

Classic Poetry Series

**Mikhail Yuryevich
Lermontov
- poems -**

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Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov(1814 - 1841)

Lermontov was born in Moscow on 15th October 1814 to a retired army captain and his wife. At the age of three Lermontov's mother died and he was sent to live with his grandmother on her estate in Penzenskaya province. Here, the natural and at times exotic beauty of the area formed a lasting impression on him, as did the customs and ceremonies of the time and the stories, legends and folk songs that he heard.

In 1827 he moved with his grandmother to Moscow and attended boarding school. There he began to write poetry and study painting. Lermontov, like many other young writers at the time, was influenced heavily by English poet Lord Byron, as was shown by his first two poems *Cherkesy* and *Kavkazsky Plennik* (1828).

His first published verse, *Vesna* followed in 1830.

Also in 1830, he entered Moscow University and studied alongside such democratically minded representatives of nobility as Aleksandr Herzen and Nikolay Platonovich Ogaryov. Students regularly discussed political and philosophical problems and it was in this atmosphere that Lermontov wrote a number of longer, narrative poems and dramas. For example, his drama *Stranny Chelovek* (A Strange Man)(1831) reflected the attitudes current among members of student societies: hatred of the despotic tsarist regime and of serfdom.

In 1832 he left Moscow university and entered cadet school in St. Petersburg. Upon his graduation in 1834 he was appointed to the Life-Guard Hussar Regiment stationed at Tsarskoye Selo (now Pushkin), close to St. Petersburg. In 1840 he was exiled following a duel with the son of the French ambassador at St. Petersburg. However, in 1841 he was allowed to return in order to spend some time with his grandmother. On his return journey he experienced a burst of creative energy and wrote such poetic pieces as *Utes* (The Cliff), *Spor*(Argument), *Net, ne tebya tak pylko ya lyublyu* (No, It Was Not You I Loved So Fervently) and his last work *Prorok* ("Prophet").

Lermontov died during a duel with a fellow officer in 1842. He was only twenty six years of age but had still shown himself to be a gifted poet, writer, and playwright who would go on inspire a number of other Russian artists.

A Prayer

Faithful before thee, Mother of God, now kneeling,
Image miraculous and merciful--of thee
Not for my soul's health nor battles waged, beseeching,
Nor yet with thanks or penitence o'erwhelming me!

Not for myself,--my heart with guilt o'erflowing--
Who in my home land e'er a stranger has remained,
No, a sinless child upon thy mercy throwing,
That thou protect her innocence unstained!

Worthy the highest bliss, with happiness O bless her!
Grant her a friend to stand unchanging at her side,
A youth of sunshine and an old age tranquil,
A spirit where together peace and hope abide.

Then, when strikes the hour her way from earth for wending,
Let her heart break at dawning or at dead of night--
From out thy highest heaven, thy fairest angel sending
The fairest of all souls sustain in heavenward flight!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

A Song

Dry leaf trembling on the branches
Before the blast,
Poor heart quaking in the bosom
For woe thou hast;
Ah what matter if the wind then,
Withered leaf from blooming linden
Should scatter wide?
Would for this the twig or branches
Have wailing sighed?
And should the lad his fate upbraid,
Although he ignominious fade--
And in an alien country die?
Will for him the beauteous maid
Complaining cry?

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Bored And Sad

It's boring and sad, and there's no one around
In times of my spirit's travail...
Desires!...What use is our vain and eternal desire?..
While years pass on by - all the best years!

To love...but love whom?.. a short love is vexing,
And permanent love's just a myth.
Perhaps look within? - The past's left no trace:
All trivial, joys and distress...

What good are the passions? For sooner or later
Their sweet sickness ends when reason speaks up;
And life, if surveyed with cold-blooded regard,-
Is stupid and empty - a joke...

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Clouds

Clouds in the skies above, heavenly wanderers,
Long strings of snowy pearls stretched over azure plains!
Exiles like I, you rush farther and farther on,
Leaving my dear North, go distances measureless.
What drives you southward? Is't envy that covertly
Prods you or malice whose arrows strike openly?
Destiny is it? A crime hanging over you?
Or friendship's honeyed but poisonous calumny?
No! O'er those barren wastes heedlessly journeying,
Passion you know not or anguish or punishment;
Feeling you lack, you are free - free eternally,
You have no homeland, for you there's no banishment.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Cradle Song Of The Cossack Mother

Slumber sweet, my fairest baby,
Slumber calmly, sleep—
Peaceful moonbeams light thy chamber,
In thy cradle creep;
I will tell to thee a story,
Pure as dewdrop glow,
Close those two beloved eyelids—
Lullaby, By-low!

