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Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov
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Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov(1787 - 1855)

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov was the son of Nikolai L'vovich Batiushkov and Aleksandra Grigor'evna Batiushkova (neé Berdiaeva); both parents belonged to the old nobility. Konstantin had three elder sisters (Aleksandra, Elizaveta and Anna) and one younger (Varvara). His father also had children by his second wife, Avdot'ia Tegleva, one of whom, Pompei Batiushkov, later became the publisher of Konstantin's biography and collected works (1885—87), edited by a leading academician, Leonid Maikov. Family tradition spoke of Nikolai as a "nobleman out of imperial favour". His career difficulties could be explained by the unfavorable attitude of Catherine II, caused by his involvement in the "affair" of his uncle (Il'ia Batiushkov) who was exiled in 1770.
From 1767 (1764?) to 1777 Nikolai was in the army. Only in 1781 was he appointed a procurator of the court, in the civil service: at first in Velikii Ustiug, and later in Yaroslavl, Vologda (1786—91) and Viatka. His fourth child, Konstantin, was born in Vologda on 18 May 1787. Nikolai's family circumstances were complicated by financial difficulties, and were made even worse when the poet's mother, Aleksandra, became mentally ill (apparently c. 1793, but not earlier, as a later family tradition supposed). Nikolai was obliged to take her to St. Petersburg, where she died on 21 March 1795.

The early years of Konstantin Batiushkov's life are difficult to reconstruct. He probably spent the first four years of his life in Vologda; the exact place he lived from 1792 to 1796 is unknown: possibly with his father (first in Viatka, and then in St. Petersburg), possibly with his grandfather, Lev Andreevich Batiushkov, on their family estate, the village of Danilovskoe, Bezhetski district, Tver province. However, it was Konstantin's youth spent in Petersburg which played the most important part in his development as a poet.

Batiushkov's earliest extant letter from St. Petersburg is dated 6 July 1797. His first years there were spent in Pensionnats (private boarding schools). Contact with his relatives was restricted to correspondence and rare meetings. From 1797 to 1800 he studied at the Pensionnat directed by a Frenchman, O.P. Jacquinot; it was a rather expensive school for children of good families. Most subjects were taught in French; the curriculum included French, Russian, German, divinity, geography, history, statistics, arithmetic, chemistry, botany, calligraphy, drawing and dancing. In 1801 Batiushkov entered the Pensionnat run by an Italian, I.A. Tripoli; he graduated in 1802. It was here that Batiushkov began to study Italian. His first literary offering, however, was a translation into French of Metropolitan Platon's Address on the occasion of the coronation of Alexander I; in the autumn of 1801 it was published as a separate pamphlet by

Platon Sokolov, an acquaintance of his father.

1802 is conventionally considered the beginning of Batiushkov's poetic career. He wrote in a letter to Nikolai Gnedich on 1 April 1810 that he had composed his first poem at the age of fifteen. Batiushkov quotes two lines; he felt that their main idea — dissatisfaction with reality and a longing for "distant lands", both geographic and spiritual — anticipated his mature work: "Muza moia, eshche devstvennitsa, ugadala" (My Muse, while still a virgin, had divined it).

When he graduated from the Pensionnat he moved in with his father's cousin, Mikhail Murav'ev and his wife Ekaterina Fedorovna Murav'eva. The friendship, patronage and influence of Mikhail Nikitich Murav'ev, one of the most important writers of Russian Sentimentalism and the creator of Russian "light verse", were decisive in Batiushkov's spiritual biography. Batiushkov later confessed that he was obliged to Murav'ev for his education. A passionate lover of Antiquity, he introduced Batiushkov to the Latin language and Classical literature. In his house Konstantin evidently became acquainted with the poets he admired, Gavriil Derzhavin and Vasilii Kapnist; most likely he also formed there a friendship with Aleksei Nikolaevich Olenin, who was both a successful "bureaucrat" and a knowledgeable amateur of the arts. Olenin's circle, however varied the literary opinions of its members, was the aesthetic centre of Russian Neoclassicism, or the Russian style empire, which combined the "cult of sentiment" with an interest in both classical and Northern Antiquity. An appreciation of this circle's atmosphere contributes much to the understanding of Batiushkov's poetics.

On 20 December 1802 Batiushkov entered the newly formed Ministry of Public Education, "without salary and self-supporting". Murav'ev became assistant minister of public education and also Supervisor of educational institutions in Moscow. It is not surprising that with such a patron, Batiushkov served, in his own words, "udachno i ne ochen' userdno" (succesfully and not very assiduously). At first his service was wholly nominal; obviously, a fifteen year old would only take such an unreal post to fulfill the prescribed number of years to obtain at least the lowest rank in the Petrine "Table of Ranks" (corresponding to the fourteenth, i.e. the lowest class). He was granted this rank on 7 November 1803, and on 21 June 1804 he retired.

Batiushkov began to write poetry seriously in 1804 (at least, the dating of his first works from 1802—03 is not documented). Two poems are conventionally regarded as having been written before the first published one. The first of these, "Bog" (God), is a direct imitation of Derzhavin's spiritual odes (Echoes of Derzhavin continued to appear in Batiushkov's mature work, but as only one element of his own, highly individual, style). The other poem is "Mechta" (the

title, usually translated as "Dream", can also mean "Fantasy" or "Imagination"). Never satisfied with the realization of his idea, Batiushkov reworked "Mechta" for the rest of his literary life; thus it is possible to illustrate the evolution of Batiushkov's versification and verbal style using only examples from successive wordings of this piece. Written under the influence of Murav'ev's lyrics, and including both original and translated fragments, this piece became a manifesto of Batiushkov's own aesthetics: "Mechtan'e est' dusha poetov i stikhov" (Dreaming is the soul of poets and of verse). This brings him close to Karamzin and the early Zhukovsky, but even in "Mechta", the literary pose of an escapist and hedonist is already evident. It was most likely the programmatic nature of this, on the whole rather weak, poem that continued to hold the interest of its otherwise self-critical author.

Batiushkov's relations with his colleagues in the Ministry form part of his literary biography: many of them were, after all, poets, essayists or publishers. For example, Nikolai Ivanovich Gnedich, a member of Olenin's circle and future translator of the Iliad; Ivan Petrovich Pnin, a poet and publicist, the President (from July 1805 until his death in September 1805) of the Vol'noe obshchestvo liubitelei slovesnosti, nauk i khudozhestv (Free Society of Lovers of Letters, Sciences and the Arts). Other colleagues were also members of The Free Society: Nikolai Radishchev, son of the famous writer Aleksandr Radishchev; Dmitrii Ivanovich Iazykov, the Secretary of the Society (and its President from 1807 to 1811).

Batiushkov's stylistics and genre repertoire of that period were partly oriented to the tastes of this literary group.

In the autumn of 1806 Napoleon occupied Berlin and most of Prussia, Russia's ally; Alexander I declared a mass levy. On 13 January 1807 Batiushkov, with the civil rank corresponding to the twelfth class, was attached to General Nikolai Nikolaevich Tatishchev's staff under Olenin (the general was commander of the Petersburg Militia, a Volunteer Corps). On 22 February he enlisted in Colonel Verevkin's Petersburg battalion of the Militia as sotennyi (a junior officer), and immediately set out for the West. On 2 March he was in Narva, 19 March — in Riga, from where he sent letters to Gnedich, containing an improptu and another verse epistle. When taking part in the Prussian campaign, he met Ivan Aleksandrovich Petin, an officer, who was to become another close friend. Batiushkov fought at the battle of Gutstadt (22—27 May); on 29 May he was seriously wounded at the battle of Heilsberg. (A year later, on 20 May 1808, he was awarded the Order of St. Anne, 3rd class, for bravery.) After the battle he was transported to hospital and then to Riga where he was convalescing during

June and July 1807. Meanwhile the Russian army had suffered a serious defeat at Friedland, and Alexander I signed the Treaty of Tilsit with Napoleon.

