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## Depicting the Landscape. Andrej Belyj's *A Wind from the Caucasus* and *Armenia*

The symbolist writer Andrej Belyj (1880-1934), after visiting different European and North African countries, only began to travel through Russia in the late 1920s, when he decided to visit the Caucasian region (cf. Spivak 2006: 335). He went to Georgia for the first time between April and July 1927, along with his future second wife Klavdija Bugaeva. According to the writer, the voyage was inspired by a conversation the couple had with the anthroposophist Jurij Michin in March of the same year (cf. Lavrov, Malmstad 2016: 496); as reported by Nikolaj Malinin, they wanted to get away from Moscow because of their complicated relations with Bugaeva's first husband (Bugaeva 1996: 193). Once in Georgia, Belyj not only visited the country, but also met some of the most important Georgian artists and writers, like Tician Tabidze and Paolo Jašvili; moreover, he became involved in the local artistic scene<sup>1</sup>. The second time, Belyj and Bugaeva left Moscow at the beginning of May of the following year, at first heading for Georgia, where they reunited with Tabidze and Jašvili and met writer Grigol Robakidze (cf. Lavrov, Malmstad 2016: 512). Some days later they decided to visit Armenia; then, they went back to Georgia and lived there until August 11<sup>th</sup>, when they returned to Moscow by train. Finally, at the end of April 1929, the couple went back to the Caucasus, this time spending almost a month in Armenia and then shuttling between Krasnaja Poljana, Kadžory and Tbilisi until August 20<sup>th</sup>.

The first direct accounts of the Caucasus can be found in letters to Ivanov Razumnik and Boris Pasternak (Belyj *et al.* 1998; Pasternak *et al.* 1988); moreover, a brief chronological report is included in Belyj's *Rakurs k dnevniku* (cf. Lavrov, Malmstad 2016). In addition, the author collected his impressions in two travelogues. He worked on the first one, *A Wind from the Caucasus* (*Veter s Kavkaza*; Belyj 1928) from January to March 1928; the second one, *Armenia* (*Armenija*; Belyj 1985), written in Georgia in June 1928 (cf. Lavrov, Malmstad 2016: 507, 510, 514), was firstly published in the journal "Krasnaja nov'" in 1928, and later reprinted in a separate volume in 1985<sup>2</sup>. Useful sources of information about the

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<sup>1</sup> Belyj took part in several meetings of the Georgian literary societies and gave three lectures while in Tbilisi (cf. Ančugova 1988; Belyj *et al.* 1998: 528; Kotrelev 2005; Lavrov, Malmstad 2016: 500).

<sup>2</sup> The genre of travel prose has been well experimented by Belyj, who devoted other works to his journey to Italy and North Africa (1910-1911) as well as to his permanence in Berlin (1921-

couple's life in the region can be found in the writings of Klavdija Bugaeva, who kept a detailed diary during the journeys (Bugaeva 1996) and later recollected the memories of her husband's final years (Bugaeva 2001).

In both *A Wind from the Caucasus* and *Armenia* the Caucasus is represented as a pleasant dichotomy of two different eras: on the one side, there is a picturesque and romantic space (“декоративно прекрасно”, as Bugaeva states while in Cichis-Dziri; Bugaeva 1996: 197), a landscape steadily tied to Russian literature and European painting; on the other, the Caucasus shows footprints of modernity as the Soviet government is establishing new factories, power plants, railways and so forth. The aim of this article is to analyse how Belyj constructs the descriptions of the Caucasian landscape, which is indeed one of the main characters in the travelogues. In doing so, I will reflect upon the central role played by visuality in the writer's accounts, as well as upon their connection to the Imperial and Soviet discourse over the Russian periphery<sup>3</sup>.

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1923). As far as the first experience is concerned, he immediately published several articles on Italy and North Africa in the Russian journals *Reč*, *Utro Rossii* and *Sovremennik* (1911-1912); in fact, he worked in order to assemble this material in a single volume left unpublished at the time. He started to re-elaborate the *očerki* in 1916, and managed to publish them in two editions (Belyj 1921; Belyj 1922); the last part of the journey, the so called *Afrikanskij dnevnik*, came out only in 1994 (Belyj 1994). These travelogues show strong traces – especially the pages devoted to Italy – of the anthroposophical theories of Rudolf Steiner, whom the author had met in 1912 (on the reinterpretation of the whole journey according to anthroposophy see for example Sulpasso 2017). Anthroposophical hints are however missing from *Odna iz obitelej carstva tenej* (1924), devoted to Belyj's Berlin years. Showing a strong thematic connection to some pages of the *Afrikanskij dnevnik* and a deep relation to the author's symbolist roots, this atypical travel account is Belyj's first attempt to celebrate directly the new Soviet power: while Berlin – and all European civilization – is irreparably sinking to death, Russia has renewed itself through Revolution. The bond to the Soviet government is more explicit in *Veter s Kavkaza* and *Armenija*, as it will become clear in the following analysis; at the same time, these last two travelogues maintain ties with Belyj's symbolist poetics: “фокусируя взгляд на конкретной перспективе, предполагающей конкретный пункт наблюдения и наблюдателя и включающей, наряду с визуализацией, ритм, Белый получил возможность превращать внутреннее (индивидуальное, к которому относится и культурное предвосхищение) и внешнее, данный объект (Кавказ во время переворота) в нечто третье – в символ (образ-смысл)” (Ebert 2010: 154). On Russian modern travel prose, and especially on Andrej Belyj's and Osip Mandel'stam's works on the Caucasus, see Sippl 1997.

<sup>3</sup> In analysing the representation of the Caucasian landscape, I will sometimes refer to post-colonial studies, as they have investigated power relations between different peoples and cultures perhaps better than any other critical trend. While several scholars have been underlying some unusual traits of Imperial Russia's expansion in the South and in the East, stating that it can't be considered a proper colonization (cf. Etkind 2011), there is no doubt that relations of power (political, but also cultural) were established between the Russian centre and the Caucasian periphery, which has been largely exoticized, orientalised and exploited by the Russian elites. For such a reading of Russian literature on the peripheries of the Empire, see Layton 1994; Sahni 1997; Thompson 2000.

