

“Many Lands Have I Left Behind Me”: E. A. Baratynskii’s Quest for Happiness in Finland, Italy, and the Homeland

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Evgenii Abramovich Baratynskii (1800–1844) was one of Russia’s most significant writers of metaphysical and psychological poetry, dealing most notably with the conflict between the intellect and the emotions.¹ Within this conflict the intellect, and its representatives in the material world, science and technology, are generally portrayed as antithetical to harmony and happiness, but too powerful to be ignored; nature and the emotions, however, can be positive, when representing life and harmony, or negative, when representing either excessive passions or the “laws of nature” as defined by science. While in the majority of Baratynskii’s work these two facets of the psyche are shown as locked in a binary opposition, there are moments in his oeuvre in which the poetic persona is able to transcend this dualism and achieve a transcendence and/or synthesis on the physical, artistic, and spiritual level. This article discusses how this is worked out in poems about three different geographic locations that feature prominently in Baratynskii’s poetry: Finland, the homeland (i.e., Russia), and Italy. As I demonstrate here, these three locations serve as three different otherworldly realms, access to which allows his poetic persona to break free of the dualism with which it struggles and achieve a higher, more fully realized understanding of life, death, and poetry.

Italy, the Nordic countries, and the homeland as topics were not unique to Baratynskii: other Russian poets of approximately the same era, most significantly for this subject, Batiushkov, also wrote poetry featuring these three places. Three of Batiushkov’s most important later works, in fact, deal with precisely these locations: “My Penates” (“Moi Penaty,” 1811) is an idyllic description of a rural homeland, “On the Ruins of a Castle in

¹ The double presence of thought and feeling in Baratynskii’s poetry was first noted by Pushkin, who claimed that, “He is original amongst us, for he thinks. He would also be original anywhere, for he thinks in his own fashion, correctly and independently, while feeling strongly and deeply” (Он у нас оригинален, ибо мыслит. Он был бы оригинален и везде, ибо мыслит по-своему, правильно и независимо, между тем как чувствует сильно и глубоко, Pushkin 1981, 152; all translations my own). This aspect of Baratynskii’s oeuvre has received considerable critical attention; for more discussion of this, and various Russian and Western critics’ estimations of how well Baratynskii was able to reconcile this conflict, see for example: Belinskii 1976a, 1976b, 1979; Brown 1986; Burton 1981; Mirskii 1987; Pratt 1984; and Pratt 1987.



Sweden” (“Na razvalinakh zamka v Shvetsii,” 1814) describes the lyrical hero wandering through Nordic ruins and contemplating the warriors who have gone there before him,² and “The Dying Tasso” (“Umiraiushchii Tass,” 1817) shows the poet Tasso looking out over Rome in his final moments. These three poems by Batiushkov share a number of lexical³ and thematic similarities with the poems by Baratynskii under discussion in this article, including specific turns of phrase as well as a more general concern with issues of life, death, and the afterlife. However, as is the case in his other poetry, in the works dealing with these locations Baratynskii takes these common Romantic topics and tropes and makes them his own, setting up a metaphysical problem and then attempting to (re)solve it; what sets these works apart from the rest of his oeuvre is that in these poems, due to the lyrical persona’s contact with the (super)natural realm he encounters in these three places, he often succeeds.

The otherworldly realms to which the poet gains access through his contact with these specific geographical locations are closely linked with another frequent feature of Baratynskii’s verse: death. His poetry on Finland has already been discussed as both showing a hell-like “land of the dead,” and as being part of the identity-building that took place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to refashion Russia’s image as a Northern, rather than an Eastern, country and culture.⁴ This article builds on that concept by connecting the dots between Northern, exotic, and forbidding Finland; the poet’s rural Russian native land, home to the ancestors; and paradisiacal Italy. These three points — North, “home,” and South — can also be seen as being hell, purgatory,⁵ and heaven in the afterlife, and as such represent not only death but immortality. They thus in and of themselves force anyone who contemplates this aspect of them to wrestle with the contradiction of achieving everlasting life through dying. While in some of his works, such as “On the Death of Goethe” (“Na smert’ Gete,” 1832)⁶ and “An Excerpt” (“Otryvok,” 1829), Baratynskii expresses doubt about the possibility of life after death, his poems on Finland, Italy, and the homeland express a belief in the possibility of transcending the limits of a strictly material, mortal existence through contact with the natural landscape of the poems’ settings, although in different ways, as befitting the different aspects of the underworld/other world that these settings represent.

Perhaps one of the reasons why death is a common topic of Baratynskii’s work is that it was something with which Baratynskii was personally acquainted beginning at an early age: his father passed away suddenly when Baratynskii was 10, and he had the misfortune of losing several of his peers, most notably Delvig and Pushkin, when they were all still relatively young men. Death shows up repeatedly in Baratynskii’s poetry throughout his literary career, whether the explicit focus as in poems such as “The Last Death” (“Posledniaia smert’,” 1827), “Death” (“Smert’,” 1828), and “On the Death of Goethe”; or as a

² For an in-depth treatment of Nordic themes in Batiushkov’s work, see Emery 2007.

³ Compare for example the line “And the seashore is in a deep sleep all around” (И все въ глубокомъ снѣ поморіе кругомъ (Batiushkov 1898, 71)) from “On the Ruins...” with the line “And all about me is in deep silence!” (И всё вокруг меня в глубокой тишине! (Baratynskii 1989, 73)) from “Finland.” Such parallels between the two poems are numerous.

⁴ See Boele 1994, 1996; Emery 2007.

