

The Repainted Icon: Criticism of *Eugene Onegin*

Khvalu i klevetu priemli ravnodushno ... [*Receive
praise and insult with equanimity...*]

Of all the celebrated authors in Russian literature, Pushkin has been and is the object of the greatest mass of writing in Russian - critical, biographical, popular, and even fictional. In part we may attribute this to the position that Pushkin is seen to occupy as the 'progenitor of Russian literature,' and to the role he has played of 'national poet' (a title first given to him by Gogol' in 1835); but perhaps the most compelling reason is his enigmatic nature - at once supremely Russian in his superstitions, his use of folk motifs, his loving depictions of Russian nature and life, his command of the Russian language, and at the same time 'foreign' in his lack of concern for deep philosophical problems, his playful, insouciant attitude towards his art, his Gallic brevity and wit, his formal perfection. In this complex literary personality generation after generation of Russian critics and scholars have found the material for a lifetime of study, and the results, in terms of sheer volumes of insights, trivia, polemics, and analysis, form a formidable barrier reef for the new student of Pushkin to cross.

There is something supremely ironic in this mass of exegesis - much of it mediocre, having more to say about the writer than about Pushkin himself - compared to the brevity, elegance, and brilliance of the works which gave it birth. And yet there is also much that is of interest. No important critic or thinker in Russia has not had something to say about Pushkin. In the literature on Pushkin we can trace all the major developments in Russian thought. Even the foreign critic, who comes to his reading of Pushkin from a different tradition and with different premises, ignores at his peril the critical image that has been drawn of the writer by one hundred and fifty years of study and thought.

Since it is the goal of this study to respond to (though not necessarily to echo) the Russian views of *Onegin*, it follows that we must review the critical literature, and define the varying attitudes.¹ As the American Pushkinist J. Thomas Shaw has pointed out, the definitive history of Pushkin studies still remains unwritten (1966,67). There exist, however, a number of sketches which, though incomplete and at times biased, can give the reader some idea of the field.² There is also a dissertation in English on early Pushkin criticism - up to and including Belinskii, as well as scattered articles on different - more or less spectacular - moments in the criticism of *Onegin*.³

By and large the stages in the history of *Onegin* criticism correspond to the development in the history of Pushkin criticism as a whole. This history has proceeded under the influence of two types of impetus. First, it has formed a natural and important part of the evolution of Russian intellectual and literary thought as a whole. As B.V. Tomashevskii put it: 'there is not a single historico-literary work concerning the nineteenth century in which we do not find in one form or another an evaluation of Pushkin's works or their reflection in the subsequent development of Russian literature' (1961,444). Thus, Pushkin criticism is an important element in the Belinskian school, in symbolist criticism, in formalism, in Soviet realist criticism, and in the criticism of structuralist poetics. A secondary but still vital factor in the history of Pushkin criticism in Russia is the *prazdnik* phenomenon - the celebration of an anniversary of the poet's birth or death. This began seriously in 1880 with the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow. Although it did not mark a significant anniversary, this event was a festival of historical importance that confirmed Pushkin's reputation as Russia's national poet. It was followed shortly by the fiftieth anniversary of the poet's death - 1887, which year also saw the extinguishing of the Pushkin family's rights to the poet's work and hence was marked by the beginning of a spate of cheap editions of the poet's works. Of supreme importance also was the centenary of the poet's birth in 1899, which was the cause of innumerable celebrations, speeches, and symposia throughout the Russian empire. Since the Revolution, the most significant event of the *prazdnik* type has been the hundredth centenary of the poet's death, celebrated in 1937. These festivals are an important feature of Russian cultural life and are closely bound up with the perception of Pushkin as a part of the national identity. They have led to the growth of the Pushkin 'industry' which - especially in the first two or three decades of the twentieth century - created a huge wealth of factual information on the poet's life, his texts, his

sources. Frequently lacking in these endeavours was an attempt at a critical understanding or appreciation of the poetry: a national cult object must be venerated, not treated critically as literature. True, it is to the initiation of Pushkin studies, and hence to the national festivals, that we owe the creation of such indispensable tools as the Academy edition of the complete works and the Pushkin dictionary. In general, however, the significant advances in criticism of *Onegin* have taken place independently of the festivals, in response to the natural development of literary thought in Russia.

For the purposes of the analysis contained in this chapter, the following periods have been identified in the development of *Onegin* criticism. 1. The criticism of *Onegin* up to 1840. This includes the criticism of the individual chapters as they appeared, as well as the reception of the collected works which appeared in 1837, immediately after the poet's death. 2. The criticism of Belinskii and his successors in the 'civic' school of criticism, up to Pisarev. 3. The alternative school of Grigor'ev and Druzhinin, culminating in Dostoevskii's speech. 4. Symbolist criticism of *Onegin*. 5. The formalists. 6. Soviet realist criticism. 7. Soviet structural poetics. In addition, we will examine finally some of the important foreign criticism of *Onegin*.

CRITICISM OF *ONEGIN* BY PUSHKIN'S CONTEMPORARIES UP TO 1840

Contemporary criticism of *Onegin* is useful on two counts. First, it tells us something about the immediate impact of the work, and hence about its meaning in the contemporary historico-literary context. This does not mean that contemporary criticism is necessarily the most important and valuable, although allusions to contemporary events, personalities, and cultural phenomena can certainly have much more force and immediacy on the contemporary reader. The subsequent critic is obliged to reconstruct for himself both the context and the meaning within that context. In this he may be more or less successful than the poet's contemporary. It is certainly a much more conscious process. Secondly, contemporary criticism is useful because it tells us a considerable amount about the state of criticism in Russia (or lack of it, as Pushkin thought) in the 1820s and 1830s.

This problem, which concerns us only indirectly, has been admirably described by Paul Debrezény, who analyses the criticism that appeared in the literary journals and almanacs of the period into three tendencies (1969, 403). The first of these is composed of the 'conservatives,' who rigidly applied the classical genre-system and conservative linguistic

norms to Pushkin's works. The second group were the romantics, who were interested in defending what they perceived as the romantic breaking of norms by Pushkin. Debreczeny sums up this critical opposition as follows: 'While the conservatives felt themselves delegated to voice the dissatisfaction of society with new trends in poetry and thought, the romantics did their best to justify and popularize these trends. The conservatives spoke for the public to the author, the romantics for the author to the public.' The third group that Debreczeny singles out is the Moscow circle known as the *liubomudry* or 'philosophers' - a group influenced by idealist German philosophy who were engaged in the quest for a Russian identity and read Pushkin's work in this light.

Debreczeny's classification is useful in that it clarifies the polyphony present in Russian criticism of the time. The situation is complicated by the fact that *Onegin* was being published, chapter by chapter, against the background of the evolution of Russian criticism and literary society. Russian literature, which until approximately 1825 had been dominated by verse and was practised and read by a small group of noblemen, was being taken over by a mass audience and was simultaneously undergoing a shift towards prose. The career of Pushkin, a nobleman who tried to earn his living from literature, and whose output changes its centre of gravity from verse (1820s) to prose (1830 onwards), reflected this shift. As a writer who was at first idolized, then treated with considerable disrespect by the critics, Pushkin was vitally interested in the practice of criticism in Russia, and we find among his critical and publicistic writings a number of essays published or in draft form on the subject. Essentially, it was Pushkin's position that Russia did not yet have her critics. Thus, in an unpublished review of Bestuzhev's 'Survey of Russian literature for 1824 and the beginning of 1825' he writes: 'Do we have criticism? Where is it then? Where are our Addison's, our Schlegels, our Sismondi? What have we analysed? Whose literary opinions have gained national acceptance, to whose criticisms may we refer, on whose may we base our arguments?' (*PSS*, XI, 26). This was in reply to Bestuzhev's assertion that there was Russian criticism, but no Russian literature. Pushkin remarks further (in a note published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 1830): 'Criticism in our journals either is limited to dry bibliographical information, satirical remarks, and more or less witty, general, friendly praise, or simply turns into a domestic correspondence between the publisher and the collaborators, proof-reader, et al.' (*PSS*, XI, 89). Certainly, Pushkin's treatment at the hands of critics during his lifetime gave him little reason to be

satisfied with the standard of the profession as practised in Russia. The principles of criticism as he perceived them are laid out in an unpublished note (attributed to 1830): 'It is based on a perfect knowledge of the rules which an artist or writer follows in his works, on an in-depth study of the models, and on an active observation of noteworthy contemporary phenomena. I do not even speak of dispassionateness whoever in criticism is motivated by anything save a pure love for art descends to the level of the rabble, which is motivated by base, greedy impulses. Where there is no love for art there is no criticism' (*PSS*, VI, 320).

Although such principles might seem self-evident to the point of banality, in the context of the reception of Pushkin's work by certain critics the assertion carries a note of emotional protest. This protest carried over into print in several instances when Pushkin felt constrained to reply, notably in the notes to *Onegin* and in the forewords to the initial publications of Chapters One and Eight (the forewords were dropped when the work was published in its entirety for the first time). Pushkin begins his running battle with the critics with an ironic taunt: 'Farsighted critics will notice, of course, the absence of a plan. Everyone is free to judge the plan of an entire novel, having read its first chapter. They will also criticize the anti-poetic character of the protagonist, who resembles the Prisoner of the Caucasus, as well as certain strophes, written in the tiresome style of the latest elegies' (*PSS*, V, 638).

These remarks, placed in the foreword to the original publication of Chapter One, suggest the poet's extreme sensitivity to the potential critical fate of his new work. *Onegin* was not simply another book it was a continuing literary phenomenon surrounded by passionate partisanship and controversy. The nature of the phenomenon itself changed spectacularly as chapter after chapter appeared.

Pushkin's response to his critics in the forewords and notes varies. In some cases he ironically echoes them, even quoting them verbatim (with tongue in cheek). At other times he attempts a learned rebuttal (e.g., when the criticism is of a particular expression or lexical item). Although the 'polemic with critics' mode of *Onegin* is considerably softened in the final version by the elimination of the forewords in question, it is still there in the footnotes and forms one aspect of the overall literary dimension which the work possesses; as such it merits close attention.

The foreword to the original publication of Chapter One is written in the third person and mimics the tone and style of an editor. The

poker-faced irony of the introduction amounts almost to parody. Thus the 'stamp of gaiety' which the verses bear is attributed to the 'influence of favourable circumstances' - a sarcastic reference to the trials and tribulations of Pushkin's exile in the South. As a ruse the foreword was effective in that Pushkin succeeded through it in 'preprogramming' some of the critical discussion which ensued. This was clearly the effect for which he was aiming - to discredit the critics by putting words in their mouths. The points which Pushkin was feeding to his critics may be listed as follows.

1. The work may never be finished and therefore the first chapter may be read as a fragment, especially since it 'has a certain unity.' He then tantalizes the critics with the thought that several chapters are already finished and with the reference to 'the plan of the whole novel,' about which he invites them to speculate on the basis of one chapter.
2. The work is gay, but satirical, a 'humorous description of manners' (Pushkin subsequently denied any satirical intent). The reference to 'strict decency' in its execution was a veiled reference to other works in Russian literature which the critics were to seize on.
3. It is reminiscent of *Beppo* - 'a humorous work of gloomy Byron.'
4. The ambiguity of genre in the subtitle is maintained in the reference in one place to 'a large poem' - using the word *stikhotvorenie* rather than the usual *poema* ('epic poem') to heighten the confusion - and to 'cantos, or chapters.'
5. The reference to 'the tiresome style of the latest elegies, in which a *feeling of despondency [unynie] has consumed all else*' invites a discussion of romanticism without mentioning the term. It was reinforced by the discussion of a poet's role, of inspiration, and so on, in the poem 'Conversation of a Bookseller with a Poet' which accompanied Chapter One.

To read the reviews of the first chapter is to realize how effective Pushkin's device was. True, most of the reviews were superficial in nature and, typically for the time, contented themselves with a little indiscriminate praise, some lengthy excerpts, and criticism of grammatical errors.' However, the appearance of Chapter One prompted one review - that of N.A. Polevoi - which led to a considerable polemic with D.V. Venevitinov. Polevoi's review, which was by far the most thorough and serious, raised a number of fundamental questions.⁴ Polevoi, as an enthusiastic supporter of the romantic school, was unstinting in his praise of the new work. His first remarks represent a refutation of 'certain critics' who attacked *Onegin* because of its contravention of the classical laws of genre. Unfortunately, as Venevitinov subsequently pointed out, these critics were almost entirely a figment of

Polevoi's imagination. Nevertheless, Polevoi does make a brave attempt to define the genre of the new work, which he sees in the tradition of the humorous poem - an observation which is clearly derived from the reference in the foreword to the 'indecent' of the precursors. In a later refutation of Venevitinov, Polevoi specifies the burlesque travesties of Maikov and Shakhovskoi. One wonders whether he did not also have in mind a bawdy poem by Pushkin's uncle V.L. Pushkin, 'The Dangerous Neighbour' ('Opasnyi sosed,' 1811), describing a riotous visit to a brothel, which circulated in manuscript form and which he would presumably not wish to mention in print.

Polevoi's review shows the influence of the foreword in a number of ways. He remarks, for example: 'We agree that it is impossible to judge the plan.' In his discussion of the genre he follows up on the hints in the foreword at a 'humorous poem,' although he suggests that Pushkin has developed the genre, making it more profound and meaningful. Other catchwords that Polevoi adopts from the foreword are 'gaiety' (*veselost'*) and 'despondency' (*unylost'*): 'His gaiety blends into despondency' (14). The formula seems to be derived straight from Pushkin's foreword.

In the most original part of his review Polevoi denies anything more than a casual similarity between *Onegin* and the Western 'models' Byron's *Don Juan* and *Beppo*. The importance of *Onegin* lies, Polevoi suggests, in its *narodnost'*: 'Onegin is not copied from the French or the English; we see our own scenes, hear our native speech, behold our own quirks' (15). The concept of *narodnost'* - best rendered here as 'Russianness' - implies in general the specific qualities which single out a literature and make it an expression of the national identity. The doublet *natsional'nost* betrays the French origin of the word, and was for some critics interchangeable with the Russian calque which subsequently took over; Polevoi's emphasis on this question is a reflection of the romantic quest for a national literature.

In his comment on the character of Onegin, Polevoi likewise touched a chord by asserting that Onegin is a link between the scenes rather than a character (although we might see an echo here of the reference in the foreword to the 'anti-poetic' character of the hero). Polevoi's review, despite its pedestrian qualities and irritating critical habits (e.g., the ritual enumeration of 'mistakes') and despite the fact that it was to a considerable extent 'preprogrammed' by Pushkin's foreword, did touch on a number of the key issues which have since dominated *Onegin* criticism: genre, *narodnost'*, the character of Onegin, and the relationship of the work to foreign models.