List! The Terek o'er its pebbles
Blusters through the vale,
On its shores the little Khirgez
Whets his murderous blade;
Yet thy father grey in battle—
Guards thee, child of woe,
Safely rest thee in thy cradle,
Lullaby, By-low!

Grievous times will sure befall thee,
Danger, slaughterous fire—
Thou shalt on a charger gallop,
Curbing at desire;
And a saddle girth all silken
Sadly I will sew,
Slumber now my wide-eyed darling,
Lullaby, By-low!

When I see thee, my own Being,
As a Cossack true,
Must I only convoy give thee—
"Mother dear, adieu!"
Nightly in the empty chamber
Blinding tears will flow,
Sleep my angel, sweetest dear one,
Lullaby, By-low!

Thy return I'll wait lamenting
As the days go by,
Ardent for thee praying,—fearing

In the cards to spy.
I shall fancy thou wilt suffer,
As a stranger grow—
Sleep while yet thou nought regrettest,
Lullaby, By-low!

I will send a holy image
'Gainst the foe with thee,
To it kneeling, dearest Being,
Pray with piety!
Think of me in bloody battle,
Dearest child of woe,
Slumber soft within thy cradle,
Lullaby, By-low!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Forever You, The Unwashed Russia!

Forever you, the unwashed Russia!
The land of slaves, the land of lords:
And you, the blue-uniformed ushers,
And people who worship them as gods.
I hope, from your tyrannic hounds
To save me with Caucasian wall:
From their eye that sees through ground,
From their ears that hear all.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

From Demon

Sailless and without a rudder,
On the ocean of the air--
Float the choirs of stars harmonious,
'Mid the mists eternal there;
Fleecy flocks of clouds elusive
Drift across immensity,
Leaving ne'er a track behind them,
Following their destiny.
Hour of parting, hour of meeting
They know not,--nor grief, nor rest--
Theirs no longing for the future,
Theirs no sorrow for the past.
By thy day of anguish broken,
Think of them and calm thy woe--
Be indifferent as they are
To the pangs of earth below!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Heaven And The Stars

Brilliant heavens of evening,
Distant stars clearly shining,
Bright as the rapture of childhood,
O why dare I send you nevermore greeting--
Stars, who are shining as clear as my joy?
What is thy sorrow?
Mortals make question.
This is my sorrow;
The heavens and the stars are--heaven and stars ever,
I am alas! but a perishing man!
Forever mortal
Envy his neighbor;
I envy rather
Ye in your freedom, ye stars ever radiant,
And only would be in your places!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

I Go Out On The Road Alone

Alone I set out on the road;
The flinty path is sparkling in the mist;
The night is still. The desert harks to God,
And star with star converses.

The vault is overwhelmed with solemn wonder
The earth in cobalt aura sleeps. . .
Why do I feel so pained and troubled?
What do I harbor: hope, regrets?

I see no hope in years to come,
Have no regrets for things gone by.
All that I seek is peace and freedom!
To lose myself and sleep!

But not the frozen slumber of the grave...
I'd like eternal sleep to leave
My life force dozing in my breast
Gently with my breath to rise and fall;

By night and day, my hearing would be soothed
By voices sweet, singing to me of love.
And over me, forever green,
A dark oak tree would bend and rustle.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

In High Noon's Heat

In high noon's heat in a Caucasian valley
I lay quite still, a bullet in my breast;
The smoke still rose from my deep wound,
As drop by drop my blood flowed out.

I lay alone upon the valley's sand;
The mountain ledges closed in all around,
Sun burned their yellow peaks
It burned me, too-but deep as death I slept.

I dreamt I saw the shining lights
Of evening feasting in my homeland.
Young maids with flowers in their hair
Spoke gaily of me 'mongst themselves.

But one maid sat apart in thought
And did not enter gaily in,
Her youthful soul was caught it seemed,
Lord God knows how, in some sad dream:

She dreamt about a valley in the Caucasus;
She knew the corpse that lay upon the ground;
His breast was blackened by a smoking wound,
His cooling blood was flowing in a stream.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Like An Evil Spirit

Like an evil spirit hast thou
Shocked my heart from out its rest,
If thou'lt take it quite away now--
Thou wilt win my healing blest!

My heart thy temple evermore!
Thy face,--the altar's Godhead sign!
Not heaven's grace,--thy smiles, restore,
Grant absolution, joy divine!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Meditation

With sadness I survey our present generation!
Their future seems so empty, dark, and cold,
Weighed down beneath a load of knowing hesitation,
In idleness stagnating, growing old.
We have received, when barely finished weaning,
The errors of our sires, their tardiness of mind,
And life oppresses us, a flat road without meaning,
An alien feast where we have dined.
T'ward good and evil shamefully uncaring
We wilt without a fight when starting on life's race;
When danger threatens us - ignoble want of daring,
Before those set on high - despicable and base.
A wizened fruit grown ripe before its hour,
No pleasure to the eye and no delight to taste,
An orphan stranger there, he hangs beside the flower -
The time of its full bloom is his to fall and waste.

