



ADAM MICKIEWICZ

Born at Nowogródek in 1798. Became a schoolmaster at Kowno. Exiled to central Russia as a political suspect, 1824 to 1829; friend of Pushkin. Escaped and settled in Paris in 1832. Married Celina Szymanowska, daughter of the pianist, in 1834, by whom he had five children. Professor of Slavonic Studies at the Collège de France, 1840-1852. Editor of *La Tribune des Peuples*, 1849. Died in 1855 at Constantinople, while organizing a Polish legion to fight the Russians.

ADAM MICKIEWICZ

FOREFATHERS

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

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FOREWORD BY

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MICKIEWICZ'S "FOREFATHERS"

Modern Polish literature can be particularly proud of its poetic drama; it can boast works of dazzling originality, imaginative daring and technical inventiveness. The most daring and ambitious is the earliest of this galaxy: Mickiewicz's *Forefathers*, coming out of the 'twenties and 'thirties of the nineteenth century.

Romantic opposition to the classical tradition was especially pronounced and articulate in the field of the drama. Most of the romantics, considering classical drama a still-born, highly constrained and affected genre, turned to another tradition, that of the Shakespearean drama. Mickiewicz's solution was a different and much more radical one. In the classical tradition, he argued, only the ancient Greeks had produced a great and genuine theatre; and they had managed to do so because their dramas were not the result of an imitation of foreign models; they were the product of a native and organic growth: they evolved from Greek religious rites. Thus, in order to create a modern, national drama one should not try to imitate the forms of the Greek tragedy but rather to follow in the path of the ancient Greeks and to build a new form of drama which would take the native folk rites as its starting point.

Mickiewicz conveniently found such a point of departure in the rites of the Belorussian peasants of his native region. These were performed in me and for the comfort of the dead, and called *dziady*, "the ancestors," "the forefathers." Twice a year the peasants would gather by night in local cemeteries or chapels, where they would conjure the spirits of the deceased, offering them appropriate food and drink in order to alleviate their lot in the other world. The observance was of pagan origin, but since it closely

paralleled the Christian celebration in honour of the dead of the All Souls' Day, the Church had tolerated it; indeed, the local priest would on occasion conduct the forefathers rites himself.

The forefathers rite struck a sympathetic chord in Mickiewicz's mind. "Such a pious aim of the feast," he wrote in the prose preface to the drama, "might, a solitary place, fantastic rites, all that at one time appealed strongly to my imagination." The notion of building a drama around such a rite was, no doubt, the more appealing in that it satisfied the romantic impulse toward the native, the primitive and the ancient. It gave to the drama a certain aura which verged upon the sacred, and, since the rite was of essentially pagan origins, it had the prestige of something time-honoured and ancestral. Moreover, it had the advantage of not clashing overtly with Christian beliefs, and thus, it enabled the poet to live imaginatively in two worlds at once: in the Christian and the Slavic-pagan realms.

Mickiewicz started writing his *Forefathers* in 1820, when he was barely twenty-two years old, and when his conversion to romanticism was still a very recent affair. Three years later, in the spring of 1823, the new work appeared in print. Its full title ran: *Forefathers: A Poem*. It began with "Part Two," which was followed by "Part Four." The use of this puzzling numeration was no doubt intended to alert the reader to the fact that what was offered was not to be treated as a rounded-off whole, but instead as two fragments of a presumed larger drama. Mickiewicz might here have been following the example of Goethe who in 1790 had published the first fragmentary version of his great drama as *Faust: Ein Fragment*. Moreover, the subtitle *A Poem* would suggest that Mickiewicz had some doubts as to whether such fragments could be considered as dramatic structure at all. In effect, the links between Part Two and Part Four are rather tenuous. We can easily guess that the recalcitrant final apparition in Part Two which the Warlock cannot exorcise is identifiable with the protagonist of Part Four, and the theme of forefathers' feast represented in Part Two is invoked again by the end of Part Four. Beyond this, the two parts differ in subject-matter, as well as in style and in the atmosphere evoked.

When Mickiewicz started writing Part Two he was still on his way to romantic Damascus. He sensed the poetic potentialities of the folk rite, but viewed it at first from a certain distance, with a half-affectionate and a half-amused eye. A total involvement, the identification with the world of folk beliefs was still lacking in him. Only in the central scene, that with the Bad Lord, are we plunged into the atmosphere of moral seriousness, and it is primarily the seriousness of protest against cruelty and social abuses. Other apparitions, that of the children who died at a tender age without ever experiencing any unhappiness, or of the girl whose main peccadillo was that she refused the embraces of her wooers, belong rather to a blithe rococo world. One could easily imagine them as coming from the pen of Voltaire (whom Mickiewicz translated in his earlier, student years) or Pope (who was highly appreciated and often translated in classicist Poland). It is obvious that when the poet began to write his drama, he did not treat the world of folk beliefs very seriously. Part Two, the product of the poet's flirtation with the world of these beliefs, is a charming but minor poetic work. It is graceful, distinguished by great fluency and melodiousness of poetic language, but the poet's grasp of the fantastic world is still uncertain.

Part Four belongs to a different spiritual world. With it we enter the sphere of great romantic poetry. Mickiewicz had been working on the drama for about three years and with time his involvement had grown deeper. The process was intensified by his immersion into the new English and German poetry and by an unhappy love affair. Each experience served to deepen the other. The love affair made the poet feel one with the newly discovered romantic world, and itself it became in turn attuned to the literature he was reading.

Mickiewicz came from a lower stratum of the gentry, that not possessing any estate. On completing his university studies, he had to earn his living as a teacher in a provincial high school. Thus, when he fell in love with a rich heiress, the affair was doomed from the outset. In due time, the girl was married off to a count, but she continued to meet clandestinely Mickiewicz and to exchange tender messages with him. She was high-strung, with

a penchant for high exaltation, thus an ideal partner for a love affair in the romantic grand style. They both developed a peculiar love mystique, regarding themselves as two elected souls, predestined for each other and prevented from consummating their love in happiness by cruel fate or, rather, by stupid social prejudice.

The experience called forth great poetry in Mickiewicz. He now found a vehicle for his urge to complain, to protest, to relieve his burden, to settle his accounts with fate, in the new drama he was working on. What had started as a half-anused dabbling in folklore now became, in Part Four, something very personal and deadly serious.

Part Four is a monodrama. It is true that, together with the protagonist, the unhappy lover, other persons appear on the stage—namely the priest and his children (the action takes part in the Eastern part of old Poland, and the priest belongs to the Uniate church). However, these characters are kept in the wings and can hardly be said to exist in themselves. The priest's brief and scant repartees to the ravings of the unhappy lover serve chiefly as a dramatic device used to justify sudden changes in the moods and topics of the young stranger who has invaded his cosy home.

Flouting all realistic, rationalistic conventions, Mickiewicz makes the existential status of his protagonist unsettled and changing. At first, he appears as a "Hermit," then, after the priest has recognized in him a former pupil, he is called by his first name, Gustav. At first, he seems to be an unhappy and deranged man, but after he has passed his knife through his body without stopping to complain or to inveigh, we are apt to feel that the children who greeted him with the cry, "A corpse, a ghost, a vampire bat!" might have been right. He has, however, none of the conventional trappings of a ghost. That pretended ghost of a dead man does not look upon his past life from an otherworldly distance, and, for that matter, ghosts can be sinister, but hardly mad. This one is obviously mad and yet, in his madness, obviously right, as he speaks out against the world of "normal," "sane" people. It is as if the poet were saying that great misfortune makes nonsense of our

habitual conceptual categories, does not square with the rational image of man.

The protagonist's outpourings are disjointed; when pieced together they do not tell a story. Much of the story remains unstated and has to be inferred by the reader. But what his ravings lack in coherence they gain in immediacy, and their emotional scope is very wide indeed, ranging from fits of passionate anger to tender reminiscences, from calm meditations to virulent sarcastic volleys. The love as expressed in Part Four is passionate, and yet it is strangely devoid of any sensuous note. Moreover, Gustav in his outbursts refers to a number of literary names as points of reference: Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise*, Goethe's *Werther*, Tasso, Homer; he quotes from Schiller and from folksongs. And yet the dominating impression is not that of something cerebral but of great directness, immediacy of feelings. Never before and hardly ever afterwards has love expressed itself in Polish literature with such directness and force.

Like Werther and Saint-Preux, Gustav is being destroyed by unhappy love. Unlike his literary predecessors, however, he is not only noble but exceptionally strong and passionate as well. He makes us believe that certain fundamental values will perish with him, and that there is something inherently wrong with the world order in which a tragedy such as his can take place.

As was mentioned, the links between Part Two and Part Four are rather tenuous in terms of a traditional dramatic plot. There is, however, still another link between the two parts, one which is more imperceptible and difficult to define. The forefathers rite, the communion between those alive and those departed, functions in the drama as a great spiritualistic metaphor. In Part Four that creed is embraced halfheartedly only, not without some ironic posturing. The moment we enter Part Four we are plunged into a spiritual world *sui generis*, whose logic the poet obliges us to take seriously. Gustav is both an unhappy youth and a "mad," raving spirit; his misfortune is a metaphysical scandal; it is the tearing apart of two souls that were predestined to be united. Mickiewicz managed to express with great directness and force the unhappy love and to evoke, at the same time, a hallucinatory,

otherworldly atmosphere enfolding it. We remain throughout in the *hic et nunc* world, which we experience as real and palpable; yet, over and over again do we sense otherworldly reverberations.

The use of the puzzling numeration was no doubt intended to alert the reader to the fact that what was offered was to be treated as two fragments of a presumed larger work. In fact, Mickiewicz was working then on a larger, fuller dramatic construction. After his death there were found in his papers a handful of dramatic scenes built round two young people, a man and a girl. They are lonely, don't know each other but sense each other's presence, and in each of them there is a longing after the unknown other. These scenes are fragmentary and cannot be said to constitute a finished whole. They break up abruptly at the moment when the man, Gustav, meets a person who seems to be his evil spirit. They deal with events which precede those recorded in the published parts. Extrapolating from this instance former editors labelled these fragments as Part One of *Forefathers*. Nowadays they are usually published separately under the title found in the manuscript: *Forefathers, A Spectacle*. If one can judge by internal evidence they must have originated after Part Two had already been written. They exemplify an attitude towards the supernatural which closely resembles that found in Part Four. Both the girl and Gustav are figures of flesh and blood and both have strong intimations of the higher spiritual world surrounding them. Those people who do not appear to sense the existence of this higher world are presented as callous, cruel and limited in their "wisdom." And the style, although much calmer and not so forceful as that of Part Four has altogether the same directness.

Parts two and Four of *Forefathers* are young Mickiewicz's most personal work, as well as his most original one. They represent, however, an adumbration of the new form of drama rather than its final embodiment. This idea would haunt Mickiewicz in subsequent years. Five years after the publication of his first dramatic attempt he wrote to a fellow-poet: "I threw into fire several whole dramas and several which were half done, and still cannot gather strength for a tragedy, although I am already turning grey

and have lost my teeth.* However, I am still hoping." Only a historical drama, he goes on, would answer the needs of the period. But nobody managed to find a proper form for it. Schiller "with all his genius" was only an imitator of Shakespeare. As for Goethe, only in *Goetz von Berlichingen* do we find some adumbration of the historical aspirations of the modern times. In all his other dramas he manages only to revive the forms of the past. Byron forged new forms of epic poetry. But the modern form of the drama still remains music of the future. And that is as it should be because in every epoch the dramatic form is the last to evolve.

These remarks were written in April of 1828. One month later Mickiewicz wrote the same friend another letter trembling with enthusiasm. At last he had come across a model for the new drama:

"Run at once to a bookshop, ask for, buy, pick up and read a French work under the title *Les Soirées de Neuilly* . . . They are dramatic scenes, in my opinion the most interesting and poetic work of our epoch; they may even be epoch-making for dramatic art, at least they announce a fully new form, different from the Greek and the Shakespearean, a form truly of our century, the most suitable for contemporary events."

Les Soirées de Neuilly was a two-volume collection of "dramatic and historical sketches" published in 1827 under the pseudonym of de Fongerey by two Frenchmen, Cavé and Dittmer. They dealt with contemporary events or events from the recent social and political past. They were of topical interest, and although they at first enjoyed considerable popularity—they ran through a full four editions—with time, they fell into oblivion, and it cannot be said that they left any imprint on modern French drama. But, as often happens with great writers, Mickiewicz read into that French collection some latent possibilities for the new dramatic form which was preoccupying him so much. Several features of *Les Soirées de Neuilly* must have appealed to him: the daring of putting current

*He was at that time approaching the age of thirty, an advanced age for a romantic.

political events and living people on the stage, their biting satirical tone, their open form, and their disregard for traditional dramatic conventions.

Four more years were to pass before the impulse given by the French collection could mature into a new drama. In Dresden, in the summer of 1832, Mickiewicz produced that drama writing in the white heat of a feverish poetic activity which came in the wake of a great national disaster, the military defeat of 1831 and a new wave of persecutions, much more oppressive than anything hitherto attempted by the Tsarist régime.

The Mickiewicz of 1832 was a different figure from the young author of *Forefathers*, Parts Two and Four. He was now, first of all, a fully-fledged romantic as well as a man who embraced a set of mystical, messianic beliefs. In the course of history he had come to see the hidden hand of God leading his nation, the chosen nation, through great tribulations to a future of splendour and greatness. And he was no longer a youth struggling for recognition but the leading and highly acclaimed poet of his generation. The previously written poem *Konrad Wallenrod*, in which Mickiewicz had wrestled with the problem of the fight for independence against an overpowering enemy, had made him the idol of the young, the militantly patriotic and the impetuous. It was interpreted as a call to arms in the face of all odds, and thus contributed to the outbreak of hostilities in 1830. It had accordingly earned him the reputation of a national poet, a leader in the national cause. Nor was his greatness recognized by Poles alone. In his exile in Russia he was hailed as great poet by leading writers, including Pushkin. His triumph in Russia was mightily aided by his gift for improvisations which tremendously impressed both Russian and Polish audiences. There were, of course, itinerant improvisators who performed in Russia as elsewhere at that time, but there were none to rival Mickiewicz in combining the gifts of an improvisator with those of a great artist in cold print. In the light of his mystical conversion, which occurred during his stay in Russia as well, he saw his gift for improvisation as a supernatural phenomenon, a sign that he was the chosen vessel, the national bard, the poet-prophet.

Thus, the new drama was conceived as a prophetic work. It is, first of all, prophetic in the literal sense, since it seeks to show God's hidden hand behind the flow of tangled and, on the surface, senselessly cruel historical events. Mickiewicz does not shrink even from predicting the future course of history, nor indeed from announcing the glorious messianic future of the now suffering Poland. The drama is prophetic as well in the sense that it tells of poet-prophet, of the birth of the prophetic calling in the prisoner-poet under the pressure of harrowing experience on the one hand and of a stirring feeling of superhuman spiritual might on the other. It is also the drama of the paradoxes inherent in such a vocation. One of these is the clash between the prophet's boundless spiritual might and his utter helplessness in the field of action, when countering human injustice and suffering; another is the conflict between humility as precondition to the fulfilment of the prophetic calling, and the inordinate hubris arising from the consciousness of having been elevated high above the station of other human beings.

These paradoxes are stressed by the juxtaposition of the two prophetic protagonists of the drama, the young poet Conrad and the elderly Friar Peter. Their relationship is one of great complexity. In one of the senses, it might be said to represent the contrast between pride and humility, between revolt and submission to God. But it also exemplifies relationship between the catechumen and his spiritual director. Conrad is an "impure" prophet; he displays a luciferic pride; and yet the saintly priest is only John the Baptist paving the way for the Saviour.

The drama appeared in Paris in 1832 as *Forefathers*, "Part Three." It was thus considered as a continuation of the previous dramatic attempt. We would, however, by no means be justified in viewing it as the missing link between the previous parts, Part Two and Part Four. It is a new drama, different in subject-matter and scope from the earlier one. It is probable that, at that stage, Mickiewicz had simply wearied of his old numbering game and that he wanted to tell the reader that the drama published in 1832 is the third part after the two published in 1823.

The new drama shares with the earlier one an underlying

spiritualistic creed for which the forefathers folk rite becomes an emblem. There is another, more personal, link between the two dramas as well. Part Four was a highly stylized projection of a personal crisis brought about by an unhappy love affair, basically an autobiographical drama. The new drama deals with another spiritual crisis, this one connected with the awakening of the prophetic consciousness, with the tangled knot of its splendid potentialities and fearful responsibilities. The crisis is presented as another turning-point in the poet's spiritual life; it is a spiritual rebirth. Thus the protagonist of Part Three is and is not identical with the protagonist of Part Four. The ambiguous relationship between the two is symbolized by a change of name in the prologue scene. The unhappy lover Gustav takes the name of Conrad, that of the protagonist of the poem *Konrad Wallenrod*. Like Wallenrod he assumes the part of a leader of his nation.

Mickiewicz projected that new crisis into the period of his imprisonment in Wilno in 1823-1824. He was arrested in October of 1823 together with some young alumni and students of Wilno University, as well as some secondary-school pupils. All these young people were accused of an anti-Russian conspiracy. The persecution had been instigated in order to put an end to the flourishing Polish schools of the Lithuanian territory which had been incorporated into Russia in 1795, and to compromise the curator of the school district, Prince Adam Czartoryski, Tsar's former friend and minister of foreign affairs. It was organized by the Prince's enemy, Senator Nicholas Novosiltzoff ("The Senator" of the drama) with the compliance of some subservient elements in the faculty ("The Doctor" and Pelikan of the drama, the latter appearing there under his proper name).

All that the investigating committee was able to establish against Mickiewicz and the group of his friends was that in 1818, while students at the University, they had founded a confraternity called the Society of Philomaths. The Society was clandestine for the simple reason that no students' organization whatsoever was tolerated at the University. Its aims, however, were not political but self-educational, literary and moral. The investigating committee was unable to unearth any serious political conspiracy; it

was nonetheless bent on proving that it had been right in its accusations. Some of the younger boys who had been found guilty of more or less childish patriotic gestures received extremely severe punishments: hard labour and many years of service in the ranks of the Russian army. The Philomaths, including Mickiewicz, were found guilty of "spreading unreasonable Polish nationalism by means of their learning." They were deported to central Russia where they were put at the disposal of the minister of education.

Mickiewicz had been "born in bondage" three years after the last partition of Poland, a Russian subject. A high-strung, patriotic youth, he was acutely aware of this bondage. But until October of 1823 the Russian rule did not considerably affect his personal life. In the early years of his reign Alexander I had entertained the idea of restoring the old Polish Commonwealth, Lithuania included, under his sceptre. Thus, a number of Polish institutions were left intact; gentry privileges were respected, instruction continued in Polish without any attempt at Russification, and the style of life of the Polish population remained to a large extent similar to that of the old, independent Poland. An upsurge in Russia of national feelings which came in the wake of Napoleonic wars caused the Tsar to abandon this policy. The persecution of the youth of Wilno was a result of that upsurge.

The persecution made of Mickiewicz a deportee, a national martyr and a political rebel. Through it, he came to experience the arbitrariness and brutality of a rule that was not only foreign but despotic as well. It hardened and embittered him. Later on, in the wake of the subsequent disaster of 1831, the Wilno persecution acquired in his eyes the character of a symbol of the national martyrology, a symbol the more fitting into his new mystico-messianic ideology since it involved the persecution of people who had not committed the transgressions they were accused of, and since its most cruelly afflicted victims were young boys, "children." Such innocent victims became in Mickiewicz's eyes a pledge for the future greatness of reborn Poland.

