

Classic Poetry Series

Henrik Wergeland

- poems -

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Henrik Wergeland(17 June 1808 – 12 July 1845)

Henrik Arnold Thaulow Wergeland was a Norwegian writer, most celebrated for his poetry but also a prolific playwright, polemicist, historian, and linguist. He is often described as a leading pioneer in the development of a distinctly Norwegian literary heritage and of modern Norwegian culture.

Though Wergeland only lived to be 37, his range of pursuits covered literature, theology, history, contemporary politics, social issues, and science. His views were controversial in his time, and his literary style was variously denounced as subversive.

Family

He was the oldest son of Nicolai Wergeland (1780–1848), who had been a member of the constituent assembly at Eidsvoll in 1814. The father was himself pastor of Eidsvold and the poet was thus brought up in the very holy of holies of Norwegian patriotism. Wergeland's younger sister was Camilla Collett and younger brother major general Joseph Frantz Oscar Wergeland. His father was the son of a bellringer from Sogn, and Wergeland's paternal ancestry is mostly farmers from Hordaland, Sogn and Sunnmøre. On his mother's side, he descended from both Danes and Scots. His great-grandfather, Andrew Chrystie (1697–1760), was born in Dunbar, and belonged to the Scottish Clan Christie. This Andrew migrated in 1717 to Brevik in Norway, moved on to Moss and was married a second time to a Scottish woman, Marjorie Lawrie (1712–1784). Their daughter Jacobine Chrystie (1746–1818) was married to the town clerk of Kristiansand Henrik Arnold Thaulow (1722–1799), father of Wergeland's mother Alette Thaulow (1780–1843). Wergeland got his first name from the elder Henrik Arnold.

Early Life

Henrik Wergeland entered The Royal Frederick University in 1825 to study for the church and graduated in 1829. That year, he became a symbol of the fight for celebration of the constitution at 17 May, which was later to become the Norwegian National Day. He became a public hero after the infamous "battle of the Square" in Christiania, which came to pass because any celebration of the national day was forbidden by royal decree. Wergeland was, of course, present and became renowned for standing up against the local governors. Later, he became the first to give a public address on behalf of the day and thus he was given credit as the one who "initiated the day". His grave and statues are

decorated by students and school children every year. Notably, the Jewish community of Oslo pays their respects at his grave on 17 May, in appreciation of his efforts to allow Jews into Norway. During the Second World War, the Nazi occupiers forbade any celebration of Wergeland.

Early Poetry

In 1829 he published a volume of lyrical and patriotic poems, *Digte, første Ring* (poems, first circle), which attracted the liveliest attention to his name. In this book we find his ideal love, the heavenly Stella, which can be described as a Wergeland equivalent to Beatrice in Dante's poem *Divina Commedia*. Stella is in fact based on four girls, whom Wergeland fell in love with (two of whom he wooed), and never got really close to. The character of Stella also inspired him to endeavour on the great epic *Skabelsen, Mennesket og Messias* (Creation, Man and the Messiah). It was remodeled in 1845 as *Mennesket* (Man). In these works, Wergeland shows the history of Man and God's plan for humanity. The works are clearly platonic-romantic, and is also based on ideals from the enlightenment and the French revolution. Thus, he criticizes abuse of power, and notably evil priests and their manipulation of people's minds. In the end, his credo goes like this:

Heaven shall no more be split
after the quadrants of altars,
the earth no more be sundered and plundered
by tyrant's sceptres.
Bloodstained crowns, executioner's steel
torches of thralldom and pyres of sacrifice
no more shall gleam over earth.
Through the gloom of priests, through the thunder of kings,
the dawn of freedom,
bright day of truth
shines over the sky, now the roof of a temple,
and descends on earth,
who now turns into an altar
for brotherly love.
The spirits of the earth now glow
in freshened hearts.
Freedom is the heart of the spirit, Truth the spirit's desire.
earthly spirits all
to the soil will fall
to the eternal call:
Each in own brow wears his heavenly throne.