For we have dried our brains with fruitless speculations,
Withholding enviously from friends and those about
The ringing voice of lofty aspirations
And noble passions, undermined by doubt.
Our lips have barely brushed the cup of delectation,
But youthful strength we did not thus retain;
From every joy we found, in fear of saturation,
We took the best and never came again.
The dreams of poesy, pure art, and its creation
With its sweet ecstasy our senses never move;
We greedily retain the remnants of sensation -
Dug deep and miserly, a useless treasure trove.
And we both love and hate by chance, without conviction,
We make no sacrifice for malice, or for good,
There reigns within our souls a kind of chill constriction,
Whene'er the flame ignites the blood.
The pastimes of our sires we think a boring story,
Their guileless, boyish dissipations unrefined;
We hurry to our graves, unhappy, without glory,
With one last sneering glance behind.

A gloomy throng are we, condemned and soon forgotten,

We pass across the world in silence, without trace,
No thoughts that might bear fruit for ages unbegotten,
No work of genius to inspire the race.
Our ashes will receive a harsh and just portrayal,
Posterity will sneer with skilled and scornful verse,
A curse of bitterness from sons at their betrayal
By their own father's spendthrift purse.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Native Land

I love my native land with such perverse affection!
My better judgement has no standing here.
Not glory, won in bloody action,
nor yet that calm demeanour, trusting and austere,
nor yet age-hallowed rites or handed-down traditions;
not one can stir my soul to gratifying visions.

And yet I love - a mystery to me -
her dreary steppelands wrapped in icy silence,
her boundless, swaying, forest-mantled highlands,
the flood waters in springtime, ample as the sea;
I love to jolt along a narrow country byway
and, slowly peering through the darkness up ahead
while sighing for a lodging, glimpse across the highway
the mournful trembling fires of villages outspread.
I love the smoke of stubble blazing,
heaped wagons on the steppe at night,
a hill mid yellow cornfields raising,
a pair of birch trees silver-bright.
With pleasure few have yet discovered,
a laden granary I see,
a hut with straw thatch neatly covered,
carved window shutters swinging free.
On feast nights with the dew descending,
I'll watch till midnight, never fear
the dance, the stamps and whistles blending
with mumbling rustics full of beer.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

No, I'M Not Byron; I Am, Yet

No, I'm not Byron; I am, yet,
Another choice for the sacred dole,
Like him - a persecuted soul,
But only of the Russian set.
I early start and end the whole,
And will not win the future days;
Like in an ocean, in my soul,
A cargo of lost hopes stays.
Who, oh, my ocean severe,
Could read all secrets in your scroll?
Who'll tell the people my idea?
I will or God or none at all!

Another translation by Martha Gilbert Dickinson Bianchi:

I AM NOT BYRON

I am not Byron--yet I am
One fore-elected, yet one more
Unknown, world-hunted wanderer,
A Russian in my mood and mind.

Scant from my seed the corn was ripe,
My mouth spoke young, was early hushed;
In depths of my own soul, the wreck
Of hope lies as in deep-sea sunk.

Who shall the counsels of the sea,
Its awe sublime unloose? Who shall
Read clear my spirit and my soul?
Unless it be a Poet--no man!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

On Departure For The Caucas

Farewell my hateful Russian country!
People of lord and serf you are--
Farewell, salute, bent knee and hand-kiss,
Three-masters, uniform and star!

Soon will the Caucas now conceal me,
There I shall not discovered be
By eyes and ears of paid, false sergeants--
Who all do hear and all do see!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

On Napoleon's Death

Cold hears thy soul the praise or cursing of posterity.
Quit of the human race, thou man of destiny!
They only could o'erthrow, who thee did elevate--
Forever thus remains thy greatness great!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

On The Death Of Pushkin

He fell, a slave of tinsel-honour,
A sacrifice to slander's lust;
The haughty Poet's head, the noblest,
Bowed on his wounded breast in dust.
No longer could his free soul suffer
The vulgar world's low infamy;
He rose against the world's opinion,
And as a hero, lone fell he.
He fell! To what avail the sobbing--
The useless choir of tears and praise?
Wretched the stammering excuses!
The Fates have spoke,--no power allays!
Have ye not at all times together
His sacred genius baited sore,
The silent fury fanned to flaming,
Delighted in your work before?
O be triumphant! Earthly torment
The Poet soul did fully bear,
Extinguished are the lights inspired,
The laurel crown lies leafless there!
The murderer contemptuous gazing
Did stedfastly his weapon aim,
No swifter beat his heart, Assassin!
Nor shook his lifted hand for shame.
No wonder; from a distance came he
As an adventurer unknown,
For worthy title, star of order--
Stood but his mad desire alone.
Sneering and self-complacent mocked he
The rights and customs of our land,
He could not understand our glory,
Against which he has raised his hand.

