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Poltava
by
Alexander Pushkin*

Translated by
Ivan Eubanks

The power and the glory of the war,
Faithless as their vain votaries, men,
Had passed to the triumphant Czar.

Byron

Dedication

*To you — but can the somber muse's
Voice ever hope to touch your ear?
And could your modest soul perceive
The aspirations of my heart?
5 Or will a poet's dedication,
As once upon a time his love,
Extend to you and lack reply,
To pass you by still unacknowledged?*

*But recognize, at least, those sounds
10 That were, at one time, dear to you;
And think, that on our day of parting,
Wherever fickle fate may lead me,
Your melancholy wilderness,
The last I'll hear of your sweet voice,
15 Shall be my only treasured idol,
My soul's one solitary love.*

Canto the First

The rich and glorious Kochubey:¹

* Footnotes to this translation are from Pushkin's original notes.

¹ Vasily Leontievich Kochubey, a General Judge, was an ancestor of a contemporary Count.

- His pastures stretch beyond one's sight;
 And there his herds of horses graze
 Unwatched, at liberty, unfenced.
- 5 Around Poltava, *khutora*²
 Are all encircled by his gardens,
 And he has many fine possessions—
 Thick furs and satin, silver, jewels—
 Displayed or hidden in his castles.
- 10 But Kochubey is rich and proud,
 Not of his herds of long-maned horses,
 Nor gold, his tribute from Crimea,
 Nor even his ancestral keeps;
 A beautiful, beloved daughter
- 15 Is Kochubey's great pride and joy.³

- And so it's said that, in Poltava,
 No maid can rival her in grace.
 She glows as fresh as cherry blossoms
 Caressed in breezy, shady glades.
- 20 She's shapely, like a poplar poised
 On Kievan heights. Her movements call
 To mind the gliding gait of swans
 As they traverse deserted waters,
 Or the adroit stride of a doe.
- 25 Her breast is white as fertile foam;
 Around the summit of her brow,
 Her darkling locks are stormy clouds.
 Her bright eyes' rays are sharp as stars,
 Her lips as red as vibrant roses.
- 30 Yet rumors whisper that her beauty
 (That temporary bloom!) is not
 The only virtue that she has:
 Maria's name is praised all over
 For modesty and acumen.
- 35 So Russia and the Ukraine send
 Their most desirable young suitors;
 But timid, sweet Maria flees
 The flowery crown, as she would chains;
 Refusing every suitor's offer,

² A *khutor* is a manor or country estate.

³ Kochubey had several daughters; one of them was married to Obidovskii, Mazepa's nephew. She, to whom we here refer, was named Matryona.

40 Until the Hetman seeks her hand.⁴
 He's old. And though worn down by years,
 By war, by labors and by worries,
 Emotions boil in him still:
 Mazeppa once again knows love.

45 The young heart flares up instantly
 And then goes out. Within it, love
 May pass away then come anew—
 Its feelings change from day to day;
 Not so obediently, so lightly,
50 Nor with such sudden bursts of passion
 Do old men's hearts enkindle—
 They've petrified throughout the years—
 But slowly, stubbornly the flames
 Of passion incubate in them,
55 And once ignited, such late fire
 Does not cool down till life goes out.

 That's no chamois beneath a crag,
 Who dreads the eagle's thunderous flight;
 Maria paces in her room;
60 She trembles and awaits the verdict.

 Her mother, full of indignation,
 Comes in and takes her daughter's hand,
 And with a shudder says to her:
 "That shameless, ignominious man!
65 How could he?... Not while we're alive,
 He won't commit this sin. Oh, no!
 He should have been a friend and father
 To his young, innocent god-daughter...
 A madman! He contrives to ask for
70 Her hand while in the twilight of his days!"
 Maria winced. A deathly pall
 Then cast itself across her face,
 And chilled as if by life's last sleep,
 She fainted on the threshold's stairs.

75 She came to, then she closed her eyes
 Again; she wouldn't say a word;
 Her father and her mother both

⁴ Mazeppa actually did propose to his god-daughter, but he was refused.

Attempted to allay her heart,
To drive away her grief and horror,
80 To pacify her troubled mind...
In vain. For two entire days,
Maria, speechless, sobbed and groaned;
Nor would she eat or drink at all;
She roamed about pale as a shade,
85 Not knowing sleep. On the third day
Her chambers were deserted.

No one knew where or how she'd gone.
A fisherman, however, said
That he had heard the sound of horses,
90 A Cossack voice and woman's whisper,
And in the meadow's morning dew
Four pairs of horseshoes left their marks.

Not only youthful golden locks
And downy cheeks entice young girls,
95 But sometimes even old men's faces,
With hoary locks and rough hewn brows,
Inspire a maiden's sense of beauty,
Infusing it with passionate dreams.

And soon the fateful news had reached
100 The frantic ear of Kochubey:
She had forgotten shame and honor,
Absconded to a villain's arms!
Disgrace! Her parents hardly dared
To understand the awful rumor;
105 For only then the truth emerged,
In all its horrid nakedness;
For only then could one explain
The young transgressor's sole desire;
For only then could one discern
110 Why she had fled capriciously
The fetters of familial duties,
And languished secretly, and sighed,
And answered all her suitors' greetings
With proud, remorseless silence;
115 Why she had sat so quietly,
And hearkened to the Hetman's words,
Though goblets rocked with frothy wine
And watered mirthful conversations;

Why she had always sung those songs
 120 That *he* had fashioned long ago,⁵
 When he'd been poor and unimportant,
 Before his reputation bloomed;
 Why she had loved, ungirlishly,
 The cavalry's formation drills,
 125 The martial beats of kettledrums,
 The loud saluting to the staff
 And mace of Little Russia's sovereign...⁶

The rich and famous Kochubey:
 He had a lot of powerful friends;
 130 He could have bathed in all his glory.
 He could have stirred Poltava's rage;
 He could have set a father's wrath
 Against the villain, and besieged
 His palace instantly, and conquered;
 135 He could have used his sure right hand
 To plunge a ... but another thought
 Assailed the heart of Kochubey.

It was a dark and troubled age,
 When Peter's ingenuity
 140 Was fueling youthful Russia's growth,
 Despite the strain of war, to manhood.
 Her given teacher was severe
 In lessons treating fame and triumph:
 The Swedish Paladin would test
 145 Her bloodily, with no forewarning.
 But in her lust for retribution,
 Having endured the blows of fate,
 Rus' took up arms. And as a hammer
 Shatters glass, she forged steel blades.

150 And crowned with ineffectual glory,
 Bold Charles slipped near an abyss.
 He marched on Moscow, rousing
 The Russian Principalities—

⁵ There are a few songs that are traditionally attributed to Mazeppa, and they are to this day preserved in the memory of the people. In his denunciation, Kochubey also refers to a patriotic *duma* [Ukrainian folk song (*trans.*)] that was supposedly composed by Mazeppa. It is remarkable for more than its historical significance.

⁶ The staff and mace were signs of the Hetman's office.

- A whirlwind stirring ashen plains
 155 And forcing dusty grass to bow.
 He took the road where tracks were left
 By a strong foe in our newer days,
 When the retreating steps of that
 Fated man glorified his fall.⁷
- 160 The Ukraine quietly grew restless.
 A spark had smoldered there for years.
 The friends of old and bloody times
 Were hoping for a people's war,
 Complaining, haughtily commanding
 165 The Hetman to cut loose their bonds,
 While their capricious lust awaited
 Impatiently the might of Charles.
 Rebellious shouts, it's time! It's time!
 Were ringing out around Mazeppa.
 170 The Hetman all the while remained
 A loyal vassal to the Tsar.
 Preserving his austerity,
 He calmly reprimanded them;
 He seemed to pay no heed to rumor,
 175 Indifferently reveling.
- "What's with the Hetman?" young men asked,
 "He's incapacitated, old;
 His flame has waned in passing seasons,
 Excessive labors leave him cold.
 180 Why should hands that tremble like his
 Still hold the Hetman's staff and mace?
 Now's the time for us to assail
 Oppressive Moscow's walls in force!
 Back in old Doroshénko's time,⁸
 185 Or if the younger Samoylóvich,⁹

⁷ See Byron's *Mazeppa*.

