

# Goethe



## Selected Poems

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## Contents

The Lovely Night.....	6
May Song .....	7
Welcome and Farewell.....	9
The Rose-Bush on The Moor .....	11
The Violet.....	12
The Artist's Evening Song.....	13
New Love, New Life.....	14
To Belinda .....	15
'Holde Lili, warst so lang' .....	16
The Traveller's Night Song I.....	17
The Traveller's Night Song II .....	18
The Fisherman.....	19
The ErlKing.....	21
'Wer nie sein Brot' .....	23
Mignon.....	24
'Heiss mich nicht reddem,' .....	25
'Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt' .....	26
To The Moon (Final Version).....	27
Song Of The Spirits Over The Water .....	29
To Charlotte Von Stein .....	31
'Du bist mein und bist so zierlich,' .....	34
Measuring Time.....	35
Anacreon's Grave .....	36
Roman Elegies I.....	37
Roman Elegies II (First Version).....	38
Roman Elegies III.....	39

Roman Elegies V .....	40
Roman Elegies VII.....	41
Roman Elegies XIII.....	42
Roman Elegies XVII.....	45
Roman Elegies XX.....	46
The Nearness of the Beloved.....	48
Venetian Epigrams I.....	49
Venetian Epigrams XXVII.....	50
Venetian Epigrams XCVI.....	51
Venetian Epigrams CIII.....	52
Permanence In Change.....	53
Provision for the Journey .....	55
Early Spring.....	56
May Song .....	58
Night Song .....	59
The New Copernicus.....	60
Ever and Everywhere.....	62
March .....	63
April.....	64
Poetry and Form.....	65
Blissful Yearning.....	66
Night of the Full Moon.....	67
At Midnight's Hour.....	68
A Trilogy of Passion.....	69
From the Chinese-German Book of Hours and Seasons...	79
To the Full Moon Rising .....	81
The Betrothed.....	82
Legacy.....	83
Index of First Lines.....	84



## **The Lovely Night**

Now I leave this little hut,  
Where my beloved lives,  
Walking now with veiled steps  
Through the shadowy leaves.  
Luna shines through bush and oak,  
Zephyr proclaims her path,  
And the birch trees bowing low  
Shed incense on her track.  
How beautiful the coolness  
Of this lovely summer night!  
How the soul fills with happiness  
In this true place of quiet!  
I can scarcely grasp the bliss!  
Yet, Heaven, I would shun  
A thousand nights like this,  
If my darling granted one.

## May Song

How sweetly Nature  
Brightens round me!  
How the sun's shining!  
How the fields gleam!

Blossoms are bursting  
From every leaf,  
Thousands of voices  
From bushes beneath,

And joy and bliss  
From every eye.  
O Earth, O Sun!  
O Joy, O Delight.

O Love, O Love!  
So golden fair,  
Like morning clouds  
On the hillside there!

Your splendour blesses  
The fields so fresh,  
The whole wide world  
In a blossoming mist.

O Darling, Darling,  
How I love you!  
How your eyes shine!  
How you love too!

So the lark loves  
Singing on high,  
And flowers at dawn  
The scented sky,

As I love you  
With veins on fire,  
You who give me  
Youth, Joy, Desire

For new dances  
New poetry.  
Be happy forever,  
As you love me!



## Welcome and Farewell

My heart was beating, swiftly to horse!  
Faster even than thought it was done.  
Already evening cradled earth's course,  
And night hung over the mountain cone:  
Already the misty oak-tree stood,  
A vast giant, towering upwards there,  
Where from out the shadowy wood  
A hundred dark eyes seemed to stare.

From a bank of cloud the Moon gazed,  
Sadly out of the mist about her,  
The winds beat soft wings, and strayed  
Around my terror-stricken ears:  
The night begot a thousand monsters,  
But my spirit was joyful, lively:  
Deep inside my veins what fire!  
Deep inside my heart what heat!

I saw you, and full measure of bliss  
Flowed to me from your sweet eyes:  
I drew for you my every breath,  
My heart was wholly on your side.  
Springtime's rose-red glow, it shone  
All about your lovely face, lit  
Tenderly for me – dear God!  
I had hoped, but not deserved it!

But ah, already at morning light  
My heart was crushed in parting:  
In your kisses what delight!  
In your eyes what suffering!  
I went, you stood, looked from above,  
And saw me go with tearful gaze:  
And yet what joy to be loved!  
Dear God, to love what happiness!

## **The Rose-Bush on The Moor**

A lad he saw a rose-bush growing,  
Rose-bush on the moor,  
Young and lovely as the morning,  
Quick he ran to see it glowing,  
With delight he saw.  
Rose-bush, rose-bush, rose-bush red,  
Rose-bush on the moor.

Said the lad: I'll pick your bloom,  
Rose-bush on the moor!  
Said the rose: 'Ah, I'll prick you,  
So you will remember true,  
I'll let you do no more.  
Rose-bush, rose-bush, rose-bush red,  
Rose-bush on the moor.

Then her bloom the cruel lad picked,  
The rose-bush on the moor:  
To protect herself she pricked,  
Cried, sighed, in vain, but quickly  
Could defend no more.  
Rose-bush, rose-bush, rose-bush red,  
Rose-bush on the moor.

## The Violet

A violet in the meadow grew,  
Bowed to earth, and hid from view:  
It was a dear sweet violet.  
Along came a young shepherdess  
Free of heart, and light of step,  
Came by, came by,  
Singing, through the flowers.

Oh! Thought the violet, were I,  
If only for a little while,  
Nature's sweetest flower yet,  
Till my Beloved picked me, pressed  
Me fainting, dying to her breast!  
So I might lie,  
There, for but an hour!

Alas! Alas! The girl went past:  
Unseen the violet in the grass,  
Was crushed, poor violet.  
It drooped and died, and yet it cried:  
'And though I die, yet still I die  
By her, by her,  
By her feet passing by.'

## **The Artist's Evening Song**

Oh, for some inner creative force  
Through my mind, echoing!  
That through my hands might course  
A sap-filled blossoming.

I only shudder, I only stutter,  
And yet can't halt: at last,  
I feel I know you, Nature,  
And must hold you fast.

When I think how all these years  
My powers have been growing,  
And where barren heath appeared  
Now streams of joy are flowing:

How I yearn for you, Nature, then,  
And long for you, with faith and love!  
For me you'll be the leaping fountain,  
A thousand springs will hurl above.