The reasons for the 'anticritique' which Venevitinov wrote in reply

to Polevoi have to do with the history of Russian criticism rather than the evaluation of *Onegin*. Venevitinov, as a member of *theliubomudry*, saw in Polevoi a mediocre vulgarizer of romanticism, who had rejected the classical approach to criticism without replacing it with a new system: 'As regards Mr. Polevoi's article - I would like to find in it criticism more based on positive rules, without which all judgements are shaky and inconsistent' (227). Venevitinov's review, which seems to have been provoked by a certain aesthetic embarrassment at the enthusiasm of Polevoi, was sufficiently inaccurate and inflammatory for Polevoi to write an effective rebuttal, although the polemic (enlarged by the contribution of two other critics) was by this time degenerating into fruitless attacks by both critics on real or asserted inaccuracies of phrase and grammar in the other's Russian. One aspect of Venevitinov's side of the argument which is of interest is his deepening of the concept of *narodnost'* which, in his view, 'is reflected ... in the very feelings of the poet, who is nourished by the spirit of one people and lives, so to speak, in the development, the achievements, and the separateness of its character' (237). It is perhaps this application of a more profound set of values in Venevitinov's article that prompted Pushkin's reported remark that 'This is the only article which I read with affection and attention. All the rest is either abuse or sugary nonsense' (quoted in Venevitinov 1934, 477). Venevitinov, who was to die in 1827, left only one further brief comment on *Onegin*, published posthumously in *Moskovskii vestnik*, in which he gave, apropos the second chapter, a precise description of Onegin: 'Experience did not implant in him either a tormenting passion or a bitter and active annoyance, but boredom, an outward dispassionateness, characteristic of Russian coldness (not to speak of Russian indolence)' (1827, 238-9).

The criticism which greeted the appearance of Chapters Two through Six assumes a fairly monotonous pattern of ecstatic praise, some retelling of the content of the chapter in question, and numerous (often lengthy) quotations. One of the few exceptions to this rule is the review of Chapters Four and Five in *Atenei*. The reviewer finds fault with the improbable storyline (e.g., the fact that Tat'iana falls in love with Onegin, having seen him only once briefly), and criticizes a large number of the expressions in the text, especially the neologisms in the description of Tat'iana's dream (*khlop, top*, etc.).⁶ Pushkin refuted the latter criticism in footnote 31 of the final text with the laconic comment: 'One should not impede the freedom of our rich and beautiful language' (*PSS*, VI, 193-4). The review of the same chapters in the *Moskovskii vestnik* assumes the form of a series of comments purportedly

overheard by the critic concerning the novel. The comments are interesting in only one respect - they illustrate the wave of interest, popularity, and speculation that accompanied the chapters as they appeared.

This wave was to crest and break spectacularly with the appearance of Chapter Seven, which was greeted with a chorus of disappointed or even malicious - criticism. Thus, the *Moskovskii telegraf* critic found the 'principal idea' - to 'cast a sardonic eye' on salons, young gentlewomen, and on fashionable young men - 'tiresome both for him [Pushkin] and the readers.' However, the attempt (in a work called *Evgenii Vel'skii*) to imitate *Onegin* 'proves only how difficult it is to imitate Pushkin,' whom it was impossible to parody. This review can be credited with the notion, which quickly spread, that the work was 'a collection of disparate, unlinked notes and thoughts about this and that, inserted into one frame' (Zelinskii, III, 1-4). The *Telegraf* review was accompanied by others in *Literaturnaia gazeta* and *Galateia*, which were likewise more or less negative. The critic of the latter periodical reproaches Chapter Seven for the lack of action, the deficiencies in the Russian, the 'tirades' (for example, the list of utensils in Seven: XXXI), and the 'unsuccessful combination of colloquial and Slavonic words' (Zelinskii, III, 4-12 [11]).

The most severe blow was dealt Pushkin by F.V. Bulgarin in *Severnaia pchela*. Bulgarin, whose 1826 review of Chapter Two had been tentative, but not negative, now launched a vitriolic attack upon Chapter Seven: 'This. Chapter... is blotched with such verse, such tomfoolery that in comparison with it even *Evgenii Vel'skii* seems something like a business-like work. Not a single thought, not a single emotion, not a single scene worthy of attention! A complete fall, *chute complete!*' (Zelinskii, III, 12-18 [12-13]). Bulgarin went so far as to attack the egoism of the poet and the descriptions of *byt* (such elements from everyday life as the domestic utensils), and to express his disappointment at the descriptions of Moscow and the ball.

It has been pointed out that Bulgarin was inspired to attack *Onegin* by a highly critical review of his own novel *Dmitrii Samozvanets* which had appeared in *Litera turn aia gazeta* and which he had (wrongly) attributed to Pushkin. Some sources point, in addition, to Bulgarin's role as editor of the semi-official newspaper *Severnaia pchela* and his connections with the secret police.^s The logic of this last factor would suggest an official conspiracy to attack *Onegin* and Pushkin himself. This appears exaggerated, since it is hard to see in *Onegin* a seditious document, or in the (relatively compliant) Pushkin of the late 1820s

an enemy of the state; but Bulgarin's personal reaction to the critical review of his own work does seem a likely factor. The fact remains, however, that the review (although mockingly chided by Nadezhdin) was feasible on the basis of Chapter Seven and did not contradict, but rather echoed, the tone of most other reviews.

In the draft of a foreword which Pushkin intended to place before an (unrealized) edition of Chapter Eight and the Journey, he comments: 'When Canto VII appeared the journals on the whole viewed it extremely unfavourably. I would willingly have believed them, had their judgment not contradicted what they had said about the previous chapters of my novel' (*PSS*, VI, 539). Characteristically, he goes on to quote verbatim Bulgarin's review, including the parodistic verse:

Nu, kak rasseiat' gore Tani?
 Vot kak: posadiat devu v sani
 I povezut iz milykh mest
 V Moskvu na iarmanku nevest!
 Mat' plachetsia, skuchaet dochka;
 Konets sed'moi glave - i tochka.

[Well, how can one allay Tania's grief~ This is how: the girl will be put on a sleigh and shipped from her beloved haunts to Moscow to the bride market. The mother weeps, the daughter is bored; there's an end to the seventh chapter: period! (PSS, VI, 540)]

In response Pushkin noted: 'These verses are very fine, but the criticism they contain is unfounded. The most insignificant subject may be chosen by the poet; criticism does not need to analyse what the poet describes, but how' (*ibid.*).

The reaction of the critics is, in fact, not totally incomprehensible when we look at the situation, not, as we do now, from the perspective of a knowledge of the complete novel, but as critics confronted by yet another separately published chapter of *Onegin*. The first point in the chapter's disfavour is the absence of three of the four central characters: Onegin, Lenskii, and Ol'ga have gone, apparently (for all the critic knows) never to return. As the critic of *Literaturnaia gazeta* put it: 'A reading of Chapter Seven of *Onegin* has the same effect on one as the sight of some haunts which were once dear to one, but which have been abandoned by those persons who animated them' (Zelinskii, III, 4-6 [4]). Although one might add that this is precisely the effect for which Pushkin strove, nevertheless the critic perceives it as a defect.

As important as the absence of three main characters is the fact that the critics were not aware that the novel would end soon. Thus Nadezhdin, in *Vestnik Evropy*, expects another seven chapters, and another reviewer, discussing the publication of Chapter Eight (1832), writes in the *Moskovskii Telegraf*: 'few thought to see so soon the end of this tale' (Zelinskii, III, 18-37 [36]; 124-9 [125]). Clearly, those critics who assailed Chapter Seven for its lack of action expected to see the work continue indefinitely to appear, chapter by chapter, becoming more and more unstructured and devoid of action. Such an assumption finds support in the foreword to a separate edition of Chapter One (which the reviewers would have had to read to survey the work to date- the foreword was dropped only when the work appeared in a single volume in 1833), in which Pushkin notes that the work will 'probably not be completed' (*PSS*, VI, 638). Ironically, at the time when these reviews were appearing, the concluding Chapter Nine (subsequently renumbered Eight) was in its final stages of preparation.

There were, perhaps, additional factors which contributed to the less than ecstatic reception of Chapter Seven. Among these is the fact that the public had already seen substantial parts of the chapter (stanzas XXXV-LIIH, published in *Moskovskii vestnik* and then in *Severnaia pchela* in 1828, and I-IV in the almanac *Severnye tsvety*, in December 1829). This practice of Pushkin's of publishing excerpts from a work before it appeared had the effect, in this case, of making the appearance of Chapter Seven anticlimactic. There might also be the suspicion that Pushkin was milking *Onegin* for more than it was worth. Thus one critic, writing in the *Moskovskii telegraf* on the occasion of the publication, in 1833, of the complete text under one cover, noted that this new edition cost the reader only twelve roubles, rather than the forty roubles which he had had to pay to buy the novel piecemeal, as it appeared.⁹ The posthumous (1837) edition was even cheaper at five roubles.¹⁰

Another final, more profound, factor which must be considered in our efforts to understand the critical reception of Chapter Seven has to do with the change of taste in the reading public. Pushkin, in the unpublished foreword to Eight (already quoted), takes issue with the notion that the times and 'Russia' have left him behind: 'If an age can advance, and the sciences, philosophy and civic consciousness can be perfected and change, poetry remains in the same place, and does not age or change. Its goal is the same, as are its means ... works of true poets remain fresh and eternally youthful' (*PSS*, VI, 540-1). Pushkin fails here to sense the true movement in the reading public, which was not progress, but a shift to a coarser, less esoteric popular literature

(historical novels and romantic adventures). The public no longer understood (if it ever did) the subtlety of the verse, the hidden allusions, the irony (one critic was indignant at Onegin's remark 'that stupid moon on that stupid horizon').¹¹ Pushkin was not repentant: 'However it may be, I have decided to try its [the public's] patience once more. Here are two more chapters of *Eugene Onegin* - the last, at least for print ... Those who would look in them for entertaining events can be assured that they contain less action than all the preceding ones' (*PSS*, VI, 541).

Chapter Eight and the Journey appeared in 1832 without the foreword quoted above, and were generally greeted favourably. Thus the reviewer 'P.S.' wrote in the *Severnaia pchela*: 'Such an ending to *Onegin* will reconcile everyone with the author' (Zelinskii, III, 124). Another reviewer noted in *TelesK.op*, 1832: 'Each chapter of *Onegin* revealed with ever greater clarity that Pushkin did not have the ambition to fulfil the gigantic plan ascribed to him' (Zelinskii, III, 131). It was the public, in the view of this critic, that had had exaggerated expectations which Pushkin would not, and did not, realize. As regards the genre, the same critic noted: '*Eugene Onegin* was not, and was not in fact intended to be, a novel, although this description, under which it appeared originally, has remained for all time at the head of it ... It cannot be bound by all the artificial conventions which criticism has a right to expect of a real novel' (*ibid.*). This important insight was to be lost as the subsequent generations entered the age of the realistic novel, of which *Onegin* was to be perceived to be the precursor.

The view that *Onegin* would not be judged by novelistic standards was developed by the critic of the *MOSK.OVSK.ii telegraf*, discussing the complete edition of *Onegin* in 1833, who saw it as an open-ended, unstructured work: 'the Poet was not thinking of completeness. He simply wanted to have a frame into which he could insert his opinions, scenes, heart-felt epigrams and madrigals to friends ... What is the underlying thought? None' (Zelinskii, III, 152). 'When he began to write, he did not know how to finish it, and when finishing it he could have written as many chapters again without damaging the integrity of the work, because there is none' (*ibid.*). Such an extreme perception of the work as a loose framework is balanced by the remarks of the critic in the *Literaturnye pribavleniia K. RussK.omu invalidu*, 1832, who develops the idea of the characters in the novel as types: 'A writer ... observes all the characteristics, all the features and peculiarities of a person and creates from them his heroes, his dramatis personae. This is how the character of *Eugene Onegin* is created, perhaps from a mul

titude of different characters whom the poet chanced to meet and who in his imagination assumed the form of a single ideal, the ideal of a cold egoist, exclusively self-centred, hungry for all worldly fame, though outwardly oblivious to it.¹² Such a dichotomy of opinion - whether to treat the novel as novel or as framework for the poet's self-indulgences - has been a persistent feature of *Onegin* criticism.

The appearance of the complete edition of *Onegin* in 1833 marks the end of the work as a contemporary literary phenomenon surrounded by the critical birds of passage and modified, at least in detaps, by the reaction of the author to criticism, and the beginning of its new and eternal function as an event in literary history. Pushkin was not unaware of the importance of this change. In saying farewell to his novel in verse, he was also, in a sense, making a truce with the critics. He responded to this with a stanza which several critics were disposed to quote and comment on:

Kto b ni byl ty, O moi chitatel',
 Drug, nedrug, ia khochu s toboi
 Rasstat'sia nynche kak priiatel'.
 Prosti. Chego by ty za mnoi
 Zdes' ni iskal v strofakh nebrezhnykh,
 Vospominanii li miatezhnykh,
 Otdokhnoven'ia l' ot trudov,
 Zhivyykh kartin, il' ostrykh slov,
 Il' grammaticheskikh oshibok,
 Dai bog, chtob v etoi knizhke ty
 Dlia razvlechen'ia, dlia mechty,
 Dlia serdtsa, dlia zhurnal'nykh sshibok,
 Khotia krupitsu mog naiti.

[Whoever you might be, O my reader, whether friend or foe, I would like us to part now on friendly terms. Farewell. Whatever you sought here as you followed my careless stanzas - be it rebellious memories, repose from your labours, lively pictures or witticisms, or errors of grammar - God grant that you found at least a crumb - for your amusement, for daydreaming, for' the heart, or for squabbles in the journals. (Eight: XLIX: 1-13)]

For critics, contemporaries, acquaintances, and friends reading them in the 1837 edition of *Onegin* or in the first volume of the posthumous *Collected Works* of 1838, these lines must have been fraught with a

particular, poignant significance. The critics reviewing the *Collected Works* (the 1837 edition of *Onegin* did not attract any reviews in its own right) were keenly aware of the fact that not only *Onegin* but now Pushkin too had passed into history, and their comments are frequently intended to provide an overview of the poet's oeuvre and its significance for Russian literature.

