

Classic Poetry Series

**Konstantin Nikolaevich
Batiushkov**
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Epitaph For A Shepherdess

Beloved maidens! Playful and carefree,
You sing, you dance and frolic in the glades.
I, too, once dwelt in gay Arcadia,
I, too, in early days found moments
Of joy in woods and glades:
In golden dreams, love promised happiness:
But what did I attain in this glad land?-
The grave!

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

Know'st Thou What Gray Methuselah

Know'st thou what gray Methuselah
Pronounced when parting with this life?
 Man's born a slave,
 He dies a slave,
 And death will never tell him why
He walked this lovely vale of tears,
 Suffered, wept, endured, and disappeared.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

My Inspiration

O recollection of the heart! You're stronger
Than reason's cheerless recollection.
Your sweetness oft
Enchants me in a far-off land.
I recollect her voice, her precious words,
I recollect her azure eyes,
I recollect the golden locks
Of loose and curling hair.
My peerless shepherdess's
Simple clothes I recollect.
Her precious, unforgotten face
Still wanders with me everywhere.
This guardian spirit love bestowed
To comfort me in solitude:
When'er I slumber, it will nestle near
To sweeten cheerless sleep.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

Odysseus' Fate

Through horrors of land and horrors of sea
Bereft and wandering, Odysseus,
God-fearing wretch, sought Ithaca;
Unflinching, he plunged into the gloom of Hades;
The roar of fierce Charybdis and underwater Scylla's groans
Shook not his noble soul.
His patience vanquished cruel fate, it seemed,
And to the dregs he'd drunk the bitter cup.
It seemed the heav'ns were done with testing him
And drove him softly, slumbering,
To homeland's longed-for cliffs.
He waked: what then? He did not know his home.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

Recovery

As a wild flower hangs its head and wilts
Beneath the reaper's killing scythe,
Ill, I awaited my untimely end
And thought: the fateful hour's nigh.
With eyes already veiled by Erebus' thick gloom,
My heart slowed down its beat:
I was collapsing, disappearing, and it seemed
The sun of youth had set.
Then you arrived, O my heart's joy,
And with the breath of your red lips,
The flaming tears of your bright eyes
The union of our kisses,
The strength of loving words and passionate sighs
You called me back from gloomy realms,
From Orcus's fields and Lethe's shores
Sweet pleasures to enjoy again.
You give me life once more, it is your healing gift,
I'll breathe you in until my grave.
My mortal hour will ev'n be sweet:
For now I die of love.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

Tasso Dying

What festival is ancient Rome preparing?
Where flow the crowds in noisy waves?
Why these aromas, myrrh's sweet smoke
And censers all around abrim with fragrant herbs?
From Capitoline Hill to Tiber's waves,
Above universal city's streets,
Why are the priceless rugs and purple stuffs
Spread among garlands, laurels?
Why all this noise? The crash and thump of timpani?
Are these heralds of joy or triumph?
Why wearing the miter hastes the holy father
With gonfalon to the prayer house?
For whom doth thankful Rome's most valued gift,
The crown, in his hands shimmer?
For whom this triumph? - 'tis for you, o blessed bard!
For you this gift... Jerusalem's bard!
And now the joyful noise has reached the cell,
Where Death joins battle with Torquatto,
Where death's winged spirit swoops
Above the sufferer's blessed head.
Not weeping friends, nor praying monks,
Nor honor's late rewards
Can tame the iron hand of fate,
Which knows no mercy for the great.
Half-dead, he sees the horrid hour,
And blesses it with joy,
And parting with life, one final time,
The wondrous swan exclaims:

"My friends, O let me catch a glimpse of splendid Rome,
Where a too early grave awaits the bard!
Allow my glance to meet your hills and smoke,
O, ancient sepulcher of citizens!
O blessed land of heroes and of wonders!
Dust eloquent and ruins!
Azure and purple of cloudless skies,
You, poplars; and you, ancient olives.
Eternal Tiber, you, who slake the thirst of every tribe,
Sown with a universe of bones.
Doomed to an early end.
I greet you from within these dreary walls!

It's done! I stand before the fatal borne
To wild applause I won't step on Capitoline,
And glory's laurels on my feeble head
Won't sweeten the bard's frightful lot.
From youth I have been everybody's puppet.
I was an exile as a child,
I wandered, a poor traveler
Under the sweet Italian sky,
What turns of fate did I not suffer?
Where did the waves not toss my bark?

Where was I safe? Where was my daily bread
Not spattered with the tears of sorrow?
Sorrento! Cradle of my woe-filled days,
Where once at night, like a trembling Askania
Fate tore me from my mother's breast,
From her embraces sweet and kisses, -
Do you recall what tears I spilled in childhood
Alas! Since then, a plaything of cruel fate,
I've known great suffering, the poverty of life.
The depths by Fortune quarried out
Beneath me, and the thunder never ceased!
Driven from place to place, from land to land,
In vain I sought a harbor on the earth:
I felt her hand relentless everywhere!
Her lightning everywhere harassed the bard!
Not in a peasant's meager hut,
Nor e'en protected by Alphonso's palace,
Nor under an obscure and silent roof,
Nor in the wilds, nor in the hills was my head safe.
Embittered by glory and ignominy alike,
An exile's head, from cradle consigned
Into the hands of an avenging goddess...

