

Heinrich Heine

Selected Poems

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Buch Der Lieder: Lyrisches Intermezzo: 'Ein Fichtenbaum'

A single fir-tree, lonely,
On a northern mountain height,
Sleeps in a white blanket,
Draped in snow and ice.

His dreams are of a palm-tree,
Who, far in eastern lands,
Weeps, all alone and silent,
Among the burning sands.

Buch Der Lieder: Lyrisches Intermezzo: 'Es liegt der heisse Sommer'

There lies the heat of summer
On your cheek's lovely art:
There lies the cold of winter
Within your little heart.

That will change, beloved,
The end not as the start!
Winter on your cheek then,
Summer in your heart.

Buch Der Lieder: Lyrisches Intermezzo: 'Ich glaub nicht an den Himmel'

I don't believe in Heaven,
Whose peace the preacher cites:
I only trust your eyes now,
They're my heavenly lights.

I don't believe in God above,
Who gets the preacher's nod:
I only trust your heart now,
And have no other god.

I don't believe in Devils,
In hell or hell's black art:
I only trust your eyes now,
And your devil's heart.

Buch Der Lieder: Lyrisches Intermezzo: 'Ich kann es nicht vergessen'

I can't forget I had you,
Dear woman, sweet to hold,
That I once possessed you,
Your body, and your soul.

I still want your body,
That body young and true,
They can bury your soul, love,
I've soul enough for two.

I'll cut my soul in pieces,
And breathe half into you,
And hug you: we must be, yes,
One soul and body too.

Buch Der Lieder: Die Heimkehr: 'Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten'

I don't know what it could mean,
Or why I'm so sad: I find,
A fairy-tale, from times unseen,
Won't vanish from my mind.

The air is cool and it darkens,
And quiet flows the Rhine:
The tops of the mountains sparkle,
In evening's after-shine.

The loveliest of maidens,
She's wonderful, sits there,
Her golden jewels glisten,
She combs her golden hair.

She combs it with a comb of gold,
And sings a song as well:
Its strangeness too is old
And casts a powerful spell.

It grips the boatman in his boat
With a wild pang of woe:
He only looks up to the heights,
Can't see the rocks below.

The waves end by swallowing
The boat and its boatman,
That's what, by her singing,
The Lorelei has done.

Buch Der Lieder: Die Heimkehr: 'Als ich, auf der Reise'

Just by chance on my journey
I met my beloved's kin,
Sister and father and mother
Knew me, and welcomed me in.

They asked me how I was faring,
And said, as I entered the place,
That I wasn't changed a bit, just
A little thin in the face.

I asked after aunts and cousins,
After many a tiresome one,
And asked how their little dog,
With its soft little bark had done.

And I asked about my darling,
Married now, by and by:
They kindly gave me an answer:
In childbed she did lie.

And I offered congratulations,
And murmured lovingly,
To give her a thousand greetings
With all their heart, from me.

Little sister interrupted:
Their dog so sweet and fine,
Had grown quite large and fierce,
And been drowned in the Rhine.

That little one's like my darling,
Especially when she smiles:
The look that made me miserable:
She has the selfsame eyes.

Buch Der Lieder: Die Heimkehr: 'Still ist die Nacht'

The night is so still, the streets are at rest,
This is the house that my love graced,
This is the town she's long since left,
But the house is here in the selfsame place.

A man's there too, who stands and stares,
And wrings his hands, in violent pain:
When I see his look it makes me scared –
The moonlight shows my face again.

You doppel-gänger! You pallid creature!
Why do you act that torment through,
Love, torturing me on this very corner,
For so many nights, those years I knew.

Buch Der Lieder: Die Heimkehr: 'Sie liebten sich beide'

They loved each other, but neither
Would admit to the other they could:
As enemies, they saw each other,
And almost died of their love.

In the end they parted and only
Saw each other sometimes in dreams:
It was long ago they had died,
But they scarcely knew it, it seems.

Buch Der Lieder: Die Heimkehr: 'Mein Kind, wir waren Kinder'

My child, we were just children,
Two happy kids, that's all:
We crept into the henhouse,
And hid there in the straw.

We crowed like the cockerel,
And all the passers-by –
Thought our: 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!'
Was the real cockerel's cry.

We papered over the boxes
We found around the yard,
And we lived there together
In our elegant house of card.

The neighbour's cat, the old one,
She often came for tea:
We paid her our respects, then,
I bowed and you curtsied.

We asked how she was feeling,
Politely and with care:
Since then we've said the same
To many an ancient fur.

We often sat there chatting,
Sensibly, as folks do,
Complaining how much better
It was in our day too:

How love and faith and loyalty
Have vanished from the earth,
How dear the coffee is now,
How hard to garner wealth!....

