

ABAI KUNANBAEV





ABAI (IBRAGHIM) KUNANBAEV
(1845 – 1904)

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POEMS

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Abai (Ibraghim) Kunanbaev is a leading figure in spiritual life of human civilization. His creations have become the common heritage of mankind. This priceless heritage of the poet is published as a souvenir to the guests of the international specialized exhibition «EXPO - 2017».

The collection includes the most popular poems of the Great poet.

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*Look deep into your soul and ponder on my words:
To you I am a puzzle, my person and my verse.
My life has been a struggle, a thousand foes I braved,
Don't judge me too severely – for you the way I paved.*

ABAI

Abai addressed these heartfelt lines to the generations to come, to his countrymen for whom he strove to pave the way to a more enlightened, better life. He carried his poetry like a burning torch through the gloom of ignorance and prejudice that enveloped the Kazakh steppes, revealing new horizons to his people and the promise of a new dawn.

MUKHTAR AUEZOV

The eagle's keeper mounts a hill,
 while his helper waits below.
The hood is snatched from the eagle's eyes.
In a flash it sights its hidden prey.
Then the fox streaks up the rise,
But the eagle knows he seeks the rocks
 and cuts across the way.

The fox cannot reach safety that he sought
to gain in height.
He crouches low, but he can't deceive
the bird's blood-lusting eye.
His lips curl back, his fangs show white.
He'll put up a fight for his life today,
if the time has come to die.

Now the fun has begun, the sport and the zest!
The hunters gallop at a breakneck pace,
reckless and risking their lives.
They know a good fox may come out the best
With his forty ivory knives.

The golden eagle plunges down,
its ruffled plumage bristles -
A knight with eight bright spears to dart...

The great wings beat.

The spread tail whistles.
It speeds like a shot at its victim's heart.

The fox and the eagle have met. And now
the jousting will start.

The bird and the beast –
each a valiant knight -
Will fight till they shed
the hot blood of a heart.

While horsemen, the hunters,
take joy in the sight.

Black is the eagle, ruddy the fox,
on snow the hue of pearl,
A billowing mass that heaves and waves
Like elbows a-flashing, when some lovely girl
Brushes her raven-black hair as she bathes.

Her snow-white body and cheeks of red
Are seen as they peep through ebony locks.
The eagle shudders from wing-tip to head,
Then, shifting its weight,
it mounts on the fox.
A lusty batyr with his fabulous bride

At their first love-encounter on a narrow
white lodge...

The huntsman struts proudly, his smile glad
and wide -
His bird won the bout, and the fox
could not dodge...

You shake the dust from your tall fur cap
and slap it on your head,
Put nasibai behind your lip to savour ash
and snuff

You hand the fox to the fine old man –
the eagle left it dead-
He offers you a thousand thanks,
his manner warm and bluff...

You grow a year younger when a Reynard
is caught.

Each time a great bird in fur sinks its claws
You can't spare the time for an unhappy
thought,
But talk about hunting with never a pause.

Indulge in that pleasure. You can always
be sure

You'll not cause another man anguish or pain.
My verses have spoken — why should I
say more?
To men with stout hearts I need not explain.

A dullard can listen, pretending to hear,
His mind merely flits over what others say.
For men who can reason my picture is clear.
They relish the phrases and words that
they weigh.

For horsemen and hunters, these verses
I write,
Who've chased the red fox with an eagle
in flight...

Translated by Tom Botting





* * *

Her brow is proud and clear
as polished silver,
Her eyes are dark, and shed a tender light.
Her eyebrows are so slim, and arched
so finely
They're like the crescent in the sky
at night.
Fresh roses bloom upon her ivory cheek,
She has a delicately sculptured nose,
And when she parts her crimson lips to speak
Her teeth are pearls, set in two
gleaming rows.
Her speech is suitably reserved and clever,
Her laugh a nightingale could not recite,

And when she tilts her head you feel
you've never
Seen Swans with necks as supple and as white.
She holds herself erect, her walk's divine
As ripe and hard as apples are her breasts,
Her body is as pliant as a vine,
In beauty rare, indeed, she is invest.
There is a childlike softness in her hands,
The fingers strangely capable and strong.
Her hair which falls in heavy,
silken strands,
Is wavy, raven-black and wondrous long.

Translated by Olga Shartse





* * *

Belles are they all, but which of them
is chaste?

Not one among the lot, or so it seems.
To squander their endowments they make haste,
Nor care to wait till they have reached
eighteen.

Their conduct is, I fear me,
far from blameless:
Some play the game of touch-me-not, and some,
Their independence flaunting,
are too shameless

And flirt outrageously with first man come.
What is upon their minds is known to all:
A young djiguit' to marry is their dream,
One who by all is held in high esteem.

Such is their one ambition and their goal,
They know not that djigiuts are not all kin:
A modest man will make no claim to fame,
A scheming sort will jump out of his skin
To draw attention to his glorious name.
These last, our beauties never stop to think,
Who do no useful work by hand or brain,
Their fortune feigned; their lifetime spent
in drink,
Are worthy not of all their tricks and pains!

Translated by Olga Shartse





1886

Oh, my luckless Kazakh, my unfortunate kin,
An unkempt moustache hides your mouth
and chin.
Blood on your right cheek, fat on your left —
When will the dawn of your reason begin?
Your looks are not bad and your numbers
are vast,
Yet why do you change your favours so fast?
You will never listen to sound advice,
Your tongue in its rashness is unsurpassed.
Unable to manage your property,
Day and night, care and worry are all
you see,
Now naughty, now wearing a look of offence,
Constant in nought but inconstancy.

All sorts of scurvy, and petty scum
Have crippled your soul for years to come.
No hope of improvement have you until
Master of your own fate you become.
Kinsmen for trifles each other hate.
God bereft them of reason — such is
their fate.

No honour, no harmony, only dissent;
No wonder cattle is scarcer of late.
Over money and power hostilities rage.
You look on while your lords in
wrangles engage.
If you fail to cast off those honourless
knaves

Fear and shame will your lot be
through age after age.
How can your heart be at ease, I ask,
If you can't even face the easiest task?
If you cannot master firmness and pluck,
My folk, you will always be out of luck.
Yet if anyone tells you the right thing to do
You abuse and revile him, so stupid are you.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

Perhaps he won't like certain things
he has heard.
Since people find beads that have dropped
to the ground,
So the words that I scatter are sure
to be found.
I don't write for one man, I write for
you all,
So let no man feel anger on hearing my call.
"Pearls are not pearls when they're cast
before swine"
Djiguits, cavaliers, heed those words
and hear mine.

Translated by Tom Botting





SUMMER

When summer in the mountains gains its peak,
When gaily blooming flowers begin to fade,
When nomads from the sunshine refuge seek
Beside a rapid river, in a glade,
Then in the grassy meadows here and there
The salutatory neighing can be heard
Of varicoloured stallion and mare.
Quiet, shoulder-deep in water stands the
herd;

The grown-up horses wave their silky tails,
Lazily shooing off some irksome pest,
While frisky colts go frolicking about
Upsetting elder horses, at their rest.
The geese fly honking through the cloudless
skies,

The ducks skim noiselessly across the river,
 The girls set up the felt-tents, slim
 and spry,
 As coy and full of merriment as ever.
 Returning from his flocks, pleased
 with his ride,
 Again in the aul appears the bai.
 His horse goes on with an unhurried stride,
 He sits and smiles upon it, hat awry.
 Surrounding the saba in a close ring,
 Sipping their heady beverage — kumyss,
 Old men sit by a yurta, gossiping
 And chuckling at quips rarely amiss.
 Incited by the servants comes a lad
 To beg the cook, his mother, for some meat.
 Beneath an awning, gay and richly clad
 The bais on gorgeous carpets take
 their seats.
 And sip their tea, engaged in leisured talk.
 One speaks, while others listen and admire
 His eloquence and wit. Towards them walks
 A bent old man bereft of strength and fire.
 He shouts at shepherds not to raise the dust
 Aiming to win the favour of the bais.
 And yet in vain he raises such a fuss —

They sit and never even turn their eyes.
There, tucking up the hems of their chapans,
Leisurely swaying in their saddles
as they trot
From nightly grazing come the young chabans
Whipping their lusty steeds god knows
for what.
A long way off from the aul's last tents
With movement and excitement getting warm,
On horseback, too, the bai's son and
his friends
Enjoy a falcon hunt. The bird's in
splendid form
At one quick spurt such falcons catch
and bring
Crashing to earth the great, unwieldy geese.
Meanwhile that bent old man, unlucky thing,
The toady that had nigh gone hoarse to please
The haughty bais, unnoticed, watches on,
An sighs for sorrow that his time is gone.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

Our warmth of feeling all too quickly wanes,
We cool too soon: a trifling hurt offends.
But genuine love and friendship mean a unity
of hearts,
No isolation, no withdrawal, no offence.
And in our usage, it is just a farce,
Mere words that have no value and no sense.
I have no one to love now, and no friend.
In disillusionment I turned to writing verse.
When I was pure in heart, how without end,
How fascinating seemed the universe!
Yes, friendship is a gift from God,
a gift divine.
You cleanse your conscience when confessing
to a friend.
I tried to form some friendships in my time,
But they were savaged into shreds
by ignorance again.
My soul craves friendship, seeks it daily,
My heart is aching for it, and while I
Have never known a friend who'd not
betray me,
I sing a hymn to friendship for all time!

Translated by Olga Shartse



* * *

Poetic speech, the Queen of literature,
implies
The finest words put well together
by the wisest bards.
Words that a person easily can memorise,
Words that will smoothly flow and touch
the heart.
Lines cluttered with unnecessary words
Speak of the poet's helplessness and lack
of culture.
Alas, there are so many ignorant
among the poets,
So many readers who're not competent
to judge.
At first, we know, there was the ayat
and the hadis,

And in composing them the beitas,
too were used.
Why would the Prophet choose this form
of writing
If it had neither harmony, nor melody,
nor rhythm?
A learned mullah in his evening prayers,
A seer in his predictions and his omens
Will rhyme his speech and choose his words
with care
To give them a harmonious and flowing sound.
It's true that everybody wants to be a poet,
Who of us, Kazakhs, can compose a poem
whose form
Would be a thing of silver, and the words
pure gold?
Let's take my predecessors, for example:
The biys, who had a well-known predilection
For garnishing their speech with proverbs.
The akyns —
Those wingless poets who could neither read
nor write,
Who spun their crudely rhymed and worded
tales
And fingering the strings of their kobyz
or dombra,

Cried out their lofty-sounding dedications,
And then passed round the hat, collecting
coppers.
A shame that they should thus discredit
poetry.
By fawning on the rich, by tricks
and flattery,
They managed to get gifts of cattle
and of sheep.
While living on the charity of other clans
They boasted of the fabulous riches
of their own.
They did not flatter everybody — just
the purse-proud bais.
But still they did not make a fortune
for their pains.
And, judging by their like the Kazakhs
had the notion
That poets windbags were and poetry
was nonsense.
I shall not speak in proverbs like
a clever biy,
Nor shall I beg for coppers like an old akyn.
I shall keep to the point, because
the moment's ripe

To speak of you, my reader, and improve
your mind.
If I were to describe the batyrs'
plunderous raids,
Or write in racy verse of love
and pretty girls,
You'd hang upon my words, you'd never
have enough,
Because you're used to hearing idle gossip,
Which dulls your mind and takes it off
more serious things.
«But such is life», you stubbornly persist.
All round you money takes the place
of human values,
So you'll forgive me if I sound
too indiscreet.
Here, everybody's looking for a windfall,
They'd even try to graft a grapevine
to a pine.
But what can you expect from all
these people,
Where in a thousand hardly one is honest?
And most are happy in their
ill-gained wealth,
And bask in flattery, however insincerely
offered.

They stir up animosity among the other rich,
And seize their chance to profit
by their quarrels.
Such things as loyalty and honesty
and honour,
Are senseless words that long have lost
their meaning.
It's common to make much of gossip, lies
and rumours
To flee from knowledge and avoid all thought.

Translated by Olga Shartse





1888 - 1889

AUTUMN

The clouds are grey and gloomy, boding rain.
An autumn mist envelops the bare earth.
Chasing each other through the spacious

plain,

To warm themselves, run foals
of last year's birth.

No grass, no tulips.

Silent everywhere
Are children's noisy games and young lads'
mirth.

The trees like poor old beggars stand
and stare,
Bereft of leaves, as naked as the earth.

The men tan cow- and horsehides in big vats
And mend old padded gowns and winter garb.
The housewives stitch up holes in the felt

tents.

Old women sit and spin their endless yarn.

The cranes set off towards the south

in flocks.

The camel caravans go marching slowly on.

All's quiet and sad in the auls

amid the steppes.

Laughter and games until next spring

have gone.

A cruel wind blows. The air gets cold as ice.

From chills old men and children suffer sore.

The hungry dogs run off to hunt for mice,

Not finding bones and meat-scrap as before.

The sky is black with dust raised

by the wind.

The autumn's damp, but as bad customs say,

To light a fire is a mortal sin

And so it's dark in tents both night and day.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



WINTER

Broad-shouldered, white-coated, powdered
with snow,
Blind and dumb, with a great big silvery
beard,
Grandad Winter plods on with a frown on his
brow,
By everything living hated and feared.
The grumpy old fellow does plenty of harm.
His breath stirs up blizzards, brings snow
and cold.
With a cloud for a hat on his shaggy head,
He marches along, all the world in his hold.
His beetling eyebrows are knit in a frown.
When he tosses his head-dismal snow starts
to fall.

Like a crazy old camel he acts in his rage.
Rocking and shaking our yurta's thin wall.
If the children run out to play in the yard
He pinches their noses and cheeks with cruel
hands.
No sheepskin can keep out the freezing cold;
With this back to the wind, the shepherd
stands.
The horses in vain try to shatter the ice —
The hungry herd scarcely shuffle their feet.
Greedy wolves — winter's henchmen — bare
their fangs;
Watch, or disaster your flocks may meet!
Drive them off to safe pastures — don't wait
until day.
You won't die if you sleep less — come,
quicken your step.
Kondibai and Kondai aren't as wicked as
wolves —
Don't let old man Winter, feast
in our steppes.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



* * *

In the silent, luminous night
On the water the moonbeams quiver.
In the gully beyond the aul
Tumultuous, roars the river.
The leaves of the thick-crowned trees
Whisper on hill and dale.
The earth lies sleeping beneath
A shimmering emerald veil.
The mountains respond in a choir
To the shepherd dogs hidden from view.
You come in a flowery dress
To your midnight rendezvous.
At once both bold and meek,
Full of sweet girlish grace,
You furtively look around,

Blushes light up your face.
Not venturing even to speak
With a soft half-sigh, half-groan
On tip-toe you rise and press
Your trembling lips to my own.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





* * *

Before a fool, O sage, 'tis best
To let the tongue of wisdom rest.
The truth stays unperceived, you'll find,
By those of us whose hearts are blind.
If you would voice your thoughts, o sage,
The ear of intellect engage.
The wisest words are naught to one
Who is from birth a simpleton.
If verse but be at all profound
He'll think it vain and empty sound.
Perplexed and weary, he will flee
From aught of any subtlety.
Though beg he may that you recite
Your lines for his express delight,
If but you do so, like a sheep

He'll blink and yawn and go to sleep.
Insouciant as a child at play,
In fun he seeks to spend his day.
By things instructive bored too soon,
He loves the pranks of a buffoon.
All learned writing he detests
And only such light verse digests
As treats about the escapades
Of heroes and of lovely maids.
Your songs, O bard, save for the few
Possessed of heart and feeling true.
By their unerring instinct led,
They will distinguish gold from lead.
To idle chatter ever prone,
'Tis gossip dullards love alone.
Do not forget this dictum, pray:
There's naught will please an ass like hay.

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





OCTAVES

You start your flight from a distance,
Impinging on the soul's resistance
 You penetrate all existence.
Agile,
In a flash
 Dashing to overtake the prey in flight.
 You ninety-times strung and well-tensed tongue,
 Speak, if you will — to speak is your right!
Engravers' tools cannot achieve,
Nor needlewomen ever weave
 A pattern such as you conceive...
Pure pearl for the wise,
Cheap in fool's eyes —
 Something ignorance feels it won't need.
 O tongue, heed no fools! Don't grieve
in vain —

So deaf are their ears, so dull is
their brain!

An empty chuckle-head,
Where all thought lies dead —
That's the trait of a mulish brain.
Such people say, «Now let us agree,
What most folk think is what it must be!»
Whenever you hear, if ever you see,
Such lapses in logic and absence of will
Let them serve as a warning —
don't talk, tongue be still.

The blood throbs hot,
Fierce rage runs rife
Seeing the sots and their way of life.
«Wake up! Stand up!
Get up! Step up!»
You tell them time and again,
But they, without shame, will listen
no more,
They flop on their backs and soon start
to snore.
To brew mischief and trouble,
While they spout at the double,
Provides these types with the keenest
delight.

All bluster and gas,
Grass brains of an ass —
Sons who defame their father's good name.
Petty and narrow, lacking in shame,
To no saving grace can they lay a claim.
Gibbering nonsense and balderdash,
Sneaking, intriguing, provoking a clash —
That is the favourite game of such trash.
At the beck and call of scum,
Braggarts beckon — just see them run!
The lower the type, the closer they come.
Honour and truth have both fled away,
Nobody cares for such things today.
No bitter rancour should you feel.
Devote your life to the common weal.
The joy in hard work will be lasting
and real...
Peals of laughter, loud and hollow,
Follow on jokes licentious and vile,
But never yet led to a deed that's
worth while.
A hard-working man will not lack
a square meal,
For alms, like a beggar, he need not
appeal.

Learn to trade, or plough a field.
Heap the fruits such labours yield.
Improve your skill and work with zeal.
Be honest, man, don't lounge about!!
Abjure the role of scrounging lout
Then wealth you'll acquire, good fame
and health.
As long as Kazakhs can't respect a Kazakh
The good things of life our Kazakh clans
will lack.
Among yourselves, Kazakhs, make peace.
Let none abuse you. None can fleece
United clans. Your quarrels cease.
While powers-that-be can lie and steal,
Misusing trust, with no appeal,
Your life will be one long ordeal.
Let honour and your heart awake!
My warning stands for all to take.
If a man is idle and also replete
You can be sure very soon he will meet
His shame before men and utter defeat.
In discord misfortune grows rife —
Stop hating, stop baiting your neighbours
in life,
For evil and ruin lie lurking in strife.

Stop your informing.

Silence is better.

May you never again write

a poison-pen letter.

You're so idle I know when you ride

It's to steal someone's cattle you hope

you can hide.

Cattle thieving — by whom were you

taught?

...But someone shall judge you.

He shan't be bought,

Then things that for years

have been rousing your lust

Will be things that may yet bring

your head to the dust.

It is not in my body that I am infirm,

But deep in my soul, so that I must yearn

For fugitive solace at every turn.

I find the air stifling and heavy

all round...

For hours I weep without making a sound,

Held in the grip of depression profound.

This dull satiation is numbing my heart,

Distracting, divorcing my mind

from my art.

My spirit is weakened. It lacks
all resistance.
My acts, like my thoughts, are devoid
of consistence.
My life's days are numbered, my goal
is still distant...
Without the gay whirl of days long gone by,
Or erstwhile beauty — here beauty must die —
I cannot endure this repulsive
existence.
No pilgrim am I of the kind who
holds back,
Yet travel I cannot, provisions I lack!
One honest man cannot defeat
The legion of rogues who bait us and cheat —
With them our existence is riddled,
replete...
My life's finest years have faded and fled
My most precious forces lie shriveled
and dead,
While the hot coals of scorn are heaped
on my head.
Time flashes by, yet life is untasted...
Intentions and efforts all have been wasted!

To seem to possess news from inside,
To pass as an orator, wise and lynx-eyed,
Well versed in law, is a headman's pride.
There is a sight oppressors find sweet —
Poor people crawling in dust at their feet
Fawning like curs that bad masters beat.
Headmen ruin a man whose conscience
is clear,
And yet raise up another who cringes
with fear.
You who have taught men the meaning of fear,
Spreading the bane of black terror here,
Should know that your acts won't bring
good fortune near.
The people have learnt that they cannot
trust you,
And you can't trust them, whatever you do.
Just try to make people take part
in your game!..
Though your wife among lechers
may have won fame,
If you pry and you spy you'll be naming
your shame.
You'd need a thousand eyes
To sort out truth from lies —

But haven't you, too, denounced boys
in this way?

You should shame yourself, as you do
boys at play.

Oh that freedom should reign
And that men could maintain
Conditions to favour the clear,
searching brain!

The indolent mind
Is indifferent and blind...
But I stand apart. I am not of the kind
Who revel in sleep and the good things
they ate

And that is the reason I'm at odds
with my fate.

Hoping to comprehend the world,
To see the meaning of life unfurled,
I gazed at one side and saw only churls,
And the same on the other. Wherever I looked —
Fools to be found, but not to be brooked.

Vast the frustration that swept
over me...

Stand watch at the helm of two ships
out at sea

While facing the storm, and you'll
comprehend me.

At mountains I shouted and cried.
I sought for an answer,
and each time I tried
I heard many voices resounding again.
I had to make sure that the sounds that
I heard
Could in fact form an answering word.
I wandered on far, and I wanderd
in vain...
I found all around dead rock and
bleak stone
That answered my call with a low
hollow moan.
The mounted men have galloped away,
Leaving me far behind on the way,
An empty road with no soul near...
Ah! There is no curing my ills I fear,
So let flame burst from my mouth to sear
The air all around, cremating each tear
That I must weep. Ah, now tears scorch
For my being is just one blazing torch!
A deep feather bed,
Feels as heavy as lead
And offers no rest to this weary head.
My heart is uneasy. I hear all around

Whispering scandals, sibilant sound,
But to speak about life here no one
is found...
Forever men try to throw dust
in your eyes,
I see the old dodges and hear
the old lies.
Five people there are who know me as brother.
Four of us suckled at the breast
of one mother,
Yet long lonely hours my soul seem
to smother.
Although I have clansmen throughout
all this land
And many acquaintances here close at hand,
Still I'm abandoned. As lonely I stand
As an old shaman's tomb that all men avoid —
Such is the truth, and truth leaves my soul
void...

Translated by Tom Botting





* * *

Not for amusement do I write my verse,
Nor do I stuff it full of silly words.
It's for the young I write, for those
Whose hearing is acute, whose senses are alert.
Men who have vision and are quick to give
response
Will understand the message in my verse.
Approach my poems with an open mind,
And in them many answers you will find,
Though you mayn't grasp them fully the first time
Not having heard such words before in rhyme.
How strange! When people fail your meaning to
divine
They instantly demand to hear a different kind!
To Ali-azret I don't sing a hymn,

Nor to a beauty with a «golden chin».
I don't preach death nor voice forebodings grim,
I do not teach the young djiguits to sin
Or honour to forget. My love for men is genuine,
My one ambition is their confidence to win.
Of highwaymen are bred those liars bold,
Those windbags, idlers, born into the fold.
They have no home, no herds, no sense, no soul,
For what they really are they're known to all.
I'd rather have my voice forever silent fall
Than by such people be admired and extolled.
My brother songsters, listen I implore,
Do not be tempted in your poems ever more
By empty words you will yourselves deplore.
You'll dissipate your talent, never to restore,
And tell me, are not you already bored
With braggarts, woman chasers, and their lore?

Translated by Olga Shartse





* * *

When your mind is as keen and as cold as ice,
When hot passions bum in your petulant heart,
Both fiery passion and patient thought
Must be ruled by the will, lest they stray apart.
Only he that can hold his heart and his thought
In the vise of will shall attain real heights.
When divided, those powers are not worth a straw
And neither will stave off a perilous plight.
What use is the mind without passion and will?
For a thoughtless heart even midday is dark.

Be able to keep all three in accord.
Let your will make your heart to your reason
hark.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





* * *

By overpowering desire I'm obsessed,
I madly crave your passionate caress,
But mine is true love and I wish you
happiness,
Though I may perish in my stark distress.
Now that you're gone, on life I have no hold,
My soul is plunged in gloom and strewn
with ashes cold.
I've lost my will and reason. I'm empty
and deplete.
There's only you for me in all the world.
I am your slave to torture and to tease.
My blood you fire as you choose, or freeze.
When I despair my heart is heavy, dead.

With hope returned — I feel alive,
released...

Translated by Olga Shartse





* * *

I hail your slender brows, your eyes!
There's nobody like you beneath the skies.
A radiance like yours, a light so clear,
Has not been shed upon the world for years!
I long for you so terribly,
Tears dim the universe for me!
Your image in my heart I keep,
It haunts me even in my sleep.
To you alone my love belongs,
I sing your beauty in my songs,
For you I'd forfeit youth and wealth,
I'll love you till my dying breath,
And neither foes nor tongues of venom,
Nor the appeal of other women
Will ever cool in me the trace

Oh, how I want to be alone with you.
Come, oh my pheasant, make my dream come
true!
Please let me hold you close, if only once,
And look into the burning darkness of your
glance!

Translated by Olga Shartse





* * *

Your letter filled me with unrest
And coaxed my heart from out my breast.
In speaking thus I do not jest —
My life is yours, beloved.
In dread from smooth-tongued wooers

I flee,

But in the words you write to me
There is, I feel, no flattery —
They are sincere, beloved.
Like oil am I cast on to flame;
No power on earth the blaze can tame
That burns within me, laying claim
Upon my heart, beloved.
Oh, take me, take me fast away,
And happy will I be for aye.

But if to do so you delay,
I will be lost, beloved.
Be merciful to me and just,
Do not betray my faith and trust,
Play not with me, and in disgust
Turn not from me, beloved
Nay, better kill me first, for I
Would rather close my eyes and die
Than on a joyless bride-bed lie,
Another's wife, beloved.
Oh, falcon, you so bold and gay,
On living flesh you, carefree, prey;
Too many maids — alack-a-day!
Your favours court, beloved.
I am the pheasant, talcon mine,
That humbly doth forthwith resign
Her life to you, with no design
Except to please, beloved.
Oh, like a reed, dear love, to lie,
At once a pliant reed and shy,
In your embrace, and, with a sigh,
Yield to your love, beloved!
I speak to one that revere
«Thout ruse, 'thout artifice or fear;
Oh, that my words had power to sear

A falcon's heart, beloved!
Let all who hear this fervent plea
Touched by its humble message be;
Let none withhold their sympathy
From her who loves, beloved.
And if in song my fate is sung,
Let no one's heart by pain be wrung;
Let all who love, both old and young,
Be filled with joy, beloved!

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





* * *

Of her long, thick braids she may well
be proud.
Hung with silver coins, from her beaver hat
They sway as she walks, soft
and raven-browed.
Have your eyes ever seen a beauty like that?
Clear, transparent as mirrors, her soft,
dark eyes
Caress your glance and your soul excite.
Have you ever met such a skin as hers,
Or such pearly teeth, or a face so white?
You will seldom see such a slender waist,
Such dainty hands and such tiny feet.
She is always standing before my eyes,
Like a ripe red apple, mellow and sweet.

If you ever happen to touch her hand
Your heart starts beating beyond control
If your face approaches her lovely face
Her nearness sends a thrill through your soul.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



62

Friends are only then true friends
indeed
When they stand beside you in your
need.
If you do not graze your herd yourself,
Who will drive it homeward from the
mead?
You yourself are master of your fate.
Work is pleasure — idleness a scourge.
Little worth is there in florid speech
Out of which no wisdom will emerge.
Let this be remembered by you all:
Whosoever lives an idle life
Will be left with nothing at the end.
Earthly goods are gained by toil and strife.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





* * *

My sorrow will not pass, not even if the Moon
Through nature's whimsy at the Sun is hurled.
E'en though to me another you prefer,
None do I dearer hold than you in all
the world.

My faithful heart that loves but you alone
From you will bear, tormented though it be,
Most cruel slight, yes, even broken vows
And undeserved neglect and mockery...

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





1890

Oh, what oppressive misery!
I feel so stifled, I can't breathe,
My tears are flowing uncontrolled
And there is not a single soul
That I can tell my troubles to.
I feel so wretched, and so low
That when I see someone I know
I cringe and turn a painful red,
Avert my eyes and drop my head,
Rush past, or flee the way I came.
I am confused. I stay awake
All night. Of food I can't partake.
I feel so weary and so spent,
Why was to me this torture sent?
And when will I know peace again?

Pain burns my heart. What awful
pain!

Oh Allah, will it never wane?
Oh Allah, show your slave the way,
Oh, help me, I beseech and pray,
Give me some thread to hold on to!
The poplar rustles in the breeze.
How young and vigorous its leaves!
And I, with grief I rock and sway,
I'm like a drunken man today,
And my chapan is soaked with tears.
Once I was proud, and I forgot
That trouble could yet be my lot.
I'm feverish, my aching heart
Turns hot and cold in fits and starts,
And not a ray hope appears...

Translated by Olga Shartse





67

And be sedate for evermore.
Do not surrender to your sadness —
Do not despair, don't fear the test —
Awake, my soul, arise in gladness!
Don't crouch inert within your nest,
A helpless fledgeling, like to die,
Spread out your wings, my soul, and soar
Like some proud falcon through the sky!
Sorrows and troubles I guard in great store,
I cannot imagine existence without them,
But ring out my song. Rise up once more!
Sing to my sorrows... Let men hear
about them!
Bitter my sadness, oppressive it's weight
I am ready to teach, if men would but hark!
Resentment's fierce blaze in my breast
won't abate.
Ignoramuses bait me. My whole life is dark...
How can I reach them? How to expound
The message I bear to fools all around?
To people who do not hold the world
dear?
They have sunk to their necks
in debauchery's grime.
They cling to their lies and they don't
have a fear

To sully their souls with the wickedest
crime.

Not having decided to leave my own land,
Not having discovered another homeland,
I still linger here, shame searing my soul.

Unlucky am I since my birth
in this place —

For bigots unbridled are out of control,
Yet I always have fought against
what would debase.

Now lonely I weep for
my people's disgrace.

A dark bitter cloud above my head lies,
For Fate has allotted a life I despise.
I could be a man, but that's not decreed...

My own clan, my people would not
let me rise.

Not one has a care but to drink and to feed
And, hog-like to wallow in slander and lies.
Ah, what in the world for me is there left,
But to lock up my house and there
to abide?

Oh, how can I live of friendship bereft?
For though I love people, from them
I must hide...

If you learnt that the wife whom you loved
were untrue
And continued to sin again and again,
Although well aware that you heard,
that you knew,
You would suffer as I do,
knowing my pain...

Translated by Tom Botting





* * *

All things may pall on you with time,
Not writing songs — a task sublime!
When an inspired song you sing,
You feel released, your soul takes wing.
Flow freely then and ring, my song!
Let lofty thoughts come in a throng,
Let tears pour from my eyes and flood
The whole of me and warm my blood.
I don't expect a rolling stone
To understand my heart-felt song.
It's worthy men who'll lend an ear
The message of my song to hear.
And even should he miss a word
His thoughts and feelings will be stirred.
For all his bitterness and wrongs

He'll find reflected in my songs.
My heart is filled with sorrow dire,
A mounting, ever-spreading fire.
'Tis only after I am dead,
That what I've written will be read.
Can anyone more luckless be!
Oh people, listen, bear with me,
And anyone who wants my song
Just take and keep it for his own.
I have no wish to be extolled
By judges ignorant and cold.
To have a listener I long
Who'd share my dream and love my song!
You're many Kazakhs, but too few
Will give real poetry its due
You are not up to it. You're fain
To chase like wolves about the plain.
You will not stop my words to hear,
You're used to catching songs by ear,
Their meaning hardly penetrates,
So why waste breath upon ingrates?

Translated by Olga Shartse



* * *

Oh, heart, you pray for agony and bliss,
You pray for love again whose venom is
An antidote to sadness and distress,
The soothing balm that brings forgetfulness.
However bitter be the blows of fate,
Love's presence will their pain obliterate.
Love is the prop, the one support of life
That brings you safely through its storms
and strife.
He who would live 'thout love is less
than man,
To envy him no beggar rightly can.
He who is loved and loves, though poor he be,
Will never know the depths of misery.
Love is the bright, the ever glowing light

That banishes the fears and dark of night.
'Thout love, as dust is all your wealth
and fame,
And you, Oh bard, have nothing to your name!

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





SPRING

How the poplars rustle when spring arrives!
The wind through the fields clouds of pollen
drives.

All alive is caressed by the steppeland sun.
The world like a happy family thrives.
Girls and lads sing songs and merrily
laugh.

The old man goes from his home with a staff.
An invalid from his bed could be roused
By the songs, the sun, the poplars
green scarf.

On springtime pastures my people gather;
Kinsmen embrace and rejoice together.
Joking and laughing, they stand and chat,

About everything — from their herds
to the weather.
To her wanton calf calls the camel-mother.
Sheep bleat, in the bush birds greet
one another.
Moths flit in the trees and over the grass.
Such a noise neither rain nor thunder
can smother.
Fowl! By the tiniest pond or lake,
Beat the reeds — and a swan to flight
will take.
Look how the falcon that you release
From under a cloud attacks a drake.
You return from the hunt, and a girl cries,
«Please,»
Handsome lad, show your kill — is it ducks or
geese?
All the girls are dressed in their very best.
Valleys dotted with tulips stretch east
and west.
In lakeside copses the nightingale trills,
And the cuckoo responds from the mountains
with zest.

The merchant brings goods on his camel
to sell.

Lambing is nigh; flocks are doing well.
Though hard is the husbandman's daily toil,
With the fruit of the land his barn
will swell.

The world is resplendent with bounty and joy.
The Creator's blessings His children enjoy.
From her bosom the earth nurtures all that
the sky
Has sired with sunshine poured down from
on high.

To Creator Nature we owe our praise
For the rapture afforded by these
spring days,
For our thriving cattle, our happy hearts,
For the bounty with which our toil
she repays.

The spirit of spring makes the timid brave.
All are generous now but the miserly knave.
All rejoice in the jubilant power
of the earth,
All revives but the stone on a mountain grave.

The white-haired old men, withered and wan,
Feel warmer watching the children at fun.
The voices of singing birds fill the skies.
Lakes resound with the cries of duck and swan.
At midnight the moon and the stars

shine bright.

How could they not burn on so dark a night?
And yet they must fade as soon as it dawns
And the day begins, full of life-giving light.
The young bride earth bids the stars depart
For the sun, her lover, with beating heart
Has waited all night for a rendezvous;
Now the fields blush with dawn —

their caresses start.

Only the wind from the earth's expanse
Will fly to the heights where the gold stars

dance

And tell them how happy are bridegroom

and bride.

How the world is warmed by their joyful

romance.

All winter the earth, getting pale and wan,
Awaited her bridegroom too long gone,

But now once again, revived and young,
She gets happier as the days go on.
To look straight at the sun may strike
one blind.

So I, who live on its benefits kind,
Only at sunset can watch it retire
Into its tent with gold vines entwined.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



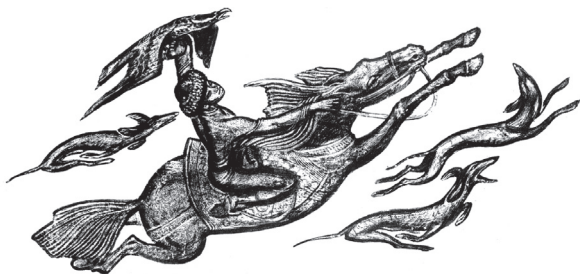


1891

Here the young folk are branded
With the wastrel's black mark.
They are mean, underhanded
And they lack friendship's spark.
Each lad's soul can be bought.
For a living they scrounge.
They are feckless, untaught,
Through the whole day they lounge.
There's not one in the batch
Whose life is well spent.
They will gorge and they'll scratch
Like pigs round the tent.
They jest, they curse and brag —
Too sickly-sweet their smile.

From place to place they drag.
Their life is swinish, vile.

Translated by Tom Betting





* * *

His addled brain thinks there cannot be
A single thing beyond his nose.
He struts for all the world to see —
But what to look at no one knows.
«An ignoramus!» people sneer...
«Fate makes us equal», cries the clod,
On earth no soul owns any peer.
We all are humble slaves of God!»
The man who lets his spirit see
Will grasp the glory, truth and soon
A flood of light will set him free
And joy within his breast will bloom.
But what remains for shallow men?
A mere existence — not real life —
Dragged out in some dark foetid den,

Imbued with pettiness and strife.
The mullah with his mighty turban,
Who twists our laws in every way,
While looking wise and very urban,
Is he not a bird of prey?
From any soul that's mean and dark
It's useless to expect much good —
But very few my words will hark...
By fewer they're understood.

Translated by Tom Botting





* * *

There was a time when thought and deed
Were fired with youth's impulsive flame;
Desire's swift steed with lightning speed
Bore you ahead to wealth and fame.
Your sorrows never lasted long.
Your work was easy, grief soon past.
And any goal — you felt so strong —
Was bound to be attained at last.
You earned your bread not begging alms
But with your strength and inspiration
You scorned both self-complacency
And underlings' self-denigration.
Without unneeded braggadocio
You'd parry anybody's blows.
No sudden twist of fate could quash you.

You were a man when need arose.
But youth won't blossom on forever
Its fire subsides, its sweetness sours.
So see you do not miss your chance
In this fast-fleeting life of ours.
Don't be too simple in your ways.
Your partner's smile may seem so winning,
Yet it may hide a scorpion's tail
You might have missed at the beginning.
Be friendly when you deal with friends.
Be quick yet just when dealing vengeance.
Who overdoes his part — repents.
The door to rectitude is patience.
Assist an honest man in need,
And you will have a lifelong friend.
A scoundrel's flattery don't heed.
It turns out worthless in the end.
This false and never constant world
Seems to a youth a springtime orchard.
He looks at it with happy eyes
By no misgivings is he tortured
He takes whatever strikes his fancy
Without a thought — just like a toy.
When people start to shout about him
The empty hubbub gives him joy.

He frankly gives his faith and love
To ail and everything on earth;
He does not know that men are false
For he has still to learn their worth.
Oh, you who smear the world with lies,
Tell lies to me — I'm old and tempered.
But do not touch the frail young reed
For it is still too young and tender.
A youth believes in all you say,
Sincere and pure in all his feelings.
Now tell me, are you not ashamed
When in surprise he whispers «Really?»

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





* * *

We grow pale and we blush,
With our blood mounting high,
Seeing nothing around
For each other we sigh.
So of passion we learn.
To a tryst having come,
We have so much to say
Yet lack words and are dumb,
With fluttering heart
You come out to your dear
And the rustle of leaves
Is a sign she is near.
Palpitation, and fear
Grips her heart like a vice.
Like a candle she burns,

Yet her hands are like ice.
Both our souls are aflame
While a mist veils our eyes.
Kisses render us mute.
All we utter are sighs.
Leaves conceal us from sight.
Midnight looks from above.
With our lips we drink in
The sweet balsam of love.
Hands touch hands, lips find lips,
Kiss comes fast after kiss.
All our beings are bathed
In the radiance of bliss.
Fear and faltering cease,
Fever burns in each limb
And our eyes all at once
Have become moist and dim.
Depth of judgement, wise words,
What do all of you cost
In the realm of romance
Where all reason is lost?

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



* * *

Eye of my eye, I beg,
Give ear to this I say:
For love of thee, dear heart,
I slowly waste away.
The wisest of the wise
Will hasten to agree
That not another maid
Can be compared to thee.
Whene'er of thee I sing,
Though tears near turn me blind,
The tenderest of words
I always seek to find.
Thy scorn has ever been
Uncommon hard to bear,
But with restraint will I

Now speak of my despair.
No more dost thou bestow
Upon me than a glance,
Of all I think and feel
Thus feigning ignorance.
Though ever by thy side,
Adoring, I remain,
Thou treatest me, alas,
With ill deserved disdain.
A home without a hearth
Is not a home, 'tis said.
A man who lacks a heart
Will often lack a head.
My love I cannot force,
This do I know, on thee,
But to confess it is
The debt I owe to thee.
Hide not from me that I
In awe and love may gaze
Upon thy snowy brow,
Upon thy lovely face.
Thy teeth are pearls, thy lips
Are dainty flowers in bloom,
Thy sable brows are each
A newly born half-moon.

As graceful as a fawn,
As slender as a tree,
As lovely as a rose
Thou seemest, love, to me.
Emerge from thy retreat,
I beg of thee, come nigh,
And let me feast on thee,
Beloved, my weary eyes.
When thou art gay — 'tis spring,
When sad – world turns chill;
To me thy laughter is
A songbird's dulcet trill.
Feign anger not, nor play
So heartlessly with me,
For I would sacrifice
My very life for thee.
Thou'rt radiant as the sun
And fragrant as a rose.
At sight of thee my heart,
Enraptured, flames and glows.
Oh, to give voice to love! —
But no, I dare not speak...
Words fail me, love, when I
To pay thee homage seek.
A gift of God art thou

That doth the heart console,
A sherbet for the flesh,
A nectar for the soul.
She who is beautiful,
In truth, is doubly blest.
To worship beauty was
The prophet's own behest.
By pain my soul is wrung
To think that we must part.
To be with thee, my love,
Is balsam for the heart.
Thy wooers are many, love,
Amongst us choose thou must.
I tremble lest from me
Thou turnest in disgust.
To speak is agony...
Turn not from me in scorn.
When thou dost smile at me
My heart in twain is torn.
All that I want from thee
Is but a word, a sign.
Oh, that my agony
Were ended; Goddess mine! ...

Translated by Irina Zheleznova



1892

My soul, what are you seeking, pray?
Tell me the truth for once, today.
I'm worried by your haste, so let's
Discuss it in a friendly way.
The vain adore those praises loud
Upon them lavished by the crowd.
But since that crowd is fickle, blind,
There is no cause to feel so proud.
And will a sage be hailed by men
Who've little honour left in them?
The eulogies will be inane
Where honesty has sadly stemmed.
Such specious praise befouls our minds
With putrid stench, so when you find
Some people who will speak the truth,

Don't shun them, thinking they're unkind.
Each word's for sale, each gushing sigh,
But then the hypocrites' flattering lie,
The buzz of wasps that swarm around,
Is really not the thing to buy.
I'm sickened by their words of honey,
By praise so crude, it's really funny.
It's like expecting love from whores
Who sell their hot embrace for money...
I am no slave to praises cheap,
I'll live, though glory I won't reap.
I shall ignore the criticism
From shallow men, in malice steeped.
Life, after all, is like a wave,
It all too quickly ebbs away,
And good or bad it's all the same,
It's full of poison anyway.

Translated by Olga Shartse





1893

All that tosses your soul
From hot into cold
Will wither one day,
Getting stale and old.
At the outset of life,
Disappointment still far —
You began to discern
The way things are.
All you counted as joy,
All that thrilled your young heart
Only brought you remorse
And with shame made you smart.
And it seemed later on
Just a trivial tale;
To retell it to friends

Was of little avail.
Only one without shame,
Lacking prudence and wit
Would blab on undismayed
By a wise word a whit.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





1894

My autumn has come, yes, the frost-tinted fall...
How to preserve my vigour and force?
In my mind it is May. I hear the clear call,
But cannot make springtide abandon
its course.
Oh, my soul! Now in May the winter returns
And can a rose blossom when smothered
in snow?
Ah, But if a fierce flame within a man burns,
It shall not be extinguished when
winter storms blow.
Narrow, short-sighted the human being!
No far vistas call to souls without wings,
Blind to all beauty, but gloating on seeing
Egoistical, petty, insignificant things.

Each an insatiable, ravening beast,
Wolf-like, cunning, knowing no rest,
Forces his way to take part in a feast,
Seizing the roast that looks fattest and

best.

To cheat and make money they never despise,
Or to guzzle and swill, when another man

pays...

«Look sharp! Don't be caught!» is their code,

honour-wise

Such are the money-hogs, such are their ways.

Only the foxiest men they respect.

Modesty seems to them craven fear.

Could anyone in a lifetime expect,

Escaping deceit, to find happiness here?

Translated by Tom Batting





* * *

I'm sorely disappointed in our modern youth,
What with their arrogance and disrespect
for truth.
They are incapable of ruling or creating,
And most of them are swindlers in the making.
They're not aggrieved by evil.
Kindness leaves them cold.
They're not deterred by either faith
or fear of God.
They trade in promises and have
no other care
But to procure a horse and plenty
of rich fare.
What are such good-for-nothings really
worth?

Can they be made to ply some trade
or till the earth?
They want to get along in life by any means
but fair,
And worry not that they're
distrusted everywhere.
A youth like that will swindle
in all matters,
His conscience must be stitched
from varicoloured tatters.
His honour he may pledge and swear
by all the world,
But no one ever takes on trust
his knavish word.

Translated by Olga Shartse





* * *

The language of lovers dispenses with words.
With their looks,
 with an inner sense they converse..
Believe it or sneer at it — just as you wish,
But a lad or a lass in love never errs.
I, too, knew that language some decades ago.
And whenever addressed
 I would let my heart go.
Then that language was near
 and clear as could be;
Now, alas, it is long since foreign to me.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



1895

Childhood flew past,
Youth did not last,
Old age is coming,
Ruthless and fast.
Are you conforming
Under its sway,
Honour forgotten,
Faith thrown away?
Or perhaps you've brought doom
On yourself who can know?
Like some mother camel
Who never will go
Out of her stall,
Year after year

Wasting away
Shapeless offspring to rear.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





* * *

Maybe nature is mortal, but man is not,
Though there's no coming back
When he draws his last breath.
The separation of I and Mine
The ignorant only regard as death.
Those who become the servants of gain
Neither praiseworthy deeds nor name,
But can there be mention of death if men
Leave Utterances of immortal fame?
Some live without caring for earthly goods,
Too aware of the numerous earthly ills.
But for others it's difficult to discern
The evil that earthly existence fills.
This world and the other can't
both be loved.

The divine and the earthly must needs
be divorced.
But a man's no believer if he in his heart
Loves this world all too much,
and the other perforce.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





1896

The tick of a clock is not something slight.
The sounds mark the fleeting fractions
of day,
Each minute a transient life in full flight
That never returns when once passed away.
The ticking of clocks unheeded still shows
The count of our days and seconds
extinguished.
Time is not constant. It changes and flows —
The past, in its march, cast off
and relinquished.
Men hide from the fact that none want
to know —
A clock gives a tick and life is diminished.
Protest as you may, it always was so —

These small sounds proclaim that life
is soon finished.
The hours become months. The months become
years.
We soon face old age — our life-span
is short.
All mortals soon pass through this valley
of tears —
Only Allah eternal can be our support.

Translated by Tom Botting





* * *

The bird of the soul flies to all parts
When a man is sunk deep in reflection.
A song is the shadow of strange-patterned
flight,
Unerringly showing the soul's introspection.
A song soars and hovers, it sweeps
and it streams,
Touching the soul, provoking new thought...
A song contains all the joys of the mind,
But by men hard of hearing it cannot
be caught.
A song awakens the deep-sleeping heart,
Soothing the soul with sweet music heard,
Creating a mood of joy and of sadness,
Balm to the soul like a little child's word.

How few know the sense of the lays
that they sing!
And even those few will not heed it for long.
Is none of you willing to listen and learn
The gentle accords of my own plaintive song?
Our melodies rise in a high and clear tone,
As if for attention forever contending.
They capture the heart elating the soul,
Yet poignant the sadness that weighs on each
ending.

Songs are diverse, like men —
wise and foolish.
Some contain phrases that jar on the ear.
Others there are of such profound meaning
That all stop to ponder on precepts
they hear.

A word to the wise I never begrudge,
Writing a verse to explain a song's sense,
Annoying the deaf who can't understand,
But bringing well-wishers a pleasure
intense.

To those with a sacred spark in their soul
My motives are clear, such men comprehend...
At first life is warm,
but at last starkly chill.

Though life starts with joy,
in tears it must end.
Yet the passage of time can be joy unalloyed
To those who have learnt how a song
is enjoyed...
The ignorant think a zhar-zhar song
delightful,
No man who can sing well is silent
by choice...
So lift up your voice with emotion resurgent —
All hearts will be captured,
all souls will rejoice.

Translated by Tom Batting





* * *

When the heart of a bard
Is unburdened and free,
It invites inspiration's
Divine harmony.
And awaking from sleep,
No more tortured, serene;
Sings away unrestrained
As a swift mountain stream,
And in childlike delight
Greets the wonder of day
With a torrent of sound,
With a rich interplay
Of the colours and hues
That turn prose into verse...
Then it is that the bard

Scans the vast universe
With an eagle's keen eye,
And, alive to its woes,
Goes to battle against
Man's most pitiless foes.
And with faith at his side,
Sits in judgement upon
Brutal tyrants whose role
Brings contentment to none.
Loving honour and truth
With resentment he flames,
And his verdict aloud,
Fearing no one, proclaims.

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





* * *

When the heavens are covered with clouds
And grey rain pours down from the sky
Deep anguish my spirit enshrouds,
My sorrowing heart starts to cry.
After rain, the sun reappears
And sweet is the brooklet's language.
Yet my eyes overflow with hot tears,
My heart fills with more poignant anguish.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





1897

Do not believe the flatterers, for they
Are certain to betray you one fine day.
Trust only in yourself.

A sober mind and toil
Will happiness and weal for you purvey.

Do not believe in sweetly flowing praise
Lest it should make you blind
and leave you dazed,
And vainly proud of your ostensible success.
Your worth you should be able to appraise.

If trouble comes, stand up to it, be strong.
If happiness — then welcome it with song.

116

The soul is cured of its pains and cares,
All seems to be well at last.
It seems to me that I hear the sound
Of another's life long since gone by.
The dreams and memories of the past
Come to life before my eye.
All that I went through comes back again,
Half-forgotten trouble and care revives
And for a time it even seems
All that I went through comes back again,
Half-forgotten trouble and care revives
And for a time it even seems
There is some truth in lies.
Thieves seem honest and swindlers fair
And worthless sluts seem both pure
and chaste,
Although there is hardly a poison on earth
That I did not chance to taste.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





1898

The ardent impulse of my soul
Will like a sharpened arrow fly,
Like lightning it must pierce the pall
Of darkness in the leaden sky.

Alas, the passion of my verse
Upon the ignorant is lost.

The fire of my daring thought
Has shaped my tongue into a spear.
To fight in battle it's been taught,
And bring my call to every ear.

But people still prefer to dose

And nought will shatter their repose.

Words which the brain alone records
They come and go, an empty sound.
If by the heart they are absorbed

To call an echo they are bound.
They sing my songs, the words they learn,
Their meaning they do not discern...

Translated by Olga Shartse





* * *

If an empty heart is accompanied
By a lack of reason and will,
The immortal light of the soul will fade
And your human worth will be nil.
It skims o'er the surface, my will-less mind
And no longer can sound the depths.
Oh my friends, my spirit is worn and tired
'Tis indeed high time that it slept.
When you curb the urges of mortal flesh
'Tis with pity you bid them adieu.
But if you should fall in your flesh's snare
The one to be pitied is you.
For then you become a senseless brute
Whose soul is both dark and dim.
Whosoever fails to fathom the depths

Life loses all colour for him.
no more can I say that I am a man;
 Surrounded by gloom, I stand.
How can I find any sense in life
When ignorance binds my land?

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





* * *

Day after day falls behind.
No peace in the world can I find.
Thought follows thought in my mind
Swifter than any wind.

Translated by Dorian Rotenberg





* * *

Ever weaker and duller beats my heart
Lying compressed in my ailing breast.
Every now and then with fright it will start.
By day and by night it knows no rest.
Disease has banished by carefree ways,
Dire sorrow oppresses my ailing mind.
Repulsed from the world I avert my gaze,
Nothing but vanity in it I find.
My spirit craves for the long-dead past.
Accursed be the present this day and hence.
Now for calm and for quiet my spirit thirsts,
Now plunges itself into new torments.
Now, full of despair, I give vent to tears,
Obsessed with my ailments all day long,
Now quench my tears for fear of men's sneers

And pretend to be haughty, nonchalant,
strong.

Ever weaker and duller beats my heart.
Concealing its woes, into gloom it retreats.
Now, glowing, a sudden tattoo it starts,
Now, deadening down, it hardly beats.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





Both love and repose in the company
Of your friends you could always find.
Happiness seemed within easy reach;
But alas, those days are behind.
So, alas, have fled your happy dreams
When joy gushed forth in streams.
It seems as if it were yesterday,
But, alas, so it only seems.
Curse or implore, beg or beseech,

[illegible]

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg





* * *

My puppy grew into a dog -
And my leg it bit one day.
I taught a youngster once to shoot
He may take my life away.

Translated by Dorian Rottenber



Though you fight the creeping
shades of night,
Though you dread to watch the darkness fall,
Yet does death, that cunning thief approach,
Robbing you, remorseless, of your soul.
Flesh soon turns, for so 'tis ruled,
to dust,
Life is but a dream whose flight we mourn.
What the morrow holds is sealed to sight;
Know: to die, Oh mortal, were you born!

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





1900

Lonely heart, do not seek response
On your road with calamities lined.
My soul, do not wander, keep still for once
If no refuge from life you can find.
A feeling expressed is always false.
No voice responds to my calls.
Oh whither, my restless, unhappy soul,
Do you draw me away from my native walls?
Friendship, happiness, peace and love
On the market of life are not worth much.
The peddlars of honour won't put them above
A copper ha'penny — life is such.
The people's judgement for them are scales
On which to weigh slander and flattery.
Those past-masters in the art of deceit,

They've forgotten what shame and honour be.
With whom can I share my anxious thoughts
If friendship is out of fashion?
Whose sympathy is there to soothe the heart
When the world has no room for compassion?
Always and everywhere men are base:
Pity someone and he will repay
By begging a loan, and if you refuse
In fury from you he will turn away.
A lying hypocrite's honeyed words
Won't find their way into hearts sincere.
A flattering scoundrel can do no good
To himself or those who give ear.
You are burning away with a useless flame,
Oh my soul whom the anguish
of loneliness rends,
What is the use of burning in vain
For where is your love and where are your
friends?

Translated by Dorian Rottenber



* * *

When the shadows of day
Merge inertly in one,
When the sun slowly sinks,
In no haste to be gone,
All my sorrows I pour
In the dusk's patient ear,
Shyly speaking of things
I want no one to hear,
Down the roads of the past
That so tortuous wind,
Down the roads of the past
Blindly forcing the mind.
And unfateful and trite
As my memories are,
Yet they leave on my heart

An indelible scar.
Like a lost, hungry pup
Whines my thought as in vain
To recall in my life
Some bright moment I strain.
To sow good I did strive
But 'tis evil I reap.
To the end of my days
Am I fated to weep.

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





1901

I hoped - the leaves of hope are shed.
I dreamed — my dreams were all deceit.
It pains my heart when I recall
My tale of ruin and defeat.
It was a life of empty dreams.
I wish I never dreamed at all.
For now the strength had left my arms,
The warmth of hope has left my soul.
Give faith to men? Mirages - they,
No peace, no truth will men accept.
They cheat and follow beaten ways,
The word they give is never kept.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



* * *

Beware of frittering youth away
In empty pastimes, talk and play.
Give enmity and friendship thought.
Their worth and merits learn to weigh.
Don't be too quick to imitate
Those virtues people celebrate.
Don't strive to ape them, my young friend.
Your talents you must cultivate.
Guard your spiritual wealth, be shrewd,
Avoid the vulgar and the crude.
Let modesty keep house for you,
And moral debt it will preclude.
Trust not in everyone you meet,
Endeavour to be more discreet.
Or foe from friend you'll never tell

And all your life will know deceit.
A rogue will swear and then forswear
His loyalty. He's always where
Men are at odds. But in the end,
He has not got a coin to spare!

Translated by Olga Shartse





* * *

Your phrases profound
Reach hearts and resound...
When orators falter
You deem it your duty
To show words they can alter,
Lending speech a new beauty.
Life's load I must bear,
Yet I never despair,
Though I've suffered so long...
I seek someone to trust,
For friendship is strong
When a friend has proved just.

Translated by Tom Botting



* * *

The heart is a sea in which joys are gems.
No heart can survive for long without joys.
But when all the warmth goes out of his soul
Nothing can bring a man to rejoice.
Friendship, wrath and delight are the heart's
concern.

Honour and honesty are what counts:
Pride and envy make spirits blind.
The flame goes out in an old man's heart,
And no Endeavour succeeds without flame.
He has to attend to conflicting advice,
Wavering, faltering, timid and tame.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



1903

When jagged lightning flashes fleet
With thunder rolling on the plain,
The one who flings his bolts, Ragit,
Adorns the world with green again.
Then woe to those who cross his will,
For great Ragit no mercy shows...
Words, too, like thunderbolts can kill,
As he who guides their flight well knows.
But who discerns a forceful word
That like a flash of lightning sears?
Not those whose plaints in courts are heard,
Who for a lambkin's price shed tears!
Let them repent to some degree
The sinful things that they have done,
Or they shall drag through life and be

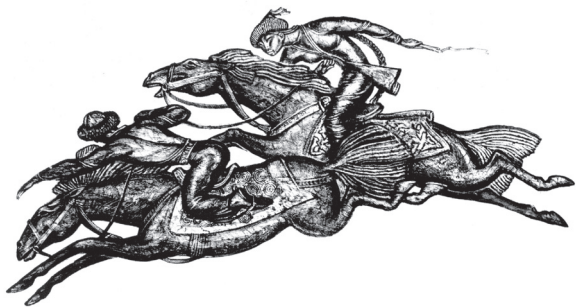
Like mangy curs, consoled by none.
Oh, what people!

What life

Among these louts —

All tears and strife!

Translated by Tom Botting





POEMS AT SUNSET YEARS

Pray lay aside your dombra, lass
Do not torment me with its song.
The pain it rouses in my heart
Too long have I endured, too long...

Do not remind me of the past,
Do not call forth its blinding tears;
Awaken not, I beg of you,
Its all too bitter memories.

Instead, come near and smile at me
And speak sweet words that will dispel
My sorrow and the flames that, fierce,
Within me rage subdue and quell.

Speak tender words to me that are
As balm-like as love's own carres;
Speak tender words that will defeat
My loneliness and my distress.

If this you do, my tortured heart
For joy and gratitude will sing,
Amid the darkness of the world
A ray of light discovering.

My soul is sick, my soul is worn
By petty and unending strife.
Take pity on my sufferings,
Bestore my faith in love and life.

Translated by Irina Zheleznova





* * *

In recollections of the past,
In meditations mute and long
I scrutinised my days and saw
That I was always in the wrong.
How can I hide it from myself?
My deeds were wicked all along.
Make efforts to reform myself?
I fear I'll never be so strong.
Just as the stones that strew the hills,
So are my sins uncounted too.
Shame and repentance cloud my eyes
When all my spirit's faults I view.
It is no well clogged up with silt;
Not for my hands to scoop it clean.
It is not God who made me so:

My deeds have married it, cruel and mean
Of what do I accuse myself?
I fell to all temptations met.
The way I spurned sincerity
I'll never in my life forget.
The voice of reason I'd attend
Then act against it and regret.
Cunning and falsehood year by year
I spun into vicious net.
Monstrosity, I lost all count
Of mischievous and wicked deeds,
Until such gruesome fruit grew up
From early misdemeanour's seeds.
When hearing someone's empty praise
Proud, I was sure that sin succeeds;
Indeed, the vilest of the vile
My own enormity exceeds.

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg



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