

Dedicated to the memory of Georgette Donchin

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Foreword

This revolutionary novel, explosive and innovative, is still little known, less understood, and inadequately appreciated in the West. The unique marriage of sound and sense in the original Russian has stymied translators into English. Were it not for Vladimir Nabokov's claim that *Petersburg* was one of the "masterpieces of twentieth-century prose," the novel might have been largely overlooked in the English-speaking world. Even in his homeland, Bely was met largely by silence for almost fifty years, although he was held in high esteem among Russian émigré scholars.

Bely and his *Petersburg* have been likened to James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Both require slow, meticulous reading (best aloud) and the scholarly commentary that peels back the layers for the inquisitive mind. The myriad influences on Bely's own voracious and encyclopedic consciousness are still being unraveled. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, a small cadre of Russian literary scholars abroad, primarily in the United States and in Europe, gradually helped restore the novel to its rightful place as one of the most stylistically and philosophically complex and demanding prose works of Western literature. In the past twenty-five years, Bely has been rediscovered by his native Russian audience, helped by brilliant and bold scholars, and aided by the contributions of those in the West who kept alive the memory of the life and works of this eccentric genius.

A century after its publication, the novel finds in this volume tributes from across the globe by many of those who are directly responsible for the new appreciation and comprehension of this jewel of Western culture. Bely had hoped that future generations would yield some who could make him accessible to others. This collection of authors more than fulfills his wish.

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Acknowledgments

In the spirit of celebrating a centennial year, I would like to express my gratitude first to the many Bely scholars who are no longer with us. To those who have passed away, among them people like Leonid Dolgoplov, Georgette Donchin, Ronald Peterson, and Vladimir Piskunov, we owe a great debt of gratitude for their lasting impact in Bely studies. Perhaps more than any other scholar, it was Dolgoplov, who courageously and almost single-handedly kept alive the spirit of Andrey Bely in the Soviet Union, when the author's great masterpiece was neglected. No scholar can be without Dolgoplov's monograph on the novel, *Andrei Belyi i ego roman "Peterburg"* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988).

I would also like to acknowledge the following scholars, who deserve special mention for laying the groundwork for Bely studies in the 1970s and 1980s in both the United States and Europe but whose works we could not include in this volume: Vladimir Alexandrov, Peter Barta, Gerald Janecek, John Malmstad, Georges Nivat, Lena Szilard, and Alexander Woronzoff. Naturally, this volume includes pioneers of Bely studies, such as Carol Anschuetz, Thomas R. Beyer Jr., Maria Carlson, Charlene Castellano, John Elsworth, Roger Keys, Magnus Ljunggren, Aleksandr Lavrov, and Ada Steinberg. Our other contributors, namely, Jacob Emery, Timothy Langen, Anna Ponomareva, Adam Weiner, and Judith Wermuth-Atkinson, represent a younger generation of scholars. Since "Bely returned to his motherland," there is one scholar, who has been especially instrumental in keeping the Bely flame alive, Monika Spivak, director of the Andrey Bely Museum in Moscow and organizer of three international conferences devoted to "Bely in a Changing World." Dr. Spivak's publications, especially *Andrei Belyi: Mistik i sovetskii pisatel'* (Moscow: RGGU, 2006), editions, conferences, and collections continue to inspire Bely studies by bringing together hundreds of scholars from around the world and help celebrate the importance of this great writer. Countless other scholars have contributed immensely to Bely studies, in their monographs and essays as well as their continued interest in all of Bely's works.

Without the help of Faith Wilson Stein and Lauren Hill of Academic Studies Press, this project would not have been possible. I feel blessed to have benefitted from their meticulous editing and generous advice. Special gratitude goes to those who read early drafts of this collection, including Brett Cooke and Charlene Castellano, and to Maria Carlson, who translated Alexander Lavrov's contribution. Finally, I would like to express once again my profound appreciation to all the contributors to this collection.

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Adam Weiner's "The Enchanted Point of *Petersburg*" was originally published in the author's *By Authors Possessed: The Demonic Novel in Russia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998). Copyright (c) 1998 by Northwestern University Press. All rights reserved.

