

Radishchev's "Bova" and Its Place in the History of Russian Folkloric Stylization

Michael Wachtel*

Abstract: Aleksandr Radishchev (1749–1802) has long been recognized for the boldness and originality of his writings. The present essay examines a substantial but largely forgotten poetic work ("Bova"), focusing on its experimental metrics. The author considers Radishchev's possible motivations in creating this unprecedented form and suggests a new means of categorizing it.

Keywords: Radishchev, Karamzin, folklore, stylization, metrics

In Memoriam
Nikolai Alekseevich Bogomolov

Aleksandr Radishchev was a remarkable poet whose work has never received the attention it deserves. For most Soviet scholars Radishchev was a political Midas – everything he touched turned subversive. As a result, a complicated thinker and original poet was transformed into a revolutionary caricature. This image overdetermined the content and context of everything he wrote. The present paper will be devoted to Radishchev's "Bova", a "heroic tale in verse" ("Povest' bogatyrskaja stikhami"). The analysis will completely disregard the work's supposed social criticism, which has been dependably, if unconvincingly, asserted by such otherwise excellent scholars as Lidia Lotman and Grigory Gukovsky.¹ Instead, it will examine the only quality of the work that can indisputably be considered revolutionary – its versification.

* Author's address: Michael Wachtel, Princeton University, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, 225 East Pyne, Princeton, New Jersey 08544, USA, email: wachtel@princeton.edu.

¹ "The poem's revolutionary character consists not of specific political hints, but in general principles directed against the literature and ideology of the nobility in its particular area, in the battle against the reactionary distortion of the idea of the folk and folk culture that was so dear to Radishchev and, first and foremost, in the battle against the very genre of the fairy-tale poem as the clearest manifestation of this movement". ["Революционность поэмы состоит не в отдельных политических намеках, а в общих принципах, направленных против дворянской литературы и идеологии на определенном ее участке, в борьбе против

Radishchev wrote poetry throughout his life, but his output was modest. The most recent edition – in the “Poet’s Library” series from 1975, includes only 16 poems, amounting to less than 150 pages in total. None of his manuscripts have survived, which is particularly unfortunate in the case of works like “Bova”, where the first publication was posthumous. Nonetheless, even in the at times unpolished form that his poetry has come down to posterity, it is striking for its highly experimental approach to form, genre, and poetic language.

In addition to his poems, Radishchev wrote two lengthy and revealing prose statements about Russian verse. The first is the chapter “Tver” from his *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow*, in which the narrator relates his discussion with a garrulous “fashionable versifier” (“novomodnyj stikhotvorets”), who, after offering a fascinating and idiosyncratic commentary on the history of Russian poetry, recites long excerpts from his ode “Vol’nost”. This interlocutor’s opinions are transparently those of Radishchev himself, just as his poem is of course Radishchev’s own. A decade later Radishchev devoted another work to the subject of Russian verse and versification. Titled “A Monument to the Dactylo-trochaic Hero”, it takes the form of a series of “dramatico-narrative conversations of a youth and his tutor” (“dramatikopovestvovatel’nye besedy junoshi s pestunom ego”) and is devoted in large part to Vasily Trediakovsky’s notorious epic “The Telemakhida”.

All of Radishchev’s poetry and writings about poetry reveal a dissatisfaction with the constraints that Russian poets had established, whether generic, thematic, metrical, rhythmical, lexical, phonetic, or syntactic. As the “fashionable versifier” of the travelogue argues, the problems began with Lomonosov’s reforms. His main complaint is not that Lomonosov was a bad poet, but that he was an excellent poet. Indeed, he was so good that his successors felt they had no choice but to follow in his footsteps.² This influence is reflected in subsequent

реакционного искажения близкой Радищеву идеи народности и народной старины, и – в первую голову – в борьбе против самого жанра поэмы-сказки, как наиболее яркого проявления этого течения”] (Lotman 1939: 140). “The ideo-political content of Radishchev’s other poems is likewise significant. He did not miss the opportunity, for example, in the poem ‘Bova’ to hint more or less transparently at the sad fate of the Russian state in his time, at the gangsterism of the rulers that had been made into law etc”. [“Значительна идейно-политическая содержательность и других стихотворений Радищева. Он не пропускал случая, например, в поэме «Бова», намекнуть более или менее прозрачно на печальную судьбу русского государства в его время, на узаконенный бандитизм властей и т. п.”] (Gukovsky 1947: 565).

² These thoughts are developed in the “Slovo o Lomonosove”, which comprises almost the entire final chapter of the *Puteshestvie*. The work’s narrator claims that this paean to Lomonosov’s brilliance was authored by that same “fashionable versifier”.

poets' dependence on rhyme ("kraeslovie", in Radishchev's archaicized idiom) and iambs. Though Radishchev himself did not always renounce iambs or rhyme, he did not feel bound by them. His most famous poem, "Vol'nost", is written in the standard iambic tetrameter and odic rhyme scheme that Lomonosov had pioneered in Russia (albeit, as we shall see, with certain unusual rhythmical features). However, some of his works draw transparently on the poetry of antiquity, which of course did not employ rhyme. (The eponymous "dactylo-trochaic hero", for example, is simply a convoluted way of referring to the modern Russian equivalent of the unrhymed hexameter of Homeric epic.)

In addition to applying ancient versification to modern poetry, Radishchev also considered the possibility of revisiting folkloric form, an interest that figures most prominently in "Bova". This turn to folklore was not unique to Radishchev; in fact, he was in this regard following the example of a number of his contemporaries.³ These writers tended to glorify Russian folk tradition in opposition to the Greek mythology that had been championed by poets of the neo-classical tradition, whether the French or their Russian imitators. The irony, as Lidia Lotman justly remarks, was that they were far more familiar with Greek mythology than with their own folklore.⁴

Radishchev knew more about his native folklore than most writers of his day (Azadovsky 2014: 83–90). However, like them, he wrongly assumed that the character of Prince Bova was distinctly Russian. As D. S. Mirsky explains: "The influence of the narrative folk-song is again clearly apparent in two romances that were introduced into Russia from abroad at some time in the first half of the seventeenth century – *Bova Korolevich* and *Eruslan Lazarevich*."

³ An excellent overview of Russian eighteenth-century attitudes toward and knowledge of folklore can be found in Azadovsky 2014.

⁴ "Though contrasted to classical, this 'Russian' mythology was completely based on ancient Greek mythology, since the writers who were extolling it knew the culture with which they were battling much better than the material on which they were constructing their convictions; not to mention the fact that the majority of them had only the vaguest conception of folklore: the authors of these fairy-tale poems often barely knew their 'ancient Russian' Olympus [...] Russian folk warriors were drawn according to the image of European knighthood, then repackaged in the form of heroes of ancient Rus' and contrasted to the West..." ["Будучи противопоставляема классической, эта «русская» мифология была всецело построена на основе античной, так как писатели, пропагандировавшие ее, лучше знали культуру, с которой боролись, нежели материал, на котором строили свои убеждения; не говоря уж о том, что большинство их имело крайне слабое представление о фольклоре: авторы поэм-сказок часто не твердо знали даже свой «древнерусский» Олимп [...] Русские богатыри рисовались по образцам европейского рыцарства, а затем преподносились в виде героев древней Руси, противопоставляемой Западу..."] (Lotman 1939: 135–136).

Bova is of French origin, being the descendant of the Carolingian romance *Bueves d'Anston* (the English version is called *Bevis of Hampton*). To Russia it came by way of a North Italian *Bovo d'Antona*, and thence through Bohemia and White Russia. In Russia it was completely assimilated and thoroughly Russianized. It is amusing to see how the French romance has been transformed into a story of purely fairy-tale adventure, with all the chivalrous and courteous element eliminated. *Bova* and *Eruslan* (which is of oriental origin and a distant descendant of the Persian Rustam) were immensely popular as chap-books. It was from them the poets of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries formed their idea of Russian folklore" (Mirsky 1927: 35).

Whether national or not, "Bova" was a story that flaunted its unpolished origins. This was a tale for the unsophisticated reader (or listener), without any pretenses to edifying its audience. As one of the grandees in Derzhavin's "Felitsa" unashamedly states: "I read Polkan and Bova; Reading the Bible, I yawn and sleep".⁵ It is thus unsurprising that Radishchev should have chosen the character of Bova for his lengthiest foray into Russian folkloric stylization. This work serves as an excellent example of just how far Radishchev was willing to stray from canonical verse form.

