

Classic Poetry Series

**Walther von der  
Vogelweide  
- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

## Walther von der Vogelweide(1170 - 1230)

Vogelweide, a poet and minnesinger(a singer of love songs), is one of the most celebrated of the Medieval German poets, the main sources of information about him are his own poems and occasional references by contemporary Minnesingers. It is clear from the title (Herr, Sir) given in these references, that he was of noble birth; but it is equally clear from his name Vogelweide (meaning: a gathering place or preserve of birds) that he belonged not to the higher nobility, who took their titles from castles or villages, but to the nobility of service.

Tirol appears to be his place of birth and had become a center of poetry and art. It was here that the young poet learned his craft under the renowned master Pemmar the Old, whose death he afterwards lamented in two of his most beautiful lyrics. This happy period of his life, during which he produced the most charming and spontaneous of his love-lyrics, came to an end with the death of Duke Frederick in 1198. Following this, Walther was a wanderer from court to court, singing for his lodging and his bread, and always hoping that some patron would arise to save him from this "juggler's life" and the shame of ever playing the guest. His criticism of men and manners was scathing; and even when this did not touch his princely patrons, their underlings often took measures to rid themselves of so uncomfortable a censor.

In 1212 he once more entered the political arena, this time in support of the Welf emperor Otto IV against Innocent III. Feeling that he was not treated with the generosity he expected Walther turned to welcome the new ruler, who was crowned in 1215. From him he received a small fief, symbol of the security he had so long desired. Two 14th-century records suggest that it was in the see of Würzburg, and it is likely that he spent the rest of his life there.

More than half of the 200 or so of Walther's existing poems are political, moral, or religious; the rest are love poems. In his religious poems he preached the need for man actively to meet the claims of his Creator by, for instance, going on pilgrimage or on crusade; in his moral-didactic poems he praises such human virtues as faithfulness, sincerity, charity, and self-discipline--virtues that were not especially prominent in his own life. As a love poet he developed a fresh and original treatment of the situations of courtly love and, ultimately, in such poems as the popular "Unter der Linden," achieved a free, uninhibited style in which the poses of court society gave way before the natural affections of village folk.

# A Mournful One Am I

A mournful one am I, above whose head  
A day of perfect bliss hath never past;  
Whatever joys my soul have ravished,  
Soon was the radiance of those joys o'ercast.

And none can show me that substantial pleasure  
Which will not pass away like bloom from flowers;  
Therefore, no more my heart such joys shall treasure,  
Nor pine for fading sweets and fleeting hours.

Walther von der Vogelweide

## Address To Emperor Frederic II.

Fain (could it be) would I a home obtain,  
And warm me by a hearth-side of my own.  
Then, then, I'd sing about the sweet birds' strain,  
And fields and flowers, as I have whilome done;  
And paint in song the lily and the rose  
That dwell upon her cheek who smiles on me.  
But lone I stray -- no home its comfort shows:  
Ah, luckless man! still doom'd a guest to be!

Walther von der Vogelweide

## Address To Leopold Vii.

To me is barr'd the door of joy and ease;  
There stand I as an orphan, lone, forlorn,  
And nothing boots me that I frequent knock.  
Strange that on every hand the shower should fall,  
And not one cheering drop should reach to me!  
On all around the gen'rous Austrian's gifts,  
Gladdening the land, like genial rain descend:  
A fair and gay adorned mead is he  
Whereon are gather'd oft the sweetest flowers:  
Would that his rich and ever gen'rous hand  
Might stoop to pluck one little leaf for me,  
So might I fitly praise a scene so fair!

Walther von der Vogelweide

## Ah! Where Are Hours Departed Fled? (Excerpt)

Ah! where are hours departed fled?  
Is life a dream, or true indeed?  
Did all my heart hath fashioned  
From fancy's visitings proceed?  
Yes! I have slept; and now unknown  
To me the things best known before:  
The land, the people, once mine own,  
Where are they? -- they are here no more:  
My boyhood's friends, all aged, worn,  
Despoil'd the woods, the fields, of home,  
Only the stream flows on forlorn;  
(Alas! that e'er such change should come!)  
And he knew me once so well  
Salutes me now as one estranged:  
The very earth to me can tell  
Of nought but things perverted, changed:  
And when I muse on other days,  
That pass'd me as the dashing oars  
The surface of the ocean raise,  
Ceaseless my heart its fate deplores;  
&c.

Walther von der Vogelweide

# Alas! Where Have All The Years Gone

Alas! Where have all the years gone?  
Did I dream my life, or is it real?  
What I always thought - was that something?  
Then I've slept and don't know it...  
Now I'm awake, and I no longer know  
What used to be familiar as my own hands:  
People and places, where I was raised from childhood,  
They are strangers to me, as if it were all lies.  
Those who were my playmates are old and indolent.  
Meadows are farmed, forests are felled,  
If it were not for the water, which flows as ever before,  
ah, then I'd believe that my misfortune is truly great.  
Many no longer even greet me, who once knew me well.  
The world is full of ingratitude everywhere.  
When I think of the many glorious days,  
They disappear, like ripples in the water -  
Forever more - alas!

Oh, how little these young people amount to!  
They once were so cheerful and light-hearted,  
Now they know only worries: why do they do this?  
When I look at the world around me, it is never happy,  
Dancing and singing disappear into worries.  
Never has a Christian man seen such miserable times.  
See, such poor jewelry the women wear,  
And the proud knights, what rude clothing they wear!  
Unfriendly letters come to us from Rome:  
Sorrow is allowed, but joy is kept from us.  
That grieves me deeply (we lived so well before),  
that I should trade my laughs for cries.  
Even the wild birds lament:  
What wonder, when I've lost all my friends?  
What do I say, a foolish man in my poor wrath?  
Whoever seeks luck in this world, loses it in the next world.

O weh, how we're poisoned with sweet things!  
I see the bitter gall swimming in the honey.  
The world is beautiful on the surface - white, green, and red.  
But inside there are blacker colors, dark like Death.

But even those led astray still have hope of salvation  
Though your sins are great, confession is easy.  
Think on that, knight, because it concerns you.  
You wear the bright helm and the hard armor,  
You carry the strong shield and the holy sword.  
God wills that even I would be worthy of this victory.  
Then even I, a man with nothing, can earn rich wages.  
But I don't mean property, or the gold of princes:  
I want (very much) to carry that crown eternally,  
with such glory as a soldier can earn with his spear.  
I could begin the lucky journey over the sea,  
Then I would sing 'How good!' and never more 'Alas!'  
Never more 'Alas!'

Walther von der Vogelweide

# Chill Penury And Winter's Power

Chill penury and winter's power  
Upon my soul so hard have prest,  
That I would fain have seen no more  
The red flow'rs that the meadows drest:

Yet, truth! 'twere hard, if I were gone,  
Upon the merry-making throng,  
That loud with joy was wont to ring,  
And o'er the green to dance and spring!

Walther von der Vogelweide

## Excerpt From Dialogue With 'The World'

Too well thy weakness have I proved;  
Now would I leave thee; - it is time -  
Good night! to thee, oh world, good night!  
I haste me to my home.

Walther von der Vogelweide

# I Thought I'D Served Her Long Enough

I thought I'd served her long enough,  
and sat dejected and confused  
despairing of the lady's love,  
when something gave my hopes a boost.  
You'll laugh at me (it seems so small,  
more of a consolation prize)  
for taking comfort there at all;  
but I could feel my fortunes rise.

What cheered me was a blade of grass:  
I measured out a stalk I'd plucked  
(as children do to learn their luck)  
and it said she'd offer me her grace.  
Listen and judge if you think she might:  
'She will, she won't, she will, she won't, she will.'  
As much as I've tried it, it's come out right,  
but you have to trust in the grass's skill.

Walther von der Vogelweide

# I've Got My Fief

I've got my fief, you world! A fief at last!  
I shall not fear the February blast,  
and petty barons can be flattered less.

The noble king has handed me heart's-ease:  
a cozy winter hearth, a summer breeze.  
The neighbors won't act haughty any more  
and make sour faces, as they did before.

I've scrounged, and had small cause for gratitude,  
so full of grumbles that my breath was bad.  
Now I can sing! The king has made me glad!

Walther von der Vogelweide

# Tanzweise

'Lady,' I said, 'this garland wear!  
For thou wilt wear it gracefully;  
And on thy brow 'twill sit so fair,  
And thou wilt dance so light and free;  
Had I a thousand gems, on thee,  
Fair one! their brilliant light should shine:  
Would'st thou such a gift accept from me,--  
O doubt me not,-- it should be thine.

'Lady, so beautiful thou art,  
That I on thee the wreath bestow,  
'Tis the best gift I can impart;  
But whiter, rosier flowers, I know,  
Upon the distant plain they're springing,  
Where beauteously their heads they rear,  
And birds their sweetest songs are singing:  
Come! let us go and pluck them there!'

She took the beauteous wreath I chose,  
And, like a child at praises glowing,  
Her cheeks blushed crimson as the rose  
When by the snow-white lily growing:  
But all from those bright eyes eclipse  
Received; and then, my toil to pay,  
Kind, precious words fell from her lips:  
What more than this I shall not say.

Walther von der Vogelweide

# 'Twas Summer

'Twas summer,-- through the opening grass  
The joyous flowers upsprang,  
The birds in all their different tribes  
Loud in the woodlands sang:  
Then forth I went, and wandered far  
The wide green meadow o'er;  
Where cool and clear the fountain play'd,  
There strayed I in that hour.

