

Classic Poetry Series

Johann Ludwig Uhland

- 9 poems -

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Johann Ludwig Uhland (26 April 1787 – 13 November 1862)

Johann Ludwig Uhland, was a German poet, philologist and literary historian.

Biography

He was born in Tübingen, then Duchy of Württemberg, and studied jurisprudence at the university there, but also took an interest in medieval literature, especially old German and French poetry. Having graduated as a doctor of laws in 1810, he went to Paris for eight months to continue his studies of poetry; and from 1812 to 1814 he worked as a lawyer in Stuttgart, in the bureau of the minister of justice.

Poetry

He had begun his career as a poet in 1807 and 1808 by contributing ballads and lyrics to Seckendorff's *Musenalmanach*; and in 1812 and 1813 he wrote poems for Kerner's *Poetischer Almanach* and *Deutscher Dichterwald*. In 1815 he collected his poems in a volume entitled *Vaterländische Gedichte*, which almost immediately secured a wide circle of readers. To almost every new edition he added some fresh poems. His two dramatic works *Ernst, Herzog von Schwaben* (1818) and *Ludwig der Baier* (1819) are unimportant in comparison with his *Gedichte*.

As a lyric poet, Uhland must be classed with the writers of the romantic school. Like them, he found in the Middle Ages the subjects which appealed most strongly to his imagination. Yet his style has a precision, suppleness and grace which distinguish his most characteristic writings from those of the romantics. Uhland wrote poems in defense of freedom, and in the states assembly of Württemberg he played a distinguished part as one of the most vigorous and consistent of the liberal members.

Politics

When in 1815 Württemberg was to be granted a new constitution, his lyrics in praise of liberty were received with enthusiasm. As a member of the legislature from 1819 to 1826, he sided with the opposition. In 1829 he was made honorary professor of German literature at the University of Tübingen, but he resigned in 1833, when the post was found to be incompatible with his political views. In 1848 he became a member of the Frankfurt Parliament that convened in the course of the 1848 revolution.

Philology and Literary History

As a Germanic and Romance philologist, Uhland must be counted among the founders of that science. Besides the treatise *Ueber das altfranzösische Epos*

(1812) and an essay Zur Geschichte der Freischiessen (1828), there are to be especially mentioned Walther von der Vogelweide, ein altdeutscher Dichter (1822); Der Mythos von Thôr (1836), the result of the most painstaking original investigation; and the masterly collection Alte hoch- und niederdeutsche Volkslieder (1844–45; 3d ed. 1892). His poetical works were repeatedly published as Gedichte und Dramen, while his scientific work is embodied in Schriften zur Geschichte der Dichtung und Sage, edited by Holland, Keller, and Pfeiffer (1865–72). He died on 13 November 1862 in Tübingen.

Translations

Longfellow translated some of his pieces into English. Alexander Platt translated his "Poems" (Leipsic, 1848), W. W. Skeat his "Songs and Ballads" (London, 1864), and W. C. Sanders his "Poems" (1869).

Legacy

One of his best known poems is "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden", which is an integral part of military funerals. A town located south of Austin, Texas is named in his honor.

Works:

1809 The Good Comrade (Der gute Kamerad)
1823 The Passage (Auf der Überfahrt, translation of Sarah Austin)
Philology
Ueber das altfranzösische Epos (1812)
Zur Geschichte der Freischiessen (1828)
Walther von der Vogelweide, ein altdeutscher Dichter (1822)
Der Mythos von Thôr (1836)
Alte hoch- und niederdeutsche Volkslieder (1844–45; 3d ed. 1892).
Gedichte und Dramen
Schriften zur Geschichte der Dichtung und Sage, edited by Holland, Keller, and Pfeiffer (1865–72).

Der Schmied (The Smith)

Ich hör' meinen Schatz,
Den Hammer er schwinget,
Das rauschet, das klinget,
Das dringt in die Weite
Wie Glockengeläute
Durch Gassen und Platz.
Am schwarzen Kamin,
Da sitzt mein Lieber,
Doch geh' ich vorüber,
Die Bälge dann sausen,
Die Flammen aufbrausen
Und lodern um ihn.

The Smith

I hear my sweetheart,
The hammer he swings,
That whistles, that clangs,
That penetrates into the distance
Like the peal of bells
Through streets and square.
At the black furnace
There sits my love,
But if I pass by,
The bellows then groan,
The flames roar up
And blaze all around him.

Johann Ludwig Uhland

Evening clouds

Clouds seh I abendwaerts
Completely dipped into purest glow,
Clouds in light zerhaucht completely,
Had so stifling darkened.
Yes! my suspecting heart says to me:
Once still it becomes whether also late,
When the sun comes down,
Me the soul shade clarifies.

