

## Madness and reason in two works by Andrej Belyj

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*Introduction: Madness in the age of Russian Symbolism* THE TURN of the twentieth century in Russia witnessed a renewed fascination with madness on the part of artists and scientists alike. On the one hand, new theories concerning the role of the subconscious mind in the creative process brought perennial questions about the relationship between madness and genius to the fore once again. The artist's psyche became a focus of study, and psychiatrists combed literary works as well as the biographies of artists for clues to the psychology of creativity. More often than not, their findings led them to postulate a link between creative genius and mental disease. On the other hand, modernist writers revived the Romantic cult of madness, drawing on its images of madness as divine inspiration and casting themselves in the role of the mad poet.

There is a distinct difference between the Romantic and Symbolist periods in this regard, however. While Romanticism developed as a reaction to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, Symbolism met head on with positivism and a new psychology that championed a diagnostic approach. Thus, while poets such as Bal'mont proclaimed it 'wonderful to be mad' (прекрасно быть безумным; 1989, 213),<sup>1</sup> psychiatrists and literary critics still under the sway of social utilitarianism were declaring modernists to be mentally ill and even a threat to society.

Psychiatrists and critics who sought to discredit the Symbolist movement found ample ammunition in a work by Max Nordau entitled *Degeneration* (*Entartung*, originally published in Berlin in 1892). This work proclaimed all modern art and literature to be symptomatic of the decline of Western civilization. In 1894—the same year in

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<sup>1</sup> From a poem in Bal'mont's 1903 collection *Let Us Be As the Sun* (*Будем как солнце*).

which Valerij Brjusov published the first volume of *Russian Symbolists* (*Русские символисты*) and BaPmont made his poetic debut with *Under a Northern Sky* (*Под северным небом*)—the Russian translation of Nordau's *Degeneration* appeared, declaring Symbolist and Decadent literature to be 'manifestations of more or less pronounced moral insanity, imbecility and dementia/ which 'have their source in the degeneracy of their authors'<sup>5</sup> (Nordau 1968, vi).

All this occurred at a time when the boundaries between science and the humanities were not yet clearly defined. Men of science, convinced that positivistic models were universally applicable, treated literature as their laboratory. This blurring was particularly evident in the periodicals of the time, which are in themselves remarkable for their bold attempts to integrate the disciplines of philosophy, medicine and aesthetics. It was on the pages of these journals, as well as at the meetings of literary circles, that Russian psychiatrists proclaimed their diagnoses of modern literature's defects, often appearing side by side with the very authors they were condemning. The fact that Moscow's Literary-Artistic Circle (Литературно-художественный кружок) was chaired at the turn of the century by the psychiatrist Dr. N.N. Baženov (1857-1923) is telling. He was, at the same time, chairman of the Russian Union of Neuropathologists and Psychiatrists (Русский союз невропатологов и психиатров), which also devoted meetings to discussions of art and literature.

A paper given at one of the society's meetings in 1900 is representative of the attitude many psychiatrists and critics expressed toward the new art. The paper, 'Art, sick nerves and education' ('Искусство, больные нервы и воспитание')<sup>2</sup> by G. I. Rossolimo, traced a connection between modern art and a rising incidence of mental illness, suggesting that the creative process itself renders artists particularly vulnerable to mental disease. The author went on to criticize modern art and literature, warning of their dangerous influence and calling for a healthier art.

The Russian Symbolists, meanwhile, defended madness as a positive force in art and life. They often glorified madness in their work, deeming it a concomitant to genius, a key to a transcendent

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<sup>2</sup> Subsequently published in 1901 in the journal *Русская мысль*, vol. 2, part 2, 72-100.

realm and—paradoxical as it may seem—a component of mental health. Some even argued that the experience of madness was essential for Russia's spiritual renewal and the subsequent salvation of Western civilization. Although they embraced madness wholeheartedly, the Symbolists did not turn their backs to reason and the advances of modern science. They sought instead to reconcile rational and non-rational principles in a grand synthesis that would unite art, religion and science.

