

Andrey Bely. *The Silver Dove*. Translated with an introduction and notes by John Elsworth. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000. 316 pp., \$17.95 (paper).

"[M]y Doves are entirely real," (33) Bely declares in his own introduction to this, perhaps his most comprehensible and accessible novel. Indeed, the Dove Child finally appears in an English translation that sings with the music of a prose that captures better than any effort to date the true essence of Bely's combination of sound and sense in his own language.

Elsworth combines a career of scholarly study and writing, (*Andrey Bely*, 1972; *Andrey Bely: A Critical Study of the Novels*, 1983), and a profound appreciation of Bely's own intricate word, sound, symbol interplay with his own sensitivity and talent in English to create a translation that conveys the magnificent Russian poetic prose into an equally enchanting, engaging variant on the novel.

Translations, and reviews of translations, are frequently written and read by those who have access to the original and have no real need of the translation itself. Let us first think of those readers who know no Russian at all, or of many of our students who cannot possibly hope to read and comprehend Bely in the original without substantial help. They are the target audience for Elsworth who explains in his "Note on the Text and the Translation": "The present translation sets out to be as accurate as possible, while providing, as an absolute priority, a readable and enjoyable English text" (26). For the first time, Bely's original text is recreated in an English translation sufficiently complex in content and style to warrant and reward the act of reading itself. An earlier English translation in 1974 (reviewed in *SEEL*, XVIII, 4 [Winter, 1974], 441-442) suffers as Elsworth notes from "inaccuracies and omissions" (26). Perhaps even more so than in his novel *Petersburg*, Bely's prose makes sense: in this novel Bely was able to "create credible and consistent characters [and] construct a coherent plot" (20). Elsworth, acutely aware from his scholarly works of the tension between sound and sense in Bely's prose, has found just the right balance between verbal sound effects and the significations of the words and phrases themselves. The English captures or reproduces many of Bely's verbal ornaments: assonance and alliteration, "acoustic-semantic parallelism," extended sentences, and his fondness for the semi-colon and the dash. The translation is no slave to the original, but nor is it ever far from the original in style. English readers will be reminded of the prose of Vladimir Nabokov and James Joyce; those who know Russian literature will find here Bely's influence on the prose of Pasternak, Pilniak and others.

Bely's *Serebrianyi golub'* (1910) was re-printed in Russia in 1989 under a cover that called it *A Forgotten Book* (*Zabytaia kniga*). Teachers and scholars of Bely will welcome this extraordinary addition to the author's works in English translation, where a critical mass of texts now exists to explore the genius of Russia's Symbolist "eccentric." The novel is all the more welcome for its contribution to what Westerners call the "Russian soul" and for its rich intertextuality. Here are the conflicts between East and West, the intelligentsia and the *narod*, Orthodoxy and mysticism, philosophy and occultism. Bely's prose world, inhabited by a Gogolian narrator and characters, conceals a dark Dostoevskian plot. Elsworth's English delights the ear when read aloud, engages the mind, and retards the process of reading to a pace appropriate to the complexity of the plot and the novel's lyrical digressions: "The road led through woodlands, past bushes and bogs, it crossed the slanting slopes of the plains against the hasting, hostile wind, it passed fields of green oats that whispered liquidly, streams and ravines — it passed them all as it ran away, hazy, to where the sky was shrouded utterly in sackcloth" (67).

Here are Bely's neologisms and his ear for the speech of the common man: baccy, li-
quoropoly, slocialists. In his "Note," Elsworth engages the question of American and British usage, deciding on a compromise that begins with the "common stock" of both versions of English. The American reader may still in places marvel at the breadth of Elsworth's vocabulary in conveying the spirit of Bely's own highly original language often stretched to the limits

of comprehension. The translator uses colloquialisms as well as obsolete and rare forms to force the reader to encounter the text actively, much as a Russian reader must engage Bely's original.

In addition to the "Note" and a highly readable and informative "Introduction" Elsworth adds a set of "Notes" modestly placed at back. Without fanfare, but in almost every case where an explanation is desired or anticipated, there is one to be found here with as much as the general reader wants or needs to know.

Elsworth sets a standard for translation from Russian into English that others will be hard pressed to match. The work may well be studied as an example of the successful struggle to convey both sense and sound of the twentieth century novel. And Bely's novel has too long gone unnoticed. Listen and reflect upon the Russia he brings before us:

You'd never dream of anything like this anywhere except in Russia; but here among these simple people, these unlearned people, here you dreamed of it for sure; the Russian fields know secrets, as the Russian forests do; in those fields and in those forests live bearded peasants and a multitude of peasant women; they haven't many words; but silence they have in plenty; if you come to them they will share that plenty with you; if you come to them you will learn to be silent: you will drink the sunsets, like precious wines; you will feed on the smells of the pine-trees' resins; Russian souls are sunsets; Russian words are strong and resinous: if you are a Russian, you will have a bonny secret in your soul, and your spirit-strewing word will be like sticky resin; . . . (223)

Even if you have read *Serebrianyi golub'* in Russian, you'll want to enjoy the novel anew in Elsworth's brilliant translation.

Thomas R. Beyer, Jr., Middlebury College

Viacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov, Zinovii Samoilovich Papernyi, and Aleksandr Efimovich Parnis, eds. *Mir Velimira Khlebnikova: Stat'i i issledovaniia 1911–1998*. Moskva: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2000. Index. 880 pp. (cloth).

This collection of memoirs and critical essays on the life and work of Velimir Khlebnikov is an invaluable resource for anyone with a serious interest in Russian Modernism in general and the *budetliianin* in particular. The 57 selections not only touch on every significant aspect of Khlebnikov's work; they also situate his thought and poetics in the contemporaneous cultural context and outline his influence on subsequent literary generations. In addition to sharply focused studies suitable for the experienced *Khlebnikoved* (e.g., articles by G. A. Levinton, A. A. Danilevsky, F. I. Grimberg, and A. E. Parnis), the volume also includes essays of a more general nature treating various aspects of Khlebnikov's poetic world (e.g., articles by G. O. Vinokur, T. S. Grits, M. V. Panov, and N. N. Pertsova).

The book is divided into two parts. Part One contains essays by the poet's contemporaries, among them classic works by such influential figures as Jakobson, Kruchenykh, Mayakovsky, and Mandelstam. A number of lesser-known and previously unpublished articles are also printed here, including works by Punin, Malevich, and Aseev. Nine of the 27 pieces in this section are accompanied by commentary so thorough and useful that one regrets only that not all of them are so meticulously edited. Despite Jakobson's insistence on the unmotivated nature of Khlebnikov's devices, a position since discredited, his 1919 article "Noveishaia russkaia poëziia" remains an excellent overview of Khlebnikov's poetics. Another highlight of this section is Vinokur's 1945 essay "Khlebnikov 'Vne vremeni i prostranstva,'" in which the