'Hence is he, hence! His song out-rung,
The Singer even as the song he sung;
Who of a hot, heroic mood,
In death disgraceful shed his blood!'

Why did he leave his home life tranquil,

To seek the envious market place,
Where each free flame is suffocated,
Expose him to the assassin base?
The human breed, who had known better
Since earliest years of youth, than he--
Why did he trust the false pretending
Of malice and hypocrisy?
Ah, of his laurel wreath you robbed him,
Gave him a martyr's crown instead,
And now the cruel thorns have pierced him
E'en to the blood of his proud head!
His last days were for him envenomed--
Through senseless fools' contempt aggrieved,
He died revenge a'thirst, accusing
That every hope his heart deceived!

Mute evermore the magic echoes,
That ne'er shall wonders more reveal,
The Poet's home is dark and narrow--
Upon the Singer's lips a seal.

But ye, sons insolent and shameless--
Defamers, faithless fathers, ye!
Who trod the pure soul of another
Beneath your feet, who zealously
Press to the Tsar's throne with your driveling
For fame and freedom, hatred steeled!
Well may you sneer at truth and justice,
The law provides you screen and shield,
Only a higher law shall sentence!
A mighty Judge beyond assail
Avenge the Poet's death on his slayers,
The Highest Judge who does not fail!
So then calumniate with brazen courage,
Your hatred's fury nought restrains--
Since your dark blood could ne'er atone for
One drop within the Poet's pure veins.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Prayer

At life's most testing moment, when
the grieving heart's replete,
a prayer that is most potent then
I call up and repeat.

There is a power, suffused with grace,
when living words combine,
a breath beyond the commonplace,
that holds a joy divine.

Like dead-weight slipping from the brain
now fades my unbelief -
I trust again, shed tears again,
and such relief, relief...

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Sail

A lonely sail is flashing white
Amdist the blue mist of the sea!...
What does it seek in foreign lands?
What did it leave behind at home?..

Waves heave, wind whistles,
The mast, it bends and creaks...
Alas, it seeks not happiness
Nor happiness does it escape!

Below, a current azure bright,
Above, a golden ray of sun...
Rebellious, it seeks out a storm
As if in storms it could find peace!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Tamara

Where waves of the Terek are waltzing
In Dariel's wickedest pass,
There rises from bleakest of storm crags
An ancient grey towering mass.

In this tower by mad winds assaulted,
Sat ever Tamara, the Queen--
A heavenly angel of beauty,
With a spirit of hell's own demesne.

Through the mist of the night her gold fires
Gleamed down through the valley below,
A welcome they threw to the pilgrim,
In their streaming and beckoning glow.

How clear rang the voice of Tamara!
How amorous did it invite!
The heart of the stranger enticing,
Seducing with magic delight!

The warrior was snared by her singing,
Nor noble, nor herd could withstand--
Then noiseless her portal was opened
By eunuchs of shadowy hand.

With pearls rare adorned and strange jewels,
Reposed on a billowy nest,
A prey to voluptuous longing,
Tamara awaited her guest.

With passioned and thrilling embracement,
With straining of breast unto breast,
With sighing and trembling and transport--
In lust's unrestrained, giddy zest--

So revelled 'mid desolate ruins,
Of Lovers,--past counting at least!
In their bridal night's wild distraction,
And in truth at their own death feast.

For when from the peaks of the mountains
The sun tore the night's veiling soft,
There reigned anew only the silence
On turret and casement aloft.

And only the Terek bewailing
With fury broke in on the hush,
As dashing her billows on billows
Her writhing floods onward did rush.

A youth's form her currents are bearing,
Ah vainly they murmur and swell!
A woman, a pale and a fair one--
Cries down from her tower 'Farewell!'

Her voice has the sound of faint weeping,
So amorous, tender and sweet--
As if she in love's holy rapture
Did promise of meeting repeat!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

Testament

I feel I'd like to be alone
with you, friend, if you'll stay:
my time on earth is nearly gone;
at least that's what they say.
And you'll be going home on leave:
mind you... what odds? I do believe,
to tel the truth, not many
will give a brass halfpenny.

