

Four Centuries

Russian Poetry in Translation



№ 32, 2024

Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation

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Four Centuries

Russian Poetry in Translation

Михаил Лермонтов (1814-1841)
Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841)

Translated into English by Olga Dumer

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Three Palms

Amidst the sand dunes of Arabian lands
Three palm trees were regally waving their heads.
From under the ground, depleted and barren,
A cold creek was running, vivaciously babbling.
The palms' leafy crowns, like fluttering fans
Protected its freshness from hot whirling sands.

So years passed by, but no one would retreat
To its coveted shade from the tiring heat
No travelers coming from far-away places
Would sink into water their fiery faces.
And soon, the lush leaves would be parched by the sun
And crystal cool water would no longer run.

The three palms lamented, "Almighty God, why
Is it our fate in seclusion to die?
Worn out by heat and exhausted by storms,
In this empty desert, so useless, we've grown;
No soul to rejoice, and no eyes to delight -
Our Father in Heaven, your curse is not right!"

As soon as they uttered their final laments,
The skyline turned hazy with eddying sands.
A caravan moved with commotion and neighing:
On saddlebacks, colorful bundles were swaying
Careening like buoys, obscuring the sun,
The camels were striding in line, one by one.

Between their humps, boasting lavish decor
The circular canopies proudly soared.
At times, swarthy hands set the curtains aside
Revealing a pair of black sparkling eyes...
His torso bent forward with sinewy force,
An Arab was galloping his restive horse.

Defiant, the raven- black stallion reared
And leaped like a leopard escaping a spear
His master dashed boldly through sandy expanse
Hallooing and throwing his piercing lance,
The folds of his splendid white robe, disarrayed,
Fell down his spine in a tiered cascade.

The caravan, looking for refuge from swelter,
Pitched clamorous tents in the welcoming shelter.
With dignified bows to fortuitous guests
The palm trees bestowed on them respite and rest.
The generous spring gladly filled empty barrels
With pure cool water refreshing the travelers.

But just as the twilight enwrapped the oasis,
The darkness resounded with thudding axes.
The pillaged palms fell on the vandalized ground
And youngsters tore off their evergreen crowns,
The secular trunks, toppled down and maimed,
Till morning were burning in smoldering flames.

When nebulous fog flitted westward at dawn,
The campsite was ravaged; the caravan gone.
And over the dunes, infertile and abandoned,
Gray cinders were strewn as the only remnant
Of foliage, now turned into ashes and dust,
And scattered around by arid wind gusts.

The quicksand is slowly defeating the rill.
In vain it is begging the Prophet for salvage
And none but a falcon, a lonely savage,
Did land at the shallow and weary creek
To torture his prey with his aquiline beak.

1838

The Ghost Ship

As Darkness descends on the ocean,
As Night spreads her silvery veil,
A brigantine cuts through the waters
And glides downwind at full sail.

Her tall topsail masts are not bending,
Her vanes are not moved by the air,
Her cannons face open deck hatches
With silent indifferent stare.

You won't hear the captain's curt orders
You won't see the sailors on deck,
Yet treacherous reefs or fierce tempests
Will not bring this vessel to wreck.

It steers to a wild distant island
Engulfed by funereal gloom.
A tomb has been carved in its granite
An emperor lies in that tomb.

He rests there, buried by rivals
Without the honors of war,
His heavy headstone would not let him
Escape from that desolate shore.

The day of the emperor's passing
Each year, on his doleful death day
The mystic ship quietly anchors
And lies in a small tranquil bay.

At midnight, the powerful emperor
Does suddenly rise from the dead -
He's dressed in his combat attire
A gray bicorn hat on his head.

His noble head slightly bent forward,
Without a farewell glance,
He steps on board, ready to steer
His ship on her journey to France.

For France he is ardently yearning
The land of his glorious reign;
The land where his son and successor
And old loyal guard have remained.

As soon as familiar shorelines
Emerge from the fog into sight,
The emperor's heart starts to flutter
His eager eyes shine with delight.

The emperor boldly strides forward
Now setting his foot on the shore,
He loudly calls for his marshals,
He forcibly summons his corps.

But his grenadiers cannot hear -
They now rest forever amid
The infinite snows of cold Russia
The hot sands of great pyramids.

And his gallant marshals are silent;
Some fell on the Elbe's grassy sward,
And others acceded to treason
And sold out their honor and sword.

The emperor angrily paces
The shore back and forth, all in vain;
And stomping his foot on the ground,
He fervently calls once again:

He calls for his son's love and favor
To amend his sad circumstance;
He pledges the world to his heir
Except for his own, his sweet France.

But when he was still in full vigor,
Death claimed his beloved dauphin;
All night, the sad father awaits him
Not willing to leave or give in.

Alone, by the sea he is standing
Till dawn puts her blush on the sky.
His eyes well with hot bitter tears,
He breathes out a long heavy sigh.

To his mystic ship, the doomed emperor
Walks slowly, his eyes downcast.
Dismissing all hope with a hand wave,
He heaves up the anchor at last.

1840

* * *

All alone, along the road I'm walking;
In the moonlight, tiny pebbles shine;
All is calm. The stars are gently talking
And the Earth is heeding the divine.

In its splendor, skies are never-ending.
In its halo the blue planet rests...
What am I awaiting? Or regretting?
Why this pain and anguish in my chest?

For the future –neither hope, nor promise
No regrets about the bygone days;
I'm seeking freedom, peace and solace
I'm longing for sweet sleep's embrace!

Not dull sleep in a tenebrous coffin...
But a dreamy slumber in repose,
As my placid chest is breathing softly
Keeping in the dormant vital force.

So that, day and night, the mellow sound
Of a love song would enthrall my ears,
And the whisper of the leafy crowns
High above my head would never cease.

1841

Фёдор Тютчев (1803-1873)
Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-1873)

Translated into English by Olga Dumer
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When our vigor is descending ...

When our vigor is descending,
And strength beginning to decay,
We must, like temporary tenants,
For new arrivals clear the way.

Then save us, our guardian angel,
From harsh reproofs and petty fuss,
From calumny against the changes
The future has in store for us.

Let us not harbor secret hatred
Of novelty; nor come to strife
With the newcomers, who have waited
For joyous feasts of transient life.

Protect us from the bitter insight
That we are about to concede
Our place, retreating to the sidelines
For others now will take the lead.

Let us not yield to the emotions
That we would cautiously conceal:
There is less shame in senile passion
Than in contentious senile zeal.

1866

Olga Dumer was born and educated in Moscow, Russia. Her Ph.D. work in Linguistics with the Russian Academy of Sciences addressed the problems of poetry translation. She taught English as a Second Language in Russia and Germany. She also worked as a translator and interpreter in both countries. She has worked as Associate Professor of English, ESL and Linguistics at Moreno Valley College, California. Translating Russian poetry into English has been her lifelong passion.

Римма Маркова
Rimma Markova

Translated into Swedish by Maria Rodikova

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* * *

Livet har slitits itu – före kriget, och nu.
Hur kommer det bli?
Bilderna flimrar, sprängda hus
och utslocknade människoliv.

Vi som lever långt från alla krig,
känner rädslan gro ändå.
Vi betraktar hur allt går oss förbi,
men vet att skulden också är vår.

Om jag kunde ropa: Herre hjälp!
Kom och håll oss nära.
Du ser ju att de som fiender är,
förut var bröder kära.

Det finns en sanning i vår värld,
som i sagorna vandrar:
Då drakdödaren blir en drake själv,
blir han värre än alla de andra.

* * *

Vi lever så som vore det fred:
ser på film, städar och fixar.
Läser, gnolar, skriver brev,
men lyfter aldrig upp blicken.

Kriget mullrar överkligt där
och verkar aldrig vilja ta slut.
Raserar helt för kommande år
liv, framtid, städer och hus.

Här utanför går allt sin gilla gång,
vi kollar mobilen som rutin,
läser nyheter på en tågplattform...
medan kriget fräter i själen in.

* * *

Europa är trött på att förse, förstå och stödja.
Hon vill vila nu, ta semester, lite sommarmätt.
I Ukraina stiger flammorna kopparröda.
Och i Ryssland väntar man ivrigt på nästa balett.

KATTEN

Kissen rymde då ingen såg,
precis när de alla kom fram till sitt tåg:
katten, papegojan och en schäfertik,
och alla deras människor, stora och små.
Då kom ett hotande muller, himlen blev grå,
sedan kaos, stötar och höga skrik.

Kissen sprang hemåt, han visste ju att,
där finns allt han behöver som innekatt:
värme, mat, smek och sällskap.
Han skulle aldrig bli ensam kvar,
för hela familjen ense var,
om att han var värdefull och älskad.

Hemåt, fort, mot sin trygga vrå.
Men vad nu? Han kunde inte förstå,
av hela huset fanns bara halva kvar.
Inget liv, varje våning gapade tom.
Snabbt som en pil vände katten om,
för här i spillrorna fanns inga svar.

Han sprang till stationen igen men såg
ingen annan än hunden som stilla låg,
och darrade från nos till svans,
vid en hög av svart förvridet stål,
och ett underligt rykande håll.
Men inga människor, ingen goja där fanns.

Hunden gnällde när katten smög,
med sina mjuka tassar på en glödande hög.
Av röken sved kissens ögon illa.
Han kurrade svagt: "Ingen fara".
Ingen fara.

Så länge han bara
inte såg barnskon som bar doft av den lilla.

* * *

Jag slets itu av en projektil,
resterna låg i en krater.
De skrapade ihop bit för bit,
men hel blir jag aldrig mer.

Mitt hjärta blev kvar under grus.
Min röst hörs gråta i en skreva.
Mina ögon har förlorat sitt ljus.
Hur kan jag fortsätta leva?

Rimma Markova was born in Leningrad. She is the author of eight books of poetry, three books of fiction, a book on Nordic artists in five languages, and a number of short stories. Her first book was published in Murmansk, Russia, where she was working after graduating from university. She has been living in Sweden since 1994. Rimma Markova is a prize-winner of several literary competitions

Maria Rodikova is a journalist and translator. She has translated Rimma Markova's poetry book *Det Georgien jag sjunger om*, the poetry anthology *På väg* with young Russian-speaking Georgian poets and was co-translator for Staffan Julén's film *Love in Russian* with Svetlana Alekseevitj.

Юлия Пикалова
Julia Pikalova

Translated into Spanish by Emilio Coco

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Dios y el lago

Dios cansado de crear descansaba,
ardiendo de imperecedera piedad,
y conteniendo el aliento miraba
el lago más allá de las azules montañas.
Él guardaba este rincón en su corazón
y, con los ojos cerrados, escuchaba con amor
las campanas en las orillas lejanas,
y el lago estaba lleno de sonidos,
y el sonido se difundía incesante.
El lago, ojo azul y grande,
miraba hacia arriba apacible y tranquilo,
ausente, indiferente, indolente
y reflejaba a las nubes y a Dios
que por un instante no pensaba en nada

El viento

¡He aquí el viento! ¡Sí, el viento!
¡Ya el lago se ha movido!

Al amanecer ha derribado los marcos,
Me ha llamado y me ha puesto las alas,

Con estruendo encuentra las olas,
Manda al diablo la trama nublosa,

¡Y yo en el torbellino salvaje
Vuelo y exulto dichosa!

¡Qué pasiones nunca experimentadas!
¡Qué dramas furiosos!...

Y no sé cómo volver
atrás a los marcos derribados.

El paseo

1.

*Ya žarpa. ¿Adónde podemos ir?...
A. Pushkin*

¿adónde ir? – preguntaste como un autómata
saliendo para dar un paseo
y te perdiste entre la muchedumbre que,
si no está lloviendo, fluye lenta por la calle

dónde – ¿no da igual? capilla parque
y un amplio viraje donde desde las cornisas
se asoman las quimeras las caritas
donde fríen los buñuelos en sartenes

donde venden chales y jerséis
donde las antiguas piedras tuercen el tobillo
donde los transeúntes no tienen ojos profundos
y no hallarán ninguna huella en la memoria

donde se provocan los carteles rivales
donde los palomos son gordos e impotentes
y donde un flautista está bajo el vetusto muro
y al hacer siete pasos ya no lo escuchas

fluye la vida con su tejido sutil
de donde se transparenta la eternidad
tú, mientras tanto, te has sentado en un pequeño bar
y comes en un plato desechable

fluye la vida
su tejido es sutil
y tú estás por este lado ahora
dónde ir – se sabe pero no lo pienses
hasta que el aceite de un buñuelo
no te unte los dedos
y el cristal de una vitrina
no refleje un semblante sombrío

2.

De repente me pegó el ritmo:
 “un plato desechable”
 Podría ser, pero ¡qué tontería!
 Olvidalo y haz algo útil.
 Pero el ritmo continuaba, así que me tocó
 reflexionar sobre lo que me empujaba a actuar.
 Entonces, con los ojos cerrados, intenté
 imaginar: quién comía, y qué, y donde,
 y cómo había ido a parar allá...

Y poco a poco
 los barrios del casco histórico
 de todas las ciudades europeas juntas
 se perfilaron bajo los párpados.
 Pero por qué – todavía no lo sabía.
 Además había un verso en el tejido
 donde se transparentaba algo –
 mejor dicho, se oscurecía, pero ¿la oscuridad
 no puede transparentarse? Y entonces
 la lengua acudió en su ayuda: ¡se transparenta la eternidad!

Y de repente siguió el resto:
 Pushkin, las antiguas piedras, las quimeras,
 los BUNUELOS, los buñuelos, sí.

“Si ustedes supieran de qué alcantarilla
 crecen los versos, sin sentir vergüenza”*

**De un poema de Anna Ajmátova*

Estupendo día para leer poesía...

Estupendo día para leer poesía.
 Fría lluvia sobre frío lago.
 Ningún barco pesquero, incluso las gaviotas
 Están al abrigo. Por la gran humedad
 Los arabescos rezuman de la pared
 Del chalé al lado: la humedad revela
 Donde estaban las ventanas – excepto aquellas
 cubiertas hace tiempo por los batientes, pues
 No había nadie que las abriera;
 Tras los postigos cuadrados de las antiguas ventanas
 Tú imaginas el vacío en el interior.
 Por aquí pasaban los soldados romanos,
 Por esta misma orilla
 Delante de mí en la gris calina,
 Y yo intento imaginar cómo por la noche

Estas orillas eran oscuras.
Sólo los puntos aislados de las hogueras
trataban de dispersar la niebla general,
Antes de que los frutos de la civilización
Se insinuaran en este pueblo, como las rimas,
Y alumbradas las noches por los faros, nosotros
Los espantáramos.
El día ha terminado. La lluvia ha parado.
Los faros se encienden como largas cadenas,
Derramando la luz y cayendo en el verso,
Y como copos de nieve chocan las falenas,
En los rayos, las alas pesadas de humedad,
Y se percibe el olor de una ignota desgracia:
La prevés, pero no sabes qué responder.
Y estando en el agua que se oscurece
Yo abrazo su propia espalda.

Julia Pikalova is a Russian poet. Born in Moscow, she is a graduate of St. Petersburg State University (Master of Philology) and of California State University (Master of Business Administration). She has made a successful career in major international companies and has worked in many countries. Having moved to Italy, Julia has restarted playing the piano; since 2017, she has been participating in the Milano Amateurs and Orchestra festival and has won it twice. Julia's poetry is published in the best magazines of Russian literature, from Canada to the Far East. It is not easy to translate her poetry because of Julia's virtuoso capacity to play with the sounds, meanings and syntax of the Russian language. Yet, 60 poems have been translated into Italian in 2020 thanks to the effort of the prominent slavist Paolo Statuti.

Emilio Coco was born in 1940 in S. Marco in Lamis (Apulia). He is a Hispanist, poet and translator, who has compiled several anthologies of Spanish poetry and 3 volumes of Spanish plays. He has also published anthologies of Italian poetry translated into Spanish in Mexico, Spain and Colombia. With the publisher Walter Raffaelli he has published anthologies of Catalan, Mexican, Colombian, Cuban, Honduran, Bolivian, Ecuadorian, Costa Rican poetry and *The Flower of Latin American Poetry of Today* in 3 volumes. At the same publisher he manages the "Ispanoamericano" poetry series. As a poet, he has published 12 books between Spain and Latin America and 7 in Italy. In 2003 King Juan Carlos I awarded him the title of Commander of the "Alfonso X el Sabio" order, one of the highest awards granted in Spain for cultural merit. In 2016 he was awarded the international Ramón López Velarde award in Mexico.

Julia Pikalova

Translated into Czech by Bronislava Volková

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Guernica

„Guernica“ viděla hlavně žáda návštěvníků.

Le Corbuisier

hmota

se pánové rozpadá

ztraceni

jsou bohové, slabiky, hlasy a města

guernica

je obrácena naruby v bezhlasém křiku

ale křik

neuslyší hrouda – rozmazaný býk

antichrist je tu navěky a odjakživa

kůň s posledním chrapotem rozervaných žil

proklíná býka

voják dokud žil

svíral meč a heřmánek

ale ruka

je oddělena od ramen

ramena od hlavy

„To jste udělal vy?

-Ne, to jste udělali VY.“*

lidé na pekelném talíři

ne já, ne ty

rozevřené rty

proklínají býka

už jsou bez jazyka

matka místo něho třímá dýku

dětské tělíčko visí jak hadřík, jedině ono

je uvolněno

svět se s posledním chrapotem hroutil a chvěl

to není mé, němé kino

...
na světové výstavě v paříži
jsme se nechtěli přiblížit
na co jsou taková plátna
guernica viděla jen naše záda

býk – tupec - ničitel
býčí maso – naše srdce a rozumy

hmota se pánové rozpadá
to děláme my

*Jednou, během německé okupace Paříže přišlo do ateliéru umělce několik hitlerovských důstojníků. Jeden vzal ze stolu reprodukcí „Guernicy“ a ledabyly se zeptal: „To jste udělal vy?“ – „Ne, to jste udělali vy.“ – odpověděl umělec. („Picasso“, Golomštok, Sinjavskij, 1960).

Nedívej se

Pane
ty ryješ obranný zákop
střepina tě trefí do zátylku
uspávající tepna
věčný spánek
hnědá skvrna je kde byl jarní trávník
rychlejší než hřebík
je naše časová tíseň
to je milosrdenství
to je
čtvrtit
rvát
na tři
nebo napůl
stydím se Pane
nedívej se
jdi si po svých raděj

Báseň je věnována Dmitriji Zubrickému a Nikolaji Vavilovovi, dobrovolníkům z Kyjeva, kteří zahynuli na jaře 2022. Bylo jim 25 let.

Bronislava Volková is a bilingual poet, semiotician, translator, collagist, essayist and Professor Emerita of Indiana University, Bloomington, USA, where she was a Director of the Czech Program at the Slavic Department for thirty years. She is a member of Czech and American PEN Club. She went into exile in 1974, taught at the Universities of Cologne and Marburg in Germany and subsequently at Harvard and University of Virginia in Charlottesville in the USA. She has authored twelve books of existential and metaphysical poetry in Czech, of which eight were published in Czech-English

bilingual editions and illustrated with her own collages. She is also the author of two books on linguistic and literary semiotics (*Emotive Signs in Language*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 1987 and *A Feminist's Semiotic Odyssey through Czech Literature*, Edwin Mellen Press, N.Y., 1997), as well as the leading co-author of a large anthology of Czech poetry translations into English *Up The Devil's Back: A Bilingual Anthology of 20th Century Czech Poetry* (with Clarice Cloutier), Slavica Publishers, 2008. Her scholarly publications include topics of Czech poetry, Czech popular culture, issues of exile, gender, implied author values and emotive signs. Her poetry has been translated into fourteen languages and her selected poems appeared in book form in seven of them. She has also received a number of international literary and cultural awards and participated in a number of international poetry festivals around the world. Recently, she has published a book *Forms of Exile in Jewish Literature and Thought (Twentieth-Century Central Europe and Migration to America)*, Academic Studies Press, Boston, 2021, available also in Open Research Library and in Czech translation in *Nakladatelství Pavel Mervart*, Czech Republic, 2022.

More at www.bronislavavolkova.com

www.indiana.academia.edu https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3y1GreHstX_OMgYi0pafTA

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If you want to delve deeper into the work of a poet or translator featured in this issue, some of the previous issues of *Four Centuries. Russian Poetry in Translation* may certainly be worth looking into! Here are the references you will need.

Poets:

Mikhail Lermontov

- Nr 9, 2014, translated into English by Robert Chandler; translated into German by Christoph Ferber; translated into Romanian by Leo Butnaru; translated into Hungarian by Árpád Galgóczy and Maja Ceszárskaja
- Nr 16, 2017, translated into Dutch by Paul Bezembinder
- Nr 20, 2019, translated into English and Hungarian by Vadim Vozdvizhensky
- Nr 23, 2020, translated into Hungarian by Aladar Halászi

Fyodor Tyutchev

- Nr 5, 2013 and Nr 12, 2015, translated into Hungarian by Maja Ceszárskaja
- Nr 14, 2016, translated into Dutch by Paul Bezembinder
- Nr 17, 2017, and Nr 22, 2019, translated into English, French, and Hungarian by Vadim Vozdvizhensky

Rimma Markova

- Nr 29, 2022, translated into Swedish by Rimma Markova and Gunnel Bergström

Julia Pikalova

- Nr 25, 2020, Nr 27, 2021, Nr 29, 2022, and Nr 31, 2023, translated into Italian by Paolo Statuti
- Nr 27, 2021, Nr 29, 2022, and Nr 31, 2023, translated into English by Anna Krushelnitskaya and Niles Watterson
- Nr 31, 2023, translated into Vietnamese by Ngô Binh Anh Khoa

Translators:

Olga Dumer: Nr 24, 27

Nr 32, Poem titles/ first lines in Russian:

Mikhail Lermontov

- Три пальмы
- Воздушный корабль
- Выхожу один я на дорогу...

Fyodor Tyutchev

- Когда дряхлеющие силы...

Rimma Markova

- Жизнь порвана надвое...
- Вот живем мы как будто при мире...
- Европа устала кормить...
- Кот
- Меня снарядам разорвало...

Julia Pikalova, translations into Spanish

- Бог и озеро
- Ветер!
- Выход(Ной)
- Прекрасный день для чтения стихов...

Julia Pikalova, translations into Czech

- Герника
- Не смотри