On *Petersburg*

VLADIMIR NABOKOV

[Bely's] greatest book, *Petersburg*, was written during the early years of this century. It is difficult to sum it up in a few words, because, as is the case with a truly great work of art, it itself represents the shortest possible exposition of all that the writer wanted to convey of it. Its manner and tackling of the subject, again as is the case with every truly great work of art, is unique and to be properly understood has to be experienced by reading.

And summing up such a book, as I am now about to do, is a thing I hate doing, for it amounts to a crippling of both the writer's intention and its realization. So now to get it over with as quickly as possible: the story proper is that of a young man, son of an important official/a senator, who, partly seduced by the temptations of terrorism, partly desperate because of a hopeless infatuation with a pretty but brainless woman and because of the silly things he has done in his desperation, agrees to introduce a time-bomb into his father's house. (The Father absentmindedly had removed it to the study.)¹ The bomb explodes with minor damage, and the young man, cured of his dangerous fancies, is seen living his mature years in Egypt, away from his family and from the place of his homicidal attempt. But the point of the book is not in this subject, however intricate and weird psychologically. The true hero of the book is the city by whose name it is called: Petersburg,

Unpublished lecture on Bely from the Berg Collection by Vladimir Nabokov. Copyright © 2015 by Vladimir Nabokov, courtesy of the Vladimir Nabokov Archive at the Berg Collection, New York Public Library, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC. This excerpt from an essay on Soviet literature was typed in English, with a title penciled in Russian, "Posle Bloka" (After Blok), by which it is catalogued. Unsigned, it has the appearance of a rough draft. This is also indicated by uncharacteristic repetitions in Nabokov's prose, which, however, convey his evident enthusiasm. Minor corrections in spelling, grammar, and style have been introduced. This excerpt elucidates Nabokov's often-cited statement that *Petersburg* is one of the four greatest novels of the twentieth century.

1 Last word crossed out.

the phantasmagoric city built upon an unstable morass and upon the bones of the serfs who in the time of Peter the Great perished by the thousand working in the bogs up to their shoulders; the city always enveloped by dense fogs and often more like a ghost born out of the misty twilight than a real city of buildings and pavements; the city in whose mists mirages and phantoms are born to invade human minds erasing a borderline between truth and fantasy; the city whose beauty was sung by Pushkin, whose domineering spirit existing by itself and outside of the sense of all human volitions that blossom and sway on its mysterious mists, frightened Gogol, appalled Dostoevsky, enchanted Blok; the city whose mysterious self-centered spirit shows yet another facet in the mystic, almost superstitious awe of the Muscovite Bely.

There is for instance this passage:

Petersburg streets possess one indubitable property: they turn passers-by into shadows.

This we have seen in the example of the mysterious stranger.

Having come into being as a mental image, somehow he got connected with the senator's house; then reappeared upon the avenue, following closely the senator in our tale.²

Or this description of a crowded street:

All the shoulders constituted a dense slowly flowing stickiness; Alexander Ivanovich's shoulder glued itself onto it: got stuck in it—so to say; he followed his shoulder in conformity to the law of completeness of bodies; and thus he flung onto the Nevsky [Prospect].

What is a caviar grain?

There, the bodies on the sidewalk become one body, grains of the same caviar: and the sidewalks of Nevsky are so much sandwich-surface; his thought was immersed in the thinking capacity of the many-legged being, which was scurrying down Nevsky Prospect.

Then silently they lost themselves in contemplation of the numerous legs; while the sticky mass crawled: crawled along and shuffled on its many feet; it was pasted together of segments and every segment was a body.

2 This essay appears to contain one of the first partial translations of *Petersburg*. The novel first appeared in a complete English translation by John Cournos in 1959. Furthermore, it is quite clear that Nabokov is citing the shorter second edition of the novel, which was published in Berlin in 1922. A 1934 letter to Vladislav Khodasevich relates how “long ago” he “read it four times—in rapture.” (I am grateful to Brian Boyd for this information from a Yale University archive.)

There were no people on Nevsky; but there was there a crawling clamoring centipede; the damp space poured together the multiplicity of voices, forming a multiplicity of words; all words, intermingling, became merged in one sentence; and the sentence seemed senseless; it hung over Nevsky Prospect; and a black smoke of unrealities hung over it.