And every single power  
In my mind you'll heighten,  
And this narrow being-here  
To Eternity you'll widen.

## New Love, New Life

Heart, my heart, what can it mean?  
What could trouble you so?  
What a strange new life, it seems!  
You, I no longer know.  
Everything you loved is done,  
Everything that grieved you,  
All your work and peace is gone –  
How could this overtake you!

Are you caught by lovely youth  
By that beloved form,  
By those eyes so good and true,  
By that all-powerful force?  
When I try to run away,  
Collect myself and flee,  
In a moment my path strays  
Back to her you see.

By that magic thread, so  
That cannot be untied,  
The dear wanton girl, oh  
She holds me fast: and I  
Must lie within her magic spell  
And live where she may go.  
How great the change, I tell!  
Love! Love! Let me go!

## To Belinda

Oh, why do you draw me, irresistibly,  
Into all this magnificence?  
Was I not living happy, virtuously,  
In midnight's solitariness?

Quietly secluded in my chamber,  
In the moonlight I lay,  
Drowned in its shining shower,  
Into which I'd stray:

Dreaming of hours, golden, filled  
With unmixed delight,  
Your sweet form now so distilled  
Deep within my mind.

Can it be me that you imprison  
Among all these lights?  
Made to hold the insufferable vision  
Of faces forever in sight?

The springtime blossom in the meadow  
Charms me less by far:  
Where you are, Angel, is Love, and Virtue,  
Nature is where you are.

**'Holde Lili, warst so lang'**

Sweetest Lili, for so long  
All my joy and all my song!  
Ah, now, all my pain, yet you  
Are still all my singing too.



## **The Traveller's Night Song I**

You who are from Heaven above  
Calming all our pain and sorrow,  
Him who's spirit's doubly hurt,  
Renewing, with a double measure.  
Oh, I'm weary of life's urging!  
Why, now, all this joy and pain?  
Sweetest Peace,  
Flood: oh flood my heart again!

## **The Traveller's Night Song II**

Over all the hill-tops  
Is Rest,  
In all the tree-tops  
You can feel  
Scarcely a breath:  
The little birds quiet in the leaves.  
Wait now, soon you  
Too will have peace.

## **The Fisherman**

The waters hissed, the waters rose,  
The Fisherman alongside,  
Quietly gazing at his rod,  
Cool at heart, inside.  
And as he listens, as he sits,  
The waters split and rise:  
Out of the flowing waters hiss  
A mermaid meets his eyes.

She sang to him, she spoke to him:  
'Why do you lure my children  
With human art and cunning,  
Up to their warm extinction?  
Ah, if you knew how snugly  
Little fish live in the deep,  
You yourself would join me,  
You'd be happy indeed.

Doesn't the sweet Sun bathe  
And the Moon, here, in the sea?  
Show with the waves they breathe  
Faces doubly bright to see?  
Doesn't this heavenly deep,  
Lure you, this rain-clear blue?  
Doesn't your own gaze leap  
Drawn down to eternal dew?'

The water hissed, the water rose  
Wetting his naked feet:  
His heart so full of yearning, oh,  
As if him his Love did greet.  
She spoke to him, she sang to him:  
All was soon done, and o'er:  
She half pulling, he half sinking,  
And he was seen nevermore.

## The Erlking

Who rides so late through the wind and night?  
It's a father with his child so light:  
He clasps the boy close in his arms,  
Holds him fast, and keeps him warm.

'My son, why hide your face, all scared? –  
'Don't you see, Father, the Erlking's there,  
The Alder-King with his crown and robe?' –  
'My son, it's the trail of mist that flows'. –

'Come, dear child, come along with me!  
The games we'll play will be fine and lovely:  
There's many a bright flower by the water,  
Many gold garments has my Mother.'

'And Father, my Father, can't you hear  
What the Erlking's whispering in my ear?' –  
'Peace, peace, my child, you're listening  
To those dry leaves rustling in the wind.' –

'Fine lad, won't you come along with me?  
My lovely daughters your slaves shall be:  
My daughters dance every night, and they  
Will rock you, sing you, dance you away.'

'And Father, my Father, can't you see where  
The Erlking's daughters stand shadowy there? –

‘My Son, my Son, I can see them plain:  
It’s the ancient Willow-trees shining grey.’

‘I love you, I’m charmed by your lovely form:  
And if you’re not willing, I’ll have to use force.’  
‘Father, my Father, he’s gripped me at last!  
The Erlking’s hurting me, holding me fast! –

The Father shudders, faster he rides,  
Holding the moaning child so tight,  
Reaching the house, in fear and dread:  
But in his arms the child lies dead.

## **'Wer nie sein Brot'**

Who has never eaten his bread with tears,  
Who has never, through night's sorrowful hours,  
Sat on his bed and wept with fear,  
He knows not you, you heavenly powers.

You lead us into life, and then  
Your Will leads us on, into sin,  
So you deliver us to pain:  
On Earth all error's paid again.

## Mignon

Do you know the land where the lemon-trees grow,  
In darkened leaves the gold-oranges glow,  
A soft wind blows from the pure blue sky,  
The myrtle stands mute, and the bay tree high?  
Do you know it well?

It's there I'd be gone,  
To be there with you, O, my beloved one!

Do you know the house? It has columns and beams,  
There are glittering rooms, the hallway gleams,  
Are those figures of marble looking at me?  
What have they done, child of misery?  
Do you know it well?

It's there I'd be gone,  
To be there, with you, O my true guardian!

Do you know the clouded mountain mass?  
The mule picks its way through the misted pass,  
And dragons in caves raise their ancient brood,  
And the cliffs are polished, smooth, by the flood;  
Do you know it well?

It's there I would be gone!  
It's there our way leads! Father, we must go on!



**‘Heiss mich nicht redden,’**

Bid me be silent, bid me not speak,  
Secrecy is a duty to me:  
I could reveal my heart complete,  
But Fate doesn't wish it to be.

In due season, the sun's bright path  
Drives the night away, the light must shine:  
The hard stone opens its breast at last  
And yields Earth water from hidden mines.

Every man seeks rest in a dear friend's arms,  
Where the heart can express its inner pain:  
But my lips are sealed by secret charms,  
And none but a god can part them again.

