

The background of the cover features a gradient from orange at the top to dark red and black at the bottom. On the left, a large black silhouette of a cross stands prominently. On the right, a smaller black silhouette of a church spire with a cross on top is visible. The text is overlaid on this background.

**Petar II Petrovich
Nyegosh**

***The Mountain
Wreath***

Translated by Branislav G. Romchevich

The title of the original: *Горски вијенац*, од Петра II Петровића
Његоша.

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Translator's Note

This edition (second electronic) is a considerably revised version of the first edition of my translation of Nyegosh's „The Mountain Wreath“.

Branislav G. Romchevich

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD: THE AUTHOR AND THE WORK

Petar II Petrovich Nyegosh (most often, simply *Nyegosh*) was, from 1830 to 1851, Vladika (Metropolitan) of Montenegro, which title carried supreme spiritual as well as secular, political authority and power. Born as Radivoje Rade Petrovich in 1813 in Nyegushi, the seat of the dynastic family to which he belonged, he grew up to be dark and handsome, over two meters tall, robust and strong looking; he died in his thirty eighth year, of tuberculosis. A priest and a statesman, he is also considered by many to be the greatest poet and sage among the Southern Slavs.

Educated at several Montenegrin monasteries, Nyegosh ascended the throne at seventeen, following the death of his uncle, Petar I Petrovich Nyegosh, and assumed the name under which he is known. He was a ruler bent on uniting Montenegrin tribes and centralizing and modernizing Montenegro. His introduction of universal taxation, personal guard and similar reforms caused several revolts during his lifetime. He did not shrink from sending serious offenders before the firing squad, but also knew how and when to show clemency.

Nyegosh's foreign policy was based on maintaining a friendly relationship with the Habsburg Austria, seeking Russia's protection,

and also included incessant struggle against the Ottoman Empire's provocations and border violations. His unfulfilled dream was the unification of all Serb lands.

In addition to his religious education, Nyegosh was acquainted with the world of literature by Sima Milutinovich Sarayliya, a Bosnian Serb poet and adventurer, who had come to Montenegro in 1827 and become the secretary to the vladika, the young Rade's uncle, and later to Nyegosh himself. Also, he had access to a not so negligible library of his uncle. During his travels in Italy and Austria, particularly during his stay in Vienna, Nyegosh had an opportunity to meet the leading Serbian literati – Karadzich, Radichevich, and others.

Nyegosh began writing poetry at seventeen and in the remaining twenty years created several poetry collections, essays and, most importantly, an extensive epic poem, *The Ray of the Microcosm*, and two epic style dramas, *The Mountain Wreath* and *The False Tsar Stephen the Short*.

Inevitably, Nyegosh drew heavily on Serb epic poetry and folklore, as well as on the biblical themes from his religious education. His metaphors and imagery are unsurpassable, and his meter, the decasyllable without cesura, is unique in all Serbian literature. His style is colloquial, laconic, economical and often cryptic. Although sometimes difficult to divine, it is, nevertheless, like a scalpel that cuts the shortest way through human thought.

The Mountain Wreath itself is a dramatic play written as an epic poem. Its main theme is the liquidation of turn-Turks in Montenegro at the very end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century, an event the historical scope and veracity of which are unclear and which even may not have happened at all. Nevertheless, Nyegosh treats it as a true event, and approaches it in all details, giving the causes and implications pertaining to it. Of the several doctrines prominent in the play, the main one is that of the freedom from foreign influence and oppression. Although principally a work of art, the play has been criticized by some in later years as being an inspiration to the Serbs to wage war on the Bosnian Muslims, as well as being „genocidal“. In any case, it cannot be more „genocidal“ than *The Bible* or *The Quran*.

The text of *The Mountain Wreath* in this book is the fifth translation thereof into English. It is not a poetic rendition, like the first two translations, or a „free“ rendering, like the third, but an endeavor to convey into English the meaning and the style of the original as truthfully as possible, line by line, „letting the meter take care of itself“. The translator hopes that the reader will be pleased with the result.

Branislav G. Romchevich

THE MOUNTAIN WREATH

Dedication

To the Dust of the Father of Serbia¹

Let the present age be prideful over all the other ages,
it will be a dreadful era to the human generations!
In it a set of octuplets swung out all at the same moment
from the cradle of Bellona² and presented themselves on the
earth:

Napoleon, Charles³, Blucher⁴, Prince Wellington⁵, and 5
Suvorov⁶,

Karageorge, the scourge of tyrants, and Schwarzenberg⁷,
and Kutuzov⁸.

Ares⁹, the terror of the earth, made them drunk with warlike
glory

and designated the earth as battlefield for them to fight in.

It's not arduous for a lion to emerge from a great bush:

within the great nations the nest is assembled for a genius; 10

it's there that he finds prepared the stuff for his exploits of
glory

and the magnificent garland of triumph to adorn his head.

But to the hero from Topola¹⁰, the immortal Karageorge,
all the hurdles were in the way, yet he arrived at the great
goal:

roused the people, baptized the country, and broke the 15
barbarous fetters,
called the Serb from the dead and breathed life into the
Serbian soul.

Here is the immortal's secret: he has given the Serbs
breasts of steel;
in them, weaned off chivalry, he arouses the hearts of lions!
In front of George freeze up all the powers of the Eastern
Pharaoh¹¹,

through George have the muscles of the Serbs been instilled 20
with chivalry!

Because of George shakes Stambul¹², the bloodthirsty father
of the plague,
by his sabre swear the Turks – with them there exists no
other oath.

Yes, a hero's at a close distance pursued by a tragic end:
to sell itself for its garland was the destiny of your head¹³!

Generations judge the deeds, giving everyone their 25

deservings!

At Borises¹⁴ and Vukashins¹⁵ thunders the universal curse,
the repulsive Piso¹⁶'s name must not dishonor the calendar,
Aegisthus¹⁷ deserves Orestes's verdict, the heaven's
thunder.

Over your illustrious grave, vile malice vomits murkiness,
but what will extinguish the powerful, divine ray of your
soul?

30

The tearful, hideous glooms – are they able to conceal the
light?

They conceal themselves from the light, they're going to
make it burn bright.

The flame of your torch, forever life-giving, will shine for
the Serb,
will be always brighter and more wondrous in the deeper
ages.

The Serb woman can bear a Dushan¹⁸, she can breastfeed
Obilichs¹⁹,
but heroes similar to Pozharski²⁰, wonderful men and
knights,
Serb women are at present bearing! Serbdom's exhaling

35

nobleness!

Away from the people, you ugly curse – the Serbs have
fulfilled the oath!

In Vienna, on New Year's Day 1847

The Author

Dramatis Personæ

Vladika Danilo ²¹	
Hegumen Stephen	Vukota Mrvalyevich
Yanko Dyrashkovich, serdar ²²	Wolf Tomanovich
Radonya, serdar	The People
Vukota, serdar	Bogdan Dyrashkovich
Ivan Petrovich, serdar	Wolf Michunovich
Knez ²³ Rade, brother of Vladika Danilo	Wolf Mandushich
Knez Bayko	Wolf from Lyeshev Stup ²⁶
Knez Rogan	Pope ²⁷ Micho
Knez Yanko	Batrigh's sister
Knez Nikola	Hadji Ali Medovich, Kadi
Voivod ²⁴ Drashko	Skender Aga
Voivod Milya	Mustai Kadi
Voivod Stanko (Lyubotinian ²⁵)	Arslan Aga Muhadinovich
Voivod Batrigh	Ferat, Zachir ²⁸ Chief of Guards
Tomash Martinovich	Headman Osman
Obrad	A crone
Wolf Raslapchevich	

Persons not listed by the poet: Wolf Markovich, a Tsutsa²⁹, a soldier, a second soldier, a Montenegrin wedding guest, a Turkish wedding guest, a pupil, pupils.

A Meeting on Lovchen³⁰ on the Eve of Whitsunday

The dead of night, everyone is asleep.

Vladika Danilo (alone)

Behold the Devil³¹ with seven mantles³²,
and also with two swords and with two crowns³³,
the great-grandson of Turk³⁴, with the Quran!
Behind him the swarms of the accursed brood,
set to devastate the whole of the earth, 5
the way the locust devastates the fields!
If the French embankment³⁵ had not been there,
The Arabian Sea would have drowned all!
An infernal dream gave Osman³⁶ the crown,
presenting him the moon like an apple, 10
an evil caller to Europe, Orkan³⁷!
Byzantium is at present nothing
but young Theodora's marriage portion³⁸;
the star of black fate is there over it.
Palaiologos is inviting Murad³⁹ 15
to bury the Greeks along with the Serbs.
Brankovich⁴⁰ thinks his thoughts with Gertuka⁴¹.
Muhammad, that is for Gertuka!⁴²
Apart from Asia, wherein their nest lies,
the Devil's tribe has pecked up the countries – 20

a country a day, like a bird for an owl:
 Murad⁴³ Serbia, and Bayezid Bosnia⁴⁴,
 Murad⁴⁵ Epirus, and Muhammad⁴⁶ Greece,
 the two Selims⁴⁷ Cyprus and Africa,
 each of them something, there remained nothing; 25
 it's dreadful to hear what is being done!
 Meager is the world for the hellish jaw,
 can't feed it full, let alone surfeit it!
 John is defending the dead Wladislaw;
 why defend him if he did not save him?⁴⁸ 30
 Skenderbeg⁴⁹'s heart's that of an Obilich⁵⁰,
 yet he died a melancholic exile. –
 But what shall I do, and also with whom?
 There are few hands, and so the strength is small,
 just a single straw among the whirlwinds, 35
 a sad orphan all alone in the world!
 The tribe of mine's sleeping a deathlike sleep,
 the teardrop of mine doesn't have a parent,
 above me the heaven is wholly shut,
 it receives not my lament or prayer; 40
 the world has all turned into Hell for me,
 and all the people are spirits from Hell.
 O, you black day, and you black destiny!
 O, you miserable, snuffed out Serbdom,
 I have outlived all kinds of your evils, 45

and I want to fight against the worst one!⁵¹
 Yes, when you crush the head of a body,
 the members thereof expire in torment.⁵²
 You plague of mankind⁵³, may God destroy you!
 Is it too little for you, half of the world 50
 which you have envenomed with your malice,
 so that the venom of your hellish soul
 you have vomited onto this rock⁵⁴, too?
 Small for you the offer of whole Serbia
 from the Danube to the bluish–green sea? 55
 You sit on a throne unlawfully taken⁵⁵,
 you are prideful of a bloodstained scepter;
 you blaspheme God from the holy altar,
 the minaret stands upon the crushed cross!⁵⁶
 But why'd you want to poison its shadow 60
 which they'd brought with them into their refuge
 in the hills for eterne consolation
 and remembrance of a heroic race?
 It is already overwashed in blood,
 a hundred times yours, and a hundred ours! 65
 Behold the work of the malicious tsar⁵⁷,
 whom the Devil instructs in everything:
 „Montenegro I cannot subjugate
 by any means to make it wholly mine;
 one should be dealing with them in this way...“ 70

Then to them began the fiendish Messiah⁵⁸
to proffer the sweetmeats of the false faith.
May God curse you, disgraceful renegades⁵⁹,
what's the Turkish faith doing among us?
Whereto will you take the ancestral curse?⁶⁰ 75
With what will you come in front of Milosh⁶¹
and in front of the other Serbian knights,
who live as long as the sun is shining?
When I reconsider today's council,
I'm inflamed with blazes of frightfulness: 80
brothers to be killing one another,
and the murderers strong and atrocious –
they'll destroy the seed in the odiva⁶².
May God wipe you out, you unhappy day
that delivered me into this here world! 85
A hundred times I curse the last year's hour
in which the Turks did not execute me⁶³,
I would not be cheating the people's hopes.

TRANSLATOR'S ENDNOTES

¹ Karageorge (*Black George* in Turkish), George Petrovich (1752–1817), the leader of the First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813) against the Turks.

² The Roman goddess of war.

³ Archduke Charles of Austria, Duke of Teschen (1771–1847), Austrian field marshal; defeated Napoleon's forces in the Battle of Aspern–Essling (21–22 May 1809).

⁴ Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher (1742–1819), Prussian field marshal, twice led his army successfully in coalitions against Napoleon: at the Battle of the Nations at Leipzig in 1813, and the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

⁵ Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (1769–1852), British general, commander of the British army in the victorious coalition against Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815.

⁶ Alexander Vasilyevich Suvorov (1729–1800), the last generalissimo of the Russian Empire, celebrated for his victories against the French in Italy.

⁷ Charles Philip, Prince of Schwarzenberg, Austrian field marshal, one of the commanding officers against Napoleon at the Battle of the Nations at Leipzig in 1813, and the victor of several battles against the retreating French.

⁸ Prince Mikhail Illarionovich Golenishchev–Kutuzov (1745–1813), a field marshal of the Russian Empire, commander-in-chief at the undecided Battle of Borodino in 1812 and in the offensive campaign during Napoleon's inglorious retreat from Russia.

⁹ Old Greek's god of war.

¹⁰ Now a small town in the Shumadiya Region in Serbia; Karageorge lived there and was buried there.

¹¹ Turkish sultan, who also ruled Egypt.

¹² The oldest part of and here equivalent to *Istanbul*.

¹³ After the murder of Karageorge in 1817 on his orders, Prince Milosh Obrenovich sent Karageorge's head to the Turkish sultan as proof of his loyalty.

¹⁴ Boris Godunov (1551–1605), Russian tsar and a very successful ruler; allegedly, he had ordered the murder of Dmitry, nine year old brother of tsar Feodor I, in order to succeed the latter.

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¹⁵ Vukashin Mrnyavchevich (1320–1371), Serbian nobleman and co-ruler with Tsar Urosh the Weak; by tradition, he was implicated in the death of the latter; however, he was killed in the Battle of Maritsa, two months prior to Urosh's demise.

¹⁶ Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso (44 BC–AD 20), a high officer and consul in the reign of Tiberius, turned by the latter to the Senate to be tried for several complex charges, including the alleged murder of Germanicus, Tiberius's heir apparent; Piso died before the trial ended, but the Senate nevertheless found him guilty and ordered, *inter alia*, that *damnatio memoriae* should apply, i.e. that his name must not be remembered.

¹⁷ In Greek mythology, Aegisthus, the lover of Clytemnestra, the estranged wife of the Mycena King Agamemnon, enticed her to kill the latter upon his return from the Trojan war; the lovers were much later killed in revenge by Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's son Orestes.

¹⁸ Dushan the Mighty (1308–1355) of the Nemanyids, Serbian tsar who considerably enlarged Serbian lands.

¹⁹ Milosh Obilich, in Serbian tradition, a Serbian knight, defender of Serbian lands against the Turks, particularly celebrated for his heroic deed during the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, when he fulfilled his promise to kill the Ottoman sultan Murad I.

²⁰ Dmitry Mikhaylovich Pozharsky (1577–1642), a Russian nobleman, leader of Russian forces that liberated Russia from Polish–Lithuanian invaders in 1611–1612.

²¹ Danilo Shchepchevich (1670–1735), Metropolitan (*Vladika* in Serbian) of Montenegro (1697–1735), and its spiritual and secular ruler, and founder of the Petrovich line of Montenegrin vladikas, which lasted until the middle of the 19th century.

²² Title of some of tribal heads in Montenegro.

²³ *Prince* in Serbian; title of tribal chieftains in Montenegro.

²⁴ *Duke* in Serbian; title of tribal military commanders in Montenegro.

²⁵ From the Lyubotin tribe, in the southern part of the Riyeka District.

²⁶ A village of the Byelitsas tribe, near Chevo.

²⁷ Orthodox Christian priest.

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²⁸ A village in the Rijeka District of Montenegro.

²⁹ A member of the Tsutsas tribe.

³⁰ Famous mountain in Montenegro (1749 m), one of its symbols and also the burial place of Nyegosh; it makes the hinterland to the coastal town of Kotor.

³¹ The Ottoman sovereign.

³² Reflecting the seven most important sovereign titles in the full style of the Ottoman sultan.

³³ Symbols of the Ottoman sovereign's titles *Sultan* and *Khan*, indicative of the dual legitimacy heritage, Islamic and Central Asian.

³⁴ Legendary patriarch of the Ottoman Turks.

³⁵ Reference to the battles of Tours (732) and Narbonne (737), when the Frankish forces under Charles Martel, Duke and Prince of the Franks and Mayor of the Palace, decisively defeated the Arab armies and thus effectively prevented further penetration of Islam into Europe.

³⁶ Osman I or Osman Gazi (died 1323/4), ruler of the Ottoman Turks and founder of the Ottoman dynasty, whose members in later centuries transformed a relatively small state ruled by him in Asia Minor into a large and mighty Islamic empire; in tradition, he had a dream which foretold these developments.

³⁷ Orhan, or Urhan (1281–1362), son of Osman I; the first Ottoman ruler to commence incursions into Europe and take possession of a part of Byzantine lands on the European side of the Bosphorus.

³⁸ Theodora, daughter of John VI Kantakouzenos, was disgracefully given by her father to Orhan I, Ottoman ruler, for his harem, in exchange for his military assistance in Byzantine power struggles; this was later used by Orhan as a basis for his claim to Constantinople.

³⁹ Murad I (1326–1389), Ottoman sultan whose military assistance John V Palaiologos enlisted on his side in Byzantine power struggles, but also against the Serbs; killed by Milosh Obilich during the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.

⁴⁰ Wolf Brankovich (1345–1397), a Serbian nobleman and provincial ruler; in Serbian tradition, he betrayed the ruler, Prince Lazar of Serbia, in the Battle

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of Kososvo against the Turks, but this is not irrefutably supported by historical facts.

⁴¹ Actually *Gerluka*, distorted form of *Kyrios Loukas* (*Lord Loukas* in Greek); reference to the Byzantine Grand Admiral Loukas Notaras, who had, by some unproven accounts, somehow betrayed the Byzantine cause during the siege of Constantinople in 1453; however, instead of rewarding him, the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II (Muhammad II) had him executed; it is unclear who was the first to introduce the misspelling *Gertuka*.

⁴² Nyegosh approves of Gertuka's punishment (meaning, „that befits Gertuka“).

⁴³ Here, Murad I.

⁴⁴ Bosnia fell under Ottoman rule only in 1463, i.e. under the reign of Mehmet II (Muhammad II); Bayezid I only commenced serious incursions.

⁴⁵ Here, Murad II, Murad the Great (1404–1451).

⁴⁶ Here, Mehmet II (Muhammad II), Mehmet the Conqueror (1432–1481), conquered Constantinople in 1453, and then the remaining part of Byzantium.

⁴⁷ Selim I, Selim the Grim (1470–1520) conquered Egypt in 1517 (and assumed the title of caliph), whereas Selim II, Selim the Blond (1524–1574) conquered Cyprus in 1570.

⁴⁸ An allusion to the brave struggle of the Hungarian legendary hero John (Yanosh) Hunyadi after the death of King Wladislaw III in 1444, which nevertheless ended in defeat and surrender after the Battle of Mohacs in 1526.

⁴⁹ George Castriot (1405–1468), an Albanian nobleman and skilled military commander who deserted the Ottomans after twenty years of service and fought successfully against them as well as Venice for the rest of his life; he died of malaria in a Venetian fort, while planning new strategies.

⁵⁰ Milosh Obilich, Serbian knight who killed Sultan Murad I during the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.

⁵¹ Against own kith and kin turned Turk.

⁵² Serbia („the head“) was crushed first, and then other Serbian lands followed.

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⁵³ The Ottoman conquerors.

⁵⁴ Montenegro.

⁵⁵ The throne of the Christian Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire.

⁵⁶ Hagia Sophia („Holy Wisdom“), the great Christian patriarchal basilica in Constantinople, was converted to a mosque by the Turks and surrounded with four minarets.

⁵⁷ The Ottoman sultan.

⁵⁸ The Ottoman sultan in his role as caliph, the supreme religious and secular leader in Islam.

⁵⁹ Turn–Turks.

⁶⁰ The Kosovo curse, or the Prince's curse, in Serbian tradition, the curse said by Prince Lazar against the Serbs who ignored the call for war against the Turks.

⁶¹ Milosh Obilich.

⁶² Serbian name for a female relative married into a family in another village; also, a euphemism for pregnant woman or young mother.

⁶³ Vladika Danilo had been captured by the Turks through deceit, but released against the payment of a ransom.