

Selections from Derzhavin



Translation and Notes by C. John Holcombe

Ocaso Press 2021

Gavril Romanovich Derzhavin
Selected Poems

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Colin John Holcombe

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INTRODUCTION

GAVRIL ROMANOVICH DERZHAVIN

Gavríl Románovich Derzhávin (1743-1816) rose from penniless obscurity to the highest offices of state, but is remembered today as Russia's greatest poet before Púshkin.

LIFE

Derzhavin was born in July 1743, either in Kazan or the Laishevsky area. His family was impoverished nobility of Tatar descent, whose scattered holdings provided more headaches than income. Derzhavin's mother could barely sign her name, and his father was sent from one dreary military posting to another in southwest Russia. The father died of consumption when Derzhavin was in his teens, and Derzhavin's education, required of the aristocracy entering imperial service, was decidedly patchy. Finally, by a bureaucratic blunder, Derzhavin was not entered into the engineering corps as wanted but made a private in the Preobrazhensky Regiment, bodyguards of the royal family at Petersburg.

Without connections, Derzhavin's rise into the officer class was very slow. On his own initiative, he became involved in the Pugachev Rebellion, which brought his name favourably to Catherine's attention, but upset his social and military superiors. On suppression of the rebellion,

Derzhavin was given lands in newly annexed White Russia. In 1777 he returned to Petersburg, and was transferred to the civil service. Thereafter, though his poetry became known throughout Russia, and indeed the world, his career improved, but its course was anything but smooth. He was promoted to Governor of Olonets (1784), to Governor of Tambov (1785), to Personal Secretary to the Empress Catherine (1791), to President of the College of Commerce (1794), and finally to Minister of Justice (1802). But with everyone, without exception, Derzhavin quarrelled. His industry, ability and honest devotion to the monarchy were never in doubt, but no one could get along with an inflexible character that imposed such exacting standards on everyone and everything. In 1803 he was dismissed from the service, and retired to spend a green old age at his splendid mansion in Petersburg and at his second wife's country estate at Zvanka, near Novgorod. At the last in particular he seems to have been content, surrounded by his wife's relations and turning out yet more odes, tragedies and Anacreontic verse. He died in 1816 and was buried in the Khutyn Monastery, his remains being reburied by the Soviets in the Novgorod Kremlin, and then re-interred at Khutyn.

WORKS

Derzhavin was an original. By force of inspiration, he completed the hopes of his eighteenth century predecessors like Katemír, Trediakóvsky and Lomonósov, and lived long enough to hear Pushkin recite his first poems, recognizing a talent that would usher in a new

sensibility. Derzhavin is famous for his odes, into which he packed a great deal of elegy, humour and satire. To our ears, the poems are rather high-minded and over-long, but they are also exceptionally accomplished and powerful.

The translations in this book include the more important odes, namely *On the Death of Prince Meshchersky* (1779), *Felitsa* (1782), *God* (1785), the opening excerpt from the *Waterfall* (1794), written on the death of Prince Potemkin, and the *Bullfinch* (1800), which served as a short elegy on the death of his friend, Marshall Suvorov. Also included are the attractively informal *Invitation to Dinner* (1795), and *Life at Zvanka* (1807).

Line lengths and rhyme schemes have been retained, but the soft feminine rhymes, common in Russian verse, have been replaced by English masculine rhymes. The translation is also more conventional than the original rather craggy Russian.

Notes, references, audio recordings and more scholarly material can be found in the Appendix.

НА СМЕРТЬ КНЯЗЯ МЕЩЕРСКОГО

Глагол времен! металла звон!
Твой страшный глас меня смущает;
Зовет меня, зовет твой стон,
Зовет — и к гробу приближает.

5. Едва увидел я сей свет,
Уже зубами смерть скрежещет,
Как молнией, косою блещет,
И дни мои, как злак, сечет.

Ничто от роковых кохтей,
10. Никая тварь не убегает;
Монарх и узник — снедь червей,
Гробницы злость стихий снедает;
Зияет время славу стерть:
Как в море льются быстры воды,
15. Так в вечность льются дни и годы;
Глощает царства алчна смерть.

Скользим мы бездны на краю,
В которую стремглав свалимся;
Приемлем с жизнью смерть свою,
20. На то, чтоб умереть, родимся.
Без жалости всё смерть разит:
И звезды ею сокрушатся,
И солнцы ею потушатся,
И всем мирам она грозит.

ON THE DEATH OF PRINCE MESHCHERSKY

The voice of time, whose metal ring
perplexes with its frightful gloom,
yet calls and calls as though to bring
my life still closer to the tomb.

5. And light itself, the first we saw,
brought death's sharp teeth into our gaze.
The scythe-like lightning strikes, and days
are grain upon that threshing floor.

No destiny eludes those jaws,
10. no creature known can haste away.
In throne and cell the small worm bores;
to elements the tombs decay.
Wide yawning time erases fame
as but to sea swift waters flow,
15. when days to endless time will go
as realms that death's own jaws will claim.

We skirt that abyss all our lives
in which, at last, we headlong fall.
With life there's death, and all that thrives
20. is also under death's dark pall.
Cruel is death, and obdurate:
the stars are subject to its will:
the sun itself fades out to chill:
whole worlds will death intimidate.

25. Не мнит лишь смертный умирать
И быть себя он вечным чаем;
Приходит смерть к нему, как тать,
И жизнь внезапно похищает.
Увы! где меньше страха нам,
30. Там может смерть постичь скорее;
Ее и громы не быстрее
Слетают к гордым вышинам.

Сын роскоши, прохлад и нег,
Куда, Мещерской! ты сокрылся?
35. Оставил ты сей жизни брег,
К брегам ты мертвых удалился;
Здесь персть твоя, а духа нет.
Где ж он? — Он там. — Где там? — Не знаем.
Мы только плачем и взываем:
40. «О, горе нам, рожденным в свет!»

Утехи, радость и любовь
Где купно с здоровьем блистали,
У всех там цепенеет кровь
И дух мятется от печали.
45. Где стол был яств, там гроб стоит;
Где пиршеств раздавались лики,
Надгробные там воют клики,
И бледна смерть на всех глядит.

25. Only we poor mortals have belief
in us ourselves, forever on,
but death comes quietly, like a thief,
and what was life is promptly gone.
He comes when we're afraid of none,
30. who know our ends are not yet soon:
like thunder heard in hills at noon
our flight to pride will come undone.

Son of easy pleasure's cause,
now where, Meshchersky, do you hide?
35. For you have left these living shores,
and with the dead must now abide.
This is your finger, yet there's no
occasion in that how? or why?
We only ever weep and cry,
40. 'we born into this world of woe.'

Comfort, joy, abundant love,
where mercy lived with shining health:
is not that chill of blood enough
that sorrow dim our spirit's self?
45. Where feast was once is coffin's pall,
where brightly spoke each laughing head,
the dead are howling to the dead,
and their last pallor looks on all.

Глядит на всех — и на царей,
50. Кому в державу тесны миры;
Глядит на пышных богачей,
Что в злате и серебре кумиры;
Глядит на прелесть и красы,
Глядит на разум возвышенный,
55. Глядит на силы дерзновенны
И точит лезвие косы.

Смерть, трепет естества и страх!
Мы — гордость с бедностью совместна;
Сегодня бог, а завтра прах;
60. Сегодня льстит надежда лестна,
А завтра: где ты, человек?
Едва часы протечь успели,
Хаоса в бездну улетели,
И весь, как сон, прошел твой век.

65. Как сон, как сладкая мечта,
Исчезла и моя уж младость;
Не сильно нежит красота,
Не столько восхищает радость,
Не столько легкомыслен ум,
70. Не столько я благополучен;
Желанием честей размучен,
Зовет, я слышу, славы шум.

It stares at all things, every king,
50. whatever be the power they held,
It sees each rich and pompous thing
as gold and silver idols felled.
It glowers at beauty, breath alive,
at mind in thought, at the sublime:
55. for those of war who boldly climb,
it sharpens up its gleaming scythe.

In death, with trembling state and fear,
are pride and poverty combined.
We talk like God, but dust is near.
60. Today such flattering hopes we find,
tomorrow, where is man then cast?
And in an hour we barely miss
confusion enters that abyss,
and, like a dream, our age has passed.

65. And like a dream, the sweetest dream,
my youth has wholly fled away.
Now beauty seems an empty theme,
nor merriment has much to say.
70. Today I'm not so well-to-do,
nor thirst for honour as in days
so long debauched by love of praise,
yet still there's glory's voice I knew.

Но так и мужество пройдет
И вместе к славе с ним стремленье;
75. Богатств стяжание минет,
И в сердце всех страстей волненье
Прейдет, прейдет в чреду свою.
Подите счастья прочь возможны,
Вы все переменны здесь и ложны:
80. Я в дверях вечности стою.

Сей день, иль завтра умереть,
Перфильев! должно нам конечно, —
Почто ж терзаться и скорбеть,
Что смертный друг твой жил не вечно?
85. Жизнь есть небес мгновенный дар;
Устрой ее себе к покою,
И с чистою твоей душою
Благословляй судеб удар.

1779

But even courage knows its day,
the hoped-for glory fails its part.
75. Wealth and riches pass away;
the seat of passion, the flooding heart
will pass as all things pass. And we
with happiness less close to hand,
find all things false. From where I stand,
80. this doorway to eternity

pronounces all must die, today,
tomorrow, Perfiliev.¹ Why grieve
that your fond friend went on his way,
and left the world we all must leave?
85. Life is heaven's brief, passing gift,
so make your peace both deep and sure:
ensure your parting soul is pure
to bless the blow of fate when swift.

1779

ВЛАСТИТЕЛЯМ И СУДИЯМ

Восстал всевышний бог, да судит
Земных богов во сонме их;
Доколе, рек, доколь вам будет
Щадить неправедных и злых?

5. Ваш долг есть: сохранять законы,
На лица сильных не взирать,
Без помощи, без обороны
Сирот и вдов не оставлять.

Ваш долг: спасти от бед невинных.
10. Несчастливым подать покров;
От сильных защищать бессильных,
Исторгнуть бедных из оков.

Не внемлют! видят — и не знают!
Покрыты мздою очеса:
15. Злодействы землю потрясают,
Неправда зыблет небеса.

Цари! Я мнил, вы боги властны,
Никто над вами не судья,
Но вы, как я подобно, страстны,
20. И так же смертны, как и я.

TO RULERS AND JUDGES

The most high God has risen: He
will judge how earthly gods have fared.
How long, saith He, can evil be
unpunished and the guilty spared?

5. Your duty speaks: uphold the laws,
refuse the bidding of the strong:
defenceless ones should be your cause,
no widow or the orphan wrong.

Protect the innocent from harm,
10. unhappy ones where hardship reigns.
Protect the weak from might's strong arm,
and free the poor from heavy chains.

The deaf, unseeing from their birth,
have bribes to cover reasons why.
15. So evil deeds still shake the earth
unrighteousness affronts the sky.

You kings who pose as heaven's fate,
above all other judges thus,
you, I know, are passionate
20. and mortal like the rest of us.

И вы подобно так падете,
Как с древ увядший лист падет!
И вы подобно так умрете,
Как ваш последний раб умрет!

25. Воскресни, боже! боже правых!
И их молению внимли:
Приди, суди, карай лукавых,
И будь един царем земли!

1780

And you will fall as others do,
and like the withered leaf behave,
will fall at last, and even you
will die as does the common slave.

25. Arise O God of probity,
accept these prayers of honest birth.
Come, punish wickedness, and be
the one almighty of the earth.

1780

ФЕЛИЦА

Богopodobная цaревнa
Киргиз-Кайсацкия орды!
Которой мудрость несравненна
Открыла верные следы
5. Царевичу младому Хлору
Взойти на ту высокую гору,
Где роза без шипов растет,
Где добродетель обитает,—
Она мой дух и ум пленяет,
10. Подай найти ее совет.

Подай, Фелица! наставленья:
Как пышно и правдиво жить,
Как укрощать страстей волненье
И счастливым на свете быть?
15. Меня твой голос возбуждает,
Меня твой сын препровождает;
Но им последовать я слаб.
Мяжась житейской суетою,
Сегодня властвую собою,
20. А завтра прихотям я раб.

FELITSA

Tsarina, wise, omnipotent
and of the Kirghuz-Kaisak race:
one whose powerful mind has bent
to find the path, the faithful trace
5. that Khlor, the young tsarevich ¹
may climb the highest mountain's reach.
Say, you whose rose can have no spine,
whose very virtue is designed
to captivate my heart and mind,
10. say how your counsel would incline.

Felitsa, give me sound instruction
in worldly opulence that's true,
have the passions find reduction
and in this world be happy too.
15. How admirable is now your voice.
Your son escorts me in this choice.
Alas, my urge to fight but thins
against the vanities of wealth,
and if today I curb myself,
20. tomorrow I'm a slave to whims.

Мурзам твоим не подражая,
Почасту ходишь ты пешком,
И пища самая простая
Бывает за твоим столом;
25. Не дорожа твоим покоем,
Читаешь, пишешь пред налоем
И всем из твоего пера
Блаженство смертным проливаешь;
Подобно в карты не играешь,
30. Как я, от утра до утра.

Не слишком любишь маскарады,
А в клуб не ступишь и ногой;
Храня обычаи, обряды,
Не донкишотствуешь собой;
35. Коня парнаска не седлаешь,
К духам в собранье не въезжаешь,
Не ходишь с трона на Восток;
Но кротости ходя стезею,
Благотворящею душою,
40. Полезных дней проводишь ток

А я, проспавши до полудни,
Курю табак и кофе пью;
Преображая в праздник будни,
Кружу в химерах мысль мою:
45. То плен от персов похищаю,
То стрелы к туркам обращаю;
То, возмечтав, что я султан,
Вселенну устрашаю взглядом;
То вдруг, прельщаяся нарядом,
50. Скачу к портному по кафтан.

Unlike the mirzas ² in your court,
you often go about on foot.
The plainest food is what you've sought
where honest fare is simply put.
25. Your hard-won rest is much the same:
you read and write by candle flame.
To us mere mortals from your pen
comes sensible but fervent bliss,
and even cards you choose to miss
30. as I do morn to morn again.

You do not care for masquerades
and to a club are quite unknown:
habit and custom, neither fades,
nor is there fooling by the throne.
35. You do not haunt Parnassus, nor
what séances are practiced for.
No eastern rule is in your gaze,
who traced an honest path, both whole
and modest. So your giving soul
40. but works for other's useful days.

But I, of course, have slept till noon,
which fumes of pipe and coffee show.
My working day is one long swoon
within whose thoughts chimeras grow.
45. With captives under Persian skies
I arm myself in Turkish guise.
Still dreaming that I am the sultan
I make my piercing look oppress,
or captured by some other dress
50. will slip out quickly for a caftan.

Или в пиру я пребогатом,
Где праздник для меня дают,
Где блещет стол серебром и золотом,
Где тысячи различных блюд:
55. Там славный окорок вестфальской,
Там звенья рыбы астраханской,
Там плов и пироги стоят,
Шампанским вафли запиваю;
И все на свете забываю

60. Средь вин, сластей и аромат.
Или средь рощицы прекрасной
В беседке, где фонтан шумит,
При звоне арфы сладкогласной,
Где ветерок едва дышит,
65. Где все мне роскошь представляет,
К утехам мысли уловляет,
Томит и оживляет кровь;
На бархатном диване лежа,
Младой девицы чувства нежа,
70. Вливаю в сердце ей любовь.

Или великолепным цугом
В карете английской, золотой,
С собакой, шутком или другом,
Или с красавицей какой
75. Я под качелями гуляю;
В шинки пить меду заезжаю;
Или, как то наскучит мне,
По склонности моей к премене,
Имея шапку набекрене,
80. Лечу на резвом бегуне.

Or at a sumptuous banquet hence
that's somehow given in my name,
with gold and silver ornaments
and umpteen tiers of fish and game,
55. good ham as rich Westphalia can
and our fine fish from Astrakan,
no pies or pilaffs go to waste;
with draughts of course of fine champagne,
the whole wide world will I disdain
when lost in brews of smell and taste.

60. Or let out in the forest groves
with falling water or of leaves,
when through them all the sweet harp roves,
or little breeze that scarcely breathes.

65. Such luxury in everything
brings pleasures where our thoughts may sing
to spice and quicken up the blood
that, with a tender creature there,
on velvet cushions I must dare
70. the heart pour out its plaintive flood.

Or for an English carriage send,
one splendidly a gold affair,
that with a dog or fool or friend,
or better, with some beauty there,
75. find the jaunty carriage drops
us into various sweetened stops.
Or something comes to me instead
and then by changing reasons led
I switch the cap upon my head
80. and in a trice am homeward sped.

Или музыкой и певцами,
Органом и волынкой вдруг,
Или кулачными бойцами
И пляской веселю мой дух;
85. Или, о всех делах заботу
Оставя, езжу на охоту
И забавляюсь лаем псов;
Или над невскими берегами
Я тешусь по ночам рогами
90. И греблей удалых гребцов.

Иль, сидя дома, я прокажу,
Играя в дураки с женой;
То с ней на голубятню лажу,
То в жмурки резвимся порой;
95. То в свайку с нею веселюся,
То ею в голове ищуся;
То в книгах рыться я люблю,
Мой ум и сердце просвещаю,
Полкана и Бову читаю;
100. За библией, зевая, сплю.

Таков, Фелица, я развратен!
Но на меня весь свет похож.
Кто сколько мудростью ни знатен,
Но всякий человек есть ложь.
105. Не ходим света мы путями,
Бежим разврата за мечтами.
Между лентяем и брюзгой,
Между тщеславья и пороком
Нашел кто разве ненароком
110. Путь добродетели прямой.

