

MILITARY SERVICE AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY:
THE VIEW FROM EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
RUSSIAN THEATER

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Across Russian society, service bound individuals and communities to the person of the monarch and to the administrative structures of the state. Promises of advancement and appeals to honor encouraged the individual serviceman to define himself in terms of the monarchy, civic society, and the common good. Yet at the same time that the obligation to serve called forth a transcendent identification with the imperial polity, it also exposed the gap between moral principles and concrete rewards. The injustices of everyday life not only contradicted proclaimed principles but also seemed more egregious because of the sacrifices service entailed. Through the prism of eighteenth-century theater—an institution where Russia's educated service classes imagined themselves as members of a larger social body—this essay explores the tension between service as a source of positive identification and service as a challenge to social hierarchy.¹

The theatrical depiction of service raised difficult moral and practical questions for which it could offer no fully satisfactory answers. How, for example, could merit and performance be rewarded in a society where legal rights were unequal and hereditary, or where political power depended on patronage and family networks? How could strict hierarchies of command and discipline be maintained in combat conditions, where all men, regardless of rank or social status, were equally vulnerable to death and equally capable of heroism?

¹ The relatively limited historiography on social attitudes toward service tends to emphasize sources of disaffection. My purpose is to explore ideas that promoted reconciliation. On the nobility, see I. V. Faisova, *"Manifest o vol'nosti" i sluzhba dvorianstva v XVIII stoletii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1999); E. N. Marasina, *Psikhologiya elity rossiiskogo dvorianstva poslednei treti XVIII veka. (Po materialam perepiski)* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999), chap. 2; Michael Confino, "À propos de la notion de service dans la noblesse russe au XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 34 (1993), 47–58; Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966). On popular attitudes, see Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *From Serf to Russian Soldier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

In confronting these questions, playwrights presented a complex and sometimes heart-wrenching portrait of tensions in the relationship of individuals and groups to the government and service. The solutions displayed on stage showed how, despite an acute awareness of these tensions, the governing classes of imperial Russia overcame cognitive challenges to constituted authority in order to preserve the comfortable exercise of power. Among educated Russians of diverse origins, social and political conflict led not to rebellion but to reconciliation: not to a desire to overthrow flawed institutions but to live within them despite a recognition of their costs.

That an historian would turn to plays as a source for understanding social attitudes reflects the limited market for commercially produced culture in eighteenth-century Russia. Further west in Europe, historians have at their disposal a wider range of sources, from books and broadsheets to the records of parliamentary debates, from which the self-understanding and characteristic dilemmas of social groups can be extracted more easily. In Russia, where constituted political bodies did not exist, and where the periodical press was in its infancy, theater provided a unique civic forum for the debate of social issues. While it may seem an intrinsically elite phenomenon, theater reached a broader range of social groups than one might expect: its performers and audiences were drawn from all ages and social statuses, including serfs and rulers. Because plays were staged at court, in private homes and sheds, in seminaries and schools, and in commercial and state-sponsored settings, they were accessible to a socially diverse public. Plays were written not only by professional men of letters, but also by amateurs whose main vocations were as policy makers, courtiers, state officials, military officers, serf owners, churchmen, professors, teachers, or actors. Lacking pretensions to the status of poet, such amateur authors wrote to educate children, honor patrons, entertain family and friends, influence society, be useful to the father land, promote knowledge, and express feelings. In their works, the strains of social and political life found vivid expression.²

Because the primary purpose of this essay is to explain how Russia's educated classes understood the relationship between military service

² The assumption of amateur status by authors also could represent literary convention, as in French autobiographical and epistolary novels of the eighteenth century. The fact remains, however, that educated Russians who had no professional literary pretensions wrote plays.

and social hierarchy, the analysis is limited to original Russian theater.³ But what was “original Russian theater” in the pan-European context of eighteenth-century enlightenment culture? Across eighteenth-century Europe, literary culture was cosmopolitan and imitative, plagiarism and piracy were rampant, authorial attribution was erratic, and literary classics of the highest value—Shakespeare immediately comes to mind—were appropriated and reworked without regard for origins, ownership, or creative integrity. Copyright laws were vague or nonexistent, and those that did apply only partially protected the proprietary claims of authors and publishers. Despite the threat of censorship, the literary culture of the eighteenth century constituted a freewheeling, relatively unregulated and unstandardized public arena where high and low forms of artistic expression overlapped and intermingled.⁴ Russian translator and adapter V. I. Lukin (1737–94) described the century as a time when the most distinguished writers “steal better than others” by presenting “skillfully covered up” work as their own.⁵ In the cosmopolitan cultural milieu of eighteenth-century Europe—where authors borrowed freely from existing works, where almost any educated person could claim the calling of writer, and where romantic notions of individual genius and originality were in gestation—an idea or a story did not have to originate in Russia in order to express a genuinely Russian point of view. Whether original, imitative, or plagiarized, a play associated with a Russian author or identified as a Russian work represented the articulation of ideas, attitudes, and beliefs held by educated Russians. Therefore, this essay defines as Russian those plays presented as original Russian works or as adaptations of foreign plays

³ The essay derives from a larger effort to reconstruct the social thinking of the educated service classes based on 259 secular literary plays, written and for the most part also published from the 1740s to the 1790s, the period when original Russian theater achieved national self-consciousness and European recognition. The plays represent the work of 79 known authors whose origins range from the serf M. A. Matinskii (1750–1820) to the Empress Catherine II. In terms of literary movements, this was a time of neoclassical ascendancy, with the incorporation of sentimentalism and pre-romanticism in the last third of the century and the eventual rise of romanticism proper in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

⁴ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); idem, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996); John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997).

⁵ V. I. Lukin, “Predislovie k *Pustomele*,” *Sochineniia i perevody Vladimera Lukina*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: n. p. 1765), vol. 1, 154–55.

to Russian mores. Precisely because the plays depicted stock situations and operated within formulaic terms of morality and personal worth, it is important to examine their specifically Russian implications.

Noble Identity

When Tsar Peter I became effective ruler of Russia in 1694, he inherited a complex hierarchy of service ranks associated with multiple privileges and functions. Through various mechanisms Muscovite law and practice had linked the attainment of ranks to heredity and service. As the proprietors of estates held in hereditary and/or service tenure, Russia's landed serf-owning ranks derived their status from service to the tsar. Theoretically, their land holdings and peasants constituted grants from the ruler for services that they or their ancestors had performed. Of course, individual families also successfully augmented their estates through marriage, commercial purchases, and private gifts. But when Peter's government began to define an agglomerated noble category (*shliakhetstvo* or *dvorianstvo*), the ownership of populated estates did not automatically confer noble status. In contrast to the Muscovite rank ordering of elite families, which blurred the relationship between social status, service and heredity, Petrine legislation made clear that henceforth service would take precedence over heredity in legal definitions of nobility. Through the Table of Ranks (1722), which with minor alterations functioned until 1917, the principle of meritorious service became formally institutionalized as the primary basis for promotion and the sole basis for ennoblement. Service to the tsar, not the mere acquisition of noble lands or serfs, constituted the only legitimate source of noble status.

Early in his reign, Peter I emphasized the disciplinary aspect of the obligation to serve when he subjected all male nobles to a harsh regimen of forced education and lifelong service that began in the lowest ranks. From the start, educational opportunity and childhood enrollments in elite guards regiments lightened the burden of service by allowing nobles to rise through the ranks in ways unimaginable for ordinary soldiers. After Peter's death, service duties continued to ease, beginning with a temporary military demobilization in 1727. The formalization of preferential treatment for nobles occurred in 1731 with the founding of Russia's first Noble Cadet Corps, grad-

uates of which entered service with officer rank. In 1736 the noble term of duty was reduced to twenty-five years, followed in 1762 by complete emancipation from compulsory service. It is generally believed that emancipation was a popular measure, even though it probably weakened the moral authority and political power of its putative beneficiaries. Nor did emancipation end the close relationship between noble identity and service. For the monarchy emancipation had become desirable precisely because sufficient numbers of qualified individuals were eager to serve. Policy makers assumed that most nobles would continue to serve, which in fact they did long after business and professional careers became plentiful in the nineteenth century. Ironically, however, by making the legal rights of hereditary nobles unconditional, the emancipation raised troubling questions about the meaning of nobility. If nobles no longer served sovereign and fatherland, on what grounds could their privileges be justified? Perhaps more disturbing for nobles, especially those with limited economic resources, if they no longer were entitled to appointments in service, how could they reap its rewards and preserve a noble way of life?

Eighteenth-century theater moved beyond the question of noble privilege to the more difficult question of noble identity. Theater articulated the Petrine principle that noble identity derived from service but also suggested that the disjoining of noble status from service required new definitions of nobility. Representing the official ideal, enlightened patriarchs or *raisonneurs* consistently associated noble virtue with a commitment to serving monarch and country. A typical statement appears in *Upbringing*, a comedy by D. V. Volkov (1727–85), one of the framers of the 1762 emancipation.⁶ The wealthy

⁶ *Vospitanie* (Moscow: Imperatorskii Moskovskii Universitet, 1774). Published anonymously, *Upbringing* was performed once in Moscow in 1774. For authorial attributions I rely on published anthologies or *Svodnyi katalog russkoi knigi grazhdanskoi pečati XVIII veka 1725–1800*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Kniga, 1963–67). Information regarding performances comes from *Istoriia russkogo dramatičeskogo teatra* (hereafter IRDT) 7 vols. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977–87), vols. 1–2. D. V. Volkov, the son of an administrative clerk (*pod'iachii*) who achieved personal nobility in 1731, received his early education at home and in 1742 became a student in the College of Foreign Affairs. After achieving noble status in 1745, he served as a translator and secretary. In 1754 Volkov moved to St. Petersburg where under the patronage of Count P. I. Shuvalov he served as secretary of the Ministerial Conference. In 1761–62 he was personal secretary to Peter III. Briefly arrested after the coup that elevated Catherine II to the throne, Volkov became vice-governor in Orenburg in July 1762. In 1764 he returned to the capital as president of the College of Manufactures and from

noble Dobromysl (Good-Thinking) has lost two sons in combat and now expects his daughter Sof'ia (Wisdom) to assume responsibility for the family debt to sovereign and fatherland. Equating female service with reproduction, he wants to see her married so that his family will have descendants who can serve: "I owe to Sovereign and Fatherland a most sacred debt. The degree to which our family has been elevated and the wealth in which our house abounds, derive from Monarchical munificence for the services of my father and grandfather: consequently, I am obligated to serve Sovereign and Fatherland eternally and to be as like my father and grandfather as possible."