⁸ Doroshénko, one of the medieval heroes of Little Russia, was an irreconcilable enemy of Russian sovereignty.

⁹ Gregory Samoylóvich, the son of a Hetman, was exiled to Siberia at the beginning of the reign of Peter the first.

Or our Paléy,¹⁰ or Gordeyénko¹¹
 Controlled our military forces,
 Then Cossacks wouldn't have to die
 Face down in snow, in foreign lands,
 190 And all their troops already would
 Have liberated Little Russia."¹²

Ablaze with insubordination,
 The youths, emboldened, grumbled so,
 With rabid thirst for dangerous change,
 195 Forgetful of their ancient yoke,
 Of Bogdan's fortune-blessed disputes,
 Of sacred broils, of binding pacts,
 And glory that their fathers won.
 But old age treads with wariness,
 200 And prudently it eyes each step.
 Nor does it hastily conclude
 That something can or can't be done.
 So who will plumb oceanic depths,
 Entombed beneath immobile ice?
 205 Whose sharp-eyed wisdom pierces deep
 Into the fated, dark abyss
 Of wicked souls? In old age, thoughts,
 The fertile seeds of bottled passions,
 Repose submerged beneath the depths,
 210 And there, perhaps, the sprouts of schemes
 Long cultivated bear their fruit.
 Who knows? The more Mazeppa feeds
 His spite, deceitfulness and cunning,
 The less he appears to act with caution,
 215 The less complex his movements seem.
 How like a despot he can read
 The hearts of men, discern them, lure them,
 And then control them through their minds,
 Deciphering their hidden secrets!
 220 At feasts, the glib old man was masked

¹⁰ Simeon Paléy, a braggart and colonel, was a famous horseman and raider. He was exiled to Yeniseysk for wanton looting, at Mazeppa's request. When the latter proved to be a traitor, Paléy, then his inveterate enemy, was restored from exile and took part in the battle of Poltava.

¹¹ Kostya Gordeyénko was a tribal ataman of the Zaporozhian Cossacks. Afterward he joined Charles XII. He was taken prisoner and executed in 1708.

¹² 20,000 Cossacks had recently been deployed to Lithuania.

In auspice and credulity;
 He speaks with elders wistfully
 Of younger days, long since gone by;
 With self-willed men, he praises freedom,
 225 With malcontents, he censures power,
 With bitter men, he sheds false tears;
 With stupid men, he bandies words!
 Perhaps it isn't known to many
 That he has an unyielding soul,
 230 That by his honor or dishonor,
 He *likes* to hurt his enemies;
 That never once has an affront,
 In all his days, escaped his grudge;
 That far away this haughty man
 235 Has gained a criminal's repute;
 That there is nothing he holds sacred,
 That there's no kindness he remembers,
 That there is nothing that he loves,
 That he'd spill blood as soon as water,
 240 That he despises liberty,
 That there's no motherland for him.

Within his soul, this wicked man
 Had nurtured heinous plans, for many
 Long years. But now a hostile gaze,
 245 A dangerous gaze, is piercing him.

"Oh no, you predator! Barbarian!"
 Thinks Kochubey and grinds his teeth,
 "I'll spare your den my fiery wrath,
 For there my daughter is imprisoned;
 250 Your corpse won't smolder into ash,
 Nor will you perish by the blow of
 A Cossack blade. Oh no, you traitor.
 On Moscow's execution block,
 In blood, amid your vain denials,
 255 Still trembling from the torturous rack,
 You'll curse the very day, the hour,
 In which you christened our poor daughter,
 The feast at which the cup of honor
 Was given you poured full of wine,
 260 And most of all the night when you,
 Old bird of prey, ensnared our dove!..."

So! Once upon a time Mazeppa
 Had been a friend to Kochubey;
 They'd shared their feelings
 265 Like salt and bread and unction oil.
 Across the fields of victory, their steeds
 Had galloped, side by side, through flames;
 And many times they'd carried on
 Long conversations all alone—
 270 The cautious Hetman had almost
 Revealed his soul's insatiable
 Abyss to Kochubey in riddled,
 Opaque exchanges, hinting at
 His treasonous, rebellious plans
 275 For opportune negotiations.
 Back then, the heart of Kochubey
 Had been devoted to the Hetman.
 He now grows fierce in bitter rage,
 Provoked to meet a single challenge;
 280 He nurtures, day and night, but one
 Obsession: He will either perish,
 Or visit ruinous vengeance on
 The man who has profaned his daughter.

But he concealed his vengeful cause
 285 Within the fortress of his heart.
 "In his debilitating grief,
 He bends his thoughts toward the grave.
 He bears no grudge against Mazeppa;
 It's all his daughter's fault alone.
 290 But even she has his forgiveness:
 Let God pass judgment on her choice.
 She's cast her shame upon her kin,
 Forgetting heaven and the law . . ."

And meanwhile Kochubey has turned
 295 An eagle's scrutiny upon
 His friends, in search of those most stout,
 Unwavering, unbuyable.
 To all of this his wife was privy:¹³
 He's secretly amassed a grim
 300 Denunciation, and possessed

¹³ In one of his letters, Mazeppa accuses Kochubey of being the pawn of his *proud and high minded* wife.

By rage that only women know,
 His wife brims over with impatience,
 Urging her wrathful spouse to hurry.
 In bed, amid night's gloomy dreams,
 305 As if some kind of anguished spirit,
 She whispers of revenge, upbraids him,
 Sheds tears, encourages his gall,
 Demands an oath—and Kochubey
 Grown fey, then takes the oath before her.

310 The blow is calculated well.
 The fearless Iskra¹⁴ is at one
 With Kochubey. And both are sure:
 "He's conquered, and his fate is sealed.
 But who, ablaze with fervid zeal,
 315 Devoted to the common good,
 Unburdened by timidity,
 Could place this charge against the mighty
 Villain at biased Peter's feet?"

 Among Poltava's Cossack youths,
 320 Of those whom poor Maria scorned,
 Was one who, from the youngest age,
 Had loved her with the greatest passion.
 In morning and in evening hours,
 Upon his native river's banks,
 325 In Ukraine's shady cherry glades,
 He'd wait for his adored Maria,
 And tortured by anticipation,
 The briefest tryst would comfort him.
 He knew his love for her was hopeless,
 330 And never wearied her with pleadings:
 He'd die of grief if she refused him.
 When suitors crowded round Maria,
 He kept his distance from their ranks,
 Immersed in thick, forlorn dejection.
 335 But when Maria's sudden shame
 Was voiced among the Cossack men,
 And when relentless rumors struck
 Her down with laughter and derision,
 "Maria" never ceased to have

¹⁴ Iskra, a colonel from Poltava and a friend of Kochubey, took part in his intrigue and shared his fate.

340 The same significance to him.
 But if Mazeppa's name, by chance
 Or no, was uttered in his presence,
 The youth went pale, and he would cast
 His gaze toward his feet in anguish.

345

 So who, beneath the moon and stars,
 Rides forth so late upon his steed?
 Whose horse is this that never tires,
 But runs across the endless steppe?

350 The Cossack holds his northward way,
 The Cossack has no need for rest,
 Not in the fields or shady glades,
 Nor on the banks near dangerous fords.

 Like glass, his damask steel blade gleams,
 355 A small sack clinks against his chest,
 And never faltering, his steed
 Speeds on, its tail a lashing whip.

