

SLEZ

PÍSN

OBP

SILESIA SONGS
O. B. Petr

Dedicated to O. B. Petr
any to my family

Silesian Songs, O. B. Petr

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SILESIA FORESTS

You are like me, my Silesian forests!
Sorrow clings to your trunks and crests,
sad your look is, sombre your gaze,
just as my thoughts, just as my lays.
Your needles fall through the night to the ground,
tears of a nation crushed and bound.

The axe fells you at Vienna's decree,
and you die slowly, you die calmly!
In silence you vanish, ocean of pine,
unending, unending, your grief and mine!

MARYČKA MAGDOŇOVA

One night going home from Ostrava
old Magdoň stopped at his wayside inn.
Ended in the ditch with a broken skull.
And Maryčka Magdoňova wept.

A truck of coal overturned on the tracks.
Buried beneath lay Magdoň's widow.
In Staré Hamry five orphans were sobbing,
the oldest Maryčka Magdoňova.

Who will care for them, who give them bread?
Will you be father to them and mother?
Who own the mines, do you think they have hearts
like you, Maryčka Magdoňova?

Boundless the forests of Marquis Gero.
If father and mother are killed in his mines,
may the orphan gather an armful of wood,
what say you, Maryčka Magdoňova?

Maryčka, it's freezing and there's nothing to eat.
In the hills, in the hills there is wood and to spare...
Mayor Hochfelder watched you gathering it,
should he say nothing, Maryčka Magdoňova?

What man have you taken to be your bridegroom?
Bayonet over shoulder, helmet and plume,
stern his looks, and you follow him to Frýdek,
will you go with him, Maryčka Magdoňova?

You a bride? Bowed is your head,
over your eyes the kerchief wet
with your tears bitter and burning,
what is it, Maryčka Magdoňova?

The rich men of Frýdek, the ladies of Frýdek
will laugh at you with malice and scorn,
Mayor Hochfelder will watch from his window.
How goes it, Maryčka Magdoňova?

In the freezing cottage the little birds linger,
who will care for them, who bring them food?
The rich man never. What was in your heart
as you went your way, Maryčka Magdoňova?

Steep, Maryčka, steep the rocks rise,
where the Ostravice wild and foaming
hurls its torrents down to Frýdek.
Do you hear, do you see, lass of the hills?

One leap to the left and all is over.
Your black hair caught on the rocks below,
red with blood your white hands,
God be with you, Maryčka Magdoňova!

In Staré Hamry by the cemetery wall
without cross, without flowers, huddle the graves
of those who died by their own hand.
There lies Maryčka Magdoňova.

FRYDEK

Translation is not available.

THE HIDEOUS SIGHT

Phew, what a hideous sight!
So say the fathers of the golden city,
so say the honoured leader of the nation,
the patriot ladies shake their pretty heads,
so say Rothschild and Gutmann, Count Laryš and Vlček,
and my noble lord Marquis Gero —
when out of the truck of seventy thousand
I raised myself up. How they whipped me!
Like furnace flared my single eye,
from my shoulders streamed my mantle bloody,
on one I bore the German school,
on the other stood the Polish church,
my right hand held a heavy hammer
(my left I lost in a fall of coal,
on eye scorched out by a tongue of flame)
and in my heart the curses and hate of seventy thousand.

God knows, I am hideous!
The stench of a corpse is on my body,
the flesh rotting on arm and leg,
you know the Baška furnace? So flares my eye,
from my shoulders streams my mantle bloody,
my right hand holds a miner's hammer,
my left I lost in a fall of coal,
one eye scorched out by a tongue of flame —
a bunch of Prussian murderers squatted on my back
(gnawed my neck like starving rats)
on each hip a pack of Polish money-lenders —
Laugh, my God, laugh at the way I look!
I, Ondřej Petr, Petr of Těšín,
bard of a nation in chains.

How do the young bloods of Prague treat a bat they've
caught?
How did the Romans elevate Spartacus?
So shall I stand — my nation long perished —
a hundred years my brow uplifted to the skies,
my severed neck touching the blue,
I, Ondřej Petr, Ahasuerus of the Czechs,
hideous phantom and bard of a nation fallen.

Translation is not available.

Seventy thousand of us left
 hard by Těšín, hard by Těšín.
 A hundred thousand as Germans claimed,
 a hundred thousand as Poles are named,
 my heart found its calm relief:
 when we are but seventy,
 of thousands only seventy,
 may we live?

Seventy thousand are the graves
 they dig for us hard by Těšín.
 Cry aloud to heaven for aid,
 no saviour's arm but bitter laughter
 of a foreign God will mock our need,
 herded together dull-eyed we look
 while they lay our heads on the block,
 oxen watching each other's slaughter.

Marquis Gero, rich you are:
 give us seventy barrels of wine,
 a thousand and seventy barrels of wine!
 Half of us they'll Germans make,
 the other half the Poles'll take,
 let our voices thunder now:

Hail and long live Marquis Gero!
 Come, before our day is done,
 let's drink us drunk on red red wine,
 mother, daughter, father and son,
 hard by Těšín, hard by Těšín.

OSTRAVA

A hundred years mute I lived in the pit,
a hundred years I dug the coal,
a hundred years on my lean arms were knit
muscles of iron mould.

My eyes the coal-dust has clogged and seared,
the red has gone from my lips,
and from my eyebrows, hair and beard
hang the black icicle tips.

Coal-bitter is the bread I bring to eat,
day after day I drudge,
from my blood and from my sweat
palaces spring by the Danube's edge.

A hundred years in the pit I held my tongue,
who will return them to me?
When hammer on high I strode among
them they answered with mockery:

Come to your senses, get back to the pit,
sweat as we masters summon —
down swung my hammer — the swift blood from it
through the streets of Ostrava ran!

All you in Silesia, I speak to you all,
miner and every manjack,
put on your shield and buckler of steel,
call thousands to the attack;

All you in Silesia, all you I name,
who own the mines as your due:
the day is coming, in smoke and in flame,
the day we shall reckon with you!

YOU AND I

Out of my way!
Black are my hands, my clothes sweat-sodden,
I'm just a miner, you're the great man today —
your home's a palace, my shanty is wooden,
yet Freedom's cap I wear, anger on my brow.
No longer I hear the orphans' cry of need,
the hares you go hunting have stripped our field bare —
no shame in you, no pity, may lightning strike you dead!
From Beskyd hills I come, son of toil and sorrow,
I sweat here in your foundries, drudge in your mines there,
in my veins the gall burns — I must toil on just the same —
I who get your timber down the plunging stream,
grimed with coal, without a penny, sweat running in my eyes,
no fault of mine the Beskyds grieve with our children's cries,
not I who starve widows and rob them of their grist,
but I'm just a beggar, you're the great man — today:
Come to see our mountains? Watch out for my fist —
Freedom's cap I wear — out of my way!

WHO'LL STAND IN MY PLACE?

Blood I have little and yet from my mouth
it flows.
When the grass grows
over my grave, when I rotting lie,
who'll stand in my place,
who will hold my shield high?

Wrapped in smoke from the furnace I came,
my eyes black as night, my nostrils aflame,
in morning sunlight, at evening's close,
stern-browed I take the measure of those
murderers — Jews in the money, lords of the line —
I, the hideous collier, right out of the mine.
Diadems your lordly brows may adorn,
I hold each of you prisoner in my scorn,
and my clenched fist defiant fills
with the wrath of a miner from Beskyd hills.

Blood I have little and yet from my mouth
it flows.
When the grass grows
over my grave, when I rotting lie,
who'll stand guard for me,
my shield hold high?

I crossed the Oder. And on to Střebovice,
to Děhylov and Dobroslavice.
Yellow fields of rape ran along my way,
skylarks sang to me the livelong day.
I greet you, my country! Softly our own tongue we breathe,
while the Prussian, axe in hand, crouches in stealth —
Hučín lies over the border.

Country of mine, we loved each other fondly.
My youth that smiled gaily from lip and eye
long bone over the hills and away.
O the blossom and leaves that have had their day
in life's early autumn! Silent and sad am I
like evening in the Beskyds. My country knows why!
Hučín lies over the border!

There before Těšín where the Lucina streams
lived a girl who dashed to the ground my dreams,
and my broken life to despair belongs.
I had only my heart and these few songs,
he a house in the city and rings of gold...
Whom did she choose? Must you be told!
Hučín lies over the border.

Where has all vanished, where has it gone?
In a strange land I live. In the distance beckon
beyond return my youth and my love,
the last ember of memory fades in dove-
grey ash. Far, far off is Střebovice,
and Děhylov and Dobroslavice...
Hučín lies over the border.

Hunting rifle over shoulder,
in his hat a feather grey,
deep in the pine forest
Marquis Gero met with me.

Polish priests he put in the parish,
in our schools German dominies.
Now he's resting — and his gun
hangs from a clump of trees.

Cursed murderer of my people!
(But with our girls how he is gamesome)
twenty paces he stood from me —
and I left my rifle home!

NÁVRAT

Translation is not available.

ONLY ONCE

I cannot remember when and where
I once heard this story told.
Somewhere far in the north
there is a gloomy valley shut in by hills,
sorrowful and dark,
where the sun has never shone.
A sad people lives there
in rough smoke-blackened tents amidst the eternal snow:
round the fire sit the men —
words cost them more than gold —
behind them the sad-eyed women,
and the children huddled together in furs.

Who can tell how it happened,
maybe the earth went out of orbit,
but one day the sun began to shine:
afraid of the brightness all the people
fled on the instant to their black tents,
pushed boulders against each entrance,
and fell face to the ground
begging the demon of the unknown
to spare their lives...
Outside meanwhile
the bright sun melted the everlasting snow
and the untouched soil
bloomed with violets at his kiss.
The sun god, seeing
the silence like death and the frightened prayers,
passed on from that valley
and never looked back again.

When fear was overcome
and the people left their tents
and gazed at the moistened earth,
smelt the fragrance of the unknown violet,
and when they perceived it was good god,
by them offended, who had shown his face,
and understood in their hearts
that the day would never come again,
then sorrow deeper than life
bowed the heads of the sombre men
and the necks of the saddened women,
and they lived on in double grief,
because they knew that once
the light of life had shone upon their clouded land,
and through fault of theirs passed by —
never to come back!

Only once love came my way.
She had black hair falling to her waist,
and in her soft voice she said to me:
You are a good man
and will make any woman happy —
and the brief shy look,
which said more than her words
spoken in the gentle tones
of my Těšín homeland,
went with her speech.
And I, who long ago
had drained the cup to the bitter dregs
and ripped out the white pages of my life's book,

said in the rough way
the blackened miners speak
there beneath Ostrava's plain:
The man you take as husband
will always be happy —
but a rose does not grow upon a wilted stem.

Translation is not available.

I loved her. And she married another.
My heart burnt out, my heart darkened,
and sorrow unending is mine
whenever I remember
how sweet love came my way
and I shut fast my cottage door
and never again will it come back!

I

I, I the prophet of the Beskyd people.
 God did not give me to them. His country is
 where the grain runs gold to the skyline,
 where violets scent the air, forget-me-nots bloom,
 where the towns are wide and castles high,
 churches rise splendid, boats sail the river,
 where men trust in heaven and faces are gay.

He whom God's curse shut in a sulphurous cavern,
 whose dour lips never shaped a prayer.
 sat on a crag defiant as of old.

Black as night his eye stared around him
 under the silent Beskyds, under Lysá Hora:
 the collier's neck sagged like a branch
 under the load of a century's toil,
 the hard fist of the foreigner that from a child's mouth
 rips the dying tones of the mother tongue,
 the brand of the traitor, of craving hands,
 all that a century had burnt into his eyes,
 roused up the demon.

He struck at the rock,
 down from the crag sprang the hideous prophet,
 bred in bondage and of traitor blood,
 railing at the moon, cursing the sun,
 witch clenched fist to the heavens upswung
 he felled to the ground in defiance and fury —

his life's portion the demon had granted —
 all those murderers. however they are gilded
 and bowed to like gods
 by the mine-slaves of Těšín —
 down from the crag sprang I!

II

In August when the sun beats down at noon
 and the rocks breathe out the summer's blaze,
 when the wild Morávka is dry in its bed,
 underground the miners heave up their arms
 and blacksmiths hammer the red-hot iron,
 while on the wide-stretching harvest fields
 their women stoop through the heat of the day:
 I, who spring from this peaceful people
 bred in bondage from the cradle,
 brought up in the ways of serfs —
 I, ill-starred son of pitmen and smiths,
 fled from Ostrava, from Vítkovice, from Baška,
 from furnace and forge, foundry and mine,
 tossed my hammer and pick down the pit,
 left mother and sister at work in the fields,
 snatched from the wall my grandfather's fiddle
 and began my tune.

Once maybe it sounded gay,
 the happy tones of youth and love.
 I can not tell — so long ago.
 Three string were broken.

The Polish priest I threw out of the church,
the German teacher drove from the school,
by night I set fire to the woods stolen from me,
and shot down the hares on my master's estate.
They dragged me off to Těšín, and God muddled my wits.
Under Lysá I played to the blackbords and squirrels
and sparrows in the branches of the red rowan-tree.
From village to village I wandered my way
in the heat and the cold, the snow and the rain.
I played behind hedges and under windows,
and my fiddle had only one string —
the heavy sigh of the seventy thousand
who have perished at Bohumín, under Lysá,
perished in the forests seized from our hands,
slowly they die in their ravished Beskyds,
they have perished in Šumbark, perished in Lutyně,
they are dying in Datyně and in Dětmárovice,
they have perished in Poremba, in Dombrava perish.
Strike your tents and put out the camp-fires!
The seventy thousand are on the march,
long ago our camp was pitched on the Olše,
far beyond the Lucina we have drawn back,
we shall cross the Ostravice, pass into Moravia,
a silenced people, stock that has gone.

Before them, like David in front of the ark,
or a snake crazed at the sound of the pine,
dances the droll bard of the seventy thousand,
Don Quixote of the Beskyds, with juniper spear,
his armour of moss and a pine-cone helmet,

for shield a mushroom and ferns for visor —
this he would grasp the stern arm of Fate,
the black sword of the knocht in golden armour.

I, Ondřej Petr, Petr of Těšín —
wandering fiddler and crazy bagpiper,
mad rebel and drungen singer,
owl of ill-omen on the towers of Těšín —
I play and sing while the hammers thunder
in Vítkovice, Frýdlant and under Lipina.
Around me go the rich, no kin of mine,
(Ondřej Petr, how you love them!)
men who are famous, of lordly line,
proud as the stars, splendid as gods,
(Ondřej Petr, who wiped out your village?)
before me go ladies in velvet and silk,
around me the men of power and fame
from the golden city beside the Danube,
and the long-haired poets from the Vltava's banks,
lovers of fair women as Paris instructed.
The one string of my fiddle quivers despairing
with the heavy sigh of the seventy thousand,
I sing to the stones, I play to the rocks,
I play and I sing — will you toss me a penny?

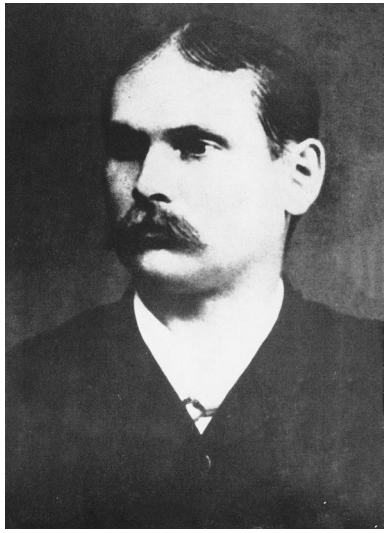
III

I am the first of the Těšín people,
first bard of the Beskyds to speak his word
to the mine-slaves and drivers of a foreign plough,

in their veins milk and water instead of blood.
Each of them has one God in the skies,
another, and greater, rules below.
To the God above they pay dues in church,
on the other their sweat and blood bestow.

He who is above gave you bread to eat,
made flowes for the butterflies, green glades for the deer;
to you the children of the Beskyds
gave the wide fields under Lysá sheer.
He gave you the mountains, gave you the forrests,
the sweet scent breathing from hill and dale;
the other grabbed from you all you had —
run off to church and weep your sad tale!

My son of the Beskyds, honour God and your masters,
it will bring you reward without end.
When chased from your woods by guardian angels,
low, low, on your knees you will bend!
“You thieving bastard! Is this your wood?
Down on your knees and kiss the ground!
Get out of the woods and up to the court!”
You, God above, how does that sound?
Your horrid tongue jars the ear of your masters,
to your guardian angels gives offence.
Give it up and you’ll do better,
your son shall have his recompense.
So be it. The Lord wills it. Night falls on my people —
we shall perish before it has passed.
This night I pray to the demon of Vengeance,
first bard of the Beskyds and the last.



Ondřej Boleslav Petr