If song and music aren't enough
with organ pipe and wooden bole,
it's fisticuffs or some such stuff.
Or I may dance away my soul,
or spiting all, in any case,
85. at once embark upon the chase,
when riding on, I heed the notes
of baying dogs on Neva's banks.
Then for the horns I give my thanks
90. or take to agile rowing boats.

Or I'm at home and horse around,
or with my wife will promptly climb
into some dovecot at a bound,
for some such fun will find the time.
95. I look at what's inside my head
and by that very act am led
to dive wholesale in books and keep
enlightened in my thought and deed.
The Bov' Polkana³ tale I read
100. and at the Bible fall asleep.

Felitsa: I am dissolute
though all the world resemble me.
That man has wisdom I'd refute:
he simply lacks right honesty.
105. I do not walk the ways of truth
but only dream of misspent youth.
In fire and faithlessness we're cast,
by vice and vanity advance,
and stumble over, find by chance
110. that virtue's path is straight at last.

Нашел,— но лъзя ль не заблуждаться
Нам, слабым смертным, в сем пути,
Где сам рассудок спотыкаться
И должен вслед страстям идти;
115. Где нам ученые невежды,
Как мгла у путников, тмят вежды?
Везде соблазн и лесть живет,
Пашей всех роскошь угнетает.—
Где ж добродетель обитает?
120. Где роза без шипов растет?

Тебе единой лишь пристойно,
Царевна! свет из тьмы творить;
Деля Хаос на сферы стройно,
Союзом целость их крепить;
125. Из разногласия согласие
И из страстей свирепых счастье
Ты можешь только созидать.
Так кормщик, через понт плывущий,
Ловя под парус ветр ревущий,
130. Умеет судном управлять.

Едина ты лишь не обидишь,
Не оскорбляешь никого,
Дурачества сквозь пальцы видишь,
Лишь зла не терпишь одного;
135. Проступки снисхожденьем правишь,
Как волк овец, людей не давишь,
Ты знаешь прямо цену их.
Царей они подвластны воле,—
Но богу правосудну боле,
140. Живущему в законах их.

We find the path but still may falter,
who are weak mortals after all.

And stumbling reason, too, can alter,
passion lead us to our fall.

115. Ignoramuses must find
that learning can mislead the mind.

Where is the flattering tongue that scorns
to live like pashas, palace-bound?

So tell me where is virtue found,

120. or where the rose without the thorns?

To you is given the proper goal

to see in darkness, kindle light,

to make of chaos one bright whole,

and have it bound to what is right,

125. to disagreements bring redress,

from violent passions happiness.

To you alone belongs the force

as sailors bent beneath the sweep

of angry winds attempt to keep

130. the vessel safely on its course.

Only you will not offend

but in speaking find accord:

you see through fingers but forbend

to furnish evil its reward.

135. Miscreants you barely scold,

unlike the wolf within the fold.

You know your people and their worth:

though subject to the tsar's own law,

to God they're even subject more:

140. the lawful dwelling on this earth.

Ты здраво о заслугах мыслишь,
Достойным воздаешь ты честь,
Пророком ты того не числишь,
Кто только рифмы может плесть,
145. А что сия ума забава
Калифов добрых честь и слава.
Снисходишь ты на лирный лад:
Поэзия тебе любезна,
Приятна, сладостна, полезна,
150. Как летом вкусный лимонад.

Слух идет о твоих поступках,
Что ты нимало не горда;
Любезна и в делах и в шутках,
Приятна в дружбе и тверда;
155. Что ты в напастях равнодушна,
А в славе так великодушна,
Что отреклась и мудрой слыть.
Еще же говорят неложно,
Что будто завсегда возможно
160. Тебе и правду говорить.

Неслыханное также дело,
Достойное тебя одной,
Что будто ты народу смело
О всем, и въявь и под рукой,
165. И знать и мыслить позволяешь,
И о себе не запрещаешь
И быль и небыль говорить;
Что будто самым крокодилам,
Твоих всех милостей зоилам,
170. Всегда склоняешься простить.

You seek out merit, honouring those
who would be worthy of our times
no empty prophecy that goes
about with all too maudlin rhymes.
145. Even the greatest caliph must
accord some honour to the just.
You're tolerant and like to think
that poetry in the lyric key
brings sweet and useful honesty,
150. like summer with its cooling drink.

You're modest even in your acts,
so rumour says and what you do
in jest and business is so lax
as make your friendship just and true.
155. Misfortune comes, but you will be
magnanimous in victory;
discounting to be called the wise;
but ask instead that you be told
the truth in all things, and be bold
160. enough to not resort to lies

In matters yet unheard of, you
are worthy of your person, proud
your people can discern what's true
in secret whispers or aloud.
165. For what they know and what they think
is that same draught you also drink.
In truth and untruth we must live:
although they be as crocodiles,
you overlook these Zoilus⁴ wiles:
170. and do not censor but forgive.

Стремятся слез приятных реки
Из глубины души моей.
О! коль счастливы человеки
Там должны быть судьбой своей,
175. Где ангел кроткий, ангел мирной,
Сокрытый в светлости порфирной,
С небес ниспослан скиптр носить!
Там можно пошептать в беседах
И, казни не боясь, в обедах
180. За здравие царей не пить.

Там с именем Фелицы можно
В строке описку поскоблить,
Или портрет неосторожно
Ее на землю уронить.
185. Там свадеб шутовских не парят,
В ледовых банях их не жарят,
Не щелкают в усы вельмож;
Князя насадками не клохчут,
Любимцы въявь им не хохочут
190. И сажей не марают рож.

Ты ведаешь, Фелица! правы
И человеков и царей;
Когда ты просвещаешь нравы,
Ты не дурачишь так людей;
195. В твои от дел отдохновеньи
Ты пишешь в сказках поученьи
И Хлору в азбуке твердишь:
«Не делай ничего худого,
И самого сатира злого
200. Лжецом презренным сотворишь».

How pleasant are the tears that flow
from those great depths of my own soul
to think that happy people know
their fates and how they have control
175. of destinies. An angel, meek
as porphyry, is peace they seek.
A sceptre sent from heaven afar
that people at their dinner may
not fear results of what they say,
180. who will not drink a toast to tsar.

With fear of none it's possible
to quite neglect Felitsa's name,
to spite her portrait, even, full
of rancour, hurl it on the ground.
185. The weddings here are not a farce,
nor miscreants have icy baths.
They daub no features in, nor put
indifference on when nobles jeer
or cackling courtiers, laughing, smear
190. their faces cindery black with soot

Felitsa, you know well the rights
that men and monarchs should possess:
no school of manners then indicts
them fools or leave them feeling less.
195. In resting even work prevails
whereby you write instructive tales
to teach young Klor the alphabet.
'You'll know that doing nothing bad
will leave no satire to be had,
200. or lies that evil can abet.'

Стыдишься слыть ты тем великой,
Чтоб страшной, нелюбимой быть;
Медведице прилично дикой
Животных рвать и кровь их лить.
205. Без крайнего в горячке бедства
Тому ланцетов нужны ль средства,
Без них кто обойтиса мог?
И славно ль быть тому тираном,
Великим в зверстве Тамерланом,
210. Кто благостью велик, как бог?

Фелицы слава, слава бога,
Который брани усмирил;
Который сира и убога
Покрыл, одел и накормил;
215. Который оком лучезарным
Шутам, трусам, неблагодарным
И праведным свой свет дарит;
Равно всех смертных просвещает,
Больных покоит, исцеляет,
220. Добро лишь для добра творит.

Который даровал свободу
В чужие области скакать,
Позволил своему народу
Сребра и золота искать;
225. Который воду разрешает
И лес рубить не запрещает;
Велит и ткать, и прясть, и шить;
Развязывая ум и руки,
Велит любить торги, науки
230. И счастье дома находить;

So you disclaim the title 'great':
to be feared and be unloved
is like the she-bear in the state
of beasts that claw and feed on blood.
205. For only deep in fever's toil
is there a need to lance the boil.
In tyranny you have not trod:
what glory is there then to gain
a famous name like Tamerlane,
210. when doing good affirms a God?

Felitsa: glory is of God
who fighting battles brought our peace:
Who clothes the orphans, has them shod
and fed that miseries decrease.
215. He looks at all with steady eye,
ingrates, cowards, fools that lie,
but to the just He gives his light,
appearing their enlightenment:
He heals the sick and has them sent
220. to goodness, as is good and right.

You leave your people free to roam
in other countries as of old,
to travel even far from home
in search for silver and for gold.
225. Your waters are their livelihoods
and they cut timber in your woods.
You let them weave and knit and sew,
you free their minds as much as hands
as trade and science make demands,
230. find joy at home as good folks do.

Которого закон, десница
Дают и милости и суд.—
Вещай, премудрая Фелица!
Где отличен от честных плут?
235. Где старость по миру не бродит?
Заслуга хлеб себе находит?
Где месть не гонит никого?
Где совесть с правдой обитают?
Где добродетели сияют?—
240. У трона разве твоего!

Но где твой трон сияет в мире?
Где, ветвь небесная, цветешь?
В Багдаде? Смирне? Кашемире? —
Послушай, где ты ни живешь,—
245. Хвалы мои тебе приметя,
Не мни, чтоб шапки иль бешметя
За них я от тебя желал.
Почувствовать добра приятство
Такое есть души богатство,
250. Какого Крез не собирал.

Прошу великого пророка,
Да праха ног твоих коснусь,
Да слов твоих сладчайша тока
И лицезренья наслажусь!
255. Небесные прошу я силы,
Да, их простря сафирны крылы,
Невидимо тебя хранят
От всех болезней, зол и скуки;
Да дел твоих в потомстве звуки,
260. Как в небе звезды, возблестят.

1782

Where law and your right hand display
true mercy, justice, what is best.
Announce, most wise Felitsa, say
when thief is parted from the rest
235. no age will ever fear to tread,
nor merit find its honest bread.
And where revenge is never known,
and conscience is at home with truth,
there is but splendour, never ruth:
240. so virtue sits upon the throne.

Where has the world but yet to hear
of your great goodness and your power ⁵
in Baghdad, Smyrna, or Kashmir?
No branch of yours that does not flower. ⁵
245. The praise you hear is only that
and seeks not uniform or hat,
or such preferment I confess
your very goodness is itself
within my soul a greater wealth
250. than Croesus could himself possess.

I beg the prophet I may bow
and touch the dust beneath your feet,
I only wish is you allow
me hear the words both wise and sweet.
255. I ask that powers of heaven employ
such favours as the good enjoy,
indeed that wings about the throne
protect from ills and boredom too, ⁶
when all thereafter praise in you
260. the light for which the stars are known.

1782.

БОГ

О ты, пространством бесконечный,
Живый в движеньи вещества,
Теченьем времени превечный,
Без лиц, в трех лицах божества!
Дух всюду сущий и единый,
Кому нет места и причины,
Кого никто постичь не мог,
Кто всё собою наполняет,
Объемлет, зиждет, сохраняет,
10. Кого мы называем: бог.

Измерить океан глубокий,
Сочечь пески, лучи планет
Хотя и мог бы ум высокий, —
Тебе числа и меры нет!
Не могут духи просвещенны,
От света твоего рожденны,
Исследовать судеб твоих:
Лишь мысль к тебе взнестись дерзает,
В твоём величьи исчезает,
20. Как в вечности прошедший миг

God

O You, most infinite in space,
that will in all things moving be,
in time eternal, threefold grace
that's faceless but a deity.
A spirit everywhere, and one
beyond where depths of reason run,
or place where earthly feet have trod,
that fills the firmament, and yet
will build for us, will save, beget
10. no name, but whom we know as God.

Plumb the ocean depths, compute
the grains of sands, the planets' rays:
a high mind might, but You refute
all measurement, through boundless ways.
Spirits cannot see aright
unless engendered of your light.
And we who'd know our destiny
in thought alone to You have crossed,
but in that magnitude are lost
20. as moments in eternity.

Хаоса бытность довременну
Из бездн ты вечности воззвал,
А вечность, прежде век рожденну,
В себе самом ты основал:
Себя собою составляя,
Собою из себя сияя,
Ты свет, откуда свет истек.
Создавый всё единым словом,
В твореньи простираясь новым,
30. Ты был, ты есть, ты будешь ввек!

Ты цепь существ в себе вмещаешь,
Ее содержишь и живишь;
Конец с началом сопрягаешь
И смертью живот даришь.
Как искры сыплются, стремятся,
Так солнца от тебя родятся;
Как в мразный, ясный день зимой
Пылинки инея сверкают,
Вратятся, зыблются, сияют,
40. Так звезды в безднах под тобой.

Светил возженных миллионы
В неизмеримости текут,
Твои они творят законы,
Лучи животворящи льют.
Но огненны сии лампы,
Иль рдяных кристалей громады,
Иль волн златых кипящий сонм,
Или горящие эфиры,
Иль вкупе все светящи миры —
50. Перед тобой — как ночь пред днем.

From those great depths would You invoke
primordial chaos; through that climb
your being in itself that spoke
eternally, before all time.

And thus it was that You alone
from that great shining light have grown.

In You originating all we see:
it is through You a single word
of new creation has occurred,
30. who was and is and so will be.

That chain of being You befriend,
and nourish, sustain and give it breath
and, joining all from end to end,
a life to every soul through death.

New suns are born from that bright arc
of sparkling streams across the dark.
As will some winter's day bequeath
when hoarfrost lights up everything:
those sights will shimmer, turn and sing
40. as stars do in the gulfs beneath.

A multitude of shining spheres
continues to infinity
and though your laws all this coheres
and pours out bright identity.
It is a lantern, every bit
is crystalline and inward lit:
a rolling wave of golden ways
whose burning ethers we can't see,
but worlds together that must be
50. as dawns breaks on the darkest days.

Как капля, в море опущенна,
Вся твердь перед тобой сия.
Но что мной зримая вселенна?
И что перед тобою я?
В воздушном океане оном,
Миры умножа миллионом
Стократ других миров, — и то,
Когда дерзну сравнить с тобою,
Лишь будет точкою одною;
60. А я перед тобой — ничто.

Ничто! — Но ты во мне сияешь
Величеством твоих доброт;
Во мне себя изображаешь,
Как солнце в малой капле вод.
Ничто! — Но жизнь я ощущаю,
Несытым некаким летаю
Всегда пареньем в высоты;
Тебя душа моя быть чает,
Вникает, мыслит, рассуждает:
70. Я есмь — конечно, есть и ты!

Ты есть! — природы чин вещает.
Гласит мое мне сердце то,
Меня мой разум уверяет,
Ты есть — и я уж не ничто!
Частица целой я вселенной,
Поставлен, мнится мне, в почтенной
Средине естества я той,
Где кончил тварей ты телесных,
Где начал ты духов небесных
80. И цепь существ связал всех мной.

Compared to You all earthly things
are like a droplet in the sea:
all things I see, which only brings,
beside You, deep humility.
Of this great ocean of the air
a hundred million worlds have share.
A hundred times that world is short
of those great realms, its total whole
is but at best a tiny soul:
60. and therefore I am only naught.

No, nothing, true, but You through me
could shine forever, never stop
if such your goodness came to be
like sunlight in a water drop.
Thus, being nothing in myself
I still may feel life's inner wealth.
Whatever those great heights I flew,
my soul was ever hungering, will
be listening, thinking, reasoning still:
70. if I exist, then so must You.

You are as nature's order shows,
as heart affirms that truth to me,
and in that sight good reason flows.
You are: I'm not nonentity.
But in the universe I still
have something of that holy will.
And in that centre, where again
You pass from bestial creature's share
to glittering spirit in the air,
80. I too am bound in that great chain.

Я связь миров, повсюду сущих,
Я крайня степень вещества;
Я средоточие живущих,
Черта начальна божества;
Я телом в прахе истлеваю,
Умом громам повелеваю,
Я царь — я раб — я червь — я бог!
Но, будучи я столь чудесен,
Отколе произошел? — безвестен;
90. А сам собой я быть не мог.

Твое создание я, создатель!
Твоей премудрости я тварь,
Источник жизни, благ податель,
Душа души моей и царь!
Твоей то правде нужно было,
Чтоб смертну бездну преходило
Мое бессмертно бытие;
Чтоб дух мой в смертность облачился
И чтоб чрез смерть я возвратился,
100. Отец! — в бессмертие твое.

Неизъяснимый, непостижный!
Я знаю, что души моей
Воображении бессильны
И тени начертать твоей;
Но если славословить должно,
То слабым смертным невозможно
Тебя ничем иным почтить,
Как им к тебе лишь возвышаться,
В безмерной разности теряться
110. И благодарны слезы лить.

1784

I link to all existing things,
I form what matter will define,
I am the point where living springs:
prime mover of the pure divine.
I in this body rot to ash
but rule the mind's dark thunder flash.
I'm king, I'm slave, I'm worm, I'm God,
which is itself miraculous.
Where have I come from? Say, because
90. it's not in self my being's shod.

I am your creature, what you made
from wisdom and your sure accord:
my life and blessings have displayed
You soul of soul, my king and lord.
It is your righteousness we need
to have the threat of death recede.
My immortality must be
as spirit clothed in mortal dress
who comes not back to life unless
100. through Father's immortality.

Inscrutable, unfathomable,
most hidden from us, where no soul
will find conception possible,
nor shadow draw such shadows whole.
What is our homage to You when
we are but weak and mortal men?
But still in praise, and praise renewed,
we rise, and know our being as
infinities your being has,
110. and shed our tears of gratitude.

1784

ВОДОПАД

Алмазна сыплется гора
С высот четыремя скалами,
Жемчугу бездна и сребра
Кипит внизу, бьет вверх буграми;

5. От брызгов синий холм стоит,
Далече рев в лесу гремит.

Шумит, и средь густого бора
Теряется в глуши потом;
Луч чрез поток сверкает скоро;
10. Под зыбким сводом древ, как сном

Покрыты, волны тихо льются,
Рекою млечною влекутся.