 He'll need his gold to hire a page;
 His zealous steed is but a trifle,
 360 No more important is his blade;
 His cap, however, has a price.

 To save his cap, he'd gladly trade
 His steed, his damask blade, the gold;
 But he would not give up his cap,
 365 Without surrendering his head.

 And why's his cap so dear? Therein
 Is sewn the grim denunciation,
 In which the Hetman is condemned
 Before the Tsar by Kochubey.

370 And meanwhile, sensing not the threat,
 Nor fearing any consequences,
 Mazeppa carries out his intrigues.
 His plenipotentiary Jesuit¹⁵

¹⁵ The Jesuit Zalensky, the princess Dulskaia and a Bulgarian archbishop who was exiled from his homeland were the primary agents aiding Mazeppa in his

- Inflames the populace, assuring
 375 Him the unstable throne of Ukraine.
 Like thieves, they gather in the night
 To hold their secret councils, where
 They weigh the pros and cons of treason,
 Compose the “Universals” items¹⁶
 380 Trade oaths on the tsar’s royal head,
 And then trade on the vassals’ heads.
 A beggar haunts Mazeppa’s palace,
 But whence he comes no one can say,
 And Orlik,¹⁷ lifelong Hetman’s lackey,
 385 Ushers him in and sees him out.
 The servants he dispatched are spreading
 Their secret poison everywhere:
 They stir the Cossacks of the Don,
 Who are commanded by Bulavin;¹⁸
 390 They wake the courage of wild hordes;
 And on the threshold of the Dnepr,
 They move the roving bands to fear
 The Russian Tsar’s autocracy.
 Mazeppa casts his gaze on all things,
 395 And letters fly from place to place:
 His clever threats even incite
 Bakhchisarai against the Tsar.
 The king in Warsaw heeds his words,
 As does the Pasha in Ochakov,
 400 King Charles, and even the Tsar.
 His perfidy is not suspected;
 Conceptions more conceptions breed,
 All honing his forthcoming strike;
 His evil will shall never tire,
 405 His treacherous flame will never dim.

But how he started, how he jumped,
 When unexpected thunder struck

betrayal of Peter. The archbishop, disguised as a beggar, was constantly moving back and forth between Poland and Ukraine.

¹⁶ The Hetmen’s manifestos were thus named.

¹⁷ Philip Orlik was Mazeppa’s Chancellor and confidant. After the latter’s death (ca. 1710), Charles XII gave him the empty title of Hetman of Little Russia. He subsequently converted to the Mohammedan faith and died in Benders in approximately 1736.

¹⁸ Bulavin was a Don Cossack who revolted at the same time.

- Before him! When grandees¹⁹ of Russia
 Sent him, the very enemy
 410 Of Russia, the denunciation
 That had been written in Poltava,
 And when, instead of just deserts,
 They lavished sympathy on him;
 For, occupied by wartime troubles,
 415 Abhorring what he thought was slander,
 Not heeding the denunciation,
 The Tsar himself consoled this Judas
 And promised to subdue such malice
 With noise of thunderous retribution!
- 420 Mazeppa, feigning melancholy,
 Submissively addresses Peter.
 "God knows, and all the world can see:
 For twenty years this Hetman's heart
 Has served, most faithfully, the Tsar,
 425 Who succored him and granted him
 Immeasurable munificence...
 Oh, what insane, short-sighted malice!...
 Must he, so near his days' conclusion,
 Begin to learn of treachery
 430 And how it mars deserved glory?
 Was is not he who angrily
 Refused to aid one Stanisław,²⁰
 Thus spurning Ukraine's promised crown,
 And sent his Tsar such pacts and secret
 435 Letters as duty would require?
 Was he not deaf to the persuasions
 Of the great Khan²¹ and Sultan of
 Constantinople? Blazing, ardent,
 He gladly used his mind and sword
 440 To contradict the white Tsar's foes,
 Begrudging neither life nor labor,
 And now these wicked wretches dare

¹⁹ The mysterious secretary general Shafirov and Count Golovkin, friends and patrons of Mazeppa. In all fairness, the blame for the horrible judgment and execution of the denunciators is to be laid on them.

²⁰ This happened in 1705. See the notes to Bantysh-Kamensky's *A History of Little Russia*.

²¹ At the time of his unsuccessful invasion of Ukraine, Kaza-Girey invited Mazeppa to unite with him in an attack on Russia.

Disgrace the gray hair on his head!
 And who? They're Iskra, Kochubey!
 445 I thought they were his age-old friends!"
 Concealing lust for blood with tears,
 The villain has the frigid gall
 To then demand their execution...²²

Whose executions?... cruel old man!
 450 Whose daughter does he now embrace?
 But he remorselessly suppresses
 The sleepy grumbling in his heart.
 He says: "But why'd the madman challenge
 A foe so far beyond his measure?
 455 That arrogant free thinker brought
 The axe upon his neck himself.
 With eyelids clamped, he bolted. Why?
 What made him think he had a chance?
 Or ... But a daughter's love will not
 460 Redeem her father's forfeit head.
 The lover in me has to yield;
 If not, the Hetman's blood will flow."

Maria, poor Maria,
 Beauty of Circassian daughters!
 465 You do not know what kind of serpent
 You nurture, held against your bosom.
 By what dark sorcery were you
 So irresistibly attracted
 Toward such a wayward savage beast?
 470 To whom have you been sacrificed?
 His smoky locks of curly hair,
 The deep-set wrinkles in his face,
 His fiery, gleaming, sunken gaze,
 His forked, beguiling utterances:
 475 You cherish these above all else;
 For them you cast away your mother,
 For you preferred his tempting bower
 To chambers in your father's home.
 With his enchanting, glowing eyes,

²² In his letters, he complained that the denouncers were punished too lightly and persistently demanded their execution, comparing himself with Susanna, who, though innocent, was slandered by the corrupt elders, and comparing Count Golovkin with the prophet Daniel.

480 The old man cast a spell on you;
 With soft and soothing whispered speeches,
 He lulled your conscience into sleep.
 You raise your blinded gaze to him,
 To look on him with reverence,
 485 You coddle him with your affection—
 You find that your disgrace is pleasant,
 For you, in your senseless rapture,
 You're proud, as if of chastity—
 You lost the tender charm of shame
 490 Somewhere within your fall from grace...

What's shame or rumor to Maria?
 What are the world's trite penalties,
 When such a proud old man inclines
 His head and rests it in her lap,
 495 Forgetting, all because of her,
 The noise and labor of his fate;
 Or when he tells a timid girl
 The secrets of his bold, grim thoughts?
 Nor does she mourn her innocence;
 500 Her soul knows only one regret,
 Which grows at times like gathering clouds:
 She keeps imagining her parents,
 Both melancholy, both dejected.
 And through her tears she sees their image,
 505 Alone and childless in old age;
 She thinks she hears their pained reproach...
 Oh, but if only she had known
 What all of Ukraine knew already!
 But as of yet the deadly secret
 510 Remained concealed from poor Maria.

Canto the Second

Mazeppa's disposition darkened.
 His mind was plagued by cruel dreams.
 Maria's young compassionate eyes
 Were fixed upon her aged lover.
 5 She, having knelt, embraced his knees
 And then affirmed her words of love.
 In vain her love aspired to quell
 Mazeppa's sullen meditations.
 He sat before the poor young girl
 10 And inattentively replied

To all her sympathy with naught
 But silence, gazing at the floor.
 She was offended and surprised,
 And hardly breathing, she stood up
 15 And said, with indignation:

“Please, listen. I have sacrificed
 All that I had, for you alone.
 For loving once, I love forever;
 I’ve had but one desire in life:
 20 To know your love for me. For that
 I’ve ruined my hope for happiness,
 And yet I don’t regret the loss—
 Recall the dreadful calm that night,
 The night our love was consummated.
 25 You swore eternal love to me.
 So why do you not love me now?”

