

ANDREJ BELYJ'S *GLOSSALOLIJA*:  
A BERLIN GLOSSOLALIA

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Scores of Russian writers descended upon Berlin in 1921 and 1922 hoping to publish their works which had been accumulating since the years of war and revolution. Few were as prolific as Andrej Belyj who published over twenty works in Berlin from 1921 to 1923. And nothing was stranger or more complex than his *Glossalolija* (1922). At the time it evoked only a few cursory reviews; and it has remained without any serious examination in spite of Belyj's own characterization of it as "the most successful" of his longer poems (1922 a: 10). One of Belyj's most opaque works, its publication came at a time when he was particularly fascinated with the role of sound in his art and actively involved with writing and revising prose and poetry. *Glossalolija* was an integral part of Belyj's own aesthetic theory and practice, and a key to the poetry and prose works he wrote or revised in Berlin. It was also the most "German" of Belyj's works, with references to German philosophy and philology and word associations based on the German language.

On April 7, 1922 Belyj gave an impromptu talk on eurythmy, one of the major influences on *Glossalolija*, in the Berlin Russian House of the Arts (Beyer 1990: 113).<sup>1</sup> His attention to sound is also evident

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<sup>1</sup> "Eurythmy" also "eurhythmy". Germans prefer the first spelling and identify this art with Rudolf Steiner. "Eurythmie. 1912 von R. Steiner auf den Grundlagen seiner Antroposophie entwickelte Bewegungskunst" (*Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, Mannheim, 1986-1994, VI, 673). Steiner wrote extensively about Eurythmy and he himself dates his version of the art to 1912. It is still widely practiced today in Anthroposophical circles and Waldorf Schools. Steiner insists that it is not a dance, but "Visible Speech", movement expressing physically and externally the internal sounds. In the English speaking world, Eurhythmy is traced back to "the Dalcroze system of musical education in which bodily movements are used to represent musical rhythms... The

in his introduction and collection of verse, *Posle razluki* (*After the Separation: A Berlin Songbook*, 1922) composed in May and June of 1922.<sup>2</sup> Belyj was also involved with rewriting his novel *Peterburg* (1922) and the substantial revision of the collection of his *Stichotvorenije* (*Poetry*, 1923 - dated September 1922). The introduction to *Glossalolija* is dated July 1, 1922, Berlin.

*Glossalolija. Poema o zvuke* (*Glossalolia. A Poem about Sound*) was published by Epoha in the fall of 1922 at the Hermann & Co. Typographie.<sup>3</sup> It is a complex construct of philosophy and poetry, and as Elsworth notes:

Glossolalia... fully realizes the tendency of theory towards poetry, but is not definable as either. It exemplifies the breakdown of genre between the different kinds of discourse (1983: 52).

*Glossalolija*: is an extended exploration, both hermeneutic and hermetic, of the relationship between sound and sense. As Belyj emphasizes in his title, this is a poem. In his introduction he identifies it as “an improvisation on sound-themes” and “a poem of sound” (*zvukovaja poema*) and cautions against applying the principles of scientific truth to his text, which he considers “completely senseless” (1922 a: 9, 10). But it is simultaneously a treatise on the origins of language, an essay on the relationship between sound and meaning

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system was developed about 1905 by Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, a professor of harmony at the Geneva Conservatory”. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* (Chicago 1985, IV, 601). EURHYTHMY “in wider sense of Gr. εὐρυθμία: a. Rhythmical order or movement; b. a graceful proportion and carriage of the body”. EURYTHMICS “a system of rhythmical bodily movements, esp. dancing, exercises, with musical accompaniment, frequently used for educational purposes” quoted from trans. of M. Jacques-Dalcroze *Rhythm, Music and Education*” (*Oxford English Dictionary*: V, 439).

<sup>2</sup> Belyj’s burst of poetic activity was admittedly stimulated by Cvetaeva’s own collection *Razluka* (*Separation*, 1922). Cvetaeva, however, overestimates her own contribution to *Glossalolija*, which was written five years earlier, when she writes: “Belyj svoju ‘Glossaloliju’ napisal posle moej ‘Razluki’...” (Beyer 1994).

<sup>3</sup> The cover illustration was prepared by S. A. Zašupin. The one hundred thirty one page book has a two page introduction and is broken into seventy five sections (there are two sections labeled ± 46) ranging from one-half page to five pages in length. Fourteen drawings by the author accompany the text, written in Russian in the old Cyrillic orthography, but with numerous words written or transliterated into the Roman alphabet. The illustrations and diagrams are in Roman and Cyrillic alphabets, and sometimes mixed.

and the origins of language based on an examination of common Indo-European roots, whose form is simple and straightforward.