And out of these unrealities, the Neva [River], swelling, roared and beat against her massive granite parapets.

The crawling centipede is ghastly; down Nevsky, it runs through the centuries; and higher, above Nevsky—times are running out. There above, things are changing; but here—all is unchangeable; periods of time have their end. The human centipede has no end; all segments change but it itself is the same; the head is turned away from the railway station; the tail is turned off on the Morskaya Street; along Nevsky segment-footed links are shuffling along.

Here people cease to act as people. A weird doom takes over and directs their activities towards unpredictable ends. The book like Bely's other novels is written in an extremely subjective style, a kind of rhythmic prose, full of unprecedented sharp turns putting sometimes the most trivial words into such unwonted relief that, in their embarrassment, they begin to emit a new, often abstract, sense which you could hardly have ever thought them capable of doing. This queer rhythm and treatment of the language was eventually pushed by Bely to such extremes that his method began to obscure his intention instead of emphasizing it (*Finnegans Wake*). Bely was a very odd personality—just on the brink between genius and lunacy. He became wildly enthusiastic about absurd philosophies; during his last years and to his death he was an anthroposophist. Unfortunately, I cannot devote any more space to this lurid, exotic, aggravating, entrancing phenomenon. His first novel, *The Silver Dove*, would also merit a translation and a detailed analysis. His later work, as I have just mentioned, is often almost unintelligible. He has in common with James Joyce his absolute departure from, I would say his complete break with, all conventional forms of literature. With the exception of *The Silver Dove*, all that his novels (as Joyce's too) have in common with other novels is their being works of fiction written about the same characters from beginning to end and containing a number of pages usually understood to represent a "novel." Everything else: treatment of the theme, approach, style, every method involved differs widely from those of every other writer and is essentially individually and inimitably his own.

This very great writer, untranslated and quite unknown outside of Russia, was also a poet of great originality and talent.

The time—the end of the XIXth century going into the beginning of the XXth—was a time “fin de siècle,” not only because a numerical century was coming to an end but because it represented the final stage of that period, of that century of Russian culture which began with Pushkin and ended with Blok.

[. . .] Great artists in the true sense of the word are only those who added to the treasures of art something that has not been there before them. However attractive a book may seem to us at first sight, however original, we are bound for disappointment if it is not true art in the above-explained sense. Because some day, as we spend more time on reading and thinking, [the] time will come when we discover that true source, the artist who truly made the discovery and gave the world a new revelation, and if our former subject of admiration was not him, we shall soon realize that our worship was misplaced and that we had simply mistaken a reflection for the true object. Once a thing has been said, and said well, in a perfect fusion of subject matter and form, no other man can do it again and earn the laurels of a true artist unless he has added a new tremor, a new touch of beauty to what had been done by his predecessor. However, there exists another rather odd phenomenon: a man of no true literary genius may make a discovery, but never succeed in making a perfect work of art with it and then after him, another, a true genius, may come and pick up the poor discovery out of the mud of flat writing, and make of it something truly great and beautiful. Such was the case of Trediakovsky—a third-rate versifier of the XVIIIth century, contemporary of Lomonosov. Trediakovsky was the first poet convinced that Russian verse should be metrical, not syllabic. He was right, but he never wrote a good poem: it was Lomonosov who was the first to write real metric verse in Russian. Stream of consciousness was invented by an obscure French writer Dujardin some 50 years ago.³

Prepared by Brett Cooke, Texas A&M University

3 Édouard Dujardin published *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (*The Laurels Are Cut Down*) in 1888. This statement suggests that Nabokov drafted this undated essay in the late 1930s or early 1940s. In a personal communication, Brian Boyd suggests this was likely in late 1940 or early 1941, when Nabokov wrote about a hundred lectures on Russian literature in hopes of teaching at American colleges. That Nabokov does not mention the 1941–45 blockade of Leningrad in his brief history of the city lends additional support to this dating.

