АЛЕКСАНДР ПУШКИН

POEMS. WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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Poems. With Introduction and Notes

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Содержание

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Preface: Bibliographical

1. The text I have used for the following translations is that of the edition of the complete works of Pushkin in ten volumes, 16mo., by Suvorin, St. Petersburg, 1887. The poems form Volumes III. and IV. of that edition. Accordingly, I have designated after each heading, volume, and page where the poem is to be found in the original. Thus, for example, "My Muse, IV. 1," means that this poem is found in Volume IV. of the above edition, page 1.

2. I have translated Pushkin literally word for word, line for line. I do not believe there are as many as five examples of deviation from the literalness of the text. Once only, I believe, have I transposed two lines for convenience of translation; the other deviations are (*if* they are such) a substitution of an *and* for a comma in order to make now and then the reading of a line musical. With these exceptions, I have sacrified *everything* to faithfulness of rendering. My object was to make Pushkin himself, without a prompter, speak to English readers. To make

him thus speak in a foreign tongue was indeed to place him at a disadvantage; and music and rhythm and harmony are indeed fine things, but truth is finer still. I wished to present not what Pushkin would have said, or should have said, if he had written in English, but what he does say in Russian. That, stripped from all ornament of his wonderful melody and grace of form, as he is in a translation, he still, even in the hard English tongue, soothes and stirs, is in itself a sign that through the individual soul of Pushkin sings that universal soul whose strains appeal forever to man, in whatever clime, under whatever sky.

3. I ask, therefore, no forgiveness, no indulgence even, from the reader for the crudeness and even harshness of the translation, which, I dare say, will be found in abundance by those who *look* for something to blame. Nothing of the kind is necessary. I have done the only thing there was to be done. Nothing more *could* be done (I mean by me, of course), and if critics still demand more, they must settle it not with me, but with the Lord Almighty, who in his grim, yet arch way, long before critics appeared on the stage, hath ordained that it shall be impossible for a thing to be and not to be at the same time.

4. I have therefore tried neither for measure nor for rhyme. What I have done was this: I first translated each line word for word, and then by reading it aloud let mine ear arrange for me the words in such a way as to make some kind of rhythm. Where this could be done, I was indeed glad; where this could not be done, I was not sorry. It is idle to regret the impossible.

5. That the reader, however, may see for himself what he has been spared by my abstinence from attempting the impossible, I give one stanza of a metrical translation by the side of the literal rendering:—

LITERAL:

The moment wondrous I remember
Thou before me didst appear,
Like a flashing apparition,
Like a spirit of beauty pure.

METRICAL:[1]

Yes! I remember well our meeting,
When first thou dawnedst on my sight,
Like some fair phantom past me fleeting,
Some nymph of purity and light.

Observe, Pushkin the real does not appear before the reader with a solemn affirmation, Yes, or No, nor that he remembers it *well*. He tells the story in such a way that the reader knows without being told that he does indeed remember it well! Nor does he weaken the effect by saying that he remembers the *meeting*, which is too extended, but the *moment*, which is concentrated. And Pushkin's imagination was moreover too pure to let a *fleeting* phantom *dawn* upon his sight. To have tried

[1] Blackwood's Magazine, lviii. 35, July, 1845.

for a rendering which necessitated from its very limitations *such* falsities, would have been not only to libel poor Pushkin, but also to give the reader poor poetry besides.

6. The translation being literal, I have been able to retain even the punctuation of Pushkin, and especially his dots, of which he makes such frequent use. They are part of his art; they express by what they withhold. I call especial attention to these, as Pushkin is as powerful in what he indicates as in what he shows, in what he suggests as in what he actually says. The finest example of the highest poetry of his *silence* (indicated by his dots) is the poem I have entitled "Jealousy," to which the reader is particularly requested to turn with this commentary of mine (p. 114). The poet is melted with tenderness at the thought of his beloved all alone, far-off, weeping. The fiendish doubt suddenly overpowers him, that after all, perhaps his beloved is at that moment not alone, weeping for him, but in the arms of another:—

Alone … to lips of none she is yielding
Her shoulders, nor moist lips, nor snow-white fingers.
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
None is worthy of her heavenly love.
Is it not so? Thou art alone. . . . Thou weepest. . . .
And I at peace? . . . . . .
. . . . . .
But if . . . . . .