In the beginning, writes Belyj, the tongue began its movements that resulted in sounds. The single Russian word *jazyk* for both “language” and “tongue” helps sustain this identification. Incomprehensible to us now, these original combinations of sounds (roots) held meaning which we can no longer recognize. Sounds are gestures of the tongue in the mouth, comparable to the gestures of a eurythmist. Belyj’s cosmology is a “physiological” refinement to eurythmy, the movements of the tongue substitute for those of the dancer. These movements embody the root of ancient consciousness and lead back to the land of Aeria, or Arya, starting point for inflected languages and comparative Indo-European philology. An examination of the Russian roots for *ponjatie*, *pojatie* (comprehending, grasping) and German *Begriff*, *begreifen*, brings Belyj to the etymological basis of words.<sup>4</sup> As linguist/poet Belyj intertwines etymological associations with poetic associations, frequently false etymologies,<sup>5</sup> progressing from Latin *nomen* and *nemo* to Russian *nem on*, concluding that the names of things (terms) are dumb (voiceless).

While such attempts to recreate the original senses-meanings (*smysl*) of words are for philologists “mindlessness-madness” (*bezumie*), Belyj makes a “leap of faith” to sound and the spirit of God that hover above the creation of the word, concluding that the conflict between the visible and invisible worlds, between what one sees (*videt’*) and what one knows (*vedat’*), can be resolved only in sound which is trans-imagal. Truth is embodied in the *Ur-*, original root. To comprehend, to grasp, we must move beyond the lineal, temporal to the supersensible via sound-wording (*zvukoslovie*).

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<sup>4</sup> The Russian words, as do English “comprehend” and Latin “con+prehendo” revolve around a concept of taking hold of, grasping, seizing. They are ultimately related to Indo-European \*em-, \*m- (see Pokorny 1949-1959: 310-311, and Vasmer II, 19, 129). A curious omission from Belyj’s philology is A. Preobraženskij, *Etimologičeskij slovar’ russkogo jazyka*. The word “etymology” is, of course, derived from Greek *etimos* “the true meaning of the word.” Belyj may have been influenced by the words of F. Max Müller: “We understand things if we can comprehend them; that is to say, if we can grasp and hold together single facts...” (1866: 18).

<sup>5</sup> False etymologies, figure etymologica, “Wahlverwandschaften”. These are “elective affinities... historically ‘false,’ but synchronously valid etymologies...” (Jakobson 1979: 179).

Belyj's *zvukoslovie* echoes esoteric literature, including Jakob Böhme and Rudolf Steiner's discussion of the German "Am Anfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erden" and the Hebrew "B'reschit bara élohim et haschamajim w'et ha'arez".<sup>6</sup>

В приводимом звучании явлено "am-an-an" (am Anfang); интересно, "m", "n" полугласные, или сонанты; "am-an" или "man" – звуки мысли; действительно: – *man- gi* есть *понимать* (по литовски), *man-am* (по армянски) есть тоже: по зендски *мысль – mana*; и по санскритски: *мысль – manah*, *молитва – и man- та*, и *man-tra*, ум – *mana-s*; *подумали – man- ate*; "mn" – звуки мысли: *mn- ить* и *mn- ение*: *mn- etí* есть *иметь на уме* (по литовски): *ум – и menos*, и *men-s* и *men-me* (ирландский) – ум. Уразумеем теперь эти звуки. – "Am Anfang" – в них есть сочетание am-an-an, переходяще в (a)mana(n); – "am Anfang" ("в начале") гласит звуком слов, что "в начале был разум". Самое начало есть разум: "В начале бе слово".

Евангелист Иоанн вписан звуками.

Так еврейское "берешит" и немецкое "Anfang" дают две картины: пылающий блесками мир: и – Элогимы под ним: это вскрыл Рудольф Штейнер... И некий космический человек "Adam Kadmon" (ad-ad-am-on) (в мысли божественной, в "Mana", звучит по немецки: "В начале всего").

Звук "aman" включает мысль разума (mana), любви (ame), жениха (Mann); Начало сошлось с Концом: юдаизм с христианством, картины и звуки иные: жест смысла – один (1922 а: 35-36).

Belyj looks at \*mn, \*man, \*men and the interconnection of sounds in Indo-European languages moving back and forth between the philological, the mystical, and the poetical for his comparisons. His sound determined associations cross boundaries of languages, disciplines and traditions. All the while Belyj reiterates his own subjectivity, admitting that this self-awareness of sound inside of us is still in an infantile state, and offering a tale, a fairy tale for some, but for him the *absurd truth (dikuju istinu)* (31).