Седая пена по берегам
Лежит буграми в дебрях темных;
15. Стук слышен млатов по ветрам,
Визг пил и стон мехов подъемных:

О водопад! в твоём жерле
Всё утопает в бездне, в мгле!

Ветрами ль сосны пораженны? —
20. Ломаются в тебе в куски;
Громами ль камни отторженны? —
Стираются тобой в пески;

WATERFALL (Opening)

In four ways split, the mountain stream
becomes a glittering diamond shower.
To pearl and silver sunk, the gleam
through clefts still shows its seething power.

5. In woods and splashed blue arc of hills,
the distant torrent thunders still.

The murmur in that forest depth
is here and nowhere, densely lost;
the vault that is by sunlight crossed
10. becomes a dream or hazy breath.

Through its silent depths, the more
those floods of milky waters pour.

Grey foam along the riverbanks
lies heaped in this wild, shuttered zone,
15. and in the air come muffled clanks
and squeals of saws and bellow's groan.

A waterfall of water tossed
and in the mist and abyss lost.

But as the pine trees in the wind,
20. are broken, boulders do not stay,
but, with the thunder, rocks are thinned
to finest sand and swept away.

Сковать ли воду льды дерзают? —
Как пыль стекляна ниспадают.

25. Волк рыщет вокруг тебя и, страх
В ничто вменяя, становится;
Огонь горит в его глазах,
И шерсть на нем щетиной зрится;

Рожденный на кровавый бой,
30. Он воет, согласясь с тобой.

Лань идет робко, чуть ступает,
Вняв вод твоих падающих рев,
Рога на спину приклоняет
И быстро мчится меж деревьев;

35. Ее страшит вокруг шум, бурь свист
И хрупкий под ногами лист.

Ретивый конь, осанку горду
Храня, к тебе порой идет;
Крутую гриву, жарку морду
40. Подняв, храпит, ушми прядет,

И, подстрекаем быв, бодрится,
Отважно в хлябь твою стремится

Под наклоненным кедром вниз,
При страшной сей красе Природы,
45. На утлом пне, который свис
С утеса гор на яры воды,

1791-4

Does ice still bind when cold days pass
and shatter it to powdered glass?

25. The wolf, in prowling round you, tries
to make you fear what's deep within.
A fire is burning in its eyes,
the hackles rising on its skin.

Born to combat and, like you,
30. will howl in fierce agreement too.

The doe walks timidly, and stops
to hear the thunder in the breeze,
her horns immediately she drops
and rushes headlong for the trees,

35. afraid of all, as hard storms beat
the fragile leaf beneath your feet.

The horse is proud but, like as not,
obeys your call and ventures near:
its mane is cool, its muzzle hot,
40. it rears and snorting, cocks an ear.

Of your intent it takes its fill
and enters bravely on your will.

The hanging cedar has its hour,
for all the beauty it may show,
45. and is but fragile in the power
of water in the gorge below.

1791-4

ПАМЯТНИК

Я памятник себе воздвиг чудесный, вечный,
Металлов тверже он и выше пирамид;
Ни вихрь его, ни гром не сломит быстротечный,
И времени полет его не сокрушит.

5.Так! — весь я не умру, но часть меня большая,
От тлена убежав, по смерти станет жить,
И слава возрастет моя, не увядая,
Доколь славянов род вселенна будет чтить.

Слух пройдет обо мне от Белых вод до Чёрных,
10.Где Волга, Дон, Нева, с Рифея льет Урал;
Всяк будет помнить то в народах неисчётных,
Как из безвестности я тем известен стал,

Что первый я дерзнул в забавном русском слоге
О добродетелях Фелицы возгласить,
15.В сердечной простоте беседовать о Боге
И истину царям с улыбкой говорить.

О Муза! возгордись заслугой справедливой,
И презрит кто тебя, сама тех презирай;
Непринуждённою рукой неторопливой
20.Чело твоё зарей бессмертия венчай.

1791

MONUMENT

I've raised a monument more durable than brass,
more marvellous and loftier than the pyramids,
that will through swirling wind and storm surpass
the flight of years to which mortality submits.

5. And so the greater part of me will never die,
however much decaying faculties condemn,
but such as my unfading glory magnify
the Slavs as may the universe still honour them.

Then word of me will echo Black Sea to the White,
10. to Volga, Don and Neva, the Ural's Riphean source
In me the countless nations of the earth delight
who from obscurity kept on his steadfast course.

It was through me that Russian syllables first trod
a path to my own sovereign's wise felicity,
15. for I could talk in simple, heartfelt words to God,
and, with a smile, make kings accept the truth from me.

O Muse! Be proud of merit here so justly earned:
if anyone despise you, it is himself he shames.
With your unhurried hand be crowned, for you discerned
20. what dawning immortality itself proclaims.

1791

Павлин

Какое гордое творенье,
Хвост пышно расширяя свой,
Черно-зелены в искрах перья
Со рассыпную бахромой
5. Позады чешуйной груди кажет,
Как некий круглый, дивный щит?

Лазурно-сизы-бирюзовы
На каждого конце пера,
Тенисты круги, волны новы
10. Струиста злата и серебра:
Наклонит – изумруды блещут!
Повернет – яхонты горят!

Не то ли славный царь пернатый?
Не то ли райска птица Жар,
15. Которой столь убор богатый
Приводит в удивленье тварь?
Где ступит – радуги играют!
Где станет – там лучи вокруг!

Конечно, сила и паренье
20. Орлиные в ее крылах,
Глас трубный, лебедино пенье
В ее пресладостных устах
А пеликана добродетель
В ее и сердце и душе!

PEACOCK

A proud creation you adopt:
the spreading tail has every spark
of green and black in feathers, topped
by that fine scattered, frilly arc.

5. About that glossy chest you wield
a wonderful and massy shield.

Turquoise into azure blue
as in each fan of quills you fold
the shadowy waves will ripple through
10. the silver streaming into gold.
Tilt, the emeralds shine, and turn,
it's now that glowing sapphires burn.

Of glorious feathers aren't you king,
the firebird, too, of paradise?
15. Such the headdress that you bring
your costume is its own surprise.
You walk, and rainbow round you splays
its arc of iridescent rays.

The eagle may have power of flight,
20. magnificence in outstretched wing:
the swan may trumpet out in white
whatever its sweet lips will sing,
and pelican be given whole
to virtue in her heart and soul.

25. Но что за чудное явление?
Я слышу некий странный визг!
Сей Феникс опустил вдруг перья,
Увидя гнусность ног своих. –
О пышность! как ты ослепляешь!
3. И барин без ума – павлин.

1795

25. But what is this phenomenon,
the curious rasping squeak I heard?
Beneath the feathers that you don,
abomination has occurred,
and dazzling through the pomp and pride
30. there comes the crazy peacock's stride.

1795

ПРИГЛАШЕНИЕ К ОБЕДУ

Шекснинска стерлядь золотая,
Каймак и борщ уже стоят;
В графинах вина, пунш, блистая
То льдом, то искрами, манят;
С курильниц благовонья льются,
Плоды среди корзин смеются
Не смеют слуги идохнуть,
Тебя стола вокруг ожидая;
Хозяйка статная, младая ¹
10. Готова руку протянуть.

Приди, мой благодетель давний, ²
Творец чрез двадцать лет добра!
Приди, — и дом, хоть не нарядный,
Без резьбы, злата и сребра,
Мой посети: его богатство —
Приятный только вкус, опрятство
И твердый мой, нельстивый нрав.
Приди от дел попрохладиться,
Поесть, попить, повеселиться
20. Без вредных здравью приправ.

DINNER INVITATION

Sterlet, Sheksninsky's best,
good cabbage soup with clotted cream,
decanter sparkling for our guest,
with ice and candles make the scene.
The incense burners follow suit
with baskets of inviting fruit.
The servants, breathless ready, stand
alert at table, and among
them is our hostess, shapely, young ¹
10. who's keen to stretch a gracious hand.

Come, my benefactor, one ²
who gave me twenty happy years.
The house is down to earth, homespun,
no gilded ornament appears.
Your visit is sufficient wealth
that preparation in itself
will speak of neat and simple taste.
So put affairs to rest, and please
to eat and drink, and take your ease
20. where naught's unhealthy or in haste.

Не чин, не случай и не знатность
На русский мой простой обед
Я звал, — одну благоприятность;
А тот, кто делает мне вред,
Пирушки сей не будет зритель.
Ты, ангел мой, благотворитель!
Приди — и насладися благ;
А вражий дух да отженется,
Моих порогов не коснется
30. Ничей недоброхотный шаг!

Друзьям моим я посвящаю,
Друзьям и красоте сей день;
Достоинствам я цену знаю,
И знаю то, что век наш тень;
Что лишь младенчество проводим,
Уже ко старости приходим,
И Смерть к нам смотрит чрез забор:
Увы! то как не умудриться,
Хоть раз цветами не увиться
40. И не оставить мрачный взор?

Слышал, слышал я тайну эту,
Что иногда грустит и царь;
Ни ночь, ни день покоя нету,
Хотя им вся покойна тварь.
Хотя он громкой славой знатен,
Но ах! и трон всегда ль приятен
Тому, кто век свой в хлопотах?
Тут зрит обман, там зрит упадок:
Как бедный часовой тот жалок,
50. Который вечно на часах !

Not title, rank, success at court,
affects this meal in Russian style
but as good nature will comport.
For those who hurt me all this while
will not be welcome at this feast.
And you, my angel, at the least
should come, enjoy and never mind
what hostile spirit may have said.
For no one here has visited
30. with steps unwanted or unkind.

And so I dedicate to friends,
to friends and beauty, this fine day:
I know the value virtue sends:
this age is passing, thin and grey.
From infancy we used to hold
that each of us is growing old.
Death grins at us, and through that fence
we know we cannot manage things
but bless the flower that beauty brings,
40. and not at life to take offence.

And there's a secret I have heard
that he is sometimes sad, the king,
long days and nights has not preferred
the calmness that good natures bring,
that he is famous for the fame
the throne confers upon his name.
For one who's courted trouble will
observe deceit, decay, decline
and all that wretchedness will sign
50. his hour when his own clock stands still.

Итак, доколь еще ненастье
Не помрачает красных дней,
И приголубливает Счастье
И гладит нас рукой своей;
Доколе не пришли морозы,
В саду благоухают розы,
Мы поспешим их обонять.
Так! будем жизнью наслаждаться,
И тем, чем можем, утешаться, —
60. По платью ноги протягать.

А если ты иль кто другие ³
Из званных, милых мне гостей,
Чертоги предпочтя златые
И яства сахарны царей,
Ко мне не срядитесь откушать;
Извольте мой вы толк прослушать:
Блаженство не в лучах порфир,
Не в вкусе яств, не в неге слуха,
Но в здравьи и спокойстве духа.
70. Умеренность есть лучший пир ⁴.

1795

However stormy weather press
it will not dim this evening land
but sweeten love of happiness
that strokes us kindly with its hand.
Until the frosty winter blows
we still admire the fragrant rose,
and to its perfume acquiesce.
So let's enjoy our lives and trust
such consolations as we must.
60. So stretch your legs out in your dress.

If you or any come, all told ³
the honoured ones, above the rest
that seek the palaces of gold,
you'll be a regal, welcome guest.
Don't come to dinner only, pray,
but listen, hear my wise words say
that bliss is not in porphyry,
in cost of food or eloquence,
but health and peace and mindful sense
70. of moderation in good company. ⁴

1795

НА ВОЗВРАЩЕНИЕ ГРАФА ЗУБОВА ИЗ ПЕРСИИ

6. Ты зрел, как ясною порою
Там солнечны лучи, средь льдов,
Средь вод, играя, отражаясь,
Великолепный кажут вид;
Как, в разноцветных рассеваясь
Там брызгах, тонкий дождь горит;
Как глыба там сизо-янтарна,
Навесаь, смотрит в темный бор;
А там заря злато-багряна
Сквозь лес увеселяет взор.

7. Ты видел, Каспий, протягаясь,
Как в камышах, в песках лежит,
Лицем веселым ослабляясь,
Пловцов ко плаванию манит;
И вдруг как, бурей рассердясь,
Встает в упор ее крылам,
То скачет в твердь, то в ад стремясь,
Трезубцем бьет по кораблям;
Столбом власы седые вьются,
И глас его гремит в горах.

On the Return of Count Zubov from Persia (Excerpt)

6. A dawning brightness met your gaze
with sunbeams sparkling on the ice,
and on the waters that reflect
a richly hued magnificence;
and splashed with colour there lies flecked
the rain with thinly-burning ambience.
Massed shapes of blue and amber stay
with clumps of pine that dot the sky.
Then gold and purple dawn gives way
to swathes of forest that delight the eye.

7. And did you see the Caspian, trace
its course through reeds and sandy shores,
as though to give a cheerful face
to swimmers seeking friendlier course?
And in a second changed, as storm
will suddenly unfurl its wings
and hell's own judgement make the norm
as lightning strikes the ships and fills
a tumultuous grey whirling form
as thunder rattles through the hills.

8. Ты видел, как во тьме секутся
С громами громы в облаках,
Как бездны пламень извергают,
Как в тучах роет огонь бразды,
Как в воздухе пары сгорают,
Как светят свеч в лесах ряды.
Ты видел, как в степи средь зною
Огромных змей стога кишат,
Как блещут пестрой чешуёю
И льют, шипя, друг в друга яд.

1797

8. Did you see the piled-up dark,
the lightning flashing through the clouds,
through abysses the violent spark
of smouldering sheets within the shrouds?
Or how the vapours were consumed
as candles burn within a wood
or how the steppeland heat assumed
the shape that only serpents could,
a glistening thickly scaled and plumed
with poison in the neighbourhood?

1797

СНИГИРЬ

Что ты заводишь песню военну
Флейте подобно, милый снигирь? ¹
С кем мы пойдём войной на Гиену? ²
Кто теперь вождь наш? Кто богатырь?
5. Сильный где, храбрый, быстрый Суворов?
Северны громы в гробе лежат.

Кто перед ратью будет, пылая,
Ездить на кляче, есть сухари;
В стуже и в зное меч закаляя,
10. Спать на соломе, бдеть до зари;
Тысячи воинств, стен и затворов;
С горстью россиян всё побеждать?

Быть везде первым в мужестве строгом,
Шутками зависть, злобу штыком,
15. Рок низлагать молитвой и Богом,
Скиптры давая, зваться рабом,
Доблестей быв страдалец единых,
Жить для царей, себя изнурять?

Нет теперь мужа в свете столь славна:
20. Полно петь песню военну, снигирь!
Бранна музыка днесь не забавна,
Слышен отвсюду томный вой лир;
Львиного сёрдца, крыльев орлиных
Нет ужé с нами! — что воевать?

1800

BULLFINCH

Why would you sing a song of war,
now little bullfinch? Tell me why. ¹
To what hyena's hungry maw ²
will chief or hero now apply?
5. Gone Suvarov, the swift and brave,
the northern thunderer, from our sight.

Who'll be riding on ahead,
tempering sword in cold and heat,
who, on his horse, will champ dry bread,
10. or on rough straw chill dawn will meet?
While cities and whole armies rave,
a few good Russians stood for right.

Who leads in courage, will not rest,
meet fate with jest or bayonet,
15. who, conquering, by a prayer is blest,
but stays a slave to sceptres yet?
Who but valour only gave,
and for the tsar exhausted might?

Great heroes from the world are gone,
20. so, bullfinch, cease yours songs forthwith:
no song of war is heard anon,
but only sadness lyres will give.
Lion-hearted, eagle-winged, save,
gone from us, how shall we fight?

1800

ЛЕБЕДЬ

Необычайным я пареньем
От тленна мира отделяюсь,
С душой бессмертною и пеньем,
Как лебедь, в воздух поднимусь.

5. В двойком образе нетленный,
Не задержусь в вратах мытарств;
Над завистью превознесенный,
Оставляю под собой блеск царств.

Да, так! Хоть родом я не славен,
10. Но, будучи любимец муз,
Другим вельможам я не равен
И самой смертью предпочтусь.

Не заключит меня гробница,
Средь звезд не превращусь я в прах;
15. Но, будто некая цевница,
С небес раздамся в голосах.

И се уж кожа, зрю, перната
Вкруг стан обтягивает мой;
Пух на груди, спина крылата,
20. Лебязьей лоснюсь белизной.

SWAN

One so phenomenal will wing
his way from world's corrupt affair,
and with immortal soul will sing
and like a swan ascend the air.

5. Possessed of two immortal traits,
I'm not to clamouring gates confined,
and, rising over jealous fates,
will leave the splendid thrones behind.

If, yes, unfavoured at my birth,
10. I have the Muses' greater wealth:
among the notables of earth
I'll be preferred by death itself.

15. The tomb shall not imprison me,
nor change to stardust be my choice,
but in a certain piping key
the heavens shall burst out with my voice.

And now I even see my skin
become at waist a feathered sight:
my back is winged, my breast akin
20. to swan's down with its pearly white.

Лечу, парю — и под собою
Моря, леса, мир вижу весь;
Как холм, он высится главою,
Чтобы услышать богу песнь.

25. С Курильских островов до Буга,
От Белых до Каспийских вод,
Народы, света с полукруга,
Составившие россов род,

Со временем о мне узнают:
30. Славяне, гунны, скифы, чудь,
И все, что бранью днесь пылают,
Покажут перстом — и рекут:

«Вот тот летит, что, строя лиру,
Языком сердца говорил,
35. И, проповедуя мир миру,
Себя всех счастьем веселил».

Прочь с пышным, славным погребеньем,
Друзья мои! Хор муз, не пой!
Супруга! облекись терпеньем!
40. Над мнимым мертвецом не вой.