One must be all vibration in order to appreciate the matchless power of the dots here. The poem here ends. I know not the like of this in all literature.

7. Wherever I could ascertain the date of a poem, I have placed it at the end. The reader will thus at a glance find at least one of the proper relations of the poems to the poet's soul. For this purpose these two dates should be borne constantly in mind: Pushkin was born in 1799; he died in 1837.

8. To many of his poems Pushkin has given no name. To such, for the reader's convenience I have supplied names, but have put them in brackets, which accordingly are to be taken as indication that the name they enclose is not Pushkin's. Many of his most beautiful poems were addressed to individuals, and they appear in the original as "Lines to –." The gem of this collection, for instance, to which I have supplied the title, "Inspiring Love"—inadequate enough, alas!—appears in the original as "To A. P. Kern." As none of these poems have any *intrinsic* bond with the personages addressed, their very greatness lying in their universality, I have supplied my own titles to such pieces, giving the original title in a note.

9. It was my original intention to make a life of the poet part of this volume. But so varied was Pushkin's life, and so instructive withal, that only an extended account could be of value. What is worth doing at all is worth doing well. A mere sketch would here, for various reasons, be worse than useless. Critics, who always know better what an author ought to do than he himself,

must kindly take this assertion of mine, for the present at least, on trust, and assume that I, who have done some thinking on the subject, am likely to know whereof I speak better than those whose only claim to an opinion is that they have done no thinking on the subject, resembling in this respect our modest friends, the agnostics, who set themselves up as the true, knowing solvers of the problems of life, because, forsooth, they know nothing.... Anyhow, even at the risk of offending critics, I have decided to misstate myself by not giving the life of Pushkin rather than to misstate poor Pushkin by giving an attenuated, vapid thing, which passes under the name of a "Sketch." The world judges a man by what is known of him, forgetting that underneath the thin film of the known lies the immeasurable abyss of the unknown, and that the true explanation of the man is found not in what is visible of him, but in what is invisible of him. Unless, therefore, I could present what is known of Pushkin in such a manner as to suggest the unknown (just as a study of nature should only help us to trust that what we do *not* know of God is likewise good!) I have no business to tell of his life. But to tell of it in such a way that it shall represent Pushkin, and not misrepresent him, is possible only in an extended life. Otherwise, I should be telling not how he was living, but how he was starving, dying; and this is not an edifying task, either for the writer or for the reader.

10. Such a life is now well-nigh writ, but it is too long to make part of this volume.

Introduction: Critical

I. POETIC IDEAL

1. Pushkin was emphatically a subjective writer. Of intense sensibility, which is *the* indispensable condition of creative genius, he was first of all a feeler with an Æolian attachment. He did not even have to take the trouble of looking into his heart in order to write. So full of feeling was his heart that at the slightest vibration it poured itself out; and so deep was its feeling that what is poured out is already melted, fused, shaped, and his poems come forth, like Minerva from Jupiter's head, fully armed. There is a perfection about them which is self-attesting in its unstudiedness and artlessness; it is the perfection of the child, touching the hearts of its beholders all the more tenderly because of its unconsciousness, effortlessness; it is the perfection which Jesus had in mind when he uttered that sentence so profound and so little followed because of its very profundity: "Unless ye be like little children." So calm and poiseful is Pushkin's poetry that in spite of all his pathos his soul is a work of architecture,—a piece of frozen music in the highest sense. Even through his bitterest agony,—and pathos is the one chord which is never absent from Pushkin's song, as it is ever present in Chopin's