Tasso and his Gerusalemme liberata (Jerusalem Delivered, 1580) — the epic that Batiushkov always described as nothing less than "immortal" — became Batiushkov's main preoccupation from 1807 to 1810 as he worked on translating it into Russian. The idea of presenting the main works of world literature in the Russian language and making them part of Russian belles lettres is characteristic of the early nineteenth century. Batiushkov (also advised by Kapnist) might have come to similar ideas under the influence of Gnedich who was already working on his translation of the Iliad. First and foremost in importance to the literati were heroic epopees. This is why in Batiushkov's correspondence with Gnedich, "your poet" and "my poet" are Homer and Tasso, although Batiushkov considered only two extracts from his incomplete verse translation of Gerusalemme liberata worth publishing. In his translation Batiushkov ignored the metric and stanzaic form of the Italian original, octave, and used the "classical" alexandrine (we should remember that, at that time, Gnedich, who later used hexameters, was still translating Homer into alexandrines).

Tasso did, however, become a personage in Batiushkov's poems. The first such poem, "K Tassu" (To Tasso), appeared in 1808 in Dramaticheskii vestnik as a kind of introduction to Batiushkov's translation of a fragment from Canto I of Gerusalemme; both were written during the Finnish campaign. Batiushkov's "introduction" is, in fact, a free version of La Harpe's Épître au Tasse (Epistle to Tasso, 1775; La Harpe was also a translator of Gerusalemme liberata). Although Batiushkov's views sometimes differ from La Harpe's, they do come together at two points: an emphasis on the contrasting themes in Tasso's work (war and love), and an empathy with the poet's fate (misfortune and madness).

Batiushkov's admiration for Italian culture was not limited to Gerusalemme liberata, the epic which was generally considered the main link in a chain between antiquity and modernity. He extended this attitude to the whole of Italian Renaissance literature, in which he found "genuinely classical beauties, well-tried by the centuries" ("sokrovishch istinno klassicheskikh, ispytannykh vekami", as he wrote to Prince Viazemsky on 4 March 1817). The chronological horizon of Batiushkov's Italian interests gradually extended (Ariosto, Petrarch, Dante; contemporaries: Casti, Rolli, Alfieri, Monti) — until he conceived the project of Panteon Itail'ianskoi Slovesnosti (Pantheon of Italian Letters) in 1817.

Batiushkov’s interest in Casti was inspired by Antonio Scoppa who wrote in his

Traité de la poésie italienne, rapportée à la poésie française (1803): "...le célèbre Casti, dont le grand génie embrasse tout ce qui rendit immortels les ouvrages de Tasso et d'Ariosto". Batiushkov translated two Anacreontic poems of Casti: "A Fille" (To a Girl) and "Il Contento" (The Contented). A free adaptation of the former, "Schastlivets" (The Fortunate), appeared in 1810 in Vestnik Evropy; the poem became popular and was often republished. An imitation of the other piece, "Radost'" (Joy), did not appear in print until the publication of Opyty. This poem evoked Pushkin's comment: "Vot Bataia garmoniia" (Here is the harmony of Bat).

Among Batiushkov's marginalia in Scoppa's book is a translation of the three opening and three concluding lines of Paolo Rolli's "Piangete, o Grazie, piangete Amori..." ("Weep, o Graces, weep, Amours..."), later copied into Batiushkov's notebook of 1810—11, Raznye zamechaniia (Various Remarks). Characteristically enough, Batiushkov did not consider what we regard as a masterpiece of his to be a finished work and did not dare to publish it. Instead, he included in his Opyty a translation of an epigram on the nymph Io by an anonymous disciple of Scoppa, although both the original and the translation can only be appraised as mediocre (Pushkin remarked of this epigram: "What a banality!").

The translation-imitation of Lygdamus's elegy (Corp. Tib. III, 3), then considered authentic Tibullus, was composed at Khantonovo in the autumn of 1809. As with his next two Tibullan imitations, he used alexandrines. Unlike contemporary "hellenists", Batiushkov was neither interested in reforming Russian prosody nor in detailed antiquarianism. Significantly, his translation of Horace's Carmen I, 22, following the original stanzaic form, remained in draft form only. After Batiushkov's imitation, Tibullus III, 3 became popular; Milonov and Ryleev published versions (though the latter's translation is rather an imitation of Batiushkov than of the Latin original). The presentation of Tibullus in Russia came to be closely linked with the name of Batiushkov, although Ivan Ivanovich Dmitriev (1795) and Vasilii Grigor'evich Anastasevich (1806) had already imitated Tibullus I, 1. Dmitriev's influence is evident in Batiushkov's version of Tibullus I, 10 (published 1810), echoes of which are frequent in Aleksandr Pushkin and Baratynsky. Later, Batiushkov translated Tibullus I, 3 (published in 1815). The choice of these elegies was clearly motivated by their themes: the contrast of war and love.

Translations from Parny, whom Batiushkov considered the greatest exponent of poésie légère, were also of exceptional importance for the Russian writer. The first to appear at that time was a free adaptation of the elegy "Le Revenant" titled "Privideníe" (The Ghost), composed in February 1810. Batiushkov was right when he wrote to Gnedich that month that he had not translated this piece, but

"conquered" it: filled with playful allusions to Karamzin's, Derzhavin's and Zhukovsky's poems, it fits perfectly into a Russian context, developing the theme of "apparition", initiated by Zhukovsky's Russified imitation of Bürger's ballad "Lenore" ("Liudmila", 1808). On the other hand Parny's works could, for Batiushkov, be associated with the Roman poets: Batiushkov himself acknowledged (in letters to Zhukovsky on 26 July 1810 and to Gnedich on 13 March 1811) that he had introduced a Tibullan word theme in his verse translation of Parny's idyll in prose "Le Torrent" and Virgilian motifs in his extract from Parny's "Scandinavian" poem "Isnel et Asléga". Batiushkov's translations are highly original, while his original works are filled with classical reminiscences. In an elegant poem about Elysium (unpublished until 1834), Tibullan and Horatian motifs, having passed through the prism of Parny and Antoine Bertin's poetics, are realized in pure Batiushkovian Russian stylistic formulae.

In summer 1810 Batiushkov spent three weeks on Viazemsky's estate, Ostaf'evo, in the company of his host, Karamzin and his wife, and Zhukovsky. Batiushkov left his friends suddenly and fled to Khantonovo from where he wrote playfully apologetic letters to Zhukovsky and Viazemsky (late July 1810). He enclosed some pieces, (including a new version of "Mechta") intended for Vestnik Evropy and for the five-volume Sobranie Russkikh stikhotvorenii (Collected Russian Poems, 1810—11), edited by Zhukovsky. Batiushkov stayed at Khantonovo until the end of the year. This pattern of living — half of the year spent in the "capitals", half in the countryside — became habitual for him. At Khantonovo he wrote a vast amount of prose (mostly non-extant), including "Predslava and Dobrynia", a tale of ancient Russia, published in Del'vig and Pushkin's almanac Severnye tsvety (Northern Flowers) in 1832. In addition, Batiushkov, made one more attempt at the grand genre: a verse variation of The Song of Songs. This non-extant poem was sent to Gnedich in St. Petersburg and to Viazemsky in Moscow; neither liked it. Its failure contrasted with his succesful poésies fugitives, which established the literary image of the "voluptuary" Batiushkov (of course, his friends knew his character was rather different). Nevertheless, his diversion into light verse and refusal to complete his translation of Tasso displeased Gnedich, who called the subjects he chose "unworthy" of his "excellent talent" (letter to Batiushkov on 16 October 1810). The poet even had to defend his works from his closest friend.

In late February 1811 Batiushkov went back to Moscow, but by the end of July 1811 had run out of money and left for Khantonovo. He was often invited by his Moscow friends, but in place of his company he presented them with one of the most original works of the 1810s, "Moi Penaty", which he subtitled "an epistle to Zhukovsky and Viazemsky" (revised version, 1812; published in 1814). The literary background of the poem is heterogeneous: the title recalls Ducis and de

Bernis; the setting, Parny and Gresset; details, Gresset, Bertin, Tibullus and Horace. There are also many allusions to Russian poets. The diversity of contrasting themes is extraordinary: imagination and reality, friendship and eroticism, country life and literature, existence and death. All is merged in Batiushkov's unrepeatable intonation, in a "light" metre, iambic trimeters (in the eighteenth century this metre was used the for Anacreontic and song genres). In reply Zhukovsky and Viazemsky composed similar epistles. With "Moi Penaty" several topoi (for example, the shades of poets' visits), original and borrowed details (such as Gresset's rickety table, the classical rusty sword), devices (chiefly the mixing of antiquity and modernity) and characters (such as retired soldier) became fashionable. The trimeter epistle came to be recognized as a genre in its own right — an extremely popular one.

