

11-16-2009

The Elegy on the Death of Napoleon, Followed by His Farewells to Marie-Louise; by the Widow of a Soldier

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Recommended Citation

Crouch, Allison and Hassett, Amanda. (2009) The Elegy on the Death of Napoleon, Followed by His Farewells to Marie-Louise; by the Widow of a Soldier.
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FCH 324: Translation III, Professor Brault
November 16, 2009

A Note From the Translators

Napoleon Bonaparte was the Emperor of France from 1804 through 1814. He was exiled for the first time in 1814 by the allied forces and sent to the Island of Elba. He escaped from the island and returned to France for his 100 day reign. In June 1815, three days after his defeat at Waterloo, Napoleon surrendered himself to the allied forces. Once again, he was exiled, this time to the Atlantic island of Saint Helena. Napoleon spent the remainder of his life on the island with only the company of Henri Gatiien Bertrand, a loyal friend and general of the French army. Napoleon fell ill and died on May 5, 1821 away from his wife and son. His body was originally buried on Saint Helena. It was not until 1844, when King Louis-Phillipe received permission from the British, that his body was transported to Paris, where he remains to this day in Les Invalides.

The Elegy on the Death of Napoleon conveys the tragedy of Napoleon's death in the eyes of his supporters. The author highlights his military achievements and denounces those who have betrayed him. Although the exact identity of the author is unknown, she clearly is the widow of a soldier. Throughout the elegy, she relates the death of her own husband to that of Napoleon. The romantic and poetic style of the document shows the significance of Napoleon's death and the emotional impact it had on his supporters.

Napoleon's farewell to Marie-Louise was most likely written by Mme Bernard, a widow of an Aide-de-Camp in Napoleon's army. Written from the point of view of Napoleon, the document demonstrates what the author believes Napoleon might have written as his final words to his wife, Marie-Louise. The document describes Napoleon longing for his family, his appreciation for Bertrand, his fears for the future of France, and finally his realization that his life is ending.

ELEGY
ON THE DEATH
OF NAPOLEON,
FOLLOWED BY HIS FAREWELLS
TO MARIE-LOUISE;
BY
THE WIDOW OF A SOLDIER.

The widow of a soldier is the widow of a great man

IN PARIS,
NOVELTY TRADE HOUSES
TO MY FELLOW CITIZENS.

As a widow of a former officer whose ashes rest in the field of honor, the pain of losing him seemed to awaken anew in me upon the news of an illustrious death that evokes so many beautiful memories. I only had to remember who my husband was, what he did for a man who, then, had the fate of the country in his hands, because the coalition of kings had put on his head the hatred that they bore for a free France; and I could not prevent myself from pitying the hero who fell because of betrayal, letting myself go to the feelings of grief that would have been those of my husband if he were alive. I believed that he could live through me again, and that only my heart would be widowed. If I was not eloquent enough in writing down the images that passed before me, it is that I could see only through my tears; and if there were lines in my elegy that happened to please, it seems that I have gotten my inspiration from the ghost of my friend.

ELEGY
ON THE DEATH
OF NAPOLEON.



Let those who betrayed him, since he just passed away,
Offend a hero they will no longer fear;
Let the scepters, that trembled during his days,
Follow the course of outright despotism,
And, from the people sold by the sheer force of the army,
Now shamelessly collect, the sweat and the tears;
Let the complaints from the old fathers of our liberty,
Spreading their sad truth,
When in exile, far away, Napoleon dies,
Blame his power and weigh on his grave:
I fall silent; Saint Helena¹ summons all of my heart,

¹ Saint Helena, the location of Napoleon's exile in the Atlantic Ocean. He was exiled by the coalition forces of Great Britain, Netherlands, Russia, Austria and Prussia after the battle of Waterloo (June 18 1815) and remained there until his death in 1821. (All notes are the translators')

And my tears shower the victor all the way from Europe.
I see him lying on his victory bed,
Aided by his friend, a companion of his glory,
Far from a young wife who was removed against his will,
Far from a son whose image only has his farewell.
I see him, ending a troublesome life,
Increasingly greater, leaving his great misfortune;
And on his illustrious lips, where his torment is depicted,
The gentle name of France slowly exhales.
The God under whom thousands marched,
Who enslaved kings surrounded as escorts,
Under the winds of misfortune sees his torch extinguish,
And does not have a single soldier to carry him to the tomb.
Ah! When the sword of my husband gleamed,
His hands soaking from foreign blood,
When, affected by death that bronze vomited.
He died victorious next to his sovereign,
He was far from believing, in these days of conquest,
That the leader of the world would fall from the top,
And that one day, by these kings that he had pardoned
His days would be poisoned by dreadful disgust!
Alas! Myself, then, condemned to widowhood,
Of a courageous husband hanging on to the noble image,
Who would have told me, when his death came to bring me to despair,
God! That I would be crying two deaths?
It is done; twice the sum of my curse:
The widow of a soldier is the widow of the great man.
Oh you who, still proud, show your dictators
A forehead completely furrowed by the fires of combat;
You, whose courage honored the country;
Warriors, without whom France would have been even more shriveled,
From the abuse that in vain vomits treason,
By talking about your accomplishments, kill off the poison.
We dare to attack the memory of a hero:
Defend it, warriors, it is another victory.
I didn't express this position in the days of his greatness;
But my lyre comes to life at the voice of honor.
Who would be able, without blushing, to insult his ashes?
The hatred in his tomb refuses to diminish.
Crowds of ungrateful traitors and fawners,
Who had cowardly praised his prosperity,
With their vain screams chase after his genius.
But can one slander such a beautiful name?

Lets move back to the times when terror without law
Ruled... Napoleon chained it to his accomplishments.
France was perishing; bloody anarchy
The heart of the country split without mercy,
And the throne smoked at the feet of the dictators
Who gave us five kings in five legislators.
The people, under the yoke, that suffered the trick,
Lead the entire state to the edge of a chasm.
Discord, agitating its torches everywhere,
Took out its fury and dug graves.
However, outside, our courageous troops
Still guarded the gates of the nation of the arts;
And, carrying France into the middle of danger,
With their noble blood sprayed their laurels.
French heroism, in this extreme chaos,
Seemed to outdo itself for the sake of the future.
Suddenly a mortal, thanks to valiant efforts,
Had peace overcome this awful regime.
He ruled, this hero guided by victory;
But unfortunately he liked glory too much.
This warrior, whose wrath confronted danger,
Our flags hovering over our enemies.
In the plains of Marengo², you saw his courage!
In Arcole³, you will speak of his sublime recklessness!
But, not confining his immortal works,
From the cleaned swamps he purified the waters,
And, crossing the haughty mountains full of pitfalls,
Of the Alps, his voice, leveled the roads.
But to the queen city let us turn our gaze;
Do you see the triumph of the arts coming out?
Do you see, Perrault⁴ completing his works,
From the rust of time repair the offenses?
Do you see his genius, the astonished centuries,

² Battle of Marengo, June 14 1800, between France and Austria in Italy, where Napoleon's forces drove the Austrians out of Italy. The Austrians lost 9,500 men, the French lost considerably less.

³ Arcole, located 40 km SE of Verona, Italy. A battle took place here on 15-17 of November 1790 between the French and the Austrians. Bonaparte's armies stopped the Austrians from advancing to Mantua to relieve their garrison that was besieging the French army there.

⁴ Charles Perrault, 1628-1703, a French author who started the genre of fairytales by using pre-existing folktales to create such stories as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Cinderella*.

That leave monuments crowned with splendor?
Everything brings back to our eyes the vividness of his power.
Vendée⁵, to his kind deed you owe your rebirth!
Ah! He would have better establish his victorious triumphs,
If he had reconquered all of the French hearts!
If, pleased with France, after much raging,
He hadn't had imposed his conquests on the kings of the North!
He is no longer... his mistakes are no longer under my eyes.
He was punished enough, since he was so unhappy.
The hatred of parties with the death must fade,
And those who blamed him must also pity him.
Let us turn our gaze to his past glory,
And together, may our tears fall on the tomb of Mars⁶.
The thought of the hero gave birth to victory,
He alone fills the temple of memory.
Today in vain one would like to offend him,
The centuries to come will be able to avenge him;
And, without seeking his name in the records of history,
A hundred pompous monuments will attest to his glory.

⁵ Vendée, region of France where they refused to recognize Napoleon as their leader, and stayed loyal to King Louis XVIII resulting in the War in Vendée (1793 to 1796).

⁶ Mars, the Roman god of war. Used to represent Napoleon and his military greatness.

NAPOLEON'S FAREWELL

TO

MARIE-LOUISE.

Louise, so it is true, it is the last time
That your dying husband lets his voice be heard?
Already eternity for me comes to be understood;
To the grave, without shuddering, I will finally go down.
Could I now fear death?
Was it not dying to live where you aren't?
Separated from the objects that tied me to the world,
Oppressed under the weight of my deepest pain,

For its last stop I give thanks to destiny.
Why can't I, oh my son! press you against my chest!
It is the wish that I develop at the end of my life;
But I leave you in the care of your noble mother.
One day, through her stories, you will know the other side of me.
After having ruled, I yearned in chains;
Abandoned, outcast, on a savage rock
I put up with the chains of slavery for six years.
Me, who dictated the law to so many leaders,
I kept only a name that they are not leaving you.
This name is going to open the barriers of glory for you,
Before crossing, take a step back,
Before all, avoid the talk of the bile sycophants,
Fear the advice of these poisonous courtiers.
Ingratitude, alas! sits on the steps of the throne,
And from the front of these kings, unfasten the crown.
Make the precious choice of a virtuous friend:
When friendship stays with us one can only partially die.
All of the gifts which, in its kindness, heaven will be able to give you,
The biggest favor is a true friend.
Who, better than me, my son, feels it at this moment?
Abandoned by all, the virtuous Bertrand⁷
In order to follow me left greatness, pleasure, and riches,
Even giving up the affection of his friends.
Of the weight of my pain he reduces the burden,
He still consoles me at the edge of my grave;
And when the last hour will ring for me,
His kind hand will close my eyelids.
Swear by my coffin, when I will no longer be,
That you will remember some day his Virtues.
Reward the one who stayed faithful to me,
And was the example and the model of friendship
Bertrand's spouse, your touching pity,
Always accompanied your noble husband,
Your gentleness helped my liveness very much,
And made me forget the dark ingratitude.
When I believed myself to be alone on the edge of the universe,
You walked in my steps in the dark deserts;
And, if my memories would take me toward France,

⁷ Henri Gatien Bertrand, 28 March 1773- 31 January 1833, French general and close friend of Napoleon Bonaparte who volunteered to go into exile to both Elba in 1814 and Saint Helena in 1815 with Napoleon .

You would offer me the hope of a sweeter future.
My dear French people, I say my goodbye;
My only ambition was to make you happy,
And in order to achieve it, I would have given my life.
I sacrificed everything to save the nation;
I served my country, and posterity
On its bronze throne will speak the truth.
Louise, my unhappiness was the work of your father;
He exercised on us his unjust anger.
Maybe it would have been better if he had killed me himself.
I would have blessed my fate in dying at his hand.
What will you become, unfortunate wife,
To eternal regrets forever condemned?
In order to lighten the weight of your drawn out pains,
I leave you my son: he will dry your tears.
His traits, already formed, will be able to recreate me;
Happiness, very often, is only a misleading delirium.
After nearly six years consider my fate;
My sweetest hope was no more than death.
Far from you, from my son, on this sad shore,
Wandering on these rocks, I was looking for your reflection;
But I called in vain to the wife of my heart:
Only echoes responded to the cries of my pain.
When the wrath of the ocean foretold the storm,
I asked God to crash my head;
And often, getting lost in these supercilious woods,
I blamed nature and I begged the heavens.
In these sad objects my buried soul
Liked to contemplate the end of life.
Near a peaceful willow where a stream murmurs,
My dethroned destiny chose a grave.
My eye measured the space with pleasure,
And I could look at the place without shuddering.
I often visited this peaceful place
Where the pain of life expires without returning.
But it's you that I pity, oh my sweet Marie!
You must put up with a long agony.
Condemned, still young, to shed tears,
You can carry around for a long time the weight of your unhappiness.
Your troubles, your regrets may pass for weakness.
Hide your sadness to indifferent eyes;
It is a necessary art and shared at the courts.
Does the courtiers' heart rule their speech?

Constantly, learning to deceive,
Could they give homage to the virtue they did not have?
But the sad precursor of death
Happens just in my chest and comes to freeze my heart.
Forever, I feel it, strength leaving me,
My eyes become heavy not able to distinguish anyone.
I cherish death after so much unhappiness;
Goodbye!... Louise! Goodbye! It is done, I am dying.

Mme. BERNARD,
Widow of a former Aide-de-Camp.