Mazeppa

My darling, you’re not being fair.
 Discard these senseless fantasies;
 You ruin your heart with vain suspicion.
 30 No, passions agitate your soul,
 Their fervent currents quench its ardor.
 Maria, do believe I love you,
 More so than power, more than glory.

Maria

That isn’t true. Don’t lie to me.
 35 Were we inseparable for long?
 And now you flee from my affections;
 They’re tiresome to you now, it seems;
 You spend all day with officers,
 At feasts, on journeys—I’m forgotten;
 40 You either spend your nights alone,
 Or with the beggar or the Jesuit.
 My humble love for you is bound
 To meet with cold severity.
 I know that recently you drank
 45 To Princess Dulskaya. That’s news;
 Who’s Princess Dulskaya?

Mazeppa

Are you

Jealous? Would I, at my ripe age,
 Endeavor toward the haughty greetings
 Of such self-loving, frigid beauty?
 50 Would I, a harsh old man, begin,
 Like idle youths, to sigh and pine,
 To drag about love's shameful fetters,
 To tempt a woman by my folly?

Maria

No, just explain without excuses,
 55 And answer me directly, simply.

Mazeppa

Your peace of mind's important to me.
 So be it. I'll reveal it all.

We've spent some time devising plans,
 And now they've reached a boiling point.
 60 A fortunate hour is upon us;
 The time for glorious battle nears.
 For far too long we've bowed our heads,
 Without respect or liberty,
 Beneath the yoke of Warsaw's patronage,
 65 Beneath the yoke of Moscow's despotism.
 But now is Ukraine's chance to grow
 Into an independent power;
 Defying Peter, I will raise
 The bloody banner of our freedom.
 70 Now all is ready: I have both
 The kings negotiating with me;
 And in the bloody chaos of
 Strife, I, perhaps, will seize the throne.
 I have reliable adherents:
 75 The Princess Dulskaya is one,
 My Jesuit, and that beggar, too—
 They move my plans toward my goals.
 It's through their hands that letters come,
 My orders from the kings. So there
 80 Are the confessions most important
 To you now. Satisfied? Have I
 Dissolved your fantasies?

Maria

My darling!

You will become the Tsar of Ukraine!
The regal crown will come to stand
85 Upon your silver locks!

Mazeppa
85 Hold on,
Not everything is finished. Storms
Are brewing. Who knows what awaits me?

Maria
I know no fear when close to you—
You're powerful! I know the throne
90 Awaits you.

Mazeppa
90 Or the chopping block?

Maria
If so, then I will join you there.
You think I could survive without you?
But no, you're destined for great power.

Mazeppa
You love me, don't you?

Maria
Do I love you?!

Mazeppa
95 So tell me who's more dear to you,
Your father, or your spouse?

Maria
My dear,
What kind of question's that? It vexes
Me quite unfairly. I have tried to
Forget about my family.
100 I've brought disgrace upon them and
Perhaps been cursed by my father
(My dreams have been so horrible!),
And all for whom?

Mazeppa
So I'm more dear

To you? You're silent...

Maria

Oh my God!

Mazeppa

105 What is it? Answer.

Maria

105 You decide.

Mazeppa

Now listen: let's say one of us,
Your father or myself, must perish,
And you were our appointed judge,
Whom would you choose to sacrifice,
110 And whom would you decide to save?

Maria

Enough! Don't twist my heart like that!
You're such a tempter!

Mazeppa

Answer me!

Maria

You're pale; your speech has turned severe...
Oh, don't be angry! I would give you
115 All, all I've ever had, believe me;
Such words as these are terrifying.
Enough.

Mazeppa

Remember that, Maria,
What you have said to me just now.

§

120 The night in Ukraine is serene,
Stars glow in the translucent sky.
The breeze is loath to overcome
Its somnolence. The silvery leaves
Of poplars scarcely tremble.
The moon shines calmly down from high

- 125 Above onto the town of Bila Tserkva,
It lights the Hetman's splendid gardens,
It lights the ancient fortress' walls.
And silence ... silence all around,
But hectic whispers fill the fortress.
- 130 Beneath a window, in a tower,
Immersed in deep and heavy thought,
In chains, sits Kochubey, who gazes
Upon the heavens in dismay.
- The dawn will bring his execution,
135 But execution doesn't daunt him;
He does not mourn his forfeit life;
What's death to him? A welcome sleep.
The bloody grave will find him ready.
Fatigue consumes him. Righteous God!
- 140 The loss of life, and with it honor,
Thus desecrated by the Tsar
And tossed, a muted beast, before
The feet of traitors to the Tsar,
Thus given over to their power,
- 145 And knowing friends will die as well,
To hear them curse you as they perish...
To lie beneath an axe, though guiltless,
To see your foe's exuberant face
As you are flung to death's embrace,
- 150 Not having anyone to whom
To leave the righteous task of vengeance...

- And he recalled his home, Poltava,
His family and his closest friends,
The wealth and glory of his past,
- 155 The songs his lovely daughter sang,
The ancient house where he was born,
Where he'd learned labor and repose,
And all that made life seem so sweet,
Which he had chosen to discard—
- 160 For what? ...

- 160 But then a key was grinding
Within a rusty lock—he woke
To wretched thoughts: So there he is!
My leader on this bloody path
Beneath the standard of the cross.

165 Oh stalwart counselor to sinners,
 Physician to our soulful sorrows,
 Oh votary of Christ, who suffered
 Excruciating death for us,
 Oh bearer of his holy Blood
 170 And Flesh, I'm strong. I'll boldly face
 My death and greet eternal life!

And stricken to the heart with grief,
 Unhappy Kochubey was ready
 To pour out melancholy prayers
 175 Before eternal and almighty God.
 His guest, however, was no priest,
 But one he knew too well already:
 The savage Orlik stood before him.
 And faltering in his disgust,
 180 The victim asked him bitterly:
 "You're here, you wretched man? Pray tell,
 Why must Mazeppa interrupt
 My final night's repose again?"

Orlik

The questioning's not over: answer.

Kochubey

185 I answered you already: Go,
 And leave me be.

Orlik

Pan Hetman still
 Demands confessions.

Kochubey

But to what?
 I've long since acquiesced to all
 Of your confessions, though my statements
 190 Have all been false. I am deceitful,
 I've launched intrigues. The Hetman's right.
 What more can you request?

Orlik

We know
 That you have countless riches hidden.
 We know there's more than what was stored

- 195 Away within Dikanka's vaults.²³
 Your punishment shall be complete;
 Your wealth and your estates should pass,
 In full, unto the Hetmanate—
 Such is the law. I order you—
 200 Fulfill your final obligation,
 And tell me where you hid your treasure!

Kochubey

- You're right, I did have more: I had
 Three treasures valued more than life.
 My honor was the first such treasure,
 205 The treasure that your torture took;
 The second cannot be restored,
 The treasure of my daughter's honor,
 Whose loss I've felt both day and night—
 Mazeppa stole that treasure.
 210 And yet I've saved my last great treasure,
 The third dear treasure—holy vengeance,
 Which I'm prepared to hand to God.

Orlik

- Old man, cut short your empty ravings;
 You feast on lurid thoughts because
 215 Today you must forsake the world.
 Now isn't the best time for jokes.
 Now answer, or there'll be more torture:
 Where is your money?

Kochubey

 Callous slave!

- Give up this senseless questioning!
 220 Be patient. Let me lie in the grave,
 Then you can run back to Mazeppa,
 And both of you can count my money
 With fingers that you've stained in blood,
 And tear apart my manor's cellars,
 225 Chop up my gardens, burn my home;
 And bring my daughter, when you do;
 For she herself will tell you all,
 And she can show you all my treasure;

²³ Dikanka was Kochubey's village.