In January 1812 Batiushkov left his estate for St. Petersburg to find a post at the Imperial Public Library (the director was now Olenin). This offended Viazemsky who was waiting for him in Moscow, and who apparently feared the "Petersburg" influence on his friend. However, Batiushkov arrived in the capital as a poet of the "Moscow" (i.e. Karamzinist) orientation. Somewhat avoiding his old literary acquiantances, he got to know future members of the "Arzamas" group: Dmitrii Nikolaevich Bludov, Dmitrii Vasil'evich Dashkov, Aleksandr Ivanovich Turgenev. While awaiting a position at the Library, Batiushkov lived at Gnedich's house. His new friends became members of The Free Society, which had changed considerably in character (its President was now Izmailov). On 8 February 1812 Batiushkov was accepted into the Society, but again his association with it was short-lived: on 14 March Dashkov delivered his notorious speech, a tongue-in-cheek eulogy to the "graphomaniac" Count Dmitrii Ivanovich Khvostov, and was asked to withdraw from the Society; Batiushkov, Bludov and Dmitrii Petrovich Severin walked out in sympathy.

On 22 April 1812 Batiushkov became an Assistant Keeper of Manuscripts at the Library, under the palaeographist Aleksandr Ivanovich Ermolaev. His colleagues included Gnedich, Krylov and Uvarov. In June he bought an apartment nearby. The quiet life ("thank God, I have wine, friends, tobacco...") was clouded only by ill-health ("I am so weak that shall not even outlive my verses"); in a letter to Zhukovsky of June 1812 (just quoted) he enclosed an epistle "Prosti, otshel'nik moi..." (Goodbye, my anchoret), a sort of melancholic addition to "Moi Penaty". Its revised version, "Prosti, balladnik moi..." (Goodbye, my balladist), was published in Pavel Aleksandrovich Nikol'sky's Panteon Russkoi Poezii (Pantheon of Russian Poetry, part II, St. Petersburg, 1814).

But even now peace and calm denied Batiushkov: Napoleon invaded Russia on 12 June 1812. Batiushkov wrote to Viazemsky that had it not been for a fever, he

would have immediately joined the army. Nevertheless, he left St. Petersburg: Ekaterina Murav'eva and her children were living, without any help, at her dacha near Moscow; 14 August Olenin gave him leave to go to them. Two days after the Russian army had left Moscow, he accompanied the Murav'evs to Nizhnii Novgorod, where most Muscovites had fled. It was probably here that he wrote a poem, Razluka (The Parting), which became a popular song (not to be confused with a later elegy of the same title). In October he accompanied Olenin — who had just arrived — to Tver, via the burned ruins of Moscow. The scenes of destruction deeply affected him and determined his attitude to the war; he wrote to Gnedich of the French: "Varvary! Vandaly! I etot narod izvergov osmelilsia govorit' o svobode, o filosofii, o chelovekoliubii!" (Barbarians! Vandals! And this nation of monsters even dares to speak of freedom, of philosophy, of philanthropy!). While in Nizhnii Batiushkov became acquainted with General Aleksei Nikolaevich Bakhmetev who promised to facilitate his joining the army, and who sent the necessary papers to the capital. On 18 December Batiushkov was released from the Library, and in February 1813 arrived, via Moscow, in Petersburg. Meanwhile the French army had been driven from Russia, and the foreign campaign began.

On 29 March Batiushkov again entered military service, with the rank of junior captain (tenth class), and was appointed Bakhmetev's adjutant. Because the general had been wounded, he was unable to take part in the campaign and Batiushkov waited for him in St. Petersburg. It was the events of 1812 that dictated the mood of an epistle-elegy, "K Dashkovu" (To Dashkov), a turning-point in Batiushkov's poetics and weltanschauung. The poem echoes his personal letters and expresses his feelings on seeing Moscow in ruins: the apparently rhetorical "trikraty" (thrice) refers to three real visits. Together with "a wounded hero" (Bakhmetev) he thirsts for revenge; hence the refusal to sing of love and joy. The War becomes an incarnation of Evil: "Moi drug! ia videl more zla / I neba mstitel'nogo kary" (My friend! I saw a sea of evil / And wrath of the avenging heavens). The poem presents a strong contrast to Zhukovsky's hymn to the events of 1812; optimism was now alien to Batiushkov, and he was only able to use the form found in Zhukovsky as a pastiche.

One of two satires, written with Izmailov, "Pevets v Besede liubitelei russkogo slova" (The Bard in The Colloquy of the Lovers of the Russian Word), although not directed against Zhukovsky, parodies his title, composition and metre. This satire on the Colloquy, the Shishkovites' Petersburg nucleus after 1811, gave Batiushkov the reputation of a militant Karamzinist, and became the precedent for the parodic and even obscene use of alternating lines of iambic tetrameters and trimeters by other poets from Pushkin to Maiakovsky. Probably, at this time Batiushkov wrote an epistle to Alexandr Turgenev (published in 1827) describing

Olenin's estate, Priiutino, and containing portraits of its habitués: Gnedich, Krylov, the painter Orest Adamovich Kiprensky. It was not only the presence of friends that attracted him to Priiutino: in April or May 1813 he fell in love with Anna Furman, the Olenins' ward. Batiushkov spent the rest of the war remembering and hiding his love.

In July 1813 Bakhmetev arrived in Petersburg, and, still unable to take part in the campaign, gave Batiushkov permission to go on active service. Batiushkov set out for Count Petr Khristianovich Wittgenstein's headquarters near Dresden on 24 July. He was appointed adjutant to General Nikolai Nikolaevich Raevsky, commander of the Third Corps of Grenadiers, and took part in the battle of Teplitz (15 August). Twice he met Petin; these, and earlier, meetings are described in his "Vospominanie o Petine" (Memoir on Petin, unpublished until 1851). Petin was killed at Leipzig in "The Battle of Nations" (4—6 October). Raevsky, whose Corps was in the vanguard, was severely wounded, while Batiushkov (who on 27 January 1814 was awarded the Order of St. Anne, second class, for bravery) was not even scratched. Through October and November, he stayed with Raevsky in Weimar, where his interest in the German authors (Goethe, Wieland, Schiller, Voss) grew. In a letter to Gnedich on 30 October 1813 Batiushkov wrote that he occasionally visited theatre and, in particular, attended a performance of Schiller's Don Carlos (staged, incidentally, by Goethe).

By mid December Raevsky and Batiushkov had caught up with the army. In January 1814 the Russians crossed the Rhine, entered France and moved in on the capital. From the literary point of view the castle of Cirey in Lorraine, where the fugitive Voltaire had lived, was the most important place Batiushkov visited at that time. He describes the visit in a prose piece, "Puteshestvie v zamok Siree (Pis'mo iz Frantsii k g. D.)" (A Visit to the Castle of Cirey: A Letter from France to Mr. D[ashkov]), written in the autumn of the following year and published in Vestnik Evropy in 1816 . During the battle for Paris (17—18 March 1814), Raevsky's Corps was held in reserve. The following day Alexander I, at the head of his armies, entered the city (a scene Batiushkov described in a letter to Gnedich on 27 March 1814).

The first month in Paris was an exciting time for Batiushkov. He even managed to attend a meeting of the Academy (his favourite, Parny, was absent). Batiushkov's impressions were negative and he wrote to Dashkov on 25 April 1814 that the age of glory for French literature had passed ("vek slavy dlia Frantsuzkoi Slovesnosti proshel"). This letter was also a literary work; an abridged version was published by the poet's friends in Boris Mihkailovich Fedorov's Pamiatnik Otechestvennykh Muz (The Monument of Fatherland Muses)

in 1827. In May Batiushkov fell ill, grew depressed and decided to return home. Severin suggested he go via England, following the emperor's retinue. Batiushkov arrived in London in mid May and spent two weeks in England. On 25 May he was issued a passport to travel home via Sweden, and from 30 May to June was sailing from Harwich to Gothenburg (Sweden). The crossing was described in a letter to Severin on 19 June 1814; Batiushkov later revised it as a traveller's sketch which appeared in Severnye tsvety in 1827. His sea trip also became the setting ("Ia bereg pokidal tumannyi Al'biona", I left the misty shores of Albion) for his elegy "Ten' Druga" (The Shade of a Friend), in which the narrator is visited by the silent ghost of a fallen comrade-in-arms (meaning Petin). According to Viazemsky, this piece was actually composed during the voyage; however, it may have been written a year later, along with other works of reminiscence.

