

Модест Мусоргский
Песни и пляски смерти

Modest Musorgsky
Songs and Dances of Death

Asterios Zervos

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1. Realism in Nineteenth century Russia

*The practice of the new government showed important differences from the methods of the preceding regime. There was a whiff of softness and tolerance characteristic of the new monarch (Alexander II). Petty press constraints were removed; universities breathed more freely; society showed a more vigorous spirit; it was said that the sovereign wanted truth, enlightenment, honesty, and a free voicing of views.*¹

Said the historian Sergey Platonov (1860-1933) about Russia after the death of Nicholas I (1796-1855). Indeed, Russia went under significant changes in the 1860s, initiated by its' defeat in the Crimean War in 1856. The monarchy started to lose its full power, and the serf-based state was weakening. In 1861, the emancipation of the serfs was issued, and it caused an influx of labor into the cities, to the factories, where even worse work and life conditions awaited them. In the midst of the social turmoil, Nikolay Chernyshevsky called upon an armed uprising of the serfs.² After Europe, Russia has too its' rapid transition to capitalism and was until now under the Tsar's and aristocracy's control, passed into the hands of self-made made millionaires, entrepreneurs and factory owners.³

Since Russia's europeanization by Peter the Great who built Petersburg, everything Russian in art and culture was viewed as inferior its' European and especially French equivalent, with the nobility preferring French culture and even thinking in French.⁴ Meanwhile, artists were seeking to express a distinctly Russian Identity. The inability to continue the strict censorship provided opportunities for the flourishing of all the arts. The Journal *Russian Messenger* (*Русский вестник*) published Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (*Преступление и наказание*, 1866) and *Brothers Karamazov* (*Братья Карамазовы* 1879-80), Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (*Война и миръ*, 1865-1869) and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (*Отцы и дети*, 1862).⁵

In painting, the *Peredvizhniki* (*передвижники*), a group of fourteen painters who called themselves *Wanderers* and decided to leave the Academy of Arts in Petersburg which had a European curriculum and started painting the aspects of Russian life.⁶ Their collective search for the art that is *useful* to society had foundations in writers like Nikolay Chernyshevsky's *Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality* (1853) which along with the novel *What is to be Done?* became so influential that by 1865 writers, painters and composers modeled their works after it.⁷ As a matter of fact, the influence reached Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) who published a pamphlet under the same name in 1902 and through him the whole history of the twentieth century.

A significant part of Russia's art flourishing can be traced back to a single estate, the Abramtsevo (Абра́мцево) located outside Moscow. Its' owners in the nineteenth century were Sergey Aksakov (1791-1859) and Savva Mamontov (1841 – 1918).

¹ Swan. 1973. 73 Quoted from Platonov. *Istoriya Rossiya*. 1917: 701

² Абызова. 1985. 37, He was arrested the next year.

³ Gray, 1986: 9.

⁴ Gray, *Ibid*: 10

⁵ Other writers of the same period are Goncharov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Pisemsky, Ostrovsky and Leskov

⁶ Swan. 1973. 73

⁷ Moser, 1999: 248

Mamontov was a railway merchant who surrounded himself with a circle of artists in his estate. He also founded the first Russian private opera, whose repertoire featured works by Russian composers.⁸ Apart from Mamontov, the *Peredvizhniki* had support Pavel Tretyakov (1832-1898) who persistently kept buying their paintings, adding them up to what would become Russia's most important art gallery named after him.⁹

Music was directed too under the same quest for expression, with its composers aiming to compose the distinctively Russian music, music based on Russia's language and tradition. In 1862 the first conservatory offering teaching of the West's music was founded in Petersburg, and in 1864 in Moscow. In the same decade, the *Balakirev Circle* was formed, called the *mighty five* (Могучая кучка) which was a group of five composers (Balakirev, Musorgsky, Cui, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov) striving to express their nation in musical terms, with Mily Balakirev (Милий Балакирев, 1835-1910) assuming the role of mentor to the other four, since he was the first to become a self-taught composer.¹⁰ The *five* too had a millionaire entrepreneur supporting them, Mitrofan Belyayev (1836-1904) a timber merchant who also formed a second musical circle that consisted of Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936) and Anatoly Lyadov (1855-1914) among its principal members.

The realist adventure in literature lasted till early to mid-1880s, a period where many of writers died and Chernyshevsky's influence had run its lifecycle. Music and painting had at least an extra decade, with only Musorgsky and Vasily Perov dying early, in 1881 and 1882 respectively. The cycle of Tsar Alexander's II reign closed with political turmoil prompted by his assassination in 1881.

2. Musorgsky's technique,

Education in music composition was almost absent in Russia, which made traveling abroad to study as the only option. There was not an adequate supply of books and teachers, as Russia has just last century begun its westernization and just this century started to take part in the development of western music. In 1862 the first conservatory offering teaching of the West's music was founded in Petersburg, and in 1864 in Moscow. Musorgsky not only lacked access to western musical education, but he also rejected it. His attitude resembled that of Peter the Great who repeatedly said, "We need Europe for a few decades, then we must show it our bottom".¹¹

But how does one compose after rejecting the western tools of the job? And what led him to such a decision? To understand this, it is important to examine Russia's trends in arts after the mid nineteenth century. After examining the context of mid nineteenth century Russia, it seems that Musorgsky's approach to composition could not be other than an idiomatic, innovative and intuitive one, like his contemporary Russian composers.¹² He went straight to the Russian spoken language to develop his musical one.¹³ In his vocal compositions, the musical setting resembles that of the spoken Russian language, following the language's inherent rhythm and intonation in the

⁸ Gray, Ibid: 11

⁹ Gray, Ibid: 11.

¹⁰ Calvocoressi. 1956: 23

¹¹ Solomon. 1995: 10

¹² Abraham. 1980: 262

¹³ Taruskin. 2005 *Music in the 19th Century*: 618

spoken word and the folk-song. Tempo, measures, intervals are all manipulated to reflect the rhythm of the Russian language. He called this process “rationally justified melody”.¹⁴ In a letter to Rimsky-Korsakov he mentions

*Whatever speech I hear, whoever is speaking, my brain is already churning out the musical embodiment of such speech.*¹⁵

He went as far as he could to convey a realist perspective in his compositions. The decision to follow this approach was initiated by the rejection of the western composition tools and was influenced by his readings of Darwin, the author of *The Origin of Species* and Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828-89).

The first purpose of art is to reproduce nature and life, and this applies to all works of art without exception.

and

*He [the artist] will, in his works, consciously or unconsciously strive to pronounce a living judgment on the phenomena that interest him (and interest his contemporaries, for a thinking man cannot think about insignificant problems that interest nobody but himself).*¹⁶

says Chernyshevsky. The effect of his writings is evident in Musorgsky’s correspondence. In a letter from 1872 to Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906) he writes:

The artistic depiction of beauty alone, that is, in its material sense, is sheer childishness—art in its infancy. The finest traits in man’s nature and in the mass of humanity, tirelessly digging through these little-known regions and conquering them—that is the true mission of the artist. “Towards new shores!”—fearlessly through storms, and shallows and treacherous rocks, “towards new shores!”¹⁷

3. Songs and Dances of Death

The abolition of serfdom in 1861 was an economic disaster for property owners without any diversification in their sources of income. Musorgsky had grown up particularly close to the serfs since his childhood in his family’s Pskov estate near the village of Karevo.¹⁸ He must have been very approving of that change in spite of the fact that his income was significantly affected since 1861, and gradually became insufficient to cover rent for a private apartment.¹⁹ In 1872, he formed a close relationship with the poet Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov, (Арсéний Голéнийщев-Кутúзов 1848-1910) and they shared an apartment in Petersburg, from 1874 until the poet’s marriage in 1875.²⁰ The roommates worked together and their result was parts of the cycle *Sunless* (*Без*

¹⁴ Maes, Francis. (trn. Pomerans, Arnodl. Pomerans, Erica.). 2001: 90

¹⁵ Taruskin, 1993: 80.

¹⁶ Chernyshevsky. 1853: *The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality*

[<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/chernyshevsky/1853/aesthetics-reality.htm>]

¹⁷ Lenda. Bertesson. Ibid: 198, Letter 93

¹⁸ Lenda. Bertesson. 1947: 1

¹⁹ Calvocoressi. 1956: 43

²⁰ Maes, Francis. (trn. Pomerans, Arnodl. Pomerans, Erica.). 2001: 89

солнца, 1874) and the *Songs and Dances of Death* (*Песни и пляски смерти* 1875-77).²¹

The *Songs and Dances of Death* is a collection inspired by the *Danse Macabre*, a medieval theme born out of the horrific plague epidemics of medieval Europe, and it was initially envisioned as a musical equivalent to the theme of the *Totentanz* like the woodcuts of Hans Holbein the Younger who made thirty nine of them. Its topic is a fatal dance between Death and characters from all social classes, ages and backgrounds, from peasants to autocrats, which can be perceived as terrifying, cathartic or redeeming, depending on someone's religious background.

It is important to describe death's context in the past centuries in order to understand the *Totentanz's* origination. [In Schubert's lied *Death and the maiden*, D. 531 death appears as a *boneman* (*Knochenmann*) and reassures the maiden that he will do no harm and that all she has to do is rest gently in his hands. In another lied of his, *To Death*, D. 518, death carries a *scythe* (*sense*) and is implored to spare all types of people.]

Premature death was a frequent tragedy in the early nineteenth century Europe and it was a common part of public life.²² The chronic overwork, combined with poor sanitation, poor eating and the overcrowding in the expanding industrialized cities, acted as a catalyst for the spreading of bacilli.²³ A new kind of epidemics were a side effect of early capitalism. For every two births, only one lead to an adult. Even kids made games that familiarized them with the probability of their early death.

Grandmother, Grandfather
Tell me the Truth
How many years am I
Going to live
*One, Two, Three, Four ...*²⁴

Cholera, Tuberculosis and syphilis were among the primary killers in both Europe and Russia. The sicknesses were so common that people of that time theorized about them, for example that they are related to high intelligence, since many artists suffered from it. Chopin, Schubert and Paganini had either one or both tuberculosis and syphilis. Schumann's rapid mental decline might have been related to neurosyphilis.²⁵

The Russian version of the lied, German art song, is called *romance* (романс) and it was developed in the nineteenth century. It combined European influences with elements of Russian folksong.²⁶ Concerning the embarkation *towards new shores*, as Musorgsky called it, in this collection he takes a path that was untraveled by the European tradition as far as tonality and the use of poetry is concerned.

²¹ *Musorgsky, Modest Petrovich* in *The new Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*

²² Nikiforuk. Ibid. 141

²³ Nikiforuk. 1991: 128-129

²⁴ Nikiforuk. Ibid. 141

²⁵ Nikiforuk. Ibid. 126-127

²⁶ Platinga: 1984: 364

In Russian the word for death is *Смерть* which by the -ь ending indicates a feminine. In Europe most of the languages descended from Latin have a feminine death (*La morte, La Muerte*) and in German it is *Der Tod* which is a masculine. In the masculine version of death, the most prevalent representation is that of a skeleton, sometimes clothed in black or holding a scythe. An early name of the *Songs and Dance of Death* is *Danses Macabres* and *She*, which is how it was referred to in Musorgksy's correspondence.²⁷ It was not published during the composer's lifetime. A list of numerous subjects was envisioned in the beginning but only four remain named *Lullaby, Serenade, Trepak* and *Field Commander*.²⁸

Table 1: Initial envision of the work.²⁹

| | Русский | English | Final work |
|----|------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Богач | The Rich Man | |
| 2 | Пролетарий | The Proletarian | |
| 3 | Знатный господин | The Grand Gentleman | |
| 4 | Сановник | The Dignitary | |
| 5 | Царь | The Tsar | |
| 6 | Молодая Девушка | The Young Girl | Serenade |
| 7 | Крестьянин | The Peasant (Countryman) | Trepak |
| 8 | Ребенок | The Child | Lullaby[?] |
| 9 | Женщина Торговец | The Merchant | |
| 10 | Священник | The Priest | |
| 11 | Поэт | The Poet | |
| 12 | Монах | The Monk | Possibly Lost |

The collection is both realistic in its representation of the omnipotence death, but also fantastic in the way death is represented. The poetry is a mixture of fantastic storytelling and drama with each poem representing a different situation in which death appears as a character to do her unavoidable job.

Table 2: Songs and Dances of Death.³⁰

| Русский | English | Composition | Dedication |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Колыбельная</i> | Lullaby | April 1875 | Anna Vorobyova-Petrova. |
| <i>Серенада</i> | Serenade | May 1875 | Ludmila Glinka-Shestakova |
| <i>Трепак</i> | Trepak (Cossack Dance) | February 1875 | Osip Afanasyevich Petrov |
| <i>Полководец</i> | Field Commander (Field Marshal) | June 1877 | Arseni Golenishchev-Kutuzov |

The first three pieces were composed during the cohabitation with Count Golenishchev-Kutuzov in 1875 and the fourth was finished two years later at the town of Tsarskoe-Selo (Цáрское Селó), just outside of Petersburg. In each of the poems, the death of a character is described, and each time Death appears personified as different character and sings. In the Lullaby she comes to take a mother's baby, which is dying. In the

²⁷ Calvocoressi. Ibid: 5

²⁸ Абызова. Ibid. 115, also Lenda. Bertesson. 1947: 297

²⁹ It should be noted that Vladimir Stasov, in his correspondence from 1876 mentions that he had heard that Musorgsky begun working one the *Monk* and *Anika the Warrior and Death* but their implementation doesn't survive.

³⁰ Lenda. Bertesson. 1947: 431

Serenade, she appears as a knight serenading a girl. In the *Trepak*, death comes to bury a drunk peasant who is lost in a snow-covered forest. In the last song, death appears as triumphant in the battlefield, commanding the fallen soldiers.³¹

Lullaby

The poem is structured as a dialogue between Death and the mother with an introduction setting the scene. The mother watches over her sick baby, the whole night she has been helplessly rocking the cradle, and the sun is now rising. Suddenly someone knocks on the door and enters the room. It is Death. The mother is worried, but Death reassures her to not be frightened, all She wants to do is take her turn in tending to the baby. The mother reacts, telling Death to be quiet, lest the disturbance will agitate the child. The argument continues, Death wants to sing a lullaby to lull the baby to sleep; the mother resists, but eventually yields. Finally, the baby falls asleep in Death’s hands.

The alternating (cross) rhyme in quatrains, is evident in the lines’ endings.

*Стонет ребёнок... Свеча, нагорая,
Тускло мерцает кругом.
Целую ночь колыбельку качая,
Мать не забылася сном.*³²

This schema is maintained through almost all of the lines of the four poems, with *Trepak* and *Field Commander* having rhyming couplets additionally. It plays little part in the music, since it is through composed and not strophic and the music follows mainly the narrative of the poem. but it is nevertheless interesting how Musorgsky treats it.

Table 3: Lullaby

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Introduction | 1 | Lento Doloroso |
| Death | 22 | Lento Funesto |
| Mother | 33 | Agitato Pathetico |
| Death | 36 [lullaby] | Lento Funesto |
| Mother | 38 | Agitato |
| Death | 41 [lullaby] | Tranquilo |
| Mother | 43 | Agitato |
| Death | 46 [lullaby] | Tranquilo |
| Mother | 48 | Agitato |
| Death | 51 [lullaby] | Lento Tranquilo |

The piece enters with *Lento doloroso* (*Slow and Painfully*). What follows is an alteration of *Tranquilo* and *Agitato*, which resembles Death’s tranquility and the mother’s agitation. After Death’s entrance, each time She sings She concludes with the lullaby *baiushky baiu baiu* (*Баюшки-баю-баю*).

Ex. 1: The repeated *baiushky baiu baiu*



³¹ Maes. (trn. Pomerans, Arnold. Pomerans, Erica.). 2001: 91

³² See Translations

Serenade

Rarely did Musorgsky compose based on poems about romantic love. the theme of the serenade is the popular in Europe theme of dying in the context of love, with examples in Schubert's — Claudius' lied *Death and the maiden*, D. 531 and Schumann's — Chamisso's *Frauenliebe und Leben*, Op.42 a lieder cycle in which a woman's marriage is documented throughout the different stages of her life until her husband death from the perspective of her romantic love.

The poem consists of a third person descriptive setting of the scene and a first-person serenade sung by Death, with the music being analogous the poem's structure. A sick young maiden sits alone in her bedroom. Under her window a figure is waiting, it is Death personified as a knight singing a serenade. She sings to her that she will be her knight and will set her free of her suffering. She flatters her with gentle compliments and seduces her, convincing her to fall into her hands and take her away.

| | | |
|-------------|----|-----------------|
| Description | 1 | |
| Serenade | 44 | L'istesso tempo |
| | 92 | A tempo |

Ex. 2: Death's Serenade after m. 44

| | | |
|--------|---|---|
| Stanza | A | „В мраке неволи суровой и тесной Молодость вянет твоя; |
| | B | Рыцарь неведомый, силой чудесной Освобожу я тебя. |
| S | A | Встань, посмотри на себя: красотой |
| | B | Лик твой прозрачный блестит, Щёки румяны, волнистой косою Стан твой, как тучей обвит. |
| S | C | Пристальных глаз голубое сиянье, Ярче небес и огня; Зноем полуденным веет дыханье... Ты обольстила меня. |
| S | A | Слух твой пленился моей серенадой, Рыцаря шопот твой звал, |
| | B | Рыцарь пришёл за последней наградой: Час упоенья настал. |
| S | C | Нежен твой стан, упоителен трепет... О, задушу я тебя В крепких объятьях: любовный мой лепет Слушай!... молчи!... Ты моя!'' |

Trepak

The trepak is a Russian folk dance of Cossack origin in 2/4 time. It is performed by men who kick the legs from a squatting position.³³ As a special effect it's tempo might accelerate and decelerate.

In the poem, a stormy night is depicted in which darkness prevails. But it's not devoid of presence. A peasant is drunk and exhausted amidst the woods. Death has approached him to dance a trepak with him. She whispers in his ear with irony about his unfortunate situation and invites him to lie down so she can cover him with snow to heat him up. She dances him to death, and when he finally falls, She whispers a summer image into his ear.

*"O, poor little peasant, wretched old man,
You got drunk, staggered along the road,
And the blizzard-witch rose up, played wildly,
From the field into the deep forest it drove you by chance.*

The song originally starts with a schema of parallel fifths. Rimsky-Korsakov, who took on the task of revising and completing Musorgsky's works after his death, made changes filling in the composers perceived lack of skill – meaning trying to understand what he intended write but lacked the technical skill to do so. However, some changes aim for a reconciliation with the westerner's listening acclimatization.³⁴ This was indeed done for this work. In his later edition Rimsky-Korsakov altered the start in order to make it more conventional but sacrificed the beginning's character.³⁵ Concerning the latter, contemporary composers assume the role of both Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov by composing instinctively, making mistakes and then refusing to edit them, for they may harm their own originality.

Ex. 3: Trepak: Musorgsky's (top) vs Rimsky-Korsakov's (bottom) Start

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of the 'Trepak' piece. It consists of two systems of music. The top system is the vocal line, written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are in Russian and German. The Russian lyrics are: 'Лес, да по-ля-ны, без-лю-дье кру-гом;', and the German lyrics are: 'Wald, kei-ne Pfa-de, kein Haus in der Näh.'. The bottom system is the piano accompaniment, written in two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat. The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Lento assai. Tranquillo.'. The piano part features parallel fifths in the right hand and a more complex accompaniment in the left hand, including a 'pp' (pianissimo) marking.

³³ *Trepak* in *The new Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*

³⁴ Platinga. 1984: 375.

³⁵ Calvocoressi, Ibid: 282

Tout est si - len - ce; les bois sont dé - serls,
 Wald und Ge - fil - de, Kein Mensch weit und breit;
 Лѣсь, да по - ля - ны, без - людь е кру - томъ;

After Death is certain that the peasant will die, the setting changes from a trepak to a lullaby.

The dance shows influence of Lizst’s *Totentanz* (*Dance of Death*) published two decades earlier, which features the Gregorian chant *Dies Irae* (*Day of wrath*) in theme and variations form.³⁶ The theme and the first variation have similar motives with the trepak, and the opening melody is similar to the *Dies Irae*

Ex. 4 Lizst: *Totentanz*: Var 1

He composes the dance’s start while alluding to Lizst’s *Totentanz*, the *Dies Irae* and the Russian spoken language at the same time while maintaining musical integrity.

Table 4: Trepak's structure

| | | | Stanza |
|-------|---------------|------|--------|
| | Scene Setting | A—C3 | 1 |
| | Trepak | B | 2 |
| Death | Tr | C | 3 |
| | | C2 | 4 |
| | | E—C2 | 5 |
| | | C | 6 |
| | Lullaby | E | 7 |

The dance starts and ends with similar material C, while C2 and C3 are periods derived from C. The C3 acts as a preparation for the main material, and the C2 as a variation

³⁶ Abraham, Gerald.[ed] 1990: 721

Ex. 5: Trepak Start of the Trepak

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Ex. 5: Trepak Start of the Trepak'. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in G major, 2/4 time, with lyrics: 'so auch ist's! Mü - den Schritts wankt ein'. The middle staff is a piano accompaniment in G major, 2/4 time, with a piano (p) dynamic marking. The bottom staff is a bass line in G major, 2/4 time, with a pianissimo (pp) dynamic marking. The music features a characteristic trepak rhythm of eighth notes.

The dance starts at the second stanza and ends before the last. A pause separates the stanzas and each stanza has its own characteristic setting. In the last stanza a small motive from the trepak is repeated, indicating the peasant's inability to dance.

Field Commander

The poem by Kutuzov is titled *The Triumph of Death* (*Торжество Смерти*) and was influenced by Liszt's *Totentanz* and the synonymous fresco by Buonamico Buffalmacco from 1355. *The Triumph of Death* is a recurring theme in European art centered on the concept of death's omnipresence.

In the poem, the process a battle with troops, horses and cannons is described in three scenes. In the first scene the action in the battlefield is described, in the second the night falls, and in the third Death's arrival. Death comes on a skeleton horse, light under to moonlight, and runs across the fallen of the battlefield until she reaches the top of the hill. She stops, smiles and shouts that she was won over everyone, all the fallen have submitted before her. She commands the fallen to stand up and march and tells them that She will bury their bones, and after they are long gone and forgotten, She will be the only one visiting their graves from time to time making sure they never arise from the ground. Death is the ultimate winner of every battle. The Death's depiction in this occurrence has a notable resemblance to three of the four horsemen of the apocalypse — Death, Conquest and War.

In 1877 a war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire took place which had about thirty thousand fallen from each side in the battles. It's possible that the choice of the *Field Commander* was influenced by that war.

*"The battle is over! I have conquered all!
Before me you have all bowed low, fighters!
Life set you at odds; I answered the call—
Now rise and stand review, all you dead knights!
[...]
With a heavy dance, the damp earth pressing,
I shall stamp it down, so the grave's dark blessing—
So your bones can never that tomb forsake,
That from this soil you may never awake!"*

Table 5: Musical setting of each stanza

| | | Music |
|--|----------------------------|---|
| | Scene 1 | A Грохочет битва, блещут брони, Орудья жадные ревут, Бегут полки, несутся кони И реки красные текут. |
| | | B Пылает полдень, люди бьются; Склонилось солнце, бой сильней; Закат бледнеет, но дерутся Враги все яростней и злей. |
| | Scene 2 | C И пала ночь на поле брани. Дружины в мраке разошлись... Всё стихло, и в ночном тумане Стенанья к небу поднялись. |
| | Scene 3 | D Тогда, озарена луною, На боевом своём коне, Костей сверкая белизною, Явилась смерть; и в тишине, |
| | | Var 3 Внимая вопли и молитвы, Довольства гордого полна, Как полководец место битвы Кругом объехала она. На холм поднявшись, оглянулась, Остановилась, улыбнулась... И над равниной боевой Раздался голос роковой: |
| | <i>With Smoke of Fires</i> | Theme „Кончена битва! я всех победила! Все предо мной вы смирились, бойцы! Жизнь вас поссорила, я помирила! Дружно вставайте на смотр, мертвецы! |
| | | Theme Маршем торжественным мимо пройдите, Войско моё я хочу сосчитать; В землю потом свои кости сложите, Сладко от жизни в земле отдыхать! |
| | | Var 1 Годы незримо пройдут за годами, В людях исчезнет и память о вас. Я не забуду и громко над вами Пир буду править в полуночный час! |
| | | Var 2 Пляской тяжёлою землю сырую Я притопчу, чтобы сень гробовую Кости покинуть вовек не могли, Чтоб никогда вам не встать из земли!`` |

The poem has two parts, the first being a series of three scenes and the second being Death's song. In the first scene the action in the battlefield is described, in the second the night falls, and in the third Death's arrival. Death sings the theme *With Smoke of Fires Z (dymem pożarów)*, a Polish song which served like a national anthem appears in stanza with the musical setting E, and with three variations. As a matter of fact, a variation E4 is heard in the fifth stanza before the main theme E.

[This is an especially demanding work to perform especially for non-Russian speakers. Recommended performances are by Boris Christoff, Feodor Chaliapin Yeygeni Nesterenko and Dmitry Hvorostovsky.]

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Translations

| | Колыбельная | Lullaby |
|--------|--|---|
| | Стонет ребёнок... Свеча, нагорая, Тускло мерцает кругом. Целую ночь колыбельку качая, Мать не забылася сном. | The child is moaning... The candle, burning low, Dimly flickers around. All night long the cradle rocking, The mother has not slept. |
| | Раным-ранёхонько в дверь осторожно Смерть сердобольная стук! | Early, very early, at the door gently Death, cautiously, knocked! |
| Death | Вздрыгнула мать, оглянулась тревожно... „Полно пугаться, мой друг! | The mother started, looked around anxiously... "Stop being frightened, my friend! |
| | Бледное утро уж смотрит в окошко... Плача, тоскуя, любля, Ты утомилась, вздремни-ка немножко, Я посижу за тебя. | Pale morning is already looking through the window... Crying, yearning, loving, You are exhausted, doze a little, I'll sit for you. |
| | Угмонить ты дитя не сумела. Слаще тебя я спою.`` - | You couldn't quiet the child. I'll sing sweeter than you." — |
| Mother | „Тише! ребёнок мой мечется, бьётся, Душу терзая мою!`` | "Hush! My child is tossing, struggling, Tormenting my soul!" |
| Death | „Ну, да со мною он скоро уймётся. Баюшки, баю, баю.`` - | "Well, with me he will soon be quiet. Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye." — |
| Mother | „Щёчки бледнеют, слабеет дыханье... Да замолчи-же, молю!`` - | "His cheeks are paling, his breath is weakening... Be quiet, I beg you!" — |
| Death | „Доброе знаменье, стихнет страданье, Баюшки, баю, баю.`` | "A good sign, the suffering will cease, Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye." — |
| Mother | „Прочь ты, проклятая! Лаской своею сгубишь ты радость мою!`` | "Away with you, accursed one! With your kindness you will ruin my joy!" |
| Death | „Нет, мирный сон я младенцу навею. Баюшки, баю, баю.`` - | "No, I will bring peaceful sleep to the child. Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye." — |
| Mother | „Сжался, пожди допевать хоть мгновенье, Страшную песню твою!`` | "Have mercy, wait to finish even for a moment, Your terrible song!" |
| Death | „ Видишь, уснул он под тихое пенье. Баюшки, баю, баю.`` | "See, he has fallen asleep under my quiet singing. Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye." |

Серенада

Нега волшебная, ночь голубая,
Трепетный сумрак весны.
Внемлет, поникнув головкой, больная
Шопот ночной тишины.

Сон не смыкает блестящие очи,
Жизнь к наслажденью зовёт,
А под окошком в молчаньи полночи
Смерть серенаду поёт:

Death „В мраке неволи суровой и тесной
Молодость вянет твоя;
Рыцарь неведомый, силой чудесной
Освобожу я тебя.

Встань, посмотри на себя: красотой
Лик твой прозрачный блестит,
Щёки румяны, волнистой косою
Стан твой, как тучей обвит.

Пристальных глаз голубое сиянье,
Ярче небес и огня;
Зноем полуденным веет дыханье...
Ты обольстила меня.

Слух твой пленился моей серенадой,
Рыцаря шопот твой звал,
Рыцарь пришёл за последней наградой:
Час упоенья настал.

Нежен твой стан, упоителен трепет...
О, задушу я тебя
В крепких объятьях: любовный мой лепет
Слушай!... молчи!... Ты моя!``

Serenade

Magical bliss, night blue and tender,
Trembling twilight of spring.
The sick maiden, head bowed, listens
To the whisper of the night's silence.

Sleep does not close her brilliant eyes,
Life to pleasure calls,
And beneath the window in midnight's silence,
Death sings a serenade:

"In the gloom of harsh and narrow captivity,
Your youth fades;
An unknown knight, with wondrous power,
I will set you free.

Rise, look at yourself: with beauty,
Your translucent face glows,
Your cheeks are rosy,
Your figure is wrapped like a cloud.

The blue radiance of your unwavering eyes,
Brighter than heavens and fire;
Your breath flows like noonday heat...
You have seduced me.

Your ears are enchanted by my serenade,
Your whisper summoned the knight,
The knight has come for the final reward:
The hour of rapture has arrived

Your form is tender, your tremor intoxicating...
Oh, I will smother you
In strong embraces: my loving babbling
Listen!... be silent!... You are mine!"

Трепак

Лес да поляны, безлюдье кругом.
Вьюга и плачет и стонет,
Чуется, будто во мраке ночном,
Злая, кого-то хоронит;

Глядь, так и есть! В темноте мужика
Смерть обнимает, ласкает,
С пьяненьким пляшет вдвоём трепака,
На ухо песнь напевает:

D Ой, мужичок, старичок убогой,
Пьян напился, поплёлся дорогой,
А мятель-то, ведьма, поднялась, выиграла.
С поля в лес дремучий невзначай загнала.

Горем, тоской да нуждой томимый,
Ляг, прикорни, да усни, родимый!
Я тебя, голубчик мой, снежком согрею,
Вкруг тебя великую игру затею.

Взбей-ка постель, ты мятель-лебёдка!
Гей, начинай, запевай погодка!
Сказку, да такую, чтоб всю ночь тянулась,
Чтоб пьянчуге крепко под неё заснулось!

Ой, вы леса, небеса, да тучи,
Темь, ветерок, да снежок летучий!
Свейтесь пеленою, снежной, пуховою;
Ею, как младенца, старичка прикрою...

Спи, мой дружок, мужичок счастливый,
Лето пришло, расцвело!
Над нивой солнышко смеётся да серпы глядят,
Песенка несётся, голубки летают...

Trepak

Forest and clearings, desolation around.
The blizzard both weeps and moans,
It feels, in the darkness of night,
The Evil one is burying someone;

Look, and it's true! In the darkness, a peasant
Death embraces, caresses,
With the drunken one she dances a trepak,
Into his ear she sings a song:

"O, poor little peasant, wretched old man,
You got drunk, staggered along the road,
And the blizzard-witch rose up, played wildly,
From the field into the deep forest it drove you by chance.

By grief, longing, and need tormented,
Lie down, curl up, and sleep, dear one!
I will warm you, my darling, with snow,
Around you I will stir up a mighty game.

Beat down a bed, you blizzard-swan!
Hey, begin, sing out, stormy weather!
A fairy tale, such a one that lasts all night long,
So that the drunkard may sleep soundly beneath it!

O forests, heavens, and clouds,
Darkness, little wind, and flying snow!
Weave yourselves into a shroud, snowy and downy;
With it, like a child, I will cover the old man...

Sleep, my friend, happy little peasant,
Summer has come, it has blossomed!
Over the fields the sun laughs and the sickles gleam,
A little song drifts, doves are flying..."

Полководец

Грохочет битва, блещут брони,
Орудья жадные ревут,
Бегут полки, несутся кони
И реки красные текут.

Пылает полдень, люди бьются;
Склонилось солнце, бой сильней;
Закат бледнеет, но дерутся
Враги все яростней и злей.

И пала ночь на поле брани.
Дружины в мраке разошлись...
Всё стихло, и в ночном тумане
Стенанья к небу поднялись.

Тогда, озарена луною,
На боевом своём коне,
Костей сверкая белизною,
Явилась смерть; и в тишине,

Внимая вопли и молитвы,
Довольства гордого полна,
Как полководец место битвы
Кругом объехала она.

На холм поднявшись, оглянулась,
Остановилась, улыбнулась...
И над равниной боевой
Раздался голос роковой:

D „Кончена битва! я всех победила!
Все предо мной вы смирились, бойцы!
Жизнь вас поссорила, я помирила!
Дружно вставайте на смотр, мертвецы!

Маршем торжественным мимо пройдите,
Войско моё я хочу сосчитать;
В землю потом свои кости сложите,
Сладко от жизни в земле отдыхать!

Годы незримо пройдут за годами,
В людях исчезнет и память о вас.
Я не забуду и громко над вами
Пир буду править в полуночный час!

Пляской тяжёлою землю сырую
Я притопчу, чтобы сень гробовую
Кости покинуть вовек не могли,
Чтоб никогда вам не встать из земли!''

Field Commander

Thunder roars, armor glimmers,
Greedy cannons roar,
Regiments rush, horses gallop,
And red rivers flood the ground.

The noonday blazes, men are fighting;
The sun sinks lower, fiercer grows the fray;
The sunset pales, yet they keep striking—
The enemies rage more furious each way.

And night descended on the field of battle.
The hosts dispersed into the dark...
All fell silent, and in the night's cold rattle,
Groans rose to heaven like a stark remark.

Then, bathed in moonlight's silver light,
Upon her war horse, pale and dread,
With bones like marble gleaming white and unbroken,
Death appeared; and in silence she spread—

Heeding the wails and the prayers ascending,
Full of a proud and grim delight,
Like a commander surveying the ending,
She rode a circle around the site.

She climbed a hill, gazed all around her,
Stopped, and a smile her features crowned...
And over the battlefield's somber border,
A fateful voice resounded sound:

"The battle is over! I have conquered all!
Before me you have all bowed low, fighters!
Life set you at odds; I answered the call—
Now rise and stand review, all you dead knights!

March in a triumphal procession before me,
Let me count my army's might.
Then lay your bones in the earth's dark story—
Sweet, after life, in the ground to rest from the fight!

Years unseen will pass with the ages,
All memory of you in men will fade.
But I will not forget; and loudly,
A feast I shall hold in the midnight shade!

With a heavy dance, the damp earth pressing,
I shall stamp it down, so the grave's dark blessing—
So your bones can never that tomb forsake,
That from this soil you may never awake!"

Dictionary

Никола́й Гаври́лович Черныше́вский — Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky
Модэ́ст Петро́вич Мýсоргский — Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky
Никола́й Андре́евич Ри́мский-Ко́рсаков — Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov
Пе́тр Ильи́ч Чайко́вский — Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Ми́лий Алексе́евич Бала́кирев — Mily Alexeyevich Balakirev
Алекса́ндр Порфи́рьевич Боро́дин — Alexander Porfiryevich Borodin
Цеза́рь Анто́нович Кюи́ — César Antonovich Cui
Алекса́ндр Серге́евич Пу́шкин — Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin
Ча́рльз Да́рвин — Charles Darwin
Влади́мир Ле́нин — Vladimir Lenin
Лев Никола́евич Толсто́й — Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy
Фёдор Миха́йлович Досто́евский — Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky
Серге́й Фёдорович Плато́нов — Sergey Fyodorovich Platonov
Никола́й I Па́влович — Nicholas I Pavlovich
Никола́й Андре́евич Ри́мский-Ко́рсаков — *Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov*
Алекса́ндр Константи́нович Глазуно́в — *Alexander Glazunov*
Никола́й I — *Nicholas I of Russia*
Митрофа́н Беля́ев — *Mitrofan Belyayev*
Серге́й Тимофе́евич Акса́ков — *Sergey Aksakov*
Са́вва Ива́нович Ма́монтов — *Savva Mamontov*
Серге́й Фёдорович Плато́нов — *Sergey Platonov*
Ива́н Серге́евич Турге́нев — Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev

Пе́сни и пля́ски сме́рти — *Songs and Dances of Death*
Без со́лнца — *Sunless*
Бори́с Годуно́в — *Boris Godunov*
Хова́нщина — *Khovanshchina*
Колыбе́льная — *Lullaby*
Серена́да — *Serenade*
Трепа́к — *Trepak*
Полководец — *Commander*
Что де́лать? — *What Is to Be Done?*
Преступле́ние и наказáние — *Crime and Punishment*
Война́ и мир — *War and Peace*
Отцы́ и де́ти — *Fathers and Sons*

Санкт-Петербу́рг — Saint Petersburg
Ца́рское Село́ — Tsarskoe Selo