strains, ay, as it ever must be present in any soul that truly *lives,*—there runneth a peace, a simplicity which makes the reader exclaim on reading him: Why, I could have done the self-same thing myself,—an observation which is made at the sight of Raphael's Madonna, at the oratory of a Phillips, at the reading of "The Vicar of Wakefield," at the acting of a Booth. Such art is of the highest, and is reached only through one road: Spontaneity, complete abandonment of self. The verse I have to think over I had better not write. Man is to become only a pipe through which the Spirit shall flow; and the Spirit *shall* flow only where the resistance is least. Ope the door, and the god shall enter! Seek not, pray not! To pray is to will, and to will is to obstruct. The virtue which Emerson praises so highly in a pipe—that it is smooth and hollow—is the very virtue which makes him like Nature, an ever open, yet ever sealed book. Bring to him *your* theories, *your* preconceived notions, and Emerson, like the great soul of which he is but a voice, becomes unintelligible, confusing, chaotic. The words are there; the eyes see them. The dictionary is at hand, but nought avails; of understanding there is none to be had. But once abandon will, once abandon self, once abandon opinion (a much harder abandonment this than either!), and Emerson is made of glass, just as when I abandon *my* logic, God becomes transparent enough.... And what is true of Emerson is true of every great soul.

2. The highest art then is artlessness, unconsciousness. The true artist is not the conceiver, the designer, the executor, but

the tool, the recorder, the reporter. He writes because write he must, just as he breathes because breathe he must. And here too, Nature, as elsewhere, hath indicated the true method. The most vital processes of life are not the voluntary, the conscious, but the involuntary, the unconscious. The blood circulates, the heart beats, the lungs fill, the nerves vibrate; we digest, we fall asleep, we are stirred with love, with awe, with reverence, without our will; and our highest aspirations, our sweetest memories, our cheerfullest hopes, and alas! also our bitterest self-reproaches, come ever like friends at the feast,—uninvited. You can be happy, blest at will? Believe it not! Happiness, blessedness *willed* is not to be had in the market at any quotation. It is not to be got. It comes. And it comes when least willed. He is truly rich who has nought left to be deprived of, nought left to ask for, nought left to will....

3. Pushkin, therefore, was incapable of giving an account of his own poetry. Pushkin could not have given a theory of a single poem of his, as Poe has given of his "Raven." Poe's account of the birth of "The Raven" is indeed most delightful reading. "I told you so," is not so much the voice of conceit, of "I knew better than thou!" but the voice of the epicurean in us; it is ever a delight to most of us to discover after the event that we knew it all before.... Delightful, then, it is indeed, to read Poe's theory of his own "Raven;" but its most delightful part is that the theory is a greater fiction than the poem itself. It is the poem that has created the theory, not the theory the poem. Neither could Pushkin do

what Schiller has done: give a theory of a drama of his own. The theory of Don Karlos as developed in Schiller's letters on that play are writ not by Friedrich Schiller the poet, the darling of the German land, the inspirer of the youth of all lands, but by Herr von Schiller the professor; by Von Schiller the Kantian metaphysician; by Von Schiller the critic; by another Schiller, in short. Pushkin, however, unlike most of us, was not half a dozen ancestors—God, beast, sage, fool—rolled into one, each for a time claiming him as his own. Pushkin was essentially a unit, one voice; he was a lyre, on which a *something, not he*—God!—invisibly played.

4. And this he unconsciously to himself expresses in the piece, "My Muse."

> "From mom till night in oak's dumb shadow
> To the strange maid's teaching intent I listened;
> And with sparing reward me gladdening,
> Tossing back her curls from her forehead dear,
> From my hands the flute herself she took.
> Now filled the wood was with breath divine
> And the heart with holy enchantment filled."

