

POETRY

Published September 12, 2018

THE TOM (THE TURKEY)**AUTHOR**

Nikolay Gumilev

Translated from Russian by Anne Becker and Leonid Margolis

DOI

10.20411/pai.v3i2.229

From the dawn of my unfaithful memories,
I recollect a dappled meadow
Where reigned a haughty Tom
Whom I adored.

Independence and rage were in him;
His beak was as scarlet as flame;
And because I was four years old,
He roundly despised me.

Neither chocolate nor caramels,
Nor pineapple soda,
Could console me
For the knowledge of my shame.

Today a great anguish returns,
With the humiliation and grief of my early years,
When you, my adored, cruel,
Proudly deny me.

But everything passes in this fluid life,
Love will pass, sorrow will pass,
And I will recall you with a smile
As I recall the turkey.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nikolay Gumilev was born in April 1886 in Kronstadt, a port about 40 miles west of St. Petersburg, to the family of a navy doctor. From childhood, he had so many serious health problems that he had to drop out of high school. Throughout his life he tried to prove to himself that he had overcome his health issues by pursuing many adventures such as travelling through Europe, hunting in the wilds of Africa, fighting a duel with another poet, taking many wives (including Anna Akhmatova, one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century), and volunteering during World

War I to fight at the front (where he was awarded an order for heroism).

Gumilev wrote his first poem when he was six. His first book of poems was published when he was a student. During his life he was immensely popular and founded a new poetry movement, “acmeism.”

In 1921, four years after the Bolsheviks came to power, Gumilev was accused of being a member of an underground organization plotting to overthrow the government. He was executed together with 61 other intellectuals on August 26, 1921. He was only 35. When, in the 1990s, the KGB archives were partially opened it was discovered that not only was Gumilev falsely incriminated, but the entire underground organization of which he was accused of being a member did not exist and was invented by the GPU, the predecessor of the KGB.

FOOTNOTES

Submitted December 18, 2017 | Accepted December 19, 2017 | Published September 12, 2018

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