



Mikhail Lermontov

Selected Poems

Translations from Russian
by Ilya Golubitskiy

Three Poems Written in 1832

P o e s i s 1

2004

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

IN MEMORY OF ILYA GOLUBITSKIY. Here we start the publication of Lermontov's poetry translations by Ilya Golubitskiy with the three most recent ones completed in October of 2003. Ilya chose Lermontov's words to be his own last message to all of us. He died on December 1, 2003, two weeks before his 22-nd birthday. Ilya was born on December 15, 1981 in Leningrad (St. Petersburg), where he spent most of his childhood years. From 1992, he lived in Boston.

Ilya was a young man of great promise. Among books that he left on his desk were a self-teaching manual of Ancient Greek, a Latin textbook, *The Elements* by Euclid, a popular science book called *At the Crossings of Physics, Chemistry, and Biology*, and Twain's *Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*. Byron, Shakespeare, and Dostoyevsky were his favorite reading. His love and passion for languages was nurtured by a profound understanding of both Russian and English. Many unusual projects that he started are never going to be completed. However, there was one important goal in his short life that he succeeded to reach, which made him feel proud and accomplished. These were his translations of Lermontov's poems, to which he dedicated three years of hard work.

The poetry of Lermontov served him as means of delivering an important message to the world and making his own humble voice heard along with the voice of the great Russian poet. He felt that there was no point for him to say anything, since Lermontov had already said it all. He put his translations on the Web in hope that many people would visit his anonymous site and change from just

reading Lermontov. That was the first stage of his personal fight with the malevolence in this world. It didn't work as efficiently as he had hoped – the world remained indifferent and did not show any signs of drastic changes.

Ilya still wanted a fight and a victory. He wondered throughout the human history in search of a certain crucial point, from which mankind went the wrong way. He was investigating about the fate of Joab, a Commander-in-Chief at King Solomon's Court, Napoleon and Hitler, Peter the Great and Stalin, the Decembrists and Free Masons, the New Age and Dalai Lama, the European Union and World Government. He envisioned all of world history as one and the same battle between two major forces – good and evil – and he wanted to participate. His aim was to look at many single historic facts from some new perspective and bring them all together in a book. The book was to make a difference. He already had an outline in mind. The title of the last chapter was to be *Alignment of the Fronts*. It was the enormous burden of this task that crushed him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th ed., New York, 1882;
Complemented by I. Golubitskiy.
Information in angle brackets added in 1911.
Text in square brackets by I. G.

LERMONTOFF, MIKHAIL YUREVITCH (1814–1841), often styled the poet of the Caucasus, was born in Moscow, <of Scottish descent>, but belonged to a respectable family of the Tula government, and was brought up in the village of Tarkhanui (in the Penzensk government) [i. e., Tarkhany, Penza Government], which now preserves his dust.

[The whole care of his childhood was devolved, by his mother's early death after an unhappy marriage and his father's military service and disadvantageous financial situation, upon his grandmother, although several attempts were made by the father to reclaim the custody over his son, the boy thus becoming the center of family intrigue. No cost nor pains, however, was spared in order to give the young lord of the estate anything he wished for, and the best education his grandmother could think of.] The intellectual atmosphere which he breathed in his youth differed little from that in which Pushkin had grown up, though the domination of French had begun to give way before the fancy for English, and Lamartine shared his popularity with Byron. From the academic gymnasium Lermontoff passed in 1830 to the university, but there his career came to an untimely close [due to his lack of enthusiasm. He had fallen in love with Varvara Lopukhina shortly before the examinations. To Lopukhina, who several years later became the wife of a vain millionaire, the poet would remain faithful to the end of his life. From 1832] to 1834 he attended the school of cadets at St Petersburg, and [during these years followed the dissolute lifestyle of his classmates;] in due course he became an officer in the guards.

[Despite his initial eagerness to enter the high society, he was soon to grasp the inhumane laws that were governing it, reflecting them in his drama *Masquerade*.] To his own and the nation's anger at the loss of Pushkin (1837) the young soldier gave vent in a passionate poem addressed to the czar, and the very voice which proclaimed that, if Russia took no vengeance on the assassin of her poet, no second poet would be given her was itself an intimation that a poet had come already. The czar, however, seems to have found more impertinence than inspiration in the address, for Lermontoff was forthwith sent off to the Caucasus as an officer of dragoons. He had been in the Caucasus with his grandmother as a boy, [several times prescribed treatment at the

mineral waters], and he found himself at home by yet deeper sympathies than those of childish recollection. The stern and rocky virtues of the mountaineers against whom he had to fight, no less than the scenery of the rocks and mountains themselves, proved akin to his heart; the emperor had exiled him to his native land.

