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M. EMINESCU

P O E M S

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUMANIAN

BY

P. GRIMM



CLUJ
TIPOGRAFIA „CARTEA ROMĂNEASCĂ“
1938



UNIVERSITARA
București

Cota III 41800

Inventar 742650

*Paul Bidargiu
1934.*

*From my
English teacher.*

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*To my British and American friends
with gratitude for their kindness.*

PREFACE

Mihai Eminescu¹⁾ was the greatest Rumanian poet and, doubtless, one of the greatest romantic poets of world literature.

Born in the year 1850, in a small village in the north of Moldavia, where his father was a tenant-farmer, he lived in the midst of nature from his early childhood and this instilled in him the ardent love of nature, which is one of the main features of his poetry.

He was sent to school to Cernăuți (Czernowitz) in Bucovina, then in Austria, and there he learnt in Rumanian as well as in German schools. Bucovina, a former Moldavian province, full of the glory of the past, with beautiful monasteries built by the old voivods of the country, fallen afterwards under foreign yoke and infested by alien races, inspired him with that deep patriotic feeling and love for the past of his country, which is another of the great characteristics of his spirit. This was strengthened by the fact that, before ending his studies, he joined a company of roving actors, and with them he travelled all over the country, but especially in Transylvania, which was then under the Hungarians and where the Rumanians, whose national spirit was very awake, had much to suffer from their rulers.

Rumania is a country where the peasants form the great majority of the population. These have a rich living popular poetry and Eminescu made collections of their beautiful songs and found in them another source of inspiration. At the same time he enriched with them his language. He did the same thing by reading the old chronicles, in which he studied the past of his country. This he used to contrast with his own time, in which he saw only selfishness and conventionality, that made him despise and even hate the society of his contemporaries.

He ended his studies by attending for two years lectures, especially on philosophical subjects, in the Universities of Vienna and Berlin.

¹⁾ Pronounce: Meehye (i. e. Michael) Emmeene'scoo.

From his early youth he had studied, besides the Rumanian literature, very much the German, especially Goethe, Schiller and the romantics, but did not neglect the other great literatures, old and modern, and of the English poets he had read especially Shakespeare and Byron.

Back in his country he was school inspector and afterwards librarian in the University of Iași (Iassy), but being dismissed by the Liberal government of the time he went to Bucarest, where he became editor in chief of the Conservative paper „Timpul“ (The Time). His daily articles, collected to-day in a volume, contain the nationalist creed. His conservatism was one of conviction and was directed against the Liberals because they had imported all sort of foreign ideas, fashions and institutions, without caring for the good old traditions of the country.

At the age of 33 he fell very ill and his mind became clouded. He never wholly recovered till he died in 1889, in a lunatic asylum near Bucarest.

He had begun to write poetry when still very young and published his first poems in provincial papers of Bucovina and Transylvania and, later on, in the *Convorbiri Literare* (Literary Talks), the review of the circle „Junimea“ (The Youth) of Iassy. This was under the direction of *Titu Maiorescu*, professor of philosophy and the most important critic of the time, who first collected all the poems in a volume, in 1884, when the poet was already ill.

A dark veil of melancholy hangs over almost all his poetry. This was due perhaps to a hereditary illness. It was strengthened by his disappointment in love, to which were added his philosophical convictions, Eminescu being a disciple of the pessimistic German philosopher Schopenhauer and of the Indian philosophy, for the study of which he even learnt Sanscrit. However, the main cause of his so-called pessimism was, doubtless, the passionate nature of the poet, striving after a perfection which he could not find anywhere, and which made him seek a refuge in his dreams.

Eminescu's poems are in Rumanian perfect symphonies owing to the poet's masterly handling of all the musical possibilities of his language. Very much of this is lost in the translations, though we kept as close to the text as possible and especially respected throughout the original form.

We give here but few of his most representative poems, others will follow.

SOLITUDE

Near my simple fir-wood table
With the curtains drawn I sit,
In the grate the fire is flick'ring,
Musingly I look at it.

And like swallows sweet illusions
Come in flights and wander all;
Dear remembrances seem crickets
Chirping in a ruined wall,

Or caressing come and sadly,
Heavy in the soul they stop,
Like the wax from candles falling
Near Christ's icon, drop by drop.

In my room in every corner
Spiders have their cobwebs spun,
And among the piled books hiding
Furtively the mice now run.

In this peace mine eye distracted
Upward to the ceiling looks,
And I listen as they slowly
Gnaw the covers of my books.

Oft I thought, the lyre forsaking,
To depart and change my mood,
And to leave off writing verses
In this wasting solitude.

But then mice with tripping noises,
 Chirping chickens bring and nurse
 My old thoughts, my melancholy,
 And this soon becomes a verse.

Sometimes while the lamp is burning
 Late, I'm dreaming without sleep,
 When I hear the door-latch clicking,
 Suddenly my heart will leap.

It is *She*. The house so empty,
 Now at once is full of light,
 In my life's black frame appearing
 She, an icon shining bright.

And I cannot now but wonder
 Why old Time will never rest,
 While I'm with my love here whispering
 Hand in hand and breast to breast.

THE TALE OF THE FOREST

Glorious emperor is the forest,
Countless peoples live and grow,
Flourish 'neath his gracious shelter,
All to him allegiance owe.

Moon and stars, the sun above them,
On his blue escutcheon are, *scut*
Harts and hinds, his *court* courtiers, wander
In his kingdom wide and far.

Messengers, the hares swift-footed,
Bear the news; while nightingales
Form an orchestra most wondrous,
And the springs are telling tales.

Swarms of wand'ring bees alight there
On the flowers, in the glade;
Ants, great armies, their food gather
Near the pathways, in the shade.

Let's go to the king, beloved,
Let's like children be, let's dream,
So that love, and joy, our whole life,
As a game to us may seem.

And thus happy, blithely living,
Being now again a boy,
I should think that nature made thee
Just for me, the sweetest toy.

From the world we both will wander,
All alone and lost we'll be,
We shall sleep beside the fountain
Springing 'neath the old lime-tree.

And the tree will shed its flowers
On us, far away now borne;
All alone, from distant sheepfolds,
Dreaming we shall hear the horn ...

Nearer, always nearer sounding —
Nearer we'll be arm in arm ...
On the waters, in the bowers
Weaves the moon a magic charm.

Soon by horn the wise men's council,
Called together by the king,
With his whole court's great assembly,
Comes around us gathering.

Foaming white the hippocampus,
Diademed the aurochs goes,
Stags with their majestic antlers,
And the nimble mountain roes.

Who we are, they all discuss it,
From the lime-tree ask it now;
And our host then, gently speaking,
With his branches makes a bow:

„See how happy they are dreaming,
In a fairy tale they seem ...
See how much they love each other!
'Tis the beech-wood's blissful dream!“

MURMUR OF THE FOREST

'Neath the sun's rays in the vale
Shimmer trembling waters clear;
Full of longing, from the brake
I look downwards to the lake,
Sitting in cool shade I hear
 Calling quail.

Softly as if half asleep
Murmur all the springs and brooks;
When among the boughs the sun
Shines on waters, quick they run,
And like deer, with frightened looks,
 Wildly leap.

Orioles and thrushes sing —
Who can understand them all?
Hidden in the trees each bird
Singing of the spring is heard,
Meaningful they talk and call
 Twittering.

Says the cuckoo: „Have you seen
Our most lovely sister dear?
Sister of our summer dreams,
Languishing with love she seems.
Where art thou? O come, appear,
 Fairy Queen!“

The old lime-tree shading spread
Its dense foliage with sweet flowers,
Stretched a branch to catch her arms
And to lift her full of charms,
Ready to rain fragrant showers
On her head.

And the spring asked woefully:
„Where art thou, my Queen most sweet?
Come, unbind thy silken hair,
Mirroring thy face so fair,
Touching me with tender feet,
Dreamily.“

And I answered: „Forest mine,
She comes not, she comes no more;
You alone, dear oaks, remain,
Wait for those blue eyes again,
That for me so oft of yore
Bright would shine.“

How much charm did she impart
To the groves, all things, that shone
As in an enchanted tale!
All is now so dark and stale...
Come, let's be again alone
Heart to heart.

FOREST, O MY FOREST

(In popular form)

Forest, O my forest dear,
What dost thou so lonesome here?
For since I have seen thee last
Many weary years have past,
And since I have gone away
In the world I much did stray.

— O, I do as in the past,
Listen to the winter's blast,
Which my branches tears and breaks,
Chains with ice my streams and lakes,
On my paths snow-hills will lay,
All my songsters drives away.
And I do, as long ago,
Listen when the women go
Singing their old *doina*¹⁾ song
As they walk the path along,
To the fountain, where they still
Come their water pails to fill.