Introduction

OLGA M. COOKE

Since that fraught time when the metal Horseman came hastening to the banks of the Neva, since that time, fraught with days when he thrust his steed on to the grey Finnish granite—Russia has been split in twain; the very fates of the fatherland have been split in twain as well; suffering and weeping, until the final hour—Russia has been split in twain. You, Russia, are like the steed! Your two front hooves are raised over the dark, the emptiness; and your two rear hooves are firmly set in the granite earth.¹

Andrey Bely, *Petersburg*

Andrey Bely's *Petersburg* not only constituted a turning point in the development of the Russian novel but also, like Igor' Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and Vasily Kandinsky's abstract paintings, participated in inaugurating modernism in the twentieth century. Bely's pivotal achievement, begun in 1911 and completed in 1913, embraced numerous avant-garde features (namely, a shift in consciousness, a new way of seeing, verbal experimentation, stream-of-consciousness technique, and the ability to encapsulate an entire age into a few days); in all, it exemplified the symbolist dictum *A realibus ad realiora*, in which a transcendent reality is seen as superior to appearances of the world.² Bely's power as an innovator depended on an interplay of narrative voices, creating a mythic epic, which not only sought to apply recent scientific discoveries, such as Einstein's theory of relativity, to art,³ but also embraced what Joseph Frank

1 All translations (except those noted) come from John Elsworth's translation of *Petersburg* (London: Pushkin Press, 2009).

2 Georgette Donchin, *The Influence of French Symbolism on Russian Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1958).

3 As early as 1907 Bely was the first to use the term "nonobjectivity" (*bezpredmetnost'*) in his essay "The Future Art," where the method of creation becomes the "object in itself." See

called the “spatialization” of literature.⁴ Ultimately, Bely’s masterpiece embodies Vladimir Nabokov’s definition of what constitutes major artistry: “Great artists in the true sense of the word are only those who added to the treasures of art something that has not been there before them.”⁵ Viacheslav Ivanov predicted that the novel would “forever hold a place in our literary heritage,” basing his prophecy on the “astral” dimensions of the text, its seismographic ravings, its hallucinatory visions of a “young poet who is vitally drawn into the maelstrom of ruinous events, and who feels the blow of the bronze hooves of the spectral Horseman on his own psyche.”⁶ Written in rhythmical prose and permeated with leitmotifs, assonances, and alliterations, Bely’s acoustic effects resemble a veritable orchestra, according to Konstantin Mochul’skii.⁷ Basing his observations on Bely’s “Cubist” fragmentation, Nikolai Berdiaev maintained that for Bely “the holistic coverings of world flesh are demolished, and for him there are already no integral organic forms. The Cubist method of the disintegration of every organic being is applied by him to literature.”⁸ This comment approximates the scale of Bely’s immense achievement in *Petersburg*.

On meeting Bely in 1902, Valerii Briusov quipped, “I’ve just met Boris Bugaev, the most interesting man in Russia.”⁹ Born in Moscow in 1880, Bely was the son of Nikolai Vasil’evich Bugaev, the dean of the Faculty of Mathematics at Moscow University, and Aleksandra Dmitrievna Bugaeva, a socialite and famous Muscovite beauty, who served as the model for Konstantin Makovskii’s bride in the painting *A Boyar Wedding Feast*. One theme that runs throughout Bely’s memoirs, and is clearly reflected in *Petersburg*,¹⁰ is the

Andrei Belyi, “Budushchee iskusstvo,” in *Simvolizm* (Moscow, 1910; repr., Munich: Fink Verlag, 1969), 452.

- 4 Joseph Frank, “Spatial Form in Modern Literature,” in *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 10. The quality of modern literature that Frank called “spatial” represented a form that grows out of the writer’s attempt to negate the temporal principle inherent in language and “to apprehend their work spatially, in a total thing in a moment of time rather than as a sequence.”
- 5 See Nabokov’s essay in this volume.
- 6 Vyacheslav Ivanov, “The Inspiration of Horror: Bely’s *Petersburg*,” in *The Noise of Change: Russian Literature and the Critics, 1891–1917*, ed. and trans. Stanley Rabinowitz (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), 209.
- 7 Konstantin Mochul’skii, *Andrei Belyi* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1955), 181.
- 8 See Nikolai Berdiaev, “An Astral Novel: Some Thoughts on Andrei Bely’s *Petersburg*,” in Rabinowitz, *Noise of Change*, 201.
- 9 Valery Bryusov, *The Diary of Valery Bryusov, 1893–1905*, ed. and trans. Joan Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 130.
- 10 Magnus Ljunggren interprets *Petersburg* as a “working through of Belyj’s traumatic relation to his father.” See his *Dream of Rebirth: A Study of Andrej Belyj’s Novel “Peterburg”* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1982), 9.

