



The Tears of the Prodigal Son

Ivan Gundulić

Translated by Cella Hawksworth

TO THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS
SEIGNEUR JERO SON OF DŽIVO
GUNDULIĆ OF THE NOBLES OF THE
CITY OF DUBROVNIK, HIS UNCLE,
FROM DŽIVO SON OF FRANO
GUNDULIĆ, GREETINGS AND ESTEEM

LONG hath it been the custom of our noble forefathers that they should in the names of their beloved issue preserve the memory of their dear parents, and so by a mutual action, in seemly recognition, vouchsafe life to those from whom they were granted life. Therefore I, who hold, consider and regard You, most gracious Sir, as my own father, exulting in so worthy and acclaimed an uncle, oft and rightfully elevated amongst our nobility, which owes allegiance to none, to the rank of Rector and to all the other highest honours, bringing forth this feeble fruit of my wit to the light of day, justly adorn it with Your name; and not because I hope in my dark ignorance to repay in kind the light which I receive constantly from You, but that in it Your eminence and my devotion should be made obvious to all. The Eternal Father whose compas-

sion (towards his weeping son, repenting his sin, through redemption) is celebrated here, may He, after a long and upright life, have mercy on You and make You his son; may our Dubrovnik, which now receives benefit, attains glory and finds adornment in the wise world, through the profound justice and the painstaking endeavour of so mighty, so righteous and so worthy a judge, so, before the general judge and before the God of Hosts, find its reflection in the glory of so beloved a son, achieve protection, seek a shield for its own demeanour, its own noble gentlemen and pure maidenhood, in whom by sublime mercy our freedom has maintained and preserved itself unsullied for more than a thousand years, which is granted also for the future by the Almighty authority through your health, most gracious Sir, whose hands I ardently kiss.

In Dubrovnik, this VIII
day of June MDCXXII

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Lament I THE SIN'S COMMISSION

Vivendo luxuriose dissipavit substantiam. Luc. cap. 15

Bitter tears I woefully weep,
bitterly weep those woeful tears
which long ago the prodigal son,
poured forth, repentant, for his sin;
that they might now bewail my sins,
tears in tears, weeping in weeping.

Eternal Word of Eternal Father,
which once appeared in mortal flesh,
made so to heal the world from death,
which takes away the life of all —
Word, which in our human nature
alone are true man and true God,

send down now to me from Heaven
breath of the most Holy Spirit,
springing from our God the Father,
and from You, blessed God the Son,
and let Him through my voice proclaim
the teaching that You bring to us!

Gentle Jesus, as I reflect
upon the depths of Your wisdom
which is boundless, forgive, I beg,
if Your great truth, once it is placed
and settled in my feeble mind,
is touched by human vanity.

To incline a calloused conscience
towards repentance for its shame,
one must remember all the worst
deceiving ruses of this world
and the Almighty's readiness
to forgive the true repentant.

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Just as a doctor, first of all,
must open up a septic wound,
and is not troubled or dismayed
that noxious worms should issue forth;
for his intention is to bring
the longest health through shortest pain.

O sinner, in your wickedness,
seek refuge in eternal good,
see yourself in this appearance,
and then you may repent and say
that God's forgiveness far outweighs
the sinfulness of all mankind.

As evening gives a day its glory
so his life's end brings grace to man;
from the heights the Lord deals mercy
to all who put their faith in Him;
be heedful, trust, believe and hear
what a penitent soul has learned.

Where bowed beneath the ilex trees
a bush grows in a tangled grove,
where on a sheer and craggy cliff
you see wild oak trees stretching up,
and the high mountain's soaring peaks
are grown all white with icy snow,

there the son who squandered his share
of wealth in base debauchery,
now desolately watches herds,
fed upon the forest acorns,
and sorrowfully leans his weight
against an old and withered stump.

Here, at the end of his life's strength,
barely gasping out feeble sighs,
faint with hunger, he envies now
the sleek plump animals their food,
and only longs to feed his fill
on the scraps that are flung to pigs.

He, who gave abundant riches,
worldly goods for deprivation,
exchanged his wealth for poverty,
gave up his honest name for shame,
now cries out in this filth and grime,
not seeing himself in himself:

Ah, can I be that gentle youth,
that youth received well everywhere,
who never knew a time without
loving sweetnesss and delights,
well-known, noble, wealthy, worthy,
honoured, feted, admired, renowned!