From Gothenburg Batiushkov travelled to Stockholm from where he set out for St. Petersburg via Finland, accompanied by Bludov (at that time an official at the Embassy in Sweden). He arrived in early July and moved into Ekaterina Murav'eva's house. There he worked on "Stseny chetyrekh vozrastov" (Scenes of the Four Ages of Man), a libretto for the celebrations on the return of Alexander I, which took place in Pavlovsk on 27 July 1814. The Dowager Empress had entrusted the preparations to Iurii Aleksandrovich Neledinsky-Meletsky, a senator-poet, who passed on this task to Batiushkov, an aquaintance. Several others, including Derzhavin, had a hand in its composition. The result was, according to Batiushkov, a "jumble", for which, nevertheless, the Dowager Empress presented him with a diamond ring; he sent it to his younger sister. At the same time he was editing, and writing an introduction to, an 1815 collection of Mikhail Nikitich Murav'ev's prose works. This piece had also been published separately in Syn Otechestva (Son of the Fatherland) in 1814 and appeared later in Opyty and in Murav'ev's 1819 Collected Works. Batiushkov considered the returning of Murav'ev's works to society his moral and literary duty.

The second half of 1814 and the beginning of 1815 was artistically a very fruitful time, outwardly calm, but psychologically the most difficult period of the poet's life. Several circumstances kept him in the capital. he had not received leave from thr temporarily absent Bakhmetev; moreover, Raevsky had proposed Batiushkov for more awards and his transfer to the prestigious Izmailovsky Regiment. The wearisome waiting and suspense eventually caused disillusionment with his social career.

On his return to St. Petersburg Batiushkov's matrimonial hopes collapsed. Although the Olenins, the Murav'evs and his relatives all approved of the match, he realized (or imagined) that Anna Furman did not really love him, so he did not

propose, using the excuse of a lack of money (incidentally, a real problem for him). Nevertheless, he continued to work. He wrote (consulting Olenin) an essay on Russian cultural history, "Progulka v Akademiiu Khudozhestv" (A Stroll through the Academy of Arts, published Syn Otechestva in 1814) and composed several important poems. Batiushkov's works of this period are coloured by his experiences of war, travels and other cultures. Even an elegy, "Plennyi" (The Captive), is based on the real captivity in France of Lev Vasil'evich Davydov (his fellow officer and brother of the famous poet, Denis Davydov). Batiushkov's critical essays and traveller's sketches are closely related to his familiar letters (and the familiar letter as a genre).

Batiushkov had been wanting, at least since the end of Finnish campaign, to compose a long poem about the North (instead he translated two extracts from Parny's Scandinavian poem); now he wrote "Na razvalinakh zamka v Shvetsii" (On the Ruins of a Castle in Sweden). This gloomy elegy, written in regular strophes combining 6- and 4- foot iambic lines, was partly inspired by a poem by Friedrich von Matthisson and the work of the historian Paul-Henri Mallet. It was a marked departure from light verse. The theme of imagination acquired a historical dimension; this new modification of the meditative poem was to be developed in Russian poetry (for example, Pushkin's "Recollections at Tsarskoe Selo", 1815) and essentially influenced the Russian elegiac vision of Scandinavia (as in "Finland ", Baratynsky's famous elegy, written in 1820).

A tale, "Strannik i domosed" (The Wanderer and The Home-Lover), conceived in London and completed in St. Petersburg, was also an attempt, although of debatable success, to leave behind his intimate lyricism. However, at this time or a little later he wrote one of his most beautiful love elegies, "Ia chuvstvuiu, moi dar v Poezii pogas..." (I feel my gift of Poetry has died...), an expression of his love and loss of Furman. Like Virgil's Tityrus (the character who personified Virgil himself in an epistle to Ivan Matveevich Murav'ev-Apostol, another of Batiushkov's works of the period), the poet teaches an echo to repeat his beloved's name, not in Arcady, but in the heat of battle, and during lonely wanderings through countries actually visited; his existence is a far cry from the shepherd's innocent happiness: both love and poetic inspiration have left him in the desert of sad experience. An extract from this elegy appeared in Opyty as "Vospominaniia" (Recollections) preceded by (and so paralleled with) the "Recollection" of his Riga love.

In early January 1815 a serious illness caused a nervous reaction; this led to a temporary change in his opinion on his chosen poetic path. In a letter to Viazemsky from February 1815 he cited the concluding lines from the complete version of the elegy to Furman: "Muza... Svetil'nik gasit darovan'ia" (The Muse...

extinguishes the lantern of inspiration). Also in February he wrote a dedication to Bludov in a manuscript collection. He claimed that his poetry was insufficiently crafted, but that it comprised a true history of passions ("istoriia strastei"); he calls the collection "zhurnal... poeta" ("a poet's diary"). This piece, with the title "K druz'iam" (To Friends), became the dedicatory poem in the second volume of Opyty. Tellingly, Batiushkov sought justifications for his "unworthy" poetry.

In March he set off in search of spiritual healing, accompanied by Ekaterina Murav'eva; they spent the second week of Lent at a monastery in Tikhvin. It seems that Batiushkov experienced a religious conversion, evidence of which may be found in a poem of this year, "Nadezhda" (Hope). Apparently in the same year he composed a poem combining the motifs of love and fatal illness: "Posledniaia vesna" (The Last Spring), a free version of Charles-Hubert Millevoye's "La Chute des feuilles" (The Fall of Leaves, 1811), one of the most popular elegies among Russian translators of the 1810s and 1820s. Another translation, "Mshchenie" (Vengeance) from Parny, was composed both as an addition to the earlier "Prividenie" (a "mirror image" of the same theme), and a possible sublimation of his dissapointment in love, which was still eloquent in his poems.

In the first half of 1815 Batiushkov came to meet the young Aleksandr Pushkin at Tsarskoe Selo; in the eyes of later generations this meeting took on an historic or even symbolic meaning, but we have little information about it. Pushkin's second epistle to Batiushkov may be a delayed response to some real remark. In mid April 1815, having at last obtained leave, Batiushkov went to Danilovskoe where he spent six "torturous" days with his father (whose second wife had died in 1814), then went on to Khantonovo. He was soon recalled to service and on 8 June set out for Kamenets-Podolsky in Bessarabia, where Bakhmetev had been made governor. Batiushkov spent the rest of the year in this remote province occupying himself with Italian, writing prose and, of course, poetry.

In August 1815 Batiushkov informed Zhukovsky: "Ia po gorlo v proze" (I'm up to my neck in prose), and as early as December he made a promise to send off his "scribblings" ("maran'ia"). Essays on Ariosto and Tasso, Petrarch, Lomonosov, a program article "Nechto o poete i poezii" (A Word on the Poet and Poetry), two "allegories" all appeared the following year in Vestnik Evropy (republished in Opyty); moral essays and memoir pieces were written and earlier drafts revised. "All this is scribbled here, out of boredom, without any books or other material (bez knig i posobii)", Batiushkov thus excused himself in a letter to Zhukovskii from December 1815, "but possibly because of this my ideas may well appear more original to you (pokazhutsia vam svezhee)". He was being a bit cunning of course: for instance, it is evident that he had at his disposal the works of

Petrarch and Tasso, Pierre Louis Ginguené's Histoire littéraire d'Italie (1811—12) and some other critical studies. However, Batiushkov suceeded in expressing a consistent, and in its own way original, view of the Italian classics. The religious eroticism of Petrarch's Canzoniere, the grandeur of Tasso's Christian epic, and the protean universality of Ariosto's Orlando furioso are grasped in their indissoluble relation with the essential characteristics of the national language.

