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"In a vividly atmospheric recreation of the occult underworld of sixteenth century Germany, during an age of Inquisition, three souls meet: an innocent young man choosing between Love and Duty, a woman prone to visions and a Knight, who is either angel or demon." Religious experience and sexual hysteria meet in an apocalyptic vision of the spiritual crisis of modern life. The Fiery Angel is one of the great novels of decadent occultism.

The Fiery Angel Details

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From Reader Review The Fiery Angel for online ebook

Vit Babenco says

The Fiery Angel is a unique hybrid of Gothic novel and roman à clef – in a symbolic and grotesque way it portrays the relationships between Valery Bryusov, Nina Petrovskaya, and Andrei Bely. The narration has an apparent satirical vein and the depiction of the Witches' Sabbath is especially mockingly picturesque.

I also asked if the snakes and tritons, crawling under our feet, could do us any harm but Sarraska, laughing happily, assured me that the creatures are sweet and harmless and, dragging a snake from under the table, entwined it around her breasts; the snake started tenderly licking her neck with its forked tongue and was playfully biting her red nipple.

And there is a special accolade of becoming a Devil's disciple:

And I gave Master Leonard two prescribed kisses. For the first one he mercifully offered me his hand and touching it with my lips, I could see one peculiarity: all the fingers and a thumb were of the equal length, crooked and clawed like those of a vulture. For the second kiss he stood up, turned to me his back, raising his tail, long as the one of a donkey, above me, and I, playing my role perfectly, stooped down and osculated the goat's ass, black and exuding disgusting mephitis, but at the same time strangely reminding of a human countenance.

But despite all the satirical hues the tale ends tragically...

Those who believe in God must also believe in the Devil so serving God they unwittingly serve the Devil too.

Berseri says

Besides being an exciting reading, this novel has an interesting peculiarity: if you check maps of Germany of that period, you can see what a thorough work the author has done- all the pathes walked by characters really existed. He also included historical facts.

Eadweard says

Quite an odd book, I'm not sure what to make of it, if I didn't know it was published in 1908, I would have taken it for a "modern" "fantasy" novel. If you enjoy historical fiction you will probably enjoy it just for the setting and all the things the protagonist writes about. If you liked The Master and Margarita and Là-bas you will probably enjoy it too. I'll see if I can watch the Prokofiev opera somewhere.

"From the small bag she had brought, she took out a few sprigs of herb: heather, verbena, wolf's bane, orache, and yet another herb with white flowers, the name of which I do not know. With her left hand Renata plucked the leaves from the herbs and threw them over her head on to the floor, but then she gathered them again and placed them on the table in a circle. Next she plunged a knife into the table surface in the middle of the circle, tied its handle round with string, passed the end of the string to me and said, looking at me attentively:

"Command it thrice to milk, in the name of Him." Silently watching all this bedevilment, I involuntarily pronounced thrice:

"In the name of the Devil, milk!"

Immediately from under the knife poured a few drops of milk, and Renata joyfully clapped her hands, embraced my shoulders and kept on exclaiming:

"Rupprecht! Dearest Rupprecht! You can! You have the power!"

"Stripped naked, I lowered myself to the floor, on my spread cape, and began to rub this ointment firmly into my chest and in my temples, under my armpits and between my thighs, repeating several times the words: "emen—hetan, emen—hetan," which mean "here—and there."

The ointment slightly burned the flesh and my head began to turn from its odour, so that soon I scarcely was aware what I was doing, my arms hung limp, and my eyelids fell over my eyes. Then my heart began to beat with such strength it seemed as though, tied upon a string, it leapt away from my chest a whole elbow's length, and this caused me pain. I was conscious of the fact that I lay upon the floor of our room, but, when I tried to raise myself up, I was already powerless to do so, and I thought: so all the tales of the Sabbath are babbling nonsense, and the much talked of miraculous ointment is only a sleeping draught—but at that very moment all went dark before me and I suddenly saw myself, or imagined myself, high above the earth, in the air, quite naked, astride as on horseback a woolly black goat."

"Soon I found myself amidst a variegated crowd, which was making merry as at the Feast on Saint John's day, or at the Carnival festivities at Venice. The field on which the Sabbath was being held was rather large, and probably used often for that purpose, for it was so trampled that no grass grew upon it. In places, here and there, fires that burned without fuel rose from within the earth, and they lit all the district by a greenish light like the light of fizgigs. Amidst these flames there bustled, jumped and grimaced three or four hundreds of beings, men and women, either quite naked or barely covered with shirts, some with wax candles in their hands, and also hideous animals of human appearance, enormous toads in green caftans, wolves and wolf hounds upright on their hind legs, apes and long-legged birds; here and there beneath their feet crawled and twisted repulsive serpents, lizards, salamanders, and tritons. In the distance on the very shore of the lake, I could make out some small children with long white staffs, who, not taking part in the merry-making, were grazing a herd of toads of a lesser size.

One of the naked witches who were leading me took an especial interest in me, and showed no sign of

leaving me when the others, dragging me into the crowd, dispersed in various directions. Her face attracted me by its gaiety and pertness and the young body, though with breasts drooping, seemed yet fresh and responsive. She held my hand firmly and, snuggling against me, told me that she was known at the night feasts as Sarraska, and was persuading me: "Come and dance." I saw no reason to refuse her.

[...]

And with these words Sarraska's teeth somehow glittered peculiarly in her mouth—white and sharp teeth; and when I asked again, not without revulsion: whether it were really true that human flesh was so tasty and wolves' caresses so agreeable, she only laughed slyly in reply. Then I asked her whether it had occurred to her to experience the caresses of demons and whether they gave joy. She, not ashamed, declared to me that they do, and a great joy, only their seed is as cold as ice."

Kevin says

Thoroughly enjoyable, and not at all what I was expecting. I'm continuing to love everything I read that Daedalus publishes.

Nora Barnacle says

"Ognjeni an?eo ili Istinita pripovest u kojoj je re? o ?avolu koji se u obliku svetloga duha više puta pokazivao jednoj devojci i kušao je na razne grešne prestupe, o bogoprotivnim bavljenjima magijom, astrologijom, goetijom i nekromantijom, o su?enju toj devojci pod predsedništvom njegovog preosveštenstva nadbiskupa trirskog kao i o susretima i razgovorima s vitezom i trostrukim doktorom Agripom iz Neteshajma i doktorom Faustom, sve ispisano rukom o?iglednog svedoka" je pun naziv i siže ovog romana Valerija Brjusova. Da biste knjigu pro?itali sa oduševljenjem i u dahu, potrebno je da za okultizam imate više interesovanja (ili vere) od mene. Ipak, nisam se pokajala. Štaviše, zabavila sam se za sve pare, a Brjusov me je potpuno oduševio, na više nivoa. Evo, redom:

Najupe?atljiviji utisak je, svakako, autorova u?enost i poznavanje materije. To sve zaklju?ujemo iz veoma izdašnih prevodio?evih napomena, gde se poimence navodi otkud Brjusovu informacija da je Isus na Maslinovoj gori prolio ta?no 97307 kapi krvavog znoja, da ?e nam Ne?astivi prilikom audijencije okrenuti dlakavu guzicu za celov, koji demoni polno opšte sa muškarcima, a koji sa ženama i kako to one ostaju bremenite kad je ?avolsko seme neplodno, kako doslovce zvu?i jedno inkvizitorsko su?enje sprovedeno prema precizno definisanim pravilnicima, kako se deca demon?i?i zabavljaju na sabatima ?uvaju?i kraj jezerceta dlakave žabe... i još stotine sli?nih fantasti?nosti i bizarnosti, dok vam ne stane pamet. Da, moglo bi se re?i da je ovo svojevrsna enciklopedija okultizma, ali, kad to shvatite (ma koliko da vas ne zanima), ipak nastavite sa ?itanjem, jer poenta, zapravo, i nije u tome. Jednako fascinantno je pi?e?e poznavanje životnih prilika u srednjovekovnoj nema?koj (uglavnom Keln, XVI vek), umetnosti, filozofije, sholastike, anti?ke književnosti (na prvom mestu Vergilija, koga je i prevodio), viteških redova, njihovih navika i posrnu?a i sve tako redom, da mu Umberto Eko zdravo pozavidi.

Ognjeni an?eo je sav iz opre?nih dualnosti: hri?ansko – okultno, muško – žensko, bludno – ?edno, ali je, makar za mene, klju?na ona koja se ti?e zatucane prestravljenosti spremne da poveruje u šta bilo i racionalne

prosvećenosti koja i najcrnjoj sotoni pokazuje renesansi srednji prst, i to sve ?eš?e i sve hrabrije baš u vreme opisanih događaja. Brjusov se, istina, eksplicitno ne izjašnjava da li u magiju treba verovati ili ne, ali je moj utisak da mu je ton sve vreme satiričan i da, više od svih bogova i demona veruje u ?udesne moći ljubavi, sa najjačim akcentom na vaginu. Uz tu ideju mi zgodno pristaje i podatak iz Brjusovljeve biografije – tačan ili netačan, kako god – o tome kako su se on i Andrej Beli takmili i na svakojake načine dovijali da osvoje devetnaestogodišnju Ninu Petrovsku. Sem toga, Brjusov, pre svega pesnik i prevodilac, izjašnjavao se kao simbolista, podvrste mistični anarhist (<3). Dodatno, narator Ruprecht prilično hladno govorio o svojim ljubavnim patnjama, bez obzira što u jednom trenutku samu dušu prodaje ?avolu ne bi li utažio strasti za dragom, a da je ta Renata oko koje nastaje ?itavo zamešateljstvo i ?iju prevrtljivost i ?udljivost ne mogu opravdati ni najmagičnije ?ini, jedna od najgavniјih ženetina ?itave istorije književnosti (najzad razumem šta, ustvari, znači „likuša“). Rečju, ja mislim da Brjusov misli da su ?avola izmisliili sladostrasni pesnici da bi žene odveli u krevet, a onda je crkva, shodno svojoj megalomanskoj suštini, sve podigla na nivo ozbiljnog biznisa.

Stilom i manirom „Ognjeni ančeo“ me više podseća srednjovekovni roman nego na ma kog Rusa. Velike slike?nosti sa Bulgakovim ne vidim (ok, ima dosta zajedničkih elementa, ali taman koliko i sve knjige koje obraćaju slike?nu temu, ali svaka ide ka sopstvenom cilju). Svi likovi, uključujući i Fausta, Mefista i Agripu su solidno razvijeni, radnja je linearna, naracija mirna i jasna, a priča uzbudljiva, sa mnogo mogućnosti tumačenja, malo rupa, zdrave suptilne satire, mnogo istorijskih informacija i mnogo sarkazma, pa svako može pronaći nešto za sebe, bilo da traži underground sf, istorijsku fikciju, okultni, gotski, satirični ili pak (malo uvrnut) ljubavni roman.

Prevod Petra Vujičića (za Službeni glasnik) arhaičnim, ali bez problema ?itljivim tonom dodatno doprinosi atmosferi, skupa sa brojnim komentarima. Kao i uvek kada je reč o veoma obrazovanom piscu koji pravi silne aluzije i uvodi desetine istorijskih liknosti, i ovde je, verujem, bilo teško pretpostaviti stepen informisanosti potencijalnog ?itaoca i shodno tome način meru napomenama, pa rešenje „koga interesuje više – snači ?e se“ možda jeste najkorektniji pristup.

Veoma dobro.

Karli says

I was interested in reading this novel initially because of the Prokofiev opera by the same name. Being the type of person who usually watches operas based on books (instead of the other way around), I decided to read the source material before listening to the music.

Since descriptions of The Fiery Angel drew similarities to The Master and Margarita and other Russian novels of the time period, I expected a much different book. The setting is in 16th century Germany, and as it is set as a 'historical novel' it doesn't read anything like other Russian novels. Whether it was the way it was worded in Russian, or the translator's decision, the language is exceedingly flowery and feels very much like something written in the 16th or 17th century. Also like many texts from that time, the main character does things that are quite unbelievable to the contemporary reader in terms of devotion to 'love' and 'honor,' but that I suspect is for effect in this particular novel.

The book constantly keeps the reader wondering if the magical and supernatural experiences the protagonists experience have actually happened, or if it they're merely the product of hysteria, mental illness and

coincidences. Even in the end, nothing is revealed completely and it's up to the individual to decide what they think happened. However, the narrator does display some more 'modern' personal convictions regarding God and religion, even if they are kept to himself as the narrator and never voiced aloud to the other characters in the book. All in all, the book was moderately interesting, and had its high and low points; in my opinion the story really picks up towards the end.

As an interesting aside, this book had three instances where a viola was used in a simile (as opposed to the violin, which would be a much more obvious string instrument reference). Since I'm a violist, I found it particularly noteworthy.

Laurie says

Ik twijfel tussen de 2 en 3 sterren. Enerzijds vind ik het heel indrukwekkend hoe Brjoesov thema's uit zijn eigen leven en parallelle met de Russische actualiteit(van die periode) weet te trekken in een verhaal over Middeleeuws Duitsland, bovendien zit er onwijs veel achtergrondinformatie en kennis in dit boek. Het verhaal getuigt van veel vindingrijkheid en intellectualiteit. Anderzijds vind ik de schrijfstijl wat langdradig en soms rommelig, in het Russisch origineel zie je bv regelmatig woordherhaling. Ook stonden de uitgebreide omschrijvingen van allerlei futiliteiten het plot soms in de weg. Kortom, prima boek, maar ik was er niet weg van.

d. says

dok je nisam dovrshila nisam mogla ni spavati ni jesti.

svega ima, ljubavi prvenstveno, sholastike, egzorcizma, inkvizicije, demonologije, filosofije i alhemije. opisan je kao istorijsko-psiholoshki roman, na njega se nadovezuje tematikom blizak mu majstor i margarita. ipak, ognjeni andjeo izdvajam kao favorit.
(brjusov me je josh sa 'mramornom glavom' kupio. ko voli fantastichne priche ta zbirk je moja iskrena preporuka!)

Paul says

This is Brusov's masterwork, but it is not the sort of novel that everyone can enjoy - even among the crowd that generally enjoys Dedalus' occult and fantastic releases.

"The Fiery Angel" is a strange journey thru beautifully and vividly invoked 16th Century Europe, with sojourns into its occult and religious underbelly. You'll encounter strange, seemingly supernatural occurrences, but they are quite underplayed and their meaning and reality is left in the air for the largest part of this novel, much like the nature and reality of that titular figure. Humanism, "enlightenment" clash with the religion and the occult, Good clashes with Evil, Truth with Illusion, much like two opposites clash in the case of our narrator and his beloved. And that last clash makes the core of this novel, and it is indeed fascinating, layered, unpredictable, rich in symbolism.

But, as I've said, supernatural is underplayed, occult is mostly occulted - you'll find neither the elaborate ceremonies, nor spectacular apparitions, nor heavy handed pseudo-symbolism here- and novel can be

excruciatingly slow at times. Patience and understanding are necessary. Translation itself is gorgeous, joy to read, but its archaic and flowery nature might deter many a reader.

There's a somewhat rough gem of Russian literature here, but it is not meant for everyone.

J says

Our hero stays the night in a boarding house in the middle of a German forest. While trying to sleep he is distracted by demonic noises emanating from the chamber next to his. He decides to investigate.

He finds a woman illuminated by moonlight. She is writhing on the ground and at turns laughing and screaming, seemingly possessed by a demon. When her "familiar" finally vacates her body, she collapses to the ground, seemingly exhausted. Despite the pleading of our hero for her to rest, sleep and recover she insists upon telling her story.

When she was young she used to play with an angel called Madiel("His face shone, his eyes were as blue as the skies, and his hair of fine gold thread"). When she became a woman she asked him to be hers "in carnal union" and he fled in disgust.

After some time apart, he appears to her again and says that since she wants to be joined with him in bodily union, he will appear to her as a man. A few months later she meets Count Heinrich, in whose face she sees the angel Madiel. Even though the Count never admits to being the angel in human form they marry, and live together in his castle.

After a few years, things turn sour and he leaves, abandoning her to "fiendish powers, who leave her no peace". She then goes on a quest to find him and escape the 'dark forces' that are tormenting her.

From this moment our hero becomes obsessed and bewitched by this mystifying creature, Renata, who we are never quite sure is angel or devil (but most likely the latter). He follows her, fulfilling her every whim and assisting her quest for the lost Count.

So begins an Occult romp through 16th Century Bohemia, via the mysterious "knockers", incantations, a black midnight mass, a flight through the stars on the back of a he-goat, the devil, witches, necromancy, possessed nuns, Helen of Troy and the Inquisition. Even Cornelius Agrippa and Faust himself make an appearance!

The story drags at some points to towards the end, hence the score, but overall "The Fiery Angel" is a wildly entertaining Gothic story for people who like their stories camp, over the top, and with lashings of occult imagery.

Dive in and enjoy! If not, the demons may get you. And believe me, you don't want that.

Willemclaey says

Vera says

This book could be called an example of symbolic novel on the one hand, and a thorough stylisation of novels of late Middle Age and the era of humanism on the another. It includes all specific features of those times - inquisitors, first humanists and scientists, travellers and openers of new countries. But the main feature of it is magic world, which fulfill the novel. The reader is always on the crossroad - to believe in magic and magicians or not. Up to the end he wouldn't find the answer. This certainly complies with the concept of symbolism in the whole: a person is in the middle of two worlds - real one and mysterious, unrecognizable one.

In the centre of the novel is the story about a soldier who came to Germany from New Spain (where he managed to make a fortune), on his way he met a strange woman called Renata and fell in love with her. Renata told him that in her childhood she experienced talking to and playing with the Fiery Angel who had became an ideal for all her life. This conflict between the real love of our hero to Renata and intense but extraordinary love of Renata to Angel could lead to nothing but tragedy.

John says

Not your typical Russian novel. A story of a medieval knight, alchemy, and the Inquisition.

Michael says

I honestly do not know how I missed this book in the past. It is one of the best novels I have read in my entire lifetime. It struck a chord that will continue to sustain for years to come. Brilliant writing, brilliant translation. I feel that I could read it again and again and always learn something new. Thank you to my friend who suggested it!