### ***The rational and non-rational in the work of Andrej Belyj***

Perhaps more than that of any other Russian Symbolist, the work of the poet, novelist and theoretician Andrej Belyj (pseudonym of Boris Bugaev, 1880-1934) presents a challenge for scholars. His prolific output of theoretical and critical articles, spanning a period of thirty years, has often been described as confusing and inconsistent.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, for all of Belyj's attempts to develop a theory of Symbolism as rigorous as any scientific system, his work seems rife with contradictions. While some of Belyj's articles, such as his studies on rhythm and sound, set out to construct a science of aesthetics, others reject science entirely, deeming it inadequate as a source of knowledge.

Belyj himself perceived a conflict in his life and work between a scientific approach to the world, on the one hand, and an intuitive, mystical tendency, on the other. He attributed this duality to a childhood trauma caused by battles between his mismatched parents. Belyj's father, a renowned professor of mathematics at Moscow University, attempted to instill in his son a respect for positivistic science, while his mother sought to counteract this influence by steeping him in music and art. Belyj later fictionalized this family drama in his novel *Kotik Letaev* (*Комик Лемаев*, 1918), and throughout his memoirs he emphasized the impact of his parents' tug-of-war on his development as an artist and thinker. He held that this clash of opposites—the dry rationalism embodied by Professor Bugaev and the fits of hysteria suffered by Belyj's mother—left a deep impression on his psyche.

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<sup>3</sup> One scholar has declared, 'this baffling protean figure was congenitally immune to consistency' (Erlich 1986,15).

Vladislav Chodasevič asserts in his memoirs (*Некрополь*, 1939) that Belyj 'owed the future structure of his views to his "rending" by his parents' and that his longing for synthesis grew out of this conflict (1997, 46):

Чем дальше, тем Белому становилось яснее, что все «позитивное», близкое отцу, близко и ему, но что искусство и философия требуют примирения с точными знаниями [...] К мистике, а затем к символизму он пришел трудным путем примирения позитивических тенденций девятнадцатого века с философией Владимира Соловьева.

It is characteristic of Belyj that he was pursuing a degree in the natural sciences at Moscow University when he embarked upon his literary career. In his 1928 essay entitled 'Why I Became a Symbolist and Why I Never Ceased to Be One in All the Phases of My Ideological and Artistic Development' ('Почему я стал символистом и почему я не перестал им быть во всех фазах моего идейного и художественного развития'), Belyj declares that his scientific background was essential to his development as a Symbolist (1994, 424):

Я сам, студент-естественник, работающий в химической лаборатории и прошедший сквозь анатомический театр, — был таков: Оствальд и «*Основы химии*» Менделеева — в одной руке; «*Апокалипсис*» — в другой; если бы «*Основы химии*» и литература по дарвинизму не были бы моим чтением, я не позволил бы себе писать в таком откровенно религиозно-символическом тоне, в каком, например, написались статьи «*Священные цвета*» и «*Апокалипсис в русской поэзии*».

This longing for a system that would unite science and metaphysics is also evidenced in Belyj's later turn to the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and his 'spiritual science' of anthroposophy. Indeed, the whole of Belyj's corpus, with its myriad contradictions, can be understood as a consistent attempt to unite rational knowledge with non-rational revelation. For Belyj, this was one of the goals of Symbolism itself.

### ***Madness and genius in The Tragedy of Creativity***

Belyj provides a recipe for such a synthesis in his long essay *The Tragedy of Creativity: Dostoevski] and Tolstoj (Трагедия творчества: Достоевский и Толстой)*, from 1911. Here he considers three

Russian writers as case studies in genius—Dostoevski)', Tolstoj and Gogol'—examining their lives and work, which he holds, in true Symbolist fashion, to be interdependent realms.

