

DEDICATION

to Sima Milutinović
Cetinje, 1 May 1845

O thou my teacher, ever dear to me,
Serbian singer, crown'd with heavenly light –
How strange a task is human destiny,
And human life – a fearful sight in dreams.
Behind the closed porch of miracles
Man is expelled – a miracle himself:
Man, thrown upon this stormy shore, and left
Here by the secret hand of bold events,
Without a guardian, led by the remote
Dim influence of secret providence – 10
He now remembers his first glory, dreams
Of blissful times, but dreams and memories
Are fading far too fast out of his sight,
Pressed in dark ranges, they withdraw and flee
Into the wide book of eternity;
Whilst after their dim passage there remains
A sadness deeply on the soul impress'd;
And struggling vainly then he shakes his bonds,
To fathom the deep gloom behind him spreading.

Does man, expelled beneath this cloudy sphere, 20
Receive here both begettings? Is this earth
The home of both his cradles? Was it once

Assigned to him by the Creator's might –
 A place of mysterious punishment,
 Or of a stormy temporal reward –
 Is it a seed-plot of spiritual bliss?
 This is the highest of all mysteries,
 Of spiritual tempests the most frightful –
 The keys to this are only in the grave.

How often, led by strange absorbing thoughts 30
 Into the flowery depth of nature, fed
 With vital juice from her fair naked breast,
 How often did I boldly ask the great
 And fruitful mother why the high Creator
 Had called her into living. Had it been
 For her innumerable children's sake,
 Or were the children made for her delight,
 Or were they both created for each other?
 But this my temporal foster-mother, crowned
 With sunbeams, and adorned with the wreath 40
 Of flowery seasons, or with pearly dew,
 All glistening in the light of dancing stars,
 Prepared to greet her glorious lord, the Sun,
 To all the burning questions of my mind
 Gives but one answer with her silent laugh.

How often times did I conjure the blue
 Pavilion of the nightly heavens, strewn
 With diamond seeds, conjured with glowing soul
 To lift the veil of secret from his self:
 Did his Creator clad him thus with light, 50
 Did he unroll his deep and boundless scroll,
 That every creature might proclaim and praise
 The might of the Creator and his bliss,

Or that from heaven's pages man should read
His utter nothingness and effort vain?

The earthly sages have I questioned oft
About man's fate and mission before God;
But all their various demonstrations here
Are wavering with dread inconstancy,
And all their reasoning, gathered into one, 60
Seem only thirsty wanderings through dim night,
And muttered sounds of a dumb dialect –
A glance, extinguished by the clouds of gloom.
Man, lulled and fettered by a heavy sleep,
Is doomed to gaze at frightful visions there,
And hardly may he in his slumber deem
That his own being is not a part of these.
It seems to him at times that he is freed
From all the heavy burden of this dream –
In vain! 'Twas but a mocking hope! For then 70
He falls into a deeper realm of sleep,
A theater of visions direr far.
Rapidity and cunning he was given
To be himself a worthy member of
This mad and maddening throng and fair on earth:
The pillars and foundations of his will
Are on the pinions of inconstancy:
Desire, the instigator and blind teacher
Of dreadful passions, envy, malice, fear,
Th'inheritance of hell, abases man, 80
And deeper does he sink than meanest beasts
– Whilst reason equals him to the immortals.

True happiness remains unknown to man,
In this his stormy temporal abode,
Its limits and its measures he ignores,