Each in own heart wears his altar and sacrificial vessel.
Lords are all on earth, priests are all for God.</i>

At the age of twenty-one he became a power in literature, and his enthusiastic preaching of the doctrines of the French July revolution of 1830 made him a force in politics also. Meanwhile he was tireless in his efforts to advance the national cause. He established popular libraries, and tried to alleviate the widespread poverty of the Norwegian peasantry. He preached the simple life, denounced foreign luxuries, and set an example by wearing Norwegian homespun clothes. He strived for enlightenment and greater understanding of the constitutional rights his people had been given. Thus, he became increasingly popular among common people.

Personal and political struggle

Critics, especially Johan Sebastian Welhaven, claimed his earliest efforts in literature were wild and formless. He was full of imagination, but without taste or knowledge. Therefore, from 1830 to 1835 Wergeland was subjected to severe attacks from Welhaven and others. Welhaven, being a classicist, could not tolerate Wergeland's explosive way of writing, and published an essay about Wergeland's style. As an answer to these attacks, Wergeland published several poetical farces under the pseudonym of "Siful Sifadda". Welhaven showed no understanding of Wergeland's poetical style, or even of his personality. On one hand, the quarrel was personal, on the other, cultural and political. What had started as a mock-quarrel in the Norwegian Students' Community soon blew out of proportion and became a long lasting newspaper dispute for nearly two years. Sadly, Welhaven's criticism, and the slander produced by his friends, created a lasting prejudice against Wergeland and his early productions. Recently, this has been debated, and his early poetry has been more favorably recognized. Wergeland's poetry can in fact be regarded as strangely modernistic. From early on, he wrote poems in free style, without rhymes or metre. His use of metaphors are vivid, and complex, and many of his poems quite long. He challenges the reader to contemplate his poems over and over, but so do his contemporaries Byron and Shelley, or even Shakespeare. The free form and multiple interpretations especially offended Welhaven, who held an aesthetical view of poetry as appropriately concentrated on one topic at a time. Wergeland supported the thought of a separate and independent language for Norway, who until this point had written in Danish. Thus, he preceded Ivar Aasen by 15 years. Later, the Norwegian historian Halvdan Koht would say, that "there

is not one political cause in Norway, which has not been seen and preceded by Henrik Wergeland".

Personality

Wergeland had a hot temper and fought willingly for social justice. At the time, poverty was normal in the rural areas, and serfdom was common. Wergeland often went into legal strife with greedy lawyers, who could legally take hold of small homesteads. Wergeland earned himself great enemies for this, and in one case, the juridical problems lasted for years, and nearly left him in bankruptcy. The quarrel had started at Gardermoen, at the time a drill field for a section of the Norwegian army. In his plays, his arch nemesis, the procurator Jens Obel Praëm would be cast as the devil himself. Wergeland was generally suspicious of lawyers, because of their attitude towards farmers, especially the poor ones.

Wergeland was tall, reckoned by average Norwegian height at the time. He stood a head taller than most of his contemporaries (about 1m and 80 cm). Often, he could be seen gazing upwards, especially when he rode his horse through town. The horse, Veslebrunen (little brown), is reckoned to be a small Norwegian breed (but not a pony). Thus, Wergeland rode his horse while dragging his feet after him.

Campbellerne

In the autumn of 1837, Wergeland took part in a playwright's competition for the theater in Christiania. He came second, just behind Andreas Munch. Wergeland had written a musical play, Campbellerne (The Campbells). This play was based on tunes and poems by Robert Burns, and the plot commented on both British colonialism in the East-Indies, and Scottish serfdom. At the same time, he criticized the situation in Norway, poverty and greedy lawyers. The play was an immediate crowd-pleaser, and was later considered his greatest theatrical success.

But the riots began on the second day of performance, 28 January 1838. To this performance, 26 distinguished high-ranking gentlemen from the university, court and administration mustered to take Wergeland once and for all. They bought themselves the best seats in the audience, and armed with small toy-trumpets and pipes, they began to interrupt the performance from the very beginning. The tumult rose, and the chief of the Christiania police could do nothing more than shout for order while jumping in his seat. Later, it has been said that the high-ranking gentlemen acted like schoolboys, and one of them, an attorney in the high court, broke into the lounge of Nicolai Wergeland, bellowing straight in his

ear. The poet's father was astonished by this behaviour. The assailant is said to have been the later Norwegian prime minister Frederik Stang. One of the actors finally calmed the audience, and the play commenced. Later, after the play, the ladies in the first and second row acted on behalf of Wergeland, throwing rotten tomatoes at the offenders, and then fights erupted, inside and outside the theater building, and in the streets nearby. Allegedly, some of them tried to escape, and were dragged back for another round of beating. The offenders were shamed for weeks, and dared not show themselves for a while. The story of this battle, called "the battle of the Campbells" (Cambellerslaget), was witnessed and recorded by a member of the Norwegian Parliament.