Batiushkov borrowed from critical literature only those ideas which were intimately close to his own, and was not scared to express his disagreement with accepted opinions. Thus, in his essay "Petrarch" (the earliest Russian work on this subject) he disagreed with La Harpe who maintained that "the principal merit" of Petrarch was his "style" and "poetic diction", whereas "thoughts" and "invention" were lacking in his works. Batiushkov argues: ‘But I want to justify the poet whom critics (while praising, however, the harmony of his verses) often equate with ordinary writers when it comes to invention and thoughts. In prose there remain only thoughts". In order to demonstrate this, Batiushkov produced his own translations from Petrarch's canzoni and Trionfi. The concepts of the essay "Ariosto and Tasso" were also illustrated by prose translations: extensive fragments from Gerusalemme liberata.

On 11 August 1815 Batiushkov sent a letter to Ekaterina Murav'eva, explaining his relationship with Furman; he enclosed "Moi Genii" (My Genius) and "Razluka" (The Parting), two elegies thematically close to "Ia chuvstvuiu, moi dar v Poezii pogas...". During a gloomy Moldavian autumn he wrote two masterpieces: the light neoclassical "Tavrida" (Tauris), and an epistle/elegy addressed to Viazemsky, "K drugu" (To a Friend). The latter synthesizes practically all the themes of his poetry, symbolically representing his life's path: epicurean motifs appear as the irretrievable past, while the loss of love and inspiration are the present; faith gives hope, but only for another world.

Meanwhile some humorous, but significant events were taking place in St. Petersburg. In September Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Shakhovskoi (a former member of Olenin's circle) attacked Zhukovsky in his comedy Urok koketkam, ili Lipetskie vody (A Lesson for Coquettes, or The Lipetsk Spa, staged 23 September 1815), which was considered by the Karamzinists as the declaration of war from the Beseda liubitelei russkogo slova. On 14 October a polemical, parodical and oppositionist society, Arzamas, was founded; members were given nicknames borrowed from Zhukovsky's ballads. At the first meeting Batiushkov was accepted, in absentia, into the group as Achilles (a name contrasting to his appearance, and corresponding to his former merits as a satirist).

Provincial service was dissatisfactory; 4 November Batiushkov requested

retirement. 26 December 1815 he was given leave and left for Moscow, where he obtained a transfer to the Izmailovsky Regiment, but decided to end his military career. He stayed with the statesman and writer Ivan Matveevich Murav'ev-Apostol, a relative and the addressee of Batiushkov's epistle on the role of poetry and of his letter/essay on Murav'ev. Batiushkov's poetic output was not high at that time, though he did write a version of Harald's Song, one of the most well-known ancient Scandinavian poems, previously translated into many languages, including Russian. 26 February 1816 Batiushkov and Zhukovsky became, in absentia, members of the Obshchestvo liubitelei rossiiskoi slovesnosti (Society of Lovers of Russian Letters) at Moscow University. Although Batiushkov's attitude to this society, expressed in letters to Gnedich on 25 September and 28—29 October 1815, was somewhat disdainful, his preliminary speech (delivered on 26 May by Fedor Fedorovich Kokoshkin), became his most famous critical work. It was modeled on Parny's address to the French Academy on poésie fugitive and when it was published as the opening piece in the first volume of Opyty, it was titled "Rech' o vliianii legkoi poezii na iazyk" (A Discourse on the Influence of Light Verse on Language). Batiushkov includes himself in a pan-European light-verse tradition, from the Greek idyllists and Roman elegists to Ippolit Bogdanovich, Murav'ev and Ivan Dmitriev in Russia. He seems to have found a justification for the light verse: since it is "prelestnaia roskosh' slovestnosti" (a charming luxury of literature), it demands the utmost possible perfection, and is thus fruitful for language and society. He also emphasized the unity of the poet's life and poetry; this connection became his principle. Half a year earlier, in "Nechto o poete i poezii", he had said: "zhivi, kak pishesh', i pishi, kak zhivesh'" (live as you write, and write as you live).

In early April, as a junior captain of the Household Guards' Izmailovsky Regiment (equal to major in ordinary regiments), he retired. The rank corresponded to the eighth class, but he was dissapointed: many of his friends had been promoted to generals or colonels. An unexpected event distracted him from career problems: in August, Gnedich offered to publish his collected works at the publisher's own expense, with a 1,500-ruble honorarium for the author. Batiushkov replied with doubts in the enterprise. Nevertheless, he refused to include "Videnie" simply to boost its popularity: first, some of its "heroes" were actually in difficult straits, second, Batiushkov, although an Arzamas member, felt distant from literary polemics. The success of Opyty v stikhakh i proze exceeded all expectations. Gnedich finally paid the author 2,000 rubles (having made 15,000 in all — not unusual for the early 19th century). Gnedich actually broke all Batiushkov's desired publication conditions. The two volumes appeared with a five-month interval, not simultaneously; they were advertised in advance, and did not appear "suddenly"; moreover, a subscription for the second volume was announced, against Batiushkov's wishes. In the two "capitals" Opyty had 183

subscribers (a number which, for that time, testifies to the author's fame).

The prose volume had been largely compiled by early October 1816. On 30 December 1816 a censor, Ivan Osipovich Timkovsky, permitted publication, and the volume appeared in early July 1817. The prose volume has a conceptual symmetrical design, partly developed by Gnedich. Two articles on poetry ("Rech' o vliianii legkoi poezii na iazyk" and "Nechto o poete i poesii") open the volume; two essays on moral philosophy conclude it. The former are followed by three essays on Russian poets (Lomonosov, Kantemir and Murav'ev), while the latter are preceded by three "Italian" pieces (an essay on Ariosto and Tasso, one on Petrarch and a translation from Boccacio). Followed by two "military officer's sketches" and miscellanea, the culturological "Progulka v Akademiiu khudozhestv" forms the ideological centre.

From late December 1816 till late July 1817 Batiushkov stayed at Khantonovo, working on the verse volume of Opyty, rewriting earlier pieces, and composing new ones. The number of unfinished projects is tantalizing: tales, long poems, a collection of translations from Italian, even a history of Russian literature. Most of the poems, written especially for Opyty, do not belong to the light-verse genre. Three of them, epic and lyric in character, were later called "historical (or epic) elegies" (an expansion of a term used by Belinsky). The first, "Geziod i Omir, soperniki" (Hesiod and Homer, Rivals), completed by mid January, is a translation from Millevoye, whom Batiushkov called, in a note, a rare true talent in contemporary France. The second, "Perekhod cherez Rein. 1814" (The Crossing of the Rhine. 1814), a military elegy with historical overtones describing a recent event of the Napoleonic wars, was considered by Pushkin indisputably to be "the best" and "strongest" of Batiushkov's poems. The third, another famous elegy, "Umiraiushchii Tass" (The Dying Tasso), was written in spring 1817. The poem was an innovation from the viewpoint of its genre (historical elegy), its composition (soliloquy set in frame: elegy within elegy), versification form (alternating lines of 6- and 5- foot iambs) and content: "On croirait, en lisant ce morceau, sentir quelques-unes des émanations de l'Italie", Uvarov wrote.

By that time Batiushkov had given up the idea of translating Tasso's work into verse; the same year he published (in Vestnik Evropy, along with a prose extract from Ariosto) a prose extract from Gerusalemme liberata intended for Panteon Itail'ianskoi Slovesnosti, an unrealized 1817 collection. Kapnist, in an epistle, reproached Batiushkov for abandoning his verse version, but "Umiraiushchii Tass" eclipsed the translations. The younger generation was, however, to reevaluate the poem; despite its fame, Pushkin did not like it, preferring Lord Byron's version of the same subject. Both the work on the Hesiod-Homer competition and "Besedka Muz" (The Bower of Muses) testify to a renewal of

Batiushkov's interest in classical antiquity; the latter poem, celebrating a real bower, elegantly resumes familiar Tibullan motifs.

In mid August, having spent a few weeks at Danilovskoe, Batiushkov arrived in Petersburg. On 27 August he paid his first visit to Arzamas (at their twenty-sixth meeting), where he delivered his "preliminary" speech. At an earlier meeting on 6 January his essay "Vecher u Kantemira" (An Evening with Kantemir) had been read in his absence. The members of the group, however, began gradually to go their separate ways. In early September, in Tsarskoe Selo, Batiushkov, Zhukovsky, Aleksandr Pushkin and Aleksandr Alekseevich Pleshcheev together composed an improptu on Viazemsky's departure to Warsaw. On 18 September, Batiushkov attended an Arzamas meeting for the last time; on 5 October, with Pushkin, he saw off Zhukovsky, who left for Moscow.

