

## Jan Kochanowski – Pieśni: Polish Carmina

### I.2 *Serce roście patrząc na te czasy*

How my heart to greet the times is swelling,  
Now, when lately barren trees shook cold,  
Snow lay cubit-deep in drifts a-welling,  
O'er the frozen rivers coaches rolled.

Now the trees breathe brisk and leaf-bedecked,  
Now the fields have blossomed full of flower,  
Now the iceless river's face reflects  
Bright the image of the boats that plough her.

Now the world is wreathed entire in smile,  
And the western wind is gently blowing,  
Corn is swaying, nesting birds meanwhile  
Herald in day's coming and day's going.

But the ground for real and honest joy  
Is when conscience resteth clear and peaceful;  
Who contrives no wicked ploy  
Has the counsel of his heart e'er easeful.

Such a man seeks not for guilt's relentment  
Cure in wine and lute of malady;  
Meagre meat supplies his heart's contentment,  
For his honest soul doth set him free.

Who is riddled by the gnawing worm  
Ne'er shall by the grandest feast be cheered;  
Music's dumb unto his heart infirm,  
Like howling wind on deaf man's ears.

Bright good cheer, though none can steal or trap thee,  
Nor entice with golden tapestry,  
Welcome when I'm staid and when I'm tipsy:  
Joyful cheer, come bide fore'er with me.

(20<sup>th</sup> November 1982)

### ***I.3. Dżbanie mój pisany***

Painted pitcher mine,  
Wine-jug polished fine,  
For tears, for wit, for bitter war to bring,  
For love, or for the sweetest slumbering.

Howsoe'er be named  
Th' wine you will contain  
Come hasten to us, let yourself be tipped,  
And let my guests your precious contents sip.

None shall thee despise,  
Though he pass for wise;  
Of ancient times philos'phers drank of you,  
Their heads though, wholesome, full of wisdom true.

Mellow us you must,  
E'en the most august;  
You let the wise men's matters drift and waft  
Releasing secrets by your treason soft.

Bring consoling hope  
To the hearts that mope;  
You make the poorest man so bold and brave,  
He feareth neither king nor chieftain grave.

Keep your mirthful might,  
All the weary night:  
You shan't be given peace until the day  
Will scare and chase the bright stars all away.

(5<sup>th</sup> January 1983)

***I.7 Trudna rada w tej mierze: przyjdzie się rozjechać***

This counsel's hard, there's no way but to part  
And now all song and merriment forego;  
With thee my carefree thoughts fly off, my heart  
Forsaken festers in this dungeon-woe,  
    And none shall free it from its snare,  
    Till thy return, O lady fair.

Surrounding voices now I fail to hark,  
Your face is like the rising dawn  
That gleameth bright above the sea's breadth dark  
And slowly makes night's shadows shrink withdrawn;  
    And stars bids vanish one by one,  
    Until the next night's sombre run.

How fond's thy image! Happy is the road  
Upon the which such dainty feet will tread.  
I envy forest thick and mountain bold  
Which soon will have her favours in my stead.  
    Their thrill the voice and cheer  
    My lonely heart doth long to hear.

O, merrymaking dear and frolic fine,  
There is no other way my poor heart knows,  
But letting hope allay this grief malign:  
In hope the peasant ploughs, in hope he sows.  
    Lady, be not unkind and hard,  
    And love's relief do not retard.

(28<sup>th</sup> December, 1982)

### ***I.10 Kto mi dał skrzydła, kto mie odział pióry***

Who hath bewinged me, who hath me plumed,  
Set me on high to spy at the strewn  
World at my feet, and aptly whilst I  
Stand touching the sky?

Was it the unquenched, unbecalmed ire,  
Gold in his might, undying sun-fire,  
Running his ancient course through sequence of years  
To spin time unshered?

Was it the changeling, bright-behorn'd disk,  
Leading the stars and bringing corn brisk?  
Hear I a voice call - wakefully real  
Or dream-sounds unsealed?

Here ne'er deep mist nor darkness has crept;  
Never the snow nor cold hailstorm swept;  
Here reigneth boundless peace, and day doth extend  
His light without end.

Worthy Thy palace is of Thy grace,  
Lord, and high virtue sits in her place;  
Next Thine her goodness glistens descried  
And dwells by thy side.

Thine, Lech. Slav prince, who knows not thy name?  
Thou, who as first this country to claim,  
Valour thy virtue, thou its land took  
And northern shore brooked.

See the Lord Krak that sits there on high,  
But to his city turning an eye;  
Wanda her robe proclaimeth a maid,  
Though warlike arrayed.

Here sitteth Przemysł, cunning and quick;  
Lestek sits next who, swift to spot trick,

Merited rule by winning the race,  
His rivals outpaced.

God likes not falsehood, God loves the just:  
Honour in heaven now for good Piast,  
Whilst on this earth his offspring attain  
To glory and reign.

Here stands Zemowit, next to his sire,  
Equally honoured. Thou are placed higher,  
Mieszko, O prince who had us behold  
And enter Christ's fold.

Next Boleslaus comes brave, with bold brood  
By him. Valiant their arms which accrued  
Poland's old martial fame – to redound  
As increase in bound.

Mid all their number stands a meek clerk,  
Called to the throne from monastery dark;  
Lesteks both; then one dwarfish in height  
But giant in might.

Then comes Jagiełło; both Casimirs,  
Noble their suits for war and for peace;  
Next shines thy splendour, stars dim around,  
Vladislaus renowned.

Here, too, is Olbracht, king of great heart;  
Aleksander; and Zygmunt who brought  
Peace after weary turmoil of war:  
Thus Poland's restored.

Royal and gracious, noble, bless'd lords!  
Heaven now grants your virtues' rewards.  
Look on your country, wish her to find  
More kings of your kind.

He who now cometh after to reign,  
Long may he rule us, prosp'rous remain,  
Healthy and happy, ne'er to decline,  
Till becked by ripe time.

(4<sup>th</sup> January 1983)

### ***I.14 Patrzaj, jako śnieg po górach się bieli***

Behold the hilltops snow-clad shimmer white,  
And northern winds do rudely swell,  
And lake lies mute in icy gel,  
And cranes 'fore winter's wake are put to flight.

Now look we therefore each unto our task,  
Now haste to heap the logs on fire,  
And wine, at table now required,  
For final act but God's provision ask.

Whate'er the future's secrets none may guess;  
'Tis vain of us to ponder o'er  
And dread the fate that lies in store;  
For in an hour God's hand can all suppress.

The brevity of time likes not long-sighted hope;  
Take what fate to thee has thrown,  
Use the change-gift for thy own,  
For none can pledge thy future's unknown scope.

The unhorned buck grows second crest anew;  
With us, when once our youth is o'er,  
'Tis gone, and gone for evermore:  
The feebling years await us and ensue.

## **I.24 *Zegar, słyszę wybija***

The clock chimes end of day,  
Melancholy, away!  
Much gravity day knows,  
Carefree must be its close.

Here each man is God's fool,  
Though he show no misrule;  
The more he strive and stir,  
More is he bound to err.

Whoso would wish to learn  
How the world's affairs turn:  
'Tis strange near truth to say:  
Man's but toy in God's play.

Honour, office, and rank –  
Meet for the mountebank;  
Death doth equal raze all:  
None might his will enthrall.

No man's a poorer sight  
But, in avarice-blight,  
Who collects for his heir,  
Dying hungry 'mid fare.

If the offspring thus bred  
In their sires' steps could tread,  
All this wide world brought low,  
Soon would a-begging go.

Justly doth God provide:  
What the hoarders now hide  
Squand'ers soon will discharge,  
Lest the world want at large.

For death obedience slays:  
Fathers, misspent your days;  
Your sons with gold you blessed,  
Virtue's not your bequest.

So such fond cares let sweep  
Into Satan's safe keep;  
Forget their interest  
Floating in Fugger's chest.

Now let's bring in the wine,  
Which maketh cheer sublime:  
Your worries washed in drink  
Soon like melting snows sink!

## **II. 5 *Wieczna sromota i nienagrodzona***

Eternal shame and harm beyond repair!  
O, Pole! Podolia lieth wasted bare:  
On Dnester sits the pagan to survey,  
To reckon and divide his wretched prey.

The infidel unleashèd hath his hounds,  
And woe! Thy fair dams and their young are bound  
And carried off to distant slavery.  
Alas! Ne'er more's thy hope them home to see!

For some 'cross Danube to the Turk are sold,  
And others follow far a distant horde.  
O, pity, Great God! Christian maids must spread  
For heathen lords the sheets on sinful beds.

The hand of vicious thief hath us put down;  
He, ignorant of village and of town,  
Doth but with wand'ring tent the country scour  
And us, the weak, with quenchless lust devour.

The preying wolf doth pillage and doth kill  
The lambs of flocks forsaken to his will,  
When neither shepherd to the flocks attends,  
Nor e'en his watchful dogs to guard them sends.

Against the terrifying Turk – what hope,  
When with his paltry fag we cannot cope?  
His counsel's eager how to choose our king:  
More eager still to crown his underling!

O, free of sleep your eyes and vigil keep,  
Brave Poles! For who shall Fortune's favour reap?  
Unknown, until Mars pleaseth to decide  
The victor – then retreat not e'en a stride!

Meantime revenge inspire your strategy,  
Until your doleful wrongs all cleansèd be  
With gush of your oppressor's gore; until  
His blood wipes clean the shame that stains ye still.

Forth-ho! What dainties make us hesitate?  
Poor plates! Whom doth the feast ye hold await?  
For he can claim to sup off silver dish  
To whom the steel of Mars the better wish.

Then silverware for golden coins exchange,  
And funds to raise revenging arms arrange;  
If some may squander whilst abroad they roam,  
Can we not gold afford to guard our home?

Now give away your gold, your selves reserve  
Lest some emergency worse still occur:  
The shield, not breast, ye should to chance prostrate:  
The wounded reach for helm and mail too late.

The saw, "A Pole is wise once harm has happed,"  
Might yet prove false, should we be wrapped  
With blacker shame unto our arms:  
"A Pole's a fool – both 'fore and after harm."

## II. 7 – *Słońce pali, a ziemia idzie w popiół prawie*

Scorching sun's glare earth to cinders burns:  
Lost the world as dust-cloud churns;  
Rivers underground constrained,  
And parchèd plants to heav'n cry out for rain.

Children, quick with wine-jug to the well;  
In the linden's shade let's dwell,  
Where 'gainst heat relief accord  
The soothing leaves, their planter's cool reward.

Come, my lute! Thy strings both sweet and kind  
Comfort the perturbèd mind;  
All my cares unquiètened  
Away on swift soft wind to Red Sea send.

## II.8 *Nie frasuj sobie, Mikołaju, głowy\**

Let not o'er-pensive thought disturb thy mind,  
Mikołaj, who'll be king ... The sealed and signed  
Decree, not writ but wrought in diamand  
Awaits despatch from heav'n and at God's hand.

Neither from north, nor south, nor east, nor west  
Expect him who to wear this crown is best;  
For only he who God's choice be will reign,  
And easily his subjects' hearts will gain.

Better though we our neighbours understand,  
God sent us a monarch from far-off land.  
Mark how He mocks and scorns our counsels sage:  
Our but-placed crown again is disengaged.

Where are the mounds of gold he once did boast,  
And where the Gascons with their liv'ried host?  
Where the guns he promised, where martial ire?  
Our bloated, blasted hopes have all misfired!

Fortune the ships doth steer on stormy sea,  
Bestows the soldier's wreath of victory;  
Both parliaments and mutinies obey  
Her will, which over man's intents holds sway.

Therefore away, ye speakers, still your tongues,  
And this fair golden crown let us have hung  
Upon a pole, and with the help of luck,  
Let him who's quickest, if not wisest, pluck!

\*Addressed to Mikołaj Firlej, Castellan of Biecz, during the interregnum of 1575, after the flight of Henri de Valois from Poland.

## II.23 *Nie zawsze, piękna Zofia*

Not forever, pretty Zofia  
Bloom the roses and lilies unpeered;  
Not forever lasteth youth's grace,  
Nor his present and comely face.

Time like water torrent flows;  
After him Occasion goes,  
Hair on front, of which grip hold –  
Seize now quick – 't has hind scone bald!

Often winter in its wake  
Doth the head so snowy make,  
Neither spring nor summertime  
Ever melts such frost sublime.

(28<sup>th</sup> December 1982)

**I.12 – *Muszę wyznać, bo się już nie masz na co chować***

I must speak out, 'tis no good to conceal  
This pang of unexpected loss I feel,  
And that for something that was never mine;  
In truth, this much my poor heart had divined.

But sudden was the fall of all my hope:  
My rival laughs at my mischance – I mope,  
He sports with that for which he never cared;  
I laboured long – misfortune be my share.

My own and loving hand this vineyard fenced  
To drive all fearsome bird and beast from hence;  
I gave it drink, lest sun should dry its sap,  
And 'gainst the winter's frosts did fondly wrap.

But when the fruits had ripened of my toil,  
Some wicked knave this vineyard stole to spoil:  
The juice he squeezes out now, grape by grape,  
While I look on, my heart will well-nigh break.

O, may this feast with plague his health salute,  
I'm foxed how he outran me to such fruit.  
Good times I'll not presume to see the more,  
Be, like the bear, content to lick my paw.

## II.24 *Niezwykłym i nieleda piórem opatrzony*

With signal, strange, and unrespited quill supplied,  
The double-natured poet, shall I fly  
And soar and hover high above the earthly realm,  
Beyond all human envy, I'll contemn

Its cities and its teeming towns. The other I  
To equal fortune born, and favoured by  
The great Myszkowski – this thy minion ne'er shall die,  
Nor wilt where Styx's sombre bypaths ply.

Whilst mortal skin decays and sheds about my shins  
My crown grows feather-white, a crest begins  
To sprout, and sends down streaks of plumes to fingertips,  
And fresh sprite-wings my morbid arms eclipse.

Now swifter than the fleeting Icarus was swept  
I'll speed to roaring Bosphor's shores, adept  
And sacred fledgeling to the Muse, I'll roam  
From Syrtian sands to Pole-Star's frozen home.

I shall be known to Moscow and to Tartary,  
To England in her seaward monarchy; [alternative: seabound]  
The Teuton and the valiant Spaniard shall me know,  
And he who drinks of Tiber's prófound flow.

So at the barren burial let no mourning chant,  
Lament nor dirge replete the air with rant;  
No rich bier bring to bear my body to the grave,  
Spare the knell and candle, and the psalter save.

[Alternative

So at the barren burial let no mourning chant  
Nor lamenting dirge replete the air with rant;  
In no rich bier bear my body to the grave.  
Spare the knell and candle, and the psalter save.]

(28<sup>th</sup> December 1982)

## ***II.12 Nie masz, I po drugi raz nie masz wątpliwości***

Never has there been the slightest doubt,  
Envy hangs on virtue's steps about;  
As the shadow prosecutes the strides,  
Slinking envy after virtue rides.

Envy shuns the gleam in virtue's eyes,  
Irkèd that others' honours higher rise,  
Since her own assay's of no avail –  
Eager at the excellent to rail.

But who's pledged his commonweal to serve,  
Ne'er such petty grievances observes;  
Let him but his righteousness suffice –  
Others choke with venom of their vice.

Virtue's value cannot be impaired;  
Nor for human honour doth she care;  
She's her own reward, her own sweet prize,  
Needing no subjoined charm besides.

If the road to heav'n lies open-doored,  
Him who serves his land it waits, for sure;  
What blind envy robs, God'll restore  
When He calleth virtue to the fore.

(4<sup>th</sup> January 1983)

## ***II.21 Srogie łańcuchy na swym sercu czuję***

Some most dreadful chain has clasped my heart,  
    But with glee I smart;  
Caught and trapped, held fast enslaved, enraptured,  
    Happy to be captured.  
    All my pris'ner's groans and pleas  
Utter but the greatest ecstasies.  
    Wardress pretty-eyed,  
Make my sentence soft and sweet to bide:  
    Blessèd was the hour  
When I fell so fully in your power.

***II.25 Czego chcesz od nas, Panie, za Twe hojne dary?***

What dost of us require, Lord, for Thy plenteous graces?  
What – for Thy generous bounty, which no bound e'er embraceth?  
The Church cannot contain Thee, Thou art all around us:  
The depths and the oceans, sky and earth surroundest.

For gold asketh Thou not, Lord, for all this is Thine  
Whate'er Man may deem his own in this whole world's confine:  
Therefore with grateful hearts, Lord, do we now avow Thee;  
Of no more fitting a gift can we e'er endowed be.

Thou, the universe's Master, who the heavens builded  
And with the beautiful stars this proud canopy gilded;  
Thou madest the foundation of the earth unfathomed,  
With countless herbs and flowers, her nakedness covered.

At Thy behest, Lord, the sea stops within its limits,  
Fearing e'er to trespass beyond the bounds Thou hast giv'n it;  
Rivers abound in waters of quantities unmeasured,  
Bright day and night's darkness know Thy timely pleasure  
By Thy will Spring bursts forth in numberless blossoms;  
By Thy will Summer her harvest-wreathed crown proffers;  
Autumn bringeth in the vine-fruit and the diverse apples,  
To let lazy Winter with this bounty grapple.

Through Thy grace, Lord, the night's dew restores the fainted grasses;  
O'er the withered crops life-reviving rain passes;  
At Thy bounteous hand, Lord, all creatures shall be nourished,  
Each at Thy deep fountain in his want replenished.

Be forever praised, Lord, O, Eternal Master:  
Thy grace and Thy goodness shall not cease ever after.  
Keep us as long as Thou will it in this lowly valley,  
But fore'er let us stay, Lord, under Thy wings hallowed.

\*

***Psalm 91 – Qui habitat in adiutorio Altissimi***

Whoso to the safety shall of his Lord retire,  
And in Him putteth all his trust entire,  
Boldly may say, "God be my defender,  
"To no great peril shall I my soul surrender."

He shall thee rescue from the hunter's snare

And surely spare thee from the plaguèd air;  
In His wings' shadow He shall keep thee ever  
Securely nestled in His sacred feathers.

Thy shield be His constance, and thy buckler mighty,  
Guarding thee safely 'gainst all terror nightly;  
The venomèd arrows need thou never fear  
Wherewith ill fortune the bland air doth shear.

Thus, when around thee lie thousand heads a-severed  
And yet more tumble, then shalt thou never  
Fall to the sword which shall justly let thee  
Look on the vengeance wreaked upon the guilty.

“The Lord is my hope,” hast thou pledged rightly,  
Thine only refuge be in God Almighty.  
Thus shalt thou live then, safe from misadventure,  
Over thy threshold no harm shall ever enter.

He shall send angels wherever thou shalt stray  
To watch thee over and guide thee on thy way,  
And as thou walkest, in their arms they'll bear thee,  
Lest thou perchance on sharp stone tread unwary.

Thou shalt walk safely through the viper's nest  
And vicious serpents with thy foot shalt press;  
The fierce lion for thy patient steed,  
Thy mount the dragon, who thy word shall heed.

List to the Lord: “He who Me loveth,  
“And in all things My commandments doeth,  
“Him shall I ever, in's most anguished need  
“Protect in danger, with assistance speed.”

“When he cries out, I shall always hear,  
“Be by his side, in danger ever near.  
“Him shall I safety and noble name accord,  
“To reach old age, in the favour of his Lord.”