## **'Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt'**

Only the Yearning, they  
Know what I suffer!  
Alone, and far away  
From all joy severed,  
Seeing the sky always  
On every side.  
Who love me and know me, they  
Distantly hide.  
I'm dizzied: I'm burned, all day  
Inwardly shudder.  
Only the Yearning, they  
Know what I suffer!

## **To The Moon (Final Version)**

Bushes, valleys, silently,  
You fill with misty light,  
Easing my soul utterly  
Again, at last, at night:

Soothingly you cast your gaze  
Over a dark country,  
As gentle and friendly eyes  
Guard my destiny.

Glad, and troubled, times  
Echo in my heart,  
I walk between pain and delight,  
In solitude, apart.

Flow on, beloved flood: flow on!  
I'll never know joy again,  
Laughter and kisses, both are gone,  
And loyalty flows away.

There was a time I had as yet  
Life's most precious thing!  
Ah, a man can never forget  
That which torments him!

River, through the valley, murmur,  
Without rest or peace,  
For my singing, gently whisper,  
Murmuring melodies,

When you rage on winter nights  
And then overflow,  
Or when around the Spring's delights  
Of bursting buds, you go.

Happy are we if, without hate,  
Hidden from the world,  
We hold a friend to our heart  
And with him explore

What, unknown to all their art,  
Ignored, by all mankind,  
Through the labyrinth of the heart  
Wanders in the night.

## **Song Of The Spirits Over The Water**

The spirit of Man  
Resembles water:  
Coming from heaven,  
Rising to heaven,  
And hither and thither,  
To Earth must then  
Ever descend.

It leaps from the heights  
Of the sheer cliff,  
In a pure stream,  
Then rises sweetly  
In clouds of spray  
Against smooth stone,  
And lightly received  
Flows like a veil  
Streaming softly  
To depths beneath.

When the sheer rocks  
Hinder its fall,  
It foams angrily  
Flowing stepwise  
Into the void.  
Along its flat bed  
It wanders the vale,  
And on the calm lake  
All the bright stars  
Gaze at their faces.

Wind is the water's  
Sweet lover:  
Wind stirs up foaming  
Waves from the deep.

Spirit of Man  
How like water you are!  
Man's fate, oh,  
How like the wind!

## **To Charlotte Von Stein**

Fate, why did you grant us this depth  
Of insightful vision into our future,  
So that our love, earthly happiness,  
Is a thing we can trust in happily never?  
Why did you grant us such intuition,  
Such power to know each other's heart,  
To see, among life's scattered throng,  
The true relationship where we are?

Oh, many thousands of us drift dumbly  
Through life, our hearts scarcely known,  
Floating here and there, and aimlessly  
Fleeing unexpected pain, without hope:  
Rejoicing again, at the unexpected  
Morning radiance of swift delight:  
Only we two, love-filled, wretched  
Souls are denied that mutual light  
Of loving without knowing one another,  
Of seeing in each what each never was,  
Setting out anew towards the Dream Lover,  
Faltering at phantom Danger's course.

Happy those an empty dream preoccupies,  
Happy those whose presentiments prove vain!  
Our every meeting, every mutual sight  
Sadly confirms our presentiments, our dream.  
Tell me, what does Fate intend for us?  
Say, how it bound us so strictly, purely?  
Oh, in some far off time you must  
Have been my wife, been a sister to me.

You knew every feature of my being,  
Saw the purest tremor of each nerve,  
With a single glance you could read me,  
Hard as I am for mortal eye to pierce:  
You brought calm to my heated blood,  
Guiding my wild and wandering course,  
And in your arms, an angel's arms, I could  
Rest as my ravaged heart was restored.  
You bound your lover fast with magic ease,  
And made many a day pass gloriously.  
What happiness could compare with these  
Hours of rapture, thankful at your feet,  
Feeling his heart flow towards your heart,  
Feeling himself virtuous in your sight,  
All his senses brightened by your art,  
The raging blood in his veins grown quiet?



And, of all of that, but a drifting memory  
Is left, round his uncertain heart again.  
He feels the old truth within, eternally,  
While this new state only brings him pain.  
And we seem to ourselves only half alive,  
The brightest day is twilight all around.  
Happy are we that Fate torments our lives,  
Yet can change nothing of what we found.

**‘Du bist mein und bist so zierlich,’**

You're mine and so dainty,  
You're mine and so mannerly,  
Yet still though you lack something:  
You kiss now with such pointed lips,  
Like a dove, when drinking it sips:  
You're really too dainty a thing.

## **Measuring Time**

Eros, what have we here! An hourglass in each of your hands!

What? Frivolous god, are you doubly measuring time?  
'The hours of lovers apart flow slowly through one:  
For lovers together the hours through the second one fly.'

## **Anacreon's Grave**

Here where roses bloom, where laurel and vine both  
mingle,  
Where the turtledove coos, where the cricket sings in  
delight,  
What grave is this that the gods have adorned and planted,  
With living beauty? It's where Anacreon rests.  
The happy poet enjoyed spring, summer and autumn:  
And this mound, at last, from winter is sheltering him.

## **Roman Elegies I**

Tell me you stones, O speak, you towering palaces!  
Streets, say a word! Spirit of this place, are you dumb?  
All things are alive in your sacred walls  
Eternal Rome, it's only for me all is still.  
Who'll whisper to me, at what window  
Will I see the sweet thing who'll kindle me now, and  
quicken?  
Already I guess the ways, walking to her and from her,  
Ever and always I'll go, while sweet time slips by.  
I'm gazing at church and palace, ruin and column,  
Like a serious man making sensible use of a journey,  
But soon it will happen, and all will be one vast temple,  
Love's temple, receiving its new initiate.  
Though you're a whole world, Rome, still, without  
Love,  
The world isn't the world, and Rome can't be Rome.

## Roman Elegies II (First Version)

Ask now, whoever you wish, you can't reach me,  
Lovely Ladies, and you, fine Men of the World!  
Did Werther really live? Was it really like that?  
Which town can truly claim Lotte as resident?  
Ah, how often I've cursed those foolish pages,  
That showed my youthful sufferings to everyone!  
If Werther had been my brother, and I'd killed him,  
His sad ghost could hardly have persecuted me more.  
So *Malbrouk* persecuted the British traveller  
From Paris to Leghorn, then from Leghorn to Rome,  
Then down to Naples, and if he'd sailed to Madras  
There too the harbour would have been filled with the  
song.  
Luckily I've escaped! She's barely heard of Lotte  
Or Werther, or knows the name of this man of hers.  
She sees in him a free, and vigorous stranger,  
Who lives among mountains and snow, in a wooden  
house.

