

Classic Poetry Series

**Innokenty Fedorovich
Annensky
- poems -**

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky(1 September 1855 - 13 December 1909)

Innokentiy Fyodorovich Annensky (Russian: *Инокентий Фёдорович Анненский*) (September 1, 1855 N.S. Omsk–December 13, 1909 N.S. Saint Petersburg) was a poet, critic and translator, representative of the first wave of Russian Symbolism. Sometimes cited as a Slavic counterpart to the *poètes maudits*, Annensky managed to render into Russian the essential intonations of Baudelaire and Verlaine, while the subtle music, ominous allusions, arcane vocabulary, the spell of minutely changing colours and odours were all his own. His influence on the first post-Symbolist generation of poets (Akhmatova, Gumilyov, Mandelshtam) was paramount.

Born in Omsk, 1 September (although this date was later disputed by the poet's son) to a high-ranking administrative officer.

1858 his Father settles his family permanently in St. Petersburg after having been transferred to Petersburg soon after Annensky's birth. The poet's happy early childhood, (he wrote his first poems when he was small for his father) is interrupted by the sudden death of his parents. He moves in with the family of his eldest brother, Nikolay Fedorovich.

From 1865-1872 he Attends various Petersburg secondary schools. His early education is marked both by obvious brilliance and interruptions caused by his poor physical condition (he suffered from a chronic heart ailment) and his family's poverty. Though both his brother, publisher of the influential journal *Russian Wealth*, and sister-in-law, Aleksandra Nikitchna (a popular writer of children's books), are both relatively successful, they have trouble making ends meet and are forced to withdraw Innokentii Fedorovich from schools. His brother, who disapproved of Russian public education to begin with, taught him at home in periods when Innokentii was not enrolled.

In 1875 he Enrolls in St. Petersburg University and studies comparative philology, with concentrations in the history of the Russian language, classics, and ancient literature.

He Graduates from St. Petersburg University in 1879 with honors and is appointed to a position teaching secondary school. Marries Nadezhda Valentinovna Khmara-Barshchevskaia, a woman several years older than the

poet and already a widow and the mother of two sons. The following year, 1780, Nadezhda Valentinovna gives birth to Annenskii's only son, Valentin, who would later publish poetry and a memoir of his father under the pseudonym V. Kirich. For the next ten years, Annensky remains in the capital, teaching and tutoring mostly for private students and only occasionally finding time to write, and then only writing academic articles and reviews for smaller journals and academic collections.

In 1891, he is hired as director of the P. Galagan College in Kiev. There Annenskii attempts to institute his innovative ideas about pedagogy in a series of reforms focused on the teaching of languages and literature. Oddly reminiscent of John Dewey's nearly simultaneous work at the Lab School in Chicago, Annensky stresses the importance of allowing the students to interact both creatively and practically with the subject matter, whether it is Pushkin's lyrics or Latin verb conjugations, and specifically attacks and attempts to eradicate the method of teaching and learning by rote. During this period, Annensky begins translating Euripides and writes several articles on Russian literature.

Both because of the school administration's antipathy to Annensky's methods and his antipathy to their increasingly rigid Ukrainian nationalism, the poet leaves Kiev for Petersburg in 1893, where he is appointed head of the 8th Gymnasium where the administration welcomes his pedagogical ideas. Begins translating the plays of Euripides.

He Publishes the first of his Euripides translations in 1886, Rhesus, and simultaneously stages it at the gymnasium to overwhelming success. Promoted to the directorship of the celebrated Gymnasium at Tsarskoe Selo. Over the course of his nine-year tenure at the school, Annensky's teaching influences many children of influential Petersburg families and several future poets and writers, particularly Anna Akhmatova (then Gorenko) and Nikolay Gumilev. The position allows Annensky to focus more on his own writing and research, and subsequently leads to a flowering in his academic and the beginning of his creative output.

1901-1902

Writes and publishes *Ìäëàìèïä-Ôëëñîô* in 1901-1902 (Melanippa the Philosopher) and *Öàğü Èëëñèí* (based on a theme upon which Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides all wrote plays that do not survive), both tragedies in verse based on Greek mythology.

1904 he Publishes *Òèöëã ïãñìè* (Quiet Songs), which includes his first published poems and translations of Horace, Longfellow, and several modern French poets |

(including Baudelaire, Verlaine, Prudhomme, Rimbaud, and Mallarme). The volume went almost entirely unnoticed by critics most likely for the manner in which Annensky presented it to the public, or, more precisely, the manner in which he hid his authorship of the book from the public.