⁵ My thanks to the anonymous reviewer who suggested the purgatory aspect of the triangle.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this poem, see Pratt 1984, 203–14.

part of more general meditations on life and fate, as in “An Excerpt” or “There is a beautiful land..” (“Est’ milia strana...” 1832). It is also often a surprisingly positive figure: while in poems such as “Longing for happiness from childhood...” (“O schastii s mladenchestva toskuia...” 1823), “Two lots were given by providence...” (“Dalo dve doli providenie...” 1823), “The Skull” (“Cherep,” 1824/1826), or “The Last Death,” the use of the intellect is associated with death or death-like imagery, when death itself is the primary focus of the poem, as in “Death” or “On the Death of Goethe,” death is depicted as part of the natural order of things. This indicates that in Baratynskii’s poetic world, the “land of the dead” is not necessarily a bad place — death can just as easily serve as an entry to a realm of peace, harmony, and union with nature, as it can be a fearsome and life-destroying force.

Like death, nature and landscape play an important but unfixed role in Baratynskii’s poetry, sometimes representing the impersonal and inexorable forces of the intellect, and at others representing an intuitive and personal connection with the world, in opposition to the cold and destructive actions of science and industry. Nature is unequivocally positive in “Spring, spring! How pure the air!...” (“Vesna, vesna! Kak vozdukh chist!...” 1832), but a lost paradise in “Omens” (“Primety,” 1839), the beginning and end of which contain perhaps the clearest expression of the thought/feeling and nature/science conflict present in so much of Baratynskii’s poetry:

Пока человек естества не пытал
Горнилом, весами и мерой,
Но детски вещаньям природы внимал,
Ловил ее знаменья с верой;

Покуда природу любил он, она
Любовью ему отвечала:
О нем дружелюбной заботы полна,
Язык для него обретала.

[...]

Но, чувство презрев, он доверил уму;
Вдался в суету изысканий...
И сердце природы закрылось ему,
И нет на земле прорицаний. (191)⁷

⁷ All quotations from Baratynskii’s poems are taken from Baratynskii 1989, with page numbers in brackets.

As long as humanity did not torment being
With the crucible, scales, and measure,
But heeded, childlike, the prophecies of nature,
Caught her signs with faith;

As long as he loved her, she
Answered him with love:
Full of friendly concern for him,
She invented for him language.

[...]

But, despising feeling, he put his faith in the mind;
Gave over to the vanity of research...
And the heart of nature was closed to him,

In the first two stanzas of the poem humanity is shown as once having had access to a more perfect form of knowledge, gained through human beings' close connection with nature and their faith in their feelings, but in the last stanza this communion with nature and higher knowledge is lost once humanity "puts his faith in the mind" and "gives over to the vanity of research." The opposition between thought and feeling, and science and nature, is left unresolved, and no hope of a return to the Edenic state of a pre-scientific society is presented.

Nature is not always a paradise, whether lost or otherwise, in Baratynskii's poetry, though. In "The Last Death" and "The Last Poet" ("Poslednii poet," 1835) it is an awesome force ultimately out of human control, while in "Of what use are dreams of freedom to a slave?.." ("K chemu nevol'niku mechtaniia svobody?.." 1832),⁸ it is a symbol of an impersonal and contradictory higher power that destroys the happiness it forces humans to desire, and in "What good are you, days!.." ("Na chto vy, dni!.." 1840), it represents the futility of existence. Nature in the works on specific geographical locations that are examined below shows many of the same traits just mentioned, such as being outside of human control; however, the result in these poems is ultimately positive, as instead of being plunged further into dualism and despair as so often happens to Baratynskii's lyrical persona, the lyrical hero of these place-specific poems is able to reconcile or transcend the contradictions he encounters, and find comfort in art, faith, or communion with his ancestors.

It is no doubt significant that Baratynskii was acquainted with these specific locations both personally and, particularly in the case of Finland and Italy, through reading and hearsay. These poems thus combine Romantic conventions common to the literature of the time, such as linking Finland with Norse mythology and clichés about the exotic Ossianic North, or describing Italy in terms of Classical mythology, with deeply personal and individual events from Baratynskii's biography.⁹

The circumstances surrounding Baratynskii's time in Finland were distinctly negative, and this is reflected in both his lyric poetry on Finland and his long *poema* "Eda." While a teenager in boarding school Baratynskii and several other friends committed as a prank a theft from the father of one of the boys; this comparatively minor offense resulted in Baratynskii's expulsion from school and a ban on any form of government service other than as a private in the army, thus effectively barring the young Baratynskii from the career that a nobleman could expect. After attempts to receive a pardon proved fruitless, Baratynskii enlisted in the army as a private, with the hope of being promoted to officer status. The hoped-for promotion took longer than expected to come through due to the unwillingness of Alexander I to grant a pardon even after several years of military service, and Baratynskii spent much of his time between 1820 and 1825 posted in various locations in southeastern Finland. His poems from this period have the lyric persona of an unwilling exile, scorned and forgotten by society and living in a bleak and desolate land. Although Baratynskii's situation was far from ideal, it was also, perhaps, not as bad as is depicted in

And there are no prophecies on earth.

⁸ For a detailed discussion of this poem, see Pratt 1987.

⁹ For more detailed discussions of Baratynskii's biography, see Kjetsaa 1973 and Peskov 1998.

his poetry: his duties were light, he was allowed to board with his commanding officer and wear civilian clothes, and he was granted lengthy leaves to return to Russia. Furthermore, it was the poetry he produced then, under the twin circumstances of personal unhappiness and plenty of leisure time, that made his name as a poet amongst the literary society back in Petersburg. As well as expressing his unhappiness at being separated from his friends and his native land, these “Finnish” poems describe a landscape that is hauntingly beautiful in its exotic bleakness,¹⁰ and that spurred his poetic persona to engage in the metaphysical meditations that would become the hallmark of his poetry.

