“Autumn,” by Alexander Pushkin, 1833

TRANSLATED BY AVRAHM YARMOLINSKY


“What does not enter then my drowsy mind...?”

—Derzhavin

I

October comes at last. The grove is shaking
The last reluctant leaves from naked boughs.
The autumn cold has breathed, the road is freezing—
The brook still sounds behind the miller’s house,
But the pond’s hushed; now with his pack my neighbor
Makes for the distant field—his hounds will rouse
The woods with barking, and his horse’s feet
Will trample cruelly the winter wheat

II

This is my time! What is the Spring to me?
Thaw is a bore: mud running thick and stinking—
Spring makes me ill: my mind is never free
From dizzy dreams, my blood’s in constant ferment.
Give me instead Winter’s austerity,
The snows under the moon—and what is gayer
Than to glide lightly in a sleigh with her
Whose fingers are like fire beneath the fur?
III
And oh, the fun, steel-shod to trace a pattern
In crystal on the river’s glassy face!
The shining stir of festivals in winter!
But there’s a limit—nobody could face
Six months of snow—even that cave-dweller,
The bear, would growl “enough” in such a case.
Sleigh rides with young Armidas pall, by Jove,
And you turn sour with loafing by the stove.
IV
Oh, darling Summer, I could cherish you,
If heat and dust and gnats and flies were banished.
These dull the mind, the heart grows weary, too.
We, like the meadows, suffer drought: thought withers
Drink is our only hope, and how we rue
Old woman Winter, at whose funeral banquet
Pancakes and wine were served, but now we hold
Memorial feasts of ices, sweet and cold.
V
They say ill things of the last days of Autumn:
But I, friend reader, not a one will hear;
Her quiet beauty touches me as surely
As does a wistful child, to no one dear.
She can rejoice me more, I tell you frankly,
Than all the other seasons of the year.
I am a humble lover, and I could
Find, singularly, much in her that’s good.

VI

How shall I make it clear? I find her pleasing
As you perhaps may like a sickly girl,
Condemned to die, and shortly, who is drooping
Without a murmur of reproach to hurl
At life, forsaking her—upon her paling
Young lips a little smile is seen to curl.
She does not hear the grave’s horrific yawn.
Today she lives—tomorrow she is gone.

VII

Oh, mournful season that delights the eyes,
Your farewell beauty captivates my spirit.
I love the pomp of Nature’s fading dyes,
The forests, garmented in gold and purple,
The rush of noisy wind, and the pale skies
Half-hidden by the clouds in darkling billows,
And the rare sun-ray and the early frost,
And threats of grizzled Winter, heard and lost.

VIII

Each time that Autumn comes I bloom afresh;
For me, I find, the Russian cold is good;
Again I go through life’s routine with relish:
Sleep comes in season, and the need for food;
Desire seethes—and I am young and merry,
My heart beats fast with lightly leaping blood.
I’m full of life—such is my organism.
(if you will please excuse the prosaism.)
IX
My horse is brought; far out onto the plain
He carries his glad rider, and the frozen
Dale echoes to his shining hooves, his mane
Streams in the keen wind like a banner blowing,
And the bright ice creaks under him again.
But day soon flickers out. At the forgotten
Hearth, where the fire purrs low or leaps like wind,
I read, or nourish long thoughts in my mind.
X
And I forget the world in the sweet silence,
While I am lulled by fancy, and once more
The soul oppressed with the old lyric fever
Trembles, reverberates, and seeks to pour
Its burden freely forth, and as though dreaming
I watch the children that my visions bore,
And I am host to the invisible throngs
Who fill my reveries and build my songs.
XI
And thoughts stir bravely in my head, and rhymes
Run forth to meet them on light feet, and fingers
Reach for the pen, and the good quill betimes
Asks for the foolscap. Wait: the verses follow.
Thus a still ship sleeps on still seas. Hark: Chimes!
And swiftly all hands leap to man the rigging,
The sails are filled, they belly in the wind—
The monster moves—a foaming track behind.

XII
It sails, but whither is it our ship goes?...
[1833]