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## Translator's Preface

*Yulia Ryzhik*

Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799-1837) is widely considered the founder of modern Russian literature and the greatest Russian poet of all time. Author of such masterpieces as the novel in verse *Eugene Onegin*, the historical tragedy *Boris Godunov* and the narrative poem *The Bronze Horseman*, Pushkin is revered as a distinctly national poet. His importance and cultural impact in Russia can be compared only to that of Shakespeare in the English-speaking world. A great innovator of literary language and style, Pushkin injected into poetry an unprecedented measure of vernacular Russian, combining it with Old Slavonic to produce a rich, harmonious, and delightfully readable language that remains influential even to the present day.

Pushkin's poetry—mellifluous yet crisp, brilliant yet subdued, spontaneous yet highly crafted, simple yet refined—is supremely difficult to translate. Both Russian and English are stress-timed languages, producing largely accentual-syllabic verse. Yet the Russian language, polysyllabic and heavily inflected, is more flexible in its syntax than English, more variable in its internal rhythms, and richer in its capacity for rhyme. Feminine rhymes, abundant in Russian poetry, are particularly difficult to render into English without making them sound stilted or inopportunistically comic. The problems of Russian-English translation become especially salient with Pushkin's verse: how can one keep within the original prosodic pattern, retain the subtle rhythms within lines, and yet convey the same natural, unobtrusive flow of speech in a similarly unaffected diction? Some lines fall into place immediately; others are agonizing. My principle of translation is simple: a verse translation is not worth doing unless one can maintain the pattern of the original.

"I loved you" is one of Pushkin's most popular and beloved lyrics. Any Russian with a high school education will have had to memorize and recite it at one point or another. Yet nothing is known about the poem's context or addressee. It stands alone in wistful acquiescence, achingly unassuming, restrained yet profoundly moving—a gem of quiet, tender emotion.

**Я ВАС ЛЮБИЛ...**

Я вас любил: любовь еще, быть может,  
В душе моей угасла не совсем;  
Но пусть она вас больше не тревожит;  
Я не хочу печалить вас ничем.  
Я вас любил безмолвно, безнадежно,  
То робостью, то ревностью томим;  
Я вас любил так искренно, так нежно,  
Как дай вам бог любимой быть другим.

**I LOVED YOU... by Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin**

*Translated by Yulia Ryzhik*

I loved you, and perhaps my love's still stronger  
Than it should be, not faded in my breast,  
But let it not disturb you any longer:  
I do not wish to grieve you with the rest.  
I loved you, wordless, hopeless, pining dearly –  
Now bashfulness, now jealousy my bane.  
I loved you then, so gently, so sincerely,  
As may God grant you to be loved again.