

*Cinco Poemas de Bécquer* was one of a series of works commissioned by the Bratnober family of St. Paul, MN, to honor their father, Harry L. Bratnober. The terms of this particular commission specified a choral work with Spanish or French text. I chose these five poems by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870), who wrote during the beginning of the transition from the Romantic to the modern era, and whose work often has a certain air of mystery and nostalgia. The third poem refers to “Ofelia;” I have added a few lines from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

duration: c. 11:00

# CINCO POEMAS DE BÉCQUER

## Del Salón en el ángulo oscuro...

Del salón en el ángulo oscuro,  
De su dueña tal vez olvidada,  
Silenciosa y cubierta de polvo  
Veíase el arpa.

¡Cuánta nota dormía en sus cuerdas,  
Como el pájaro duerme en las ramas,  
Esperando la mano de nieve  
Que sabe arrancarlas!

¡Ay! –pensé–, ¡cuántas veces el genio  
Así duerme en el fondo del alma,  
Y una voz como Lázaro, espera  
Que diga: “¡Levántate y anda!”

In a dark corner of the hall,  
Forgotten perhaps by its mistress,  
Silent and covered with dust  
Was a harp.

What sound was sleeping in its strings  
As a bird sleeps in the branches,  
Waiting for the snowy hand  
That knows how to pluck them!

Ah! –I thought– how often genius  
Likewise sleeps in the depths of the soul,  
Waiting, like Lazarus, for a voice  
That would say, “Rise and come forth!”

## Besa el aura que gime blandamente...

Besa el aura que gime blandamente  
Las leves ondas que jugando riza;  
El sol besa a la nube en Occidente  
Y de púrpura y oro la matiza;  
La llama en derredor del tronco ardiente  
Por besar a otra llama se desliza,  
Y hasta el sauce, inclinándose a su peso,  
Al río que le besa, vuelve un beso.

The gentle breeze, which softly roars, kisses  
The light waves which it playfully curls;  
The sun kisses a cloud in the West  
And tints it purple and gold;  
A flame slides ardently around a trunk  
In order to kiss another flame,  
And even the willow, bending under its weight,  
To the river which kisses it, returns a kiss.

## Como la brisa que la sangre orea...

Como la brisa que la sangre orea  
sobre el oscuro campo de batalla,  
cargada de perfumes y armonías  
en el silencio de la noche vaga;

símbolo del dolor y la ternura,  
del bardo inglés en el horrible drama,  
la dulce Ofelia, la razón perdida,  
cogiendo flores y cantando pasa.

Like a breeze which freshens the blood  
over the dark field of battle,  
laden with perfumes and harmonies  
wanders in the silence of the night;

symbol of sadness and tenderness,  
in the awful play by the English bard,  
sweet Ophelia, her reason lost,  
passes, gathering flowers and singing.

(There's rosemary, that's for remembrance;  
and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.  
There's a daisy: I would give you some violets,  
but they withered all when my father died.

Hey nonny nonny no.)

### Yo soy ardiente, yo soy morena...

—Yo soy ardiente, yo soy morena,  
Yo soy el símbolo de la pasión;  
De ansia de goces mi alma está llena.  
¿A mí me buscas?—No es a ti; no.

—Mi frente es pálida; mis trenzas de oro;  
Puedo brindarte dichas sin fin;  
Yo de ternura guardo un tesoro.  
¿A mí me llamas?—No; no es a ti.

—Yo soy un sueño, un imposible,  
Vano fantasma de niebla y luz;  
Soy incorpórea, soy intangible;  
No puedo amarte.—¡Oh, ven; ven tú!

### Voy contra mi interés al confesarlo...

Voy contra mi interés al confesarlo;  
pero yo, amada mía,  
pienso, cual tú, que una oda sólo es buena  
de un billete del Banco al dorso escrita.  
No faltará algún necio que al oírlo  
se haga cruces y diga:

“¡Mujer al fin del siglo diecinueve,  
material y prosaica...” ¡Bobería!  
¡Voces que hacen correr cuatro poetas  
que en invierno se embozan con la lira!  
¡Ladridos de los perros a la luna!  
Tú sabes y yo sé que en esta vida,  
con genio, es muy contado quien la *escribe*,  
y con oro, cualquiera *hace* poesía.

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer  
(1836-1870)

I am ardent, I am brunette,  
I am the symbol of passion;  
My soul is full of a longing for pleasure.  
Is it I you seek? No, not you.

My brow is pale; my tresses of gold;  
I can offer you happiness without end;  
I hold a treasure of tenderness.  
Is it for me you call? No, not for you.

I am a dream, impossible,  
A vain phantom of mist and light;  
I am incorporeal, I am intangible;  
I cannot love you. Ah, come!

It goes against my interest to confess it;  
But I, my love,  
think, as you do, that an ode is good only  
if written on the back of a banknote.  
Of course some fool on hearing this  
will cross himself and say:

“A woman at the end of the nineteenth century,  
materialistic and prosaic...” What stupidity!  
Like tales of four poets  
who in winter wrapped themselves in inspiration!  
Like the barking of dogs at the moon!  
You know and I know that in this life,  
with genius; it is very seldom that one *writes*,  
and with gold, anyone can *make* poetry.

(translation by Carol Barnett)