



Mikhail Lermontov

Selected Poems

Translations from Russian
by Ilya Golubitskiy

Death of the Poet
with relevant translations from Pushkin

Poesis 3

2004

DEATH OF THE POET

I crave redemption, O my lord, redemption!
And I implore thee at thy feet:
Be just and punish the assassin,
So that his death in later ages
Would herald of thy righteousness to our descendants,
Would stand as an example for all future villains.*

We've lost the poet! Has the bondsman
Of honour fall'n – by words defamed,
Unslaked the thirst of vengeance on his man,
Droop'd his proud head, yet he untamed!..
Had not a poet's memory
The shame of petty wrongs forgot,
He challenged worldly tyranny,
Alone again... and he is shot!
He is shot!.. What sense in lamentations,
The empty praise from every room,
And prattling of justifications?
The Fates have carried out their doom!

Before, was 't none but you who bred
Such malice for his free, bold gift;
Was not for your amusement fed
The smouldering fire the moment whiff'd?
You may rejoice...– the final anguish
Was more than what he could sustain:
The torch is out, the wreath doth languish,
The triumph over, genius slain.

The assassin has ta'en, indifferent,
His careful aim... there's no escape:
The empty heart can not be rent,
Can not the deed the face misshape.
Why marvel?.. from a land afar,
Like hundreds others, to importune
In the pursuit of ranks and fortune,
He is cast here by some wandering star;
Did, laughing, saucily despise
Strange country's tongue and customs he;
To spare our fame would he agree,
Or at this bloody moment see
'Gainst what his hired hand did rise?..

And he is shot – laid in his tomb,
As was, unknown yet dear, that bard of whom
He with such power sung each sweet strand,
Prey to the same dull jealousy and gloom,
And smitten as was he, by an unpitying hand.

Why left he quiet joys and simple-hearted friends,
Why enter'd he this world which stiflingly descends
On all true passions of a freedom-loving heart?
Why open'd he his ardent soul to slanderous rabble,
In earnest took the endearments simply meant to dabble,
He, who had grasp'd men's nature from the start?..

And when they had taken off his wreath – a blackthorn crown,
Entwined with laurel, on his head they did bestow:

But harshly did the thorns drive down,
Though hidden, in the glorious brow;
Not even his last moments have escaped the singe
With the insidious whispers of the mocking crowd,
And died he – vainly thirsting for revenge,
Vext secretly to see above his hopes a cloud.

Thus muted are the wondrous airs,
E'er silenced is the heavenly peal:
The bard in sombre darkness fares,
And on his lips is prest a seal.

And ye, O haughty progenies
Of fathers well renown'd for their beginnings base;
Who having trodden down now slight with servants' eyes
The débris of a wrong'd by play of fortune race!
Ye, countless palace rats who at the Throne do gnaw,
The bane of Liberty, of Genius, and of Fame!
To you, under the auspices of Law,
To silence Justice, Truth – 'twere all the same!..
But is there Justice of the Heavens, corrupted lot!
Of its remittal there's no chance;
The Judge awaits; He can't be bought,
And all our thoughts and actions knows He in advance.
Then will you vainly your maligning gossip say:
It shan't avert the fate you dread;
And not with all your sordid blood you'll wash away
The poet's righteous blood you 've shed!

* The epigraph is taken from an unpublished adaptation by A. A. Zhandr (1789–1873), a Russian playwright-translator and an acquaintance of Lermontov, of 'Venceslas' (1648), a tragedy by Jean de Rotrou (1609–50), one of Richelieu's Five Authors.

"...As was, unknown yet dear, that bard..." An allusion to the episode from Pushkin's 'Eugene Onegin', where a young poet Vladimir Lenskiy is killed on the duel by Onegin (see Appendix).

СМЕРТЬ ПОЭТА

Отмщенья, государь, отмщенья!
Паду к ногам твоим:
Будь справедлив и накажи убийцу,
Чтоб казнь его в позднейшие века
Твой правый суд потомству возвестила,
Чтоб видели злодеи в ней пример.*

Погиб поэт! – невольник чести –
Пал, оклеветанный молвой,
С свинцом в груди и жаждой мести,
Поникнув гордой головой!..
Не вынесла душа поэта
Позора мелочных обид,
Восстал он против мнений света
Один, как прежде... и убит!
Убит!.. к чему теперь рыдания,
Пустых похвал ненужный хор
И жалкий лепет оправданья?
Судьбы свершился приговор!