In the first Finnish poem under discussion here, “Departure,” or “Farewell, fatherland of foul weather...” (“Ot”ezd” or “Proshchai, otchizna nepogody...,” 1821), which Baratynskii wrote under the belief that he would soon be released from his military service and return permanently to Russia, Finnish nature is presented as gloomy, unpleasant, and full of contradictions, with a “lifeless spring” (Безжизненна весна, 86) that the lyrical hero nonetheless remembers “with secret pleasure” (Я вспомню с тайным сладострастьем (87)). Despite, or possibly because of, these difficulties, the lyrical hero is able to remain true to poetry — as he says, Finland is:

Но где порою, житель неба,
Наперекор судьбе,
Не изменил питомец Феба
Ни музам, ни себе. (87)¹¹

In the poem the poetic persona disavows the life-giving properties of the spring landscape, describing it not only as “lifeless,” but also as “desolate” (Пустынную) with “bare fields” (полей нагих) on which the sun shines “unwillingly” (Где солнце нехотя сияет) (86). His own spring, while also bitter, is, in contrast to that of the Finnish landscape, capable of generative powers, as he is able to remain true to his Muse and create poetry, and his reference to himself as an “inhabitant of heaven” seems to place him in opposition to the stones, sea, and moss of Finnish nature. One might be tempted to conclude that the poetic persona is able to remain a poet in spite of his sojourn in Finland, not because of it.

However, while the landscape depicted here is ostensibly barren, it is full of something very important for poetry — sound. The word шум is used twice in the poem, once in reference to the sound of the pines and once in reference to the sound of waterfalls (86). There is also the roar of the sea: моря рев (86). Both these sounds also come up in the poem “The Waterfall” (“Vodopad,” or “Shumi, shumi s krutoi vershiny...” 1821), along with howling (вой), echoing (отзыв), creaking (скрыпучий), and wordless speech (речь безглагольную, 85–86). All this suggests a link with the sounds (звуки, 73) in the final line

¹⁰ For discussions of the realism or lack thereof of Baratynskii’s descriptions of Finland, see for example: Boele 1994, 30; Burton 1975, 99; Dees 1972, 37; Kjetsaa 1973, 352; and Toibin 1988, 49.

¹¹ But where at times, an inhabitant of heaven,
In defiance of fate,
Phoebus’s pupil did not betray
Either the muses, or himself.

of “Finland” (“Finliandiia,” 1820/1826) one of Baratynskii’s most important poems about poetry and metaphysics as well as Finland. The natural world in “Departure” and “The Waterfall” does in fact parallel the consciousness of the lyrical hero, because it, like him, produces sound, meaning that it is not as barren as it first appears to be.

This is one of the many contradictions of nature in Baratynskii’s poetry about Finland. It is dead but full of sound, it is the land of exile but also the place of the poet’s poetic flowering, it is the place the poet has left behind and which is still with him, and it is a place where the lyrical hero was unhappy, but which he remembers with a smile (see “My clumsy pencil...” (“Moi neiskusnyi karandash...” 1831). In “Finland” the contradictions are collapsed, so that sea and sky come together, the night is without darkness, the stones become human and humans become like the stones, water becomes a mirror, and stars become diamonds.¹² This all leads to the final reconciliation of opposites, as the lyrical hero merges with time, and an instant becomes one with eternity:

Не вечный для времен, я вечен для себя:
 Не одному ль воображенью
 Гроза их что-то говорит?
 Мгновенье мне принадлежит,
 Как я принадлежу мгновенью! (73)¹³

The logical contradictions and their reconciliation via identification with the flow of time act to push the poet past the hopeless conflict seen in, for example, “Omens,” towards a

¹² The first part of strophe 2 of the poem reads:

Как всё вокруг меня пленяет чудно взор!
 Там необъятными водами
 Слилося море с небесами;
 Тут с каменной горы к нему дремучий бор
 Сошел тяжелыми стопами,
 Сошел — и смотрится в зеркале гладких вод!
 Уж поздно, день погас; но ясен неба свод,
 На скалы финские без мрака ночь нисходит,
 И только что себе в убор
 Алмазных звезд ненужный хор
 На небосклон она выводит! (72)

How marvelously all about me captivates my gaze!
 There like vast waters
 Have come together sea and sky;
 Here from a stony mountain the thick pine wood
 Has descended with heavy steps,
 Descended — and looks into a mirror of smooth waters!
 It is late, day is done, but the vault of heaven is clear,
 A night without darkness descends onto Finnish cliffs,
 And only as decoration
 An unneeded choir of diamond stars
 She leads onto the horizon!

¹³ Not eternal for the times, I am eternal for myself:

Does not their threat
 Speak only to the imagination?
 The moment belongs to me,
 As I belong to the moment!

transcendent acceptance of existence and, in “Departure” and “Finland,” the acknowledgement of a higher calling, that of the creation of poetry — in the final two lines of “Finland,” the poet concludes that “I, unheeded, am sufficiently rewarded / With sounds for sounds, and dreams for dreams” (Я, невнимаемый, довольно награжден / За звуки звуками, а за мечты мечтами. 73).

