



# BAKUNIN

*Posted on February 1, 2023 by Władysław Broniewski*



Władysław Broniewski (1897—1962), the famous Polish poet, translator, writer and soldier, wrote this poem as a homage to Mikhail Bakunin (1814—1876), the Russian revolutionary. This poem is translated by Przemysław Abramowski.



## **Bakunin**

Such veiny hand on manuscript  
Lionish profile of head above it.  
Huge shadow falls on wooden doors  
Slightly ajar. On the table  
Oil lamp glows  
While the night—immense, starry...  
The silence overwhelms, it's midnight.  
Sparkling snow on roofs, fluffy snow.  
Bakunin's writing.  
(This veiny hand. The lion's mane.  
Ominous shadow alludes pain?)  
The shadow here might rise a cloud  
Which could unleash a storm today!  
(How heavy's hand... To think about  
Why pen—my weapon—is a weight...)  
Outside—just snow, night, stars...  
The tea is tepid. Pipe's smoke rises...  
Bakunin dreams—scenes from his life  
Flow in his brain... some, inter alia,  
Adventurous—like freedom run  
He made alone through Transbaikalia  
With Tsarist posse right on his heels  
Escape by luck—chance U.S. sail...  
His traces then, to their blight  
As if some snow obscured white.

The silence grows. The darkness crawls.  
Cherry smoke curls dreamingly wade...  
This shadow there, dwarfing the walls  
It's him! Year eighteen forty-eight!  
Again, voracious and so savage  
Sniffing for blood in shifts of tone  
Song sung on Dresden's barricades  
Which cries as then: Tear down the thrones!  
This song puts Europe to a torch  
The spring of nations, freedom's magnet  
The million-footed crowd now bulging  
In booms of salvos—hear, young Wagner!  
...all lost. Last, mutinous  
Prague would flash, then only darkness.  
And so things ended up  
In chains, in bloody Chemnitz dungeon.  
Each day he measured the world with thought  
His cell had three steps for him only.  
Freedom! Many hard years went by  
Whispering her name to walls in torment.  
Nicholas' thugs put him in chains  
Whose ringing he only heard as "Rise!"  
Free man he sailed the world around,  
No land was safe like Switzerland  
Where he had settled—and what today—  
Bern's eerie silence so tough to heart?  
Here—Siberian snow...  
Wild and unbounded freedom!  
Longing, which Herzen didn't know!  
In this great silence time seems to  
Roll back the memory with its weight  
Bakunin's mind breaks free and talks  
Again to Orlov, which their fate  
Prevented, yet the old man swears  
To give the Tsar no more weak lies  
Never kowtow—better offend!

"Pugachov's spectre is now me  
So like a phantom shall I stand  
Over Empire, and people's fury  
From prison here I will swing  
On world and Russia!"  
With squinted eyes  
This January Bakunin writes:  
"I'm leaving only what I got  
Some clothes (all patched), some free thought.  
The glass of life—I took a good sip  
So as a free man I'm on this old trip  
I'm leaving now. Swiss city Bern,  
Its silence—let clock-masters keep them.  
Our stars have harsher sparkle learnt  
Over the steppes and in my wisdom.  
Slowly through snow I'll walk alone  
After the call of northern wind  
Which in eternal snowstorm blows  
And blasts, so free—all time it did  
Shake fist at Earth—while in its path  
Teaching us humans its full wrath."

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