— Forest dear with quiet streams
All in this world flowing seems;
Time goes past, but only thou
Still art young and younger now.

1) *Doina*, the Rumanian popular song.

— What is time, when every night
Shines for me the stars' still light!
Be the weather good or bad,
Be it sunny, be it sad,
Winds through rustling leaves still blow
And the Danube's waters flow.
Man alone is wavering,
Changeable and wandering,
While we all the same remain,
Mountains, rivers, the great main,
As we were so we abide,
This great world with deserts wide,
Sun, moon, stars, eternal things,
And the forest with its springs.

SO FRESH THOU ART...

So like the sweet, white cherry blossom,
So tender and so fresh thou art,
And on my life's way like an angel
Appearing thou dost light impart.

Thou scarcely touchest the soft carpet,
The silk on thee doth rustling stream,
From top to toe so light and lofty,
Thou floatest like an airy dream.

From draping folds like purest marble
Thine image unto me appears,
My whole soul on thine eyes is hanging,
Those eyes so full of joy and tears.

O happy dream of love, so happy,
Thou bride of fairy tales, so mild,
No, do not smile! Thy smile doth show me
How sweet thou art, thou gentle child.

My poor eyes thou canst close for ever
With deepest night's eternal charms,
With thy sweet lips' sweet fondling whispers,
Embracing me with thy cool arms.

A veiling thought at once now passes
Thy glowing eyes thus covering:
It is the dark renunciation,
The sweetest yearning's shadowing.

Thou go'st away and, well I know it,
To follow thee must I no more,
Thou art for me now lost for ever,
My soul's dear bride, whom I adore.

My only guilt was that I saw thee,
Which I to pardon have no might,
Mine arm I'll stretch for ever vainly
To expiate my dream of light.

Like holy Virgin's purest image
In my fond eyes thou wilt rise now,
The brightest crown on forehead bearing,
Where dost thou go? When comest thou?

A DACIAN'S PRAYER

When Death was not, and nothing immortal had been wrought,
Nor light's divinest kernel the world its life had brought,
When yesterday, to-morrow, to-day had yet no name,
When one was all, wherever, and all was one, the same;
When earth, and air, and heavens, the whole world that is seen
Were in the deep abysm like things that have not been —
Thou wast alone, and anxious myself I'm asking now:
Who is the God, to whom we, with hearts most humble, bow?

Sole God he was, when others were not, and in the dark
Unfathomable ocean gave force to light's first spark,
He is mankind's great saviour and source of happiness,
To gods gives soul and power and everything doth bless:
Cheer up your hearts! Adore him and praise in sacred hymn,
For life and resurrection from death all come through him!

He gave me eyes most happy that they may see the light,
He filled my heart with pity, with high, divine delight,
How through the world he paces in roaring winds I heard,
I heard in songs most holy his sweetest voice, his word,
And still one thing I ask him from inmost bosom's core:
That he may now allow me to rest for evermore!

To curse all those who pity will show for me, to bless
All those who make me suffer and ruthlessly oppress,
To those who spurning mock me to listen, and believe,
And to the arm that kills me the utmost force to give,
And he among all others as first may praised be
Who e'en my stony pillow will steal away from me.

Pursued by all and hunted shall pass away my years
 Till they will have exhausted the fountain of my tears,
 Till I shall feel that each man for me is but a foe,
 Till my own self thus hated by all I shall not know,
 Till endless pain and anguish my heart have so oppressed
 That I may curse my mother whom I, of all, loved best —
 When utmost cruel hatred like love seems to my eye,
 My suffering forgetting, perhaps I might then die.

And if, by all accursèd, I die a stranger, they
 Upon the street my body to dogs shall throw away,
 And him who sets them on me, that they may tear my heart,
 O him, my gracious Father, the highest crown impart,
 And him who stones will on me with hatred throw, O give
 My Lord, that he in glory eternally may live!

Thus only can I, Father, sing praises thanking Thee,
 That graciously Thou gavest this earthly boon to me.
 I do not bend my forehead for other gifts, Thy ire,
 Thy curses and Thy hatred are all that I desire,
 To feel how disappearing my breath by Thine is quelled,
 And in the night eternal I traceless am dispelled.

THE MIDNIGHT HOUR OF SORROW...

The midnight hour of sorrow on brazen bell doth toll,
 And sleep, life's toll-collector, comes not to take the toll.
 On roads so often trodden Death wants to lead for aye,
 And Life and Death comparing, which is the best to weigh;
 But now my reason's balance unchangèd still doth stand,
 For 'tween them both is fixèd, unmoved the pointing hand.

FIRST EPISTLE

When with weary eyes the candle I blow out, my thoughts still stray,
While the clock alone is treading on old Time's unending way.
If I draw aside the curtains, in the middle of the night,
All the room at once is flooded with the moon's voluptuous light;
From the deep night of remembrance back again she doth recall
An eternity of sorrows and in dream we feel them all.

Moon, the world's vault gliding over, Queen who dost o'er oceans reign,
Giving life to thoughts, thou soothest with sweet balm our endless pain;
Deserts vast and lonely glisten 'neath thy clear light, purest maid,
And the sparkling spring that's hidden far away in forest glade!
On how many countless billows doth thy power hold its sway,
When thou glidest forth on ocean's moving solitary way!
And what flowered shores, what cities and what palaces are shown,
Through thy magic charm transfigured, but to thee, to thee alone!
Through how many thousand windows dost thou enter still and soft,
Shining mild on brows which ponder, into eyes that look aloft!
There a king, great plans combining, round the globe a web doth twine,
While what he will do to-morrow scarce a poor man can divine ...
Though their lots are cast asunder, both are doomed by fate's great
[might,

Both are swayed by death's grim genius and the ray of thy pure light;
Slaves of the same chain of passions in this same world, willy-nilly,
Be they weak, or be they mighty, be they geniuses or silly.
This one, pleased with his own image, in the mirror curls his hair,
While through space and time another searches for what's true and fair,
He from yellow leaves will gather countless trifles, one by one,
And their transient names well scoring, this is all that he has done;
While a third, behind his counter, marks what he has bought and sold,
In his grandest dreams sees only galleons freighted down with gold.



There alone the aged Master silently is reasoning,
 Leaning on his worn out elbows, lost in endless reckoning,
 Lank and slender, bent and crookèd, shivering as he doth linger,
 All the universe unmeasured resting on his little finger.
 For there under his broad forehead past and future, all is clear,
 The eternal night, vast spaces, all like problems solved appear;
 And like Atlas who in old times bore the skies upon his shoulders,
 So he all supports with numbers — the eternal world's upholders.

While the moon shines on piled volumes, he returneth with his mind
 In a twinkling over aeons, endless centuries behind.
 First of all, in the beginning, in the utter nothingness,
 With no being, no existence, lifeless, will-less, purposeless,
 When there was no thought, no secret, and yet nothing was disclosed.
 When, himself alone conceiving, sole the Unconceived reposed,
 Was there nothing but a chasm filled with waters? An Abyss?
 There was yet no world imagined, and no mind to think of this,
 For there was an utter darkness, not the slightest ray of light,
 Nothing to be seen whatever, not an eye to pierce with sight;
 Shadows of things uncreated had not yet begun to creep,
 Quiet, with itself contented, reigned calm peace, eternal sleep!
 But at once a point, one only . . . it moved onward, fast and faster,
 Chaos was its Mother; Father it became and world's great master.
 Weaker than from froth the bubble, this point, from which all things
 [soared,
 Moving on the world's great vastness, it became the boundless lord.
 Since then all that mist eternal, streak by streak, was soon dispelled,
 Since then rose sun, moon, the whole world, elements their power held.
 Since then up to this day always, colonies of worlds long lost
 Through the deep grey vales of chaos are on unknown pathways tossed.
 Springing forth like swarms effulgent, from the infinite come thronging,
 They to life allured are driven by an unquenched thirst and longing.
 And in that great world, we, nothings, children of this little one,
 Build on earth our tiny ant-hills, heaping riches we have won;
 Kings and emperors, hosts unnumbered, in successive generations,
 We think marvellous, Great Powers, our poor microscopic nations;
 Flies that live a day, forgetting, in a tiny network trapped,
 That this world is but a twinkle, and in utter darkness wrapped.
 Like the dust that dances gaily in the kingdom of a ray,
 From the sight soon disappearing when that beam has gone away,

So too, in this everlasting, deep night of eternity
 Shines a ray, a passing instant, in the vast immensity;
 When extinguished, like a shadow, back to darkness will be hurled
 This vain dream of a nonbeing, all this fleeting phantom world.