In *Forefathers*, Part Three, Mickiewicz recreates the history of these persecutions in dramatic form. On one plane Part Three is a drama-reportage. In it Mickiewicz writes of contemporary people,

some of them under their proper names and most of them still alive. The style, as befits a drama-reportage is realistic up to a certain point. The young people in the prison scene may hardly be seen as the symbol of national martyrdom. They are characters of flesh and blood who face their persecutions with a sort of grim humour; they crack jokes, refer to different circumstances of their lives, and are sharply individualized. The whole scene is a vivid evocation of something actually experienced. The persecutors of "The Senator" scene are depicted with a savage passion tending in effect towards the grotesque. But they, too, are true to life; in fact, the actual prototypes of Mickiewicz's protagonists were easily recognizable for the poet's contemporaries—and were intended to be recognizable.

This is, however, only one facet of the drama. Drama-reportage turns out to be at the same time a national mystery play. Later, in his Parisian lectures, Mickiewicz would scornfully reject modern drama which he characterizes as "limited to drawing rooms and boudoirs" and which represents, he thinks, a sad decline of the genre; he would speak in glowing terms of medieval mystery plays which had presented in dramatic terms not only earthly events but Heaven and Hell as well. Part Three is a modern version of such a mystery play. The supernatural forces of good and evil are involved; the trial of a handful of young people is presented as part of a cosmic battle; there are hints of parallelism with the cycle of Christ's birth, crucifixion and resurrection; the drama's vistas extend vertically from Heaven to Hell and horizontally into distant future. All this gives the events of the drama a certain hallucinatory character and creates a tremendous emotional impact. Part Three contains no dramatic plot in the traditional sense of the word. There is, however, the feeling of a stupendous significance of what is going on, and this feeling as well as a sense of strong and mysterious links between disparate events give the play a unique dramatic momentum of its own.

Romantic poetic drama—witness plays like *Manfred* or *Prometheus Unbound*—was fond of paradigmatic figures and of discussions of ultimate questions. But its atmosphere as a rule was somewhat rarefied, and its characters, somewhat abstract. Sublime

though they may appear, we cannot refrain from a certain impression that we are observing shadow-boxing. Mickiewicz takes as his subject matter a *fait divers* with its usual slough of casual, trivial details, and yet, in the crucible of his fiery imagination, he transforms that *fait divers* into a powerful myth of national suffering and redemption. This constitutes the uniqueness of his drama.

Like many works of Polish romantic literature, Part Three is preoccupied, even obsessed, with the national predicament. But the poet's national feelings, intense as they are, never degenerate into jingoism. They remain controlled by the awareness of the existence of higher, paramount moral criteria. In the "Senator" scene there appear two Russians: an Officer and Bestuzhev (a name, incidentally, which was known in the annals of the Russian revolutionary movement), who feel towards the corrupt Tsarist officialdom exactly as the Poles do. Their part in the scene is episodic: they express their views in a few lines and disappear from our purview. The introduction of these Russian figures is clearly intended to suggest that the condemnation of the Russian oppression of the Poles, fierce as it is, should not be extended to the nation as a whole. This view receives a more explicit statement in Friar Peter's vision. Here Russia is called the "fiercest of stupid hireling wolves." But the visionary also knows that Russia will amend its ways and that she will be forgiven by God.

Friar Peter's vision conveys the idea that the poet's own nation is a sort of modern reincarnation of Jesus Christ. A strange perversion of Christianity, stemming from a neurosis of defeat, this notion stands little chance of finding favour with non-Polish readers. But it is no less embarrassing for contemporary Polish readers. Apart from it, *Forefathers*, Part Three, as a drama of love of one's country, revolt against oppression and suffering, search of Christian meaning in history—is a literary work of universal appeal.

It is again an unfinished work. It was conceived as "Act One" of a larger whole. In the volume of 1832 it was followed by the so-called *Digression*, a sequel, here not translated, consisting of six narrative and descriptive poems which dealt with the Russian ex-

perience of an unnamed deportee, a Pilgrim whom we may identify as the protagonist of the drama, Conrad. The sequence is followed by a short poem *To My Moscovite Friends*, also not included here.

Mickiewicz considered *Forefathers* his life work, and was eager to continue it. He could not, however, recapture the inspiration of the few weeks in 1832 during which Act One was written, and nothing came out of his endeavours. Like the previous drama written a decade earlier, Part Three was left a torso. It nonetheless bears the clear imprint of a masterpiece. Moreover, its free and open composition, its lack of any traditional type of a plot allow us to accept it on its own right: a piece of splendid poetry, it represents a highly original venture into a new dramatic structure as well.

Because, it should be stressed again, *Forefathers*, in both of its versions, is not a kind of *Lesedrama*, a piece of poetry written in the form of dialogues and monologues not, however, intended for a stage production. It is true, when Mickiewicz was writing his *Forefathers*, the earlier as well as the later drama, he had not in mind any immediate production, and in fact, neither the one nor the other drama was ever staged during his lifetime. He was thinking instead of a theatre of the future with greater possibilities than those that were offered by the Polish stage of his day, and later on, in 1843, he presented in a few bold lines his ideas about the monumental theatre of the future. It is owing to this happy freedom from the constraint exerted by the theatrical conventions of the poet's times that *Forefathers* could deal so cavalierly with the traditional dramatic technique and, at the same time, be so pregnant with new theatrical possibilities. It was a seminal work that invited other romantic poets to perform bold experiments with dramatic form. When in our times the drama found, in Leon Schiller, a producer equal to his task, the result was a truly great production, one of the landmarks in the history of the Polish theatre.

Unlike *Pan Tadeusz*, *Forefathers* had hitherto little luck with English translators. One of its scenes, the Improvisation scene from Part Three, appeared in English as early as 1838. The English rendering was due to Giuseppe Mazzini, a great Italian Risorgi-

mento leader, but not necessarily a great English poet. A few fragments were translated at later dates. In 1944, there appeared a volume of *Poems* by Mickiewicz translated by various hands and edited by G. R. Noyes which contained Part Two and Part Three. The translation, generally accurate as to the meaning of the text and provided with good notes, unfortunately falls flat as poetry.

The present translation by Count Potocki of Montalk of Parts One (or, rather, *The Spectacle*), Two and Three appeared initially in small private editions in 1944 and 1945. Part Four appears here for the first time. Thus, the present translation is the first to render in English all the strictly dramatic scenes of *Forefathers* (with the exception of one scene from Part Three which the translator has omitted). It is also the first translation which the reader can enjoy as true poetry.

Cambridge, Mass.

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Mickiewicz's drama has now a long and varied theatrical career and has been differently interpreted by many—if not all!—more ambitious Polish producers. While experimenting with the text they were free to underline certain passages and emphasize (or eliminate) others. The *Forefathers* could therefore be presented either as a mystery play or, as a political drama.

The postwar Polish productions of the *Forefathers* staged in highly elaborated décors and with a cast consisting of the best actors—but rather cautious in the selection of texts—drew large and enthusiastic audiences to the theatres. But in 1968, when the climate of protest spread all over Eastern Europe, an outspoken version of the *Forefathers* staged in Poland by Mr. Dejmek, provoked a series of widespread and meaningful protests and manifestations. Evening after evening the audience acclaimed in turn several passages containing references to the lack of freedom, Russian oppression, the attitude of the authorities towards youth in revolt (patriotic in this case!). Staged in the sultry atmosphere of today's Poland the *Forefathers* proved to be a topical and

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 A certain being overhead who never
 Thee from its sight of eyes doth lose or sever
 And wants to visit thee in human form,
 If thou, to the oath thou gavest, wilt conform.

GUSTAV

Good God! What can this mean? Don't touch me ever!

(This is apparently all that is extant of Part I.)

PART III

LITHUANIA

To the sacred memory of Jan Sobolewski, Cyprian Daszkiewicz, Felix Kolakowski, my school-fellows, gaol-mates, and fellow-exiles; who were persecuted for their love of their Fatherland, and died of longing for their country, in Archangelsk, Moscow and Petersburg, martyrs of the national cause.

FOREWORD

For half a century past Poland presents to our view on the one hand such continual, untiring, pitiless cruelties of tyrants, and on the other such unbounded devotion on the part of the people and such stubborn endurance, as has not been seen since the times of the persecutions of Christianity.

It seems as if the kings have a Herod-like presentiment of the appearance of a new light on the world and of their own imminent fall, whilst the people believes ever more strongly in its own rebirth and resurrection.

The annals of martyred Poland embrace many generations and a countless multitude of sacrifices; bloody scenes take place on all sides of our land and in foreign countries.—The poem, which we now publish, comprises a few small sketches from that huge picture, a few events from the time of the persecution, as intensified by the Emperor Alexander.

About the year 1822, the policy of the Emperor Alexander, antagonistic as it was to all freedom, began to take clearer shape,

to settle down, to follow a definite direction. At that time universal persecution was increased against the whole Polish folk and became ever more violent and bloody. At that time Novosiltzoff, so memorable in our annals, came on the scene. He was the first who set out to demonstrate the instinctive, bestial hatred of the Russian government towards the Poles as a salutary and politic system, took it as the basis of his activities, and laid down as his object the destruction of the Polish nationality. At that time the whole space from the Prosna to the Dnieper and from Galicia to the Baltic was closed and run as one huge prison. The whole administration was perverted into one great engine of torture, whose wheel was turned by the Tsarevitch Constanty and the Senator Novosiltzoff. The systematic Novosiltzoff applied his torments first of all to the children and young folk, so as to exterminate in the very bud the hopes of the future generations. He set up the chief headquarters of torture in Wilno, the cultural capital of the Lithuanian and Ruthenian provinces. At that time among the youth of the University were various literary associations, whose aim was to maintain the Polish language and nationality, which were left to the Poles by the Congress of Vienna and by the privileges signed by the Tsar. These societies, seeing the increasing suspicion of the Government, broke up of their own accord, before any ukase made them illegal.

But Novosiltzoff, although he arrived in Wilno a year after the dissolution of these societies, pretended to the Tsar that he found them still active; and he made out their literary work to be a distinct revolt against the Government. He imprisoned several hundred young students, and set up courts martial under his own influence, to judge them. In the Russian secret procedure the accused have no means of defending themselves, for often they do not know for what reason they have been summoned. Even the depositions themselves are liable to be tampered with by the commission, which suits its own convenience in accepting some and entering them in the report, while rejecting others.

Novosiltzoff arrived with unlimited powers from the Tsarevitch Constanty, and was prosecutor, judge and executioner in one. He closed down several schools in Lithuania and made an order that the young people who had been frequenting them were to be regarded as dead from a civic point of view, and were not to be allowed to perform any civic functions nor to hold any office: nor yet to finish their studies in any public or private establishments. There is no example in history of such an ukase, forbidding education, and it is an original Russian invention. Apart from the closing of the schools, some dozens of students were condemned to the Siberian mines, to hard labour, or to the Asiatic garrisons; among their number were

mere boys, belonging to distinguished Lithuanian families. About twenty of them, who were already teachers and were studying at the University, were sent to permanent exile in the depths of Russia, as being suspected of Polish nationality.

Out of all this number only one has so far succeeded in getting out of Russia.

All the writers who have mentioned the persecution of Lithuania at that time agree that there was something mystic and mysterious in the affair of the Wilno students. The mystic, mild but unshakable character of Thomas Zan, the leader of the students; the religious resignation, brotherly concord and love of the young prisoners, the divine punishment which visibly reached the persecutors, left a deep impression on the minds of those who witnessed or participated in these happenings—and when they are recounted they seem to transport the reader back to ancient times, the times of faith and of miracles.

One who is well acquainted with the events of those times, gives the author his testimony that he has described conscientiously the historical scenes and the characters who acted therein, adding nothing and nowhere exaggerating. And why should he exaggerate? Would it be to reanimate hatred towards our enemies in the hearts of his countrymen? Or to awaken pity in Europe?—And what were all the cruelties of those times in comparison with what the Polish Nation is now suffering and which Europe is watching with indifference? The author's only wish is to preserve for the nation a faithful memorial of a few years from the history of Lithuania; he has no need to render the enemy repulsive in the eyes of his countrymen, who have known them for centuries—and as for the pitying nations of Europe, who wept over Poland as the indolent women of Jerusalem wept over Christ, our nation will speak to them only in the words of our Saviour: "Weep over yourselves, not over Me, ye daughters of Jerusalem!"

PROLOGUE

In Wilno, Ostrobramska Street—the monastery of the Basilian Fathers, converted into a prison. A prisoner's cell.

(The prisoner, leaning against the window, is asleep)

“But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the Councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you.”

(St. Matthew, Chapter X, v. 17.)

“Yea, and before governors and kings shall ye be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles (Pagans).”

(St. Matthew, Chapter X, v. 18.)

“And ye shall be hated of all men for my Name's sake; But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.”

(St. Matthew, Chapter X, v. 22.)

GUARDIAN ANGEL

Unkind, unfeeling boy!
Thy mother's daily prayers
And when on earth her cares
Guarded from all annoy
Your childhood, and from all snares—
Like the rose, angel whose charm
Blooming by day, by night,

Protects with scent the brows
Of drowsy babes, from harm
Of insects and of blight.

Upon thy Mother's prayer full oft
And by God's wish, did I
To thy small home descend:
Quietly in night's shadows soft
Descending on a beam, and nigh
Thy little bed would bend.

When thou wert rocked by night
I by thy passionate dream
Stood like a lily white
Bent o'er a muddy stream.
How oft I sickened of thy thought!
Yet in the evil thought's embrace
As in the ant-hills grains are sought
Of frankincense, I sought for grace.

I take thy soul in hand
When first the good thought gleams,
And lead it to the shining land,
Eternity, and sing it hymns
Such as have hardly ever
Been heard by sons of earth, and then
After their sleep remembered never.
Of future happinesses when
I bore thee to the sky I sang,
You thought the heavenly chime and clang
Like songs at some great banquet rang.

Then I, the immortal child
Of Glory, took the shapes,
To scare and keep thee undefiled,
Of loathsome hellish apes.

And thou receivedst God's chastening,
As a savage the torture of the foe;
And thy soul in disquieting
Wonder awoke and woe:
Thus from oblivion's well of tears
All night thou drankest the lees,
And memories of higher spheres
Like a cascade, drewest to the deeps,
When underground it leaps
And draws down flowers and leaves of trees.

Then I wept for bitter care,
Nursing my face in my hands;
For a long time I did not dare
Return to the wished heavenly lands
Lest there thy anxious Mother probe
My thoughts of this sad globe,
And ask how thou at home dost fare,
Or what dream wert thou dreaming there?

PRISONER

(Awakes alarmed and looks out of the window.

—Dawn)

Calm night! When thou dost come, who questions thee
Whence thou hast come? And when thou sowest stars,
Who figures out from them thy future way?

"The sun has set," astronomers can see
From towers, and cry—but wherefore, none can say.
Shadows conceal the earth, and people sleep:
But why they sleep, to seek out no one dares;
Unconscious as they sleep, unconsciously
They wake; nor wonder at the Sun's most strange
But daily Face: for Light and Darkness keep
Their watch—but where the Chiefs who bid them
change?

And dreams? That hollow world, mysterious, still,
The spirit's life, is it not worth surmise?
Who measures its extent, or counts its times?
Who falls asleep alarmed, may laugh his fill
When he awakes. They say, the cursèd wise,
That dreams are only recollections, mimes.
Do I not know a memory from a dream?
Unless they say that prisons only seem!

They say that dreamt voluptuousness and pain
Is only the imagination's play:
Fools, for the rumour of imagination
They hardly know, and yet forsooth they deign,
To us, prophets and bards, to prate away.

For I have haunted there, and with elation
Better have measured the spaces of those plains,
And know, that past their boundaries, lie—dreams;
Sooner will day be night, delights be pains,
Than dream be memory, or visionary gleams
Imagination.

(He lies down, and then gets up again. He goes to the window)

Ah I cannot rest—
These dreams frighten and disturb my breast.

(He dozes)

NOCTURNAL SPIRITS

Black down, soft down, we spread and lay below
His head; sing low, and fright him not: sing low!

SPIRIT FROM THE LEFT

In gaol the night is sad; but in the town
Musicians clamour by the tables; yonder
Gay singers in their brimming glasses drown
All trace of care; there shining comets wander,
Comets with sparkling eyes and shining braid.
Whoever steers his vessel by their gleams
Falls sleepy on the wave mid charming dreams
And wakens shipwrecked on our shore—betrayed!

ANGEL

It was in answer to our prayer
God gave thee up, that thou mightest quail
And languish in thy foeman's lair.
Loneliness is the mistress of the wise—
Thou, in this lonely gaol
Like a prophet in the wilds
To wonder must not fail
Where thy great calling lies;

Nor in thy cell, elate,
To muse upon thy Fate.

CHORUS OF NOCTURNAL SPIRITS

God vexes us in daytime, but at night
Begins our fun; while idle fools are feeding,
The singers' songs and morals then grow light,
We devils teach them words. Whoever heeding
The early Mass from Church brings pious thought,
And has the taste of good words in his mouth—
The leech of Night sucks holiness from thought,
And serpent Night brings all good tastes to drouth.
Sons of the Night, let's sing above his bed,
And be his servants till he turn our slave—
Invade his heart, and run about his head:
May he sleep long—he will be ours, the knave.

ANGEL

In heaven and earth are many prayers for thee:
Earth's tyrants shall be forced to set thee free.

PRISONER

(awakes)

You, who your neighbours scourge, imprison, kill,
Smile all the day, all evening eat your fill,
Can you remember one dream of the night?
And if you do, interpret it aright?

(He dozes)

ANGEL

Thou shalt be free once more : we come with news.

PRISONER

(wakes)

Be free? I heard the news. And yet I seem
To think that God revealed it in a dream.

(Falls asleep)

ANGELS

Let's watch his mind and all its varying cues :
Among his thoughts the fighting has been hard!

SPIRITS FROM THE LEFT

Double the attack, devils!

SPIRITS FROM THE RIGHT

Double the guard!
Whether the good thoughts win, or the unclean,
Tomorrow in his speech and acts is seen;
Well may one moment in this inner strife
Decide a man's fate for the term of Life.

PRISONER

Freedom? I know not whence the news nor why,
But I know what Russian pardons signify!
The scoundrels take the fetters from our hands
And feet, to bind our souls in harsher bands.

I shall be exiled, among distant dangers,
To wander in a foreign crowd, mid strangers.
I am a singer—none will understand
Aught of my song, except its formless, bland
Rhythm and harmony. They have not taken
This weapon from me, scoundrels, but it's shaken
And broken in my hand. Though I'm alive,
For my country I'm as dead—what thoughts will thrive
Locked in the shadows of my brain, alone,
Like diamonds hidden in a dirty stone?

He gets up and writes on one side with a piece of coal:

D.O.M.
Gustavus
Obiit M.D.CCC.XXIII
Calendis Novembris

—and on the other side:

Hic natus est
Conradus
M.D.CCC.XXIII
Calendis Novembris.

(He leans on the window and falls asleep)

SPIRIT

Oh man, if you but knew, how great your power!
A thought in the head, a spark in a cloud, oft gleams
Invisible, collecting rain, that teems,
Makes thunderstorms, or brings the fertile shower—

If thou but knewest, Man, no thought of thine,
 But, like the massing elements in storms,
 Satans and angels wait to take their forms—
 According as thou strike in Hell, or Heavenward shine.
 But like a lofty, wandering cloud, you blaze,
 Yourself not knowing whither fall your rays!
 O men! Each of you could, locked up alone,
 By faith destroy and stablish many a throne!

ACT ONE

SCENE I

A corridor. A guard with a rifle is standing at some distance. Several young prisoners come out of their cells, holding candles. Midnight.

