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| BALMONT, Konstantin [БАЛЬМОНТ, КОНСТАНТИН] (1867-1942) |
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| Russian poet, translator, novelist, essayist, polyglot, traveler and travel writer. In the early years of the Symbolist movement Balmont was perhaps the best-known living Russian poet, representing the promise of Symbolism as a poetic school. His musical verse offered Decadent and other fashionable themes in rich metrical forms and intoxicating prosody. He published twenty-nine books of poetry in his lifetime, though the later emergence of new movements (ACMEISM, FUTURISM) and his own prolific production and willingness to publish work of varying quality damaged his reputation with critics. He is also extremely important in Russian culture as a translator, especially of poets such as Poe, Shelley and Whitman. |
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For some years in the late 1890s and early 1900s, Balmont was the most popular Russian poet, the first Symbolist widely published in the ‘thick’ journals that then dominated Russian public discourse. He was a stylistic virtuoso who employed a wide range of poetic metres and often featured exotic rhymes. Balmont inspired two generations of Symbolists, especially the Decadents, and his sensual themes shocked some readers while hymning free love and inspiration for others. His greatest critical and popular success was his 1903 collection, *Budem kak solntse* (Let’s Be Like the Sun). Later work could suffer from a lack of focus, prompting the comment that it read like ‘a splendid translation from an unknown original.’ Publishing twenty-nine books of poetry in his lifetime, Balmont was prolific but not always a good judge of his own work; by the 1910’s many critics considered him passé. Some of his later work is nonetheless very much worth attention. Frank Silbajoris estimates that, of about 7000 poems by Balmont, some 100 are ‘masterpieces important to the development of Russian poetic culture in general.’  File: Balmont 1936  Balmont 1936  Source: URL available at <http://poetree.ru/blog/konstantin_balmont_stikhotvorenie_bezglagolnost/2011-05-16-2402>  Balmont studied law at Moscow University without completing the course. He first attracted attention with translations from English; the first book of his own poetry was published in 1894. He particularly appreciated English language poets, translating Whitman, Poe, and Shelley; his book-length 1915 essay, *Poetry as Enchantment*, declared Poe the finest poet of all times. He also translated from many other languages and took examples of poetic creativity from cultures distant in time and space (e.g., Mayan, Australian Aboriginal). A restless traveler, Balmont visited Mexico and California in 1905 and lived for several years in Paris, fearing repercussions from anti-monarchist poetry he had written during the 1905 revolution. He returned to Russia only in 1913, after an amnesty.  Married three times (the third time in a civil marriage, without divorcing his second wife), Balmont had one son and two daughters. One daughter was named ‘Mirra’ after his friend and lover, the poet Mirra Lokhvitskaya. His often exhibitionist behavior exemplified the ‘life-creation’ of Russian Symbolists, who saw biography as an aesthetic composition just as much as their writing. Unlike some contemporaries, Balmont did not strive to be an intellectual or philosopher, though he was aware of fashionable modes of thought such as theosophy. His prioritization of magic and music, and his vibrant and enchantingly musical verse, explains his appeal to the important younger poet Marina Tsvetaeva. He lived in great poverty following the 1917 Revolution (unlike his peer Valery Briusov, he reacted by becoming a staunch monarchist), and emigrated in 1920. Balmont lived in Paris until 1927, then in Cap Breton on the French Atlantic coast. Gradually succumbing to mental illness and alcoholism, he moved to a Russian rest home in Noisy-le-Grand in 1936, and he died 24 December 1942. Several collections of his work have been published recently in Russia. List of Works:Poetry Pod severnym nebom [*Under a Northern Sky*] (1894)  V bezbrezhnosti [*In Boundlessness*] (1895)  Tishina [*Silence*] (1898)  Gorashchie zdaniia [*Burning Buildings*] (1900)  Budem kak solntse [*Let’s Be Like the Sun*] (1903)  Tol'ko liubov' [*Only Love*] (1903)  Liturgiia krasoty [*The Liturgy of Beauty*] (1905)  Feinye skazki [*Fairy Tales*] (1905)  Zhar-ptitsa [*The Firebird*] (1907)  Zelenyi vertograd [*The Green Garden*] (1909)  Zarevo zor' [*The Glow of Rising and Setting Suns*] (1912)  Belyi zodchii [*The White Architect*] (1914)  Iasen' [*The Ash Tree*] (1916)  Sonety solntsa, meda i luny [*Sonnets of the Sun, Honey, and the Moon*] (1917)  Sem' poem [*Seven Long Poems*] (1920)  Marevo [*The Mirage*] (1922)  V razdvinutoi dali [*In the Drawn-Apart Distance*] (1929)  Severnoe siianie [*Northern Lights*] (1931) Essays and Memoirs Poèziia kak volshebstvo [*Poetry as Enchantment*] (1915)  Pod novym serpom [*Under a New Sickle*] (1923)  Vozdushnyi put' [*A Path by Air*] (1923)  Visions solaires [*Solar visions*] (1923)  Gde moi dom? [*Where is My House?*] (1924) |
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