One might conclude that the followers of Wergeland won the day, but the men in position might have taken some revenge by slandering Wergeland's reputation after his death.

In February, a performance was held "for the benefit of Mr Wergeland", and this gave him enough money to purchase a small abode outside town, in Grønli under the hill of Ekeberg.

Marriage

From Grønli, Wergeland had to row across the fjord to a small inn at the Christiania quay. Here, he met Amalie Sofie Bekkevold, then 19 years of age, daughter of the proprietor. Wergeland quickly fell in love, and proposed the same autumn. They got married on 27 April 1839 in the church of Eidsvoll, with Wergeland's father as priest.

Although Amalie was working class, she was also charming, witty and intelligent, and soon won the hearts of her family-in-law. Camilla Collett became her trusted friend throughout their lives. The marriage produced no children, but the couple adopted Olaf, an illegitimate son Wergeland had fathered in 1835, and Wergeland secured an education for the boy. Olaf Knutsen, as he was called, would later become the founder of the Norwegian School-gardening, and a prominent teacher.

Amalie became the inspiration for a new book of love-poems; this book was filled with images of flowers, whereas his earlier love-poems had been filled with images of stars. After Wergeland's death, she married the priest, Nils Andreas Biørn, who officiated at his funeral and was an old college friend of Wergeland. She had eight children by him. But at her death many years later, her eulogy was as follows: The widow of Wergeland has died at last, and she has inspired poems like no-one else in Norwegian literature.

Employment

Wergeland had tried to get employment as a Chaplain or priest for many years up to this point. He was always turned down, mostly because the employers found his way of living "irresponsible" and "unpredictable". His legal strife with Praëm was also a hindrance. The department stated that he could not get a parish while this case was still unresolved. His last attempt vanished "on a rose-red cloud" during the winter of 1839, due to an incident on a tavern.

Meanwhile, Wergeland worked as a librarian at the University Library for a small wage, from January 1836. In late autumn 1838, King Carl Johan offered him a small "royal pension" that nearly doubled his salary. Wergeland accepted this as a payment for his work as a "public teacher". This pension gave Wergeland enough income to marry and settle down. His marriage the same spring made him calmer, and he applied again, this time for the new job as head of the national archive. The application is dated January 1840. Eventually, he obtained it, and was employed from 4 January 1841 until he had to retire in the autumn of 1844.

On 17 April 1841, he and Amalie moved to his new home, Grotten, situated near the new Norwegian royal palace, and here he lived the next few years.

Personal Struggles

After his employment, Wergeland became suspected by his earlier comrades in the republican movement, of betraying his cause. He, as left-wing, should not have taken anything from the King. Wergeland had an ambiguous view of Carl Johan. In one perspective, he was a symbol of the French Revolution, a reminder of values Wergeland admired. On the other hand, he was the Swedish king who had hindered the national independence. The radicals called Wergeland a renegade, and he defended himself in many ways. But it was apparent that he himself felt lonely and betrayed. On one occasion, he was present at a students' party, and tried to propose a toast for the old professors, and was rudely interrupted. After a couple of attempts, he despaired and broke a bottle against his forehead. Only one single person, a physician, later recalled that Wergeland wept that night. Later that evening, the students prepared a procession in honour of the university, and they all left Wergeland behind. Only one student offered him his arm, and this was enough to get Wergeland back in the mood. The student was Johan Sverdrup, later the father of Norwegian parliamentarism. Thus, the two symbols of Norwegian left-wing movement, a generation apart, walked together.

