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Alexander Dobrokhotov

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THE PHILOSOPHY
OF THE RUSSIAN SYMBOLISM**

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Alexander Dobrokhotov¹

THE REVOLUTIONS OF 1917 IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE RUSSIAN SYMBOLISM²

The article is dedicated to the philosophical reaction offered by several Russian symbolists to the revolution of 1917. It demonstrates the “re-grouping” of the Silver Age Symbolism, which laid bare the underlying differences in its value foundations. The article considers this refracted unity in the ideational world of Symbolism in the journalistic writings of Vyach. Ivanov, Blok, and Bely.

Key words: philosophy, revolution, Russian Symbolism, Vyach. Ivanov, Andrey Bely, A. Blok.

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¹ National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia); Department of Philosophy. A professor in the School of Cultural Studies. E-mail: gumaniora@gmail.com

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By 1917, the revolutionary journalistic discourse has had a long and full history. The reflections on the revolution of 1905 may be considered as the immediate start of the shaping of the “metaphysics of revolution”; aside from philosophical texts, that reflection absorbed the “ideological collections” (*Milestones* [Vekhi] etc.), literary polemics, and, certainly, bountiful fruits of literature itself. They were continued in the post-February discourse of the “time of hopes”; that discourse was rich in theoretical articles and journalistic writings that contained a “metaphysical breakthrough” of the topic of the Russian revolution in the works of Russian philosophers. This is the time when partially overlapping, yet not identical approaches to understanding the revolution take their ultimate shape; these approaches revived the old patterns of Russian historiosophy: eschatology, sophiology, syncretic religious mysticism, national and cultural missionism, etc. The first post-October wave of reflections produces a radical split into two streams of thought: “yes” (with its literary and poetical dominant) and “no” (well represented by the philosophers who contributed to the *Out of the Depths* [Iz glubiny] collection). At first glance, there is no clear watershed in the general ideational space, and literary and journalistic sentiments of the cultural elite offer many compromise variants. Yet this somewhat risky simplification is supported by the fact that everything “other” was rapidly subsumed by these two streams: this process had largely completed by 1922. The philosophical reaction to the revolution of 1917 is characterized, in particular, by a certain “re-grouping” of the settled movements and trends of the Silver Age, which highlights previously invisible, yet deep-running differences in seemingly aligned value worldviews of certain cultural denominations. The revolution turned out to be a sort of a prism that unfolded programmatic unity into a fan of different opinions. In this article, I attempt to view this refracted unity in the ideational world of symbolism in the journalistic writings of Vyacheslav Ivanov, Blok, and Bely.

We may take as our starting point Vyacheslav Ivanov’s evolution of ideas, since his theories *de facto* became the recognized philosophical manifesto of the Russian symbolism in all its recensions. Vyacheslav Ivanov was not among those members of the intelligentsia who sharply condemned the Bolshevik coup d’état and he apparently strenuously attempted to see in the events that surrounded him the attributes of the “organic age” he had been awaiting (judging also from the fact that he kept his Soviet passport for a long time and his hopes persevered). Yet at the same time, the demonic nature of those events could not but repel Ivanov. He contributes to the *From the Depths* collection, which was one of the starkest documents of the intellectual resistance of the time, yet, tellingly, he chooses a fairly neutral topic for his article, “Our Language.” Naturally, this is not a manifestation of conformism (See his 1919 poem “Yes, we have been kindling this fire” [“Da, sei pozhar my podzhigali...”] with its clinching formulas);