JACOB

Is it all right?

ADOLPHUS

The guards are drinking,
 Corporal is our friend.

JACOB

What's the time?

ADOLPHUS

It's midnight soon.

JACOB

But if we're caught, they'll give the corporal Hell.

ADOLPHUS

They'll see the lights. It might be just as well
 To snuff our candles. Then they'll never tell—
 They'll have to knock a long time at the doors,
 Then give and take the watchword—fetch the key,
 And cross a longish corridor, to see
 Our cells all neatly shut, and hear loud snores.

(They call the other prisoners out of their cells)

ZEGOTA

Good evening!

CONRAD

You here!

FATHER LWOWICZ

You too!

SOBOLEWSKI

I'm here as well.

FREYEND

I say, Żegota, let's go to your cell.
 He's a new novice to our monkish halls—
 He has a fireplace, too, it would appear.
 Besides, it does one good to see new walls.

SOBOLEWSKI

Good Lord, Żegota, how did you get here?

ŻEGOTA

But my cell's far too small for such a crowd.

FREYEND

I know—let's pay a visit to the bard—
 His has a wall against the church—the guard
 Can't hear so far, not if they listen hard,
 Nor even if we sing and yell out loud.
 I want to sing a lot today and gabble;
 In town, they'll think it's singing in the chapel:
 After all, tomorrow's Christmas. I've a few
 Bottles of vodka, friends . . .

JACOB

If the corporal knew . . . !

FREYEND

He's had a sip himself—he's a good Pole—
 His name is on the Legion's battle-roll.

The Tsar made him a Muscovite by force:
 He's the very best of Catholics. Of course
 He'll let us spend our Christmas Eve together.

JACOB

If they found out, I fear he'd meet foul weather.

*(They go into Conrad's cell, make a fire in the grate,
 and light their candles. Conrad's cell, as in the Prologue)*

FATHER LWOWICZ

Żegota, how did you come here? And when?

ŻEGOTA

They grabbed me at home, today. I was in the byre.

FATHER LWOWICZ

What, have you turned farmer? Or country squire?

ŻEGOTA

You'd think I was born to it. Oh, I wish you could peep
 At my pastures and byres, at my pedigree cattle and
 sheep.
 For I, who used not to know what was corn, what was
 hay,
 Am the keenest of Lithuanian farmers, they say.

JACOB

Did you expect it?

ZEGOTA

Well, not really, no.
 I'd heard about this trial long ago
 From Wilno, and my house is near the road:
 We saw the prisoners by the wagon-load,
 Flying towards Siberia. Every night
 The postman's bell filled the old folks with fright.
 If one of us at supper-time in jest
 Clinked on an empty glass the blade of his knife,
 The old folk went as pale as death, and my wife
 Trembled, thinking: Kibitka; Police! Arrest!
 But I wasn't so far involved in the tiniest plot—
 I didn't know even who was suspected, or what.
 I think it's all a money-making scheme—
 I expect they'll take down blarney by the ream,
 Then make us pay a forfeit, good and fat,
 And send us home.

THOMAS

You live on hopes like that?

ZEGOTA

We'll not go to the mines, if innocent—
 And what crime can they think out or invent?
 Why don't you speak? Please tell me—Please speak out!
 What are we charged with? What's it all about?

THOMAS

Novosiltzoff's come from Warsaw—that's the charge!
 You know his character—well, it's no wonder

He's out of favour with the Tsar—his plunder
 He's spent in drink and squandered by and large.
 His tradesmen stopped his credit, and in spite
 Of all his espionage, he could not find
 In Poland even a trace of treasonous blight.
 Therefore, the Senator made up his mind
 To visit Lithuania's virgin soil,
 And moved here with his General Staff of spies.
 He hopes to rob, to plunder, to despoil,
 Just as he did in Poland, and as well,
 To worm himself in the Tsar's grace again,
 By faking a conspiracy, to swell
 The innocent sufferings.

ZEGOTA

But we'll complain
 and prove our innocence!

THOMAS

Alas, in vain!
 A secret court, behind a bolted door,
 Won't even say what we're arrested for:
 There the accuser judges our defence!
 To have us sentenced he's determined; hence
 We'll be condemned. We've one sad project left—
 The only one of which we're not bereft:
 To sacrifice a few of us, who'll take
 The brunt for all the rest, and thereby slake
 The tyrant's thirst for blood. I was the chief
 Always in your society: I'm lief
 To suffer for you, and I feel I should.

Give me a few more brother-orphans, chosen
 From those who have no closer ties of blood,
 For whose loss fewest heart-strings will be frozen,
 Unmarried men, or older men, and save
 The young and needful from a Russian grave.

ZEGOTA

Then it's come to that?

JACOB

Just look how sad he's grown—
 Poor fellow—clearly he could not have known
 That he may never see his home again.

FREYEND

Jack had to leave his wife in labour pain,
 And yet he does not weep.

FELIX KOLAKOWSKI

Maybe he should.
 I'll tell his fate—a son, that's understood.
 I know a little about cheiromancy,
 And I can tell his future life, I fancy.

(He looks at Jack's hand)

If he is honourable he cannot fail
 To end up in Siberia or in gaol;
 Who knows, he'll find us here still, if he waits.
 I like sons—they're our future prison-mates.

ZEGOTA

How long have you been here?

FREYEND

How do we know?
 We have no calendars, we don't write letters;
 What's worse, we don't know when we'll leave our
 fetters.

SUZIN

In my cell there's a pair of wooden shutters;
 I can't distinguish dawn from twilight's glow.

FREYEND

Ask Thomas, he's the patriarch of woe.
 He fell in the net first, like the biggest trout—
 He came in first, he'll be the last one out.
 He knows who's here, and whence they came, and when.

SUZIN

Is that Thomas; I did not recognise him.
 It's true you did not know me well—for then
 Your friendship was so sought for by a host
 Of friends more intimate and enterprising—
 You did not notice me within the throng,
 But I knew all your work and what it cost;
 I knew you strove, I knew you suffered wrong;
 But I shall brag how well I knew you, now,
 And on my death-bed sigh: "I wept with Thomas."

FREYEND

I'm sure he'll thank you kindly for your homage.
 But why the sighs and tears? When he was free
 "Scapegoat" was written broad across his brow;
 In gaol he's in his element, you see.
 When he's at large, like cryptogamic fungus,
 He dries up in the sun, but in a dungeon
 Where we, like sunflowers, wither and grow dim,
 He blossoms out, and puts on weight—for sure,
 He's taken on a fashionable cure,
 The fasting cure. He's swollen from hunger.

ZEGOTA

(to Thomas)

Have they starved you?

FREYEND

They give us food all right,
 But you should see it. It's a curious sight.
 The smell's enough to fumigate the room,
 And mice and crickets deal an early doom.

ZEGOTA

Then how could you eat it?

THOMAS

I didn't the first week,
 At last I tried to eat it. I felt weak;
 And then I had, like after taking poison,

Pains in my stomach, aches, and pangs, and noises.
 To name the ills I had, I'm quite unable—
 There was no doctor by to write a label.
 At last I got up, and ate it again, and it seems
 This food is the very nectar of my dreams.

FREYEND

(with forced gaiety)

'Twas nothing but mirages that we basked in
 Outside—sure gaol's the only place to get
 Secrets of food, and comfort's final art.
 I think it's all a habit for my part.
 Once long ago a Lithuanian met
 A devil, or a man from Pinsk, and asked him:
 "Why do you sit in the mud?"—"It's just a habit."

JACOB

This habit takes acquiring, brother.

FREYEND

Damn it,
 That's the whole art of it—you'll do it yet.

JACOB

I've been here now eight months—it hurts as sore
 As when I came in first—and maybe more.

FREYEND

Why, Thomas is so used to life in gaol
 That fresh air makes him giddier than ale.
 He's got used to not breathing—likes to stay
 Inside his murky cell the live-long day :
 And if they drive him out, his stretch will pay—
 He'll never need to spend his cash on drink,
 For he'll get tight on fresh air in a wink.

THOMAS

I'd rather suffer hunger, illness, dearth,
 The cat, or worse than the cat, the third degree—
 I'd rather be a corpse beneath the earth,
 Than have you here to keep me company.
 The scoundrelly rogues! Just think what they will save,
 Digging us all into one common grave.

FREYEND

Do you mean to say you're going to weep for me?
 What use I am is more than I can see.
 In war-time, yes—I'm not bad in a scrap—
 I could give some Cossack pates a nasty rap—
 But not in peace-time. What would be the use
 If I should live a hundred years to curse
 The Muscovites with torrents of abuse,
 Then trundle gravewards in a peaceful hearse?
 I'd be a good-for-nothing all my days,
 Like powder or new wine, if I were free;
 And now that I'm shut up in gaol, you see,
 I'm like the bottled wine, the loaded gun.

I would have frothed away like wine in a bowl,
 Or flared like powder in an open hole :
 But now what thoughts my countrymen will cherish :
 "Look how the noblemen of Lithuania perish !
 Just wait, you murdering Tsar, you Russian King!
 For such as I, Thomas, would gladly swing
 To make your lifetime longer by one breath,
 Since such as I am, only by our death
 Our Fatherland can ever serve or save.
 To raise you from the dead, I'd die ten times,
 Or Conrad, solemn lord of mournful rhymes,
 Who tells the future like a gipsy knave.

(To Conrad)

Thomas says you're a poet—believe me, I
 Love you : you too are like a flask of wine,
 Pouring out fire and song and feelings fine—
 We drink you up, while you yourself run dry.

*(Takes Conrad by the arm and wipes the tears from
 his own eyes)*

(To Thomas and Conrad)

You know I love you : there's no need to shout
 Or weep; so brothers, dry your eyes. For once
 I get all soft and slobber like a dunce,
 I'll spoil the tea and let the fire go out.

FATHER LWOWICZ

This isn't fair to our new friend, it's true.

(Pointing to Żegota)

It's a bad sign to weep on recruiting day,
And don't we get enough of silence, pray?

JACOB

Is there no news from town?

ALL

No news?

FATHER LWOWICZ

Nothing new?

ADOLPHUS

They've cross-examined Jan. He spent an hour
In town, but as you see, he's looking sour—
He doesn't feel like talking.

SOME OF THE PRISONERS

Tell us, quickly.

JAN SOBOLEWSKI

Today they've sent away twenty *kibitki*
To Siberia, full of students.

JACOB

Who's been taken?
My brother?

JAN

All were sent, I saw them go.

JACOB

All of them? Are you sure you're not mistaken?
My brother, too?

JAN

All of them, more's the woe.
I asked the sergeant, coming back from Court,
To let me watch. He did, though time was short.
I stood by the Church columns, heard the song
Of Mass, and saw the congregation throng.
Suddenly, out the crowd of people pours
Toward the gaol—I glanced in through the doors—
So bare the pews, that I could see quite well
The priest with chalice, altar-boy with bell.
The people stood immobile round the gaol:
Right from the gates to the square in their double rows
Stood the armed soldiers, as at great State shows;
The Kibitkas in the middle. Proud, on his horse,
The Chief of Police; and you could tell, of course,
What a great triumph this great hero bids,
For the icy Tsar—that conqueror of kids!
The drums roll out, and the great portals ope—
Guarded by troops, with bayonets at the slope—

Poor starving boys, their heads like convicts' shaved,
 Neglected, and their feet with chains entraved.
 Poor lads! I heard the youngest one complain—
 A ten-year-old—he could not bear the chain,
 And showed his naked leg with blood a-spatter.
 Up rides the Chief, and asks, What is the matter?
 Humane, in person he'll investigate:
 "Ten pounds," he says, "the regulation weight."
 Then came Janczewski, uglier through trouble,
 Darker, thinner, and yet strangely noble.
 Last year a small boy frolicsome and fair,
 Now like that Emperor, with sombre air,
 Yet dry, serene, from Saint Helena's cliff,
 So looks he from his gaol-cart, proud and stiff.
 Thus did he seem his fellows to beguile
 And bid the big folk farewell with bitter smile
 Yet gentle. "It hurts not much," he seemed to say.
 Just then methought he turned his eyes my way:
 He did not mark the sergeant by me stand,
 And waved, congratulations to afford me—
 Then suddenly all eyes were turned toward me;
 The sergeant pulled me back to hide, but I
 Would not, clung closer the Church column by,
 I kept my eye on that prisoner beloved:
 He saw them looking at his chains and sobbing—
 Then rattled them, as if to say: "They're nothing!"
 They started up the horse—the *kibitka* moved—
 He raised his hat, called loudly to the host
 Three glorious times: "Still Poland is not lost!"
 They fell on the crowd—but his hand, raised in that
 manner
 To Heaven, his black hat like a funeral banner,

That head, by shameless tyranny made bald,
 Proud and undaunted doth from far proclaim
 To all the world his innocence, their shame,
 Stands o'er the background of black heads that swarm
 Like a dolphin leaping, herald of the storm—
 That hand, that head my vision have enthralled,
 And will be in my thoughts—there they will show
 Where virtue is, and whither I should go!
 If I forget them, God in Heaven, Thou
 Forget me too!

FATHER LWOWICZ

Amen.

ALL THE PRISONERS

We join the vow!

JAN SOBOLEWSKI

Meanwhile some other gaol-carts passed along
 Proceeding one by one, a sorry throng.
 Through all the huddled crowd and troops my gaze
 Discerned but faces white with corpse-like glaze.
 And in that crowd did such a silence reign
 I heard each pace, I heard each clanking chain.
 People and army feel such things inhuman are,
 But they keep silent, for they fear the Tsar.
 The last boy seemed to struggle, but in truth,
 Too weak to walk, he screened his eyes, poor youth,
 Came slowly down the stairs, and then his strength

Gave out, he fell, and lay there, all his length.
 'Twas Wasilewski, who was with us here.
 They knocked him about at the Court so much, I fear,
 That hardly a drop of blood was left in his face.
 A soldier stepped out, picked him from the place,
 Carried him into the cart kindly, a sly
 Hand wiped away the tears from his eye.
 Poor Wasilewski did not drag or weigh,
 But fell to earth as straight and stiff as clay;
 And when they picked him up, he stuck like a post,
 Like Christ on the soldier's back, with his arms crossed,
 When taken down from the Cross, eyes white and wide.
 The people opened their eyes and mouths, and a tide
 Of deepest sighing rose from underground—
 From the breasts of a thousand folk it swelled around,
 As did all groaning graves as one resound.
 That moan was drowned with roll of drums, and feet
 Stamping: "Slope arms! Quick march!"—and then the
 street
 Saw the last gaol-cart leave at lightning speed.
 The prisoner was invisible indeed—
 Protruding from the straw a corpse-like hand
 Seemed to be waving Good-bye to his land.
 The kitbitka passed through the crowd at the church
 door,
 And, as the young dead body passed before,
 The altar-bell rang out that very moment—
 I looked in the empty Church and saw the omen,
 The priest's hand raising up the Body and Blood,
 And I prayed: "Lord, Who in the courts of Pilate stood,
 And poured out innocent Blood for the world's good,

Take this child-victim from the Tsar's courts sent,
 Neither so great nor holy, but as innocent!"

(Long silence)

JOSEPH

I've read of ancient wars. In those wild times,
 They write, that war was waged with frightful crimes:
 They burned the very forests to the ground
 And even the crops for many a league around;
 The Tsar is worse, Poland he seeks to bleed,
 For he gathers up and takes away the seed.
 Satan himself has taught him to destroy.

KOLAKOWSKI

And gives the Tsar first prize, his school's top boy.

(A moment of silence)

FATHER LWOWICZ

Brothers, our comrade lives for all we know;
 God knows, and may reveal it some day so.
 I, as a priest, pray; and sincerely suggest
 You should say Paternosters for his rest.
 What Fate the morrow brings us, who can tell?

ADOLPHUS

For Xavery, say paters, Priest, as well,
 Before they got him, he blew out his brains.

FREYEND

Stout fellow! Many a feast he shared with us,
But when it came to sharing woes and pains,
He quit the world in haste, without a fuss.

FATHER LWOWICZ

And for him, too, some prayers we should offer.

JANKOWSKI

I fear your faith but makes me laugh, good Father.
Now, what if I'd been worse than Turk or Tartar,
Or even a thief, a spy, a highway robber,
A Prussian official or a Tsarist jobber?
I shouldn't bother for God's wrath too soon—
We're gaoled, Wasilewski's dead, and the Tsar's on his
Throne!

FREYEND

I'm glad you've sinned for me; I'd have said the same;
But let me breathe, I fear I've gone all tame;
Hearing these tales, a man has gone quite daft.
Heigh, Felix! Cheer us up! We need your chaff!
In Hell, if you liked, you could make the Devil laugh.

SEVERAL PRISONERS

Felix must sing and talk—Hear, hear! That's fine—
It's Felix's turn. Freyend, pour out the wine.

ZEGOTA

I too to the local Parliament belong!
For me to hold my tongue would be quite wrong,
Though I came last. Joseph just spoke of grains,
'Tis meet the County Squire trot out his brains.
If the Tsar wants to take away all the seed of our garden
And bury it under the ground in the wastes of his
Tsardom—
Prices may rise, but none need go hungry. Our charming
Anthony's written about that system of farming.

ONE OF THE PRISONERS

Anthony who?

ZEGOTA

Do you know Gorecki's fable,
true story, rather?

SEVERAL

Which? Put your cards on the table.

ZEGOTA

When God drove sinners out from the Garden of
Wonder,
He did not wish to see men die of hunger.
He told His angels to prepare some wheat,
And spread it round the paths of human feet.
Then Adam came, and spied them warily,
And left, not knowing what their use could be.

At nightfall came a Devil: "Not in vain,"
 He wisely said, "has God thrown round this grain.
 There must be some great hidden power in them—
 Hide them, ere man work out the theorem."
 He made a ditch with his horn, put the grain in, and
 spat,
 Covered it up with his hoof and stamped it down flat.
 Proud to have spoiled the Lord's designs, he leered,
 And laughed aloud, and jeered, and disappeared.
 But to his great astonishment, in Spring,
 Rose grass and flowers and every growing thing!
 You who came out from Russia's icy night,
 Who call mere cunning "wisdom," mere rage "might"—
 You find our faith and freedom, dig them graves
 To cheat the Lord—but cheat yourselves, vile slaves.

JACOB

The tale will spread in Warsaw, but I fear
 Tony will spend in gaol another year!

FREYEND

Your fables are fine; but I prefer Felix's poems.
 What sort of verse are your tales with their fables and
 proems?
 They give us a pain in the head, ere their meaning we
 think.
 To Felix and Felix's poems—long life and long drink!
 (Pours him out some wine)

JANKOWSKI

And what of Lwowicz? He's saying his requiem—
 Listen! I'll dedicate my song to him.

(Sings)

Sing—sing, if you wish, in chorus,
 Jesus Mary!
 But before I shall believe that they're for us,
 Jesus Mary!
 They ought to be toward villains contrary,
 Jesus Mary!
 The Tsar over there is a monster hairy,
 Jesus Mary!
 Novosiltzoff right here is an adder,
 Jesus Mary!
 Until the Tsar breaks his neck from a ladder,
 Jesus Mary!
 While Novosiltzoff's drunk and merry,
 Jesus Mary!
 Of your love to us I shall still be chary,
 Jesus Mary!

CONRAD

Here! Of these names, while in your cups, beware!
 Long since, my faith has gone I know not where;
 The Saints of the Litany are all the same
 To me, but don't blaspheme with Mary's Name!