If that same man I truly am,
woe and alas, now where are all
the pure silk and velvet garments
that so nobly once attired me?
Where are all my lavish banquets,
and my friends and all the ladies?

Ah no, I am not who I was,
if once I am not in myself;
alas, I have been abandoned
by all amidst this rocky waste;
in my nakedness the chill
repels me from the very rocks.

Instead of sweet and noble food,
instead of gilded palaces,
instead of servants night and day,
to wait upon my every wish,
instead of ornamented beds
where I once quelled all my desires,

now all I have for nourishment
is the obscure and bitter grass,
pigs for friends, hills for a palace,
the hard rock for my soft pillows,
and, alas, my deep feather-bed
is the black face of the parched earth.

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All my father's duteous servants
 feed themselves with wheat in plenty;
 while I hunger, full of sorrow,
 alone in this deserted land,
 vainly longing, like some mean beast,
 to find white wheat in the acorns.

Ah, is this what your debauchery
 has led me to, oh treacherous one,
 who under guise of sweet repose,
 of a kind and gentle lover,
 did enlist me in your service,
 till you had sucked all my blood dry?

Ah, heedless one, who does not care
 for either reason or for law;
 ah, ruthless one, who disguises
 a daring lie as honest truth;
 ah, you whose hardened heart knows nought
 of shame of men, of fear of God.

In your base lust, whom did you not
 embrace and take unto yourself?
 Your dissolute friends ever were,
 both in summer and in winter,
 the local youths and foreign lads,
 you came upon in your foul trade.

Ah, with whom did you not meet?
 Whose head has not lain in your lap?
 Who is there you have not betrayed?
 Is there one you have not deceived,
 always faithless, always changing,
 perfidious, wicked, vicious, vain?

I shall not hide the fiendish ways
 in which you ravaged my whole being;
 I shall tell all the cunning wiles
 with which you dazed and blinded me;
 I shall bury in these mountains
 your infamy and my disgrace.

She had loosened lasciviously
 her golden locks upon her brow,
 a merry and enchanting light
 of gentle suns shone from her eyes,
 and in her face there bloomed the sweet
 amaranthus entwined with roses.

Her lips were fashioned from coral,
 and her bosom was lily white.
 Her radiant, bewitching smile
 would whisper: »Give me all your heart!«
 and again: »Oh, give it to me!«
 murmured her sweet and loving glance.

Each of her actions would enchant
 in the midst of rapturous pleasure,
 let him want her who should glimpse her,
 let him perish who desired her;
 her pearly hand surpassed the snow,
 stepping softly she seemed to dance.

Ah, then my senses where quite numbed:
 to have held this in such esteem!
 for she was really withered, old,
 and had transformed her appearance,
 by anointing and adorning
 her murky, dry and sallow skin.

She had clipped the hair from a corpse,
 taken the maggots from its mouth,
 from the grave placed them on herself
 disentangling her golden curls;
 all her glory was robbed from death,
 weaving a sweet, beguiling web.

Her ashen face was furrowed deep,
 it was freckled, dry and yellow,
 yet she could deftly transform it
 with skilful use of many arts,
 that black would be the same as white,
 in her face without a face.

XXVII
Takò, i more ù tiscini
Skraia pomorza ù plavu sorce;
A' kadga ima ù pucini
Skoci, i ušvri nà valove;
I ù pòtopu kij nagn ori
Prije smarti grobmu orvori.

XXVIII
Ah, sad imam pamet hitru
Srvie sòto sviet gleda, i d'vori;
Nà oghniu vosak, dim na vitru,
Snieg nà sunzu, san ò zoti;
Trenutic oka; strijla i luka
Kiem poteghne snascna ruka.

XXIX
A, nije scivot gliudzki drugo
Negh smuchieno iedno more;
Negh plavu iedna, kù ù dugo
Biju vali, kako gore;
I sred orvich netom tmina
Clockse rodi mriet pocina.
Bie/ci

XXX
Bie/ci kud snasc, sòto hoch cial
Japad, i istok vas obhodi;
I be/krainoi po pucini
Srviet kry/cechi indie brodi;
Krise ù iame gorskieh hridi
Smart svudate slidom slidi.

XXXI
I nije stvarì koia mošce
Ubieghnuti togai suda;
U' pokoiu sred raskosce
Stoi be/ misli, i be/ truda;
Branse oru/ciem flato trau
Nechiescioise odarvati.