emotional roller coaster that was to define his schizophrenic childhood. Bely describes how a virtual battle over the control of himself as a child led to what Bely called “the problem of scissors,” one blade of which represented his rational, scientific father, and the other his musical, intuitive mother. As he realized, through delirium, nightmares, and trauma, that he was the source of domestic discord, Bely exclaimed, “They are tearing me to pieces; once again I am terrified to death; I hear words about a separation”; “I am defenseless: there’s no nanny, no servant; I have parents and they are tearing me in two; fear and suffering fill me up: again—the scissors.”¹¹ In *Petersburg* Nikolai Apollonovich’s Dionysian experiences, entailing frightening hallucinations of “being torn to pieces,” clearly hark back to Bely’s filial relationships.

After his literary debut with his first published work, *Second Symphony, Dramatic*, in 1902, Bely was joined by two more members of the so-called Second Wave of symbolists, Aleksandr Blok and Viacheslav Ivanov. To avoid embarrassing his father, Bely decided to use a pseudonym. Although he would remain “Boria” to family and friends, Boris Bugaev officially became Andrey Bely (the “White”). Considered “legendary” and the “darling of Russian literary circles,”¹² Bely has been called a writer’s writer, the father of Russian modernism, the “Russian Joyce.”¹³ Bely was such an idol among the youth at the time that everyone, according to Vladislav Khodasevich, would fall “a little in love with him.”¹⁴

Petersburg is also a roman à clef, dramatizing Bely’s tragic love affair with Blok’s wife, Liubov’ Dmitrievna Blok, in the form of Nikolai Apollonovich’s pursuit of Sergei Likhutin’s wife, Sof’ia Petrovna. At the same time as the cult of the Beautiful Lady, Bely viewed Blok’s wife as the incarnation of the Divine Sophia. Indeed, along with Sergei Solov’ev, Bely cultivated a vision of a Madonna-like figure to be worshipped and adored even before he met Liubov’.¹⁵ By the time Bely began writing *Petersburg*, five years after his “Petersburg drama,” many artistic changes had occurred in his life: he had had a falling out with his closest friend, Blok; written his first novel, *The Silver Dove*,

11 See Andrei Belyi, *Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1930; repr., Chicago: Russian Language Specialties, 1966), 174.

12 Oleg Maslenikov, *The Frenzied Poets: Andrey Biely and the Russian Symbolists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 106.

13 Yevgeny Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, ed. Mirra Ginsburg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 245.

14 Vladislav Khodasevich, *Nekropol'* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1939), 80.

15 Ada Steinberg maintains that Bely’s portrait of Sof’ia Petrovna undergoes a complete reversal of the Divine Sophia. See her “On the Structure of Parody in Andrej Bely’s *Peterburg*,” *Slavica Hierosolymitana* (Jerusalem) 1 (1977): 145–53.

in 1909; met his future wife, Asia Turgeneva; traveled throughout Europe and northern Africa; pursued his studies in theosophy and the occult; and continued his search for a spiritual father, eventually manifested in the figure of Rudolf Steiner. The culmination of this period coincided with his spiritual rebirth—namely, his commitment to anthroposophy, called the “most important event of his life”¹⁶—which occurred on a train trip in Norway in October 1913.

