

Classic Poetry Series

**August Stramm**  
**- poems -**

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# August Stramm(29 July 1874 – 1 September 1915)

August Stramm was a German poet and playwright who is considered one of the first of the expressionists. He also served in the German Army and was killed in action during World War I.

He worked in the German Post Office Ministry as a young man and served his mandatory year of duty in the German Army in 1896–1897. After this, he travelled to the United States several times over the next few years before settling in Berlin. In 1912-1913, he wrote two plays, *Sancta Susanna* (which was subsequently used as a libretto for an early opera by Hindemith) and *Die Haidebraut*, the first of many to appear before the war.

Stramm was also a reservist in the German Army and had achieved the rank of Captain, the highest available to civilians. He was called to active duty when war broke out in August 1914. In January 1915, Stramm was awarded the Iron Cross (Second Class) for his service in France. Later that year, he was sent to the Eastern Front, where he served as Company Leader, later being promoted to Battalion Commander. He was killed in hand-to-hand combat in Horodec near Kobryn (today Belarus).

## <b>Major Works</b>

Although Stramm's literary career began as a playwright, he is perhaps best known in the twenty-first century for his poems, which were published in two collections: *Du: Liebesgedichte* (Thou: Love Poems, 1915), and *Tropfblut* (Drip-Blood, 1919). Although he was involved in the early stages of planning for the publication of his first volume of poems, he died before the book was in print. Characterized by his streamlined, minimalist approach to language, these poems are expressions of his exploration of love's many faces, and yet, as critic Karin von Abrams has pointed out, only the subtitle of the volume strongly indicates that love is to be considered the "governing theme" of the collection. The poems contained in *Drip-Blood* exemplify Stramm's evolving style of focusing on individual words and personifying abstract concepts through the manipulation of syntax and the use of such structural elements as one-word lines. These later works exerted a "frequently staccato" effect, writes critic Jeremy Adler.

Stramm saw a number of his poems published in the literary magazine *Der Sturm*, but he did not live to see either the publication of his volumes of poetry or the performance of any of his plays, several of which, including *Die Haidebraut* (The Bride of the Moor, 1914) and *Sancta Susanna*, (1914) were in print before

his death. Der Sturm editor Walden oversaw the posthumous publication of the poems and several more plays.

### <b>Critical Reception</b>

Stramm received very little critical attention during his lifetime. He was known to a relatively small circle of literary peers and, until after his death, his works appeared only in the literary journal Der Sturm, which was itself a vehicle for experimental works not yet received into the cultural mainstream. During the eighteen months he was associated with Der Sturm, however, Stramm's works appeared in the journal more often than those of any other writer in the magazine's history. In the months following his death, as Walden published and promoted Stramm's works, his contemporaries began to consider Stramm a poet and dramatist whose unique voice, though silenced through the violence of war, would become influential in the emerging expressionist movement in Germany. In his very precise use of language, nothing was written that did not need to be written, and when existing words were not accurate enough for Stramm, he invented new ones. Following his death, his unconventional approach to creative expression was recognized by an English-speaking literary peer, Edward J. O'Brien, who wrote in the American journal Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, "Stramm gave poetry a new method. ... His gift to imaginative literature was just beginning to be perceived." Although his literary output was limited, later critics concur that Stramm—a postal service bureaucrat who was married with children, who pursued gentle hobbies as an amateur painter and cellist, and who was dismayed and yet fascinated by the horrors of war—forged a significant, though unlikely, role as a literary figure whose works influenced the Dada movement in western Europe and anticipated the techniques of modern poetry.

# Angriff

Tücher  
Winken  
Flattern  
Knattern.  
Winde klatschen.  
Dein Lachen weht.  
Greifen Fassen  
Balgen Zwingen  
Kuss  
Umfangen  
Sinken  
Nichts.

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## ATTACK

Scarves  
Wave  
Flutter  
Chatter  
Winds clatter.  
Your laughter blows  
Grasp hold  
Scuffle force  
Kiss  
Surrounded  
Sink down  
Nothingness

August Stramm

# Battlefield

Yielding clod lulls iron off to sleep  
bloods clot the patches where they oozed  
rusts crumble  
fleshes slime  
sucking lusts around decay.  
Murder on murder blinks  
in childish eyes.

August Stramm

# Battlefield

Tender sods fallen asleep at their iron  
Blood fluffing outpost scum  
Rusted crusts  
Slimy flesh skinned  
Sucking scores the dessicated.  
Baby-faced  
Killerkillers  
Winking

August Stramm

# Frost Fire

Toes deaden.  
Breath smelts to lead.  
Hot needles dance in fingers.  
Backs turn to hum coffee.  
The fire swaggers with logs  
and with a shrivel a crack  
a satisfaction your simmer heart  
sips  
from high in the sky a seething sleep.

August Stramm

# Guard-Duty

A star frightens the steeple cross  
a horse gasps smoke  
iron clanks drowsily  
mists spread  
fears  
staring shivering  
shivering  
cajoling  
whispering  
You!

August Stramm



# Melancholy

Living desires  
Shouldering to stand  
Glimpses searching  
Dying grows  
Striding to strive  
What is to come  
SHRIEKS!  
Deep  
Dumbing  
We.

August Stramm

# Primal Death

Space

Time

Space

Travel

Raining

Aiming

Space

Time

Space

Expanding

Uniting

Increasing

Space

Time

Space

Sweeping

Restraining

Stretching

Space

Time

Space

Wrestling

Throwing

Throwing up

Space

Time

Space

Falling

Sinking

Overturning

Space

Time

Space

Whirling

Space

Time

Space

Disturbing

Space

Time  
Space  
Whirring  
Space  
Time Space  
Erring at  
Nothing

August Stramm

# War Grave

Staffs flehen cross arms  
Writing zagt pale unknown  
Flowers impudent  
Dust shyly.  
Flare  
Water  
Glast  
Forgotten.

August Stramm

# Wonder

U Stands! U stands!  
And I  
And I  
I wing  
Spaceless timeless lost my way  
U stands! U stands!  
And  
Raging bearishly shrieks myself  
I  
Bears my very self!  
U!  
U!  
U binds time  
U bends the circle  
U souls the spirit  
U gazes the look  
U  
Circles the whirled  
The whorled  
The world!  
I  
Circle the all  
and u  
and u  
U  
Stand  
The  
Wondrous

August Stramm

# Wounds

Earth under the helmet flowers

Falling stars

Grope through space.

Roaring shudders

Whirl

Alienation.

Distance

Mist

Weeping

Your glance.

August Stramm