CORPORAL

(coming up to Conrad)

Thank God, sir, that one Name is left you yet!
 If a gambler loses all at wild roulette,
 While one gold piece remains, all's not reverse—
 He finds it on a lucky day in his purse—
 He puts it out at interest with God's blessing;
 His fortune when he dies gets people guessing.
 That Name's no joke, Sir—when I was in Spain
 I was in Dombrowski's Legion, then again—
 'Twas many years ago—some time I spent
 In Sobolewski's famous regiment—

SOBOLEWSKI

My brother!

CORPORAL

God! Eternal Peace betide!

Five shots together—so that brave man died!
 He was not unlike you. I was taking round
 Despatches from him to Lamego, a place where I found
 Masses of Frenchmen at dice or cards, or the Frogs
 Were squeezing their girls—all right on the road to the
 dogs,
 And slobbering too, as Frenchmen do when tight,
 Sing songs about things that one can't call right—
 Grey-bearded warriors sang the smuttiest verse.
 They put young chaps to shame. From bad to worse,
 They began on the Saints. Then they got still more
 shady,

Blaspheming with the Great Name of Our Lady,
 To whose Sodality as I belong.
 I'm sworn to keep her Holy Name from wrong.
 I tried persuasion: "Close your face, I say!"—
 And they preferred to let me have my way!

(Conrad falls a-musing: the others begin to talk)

But listen, Sir, what happened in the end—
 After the row we slept, all nicely canned—
 Deep in the night the trumpets sound alarm—
 The Frenchmen lift their hats with weary arm—
 And find no place to put their hats! Each noddle
 Was neatly sliced with a knife, for talking twaddle.
 The landlord rogue killed them like farmyard fowl—
 I look, my head's still there, both cheek and jowl!
 A card in my cap—from whom, I cannot say:
 "Vivat Polonus, unus defensor Mariae!"
 So you see, Sir, I live by that Name my livelong day.

ONE OF THE PRISONERS

Felix must sing! Pour him out tea or wine!

FELIX

The unanimous company decides, in fine,
 I must be gay. Though the heart break, a lay
 Felix will sing, and Felix will be gay.

(Sings)

I don't care what the verdicts are:
 The mines or chains or such preferment—

I'll always work, a faithful servant,
A servant of the Russian Tsar.

And down the mines I'll think and stammer:
"Within this iron, hidden far,
And in this gloom, there lies the hammer
Will make an axe to serve the Tsar."

And if I'm put on colonisation,
I'll take the daughter of a Tatar,
And maybe in my generation
There'll be a Palen for the Tsar.

But if the settlements should claim me
I'll plough the field and dig the row there,
And every year, now who will blame me,
If flax and hemp is all I sow there!

The flax is spun for some rich donor—
And when the threads all silvered are,
Maybe my flax will have the honour
To be a scarf to serve the Tsar.

(Chorus sings)

There'll be a Palen for the Tsar
Ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra.

SUZIN

Look, Conrad's wrapped in gloom, as if to sift
His list of sins in silence, for the shrift.
Felix, he didn't hear your piping—hush,

Conrad! First he went white, and now what blush!
Is he fainting?

FELIX

Be quiet. Why, we are used to these scenes—
I knew it would be like this. We know what it means.
Midnight's his hour. And now, my comrades, come,
And hear a better song. Felix is dumb.
But we need music: Freyend, where's your flute?
Play as of old, and we shall stand round mute,
Unless there be a chorus we should hum.

JOSEPH

(looking at Conrad)

Brothers! His spirit wanders out afar—
Perhaps he reads the future in some star,
Or greets some friendly spirits who, no doubt,
Inform him what the stars will bring about?
How strange his eyes! Fire flashes 'neath the lids,
The eye says naught, asks naught, and nothing bids:
No soul in them: they shine like watch-fires made
By hosts that have moved off at midnight shade,
Silent, on distant frays: the fires still burn,
Warming the camp—the army will return.

(Freyend tries out his flute)

CONRAD

(sings)

My song was in the grave, already cold—

But blood it smells, and from the ground it spies.
Hungry for blood, like a vampire, it grows bold—
And “Give me blood, blood, blood!” it cries.

So vengeance, vengeance, vengeance on the foe,
With God—or sans God if it need be so!

(The Choir repeats these two lines)

My song says: “Now an evening stroll I’ll take.
First, I must bite my brothers, fellow Poles—
In someone’s soul my claws I now must slake,
A ghost like me must drink the blood of souls.

So vengeance, vengeance, vengeance on the foe,
With God—or sans God if it need be so!

“And then I’ll drink the foeman’s blood in pails!
I’ll cut his body open with an axe,
I’ll fix his hands down and his legs with nails,
Lest he should rise and claim a vampire’s tax.

So vengeance, vengeance, vengeance on the foe,
With God—or sans God if it need be so!

“We’ll drag his soul to Hell, and there will we
Sit on it all together through the night,
And squeeze it of its immortality:
As long as it has feeling—we will bite!”

So vengeance, vengeance, vengeance on the foe,
With God—or sans God if it need be so!

FATHER LWOWICZ

Conrad, that’s a pagan song! Oh, stop!

CORPORAL

He looks awful! It’s a fiendish song!

(They leave off singing it)

CONRAD

(accompanied on the flute)

I am rising, flying, to that rock, to the top!
Already, high above the human throng
Among the seers . . .
From thence my eye-ball shears,
As ’twere a sword, the future’s muddy clouds,
And my arms, like gales, sunder those misty shrouds.
Now all is bright and clear: downwards I look
On the world’s future fate, its Sybilline book,
Down upon folks and fears!
Behold: the things to come, the following years,
Like small birds when they espy
Me, an eagle in the sky,
Look how they fall to earth, the whole band,
Running and burrowing in the sand!
After them, after them, heigh! my falcon eyes,
My lightning eyes.
After them, my claws!—I have them, I seize the
prize!
What’s that? What’s that bird that rose and spread
its wings,

Challenges me with its eye, and shields all fleeing
things?

His wings are black like thunderclouds, and wide
And long like a rainbow's arch from side to side:
He covers the whole heaven . . .

It's a gigantic raven! Who art thou?—Who art thou,
raven,
Who art thou?—I'm an eagle!—the raven gazes and
confounds my mind.
Who art thou? I am the Lord of Thunderbolts, you'll
find.
He's looked at me, and struck my eyes, as 'twere with
smoke
And doth my thought confound and cloak . . .

SEVERAL PRISONERS

What's he saying?—What?—See, he's looking white!
(They take hold of Conrad)
Calm yourself! . . .

CONRAD

Hold off! I've dared the raven to a mortal fight!
I'll disentangle my mind's maze, complete my song . . .
(He sways)

FATHER LWOWICZ

Enough of these songs!

OTHERS
Enough!

CORPORAL

Enough! God guard from wrong!
There's the bell! Did you hear it? They're doing the
rounds!
Put out the light, get back.

ONE OF THE PRISONERS
(looking out of the window)

We're out of bounds . . .
Conrad's fainted—alone in his cell, without a light!
(They all flee.)

SCENE II

IMPROVISATION

CONRAD
(after a long silence)

O lonely Poet! What's a singer to the throng?
Where is the man who wholly understands my song,

Whose vision scans the beams it rays on every side?
 Him who would tax his voice for others, woe betide!
 His tongue belies his voice, nor voice his thoughts can
 reach :
 Thought flies keen from the soul, ere it breaks itself on
 speech
 Whose words devour his thought, and on the thought
 they shiver
 Like earth trembling above a subterraneous river.
 Do men divine from the trembling earth, the currents
 scurrying,
 Or guess, whither they're hurrying?

✓ Feelings burn in my soul, they glow, they whirl apace,
 As blood through its deep invisible rapids throngs,
 And as little of my blood as people see in my face
 Do they guess the strength of my feelings in my songs.

My song, thou art a star beyond earth's lot,
 And earthly Sight, sent thee for messenger,
 Though he take glassy wings, reaches thee not :
 He only strikes against thy Milky Way;
 "These are Suns" he will aver;
 How vast their multitude he cannot say.
 Song, thou dost not need earthly eyes nor ears!
 In my soul's caverns flow,
 On her heights shine and glow.
 Like subterraneous streams, like stars beyond the
 spheres!

✓ Thou Nature, and thou, God! take heed, and hear
 Music and singing worthy of your ear!

✓
47. 7
6. 46

A Master, I!
 A Master, I reach out my hands to the sky,
 To the very heavens, and touch the stars on high—
 Upon those glassy stops I lay my hands :
 With my soul's free, sudden play
 I spin the stars my way,
 Out flow a million tones; and I alone
 Drew out each one, and know of every tone :
 Make them agree, and join them and divide,
 Till in their rainbow-chords and stanzas tied
 I pour them out in sounds and lightning bands!

I have removed my hands, laid them on the edge of the
 world,
 And the rings of harmony arrested where they swirled.
 I sing alone and listen to my song :
 Long, protracted, like the gales they throng,
 They winnow whole gulfs of the human name—
 With the storm they roar, they moan with sorrow,
 And the ages echo back the morrow,
 While all these sounds together play and flame.
 I have it in the ear, I have it in the eye;
 Like the wind when it rocks the billow;
 From its swish its flight I follow,
 Or in a dress of cloud espy.

Worthy of God and Nature such elation!
 My song is great, my singing is Creation!
 For such a song is strength : is more than strong.
 True immortality is such a song!
 I feel immortal, deathlessly create!
 What couldst Thou greater do, O God so great!

These thoughts myself from my own self I drew,
 In words embodied: flying they
 Themselves around the heavens strew,
 And roll about and shine and play,
 Already far: I feel with them,
 In all their charm I take delight,
 Caress their roundness; while my sight
 Calculates their speedy flight.

I love you, my prophetic children
 Oh my thoughts, my stars that shine,
 Oh my feelings, whirlwinds mine!
 I stand among you, like my children round me grown—
 You are all my own.

I have trampled you, poets all,
 All the wise men's names erased,
 And prophets whom the wide world praised!
 Had they walked hitherto 'mid children of their soul,
 And heard all praises, yea, and all acclaim,
 And felt it all and known it to be true,
 And kindled all the gleams of quotidian fame
 In rays upon their wreaths of every hue,
 Chosen from all the songs and crowns of praise
 From generations and from ancient days,
 As I feel today in this lonely night,
 Singing alone for my own delight,
 Alone for my own delight!
 Yes! I am tender, wise, strongly endowed!
 Never have I felt as at this hour:
 Today's my zenith and my height of power,
 Today I'll know if I'm highest, or merely proud;
 Today there is a moment set aside,

Today most strong, I stretch my soul's arms wide—
 The hour of Samson's pride,
 When the blind prisoner by the column mused aloud.
 Only as spirit I spread my wings—cast off the flesh—
 'Tis flight I need—
 From stars' and planets' axle-tree I speed—
 Thither, where Nature and Creator join their mesh.
 And I have them, I have them, I have that pair of
 wings!

They suffice! From West to East they spread alike.
 With the left on the past, with the right on the future
 I strike,

And on the rays of feeling Thee-ward fly
 And gaze into Thy feelings!

O Thou, of Whom they say that Thou dost feel on high!
 I'm here, I have arrived! Seest Thou my power?

Even to here my pinions lower!
 But I'm a man; down there's my mortal part;
 There I loved; in my country stays my heart.

Nor yet did that my mortal love repose
 Upon one single man, however sage,
 Like an insect in a rose,
 Nor on one family nor on one age;
 I love the entire nation! My arms embrace
 All its past and future generations,
 I pressed them to my bosom, all the race,
 As friend, as lover, husband, father;
 I wish to make them happy, raise them,
 And make the whole world praise them!
 I lack the means, and seeking it, came hither.
 I came armed in the whole might of thought,

That thought, Thy thunderbolts to earth which tore,
 Opened Thy deep seas and the planets' lore!
 I've that of which mere mortal folks give nought;
 That feeling, which within itself lies hidden,
 Volcano, which at times smokes words unbidden.

Not from the tree of Eden comes my power; not
 From knowledge of good and evil, is it got,
 Not from books nor tales nor dreams
 Nor yet from solving themes,
 No, not from magic schemes!
 I am creator born! I bore them—
 My powers spring from that same shrine
 Whence Thou, God, drewest Thine,
 Since Thou hast not passed o'er them.
 Thou fearest not Thy dissolution, nor I mine!
 Whether Thou gavest, or I took, a powerful eye—
 Thence whence Thine came—when I gaze on high
 In the hour of my strength, art the clouds
 meandering,
 And hear the song of birds in their wandering,
 Sailing on scarce seen wing, I do but will,
 And like a snare my vision holds them still.
 The flock, lamenting, chimes, yet till I say:
 "Depart" Thy storms have over them no sway.
 When I gaze with my soul's whole power upon a comet,
 It holds its place and dare not wander from it.
 Only base human kind
 With mean but immortal mind
 Serve me not, know me not, for they know neither
 Me nor Thee.

For means to deal with them I have come hither,
 Heavenward—see!

That power I have above my nature—God,
 I'd wield o'er human souls and labours:
 As I rule birds and stars thus with my nod,
 So would I govern them, my neighbours
 Not with weapons—arms beat off arms—
 Nor learning—it soon rots—
 Nor songs—too long in growing are their charms—
 Nor miracle—a noise for sots.

No, I would rule by the feeling that is in me,
 Rule all like Thee for ever secretly;
 What I desire, let them guess once for all,
 Do it, and find their happiness therein,
 And if they set themselves against it, then,
 Then let them suffer on and let them fall!

Let men be like as words and thoughts to me,
 From which, at will, I build my poetry!

They say, that such is Thy control . . .
 Thou knowest I starved not speech, did thought no
 wrong;

If Thou gavest me equal sway over each soul
 I would create my nation like a living song,
 And do a greater wonder than Thine Own;
 For what a happy song I would intone!

Give rule of souls! I so despise the absurd
 Dead form men call the world and praise,
 I've not yet tried whether my mere word

Might not that huge world-structure wholly raze;
But I feel within myself that if I steel,
Draw tight and eke illuminate my will,
I can put out a hundred stars, and light a hundred still!

For I am immortal. In creation's wheel
Are other such; but I have met no peer.
All Highest in the Heavens! I have sought Thee here.
Highest of those who feel in the vale of clay,
I've not yet met Thee, but divine: Thou art;
Let me meet Thee, feel Thine the higher part!
I desire power! Give, or else show the way!
I have heard of the prophets, I believe their sway
Over the soul, but I can do as they—
I desire power, such as Thou dost possess,
To rule souls as Thou rulest them, no less!

(Long silence)

(Ironically)

Thou keepest silence! I know now, I have seen Thee,
Such as Thou art, and how Thou rulest, ween Thee;
He was a liar, who Thy name "Love" did call;
For Thou art only wisdom, that is all!
By thought, not heart, keys of thy ways are bought:
Men find Thy armories, not by heart, but thought!
For only he, who toiled through books at length,
Through dead bodies, metals, numbers, speed—
He is the only man who doth succeed
To appropriate a portion of Thy strength;
He finds out poison, dust, and steam, and breath,
Finds gleams and smokes and war-like tools,

Finds legal systems and bad faith
For wise men and for fools.
To thoughts Thou has given over the world's use,
To hearts Thou leavest limitless abuse—
Thou gavest me the shortest life-time, reeling
With the most mighty feeling.

(Silence)

What is my feeling?
Ah, merely a spark!
What is my life-time?
A flash in the dark!
Yet, what is tomorrow's thunderbolt today?
Ah, merely a spark!
What the whole stretch of time men's books display?
A flash in the dark!
Whence comes the whole man—little world—oh,
whence?
From a mere spark.
What's death, that scatters my thought's affluence?
A second of dark.
While He held the world in His Breast, oh, what was
He?
Only a spark.
When He consumes the age of the world, what will it
be?
A flash in the dark.

VOICE FROM THE LEFT SIDE

I must ride astride
on his soul's pride.
What a steed!
Speed! Speed!
Gallop! Gallop!

VOICE FROM THE RIGHT

What a fury!
Let's shield him, surely,
let's screen his brow,
with our wings, now!

The moment and the spark, when prolonged, when
 Aglow, create and overthrow.
 Boldly! Let us extend the while, prolong,
 Boldly! Let us stir up the spark, blow strong!
 Now—all is right. I challenge Thee once more,
 Unveil Thy Soul quite kindly as before.
 Silent? Yet Satan's self Thou hast withstood?
 I challenge Thee for good!
 Despise me not: though single here I'm not alone!
 My heart with a great Folk on earth is kin,
 By me stands many an army, power, and Throne . . .
 And if I should blaspheme
 I'll give Thee a bloodier fight than the Lord of Sin;
 I challenge on the heart! He but with brains did scheme!
 I loved and suffered, grew in love's own leaven;
 When Thou far from me mine own bliss didst wrest,
 With my own hands I wounded my own breast—
 I never raised them against Heaven!

VOICE

I transform my charger
 into a larger—
 eagle whose wing
 on high doth swing!
 Fly!

VOICE

Oh, falling
 star of bliss!
 What fury appalling
 strikes thee far
 in the abyss!

Now my soul is incarnate in my land;
 My body has absorbed her soul.
 I and my country—am one whole!
 My name is "Million"—since, for millions, oh, alack!
 I love, and suffer the rack,
 I gaze on my poor land and feel
 Like a son whose father is bound on a wheel—

I feel for the whole nation's doom,
 Like a mother for the pains of the fruit of her womb—
 I suffer, whilst Thou, wise and gay, dost loom,
 Governest ever,
 Dost judge and sever—
 And they say, Thou errest never!

Listen! If that was true I heard with childish faith,
 When in this world below I first drew breath,
 That Thou lovest, and didst love the world Thou
 madest,
 A Father's kindness to Thine offspring gavest—
 If tender-heart was with the beasts Thou dravest
 Into Thine ark and from the flood-gates savedst,
 If heart is not a monster strangely born,
 Doomed not to live his days, nor Thou hast sworn
 Tenderness in Thy realms shall be called crime;
 If in a myriad crying "Help" Thou seest more
 Than an extremely complicated score—
 If Love has something in Thy world to make,
 And's not Thy mere numerical mistake—

VOICE

Eagle into hydra!
 I'll tear out his eyes there.
 On to the attack!
 Flame! Crack!
 Roar! Thunder!

VOICE

From the bright sun,
 Oh erring comet!
 Whither would'st run?
 Nothing can stem it!

Silent! I've bared to Thee my deepest heart.
 I implore Thee, give me power! A paltry part,
 Such as mere arrogance achieved of late—

→ With it, what happiness I will create!

→ Silent?

Thou wilt not give for heart, then give for brain!
 Thou seest I'm first of the human and angelic train
 And know Thee better than Thine own archangels do,
 Worthy, that Thou shouldst share Thy power in two.
 If I am wrong, then say so! Silent. I am right.
 You keep silence, trusting in Your armed might.

What thought breaks not, feeling may set alight
 And burn. Dost see my furnace, Feeling, swell?
 I gather it, to burn more fierce the while—
 I ram it down in my will's iron shell,
 I am the destroying cannon's projectile!

VOICE

Fire! Burn!

VOICE

Pity! Mourn!

Speak! For against Thy nature I will shoot!
 And if I don't destroy it to the root,
 I'll shake the entire space where Thy Kingdoms are,
 For I'll shoot out a voice through all creation,
 From generation unto generation,
 I'll scream,
 Thou'rt not the Father of the world, but . . .

A DEVIL'S VOICE

The Tsar!

(Conrad stands a while, sways, and falls down)

SPIRITS FROM THE LEFT SIDE

FIRST

Tread, seize!

SECOND

He still breathes.

FIRST

He's fainted—ere
 he wakes, we'll strangle him.

SPIRIT FROM THE RIGHT SIDE

Away! They pray for him.

SPIRIT FROM THE LEFT

You see, they drive us off.