Sensitive to officialdom's antipathy to Symbolist poetry, Annensky published under a pseudonym up until his leaving Tsarskoe Selo in 1906. He did this in part so as not to lose his job, but the name under which he published, *Никто* (literally "Nobody" in Russian), also demonstrates one of the primary aspects of Annensky's poetry-intertextuality. Readers familiar with Homer's *Odyssey* recognize that "Nobody" is the name Odysseus used with the cyclops Polyphemus. This sort of allusion (both for its intertextuality and for its layering of meaning) is typical of Annensky's method of engaging his reader and was not entirely typical of the Symbolists up that point. The association of Annensky with Symbolism, in fact, is unfortunate because Annensky himself disliked the mystical pretensions of poets like Blok (who equally disliked Annensky's poetry for its "lack of taste" and inconsistency) and Bely. Annensky was much more interested in, and his poetry had much more in common with, the Acmeist poets who rose from the wake of Symbolism towards the end of his life.

1906

Dismissed from the directorship of Tsarskoe Selo (in part because of his indifference to the coup of 1905 and his refusal to seriously deal with students sympathetic to the revolutionaries and in part because he had expressed the desire to retire and devote more time to his writing and research) and is appointed District Educational Inspector. Publishes the first *Книга размышлений* (Book of Reflections), a collection of essays on contemporary literature which incorporate both academic analyses of, and lyric digressions inspired by, works by Gogol', Turgenev, Dostoyevskii, and Bal'mot, among others. Annensky is again disappointed by the relative silence the book receives both from the official press and the literary underground.

1907-1908

Loadmila, is published first (1906) in the journal *Severnaia rech'* and then is revised and separately published in 1907. Annensky's final and most successful play, *Thanyras Cytharoede*, completed in 1906), will not be published until 1913, four years after his death. Similarly, the bulk of his Euripides translations appear in two volumes published posthumously beginning in 1916, but he does manage to publish the first volume of translations in 1907. His new position as Inspector does allow him more time to compose and he begins to participate more actively in Petersburg's cultural societies. Nikolai Gumilev returns from abroad and frequently visits his former teacher,

1909

Begins working relationship with the publisher of Apollon - an influential literary journal - Sergey Makovsky. Finalizes arrangements for Makovsky to publish a collection of poems to be entitled *The Cypress Chest* (Êèîàğěñîâúé ëàğö). Publishes *The Second Book of Reflections* (Âòîğàÿ êíèà îòğàæâíèé), this time with essays on Bely, Judaism, Shakespeare, and Ibsen and receives similar critical indifference. Submits a final request for retirement on grounds of failing health (his heart condition had begun to worsen significantly a few years earlier) but was struck dead by heart failure on the steps of the station at Tsarskoe Selo on the very day, December 13, that the request was granted. The following year *The Cypress Chest* is published in Moscow to great acclaim. Fueled certainly by the dramatic story of his death but equally by the remarkable quality of the poems themselves, the volume is considered a benchmark in the Silver Age. Almost literally ending the reign of one generation while containing the spark of the next, the poems in *The Cypress Chest* represent Annensky's perfection of the (French) Symbolist aesthetic and his anticipation of Acemeism's precision of language and Futurism's experimentation.

A Gas Butterfly

Tell me what's happening to me?
Why is my heart beating so fervently?
Why has this madness, like a wave,
Broken through the rock of habit?

Is it my strength or just my torment
I'm too disturbed to tell:
From the shimmering lines of life
I extract a forgotten phrase...

Is it a thief who turns his lantern
Upon the crowd of dreary letters?
I can't help reading the phrase,
But haven't the strength to go back...

It really had to flare up,
But it only harries the darkness;
All night, like a gas-flame butterfly
It trembles, but cannot escape...

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

After The Concert

The blackened skies have reached the garden walk;
Yet my poor heart tonight cannot be not the restless...
The lights that have been failed, the lost of sounds talk,
Are they the remnants of the dream in sadness?

Oh, how sad it was, the satin of her dress,
Her breast was very white, among the straps black fair!
How sorry I was then to see her eyes distressed,
Her hands in snowy gloves, resigned as to a prayer!

