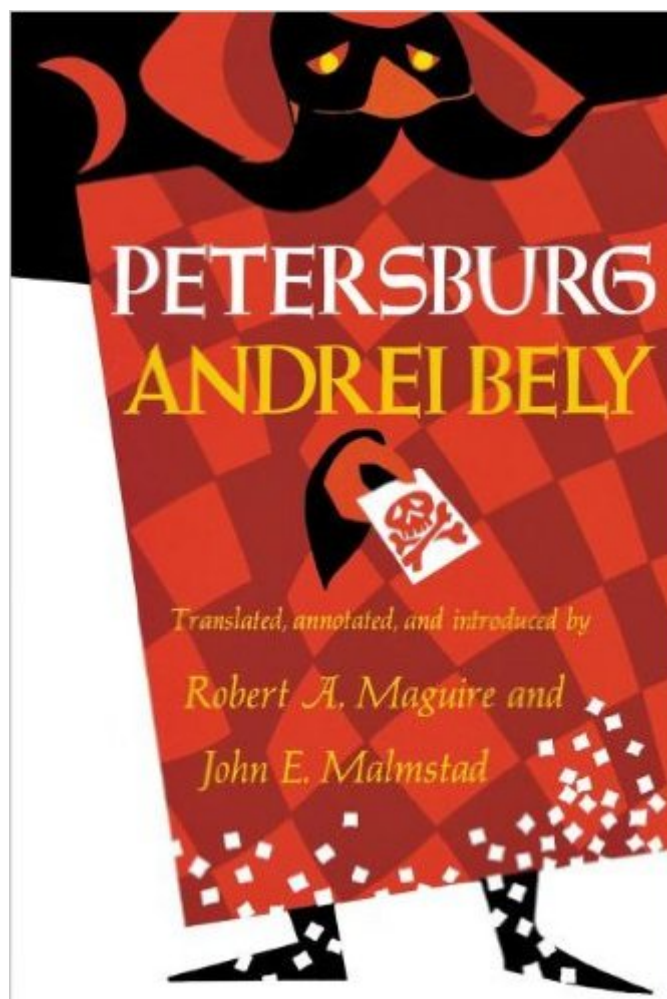


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# Petersburg



## Synopsis

"... a translation that captures Bely's idiosyncratic language and the rhythm of his prose, and without doing violence to English, conveys not only the literal meaning of the Russian but also its echoes and implications." — The New York Review of Books "This translation of Petersburg finally makes it possible to recognize Andrei Bely's great novel of 1913 as a crucial Russian instance of European modernist fiction." — Inquiry "All people who go in for the Beckett, Brecht, Buñuel — better get hold of Bely. He came first, and he's still the best." — Washington Post Book World "... a jewel-cutter's showcase." — Kirkus Reviews "... the most important, most influential and most perfectly realized Russian novel written in the 20th century." — Simon Karlinsky Here is the long-awaited, authoritative, unabridged translation of Petersburg, the Chef-d'oeuvre of Symbolist writer Andrei Bely. Nabokov has ranked Petersburg beside Joyce's Ulysses, Kafka's Metamorphosis, and Proust's À la recherche du temps perdu as one of the four great works of prose fiction of the twentieth century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Petersburg was originally published between 1913 and 1914 in installments by Sirin in its literary miscellany of the same name, and then in book form in 1916. Obviously dissatisfied with the first edition, Bely began revising it almost immediately, but during the revolutionary and civil war period, he could find no one interested in publishing a revised second edition. Bely emigrated to Berlin temporarily, where he found a publisher, and made massive cuts to the novel. The revised novel

was published in 1922 (the authoritative text for this translation), and was reprinted in the Soviet Union in 1928 with minor changes made by Bely and extensive modifications made by the Soviet censors. The 1928 edition was reprinted in 1935, but with the growing demand that literature conform to the standards of Socialist Realism, Petersburg was virtually ignored until, with the gradual easing of restrictions after Stalin's death, it regained a certain respectability. The novel takes place over a short period of time in the autumn of 1905. Although Russian cultural activity was gaining more and more prominence on an international scale, political and social unrest were on the rise domestically. Demand for reform was rampant, and even outright revolution was being advocated in some circles. Commencing in January 1905, a series of strikes, assassinations, and uprisings had occurred. The widespread feeling among the populace that the old values were inadequate for a burgeoning modernity, and that Russia was teetering on the edge of an abyss, becomes apparent early in the novel in this beautifully poetic passage: From the fecund time when the metallic Horseman had galloped hither, when he had flung his steed upon the Finnish granite, Russia was divided in two.

In any discussion of Bely's PETERSBURG there eventually arises the question of whether or not it's one of the 20th century's greatest novels. Frankly, I'm not even sure what this means, because what you will take from this book depends very much on what you came for. Distinctive narrative structure, mind-bending imagery, and creative use of language earn PETERSBURG a place in the literary pantheon. As an important product of the Symbolist movement and a document of Russian revolutionary ferment, it deserves the considerable scholarly attention it has received. The Maguire/Malmstad translation is a tour de force, and their care for their subject is greatly in evidence in what must have been one of the toughest translation tasks ever attempted. For any students out there: if any of the foregoing are of any interest to you, you are in for a treat. None of these things, however, guarantee that PETERSBURG will be a particularly good choice for the casual reader, and in fact it's an extremely tough row to hoe. The book is noisy, chaotic, cluttered, and at times supremely difficult to follow. As a reader, I felt myself experiencing the book very much as a painting, albeit one viewed through a frenetically shaken magnifying glass. Some of what you'll see will be stunning; much will be baffling. I believe very much that there is sense behind every fragment of this book, but it takes hard work to dig it up, and often just dragging your eyes across the page is not so easy. As a further stumbling block to many readers, PETERSBURG's beauty relies very much on the beauty of the city of Petersburg itself.

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