*A Wind from the Caucasus and Armenia*<sup>4</sup> share what can be defined as a “strongly visualized narrative perspective” (Ross Bullock 2014: 751)<sup>5</sup>, or – in other words – a penchant for the visual element, as Kauchtschischwili 2011 has highlighted. Quite common in travel literature, here it is reflected in an astonishing amount of words related to the semantic sphere of sight. In *VK* (which counts 293 pages), 370 derivatives from *вид-* occur, 103 from *гляд-*, 83 from *глаз-* and 68 from *смап / смотр-* against, for example, only 40 from *звук-*. At the same time, in *AR* (79 pages) there are 117 derivatives from *вид-*, 25 from *смап / смотр-*, 23 from *гляд-*, 16 from *глаз-* against only 4 from *звук-*. Indeed, already from the preface of *VK* Belyj explicitly stresses the fundamental role of sight, stating humanity’s need to be able to really see (*VK*: 5). Similarly, in *AR* he reports men’s usual inability to see, declaring that we should remove the cataract which dims our sight: “Прекрасно – увидеть; прекрасней – заставить увидеть, снимая с зрачков катаракты: мы все – ‘катарактики’: видя, не видим” (*AR*: 34). In Belyj’s mind, sight is inextricably linked to art and painting. In this regard, to gaze at a landscape appears to be just the same as to admire an exposition in a museum: “я многое разглядел в природе через воспитание глаза в музеях” (*VK*: 6), the author frankly admits adding a thought about the crucial role played by artists<sup>6</sup> in shaping the common man’s perception of a distant land. Klavdija Bugaeva testifies the writer’s obsession with finding the right way to gaze at the Caucasian environment. Wishing to follow the Georgian Military Road (*Военно-грузинская дорога*), for example, he wondered: “как по ней лучше ехать, чтобы картины ее дали большее нарастание и значительность их вскрылась бы глубже: от Тифлиса на Владикавказ? Или обратно?” (Bugaeva 2001: 118). As a matter of fact, Belyj is used to comparing his memory to a camera, able to register the general impression of a place, the essence of space and time (what he calls the fourth dimension)<sup>7</sup>, but not the geographical

<sup>4</sup> From now on *A Wind from the Caucasus and Armenia* will be referred to as *VK* and *AR*.

<sup>5</sup> Ross Bullock coins this expression analysing the role of gaze in Andrej Platonov’s *Džan* (1935); in particular, he underlines the writer’s strong relation to the Stalinist visuality of that period. While in Belyj the gaze seems equally important, it is not merely linked to the Stalinist – or even Soviet – iconography; as will become clear in the article, it seems to be the embodiment of the Russian – in this case latent – sense of superiority towards the Caucasian periphery.

<sup>6</sup> Here Belyj refers to painters and writers, quoting Russian painter Michail Vrubel’ for the former, and French geographer Élisée Reclus for the latter: “горожанину свойственно говорить: ‘скала, как... у Врубеля’; Врубель – путеводитель, например, по иным местностям Кавказа; сельчанину свойственно, наоборот, стоя перед Врубелем, говорить: ‘как у нас... в Грузии’. Описание края художниками слова играет громадную, доселе не оцененную роль; художники должны еще стать краеведами, этнографами и отчасти географами” (*VK*: 6).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. for example a letter to Pasternak written in Kadžory in 1928: “вид с высоты в глубину ширей, так физиологически входящий в организм и меняющий все восприятие не поддастся зарисованию в условиях трехмерной перспективы, ибо три координатных оси (длины, ширины, высоты) – не три, а четыре в качественном восприятии, которое и есть восприятие собственно [...]. [...] Эти мысли и ряд других, с ними связанных, я стараюсь проверить оптически, прове-

details. As mentioned by Bugaeva, this is why the writer often relies on pictures and postcards when he is about to describe a place he has visited. While this habit proves to have been fruitful in the case of his journey to North Africa in 1911, the lack of decent postcards in Georgia and Armenia forced Belyj to draw sketches of Caucasian landscapes personally: “выбор открыток и снимков был слишком скудным. Тогда-то желание хоть как-нибудь закрепить характерные мелочи посещаемых мест толкнуло его к зарисовкам. Так появились его кавказские рисунки”, remembers Bugaeva (Bugaeva 2001: 129-130). The writer continued to draw during the second and third voyages, shifting from graphite to watercolour; even though he did not possess technical training as a painter, he tried to fix the essence of the landscape, its “основной колорит” (Bugaeva 2001: 131), on paper<sup>8</sup>.

Belyj’s Caucasian drawings and watercolours are collected in the State Literature Museum in Moscow and in Andrej Belyj’s fund of National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg, mostly with captions, dates and notes by Bugaeva. An actual example of his pictorial representation of the Caucasus can be the watercolour displayed in FIGURE 1 (cf. ZR), which – according to the caption by Bugaeva – dates back to 1929 and represents a “brigand’s castle” (*zamok razbojnika*) near Kadzory in Georgia. As a matter of fact, while in this area Belyj started to paint a series of landscapes, as he recalls in a letter to Ivanov-Razumnik:

Дорогой друг, – знаете, чем мы с К.Н. занимались в Каджорах, – с яростью, с самозабвением, с бессонными ночами? Зарисовали и красили. Смешно сказать: привез ряд “Каджор” (колоритов). [...] и каджорские колориты нас так замучили, просясь на лист белой бумаги, что мы, перепачканные красками, 2 недели добровольно укладывали себя в лоск, сияясь схватить в убогих каракулях хоть намек на 1/100 того, что видели, как колорит. И это вовсе не важно, что получилась всякая юмористика (вместо рисунков); важно то, что осознавалось в процессе мазанья и ощупывания красок; [...] верьте, – тут не искусство, а – познание (Belyj *et al.* 1998: 649).

Here drawing and painting seem to be a tool towards a better awareness of the region Belyj is visiting; they are, most importantly, an essential part in his creative process. From the author’s point of view, a realistic portray of the landscape is not quite important; more important is to fix its essence through colour, as FIGURE 1 clearly shows. The huge mass of the mountain stand out in the foreground, while the figurine of Klavdija Bugaeva with a parasol is put in the right bottom to emphasize her smallness. The depiction of the flora is neither accurate nor detailed: there are indeed some trees, but they are stylized, mere splashes of colour. Through splashes of colours the gradual passage from the greenery of

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речь детскими зарисовками контуров при помощи карандаша, ибо мне ясно, что я вижу глазами 4 измерения” (Pasternak *et al.* 1988: 696, 697). For an account of the ‘fourth dimension’ both in Belyj’s work and in European art at the beginning of the Twentieth century, see Matich 2010: 83-120.