What follows is the essence of *Glossalolija*, a mixture of free associations, inspired by sound, and grafted onto Steiner's cosmogony of Saturn, Sun, Moon, Earth contained in his *Die Geheimwissenschaft*

<sup>6</sup> What Belyj identifies as *Zyklus XIV* is now printed under the title *Die Geheimnisse der biblischen Schöpfungsgeschichte*. In the 1921 *Drakon* edition Belyj omits sections 15 and 16 with their references to Steiner, the Cabala, and Jakob Böhme.

*im Umriss*. Belyj briefly describes each day of creation, and then offers an account of how the world of consonants and vowels came to be inside-the-mouth. This cosmology is assisted in Russian by Belyj's juxtaposition of *nebo* = sky and *něbo* = palate. Belyj frequently rebounds between the philological and the mythical-mystical:

это время течет из Начала: из “U” – вытекает: и “u-h-r” означает: первичное небо: “Uranos” и “Uhr-alte” – одно (1922a: 42).<sup>7</sup>

“Time” “hour” emerge from “ha” and “er” and Arché begets Chronos, the *Herr* who conquers *Uhr* and *Ur*, Uranus.<sup>8</sup> A graphic depiction of this first day, Saturn, inside the mouth is a cross “h, r, w, sch”, within the circle “a-e-i,” the vowels for Yahweh, and æggs, æternal, eve, avva, abba, father, Jupiter.

These sound associations for the main part are bound to Indo-European roots, but in two instances Belyj provides non-sense sounds. The first is “wi-we-wa-wo-wu, hi-he-ha-ho-hu, wir-wer-war-wor-wur, chri-chre-chra-chro-chru, wri-wre-wra-wro-wru” (1922a: 48). Here the sounds, not directly related to known roots, resemble most closely the glossolalia of Paul and modern day Pentecostalists.

On the second day, the day of the Sun, we begin to emerge. We who were people of the dawn (*na zare*)-Nazareans. In a key passage Belyj connects his own *zvukoslovie* with *glossolalija*:

В древней-древней Аэрии, в Аэре, жили когда-то и мы – звуколюди: и были там звуками выдыхаемых светов: звуки светов в нас глухо живут: и иногда выражаем мы их звукословием, глоссалолией (1922a: 68).

<sup>7</sup> Belyj identifies among others, Müller and the *Atarva Vedy*, as the sources and inspiration for his own connections. While some words may be etymologically related, it is sound not science that inspires Belyj. His footnotes also reveal a lack of understanding of at least some of his own borrowed wisdom.

<sup>8</sup> This free association is not unlike Müller's attempts to identify myths and their basic meanings with the words themselves (1881, 465 ff.). It does, however, require that one ignore the distinction between χρόνος “time” and the youngest son of Uranos κρόνος, “Cronos or Kronus,” sometimes “Time Personified”. Belyj, as did the Greeks themselves, saw a natural sound affinity, and he associates the Cross and Christ, alternating between Russian к and х (German K and Ch). This is poetic license, but not necessarily historically accurate or demonstrable.

On the third day Belyj provides another non-sense passage along with an explication.

Вот рассказ этот в звуках:

WE-ol: wol-woln; soln-saln-seln; chlin-nz-zk-k: ktz; w-zwt.

Что он повествует?

“We-ol —

— облака —

— и “weoln” (волны морю) бегут: соянце — светит: sol-son! И, тончась на песках, золотая струя пролетает: seln-siln! И вот хлынула в озерце: в нем осаждаются соли: “nze-ze!” в нем растут берега “ze-ka-ka!” И — трава (ti-te-ta) зацветает (“ze”) цветом под “v” — вольным воздухом: и “ze-ve-te” — качаются.

Вот какие картины нам вписаны в звуках: их надо уметь прочитывать: все звучанья — рассказы, заветы, наследия, мифы (1922 а: 82-83).

While this may all be indecipherable to the listener, it is not senseless to the speaker! It culminates in the assertion that comprehension is the *apprehension* of *amendations* of the surrounding world: “I otogo to ponjatie est’ *pojatie* izmenenij *obstavšego* mira” (1922a: 90). Belyj breaks his narrative to restate his essential belief that understanding is not enough: we must comprehend, take it into ourselves.

On the fourth day of creation, the biblical creation of the world and Man, the sounds of Earth and speech emerge: “Polost’ rta est’ zarodyš vselennoj, grjadušej kogda-nibud’” (1922a:105). The sounds of Earth are Belyj’s own *Sefer Jezirah*, which contains the five vowel sounds: а, е, і, о, u and the Russian consonants х, с, р, з, ж, ш, щ, ч, т, к, л, н, д, м, б, ф, п, г, к, ц.<sup>9</sup> Many are illustrated by a sort of *zvukoslovie* where meaning is determined or directed by sound:

— “з” — розоватость, зарю, лезвие, изостренье, разсыпчатость и простертость лучей от блистаний и юнностей “С”: разверзание лучом, лезвием, тела мрака: мечи, заревые восходы, напевы, влюбленности, розы и сказки. [...]