But now, for goodness sake, just let
 230 Me be, I beg you, leave me in peace.

Orlik

The money! Where's it hidden? Speak!
 Don't want to? Where's the money!? Tell me,
 Or else endure the consequences.
 Just think about it. Name the place!
 235 Still silent? Fine. Call in the Headsman!²⁴

The Headsman came.

Oh, torturous night!

But where's the Hetman, where's the villain?
 Where has he fled to dodge the pangs
 Of his cold-blooded serpent's conscience?
 240 Within the slumbering maiden's chambers,
 Mazeppa sat beside the bed
 In which his god-daughter then slept,
 Still blissful in her ignorance,
 And there his muted gloom inclined
 245 His head beneath the weight of thoughts,
 Each one more dismal than the last.
 "The senseless Kochubey will die;
 He can't be saved. As I approach
 My goal, I must, with every step,
 250 Exhibit power more and more,
 While enemies bow ever lower
 Before me. There is no salvation;
 This fool informer and his minion
 Will die." But when his eyes strayed toward
 255 The bed, Mazeppa thought "Oh, God!
 But what will happen with Maria,
 When she finds out the fateful news?
 For now, her mind is still at peace,
 But such a secret can't be kept
 260 From her much longer. The axe will fall
 Tomorrow, and its thunderous noise
 Will peal throughout all Ukraine, voices
 Erupting in all social circles! . .
 Ah, now I see: A man condemned

²⁴ Having already been condemned to death, Kochubey was tortured in the Hetman's fortress. According to the unfortunate's answers, it was evident that he had been interrogated about treasure he had hidden away.

265 By fate to lead a turbid life
 Should stand alone before the storm,
 Not call a woman to his side!
 You cannot hitch a trembling doe
 And horse up to a single carriage.
 270 I carelessly forgot myself,
 The chopping block demands its due...
 This poor young girl bestowed on me
 All, all that makes life beautiful,
 And everything that makes life dear—
 275 On me, a grim old man—and then?
 And then I aim this blow at her!"
 He gazed upon her: Oh, how sweet
 The peacefulness of youth now seems!
 How gently dreams are coddling her!
 280 Her soft lips part, thus making way
 For placid breath from her young breast;
 Tomorrow, yes tomorrow ... shuddering,
 Mazeppa turned his gaze away,
 Stood up, and stealing silently
 285 Away, he went down to his gardens.

The night in Ukraine is serene,
 Stars glow in the translucent sky.
 The breeze is loath to overcome
 Its somnolence. The silvery leaves
 290 Of poplars scarcely tremble.
 But strange and dismal dreams still plague
 Mazeppa's soul: the midnight's stars,
 Like clusters of accusing eyes,
 Look down on him with mockery.
 295 The poplars, crowded in their ranks,
 Austerely shake their wizened heads,
 Like judges, whispering to each other.
 And summer's warm nocturnal gloom
 Is stifling as a dungeon's shadows.

300 And then ... a weak scream ... a vague groan,
 It seems, have issued from the castle.
 Perhaps they are hallucinations,
 Or owls' cries, or beastly howling,
 Or torturous groans, or something else—
 305 But now the aged man can not
 Defeat his own anxiety,

And so the weakly drawn out scream
 Is drowned out by Mazeppa's answer—
 Another scream, which he'd let forth
 310 In savage joy on battlefields,
 When, with Zabela, Gamaley,
 And yes, with him, with Kochubey,
 He'd galloped through the martial flames.

The crimson streaks of dawn embrace
 315 The heavens with their vivid streaks.
 The valleys, hills and wheat-fields shine,
 So do the groves and rivers' waves.
 The playful noise of morn resounds,
 And then mankind abandons slumber.

And still Maria sweetly breathes,
 Embraced by dreams, but senses through
 Transparent sleep that someone comes
 Into her room to touch her legs.
 She woke—but quickly, with a smile,
 325 She turned her face away, avoiding
 The gleam of morning's blinding rays.
 Maria held her tender hand
 Out, asking in a languid whisper:
 "Mazeppa, is that you?" But someone
 330 Else's voice responds ... Oh my God!
 She started, looked around, and ... What?
 Her mother stood there...

Mother

Quiet, quiet;
 Don't give us up: I stole in here
 With night's long shadows, carefully,
 335 With but a tearful supplication.
 Today's the execution. You
 Alone might tame those savage beasts.
 Your father ... save him!

Daughter
(horrified)

What? Which father?
 What execution?

Mother

What? You still

- 340 Don't know? But no ... you live at court,
Not in the wild. You have to know
About the Hetman's awful strength,
How all the lords obey him now,
And how he punishes his foes—
345 Oh now I see: you'll spurn your family,
Despite its doleful need, for him.
I find you here, in sleepy leisure,
While cruel judgments are prepared,
While sentences are being read,
350 An axe made ready for your father!
It seems that we are strangers now...
Collect yourself, Maria, daughter!
Go! Run, and fling yourself before him!
Go, save your father, be our angel!
355 Your eyes will bind the villains' hands,
You can deflect them from the axe.
Demand! The Hetman can't refuse:
For him you have forgotten honor,
Your family, God.

Daughter

What's happening?

- 360 Mazeppa ... Father ... execution—
My mother's here with supplications—
I've lost my mind ... or this is all
A nightmare.

Mother

- God have mercy on you,
It's not a nightmare, not a dream.
365 But could it be that you don't know?
Your father grew enraged, refused
To bear his daughter's loss of honor,
Became consumed with thirst for vengeance,
Denounced the Hetman, then was tortured
370 So bloodily that he confessed,
At last, to criminal intrigues,
As well as shameful slander.
A victim of bold righteousness,
His head is forfeit to Mazeppa.
375 His execution will take place

Today, before a military
 Assembly, if the hand of God
 Almighty doesn't intervene.
 He's here, right now, within the castle,
 380 Imprisoned in a tower.

Daughter

380 Oh God!...
 Today!... Oh God! My poor, poor father!

The maiden fell upon the bed,
 As cold and limpid as a corpse.

A motley mob of caps converges.
 385 The lances shine. The drums resound.
 Platoons align, and *serdyuks* gallop.²⁵
 The crowd is boiling. Hearts are racing.
 The road is clad in human scales,
 And writhes, as if a serpent's tail.
 390 The field contains a fateful platform,
 Where to and fro the Headsman paces,
 Rejoicing, greedily awaiting
 His victim. Then, with pale white hands,
 He playfully picks up his heavy
 395 Axe, jesting with the joyful mob.
 All sounds were drowned in thundering voices:
 A woman's scream, guffaws, and swearing.
 An exclamation then rang out,
 And all fell silent. Nothing broke
 400 The dreadful calm but horses' hooves.
 And there, upon a raven steed,
 The Hetman rode, surrounded by
 His bodyguard and general council.
 And there, upon the Kiev road,
 405 A wagon followed. Awestruck gazes
 Turned toward it. In it, reconciled
 With heaven and the earth, and firm
 Within the bastion of strong faith,
 The guiltless Kochubey was sitting,
 410 And with him Iskra, quiet, indifferent,
 A lamb, obedient to fate.
 The wagon stopped. A prayer burst

²⁵ Soldiers that the Hetman personally maintained.

- Like thunder from the crowd of faces.
The incense rose from thuribles.
415 The crowd prayed silently, to bless
The souls of the unfortunates,
The victims prayed thus for their foes.
Then up they went, and Kochubey
First crossed himself, then lay upon
420 The block. Grave silence struck the masses.
The axe blade made a gleaming arc,
The head leaped free. The whole field moaned.
The second head went tumbling after,
Its eyes still blinking as it rolled.
425 The grass was reddened by the blood—
The Headsman, joyful in his malice,
Grasped both the heads, each by its forelock,
And with a tense and bulging arm,
He shook them both before the crowd.
- 430 The execution was now over.
The people carelessly dispersed,
Already, on their homeward way,
Discussing their unending labor.
The field was emptied bit by bit.
435 And then, two women ran against
The current of the motley crowd,
Fatigued and veiled in sweaty dust.
It seemed they hurried, full of fear,
Toward the place of execution.
440 “You’re late,” said someone from the crowd,
While pointing toward the bloody field.
The fatal platform was in pieces now,
Black chasubles emitted prayers,
Two Cossacks heaved an oaken coffin
445 Onto a waiting wagon’s bed.
- Alone before his mob of horsemen,
Mazeppa, dreadful, quit the place
Of execution. He was prey
Somehow to horrid emptiness.
450 Nobody dared approach him now,
Nor would he speak a single word.
His steed sped on, imbrued in foam.
Arriving home, he asked “Maria,
Where is she?” And Mazeppa heard

455 Their timid, muffled answers...
 Struck by involuntary terror,
 He went to her, into her room:
 Her silent room had been abandoned—
 He sought her in the garden, anxious;
 460 But all around the expansive pond,
 Along the peaceful, shrub-lined paths,
 There was no trace, all were deserted.
 She's gone! He called his faithful servants,
 His own elite and trusty guard.
 465 They flew on rearing, snorting steeds—
 Their cries of wild pursuit rang out,
 And thus the special mounted guard,
 Full tilt, set out to scour the land.

The precious moments hurtle by,
 470 Maria still has not returned.
 And no one knew, nor had they heard,
 Of how or why she had departed.
 Mazeppa ground his teeth and brooded.
 His servants trembled quietly.
 475 The Hetman's heart held boiling venom.
 He'd locked himself within their room.
 He sat there, in the gloom of night,
 Beside their bed, his eyes unclosed,
 Immersed in supernatural grief.
 480 When morning came, his special guard
 Began returning, one by one, to him.
 Their horses nearly dead, their bridles,
 Their saddle-blankets, saddle-girths,
 485 And even horseshoes drenched in foam.
 Though bruised and bloody and dismayed,
 Not one could tell him news of her.
 For every trace of her existence
 Had vanished, like an empty sound:
 490 Even her mother had departed
 Alone into the gloom of exile.

Canto the Third

The soul's profoundest melancholy
 Did not inhibit Ukraine's Chief
 In his impertinent ambition.
 Remaining firm in his intrigue,

5 He carried forth negotiations
With Charles the proud, the Swedish King,
All while, so as more certainly
To fool the eyes of hostile doubt,
He lay in bed and mimicked suffering,
10 Surrounded by a crowd of doctors,
And groaned, and begged for them to cure him.
The fruits of passion, war and labor,
Disease, decrepitude and sorrow,
These harbingers of death had chained
15 Him to his bed. He was prepared
To leave this mortal world already;
He had requested his last rites,
He called a bishop to his bed,
To wait for his uncertain end,
20 Who then anointed those insidious
Gray hairs with oil of holy unction.

But time went on, and Moscow waited
Hour after hour, in vain, for guests,
Preparing funeral feasts for them
25 Amid old adversaries' graves.
But Charles suddenly turned south,
To redirect the war to Ukraine.

The day had come. Mazeppa rose
From bed, the sickly sufferer,
30 The living corpse, who'd still been groaning,
With a foot in the grave, the day before.
And now he's Peter's mighty foe.
And now he's hale, his eyes gleam bright
And proud before his men, he swings
35 His saber; on his steed he flies
To Desna, full of healthy speed.
Thus had the clever cardinal
Of legend, bent beneath the weight
Of waning years, grown young, erect,
40 And fit when crowned with Rome's tiara.

The news spread fast, as if on wings.
And Ukraine, troubled, started whispering:
"He's now changed sides, betrayed the Russians,
He's lain his humble staff and mace
45 At Charles' feet." The flame exploded,

The bloody dawn of national war
Was rising.

- But who could describe
The rage and fury of the Tsar?²⁶
Anathema resounds in churches;
50 Depictions of Mazeppa burn.²⁷
The noisy Council's fierce debate
Inaugurates another Hetman.
And Peter quickly summons all
Of Kochubey and Iskra's kin from
55 The Yenisei's deserted banks.
He sheds remorseful tears with them.
He comforts them, bestows good will
On them, restores their honor.
And old Paléy, Mazeppa's foe,
60 A fervent raider, flies to Ukraine,
To Peter's camp, from exile's gloom.
The orphaned mutiny was trembling.
Brave Chechel²⁸ perished on the block,
As did the Zaparozhian Ataman.
65 And you, who love the battle's glory,
Who cast aside the crown for helm,

²⁶ The forceful measures that were adopted by Peter, with his customary speed and energy, forced Ukraine into submission.

"In the year 1708, on the 7th day of November, by command of the sovereign, the Cossacks have chosen Ivan Skoropadsky, Colonel of Starodub, as their new Hetman, according to their custom of election.

"On the 8th day of November, the Arch-bishops of Kiev, Chernigov and Pereyaslav arrived in Glukhov.

"And on the 9th day these distinguished clergymen publicly passed Anathema over Mazeppa; on the very same day, the effigy (a puppet) of the traitor Mazeppa was brought forth and, once the insignia of his Order (which had been attached to the effigy with a bow) had been removed, this same effigy was given over to the hands of the executioner who, having taken it and tied it with a noose, dragged it through the street and around the square, even so far as to the gallows, and there it was hung.

"In Glukhov, on the 10th day they executed Chechel and other traitors..."

(from *The Diary of Peter the Great*)

²⁷ A word in Little-Russian for "executioner." [This footnote refers to Pushkin's use of the word *kat* in the text of the poem. The line in question literally reads "An executioner tears an image of Mazeppa's countenance to pieces"—*trans.*]

²⁸ Chechel desperately defended Baturin against the forces of Prince Menshikov.

Your day is near, for from afar
 You've glimpsed the ramparts of Poltava.

The Tsar advanced his retinue
 70 With haste, a violent surging flood—
 And both the camps upon the plain
 Began their clever flanking dances:
 Thus warriors with chosen warriors,
 Experienced in brave defeat,
 75 Yet lusting still for heady blood,
 Engage at last in fierce battle.
 And, angered, mighty Charles saw
 That the once chaotic, hapless cloud
 Of men he'd routed near the Narva
 80 Was now a shining, structured web
 Of loyal, swift, undaunted legions
 And threads of stalwart, fierce platoons.

But he resolved to fight tomorrow.
 The Swedish camp profoundly slept.
 85 Within one tent, however,
 A whispered conversation ran:

"No, Orlik, no, I think that we
 Have rushed *mal à propos*, my friend:
 Our calculations, overbold
 90 And faulty, promise little yield.
 My goal, I fear, escapes my grasp.
 What now? But Fortune has been cruel:
 I erred in judging Charles...
 95 He's but a sly, courageous boy;
 He might win two or three engagements;
 He can successfully attack
 His foes at dinner time,²⁹ can laugh
 At bombs thrown in his tent,³⁰ can steal
 100 To enemy camps, concealed by night,
 And, as today, can take down Cossacks,
 Exchanging wound for bloody wound.³¹

²⁹ As he attacked King Augustus in Dresden. See Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII*.

³⁰ "Ah, your majesty! A bomb!..." "What does a bomb have to do with the letter I'm dictating? Write!" This actually happened much later.

But to conduct a battle against
 Such a colossus is beyond him:
 105 He wants to force his fate to turn
 About face with a drum roll, like
 His regiments. He's blind. He's stubborn,
 Impatient, flippant, arrogant.
 God knows what charms he puts his faith in.
 110 He measures Peter's newfound strengths
 By his own prior victories—
 And that will bring him to his knees.
 Now I'm ashamed: enamored of
 A warlike tramp, and at my age;
 115 His courage blinded me, as did
 The fleeting joy of victory,
 As might a timid girl."