The verse volume of Opyty appeared in October 1817. It was divided into genre sections: "elegies" (opened by "Nadezhda" and concluded by a new version of "Mechta"); "epistles" (first, a "friendly" one, "Moi Penaty", and last, a "didactic" one to Murav'ev-Apostol); and "miscellanea" (a section with an undefined organizing principle, for some reason followed by three of Batiushkov's most recent works). The distribution, however, created a precedent for genre blurring: epistles to Gnedich, Dashkov and "a Friend" (Viazemsky) turned up as "elegies".

Public recognition immediately followed. On 17 October 1817 Batiushkov became an honorary member of the Obshchestvo voennykh liudei (Military Society); on 18 November he was made an honorary librarian at the Public Library; and in April 1818 he became an honorary member of the Vol'noe obshchestvo liubitelei rossiiskoi slovesnosti (Free Society of the Lovers of Russian Letters). Meanwhile reviews of Opyty began to appear; it was praised by Izmailov, Sergei Nikolaevich Glinka and Vasilii Ivanovich Kozlov.

The most authoritative response came from Arzamas circles. Uvarov, in an unsigned French article, was the first to proclaim Zhukovsky and Batiushkov leaders of "a new school". He demonstrated both a unity and difference between the two poets; though representing the new poetics, in all else they followed different paths: for instance, Anglo-German spirituality (Zhukovsky) vs Franco-Italo-classical exquisiteness (Batiushkov). This observation was to become a critical commonplace and was repeated, during the 1820s and 1830s, with variations, by Petr Aleksandrovich Pletnev, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev, Aleksandr Pushkin and others. In "O napravlenii nashei poezii, osobenno liricheskoi, v poslednee desiatiletie" (On the Tendency of our Poetry, Especially Lyric Poetry, in the Last Decade), Vil'gel'm Karlovich Kiukhel'becker's famous attack on the new elegists, published in Mnemosyne in 1824, the ephemeral

coryphaei are again Batiushkov and Zhukovsky. This tradition was summarized by Belinsky, who, wanting to find a genealogy for Pushkin, created a triad, following the German Romantic philosophers' model. Since Pushkin represented the modern synthesis, Zhukovsky was to stand for the spiritual indefiniteness of the Middle Ages, and Batiushkov for the sculptural plasticity of classical Antiquity.

In 1817 the desire in Arzamas was to give the society a more serious purpose. The idea of a journal was born, but it was not realized. As a potential contribution, in 1817 or 1818 Uvarov (possibly with Batiushkov) wrote a monograph article on the Greek Anthology, illustrated with imitations of epigrams by Batiushkov, who actually used Uvarov's French translations (also included) as a medium. In 1820 all this was published by Dashkov as a separate pamphlet, O grecheskoi antologii. The work preserved evidence of its Arzamas origins: it was preceded by Dashkov's mystifying introduction, and the authors were revealed only by the initials of their Arzamas nick-names, Akhill (Achilles) and Starushka (The Old Lady). Along with another anthological (non-translational) cycle, written in 1821 under Johann Gottfried von Herder's influence, the "Greek epigrams" were to have been included in an unrealized, revised edition of Opyty. When reviewing the pamphlet, Kiukhel'beker noted that, judging from their quality, the poems could belong only to Pushkin or Batiushkov; the style, he felt, was more likely to be Batiushkov's. This confusion was telling. Later Belinsky considered Batiushkov the creator of Russian anthological verse and traced not only Pushkin's but also Apollon Maikov's and the young Afanasii Fet's "anthology" to him.

On 9 January 1818 Batiushkov returned to St. Petersburg and continued his attempts (begun in the autumn) to enter the diplomatic service. The whole year was spent trying to get away from familiar places. He obtained leave from the Library on 10 May to go to the South to research manuscripts and monuments. In late June, having spent some time in Moscow with Mikhail Nikitich Murav'ev's son, Nikita (the future author of the Decembrist's constitution), he left for Odessa, accompanied by Ivan Matveevich Murav'ev-Apostol's son, Sergei (later hanged with four other Decembrists). Before his departure, advised by Aleksandr Turgenev and helped by Zhukovsky, he wrote a letter to Alexander I, describing his imperial service and asking for a post in Italy. On 16 July the emperor raised him to the seventh class and attached him to the Consulate in Naples. After a month in Odessa, Batiushkov left for Moscow, arriving on 25 August. In September he sent the Karamzins an unsigned poem celebrating the publication of Karamzin's Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskogo (History of the Russian State,1816—18). On 11 September he wrote an epistle to Prince Shalikov, which, ironically, turned out to be his farewell to Russia; Shalikov, a chance addressee,

did not miss the opportunity to publish it in 1822 without the author's permission.

In mid October Batiushkov arrived in Petersburg, and on 19 November a farewell dinner in his honour was given at Tsarskoe Selo; among those present: Zhukovsky, Aleksandr Pushkin, Gnedich, Ekaterina and Nikita Murav'ev, and Aleksandr Turgenev. Batiushkov set off for Naples (arriving in late February) via Vienna, Venice and Rome (where he met the Russian painters, among them Kiprensky). "The classical land", in which he was to spend more than two years, appeared to him as "a library, a museum of antiquities": "Rome is a book; who can read it?"; "Magical, unique city, it is a cemetry of the universe", he wrote in his letters letter to Gnedich (May 1819) and Olenin (February 1819). The conventional image of the Eternal City which had crystallized in neo-Latin, Italian and French poetry from Janus Vitalis's "Qui Romam in media quaeris..." to Jacques Delille's Les Jardins revived here as a supreme aesthetic reality. Batiushkov did not wish to see the mundane, everyday Italy; hence his dislike of Naples itself and admiration for Vesuvius, Pompeii, Cumae or Baia. He described the latter in a short poem that was published in 1857 and became well known: "Ty probuzhdaesh'sia, o Baia, iz grobnitsy, / Pri poiavlenii Avrorinykh luchei, / No ne otdast tebe bagrianaia dennitsa / Siianiia protekshikh dnei..." (Thou art awakening, o Baia, from thy grave, / With the appearance of Aurora’s rays, / But the purple dawn will not return to thee / The radiance of thy past days...). Among his extant "Italian" poems is a translation (possibly from an Italian medium version) of a stanza from Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage that Pushkin added to his own copy of Opyty v stikhakh i proze. Batiushkov also imitated an octave from Ariosto's Orlando furioso (I, xlii), reshaped as an "anthological" sixain.

During 1820 Batiushkov's depression grew. In August he applied for leave to go to Germany, confirmed only in April 1821. From December 1820 to May 1821 he lived in Rome, then went to Teplitz for convalescence; in November he moved to Dresden. The first signs of approaching insanity were a series of quarrels on relatively insignificant grounds. In 1820 an editor of Syn otechestva, Aleksandr Fedorovich Voeikov, permitted himself an unauthorized publication of an epitaph by Batiushkov. The author overreacted; Bludov came to his aid; and Voeikov bore a grudge. In February Voeikov published Pletnev's poem, "B—v iz Rima" (B[atiushko]v from Rome); Pletnev's name was (perhaps deliberately) missing, so the poem was taken as its "hero's" creation. Batiushkov, infuriated, sent Gnedich a letter intended for Syn otechestva, claiming he had abandoned his writing forever. Pletnev, a genuine admirer of Batiushkov, attempted to palliate his "guilt" by publishing a panegyrical "inscription" to Batiushkov — who took it as yet another insult. Batiushkov's mind became clouded, and in a fit of

depression he destroyed his latest manuscripts.

On 18 September and 12 December 1821 Batiushkov applied for retirement. Instead, the emperor granted him indefinite leave. He came to St. Petersburg on 14 April 1822 and travelled to the Caucasus from May to July; in August he arrived in Simferopol, where, over the following months, symptoms of persecution mania became obvious. He burnt his books and three times attempted suicide. On 4 April 1823 he was sent to St. Petersburg, supervised by a doctor. For a whole year his relatives and friends looked after him. In April 1824 he wrote a completely mad letter to the emperor with a request to enter a monastery. After a word with Zhukovsky, Alexander decided to send the unfortunate writer for treatment at state expense. From 1824 to 1828 Batiushkov was at the "Maison de santé" in Sonnenstein (Saxony), from 1828 to 1833 in Moscow; and from 1833 onward he lived in Vologda. On 9 December 1833 the incurable Batiushkov was at last released from service and granted a life pension.

