

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Nikolay Alekseyevich Nekrasov**

**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

## **I Shall Soon Fall Prey To Rot**

I shall soon fall prey to rot.  
Though it's hard to die, it's good to die;  
I shall ask for no one's pity,  
And there's no one who would pity me.

With my lyre I won no glory  
For my noble family name;  
And I die as distant from my people  
As the day that I began to live.

Ties of friendship, unions of the heart-  
All are broken: from my youth,  
Fate has sent me foes implacable,  
While my friends all perished in the struggle.

Their prophetic songs were left unfinished,  
They fell victim to misfortune, were betrayed  
In the bloom of life; and now their portraits watch me  
From the walls, reproachfully.

Nikolay Alekseyevich Nekrasov

## Morning

You're unhappy, sick at heart:  
Oh, I know it-here such sickness isn't rare.  
Nature can but mirror  
The surrounding poverty.

All is ever drear and dismal,  
Pastures, fields, and meadows,  
Wet and drowsy jackdaws  
Resting on the peaked haystacks;

Here's a drunken peasant driving  
His collapsing nag  
Into far-off blueish mists,  
Such a gloomy sky . . . It makes one weep!

The rich city is no better, though:  
The same storm clouds race across the sky;  
It's hard on the nerves-steel shovels  
Scraping, screeching as they clean the streets

Work's beginning everywhere;  
From the fire tower an alarm goes up;  
A condemned man's brought outside  
Where the executioners already wait.

At the break of day a prostitute is hurrying  
Home from someone's bed;  
Officers inside a hired carriage  
Leave the city-there will be a duel.

Shopkeepers have roused themselves  
And they rush to sit behind their counters:  
All day long they need to swindle  
If they want to eat their fill at night.

Listen! Cannon fire from the fortress!  
There's a flood endangering the capital . . .  
Someone's died: Upon a scarlet cushion  
Lies a first-class Anna decoration.

Now a yardman beats a thief-he got him!  
Geese are driven out to slaughter;  
From an upper floor the crackle  
Of a shot-another suicide. .

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## On The Day Of Gogol's Death

How blessed's the good-natured poet,  
With little bile and much emotion:  
All lovers of the gentle arts  
Send him sincerest greetings;

The admiration of the crowd  
Sounds in his ear like rippling waves;  
He is a stranger to self-doubt-  
That torture of creative souls;

Lover of comfort and tranquility,  
Shunning audacious satire,  
He firmly dominates the crowd  
With his peace-loving lyre.

He is not cursed nor driven out  
But worshipped for his splendid mind,  
While all his countrymen prepare  
A monument to him in life.

But fate will show no mercy  
To one whose noble genius  
Has led him to unmask the crowd,  
Expose its passions and mistakes.

His heart abrim with hate  
His lips all clad in satire,  
He wanders down a thorny path  
His wrathful lyre in hand.

He is reviled at every step:  
He catches sounds of admiration  
Not in sweet murmurings of praise  
But in wild cries of enmity.  
With disbelief and new belief  
In his high calling's dream,  
He preaches love to all  
Through venomous denial.

His speech's every syllable  
Engenders for him cruel foes,  
And all men, whether smart or dull,  
Are quick to vilify him.

They curse at him from every side,  
And only when they see his corpse  
They'll understand how much he did,  
And that in hate, he was yet full of love!

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## Thoughts At A Vestibule

Here's a vestibule. On holidays  
Overcome by slavish fear,  
The whole population, in a state of awe,  
Rushes to the sacred doors.  
Having left their names and ranks.  
All these visitors return then to their homes  
They are all so deeply satisfied  
You might think this was their calling!  
Yet on other days this ornate vestibule  
Is beset by much more wretched sorts:  
Schemers and position-seekers,  
By a widow and an aged man.  
To and fro each morning without cease  
Couriers bustle with their papers.  
Some returning seekers whistle a tune  
While some others walk and weep.  
Once I saw some peasants who stopped by,  
Simple Russian villagers.  
Having crossed themselves they stood aside  
And they hung their flaxen heads.  
Then up came a doorman.-"Let us in," they said  
With a look of torment and of hope.  
He surveyed the visitors: how ugly they all looked.  
Sunburned hands and faces  
Threadbare coats upon their backs,  
On bent shoulders knapsacks,  
Crosses round the neck and bloodied feet  
Shod in hand-made bast  
(Must have come from far away,  
From some far-flung province).  
Someone yelled out to the doorman: "Send them off!  
Our boss doesn't care for ragged mobs!"  
And the door was shut. In time  
They untied their bags  
But the doorman spurned their meager offerings  
And they walked off through the burning sun,  
Saying: God will be the judge!  
With their arms thrown wide in consternation,  
I observed them 'til they disappeared,  
And they never donned their caps.

While the owner of this lavish palace  
Was still nestled in deep sleep's embrace . . .  
You who think so highly of a life  
Full of thrilling, shameless flattery,  
Gluttony, philandering and play,  
Wake now! There's a greater pleasure:  
Call them back. For you are their salvation!  
But the sated are to goodness deaf.

Heavenly thunder doesn't frighten you,  
Earthly thunders you hold in your hands

That is why these unknown men must carry  
Grief disconsolate within their hearts.

But what does this desperate sorrow mean to you?  
What do you care for these desperate folk?  
A life racing by in endless holidays  
Keeps you from awakening.  
And why care? For you the people's good  
Is an idle game for scribblers;  
You will live a glorious life without it  
And you'll die a glorious death!  
Your declining days will pass  
Peacefully like some Arcadian idyll:  
Under Sicily's charming skies,  
In the fragrant shade of trees,  
Contemplating crimson suns  
As they sink into the azure sea  
Casting shining rays of gold,-  
Lulled by the soft melody  
Of Tyrrhenean waves-just like a child  
You will slumber, satisfied in every need  
By your dear and loving family  
(Who await your death impatiently);  
Your remains they'll transport back to us  
To reward them with a funeral feast.  
Like a hero you'll be lowered to the grave,  
By your homeland silently cursed,  
Glorified by boisterous praise! . . .

Still, why bother such a personage  
With the pains of trivial folk?  
Rage at them instead-a great idea!  
It's less dangerous. . . and more amusing,  
Find ourselves some kind of solace . . .  
What a peasant bears is no big deal:  
It's what fate that guides us  
Has decreed . . . And anyway, he's used to it!  
In some lowly inn outside the city gates,  
These poor men will drink their final rubles down  
And then head for home, begging all the way,  
Moaning humbly . . . O my homeland!  
Tell me now of some abode-  
I have surely never seen it-  
Where your sower and your guardian,  
The meek Russian peasant, does not moan?  
In the fields he moans, and on the roads,  
In the prisons and stockades he moans,  
And in ore mines, wearing iron chains;  
Moans burst out from barns and stacks of hay,  
And from carts where he sleeps in the steppe;  
In his own poor hut he moans,  
Warmed by nothing on God's earth;

In each godforsaken town he moans,  
In the vestibules of courts and palaces as well.  
Go out to the Volga: hear whose moan  
Rises over Russia's greatest river?  
In our land, this moan is called a song-  
It's the boatmen straining in their traces! . .  
Volga! Volga! In the spring your torrents  
Cannot flood the fields as much  
As our people's awful pain  
Floods our land-  
Where you are there's moaning-O, my people!  
What can all this endless moaning mean?  
Will you ever waken, filled with strength,  
Or, obeying fate's command,  
Have you done all that you can,  
Fashioning a song so like a moan,  
While your soul remains forever mired in sleep?..

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