Orlik

We've time.
 We'll wait for battle, then we'll bury
 The hatchet yet again with Peter:
 120 We still might mend our differences.
 No doubt, we've hurt the Tsar enough,
 He won't refuse to make his peace.

Mazeppa

Too late. I can't redeem myself
 Before the Russian Tsar. My fate
 125 Has long since now been set in stone.
 I burn with malice long constrained.
 One night, near Azov, I was feasting
 With the cruel Tsar in his tent:
 The goblets seemed to boil over
 130 With purple, frothy mirthful wine,
 And conversation boiled over
 As well. I spoke a brazen word.
 The younger guests became embarrassed—
 The Tsar went crimson, dropped his goblet,
 135 Then grabbed me by my graying whiskers
 And threatened me. And afterward,

³¹ During the night Charles, performing reconnaissance on our camp himself, rode upon some Cossacks who were sitting by a campfire. He galloped straight at them and shot one of them with his own hand. The Cossacks fired three shots and wounded him cruelly in the leg.

Submissive in my helpless rage,
I swore I would exact revenge.
I bore my oath as mothers bear
140 Their children in their wombs. At last,
The time has come. And thus he'll ever
Preserve his memory of me.
I'm sent to Peter as a nuisance,
A thorn within his leafy crown;
145 He'd give the cities of his kin,
The happiest hours of his life,
To grab Mazeppa by the whiskers
Again, as in those older days.
Yet still, some hope remains for us:
150 The dawn will show who must retreat.

The traitor to the Russian Tsar
Fell silent, then his eyelids closed.

The new dawn burns the eastern sky.
Already canons roar, upon
155 The hills and on the plains. The purple
Smoke, twisting, rises toward the heavens,
To make a tryst with morning's rays.
The regiments are closing ranks.
The marksmen fill the scattered brush.
160 The shot is flying, bullets gleam,
Cold bayonets foreshadow doom.
The Swedes, the sons of precious victory,
Tear through the fire of Russian trenches;
The cavalry, excited, charges;
165 The infantry then charges after,
Endeavoring to fortify
The cavalry with steadfast ranks.
The field of fatal battle thunders,
Illuminated by the flames.
170 But martial jubilation clearly
Already complimented our side.
Their retinues, repulsed by fire,
Dispersing, perished in the dust.
Rosen retreated through ravines;
175 The ardent Shlippenbach surrendered.
And host for host we pressed the Swedes;
The glory of their banners darkens,

And by the grace of God, each step
We take across the field is blessed.

180 Then Peter's sonorous, inspired
Voice somehow rose above the din:
"To battle! God is with us!" Peter
Emerged, surrounded by a crowd
Of favorites, from his tent. His eyes
185 Ablaze, his face inspiring awe,
He quickly moves, magnificent,
Like bolts of lightning cast by God.
He's going. Someone brings his horse.
His steed is ardent and resolved,
190 Atremble as his nostrils sense
The battle flames. Through martial dust
He flies, his eyes attentive, sly,
And proudly bears his mighty burden.

 The scorching glow of noon approaches.
195 The fighting slackens, like a ploughman.
Some Cossacks, on their horses, prance.
Right dress! Formations; troops congeal.
The tunes of war have fallen silent.
The cannons on the hills, at rest,
200 Have ceased their ravenous eruptions.
And lo—the plains then overflowed
With distant, bursting cries: *hurrah!*
The troops had caught a glimpse of Peter.

 He tore ahead of all the ranks,
205 Enraptured, mighty as the battle.
His eyes devoured the martial field.
The fledglings of the Petrine nest
Surged after him, a loyal throng—
Through all the shifts of worldly fate,
210 In trials of policy and war,
These men, these comrades, were like sons:
The noble Sheremetev,
And Brius, and Bour, and Repnin,
And, fortune's humble favorite,
215 The mighty, quasi-sovereign.

 And then, before the cobalt ranks
Of his combative retinue,

Borne forth by his most loyal servants,
Upon a litter, pale, unmoving,
220 In wounded anguish, Charles appeared—
A hero, followed by his chiefs.
His silent thoughts weighed down on him.
The discomposure of his gaze
Betrayed unprecedented angst.
225 The battle Charles so long desired
Had seemed to put him in a quandary...
At once he feebly waved his hand
And moved his troops against the Russians.

They clashed with Peter's retinues
230 Within the smoke amid the plains:
The battle of Poltava thundered!
In flames, beset by burning hail,
Which hail a living wall repels,
And over fallen ranks fresh ranks
235 Close in with bayonets. Grave clouds,
The cavalry detachments fly,
Their bridles and their sabers ringing,
Colliding, hacking from the shoulder.
The corpses pile on heaps of corpses,
240 For pig-iron globes are all around
Them, leaping, striking, scattering
Dust, hissing in the pools of blood.
The Swedes and Russians—chop, hack, cut.
The battle drums, screams, gnashing teeth,
245 Erupting cannons, hooves, neighs, groans,
And death and hell are everywhere.

Amid the turmoil and alarm,
The warlords, with inspired gazes,
Look calmly out upon the battle,
250 Observing the strategic moves,
Predicting death and victory,
Conversing in the quietude.
But who's this gray-haired warrior
Who fights so near to Moscow's Tsar?
255 Supported by a pair of Cossacks,
Aflame with heartfelt zealousness,
He scans the battle's ebb and flow
As only veteran heroes do.
No longer will he mount his steed,

260 Grown old and orphaned in his exile;
 No longer will the Cossacks rally
 When someone shouts the name Paley!
 But why'd his eyes just blaze so bright,
 And why did rage, like midnight dark,
 265 Just wash across this old man's brow?
 Whatever could have roused such ire?
 Could he, through all the smoke, have seen
 His very nemesis, Mazeppa,
 And at that moment come to hate
 270 His own unarmed decrepitude?

Immersed in thought, Mazeppa watched
 The battle, all the time surrounded
 By throngs of rebel Cossack men,
 His kin, his council, and his guard.
 275 A sudden shot. The old man turned.
 In Voynarovksy's hands there was
 A musket with a smoking barrel.
 Shot down, a few short steps away,
 A Cossack youth lay in his blood;
 280 His steed, all drenched in dusty foam,
 In newfound freedom wildly bolted
 And vanished in the fiery distance.
 Through battle, with his blade in hand,
 His eyes, enraptured, burning bright,
 285 This Cossack had pursued the Hetman.
 The old man rode to him to ask
 A question, but the Cossack had
 Already died. And yet his eyes,
 Though vacant, menaced Russia's foe;
 290 His dismal face was deathly pale,
 And the tender name of Maria
 Still tried to take form on his tongue.

But victory was near, so near.
 Hurrah! The Swedes, at last, are broken.
 295 Oh, blessed hour, blessed sight!
 Another surge—our foes retreat,³²

³² Owing to the superb counsel and action of Prince Menshikov, the outcome of the crucial engagement was decided beforehand. The whole affair did not last even two hours. *For* (written in *The Diary of Peter the Great*) *the invincible Swedish lords soon turned their backs, and the whole of the unfriendly army was completely*

Our cavalry in hot pursuit,
 The slaughter dulls their sabers' blades,
 The fallen cover up the steppe
 300 As if a swarm of jet-black locusts.

But Peter revels, and his gaze
 Is proud, and clear, and full of glory.
 His regal feast is marvelous.
 Within his tent, amid the shouts
 305 Of all his men, he entertains
 His leaders and his enemies' leaders,
 Consoles his worthy prisoners,
 Raises the cup of victory
 To drink his warlike teacher's health.