In 1834 his works were republished, with additions. The same year one of his pieces from the early or mid 1820s was published as "Izrechenie Mel'khisedeka" (The Apophthegm of Melchizedek), in a very popular journal, Biblioteka dlia chteniia (Library for reading), and fifty years later republished in Russkaia Starina (Russian Antiquity) with a note stating that these verses had been found after Batiushkov's death, written on the wall. Actually, when "Izrechenie Mel'khisedeka" first appeared, he was still living, but refused to live within time. His obsessive devotion to "Eternity" was remembered, in the twentieth century, in "Net, ne luna, a svetlyi tsiferblat" (No, not the moon, but a bright clock-face..., 1912), a poem by Osip Mandel'shtam. "Izrechenie Mel'khisedeka", a poem about the senselessness of human existence and suffering, is considered the last of Batiushkov's "normal" works. When ill, he wrote only a few incoherent texts. His final poem was written in Vologda on 14 May 1853; it is a quatrain which concludes as follows: "Ia prosypaius', chtob zasnut', / I spliu, chtob vechno prosypat'sia" (I only wake to fall asleep / And sleep, to awake without end). At 5 p.m. on 7 July 1855 he died from typhus. Few noticed his passing — he was already living in history.

Epitaph For A Shepherdess

Beloved maidens! Playful and carefree,
You sing, you dance and frolic in the glades.
I, too, once dwelt in gay Arcadia,
I, too, in early days found moments
Of joy in woods and glades:
In golden dreams, love promised happiness:
But what did I attain in this glad land?-
The grave!

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

Know'st Thou What Gray Methuselah

Know'st thou what gray Methuselah
Pronounced when parting with this life?
    Man's born a slave,
    He dies a slave,
    And death will never tell him why
He walked this lovely vale of tears,
    Suffered, wept, endured, and disappeared.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

My Inspiration

O recollection of the heart! You're stronger
Than reason's cheerless recollection.
Your sweetness oft
Enchants me in a far-off land.
I recollect her voice, her precious words,
I recollect her azure eyes,
I recollect the golden locks
Of loose and curling hair.
My peerless shepherdess's
Simple clothes I recollect.
Her precious, unforgotten face
Still wanders with me everywhere.
This guardian spirit love bestowed
To comfort me in solitude:
When'er I slumber, it will nestle near
To sweeten cheerless sleep.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

Odysseus' Fate

Through horrors of land and horrors of sea
Bereft and wandering, Odysseus,
God-fearing wretch, sought Ithaca;
Unfaltering, he plunged into the gloom of Hades;
The roar of fierce Charybdis and underwater Scylla's groans
    Shook not his noble soul.
His patience vanquished cruel fate, it seemed,
    And to the dregs he'd drunk the bitter cup.
It seemed the heav'ns were done with testing him
    And drove him softly, slumbering,
To homeland's longed-for cliffs.
He waked: what then? He did not know his home.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

Recovery

As a wild flower hangs its head and wilts
  Beneath the reaper's killing scythe,
Ill, I awaited my untimely end
And thought: the fateful hour's nigh.
With eyes already veiled by Erebus' thick gloom,
  My heart slowed down its beat:
I was collapsing, disappearing, and it seemed
The sun of youth had set.
Then you arrived, O my heart's joy,
And with the breath of your red lips,
The flaming tears of your bright eyes
The union of our kisses,
The strength of loving words and passionate sighs
You called me back from gloomy realms,
From Orcus's fields and Lethe's shores
Sweet pleasures to enjoy again.
You give me life once more, it is your healing gift,
I'll breathe you in until my grave.
My mortal hour will ev'n be sweet:
For now I die of love.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

Tasso Dying

What festival is ancient Rome preparing?
  Where flow the crowds in noisy waves?
Why these aromas, myrrh's sweet smoke
  And censers all around abrim with fragrant herbs?
From Capitoline Hill to Tiber's waves,
  Above universal city's streets,
Why are the priceless rugs and purple stuffs
  Spread among garlands, laurels?
Why all this noise? The crash and thump of timpani?
  Are these heralds of joy or triumph?
Why wearing the miter hastes the holy father
  With gonfalon to the prayer house?
For whom doth thankful Rome's most valued gift,
  The crown, in his hands shimmer?
For whom this triumph? - 'tis for you, o blessed bard!
  For you this gift... Jerusalem's bard!
And now the joyful noise has reached the cell,
  Where Death joins battle with Torquatto,
Where death's winged spirit swoops
  Above the sufferer's blessed head.
Not weeping friends, nor praying monks,
  Nor honor's late rewards
Can tame the iron hand of fate,
  Which knows no mercy for the great.
Half-dead, he sees the horrid hour,
  And blesses it with joy,
And parting with life, one final time,
  The wondrous swan exclaims:

"My friends, O let me catch a glimpse of splendid Rome,
  Where a too early grave awaits the bard!
Allow my glance to meet your hills and smoke,
  O, ancient sepulcher of citizens!
O blessed land of heroes and of wonders!
  Dust eloquent and ruins!
Azure and purple of cloudless skies,
  You, poplars; and you, ancient olives.
Eternal Tiber, you, who slake the thirst of every tribe,
  Sown with a universe of bones.

Doomed to an early end.
I greet you from within these dreary walls!

It's done! I stand before the fatal borne
To wild applause I won't step on Capitoline,
And glory's laurels on my feeble head
Won't sweeten the bard's frightful lot.
From youth I have been everybody's puppet.
I was an exile as a child,
I wandered, a poor traveler
Under the sweet Italian sky,
What turns of fate did I not suffer?
Where did the waves not toss my bark?
Where was I safe? Where was my daily bread
Not spattered with the tears of sorrow?
Sorrento! Cradle of my woe-filled days,
Where once at night, like a trembling Askania
Fate tore me from my mother's breast,
From her embraces sweet and kisses, -
Do you recall what tears I spilled in childhood
Alas! Since then, a plaything of cruel fate,
I've known great suffering, the poverty of life.
The depths by Fortune
Beneath me, and the thunder never ceased!
Driven from place to place, from land to land,
In vain I sought a harbor on the earth:
I felt her hand relentless everywhere!
Her lightning everywhere harassed the bard!
Not in a peasant's meager hut,
Nor e'en protected by Alphonso's palace,
Nor under an obscure and silent roof,
Nor in the wilds, nor in the hills was my head safe.
Embittered by glory and ignominy alike,
An exile's head, from cradle consigned
Into the hands of an avenging goddess...

But friends! what clutches terribly my breast?
Why does my heart lament and tremble?
Whence do I come? What awful path have I been following,
And what behind me in the darkness gleams?
Ferrara...Furies...envy's serpent!..
Whither? O, whither, murderers of my gift!

I am in harbor. Here is Rome. My brothers and my kin!
  Here are their tears and sweet embrace...
And Virgil's wreath upon the Capitoline hill.
  Thus, I fulfilled Appollo's task.
From my first youth, his dedicated priest,
  Through lightning, under raging skies,
I sang the grandeur glorious of bygone days,
  In bondage I did not betray my soul,
It harbors still the muses' sweet delight,
  And torments only reinforced my gift.
It lived in wonderland, by Zion's walls,
  On Jordan's flowering shores;
It questioned you, impatient Cedron,
  And you serene asylum of Lebanon!
It raised you from the dead, o heroes hoary,
  To awesome glory's dazzle and grandeur:
It gazed upon you, Gottfried, ruler, king of kings,
  Magnificent and calm 'midst whistling arrows;
On you, o young Rinaldo, ardent as Achilles,
  In love and battle a blessed victor.
It watched you fly above the corpses of your foes,
  Like fire, like death, like an avenging angel...

And Tartarus is vanquished by a shining cross!
  O models of extraordinary valor!
O holy triumph of our ancestors,
  Long laid to rest! Pure faith victorious!
Torquato has invoked you from the depths of time:
  He sings - and you will never be forgot, -
He sings, and gains the wreath of immortality,
  By glory woven and the muses' hands.