If anyone should ask of you...
well, anyone at all...
you tell them where that bullet flew
right through the chest, one ball:
'He died with honour for the Tsar'
- and say how bad our surgeons are -
'and to his habitation
he sent his salutation.'

You'll likely find that my old dad
and mother both are dead...
I wouldn't want to make them sad
or send them tears to shed;
but if you find that they're all right,
just say I haven't time to write,
the regiment's campaigning
and there's no use complaining.

They've got a woman neighbour there?
God knows how long ago
we parted!... She will hardly care
to ask you.. Let it go,
tell her the truth, leave out no part,
no need to spare an empty heart;
she'll shed a tear or two there...
but it means nothing to her!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Angel

At midnight an angel was crossing the sky,
And quietly he sang;
The moon and the stars and the concourse of clouds
Paid heed to his heavenly song.

He sang of the bliss of the innocent souls
In heavenly gardens above;
Of almighty God he sang out, and his praise
Was pure and sincere.

He bore in his arms a young soul
To our valley of sorrow and tears;
The young soul remembered the heavenly song
So vivid and yet without words.

And long did it struggle on earth,
With wondrous desire imbued;
But none of the tedious songs of our earth
Could rival celestial song.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Beggar

By gates of an abode, blessed,
A man stood, asking for donation,
A beggar, cruelly oppressed
By hunger, thirst and deprivation.
He asked just for a peace of bread,
And all his looks were full of anguish,
And was a cold stone laid
Into his stretched arm, thin and languished.
Thus I prayed vainly for your love,
With bitter tears, pine and fervor,
Thus my best senses, that have thrived,
Were victimized by you forever!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Cliff

By a cliff a golden cloud once lingered;
On his breast it slept, but, rising early,
Off it gently rushed across the pearly
Blue of sky, a tiny thing and winged.

Still, a trace it left upon the stony
Giant's heart, and plunged in thought and weeping
Slow and tortured tears, he stands there, keeping
Vigil o'er the gloomy waste and lonely.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Dagger

I like you well, O trusty dagger mine,
My comrade wrought of cool Damascus steel!
Forged were you by the Georgian with revenge in the mind,
By the Circassian free - for war were you made keen.

A lily-white hand it was gave you to me -
You were affection's keepsake, its last gift...
Not blood, but pearl-like tears born of the agony
Of bitter parting down your blade ran swift.

Her dark eyes rested, full of secret pain,
Of sadness and of mystery, upon
My face, and like yourself when lit by flickering flame,
Now clouded and turned dull, now glowed and shone.

O dagger, love's mute pledge, you will my true
Friend stay, and an example set to me, a wanderer:
For faithful, yes, and firm of soul like you
I'll be like you that tempered was by fire.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Demon

“...Cold and regretless shalt thou view this sphere,
Where crime’s inseparable from fate,
Where beauty only blossoms to grow sear,
Where all is miserable, where, without fear
No one can either love or hate.
Know’st thou, Tamára, what is mortal love?
A febrile movement of the blood!
Years roll away—the pulse can scarcely move,
Love’s wither’d branches cease to bud.
Who can resist new beauty’s luring bait?
Who, parting, never shed a tear?
Who can withstand the tedium of fate,
The weariness of all things here?
No, my beloved, believe, ’tis not thy lot
To perish in a living grave,
In silence, languish on this narrow spot,
Of brutal jealousy the slave....”

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Dispute

Once 'mid group of native mountains
Hot dispute arose,
Elbrus, angry, did with Kasbek
Argument propose.
'Now beware!' the hoary Elbrus,
Warning did exclaim--
'To enslave thee and enthrall thee
Is man's evil aim!
Smoking huts he will be building
On thy mountain side,
Loudly through thy clefts resounding
Ring his hatchet wide!
The swift swinging iron shovel
Breast of stone will part,
Of thy bronze and stone will rob thee--
Pierce thee to the heart.
Caravans, e'en now, are passing
Through thy rocks afar,
Where before the fogs were swimming--
And the Eagle Tsar.
Ah, mankind is bold and fearless!
Dreads no lifted hand,
Guard thee! populous and mighty
Is the morning land!'
'Threatens me the East?' then queried
Kasbek with disdain,
'There eight centuries already
Sleeping, man has lain.
See, in shadow the Grusine
Gloats in lustful greed,
On his many coloured raiment
Glints the winey bead!
Drugged with fumes of his nargileh,
Dreams the Mussulman--
By the fountains on his divan
Slumbers Teheran.
See! Jerusalem is lying
At his feet o'erthrown--
Deathly dumb and lifeless staring