The extant text of "Bova" is 988 lines long, consisting of an "Introduction" followed by the first canto. According to the poet's son, Radishchev commenced work on the poem in 1799 and completed eleven of the projected twelve cantos.⁶ Had this text come down to us, it would have been by far Radishchev's longest work in verse. However, for reasons unknown, at some point between 1799 and his suicide in 1802, the poet destroyed cantos two to eleven. The plot of the missing ten cantos – a series of adventures and misfortunes (*sventura*)⁷ – can be reestablished through recourse to a surviving

⁵ "Полкана и Бову читаю; За библией, зевая, сплю". In notes to his own poem, Derzhavin explains that the grandee in question is Aleksandr Alekseevich Viazemsky, who tasked the poet with reading aloud to him "Polkan and Bova and <other> well-known ancient Russian stories" (Derzhavin 1957: 376).

⁶ In his notes to the Soviet complete edition of Radishchev, Gukovsky points out that Pavel Radishchev made this statement almost fifty years after his father's death. Gukovsky argues that the poem could have been begun in 1798, but not earlier (Radishchev 1938: 449).

⁷ The epigraph to the entire work is "O che caso! che sventura" (Oh, what a situation! What a misfortune). I cannot agree with Andrei Kostin's claim that "sventura" ("misfortune" or "misadventure") is a misprint for "avventura" ("adventure") (Kostin 2012: 188). The expression "che sventura" is common in Italian, and "Bova" – *pace* Kostin – relates numerous misadventures, even if the work was ultimately to culminate in a happy ending. Kostin hypothesizes that the source of this epigraph comes from an Italian aria and laments that it has never been discovered. In fact, his hypothesis is probably correct. Igor Pilshchikov (private communication) has

six-page prose "plan", which gives an overview of the entire poem, at least as it was initially conceived.

While our interest is primarily in the versification, it is important to say a few things about this plan and the poem's plot. First and foremost, the prose plan is in many ways inadequate. It begins as follows: "As a ship sails silently, Bova sings a song about his sad fate. Suddenly there is a storm [...]"⁸ The first sentence of this summary corresponds to the first 35 lines of the first canto. However, the second sentence corresponds to what must have been the second canto, because these events are not recounted in the first. In other words, approximately 700 lines of the first canto are not reflected in the plan. These lines – the vast majority of the extant text – relate a conversation between Bova and an old woman, the ship's cook. Upon hearing Bova's tale of woe, she is moved to compassion and then to passion. Their conversation has a humorous character, because the old woman's interest in Bova, seemingly maternal at first, becomes increasingly erotic in nature. By the end of the canto, when Bova innocently mentions a despondent princess who wants to hang herself on a "bol'shoj gvozd' i dereviannyj" ("a large wooden stick"), his by now nymphomaniacal interlocutor recognizes this large stick as a phallic symbol or, possibly, a dildo. This inspires her to sing a hymn to the god "Fal" (Phallus) and even to produce a "svjashchennyj obraz" ("holy image") of "her god" made of clay. Lidia Lotman has recognized in this scene a spoof of the traditional "fairy godmother" motif of fairy tales, leading her to conclude that the entire poem is a parody.⁹

discovered two potential sources of this quotation, both of which belong to the once popular genre of the "dramma giocoso". The first is "La Vendemmia" by Giovanni Bertati (1778), where the line appears in the closing quatrain of Act 1, Scene 7: "O che caso, che sventura / Io non so quel che mi far. / Batte il cor per la paura, / Che mi gela, e fa tremar" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=Ev6WkzUx4goC&pg=PA16>). The second is from "Lo sposo di tre e marito di nessuna" by Pasquale Anfossi (1768), where it is found in Act 3, Scene 1 in a less prominent position: "Oh che caso! Oh che sventura! / Maladetta la scrittura, Lassa me! Povera me!" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=2RgKpoF7DFMC&pg=PA57>). It should be noted that the additional "Oh" in this line does not affect the scansion, since standard Italian pronunciation would elide it with the "o" in "caso". Whether Radishchev would have known this is another question, and it makes the former source more probable.

⁸ "При тихом плавании Бова поет песню, соответственную своей горькой участи. Вдруг восстает буря [...]" (Radishchev 1975: 16).

⁹ For her, this particular scene "borders on the grotesque" (Lotman 1939: 140). Gukovsky likewise reads this scene as a parody, though of an epic: the meeting of Dido and Aeneas in Vergil's *Aeneid* (Radishchev 1938: 452). Nikolai Bogomolov (e-mail communication of 4 July 2020) has suggested that Radishchev is responding directly to his notorious contemporary I. S. Barkov. Citing this same passage, William Edward Brown cryptically notes: "It is evident from

Whether folkloric or parodic (or both), a work of twelve cantos qualifies as an epic – or a mock-epic. Vergil's *Aeneid*, it should be recalled, is divided into twelve cantos. All told, Vergil's poem contains slightly less than 10,000 lines. Had Radishchev completed his project as planned and had all his stanzas been of the same length as the first, his work would have been close to 10,000 lines as well. In "Tver", the "fashionable versifier" advocates the necessity of expanding the metrical repertoire of Russian epic poetry: "If Lomonosov had translated Job or the psalmist in dactyls and if Sumarokov had written 'Semira' or 'Dimitri [the Pretender]' in trochees, then Kheraskov might have thought of writing in other meters besides iambs and, had he described the taking of Kazan in a verse form appropriate to an epic, his eight-year labor would have garnered greater glory".¹⁰ The reference here is to Kheraskov's monumental but not terribly successful "Rossijada", which was written in Russian alexandrines (iambic hexameter rhymed in pairs), a form familiar to contemporary Russian readers from Sumarokov's neo-classical tragedies (such as "Semira" and "Dimitri").¹¹

One possible alternative to iambs was the ancient hexameter, familiar from Homer and Vergil. This was Trediakovsky's model when he decided to turn Fénelon's French novel about Telemachus into a Russian epic. Radishchev's "fashionable versifier" has a lot to say about this:

The indefatigable workhorse Trediakovsky made no small contribution [to the stasis of Russian versification] with his "Telemakhida". It is now very difficult to give an example of new versification, because the examples of good and bad versification have left deep roots. Parnassus is surrounded by iambs and guarded by rhymes. Whoever might try to write hexameters is assigned Trediakovsky as a tutor, and the most beautiful child will appear to be an abomination until a Milton, Shakespeare or Voltaire is born. Then they'll dig Trediakovsky out of his

passages such as this in 'Bova' that, despite the markedly indecent nature of the treatment, there is intended an esoteric secondary meaning, the nature of which can hardly be made out certainly from the meager fragment we possess" (Brown 1980: 489).

¹⁰ "Если бы Ломоносов преложил Иова, или псалмопевца Дактилями или если бы Сумароков, Семиру или Дмитрия написал Хорейями, то и Херасков вздумал бы, что можно писать другими стихами опричь Ямбов, и более бы славы в осмилетнем своем приобрел труде, описав взятие Казани, свойственным Епопеи стихосложением" (Radishchev 1938: 352).

¹¹ On the widespread use of iambic hexameter in high genres of eighteenth-century Russian poetry, see Gasparov 1984: 58–60.

moss-covered tomb, and they will find good lines in the "Telemakhida" that will serve as models.¹²

Provocatively, Radishchev himself chose a line from the "Telemakhida" as the epigraph to the *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow*.¹³ Radishchev's evaluation of Trediakovsky's epic is aptly summarized at the end of the "Dactylo-trochaic Hero": "In the 'Telemakhida' there are some superb lines, some good lines, many mediocre and weak lines, and so many ridiculous lines that though it would be possible to count them, no one is ready to do so. Thus, we can say: the 'Telemakhida' is the work of a man who was learned in versification, but who had not the slightest idea about taste".¹⁴ In other words, Radishchev sees the problem not in the applicability of ancient meters to Russian verse, but with the poet who chose to apply them and through his example discredited the very possibility.

Radishchev further argues that Fénelon's novel was an inappropriate subject for a "heroic song".¹⁵ In other words, he recognizes that certain forms are

¹² "Неутомимый возовик Тредиаковский немало к тому способствовал своею Телемахидою. Теперь дать пример нового стихосложения очень трудно, ибо примеры в добром и худом стихосложении глубокий пустили корень. Парнас окружен Ямбами, и Рифмы стоят везде на карауле. Кто бы ни задумал писать Дактилями, тому тот час Тредиаковского приставят дядькою, и прекраснейшее дитя долго казаться будет уродом, доколе не родится Мильтона, Шекеспира или Вольтера. Тогда и Тредиаковского выруют из поросшей мхом забвения могилы, в Телемахиде найдутся добрые стихи и будут в пример поставляемы" (Radishchev 1938: 352–353).

¹³ That same line is called "laughable" [smekhotvorno] in the later "Dactylo-trochaic Hero" (Radishchev 1975: 204).