Before these lines Byelinsky, the great Russian critic, stands awe-struck. And well he may; for in the Russian *such* softness, smoothness, simplicity, harmony, and above all sincerity, had not been seen before Pushkin's day. And though in the translation everything except the thought is lost, I too as I now read it over

on this blessed Sunday morn (and the bell calling men unto the worship of the great God is still ringing!), I too feel that even before *this* sun, shorn of its beams though it be, I am still in hallowed presence. For the spirit is independent of tongue, independent of form; to the god-filled soul the leaf is no less beautiful than the flower. Discrimination, distinction, is only a sign that we are still detached from the whole; that we are still only *half*; that we are still not our own selves,—that we still, in short, miss the blessed ONE. To the god-filled soul the grain of sand is no less beautiful than the diamond; the spirit breaks through the crust (and words and forms are, alas, only this!), and recognizes what is its where'er it finds it, under whate'er disguise. The botanist prizes the weed as highly as the flower, and with justice, because he seeks not the gratification of the eye, but of the spirit. The eye is delighted with variety, the spirit with unity. And the botanist seeks the unity, the whole, the godful in the plant. And a fine perception it was,—that of Emerson: that a tree is but a rooted man, a horse a running man, a fish a floating man, and a bird a flying man. Logical, practical Supreme Court Justice, with one eye in the back of his head, declares, indeed, such utterance insane, and scornfully laughs, "I don't read Emerson; my garls do!"[2]but the self-same decade brings a Darwin or a Heckel with his comparative embryos; and at the sight of these, not even a lawyer, be he even Chief Justice of Supreme Court, can distinguish between snake, fowl, dog, and

[2] Jeremiah Mason.

man.

5. In time, however, Pushkin does become objective to himself, as any true soul that is obliged to reflect must sooner or later; and God ever sees to it that the soul *be* obliged to reflect if there be aught within. For it is the essence of man's life that the soul struggle; it is the essence of growth that it *push* upward; it is the essence of progress in walking that we *fall* forward. Life is a battle,—battle with the powers of darkness; battle with the diseases of doubt, despair, self-will. And reflection is the symptom that the disease is on the soul, that the battle is to go on.

6. Pushkin then does become in time objective, and contemplates himself. Pushkin the man inspects Pushkin the soul, and in the poem, "My Monument," he gives his own estimate of himself:—

> "A monument not hand-made I have for me erected;
> The path to it well-trodden, will not overgrow;
> Risen higher has it with unbending head
> Than the monument of Alexander.
>
> No! not all of me shall die! my soul in hallowed lyre
> Shall my dust survive, and escape destruction—
> And famous be I shall, as long as on earth sublunar
> One bard at least living shall remain.
>
> "My name will travel over the whole of Russia great
> And there pronounce my name shall every living tongue:

. . . . . .
And long to the nation I shall be dear."

Observe here the native nobility of the man. There is a heroic consciousness of his own worth which puts to shame all gabble of conceit and of self-consciousness being a vice, being immodest. Here too, Emerson sets fine example in not hesitating to speak of his own essays on Love and Friendship as "those fine lyric strains," needing some balance by coarser tones on Prudence and the like. This is the same heroic consciousness of one's own worth which makes a Socrates propose as true reward for his services to the State, free entertainment at the Prytaneum. This is the same manliness which in a Napoleon rebukes the genealogy-monger who makes him descend from Charlemagne, with the remark, "I am my own pedigree." This, in fine, is the same manliness which made Jesus declare boldly, "I am the Way, I am the Life, I am the Light," regardless of the danger that the "Jerusalem Advertiser" and the "Zion Nation" might brand him as "deliciously conceited." This recognition of one's own worth is at bottom the highest reverence before God; inasmuch as I esteem myself, not because of my body, which I have in common with the brutes, but because of my spirit, which I have in common with God; and wise men have ever sung, on hearing their own merit extolled, Not unto us, not unto us! There is no merit in the matter; the God is either there or he is not....

7. Pushkin, then, even with this in view, is not so much a

conscious will, as an unconscious voice. He is not so much an individual singer, as a strain from the music of the spheres; and he is a person, an original voice, only in so far as he has hitched his wagon to a star. In his abandonment is his greatness; in his self-destruction, his strength.

> "The bidding of God, O Muse, obey.
> Fear not insult, ask not crown:
> Praise and blame take with indifference
> And dispute not with the fool!"

