

THE UPAS-TREE (“Anchár”)

by

Aleksandr Pushkin

translated by

Michael Allen

Physics/Ruissian Senior

In a desert stingy, fell,
In soil by hell-fire blasted, blown,
And like a threat'ning sentinel
An Upas-Tree stands all alone

Nature of the parchèd plain
Begot it on a day of ire;
Its roots, its baneful leafy mane
She gave to drink a poison dire.

Poison, beading on the bark,
Melts in the midday holocaust
And hardens in the chilling dark:
With vitreous pitch the tree's embossed.

Near it no birds nor tigers stay,
this Tree-of-Death, black whirlwinds dare
Alone to brush it, spin away,
Envenomed now with noxious air.

And were its dense leaves watered by
Some cloud, the rain, now venomous,
From dripping boughs would vilify
And stream into the flaming dust.

But man sent man to Upas-tree
With commanding glance; and on his way
this man set out. He, trustfully,
Returned at dawn the following day.

He brought with him a withered bough
With deadly pitch and leaves of brown;
The sweat stood out upon his brow,
In icy streams it trickled down.

In vaulted hut, his task complete,
He, weakened, lay on thatched floor;
The poor slave died there at the feet
of the lordly conqueror.

This Prince made arrows pestilent,
In poison soaked his trusty darts;
And grievous ruin 'round he sent
To neighboring folk in foreign parts.