



Symbolist Writer Andrej Belyj's Viewpoints of Mythology

Qian Wu

Qingdao University of Science & Technology

304 No.1 Building, Xiangcheng Road, Sifang District

Qingdao 266000, Shandong, China

Tel: 86-532-8496-9935 E-mail: wuqian4946@sina.com

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Abstract

Andrej Belyj, a symbolist writer, conveys profound ideas and concepts of mythology through his own creation by borrowing a large number of plots and characters from myths or creating new mysterious stories, all based on his mythical thinking and the structure of myths he has employed in his creation. This paper takes the writer's masterpiece, Petersburg, as an example to explore deeply his viewpoints of mythology.

Keywords: Mythology, Symbolism, Petersburg

The creation nature of Andrej Belyj's literal myths is reflected in his symbols. In the scope of religion the symbolist concepts aiming at demonstrating, the nature can be found in the much use of myths and the structural employment of world symbolist model. Subject matters that Andrej Belyj adopts are quite different from traditional myths. His heroes or heroines are not gods, forefathers or great people. Based on secular city life of Petersburg, he decides it to be the main field of the activities of his protagonists. Therefore, the myths that Andrej Belyj makes according to the model of analogy is of the attribute of conscious creation. It is right because that Ann creates his myths spontaneously and intuitively, he can surely more accurately display his awareness of symbolism and the crisis state of the surrounding community of the era, especially the revolution in 1905, the future of Russia, sense of loneliness that personalities have in modern collective society and so on.

As for the subject matters adopted, Andrej Belyj interweaves the myths from ancient Greece, ancient Europe, Africa and Asia, and the fragments of consolation in the works of Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky and other writers. The principle of adopting subject matters is based on the author's sympathetic share of the materials and the analogy of creative experience imitating the rites in life. In other words, Andrej Belyj's concept of experience gets fully demonstrated in his theory of symbolism when he organizes the materials. But the process and results of such experience always lead to the emergence of the mythical thinking. Or it can be interpreted as that symbolism is evolved into mythology. For example, Andrej Belyj displays his creative process by identifying his mythical images and symbols in one of his books, "Magic Words". He demonstrates that symbols become myths by such words as "the moon is the white horn". "The moon becomes the external image of the cattle or sheep as the oracle. We can see the horn of the mythical animal but we cannot see the animal itself. In this sense, all the artistic creation is mythical. When I say that the moon is a white horn, of course, my sense does not prove the existence of the mythical animal. In the sky, what I can see is the image of the moon appearing as a horn. But in my deep sense of creativity, I can not help but believe that some reality is there." (Ардрей Белый, 1994, p243). Andrej Belyj names the process as the mythical thinking, which is the basic resource of any creative expressions. The two semantic components in symbolism are integral. Each melts into the significance of the symbolism. In this sense, symbolism becomes the reality of language imagination, and imagination becomes mythology. Therefore, Andrej Belyj defines the essence of the myths created by language.

Based on the same sympathetic for the materials or Fry's prototype, Andrej Belyj selects the characters and plots from many traditional myths and classic literature. Although these characters and plots reflect in the novel the secular life scenes in 1905 revolution, Andrej Belyj uses them as the creative factors of myth creation to serve his purpose of creating his doomsday fictional myths and express the idea of the fall of a great city. Similarly, because Andrej Belyj

pays much attention to the importance of experience, he has given deep exploration to these writers such as Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoyevsky mentioned in the text. Now what I want to add is that Andrej Belyj has given consecutive concerns to Pushkin and Gogol. For example, his collection of poems, *Meeting for the First Time* (1921), takes Pushkin's *Eugen Onegin* as the writing prototype. In 1929, he published *Rhythm as Dialectics and Bronze Knight*. His study on Gogol can be found in *Techniques by Gogol* (1934). In this sense, these classical writers and their works become the indispensable prototype materials to his creation. Dostoyevsky becomes the rival that Andrej Belyj fights against in his whole life, for Melezhkovski once wrote full of emotion to try to persuade Andrej Belyj who had strayed away from Dostoyevsky's religious thought. He wrote, "dear Polya, we (the Melezhkovskis) made a telegram to you, because we are surprised to read the two articles about Dostoyevsky." (Note 1). And subsequently, they described that Dostoyevsky was on the right religious way and Andrej Belyj should not deviate from this path. At last, they wrote emotionally, "dear Polya, my poor child. Do not believe that we have abandoned you. We firmly believe that you are just temporarily disoriented. You always love us the same as we love you..." (Мережковский Д. С. Белый А. 2006, pp164-165)