But the thinker in the present doth not stop, his mind is led
 In a twinkling over aeons, endless centuries ahead:
 This resplendent sun, so beauteous, now he sees it brown-red, dull,
 Like a wound in dark clouds, dreary, or in storms a drifting hull;
 All the planets, which no longer curbs with mighty reins the sun,
 Frozen in their hearts, as maddened, wildly through the spaces run.
 Like a temple that is shattered, breaks in pieces all this sphere,
 Like the leaves in autumn falling, all the stars now disappear,
 And all time is dead and burried, it becomes eternity,
 Nothing happens now and empty is the vast immensity,
 In the deep night of nonbeing everything again doth creep,
 Quiet, with itself contented, reigns calm peace, eternal sleep.

.....

From the lowest to the highest, from the beggar to the king,
 With their painful life's enigma all are vainly labouring.
 Who is the most miserable? Who in this poor world can say?
 All are like, and over others rises only he who may,
 While so many, humble hearted, lying in the shadow, thrown
 From the way, or tossed or driven, like the foam will die unknown.
 What doth blind fate care whatever for their wishes, thoughts or strife?
 Like the stormy wind it passes over this poor human life.

If he's praised by all his fellows and acknowledged by his age,
 What will he win from these praises for himself the wise old sage?
 Immortality! Yea, truly all that he could do and be
 Twined around one great idea, like the ivy to the tree.
 „Though I die — he says — like others, centuries will bear my fame
 Everywhere and through all ages, and from mouth to mouth my name
 Borne along with all my writings, in this world's uproar and welter,
 In uncounted minds alighting, they will find a quiet shelter!“
 Poor old man, dost thou remember all that thou hast seen and heard
 All that thou thyself hast spoken, every name and every word?
 Here and there perhaps an image, or the traces of a thought,
 But a word, a slip of paper, all just little more than nought.

When thy life thou scarcely knowest thinkest thou that others care
 Thoroughly to know thy story or thy memory to spare?
 Later, some pedantic scholar, on the trashy volumes' pile
 Sitting, trash himself, will study in thy books the Attic style,
 Showing some mistakes and errors, which thou madest long ago,
 And the dust of those old volumes from his spectacles will blow;
 To reward thy toil he'll give thee, great attention, learned sage,
 Two lines in a random footnote, ending thus a stupid page.

One may build a world, destroy it: over what one thinks holds fast,
 Whatso'er it be, a shovel full of earth is thrown at last.
 Heads a universe enclosing, sceptered hands desiring sway
 Over empires vast unbounded, 'tween four boards must lie one day . . .
 There a funeral procession gravely, solemnly advances,
 So ironically splendid, with indifferent side glances;
 And some little man's oration, this will be of all the ending,
 Not thy character extolling, but himself at last commending
 Under thy good name's great shadow: this is all that waits for thee.

But posterity e'en fairer still will be, O thou wilt see . . .
 Since they could not reach thy standard, thinkest thou they will admire?
 The biographer so artful, who fulfils all their desire,
 Him they'll praise, when he will show that thou resemblest all the others,
 Not a genius, but so common, that you well might have been brothers.
 All are highly flattered thinking that thou wert not more than they,
 And with pride their nostrils swelling, their stupidity display;
 Always when they talk about thee in their learned coteries,
 With ironic smile to praise thee, in mere words, well settled 'tis.
 Falling to their hands, with pleasure, with great joy they'll dust thy
 [jacket,

They will judge with understanding, without seeing that they lack it . . .
 They will seek out all thy blunders, out of malice sheer to blame thee,
 To find all the little scandals, every blemish, to defame thee —
 This is all that brings thee near them, not the light that thou hast shed
 In this world of sin and sorrow, but the faults, the sins inbred,
 And the lassitude, the weakness, all that may impair thy worth,
 Evils fatally inherent in a handful of this earth;
 Miseries of poor tormented human soul, for everyone
 These will be the things that please them, not what thou hast
 [thought and done

.....

In this springtime, on the gardens, on the blossoms fragrant, tender,
On the beautiful, wide landscape, sheds the moon her quiet splendour!
She from deep night of remembrance countless longings doth recall,
Soothing endless pains and sorrows, now in dreams we feel them all,
To our own thought's world she opens wide and large an entrance door.
Raising round us endless shadows, marvels of the dark before . . .
Deserts vast and lonely glisten 'neath thy clear light, purest maid,
And the sparkling spring that's hidden far away in forest glade!
On how many countless billows doth thy power hold its sway,
When thou glidest forth on ocean's moving solitary way,
And o'er all of us abiding under fate's grand, awful might,
Sways alike grim death's great genius and the ray of thy pure light!

SECOND EPISTLE

Why my pen, that once was busy, idly on the inkstand slumbers?
Why am I not, work forgetting, tempted by the rhythmic numbers?
Sleeping in the yellow pages, why no longer to me, come
All the trochees, soaring iambs, and the dactyls frolicsome?
Could I tell you all the hardship of my poor life day by day,
You would see that I've great reason this my pen to throw away.
After all this useless struggle is there any reason why
In new form the old, wise language I to mould again should try?
That profound, mysterious feeling, sleeping on my harp-strings well,
Must I now retail in couplets, like the goods the merchants sell?

Yes, of course, you will now answer, 'twould be well if for my name
In this world I should acquire with my verse immortal fame.
If with dedicating poems to great ladies court I paid,
Men of influence attracting, thus my fortune would be made,
And, fulfilled the mind's ambition, would the soul's distress allay.
My dear friends, so many others have already trod this way.
In our age quite well we know them, those strange bards who only list
Highest offices and many, everyone a pluralist.
Writing compliments to ladies and to statesmen; with their lyres
Trying only to accomplish in this world their mean desires.
In saloons these vapid idols now become our men of note,
Their career they strive to make, protected by a petticoat.

Why do I not go on writing for my name, for glory? Why?
Is there truly any glory in the desert thus to cry?
When to selfish passions only all poor mortals are the slaves,
Glory is a fancy idol praised by thousands of dull knaves,
Who call great a dwarfish creature, and a mighty genius see
In what is from froth the bubble in a trifling century.

Shall I now again my lyre strike extolling love? A chain
 That 'twixt two or sev'ral wooers may be shared, supremely vain.
 Must we all, like fools, adoring at the women's feet down lay us,
 Like the operetta chorus that is led by Menelaus?
 Nowadays the women, often, like the world, are but a school,
 Where one learns humiliation, and to suffer is the rule.
 To these colleges of science of the goddess Venus come
 Crowding ardently our young men, even of the youngest some;
 Till that whole school lies in ruins, go they must the beardless youth,
 A veneer is all their knowledge, nought they learn of life and truth.

Do you still those years remember when we sat on benches dreaming,
 Listening how the poor old masters Time's worn coat were patching,
[seaming,
 Corpses only of odd moments gathered from their trashy books,
 In the shreds of things deep wisdom seeking with their drowsy looks?
 Softly murmuring a fountain deep they were of *horum-harum*,
 With much toil but scarcely earning *nervum rerum gerendarum*,
 With the deepest veneration they wound up the spirit's pulley,
 With Egyptian kings, plants, planets, thus our poor brains cramming
[fully.

The astronomer methinks I see, how from the chasm's yawn
 Easily as from a drawer one by one the worlds were drawn,
 Dark eternity unrolling, he then taught us marvelling
 How the epochs, like a necklace, pearl by pearl, thus formed a string,
 Like the learned Galileo in our hearts we then could feel
 How the whole world's sphere was whirling round and round as
[does a reel.

With dead languages, with planets, in the dizziness of dream,
 Our old master some moth-eaten mummy of a king would seem;
 While he spoke of king Sesostris, on the walls and on the ceiling
 I examined all the cobwebs, dreamt of blue eyes, my mind reeling,
 And on copybooks, on margins, wrote down verses for some Flora,
 With her rosy cheeks, capricious, telling how I did adore her.
 So in a confused, wild jumble floated there before my mind
 Kings, and animals, and planets; images of every kind,
 All things, even boys' pens scraping, to the silence charm then gave,
 In my dream I saw green meadows, cornfields in the wind would wave,
 In an infinite all melted, down would fall my heavy head;
 When the bell rang, old Sesostris must already have been dead.

Then the fancied world was living, its existence we could feel,
While the actual one, so squalid, seemed far distant and unreal;
Only now we see how barren, rough and narrow is the road
On which honest souls, like pilgrims have to stagger with their load.
In this common world of ours it is dangerous to dream,
Lost you are with your illusions, and ridiculous you'll seem.

