



«Река времен в своем стремлении...» Г. Р. Державина в контексте темы бессмертия поэта

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Gavrila Derzhavin's «Reka vremen v svoem stremlen'yi...» in the context of the topic of the poet's immortality

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Аннотация

Тема поэзии и бессмертия поэта — одна из важнейших тем державинского творчества. Последнее стихотворение Державина «Река времен в своем стремлении...» (1816), как правило, не рассматривается в контексте державинских произведений, посвященных теме поэзии и бессмертия поэта. Однако в этом стихотворении обнаруживается ряд мотивов и образов (бессмертие/смерть поэта, река, слава, памятник/руина), общих с державинским «Памятником» (1795), в котором данная тема решается характерным для риторической культуры образом: поэт, прославляющий государство, «совечен» ему (Л. В. Пумпянский).

Сопоставление данных текстов делает возможным вывод о том, что а) Державин сохраняет представление о связи творчества с империей, б) «совечность» поэзии государству

оборачивается их общей гибелью. Трагичность, эсхатологичность последнего стихотворения Державина, его одновременная принадлежность риторической культуре и эпохе «неготового слова» становятся поводом для обращения к нему поэтов XX–XXI вв.

Abstract

The topic of the poetry and the poet's immortality is among the most important topics of Derzhavin's oeuvre. His last poem «Reka vremen v svoem stremlen'yi...» (1816) is usually not considered along with his works devoted to that topic. However, this poem exhibits a series of motives and images (immortality/poet's death, river, glory, monument/ruins) common to Derzhavin's «Pamyatnik» (1795) where the topic in question is resolved in a way that is typical for the rhetorical culture: the poet



glorifying the state is co-eternal to it (L. Pumpyansky).

By comparing those texts it may be shown that a) Derzhavin preserves the idea of the creative work being connected to the Empire; b) the co-eternity of the poetry and the State turns into their common downfall. The tragedy and eschatology of Derzhavin's last poem, its belonging to the rhetorical culture and the epoch of «unprepared word» becomes an occasion for 20th-21st c. poets to refer to the text.

Ключевые слова: Г. Р. Державин, творчество, государство, бессмертие поэта, «река времен».

Keywords: G. Derzhavin, creative work, state, poet's immortality, «river of times»

On the history of studying

G. Derzhavin's poem «Река времен в своем стремлении»

Gavril Derzhavin's poem «Река времен в своем стремлении» (1816, «PB» later on) has usually been attracting scholars' attention sub specie the circumstances of its creation, its genre identification and possible interpretations of the acrostic. The context wherein the work was created is more or less reconstructed. For example, it is a common place to mention the map in Derzhavin's parlor, by F. Strass, entitled «Река времен, или Эмблематическое изображение Всемирной истории от древнейших времен по конец осьмого надесять столетия», where the name of the poet himself was mentioned in a due place. Later Derzhavin's interest in acrostic is known [Халле], conjectures are made about literary sources and cultural parallels [Лаппо-Данилевский, с. 156–157][Морозова, с. 140–142] which might have affected the imagery of the poem in question. The matter of reading the

acrostic («РУИНА ЧТИ») is still topical, though the ultimate decision is hardly possible and all the stated versions remain hypothetical [Халле][Левицкий, с. 69–70][Лаппо-Данилевский, с. 149].

It seems more promising, though, to introduce Derzhavin's last poem into the broader context of the poet's œuvre. Despite such attempts having been made, the subject, undoubtedly, asks for further analysis.

Death and immortality as topics of Derzhavin's lyrics

One of the principal topics of Derzhavin's lyrics, which was being referred to by the poet throughout his œuvre, is that of death and immortality. It is this topic that the last poem by Derzhavin is on. Its tragic sound, uncharacteristic of 18th c. poetry, and its particular status in the eyes of readers was not left unnoticed by scholars [Лаппо-Данилевский, с. 150, 158][Пономарева, с. 274–275]. The issue of death and immortality in Derzhavin's œuvre as well as in the rhetorical culture in general can be resolved in three **positive** ways: first, by stating the immortality of the soul, second, by accepting the finitude of the man but at the same time asserting the value of his life, and third, by establishing the relationship between those who glorifies the Empire and the eternity of the Empire itself (the canonical example thereof is «Exegi monumentum» by Horace). In «PB» Derzhavin challenges the tradition-approved solutions and stays open to a different, eschatologic, view full of bitter sense of human mortality and complete oblivion of man's deeds.