XXXII
Smart neghleda ni cije lize,
Iednakose od gnie tlacc
Siromascke kuchiarize,
I kraglievske rei polacc;
Onna ùpored mechie, i vaglia
Stara, i mlada, robba, i kraglia.
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And, rubbing them, she would bring blood
to her withered and bluish lips,
making them seem red as coral,
a disgrace to their real nature;
and she would denude the springtime
to disguise her winter in flowers.

Gardens of flowers would tremble,
intertwined in her shining hair,
loops of flowers hung from her ears,
flowers lay strewn upon her breast,
flowers in her hands, flowers everywhere,
and she in the flowers: a vile snake.

Honeyed words, in her heart poison;
her eyes ablaze, her breast of ice;
feigning to love, she slyly hates;
never wanting you, but watching;
she'd think one thing, do another;
deceive, betray, lie, dissemble.

I care only for this woman,
only she is my beloved,
only for her do I not tire,
roaming all night around her door,
singing in harmonious song,
of all her beauty, of my love.

She, when saw me and knew full well
I was entrammelled in her net,
then showed herself quite merciless,
icy cold to my ardent flame;
I gazed on her without ceasing,
haughty, she turned her eyes from me.

But her coldness enflamed my fire,
her anger just increased my love,
her iciness kindled live coals,
her hate made her sweeter to me;
I rejoiced in my discomfort,
she was ever before my eyes.

She ran from me, I would follow,
she hid and I would write to her:
saying how I ached with longing,
wilting, fading, pining, sighing;
she tore my letters, destroyed them,
ever waiting for better things.

And I, seeking for her favour,
sought to make myself more handsome:
I dressed in silk, carried flowers,
adorned my face, coloured my hair,
sighing constantly sighs of fire;
— she would not even notice me!

Then I would make myself believe
what I refused to see was true,
ever with new charms, devices,
I courted, sought better fortune;
I walked, I watched, I softly sang,
but all I did was all in vain.

Then finally my hand came on
the sharpest sword, that is — gold coins,
for them to penetrate, cut through
her adornments' solid armour,
for them to help me win at last,
and come where my love had denied me.

Then she altered and enlivened
her appearance for my sake,
feigning she wanted nothing else
but to fulfill all my wishes;
her eyes fixed eagerly on mine,
now she grew pale, sighed and fainted.

Seeing these emboldening signs,
I did not spare myself, but gave
her each and every kind of gift,
expending ever more and more;
then she would measure my heart's hopes,
by the bright gold which she received.

At last to reach my longed-for goal,
I sent again more and more gold
and precious stones set into rings,
pearls to adorn her lily neck;
she made me hang upon her words,
promising, but never acting.

One glance, shot lasciviously,
a sweet smile, a word of honey,
a longing sigh, but a forced one,
which her heart of ice bequeathed me,
chosen and measured out with care,
these were balm to my smarting wounds.

Gold flew ever in abundance,
pouring out of my eager hands;
and my face grew paler, whiter,
wasting away, and for my pain
and all the harm to my own life,
for all reward — but smoke on the wind.

My burning sighs then beseeched her
not to keep me in such torment;
and my torment seemed to pain her,
she would promise and then refuse
so cunningly that it appeared
I was to blame for her deceit.

At that my life by day and night
was ebbing out, draining away;
I heaped, poured out with all my might
all that I had of gold and treasure;
my reason dead, my senses blind,
I hastened to fell disaster;

for just as the flooding waters
which sweep away all they have broken,
and, as they crash down steep cliff sides,
roll away mountains, devour fields,
she devastated and devoured
every last vestige of my wealth.

MA. 125.00. 1910/1911
ZAGREB

Bust still the harm would have been slight
— to have lost only worldly goods;
had she not also driven me
to squander too the priceless gift
of all my inner qualities,
without regard, without mercy.

What vile deeds did I not commit,
into what evil fall for her?
I broke the law, lived shamefully,
I schemed, I trapped, I grabbed, I stole;
I laid the way for still worse crimes:
cast out all shame, abandoned God!

Then I lost all my demeanour
and all countenance of a man;
for each and every part of me
was altered by my heinous sin;
my whole being was turned to evil,
my body to a dreadful shade.

Then in my senseless mind was fixed
proud, perfidious arrogance.
Into my lordly brow was etched
a haughty, vain dementedness,
and on my pale and icy face
was heedless nefariousness.

My eyes flashed glances full of hate,
of poison, malice, wickedness,
my tongue frothed with a pungent gall,
spitting out all its bitterness,
my fetid mouth belched and spurted
the rank blood of loathsome licence.