Therefore it is useless asking why my pen so idly slumbers,
Why am I not, work forgetting, tempted by the rhythmic numbers,
Sleeping in the yellow pages, why no longer to me come
All the trochees, soaring iambs, and the dactyls frolicsome;
If I were to write more verses I'm afraid that I might raise
The applause of that wild rabble, my contemporaries' praise.
If serene I bear their hatred, and my heart is not impressed,
It is certain with their praises I should sorely be distressed.

THIRD EPISTLE

Once upon a time a Sultan, ruler over nomad bands,
Roaming with their herds and seeking pastures new in many lands,
On the earth lay sleeping, pillowed was his head upon his arm,
But his eyes, beneath closed lashes, now awoke in dream's sweet charm.
From the sky down gliding gently, all in silver dress arrayed,
Came the moon towards him descending as a pure and lovely maid,
On her pathway, all, around her, as on mild spring's step did bloom,
Yet her eyes were full of shadows born of secret sorrow's gloom,
All the woods with so much beauty charmed were thrilling with delight.
All the brooks and rivers quivered with their limpid faces bright,
Diamond dust was lightly falling from above like finest rain,
Glitt'ring in the air, on flowers, over all in nature's reign,
In the night resplendent rainbows arching on the sky were seen,
And bewitching, softly whispered, sounded music sweet, serene . . .
Lovely arms she stretched towards him as he lay, her raven hair
Fell like silken waves down streaming on her snowy shoulders bare:
— „Let our lives be bound together, come, beloved, to my breast,
Soothing balm to my sweet sorrow be thy sorrow, near me rest . . .
This in Life's book for all ages on the stars did Fate record:
I must be thy sovereign lady, thou must be my life's dear lord.“

As to her he looked and listened, darkening she disappeared;
From his heart sprang up a tree that towards the sky its branches reared,
And it grew, it grew in moments as in ages long, this tree
Shot its boughs with massy foliage over all, on land and sea,
Underneath the shadows creeping over all the world disperse,
One great shadow now embracing all the boundless universe.
On the four points of th'horizon the gigantic mountain ranges,
Atlas, Caucasus and Taurus, and the Balkans hoar with ages,
And the Tigris, the Euphrates and the Nile, the Danube old,
All the world th'unmeasured shadow of this tree did now unfold.

Vast espanses, Asia, Europe, Africa with deserts wide,
 With their sea-shores and their harbours, and strong cities on each side,
 On the seas and on the rivers galleons rocking on the waves,
 And the undulating corn-fields, riches, all that man's heart craves,
 Linked together, countries, nations, wheresoe'er his eyes would stray.
 A vast carpet intermingling countless hues before him lay.
 Through a greyish mist transparent there before his eager view,
 Under one tree's shadow only an all-powerful empire grew.
 Towards the sky the eagles flying to its branches could not soar;
 Loud and victory presaging, a strong wind began to roar,
 And the rustling foliage wildly in the stormy blast was rent,
 Cries of battle, Allah! Allah! to the highest clouds were sent.
 And the tumult grew tremendous like a high tempestuous sea,
 Shouts of triumph, shouts of horror, howling now unceasingly;
 But with spear-like leaves the branches in the tossing winds contending,
 Over the new Rome inclining to the earth were lowly bending.

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Shaken by his dream the Sultan wakened . . . looking upwards, there
 On the sky the moon was gliding o'er the hills of Eski-Shehr,
 And behind a latticed window smiling was a face so meek,
 Twas the graceful child, the daughter of Edèbali, the sheik,
 Like a hazel twig so slender, haloed by the bright full moon,
 Dreaming on the casement leaning stood the fair maid Malcatoon.
 Then he knew that the great Prophet had imagined this device,
 That in dream he had ascended in Mohammed's paradise,
 And that from his love an empire would be born and wide would grow.
 But its destined years and limits Heaven could alone foreknow.

So, as Fate decreed, the passing ages proved his vision true,
 Like an eagle soaring upwards every year the empire grew,
 Sultan after sultan followed, their green banner rose still higher,
 Nation after nation conquered was by them with sword and fire,
 Country after country open all the ways for them did set . . .
 Full of glory to the Danube came the stormy Bajazet.
 At a sign with floating vessels shore to shore was quickly bound,
 The whole army crossing over to the martial trumpets' sound.
 Janizaries, Allah's children, spahees, with their spears and shields,

Swarmed like bees, the whole earth dark'ning on Rovine's¹⁾ marshy
[fields,

Numberless their high tents pitching, waiting for the battle grim;
Ominous the oak-woods rustled looming in the distance dim.

A peace messenger came bearing on a rod a kerchief white.

Bajazet then asked him, looking as to one whom he did slight:

— „Say, what wantest thou?“

— „Your Highness, peace is all we come to seek,

If you grant it, fain our lord would with the gracious emperor speak.“

At a sign the way was opened, to the tent with nobleness

Came an old man plain and simple in his words and in his dress.

— „Thou art Mircea?“

— „Yes, High Sultan!“

— „For thine homage here came I,

Lest thy crown to thorns be changèd, with my will thou must comply.“

— „Howsoe'er thou camest, Sultan, and whate'er thy thought may be,

While we are in peace and quiet, as a friend I welcome thee.

As for vassal's homage, pardon! but our honour this denies:

Would'st thou with thy warring armies this poor country now chastise?

Give us rather, mighty Sultan, a high token of thy grace

And magnanimously leave us, back again thy way retrace . . .

Be the one or be the other, what our fate may have in store,

Gladly shall we bear it always, be it peace or be it war.“

— „When the world to me is open, thinkest thou that I can bear

That my mighty host should stumble on a stump that's lying there?

O thou knowest not how many in my way with armies pressed!

All the heroes bold and famous, all the glory of the West.

All that 'neath the cross was gathered, kings and emperors great

[did form

An innumerable army 'gainst the crescent's furious storm.

In their shining mail, well armoured, and in martial proud array

Came the dauntless knights of Malta bold and eager for the fray;

And the Pope, the triple-crownèd, all his gathered thunders sent

Gainst the thunder that most direful earth and sea with rage had rent²⁾,

¹⁾ Rovine (pron. Roveena), a marshy plain near the Danube where Mircea Basarab (pron. Meerchah), ruler of Wallachia (1386—1418) vanquished the sultan Bajazet. He also took part at the battle of Nicopolis (1396) in the last crusade of the West against the Turks.

²⁾ Allusion to the name of Bajazet „the Thunder“.

At a sign, like rivers flooding from the mountain, field and wood,
 The whole West sent forth its nations, for the glory of the Rood.
 And they came, the whole world shaking from its deepest quietness,
 Darkening the far horizon with their shields, spears numberless.
 On the land like moving forests they advanced in awful might,
 By their daring galleons shaken, trembled e'en the sea with fright...
 At Nicopolis thou sawest how they camped, assembling all,
 To my power there opposing an unshaken bulwark wall;
 When I saw them there as many as the sands are on the shore,
 With an unquenched hate I muttered in my beard, an oath I swore,
 Over them to tread, to crush them, ruthlessly my way to force,
 And in Rome, on Peter's alter, make a manger for my horse.
 And my hurricane, that's sweeping all away like dust and chaff,
 Thinkest thou that thou canst stay it only with an old man's staff?"
 — „Yes, 'tis true, an old man, Sultan! but the man thou dost behold
 Is a man not of the common, but Wallachia's ruler bold.
 I wish not that thou shouldst ever come our direful wrath to know,
 That thy mighty hosts should perish in the Danube's angry flow.
 Yet in olden times full many, on their way all conquering,
 First of all and the most famous, great Darius, Persian king,
 Built a bridge on our old Danube, battling o'er with might and main,
 Fright'ning all around and thinking the whole world was their domain:
 Emperors, whom the vastest empires could within their bounds not hold,
 Came here asking earth and water, as in olden tales is told,
 And I do not wish to frighten, nor do I now wish to boast,
 They were turned to earth and water, nought was left of all their host.
 Thou dost boast that thou couldst conquer, all before thee crushing down,
 Emperors' proud, great hosts, well armoured, bravest knights of high
 [renown,
 Thou dost boast the Western powers all their armies 'gainst thee pressed,
 But what urged them to the battle, what allured the glorious West?
 They would fain have torn the laurels from thy iron brow so bright,
 Victory for faith and glory — this was sought by every knight.
 I do here defend my country, my poor nation in distress...
 Therefore all that here is stirring, friends to me with help will press:
 Men, all creatures, woods and rivers, everything will be thy foe,
 And the meaning of our hatred to its fulness thou wilt know.
 Armies have we not, but know it, love of country is a wall
 That by fear is never shaken, nothing ever makes it fall!"