rather, he was biding this time, proceeding from his sophisticated knowledge of the paths of the world history. The poets of 1917 were not afraid of fires (although a blaze did reduce to ashes the entire printing run of Ivanov's book *The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God* that ultimately never saw the light of day and another blaze consumed Blok's library). The discrepancy between expectations and accomplishments was a cause for alarm. Vyacheslav Ivanov's dream of an "organic age" proved to be largely utopian, but the concomitant critique of individualism and liberal humanism retained its multi-pronged significance for Ivanov. Starting with his 1905 article "The Crisis of Individualism," Ivanov longs for a transition from the cult of an individual to *sobornost* (collectivity). From the point of view of this approach, archaic "Byronic" individualism must give way to the new understanding of the dignity and destiny of Man. In this work, Ivanov acknowledges the greatness of the European principle of individuality and describes the types it begot, and then he states that, "Despite all this, though, some kind of break, some kind of as yet obscure turn toward the pole of collectivity [*sobornost*'] has occurred in our soul."³ What he calls an "obscure turn" acquires clarity and becomes, in 1917, a diabolical parody of the utopia of *sobornost*. In his article "The Revolution and the People's Self-Determination" (1917) published in *Narodopravstvo* weekly and included in the *Matters Native and Universal* collection, Ivanov states that the revolution has opted for a path outside religion and therefore it does not reflect the people's self-determination. "Revolutionary action forced to confine itself to proclaiming abstract patterns of public thought and civil morals as the new foundations for the people's life is inactive. When it is impossible for the revolutionary state to manifest itself in creative action, it takes on the character of a morbid state, revealed by the grave symptoms of growing anarchy and overall devastation, by the development of centrifugal forces that establish themselves in division and discord, and by the collapse of the people's integral organism into dead parts. The revolution will either reduce Russia to 'a pile of smoldering bones' or will be Russia's true rebirth and a new embodiment of the people's spirit, an embodiment that is full and conscious for the first time. In order to achieve its true accomplishment in this sense, it should manifest an integral and, therefore, primarily religious self-determination of the people."⁴ G.V. Obatin's analysis shows that Ivanov's newspaper articles demonstrate the same stance.⁵ Obatin singles out the following invectives in Ivanov's newspaper articles: criticism of Bolsheviks' pro-German leanings and their desire for a separate peace; "cultural masochism" of the Russian people and the intelligentsia open to the "vibrations of the German culture"; murders of priests that Red Army soldiers committed with impunity.

³ *Ivanov Vyach. I. Sbranie sochinenii*. Vol. 1. Brussels, 1971. P. 836.

⁴ *Vyach. I. Ivanov. Sbranie sochinenii*. Brussels, 1979. Vol. 3. P. 364.

⁵ *Obatin G.V. Shtrikhi k portretu Viach. Ivanova epokhi revoliutsii 1917 goda // Russkaia literatura*. 1997 (2).

Obatnin also quotes Ivanov's talk in the House of Free Art on May 19/6, 1918, "Revolutionary ages are ages of the least creative activity and of the greatest *becoming*. When the metal is molten, is creation of forms possible? Is action possible during birth? We feel that life is *creating* us, and not that we create life. Hence the feeling of *fate*. ... The only gesture we can make of our own free will is to grasp the hand extended from the darkness. This is not creativity, this is sacrifice. What is left for the spirit is the readings of the stars and *suggestions of the Muse Urania*. ... And also hope!" Obatnin sees this talk as Ivanov's "gesture of resignation to what has happened." Indeed, this is the time when Ivanov begins to work in Narkompros (The People's Commissariat for Education), becomes seriously involved with the reform of theater and refrains from openly criticizing the regime. Yet what is telling is the change in scale of his ruminations on the revolution that is apparent in his articles and poems of 1918-1921. The revolution as an event is moved from the immediate context of the era into the greater history that does not presuppose immediate results. Thus, the article "Cliffs. On the Crisis of Humanism" (1919) proclaims the advent of the new antihumanist testament akin to the classical antiquity and rejects individualism of the Modernity. Humanism gives way to what Ivanov calls "monanthropism," Adam's ancient will toward reuniting his dispersed elements through the sacrifice of the principle of individualism. Ivanov here notes the sensitivity of the avant-garde aesthetics that manifests anthropomorphic and anthropocentric art. Contrasting Shakespeare and Goethe's individualism with Aeschylus and Dostoevsky's monanthropism, Ivanov writes that, "Here, ancient memory and new anticipations meet. Here is the outline of those purifications whose religious meaning consists in the entire humankind, understood as a living and universal and personal unity, accepting individual will and guilt..."⁶ Such a change in focus should hardly be reduced to conciliatoriness, but what can be seen here is the disappointment in the present and even a loss of interest in it. "The Correspondence from Two Corners" (1921) proclaims the motif of the salvific power of culture with greater optimism. Having spotted in Gershenzon's thought (maybe having slightly misunderstood it, but it is beside the point here) a call for the Rousseauist adoption of a simple life, Ivanov objects, denouncing, as usual, the "age-old sin of 'individuation'":

We strive to overcome this fatal principle every day and every hour by the uninterrupted creative process carried on in little and big cults <...> and catholicity flashes up for a moment and dies out again, and the multi-headed hydra of culture torn by inner dissension cannot change into a harmonious cult. Nevertheless, the thirst for unity must not tempt us to yield and compromise, i.e.,