1804

I fly, I soar, and under me
pass seas and forests, turning earth:
the mountains rise attentively
to hear my hymn to God's high worth

25. From Kurile Isles to Bug unfurled,
from Caspian to the White Sea shores,
the people making half the world,
the races, Russia, that are yours

will hear of me in time: the Huns,
30. the Slavs, the Finns, the Scythians,
and those whom now such scandal stuns,
will point their finger: 'Here begins

the flight of one who with his lyre
called on the heart's own inner wealth:
35. a world at peace his one desire,
who had that happiness himself.'

Forgo the glories of the dead,
those songs, my friends, the Muses hear.
Dear wife, have patience: do not shed
for one not dead a single tear.'

1804

ЕВГЕНИЮ. ЖИЗНЬ ЗВАНСКАЯ

Блажен, кто менее зависит от людей,
Свободен от долгов и от хлопот приказных,
Не ищет при дворе ни злата, ни честей

4. И чужд сует разнообразных!

Зачем же в Петрополь на вольну ехать страсть,
С пространства в тесноту, с свободы за затворы,
Под бремя роскоши, богатств, сирен под власть

8. И пред вельможей пышны взоры?

Возможно ли сравнять что с вольностью златой,
С уединением и тишиной на Званке?

Довольство, здравие, согласие с женой,

12. Покой мне нужен — дней в останке.

Восстав от сна, взвожу на небо скромный взор;

Мой утреннюет дух Правителю вселенной;

Благодарю, что вновь чудес, красот позор ¹

16. Открыл мне в жизни толь блаженной.

Пройдя минувшую и не нашедши в ней,

Чтоб чёрная змия мне сердце угрызала,

О! коль доволен я, оставил что людей

20. И честолюбия избег от жала!

TO EUGENY: LIFE AT ZVANKA

Blest is he who will depend on none for aught,
who's free of debts and strivings' feared degeneracies,
who looks for neither wealth nor honours at the court:
4. beyond all sorts of vanities.

Why go to far St. Petersburg for passion's hour,
and give up space for long confinement, check and chain,
with wealth be burdened, luxury, the siren's power,
8. and doubtless nobleman's disdain?

And what in that compares then to this golden lease
of solitude and quiet? In these Zvanka ways
there's health, contented living with my wife, and peace
12. I look for in my last of days.

I rise from sleep, see over me a sky that's full
of His great majesty, its mighty ruler king
of all life's beauty. In this wondrous spectacle ¹
16. are revelations blessings bring.

The good I've looked for all my life, a past that flows
as close as that black serpent does, which gnaws the heart:
but here I'm happy knowing I've avoided those
20. ambitions with their venom'd art.

Дыша невинностью, пью воздух, влагу рос,
Зрю на багрянец зарь, на солнце восходяще,
Ищу красивых мест между лилей и роз,
24. Среди сада храм жезлом чертяще.

Иль, накормя моих пшеницей голубей,
Смотрю над чашей вод, как вьют под небом круги;
На разноперых птиц, поющих среди сетей,
28. На кроющих, как снегом, луги.

Пастушьего вблизи внимаю рога зов,
Вдали тетеревей глухое токованье,
Барашков в воздухе, в кустах свист соловьёв,²
32Рев крав, гром жолн и коней ржанье.³

На кровле ж зазвенит как ласточка, и пар
Повеет с дома мне манжурской иль левантской,⁴
Иду за круглый стол: и тут-то раздобар
36. О снах, молве градской, крестьянской;

О славных подвигах великих тех мужей,
Чьи в рамах по стенам златых блистают лица
Для вспоминанья их деяний, славных дней,
40. И для прикрас моей светлицы,

В которой поутру иль ввечеру порой
Дивлюся в Вестнике,⁵ в газетах иль журналах
Россиян храбрости, как всяк из них герой,
44. Где есть Суворов в генералах!

I breathe in innocence, I drink the life-filled air
and see the crimson sun ascend, a glorious sight.
I seek out garden spots of rose and lily: there
24. a temple's traced in shafts of light.

I put out corn for pigeons, assuring each one gets
enough as high above the lake the circlings show
their happiness, each singing in the midst of nets:
28. they cover meadows thick as snow.

Close by, a shepherd blows his horn: the sound then trails
to grouse with muffled cawings, then, not far away.
are lambs, and whistling bushes filled with nightingales: ²
32. while birds' wings thunder, horses bray. ³

The roof has wisps of steam, which like the swallows play,
and speak of Levantine, Manchurian smells; ⁴
and on the table waiting me a feast's display,
36. like dreams of towns a peasant tells.

And all around are the glorious deeds of those great men
whose faces line my walls, and from their golden frame
reflect the celebrated days and deeds of then,
40. and make my chamber shine the same.

For here, continually, from night to morn, I read
the Herald's ⁵ daily bulletins or news thereof:
great heroes all, but where, in answering Russia's need,
44. are generals like old Suvorov?

В которой к госпоже, для похвалы гостей,
Приносят разные полотна, сукна, ткани,
Узорны, образцы салфеток, скатертей,
48. Ковров и кружев, и вязани. ⁶

Где с скотен, пчельников и с птичников, прудов
То в масле, то в сотах зрю золото под ветвями,
То пурпур в ягодах, то бархат-пух грибов,
52. Серебро, трепещуще лещами. ⁷

В которой, обзрев больных в больнице, врач ⁸
Приходит доносить о их вреде, здоровье,
Прося на пищу им: тем с поливкой калач,
56. А тем лекарствица, в подспорье.

Где также иногда по палкам, по костям
Усатый староста иль скопидом брюхатый
Дают отчёт казне, и хлебу, и вещам,
60. С улыбкой часто плутоватой.

И где, случается, художники млады
Работы кажут их на древе, на холстине,
И получают в дар подачи за труды,
64. А в час и денег по полтине.

И где до ужина, чтобы прогнать как сон,
В задоре иногда, в игры зело горячи,
Играем в карты мы, в ерошки, в фараон, ⁹
68. По грошу в долг и без отдачи

And then the mistress comes, and to the praise of guest
brings various cloths and fabric patterns, where they trace
what sample, napkin shape or tablecloth is best,
48. what woven floor-cloth, knit or lace. ⁶

From stall and poultry houses, beehives, lake or stream
comes golden butter, honeycombs beneath the trees:
the purple berries over velvet mushrooms gleam
52. and perch in silver argosies. ⁷

Our serfs become our patients, where a doctor will ⁸
report the state of their good body's commonwealth,
talk diet with them, prescribing loaves of good or ill,
56. and medicines to aid their health.

There also can be divination, saws or bones,
moustachioed old headman that hoarded time forgot,
and from the bread or treasury will mark out loans
60. with roguish smile, as like as not.

Young artists, also, oftentimes, who show enough
in wood or painted things to indicate their reach.
For these they're well rewarded: hourly, for such stuff,
64. will get at least a kopeck each.

To put off sleep to supertime, we have to thank
some game of cards or other, energy refund:
first yeroski, or then with pharaoh for the bank, ⁹
68. we get a groschen back each round.

Оттуда прихожу в святилище я муз,
И с Флакком,¹⁰ Пиндаром, богов восседши в пире,
К царям, к друзьям моим, иль к небу возношусь,
72. Иль славлю сельску жизнь на лире.

Иль в зеркало времён, качая головой,¹¹
На страсти, на дела зрю древних, новых веков,
Не видя ничего, кроме любви одной
76. К себе и драки человеков.

Всё суета сует! я, воздыхая, мню,
Но, бросив взор на блеск светила полудневна,
О, коль прекрасен мир! Что ж дух мой брежнему?
80. Творцом содержится вселенна.

Да будет на земли и в небесах его
Единого во всём вседействующа воля!
Он видит глубину всю сердца моего,
84. И строится моя им доля.

Дворовых между тем, крестьянских рой детей
Сбираются ко мне не для какой науки,
А взять по несколько баранок, кренделей,
88. Чтобы во мне не зрели буки.

Письмоводитель мой тут должен на моих
Бумагах мараных, пастух как на овечках,
Репейник вычищать, — хоть мыслей нет больших,,
92. Блестят и жучки в епанечках.¹²

And then I come to sanctuary of the Muses' lays,
with Flaccus¹⁰, Pindar, feasting with the god's own powers,
will give to kings or friends or heaven, my lyre's own praise
72. for this good countryside of ours.

And in the glass of time ¹¹ I also shake my head
at passion's deeds to come or through the long days then,
and, where there should be love itself, I'm shown instead
76. the self that makes the fights of men.

All vanity of vanities! In thought about
the brightness of the midday sun, why should we curse
a world so beautiful, have burdened spirits doubt
80. the One who fills the universe.

So be it on the earth and in the heavens too,
with all things working there but to His sovereign will.
He looks within, and in my deepest heart will view
84. that portion He is shaping still.

And all the time a swarm of peasant children come
to me, though not for any expertise I give
but simple bread and pretzels that I offer, some
88. of local standing where I live.

And so the clerk must do his careful work, must sort
out white from blotched, as sheep are by shepherd blessed,
must clean out pens and papers that a modest thought
92. be clearly spoken and expressed. ¹²

Бьёт полдня час, рабы служить к столу бегут;
Идёт за трапезу гостей хозяйка с хором.
Я озреваю стол — и вижу разных блюд
96. Цветник, поставленный узором.

Багряна ветчина, зелёны щи с желтком,
Румяно-жёлт пирог, сыр белый, раки красны,
Что смоль, янтарь — икра, и с голубым пером
100. Там щука пёстрая: прекрасны!

Прекрасны потому, что взор манят мой, вкус;
Но не обилием иль чуждых стран приправой,
А что опрятно всё и представляет Русь:
104. Припас домашний, свежий, здоровый.

Когда же мы донских и крымских кубки вин,
И липца, воронка и чернопенна пива ¹³
Запустим несколько в румяный лоб хмелин, —
108. Беседа за сладьми шутлива.

Но молча вдруг встаём: бьёт, искрами горя,
Древ русских сладкий сок до подвенечных бревен; ¹⁴
За здравье с громом пьём ¹⁵ любезного царя,
112. Цариц, царевичей, царевен.

Тут кофе два глотка; схрапну минут пяток;
Там в шахматы, в шары иль из лука стрелами,
Пернатый к потолку лаптой мечу леток ¹⁶
116. И тешусь разными играми.

The hour strikes noon; the servants assembled for the sake
of guests, arrived at table, by the hostess led.

I look around, and find the stands and dishes make
96. the patterning of a flowerbed.

Good red ham is here, green cabbage soup with yolk,
stout pies in pink and yellow, white cheese, a crayfish, red,
the amber caviar that's decked with feather's stroke
100. of blue, and pike: all richly spread.

And beautiful to eyes because they signal so,
and not to gross degrees, in foreign spices stewed,
but things which homely Russians planted, bred or grew,
104. here freshly made and wholesome food.

Crimean wine we have, in goblets, or from the Don
and honeyed Liepiec and Cherepinina brew. ¹³
Let's taste the hop and run the conversation on
108. till words will please as puddings do.

Then suddenly we're standing as the sad sparks fall
beside the embers as with juice¹⁴ they toast the brides:
and with the cannonades¹⁵ on kindly tsar they call:
112. a health to all of his besides.

Two sips of our rich coffee keeps dull sleep away:
there's chess, there's ball games, tests of shooting skill,
the game of shuttlecock that tests the swordsman's play,¹⁶
116. as much as such amusements will.

Иль из кристальных вод, купален, между древ,
От солнца, от людей под скромным осененьем,
Там внемлю юношей, а здесь плесканье дев,
120. С душевным неким восхищеньем.

Иль в стёкла оптики ¹⁷ картинные места
Смотрю моих усадеб; на свитках грады, царства,
Моря, леса, — лежит вся мира красота
124. В глазах, искусств через коварства.

Иль в мрачном фонаре ¹⁸ любуюсь, звезды зря
Бегущи в тишине по синю волн стремленью:
Так солнцы в воздухе, я мню, текут горя,
128. Премудрости ко прославленью.

Иль смотрим, как вода с плотины с ревом льёт
И, движа машину, древа на доски делит;
Как сквозь чугунных пар столпов на воздух бьёт
132. Клокоча огонь, толчёт и мелет.

Иль любопытны, как бумажны руны волн
В лотки сквозь игл, колёс, подобно снегу, льются
В пушистых локонах, и тьмы вдруг веретён
136. Марииной рукой прядутся. ¹⁹

Иль как на лён, на шёлк цвет, пестрота и лоск,
Все прелести, красы берутся с поль царицы; ²⁰
Сталь жёсткая, глядим, как мягкий, алый воск,
140. Куётся в бердыши милицы. ²¹

In crystal waters there are baths beneath the trees.
The sunlight falls with humble autumn in the air.
There the young men, here the maidens: frolic sees
120. an almost spiritual affair.

The optic glass ¹⁷ shows pictures of the world around —
of my estates, of city scenes, a kingdom's worth:
I look on seas and forests and the beauty found
124. through eyes and guileful arts on earth.

I take the gloomy lantern, ¹⁸ look in disbelief
at those blue vistas of the heavens, to quiet retire.
For those far suns, I fancy, are but filled with grief,
128. however seen with wisdom's fire.

I watch how roaring waters from the dam bear down,
enabling thus the mill to cut the trees to planks:
how thick the air with steam, how loud the beating sound,
132. with fire and engine's heavy clanks.

Or, curious, watch how runes of pulped-up paper flow
into a mass of wheel and spindles, which, like snow
or curled up fleeces, have that interwhirling flow
136. that Mary's operations know.¹⁹

In silk and linen interwoven go the facts
about the gloss and mottling, and indeed the Queen's ²⁰
own messages are in the steel and scarlet wax
140. like dirks that set the soldier's scenes. ²¹

И сельски ратники как, царства став щитом,
Бегут с стремленьем в строй во рыцарском убранстве,
«За веру, за царя мы, — говорят, — помрём,
144. Чем у французов быть в подданстве».

Иль в лодке вдоль реки, по берегу пеш, верхом,
Качусь на дрожках я соседей с вереницей;
То рыбу удами, то дичь громим свинцом,
148. То зайцев ловим псов станицей.

Иль стоя внемлем шум зелёных, чёрных волн,
Как дёрн бугрит соха, злак трав падёт косами,
Серпами злато нив, — и, ароматов полн,
152. Порхает ветер меж нимф рядами.

Иль смотрим, как бежит под чёрной тучей тень
По копнам, по снопам, коврам жёлто-зелёным,
И сходит солнышко на нижнюю степень
156. К холмам и рощам сине-тёмным.

Иль, утомясь, идём скирдов, дубов под сень;
На бреге Волхова разводим огонь дымистый;
Глядим, как на воду ложится красный день,
160. И пьём под небом чай душистый.

Забавно! в тьме челнов с сетями как рыбаки,
Ленивым строем плив, страшат тварь влаги стуком;²²
Как парусы суда и ляжкой бурлаки
164. Влекут одним под песнью духом.

With its own countrymen a land's defence must lie:
how eagerly they join the ranks of knighthood's cause.
'It is for faith and tsar,' they say, 'we'd rather die
144. than acquiesce to France's laws.'

By riverboat or on a horse we ride ahead,
or with the droshky slowly, as our neighbours fare,
we fish with bows and arrows, track with sportsman's lead;
148. with packs of dogs we hunt the hare.

Or, standing, watch the waves of green and dark events:
we see the plough cut sward, how scythe through grasses flows,
or sickles in the golden fields, the fragrant scents
152. in winds through fluttering nymphs in rows.

Beneath dark clouds, the ever-changing shadows see
the strips of yellow sheaves revert to greener hue.
The sun goes slowly down and, imperceptibly,
156. the hills and forests dim to blue.

If wearied we would seek some rick's or oak's broad shade,
or by the Volkhov river build a smoky blaze,
we there are drinking, red day in the water laid,
160. sweet tea beneath the sky's soft haze.

Or laugh like fishermen, in darkness spreading nets,
to frighten schools of fish there with a heavy sound,²²
when, with boats and straps of burlap, fishing gets
164. a sense of spirits far around.

Прекрасно! тихие, отлогие брега
И редки холмики, селений мелких полны,
Как, полосаты их клоня поля, луга,
168. Стоят над током струй безмолвны.

Приятно! как вдали сверкает луч с косы
И эхо за лесом под мглой гамит народа,
Жнецов поющих, жниц полк идет с полосы,
172. Когда мы едем из похода.

Стёкл заревом горит мой храмовидный дом,²³
На гору жёлтый восход меж роз осиявая,
Где встречу водомёт шумит лучей дождём,
176. Звучит музыка духовая.

Из жерл чугунных гром по праздникам ревёт;
Под звёздной молнией, под светлыми древами
Толпа крестьян, их жён вино и пиво пьёт,
180. Поёт и пляшет под гудками.

Но скучит как сия забава сельска нам,
Внутри дома тешимся столиц увеселеньем;
Велим талантами родных своих детям
184. Блистать: музыкой, пляской, пеньем.

Амурчиков, харит плетень, иль хоровод,
Заняв у Талии игру и Терпсихоры,²⁴
Цветочные венки пастух пастушке вьёт,
188. А мы на них и пялим взоры.

How quiet and beautiful. The sloping shoreline falls
past villages, occasional hills, to daylight's verge:
and field to field each sloping strip of darkness calls,
168. and silences with shadows merge.

How pleasant too to see how far-off sickle gleams,
how forest echoes voices through the peopled haze:
with droves of reapers all about, their singing seems
172. an answer to the march of days.

My temple's dome of glass ²³ will catch the last light's flare
beneath a flood of yellow onto pillared pinks,
and musical is water cannonading there,
176. as rain that in soft torrents sinks.

Loud on holidays, the cannon's roar we hear;
between the trees the starry lightning, skyward-sent.
The serfs with wives are singing at their wine and beer,
180. and dance to horn's accompaniment.

And if, then tired of rural entertainment, we
can make the house the capital of everything,
and have the relatives of children willingly
184. play music for them, dance and sing.