The first attempt to survey Pushkin in this fashion dates from an earlier period: 'On the character of Pushkin's poetry' was published by I. Kireevskii in 1828. Kireevskii, a member of the *liubomudry* group, later became known as a philosopher. He sets out his goals at the beginning of his essay in a rhetorical question: 'Why has no one until now undertaken to determine the character of his [Pushkin's] poetry as a whole, to evaluate its beauties and its defects, to show the position which our poet has succeeded in occupying among the first-class poets of this age?' (1). While noting that the variety of Pushkin's work made it difficult to see the unity in it, Kireevskii attempts some generalizations, including the first attempt at periodization of Pushkin's work. Significantly, Kireevskii clarifies three periods which he distinguishes in terms of external influences, 'the Italo-French school' and 'the echo of Byron's lyre' constituting the first and second periods. It is only in the later chapters of *Onegin*, of which Kireevskii had read five, and in *Boris Godunov*, of which he had read one scene, that the critic sees the original Pushkin appearing. Kireevskii discusses the difference between Pushkin and Byron in terms of their heroes: 'Childe Harold has nothing in common with the mob of ordinary people: his sufferings, his aspirations, his pleasures are incomprehensible to others; only lofty mountains and naked crags reply to him with their secrets which he alone can hear ... Onegin, on the other hand, is a perfectly ordinary and insignificant creature' (11). If in *Onegin* the character and the form of the work are Byronic in inspiration, the other characters, in Kireevskii's view, show Pushkin's originality and independence. At the point when Kireevskii was writing, there was little more to be said. His tendency to view *Onegin* in terms of Byron's work was one from which most subsequent critics felt obliged to distance themselves. The critic, however, was also careful to stress Pushkin's Russianness, his *narodnost'*: 'But all the innumerable beauties of the poem: Lenskii, Tat'iana, Ol'ga, Petersburg, the countryside, the dream, winter, the letter etc. etc. - belong to our poet alone. Here he clearly revealed the natural bent of his genius' (12).

Ten years later, the appearance of the posthumous *Collected Works* provoked a number of panoramic reviews, most notably those by a

German critic Varnhagen von Ense, published in translation in *Syn otechestva*, 1839, by S. Shevyrev, in *Moskvitianin*, 1841, and an anonymous review in *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*, 1841.¹³ All three of these critics agree that Pushkin is not an imitator in *Onegin*. The question had to do with the *narodnost'* or *natsional'nost'* of the poet. Thus Shevyrev writes: 'Eugene Onegin himself is loftier than all the heroes who were inspired in Pushkin by Byron's muse, because in Onegin there is a truth extracted from Russian life' (205). For Shevyrev it is Russian life that is influenced by the West: 'He is typical of Western influence on our people of society, a current type, encountered everywhere: this is our Russian apathy, inspired in us by an aimless acquaintance with Western disillusionment' (ibid.). The notion of Onegin's typicality is not entirely new, but Shevyrev repeats it with renewed force. From his reading of Onegin's character it is but a step to the Oblomovs and Rudins that are the commonplace characters of the Russian nineteenth-century novel.

All three reviews typically stress the 'truth' and 'naturalness' of the work. They see in Pushkin a 'national' or *narodnyi* poet, and they stress Pushkin's freedom from Byron. They all take for granted the form of the work, and have nothing but a few banalities to say on the subject of the verse. True, the critic of *Biblioteka dlia chteniia* does attempt some further account of the personal aspect of the work: 'we see in *Onegin* a secret but sincere, frank confession by the poet. He has revealed himself before us in his entirety, with all his passions and weaknesses, and has divided his character into two persons: one, the dark side of this character, was transposed into Onegin, the other, bright side animated Lenskii' (156). Such an interpretation is hopelessly schematic and sets up an artificial opposition that is scarcely vindicated by the irony with which Lenskii is portrayed, nor by the affection and sympathy that Onegin evokes at certain points (to say nothing of the presence of the poet as a character in the work). The reality of *Onegin* is much more complex than this simplistic formula. The critic was right, however, in drawing attention to the intimate, 'confessional' aspect of the work.

The criticism published during a poet's lifetime is important because it is - or can be - a two-way street. This aspect of *Onegin* criticism was enhanced by the fact that the work appeared chapter by chapter, so that it was a continuing phenomenon on the pages of Russian journalism rather than a single event. Although Pushkin stated in one place that he only skimmed the criticism of Chapter Seven, it is clear that for the most part he paid attention to the critics and frequently took

time to refute them, reply to them, and attack them. It is less clear whether Pushkin actually modified the work substantially because of criticism. The answer is almost certainly not - although the literary dimension of the novel is enhanced by the ironic asides directed at the critics in text, forewords, and footnotes.

The criticism that appeared during Pushkin's lifetime and in the first years after his death permit one to discern a number of problems and critical truisms which were to become of prime importance in subsequent *Onegin* criticism. Foremost among these are the relationship of the work to foreign models (specifically Byron, although others were mentioned; Benjamin Constant, for example); the problem of Onegin's character; the *narodnost* of the work; the question of the form *I* genre - a novel or a 'frame' for a series of random 'pictures'; the excellence and importance of Tat'iana's character and of the poetry. It remained for a critic of stature to undertake a detailed analysis of these problems and to give the critical discussion the necessary depth and scope.

BELINSKII AND HIS SUCCESSORS

If the first criticism of Pushkin and specifically of *Onegin* consisted of more or less inspired reviews of the various editions as they occurred, the years 1843-6 saw, in the eleven articles published by V.G. Belinskii in *Otechestvennye zapiski* on Pushkin, the first real literary criticism of lasting value. The articles taken together, although they were entitled 'The Works of Aleksandr Pushkin' and were provoked initially by the publication of three additional volumes of the *Collected Works*, represent a sweeping critical monograph that laid the basis for much subsequent nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Soviet Pushkin criticism, and essentially created the 'Pushkin myth' in Russian life and letters. Whether one is studying Pushkiniana or Pushkin, after the oeuvre itself one reads Belinskii.

The reader of the articles is immediately struck by their scope. The first three articles cover the major developments in Russian literature (especially poetry) before Pushkin, so that it is only in the fourth article that Belinskii, having placed the poet in his literary and historical context, actually focuses on the subject himself. It is this awareness of the historical perspective that sets apart Belinskii's criticism from the efforts of his predecessors. He expresses his critical credo early in the first article: 'the task of healthy criticism consists in determining the importance of a poet both for his own age and for the future, his historical and his undoubted artistic importance' (132). Noting that 'in

Russia everything grows not by the year, but by the hour, and five years for her are almost an age,' Belinskii, writing some six years after the poet's death, finds Pushkin is no longer a contemporary but a historical figure: 'All have come to feel that Pushkin, while not losing in the present and in the future his importance as a great poet, was nevertheless also a poet of his time, of his epoch, and that that time has already passed' (132). Later Belinskii confesses that it is only with the passing years that his own views on Pushkin have crystallized to the point that he has a clear understanding of Pushkin's significance (136). This understanding is, for Belinskii, rooted in his reading of Russian literature, since 'to write about Pushkin means to write about the whole of Russian literature' (137). To sum up Belinskii's view of Russian literature, it is that it had, until Pushkin, consisted of empty imitations of foreign models: 'In the twenties of the present century Russian literature moved from imitation to originality: Pushkin appeared' (449-50). In doing so, literature had a vital social role to play: 'literature, by bringing together and making friends of people of different classes through the bonds of taste and the desire for the noble pleasures of life, turned a *class* into a *society*' (449; Belinskii's emphasis). Thus, Belinskii's sense of the historical development of Russian literature is complemented by his awareness of the sociological processes in Russia and their relationship to literature.

The sociological dimension is very important in Belinskii's criticism, and much space is devoted to the discussion of Russian society as it is reflected in *Onegin*. Belinskii's view of society - and hence his interpretation of literature - is permeated by a radical determinism. Thus he writes, discussing the *narodnost'* of *Onegin*: 'The primary reason for the particularity of a tribe or people lies in the soil and climate of the land it occupies: are there many lands on the globe which are identical as to geology and climate?' (439). Belinskii puts a finer point on his definition of the circumstances surrounding the creation of the individual in a subsequent statement: 'Man may be created by nature, but he is developed and educated by society. No circumstances of life can save or protect a man from the influence of society; there is nowhere for him to hide or escape from it' (484). This determinism has an important role to play in Belinskii's interpretation of the characters in *Onegin*. It is clear, from the bitter sketches which Belinskii draws of Russian society, that he is profoundly alienated from it. We have, in a phrase or two, the simplistic logic of revolutionary Russia: to make the people better, one must change the society.

In Belinskii's view, the problem of Russian society is the same as

that of Russian literature: 'Our society, which consists of the educated classes, is a fruit of the reforms [i.e. of Peter the Great]. It remembers the day it was born because it existed officially before it existed in reality, and because, finally, this society for a long time consisted not in the spirit, but in the cut of the dress, not in enlightenment, but in privilege. It began, like our literature, with the imitation of foreign forms without any content' (485). The role of literature, for Belinskii, is to create and describe the national spirit, the *narodnost'*, which would be the content of the literature and of the society. In his discussion of the problem Belinskii (like Polevoi before him) rejects the notion that *narodnost'* - national content - consists in folkloric peasant motifs: 'The secret of the national spirit of each people consists, not in its dress and cuisine, but, so to say, in the way it understands things. In order to depict a society, one must first understand its essence, its particularity - and this can only be done by discovering factually and evaluating philosophically the sum of rules by which the society is maintained' (445). It is precisely this task which Belinskii believes Pushkin to have accomplished in *Onegin*: '*Onegin* is a depiction of Russian society at a certain point in time which is poetically true to reality' (445).

This position, which Belinskii defends in his study of *Onegin*, was to become axiomatic in much of subsequent Russian criticism, in which 'true to reality' is transformed into 'realistic.' Belinskii's approach is most defective in that it ignores the ambiguous nature of the text of *Onegin* and reads the work as a *novel* pure and simple. Thus he writes:

The first national-artistic work was Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. In this determination of the young poet to represent the moral physiognomy of the most European class in Russia one cannot help but see proof that he was, and profoundly felt himself to be, a national poet. He understood that the time of the epic poem was long past, and that to depict contemporary society, in which the prose of life had so deeply penetrated the very poetry of life, he needed a novel, not an epic poem. He took this life as it was, rather than simply extracting its poetic moments; he took it with all its coldness, all its prose and vulgarity. Such boldness would be less surprising, if the novel were written in prose; but to write such a novel in verse at a time when there was not a single decent prose novel in Russian
- such boldness is undoubted testimony to the genius of the poet. (443)

Belinskii's argument is exposed at its weakest here: he does not perceive the profound difference in intent and in effect between a prose novel and a 'novel in verse.' If it is true that the poet's aim was to depict the 'prose of life' and if, as Belinskii argues, prose of life equals prose in literature (in fact an empty formula: 'prose' and 'poetry' in life are figures of speech that have nothing to do with literary genres) then Pushkin would surely have written in prose. Throughout his discussion Belinskii discusses the work as a novel in which everything unfolds, and is susceptible to analysis, in the manner of a realist prose novel. In doing so he begs the question of the genre (did Pushkin choose verse simply to demonstrate his 'boldness' and hence his 'genius'? surely not) and ascribes to the poet those goals which Belinskii would like him to have in terms of his own premises. Even if Pushkin does depict certain features of Russian life, one cannot take this to be the sole purpose of the work, to the neglect of its other features, without distorting the total effect which the work has on the reader.

The criterion which Belinskii assumes to be cardinal in Russian literature - 'faithfulness to reality' - colours the entire historical perspective in which he views literature: 'He [Pushkin] was concerned not with resembling Byron, but with being himself and being faithful to that reality which until his time had been unperceived and untouched, and which begged to be described. And it is for this reason that his *Onegin* is a highly original and national Russian work. Together with the contemporary creation of Griboedov's genius - *Woe from Wit* - Pushkin's verse novel laid a firm foundation for a new Russian poetry, a new Russian literature' (444). Belinskii's view of literature is teleological, progressive. He sees works of literature as stepping stones in a chain of development towards greater profundity, and towards a 'more national' literature. The problem with this view is that it tends to stress the ephemeral, the transient aspects of a work and ignores that which is universal, which exists, eventually, outside time (compare Pushkin's view quoted above that art does not change). Certainly, one cannot deny that there are traces of *Onegin* in subsequent Russian literature, although they are much more oblique than Belinskii would have us believe, and the work proved, ultimately, inimitable. Rather than laying the foundation for the new Russian poetry, in many ways *Onegin* proved to be the final expression of the old. Belinskii's historical and sociological approach, though well and seductively argued, does not, in the final analysis, succeed in doing justice to the work.

Most of Belinskii's analysis of *Onegin* is taken up with the study of

the characters of Onegin and Tat'iana, whom the critic sees as equal in importance. Belinskii offers a psychological analysis, interpreting them as sociological portraits in a novel that is endeavouring to present an image of what is typical in Russian society. Characteristically, he refers to the characters as 'persons.' Thus, in discussing Onegin, Belinskii adopts a view which grows out of his determinism and his negative view of Russian society: 'The greater part of the public denied absolutely the existence of any heart or soul in Onegin, seeing in him a person who was cold-hearted, dry and an egoist by nature. It is impossible to have a more perverse or erroneous understanding of a person! This is not all: many honestly believed and believe that the poet himself wished to portray Onegin as a cold-hearted egoist' (455). It is Belinskii's thesis that Onegin, far from being a 'cold-hearted egoist,' is an 'involuntary egoist,' a 'suffering egoist' (459) because he does not live in 'a society which gives each of its members the possibility of working in his line of activity towards the realization of the ideal of truth and well-being' (460). According to Belinskii, it is society which is responsible for Onegin's egoism: this is his *tatum*, the lot which society has imposed on him.

The discussion of Tat'iana which takes up Article Nine - the second part of the analysis of *Onegin* - begins with an impassioned discussion of the state of women in Russia: the superficial education, the goals (to marry successfully), the arranged marriages, the fantasy life in literature. Tat'iana is, in Belinskii's view, typical of this milieu. For Belinskii, the Tat'iana of Chapters Two to Six lives in a fantasy world: 'for Tat'iana the real Onegin did not exist; she could neither understand him nor know him' (488). The Onegin whom she falls in love with is a literary creation, borrowed from her reading. It is only when she reads the books in his library in Chapter Seven that she understands him. The world of 'other interests and sufferings' revealed by these books is a revelation which 'frightened her, horrified her and obliged her to regard the passions as the destruction of life, convinced her of the necessity of submitting to reality as it is, and, if one is to live the life of the heart, then secretly, in the depth of one's heart, in the silence of withdrawal, in the gloom of a night spent in grief and sobbing' (495-6).

In attempting to account for Tat'iana's psychological development Belinskii is breaking new ground. For the most part he fleshes in the laconic strokes of Pushkin's portrait with a plausible motivation, and asks himself questions that other critics had not thought to consider. One finds it difficult, however, to agree with his analysis of the final

scene between Tat'iana and Onegin. Belinskii takes at face value the reproaches which Tat'iana makes to Onegin that he loves her only because she is an object in society and 'now the desire for a scandalous fame brings him to her feet' (497). Most surely there is an intended irony in her reproaches; she senses the real passion behind Onegin's advances, a passion that dooms them to frustration, for the practised seducer knows one cannot succeed if one is sincere. Belinskii is scornful of Tat'iana's decision to remain faithful to her husband: 'Faithfulness to those relationships which constitute a profanation of feelings and feminine purity, because relationships not sanctified by love are highly immoral' (498). It is his conclusion that it is the opinion of society, the 'strict fulfilment of the external obligations' that motivates Tat'iana's rejection of Onegin's advances. Again, Pushkin's spare sketch is inscrutable. Yet one finds it difficult to believe that Tat'iana would be driven to her refusal by mere public opinion - more likely it is her rejection of that romantic belief in the happy ending. In her refusal is contained the entire logical sequence which later leads to the destruction of Anna Karenina. Although Belinskii accepts Tat'iana's refusal of Onegin, he attributes it to the fact that she is the 'typical Russian woman' who 'cannot ignore the opinion of society' (499). Rather, one would tend to see in her refusal a lack of typicality: most women would refuse for fear or yield to the moment's passion. Tat'iana, neither fearful nor impulsive, refuses out of a sense of principle, a very different matter.