And how much her soul was mercilessly dispersed,
Among the tearless, cold-hearted and unsettled!
Like sounds, bred in silence, were there spelled –
The starry sounds – lilac, bright, and gentle!

Like at an anguish's flesh, from broken a lace,
In dazzling light of moon, with gentleness and fire,
Roll dawn amethysts into the dewy mire,
And die without trace.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Amethysts

My eyes forgot the heavens' blue,
To them the sun's dust is not gold,
But I live just one substance through,
That's to the amethyst's planes owned.

'Cause that that, drunker than young spring
And troubling stronger than idea,
The lilac fires have to sing
And coldly play with colors here.

And for the heart with pain and shame,
A dream comes, tender and deceiving:
As a crystal in the candles' flame,
To stay in cold of lilac singing.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Among The Worlds

Among worlds shone, amid glimmers,
A single star whose name I repeat....
Not so that I may come to love it,
But because I am weary of the rest.

And if I find doubt a burden,
I seek only from her an answer,
Not because she shines brightly
But because with her I need no light.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Among Worlds

Among the worlds, the sparkling spheres,
The name of One Star only I repeat...
It's not because I love Her dearly
But just because I pine with others.

And when by doubt I'm troubled
I pray to Her alone for answers.
It's not because She gives off light,
But just because with Her I don't need light.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Bow And Strings

What heavy, dark delirium!
What dim and moonlit heights!
To touch the violin for years
And not to know the strings by light!

Who needs us now? And who lit up
Two hollow, melancholy faces...
And suddenly the bow felt
Someone take them up, unite them.

"How long it's been! Amidst this gloom
Just tell me this: are you still the same?"
The strings caressed the bow,
Rang out, caressed it slightly trembling.

"Is it not true, that we will never more
Be parted. It's enough..."
Yes, replied the violin,
But pain was throbbing in her heart.

The bow discerned it and grew mute,
The echo still continued in the violin...
What was a torture to them both
The people heard as music.

But the violinist didn't snuff
The candles out 'til dawn...The strings sang on...
The sun found them worn out
On the black velvet of their bed.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Children

Has time come? I'm fully ready.
If we've sinned – there's no a chance...
We – to prisons, they – to gladness...
Give to children – sun and grass!

When one's child – the life's thread's thinner,
Days are shorter in that age...
Do not scold a little `sinner`,
Pet a child without edge.

You're a looser if whenever
Cannot understand your child,
Drew child's whisper – what's a shame there!
Bigger shame – to raise his fright!

But the sinless children's tears
Can't be dried, tho' you confess,
'Tis because they always bear
Jesus Christ in holly rays.

But they which live like in prisons,
Whose arms are the thinnest threads...
People! Brothers! Aren't these reasons
Why our peace is only death?

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Ego

A weak son of the dying generation,
I would not seek the roses of Alps,
I will not gain the beautiful sensation,
Not from wave's noise, nor from young tempests hums.

But I would see on fields of scarlet glass
The brilliant and forever crying highlands,
The faded flowers in whites of tables' vase,
The ornament, that flame of evening founds.

And when my head has sunk in nightly rest,
I read dreamed stories, lost of any real,
Forgotten words of books, burned in forgotten past,
In hazy sleep, I kiss with hot appeal.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Harmony

In midst of waves, there are the silver beads
And scraped by time paints of the white enamel ...
I so like the morns which autumn breeds,
For their caress, so short and so gentle.

And I do like the foam on the shore,
When it again is whitening in mire,
And, greedy, I am hiding here a store
Of hazy days, while skies are full of fire.

But somewhere there, they're roaming in flame,
The same ones as I am, without name and number,
And somebody's young being – just the same –
Instead of me, is ceasing in sad amber.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

I Thought That The Heart...

I thought that the heart made of stone,
That it's fully empty and dead:
Though fire in it had been thrown,
It's not damaged or just upset.

And that's right: it was not tormented,
If – painful, then only a bit,
But, yet, it is better to end it,
Put out, while you can do it...

The heart is in darkness entire,
I've known: the victory's mine –
At last, we extinguished the fire...
And, yet, in a smoke I die.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

My Life's Burden...

My life's burden's for me light and shone,
I won't you to be baffled or wound;
And not God, who had thought on a stone –
I do pity the stone he's found.

I do pity the violet, faded -
Just in vain – just forgot among pages,
And the mist, by which glass has been laden,
Then – dissolved by hot tears for ages.

