

Translator: Lloyd Haft

Author: Herman Gorter (1864-1927)

Title(s) and page numbers:

The following is a selection of Gorter's lyric poems, grouped in three sections:

- (1) from *Verses* (1890) – these are from Gorter's collection *Verzen* (1890);
- (2) other short poems – from *Verzamelde lyriek tot 1905* or the eight-volume *Verzameld werk* (1948-1952); and
- (3) from *Lyrics* (1930) – from *Liedjes* (1930).

The page number of each poem in the original is indicated in square brackets above the translation. *Verzen* as a source is abbreviated as "1890," *Verzamelde lyriek tot 1905* as "Athenaeum," and Volume 6 of *Verzameld werk* as "VW6."

Detailed citations of the sources:

Verzen. De editie van 1890, edited by Enno Endt. Athenaeum-Polak en Van Genneep, 1977.

Verzamelde lyriek tot 1905, edited by G. Stuiveling and Enno Endt. Athenaeum-Polak en Van Genneep, 1966.

Herman Gorter, *Verzameld werk* (8 vols.), edited by G. Stuiveling and Jenne Clinge Doorenbos. Dishoeck/Querido, 1948-1952.

Liedjes, edited by Jacob Groot. Arbeiderspers, 1981.

from *Verses* (1890)

[1890 p. 7]

When times were leaf-still, long gone by,
 born she was, in autumn hush a bloom
 in bleak lightweepings standing pale light –
 the clouds cloak her in rains.

Pale she stood her light amidst all drear,
 keeping light eyes, blonde hair spreading near her,
 tears at many an hour, white of hands –
 a poor light girl light-famished.

Bring upon her color of bloomglow,
 your blood-red, o new season that is now.

[1890 pp. 12-14]

You are a white and silent shining snow,
 you are a shivering sea of shining sea.

You are a lilymaiden shimmerwhite,
 you are a palehood fluttering wide.

You are the open, the white, the willing,
 the waiting beaming flaming quivering light.

[1890 p. 25]

Pallor of grey,
pitter of rain –
wet are the roofs, the wind
sings its meager lay.

The slow human ruckus
goes on. They call it work:
that sober daily going
without ever knowing.

O, for a lass to bloom this way
in brightish pale,
a lilyhood and bleary
unto me, the warm, the weary.

[1890 p. 26]

A child ever longing
as a great bloom's heart, hanging
open, born that way
in the dawning day.

[1890 p. 67]

In the silence of the city
 she came, her skirt rustled,
 she held her white hands silent,
 I listened.

[1890 p. 81]

Far off I saw bright waters,
 nearby was gentle splashing
 of a voice I know;
 around it all was silence
 that I heard above the slender flow
 of words from in her gentle speaking.
 All was silent but the voice's splash
 with waters shining bright behind,
 and I heard wordlets moving
 crystal-clear through glassy silence.

[1890 p. 123]

Always that metal rustling of the metal-beaming sea
 and the wild-lighted crashing, cruel weight of waves,
 the flashing biting fine-rayed infinite,
 the overwidespread flooding walling in,
 and yet that rolling in, full wet blue,
 deep waterful of spraying drift,
 fine to the eye, eye-quenching dawn of water

with over it straight-on streamers of wind –
 that ladies' cheeks go by in, blooming close
 in parasolsilver, fine-dangled hands
 gemlike in eyeshine.

[1890 p. 125]

The waves and their falling more than onward
 with their flaunting so charming so silly so forgotten
 ever and always wanting to be above all –
 and then the sinking together, no longer wishing to be
 the whole but deep under others, they sink expiring
 with their dully loyal water-human eyes,
 each mumbling to other, standing under another
 all of them low and low and now no one higher –
 thundering up they go to the preening high and lonely
 sky that lights the world –
 crashing full sheering rocking striped dark-faceted water,
 fullgreen whitefoam breasting foam-dribbling water,
 water still but turning to light, yet lightly,
 yet staring lovely lonely, the mute godworldly light
 of heaven – and here the lowly greenfondling grass
 laid to the wind, eyeing away, bending back
 to the trees in the clumped quiet ground.

Other short poems

[VW 6, p. 202]

Deepest pain wrings onto the heart
 figures of love clear
 and comely as the darkness
 on a shell, ivory-pure.

[VW 6, p. 233]

Like the cool corridors
 of an empty house, full
 of a gleam, a soft
 whisper along the walls
 of an absence –
 so my soul is full
 of your presence.

[Athenaeum p. 232]

The grass has started in
 on night: the calm-sunned garden,
 sky still unthinking,
 light so unbroken.

Trees white as buckwheat
 hang in quiet beauty
 but the loose chestnut leaves
 are skittish, starting to feel
 the weight of the wind.

from *Lyrics* (1930)

[11]

Unto me came shining
a Lady in the all of All –
precious as crystal,
image of a new humankind.

[13]

And her I loved with deepest love,
gently and with her I danced
through all the deep and high All's glance
and she became my only Love.

[15]

Love, star in the night –
shine my heart through
that the thwart-shadowed world
be lighted too.

[23]

I was present at your womb,
my head nearby your bosom,
and your knee was there, full blossom
of your tenderness.

[31]

Nights, Beloved, I hold fast
your image with my eyes
as the seaman holds the mast
lest he go under.
But then it is I do go under, Love,
with your image in the dark of love.

[42]

All the rest fades
where you dance into day.

[49]

Naked
she nears
and all else disappears
fading before her appearance
veined through with silence
in air
bare.

[54]

Her eyes appear
as flames. We speak
in what so softly warms:
her arms.

[62]

Far Bride,
gentle beauty Bride –
out of the boundless
your face pearls
through this world.

[77]

Her eyes
sending light.

[79]

In her golden Light,
her golden Mind,
my mind.

[80]

A golden world
in which my mind's a pearl.

[81]

Now I've been immersed
in your golden body's fathoms –
shining as a pearl
within your golden Mind my mind.

[82]

The inner you
is now the outer me.

[90]

High in you,
deep in you.
Around me is no day or night.
Around me is a single light.

[94]

O blossoming sunlight,
blossoming water!
Unending thirst
that's love's flowering!

To the showering sound
of white sourcelight
my Love lies
on my breast.

[125]

The sea one blue meadow,
grassless, greenpale,
and one white wave – a flowering
in wideness without end.

[131]

As the dove
soars in the light –
so I soar in the light
of love.

[159]

O Golden Spirit
of freedom –
now I'm coming,
thrusting ever clearer, whiter, golder
into Joy, your golden body.

[176]

In downy repose
she naked lay;
her thought arose
like a bloom in the sky.

[177]

Soft as a velvet
jewel
was her gaze
of joy.

[182]

She lay supine,
her head full high,
and on her eyes, unopened, glinted
gladness given.

[183]

The radiant Maiden
bright as if in dawning
from the deepest fount
grew golden in the light of sun.

[185]

The all-radiant
that the years had seen
in water, mountain, wood –
became white light of Love.

[186]

Deep into the fount
the sun finally fell.
And the fount
rose to heaven.

[187]

In my arms
the luminous fount
turned to heaven.
I saw her face swimming
with heaven all around it,
saw her spirit swimming
in heaven.

[196]

Out of the dark of earth
arises light –
all of All suspended in the light
of love.