Scarce the old man had departed, when with storm the forest torn
 Rustled, roared with shouts and clangour, sounds of arms and sounds
 [of horn.

Coming from the dark, deep shadows, on the green skirts of the wood,
 Thousands, thousands of bright helmets, long-haired yeoman gathered
 [stood.

At a sign together swarming, on their horses, wild and fleet,
 On the panting flanks the riders with their wooden stirrups beat,
 Like a dust cloud, storm fore-telling, lightly, swiftly on they sped,
 Shield on shield gave back the sunlight, spear points glittered over head,
 As from copper clouds in autumn hail storms driven by the blast,
 Hide in darkness the horizon, so sharp arrows flashing passed,
 Whizzing, singing, hurtling, ringing, filled the air with dread alarms,
 And to thundering horsehoofs echoed cries of battle, clash of arms.
 Vainly like the fiercest lion did the sultan roar and rage,
 Death's grim shadow grew still greater on all those who war did wage:
 Vainly to arouse their spirits did they lift the Prophet's flag,
 For on front, on flanks fast seizing Death did all to ruin drag;
 Wavering whole troops were shaken, thinned fell down long battle rows,
 The Arabians fell like grass-blades, when a man his meadow mows,
 Horsemen from their steeds were tumbled, footmen beaten to their knees,
 And the arrows came like billows surging on tempestuous seas,
 Like the frost from all sides biting, and it seemed as if the world,
 To the darkest depths down falling, heaven and hell on earth were
 [hurled.

Mircea led himself in battle this fierce storm so wildly rushing,
 Coming on and on, in fury, all beneath it trampling, crushing.
 Vanquished were the foe's great armies, scattered, cast away, like rags,
 And victoriously advancing came the country's blessed flags.
 As in wind the chaff is winnowed, so the paynims were dispersed,
 To the Danube they were driven, as within a flood immersed,
 That doth carry all resistless to the raging sea's wild coast,
 And behind them came in triumph the Rumanian glorious host.

As to rest the army settled, gorgeously the sun went down,
 As if victory's bright nimbus the land's highest crests would crown,
 Like a long and lasting lightning, that with splendour now did rest,
 O'er the dark high rising mountains, our land's bulwark toward the
 [West.

From the deep night of the ages, one by one, the stars came, soon
 From the mists, o'er dark green forests, shimmering appeared the moon.
 The great queen of night and oceans, peace and sleep to all things sent.
 A young son of our bold ruler watchful sat beside his tent,
 Smiling with a dear remembrance, while the calm moon shone above,
 On his knee a letter writing, home to send it to his love:

From Rovine, in a dale
 Lady mine, I send this mail.
 Many things I have to say,
 But thou art so far away.
 I must send all in a letter,
 Since I cannot now do better.
 Lady dear this soul of mine
 Yearns for all that's truly thine,
 For thine eyes, sweet, smiling, good,
 For the springs, the fields, the wood.
 Send them, for I too send, dear,
 All that is most lovely here,
 My proud host with banners glorious,
 Over our great foes victorious,
 And with them will come together
 My bright helm with pea-cock feather
 And my brows, my loving eyes:
 All to thee, with longing hies.
 Thanking Christ, God save my soul!
 I am safe and sound and whole.
 With my love I send thee this,
 Thy sweet lips, sweet soul, I kiss.

.....

Such were those old times that happy chroniclers and poets knew,
 Our own age is full of jugglers, mountebanks and all their crew.
 In the legends and old annals may the heroes still be found.
 Shall I greet with dreamy music, with my lyre and flute's sweet sound
 All these patriots who later in their heritage did follow?
 Oh! before all these, with horror, veil and hide thyself, Apollo!
 You were hid in glorious shadows of the past, O heroes bold!
 But it is the newest fashion, with your fame from annals old
 Our own hollow times to brighten, and to drape with it those fools,

Who your golden age are smirching with their prose, their filthy pools.
Bassarabs, Mushats¹), in holy shadows stay, you noble race,
Settlers of the land and givers of new laws, you who did trace
With the spade and plough new frontiers for a country large and free,
Far extending from the mountains to the Danube and the sea.
Is not great our present? Does not all that one can wish abound?
In our throng is there not any precious jewel to be found?
Is not here the Sybaritic temple of false glories, none
But are offsprings of the taverns, reputations cheaply won!
See we not the fighting heroes, who with rhetor's lances meet,
Thus exciting the loud plaudits of the rabble in the street?
Dancers on the rope, impostors, jugglers, rivals for the prize,
Famous masquerading actors in the comedy of lies.
Does the liberal not always speak of virtue, country-love?
One would think his life is crystal, like the purest sky above.
You would not think that before you is a coffee-house supporter,
Who at his own words is laughing, a mere ape, a word distorter.
See that soulless, heartless being, with big jaws, and swollen face,
Monster in whom all the vices find the fittest meeting place,
Swarthy, hunchbacked, greedy, wily, he with all the ruffians leagues,
And imparts to his low fellows all his venomous intrigues.
On their lips is always virtue, but their souls are hollow shells,
Worthlessness in these mere nothings, void from top to bottom, dwells.
Mustering his army's numbers, eagerly and well pleased spies
Over all that hideous monster with his swollen, frog-like eyes.
Such are those whom our land choosing representatives must call,
Men who fitly would be gathered all behind some bedlam's wall,
In long shirt and with a fool's cap; these assemble now and thus,
Making laws and fixing taxes, they our public weal discuss.
Patriots and pious founders of establishments like those
Where in words, in deeds, in gestures lewdness, only lewdness shows.
They in parliament assemble, sit admiring there each other's
Thick, stiff necks or long, thin noses, all these Greek, Bulgarian brothers.
Heirs of the great Roman empire are they all, and everyone
Of his ancestors is boasting, being Trajan's great grandson!
And this mob, this scum, this vermin, this our country's desolation,
They should now become our leaders, rulers of this once great nation!

¹) Bassarab and Mushat: the names of the two ruling families of Wallachia and Moldavia.

All that in the neighb'ring countries was deformed and misbegotten,
 All that's stained with foul corruption's mark by nature, all that's rotten,
 All these helots, mean and greedy, which the Phanar¹⁾ here has sent,
 Self-styled patriots, so-called brothers, on their selfish schemes intent,
 Babblers, stutterers, and cretins, wry-mouthed wretches, now grown
[great
 Are your masters, — yes, these prattlers are the pillars of the state.

You the heirs of Rome? You, eunuchs, of her fame are boasting when
 All the world, with horror shrinking, is ashamed to call you men!
 And this pestilence, these creatures with their nasty mouths proclaim
 That they are the country's saviours, and they dare, they have no shame,
 All the glory of our nation with their filth but to besmear
 And thy holy name pronouncing to disgrace it, country dear!

In the lupanars, in Paris, day and night you have been seen
 With the most depraved of women and in revelry obscene,
 You have lost your youth and fortune, gambling, drinking, wild and
[lewd,
 How could Paris make you better, since in you was nothing good?
 Wearing monocles like dandies, with a little walking cane,
 You came back, your heads pomaded, in your brains did nought remain
 But some waltz learnt in the ballrooms, nothing else was left behind:
 And all prematurely withered, with an empty childish mind,
 And a harlot's dancing slippers, all the wealth you did acquire...
 I admire you, proudest offspring of the Romans, I admire!

Now you look amazed and frightened to our cold and sceptic eyes,
 And you wonder why no longer we can listen to your lies?
 When we see that all these loafers, who with great words make such din
 Are but chasing after money, cheaply, without work to win.
 If these polished, empty phrases, all this idle talk, my brothers,
 Cannot cheat us any longer, is it now the fault of others?
 Too much did you this poor country with our foes to pieces tear,
 Too much did you shame our nation, too much, too much did you dare

¹⁾ The Rumanian principalities, fallen under the Turkish yoke, were governed during the XVIII-th century by Greek princes sent by the Turks from the Phanar of Constantinople. Many of these princes, with their followers, had devastated the country.

Our most holy things, our customs, language, ancestors defile!
But we have now all your measure, O you scoundrels mean and vile!
Yes, to gain without an effort is your end, and rich to be,
Virtue is the merest folly, genius is but misery!

Let the ancestors sleep soundly in their annals' dusty book,
From their glorious past they surely down on you with scorn would look.
Where art thou, old prince, Vlad Tzepesh¹), on them all to lay thy hands
Treating them as rogues and madmen, to divide them into bands,
Throw them into two big houses, as with others thou didst whilom,
Setting fire unto the prison, and the lunatic asylum.