⁶ *Vyach. I. Ivanov. Sobranie sochinenii. Brussels, 1979. Vol. 3. P. 382.*

to establish an external and sham bond where the very roots of consciousness and, so to speak, the arteries of our spiritual beings have not become woven into one net. In the depth of depths, which is unattainable to us, all of us make up a universal system of blood circulation that feeds the single heart of mankind. But we must not steal a march on sensibility, which is given us only as a distant and obscure foreboding, and substitute fictitious likeness for the hidden sacred reality. You and I have not a common cult. It seems to you that oblivion liberates and gives life, and that cultural memory enslaves and deadens; I maintain that it is memory that liberates, and that it is oblivion that enslaves and deadens.⁷

Here we see an important qualification concerning the idea of monanthropism: unity cannot be imitated. It is achieved through individual ascent up the vertical of culture. Simplicity is the product of complexity, “It is achieved not by flight from a given milieu or country, but by ascent.”⁸ The utopian nature of *sobornost* is thus neutralized by the power of cultural Memory.

Now let us look at the attempt to respond to the challenge of the present that is constituted by Andrey Bely’s “Revolution and Culture.” “The Revolution and Culture”⁹ holds a peculiar place among Andrey Bely’s works. This article is his first and probably last attempt to become directly involved with the subject of the revolution proper and to find a common language with the creators of the new ideology.¹⁰ Oddly, during this long-awaited time of changes, Andrey Bely finds himself virtually “at somebody else’s feast.” Following the prophetic depths of *The Silver Dove* and *Petersburg*, the subject of the revolution moves to the background: now Bely is concerned with the mysteries of evolution, which are close to his Goetheanism, to Jena-type Romanticism, and to anthroposophy he has newly discovered. His last and principal topic, “the history of becoming of a soul conscious of itself,” presupposes solving the mystery of evolution’s rhythms and meanings, and revolutionary clashes are just a logical caesura within that process. During the revolutionary months, he writes *Kotik Letaev* and “Glossolalia,” which tell rather of overcoming splits than of overturns, that is, revolutions. “Connection of glints,” “germination of meanings,” fantasies of “sound-images” that overcome “the doubling of literature,” all of that serves psychogenesis: an inexorable unfolding of “self” within personal and world history. The “revolution” is just an instrument of this process. The

⁷ Vyach. I. Ivanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. Brussels, 1979. Vol. 3. P. 410. Translated into English by Norbert Guterman.

⁸ *Ibid.* P. 412.

⁹ The article was written in June-July 1917 and published as a pamphlet: *Andrey Bely. Revolutsiia i kultura*. Moscow: G.A.Leman & S.I. Sakharov Press, 1917.

¹⁰ On the complex tactics of adapting to the Soviet ideology see: *Spivak M.L.* Andrei Belyi – mistik i sovetskii pisatel'. Moscow, 2006; *Spivak M.L., Odesskii M.P.* Andrei Belyi mezhdru simvolizmom, antroposofiei i sovetskoi vlast'iu: Simvolizm stikhovedeniia vs. stikhovedenie simvolizma // *Symbol w kulturze rosyjskiej* / K. Duda, T. Obolovitch, eds. Krakow, 2010.

concept of “crisis” is more akin to Bely: the cycle of works conceived and partially written in the 1920s is dedicated to this particular phenomenon. Yet for Bely, “crisis” is a rhythmically necessary “turning point” and “passage” within an integral process, and not a catastrophic overturn.

“Revolution and Culture” is interesting because Bely attempts to emphasize the subject of revolution thereby finding “rhymes” for topical events in his own subjects. He believes it possible to find an agreement between the evolution of the soul and the revolution in society by building a bridge between art and revolution, by highlighting their underlying kinship. The course his thoughts follow is this. Outwardly, the connection between the growth of creative forms and revolution is reversed similar the growth of stems and roots, but the center of the growth is the same. Like all forms of culture, art presupposes cult and evolution; revolution, however, breaks and sweeps away all forms. On the other hand, there is the green underbrush of culture, on the other hand, there is the molten lava of the revolutionary volcano. Yet the colors green and red are complementary; their intersection is in the whiteness of Apollo’s spiritual light, that is, in art. Solidified art forms become the power of coercive force, and then their clash with the living spirit begets Prometheus’s punishing fire. This is the hotbed of revolution: revolution begins in spirit. Yet it also ends in spirit – as the rainbow of the newborn culture. Within revolution itself, art is a process that does not have a manifested form. Revolution and culture may threaten each other: revolution’s content that has not taken on a form is destructive for culture, but cultural products that have been turned into a “commodity” similarly destroy the free movement of life. In Bely’s view, the foundations of clashes between revolution and culture are the social manifestations of two human “I’s” – the higher “I” clashes with solidly fleshed-out products of its own creativity, with the inert “I” as its double, and engages in a struggle with it. In essence, this is the root of all art: tragedy as a struggle with fate.

