



Belarusian Literature in English Translations

БЕЛАРУСКАЯ ЛІТАРАТУРА Ў АНГЛІЙСКІХ ПЕРАКЛАДАХ

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EARTHQUAKE

'Neath the fetters of mountains the oceans burn,
There the frenzied lava-streams flow...
“Do not stifle my breast, you crust of earth!
I'm still breathing and living below!...
Do you hear? Stony slavery opposes me long!
Do you hear? Deep down underground,
In the womb of the rocks sighs a monstrous gong,
As big as the Black Sea round!”
Here. Here. Here. And there. There. There
Its boom 'neath the rocks resounds.
The tom-tom is thundering everywhere.
Now alerted the hare pricks a sensitive ear.
The earthquake draws near...
The mountain deer are deserting the wood,
The carp start to choke in the stream.
Any moment now, the peakes, red us blood,
With their forked tongues of fire will gleam.
The sea has stirred, with red grief on its face...
Silt churns with a blood-tingled tint,
To the trembling shore the great breakers race –
Towering walls of cast iron a-glint.
Do you hear? Now. It's coming! Now! Now!! Now!!!
The world's axle creaks and then breaks,
Meadows wrinkle and crumple like cloth, somehow –
An earthquake!
An earthquake!
Earth shakes!!
We're deafened by Archangel Gabriel's last trump,
The mountains for succour cry,
From jolts 'neath their feet the great oak-trees jump,
Castle-towers in the heavens fly.
The nails from the crosses like bullets whizz,
And raising the dust of dead days,
Into blood-streaked thunderclouds corpses rise
From famous and infamous graves.
Do you hear? Now... It's coming! Now! Now!! Now!!!
The world's axle creaks and breaks.

Earth's squashed like a melon by a sledge-hammer blow –
An earthquake!
An earthquake!
Earth shakes!!
Can you see? Sparks and ashes create a murk,
The gloom, a huge cloud, starts to grow;
From the crags, like a crowd, streams of lava spurt
With black shadows and ruddy glow.
Their cloaks are like clouds o'er the world of the blind,
Their feet like a threatening fear.
Lightning flushes above them like sickles shine,
And their sickles like lightning appear.
The earth is trembling beneath their tread.
Woe to those, who as blind as a mole,
Try to close with their hands earth's lips of red –
The earthquake's wide-gaping hole.

1966

Translated by W. May