Carefully and assiduously
my ears drank in lascivious talk;
my throat gaped open like a chasm,
to feed my boundless gluttony;
my hands grasped swiftly, avidly,
and my feet dragged, slow to do good.

My head, my brow, my eyes, my ears,
my mouth, my throat, my hands, my feet,
through all my body and my soul,
brimming with obnoxious evil,
I had become a vast monster:
worse than all monsters, than all beasts.

But if I ever chanced to hear
anyone speaking ill of me:
»Envy!« I would say, »and malice
is the cause and source of this.«
If relatives should rebuke me
I would swear they were mistaken.

I abandoned all my old friends,
and now for my new companions
I sought out those with like desires,
who languished in debauchery;
taking them for my protection,
enticing them with lavish feasts.

With them I would roam ceaselessly
around the high, beloved walls,
with them I watched, whoever I met,
lest his eyes turn where mine were fixed,
and for that reason many times
I suspected my own shadow.

But should any man really think
of casting covetous eyes on her,
I would see guilt in suspicion,
and would chew my lips in hatred,
saying: »May he be burned alive,
be he even my dearest friend!«

What did I not do, what not say,
what did I not spend abundantly,
until at last I gained from her
what my lust had so long desired,
what she, in her depravity,
had already widely given away.

Ah, he had rather build on sand,
or run across the ocean's foam,
chase a whirlwind through the mountains,
soften the all-resisting rocks,
empty the sea with a small bowl,
warm a snake's blood, stroke a lion,

show himself a slave hide his chains
seek for health in infirmity,
find stones in flowers, flowers in snow,
snow in the sun and sun at night
— whoever thinks that he may find
loving faith in a weak woman.

At last she submitted to me,
let me into her company,
eating with me, drinking with me;
wound round my neck like a serpent,
vicious, poisonous and very
wanton, insolent and greedy.

She and my belly then became
my goods, let them without reserve
ply me with copious food and drink,
my appetite was not assuaged;
but I selected from all sides
excellent food, the choicest wines.

Day and night, summer and winter,
I shared with her my infamy;
securely tied with filthy ropes,
bound to her in utter blindness,
chained like a dog to her doorpost,
mocked and taunted by everyone.

Alas, it is enough just once,
recklessly to trample honour,
to cast the mirror, that we hold
before our eyes, far behind us,
lest any other make us see
just how flagrantly we are scorned.

In this foul, dark debauchery,
my depravity grew and grew,
I lived like a beast in a sty,
like these which I graze in this wood;
the stench from my infamous deeds
had spread out over everything.

Ah, my disgrace holds back my tongue
from now divulging all my shame,
how the dissolute fire burned
my whole being without regard,
till my stained and tarnished honour
was swept away in blackest ash.

For when I gave her all my wealth,
and once her eyes had clearly seen
that now my naked poverty
had nothing more of gold to give,
that she had gnawed down to my bones,
had drunk my blood, picked off the flesh,

and that I was completely stripped,
without my health, without honour,
and that no vestige of her sun
could ever reach again to me —
there where my golden soul had gone,
she cast dead love out of the door.

With gain all love departed too!
But I did not yet comprehend,
for in my deep depravity
I still sought my being's waster,
but, merciless, she then refused
to know me, in my poverty.

So, as a flower, which no longer
ornaments once it has withered,
is first picked off, and then is crushed,
so she cast me into the street,
to leave my withered glory's rags
trampled in the dust and mire.

Were all the fields and hills of gold,
did all the rivers run with gold,
were the vast ocean made of gold,
were the whole world said to be gold:
not even that could satisfy
one hundredth part of woman's desire.

Beauty, reason, loyalty, faith,
all these are only pretty words:
what you are she does not notice,
how much you have is all she sees;
she seeks to suck the gold from you
and then to throw you on the muck heap.

In vain debauchery I lost
my honour, good sense and my wealth,
and all I had in my torment
was only sorrow and regret,
when I reflect upon my grief,
what I was once, what I am now!



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Lament II COGNITION

Et reversus in se. Luc. 15.

Just as our God, in his greatness,
in the beginning made the world,
first amidst the general darkness
He opened up a ray of light
and divided the night shadows
from the white brightness of the day,

so, in the darkness of the world,
when the Almighty in the skies
came to transform this mortal man,
standing in the dark, bewildered,
first of all He enlightened him
bountifully with rays of mercy.