But Wergeland was barred from writing in some of the bigger newspapers, and was therefore not allowed to defend himself. The paper Morgenbladet would not print his answers, not even his poetical responses. One of his best known poems was written at this time, a response to the paper's statement that Wergeland was "irritable and in a bad mood". Wergeland responded in free metre:

I in a bad mood, Morgenblad? I, who need nothing more than a glimpse of sun to burst out in loud laughter, from a joy I cannot explain?

The poem was printed in another newspaper, and Morgenbladet printed the poem with an apology to Wergeland in the spring of 2008.

In January 1844 the court decided on a compromise in the Praëm case. Wergeland had to bail himself out, and he felt humiliated. The sum was set at 800 speciedaler, more than he could afford. He had to sell his house, and Grotten was purchased the following winter by a good friend of his, who understood his plight.

The psychological pressure may have contributed to his illness.

Sickness and Death

In the spring of 1844, he caught Pneumonia and had to stay at home for a fortnight. While recovering, he insisted on taking part in the national celebrations that year, and his sister Camilla met him, "pale as death, but in the spirit of 17 May." on his way to the revels. Soon after, his illness returned, and now he had symptoms of tuberculosis as well. He had to stay inside, and the illness turned out to be terminal. There has been many theories about his actual sickness and the nature of it. There are some who claim he developed lung cancer after a lifetime of smoking. At the time, the dangers of smoking was unknown to most people. This last year, he wrote rapidly from his sickbed, letters, poems, political statements and plays.

Due to his economic situation, Wergeland moved to a smaller house, Hjerterum, in April 1845. Grotten was then sold. But his new home was not yet finished, and he had to spend ten days at the national hospital Rikshospitalet. Here, he wrote some of his best known sickbed poems. He wrote almost to the end. The last written poem is dated 9 July, three days before his death.

Henrik Wergeland died in his home early morning 12 July 1845. His funeral was held 17 July, and was attended by thousands, many of whom had traveled from the districts around Christiania. The priest had expected some hundreds, but had

to correct himself. The congregation was ten times that number. His coffin was carried by the Norwegian students, while the appointed wagon went in front of them empty. Allegedly, the students insisted on carrying the coffin themselves. Wergeland's grave was left open during the afternoon, and all day, people revered him by spreading flowers on his coffin, until evening came. His father wrote his thanks for this in *Morgenbladet* three days later (20 July), stating that his son had gotten his honour at last:

<i>Now I see how you all loved him, how you revered him... God reward and bless you all! The brother you held in such esteem had a risky beginning, was misunderstood a long time and suffered long, but had a beautiful ending. His life was not strewn with roses, but his death and grave the more - (Nicolai Wergeland).</i>

Wergeland was in fact laid in a humble section of the churchyard, and soon his friends began to write in the newspapers, claiming a better site for him. He was eventually moved to his present grave in 1848. At this time, debate arose about a proper monument for his grave. The monument on his grave was provided by Swedish jews, and officially "opened" 17 June 1849, after six months of delay.

His statue stands between the Royal Palace and Storting by Oslo's main street, his back turned to Nationalteateret. On Norwegian Constitution Day, it receives an annual wreath of flowers from students at the University of Oslo. This monument was raised on 17 May 1881, and the oration at this occasion was given by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson.

Works

The collected writings of Henrik Wergeland (*Samlede Skrifter* : trykt og utrykt) were published in 23 volumes in 1918-1940, edited by Herman Jæger and Didrik Arup Seip. An earlier compilation also titled *Samlede Skrifter* ("Collected Works", 9 vols., Christiania, 1852-1857) was edited by H. Lassen, the author of *Henrik Wergeland og hans Samtid* (1866), and the editor of his *Breve* ("Letters", 1867).

Wergeland's *Jan van Huysums Blomsterstykke* (Flower-piece by Jan van Huysum, 1840), *Svalen* (The Swallow, also translated to English, 1841), *Jøden* (The Jew 1842), *Jødinden* (The Jewess 1844) and *Den Engelske Lods* (The English Pilot 1844), form a series of narrative poems in short lyrical metres which remain the most interesting and important of their kind in Norwegian literature. He was less successful in other branches of letters; in the drama neither his *Campbellerne* (The Campbells 1839), *Venetianerne* (The Venetians 1843), nor *Søkadetterne* (The Sea Cadets 1837), achieved any lasting success; while his elaborate

contribution to political history, Norges Constitutions Historie (The History of the Norwegian Constitution 1841-1843, is still regarded as an important source. The poems of his later years include many lyrics of great beauty, which are among the permanent treasures of Norwegian poetry.