<sup>8</sup> Belyj always used to draw not only while travelling but also while writing, as the large number of sketches (depicting characters and episodes from his books, as well as anthroposophical subjects) proves (cf. Kajdalova 1988; Nikolesku 2000).



FIGURE 1.

A “brigand’s castle” (*zamok razbojnika*) near Kadžory in Georgia (watercolour, 1929).

the plain to the arid stone of the top of the mountain is also recreated. It is here that the so called “castle” – now in ruins – stands, an almost shapeless contour with no neat distinction from the soil, as if the building and the mountain were part of the same substance. The focus is merely on the mountain, while the stripe of the vivid blue sky is quite narrow. The choice of increasing the importance of one element (the mountain) to the detriment of the others is a common feature of Belyj’s Caucasian sketches; as Kajdalova notices, they are characterised by “нарушение пропорций [...] в динамике кавказской природной ‘мистерии’ то горы вырастают до неба, то цветы и листья приобретают гиперболические размеры” (Kajdalova 1988: 603). The bright colours, shifting from green to ochre, from cobalt blue to lemon yellow, from purple to orange help passing a sensation of unreality, a feature also stressed by the curved lines marking the different painted areas. Due to the vividness of the paintings and the technique used, Kajdalova (1988) suggests Martiros Sar’jan as the main influence on Belyj’s landscapes, while Nikolesku shows links to Kuz’ma Petrov-Vodkin (a painter repeatedly cited by Belyj himself in his travelogues) and Michail Matjušin, especially for their interest in a new, synthetic perspective and in the necessity of a new way of seeing at things: “Белого увлекали практические опыты, проводимые и Петровым Водкинским, и Матюшинским для осуществления ‘нового смотрения’, ‘новой видимости’, которые означали и новые ‘мироопределения’” (Nikolesku 2000: 130)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> See also Nikolesku 2018: 639. At the same time, Christa Ebert has underlined the coexistence of the avant-garde (Petrov-Vodkin, Sar’jan, Mejerchol’d) and symbolist (Čiurlionis) aesthet-

This pictorial text (cf. Böhmig 2018) has a written antecedent, as the author describes the very same place in a passage of *VK* where he recollects a trip around Kadžory. In this case, the painting does not function as the mediator between reality and its written reproduction, nor is it a later illustration of the *VK* passage<sup>10</sup>. On the contrary, both the painting and the verbal description share the same status, being the direct products of Belyj's gaze. While they belong to different years, they do share some similarities. In the *VK* passage, the emphasis remains on the colours ("сухость, ясность, игра колоритов, просторы, приятная свежесть, потоки озона" [*VK*: 178]) and on the unusual perspective naturally shaped by the landscape ("справа и слева, и сзади и спереди – слеты, просторы, балет перспектив" [*VK*: 178-179]). Moreover, the author underlines that an "artist of the word" is requested to describe such a wonderful nature ("зову в них [Каджорах] – художников слова, беременных произведением новым" [*VK*: 179]). The "castle" is not openly sketched out. The reader therefore does not learn about its appearance; instead, he learns some details about its history and the fact that now the authorities do not care about it (*VK*: 179). Here lays the first similarity between the written and the pictorial texts: in both cases, the building is not relevant in itself, it is simply part of the landscape. Indeed, the landscape reigns, as the lines following the reference to the "castle" prove:

[...] смелькались местности; все перспективы нарушены сызнова: слеты, отлеты, пригорбья равнин, в тени сев, загорелися странно; там – синяя, там красноватая муть с пятном зелени, в муть выступающей, но – без конца и начала: как будто пятно из пространства повесили; воздух – выше и ниже. Исчезли все земли (*VK*: 179).

The second similarity stems from the vagueness of the represented; the verb *смелькаться*, the hint at the broken perspective, the nouns *муть* and *пятно*, the infinitude suggested by the expression *без конца и начала*, the final remark about the vanishing of the land correspond to the aerial coats of paint of the 1929 watercolour.

Belyj did not only make actual drawings of the Caucasus; he also constructed the verbal descriptions of Caucasian nature like a picture at an exhibition. In this regard, the writer frequently uses the substantive *картина* ('picture'). From time to time, *картина* can be used in reflections upon the process of sight ("каждая картина имеет свой фокус зрения; его надо найти" [*VK*: 5]); as a metaphor for the changing of eras ("это история длиною лентой разворачивает свои смены картин" [*VK*: 62]); in metatextual thoughts upon Belyj's writing technique, presented through the words of Mejerchol'd, who defines

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ics in Belyj's written depictions of the Caucasus: "акцентированием визуального он не только утверждает важный тезис своего понимания символизма, но и оказывается в русле искусства современного авангарда" (Ebert 2010: 152).

<sup>10</sup> Belyj visited the area around Kadžory several times; the *VK* description concerns the 1928 experience, while the watercolour the 1929 one.

Belyj's style as cinematographic<sup>11</sup> (вк: 77); in its primary meaning (вк: 85); finally, as a synonym for 'landscape' ("картина чудовищная" [вк: 105]; "вся картина, которою видим у ног, – заключительный акт эпопей увиденной" [вк: 107]; "все картины – прекрасны; и декоративность – изысканная; видел эдакие я картины уже: близ Монтре, в Оберланде, в предснежном районе" [вк: 127]; "выросли и стены и башни; картина – причудливая; это Кремль" [вк: 283]; "лишь зимой, сидя в снегах и в умственной работе, до конца ценишь те картины, которые промелькнули летом; и ведение Арарата, картина Эриванской долины, постоянно поднимаются нам с К.Н. из-за кучинских снегов" [ар: 92]). At the same time, the verb *любоваться* ('to admire by seeing') is frequently used in connection both with paintings and with landscape, a feature that stresses their proximity in Belyj's mind<sup>12</sup>.

Through the work of Edward Said and Michel Foucault, postcolonial studies have shown the connection between what might seem an innocent description of a natural spot and the assertion of power which lies beneath it. Indeed, a subjugated environment frequently becomes the passive object of the imperialist's gaze, obsessed with surveillance and control over the 'other' country. As Ashcroft *et al.* (2007) have noticed,

Surveillance of colonial space is a regular feature of exploration and travel writing. The emergence of 'landscape' and the concomitant desire for a commanding view that could provide a sweeping visual mastery of the seen was an important feature of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry and fiction. It became a significant method by which European explorers and travellers could obtain a position of panoramic observation, itself a representation of knowledge and power over colonial space (Ashcroft *et al.* 2007: 208).

