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ON THE EARLY RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS OF BYRON'S *DARKNESS* (1822-1831)*

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Early 19th-century Russian translators seem to have had a special liking for *Darkness* by Lord Byron, as within a decade since the publication of its first Russian translation by O. Somov (1822) five others by F. Glinka, A. Voejkov, M. Vrončenko, A. Rotčev and M. Lermontov followed. The idea of the present study is to show whether these translations were made independently or the translators used the earlier publications reference when stumbling upon a difficult word or expression. A number of correlations between the texts allows me to deduce Vrončenko had a considerable influence upon Lermontov. The comparison of the six texts also revealed the translators had been divided over how to translate the title of the poem, *Мрак* [*mrak*] or *Тьма* [*t'ma*]. In Glinka and Rotčev, these Russian nouns are used as complete synonyms. Somov, Voejkov and Vrončenko pulled them apart as denoting the initial and final degrees of the darkness. In Lermontov's translation, too, *t'ma* is a state preceding *mrak*. However, he was the only one to notice the boundary between the phases of *darkling* and *blackening* of the world in the original and accurately convey Byron's intent in his translation.

I traduttori russi di inizio Ottocento sembrano abbiano avuto una particolare predilezione per *Darkness* di Lord Byron: nel decennio successivo alla prima traduzione O. Somov (1822) ne apparvero altre cinque, a cura di F. Glinka, A. Voejkov, M. Vrončenko, A. Rotčev e M. Lermontov. Il saggio intende analizzare se queste traduzioni sono state fatte indipendentemente le une dalle altre oppure se i traduttori successivi si sono serviti delle precedenti nel caso di una parola o espressione ostica. Un significativo numero di correlazioni tra i testi tradotti consente di dedurre che la versione di Vrončenko abbia avuto un'influenza considerevole su Lermontov. Il confronto tra le sei versioni ha anche rivelato che i traduttori si sono divisi su come tradurre il titolo del poema *Мрак* [*mrak*] o *Тьма* [*t'ma*]. In Glinka e Rotčev, questi termini russi sono usati come meri sinonimi, mentre Somov, Voejkov e Vrončenko li hanno usati separatamente, perché denotano i gradi iniziali e finali dell'oscurità. Anche nella traduzione di Lermontov, *t'ma* è uno stato che precede *mrak*; tuttavia, fu l'unico a notare il confine tra le fasi di *darkling* e *blackening*, utilizzate nell'originale da Byron con precisione, e inserire questo nella sua versione.

I LORD BYRON'S *DARKNESS* AND LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE WORLD

The gloomy, pessimistic mood permeating Lord Byron's poem *Darkness* written between 21 July and 25 August 1816 could be explained both by the poet's personal tragedy that made him leave Britain and his sharing the general Romantic emotional upheaval

* Strange as it may seem, in Russia the early translations of *Darkness* have not yet become an object of comparative studies. The best known of them, the one by Lermontov, was described by A.V. Fedorov as a translational drill of the young poet learning English, i.e. devoid of any artistic merits, which influenced the general attitude to this text in Russian literary criticism. V.E. Vacuro and B.M. Ejchenbaum studied the influence of Byron's favourite motifs upon Lermontov's lyrics but even in their systematic and enlightening works the early Russian translations of *Darkness* were completely ignored being beyond the scope of the researchers' goals. Ju.D. Levin, the best of the historians of translated literature in Russia, only mentioned Vrončenko had translated *Darkness* in his monograph on the 19th-century Russian translations. Almost the same can be told about the works of Russian Byron scholars E.I. Klimenko, N.Ya. D'jakonova and others. This paper is a tribute to the memory of Sergej Sucharev, a modern Russian translator of British poetry, who passed in September 2017 and had probably been the first to understand the necessity of studies in the almost bicentenary history of *Darkness* translations into Russian.

caused by the come-down of the optimistic illusion of the Age of the Enlightenment, reinforced by the increasing popularity of the Cuvier catastrophe theory ruinous to the image of Nature as a careful mother of the human race, their kind comforter, recourse and ally. After his defeat and the collapse of his First French Empire, Napoleon tried to explain his hard luck by blaming the outrage of water, air and fire uniting to destroy his army in Russia.¹ This further promoted Cuvier's theory, having broadened its functional area and boosted *catastrophic* plotlines in Western European literature of the late 1810s.

Some scholars paid attention to the climate abnormalities of the year 1816 that is sometimes called the Year Without a Summer or the period of the great subsistence crisis, which, in their opinion, could not but influence both European economics and people's spirits and state of mind. According to the data carefully collected by John Bate to prove 1816 was the worst summer ever recorded, it rained in Switzerland on 130 days out of 183 from April to September, the average temperature keeping almost five degrees below the climate normal,² and that could only deepen Byron's depression during his stay there. At least twice during the summer he complained of the unseasonable chill in his letters.³ It should also be kept in mind that *Darkness* was created amidst the general panic that seized Europe due to the so called *Bologna prediction* according to which the Sun had to go out on 18 July 1816 as a prologue to the oncoming world's end.⁴ The name of the author of the prediction was never known but even the most skeptically-minded persons must have tempered their criticism towards such a perspective when the astronomers reported of the growth of spots on the surface of the Sun, which was interpreted as an apparent sign of its extinction in progress and to some extent explained the change of the climate. Two subsequent total eclipses of the sun on 6 July 1815 and 27 May 1816 perceived as sinister omens also added to the general dismay. Yet there were no falling stars, terrible earthquakes or extraordinary commotions of the seas, and neither the sun or moon turned bloody in colour as it was to be expected before the approaching end of the world according to the Holy Scriptures.⁵

2 ALL-CONQUERING DARKNESS: DISCUSSION OF THE RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS OF THE POEM IN THE 1820S

Byron's *Darkness* seems to be in perfect congruity with the mindset of the time, describing how light vanishes from the Universe while the Earth is gradually devoured by the crescent darkness: the Sun extinguished, people kindled fires in which not only wood but everything that had been created by civilization were burnt, and when these burial

1 LEE STERRENBURG, *The Last Man? Anatomy of Failed Revolutions*, in «Nineteenth-Century Fiction», XXXIII/3 (1978), pp. 324-347, p. 326.

