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**THE CAUCASUS TO RUSSIA (ON THE CAUCASIAN WORKS OF  
A. BESTUZHEV-MARLINSKIY**

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***Abstract***

The article is devoted to the literary work of one of the active participants in the Decembrist uprising Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy, convicted and exiled to the Caucasus. His personality is revealed as a person of an extraordinary mind and selfless courage. The theme of Caucasian works of A. Bestuzhev is wide and diverse. His works trace the evolution of views on the mountaineers, Caucasian politics, tsarism. The characteristic feature of the Caucasian creativity of A.A. Bestuzhev was duality. It is inherent in almost everything he wrote about. Perhaps it was caused by his position of a “state criminal”, demands of censorship, when “the highlander-robber” had to oppose the positive characteristics of a highlander, a description of the brutal actions of the tsarist army, the looting of soldiers, etc. At the same time, as a man of great culture, he treated the highlanders with great respect, objectively paying tribute to the character of the highlanders. He sought to highlight the positive and negative aspects of everyday life, character, and relations of the highlanders in his own way objectively and more fully. The first "Caucasian" works of A.A. Bestuzhev were published in Russia in 1832 and had great success. Within several years, they were reprinted several times. Russian readers were attracted by themes of Bestuzhev's works, idealization of the strong and passionate nature of the romantic heroes of his works, the excited form of thoughts expression, landscape and battle paintings in writings, genre and ethnographic elements, exceptional interest of the plot.

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**Keywords:** Tsarist Russia, Caucasian War, A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy, Decembrists, Highlanders, Northern Caucasus.



## 1. Introduction

After the suppression of the Decembrist uprising, several hundred of its participants were exiled to the Caucasus. A number of them left a rich literary legacy. Alexander Bestuzhev, who took the literary name Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy, was especially popular with them. For active participation in the Decembrist uprising, he was convicted as a "state criminal" "on the first level" and exiled to Siberia. Thanks to numerous requests of A.S. Griboyedov A. Bestuzhev was transferred to the Caucasus as a simple soldier and served here for seven years (until his death in battle). Some Russian officers in the Caucasus either got drunk or hardened or began to hate everything Caucasian. Here is how the exiled Decembrist M.M. Korsakov was described this, "... Our community of Stormy fortress (fortress in Dagestan. – Auth) is so disgusting, stupid, ... absurd, that, really, you cannot exist in it. The officers of our battalion, with the exception of two or three, are no better than a serf ...". A.A. Bestuzhev showed himself in exile in the Caucasus, in this "warm Siberia", a man of great will, selfless bravery and an extraordinary mind. After arriving in the Caucasus, he began to study the languages, ethnography, history and economics of the mountain peoples, after a few years becoming the greatest connoisseur of the Caucasus. He was fluent in several Caucasian languages (as cited in Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy, 1981a). All this took place in conditions of difficult, bloody, bitter, continuous campaigns and battles with the mountaineers, when friends-officers die. "It's impossible to deny Bestuzhev's wonderful acquaintance with the life and nature of that land, where he had to spend too seven years: his awareness in Caucasian dialects and his strong ethnographic interests are undoubted," noted Alekseev (1928). – For his time, Bestuzhev knew more about the mountains and the mountaineers, in particular about Dagestan, than anyone else; his personal impressions received during numerous campaigns and dangerous expeditions ... he systematically checked and justified in reading special literature" (Alekseev, 1928, p. 160). Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy (1981b) enjoyed great respect and fame as a connoisseur of Islam and the Koran among the Dagestan residents.

*The Muslim scholars of Derbent turned to Bestuzhev for translations of dark places ..., on questions of grammar, theory ... Bestuzhev tries through observed facts to penetrate the dynamics of life and to bring out all the peculiarities of character, psychology, customs, the life of Caucasians from natural geographical, socio-economic and cultural- historical conditions. (Vasiliev, 1926, p. 11)*

## 2. Problem Statement

The problem of the study is the literary work of one of the active participants in the Decembrist uprising Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy, convicted and exiled to the Caucasus, his personality as a person of an extraordinary mind and selfless bravery.