Not the mad woman's pain, but the willow
Is awaking my heart's even sadness,
'Cause, while lulling this pain on leaves' pillows,
It was tired and cut by winds merciless.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Notturmo

Select a dark night and in a field, unpeopled, naked,
dip into gray twilight.... May the air, having fanned, becalm,
May the stars, winking, in the cold sky slumber on....
Tell the heart not to count its thumps....
Stop in mid-step and listen! You're not alone... The wings
of a bird, heavy, sodden, drift through the fog.
Listen.... it's the flight of a predator, a sovereign avian,
They call that bird T i m e, and on its wings is your will,
A passing dream of happiness, hopes' golden rags ...

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Poetry (Sonnet)

The life's chance and creative spirit
United painfully in you,
And midst the beauty's hitting views
There's not so airy and exquisite...

In the world desert's sandy grounds –
Where all's a host, you fell in love
With cosmos of the different sounds
And flowers of troubled life.

Untouchable, transparent wholly!
We're pined by you, oh, goddess holly,
When, through pale slots, you, vaguely viewed,

Such grasp all our thought and body,
That if to fall in love with you –
Love will be mad for everybody.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Poppies

The gay day is ablaze... And in the languid grass
The poppies' patches burn like impotent desire...
Like lips that can allure or deathly poison us,
Or wings of butterfly, wide spread and red like fire.

The gay day is ablaze... But old and empty stands
This garden, long ago lost of the feasts and pleasure,
And poppies, weathered, like old women's heads,
Are warmly overspread by heaven chalice, azure.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Sad Country

Sad and made of copper
The symbol we are wed,
Even our comedies
End a little sadly....
Our joyful neighbors
Wear their infernal
Hirsute fur coats....
And that only... banal
Are our mangy bears
With prey trembling
In blood-covered lips.

For what purpose, when dreams betray,
That words brim over with delusions?
For what purpose, on a forgotten grave,
Grass grows greener and emits a noise?

For what purpose these lunar heights,
If my garden is silent and dark?
And the tails of her plaits are untied,
And I hear their breath... for what?

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

September

The gardens full of gold and decay,
With lure of purple of the swelling ailments,
And tardy heat of sun in curves of sunbeam's remnants,
Unable to distil into the fragrant spray.

The carpets' yellow silk and traces, roughly laid,
And the avowed false of the preceding meeting,
And ponds of parks, extinguished, deep and sad,
And ready long ago for suffering and missing...

But ones' hearts only seek past beauty in decays,
Just the allurement of enchanted forces,
And they, who've tested the unearthly lotus,
Are thrilled by fragrance of autumnal days.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

The Anguish Of A Mirage

They faded, the last bands of reddish,
Like whispers of prayers in night,
O tale, such seductive and maddish,
What else do you want of this heart?

Are not, beyond measure and count,
So hard in the snows my ways?
Aren't gray empty spaces around?
Isn't husky the ring of the bells?

And why, every minute and instant,
My heart is divided in two?
I know that she is in distance,
But feel her right near me, too.

Here they are, the snowy clouds,
I can't take my eyes from all that:
Right now, shall merge our routs
In snows, so white and so dead.

Right now will be silently bound
And newly unbound our sleighs.
We'll hear the bell's common sound
In an instant of sadness and pains...

We'd heard... But we'll not any more
Have meeting in this hazy night...
In the circle of anguish and woe
I wander on my path of blight...

They faded, the last bands of reddish,
Like whispers of prayers in night,
O tale, such seductive and maddish,
What else do you want of this heart?

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

The Autumnal Romance

1903

I watch you as coldly as never,
But can't keep this pine in my breast,
Today sun's in smoke of havens,
And sadness makes heavy a breath.

I know, I breed just a fable –
At least, trust to fables, - but you?..
Like needless oblations, in alleys,
Leaves fall in the mournful hue.

We're joined by the fate that was blinded:
Would God join us 'there' – behind sky?..
Don't laugh, if in spring days, delighted,
You'll step on the lives that here die.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

The Bow And The Strings

How dark and heavy's the delirium's embrace!
How they're turbid under moon – the heights!
To have touched Violin for so many years
And not distinguish those Strings in light!

Who craves for us? Who, insolent, has set
In flames two faces, yellow and vexed,
And suddenly the saddened Bow felt
That someone took them and forever merged.

'How long ago it was – as in a dream –
Tell me through dark: are you the same one, else?'
And Strings pressed close, caressing, to him,
Ringing and tossing in their fond caress.

'Is that all true, that it's enough, God blessed,
That we shall never ever part again?
And poor Violin replied him always 'yes',
Though its heart was sinking in sharp pain.

Bow fell silent, understanding, then,
But poor Violin still echoed its complaint,
And what seemed music to the most men,
To both of them was everlasting pain.

The man didn't blow, till the night was gone,
The candles ... And the Strings were singing, yet...
And they were found, drained of strength, by sun
On the black velvet of the sleepless bed.

Translated by Yevgeny Bonver, January, 2001

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

The Candles Are Brought In

Don't you have the strange vision sometimes
(When a dark penetrates in a house)
Of another existence for us,
Where we live in the other life's phases?

There, a shade's softly pressed to a shade,
And such wonderful minute there hovers,
Where as if, through the beams by eyes sent,
We unite our bodies and souls.

We afraid that a word or a move
Would get off this magnificent instant,
As if one puts his ear above
And recalls us to listen at distance.

But as soon as a candle is kindled,
Second world would this minute retire...
And from eyes through the light's rays inclined,
Shades would run into pale-blue of fire.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

The Old Barrel Organ

We almost lost our minds through that mad sky:
It blinds us with its fire or its snow,
And, baring teeth, like any beast of wild,
Old winter hides in April very slow.

No sooner has it fallen into sleep,
That has again its helmet over brows,
And those streams, gone into snow deeps,
Cease their song and freeze in deadly silence.

But all this is forgotten in the past,
The garden hums, and whitens vibrant stone,
And rooms look with opened windows' eyes,
At dark-green grass, over the road sown.

But only one – the barrel organ old
Shivers with cold in May of sunset's languor -
Can't ever grind all injuries recalled,
As it rotates the heedful shaft with anger.

This rusty barrel cannot understand
That all its work is void of any goal,
That any pain of old age extends,
On every pin and every turn, in whole.

But even if it once were to discern
Its own fate and fate of the street organ,
It would not ever cease to sing and turn -
'Cause every song is one of pain and moan.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

The Pine Of Reminiscence

I see always the page that is filled on
By the muddy-black blotches of ink.
I am able from men to be hidden,
But to where could I run from night's brink?

All that live has become so distant,
That didn't come – so perfectly watched,
And forgotten lines merge from that instant
Till next dawn into many a blotch.

I'm all there – in impossible answers,
Where the letters of dreams loom in sight...
I like children to be in a house –
And these children to cry in the night.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

The Spring Romance

The river else doesn't wholly reign,
But pale-blue ice is drowned now;
And clouds are not blue again,
But sun had drunk the snow out.

Through a half-opened door,
You fret a heart with rustle; though...
You are not else in love; but lor!
You can't not fall in love tomorrow.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

To The Poet

In different clearness of rays,
In addling amalgam of visions
We always live in world's things' reign
With its triad of space division.

And spreading borders of this life,
Or multiplying forms by fable,
To hide your I from not-I's eyes
You will be never-never able.

This power's your leading star,
It has your God and nature's law,
And before it, it's pale and far –
The Art, belittling things' great role.

You can not flee from slaving reign
To look for charms of airy smears,
The deepness is not verse's main,
But just a puzzle which it bears.

.....

So, love the clearness and rays,
In the aroma – their creation,
And cut bright bowls for the grace
And always integral receptions.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

Two Loves

S. B. f-Shtein

There is such love that's similar to smoke:
If it is bound – it's intoxicating,
Receiving freedom – vanished, not awaiting...
Be like the smoke – but in young years locked.

There is such love that's similar to shade:
If it is day – lay by your feet – a hound,
If it is night – embraced you all around...
Be like the shade – together night and day...

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky

You'Re Again With Me

You're again with me, my girlfriend autumn?
But through your net of the boughs bared,
Bluish tints were ne'er such pale and frozen,
And I don't recall the snow more dead.

I've not seen some sadder than your rabble,
And such black as all your lakes and streams,
In your skies – old, faded and unstable –
Yellow clouds of my painful dreams.

Just to see this all, while fully freezing...
How strangely new is this air cold...
Do you know, I thought, more dizzying
Is to see the empty deeps of words.

Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky