



Mikhail Lermontov

Selected Poems

Translations from Russian
by Ilya Golubitskiy

Borodino

P o e s i s 2

2004

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Not without some justification one would draw a comparison between the emotional waves that passed through the Russians after their War for the Fatherland of 1812 and the ones that passed through the English after their victory over the Armada of 1588, and perhaps those as well that are passing this very moment through the Americans after the events of September 2001.

The narrator of the poem was made an artilleryman with reason. On the eve of the battle, the 1st West Army chief of artillery gave out an order in which the following words sum up the role of his troops hours later: "The artillery needs to sacrifice itself; let them take you together with the guns, but the last canister-shot is to be fired point-blank." The Shevardino redoubt, the narrator explicitly states in the 1830 draught of the poem, six times was yielded and retaken.

BORODINO

– Hey tell, old man, had we a cause
When Moscow, razed by fire, once was
Given up to Frenchman's blow?
Old-timers talk about some frays,
And they remember well those days!
With cause all Russia fashions lays
About Borodino!

– Yea, were there men when I was young,
Whose songs your tribe is not to 've sung:
They'd fight,– you 're none as good!
An evil lot have they been drawn:
Few left the grounds to which they had gone...
Had it not been God's will alone,
Old Moscow should have stood!

Retreating this day and the next,
We wonder'd when 's our battle, vex;
The veterans talk'd upset:
"What then? we 're off to winter dorms?
Go the commanders by new norms;
Daren't they rip foreign uniforms
On Russian bayonet?"

And then we had come upon a plain:
Here's room to fight with might and main!
There built we a redoubt.
Our troops are curt on high alert!
Soon as sun's beams on cannon spurt,
And on the bluish wood-tops squirt –
The Frenchmen march right out.

I drove the shell in tight: well isn't
It meet our guest receive a present!
Hold off, my friend Moosue!
Who needs these games, why not begin;
Those left alive will wall you in,
If this be what it takes to win
Our motherland from you!

Two-days'-worth pass'd in trading shots.
Why give of that too many thoughts?
We waited third day on.
Words started then to fly to the ear:
" 'Tis time we use the grape-shot, hear!"
And now the field of carnage sheer
The pall of night does don.

Then I dozed off beside our gun,
And not until the dawn, was done
The revel of the French.
But quiet was our open camp:
His shako with a brush one 'd scamp,
Cross-hearted, would another tramp,
His sharpen'd bayonet clench.

And once the sky lit from its border –
Formations, gleaming, pass'd in order,
With shouts all took its berth.
Our colonel's mettle did you feel:
Czar's servant, soldiers' father real...
Yea, 'tis a pity: slain by steel,
Now sleeps he in black earth.

And eyes aflame, he spoke his mind:

"Hey lads! is Moscow not behind?

By Moscow then we die

As have our brethren died before!"

And that we'll die we all then swore,

And th' oath of loyalty ne'er tore

Neath Borodinian sky.

Some day it was! Through flying smoke

Set out in swarms many a French bloke,

And e'er for our redoubt.

The lancers in their motley guise,

Dragoons with horse-tails with loud cries –

They all would flash before our eyes,

They all were near about.

You 're never to behold such fights!..

The banners would fly by like sprites,

In smoke would glimmer fire,

The blade would sound, the grape would shriek,

The fighters' hand to thrust grow weak,

And muzzles have no space to seek

O'er bloody heaps e'er higher.

The foe that day had many ways
To feel what daring combat weighs,
Our Russian hand-to-hand!..
As did our chests – earth's hollows trembled;
The steeds, the men all disassembled,
And cannon volleys' sound resembled
A moaning o'er the land...

Dusk fell. We all were ready to
Next morrow start the fight anew
And stand till none were left..
Of drums we heard far off the rattle –
The pagans left the field of battle.
To count then we began the sad toll
Of wounds and comrades reft.

Yea, were there men when I was young,
Bold tribe of whom shall songs be sung:
They'd fight, – you 're none as good.
An evil lot have they been drawn:
Few left the grounds to which they had gone.
Were 't not the will of God alone,
Old Moscow would have stood!

БОРОДИНО

– Скажи-ка, дядя, ведь не даром
Москва, спаленная пожаром,
Французу отдана?
Ведь были ж схватки боевые,
Да, говорят, еще какие!
Недаром помнит вся Россия
Про день Бородина!