Bely had originally planned *Petersburg*, his second novel, as a sequel to *The Silver Dove*, conceived as a projected trilogy, called *East or West*. Among the original titles considered were *The Lacquered Carriage*, *The Admiralty Spire*, *The Red Domino*, and *Evil Shadows*. At first Bely received an offer of publication from *Russian Thought*, but on submitting his manuscript by Christmas of 1911, Petr Struve, the general editor of the journal, rejected it out of hand. Even Bely’s friendship with Valerii Briusov, the literary editor, could not salvage the original agreement. Worried that Bely’s novel would not find a publisher, Viacheslav Ivanov assembled all of his associates at his Tower and had Bely read aloud to the Anichkovs, Fedor Sologub, and Aleksey Tolstoy, “shouting that my novel was epoch-making.”¹⁷ Ivanov insisted, “Boris, there is only one title for your work—*Petersburg* and so it will be.”¹⁸ Thus, Bely considered Ivanov the “godfather” of the novel. Thanks to Ivanov’s campaign and encouragement, after all the fuss that Ivanov had raised, publishers came running to print the novel. In 1912 the Nekrasov publishing house considered the manuscript, which by then had been completely revised, but Nekrasov’s edition was never published. Once again desperate to find the means to continue his stay abroad with Asia Turgeneva, Bely transferred the manuscript to the miscellany *Sirin*, whose editor M. I. Tereshchenko serialized the novel in three parts, in the newly founded anthologies of 1913–14. Bely was finally able to bring it out in book form, based on the *Sirin* edition, in 1916.

Petersburg focuses on the attempted assassination of Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov by his son, Nikolai Apollonovich, who is ordered by a group of terrorists to kill his father. Apollon Apollonovich is an imperial senator modeled loosely on Konstantin Pobedonostsev, an ideologue of the extreme right during the reign of Alexander III, while the pseudointellectual neo-Kantian Nikolai Apollonovich, not unlike Goncharov’s bathrobe-clad Oblomov, occupies a soporific existence but embraces an interest in philosophy and metaphysics. Both

16 See Ljunggren, *Dream of Rebirth*, 112–17.

17 Andrei Belyi, *Nachalo veka* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1933), 326.

18 Ibid.

father and son are tied to the rational West, but by virtue of the Mongol blood coursing through their veins, they are also servants of the East, controlled by an irrational fate that demands retribution for Peter the Great's egomaniacal sin of placing Russia's capital on its Finnish shores. Occupying an equally important place is the ubiquitous mystic-terrorist Dudkin, who delivers the bomb to Nikolai in a sardine can, and whose proactive nature in trying to avert the impending assassination plot against Apollon qualifies him as the novel's main hero.¹⁹ Although the explosion of the bomb hurts no one, it leads to the spiritual destruction of virtually every character. Even though the ghost of Christ appears in the novel to triumph over the forces of darkness, in the end the Bronze Horseman wins.²⁰ Ultimately, Bely uses the theme of parricide to illustrate the pervasive deterioration of the family and nation. The streets teem with agents, revolutionaries, spies, bureaucrats, and other Gogolian homunculi, accompanied by malarial canals, crouching buildings, and slums. But this is merely on the surface.

Petersburg represents the first time in Russian literature that a city is the hero of the novel. "The Petersburg of October 1905 symbolizes the border of an enormous epoch, behind which dawns the beginning of a new, unknown period," maintains Dolgoplov.²¹ He says for Bely only Petersburg could represent the "nexus" of mankind's destiny.²² In essence, Petersburg the city and *Petersburg* the novel together merge as a map of the modern mind. As Marshall Berman expounds on Bely's modernist cityscape, "It [the novel] consists almost entirely of broken and jagged fragments: fragments of social and political life in the city's streets, fragments of the inner lives of the people on those streets."²³ Bely's understanding of the modern Russian city was supplemented by impressions gathered from urban life of other cultures, especially his negative views of European cities, in addition to this literary myth. Much of *Petersburg* was written after an extended tour of France, Italy, and northern Africa.²⁴ Indeed, traveling to these places "convinced Bely that

19 See my "Letuchii Dudkin: Shamanstvo v *Peterburge* Andreia Belogo," in *Andrei Belyi Publikatsii: Issledovaniia*, ed. A. G. Boichuk (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2002), 220–27.

20 According to Leonid Dolgoplov, Christ's appearance is "the one bright spot in the novel." See his *Andrei Belyi i ego roman Petersburg* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1988), 333.

21 *Ibid.*, 315.

22 *Ibid.*

23 See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 256. Berman develops the idea that even the punctuation floats alone and is lost in empty space.