Не вы ль сперва так злобно гнали
Его свободный, смелый дар
И для потехи раздували
Чуть затаившийся пожар?
Что ж? веселитесь...– он мучений
Последних вынести не мог:
Угас, как светоч, дивный гений,
Увял торжественный венок.

Его убийца хладнокровно
Навел удар... спасенья нет:
Пустое сердце бьется ровно.
В руке не дрогнул пистолет.
И что за диво?.. издалика,
Подобный сотням беглецов,
На ловлю счастья и чинов
Заброшен к нам по воле рока;
Смеясь, он дерзко презирал
Земли чужой язык и нравы;
Не мог щадить он нашей славы;
Не мог понять в сей миг кровавый,
На что он руку поднимал!..

И он убит – и взят могилой,
Как тот певец, неведомый, но милый,
Добыча ревности глухой,
Воспетый им с такою чудной силой,
Сраженный, как и он, безжалостной рукой.

Зачем от мирных нег и дружбы простодушной
Вступил он в этот свет, завистливый и душный
Для сердца вольного и пламенных страстей?
Зачем он руку дал клеветникам ничтожным,
Зачем поверил он словам и ласкам ложным,
Он, с юных лет постигнувший людей?..

И, прежний сняв венок, – они венец терновый,
Увитый лаврами, надели на него:

Но иглы тайные сурово
Язвили славное чело;

Отравлены его последние мгновенья
Коварным шепотом насмешливых невежд,
И умер он – с напрасной жадой мщенья,
С досадой тайною обманутых надежд.

Замолкли звуки чудных песен,
Не раздаваться им опять:
Приют певца угрюм и тесен,
И на устах его печать.

А вы, надменные потомки
Известной подлостью прославленных отцов,
Пятою рабскою поправшие обломки
Игрою счастья обиженных родов!
Вы, жадною толпой стоящие у трона,
Свободы, Гения и Славы палачи!
Таитесь вы под сению закона,
Пред вами суд и правда – всё молчи!..
Но есть и божий суд, наперсники разврата!
Есть грозный суд: он ждет;
Он не доступен звону злата,
И мысли и дела он знает наперед.
Тогда напрасно вы прибегнете к злословью:
Оно вам не поможет вновь,
И вы не смоете всей вашей черной кровью
Поэта праведную кровь!

* Эпиграф взят из неопубликованного вольного перевода трагедии "Венцеслав" (1648) Жана де Ротру (1609–50), одного из Пяти Авторов Ришелье. Трагедия была пересказана А. А. Жандром (1789–1873), русским драматургом-переводчиком, знакомым Лермонтова.

APPENDIX

Allusions to Pushkin's poetry are found throughout the poem. Below are translations of some of Pushkin's verses that Lermontov was likely to recall while composing his poem.

From the first part of the poem* CAUCASIAN CAPTIVE (1821)

A bondsman of unpitying honour,
His death he had seen and would not dread,
To duels' resolute cool a donor,
Expecting the pernicious lead.

* Dedication to the poem mentions the "whispers of calumny" and "victim of calumnious, vengeful, ignorant crowd."

ПРИЛОЖЕНИЕ

Реминисценции пушкинских тем и образов пронизывают всё стихотворение. Вот те пушкинские строки, которые, вероятно, вспоминал Лермонтов.

Из первой части поэмы * КАВКАЗСКИЙ ПЛЕННИК (1821)

Невольник чести беспощадной,
Вблизи видал он свой конец.
На поединках твёрдый, хладный,
Встречая гибельный свинец.

* В посвящении к поэме фигурирует "шепот клеветы", "жертва клеветы и мстительных невежд".

From the poem
ANDRÉ CHÉNIER (1825)

...What for abandon'd I this lazy, simple life,
And threw myself into the fatal, frightening strife,
Where savage passions, wanton ignorance ran high,
Where malice reign'd and avarice! O whither, why
Have drawn you me, my hopes! What saw I in that riot,
I, faithful but to love and poetry and quiet...

.

Be silent, thou weak-hearted plaint!
Pride thee, O poet, joyful grow:
Thy head droop'd not, thou wouldst not faint
Before our days' disgraceful low...

Из стихотворения
АНДРЕЙ ШЕНЬЕ (1825)

...Зачем от жизни сей, ленивой и простой,
Я кинулся туда, где ужас роковой,
Где страсти дикие, где буйные невежды,
И злоба, и корысть! Куда, мои надежды,
Вы завлекли меня! Что делать было мне,
Мне, верному любви, стихам и тишине...

.

Умолкни, ропот малодушный!
Гордись и радуйся, поэт:
Ты не поник главой послушной
Перед позором наших лет...

From the novel
EUGENE ONEGIN, CHAPTER SIX

XXX

...Now five more steps they have advanced,
And Lenskiy, squinting his left eye,
Too started aiming – suddenly
Onegin fired his shot... Entranced,
The poet's soul would soon move on:
Now drops he silently his gun,

XXXI

His hand but for an instant hangs
Upon his chest, and so he falls.
His misty gaze speaks death, not pangs.
Thus in the mountains slowly rolls,
And sparkles in the sun with lights,
A snowy bulk down sloping heights.
At once pour'd o'er with chilling ruth,
Onegin hurries to the youth,

And looks, and calls his name... in vain:
He lives no more. The juvenile bard
Has found his doom, by Time unmarr'd!
Did breathe the tempest, and did wane
The blossom fair at Morning's rays,
The altar fire did cease to blaze!..

.

XXXV

His heart quite eaten with remorse,
The pistol in his hand still clench'd,
Ievgeniy looks at Lenskiy's corse.
"What then? he is shot," the neighbour cinch'd.
He is shot!.. Strikes this grave exclamation
Onegin, and with trepidation
He walks aside...

.

XLIV

I've found the voice of different yearnings,
I've found a new kind of a fret,
And I accept the first ones' spurnings,
Though losing my old fret regret.
O dreams! where is your mirthful truth?
Where's, her eternal rhyme, my youth?

Is 't so, now really at last
Away her garland must be cast?
Is 't so in verity indeed,
No elegiacs to devise,
My spring near to its finish hies
(What jesting I'd till now concede)?
Is 't so, and I must turn the page
And soon be thirty years of age?

Из романа
ЕВГЕНИЙ ОНЕГИН, ГЛАВА ШЕСТАЯ

XXX

...Вот пять шагов еще ступили,
И Ленский, жмуря левый глаз,
Стал также целить – но как раз
Онегин выстрелил... Пробили
Часы урочные: поэт
Роняет молча пистолет,

XXXI

На грудь кладет тихонько руку
И падает. Туманный взор
Изображает смерть, не муку.
Так медленно по скату гор,
На солнце искрами блистая,
Спадает глыба снеговая.
Мгновенным холодом облит,
Онегин к юноше спешит,

Глядит, зовет его... напрасно:
Его уж нет. Младой певец
Нашел безвременный конец!
Дохнула буря, цвет прекрасный
Увял на утренней заре,
Потух огонь на алтаре!..

.

XXXV

В тоске сердечных угрызений,
Рукою стиснув пистолет,
Глядит на Ленского Евгений.
"Ну, что ж? убит", – решил сосед.
Убит!.. Сим страшным восклицаньем
Сражен, Онегин с содроганьем
Отходит...

.

XLIV

Познал я глас иных желаний,
Познал я новую печаль;
Для первых нет мне упований,
А старой мне печали жаль.
Мечты, мечты! где ваша сладость?
Где вечная к ней рифма, младость?

Ужель и вправду наконец
Увял, увял ее венец?
Ужель и впрям и в самом деле
Без элегических затей
Весна моих промчалась дней
(Что я шутя твердил доселе)?
И ей ужель возврата нет?
Ужель мне скоро тридцать лет?



From the poem
MY FAMILY TREE (1830)

I know the times' præposterousness,
Contest not, verily, its will:
New by descent is our noblesse,
And if yet newer, then nobler still.
A fragment of an hoaring race
(And more may, sadly, oft be seen),
Of olden boyars I'm the trace,
I'm, friends, a petty meshchanin*.

.

A stack of deeds and letters missive
Has my heraldic seal suppress'd,
And with the new I'm not dismissive,
And put my pride of blood to rest.
I'm literatus and verse-maker,
I'm Pushkin simple, not Mussin**,
I'm not too rich, I'm no grace-taker,
I'm big myself: a meshchanin.

