

Classic Poetry Series

**France Preseren**  
**- poems -**

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# France Prešeren(3 December 1800 – 8 February 1849)

France Prešeren was a Slovene Romantic poet. He is considered the Slovene national poet. Although he was not a particularly prolific author, he inspired virtually all Slovene literature thereafter.

## <b> Life</b>

He was born 3 December 1800 (Saturday) in the Upper Carniolan village of Vrba, then part of the Habsburg Monarchy (today in Slovenia), to a relatively well-to-do peasant family. Already as a child, he showed considerable talent, so his parents decided to provide him with a good education.

At the age of eight, he was sent to elementary schools in Grosuplje and Ribnica, run by the local Roman Catholic clergy. In 1812, he moved to the Carniolan provincial capital of Ljubljana, where he attended the State Gymnasium. Already at a very young age, he learned Latin, Ancient Greek, as well as German, which was then the language of education, administration and high culture in most areas inhabited by Slovenes. In Ljubljana, Prešeren's talent was spotted by the poet Valentin Vodnik who encouraged him to develop his literary skills in the Slovene language. As a high school student, he became friends with the future philologist Matija Cop, who would have an extremely important influence on the development of Prešeren's poetry.

In 1821, Prešeren enrolled at the University of Vienna, where he studied law, against the wishes of his mother who wanted him to become a priest. In Vienna, he became acquainted with the western canon from Homer to Goethe, but he was most fascinated by Dante and the Italian trecentists, especially Petrarch and Boccaccio. He also read contemporary Romantic poets, and he was even fired from the teaching post at the Klinkowström's Jesuit institute for having lent a booklet of banned poetry to his friend Anastasius.

After acquiring a law degree in 1828, he returned to Ljubljana, where he got employment as an assistant in the firm of the lawyer Leopold Baumgartner. He was constantly striving to become an independent lawyer by putting in as many as six applications, but he was not successful. In 1832, he shortly moved to Klagenfurt in the hope of furthering his career, but returned to Ljubljana after less than a year. In the spring of 1833, he met Julija Primic, the daughter of a rich merchant, who would become the unfulfilled love of his life.

Around 1836, Prešeren finally realized that his love for Julija would never become mutual. The same year, he met Ana Jelovšek, with whom he entered into a permanent relationship. They had three children, but never married. Prešeren supported Ana financially and treated her as his rightful mate, but engaged in several other love affairs at the same time.

He also spent a lot of time travelling throughout Carniola, especially to Lake Bled, from the scenery of which he drew inspiration for his poems. In 1834, he began working as an assistant to his friend Blaz Crobath who gave Prešeren enough free time to engage in his literary activities. In 1846, he was finally allowed to open his own law firm and moved to Kranj with his family. He died there on 8 February 1849. Upon his deathbed he confessed that he had never forgotten Julija.

In general, Prešeren's life was an unhappy one. He was confronted with constant rejections, had an unstable sentimental life, and saw most of his closest friends die tragically. He lived in confrontation with both the civil and religious establishment, as well as with the provincial bourgeoisie of Ljubljana. His talent was far too high to be fully acknowledged by the contemporary culturally backward society of Slovenia. He fell victim to severe drinking problems and tried to take his life on at least two occasions. The motive of "the hostile fortune" is a frequent one in his works.

Prešeren's first serious poetic attempts date from his student years in Vienna. In 1824, he wrote some of his most popular poems, still under the influence of Valentin Vodnik and the rich tradition of Slovenian folk poetry. In 1825, he completed a collection of "Carniolan songs", which he showed to the philologist Jernej Kopitar. Kopitar was very critical of the young man's literary attempts, so Prešeren destroyed the whole collection.

Kopitar's rejection hindered the development of Prešeren's creativity; he did not publish anything more until 1827, when his satirical poem "To the Maidens" (Dekletom) was published by the German language journal *Illyrisches Blatt*. In 1828, Prešeren wrote his first important poem, *A Farewell to Youth*. It was however published only in 1830, in the literary journal *Kranjska čbelica* ("The Carniolan Bee"), established the same year by the publisher Miha Kastelic in Ljubljana.

In 1830, Prešeren's old high school friend Matija Cop returned to Ljubljana and re-established contacts with Prešeren. Cop soon recognized his friend's poetic talent and persuaded him to adopt Romanic poetic forms. Following Cop's advice,

Prešeren would soon become a master of the sonnet. His poems were noticed by the Czech scholar František Celakovsky who published several highly positive critiques of it. Celakovsky's praise was extremely important for Prešeren's self-esteem and gave him the strength to continue in the path on which Cop had orientated him.

Between 1830 and 1835, Prešeren composed his esthetically most accomplished poems, which were inspired by the setbacks in his personal life, especially by the unhappy love for Julija Primic. Prešeren followed Cop's advice and transformed Julija into a poetic figure, reminiscent of Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura, as can be seen in this first stanza of his poem Gazele:

*Let my poem, like a shrine, contain - your name;  
In my heart shall ever proudly reign - your name;  
Let my countrymen hear echoes, east and west,  
Of the music in that joyous strain - your name;  
On this shrine shall nations henceforth read your fame;  
Here it stays to glow and glow again - your name.*

*When both you and I have crossed in Charon's boat,  
Even then the glory will remain - your name.  
More than Cynthia, Laura, Delia and Corrina,  
Time will ever hallow my refrain - your name.*

### **The Wreath of Sonnets**

The most important poem from this period is the crown of sonnets *Sonetni Venec* ("A Wreath of Sonnets"), written and published in 1834. In it, Prešeren tied together the motives of his own unhappy love with that of an unhappy, subjugated homeland. In the seventh sonnet, Prešeren made something that was later seen as a prophecy of his own glory: referring to the ancient myth of Orpheus, he invoked the skies to send a new Orpheus to the Slovene people, the beauty of whose poetry would inspire patriotism, help overcome internal disputes and unify all Slovenes into one nation again.

In the eighth sonnet, he went on in exposing the reasons why such an Orpheus—the metaphor for high culture in general and poetry in particular—had not yet been produced by the Slovenes. Exposing a decidedly negative vision of Slovenian history, consisting of nothing but foreign invasions and internal disputes ("the roar of tempests o'er a home unkind"), he maintained that it was the lack of glorious deeds that had hindered the flourishing of poetry. The few flowers of poetry still growing on the Slovenian Parnassus were fed only by tears

and sighs:

*Where tempests roar and nature is unkind:  
Such was our land since Samo's rule had passed  
With Samo's spirit - now an icy blast  
Sweeps o'er his grave reft from the nation's mind.*

Our fathers' bickerings let Pepin bind  
His yoke upon us, then came thick and fast  
Bloodstained revolts and wars, the Turk at last -  
With woes our history is deeply lined.

Our age of glory needs must disappear  
When deeds of valour ceased in our past state  
And triumphs that our songs could celebrate.  
The flowers on our Parnassus shyly rear  
Their heads - the flowers that have been spared by fate:  
They were all fed on many a plaint and tear.

But, he went on in the next sonnets, there was still hope for the renewal of Slovenian poetry and thus for the coming of an Orpheus that would unify all the nation with his gentle singing: Julija only had to "send rays from her eyes for their glory to renew". Prešeren's message was clear: if Julija accepted his advances, she would become the muse inspiring solemn poems which would bring a new high culture to the Slovenes and thus make them a nation again.

Besides the complex and sophisticated content, the "Wreath of Sonnets" has an interesting format, too: the last line of one sonnet becomes the first line of the next one, making all fourteen sonnets of the circle an intertwining "garland" of emotional lyricism; one sonnet cannot exist without the other. The first lines of all the single fourteen sonnets form in turn another sonnet, called the "Master Theme" or the *Magistrale*. In the English translation by Vivian de Sola Pinto the Master Theme is as follows:

*A Slovene wreath your poet has entwined;  
A record of my pain and of your praise,  
Since from my heart's deep roots have sprung these lays,  
These tear-stained flowers of a poet's mind.  
They come from where no man can sunshine find,  
Unblest by soothing winds of warmer days;  
Above them savage peaks the mountains raise,  
Where tempests roar and nature is unkind.*

They were all fed on many a plaint and tear;  
Frail growth these blossoms had, so sad and few,  
As over them Malignant storm-clouds flew.  
Behold how weak and faded they appear!  
Send but your rays their glory to renew -  
Fresh flowers will spread fragrance far and near.</i>

In the Slovene original, however, the first letters of every verse form the words Primicovi Julji, meaning "to Julija Primic". The poem was recognized as a masterpiece by Matija Cop, but it did not gain much recognition beyond the small circle around the Kranjska c'belica magazine. Moreover, Julija was unimpressed. Understandably, Prešeren moved to more bitter verses.

### <b>The Sonnets of Unhappiness</b>

Another important work from this period are the "Sonnets of Unhappiness" (Sonetje nesrece), which were first drafted already in 1832, but were published only in 1834, with some changes. They are undoubtedly the most pessimistic of Prešeren's works. It is a group of six (initially seven) sonnets expressing the poet's despair over life. The first sonnet, in which Prešeren regrets having left his home village, became extremely popular during the late 19th century. Several musical interpretations of the poem have been created, the most famous a folk rock version by a prominent Slovene musician Vlado Kreslin. The other sonnets from the circle have not gained such a widespread popularity, but are still considered by scholars to be among Prešeren's most genuine and profound works.

1835 was Prešeren's annus horibilis. His closest friend Matija Cop drowned while swimming in the Sava river, Julija Primic married a wealthy merchant, and Prešeren became alienated from his friend and editor of the Kranjska c'belica literary magazine Miha Kastelic. Following Cop's death, Prešeren wrote his magnum opus, "The Baptism at the Savica Waterfall" (Krst pri Savici), dedicating it to his late friend. The poem, set during the Christianisation of Karantanians in the late 8th century, addresses the issues of hope, faith and resignation. The philosopher Slavoj Žižek interpreted the poem as a paradigmatic example of the emergence of modern subjectivity.

In 1837, Prešeren met Emil Korytko, a Polish political activist from Galicia, confined by the Austrian authorities to Ljubljana. Korytko introduced to Prešeren the work of Adam Mickiewicz, which had an important influence on his later works. The two even jointly translated one of Mickiewicz's poems (Resygnacja) from Polish to Slovenian and started collecting Slovenian folk songs in Carniola

and Lower Styria. In 1839, Korytko died, leaving Prešeren without an important interlocutor after Cop's death.

In the autumn of the same year, Andrej Smole, one of Prešeren's friends from his youth, returned home after many years of living and travelling abroad. Smole was a relatively rich young intellectual from a well-established merchant family, who supported the development of Slovenian culture. The two spent much of the winter of 1839-1840 on Smole's estate in Lower Carniola, where they planned several cultural and literary projects, including the establishment of a daily newspaper in the Slovenian language and the publishing of Anton Tomaz Linhart's comedy "Maticek's Wedding" which had been prohibited as "politically unappropriate" in 1790, due to the outbreak of the French Revolution. Both projects failed: the planned journal *Ilirske novice* was blocked by the Viennese censorship, and Linhart's play would be staged only in 1848, without Prešeren's assistance. Smole died suddenly in 1840, literally in Prešeren's arms, while celebrating his 40th birthday. Prešeren dedicated a touching, yet unexpectedly cheerful and vitalist poem to his late friend.

### <b>The Later Years</b>

After 1840, Prešeren was left without any interlocutor who could appreciate his works, but continued to write poetry, although much less than in the 1830s. He gradually departed from the typical romantic trend, adopting an increasingly diverse and innovative style. In 1843, an important breakthrough for Prešeren happened: Janez Bleiweis started publishing a new daily journal in the Slovenian language and invited Prešeren to participate in its cultural section.

The two men came from rather different backgrounds: Bleiweis was a moderate conservative and staunch supporter of the ecclesiastical and imperial establishments and alien to the Romantic culture. He nevertheless established a fair relationship with the poet. Prešeren's participation in Bleiweis' editorial project was the closest he would come to public recognition during his lifetime.

In 1844, he wrote the patriotic poem *Zdravljica* ("A Toast"), the most important achievement of his late period. In 1847, a volume of his collected poems was published under the simple title *Poezije dr. Franceta Prešerna* ("Poems of Dr. France Prešeren").

Prešeren spent the last two years of his life occupied with private life and his new job as a lawyer in Kranj. According to some accounts, he was planning several literary projects, including a novel in the realistic style and an experimental play, but he was struck with liver disease caused by his excessive drinking in prior

years. The revolution of 1848 left him rather indifferent, although it was carried out by the young generation who already saw him as an idol of democratic and national ideals. Before his death, he did however redact his *Zdravljica*, which was left out from the 1847 volume of poems, and made some minor adjustments for a new edition of his collected poems.

Today, Prešeren is still considered one of the leading poets of Slovenian literature, acclaimed not only nationally or regionally, but also according to the standards of developed European literature. Prešeren was one of the greatest European Romanticists. His fervent, heartfelt lyrics, intensely emotional but never merely sentimental, have made him the chief representative of the Romantic school in Slovenia.

Nevertheless, recognition came slow after his death. It was not before 1866 that a real breakthrough in the reception of his role in Slovenian culture took place. In that year, Josip Jurčič and Josip Stritar published a new edition of Prešeren's collection of poems. In the preface, Stritar published an essay which is still considered one of the most influential essays in Slovenian history. In it, he showed the aesthetic value of Prešeren's work by placing him in the wider European context. From then on, his reputation as the greatest poet in Slovene language was never endangered.

Prešeren's legacy in Slovenian culture is enormous. He is generally regarded as the national poet. In 1905, his monument was placed in the central square in Ljubljana, now called Prešeren Square. By the early 1920s, all his surviving work had been catalogued and numerous critical editions of his works had been published. Several scholars were already dealing exclusively with the analysis of his work and little was left unknown about his life. In 1944, the anniversary of his death, called Prešeren Day, was declared as the Slovenian Cultural Holiday.

In 1990, the seventh stanza of his *Zdravljica* was declared the national anthem of Slovenia, replacing the old *Naprej zastava slave*. In 1992, his effigy was portrayed on the Slovenian 1000 tolar banknote, and since 2007 his image is on the Slovenian two-euro coin. The highest Slovenian prize for artistic achievements, the Prešeren Award, is named after him.

His poems have been translated into several languages, although he still lacks the recognition accorded to some other poets of his rank.

# A Farewell To My Youth

O happier half of days decreed to me,  
My early years, so soon you passed away:  
Few were the flowers that blossomed on that tree,  
And they, scarce budded, fell into decay.  
Few were the rays of hope that I could see,  
And storms would often rage in wild array;  
Still, for my youth, dark though thy dawn may be,  
My heart will ever cry, God be with thee!

Too soon the fruits of knowledge did I eat!  
Where dripped their poison, faded all delight:  
I saw how honesty and truth could meet  
Among the human kind with scorn and spite.  
I sought true love - an empty dream and fleet,  
Which disappeared as dawn broke into light!  
And wisdom, justice and the learned mind  
Were dowerless maids - no suitors could they find.

I saw how those who are not loved by fate  
Their ship in vain against the wind may steer;  
The one who is not born to high estate  
Shall see no Fortune at his cradle appear;  
I saw how fame is purchased at the rate  
Of current cash - no price too high, too dear;  
I saw in glory's and in honour's seat  
All that beguiles men's minds with lies, deceit.

These sights and others uglier by far  
Burned in my heart till cruelly it bled;  
Yet thoughts like these the joys of youth will bar  
And quickly drive them out of heart and head;  
Fair cloud-born castles glimmer from afar,  
Green lawns arise where desert places spread,  
Hope kindles many a wanton, beckoning light,  
To lure the young and tempt them in the night.