¹) Vlad, ruler of Wallachia in the XV-th century, famous for his cruelty; surnamed Tzepesh (The Impaler) because after a victory against the sultan Mohammed II he impaled all the prisoners. He is said to have imprisoned in a house all the thieves he could catch, afterwards setting it on fire.

FOURTH EPISTLE

Solitary stands the castle mirrored in the lake and deep
In the waters clear for ages quietly its shadows sleep,
There it rises in the silence, high above the ancient trees,
Throwing darkness on the waters ruffled by the summer breeze,
Inside one can see but faintly through the panes of arched bays
Folded curtains like the hoar-frost glinting in the twilight rays.
Over forests trembling rises now the moon and burning grows,
Mossy rocks and tree-tops painting 'gainst the sky, their beauty shows;
Those tall oaks, a guard of giants, tow'ring high there, on the azure.
Her bright orient bed seem guarding like a precious, secret treasure.

There the white swans softly gliding through the reeds come from
[their nests,

Lonely lords of quiet waters, in this calm the only guests,
Now they soar, their heads uplifting, and their outspread wings they
[shake

Cutting undulating circles, glowing furrows on the lake;
By the waves moved quiver rustling all the rushes in the thicket,
In the grass with flowers fragrant drowsy chirps and sighs a cricket...
O how sweet the summer breathing, sweet the voices of the night!...
Under the veranda sighing stands a solitary knight.
All the balustrade is hidden under woodbine, roses rare,
Their intoxicating perfume has embalmed the evening air;
With the night's bewitching fragrance drunk now all his senses are,
Over this whole charm of nature sweetly ripples his guitar:

„Come in thy white silken garment, with its long train, which doth seem
All with silver dust besprigled, come again my dearest dream.
All my life thy radiant presence I shall worship, lady mine,
With thy slender hand caressing those soft golden curls of thine.
Come and play with me, the flowers from thy bosom on me throw...

O the night's so white in moonlight, all seems sleeping under snow.
 Shall we linger, time beguiling, in the bower's fragrant shade?
 Cupid, prankish page, the candle hides away, my tender maid!"

Rustling silk is heard above him, on the balustrade inclining,
 Childlike laughs a face so happy, as an angel she is shining;
 From the balcony she throws him down a rose, she seems but scolding
 While she whispers to him fondly, round her lips her white hands
 [holding:

She again now disappearing, quick steps come downstairs in haste...
 Running with their arms outstretchèd fondly they are now enlaced...
 Arm in arm they go, so meetly to each other they belong,
 She so beautiful and slender, he so handsome, tall and strong.
 From the shady shore advances slowly moved by oars a barge,
 From the mast its sails are drooping, and the wind abaft at large,
 And they fly on dream wings happy, far from envy, far from harm,
 Rocked in soul with so much beauty, spellbound, rapt by nature's charm.

Now the moon, the moon ascendeth in her splendour, full and bright.
 And from shore to shore on waters builds a path of glowing light,
 That in thousandfold quick ripples mirrors gleaming every beam
 Sent by heaven's fairest maiden, of eternal mist the dream;
 And the more her sweet light shining clearer, brighter still doth glow,
 So the waves, the shores are greater, and the forest seems to grow,
 While the ocean swaying moon disk nearer seems, on shady bowers
 From the mighty lime-trees shaken, their fair blossoms fall in showers,
 Or by wind o'er waters driven fly to match her golden hair,
 Throwing back her head, enraptured, in her arms she clasps him there.

„O thy words are sweetly thrilling, speak no more, O thou amazest
 Thy poor slave whom now so highly in thy lofty thought thou raisest:
 This love pain that thy soul feeleth this is all my life's desire,
 My poor heart is aching, kindled by thy voice's gentle fire.
 O this seems an old love story! All thy dreams, thy eyes' sweet night,
 O they burn my soul to ashes, and they fill me with delight.
 These deep eyes, though they may blind me, give them me, my

[heaven's gates!

Listen how the waves are talking with the stars that know the fates!
 Those dark forests speak now dreaming; listen, every wand'ring spring
 When he meets another wand'rer of our love is whispering,

And the morning star above us that his trembling cold rays sends,
 This whole earth, the lake, the heavens, they are all our loving friends.
 Thou may'st now forget the rudder, thou may'st throw away the oars.
 Let's be taken where it listeth by the wind that gently soars,
 Let's be led on wheresoever, our dear aim we cannot miss,
 If to life or death we're led on, wheresoe'er we go is bliss!"

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Fancy, O my dearest fancy! When I am alone with thee
 How oft dost thou make me wander in the groves, on fields, on sea!
 How to all these unknown countries couldst thou ever wander so?
 When did all these strange things happen? Many centuries ago?
 Now there is no time with full heart thy belovèd to caress,
 To embrace and kiss her, feeling in her eyes love's blessedness;
 Now her hand thou scarcely touchest, and at once through opened door.
 All her relatives assembled in a congress in will pour,
 Soon aside thy head thou turnest, casting down thy humble look...
 In this world is there no longer left for love a quiet nook?

With this life I'm sick and weary... Not that I its cups have sipped,
 But its misery's so bitter, in its prose to be so dipped!
 Fools, how can you cry and suffer, sanctify with holy tear
 This vain instinct, common impulse, that e'en birds feel twice a year?
 No, you do not live, another loves, inspires you, — he but lives,
He with your own mouth is laughing, *he* to all the impulse gives.
 All your lives are like the waters, waves in never ending surge
 In a stream that is eternal, this stream is the Demiurge.
 Don't you feel that you see wonders in these dull desires? O fools!
 That your love is but another's, that all these are but the tools
 To fulfil another's purpose, serving only nature's need?
 That this all is but the cradle of new life, of hate the seed?
 Don't you see your joy and laughter in your sons cause only pain?
 That in all our veins is running still the guilty blood of Cain?
 Much ado of human voices, nothing but a puppet show,
 They tell jokes, mere words like parrots, but their meaning do not
 [know...
 The same actor through the ages one same thing again will say,
 Endlessly soliloquizing, in an everlasting play.
 Why then, while the moon o'er deserts through the clouds is gliding
 [slowly,

Creepst thou with thoughts so lofty on a woman's footsteps lowly?
 Look at her through lighted windows how, surrounded in a ball
 By a swarm of idle fellows, frivolous she smiles at all?
 While they wink with understanding, and the while she flirts with these,
 With such foolish adoration thou before her door wilt freeze?
 And with passion love her, faithful, thinking that she is delightful,
 While like April she's capricious, while she is so cold and spiteful?
 In thy dreams embrace her always, all consumed with holy fire,
 And from top to toe caress her in thy thought, and to admire,
 To adore like a Madonna painted by a Raphael,
 While she is so cold, coquettish? — 'Tis ridiculous, mark well!
 Yes... anon I dreamt so often of the only one to love me,
 Knowing that I understand her, she would stand inclined above me,
 Like a muse when I am thoughtful, I should feel her near me, near...
 Our whole life would be a love-tale, like a fountain pure and clear.
 No, I seek her now no longer... Why should I? The same old song,
 Thirst for quietude eternal, this is all for which I long;
 But the instrument is shattered, midst disordered screeches wild,
 As in night the spring soft murmurs, that old song is heard so mild.
 Here and there a voice, though faintly, sounds as clearly as before
 From a *Carmen saeculare* which I dreamt in times of yore,
 But the whole now whistles, screeches, jars with broken sounds so dire,
 Wildly driving, tossing, whirling, rolls tumultuous on my lyre.
 My poor head is waste and burning, in my thought the winds howl
[strong,
 Harsh and shrill is still resounding that eternal, endless song...

Where are they, those clear, light moments of my poor life now so sad?
 O the instrument is shattered, the musician now is mad!

FIFTH EPISTLE

(Delilah)

In the Bible we are told how Samson's wife one fateful night,
While he slept, his long hair shaving, severed him from all his might,
That his foes might overcome him, fetter him and blind his eyes,
This to show the soul that hidden 'neath a woman's garment lies.
O young man who always follow'st in her footsteps full of dreams,
While the golden shield of heaven on the alleys brightly beams
And the shadows green with laces so mysteriously are girt,
O forget not thy belovèd hath short wit, though long her skirt.
A midsummernight's dream charms thee, with its beauty, fairylike;
All that is in *thy* soul only . . . Ask her what she thinks, belike
She will speak of ribbons, flounces, all that is the newest fashion,
While thy heart is throbbing rhythmic, like an ode, with sacred passion...
When her little head close nestles on thy breast, 'tis to beguile. Ah!
If thou hast a heart and senses, then beware, think of Delilah!