The essay argues that for the select few, genius is a blessing with tragic consequences, among which numbers madness. For each of these three writers, Belyj names an affliction as a distinguishing feature in their lives as well as their works (1971, 13): Три величайших русских писателя: — один маниак [Гоголь], другой эпилептик [Достоевский], третий либо святой, либо сумашедший [Толстой] .

Belyj delineates three stages in the development of genius. He links the first stage with madness, describing it in language remarkably similar to that found in Nordau's attempt at a scientific classification of degenerate art and literature (Belyj 1971,11):

на основании историко-литературных данных мы заключаем не без основания, что художественный гений часто начинается с необычайно бурного взрыва жизненных сил, с какого-то воистину вулканического безумия; что безумие оказывается запечатленным и в жизненных бурях, и в переживаемых творцом, и в туманностях формы, и в неопределенной мистической дымке, заволакивающей от нас идею творимого.

Belyj explains how the madness of this first stage, which he labels the romantic stage, has the capacity to consume the entire work and life of an artist, and he cites Beethoven, Schumann and Nietzsche as examples of this. He cautions that romanticism unchecked ultimately leads down a path of self-destruction, and issues a warning of which Nordau would have approved (1971,17):

Способность видеть влекущие образы не может не перейти в опьянение; характерно, что многие романтики начинали с культа всего неуловимого, изнутри экстатического, а кончали либо пьянством (Гофман, По), либо ленью (Шлегель).

The second stage in Belyj's scheme of artistic development is classicism, distinguished by harmony, self-control and a striving for clarity. The artist's journey is still far from complete at this point, however, for Belyj writes (1971, 16):

Уравновешенность, победа над романтизмом не *последняя* цель художественного творчества; уравновешенность, гармония формы есть лишь временная остановка на пути безумия, называемого творчеством.

This state of creative madness is attained only in the final stage of genius. Whereas the romantic madness of the first stage is dangerous because it is undirected, the madness of the third stage serves the higher purpose of uniting art with life. It is here that the artist becomes a prophet, and art becomes a religious act.

Although Belyj would appear to agree with Nordau on the dangers of romantic excess, he differs significantly on the nature of the cure. Belyj advocates not the eradication of romantic madness, but its synthesis with classical reason. This synthesis comes at a price, however (1971, 17): в этой борьбе художник или разрушается, как художник (Толстой), или он разрушается, как человек (Достоевский), или он гибнет, и как художник, и как человек (Гоголь). Herein lies the tragedy of creativity named in the essay's title.

Belyj argues that works of genius would not be possible without madness. The artist is thus destined to be misunderstood by his audience at some point (1971, 14):

поняли мы, что Шуман писал прекрасные симфонии, и не поняли, что именно оттого, что он писал прекрасные симфонии, он и сошел с ума; именно оттого погибли Лермонтов и Пушкин на дуэли, что они были Лермонтов и Пушкин; [...] Достоевский, если бы не страдал эпилепсией, не был бы Достоевским.

The implication here is that madness is linked with genius at its very source, and that it is this mad aspect of genius that frightens the reader and results in his inability to comprehend great artists and their works. Belyj asserts that it is precisely this lack of comprehension which gives rise to theories such as those propounded by Nordau.

Belyj links his entire literary trinity to the fate of Russia, stating that Gogol', Dostoevskij and Tolstoj envisioned a special role for Russia in the future. He holds the suffering and madness of all three to be essential for Russia's survival (1971, 35):

И вот, мы, веруя в русскую культуру, должны строго, отчетливо осознать, что вера наша ведет неминуемо нас через муки Гоголя, сумашедший дом Достоевского, что в истории русской нет ничего, кроме гениальных вспышек света.

Belyj believed that the death of Tolstoj presaged a spiritual renewal in Russia, and he likened this renewal to the rising of a new sun (1971, 46): последний творческий акт Толстого есть первое его религиозное действие, первый луч восходящего над русской землей солнца жизни.