But friends! what clutches terribly my breast?
Why does my heart lament and tremble?
Whence do I come? What awful path have I been following,
And what behind me in the darkness gleams?
Ferrara...Furies...envy's serpent!..
Whither? O, whither, murderers of my gift!
I am in harbor. Here is Rome. My brothers and my kin!
Here are their tears and sweet embrace...
And Virgil's wreath upon the Capitoline hill.
Thus, I fulfilled Appollo's task.
From my first youth, his dedicated priest,
Through lightning, under raging skies,
I sang the grandeur glorious of bygone days,
In bondage I did not betray my soul,
It harbors still the muses' sweet delight,
And torments only reinforced my gift.
It lived in wonderland, by Zion's walls,
On Jordan's flowering shores;
It questioned you, impatient Cedron,
And you serene asylum of Lebanon!
It raised you from the dead, o heroes hoary,
To awesome glory's dazzle and grandeur:
It gazed upon you, Gottfried, ruler, king of kings,
Magnificent and calm 'midst whistling arrows;
On you, o young Rinaldo, ardent as Achilles,
In love and battle a blessed victor.
It watched you fly above the corpses of your foes,
Like fire, like death, like an avenging angel...

And Tartarus is vanquished by a shining cross!
O models of extraordinary valor!
O holy triumph of our ancestors,
Long laid to rest! Pure faith victorious!
Torquato has invoked you from the depths of time:
He sings - and you will never be forgot, -
He sings, and gains the wreath of immortality,
By glory woven and the muses' hands.

But it's too late! I stand before the fatal borne.
To wild applause I won't step on Capitoline,
And glory's laurels on my feeble head
Won't sweeten the bard's frightful lot.

He then fell mute, eyes burning with a doleful flame,
A final ray of talent 'ere the end;
Even in dying, it seemed he wished
To wrest a day of triumph from the Fates,
His gaze sought out the Capitoline walls,
He strained to raise himself,
But, spent by struggles terrible with death,
Remained immobile on his bed.
The golden orb was sliding to the west,
And sinking in a scarlet glow;
The hour of death approached...the sufferer's somber brow
Brightened a final time.
He gazed with quiet smile toward the west...
And then, refreshed by evening chill,
He raised his right hand to the listening heavens,
Like a full righteous man, with hope and joy:.
"See," to his weeping friends he quoth,
"The king of stars burns in the west!
'Tis he who summons me to cloudless lands,
Where the eternal star will shine...
I see the angel to that realm my guide;
He has enfolded me in azure wings...
Bring close the sign of love - the cross mysterious...
And pray with hope and tears...
All earthly things must die...both glory and the crown...
Art and the muses' great creations,
But there all's neverending like our God
Who vouchsafes us eternal glory's crown!
The greatness of that place has filled my soul,
I've breathed it since my cradle days.
O brothers! Friends! Don't weep for me:
Your friend's attained his long-sought goal.
He will depart in peace and, strong of faith,
He will not heed the agonizing end:
There, there...O joy!..among the righteous wives,
Among the angels, Elenora waits!"

And, uttering the name of love, the heav'nly poet died;

In silence friends wept over him,
The day died quietly... the voice of bells
Bore the unhappy news through city streets.
"Torquatto's gone!" Rome cried in grief,
"Our bard is dead, so worthy of a better life!..
The morning witnessed somber smoke.
The Capitoline in mourning cloaked..

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

The Farewell

BENT o'er his sabre, torrents starting
From his dim eyes, the bold hussar
Thus greets his cherish'd maid, while parting
For distant fields of war:

'Weep not, my fair one! O forbear thee!
No anguish can those tears remove;
For, by my troth and beard, I swear thee,
Time shall not change my love.

'That love shall bloom— a deathless blossom,
My shield in fight— with sword in hand,
And thou, my Lila, in my bosom,
What shall that sword withstand?

'Weep not, my fair one! O forbear thee!
Those tears can bid no grief depart;
And were I faithless, Maid! I swear thee,
Anguish would tear my heart!

'Then my good steed would sure betray me,
And falter in the battle-fray,
In peril's hours refuse t' obey me—
My stirrup would give way.

'The sword, my valour's proudest token,
When grasp'd, like rotten wood would break;
And I should seek thee, spirit-broken,
Death's paleness on my cheek.'

But the false horseman's steed obey'd him,
Gentle and eager still;— his sword,
Bright and unbroken, ne'er betray'd him,
Though he broke oath and word.

The tale of love— the tears which shower'd
From Lila's eye— were all forgot;
The rose-wreath faded— pale— deflower'd:—
Such buds re-blossom not!

That maiden's breast of peace he rifles;
Then hies him to another's breast;
Man's oaths to woman are but— trifles;
And love itself— a jest.

