

Classic Poetry Series

Julian Tuwim

- poems -

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Julian Tuwim(1894 - 1953)

Julian Tuwim was a polish poet born in 1894. He was the leader of the Skamander group of experimental poets, he was also a major figure in his nation's literature. In his principal collection of poetry, *Slowa we krwi* [words bathed in blood] (1926), he wrote with fervor and violence of the emptiness of urban existence.

Tuwim spent his childhood and early school years in Lodz. Between 1916-1918 he studied law and philosophy in Warsaw. During that time he co-operated with various magazines and cabarets. During World War II he emigrated to Romania, France, Portugal, Brasil, and in 1942 to New York. There he wrote his major poem "Kwiaty Polskie" , in which he describes the time of his early childhood in Lodz. In June 1946 Tuwim returned to Poland. Between 1947-1950 he was the artistic director of Teatre Nowy in Lodz. He was awarded many times for his poetry, among them was the Literary Award of Lodz (1928, 1949), doctor honoris causa title by the University of Lodz (1949), Pen Club Award for translations from Puszkin (1935) and the national award (1951).

He died in 1953

Grass

Grass, grass up to my knees!
Grow up to the sky
So that there won't seem to be
Any you or I

So that I will turn all green
And blossom to my bones,
So that my words won't come between
Your freshness and my own.

So that for the two of us
There will be one name:
Either for both of us - grass,
Or both both of us - tuwim.

Julian Tuwim

Polish Flowers

A box with paints from childhood's time:
The colors of town are earth and grime.
An old worker at a dark doorway squats,
The spuds in his bowl are powdery dry.
It's a face of yellowish and gray spots
In the midst of hunger, cold, dirt and slime.

Julian Tuwim

The Common Man

When plastered billboards scream with slogans
'fight for your country, go to battle'
When media's print assaults your senses,
'Support our leaders' shrieks and rattles...
And fools who don't know any better
Believe the old, eternal lie
That we must march and shoot and kill
Murder, and burn, and bomb, and grill...

When press begins the battle-cry
That nation needs to unify
And for your country you must die...
Dear brainwashed friend, my neighbor dear
Brother from this, or other nation
Know that the cries of anger, fear,
Are nothing but manipulation
by fat-cats, kings who covet riches,
And feed off your sweat and blood - the leeches!
When call to arms engulfs the land
It means that somewhere oil was found,
Shooting 'blackgold' from underground!
It means they found a sneaky way
To make more money, grab more gold
But this is not what you are told!

Don't spill your blood for bucks or oil
Break, burn your rifle, shout: 'NO DEAL!'
Let the rich scoundrels, kings, and bankers
Send their own children to get killed!
May your loud voice be amplified
By roar of other common men
The battle-weary of all nations:
WE WON'T BE CONNED TO WAR AGAIN!

Julian Tuwim

The Dancing Socrates

I roast in the sun, old wretch...
I lie, and yawn, I stretch.
Old am I, but full of pep:
When I take a slug from the cup
I sing.
My ancient bones bask in the sun's glow,
And my curly, wise, grey head.
In that wise head, like woods in spring
Hums and hums a wiser wine.
Eternal thoughts flow and flow,
Like time.

Julian Tuwim

The Locomotive

A big locomotive has pulled into town,
Heavy, humungus, with sweat rolling down,
A plump jumbo olive.
Huffing and puffing and panting and smelly,
Fire belches forth from her fat cast iron belly.

Poof, how she's burning,
Oof, how she's boiling,
Puff, how she's churning,
Huff, how she's toiling.
She's fully exhausted and all out of breath,
Yet the coalman continues to stoke her to death.

Numerous wagons she tugs down the track:
Iron and steel monsters hitched up to her back,
All filled with people and other things too:
The first carries cattle, then horses not few;
The third car with corpulent people is filled,
Eating fat frankfurters all freshly grilled.
The fourth car is packed to the hilt with bananas,
The fifth has a cargo of six grand pi-an-as.
The sixth wagon carries a cannon of steel,
With heavy iron girders beneath every wheel.
The seventh has tables, oak cupboards with plates,
While an elephant, bear, two giraffes fill the eighth.
The ninth contains nothing but well-fattened swine,
In the tenth: bags and boxes, now isn't that fine?

There must be at least forty cars in a row,
And what they all carry -- I simply don't know:

But if one thousand athletes, with muscles of steel,
Each ate one thousand cutlets in one giant meal,
And each one exerted as much as he could,
They'd never quite manage to lift such a load.

First a toot!
Then a hoot!
Steam is churning,

Wheels are turning!

More slowly - than turtles - with freight - on their - backs,
The drowsy - steam engine - sets off - down the tracks.
She chugs and she tugs at her wagons with strain,
As wheel after wheel slowly turns on the train.
She doubles her effort and quickens her pace,
And rambles and scrambles to keep up the race.
Oh whither, oh whither? go forward at will,
And chug along over the bridge, up the hill,
Through mountains and tunnels and meadows and woods,
Now hurry, now hurry, deliver your goods.
Keep up your tempo, now push along, push along,
Chug along, tug along, tug along, chug along
Lightly and sprightly she carries her freight
Like a ping-pong ball bouncing without any weight,
Not heavy equipment exhausted to death,
But a little tin toy, just a light puff of breath.
Oh whither, oh whither, you'll tell me, I trust,
What is it, what is it that gives you your thrust?
What gives you momentum to roll down the track?
It's hot steam that gives me my clickety-clack.
Hot steam from the boiler through tubes to the pistons,
The pistons then push at the wheels from short distance,
They drive and they push, and the train starts a-swooshin'
'Cuz steam on the pistons keeps pushin' and pushin';
The wheels start a rattlin', clatterin', chatterin'
Chug along, tug along, chug along, tug along!

Julian Tuwim

The Saturday Night Song

Hooray, the echo will resound throughout the wide square,
When a sincere drunkard's song emanates from my throat;
Tonight I'll be lapping up a smoky pub's atmosphere,
I'm bloody well going to get sloshed, buzzed and somewhere float.

My spirit gorged, I'll bang the table with my strong fist,
Searching for a little brightness from these gloomy days-
Take no more you soft touch! Liberty! May the vile twists
Of my ricketed brats in the garret rot away.

I'll drink-smash everything in sight but never mind,
I'll pay myself! Can I not afford to break a glass or two?
I can, you bastards! With the rubles from my black grind
I could even have two dozen mistresses to woo.

I smash-because I feel like it! Hang it all! Freedom! I've power!
Run, spirit, till dawn. Out of the way. Today we rule!
And when I leave the pub with hands in the pocket of my trousers
I'll stagger wide down the drunken street, nobody's fool!

Julian Tuwim

Wife

My husband is idle, is dumb and spends money.
He either stands still at the window or runs about town like a bunny.

He stares and he stares, at a tram, at the sky.
He mutters, he whistles: he rummages over the house like an amateur spy.

And then he reads books: he turns their pages at least.
There are books in the kitchen and cellar; folios mixed with the yeast.

But what is he thinking about? what does my husband mumble?
When he tries to speak he gets nervous: piles of words flurry and tumble.

In the evening he drinks, and I feel angry enough
When I see his dear eyes getting misted up with that stuff.

His eyes are misted. He takes one more dram.
He kneels down beside me and lays his head on my arm.
It is only then that I learn for the first time who I am.

Julian Tuwim