Belyj would seem to agree with the psychologists who proclaimed Russia to be diseased and degenerating on one particular point. In the beginning of *The Tragedy of Creativity*, he declares that Russia is sick and likens this state to that of Tolstoj during his philosophical period (1971, 7f):

Толстой сидел тридцать лет в тупике: ни взад, ни вперед. [...] И вот Толстой встал и пошел — тронулся. Как знать, не тронется ли так же и Россия, то же больная; как бы грохот лавинный чувствуется нам в движении Толстого.

The similarity between Belyj's appraisal of modern society's plight and that of psychiatrists ends there, however, for the cures they prescribed could not be more different.

Many psychiatrists and critics sought to shield Russian society from the madness they equated with modern literature. Inspired by Western psychiatry, they looked to rationalistic models for a cure. Belyj, by contrast, suggested that the current crisis originated from an over-emphasis on rationalism and positivism. He argued that a resurrected Russia would free civilization from this Western yoke (1971, 8):

есть тут чего бояться Европе. Не философии западной противопоставляется тут восточная, а сказанному уже слову культуры — еще не сказанное несказанное слово уже грядущей культуры русской.

Belyj, like other Russian Symbolists, believed that salvation would come from Russia, where the life and works of genius intertwined to play an essential role in the progress of mankind. He called on his readers to embrace the madness of true genius not for the sake of art alone, but for the fulfillment of Russia's destiny, which he held to be nothing short of the salvation of civilization through a synthesis of Western rationalism and the non-rational experience embodied by Russia.

### ***Madness and Russia 's destiny in The Silver Dove***

Belyj's ideas on madness, rationalism and Russia's future also pervade his novel *The Silver Dove* (*Серебряный голубь*, 1909). This work was originally planned as the first part of a trilogy devoted to the destiny of Russia, to be titled 'East or West' ('Восток или Запад'). *The Silver Dove* explores what Belyj characterized as Russia's Eastern aspect through a depiction of the passions and chaos associated with religious sectarianism. The second novel, *Petersburg* (*Пetersбург*, 1913), although not a sequel to *The Silver Dove* in any strict sense of the word, presents a critique of Russia's assimilation of Western rationalism. These two extremes were to be reconciled in a third, unrealized volume, which, in Belyj's own words, would 'depict healthy, elevated moments of life and the Spirit' (1995, 312). Taken together, *The Silver Dove* and *Petersburg* point up the need for a synthesis of Eastern and Western values by depicting the dangers of both extremes. *The Silver Dove* juxtaposes these antithetical influences within Russia, showing them both to be incapable, in and of themselves, of rescuing Russia from crisis.

*The Silver Dove* is set in 1905, an uneasy year of peasant revolt in Russia. The protagonist, Petr Dar'jal'skij, is a child of the intelligentsia and the eccentric author of modernist poetry; he was, in other words, a Symbolist type. Dar'jal'skij is in love with the young baroness Katja, and they have just become engaged when he succumbs to an unlikely passion. The new object of Dar'jal'skij's affection is Matrena, an old, pock-marked peasant woman from the neighboring village. Matrena is married to Kudejarov, a carpenter and leader of an ecstatic religious sect known as the 'Doves'. As Belyj points out in his preface, this sect is loosely, though not exclusively, based on the real-life Russian sect of 'chlysty'.

Dar'jal'skij is seduced by Matrena and subsequently breaks off his engagement to Katja. He moves in with Kudejarov and Matrena and then joins the Doves. Unbeknownst to Dar'jal'skij, his attraction to Matrena has been brought on by a spell cast by Kudejarov. Kudejarov has personally selected Dar'jal'skij to sire a son with Matrena, and it is the expectation of the Doves that this child will be their savior, come to announce their sect to the world. This messiah is never conceived, however, and at the end of the novel the



Doves turn on Dar'jal'skij at the instigation of Kudejarov. Dar'jal'skij attempts to flee to Moscow, but is pursued and meets a violent death at the hands of the sectarians.