FIRST SPIRIT FROM THE LEFT

Beast! Stupid! Dull!
 You couldn't help, to make him bellow louder!
 To peg him up the smallest fraction prouder—
 One extra word, and this head would be a skull.
 To be so close to this skull, and unable to kick it!
 To see blood come to his lips, and unable to lick it!
 Most stupid of devils, you've let him go at half-way!

SECOND

He's coming to . . .

PRISONER

My God, is this a time to pray and moan?
Let's lift him up and put him into bed.

FRIAR PETER

Put him down here.

PRISONER

There's a pillow for his head.

(He lays Conrad down)

I know all about it. Sometimes he gets crazy;
At first he'll sing, then afterwards he'll talk,
And next day he's all right, fresh as a daisy.
Who told you he's ill?

CORPORAL

I wish you would go for a walk,
And let Friar Peter help your friend with prayer,
For I know there was something wicked here.
When the guard went, I heard a row in this cell.
I took a look through the keyhole—I saw it well.
I know what I saw. I lost no time, but I ran
To my mate, Friar Peter—that good, pious man.
Look at this sick man—things are very bad.

PRISONER

I don't understand a word—I'll be going mad.

CORPORAL

Mad?—My Good Sirs, look out! You've a heap of
defiance
And eloquent talk on your lips, and your heads full of
science,
Yet such a wise head in the dust had to wriggle and
roam,
And from out these eloquent lips came forth white foam.
I heard what he sang—'twas beyond me—but still I
can vow
There was something strange in his eyes—something
strange on his brow.
Believe me, things are not going well with him now.
Myself, I was once in the Legions—yes, my hearts,
I took convents by storm, redoubts, and forts.
More souls leaving their bodies, I'll be sworn,
I've seen, than you've read books since you were born.
And it's no small thing to see how a man dies.
I saw priests butchered in the Prague's fair bowers—
In Spain I saw them thrown alive from towers.
I've seen wombs ripped from mothers, heard the cries
Of their dying babes on Cossack spears a-truss—
I've seen Turks die impaled, and French in the snow,
And what one sees when martyrs die, I know,
And what in the thief or bandit, Turk or Russ.
I've seen men shot, at the gun they boldly stare,
And no blind-folding kerchief will they wear;
But when they fell, I saw their fear, I swear,
Till then by shame or pride held in and bound,
Come out of the corpse and insect-like crawl round—
Worse than the fear a coward feels in battle,

Upon that man's dead brow is written plain
 How sore he sulked in fear beneath his prattle,
 Suffering for ever, while despising pain.
 And so, Sir, to my mind a dead man's look
 For the next world's his regimental book,
 And you can tell at once how he'll be placed,
 His rank or title, sainted or disgraced.
 Well, then, I don't like the look of this man's brow,
 Nor his eyes, nor his song, nor his disease. And now,
 Go quickly back to your cell, good Sir, I pray.
 Friar Peter and I shall watch by the bed till day.

(Exit prisoner)

CONRAD

An abyss—a thousand years—void everywhere—
 Still more—ten thousand thousand I can bear . . .
 To pray?—Prayer's not a scrap of use in this—
 And was there such a bottomless abyss?
 I knew not, but it's there . . .

CORPORAL

He's muttering charms.

FRIAR PETER

My son, underneath are the Everlasting Arms.

(To the sergeant)

Go out and watch. Don't let a soul come near:
 Till I come out, let no one interfere.

(Exit Corporal)

CONRAD

(starts up suddenly)

No!

He's not torn out my eye—my watch I keep,
 My eye is strong, though I lie dark and deep;
 I see thee, Rollison! Brother, what means this fall?
 Imprisoned, beaten, and all splashed with blood?
 God did not hear thee? Is despair thy mood?
 Seeking a knife, and beating head on wall;
 "Help!"

What God Himself withholds, can I supply?
 Would my strong glance destroy thee? Let us try.
 No—but my eye will show thee how to die;
 Thy window smash, jump, break thy neck, and lo!
 Fly with me in these dizzying deeps below!
 The abyss is better than earth's vale of tribulations:
 There are no brothers here, no mothers, tyrants
 nations—

Come hither!

FRIAR PETER

Thou unclean ghost, I know thee by thy poison!
 Most cunning of the whole Satanic foison!
 You've crawled into his lips to your own damnation.
 Once more in a deserted house you've crept—I'll
 Arrest you in the Lord's Name. Hideous reptile!
 Exorciso . . .

SPIRIT

Stop! Don't curse me—let me go!
 I'll go!

FRIAR PETER

You'll not leave till it please God so.
 The Lion of Judah here is Lord and King.
 You've set a trap for a lion—let's see how you'll fare.
 You've snared yourself in your own trap—poor thing—
 God's trapped you in this sinner like a snare.
 Within his lips I shall deal you a terrible blow—
 Liar, speak truth! For I command you so.

SPIRIT

Parle-moi donc Français, mon pauvre Capucin!
 J'ai pu dans le grand monde oublier mon latin;
 Mais étant saint, tu dois avoir le don des langues—
 Vielleicht sprechen Sie deutsch? Was murmeln Sie so
 bang?
 Cavalleros, rispondero Io—what's the matter?

FRIAR PETER

His words you're howling, hundred-tongued adder.

SPIRIT

C'est juste. Dans ce jeu, nous sommes de moitié;
 Il est savant, et moi, diable de mon métier.
 J'étais son précepteur et je m'en glorifie;
 En sais tu plus que nous? parle, je te défie.

FRIAR PETER

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy
 Ghost . . .

SPIRIT

Stop, stop, dear Father, stop, or else I'm lost!
 Priestie darling, why torment me in vain?
 Are you Satan, to love inflicting pain?

FRIAR PETER

Who art thou?

SPIRIT

Leviathan, Lucrece,
 Voltaire, old Fritz, Legio sum.

FRIAR PETER

What have you seen?

SPIRIT

A beast.

FRIAR PETER

Where?

SPIRIT

In Rome.

FRIAR PETER

He will not hear.
 My time is wasted. Let's return to prayer.

(He prays)

SPIRIT

But I'm listening.

FRIAR PETER

Where did you see the prisoner last?

SPIRIT

I told you, in Rome.

FRIAR PETER

You're lying thick and fast.

SPIRIT

Priest, on my honour, on my mistress' name,
 My jet-black girl, who clings so to my side!
 And do you know my lover's name?—False Pride!
 You don't take much interest, all the same—

FRIAR PETER

(to himself)

The spirits do not obey me—Let's make
 Acts of contrition, for our Saviour's sake.

(He prays)

SPIRIT

There's no need to go praying to the Lord,
 I'll go away myself of my own accord.

I admit I've bungled things, crawling within
 This soul—he pricks me like a hedgehog-skin.
 I've put him on inside out—it's a real disaster.

(The priest prays)

Though you're a simple friar, at work you're a master—
 To beat *you* at this game I've not a hope.
 Donkeys, they should have chosen you as Pope.
 In the Church stupidity's forward, like pillars of
 plaster—
 While they hide you in a corner, star of flame!

FRIAR PETER

Tyrant and flatterer, pompous in your shame,
 I wish you'd bite your breast as you writhe in the sand.

SPIRIT

(laughing)

Ho, ho! You're angry! You've stopped praying!
 That's grand!

And now once more *da capo*—I wish you saw
 Just what you look like brandishing your paw—
 Like a bear, catching mosquitoes—but he gets 'em.
 Well, enough of these quarrels—I know your power
 And wish to make before you my confession—
 I'll tell you the past, also the future hour.
 D'you know what they're saying about you in the whole
 town?

(The priest prays)

D'you know what'll happen to Poland centuries hence?

Do you know why the Prior wants to get you down?
 Or what Beast means in the Apocalyptic sense?
 He won't answer, he prays and pegs away,
 He's glued his eyes on me in a dreadful way.
 Priestie, why do you want to plague me, say?
 Am I the King of all the powers of Evil?
 I've done no harm. I'm only a plain devil.
 I only came here under Satan's orders.
 We can't explain to him or answer back.
 I'm just like other Bailiffs, Beaks, Recorders—
 The Bigwigs tell me to arrest some soul—
 I grab him, stow him away in a dark hole
 —And if it's hardly pleasant there, alack,
 Is it my fault? I'm only a blind tool—
 The tyrant writes, and so it has to be.
 D'you think I enjoy tormenting? It's misery.

Ah (*sighing*)

It's a sad thing to be so pitiful!
 Tormenting others, I torment myself—
 My poor heart nearly breaks, and all for pelf.
 Oft, when I tear the sinner with my claws,
 I wipe the tears from my eyes with tail, or paws.

(*The priest prays*)

D'you know you'll be beaten tomorrow, priest, like
 Haman?

FRIAR PETER

*In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.
 Ego te exorciso, spiritus immunde—*

SPIRIT

All right! All right! I'll tell you all (*in a whisper*) next
 Monday.

FRIAR PETER

Where's the unhappy prisoner wants to lose
 His soul? No answer? *Exorciso te . . .*

SPIRIT

I'll tell—I'll tell—because I cannot choose.

FRIAR PETER

Whom did you see?

SPIRIT

A prisoner.

FRIAR PETER

Which?

SPIRIT

A sinner.

FRIAR PETER

Where?

SPIRIT

In the second cloister.

FRIAR PETER

Which?

SPIRIT

The inner
Cloister at the Dominicans. There I saw
A sinner, who's damned. He belongs to me by law.

FRIAR PETER

You lie.

SPIRIT

He's dead already.

FRIAR PETER

You lie.

SPIRIT

He's ill.

FRIAR PETER

Exorciso . . .

SPIRIT

I'll sing, I'll dance, I'll tell.
But don't curse. Do I have to talk already?
You're strangling me—I'm out of breath—go steady!

FRIAR PETER

Speak the truth!

SPIRIT

The sinner's lying sick,
He's off his head, tomorrow he'll break his neck.

FRIAR PETER

You're lying.

SPIRIT

I've got a creditable witness—
Beelzebub. Torment *him*, prove his fitness,
But leave my poor innocent soul in peace.

FRIAR PETER

How can the sinner be saved?

SPIRIT

I wish you'd die,
You damned schoolmaster. I'll not tell, not I.

FRIAR PETER

Exorciso . . .

SPIRIT

Comfort will save.

FRIAR PETER

Indeed—
Speak plain—of what is he in need?

SPIRIT

My throat's getting sore. And so's my chest.

FRIAR PETER

Speak up!

SPIRIT

My Lord! My King! Give me a rest.

FRIAR PETER

Speak up, what does he need?

SPIRIT

My darling priest,
I won't tell. Spare me that, at least!

FRIAR PETER

Hurry up.

SPIRIT

Eh? He needs bread and wine.

FRIAR PETER

I understand: Thy Bread and Blood of Thine,
O Lord. Help me, that Thy Will may be mine.

(To the spirit)

Go, and take all thy wickedness away:
Whence thou didst come, go back, and prithee stay.

(Exit spirit)

CONRAD

Who's raising me? Friend, of the deeps beware—
Yourself you'll fall. We're flying through the air,
Like birds—I shine with rays—sweet scents surround
me.

Who raised me up? Good men and angels found me!
What pity made you search these depths and dangers.
Men? I despised men, and I knew not angels.

FRIAR PETER

Pray. The Lord's Hand has touched thee heavily.
Those lips with which, alas, thou hast offended
The Eternal Majesty, have evilly
With a fiend's heinous utterances blended
With a fiend's foolish words—the direst menace
And sorest woe for wise men's lips to weave.
Would that they might be counted thee for penance
And would thou might'st forget them, by God's leave.

CONRAD

Already they are graven in Heaven, I ween.

To Bethlehem—yea, every man:
 The first to honour and to seek
 Eternal wisdom were the meek,
 To know eternal power, the weak.

FIRST ARCHANGEL

The Lord, when in His angels He perceived
 Conceit, and curiosity, and cunning,
 Forgave not those eternally conceived
 Spirits, and crowds of angels downward running,
 Fell from the Heaven like streams of starry rain—
 And daily Hellward likewise fall the vain
 Sciences of the pedants of the brain.

ANGELIC CHOIR

God to the small reveals
 What He from the great conceals.
 Mercy on the son of earth,
 Pity his state!
 He was among the great:
 Mercy on the son of earth!

SECOND ARCHANGEL

It was not curiosity that bade
 Him search into Thy judgments, no, nor Fame.

FIRST ARCHANGEL

He did not worship Thee, Great Lord, nor Thy dread
 Name!

He did not love Thee, Son of God, the world Who
 made.

SECOND ARCHANGEL

Yet he revered the Holy Name of Mary!
 He loved his nation, loved many, was not wary!

AN ANGEL

A cross, all made of gold,
 On King's crowns glistens bold,
 On bishops' bosoms shines like dawn, elate.
 Only the soul it cannot penetrate.
 Enlighten them, O God, their need is great!

ANGELIC CHOIR

We love mankind—their hearts we try to win:
 We long so much to be with them, our kin!
 Driven out by priest, professor, king,
 The simple human takes us in;
 All night, all day, for him we sing.

CHOIR OF ARCHANGELS

Raise his head. He'll rise from the dust, and reach the
 sky,
 And fall at the foot of the Cross of his own good grace!

BOTH CHOIRS

Peace to simplicity,
 Gracious humility!

O, servant humble, tried,
 With peace, with peace dost bless
 The puffed-up house of pride!
 Peace to the fatherless.

SCENE IV

has been omitted in the present translation.

SCENE V

FRIAR PETER'S CELL

FRIAR PETER

(who is praying, lying on his face)

O Father, what am I before Thy Face?
 But nothingness and dust. Yet for a space
 When I've confessed to Thee my nothingness,
 Though I'm but dust, I'll talk with God no less.

THE VISION

The tyrant's risen—Lord, the whole youth of this land
 Given into Herod's hand!
 What do I see? The long white roads of suffering go
 As far as eye can reach, through wilderness, through
 snow,
 All to the North! Thither, where all creation shivers,
 They flow, like rivers . . .
 They flow. Straight to an iron gate one white road rolls,
 And one like a stream, in subterraneous holes
 Vanishes underground. Along those roads the crowds

Of wagons hurry like wind-hastened clouds
 And all in one direction driven.
 Oh God! Remember that they are our children!
 Is it their fate to be thus driven forth,
 Oh God, toward the ever-frozen North?
 And wilt Thou let them die so young and tender,
 And utterly destroy our generation?

But look! A child untouched—grows up—is our
 defender,
 Saviour of our nation!—
 From a foreign Mother; His blood: heroes of yore,
 And his name shall be: forty and four.

Wilt Thou not deign, O God our Lord, to hasten
 His coming, and console my people?
 But no: our race must bear these woes, for woes
 Refine and chasten.

I see them, tyrannous bandits who have maimed
 My Fatherland! All Europe's come to scoff and
 quibble:
 "A tribunal!" thither the murderous mob
 Drag off the innocent one. As judges named
 Are heartless, crippled jowls, more fit to rob
 And kill than to be judges!
 Ah Lord, and now I see a cross . . . how long he must
 Bear it! Have pity, for Thy servant is but dust!
 And lest he fall by the wayside, give him strength!
 The arms of the cross span Europe with their length—
 From three dried-up nations, like three hard trees hewn.

They gather round—my nation on the penance-thrown
Cries out: "I thirst!"

Rakus gives vinegar and Borus bile,
And Mother Freedom kneeling weeps the while.

Look—an accursed

Muscovite soldier leaps with a spear and spills

My nation's innocent blood in crimson rills.

What hast thou done, fiercest of stupid hireling wolves?

Yet he alone amends his ways; and God absolves.

My beloved's head has fallen downward on his breast—

"Lord, why hast Thou forsaken him whom Thou hast
blessed?"

—It is finished, he is at rest.

*(Choirs of angels are heard, singing in the distance
Easter songs, and at the end: Alleluja! Alleluja!)*

Heavenward, heavenward he flies, fair and fleet

And a robe snowy-white

Floats downward from his feet.

Fluttering as it falls—so wide it is and warm

That it will wrap the whole of the world from woe and
harm.

My beloved in the skies is not lost to our sight.

Like three Suns his three eyeballs gleam and glow.

He shows the world his pierced right hand of Peace.

What is that Man? Heaven's Viceroy here below.

I knew him as a child, and without cease

Marvel at his continual increase

In stature of body and mind!

Alas! for he is blind

But he has a little angel-boy to lead him.

This Man is terrible—the earth must heed him—

He has three brows,

Three faces ever shows.

Like to a baldachim above his head,

The book of unlocked mysteries is spread

Throwing a veil of shadow on his cheeks.

The earth's three corners tremble when he speaks.

And thunderous voices from heaven trumpet forth:

" 'Tis Freedom's Viceroy visible on earth!

He shall build on the Glory of his name

The massive structure of his faith and fame,

The temple of Life.

Raised above kings and peoples, kingly he looks down

Upon three subject kingdoms, but he wears no crown.

His heavy life—a yoke of yokes

His glorious title—Folk of Folks;

From a foreign Mother; his blood: heroes of yore,

And his name: forty and four.

Glory! Glory! Glory!

(He falls asleep)

ANGELS

(who descend in visible form)

He has fallen asleep—let us take his soul from his flesh,

Like a drowsy child from a golden cradle's mesh;

Let us take off the dress of senses, and array

His soul in light, like the harbinger of day.

Let us fly up to the third realm of ease

And lay this radiant soul on our Father's knees—

Caress remembered as a hallowing fable

When his soul returns to life ere the hour of Matins

Wrapped up anew in senses' purest satins,
And placed once more in his body's golden cradle.

SCENE VI

*A magnificent bedroom. A Senator turns in his bed
and sighs. Two devils over his head.*

DEVIL I

He's drunk, and cannot sleep;
Too long my watch I keep . . .
Lie still, you tike of tikes!
Are you on hedgehog spikes?

DEVIL II

Strew poppy on his eyes.

DEVIL I

He sleeps—To be a beast's my boast:

DEVIL II

A vulture on its prize.

BOTH

Drag him to Hell's grim coast—
Scourge him with serpents, roast!

BEELZEBUB

Beware!

THE TWO DEVILS

Who're you to tweak our noses?

BEELZEBUB

Beelzebub.

THE TWO DEVILS

Well what?

BEELZEBUB

Don't scare my game!

DEVIL I

But when the scoundrel dozes
His dream is mine by right.

BEELZEBUB

When he sees the night and the flame,
And torments past all name,
Against us he'll take fright,
Recall the dream o'er night,
And even reform: the beast!
His death is far off yet.

DEVIL II

(putting out his claws)

Let's have our fun at least!
 About him are you worrying?
 If he reforms, you bet
 I will become a priest
 And to the Cross go scurrying.

BEELZEBUB

To scare this rogue beware,
 A remembered dream will scare,
 To cheat us he'll prepare,
 He'll wriggle from the snare.

DEVIL I

(pointing to the sleeper)

And shall our comrade here,
 My dearest son, my own,
 Sleep without plague or fear?
 So you don't want him hurt?
 Myself, I'll make him groan!

BEELZEBUB

Take heed, you son of dirt!
 My power is from the Tsar!

DEVIL I

Then pray what's your decision?

BEELZEBUB

You can attack his soul
 And blow it up with pride
 And stuff foul shame inside
 And drag it to derision,
 And lash it raw with jeers—
 But nothing of Hell fears!
 We're off, boys! Flap! flap! flap!

(He flies away)

DEVIL I

So after his soul! Yap! Yap!
 Heigh, now you will tremble, Louse!

DEVIL II

Still, hold him in your lap
 Softly, like cat with mouse!