 Politics and Controversies

The erroneous belief that he really became a Muslim, derives from a letter to his father, written on 17 May 1845, where he, in the letter, mentions God as Allah once, though he returns to the word God for the rest of the letter. In the letters written after this, the word Allah is never mentioned again, but the letters to his father often ends with the sentence God bless you (in fact, the letters mentioned does not consider religious questions at all). The phrase I die a deist, an honest worshiper of Allah, may point to his religious tolerance, and the fact that Christian Arabs in the Middle East use the word Allah for the Christian god, as does the Indonesian Bible. As a matter of fact, Wergeland always set Christianity first of the religions, although he once proclaimed: All religions have a gentle and loving heart. The "Convertist" view of Wergeland has sometimes led to newspaper debates in recent years.

Wergeland became a symbol for the Norwegian Left-wing movement, and was embraced by many later Norwegian poets, right up until today. Thus, a great number of later poets owe him allegiance in one way or another. As the Norwegian poet Ingeborg Refling Hagen said, "When in our footprints something sprouts,/ it's a new growth of Wergeland's thoughts." She, among others, initiated an annual celebration on his birthday. She started the traditional "flower-parade", and celebrated his memory with recitation and song, and often performing his plays.

Wergeland's most prominent poetical symbols are the flower and the star, symbolizing heavenly and earthly love, nature and beauty.

Wergeland in English

The Army of Truth, selected Poems by Henrik Wergeland, University of Wisconsin press, 2003. Translations by Anne Born, G. M. Gathorne-Hardy and I. Grøndahl. Contains mostly poems from The Jew and The Jewess. Earlier translations were made by Jethro Bithell.

Juleaftenen (Christmas Eve)

Hvo minnes ikke
et vær, han tror, ei himlen mer kan skikke?
et vær som om hver sjel, fra Kains til den,
Gud sist fordømte,
den jord forbannet, fra helvete rømte,
som fristet dem å svike himmelen?....
Et vær, hvis stemmes
forferdelser ei mere kan forglemmes?
Thi alle tenkte: det må være sendt
for min skyld ene;
orkanens tordner meg kun meg de mene;
min synd er blitt åndene bekjent...
Et vær, hvis styrke
kan lære prest og troende å dyrke
demoner i det element, hvis brak
den gamle høre
fra barnsben kan i sitt bemoste øre
et skyens jordskjelv, luftens dommedag?
Et vær, som rystet
den sterkes hjerte i dets skjul i brystet,
et himmelvær, hvori sitt eget navn
han påropt hørte
av ånder, stormene forbi ham førte,
mens hver en tretopp hylte som en ravn? Men raven gjemte
seg selv i klippen, ulven sulten temte,
og reven våget seg ikke ut.
I huset sluktes
hvert lys, og lenkehunden inneluktes....
I slikt vær, da får du bønner, Gud!

I slikt vær - det var en juleaften -
da natt det ble før dagens mål var fullt,
befant en gammel jøde, nær forkommen,
seg midt i Sverigs ørken, Tivedskogen.
Han ventedes til bygden denne side
fra bygdene på hin, for julens skyld,
av pikene med lengsel, thi i skreppen
lå spenner, bånd og alt hva de behøvde
for morgendagen, annen dag og nyttår.

