

THREE  
RUSSIAN  
POETS

PUSHKIN

LERMONTOV

TYUTCHEV

# THREE

## RUSSIAN POETS

*translated by* VLADIMIR NABOKOV

GOOD TRANSLATIONS of poetry are extremely rare. Good translations of Russian poetry into English are almost non-existent. And so these selections from the great Russians, versions which succeed in being exceptional English poems in their own right, should meet with a warm response from the ever growing number of American readers deeply interested in all things Russian. Pushkin and Lermontov need no introduction; their fame is worldwide. Tyutchev is far less well known, but his best poems rank with the finest in the Russian language. Few as they are, these poems are so well chosen, and the translations so expert, that a sensitive reader may draw from them a very true appreciation of the real nature of the Russian poetic genius.

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**THREE RUSSIAN POETS**



**THREE**  
**RUSSIAN POETS**

*Selections from Pushkin, Lermontov*

*and Tyutchev*

IN NEW TRANSLATIONS BY

*Vladimir Nabokov*

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# PUSHKIN

## EXEGI MONUMENTUM

“No hands have wrought my monument; no weeds  
will hide the nation’s footpath to its site.  
Tsar Alexander’s column it exceeds  
in splendid insubmissive height.

“Not all of me is dust. Within my song,  
safe from the worm, my spirit will survive,  
and my sublunar fame will dwell as long  
as there is one last bard alive.

“Throughout great Rus’ my echoes will extend,  
and all will name me, all tongues in her use:  
the Slavs’ proud heir, the Finn, the Kalmuk, friend  
of steppes, the yet untamed Tunguz.

“And to the people long shall I be dear  
because kind feelings did my lyre extoll,  
invoking freedom in an age of fear,  
and mercy for the broken soul.”

Obey thy God, and never mind, O Muse,  
the laurels or the stings: make it thy rule  
to be unstirred by praise as by abuse,  
and do not contradict the fool.

## THE UPAS TREE

(ANTIARIS TOXICARIA, Lesch. 1810)

Deep in the desert’s misery,  
far in the fury of the sand,  
there stands the awesome Upas Tree  
lone watchman of a lifeless land.



The wilderness, a world of thirst,  
in wrath engendered it and filled  
its every root, every accursed  
grey leafstalk with a sap that killed.

Dissolving in the midday sun  
the poison oozes through its bark,  
and freezing when the day is done  
gleams thick and gem-like in the dark.

No bird flies near, no tiger creeps;  
alone the whirlwind, wild and black,  
assails the tree of death and sweeps  
away with death upon its back.

And though some roving cloud may stain  
with glancing drops those leaden leaves,  
the dripping of a poisoned rain  
is all the burning sand receives.

But man sent man with one proud look  
towards the tree, and he was gone,  
the humble one, and there he took  
the poison and returned at dawn.

He brought the deadly gum; with it  
he brought some leaves, a withered bough,  
while rivulets of icy sweat  
ran slowly down his livid brow.

He came, he fell upon a mat,  
and reaping a poor slave's reward,  
died near the painted hut where sat  
his now unconquerable lord.

The king, he soaked his arrows true  
in poison, and beyond the plains  
dispatched those messengers and slew  
his neighbors in their own domains.

# *A scene from* "THE COVETOUS KNIGHT"

SCENE 2. A CELLAR. THE BARON, ALONE.

THE BARON

Just as a mad young fellow frets awaiting  
his rendez-vous with some evasive harlot,  
or with the goose seduced by him, thus I  
have dreamt all day of coming down at last  
in vaulted dimness to my secret chests.

The day was good: this evening I can add  
to coffer six (which still is not quite sated)  
some recently collected gold: a fistful,  
a trifle, you might say, but thus my treasure  
a trifle is increased. There is some story  
about a Prince who bade his warriors bring  
a handful each of earth, which formed a hillock  
which swelled into a mountain, and the Prince  
from this proud height could merrily survey  
the dale white-dotted with his tented army,  
the many sails that sped upon the sea.

So bit by bit I have been bringing here  
my customary tithe into this vault,  
and heaped my hill, and from its eminence  
I now survey my vassaldom at leisure.

And who is not my vassal? Like some daemon  
from here in private I can rule the world;  
let me just wish — and there will rise a palace;  
amid the marvels of my terraced lawns  
a swarm of Nymphs will airily assemble;  
the sacred Nine will come with mask or lute;  
unshackled Genius labor as my bondsman,  
and noble merit, and the sleepless drudge  
wait with humility till I reward them.

I'll whistle, and behold: low-bending, cringing,  
in creeps Assassination, blood-bespattered,  
and while it licks my hands it will be watching  
my eyes to read in them the master's order.  
All is to me subjected, I to naught.

I am above desiring; I am tranquil:  
I know my domination, and this knowledge  
I deem sufficient.

*(Looks into his money-bag)*

It may seem a little,  
but what incalculable human cares,  
deceptions, tears, entreaties, imprecations,  
have weighty representatives here seated!

