

Title: Voicing the Ineffable: Maksimilian Voloshin's Poems on Russia and Terror

Author: Marianna Landa, University of Maryland

Galina Rylkova recently wrote: "In the 2000s, Maximilian Voloshin (1877-1932) is as popular with the students of culture and readers at large as were Vladimir Nabokov and Mikhail Kuzmin in the 1990s, Akhmatova in the 1980s and Mikhail Bulgakov in the 1960s." (Rylkova) Why does Voloshin remain popular? Literary scholarship has traditionally viewed him as an important cultural figure but a second-tier poet of the Silver Age. Recent scholarship has started to challenge this view. However, no one has yet considered Voloshin's truly original contribution to Russian literature in his poems on revolution. This paper overturns the established scholarly views of Voloshin, by claiming that Voloshin's poetry of 1920s elevated him to the ranks of major national poets.

During the Red Terror in the Crimea, Voloshin underwent a personal crisis, resulting in a radical transformation of his poetic voice. In his poems on Russia ("Northeast", "Readiness", "Terror", and "Russia"), he abandoned Symbolist aesthetics for what he called "biblical naturalism", describing the horrors of mass killings in a breath-taking, sexually-charged language taken from the Hebrew Bible. His new poetry immediately gained popularity. The Red and White army soldiers, intelligentsia, atheists, Russian and Jewish Orthodox believers, émigrés, - all read and memorized his poems. Voloshin's popular appeal stemmed both from his new poetic voice and the unprecedented themes of his poetry. He addressed the revolutionary violence, exposing the suppressed trauma of the society that needed to be exposed. No other important poet of his time, such as Blok, Bely, Ivanov, Akhmatova, Tsvetaeva, Esenin, Mayakovsky, and Khlebnikov undertook this task. Voloshin became the voice of Russia's historical catastrophe, and one of the leading poets of his time.

Bibliography:

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