As cupids in their rural dancing there conceive
their play belongs to Thalia or Terpsichore, ²⁴
so shepherds to their loves a floral wreath will weave
188. and so astounding us the more.

Там с арфы звучная порывный в души гром,
Здесь тихогрома с струн смягченны, плавны тоны ²⁵
Бегут, — и в естестве согласия во всём
192. Дают нам чувствовать законы.

Но нет как праздника, и в будни я один,
На возвышении сидя столпов перильных,
При гусях под вечер, челом моих седин
196. Склонясь, ношусь в мечтах умильных;

Чего в мой дремлющий тогда не входит ум?
Мимолетящи суть все времени мечтанья:
Проходят годы, дни, рёв морь и бурей шум,
200. И всех зефиров повеванья. ²⁶

Ах! где ж, ищу я вкруг, минувший красный день?
Победы слава где, лучи Екатерины?
Где Павловы дела? Сокрылось солнце, — тень!..
2004. Кто весть и впредь полёт орлиный?

Вид лета красного нам Александров век:
Он сердцем нежных лир удобен двигать струны;
Блаженствовал под ним в спокойстве человек,
2008. Но мечет днесь и он перуны. ²⁷

Умолкнут ли они? — Сие лишь знает тот,
Который к одному концу все правит сферы;
Он перстом их своим, как строй какой ведёт,
212. Ко благу общему склоняя меры.

And then the harp that seems to thunder to the soul
brings soft, smooth melodies from every answering string,²⁵
for harmony inherent in our nature's whole
192. says feel the laws in everything.

On days not festive, weekdays when I am alone
and sat at evening, reading by the pillared stone
my psaltery, I note how grey my hair has grown,
196. the reverence in dreams now flown.

And to my slumbering consciousness what entity
does not arrive, fleet past, a something no one sees?
So pass the years and days, and even storms at sea
200. have no more force than lulling breeze.²⁶

What does the flaring red of former sunsets say?
Where is that Catherine blaze of glory in the sky?
Or Paul's great deeds? What sun behind the darkest ray
204. brings news of lands where eagles fly?

The summer's red to us of Alexander's age,
the gentleness of heart that moves the lyre's strings:
blessed the man who's reached at last life's tranquil stage
208. beyond the frowns that Perun brings.²⁷

Will uproar then fall silent? Only He knows that
who rules the spheres, and all that is, to one full end.
His moving finger leads to what we all of us are at,
212. and then what common good will send.

Он корни помыслов, он зрит полёт всех мечт
И поглумляется безумству человеков:
Тех освещает мрак, тех помрачает свет
216. И днешних и грядущих веков.

Грудь россов утвердил, как стену, он в отпор
Темиру новому под Пультуском, Прейсш-лау; ²⁸
Младых вождей расцвёл победами там взор
220. И скрыл орла седого славу. ²⁹

Так самых светлых звезд блеск меркнет от ночей.
Что жизнь ничтожная? Моя скудельна лира!
Увы! и даже прах спахнёт моих костей
224. Сатурн крылами с тленна мира.

Разрушится сей дом, засохнет бор и сад,
Не вспомнянется нигде и имя Званки;
Но сов, сычей из дупл огнезелёный взгляд
228. И разве дым сверкнёт с землянки.

Иль нет, Евгений! ты, быв некогда моих
Свидетель песен здесь, взойдёшь на холм тот
страшный. ³⁰

Который тощих недр и сводов внутрь своих
232. Вождя, волхва гроб кроет мрачный,

От коего, как гром катается над ним,
С булатных ржавых врат и збруи медной гулы
Так слышны под землёй, как грохотом глухим,
236. В лесах трясясь, звучат стрел тулы.

He sees the roots of thoughts, He sees their dreams in flight.
He mocks the folly that is man. He lights for some
their darkness, yet for others will He dim the light
through all the ages yet to come.

So Rossov's near defeat. He had the Russian wall fight back
as some new Timur at Pultusk, at Preussh-Lau. ²⁸
It was the new commander's glory in attack,
220. the grey-haired one would not allow. ²⁹

So fade the stars themselves eternity dethrones,
whatever of this paltry life our lyre will say:
and from corruption, even ashes of my bones,
224. will Saturn wing himself away.

This house will fall, both forest and the garden fade,
Zvanka's name be lost, with none to know or care:
how green the eyes of barn-owls flash from at that dim shade,
228. and smoke rise up from hovel there.

Or not. For you, Eugene, who were my witness here
of songs about this place, who'd climb the dreaded hill ³⁰
that held the scrawny bowels and vaults, with much to fear
232. from sorcerer and buried ill.

Which as the rolling thunder passing overhead
would cause the copper horns that cap the rusty gates
to tremble, audibly, as in the heavy tread
236. of storms that batter forest states.

Так, разве ты, отец! святым своим жезлом
Ударив об доски, заросши мхом, железны,
И свитых вокруг моей могилы змей гнездом
240. Прогонишь — бледну зависть — в бездны.

Не зря на колесо весёлых, мрачных дней,
На возвышение, на понижение счастья,
Единой правдою меня в умах людей
244. Через Клии воскресишь согласия ³¹

Так, в мраке вечности она своей трубой
Удобна лишь явить то место, где отзывы
От лиры моя шумящею рекой
248. Неслись через холмы, доли, нивы.

Ты слышал их, и ты, будя твоим пером
Потомков ото сна, близ севера столицы,
Шепнёшь в слух страннику, в дали как тихий гром:
252. «Здесь Бога жил певец, — Фелицы». ³²

Май — июль 1807

And Father, you, who, with your holy sceptre blessed,
have struck the ground here overgrown with iron and moss,
here at my grave, where writhing serpents nest,
240. turn envy into empty loss.

And all for nothing do our joys and sorrows turn
upon that wheel of life, now up, now down, that sees
my name alone for truth among the people earn
244. its praise for Clio's harmonies. ³¹

So in that dark's eternity, with trumpet sound
that marks the end of all things, when the truth's revealed,
my lyre may add its voice to noisy rivers found
248. at hillside, valley still and field.

For you have called them, kept from sleep with pen
descendants from the northern capital, no less.
In distant thunder whisper out to passing men:
252. 'He sang of God and happiness.' ³²

May - July 1807

Река времен в своем стремленьи
Уносит все дела людей
И топит в пропасти забвенья
Народы, царства и царей.

А если что и остается
Чрез звуки лиры и трубы,
То вечности жерлом пожрется
И общей не уйдет судьбы.

6 июля 1816

Time's River

By time's great rushing river bound
are hopes and what endeavour brings,
and in oblivion deeds are drowned
of peoples, empires and their kings.

If anything should still be ours
through sound of trumpet and the lyre,
even these eternity devours,
the fate of all is to expire.

6 July 1816

NOTES ON INDIVIDUAL POEMS

On the Death of Prince Meshchersky

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/010.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/010.htm#c1>

Audio recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPYpkkeS9aA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Diz744mfkro>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YD7JyruV00M>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXAr2CX6VZI>

Other translations

<https://ruverses.com/gavrila-derzhavin/on-the-death-of-prince-meshchersky/3270/>

<https://linguafennica.wordpress.com/2016/04/14/on-the-death-of-prince-meshchersky>

http://max.mmlc.northwestern.edu/mdenner/Demo/texts/death_of_meshch.htm

<https://internetpoem.com/gavrila-romanovich-derzhavin/on-the-death-of-prince-meshchersky-poem/rhyme/>

<https://steemit.com/poeta/@lpolertys/on-the-death-of-prince-meshchersky>

<https://www.poemhunter.com/>

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001 (Anthologized in Chandler, R. et al. The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry 2005.)

Written in Petersburg in 1779 and the first of Derzhavin's really successful poems. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 84-

6. Specific notes:

1. A reference to General Perliev, a common friend of Meshchersky and Derzhavin.

11 stanzas of tetrameters rhymed aBaBcDDc.

To Rulers and Judges

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/013.htm>

Audio recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOGc5ZWzk88>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZXWAZ0Hy64>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54QMUqpeV70>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeQVofhfV-o>

Other translations

https://www.poetryloverspage.com/yevgeny/miscellaneous/derzhavin/to_rulers_and_judges.html

<https://ruverses.com/gavrila-derzhavin/to-rulers-and-judges/>

<https://peskiadmin.ru/en/tema-ody-vlastitelyam-i-sudyam-analiz-stihotvoreniya.html>

<https://iia-rf.ru/en/databaseny-a-for-children/ya-mnil-vy-bogi-vlastny-g-r-derzhavin-vlastitelyam-i-sudiyam/>

<https://www.poemhunter.com/>

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001 (Anthologized in Chandler, R. et al. The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry 2005.)

Written in 1780 in Olonets, when Derzhavin was involved in one his usual battles with officialdom. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 113-4. 7 stanzas of tetrameters rhymed aBaB.

Felitsa

Rusian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/017.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/017.htm#c1>

Audio recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXAr2CX6VZI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cw7klUY7hPg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiIFT6-l3-s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OCE-R4eQX0>

<http://rushist.com/index.php/literary-articles/4387-derzhavin-felitsa-kratkoe-soderzhanie-i-analiz>

Other translations

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/felitsa/>

<http://individual.utoronto.ca/aksmith/resources/Felitsa.htm>

↓

<https://theuncommonplacebook.wordpress.com/2017/12/15/felitsa-gavrila-romanovich-derzhavin/>

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001

Written in Petersburg in 1782, and dedicated to the empress Catherine. It was thought not sufficiently respectful by courtiers, but delighted the empress herself, who rewarded Derzhavin with a diamond-encrusted snuff-box. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 91-6. 26 stanzas of tetrameters rhymed AbAbCCdEEEd.

Specific notes are:

1. Khlor. Refers to a book of instruction written by Catherine for her grandson, the future Alexander I.
2. Mirza were noblemen of Tatar descent.

3. Polkana and Bova are characters in Russian folklore. Polkana beat Bova with an oak tree, but was defeated by Bova and became his loyal friend and ally.
4. Zoilus (c.400-320 B.C.) was a Greek philosopher, grammarian and critic of Homer.
5. Meaning of lines 242 and 244 transposed in the translation.
6. Literally: from all sickness, illness and boredom.

God

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/021.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/021.htm#c1>

Audio recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ym4Bg0TYMw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJnCeKB3E7U>

<https://doma-u-semena.ru/audioskazki/Derzhavin-Bog-mp3.php>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRgXkjjE-8o>

Other translations

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/God_\(Derzhavin\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/God_(Derzhavin))

<http://max.mmlc.northwestern.edu/mdenner/Demo/texts/god.htm>

<https://ruverses.com/gavrila-derzhavin/god/>

<https://mypoeticside.com/show-classic-poem-7760>

<https://www.poemhunter.com/>

<https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2009/12/derzhavins-ode-to-god-and-saint-herman.html>

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001.

(Anthologized in Chandler, R. et al. The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry 2005.)

Started in 1783 while expecting the governorship of Kazan to come to him but finished in 1784. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 96-100. 11 stanzas of tetrameters rhymed AbAbCCdEEEd.

Waterfall (opening excerpt)

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/038.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/038.htm#c1>

Audio recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMVnBw0KPC4>

Other translations

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001 (Anthologized in Chandler, R. et al. The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry 2005.)

Written in Petersburg in 1791-4 but alludes to the Kivach falls, which Derzhavin visited as Governor of Olonets in 1785. The poem adds an elegy to Prince Potemkin. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 107-9. 74 stanzas of tetrameters rhymed AbAbCC.

Monument

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/035.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/035.htm#c1>

Audio recordings:

<https://doma-u-semena.ru/audioskazki/Derzhavin-Pamyatnik-mp3.php>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiIFT6-l3-s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn-FLRWsCek>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qYkTTRabK8>

Other translations

<https://ruverses.com/gavrila-derzhavin/monument/>

<https://www.poemhunter.com/>

http://max.mmlc.northwestern.edu/mdenner/Demo/texts/monument_derzhav.htm

<https://lyricstranslate.com/es/pamyatnik-monument.html>

<https://ruverses.com/gavrila-derzhavin/monument/>

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001
(Anthologized in Chandler, R. et al. The Penguin Book of
Russian Poetry 2005.)

Written in Petersburg in 1791 and modeled on Horace, Ode
III 30. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 158-9. 5 stanzas of
hexameters rhymed AbAb.

Peacock

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/068.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/068.htm#c1>

Other translations

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001

Generally seen as a complaint against overdressed courtiers, Derzhavin may also have had T.I. Tutolmin in mind, with whom he quarrelled when Governor of Olonets. Written in 1795 in Petersburg. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 231-2. 5 stanzas of tetrameters generally rhymed AbAbCC.

Invitation to Dinner

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/059.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/059.htm#c2>

Audio recordings:

Other translations

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001

Written in 1795 in Petersburg, when Derzhavin and his first wife kept open house at Fontanka. Loosely modelled on Horace Odes II 28-9. Printed in 1808. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 143-5. 7 stanzas of tetrameters rhymed AbAbCCdEEEd.

Specific notes are:

1. Derzhavin had married again.
2. First addressed to I. I. Shuvalov but later also attributed to Count A. A. Bezborodko, one of the richest and most eminent of Derzhavin's contemporaries.
3. Prince Zubov was to have come, but sent apologies saying the empress had detained him.
4. Moderation is the best feast.

On the Return of Count Zubov from Persia (exerpt)

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/086.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/086.htm#c1>

Other translations

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001

Written in Petersburg in 1797, and particularly disliked by tsar Paul I: Count Zubov was one of Catherine's favourites. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 125-6. 14 stanzas of tetrameters generally rhymed AbAbCCDeDe or AbAbCdCdCd.

Bullfinch

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/114.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/114.htm#c1>

Audio recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8PJ-eSL7Nc>

<https://uskazok.ru/snigir-g-r-derzhavin/>

Other translations

<https://www.poemhunter.com/>

<https://ruverses.com/gavrila-derzhavin/the-bullfinch/>

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001

Written in 1800 in Petersburg, after the death of General Suvurov, whom Derzhavin had visited shortly before. Printed in 1808. Comment by Khodasevich p. 174 and pp. 263-4. 4 stanzas of tetrameters rhymed AbAbXy, CdCdXy,

etc. In fact a rather unusual metre (generally-uu-uu-u-u / -uu-uu-u-) with a fixed caesura before the last two feet. {6}
Specific notes are

1. Suvurov had a pet bullfinch when Derzhavin visited him.
2. Hyena refers to revolutionary France.

Swan

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/134.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/134.htm#c1>

Audio recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zp3aOqgnhFo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7h3ijIM1JbI>

<http://rushist.com/index.php/rus-literature/4743-derzhavin-lebed-chitat-tekst-onlajn>

Other translations

<https://www.poemhunter.com/>

<https://ruverses.com/gavrila-derzhavin/the-swan/>

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001

Written in Petersburg or Zvanka in 1804, when Derzhavin had retired from service. It is modelled on Horace, Ode II 20. 8 stanzas of tetrameters rhymed AbAb.

Life at Zvanka

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/148.htm>

Russian notes at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/02comm/148.htm#c2>

Audio recording:

<http://rushist.com/index.php/literary-articles/5701-derzhavin-evgeniyu-zhizn-zvanskaya-kratkoe-soderzhanie-i-analiz>

Other translations

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001 (Anthologized in Chandler, R. et al. The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry 2005.)

Comment by Khodasevich pp. 205-13. 63 stanzas of hexameters/tetrameters rhymed 6a6B6a4B. Written in May–July 1807, at Zvanka, the country residence in which the Derzhavins spent the summer months after 1803. The poem is dedicated to Derzhavin's friend, Bishop Eugene Bolkhovitinov (1767-1837), historian, archaeologist, and historian of literature, who lived in the Khutynsky monastery, some 60 versts away. Derzhavin's Russian is difficult, and my rendering is doubtless a little free in places. Specific notes are as follows:

1. Literally 'of all life's wonder. In this beauty's spectacle': transposed for euphony. Krasot strictly means 'shame' i.e. a spectacle.
2. Translation a little condensed: literally: the sound of lambs in the air, in the bushes the nightingale's whistle.
3. Ditto: literally: the roar of crows, the thunder of woodpeckers and the neighing of horses.
4. 'The breeze from my house is Manzhurian or Levantine'. Refers to smells of tea (Manchurian) and coffee (Arabia, delivered through the Levantine trade).
5. Divlyusya in Vestnik ('Herald of Europe'), founded by N. M. Karamzin and published at the time by V. A. Zhukovsky.
6. There were small factories in Zvanka.

7. My flourish: Russian is literally 'silver that flutters with bream'.
8. There was a small hospital for the peasants.
9. Yeroshki and pharaoh were card games.
10. Flaccus is Horace.
11. 'Glass of time' here means history.
12. Glossed as: mediocre thoughts, well spoken, in a clean syllable, make the beauty of an essay.
13. Alcoholic brews, local and strong.
14. Apple or birch juice, which was made like champagne.
15. Literally: with the cannon firing.
16. Literally: a feathery to the ceiling, i.e. a game of shuttlecock.
17. A kind of magic lantern.
18. A camera obscura.
19. The Empress Maria Feodorovna ordered a spinning machine from England, one where a single man could turn more than a hundred spindles.
20. Russian is condensed: the dye-house, where they dye silk, wool, linen and paper with herbal plants, picking them from the queen of the fields, i.e. Flora.
21. Literally: the militia.
22. A method of fishing called pounding in which several dozen boats, each with two men in them, are set behind a net quietly spread in the water. Men strike the boats with sticks, producing a terrifying sound that causes the fish to dart headlong through the water and become entangled in the nets.
23. Derzhavin's house had a dome and columns, and looked a little like a temple.
24. Thalia was the goddess of comedy and idyllic poetry. Terpsichore was the goddess of song.