Det gjorde lengselen spent, men ikke bange;
thi ennu hadde "Gamle-Jakob" aldri
dem sviktet noen jul: Han kom så visst
som juleaftenen selv.
"Tyss! var det atter stormen,
som hylte gjennom grenene? Det skrek.
Nu skriker det igjen." Og Gamle-Jakob
fluks stanser lyttende for annen gang.
Nu tier det. Thi stormen øker på,
som fossen drønner over den, der drukner.
Han vandrer atter. "Tyss! igjen en lyd!"
- en lyd, som skar igjennom skogens brusen.
"Den falske hubro skriker som et barn.
Hvo slipper barn vel ut i sådant vær?
Det gjør ei selv ulven selv med sine." Og
den gamle stolper atter frem i sneen.
Da skrek det atter, så han mer ei tviler;
thi dette stormkast, som borte alt
et snoet snetårn hvirvler over skogen,
har ført et ord, et enkelt ord forbi;
og fluks han dreier dit hvorfra det kom,
arbeidende seg dypere i skogen
og dypere i sneen og i natten,
der som en kullsort fjellvegg reiste seg
mot hvert kans skritt, av fyk kun gjennomlyst,
som om den ene hele vide skog var full
av flyvende slørhyllete gespenster,
der hylende seg stillet ham i veien,
på luftig tå seg hvirvlet, vokste reddsomt,
og så forsvant imellom stammene.
Dog kjempet oldingen seg frem mot stormen.
Han vandrer når den vokser, når den saktner
og drager ånde, lytter han på kne.
Men fluks han springer opp, og går i mulmet,
som dvergen trenger gjennom, sorte, muld.
.... Han hører intet mer. Den gamle skjelver
ved tanken, at ham onde ånder gjekker,
og mumler frem de bønner, som han vet.
Da klynker det igjen, og ganske nær;
hans eget rop mot stormen vender kun
tilbake i hans munn. Men hist, ja hist!
Ti skritt ennu! Der rører noe mørkt seg

på sneen, som om stormen lekte med
en stubbe, der var løsnet litt i roten.
"O Herre! en arm! O Herre!
et barn, et barn! Men dødt! - "
Akk, tenkte stjernene i denne natt,
da Betlehemsstjernen lyste mellom dem,
og intet godt på jorden kunne skje?
Thi ingen av dem så, at Gamle Jakob,
så glad som om en skatt han hadde funnen,
fluks kastet bort sin hele rikdom: Skreppen,
trakk av sin knappe kjole, hyllet den
om barnets lemmer, blott sitt bryst,
og la så dets kolde kinn derved
inntil det våknet av hans hjertes slag.
Da sprang han opp. Men nu hvorhen? Thi stormen
har blåst hans spor igjen. Det ei bekymret.

Thi han I tordenen i skogens topper
nu hørte Davids jubelharper kun;
ham fykene nu syntes som kjerurber,
der viste vei på svanehvite vinger,
og i det må og få, han fulgte, følte
han Herrens eget sterke fingertrekk.
Men hus på ville Tiveden å finne
I slik en natt, da lys ei turde brennes?
Og midtveis lå der kun en enkelt plass;
det lave tak ei skilles kan fra sneen,
den sorte vegg ei fra et klippestykke.
Dog stanstes ved et under han av den.
Der sank han ned. Han maktet ikke mere;
og mange vindstøt for før med sin byrde
han orkede å slepe seg til døren.
Han banket sakte først, thi barnet sov;
og nu først savnet han sin tapre skreppe,
fordi han intet eiede å give
de gode arme folk, som snarlig ville
med gjestfri hasten åpne døren. Akk,
han banket mange ganger før det svarte:
"I Jesu navn, hvem kommer der i slik en natt?"
"Den gamle Jakob. Kjenner i meg ei?
den gamle jøde?" "Jøde!" skrek forferdet
en manns- og kvinnerøst. "Da blir du ute!

Vi eier ingenting å kjøpe for,
og blott ulykke vil du bringe huset
i denne natt, da han ble født, du drepte."
"Jeg?"
"Ja, ditt folk, og det er synden, som
igjennom tusen ledd skal straffes."
"Akk!
I natt da hunden lukkes inn?"
"ja, hunden,
men ingen jøde i et kristent hus."
Han hørte ikke mer. De hårde ord
ham koldere enn vinden gjennomhvinte,
og slengte, sterkere enn dem, ham ned
i sneen, bøyet over barnets slummer.
Da syntes ham, mens han mot vinduet stirret,
om ei det hvite ansikt atter kom
til syne dog, som om han sank i dun,
at liflig varme gjennomfløt hans årer,
og at bekjente vesner, hviskende
som sommervindens eolsspill i gresset,
omsvevede hans leie, inntil en
med løftet finger sa: kom! han sover.
Og i en opplyst sal ved siden av
forsvant de alle; barnet kun forble der
ved foten av hans leie, dragende
hans puter stetse bedre om ham, til
det forekom ham selv, at han sov inn.
- Der sneen var, som vokste om den døde.
"O Jesus! Jøden sitter der ennu!"
skrek mannen, da han så om morgnen ut.
"Så jag ham bort! Det er jo juledag,"
falt konen inn. "Og se den jødeskjelm,
hvor fast han holder bylten klemt til brystet!"
"Han er påtrengende med sine varer.
Med stive blikk han ser herinn, som om
vi hadde penger nok å kjøpe for."
"Dog gadd jeg se hva han i bylten har."
"Vis frem da, jøde!"
Begge tren de ut.
Den frosne glans de så I likets øyne.
De bleknet mer enn det, de skrek av skrekk,
og skalv av angrens slag.

