



The Stony Dance: Unity and Gesture in Andrey Bely's Petersburg (SRLT)

Timothy Langen

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Widely considered the greatest Russian modernist novel, Andrei Bely's *Petersburg* has until now eluded the critical attention that a book of its caliber merits. In *The Stony Dance*, Timothy Langen offers readers a study of Bely's masterpiece unparalleled in its comprehensiveness, clarity, and inclusion of detail--a critical study that is at the same time a meditation on the nature of literary art.

Thoroughly versed in Russian and European modernism, in Bely's biography and writings, and in twentieth-century literary theory, Langen constructs an original analytic scheme for reading *Petersburg*. Guided by Bely's fertile but challenging notions of art and philosophy, he analyzes the novel first as an object embodying intentions and essences, then as a pattern of signification and events, and finally as a dance of gestures that coordinate body and meaning, regularity and surprise, self and other, and author, novel, and reader. The terms are derived from Bely's own writings, but they are nuanced with reference to Russian and European contexts and clarified with reference to philosophy and literary theory. Langen shows how Bely invariably challenges his own concepts and patterns, thereby creating an unusually demanding and dynamic text. In finding an approach to these enriching difficulties, this book at long last shows readers a welcoming way into Bely's thought, and his masterwork, and their place in the complex world of early twentieth-century literature.

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