If Belinskii's analysis of *Onegin* concentrated on the historicoliterary aspect and treated the work almost exclusively as novel, the critic nevertheless is conscious of the artist in Pushkin. The work is, the critic insists, an *artistic* reproduction of reality. For Belinskii, the artist as artist remains, despite the 'progressive,' 'sociological' bias of his criticism, an indispensable part of the work - the expression of that 'genius' which he enthusiastically, even ecstatically, praises, but does little to investigate. Another aspect of the poet of which the critic is aware is his aristocratism. Belinskii takes considerable pains in the articles to refute the notion, expressed in a review in *Galateia*, that Pushkin is merely a writer about and for the nobility who has nothing to say about the lower classes. Belinskii's response, which strongly anticipates that of later Russian Marxist critics such as Plekhanov, is essentially to say that the upper classes offered, at that point in Russia's history, the only meaningful subject: 'Our poetry ... must find its materials almost exclusively in that class which, by its way of life and customs, is more developed and intellectually active' (437). Belinskii's

defence of Pushkin's aristocratism is based on a tacit belief in the organic nature of the national spirit, which may be expressed by any class which has the necessary cultural baggage and intellectual consciousness. Belinskii's social generosity was not to be shared by all his followers, and his characterization of the poet was to be seen as accurate but damning: 'the personality of the poet which was so fully and brilliantly expressed in this poem is always so fine, so humane, but at the same time primarily artistic. Everywhere one sees in him a man who belongs heart and soul to a basic principle which is the essence of the class he depicts; in brief, everywhere one sees the Russian landowner ... He attacks everything in that class which contradicts humanity, but the principle of the class is for him an eternal truth' (499-500). To be above all an artist, to be above all a proponent of the landowning class - such credentials were not likely to render Pushkin and his work popular with a literary intelligentsia that was moving towards an infatuation with progress, class struggle, and the requirement that literature be *engage* and progressive rather than artistic. Belinskii reconciles very disparate opposites in his analysis in which an instinctive love for literature comes together with a growing social and historical awareness. ¹⁴

FROM BELINSKII TO PISAREV

The underlying contradiction in Belinskii's approach to Pushkin was to manifest itself, in the course of the next twenty years, in an increasingly strident polemic between two schools of critics, one of which, represented by Druzhinin, Katkov, and Grigor'ev, was to espouse the 'artist as artist' aspect of Pushkin. The other camp - Chernyshevskii, Dobroliubov, and Pisarev - proposed a 'utilitarian' concept of art which emphasized the transient, socio-critical role of the writer and was to bring Pisarev, ultimately, to attack both Pushkin and Belinskii. Paradoxically, both these groups owed much to Belinskii.

The years following the appearance of Belinskii's articles were relatively quiet as far as Pushkin studies are concerned. We may note, in passing, the appearance of A.P. Miliukov's *Outline of the History of Russian Poetry* (1847). Miliukov's sober academic study has little new to say on the subject. He stresses the influence of Byron's *Don Juan* on *Onegin*, and underlines the satirical intent ('a satire on the vacuousness of society, with all its ritual and conventions, opinions and pronouncements,' 171). After some by now commonplace praise of the character depiction, especially of Tat'iana, Miliukov comes to the

conclusion that 'Pushkin is not a world poet, and is important only for his fatherland' (187).

The next significant event in the history of Pushkin studies was the publication in 1855 of a new edition of *Collected Works* with a companion volume, *Materials for a Biography of Pushkin* by P.V. Annenkov. The appearance of this new edition, and especially the wealth of biographical material given by Annenkov, prompted a number of reviews and stimulated renewed interest in Pushkin, who had in general suffered from the swing towards prose in the tastes of the Russian reading public.

In his reviews, published in *Russkii vestnik* (1856), Katkov defends the position of that camp which insisted on the primacy and independence of art: 'poetry, in its true sense, is cognitive thought directed on that which is not susceptible to abstract reasoning' (166). This quotation is taken from his first review, which is entirely devoted to questions of poetic theory. In his subsequent review, in which he discusses certain concrete works, Katkov shows his debt to Belinskii. Thus, Belinskii's assertion that *Onegin* was 'an act of consciousness for Russian society' finds its echo in Katkov: 'Before him [Pushkin] poetry was a matter of schools; after him it became a matter of life, its social consciousness' (284). Belinskii's benign view of *Onegin* is also reflected in Katkov, for whom *Onegin* is 'an empty fop, but still a nice chap, who could turn into something more useful' (303).

Concerning the form of *Onegin*, about which Belinskii had had little to say, Katkov emphasizes what he considers the lack of unity: 'Everywhere there are individual moments, depictions of individual events; nowhere is there a coherent development, for the whole is broken up into episodes, and the narrative serves only as a thread on which is strung a wonderful series of pictures, sketches, images and lyrical passages' (292). Katkov's remark shows his awareness of how far the poem is from the realistic novel that Belinskii had read it to be. There is, however, a note of critical condescension, almost annoyance. Rather than read it for what it was, critics were still inclined to impose on the piece a preconceived formal conception.

Another article inspired by the new edition and devoted to the notion of Pushkin the poet was that of A.V. Druzhinin, 'A.S. Pushkin and the latest edition of his works' (1855). Druzhinin reviews the literary life of Pushkin on the basis of Annenkov's *Materials* and attacks a number of preconceived ideas - for example, that Pushkin was 'lazy' and had written his best pieces by the time of his death and that poetry is merely a youthful activity. Rather, Druzhinin sees in the last works

of Pushkin the 'embryo of something great' that would have made him an 'all-European poet.' Most important, Druzhinin attacks the notion that Pushkin's prose is weak (a feature of Belinskii's criticism), seeing in it 'an object of useful study for the most recent writers' (61). In Druzhinin's view, Pushkin offers an alternative to the contemporary trend in Russian literature: "The poetry of Pushkin can serve as the best weapon against that satirical style to which we have been brought by the immoderate imitation of Gogol" (60). It is in this stressing of Pushkin's poetic vision that the interest of Druzhinin's article lies. He has little to say about *Onegin* itself.

A third critic who was to discuss Pushkin (though not in the form of a review of the new edition) was Apollon Grigor'ev, who in his article 'A View of Russian Literature since Pushkin's Death' (1859) attempted to bridge the critical gap. Again, Grigor'ev owes much to Belinskii, whom he quotes extensively. He notes: 'The Pushkin problem has advanced little towards its resolution since the times of the 'Literary Reflections' [by Belinskii], - but if we do not solve this problem we cannot understand the actual situation of our literature. Some would see in Pushkin an aloof artist since they believe in some kind of aloof art, remote from life and not born of life, others would make the prophet "seize a broom" and serve their conventional theories.' Is Grigor'ev's argument is conducted on a very general plane, and his famous observation on Pushkin the type is of little help to our present purpose: 'Pushkin is our spiritual physiognomy, realized for the first time, in outline, but fully and wholly; a physiognomy which is already clearly distinct and separate from the mass of other national, typical physiognomies... He is our original type' (167). It is in this abstract and, to the modern reader, nebulous vein of discussion of 'national' (*narodnyi*) types and features that much of the debate of the middle decades of the nineteenth century was conducted: "In Pushkin's great nature, which excluded nothing, neither the disturbed romantic element, nor the humour of common sense, nor passion, nor the northern contemplativeness - in this nature, which reflected everything, but reflected as a Russian soul should, - is found the justification and the reconciliation for all our present, apparently so hostilely divided sympathies' (ibid.). Both the tone and the sense of this passage foreshadow Dostoevskii's view of Pushkin as a figure who can heal the divisions in the nation and (through his Protean spirit) in humanity itself.

The debate that was provoked by the appearance of the edition of 1855 and Annenkov's *Materials* was waged, on one side, by the proponents of an independent art ('art for art's sake'). Their theories rested

on the notion of the eternal importance of art - the perception of artistic beauty and the international, universal meaning of great art. This criticism, which stressed the poetic aspect of Pushkin and the irreducibility of the poetic mode, was derived, at least in part, from that Belinskii, who waxed ecstatic in praise of Pushkin's 'genius' and stressed his 'artistic' reproduction of reality. The notion that poetry did not need any external justification, that it had a unique and important artistic function, found its basis in the poetry of Pushkin in such themes as 'poetic inspiration' and 'the poet and the rabble.' Belinskii's observation on Pushkin's aristocratism (quoted above) is not without importance here, since in Russia lyric poetry had been - and in the 1850s continued to be - largely the preserve of an aristocratic elite. One important aspect of the 'aesthetic' criticism of the 1850s was the fact that it bore the seeds of a more profound interest in poetic technique (e.g., already Katkov shows such an awareness of Pushkin's transformation of language). Sooner or later critics would feel obliged to go beyond ecstatic praise of Pushkin's 'talent' and examine the specifics of his poetry.

Ranged against this 'aesthetic' criticism were those critics who developed the socio-critical aspect of Belinskii's study. Their interest was in that Pushkin who was a historical, obsolescent figure and who had occupied a certain place in the development of the national consciousness. In their view, Pushkin was of limited importance for the present day, since the society which he described was a restricted one and his satire had been superseded by Gogol's. As we have seen, Pushkin had himself used the term 'satire' only to withdraw it subsequently. The hybrid nature of *Onegin* - novel (and hence reproduction of reality) and verse (poetry with the lyrical, inspirational, and intimate properties that entails) - is, furthermore, ambiguous. The ambiguities were, inevitably, compounded into contradictions in the criticism of Belinskii, and the result was the critical dichotomy of the 1850s.

An additional factor in the debate (and one of some importance for both parties) was the question of *narodnost'* - of Pushkin's 'Russianness.' As we have seen, this question went back, through Belinskii, as far as the Polevoi-Venevitinov polemic. As it was a question of the vitality of the national spirit and the originality of Russian literature in the face of foreign influences, this problem appealed to critics of both parties. Related to the *narodnost'* problem was the perception of 'types.' The typicality of Tat'iana and Onegin as representatives of the national spirit was to become axiomatic in Russian criticism. Onegin, for example, was assimilated to the growing gallery of 'superfluous men' - Pechorin, Rudin, Oblomov, et al. - who were perceived to be

a 'national type.' The analyses of criticism were here provoked by the demands of realistic art. The 'realistic' interpretation of the *Onegin / Tat'iana* 'novel' became a source of inspiration for the prose novelist.

The years 1855 to 1865 saw a growing disaffection among the 'utilitarian' critics for Pushkin. As has been recently demonstrated by the Soviet critic S.S. Konkin, the attack on Pushkin and Belinskii by Pisarev in 1865 was no isolated outburst, designed to damage the 'aesthetic' critics, but rather the culmination of a process which had begun with Belinskii (Konkin 1972, 58, 61ff.). For the latter critic Pushkin's role as a poet and an artist was acceptable, even desirable. By Pisarev's time, Pushkin had become the rallying point of the aesthetic criticism and, hence, anathema. As Konkin demonstrates, Chernyshevskii, in his review articles on the 1855 edition, and Dobroliubov, writing subsequently, were both inclined to see in Pushkin a man of the past, who had made his contribution largely in the area of poetic form. Chernyshevskii writes: 'Pushkin carried out completely his great task that of introducing into Russian literature poetry as beautiful artistic form, and having discovered poetry as form, Russian society could go further and seek a content in this form' (1855, 5161).

Although he had abandoned Belinskii's historicism and organicism, so that his criticism was much cruder, Chernyshevskii still relied heavily on Belinskii in his review articles, as had Dobroliubov who, in an article entitled simply 'Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin' (1858a), writes: 'if we were to engage on a detailed account, we of course could say nothing new after the remarkable essays on Pushkin written by Belinskii.' Dobroliubov's view of *Onegin* is likewise derived from Belinskii: 'His *Onegin* is not simply a society fOPi he is a man with great strength of soul, a man who understands the emptiness of that life to which he is called by fate, but who does not have sufficient strength of character to tear himself out of it' (300). The contradiction inherent in this formula of a character who has 'strength of soul' but not 'strength of character' are so apparent that little in the way of critical reasoning was needed for Pisarev to reject the Belinskii interpretation of *Onegin* as a 'nice chap' which had motivated Dobroliubov to trap himself in the formula. In another 1858 article, 'On the degree of participation of *narodnost'* in the development of Russian literature' (a review of a second edition of Miliukov's *History*), we see Dobroliubov's growing disenchantment with *Onegin*: 'if in Russia such talented natures as Aleko and *Onegin* were in the majority, and if, being so numerous, they still remained such worthless fellows as these gentlemen - Muscovites in Childe Harold's cloak - then it would be a sad look-out for

Russia' (1858b, 260). In the same article Dobroliubov concurs with Chernyshevskii's view that Pushkin had mastered only 'the *form of narodnost*': its content remained inaccessible even to Pushkin' (ibid.). Pushkin, Dobroliubov maintains, had neither the inclination, the education, nor the character to go further.

Essentially, Chernyshevskii's and Dobroliubov's bromides were simply an intermediate stage in that development which led from Belinskii to Pisarev. The latter's essay on *Onegin* (published with a second part on Pushkin's lyrics under the title 'Pushkin and Belinskii,' 1865) represents the first major study of the work since Belinskii. It is also one of the most controversial statements on *Onegin* in a literature that is full of heated controversy, and is still a cause of debate and interpretation that can be read with profit and enjoyment.¹⁶ The criticism that Pisarev makes, however, has to be read against the background of the polemic between the *engage* progressive critics, of whom Pisarev is the most logical and radical, and the aesthetes, or 'philistines' and 'romantics' as Pisarev prefers to call them. Although Pisarev's article is a direct refutation of Belinskii's interpretation, he stresses his appreciation of Belinskii: 'While we diverge from Belinskii in our evaluation of certain facts, finding him overly credulous and too easily impressed, we still come much closer to his basic convictions than do our adversaries' (1865, 364). As we have seen, this ambivalent attitude is the consequence of the ambiguities in Belinskii's own criticism.

The positions from which Pisarev attacks *Onegin* are typical of the 'civic' strain of criticism. Pisarev had seen, in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* and *Rudin*, and before that in Griboedov's play *Woe from Wit*, what he interpreted as an *engage*, realist art. Thus he seeks to find in *Onegin* 'answers to those questions which are posed by real life' (306). Having found those answers lacking, his conclusion is inevitable (and again reflects the expectations of the critic):

the 'favourite child' of Pushkin's muse must have acted on its readers as a sedative, thanks to which a person forgot that which he should have constantly remembered, and reconciled with that against which he should have struggled untiringly. The whole of *Eugene Onegin* is nothing but a bright and shining apotheosis of the most dismal and ridiculous status quo. All the pictures in this novel are drawn in such bright colours, all the filth of real life is so carefully moved to one side, the massive absurdities of our social mores are described in such a majestic manner, minute peccadilloes are mocked with such

unperturbed good humour, the poet himself leads such a merry life and breathes so easily, that the impressionable reader must inevitably imagine himself to be the fortunate denizen of some Arcadia, in which tomorrow must inevitably bring a golden age. (357)

The conclusions that Pisarev sarcastically draws suggest clearly his demand for a 'progressive' literature, didactic, moralistic, and, above all, critical of society's defects.

The attack that Pisarev makes on *Onegin* is concentrated on the depiction of Onegin and Tat'iana. At the outset of the discussion of Onegin, Pisarev quotes Belinskii's characterization: 'Onegin is a nice chap, and at the same time he is different. He will never be a genius, and has no pretensions to greatness, but inactivity and the emptiness of life are suffocating him' (306). Pisarev's discussion is directed at discrediting this view, which he assumes Pushkin shares, and demonstrating that Onegin, far from being admirable, is in fact a despicable egoist. In a *reductio ad absurdum* of Belinskii's determinism, Pisarev sarcastically attributes Onegin's spleen to overindulging in rich food and wine: 'This boredom is nothing but the physiological consequence of a very dissolute life' (311). Money and seduction of other men's wives are shown to be the other two mainsprings of Onegin's selfindulgent and wanton existence. Pisarev attacks what he sees as the fatalism in Onegin (the fatalism that becomes Belinskii's determinism - d. the discussion of *fatum* above): 'To unload in this fashion all the guilt on the fateful laws of nature is, of course, very convenient and even flattering for those people who have not become accustomed and do not know how to reason and who, as a result of this delegation of responsibility, can with no further ado promote themselves from the ranks of layabouts to exalted natures' (315).

Pisarev's impatience with Onegin's immorality and lack of will is closely linked to his espousal of a different 'type' of hero. Thus, Pisarev believes Pushkin lets Onegin off lightly when the latter kills Lenskii in the duel: 'he [Pushkin] should have ridiculed, denigrated, and stamped into the ground without the slightest sympathy that base cowardice which obliges an intelligent man to play the role of a dangerous idiot in order not to be subjected to the timid and oblique gibes of real idiots worthy of total contempt' (329). Pisarev's ideal hero, by contrast, would have been oblivious to the opinion of society, would have taken a moral stand, and would have been actively engaged in useful pursuits: 'of course, Onegin's intellectual capabilities are very mediocre and com

pletely spoiled by inactivity' (532). In his espousal of such a hero - and in consequent attacks on Onegin - Pisarev imposes on the text the criteria of the realist novel, and in assuming that it is Pushkin's goal to hold up Onegin as a tragic figure he ignores the irony with which Pushkin treats his hero. It is true that *Onegin* has important defects and contradictions if treated as a psychological novel. The question is - should the critic treat it as such? It is an error which goes back to Belinskii.

Pisarev's sarcasm in the criticism of Onegin is equalled by the contempt with which he treats Tat'iana: 'Belinskii places Tat'iana on a pedestal and ascribes to her high qualities to which she has no claim and with which Pushkin, despite his superficial and childish view of life in general and womankind in particular, would not and could not endow the favourite creation of his imagination' (351). For Pisarev, the fact that Tat'iana falls in love with a man after seeing him once (and not talking to him) and the fact that she acquiesces in the arranged marriage make her ineligible for the admiration she receives. He is also critical of her rejection of the man she loves, although Pisarev is the first critic to visualize the consequences of an acceptance: 'If this woman had thrown herself at Onegin and said to him: "I am yours for my whole life but, whatever the cost, take me away from my husband because I will not and cannot act a low farce with him" - then Onegin's protestations of love would have cooled very sharply in a minute' (351). If she had eloped with Onegin, the consequences would have been dire: 'The business would have finished with her running away from him, having learned to despise him to the bottom of her heart; and, of course, the poor, humiliated woman would have had to die in the most terrible poverty, or be dragged against her will into the most pitiful debauchery' (351).

Pisarev's approach to the analysis of *Onegin* is to present a sarcastic, depoeticized retelling of the events and characters from the point of view of the psychological novel. An important device is the invocation of a naive, gullible reader whose acceptance of the (to Pisarev) ridiculous assumptions in the text is ascribed to the seductive qualities of the poetry. In the space of forty years a poem which, when it was written, challenged the tastes and prejudices of the reader had become a mainstay of the conservative canon - to be challenged in its turn by the new consciousness. In some ways we may see Pisarev's essay as performing an analogous function to the original text. It was Pisarev's function to educate the Russian reading public, to raise its consciousness. For this, as I have suggested, he imposes (in a deliberately

tendentious and perverse way) the criteria of the realistic novel on *Onegin*. May we then assume that Pisarev is unaware of other approaches? Interestingly, there is a hint of another view in a remark contained in the conclusion of the article in which, discussing Belinskii's paeans in praise of *Onegin*, he describes that work as 'an old temple in which there is much food for the imagination and in which there is no food for the mind' (363). Although for Pisarev 'the mind' is positive and 'imagination' is pejorative, in another context his reference to 'imagination' might prove a useful starting point for the appreciation of the poetic qualities of the novel. In any case, his essay was an important event in the history of the criticism of *Onegin* in Russia and a challenge to the reader lulled by Belinskii's enthusiasm.

THE PUSHKIN MYTH 1880-99

The Pisarev article was to place a vast obstacle in the path of further evaluation of *Onegin* by leftist or 'progressive' critics. Pisarev's denial of the importance or relevance of *Onegin* for Russian society was to reverberate until well into the Soviet period with greater or lesser intensity, and *Onegin* and Pushkin became the property more of the 'aesthetic' trend in criticism in the last third of the nineteenth century. It was to the articles by Grigor'ev and Katkov that Strakhov turned in a series of articles on Pushkin (1866-77), later republished in book form under the title *Notes on Pushkin*. Strakhov picks up where Katkov's study of Pushkin's relationship to language left off. He examines such questions as parody, imitation, and Pushkin's lack of innovation. Although he has little to say specifically about *Onegin*, Strakhov's *Notes* are a stimulating change of focus and attention and foreshadow later work on questions of poetics.

The year 1880 saw the first of the great Pushkin *prazdniki* with the unveiling of the Pushkin statue in Moscow, accompanied by three days of religious celebrations, performances, and speeches. Strakhov has left us an account of the events of those three days, which were charged with emotion and excitement and assumed the proportions of a national event (Strakhov 1888). Intellectually, Russia was divided into several camps. There were the Slavophiles, the Westernizers, and a number of people who did not fit easily into either group. With the notable exception of Count L.N. Tolstoi, the Great Men of Russian culture were present. In the emotional atmosphere the speech-making assumed the importance of a competition, ultimately, between two men, Turgenev and Dostoevskii. Turgenev, who spoke first, somewhat

disappointed his audience. His speech essentially continues the line of Belinskii's historical criticism. Thus he emphasizes the role of Pushkin as the 'first Russian poet-artist' who had the double task of 'establishing the language and creating the literature' (Turgenev 1880, 71). In response to the rhetorical question whether he was a 'national poet in the sense of universal' like Shakespeare, Goethe, and Homer, Turgenev replied: 'This is a monument to our teacher!' The carefully drawn historical perspective and the equally carefully calibrated discriminations of Turgenev's speech were too cerebral and sober for the audience and the occasion. They did not want to hear that 'only recently has the return to his poetry become noticeable' or that 'who knows, perhaps a new, as yet unknown chosen one will appear who will outdo his teacher and will fully earn the title of national-universal poet which we do not feel able to give Pushkin - though we do not dare deprive him of it' (75).

It was on the next day, in the speech of Oostoevskii, that the celebrations reached the emotional climax the audience had been seeking. This speech proved an important event in the interpretation of *Onegin* in Russia, since the first two points which were made involved the work. Firstly, Oostoevskii saw in Onegin and in Aleko, the hero of 'Tsygany' ('The Gypsies'), 'that traditional Russian wanderer so divorced from the people, whose appearance in our society was so historically necessary' (1880, 511). Oostoevskii's depiction of Onegin the 'dreamer,' 'wanderer,' 'terrestrial sufferer' owes more than a little to Belinskii. Onegin was, to Oostoevskii, 'our negative type, a restless and unreconciled man who believes neither in his native soil nor in its native strength, ... who ultimately denies Russia and himself, who does not wish to have to do with others and sincerely suffers' (500). With this 'negative type,' Oostoevskii contrasts the 'positive type' of Tat'iana, 'the type of positive beauty, the apotheosis of Russian womanhood' (515). The sentimental scheme which Oostoevskii imposes on *Onegin* reaches its apogee in his interpretation of Tat'iana's rejection of Onegin. For this it is necessary for him to see in Prince N 'simply an honest old man, the husband of a young wife in whose love he believes blindly, although his heart does not know her at all, loves her, is proud of her, is happy with her and at peace' (518). Typically, Oostoevskii sentimentalizes Tat'iana's relationship with her husband and, by making her husband a doting old man, drains it of any sexual content: 'No, this is what her pure Russian soul decides: "So what if I alone am deprived of happiness, if my unhappiness is immeasurably greater than the unhappiness of this old man, if, finally no one, not

even this old man, will ever learn of my sacrifice and appreciate it, I will not be happy through the destruction of another" , (518). In these lines the transformation of *Onegin* into a Dostoevskii novel is complete.

Dostoevskii's view of Tat'iana stresses in her the *narodnyi* element: 'He [Onegin] has no soil, he is a blade of grass, blown by the wind. She is not so at all: even in her desperation, even in her suffering consciousness that her life has been ruined, she still has something firm and unshaken on which her soul rests. This is her memories of childhood, memories of her place of birth, the rural backwoods in which her humble, pure life began, and "the cross and shadow of the branches above the grave of her poor nanny" , (519). It is in this interpretation of *Onegin* that the cliché becomes dominant and the reality is lost in a scheme of 'types' that serve an ideological programme. *Onegin* had become an icon, to be painted and repainted in versions ever more remote from the original and darkened by the votive lamps of the reverent. To a considerable extent we have to live with the consequences of Dostoevskii's icon-painting.

Turgenev's reluctance to give Pushkin the title of national or world poet and his careful eschewal of hyperbole were not shared by Dostoevskii, who stressed (following Grigor'ev) what he saw as Pushkin's 'ability to respond to all the world and transpose himself almost completely into the genius of other nations' (501). This ability Dostoevskii, incredibly, sees as a profoundly Russian trait, and he develops it into a messianic pan-Russian philosophy: 'To become a true Russian, to become totally Russian perhaps means only (ultimately, underline this) to become the brother of all men - a pan-man, if you like.' In such a messianic vision Dostoevskii tries to unite both the Slavophile and Westernizing tendencies in a new synthesis. Pushkin, Dostoevskii suggests, took this vision with him to the grave; 'now without him we are divining this great secret' (527). As I have suggested, the Dostoevskii speech tells us more about its deliverer than its victim. Nevertheless, it was an uproarious success and continued to influence Russian thought on the subject long after. It signalled a new epoch in the history of Pushkin criticism in Russia - an epoch of myth and misunderstanding.

The year 1887 - the fiftieth anniversary of the poet's death-followed too closely on the heels of the 1880 celebrations to produce much criticism of lasting worth. The historian V.O. Kliuchevskii delivered a speech, subsequently published in 1887 under the title 'Eugene Onegin and His Forebears,' in which he traced the 'types' of the generations (from Peter onwards) preceding Onegin. His essay, written from the point of view of the historian, has little to say about the novel except

for reminiscences about its personal significance for Kliuchevskii and those of his generation who grew up immediately after Pushkin's death.

Despite the rather disappointing harvest of 1887 in terms of criticism, it was to prove a significant date in another respect: now anyone could print Pushkin's works, and cheap mass editions began to appear. The growth of interest thus engendered gave rise to a great increase in publications on Pushkin. Many of these, to be sure, were ephemera textbooks for high schools, public lectures, articles in newspapers but some were of more lasting significance - e.g., the articles which began to appear in scholarly journals on different aspects of Pushkin's life and works. In addition, in 1899 the nation celebrated the centenary of Pushkin's birth with hundreds of celebrations, great and small, throughout Russia. The anniversary was the cause for a huge quantity of publication. Again, much of this was of a highly ephemeral character, such as speeches given at high schools and poems composed by schoolboys for the occasion, but there were, in the 1890s, a number of publications that merit attention.

Some of the critics maintained what must be seen as a normative approach to *Onegin*, which had coalesced out of the writings of Dostoevskii, Grigor'ev, and, above all, Belinskii. The basic positions were clear: the work is interpreted as a realistic novel (seen as the 'progenitor' - *rodonachal'nik* - of the chain of novels in Russian realism - Lermontov, Goncharov, Turgenev, Tolstoi - which was by now complete); the characters are seen as 'types'; Tat'iana is interpreted as the sublime incarnation of Russian womanhood, with her roots in the Russian folk; Onegin is the first of the great 'superfluous men' of the novel tradition; the poetry comes in only for some vague, but generally ecstatic, praise. The critic A.I. Nezelenov, in an essay on *Onegin* published in 1890, offers only very minor variations on these themes (Nezelenov 1890). Thus, he imposes the criteria of psychological realism on the work to the extent of perceiving 'errors.' For example, he makes a great fuss over the fact that Pushkin, in Chapter One, does not tell us the effect which Onegin's reading had on him, or which books he read, an 'error' which Nezelenov attributes to the fact that Pushkin wrote the chapter in 1823 when his talent was not fully developed. Nezelenov's rather pompous, condescending tone and line of criticism continue when he finds another 'error' in the fact that Pushkin had 'left out' the 'period of romanticism' in describing the development of Onegin's character. Nezelenov's criticisms have nothing to do with Pushkin's intentions or, procedures, but do illustrate how firmly the 'realistic novel' interpretation had established itself in the Russian critical consciousness.

The year 1897 saw the appearance of a book which, though short

enough to be little more than a long essay, must be regarded by the impartial observer as an important event in the intellectual assimilation of Pushkin: D. Merezhkovskii's *Eternal Companions (Pushkin)*. Merezhkovskii, who is anathema to Soviet critics, develops an interpretation of Pushkin which, with its stress on the poet's anti-democratism and his cult of Peter the 'superman,' is a challenge to the basic assumptions of realist criticism. It is Merezhkovskii's thesis that Pushkin - almost alone in Russian literature - was able to express and hold in creative tension the two elements of great art (which had been realized in the art of the Renaissance): the superhuman and heroic, and, opposed to it, the forgiveness of one's enemies, charity.

Merezhkovskii's interpretation of the meaning of Pushkin's oeuvre is based upon the integrated reading of the works which (although other critics had made some comparisons, e.g. of *Onegin* and *Aleko*) are seen for the first time as repeated attempts to solve an aesthetic problem in artistic terms. Where Belinskii sees Pushkin mainly in a social and historical context, Merezhkovskii places him in the aesthetic context of world literature, something which had been made possible by the achievements of such writers as Gogol', Turgenev, Dostoevskii, and Tolstoi, but which for Belinskii, of course, was only a dream. It was this perspective that permitted Merezhkovskii to compare Pushkin to such giants as Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, which Belinskii had declined to do. By deepening the intellectual understanding of the meaning of Pushkin's art, Merezhkovskii takes the traditional statements on Pushkin and makes them precise. Thus, he sets out the importance of *Onegin* for subsequent Russian writers: 'In *Eugene Onegin* Pushkin described the horizon of Russian literature, and all subsequent writers had to move and develop within this horizon' (1897, 43). In this sense, we must see Pushkin as the initiator. Here the Russian writer is passive: Pushkin has created the world in which he must function. However, as Merezhkovskii also points out, that part of the Russian writer which is consciously acting in the Pushkin tradition betrays it: 'The tragedy of Russian literature lies in the fact that, although it with every step moves further away from Pushkin, it nevertheless considers itself the true guardian of Pushkin's legacy' (79). Merezhkovskii might have mentioned here the role of the critic as distorter.

The sharpness of focus with which Merezhkovskii redefines issues applies to *Onegin* as well. The critic places the novel in verse in the same context as 'The Gypsies' and 'The Prisoner of the Caucasus,' seeing in the Tat'iana/*Onegin* relationship an extension of the problem of the simple, innocent native and his relationship to the 'contempo

rary *man* who is incapable of neither love nor friendship, contemplation nor action' (38). Thus, Merezhkovskii takes the by now accepted interpretation of Tat'iana as the simple country girl with her origins in the folk, but, again, deepens and sharpens the focus by placing the notion in a broader intellectual context. The figure of Onegin is one that has constantly exercised critics. It is, perhaps, best explained by placing it, as Merezhkovskii does, against the broader background of other similar works by Pushkin. Merezhkovskii offers a criticism of the result: 'The deficiency of the poem lies in the fact that the author does not fully separate the hero from himself, and therefore does not relate totally objectively to him' (36). It is difficult to agree with the critic here, although his comment is understandable when one considers the brevity of his analysis - he does not, for example, discuss the character of the poet/narrator at all.

If the problem of Onegin's character is a continual concern in Russian criticism, then the other question which may be considered an 'index' of the critic's orientation is his interpretation of the denouement. Does Onegin love Tat'iana? Does she love him? How are we to interpret her refusal of his approaches? Merezhkovskii comes closer than most critics to an understanding of the irony and fittingness of the final scene: 'Only now does Onegin understand that pride which obliged him to despise a divine gift - simple love - and reject Tat'iana's heart with the same cruelty with which he stained his hands with Lenskii's blood. ...All the horror of the punishment strikes him when he realizes that Tat'iana loves him as before, but that this love is as sterile and dead as his own' (41). In his understanding of the symmetrical retribution which is meted out, the studied elegance of the finale, and the attribution of a poetic motivation to Tat'iana's rejection - in all of this Merezhkovskii reaches out beyond a psychological/realist interpretation of the novel.

It is impossible to agree fully with Merezhkovskii's generalized and schematic view of Pushkin's oeuvre. He cannot, and does not, go into the kind of detail necessary to do justice to the text. His essay must be seen as a sharp corrective, the critic distancing himself from a current of thought which he finds odious. But by emphasizing the poet's disdain of the 'Jabble,' and his fascination with the strong type, the self-willed egoist, as expressed in variation after variation in work after work, Merezhkovskii made an important (though unfortunately often reviled and unheeded) contribution to the understanding of Pushkin. Most important, Merezhkovskii realized that Pushkin was a great thinker (contrary the common image of him as a frivolous poet incapable of

philosophical depth), that he was an artist who sought aesthetic solutions to aesthetic problems, and that he must be read and evaluated in those terms.

Merezhkovskii's revision of the Belinskian interpretation of *Onegin* was, at least in part, echoed by the critic K.F. Golovin (Orlovskii) who, in his book *The Russian Novel and Russian Society* (1897), attacks Belinskii's desire to 'paint Onegin in liberal colours' (62). Concerning the interpretation of the finale, Golovin, too, is prepared to understand rather than judge Tat'iana's actions: 'She did not, however, cease to love him, but it was no longer the former ecstatic obeisance to an idol, but a bitter love to which was added not a little disappointment' (ibid.). Golovin also shares Merezhkovskii's view of the cult of the strong man in Russian literature: 'From Pushkin until the present day Russian literature has been searching for a strong man, ready to admire his egoism' (63). Onegin falls short of this ideal in that his 'excellence is fruitless.'

The jubilee of 1899 was, as I have said, marked by a great volume of Pushkin studies, mostly of a general character - Pushkin's meaning for Russian literature, Pushkin in Russian criticism, and so on. The atmosphere of civic pride and formal speechifying at various celebrations (e.g., at the universities) was hardly conducive to the emotional distance necessary for good criticism. The most interesting aspect of the jubilee was the position of the symbolists who, as poets and critics, tried to coopt Pushkin in an issue of the *World of Art* magazine. This event, and the polemical attack by V.L. Solov'ev that ensued, are important in the history of the literary climate of the time, but did not really contribute anything to the study of *Onegin* 17

The one essay of the jubilee that is worth noting is that by V. V. Sipovskii entitled 'Onegin, Lenskii and Tat'iana' (1899b). In an earlier essay 'Pushkin, Byron and Chateaubriand' (1899a), Sipovskii had attacked the commonly held view that Pushkin was 'influenced' by Byron, especially in the long poems written in exile. Sipovskii demonstrated that Chateaubriand was an at least equally important inspiration for those poems. The methodology is pushed further in the study of *Onegin*, where Sipovskii demonstrates that the character of Tat'iana is largely a pastiche of a number of characters in French and English literature - e.g., Pamela and Delphine - and that certain passages in her letter make much better sense if one realizes that they are taken from Western sources. The effect of the argument is to challenge the 'realistic novel' model still further and place a new stress in the study of *Onegin* on the literary plane. Sipovskii's argument discredited likewise the

notion of Tat'iana's *narodnost'*: 'What is Russian about her, about this "ideal Russian woman"? Only that she was superstitious, loved Russian folktales, Russian nature, and the Russian troyka!' (326).

Sipovskii analyses the characters of Onegin and Lenskii in a similar manner. In *Onegin* he sees, in addition to the influence of Chateaubriand's *Rene*, Richardson's *Lovelace* and *Grandison*, and Byron's *Childe Harold*, and examines the role of Pushkin's friend A.N. Raevskii, the supposed, original of Pushkin's poem 'The Demon,' as possible 'model' Sipovskii's study proved important in that it demonstrated the necessity of literary scholarship as well as critical acumen for the interpretation of *Onegin*, which in his essay ceases to be a realist sociopsychological novel and becomes rather a palimpsest of literary allusions and echoes, in which the characters are as much parodies as types, and in which the details of the composition and motivation (e.g., Tat'iana's love for Onegin) cannot be interpreted simply as events in a narrative.

BEFORE OCTOBER

The jubilee celebrations of 1899 bore fruit in a number of ways. The scope and the fervour of the celebrations established (if there had been any doubt) the importance of Pushkin in Russian literature and the Russian consciousness. The years that led up to the Revolution were marked by a number of important developments. Of these, the most significant was the establishment of 'Pushkin studies' on an academic and scientific basis. The Imperial Academy of Sciences began the process of publishing an authoritative edition of Pushkin's works, and of concentrating manuscript and other material into one archive (to become, later, the 'Pushkin House'). A scholarly journal, *Pushkin and His Contemporaries*, was started to publish the mass of biographical, textual, and documentary material as it came to light, and the first university seminars devoted to Pushkin took place (under S.A. Vengerov) in Petersburg, preparing a generation of Pushkin scholars whose activity lasted into the 1950s.

The new scholarly impetus of the first decades of the twentieth century brought new insights to the study of *Onegin*. Many of these were minor - N.O. Lerner, in a series of articles, suggested, for example, new (literary) sources for *Onegin*, as well as possible models for Tat'iana among Pushkin's acquaintance. But the publication in 1910 by P.O. Morozov of deciphered material which he attributed to a tenth chapter of *Onegin* was to have long-lasting implications. It suggested the

existence of an entire clandestine chapter, and even that the canonical text of *Onegin* was only a modified version of a suppressed text or plan. The debate begun by the publication of Morozov's research will perhaps never be resolved. It had the effect, however, of politicizing the interpretation of *Onegin*. In particular, Morozov's article, and the inferences which could be drawn from it were to play an important role in the formation of the Soviet view of the work.

Another development which must be mentioned here, and which was to prove of importance in the critical activity of the period during and shortly after the Revolution, was the interest shown by symbolist poets, especially Briusov and Belyi, in Pushkin's poetics.¹⁹ Their studies (which may be traced back to Strakhov and Katkov) were the forerunners of Russian formalist criticism. Although their contribution was of a general kind, and little work was done specifically on *Onegin*, the growing interest in poetics must nevertheless be rated a significant factor in the pre-revolutionary scene, which was becoming polarized into 'aesthetic' and 'poetic' criticism on the one hand and 'realist' and sociological criticism on the other.

That there was an increasingly complicated critical situation in Russia in the period leading up to the revolution is true. One cannot speak, however, of a 'crisis,' as does the Soviet critic B.S. Meilakh.²⁰ On the contrary, the study of Pushkin was acquiring a new sophistication, and the perspective of time (marked by the jubilee) and new documentation placed new tasks before the critics. The most successful study of the period in question (and one which Meilakh - revealingly, perhaps passes over in silence), was the article '*Eugene Onegin*' by Ivanov-Razumnik, which appeared in a special multivolume collection of texts and essays edited by Vengerov (Ivanov-Razumnik 1909).

Ivanov-Razumnik's essay is sober and thoughtful in tone, for the most part without the hyperbolic praise and panegyric outbursts that some critics felt necessary. Ivanov-Razumnik tries to appreciate *Onegin* on its own terms, without imposing external criteria. His arguments are strengthened by a good grasp of the detail, not only of the work itself, but also of Pushkin's poetry as a whole. In addition, Ivanov-Razumnik had studied the preceding critics on the subject, and attempts to synthesize the views of a considerable number of them.

The basic position of Ivanov-Razumnik may be characterized as 'neo-Belinskian.' A considerable part of the essay is devoted to sociological aspects of *Onegin* - the history and subsequent development of the Onegin and Tat'iana 'types' in Russian society. This sociological approach, inspired by Belinskii and Kliuchevskii, is taken about as far as

it can go by Ivanov-Razumnik. Thus, in the study of Onegin he distinguishes three social groups among the young men of that generation: the affected (those who adapted to the regime), the disaffected (who became the Decembrists), and those in between - disaffected, but unfired by the revolutionary ideals of youth. To this third group, Ivanov-Razumnik suggests, belongs Onegin. In addition he takes the Tat'iana 'type' and sketches in an 'ancestry' for her (i.e., the 'types' of preceding generations out of which she grew) just as Kliuchevskii had done for Onegin. The problem with these arguments is that they are based upon the concept of the 'type' which is unquantifiable and must ultimately be taken on trust. Ivanov-Razumnik is himself uneasy with the term. Following Kliuchevskii he speaks of Onegin as a 'typical exception' 'he is too typical to be an exception and sufficiently exceptional to be a type' (213). This paradoxical remark is illustrative of the problems that the sociological approach can get into. Another paradox results from Ivanov-Razumnik's insistence that Onegin and Tat'iana, although types, are also individuals. The approach begs a number of questions about the work under study: did Pushkin intend to create 'types'? Was a true sociological portrait of Russian society his goal or even the effect? Does not the sociological interpretation contradict the image of Onegin as literary parody of Western romantic heroes sketched by Sipunovskii?

Whatever were the artist's intentions, it is certain that subsequent Russian writers found in the work those 'types' and situations which they sought, and Ivanov-Razumnik makes hay in his observations on the impact of Onegin the 'superfluous man' (and even Tat'iana the 'superfluous woman') on subsequent writers. As he notes, the 'contrast between the weak man and the strong woman' becomes a standard feature of the Russian novel, which spawns 'Onegins' and 'Tat'ianas' and the disease of 'oneginism' (*oneginstvo* - cf. Dobroliubov's similar term for the Russian social disease of *oblomovshchina*) (217). Ultimately, the decision whether to accept Ivanov-Razumnik's line of argument depends on whether one believes that it is the function of art to provide a sociological portrait of a society (leaving aside the question of the accuracy of such a portrait). That this was the goal of certain later realist prose writers in Russian is clear. But it is important, for Ivanov-Razumnik's argument to succeed, that Pushkin be attached to this group. Hence, he emphatically describes him as a 'great realist' and equally emphatically declares: 'He was never a romantic; his Byronic pseudo-romanticism was therefore only a transitory and narrow phenomenon even in this work of the years 1820-24' (216-17).

The sociological part of Ivanov-Razumnik's essay is the 'missing

link' between nineteenth-century 'civic' criticism and the position which Soviet criticism was to adopt in the middle 1930s. The key words were *rodonachal'nik* (progenitor: Pushkin as the progenitor of Russian literature, Onegin as the progenitor of the superfluous men); 'realism' (Pushkin assimilated to the realist school, denial of romanticism as a negative, alien phenomenon); 'overcoming' (Pushkin 'overcame' [*preodolel*] the ideological content of Onegin the sceptic - in Soviet criticism this is reduced to the 'overcoming' of romanticism).

The insistence on the social role of the artist (and of all members of society) is an essential feature of Russian culture and, as such, runs counter to the desire of the individual artist for self-expression and artistic freedom. Ivanov-Razumnik is aware of this contradiction, which frequently is expressed in Russian criticism by ecstatic praise of the artist's 'genius' - a belated genuflection towards the importance of artistic individuality after social relevance has been proven - and he treads a fine line. Thus, in his essay he turns, after treating the historical and sociological aspects of the work, to questions of Pushkin's world-view, or 'world sense' as Ivanov-Razumnik modifies the term. This is the most interesting and original section of the essay. Here the critic links the writing of *Onegin* with the philosophical development of the poet. He interprets Lenskii as the incarnation of the naive optimism for humanity and the romantic longings of the Decembrist poets (in particular, Vil'gel'm Kiukhel'beker), and Onegin as a sceptical denier and a nihilist - representative of a phase which Pushkin went through during his exile in the south and which was expressed in the poem 'The Demon.' Ivanov-Razumnik describes the result of this searching for a philosophical view: 'the Demon had fulfilled its role with the "cold poison" of his scepticism he had killed the "romanticism" of Pushkin-Lenskii; there is nothing of value, he had whispered - everything in life is equally senseless, everything is equally unnecessary, absurd, aimless.' The assimilation of this view leads, in *Onegin*, to a new attitude in the poet: 'Pushkin opposed to the denial of the objective value of life a recognition of its great subjective value - to the denial of the objective sense of life he opposed the recognition of its great subjective sense' (232). It is here that Ivanov-Razumnik sees the meaning of *Onegin*: 'In Pushkin victory went to the elemental, bright, sunny, unconscious acceptance of life, the fullness of existence. And at this height nothing is fearful- neither sufferings, nor evil, nor death itself' (233).

The perception of this meaning in *Onegin* - a meaning which is aesthetic and is achieved through poetic means - is Ivanov- Razumnik's

contribution to the study of *Onegin*. He asked himself a question which had not been asked before by other critics, and his answer goes a long way towards the truth. He does not, in my opinion, sufficiently consider that tone of melancholy which suffuses the work (especially the last two chapters), nor does he give sufficient weight to the importance of art as mode of existence for Pushkin. What must be reckoned important is that here, in this discussion, he treats the work intrinsically, as opposed to the extrinsic discussion that informs and vitiates the major part of his essay. There are many other aspects of the work which Ivanov-Razumnik neglects totally - questions of poetics, tone, point of view, structure. What is more striking is that the extrinsic, 'Belinskian' elements and the intrinsic, original discussion are at odds with each other. As we have seen, this is a dichotomy which may be traced back to Belinskii himself.

Another critic whom one might also describe as 'neo-Belinskian' although much less successful than Ivanov-Razumnik - was N.A. Kotliarevskii, who devotes a chapter (326-58) of his book *Literary Trends of the Alexandrian Period* (1907) to *Onegin*. In general, Kotliarevskii hews to the established line of 'types' and realism. He explains the choice of types as an 'opposition of a "romantic" nature to two sentimental ones' (i.e. *Onegin* versus *Lenskii* and *Tat'iana*); as well as symbols, however, Kotliarevskii insists that the characters are 'people and people of that time.' Interestingly, Kotliarevskii has some doubts about the genre of *Onegin* (which had generally been treated, since Belinskii, as a novel): 'Indeed, in essence, is it a novel? Does there not lie beneath this novel the purest lyrical confession?' (212). Further on, Kotliarevskii uses the phrase 'a diary in verse' to describe *Onegin*; the term is echoed later by the Italian critic Ettore Lo Gatto. Another little-discussed question that Kotliarevskii touches upon is the completeness of the work. In most critics the question is ignored and one is left with the impression that they did indeed consider it finished. Kotliarevskii insists on the opposite view: 'as we know, he broke off his work in the Eighth Chapter and never returned to it' (210).

One of the important establishment critics of the period was D.N. Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii. The chapter (331-76) on *Onegin* in his book *A History of the Russian Intelligentsia* (1906) covers ground already well tilled - the social basis of the *Onegin* 'type.' Like Belinskii, Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii tries to explain why *Onegin* was 'superfluous' and a failure. He suggests - with a stern moralistic tone - *Onegin*'s 'bad psychological organization' and his 'alienation of personality from the environment' as the reasons. They appear to be little more than Belinskii's determinism.

Certainly, the discussion here has nothing to do with *Onegin* as literature and is totally extrinsic.

In contrast, another analysis of *Onegin* by the same critic in his monograph *Pushkin* (1909) is of much greater interest (85-112). Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii analyses the text of the work in terms of the presence of 'subjective' and 'objective' lyrics. By 'subjective' lyrics he means the lyrical presence of the author in the novel as manifested in the tone of the narrative and the lyrical digressions: 'True, he does not introduce himself onto the stage, but he frequently speaks about himself and, so to speak, is present in the novel, if not in the form of a *drama tis persona*, then as author' (85). Echoing Kotliarevskii, Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii sees the work to a significant degree as 'a poet's confession.' The division into objective and subjective is important because it hints, almost for the first time, at the complex structure of the text and the importance of the figure of the author. The critic gets into difficulties, however, when he treats other sections of the text as 'objective lyrics' - such a term might stretch to cover Tat'iana's dream, but it is totally misplaced when used to describe the specimens of Lenskii's poetry inserted into the text.

If one had to characterize the period leading up to the Revolution in one sentence, then one would say that the writing on *Onegin* was assuming an increasingly scholarly character. The critical interpretation established by nineteenth-century critics was so well entrenched that it needed a considerable effort of will to break out of it. Nevertheless, the critics whom we have discussed did offer certain new insights. In particular, the questions of poetics touched upon by Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii chimed in with a growing emphasis on the study of the poetic text (as opposed to the Belinskian emphasis on sociology and history) that was manifesting itself in Russian literary studies overall.

AFTER OCTOBER

The revolution of October 1917 brought to a head the changes that had been underway in literary criticism. A new society with a new ideology presupposed - or so many thought - a new approach to literature. The history of Soviet literary criticism in the first fifteen years is the history of the struggle of competing schools and approaches: formalism, Marxism, Freudianism, sociologism. It is a feature of Russian culture that it abhors disunity. Present-day Soviet scholars therefore tend to look back on the period negatively as a chaotic interregnum

that took place before Soviet criticism was able to develop a single, unified line. Although it is true that the period did not produce any large-scale works of Pushkin scholarship, it did give birth to some of the most stimulating and thoughtful work that has been written to date, with the emphasis on criticism and poetics rather than on formal academic study.

The revolution had the initial effect of calling into question the usefulness and relevance of Pushkin for the modern, revolutionary period. The problem was posed by Boris Eikhenbaum in his article 'Problems of Pushkin's Poetics' (1921): 'Everyone is troubled by the question - after all that we have gone through in life and in art, is Pushkin alive? And if so, what has he become for us?' (11). Eikhenbaum's remarks were prompted by the Futurists' demand to throw Pushkin 'off the steamship of the modern age.' For the extreme avantgarde, Pushkin's art was the effete product of an exploiting class. But even those who were prepared to recognize and study Pushkin felt dissatisfaction with Pushkin criticism as it existed. Thus, Eikhenbaum continues: 'Up to now Pushkin was too close to us, and we perceived him badly. We talked about him in a dead, schoolboy language, repeating a thousand times over Belinskii's hasty and fuzzy words. But there it is - everything that is schoolboyish and dead that can be said in the Russian language about Pushkin has been said and learned off by heart. We have said and repeated an endless number of times that word which is limp on our modern lips and easy for everyone because it does not bind one to anything: "Genius." And what happened? Pushkin has become, not a monument, but a plaster-of-paris statuette' (157). Eikhenbaum's outburst - in a language in which literary criticism tends to be guarded, circumspect, hemmed in by many constraints is refreshing in its unwillingness to take anything for granted.

The article which these remarks prefaced (or, rather, the lecture, for this, like a number of the most important critical statements of the 1920s, was first delivered at a 'Pushkin evening' in the House of Litterateurs) touches only obliquely on *Onegin*, but in its theme it tackles one of the major topics in Pushkin criticism of the time: the shift from poetry to prose in Pushkin's work. It was a topic that grew naturally out of the interest in poetics that had become known as the 'formal method' or 'formalism' (a pejorative term in the later Soviet period). In the process of Pushkin's shift towards prose *Onegin* had an important role to play, as Eikhenbaum pointed out: '*Eugene Onegin* was the preparation for this transition. It is an album of lyrics, but also the beginning of subject structures which do not require verse' (161).

Eikhenbaum's call for a rereading of *Onegin* was brilliantly answered by two critics. The first of these - Viktor Shklovskii - creates an entire shift in the way *Onegin* is viewed in the space of twenty-one pages in his article '*Eugene Onegin* (Pushkin and Sterne),' published in Berlin in 1923. Even the form of the essay is extraordinary: a dishevelled zigzag of breathless insights and aphorisms that adopt an ironic stance towards traditional 'coat and tie' scholarship. Footnotes are conspicuous by their absence and the text has an ironical 'shimmer of errors' - to use Nabokov's phrase - again, an expression of disdain for the paraphernalia of scholarship? Characteristically, Shklovskii dismisses previous criticism - e.g. the concept of 'types' - in a few casual sentences at the end of the essay - almost as an afterthought. In fact, rather than refuting previous critics, Shklovskii ignores them. His essay uses the new terminology of the formal method with its emphasis on poetics rather than content or literary and social 'environment': the work is seen, to use Shklovskii's own formula, as the 'sum of all stylistic devices employed in it.' The comparison between the author of *Tristram Shandy* and Pushkin is used largely as an initial insight to set the argument in motion. Shklovskii notes the allusion to Sterne in *Onegin* (in footnote 16), before drawing attention to the way both *Tristram Shandy* and *Onegin* begin in medias res - without the traditional introduction, which is inserted in the text much later (in *Onegin*, at the end of Chapter Seven).

Discussing the structure of the novel, Shklovskii notes: 'The plot [*siuzhet*] of the novel is itself extraordinarily simple! The action is braked by the fact that when Tat'iana loves Onegin, Onegin does not love her and when he falls for her, Tat'iana rejects him' (209). The critic is led to conclude that this banal plot - so common, as he notes, in literature - is not the *raison d'etre* of the work, and stresses the importance of the 'digressions': 'The true plot of *Eugene Onegin* is not the story of Onegin and Tat'iana, but the manipulation of this situation [*tabula*]. The main content of the novel is its own constructive forms, the plot form being used as real objects are used in Picasso's pictures' (211). Such an insight represents a quantum leap not only in the way literature is discussed, but in the philosophy of art. The distance between Belinskii and Shklovskii is (to use the latter's 'device' of analogy from the visual arts) the distance between Repin's *Volga Boatmen* and Malevich's *White Quadrilateral on White*.

Shklovskii's line of argument leads him to the conclusion that '*Eugene Onegin* is full of parodic devices.' He examines a number of these - vocabulary, verse structure, rhyme, footnotes, similes - and, although

his approach is impressionistic, he makes a good argument for their parodic intent. The weight of these arguments leads him to ask: 'Indeed, this is an interesting question: was *Eugene Onegin* written with serious intent? To put it crudely, did Pushkin cry over Tat'iana, or was he joking? Russian literature, headed by Dostoevskii, assures us that he cried' (214). Shklovskii does not immediately answer his own question, although the ironical way it is framed and his switching the subject to the question of parody suggests that he does not share Dostoevskii's opinion. Later he remarks: 'True, Pushkin himself appears to relate seriously and sympathetically to Tat'i-ana. [Here he quotes from the poet's professions of sympathy for the heroine.] But the tone of these extracts is undoubtedly Sternian. It is sentimental play and a play on sentimentalism. The description of Tat'iana, so suspicious in its archaic vocabulary, must be parodic' (218). Inasmuch as the 'seriousness' of the work depends on Tat'iana's lack of parody, Shklovskii has, perhaps, proved his point. This suggests that if we wish to find a serious intent, it must be sought elsewhere, at a deeper level.

Shklovskii's argument concludes with another 'question': 'why it is that *Eugene Onegin* takes the form of a parodistic Sternian novel. The appearance of *Tristram Shandy* is explained by the petrification of the devices of the old adventure novel. All the devices had become completely ineffective. The only way to revive them was parody. *Eugene Onegin* was written, as Professor B.M. Eikhnenbaum has shown, on the eve of the appearance of the new prose. The forms of poetry had already grown old. Pushkin dreamed of a prose novel. Rhyme bored him' (219). Thus Shklovskii, like Eikhnenbaum, proposed a new historical perspective to replace the Belinskian one. Instead of seeing *Onegin* as the 'progenitor' of 'new Russian literature' he proposed to see it as the last event in the literature of classicism, a view which he captures in a remarkable and characteristic image: '*Eugene Onegin* is like a mimic who comes on stage at the end of a variety show and acts out all the trade secrets of the previous numbers' (219).

The second formalist critic whose work is of fundamental importance in the criticism of *Onegin* is I.U.N. Tynianov. The year 1974 saw the first publication in Russian of an article written (although only in draft form) by Tynianov in 1921-2 and entitled 'On the Composition of *Eugene Onegin*.' The appearance of this article may be reckoned an event of major importance in Russian criticism of *Onegin* (especially since Shklovskii's article has never been printed in the USSR), as may be adjudged from its initial appearance in the journal *Monuments of Culture* (along with reports on archaeological finds),²¹ Despite its draft

form, the line of argument is - typically for Tynianov - densely knit and logical with none of Shklovskii's imagery or aphoristic fireworks.

Tynianov approaches the question of composition from the point of view of the prose/verse opposition. This was a question which concerned him (and other formalist critics) a great deal (and which he discussed in the monograph *The Problem of Verse Language*, published in 1924). Tynianov sees the opposition of prose and poetry to be rooted in the contrast of sound and semantics in the word. The argument is summed up in a typical formulation: 'Deformation of sound by the role of meaning is the constructive principle of prose; deformation of meaning by the role of sound - is the constructive principle of poetry. Partial changes in the correlation of these two elements are the motive factor of both prose and poetry' (56). The definition of this principle has important implications for the interpretation of poetry in general, since 'speaking of poetic semantics we have to remember that we have to do with a sense which has been deformed' (56). The argument, though abstractly put, relates directly to *Onegin* in that 'We are wrong to relate to the semantic elements of verse speech in the way we do to the semantic elements of prose speech. Such an error occurs most easily when a genre which is usually for prose (e.g. a novel) and is closely linked to the constructive principle of prose is thrust into verse.' Without saying so directly, Tynianov here calls into question the entire tradition of what he called the 'naive realistic' interpretation of the novel, that tradition which read *Onegin* simply as a novel without considering the verse factor and the deformation of the novel which that brought.

The correlation of prose/verse was, as Tynianov shows, a continuous problem for Pushkin: the two forms had very different requirements. With regard to *Onegin*, Tynianov remarks: 'It was necessary to combine an entire prose genre with verse - and Pushkin oscillates. For him *Eugene Onegin* is sometimes a novel, sometimes a poem; the chapters of the novel turn out to be cantos of a poem; the novel, which parodies the usual strategies of novels through compositional play, oscillating, intertwines with the parodic epic' (64). The device of the combination of novel and verse had, as Tynianov shows, profound effects on various elements in the novel structure. First, and most important, it deformed the levels of plot and action: 'Pushkin did everything possible to stress the verbal plane of *Eugene Onegin*. By publishing the novel chapter by chapter with intervals of several years, he quite clearly destroyed all emphasis on the plane of the action, on the *siuzhet* and the *fabula*; the dynamic of the semantic signs was replaced by the dynamic of the

word in its poetic meaning, the development of the action by the development of the verbal plane' (64). As Tynianov indicates, the dominance of the poetic element over the novelistic (prose) element is expressed in the characters - who lose their prime role as participants in the action - in the role of the digression, and in the device of the omission (which becomes an ambiguous sign in the composition of the work).