"O Jemini!
Hva uhell her er hendt!"
De opp ham reiste,
og bylten fulgte med. De åpnet kjolen.
Der hang, med armene om jødens hals,
Margrethe, deres barn - et lik som han.
Så slår ei lyn, så rappe orm ei biter,
som skrekk og smerte ekteparet slo.
Så blek som faderen var ei sneen,
så hylte stormen ei som moderen.
"O Gud har straffet oss! Ei stormens kulde,
vår egen grusomhet har drept vårt barn!
Forgjeves! akk, som jøden på vår dør
på nådens ville vi forgjeves banke."

Da skogen veibar ble, kom bud fra gården,
hvor lille Gretha fostredes i legd,
og hvorfra hun, da helgen inn ble ringet,
før været kom, var vandret av seg selv,
foreldrene å gjeste juleaften.
Dog kom det ei å spørre efter barnet,
men efter jøden fra bygdens piker,
hvis håp nu til å kunne gjeste kirken
kun stod til nyttårsdagen, om han fantes.
Der lå han død I stuen foran arnen,
hvor mannen med et blick som jødens frosne,
og I en stilling krum som likets, satt,
I bålets røde aske stirrende
og stetse økende dets brann, at liket
dog kunne blive strakt og hånden korslagt.
Men foran lå på kne Margrethes moder,
sin lilles stive armer bøyende
bestandig fastere om likets hals.
"Hun ei tilhører mere oss" hun hulket,
"Han har vårt barn seg tilkjøpt for sin død.
Vi tør ei skille liten Greta fra ham;
thi hun for oss må bede Jesus om
hans forbønn hos sin fader; thi for ham
vil arme jøde klage - -"

Henrik Wergeland

The Army Of Truth

Words, the world so light esteemeth?
Lower yet,
words in poet's stanza set!
O how frail your power seemeth,
to be fighting
for the truth mankind is slighting.

Truth should come with thunder pealing,
flashing Levin:
To her succour sent from Heaven,
angel hosts their cohorts wheeling,
wide extended,
should escort her advent splendid.

Ah! Why comes she not, th'exalted,
hither now?
With a helm about her brow,
fashioned of the sky star-vaulted,
fiercer looming,
swords her radiant pinions pluming?

Why are not her white tents planted,
far and wide,
gleaming on the mountain side?
why are not her warriors granted,
in their striving,
mastery over life and living?

Bastioned night is steep for storming;
bigotry
rests secure on columns high;
like Egyptian serpents swarming,
round her temple,
error's black-robed guards assemble.

Onward yet, brave words, undaunted,
howso few!
Earthly triumph has to you
by the God of light been granted,

who are serving
truth, his child, with faith unswerving.

Forward, words, the truth's selected
Hero band!

Soon in human hearts shall stand
your victorious tents erected;
glory sweeping
sunlit folds above your sleeping.

Forward, then, with fearless faces,
truth's firm line!
Yours shall be, by pledge divine,
power no earthly might displaces;
death can never
still thee, voice of truth, for ever.

Cease then, puny host, your quailing,
truth her cause
through defeat to triumph draws:
Falsehood's desert heights assailing,
see, your powers
dissipate those phantom towers!

Henrik Wergeland

The First Embrace

Come to me, grief, on my bosom press,
Lest it should burst with joy's excess:
Heaven, with disaster, hell, with your pains,
Calm its commotion. For here awhile
 She has lain. Strike, foes!
Your shafts but soothe, when they pierce the veins
 Of a breast that lows
With the bliss of her thrill and her smile.