Pratt has shown that the inclination to consider the landscape as a picture is a common feature in travel literature, and especially in Western accounts of a geographical other. She identifies three strategies in landscape description:

First, and most obvious, the landscape is *estheticized*. The sight is seen as a painting and the description is ordered in terms of background, foreground, symmetries [...] and so forth. [...] Second, *density of meaning* in the passage is sought. The landscape is represented as extremely rich in material and semantic substance. This density is achieved especially through a huge number of adjectival modifiers. [...] The third strategy [is] the relation of *mastery*

<sup>11</sup> The cinematographic structure of Belyj's prose has been defined years later by Lev Novikov: "орнаментальная проза А. Белого [...] кинематографична по своей композиции. [...] Композиция здесь в гораздо большей степени, чем в обычной прозе, – прием: это часто смена ракурса, детализация, укрупнение плана или, напротив, его поистине космическое расширение, эмоционально-смысловые 'задержки' в тексте путем сознательно вклинивания других эпизодов и др." (Novikov 1990: 98).

<sup>12</sup> To give just a few examples, in вк Belyj writes "местности около Гори – проспали; проснулись меж Гори и Мцхетом; то – Грузия; ранней весной, по дороге в Батум, любовались мы ей" (вк: 60), but also "посещение – обрадовало: любовались Яшвили" (вк: 146). Cf. also ар: 44.

predicated between the seer and the seen. The metaphor of the painting itself is suggestive. If the scene is a painting, then [...] [the writer, *A.F.*] is both the viewer there to judge and appreciate it, and the verbal painter who produces it for others (Pratt 1992: 204-205).

Belyj's Caucasian landscape is constructed according to these principles. Clearly, as we have already mentioned, it is estheticized, but it also displays a "density of meaning" which, after all, is a typical feature in Belyj's ornamental prose. As Novikov (1990) points out, the author usually employs lexical repetition as well as repetition of sounds and colours; moreover, he scatters the text with variations of adjectives put in a climax<sup>13</sup>. The overall effect is that of a thick density, which is reflected in the rendering of a landscape connotatively quite rich; for example, just arrived in Cichis-Dziri, Belyj describes in this way what he sees from his house:

Я и друг – на веранде; из зелени, бирюзоватистое, точно озеро, гладкое, точно сам воздух, сквозное – прозрачнеет море; а сбоку развалины дряхнут картинно в плюще, времен Юстиниана, выглядывая из-за кучки разлапистых пальм; справа бросились в море – далеко, глубоко – чуть матово, тронутые желтизной, облачка – неподвижные, белые: цепи Кавказа; над виллою – снег, не сбежавший с рогов голубых, отовсюду приподнятых легких Аджарских утесов; опустишься к морю, – и видишь: лиловые, желтые белесоватости слабо означенных гор, иль – раствор бледных линий в изнеженном воздухе; то – Анатолия (VK: 9-10).

The construction of the scene perfectly suits Pratt's strategies: the landscape is presented as a painting, whose elements are ordered according to their placing in space (cf. the adverbs *сбоку*, *справа*, *отовсюду*, the preposition *над*, the change in perspective and focus determined by the expression *опуститься к морю*); the density is given through a large number of adjectives (*бирюзоватистый*, *гладкий*, *сквозной*, *разлапистый*, *неподвижный*, *белый*, *голубой*, *легкий*, *лиловый*, *желтый*, *бледный*, *изнеженный*), adverbs (*далеко*, *глубоко*, *матово*, *слабо*) and comparisons (*точно озеро*, *точно сам воздух*); finally, the mastery is established as the author both enjoys and reproduces the landscape for his readers. In this regard, the perspective chosen by the author is meaningful: he contemplates the view from a veranda, a privileged spot outside the landscape itself, as if he was a member of the audience in a theatre admiring a stage design. The choice of describing things from a distant place frequently recurs in the travelogues; in AR, for example, the painter Martiros Sar'jan – who became a friend of Belyj's – urges the author to admire Erevan from a terrace, with the aim to see the Armenian capital in an unexpectedly new perspective:

<sup>13</sup> Novikov states that "повторы в прозе А. Белого подвергались специальному исследованию; намечена их иерархия: повтор сквозного слова, слов одного семантического поля, варьирование тропов, использование слова в разных функциях [...], повтор модели, фраз, крупных синтаксических единиц, сверхфразовых единств. Они подчеркивают фактуру орнамента. Густота повтора – характерная особенность образной насыщенности орнаментальной прозы, ее экспрессии" (Novikov 1990: 146-147).



– Идем на террасу: оттуда видна Эривань!

Суть – вот в этом, а шествие наше сквозь классы – предлог, чтоб попасть на террасу, являющую Эривань в неожиданно новом ракурсе (AR: 34).

Another way to describe the landscape from an external point of view is to present it through the window of a train: “поезд – в Лорийском ущелье, обещанном деревом; склоны холмов в раскудрявой лозе, разводимой невыгодным способом, взятым у персов; лоза это терпкая, крепкая спиртом: идет на коньяк; вот уходит – в верх каменный” (AR: 6). Again, it can be depicted from the perspective of a car in motion<sup>14</sup>:

Машина рисует орнамент сечений конических по позвоночникам почв: и уныривает в тень каньона, и снова выюркивает из-за ребер их, и забирает все выше; там Гегаркуник стоял, в тучах укрыв серебро; [...] мы – выше, он – ниже, неясен возлет; но упад Эривани отчетлив; равнина отброшена за километры нагорьями, скачущими галлопадой: и ниже, и ниже; редуют туманы, сквозящие глубиью [...]; предел за пределом роняет рельефы белясые, полные бледно-лиловых теней [...] (AR: 68).

Here at first the focus is on the car, which Belyj observes from an external point of view, as if he was not in it; then, it gradually shifts to the landscape, described from the perspective of the passengers. Analysing how colonial rhetoric functions in travel writing, David Spurr comments that usually, describing a scene, “the writer is placed either above or at the center of things, yet apart from them, so the organization and classification of things takes place according to the writer’s own system of values” (Spurr 1993: 16). Thus, the writer’s mastery is accomplished.

The aestheticization of the landscape is not limited to the stylistic devices deployed, which anyway take the credit for pointing out how in Belyj’s mind a landscape essentially equals a painting. Actually, the author stresses in other ways this strong connection. Firstly, he deals with nature as if it was a real piece of art crafted and modified by a qualified artist:

Над подтифлисским ландшафтом работал – резец; гравер, опытный мастер, отбросил все яркости; декоративности стерты: сознательно; все – предчислено; линии – будто сухие, простые; во всем экономия, ясность; но именно: невыразимость подчеркнута ясно и трезво измерена: формулой (VK: 60).

