

De Profundis (Psalm 130)

SHIR HAMA-ALÓT: MIMÁ-AMAKÍM KÉRATÍCHA, ADONÁÍ.
ADONÁÍ; SHIM-ÁH VEKOLÍ!
TIYÉNA OZNÉCHA KASHUVÓT LEKÓL TACHANUNAÍ!
IM AVONÓT TISHMÓR YA ADONÁÍ, MI YA-AMÓD?
KI IMCHÁ HASLÍCHA, LEMÁ-AN TIVARÉ.
KIVÍTI ADONÁÍ, KIVTÁ NAFSHÍ, VELIDVARÓ HOCHÁLTI,
NAFSHÍ LADONÁÍ, MISHOMRÍM LABÓKER, SHOMRÍM LABÓKER.
YACHÉL YISRAÉL EL ADONÁÍ, KI IM ADONÁÍ HACHÉSED
VEHARBÉH IMÓ FEDÚT,
VEHÚ YIFDÉH ET YISRAÉL MIKÓL AVONOTÁV.

Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.
Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?
But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.
I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.
My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning:
I say, more than they that watch for the morning.
Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy,
and with him is plenteous redemption.
And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.
English: King James Bible

Ode To Napoleon Buonaparte (1814)

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824)

Written on learning that Napoleon had surrendered and accepted exile on the island of Elba, Byron's ode to the man who had once been his hero was prefaced by a quotation from the historian Edward Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire: "By this shameful abdication, he protracted his life a few years, in a very ambiguous state, between an Emperor and an Exile, till —". The Ode includes several references to fallen leaders, both mythological and historical.

'Tis done—but yesterday a King!
And armed with Kings to strive—
And now thou art a nameless thing:
So abject—yet alive!
Is this the man of thousand thrones,
Who strewed our earth with hostile bones,
And can he thus survive?
Since he, miscalled the Morning Star,¹
Nor man nor fiend hath fallen so far.

Ill-minded man! why scourge thy kind
Who bowed so low the knee?
By gazing on thyself grown blind,
Thou taught'st the rest to see.
With might unquestioned,—power to save, —
Thine only gift hath been the grave
To those that worshipped thee;
Nor till thy fall could mortals guess
Ambition's less than littleness!

Thanks for that lesson—it will teach
To after-warriors more
Than high Philosophy can preach,
And vainly preached before.
That spell upon the minds of men
Breaks never to unite again,
That led them to adore

Those Pagod things of sabre-sway,
With fronts of brass, and feet of clay.

The triumph, and the vanity,
The rapture of the strife—
The earthquake-voice of Victory,
To thee the breath of life;
The sword, the sceptre, and that sway
Which man seemed made but to obey,
Wherewith renown was rife—
All quelled! —Dark Spirit! what must be
The madness of thy memory!

The Desolator desolate!
The Victor overthrown!
The Arbiter of others' fate
A Suppliant for his own!
Is it some yet imperial hope
That with such change can calmly cope?
Or dread of death alone?
To die a Prince—or live a slave—
Thy choice is most ignobly brave!

He who of old² would rend the oak,
Dreamed not of the rebound;
Chained by the trunk he vainly broke—
Alone—how looked he round?

Thou, in the sternness of thy strength,
An equal deed hast done at length,
And darker fate hast found:
He fell, the forest prowlers' prey;
But thou must eat thy heart away!

The Roman,³ when his burning heart
Was slaked with blood of Rome,
Threw down the dagger—dared depart,
In savage grandeur, home. —
He dared depart in utter scorn
Of men that such a yoke had borne,
Yet left him such a doom!
His only glory was that hour
Of self-upheld abandoned power.

The Spaniard,⁴ when the lust of sway
Had lost its quickening spell,
Cast crowns for rosaries away,
An empire for a cell;
A strict accountant of his beads,
A subtle disputant on creeds,
His dotage trifled well:
Yet better had he neither known
A bigot's shrine, nor despot's throne.

But thou—from thy reluctant hand
The thunderbolt is wrung—
Too late thou leav'st the high command
To which thy weakness clung;
All Evil Spirit as thou art,
It is enough to grieve the heart
To see thine own unstrung;
To think that God's fair world hath been
The footstool of a thing so mean;

And Earth hath spilt her blood for him,
Who thus can hoard his own!
And Monarchs bowed the trembling limb,
And thanked him for a throne!
Fair Freedom! we may hold thee dear,
When thus thy mightiest foes their fear
In humblest guise have shown.
Oh! ne'er may tyrant leave behind
A brighter name to lure mankind!

Thine evil deeds are writ in gore,
Nor written thus in vain—
Thy triumphs tell of fame no more,
Or deepen every stain:
If thou hadst died as Honor dies.
Some new Napoleon might arise,
To shame the world again—
But who would soar the solar height,
To set in such a starless night?

Weigh'd in the balance, hero dust
Is vile as vulgar clay;
Thy scales, Mortality! are just
To all that pass away:
But yet methought the living great

Some higher sparks should animate,
To dazzle and dismay:
Nor deem'd Contempt could thus make mirth
Of these, the Conquerors of the earth.

And she, proud Austria's mournful flower,⁵
Thy still imperial bride;
How bears her breast the torturing hour?
Still clings she to thy side?
Must she too bend, must she too share
Thy late repentance, long despair,
Thou throneless Homicide?
If still she loves thee, hoard that gem,—
'Tis worth thy vanished diadem!

Then haste thee to thy sullen Isle,
And gaze upon the sea;
That element may meet thy smile—
It ne'er was ruled by thee!
Or trace with thine all idle hand
In loitering mood upon the sand
That Earth is now as free!
That Corinth's pedagogue hath now
Transferred his by-word to thy brow.

Thou Timour!⁶ in his captive's cage
What thoughts will there be thine,
While brooding in thy prisoned rage?
But one—"The world was mine!"
Unless, like he of Babylon,
All sense is with thy sceptre gone,
Life will not long confine
That spirit poured so widely forth—
So long obeyed—so little worth!

Or, like the thief of fire⁷ from heaven,
Wilt thou withstand the shock?
And share with him, the unforgiven,
His vulture and his rock!
Foredoomed by God—by man accurst,
And that last act, though not thy worst,
The very Fiend's arch mock;
He in his fall preserved his pride,
And, if a mortal, had as proudly died!

There was a day—there was an hour,
While earth was Gaul's—Gaul thine—
When that immeasurable power
Unsated to resign
Had been an act of purer fame
Than gathers round Marengo's name⁸
And gilded thy decline,
Through the long twilight of all time,
Despite some passing clouds of crime.

But thou forsooth must be a King
And don the purple vest,
As if that foolish robe could wring
Remembrance from thy breast
Where is that faded garment? where
The gewgaws thou wert fond to wear,

The star, the string, the crest?
Vain froward child of Empire! say,
Are all thy playthings snatched away?

Where may the wearied eye repose
When gazing on the Great;
Where neither guilty glory glows,
Nor despicable state?
Yes—One—the first—the last—the best—
The Cincinnatus⁹ of the West,
Whom Envy dared not hate,
Bequeathed the name of Washington,
To make man blush there was but one!

The last two stanzas were not set by Schoenberg:

*Yes! better to have stood the storm,
A Monarch to the last!
Although that heartless fireless form
Had crumbled in the blast:
Than stoop to drag out Life's last years,
The nights of terror, days of tears
For all the splendour past;
Then,—after ages would have read
Thy awful death with more than dread.*

*A lion in the conquering hour!
In wild defeat a hare!
Thy mind hath vanished with thy power,
For Danger brought despair.
The dreams of sceptres now depart,
And leave thy desolated heart
The Capitol of care!
Dark Corsican, 'tis strange to trace
Thy long deceit and last disgrace.*

Notes

1. Lucifer ("Bearer of Light") originally denoted the planet Venus. St. Jerome makes Lucifer the name of the principal fallen angel who must lament the loss of his original glory, once as bright as the morning star.
2. According to Bullfinch's Mythology: "Milo the celebrated athlete led the army of Crotona. Many stories are told of Milo's vast strength, such as his carrying a heifer of four years old upon his shoulders and afterwards eating the whole of it in a single day. The mode of his death is thus related. As he was passing through a forest he saw the trunk of a tree which had been partially split open by woodcutters, and attempted to rend it further; but the wood closed upon his hands and held him fast, in which state he was attacked and devoured by wolves."
3. Lucius Cornelius Sylla (or Sulla), scion of an ancient Roman patrician family, defeated Mithridates, King of Pontus, before seizing power in Rome. As self-made Dictator, he annihilated his political opponents while also reforming the Roman constitution. In 79 BC he retired, spending his last years on his country estate, writing his memoirs.
4. Charles V (1500–1558), Holy Roman Emperor (1519–56), King of Spain (as Charles I, 1516–56), and Archduke of Austria (as Charles I, 1519–21), abdicated and retired to the monastery of Yuste.
5. Napoleon's second wife was born Archduchess Maria Luisa of Austria.
6. "After having seen Napoleon begin like Tamerlane and end like Bajazet in our own time, we have not the same interest in what would otherwise have appeared important history." Byron
7. Prometheus, the titan of Ancient Greek mythology, who stole fire from Zeus' lightning to give to humanity.
8. In the Battle of Marengo (14 June 1800) Napoleon's forces defeated the Austrians following General Michael von Melas's surprise attack, driving the Austrians out from Italy, and enhancing Napoleon's political position in Paris.
9. Lucius (Titus) Quinctius Cincinnatus, Roman Consul in 460 BC, was plowing his fields when messengers arrived to tell him he had been named dictator to defend the city against the Aequi and the Volscians. Assuming supreme command, he defeated Rome's enemies, freed the besieged consul Minucius, and returned to his farm, all within 16 days, although he refused honours for these military victories. George Washington was called the "American Cincinnatus" because he likewise held his military command only until the defeat of the British in the American War of Independence.