



Swan Songs: Akhmatova & Gumilev

Francis Laird

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On a snowy St. Petersburg street in 1903, Nikolai Gumilev, already a budding poet, met and fell in love with the fourteen year old Anna Gorenko (Akhmatova). In that moment, she would take her place at the center of Gumilev's emotional life and his poetic world. Despite the painful ruptures between the two over the next eighteen years, she would remain there until his abrupt and violent death in 1921 at the age of thirty-three. *Swan Songs: Akhmatova and Gumilev* is the compelling and tragic story of these two great Russian poets, one well known in the West, the other quite unknown. It is told through their biographies, letters, journals, memoirs and especially the poems that Akhmatova and Gumilev wrote to and about one another. These poems, newly translated by the author and set in the context of their lives, provide the key to unlocking the secrets of this passionate, turbulent and often painful relationship that Akhmatova herself called a 'terrifying and burning love.' This book will follow the two poets through their childhood and student days in Tsarskoe Selo and Gumilev's years of persistent wooing of Anna that finally ended with their marriage. In the Silver Age of Russian poetry, Akhmatova and Gumilev would play leading roles in the lively literary world of St. Petersburg even as their marriage was coming unraveled. These frenetically creative days soon darkened with the coming of the Great War and Gumilev joined the Russian army as a cavalry officer. After too many betrayals on both sides, Akhmatova and Gumilev were divorced and re-married, but both suffered the terrible privations of wartime. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Gumilev attempted to make a place for himself in a new literary landscape, teaching and lecturing. Akhmatova soon realized that her voice would no longer be heard in this brave, new world. In August 1921, Gumilev was suddenly arrested, accused of being part of a conspiracy and shot. Akhmatova was devastated and spent the rest of her life c

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