations repeated (1234-45).

The dominant colour in Part 4, however, is not blue, or even turquoise, which appears in one passage as its equivalent (1194, 1201), but white, in Steiner's terms, as has been noted above, the 'image of the spirit'. Bely's progress through Moscow is accompanied by a snowstorm, paralleling the turbulent snowstorm of Parts 1 and 2, but now suffused with numerous additional images of white and purity. As Bely runs to the street called Prechistenka (literally 'most pure'), turned white with the snow, for example, he sees for a moment both Jesus, with diamond eyes, and the Virgin Mary, with a pearl-like tear in her eye (1246-61). Shortly after this presentiment of religious reunification, Bely sees another vision in the snow, this time of the white-haired Vladimir Solov'ev, in the form of a white geyser. The section ends with a final appearance of the Virgin Mary, again associated with snow and pearls, yet we are left with a certain ambiguity as to whether Bely's insight can be sustained. Mary is pensively tearful, and the turbulence of the snowstorm threatens the stability of Bely's glimpses of the spirit world even as its whiteness promises their continuation. The short epilogue to the poem, however, looking back on the events of the poem from twenty years later, suggests that in any event memory of the earlier visions has not lost its power to transfigure and console.

If this is indeed the case, it is in no small measure due to Bely's own skill in manipulating and selecting from the past. The particular version of anthroposophical enlightenment which he presents through the elaboration of colour motifs, for example, cannot belong to Bely's thought in 1900, when anthroposophy as such did not exist and theosophy was barely known to him. It is rather imposed on Bely's material from his viewpoint of 1921 and merged seamlessly with his reception of Solov'evian mysticism and, among other things, Wagnerian synaesthesia. There is always a danger when analysing

individual symbolic strands in modernist poetry of presenting an overly schematic picture that loses sight of the work as a whole. But although the foregoing examination of colour in *Pervoe svidanie* allows only a partial view of the poem and is itself by no means complete, it should be clear that colour motifs play a central and unifying role, linking the mystical enlightenment that is at the poem's centre not only with a series of analogies in mythological and occult symbolism but also with correlatives in Bely's historical Moscow at the turn of the last century.

NOTES

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¹ G.S. Smith, 'Bely's Poetry and Verse Theory', in John E. Malmstad (ed.), *Andrey Bely: Spirit of Symbolism*, Ithaca, 1987, pp. 272-3. Smith refers to *Pervoe svidanie* as the Apollonian pole of Bely's oeuvre.

² Andrey Bely, *The First Encounter*, trans. and introd. by Gerald Janeček, preliminary remarks, notes and comments by Nina Berberova, Princeton, 1979 (hereafter FE). This edition reproduces the 1921 Alkonost edition of *Pervoe svidanie*. In-text references are to line numbers in this edition, and Janeček's translations are given where appropriate, with minor amendments to conform to British spelling.

³ See K. Mochul'skii, *Andrei Belyi*, Paris, 1955, pp. 228-32; O. Il'inskii, 'O poeme Andreia Belogo "Pervoe svidanie"', *Novyi zhurnal*, no. 90, 1968, pp. 99-100, 108; FE, *passim*.

⁴ L.K. Chursina, 'O khudozhestvennoi strukture poemy Andreia Belogo "Pervoe svidanie"', *Russkaia literatura*, 1992, no. 4, pp. 41-5. Parallels with Pushkin have also been noted by others: see Il'inskii, *op. cit.*, p. 110; Boris Christa, *The Poetic World of Andrey Bely*, Amsterdam, 1977, pp. 116, 118.

⁵ Simon Karlinsky, 'Symphonic Structure in Andrej Belyj's "Pervoe Svidanie"', *California Slavic Studies*, vol. 6, 1971, pp. 61-70.

⁶ B.A. Kats, 'O kontrapunkticheskoi tekhnike v "Pervom svidanii"', *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1995, no. 4/5, pp. 189-91.

⁷ See FE, xv-xix, xxiii-xxx; K.F. Taranovsky, 'Chetyrekhstopnyi iamb Andreia Belogo', *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics*, vol. 10, 1966, pp. 127-47; Chursina, 'O khudozhestvennoi strukture', pp. 46-8.

⁸ Raymond Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, Manchester, 1982, p. 7.

⁹ See especially Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, Cambridge, 1995.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 145-86; on the theme of Bely and Wagner see also Olia Tielkes, *Literatura i muzyka: Chetvertaia simfoniia Andreia Belogo*, doctoral thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1997, pp. 205-47.

¹¹ See L.L. Gerver, *Muzyka i muzykal'naiia mifologiiia v tvorchestve russkikh poetov (pervye desiatiletiiia XX veka)*, Moscow, 2001.

¹² Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, pp. 143-4.

¹³ Ada Steinberg, *Word and Music in the Novels of Andrey Bely*, Cambridge, 1982, p. 210.

¹⁴ Roger Keys, *The Reluctant Modernist: Andrei Belyi and the Development of Russian Fiction, 1902-1914*, Oxford, 1996, pp. 138-9.

¹⁵ Tielkes, *Literatura i muzyka*, pp. 347-8.

¹⁶ John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus, *The New Grove Wagner*, New York, 1984, pp. 112, 146.

¹⁷ See Tielkes, *Literatura i muzyka*, pp. 336-50.

¹⁸ J.D. Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 72-4; Keys, pp. 215-16.

¹⁹ See, for example, Georges Nivat, 'Andrej Belyj: Lettre autobiographique à Ivanov-Razumnik', *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, vol. 15, no. 1-2, 1974, p. 56.

²⁰ Gerald Janeček, 'Introduction', in id. (ed.) *Andrey Bely: A Critical Review*, Lexington, Ky., 1978, pp. 11-12.