They're gone our games as children,
Everything goes, we see –
Wealth and Earth and ages,
Faith, love and loyalty.

Buch Der Lieder: Die Heimkehr: 'Der Tod, das ist'

Our death is in the cool of night,
Our life is in the pool of day.
The darkness glows, I'm drowning,
Day's tired me with light.

Over my head in leaves grown deep,
Sings the young nightingale.
It only sings of love there,
I hear it in my sleep.

Neue Gedichte: Neuer Frühling: 'Unterm weissen Baume'

Sitting under white branches,
You can hear the wind blowing,
In blankets of mist shrouded,
See the silent clouds flowing.

See how the fields and forests
Are bare, extinguished, down below –
Winter round you and inside you,
And your heart frozen so.

Suddenly white flakes are falling
Over you, and crossly
You think it's the tree sprinkling
A snow flurry across you.

But it's not a snow flurry,
You soon see, with joyful dread,
It's fragrant Spring blossom
Teasing, veiling you instead.

What sweet, terrible enchantment,
Winter's changing into May,
Snow is changing into blossom,
Your heart's in love again.

Neue Gedichte: Neuer Frühling: 'Es war ein alter König'

There was a king, now ageing,
With heart of lead, and head so grey.
He took a wife, the old king,
A young wife too, men say.

There was a handsome pageboy
With hair of gold, and thoughts so free:
He bore the silks with joy
That trailed behind the queen.

Do you know the ancient singing?
It rings so true: it rings so sweet!
Both had to die, of loving,
Of love that was too deep.

Neue Gedichte: Verscheidene: 'Wenn ich, beseligt'

When I'm made happy by lovely kisses,
Lying so sweetly in your arms' prisons,
You mustn't speak of Germany, to me –
I just can't stand it – I have my reasons.

Oh, leave me in peace about Germany!
Don't plague me with endless questions, *mit*
Homeland, tribe, and national customs –
I have my reasons – I just can't stand it.

The oak trees are green: blue are the eyes
Of German women: they pine in season
And sigh about faith, hope, love, but I,
I just can't stand it – I have my reasons.

Neue Gedichte: In Der Fremde: 'Ich hatte einst'

I had a lovely homeland long ago.
The oak trees seemed
So tall there, and the violets blew so sweet.
It was a dream.

It kissed me in German, spoke in German
(You'd scarce believe
How good it sounds) the words: I love you true!
It was a dream.

Neue Gedichte: Verscheidene: Romanzen: 'Ein Weib'

They loved each other with love so deep,
She was a tramp and he was a thief.
While he was plying his naughty craft,
She just lay on the bed and laughed.

The days went by in pleasure and joy,
At night in the sheets she hugged her boy.
When they dragged him off to jail at last,
She just stood at the window and laughed.

He wrote to her saying: 'O come to me,
I long for you, so badly, you see,
I'm weeping: I'm fading fast –
She shook her sweet head and laughed.

At six in the morning they hung him high,
At seven they buried him under the sky,
But as eight o'clock went past,
She drank red wine and laughed.

Neue Gedichte: Verscheidene: Romanzen: 'Die Unbekannte'

My golden-haired beauty,
I'm always sure of seeing,
In the Tuileries Gardens,
Under the chestnut trees.

Every day she's out walking
With two ugly old ladies –
Are they aunts? Or dragons,
Disguised in women's clothing?

Could no one give me a clue then,
Of who she was? I asked my friends,
All of them, but all in vain,
I was nearly ill with passion.

Daunted by the moustaches
Of her elderly companions,
And daunted by my own heart
Even more completely,

I never dared to whisper
A single sighed word in passing,
Scarce dared to show my ardour,
By the passion in my glances.

Only today I've learnt at last
Her name. She's called Laura,
Like the beautiful Provençale
A great poet fell in love with.

She's called Laura! Now I've got as
Far as, long ago, Petrarch did,
Who praised the lovely woman
In *canzones* and *sonettos*.

She's called Laura! Just like Petrarch,
I can try platonic toying
With her name's melodic music –
He himself achieved no more.

Neue Gedichte: Zur Ollea: 'Altes Kaminstück'

Outside, white snowflakes are blowing
Through the night: the storm is loud:
Here I'm alone, beside the blazing
Hearth inside, warm, quietly bowed.

I sit here in my chair, just thinking,
Here beside the crackling glow,
Kettle humming, as its boiling,
Melodies from long ago.

And my little cat sits near me
Warms its paws beside the coals,
While the flames are flickering, weaving
Brave imaginings in my soul.

Now many a long forgotten age
Rises in twilight air,
As if in shining masquerade,
And faded splendour, there.

Lovely women with knowing glances
Beckoning with sweet mystery,
And Harlequins in prancing dances
Leaping, laughing merrily.