¹⁴ "[...] в «Телемахиде» находятся несколько стихов превосходных, несколько хороших, много посредственных и слабых, а нелепых столько, что счесть хотя их можно, но никто не возьмется оное сделать. Итак, скажем: «Телемахиде» есть творение человека ученого в стихотворстве, но не имевшего о вкусе нималого понятия" (Radishchev 1975: 210). On Radishchev's complicated and at times seemingly contradictory attitude towards the "Telemakhida", see also V. A. Zapadov's comments in Radishchev 1975: 40.

¹⁵ "The prejudice against the creator of the 'Telemakhida' is too great. If you take into account that the idea of this book was not his, that he should not answer for what is unnecessary and inappropriate for a heroic poem or for the weak or drawn-out passages... then at worst he should be judged as a person who passionately loved Fénelon's 'Telemachus,' who wanted to dress it in a Russian caftan, but being a bad tailor, was not able to give it a fashionable look and hung little bells on it as decoration" ["Предубеждение твое против Творца Телемахиды чрез меру велико. Если ты рассудишь, что вымысел сея книги не его, что он отвечать не должен ни за ненужное и к ироической песни неприличное, ни за места слабые или растянутые... то о нем должно судить разве как о человеке, полюбившем страстно Фенелона Телемака,

better suited than others for certain genres. One may thus presume that he felt that – albeit for different reasons – neither iambs nor Greek hexameters could be used in a Russian epic (or mock-epic). As the opening lines of “Bova” illustrate, Radishchev’s solution was unprecedented in Russian poetry.

Из среды туманов серых
 Времен бывших и протекших,
 Из среды времен волшебных
 Где предметы все и лица,
 Чародейной мглой прикрыты,
 Окруженны нам казались
 Блеском славы и сияньем [...]

(Radishchev 1975: 137)

With the exception of the second line, these verses easily scan as trochaic tetrameter. And indeed, M. L. Gasparov does not hesitate to describe “Bova” in precisely this way. However, the second line is – at least by the standards of conventional Russian versification – an anomaly. For it to read “correctly”, the word “vremen” would have to take stress on the first syllable. Any thought that this was Radishchev’s intention is made problematic by the fact that the same word appears in the very next line with its usual stress on the second syllable. It should be recalled, of course, that Russian folklore is characterized by stresses on syllables that would not be stressed in ordinary speech or in written poetry. The same word may be stressed two different ways in the same line or the same passage (Bailey 1993: 44). In connection with the opening of Radishchev’s “Bova”, we might note that such “incorrect” stresses likewise occur in folkloric stylizations (Bailey 1970: 439). The formula “v nochnó vremjá” is attested to in folkloric poetry (Bailey 1993: 54), though it is doubtful that the same phenomenon would occur outside of that fixed phrase and in particular with the genitive plural “vremen”, a form with a valence much more literary than folkloric.

Outside of folklore, it is not so unusual to find stress on “weak” beats in Russian syllabo-tonic poetry. However, in binary meters such freedoms are limited to monosyllabic words. In German and especially in English binary

захотевшем одеть его в Русской кафтан, но будучи худой закройщик, он не умел ему дать модного вида и для прикрасы обвесил его колокольчиками”] (Radishchev 1975: 187–188).

meters, such stress shifts routinely occur on disyllabic words.¹⁶ Thus, Milton can write (emphases mine):

And bended dolphins play: part huge of bulk
Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait,
Tempest the ocean [...]

(*Paradise Lost*, 7: 410–412)

This passage – and the entire work that it is from – is in iambic pentameter (blank verse), but the second line and third lines begin with trochees.¹⁷ Milton presumably employs these rhythmic “interruptions” for a semantic purpose, in this instance to emphasize clumsiness of motion. That he seems to have confused the graceful movement of dolphins with the lumbering movement of larger sea creatures need not bother us. The relevant issue concerns poetic rhythm. Passages like this are common in Milton, where they are used expressively, as a type of rhythmic underlining.

In Russian, such possibilities are extremely restricted. It is precisely this characteristic that has allowed for the development of the statistical approach to Russian verse. Initiated by the poet Andrei Belyi, refined by Boris Tomashevsky, and systematized by Kirill Taranovsky and M. L. Gasparov, this methodology allowed scholars to reveal distinct rhythmical tendencies in the poets of various historical epochs and, at times, in poets within a single epoch. This entire approach is predicated on two main assumptions: 1) that a syllable is either stressed or unstressed (i.e., that there are no “gray areas” or “partial stresses”) and 2) that hypermetrical stress – i.e., stress on weak syllables – either does not occur at all or occurs so rarely as to be statistically insignificant.

Elsewhere I have questioned the first assumption (Wachtel 2015). The work of Radishchev, especially “Bova”, forces us to confront the second. The oddity of Radishchev’s rhythms was noticed by Tomashevsky himself, who drew attention to a peculiarity of the iambs in the following stanza from “Vol’nost”:

Господню волю исполняя,
 До востока солнца на полях
 Скупую ниву раздирая,

¹⁶ For a clear overview of the differences in national traditions, see Gasparov 1996: 202–206 and Tarlinskaja 1987.

¹⁷ In the context of Milton’s versification, both of these words have only two syllables. Because of elisions, the second line would scan: “WALL’wing unWIELd’ enORMous in their GAIT”.

Волы томились на браздах;
 Как мачиха к чуждоутробным
 Исходит с видом *всегда* злобным,
 Рабам так нива мзду дает.
 Но дух свободы ниву греет,
 Бесслезно поле вмиг тучнеет;
 Себе всяк сеет, *себе* жнет.

(Emphases by Tomashevsky in Tomashevsky 1929: 67)

Here we find two instances of disyllabic words where the stress falls on weak syllables. One might argue that the word “vsegda” could be read with no stress at all, but “sebe” is more difficult to explain. Similar to the case we examined above (“vremen”), the word is used twice in close proximity, but with different stresses. In this example, they occur within the very same line, with the standard stress coming first (*Себе* всяк сеет, себе жнет) and the incorrect stress second (Себе всяк сеет, *себе* жнет). However, in the context of “Vol’nost” there are mitigating circumstances. First of all, this happens only rarely. Second, the word “sebe”, being a pronoun, could arguably be read without any stress (as pronouns are pronounced when they fall on weak syllables).¹⁸

Compare, for example, the use of the possessive pronoun “tvoj” in the very first stanza of “Vol’nost”:

О! дар небес благословенный,
 Источник всех великих дел,
 О, вольность, вольность, дар бесценный,
 Позволь, чтоб раб тебя воспел.
 Исполни сердце *твоим* жаром,
 В нем сильных мышц *твоих* ударом
 Во свет рабства тьму претвори,
 Да Брут и Телль еще проснутся,
 Седяй во власти да смятутся
 От гласа *твоего* цари.

(Radishchev 1975: 56. Emphases mine.)

¹⁸ Thus, because of the iambic “rhythmic inertia”, the opening of Pushkin’s famous poem “Я вас любил” is scanned with a stress on “vas”, but not on “ja”. Whether this corresponds to the way one would or should recite the poem is a complicated question, but this is the assumption that Tomashevsky, Taranovsky, and Gasparov have used to create their formidable statistical studies.

The second and third appearances of this word take stress on the expected final syllable, but in the first usage ("tvoim") the stress would presumably fall on the first syllable. Once again, the easy explanation – whether correct or not – is to appeal to what Russian metricists call "atonirovanie", i. e., that, in the context of iambic "rhythmic inertia", the exceptional stress is reduced to the point where it simply disappears. Otherwise, one must accept that Radishchev was pushing the possibilities of Russian meter to the breaking point, not only allowing stresses to fall on weak syllables, but allowing them to fall on weak syllables of polysyllabic words. Interestingly, this second explanation is Gasparov's. He cites this passage in the context of radical experimentation in the late eighteenth century, of making poetic rhythm "more difficult" ("zatrudnennyj stikh")¹⁹ (Gasparov 1984: 82).

As we have already noted, the situation is more complicated in "Bova", because, as far as poetic rhythm is concerned, there is an enormous difference between a pronoun and a noun. One can argue that "tvoim" should not be stressed at all, but it is harder to make that claim about "vremen". And there is another, more significant problem. If this phenomenon occurred only rarely, it might be dismissed as a statistically insignificant aberration.²⁰ However, this is by no means the case. Whereas relatively few accentually problematic lines appear in "Vol'nost", they are common in "Bova". Let us look at the following passage:

Говоря сие, отводит
 Бову в малую каюту,
 Где старуха наша нежна
 Обед братьям всем готовит.
 Тут, согрев и накормивши,
 Бову нежно обнимает,
 Очи мокры от слез горьких
 Отирает поцелуем.
 "Скажи мне, – она вещает, –

¹⁹ Taranovsky cites another line from "Vol'nost" with the same rhythmic shift and notes that this is "very rare" ("sovsem redko") in iambic verse (Taranovsky 2010: 33).

