

Classic Poetry Series

Afanasy Afanasevich Fet

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

By Life Tormented

By life tormented, and by cunning hope,
When my soul surrenders in its battle with them,
Day and night I press my eyelids closed
And sometimes I'm vouchsafed peculiar visions.

The gloom of quotidian existence deepens,
As after a bright flash of autumn lightning,
And only in the sky, like a call from the heart,
The stars' golden eyelashes sparkle.

And the flames of infinity are so transparent,
And the entire abyss of ether is so close,
That I gaze direct from time into eternity
And recognize your flame, universal sun.

Motionless, encircled by fiery roses,
The living altar of the cosmos smolders
And in its smoke, as in creative slumber,
All forces quiver, eternity's a dream.

And all that rushes through the abyss of ether,
And every ray, embodied or ethereal,-
Is but your reflection, O universal sun,
It is but a dream, but a fleeting dream.

Through the worldly breath of these reveries
I fly like smoke, involuntarily disperse,
And in this vision, in this delirium,
I can live with ease and breathe without pain.

In the darkness and still of a mysterious night
I see a fond and welcoming spark,
From the chorus of spheres, familiar eyes
Shine upon a grave forgotten in the steppe.

The grass has faded, the desert is grim,
A lonely tomb dreams an orphan's dream,
And only in the sky, like an eternal idea,
The stars' golden eyelashes sparkle.

And I dream you've risen from the dead,
Unchanged since you departed the earth,
And I dream a dream: we both are young,
And you've looked at me as you did back then.

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I Always Like The Northern Birches

I always s like the northern birches:
Their view, so downcast and grave,
The fever, which poor souls scorches,
Cools like the mute speech of a grave.

But yet, the willow, which branches,
With their long leaves, cast in a flood,
Is closer to a dream, that scourges,
And longer lives in our heart.

Deploring groves their own,
Their meadows – with bitter tears,
Tell birches to cold wind alone
Their common sufferings and fears.

Believing that the whole ground
Is motherland of sacred grieves,
The weeping willow all around
Inclines its branches with long leaves.

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I Have Come To You Delighted

I have come to you, delighted,
To tell you that sun has risen,
That its light has warmly started
To fulfil on leaves its dancing;

To tell you that wood's awaken
In its every branch and leafage,
And with every bird is shaken,
Thirsty of the springy image;

To tell you that I've come now,
As before, with former passion,
That my soul again is bound
To serve you and your elation;

That the charming breath of gladness
Came to me from all-all places,
I don't know what I'll sing, else,
But my song's coming to readiness.

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Never

I wake. Yes, it's a coffin lid.-With effort
I reach my hands out and I call
For help. Yes, I recall the tortures
Of dying.-Yes, this is no dream!-
And without effort, like a spider web
I push aside my casket's rotting wood

And stand. How bright the winter light appears
In the crypt's doorway! Can I doubt it? -
I see the snow. The crypt's without a door.
It's time to head for home. How stunned they'll be!
I know this park, I cannot lose my way.
But oh how different it looks now!

I hurry. Snowdrifts. Frigid boughs
Of dead trees poke deep into the sky,
There are no tracks or sounds. It's still.
The realm of death in an enchanted world.
And here's my home. But what decay!
I'm shocked by this heartbreaking sight.

The village sleeps beneath a snowy blanket,
There is no path in all the boundless steppe.
Yes, there it is: upon a far-off hill
I see the ancient belfry of the church.
A frozen traveler in the whirling snow,
It stands out clear against the cloudless span.

No winter birds or midges dot the snow.
I understand: the earth has long lain chill
And dead. For whom do I conserve
The breath within my chest? To whom did death
Return me? What's my mind
Connected to? And what's its final purpose?

Where shall I go if there is no one to embrace?
And time has lost itself in space?
O, Death, return! And hasten to assume
The fatal burden of this final life.
And you, stiff corpse of earth take flight
And bear my corpse on the eternal path!

Afanasy Afanasevich Fet

Nightingales, A Sigh, A Whisper

Nightingales, a sigh, a whisper
In a shady nook
And the lullaby in silver
Of a lazy brook.

Light of night and midnight shadow
Falling from above
And the changing mood and magic
Of a face you love

Through dark clouds a red rose peeping
And an amber gleam,
And the kissing and the weeping
And the dawn serene!

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The September Rose

To sighs of morning air, that froze,-
(With her lips opened for a say),
How curiously has smiled the rose
On a September fleeting day!

And how has she ever dared
To greet, with air of springy queens,
The single blue-tit, in the bare
Shrubs fleshing in the orb of wings;

To bloom with steadfast dream that later,
Just leaving her cold bed in rest,
She'll cling, the last and dissipated,
To a young hostess's charming breast!

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Upon A Haystack On A Southern Night

Upon a haystack in lands of South,
I lay, while facing skies of night,
The choir of stars, alive and couth,
Was trembling, spread at every side.

The earth, mute as a dream half-hidden,
Was fast receding into space,
And I, as if the first in Eden,
Alone met the black night's face.

Did I race to the depth profound,
Or did the stars race strait to me?
In mighty hands, it seemed me how,
I hanged above abysmal sea.

With heart, so sinking and bewildered,
I measured with my look a depth,
Into which, every moment sighted,
I sink, and nobody helps.

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When You Were Reading Those Tormented Lines

When you were reading those tormented lines
In which the heart's resonant flame sends out glowing streams
And passion's fatal torrents rear up,-
 Didn't you recall a single thing?

I can't believe it! That night on the steppe
When, in the midnight mist a premature dawn,
Transparent, lovely as a miracle,
 Broke in the distance before you

And your unwilling eye was to this beauty drawn
To that majestic glow beyond the realm of darkness,-
How could it be that nothing whispered to you then:
 A man has perished in that fire!

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While Lounging In A Chair

While lounging in a chair, I looked up at the ceiling
Where, teasing my imagination,
A circle hangs above the quiet lamp,
And spins just like a ghostly shadow.

Within the flicker there's a trace of autumn sunset:
As if, above the rooftop and the garden,
Unable to fly off, afraid to land,
Dark flocks of blackbirds circle. . .

No, it's not wings I hear, but hooves at the front gate!
I hear the trembling hands . . .
How chill the pallor of a lovely face!
How bitter parting's whisper! . .

Lost and in silence, I survey the distant road
Beyond the dimming garden,-
While the impatient flock of blackbirds,
Unsheltered, circles still.

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With One Firm Thrust

With one firm thrust to force the boat of living
From off the sands, and, by a wave tossed high,
Be toward a new life borne, a new beginning,
To feel the wind from scented shores sweep nigh,

To wake from torpid sleep a mind turned sluggish,
To revel in the strange and the unknown,
To lend fresh breath to life, and joy to anguish,
To make another's cares and griefs your own,

To speak of things it numbs the tongue to utter,
To fire the timid heart that fierce 't may pound -
This can the chosen songsmith do, no other,
And 'tis for this that he is known and crowned!

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