The encounter with fate as with one’s own double is the enormous force of tragedy; the bifurcation in the life of the arts is reconciled in the recognition of the bifurcation in man’s ‘I’: his higher ‘I’ begins a struggle with his stagnant ‘I’. From the outcome of the struggle the entire course of the creations of backward cultures changes ; the collision between revolution and culture is a dialogue between two human ‘I’s’ in the manifestations of social life. The root of all tragic collisions is, in truth, my encounter with my own ‘I’; The root of all manifestations of art is tragedy. This is why we understand that the struggle between man and fate is reflected in tragedy’s construction of generated forms. From the initial tragedy fell all the initial forms; duality swept them all aside. This duality consists in the fact

that, on the one hand, a work of art is not limited by time, place or form; it expands infinitely in the depths of our soul. On the other hand, it is a form in time, in a specific space, and is cast motionlessly in material.¹¹

By depicting this underlying coincidence of the opposition of art and revolution, Bely protests against the depiction of revolution in “protocols” and “photographs.” Revolution is the act of conceiving creative forms, but they are born transformed. At this point, Andrey Bely offers a new semantic of color: blue flowers of Romanticism, the bliss of azure, the gold of the sun.

From the mechanical point of view of life, revolution is an explosion that cuts off dead form into a formless chaos; but its manifestation is different: the revolution is rather the pressure of a growing sprout, a sprout bursting through the seed shell, the growth of the maternal organism in the mysterious act of birth; in this instance, we have every right to call revolution the incarnation of spirit in the organic life; the revolutionary expression of involution is one particular instance of involutory processes; specifically, a clash of a sprout’s power clashing with an abnormally thickened scab of the shell; here, the form, the skeleton, has been violently thrown away. ... Involution ... connects in their very roots the revolutionary content with evolutionary forms; seen in its light, the impetus of revolution indicates that the babe leaped in the womb. (300-301)

Thus, Bely replaces the traditional view of revolution with a two-polar model of “revolution – involution,” thereby mitigating the “revolution – evolution” opposition. This development puts a question mark over both the matter of perplexing the artist with a guileless reflection of revolutionary events, and over the more sophisticated task of destroying old forms, “The revolution of forms is not yet a revolution; no, it is but a decomposition of the inert matter of creativities; under the wreckage of forms, new contents manifests itself in destructive whirlwinds that depredate the forms...” (P. 302). Demonstrating what the new content is in the psychic depths of culture, Bely offers the following series of oppositions: *rhythm*, not whirlwind; *harmony*, not noise; *poetry*, not *powerful elements*. However, none of that is thus far present in reality; “harmony” is only anticipated, and “twisted forms” are only a silent symbol of the future.

Revolution in the sphere of form is a consequence of romanticism: the sense of voicelessness, of ineffability, eternally accompanies it; the mystery of future form

¹¹ *Andrey Bely. Revoliutsiia i kul'tura // Andrey Bely. Simvolizm kak miroponimanie / L.A. Sugai, ed., compiler. Introduction by L.A.Sugai. Moscow: 1994. P. 298. Hereinafter the page number is indicated in the text.*

has not been revealed, and the existing forms have been exhausted. They are declining. Revolution in the sphere of form is illusory; it is the evolution of the decomposition of dead, stiff carcasses under the pressure of inner impulses that have not shown their face. (C. 301).

This is why the energy of Romantic anticipation is so important for Bely. It allows for distancing from a direct “commission” to serve the time, since this energy is working on the margins of the revolution, “First revolutionary thunders are stealthily moving with doves’ footsteps ... within us. The revolution is framed with the entire Romanticism of creativity” (C. 302). Zarathustra’s “doves’ footsteps” are in meaningful consonance with the gold and azure that Andrey Bely unexpectedly ties in with the fruits of the revolution. The abundance of exceptionable catachreses the article uses to describe the creative élan and the inert reality should be treated with understanding: Bely is solving the difficult task of defending creativity from “partisanship” and at the same time, he is solving the task of calling upon creativity to “involute” into revolution. Bely’s reply to Kerensky’s slogan “We shall be romantics” is plain difficult to read. The poet blesses “the union of the evolutionary and the artist in the *flaming enthusiasm* of both, in their romantic attitudes toward the events taking place” (C. 303). Of course, today we know that Kerensky should not have striven for a union in an enthusiastic élan, but finished off the Bolshevik monster, but the article was written at the time when the July uprising had been suppressed, and Russia had four months of hope ahead of it. Bely’s understanding of Romanticism as explained above is rather a boundary than a reckless “union.” Further on, Bely offers a precise formula of a conflict (not harmony) between two cultural forces; in a paradoxical and even polemical and challenging manner, he educes the “bourgeois nature” of the social interpretation of revolution:

Creation is the process of the spirit’s incarnation; it is involution. Matter is shattered spirit; materialization involved the drying up of creativity. The contradiction between revolution and art is the clash between materialistic attitudes toward art and the abstractions of revolution. The clash looks like a clash of equally negative forces: the force of the stagnations of forms and the formless force of impulse. In recent centuries the spirit has been replaced by the abstractions of the spirit. The abstractions of the spirit is a principle; its life is a dialectic of dead concepts <...> the substantiation of spirit has been replaced by the substantiation of the world of matter in the abstractions of thought. Because of this idea of revolution (the revolution of spirit in matter) naturalli is replaced by the idea of revolution of the material circumstances of surrounding daily life – and

only this. Economic materialism is the abstraction of the revolution of the spirit. There is no revolutionary organism in it; there is its flat shadow. The revolution of productive relations is the reflection of revolution but not revolution itself. Economic materialism supposes purity in it alone; and it supposes: revolutions of the spirit are not pure; they are bourgeois ... and are located inside the evolutionary circle of the enormous epoch we call "history". The advancing epoch is extra-historical, global. Thus the abstract seizure of revolution replaces it with evolutionary process. (C. 303).

Thus, Bely believes that "economic materialism" is the "abstraction of the revolution"; revolutions of spirit are insufficiently revolutionary for this materialism, for they are bourgeois in nature. He hurls back at the materialists their own accusation as he claims that any social revolution is bourgeois in nature, since it stems from the evolution of economic relations. The revolution of forms is the same, as it is fettered by "bourgeois" dependency on product (solidified matter) and production implements, which have burst into the world of modern art. For Bely, this is the tragedy of modern art, the tragedy expressed in the negation of creativity proclaimed by the mutinous geniuses of the 19th century. A true revolution is the spiritual one, it proceeds from labor (the abstraction of creation) to creation itself, thereby performing a true "leap into the kingdom of freedom": "... this *kingdom of freedom* is, in essence, merely a recognition of a new dimension of life outside the earthly conditions of commodity culture and the earthly cerebral thought it begets. Only a *new consciousness* can measure the coming *kingdom of freedom*; yet this consciousness lies beyond the consciousness we have been endowed with" (P. 304).

Bely depicts the evolution of creativity as a performance in three acts. Act One: the creation of the world of arts; Act Two: creating oneself in the image and likeness of the world and struggling with one's own earthly form; it is during this struggle that the departure from art takes place; Act Three: entrance into the kingdom of freedom and new ties between unconditionally free people (C. 305-306). Only Act Three becomes the true revolution of life; but prior to that, it disappears as the world of forms; in the "realized" culture, it is shapeless, since it lies beyond this culture. Apparently, the revolution of the spirit in this version does not cast aside the public meaning of the transformation of the soul, but endows it with a special modus, "... [T]he forms of public life of the future, the forms realized by the revolution, are not forms of some 'Bolshevik' culture, but the eternal being concealed under the formal veil of arts. The kingdom of our freedom that can be realized in the future is already here, now with us; it is the 'eternal being' concealed in the world of arts" (P. 306).

This fairly eschatological picture has, nonetheless, a topical dimension: the “eternal being” is already here. Considering art forms according to their “solidity,” that is, to their degree of dependence on the material masses that conceal the future, Bely puts a special emphasis on music, in whose imageless voice we can hear the revolution of the spirit and which partially manifests the eternal being. Only music can act as an intermediary between the world of the victorious revolution (Bely insists that this world is invisible as a matter of principle) and today’s visible forms of art. The following proportion is typical: as the proletariat is a class among classes, whose mission is to go beyond the society’s class system, so music is a form among forms whose mission is to go beyond the form, to dissolve the products of creation (forms of art) in the process of creation (P. 307). Bely mentions proletariat remembering all the while that the purpose of the article is to set up a dialog with the new authorities without abandoning the task of synthesizing red and green in the Apollonian whiteness. Music is important for him, because it does not add yet another form to others, but translates the language of form into the language of the soul’s response, and in its response, the soul quite autonomously shapes itself; this is the psychogenesis Bely seeks, his musical entelechy.

