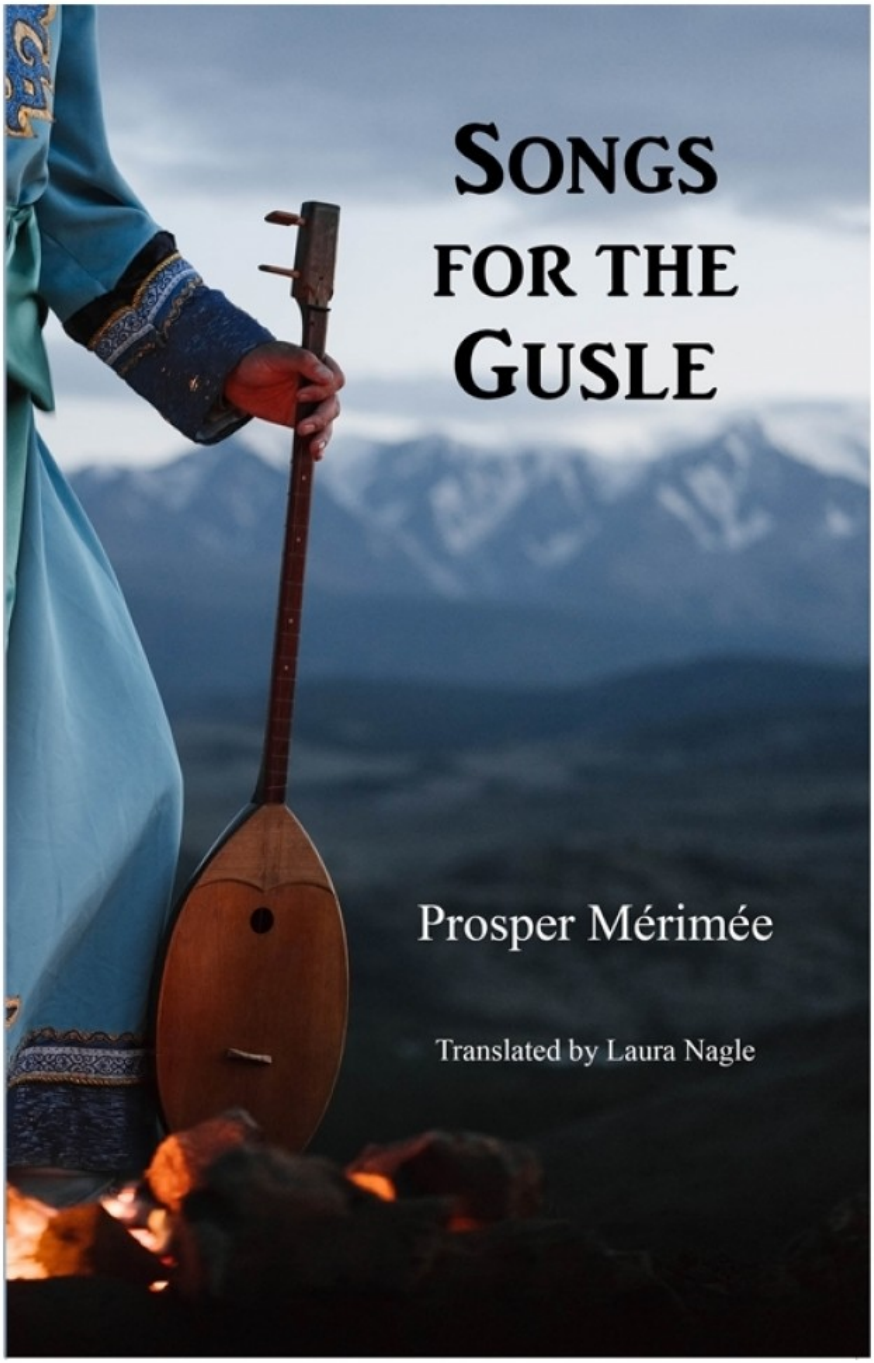
First Ever English-Language Translation of Songs for the Gusle by Prosper Mérimée

Frayed Edge Press is pleased to announce the publication of Songs for the Gusle, the first-ever complete English-language translation of Prosper Mérimée's 19th-century French literary hoax, an early example of "fakelore."


SONGS
FOR THE
GUSLE
Prosper Mérimée
Translated by Laura Nagle

Phildelphia, Pennsylvania Mar 21, 2023 (Issuewire.com) - Frayed Edge Press is pleased to announce the publication of Songs for the Gusle, the first-ever complete translation of Prosper Mérimée's 19th-century French literary hoax. The widely-praised translation by Indiana-based translator Laura Nagle makes this exciting early example of "fakelore" available to English-language readers for the first time.

Prosper Mérimée (1803–1870) was a major figure in the French Romantic movement. He is remembered as a pioneer of the novella, with *Carmen* (1845) and *Colomba* (1840) being his best-known works. His story of *Carmen* served as the basis for the libretto of the opera of the same name by Georges Bizet. But in 1827, before he was a celebrated literary figure, Mérimée was a young civil servant looking to make some quick money on the side. He accomplished this by writing *La Guzla, ou Choix de poésies illyriques recueillies dans la Dalmatie, la Bosnie, la Croatie et l'Herzégowine*, purported to be a collection of folktales, ballad lyrics, and travel narratives compiled and translated into French by an anonymous traveler returning from the Balkans. The book proved to be a surprise bestseller, and excerpts from it were translated into a number of major European languages, including English. Its content was taken at face value and even today, some writers and critics still cite it as an example of Balkan folklore.

The work consists of short pieces drawing from various genres—ersatz scholarly essays, ballad lyrics presented in the form of prose poems, folk tales, a fragment of a stage play—all generously peppered with footnotes explaining the historical and sociological context of these "discoveries." In these dramatic tales of love, war, and encounters with the supernatural, Mérimée has given us both a treasure trove of "fakelore" and a satirical portrait of a self-appointed expert blissfully unaware of how little he understands the cultures he claims to represent.

The volume also includes Mérimée's preface to the 1840 edition of the work, in which he confesses to the deception, as well as a translator's note by Laura Nagle in which she discusses the background of the work and some of the challenges of translating it.

Ena Selimović, the co-founder of Turkoslavia, a collective of literary translators working from Turkic and Slavic languages, had this to say: "A joyfully elliptical translation that enlivens the dark humor of the original, penned by a writer posing as the preserver of the mythical and so-called barely human 'Illyrian tongue.' A long overdue edition for anyone interested in folk poetry, race politics, and empire in the Balkans."

Professor of French Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Philippe Met, has commented that "Mérimée's *La Guzla* is a unique, mesmerizing work that combines poetry, prose, and critical apparatus into one of the most brilliant literary hoaxes. Unfairly overlooked to this day, even in its native France, it has been unavailable in English in its entirety—until now. Both accurate and elegant, Laura Nagle's felicitous translation uncannily navigates the many pitfalls and subtleties hidden in Mérimée's deceptively simple text with admirable skill and efficacy. The result is a momentous translator's feat and a sumptuous feast for the reader."

Songs for the Gusle officially launch on March 21, 2023, and may be purchased directly through our distribution partner Parlew Distribution. The book is also available through major online booksellers, including Amazon and Barnes & Noble as well as most library book jobbers, including Ingram and Baker & Taylor.

Laura Nagle is a translator and writer based in Indianapolis. Her translations of prose and poetry from French and Spanish have appeared in journals including *AGNI*, *The Southern Review*, *ANMLY*, and

The Los Angeles Review. She received a Travel Fellowship from the American Literary Translators Association in 2020.

Frayed Edge Press is a small independent press located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which specializes in publishing marginalized voices, overlooked literature in translation, and works that wrestle with important questions impacting contemporary society. For more information about the press, visit our website at: https://www.frayededgepress.com/

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