

Old Testament precursor to the Antichrist, could have possibly escaped Gogol', 7). It is perhaps no accident that the author should from the first insist upon the idiosyncratic nature of these 'speculative essays' (118), which extends also to their structure (with its numerous self-styled 'digressions', 'u-turns', 'returns' and excursi designated 'magnifying glasses') and, less excusably, to the sometimes eccentric English in which they are framed. An idiosyncrasy so 'unabashed' and so self-conscious reminds us that decoders too have their personal codes.

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Timothy Langen, *The Stony Dance: Unity and Gesture in Andrei Bely's Petersburg* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), xiv + 191 pp., ISBN 0-8101-2224-3.

'Protean' is a word that comes up very frequently in studies of Andrei Bely. His intellectual interests were wide, embracing the mathematics and chemistry of his early training, his later philosophical studies and his preoccupation with the intricacies of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy as well as his more directly literary enterprises. The experimentation with form which characterises Bely's writing suggests an epistemological quest in which full apperception constantly escaped him and which spurred him to the constant evolution of new methods. Bely, moreover, often revised and reissued his work so that it is frequently impossible to establish definitive texts of key works. Boundlessly energetic, but rarely achieving or even aiming at closure, Bely sometimes seems to add up to less than the sum of his parts. Even in what is arguably his best and most influential work, *Peterburg*, Bely refuses to endorse a stable cognitive viewpoint. This was a concern of much early criticism – Mandelstam, for example, writing in 1922, bemoaned a lack of unity in the novel, calling it, as Timothy Langen notes, 'a pile of broken stones' (xii).

Langen's argument in *The Stony Dance* is that on the contrary, *Peterburg*, notwithstanding its multiplicity of themes and its stylistic fragmentation, does indeed constitute a unified whole; moreover, that this unity does not exist primarily on the level of ideology or technique or theme as suggested by more recent critical responses than Mandelstam's, but that *Peterburg* also comprises a systematic

examination of the conception of unity itself. In this context Langen notes the importance of the novel's 'Prologue', which contemplates the simultaneous unity and complexity of the Russian empire. He identifies three principal models which Bely uses to explore the idea of unity, characterising them as unity of thing, unity of pattern and unity of gesture.

Within this framework Langen's technique is to isolate specific topics or themes or stylistic devices or influences in *Peterburg* and to examine them for the light they shed on the novel's unity. Many of these are well known focuses in Bely criticism – anthroposophy, symbolist models of cognition, the assignment of meaning to particular letters or speech sounds, the symbolic value of St Petersburg's geography or of such monuments of its architectural heritage as the Admiralty Needle or Falconet's Bronze Horseman, the recapitulation of Pushkin or Dostoevsky. Langen handles them elegantly and comprehensively and is adept at demonstrating the ways in which they combine in Bely's writing to produce a richly patterned text. Most interesting is the discussion of Bely's use of gesture. Building on the work of R. P. Blackmur, Langen sees gesture as 'the graceful response of mind and body to the unexpected and the unknown' (118), and thus central to the interaction and disruptions of other patterns established in *Peterburg*. He identifies a repertoire of seven fundamental gestures (spasm, thrust, swerve, fold, break, gape, and the reach across), which are repeated at key moments and themselves comprise, as it were, a regulatory pattern governing the 'pulsation of the elemental body' (158) which is Bely's novel. The repetition of gestures is thus at the centre of Bely's conception of unity.

While his arguments are meticulously documented, Langen's own prose often seems to be modelled on the text of *Peterburg* itself. He favours short sections with mildly provocative headings (for example: The Meaning of Love, The Pragmatic Principle of Ice, Cartesian Windows). He makes considerable use of parenthesis, fragmentary sentences, rhetorical questions and indirect free speech. His argument proceeds at least as much by the use of example and juxtaposition as it does by logical exposition. On one level this is extremely effective: it gives Langen's writing an immediacy and impact which is very often missing from academic discourse, and by force of example provides a valuable insight into Bely's own mode of composition. Paradoxically, on the other hand, the consciously fragmentary nature of Langen's exposition to some extent militates against a unified assertion of his central thesis: *Peterburg's* complexity is more

successfully conveyed than its unity. Nevertheless, *The Stony Dance* is a valuable and inspiring book, full of insights, and an important addition to the literature on Bely.

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David MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today: Primetime Drama and Comedy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 244 pp.

This is one of three books on Russian television to be published in recent years. The other two, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia* by Sarah Oates (2006) and *Television, Power and the Public in Russia* by Ellen Mickiewicz (2008) chart the intersection between the medium and the political process. By contrast, the book under review investigates Russian television serials of both the Soviet and post-Soviet years with a view to drawing conclusions about the main ideas and themes informing them. The topic is a compelling one, potentially of interest to scholars working in related spheres of popular culture. In his introduction David MacFadyen notes that television has taken over the storytelling function formerly the province of literature but that it remains closely interlinked with the written word in that televisual series are often based on pre-existing literary works or in a reverse dynamic give rise to the production thereof. The author contends that television drama uses ‘historical or collective situations to comprehend and articulate a modern selfhood’ relying on ‘some of the most important platitudes of Russian self-awareness, conceivable as an illogical, “indescribable ‘inner world’, an expansive, authentic ‘life force’”’ (p. 2).

This book contains a great deal of interesting information about the main serials of the past few decades, however, treatment of the material is, to say the least, idiosyncratic. The author delineates his theoretic approach in the opening pages and foreshadows analysis along a number of lines, based on Mikhail Epstein’s view of the Russian void and Katerina Clark’s premise of ‘extraordinary time’. However the exposition which follows under the chapter headings of Adaptations, Soaps, Melodrama, Comedy among others, owes little to these themes and essentially reduces to a meandering description of serialized tele-