**Classic Poetry Series**

# Erik Johan Stagnelius

## - poems -

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## Erik Johan Stagnelius (October 14, 1793 - April 3, 1823)

Erik Johan Stagnelius was a Romantic poet and playwright.

1810 to 1840 was a blossoming time in Swedish poetry, and there were several writers of distinguished merit, among them Esaias Tegnér, Erik Gustaf Geijer, Per Daniel Amadeus Atterbom and Erik Johan Stagnelius. The brief and mysterious life and death of Erik Johan Stagnelius have given a romantic interest to all that is connected with his name.

Life

His father was a vicar on Öland, later on biskop in Kalmar on the nearby main land, which likely influenced Stagnelius spiritual thinking. He came from a large family. Stagnelius showed a natural gift for poetic writing from an early childhood. He took his Bachelor's Degree from Uppsala University in 1814 and got an employment as a clerk in Stockholm. As a person he was said to have been unattractive and unkempt. A woman who knew him, said of his appearance "where in this shabby person lies the beauty which his poetry expresses?".

He was notably gloomy and lived alone for most of his life, although he seemed to flourish during brief visits to his home town. As he first arrived to Stockholm, he strived for success as a poet, but basically this did not come until after his death.

His first publication was the epic of Wladimir den store (Vladimir the Great; 1817); followed by the romantic poem Blenda. His singular dramas, Bacchanterna (The Bacchantes; 1822), Sigurd Ring, which was posthumous, and Martyrerne (The Martyrs; 1821), are esteemed by many critics to be his most original productions. His mystical lyrics, entitled Liljor i Saron (Lilies in Sharon; 1820), and his sonnets, which are best read in Swedish, may be recommended as among the most delicate products of the Scandinavian mind.

It is believed that he suffered a chronic physical condition (Noonan syndrome have been suggested by Swedish researchers) causing him increasing pain, and that he used opium as his main remedy. On the details of his life, little is known. He had only a few friends, and no female companionship. At his death in Stockholm at the age of 29, no relatives were present at the funeral.

Poetry

Stagnelius has been compared, and not improperly, to Shelley. Several of

Stagnelius poems were translated into English by Edmund Gosse (1886). The bulk of his poetry was found in a sack in his shaddy apartment, after his death. They were almost sent to be burnt, but were instead kept, and several are still being appreciated today for their romantic and mystic/spiritual qualities. The perhaps best known are the poem "Näcken," a romantic verse-based poem about the Nix; Till förruttnelsen (For Decay) and Resa Amanda, jag ska (Go Amanda, I will).

Philosophy

His thinking, which is evident from his later works, is influenced by mystics and romantic philosophers. Partly, he was also influenced by gnostic beliefs. Not proper, perhaps, in the Christian 19th century Sweden, this possible belief has been thoroughly examined, and is believed to have originated by a reading of the Swedish translation of Ginza Rba, the holy works of the Mandaeism, published as Adam's Book. Other persons whose works he read and were likely influences were Schelling, Jakob Böhme and Plato.

**Eternity**

Up through the ruins of my earthly dreams
    I catch the stars of immortality;
    What store of joy can lurk in heaven for me?
What other hope feed those celestial gleams?
Can there be other grapes whose nectar streams
    For me, whom earth's vine fails? Oh! can it be
    That this most hopeless heart again may see
A forehead garlanded, an eye that beams?
Alas! 'tis childhood's dream that vanisheth!
    The heaven-born soul that feigns it can return
        And end in peace this hopeless strife with fate!
There is no backward step; 'tis only death
    Can still these cores of wasting fire that burn,
        Can break the chain, the captive liberate.

Erik Johan Stagnelius

## Friend In The Desolate Time

Friend, in the desolate time, when your soul is enshrouded in darkness
When, in a deep abyss, memory and feeling die out,
Intellect timidly gropes among shadowy forms and illusions
Heart can no longer sigh, eye is unable to weep;
When, from your night-clouded soul the wings of fire have fallen
And you, to nothing, afraid, feel yourself sinking once more,
Say, who rescues you then?—Who is the comforting angel
Brings to your innermost soul order and beauty again,
Building once more your fragmented world, restoring the fallen
Altar, and when it is raised, lighting the sacred flame?-—
None but the powerful being who first from the limitless darkness
Kissed to life seraphs and woke numberless suns to their dance.
None but the holy Word who called the worlds into existence
And in whose power the worlds move on their paths to this day.
Therefore, rejoice, oh friend, and sing in the darkness of sorrow:
Night is the mother of day, Chaos the neighbor of God.

Erik Johan Stagnelius

**Luna**

Deep slumber hung o'er sea and hill and plain;
With pale pink cheek fresh from her watery caves
Slow rose the moon out of the midnight waves,
Like Venus out of ocean born again.
Olympian blazed she on the dark blue main;
'So shall, ye gods,' — hark how my weak hope raves! —
'My happy star ascend the sea that laves
Its shores with grief, and silence all my pain!'
With that there sighed a wandering midnight breeze
High up among the topmost tufted trees,
And o'er the moon's face blew a veil of cloud;
And in the breeze my genius spake, and said,
'While thy heart stirred, thy glimmering hope has fled,
And like the moon lies muffled in a shroud.'

Erik Johan Stagnelius

**Memory**

O camp of flowers, with poplars girdled round,
    The guardians of life's soft and purple bud!
    O silver spring, beside whose brimming flood
My dreaming childhood its Elysium found!
O happy hours with love and fancy crowned,
    Whose horn of plenty flatteringly subdued
    My heart into a trance, whence, with a rude
And horrid blast, fate came my soul to hound:
Who was the goddess who empowered you all
    Thus to bewitch me? Out of wasting snow
        And lily-leaves her headdress should be made!
Weep, my poor lute! nor on Astræa call.
    She will not smile, nor I, who mourn below,
        Till I, a shade in heaven, clasp her, a shade.

Erik Johan Stagnelius

**Nacken - Water Demon**

The evening is festooned with golden clouds
the fairies dance in the meadow
and the leaf-crowned Nacken
plays his fiddle in the silvery brook.
Little boy in the brush on the bank
resting in the violet vapor
hears the noise from the chilly water
calls out in the still night.

"Poor old fellow, why do you play?
will it take the pain away?
you bring the woods and the fields to life
but you'll never be a child of God.

Paradise's moonlit nights
eden's flower-crowned plains
angels of the light on high--
never to be beheld by your eye."

Tears stream down the old man's face
down he dives into the rapids
the fiddle silences.
And the Nacken will never
play again in the silvery brook.

Erik Johan Stagnelius

## O Camp Of Flowers

O camp of flowers, with poplars girdled round,
Gray guardians of life's soft and purple bud!
O silver spring, beside whose brimming flood
My pensive childhood its Elysium found!
O happy hours by love and fancy crowned,
Whose horn of plenty flatteringly subdued
My heart into a trance, whence, with a rude
And horrid blast, fate came my soul to hound!
Who was the goddess that empowered you all
Thus to bewitch me? Out of wasting snow
And lily-leaves her head-dress should be made!
Weep, my poor lute! nor on Astraea call,
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