As an earthly tomb.
And beyond the Nile is washing
O'er the burning steps
Of the Kingly mausoleums,
Yellow, shadowless.
In his tent, the hunt forgotten--
Now the Bedouin lies,
Sings the old ancestral legends,
Scans the starry skies.
See! far as the eye can venture,
All sleeps as before--
No, the threat of dreaming Orient
Frights me nevermore!
'Laugh thou not too early, Kasbek,'
Elbrus did persist--
'Look! What vast mass is it turning
Northward, through the mist?'
Secretly the heart of Kasbek
Faltered,--as amazed,
Silent and with dark foreboding
To the North he gazed:
Full of woe stared in the distance;
What a thronging swarm!
Hark! there rings the clash of weapons!
Battle-cry alarm!
From the Don unto the Ural
What a human sea!
Regiments that wave and glitter
Past all counting be!
Feathers white like sedge of ocean,
Waving in a gust--
Many coloured Uhlans storming
Through the blowing dust.
The imperial battalions
Densely packed proceed,
Trumpets flaring, banners flying
In the victor's lead.
Batteries with brasses rattling
Conquering advance,
With their blood-red splendor flashing
Cannon matches glance.
And a battle-proved commander

Leads the army there--
From whose eyes the lightning flashes,
'Neath his snowy hair.
Swells the host until as Griesbach's
Billows roaring loud,
From the Eastward nears the army
As a thunder cloud.
Kasbek peered with sinister boding
Through the clouds,--would fain
Count his enemies approaching--
Found it was in vain:
Threw one glance unto the mountains--
Anguished, overcome,
O'er his brow drew close the vapours,
Was forever dumb.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Dream

In noon's heat, in a dale of Dagestan
With lead inside my breast, stirless I lay;
The deep wound still smoked on; my blood
Kept trickling drop by drop away.
On the dale's sand alone I lay. The cliffs
Crowded around in ledges steep,
And the sun scorched their tawny tops
And scorched me - but I slept death's sleep.
And in a dream I saw an evening feast
That in my native land with bright lights shone;
Among young women crowned with flowers,
A merry talk concerning me went on.
But in the merry talk not joining,
One of them sat there lost in thought,
And in a melancholy dream
Her young soul was immersed - God knows by what.
And of a dale in Dagestan she dreamt;
In that dale lay the corpse of one she knew;
Within his breast a smoking wound showed black,
And blood ran in a stream that colder grew.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Gift Of The Terek

Through the rocks in wildest courses
Seethes the Terek grim of mood,
Tempest howling its bewailing,
Pearled with foam its tearful flood.

At the mountain's feet soft streaming,
Gentler grown its murmurs be,
And with greeting full of fawning
Speaks to the Caspian Sea:

'Hospitable part thy billows,
Give me room, oh Ocean grave!
From a distance drawing thither--
Scarce my weary currents wave.

Born upon the edge of Kasbek,
By the breast of clouds renewed,
Hatred have I sworn to mankind,
Who with us, the free, make feud.

See, by rage of my own fury
Lies despoiled my Darjal home,
And as playthings for thy children,
Pebbles bearing now I come.'

Yet upon her strands a'dreaming,
Mute the grey Sea did remain,
And the Terek, silver foaming,
Spoke caressingly again.

'Grey Sea I would serve thee only,
Have a present borne to-day--
See, 'tis a young Carabineer
Who has fallen in the fray.

How his coat of mail is gleaming
Silver on the billows' span!
Golden on his trappings shining
Blessing of the Alcoran!

Menacing the one who slew him
Scowls the brow's relentless feud,
By his noble life blood crimsoned
O'er his lips his hair is glued.

Through the half-closed eyelids glancing
Still the lust of quarrel mocks,
From his head deep underneath him
Flow the matted raven locks.'

Motionless upon her beaches
Did the grey Sea still remain,
And the Terek foaming yellow
In displeasure spoke again.

'So then, take him as a present,
As I nothing fairer know
On this round earth,--for thee only
This rare prize I've guarded so!

'Tis a mountain Cossack's body
Wafted 'mid my billows' dance,
See his hair,--no silk is softer--
See his shoulder's gold expanse!

See how o'er his red lips speechless
Now the seated eyes find rest;
Trickling yet the purple life blood
From the small wound on his breast.

For a young and holy maiden,
Weeps lamenting, every heart!
One sole Cossack in the village,
In this mourning takes no part.

From the confines of his country
Rode he forth with boding grey,
'Neath the dagger of the Tscherkes
He has breathed his soul away.'

And the Terek paused; behold now

In the gleaming foam flood drowned,
Silvered in the spraying billows
Dips a head with rushes crowned.

And the hoary one's lips whisper
Haughty words of youthful fire,
And the eyes lit with love lustre
Flame with passionate desire.

Foaming, rushing on swift longing,
Seethed he up in youthful zest--
And the Terek flood was wedded
With him in embraces blest.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Leaf

A little oak leaf tore off from its branch
Was driven o'er the steppe by a cruel gale;
Dried up and withered from the cold, the heat and sorrow
It finally alit by the Black Sea shore.

A young plane tree stands by the Black Sea shore;
A whispering wind strokes her green boughs;
On her green boughs sway heavenly birds
Singing the praises and fame of the queen of the sea.

The traveler lit at the soaring tree's roots;
Anguished he pled for a moment's shelter,
And these were his words: "I am but a poor oak leaf,
Matured before my time in a grim homeland.

For ages I've wandered without a goal, all alone
Without shade I withered, without repose, faded.
Would you welcome this stranger among your emerald leaves,
I know many stories of wonder and wisdom."

"But why do I need you?" the young tree replies, -
"You are dusty and yellow - ill-suited to my wholesome young sons.
You've seen many things - but what use do I have for your tales?
The heavenly birds have long wearied my ears.

O traveler! Be on your way. You are a stranger to me!
Beloved by the sun, I bloom and shine for him;
My boughs are spread in the heavenly fields,
The cool sea refreshes and washes my roots."

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Palm Branch Of Palestine

Palm branch of Palestine, oh tell me,
In that far distant home-land fair,
Wast rooted in the mountain gravel
Or sprung from some vale garden rare?

Once o'er the Jordan's silver billows
Fond kissed with thee the Eastern sun?
Have the grim gales 'neath starry heavens
Swept over thee from Lebanon?

And was a trembling prayer soft whispered,
A father's song sung over thee--
When from the parent stem dis-severed
By some poor aborigine?

And is the palm tree ever standing,
Amid the fierce glare beating down,
The pilgrim in the desert luring
To shelter 'neath her shadow crown?

Perhaps the leaves ancestral shiver
In unappeased parting pain,
The branch conceals a homesick longing
For desert wilderness again?

Was it a pilgrim who first brought thee
To the cold North, with pious hand?
Who mused upon his home in sadness,
And dost thou bear his tear's hot brand?

Was it Jehovah's favored warrior,
His gleaming head transfigured bright,
For God and man true-sworn, devoted
Unto the victory of light?

Before the wonder-working image
Thou stand'st as heaven's defence divine,
O branch from out that holy country,
The sanctuary's shield and sign!

It darkens, golden lamp light splendors
Enveil the cross, the sacred shrine--
The peace of God is wafted o'er us
From thee, oh branch of Palestine!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Poet's Dead

The Poet's dead! - a slave to honor -
He fell, by rumor slandered,
Lead in his breast and thirsting for revenge,
Hanging his proud head!...
The Poet's soul could not endure
Petty insult's disgrace.
Against society he rose,
Alone, as always...and was slain!
Slain!...What use is weeping now,
The futile chorus of empty praise
Excuses mumbled full of pathos?
Fate has pronounced its sentence!
Was it not you who spitefully
Rebuffed his free, courageous gift
And for your own amusement fanned
The nearly dying flame?
Well now, enjoy yourselves...he couldn't
Endure the final torture:
Quenched is the marvelous light of genius,
Withered is the triumphal wreath.

Cold-bloodedly his murderer
Took aim...there was no chance of flight:
His empty heart beat evenly,
The pistol steady in his hand.
No wonder...from far away
The will of fate sent him to us
Like hundreds of his fellow vagrants
In search of luck and rank;
With impudence he mocked and scorned
The tongue and mores of this strange land;
He could not spare our glory,
Nor in that bloody moment know
"gainst what he'd raised his hand!...

He's slain - and taken by the grave
Like that unknown, but happy bard,
Victim of jealousy wild,
Of whom he sang with wondrous power,

Struck down, like him, by an unyielding hand.

Why did he quit the blissful peace of simple fellowship
To enter this society, so envious and stifling
To hearts of free and fiery passion?
Why did he give his hand to worthless slanderers,
How could he have believed their hollow words
And kindness, he, who'd ever understood his fellow man?...

And they removed his wreath, and set upon his head
A crown of thorns entwined in laurel:

 The hidden spines were cruel
 And pierced his noble brow;
Poisoned were his final moments
By sly insinuations of mockers ignorant,
And thus he died - for vengeance vainly thirsting
Secretly vexed by false hopes deceived.

 The wondrous singing's ceased,
 T'will never sound again.
 His refuge, gloomy and small,
 His lips forever sealed.