Secondly, he repeatedly makes references to European and Russian painters while describing Caucasian natural environment. Thus, portraying the surroundings of Cichis-Dziri in Georgia he writes:

<sup>14</sup> The author more than once describes the landscape from boats, too. This can be especially seen in the final chapter of VK, where the author recollects his 1927 return to Moscow by steamship, following upstream the Volga river.

[...] в оттенке листа земляничного есть Рафаэль, есть Иванов; в оттенках боярышника засыхающего – есть Грюневальд; вишня сохнувшая – Тинторетто [...]. Я убежден – вся история живописи, изучаемая в колорите, часть палитры этой: ничтожная часть [...]. И везде осенями градация листьев, ярчайших, чудеснейших, глаз развивающих так, как его развивают Рембрандты и Врубели (вк: 53).

The colours of the nature around him are compared to canvases by Raphael, Aleksandr Ivanov, Matthias Grünewald, Tintoretto, Rembrandt and Vrubel': through Belyj's lenses, nature becomes a reproduction of beautiful pieces of art. This appears quite clearly in a passage where the author declares that nature has copied from a canvas by Vrubel' (except for a final remark in which he suggests that maybe it was, actually, the Caucasian view that inspired the Russian painter):

Да: видим Врубеля; и – первый сорт: эта правильность сочно-квадратных мазков, обведенных, раскраска их, – Врубель такой, какой не был на выставках [...]. Так удивила нас роспись камней, даже глыб, расщепленных пред нами (как всюду, в тифлисской окрестности) на ряд квадратиков, правильных в два-три вершка; вся природа точнее скопировала живописную технику Врубеля; или вернее всего: Врубель вынул отсюда разбитые радуги крыльев своих падших ангелов (вк: 75).

Similarly, he admits that he saw Armenia for the first time in Martiros Sar'jan's paintings: “я видел Армению – два уже дня: но увидел впервые – в полотнах Сарьяна; их вынес позднее на улицу, в поле, чтобы там развивать мне преподавшее мастерство: уметь видеть” (AR: 31). In this passage, the real Armenia, which the author has already seen for two days, shifts to a secondary level, because it is its fictitious reproduction that really matters in Belyj's mind. In this way, reality loses its neat and precise contours and becomes an abstraction, a colourful yet two-dimensional picture just like the writer's drawings.

While describing the landscape, Belyj refers not only to the art of painting, but also to literature, as the numerous quotes from Russian classic authors, like Aleksandr Puškin and Michail Lermontov, testify. The nearly dominant presence of these references makes clear the centrality of Russian discourse over the Caucasus in the author's perspective. Signs of Imperial power as they are manifestations of the dominant – Russian – voice, they connote Georgia and Armenia as peripheral areas intimately connected to their centre. The hints to the Imperial past are combined with signifying practices whose aim is to construct a modern image of the new Soviet Caucasus<sup>15</sup>, once again a peripheral space formally linked to its centre by a “brotherhood of nations”:

<sup>15</sup> In вк, Belyj significantly asserts that “декоративный Кавказ исчезает: встает Кавказ с будущим” (вк: 52).

К русским грузины относятся очень любезно; чрез наше искусство, через Пушкина, Врубеля, Лермонтова, мы уже – в побратимстве; кто любит их, Грузию любит; кто Грузию любит – того грузин чувствует; кроме того: грузин знает, что “ЗССР” есть курорт “СССР”; и что в будущем преуспевание края, богатство его, тесно связано с крепнущим братством народов (вк: 52).

The brotherhood is established only thanks to Russian literature and art on Georgia, in other words thanks to a narration produced by Russians in a Russian (written or visual) language; moreover, it seems that only the ones who appreciate Puškin and Lermontov are able to truly love Georgia and, as a consequence, to be recognised by Georgians as sort of spiritual fellows. There is no counter-discourse (cf. Ashcroft *et al.* 2007: 50) presented, no native voice who can provide a different narration. Finally, the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic<sup>16</sup> is depicted as the holiday resort of the Soviet Union and its future wealth.

While Belyj sometimes disagrees with some descriptions and statements by other Russian writers, mainly because reality has slightly changed, he never brings into question their authority, which remains untouched. This is mirrored even in his relationships with the Caucasian artists of that period, like the writer Tabidze, the post-symbolist poet Jašvili and the painter Sar’jan, with whom he became quite good friends. On the one side, Belyj repeatedly praises their works; on the other, he – perhaps unwillingly and subconsciously – regards them as peripheral copies (though beautiful and creative) of Russian artistic trends, or even as their exotic counterparts. Thus, recalling the room dedicated to Sar’jan in Erevan art museum, he writes that “все заслоняет – Сарьян; его зала – омега и альфа”, but at the same time he labels his work as ‘oriental’ and ‘prototypical’, thus stereotyping and presenting it with an exotic aura (AR: 31). Similarly, he positively judges Paolo Jašvili, saying that he is a poet without quotations marks (“ну какой же Яшвили ‘поэт’; он – поэт, без кавычек” [вк: 145]), but later he seems astonished to find out that he has a sound knowledge of Russian literature, as if, on the contrary, he was illiterate: “дивился, как знает он русскую литературу; его замечания о Блоке, Бальмонте и Брюсове – тонки, отчетливы, трезвы” (вк: 146). The peripheral essence of Caucasian artistic production emerges also in Belyj’s letters of the period, where Georgian literary trends are regarded as successful copies of the Russian ones<sup>17</sup>. It is no surprise, therefore, that Belyj tends not to compare Caucasian nature to Sar’jan canvases, nor to quote Tabidze poetry, relying instead on Russian classics.

<sup>16</sup> Here Belyj uses the acronym *ZSSR* as he looks for musical consonance with *SSSR*; however, the real name of this republic was *Zakavkazskaja Socialističeskaja Federativnaja Sovetskaja Respublika* or *ZSFSR*. It consisted of present-day Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, and lasted from 1922 to 1936.

<sup>17</sup> To Ivanov-Razumnik, for example, Belyj writes that the Georgian movement *Blue Horn* is none other than once was *Argonautism*: “‘голуборогизм’, насколько я понял, есть то, что мы когда-то называли ‘аргонавтизмом’, с тою разницей, что ‘аргонавты’ возникли в 1903 году, а ‘голубые роги’ в 1915-16-17 годах” (Belyj *et al.* 1998: 529).