The conflict between East and West, suggested by Belyj's title for the projected trilogy, is manifested on different levels within *The Silver Dove*. The juxtaposition of Eastern and Western influences in Russia is reflected in the geographical layout of the novel and the etymology of place names. Kudejarov and Matrena (and, later, Dar'jal'skij) live at the geographical center of the novel, near the village of Celebeevo.

To the west lies Gugolevo, the estate belonging to Katja's family, the Todrabe-Graabens. The estate and its residents symbolize Europeanized Russia in a state of decline. As Samuel Cioran (1973, 126) and Maria Carlson (1987, 73 f) have pointed out, the family's European character is conveyed by their German-sounding name, the derivation of which—from the German *Tod-Rabe-Grab*—"death-raven-grave"—also signifies decay. Katja's uncle, Senator Pavel Pavlovič, is a Westernizer who debates Russia's future with Dar'jal'skij and anyone else who will listen. The estate is filled with symbols of the Age of Reason, including dust-covered volumes of Diderot and Racine. The Europeanized Russia embodied by the Gugolevo estate is even compared in the novel to Katja's frail and aging grandmother. The narrator exclaims (1995, 74f),

Не так ли и ты, старая и умирающая Россия, гордая и в своем величье застывшая, каждодневно, каждочасно в тысячах канцелярий, присутствий, дворцах и усадьбах совершаешь эти обряды, обряды старины ? Но, о вознесенная, — посмотри же вокруг и опусти взор : ты поймешь, что под ногами твоими разворачивается бездна: посмотришь ты, и обрушишься в бездну !..

To the east lies the village of Lichov, whose name carries an association in Russian with "evil", "fever" and "madness" (Carlson 1987, 76; Cioran 1973, 130). Significantly, Dar'jal'skij passes through Lichov shortly before his death, in a vain attempt to flee from the Doves.

Celebeevo, the name of which evokes associations with "wholeness" and "healing", is thus located between Gugolevo to the west and Lichov to the east. This positioning suggests that healing and salvation lie somewhere between the extremes of the rationalistic West and the chaotic East.

In leaving his fiancée for Matrena, Dar'jal'skij heads eastward in both a literal and metaphorical sense. He not only makes a physical move from the Todrabe-Graabens' estate to the hut of Matrena and Kudejarov; he also undergoes a psychological shift, abandoning the Western values embodied by Gugolevo for Russia's irrational depths, symbolized here by the East. He gives up his books and intellectual pursuits in favor of experiential knowledge. The notion, expressed in *The Tragedy of Creativity*, that Russia would ultimately overcome the rationalism of the West resounds in Dar'jal'skij's argument (1995, 166): много есть на западе книг; много на Руси несказанных слов. Россия есть то, о что разбивается книга, расплывается знание да и самая сжигается жизнь.

This expectation was not unusual at the turn of the century, when many intellectuals abandoned their urban lives to become wanderers and join the *narod*. One such example was the Symbolist poet A. M. Dobroljubov, who withdrew from literary life in order to form his own religious sect. Like the real-life wanderers, Dar'jal'skij awaits a future Russia that would emerge triumphant from its native chaos.

From the moment Dar'jal'skij first catches sight of Matrena, he begins to experience rapturous states previously unknown to him. Supernatural powers wielded by Kudejarov overcome him, and he has visions of Matrena that are likened to a state of madness (1995, 77). Dar'jal'skij is also drawn into the communal ecstasy of the Doves' mystical rites.