They know not of the sudden storm that blows,  
Dispelling phantom shapes that cannot last,  
And all too soon forget misfortune's woes,

Forget the wounds once they are healed and past -  
Until the changing years show how life flows  
Into a vessel that is leaking fast.  
Still, O my youth, dark though thy dawn may be,  
My heart will ever cry, God be with thee!

France Preseren

# A Toast

The vintage, friends, is over,  
And here sweet wine makes, once again,  
Sad eyes and hearts recover,  
Puts fire in every vein,  
Drowns dull care  
Everywhere  
And summons hope out of despair.

To whom with acclamation  
And song shall we our first toast give?  
God save our land and nation  
And all Slovenes where'er they live,  
Who own the same  
Blood and name,  
And who one glorious Mother claim.

Let thunder out of heaven  
Strike down and smite our wanton foe!  
Now, as it once had thriven,  
May our dear realm in freedom grow.  
Let fall the last  
Chains of the past  
Which bind us still and hold us fast!

Let peace, glad conciliation,  
Come back to us throughout the land!  
Towards their destination  
Let Slavs henceforth go hand-in-hand!  
Thus again  
Will honour reign  
To justice pledged in our domain.

To you, our pride past measure,  
Our girls! Your beauty, charm and grace!  
here surely is no treasure  
To equal maidens of such race.  
Sons you'll bear,  
Who will dare  
Defy our foe no matter where.

Our hope now, our to-morrow -  
Our youth - we toast and toast with joy.  
No poisonous blight or sorrow  
Your love of homeland shall destroy.  
With us indeed  
You're called to heed  
Its summons in this hour of need.

God's blessing on all nations,  
Who long and work for that bright day,  
When o'er earth's habitations  
No war, no strife shall hold its sway;  
Who long to see  
That all men free  
No more shall foes, but neighbours be.

At last to our reunion -  
To us the toast! Let it resound,  
Since in this gay communion  
By thoughts of brotherhood we're bound.  
May joyful cheer  
Ne'er disappear  
From all good hearts now gathered here.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (1/14)

A Slovene wreath your poet has entwined,  
Of fifteen sonnets is the chaplet bound,  
And in it thrice the Master Theme must sound:  
Thus are the other harmonies combined.

Now from his source like streams in order wind  
The sonnets, and the head of each is found  
By the last line of the last sonnet crowned;  
This is a semblance of your poet's mind.

From one love all by thoughts arise, and lo!  
Whene'er I sleep at night they cease to flow,  
But stir when darkness flees before dawn's rays.

You are the Master Theme of my whole life,  
Which will be heard when I have ceased my strife -  
A record of my pain and of your praise.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (10/14)

Frail growth these blossoms had, so sad and few:  
As when on some warm February day  
An early rose unfolds her petals gay,  
Enjoying for a space the sun anew,

But bends her stricken head as soon as due  
Storm-driven mists come, and with icy spray  
The hoar-frost falls from skies grown cold and grey,  
While hill and dale are decked in snowy hue.

Thus did your beauty's sun upon me smile -  
A radiance I would search for and pursue  
To warm the petals of my love awhile.

But false that sunshine proved. Then they must rue  
Their error in a frost naught could beguile,  
As over them malignant storm clouds flew.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (11/14)

As over them malignant storm clouds flew,  
Your poet's days were but disgust, despair;  
By all the furies harried, he nowhere  
Could find release nor any rest he knew.

Once in Diana's shrine Orestes, too,  
Had eased his weary soul from all its care;  
So I from my love's shrine had hoped to bear  
Away a heart and mind appeased by you.

Such fleeting dreams were quick to disappear.  
No sooner on my eyes had flashed the light  
Of every hope than blacker was the night.

Since then my heart has been both dark and drear;  
How could the verses sprung from it be bright!  
Behold how weak and faded they appear!

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (12/14)

Behold how weak and faded they appear!  
They have no strength or beauty. Thus the pale  
Untended roses in some lonely vale  
Midst ruins their sparse heads with sadness rear.