— Темный и жаркий, удушливый газ, иль вне-цветности мира — широкое “ш”: купол тверди, когда взор его проникает из “сини” становится: неизмерными ширями; (ужасает) все — ширится: расширение тел и устремление газов распространится без меры: и — *шар* возникает: *шар*, жар суть синонимы: “ж” прикасается к “ш”:

<sup>9</sup> In another linguistic slight of hand, Belyj shifts from the Roman alphabet for the vowels, to the Cyrillic for the consonants.

воспламенное “ш” и есть “ж”: ощущение эфирного тела дано в сочетании звуков “ш”, “р”: *ширина, широта, расширение, шар* (1922 а: 108-109).

At these moments of most sustained poetry, or glossolalia, Belyj reiterates the personal and arbitrary nature of his work:

Когда я утверждаю — “звук то-то и то-то”: то не закрепляю за утверждением ничего, а рисую наброски: и тотчас кидаю и звуки текут (1922а: 114).

The ability to read sounds hints at the “tongue of tongues” (*jazyk jazykov*) and of the Second Coming. It closes the circle. This sound can be depicted graphically, but it is also a gesture, which eurythmy depicts in motion: “*èvritmija legka, kak puřinka, svetla, kak zarja i řista, kak almaz*” (1922a: 127). Image and thought are a unity and our goal is to overcome the duplicity of the literary word, to transcend the tragedy of thought without the word, to comprehend the whole word. Eurythmy, the new science, this joyful science, enlightens and leads us to restoration of brotherhood of peoples, the Second Coming.<sup>10</sup>

To look at the work simply as a treatise on the origins of human language or even as a cosmogony is to ignore the fact that it is a poem, characterized by devices of poetic speech, or more precisely, those of Belyj's poetic, ornamental prose. The primary organizing factor of the work is sound; the resulting associations and affinities then resonate with assonance, alliteration, internal rhyme, all of which are embodied in the poetry that Belyj is writing in 1922. Note, for example the repetition of t, k, and l sounds:

Что такое земля? Она – лава: лишь корость кристаллов (камней) сковал пламень; и рокоты лавы бьют в жёрла вулканов; и верхний пласт – земли – так топок; покрыт он травой (1922а: 11).

The text also contains frequent extended strings of the ternary feet characteristic of other later “prose” works by Belyj:

<sup>10</sup> The single omission from the excerpts printed in the *Drakon* text emphasize the apocalyptic nature of glossolalia: “они изливали свой свет в чистой зыби движений: планеты, в звезды струились слезами от них; становясь в полкруг, начинали: “В начале бе Слово”. И в сочетании Слов – окрылением я вспоминал и стояли они; и – тянулись руками ко мне!”

amphibrachs	Глубокие тайны лежат в языке...
anapests	Что такое земля? Она – лава; лишь корость кристаллов (камень)...
dactyls	Некогда не было знаков, “Земель”...

Given the complexity of the work it is little wonder that *Glossolaliya* perplexed readers and irritated reviewers. When it appeared in Berlin along with a flurry of other publications by Belyj, it attracted little critical attention. Sergej Bobrov wrote a scathing attack on Belyj and symbolism, offended by the religious-mystical-anthroposophical basis of the book, which he dismissed as a “howl” (*voplju*).

Вся эта книжка наполнена вот такой невероятной галиматьей... нам от всей души отвратительно и стыдно смотреть эту антропософически-распутинскую балаганщину в которой он [Белый] теперь утонул (Бобров 1923: 156-157).

A somewhat more tempered, albeit critical review signed L. Čackij appeared in the Berlin journal, “Spolochi”:

Поэмой о звуке назвал автор “Глоссалолию” и в предисловии просит не критиковать научно: бесполезно. Но что же скажешь об этой изящно изданной книге, когда поэзии в ней не вижу, а научно критиковать, даже обойдя просьбу автора, не могу, ибо не достаточно знаю науку о звуке и в языковедении далеко не ушел...

Во всяком случае, при огромной заслуге этой книги в неведомой области, принужден сознаться, что читается она с большим трудом и для рядового читателя (восемь классов гимназии или реального училища, Шерлок Холмс, Тургенев, Толстой, Достоевский и Карл Маркс) совсем непонятна. Конечно, автору она ясна и как “теорию”, так как он читает свои стихи по ее “системе” (Чацкий 1922: 55).

An important exception to this negative reaction was expressed in a review signed simply “В. Л”.

О “Глоссалалии” можно и надо бы сказать очень много, гораздо больше, чем позволяет размер газетной заметки.