## 3. Research Questions

Events of the writer's works show the relationship between Russia and the Caucasus. Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy (1981b) was one of the first to make his vision of the Caucasus an integral part of the Russian's ideas about this region, which has survived to the present day. Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy (1981b) made

interesting observations concerning the subsequent concepts of war in the Caucasus. All this makes the writer's journalism relevant and topical, and its comprehensive research becomes very important.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is a review and comprehensive analysis of A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy's Caucasian journalism and the writer's personal letters, the reflection of Caucasian motifs and realities in his work.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Descriptive, analytical, historical-literary and complex research methods used in the work allowed for objective determination of the role and place of Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy (1981a) in the development of the Caucasian theme in Russian literature and tracing the evolution of his views on the Highlanders, on the Caucasian policy of Tsarist Russia.

#### **6. Findings**

In the first half of the 19th century, when there was an endless Caucasian war, for the overwhelming mass of Russian residents, the Caucasus seemed to be a “death place”, where Russian soldiers were dying for nothing, Russian blood was flowing, and the Highlanders were considered to be “robbers” and “villains”. Naturally, the majority of Russian officers (and the Decembrists were not an exception in this regard”) treated the highlanders far unfriendly. It should also be borne in mind that in the Decembrist circles of the nobility revolutionaries they did not study to understand and sympathize with the liberation struggle of the North Caucasian highlanders. "Russian Truth" by Pestel (1958) interpreted the solution of the vital problems of the Highlanders in a very peculiar way.

*... All the experiments made to turn the Mountain peoples into peaceful and calm neighbors have already proved clearly and indisputably that it is impossible to achieve this goal. These peoples do not allow even the slightest chance to inflict every possible harm on Russia, and there is only one means to pacify them in order to completely conquer them: until this is fully accomplished, neither silence nor security can be expected and there will be war in those countries forever (Pestel, 1958, p. 302)*

The limitations, weaknesses, certain moments of great power were manifested in the solution of the Caucasian problem in the "Constitution" of N. Muravyov. He proposed to “mix” various “tribes” of the Caucasus with the Russians, to oblige everyone who wants to become full-fledged “citizens” of the state to study Russian literacy for twenty years. Of course, in the program documents of the Decembrists there were also strong, progressive sides. This, above all, is the declaration of all peoples free and equal before the law of revolutionary Russia. Still, the methods proposed to solve the problems of the mountain peoples, their accession to Russia were very far from humanity. It is clear that the Decembrists arrived in the Caucasus, were very negatively disposed towards the highlanders. However, ideas about the mountaineers, their

struggle for independence, and the methods of actions of the tsarist authorities begin to change gradually among the Decembrists when they see the brutal actions of the Russian army during the "pacification" of the mountaineers. They become familiar with their life, communicate with them, visit villages, acquaintances and even make friends with the mountaineers. Decent and progressive-minded people have to think about the colonial policy of tsarism, one way or another, and determine their attitude towards it. This evolution of the Decembrists' views on the Highlanders, on the Caucasian policy of tsarism, is clearly visible in the works of A. Bestuzhev, since he wrote on the fresh traces of events in the Caucasus and sent his works to Russia, where they were printed almost immediately. The works of other famous Decembrists about the Caucasus – N.I. Lorera, E. Lachinova, A.E. Rosen and others are memoirs, memories written after returning from the Caucasus, the results of their reflections, but not letters and diaries. The first "Caucasian" works of Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy (1981b) was published in Russia in 1832 and had great success. Within several years, they were reprinted several times. Famous historian and expert in the Caucasus Zisserman recalled:

*I was 17 years old when, living in one of the provincial cities, I read some of Marlinskiy's works for the first time. I will not dwell on my admiration of Ammalat bek, Mulla-Nur and other essays of the Caucasus: it's enough to say that this reading gave birth to the thought of abandoning everything and flying to the Caucasus, to this promised land, with its menacing nature, belligerent inhabitants, wonderful women, poetic sky, high mountains forever covered with snow, and other delights that inevitably ignite the imagination of the seventeen-year-old head.. (Zisserman, 1879, p. 191)*