Weeds stifle them, rank nettles interfere,  
And scourges, pests their fragile roots assail;  
Transplanted to a garden, although frail,  
They'll bloom again and gladden with their cheer.

If my poetic flowers in sunlight grew,  
They'd live again and freshly thrive ere long  
For you, their queen - these blossoms of my song.

To make them more resplendent then, imbue  
Their jaded forms with life both fresh and strong!  
Send but your rays their glory to renew!

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (13/14)

Send but your rays their glory to renew  
And let me not look for dawn's light in vain  
In your dear face, to hold back night's domain  
And calm the wildest storms that ever blew.

Fall with the load of heavy cares I knew,  
Their fetters will be loosened, chain by chain,  
And all the wounds they caused that still remain  
With gentle soothing will be healed by you.

The cloud then from my frowning brow shall clear,  
Within me hope will shine and thrive once more,  
And from my lips sweet words again shall pour.

My heart no longer shall remain austere,  
And from the inspiration in its store  
Fresh flowers will spread fragrance far and near.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (14/14)

Fresh flowers will spread fragrance far and near,  
Like roses when the winter's passed away,  
And spring displays its marvellous array,  
While through the trees white scattered blossoms peer.

The bees hum in the air sun-drenched and clear,  
The shepherd's up by golden break of day,  
Loud trills the nightingale on many a spray -  
All nature is aglow with joyful cheer.

I know I scarce deserve such bliss; my mind  
Is full of dread that you may still disdain  
These poems or be vexed by them again.

Let them at least some little favour find  
With you; to ease by it his bitter pain,  
A Slovene wreath your poet has entwined.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (2/14)

A record of my pain and of your praise  
Will this be to Slovenes as yet unborn,  
When moss shall grow upon my tomb forlorn,  
And over all that grieves me and dismays;

And haughty maids with beauty to amaze  
Like yours, on hearing these my strains, will scorn  
To lock their hearts in armour; they'll adorn  
Their love with faithful thoughts and faithful ways.

For all Slovenes will then dawn brighter days  
And kindlier stars upon their land will gaze,  
More brilliant songs will come with better times.

Yet my songs, too, with sweetly flowing rhymes  
May still survive the future's changing phase,  
Since from my heart's deep roots have sprung these lays.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (3/14)

Since from my heart's deep roots have sprung these lays,  
A heart not to be silenced any more;  
Now I am like to Tasso who of yore  
Would sing his Leonora's fame and praise.

He could not plead his love whose tortuous maze  
Bemused his years of youth, and fiercely tore  
His life beyond all hope; and yet he bore  
The burden he revealed in secret phrase.

My passion is aflame, although I find  
Your glance gives me no hope when you are near;  
Lest I offend, my lips are sealed by fear.

My poor heart's fate, so bitter and unkind,  
My secret burden - all this they make dear,  
These tear-stained flowers of a poet's mind,

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (4/14)

These tear-stained flowers of a poet's mind,  
Culled from my bosom, lay it wholly bare;  
My heart's a garden: Love is sowing there  
Sad elegies each with my longing signed.

You are their sun whose radiance, purblind,  
I seek in vain at home and everywhere,  
In theatre, on promenade and square,  
Midst revels where the chains of dancers wind.

How often through the town with watchful eyes  
I wander, praying for a fate more kind,  
Yet catch no glimpse of that elusive prize.

I shed my tears to loneliness confined:  
Hence all these songs which from my love arise;  
They come from where no man can sunshine find.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (5/14)

They come from where no man can sunshine find -  
Not from those regions by your glance caressed,  
Where all the cares of this world are at rest,  
And sweet oblivion follows close behind;

Where joy reigns with a fullness scarce divined,  
And vanished are the conflicts that distressed;  
Where song springs from an overflowing breast  
With sweetest harmonies of every kind;

Where nursed by pure love, grow the fairest flowers,  
Luxuriant in beauty and in grace,  
As though kissed by the breath of vernal hours.