“Глоссалалия” не просто изумительная поэма о звуке, но и огромное событие. Белый приоткрывает дверь из нашего мира – в новый мир, полный неясностей и хаоса, туда, в бесконечность. И да будет встречена эта не большая поэма не только, как художественное произведение!! (1922: 12).



V. L. was Vera Louric (Lur'c), who was particularly close to Belyj and had received an autographed copy of *Glossalolija*.<sup>11</sup> The review is significant because it was inspired by Belyj's own words. Vera has admitted:

Я не могла так написать – это конечно Белый мне рассказал... Писала я одна. В этом можете быть уверенным. Это я хорошо помню. Он мне объяснял смысл этой книги, написала я это (рецензию) сама. Я ничего с ним не писала. Все мои рецензии я писала дома.

Честно говорю, я ничего не поняла (Лурье 1995).

The unrestrained praise for the work both mark her own affection for Belyj and point to his own personal evaluation and enumeration of the key aspects of his work: it is a tale about the creation of the world from sound, the way for our soul(s) to merge again with the world soul, and the path to new art form in which movement, the poetic word, and the graphic arts would complement one another. It is not philosophy, but a poem, where form and content are one, a unity. In this evocation of the symbolic word, Belyj, of course, returns to his own Symbolist roots.

How is the critic/scholar of Belyj to deal then with this “poem” which the author considered so “successful”? The rhythm and poetic form are constituent elements of the text. It is, however, the nature of the content, both hermeneutic-interpretative and hermetic-esoteric, that enriches the text while making it so complex and for most inaccessible. The confusion of genres already mentioned also intimidates and blocks access, and as esoteric literature it defies most attempts at scholarly analysis.<sup>12</sup> Čackij facetiously offers an option to those interested in comprehending Belyj's text:

Есть выход: это – смотреть на эту работу, как принадлежащую к области тео-, фило- и других софий. Обратиться к древне-санскритским и древне-еврейским источникам, провести месяцы в изучении многочисленного и, боюсь, многоотного материала, на то указывают сноски автора... (Чацкий 1922: 55).

<sup>11</sup> For more on Vera Louric see Beyer 1987c.

<sup>12</sup> “Esoteric literature requires to be read in a frame of mind that precludes a normal critical response. The critic faces a quandary, since to disregard that requirement is clearly in some sense to misread, while to observe it is to forego criticism” (Elsworth 1983: 40).

Even before examining this voluminous material it is legitimate to ask, to what extent is Belyj's work "glossolalia" at all. The title of the 1922 version is *Glossalolija*. In Belyj's article *Žest Aarona (Aaron's Staff)* the word appears as *glossolalija* (1917: 212), as it does in an excerpt of the work printed in *Drakon* in 1921. Klavdija Nikolaevna Bugaeva and A. Petrovskij also identify the text as *Glossolalija*, pointing out that the spelling *Glossalolija* is a misprint (Bugaeva-Petrovskij 1937: 623).<sup>13</sup>

Today glossolaly is relegated to three realms, the religious, the psychological, and the poetic; or as one recent historian of the phenomenon Jean Jacques Courtine puts it: "religieux, pathologique, ou poétique" (1988: 7). The religious tradition has its origins in the New Testament when the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles at Pentecost after which they speak in new tongues (Gospel of Luke 16:17). "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts of the Apostles,

<sup>13</sup> Vera Lourie in the title of her review spells it: *Glossalalija*. Bobrov and Čackij use *Glossalolija*. Some scholars have followed the reasoning of Bugaeva and Petrovskij and like John Elsworth routinely correct the title; others preserve the original spelling, mindful of the distinction. On purely etymological grounds it should be: Glossolalia: **glossolália**. Also in Anglicized form **glossólaly** [f. Gr. γλωσσο - glosso- [tongue] + λαλία speaking]. The faculty or practice of speaking with 'tongues' (*Oxford English Dictionary* VI, 593). While there are enough inaccuracies in Belyj's poorly edited text to support the "misspelling" or "typographical error" theory, there are alternatives. It could be an error in Belyj's hearing or memory that exchanges *-lolija* for *-lalija*. If the word is stressed on the initial syllable, the reduction of unaccented vowels in Russian results in identical pronunciation of *-alolija* and *-olalija*. Tschizewskij has a curious footnote: "In meinen Händen befand sich vor Jahren ein Exemplar, auf dessen Umschlag der Titel "Glossolalija" heißt. Der Name stammt von gr. 'glossa' oder 'glotta'— die Sprache" (1971: V). Note the root form "glossa," typically found in Russian words. It is also possible that Belyj was misreading *-lolija* for *-logiju*. The typographical distinction between Russian г and л is not that great, and Belyj used the word *glossologiju* (1917: 172). Müller uses the word "glottology" or "Glossology" in his essays to designate "the science of language" (1866: 4). The word "glóssology" in English comes from "[glosso+ Gr. λογία logia discourse]. The study of a language or languages. The science of language (=Glóttology)" (*Oxford English Dictionary* VI, 593-594). While the prevailing assumption is that Belyj's intention was to name his work *Glossolalia (Zungenreden, as the Deutsche Bücherei notes in its card catalog)*, I have retained the spelling of "Glossalolia," perhaps one more of Belyj's many neologisms.

