Classic Poetry Series

August Stramm

- poems -

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August Stramm (29 July 1874 – 1 September 1915)

August Stramm was a German poet and playwright who is considered one of the first of the expressionists. He also served in the German Army and was killed in action during World War I.

He worked in the German Post Office Ministry as a young man and served his mandatory year of duty in the German Army in 1896–1897. After this, he travelled to the United States several times over the next few years before settling in Berlin. In 1912-1913, he wrote two plays, Sancta Susanna (which was subsequently used as a libretto for an early opera by Hindemith) and Die Haidebraut, the first of many to appear before the war.

Stramm was also a reservist in the German Army and had achieved the rank of Captain, the highest available to civilians. He was called to active duty when war broke out in August 1914. In January 1915, Stramm was awarded the Iron Cross (Second Class) for his service in France. Later that year, he was sent to the Eastern Front, where he served as Company Leader, later being promoted to Battalion Commander. He was killed in hand-to-hand combat in Horodec near Kobryn (today Belarus).

Major Works

Although Stramm's literary career began as a playwright, he is perhaps best known in the twenty-first century for his poems, which were published in two collections: Du: Liebesgedichte (Thou: Love Poems, 1915), and Tropfblut (Drip-Blood, 1919). Although he was involved in the early stages of planning for the publication of his first volume of poems, he died before the book was in print. Characterized by his streamlined, minimalist approach to language, these poems are expressions of his exploration of love's many faces, and yet, as critic Karin von Abrams has pointed out, only the subtitle of the volume strongly indicates that love is to be considered the “governing theme” of the collection. The poems contained in Drip-Blood exemplify Stramm's evolving style of focusing on individual words and personifying abstract concepts through the manipulation of syntax and the use of such structural elements as one-word lines. These later works exerted a “frequently staccato” effect, writes critic Jeremy Adler.

Stramm saw a number of his poems published in the literary magazine Der Sturm, but he did not live to see either the publication of his volumes of poetry or the performance of any of his plays, several of which, including Die Haidebraut (The Bride of the Moor, 1914) and Sancta Susanna, (1914) were in print before his death. Der Sturm editor Walden oversaw the posthumous publication of the poems and several more plays.

Critical Reception

Stramm received very little critical attention during his lifetime. He was known to a relatively small circle of literary peers and, until after his death, his works appeared only in the literary journal Der Sturm, which was itself a vehicle for experimental works not yet received into the cultural mainstream. During the eighteen months he was associated with Der Sturm, however, Stramm's works appeared in the journal more often than those of any other writer in the magazine's history. In the months following his death, as Walden published and promoted Stramm's works, his contemporaries began to consider Stramm a poet and dramatist whose unique voice, though silenced through the violence of war, would become influential in the emerging expressionist movement in Germany. In his very precise use of language, nothing was written that did not need to be written, and when existing words were not accurate enough for Stramm, he invented new ones. Following his death, his unconventional approach to creative expression was recognized by an English-speaking literary peer, Edward J. O'Brien, who wrote in the American journal Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, “Stramm gave poetry a new method. … His gift to imaginative literature was just beginning to be perceived.” Although his literary output was limited, later critics concur that Stramm—a postal service bureaucrat who was married with children, who pursued gentle hobbies as an amateur painter and cellist, and who was dismayed and yet fascinated by the horrors of war—forged a significant, though unlikely, role as a literary figure whose works influenced the Dada movement in western Europe and anticipated the techniques of modern poetry.

Eserleri:

Sancta Susanna (1912)
Die Haidebraut (1913)
Dripping Blood (1915)

Angriff

Tücher
Winken
Flattern
Knattern.
Winde klatschen.
Dein Lachen weht.
Greifen Fassen
Balgen Zwingen
Kuss
Umfangen
Sinken
Nichts.

ATTACK

Scarves
Wave
Flutter
Chatter
Winds clatter.
Your laughter blows
Grasp hold
Scuffle force
Kiss
Surrounded
Sink down
Nothingness

August Stramm

Battlefield

Yielding clod lulls iron off to sleep
bloods clot the patches where they oozed
rusts crumble
fleshes slime
sucking lusts around decay.
Murder on murder blinks
in childish eyes.

August Stramm

Battlefield

Tender sods fallen asleep at their iron
Blood fluffing outpost scum
Rusted crusts
Slimy flesh skinned
Sucking scores the dessicated.
Baby-faced
Killerkillers
Winking

August Stramm

Frost Fire

Toes deaden.
Breath smelts to lead.
Hot needles dance in fingers.
Backs turn to snails.Ears hum coffee.
The fire swaggerswith logs
andwith a shrivela crack
a satisfactionyour simmer heart
sips
from high in the skya seething sleep.

August Stramm

Guard-Duty

A star frightens the steeple cross
a horse gasps smoke
iron clanks drowsily
mists spread
fears
staring shivering
shivering
cajoling
whispering
You!

August Stramm

Melancholy

Living desires
Shouldering to stand
Glimpses searching
Dying grows
Striding to strive
What is to come
SHRIEKS!
Deep
Dumbing
We.

August Stramm

Primal Death

Space
Time
Space
Travel
Raining
Aiming
Space
Time
Space
Expanding
Uniting
Increasing
Space
Time
Space
Sweeping
Restraining
Stretching
Space
Time
Space
Wrestling
Throwing
Throwing up
Space
Time
Space
Falling
Sinking
Overturning
Space
Time
Space
Whirling
Space
Time
Space
Disturbing
Space
Time
Space
Whirring
Space
Time Space
Erring at
Nothing

August Stramm

War Grave

Staffs flehen cross arms
Writing zagt pale unknown
Flowers impudent
Dust shyly.
Flare
Water
Glast
Forgotten.

August Stramm

Wonder

U Stands! U stands!
And I
And I
I wing
Spaceless timeless lost my way
U stands! U stands!
And
Raging bearishly shrieks myself
I
Bears my very self!
U!
U!
U binds time
U bends the circle
U souls the spirit
U gazes the look
U
Circles the whirled
The whorled
The world!
I
Circle the all
and u
and u
U
Stand
The
Wondrous

August Stramm

Wounds

Earth under the helmet flowers
Falling stars
Grope through space.
Roaring shudders
Whirl
Alienation.
Distance
Mist
Weeping
Your glance.

August Stramm

Wunde

Die Erde blutet unterm Helmkopf
Sterne fallen
Der Weltraum tastet
Schauder brausen
Wirbeln
Einsamkeiten
Nebel
Weinen
Ferne
Deinen Blick.

August Stramm