THE SENATOR'S VISION

SENATOR

(in his sleep)

A letter—for me—a rescript from the Tsar!
 In his own hand! A million! And St. Andrew's Star!
 Where's the footman? Pin it here: Created Prince—
 Ha, ha! Grand Marshal! That'll make them wince!

(He turns over——)

To the Tsar. Anteroom. They all stand in a row;
 They all hate me, they all fear me, they all bow.
 The Marshal Grand-Contrôleur—he's masked, old
 shaver—

Oh, what a pleasant savour
 Of murmurings that waver—

“The Senator's in favour, in favour, in favour.”

Ah, let me die mid these murmurs, this elation,
 As mid my concubines' sweet titillation!

They're all bowing and blathering—
 I'm the soul of the gathering.

They're jealous, they stare—but I haughtily look down
 my nose.

Oh, joy! Oh, joy! I'll die amid your throes!

(He turns over—)

The Imperial Majesty! Ah Cæsar comes . . .

What? Not see me? Frowns? and looks askance . . .
 Oh, mightiest Lord! I've lost my voice . . . dread
 glance . . .

Can't speak . . . shivers that freeze and sweat that
 numbs . . .

Ah, Marshal . . . turns his back toward me . . . what?
 His back! Ah, Senators, and Court officials!
 I'm dying, dead . . . buried and laid to rot,
 And worms devour me, jokes and jeers and whistles . . .

Everyone shuns me, stranded high and dry . . .

The scoundrelly Chamberlain grins; his teeth he
 shows . . .

And boom! that smile's a spider—in my mouth it goes.

(He spits)

What a noise!—It's a pun.—And oh, you hideous fly!
(He makes a gesture of chasing a fly away near his nose)

He hovers round my nose,

Like a wasp he goes,

And epigrams, jokes and sneers

Those whispers . . . Ah, they're crickets that crawl in
 my ears.

Oh, my ears, my ears!

(He cleans out his ear with his finger)

The Lords of the Bedchamber like hoot-owls quaver,

Like rattlesnakes, the ladies' tails all creak . . .

What a dreadful noise! What laughter! What a shriek!

“The Senator's fallen from favour, from favour, from
 favour!”

(He falls from the bed on to the floor)

DEVILS

(They come down and are visible)

We'll drag his soul from his senses, like a dog

Let off the chain; though muzzled, he's kept feeling

By one half of his body like a bog;

We'll drag the other half to the world's edge reeling.

Where timelessness begins, time ends its course,

Where Hell's dominions border on Remorse—

And where they meet, we'll tie this canine trash—

Then work, my hand, and whistle, my good lash!

Before the third cock crow, he must
 Leave the rack,
 And we must send this foul and weary brain
 Back to his senses, like a dog to its chain
 And in his body's kennel, lock him back.

SCENE VII

A SALON IN WARSAW

A few high officials, a few great men of letters, a few ladies du grand monde, a few Generals and staff officers; all incognito. They are drinking tea at a table. Nearer the door, some young people and two elder Poles. The ones standing up are talking livelily. The group at the table are speaking French; that by the door, in Polish.

Near the door.

ZENON NIEMOYEWski

(to Adolphus)

In Lithuania, is it as bad?

ADOLPHUS

Much worse, blood flows. Up our way, things are sad . . .

NIEMOYEWski

Blood?

ADOLPHUS

Not in battle, but from the hangman rogue.
 Not the sword, for only the whip's in vogue.

(They talk more quietly)

At the table.

COUNT

And was the ball so fine? Did gold braid throng?

FRENCHMAN

I heard it was as empty as a church.

LADY

Sure, it was crowded.

COUNT

Fine?

LADY

The tale were long . . .

GENTLEMAN OF THE BEDCHAMBER

The service couldn't be worse, yet waiters in number.
 I hadn't a drop of wine. Left quite in the lurch.

The way to the buffet was cluttered with rabble and lumber.

FIRST LADY

There was no grouping on the floor at all:
And they trod on your toes, just like an English ball.

SECOND LADY

It was one of their private evenings—you're far too hard.

CHAMBERLAIN

Pardon—a formal ball—I've kept the card.
(He pulls out his invitation and displays it. They all admit it was a formal ball)

FIRST LADY

That makes it worse. The groups, the gowns, they mixed—
To judge the frocks there wasn't half a chance.

SECOND LADY

Since Novosiltzoff went away from Warsaw
There's no one with the taste to stage a ball more:
I haven't seen a single decent dance.
He had the groups as in a painting fixed.
(Some of the men laugh)

FIRST LADY

Laugh if you like, and mutter what you will—
His place in Warsaw there is none to fill.

Near the door.

ONE OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Cichowski out?

ADOLPHUS

Yes, and I've seen him, too,
And heard his story, for I want the youth
of Lithuania to know the truth.

ZENON NIEMOYEWski

We ought to join and give each other heart,
Lest we all miserably die apart.

(They talk in a low voice)

YOUNG LADY

(standing near them)

And what appalling things he has been through.

(They talk)

At the table.

GENERAL

(to a literary man)

Well, after all, read it! Out with it—out!

LITERARY MAN

I don't know it by heart.

GENERAL

But you drag it about—
Is that it, there, in your waistcoat pocket, or what?

They wait . . .

LITERARY MAN

They're authoresses all, they've got
More French verse off by heart, I dare well say,
Than I.

GENERAL

(Goes to talk with the ladies)

But don't poke fun at him ladies, I pray.

LADY

Vous allez lire? I'm Polish, but dear me!
I see no sense in Polish poetry.

GENERAL

(to an officer)

She's partly right; he's somewhat of a bore.

(He points to the literary man)

He plants a pea in fifty reams or more.

(To the literary man)

Please read! Unless we hear your verses, this

(pointing to second literary man)

Vile journalist will snipe at us with his.

Your hearers should be much obliged, I'm thinking—
Just look how he's inviting, smiling, blinking,
He's opening his mouth like a dried-up oyster;
He's rolling an eye like a fat pig in a cloister.

LITERARY MAN

(to himself)

They're going out.

(to the General)

The poem's long, my chest
would hardly stand the strain.

GENERAL

You must know best.

(To the officer)

It's just as well he doesn't want to read:
I'm much afraid he'd bore us with his screed.

YOUNG LADY

(going from the group by the door, approaches the table)

Oh, it's a frightful thing. Just listen Sirs!

(To Adolphus)

Speak of Cichowski to these officers.

HIGH OFFICER

Cichowski out?

COUNT

So many years his doom
to spend in gaol—

CHAMBERLAIN

I thought him in the tomb.

(To himself)

Things of that sort are hardly safe to hear;
To go out in the middle's rude, I fear.

(He goes out)

COUNT

They've let him out? That's strange.

ADOLPHUS

They found no crime.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Who speaks of crime? No lack of other causes . . .

He will have heard too much, who's spent much time
In gaol—the State has its own hidden clauses,
Objects and views profound which hide it must,
Cabinet plans and secrets held in trust—
The same in every land—secrets of State.

But you're from Lithuania, and wait
To know as much of Empire, Country Squires,
As each into his little farm enquires.

(He smiles)

GENTLEMAN OF THE BEDCHAMBER

Yet you speak Polish—I don't follow quite—
I thought each Litwin* was a Muscovite!
I know far more of China, and such capers,
Than Lithuania—the Paris Press—
Le Constitutionnel wrote something, yes,
About the Lithuanians, I guess,
But not a word in other Paris papers.

YOUNG GIRL

(to Adolphus)

Impress on them how it concerns us all—
All Poland! Say it's urgent, national!

*Polish for "Lithuanian"—cf. Shakespeare who says "Pollacks", which is the Polish word for "Poles" (P. of M.).

ELDER POLE

I knew the old Cichowskis. A good clan—
 I heard they'd seized the son; the poor young man
 Was being starved. To think they're my relations!
 I haven't seen them since . . . Oh, Times, Oh, Nations!
 They've tortured us for three whole generations:
 Our fathers then, and now our sons they ban.

ADOLPHUS

(They all approach and listen)

I knew him in my childhood. He was gay,
 Witty—and beautiful, the ladies say—
 Where he went, his liveliness infused
 And with his jokes and tales the crowds amused.

The children liked him, called him "Uncle Jolly"—
 He dandled me, and gave me many a lolly,
 I call to mind his hair: how oft my hands
 I twirled among its bright and curly strands.

He must have been both innocent and mild,
 For when he looked at us, he seemed a child.
 Looking at us he lured us like a mage:
 Looking at him, we felt of equal age.

He brought us all the presents from his lass,
 And asked us to his wedding. Then, alas,
 He came no more; they said he'd disappeared
 No one knew where, and he was lost, they feared.

"The Government enquiries led to nought"
 And in the end "he drowned himself," they thought;
 Then the Police add proof to prove the guess—
 They found his coat on Visla's banks, no less.
 They brought his wife the coat: "It's his: he's
 drowned"—

But no one found the corpse. A year came round.
 "Why should he drown himself?" they asked. "For
 what?"

They enquired, lamented, wept—and then forgot.

And then one eve after the second year,
 Prisoners were brought into the Belvedere.

The night was dark and wet, but someone saw
 By chance or wish that transit of the law—
 Maybe 'twas one of those young Warsaw men
 Who watch to keep our prisoners in ken.
 The streets were full of guards and gloom—a call
 Of "Prisoners, who are you?" leapt the wall.
 A hundred names were called, and one was his:
 Without delay his wife was told of this.

She wrote and begged and prayed, ran herself lame,
 Yet got no satisfaction but that name.

And three more years went past without a trace,
 But someone spread a tale about the place,
 The Russ had oft to cruelties resorted
 And so far no confession had extorted;
 Thus he still lived.

For many a long day wept his wife and child
Upon their knees, ere he became less wild.

Men who have been in prison like to tell
Their prison past—I thought he would as well,
And bring to light from under ground and guard
His own, and all our Polish heroes' hard
History; for Poland lives and flowers
Today in Russian mines and gaols and towers.
And what his answer? that himself he knows
Nothing by now of his past prison woes,
His memory was turned to dust when found,
Like a book from Pompeii, beneath the ground.
The very author can no clue afford,
And simply says: "I mean to ask the Lord,
Who wrote it and can tell me all again."

(Adolph dries his tears.—There is a long silence)

YOUNG LADY

(to literary man)

Why don't you write of that, you gentlemen?

COUNT

For old Niemcewicz's memoirs, that's the caper;
He's gathering, I hear, some fine waste paper.

FIRST LITERARY MAN

What a story!

SECOND LITERARY MAN

Terrible!

GENTLEMAN OF THE BEDCHAMBER

Excellent, by Jove!

FIRST LITERARY MAN

Doubtless to hear such stories people love,
But who will read them? And, pray, who can sing
Not legend, but a real, witnessed thing?
Besides, it is a clear and sacred rule
Of art, poets must wait until——

ONE OF THE YOUNG MEN

Damned fool!

Must wait until the raw event, for sure,
Grow fig-wise sweet, tobacco-wise mature?

FIRST LITERARY MAN

There's no fixed time . . .

SECOND LITERARY MAN

A hundred years . . .

FIRST LITERARY MAN

Too short!

THIRD LITERARY MAN

A thousand years or two . . .

FOURTH LITERARY MAN

No harm at all,
I find, a brand-new subject for your ditty,
But it is far from Polish, that's the pity.
Simplicity, hospitality's our pride,
But horrible, violent scenes we can't abide.
The peasants' loves, their flocks, is all our lore—
The pastoral is what we Slavs adore.

FIRST LITERARY MAN

I hope no thought across your mind goes erring,
To write in poems how one ate a herring.
Sans polish, can no verse exist, I ween,
And where no Court is, is no polish seen.
The Court decides on taste and fame—in short,
Poland is dying!—Warsaw has no Court!

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

No Court! That would astonish me a lot,
I'm Master of Ceremonies there, God wot!

COUNT

(on the quiet, to the Master of Ceremonies)

If you were to drop the Governor a word,
My wife would be Lady-in-Waiting, good my Lord.

(Aloud)

But what's the use, all the good posts are full!
The aristocracy has all the pull.

SECOND COUNT

(newly created from the middle class)

The aristocracy's the prop of freedom—
Take your example, gentlemen, from Britain.

(A political quarrel begins. The young folk go out)

FIRST OF THE YOUNG FOLK

The scoundrels! Oh, for a stick!

A . . . G . . .

Or a hangman's noose!
I'd show him the Court, and teach him taste, the goose!

N . . .

How can we even begin? Look, who'd have said
These are the sort who are at the nation's head!

WYSOCKI

The surface! Not the head! Our folk, I'm told
Is like lava, hard and nasty, dry and cold
Above, but there's an inner fire which keeps
Its heat for centuries: let's dive to those deeps!

(They go out)

SCENE VIII

THE SENATOR

In Wilno. A palatial ante-chamber; on the right, the door of the Investigating Commission's hall, where prisoners are being led in and huge files of papers are visible. At the back, the door of the Senator's rooms, whence music can be heard. The time: Just after dinner. The Secretary is sitting by the window, bent over some papers; further on; a little to the left, a table where some people are playing whist. Novosiltzoff is drinking coffee; around him are the Chamberlain, Baykoff, Pelican, and a Doctor. At the door, a sentinel and several motionless footmen.

SENATOR

(to the Chamberlain)

Diable! Quelle corvée! At dinner, Oh, I say!
La Princesse let us down, won't come today,
 Besides, *en fait de dames*, stupid, or ageing—
 Chattering business *au diner* it's enraging!
Je jure, no patriot females à ma table

Avec leur franc parler et leur ton détestable.
Figurez-vous I talk of gowns and fun:
 My neighbour drags her father in, or son:
 "He is too old"—"Too young"—"Lord Senator"
 "He can't stand prison life, Lord Senator . . ."
 "He wants to see his wife" . . . "He wants a priest" . . .
 "He"—*Que sais-je!* Nice thanks for a feast!
Il y a de quoi go mad! I'll end this see-saw
 And flee from Wilno to my lovely Warsaw.
Monseigneur's written me, *de revenir*,
 He's bored without me, and I've this rabble here—
Je n'en puis plus.

DOCTOR

(coming toward him)

I was saying, my Lord, the affair,
 Though scarce begun, is like a patient, where
 A doctor visits him—others have failed—
 He makes an *anagnosis*. Students are gaoled
 In shoals—and all are cross-examined—still,
 No proof! We can't yet reach the cause of the ill.
 A couple of poems! *Ce sont de maux bien légers*
Ce sont, one might say, *accidents passagers*;
 But no real trace of plotting's to be had and . . .

SENATOR

(angrily)

No trace of plots? I see your vision's bad!
 No wonder, after dinner—well, *Signor dottore*,
Addio, buona notte—thanks for pretty story!

Examined them myself—you say no trace—
And *vous osez, docteur*, to talk thus to my face?
I wish you knew the trouble that I gave it!

(showing the papers)

Here's each confession, oath, and affidavit—
It's all here—the plot of blasphemous murder
Is writ down plain like a senatorial order.
No trace! What do I gain by all this rot!

DOCTOR

My Lord, *excusez*, who doubts there was a plot?
In fact, I was saying that . . .

FOOTMAN

A man from Kanivitch, the merchant,
Is here to remind you of something, my Lord,
Which is urgent.

SENATOR

Remind me? What of? Who?

FOOTMAN

The merchant, Kanivitch,
You told him to come . . .

SENATOR

Clear out, you son of a bitch!
You can see I'm busy.

DOCTOR

(to the footman)

You idiots, can't you see
The Senator's taking his coffee privately!

SECRETARY

(getting up from the table)

He says, if you don't pay at an early date,
He'll sue.

SENATOR

Then write politely, let him wait!

(He reflects)

And *à propos*, we must gaol his offspring—oy!
What a little devil!

SECRETARY

He's only a young boy.

SENATOR

They're all small, but just look in their hearts!
Better put out the fire before it starts.

SECRETARY

His son's in Moscow.

SENATOR

In Moscow—*voyez-vous*—
An emissary of the clubs, I know.

SECRETARY

He serves in the cadets, so it would seem.

SENATOR

To wreck the army—*voyez-vous*—'s his scheme.

SECRETARY

He left Wilno in infancy.

SENATOR

Oh, *cet incendiaire*.
He works through correspondents.

(To the secretary)
Pas ton affaire.

You understand. Heigh, orderlies! I say
A search party must leave this very day!
His father need not stand in fear of us
If the young brat confesses without fuss . . .

DOCTOR

In fact, as I was saying to you, my Lord,
These trials every age and rank afford—
The most dangerous symptom of the plot—the thing

Is wholly moved by some well-hidden spring
Which . . .

SENATOR

(with indignation)

Hidden?

DOCTOR

Mysteriously hid, I say,
By my Lord's watchfulness revealed today.

(The Senator turns away)

(To himself)

He's as restless as Satan! I've things to discuss in
heaps—
Important, too! But he won't let me open my lips!

PELICAN

(to the Senator)

What are your orders, Sir, for Rollison?

SENATOR

Which?

PELICAN

Who had to be thrashed while the case was on.

SENATOR

Eh bien?

PELICAN

He fell ill.

SENATOR

How many strokes did he get?

PELICAN

During the trial there isn't a limit set.
Mr. Botwinko had him.

BAYKOFF

Then there's no knowing.
He doesn't stop in a hurry, once he gets going!
I'll guarantee that he looked after him fine.
Parions that he gave him three hundred and nine!

SENATOR

(astonished)

*Trois cents coups, et vivant? Trois cents coups le
coquin:*

Trois cents coups, sans mourir? Quel dos de jacobin!
I thought, that in Russia, *la vertu cutannée*
Surpasse tout—this scoundrel has *une peau mieux
tannée!*

Je n'y connais rien. Ha, ha, ha, ha, mon ami!

*(To one of those playing whist, who is waiting for his
partners to play)*

The Poles are stealing our trade in skins!

Lor damme,

Un honnête soldat en serait mort dix fois!

*Quel rebelle! (He goes up to the table) I've got you
un homme de bois:*

Three hundred strokes of our Botwinko's giving—
And yet the wooden lad—*figurez-vous*—is living!

(To Pelican)

He confessed nothing?

PELICAN

Almost. But "Heaven forfend"
He cries "I should betray an innocent friend"—
But there's a lot which these few words discover—
These students are his friends, or I'm a duffer.

SENATOR

C'est juste. What obstinacy!

DOCTOR

As I just said,
My Lord, they infect the lads, stuffing their head
With nonsense. For example, history
Just drives the young folk mad, as all can see.

SENATOR

(gaily)

*Vous n'aimez pas l'histoire? Ha, ha! Un satirique
Aurait dit, you're afraid de devenir historique.*

DOCTOR

Certainly, they ought to learn the deeds of Kings
And their great ministers, and such-like things . . .

SENATOR

C'est juste.

DOCTOR

(pleased)

Just as I say, my Lord, you see,
There is a way to teach lads history,
But why for ever of republics gabble,
Of Athens, Sparta, Rome, and such-like rabble?

PELICAN

(to one of his companions, pointing to the Doctor)

Look how he crawls, the flattering old shaver!
And worms himself by his tricks in the Senator's
favour!

(Comes up to the Doctor)

But is this time to drag it to the fore?
D'you think it's right to plague the Senator?

FOOTMAN

(to the Senator)

Am I to admit those ladies—women—they
Who arrive here in a carriage every day?
One's blind, and the other . . .

SENATOR

Blind? Is there such a one?

FOOTMAN

Madame Rollison.

PELICAN

Mother of that convict Rollison.

FOOTMAN

They're here each day.

SENATOR

You should throw her out.

DOCTOR

With a blessing!

FOOTMAN

We do, but she sits on the pavement wailing and hissing.
We called the police; but she's blind, and a crowd
gathered round;

They beat up our men; it wasn't so simple we found.
Shall I let her come in?

SENATOR

Where's your gumption? You're hollow!
Yes, as far as the landing, and then—d'you follow?—
Below, thus (*with a gesture*) toughly to the ground floor,
So that she just won't plague us any more
With her wandering.

(*Second footman comes in and gives a letter to Baykoff*)

Well go!

BAYKOFF

Elle porte une lettre.

(*He gives the Senator the letter*)

SENATOR

Who's written it for her?

BAYKOFF

C'est la Princesse peut-être.

SENATOR

(*reads it*)

The Princess! What's her idea? This hag she'll shovel
On to our shoulders—*avec quelle chaleur*—the Devil!

(*The two ladies come in with Friar Peter*)

PELICAN

(*to Baykoff*)

An old sorceress, *mère de ce fripon*.

SENATOR

(*politely*)

Good day, good day. Which is Madame Rollison?

MADAME ROLLISON

(*weeping*)

My Lord!

SENATOR

A moment—you've a letter. Pray,
Then why have so many ladies come this way?

SECOND LADY

We're two.

SENATOR

(*to the second lady*)

To what do I owe the honour of your visit?

SECOND LADY

It's hard for her to find the road.

SENATOR

Oh is it?

SECOND LADY

She cannot see.

SENATOR

She's able, then, to smell,
For every day she finds her way quite well.

SECOND LADY

I bring her, as she's old and not too fit.

MADAME ROLLISON

For God's sake . . .

SENATOR

Quiet. *(To the second lady)* What's
Your name?

SECOND LADY

Mrs. Kmit.

SENATOR

Better think of your sons, and do not stir
From home. They are suspected.

MRS. KMITA

(going pale)

What! Good Sir!

(The Senator laughs)

MADAME ROLLISON

My Lord, pity a widow! Senator!
I heard they killed him—but good God! What for?
My child! The good priest says that he's still living—
Who ever would be guilty, Lord, of giving
Such pitiless hangman's thrashing to a child!

(She weeps)

SENATOR

Where? My good woman, please don't talk so wild!

MADAME ROLLISON

My Lord! I'm a widow! He's my only one!
Think of the years it takes to raise a son!
Has his own pupils now, enquire, my Lord,
How well he did! I'm poor, I can't afford
His loss; he kept me on his slender means!
I'm blind! He was my eye! . . .

SENATOR

I hate these scenes.
Whoever spread this story won't get clear!
Who told you?

MADAME ROLLISON

Told me? I've a mother's ear.
I'm blind—and in my hearing now is all
My mother-soul—they took him to the Hall
Last night . . .

SENATOR

Did they let her in?

MADAME ROLLISON

They pushed me from the yard,
From the door, from the sill; I sat and listened hard
At the corner, gluing my ears to the thick walls;
I sat there from dawn; no sound by midnight falls—
I listen; at midnight, there in the wall, my ears
Hear him, as plain as God in Heaven hears;
I'm not deceived—his voice is quiet, more
As if from 'neath the earth, from the world's core!
My hearing entered the depths of the wall like a root,
Ah, farther far, than keenest eye could shoot!
I heard them torturing him!

SENATOR

Like in a fever! She raves.
There are others there. The gaol is full of knaves.

MADAME ROLLISON

What!—That was my baby's voice. 'Tis true,
Even in the largest flock the speechless ewe

Knows it's own lambkin's voice: ah, yes, good Sir,
If you had heard that cry but once, I swear
You'd never sleep in peace till in your shroud.

SENATOR

Your son must be quite well, who screams so loud.

MADAME ROLLISON

(she falls on her knees)

If you have a human heart . . .

*(The door of the salon opens. Music can be heard.
A young lady in ball dress runs in)*

YOUNG LADY

*Monsieur le Sénateur,
Oh! Je vous interromps . . . On va chanter le choeur
De "Don Juan," et puis le concerto de Herz . . .*

SENATOR

*"Herz!" Choeur! Here too was talk of hearts. Certes,
Vous venez à propos, vous, belle comme un coeur.
Moment sentimental! Il pleut ici des coeurs.*

(To Baykoff)

If the *Grand-duc Michel* heard that pun, I bet
I'd soon have a seat—*ma foi*—in the Cabinet.

(To the young lady)

J'y suis—dans un moment.

MADAME ROLLISON

Lord, do not throw us
Into despair! I'll not leave you.

(She seizes his clothes)

YOUNG LADY

Faites-lui donc grâce!

SENATOR

Diable m'emporte, if I know what she wants, the beast!

MADAME ROLLISON

I want to see my son.

SENATOR

(with emphasis)

The Emperor forbids.

FRIAR PETER

A priest!

MADAME ROLLISON

Send him a priest at least! He asks for a priest . . .
If a mother's tears mean nothing, yet fear God!
Subject his body, not his soul, to your rod!

SENATOR

C'est drôle. Who spreads this gossip? Madame, pray,
Who told you he had asked for a priest today?

MADAME ROLLISON

(pointing to Friar Peter)

Good Father Peter here. For weeks he's pleaded
But they wouldn't let him in, he begs unheeded.
Ask him; he'll tell you . . .

SENATOR

(looking sharply at the priest)

Well, I suppose I must
Agree; so he's the one! The Emperor's just
And won't forbid a priest. Their worth he'll praise
Who bring the young folk back to moral ways.
No one respects religion more than I . . .

(He sighs)

Ah! It's through lack of morals young folk die.
Eh bien, Madame. Good-bye.

MADAME ROLLISON

(to the young lady)

Ah, dear young Miss,
For God's Wounds' sake, support me still in this!
My son's a child; he has lived on water and bread
For a year, half-clothed, in the prison cold
and dread . . .

YOUNG LADY

Est-il possible?

SENATOR

(embarrassed)

What's this? Locked up for a year?
Imaginez-vous—this never reached my ear.

(To Pelican)

Look into this without delay; if true
the Commissioners will be walloped, *voyez-vous!*

(To Madame Rollison)

Soyez tranquille; come back at six o'clock.

MRS. KMITA

He didn't know. You see, he's had a shock;
Perhaps when he's enquired he'll set him free.

MADAME ROLLISON

(rejoiced)

May God reward him if he succours me!
I always said, he can't be such a sadist
As people say—Oh, God, 'twas Thou that madest
Him, like us all: his mother's milk in youth
Fed him—Folk laughed: you see I spoke the truth!

(To the Senator)

You did not know! It was concealed by thugs!

You are surrounded by a gang of rogues!
Don't ask them, Sir, ask us; we'll tell you all,
All of the truth . . .

SENATOR

(laughing)

You'll tell me when you call,
I haven't time just now: and tell the Princess
That I'll do all I can to please Her Highness.

(Politely)

Adieu, Madame Kmita, Adieu!—I'll do what I can.

(To Friar Peter)

Stay! I've a couple of words for you, my man.

(To the young lady)

J'y suis dans un moment.

(The ladies go out)

(After a pause, to the footmen)

Scoundrels, rotters!
You're on the doors, and yet you let in plotters.
I'll teach you villains service, I'll tear off your skins.

(To a footman)

Now, listen—get after the woman—

(To Pelican)

No, you for your sins:

When she leaves the Princess's place, you will give her
 permission
 To visit her son, and you'll take her as far—as the
 prison:
 Then lock her up herself, as she deserves.
C'en est trop! I'll teach you how one serves.

(He throws himself into an armchair)

FOOTMAN

(trembling)

You told us to let her in, Sir . . .

SENATOR

(starting up)

What? Do you dare
 To answer back? No Polish tricks I'll bear:
 I'll soon unteach you. Put him in the cells
 On bread and water—beat him till he yells—
 A hundred strokes . . .

PELICAN

My Lord, consider hard,
 Despite a vigilant and watchful guard,
 Unfriendly persons spread the story round
 About this thrashing: channels might be found
 To blacken our pure work in the Emperor's eyes,
 If this affair were not soon cleaned of flies.

DOCTOR

Just so—I've thought it over, Sir, and find
 Rollison's not quite right, Sir, in his mind.
 He wants to jump from the window—no lack of
 gumption—
 Suicide—but it's closed.

PELICAN

He has consumption—
 It's wrong to keep him in the stuffy air:
 I'll have it opened up at once, and where
 He is, on the third floor, he'll enjoy the breeze . . .

SENATOR

(distracted)

That hag let in at teatime, if you please!

DOCTOR

Exactly as I say, my Lord, you ought
 Of your most precious health to take more thought.
 I'd put aside these cases *après diner*,
 And rest, your precious health *ne pas ruiner*.

SENATOR

(calmly)

Eh, mon Docteur, duty comes first, meanwhile
 It helps a weak digestion, stirs the bile,
 And after all, the bile *fait la digestion*.

After dinner, I could *voir donner la question*,
When duty so demands. *En prenant son café*,
D'you know, is the time to see an *auto-de-fé*.

PELICAN

(*pushing the Doctor away*)

Regarding Rollison, Sir, what's your word?
Suppose he dies today?

SENATOR

Have him interred!
Embalm him, too, if you wish to be absurd.
A propos, Baykoff, isn't it time that you took
A spot of balm—you've such a corpse-like look
And marrying, too. Did you know he's engaged?
It's a scream—

(*A door one side opens. A footman comes in. The
Senator points through the door*)

Look, there's the young lady—all innocent peaches and
cream.

My! A bridegroom, *avec un teint si delabré*—
You ought to manage your marriage like *Tibère à
Capré*.

How they can force a girl, I cannot guess,
With her own lovely mouth to blurt out "Yes."

BAYKOFF

Force? *Parions*, I'll divorce in a year,
And take a yearly wifelet, never fear,

Without force. One only has to glance—
To be a General's wife, for them, *quelle chance!*
Ask the Priest if they cry or make a hubbub.

SENATOR

A propos of Priest . . . (*to the Priest*) My dear black
Cherub!
Look, *quelle figure*. He has *l'air d'un poète*—
Did you ever see *un regard aussi bête?*
We must wake him up—here's a whisky; here's another.

FRIAR PETER

I don't drink.

SENATOR

Come, drink!

FRIAR PETER

I'm a Little Brother.

SENATOR

Little Brother, or Uncle, how do you
Find out what other people's children do
In gaol? Was it you who brought the tale to the dames?

FRIAR PETER

I.

SENATOR

(to the Secretary)

Write that admission, with witnesses' names.

(To the Priest)

And how did you know? Father, you're pretty fly!
He sees they're writing it down, he won't reply.
What's your order?

FRIAR PETER

The Bernardines.

SENATOR

A link!

Cousins of the Dominicans, I think?
The Dominicans' former cloister is our gaol.
Now how did you know? Where did you get the tale?
D'you hear? I command! Don't whisper in a funk!
I command in the name of the Tsar! Do you hear me,
Monk?
Monk, of the Russian knout have you ever heard?

(To the Secretary)

Write, he said nothing.

(To the Priest)

And yet, you serve God's word!
D'you know Theology? Here's a lesson then—
Knowest thou God gives all earthly power o'er men?

When Power commands your speech, silence is sin.

(The Priest says nothing)

Monk, I can have you hanged that Power has said:
We'll see if your Prior can raise you from the dead.

FRIAR PETER

If we suffer Power, say not, that we obey it.
God sometimes in most evil hands doth lay it.

SENATOR

Supposing the Tsar gets to know that I've hanged you
today,
Informally somewhat—d'you know what he's likely to
say?

"Dear Senator, you give us all the creeps"—
But once you're hanged, my monk, you're hanged for
keeps!

I'll give you one more chance to speak the truth:
Confess, who told you that we flogged the youth?
Silent? You did not learn it on the level . . .
Who told you? God? Or Angel? No, the Devil!

FRIAR PETER

What hast thou said?

SENATOR
(enraged)

You call me "thou"? Monk, you're as good as dead!

DOCTOR

Ha, wretch! One says "Your Noble Lordship!"—Why,

(To Pelican)

Teach him to speak! He's brought up in a sty . . .
Like this!

(Shows his fist)

PELICAN

(strikes the Priest on the face)

You see, the Senator's angry, ass!

PRIEST

(to the Doctor)

Lord, forgive him, he knows not what he does!
Brother, you've done for yourself by talking thus!
Today you will stand before God.

SENATOR

What's that?

BAYKOFF

He's clowning. Fie!
Smack his mug once more, let him prophesy!

(Gives him a blow)

FRIAR PETER

Brother! Thou imitatest his disgrace!
Thy days are numbered, follow in his trace.

SENATOR

Heigh! Send for Botwinko! Keep Jack-Priest here,
I'll examine him myself, we'll have some cheer
We'll see if his silence will stay obstinate:
Someone has sent him in.

DOCTOR

Just so, I humbly state
The thing's arranged, the whole conspiracy
Is run, I'll prove, by the Prince Czartoryski.

SENATOR

Que me dites vous là, mon cher, about the Prince?
Impossible.

(To himself)

Who knows? In ten years hence
He'll still be struggling to break my snare—

(To the Doctor)

How do you know?

DOCTOR

Long since I solved the affair.

SENATOR

And you didn't tell me?

DOCTOR

You wouldn't hear my claim.
My Lord, I said that someone fans the flame.

SENATOR

Someone! But not the Prince?

DOCTOR

What could be better?
I've many a proof and intercepted letter.

SENATOR

From the Prince?

DOCTOR

At least, there's mention of him, making
A full account of all his undertaking;
And some Professors. Chieftain of the lot,
Lelewel secretly maintains the plot.

SENATOR

(to himself)

Ah, if a proof, a shade of proof, a proof of shade
A suspicion, a shadow of shadows, could be made!
The words have crossed my hearing times untold,
How I have been by that great Prince extolled;

Now let us see which can the higher go—
He who extols, he who can overthrow.

(To the Doctor)

Come, *que je vous embrasse*. There, now! There, there!
I knew at once that it wasn't a boys' affair;
I knew at once 'twas a Princely job—with Lelewel.

DOCTOR

(confidentially)

He who'd outwit you, Sir, could devour the Devil.

SENATOR

(gravely)

My Lord Privy Councillor—though I know
All this, if you substantial proofs can show,
Ecoutez—I give you my Senatorial word,
Your salary's raised by half, you'll be preferred,
Maybe you'll get Crown lands or canonical lands,
A Knighthood—who knows, our Tsar pays with open
hands.

To ask the Tsar myself shall be my business,
And you will be remitted ten years' service.

DOCTOR

Why, yes, the thing has cost me lots of troubles—
For spies I've paid out half my pay in roubles—
And all from zeal to serve the Tsar, I swear.

SENATOR

(taking his arm)

Go with my Secretary now, *mon cher*.

(To the Secretary)

Bring all those papers here and seal them up.

(To the Doctor)

We'll go through them this evening while we sup.

(To himself)

The investigation's mine, and all the drudgery,
The praise and profit's his for this discovery!

(He thinks)

(in the Secretary's ear)

Arrest the Doctor, when you've searched his shelves.

(To Baykoff, who has just come in)

The affair is weighty, we'll see to it ourselves;
The Doctor let a word out carelessly;
The rest will come to light with third degree.

*(Pelican, seeing the Senator's favour, bows low to
the Doctor, and goes off with him)*

DOCTOR

(to himself)

Of late, he pushed me off—that was unwise:
I'll push him down so that he shall not rise!

(To the Senator)

I'll be back soon.

SENATOR

(carelessly)

I'm leaving town at eight.

DOCTOR

(looking at his watch)

My watch says twelve o'clock. What's this——

SENATOR

It's late—
already five.

DOCTOR

What, five o'clock? I'll soon
Be doubting my own sight. Exactly noon
By hour and minute hand, and second too.
Not a hair's breadth! It's too strange to be true!

FRIAR PETER

Brother, your clock is stopped, and will not toll
Another noon. Brother, think of your soul!

DOCTOR

What d'you want?

PELICAN

Some prophesy he thunders
At you: his eyes gleam like a salamander's!

FRIAR PETER

God warns by differing signs before we die.

PELICAN

This Little Brother looks to me a spy.

(The door on the left opens. A crowd of women in ball-dresses come in, officials, and guests. After them an orchestra)

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE

May we?

SOVIETNIK'S WIFE

C'est indigne.

GENERAL'S WIFE

Ah mon cher Sénateur,
We're waiting for you!

SENATOR'S WIFE

Vraiment, c'est un malheur.

ALL

(together)

So at last we came to fetch you.

SENATOR

What a vision!

LADY

There's space in here; we'll dance without collision.

(They stand round and prepare to dance)

SENATOR

*Pardons, mille pardons, j'étais très occupé.
Que vois-je? Un menuet? Parfaitement groupé.
Cela m'a rappelé les jours de ma jeunesse.*

PRINCESS

Ce n'est qu'une surprise.

SENATOR

*Est-ce vous, ma Déesse!
Que j'aime cette danse! Une surprise? Ah, dieux!*

PRINCESS

Vous danserez, j'espère.

SENATOR

Certes, et de mon mieux.

(The orchestra plays the Minuet from Don Juan. On the left stand officials and their ladies on the right, some young folk, some Russian officers, some old gentlemen dressed in Polish style, and some young ladies. In the centre, the Minuet. The Senator is dancing with Baykoff's fiancée, and Baykoff with the Princess)

BALL

Scène Chantée.

LADY

(on the right)

Look at the old fool panting and wriggling;
I wish he'd break his neck while giggling!

(To the Senator)

How beautifully lightly you dance, Senator!

*(Aside)**Il crévera dans l'instant.*

YOUNG MAN

Look, look, how he fawns and cringes!
Murdering yesterday, dancing today!
Look, look! His eyes are on hinges!
He jumps like a lynx in a cage, I say.

LADY

Yesterday murder and torture and laws,
And pouring out so much innocent blood;
Look! Today he has put in his claws,
He wants to make himself pleasant and good.

(From the left)

REGISTRAR

(to the Sovietnik)

Do you see the Senator dancing and flitting?
Sovietnik, let's go and dance, I say!

SOVIETNIK

And do you think it would be fitting
If you were to dance with me, I pray?

REGISTRAR

But each of us can find a lady.

SOVIETNIK

That's not the point: I'll do without
Your company; it's far too shady.
If I dance, I'll dance alone. Get out!

REGISTRAR

What's the idea?

SOVIETNIK

I'm a Committee member!

REGISTRAR

And I'm an officer's son, remember!

SOVIETNIK

I'll dance with no one, my dear Sir,
Who in a world so base doth stir.

(To the Colonel)

Come, Colonel, join the ball! You see
The Senator himself is dancing.

COLONEL

Who was that gabbling nobody?
(pointing at the Registrar)

SOVIETNIK

A registrar! Look at him prancing!

COLONEL

A revolutionary scoundrel!

LADY

(to the Senator)

How beautifully lightly you dance, Senator.

SOVIETNIK

(angrily)

What crimes with levity confounded!

LADY

Il crèvera dans l'instant.

(From the left in a chorus)

LADIES

Ah, quelle beauté, quelle grâce!

MEN

Oh, what splendour, there's none like them!

(From the right in chorus)

MEN

Never was villainy so crass!
Oh, that a thunderbolt would strike them!

SENATOR

(dancing, to the Governor's wife)

The Starost's one I'd like to know;
Has pretty wife and girl: the sap
Is jealous——

GOVERNOR

(running after the Senator)

He's a simple chap,
Leave it to us, my Lord. I'll go.

(He goes up to Starosta)

How is your wife?

STAROSTA

At home, that's all.

GOVERNOR

And how are your daughters?

STAROSTA

I've only one.

GOVERNOR'S WIFE

Your daughter isn't at the ball?

STAROSTA

No.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE

You're here alone?

STAROSTA

Alone.

GOVERNOR

You've missed a chance, you should have brought her.

