

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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