But it's too late! I stand before the fatal borne.
  To wild applause I won't step on Capitoline,
And glory's laurels on my feeble head
  Won't sweeten the bard's frightful lot.

He then fell mute, eyes burning with a doleful flame,
  A final ray of talent 'ere the end;
Even in dying, it seemed he wished
  To wrest a day of triumph from the Fates,
His gaze sought out the Capitoline walls,

He strained to raise himself,
But, spent by struggles terrible with death,
Remained immobile on his bed.
The golden orb was sliding to the west,
And sinking in a scarlet glow;
The hour of death approached...the sufferer's somber brow
Brightened a final time.
He gazed with quiet smile toward the west...
And then, refreshed by evening chill,
He raised his right hand to the listening heavens,
Like a full righteous man, with hope and joy:.
"See," to his weeping friends he quoth,
"The king of stars burns in the west!
'Tis he who summons me to cloudless lands,
Where the eternal star will shine...
I see the angel to that realm my guide;
He has enfolded me in azure wings...
Bring close the sign of love - the cross mysterious...
And pray with hope and tears...
All earthly things must die...both glory and the crown...
Art and the muses' great creations,
But there all's neverending like our God
Who vouchsafes us eternal glory's crown!
The greatness of that place has filled my soul,
I've breathed it since my cradle days.
O brothers! Friends! Don't weep for me:
Your friend's attained his long-sought goal.
He will depart in peace and, strong of faith,
He will not heed the agonizing end:
There, there...O joy!..among the righteous wives,
Among the angels, Elenora waits!"

And, uttering the name of love, the heav'nly poet died;
In silence friends wept over him,
The day died quietly... the voice of bells
Bore the unhappy news through city streets.
"Torquatto's gone!" Rome cried in grief,
"Our bard is dead, so worthy of a better life!..
The morning witnessed somber smoke.
The Capitoline in mourning cloaked..

The Farewell

BENT o'er his sabre, torrents starting
From his dim eyes, the bold hussar
Thus greets his cherish'd maid, while parting
  For distant fields of war:

'Weep not, my fair one! O forbear thee!
No anguish can those tears remove;
For, by my troth and beard, I swear thee,
  Time shall not change my love.

'That love shall bloom— a deathless blossom,
My shield in fight— with sword in hand,
And thou, my Lila, in my bosom,
  What shall that sword withstand?

'Weep not, my fair one! O forbear thee!
Those tears can bid no grief depart;
And were I faithless, Maid! I swear thee,
  Anguish would tear my heart!

'Then my good steed would sure betray me,
And falter in the battle-fray,
In peril's hours refuse t' obey me—
  My stirrup would give way.

'The sword, my valour's proudest token,
When grasp'd, like rotten wood would break;
And I should seek thee, spirit-broken,
  Death's paleness on my cheek.'

But the false horseman's steed obey'd him,
Gentle and eager still;— his sword,
Bright and unbroken, ne'er betray'd him,
 Though he broke oath and word.

The tale of love— the tears which shower'd
From Lila's eye— were all forgot;
The rose-wreath faded— pale— deflower'd:—
  Such buds re-blossom not!

That maiden's breast of peace he rifles;
Then hies him to another's breast;
Man's oaths to woman are but— trifles;
  And love itself— a jest.

He serves— secures— and then he slights them;
His vows are change— and treachery;
For laughing Cupid's arrow writes them
  Upon the shifting sea.

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

The Friend's Shadow

Sunt aliquid manes; letum non omnia finit;
Luridaque evictos effugit umbra rogos.
PROPERTIUS.

– ——

To Albion's misty isle across the waves I sped me:
It look'd as if interr'd beneath a leaden sea,
And gathering round our bark the halcyon's music led me,
While all the crew rejoiced in their sweet melody.
The dancing surge, the evening breezes falling,
And through the sails and shrouds those breezes whistling thrill,
And to the watch the active helmsman calling,
The watch, who, midst the roar, sleeps tranquilly and still.
All seem'd to rock itself to gentle thought;
Like an enchanted one, I, from the mast, look'd forth,
And through the night and through the mist I sought,
I sought the star beloved of my domestic north.
Then into memory melted every feeling—
My soul had sanctified my home of joy and peace,
And the sea raging, and the zephyrs gently stealing,
Cover'd my eyelids o'er with self-forgetfulness.
Then dreams with other dreams were blended,
And lo! there stood— was it a dream?— the form
Of that dear friend who his career had ended
Nobly, amidst the thundering battle storm.
He stood upon the mist, and smiled— his face,
Fresh as the morn and bloodless, shining
Like the young spring in gaiety and grace,
Even as an angel from high heaven declining:—
'Comrade of better time! and is it thou?
And is it thou?' I cried, 'thou hero bright!
Did I not in the fury of the fight
Attend thee— and when thou hadst fallen below
Make thy new grave— and on a neighbouring tree
Write with my sword thy feats of bravery,
And follow'd thy cold ashes to their bed,
And hallow'd it with prayers, and with tears watered?
Speak, unforgotten one! speak! was it a deceit?

Is all that's past a dream— a cheating dream?
A dream that corpse— a dream that grave— that sheet
Wrapt round thee— were they not— did they but seem?
O but one word! let that tongue's melody
Yet sweetly fall on my transported ear:
O unforgotten one! stretch out to me
Thy old right hand of friendship— stretch it here.'
I sprung towards him— Oh! the mists had dimm'd my eye—
He vanish'd like a shade— a lock of airy smoke—
Dispersed in the wide azure of the sky,
And I, arousing from my dream, awoke.
Beneath the wing of stillness all was sleeping;
The very winds— the very waves, at rest;
And scarce a breath upon the sea was creeping;
The pale moon swam along upon the white cloud's breast.
But I was troubled— peace had left my soul—
I stretch'd my hands tow'rds him, whom I no more could see—
I called on him— whom I could not control—
On thee— belov'd one! best of friends! on thee!

Konstantin Nikolaevich Batiushkov

The Prisoner

THERE, where the swift Rhone's waters flow
Its verdant banks between;
Where fragrant myrtles bending grow,
And Rhone reflects their green;
There, where the vineyards deck the hills,
And o'er the valleys spread,
Which golden citrons' fragrance fills,
And plantains rear their head—

There stood, as sunk the lord of day,
Upon the smiling shore,
One who long watch'd the waters play,
And thought his sorrows o'er;
A Russian hero— stolen by war,
The honour of the Don;
Divided from his friends afar,
He wander'd there alone.

'O roll!' he sang, 'ye waters roll—
Flow in your glory on;
Your waves shall waken on my soul
The memory of the Don.
My days pass by without an aim,
Amidst life's busy roar;
For what is life without its fame,
Or the bright world?— 'tis poor.

'Now nature wears its spring-tide dress,
The sun shines splendidly;
All liberty and loveliness—
O! why am I not free?
O roll, ye waters! rage, thou Rhone!
And waken, as ye roll,
The thoughts of my domestic zone
Within my troubled soul.

'The maidens here are fair and bright,
Their glance is full of fire;
And their all-graceful smiles of light

Might satisfy desire
'But what is love in foreign lands,
Or joy?— I only know
The joy and love that bless our sands,
Midst forests and midst snow.

'Give me my freedom— let me tread
Once more my country's strand;
With frost and storm all overspread—
My home— my father-land!
Deep is the snow around my door;
But give me my own steed,
And day and night, the mountains o'er,
Me to my home he'll lead.

'At home, there's one who sits and keeps
The memory of her love;
And often to the window creeps,
And pours her prayers above.
She guards the thoughts of him whose mind
Guards every thought of her;
She pats the horse I left behind—
How privileged to be there!

'O roll, thou Rhone! ye waters roll—
Rush in your glory on;
Your waves still waken in my soul
The memory of the Don.
Come, winds! come hither from the north,
Come, in your freshness, come:
And thou bright pole-star blazen forth,
Memento of my home!'

So spake the prisoner, as he turn'd
To Lyons his tired eye,
When long in exile's chains he mourn'd
His hapless destiny.
He sang— the Rhone roll'd proudly on,
The moon oft kiss'd its tide;
And oft on Lyons' turrets shone
The sun in all his pride.