Sorrow and trouble have died away
Here, where her face in its loveliness lay.
Drowned she these in the deep of her eye?
Or sucked she their venom? I seemed to mark,
 On her smiling lips,
How a tremulous shadow of pain passed by:
 And the blue grew dark,
As her eyes' light found eclipse.

Innocent bride, thou hast joined afresh
Soul with earth, and with God the flesh.
When on my breast, as pure and bright
As a saint's white robe, thy perfect brow
 Gently was lain,
Guilt with its tear-steins vanished quite,
 And my mind is now
Like a cleansed and lighted fane.

My heart reflected an inward grace
From the sinless blush of thy maiden face:
To the waft of celestial wings was changed
The tress that wavered over me;
 And, O joy, my soul,
Demoniac once, from heaven estranged,
 Is, thanks to thee,
Darling, restored and whole.

I feel, where thy loving lips have pressed,
A glory shining within my breast,

And O, the paeans of love that burst,
At the touch of thy passionless, drowsy kiss.
I was fired and manned, -
While my fancy drank with a burning thirst
All the sweet of this
By a tender angel's hand.

Love, while you lay by my beating heart,
What burgeoning blossoms seemed to start!
Blossoms that lived, and dreamed, and thought.
Almond or apple was never so gay;
So rich a stream
Of the sun's blood never the roses caught.
My soul its clay
Left in a blissful dram.

Cold, dark spirit, hold thee apart,
Or blend with the blood that stirs my heart;
Let it flow supreme in its pulses still,
Let nerves aquiver their passion prove,
And in ecstasy
Hark to the breast's tense chords athrill,
Where, tranced in love,
She late at rest did lie

Henrik Wergeland

To A Pine Tree

Crowned, lofty scion of the pine
Whence Gothic architect's design
Derived the grace and power
For churches planned in noblest style,
For Notre Dame's majestic pile,
Westminster Hall, or Münster's aisle,
Or Pisa's leaning tower, -

In this dark valley laid aside,
Thou in thy grief thy crown of pride
Dost in the clouds retire;
And far thy somber glance ahs flown
To spires like pine-trees shaped in stone,
Perceiving, with a wistful groan,
The portrait of thy sire.

The dastard axe awaits thy wood:
Like Hercules in dragon's blood,
Thou in slow flames must die.
Yet perish proudly, pine, for know
Not all of Europe's skill can show
How such a pyramid may grow,
So stately and so high.

Lament not thou, for many a heart,
Fit model for the loftiest art,
Unknown in rags has pined;
There, brooding over work denied,
Some hero sits, some Tell Untried;
A Byron, Plato, oft has died
Unnoticed by mankind.

You Tell, for lack of tyrant foe,
Wars on the sparrow and the crow,
And he whose brain could soar
To match the master-minstrel's lays –
Some trumpeter usurps his bays,
While on his rustic pipe he plays
For alms from door to door.

Like theirs, my pine, obscurely placed,
Thy nobleness must run to waste,
 With lowly village spires –
Unworthy hovels – must contend,
Thou, Nature's temple! Fortune send
Thee first a Herostratic end,
 Immortalised in fires.

Thou stand'st a nobler temple there,
Thy dome the leaden clouds of air;
 No Lateran tapers fling
A beam so radiant and so fine
As those dew-spangled boughs of thine,
What sacred strains are so divine
 As those thy linnets sing?

Beneath what temple arches are
Such trophies of victorious war,
 So honourably won,
As are these pennons pearly bright,
Flecking thy darkest twigs with white,
Which spiders, in a hard-fought fight,
 Have stablished where they spun.

Dim spaces filled with incense fine,
A choir thou hast, a holy shrine,
 But ne'er an image there;
For sinless Nature, who did base
Thy root, to God speaks face to face,,
Nor needs, like man, who fell from grace,
 To mediate her prayer.

Upon thine organ-pipes the storm
Its wild Te Deum can perform,
 So awful, yet so fair:
Join thou, my soul, that anthem's strain; -
"The house of God is Nature's fane;
No moss so small, no weed so plain,
 But builds a chapel there."