"And dispute not with the fool!" The prophet never argues; it is for him only to affirm. Argument is at bottom only a lack of trust in my own truth. Caesar's wife must be above suspicion: and to bear misunderstanding in silence,—this is to be great. Hence the noblest moment in Kepler's life was not when he discovered the planet, but when he discovered that if God could wait six thousand years for the understanding by man of one of his starlets, *he* surely could wait a few brief years for *his* recognition by his fellow-men. God is the great misunderstood, and he—never argues. In living out my truth in silence, without argument even though misunderstood, I not only show my faith in it, but prove it by my very strength. If I am understood, nothing more need be said; if I am not understood, nothing more can be said. Pushkin, therefore, often weeps, sobs, groans. He at times even searches, questions, doubts, despairs; but he never argues. Broad is the back of Pegasus, and strong is his wing, but neither his back

nor his wings shall enable him to float the rhyming arguer. No sooner does the logician mount the heavenly steed than its wings droop, and both rider and steed quickly drop into the limbo of inanity. Melancholy, indeed, is the sight of a dandy dressed for a party unexpectedly drenched by the shower; sorrowful is the sight of statesman turned politician before election; and pitiful is the spectacle of the manufacturing versifier, who grinds out of himself his daily task of one hundred lines, as the milkman squeezes out his daily can of milk from the cow. But most pitiful of all, immeasurably pathetic to me, is the sight of pettifogging logician forsaking his hair-splitting world, and betaking himself to somersaulting verse. To much the bard is indeed called, but surely not to that....

8. To affirm then the bard is called, and what in "My Monument" is but hinted, becomes clear, emphatic utterance in Pushkin's "Sonnet to the Poet."

> "Poet, not popular applause shalt thou prize!
> Of raptured praise shall pass the momentary noise;
> The fool's judgment thou shalt hear, and the cold mob's laughter—
> Calm stand, and firm be, and—sober!
>
> "Thou art king: live alone. On the free road
> Walk whither draws thee thy spirit free:
> Ever the fruits of beloved thoughts ripening,
> Never reward for noble deeds demanding.

"In thyself reward seek. Thine own highest court thou art;
Severest judge, thine own works canst measure.
Art thou content, O fastidious craftsman?
Content? Then let the mob scold,
And spit upon the altar, where blazes thy fire.
Thy tripod in childlike playfulness let it shake."

But because the bard is called to affirm, to inspire, to *serve*, he is also called to be worn. To become the beautiful image, the marble must be lopped and cut; the vine to bear sweeter fruit must be trimmed, and the soul must go through a baptism of fire.... Growth, progress is thus ever the casting off of an old self, and *Scheiden thut weh*. Detachment hurts. A new birth can take place only amid throes of agony. Hence the following lines of Pushkin on the poet:—

… No sooner the heavenly word
His keen ear hath reached,
Then up trembles the singer's soul
Like an awakened eagle.

"The world's pastimes now weary him
And mortals' gossip now he shuns.
. . . . . .
Wild and stem rushes he
Of tumult full and sound
To the shores of desert wave

Into the wildly whispering wood."

9. This is as yet only discernment that the bard must needs suffer; by-and-by comes also the fulfilment, the recognition of the wisdom of the sorrow, and with it its joyful acceptance in the poem of "The Prophet."

"And out he tore my sinful tongue
. . . . . .
And ope he cut with sword my breast
And out he took my trembling heart
And a coal with gleaming blaze
Into the opened breast he shoved.
Like a corpse I lay in the desert.
And God's Voice unto me called:
Arise, O prophet, and listen, and guide.
Be thou filled with my will
And going over land and sea
Fire with the word the hearts of men!"

"Be thou filled with my will!" His ideal began with abandonment of self-will; it ended with complete surrender of self-will. When we have done all the thinking and planning and weighing, and pride ourselves upon *our* wisdom, we are not yet wise. One more step remains to be taken, without which we only may avoid the wrong; with which, however, we shall surely come upon the right. We must still say, Teach us, Thou, to merge our will in Thine....

