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Adjuration by Alexander Pushkin

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If it be true in nightly haze
When all the living lay in repose
And from the heavens lunar rays
Slither among the graves and their stones,
If it be true that one would say
That the quiet tombs have been unmade—
I call Leila; I await that shade:
To me, my friend, this way, this way!

Appear once more, shade whom I adore,
Like the day you left and were all the while
Wan and cold as the winter you wore
When all those terminal woes warped your smile.
Come, like a distant star far away,
Like a soft sound or exhaled emission—
Or like a terrible apparition.
Any way at all: this way, this way!...

I call you not so that you might
Upbraid those men whose malicious ways
Took the life of my friend that night,
Or to learn the secrets of these graves,
Or for the times when I would lay
All racked with doubt... Rather, I have pined
Wishing to say that I love in kind,
For I'm all yours: this way, this way!

Commentary

I felt that finding the proper refrain for this poem proved to be the hardest and most crucial aspect of a proper translation. Despite its deceptively simple quality, its nuances support the main crux of the poem: the speaker's coming "hither" represents not only his invocation of his lost beloved, but also his approaching of the addressee in space and in form.

I also strove to preserve the rhyme and a syllabic meter. The poem does, however, diverge from the eight- and nine-syllable line schema in the second stanza. The change in meter, in addition to the alliteration of a distinctly non-Russian sound, disconnected the stanza from the rest of the poem just enough to support the scholarly speculation concerning its apocryphal nature.

Perhaps the most remarkable sonic feature of the Russian pertains to the assonance of the *u* sound (e.g. лунные лучи, line 3 and сюда, сюда, line 8). While replicating the exact sound might unnecessarily bridle the poem, I opted for the similarly melancholic repetition of the *ei* sound, scattered throughout the translation (e.g. "haze," "way," and "shade").

Though the use of the colon and dash in the English translation was unconventional, I felt the need to preserve them, as the colon seemed to signal the speaker's direct speech while the dash served as a prolonged pause. Rather than rely upon quotation marks and commas to fulfill those roles, I felt that the dashes, colons, ellipses, and exclamations offered a particular visual importance, reinforcing the concept of bodies in repose, atop one another, among graves, and standing erect, respectively.

I did divert from using any of the previous translations of the title, such as "Invocation" or "Incantation." Though one sense of the term, "invocation," does apply to the poem, I felt that some of its more immediate connotations do not. Furthermore, although there is certainly a kind of conjuring at work, the use of "incantation" might have limited the poem's interpretation in a single direction. Therefore, after considering Russian and English etymologies and uses of the term, I settled upon "adjuration" for its ability to speak to both the fantastical and temporal elements within the poem.