The life experience of writing with the feature of rites is revered very much by Andrej Belyj. He firmly believes that creation is deeply rooted in the initial chaos, where the collective unconsciousness arises. Thus, chaos constitutes the basis of the psychology of human beings, in other words, in Nietzsche's terminology, the basis of Dionysus. Adhering to the theory of symbolism of life creation, Andrej Belyj immerses himself in the atmosphere of mythology, experiencing the mystical life of his surroundings. Andrej Belyj once prescribed the experience in his memoirs, *At the Turning Points of the Centuries*, "I am interested in geography, and politics as well. In addition, state, people, capital, the number of residents, the army and the fleet are all in the scope of my interest. However, I do not learn these historical materials mechanically but put them in a game to master them. In this winter I read many books of mythology. And for some time I was full of the events of Greek mythology and I mastered them in the game again. I acted as Jason, the heroes on *Argo ship*, Perseus and other mythical figures and was excited very much to complete the 12 achievements of Hercules." (Андрей Белый На рубеже двух столетий: http://az.lib.ru/b/belyj_a/text_0010.shtml 223).

Similarly, based on the same viewpoints of life experience of creation, Andrej Belyj attempts to adapt the novel of "Petersburg" into the drama of "Death of a Senator". His love for drama is different from that of the Ivanov and Blok (who discuss the specific issues of drama). He is more obsessed with the principles of the drama in the framework of symbolist creation of life. Andrej Belyj believes that drama can demonstrate the essence comprehensively that symbolism and mythology are created by collective life because mythology is not the free imagination of personal sense, but the product of collective creation. The creation of mythology is always collective and always goes beyond the personality. This proves indirectly that the mythical subject matter is really in "Petersburg".

The establishment of principles that Andrej Belyj selects the subject matters can not ignore the effects of the psychological novels of the traditional Russian literature and the trend of characteristics that the twentieth century novels persist in exploring the soul or psychological activities. These works concentrate on people, that is, those more or less surpass the social state to constitute the novels with the feature of modernism. Take stream-of-consciousness novels as an example (Note 2), Andrej Belyj is good at combining psychology, symbolism with the elements of mythology. The good case in point is the ingression of the narrative perspective in his novel, "Petersburg", and the use of writing technique of the stream of consciousness. The principle of Dionysus was implied in the sub-consciousness of the main characters of Nicholas and Dudkin (Dudkin mentions in the discussion with Nicholas that they both feel Dionysus mutually). They realized the leap to the extremely social collective unconsciousness of the ancient society. In addition, Andrej Belyj has mentioned for many times that the symbolic reality is not only of individuals, but also of the community. Moreover, the collective reality is much higher than the individual reality. This conclusion stems from what Andrej Belyj believes that the true reality is that of the psychological field.

In addition to the modern mythical features displayed in the author's subject matters, "Petersburg" embodies the myth of the subject matters themselves. These subject materials are from the same resource, that is, the myth of the history of city construction, the myth of the constructors and the myth of depicting the cities in literature. In "Petersburg", the process is helped by Frye's concept of the myth prototype. Looking through "Petersburg", the viewpoint of Andrej Belyj is quite close to Northrop Frye's literary theory of the myth prototype, and to some degrees, integrates the expounding of the symbolism. That is to say, Andrej Belyj distinguishes symbol of inspiration from initial symbol. Initial symbol belongs to the concept of prototype advanced by Jung. Andrej Belyj believes that all the symbol continues to demonstrate the initial unified prototype. Accordingly, Andrej Belyj distinguishes the initial symbol from the later derived symbol of the second layer. The latter creates the symbolic system (a culture), enlarge and specify the initial prototype. The symbol of expansion and collectivization (or known as the second-layer symbol) still remains the characteristics of the procedure of the myth creation. Thus, in the framework of myth creation (the process of myth) the life reality is turned into symbols and all the reality displays the hallucination of initial prototype.

Andrej Belyj's poetic connotation of myth, one of the scopes of the rational or philosophical novels, does not go back to

spontaneous and intuitive mythical thinking based on the author's intensive academic study of ancient cultures, religious history and various modern theories. Many explanations of the ancient Greek and Roman mythology and the Bible were quoted in this paper because Andrej Belyj, to a large extent, depends on the thoughts of Soloveyov and Nietzsche, the world outlook of symbolism and the viewpoints of anthroposophy. Andrej Belyj employs ancient myths and the ancient classics of literature for the same purpose, aiming at, to a certain extent, completing casting the new man, and revealing his meditation of the situation and way-out of Russia.

Andrej Belyj's self-awareness of the personality is of profound significance, which displays its process of growth with the development of culture. The growth process relies on the thought of anthroposophy and becomes true in art. His understanding of condemnments against sins is quite different from Dostoevsky's comprehension of salvation. Andrej Belyj pays much more attention to the cultural process of psychological growth of characters.

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Notes

Note 1. Here refers to the two articles, Ibsen and Dostoevsky, and At the Turning Points published in Libra in 1905 and 1906.

Note 2. This point is mentioned by many authors. In the back cover of Chinese version, Petersburg, Ulysses by Joyce, Remembrance of Things Past by Proust and Petersburg by Belyj are named three great books of the world.