Johann Ludwig Uhland

Frühlingsglaube (Faith In Spring)

Die linden Lüfte sind erwacht,
Sie säuseln und wehen Tag und Nacht,
Sie schaffen an allen Enden.
O frischer Duft, o neuer Klang!
Nun, armes Herze, sei nicht bang!
Nun muß sich alles, alles wenden.
Die Welt wird schöner mit jedem Tag,
Man weiß nicht, was noch werden mag,
Das Blühen will nicht enden.
Es blüht das fernste, tiefste Tal:
Nun, armes Herz, vergiß der Qual!
Nun muß sich alles, alles wenden.

Faith In Spring

The gentle winds are awakened,
They murmur and waft day and night,
They create in every corner.
Oh fresh scent, oh new sound!
Now, poor dear, fear not!
Now everything, everything must change.
The world becomes more beautiful with each day,
One does not know what may yet happen,
The blooming doesn't want to end.
The farthest, deepest valley blooms:
Now, poor dear, forget the pain!
Now everything, everything must change.

Johann Ludwig Uhland

Ich hatt' Einen Kameraden (I Had A Comrade)

Ich hatt' einen Kameraden,
Einen bessern findst du nit.
Die Trommel schlug zum Streite,
Er ging an meiner Seite
In gleichem Schritt und Tritt.

Eine Kugel kam geflogen:
Gilt's mir oder gilt es dir?
Ihn hat es weggerissen,
Er liegt vor meinen Füßen
Als wär's ein Stück von mir

Will mir die Hand noch reichen,
Derweil ich eben lad'.
'Kann dir die Hand nicht geben,
Bleib du im ew'gen Leben
Mein guter Kamerad!

I Had a Comrade

In battle he was my comrade,
None better I have had.
The drum called us to fight,
He always on my right,
In step, through good and bad.

A bullet it flew towards us,
For him or meant for me?
His life from mine it tore,
At my feet a piece of gore,
As if a part of me.

His hand reached up to hold mine.
I must re-load my gun.
'My friend, I cannot ease your pain,
In life eternal we'll meet again,
And walk once more as one.'

Translated by Frank Petersohn

I Had a Comrade

I had one faithful comrade
'Ere we heard the trumpet's call,
And we pledged our hearts forever
In battle joined together
To beat the foe or fall.

A musket shot came screaming
To seal his fate or mine

Right at my feet he stumbled,
And friendship's shrine it crumbled
Around that friend of mine.

His hand is blindly seeking
The clasp I cannot give
For duty calls me onward
Farewell my dying comrade,
Our love shall ever live.

Translated by Arthur Keves

Johann Ludwig Uhland

The Black Knight

'T was Pentecost, the Feast of Gladness,
When woods and fields put off all sadness.
Thus began the King and spake:
'So from the halls
Of ancient hofburg's walls,
A luxuriant Spring shall break.'

Drums and trumpets echo loudly,
Wave the crimson banners proudly,
From balcony the King looked on;
In the play of spears,
Fell all the cavaliers,
Before the monarch's stalwart son.

To the barrier of the fight
Rode at last a sable Knight.
'Sir Knight! your name and scutcheon, say!'
'Should I speak it here,
Ye would stand aghast with fear;
I am a Prince of mighty sway!'

When he rode into the lists,
The arch of heaven grew black with mists,
And the castle 'gan to rock;
At the first blow,
Fell the youth from saddle-bow,
Hardly rises from the shock.

Pipe and viol call the dances,
Torch-light through the high halls glances;
Waves a mighty shadow in;
With manner bland
Doth ask the maiden's hand,
Doth with ter the dance begin.

Danced in sable iron sark,
Danced a measure weird and dark,
Coldly clasped her limbs around;
From breast and hair
Down fall from her the fair
Flowerets, faded, to the ground.

To the sumptuous banquet came
Every Knight and every Dame,
'Twixt son and daughter all distraught,
With mournful mind
The ancient King reclined,
Gazed at them in silent thought.

Pale the children both did look,
But the guest a beaker took:
'Golden wine will make you whole!

The children drank,
Gave many a courteous thank:
'O, that draught was very cool!'

Each the father's breast embraces,
Son and daughter; and their faces
Colorless grow utterly;
Whichever way
Looks the fear-struck father gray,
He beholds his children die.

'Woe! the blessed children both
Takest thou in the joy of youth;
Take me, too, the joyless father!
Spake the grim Guest,
From his hollow, cavernous breast;
'Roses in the spring I gather!'

Johann Ludwig Uhland

The Castle By The Sea

'Hast thou seen that lordly castle,
That Castle by the Sea?
Golden and red above it
The clouds float gorgeously.

'And fain it would stoop downward
To the mirrored wave below;
And fain it would soar upward
In the evening's crimson glow.'

