

ELEVEN POEMS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649755790

Eleven poems by Rubén Dario & Thomas Walsh & Salomon de la Selva

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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RUBÉN DARÍO & THOMAS WALSH & SALOMON DE LA SELVA

ELEVEN POEMS

ELEVEN POEMS OF
RUBÉN DARÍO

TRANSLATIONS BY
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AND
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INTRODUCTION BY
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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
1916

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Contents

	Page
Introduction	v
Primavera!	3
(Primavera!)	
Autumnal	7
(Autumnal)	
Portico	13
(Pórtico)	
The Three Wise Kings	23
(Los Tres Reyes Magos)	
Song of Hope	25
(Canto de Esperanza)	
Poets! Towers of God	29
(¡Torres de Dios! Poetas!)	
A Sonnet on Cervantes	31
(Soneto a Cervantes)	
On the Death of a Poet	33
(En la Muerte de un Poeta)	

	Page
Antonio Machado	35
(Oración por Antonio Machado)	
Bagpipes of Spain	37
(Gaita Galaica)	
Song of Autumn in the Springtime	39
(Canción de Otoño en Primavera)	
Bibliography	45
Criticisms	47

Introduction

WITH the death of Rubén Darío, the Spanish language loses its greatest poet of to-day,—the greatest because of the æsthetic value and the historical significance of his work. No one, since the times of Góngora and Quevedo, has wielded an influence comparable, in renewing power, to Darío's. Zorrilla's influence, for instance, was enormous, but not in the sense of a true innovation: when it spread, the romantic movement he represented was already the dominant force in our literature. Darío did much more, in prosody and in style as well as in the spirit of poetry. Darío's victory was not without surprising elements,—especially because, born in the New World, he was unreservedly acclaimed by the intellectual groups of our former metropolis, Madrid. The homage of the Spanish writers to Darío was great and sincere. Even Royal Academicians, in spite of the timidity natural in traditional institutions, paid signal tribute to his genius. Upon the news of his death, the writers and artists of Spain, headed by Valle-Inclán (the greatest literary force in the present generation), organized a movement to erect a monument to his memory in the royal gardens of the Buen Retiro.

Darío began, when very young, writing quite within
v.]

the traditions of our language and literature. He was a reader of both the classics and the moderns, and essayed such widely different tones as those corresponding to the solemnity of the blank verse and to the fluency of the *romance*. Soon after, he took up the study of the modern French and, partly, the English literatures; and his poetry, in *Azul*, began to show the marvellous variety of shading and the preciousity of workmanship which were to be his distinctive traits in *Prosas profanas*. His most important achievement was the book of *Cantos de vida y esperanza*. There he attained (especially in the autobiographical *Pórtico*) a depth of human feeling and a sonorous splendor of utterance which placed him among the modern poets of first rank in any language. His later work did not always rise to that magnificence, but it often took a bold, rough-hewn, sort of *Rodinesque* form, which has found many admirers.

As a prosodist, Rubén Darío is unique in Spanish. He is the poet who has mastered the greatest variety of verse forms. The Spanish poets of the last four centuries, whether in Europe or in America, although they tried several measures, succeeded only in a few. Like the Italians before Carducci, they had command only over the hendecasyllabic, octosyllabic and heptasyllabic forms. A few meters, besides these three, have at times enjoyed popularity, as, for instance, the

alexandrine during the romantic period; but they suffered from stiffness of accentuation. Darío, and the modernist groups which sprang into action mainly through his stimulus, gave vogue, and finally permanence, to a large number of metrical forms: either verses rarely used, like the enneasyllabic and the dodecasyllabic (of which there are three types), or verses, like the alexandrine, to which Darío gave greater musical virtue by freeing the accent and the cesura. Even the hendecasyllable acquired new flexibility when Darío brought back two new forms of accentuation that had been used by Spanish poets during three centuries but had been forgotten since about 1800. He also attacked the problem of the classic hexameter, which has tempted many great modern poets, from Goethe to Swinburne and Carducci, and, before these, a few of the Spanish in the XVIIth century, chiefly Villegas. He introduced, finally, the modern *vers libre*, the type in which the number of feet, but not the foot, changes (as in the *Marcha triunfal*), as well as the type in which both the number of syllables and the foot vary frequently.

X In style, Rubén Darío represents another renewal. He not only fled from the hackneyed, from expressions which, like coins, were worn out by use: it is the natural outcome of every new artistic or literary tendency to do away with the useless remains of for-
vii]

X mer styles. He did much more; together with a few others, like Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera of Mexico, Darío brought back into Spanish the art of nuance, of delicate shading, in poetical style. This art, all but absent from Spanish poetry during two centuries, had been substituted by the forceful drawing and vivid coloring which foreigners expect to find in all things Spanish.

In the spirit of poetry, Rubén Darío succeeded in giving "*des frissons nouveaux*." If not the first, he was one of the first (simultaneously with Gutiérrez Nájera, with Julian del Casal, of Cuba, and José Asunción Silva, of Colombia) to bring into Spanish the notes of subtle emotion of which Verlaine was arch master; the gracefulness and the brilliancy which emerge from the world of Versaillesque courts and feigned Arcadies; the decorative sense of a merely external Hellenism, which is delightful in its frank artificiality; the suggestions of exotic worlds, opulent storehouses of imaginative treasures.

But, while he did all this, he never lost his native force: he was, and he knew how to be, American,—Spanish-American, rather. He sang of his race, of his people,—the whole Spanish-speaking family of nations,—with constant love, with a tenderness which at times was almost childlike. If he did not always think that life in the New World was poetical, he did think