Even though he quotes other writers and poets, like Afanasij Fet, he admits that it is indeed Puškin who comes to mind in Georgia:

Живя в Аджарии, нам вспоминалися строчки из Фета:

На суку извилистом и чудном  
Райская качается Жар-птица.

Но в Грузии Фета не вспомнишь. Кого вспомнишь? Пушкина (вк: 61).

Indeed, Puškin seems to be the true protagonist of the Caucasian space: “Грузия для пушкиниста”, the author affirms while depicting the Adjara region (вк: 61).

At the same time, Belyj recognizes the oldness of Georgian culture, which existed long before the Russian one, and expresses his desire to learn Georgian language to read its literature without the need of a translation (вк: 191). Even when he praises Caucasian environment, however, he keeps a superior attitude; thus, the ancient Georgian culture seems to be important only as a source of inspiration for Puškin and Lermontov, as a way for Russian literature to develop and grow: “да, Грузия переполнялась культурой, когда мы, как звери, блуждали в лесах; они – старше; нам – надо учиться во многом у них; и учили: в застольных речах, поминая любезные символы: Лермонтов, Пушкин” (вк: 191). The huge number of references to Puškin (29) and Lermontov (15) in вк helps the maintenance of the traditional romantic image of the Caucasus as well as its link to the past, a feature that is consolidated through another myth particularly dear to Belyj, that of Medea, Jason and the argonauts (cf. Lavrov 1978). After all, it is this fertile, ochre land that once guarded the Golden Fleece: “и ты понимаешь, что, может быть, именно в этих местах притянулись мифические аргонавты” (вк: 29).

Nevertheless, the landscape clearly shows footprints of modernity and traces of the Soviet power. An example of this dichotomy in the description of Caucasian space is Batumi: in Soviet years, what once was a tiny town at smugglers’ mercy is now a growing modern city with factories, railways and an international port. While it is certainly destined to a bright future, for now it maintains a sort of evening sleepiness that compels Belyj to report its tie to the past (“прошлое еще не изжито здесь” [вк: 33]). But there is no doubt that the country is rapidly changing, permeated by the Soviet energy: “я удивляюсь энергии строящих жизнь: всюду – труд проведенья дорог и шоссе, всюду – ширится сеть просвещения, проекты, прокладки, взрыв бытов; [...] электрификация забирается в недра страны” (вк: 34). The same occurs in the case of Erevan, now a truly modern city:

Теперь Ереван из-за хаоса переустроек – все ж выглядит чисто; и вся в электричестве; есть тротуары; расширены сети каналов; [...] новая электростанция щедро снабжает энергией ряд предприятий; [...] все это – плод достижений Советской Армении [...]. Словом: здесь новая жизнь бьет ключом, поднимающим в степи свое радостный лозунг (ар: 24-25).

One of the tangible proofs of the Soviet times are the various factories which Belyj visited during his journeys and described in detail in AR<sup>18</sup>. An entire chapter, entitled *Proizvodstva* ('Production'), is especially devoted to this experience; here, Belyj recollects a cotton mill, a carbide factory and a school for future workers. While he calls to mind all the products made in the cotton mill and the techniques used, giving the chapter a technical touch, he also acquires lyrical tones: "завод же – симфония; есть композитор, сложивший ее; дана тема – намерение: сочетать органически данность условий в конструкции круга машин; контрапункт вырастает из этого" (AR: 62). The mill is seen as an organic whole, a living organism ruled by a symphony; in a similar way, when he remembers the carbide factory, Belyj underlines the heroism of the workers, whose self disappears as they become a collective community: "тут нужен действительный, непоказной героизм, чтобы вынести ужас работы [...]. Коль сложение машин – композиция, то исполнение по нотам ее есть огромная жертва, возможная лишь в изживании себя – в организме, где 'я' – не 'я': 'мы'" (AR: 63-64)<sup>19</sup>. A constant in the travelogues, the glorification<sup>20</sup> of Soviet modernity is frequently associated with images of energy, growth (cf. for example AR: 37) and new life: "'все это' – радуется; 'все это' – плод коллективной работы: рабочих, правительства и, наконец, населения; 'всем этим' может гордиться Армения, точно взметенная в вихри строительства из пепельной смерти, как феникс"

<sup>18</sup> In Bugaeva's diary the visit to the factories is reported under the date 23 May 1928. She, too, was strongly impressed by their modernity (cf. Bugaeva 1996: 272-273). In *Rakurs k dnevniku* Belyj writes, under the same date, only "осмотр с Сарьяном предприятий" (Lavrov, Malmstad 2016: 513).

<sup>19</sup> In an attempt to ingratiate himself with the government, in his last years Belyj intended to commit to the genre of the production novel (*proizvodstvennyj roman*), which arouse precisely in the late Twenties and early Thirties. Initially promoted by RAPP, the production novel should have stressed the industrialization of the country made possible by the Soviet government, at the same time bringing the writers close to the workers' life and efforts in the factories (cf. Colombo 2008: 19-48; Nicholas 2010; Clark 2017). As far as Belyj is concerned, he was going to use reminiscences from his experience in Georgia and Armenia, since these countries were commonly seen as the perfect incarnation of the Soviet push towards modernization. For example, Belyj's close friend Marietta Šaginjan published the novel *Hydro-central* (*Gidrocentral'*, 1930) following a trip to Armenia in 1928. On this topic see Lavrov 2002. On the broader subject of the relationship between art and production during the Twenties, see Zalambani 2003.

<sup>20</sup> The praise of the government policies in the Caucasus must not be understood as proof of the writer's pro-Sovietism, but rather as an attempt to integrate himself – an author intimately connected with the disgraced Symbolist movement and Anthroposophist thought – in the new reality. On this matter, Ebert for example asserts that "путешествия Андрея Белого на Кавказ свидетельствуют о попытке сделать 'шпагат' между двумя мирами в эпоху, когда глубокий разрыв, разделяющий эти миры, не был вполне понятен некоторым современникам" (Ebert 2010: 146), seeing these journeys as a "новый шаг к сближению Андрея Белого с советской действительностью" (Ebert 2010: 149). On Belyj's "double life" during the Soviet era, when he was involved in institutions like *Narkompros* and *Proletkul't* at the same time remaining intimately connected to Anthroposophy and Symbolism, see Spivak 2006; Lavrov 2008; Voronin 2008; Cooke 2017; Gluchova 2017.