STAROSTA

My wife's my own, I've only one.

THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE

I offered to introduce your daughter.

STAROSTA

Indeed, I'm sure you would have done.

GOVERNOR

In the Minuet there's a couple short:
My Lord needs ladies for his fun.

STAROSTA

I do not send her out to court;
She'll wed a Polish yeoman's son.

GOVERNOR'S WIFE

I hear she dances and plays whist—
The Senator she should not shun.

STAROSTA

I can quite see he would insist
On several ladies for his fun.

LEFT SIDE

(in chorus)

What singing, what music, m'Lud,
How tastefully furnished the house.

RIGHT SIDE

(in chorus)

All the morning the knaves drink blood,
And after noon on rum carouse.

SOVIETNIK

(pointing to the Senator)

He rends them, true; then asks to dine—
To be rent by him is no mischance.

STAROSTA

Our young folk in their dungeons pine—
They order us to attend a dance!

RUSSIAN OFFICER

(to Bestuzheff)

That they all curse us here's no wonder;
For the last century or more
They've sent out here from Moscow yonder
The rottenest villains by the score.

STUDENT

(to the officer)

Look, look at Baykoff, how he struts—
What an expression, what a lout!
Like a toad that's crawling on rubbish he hops.
Look, look at Baykoff's swollen guts!
He has swallowed too much—he is licking his chops.

Look look, how he's opened his snout,
Listen, listen—a roaring bout!

*(Baykoff sings)**(To Baykoff) Mon Général, quelle chanson!*

BAYKOFF

(sings Beranger's song)

Quel honneur, quel bonheur!
Ah, Monsier le Sénateur!
Je suis votre humble serviteur, etc., etc.

STUDENT

Général ce sont vos paroles?

BAYKOFF

Oui.

STUDENT

Je vous en fais mon compliment.

ONE OF THE OFFICERS

(laughing)

Ces couplets sont vraiment fort drôles;
Quel ton satirique et plaisant!

YOUNG MAN

Pour votre muse sans rivale,
Je vous ferais académicien.

BAYKOFF

(in his ear, pointing to the Princess and the Senator)

He'll be a cuckold today, he shall!

SENATOR

*(in his ear, pointing to Baykoff's fiancée)**Va, va, je te coifferai bien.*

YOUNG LADY

(dancing, to her mother)

They're too abominable, too old!

MOTHER

(from the right)

If he disgusts you, throw him off!

SOVIETNIK'S WIFE

(from the left)

He'll suit my darling daughter's mould.

STAROSTA

They smell of rum, on blood they sup!

SECOND SOVIETNIK'S WIFE

*(to her daughter)*Look up, Sophie, perhaps my Lord
Will spy you here, my little apple.

STAROSTA

If me the beast should try to grapple,
I'll bash him *(grasping his sabre)* with the hilt of my
sword.

LEFT SIDE

*(in chorus)*Oh, what splendour, there's none like them!
Ah, quelle beauté, quelle grâce!

RIGHT SIDE

*(in chorus)*Never was villainy so crass!
Ah, that a thunderbolt would strike them!

JUSTYN POL

*(to Bestuzheff, pointing to the Senator)*I want to stick my knife in his belly,
Or at least to smash his nose in two.

BESTUZHEFF

To pound one scoundrel into jelly,
Or kill him—what good would it do?
They'll close your college for two pins,
“At the University” they'll cry,
“The students are all Jacobins”
And they'll devour all your young fry.

JUSTYN POL

But he will pay for all the wounds,
The tears, the tortures, woe and blood.

BESTUZHEFF

Our Emperor has many hounds.
If one should perish, what's the good?

POL

My knife is itching : let me smash him!

BESTUZHEFF

My friend, I warn you once again.

POL

At the very least you'll let me bash him.

BESTUZHEFF

And ruin all your countrymen!

POL

Ah, scoundrel, villain, criminal!

BESTUZHEFF

I'll have to lead you past the sill.

POL

Will no one punish him at all?
Will none avenge us?

(They go towards the doors)

FRIAR PETER

Yes, God will!

(The music suddenly changes and the Commander's Air is heard)

DANCERS

What's that?

GUESTS

What gloomy tones! It's stopped
the dance!

A GUEST

(looking out of the window)

It's dark! A fog of fogs!

(He shuts the window. A thunderbolt is heard outside)

SENATOR

What's that?

CONDUCTOR OF ORCHESTRA

They made a mistake.

SENATOR

The dogs!

CONDUCTOR

Selected pieces were to be chopped
From the opera, but they've got it mixed.

SENATOR

*Arrangez donc. Ladies, it's fixed.
(A loud cry is heard through the door)*

MADAME ROLLINSON

(in an awful voice, through the door)

Let me in!

SECRETARY

Is she blind?

FOOTMAN

(frightened)

She sees! Like a man
She strides the stairs! Stop her!

OTHER FOOTMEN

Who can?

MADAME ROLLISON

I'll find that drunken tyrant here, as I guessed!

FOOTMAN

(tries to hold her—she knocks down one of them)

Look how she knocked him down! She is possessed!

(They flee)

MADAME ROLLISON

Where art thou? I'll find thee, and bash the brains from
thy head,

Like my son! Ha, tyrant, my little son is dead!
Hast a conscience? They've thrown him from on high
From the window, on the pavement, on the hard stone
to die!

Ha, thou old drunkard, spattered with gory guile
And blood of babes, where art thou, crocodile?
I'll tear thee in bits like my Jack, and break thy bones;
They threw him from the cloister window on to the
stones!

My only son, my father who earned my bread,
That monster lives, and is our God then dead?

FRIAR PETER

Woman, blaspheme not: your son is hurt, but living.

MADAME ROLLISON

Whose words are these, whose words such comfort
giving?

Father, is't true? I heard the gaolers call
"He's fallen," but I did not see the fall—
I did not see the body of my only son,
For I am the blind, the orphaned, lonely one!
But I felt his blood on the stones! By God Who reigns!
Here I feel same blood, the blood of my son!

There's a murderer here, too, whom that same blood
stains!

*(She goes straight to the Senator, who evades her. She
falls in a swoon on the ground. Friar Peter is the only
one, beside the Starosta, who approaches her. A
thunderbolt is heard)*

ALL

(terrified)

The Word was made flesh! It's here!

OTHERS

Here!

FRIAR PETER

Not here.

A GUEST

(looking out of the window)

The edge of the University block! How near!

SENATOR

(goes to the window)

The Doctor's window!

ONE OF THE SPECTATORS

D'you hear? Some woman yelled.

SOMEONE IN THE STREET

(laughing)

Ha! The Devil's got them!

(Pelican comes in, confused)

SENATOR

Our Doctor?

PELICAN

Killed

By the thunderbolt! A marvel that deserves
Close analysis: a dozen lightning-rods
Stood round the block, but the last room was pelted.
Nothing was harmed but some silver roubles that melted
They were in the desk, close by the head of the doctor,
Doubtless they acted today as a lightning-conductor.

STAROSTA

Russian roubles, I see, are very risky.

SENATOR

(to the ladies)

Don't stop dancing, ladies! *(To footman)* Give me a
whisky . . .

(seeing that the ladies are rescuing Madame Rollison)

Take her away—help this woman! She's ill!

Take her away!

FRIAR PETER

To her son?

SENATOR

Take her where you will!

FRIAR PETER

Her son is not yet dead—still breathes—'twere well
To let me go to him.

SENATOR

Go where you like—to Hell.
The Doctor's killed. Ah! Ah! *C'est inconcevable*
That priest foretold it him. Ah! Ah! Ah! *C'est un*
diable!

(To the guests)

Well, what's frightful in that? We have clouds in spring,
Thunderbolts fall from the clouds—it's a natural thing.

SOVIETNIK'S WIFE
(to husband)

Say what you like, dread's always dread! The proof,
I won't stay longer with you 'neath one roof.
"Husband," I said, "crawl not in children's blood!"
When you beat up Jews—even harmless Jews—I stood
Silent — but children! — The Doctor was punished
quickly!

SOVIETNIK

You're stupid.

SOVIETNIK'S WIFE
I'm going home. I'm feeling sickly.

(A fresh thunderbolt is heard. All flee, first those on the

left, then those on the right side. The Senator, Pelican
and Friar Peter remain)

SENATOR

(watching them flee)

That damned Doctor! Alive, he bored me with his jests,
And even now he's dead, he drives away my guests.

(To Pelican)

Voyez, how that Priest looks—*voyez, quel oeil hagard:*
It's a strange coincidence, *un singulier hasard . . .*
Say, do you know any charms, my darling Priest?
How did you know? God's punishment, at least?

(The Priest keeps silent)

To speak the truth, that Doctor was somewhat guilty;
To speak the truth, he went beyond his duty.
On aurait fort à dire—who knows, there are warnings
of wrath—

And after all, my God, why not stick to the simple path?
When then, my Priest? He sulks, and droops his nose.
But I'll set him free. *On dirait bien des choses!*

PELICAN

If prosecuting Polish folk's the danger,
The bolt would strike us first, before a stranger.

FRIAR PETER

I'll tell two ancient stories, full of meaning.

SENATOR
(*interested*)

About lightning? Or Doctors?

FRIAR PETER

Under a leaning

Wall, came various travellers, and laid
Them down to sleep from the hot sun, in the shade.
Among them was a murderer, worst of all.
An Angel woke him: "Rise, it's due to fall!"
He rose, the rest were killed. He joined his hands
And thanked God he was saved. The Angel stands
Saying: "You are the worst, you'll not slip by—
Last of them all, covered with public shame, you'll die."

The second tale says, in the times of old,
A Roman Chief defeated a Monarch bold
And put to death centurions and slaves
And even Captains. But alive he saves
The King himself, the Colonels of his host,
And men who great authority could boast.
And the foolish prisoners said: "We're going to live,
To the great Roman Chieftain thanks we give."
But a Roman soldier, who these Princes served,
Said: "True, our Chieftain has your lives preserved,
For he will chain you to his triumph-car,
And lead you round the camp and the world afar.
Leaders like you are taken back to Rome,
That famous city, that the folk at home
May cry: "Behold our mighty Chieftain's feat,
Who could such Colonels and such Kings defeat!"

And afterwards you're led in golden chains
And handed to the hangman for your pains,
Who'll plant you in dark holes, the earth beneath
Where you shall weep for aye and gnash your teeth."
Thus spake the Roman soldier: to whom the King,
Thundering, said: "The words of a stupid thing!
Did you e'er banquet with your Chief, my man,
That you might learn his every thought and plan?"
Thus did he with his fellow-prisoners laugh
And drink with his colonels and his entire staff.

SENATOR
(*bored*)

Il bat la campagne. Father—get out—escape—
If I catch you at it again, your skin I'll scrape,
Till you look like Rollison's son, and your own mother
Won't know you from him—or from any other.

(The Senator goes to his apartments, with Pelican. Friar Peter goes toward the door and meets Conrad, who is being taken to the Investigation Committee by two soldiers. He sees the Priest. He stops and looks at him for a long time)

CONRAD

How strange! I never saw him, but I seem
To know him like a brother. Was it a dream?
Yes, in a dream, I remember now the face,
The eyes—he seized me from the bottomless space,
He saved me in the dream: I'll ne'er forget.

(To the Priest)

Father, though we don't know each other yet—
 You don't know me—take this, for favours shown,
 Though only to my inner conscience known.
 For friends, although but seen in dreams, are dear;
 We find so few in real life, I fear.
 Please sell this ring: give half to the poor; the rest
 For Mass for souls in Purgat'ry oppressed.
 If Purgatory is prison, I know their pain—
 Who knows, if they'll e'er let me hear Mass again?

FRIAR PETER

They will. In return for the ring, hear what I say:
 You will depart on an unknown, distant way;
 You'll be among the great, rich, wise and gay—
 Seek out a man, who knows far more than they!
 You'll know him, for he'll be the first to greet you
 In the Divine Name: Hear Him!

CONRAD

(staring)

God! Did I meet you . . .
 a minute, wait . . .

FRIAR PETER

I cannot. Friend, good-bye!

CONRAD

One word!

SOLDIER

Not here! Each his own road must ply.

SCENE IX

FOREFATHER'S NIGHT

*A Cemetery. In the distance, a chapel; the Warlock
 and a Woman in mourning.*

WARLOCK

Into the chapel pour the crowds,
 Soon will begin the Feast of Shrouds.
 It's time to go, the night grows dim.

WOMAN

Warlock, I'll not go that way,
 Here in the graveyard I would stay,
 Him I would see, and only him,
 Spirit who ere the years had sped
 Shewed himself after I was wed;
 Who suddenly amid the herd
 Of ghosts appeared, spoke not a word,
 Gazing upon me, bloody and pale;
 And with his eye he made me quail.

WARLOCK

He, when I called him, was still living,
 Maybe, therefore, no answer giving,
 For 'mid the spiritual crowds
 On the mysterious Night of Shrouds,
 To call the living we can claim.
 Their bodies are at banquet gay,
 In battle, or at gambling play,
 And remain behind there in the room—
 While the spirit, summoned by its name,
 In a light shade will hither loom,
 But may not speak, the while it lives;
 It stands there pale, no utterance gives.

WOMAN

And the wound in his breast, what did it mean?

WARLOCK

Something has hurt his soul, I ween.

WOMAN

Alone here I shall lose my way.

WARLOCK

Beside you here myself I'll stay.
 Without me they can make each spell,
 The other warlock chants them well.
 Dost hear the singing from afar?
 That's where the folk assembled are.

They've cast the first spell on the heath,
 Spell of the distaff and the wreath;
 They've summoned up the airy ghosts—
 And now those lights, those glittering hosts,
 Like falling stars, dost thou descry?
 Dost see that stretch of fiery chains?
 They're spirits from the airy plains.
 Above the chapel they shine down
 Beneath the black space of the sky,
 Like milk-white pigeons, when they fly
 At night above the glaring town
 And there upon their wings' white down
 Reflecting back the flaming glow
 They seem a flock of stars below.

WOMAN

He'll not be found 'mid such a team.

WARLOCK

See, from the chapel bursts a gleam,
 They're conjuring by the power of fire,
 They're calling from the desert mire,
 And from the tomb, bodies in the power
 Of evil spirits, here's the hour—
 Search for him in your memory.
 Hide behind me in the hollow tree,
 In this dry and hollow oak,
 Whence hidden oracles once spoke.
 The whole cemetery's bustling,
 The tombs are opening, trees rustling,
 A little bright blue flame bursts out

And the lids of the coffins jump about
 The damned protrude their pallid head
 And their long arms dry and dead.
 Dost see the eyes, like burning coal?
 Hide thine eyes in the tree-hole;
 They burn, those spectral eyes that lower
 But over the Warlock have no power.

Ha!

WOMAN

What do you see?

WARLOCK

A corpse that's fresh,
 In clothes of yet unrotted mesh—
 He smells all round of sulphur smoke,
 He has a forehead black as coke—
 Instead of eyes, by the skull's angles
 Gleam two large golden spangles,
 And in the middle of each circle
 Sits a small devil turning turtle,
 Somersaulting, flashing by
 Quick as lightning in the sky.
 He grits his teeth—this way he's flown.
 He pours from hand to hand, toiling
 As if from sieve to sieve, boiling
 Silver. . . . Do you hear his groan?

PHANTOM

Where is the church? Folk in that place
 Praise God! Man, understand,

See how these ducats burn my face,
 This silver scalds my hand!
 Ah! pour it out for the orphan cold,
 For some prisoner's or widow's bread.
 Ah! pour from my hand this hot silver and gold
 And pluck these gold coins from my head!
 You won't! This metal I must roll,
 Till that child-murdering devil
 Gives up his greedy, bottomless soul—
 In his heart I'll pour this metal;
 Then pour it out by his eyes once more,
 And back again by the same.
 I'll turn his corpse like a sieve; to pour
 And sift will be my game!
 I'll pour this metal in my turn,
 Through him—ah when! I burn. I burn!

(Flees)

WARLOCK

Ha!

WOMAN

What do you see?

WARLOCK

Ha, how near!

It's crept out, and it's coming here!
 What a horrible corpse is hither heading—
 All pale and fat! The corpse is new
 And has new clothing on it too:

It's all dressed up, as for a wedding—
Not long among the worms he lies,
They've scarcely eaten half his eyes.

He's jumped aside from the church—the devil
Hoodwinked him—the lord of evil
Won't let him near the church. He has
Assumed the shape of a young lass:
He waves to the corpse, with female wiles
He eggs him on, and winks and smiles.
Toward her watch the madman jump
From grave to grave, from stump to stump.
Deluded, arms and legs he writhes
Like the arms of a windmill, or like scythes:
At last he reaches her embraces,
Then underneath him from dark places
Spurt up a dozen long black jowls;
Those huge black dogs jump out with howls—
They snatch him from his sweetheart's legs
And tear him into bits and dregs,
And shake his limbs with bloody snout,
And carry the meat all round about.

The dogs have vanished. What new wonder!
Every piece is living yonder
And like separate corpses creep
All the bits to join the heap.
The head jumps like a toad, and from
Its nostrils streams of fire come—
The chest of the body crawls as well
Like a gigantic tortoise-shell.
The body's joined the head meanwhile,

It gallops like a crocodile—
The fingers torn off from the hand
Wriggle like snakes on the sand
To find the palm and the palm to find
The fingers dig till all are lined.
Likewise the legs together roll;
Once more the corpse is standing whole,
Once more the girl displays her charms,
Once more he falls into her arms,
Once more the fiends from 'twixt her legs
Seize him, and tear to bits and dregs. . . .
Ha, may I never see him more!

WOMAN

You fear him so?

WARLOCK

You mean—abhor!
Tortoises, toads, adders, crocodiles—
In one dead corpse so many reptiles!

WOMAN

Not with such spirits is my friend.

WARLOCK

Soon, soon Forefathers' Night will end.
Dost hear? The third cock-crow is ringing;
The deeds of their fathers they are singing.
Soon will disperse the gathered crowds.

WOMAN

He came not to the Feast of Shrouds!

WARLOCK

If that spirit's still in the body,
Whisper his name three separate times,
While I above the magic poppy
Conjure him in our secret rhymes—
Then he will leave his body for you
And reveal himself before you.

WOMAN

I've said it.

WARLOCK

Then he does not hear it,
though I've conjured.

WOMAN

There's no spirit!

WARLOCK

Oh, woman! It must be thy lover
His fathers' faith has given over
Or else he's changed his ancient name.
Thou seest, the dawn begins to flame. . . .
Our spells have lost their power, I fear
Thy sweet one will not now appear.

(They come out of the tree)

What's that? Look thither, Westward, in
The ancient town of Giedymin;
'Mid the thick blizzards of the snow
Some scores of wagons northwards go!
All of them, all, towards the North,
With all the horses' strength, speed forth.
Dost see? In front there's someone—stay—
His clothes are black. . . .

WOMAN

It's he!

WARLOCK

This way!

WOMAN

Oh, he's turned back! Unlucky chance!
And from his eyes one only glance,
One only! Ah, what an eye! What a story!

WARLOCK

His breast with blood is soaked and gory,
For many wounds are in that breast;
He suffers torment without rest.
A thousand swords, and every sword
Reached through his body to his soul.
Now death alone will make him whole.

WOMAN

Who is it hath so struck my lord?

WARLOCK

The nation's enemies, I vow.

WOMAN

He had one wound upon his brow,
One only and not very large,
A black spot on a white marge.

WARLOCK

'Tis one that gives the greatest pain.
I've seen and sounded it in vain—
'Tis his own doing, thus, again,
It can be only healed by death.

WOMAN

Ah, heal him, great God!—with Thy breath.

END OF THE FIRST ACT