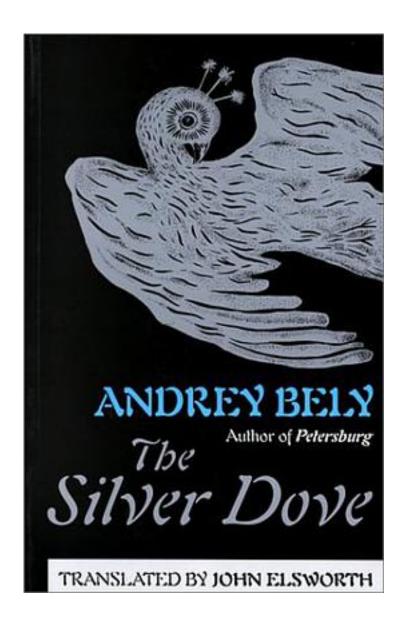
The Silver Dove



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Steeped in the social and religious culture of prerevolutionary Russia, Andrey Bely's first novel is inspired by theosophy, the myth of Dionysus, and the author's own thoughts on the relationship between artistic and religious creation. The story of an idle intellectual who pursues transcendence, The Silver Dove is also Bely's study of the unbridgeable chasm between his country's Westernized intelligentsia and the mysterious, apocalyptic passions of its peasants. Dissatisfied with the life of the intellectual, the poet Daryalsky joins a rural mystic sect, the Silver Doves. The locals, and in particular the peasant woman Matryona, are fascinated by the dashing stranger. Daryalsky is taken in by the Doves' intimacy with the mystical and spiritual -- and by Matryona. Under the influence of the cult leader, the carpenter Kudeyarov, Daryalsky is ruthlessly used in a bid to produce a sacred child -- a dove who will "descend on silvered plummage" and usher in a new age. Bely, fascinated by the theosophical beliefs of the nineteenth century, places his hero at the center of a cycle in which elements of the past are eternally present, suggesting a parallel between Daryalsky and the figures of Dionysus and Christ. In time, Daryalsky disappoints the Doves and must face their all-too-mortal suspicions and jealousies, as well as his own doubts. As the story concludes, Bely invokes the primitive rituals of the bacchanals -- and the symbols of the Crucifixion -- to reveal Daryalsky's dire fate.

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