Derzhavin's «PB» and «Памятник»: some parallels



This article is concerned with a single aspect of the above-mentioned topic: the immortality of the poet and the poetry. Among the crucial poems by Derzhavin devoted to the immortality of the poet is the «Памятник» (1795), directly referring to Horace's «Exegi monumentum» [Пумпянский, 2000b, с. 198–205]. They both belong to the same tradition, perceiving the immortality of the poet through his deep nexus with the Empire (the Roman Empire for Horace and the Russian Empire for Derzhavin, but the absolute state in both cases), with the idea of its grandeur and immortality [Пумпянский, 2000b, с. 201].

Comparing the «PB» and the «Памятник», a number of parallels is revealed that establish the relationship between these texts whereby it becomes possible to put Derzhavin's last poem among his works that elaborate the topic of the poet's immortality. Let us consider the most important of those parallels.

The «PB» is built upon images common to the European culture that may be realised in specific texts in different ways: the river of time, the lyre, the trumpet, the eternity. The image of the river of times is based, first of all, upon a universal mythological symbol of the river as a border between the worlds and, second, upon a conception of the water element as the one that destroys and gives life at the same time. Derzhavin's last poem contains only one side of this conception: that of the ruinous, destructive element. In the «Памятник» the element of water is represented by specific geographic locations, namely Black and White Seas, the rivers of Volga, Don, Neva, Ural. As stated by L. Pumpyansky, those are «the names of the future glory of the poet» [Пумпянский, 2000b, с. 203].

Whereas in the poem of 1816, the river destroys the man, his deeds and all remembrance of him, in the «Памятник»

rivers are the roads that spread the poetic glory. Thus another side of the image is actualised. The choice of words, the semantics of the future tense all stress that the focus of the all-increasing glory lies in the times to come and the glory is declared a pledge for the poet's immortality, even after his physical death.

The motive of the glory is reduced in the «Памятник» to the poetic glory and is detailed by enumerating his merits in poetry, as vastly presented in the fourth stanza. The «PB» touches the two possible manifestations of the glory: the poetic and the martial one, but their description is reduced to naming the sign images: the sounds of lyre and trumpet.

The image of eternity is given by Derzhavin according to the general intention of each of the poems. In the «Памятник» it is correlated to the increasing glory and light, and in «PB» to the ultimate destruction, the collapse and the omnivorous death.

The images, common to both works, are thus presented by Derzhavin from the opposite ends, ambivalently. Their specific embodiments are strictly contrasted to each other (the life-destroying river / glory-spreading rivers, eternity as immortality / eternity as oblivion). The glory is also shown as the martial glory (the trumpet) and the poetic glory (the lyre). But being put together, those opposites form a comprehensive image.

The fusion of the poetry and the state present in the «Памятник» can also be found in the «PB». Peculiar signs of the inter-dependency of the poetry and the state in the works in question are two inherently architectural images. These are the monument and the ruins. The former is used in the heading of the poem, the latter forms a part of the acrostic, and both the images are essential for the given texts.



The monument, the obelisk, the pyramid, and on the other hand, the ruins are among significant images in the whole œuvre by Derzhavin [Пумпянский, 2000a, с. 180].

In essence, the monument and the ruins are the two opposite sides of the same image, constituting a binary opposition. While in the «Памятник» the poetry and the state are co-eternal, in the «PB» they are doomed to death — the memory of military exploits and the poetry are equally destroyed, along with the downfall of «nations, kingdoms and kings».

That the poetry stands on par with the State and the martial glory clearly signifies its importance for Derzhavin and the rhetorical culture as a whole. But it is even more important that the poetry, just as any creative work, is regarded by the rhetoric culture as but one of many possible forms of human activity. The creative work is equated to any other work and its value, just as the value of others, lies **outside** the human, alienated from the man's inner, personal domain, thus allowing the poetry to «fuse» with the state, or even necessitating such a fusion, the state being the indisputably utmost value of the mundane world order. Waiving the «miraculous, eternal» monument, the poetic immortality is a direct consequence of this dependency: the nations, the kingdoms, the kings, the glory, the human deed and the creative work share the same lot.

The «PB» written by Derzhavin in 1816, demonstrably belongs, on the one side, to the literary tradition and the rhetorical culture. On the other side, it seems to bring this tradition to its full completion, paradoxically unlocking its borders. It is not a coincidence, then, that it is this poem that became actual for the Russian poetry of 20th–21st cc., where a number of poetic works references the «PB» and polemise with this text.

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