

# POET AS HIEROPHANT

*Svyet Vyecherni: Poems by Vyacheslav Ivanov.* Commentary by O. Deschartes. Edited by Dimitri Ivanov. 229pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. 35s.

Vyacheslav Ivanov was one of the older generation of Russian symbolists, a contemporary of Merezhkovsky and Balmont. Born in 1866, he was a brilliant classicist who abandoned a scholarly career for one as a poet and philosopher. Together with Andrey Bely, he became one of the chief theoreticians of the symbolist movement, emphasizing in his critical works the mystical and religious aspects of the new poetry. A clash between this outlook and that of other poets, like Bryusov, who saw symbolism primarily as a poetic technique, led to a split in the movement, and in 1906 Ivanov became the leader of the "mystical anarchists", a group originally formed by the poet Chulkov.

After 1912 Ivanov's influence declined: this was due partly to his

even Sumarokov, than that of his contemporaries.

All these traits are to be found in the earlier poems in this new collection. But there are also to be found those qualities which redeem the best of Ivanov's early poetry: a power and intensity of feeling which transcend the ornateness and intricacy of his style. *Svyet Vyecherni* also contains a number of poems, mainly *pièces d'occasion*, which are little more than trivia, and have no real interest in themselves. Nearly half the book however is taken up by four groups of poems: three sonnet cycles—*Winter Sonnets*, *De Profundis Amavi* and *Roman Sonnets*—and the *Roman Diary of 1944*. It is these poems which give the book its value.

The *Winter Sonnets* were written during the winter of 1919-20, when Ivanov's wife Vera and his children were in hospital. As well as being a record of his own hardships and fears at that time, they seem to characterize Ivanov's attitude towards the Revolution, which emerges as an elemental force, cruelly indifferent to man's search for food, warmth and shelter.

The cycle *De Profundis Amavi* dates from 1920. It was written in a rest home outside Moscow and celebrates his love for his first wife, Lidiya Zinoveva-Annibal, who died in 1907, and for his second wife, who was to die in 1920. In the *Roman Sonnets*, composed on his return to Rome in 1924, the poet describes with a new warmth and tenderness his favourite corners of the city, and seems in these poems to foreshadow his conversion to Roman Catholicism two years later. The 116 poems of the *Roman Diary* are perhaps Ivanov's finest work. They follow the progress of the year from day to day, reflecting the actual events of 1944 in Rome—the Allied aerial bombardments, the German evacuation—yet at the same time commemorating events long past—the death of the philosopher Solovyov, of the poet's wife—which obviously to Ivanov possess the same degree of reality.

Ivanov kept his Platonic ideals to the end; he believed firmly in the existence of a higher reality, of which the objects of this world are but a reflection. In these last poems he succeeds in conveying this conception with a serenity and peace, and above all with a simplicity, which are deeply moving.

Sir Maurice Bowra has written an enlightening introduction, and O. Deschartes, Ivanov's constant companion during the last years of his life, has contributed an extremely valuable and fascinating commentary, which is a great help to understanding the poems.

## md Sight

gift of second sight  
eyes and watch my heart,  
ss, but untrue love  
shadow of.  
h. We have all night.  
at the first sight.

ROBERT NYE.

move from St. Petersburg to Moscow, when his famous "Wednesdays"—his literary receptions—ended, and also to the gradual eclipse of symbolism, which was replaced, first by the acmeism of Gumilev and Gorodetsky, and then by the futurism of Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky.

Ivanov's attitude to the revolution was a detached one: he did not emigrate, as did Merezhkovsky, but neither did he write poems in praise of Lenin, as did Bryusov. For a short time he worked in the theatrical section of the People's Commissariat for Education, but in 1920 moved to Baku, where for four years he was Professor of Classical Philology. In 1924 he left Russia for Italy, going first to Pavia, and then to Rome, where he remained until his death in 1949.

This new collection of Ivanov's poems is the first since the appearance of *Nezhnaya Tayna* in 1912. It contains nearly 300 poems written between 1914 and 1949, of which 117 are appearing in print for the first time. Ivanov's early poetry tends to be rhetorical, pedantic and esoteric. He regards poetry primarily as a religious search and the poet as a hierophant. This conception naturally requires an "elevated" style for its expression, and the language of these poems, with its complicated syntax, compound adjectives and numerous Slavonicisms, seems closer to that of Derzhavin, or