### **Roman Elegies III**

Beloved, don't fret that you gave yourself so quickly!  
Believe me, I don't think badly or wrongly of you.  
The arrows of Love are various: some scratch us,  
And our hearts suffer for years from their slow poison.  
But others strong-feathered with freshly sharpened points  
Pierce to the marrow, and quickly inflame the blood.  
In the heroic ages, when gods and goddesses loved,  
Desire followed a look, and joy followed desire.  
Do you think the Goddess of Love was calm for long  
Once Anchises attracted her in the groves of Ida?  
If Luna had waited to kiss her beautiful sleeper,  
Ah, then envious Dawn would have woken him swiftly.  
Hero saw her Leander at a loud feast, at once  
Her hot lover leapt out into the midnight flood.  
Rhea Silvia the royal maiden went to the Tiber  
To draw water, and the God captured her there.  
So Mars conceived his sons! – And so a she-wolf  
Suckled twins, so Rome became Queen of the World.

## **Roman Elegies V**

I feel I'm happily inspired now on Classical soil:  
The Past and Present speak louder, more charmingly.  
Here, as advised, I leaf through the works of the Ancients  
With busy hands, and, each day, with fresh delight.  
But at night Love keeps me busy another way:  
I become half a scholar but twice as contented.  
And am I not learning, studying the shape  
Of her lovely breasts: her hips guiding my hand?  
Then I know marble more: thinking, comparing,  
See with a feeling eye: feel with a seeing hand.  
If my darling is stealing the day's hours from me,  
She gives me hours of night in compensation.  
We're not always kissing: we often talk sense:  
When she's asleep, I lie there filled with thought.  
Often I've even made poetry there in her arms,  
Counted hexameters gently there on my fingers  
Over her body. She breathes in sweetest sleep,  
And her breath burns down to my deepest heart.  
Amor trims the lamp then and thinks of the times  
When he did the same for his three poets of love.



## Roman Elegies VII

Oh, how happy I am in Rome, remembering the times  
When grey days clung to me, back there in the North,  
The sky was dark and weighed heavily on my head,  
The world around me colourless, formless, dull,  
And I'd sink to brooding over myself, trying to see  
Down the gloomy paths of my discontented spirit.  
Now the glow of brighter air shines round my brow:  
Phoebus, the god, calls up colour and form.  
The night shines bright with stars, echoes with gentle  
song,  
And the Moon shines clearer to me than Northern day.  
What happiness for a mortal! Do I dream? Does your  
Ambrosial palace, Father Jupiter, receive its guest?  
Ah, here I lie, to your knees extending imploring  
Hands. Oh hear me, Jupiter, the Lord of Guests!  
How I reached here, I don't know: Hebe claimed  
The wanderer, and has drawn me to these halls.  
Did you command her to go and fetch a hero?  
Did Beauty err? Pardon her! Let error help me!  
Your daughter Fortune, too! She hands out noblest  
Gifts, like the girl she is, as the mood might take her.  
Aren't you the God of hosts? Oh then don't hurl  
Your guest downwards to Earth from Olympus again!  
'Poet, where are you climbing to?' – Forgive me:  
The high Capitoline Hill's your second Olympus.  
Accept me here, Jupiter, later let Hermes lead me,  
Quietly, by Cestius' Pyramid, down to Orcus.

### **Roman Elegies XIII**

Amor is still a rogue: if you trust he'll betray you!  
The hypocrite came and said: 'Trust me again this once.  
I mean well by you: you have, I know and I'm grateful,  
Dedicated your life and poetry to my worship.  
Look, I've even followed you to Rome! And I'd like  
To do you a service of sorts in these foreign fields.  
Travellers always complain hospitality's poor:  
With Love's recommendation it proves first class.  
You're gazing now in wonder at ancient ruins,  
Sensibly wandering round this sacred place,  
You revere even more all the works that remain  
By rare artists, whose workshops I frequented.  
I created these forms myself! This time, forgive me,  
I don't boast: you'll confess what I say is true.  
Now you serve me idly where are the lovely forms,  
Where are the colours and light of your inventions?  
Do you wish to create, my Friend? The Greek school  
Is still open, the years haven't closed its doors.  
I, the teacher, am ever young: and love youth.  
I don't like aged cunning! Listen now, look alive!  
When those happy ones lived the ancient was new!  
Live happily, and the past will be living, in you!  
Where are the themes for your song? I'll grant them,  
You'll only learn of the highest style from Love,'  
So spoke the Sophist. Who could argue with him?  
And alas I follow orders when the master commands. –

Now the traitor is keeping his word, granting a theme,  
Ah, and robbing me too of sense, and time and strength:  
A loving pair clasp hands, are exchanging glances:  
Affectionate tones: and words of precious meaning.  
Here lispings is conversation, stammering sweet speech:  
A hymn like this rises without verse or metre.  
Say how I found you, once, Dawn, the Muses' friend!  
Aurora, has Amor, the wanton, seduced you too?

You appear to me now as his friend, and wake me  
To a day of feasting again before his Altar.  
I find the wealth of her hair over my breast!  
Her hand weighs on the arm that cradles her neck.  
How gladly I wake to find that the peaceful hours  
Show traces of the desire that lulled us to sleep! –  
She moves in her sleep, sinks down in the wide bed,  
Turns from me, and yet still leaves her hand in mine.  
True longing and heartfelt love bind us forever,  
And only our passion retains its right to vary.  
A touch of my hand, and I'll see those heavenly eyes  
Open again. – No! Let me take rest in her Form!  
Don't open! You'll make me drunk, confused, snatch me  
Too soon from the calm pleasure of pure Beholding.  
Her shape, how fine! Her limbs how nobly formed!  
If Ariadne, asleep, was so fair: Theseus how could you  
go?  
Just one kiss on those lips! O Theseus, can you leave now!  
Gaze in her eyes! She wakes! – She holds you fast for  
ever.

## **Roman Elegies XVII**

Many sounds annoy me, but still the one I hate most  
Is the barking of dogs: and their ear-splitting yelps.  
There's only one dog whose yelp and bark can fill me  
With pleasure: the dog my neighbour has reared.  
He once barked at my sweetheart, when she crept here  
On the quiet, and he nearly betrayed our secret.  
Now, hearing him bark, I always think: she's here!  
Or remember the time when I waited, and she came.