²⁰ One might compare "Bova", with "Pesn' istoricheskaja", Radishchev's longest surviving work, which is written in this same form. That poem also features rhythmic shifts (e.g. "Народ шаткий, левоверный" or "Может, может сказать смело" – emphases mine), but they are infrequent. This raises the obvious question of why they occur so often in "Bova". I would suggest that the folkloric qualities are central here, though one could argue that the parodic nature also contributes to its rhythmic "errors".

“Скажи мне свою кручину,
Свою участь мне сурову!”
Бова нежно имел сердце...

(Radishchev 1975: 145. Emphases mine.)

Of these twelve consecutive lines, only four are, strictly speaking, “correct” trochees. The other eight all feature misplaced accents. Or, put otherwise: in the space of twelve trochaic lines, we find nine iambic feet (with the final line mixing two iambic and two trochaic feet). For purposes of comparison, we might note that, according to Maksim Shapir, such exceptional stresses occur only nine times in *all* of Radishchev’s “Vol’nost”, a poem of 540 lines.²¹ Moreover, of the nine “incorrect” stresses in this passage in “Bova”, only one falls on a pronoun. The rest fall on verbs or nouns, words that indisputably take stress. In most cases the “errors” occur on the first foot of the line, creating an emphatic syncopation that simply is not to be found elsewhere – at least not with anything approaching this type of frequency – in Russian syllabo-tonic versification.

Though this passage is extreme, it is not difficult to find consecutive lines with “incorrect” stresses in “Bova”, as the following passage, found towards the very end of the first canto (lines 971–975), indicates.

“Продолжай, – она вещает, –
Свою повесть ты плачевну.
Бова, вынув платок белой,
Оттирает чело старо
Своей нежные подруги [...]

(Radishchev 1975: 161. Emphases mine.)

Here we find four consecutive lines with iambic stress shifts, including one line (as in the previous passage) with two of them.

Gasparov rarely mentions “Bova”, but his brief comments are characteristically insightful. In his *Outline of the History of Russian Verse*, he writes: “In his experiments with verse made difficult, Radishchev dared even to break the rule that only allowed hypermetrical stress in the iamb and trochee on monosyllabic words [...] In the trochees of the poem ‘Bova’ such striking interruptions are still more numerous [...] Here we undoubtedly encounter an imitation

²¹ In all nine instances, the words in question are pronouns or adverbs. Shapir argues that while the stress on these words is surely reduced, it is nonetheless present (Shapir 2009: 465).

of folk verse" (Gasparov 1984: 82).²² In his lengthy study of Russian literary imitations of folk poetry, he adds two more observations: "In folk verse there are almost no works written in trochaic tetrameter with feminine endings, and in literary imitations this meter appears only in Radishchev's 'Bova' (perhaps not without the unexpected influence of the 'Spanish' trochaic tetrameter of Karamzin's recent 'Count Guarinos')" (Gasparov 1997: 86).²³

First, Gasparov explains the poem's rhythmic oddities as a reflection of Russian folkloric practice. This fact had already been established by Taranovsky in his study of binary meters. Taranovsky found that, to the extent such rhythmic shifts were present, they tended to occur on the first foot of a trochaic line (Taranovsky 2010: 27–28). As our exemplary passages demonstrate, this is indeed the case in Radishchev, and it suggests a much more thorough acquaintance with folk versification than was common in the eighteenth century. However, as Gasparov points out, while Radishchev's rhythms may be modeled on folklore, his meter has no folkloric provenance. In order to account for it, he suggests a source in Karamzin's "Graf Gvarinos" ("Count Guarinos").

Anthony Cross has shown that Radishchev's views of poetry and poetics were strikingly close to those of the young Karamzin, who himself had advocated supplementing the dominant Russian iambic tradition with trochees, unrhymed verse, and meters from antiquity (Cross 1968: 40).²⁴ Given Karamzin's status in the literary world of eighteenth-century Russia, one may safely assume that his poetic practice was highly influential in forming Radishchev's views.

Karamzin's "Graf Gvarinos", written in 1789 and published in 1792, is a good example of these experimental tendencies. Written on an exotic Spanish subject (according to the subtitle, it is an "ancient Hispanic historical song" [древняя гишпанская историческая песня]), it is formally striking. It is the first Russian example of what in European versification is called "Spanish trochees", meaning unrhymed trochaic tetrameter. Spanish versification is

²² "В своих экспериментах с затрудненным стихом Радищев решился даже нарушить правило, допускавшее сверхсхемные ударения в ямбе и хорее лишь на односложных словах [...] В хорее поэмы «Бова» таких резких перебоев еще больше [...] Здесь несомненная имитация ритма народного стиха".

²³ "Произведений, написанных четырехстопным хореем с женским окончанием, в народной лирике почти нет, а в литературных имитациях этот размер появляется лишь в «Бове» Радищева (быть может, не без неожиданного влияния «испанского» четырехстопного хорее недавнего «Графа Гвариноса» Карамзина)".

²⁴ Cross emphasizes that after 1793 Karamzin's poetry became much more "traditional", the result of Karamzin changing his models from German to French.

syllabic, so the term “trochee” is, strictly speaking, irrelevant, but this was how German poets had rendered the Spanish “Romancero” (Polilova 2018). Indeed, Karamzin’s poem was itself a translation of Friedrich Justin Bertuch’s German translation from the Spanish. At least in meter, Karamzin’s poem resembles the form that Radishchev was to use: unrhymed trochaic tetrameter.

Closer inspection reveals, however, that the works are formally distinct. The first eight lines of Karamzin’s poem suffice to show why this is so:

Худо, худо, ах, французы,
В Ронцевале было вам!
Карл Великий там лишился
Лучших рыцарей своих.

И Гваринос был пойман
Многим множеством врагов;
Адмирала вдруг пленили
Семь арабских королей.

(Karamzin 1966: 74)

“Count Guarinos” is divided into quatrains, whereas Radishchev’s poem is astrophic. Moreover, Karamzin alternates feminine and masculine line endings, whereas Radishchev uses only feminine cadences. Most importantly for our purposes: Karamzin uses none of the rhythmic freedoms that make “Bova” so distinctive. These are three significant differences, and one wonders whether Gasparov’s suggestion was inspired by thematic rather than strictly formal considerations.²⁵

²⁵ In Karamzin’s poem, the eponymous hero, Charlemagne’s companion Count Guarinos, is taken prisoner in the Battle of Roncevalles (in 778). After refusing to convert to Islam, he languishes for years in an Arab prison. At a certain point, the local ruler organizes a chivalric tournament where all knights are challenged to hit a target with their spear. None succeed, at which point Guarinos asks for the opportunity to do so, offering his life if he should fail. After seven years of forced inactivity and against the ruler’s expectations, Guarinos succeeds. He then slays a vast number of Arabs and escapes to his native France. Though this plot has no connection to the extant sections of “Bova”, it does bear a resemblance to an episode that Radishchev sketched in his prose plan. Bova, separated from his beloved princess, is enslaved and sent to work in a stable. When a tournament is announced, he is not allowed to participate, but he nonetheless appears and defeats the champion (Radishchev 1938: 23–24). That said: miraculous escapes from imprisonment to victory on the battlefield are not uncommon in adventure stories (Americans might think of the film “The Princess Bride”), so such plot similarities may be typological rather than a sign of influence.

There is another Karamzin poem that might just as plausibly have served as Radishchev's model: the unfinished, but highly influential "Ilya Muromets", subtitled "Bogatyrskaja skazka" (cf. Radishchev's "Povest' bogatyrskaja stikhami") and published to great acclaim in 1795.²⁶ A few representative lines of Karamzin's poem follow:

[...]

Нам другие сказки надобны;
мы другие сказки слышали
от своих покойных мамушек.
Я намерен слогом древности
рассказать теперь одну из них
вам, любезные читатели,
если вы в часы свободные
удовольствие находите
в русских баснях, в русских повестях,
в смеси былей с небылицами,
в сих игрушках мирной праздности,
в сих мечтах воображения.

(Karamzin 1966: 149–150)

This poem is not a Spanish stylization of a Western European theme, but rather is devoted to a truly Russian folk hero. Like "Bova", it is astrophic and in trochaic tetrameter. However, rather than the feminine endings of "Bova", Karamzin used exclusively dactylic endings. In a note appended to the title, Karamzin insisted that this form was "completely Russian", and that "almost all of our ancient songs are written in this meter".²⁷ This claim is not entirely correct, but neither is it wrong. Trochees are indeed found in many forms of Russian folklore (though generally in lyrics rather than epics), as are dactylic endings. Indeed, in Karamzin's time, dactylic cadences were exceedingly rare in Russian poetry, and they were introduced to give an exotic folkloric flavor (Gasparov 1999: 19–20). Given the limited number of genuine folkloric texts that would have been familiar to Karamzin at the time he wrote "Ilya

²⁶ On Radishchev's distinction between "povest'" (an oral genre) and "povestvovanie" (a written genre), see Kostin 2013: 321–322.

²⁷ "В рассуждении меры скажу, что она совершенно русская. Почти все наши старинные песни сочинены такими стихами" (Karamzin 1966: 149).

Muromets”, his stylization of folklore was metrically astute.²⁸ Gasparov (1999: 21) convincingly postulates that he had found this form in Chulkov’s anthology of folk songs, published in 1780–81.²⁹

Two salient features separate the form of Karamzin’s “Ilya Muromets” from Radishchev’s “Bova”: the cadence (dactylic in Karamzin, feminine in Radishchev) and the free placement of stresses in weak positions. Both of these features of Radishchev’s poem are highly unusual, and their combination is unique in the history of Russian poetry. Nonetheless, it might be noted that Karamzin occasionally uses a misplaced stress. Compare, for example, the lines:

Чудодея *Илью* Муромца! [...]
 Кто сей рыцарь? – *Илья* Муромец [...]
 Как *Илья*, хотя и Муромец
 (emphases mine)

In the trochaic context of the poem, only the third of these lines places the stress correctly, on the second syllable of the eponymous hero’s first name. The other two lines use an “incorrect” stress on the first syllable.³⁰ Again, one can point to folkloric practice, where phrasal stress takes precedence over word stress and where the name “Ilya” would get reduced stress, because the primary stress would fall on the following syllable (on the surname “Muromets”).³¹ But insofar as Karamzin’s popular stylization of folklore served as a point of departure for Radishchev, it is tempting to see these unusual “misplaced” stresses

²⁸ The tradition of the “bylina” was at this point unknown to Karamzin, since the Kirsha Danilov collection was first published in 1804. Karamzin saw this collection in manuscript and advocated for its publication, but this occurred in the early years of the nineteenth century, not in the 1790s (Putilov 1977: 361).

²⁹ Gasparov notes in passing that the poems in that anthology that used this form were not, strictly speaking, folkloric in origin. However, this did not prevent later poets from using the form of Karamzin’s “Ilya Muromets” for their own folkloric stylizations. This verse form was the subject of one of Osip Brik’s presentations at the Moscow Linguistic Circle (Pilshchikov and Ustinov 2020: 407–408).

³⁰ The second of these lines is cited by Taranovsky (2010: 27) as a rare example of a trochaic stress shift that occurs in the middle of a line. He cites another line from Karamzin’s poem as a more common shift that occurs at the beginning of the line: “Ему хочется глаза ее”, though it bears repeating that pronouns do not have the same status as other nouns when it comes to determining poetic stress.

³¹ On the origin of the name Muromets, see Azadovsky 2014: 101.

as a rhythmic feature that Radishchev chose to develop. And they do indeed occur far more frequently in Radishchev than in Karamzin.

But how can we explain the feminine ending? Everyone who has written about the form of "Bova" notes the oddity of this cadence. As we have seen, Gasparov emphasizes that this form has no precedent in Russian folklore and that it never again appears in Russian folkloric stylizations (Gasparov 1997: 86). For Andrei Kostin, this is proof that Radishchev did not understand – or value – folk versification.³² However, there is an explanation that Gasparov himself offers, albeit in another context. In his study of the trochaic tetrameter with dactylic ending (the highly influential form of Karamzin's "Ilya Muromets"), he notes that this was only one of many ways that Russian poets chose to imitate the folkloric "taktovik". From the perspective of literary versification, the "taktovik" was an odd form in that it contained a mixture of lines, some of which could be scanned according to the syllabo-tonic system, while others could not. All the lines, however, had one unifying feature: an unrhymed dactylic cadence. In adapting the "taktovik" to literary norms, most poets retained that cadence, but simplified the rhythmic diversity of the individual lines. They took one of the syllabo-tonic variants and used it

³² "It also should be noted that not once in his numerous discussions of Russian verse does Radishchev mention folk verse; there are basically no attempts in his works to imitate it, even in a work where it would be logical to expect it [...] The trochaic tetrameter of 'Historical song' and 'Bova,' that has more than once been seen as "Russian verse", lacks the dactylic cadence, the main marker of the form that is being imitated, and for this reason can hardly be considered an experiment with folk versification. It is noteworthy that the meter of 'Bova' repeats the meter of the Italian verse line 'Ah, che caso, che sventura,' apparently borrowed from an Italian aria." ["Следует заметить также, что ни разу в своих многочисленных рассуждениях о русском стихе Радищев не упоминает стиха народного; нет, по сути, в сочинениях писателя и попыток его имитации, в том числе в таком сочинении, где их логично было бы ожидать [...] Неоднократно указываемый в качестве «русского» стих «Песни исторической» и «Бовы» – четырехстопный хорей – не обладает главным признаком имитирующего размера, дактилическим окончанием, и поэтому вряд ли может считаться опытом работы Радищева с народным стихом. Примечательно, что размер «Бовы» повторяет размер итальянского стиха «Ah, che caso, che sventura», по-видимому заимствованного из какой-либо итальянской арии" (Kostin 2013: 316–317). Kostin's observation that the meter of the Italian epigraph coincides with the meter of the poem is ingenious, even if the Italian line would have to be (mis)read according to syllabo-tonic principles, something Russian poets have been known to do. However, it is difficult to accept the suggestion that one line from an Italian aria served as the poem's metrical source. Most poets would write their poem before choosing an epigraph. If anything, it would be more logical to conceive of a poet writing his work and then seeking out an equimetrical epigraph. In this particular instance, even if we agree that both epigraph and poem are in trochaic tetrameter (and this is already a significant assumption), the epigraph does not display any of the rhythmic oddities that distinguish the poem.

exclusively, adding the dactylic cadence as a clear marker of folk style. So, for example, while in “Ilya Muromets”, Karamzin took the trochaic tetrameter, other poets opted for trochaic hexameter, anapestic trimeter or the “5 + 5” meter (Gasparov 1999: 21). Nonetheless, there were occasional poets who decided to reflect the rhythmic peculiarities of the “taktovik” by combining in a single poem syllabo-tonic and non-syllabo-tonic lines. The works Gasparov has in mind were almost all written after Radishchev’s death, in an age when, thanks to the publication of the Kirsha Danilov anthology, folkloric study had reached a higher level of sophistication. Vostokov and Pushkin wrote stylizations that used the full range of rhythmic possibilities of the folkloric “taktovik”, yet they replaced the traditional dactylic ending with a feminine ending. Gasparov explains their motivation as follows: “The exotic rhythm made the exotic cadences unnecessary” (Gasparov 1999: 21).³³ In other words: to achieve the effect of Russian folklore, it was not necessary to copy every aspect of the source text. One could *either* use the dactylic line endings (in which case the strange rhythms were superfluous) *or* the strange rhythms (in which case the dactylic line endings were superfluous). This seems to be precisely the decision that Radishchev reached, anticipating by more than two decades the development of Russian metrics.³⁴

When Gasparov studied the folkloric stylizations in “taktovik” by Pushkin and Vostokov, he of necessity altered his statistical approach. Rather than trying to force these poems into a syllabo-tonic system, he took the poems line by line to see the relative percentage of the various meters (Gasparov 1997: 128). To represent fairly the innovative versification of “Bova”, a similar approach would presumably be appropriate. However, Gasparov never attempted such a task, perhaps because Radishchev’s experiment had no influence on future poets or perhaps because to take Radishchev’s practice seriously would have necessitated rethinking the statistical methods that could so easily be applied to all other Russian syllabo-tonic poetry. Similarly, in the “theoretical” introduction to his book, Taranovsky did not hesitate to include lines from Radishchev’s “Bova” as examples of odd stress patterns of the trochee, but when he undertook the “historical” (statistical) study, he passed over Radishchev in silence.

³³ “Экзотический ритм делал ненужными экзотические окончания”.

³⁴ It is conceivable that Radishchev took his cue from Sumarokov’s “Khor k prevratnomu svetu”. However, this metrically experimental work is not particularly folkloric, and there is no certainty that Radishchev even knew it.

Vladimir Zapadov, editor of the "Poets' Library" edition of Radishchev, approached the problem of the versification of Radishchev's "Bova" from a very different direction.

Radishchev strongly emphasizes the non-trochaic (it might even be better to say anti-trochaic) character of his "Russian verse" by introducing an enormous number of stresses on the even-numbered syllables, especially noticeable at the beginning of the line, on the second syllable [...] The "Introduction" of this poem consists of 203 lines, and according to the syllable count (not the foot!) the stress is allocated thus: 48–42–203–10–92–21–203–3. In other words, the third and seventh syllables are stressed 100% of the time, while the first and second are almost equal in the degree of stressing (23.3 and 20.7). Surely Radishchev put such a large number of stresses on the second syllable because he was especially concerned that his readers not confuse his "Russian structure", his "Russian verse" with a trochee. The poet "structures" his lines this way so that he destroys the possibility of perceiving his "Russian verse" as a variant of a syllabo-tonic meter. The fundamental rhythmic principle of Radishchev's "Russian verse" is the two-stressed line, moreover in the vast majority of cases these fall on the third and seventh syllable; in exceptional cases, on the first and seventh (Radishchev 1975: 38–39).³⁵

According to Zapadov, "Bova" is simply not a syllabo-tonic poem. He dismisses the possibility that it is trochaic, going so far as to label it "anti-trochaic". This is an interesting argument, but it has its shortcomings. To begin with, Zapadov's statistics are open to question. Because he begins with the assumption that this poetry is not syllabo-tonic, he reads the text as if it were free verse or prose, without any rhythmic inertia, which means that any monosyllabic word can

³⁵ "Радищев резко подчеркивает нехореический (лучше даже сказать – антихореический) характер своего «русского стиха», вводя огромное количество ударений на четных слогах, в особенности ощутимых в начале строки, на втором слоге [...] «Вступление» к этой поэме насчитывает 203 стиха, и по слогам (а не по стопам!) ударения распределяются так: 48–42–203–10–92–21–203–3. Иначе говоря, третий и седьмой слоги имеют 100% ударений, а первый и второй – почти одинаковы по степени ударности (23,3 и 20,7). Не потому ли у Радищева такое большое количество ударений на втором слоге, что он специально заботился, дабы читатели не перепутали его «русский строй», «русский стих» с хореем? [...] Поэт «строит» строки таким образом, что ликвидирует всякую возможность восприятия «русского стиха» как разновидности силлабо-тонического размера. Основной ритмический принцип радищевского «русского стиха» – двухударность, причем в подавляющем большинстве случаев ударения расположены на третьем и седьмом слоге; редчайшие исключения – первый и седьмой".

in principle take stress, regardless of its position in the line.³⁶ He thus gives himself license to stress every pronoun and every monosyllabic word (except for particles). For example, since he claims that the final syllable of the line is stressed three times, he could only have had in mind the following lines:

Я намерен рассказать вам (l. 34)
Итак, только расскажу вам (l. 41)
Когда будет, – не пророк я (l. 197)

In all three of these examples, Zapadov seems to read the final two syllables of the line as being stressed. If these lines were scanned as trochaic, according to the conventions used by statisticians of verse, the last syllable would be regarded as unstressed. As Taranovsky (2010: 26) explains: “While the final strong syllable in Russian binary meters is as a rule always stressed, all of the non-obligatory syllables after it are as a rule unstressed”. In the context of Radishchev’s exclusively feminine clausulae, it is obvious that phrases like “рассказать вам”, “расскажу вам”, “не пророк я” have only one stress and that it falls on the penultima. To read these lines as ending in a spondee would be strange from any point of view, whether that of a scholar of verse form or of a native speaker or, for that matter, of a non-native speaker – *pro doma sua*.

However, we might return to our earlier examples to see how complicated this question can become:

Скажи мне, – она вещает, –
Скажи мне свою кручину [...]

Syntactically and rhythmically, the opening of these lines clearly resembles the clausulae of the first two lines we examined above. In each case, a verb is followed by a monosyllabic indirect object in dative case. In all of these passages, the logical stress falls on the verb. If we read the lines as trochaic, however, rhythmic inertia would encourage at least a weakened stress on the pronoun when it falls on syllable three. This is definitely how Zapadov reads these lines, because he views stress on the third syllable as an invariant. In this case, the

³⁶ In syllabo-tonic verse, monosyllabic words are not stressed in weak positions unless they are clearly set off by syntax or semantic weight. For example, in the context of iambs, the first stress of the line “Гм-гм, читатель благородный” falls unambiguously on the second syllable. If this were part of a prose passage, one might argue for different accentuation. (This example comes from Lotman 1995: 267.)

Russian verse statisticians would presumably agree with him, because syllable three is a strong position in trochaic meters.

Once we move away from the concept of rhythmic inertia, it becomes challenging to scan the text. To give just one example:

Во Болгарах спюю песню;
Воздохну на том я месте (lines 151–152)

The first of these lines is fairly clear. It has stress on syllables 3 and 7, but also on syllable 6, a weak position in a trochaic line. One might reduce this stress somewhat in actual declamation, but it is a verb, which ordinarily demands stress. The second line is less obvious. Again, the stresses clearly fall on syllables 3 and 7, but here one could argue for additional stresses on 5 and 6. Three consecutive stresses are rare in Russian, especially if the words are not the same part of speech. (Cf. "Слова: бор, буря, ведьма, ель", in *Eugene Onegin* 6: XXIV or Derzhavin's "Рев крав, гром жолн и коней ржанье").³⁷ If Radishchev's lines were unambiguously trochaic, it would be clear that the stress on "ja" should be omitted in the phrase "Воздохну на том я месте". But in the context of a poem where stresses fall unpredictably, one could plausibly argue that the stress should be omitted from syllable five (where it would be likely to fall in a trochaic line) and displaced to syllable six (where it did indeed fall in the previous line) or that one is supposed to stress three consecutive syllables, albeit with greater or lesser emphasis. Here we would enter the thorny question of relative stress levels.³⁸

Since such ambiguities are frequent, I was unable to reproduce Zapadov's statistics. In one reading, I put stresses only where they logically and unambiguously fall. I read the syllable stresses of the same 203 lines as follows: 26–19–203–1–39–6–203–0. In another reading, I was much more generous in allowing stresses on monosyllabic words and came up with the following figures: 51–32–203–9–85–14–203–0. Though both sets of my numbers differ

³⁷ Strong syntactic breaks can also create constructions with (potentially) three consecutive stresses. See Lotman 1995: 279.

³⁸ At a 1919 meeting of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, Osip Brik (following F. E. Korsh) insisted on the need to distinguish among different levels of stress in analyzing the rhythms of Russian poetry (Pilshchikov 2017: 167–68). A few years later, Zhirmunsky advocated four degrees of stress (Zhirmunsky 1925: 128–130). Later Russian theorists did not necessarily disagree with Brik and Zhirmunsky; they apparently just recognized that such a complicated system was impractical for statistical analysis. In scholarship on other traditions, where statistics play a lesser role, the concept of four degrees of stress is common (Kiparsky 1975: 582).

significantly from Zapadov's, there is no disputing the fact that, if this verse is indeed trochaic, a surprisingly high percentage of stresses fall on the second syllable. (According to my first scansion, the first syllable is stressed approximately 13% of the time, while the second syllable is stressed about 9% of the time. According to my revised scansion, it would be 25% vs. 16%.) Regardless of which set of data one uses, there is no question that the figures for stress on the second syllable are statistically significant.

Yet Zapadov's explanation is troubling. On the one hand, he insists that the preponderance of unusual stresses indicates that this cannot be syllabo-tonic verse, but on the other hand he argues for "metrical constants" on the third and seventh syllables. So strong is his sense of these constants that he marks accents in lines where the third-syllable stress might not be obvious to modern readers: e.g., line 202: "О страна́х сих иметь хочешь", since contemporary readers might anachronistically place the initial stress on syllable two: "О страна́х сих иметь хочешь".³⁹ This would result in three iambic feet and only one trochaic foot, something that never happens elsewhere in the poem. As far as the invariant stress on the third syllable goes, Zapadov is surely correct. It might be noted in support that lines beginning with words of three or more syllables inevitably take stress on the third syllable, e.g., *рассека́л, подошла́, умира́ющих, прижима́ла*. There is never a case where a line opens with a polysyllabic word that has a rhythmic profile like *чита́ет* or *слы́шала*, which would unambiguously displace the stress from syllable three to syllable two (or one). In other words, the third syllable may not get the primary phrase accent, but it always has the possibility of getting some degree of stress, cf. the above-mentioned line opening of "Скажи́ мне...".

In his urge to reject the possibility of trochaic verse, Zapadov neglects one important factor. It so happens that the third and seventh syllables are by far the most common positions for stress in a standard trochaic tetrameter line. In his discussion of this meter, Taranovsky observes: "It is immediately evident that the percentage of stresses on the third syllable continually rises. In eighteenth-century poets it wavers between 82.1% and 94.4%, while in the nineteenth century it ranges from 96.1% to 100%. In eight instances we are talking precisely about 100% – this is one of few examples where a rhythmic tendency becomes a rhythmic constant" (Taranovsky 2010: 73).⁴⁰ In other

³⁹ On the accentuation of the word "strana", see Es'kova 2008: 58. In such instances, Zapadov's stress marks are correct, but nowhere does he indicate that he added them. They are not found in earlier publications, e.g., the edition that Gukovsky prepared (Radishchev 1938) or, of course, the first edition (Radishchev 1807).

⁴⁰ "Бросается в глаза то, что процент ударений на третьем слоге постоянно растёт.

words, in addition to the obligatory stress on the penultima (syllable seven) of a trochaic tetrameter line, Taranovsky notes a very strong propensity for stress to fall on the third syllable.⁴¹ Thus, it is strange to argue that "Bova" is "anti-trochaic" when the "invariant" stresses correspond so closely to the primary patterning of trochaic tetrameter. Indeed, in this regard Radishchev was if anything ahead of his time, since his insistent realization of the stress on syllable three anticipates the usage found in later poets (Taranovsky 2010: 26). In regard to Zapadov's insistence that Radishchev shifts the stress on the first foot with the aim of rejecting the possibility of a trochaic reading, Taranovsky makes another apposite point: "In the trochee a shift of stress occurs rather often at the beginning of a line (from the first syllable to the second) [...] Such a stress shift is especially often encountered in trochaic folk songs" (Taranovsky 2010: 27–28).⁴² Unfortunately and uncharacteristically, Taranovsky does not define what "rather often" means in the present context. His first two examples of this phenomenon are, not surprisingly, from Radishchev's "Bova". Curiously, he takes two subsequent examples from Karamzin's "Ilya Muromets", though he does not postulate the influence that we have suggested.⁴³ Despite the absence of statistics, one might apply Taranovsky's observations by saying that the surprising number of lines in Radishchev where the initial stress falls on the second syllable is not so very unusual in trochees, especially in folkloric trochees. Indeed, if we look at the placement of "inverted feet" in "Bova", a striking pattern emerges. These occur only in mono- or disyllabic words,

У поэтов XVIII века он колеблется от 82,1% до 94,4% а в XIX веке от 96,1% до 100%. В восьми случаях речь идет именно о ста процентах – это один из редких примеров перехода ритмической тенденции в константу".

⁴¹ Strictly speaking, the stress on syllable 7 is mandatory in trochaic tetrameter. In this regard, it is noteworthy that in the line "Иль вы, гусли звончатые", Zapadov's statistics indicate that he places the stress on the penultima. In the context of this poem, it is tempting to read it his way, but it would be an extremely unusual stress for that word. Oddly, the standard stressing of that word before the twentieth century was on the second syllable (Es'kova 2008: 405–406), but if it were read this way, the final stress of this line would fall on syllable 6, which would be unprecedented in Radishchev's poem. In my statistics, I have followed Zapadov in this instance, but with a good deal of uncertainty.

⁴² "В хорее довольно часто является сдвиг ударения в начале стиха (с первого слога на второй) [...] Такой сдвиг ударения особенно часто встречается в песенной народной лирике хореического типа".

⁴³ In contrast, Dimitri Blagoi (Blagoi 1960: 499–500) apodictically states that Radishchev borrowed the form of "Bova" from Karamzin's "Ilya Muromets". However, he simply labels the form of "Bova" as "unrhymed trochaic tetrameter" and completely disregards the frequent rhythmic shifts that make it so distinctive.

usually on syllables one and two and, less frequently, on syllables five and six. This means that the word boundaries always coincide with the boundaries of a binary foot and only occur on the first and third “feet”, the weak feet in a tetrameter line. In more traditional scholarly notation, this could be designated as SW CW SW CW, where S = strong position, W = weak position and C = constant (obligatory stress) and where SW feet can be pyrrhic or inverted (that is WW or WS), but CW feet are fixed and therefore cannot be pyrrhic or inverted. All of this strongly suggests that we are dealing with some variant of trochaic tetrameter. However, the frequent inversions on disyllabic words make it impossible to define this variant through recourse to traditional Russian metrics.

At this point, it seems appropriate to introduce – and refute – one final perspective on Radishchev’s choice of meter. The American scholar William Edward Brown (Brown 1980: 488) writes: “‘Bova’ uses the so-called ‘Russian meter,’ an octosyllabic line of two strong beats and one or two weak ones, basically trochaic in rhythm [...] The meter inevitably suggests to an American Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, which is trochaic tetrameter acatalectic, and very similar; and since Longfellow’s use of the meter, and indeed some of the episodes in his poem, come, by his own admission, from the Finnish *Kalevala*, one may wonder if Radishchev had encountered Karelian or Estonian prototypes of the ballads which Dr. Lönnrot collected to put together the *Kalevala*”.⁴⁴ The meter of the *Kalevala*, as Mihhail Lotman has shown, is a bit more complicated than Brown’s description.⁴⁵ Still, in the *Kalevala*, the two initial positions are arbitrary in terms of stress, and it is these syllables that account for the majority of Radishchev’s odd rhythms. Attractive as the explanation is, the possibility that Radishchev had encountered this form is remote. According to Kostin (Kostin 2013), he showed little interest in collecting even Russian folkloric songs, let alone folkloric verse in a language he did not know (and in a language in which both syllable length and stress are relevant to the versification). Additionally, there is a powerful historical argument to be made against the influence of the *Kalevala*. Even in Scandinavia, this work was barely known until 1835, when Lönnrot produced his edition. Any resemblance between Radishchev’s poem and the Finnish epic must be therefore attributed to coincidence rather than influence.

⁴⁴ Brown’s comment about the “Russian meter” appears to come from some sloppy terminology in Zapadov’s essay cited above (Radishchev 1975: 38). Ordinarily, the term “Russian meter” refers to Vostokov’s definition of the folk “taktovik”, a non-syllabo-tonic form with a constant number of stresses per line.

⁴⁵ Gasparov 1996: 257. This subsection of the book was authored by Mihhail Lotman.

Trochaic or not trochaic? Ultimately, that is the question. But perhaps we can answer it indirectly, not in terms of either/or, but rather both/and. Some verse theorists at the beginning of the twentieth century considered the possibility of "paonic" approaches to Russian poetry (Tomashevsky 1925: 76–78; Scherr 1986: 122–124). The basic idea was that, if binary meters had feet of two syllables and ternary meters had feet of three syllables, then it should theoretically be possible to have feet of four syllables (a paeon) or even five syllables (a penton). The first paeon would sound like this ($\times \cup \cup \cup$), the second ($\cup \times \cup \cup$), the third ($\cup \cup \times \cup$) and the fourth ($\cup \cup \cup \times$), where \times signifies stressed and \cup signifies unstressed syllables. The terminology was adapted from ancient Greek and Latin verse, which was based on syllable length rather than stress and which in various positions permitted substitutions of one long syllable for two short syllables. When applied to Russian versification, based entirely on stress, such substitutions were impossible. Hence a problem was readily apparent; "pure" paeons and pentons occur in the Russian language only rarely. It would be difficult to compose an entire poem where stress would fall only on every fourth or fifth syllable. Within most paeons or pentons there would inevitably be "hypermetrical" stresses that break the line down into more traditional feet, such as iambs and trochees. As Barry Scherr notes, "The first and third paeons have a trochaic rhythm, the second and fourth iambic" (Scherr 1986: 123). If this is the case, rather than describing various types of paeons with hypermetrical stresses, one might just as well stick with the traditional metrical arsenal of iambs, trochees, and pyrrhic feet (Tomashevsky 1925: 123–124).

However, one distinct advantage of a paeonic theory is that it could allow us to highlight the key stresses (the invariants or "constants") while worrying less about the placement other stresses.⁴⁶ Thus, Radishchev's "Bova" could be said to exemplify a dimeter line of the third paeon ($\cup \cup \times \cup$). In its purest form, this would correspond to lines such as: "Добродетели чертами" or "Велелепные и пышны". However, such lines are relatively few. In Radishchev's "Bova", it is not so much that there are no other stresses except on syllables 3 and 7 as much as that these other stresses are so unpredictable, especially at the beginning of the line. Thus, we could say that the paeonic form offers a rhythmic outline, a new type of rhythmic inertia, which insists on the precise placement of two stresses in the line, but tolerates stresses on all other syllables except the last.

⁴⁶ This is one of the reasons why Mihhail Lotman reads Joseph Brodsky's "Pis'ma rimskomu drugu" ("Letters to a Roman Friend") as "paeonic" rather than trochaic (Lotman 1995: 312–314). It might be noted that Brodsky's rhythmic shifts in this poem are far less radical than those in Radishchev's "Bova".

Admittedly, the unpredictability is usually limited to syllables 1, 2, 5 and 6, but stress could in principle fall anywhere except on the final syllable.⁴⁷

Ultimately, it is not so important to determine which classification of Radishchev's poem is "correct". In a certain sense, all three classifications are correct. My modified paeonic approach can be easily reconciled both with trochees (the interpretation of Gasparov and Taranovsky), and with Zapadov's "anti-trochaic" reading. The problem with Zapadov's explanation is that it does not recognize that Radishchev's rhythmic shifts are common – albeit not *this* common – in trochaic (and especially in folk trochaic) verse. The problem with a strictly trochaic reading like that of Taranovsky or Gasparov is that it erases precisely those experimental qualities that make the work so interesting. One of the essential qualities of this verse is that it resists definition according to the traditional parameters of Russian metrics. And if this is the case, it would seem more appropriate to adjust those parameters rather than to remove the work from close scholarly analysis. Radishchev himself was exiled to Siberia; his poetry deserves a better fate.

References

- Azadovsky, Mark Konstantinovich 2014. *Istorija russoj fol'kloristiki*. Sost. i otv. red. O. A. Platonov. Moskva: Institut russoj tsivilizatsii.
- Bailey, James 1970. Literary Usage of a Russian Folk Song Meter. In: *Slavic and East European Journal*, 14(4), 436–452. <https://doi.org/10.2307/305737>
- Bailey, James 1993. *Three Russian Lyric Folk Song Meters*, Columbus, OH: Slavica.
- Blagoi, Dmitriij Dmitrievich 1960. *Istorija russoj literatury xviii veka*. Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo.
- Brown, William Edward 1980. *A History of 18th Century Russian Literature*. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Cross, Anthony 1968. Problems of Form and Literary Influence in the Poetry of Karamzin. In: *Slavic Review* 27(1), 39–48. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2493911>
- Derzhavin, Gavriila Romanovich 1957. *Stikhotvorenija*. Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel'.

⁴⁷ Such a conclusion would dovetail with Taranovsky's observation that the folkloric trochee tends towards paeons more than the literary trochee (Taranovsky 2000: 282). Admittedly, Taranovsky was simply referring to the frequency of pyrrhic feet, not to the expanded notion of the paeon that I am suggesting here.

- Es'kova, Natal'ja Aleksandrovna 2008. *Normy russkogo literaturnogo jazyka XVIII–XIX vekov: Udarenie, grammaticheskie formy, varianty slov, slovar', pojasnitel'nye stat'i*. Moskva: Rukopisnye pamjatniki Drevnej Rusi.
- Gasparov, Mikhail Leonovich 1996. *A History of European Versification*. Translated by G. S. Smith and Marina Tarlinskaja. Edited by G. S. Smith with Leofranc Holford-Strevens. Oxford: Oxford UP, 202–206.
- Gasparov, Mikhail Leonovich 1997. Russkij narodnyj stikh i ego literaturnye imitatsii. In: Gasparov, Mikhail Leonovich, *Izbrannye trudy*. Tom 3: *O stikhe*. Moskva: Jazyki russkoj kul'tury, 54–131.
- Gasparov, Mikhail Leonovich 1999. *Metr i smysl: Ob odnom iz mekhanizmov kul'turnoj pamjati*. Moskva: RGGU.
- Gasparov, Mikhail Leonovich 1984. *Očerki istorii russkogo stikha*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Gukovsky, Grigorij Aleksandrovich 1947. Radishchev. In: *Istorija russkoj literatury v 10 tomakh*. Moskva, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1941–1956. T. IV: *Literatura XVIII veka*. Ch. 2, 507–570.
- Karamzin, Nikolai Mikhailovich 1966. *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenij*. Moskva, Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel'.
- Kiparsky, Paul 1975. Stress, Syntax, and Meter. In: *Language*, 51(3), 576–616. <https://doi.org/10.2307/412889>
- Kostin, Andrej Aleksandrovich 2012. Ob istochnike epigrafa k poeme A.N. Radishcheva "Bova". In: *Litterarum fructus: Sbornik statej v chest' Sergeja Ivanovicha Nikolaeva*. Sankt-Peterburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 184–192.
- Kostin, Andrej Aleksandrovich 2013. Radishchev kak fol'klorist. In: *XVIII vek* 27, 310–324.
- Lotman, Lidija Mikhailovna 1939. "Bova" Radishcheva i traditsii zhanra poemy-skazki. In: *Uchenye zapiski Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* 33 (Filologičeskaja serija, № 2), 3–17.
- Lotman, Mihhail 1995. Russkij stikh: Osnovnye razmery, vkhodiashchie v evropeiskij metricheskij fond. In: Červenka, Miroslav; Pszczołowska, Lucylla; Urbańska, Dorota (eds.), *Słowiańska metryka porównawcza VI: Europejskie wzorce metryczne w literaturach słowiańskich*. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich.
- Mirsky, Prince D.S. 1927. *A History of Russian Literature from the Earliest Times to the Death of Dostoyevsky (1881)*. London: George Routledge & Sons.

- Pilshchikov, Igor 2017. Zasedanie moskovskogo lingvističeskogo kruzhka 1 ijunia 1919 g. i zarozhdenie stikhovedčeskikh kontseptsij O. Brika, B. Tomashevskogo i R. Jakobsona. *Revue des études slaves* 88(1/2), 151–175.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/res.956>
- Pilshchikov, Igor; Ustinov, Andrei 2020. Moskovskij Lingvističeskij Kruzhok i stanovlenie russkogo stikhovedenija (1919–1920). In: Fleishman, Lazar; Bethea, David M.; Vinitsky, Ilya (eds.), *Unacknowledged Legislators: Studies in Russian Literary History and Poetics (Stanford Slavic Studies 50)*. Berlin [etc.]: Peter Lang, 389–414.
- Pilolova, Vera 2018. Spanish *Romancero* in Russian and the semantization of verse form. In: *Studia Metrica et Poetica* 5(2), 77–108.
<https://doi.org/10.12697/smp.2018.5.2.04>
- Putilov, Boris Nikolaevich 1977. “Sbornik Kirshi Danilova” i ego mesto v russkoj foľloristike. In: Evgen’eva, A. P.; Putilov, B. N. (eds.), *Drevnie rossijskie stikhotvorenija sobrannye Kirsheju Danilovym*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Radishchev, Aleksandr Nikolaevich 1938. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij*. T. 1. Moskva, Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo AN SSSR.
- Radishchev, Aleksandr Nikolaevich 1807. *Sobranie ostavshikhsja sochinenij pokojnogo Aleksandra Nikolaevicha Radishcheva*. Ch. 1. Moskva: Tipografija Platona Beketova.
- Radishchev Aleksandr Nikolaevich 1975. *Stikhotvorenija*. Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel’.
- Scherr, Barry P. 1986. *Russian Poetry: Meter, Rhythm, and Rhyme*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Shapir, Maksim Il’ich 2009. “Tebe čisla i mery net”: O vozmožnostiakh i granitsakh “točnykh metodov” v gumanitarnykh naukakh. In: Prokhorov, A. V.; Skulacheva, T. V. (eds.), *Slavjanskij stikh. VIII: Stikh, jazyk, smysl*. Moskva: Jazyki slavjanskikh kul’tur.
- Taranovsky, Kirill 2000. *O poezii i poetike*. Moskva: Jazyki russkoj kul’tury.
- Taranovsky, Kirill 2010. *Russkie dvusložhnye razmery. Stat’i o stikhe*. Moskva: Jazyki slavjanskoj kul’tury.
- Tarlinskaja, Marina 1987. Meter and Language: Binary and Ternary Meters in English and Russian. In: *Style* 21(4), 626–649. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42945666>
- Tomashevsky, Boris Viktorovich 1925. *Teorija literatury (Poetika)*. Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo.
- Tomashevsky, Boris Viktorovich 1929. *O stikhe*. Leningrad: Priboi.

Wachtel, Michael 2015. Charts, Graphs, and Meaning: Kiril Taranovsky and the Study of Russian Versification. *The Slavic and East European Journal* 59(2), 178–193. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44739360>

Zhirmunsky, Viktor Maksimovich 1925. *Vvedenie v metriku: Teorija stikha*. Leningrad: Academia.