24 According to Magnus Ljunggren, "The book was written in 20 different places in five different countries, from October 1911 near Moscow to December 1913 in Berlin." See

Russia is destined for a very unique journey through history.”²⁵ Not unlike Dostoevsky’s Slavophilic pronouncements against European culture, Bely’s letters from abroad to Aleksandr Kozhebatkin express an uncanny hatred for everything European: “I return ten times more Russian: my five-month relationship with Europeans, with these walking executioners of life, has embittered me *greatly*: thank God, we Russians are not Europe; we have to treasure our un-Europeaness [. . .]. As a matter of course, every time it comes to the question of ‘Europe,’ I make a point of poking European ugliness right in the eye.”²⁶

What gives rise to the cultural mythology of Petersburg that it would embrace a phenomenon such as a “Petersburg text”? As the citation opening this introduction suggests, *Petersburg* was built on a literary tradition that highlighted the city’s schizophrenic dimension. Petersburg is not merely an actual city created by Peter the Great; it is also a myth created by the literary greats of the nineteenth century. Operating on multiple levels of intertextuality, the novel engages in a polemical discussion with its literary antecedents—the many masterpieces by Russian nineteenth-century literary giants pertaining to the city. From Pushkin’s *Bronze Horseman* Bely borrows the image of Peter the Great, at once benevolent patriarch and avenging metallic statue, intent on splitting Russia’s consciousness in two. Indeed, no writer, except perhaps Gogol, exerted a deeper hold on Bely than Pushkin. Every chapter of *Petersburg* is preceded by an epigraph from Pushkin: citations from “Ezerskii,” “God Grant That I Not Go Mad,” *Boris Godunov*, *Evgenii Onegin*, and especially *The Bronze Horseman*. Resembling the hero of *The Bronze Horseman*, Dudkin, “his Evgenii,” emerges directly, according to Bely, from the Decembrists, who attempted a coup d’état in 1825. Insofar as Bely’s hero is an incarnation of Pushkin’s Evgenii “running in vain for a century,” Dudkin finishes Evgenii’s task. Looking at the past from the present, Bely was influenced not so much by the introduction of Pushkin’s poem (i.e., Pushkin’s paean to Peter’s city) but rather by what Dolgoplov terms “the realistic-tragic content of the poem, in which the episode of the mighty Horseman pursuing Evgenii occupies the central place.”²⁷ Bely considered Pushkin’s “bronze-browed giant chased through periods of time right up

Magnus Ljunggren, “*Peterburg* and Switzerland,” in *Twelve Essays on Andrej Belyj’s “Peterburg”* (Stockholm: Goteborgs Universitet, 2009), 133.

25 Dolgoplov, *Andrej Belyj*, 295.

26 *Ibid.*, 297.

27 *Ibid.*, 301.

to the present moment, closing the well-forged circle,”²⁸ to represent an apocalyptic allusion to Peter’s curse on the city, as well as the Nietzschean symbol, so essential to Bely, of “eternal return.” Indeed, Pushkin’s Peter is such an omnipresent force in *Petersburg* that, according to Ol’ga Forsh, he is “more alive than any other character in the novel.”²⁹

Nikolai Gogol’s *Petersburg Tales* resound through the nightmarish, ghostlike personalities that inhabit Bely’s cityscape.³⁰ Bely’s are not simply disembodied Gogolian noses, bowler hats, and canes that come alive in the streets, but together they rise up menacingly to create a “myriapod” (*mnogonozhka*). In his *Mastery of Gogol*, Bely even italicized whole phrases from Gogol’s *Petersburg Tales*, lining them up with passages from his novel, to pay homage to Gogol.³¹ Moreover, Gogol’s satirical style, fraught with sound orchestration and symbolism, also attracted Bely, insofar as Gogol was seen, not only by Bely but by all symbolists, as a precursor of modernism. At the same time Bely’s eschatological prophecies are undercut by parody and the grotesque. As Samuel Cioran notes, whereas in *The Silver Dove* Dar’ial’skii “was spared the author’s parody, all the major characters of *Petersburg* emerge as rather grotesque exaggerations of some earlier symbolist concept.”³² Just as in Gogol, “the whole novel is a theatre of grotesque masks wearily drifting through a grotesquely distorted, unreal stage.”³³