Yes, of course, she is so charming . . . Like a child, so full of fun,
When she laughs she has two dimples in her cheeks, and there is one
On each knuckle of her fingers, she's not lanky, lean or tall,
Fashioned well to be embracèd, to be loved, adored, and all
That she says is so becoming, what she does is always sweet,
It is so because she does it, all perfections in her meet:
If she speaks or if she's silent, she's delightful, only she,
And if „go away“ her lips say, then her laugh says „come to me!“
Idly balancing she walketh as if listening to a song,
Fondly spoiled, as if for kisses only she did always long,
Towards thy lips she'll rise on tiptoe for a heartfelt given kiss,
That mysterious warmth instilling, lavishing that heav'nly bliss
That a woman's soul alone can yield with her bewitching charms . . .
O the happiness thou findest only in her loving arms!
If thou couldst but see her blushing thy whole soul would be alight —
She a dreamy queen, capricious, thou a young and hopeful knight —
Deeply in her eyes then looking thou wouldst understand and see

What the price of life for thee is, what the price of death may be.
 Poisoned with sweet melancholy, spellbound as thou art, she seems
 Queen of queens, the fairest empress of thy world of thoughts and

[dreams:

In thy fancy, with her tearful eyes in which her love does shine,
 Brighter she would seem than Venus rising from the foamy brine:
 In the chaos of oblivion though the hours may run so fast,
 For thee she'll be always dearer every day unto the last.
 Vain illusions! Dost thou not see from her look, from her whole face,
 That her attitude is habit, and her smile but a grimace,
 That here all her splendid beauty wasteth like a useless thing,
 That her soul's most precious treasure she is idly squandering?
 With its seven strings thy tuneful lyre accompanies in vain
 With its cadences harmonious thy melodious wailful strain;
 Vainly does thy mind transfigure fairylike this world of ours,
 Like the frost that paints on windows an embroidery of flowers,
 When thy heart is full of summer; vainly now thy soul endears
 Her proud head to sanctify it, on her soft hair fall thy tears.
 No, she cannot see that 'tis not *thou* who wantest her . . . in thee
 Is a daemon that is thirsting after her sweet light, and he
 Cries and laughs, — O the poor daemon — but himself he hears not, and
 If he longs for her 'tis only his own self to understand;
 So he pineth like a sculptor to whom neither arm was left,
 Like the great inspired composer who of hearing was bereft,
 While his soul was soaring upwards in the music of the spheres,
 Whose harmonious, rhythmic rolling in his mind he always hears.
 He does not ask *her* to offer on an altar her own life,
 As in olden times fell victim to the high priest's sacred knife
 Many pure and lovely virgins, who with holy rites were slain,
 Having stood as sculptor's models for a goddess in a fane.
 She might help him to discover his own self, aloft to strive,
 And with his own fire consumèd, to a new life to revive;
 With his wild unsated passion, he, inspired by her, would try,
 In Adonic verse, like Horace, skilfully his tongue to ply;
 In his dream would bring the murmur of the springs, all flowers vernal,
 Cooling shadows of deep forests and the stars' bright fire eternal,
 And in that mysterious moment, feeling happy, in his eyes
 The antique blest world with glamour to new life would seem to rise,
 And with deepest passion kneeling he would praise, he would adore her,
 In her youthful eyes up looking, for her grace, he would implore her,
 In his arms would keep her ever, on his bosom warm infold,

Try to thaw with long, hot kisses those unfeeling eyes so cold.
 If she were a marble statue, she would melt with so much love,
 On his knees he would entreat her, that stone heart would strive to move;
 Mad, with so much bliss all smothered, feeling more than words could
 [form,
 More and more he now would love her, in his passion's wildest storm.

Does she know that she might give thee a whole splendid world, if she
 Tried to understand thee better, plunging in thy soul's deep sea,
 She would fill it with a heaven full of morning stars so bright!
 With coquettish smile, delighted, and with looks demure, she might
 Act as if she understood thee. Highly flattered are they all
 The eternal Beauty's shadows to be on this earthly ball.
 Call her flower among the women, she'll be pleased, but ask her who
 Is the one whom she would favour of the three who round her woo,
 And who all pretend to love her, thou wilt see that though naïve,
 Thy belovèd will at once be practical and positive.
 With thy heart and mind perhaps thou art but serving as a screen,
 And behind thee she's attracting some young fop with courtly mien,
 While with gallant looks, coquettish, she is seeking but to shine,
 Captivating now a dandy, now a lewd old libertine,
 There's no wonder that her spirit should be all a sad confusion,
 And an upstart knave impress her like the king of spades, delusion!
 And with thy poor spirit's daemon she'll feign meekness, like a nun,
 While when that young fop appeareth, then at once her heart is won,
 And at this fool's wit and beauty she'll be fondly marvelling.

O to dream that truth, high spirit, or some other useless thing,
 One small jot could change in nature, or of any help might be,
 This is the eternal hindrance to the truth's great victory.

Therefore in² woman's footsteps when thou follow'st full of dreams,
 While the golden shield of heaven on the alleys brightly beams,
 And the shadows green with laces so mysteriously are girt,
 O forget not, thy belovèd hath short wit though long her skirt.
 A midsummernight's dream charms thee, with its beauty, fairylike,
 All that is in *thy* soul only . . . Ask her what she thinks, belike
 She will speak of ribbons, flounces, all about the newest fashion,
 While thy heart is throbbing rhythmic, like an ode, with sacred passion.
 When thou see'st th'unfeeling marble, without pity's gentle smile, Ah!
 If thou hast a heart and senses, go away, she is Delilah!

O MOTHER...

O Mother, sweetest Mother, thy calling voice so dear,
Through time's dark mist resounding, in rustling leaves I hear;
Where quietly thou sleepest, o'er thy most holy tomb,
The wind now shakes the willows in heavy autumn's gloom;
In gently rustling branches I hear the voice of yore...
The wind for ever shakes them, thou sleepest evermore.

When I shall die, belovèd, thou shalt not weep for me,
But tear a branch, my dearest, from that sweet linden-tree,
And carefully then plant it near my reposing head,
To make it grow, upon it thy loving tears shalt shed,
And on my tomb I'll feel it, its shadows creeping o'er...
For ever grow the shadows, I sleep for evermore.

And if one day together it be our doom to die,
Not in a dreary churchyard should we be put to lie,
But near the flowing river let us for aye repose,
A single narrow coffin shall both of us enclose,
And thou shalt be for ever so near my bosom's core...
For ever weep the waters, we sleep for evermore.

EVE ON THE HILL.

Dreary the horn sounds in the eve on the hill,
Sheepflocks return, stars on their way twinkle still,
Watersprings weep murmuring clear, and I see
Under a tree, love, thou art waiting for me.

Holy and pure passes the moon on the sky,
Moist seem the stars born from the vault clear and high,
Longing thine eyes look from afar to divine,
Heaving thy breast, pensive thy head doth recline.

Tired with their toil, peasants come back from the field,
From the old church, labourer's comfort and shield,
Voices of bells thrill the whole sky high above;
Struck is my heart, trembling and burning with love.

Ah! very soon quietness steals over all,
Ah! very soon hasten shall I to thy call,
Under the tree, there I shall sit the whole night,
Telling thee, love, *thou* art my only delight.

Cheek press'd to cheek, there in sweet ecstasy we,
Falling asleep under the old locust-tree,
Smiling in dream, seem in a heaven to live,
For such a night who his whole life would not give?

ODE

(in Sapphic metre)

That I'm doomed to die I believed it never;
Always young and clad in my mantle I wandered,
Dreaming eyes uplifted for ever fixed on
Solitude's starlight.

When so sudden, there on my pathway rising,
Sorrow, O so painfully sweet, thou camest!
Then with deep delight to the dregs I drank thy
Merciless death cup.

And like Nessus burning alive and tortured,
Poisoned as was Hercules with his garment,
This great fire that's blazing in me I cannot
Quench with an ocean.

My own dream consuming me, sore lamenting,
On my pyre I die thus to ashes burning . . .
Can I from it living arise as bright as
Phoenix the immortal?

Troubling eyes, go out of my way for ever!
Back to me indifference dreary come now!
That I may in quietness die, O give me
Back my old selfhood!

WHAT IS LOVE?

O, what is love? It is a cause
Of pain so long and sore,
That though thou shedd'st a million tears
It still will ask for more.

A passing token but from her
Forever binds thy soul,
And never wilt forget her now,
Thy life is hers, the whole.