The service ideal so infuses Dobromysl's thinking that when Sof'ia invokes an archaic distinction, abolished by Peter I, between lands held in hereditary tenure and those granted on condition of service, he is indifferent to the patrimonial status of the family's property: the lands inherited from his father and grandfather were granted by the monarch for the loyal services of his ancestors. "I do not know," Dobromysl declares, "whether they [the lands] are called patrimonial: but I do know that a family possessing such tokens of Monarchical favor is incomparably more obligated to serve to the uttermost." For Dobromysl, it is absolutely essential that he and his descendants provide eternal evidence of the ancestral service and merits that elevated the family to its present degree and wealth. The notion of a family debt that continually must be repaid through service leads Dobromysl to a broader discussion of noble identity. He also believes that nobles are set apart by their ability to devote themselves to good deeds beyond the family context. Unlike the most well-behaved, kind, and honorable agriculturalist or poor townsman, who is burdened by labor and a large family and whose virtue rarely can function outside his own household, an educated noble possesses the means and ability to perform good deeds. As a military commander, he can be useful to sovereign and fatherland; to his subordinates, he can be a father and protector. As a state official, he can

1768 he was a privy councilor and senator. In 1776 Volkov became governor-general in Smolensk while remaining a senator and president of the College of Manufactures. In 1778 he returned to St. Petersburg as general policeman, a post he retained until 1780. *Slovar' russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka* (hereafter SRP), 2 vols. (Incomplete) (Leningrad: Nauka, 1988; St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1999), vol. 1, 169–70; *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (hereafter ES), 43 vols. in 86 pts. (St. Petersburg: F. A. Brokgauz-I. A. Efron, 1890–1907), vol. 13, 36–37.

eradicate slander and insure justice in his administrative domain. If he returns to his villages (presumably after service), all his peasants can rejoice in the presence of their father, guardian, and defender, who reduces ignorance and superstition, heals sickness, teaches improved methods of cultivation and handicrafts, eliminates idleness and drunkenness, and transforms quarrels into friendship and harmony. In Dobromysl's conception, service can be broadly defined, but nobility cannot be disjoined from service.

That the 1762 emancipation had indeed disjoined noble status from service helps to explain Dobromysl's concept of rank, which incorporates the changed circumstances into the Petrine definitions.⁷ Dobromysl distinguishes genuine nobility, which represents a moral principle, from mere noble status in the legal sense. He insists that a noble cannot be a true son of the fatherland simply on the basis of legacy and the possession of estates, which in fact belong to the fatherland. In his view, nobles are not entitled to rank, which is separate from honor. Ranks are for the court to present; therefore, nobles should seek appointment to service, and if they perform their duties, they may then hope for recognition of their zeal and talents. If the monarch awards rank to an infant, the honor derived from that rank belongs to the parent whose services the monarch has favored; consequently the child recipient is forever obligated to emulate his father in service. Because all nobles theoretically attained their status in recognition of their own or their forebears' service, nobility and the honor of rank are meaningless in the absence of an earnest devotion to service. In the aftermath of emancipation, Dobromysl's understanding of nobility and honor implies a moral debt to monarch and country.

Stage characters of Dobromysl's generation consistently share his commitment to service, and it is tempting to attribute their zealousness to the ideals of an earlier age when every noble was required to serve. Certainly in the plays depicting service, all the patriarchal figures, even those held up to ridicule, believe their sons should serve.

⁷ Peter I's Table of Ranks established an order of fourteen grades corresponding to specific ranks or offices in military, civil, and court service. Because promotion in service was based on the Table of Ranks, the attainment of a higher grade signified social advancement. Although nobles always rose more quickly than commoners and over time entered service at ever higher grades, noble status did not in and of itself guarantee the possession of rank.

The sons exhibit more varied attitudes, though the virtuous among them also embrace the service ethic of the fathers.⁸ Sof'ia's future husband, Colonel Dobromysl, in Moscow recuperating from combat wounds, seems ready to sacrifice all for sovereign and fatherland. When the older Dobromysl notes that duty does not require nobles to neglect their property during long years of service, because a person who tends to his estate is better equipped "to perform State service," the colonel counters that his home and villages are not suffering. But even if they fall into ruin, "when the Fatherland demands service, one should think only of this." Especially in wartime, the only good reason to leave service is poor health. If nobles retire simply to manage their estates, and many do this, it follows that the more generously a family is endowed with properties, the greater right they have not to serve and not to be useful. This would mean "that Monarchical favor brings harm to Sovereigns," and rulers would find themselves contradicting the principle of generosity: the longer their true servitors served, the less they would reward them. Echoing the older Dobromysl, the colonel believes that the purpose of wealth is to possess the means to serve the fatherland. He also is uncomfortable with the practice of granting promotions at retirement: because his ancestors could not have obtained his present rank so quickly, he wishes to achieve higher rank through service, not retirement. The character of Colonel Dobromysl personifies the close relationship between virtue and the desire to serve, which is central to the older Dobromysl's thinking.

In Colonel Zasluzhenov (Meritorious), the comedy *Mitrofanushka in Retirement* by G. N. Gorodchaninov (1772–1852), introduces another zealous young officer.⁹ Zasluzhenov sincerely believes that a man

⁸ The generational differences are metaphorical. There is no historical evidence that nobles of a particular generation were more or less likely to evade service. If anything, the most extensive evidence of resistance to service comes from the reign of Peter I, when new and harsher obligations were imposed.