(AR: 66). The metaphor of the phoenix is here linked to Armenia which, on the verge of death, was able to recreate itself through the combined forces of the workers, the government and common people.

The landscape in which tradition and modernity most significantly coexist is the area around the newly built hydroelectric power plant *ZAGĒS* (*Zemo-Avčal'skaja GĒS*), constructed between 1923 and 1938 near Mccheta, 20 km north from Tbilisi, on the Kura river. The place itself is meaningful. Firstly, Mccheta is one of the oldest town in Georgia, founded in the fifth century BC. Secondly, Lermontov personally visited the area in 1837, describing the ancient Jvari monastery on the hill above the river in the poem *Мцыри*, in which historical references intersect the Romantic worship of nature and ruins (cf. Magarotto 2015: 193-224). Finally, in 1927 the place was provided with a gigantic monument to Lenin, erected by Russian sculptor Ivan Šadr (1887-1941)<sup>21</sup>. It is therefore a landscape profoundly connected to the Russian establishment, of both Imperial and Soviet times, as Belyj's perspective betrays:

[...] и Мцхет осмотреть основательно, Мцхетский собор называемый “Свети Цховели” [...], взобраться до Мцыри (до Лермонтовского); все то – надо; но, но – надо ж видеть “Загэс”, закавказскую станцию, иль конденсатор энергии, памятник Ленина (как раз под Мцыри – в долине); и то надо видеть, и это: историю и современность (вк: 91).

The first glance at the landscape is from the car by which Belyj, Bugaeva, the Mejerchol'ds and their guide, the engineer Mikeladze, reached *ZAGĒS*: on the right, the ruins of the Jvari monastery are visible in the background; then the workers' village appears, new and clean, with the houses gathered around a giant (гигант) put on a pedestal, with the index pointing to the ground (вк: 96)<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, the statue matches particularly well with a landscape that Belyj compares to the distant planets depicted by H.G. Wells or Jules Verne<sup>23</sup>, and it becomes its natural completion:

Нет, – статуя Ленина, есть продолжение ландшафта; и ею показана: новая эра земли; и ландшафт, повелительно сбрасывающий все иные затеи культуры [...] Лени-

<sup>21</sup> Recalling the crafting of the statue, Šadr reflected upon the coexistence of different eras and creeds in the place where it was meant to be put: “Выбор места. Участие архитектора С.Е. Чернышева. При слиянии рек Арагвы и Куры. ‘Мцыри’. Мцхета. Казбек. Пять эпох: эпоха пещерных жителей. Эпоха огнепоклонников (капище). Эпоха христианства (‘Мцыри’). Железобетонная. Электрификации” (Šadr 1978: 93-94).

<sup>22</sup> In an article in which she reflects upon the role played by photographs in the construction of the Soviet iconography, Leah Dickerman relates Lenin's distinctive pose chosen by Šadr to a 1919 picture of the leader speaking in the Red Square (cf. Dickerman 2000: 147, 149).

<sup>23</sup> Belyj notices similarities between the Georgian landscape and the planet Mars as depicted by Wells (cf. вк: 95); Bugaeva defines it as a “landscape from the future” (Bugaeva 1996: 208), and recalls that for Belyj *ZAGĒS* was similar not only to Wells' or Verne's pages, but also to the building of the Goetheanum (cf. Bugaeva 1996: 208-209).

на взял; это Ленин, врастающий в почву, без позы, – хозяйствует: распоряжается местностью [...]. Над ревом Куры, обрамленный отвесами, Мцхетом, платиной, под Мцыри – уместен он: в фокусе прошлого, будущего, – настоящего; Мцыри и – Ленин [...]; место скрещения культур (христианской с языческим) – стало и третьей культурой: железобетонной (ВК: 96-97).

Here Lenin appears as the undisputed master of the landscape; he is the only one who has been able to fit properly amongst a nature that seems to reject all other cultural products. In this regard, the verbs associated with him (хозяйствовать, распоряжаться) are meaningful, as they clearly denote his intrinsic superiority and power over the area. Moreover, Lenin gives the impression of being in control of time, since he gazes at the past (the old monastery), the future (the electrification of the whole country) and the present (the newly established power plant). In this sense, he brings a new element, the reinforced concrete, to the already existent cultural contamination. The monument is so evocative that Lenin's famous slogan inevitably comes to mind: "вспомнили мы: революция, электрификация, – вместе равны: социализму" (ВК: 97). At the same time, its considerable height brings the ordinary man back to his proper place; thus, in a meaningful passage Mikeladze positions himself under the statue, underlying his own insignificance:

Микеладзе нарочно в подножии стал.  
– Вот какой я: вы можете ясно судить о размерах.  
Под Лениным – карлик он.  
Думал я (ВК: 100).

The scene is constructed from Belyj's point of view, as it is the writer who reports through his own gaze the insignificance of the Georgian engineer, labelled a dwarf. But Mikeladze seems perfectly aware of his unimportance when compared to Lenin, thus obeying to what Joep Leerssen has called auto-exoticism, or the internalization of the imperial gaze by its objects (Beller, Leerssen 2007: 341). In a space with a subjugated other, as Slemon notices,

[...] the viewers, in recognising the statue as a semiotic system, and in assembling from the codes it deploys the allegory of Imperial Self, become complicit in the colonising gaze, active participants whose knowledge of Western modes of representation is necessary to the communication of the statue's allegorical meaning (Slemon 1987: 6).

Both Belyj (the representative of the Russian power) and Mikeladze (the native) are complicit in the colonising gaze: while the former chooses to describe the scene emphasizing a symbol of the Soviet establishment, the latter recognizes and internalizes the semiotic meaning of the monument.

At the same time, the hugeness of the statue, combined with the vastness of the land and the astonishing innovation of the power plant, transposes in modern (and Soviet)

times what Harsha Ram has called the ‘imperial sublime’. A feeling of dismay perceived in front of a thrilling landscape, the sublime has been intended by some critics as “a dynamic manifestation of *power*”, which “conveys an ongoing imbalance of greater and lesser forces, allowing for temporary convergences of discursive position or subjective identification” (Ram 2003: 16). Indeed, the sublime can be regarded as the peculiar aesthetic of a totalitarian regime (cf. Dobrenko 2013). Quoting Terry Eagleton, who has explained that “as a kind of terror, the sublime crushes us into admiring submission” (Eagleton: 144), Dobrenko links the sublime not only to terror, but also to the core of Soviet power, and describes it as a “desacralized [...] beauty” (Dobrenko 2013: 145) characterized by “a profound internal disharmony” (Dobrenko 2013: 146), at the same time the object of fear and admiration.