2:4). In Paul "tongues" are seen as gift and a sign of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12), and he refers to "speaking in tongues" (I Corinthians 14).<sup>14</sup> Psychological interest in glossolalia was heightened at the turn of the century in the book by Theodor Flournoy *Des Indes à la planète Mars: Etude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie* (Paris 1900).<sup>15</sup> The linguistic aspect of glossolalia has been explored by Roman Jakobson (1979), who does not mention Belyj in this connection, and Efim Etkind in *Materija sticha (The Matter of Poetry, 1978)*. In his chapter on "Zvuk i smysl" (*Sound and Sense*), Etkind recalls the Russian fascination with sound in the second decade of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> The renewed religious interest in "speaking in tongues" among American Pentecostals in the 1960's found a poetic or literary echo in the story by John Barth, "Glossolalia" (1963).<sup>17</sup>

Belyj's work fits into all three traditions. The religious-esoteric tradition leads from Genesis: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" (B'reschit bara élohim et haschamajim w'et ha'arez) to St. John: "V načale bylo Slovo, i Slovo bylo u Boga. I Slovo bylo Bog... V Nem byla žizn'..." (John 1:1).<sup>18</sup> Belyj's hermetic approach includes reference to the *Sefer Yetsirah (The Book of Creation)*, *Zohar (The Book of Splendor)* and Jakob Böhme's *Aurora*. These all point

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<sup>14</sup> What is traditionally seen as the gift of tongues, i. e. speaking in a foreign tongue and being understood, is to be precise: "zenolalia" [also spelled "xenolalia"]. "An utterance in a foreign tongue with reference to the Greeks — a language that he does not know, but is readily understood by a native. Glossolalia refers to a purely ecstatic utterance that represents no human language" (Mills 1986: 2). Xenolalia and xenoglossia both derive from Greek *xenos* guest, foreigner (*Oxford English Dictionary* XX, 673).

<sup>15</sup> In this study Helene Smith (actually Catherine Elise Muller) claimed that she was an ancient Princess of India capable of speaking with the dead. Flournoy was a professor at the University of Geneva. The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure also at Geneva took an active interest in the phenomenon.

<sup>16</sup> For example, *Poezija kak volšebstvo*, by Bal'mont, and the work of Chlebnikov. Gumilev had translated the famous poem of Rimbaud (See Etkind 1978: 260-263).

<sup>17</sup> The story appears in the collection of stories by John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*, New York 1963, pp. 111-112. See also his introductory notes to the 1969 edition. The story is the subject of the article by Mary L. Collar (1982).

<sup>18</sup> This passage, one of Belyj's favorites, is repeated in, among other places, his *Poezija slova* (1916, published in Berlin in 1922: 50).

directly to Rudolf Steiner, whose cosmogony, exegesis of the Genesis, and the emerging art of eurhythmy are the key to reading and understanding Belyj's text.<sup>19</sup>

Belyj cites two works by Steiner as key: *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriß*, and *Zyklus XIV*. In the first Steiner outlines his own cosmogony consisting of the four days of Saturn, the Sun, the Moon, and the Earth.<sup>20</sup> Steiner is also the likely source of the Jewish Cabala, of substantial interest to him, and the fascination with Max Müller, the philologist-glossologist-mythologist.<sup>21</sup>

Belyj mentions several times "eurhythmy," the art of movement to express sound. His drawings of the tongue and his repeated references to gestures (*žesty*) correspond to foundations established by Steiner in his lectures and the actual practice of eurhythmy at Dornach, subsequently described in works such as *Eurythmie*, and *Eurythmie als sichtbare Sprache*.