'Well have I seen that castle,
That Castle by the Sea,
And the moon above it standing,
And the mist rise solemnly.'

'The winds and the waves of ocean,
Had they a merry chime?
Didst thou hear, from those lofty chambers,
The harp and the minstrel's rhyme?'

'The winds and the waves of ocean,
They rested quietly,
But I heard on the gale a sound of wail,
And tears came to mine eye.'

'And sawest thou on the turrets
The King and his royal bride?
And the wave of their crimson mantles?
And the golden crown of pride?

'Led they not forth, in rapture,
A beauteous maiden there?
Resplendent as the morning sun,
Beaming with golden hair?'

'Well saw I the ancient parents,
Without the crown of pride;
They were moving slow, in weeds of woe,
No maiden was by their side!'

Johann Ludwig Uhland

The Luck Of Edenhall

Of Edenhall, the youthful Lord
Bids sound the festal trumpet's call;
He rises at the banquet board,
And cries, 'mid the drunken revellers all,
'Now bring me the Luck of Edenhall!'

The butler hears the words with pain,
The house's oldest seneschal,
Takes slow from its silken cloth again
The drinking-glass of crystal tall;
They call it The Luck of Edenhall.

Then said the Lord: 'This glass to praise,
Fill with red wine from Portugal!'
The graybeard with trembling hand obeys;
A purple light shines over all,
It beams from the Luck of Edenhall.

Then speaks the Lord, and waves it light:
'This glass of flashing crystal tall
Gave to my sires the Fountain-Sprite;
She wrote in it, If this glass doth fall,
Farewell then, O Luck of Edenhall!

"T was right a goblet the Fate should be
Of the joyous race of Edenhall!
Deep draughts drink we right willingly:
And willingly ring, with merry call,
Kling! klang! to the Luck of Edenhall!'

First rings it deep, and full, and mild,
Like to the song of a nightingale
Then like the roar of a torrent wild;
Then mutters at last like the thunder's fall,
The glorious Luck of Edenhall.

'For its keeper takes a race of might,
The fragile goblet of crystal tall;
It has lasted longer than is right;
King! klang!-with a harder blow than all
Will I try the Luck of Edenhall!'

As the goblet ringing flies apart,
Suddenly cracks the vaulted hall;
And through the rift, the wild flames start;
The guests in dust are scattered all,
With the breaking Luck of Edenhall!

In storms the foe, with fire and sword;
He in the night had scaled the wall,
Slain by the sword lies the youthful Lord,
But holds in his hand the crystal tall,

The shattered Luck of Edenhall.

On the morrow the butler gropes alone,
The graybeard in the desert hall,
He seeks his Lord's burnt skeleton,
He seeks in the dismal ruin's fall
The shards of the Luck of Edenhall.

'The stone wall,' saith he, 'doth fall aside,
Down must the stately columns fall;
Glass is this earth's Luck and Pride;
In atoms shall fall this earthly ball
One day like the Luck of Edenhall!'

Johann Ludwig Uhland

The Shepherd's Sabbath Song

Schäfers Sonntagslied

Ich bin so hold den sanften Tagen,
Das ist der Tag des Herrn!
Ich bin allein auf weiter Flur;
Noch eine Morgenglocke nur,
Nun Stille nah und fern.
Anbetend knie ich hier.
O süßes Graun! geheimes Wehn!
Als knieten viele ungesehn
Und beteten mit mir.
Der Himmel nah und fern,
Er ist so klar und feierlich,
So ganz, als wollt' er öffnen sich.
Das ist der Tag des Herrn!
This is the Sabbath day!

The Shepherd's Sabbath Song

In the wide field I am alone.
Hark! now one morning bell's sweet tone--
Now it has died away.
Kneeling, I worship Thee:
Sweet dread doth o'er my spirit steal,
From whispering sounds of those who kneel,
Unseen, to pray with me.
Around and far away
So clear and solemn is the sky,
It seems all opening to my eye:
This is the Sabbath day!

Johann Ludwig Uhland

Three Students

Three students once tarried over the Rhine,
And into Frau Wirthin's turned to dine.

'Say, hostess, have you good beer and wine?
And where is that pretty daughter of thine?'

'My beer and wine is fresh and clear.
My daughter lies on her funeral bier.'

They softly tipped into the room;
She lay there in the silent gloom.

The first the white cloth gently raised,
And tearfully upon her gazed.

'If thou wert alive, O, lovely maid,
My heart at thy feet would to-day be laid!'

The second covered her face again,
And turned away with grief and pain.

'Ah, thou upon thy snow-white bier!
And I have loved thee so many a year.'

The third drew back again the veil,
And kissed the lips so cold and pale.

'I've loved thee always, I love thee to-day,
And will love thee, yes, forever and aye!'

Johann Ludwig Uhland