Where was that old doubloon? . . . Here 'tis. This evening  
a widow paid it me — though only after  
she'd stood, with her three children, many hours  
under my window, on her knees and wailing.  
It rained, and ceased to rain, and rained again:  
the shamming creature never budged. I might have  
sent her away, but a faint something told me  
that she had brought the sum her husband owed  
and would not care to be in jail next day.  
And this one? this was brought me by Thibault:  
whom did he get it from, the fox, the loafer?  
Stole it, I wager; or perhaps . . . somewhere,  
at nightfall, on the highway, in a coppice —  
Ah, yes! if all the tears, and blood, and sweat,  
that have been shed for what is in my keeping,  
out of deep earth might suddenly gush forth  
we'd have a second flood,— and with a splutter  
I'd perish in my trusty vaults.

And now —

*(He is about to unlock number six)*

Strange — every time I want to open one  
of my good chests, I feel all hot and shaky:  
not fear (oh, no! whom should I fear? I have  
my gallant sword: one metal guards the other  
and answers for it), but a heart-invading  
mysteriously enveloping oppression. . . .  
Physicians claim that there exist queer people  
who find in homicide a kind of pleasure;  
when I insert and turn the key, my feelings  
are similar, I fancy, to what they

must feel when butchering their victims: pleasure  
and terror mingled.

*(Unlocks)*

This is lovely, lovely . . .

*(Pours in his gold)*

Go home, you've had your fill of worldly frisking  
and served your time with human needs and passions.  
Here you will sleep the sleep of peace and power,  
as gods do sleep in Heaven's dreamy depth.  
To-night I wish to have a feast in secret: —  
a candle bright in front of every chest,  
and all of them wide-open, and myself  
with eyes aglow amid their brimming glory.

*(Lights candles and proceeds to unlock the chests)*

Now I am king! What an enchanting shine!  
A mighty realm has now become my manor;  
here is my bliss, my blazon, and my banner!  
Now I am king! — But who will next enjoy  
this bounty when I die? My heir will get it!  
A wastrel, a disreputable boy,  
by ribald fellow-revellers abetted!  
With my last sigh, him, him! this vault will hear  
come stamping down into its gentle silence,  
with crowds of fawning friends, rapacious courtiers;  
and having plucked the keys from my dead fist  
he will unlock chest after chest with glee,  
and all the treasures of my life will stream  
through all the holes of tattered satin pockets.  
Thus will a sot destroy these holy vessels,  
thus mud will drink an oil for kingly brows,  
thus he will spend — And by what right, I ask you?  
Did I perchance acquire all this for nothing?  
Or with the ease of a light-hearted gambler  
that rattles dice and grabs his growing winnings?  
Who knows how many bitter limitations,  
what bursting passions curbed, what inner gloom,  
what crowded days and hollow nights — my wealth  
has cost me? Or perhaps my son will say

that with a hoary moss my heart is smothered,  
that I have had no longings, and what's more,  
that conscience never bit me? Grizzly conscience!  
the sharp-clawed beast that scrapes in bosoms; conscience,  
the sudden guest, the bore that does the talking,  
the brutish money-lender; worst of witches,  
that makes the moon grow dark, and then the grave-stones  
move restlessly, and send their dead to haunt us!  
Nay, suffer first and wince thy way to riches,  
then we shall see how readily my rascal  
will toss to winds what his heart-blood has bought.  
Oh, that I might conceal this vaulted chamber  
from sinful eyes! oh, that I might abandon  
my grave and, as a watchful ghost, come hither  
to sit upon my chests, and from the quick  
protect my treasures as I do at present!

# A FEAST DURING THE PLAGUE

*Pushkin's version of a scene in Wilson's tragedy*

## THE CITY OF THE PLAGUE

*Several men and women making merry at a table laid in the middle of the street.*

### A YOUNG MAN

Most honorable chairman! Let me now remind you of a man we all knew well, a man whose quiddities and funny stories, smart repartees and pungent observations, — made with a solemn air that was so pleasing — lent such a sparkle to the table talk and helped to chase the gloom which nowadays our guest the Plague unfortunately casts over the minds of our most brilliant wits. Two days ago our rolling laughter greeted the tales he told; t'would be a sorry jest if we forgot while banquetting to-day our good old Jackson! Here his armchair gapes: its empty seat still seems to be awaiting the wag; but he, alas, has left already for a cold dwelling-place beneath the earth. Though never was so eloquent a tongue doomed to keep still in a decaying casket, we who remain are numerous and have no reason to be sorrowful. And so let me suggest a toast to Jackson's spirit, a merry clash of glasses, exclamations, as if he were alive.

### THE CHAIRMAN

He was the first to drop out of our ranks. In silence let us drink to his memory.

### THE YOUNG MAN

Have it your way.

*All lift their glasses in silence.*

THE CHAIRMAN (*to one of the women*)

Your voice, my dear, in rendering the accents  
of native songs reveals a wild perfection:  
sing, Mary, something dolorous and plaintive  
that afterwards we may revert more madly  
to merriment — like one who has been torn  
from a familiar world by some dark vision.

MARY (*sings*)

In times agone our village  
was lovely to behold;  
our bonny church on Sundays  
was full of young and old;  
our happy children's voices  
rang in the noisy school;  
in sunny fields the reaper  
swung fast his flashing tool.

But now the church is empty;  
the school is locked; the corn  
bends overripe and idle;  
the dark woods are forlorn;  
and like charred ruins the village  
stands stricken on its hill:  
no sound; alone the churchyard  
is full and never still.

