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**THE FIRST LITERARY
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KRYLOV AND OTHERS**

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THE FIRST LITERARY JUBILEE IN RUSSIA: KRYLOV AND OTHERS²

The study is focused on an important stage in the process of shaping and functioning of Ivan Andreevich Krylov's public image. A unique behavioral strategy created by the fabulist in the 1800s synthesized literary pattern with the everyday life. It not only provided Krylov with the most favorable life conditions during three decades (from 1812 till 1844, the year of his death). In virtue of a number of circumstances concerning the formation of the official ideology of the reign of Nicolas I, the named strategy, set upon Krylov's fables, his *opus magnum*, resulted in a singular phenomenon of Krylov's appropriation by the State (*ogosudarstvlenie*). The paper seeks to show how the idea of celebrating the 50th anniversary of Krylov's literary activity on February 2nd, 1838, was born and performed in the described context. The light is also shed on the connection between the construct of *Grandfather Krylov* ("dedushka Krylov") and further life of the fabulist and his works.

Keywords: Ivan Krylov; Russian literature; social status of the writer; literary reputation; appropriation by the State; commemoration

JEL Classification: Z.

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Introduction

By mid-1820s, Ivan Andreevich Krylov had already been seen as one of the central figures of Russia's modern national culture, given, for instance, numerous translations of his fables into French, English, and other European languages, accompanied by his biographies, as well as circulation of his portraits sold separately from editions of his works.

Meanwhile, during the first years of Nicolas I's reign a complex of values matured which later was taken as the basis of an official conservative ideology. Pragmatics of the national character having become a "crystallizing point" of this forming ideology, Krylov's fables, already recognized as the most perfect expression of *narodnost* in art, turned out to be a true catch. "I. A. Krylov's style <...> is the Russian sense, Russian popular language ennobled by philosophy and politeness of high society. His fables represent a gallery of Russian manners and customs..." [Bulgarin 1824: 62-63]. It is of substantial importance that all qualities of "the Russian sense" *à la* Krylov – "aptitude, power of observation, plain-hearted ruse, gaiety, and thoughtfulness, not speculative, not abstract, but practical and earthly" [Viazemsky 1845: 20] – are absolutely non-political by nature.

All these factors contributed to using Krylov's public and literary image as a perfect material for appropriating by the State (*ogosudarstvlenie*). Krylov's concept of the Russian national character, emerged in 1810s, at the turn of two further decades was powerfully requested by the process of ideological construction.

As a result, during the first half of 1830s, a series of symbolic acts transformed Krylov in a living classic author. Thus, in public opinion, he occupied an outstanding position, unprecedented in Russian culture. In 1830, Samuil Galberg executed, in several copies, his sculpture portrait made as a classic herm, and the Emperor gave one of them to his 13-year old son, the Heir to the throne, as a New Year 1831 gift. Later in 1830, Krylov is granted with the rank of the State Counselor (*statskij sovetnik*) – exceptionally (he had not graduated from a University), given his literary works, "well-known not only in Russia, but also abroad" [Grot 1869: 43]. In Spring 1834, Alexei Nikolaevich Olenin, Director of the Imperial Public Library, submits to the Minister of Public Education a demand, according to which "the famous Russian fabulist" is in a pressing need of having "an equipage requested by his age, height and obesity" [Olenin 1834: Fol.36 verso]. The Emperor consented to pay Krylov additional 3,000 rubles per year as a "recovery of transportation expenses" from the funds of the State Treasury. As a matter of fact, the decision to provide Krylov with the second salary paid for "remarkable services rendered to the national literature" meant that the definition "the famous Russian fabulist" became a quasi-official status.

The State pronounced attention to Krylov's material security was an obvious argument of his transformation in an officially recognized national property. The presented paper seeks to demonstrate how this status was used, completed and polished during the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the fabulist's literary career in February 1838.

Emerging of jubilee tradition in Russia

In mid-1830s, the European tradition of corporate jubilees – 50th anniversaries of a professional activity – started functioning in Russia. Modest Korf, a high-ranking official and attentive spectator of the social life, wrote in his diary: “Since some time, a mode is being introduced here, having existed for a long time in Germany and, in general, abroad, to commemorate 50-year jubilees of honored, well-known persons. The first example, I presume, of *public* commemoration of such kind, which was made *official* by participation of the Emperor (by his favors, surely, not in person), was Prof. Zagorsky jubilee <...> Afterwards, Dr Ruehl’s jubilee was commemorated in the same way” [Korf 2010: 250; italics by the author].

Indeed, it was medical society, closely linked to the European corporate culture and its traditions that started commemorating jubilees. On 2 November 1836, the ceremony of honoring an outstanding anatomist and physiologist, Petr Aleksandrovich Zagorsky, member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences and the Russian Academy, was held in St. Petersburg, in the Hall of Noble Assembly (Dvorianskoe Sobranie) located in Engelhardt mansion [Piatidesiatiletie 1838]. It is attended by Zagorsky’s numerous colleagues and pupils, as well as by several members of both Academies, including Krylov and some writers which soon will take part in his own jubilee – Nestor Vasilievich Kukolnik, Mikhail Evstafievich Lobanov, Petr Alexandrovich Pletnev, etc. Later, on 16 July 1837, in the hall of the Establishment of Artificial Mineral Waters in Novaya Derevnia, St. Petersburg’s fashionable *faubourg*, the jubilee of Ivan Fedorovich (Johann Georg von) Ruehl, the Court doctor, took place.

Both celebrations were thoroughly prepared by special *committees* made of notorious colleagues. Funds were being collected well in advance³ which allowed not only for giving a gala dinner and presenting a valuable gift to the hero of the day, but also commanding a commemorative medal in his honor. Celebrations had a specific ritual. In the morning, representatives of the *Committee* visited the hero of the day at his home, offered him congratulations and invited him to the banquet. In some hours, the celebration was continued by the gala dinner accompanied by music, speeches, toasts, and compulsory performing of the national anthem. Besides, gifts were handed and information concerning the decorations accorded to the hero of the day was read. The dinner was concluded with the toast for prosperity of a corresponding professional corporation.

³ For instance, subscription organized for Zagorsky’s jubilee was supported by 1190 persons, mainly medic men, amongst which those who practiced outside of metropolitan areas [Piatidesiatiletie 1838].

Tendency to wider press exposure of such events is interesting. The anniversary of “enlightened and useful” service of Zagorsky was mentioned only by a specialized medical weekly *Friend of Health* (“Drug zdravija” – 1836. N42. P. 336), while the description of Ruehl’s jubilee was, earlier than by *Friend of Health* (1837. N31. P. 240), published by the most popular newspaper of the time *The Northern Bee* (“Severnaja pchela” – 1837. July 27. N166. P. 663-664).

Organization of Krylov’s jubilee

It would be logically to expect that the 50th anniversary of Krylov’s activity in literature would be commemorated according to the same pattern. The Russian Academy, which elected Krylov its member in 1811, awarded him the Big Golden Medal in 1823, and unanimously decided to command, at its own cost, the fabulist’s portrait in order to “put it in the Assembly Hall” [Babintsev 1958: 69], might act as a main organizer. However, the Russian Academy had never commemorated jubilees of its members. For the moment, there were no active literary societies in St. Petersburg. The English Club (Anglijskij klub) of the capital⁴ had a tradition of big solemn dinners, annual as well as marking either its own anniversaries or the State celebrations, but there was no habit to honor its individual members.

The idea to commemorate Krylov’s jubilee emerged early in November 1837. We may suppose that a fresh impression of Ruehl’s celebration played an important part in its appearing, and also the publication of the first Russian biography of Krylov [Zhivopisnoe 1837: 22-24]. His early tragedy *Philomel* (“Filomela”)⁵ was taken as a starting point while calculating the term of his literary activity. M. E. Lobanov, having found this rarest piece in the Imperial Public Library, dated it by 1786 [KVS 1982: 54-55] – so it instantly became clear that the 50th anniversary of Krylov’s entering the literature had already been missed. Nevertheless, intention to celebrate the jubilee was so powerful that St. Petersburg literary sphere decided to link the jubilee at least to forthcoming Krylov’s birthday. This strained interpretation is obvious in the official name of the celebration: “On his birthday and *happened* 50th anniversary of his literary activity” [italics is mine. – *E.L.*]. The year of 1838 chosen as Krylov’s 70th birthday also was highly conventional [Babintsev 1959: 183-186], as the fabulist’s remarks on his own biography always were unreliable. It would be also useful to point out that, during the discussed period, there was no habit to celebrate so-called milestone anniversaries. Few jubilees of private persons celebrated

⁴ Krylov was its member since 1817.

⁵ Nowadays, it is argued that Krylov’s first publication is the fable *Happy Gambler* (“Schastlivyj igrok”) in *Morning Hours* (“Utrennie chasy”) magazine in April 1788.

before Krylov's one and many celebrated after it were connected exclusively with professional activity.

It seems that Krylov's jubilee has been initially thought as a purely corporate celebration amongst writers, similar to medical anniversaries. According to Nikolay Ivanovich Grech, the idea launched on one of regular Wednesday meetings at Kukolnik's, was enthusiastically supported by the company. The *Committee* was instantly formed (*in absentia* of some of its supposed members) including A. N. Olenin, Director of the Imperial Public Library, composer Count Mikhail Yurievitch Vielgorsky, famous painter Karl Pavlovich Bryullov, writer and official of the Ministry of Public Education Vilgelm Ivanovich Karlhof, Kukolnik, and Grech himself who prepared a draft of the program of celebration. Grech also tells that the initiative was immediately presented to Aleksandr Khristoforovich Benkendorf, chief of the Third Department of the Imperial Chancellery [Grech 1930: 625]. Elizaveta Alekseevna Karlhof, the wife of one of the *Committee* members, adds to this an important statement: Sergey Semenovich Uvarov, the Minister of Public Education, having known of such plans, flatly got the process under control and, in point of fact, appointed Olenin, Vasiliy Andreevich Zhukovsky, Vladimir Fedorovich Odoevsky, Pletnev, and Karlhof the organizers of the celebration [KVS 1982: 281]. This intrigue needs to be seen in context of antagonism between Benkendorf and Uvarov that became extremely strained since autumn 1836 due to the case of *Telescope* ("Teleskop") magazine and publication of Chaadaev's *Philosophical Letter* [Velizhev 2010: 28-33]. The fresh history of a scandalous behavior of writers belonging to Kukolnik's group on 6 November 1837, during the dinner celebrating the opening of Alexander Fedorovitch Voeikov's print shop [Nikitenko 1955: I, 201-202], [Panaev 1988: 108-110] surely influenced the change of organizers. Being put aside of his own idea, Grech was revolted, Faddej Venediktovich Bulgarin supported him that resulted in absence of both writers at the jubilee [Grech 1905: 201-203], [Grech 1930: 828-829].

One may reasonably suggest that Uvarov's intervention conduced that the anniversary of Krylov's literary activity by this time have already understood as an event of the highest national and cultural importance, and not as a purely corporate celebration. However, as the organizers started their work quite late, many aspects were nearly neglected or omitted, in contrast to accurately prepared medical jubilees. For instance, the subscription for Zagorsky's anniversary brought over 28,000 rubles, the sum sufficient not only for the gala dinner, valuable gift and a number of commemorative medals, including one executed in gold. It also allowed for establishment of Zagorsky's prize, publishing of a special research dedicated to him, and a substantial investment in the "orphan capital" aimed for providing financial help to the families

of deceased doctors [Piatidesiatiletie 1838: 5]. In contrast, subscription pages “were sent to all writers resided in St. Petersburg” only several days before Krylov’s celebration, simultaneously with the distribution of invitation cards [LPRI: 1838. February 12. N7. 140]. According to E.A. Karlhof, the organizers “succeeded to make everything during four days” [Zvezdochka 1844: 52]. The sum accumulated by this way remains unknown, but the organizers were surely obliged to invest their own money. As a result, they had neither possibility nor time for preparing a valuable gift (usually, a vase made of gold or silver was given) or striking a commemorative medal in order to present Krylov with it within the framework of the celebration.

Meanwhile, Krylov’s jubilee differed from previous celebrations of the kind in an important aspect. The organizers managed to compose and, by the day of the jubilee, print a booklet – *Congratulations presented to Ivan Andreevich Krylov on his birthday and happened 50th anniversary of his literary activity, at the dinner of 2 February 1838, in the Hall of Noble Assembly*. The publication of such booklets was normal in jubilee practice, but usually they appeared *post factum* and contained descriptions of celebrations that had already been held. The booklet for Krylov’s jubilee was approved by a censor on February 2, just on the day of celebration. Thus, full texts of congratulations were permitted for printing before they were pronounced. It is impossible to precise the correspondence between printed texts and speeches and toasts that were really voiced during the celebration. However, the texts from the booklet were, without any changes, used in all published reports concerning the event.

The jubilee and its reception

It is worth indicating that Krylov’s jubilee had an unprecedented coverage in press. All leading Russian newspapers of the capital published depictions of the celebration: *The Russian Invalid* (“Russkij Invalid”, February 4), its *Literary Supplement* (“Literaturnye Pribavlenija k Russkomu Invalidu”, February 5), *St. Petersburg Bulletin* (“Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti”, February 5), and *The Northern Bee* (“Severnaja Pchela”, February 8). Also, after some time, March issues of several magazines reproduced the report: *The Contemporary* (“Sovremennik”), and *The Magazine of the Ministry of Public Education* (“Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshchenija”). *The Russian Invalid* annotated the celebration as a “splendid patriotic dinner”. The coverage of this extraordinary event was the point of special attention from the part of the censorship: all materials were considered by the Minister Uvarov in person.

Special mention should be made of the fact that an advantageous impression from the jubilee created by the periodicals was, however, shadowed by the scandal initiated by A.F. Voeikov. With the obvious aim to bite his literary enemies, he incorporated a brief but dangerous

remark in the report of the celebration published in *The Russian Invalid*: “From among well-known writers, *F. V. Bulgarin, N.I. Grech and O.I. Senkovskiy* did not participate in this solemn day”. Given a semiofficial aspect of the jubilee, presence of persons of the highest rank and demonstration of the Emperor’s grace towards Krylov, such notice appeared as accusation of not only non-respect to Krylov, but also of an attempt to create a literary fronde. Grech answered by a justificatory article in *The Northern Bee* (February 8. N32. P.127), but the scandal was still growing. The organizers of the celebration published an announcement containing some disadvantageous details of Grech’s conduct in the situation [LPRI: 1838. N7. P. 140]. After that, polemics in periodicals was interrupted by intervention of the Third Department, and Grech was obliged to explain the whole episode in written form [Grech 1905: 202-203].

Each visitor coming to the jubilee got a copy of the booklet containing the texts of main speeches and toasts, as well as scenario of the evening including the list of musical works which were to be executed during the celebration [Iampolskiy 1970: 44-47]. It seems to be the trace of tradition of *ephemeridae* – leaflets of small circulation, intended for participants of closed theatricalized amusements, such as costume parties or masked balls. The singularity of the leaflet of 2 February 1838, in comparison with ones dedicated to heroes of other jubilees of late 1830s, was the absence of Krylov’s biography. Instead, the leaflet included a menu of the dinner, elegantly designed by Karl Bryullov. The menu sheet was decorated with the fabulist’s portrait, surrounded by animals, heroes of his fables. Such a change seems to be a paradox, but it reflects an important aspect of Krylov’s reception by contemporaries who appreciated his enormous and legendary appetite nearly not less than his literary works. It is not a coincidence that the list of the courses of French cuisine, quite ordinary for banquets, opens with “literary” plats, named *Demian’s fish soup* (“Demianova ukha”, following Krylov’s famous fable), and *Krylov’s meat pie* (Krylovskaja kulebiaka, one of the fabulist’s most favorite meals).

On February 2, by 5 p.m., nearly 300 persons⁶ assembled in the parade hall of Engelhardt mansion on the Nevsky Perspective. Mostly they were writers or lovers of literature from high society. Nevertheless, a public celebration, organized by a group of private persons headed by Olenin, became, in fact, semiofficial: functionaries were recommended to wear a uniform [Kenevich 1869: 308].

⁶ This number appears to include only men who were sitting at the tables, though ladies, in an unknown quantity, were sitting on choir gallery and, according to some memoirs, greeted Krylov from there [KVS 1982: 80].

“The Minister of Public Education arrived at 5 p.m., in circle of all the visitors read aloud the Emperor’s charter granting Ivan Andreevich with the order of St. Stanislas⁷ of the 2nd degree <...> in person of Krylov the Emperor granted the Russian literature as a whole”, reported *The Northern Bee* several days later. Previous celebration of Ruehl’s 50th anniversary was also marked by granting him with the order of White Eagle, but the Emperor’s benevolence to Krylov was highlighted by the fact that the charter was given to him, and the cross, the ribbon and the star of the order were laid on him by the Minister in person. The formula of the charter seems to be generated also by Uvarov: for “outstanding successes marking your long-term works on the field of literature, and for noble, truly Russian sentiment always expressed in your creation that became popular (*narodnymi*) in Russia”.

The singularity of the celebration was deeply impressive. Krylov’s public triumph meant that, for the first time in the Russian history, a writer was elevated up to the level of the State or military man. It was underlined by the presence, amidst the visitors, not only the Minister of Public Education, but also the President of the State Council, War Minister, Finance Minister, Minister of Interior, Minister of the State Properties, the head of the Third Department, Marshal of nobility of St. Petersburg province, many high-ranking Court and military men, including generals-writers Denis Vasilievich Davydov, Ivan Nikolaevich Skobelev, Aleksandr Ivanovich Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, and even the elderly President of the Russian Academy Aleksandr Semenovich Shishkov. “Our famous old Admiral Shishkov glistened for a moment in the assembly and congratulated the famous fabulist with the supreme grace”, reported *The Russian Invalid*. Mention of Shishkov, together with Davydov, Skobelev, and Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, by the military newspaper is important. Thus, in the description of the jubilee, sounded the theme of the Patriotic war of 1812, with which a number of Krylov’s fables was closely linked.

Count Iosif Mikhailovich Vielgorsky, grown up at the Court, attentively fixed the similarity with the Court ceremonies: “Krylov was received as the Monarch. Everyone made way for him. Everybody came up to him for greetings, many presented themselves to him, and everybody was glad to be acquainted with him at the moment” [Vielgorsky 1999: 242-243].

“I was moved to tears, wrote Vielgorsky, it was a wonderful and highly remarkable celebration. *First public dinner in St. Petersburg*” [Ibid.: 243; italics by the author]. Mention made of the English public dinners is not a coincidence. In Russia such phenomena were of extreme rarity.

⁷ According to the statute of St. Stanislas order (1829), it was granted for such services as “composing and publishing of works recognized as universally useful”.

Conclusion: Grandfather Krylov

The true culmination of the evening became a greeting cantata executed by Osip Afanasievich Petrov, the best basso of the Imperial theaters. Its words were written by Prince Petr Andreevich Viazemsky, music – by Count Mikhail Vielgorsky. The son of the composer, Count Iosif, whose diary was cited above, underlined the effect made by these “couplets” with their refrain: “God bless you, Grandfather Krylov”: “When started *Zdravstvuj, dedushka Krylov*, the loud exclamations, hurray, the sound of knives, clapping of hands greeted the famous fabulist. Musicians were obliged to repeat the couplets four times” [Ibid.: 243].

Viazemsky not only gave to the fabulist the surname that immediately amalgamated with his last name. His poem, for the first time, traced the contours of an ideological construction which will be linked to Krylov. On the one hand, his nomination as *Grandfather* may be explained by the fact that his age was, coincidentally, included in the semantic field of the celebration. Such reception of Krylov was favored by high stability of his appearance that formed in the very beginning of the 19th century and remained, basically, the same during nearly fifty years. During his life, Krylov transformed for his contemporaries in a phenomenon not subject to the movement of time, similar to a living monument, in a piece of a passed Golden age.

Unsurprisingly, Viazemsky, representing the literary jubilee, uses a metaphor of the golden wedding – the 50th anniversary of union of the Poet and his Muse. Writers and lovers of literature, visiting this celebration, he names in-laws, parents of the married couple (“svatja”). Addressing to Krylov as to Grandfather from the participants of the celebration, and then widening this notion of “we” (*my*) to all native speakers of the Russian language, and stating that Krylov’s fables would be known by heart also by his grandchildren, not only contemporaries, Viazemsky builds this image up to an archetype. The concept of Grandfather Krylov goes from literature to a wide space of metaphysics of national. “His house is rich of children <...> and his children are good fellows”, states Viazemsky, using attributes of patriarchal family in order to point out Krylov’s popularity. All Russians are thus united in a big family for which Krylov is represented as an ancestor.

In the construction of Grandfather Krylov a function of primogenitor, as guard of principles and foundations of the clan, initial and, simultaneously, final man of a traditional society, is accentuated. Interpreted as such, the figure of Grandfather finalized the political model of patriarchal autocracy, based on relationship between the monarch as father and his subjects as children. The image of Grandfather Krylov emerged as a result of a long process of

appropriating the real personality of the fabulist by the State (*ogosudarstvlenie*). Thus, the culture of époque of Nicolas I found a substantial symbol of sought *narodnost'* interpreted as a net of roots linking a modern culture to the depth of times.

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