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<sup>19</sup> The *Sefir Yetsirah (Book of Creation)* belongs to the Jewish esoteric tradition — and was later integrated into the Cabala. It designates the ten numerals as sefirot(h) and uses them and the twenty two letters of the Hebrew alphabet as "cosmological factors" or "instruments of creation." The *Zohar (Book of Splendor)*, one of the original books of the Cabala, is also mentioned along with Adam Kadmon (Adam Qadmon) the primordial man. Jakob Böhme's *Aurora* was available in the 1914 translation by Aleksej Petrovskij, a numbered copy of which was in Belyj's possession in Dornach. Belyj cites from Böhme the secrets of language concealed in the German translation of Genesis: "Am Anfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde". It should be unnecessary to revisit the relationship of Rudolf Steiner and Andrej Belyj, but the impression in the Russian language community first articulated by Chodasevič and Cvetaeva, and repeated by Močul'skij, have a certain staying power. See Beyer 1987 a and 1987 b. Most of Belyj's contemporaries dismissed Steiner and his theories, considering them a harmful influence on Belyj's literary output. Modern scholars have turned their attention to the works themselves and been more willing to be objective, but they have been hampered by the nature of Anthroposophy and its mysteries. The work of the late Frédéric Kozlik is in spite of its shortcomings an invaluable source for those who wish to understand the Belyj-Steiner connection.

<sup>20</sup> The English translation, *Outlines of Occult Science*, makes a useful distinction, impossible in German, by capitalizing the words Saturn, Sun, Moon, Earth when they refer to stages of creation as opposed to our sense of the sun, moon and earth (111 ff).

<sup>21</sup> Steiner generally quotes from Müller, *Vorträge über die Wissenschaft der Sprache* (Leipzig 1892). The book is not in Steiner's library. I am grateful to Dr. Walter Kugler of the Rudolf Steiner Nachlaß in Dornach for his assistance.

Belyj hints at the psychological, "pathetique" of his own musings calling them in one place "bezumie" (1922a: 28) and in another "bred" (1922a: 34)! While most of his work tries to establish a correspondence between original roots and their meanings, in particular, between the sound and meaning of Indo-European roots and languages, there are as we have noted two instances of what can only be called nonsense sounds.<sup>22</sup>

The linguistic/poetic strain falls into the overlap of glossology and glossolaly. Several philologists, or glossologists, are mentioned including A. Meillet and M. Potebnja. Belyj cites several standard German works, including those by Karl Brugmann and Benseler.<sup>23</sup> The major philological influence in Belyj's work comes from F. Max Müller, German born and educated, who became the Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford. The categories of language and many of the basic roots appear to be direct borrowings from Müller. Indeed, Belyj's work fits into a context of 19th and early 20th century attempts to find the origin of language, and the positing of Indo-European (Indogermanisch), "Aryan" for Müller, as the basis of language. In a work not cited by either Belyj or Steiner there is an important transition from roots of words to Greek myths in particular, a connection that Belyj too explores poetically in *Glossalolija*.<sup>24</sup>

The poetic preference for sound over sense in Russian was already emerging in 1917 and Belyj, as he had been a decade earlier in his pioneering metrical studies, was one of the leading voices for a new theory and practice of poetic language, even though much of what Belyj composed during these turbulent times of 1916-17 was published only later in 1921-22. *Glossalolija*, in one sense, is as much a product of Belyj's Russia in 1917 as it is of Germany in 1922.

Having returned from Dornach to Russia in the fall of 1916, Belyj spent time at the estate of Ivanov-Razumnik at Carskoe Selo in February of 1917 and then later again in the fall. Here he met Nikolaj

<sup>22</sup> See passages (1922a: 48 and 82, 83).

<sup>23</sup> Belyj's reference to Benseler is actually to: W. Pape 1884. Belyj's own linguistic skills have their limits. He mistakenly converts the upper case initial letters for toponyms and anthropronyms into lower case letters. His transcriptions from Greek into Latin script eliminate the distinctions between e and n, i and u, o and w.

<sup>24</sup> See Müller, Vol. II of *Selected Essays on Language, Mythology and Religion*.

Kljuev and Sergej Esenin, both of whom he quotes in *Glossolalija*.<sup>25</sup> He worked on several articles for the journal, "Skify", including a lengthy unpublished article "K zvuku slov" (*Toward the sound of words*) which would become *Glossolalija*. An important theoretical basis for the work appeared in 1917 in "Aaron's Staff":

Смысл "понятийной" жизни окончен: он мертвый; глоссолалия же футуристических звуков – срывание плода древа слов, древа смыслов для корыстного, плотоядного поядению материи звука: всякий плод – оболочка: в плоде живет семя... новое слово поэзии. В нем по новому соединятся три смысла: мифологический, логический, звуковой – в новое раскрытие Мудрости (212).

The article was part of an ever evolving theory of the poetic, symbolic, magical word in Belyj's writings. His working definition of "glossolalia", of the "new poetical word", combining the mythological, logical and the sound senses leading to Wisdom, was for Belyj a matter of faith and ultimately the theory embodied in practice in *Glossolalija*.