This higher calling is linked explicitly in “Departure,” with its references to the Muses and Apollo, to divinity and a superhuman realm, something to which the lyrical hero remains true in spite of the betrayal of the external world. In “Finland” the lyrical hero also has access to a superhuman realm, both through his communion with nature and time, and through his vision of “Odin’s children” (Одиновых детей, 72) and the ghosts of “midnight heroes” (полночные герои, 73). In the article “Finland in the Work of Jevgenij Baratynskij: Locus Amoenus or Realm of the Dead,” Otto Boele analyzes the frequent cemetery imagery in Baratynskii’s “Finnish” poetry and argues that, “Since Finland is implicitly being compared to a cemetery, to a place of the dead, it can also be interpreted, not just as the ‘dead fatherland’ (‘мертвая отчизна’), but also as an ‘отчизна мертвых’, a Realm of the Dead” (Boele 1994, 43). I would expand on that by adding that this superhuman or divine realm linked with Finland is also part of what makes it the “land of the dead.” This is the final and most important of the generative contradictions of Finnish nature: a “lifeless” land peopled with ghosts, it pushed the poet into poetry.

Finland may have been the land of the dead for Baratynskii, but it was not the only one. The homeland, to which he dedicated a number of poems, was also full of ghosts, whom the poetic persona expected to join in good time. Baratynskii’s poetry about the homeland thus forms an interesting contrast to his poetry about Finland: while Finland was a wild land, populated with the shades of fallen heroes, and the place where Baratynskii’s poetic persona was able to remain true to his poetry despite all the obstacles in his path, the homeland is a settled, agrarian landscape, where the lyrical hero becomes one with nature through the cultivation of the land, an activity which is compared to the production of both poetry and future generations. So while in Finland the poetic persona was able to find an escape from death through an ecstatic merging with time, in the homeland the poetic persona does not seek to escape from death, but rather hopes to join his forbearers and be replaced by his offspring, who will take his place both as tillers of the field and as creators of poetry.

For Baratynskii the homeland could refer to multiple locations within Russia. Moscow, the Russian city in which he spent the most time, features surprisingly rarely in his poetry, while St. Petersburg, where he was stationed prior to his transfer to Finland, and where he became part of the literary circle of the day, appears primarily as the fond memories of the unhappy exile who narrates the Finnish poems, and contains little of Russia or of anything “homey” in its descriptions. For the purposes of this article I am thus defining the “homeland” as those poems which deal with the lyrical hero’s return to, or life in, rural Russia, implicitly or explicitly inspired by Baratynskii’s time on the family estates of Mara, in the Tambov region, and Muranovo, outside of Moscow. An examination of three of Baratynskii’s poems about the homeland from the beginning, middle, and end of his career will show both the similarities and differences in his relationship to nature in the homeland and in Finland.

The poem “Motherland” (“Rodina”) was written in 1821, the same year as “Departure,” and forms a mirror image to it: “Departure” describes an imagined departure from a wild, barren, “lifeless” spring, while “Motherland” describes the lyrical hero's imagined return to a fertile, peaceful, “luxuriant” (роскошная, 77) spring and “reborn” (воскреснувшей 77) nature. In “Departure” the lyrical hero is a passive observer of the landscape, which he sees and hears and which acts upon him by stalking him in his imagination; in “Motherland” the lyrical hero works actively on the land by plowing, digging, and planting, first describing how he will work the fields:

Прилежный, мирный плуг, взрывающий бразды,
Почтеннее меча; полезный в скромной доле,
Хочу возделывать отеческое поле.
Оратай, ветхих дней достигший над сохой,
В заботах сладостных наставник будет мой;
Мне дряхлого отца сыны трудолюбивы
Помогут утучнять наследственные нивы. (77)¹⁴

And then how he will work in his garden:

Я сам, когда с небес роскошная весна
Повеет негою воскреснувшей природе,
С тяжелым заступом явлюся в огороде,
Приду с тобой садить коренья и цветы. (77)¹⁵

Notably, the work here is augmented by the use of the tools of industry. Although the technology employed in “Motherland” is extremely simple — a plow and spade — the lyrical hero is employing the fruits of industrial production to refashion the landscape, and this is portrayed as being positive and in accordance with nature's plan, as the hero receives his training in the agricultural arts from his elders, works alongside their sons to “enrich the inherited fields,” and expects a spade and pipe to be placed over his grave instead of a marble headstone:

В весенний ясный день я сам, друзья мои,
У берега насажу лесок уединенный,

¹⁴ A diligent, peaceful plow, turning up the furrows,
Is more venerable than a sword; useful in a modest lot,
I want to cultivate the paternal field.
A plowman, having achieved ancient days over his plow,
Will be my mentor in these sweet cares;
The hardworking sons of a decrepit father
Will help me enrich the inherited fields.

¹⁵ I myself, when from the heavens a luxuriant spring
Will waft bliss onto reborn nature,
With a heavy spade I will appear in the garden,
I'll come to plant roots and flowers with you.

И липу свежую, и тополь осребренный,
 В тени их отдохнет мой правнук молодой;
 Там дружба некогда сокроет пепел мой
 И вместо мрамора положит на гробницу
 И мирный заступ мой, и мирную цевницу. (77)¹⁶

This use of technology and industry, such as it is, seems to be acceptable to the poet because it is not for abstract knowledge or monetary gain (as opposed to the use of science, technology, and industry in poems such as “The Last Death,” “The Last Poet,” and “Omens,”), but is part of the cycle of birth, life, and death, thus allowing the lyrical hero to become one with nature by participating in the natural rhythm of planting, sprouting, withering, and regeneration, which is explicitly linked in the final line with the production of art as well. While in “Departure” the poet is able to access a divine, superhuman realm through his contact with, and opposition to, the contradictions of Finnish nature, here in the motherland nature is in harmony with itself and humanity, and the opposition that is reconciled is that between life and death, as the lyrical hero dies in order to be reborn in his offspring like the plants around him. As with vegetative growth, human and artistic life and growth arises from death, and human activities are simply part of the general activities of all living/dying things, and are thus both effective and beneficial.

