Classic Poetry Series

Victor Marie Hugo

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

A Sunset

I love the evenings, passionless and fair, I love the evens,
Whether old manor-fronts their ray with golden fulgence leavens,
In numerous leafage bosomed close;
Whether the mist in reefs of fire extend its reaches sheer,
Or a hundred sunbeams splinter in an azure atmosphere
On cloudy archipelagos.

Oh, gaze ye on the firmament! a hundred clouds in motion,
Up-piled in the immense sublime beneath the winds' commotion,
Their unimagined shapes accord:
Under their waves at intervals flame a pale levin through,
As if some giant of the air amid the vapors drew
A sudden elemental sword.

The sun at bay with splendid thrusts still keeps the sullen fold;
And momently at distance sets, as a cupola of gold,
The thatched roof of a cot a-glance;
Or on the blurred horizon joins his battle with the haze;
Or pools the blooming fields about with inter-isolate blaze,
Great moveless meres of radiance.

Then mark you how there hangs athwart the firmament's swept track,
Yonder a mighty crocodile with vast irradiant back,
A triple row of pointed teeth?
Under its burnished belly slips a ray of eventide,
The flickerings of a hundred glowing clouds in tenebrous side
With scales of golden mail ensheathe.

Then mounts a palace, then the air vibrates--the vision flees.
Confounded to its base, the fearful cloudy edifice
Ruins immense in mounded wrack;
Afar the fragments strew the sky, and each envermeiled cone
Hangeth, peak downward, overhead, like mountains overthrown
When the earthquake heaves its hugy back.

These vapors, with their leaden, golden, iron, bronzèd glows,
Where the hurricane, the waterspout, thunder, and hell repose,
Muttering hoarse dreams of destined harms,--
'Tis God who hangs their multitude amid the skiey deep,
As a warrior that suspendeth from the roof-tree of his keep
His dreadful and resounding arms!

All vanishes! The Sun, from topmost heaven precipitated,
Like a globe of iron which is tossed back fiery red
Into the furnace stirred to fume,
Shocking the cloudy surges, plashed from its impetuous ire,
Even to the zenith spattereth in a flecking scud of fire
The vaporous and inflamèd spaume.

O contemplate the heavens! Whenas the vein-drawn day dies pale,
In every season, every place, gaze through their every veil?
With love that has not speech for need!

Beneath their solemn beauty is a mystery infinite:
If winter hue them like a pall, or if the summer night
Fantasy them starre brede.

Victor Marie Hugo

Boaz Asleep

Boaz, overcome with weariness, by torchlight
made his pallet on the threshing floor
where all day he had worked, and now he slept
among the bushels of threshed wheat.

The old man owned wheatfields and barley,
and though he was rich, he was still fair-minded.
No filth soured the sweetness of his well.
No hot iron of torture whitened in his forge.

His beard was silver as a brook in April.
He bound sheaves without the strain of hate
or envy. He saw gleaners pass, and said,
Let handfuls of the fat ears fall to them.

The man's mind, clear of untoward feeling,
clothed itself in candor. He wore clean robes.
His heaped granaries spilled over always
toward the poor, no less than public fountains.

Boaz did well by his workers and by kinsmen.
He was generous, and moderate. Women held him
worthier than younger men, for youth is handsome,
but to him in his old age came greatness.

An old man, nearing his first source, may find
the timelessness beyond times of trouble.
And though fire burned in young men's eyes,
to Ruth the eyes of Boaz shone clear light.

Victor Marie Hugo

Demain, dès l'aube...

Demain, dès l'aube, à l'heure où blanchit la campagne,
Je partirai. Vois-tu, je sais que tu m'attends.
J'irai par la forêt, j'irai par la montagne.
Je ne puis demeurer loin de toi plus longtemps.

Je marcherai les yeux fixés sur mes pensées,
Sans rien voir au dehors, sans entendre aucun bruit,
Seul, inconnu, le dos courbé, les mains croisées,
Triste, et le jour pour moi sera comme la nuit.

Je ne regarderai ni l'or du soir qui tombe,
Ni les voiles au loin descendant vers Harfleur,
Et quand j'arriverai, je mettrai sur ta tombe
Un bouquet de houx vert et de bruyère en fleur.

Victor Marie Hugo

Letter

You can see it already: chalks and ochers;
Country crossed with a thousand furrow-lines;
Ground-level rooftops hidden by the shrubbery;
Sporadic haystacks standing on the grass;
Smoky old rooftops tarnishing the landscape;
A river (not Cayster or Ganges, though:
A feeble Norman salt-infested watercourse);
On the right, to the north, bizarre terrain
All angular--you'd think a shovel did it.
So that's the foreground. An old chapel adds
Its antique spire, and gathers alongside it
A few gnarled elms with grumpy silhouettes;
Seemingly tired of all the frisky breezes,
They carp at every gust that stirs them up.
At one side of my house a big wheelbarrow
Is rusting; and before me lies the vast
Horizon, all its notches filled with ocean blue;
Cocks and hens spread their gildings, and converse
Beneath my window; and the rooftop attics,
Now and then, toss me songs in dialect.
In my lane dwells a patriarchal rope-maker;
The old man makes his wheel run loud, and goes
Retrograde, hemp wreathed tightly round the midriff.
I like these waters where the wild gale scuds;
All day the country tempts me to go strolling;
The little village urchins, book in hand,
Envy me, at the schoolmaster's (my lodging),
As a big schoolboy sneaking a day off.
The air is pure, the sky smiles; there's a constant
Soft noise of children spelling things aloud.
The waters flow; a linnet flies; and I say: "Thank you!
Thank you, Almighty God!"--So, then, I live:
Peacefully, hour by hour, with little fuss, I shed
My days, and think of you, my lady fair!
I hear the children chattering; and I see, at times,
Sailing across the high seas in its pride,
Over the gables of the tranquil village,
Some winged ship which is traveling far away,
Flying across the ocean, hounded by all the winds.
Lately it slept in port beside the quay.
Nothing has kept it from the jealous sea-surge:
No tears of relatives, nor fears of wives,
Nor reefs dimly reflected in the waters,
Nor importunity of sinister birds.

Victor Marie Hugo

More Strong Than Time

Since I have set my lips to your full cup, my sweet,
Since I my pallid face between your hands have laid,
Since I have known your soul, and all the bloom of it,
And all the perfume rare, now buried in the shade;

Since it was given to me to hear on happy while,
The words wherein your heart spoke all its mysteries,
Since I have seen you weep, and since I have seen you smile,
Your lips upon my lips, and your eyes upon my eyes;

Since I have known above my forehead glance and gleam,
A ray, a single ray, of your star, veiled always,
Since I have felt the fall, upon my lifetime's stream,
Of one rose petal plucked from the roses of your days;

I now am bold to say to the swift changing hours,
Pass, pass upon your way, for I grow never old,
Fleet to the dark abysm with all your fading flowers,
One rose that none may pluck, within my heart I hold.

Your flying wings may smite, but they can never spill
The cup fulfilled of love, from which my lips are wet;
My heart has far more fire than you can frost to chill,
My soul more love than you can make my soul forget

Victor Marie Hugo

The Genesis of the Butterfly

The dawn is smiling on the dew that covers
The tearful roses; lo, the little lovers
That kiss the buds, and all the flutterings
In jasmine bloom, and privet, of white wings,
That go and come, and fly, and peep and hide,
With muffled music, murmured far and wide.
Ah, the Spring time, when we think of all the lays
That dreamy lovers send to dreamy mays,
Of the fond hearts within a billet bound,
Of all the soft silk paper that pens wound,
The messages of love that mortals write
Filled with intoxication of delight,
Written in April and before the May time
Shredded and flown, playthings for the wind's playtime,
We dream that all white butterflies above,
Who seek through clouds or waters souls to love,
And leave their lady mistress in despair,
To flit to flowers, as kinder and more fair,
Are but torn love-letters, that through the skies
Flutter, and float, and change to butterflies

Victor Marie Hugo

The Grave and The Rose

The Grave said to the Rose,
"What of the dews of dawn,
Love's flower, what end is theirs?"
"And what of spirits flown,
The souls whereon doth close
The tomb's mouth unawares?"
The Rose said to the Grave.

The Rose said, "In the shade
From the dawn's tears is made
A perfume faint and strange,
Amber and honey sweet."
"And all the spirits fleet
Do suffer a sky-change,
More strangely than the dew,
To God's own angels new,"
The Grave said to the Rose.

Victor Marie Hugo

The Ocean's Song

We walked amongst the ruins famed in story
Of Rozel-Tower,
And saw the boundless waters stretch in glory
And heave in power.

O Ocean vast! We heard thy song with wonder,
Whilst waves marked time.
"Appear, O Truth!" thou sang'st with tone of thunder,
"And shine sublime!

"The world's enslaved and hunted down by beagles,
To despots sold.
Souls of deep thinkers, soar like mighty eagles!
The Right uphold.

"Be born! arise! o'er the earth and wild waves bounding,
Peoples and suns!
Let darkness vanish; tocsins be resounding,
And flash, ye guns!

"And you who love no pomps of fog or glamour,
Who fear no shocks,
Brave foam and lightning, hurricane and clamour,--
Exiles: the rocks!"

Victor Marie Hugo

The Poor Children

Take heed of this small child of earth;
He is great; he hath in him God most high.
Children before their fleshly birth
Are lights alive in the blue sky.

In our light bitter world of wrong
They come; God gives us them awhile.
His speech is in their stammering tongue,
And his forgiveness in their smile.

Their sweet light rests upon our eyes.
Alas! their right to joy is plain.
If they are hungry Paradise
Weeps, and, if cold, Heaven thrills with pain.

The want that saps their sinless flower
Speaks judgment on sin's ministers.
Man holds an angel in his power.
Ah! deep in Heaven what thunder stirs,

When God seeks out these tender things
Whom in the shadow where we sleep
He sends us clothed about with wings,
And finds them ragged babes that weep!

Victor Marie Hugo