– Да, были люди в наше время,
Не то, что нынешнее племя:
Богатыри – не вы!
Плохая им досталась доля:
Немногие вернулись с поля...
Не будь на то господня воля,
Не отдали б Москвы!

Мы долго молча отступали,
Досадно было, боя ждали,
Ворчали старики:
"Что ж мы? на зимние квартиры?
Не смеют, что ли, командиры
Чужие изорвать мундиры
О русские штыки?"

И вот нашли большое поле:
Есть разгуляться где на воле!
Построили редут.
У наших ушки на макушке!
Чуть утро осветило пушки
И леса синие верхушки –
Французы тут как тут.

Забил снаряд я в пушку туго
И думал: угощу я друга!
Постой-ка, брат мусью!
Что тут хитрить, пожалуй к бою;
Уж мы пойдем ломить стеною,
Уж постоим мы головою
За родину свою!

Два дня мы были в перестрелке,
Что толку в этакой безделке?
Мы ждали третий день.
Повсюду стали слышны речи:
"Пора добратся до картечи!"
И вот на поле грозной сечи
Ночная пала тень.

Прилег вздремнуть я у лафета,
И слышно было до рассвета,
Как ликовал француз.
Но тих был наш бивак открытый:
Кто кивер чистил весь избитый,
Кто штык точил, ворча сердито,
Кусая длинный ус.

И только небо засветилось,
Все шумно вдруг зашевелилось,
Сверкнул за строем строй.
Полковник наш рожден был хватом:
Слуга царю, отец солдатам...
Да, жаль его: сражен булатом,
Он спит в земле сырой.

И молвил он, сверкнув очами:
"Ребята! не Москва ль за нами?
Умремте ж под Москвой,
Как наши братья умирали!"
И умереть мы обещали,
И клятву верности сдержали
Мы в Бородинский бой.

Ну ж был денек! Сквозь дым летучий
Французы двинулись, как тучи,
И всё на наш редут.
Уланы с пестрыми значками,
Драгуны с конскими хвостами,
Все промелькнули перед нами,
Все побывали тут.

Вам не видать таких сражений!..
Носились знамена, как тени,
В дыму огонь блестел,
Звучал булат, картечь визжала,
Рука бойцов колоть устала,
И ядрам пролетать мешала
Гора кровавых тел.

Изведал враг в тот день немало,
Что значит русский бой удалый,
Наш рукопашный бой!..
Земля тряслась – как наши груди;
Смешались в кучу кони, люди,
И залпы тысячи орудий
Слились в протяжный вой...

Вот смерклось. Были все готовы
Завтра бой затеять новый
И до конца стоять...
Вот затрещали барабаны –
И отступили бусурманы.
Тогда считать мы стали раны,
Товарищей считать.

Да, были люди в наше время,
Могучее, лихое племя:
Богатыри – не вы.
Плохая им досталась доля:
Немногие вернулись с поля.
Когда б на то не божья воля,
Не отдали б Москвы!

RELEVANT LINKS

Site built by Ilya Golubitskiy

year1837narod.ru

Poesis guestbook/forum and online link bank

<http://www.salicicola.com/servlet/poeservlet>

More about Lermontov

http://www.geocities.com/y_volkov/bio.htm

with Nabokov's translations

Other translations from Lermontov

<http://www.friends-partners.org/friends/literature/19century/lermontov1.html>

http://www.geocities.com/y_volkov/poetry.htm

Borodino and other poems

<http://www.learningrussian.com/library/lermontov/index.htm>

from 'Online Library of Russian classical literature'

Borodino

<http://www.100megsfree4.com/rusgeneral/gal000.htm>

Art Gallery. 'The Patriotic War of 1812', publ. St. Petersburg, 1911

<http://www.underthesun.cc/Classics/Tolstoy/warandpeac/warandpeac209.html>

Lev Tolstoy about the battle of Borodino

<http://www.xenophongi.org/rushistory/battles/borodino/main.htm>

Campaign of 1812

http://www.napoleonguide.com/battle_borodino.htm



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Portrait of Lermontov by Ye. V. Terekhov (1937)

Vignette on page 13: the Russian foot artillery shako insignia (1808)

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