Roaming on, the nightingale  
Sang sweetly in my ear;  
And, by the greenwood's shady side,  
A dream came to me there;  
Fast by the fountain, where bright flowers  
Of sparkling hue we see,  
Close sheltered from the summer heat,  
That vision came to me.

All care was banished, and repose  
Came o'er my wearied breast;  
And kingdoms seemed to wait on me,  
For I was with the blest.

Yet, while it seemed as if away  
My spirit soared on high,  
And in the boundless joys of heaven  
Was wrapt in ecstasy,  
E'en then, my body revelled still  
In earth's festivity;  
And surely never was a dream  
So sweet as this to me.

Thus I dream'd on, and might have dwelt  
Still on that rapturous dream,  
When, hark! a raven's luckless note  
(Sooth, 'twas a direful scream,)  
Broke up the vision of delight,  
Instant my joy was past:  
O, had a stone but met my hand,

That hour had been his last....

Walther von der Vogelweide

# Under Der Linden

Under der linden  
an der heide,  
dâ unser zweier bette was,  
dâ muget ir vinden  
schône beide  
gebrochen bluomen unde gras.  
Vor dem walde in einem tal,  
tandaradei,  
schône sanc diu nahtegal.

Ich kam gegangen  
zuo der ouwe:  
dô was mîn friedel komen ê.  
Dâ wart ich empfangen  
(hêre frouwe!)  
daz ich bin sælic iemer mê.  
Kust er mich?  
Wol tûsentstunt:  
tandaradei,  
seht wie rô̄t mir ist der munt.

Dô hete er gemachet  
alsô rîche  
von bluomen eine bettestat.  
Des wirt noch gelachet  
inneclîche,  
kumt iemen an daz selbe pfat:  
bî den rô̄sen er wol mac,  
tandaradei,  
merken wâ mir'z houbet lac.

Daz er bî mir læge,  
wesse'z iemen  
(nu enwelle got!), so schamte ich mich.  
Wes er mit mir pflæge,  
niemer niemen  
bevinde daz, wan er und ich,  
und ein kleinez vogellîn:  
tandaradei,

daz mac wol getriuwe sîn.

Walther von der Vogelweide

# Under The Lime Tree

Under the lime tree  
On the heather,  
Where we had shared a place of rest,  
Still you may find there,  
Lovely together,  
Flowers crushed and grass down-pressed.  
Beside the forest in the vale,  
Tándaradéi,  
Sweetly sang the nightingale.

I came to meet him  
At the green:  
There was my true love come before.  
Such was I greeted —  
Heaven's Queen! —  
That I am glad for evermore.  
Had he kisses? A thousand some:  
Tándaradéi,  
See how red my mouth's become.

There he had fashioned  
For luxury  
A bed from every kind of flower.  
It sets to laughing  
Delightedly  
Whoever comes upon that bower;  
By the roses well one may,  
Tándaradéi,  
Mark the spot my head once lay.

If any knew  
He lay with me  
(May God forbid!), for shame I'd die.  
What did he do?  
May none but he  
Ever be sure of that — and I,  
And one extremely tiny bird,  
Tándaradéi,  
Who will, I think, not say a word.

Walther von der Vogelweide

# Up, Then, Dance We To The Song

Up, then, dance we to the song,  
Care, for ever be thou gone!  
Firm at length shall be my step,  
High again my spirit leap!

Walther von der Vogelweide

# When From The Sod The Flow'rets Spring

When from the sod the flow'rets spring,  
And smile to meet the sun's bright ray,  
When birds their sweetest carols sing  
In all them morning pride of May,  
What lovelier than the prospect there?  
Can earth boast any thing more fair?  
To me it seems an almost heaven,  
So beauteous to my eyes that vision bright is given.

But when a lady, chaste and fair,  
Noble, and clad in rich attire,  
Walks through the throng with gracious air,  
As sun that bids the stars retire,--  
Then, where are all thy boastings, May?  
What hast thou beautiful and gay  
Compared with that supreme delight?  
We leave thy loveliest flowers, and watch that lady bright.

Wouldst thou believe me,-- come and place  
Before thee all this pride of May;  
Then look but on my lady's face,  
And, which is best and brightest? say:  
For me, how soon (if choice were mine)  
This would I take, and that resign!  
And say, 'Though sweet thy beauties, May!  
I'd rather forfeit all than lose my lady gay.'

Walther von der Vogelweide

## Worthy Art Thou, Returning Home

Worthy art thou, returning home, the bell  
For thee should ring, and crowds come gathering round  
To gaze, how as a gladdening miracle  
Thou com'st, of sin or shame all blameless found.  
Man's praise and woman's love shall thus abound;  
And this thy glorious welcome shall dispel  
The slanderous words which some have breathed around,  
That honour bade thee still at distance dwell.

Walther von der Vogelweide