

An Anthology of Belgian Symbolist Poets

Donald Flanell Friedman
Editor

PETER LANG

An Anthology
of Belgian Symbolist Poets

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Donald Flanell Friedman
General Editor

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EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
Donald Flanell Friedman



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Printed in Germany

For my mother and father

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NOTE TO THE RE-EDITION

 It is with pleasure that I again offer this selection of Belgian Symbolist poetry, first published in the Garland World Literature in Translation series in 1992. I remain struck by the visionary immediacy of the Belgian verse achieved in a remarkable efflorescence a century ago. The pleasure is heightened by the fact that the poems will appear in the Belgian Francophone Library. My resounding thanks to the many authors in Europe and the U.S. who have made this a vibrant series. At the Belgian Ministry of Culture, I would like to express gratitude to Marc Quaghebeur with whom I conceived the series, and appreciation to Jean-Luc Outers, who has unfailingly nurtured and supported the series since its inception. They have made this a fruitful collaborative venture.

This *Anthology of Belgian Symbolist Poets* was originally inspired by the work of Anna Balakian, whom I am proud to claim as mentor. The example of this great scholar remains luminous. She combined intellectual penetration, absolute openness to the essence of poetry, and the ability to live life with intense commitment. I would like to express appreciation to the Spanish poet, Francesc Miguel Franch, who generously shared his expertise and poetic insight during the translation process.

I am fortunate to enjoy the friendship of scholars of the Belgian fin de siècle, Jane Block, Adrienne Fontainas, Steven Goddard, and Patrick Laude. I am grateful for their profound work and warm rapport. My path has been lit by the creation of Paul Williams and by Elza Willems' understanding and sustaining friendship. With gratitude, I honor the memory of scholar, Luc Fontainas, who, with characteristic kindness, introduced me to poets included in this anthology.

I would like to express warm appreciation to Dr. Madeleine Jacobs for her radiant wisdom and guidance.

The encouragement of my mother and father, their sensitivity to all manifestations of beauty, made this work possible. Friederike Zeitlhofer is ever an inspiring and joyous presence, a source of hope in my world.

Donald Flanell Friedman
Winthrop University
February, 2002

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BELGIAN SYMBOLISM: A POETRY OF PLACE AND DISPLACEMENT

 Belgian Symbolism participates in the essence of the international movement, which originated in France and swept Europe at the turn of the century. In its broadest definition, Symbolism is a style and a mystique unconcerned with mimetic representation of objects and events in their historical reality, but with evocation and distillation of mood. The thrust of the movement was to suggest, in indirect discourse, the secrets of interiority, thereby creating an enduring zone of aesthetic experience distanced from the mundane concerns and materialism of society. The elusive and evanescent, the disappearance of the lyric self, masked by the personae of myth and legend, such is the general aura of Symbolism. Within this aura, Belgian Symbolism has its own particular nuance and characteristics which encompass the highly varied and individualistic creation of many young writers—beginning in the 1880's, with prolongations lasting through the 1920's—who found artistic renewal in giving expression to the mysterious and uncharted depths of interiority.

In the January, 1894 *Le Reveil*, Victor Remouchamps wrote of the “Interior World”: “We have everything within us. The mind is an ocean of sensations, a universe of visions; but it is necessary to know how to explore it . . .”¹ Paradoxically, the key to this exploration was vouchsafed the Belgian Symbolists by means of highly concrete imagery, culled from the exterior world, which became a transparent screen and mirror allowing access to inner states. Emile Verhaeren summarized the essential modality and distinction of Belgian Symbolism in an 1887 article in *L'Art Moderne*: “One begins with things seen, heard, felt, tasted in order to give rise to evocation. . . .”² Concrete imagery may dilate, expand in meaning to encompass abstract states of mind. In his well-known response to an inquiry by Jules Huret, Mallarmé had distinguished two types of symbolic usage, either to gradually evoke an object in order to demonstrate a mood or, conversely, to start with an object and, through deciphering, disengage a mood from it.³ The second usage