But when on threshold there for thee,
Or in the shady nooks,
Fulfilling all thy hearts desire,
She waits with longing looks,

Then earth and heavens disappear,
And throbbing is thy heart,
All hangs on a half-whispered word,
New life with it doth start.

A pressure of the hand so sweet,
An eyelash twinkling, nay,
A lazy gait, an aimless word,
Pursues thee night and day.

And eyes pursue thee, light thy way,
Like sun and moon so bright,
And wheresoever, night and day
They are thy only light.

And it was doomed that all thy life
For her alone shall long,
For like the water bindweed she
Has caught thy soul so strong.

THOU GOEST ...

Thou goest and through years of suff'ring
For thee will long my dreary eyes,
Of all thy being's charms enamour'd,
For thy sweet smile my spirit sighs.

My love's not mild like tales of fairies,
My love so painful tears my breast,
And O thy soul is but a demon
In beauteous form of marble dressed!

Thy face has all the charms of pallor,
And moist and sparkling is thine eye,
With coaxing looks thou art so thrilling,
So full of wiles, so roguish, sly.

And when thou touchest me I quiver,
And when I hear thy steps I start,
Thy trembling lashes' charm for ever
Enthralls my life, my throbbing heart.

Thou goest and I shall no longer
With deep regret for past days mourn,
No more a victim, will no longer
My heart with ruthless pain be torn.

And in my ear thy burning whisper
My ravished mind no longer woos,
Thy hand no longer smooths my forehead,
To make me all my wits to lose.

O in my thought with names most shameful
Thy conduct I could then reprove,
I cursed thee with the wildest hatred,
I cursed thee, O it was but love!

Now even this is left no longer
And none have I to curse to-day,
And as to-day will be to-morrow,
So all my years will pass away.

An autumn which doth sadly linger
Above a dreary fountain dry,
And o'er it withered leaves are falling —
They are my dreams that now must die.

And life to me seems but a madness,
So spent before e'en it was born,
In an eternity of darkness
One moment's bliss and thence forlorn.

O thence for ever from me flying
My luck I never, never met,
O give me back one moment's treasure
With all its years of deep regret!

IN THAT NARROW LANE...

In that narrow lane as always
Shines the moon on windows clear,
Only thou behind the lattice
Never dost again appear!

And the same old tree now stretches
O'er the hedge its blooming bough,
Only those old days so happy
As they were cannot be now.

Changed is thy soul now wholly,
Changed are thy looks to-day,
Only I, the same remaining,
Wander on the wonted way.

Graceful, slender, gently treading,
Thou didst come, so sweet and soft,
To that secret grove, where longing
I did wait for thee so oft.

With thee near my heart, not knowing
What on earth around us stirred,
O how much we were then telling,
Without uttering a word!

Kisses were the only answer
To all questions, and the best;
Nothing else on earth desiring,
With life's utmost charm then blest.

I forgot, thus happy dreaming,
That it is the same, forsooth,
If one leans against a shadow
Or believes in woman's truth.

Winds blow in the trembling curtains,
As they did in days of yore,
Only there behind the windows
Thy sweet face appears no more.

SINCE SO LONG ...

Since so long with one another
We could neither speak nor meet,
O meseems we have forgotten
How much we have loved, my sweet.

Now I see thee pale before me,
And thy wounded heart I feel,
As in former days, O let me
At thy feet here humbly kneel.

Let me weep for pity; fondly
Let those little hands be kissed;
What did you so long, my dearest
Hands, which many weeks I missed?

WHERE POPLARS SOLITARY GROW...

Where poplars solitary grow
I passed so oft alone,
And all thy neighbours knew me well,
By thee I was not known.

Beneath thy shining window oft
Up looking did I stand,
A whole world round thee understood,
Thou didst not understand.

How often did I wait to hear
From thee a whispered word,
How happy should I then have been,
Had I thy voice but heard.

O but an hour of love with thee,
An hour to be thy friend,
To hear thy whisp'ring accents sweet,
And then this life to end.

If from thine eye serene had come
To me a ray of love,
Then for all future times would shine
A new star's light above.

Thou wouldst have lived for ages long,
For ever in my rhyme,
And thou wouldst shine, with marble arms,
As beauty's mould sublime.

And thou wouldst be for aye adored,
 So beauteous, with no peer,
Like fairies from the times of yore,
 That in our dreams appear.

I loved thee with a heathen's eyes,
 With painful passion hot,
That from my father's fathers came
 To be my earthly lot.

But seldom do I pass to-day,
 Mine eyes no longer burn,
Nor do I care if sadly thou
 For me thy head dost turn.

For in thy gesture, gait, to-day
 Thou art like all, and I
Indifferently look at thee
 With dead man's sightless eye.

O if thy soul had then been filled
 With sacred ecstasy,
Thou wouldst have lit on earth love's lamp
 To burn eternally.

SONNETS

By secret love of thee I thought it right
To keep full silence, deemed this pleasèd thee,
I in thy looks saw an eternity
Of dreams consuming with their high delight.

I can no more. My longing, love's great might
Lends wingèd words to that sweet mystery,
And, all on fire, I would consumèd be
In that dear heart that would with mine unite.

That I am burning how canst thou not feel?
My lips with thirst for thee are parched and dry;
Fair maid, alone thou canst my fever heal.

A breath of thine alone may soothe my sigh,
And when thou smil'st my thought with joy doth reel,
O end my pain — come to my breast, come nigh!

Like clouds o'er plains have passed the years so long,
And back again they'll never more be wiled,
They charm no longer as they charmed, beguiled
The youth, those tales and riddles, that sweet song,

Scarce understood, delightful for the child,
With meaning full, for which I much did long —
In vain surrounds me now thy shadows' throng
O hour of mystery, O twilight mild!

Of life's dear past how can I hear the chimes,
And make thee tremble now again, my soul?
In vain I play my lyre, in vain I hearken:

'Tis dumb the lovely voice of those old times,
My youth is far, my joy is lost, the whole,
And Time runs fast behind . . . My mind doth darken!

'Tis gone the life of Venice with its pride —
 No songs are heard, nor seen are lights of balls,
 On marble stairs, on portals, in the halls,
 The moon's pale rays alone all whitening glide.

In the canals Oceanus wailing calls . . .
He only will forever young abide,
 Fain would he give life's breath to his sweet bride,
 His sounding waves are beating mouldering walls.

A churchyard silence o'er the town doth lower.
 A priest whom ages left in his old fane,
 St Mark strikes sinister the midnight hour.

In rhythmic numbers, softly, in deep strain,
 In language sibylline sounds from the tower:
 „The dead do not awake — it is in vain.“

(Posthumous)

How terrible the ocean's wrath can be!
 He roars with rage and foaming arms will send
 To rule the world and to the clouds ascend,
 Till spent by storm he sinks back sullenly.

How vainly frightful thunderbolts defend
 The heaven . . . In the blue vault he doth see
 His palace, a strong fortress, on which he
 With grim assault his power would extend.

By lightning wounded, down he seems to fall,
 With whispered tales a breeze his anger stills,
 And in his depth is mirrored heaven's high hall.

What he had so desired a dream fulfils:
 They are now his, the moon, the stars and all,
 He murmurs happily, with joy he thrills.

TO MY CRITICS

There are many flowers, but only
Few of them a fruit will bear,
All light seeking, but for many
Early death is all their share.

It is easy to write verses
When thou nothing hast to tell,
Like the pearls bare phrases stringing,
Word by word to rhyme them well;

But when longings, passions, tossing
Prey upon thy mind and heart,
Thou dost hear tumultuous voices,
Listening then to all thou art.

At the doors of thought all knocking,
Like the flowers for light they press,
They all want this world to enter,
Well adorned in speech's dress.

For thy whole life's deepest passions,
For thy suffering soul which cries,
Dost thou see the awful judges
With their cruel icy eyes?

O then on thy head so heavy
All the heaven seems to fall;
Where to find the word that fitly
Answers truth's and beauty's call?

Critics, you, like barren flowers,
Ever fruitless, know it well:
'Tis most easy to write verses,
When one nothing has to tell.

(Posthumous)

Of the masts by thousands leaving
Shores which many an ocean laves,
O how many will be shattered
By the winds and by the waves.

Of the birds by thousands wand'ring,
Many a one a grave soon finds,
While still hopeful it is driven
By the waves and by the winds.

If to high ideals aspiring,
Or thy soul but fortune craves,
Thou art driven wheresoever
By the winds and by the waves.

Never understood the thought is
That the song in wing'd words binds,
Ever floating, far off echoed
By the waves and by the winds.



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