

Classic Poetry Series

Valery Yaklovich Bryusov
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Valery Yaklovich Bryusov(December 13 [O.S. December 1] 1873 – October 9, 1924)

He was a Russian poet, prose writer, dramatist, translator, critic and historian. He was one of the principal members of the Russian Symbolist movement.

Biography

Valery Bryusov was born on December 13, 1873 (recorded December 1, according to the old Julian calendar) into a merchant's family in Moscow. His parents had little to do with his upbringing, and as a boy Bryusov was largely left to himself. He spent a great deal of time reading "everything that fell into [his] hands," including the works of Charles Darwin and Jules Verne, as well as various materialistic and scientific essays. The future poet received an excellent education, studying in two Moscow gymnasiums between 1885 and 1893.

Bryusov began his literary career in the early 1890s while still a student at Moscow State University with his translations of the poetry of the French Symbolists (Paul Verlaine, Maurice Maeterlinck, and Stéphane Mallarmé) as well as that of Edgar Allan Poe. Bryusov also began to publish his own poems, which were very much influenced by the Decadent and Symbolist movements of his contemporary Europe.

At the time, Russian Symbolism was still mainly a set of theories and had few notable practitioners. Therefore, in order to represent Symbolism as a movement of formidable following, Bryusov adopted numerous pen names and published three volumes of his own verse, entitled *Russian Symbolists. An Anthology* (1894–95). Bryusov's mystification proved successful - several young poets were attracted to Symbolism as the latest fashion in Russian letters.

With the appearance of *Tertia Vigilia* in 1900, he came to be revered by other Symbolists as an authority in matters of art. In 1904 he became the editor of the influential literary magazine *Vesy* (The Balance), which consolidated his position in the Russian literary world. Bryusov's mature works were notable for their celebration of sensual pleasures as well as their mastery of a wide range of poetic forms, from the acrostic to the *carmina figurata*.

By the 1910s, Bryusov's poetry had begun to seem cold and strained to many of his contemporaries. As a result, his reputation gradually declined and, with it, his power in the Russian literary world. He was adamantly opposed to the efforts of

Georgy Chulkov and Vyacheslav Ivanov to move Symbolism in the direction of Mystical Anarchism.

Though many of his fellow Symbolists fled Russia after the Russian Revolution of 1917, Bryusov remained until his death in 1924. He supported the Bolshevik government and received a position in the cultural ministry of the new Soviet state. Of his activities at this time, Clarence Brown writes:

Bryusov's review [of Osip Mandelstam's *Second Book*, 1923] is not so much a review as it is a subtle donos, an act of political informing. When one considers his infinitely superior gift as a poet, Bryusov is an even more distasteful personality than Sergey Gorodetsky. His embrace of Bolshevism and the new order of things was more fervent by far than that of Mayakovsky, the unofficial poet-laureate of the Revolution, and his personality incomparably more devious. ... He invents the name 'Neo-Acmeist' for 'certain circles' (not further specified) by whom Mandelstam had been made 'exceedingly famous,' and designates him as their teacher. ... No one without access to a large research library today could possibly discover the identity of these utterly unknown people, Mandelstam's 'disciples.' According to Nadezhda Yakovlevna, however, they were 'the most compromising people he could think of.' It was to be understood that Mandelstam was not an isolated antagonist of the 'new reality' - he stood at the head of a concerted effort. What Gumilyov [who had been executed for alleged participation in an anti-Soviet plot in 1921] had been, Mandelstam now was.

Literature

Prose

Bryusov most famous prose works are the historical novels *The Altar of Victory* (depicting life in Ancient Rome) and *The Fiery Angel* (depicting the psychological climate of 16th century Germany).

The latter tells the story of a scholar and his attempts to win the love of a young woman whose spiritual integrity is seriously undermined by her participation in occult practices and her dealings with unclean forces. It served as the basis for Sergei Prokofiev's opera *The Fiery Angel*.

Translation

As a translator, Bryusov was the first to render the works of the Belgian poet Emile Verhaeren accessible to Russian readers, and he was one of the major translators of Paul Verlaine's poetry.

His most famous translations are of Edgar Allan Poe, Romain Rolland, Maurice Maeterlinck, Victor Hugo, Jean Racine, Ausonius, Molière, Byron, and Oscar Wilde. Bryusov also translated Johann Goethe's Faust and Virgil's Aeneid.

At Home

It's all so familiar and clear,
My eye's accustomed to every turn;
I'm not mistaken- I'm at home;
The wallpaper flowers, the chains of books...

I don't disturb yesterday's ashes -
The fire here has long gone cold.
Like a snake surveying its molted skin,
I gaze upon what I was.

Though many hymns remain unsung
And many blessings unbestowed,
I sense the glint of a different world,
A chance for new perfection!

I am called to unknown mountain peaks
By the chorus of spring,
And these letters from a woman
Lie in a cold, lifeless pile!

Dewdrops shine like eyes in the sun,
As if everything were splashed with silver...
My staff awaits me at the door!
I'm coming! I'm coming alone!

Valery Yaklovich Bryusov

Creative Work

The shadow of uncreated creatures
Flickers in sleep,
Like palm fronds
On an enamel wall.

Violet hands
On the enamel wall
Drowsily sketch sounds
In the ringing-resonant silence.

And transparent kiosks,
In the ringing-resonant silence,
Grow like spangles
In the azure moonlight.

A naked moon rises
In the azure moonlight...
Sounds hover drowsily,
Sounds caress me.

The secrets of created creatures
Caress me caressingly
And palm shadows gutter
On an enamel wall.

Valery Yaklovich Bryusov

Saint Sebastian

On slow and smoky fire thou burn'st and art consumed,
O thou, my soul!
On slow and smoky fire thou burn'st and art consumed,
With hidden dole.

Thou droopest like Sebastian, pierced with pointed arrows,
Harassed and spent.
Thou droopest like Sebastian, pierced with pointed arrows,
Thy flesh all rent.

Thy foes encircle thee and watch with gleeful laughter
And bended bow.
Thy foes encircle thee and watch with gleeful laughter
Thy torments slow.

The embers burn, and gentle is the arrow's stinging
'Neath the evening sky.
The embers burn, and gentle is the arrow's stinging
When the end draws nigh.

Why hastens not thy dream unto thy lips now pallid
With deadly drouth?
Why hastens not thy dream unto thy lips now pallid
To kiss thy mouth?

Valery Yaklovich Bryusov

To A Young Poet

Pale youth with burning gaze,
I give you three commandments now:
Follow the first: don't live by the present,
The future is a poet's only place.

Second, remember: feel for no one,
Love yourself without bounds.
Safeguard the third: worship art,
Art alone, without thought or goal.

Pale youth with embarrassed gaze!
If you follow my three commandments,
I'll die in peace, a defeated warrior,
Knowing I leave a poet behind.

Valery Yaklovich Bryusov

Twilight

Electric moons glow
On long bent stalks
The telegraph wires hum
In gentle unseen hands;

Circular amber clock faces
Brighten like magic above the crowd,
And a cool calm alights
On the parched slabs of pavement.

Beneath the fluttery, beguiling net
The misty park grows quiet,
And with a smile, evening kisses
The eyes of passing courtesans.

With the soft sounds of a clavier -
The faraway day murmurs...
O twilight! Mercy of the world
Dawn once again upon me!

Valery Yaklovich Bryusov