[His writing had matured by the time he returned to St Petersburg the next year. He was able to take on the destiny of a generation, that, to his mind, had been idling away its existence and had not inherited the virtues of its predecessor – the contemporaries of Pushkin, the Decembrists, and warriors of 1812. In 1839 he wrote the novel *A Hero of Our Time*. The same refusal to let be anything false or unnatural for which his novel gained him so many ill-wishers would entail the occasion of the duel in which he lost his life in July 1841 during his second Caucasian exile. He left behind a controversial reputation, and among his countrymen not until the accession of Alexander II. did it become accepted to discuss his works in public.]

Lermontoff published only one small collection of poems in 1840. Three volumes, much mutilated by the censorship, were issued in 1842 by Glasunoff; and there have been full editions of his works in 1860 and 1863. To Bodenstedt's German translation of his poems (*Michail Lermontoff's poetischer Nachlass*, Berlin, 1842, 2 vols.), which indeed was the first satisfactory collection, he is indebted for a wide reputation outside of Russia. His novel has found several translators (August Boltz, Berlin, 1852, &c.). Among his best known pieces are "Ismail-Bey," "Hadji Abrek," "Walerik," "The Novice," and, remarkable as an imitation of the old Russian ballad, "The song of the Czar Ivan Vasilivitch, his young bodyguard, and the bold merchant Kalashnikoff." <"The Demon", translated by Sir Alexander Condie Stephen (1875), is an English version of one of his longer works.>

THE COMBAT

Two heavenly sons did once fly over me
To meet in battle, each in ether sunk;
The one – in fringes and insignia silvery,
The other – clothed as a black monk.
And seeing the second adversary's hate,
I pitied much the warrior with the wreath;
But on his garments he now raised the silver plait,
And I mark'd thunder underneath.
And hit the wings of their untested colts,
And did with blazing flames the nostrils bleed;
But died the squall before the thunderbolts,
And fell on earth the sable steed.

БОЙ

Сыны небес однажды надо мною
Слетелися, воздушных два бойца;
Один – серебряной обвешан бахромою,
Другой – в одежде чернеца.
И, видя злость противника второго,
Я пожалел о воине младом;
Вдруг поднял он концы сребристого покрова,
И я под ним заметил – гром.
И кони их ударились крылами,
И ярко брызнул из ноздрей огонь;
Но вихорь отступил перед громами,
И пал на землю черный конь.

1832

* * *

So as at night a fallen star's,
The world needs not my flame.
Though o'er my heart run many scars,
'Tis vicious all the same.

To vanity by inspiration
I'm kept from being slave;
But from the soul's own vacillation
Not joy itself can save.

I'd beg of joy, it used to be,
'Twas at the last my own,
And heavy was the joy to me,
As to a king a crown.

And having all my hopes destroy'd
Alone did I remain –
As of a castle dark and void
The worthless sovereign.

* * *

Как в ночь звезды падучей пламень,
Не нужен в мире я.
Хоть сердце тяжело как камень,
Но все под ним змея.

Меня спасало вдохновенье
От мелочных сует;
Но от своей души спасенья
И в самом счастье нет.

Молю о счастье, бывало,
Дождался наконец,
И тягостно мне счастье стало,
Как для царя венец.

И все мечты отвергнув, снова
Остался я один –
Как замка мрачного, пустого
Ничтожный властелин.

1832

THE SKIFF

Through marvellous arbitrary power
Th' kingdom of passion has given me o'er,
Like casts the sea ashore to lave
The skiff ramm'd up in last night's wave.
Now let each tide cajole, caress, –
'Twill not the invalid deceive;
He knows of his own powerlessness
And would he sleeps make you believe;
None will entrust him from now on
Their safety or their precious chest;
He is no good – and he is done!
He perish'd – and is given rest!

ЧЕЛНОК

По произволу дивной власти
Я выкинут из царства страсти,
Как после бури на песок
Волной расшибенный челнок.
Пускай прилив его ласкает, –
В обман не вдастся инвалид;
Свое бессилие он знает
И притворяется что спит;
Никто ему не вверит боле
Себя иль ноши дорогой;
Он не годится – и на воле!
Погиб – и дан ему покой!

1832

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Portrait of Lermontov by Ye. V. Terekhov (E. B. Tepexov) 1937

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