In the passage, the dismay is caused by the Martian landscape as well as by Lenin’s statue and the hydroelectric power plant, the signs of the country’s projection into the future. This is a phantasmagorical world (“вступили в фантасмагорический мир” [ВК: 97]), strongly modified by human beings:

[...] росло удивление: это все выполнить – в 3 ½ года! Сначала Куру – отвели; поразрыли двухверстный обводный канал, обложивши покато бетоном ту страшную яму, иль ложе пустое, забаррикадировали установкою стаи чудовищ (машин); опустили стальные щиты; и потоки вод – грянули в них; щиты – выдержали (ВК: 97).

Thus, Lenin embodies this new possibility to control and manipulate the landscape, aiming at the modernization of the country. The present times acquires such importance, that in the end Belyj and his group forget about the monastery and do not visit it, since it does not seem proper to go around an ancient ruin after having been in contact with modernity: “но ясно: сегодня туда – невозможно нам; соединять ту романтику с этим железобетонной фантасмом, – безвкусица; да и не выдержат нервы; придется все смазать” (ВК: 101).

A final remark can be made regarding Belyj’s view on the spread of modernity in the Caucasus. Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have pointed out how the modern traveller feels disoriented when he arrives in far, Oriental countries which are no longer ‘Oriental’ or ‘authentic’ enough: “to write about the modern Orient is either to reveal an upsetting demystification of images culled from texts, or to confine oneself to the Orient [...] as ‘image’ or ‘pensée’” (Said 1979: 101). Indeed, colonised countries have undergone a process of Europeanization by their colonizers which has created a hybrid society, a ‘third space’ as Bhabha puts it, or the result of two cultures colliding together (cf. Bhabha 1994). The rupture of the traditional binary division between the colonisers and the colonised causes in the traveller’s mind feelings of anxiety, fear and disgust. These tendencies become evident in Belyj’s travelogues about North Africa, where he went in 1911. In *Putevye zametki* and *Afrikanskij dnevnik* the author demonises European colonization in Tunisia and Egypt, stating that it produces a horrid mixture of different styles, noticeable in local architecture, in the railways running to the very core of Africa, in the changing habits of the Arab people, who now wear Western clothes and speak mangled European languages, thus appear-



ing grotesque. However, as far as the Caucasus and Soviet power are concerned, the author slightly changes his mind. Even though the Sovietization is partially levelling the Caucasus to the European part of Russia, Belyj still constructs it as an ‘other’ with a peculiar soul. While he constantly quotes Russian past writers, thus perpetuating old stereotypes, he sometimes encourages the reader to go beyond them and see the actual Georgia or the actual Armenia. At the same time, however, he is not able to abandon a rhetoric based on generalization and abstraction, typical, according to Said 1979, of a Western mind talking about an oriental ‘other’. For example, Belyj is annoyed when Russians tell the same old jokes about ‘Asian people’ (“люди восточные”), but he, too, characterizes them through general traits, like tact, warmth, moderation and straightforwardness (VK: 51-52). In other passages, he creates an abstract image of Tbilisi, emphasizing the grey tonality of the city: “серый Тифлис: он – приветливо серый: есть серость, которая – лишь аллегория скуки; и есть серый цвет: просто цвет безо всякого примысла” (VK: 65)<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, in his mind the Caucasus is not merely oriental; on the contrary, it is the place where the West and the East meet. Recalling the Georgian capital, Belyj states that its appearance is clearly oriental, but the sounds of the city are western, since he hears a symphony by Beethoven coming from an open window (VK: 67). The architectural features of the area are a symbol of cultural contaminations, too: “вставала конструкция храмов армянских, связавшая Запад с Востоком и стили сирийские с ранним романским и с русским” (AR: 14); the whole Armenian population is actually composed by different peoples and cultures (AR: 40-41). The new Soviet presence is perceived as the continuation of this traditional cultural mixture, and the modernization of the country is not seen by Belyj as a distortion of an ‘original’ Caucasus. This not only goes against what postcolonial studies have shown, but also it clashes with the aforementioned travelogues on North Africa in which the ‘new’ is considered inappropriate for Oriental places. The Caucasian picture is rather different: while the author insists on the past / future theme, describing in detail the electrification and the rapid growth of the area, he does not perceive it as a distortion of a lost authenticity. Thus, in AR Belyj depicts a country under permanent construction, speaking about a “construction fever” (AR: 11) or a surprising “Armenian construction pathos” (AR: 11, 44), and extolling people’s projection into the future (“строится новая жизнь” [AR: 12]; “тамановский” стиль [...] строит картину великого завтра” [AR: 22]; “строительство новой Армении” [AR: 56]). It is no surprise, therefore, that the travelogue ends with the following exclamations:

- Строимся!
- Выстроили!
- Будем строить! (AR: 79)

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<sup>24</sup> This is a common feature in Belyj’s description of the cities, as he himself admits: “воспринимаю я город в цветах; [...] Берлин мне останется буро-сиренево-серым; Тунис – ярко-белым; Неаполь стоит краснобоким” (VK: 66).

*Abbreviations*

- AR: A. Belyj, *Armenija: očerk, piš'ma, vospominanija*, Erevan 1985.  
 VK: A. Belyj, *Veter s Kavkaza. Vpečatlenija*, Moskva 1928.  
 ZR: *Zamok razbojnika. Kadžory 29 goda* – Sankt-Peterburg, RNB, f. 60, ed. chr. 50, l. 21.

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### *Abstract*

Anita Frison

*Depicting the Landscape. Andrej Belyj's A Wind from the Caucasus and Armenia*

Andrej Belyj (1880-1934) went to the Caucasus three times, in 1927, 1928 and 1929. He collected these experiences in two travelogues, *A Wind from the Caucasus* and *Armenia*. The aims of this article are to analyse how the author describes the Caucasian landscape and to underline the importance of the visual element in Belyj's portrayal of the region. On the one hand, descriptions maintain traditional Romantic elements stemming from the works of Puškin and Lermontov, but on the other, they show new, modern (and Soviet) references, for example to a newly built monument to Lenin or to the numerous factories established by the Soviet government in the area. The 19<sup>th</sup> century myth of a picturesque and wild Caucasus is therefore placed side by side with a new mythology of modernization and projection into the future.

### *Keywords*

Andrej Belyj; Caucasus; Visual Studies; Postcolonial Studies.