## Roman Elegies XX

Strength, generosity, courage become a man,  
Ah, but deepest reticence becomes him more.  
Discretion, conqueror of cities, ruler of men,  
Beloved goddess who led me safely through life,  
What a fate is mine! The laughing Muse, and Amor,  
That rogue, both are unlocking my sealed mouth.  
Ah, already the King's shame's harder to hide!  
Neither a crown nor a Phrygian cap can conceal  
Midas' long ears: his closest servant has seen,  
And at once the secret weighs heavily on his breast.  
He'd gladly bury it deep, and so find release:  
But Earth refuses to guard such secrets as these.  
Reeds spring up, and rustle and lisp in the wind:  
'Midas, Midas the King, he's grown long ears!'  
Now too I'm finding it harder to keep a sweet secret:  
Ah, how quickly the heart's fullness flows from the lips!  
There's no friend I can trust: she might scold me:  
No man either: he might be a dangerous rival.  
And I'm not solitary enough, or so full of youth,  
As to confide in the woods or the echoing cliffs.  
Hexameter, and Pentameter, I'll tell it to you,  
How she delights me by day and enchants me by night.  
Pursued by hosts of men, she avoids the snares  
The impudent bold, and the secretly cunning, lay:  
Cleverly, daintily, she slips by, knowing the path  
Where her eagerly listening lover waits for her.  
Stay, Luna, she comes! Don't let the neighbours see:

Rustle, breeze, in the trees! So no one hears her step.  
And you grow and bloom, my beloved songs,  
And sway in the gentlest breath of the loving air,  
Reveal to the Romans, like those gossiping reeds,  
The lovely secret at last of this happy pair.

## **The Nearness of the Beloved**

I think of you, when I watch the sunlight glimmer  
Over the sea:  
I think of you, when the moonbeams shimmer  
Over the stream.

I see you there, when the dust swirls high  
On the far road,  
When the traveller shivers, in deepest night,  
As it narrows.

I hear you, when with a dull roaring  
The waters rise.  
Often in silent groves I go walking  
When all is quiet.

I stay with you, however far you are,  
To me you're near!  
The sun sets: soon above me are the stars.  
Would you were here!



## Venetian Epigrams I

Sarcophagi, urns, were all covered with lifelike scenes,  
Fauns dancing with girls from a Bacchanalian choir,  
Paired-off, goat-footed creatures puffing their cheeks,  
Forcing ear-splitting notes from blaring horns.  
Cymbals and drumbeats, the marble is seen and heard.  
How delightful the fruit in the beaks of fluttering birds!  
No startling noise can scare them, or scare away love,  
Amor, whose torch waves more gladly in this happy  
throng.  
So fullness overcomes death, and the ashes within  
Seem still, in their silent house, to feel love's delight.  
So may the Poet's sarcophagus be adorned,  
With this book the writer has filled with the beauty of  
life.

## **Venetian Epigrams XXVII**

All Nine often used to come to me, I mean the Muses:  
But I ignored them: my girl was in my arms.  
Now I've left my sweetheart: and they've left me,  
And I roll my eyes, seeking a knife or rope.  
But Heaven is full of gods: You came to aid me:  
Greetings, Boredom, mother of the Muse.

## **Venetian Epigrams XCVI**

I saw the sea gleam, and the sweet waves glitter:  
Lively sails crossing it, with a following wind.  
My heart felt no desire: my languishing gaze  
Soon turned back again towards mountains and snow.  
How many treasures lie Southward! Yet one in the North  
Like a great magnet draws me irresistibly back.

### **Venetian Epigrams CIII**

And so, far from all joys, I trifled away  
My days and hours in the City of Neptune.  
All I found I seasoned with sweet Memory,  
And with Hope: the world's loveliest savours.

## **Permanence In Change**

If only this early blessing  
Could last a single hour!  
But the warm west wind is shaking  
Over me a rain of flowers.  
Shall I take pleasure in the leaves  
Whose shade I once enjoyed?  
Soon a storm will scatter sheaves  
Through autumn's trembling void.

If you want to grasp the fruit then,  
Hurry now and take your share!  
Some of it's begun to ripen,  
Some is germinating there:  
Swiftly and with every shower  
There's change along the valley's rim,  
Alas, in the selfsame river  
A second time you cannot swim.

You yourself too! What was standing  
Firm as rock before your sight,  
Wall and Palace, now you're seeing  
With ever-changing eyes.  
Wasted now are those lips  
Kisses healed once long ago  
And the feet now that skipped  
On cliffs like mountain goats'.

And the hand that gently moved,  
That articulated structure,  
Generously, to do good,  
Shows a different nature.  
And what now in their place  
Calls itself by your name,  
To the elements in haste  
Flows like water, as it came.

Let the end and the beginning  
Gather themselves into one!  
Let your own self go flying  
Swifter than all these objects can!  
Give thanks that the Muses' art  
Promises one unfading thing,  
The Meaning in your Heart,  
And the Form in your Being.

## **Provision for the Journey**

I was to be weaned from the light of her eyes,  
They were to beautify my life no longer.  
What men call Fate, inexorable forever,  
I know it well: I stepped back in fright.

Now I'd know no other happiness either.  
I began at once to wean myself from you,  
And you, you necessary Things, you too:  
Nothing seemed necessary but that gaze of hers.

Wine's glow, food's enjoyment, sleep  
Comfort and friends, and other delights,  
I denied: there was little left to remove.

Now I can travel through the world at ease:  
Whatever I need's to be found on every side,  
And I bring the indispensable with me – Love.

## Early Spring

Days of delight  
Are you almost here?  
Bringing the sunlight  
Hills and woods near?

Oh, and the streams  
Richer in flow.  
Is this the valley?  
This the meadow?

How blue now and fresh!  
Heaven and height!  
The bright golden fish  
In the lake's night.

Rainbows of feathers  
Rustle the leaves:  
Celestial songs, where  
Echo deceives.

Under the greenery's  
Blossoming powers,  
The buzzing of bees  
Sipping the flowers.



A gentle movement  
Trembling in air,  
Sleep-bringing scent  
Loveliest stir.

Soon there's a greater  
Force to the breeze,  
Yet it is lost there,  
Now, in the trees.

But back to the heart  
It's carried again.  
Muses, help me with art,  
To suffer joy's pain!

Since yesterday say, here,  
What's happened to me?  
My Beloved Sisters,  
The Beloved I see!

## May Song

Between wheat-field and corn,  
Between hedgerow and thorn,  
Between grasses and tree,  
Where's my darling?  
Tell it me!

I know my darling  
She's not at home:  
My precious thing  
Wishes to roam.

May is shining,  
Blossoming, green,  
There goes my darling  
Happy and free.

Near the stone, by the brook,  
Where her kisses I took,  
That first time in the leaves,  
What do I see!  
Could it be?

## Night Song

Oh, on your soft pillow  
Dreaming now, half-hear!  
In my music's echo  
Sleep! What would you more?

In my music's echo  
The starry host appear,  
Eternal feelings, bless, now:  
Sleep! What would you more?

Eternal feelings, bless, now,  
Lift me higher and higher,  
From all earthly beings: oh,  
Sleep! What would you more?

From all earthly beings, oh,  
You carry me, now, so far,  
Enchanted by the cool flow:  
Sleep! What would you more?

Enchanted by the cool flow,  
Dreaming now, you hear.  
Ah, on your soft pillow,  
Sleep! What would you more?

## **The New Copernicus**

I have a house, a little one,  
And hidden there inside  
I'm screened quite nicely from the sun,  
And the burning light.

For there are tiny windows,  
Latches, shutters there,  
Alone I am as happy  
As with a pretty girl.

Since, O wonder! Just for me  
The forest moves about,  
And the farthest country  
Comes nearer to my heart.

And the wooded hills as well  
They come dancing by:  
The only thing that's missing  
Is the merry dwarf's wild cry.

Yet so completely quiet and hushed  
It rushes past me there,  
Sometimes straight, and often curved,  
And that's what I prefer.

If I choose to look more closely, till  
All's carefully considered,  
Perhaps these things are standing still –  
And I myself have travelled.

## **Ever and Everywhere**

Penetrate deep mountain caverns,  
Follow clouds towards the heavens:  
Muses call, to stream and valley,  
Many a thousand times, oh, many.

As soon as fresh flowers meet the eye,  
New songs our efforts earn:  
And though fleeting time goes by,  
The seasons they return.

## March

Look, it's snowed for hours,  
The time is not yet right,  
For all the little flowers,  
For all the little flowers,  
To fill our hearts with light.

The sunlight is deceiving,  
Mild but false it shone,  
Even the swallow's cheating,  
Even the swallow's cheating,  
Why? He comes alone!

Alone, could I be happy  
Even though spring is near?  
But if you were with me,  
But if you were with me,  
Suddenly summer's there.

## April

Eyes tell, tell me, what you tell me,  
Telling something all too sweet,  
Making music out of beauty,  
With a question hidden deep.

Still I think I know your meaning,  
There behind your pupils' brightness,  
Love and truth are your heart's lightness,  
That, instead of its own gleaming,

Would so truly like to greet,  
In a world of dullness, blindness,  
One true look of human kindness,  
Where two kindred spirits meet.

And since I'm lost, in what entrances,  
Studying those mysteries,  
Eyes, may you be drawn to see,  
The intention in my glances!



## **Poetry and Form**

Let the Greek mould his clay  
To the forms he's planned,  
And take increasing pleasure  
In the product of his hands:

But to us it's blissful when  
We clutch at the Euphrates,  
And in the flowing element,  
Swish to and fro, with ease.

Quenching, so, my burning soul,  
I'll utter what I feel:  
Gathered in the poet's pure hand  
The waters will congeal.

## **Blissful Yearning**

(From the West-Eastern Divan)

Tell it no one but the wise,  
The crowd will only jeer:  
The living thing I praise,  
That longs for death by fire.

Cooling, in those nights of love,  
Conceiving as you were conceived,  
A strange emotion fills you  
While the quiet candle gleams.

You're no longer in the grasp  
Of shadows, darkening,  
A new desire lifts you up  
On to a higher mating.

No distances can weigh you down,  
Enchanted you come flying,  
And greedy for the light, at last,  
A moth, you burn in dying.

And as long as you lack this  
True word: Die and Become!  
You'll be but a dismal guest  
In Earth's darkened room.

## **Night of the Full Moon**

(From the West-Eastern Divan)

Lady, say, what do you whisper?  
What so softly moves your lips?  
To yourself you're murmuring,  
Sweeter than the wine in sips!  
Would you think to those twin sisters  
To summon up another twin?  
    'I would kiss! Would kiss! I say.'

Look! In the uncertain eve  
Every branch is glowing, flowering,  
Star is shining down on star:  
And a thousand gems are glowing  
Emerald throughout the leaves:  
Yet your spirit travels far.  
    'I would kiss! Would kiss! I say.'

Your beloved, feels likewise  
The bittersweet, far distant now,  
Filled with a sad happiness.  
You both swore a sacred vow,  
To greet each other at the rise  
Of the full moon, which it is.  
    'I would kiss! Would kiss! I say.'

## At Midnight's Hour

At midnight's hour I'd go, unwillingly,  
Past the Church, a little tiny boy  
To the priest's, my father's house: how beautifully  
Star on star shone there in the sky:  
At midnight's hour.

And when later on in my life, I must  
Go to my beloved, must, drawn by her eye,  
The stars and northern lights warred above,  
Coming and going, I breathed my delight:  
At midnight's hour.

Till finally the full Moon's radiance  
So bright and clear overflowed my night,  
And swift willing Thought's meaning glance,  
Swallowed past and future in its light:  
At midnight's hour.

## A Trilogy of Passion

### **To Werther**

Once more you venture, much-lamented Shadow,  
Into the open light of day,  
Encountering me in freshly flowering meadows,  
Unembarrassed now by my gaze.  
It's as if you re-lived that former season,  
When we two were refreshed by the same field's dew,  
When after the day's unwelcome exertions,  
The setting sun's last rays gave pleasure too:  
I fated to remain, and you to vanish,  
You went before – missed little at the finish.

Human life seems a pleasant fate:  
The day so sweet, and the night so great!  
And, in an enchanted Paradise, set down,  
We've scarce begun to enjoy the heavenly sun,  
When all at once our own confused endeavour  
Conflicts with our own self, and then the other:  
Nothing is complementary, as we'd wish,  
It darkens outside when inside it's bliss,  
A bright exterior's hidden from our gaze,  
Joy is near – yet no one knows its face.

Now we think we've grasped it! With its power  
A woman's seductive shape fills the hour:  
A young man, happy, in the flower of youth,  
Steps out, in Spring, and is the Spring, in truth,  
Delighted, wondering, who achieved this thing?  
He looks around – the world's a gift to him.  
Some hasty impulse draws him swiftly on,  
And neither wall nor palace block his vision:  
Like the birds that skim the wooded peaks,  
He hovers, and around his love he sweeps,  
Ready to swoop down from the sky to find  
Her loving glance, and then it closely binds.

But first too early, then too late prepared  
He feels his flight hemmed in: himself ensnared.  
To see her is a joy, to part is pain,  
A greater joy to see her yet again,  
A single glance repays the years past:  
But a harsh Farewell waits at the last.

You smile, my Friend, with feeling, as is right:  
A fearsome parting made your name shine bright:  
To your misfortune's wretchedness we're kind,  
For better or worse, you left us all behind.  
And we were drawn uncertainly again  
Down all of passion's labyrinthine ways:  
And for us there's anguish with each breath,  
Then, at last, the parting – which *is* a death!  
How sweet it sounds, when the poet sings,  
Evading the true death that parting brings!  
Entangled in these torments, half to blame,  
May some god give them power to speak their pain.

## Elegie

*And, if Mankind in torment's dumb, again  
May some god give me power to speak my pain.*

What can I hope for now from this fresh meeting,  
From this day's still tightly unopened flower?  
Paradise and Hell open to me in greeting:  
What hesitation rules my inward power! –  
No further doubt! She's there at Heaven's door,  
And one is gathered in her arms once more.

So one was received in Paradise again,  
As if worthy of life's beauty there forever:  
No wish, no hope, no longing still remained,  
Here was the goal of innermost desire,  
And in that vision of unique loveliness  
At once the fount of yearning tears grew less.

How little Day restrained his swift-beating wings,  
And seemed to drive the minutes there before him!  
A closely binding seal, the kiss at evening:  
So at the next day's dawn it would remain.  
The hours too softly following each other,  
Like sisters, but no one quite like another.



The kiss, the last, cruelly sweet, now tearing  
The glorious net of intertwined desires.  
The foot now flees the threshold, swift, then faltering,  
As if a Cherub drove it thence with fires.  
The eye frustrated sees the path is darkened,  
It looks behind, and now the gate is fastened.

And now within itself the heart's imprisoned  
As if it had never opened out: unknown  
Those blessed hours beside her, when it shone  
As bright as all the stars the heavens showed:  
And remorse, reproach, and irritation, care  
Weigh it down beneath the oppressive air.

Isn't the world there still? Are the rocky heights  
No longer crowned with all their holy shadow?  
Doesn't the harvest ripen? The countryside  
Still lie, green leaves and fields, where rivers flow?  
And doesn't the overarching vastness fill  
With hosts of forms, emptying itself, still?

How light and dainty, clearly, tenderly formed  
Through the stern choir of clouds, like a Seraph,  
A slender shape, as if it were her shape, soars  
Made of bright mists, through the blue sky above!  
So you saw her, move happily in the dance,  
The loveliest of those sweet forms that entrance.

But for no more than a moment do you dare  
Hold an ethereal image fast in her place:  
Return to your heart! Much more easily there  
You'll find her, there she moves in changing shapes:  
Though she's One, the Many you discover,  
Thousand-fold and ever, ever dearer.

How she waited at the gate to welcome me,  
And delighted me, from then on, step by step,  
And still after the last kiss ran after me,  
To press the last kiss of all to my lips:  
This image of the Beloved, so quick and clear,  
Is written on my heart, in fiery letters there.

On my heart, that firm as a towering wall,  
Holds itself for her, and her within itself,  
That joys, for her sake, in being here at all,  
Knows itself only when she reveals herself,  
Feels itself freer in such beloved bonds,  
And only beats for her, for all, in thanks.

Its power to love, its need for love in return  
Had been consumed and vanished completely,  
But I found the glad impulse to hope again,  
To make decisions, and take action swiftly!  
If ever Love inspired a lover, then see,  
It achieved it most delightfully with me:

And that was through her! – How unwelcome  
The weight of inner care on my mind and body:  
Images of dread, surrounding my gaze, loom  
Through the heart's wasteland, anxious and empty:  
Now hope dawns across the familiar sill,  
In gentle sunlight she shines, herself, still.

To God's peace that down here – we learn –  
Brings a blessedness that passes understanding,  
The tranquil peace of Love I would compare,  
In the presence of the object of our loving:  
Then the heart rests and nothing can disturb  
The deepest sense: the sense of being hers.

An impulse rises in the heart's clear depths,  
To give ourselves freely, and gratefully,  
So entering into the eternally nameless,  
To something higher, purer, unknown, entirely:  
It's piety, we say! – When I stand before her  
It's this high blessedness that I seem to share.

Before her gaze, as before the sun's force,  
Before her breath, as before the spring breeze,  
Self-regard, for so long frozen, thaws  
And melts away within its wintry deeps:  
No self-interest, no self-will remains,  
At her coming they dissolve again.

It's as if she said: 'Hour by kindly hour,  
Life is offered to us, even though  
Our yesterdays leave little trace, and our  
Tomorrows – we are not allowed to know:  
And if ever I shrank from the evening, sad,  
The sun still set on sights that made me glad.

Do as I do, and look the Moment in the eye,  
With joy and understanding! No evasion!  
Meet it with goodwill, swiftly as it flies,  
Whether in Love's pleasures or in action.  
Be only where you are, be childlike ever,  
You'll then be all things, be defeated never.'

I thought: you may well say so: for companion  
Some god granted you the Moment's grace,  
In your sweet presence surely every man  
At once feels he's the favourite of fate:  
But I fear a sign, that takes me from you –  
To learn such noble wisdom, what's the use!

Now I am far! The present minute now,  
What does it ask? I have no way to see:  
It has many good and lovely things to show,  
They're only burdens I must cast from me.  
I'm driven on by an unyielding yearning:  
No counsel left, but only tears unending.

Flow on then, tears, and flow unquenchably:  
Though you could never quench the inner fire!  
Already my heart is torn by violent frenzy,  
By life and death struggles, hideous desire.  
There may be herbs to heal the body's pain,  
But the spirit fails to will or act again,

Fails to grasp: how can I live without her?  
Imagining her shape a thousand ways.  
Now indistinct now radiantly clear,  
Now slow to form, now swiftly snatched away.  
What slightest comfort could this ever bring,  
This ebb and flow, this coming and this going?

Loyal comrades, leave me in this place!  
Leave me alone with marsh and mossy stone:  
Go ever onwards! Earth gives you the space,  
The world is wide, the sky's celestial zone:  
Search and consider, its details bring together,  
And slowly spell out the mysteries of Nature.

All's lost to me, myself as well I've lost,  
I who was once the darling of the gods:  
They tested me: they gave me Pandora's box,  
Full of blessings, fuller of danger's cost:  
To their bountiful lips, then they pressed me,  
They part me from them, now, and destroy me.

## **Reconciliation**

Passion brings pain! – Who will soothe you,  
Troubled heart that has lost so, lost completely?  
Where are the hours that all too swiftly flew?  
In vain were you granted a sight of Beauty!  
The spirit is clouded: purposes confused:  
How the world's splendour fades from our view!

But music soars aloft now on angel's wings,  
Millions of notes on notes are intertwined,  
Piercing through and through all mortal being,  
Eternal beauty flows now through the mind:  
The eyes are dim, and filled with highest yearning,  
The divine power of tears, and music's singing.

And so the heart is eased, and once more feels  
It lives and throbs, must go on throbbing,  
And in pure thanks a willing offering yields,  
Of self, in kind, for this so generous giving.  
Then it is felt – that it might last forever! –  
The double joy of love, and music's singing.

## From the Chinese-German Book of Hours and Seasons

### I

White as lilies, purest candles  
Like the stars, now gently bowing,  
Red-rimmed from their hearts' centres  
Radiance of affection glowing.

So the earliest Narcissi  
Flower in garden rows, and maybe  
In their goodness they know why  
And for whom they're neatly waiting.

### II

Twilight sinks down from above us,  
Swiftly all the near is far:  
But first shining high above us  
Radiant is the evening star!  
Everything is drifting vaguely,  
Mist steals upwards to the height:  
And the still lake mirrors darkly  
Black abysses of the night.

Now in all the eastern distance  
I suspect moon's gleam and glow,  
Slender willow's trailing branches  
Dally with the neighbouring flow.  
Through the play of moving shadows  
Trembling lunar magic shines,  
And a soothing coolness follows,  
To the heart now, through the eyes.



## **To the Full Moon Rising**

Are you leaving me already?  
Only now, you were so near!  
Cloud-mass shadows you, I see,  
And you're no longer here.

Yet you feel how sad I am,  
Your rim still shines, a star!  
Telling me how loved I am,  
Though my Beloved's far.

So pursue, now! Brighter, brighter,  
Purer ways, with greater light!  
Though my heart in pain beats faster,  
More than blessed is the Night.

## **The Betrothed**

At midnight's hour I slept, waking in my breast  
My love-filled heart, as though it were still day:  
Daylight came: to me, it still seemed night at best –  
What's day to me, whatever gifts it makes?

She'll not be there! It was for her sake only,  
I worked and strived through all the fiery hoard  
Of burning hours: and then in the cool evening,  
Was so refreshed! That was my true reward.

The sun set, twined together hand in hand  
We greeted the last sacred gleam of light,  
And eye with clear eye met, to understand:  
Hope, still: for from the East dawn rises bright.

At midnight's hour the shining stars direct me  
In sweet dream to the threshold where she lies.  
For me too may a resting-place be ready!  
Whatever it may be, it is good, this Life.

## **Legacy**

(For Marianne von Willemer)

To the eyes of my Beloved,  
To her fingers that prepared them –  
Once with such a burning longing  
So awaited, and received, then –  
To the heart from which they flowed,  
Shall these letters once more go,  
Ready ever to recall,  
The most perfect time of all.

## Index of First Lines

Now I leave this little hut, .....	6
How sweetly Nature.....	7
My heart was beating, swiftly to horse! .....	9
A lad he saw a rose-bush growing, .....	11
A violet in the meadow grew,.....	12
Oh, for some inner creative force .....	13
Heart, my heart, what can it mean?.....	14
Oh, why do you draw me, irresistibly, .....	15
You who are from Heaven above .....	17
Over all the hill-tops .....	18
The waters hissed, the waters rose,.....	19
Who rides so late through the wind and night? .....	21
Who has never eaten his bread with tears,.....	23
Do you know the land where the lemon-trees grow,.....	24
Bid me be silent, bid me not speak, .....	25
Only the Yearning, they .....	26
Bushes, valleys, silently,.....	27
The spirit of Man.....	29
Fate, why did you grant us this depth .....	31
You're mine and so dainty,.....	34
Eros, what have we here! An hourglass in each of your hands! .....	35
Here where roses bloom, where laurel and vine both mingle, .....	36
Tell me you stones, O speak, you towering palaces! .....	37
Ask now, whoever you wish, you can't reach me,.....	38
Beloved, don't fret that you gave yourself so quickly! ...	39

I feel I'm happily inspired now on Classical soil:.....	40
Oh, how happy I am in Rome, remembering the times ..	41
Amor is still a rogue: if you trust he'll betray you! .....	42
Many sounds annoy me, but still the one I hate most.....	45
Strength, generosity, courage become a man,.....	46
I think of you, when I watch the sunlight glimmer .....	48
Sarcophagi, urns, were all covered with lifelike scenes,	49
All Nine often used to come to me, I mean the Muses: ..	50
I saw the sea gleam, and the sweet waves glitter:.....	51
I was to be weaned from the light of her eyes, .....	55
Days of delight.....	56
Between wheat-field and corn,.....	58
Oh, on your soft pillow.....	59
I have a house, a little one,.....	60
Penetrate deep mountain caverns,.....	62
Look, it's snowed for hours, .....	63
Eyes tell, tell me, what you tell me,.....	64
Let the Greek mould his clay.....	65
Tell it no one but the wise,.....	66
Lady, say, what do you whisper?.....	67
At midnight's hour I'd go, unwillingly,.....	68
Once more you venture, much-lamented Shadow, .....	69
White as lilies, purest candles .....	79
Twilight sinks down from above us, .....	79
Are you leaving me already? .....	81
At midnight's hour I slept, waking in my breast.....	82
To the eyes of my Beloved,.....	83
To her fingers that prepared them –.....	83
Once with such a burning longing.....	83