Music can be called mathematics of our soul; in relation to the diversity of the thoughts and images it awakens, music is a law of sorts that evokes them in the soul, it is the unity of solution, and thoughts and images of music within us are crystals. ... rhythms of our future actions in the kingdom of freedom descended to us are given; the laws of actions remain unrevealed: music is even deeper than the laws given to us in words; it is our inner law of our eternal freedom; and the speech is its product. ... the form itself anticipates for us the revolution of creativity, it contains a summons to realize the kingdom of freedom, and this is why it alone contains the ultimate baring of creativities; historically, it took form later than other forms; its form contains the attempt to shape trans-shape chaos, to reveal the revolution of spirit beneath the revolution of form; music is an attempt to express the quintessence of creative processes in form (P. 307).

Music is an unopened envelope containing our destiny. In music lie the contents of future historical life. Music is the dove from the heights of the future Ararat bringing its first olive branch to our ark; this news is the decision of the lot of everyone imprisoned in the ark. That is why it is general and, at the same time, individual, intimate. It affects each one of us. In it the truly general image is revealed to each individual soul. But this image of ours is inside us, like a star; it cannot be seen; it is given in a bundle of glints. (C. 307).

Let us not a few important points. 1) Music *shapes* “trans-shape” chaos; it remains an Apollonian, and not a Dionysian force. 2) It is apophatic, since it does not presuppose an accessible content (“an unopened envelope”), but it provides the universal “law,” and, therefore, very much in the spirit of Novalis, Bely calls it mathematics. 3) It is “general” (a polite nod to Wagner and Kerensky), but it is also “individual” and even “intimate.” 4) Speech is secondary; it is begotten by music.

The first three points are akin to Ivanov’s monanthropic aesthetics, except that Ivanov would take exception to the prevalence of the Apollonian principle: Ivanov would never have sacrificed the double unity of Apollo and Dionysus. Yet Ivanov would categorically reject the fourth point: for Ivanov, speech is a primary phenomenon both ontologically and religiously. This is why logos should be the entelechy of the music of revolution. In this regard, the remarks on the spirit of revolution he made in his article on Skryabin, a cult composer for all Symbolists, are telling. Noting that “he desired stages of the external renewal of historical life as necessary preliminary metamorphoses preceding the final and purely spiritual event, humankind’s voluntary transition to another level of being,” Ivanov concludes that, “If the revolution we are experiencing is truly the great Russian revolution, the long-suffering and painful birth of ‘an independent Russian idea,’ the future historian will recognize Skryabin as one of its spiritual causes, and will probably recognize the revolution itself as the first bars of his unwritten Mystery. Yet this is only in case, looking upon our current experience from the distance of time, he will have not only the right to say that ‘The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep,’ but also the right to add ‘And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters’ – concerning what is now looking upon us, its contemporaries, with the vague glance of chaos ‘without form’.”¹² (Written on October 24, 1917.) For Bely, the music of the revolution is in itself positive and constructive, yet on one important condition: we should read and decipher its rhythm, not verbal and ideational programs. It follows from Bely’s article that the structural and rhythmic message of the revolution is endlessly more important and mysterious than the verbal and ideational shells. It appears that Bely’s attitude to his father’s arrhythmology has been little researched, yet it is obvious that he paid certain attention to its symbolic potential, noting, for example, that, “as a mathematician, he included in the evolution theory the revolutionary role of a leap, a break, a probability, an attribute.”¹³ As a symbolist, Andrey Bely also included in his evolution theory the apophatic function of the revolution. And it is not at all surprising that Bely’s principal response to the

¹² Skriabin i dukh revoliutsii // *Vyach. I. Ivanov. Sobranie sochinenii*. Brussels, 1979. Vol. 3. P. 194.

¹³ *Bely A. Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii. Memoirs in 3 books. Book 1. / Introduction, commentaries by A.V. Lavrov. Moscow, 1989. P. 171.*

events of the rebellious era was his phonetic fantasy of 1917 on the semantics and rhythm of sound-images. It is possible that it was the most original interpretation of the historical shift offered at the time: revolution as glossolalia.

And therefore this concept is a perception of amendations of the surrounding world: the amendation of the world in itself is - the amendation of the world around; the revolution of the world on the outside is just a phase of the revolution; and - its beginnings: I can just throw off what is for me the outlived carcass of me; but inside of me it can not be thrown away; the overthrow of the tsar takes place in one's own head, if that tsar is an abstraction of thought, it is an internal act of revolution; we must renounce the old world inside, if we will the construction of a new world around us. It is too little to only comprehend, you have to - grasp it: grasp it into yourself. An image compels us to view it; and - it does not give penetrations; visions of the revolution are carried about; and - to the majority they are incomprehensible.¹⁴

The call to dethrone the “tsar in one's own head” draws a noticeable distinction between Ivanov and Bely’s programs, but their mutual admission that the revolution in the external world is viewed only as a stage of the true spiritual revolution brings their positions closer, or at least makes a dialog “from two corners” possible.

The concept outlined above is nothing like Blok’s “music of the revolution,”¹⁵ although this is the first association that springs to mind. For Blok, “music” is a figurative denomination of the underlying connection and likeness of outwardly different phenomena (which is now the subject of cultural studies); as applied to the revolution, it is the voice of the elements. Even though in his article “Intelligentsia and the Revolution,” Blok says that “spirit is music” and even (maybe in a polemic with Bely?) exhorts “not to block the path to spirit with soul,” his own “music” of that text is perceived as an evocation of the spirit of the elements; and when Blok recalls that Socrates’s daemon told him to obey the spirit of music, it appears that the key word here is not “Socrates,” but “daemon.”

Proud politicking is a great sin. The longer the intelligentsia remain aloof and sarcastic, the more terror and bloodshed there may be. Dreadful and dangerous is that elastic, dry, unsavory "adogmatic dogmatics" seasoned with patronizing

¹⁴ Bely A. Glossolaliia. Poema o zvuke. Moscow: Evidentis, 2002. P. 80 – 81. Translation by Thomas R. Beyer, Jr. E-version see on: <http://rvb.ru/belyi/01text/gloss.htm>

¹⁵ On the multi-aspectual opposition “Blok-Bely” in this regard see: *Chubarov I.M.* Simvol, affekt, mazokhizm (Obrazy revoliutsii u Belogo i Bloka) // *Filosofiiia. Literatura. Iskusstvo: Andrey Bely - Vyacheslav Ivanov - Aleksandr Skryabin.* Moscow, 2013.

soulfulness. Behind the soulfulness is blood. The soul attracts blood. Only the spirit can combat horror. Why bar with soulfulness the way to spirituality? The good is hard as it is. And the spirit is music. Socrates' daemon once ordered him to obey the spirit of music. With your whole body, your whole heart, your whole consciousness – listen to the Revolution.¹⁶

It was written on January 9, 1918. This is the case when the date is more important than it might initially appear. On January 6, the Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly, and Blok was quite aware of what daemon assumed the role of a guide on the way to “spirituality.” What catches the reader’s attention among the Romantic clichés Blok uses to describe the difference between a true revolution and a mutiny is the emphasis on the elemental nature and cruelty, which is absent from other Symbolists’ works. In this context, the difference between “music” and “roar” becomes essentially negligible.

Woe to those who expect a revolution to fulfill merely their own dreams, however high-minded and noble. A revolution, like a hurricane, like a blizzard, always brings something new and unexpected. It cruelly deceives many, it easily maims the deserving in its vortex, it often carries the undeserving unharmed to dry land; but these are details, they change neither the main direction of the torrent nor its awesome, deafening roar. The roar is still about something grand—always.¹⁷

“Catiline,” Alexander Blok’s large sketch written in April 1918, explains much in Blok’s “music” since it serves as a libretto of sorts for a revolutionary opera. The Roman “Bolshevik” Catiline, as Blok calls him, rebels against the old world and attempts to blow up “the depraved civilization” from within a few decades before Christ. Christ is in front of him, as He is in front of the twelve Red Army soldiers. In Catiline’s time, before the birth of Jesus Christ, the herald of a new world, a wind rose which escalated into a storm that destroyed the pagan world. Catiline throws himself into that wind; he lives and acts as the wind blows him. And Blok also points out that, in surrendering to the element, the hero pays for it with a moral, psychic, and even physical rebirth. (Now we understand why the revolution must be listened to “with [one’s] whole body.”)

The simplicity and horror of the state of the soul of the doomed revolutionary lies in the fact that a long chain of dialectic and чувственных premises was apparently discarded from it, and the conclusions drawn by the reason and heart appear wild, accidental, groundless. Such a person is insane, maniacal, possessed.

¹⁶ Blok A.A. *Sobranie sochinenii*. In 6 vols. Vol. 4. Leningrad, 1982. P. 239.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* P. 232.

As it transpires, life appears to be subjugated to different laws of causality, space and time; hence, the entire composition, both material and spiritual turns out to be completely different from that of ‘gradualists’; it is applied to a different time and a different space.”¹⁸

Yet even here, Blok hears the music of the revolution:

Here, on this black background of the nighttime (the revolution like all great events, always emphasizes blackness), imagine a gang, at the head of which walks a man who has lost his senses from rage and has forced them to carry the signs of the consul rank ahead of him. This is the same Catiline, the recent favorite of the luminaries of Roman society and the demi-monde, the criminal leader of a degenerate band; He walks at the same ‘lazy, then hurried’ pace, but his rage and fury endow his gait with a musical rhythm; he appears to be no longer the self-interested and depraved Catiline; this man’s steps are mutiny, rebellion, furies of the people’s wrath.¹⁹

Blok finds a place for himself here as well. The poet apparently identifies himself with Catullus and analyzes poem 63, “Attis,” which describes the beautiful youth Attis flying into frenzy due to his hatred of Venus and castrating himself. Blok interprets this poem (none too convincingly) as Catullus’ experience of the civil war, claiming that “in the time of storms and trouble, the most tender, the most intimate strivings of a poet’s soul also become filled with storms and trouble.”²⁰ A. Etkind undertakes a detailed analysis of this strange comparison,²¹ yet for our purposes, it is sufficient to record the poet’s desire to project his “most tender, most intimate” problems and worries onto the historical screen of the revolution. This virtually unsublimated intoxication with destruction and the ambiguous and mysterious attitude to “das Ewig-Weibliche” Blok had celebrated, which is oddly linked to the revolution, set Blok apart from other Symbolists. Olga Deshart writes about Vyacheslav Ivanov’s attitude to this complex of Blok’s, “A certain distancing occurred, because Blok sensed that V.I. did not like snowstorms, howling snow pillars, did not like ‘blinding blizzards’ of wild revolutions, which the Dionysian herald and summoner of ‘the righteous madness’ considered ‘sinful madness,’ exclusively destructive madness.”²² Yet what the three Symbolists undoubtedly have in common is the fear of a changeling revolution, of the revolution being supplanted with something else, something

¹⁸ Ibid. P. 274.

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 289.

²⁰ Ibid. P. 287.

²¹ Etkind A.M. *Khlyst: Sekty, literatura i revoliutsiia*. Moscow, 1998. P. 363 – 370.

²² Deshart O. *Vvedenie // Ivanov Vyach.I. Sobranie sochinenii*. Vol.1. Brussels, 1971. P. 162.

alien and terrible. In the people's mind, such was always the fear of a "changeling tsar." In his memoirs, K. Chukovsky writes about Blok, "Personally, he was not afraid of the revolution, he adored it, and only one thing concerned him: What if it is a false revolution? What if there never has been a true revolution? What if he only dreamed of the true revolution? One could see it was the crucial question for him."²³

Maybe, the ideational landscape of Symbolism I have charted here, with its experience and comprehension of the revolution, should be augmented with another perspective: with assessments made in the name of the revolution by one of its catilines.

The inter-revolutionary (1905-1917) literature, which is decadent in its mood and reach and over-refined in its technique, which is a literature of individualism, of symbolism and of mysticism, finds in Biely its most condensed expression, and through Biely was most loudly destroyed by October. Biely believes in the magic of words. It is permitted to say about him, therefore, that his very pen-name testifies to his antithesis to the Revolution, for the greatest fighting period of the Revolution passed in the struggle between Red and White.²⁴

To be sure, Blok is not one of ours, but he reached towards us. And in doing so, he broke down.²⁵

This verdicts allow us to realize that the Symbolists' love for the revolution could not have been requited. To some degree, they found themselves in a cultural and historical "capsule" due to their sincere struggle with "humanism," however we understand it. "And see your judgment in the servant / You summoned, but did not expect."

Alexander Dobrokhoto

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia);
Department of Philosophy. A professor in the School of Cultural Studies. E-mail:
gumaniora@gmail.com

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²³ *Chukovsky K. I. Aleksandr Blok kak chelovek i poet // Sochineniia. 2 vols. Vol. 2, Moscow, 1990. P. 415.*

²⁴ *Trotsky L.D. Literatura i revoliutsiia. Moscow, 1991. P. 49. Translated by Rose Strunsky.*

²⁵ *Ibid. P. 102.*