25. 'String' refers to the piano.
26. 'Breeze' is zephyr in the Russian text.
27. Derzhavin is referring to the Fourth Coalition War of 1806-1807 against France. Perun is the chief Slavic god, one of lightning, storms and war.
28. To Temir the new one near Pultusk, Preyssh-lau. Temir (Tamerlane) is the Asian conqueror. The battles of Pultusk and Preisisch-Eylau were relatively successful for the Russian army.
29. Count M. F. Kamensky (1738-1809) was appointed commander-in-chief, but after a few days was replaced by Bennigsen.
30. There was a hill in the garden, on which Derzhavin liked to sit. The poem also refers to the legend that one of the Novgorod leaders was a sorcerer, from whom the river Volkhov got its name. This sorcerer was allegedly buried under a hill near Derzhavin's house.
31. Clio is the muse of history. In 1806, Eugene Bolkhovitinov printed the biographies of several writers, including that of Derzhavin, in the magazine 'Friend of Enlightenment'. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 205-13.
32. Felice in the Russian is Latin for happiness, and so refers to the Empress Catherine II, the subject of Derzhavin's earlier poem 'Felitsa'.

Time's River

Russian text at:

<https://rvb.ru/18vek/derzhavin/01text/163.htm>

Audio recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AoPYwfR89A>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYMQfL9DMJc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rfx6N7nPIto>

Other translations

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Time%27s_river_in_its_rushing_current

<https://brown.edu/Research/poetry-in-translation/2017/01/27/russia/>

<https://ruverses.com/gavrila-derzhavin/the-current-of-time-s-river/>

<https://internetpoem.com/gavrila-romanovich-derzhavin/the-current-of-time-s-river-poem/>

https://www.poetryloverspage.com/yevgeny/miscellaneous/derzhavin/river_time.html

https://wikilivres.ru/Time%27s_river_in_its_rushing_current

<https://mypoeticside.com/show-classic-poem-7761>

<https://malun.ru/en/finish/reka-vremen-v-svoem-stremlene-zhanr-stihotvorenje-g-r-derzhavina-reka-vremen-v/>

Levitsky and Kitchen G. R. Derzhavin: Poetic Works 2001 (Anthologized in Chandler, R. et al. The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry 2005.)

A fragment found written on a slate at Derzhavin's death on 20th July 1816. Comment by Khodasevich pp. 251-2. Two stanzas of tetrameters rhymed AbAb.

APPENDIX

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Russia was a patrimonial empire, which the Romanovs ruled through families they ennobled, and from whom they expected wise counsel and loyal service — a system that depended much on the tsar's character and competence. In essence, the empire was the tsars' to govern without laws or parliaments, guided only by their conscience before God. In practice, much in Russia went its own local ways, with officialdom barely reaching into the countryside. Church and local communes retained their inveterate and sometimes barbaric customs, and were worlds apart from the court, city life, the fledgling professions and industry. {1}

Much had been reformed by Peter I (ruled 1682–1725), who was rightly called the Great. By sheer force of will, this giant of a man had turned a vast but poor and backward country into a world power. He created a strong navy, reorganized its army on Western lines, secularised schools, administered greater control over the reactionary Orthodox Church, and introduced new administrative and territorial divisions. He acquired territory in Estonia, Latvia and Finland, and through several wars with Turkey secured access to the Black Sea. Most importantly, he established the city of St. Petersburg on the Neva River in 1712, and moved the capital there from its former location in Moscow. The city became Russia's 'window on Europe'. {2}

Peter's rule could nonetheless be brutal and oppressive: his heavy taxes led to revolts, which were savagely put down. He married twice and had 11 children, many of whom died in infancy. The eldest son from his first marriage, Alexis, was convicted of high treason by his father and secretly executed. No heir was nominated, and short reigns followed Peter's death. The throne passed to Catherine I (1725–27), to Peter II, (1727-30), to Anna Ioannovna (1730-40) and to the infant Ivan IV (1740-41). With army support, Peter's second daughter, Elizabeth (1741-62), then seized the throne and declared her own nephew as heir, the future Peter III (1762). {3}

Elizabeth was a popular ruler. She was vivacious, outgoing and pretty, not only capable but cultivated, speaking French, German and Italian. With Peter's modernisation and building schemes she was intimately familiar, saw the country through the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Year's War, encouraged the arts, and created the most splendid court in Europe. {4}

Catherine, who ousted her detested husband, Peter III, in the 1762 coup, did even better. Of all periods in Russia's history, the happiest was probably under this well-informed, hard-working and long-headed German princess. Catherine ruled through favourites and sometimes lovers, but these were patriots and highly talented: the generals Orlov, Potemkin, Suvorov and Rumyantsev, the admirals Greig and Ushakov, and many others who either performed suitably or were promptly replaced. Russia colonised Alaska, and through war obtained Crimea and territories along the Black and Azov Seas. {5}

Catherine, who diligently learned Russian and Russian customs, re-established the governorates, founded new towns and cities, and continued the reforms of Peter and Elizabeth. The economy and army still depended on serf labour, however, and their over-exploitation led to many uprisings, most seriously in the Pugachev Rebellion. Nonetheless and throughout, Catherine saw herself as patron of the arts, literature and education, expanding the royal collections, re-landscaping palace grounds in European styles and bringing noted intellectuals and scientists to court. She corresponded with Voltaire and Diderot, and was indeed regarded as Europe's enlightened monarch. {5}

LIFE OF DERZHAVIN

The Derzhávin's were barely aristocracy. In the seventeenth century, during the reign of Grand Prince Vasily Vasilievich the Dark, the Tatar *mirza* Bagrim left the Golden Horde to serve Muscovy, receiving lands in the usual manner. From Bagrim descended three families, one of which became the Derzhavins, who initially held good estates along the River Myosha, between the Volga and Kama rivers. But by the time of Derzhavin's father, Roman Nikolaevich, entered military service, the patrimony had dwindled to a few scattered holdings. His marriage to a distant relative, Fyokla Andreevna Gorina, neé Kozlova, brought little improvement: she was a widow without children, and her possessions were as thin and scattered as her new husband's. Even so, they were still the source of endless lawlessness and litigation that was not settled until the

1880s. Their son, Gavríl Románovich, was born 1743, some nine months after the wedding: small, weak and thin. {6}

Derzhavin's father was then transferred to the city of Yaransk, in Vyatka province, and afterwards to Stavropol, on the Volga, about a hundred versts from Samara. Here was born a second son, and then a daughter, who died shortly afterwards. The posting was to an area of scattered towns largely consisting of small wooden shacks. The salary was poor, and Fyokla was semi-illiterate, scarcely able to do more than write her name — a disability that handicapped her sorely in the lawsuits she later tried to bring. There was no talk of the arts or sciences in this wretched household, and only their noble status required the parents to educate their children if an army or civil service career was wanted. Local churchmen supplemented a basic home education until Derzhavin was sent to a German school in Orenburg, run by Joseph Rose, an ignoramus and former convict. Tuition was in the German language, whose grammar Rose did not know himself, and punishment was harsh and sometimes 'indecent'. Happily, Derzhavin was an apt pupil and acquired the basics of the language, which was thought important in Russia at the time, before being supplanted by French in the following century. The boy also learnt some elements of sketching and geometry from a land-surveyor then working with his father.

It was not an auspicious start to life, but after two years the family moved back to their estates in Kazan. His father then took Derzhavin to Moscow, where he intended to formally retire from the service on the grounds of ill health.

Subsequently they were to go on to Petersburg, where Derzhavin would enrol in an elite cadet corps. Unfortunately, bureaucratic delays consumed what funds his father possessed, and the Petersburg trip had to be put off. The party returned to Kazan. Retirement was eventually confirmed, but Derzhavin's father died of consumption the same year. The death left the Derzhavin family in perilous straits, unable even to repay a fifteen-ruble loan, or fend off seizures of their land by neighbours. Fyokla went from judge to judge in the area, but, without funds or influence, was unable to get her cases heard.

Meanwhile the second examination that children of the nobility were put through was approaching, and Fyokla engaged two private tutors for her sons: the garrison schoolmaster Lebedev and the cadet Poletaev. With this superficial polish given them, Fyokla set off to enrol her sons in Petersburg, when, once again, stopping off in Moscow, bureaucratic obstacles prevented the journey continuing. Money ran out, but this time, happily, a kind relative came to their rescue, though the Petersburg trip was again put off. The following year saw Derzhavin enrol at the grammar school in Kazan, where he received some grounding in Latin, French, German, arithmetic, geometry, music, dancing and fencing. There were no textbooks, however, the teachers quarrelled and denounced each other, and the principal, Veryovkin, a university graduate, sent off grandiose reports to the Moscow authorities on fictitious achievements. This education, basic as it was, ended three years later when Derzhavin was sent off to be a private in the Preobrazhensky regiment, an administrative

blunder having diverted him from the engineering corps he had applied for.

Derzhavin thus found himself at the centre of events, though in a very junior role. Lacking funds for a private apartment, Derzhavin was billeted at the barracks with two bachelors and three married soldiers with families. Here he spent the funds given him by his mother on furthering his neglected education, reading whatever books he could lay his hands on, and taking his first struggling steps towards poetry, both activities confined to the night hours, when others were asleep. Otherwise, it was sentry duties, removing snow, cleaning canals, conveying provisions, and running errands for fellow soldiers. He also helped them write letters home, and his verses circulated in the barracks. Derzhavin became popular, but bided his time as fellow privates with more influence were promoted over him. He considered transferring to the Holstein army, where his German could help secure an officer's position.

The role of the Preobrazhensky regiment was to protect the tsar, who at this time was Peter III, a much detested and oafish man then reforming the army on Prussian lines and preparing for a pointless attack on Denmark. He was overthrown by a coup that set his German wife on the throne, the Empress Catherine. Derzhavin thus became an active participant in guarding the new tsarina though, at a stroke, his Holstein hopes had been dashed. There were protracted celebrations, and the deposed Peter obligingly died of 'an ordinary haemorrhoidal attack', an assassination that would cause trouble for Catherine in the Pugachev uprising later in her reign. During this time, when he stood

guard duty for the new empress, Derzhavin finally obtained promotion to the rank of corporal. He returned home to Kazan on a year's leave of absence, meeting and falling in love with Veryovkin's mistress on the way, his first romance, which of course went nowhere at the journey's end.

Derzhavin returned to military life, continuing his literary efforts as before. He translated Klopstock and Kleist, read the works of Tredikóvsky, Lomonósov and Sumarókov, and began to write stanzas for a certain Natasha, 'a beautiful soldier's daughter'. Sometimes he went to literary parties given by Osokin, a minor poet from his part of the country, and there met Tredikóvsky, who would certainly have helped the young man in whom he saw promise, but the acquaintance didn't progress. Derzhavin's poetry was still rather clumsy, moreover, with only the lewd rhymes amusing his colleagues. A poem alluding to an affair by the wife of a fellow corporal in fact cost him dear: he was passed over for promotion for two long years. But the offended party eventually left, and Derzhavin was promoted to quartermaster and then to quarter-sergeant. He moved into lodgings shared with noblemen, and was drawn into their lifestyles, for which he had insufficient funds or the daredevil temperament.

Finally he was sent off under the command of the two Lutovinov brothers to prepare for the forthcoming tour of the empress Catherine of the Volga area, a preparation that degenerated into such drinking and debauchery that the elder Lutovinov was subsequently disciplined. Derzhavin survived unscathed, however, visited his mother, saw the

empress arrive in Kazan and wrote his first ode to her. After helping his mother fight off various lawsuits, continually mortgaging, buying and selling land, he returned to Petersburg, this time accompanied by his younger brother preparing to enter the service. Derzhavin was promoted to sergeant and was now more comfortably accommodated in his cousin Bludov's house, though its drinking and card playing never stopped. Here he unfortunately lost whatever money he had saved from his meagre salary and had to accept a loan from Major Bludov, on unfavourable terms. Months were then spent gambling at local taverns and learning cardsharp tricks, but Derzhavin did not win enough to pay off the loan, though these skills did prove useful in the many financially difficult periods that make the first half of his life. Derzhavin was then saved further trouble by being transferred to a Moscow regiment.

Yet here he was involved in more disreputable incidents. By keeping up with his former gambling partners, Derzhavin was arrested for a somewhat shameful affair with a deacon's daughter, a crime by association more than deed, however and Derzhavin was acquitted. Then he was accused of eliciting a promissory note to cover gambling debts owed him, which again petered out for lack of witnesses. None of these associations were good for his career or the poetry he was writing at the time, and after two years of this sorry existence, where he had many shady acquaintances but no real friends, Derzhavin took steps to return to Petersburg.

But again, some 150 versts out, Derzhavin met up with old companions at Tiver and gambled his money away, having to borrow fifty rubles from another traveller. At Novgorod he gambled that loan away. At Tosna he ran into the plague quarantine, and had to dispose of his trunk to get through: all his clothes and writings were burned. Penniless, he arrived in Petersburg, only to find his younger brother ill with consumption. Derzhavin obtained leave of absence to take Andrei home to Kazan, where he died in the autumn of the same year. Back in Petersburg, Derzhavin rejoined his regiment, lived as quietly as possible, but nonetheless had to borrow eighty rubles from a regimental comrade to survive.

At this point, when prospects could hardly be less promising, Derzhavin turned over a new leaf. He gave up his dubious contacts and chose his friends more carefully. He still gambled but honestly and cautiously, avoiding card sharpening tricks, and began to make a modest income in this way. He worked assiduously at regimental duties and was promoted to sergeant-major, and then, at the ripe age of 28, to ensign. The rank entailed expenses, for uniform and carriage, and Derzhavin therefore lodged with a certain Madame Udolova, quietly and respectably, away from his previous bad company.

In Derzhavin's unpropitious life there now enters the Pugachev Rebellion. Under the modernising regime of the empress Catherine, the nobility had embraced new fashions and technologies, thereby increasing taxes on their estate to pay for a more luxurious life-style. The peasants naturally protested, and there were some 160 popular

uprisings between 1762 and 1772. The Pugachev Rebellion of 1773-1775 in southwest Russia was by far the most serious, however. Emilian Pugachev was a Cossack born in the village of Zimoveyskaya, who had served as an officer in the Turko-Russian wars, but deserted. After wandering along the Yaik (renamed the Ural), Don and Volga rivers for some years, he was persuaded by church authorities to proclaim himself the long lost Peter III. The previous tsar had miraculously escaped assassination, and now advocated religious tolerance, unlike an empress who had imposed economic hardship and forcible conversion to Christianity. Pugachev looked nothing like Peter, but such was his charismatic leadership that tens of thousands flocked to his banner: Tatars, Bashkirs, and Kalmyks, manorial peasants escaping their landowners, even priests and minor civil servants. {7-8}

Pugachev had remembered his military training, moreover, and his armies initially avoided trouble. By 1773 they were besieging Orenburg on the Volga. Catherine sent General Kar to quell the rebellion, but he was decisively beaten, and Pugachev's numbers correspondingly increased. By March 1774, the rebels had consolidated their power near Orenburg and presented a serious threat to the throne. Catherine then sent General Bibikov, who lifted the siege of Orenburg, but could not prevent the rebels from regrouping. In July 1774, these same rebels took Kazan. Though quickly expelled by Colonel Mikhelson, they again melted into and regrouped on the steppes. Not until August 1774 were the rebels cornered at Tsaritsyn in the Ukraine and decisively beaten, indeed slaughtered, with the loss of 10,000 lives. Pugachev himself escaped, but was

quickly handed over by Cossacks, and publicly executed in Moscow in January 1775. {7-8}

Derzhavin's role in these complicated events can only be touched on here. Initially, he was living quietly at Madame Udolova's, but beginning to realise that he would never make a career in the guards. Through a contact of Madame Udolova's, he managed to get General Bibikov to accept him, a mere second lieutenant but knowledgeable on Kazan affairs, into a council of enquiry. In that capacity he travelled to Kazan and started his investigations. When Bibikov arrived in Kazan in December 1773, Derzhavin's reports were not encouraging. Other members of the inquiry were carousing in the notorious Russian fashion. The main body of Bibikov's troops had not arrived, though Derzhavin stressed the need for immediate action. In a quandary, Bibikov sent Derzhavin off to join other detachments, with instructions to report on their battle readiness. Bibikov himself tried to persuade the good citizens of Kazan to form a home guard, which met with some success, particularly through the eloquence of a local landowner whom Catherine had sent for the purpose.

On his return to Kazan, Derzhavin was given fresh instructions, to create a network of scouts that would reveal Pugachev's real identity and whereabouts, liasing with the authorities as necessary. In fact, Derzhavin got little help from local governors but rushed back to Kazan on hearing that the rebels had been defeated at Orenburg, though Pugachev had escaped. The situation was now changing fast. Derzhavin requested troops to capture Pugachev, but Bibikov was now dead, of overwork, at the young age of

42. Other commanders were now in the field, anxious to secure that honour for themselves. Catherine additionally entrusted that mission to General Sergeevich Potemkin, a second cousin to the new favourite.

Unfortunately, Potemkin met the rebels at Kazan with only 400 troops and was overwhelmed, barely escaping with his life. Mickelson then arrived to set the rebels flying again, but they were still gathering recruits. Potemkin approved of Derzhavin's plans and authorized him to continue the search for Pugachev. Again governors and town authorities resented orders from a second lieutenant, and imperial Cossack troops were unreliable, apt to join Pugachev on the least hint of rebel successes. On several occasions, Derzhavin was himself in danger of being captured. He appealed to General Mansurov, but was ambushed by peasant bands that had been marauding through the villages, thieving and murdering at will. Escaping them, he wrote for instructions from General Potemkin, but no reply came. On his own initiative, Derzhavin therefore gathered 25 hussars and one canon into his own small army and started administering local justice on a tribal rabble of Kirgiz and their sympathisers. Local clergy were obliged to watch as ringleaders were hung or whipped. Derzhavin then mustered 700 men and the Kirghiz were hunted down. Two hundred were captured and this local insurrection stamped out.