²¹ Andrei Belyi, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii*, Moscow, 1989, pp. 337, 523.

²² On Bely's engagement with theosophy and anthroposophy, see Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study*, pp. 37-53; Boris Christa, 'Andrej Bely's Connections with European Occultism', in Richard Freeborn, R.R. Milner-Gulland, Charles A. Ward (eds), *Russian and Slavic Literature*, Cambridge, Mass., 1976, pp. 213-23; and especially Frédéric C. Kozlik, *L'Influence de l'anthroposophie sur l'oeuvre d'Andréi Biélyi*, 3 vols, Frankfurt, 1981. For a general account of theosophy in Russia see Maria Carlson, 'Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia', in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, Ithaca, 1997, pp. 139-43.

²³ For a succinct account of this period of Bely's life see J.D. Elsworth, *Andrey Bely*, Letchworth, 1972, pp. 81-104.

²⁴ Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, pp. 187-8.

²⁵ Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Supersensible Knowledge of the World and the Destination of Man*, New York, 1971, p. 175.

²⁶ E.g. 'Apokalipsis russkoi poezii'; see Elsworth, *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study*, pp. 24-27; see also FE, p. 104.

²⁷ Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, pp. 188-94.

²⁸ Bely's phrasing here (*Kak rech' prorocheskaia Norn, / Kak karknuvshii Votanov voron* (871-2; *Like the prophetic speech of the Norns, / Like one of Wotan's cawing ravens*; emphasis added)), suggests that it is perhaps not in fact Wagner who is being played. The piece is conceivably something by Scriabin, who is mentioned as being in the audience (902) and who was himself much influenced by theosophy.

²⁹ See Annie Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom: An Outline of Theosophical Teachings*, London, 1897, pp. 65-6. *Glossolaliia*, published at around the same time as *Pervoe svidanie* (though substantially written in 1917), also links anthroposophical and Wagnerian concepts: see Elsworth, *Andrey Bely* (1983), p. 49; Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia*, pp. 282-4. Bartlett here explores a string of intertextual allusions connecting the figure of the dwarf Mime, who appears in both *Pervoe svidanie* and *Glossolaliia*, with Blok and Medtner.

³⁰ Christa, *Poetic World*, pp. 24-5; I.V. Rogacheva, *V poiskakh utrachenogo... : dve redaktsii 'Zolota v lazure' Andreia Belogo*, Moscow, 2002, pp. 56-9.

³¹ Andrei Belyi, *Moskva: Moskva pod udarom, Moskovskii chudak, Maski*, Moscow, 1989, pp. 762, 764; see Steinberg, *Word and Music*, p. 209.

³² Tielkes, *Literatura i muzyka*, pp. 354-6; see *ibid.*, pp. 354-67 for the broader discussion of colour in the Fourth Symphony.

³³ Steinberg, *Word and Music*, pp. 213-16. See also *ibid.*, pp. 216-36; Samuel D. Cioran, 'A Prism for the Absolute: The Symbolic Colours of Andrey Bely' in: Janeček (ed.), *Andrey Bely*, pp. 103-114; Christine D. Tomei, 'On the Function of Light and Color in Andrej Belyj's

Petersburg: Green and Twilight’, *Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1992, pp. 57-67;

³⁴ Steinberg, *Word and Music*, pp. 192-4, 275 ; Tielkes, *Literatura i muzyka*, pp. 352-3.

³⁵ Rudolf Steiner, *Colour: Three Lectures Given in Dornach, 6th to 8th May 1921 with Extracts from his Note-Books*, trans. John Salter, London, 1971, p. 7.

³⁶ See Andrei Belyi, *Vospominaniia o Shteinere*, ed. Frédéric Kozlic, Paris, 1982, pp. 215-94. The first Goetheanum is illustrated in Wolfgang Pehnt, *Rudolf Steiner: Goetheanum, Dornach*, Berlin, 1991, pp. 12-15.

³⁷ A further dimension which would merit separate investigation is the degree to which colours in *Pervoe svidanie* are also linked with particular sounds and rhythms. Bely had experimented with correlations between sounds and colours in earlier works such as the 1913 poem ‘Ase’ (To Asia) and the 1917 poem ‘Utro’ (Morning) as well as in *Glossolaliia*. They are also a prominent subject of his 1934 study *Masterstvo Gogolia*. See Steinberg, *Word and Music*, pp. 194-9.

³⁸ C.W. Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible: Examples of Different Types of Men as Seen by Means of Trained Clairvoyance*, 2nd rev. edn, London, 1920, plate XXIII.

³⁹ Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible*, pp. 84-5.

⁴⁰ Steiner, *Colour*, p. 16.

⁴¹ Andrei Belyi, ‘Sviashchennye tsveta’ in his *Kritika, estetika, teoriia simbolizma*, ed. A. Ia. Zis’ et al., Moscow, 1994, vol. 2, p. 110. Steiner, *Colour*, p. 18-21 (21).

⁴² Cf. ‘On – dlan’, protainutaia k Bogu / Skvoz’ nezhnyi veter purgovoi’ (131-14); ‘Zimoi, v purgovye rasskaty / Zvuchalo zdes’ “Na vek odno”’ (335-6).

⁴³ Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible*, p. 85.

⁴⁴ FE, p. 104.

⁴⁵ Belyi, ‘Sviashchennye tsveta’, p. 112.

⁴⁶ Steiner, *Colour*, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁷ Belyi, ‘Sviashchennye tsveta’, p. 116.

⁴⁸ Steiner, *Colour*, pp. 32-5.

⁴⁹ Belyi, ‘Sviashchennye tsveta’, p. 114.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.