⁹ *Mitrofanushka v otstavke. Komediiia v piati deistviiakh. Rossiiskoe sochinenie G. G.* (Moscow: Universitetskaia Tipografia, 1800). Published pseudonymously, *Mitrofanushka in Retirement* was performed once in Moscow in 1801 and has been described as an imitation of D. I. Fonvizin's *The Minor*. G. N. Gorodchaninov was born into a merchant family and received his education at the Nizhnii Novgorod seminary and Moscow University. In 1799 he began service at the postal department in St. Petersburg, became a junior assistant of Russian literature at Kazan University in 1806, served as librarian at the Medical Surgical Academy in Moscow from 1808, and finally returned to Kazan as professor of Russian literature in 1810. ES, vol. 17,

who devotes his youth to "useful labors" will be rewarded with a quiet and prosperous old age. Love for the fatherland, honor, and his own family obligate a noble to serve. In fact, Zasluzhenov declares, "we all are servants." Zasluzhenov's hostess, Mrs. Domosedova (Stay-at-Home), objects that a noble cannot be a servant; servants are household serfs, and a person who is born noble is born a master. While she equates nobility with noble birth, the colonel draws a clear distinction between mere nobles, who are born, and noble souls who do good irrespective of personal interests. Because "all [people] are obligated to serve each other," assistance rendered to another represents nothing more than the fulfillment of a human duty. Zasluzhenov's idea of service as a human duty takes him beyond the particularist question of legal nobility to the universalist concept of noble souls. Thus, he concludes, the soul of a servant can be more noble than the soul of a master: "in the eyes of a right-thinking person, a kind servant is incomparably preferable to a dishonorable Lord."

Alongside the zealous servicemen and enlightened patriarchs who internalize the Petrine service ethic, eighteenth-century theater portrayed another type of young noble who also possesses education and rank yet openly disdains service. In *Upbringing*, the ignorant Francophile Makhalov articulates a view of nobility and honor that separates these concepts from the notion of a moral debt to monarch and country. Believing he is entitled to recognition, Makhalov is willing to serve only if the court grants him a rank that a person of his "nature and education can accept with decorum." In his view, nobles should serve out of honor and not for reward, which is to say nobles possess honor by definition, as opposed to honor being the just reward for service. Furthermore, Makhalov insists, he already served and brought honor to the fatherland by cutting such a fine figure in France. It would be laughable, in his eyes, if he served under a commander who had never seen Paris. For young Makhalov genuine nobility is not a matter of service, because honor and social merit derive from nature (that is, birth) and education (that is, seeing Paris).

Mitrofanushka in Retirement depicts an equally unworthy officer who retires from service the moment war is declared. Colonel Zasluzhenov

320–21; *Russkie pisateli 1800–1917: biograficheskii slovar'*, 4 vols. (incomplete) (Moscow: Nauchnoe Izdatel'stvo "Bol'shaia Rossiiskaia Entsiklo-pediia," 1992–9), vol. 1, 641–42.

recognizes that while Mitrofanushka, the son of Mrs. Domosedova, is both a noble and a captain, he also is "an unheard of ass, a boor, who has no respect for his parents, without education, without understanding of honor and decency; a scoundrel, who is completely ignorant of noble feelings; dissolute, self-righteous, capable of the most vile deeds; a parasite who does not want to serve the fatherland." Zasluzhenov is forced to question whether a noble with the personal qualities of Mitrofanushka can be useful to the fatherland. That Mitrofanushka has attained the rank of captain Zasluzhenov decries as "a blow for a person with merit" and "a stain for noble souls." The obvious contradiction between the idea of nobility and the everyday behavior of Mitrofanushka threatens to undermine the moral terms of noble identity. If the "important title of noble" is a reward for service, and service is an obligation of nobility, what becomes of the noble whose individual vices render him incapable of useful service? The solution to this conundrum, indicated by Zasluzhenov, is to reorient nobility from the particularist social realm of noble status to the universalist moral realm of noble souls.

A further challenge to Zasluzhenov's concept of the relationship between nobility and service arises in the person of retired Ensign Khrabrilkin (Courageous), a landless noble living on the Domosedov estate. Burdened by poverty and the loss of a leg in battle, Khrabrilkin behaves in a soldierly manner out of nostalgia for military life. Determined to maintain the honor of officer rank, and proud of his military past, which understandably he prefers to his present life, Khrabrilkin condemns Mitrofanushka's decision to leave service. Yet even as he defends the dignity of servicemen, Khrabrilkin presents a pathetic figure. He embodies the ideal combination of noble identity and devotion to service, but is physically disabled and bereft of material security. Ordered to eat with the servants when esteemed guests visit, his retirement is a far cry from Zasluzhenov's image of the quiet prosperity that awaits the noble who spends his youth performing "useful labors." In contrast to Mitrofanushka, who refuses to accept service as a moral obligation, Khrabrilkin embraces the obligation to serve, yet his only reward is to suffer neglect and humiliation. Concrete experience clearly contradicts the service principle.

The final threat to Zasluzhenov's understanding of service is the relationship between the enlightened patriarch Brigadier Zdravomyslov (Sensible) and a noble friend raised with him as a brother. The young men began military service together in the same regiment;

however, the friend turned out to be a good politician and a poor officer. After leaving the military, he obtained a position at court and, from this exalted position, received Zdravomyslov with preference. Expecting to benefit from the patronage of his friend, Zdravomyslov spent years waiting for promised—yet ultimately unfulfilled—appointments. Disillusioned by the realities of service, Zdravomyslov nevertheless retains the belief that all nobles are obligated to serve. At the same time, by questioning the moral worth of courtiers, he also questions the imagined relationship between service and virtue. Like Zasluzhenov, he is compelled to recognize that while Mitrofanushka's decision to retire is disgraceful, the young noble would be of little use in service. Nor, he notes, is it any longer fashionable to disdain an officer who does not want to sacrifice his life for the fatherland. The services that bring institutional rewards are not necessarily equivalent to true merit. Resourceful seekers who are ready to sacrifice tranquility, health, life, and honor in order to please a grandee, who also may lack merit, obtain rewards that a man with true merit dares not hope to receive. In Zdravomyslov, the combination of disappointment in service with belief in the noble obligation to serve places the obligation on a higher moral plane. Service is a duty even though the distribution of benefits is unpredictable and the unworthy often receive promotions.

Clearly, the obligation to serve represented a fundamental yet inherently ambiguous source of noble identity. Plays written after the 1762 emancipation of nobles from obligatory service depicted service as a moral obligation that was indicative of nobility, enlightenment, and virtue. Given that nobles such as young Makhalov and Mitrofanushka were indifferent or even hostile toward service, a distinction arose between true nobility or nobleness and mere noble status in the legal or hereditary sense. Once virtue, enlightenment, and the desire to serve became crucial markers of nobility, the role of birth receded, and lowly servants potentially could possess the attributes of nobility. Once an association existed between noble identity and a moral obligation to serve, the social reality of noble status and the moral reality of nobility no longer necessarily coincided. As the worthy Colonel Zasluzhenov describes it, all people, including nobles, are servants. By making hereditary noble privileges unconditional, the emancipation encouraged a moral definition of nobility that transcended concrete legal distinctions. The utilitarian language of the Petrine common good remained, but instead of legitimizing

coercive measures, usefulness became a moral obligation for all properly educated nobles. Because the legal possession of noble status no longer required service, the social obligation to serve became a personal moral obligation that fostered the internalization of service values and focused attention on the individual's relationship to civic society.

Combat

A definition of nobility based on individual moral virtue accorded well with the principles of heroism and honor that were so central to the eighteenth-century understanding of combat. For Russian servicemen the eighteenth century was a time of almost continual warfare. The Great Northern War against Sweden dragged on for more than twenty years (1700–21), stretched from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, and included operations against Ukraine and Turkey. Military actions against Persia persisted for a decade (1722–32). During the 1730s, Russian troops fought the War of Polish Succession (1733–35), the Turkish War (1736–39), and four Crimean campaigns (1735–38). Following the Swedish War of 1741–43, the Russian army enjoyed a brief respite, until imperial troops were sent deep into Prussia during the Seven Years War (1757–62).¹⁰ The reign of Catherine II brought aggressive diplomacy and unprecedented military fortune: the First Polish War (1768–72); the First Turkish War (1768–74), which began the military subjugation of the Caucasus; the annexation of Crimea (1783); the Second Turkish War (1787–91); the Swedish War (1788–90); and finally, the Second Polish (Insurrectionary) War (1794–95). In 1799 the wars against revolutionary France led to Russian campaigns in Holland, Italy, and Switzerland—campaigns that marked the beginning of one of the most dramatic periods in the history of European warfare.¹¹ During the more than 150 years of territorial expansion and military engagement that culminated in the Crimean War (1853–56) and the era of the Great Reforms, broad sectors of the Russian educated public experienced warfare firsthand. Repeatedly, this military experience provided the inspiration for original literary creations. Though hardly deserving to be

¹⁰ The dates of Russian involvement are given here.

¹¹ On Russia's eighteenth-century wars, see A. A. Kersnovskii, *Istoriia russkoi armii v 4 tomakh. Tom I: Ot Narvy do Parizha 1700–1814*, reprint (Moscow: Golos, 1992).

included in the corpus of literary classics, eighteenth-century theatrical depictions of mobilization, combat, and the consequences of war confirmed both the visibility of military servicemen in civilian society and the presence of a military frame of mind that envisioned social relationships in terms of individual performance. Like the moral virtue of true nobility, the qualities of heroism in battle and zealousness in service accrued to individuals rather than social groups.

Theatrical portrayals of war assumed that while conscription and mobilization caused painful social dislocation, soldiers and officers not only adapted to military life but also embraced its principles of courage, heroism, and glory. Two dramas by the officer-playwright P. S. Potemkin (1743–96) expressed a decidedly heroic view of military service, yet also communicated the bloody horror of combat. *Russians in the Archipelago* recounts the historic destruction of the Turkish fleet at Chesme in 1770.¹² Although lavishly celebrated at the time, Russian victories in the Archipelago under A. G. Orlov proved less significant than those achieved on land under P. A. Rumiantsev and V. M. Dolgorukov. Anticipated uprisings of Greeks and Balkan Slavs failed to materialize, and the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainardzhi (1774) returned the islands of the Archipelago to Turkish rule.¹³ *Russians in the Archipelago* is both a dramatization of these historic events and a political panegyric celebrating imperial military successes, the heroism and sacrifices of Russian troops, the wisdom of the empress, and the zeal of Aleksei and Fedor Orlov.¹⁴

¹² P. S. Potemkin, *Rossy v Arkhipelage. Drama in Rossiiskii featr, ili polnoe sobranie vsekh Rossiiskikh teatral'nykh sochinenii* (hereafter RF), 43 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1786–94), vol. 8, 33–96. First published in 1772, *Russians in the Archipelago* may have been performed in St. Petersburg that same year. Count P. S. Potemkin, a relative of Prince G. A. Potemkin, probably studied at Moscow University before beginning military service in the Semenovskii Regiment in 1756. He served in the Active Army during the First Turkish War (1769–74), reaching the rank of captain in 1772 and brigadier in 1774. Potemkin's role in the suppression and investigation of the Pugachev uprising brought promotion to lieutenant general in 1782 and appointment as commander of the two Caucasian corps. In 1784 Potemkin became governor-general of Saratov province and the Caucasus; he returned to active military service in 1787 during the Second Turkish War and distinguished himself at the storming of Izmail in 1790. In 1794 Potemkin fought with Suvorov against the Poles which brought him the rank of *general en chef* and the title of count. SRP, vol. 2, 484–86; ES, vol. 48, 730.

¹³ Kersnovskii, *Istoriia russkoi armii*, vol. 1, 125–37; I. A. Zaichkin and I. N. Pochkaev, *Ekaterininskie orly* (Moscow: Mysl', 1996), 108–21, 168–80.

¹⁴ A. G. Orlov (1737–1808) commanded the Russian naval expedition in the

Throughout the drama, Potemkin glorifies Russian civilization by juxtaposing two themes: the moral and military superiority of Russians over Turks, Greeks, and foreigners; and the heroism of Russian fighters, who despite their generosity and deep-felt horror of bloodshed, always are ready to die for the good of the fatherland and society. In Potemkin's rendition of military glory, Russians represent the only real heroes. Just before the decisive battle, Rear-Admiral Elphinstone concludes that victory is impossible given Turkish numerical superiority. Aleksei Orlov counters that numbers are irrelevant; Russian bravery will insure success. As the Orlovs, Prince Iurii Dolgorukov, and Admiral Spiridov declare their willingness to spill blood and die for the glory of society, the Scot Elphinstone and the Englishman Rear-Admiral Greig clearly are moved by the honor and zeal of the Russians.¹⁵ Unlike the barbaric Turks, the disorderly Greeks, and the cautious Scot, Russian warriors are dedicated to the pursuit of glory. Even as Aleksei Orlov grieves over the mistaken news that his brother has perished, he preserves the belief that love of the fatherland demands sacrifice. Even as he laments his own limited military accomplishments, Orlov maintains that victory brings glory to monarch, fatherland, society, and Russians. The heroic warfare of *Russians in the Archipelago* assumes identification with historical arenas beyond the immediate spheres of family and personal advancement. Instead of a profitable marriage, a secure social position, or a recognized service rank, the Russians in the Archipelago strive for glory, a quality that accrues less to the individual than to Russia.

A more broadly conceived idea of glory informs Potemkin's lyric drama in verse about the Second Turkish War, *Zel'mira and Smelon, or The Capture of Izmail*.¹⁶ One of the legendary events of Russian

Archipelago. F. G. Orlov (1741–96) served in the Mediterranean and at Chesme under Admiral G. A. Spiridov (1713–90), also a character in the drama, and repeatedly distinguished himself during the First Turkish War. ES, vol. 43, 169–70; vol. 61, 223.

¹⁵ Historical figures who served at Chesme and appear as characters in the drama include Prince Iu. V. Dolgorukov (1740–1830); Captain Samuel Greig (1736–88), who was promoted to rear-admiral soon after Chesme and by 1782 became a full admiral in the Russian navy; and Rear-Admiral John Elphinstone, who left Russian service in 1771. ES, vol. 18, 606; vol. 20, 924; vol. 80, 690; Anthony Cross, *By the Banks of the Neva: Chapters from the Lives and Careers of the British in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 183–204.

¹⁶ *Zel'mira i Smelon, ili Vziatie Izmaila. Liricheskaia drama* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Korpusa Chuzhestrannykh Edinoverstov, 1795). Published anonymously, the drama is not listed in IRDT.

military history, the storming of Izmail, took place on December 11, 1790 under the command of A. V. Suvorov. Potemkin himself served with distinction at Izmail, and he recounts the experience through the eyes of two lovers torn apart by the war. Zel'mira is the daughter of Mukhafiz Osman, the commander of the Turkish forces; her beloved Smelon (Bold), though a mere colonel by rank, commands the Russian troops that are set to attack unless the Turks surrender Izmail.¹⁷ In the recent past, when Smelon had been a wounded prisoner in the home of Osman, he and Zel'mira had fallen in love. Now duty and honor force the lovers to sacrifice personal feelings for the higher good of the fatherland. Zel'mira is prepared to leave fatherland, parent, and home in order to follow her beloved, yet when Smelon urges her to persuade Osman to relinquish the city, she vehemently refuses. To use her father's love to betray duty, respect, and blood would be an evil act. Smelon possesses an equally strong sense of duty. During his imprisonment Osman had treated him like a son, and although the Turkish refusal to capitulate now impels him to view Osman as an enemy, he cannot be unfaithful to his benefactor by carrying off his daughter. Smelon's personal duty to Osman supersedes his love for Zel'mira. Osman is likewise pained by the inevitability of battle. As he explains to Smelon, "We cannot be personal enemies, but for the fatherland we must forget the bond of friendship. From the hour that we were born into this world we became subjects of the Tsars and sons of society."¹⁸ Personal honor and the common good demand the subordination of friendship to this transcendent identity.

Faced with destruction, Zel'mira, Smelon, and Osman all display an unequivocal understanding of where duty lies. In word and deed, they uniformly embrace the belief that personal happiness must be sacrificed to the principle of duty. By contrast, the lovers portrayed in *Soldier's Happiness*, the 1779 adaptation to Russian mores of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm, oder Das Soldatenglück* (1767), draw attention to the unheroic consequences of war, particularly its wounded bodies and broken spirits.¹⁹ Evgeniia's betrothed, Major

¹⁷ Smelon's modest rank may represent an allusion to Suvorov's belief that he was not sufficiently rewarded for his military achievements. Oleg Mikhailov, *Suvorov* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1980), 281-83.

¹⁸ Although the Ottoman commander Osman expresses political loyalty in Russian terms, the meaning conveyed clearly is not limited to the tsarist polity.

¹⁹ *Soldatskoe shchast'e. Komediiia v piati deistviiakh G. Lessinga. Prelozhit s nemetskogo na*

Dobroserd (Good-Hearted), has returned from war dispirited, dishonored, and mutilated. He has lost the use of his right arm, faces charges of corruption, refuses financial assistance from trusted friends, and regards himself as unworthy of the wealthy and stylish Evgeniia. Toward the end of the comedy, Dobroserd receives an imperial ukase clearing him of all suspicion and inviting him to return to service; however, his response to the monarch's appeal for "Officers with your merits" is suggestively ambiguous. With his honor restored, Dobroserd initially declares his intention to serve but soon reveals a desire to live with Evgeniia in a remote, quiet corner of the country. More important than a soldier's glory and his sovereign's personal plea is Dobroserd's wish to serve Evgeniia.

Dobroserd's understanding of honor also seems detached from military service. Sergeant-Major Tverdov (Steadfast) repeatedly tries to help Dobroserd, his former commander, who just as stubbornly insists that it would be improper to accept financial assistance. Such pridefulness offends Tverdov, who shared precious water with Dobroserd while on campaign and twice saved his life in combat. Now, in another time of urgent need, Dobroserd refuses to take money, which is no more precious than the water he drank on campaign. The equality of men in arms evaporates in civilian society where Dobroserd is unwilling to receive charity from a social inferior. Dobroserd expresses even greater alienation from military life when Tverdov reveals his intention to return to service. The major questions Tverdov's motivation: if his decision to serve reflects a penchant for the bestial, wandering life—a desire to shed blood, make other people unhappy, and then search for profit in their ruined shacks—he is a brigand, not a warrior. The only worthy reason to serve is to defend the fatherland. Evgeniia's attitude toward service is similarly ambivalent. She does not believe the investigation dishonors Dobroserd. Rather, she accepts that the monarch cannot recognize all meritorious contributions, and she does not allow Dobroserd to destroy the ukase inviting him to serve. Yet she also acknowledges a private sphere of romantic dreams that is distinct from the official world of service. Although preservation of the sovereign's ukase implies that Evgeniia and Dobroserd remain committed to the idea of service,

Rossiiskie nrayy I. Z. (Moscow: Tipografiia Imperatorskogo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1779). *Soldier's Happiness* was performed four times in Moscow in 1779–90.

they also seem poised to subordinate this transcendent duty to the immediate satisfactions of love.

The heroic view of war appeared strikingly muted in the story of Evgeniia and Dobroserd. Clearly, combat produced ambivalent responses in the hearts and minds of servicemen. This is evident from *Campaign against Sweden*, a comedy with chorus and ballet by I. A. Kokoshkin (1765–1835), that depicts honorable and dishonorable reactions to the call to arms.²⁰ Both the Count and his servant are frantic over how to break the news of war to their lovers. The servant has no choice but to accompany his master; however, he clearly expresses indifference to duty and honor: “better to live a lifetime in leanness than die once in glory.” The officer Skorodum (Fast-Thinking) does not question the concept of glory but is distraught over his inability to carry out his wedding plans: instead of acquiring 2,000 souls through marriage, he must go on campaign.²¹ A quite different response comes from an adulterous wife eager to send her husband off to war so that she can freely enjoy her lover. Her amorous schemes are rightfully thwarted when her husband, convinced she is dying of grief, gives up his regimental place to the officer Modest, who is keen to fight but has been unable to obtain an assignment. Worse still, the lover receives orders to replace Mr. Trusov (Coward), who has bribed a doctor to certify that he is too sick to serve. The son of Cheston (Honest) grudgingly accepts the obligation to serve while feigning concern about his father’s health. In reality, he is sorry to leave the social and cultural amenities of the capital. Alongside the unworthy characters who respond to war based on personal interest, *Campaign against Sweden* also portrays

²⁰ *Pokhod pod Shveda. Komediiia v trekh deistviiakh s khorami i baletom* (St. Petersburg: n. p. 1790). The comedy was performed once in St. Petersburg in 1790, though according to ES, it played frequently in Catherine II’s Hermitage Theater. Identified as the first cousin of F. F. Kokoshkin (1773–1838)—a prominent actor, Moscow theater director, and writer—I. A. Kokoshkin was from a noble family and in 1816 became a member of the Free Society of Lovers of Russian Literature. ES, vol. 30, 630–31; SRP, vol. 2, 103–04. Following the outbreak of war between Russia and Turkey in 1787, Sweden unsuccessfully attempted to reassert its position in the Baltic. Land and naval operations began in the summer of 1788 and ended in the summer of 1790 with the Treaty of Verelä. Kersnovskii, *Istoriia russkoi armii*, vol. 1, 156–58.

²¹ Population censuses introduced in the reign of Peter I to determine liability for conscription and the capitation counted numbers of male serfs, referred to as souls; consequently, the number of souls also became the primary measurement of noble wealth.

virtuous characters who embrace the opportunity for sacrifice: a wife who insists on accompanying her husband while he defends the fatherland, two officers who are overjoyed at the prospect of testing the Russian sword and proving the worthiness of Russian fighters, and the young Modest, who is encouraged by his father to prove himself in battle and proudly prepares to join his comrades. Despite the fundamental association of virtue with a desire to serve, the news of war elicits complex emotions that tarnish the glory of the military calling.

Because Russia's educated classes were painfully aware of the heavy social cost exacted by military service, stories of combat evoked bitter sorrow and suffering. At the same time, countervailing images of gaiety, fearlessness, and spirited anticipation conveyed an atmosphere of fellowship and cooperation. Juxtaposed to a sense of loss was a sense of belonging. Adding to the ambiguity was the realization that not every noble who questioned the obligation to serve or articulated an unheroic view of war necessarily deserved condemnation. A. P. Sumarokov's tragic hero Khorev speaks openly against the barbarism of war, where murder and robbery are called heroism, while V. K. Trediakovskii's King Lycomedes condemns war's evil, inhumanity, and violence.²² In Ia. I. Blagodarov's comedy *Maternal Love*, a mother who seeks glory and welcomes war as an opportunity for her son to distinguish himself becomes hysterical once he actually goes off to battle.²³ Unable to see the glory, a broad range of sympathetic characters answers the call to arms with distress and uncertainty.

²² A. P. Sumarokov, *Khorev. Tragediia* in *Dramaticheskie sochineniia*, ed. Iu. V. Stennik (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1990), 36–82 (act 2, scene 2). After the initial publication of *Khorev* in St. Petersburg in 1747, Sumarokov radically reworked the tragedy and republished it in 1768. *Khorev* was performed seven times in St. Petersburg in 1750–58 and 14 times in Moscow in 1760–97. A single revival performance occurred in St. Petersburg in 1811. In V. K. Trediakovskii's (1703–69) tragedy *Deidamia* (1750), King Lycomedes of Scyros condemns war in response to Odysseus (called Ulysses by Trediakovskii), who describes the Greek attack on Troy as “just revenge.” Vasilii Trediakovskii, *Deidamiia. Tragediia* in RF, vol. 3, 177–314 (act 3, scene 5).

²³ Ia. I. Blagodarov, *Materniiaia liubov'. Komediia v odnom deistvii* in RF, 29: 133–88. First published in Moscow in 1786, *Maternal Love* does not appear in IRDT. Ia. I. Blagodarov (1764–1833) originated from the Polish nobility and graduated from Moscow University in 1788. He reached the rank of state councilor in service where he remained until his death. Blagodarov's service assignments included translator and proof-reader at the university press, land-surveyor in Tambov province, bur-sar in Mozhaisk, and postmaster in V'iazma and Pereiaslavl'. Showing the influence of masonry, Blagodarov's literary activities began as a student and continued until 1803. His publications included translations from French and German as well as

Conclusion

By allowing laudable nobles to express ambivalence about war and by elevating the principles of courage, heroism, and glory, which were not socially specific, theatrical images of combat raised cognitive challenges to established hierarchies of status and authority. Descriptions of military performance emphasized the natural human equality of all servicemen, regardless of rank, who devoted themselves to the fulfillment of duty. Alongside meritorious servicemen, there were ignorant young nobles who possessed undeserved rank, as well as arbitrary officers who readily abused their power. Yet whether or not command authority was deserved, based on moral virtue and professional competence, discipline remained crucial to victory and survival. As Modest's father explains, "before you can be victorious over the enemy, you must learn to master yourself." Precisely because war required extraordinary self-mastery, command authority, even though it tended to mirror social hierarchy, did not depend on social hierarchy for effectiveness. At moments of grave danger social differences could be transcended without weakening military discipline. Formal command structures receded, and hierarchies of strength, steadfastness, and courage emerged. The enlightenment virtue of self-mastery, which combined principles of Christianity and civic humanism, belonged to the individual serviceman. Nor were heroism and glory merely jingoistic concepts designed to gloss over the injustices of war. To the contrary, the belief in heroism and the pursuit of glory produced a state of mind that made it psychologically possible for soldiers to confront war and its atrocities by moving beyond immediate relationships to identification with the common good. Through this externalized identification, servicemen overcame emotional ambivalence and committed themselves to the moral principle of service.

Although identification with the common good encouraged nobles to embrace the moral principle of service, the association of service with moral virtue appeared uncertain. In hierarchical terms, ambiguity arose because the rewards of service did not necessarily go to persons of merit. There was a contradiction between the idea of

original works. During the period he served in the Tambov land-surveying office (1791–1801), Blagodarov also worked as a proof-reader for the publishing firm of I. G. Rakhmaninov. SRP, vol. 1, 92–94.

service and the reality of organized institutional life, where intrigue and deception frequently were decisive. A story recounted by Starodum (Old-Thinking) in D. I. Fonvizin's *The Minor* illustrates the potential for conflict.²⁴ Starodum had been seriously wounded in combat, received no promotion, and decided to retire from service after a close friend who had avoided going to war obtained a higher rank. In old age he regrets the decision, having learned that a man of honor aspires to deeds not ranks, that ranks often are solicited whereas true esteem is earned, and that it is better to be overlooked without blame than to be rewarded, as was his friend, without merit. To maintain the association between service and virtue, the moral worth of the serviceman inevitably became disjoined from social origin, legal rights, and formal rank. Both institutional life and war required the temporary suspension of everyday morality in favor of a larger social stage where the rules of behavior were different and the rewards of virtue less immediate. To overcome the conflict between personal merit and social organization on a large scale, the serviceman assumed a moral relationship to society and polity—a relationship that, by emphasizing individual virtue rather than the righting of social wrongs, allowed him to subordinate justifiable expectations to broader needs.

²⁴ D. I. Fonvizin, *Nedorosl'. Komediiia v piati deistviiakh* in *Ot russkogo klassitsizma k realizmu: D. I. Fonvizin, A. S. Griboedov*, ed. E. Rogachevskaia (Moscow: Shkola-Press, 1995), 82–148. Published anonymously in 1783, *The Minor* was performed frequently in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: in St. Petersburg there were 23 performances in 1782–1800 and 50 in 1802–25; in Moscow there were 27 performances in 1783–1800 and 26 in 1802–24.