My songs that praise you come from no such place;  
They grew untouched by any friendly powers,  
Unblest by soothing winds of warmer days.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (6/14)

Unblest by soothing winds of warmer days,  
My songs remain, since from you, haughty maid,  
They never won the word that might be said -  
The word that neither saddens nor dismays.

As you were bred upon the German phrase,  
Like many a Slovene girl, they were afraid  
That from such flowers on our Parnassus laid  
With cold disdain you would avert your gaze.

Our Muses were not loved in our own land:  
They were but spinsters doomed to lonely ways,  
While foreign beauties won both heart and hand.

Like flowers that bud within the glacier's maze,  
Our songs are sparse, as though by nature banned,  
Above them savage peaks the mountains raise.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (7/14)

Above them savage peaks the mountains raise,  
Like those which once were charmed by the refrain  
Of Orpheus, when his lyre stirred hill and plain,  
And Haemus' crags and the wild folk of Thrace.

Ah, would, to cure the dearth of these our days,  
An Orpheus dowered with song of native strain  
Were sent to us that all Slovenes might gain  
Fresh fire to set their frozen hearts ablaze.

His words might kindle thoughts that would remind  
Us of lost pride of race; discord would cease;  
Our people in one nation then combined

Would see that feuds no longer did increase.  
His strains would bring the rule of joy and peace,  
Where tempests roar and nature is unkind.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (8/14)

Where tempests roar and nature is unkind:  
Such was our land since Samo's rule had passed  
With Samo's spirit - now an icy blast  
Sweeps o'er his grave reft from the nation's mind.

Our fathers' bickerings let Pepin bind  
His yoke upon us, then came thick and fast  
Bloodstained revolts and wars, the Turk at last -  
With woes our history is deeply lined.

Our age of glory needs must disappear  
When deeds of valour ceased in our past state  
And triumphs that our songs could celebrate.

The flowers on our Parnassus shyly rear  
Their heads - the flowers that have been spared by fate:  
They were all fed on many a plaint and tear.

France Preseren

## A Wreath Of Sonnets (9/14)

They were all fed on many a plaint and tear  
The humble blooms on my Parnassus grown;  
My tears of love flowed not for you alone,  
But also for the land I hold so dear.

My soul was filled with bitterness and fear  
At love so scant to a trusting Mother shown;  
The thought that no more love from you I've known  
Torments and tears me like a wound severe.

All the reward I wished for was that you  
With me a poet's timeless fame might share  
That native songs our poignant tale might bear;

That all Slovenes should waken and that true  
Content and joy might come. Despite my care,  
Frail growth these blossoms had, so sad and few.

France Preseren

# Gazelle

1

Let my poem, like a shrine, contain - your name;  
In my heart shall ever proudly reign - your name;  
Let my cuntrymen hear echoes, east and west,  
Of the music in that joyous strain - your name;  
On this shrine shall nations henceforth read your fame;  
Here it stays to glow and glow again - your name.  
When both you and I have crossed in Charon's boat,  
Even then the glory will remain - your name.  
More than Cynthia, Laura, Delia and Corrina,  
Time will ever hallow my refrain - your name.

France Preseren

# He Who From Fate Receives But Blow On Blow

He who from fate receives but blow on blow,  
Who, like myself in her disfavour stands,  
Although he had a hundred mighty hands,  
Would vainly strive for riches here below.

His paths are strewn with thorns where'er he go;  
And where he looks for home there soon expands  
A sea of woes: against its stormy strands  
Waves roll and splash in unremitting flow.

Pursued and tossed about by Care, by Need,  
He finds no peace from worries on his road,  
Though to the farthest place his search may lead.

And only in the quiet, cold abode,  
Which after weary life's span is decreed,  
Will death relieve him of his toilsome load.

France Preseren

# Mid Wastes Of Africa A Wanderer Sped

Mid wastes of Africa a wanderer sped:  
He found no pathway; night was now afield.  
Through clouds no stealthy glimmer was revealed;  
Craving the moon, he made the grass his bed.