Elsewhere, matters were now going so badly that Catherine considered taking personal command of the army, but was eventually persuaded to appoint General Panin, an appointment that did not please Potemkin. General Suvorov

now joined these forces, informing Derzhavin that his actions had been favourably noted but offering no fresh commission. Chased now by several commanders, and a Prince Golitsyn who had joined the fray earlier, Pugachev still held the field, insolently taking Saratov in the process. In due course, however, after yet more successes and reversals, Pugachev's army was cornered and destroyed at Tsaritsyn, and the rebel leader handed over to Panin, who then initiated savage reprisals. Derzhavin offered his services to Golitsyn and Panin, but both were incensed by Derzhavin's independent conduct. Indeed they threatened to hang him for his alleged failure to protect Saratov, though it was others who had hindered his attempts to set up fortifications. Golitsyn slowly softened his attitude but Panin developed a hatred for the second lieutenant, who was obliged to travel on to see General Potemkin.

Potemkin was equally displeased that Derzhavin had not required Panin surrender the captive Pugachev to him. Now in disgrace with all parties, Derzhavin was ordered to find and interview a church elder sympathetic to the rebels. He caught a cold in making preparations, and spent the next three months in bed, but then continued his search through the now devastated districts. Even his mother had been captured by rebels at Kazan and nearly murdered, returning to find her properties at Kazan and Orenburg in ruins. Derzhavin managed to compose two odes on these experiences, the so-called Chitalagai odes, *On Nobility* and *On Greatness*, where the authentic Derzhavin tone is appearing, but the pieces are still ill-constructed and somewhat derivative of Frederick II's verses. A wiser Derzhavin finally returned to guard duties Petersburg, only

to learn he was now liable for debts owed by an acquaintance of Madame Udolova, for whom he had been unwise enough to stand surety. His mother's estates would be seized as payment, though these had been largely destroyed by government troops and the promised compensation reduced from 25,000 to 7,000 rubles.

So ends the first half of Derzhavin's life, still in near poverty, with a poetic gift that had yet to find its voice, and deepening awareness of the acute and shifting divisions in Russian life. In due course he was to receive a few serfs and lands in White Russia for the Pugachev affair, but they were poor compensation for having antagonised the superior officers whose good word would be needed for military advancement.

In the months that followed, hearing of the calumnies of Panin against him, Derzhavin appealed to Prince Potemkin, twice, but received no answer. In despair he embarked on the one skill that remained to him: gambling. Astonishingly, playing honestly now and with cool nerves, Derzhavin won 40,000 rubles over the next few days, which enabled him to pay off a wide array of debts. He petitioned again for his military services to be acknowledged, but his many enemies ensured that he was instead declared unfit for military service, and abruptly transferred into the civil service with the rank of collegiate councillor. His reward for service was land and three hundred souls (serfs) in Sebezhsy district of Belorussia, a paltry sum compared to what was given to others who had done far less for their country.

Derzhavin mortgaged that land, continued his successful gambling and looked for new friends. Life in Petersburg was now enjoyable as the court and the aristocracy celebrated the defeat of Pugachev with even greater displays of largesse and high living. Derzhavin made himself agreeable, was invited to the lavish entertainments of Prince Meshchersky, General Perliev and a host of the less exalted, where wine and women flowed freely. He was introduced to Prince Vyazemsky, and soon became a family friend, staying with them on their estate near Petersburg and being appointed executor of the First Department. Other contacts followed, and Derzhavin became a familiar figure in the social mix of dinners, dances, duels and amorous intrigue that made up Petersburg society.

Through Osip Petrovich Kozodavlev, an executor in the Second Department, he met his future wife, Ekaterina Yakolevna Bastidonov, quickly proposed, and was accepted. The mother, Matryona Dmitrievna, was a pushy and greedy woman whom the empress now disliked, but had recently been widowed again and needed to marry off her three daughters. The heir to the throne gave his blessing and promised a dowry, though the money never came. But at 35, almost twice his bride's age, yet financially independent, Derzhavin was not a bad catch. Ekaterina was demure, dutiful and genuinely attached to her husband. She charmed Derzhavin's mother and local society when they visited Kazan. Derzhavin's financial standing improved, and he bought lands in Kazan and along the Dnieper, in all amounting to a thousand souls. There were no children, but the couple entertained extensively and Derzhavin's friends now included poets with fashionable

connections. Under the influence of Lvov, Kapnist and Khemnitser, now forgotten but well-known poets at the time, Derzhavin wrote *On the Death of Prince Meshchersky*. Lvov and Kapnist had to help sort out some prosodic tangles, but the poem had the unmistakable note of greatness.

Derzhavin was a monarchist, believing firmly in the tsar's right to rule Russia, but he also understood the grievances that had fuelled the Pugachev Rebellion. The tsars had duties towards their people, and those of Catherine, he realised, were guided by her moral principles and sound common sense. So her early *Instructions* had announced, and so Derzhavin enumerated in his famous *Felitsa* poem. The empress made no comment when the over-familiar poem was shown her, but privately sent Derzhavin a diamond-encrusted snuffbox. From *Felitsa* would grow the great stream of Russian realism, that common humanity which is the greatest contribution of Russian literature to the nineteenth-century world, but the poem also criticised the more easy-going ways of the Russian Civil Service. Indeed Catherine mischievously sent copies of *Felitsa* to Generals Potemkin, Panin and Orlov, whom their author had most offended. Derzhavin, now a celebrity, could be useful to the empress, but would need watching.

Unfortunately, Derzhavin was soon criticising the Procurator-General for concealing income, for which the upstart had eventually to resign. Catherine made no comment, but sent word that Derzhavin should be patient. When the Governor of Kazan retired, Derzhavin so expected preferment that he sent his luggage on to Kazan, and in a

fit of inspiration composed his famous *God*. But Catherine, ever long-headed, appointed Derzhavin to the governorship of Olonets, a promotion for Derzhavin, but nonetheless a dreary stretch of pine forest, tundra and swamp bordering the White Sea. It featured the mostly wood-built towns of Petrozavodsk, Olonets, Vytegra, Kargopol and Povenets, but the population was scattered and only half Russian. The Derzhavins took up residence in the one brick-built single story treasury in Petrozavodsk, and almost immediately crossed swords with Tutolmin, their opposite number in the neighbouring Ekaterinoslavl province. Derzhavin tried to bring some order and sensible government to his province but Tutolmin was more concerned with pomp and display. Complaints flew back and forth to the vicegerent. Pranks were played by both parties. Petersburg was dragged in. Derzhavin tried to find relief in exploring his province, and indeed visited the Kivach falls that features in his poem *The Waterfall*, continuing on to visit hamlets and monasteries where he encountered 'debauchery, deceit and lawlessness' and then visited islands in the White Sea. He returned to find Petrozavodsk in its usual confusion. Seven thousand rubles were missing, and merchants had not signed for loans. Derzhavin began to despair of the law in Russia, penning his famous *To Rulers and Judges*. He appealed for a change of governorship and was posted to Tambov.

There more grief awaited him. He learned that his mother had died. And though Tambov was larger than Olonets, there were no paved streets or even a proper jail. The province had been in existence for only six years, moreover, though it had seen frequent changes of governor. Derzhavin's tenureship lasted barely three years

— the first half engaged in administrative reforms and constructive projects, and the second half in the usual quarrels. He managed to build a school, an orphanage, an almshouse, a hospital, a home for the insane and something approaching a decent prison. Further schools were built, and the Derzhavins began to live in some style. Receptions, balls, dinners and music recitals were held at their residence, and the anniversary of Catherine's coronation celebrated. A local theatre was built and, under his wife's direction, operas, plays and comedies were put on.

Then came the interference from the vicegerent, a military man, but fairly relaxed about the pilfering of state funds, where the governor was not. Derzhavin failed to get a Tambov merchant indicted for embezzlement, and then fell foul of the law in helping an agent Potemkin had sent to buy provisions for a Turko-Russian war. Derzhavin's high-handed ways were officially censured, and there began a protracted tussle between governor and vicegerent. Eventually, the Petersburg Senate recommended to the empress that Derzhavin be dismissed, and the governorship was over.

The one pleasing event in this catalogue of scandals and quarrels was the Derzhavins' stay at the Zubrilovka estate of Prince Golitsyn, where Ekaterina remained when Derzhavin went on to his trial in Moscow. Happily, Princess Golitsyn managed to prevail on Prince Potemkin, and Derzhavin was acquitted. He had behaved impulsively, but not criminally so. Catherine was pleased and invited Derzhavin to Tsarkoe Selo, where she announced to

courtiers, 'This is my personal author, who has suffered oppression'. But in private she also questioned Derzhavin closely, and promised nothing. Derzhavin therefore appealed to her current favourite, but still nothing came. Nonetheless, Derzhavin's fame had only grown in the years of his governorships, and his poetry circle widened. He became friendly with Nikolái Mikháilovich Karamzín, the leader of the important school of sentiment in Russian poetry. {9}

Prince Potemkin's star waned. His war with Turkey was not going well. Suvorov won important victories, and Zubov became Catherine's latest favourite. Potemkin's immense spectacle organised for her at Petersburg featured Derzhavin's anthem *Let the Thunder of Victory Resound*, but Potemkin was not received back into favour, and died shortly afterwards. Derzhavin incorporated an epitaph in *The Waterfall* poem. Catherine, who was now wanting to limit the power of the Senate, turned to Zubov, who turned to Derzhavin, who was thus appointed Cabinet Secretary, i.e. personal secretary to Catherine. As always, Derzhavin was honest, assiduous and intelligent, but unfortunately expected the same devotion to duty from Catherine. At sixty-three, she had long ago learnt how to be tolerant of human weakness, what policies were possible and what were not, and Derzhavin's unyielding high-mindedness made for frequent quarrels. Each respected the other, but Derzhavin was dismissed after three years. Unusually for positions near the throne, Derzhavin had made no fortune out of his appointment, but did manage to purchase the Fontanka, a splendid house near the Izmailov Bridge, where the couple entertained lavishly, particularly their poet

friends. {10-11} Ekaterina's health was now poor, however: it had been weakened by Tambov fevers and never fully recovered during the long years in Petersburg. At 33, she died, plunging her husband into grief and despair.

Derzhavin was now 52. He had been made President of the Collegium of Commerce, but neither concentrating on those duties, nor writing verse on his wife's death, or even the usual battles with colleagues gave any relief. He was therefore married again, six months after Ekaterina's death, to Darya Alekseevna Dyakova, a much less accommodating personality than Ekaterina, but good-natured, supportive and sensible. Unfortunately, relations with the empress continued to deteriorate, and while she enjoyed the added fame Derzhin's poetry brought, she did not really appreciate the work. Indeed Derzhavin's poem commemorating Suvorov's capture of Warsaw was entirely incomprehensible to her. Derzhavin brought out a selection of his best poems, with the dedication to the empress, but suspicions lingered. Derzhavin asked to resign, but the request was denied. Derzhavin continued his investigations into corrupt officials, which further offended Catherine. Finally, unreconciled, Catherine died of a stroke, and Derzhavin had to face a very different regime under Paul I.

Though many were demoted under the changeable and vindictive Paul, Derzhavin was appointed head of his Supreme Council, with access to tsar at any time, an appointment that was suddenly and inexplicably reduced to head of the Council Chancery. Both men tried to be cordial but there was no affection between them. Derzhavin was a

celebrated poet, writing his famous *Monument* poem at the time. Paul was an erratic autocrat, who brooked no opposition to his will. Derzhavin had become friends with Suvorov, but the general and Zubov were then retired by Paul. Derzhavin, who had written a poem in praise of Suvorov, unwisely wrote one on Zubov: *On the Return of Count Zubov from Persia*, which reached Paul's ears though remaining unpublished.

Derzhavin also turned more to the poetry of sentiment, to his years with Ekaterina, and then to the attractions of other women that began to take his eye. So arose the Anacreonic verses, on pleasures first imagined and then, when retired to Zvanka, to brief affairs. The pieces were pleasant and harmless enough:

АНАКРЕОН У ПЕЧКИ

Случись Анакреону
Марию посещать;
Меж ними Купидону,
Как бабочке, летать.

Летал божок крылатый
Красавицы вокруг,
И стрелы он пернаты
Накладывал на лук.

Стрелял с ее небесных
И голубых очей,
И с роз в устах прелестных,
И на грудях с лилей.

Но арфу как Мария
Звончатую взяла,

И в струны золотые
Свой голос издала, —

Под алыми перстами
Порхал резвее бог,
Острейшими стрелами
Разил сердца и жег.

Анакреон у печки
Вздохнул тогда сидя,
«Как бабочка от свечки,
Сгорю, — сказал, — и я».

1795

Which, rather freely translated, runs:

Anacreon at the Fire.

Anacreon the same
of Mary took his fill.
Between them Cupid came
and fluttered as moths will.

At which the winged god flew,
such charms he had to show:
his feathery arrows too
then threaded on the bow.

The arrow broke the drouth:
how blue those heavenly eyes,
what roses made the mouth,
at breasts the lily sighs.

Then Mary took the strings
and made the harp rejoice,
and so the golden strings
rang out with her clear voice.

But then the feathered god
more fiercely played his part;

with sharper arrow shod
he stabbed the burning heart.

Anacreon at this fire
sighed: 'To this I turn:
to the candle I aspire,
and like the moth will burn.'

His new wife indulged these interests: her more pressing concern was to save Derzhavin's position and salary if he continued to antagonize the new tsar. Derzhavin in fact withdrew to obscurity in the Senate for the following two years, but was flushed out of hiding when sent to Belorussia to report on Jewish commercial transactions. Suvorov's star meanwhile had risen again, if only briefly, and Derzhavin's commemoration of his Italian victories did not reflect well on the tsar. But Suvorov was by then ill, and died in May, shortly after a visit from Derzhavin, who wrote a brief elegy in his *Bullfinch* poem. Paul did not at all like the poetry Derzhavin was writing, but continued to value his honesty. He was promoted to President of the Collegium of Commerce, and awarded the Commander's Cross of the Maltese Order. More appointments followed. Derzhavin continued his cavalierly independent way until dismissal seemed inevitable. But in March 1801, Paul was assassinated, and the much more personable Alexander I came to the throne.

Derzhavin wrote a poem in honour of Alexander's accession, which caused the new tsar to send its author a diamond ring but have the poem suppressed. Alexander wanted a break with the past: new ideas, new appointments. Derzhavin relinquished his post of state

treasurer, and was not re-instated. Some of Catherine's former ministers were recalled to power, but they were largely Derzhavin's enemies. As the new tsar introduced a milder and more liberal regime, the poet was more consumed by the imponderables of the law and legitimacy of succession, probably sympathizing with Paul's assassins but also fearful of any weakness in the ruling power of the monarchy. He upheld the sanctity of previous salt contracts, and found himself appointed guardian of the lately divorced but still young beauty Natalya Alekseevna Koltovskaya, orally by the tsar but then not upheld when questioned by Natalya's previous guardians. Alexander was forced to yield to the opinion of his difficult adviser, who then devised a programme under which Alexander's liberalising hopes could be augmented under a reformed Senate, though in fact strengthening the power of the tsar and weakening that of the legislature by binding it closer to the law. Derzhavin was invested with the Order of Alexander Nevsky for this scheme, but any new influence he had won with Alexander was soon extinguished when he investigated the actions of the governor of Kaluga, who had powerful connections. Derzhavin had been promoted to Procurator-General and Minister of Justice, but meetings of the ministers, presided over by the tsar, only demonstrated how much Derzhavin was disliked by the senators. So matters dragged on for months until, blocked on all sides by the men the tsar had hoped Derzhavin would protect him from, Derzhavin refused to cooperate further, and was dismissed, without the customary ribbon for service and year's salary.

Derzhavin retained the expanded mansion at Fontanka and busied himself with his tragedies. Older poets died. His friend Karamsin was becoming influential. The Russian language itself was changing, absorbing French attitudes and dropping Church Slavonicisms, though the old guard fought back by creating a poetry circle, Besed, which often met at Fontanka. Krylov and Derzhavin became important members. Karamsin's followers formed their own circle, which Pushkin in time joined. Relations between the circles were sometimes strained, but Derzhavin soon found other things to do. Out of office, Derzhavin hankered for practical pursuits, and so turned to Zvanka, Darya Alekseevna's estate some 170 versts from Petersburg, which she had improved over the previous decade. Progressively enlarged, the house eventually had some sixty rooms. There were kitchen gardens, beehives, livestock and poultry yards. There was also a water-driven sawmill, and a steam-driven cloth-mill. A smithy manufactured side arms, and the locals were conscripted into a militia to face Napoleon's invasion, which greatly troubled Derzhavin, as it troubled all Russians, but left him largely unscathed.

Gradually he retired fully to Zvanka, becoming more friendly and generous to the serfs until Darya Alekseevna took control of the finances. His wife was not a passionate woman, but sensible, caring and energetic. She generously entertained her poorer relations at Zvanka, and Derzhavin was always surrounded by womenfolk, Darya's extended family, who took the ageing poet's eccentricities in their stride. Local women supplied what Darya could not. Derzhavin was also addicted to the pleasures of the table, and opened his doors to outside guests once a week. He

ate heartily, and entertained especially lavishly on the third and thirteenth of July, his birthday and name day. When guests left, Derzhavin got down to writing again, spasmodically, on several poems simultaneously. The best of his work was selected and republished in four volumes, prosodic liberties notwithstanding. Convention was subordinated to an all-important expressiveness, in which Derzhavin became a forerunner to twentieth-century experiments.