Russian readers were drawn to the themes of Bestuzhev's works, the idealization of the strong and passionate nature of the romantic heroes of his works (such as Ammalat bek, Mulla-Nur), an upbeat, agitated form of expression of thoughts, landscape and battle paintings in his writings, genre, ethnographic elements in his work, the exceptional interest of the plot. The themes of Caucasian works of Bestuzhev-Marlinsky are very wide and varied: the nature of the Caucasus, life, and customs, ethnographic issues, episodes of the tragic Caucasian War, images of mountaineers, soldiers and officers. The characteristic feature of the Caucasian creativity of A.A. Bestuzhev was duality. It is inherent in almost everything he wrote about: the actions of the tsarist troops, the characteristics of highlanders and Russian soldiers, etc. Perhaps it was caused by his position of a "state criminal", demands of censorship, when the highlander-robber had to oppose the positive characteristics of a highlander, a description of the brutal actions of the tsarist army, the looting of soldiers – praise of the tsarist military leaders, praise of Nicholas I, etc. "... It is very unsafe to rely on the honor of an Asian who does not know and does not respect any rights and rules of the military observed by Europeans," writes Bestuzhev in "Letters from Dagestan". Overwhelmed by warfare, predatory moods, seeing the daily death of his comrades, observing the inertia and the lack of culture of the Highlanders in a European way, not always analyzing the causes of these phenomena, believing that these "shortcomings" of the highlander can be eliminated only by force, and seeing that the mountaineers do not show a desire to put up with Russia and stubbornly defend their independence and age-old customs and traditions with arms, A. Bestuzhev sometimes expressed unjust, chauvinistic thoughts. At the same time, as a man of great culture, imbued with liberation ideas and humane moods, in general,

he treated mountaineers without hatred and contempt, objectively paying tribute to the valuable qualities of their character. Shading the "dark" side of the character of the Highlanders, he repeatedly shows their positive qualities. In the work "Ammalat Bek" he writes:

*The Avars are a free people. They do not know and do not tolerate any power over themselves ... They are poor ... and they are brave to the extreme, well-aimed arrows from rifles, they act nicely on foot ... Loyalty to the Avar word in the mountains turned into a proverb. ... They are ready to die and take revenge for the guest until the generation ends.* (Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy, 1981a, p. 16)

In Letters from Dagestan Bestuzhev describes the actions of the Russian troops against the rebels Gazimuhammed (Kazi-Mullah), praising the heroism of the Russian soldiers, calling the mountaineers "rebels". "We again treated Kazi-Mullah's troops on June 19 (1831 – Auth.) Now we are making sensitive trips to the mountains, beating the rebels at every meeting and making quarantine stubs in their nests with gunpowder and smashing them into stone for airing. ... Most of all we were delighted that on that day when joyful Russia laid the crown of Monomakh on the head of the worthiest of the kings, the victory made a new wreath on his weapon." And all this is accompanied by a clear condemnation of the colonial war, its cruel methods, and its tragic consequences.

*The morning of May 30 revealed to us a terrible picture of extermination ... the houses were smoked and there were burnt corpses of the Highlanders who died in the flames. The streets were not traveled because of the dead: they were lying in huts and in ridges ... Some plaintive verse found me ... A whistle of cannon shots from a large battery was heard to me by the moan of widows and orphans. "Why do people torment each other mercilessly? I thought ...* (Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy, 1981b, p. 107)

This question clearly shows the negative attitude of Bestuzhev to the colonial war with the highlanders. He is a supporter of the accession of the Caucasus to Russia, but not by military methods. No "lofty goals" – strategic, economic, and other interests of Russia justify the mass extermination of the Highlanders in the eyes of the writer. It seems that Bestuzhev praised the victories of Russian weapons in Dagestan for the censorship to miss the posing of such questions that L.N. Tolstoy asked M.Yu. Lermontov and A. Polezhaev. In private letters to friends, A. Bestuzhev is more outspoken than in his writers' works undergoing strict censorship. In one of the letters to K.A. to Polevoi, he expresses very bold thoughts for a disgraced and exiled revolutionary about the war against the highlanders: "...They are scolding them for robbery, but can they really abandon this craft now, when the Russians, like a boa constrictor, with each day, tighten their rings and take away their field by field, cliff by cliff? They are reproached with ingratitude, but ... tell me, why should they be grateful? In all Caucasian works of Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, the main character is a simple Russian soldier, shown with surprising veracity and love. Marlinskiy's soldier marches from the recruiting in Russia to the death in the Caucasus, pursued by commanders, an obscure, dark, heroic victim of a great historical deception. It is shown without fake cloying, in simple words, many examples of his terrible life in the Caucasus are told, but it is the image of the soldier and the picture of the soldier crowd

that came out of the writer's pen in the most memorable, complete and true types. In a letter to Polevoi, Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy notes:

*As for the Russian soldiers, your opinion is not quite right... Our soldier very reluctantly goes into the fire, but well stands it and why do you think that is? He does not know how to leave and goes on the certain death because he does not dare to disobey. However, the Russian soldier is available to all high feelings, if they were able to excite them in advance. An example to follow and eloquence carry them away, and a wonderful thing is: the name of a regiment, the name of a company known from ancient times, turns cowards into the fearless. (Polevoi, 1861, par. 6)*

Bestuzhev writes a lot about the “generosity”, “justice”, and “strict order” of the tsarist army, but he doesn’t give specific facts to these assertions. But on the other hand, he cites many examples of the reverse order: truthfully and violently described pictures of cruelty, greed, and looting of the Russian army in the North Caucasus. "In the intervals, a detachment burned the villages," "burned 9 villages," "Russians left behind 12 villages in ashes". None of the Russian authors of the 19th century cited such a frank and therefore terrible picture of looting of Russian soldiers in the captured mountain villages in his works, as A.A. Bestuzhev did in his Caucasian works. The contradictions and duality found in the Caucasian works of A. Bestuzhev in the assessments of many phenomena are possibly (partially) explained by the duality of the position of the author himself. A progressive man of his era, upholding advanced socio-political views, sincerely desiring peace and enlightenment to the Caucasus, he was made to participate in the unjust war of tsarist Russia against the mountain peoples with the aim of their enslavement. He could not but sympathize with the mountaineers who upheld the freedom and independence of their homeland, their centuries-old customs, and traditions, their way of life. Being a soldier of the Russian army, he was forced to fight with them against his will. In the letter to his brothers Nikolay and Mikhail of December 24, 1831, he writes: “I trampled the snow of the Caucasus, I fought with his sons – worthy enemies. How skillfully they can fight, how heroically they decide to die”. A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky believed that many negative perceptions of the Russian public about the mountaineers are because of the fact that people in the North Caucasus are unknown in Russia. In Russian publications, they are written tendentiously and biased. Moreover, they are portrayed with a single paint, while the peoples of the Caucasus must be approached differentially. "In the heart of the Caucasus, there are tribes that never converged with the Russians ... there are peoples who are completely peaceful. ... In general, the Caucasus is completely unknown: it was stained with ink, painted like a burka ... Especially we know Chechnya badly ...").

## **7. Conclusion**

Despite participating in constant campaigns, A. Bestuzhev devoted a lot of time studying the world of the Highlanders, trying to understand their socio-economic structure. He sought in his own way objectively and more fully to highlight the positive and negative aspects of everyday life, character, and relations of the highlanders. Geographical and climatic conditions explained the human qualities of the mountaineers, their character. While portraying an ordinary representative of a people, he often emphasizes that his behavior is determined by specific circumstances and living conditions. Even emphasizing the

negative, from his point of view, customs and behavioral stereotypes of the Highlanders, A. Bestuzhev treated them with respect. He emphasized the nobility in treating the highlanders between themselves. Disputes are resolved in the circle of old men; fights are almost unknown. He notes the philanthropy, wide hospitality, love of freedom, their military prowess and respect for their elders.

Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy's Caucasian works (novels, stories, essays, letters), which aroused great interest in Russian society, contributed to the elimination of tendentiousness towards the highlanders, the spread of objective ideas about the North Caucasian highlanders, their life, and customs, showed the cruel truth about the Caucasian war, which became a tragedy not only for the highlanders, but also for the Russian people.

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