Despite this new-found rapture, Dar'jal'skij occasionally feels the pull of his former life. He begins to have doubts about his new path and fears that he is losing his soul (1995, 96). The Westernizer Pavel Pavlovič tries to convince Dar'jal'skij to come back to Katja and everything her family represents, calling him a 'man of the West' (1995, 185). Significantly, Pavel Pavlovič is just as preoccupied with Russia's fate as Dar'jal'skij. Unlike Dar'jal'skij, however,

he attributes the contemporary crisis to a need for more rationalism. Pavel Pavlovič subscribes to Nordau's theory of degeneration, as evidenced by his statement to Dar'jal'skij (1995, 169): «Вы — молодой человек: а молодые люди все — вырождаются; это печально — но это так: русские люди вырождаются; европейцы вырождаются тоже.» Dar'jal'skij chooses to stay his course, however, sticking with Russia's irrational, Eastern aspect. He declares, Отыди от меня, Сатана: я иду на восток. (1995, 186.)

Dar'jal'skij's surrender to the chaos, passion and madness of life with the Doves ultimately leads to his destruction. By the end of the novel, Dar'jal'skij has realized that the Russia he thought he had discovered by joining the Doves was in fact a false Russia with the potential to destroy him (1995, 188): он уже начинал понимать, что то — ужас, петля и яма: не Русь, а какая-то темная бездна востока прет на Русь из этих радением истонченных тел. He decides to return to his former life, fleeing the Doves and even writing a letter to Katja, but he cannot escape from the abyss. Figuratively torn between two antithetical worlds, Dar'jal'skij is destroyed, beaten to death by the sectarians.

In the novel, Dar'jal'skij's failure to overcome the forces of chaos and his subsequent sacrifice at the hands of the sectarians serve to point up the need for a balance of the irrational with reason. Dar'jal'skij's path is likened to that of Russia (1995, 84): И этот путь для него был России путем — России, в которой великое началось преображение мира или мира погибель. *The Silver Dove* thus presents an allegory for Russia's predicament, caught between Asia and Europe, chaos and order. The novel advocates neither Eastern chaos nor Western rationalism in isolation, for both are shown to be equally destructive; instead, Belyj calls for a synthesis of the two opposing principles.

It has been argued that Belyj failed in his attempt to depict this synthesis in his fiction, and that 'the impossibility of arriving at a real synthesis of East and West in the geographical terms here set up is made evident by the fact that Belyj was unable to complete the trilogy' (Cioran 1973, 115)- While it is true that Belyj never spelled out his prescription for synthesis in the form of a third volume, he nonetheless points the way toward resolution in *The Silver Dove* itself. Dar'jal'skij's friend Schmidt, in whose mouth Belyj

'places his most cherished thoughts', as Konstantin Močul'skij noted (1995,167), expresses a hope that his friend may still be saved from the evil forces to which he has succumbed. Schmidt says to Katja after Dar'jal'skij has left her (Belyj 1995, 130):

ему следует в себе победить себя, отказаться от личного творчества жизни; он должен переоценить свое отношение к миру; и призраки, принявшие для него плоть и кровь людей, пропадут; верьте мне, только великие и сильные души подвержены такому искусу; только гиганты обрываются так, как Петр.

In describing how Dar'jal'skij could be saved from his plight, Schmidt voices the same imperative as in *The Tragedy of Creativity*: to 'turn away from a personal creation of life' and devote oneself to a higher cause. Dar'jal'skij does not succeed at this, but his death does not invalidate Schmidt's words within the world of the novel. Like the geniuses discussed in *The Tragedy of Creativity*, Dar'jal'skij is described here as an exceptional individual, belonging to the chosen. His destruction is tragic, but there is a way out.

Several details in the novel linking the Doves' worship to Dionysian orgies suggest that Dar'jal'skij will be resurrected. The rapturous singing and dancing of the Doves bear a resemblance to the collective ecstasy of Dionysian worship. The abundance of alcohol in the novel also creates an association with bacchanalia. The walking stick with the tin dove on top carried by the barefoot wanderer Abram resembles the thyrsi carried by Greek bacchantes. At one point, Dar'jal'skij dons a wreath of spruce, similar to the wreaths worn by Dionysian worshippers. This gives him the appearance of having two horns on his head like Dionysian sacrificial victims—a detail that foreshadows Dar'jal'skij's death at the hands of the sectarians. Finally, the collective murder of Dar'jal'skij has the attributes of ritual sacrifice, as Maria Carlson has pointed out. Like sacrificial victims who were wrapped in papyrus, Dar'jal'skij's corpse is wrapped in bast (Carlson 1987, 89). Carlson asserts that Belyj 'finds modern dress for this ancient form, and presents the reader with a mystery drama for the psychic renewal of modern man.' (1987, 78.)

