

**Roger Keys, *THE RELUCTANT MODERNIST: Andrei Belyi and the Development of Russian Fiction 1902-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. xii+268 pp. \$70.00.**

Roger Keys, despite only modest mention in his up-to-date bibliography, is a well-known scholar of Andrej Belyj, and along with his wife, translator of Belyj's *The Dramatic Symphony* (1986). This latest study is a revised version of his doctoral dissertation written almost a dozen years ago. The new acceptance of Belyj in Russian post-*perestroika* research is carefully included, even though as Keys noted, "its judgments mainly... recapitulate those reached by doctrinally less hampered scholars in the West during earlier decades."

Keys promises to describe the "distinctive features of Andrej Belyi's contribution to the development of non-realistic or 'modernist' fiction in Russia during the period until 1914." The book is divided into three sections. Part I, "'Modernist' Prose and its Critical Reception," summarizes the critical theories of the Symbolists and later generations up until our own time. Part II, "The Attraction of 'Theurgy': Belyi's Early Symphonies," examines the concept of writer as prophet and concludes that fiction was for Belyj not the proper vehicle to communicate this message. Part III, "The Snare of Modernism: *The Silver Dove* and *Petersburg*," moves from the theoretical basis of Belyj's fiction to a closer, albeit rather concise, look at Belyj's initial, and many would argue his most enduring, achievements in Russian prose.

Keys is at home in the philosophical, mystical, complex and confusing world of Russian letters at the beginning of the century. He is best when he makes sense of what for many is either obscured or obfuscated in the writings of Belyj and his contemporaries. Here Keys follows in the footsteps of Steven Cassedy and John Elsworth—both of whom have given us a clearer vision of what it all is supposed to mean. In five succinct chapters Keys examines the critical reception and neglect of "modernist" literature in a wonderfully detailed account encompassing the entire twentieth century. It could stand as a separate study. Keys foregrounds the significant prose writers of Russia's modernist period--Belyj, Remizov, and Sologub and his own study shows great familiarity with the mixed fate of a century of criticism and scholarship. Students and scholars alike will be grateful for this useful overview.

From the realistic novel to the Symphonies—moving from verbal to the musical—we follow Belyj's path through "Antichrist," *The Northern Symphony*, *The Return* and *Goblet of Blizzards* to Belyj's breakthrough in *The Dramatic Symphony*. Keys is on familiar ground here and his firm footing is evident as he examines this progression with special attention to music and the influence of Schopenhauer. There is, however, for this reader a reluctant recognition that this study concerns more the underlying principles of Belyj's artistic creation than the art itself. The texts discussed seem distant, for Keys addresses an audience that knows the texts intimately.

At last comes a discussion of the novels, *The Silver Dove* (Keys notes that a new translation of the novel by John Elsworth is in press) and *Petersburg*. As he does in the earlier two sections, Keys carefully, meticulously prepares the foundation for his discussion by looking to Belyj's own theoretical writings and the works of those who have influenced him in this case, Kant, Humboldt, Potebnja—to construct his own readings of the novels. Keys finds *ambiguity* in the very structure of *The Silver Dove* furthering Belyj's intent to use fiction as a medium of expression for *transcendental* reality. The novel *Petersburg* receives a brief eleven page article, although Keys promises that a separate work on the novel is in progress: "By comparison with *The Silver Dove*, *Petersburg* signals an even greater shift towards ambiguity and irony with all that this implies for the possibility of embodying supra-empirical meanings, whether positive or negative. At the opposite pole from the authoritative authorial word... is the utterance lacking all authority, the novel offering so many possible perspectives that it ends up lacking any."

Belyj is a reluctant modernist and Keys has prepared the way here for a more detailed examination of how Belyj's greatest novels in fact contributed to that movement. Keys's own valuable contributions will for the most part be accessible to those who already know Belyj well in Russian. Belyj still awaits a new generation of translators and scholars who will focus more on the literary texts themselves than on their theoretical underpinnings.

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