There is a similar attitude towards human intervention in nature in the 1832 poem “Desolation” (“Zapustenie”), which describes the lyrical hero’s actual, as opposed to imagined, return to the fatherland, as it is composed of the hero’s thoughts of his father as he walks through the garden his father created. Like the other poems under consideration here, there is a specific biographical event behind this work: Baratynskii’s visit in the fall of 1832 to the estate of Mara, where the family lived prior to his father’s death in 1810 (ibid. 418). Once again we have a tamed, domesticated landscape, although one that has fallen into disrepair following the death of its creator. This poem, in contrast to “Motherland,” is set in fall, not spring, and appears to be weighted towards death, not life. Even its title, “Desolation” (Запустение), recalls the “desolate land” (пустынная страна) that is Finland in “Departure,” and the deserted garden, like Finland in “Finland,” is populated with the ghost of a heroic figure, one who, like the Finnish past in “Finland,” has been forgotten by the present:

Давно кругом меня о нем умолкнул слух,
 Прияла прах его далекая могила,
 Мне память образа его не сохранила,
 Но здесь еще живет его доступный дух;
 Здесь, друг мечтанья и природы,

¹⁶ On a clear spring day I myself, my friends
 Will plant a secluded wood by the shore,
 Both the fresh linden and the silvered poplar;
 My young great-grandson will rest in their shade;
 There someday friendship will conceal my ashes
 And instead of marble will place on the grave
 Both my peaceful spade and my peaceful pipe.

Я познаю его вполне:
 Он вдохновением волнуется во мне,
 Он славить мне велит леса, долины, воды;
 Он убедительно пророчит мне страну,
 Где я наследую несрочную весну,
 Где разрушения следов я не примечу,
 Где в сладостной тени невянущих дубров,
 У нескудеющих ручьев,
 Я тень, священную мне, встречу. (177)¹⁷

The final few lines of the poem undo all that, however, and ally “Desolation” with “Motherland” rather than “Departure.” In the poem's conclusion the ghost inhabiting the desolated garden, who “stirs as inspiration” inside the poet and is described as “a friend of dreaming and of nature,” promises the lyrical hero a “timeless spring,” along with unwithering oak forests and streams that never run dry. The final image of the poem is one of springtime fertility and artistic inspiration that is part of the cycle of inheritance sanctioned by the natural order in these poems about the homeland. This poem, like the poems on Finland, also contains a number of contradictions and oppositions, such as the “timeless spring” and the lyrical hero’s ability to recognize his father’s forgotten image, but their treatment here is different: while the Finnish landscape in the poems discussed above challenges the lyrical hero with its contradictory nature, the abandoned garden in “Desolation,” despite actually being barren and deserted (as opposed to the landscapes of Imatra and Hamina, the settings that inspired “The Waterfall” and “Finland,” which were in fact inhabited by both Russians and Finns), is a direct point of access to a welcoming afterlife, where one achieves eternal life through dying, and thus all conflicts are reconciled in the most positive way possible. The father’s ghost, “a friend of dreaming and of nature,” is able through his contact with the lyrical hero’s imagination to act as a bridge between life and death, and art and nature, moving the action of the poem out of the merely material and into a plane that transcends these binary definitions, so that the bounded season of spring, for example, can be “timeless,” and the living and the dead can communicate unobstructed.

¹⁷ Rumor of him has long fallen silent around me,
 A distant grave has taken in his dust,
 My memory has not preserved his image,
 But here still lives his approachable spirit;
 Here, a friend of dreaming and of nature,
 I know him entirely:
 He stirs as inspiration within me,
 He commands me to praise the woods, valleys, waters;
 He convincingly prophesies for me a land
 Where I will inherit a timeless spring,
 Where I will not notice the signs of destruction,
 Where in the sweet shade of unfading oaks,
 By inexhaustible streams,
 I will meet a shade sacred to me.

The last of the three poems I will discuss in connection with nature and the homeland is “On Planting a Forest,” or “Na posev lesa,” most likely written in the fall of 1842, when Baratynskii was in fact planting a forest on his estate of Muranovo (430). Like “Motherland” and “Desolation,” it deals with spring, plowing, sowing, and refashioning nature, and like the previous two poems it presents these human interventions into nature as positive and part of the natural cycle. The physical spring is contrasted with the physical and emotional winter that encases the lyrical hero, who has fallen into despair over the hopelessness of his self-appointed task of awakening the better feelings of humanity.¹⁸ The poem ends with the lyrical hero's decision to abandon poetry in favor of planting trees:

Летел душой я к новым племенам,
 Любил, ласкал их пустоцветный колос,
 Я дни извел, стучась к людским сердцам,
 Всех чувств благих я подавал им голос.

Ответа нет! Отвергнул струны я,
 Да хрящ другой мне будет плодоносен!
 И вот ему несет рука моя
 Зародыши елей, дубов и сосен.

И пусть! Простяся с лирою моей,
 Я верую: ее заменят эти,
 Поэзии таинственных скорбей,
 Могучие и сумрачные дети. (218)¹⁹

As in “Motherland” and “Desolation,” the issue of generations and passing down knowledge from father to son is a central concern in “On Planting a Forest,” and is connected with both working the land and producing poetry. “Motherland” describes the whole cycle from the perspective of one about to embark on it, “Desolation” describes the middle of the cycle, as the lyrical hero surveys the results of his father's digging and planting, and in “On Planting

¹⁸ Like several other of Baratynskii's poems (e.g., “Osen” “Madona”), this work shares marked similarities with poems by Pushkin on similar themes (in this case there are notable parallels with “Exegi Monumentum”), but is written in a much darker vein. After Pushkin's death, and in response to what Baratynskii considered the general public's unforgivable indifference to it, the alienation expressed in Baratynskii's poetry became even more pronounced.

¹⁹ I sent my soul to new tribes,
 I loved, caressed their unflowering ears of grain,
 I wasted my days knocking on human hearts,
 I gave voice to all their noble feelings.

No answer! I have rejected my lyre strings,
 And some other flesh will bear me fruit!
 And here my hand brings to it
 The embryos of firs, oaks, and pines.

So be it! Parting with my lyre,
 I believe: it will be replaced by these
 Mighty and gloomy children
 Of the poetry of mysterious sorrows.

a Forest,” the poem amongst the three surveyed here most deserving the label of what William Brown calls Baratynskii's “profound pessimism” (Brown 1986, 311), the lyrical hero is preparing to pass to the next phase of the cycle, that is, death. Already ghost-like in his inability to influence the “new tribes,” he decides to give up poetry, but with the certainty that his lyre will be taken up by “mighty and gloomy children.” Although this poem is the darkest of the three, as befits its position at the end-point of the cycle of birth, life, and death, it ends on a note of hope, foreseeing the beginning of the next cycle of both plant growth and poetic production. Once again the lyrical hero is able to find peace of a sort through the reconciliation of opposites: as with the other homeland poems under discussion here, the poetic persona finds comfort in, and an escape from, his own material mortality through his connection with the life, human, vegetative, and poetic, that arises out of and transcends death.

In the “homeland” poems analyzed here, humans are connected to nature through their labor and through their participation in the same flowering, fertilization, and harvest as the plants that they tend, and poetic inspiration is passed down from father to son as part of the inheritance of growth and tending the land. This sets the homeland apart from Finland, which is not only a wild barren country, it is also a country where the connection between generations has been broken,²⁰ so that there is no one either to work the land or to inherit the gift of poetic inspiration, which instead passes to the foreign poet-observer. In the Finnish poems, poetic inspiration and freedom from the binary conflict that brings unhappiness both come from the destabilizing effects of the wild, empty, and contradictory landscape; in the homeland poems, inspiration and freedom come from acceptance of the natural cycle, which is not oppressive and threatening, as natural forces are in “Of what use are dreams of freedom to a slave?..” but rather allows the human and natural worlds to merge, just as they ultimately do in the “Finnish” poems.

Moving on to the third point in our geographic triangle, Italy is also a transcendent, otherworldly realm in Baratynskii's poetry, but with its own unique features. Like Finland, Italy held a special place in Baratynskii's personal and poetic development: as a child his “diad’ka,” a male caretaker for a Russian noble boy, was the Italian Giacinto Borghese, who came to Russia with the French army and remained there for the rest of his life, working, after an unsuccessful stint as an artist, for the Boratynskii family.²¹ The fond memories Baratynskii had of Borghese and his stories about Italy, which Baratynskii mentions explicitly in “To my Italian Caretaker” (“Diad’ke-ital’iantsu,” 1844), the last poem he wrote before his death in Naples, seem to have colored Baratynskii’s impressions of Italy from an early age, and long before he ever visited the country, Italy serves in his poetry as a longed-for refuge and a place where the faith that Baratynskii’s poetic persona continuously sought could be found.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this article, the skepticism of Baratynskii’s poetic persona about the beneficence of providence and of the existence of an afterlife, especially

²⁰ Near the beginning of strophe 3 of “Finland” we are told that, “Sons do not know of the deeds of their fathers” (Сыны не ведают о подвигах отцов, 72).

²¹ Although the spelling of the family name did not stabilize until later in the nineteenth century, it is common to refer to the Boratynskii family, reflecting their preferred spelling of the name, but to Baratynskii the poet, reflecting the spelling he most often used for publication.

a pleasant afterlife, can be seen in multiple poems, ranging from early works such as “Two lots were given by providence...” (1823), to works from his middle period such as “An Excerpt” (1829) and “On the Death of Goethe” (1832), to his most mature works, such as “The Stillborn” (“Nedonosok,” 1835). This mistrust of providence is one of the most distinctive features of Baratynskii’s oeuvre and has led to some of his most significant metaphysical meditations on the meaning of human existence. However, his works on Italy form a counter-thread to this general trend, and point to the possibility of another facet to his poetry, one that was only beginning to be developed at the time of his death. We can see this throughout the “Italian” strain in Baratynskii’s work, peaking in his final poems, written once he was on his way to or actually in Italy.

Beginning with poems written before Baratynskii had visited Italy in person, we see that the scene in “The Madonna” (“Madona,” 1832) is set in a manner similar to the Finnish poems: the poem begins with a description of a hut in the middle of an empty field (в поле пустом, 170) — the use of the word пустой (“empty”) is reminiscent of the пустынная страна (“desolate — literally “emptied” — land”) that is Finland), inhabited by a mother and daughter living in straitened circumstances somewhere outside of Pisa. The daughter is driven to despair and rails against God (И дочка порою душой унывала; / Терпеньем скудея, на бога роптала, 170), much as Baratynskii’s poetic alter ego often does. Her mother tells her not to lose heart, as the Madonna will come to their aid. This in fact happens when a stranger comes to their hut for a drink of water and recognizes their painting of the Madonna as a Correggio. Although the mother refuses to sell it to him, word begins circulating through the country about its existence, and she is able to support herself and her daughter by charging people to come see it. The poem concludes with the statement that the mother’s “living faith” (вера живая, 172) has been justified by the Madonna (Тебя оправдала Мадона святая, 172). Here Italy is, like Finland, an empty and forbidding landscape, and is also, like Finland, populated by the shades of distant ancestors, as the chief figure is the icon of Madonna, a picture of a dead person painted by a dead person (Antonio da Correggio, the artist referred to in the poem, died in 1534). But unlike Finland, and like the homeland, Italy is a place where the connection between the generations is still intact, as the mother and daughter are able to interact and take care of each other, and distant “ancestors” — Correggio and the Madonna — effect an intercession for the poem’s protagonists, thereby justifying the old woman’s faith in them.

The justified “living faith” from “The Madonna” is present in various forms in the other Italian works. In the 1829 poem “To Princess Volkonskaia” (“Книagine Volkonskoi”), Italy is compared explicitly with heaven. In it the departure of Princess Volkonskaya to Italy is described as a journey from the “kingdom of whist and winter” (Из царства виста и зимы, 149) to a “better land and better world” (в лучший край и лучший мир, 150). Italy is thus also the “land of the dead,” like Finland, but rather than being a “dead land,” it is paradise. We therefore have three different “lands of the dead” in Baratynskii’s poetry: the cold, hostile underworld that is Finland; the homeland, which is the land of the ancestors; and Italy, the warm and life-giving heavenly otherworld. The increasing levels of perfection of these three lands can be seen by, among other things, the increasing levels of harmony between human technology and the natural world, reaching its apex in Italy, where human invention is part of the natural landscape. Because science and technology often stand in

for the intellect in Baratynskii's work, the peaceful and mutually beneficial interactions between the technological/industrial and the natural worlds can be understood as a reconciliation of the master conflict, that between thought and feeling, in his poetry.

In "To Princess Volkonskaia" art, artifice, and nature are all brought together, as Tasso's octaves are recited in the palace porticos, the gods are alive, and the hills are eloquent.²² This forms an interesting contrast to "Finland," where the bards have gone silent, religious rites are no longer observed, and native gods "lie face-down in the dust!";²³ while in Finland, the links between fathers and sons, nature and art, and the human and divine have been severed, in Italy, the realms of art, artifice, nature, and divinity are all connected. Similarly, in "The sky of Italy..." ("Nebo Italii..." 1843), the final rhyme is леса благовонны ("fragrant forests," 219) and чертогов колонны ("the columns of the mansions," 219), thus bringing together human and natural creation as two equal parts to the glory that is Italy. And in "The Steamship" ("Piroskaf," 1844), ships are like birds and steam and wind work together to take the hero to the "earthly Elysium" ("Elizii zemnoi,"²⁴ 202). As in "Finland," in "The Steamship" things are turned upside down or mixed up in unexpected ways; unlike "Finland," the landscape is populated by living beings and helpful technology, so that the lyrical hero does not have to retreat into his own, subjective experience of immortality, but can experience the elements firsthand and make his way to a physical paradise.

As with the other poems under consideration here, "The Steamship" is based on a real biographical event. In the fall of 1843 Baratynskii, accompanied by his wife and eldest children, set off on a lengthy visit of Western Europe, which took them through present-day Germany, France, and finally Italy, with the plan to return to Russia via Austria. "The Steamship" was written while Baratynskii was traveling by steamship from Marseilles to Naples, and describes such a journey in both physical and metaphysical terms.

A brief examination of the bird-boat imagery of the poem will show how nature, industry, and humanity come together in it, and how the lyrical hero shows a peaceful acceptance of certain types of discordance that are inescapable and even essential for the achievement of higher goals. In the first three stanzas, which describe the physical journey the lyrical hero is making, boats are shown as being in conflict with the elements, and yet, by giving itself to the wind in the first stanza, the hero's boat is able to sail:

²² Где в кущах, в портиках палат
Октавы Тассовы звучат;
Где в древних камнях боги живы,
Где в новой, чистой красоте
Рафаэль дышит на холсте;
Где все холмы красноречивы [...]. (150)

²³ Умолк призывный щит, не слышен скальда глас,
Воспламенный дуб угас,
Развеял буйный ветр торжественные клики;
Сыны не ведают о подвигах отцов;
И в дольном прахе их богов
Лежат низверженные лики! (72)

²⁴ For a discussion of the similarities between the depiction of Italy as an "Earthly Elysium" in Baratynskii's poetry, and the conception of Taurica (Crimea) in the poetry of Batiushkov and Pushkin, see Panfilov 2012, 77–79, 84.

Дикою, грозною ласкою полны,
 Бьют в наш корабль средиземные волны.
 Вот над кормою стал капитан.
 Визгнул свисток его. Братствуя с паром,
 Ветру наш парус раздался недаром:
 Пенясь, глубоко вздохнул океан! (201)²⁵

This opening stanza sets up the balance between, and merging of, the human, natural, and technological elements that continues throughout the poem, something which is emphasized by the use of a first-person plural verb as the first word of stanza two (мчимся, or “we race along” 201). Then, as they – the plural group implied by the verb form – leave sight of shore, they see a bird flying “between the waters and the heavens” (Только что чайка вьется за нами / Белая, рея меж вод и небес, 201). In the third stanza a fishing boat spotted in the distance is called explicitly “an inhabitant of the ocean, / Like a gull, a bird of its waters” (океана жилица, / Чайке подобна, вод его птица, 201). Physically, both the boats and the bird occupy an in-between, bridging space between two shores and two elements, while metaphorically they bridge the gap between natural and non-natural objects. And even though the steamship and the fishing boat are in an antagonistic relationship with the elements (С бурной стихией в томительном споре, / Лодка рыбацья качается в море, 201), the elements also support and propel them. The reconciliation of opposing forces that takes place here does not, then, annul or deny the different elements, as we see, for example, in the end of “Finland,” when the lyrical hero turns away from time and the external world and into poetry, nor does it rely on the entrance to another, non-earthly realm, in which the rules of time and the material world as we know it are abandoned or changed, as in “Desolation.” Rather, in “The Steamship” the poetic persona accepts the necessity of opposition and is able to benefit from it, as he and his ship are carried along by the wind, water, and steam. The realm described in “The Steamship” is thus much more physical, and much more grounded in material reality, than the otherworldly realms described in the earlier works, and as such indicates yet another merging of opposites: the lyrical hero is finally able to access the divine while still keeping his feet firmly planted on the ship’s deck, so that the divine and mundane have also become one.

The first half of the poem describes the lyrical hero's physical journey from France to Italy from the point of departure to the moment when the shore disappears from view (С берегом набережное скрылось, ушло! 201). In the second half of the poem, which describes the journey across the open ocean and the anticipated arrival in Italy, the focus switches to the spiritual movement of the lyrical hero, who is leaving behind his internal problems through this ocean crossing:

²⁵ Full of a wild, threatening love,
 The Mediterranean waves beat against our ship.
 Here stands the captain above the stern.
 His whistle shrieked. Partnering with the steam,
 Our sail spread out and caught the wind:
 Foaming, the ocean sighed deeply!

Много земель я оставил за мною;
 Вынес я много смятенной душою
 Радостей ложных, истинных зол;
 Много мятежных решил я вопросов
 Прежде чем руки марсельских матросов
 Подняли якорь, надежды символ! (201)²⁶

The “many lands” the lyrical hero has left behind are paralleled with the “many stormy questions” he has resolved prior to weighing anchor, so that by setting off on this sea journey to Italy he is leaving behind both his physical and moral difficulties. And while the ship is indeed carrying the hero to the “earthly Elysium” of Italy, they are both currently located in an in-between state, partway through the journey and in the middle of the sea, out of sight of either shore. The lyrical hero of “The Steamship” is thus in much the same situation as the lyrical hero of “On Planting a Forest”: at a turning point, about to complete one phase of his lifecycle but not quite there yet. Unlike the lyrical hero of “On Planting a Forest,” though, in “The Steamship” the lyrical hero has made peace with the past and is able to continue on to the next stage of his natural cycle without regrets and in harmony with the human and non-human elements around him. His transcendence of the binary conflict between the opposing forces of past and present, nature and industry, and logic and happiness, is finally complete.

Baratynskii’s sudden death of unknown causes on June 29 (old style), 1844, while still in Naples, occurred before “The Steamship” was first published, along with “To my Italian Caretaker,” in the July 1844 edition of *The Contemporary* (Peskov 1998, 411)). These two poems mark a sharp departure from the ethos of the majority of Baratynsky's earlier work, and suggest that, had he lived, he might have been about to embark on a new phase in his literary career. Unfortunately, we can only speculate as to what poetry that new phase might have brought. While the conflict that fills his earlier works is still present in these last poems, the treatment of it and the ultimate conclusions of these poems differ significantly from most of the previous poetry. While they share the same contents as many of their predecessors, the feeling-tone of these last poems is quite different, as if the spirit behind them had finally found the peace of mind it had been searching for, but not, as it had feared for so long, at the expense of its dreams and desires. It is therefore, and perhaps quite fittingly, both satisfying and unsatisfying to conclude a discussion of Baratynskii's poetry with “The Steamship”; satisfying because it provides an uplifting ending to his poetic trajectory, and unsatisfying because it suggests that Russian poetry is much the poorer for having lost one of its best poets at this stage in his career.

²⁶ Many lands have I left behind me;
 My turbulent soul had borne many
 False joys, true evils;
 Many stormy questions had I resolved
 Before the hands of the Marseilles sailors
 Raised the anchor, that symbol of hope!

For a discussion of the symbolism of the anchor, which itself serves as a bridging mechanism between disparate elements, see Panfilov 2012, 89.

The “many stormy questions” in “The Steamship” point to the most significant element of these poems about nature in three specific geographic locations. While in poems about “nature” in the abstract, such as “Of what use are dreams of freedom to a slave?..” “Spring, spring, how pure the air!..” or “Omens,” questions and quandaries are either absent or left unresolved, but in poems about Finland, the homeland, and Italy, the lyrical hero does, through his contact with the specific nature of these specific places, achieve transcendence or come to a reconciliation, while also being rewarded with some form of immortality. In the “Finnish” poems it is by passing through the destabilizing effects of contradictory Finnish nature and becoming wholly dedicated to poetry, in the “homeland” poems it is by taking up his proper place in the cycle of plowing, sowing, and harvest, and in the “Italian” poems it is by leaving behind his old life and surrendering himself to the elements, which welcome him mercifully and bear him to a welcoming earthly heaven. In all cases, this line in Baratynskii’s poetry suggests that all is not so bleak as is claimed in “Omens”: even after the rise of science, technology, and the intellect, humans can still hear the voice of nature if they take the time to listen.

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