

Three Poems

Taras Shevchenko

In the Casemate

VII. "A cherry orchard by the house."

A cherry orchard by the house.
Above the cherries beetles hum.
The plowmen plow the fertile ground
And girls sing songs as they pass by.
It's evening—mother calls them home.

A family sups by the house.
A star shines in the evening chill.
A daughter serves the evening meal.
Time to give lessons—mother tries,
But can't. She blames the nightingale.

It's getting dark, and by the house,
A mother lays her young to sleep;
Beside them she too fell asleep.
All now went still, and just the girls
And nightingale their vigil keep.

1847

Translated by Boris Dralyuk and Roman Koropecykj

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"It was the year I turned thirteen..."

It was the year I turned thirteen.
 I was out shepherding the lambs.
 Was it the brightly shining sun?
 Why did I feel the way I did?
 As though with God...
 They had already called me home,
 But I kept lying in the grass,
 Praying to God... And I don't know
 Why praying felt so pleasant then,
 To me, a little orphan boy,
 And why my heart had felt such joy?
 The village and the clear blue skies,
 The lambs—they all seemed to rejoice!
 The sun glowed warm, it didn't blaze!
 But not for long did it stay warm,
 And not long were my prayers...
 The sun turned red, began to burn,
 Set paradise ablaze.
 As though awakened, I look up:
 The village had turned black,
 And God's blue heaven up above,
 It also had gone dark.
 I looked at all the little lambs –
 They're not my little lambs!
 I turned toward the village huts –
 I do not have a hut!
 God gave me nothing of my own!...
 And then the tears poured down,
 Such bitter tears... And then a girl,
 Gathering hemp not far
 From where I sat, just by the road –
 She must have heard me cry.
 She came and greeted me,
 And wiped away my tears,
 And gently kissed my face...

It seemed the sun began to shine,
 It seemed all things on earth were mine,
 Mine all... the orchards, fields, and gardens!...

And playfully we herded them—
Somebody else's sheep—to water.

What garbage!... Yet, when I look back,
My heart is filled with pain—it cries.
Why had the Lord not let me live
My life out in this paradise?
I would have died tilling the land,
And knowing nothing of this world,
Not been a madman in this world,
Cursing both God and man...

1847

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"Have ill luck and captivity..."

Have ill luck and captivity,
 Have all those years, gone flying by,
 Shattered my soul? Or have I even
 Ever lived with it while living
 With people in the mire, defiling
 My purest soul?... And meanwhile people!
 (People, of course, giving a laugh)
 They say that it's unsullied still,
 And young, and innocent, and holy,
 And other things besides... The bastards!!
 Vicious! Vicious! You have stolen
 My purest, my most precious diamond,
 My once unsullied, holy soul,
 And mired it in a filthy swamp.
 And now you laugh! You infidels!
 But was it not among you, bastards,
 That I abased myself, and now
 Can't tell if I was ever pure,
 Because you dragged me down among you
 From holy heaven—and have taught
 Me how to write these filthy poems.
 You set a heavy boulder down
 Upon the road... shattered my heart
 Against it... Fearing God the while!
 My heart—so small and so impoverished,
 And it was righteous at one time!
 And now I go without direction,
 Without a beaten path... while you!
 You wonder why it is I stumble,
 Why I curse you and curse my fate,
 And weep so hard, and, like you all...
 Disown my poor, impoverished soul,
 Disown my soul—sinful and hateful!

1850

Translated by Boris Dralyuk and Roman Koropecykyj

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