And you, the offspring arrogant
Of fathers known for malice,
Crushing with slavish heels the ruins
Of clans aggrieved by fortune's game!
You, greedy hordes around the throne,
Killers of Freedom, Genius and Glory!
 You hide beneath the canopy of law
 Fall silent - truth and justice before you...
But justice also comes from God, corruption's friends!
 The judge most terrible awaits you:
 He's hardened to the clink of gold,
He knows your future thoughts and deeds.
Then will you turn in vain to lies:
 They will no longer help.
And your black blood won't wash away
 The poet's sacred blood!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Prayer

When faints the heart for sorrow,
In life's hard, darkened hour,
My spirit breathes a wondrous prayer
Full of love's inward power.

There is a might inspiring
Each consecrated word,
That speaks the inconceivable
And holy will of God.

The heavy load slips from my heart--
Oppressing doubt takes flight,
The soul believes, the tears break forth--
And all is light, so light!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

The Sail

A single sail is bleaching brightly
Upon the waves caressing bland,
What seeks it in a stranger country?
Why did it leave its native strand?
When winds pipe high, load roar the billows
And with a crashing bends the mast,
It does not shun its luckless fortune,
Nor haste to port before the blast.
To-day the sea is clear as azure,
The sun shines gaily, faint the wind--
But it revolting, looks for tempest,
And dreams in storms its peace to find!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

To A.C.S.

Afar--I fain, so much would tell thee!
List to thee o'er and o'er when near;
Yet passioned glances thou dost silence--
My words bind to my lips in fear.
How, by mere homely speaking, can I
E'en hope to captivate thine ears?
I swear it would be food for laughter--
If it were not more fit for tears!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

To Kasbek

With winged footsteps now I hasten
Unto the far cold North away,
Kasbek,--thou watchman of the East,
To thee, my farewell greetings say!

Since all eternity, a turban
Snow white, thy glorious brow has veiled,
The peace sublime about thy glacier
The strife of man has ne'er assailed.

Accept my humble supplication,
Hear thy submissive faithful son,
To starry heights lift his entreaty
To Allah's everlasting throne.

I do implore--spice breathing coolness
Through sultry sun-glow in the vale,
A stone for rest unto the pilgrim
In whirling dust of desert gale.

Turn, I implore, the storm's hot hatred,
The deadly thunderous lightning's course--
In Dariel's wild pass protect me
And my distracted, trembling horse.

Yet one prayer more my heart audacious,
Weeping, lifts up in bodeful stress,
What if my native land forget me
In my sad exile's loneliness?

Will, greeting me by name familiar,
My friend then open wide his arms?
Will e'en my brothers recognise me,
So changed by many griefs and harms?

Perchance my foot will fall profaning
Dust of those loved in youth's far day,
The pure and noble, deeply trusted--
Withered as Autumn leaves in May.

O Kasbek, then with earth o'erwhelm me!
Snow o'er thy weary wanderer back,
And blow away my dust and scatter
Along thy rock-ridged clefts lone track!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

To My Country

With love of my own race I cling unto my country,
Whatever dubious reason may protesting cry;
The shame alone of all her blood bought glory,
Her haughty self-assurance, conscious pride,
And the ancestral faith's traditions dark,
With woe have penetrated all my heart.

And yet I love it! Why, I cannot say;
The endless snowy Steppes so silent brooding,
In the pine forests Autumn winds pursuing--
The flood's high water on all sides in May.
By peasant cart I fain would haste in nightly darkness,
Through the lone wilderness and village desolate,
How hospitable shines the sole beam sparkling
To me from each poor hut! Filled with content so great,
The smell of stubble burnt, delights. Piled high
The wagons silent standing take their nightly rest,
On distant hills the silver birches I descry,
Framed gold by fertile fields the sacred picture blest.
Then with a joy unshared save by the vagrant,
I see the threshing floor well filled and fragrant,
The sloping straw-thatched cottage roofs again,
The window panels carved, of varied stain.

Nightly could I, till morning grey arrested,
Gaze on the dancing, stamping, whistling crowd,
Watching the villager,--young, happy, festive--
And hearing drunken peasants glad carouse!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov

To The Clouds

Clouds--ye eternal wanderers in hunting grounds of air,
High o'er the verdant Steppes, wide through the blue of heaven--
Coursing fraternal,--say, must ye exiled as I
From the beloved North to the far South be driven?

O tell me, were ye outlawed thus by Fate's behest?
Drives ye forth open hate, or secret grudge flee ye?
Follows ye unappeased an evil-doer's curse?
Are ye pursued by poisonous words of calumny?

Ah no! Only from the unfruitful earth ye fly;
Free are your sufferings, your blessedness is free,
Ye know not wretchedness that holds us here in chains,
Know not the joy of home or exile's misery!

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov