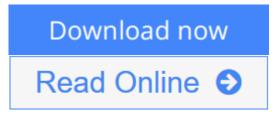


The Absolute Gravedigger

By Vít?zslav Nezval



The Absolute Gravedigger By Vít?zslav Nezval

The Absolute Gravedigger, published in 1937, is in many ways the culmination of Vít?zslav Nezval's work as an avant-garde poet, combining the Poetism of his earlier work and his turn to Surrealism in the 1930s with his political concerns in the years leading up to World War II. It is above all a collection of startling verbal and visual inventiveness. And while a number of salient political issues emerge from the Surrealist ommatidia, Nezval's imagination here is completely free-wheeling and untethered to any specific locale as he displays mastery of a variety of forms, from long-limbed imaginative free verse narratives to short, formally rhymed meditations in quatrains, to prose and even visual art (the volume includes six of his decalcomania images).

Together with his previous two collections, The Absolute Gravedigger forms one of the most important corpora of interwar Surrealist poetry. Yet here Nezval's wild albeit restrained mix of absolute freedom and formal perfection has shifted its focus to explore the darker imagery of putrefaction and entropy, the line breaks in the shorter lyric poems slicing the language into fragments that float in the mind with open-ended meaning and a multiplicity of readings. Inspired by Salvador Dalí's paranoiac-critical method, the poems go in directions that are at first unimaginable but continue to evolve unexpectedly until they resolve or dissolve – like electron clouds, they have a form within which a seemingly chaotic energy reigns. Nezval's language, however, is under absolute control, allowing him to reach into the polychromatic clouds of Surrealist uncertainty to form shapes we recognize, though never expected to see, to meld images and concepts into a constantly developing and dazzling kaleidoscope.



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The Absolute Gravedigger By Vít?zslav Nezval Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

The Absolute Gravedigger represents the moment when the paranoiac-critical method first broke through to Czech poetry. And Nezval got so carried away by his initial excitement that he didn't hesitate to draw the curtain over his entire oeuvre up till then, declaring that the first movement of his work had ended. Yet The Absolute Gravedigger turned out to be both the beginning and the ending of the promised second movement. – Jaromír Typlt

In this, The Absolute Gravedigger is a valuable example of the avant-garde's response to the tumult of the 1930s? but that is far from its only merit. – L.A Review of Books

The Absolute Gravedigger is an appealing little volume, with many striking pieces, with some context and useful background provided in the Afterword, where the translators also discuss some of their translation choices and approaches (as, unsurprisingly, some of this is hard to translated directly). It is also an impressively varied collection: while certainly of Nezval's surrealist-period, this manifests itself in a variety of ways and approaches – welcome shifts of poetic strangeness from section to section. – Complete Review

About the Author

Vít?zslav Nezval (1900-1958), an original member of the avant-garde artists group Dev?tsil and a leading figure in the Poetist movement, was perhaps the most prolific Czech writer of the interwar period. His output consists of a number of poetry collections, experimental plays and novels, memoirs, essays, and translations. His best work is from the interwar period. He frequently visited Paris, engaging with the French surrealists. Forging a friendship with André Breton and Paul Eluard, he was instrumental in founding The Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia in 1934.

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