These similarities between the Doves' rites and Dionysian ritual suggest that Dar'jal'skij, like Dionysus, will rise again. If we extend the parallel drawn in *The Silver Dove* between the fate of Dar'jal'skij and that of Russia, it is logical to conclude that Russia, too, will be resurrected when the forces tearing her apart are overcome. The narrator asserts (1995, 166): в тот день, когда к России привьется запад, всемирный его охватит пожар : сгорит все, что может сгореть, потому что только из пепельной смерти вылетит райская душенька — жар-птица.

Hope for the salvation of Russia is also expressed in Dar'jal'skij's comparison of Russia with ancient Greece. In the chapter entitled 'Who is Dar'jal'skij?' ('Кто же Дарьяльский?'), we learn that he has a penchant for all things Greek (1995, 82):

он и странную создал, или, верней, пережил, а еще верней, что жизнью своею сложил правду; она была высоко нелепа, высоко невероятна: она заключалась вот в чем: снилось ему, будто в глубине родного его народа бьется народу родная и еще жизненно не пережитая старинная старина — Древняя Греция.

Here the essence of ancient Greece represents not merely a bygone world, but a latent quality that has survived in the Russian people and still has the potential to reawaken. Dar'jal'skij awaits a new Russia, which he believes will rise from the chaos of Russian reality (1995, 82):

Новый он видел свет, свет еще и в свершении в жизни обрядов греко-российской церкви. В православии и в отсталых именно понятиях православного (то есть, по его мнению, язычествующего) мужичка видел он новый светоч в мир грядущего Грека.

Russia is thus linked to ancient Greece through her Byzantine heritage, Eastern Orthodoxy. One senses here the influence of not only Nietzsche, but especially Vjačeslav Ivanov, who held up ancient Greek culture as a model of synthesis long hidden from Western culture by a rationalistic worldview and also asserted that Russia, by virtue of a unique history and culture, stood closest to this Hellenic world.

## Conclusion

Several Russian Symbolists expressed a conviction that Western culture had been played out and that Russia's time had come. They emphasized the differences between Russia and Western Europe, defining mysticism, chaos and the Russian ideal of *sobornost'* as distinguishing traits of Russian culture. They found support for this in the religious sectarianism that was flourishing at the turn of the century, and also in Eastern Orthodoxy, which they believed was less compromised than Western Christianity by rationalism, and therefore more capable of providing an antidote to positivistic science.

The turn of the twentieth century in Russia was a nervous time, when doctors and artists alike saw a crisis looming on the horizon. This added urgency to their arguments on the causes and cures of society's ills. While the doctors sought to avert chaos, many Symbolists called upon society to embrace it. In depicting madness as linked with genius, essential to the creative process and the fulfillment of Russia's destiny, the Russian Symbolists drew upon previous traditions and older views of madness. This was not merely a case of literary borrowing, however; they adapted these views to suit the twentieth century, seeking to reconcile them with reason and modern science.

In *The Tragedy of Creativity*, Belyj argued that the proper balance of reason and madness was essential to the development of genius, and that the consummate artist must ultimately overcome the opposition between the two in order to fulfill art's final aim of transforming reality. *The Silver Dove* illustrates the need for balance through its portrait of a decaying westernized Russia, on the one hand, and the destructive effects of its non-rational side, on the other. These works thus stand out for their ideal of a synthesis of reason and madness—a synthesis the Symbolists believed would save both the East and the West.

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