II. INNER LIFE

10. I have already stated that Pushkin is a subjective writer. The great feelers must ever be thus, just as the great reasoners must ever be objective, just as the great lookers can only be objective. For the eye looks only on the outward thing; the reason looks only upon the outward effect, the consequence; but the heart looks not only upon the thing, but upon its reflection upon self,—upon its moral relation, in short. Hence the subjectivity of a Tolstoy, a Byron, a Rousseau, a Jean Paul, a Goethe, who does not become objective until he has ceased to be a feeler, and becomes the comprehender, the understander, the seer, the *poised* Goethe. Marcus Aurelius, Pascal, Amiel, look into their hearts and write; and Carlyle and Ruskin, even though the former use "Thou" instead of "I," travel they never so far, still find their old "I" smiling by their side. But the subjectivity of Pushkin, unlike that of Walt Whitman, is not only not intrusive, but it is even delight-giving,—for it paints not the Pushkin that is different from all other men, but the Pushkin that is in fellowship with all other men; he therefore, in reporting himself, voices the very experience of his fellows, who, though feeling it deeply, were yet unable to give it tongue. It is this which makes Pushkin the poet in its original sense,—the maker, the sayer, the namer. And herein is his greatness,—in expressing not what is his, in so far that it is different from what is other men's, but what is his,

because it is other men's likewise. Herein he is what makes him a man of genius. For what does a genius do?

11. What is it that makes the water, when spouting forth in a smooth stream from the hose, such a power? What is it that makes the beauty of the stem and curve of the body of water, as it leaps out of the fountain? It is the same water which a few yards back we can see flowing aimless in stream or pond. Yes, but it is the concentration of the loose elements into harmonious shape, whether for utility, as in the case of the hose-spout, or for beauty, as in the case of the fountain. Nought new is added to the *mass* existing before. This is precisely the case of genius. He adds nought to what has gone before him. He merely arranges, formulates. A vast unorganized mass of intelligence, of aspiration, of feeling, becomes diffused over mankind. Soon it seeks organization. The poet, the prophet, the seer, cometh, and lo, he becomes the magnet round which all spiritual force of the time groups itself in visible shape, in formulated language.

12. Pushkin, then, is self-centred; but it is the self that is not Pushkin, but man. His mood is others' mood; and in singing of his life, he sings of the life of all men. The demon he sings of in the poem called "My Demon" is not so much his demon alone as also yours, mine, ours. It is his demon because it is all men's demon.

> "A certain evil spirit then
> Began in secret me to visit.

Grievous were our meetings,
His smile, and his wonderful glance,
His speeches, these so stinging,
Cold poison poured into my soul.
Providence with slander
Inexhaustible he tempted;
Of Beauty as a dream he spake
And inspiration he despised;
Nor love, nor freedom trusted he,
On life with scorn he looked—
And nought in all nature
To bless he ever wished."

And this demon—"the Spirit of Denial, the Spirit of Doubt"—of which he sings afterwards so pathetically tormented him long. He began with "Questionings:"—

"Useless gift, accidental gift,
Life, why art thou given me?
Or, why by fate mysterious
To torture art thou doomed?

"Who with hostile power me
Out has called from the nought?
Who my soul with passion thrilled,
Who my spirit with doubt has filled?…"

And he continues with "Sleeplessness:"—

"I cannot sleep, I have no light;
Darkness 'bout me, and sleep is slow;
The beat monotonous alone
Near me of the clock is heard
Of the Fates the womanish babble,
Of sleeping night the trembling,
Of life the mice-like running-about,—
Why disturbing me art thou?
What art thou, O tedious whisper?
The reproaches, or the murmur
Of the day by me misspent?
What from me wilt thou have?
Art thou calling or prophesying?
Thee I wish to understand,
Thy tongue obscure I study now."

13. And this demon gives him no rest, even long after he had found the answer,—that the meaning of Life is in *Work*. Solve the problem of life? *Live*, and you solve it; and to live means to do. But that work was the solution of the problem of life he indeed discerned but vaguely. It was with him not yet conscious fulfilment. He had not yet formulated to himself the gospel he unconsciously obeyed. Hence the wavering of the "Task:"—

"The longed-for moment here is. Ended is my long-yeared task.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.