A new corpse every minute  
is carried in with dread  
by mourners loudly begging  
God's welcome for the dead.  
A new hole every minute  
is needed for their sleep,  
and tombs and tombs together  
huddle like frightened sheep.

So if an early gravestone  
must crown my springtime bright,  
you whom I loved so dearly,  
whose love was my delight,—  
to your poor Jenny's body,  
I pray, do not come near,  
kiss not her dead lips; follow  
with lagging steps her bier.

And after I am buried,—  
go, leave the village, find  
some place where hearts are mended  
and destiny is kind.  
And when the Plague is over  
visit my dust, I pray. . . .  
But, even dead, will Jenny  
beside her Edmund stay.

#### THE CHAIRMAN

We thank you, Mary, melancholy Mary,  
we thank you all for this melodious moan.  
In former days a similar infection  
had visited, it seems, your hills and valleys,  
and one could hear most piteous lamentations  
sounding along the rivers and the brooks  
which now so peacefully and gaily tumble  
through the wild paradise of your dear land;  
and that dark year in which so many perished,  
so many gallant, good and comely souls,  
has left but a vague memory that clouds  
the elemental minstrelry of shepherds  
with pleasing plaintiveness. Nothing, I swear,  
so saddens us amid life's animation  
as dreamy sounds that dreamy hearts repeat.

#### MARY

Oh, had I never sung beyond the threshold  
of the small cottage where my parents dwell!  
Dearly they used to love their Mary's voice.



Behind my song I felt as if I listened  
to my old self singing in the bright doorway:  
my voice was sweeter in those days: it was  
the golden voice of innocence.

LOUISA

Such ditties  
are nowadays old-fashioned; but one still  
finds simple souls eager to melt when seeing  
a woman weep: they blindly trust her tears.  
She seems to be quite sure that her wet eyes  
are most enchanting; and if just as highly  
she ranked her laughter then you may be sure  
she'd always titter. Walsingham had chanced  
to praise the shrill-voiced Northern beauties; so  
forthwith she wails her head off. I do hate  
that yellow color of her Scottish hair.

THE CHAIRMAN

Listen! I hear the sound of heavy wheels.

*A cart passes laden with dead bodies. It is driven by a Negro.*

THE CHAIRMAN

Aha, Louisa faints. I thought she had  
a warrior's heart judging by her expressions —  
but evidently cruelty is weaker  
than tenderness: strong passions shy at shadows.  
Some water, Mary, on her face. She's better.

MARY

Dear sister of my sorrow and dishonor,  
recline upon my breast.

LOUISA (*regaining her senses*)

A dreadful demon  
appeared to me: all black with white eyes rolling,  
he beckoned me into his cart where lay  
piled bodies of dead men who all were lispig

a horrible, a most unearthly tale.  
Oh, tell me please — was it a dream I dreamt  
or did the cart pass really?

### THE YOUNG MAN

Come, Louisa,  
laugh it away. Though all the street is ours  
— a quiet spot secure from death's intrusion,  
the haunt of revellers whom none may trouble —  
but. . . . Well, you see, that black cart has the right  
to roll and creak down any street it chooses  
and we must let it go its way. Look here,  
friend Walsingham: to cut short all discussions  
that lead to women swooning, sing us something,  
sing us a liberal and lively song,  
— not one inspired by long mists of the Highlands  
but some unbridled bacchanalian stuff  
that sprung to life from wine-foam at a banquet.

### THE CHAIRMAN

Such songs I know not, but I have for you  
a hymn in honor of the plague. I wrote it  
the other night as soon as we had parted:  
I was possessed by a strange urge to rhyme  
which never had I felt before. So listen.  
My husky voice will suit this kind of poem.

### SEVERAL VOICES

A hymn! A hymn! Let's hear our chairman sing it!  
In honor of the Plague? Good. Bravo, bravo!

### THE CHAIRMAN (*sings*)

When mighty Captain Winter swoops  
upon us with his hoary troops,  
leading against us all his grim  
legions of frost and snow,—  
logs crackling brightly laugh at him  
and festive wine cups glow.

Her awful Majesty the Plague  
now comes at us with nothing vague  
about her aims and appetite;  
with a grave-digger's spade  
she knocks at windows day and night.  
Where should we look for aid?

Just as we deal with Winter's pest  
against *this* one it will be best  
to stay in lighted rooms and drink  
and drown our minds, and jest.  
Come, let us dance upon the brink  
to glorify Queen Pest!

There's bliss in battle and there's bliss  
on the dark edge of an abyss  
and in the fury of the main  
amid foam-crested death;  
in the Arabian hurricane  
and in the Plague's light breath.

All, all such mortal dangers fill  
a mortal's heart with a deep thrill  
of wordless rapture that bespeaks  
maybe, immortal life,  
— and happy is the man who seeks  
and tastes them in his strife.

And so, Dark Queen, we praise thy reign!  
Thou callest us, but we remain  
unruffled by the chill of death,  
clinking our cups, carefree,  
drinking a rose-lipped maiden's breath  
full of the Plague, maybe!

*An old Clergyman enters.*

## THE CLERGYMAN

What godless feast is this, you godless madmen?  
Your revelry and ribald songs insult  
the silent gloom spread everywhere by death!

Among the mourners and their moans, among  
pale faces, I was praying in the churchyard  
whither the thunder of your hateful orgies  
came troubling drowsy graves and rocking  
the very earth above the buried dead.  
Had not the prayers of women and old men  
blessed the dark pit of death's community  
I might have thought that busy fiends to-night  
were worrying a sinner's shrieking spirit  
and dragging it with laughter to their den.

#### SEVERAL VOICES

A masterly description of inferno!  
Be gone, old priest! Go back the way you came!

#### THE CLERGYMAN

Now I beseech you by the holy wounds  
of One Who bled upon the Cross to save us,—  
break up your monstrous banquet, if you hope  
to meet in heaven the dear souls of all those  
you lost on earth. Go to your homes!

#### THE CHAIRMAN

Our homes  
are dismal places. Youth is fond of gladness.

#### THE CLERGYMAN

Can it be you — you, Walsingham? the same man  
who but three weeks ago stood on his knees  
and wept as he embraced his mother's corpse,  
and writhed, and rocked, and howled over her grave?  
Or do you think she does not grieve right now —  
grieve bitterly, even in God's abode —  
as she looks down at her disheveled son  
maddened by wine and lust, and hears his voice  
a voice that roars the wildest songs between  
the purest prayer and the profoundest sigh?  
Arise and follow me!

## THE CHAIRMAN

Why do you come  
to trouble thus my soul Here am I held  
by my despair, by memories that kill me,  
by the full knowledge of my evil ways,  
and by the horror of the lifeless void  
that meets me when I enter my own house,  
and by the novelty of these wild revels,  
and by the blessed poison of this cup,  
and by the light caresses (God forgive me)  
of a depraved but fair and gentle creature.  
My mother's soul can summon me no more;  
my place is here; too late! . . . I hear your voice  
calling my soul. . . . I recognise your efforts  
to save me . . . but, old man, depart in peace —  
and cursed be anyone who goes with you.

## SEVERAL VOICES

Bravo, bravo! Well spoken, worthy chairman!  
Now you have got your sermon, priest! Be gone!

## THE CLERGYMAN

Mathilda's stainless spirit summons you!

## THE CHAIRMAN

No,— promise me,— with your pale withered hand  
raised heavenward,— promise to leave unuttered  
a name that death has silenced in the tomb.  
Could I but hide from her immortal eyes  
this sight, this banquet. . . . Once upon a time  
she thought me pure, free-spirited and proud,  
and my embrace was paradise to her.  
Where am I? Sacred child of light, I see you  
above me, on a shore where my wrecked soul  
now cannot reach you.

A WOMAN'S VOICE

Look, he has gone mad,  
he raves about his wife who's dead and buried.

THE CLERGYMAN

Come, come with me.

THE CHAIRMAN

For God's sake, holy father,  
leave me.

THE CLERGYMAN

The Lord have mercy on your soul.  
Farewell, my son.

*The Clergyman departs. The feast continues. The Chairman  
remains plunged in deep meditation.*

# MOZART AND SALIERI

This dramatic poem by Pushkin is based on the legend that Salieri poisoned Mozart out of jealousy. It is to literature what "Die Meistersinger" is to music: the classical dramatization of the conflict between natural genius and accomplished mediocrity. This conflict we have always with us, and Salieri never fails from age to age to perform his appointed role, whether as critic, academician, professor or successful second-rate artist (note that he takes the point of view that he is performing a public service in protecting a vested interest, and that he allows himself to enjoy Mozart's music only after he has made sure that he has killed him).

EDMUND WILSON

## SCENE I. A ROOM.

SALIERI

They say there is no justice on the earth.  
I know now there is none in Heaven. Plain  
as seven simple notes! I have loved the art  
from birth; when I was but a little child  
in our old church and the organ boomed sublimely,  
I listened and was lost — shedding delicious  
involuntary tears. I turned away  
from foolish pastimes early; found repellent  
all studies foreign to my music — ay,  
from all I turned with obstinate disdain,  
determined thence to dedicate myself  
to music, music only. The start is hard,  
the first steps make dull going. I surmounted  
the initial obstacles; I grounded firmly  
that craft that makes the pedestal for art;  
a craftsman I became: I trained my fingers  
to dry obedient proficiency,  
brought sureness to my ear. Stunning the sounds,  
I cut up music like a corpse; I tested  
the laws of harmony by mathematics.

Then only, rich in learning, dared I yield  
to blandishments of sweet creative fancy.  
I dared compose — but silently, in secret,  
nor could I venture yet to dream of glory.  
How often, in my solitary cell,  
having toiled for days, having sat unbroken hours,  
forgetting food and sleep, and having tasted  
the rapture and the tears of inspiration,  
I'd burn my work and coldly watch the flame  
as my own melodies and meditations  
flared up and smoked a little and were gone.  
Nay, even more: when the great Gluck appeared,  
when he unveiled to us new marvels, deep  
enchancing marvels — did I not forsake  
all I had known, and loved so well and trusted?  
Did I not follow him with eager stride,  
obedient as one who'd lost his way  
and met a passerby who knew the turning?  
By dint of stubborn steadfast perseverance  
upon the endless mountainside of art  
I reached at last a lofty level. Fame  
smiled on me; and I found in others' hearts  
responses to the sounds I had assembled.  
Came happy days; in quiet I enjoyed  
work and success and fame — enjoying also  
the works and the successes of my friends,  
my comrades in that art divine we served.  
Oh, never did I envy know. Nay, never!  
Not even when Piccini found a way  
to captivate the ears of savage Paris —  
not even when I heard for the first time  
the plangent opening strains of "Iphigenia."  
Is there a man alive who'll say Salieri  
has ever stooped to envy — played the snake  
that, trampled underfoot, still writhes and bites  
the gravel and the dust in helpless spite?  
Not one! . . . Yet now — I needs must say it — now  
I am an envious man. I envy — deeply,  
to agony, I envy.— Tell me, Heaven!  
where now is justice when the holiest gift,  
when genius and its immortality,



come not as a reward for fervent love,  
for abnegation, prayer and dogged labor —  
but light its radiance in the head of folly,  
of idle wantonness? . . . Oh, Mozart, Mozart!

*Mozart enters.*

MOZART

Aha! you saw me! I was just preparing  
to take you by surprise — a little joke.

SALIERI

You here? — When did you come?

MOZART

This minute. I  
was on my way to you to show you something  
when, passing near a tavern, all at once  
I heard a fiddle. . . . Oh, my dear Salieri!  
You never in your life heard anything  
so funny. . . . That blind fiddler in a pothouse  
playing *Voi che sapete*. Marvelous!  
I simply had to bring him here to have you  
enjoy his art.— Step in!

*Enters a blind old man with a violin.*

Some Mozart, please!

*The old man plays the aria from "Don Giovanni";*

*Mozart roars with laughter.*

SALIERI

And you can laugh?

MOZART

Oh, come, can't you?

SALIERI

I cannot.

I am not amused by miserable daubers

who make a mess of Raphael's Madonna;  
I am not amused by despicable zanies  
whose parodies dishonor Alighieri.  
Be off, old man.

MOZART

Wait: here's some money for you —  
you'll drink my health.

*The old man goes out.*

It seems to me, Salieri,  
You're out of sorts to-day. I'll come to see you  
some other time.

SALIERI

What have you brought?

MOZART

Oh, nothing —  
a trifle. My insomnia last night  
was troubling me, and one or two ideas  
entered my head. Today I dashed them down.  
I wanted your opinion; but just now  
you're in no mood for me.

SALIERI

Ah, Mozart! Mozart!  
When is my mood averse to you? Sit down.  
I'm listening.

MOZART (*at the piano*)

I want you to imagine . . .  
Whom shall we say? . . . well, let's suppose myself  
a little younger — and in love — not deeply,  
but just a little — sitting with a damsel  
or with a bosom friend — yourself, let's say —  
I am merry. . . . All at once: a ghostly vision,  
a sudden gloom, or something of the sort. . . .  
Well, this is how it goes.

*He plays.*

**SALIERI**

You were bringing this,  
and you could stop to linger at a tavern  
and listen to a blind man with a fiddle!  
Ah, Mozart, you are unworthy of yourself.

**MOZART**

You like it, do you?

**SALIERI**

What profundity!  
What daring and what grace! Why, you're a god,  
and do not know it; but *I* know, *I* know.

**MOZART**

What, really? Maybe so. . . . If so, His Godhead  
is getting to be hungry.

**SALIERI**

Listen, Mozart:  
Let's dine together at the Golden Lion.

**MOZART**

A capital idea. But let me first  
go home a moment: I must tell my wife  
she's not to wait for me.

*He goes.*

**SALIERI**

Don't fail me now.  
— Nay, now can I no longer fight with fate:  
my destiny's to stop him — else we perish,  
we all, the priests, the ministers of music,  
not I alone with my dull-sounding fame. . . .  
What worth are we if Mozart lives and reaches  
new summits still? Will this exalt our art?  
Nay: art will sink so soon as he departs:  
he will leave us no successor — will have served

no useful purpose. Like a seraph swooping,  
he brought us certain songs from Paradise,  
only to stab us, children of the dust,  
with helpless wingless longing, and fly off!  
— So fly away! — the sooner now, the better.  
Here's poison: the last gift of my Isora.  
For eighteen years I've kept it, let it season —  
and often life would seem to me a wound  
too bitter to be borne — I have often sat  
with some unwary enemy at table,  
yet never did that inward whisper win me;  
though I'm no coward and feel insult deeply,  
and care not much for life. Still did I tarry,  
tormented by the thirst for death, yet brooding;  
why should I die? Perchance the future yet  
holds unexpected benefits; perchance  
I may be visited by Orphic rapture,  
my night of inspiration and creation;  
perchance another Haydn may achieve  
some great new thing — and I shall live in him . . .  
While I was feasting with some hated guest,  
perchance, I'd muse, I'll find an enemy  
more hateful still; perchance a sharper insult  
may come to blast me from a prouder eminence  
— *then* you will not be lost, Isora's gift!  
And I was right! At last I have encountered  
my perfect enemy: another Haydn  
has made me taste divine delight! The hour  
draws nigh at last. Most sacred gift of love:  
You'll pass to-night into the cup of friendship.

SCENE 2. A PRIVATE ROOM IN A TAVERN, WITH A PIANO.

MOZART AND SALIERI AT TABLE.

SALIERI

What makes you look so gloomy?

MOZART

Gloomy? No.

SALIERI

Mozart, there's surely something on your mind.  
The dinner's good, the wine is excellent,  
but you, you frown and brood.

MOZART

I must confess it:  
I'm worried about my Requiem.

SALIERI

Oh, you're writing  
a Requiem? Since when?

MOZART

Three weeks or so.  
But the queer part . . . didn't I tell you?

SALIERI

No.

MOZART

Well, listen:

three weeks ago I got home rather late —  
they told me someone had been there to see me.  
All night — I know not why — I lay and wondered  
who it could be and what he wanted of me.  
Next day the same thing happened: the man came;  
I was not in. The third day — I was playing  
upon the carpet with my little boy —  
there came a knock: they called me, and I went;  
a man, black-coated, with a courteous bow,

ordered a Requiem and disappeared.  
So I sat down at once and started writing.  
Now from that day to this my man in black  
has never come again.— Not that I mind  
I hate the thought of parting with my work,  
though now it's done. Yet in the meantime I . . .

**SALIERI**

You what?

**MOZART**

I'm ashamed to say it.

**SALIERI**

To say what?

**MOZART**

I am haunted by that man, that man in black.  
He never leaves me day or night. He follows  
behind me like a shadow. Even now  
I seem to see him sitting here with us,  
making a third.

**SALIERI**

Come, come! what childish terrors!  
Dispel these hollow fancies, Beaumarchais  
was wont to say to me: "Look here, old friend,  
when black thoughts trouble you, uncork a bottle  
of bright champagne, or reread "Figaro."

**MOZART**

Yes, you and Beaumarchais were boon companions,  
of course — you wrote "Tarare" for Beaumarchais.  
A splendid piece — especially one tune —  
I always find I hum it when I'm gay:  
ta-tá, ta-tá. . . . Salieri, was it true  
that Beaumarchais once poisoned someone?

SALIERI

No:

I doubt it. He was much too droll a fellow  
for such a trade.

MOZART

And then he was a genius  
like you and me. And villainy and genius  
are two things that don't go together, do they?

SALIERI

You think so?

*He pours the poison into Mozart's glass.*

Drink your wine.

MOZART

Your health, dear friend:  
here's to the frank and loyal brotherhood  
of Mozart and Salieri, sons of Music.

*He drinks.*

SALIERI

Wait, wait! You've drunk it off. You've left me out.

MOZART (*throwing his napkin on the table*)

Enough:

I've eaten.

*He goes to the piano.*

Listen to this, Salieri:

my Requiem.

*He plays.*

Are you weeping?

SALIERI

These are tears  
I've never shed before — painful yet anodyne,  
as if I had discharged a heavy debt,  
as if the surgeon's knife had lopped away  
a sick and throbbing limb! These tears, dear Mozart. . . .

You must not mind them. Oh, play on, make haste,  
flooding my soul with sound. . . .

MOZART

If all could feel  
like you the force of harmony! But no;  
the world would crumble then; for none would care  
to bother with the baser needs of life;  
then all would seek art's franchise. We are few,  
the chosen ones, the happy idlers, we  
who have no use for what is merely useful,  
who worship only beauty — do we not,  
dear friend? — But I'm not well — some leaden languor. . . .  
I must have sleep. Adieu!

SALIERI

Until we meet.

*Alone.*

Your sleep will be a long one, Mozart! — Nay,  
it cannot be that what he said was true,  
and I no genius. “Villainy and genius,  
two things that do not go together.” Wait:  
that's false — for surely there was Buonarroti.  
— Or is that but a legend, but a lie,  
bred by the stupid mob, by their inane  
vulgarity, and that great soul who wrought  
the Vatican had never sunk to murder?



# LERMONTOV

## FAREWELL

Farewell! Nevermore shall we meet,  
we shall never touch hands — so farewell!  
Your heart is now free, but in none  
will it ever be happy to dwell.



One moment together we came:  
time eternal is nothing to this!  
All senses we suddenly drained,  
burned all in the flame of one kiss.

Farewell! And be wise, do not grieve:  
our love was too short for regret,  
and hard as we found it to part  
harder still would it be if we met.

## MY NATIVE LAND

If I do love my land, strangely I love it:  
'tis something reason cannot cure.  
Glories of war I do not covet,  
but neither peace proud and secure,  
nor the mysterious past and dim romances  
can spur my soul to pleasant fancies.

And still I love thee — why I hardly know:  
I love thy fields so coldly meditative,  
native dark swaying woods and native  
rivers that sea-like foam and flow.

In a clattering cart I love to travel  
on country roads: watching the rising star,  
yearning for sheltered sleep, my eyes unravel  
the trembling lights of sad hamlets afar.

I also love the smoke of burning stubble,  
vans huddled in the prairie night;  
corn on a hill crowned with the double  
grace of twin birches gleaming white.

Few are the ones who feel the pleasure  
of seeing barns bursting with grain and hay,  
well-thatched cottage-roofs made to measure  
and shutters carved and windows gay.

And when the evening dew is glistening,  
long may I hear the festive sound  
of rustic dancers stamping, whistling  
with drunkards clamoring around.

## THE TRIPLE DREAM

I dreamt that with a bullet in my side  
in a hot gorge of Daghestan I lay.  
Deep was the wound and steaming, and the tide  
of my life-blood ebbed drop by drop away.

Alone I lay amid a silent maze  
of desert sand and bare cliffs rising steep,  
their tawny summits burning in the blaze  
that burned me too; but lifeless was my sleep.

And in a dream I saw the candle-flame  
of a gay supper in the land I knew;  
young women crowned with flowers. . . . And my name  
on their light lips hither and thither flew.

But one of them sat pensively apart,  
not joining in the light-lipped gossiping,  
and there alone, God knows what made her heart,  
her young heart dream of such a hidden thing. . . .

For in her dream she saw a gorge, somewhere  
in Daghestan, and knew the man who lay  
there on the sand, the dead man, unaware  
of steaming wound and blood ebbing away.

# TYUTCHEV

## NIGHTFALL

Down from her head the earth has rolled  
the low sun like a red-hot ball.  
Down went the evening's peaceful blaze  
and seawaves have absorbed it all.

Heavy and near the sky had seemed.  
But now the stars are rising high,  
they glow and with their humid heads  
push up the ceiling of the sky.

The river of the air between  
heaven and earth now fuller flows.  
The breast is ridded of the heat  
and breaths in freedom and repose.

And now there goes through Nature's veins  
a liquid shiver, swift and sweet,  
as though the waters of a spring  
had come to touch her burning feet.

## TEARS

*O lacrimarum fons. GRAY.*

Friends, with my eyes I love caressing  
the purple of a flashing wine,  
nor do I scorn the fragrant ruby  
of clustered fruit that leaves entwine.

I love to look around when Nature  
seems as it were immersed in May;  
when bathed in redolence she slumbers  
and smiles throughout her dreamy day.

I love to see the face of Beauty  
flushed with the air of Spring that seeks  
softly to toy with silky ringlets  
or deepen dimples on her cheeks.

But all voluptuous enchantments,  
lush grapes, rich roses — what are you  
compared to tears, that sacred fountain,  
that paradisaal morning dew!

Therein divinest beams are mirrored,  
and in those burning drops they break,  
and breaking — what resplendent rainbows  
upon Life's thunderclouds they make!

As soon as mortal eyes thou touchest,  
with wings, Angel of Tears, the world  
dissolves in mist, and lo! a skyful  
of Seraph faces is unfurled.

## THE JOURNEY

Soft sand comes up to our horses' shanks  
as we ride in the darkening day  
and the shadows of pines have closed their ranks:  
all is shadow along our way.

In denser masses the black trees rise.  
what a comfortless neighborhood!  
Grim night like a beast with a hundred eyes  
peers out of the underwood.

## SILENTIUM

Speak not, lie hidden, and conceal  
the way you dream, the things you feel.  
Deep in your spirit let them rise  
akin to stars in crystal skies  
that set before the night is blurred:  
delight in them and speak no word.

How can a heart expression find?  
How should another know your mind?  
Will he discern what quickens you?  
A thought once uttered is untrue.  
Dimmed is the fountainhead when stirred:  
drink at the source and speak no word.

Live in your inner self alone  
within your soul a world has grown,  
the magic of veiled thoughts that might  
be blinded by the outer light,  
drowned in the noise of day, unheard . . .  
take in their song and speak no word.

## LAST LOVE

Love at the closing of our days  
is apprehensive and very tender.  
Glow brighter, brighter, farewell rays  
of one last love in its evening splendor.

Blue shade takes half the world away:  
through western clouds alone some light is slanted.  
O tarry, O tarry, declining day,  
enchantment, let me stay enchanted.

The blood runs thinner, yet the heart  
remains as ever deep and tender.  
O last belated love, thou art  
a blend of joy and of hopeless surrender.

## DUSK

Now the ashen shadows mingle,  
tints are faded, sounds remote.  
Life has dwindled to a single  
vague reverberating note.  
In the dusk I hear the humming  
of a moth I cannot see.  
Whence is this oppression coming?  
I'm in all, and all's in me.

Gloom so dreamy, gloom so lulling,  
flow into my deepest deep,  
flow, ambrosial and dulling,  
steeping everything in sleep.  
With oblivion's obscuration  
fill my senses to the brim,  
make me taste obliteration,  
in this dimness let me dim.

## THE ABYSS

When sacred Night sweeps heavenward, she takes  
the glad, the winsome day, and folding it,  
rolls up its golden carpet that had been  
spread over an abyssmal pit.

Gone vision-like is the external world,  
and man, a homeless orphan, has to face  
in utter helplessness, naked, alone,  
the blackness of immeasurable space.

Upon himself he has to lean; with mind  
abolished, thought unfathered, in the dim  
depths of his soul he sinks, for nothing comes  
from outside to support or limit him.

All life and brightness seem an ancient dream —  
while in the very substance of the night,  
unravelling, alien, he now perceives  
a fateful something that is his by right.

## AUTUMN

When Autumn has just come, there is  
most brief a lull: brief but divine.  
All day 'tis like some precious prism,  
and limpidly the evenings shine.

Where lusty sickles swung and corn-ears bent  
the plain is empty now: wider it seems.  
Alone a silky filament  
across the idle furrow gleams.

The airy void, now birdless, is revealed,  
but still remote is the first whirl of snow;  
and stainless skies in mellow blueness flow  
upon the hushed reposing field.

## APPEASEMENT

The storm withdrew, but Thor had found his oak,  
and there it lay magnificently slain,  
and from its limbs a remnant of blue smoke  
spread to bright trees repainted by the rain —  
—while thrush and oriole made haste to mend  
their broken melodies throughout the grove,  
upon the crests of which was propped the end  
of a virescent rainbow edged with mauve.

## TEARS

Human tears, O the tears! you that flow  
when life is begun — or half-gone,  
tears unseen, tears unknown, you that none  
can number or drain, you that run  
like the streamlets of rain from the low  
clouds of Autumn, long before dawn. . . .

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

### PUSHKIN

IT SEEMS UNNECESSARY to remind the reader that Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) was Russia's greatest poet but it may be preferable not to take any chances. Apart from numerous short lyrics displaying a precision of expression and a melody of tone that Russian literature had never known before, he wrote epics, ballads, fairy tales, humorous or romantic fantasies (*THE CAPTIVE OF THE CAUCASUS*, *THE FOUNTAIN OF BAKIICHISARAY*, *COUNT NULIN*, *THE COTTAGE IN KOLOMNA*, *THE GYPSIES*, *POLTAVA*, *THE EGYPTIAN NIGHTS*, *ANGELO*, *THE GOLDEN COCKEREL*, *THE BRONZE HORSEMAN*, etc.), dramas in blank verse (*BORIS GODUNOV* and the diminutive *MOZART AND SALIERI*, *THE COVETOUS KNIGHT*, *THE FEAST DURING THE PLAGUE*, *THE GUEST OF STONE*, *THE RIVER NYMPH*) and that prodigious "novel" consisting of sonnet-like strophes,—*EUGENE ONEGIN*. He applied the principles of his poetry — an epigrammatical precision and a rhythmical balance difficult to define without examples—to his prose (see his stories and short novels of which the best is *THE QUEEN OF SPADES*). This precision and balance were quite abandoned by the great but diffuse Russian novelists of the XIX century.

During his lifetime he was pestered by a fatherly but grossly uncultured Tsar just as his writings were to be rejected later by the well-meaning radical critics of the civic school that dominated public opinion in the Sixties and Seventies. In modern times Marxism had considerable difficulty in adjusting Pushkin to its needs and principles but the question was finally solved on the nationalistic plane.

However, for a true appreciation of Pushkin too much is required from the reader to make such readers numerous. His conventional admirers think of him mainly in terms of schoolbooks and Chaikovsky's operas.

His life was as glamorous as a good grammarian's life ought to be. A maze of tragic events led to his fatal duel with a young ex-Chouan, a blond, fatuous adventurer who was hardly aware that the morose black-bearded husband of the pretty woman he courted, dabbled in verse. This Baron d'Anthès having recovered from the slight wound he had received after shooting Pushkin through the liver returned to France, had a glorious time under Napoléon III, was mentioned by Victor Hugo in one of his poetical diatribes and lived to the incredible and unnecessary age of 90. When an inquisitive Russian traveller once asked the grand old man how he had found it possible to deprive Russia of her greatest poet—"Mais enfin," answered the Baron rather testily, "moi aussi, I too am something: je suis Sénateur!"

### LERMONTOV

MICHAEL LERMONTOV was born when Pushkin was a lad of fifteen and he died four years after Pushkin's death, aged 27. Like Pushkin, he was killed in a duel but this was a casual rencontre—not the inevitable sequel of a tangled tragedy as in the master's case. He spent the best years of his short life in the Caucasus whither he had been banished twice—first for offending the Government by a piece of poetry on Pushkin's death (for which he rightly blamed the scoun-



drels surrounding the throne), then for a scrap with a lesser d'Anthès.

A moody young man with dark lusterless eyes, he tended to imitate Byron in his ways but was a greater poet than the latter. He was a brave soldier and seems to have enjoyed fighting the Caucasian tribes. His best poetry was written during the last three or four years of his life. As the critic Mirsky, whose work on Russian literature is the best on the market so far, puts it "As a romantic poet he has . . . no rival in Russia and he had in him everything to become also a great realist—in the Russian sense." Of his longer pieces *THE DEMON* and *MRSYRI* are the most perfect. His highly original prose is terser, less velvety and even more sober than Pushkin's. Though decidedly patchy, Lermontov remains for the true lover of poetry a miraculous being whose development is something of a mystery.

#### TYUTCHEV

NEITHER TYUTCHEV's life (1803-1873) nor personality contains that romantic appeal which makes the biographies of Pushkin and Lermontov almost homogeneous with their muses. His poetry however has quite exceptional

qualities and reveals (in the thirties!) elements which characterize the fin de siècle renaissance of Russian poetry (also called decadence, also called symbolism—the student ought not to bother much about these terms) which in its turn was partly influenced by similar trends in French poetry. This is a somewhat loose statement but too much space would be required to elaborate peculiarities and affinities.

In the early twenties the gentle Tyutchev entered the diplomatic service and spent the next twenty-two years mostly abroad and mostly in South Germany. He was on friendly terms with Schelling and Heine and both his wives were German. His only insubordination during those years seems to have been a trip to Switzerland without a proper leave from his Ambassador. When about fifty he had a pathetic liaison which lasted until his mistress' death in 1864. Politically he was a rather smug conservative with Slavophile leanings and a sentimental fondness for permanently anointed Tsardom. The batch of poems inspired by his political views makes rather painful reading. On the other hand, his short lyrics belong to the greatest ever written in Russian.

QP

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