He serves— secures— and then he slights them;
His vows are change— and treachery;
For laughing Cupid's arrow writes them
Upon the shifting sea.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

The Friend's Shadow

Sunt aliquid manes; letum non omnia finit;
Luridaque evictos effugit umbra rogos.
— — —
PROPERTIUS.

To Albion's misty isle across the waves I sped me:
It look'd as if interr'd beneath a leaden sea,
And gathering round our bark the halcyon's music led me,
While all the crew rejoiced in their sweet melody.
The dancing surge, the evening breezes falling,
And through the sails and shrouds those breezes whistling thrill,
And to the watch the active helmsman calling,
The watch, who, midst the roar, sleeps tranquilly and still.
All seem'd to rock itself to gentle thought;
Like an enchanted one, I, from the mast, look'd forth,
And through the night and through the mist I sought,
I sought the star beloved of my domestic north.
Then into memory melted every feeling—
My soul had sanctified my home of joy and peace,
And the sea raging, and the zephyrs gently stealing,
Cover'd my eyelids o'er with self-forgetfulness.
Then dreams with other dreams were blended,
And lo! there stood— was it a dream?— the form
Of that dear friend who his career had ended
Nobly, amidst the thundering battle storm.
He stood upon the mist, and smiled— his face,
Fresh as the morn and bloodless, shining
Like the young spring in gaiety and grace,
Even as an angel from high heaven declining:—
'Comrade of better time! and is it thou?
And is it thou?' I cried, 'thou hero bright!
Did I not in the fury of the fight
Attend thee— and when thou hadst fallen below
Make thy new grave— and on a neighbouring tree
Write with my sword thy feats of bravery,
And follow'd thy cold ashes to their bed,
And hallow'd it with prayers, and with tears watered?
Speak, unforgotten one! speak! was it a deceit?
Is all that's past a dream— a cheating dream?
A dream that corpse— a dream that grave— that sheet
Wrapt round thee— were they not— did they but seem?
O but one word! let that tongue's melody
Yet sweetly fall on my transported ear:
O unforgotten one! stretch out to me
Thy old right hand of friendship— stretch it here.'
I sprung towards him— Oh! the mists had dimm'd my eye—
He vanish'd like a shade— a lock of airy smoke—
Dispersed in the wide azure of the sky,
And I, arousing from my dream, awoke.
Beneath the wing of stillness all was sleeping;
The very winds— the very waves, at rest;

And scarce a breath upon the sea was creeping;
The pale moon swam along upon the white cloud's breast.
But I was troubled— peace had left my soul—
I stretch'd my hands tow'rds him, whom I no more could see—
I called on him— whom I could not control—
On thee— belov'd one! best of friends! on thee!

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

The Prisoner

THERE, where the swift Rhone's waters flow
Its verdant banks between;
Where fragrant myrtles bending grow,
And Rhone reflects their green;
There, where the vineyards deck the hills,
And o'er the valleys spread,
Which golden citrons' fragrance fills,
And plantains rear their head—

There stood, as sunk the lord of day,
Upon the smiling shore,
One who long watch'd the waters play,
And thought his sorrows o'er;
A Russian hero— stolen by war,
The honour of the Don;
Divided from his friends afar,
He wander'd there alone.

'O roll!' he sang, 'ye waters roll—
Flow in your glory on;
Your waves shall waken on my soul
The memory of the Don.
My days pass by without an aim,
Amidst life's busy roar;
For what is life without its fame,
Or the bright world?— 'tis poor.

'Now nature wears its spring-tide dress,
The sun shines splendidly;
All liberty and loveliness—
O! why am I not free?
O roll, ye waters! rage, thou Rhone!
And waken, as ye roll,
The thoughts of my domestic zone
Within my troubled soul.

'The maidens here are fair and bright,
Their glance is full of fire;
And their all-graceful smiles of light
Might satisfy desire
'But what is love in foreign lands,
Or joy?— I only know
The joy and love that bless our sands,
Midst forests and midst snow.

'Give me my freedom— let me tread
Once more my country's strand;
With frost and storm all overspread—
My home— my father-land!
Deep is the snow around my door;
But give me my own steed,
And day and night, the mountains o'er,

Me to my home he'll lead.

'At home, there's one who sits and keeps
The memory of her love;
And often to the window creeps,
And pours her prayers above.
She guards the thoughts of him whose mind
Guards every thought of her;
She pats the horse I left behind—
How privileged to be there!

'O roll, thou Rhone! ye waters roll—
Rush in your glory on;
Your waves still waken in my soul
The memory of the Don.
Come, winds! come hither from the north,
Come, in your freshness, come:
And thou bright pole-star blazen forth,
Memento of my home!'

So spake the prisoner, as he turn'd
To Lyons his tired eye,
When long in exile's chains he mourn'd
His hapless destiny.
He sang— the Rhone roll'd proudly on,
The moon oft kiss'd its tide;
And oft on Lyons' turrets shone
The sun in all his pride.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov