

Classic Poetry Series

Giacomo Leopardi

- poems -

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Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837)

Giacomo Leopardi was born of an aristocratic family in Recanati. Plagued, like Heine, by crippling illness he nevertheless made himself a life as a literary man. He lived in Florence, Bologna and Milan before finally settling in Naples where he died. The greatest Italian poet since Petrarch, Petrarch was equally an enormous influence on his clear, lucid Italian.

The Infinite

It was always dear to me, this solitary hill,
and this hedgerow here, that closes out my view,
from so much of the ultimate horizon.
But sitting here, and watching here, in thought,
I create interminable spaces,
greater than human silences, and deepest
quiet, where the heart barely fails to terrify.
When I hear the wind, blowing among these leaves,
I go on to compare that infinite silence
with this voice, and I remember the eternal
and the dead seasons, and the living present,
and its sound, so that in this immensity
my thoughts are drowned, and shipwreck seems sweet
to me in this sea.

Giacomo Leopardi

To Himself

Now will you rest forever,
My tired heart. Dead is the last
deception,
That I thought eternal. Dead. Well I
feel
In us the sweet illusions,
Nothing but ash, desire burned out.
Rest forever. You have
Trembled enough. Nothing is worth
Thy beats, nor does the earth
deserve
Thy sighs. Bitter and dull
Is life, there is nought else. The
world is clay.
Rest now. Despair
For the last time. To our kind, Fate
Gives but death. Now despise
Yourself, nature, the sinister
Power that secretly commands our
common ruin,
And the infinite vanity of
everything.

Giacomo Leopardi

To Silvia

Silvia, do you remember
the moments, in your mortal life,
when beauty still shone
in your sidelong, laughing eyes,
and you, light and thoughtful,
went
beyond girlhood's limits?

The quiet rooms and the streets
around you, sounded
to your endless singing,
when you sat, happily content,
intent, on that woman's work,
the vague future, arriving alive in your mind.
It was the scented May, and that's how
you spent your day.

I would leave my intoxicating studies,
and the turned-down pages,
where my young life,
the best of me, was left,
and from the balcony of my father's house
strain to catch the sound of your voice,
and your hand, quick,
running over the loom.
I would look at the serene sky,
the gold lit gardens and paths,
that side the mountains, this side the far-off sea.
And human tongue cannot say
what I felt then.

What sweet thoughts,
what hopes, what hearts, O Silvia mia!
How it appeared to us then,
all human life and fate!
When I recall that hope
such feelings pain me,
harsh, disconsolate,
I brood on my own destiny.
Oh Nature, Nature
why do you not give now
what you promised then? Why
do you so deceive your children?

Attacked, and conquered, by secret disease,
you died, my tenderest one, and did not see
your years flower, or feel your heart moved,
by sweet praise of your black hair
your shy, loving looks.
No friends talked with you,
on holidays, about love.

My sweet hopes died also
little by little: to me too
Fate has denied those years. Oh,
how you have passed me by,
dear friend of my new life,
my saddened hope!
Is this the world, the dreams,
the loves, events, delights,
we spoke about so much together?
Is this our human life?
At the advance of Truth
you fell, unhappy one,
and from the distance,
with your hand, you pointed
towards death's coldness and the silent grave.

Giacomo Leopardi

To the Moon

Oh gracious moon, now as the year turns,
I remember how, heavy with sorrow,
I climbed this hill to gaze on you,
And then as now you hung above those trees
Illuminating all. But to my eyes
Your face seemed clouded, temulous
From the tears that rose beneath my lids,
So painful was my life: and is, my
Dearest moon; its tenor does not change.
And yet, memory and numbering the epochs
Of my grief is pleasing to me. How welcome
In that youthful time -when hope's span is long,
And memory short -is the remembrance even of
Past sad things whose pain endures.

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