Derzhavin was immersed in writing his memoirs, or *Notes*, as he called them, when Napoleon crossed the Nieman and entered Russian territory. Derzhavin went to Pskov on recruiting business, where, hearing that inhabitants were leaving Petersburg, he authorized what needed to be saved at Zvanka. Returning to Petersburg he met up with Zubov, and they together followed the destruction of Moscow and Napoleon's costly retreat. He was still settling old scores in his *Notes* when victory over the French forces was declared. Derzhavin took little part in the celebrations but joined Darya on a pilgrimage to Kiev, in the course of which they viewed the ravaged remains of Moscow. Darya met up with a long-lost sister, and the party returned to Zvanka. Derzhavin was now growing deaf and no longer took such pleasure in his poetry circle, though he did hear Pushkin, still a schoolboy at the Tsarskoe Selo Lycée, recite a poem in the Derzhavin manner: *Reminiscences in Tsarskoe Selo*. Later, during an examination in Russian literature, Pushkin recited a poem in which the poet was singled out for praise. The old man rose to his feet, tears in his eyes, but the young Pushkin had disappeared. Derzhavin had noted the talent, however, and did not forget the name. A new school

of poetry was in the making, though Derzhavin who died at Zvanka in 1816, was inimitable and irreplaceable. Scribbled on a slate in his room was found a last fragment of his verse, only eight lines, but always printed as a testament to what Derzhavin still had in him when he succumbed to the mortality that was never far from his thoughts. {12}

DERZHAVIN'S POETRY

It was Derzhavin far more than Pushkin who created the writer's claim to be the social conscience of Russia. {13} Ironically, the gift came from Derzhavin's marked disabilities, the contrariness that so exasperated contemporaries expecting deference to wealth, social position and court procedures. Hemmed in by a social order to which he did not wholly belong, Derzhavin's own scruples became his lodestone, first in his Pugachev adventures, and increasingly in his writings. His first book, *The Chitagalai Collection*, published anonymously and at his own expense in 1774, followed an unusual order — translations of four of Frederick the Great's odes, then his own poems, plus a dedication to General Bibikov followed by one to the empress Catherine — but was otherwise modest and unassertive. Two important odes followed: *On the Death of Prince Meshchersky* and *To Rulers and Judges*, the first having the blood-chilling note of great poetry and the second causing some censorship problems {14} Then came *Felitsa* in 1782, which portrayed the empress as an exceptionally competent, hard-working and sensible woman. It was written in a mixture of styles. The second stanza adopts what Lomonosov would have called the low:

Felitsa, give me sound instruction
in worldly opulence that's true,
have the passions find reduction
and in this world be happy too.
15. How admirable is now your voice.
Your son escorts me in this choice.
Alas, my urge to fight but thins
against the vanities of wealth,
and if today I curb myself,
20. tomorrow I'm a slave to whims.

The last stanza is the high style, and could indeed one Lomonosov's elevated pieces, sonorous and somewhat disembodied:

I beg the prophet I may bow
and touch the dust beneath your feet,
I only wish is you allow
me hear the words both wise and sweet.
255. I ask that powers of heaven employ
such favours as the good enjoy,
that sapphire wings about the throne
protect from ills and boredom too,⁶
when all thereafter give to you
260. the light for which the stars are known.

But of course Derzhavin had also smuggled in the author posing as her dutiful mirza, well-intentioned but portrayed with all the evident failings of her court. Self-deprecating the portrait may have been, and charmingly expressed, but these tongue-in-cheek passages coloured the whole piece by association. Courtiers thought the manner much too familiar, but Catherine was delighted, sending copies to Derzhavin's adversaries. She asked for more of the same, but Derzhavin did not or could not produce to order, and the *Ode to Catherine* that followed in 1789 was the

standardised article: long, impersonal and uninspired. Derzhavin was his own man still, or perhaps had already seen too many of Catherine's failings to continue his smiling admonition.

Indeed, Derzhavin's own choices that followed *Felitsa – On Moderation* and *My Bust* – shows Derzhavin distancing himself from court flatterers, and this implied criticism of the empress deepens in the 1783 (but not published in Catherine's lifetime) *On Fortune*, which attacks the whole fabric of a Russian society subject to the whims and caprices of an arbitrary fortune. The poet was now supplanting the empress in moral guidance of the nation.

Derzhavin's poetry has features that belong both to classicism and his own character. His *God* drew on Edward Young's *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1745), {15}

How poor, how rich, how abject, how august,
How complicate, how wonderful, is man!
70. How passing wonder He who made him such!
Who centred in our make such strange extremes!

From different natures marvellously mix'd,
Connexion exquisite of distant worlds!
Distinguish'd link in being's endless chain!
Midway from nothing to the Deity!

A beam ethereal, sullied and absorb'd!
Though sullied and dishonour'd, still divine!
Dim miniature of greatness absolute!

An heir of glory! a frail child of dust!
80. Helpless immortal! insect infinite!

A worm! a god!—I tremble at myself,
And in myself am lost!

But Derzhavin's work has a chiasmic structure of its own where the key elements are repeated in reverse. In the central stanza, lines 51-60, the poet is still the smallest element in the great chain of being, but starts reversing the direction of the earlier lines. God is seen in majesty through the poet's gifts, being and understanding, just as Catherine was in *Felitsa*, though 'and shed our tears of gratitude' with which the poem ends will not be outgrown by experience.

The *Death of Prince Meshchersky* continually repeats the 'death destroys everything' theme, finding multiple metaphors for death, destruction and extinguished lives in both active and passive terms. 'Death' appears fourteen times and is made the forceful subject of transitive verbs, supported by the many inversions typical of Derzhavin's mature style.

Life at Zvanka follows the course of a single day, from the sun's rise in God's magnificence to nightfall signifying the darkness of eternity. The early stanzas see the poet looking outwards, to many pleasing features of life on a country estate: good food, recreation and a contented peasantry. Here Derzhavin combines the Orthodox view of God's transcendence and unknowability with the Enlightenment's belief in science, rational thought and social progress. Where Lomonosov sought God through science, Derzhavin's path is through thought: retired from court life to the peace and tranquillity of a well-run estate, whose features he happily depicts, he can reflect on his past life of service and

the achievements of his important friends and contemporaries. In the second half of the poem, from line 121 onwards, Derzhavin's view opens out to less tangible things: the view through mechanical inventions, the passing seasons, home entertainments and his place in Russian history. Events around the River Volhov are subject to time, as is the poet himself, who sees Zvanka being eventually overgrown and forgotten, but trusts his work will continue to be read even as the Volkhov still flows through the scenes he once loved. In its smaller way, poetry echoes God's creations, those physical manifestations through which He can be known, and which can be a little improved by man.

Pushkin and his contemporaries thought Derzhavin's *The Waterfall* the greatest poem in the Russian language. It is exceptionally long, however, and is for the most part the standard ode, a three-year labour of love to Derzhavin's hero and part patron, Prince Grigory Potemkin: foremost statesman and military leader. I have only given the opening verses, where Derzhavin appears in a different guise, as the keen student of nature, almost the Romantic poet of contemporary Germany or England.

That strong drawing of nature in her stormy moods is also found in a small section of Derzhavin's *On the Return of Count Zubov from Persia*, which I have again featured. (Zubov had been sent by Catherine on the impossible task of setting up trading posts to India and Tibet. {16}) Though spoilt by the last stanza, *The Peacock* also shows Derzhavin's descriptive abilities, superb when such matters interested him. For the most part, Derzhavin's interests lay

elsewhere, as they did with most Russian writers in the century that followed. Pushkin, Tyutchev, Turgenev, Bunin can paint the natural scene as compellingly as anyone, but there is no Russian Wordsworth, or indeed real escape from pressing social problems through identification with the mysterious and all-powerful beauties of nature.

Derzhavin was always a monarchist. How badly justice was administered in Russia would have been only too clear to him, but Derzhavin never wavered from his belief in strong rule by an astute, far-seeing and capable tsar. So was Catherine, for all her faults, but later tsars much less so, until the inflexible and incompetent Nicholas II brought the whole edifice crashing down.

STYLE

Eighteenth century Russians had a rich legacy of distinctly medieval poetry, with *bliny* and semi-liturgical works, but poetry in the European manner dates largely from Peter the Great's reforms. Its shapes and expectations were imported wholesale from abroad, from Poland and Germany largely, and given a Russian shaping by poets and theoreticians like Antioch Kantemír (1708-44), Vasíly Tredikóvsky (1703-69) and Mikháylo Lomonósov (1711-65), the last a multifaceted genius. The distinctive Russian voice, with the unassailable aptness of expression, comes with Alexander Púshkin (1797-1837), but the approach in the eighteenth century was more trial and error, with some very good poetry by Lomonosov in the 'high' classical manner, and then poetry in the 'middle style' and with more sentiment by Nikoláy Karamsín (1776-1826). {17}

Poetry goes beyond mere prosody — or, to be more exact— poetry accommodates such rules in its quest for the otherwise unsayable, where only inspiration, to use that much-abused word, will aid its flight. Pre-eminently among Russian poets, Derzhavin did have that inspiration, at least at intervals. Even in these translations, readers should be able to feel the depth and power of his writing, but he could go sadly amiss on the rules at times.

Or so most commentators have believed. Well-wishers, particularly in the early days, before *On the Death of Prince Meschersky* in 1779, would have to correct the prosody and remove the usual scatter of unneeded spondees and dactyls. But we should not exaggerate these ‘errors’. Derzhavin could write perfectly correct odes in the solemn Lomonosov manner, as in this brief example from Felitsa displaying hyperbole (тысячи) and repeated anaphora (Где, Там): {18}

Или в пиру я пребогатом,
Где праздник для меня дают,
Где блещет стол серебром и золотом,
Где тысячи различных блюд:
55. Там славный окорок вестфальской,
Там звенья рыбы астраханской,
Там плов и пироги стоят,

In the same poem can be found a host of rhetorical tropes, but what set the poem apart from its predecessors was the intrusion of the smiling narrator, and a most unsolemn diction:

But I, of course, have slept till noon,
which fumes of pipe and coffee show.
My working day is one long swoon
within whose thoughts chimeras grow.
45. With captives under Persian skies
I arm myself in Turkish guise.
Still dreaming that I am the sultan
I make my piercing look oppress,
or captured by some other dress
50. will slip out quickly for a caftan.

These 'errors' Derzhavin kept throughout his work, if we mean the tendency to cram phrases into parts of the line where they don't naturally belong, to use cumbersome Church Slavonic forms where simpler words existed, and an ornament so excessive and intricate in places that many have called the style baroque in complexity. But, as Anna Crone {19} points out, this was not entirely incompetence but an effort to add tension and emotional impact, increase ambiguity and polysemy, and delay full understanding until the denouement came. In these developments, Derzhavin was carrying Lomonosov's conception of the high style to extremes, and to us these long poems may seem too correct, too impersonal and civic-minded. But to the poets of Russia's later golden age, his verse could seem rugged and improvisatory, conceived in brief spurts of productivity, when Derzhavin would lock himself away for a day or so on a strict bread and water diet. The Age of Classicism prided itself on discipline, balance and informed common sense, and here Derzhavin was not only markedly individual but employed a style that extended Lomonosov's efforts to the limits of the intelligible. Progress would have to be in other directions, notably Karamsin's 'middle' style and Pushkin's idiomatic ease.

Many of Derzhavin's contemporaries wrote poetry. It was a social accomplishment, and could lead to preferment. Derzhavin's schooling was elementary, sufficient to make him popular with his illiterate soldiers who needed his help to write to spouses and sweethearts, but not to make his early efforts more than a muddle that fellow verse writers were at pains to sort out. His first really successful piece was *On the Death of Prince Meshchersky*, a rich but not particularly distinguished aristocrat, whom Derzhavin knew only slightly anyway. The death was a peg on which to repeat high-minded homilies, with much oxymoron, but the words have a chilling force nonetheless. Thereafter, the odes were inspired by real events and observations important to Derzhavin. *To Judges and Rulers* was occasioned by Derzhavin's troubles as a governor. Derzhavin had the unfortunate tendency to be both impetuous and unaccommodating. When he quarrelled, which is practically with everyone, from empress down, he generally had good sense and fairness on his side, but politics, alas, is a game of caution, strategy and deviousness that were quite foreign to Derzhavin's forthright and sometimes coarse nature.

It is therefore astonishing that Derzhavin got so far in government circles, further than any other important Russian writer, before or since. Indeed his whole life seems wildly improbable. His Pugachev exploits have an air of the picaresque or comic opera, though the dangers were real enough. His adventures ruffled many feathers, of course, but also brought him to Catherine's attention, giving his name some currency when he entered the civil service and

Petersburg society. He now began writing seriously, and associating with others that would bring his poetry into prominence. Petersburg society found him his first wife and the Governorship of Olonets. The Governorship of Tamov, awarded a year later, was scarcely more inviting, however, and Derzhavin again fell out with opposing parties. Catherine nonetheless stood by him, probably liking his transparent honesty. Unhappily, the empress herself, who ruled through a mixture of femininity and astute worldly wisdom, accepting that no one is perfect and politics is always a shifting compromise, also fell short of the inflexible standards Derzhavin set for himself and everyone else.

That unaccommodating nature can be felt in his poetry. When most himself, Derzhavin has a chilling force that is rare in all poets, and especially in Russian, but it is in the Horacian poems like *Invitation to Dinner* and *Life at Zvanka* that we see the more human and often hidden side of the poet, with his gusty appreciation of the good things of life. These are simple and heartfelt poems, and have none of Pushkin's amused ambivalence, or the social issues of Nekrasov. But they are not simple reportage. As noted above, Derzhavin had deeper truths to explore and there is often a metaphysical structure to his poems. Fortune, God and the law seem never to have been far from his thoughts. {20}

Derzhavin's poetry was indeed always at the service of the State, as he was himself, resoundingly, which caused so many conflicts with colleagues and superiors. Pushkin was much the more gifted, writing almost from the first with an

easy grace that Derzhavin does not approach, but he lacks Derzhavin's rugged directness and hard grandiloquence, the odd lapses in Russian prosody or even grammar notwithstanding. His *Monument* was true. Derzhavin did become a household name across Russia and the literary world beyond. One cannot imagine any other Russian writer making that claim, but Derzhavin's achievements were real, sufficient to give even the tsars pause when exasperated yet again by his uncompromising character.

THIS TRANSLATION

Derzhavin is difficult to emulate. He mixes styles, the high with the low, but also has a penetrating depth that subsumes the particular in the immemorial commonplaces of life. The style is markedly individual. It has the archaic diction, semantic inversions and the contorted syntax thought necessary at the time for the higher styles of poetry, but mixes these with the more everyday language that Pushkin was to bring to perfection. A simple example is stanza 5 in *The Swan*: The Russian:

И се уж кожа, зрю, перната
Вкруг стан обтягивает мой;
Пух на груди, спина крылата,
20. Лебязьей лоснюсь белизной.

A word-for-word rendering is:

And all very skin, (I) see, feathery
around waist tight-fitting my
down on breast, back (is) winged
20. swan (is) glossy white

The meaning is clear enough but the Russian is hardly idiomatic. My rendering:

And now I even see my skin
become at waist a feathered sight:
my back is winged, my breast akin
20. to swan's down with its pearly white.

This is a literary translation, therefore, where I've tried to capture the poetry, often at the cost of an exact word-for-word rendering. In general, I have aimed for a pleasing translation in traditional English verse, one that conveys Derzhavin's meaning in a style that is typical of the period and faithful to the original stanza shape. The result has been a 'quieter' and smoother rendering than the original. The *Felitsa* snippet quoted previously is literally:

Or at the feast, I am rich,
Where they give me a feast,
Where the table shines with silver and gold,
Where a thousand different dishes are served:
55. There is a glorious Westphalian ham,
There is good Astrakhan fish,
There is pilaf and pies standing there,

But is here translated as:

Or at a sumptuous banquet hence
that's somehow given in my name,

with gold and silver ornaments
and umpteen tiers of fish and game,
55. good ham as rich Westphalia can
and our fine fish from Astrakan,
no pies or pilaffs go to waste;

For most of Derzhavin's better-known poems there exist several fairly close translations, in books and on the Internet, so that the real need now is literary quality. Faithful and pleasing verse renderings can, of course, be easily obtained if rhyme requirements are dropped, as excellent translations by Evelyn Bristol {15} and Michael Slager {22} show, but that 'shaped and finished authority' is missing: rhyme helps restructure lines for memorability, force and beauty.

Meanings incomplete in the Russian have sometimes been rounded out in the English. I have replaced the Russian feminine rhyme by the English masculine rhyme throughout, and not attempted to convey Derzhavin's full rhetoric and supposed 'errors', an exercise well beyond my powers, even supposing the results would be readable: no equivalent to Derzhavin's rugged style exists in English verse. I have also added a short social history of Russia to Derzhavin's biography, as the poetry needs to be seen in its larger setting.

INFLUENCE OF DERZHAVIN

Meaning is often compressed in Derzhavin, even tangled in places, but that semantic density can be further enhanced by rich colour imagery and sound effects. Russian verse subsequently took Pushkin's more mundane and useful route, but Derzhavin's rugged vitality was later of interest to iconoclastic poets like Mandel'stam and Mayakovsky escaping the effete world-weariness of late Silver Age poetry. His work gave orientation and stability in a world beset by revolution and fast-changing styles. Derzhavin was also the first major Russian poet to add everyday, mundane words to the literary mix, though Nekrasov probably found his own way to the practice.

Like many poets, Derzhavin was not a good judge of his own work. Much of his time at Zvanka was taken up with the Anacreonic poems, which show a sane and balanced sensuality, not always harmless, but indulged by his second wife. Worse, Derzhavin never tired of extolling the virtues of his tragedies, though they were not much liked at the time, nor treasured since. So straightforward a character as Derzhavin did not have the reading, balance and detachment needed for literary criticism, and he was often baffled by his contemporaries' single devotion to his odes. Yet it is these that now tower over the two centuries of Russian poetry — rugged, individual and irreplaceable in the world-class literature that Russia was now beginning to produce.

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