* 'Meshchanin' (from Polish 'mieszczanin,' townsman, bourgeois) – bourgeois.

** An allusion to the Mussin-Pushkin Counts and, it would seem, also to the banned Russian Freemasons, as earlier the former had been prominent among the latter.

Compare this excerpt from Pushkin with the final part of Lermontov's 'Death of the Poet': "And ye, O haughty progenies...", which lies totally within Pushkin's historic concept concerning "new aristocracy" who then started to dominate the society thus dismissing the old nobility, the carriers of the national, historic, and cultural tradition. Indeed, Lermontov saw Pushkin himself as one of those "débris of a race wronged by play of fortune."

Из стихотворения
МОЯ РОДОСЛОВНАЯ (1830)

Понятна мне времен превратность,
Не прекословлю, право, ей:
У нас нова рождением знатность,
И чем новее, тем знатней.
Родов дряхлеющих обломок
(И по несчастью, не один),
Бояр старинных я потомок;
Я, братцы, мелкий мещанин.

.

Под гербовой моей печатью
Я кипу грамот схоронил
И не якшаюсь с новой знатью,
И крови спесь угомонил.
Я грамотей и стихотворец,
Я Пушкин просто, не Мусин*,
Я не богач, не царедворец,
Я сам большой: я мещанин.

* Имеются в виду графы Мусины-Пушкины; возможен также намек на запрещенные в России масонские ложи, поскольку Мусины-Пушкины занимали высокие посты в ложах.

ABOUT THE POEM

The poem 'Death of the Poet', Lermontov's response to the tragic death of Pushkin, is said to be written on January 28, 1837. Pushkin died one day later, but rumors about his death spread immediately after his duel with G. d'Anthes, Lieutenant of the Imperial Cavalier Guard Regiment, a French emigre.

The final part of the poem was added on February 7. On that day Lermontov (who was sick at the time) had a turbulent argument with a visiting relative, N. A. Stolypin, an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, regarding Pushkin's duel. Lermontov reveals the real perpetrators of Pushkin's death and shows a larger picture, far beyond the poet's conflict with the infamous lieutenant.

The poem was first published in London in 1856, 15 years after Lermontov's death. In 1837, it was disseminated all across St. Petersburg in hand-written copies and right away made Lermontov (who was 23) a poetic star of the first magnitude. One of the copies reached the Tzar Nicolas I with a comment: 'A call for the revolution' – and made the tzar furious. The epigraph with its direct appeal to the monarch for retribution was considered by the officials to be a particularly offensive, most criminal part. Lermontov was prosecuted and exiled for his poem (see Lermontov's biography 'About the Author' in issue no. 1). D'Anthes was deported to France. [Editors' note]

RELEVANT LINKS

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<http://year1837narod.ru>

Poesis guestbook/forum and online link bank

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

Other translations of 'Death of the Poet'

<http://jw.deepspace93.com/poetry/lermontovtr.html>

translated by John Woodsworth (Ottawa, Canada), 1999

<http://www.friends-partners.org/friends/literature/19century/lermontov/lermontov7.html>

http://www.geocities.com/y_volkov/dofpoet2.htm

translated by Yevgeny Bonver

http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/lermontov/death_of_poet.html

translated by Yevgeny Bonver, 1998; edited by Dmitry Karshtedt, 2001

About Pushkin

<http://www.pushkininenglish.com/Pushkin's%20life.htm>

Other translations from Pushkin

http://www.lib.ru/LITRA/PUSHKIN/ENGLISH/onegin_j.txt

'Eugene Onegin' translated by Charles Johnston

<http://www.pushkins-poems.com/Yev604.htm>

'Eugene Onegin' translated by G. R. Ledger

Another subject

http://80.1911encyclopedia.org/R/RO/ROTROU_JEAN_DE.htm

biography of the author of 'Venceslas' (see the epigraph to 'Death of the Poet')

<http://reference.allrefer.com/encyclopedia/C/ChenierA.html>

about Andre Chenier (in English)

<http://www.peoples.ru/art/literature/poetry/oldage/chenier/>

about Andre Chenier (in Russian)

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Front page: Portrait of Lermontov by Ye. V. Terekhov (1937)

Page 20: Pushkin's self-portrait

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