*Glossolalija* was thus not an isolated event. At the time of its composition in 1917, Belyj's own prose was moving further and further in the direction of sound dominating over sense or meaning. There would be an acceleration of that process in which sound and sense would be found in inverse proportion, i.e. the sound of words achieved ever increasing significance, while the meaning or reference of words became less important as the organizing force of Belyj's works. Style increasingly became the substance. Sound prevailed over sense. The word predominated over the sentence. The part was often more important than the whole. Belyj disassembled the linear and temporal components of logic. In place of traditional exposition, in which one word following another was logically connected with it, there was a verbal and spatial logic based on the repetition of sounds, roots, words. Connections were made by associating like sound elements. The chaos of external reality was ordered only by the imposition of an internal patterning upon the words. This was the Symbolist poet sensitive to sound and asserting the poet's right to order the world verbally.

The text was far more, however, than simple word play. Belyj, as *Glossolalija* demonstrates, firmly believed in the "magic of words,"

<sup>25</sup> See Subbotnik 1988 and Švecova 1988.

i.e. that words formed a secret, mysterious repository of esoteric knowledge, and his life and creative works were attempts to bridge the gap between everyday experience, the perception of reality, and this other noumenal world where the elemental chaos of our existence would give way to order. This was Belyj's search for some way out the chaos which he perceived around him and in his own life. He was forever searching for that special secret, a synthesis, which would provide a simple answer to a complex world. *Glossalolija* was a poetic experiment to find *sense* in the non-*sense* of language. Belyj's aim throughout his artistic career was to revitalize language, to create the "living word". In *Glossalolija* sounds abound, and gradually the reader comes to see and hear that the sound precedes the sense, that the *unit* comes before *unit-y*.

*Glossalolija* is a cosmogony, a theory of the origin of the universe based on sound; but it is less a new direction, than a compilation, culmination, and summation of Belyj's poetic credo. It is the most foreign and most "esoteric" of his completed works, and makes enormous demands upon the reader. In addition to the multilingual word play, ranging from Armenian to Zendic, there is content, the intertextuality of the work, and the difficulty in reading any esoteric literature.<sup>26</sup> The work refers to philology and philosophy, draws on a long Judeo-Christian tradition, the Old and New Testaments, the Cabala, and the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, requiring an act of faith to embrace the supra- or super-sensible.

Belyj's poem was undoubtedly misunderstood, or unappreciated by his readers. Yet, his leaps are bold, and the text shines with a brightness and rings with a clarity so uncharacteristic of the time in Berlin. The text plays the music Belyj was hearing, and if it can be grasped, comprehended — even if not completely understood — it opens new possibilities for a re-examination of all Belyj's work after 1917. As Bugaeva and Petrovskij commented:

Субъективно, в плане творчества самого Белого, эта "поэма о звуке" нашла, однако, подтверждение (1937ь 623).

<sup>26</sup> In addition to the Russian and German base, there was the inclusion of Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, as well as Armenian, Celtic, English, French, Old High German, Lithuanian, etc. This is the realm of Comparative Philologists, but not of your average reader.

It is also a document to Russian Berlin. It is certainly the most “German” of his works. No other work of the period has such a mixture of Russian and German language and roots, a knowledge of which is crucial for many of the associations; for example, *Ich* (German for “I”) as the monogram for Iustus Christus is crucial to Belyj’s cosmogony. Belyj knew German well from his governess, his own reading in philosophy, and his association with Steiner via lectures and life at Dornach. He was on occasion the German language spokesman for the Russian literary community in Berlin, for example at an evening with Thomas Mann in March 1922 or Gerhart Hauptmann in November 1922 (Beyer 1990:111, 127). There is the unmentioned, but significant influence of the German Romantics, Novalis and Friedrich von Schlegel. Goethe and Nietzsche are quoted and identified. Potebnja admits his own dependence on the works of dependence on Wilhelm von Humboldt. The study of roots and their relationships are part of a long German philological tradition.

Ultimately Belyj’s *Glossalolija* belongs to all and consequently none of the glossolalic traditions, and to no one language. It is a ‘new word’, a multilingual addition to the tradition and bibliography of ‘spiritual science’.<sup>27</sup> The work is unique to Russian literature and is a singular Russian contribution to Indo-European studies. As a ‘poem’ representing Belyj’s own evolving emphasis on the primacy of sound over sense, it is an important cultural document of Russian Symbolism and provides ties to the larger European intellectual context.

*Glossalolija* was so ambitious in its reach and intention, that some may conclude it falls short of its goal. Yet if it fails, it does so magnificently.

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<sup>27</sup> There is a fascinating study by Werner Bohm, which explores many of the paths of Belyj and Steiner, including the *Sefir Yetsirah*, the sefiroth, and initial lines of the Book of Genesis, all in the spirit of Anthroposophy. Like others Bohm appears to be unaware of Belyj’s work. I am grateful to Frau Svetlana Geier for her suggestions and guidance in pursuing many of the esoteric elements of *Glossalolija*.



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