

Crowley's The Translator

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 29 Mar 2002

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Russell Wodell — 29 Mar 2002, 16:11

Notes from a first reading:

1. The source seems to be Auden's famous quote that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of reality. Here, this seems to be interpreted as poet=saint or poet=angel.
2. Crowley seems to be saying that the peaceful resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis was a literal miracle. Exactly how an exiled Russian poet could prevent nuclear war is left as teasingly unclear as the actions of the fairies in "Little, Big."
3. The poetic concept that each nation has two opposing angels seems to be meant literally as well -- but Crowley is a recovering Catholic and is deeply ambiguous about this. There are several candidates for America's dark angel.
4. The hostile NY Times review complained that Crowley's invented Russian poetry was awful. I strongly disagree: I found it moving and much more authentic than, say D.M. Thomas's similar efforts in his novels (though his translations of actual poetry are sometime marvellous).

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Matthew Davis — 31 Mar 2002, 13:26 · follows Russell Wodell

1. The source seems to be Auden's famous quote that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of reality. Here, this seems to be interpreted as poet=saint or poet=angel.

The "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" quote is from Shelley, not Auden. "Poet" in Greek means "maker", so poets are the creators of our world, in as much they shape our understanding of them. Besides Nabokov and Brodsky, I also wonder how much Robert Frost might be an influence - at the time of the Cuba Crisis I think he made some notable comment but I can't remember what. But then again copies of "The Translator" haven't even begun appearing over in the UK, so what do I know.

I haven't seen this review yet (was it in the NYTBR, or in the daily paper?)

Reviews of Crowley's Translator so far:

Locus, February 2002 (Faren Miller) - not online

Book Magazine, March/April 2002 (James Schiff)

<http://www.bookmagazine.com/issue21/capsules.shtml#Crowley>

New York Times, March 13, 2002 (Richard Eder)

<http://query.nytimes.com/search/full-page?res=9B01E0DE1539F930A25750C0A9649C8B63>

Christian Science Monitor, March 21, 2002 (Ron Charles)

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0321/p15s02-bogn.html>

Salon, March 21, 2002 (Laura Miller)

<http://www.salon.com/books/review/2002/03/21/crowley/index.html?x>

Washington Post Book World, March 24, 2002 (Howard Norman)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A276-2002Mar21→Found=true>

San Francisco Chronicle, March 24, 2002 (Miriam Wolf)

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/chronicle/archive/2002/03/24/RV128730.DTL>

Booksense magazine has an interview with Crowley about "The Translator"

<http://www.booksense.com/people/archive/crowleyjohn.jsp>

Adam Stephanides — 01 Apr 2002, 16:48 · follows Matthew Davis

on 3/31/02 7:26 AM, Matthew Davis at matthew at michaelscycles.freemove.co.uk wrote:

Besides Nabokov and Brodsky, I also wonder how much Robert Frost might be an influence - at the time of the Cuba Crisis I think he made some notable comment but I can't remember what.

Frost read a poem at Kennedy's inauguration, referred to on p. 4 of THE TRANSLATOR (which also has another reference to the Shelley quote). Neither Falin's poems nor Kit's own poems seem Frost-like to me, though I don't know that much about poetry.

--Adam

Adam Stephanides — 02 Apr 2002, 15:29 · follows Adam Stephanides

on 3/29/02 10:11 AM, Russell Wodell at hse at telus.net wrote:

4. The hostile NY Times review complained that Crowley's invented Russian poetry was awful.

I read the review cited by Matthew Davis, in the Mar. 13 NYT, and in fact it praises Falin's poetry. Was there another NYT review? I'd call the review as a whole mixed rather than hostile; the reviewer praises the character of Falin highly (though I strongly disagree with the statement that Kit is a "pallid figure").

--Adam