But where's the first, the guest of honor?
 Where is the first, our frightening teacher,
 Whose long endured maliciousness
 The victor of Poltava quenched?
 And where's Mazeppa, where's the villain?
 315 Where has that Judas fled in fear?
 Why isn't the King among the guests?
 Why isn't the traitor on the block?³³

On horseback, in the naked wild,
 The Hetman and the King both fly.
 320 They flee. Their fates are bound together.

overrun by our forces. Peter subsequently issued Danilych a pardon in return for services rendered on that day to General Prince Menshikov.

³³ *L'Empereur Moskovite, pénétré d'une joie qu'il ne se mettait pas en peine de dissimuler* (there was, after all, a reason to rejoice), *recevait sur le champ de bataille les prisonniers qu'on lui amenait en foule et demandait à tout moment: où est donc mon frère Charles? Alors prenant un verre de vin: A la santé, dit-il, de mes maîtres dans l'art de la guerre! —Renschild lui demanda: qui étaient ceux qu'il honorait d'un si beau titre. —Vous, Messieurs le généraux Suédois, reprit le Czar. —Votre Majesté est donc bein ingrate, reprit le Comte, d'avoir tant maltraité ses maîtres.* [The Emperor of Moscow, penetrated by joy that he made no effort to conceal (*there was, after all, a reason to rejoice*), received his prisoners, who were led to him in a crowd, on the field of battle, at which time he asked: "But where is my brother Charles?" Then, having taken a glass of wine, he said: "To the health of my teachers in the art of war!" Renschild asked him on whom he had bestowed such an honorable title. "On you, Messieurs Swedish Generals," answered the Tsar. "Your Majesty is therefore rather ungrateful," replied the Count, "to mistreat your teachers so."]

Impending danger and pure spite
Have given strength unto the King.
He disregards his serious
Wound. Having hung his head, he gallops,
325 He's hunted by the Russians now,
His scattered crowd of faithful men
Can hardly follow after him.

Surveying the wide, semi-circle
Arc of the steppe with trenchant sight,
330 The aged Hetman rides beside him.
They come upon a manor . . . But
Why does Mazeppa seem afraid?
Why did he suddenly rush past
The manor, full speed, without stopping?
335 Or have that desolated courtyard,
The house, and the deserted garden,
As well as the half-open door,
Somehow reminded him just now
Of some forgotten fairytale?
340 Destroyer of pure innocence!
Perhaps you recognized this home,
This house, this former hearth of joy,
Where you, excited by good wine,
Surrounded by a happy family,
345 Would relish merriment and dine?
Perhaps you recognized the nest
Where a peaceful angel once dwelled,
The garden, too, from whence you stole
Away with her... You recognized them!

350 The shades of night embrace the steppe.
Upon the Dnepr's dark blue banks,
Among the crags, the enemies
Of Russia and of Peter doze.
The hero's dreams were merciful,
355 They drowned Poltava's memories.
Mazeppa, though, had troubled dreams.
They brought his dismal soul no peace.
And suddenly the muted night
Was rippled by a call. He woke.
360 He saw, suspended over him,
A fist, and someone looming, silent.
He winced, as if beneath an axe.

Before him, with disheveled hair,
With grim and sunken eyes aglow,
365 Enshrouded all in rags, thin, pale,
There stood, illumined by the moon...
“Is this a dream?... Maria?... Dear?”

Maria

Ah, quiet, quiet, friend! Right now
My father’s and my mother’s eyes
370 Are closed... But wait ... they can still hear us.

Mazeppa

Maria, poor Maria! Please,
Come back, come back, Oh, God!... What’s wrong?

Maria

But listen: Oh, what cunning tricks!
You know, they have the strangest stories.
375 She told me all about her secret,
That my poor father was deceased,
And, quietly, she pointed out
A gray-haired head—a counterfeit!
Can we escape from wicked words?
380 But think about it: that ... that head
Was not a human head at all,
It was a wolf’s head, see: like that!
She wanted to deceive me! Shouldn’t
She be ashamed, to scare me so?
385 And why? So I would lack the nerve
To run away with you today!
Impossible?

With deep-felt grief,
Her vicious lover listened to her.
But turbid thoughts washed over her,
390 “However,” she said, “I recall
A field ... a noisy holiday...
A crowd ... and corpses ... mother brought
Me for the holiday... But where
Were you?... And why must you and I
395 Meander separately, at night?
Come, let’s go home. Right now ... it’s late.
Aha, I see ... oh no, my head
Is full of empty turbulence...

I thought that you were someone else,
400 Old man. So get away from me.
Your gaze is horrible, sardonic.
You're ugly. He is beautiful...
Within his eyes there shines true love,
Within his words ... such tenderness!
405 His beard is whiter than fresh snow,
But yours is stained with drying blood!..."

And with an untamed, screaming laugh,
More dexterous than a young chamois,
She sprang onto her feet and ran,
410 Then disappeared into the gloom.

The eastern flush dispersed night's shades.
The Cossacks' fires were burning red.
The Cossacks boiled their morning gruel.
Their pages, by the Dnepr's banks,
415 Attended the unsaddled steeds.
And Charles awoke. "Oho! It's time!
Get up, Mazeppa. Day is breaking."
The Hetman, though, had not slept long.
The pangs of grief were gnawing him;
420 His breath constricted in his chest.
He silently got on his horse
And rode beside the fleeing King.
A frightful gleam shone from his eyes
As he forsook his native land.

§

425 A hundred years have passed—but what
Remains of these proud, powerful men,
Imbued with all their willful passions?
Their generation passed. And with
Them every bloody trace of effort,
430 Of failure, of victory vanished.
Of all the northern citizens,
Throughout the nation's war-torn fate,
Only you, hero of Poltava,
Have built yourself a monument.
435 For where the rows of winged mills
In clusters form a peaceful fence
Around the desert peaks of Benders,

Where horned buffalo roam free
 About the graves of warriors—
 440 What's left of a putrescent tent,
 Three steps retreating deep into
 The ground, a bed for growing moss,
 Commemorate the Swedish King.
 From there the daring hero sheered,
 445 Alone among his household servants,
 The loud assault of Turkish forces,
 And cast his sword beneath the staff;
 In vain the somber foreigner
 Would seek the Hetman's grave nearby:
 450 Mazeppa had been long forgotten;
 Only in a solemn, hallowed site,
 Each year unto this day, in wrath a
 Cathedral peals anathema
 On him. Yet two graves still endure,
 455 Where dust of the two martyrs rests:
 The church preserves their halcyon respite
 Among the righteous, ancient graves.³⁴
 A row of oaks, now ancient, grows,
 Which friends had planted in Dikanka,
 460 And to this day they testify
 To sons about their murdered fathers.
 As for the daughter who transgressed . . .
 The legends do not speak of her.
 Her suffering, her fate, her end
 465 Are hidden by a veil of darkness.

³⁴ The beheaded bodies of Iskra and Kochubey were given to their families and interred in the Kiev monastery. The following engraving can be found on their tomb:

"What man soever there be that passeth here knowing naught of us,
 Who have here been laid to our eternal rest,
 Because our passion and our death command us to silence,
 This stone gives voice to those prophecies concerning us,
 Both for the truth and our faithfulness to our Monarch,
 The cup of suffering and death from which we drank,
 Mazeppa's villainy, all eternal truths,
 The axe that so forcefully severed our heads;
 We honor in this place the Sovereign Mother of God,
 Who grants all his servants eternal life.

In the year 1708, on the 15th day of July, the noble Vasily Kochubey, Judge General, and Ioann Iskra, Colonel of Poltava, were beheaded before the Military Convoy near Belaya Tserkov, at Borshegovets and Kovsehoi. Their bodies were transferred on the 17th of July to Kiev and on that day interred in the Holy Pecherskaya monastery."

And yet, sometimes an old and blind
Ukrainian rhapsodist, before
The people of a village, strums
The Hetman's songs about a sinful
470 Maiden, and afterward the Cossack
Youths listen as he tells her tale.