

**MODERN RUSSIAN
POETRY; AN
ANTHOLOGY**

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Modern Russian poetry; an anthology by Babette Deutsch & Avrahm Yarmolinsky

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BABETTE DEUTSCH & AVRAHM YARMOLINSKY

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AN ANTHOLOGY

CHOSEN AND TRANSLATED BY
BABETTE DEUTSCH
AND
AVRAHM YARMOLINSKY



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1921

Acknowledgments

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Foreword

This volume heaps the anthological Pelion upon the Ossa of translation. It aims to present the lyrical poetry of Russia for the last hundred years by a selection of poems translated by the editors. Within the fences thus set up lay a wide foreign field to pick from: the old-fashioned garden overrun by the rank growth of exotic flowers, beautiful weeds outflanking the hothouse plants. The principle of selection was, so far as might be, æsthetic. Poems were chosen less for their representative quality than for their immediate worth and, of course, their ability to stand the test of translation. In view of the pioneer character of this work, however, some concession was made to historical considerations, and, therefore, part of the material included may appear rather jejune and *vieux jeu*. The effort was to give a brief general glimpse of the classic poets and to treat in greater detail the moderns and contemporaries who are, to the translators, as to the readers, more of a living actuality.

The difficulties of selection are obvious. You may add, you may alter the choice how you will, but the sin of omission will cling round it still. In this case the problem was sharpened by the rigors of translation. These were not mere flowers for the plucking. They had to be transplanted into strange soil, which was not hospitable to them all. Translation has been likened to "the wrong side of a Turkey carpet." The question was

how best to carry over, unbroken and undiminished, the colors and contours of the right side. We are attached to the idea that we have given as much to the originals as we took from them. Adherence to metrical and rhythmical structure was possible, owing to the essential likeness between the two languages with regard to versification. In matters of imagery and the finer aspects of technique there was also an attempt to be as faithful as the linguistic media allow. But juggling is a fine art, not unworthy of the service of Notre Dame, and the three bright balls of substance, form, and spirit were not always easy to keep in the air at once. What we continually sought was to produce, in the end, a poem.

The personality of each poet is brought out in a note preceding the selection from his work, and the filiation of poetic movements is briefly indicated in the introductory essay.

And finally a word *pro domo nostra*. While it may be difficult to single out each collaborator's part in the work, it is possible, and perhaps interesting, to define the attitude of each. The one, native to Russian literature, brought to the task all the prejudices and privileges of long intimacy. The other, a stranger, saw it with the fresh vision and untaught caprice of a foreigner, making a less practised and a more personal approach. The one was aware, the other persuaded of the gold in the Scythian earth. The two labored together to wrest it, like the one-eyed Arimaspi, from the guardian gryphons.

BABETTE DEUTSCH.

AVRAHM YARMOLINSKY.

New York, June 28, 1921.

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