Marble gods from furthest distance
Greet me: near them, dreamlike, grow
Flowers, from tales, that entrance
In the moonlight glow.

Many a magic castle, rising,
Swims uncertainly to view,
Behind them gleaming knights riding
And with them pageboys too.

And all of this goes flashing by,
Hurrying on in shadow flight –
Ah! The kettle's boiling over,
And the little cat howls with fright.

Romanzero: Erstes Buch: Historien: 'Der Asra'

Every day so lovely, shining,
Up and down, the Sultan's daughter
Walked at evening by the water,
Where the white fountain splashes.

Every day the young slave stood
By the water, in the evening,
Where the white fountain splashes,
Every day grew pale, and paler.

Then the princess came one evening,
Quickly speaking to him, softly,
'Your true name – I wish to know it,
Your true homeland, and your nation.'

And the slave said, 'I am called
Mahomet, I am from Yemen,
And my tribe, it is the Asra,
Who die, when they love.'

Romanzero: Zweites Buch: Lamentationen: Gedächtnisfeier'

Not a Mass will be sung then,
Not a Kaddish will be said,
Nothing sung, and nothing spoken,
On the day when I am dead.

But perhaps another day
When the weather's mild, serene,
My Matilde will go walking,
In Montmartre, with Pauline.

With a wreath of immortelles,
She'll come to dress my grave,
And she'll sigh: 'Oh, poor man.'
That moist sadness in her gaze.

A shame I'm so high up,
And I've no chair for my sweet,
Not a stool to offer her,
Ah, she trips with weary feet!

Don't, my sweet, plump child,
Make your way back home on foot,
Behind the iron railings,
The cabs are waiting, look.

Gedichte 1853 Und 1854: Zum Lazarus: 'Einst sah ich viele'

I saw a crowd of flowers in bloom,
On my way: too lazy of course
To stir myself and pick them too,
I rode on by, on my proud horse.

Now, when I'm wretched and I'm dying,
Now, when my grave's already aired,
Often in memory, painful, mocking,
The scent of flowers I scorned is there.

One, especially, of fiery yellow,
A violet, burns inside my head,
How I regret I never fully
Had that sweetheart in her bed.

My solace: Lethe's water can
Even now, not lacking in its powers,
Refresh the foolish heart of Man,
With sweet forgetful midnight hours.

Aus Der Matratzengruft: 'Mein Tag war heiter'

My day was happy, fortunate my night.
My People loved me when I struck the lyre
Of Poetry. Passion was my song, and fire:
There it kindled many a lovely light.

My summer's still ablaze but I've already
Dragged to the barn the crop I brought to birth –
And now I have to leave all that the Earth
Made so dear to me and loved so dearly!

The instrument sinks from my hand.
The glass breaks in splinters, that to my lips
Overconfidently, I so cheerfully pressed.

Oh God! How deeply bitter dying is!
How sweet and intimate the life of Man,
In this sweet, intimate and earthly nest.

Aus Der Matratzengruft: 'Morphine'

There's a mirror likeness between the two
Bright, youthfully-shaped figures, though
One's paler than the other and more austere,
I might even say more perfect, more distinguished,
Than the one who'd take me confidingly in his arms –
How soft then, loving, his smile, how blessed his glance!
Then it might well have been, that his wreath
Of white poppies touched my forehead, at times,
Drove the pain from my mind with its strange scent.
But all that's transient. I can only, now, be well,
When the other one, so serious and pale,
The older brother, lowers his dark torch. –
Sleep is good: and Death is better, yet
Surely never to have been born is best.

Note: Thanatos, Death, was the son of Night, usually shown as a winged spirit. He then completely resembled his brother Hypnos, Sleep, who lived with him in the Underworld. Hypnos put men to sleep by touching them with his magic wand or by fanning them with his dark wings. His son, Morpheus, was god of dreams.

Aus Der Matratzengruft: 'Der Scheidende'

It has died in me, as it must,
Every idle, earthly lust,
My hatred too of wickedness,
Utterly now, even the sense,
Of my own, of other men's distress –
All that's living in me is Death!

The curtain falls, the play is done,
And my dear German public's gone,
Wandering home, and yawning so,
Those good folk aren't stupid though:
They'll dine happily enough tonight,
Drink, and sing, and laugh – He's right,
The noble hero in Homer's book,
Who said once that the meanest *schmuck*,
The lowest little Philistine there,
In Stuttgart (*am Neckar*), is happier
Than I, son of Peleus, the hero, furred,
The shadow prince in the Underworld.

Note: The reference is to Homer's Odyssey Book XI:488-491, Odysseus' visit to the Underworld, to which the dying Heine considers himself banished, where Odysseus speaks with the dead Achilles, son of Peleus.

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