Dostoevsky’s *The Possessed* and *Brothers Karamazov* provide ample patricidal subplots in *Petersburg*, replete with doubles and love-hate relationships between ossified fathers and their bungling revolutionary sons. In this volume, contributors Carol Anschuetz and Adam Weiner address the immense Dostoevskian subtexts of Bely’s novel. Nikolai Apollonovich’s relationship with his mother also echoes that of Anna and Serezha in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. Moreover, Tolstoy’s theme of adultery is explored, albeit in a perversely comic way, insofar as the Ableukhov family crisis begins with Apollon Apollonovich’s wife, Anna Petrovna, running off with her Italian lover. This momentous event coincides both with Nikolai Apollonovich’s failed love affair with Sof’ia Petrovna and with his promise to commit a terrorist act. A family reconstitution, a common Tolstoyan motif, is,

28 Ibid., 411.

29 Ol’ga Forsh, “Propetyi gerbarii,” in *Sovremennaia literatura: Sbornik stat'ei* (Leningrad: Mysl', 1925), 34.

30 Mochul'skii called the city a “ghost,” as well as the population. See Mochul'skii, *Andrei Belyi*, 174.

31 Cf. Andrei Belyi, *Masterstvo Gogolia* (Moscow-Leningrad: OGIZ, 1934), 297–308.

32 Samuel D. Cioran, *The Apocalyptic Symbolism of Andrej Belyj* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 155.

33 Georgette Donchin, introduction to *Peterburg*, by Andrej Bely (repr., Chicago: Russian Language Specialties, 1967), vi.

unfortunately, thwarted on the night the bomb explodes, however harmlessly. Indeed, Bely prophesized grimly that his twentieth-century bacchanalian novel of filial ties would outdo its Dostoevskian and Tolstoyan forebears. In addition to themes of family despotism and revolutionary nihilism, the implications of surveillance in the twentieth century are explored in Bely's novel. In the present volume Aleksandr Lavrov's essay on Bely's indebtedness to novels of terrorism, such as Conrad's *Secret Agent* and Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, elucidates this theme. *Petersburg* also addresses the political and philosophical issues of its day, using the debacle of the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, as well as the failed revolution of the same year, as a backdrop. Indeed, with threats of explosions occurring on the microcosmic as well as macrocosmic level, a preoccupation with the end of the world becomes the essential condition of modern life in *Petersburg*.

Modernist novels à la Bely demand a multifaceted approach. Many a critic has commented on the many-layered qualities of *Petersburg*. For example, George Reavey observed, "It is not easy to render its multiple meanings, its brilliance, in another language. As in the case of James Joyce, his works raise many problems for the translator—those of alliteration, allusion, verbal association and symbolism, poetic rhythm, ellipsis, onomatopoeia, the transferred image, puns, the symbolism of proper names, ambiguities, a cyclic order, the interpenetration of reality and myth, musical refrains and motifs, structure, punctuation . . ."³⁴ To reinforce the supernatural messages that emanate from a spaceless and timeless universe, Bely uses noises from the elemental world in *Petersburg*; the city is charged with constant intrusions based on sound and sensations. The apocalyptic sound of "oo" in the names Ableokhov, Doodkin, and Likhootin and in words like "Peterboorg," "revolootion," and "evolootion"³⁵ streams out into the streets of Petersburg. At one point the sound "oo" stands independently in the text, as though living its own life, clearly displaying the sound as a leitmotif of revolution:

"Ooo-ooo-ooo." There was a buzzing in the space around and through that
 "ooo" there resounded now and then:

"Revolution. . . Evolution. . . Proletariat. . . Strike. . ." And then again:
 "Strike. . ." And again: "Strike. . ." (130)

In a scene that blurs the boundaries between poetry and prose, "oo" pursues Dudkin as he makes his way up a dirty staircase.

34 George Reavey, introduction to *The Silver Dove*, by Andrey Bely (New York: Grove Press, 1974), xxxvi.

35 My emphasis.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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