The heavens opened, moonbeams then were shed;  
He sees where poison-serpents are concealed,  
And where their brood of cubs the tigers shield;  
He sees the lion upraise his wrathful head.

Thus 'tis the wont of youth perforce to view  
What now befalls, so long the veil yet drapes  
The future from the road he would pursue.

Clearer has grown the night, and from it gapes  
Loathing of life; of pangs and griefs not few,  
The deep abyss from which none e'er escapes.

France Preseren

# O, Vrba, Happy Village, My Old Hme

O, Vrba, happy village, my old home -  
My father's cottage stands there to this day.  
The lure of learning beckoned me away.  
Its serpent wiles enticing me to roam,

Else had I never known that heart's joy,  
Sweet promise, could become a poisoned draught,  
Not known myself of self-belief bereft,  
Tossed in internal tempests like a toy.

A dowry riches never could surpass,  
A faithful heart, a hand that's made for work,  
Would have come with a chosen country lass

Serenely onward would have sailed my bark,  
My house from fire, my corn from hailstorm loss  
Safeguarded by my neighbour near, Sain Mark.

France Preseren

# O'Er Thee, Misfortune, I Have Ceased To Wail

O'er thee, Misfortune, I have ceased to wail,  
I'll utter no reproaches any more.  
Thank God, I'm used to griefs thou hast in store  
And to the sufferings in life's strong jail.

No burden can now hurt my shoulders frail;  
My lips are used to bitter drinks of yore;  
My feet, like leather, are no longer sore,  
I dread no thorny path, no irksome trail.

Stiff are my limbs and joints as if confined.  
My heart, once sensitive, is hard as stone,  
The claims of sorrow have subdued my mind.

All fear is fled; with it all hopes have flown.  
Should Fate caress or beat me, it will find  
Insensibility of flesh and bone.

France Preseren

# The Baptism

(an excerpt from the epic The Baptism at The Savica)

The warring clouds have vanished from the skies;  
The war of men has ended with the night.  
The morning sun gilds the tree heads that rise  
Supreme above the Carniola's snowpeaks white.  
The lake of Bohinj calm in stillness lies,  
No sign of strife remains to outward sight;  
Yet in the lake the fierce pike never sleep,  
nor other fell marauders of the deep.

Is not this lake upon whose bank you stand,  
Brave Crtomir, the image of your soul?  
The clash of arms has ceased throughout the land,  
Yet in your breast the storms of war still roll.  
If aught of life's dire ills I understand  
The eternal worm takes yet more deadly toll,  
Battens on lifeblood in its inner lair  
And reawakes the harpies of despair.

France Preseren

# The Master Theme

A Slovene wreath your poet has entwined;  
A record of my pain and of your praise,  
Since from my heart's deep roots have sprung these lays,  
These tear-stained flowers of a poet's mind.

They come from where no man can sunshine find,  
Unblest by soothing winds of warmer days;  
Above them savage peaks the mountains raise,  
Where tempests roar and nature is unkind.

They were all fed on many a plaint and tear;  
Frail growth these blossoms had, so sad and few,  
As over them Malignant storm-clouds flew.

Behold how weak and faded they appear!  
Send but your rays their glory to renew -  
Fresh flowers will spread fragrance far and near.

France Preseren

# The Unmarried Mother

What was the need of you, little one,  
My baby dear, my darling son,  
To me - a girl, a foolish young thing,  
A mother without a wedding ring?

My father cursed and beat me,  
My mother in tears would entreat me;  
My friends would blush and pass me by,  
Strangers pointed at me on the sly.

And he who was my own true love -  
Your father by the will above -  
He wanders God knows how far from here.  
Shamed because of us, poor dear.

What was the need of you, little one,  
My baby dear, my darling son?  
But whether there was need or no,  
With all my heart I love you so.

There seem to open azure skies  
Whene'er I look into your eyes;  
And when on me you sweetly smile,  
All I've suffered is gone for a while.

May He, by whom the birds are fed,  
Joy and blessings on you shed!  
Whether there was need or no,  
With all my heart I love you so.

France Preseren