2 JONATHAN BATE, *Living with the Weather*, in «Studies in Romanticism», XXXV/3 (1996), pp. 431-447, p. 433.

3 GEORGE GORDON BYRON, *Byron's letters and journals*, ed. by LESLIE A. MARCHAND, 12 vols., London, John Murray, 1976, vol. v, pp. 81-86.

4 JEFFREY VAIL, *The Bright Sun was Extinguish'd: The Bologna Prophecy and Byron's Darkness*, in «Wordsworth Circle», XXVIII/3 (1997), pp. 183-192, p. 186.

5 THOMAS BURNETT, *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*, London, T. Kinnersley, 1816, pp. 479-480.

fires went out, the world was engulfed by the all-conquering eternal darkness. Byron's visionary poem caught the imagination of those who could read English and inspired a lot of translations of the poem. The first French translation of *Darkness* by Amédée Pichot was published in 1821.⁶ According to R.A. Cardwell and P. Barnaby, Giuseppe Nicolini produced his Italian version of the poem in 1828, in Denmark, *Darkness* was translated as early as in 1823, but later that work was outshone by the second translation by Hans Christian Andersen (1832). The Polish translation by Adam Mickiewicz appeared in 1824, and in Russia it was Michail Lermontov who created the Russian adaptation of the poem in 1830.⁷

However, that said, the history of the Russian reception of *Darkness* is a little bit longer, beginning in 1822, when almost simultaneously Orest Michajlovič Somov (1793-1833) and Fedor Nikolaevič Glinka (1786-1880) published their translations of the poem in the periodicals launched by the Society of Friends of Russian Philology to facilitate the general public to read in Russian, «Blagonamerennyj»⁸ and «Sorevnovatel' prosveščeniija i blagotvorenija».⁹ In 1825, those were followed by Aleksandr Fedorovič Voejkov's (c. 1778-1839) translation,¹⁰ then, in 1828, another two ones, by Michail Pavlovič Vrončenko (c. 1801-1855)¹¹ and Aleksandr Gavrilovič Rotčev (c. 1807-1873), were published.¹²

The fact is quite notable, especially given that there seems no climatic changes were reported in Russia either in 1816 or in the 1820s but for the famous opening lines of the first stanza of Book IV of *Eugene Onegin* witnessing that it started snowing only on January 3. The year when that happened was not given by the poet, and modern Puškin scholars believe these lines described the winter either of 1821¹³ or 1825.¹⁴ It should be also noted that it was written only about the central European part of Russia. The flood on November 7, 1824 in St. Petersburg, no matter how devastating, was also perceived as a local catastrophic event, quite rare but having nothing to do with the Apocalypse. So it was not the exceptional climatic phenomena but the general somber atmosphere in the country that drew attention to *Darkness*.

- 6 GEORGE GORDON BYRON, *Oeuvres complètes de Lord Byron, traduites de l'anglais par MM. A.-P. et E.-D. S.*, 8 vols., Paris, Ladvocat, 1821, vol. III, pp. 173-176.
- 7 RICHARD A. CARDWELL (ed.), *The reception of Byron in Europe*, 2 vols., London / New York, Thoemmes Continuum, 2004, vol. I, pp. xxv-xxviii.
- 8 GEORGE GORDON BYRON, *Darkness*, trans. by OREST SOMOV, in «Blagonamerennyj», XVIII/3 (1822), ed. by ALEKSANDR IZMAJLOV, pp. 122-126, pp. 122-126.
- 9 GEORGE GORDON BYRON, *Darkness*, trans. by FEDOR GLINKA, in «Sorevnovatel' prosveščeniija i blagotvorenija», XVII/21 (1822), ed. by ALEKSANDR BOROVKOV, pp. 159-164, pp. 159-164.
- 10 GEORGE GORDON BYRON, *Darkness*, trans. by MICHAİL VRONČENKO, in «Novosti literatury», XII (1825), ed. by A. VOEJKOV, pp. 172-175, pp. 172-175.
- 11 GEORGE GORDON BYRON, *Darkness*, trans. by MICHAİL VRONČENKO, in «Atenej», II/6 (1828), ed. by MICHAİL PAVLOV, pp. 150-152, pp. 150-152.
- 12 GEORGE GORDON BYRON, *Darkness*, trans. by ALEKSANDR ROTČEV, in «Russkij zritel', žurnal istorii, archeologii, slovesnosti i sravnitel'nyh kostjumov», IV/13-14 (1828), ed. by MICHAİL POGODIN, pp. 64-67, pp. 64-67.
- 13 JURIJ M. LOTMAN, *Puškin. Biografija pisatelja. Stat'i i zametki, 1960-1990. Evgenij Onegin, kommentarij* [*Puškin. The biography of the writer. Papers and notes, 1960-1990. Eugene Onegin, a commentary*], Sankt-Peterburg, Iskusstvo-SPb, 1995, p. 483.
- 14 VADIM P. STARK, 'Sneg vypal tol'ko v janvare...' [*The snow fell only in January...*], in «Zvezda», VI (2011), pp. 186-195, pp. 186-195.

Almost the whole of the society cried out for liberal reforms. Peasants were rioting against being driven into military settlements, and aristocratic secretive associations and masonic lodges were mushrooming in many parts of the country. The emperor's decree of August 13, 1822, which prohibited all clandestine organizations, only brought Russia to the Decembrist uprising of 1825 in St. Petersburg. Alexander I was brought up as a romantic adept of Enlightenment but in his late years he grew rather conservative, and he also plunged into mysticism. He gave up his previous intentions to modernize the society. All remaining hopes for social reforms completely died out with his brother Nicholas I's accession to the throne, and general disillusion nourished the public craving for a Romantic literature which exploited the motif of the bleak future of the human race. *Darkness* by Byron perfectly satisfying the demand, its translation into Russian became inevitable.

Somov was a Novo-Russian gentleman and a member of the Society of Friends of Russian Philology. His essay *On Romantic Poetry* played an important part in the history of the Russian Romantic movement. He is also remembered as having been the first to produce a prosaic rendering of *Darkness* from the French translation of the poem, *Les Ténèbres* by Amédée Pichot. Pichot followed de Chateaubriand's almost word to word principle of rendering foreign poetry, though he could not resist the temptation to introduce some small additions that were all faithfully reproduced by Somov. If it had not been known Somov used Pichot's text, these tiny insertions would have been enough to prove the fact. The only purpose of his translation was to let the general Russian public know the contents of Byron's masterpiece, and Somov certainly achieved his purpose. He drew much attention to it.

The first Russian prosaic rendering of *Darkness* directly from the English original was produced by Fedor Glinka, a Russian officer and member of the Decembrists' societies, also known as a gifted poet and writer. Glinka tried to keep to Byron's text as close as possible but his desire to achieve a kind of stylistic perfection did him a disservice. For instance, Byron's opening line – «I had a dream, which was not all a dream» – obviously embarrassed Glinka with the double repetition of «a dream», but, trying to avoid it, he rendered the phrase in the worst possible way, «Я видел сон, который много походил на существенность» [*Ja videl son, kotoryj mnogo pochodil na suščestvennost'* the Russian – 'I had a dream, which was much like a materiality'], *mного pochodil* and *suščestvennost'* completely inappropriate to the poetic style, the former contradicting idiom, the latter belonging to the language of officialdom¹⁵ and irreconcilable with genuine

¹⁵ Before the 1820s, *suščestvennost'* had been used to denote 'something hearty, satisfying or wholesome'. It got its second meaning, 'reality', after the «Vestnik Evropy» published an essay on Schelling's philosophical system by J.P.F. Ancillon in A. Gusev's translation, in which this infrequently used word was introduced as an equivalent for the German term *Wirklichkeit*. The meaning was so novel that the editor had again and again to explain it in parentheses (see *O Novejšich Sistemach Metafiziki v Germanii (iz Ancillona)* [*On the Most Modern Systems of Metaphysics in Germany (from Ancillon)*], in «Vestnik Evropy», XIII-XIV (1823), ed. by M. KAČENOVSKIJ, pp. 18-64, pp. 23;26-29). In common parlance, however, the word had become obsolete by the 1820s, while in philosophy it was quickly replaced by *realnost'* or *dejstvitel'nost'* (see VIKTOR V. VINOGRADOV, *Izbrannye Trudy: Istorija Russkogo Literaturnogo Jazyka* [*Selected Works: The History of the Russian Language*], Moskva, Nauka, 1978, p. 57). The process is perfectly illustrated by two quotations from Alexandr Turgenev's correspondence: in a letter dated 20 January 1819 *suščestvennost'*

poetry. The image of the stars that «Did wander darkling in the eternal space, / Rayless, and pathless» (lines 3-4) must have seemed to Glinka too sombre for the beginning of the poem and he tried to embellish the picture with a comparison of these celestial bodies to «блуждающие стада» [*bluždajuščie stada* – ‘wandering flocks’], which provides a far more pleasant, pastoral hue to the original description. Another excrescency to Byron occurred in line 19. It characterized the burning forests, «веками взрощенные» [*vekami vzroščennye* – ‘nurtured for centuries’], and it also fell short of its aim by failing the general tragic pathos of the poem. Byron’s laconic «Even dogs assail’d their masters» (line 48) was developed by Glinka into twice as long a passage, «И самые псы восстали противу господ своих и питались трупами своих питателей» [*I samye psi vosstali protivu gospod svoich i pitalis’ trupami svoich pitatelej* – ‘And even dogs turned against their sovereigns and fed on the corpses of those who had fed them’], which is not only another example of the translator’s addition to the text but also stylistically clumsy. Moreover, it underscored Glinka’s effort to remedy the defect in the opening line of the original poem. He disliked the word repetition in the phrase quoted above, but he failed to avoid it, too («своих» and «питались» – «питателей»). As the darkness engulfs the world, the translator increased his additions, and they ruined the laconic sublimity of the original. Glinka could not resist the temptation to amplify the emotional effect in the final part of the poem.

Both Somov and Glinka belonged to a type of the early 19th-century Russian translators whom Aleksandr Puškin designated as «post-horses of enlightenment»,¹⁶ whose task was to render the subject matter of the original. Following Chateaubriand in choosing verse-to-prose method of translating a poem, they had not yet embraced the Romantic idea of translation, which Jurij Levin described as an attempt to recreate the aesthetic ideal that had inspired the original author.¹⁷ Somov’s is almost a word-to-word translation, while Glinka’s rendering, if we use terms of Puškin, should be called a «correctional» one.¹⁸

Unlike both his predecessors, Aleksandr Voejkov, a descendant of an ancient noble family, was a professional critic, publisher, journalist and translator. A friend of Vasilij Žukovskij and Aleksandr Turgenjev since their green years at the famous Noble Pension under Moscow University, he occupied a position of an ordinary professor of Russian literature at the University of Derpt (now Tartu, Estonia) and in 1819 became a member of the Russian Academy in St. Petersburg, where he stayed ever since 1820 playing an

was used in a word play in its older meaning, while in another letter dated 13 October 1840 it was used in its new meaning as a philosophical term (see ALEKSANDR I. TURGENEV, *Pisma Bulgakovim* [*Letters to the Bulgakovs*], Moskva, Socekiz, 1939, p. 168; p. 238). Another example found by Victor Vinogradov in I.I. Lažečnikov’s novel *The Ice House* (1835) demonstrates that in the mid-1830s *suščestvennost’* was already perceived as an obsolescence and associated with the language of bureaucracy.

16 ALEKSANDR S. PUŠKIN, *Kritika. Avtobiografija* [*Critics. Autobiography*], in *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij* [*The Complete Works*], 16 vols., Moskva-Leningrad, Izdatel’stvo AN SSSR, 1949, vol. XII, p. 179.

17 JURIJ D. LEVIN, *Russkie perevodčiki XIX v. i razvitie chudožestvennogo perevoda* [*Russian translators of the 19th c. and development of literary translation*], Leningrad, Nauka, 1985, p. II.

18 ALEKSANDR S. PUŠKIN, *O Mil’tone i Šatobrianovom perevode Poterjannogo Raja* [*On Milton and Chateaubriand’s Translation of the Paradise Lost*], in *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij* [*The Complete Works*], 10 vols., Leningrad, Nauka – Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1978, vol. VII, pp. 334-343, p. 335.

important part in the city's cultural life.¹⁹ It is no wonder his translation of *Darkness*, also in prose, far and away surpasses the previous amateurish attempts. His style is really elegant, and its beauty has not faded away until present time. That is so despite the evolution of the Russian language during the past two centuries. Still even that man of letters experienced certain difficulties translating English words beyond the scope of his vocabulary. For instance, Voejkov had a problem in finding the equivalent for Byron's neologism «darkling» (line 3), obviously difficult for all the Russian translators of the poem. Voejkov chose a rough variant of translation assimilating the idea of disappearance of light, «без лучей» [*bez lučej* – 'without rays', 'rayless']: «Звезды без лучей странствовали во мраке посреди вечного пространства» [*Zvezdy bez lučej stranstvali vo mrake posredi večnogo prostranstva* – 'stars without rays wandered in the darkness amidst the eternal space'].

Unfortunately, this deprives Byron's image of the stars that «Did wander darkling in the eternal space» of the effect of their gradual going dark and demonstrates that Byron and Voejkov had different understanding of the physical aspect of the process: in Byron's poem, stars, moon, all celestial bodies, turn cold and dark because the sun goes cold and dark and they become invisible in the darkness, stopping to reflect sunrays, the Sun being considered a universal source of light in the universe. In Voejkov's translation, the stars are independent sources of light, which is more correct from the point of physics but does not explain what made them start *darkling* and hence distorts the logics of the process described in Byron's vision.

In their translations, Somov, Glinka and Voejkov all chose to substitute the blank verse of the original poem by prose. This could be explained by the attitude towards the blank verse, characteristic of the first half of the 19th century: the unrhymed iambic pentameter was regarded as a means of immediate expression of a poet's thoughts, most closely approximate to prose.²⁰

The Russian public, however, was more habituated to rhymed verse translations of foreign poetry, so there is little wonder that the publications mentioned above were followed by several attempts to create a verse translation of *Darkness*. Aleksandr Rotčev, then a young poet who later would become a professional translator from German, English and French, the last Russian governor of Fort-Ross in American California, and explorer, created a versified paraphrase of *Darkness*, which he modestly defined as «an imitation of Byron». Rotčev felt poems should be translated in verse but he chose to substitute the blank verse with the most popular Russian meter, the rhymed iambic tetrameter, also having divided the poem into stanzas corresponding to the five conceptual blocks of the original. Within these stanzas, the lines are grouped in quatrains of arbitrary structures, without any signs of their measured alternation like in the Russian sonnet. The metric transformation of the poem turned out to be pernicious. It harmed the slow, gradual unfolding of the epic picture of catastrophe of the original as well as its meditative, somnambular intonation. Rotčev must have felt that himself, judging by his

19 ALEKSEJ A. SURKOV (ed.), *Kratkaja Literatunaja Ėnciklopedija* [*A Concise Literary Encyclopedia*], 9 vols., Moskva, Sovetskaja Ėnciklopedija, 1962, vol. I, clm. 1006.

20 HERBERT READ, *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry*, London, Faber and Faber, 1968, p. 29.

obvious striving to strengthen the emotional impact of his translation: his text is made up of 36 exclamatory sentences, some of them ending with dots. Another Rotčev's fault is the superfluity of poor, verbal inflection – «блуждали»–«пали» [*bluždali-pali*]; «обратилась»–«соединилась» [*obratilas'-soedinilas'*]; «дотлевали»–«разрывали» [*dotlevali-razryvali*] – or slant rhymes – «могла»–«земля» [*mogla-zemlja*]; «людей»–«змея» [*ljudej-zmej*]; «черепам»–«костям» [*čerepam-kostjam*]. The amateur poet did not escape some clumsy wordings, the most infelicitous of them being the attributive «зловней детей лесов» [*zlobnej detej lesov* – ‘more evil than the children of the forests’, (line 65 of the Russian text)] applied to the «dogs», which completely breaks an exaltation of the period with its ineptness bordering on comicality. In broad terms, Rotčev's translation of *Darkness* lacks aesthetic value, the publication being of interest only for the historians of translated literature.

The situation is completely different with the verse translation of the poem by Michail Vrončenko who had already developed a reputation due to the publications of the first Russian faithful translation of *Hamlet* and *Manfred*²¹ and become one of those 19th century Russians who made «the most significant contribution to shape the notion what translated poetry is».²²

As a translator of Byron, Vrončenko is unique among his Russian contemporaries in the consistency of his approach to the task: having appreciated the ideological affinity of *Manfred* and *Darkness* written almost at the same time, he also translated them into Russian almost simultaneously. His *Darkness* is very close to the original text both in subject matter and form, Vrončenko was the first to translate the poem into Russian blank verse. He tried to preserve other formal elements of the original, down to the position of punctuation marks: the only difference on that score being the exclamation mark instead of the comma at the end of the sixth line, which is justified by the specifics of the Russian intonation. The translator also succeeded in finding equivalent means to preserve the archaic flavour of Byron's text which was produced by a considerable amount of verbs with reduced endings – «chill'd» (line 9), «contain'd» (line 18), «extinguish'd» (line 21), «gnash'd» and «howl'd» (line 32), etc. – as well as by frequent use of the analytical form of a verb in Past Simple – «did wander» (line 3), «did live» (line 10), «did rest» (line 25), «did flutter» (line 33), etc. – which seems to be Byron's tribute paid to the epic poetry style traditions dating back to Spenser and Milton and highly suitable for a visionary poem with an elevated narrative. Analogous forms nonexistent in Russian, Vrončenko chose to use slavisms – «твердь» [*tverd'* – ‘expanse’ (line 5)], «длань» [*dlan'* – ‘hand’ or ‘palm’ (line 26)], «утробы» [*utroby* – ‘bellies’/‘bowels’ (line 44)], etc. – as a lexical means to highlight the epic qualities of the text. It is interest-

21 VALERIJ A. ERMOLENKO, *Žizn', dejatel'nost' i putešestvija M.P. Vrončenko* [*Life, work and travels of M.P. Vrončenko*], in *Žizn' i dejatel'nost' voennogo geodezista i poeta-perevodčika Michaila Pavloviča Vrončenko (1802-1855). Doklady Meždunarodnoj naučnoj konferencii* [*Life and work of Michail Pavlovič Vrončenko, military surveyor and translator of poetry (1802-1855). Proceedings of the International scientific conference*], Minsk, 20 February, 2002, ed. by V.A. ERMOLENKO and N.M. SARKISOVA, Minsk, Belorussia State University Press, 2003, pp. 5-17, p. 12.

22 LEVIN, *Russkie perevodčiki XIX v. i razvitie chudožestvennogo perevoda* [*Russian translators of the 19th c. and development of literary translation*], cit., p. 26.

ing to mention that in some occurrences words derived from Church Slavonic are also perceived as reduced forms of Modern Russian words – cfr. «хладная» (line 4) [*chladnaja*] and «холодная» [*cholodnaja*], ‘cold’; «грады» (line 13) [*grady*] and «города» [*goroda*], ‘cities’; «глад»/«глада» (lines 50; 55/59) [*glad/glada*] and «голод» [*golod*], ‘hunger’.

These were the five Russian translations of *Darkness* produced in the 1820s and preceding the one by Michail Lermontov.

2.1 MICHAİL LERMONTOV’S TRANSLATION OF *DARKNESS*

Lermontov has been one of the dominant names in the history of the Russian literature, and certainly none of the men of letters mentioned above, even Vrončenko, could come near him in their achievements. Lermontov’s poetic career started in 1828 and he was only going sixteen when he produced his translation of *Darkness*. However, from the very beginning it was not intended for publication and came out of print as a piece Lermontov’s juvenilia only in 1910.²³

The influence of Byron in general and his *Darkness* in particular on Lermontov’s work has been universally acknowledged and it is the affinity of their aesthetic preferences and community of key motifs of their works that invites attention. Lermontov’s early poems made the Russian readers regard him as another Byron though the young poet strongly objected to these praiseful words and even wrote an energetic poem *Net, ja ne Bajron, ja drugoj* (*No, I’m not Byron, I am another*, 1832) to highlight his individuality. According to his second cousin and life-long friend Akim Pavlovič Šan-Girej, Lermontov used to «mock Byron», but it was Byron who helped Lermontov discover the world of the English language and poetry. Lermontov’s first governor was a former prisoner of war, a French colonel named Jean Capet who settled in Russia after the defeat of Napoleon. In 1829, after the death of this French officer, Lermontov got another mentor, a Mr. Winson, who started teaching him English using famous works by Byron, Moore and Scott for educational purposes. After several months of studies Lermontov had no difficulty in understanding English though his English conversational skills remained much inferior to his fluent French and German.²⁴ Lermontov’s translation of *Darkness* was made only about a year after his lessons of English under Winson had begun. Even nowadays, when Lermontov is regarded as a Russian poet second only to Puškin, this work is traditionally mentioned only as a mere school exercise of a very young man still in the classroom.²⁵ That said, it is worth being examined more thoroughly.

That Lermontov was familiar with the works by British writers goes without saying but at the same time there are hints that he was also well read in their Russian translations, and it was Vrončenko, of all the translators, who influenced him most, and not only in his translation of *Darkness*. To prove the latter, let us first address to Lermontov’s

²³ MICHAİL JU. LERMONTOV, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij M. Ju. Lermontova* [*The complete works by M. Ju. Lermontov*], 5 vols., Sankt-Peterburg, Izd. Razrjada izjašč. slovesnosti Imp. Akad. Nauk, 1910, vol. II, pp. 422-423.

²⁴ AKIM P. ŠAN-GIREJ, *M. Ju. Lermontov*, in «Russkoe Obozrenie», VIII (1890), pp. 724-754, pp. 727-728.

²⁵ ANDREJ V. FEDOROV, *Lermontov i literatura ego vremeni* [*Lermontov and the literature of his time*], Leningrad, Chudožestvennaja literatura, 1967, p. 323.

poem *Zovi nadeždu snoviden'em* (*Call hope a dream*, 1830 or 1831), which was written just about the same time he translated *Darkness*.

The poem under consideration belongs to the so-called *Suškova cycle*, a set of eleven youthful love lyrics dedicated to his sister cousin's friend Ekaterina Suškova whom Michail had fallen in love with at the age of fifteen. It is generally known the poem was created under the marked influence of Vrončenko's translation of *Hamlet*: the monumental *Lermontov Encyclopedia* specifies the first stanza of the poem to be a paraphrase of the verses from Hamlet's letter to Ophelia (Act II, sc. ii) in Vrončenko's translation first published in 1828.²⁶ It is not exactly this way, however, as the first stanza of Lermontov's poem also renders the most significant phrase from the prosaic continuation of Hamlet's letter. The interlinear translation of the poem –

Call hope a dream,
Call fib the truth,
Do not have faith in compliments and assurances,
But, oh, have faith, do have faith in my love!

You cannot but have faith in such love,
My eyes can conceal nothing:
It is a sin for me to play the hypocrite with you,
You are too much an angel for that. –

shows only a few slight correlations with the lines from Shakespeare: the anaphoric «call» in the beginning of the poem reminds of the thrice repeated «You may wonder if...» in Hamlet's letter; the plea to «call fib the truth» is roughly the same as Hamlet's «You may wonder if the truth is a liar», while the line completing the first stanza, «But, oh, have faith, do have faith in my love!», with its double repetition, has a strong correlation with the beginning of the prosaic part of the letter, «I can't put my feelings into verse, but please believe I love you best, oh, best of all. Believe it».

Conversely, the first stanza of the poem contains a direct quotation from Vrončenko's translation of *Hamlet*: lines 2, «Неправду истинной зови» [*Nepravdu istinoj zovi* – 'Call fib the truth'], and 4, «Но верь, о, верь моей любви!» [*No ver', o, ver' moej ljubvi!* – 'But, oh, have faith, do have faith in my love!'], perfectly correspond to lines 3-4 from Vrončenko's text. Moreover, the second stanza of the poem encompasses another allusion to Vrončenko's translation of Hamlet's letter, now to its prosaic part, in which the prince of Denmark asks Ophelia to believe him: «[...] я люблю тебя более всего на свете, верь тому, существо совершеннейшее» [*ja ljublju tebjja bolee vsego na svete, ver' tomu, suščestvo soveršennejšee* – 'I love you above all, believe this, the most perfect creature' (line 5 of the letter)]. This is very close to Lermontov's «You cannot but have faith in such love», also in the fifth line, while Hamlet's attitude to Ophelia, according to Vrončenko, almost equal to his acceptance of her angelic nature, echoes in Lermontov's perception of his love as «too much an angel» in the final line of his poem. It should also be mentioned that Hamlet's confession, «I'm bad at poetry. I can't put my feelings

²⁶ ВИКТОР А. МАНУЈЛОВ (ed.), *Lermontovskaja ěnciklopedija* [*Lermontov encyclopedia*], Moskva, Sovetskaja ěnciklopedija, 1981, pp. 177-178.

into verse... » translated by Vrončenko as «мне чуждо искусство выражать мерным языком мои стенанья» [*mne čužno iskusstvo vyražat' mernym jazykom moi stenan'ja* – ‘the art to express my laments in measured words is alien to me’], might inspire Lermontov’s unwillingness to say something artificial or false to his lady. Thus the whole of the poem should be regarded as a variation on Vrončenko’s translation.

It is quite possible to assume the young poet also knew Vrončenko’s translation of *Darkness* and followed along with it for reference while rendering Byron’s poem. This could be attested by at least six tell-tale matches between the texts.

The first match concerns the translation of Byron’s line 10, «They did live by watchfires». Vrončenko rendered it as «зажглись огни повсюду» [*zažglis' ogni povsjudu* – ‘fires were lit everywhere’], which might seem quite natural an attempt to dissipate darkness. Lermontov’s variant is more precise, «люди жили при огнях» [*ljudi žili pri ognjach* – ‘people lived in the light of fires’]. The back translation conveys Byron’s general idea: after the Sun had turned cold people lit artificial lights. The word *fire*, being a part of the compound noun *watchfires* used in the original, however, has two Russian equivalents, «огонь» [*ogon'* – ‘flames’, ‘fire’, ‘light’] and «костёр» [*kostër* – ‘campfire’, ‘balefire’, ‘pyre’]. A *kostër*, then, is the best equivalent to a *watchfire*, and Vrončenko’s choice of *ogon'* would do if the word were preceded by an epithet «сторожевой» [*storoževoj* – ‘protective’, ‘watch’]. Thus, both translators picked up second to the most appropriate meaning of the word. By comparison, Glinka was the only one of the 1820s translators to choose *kostry*, Rotčev dropped the detail, Somov misrepresented the original line – «все жилища были сожжены для подания знаков» [*vse žilišča byli sožženy dlja podanija znakov* – ‘all lodgings were burnt to send signals’], while Voejkov, having caught the general meaning of the phrase, offered its loose translation, «Повсюду зажигали огни и толпились около сияющего пламени» [*Povsjudu zažigali ogni i tolpilis' okolo sijajuščego plameni* – ‘Fires were lit everywhere, and they crowded around the irradiant flames’]. Lermontov might make a self-opinionated choice of the Russian equivalent but we should keep this coincidence in mind.

The second thing matching is the description of volcanoes. All the Russian translators mentioned above had certain difficulties in rendering Byron’s lines 16-17, «Happy were those who dwelt within the eye / Of the volcanos, and their mountain-torch». Somov’s version of this phrase, «Счастливы те, кои жили близ грозных горнил огнедышащих!» [*Sčastlivy te, koi žili bliz groznych gornil ognedyšučich!* – ‘Happy were those who dwelt by the menacing fiery hearths!’], is less exact in pointing out the location of those happy places, «to dwell by» is not the same as the original «to dwell within the eye» which makes more sense if we try to understand the source of happiness of those who lived in areas lit by volcanoes but, perhaps, not too close to them. One can easily notice Somov had a problem with rendering *volcano*, the corresponding Russian term still remaining quite uncommon for the general public of the 1820s. Even the famous lexicographer Vladimir Dal’ defining the word in his *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language* (1863-1866, 1st publication) thought it appropriate to double «вулкан» [*vulkan*] with a descriptive synonym «огнедышащая, огнетная, огневая гора»²⁷ [*ognedyšaščaja, ognemetnaja, ognevaja gora* – ‘spitfire, flame-throwing,

27 VLADIMIR I. DAL’, *Tolkovyj slovar' živogo Velikoruskogo Jazyka* [*The explanatory dictionary of the living*

fiery mountain’]. Thus, Somov’s strategy could be explained either by his desire to use a more familiar expression or by his attempt to translate the English word as Latin (*volcano* is Latin for ‘fire’, ‘flame’). Glinka extended the original phrase to «Счастливыми называли немногих обитавших при грозных пламенниках, которыми дышали неугасимые Волканы» [*Sčastlivcami nazyvali nemnogich obitavšich pri groznych plamennikach, kotorymi dyšali neugasimye Vólkany* – ‘Those few, who dwelt by the menacing torches with which unquenchable Volcanos were breathing, were called lucky’]. Actually, the epithet «грозные» [*groznye*] is the extension *menaçantes* borrowed by Somov from A. Pichot’s French translation. In Voejkov’s text, Somov’s influence can be suspected by the way he used the epithet «огнедышущих» [*ognedyšuščich* – ‘breathing out fire’]: «Счастливы те, которые обитали близ жерла гор огнедышущих» [*Sčastlivy te, kotorye obitali bliz žerla gor ognedyšuščich* – ‘Happy were those who dwelt by the throats of the mountains breathing out fire’]. Vrončenko’s variant was not impeccably faithful to the original, too: «Щастливы были жившие вблизи / Природы горных факелов, вулканов» [*Sčastlivy byli živšie vblizi / Prirody gornich fakelov, volkanov* – ‘Happy were those who dwelt near / The Nature’s mountain torches, volcanoes’]. On the one hand, Vrončenko was true to Byron in locating places most suitable for survival; on the second hand, to him, Byron’s *mountain-torch* was a full synonym to a *volcano* though these are two different things in the original. Vrončenko’s phrase was almost repeated in Lermontov’s translation, «[...] счастливы были жившие противу вулканов, сих горных факелов» [*sčastlivy byli živšie protivu volkanov, sich gornich fakelov* – ‘happy were those who dwelt near volcanoes, those mountain torches’].

Thirdly, Lermontov, following Vrončenko, translated «unearthly» («The brows of men by the despairing light/ Wore an unearthly aspect...», lines 22-23) as «неземные» (*nezemnye*), i.e., heavenly, sublime, supernatural, not belonging to this world. As a comparison, Somov described those horrified people as having «беспокойные, исступлённые взоры» [*bespokojnye, isstuplënnye vzory* – ‘troubled, frantic looks’], Glinka evaded the difficult word marking the «выражение неописанное» [*vyraženie neopisannoe* – ‘undescribed expressions’] of their faces, both Voejkov and Rotčev also chose a descriptive way to convey the meaning of «unearthly», the former rendering it as «an unusual expression», the latter mentioning the wailsome, depressed miens of those peering at the darkening skies: «[...] с тоской, подняв чело, / Толпа на небо взор вперяла [...]» [*s toskoj, podnjav čelo, / Tolpa na nebo vzerjalo* – ‘yearningly, their fronts turned upwards, / The crowd were staring at the sky’].

The fourth match may seem a little less convincing; nevertheless it should not be ignored. Both Lermontov and Vrončenko chose to translate the *wildest brutes* (line 34) as «лютейшие звери» [*ljutejšie zveri* – ‘the most vicious beasts’], using a superlative form of the adjective that might be paralleled to the *viciousest* should such word exist in the English language. One can also find it in Glinka’s version, while Voejkov favoured the standard synthetic form of the epithet, «самые лютые» [*samyje ljutyje* – ‘the most vicious’], Rotčev omitted it and Somov preferred a more suitable phrasing, «кровожаднейшие звери» [*krovožadnejšie zveri* – ‘the most bloodthirsty beasts’].

great Russian language], 4 vols., Sankt-Peterburg, Tovariščestvo M.O. Wolf, 1903, vol. 1, p. 673.

Fifthly, we should pay attention to the similarity of Vrončenko's and Lermontov's translations of lines 55-56 in which Byron tells about the fate of the last two survivors in «an enormous city». Vrončenko again antedated Lermontov in rendering of «enormous» as «обширный» [*obširnyj*]. By comparison, Somov called the city «великий» [*velikij* – 'great both in size and importance'], Glinka simply named it «большой город» [*bol'soj gorod* – 'a big city'], Voejkov and Rotčev merely skipping the detail.

Finally, line 79 of the original, «The moon their mistress», was turned into «царица» [*carica* – 'czarina'] only in the translations of Vrončenko and Lermontov.

The coincidences listed above suggest that, translating *Darkness*, Lermontov was reviewing his work against Vrončenko's already published variant. The young poet must have taken up the translation of the poem both to practice his English language skills and to clarify the contents of the original text shaded in the earlier Russian translations. That said, he was able to discover the author's intention ignored by all his Russian predecessors and to show the ingress of the darkness as a lengthy process.

In this connection it is necessary to dwell upon the peculiarity of the translation of the word *darkness* into Russian. It could be rendered as either *t'ma* or *mrak*. Glinka, Voejkov and Rotčev entitled their translations *T'ma*, this variant also prevailing in numerous later translations of the poem, whereas Somov and Vrončenko chose to call their works *Mrak*. As it is well known, the title of the text always presents a kind of a judgement about it,²⁸ but from this standpoint both variants of the translation are equally justified.

However, the use of synonymous *mrak* and *t'ma* in a Russian translation of Byron's poem creates a potential for depicting the atmosphere of the catastrophe in progress which permeates the original poem where its description begins with the appearance of the «darkling» stars (line 3) and finishes with the complete vanishing of light, «Darkness» (line 81). Some of the early translators did not pay attention to that gradation. Thus, in Rotčev's version, all the events happen in the world already engulfed by darkness, the earth having been «тьмой окружена» [*t'moj okružena* – 'surrounded with darkness'] and grown «омраченной» [*omračennoj* – 'clouded, sunk in the dark'], i.e., *mrak* and *t'ma* act as full synonyms. The same can be observed in Glinka: «[...] и Мир, как усопший, погребен был во мраках, – и темной, как беззвездная полночь, была Вселенная» [*i Mir, kak usopšij, pogreben byl vo mrakach, – i temnoj, kak bezzvezdnaja polnoč', byla Vselennaja* – 'and the World, like a deceased, was buried in the obscurity, – and the Universe was as dark as at a starless midnight']. Both Somov and Voejkov pulled apart the meanings of *mrak* и *t'ma* making them denote different degrees of the darkness. Somov believed *mrak* preceded the onset of *t'ma*, while Voejkov made *t'ma* fall before the onset of *mrak*. The same effect is also present in Vrončenko's text where the universe first plunges into the darkness (in line 40, people devour their prey in the *mrak*) and then it grows impenetrable (line 82).

²⁸ ALEKSANDR M. PEŠKOVSKIJ, *Russkij sintaksis v naučnom osveščennii* [*The Russian Syntax in an Academic Light*], Moskva, Gosudarstvennoe učebno-pedagogičeskoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva prosvveščennija RSFSR, 1956, p. 178.

Lermontov's translation stands apart from all mentioned above. The first thing that makes it different from the previous variants is the title, *Mrak. T'ma*. Both words are equally organic for the poet, being among the thousand words most frequently used by him; according to the *Frequency dictionary of the language of M.Yu. Lermontov*, the group rank for *mrak* is 704-717 (67 references), the one for *t'ma* is a bit lower, 931-959 (50 references),²⁹ which perfectly mirrors the order of the synonyms in the title. The double heading, however, can be interpreted either as a sign of the poet's doubts as to the choice of the final variant or as a tribute to the two-way tradition of the original poem translation, which had already been manifested in the 1820s.

That said, in Lermontov's translation of *Darkness*, *t'ma* is a state that precedes *mrak*. *T'ma* falls on the earth when the sunlight goes off but men still have the opportunity to support their lives by artificial sources of light and heat (this period of the disaster corresponds to the dehumanization of the human race, the description of which includes words cognate to *t'ma*: «звезды темные» [*zvezdy temnye* – 'dark stars'] are wandering in the skies, people running wild devour their meals «в темноте» [*v temnote* – 'in the dark']. During that period, «все было мрачно» [*vse bylo mračno* – 'everything was darksome'] but it was only the prelude to the onset of the absolute darkness that enveloped the earth only with the extinction of the last of the fires and the death of the last men. And Lermontov – the only one among the early Russian translators of the poem – noticed the boundary between the phases of «darkling» and «blackening» (lines 3 and 5) of the world in the original text and was able to accurately convey Byron's intent in his translation.

Also Lermontov made an attempt to reproduce occasional alliterations occurring in the original blank verses, perhaps, to reinforce the epic character of the picture and allude to the British tradition of epic poetry coming down to Spenser. Lermontov failed to reproduce the original pattern in his translation, which was inevitable in a prose translation of the poem, but he attempted to simulate this artistic device in other positions: «Блестящее солнце потухло, и звезды / темные блуждали [...]» [*Blestjaščee solnce potuchlo, i zvezdy / temnye bluzhdali* – 'The dazzling sun grew extinguished and dark stars were wandering']; «люди забыли о своих страстях / в страхе и отчаянии [...]» [*ljudi zabyli o svoich strastjach / v strache i otčajanii* – 'men forgot their passions in fear and despair...']; «и поддерживали в погребальных кострах пламя, / и с безумным беспокойством / устремляли очи на печальное небо» [*i podderživali v pogrebal'nych kostrach plamja, / i s bezumnym bespokojstvom / ustremljali oči na pečal'noe nebo* – 'nursed the burial fires, and with a crazy concern fastened their eyes on the gloomy sky']; «и война, уснувшая на миг, с новой силой возобновилась; / пища покупалась кровью,» [*i vojna, usnuvšaja na mig, s novoj siloj vozobnovilas'; / pišča pokupalas' krov'ju*, – 'the war that had fallen asleep for a while started afresh; food was bought with blood']; «[...] с жалобным и протяжным воем / и с пронзительным лаем [...]» [*s žalobnym i protjažnym voem / i s pronzitel'ny'm laem* – 'with a plaintive and prolonged howling and shrill barking'], etc. It is easy to notice the occurrence of alliterating consonants is more frequent in the first half of the poem, and their disappearance towards the end of the poem produces the same effect of time dilation as in the original.

29 МАНУЈЛОВ, *Lermontovskaja enciklopedija* [*Lermontov encyclopedia*], cit., pp. 717-774.

3 CONCLUSION

The comparison of six early Russian translations of Byron's *Darkness* shows the superiority of Vrončenko's and Lermontov's texts over those texts created by other translators. Both addressed to the poem to create a corrective translation amending the mistakes in previous translations. Vrončenko excelled all the rest of the early Russian translators of *Darkness* in having preserved most formal elements of the original and faithfulness to its contents. Lermontov's prose translation of *Darkness*, although unrevised, and although containing some negligible speech and stylistic errors, still goes far beyond a mere school exercise in the English language. It stands out by reason of the young poet's deeper understanding of Byron's artistic intentions. Our analysis shows that Lermontov was much indebted to Vrončenko, a gifted but rather relegated translator of poetry.

While giving well-deserved priority to Vrončenko's and Lermontov's translations of *Darkness*, it should also be noted that the competitive character of the translational process provided for the emergence of better versions. Glinka's understanding the advantage of translation from the original rather than from an intermediary text helped him avoid aberrations that had appeared in the French translation. Voejkov, having been influenced by Somov's publication, attempted to create a more elegant Russian text. Rotčev and Vrončenko almost simultaneously decided on a poetic translation. Vrončenko succeeded where Rotčev failed completely, having produced a nice poem faithful to the original both in its content and form. His translation influenced Lermontov who proved to surpass his predecessors in understanding Byron's artistic intentions.

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