Tynianov's emphasis on the 'verbal dynamic' of the poetry as dominant feature leads him to a highly intriguing observation on the vexed question of whether *Onegin* is finished. Since the verbal plane is the decisive, 'levelling' element, the true ending of the novel is not Chapter Eight: LI; it is the last line of the 'Extracts from Onegin's Journey' that is 'the culminating point of the whole novel' (61). The deduction is logical, aesthetically justified, and totally new. Less striking, but equally important, are the analyses which Tynianov offers of the deforming effect on the verse of such linguistic devices as the use of an initial for a person. For example, in the line

Zavetnyi venzel' 0 da E.

[*The fatal monogram 0 and E. (Three: XXXVII: 14)*]

the letters, by assuming a metrical (and even rhyming) role, are 'unnovelistically' foregrounded.

It is difficult to speak of the 'influence' of the formalists on subsequent criticism - Tynianov's manuscript languished in limbo until the late 1960s, when parts of it appeared in Italian. Shklovskii's essay has been almost equally inaccessible save to the specialist in the Soviet Union. The true line of formalist criticism leads (at least for a considerable span of time) outside the confines of the Soviet Union. Roman Jakobson, in his 'Marginalia on *Eugene Onegin*,' published in Czech in 1937 (and recently translated into English), notes, apropos the characters in *Onegin*: 'Each of Pushkin's images is so elastically polysemantic and manifests such an amazing assimilatory capacity that it easily fits into the most varied contexts ... Either this kind of *oscillating characterization* evokes the notion of a unique, complex, unrepeatable individuality or, if the reader is accustomed to clear-cut typification, he gets the impression (let us cite several notable expressions of Pushkin's time) that in the novel "characters are lacking", "the hero is only a connecting link of descriptions", "the characterizations are pale", "Onegin is not depicted profoundly; Tat'iana does not have typical

traits," etc.' (1937b, 54-5). Jakobson's observations (and the reactions of contemporary critics whom he quotes) bear out Tynianov's view that the verse plane is dominant, and that the characters therefore cannot be read simply as participants in a novel.

Of the other formalist writings on Pushkin, mention should be made of B. Tomashevskii's study 'The Rhythmics of the Iambic Tetrameter Based on Observations of the Verse of *Eugene Onegin*' (1918). This essay, which carries on from the symbolist interest in Pushkin's poetics, is a classical statistical analysis of the internal rhythmics of the iambic tetrameter line. It represents the first major scientifically based study of the poetics of *Onegin*. Although directed to some extent polemically at certain *idees reçues* (e.g., the presence of a caesura in the tetrameter), the study does give a firm statistical basis for generalization on the poetic organization of the line in *Onegin* and tends, parenthetically, to reinforce the 'poetry' side of the 'novel in verse' equation.

The other critical tendency of the post-October period that produced a lasting contribution on *Onegin* was the 'sociological' trend represented by the critic D.o. Blagoi, who devotes a lengthy chapter of his book *The Sociology of Pushkin's Art* (1929) to the work. In his study Blagoi examines the ideological content of *Onegin* in terms of Pushkin's class identity and his sociological perceptions. Blagoi stresses Pushkin's consciousness of his belonging to a class (the landed nobility) which was in decline (a concern which is demonstrated by the recurrent theme of the poet's ancient lineage). Blagoi sees the two main protagonists of the work - Onegin and Tat'iana - as representatives of two groups in the nobility. Onegin lives in the city, affects foreign fashions, wastes his fortune (as his father had), and has no interest in continuing his line (witness his rejection of marriage). His spleen is seen as the symptom of his sociological state. In Blagoi's phrase, 'Before our eyes psychology becomes sociology' as the poet uses class and economic features to characterize his hero.

If Onegin represents the decadence and decline of the nobility, then for Blagoi Tat'iana symbolizes the possibility of a renaissance. Noting the fact that both Larin and Zaretskii choose to live in the country, and that their existence there is described in idyllic terms, Blagoi suggests that it is precisely in such a return to the land that Pushkin sees the sole salvation of the nobility. It is Tat'iana who represents in concrete terms that ancient nobility, rooted in the land, which is the best segment of the class: "Tat'iana shows the possibility of a recuperation, a rejuvenation of a nobility which has returned to "its father's house," to the land, to its native roots - she is the symbol of the salvation of

the class. The bringing together of Onegin and Tat'iana is the central moment in the plot' (146). The confrontation of Onegin and Tat'iana results, in Blagoi's view, in a victory for Tat'iana, who becomes the most important figure in the work and with whom 'the poet merges.'

Blagoi shows how the same problem recurs in work after work, the female figure gradually assuming the ascendancy; the shift in titles 'The Prisoner of the Caucasus,' *Onegin*, 'The Peasant Noblewoman,' *The Captain's Daughter* - shows this. Blagoi sees a similar shift occurring from romanticism to realism and from poetry - specifically the *poema*, or long poem - to prose. The scheme which he proposes combining the formalist concern with genre and the sociological question of the content and method - has become one of the most deeply rooted features of Pushkin criticism in Russian. It is a view which must be handled with a degree of circumspection: for example, how does one explain *The Bronze Horseman*, a late *poema* with a romantic male eponymous hero? The scheme is, one must recognize, a very attractive way of explaining what Blagoi describes as the 'semi-parodic form of *Eugene Onegin*' (168).

Blagoi's interpretation of *Onegin* is defective in many ways; it ignores the question of irony (e.g., in the depiction of Tat'iana, in Pushkin's attitude towards the 'rural idyll'), and it tends to 'read in' views that are Blagoi's rather than Pushkin's. For all that, it is interesting in that it investigates the possibility of a 'biographical imperative' which is operative at some level of the creative process in the choice of themes and images, and in that it poses the problem of the value system underlying the work. Blagoi was to modify his approach considerably in subsequent criticism, becoming a pillar of the Soviet literary establishment, and this early work is now viewed negatively in the Soviet Union.

THE STALIN PERIOD

The beginning of the 1930s was marked by profound social and ideological changes in the Soviet Union. The collectivization of agriculture, the transformation of industry under the five-year plans, and the concentration of absolute power in the hands of Stalin were reflected in the emergence of a new approach to literature by the Party which had at its core the desire for unity of thought and style. The first All-Union Congress of Writers of 1934, at which the doctrine of Socialist Realism was promulgated, left a profound mark on the development of Russian literature. The effect of this new (or old, if one sees it as the imposition

of the bases of Gor'kii's social realism of the turn of the century on Soviet writing) literary doctrine on the criticism of Pushkin took some time to appear, although the matter was of some urgency, since the centenary of Pushkin's death (the most *importantprazdnjk* since 1899) was approaching quickly, and it was essential from the Party's point of view that Soviet critics develop a unanimous line to treat the event in the appropriate manner.

The most important episode in the years leading up to the centenary was the appearance, in 1934, of a triple volume of the series *Uterary Herhage* devoted to Pushkin. This collective volume contained much previously unpublished material by and about Pushkin -letters, memoirs, etc. - as well as studies of different aspects of Pushkin's work and biography (including an article by B. Tomashevskii on Chapter Ten of *Onegjn*). From the point of view of the critical interpretation of *Onegjn*, the most important part of the volume is the series of 'keynote' essays in the first section, which is entitled 'Problems in the Study of Pushkin.' Of interest in this section are the articles of a general character by three critics, I. Vinogradov, I. Sergievskii, and D. Mirskii. The reader is struck by the more or less complete unanimity of approach of these three critics. They are united in rejecting the methods of the formalists and also of Blagoi, and adopt a position that affirms the development of realism in Pushkin's work. Most interestingly, all three speak of the ideological 'capitulation' of Pushkin. For example, Sergievskii writes: 'It is in particular untrue to say that Pushkin capitulates to the feudal regime only after the December uprising. Elements of disappointment, distrust, and intellectual and psychological depression appear in him even before his exile from Petersburg. A couple more years go by, and Pushkin already openly criticizes the freedom-loving dreams of youth and openly capitulates to the patriarchal way of life of the squirearchy: this is precisely the meaning of *Eugene Onegjn*' (120). The notion of an ideological shift in Pushkin is made more explicit by Vinogradov: 'The opposition of the "Russian soul" and "foreign ideology" is clearly represented for the first time in the images of Tat'iana and Onegin. Tat'iana also is not immediately delineated from this side of her. At first she is a provincial miss who speaks Russian badly. One cannot perceive in her that bearer of a "Russian soul" and moral duty which she will become in succeeding chapters' (78). Previous critics of the 'naive realism' school had tended to see the characters in the work as wholes. The concept of a change in the portrayal of Tat'iana that is stressed by these critics is therefore of importance.

It can scarcely be a coincidence that the same view is repeated (and

given flesh and blood) by Mirskii (who had recently returned to the Soviet Union from England and was destined to die in a *gulag*). Mirskii goes into the most detail on the image of Tat'iana. His remarks are worth quoting at length because they represent the best expression of the 'line' adopted by all three men:

Extremely characteristic is the change in the image of Tat'iana in the course of *Eugene Onegin*. At the beginning Tat'iana is portrayed as an awakening personality opposed on the one hand to the philistine environment of the provincial squirearchy, and on the other to the mature Onegin. This Tat'iana is closely linked to the spring of the progressive gentry whose bard Pushkin was in those years. By the time of Chapter Eight, Pushkin does not need such a Tat'iana, and the fate of her character is now determined by the requirements of that adjustment to the aristocracy surrounding Nicholas which was the first order of business for Pushkin. The Tat'iana of Chapter Eight is on the one hand the apotheosis of the grand lady, the highest expression of that aristocracy to which Pushkin had to adapt himself, and on the other a moral exemplar of the faithful wife for Natal'ia Nikolaevna who, being 'given' to Pushkin, related with the same lack of passion to him as Tat'iana did to her general, but whose future marital behaviour was an essential element in Pushkin's adjustment to the 'highest circles.' The hopes which Pushkin placed in her as the instrument of such an adjustment were sublimated in the lofty lyricism of Chapter Eight. (105-6)

Mirskii's view of Tat'iana has considerable merit: no doubt the existential concerns of Pushkin were highly influential in moulding Tat'iana's character. One is disturbed, however, by the mechanistic way in which the theory is applied. Surely the early Tat'iana and the proud Princess N are intimately and organically related? Also, if Tat'iana's declaration of marital fidelity is related (as I believe it is) to the question of Pushkin's marriage, then it is surely a superstitious self-assurance on the part of a poet (who had formerly tended to take the part of the cuckold) rather than a moralistic homily to his intended.

Mirskii's and his colleagues' view presupposes an 'original conception' of *Onegin* by Pushkin that becomes modified by the different social climate in which the poet finds himself after his return from exile. The notion of this 'original conception' is a seductive one and

becomes a commonplace of subsequent Soviet criticism. That the related idea of Pushkin's 'capitulation' is developed in all three essays suggests the degree of orchestration that was being imposed on Pushkin criticism (as on other spheres of cultural life) with a view to achieving a single unified line. The ironically minded observer might be tempted to see in the image of Pushkin capitulating to an authoritarian regime a parallel with the fate which Russian criticism was undergoing at precisely the same time. In fact, the critical stance adopted by the critics in the *Literary Heritage* volume was to prove only an episode in the development of Soviet criticism. Their interpretation was too doctrinaire and too condescending to prove acceptable as the official view of Russia's national poet, the centenary of whose death was approaching. Firstly, the idea that Pushkin 'capitulated' to the regime of Nicholas was at odds with the desire to see him as a progressive writer whose development of a realist art would lead to the great writers of nineteenth-century realism, the so-called 'critical realists,' and, beyond them, to socialist realism. It was therefore necessary to lay more stress on Pushkin's political engagement and his links with the Decembrists, and to de-emphasize the biographical and social imperatives. Other reasons would have to be found for the shift in the image of Tat'iana and all the other changes which it exemplified.

On 17 December 1935 the Soviet government published its directive on the creation of an All-Union Pushkin Committee, to be chaired by Maksim Gor'kii, which would direct the celebration of the centenary of Pushkin's death. The text of the decree characterized Pushkin as a 'great Russian poet, the creator of the Russian literary language and the progenitor of the new Russian literature.¹²² The effect of this declaration of the position of the party was not immediately apparent as it was not until the year 1941 that the first major expressions of the new line appeared - two collective volumes entitled *Pushkin - Progenitor of the New Russian Literature* and *Pushkin: A Collection of Articles*, with contributions by such critics as A. Tseitlin, D. Blagoi, G. Pospelov, and G. Vinokur.

These volumes, and the collections and monographs which followed, combine to form an orthodox, unified interpretation of Pushkin along the lines of the party decree. One may generalize the features of this interpretation as follows. Firstly, Pushkin is seen as a revolutionary, even a Decembrist. Blagoi writes: 'Pushkin came to literature under the sign of Decembrism. This initial content gave a great progressiveness, a vast progressive strength to all Pushkin's subsequent literary activity. For a century the degree of his participation in the Decembrist

movement, his role in it has been, as a rule, underestimated for various reasons - censorship, the tendentiousness of biographers, the destruction or loss of the most important documents, beginning with the autobiographical notes of Pushkin himself" (5). The portrait was thus completely changed from that of an aristocrat who was never a Decembrist and who capitulated before Nicholas to that of a Decembrist, crypto-revolutionary poet.

Hand in hand with this rejection of 'vulgar sociology,' as it came to be known, was the view of Pushkin as 'national' poet (emphasizing his *narodnost'*). The same emphases obtained here as in earlier criticism of this type: Pushkin is considered to have transcended his own class limitations and to have created the bases for the national literature. The concept of *of narodnost'* has as its necessary concomitant the idea of realism, in that the realistic portrayal of national types is, it is argued, what makes Pushkin *narodnyi* or national. The comment of G. Pospelov (in his article '*Eugene Onegin* as a Realist Novel') may be considered as a classical statement of the line: 'Realist poetry shows in the collision of typical heroes the laws of existence and, by the same token, reflects the more profound essential relationships in reality' (143). This remark is made in the context of Pospelov's discussion of how Pushkin 'overcomes' Byron and Byronic romanticism (*Don luan*).

From this it can be seen that the line adopted by Soviet critics in response to the decree was essentially not new, but derived from the 'neo-Belinskian' criticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was modified principally by the insistence on Pushkin's progressive (revolutionary) views. The poet's apparent capitulation was ascribed to the dissimulation of the poet in the face of strict censorship, a view that was lent some credence by the existence of such documents as the deciphered passages attributed to Chapter Ten.

As regards *Onegin* specifically, the new criticism tended to treat the work as a realistic novel, in the Belinskian manner, since in this way one could argue its importance for subsequent literature. The reference in the party decree to Pushkin as the founder of the Russian language legitimized discussion of Pushkin's language and style (see below), but the continuing swing against formalism made discussion of form, genre, and structure less acceptable, and generally critics limited themselves to appreciative remarks concerning the 'composition,' particularly in studies written for the mass audience. Pospelov, for example, argues that the digressions and authorial asides in *Onegin* are of less importance than in Byron's *Don luan*, and implies that they are vestigial traces of the Byronic genre which Pushkin's realist art 'overcomes.'

The war years and subsequent economic hardships slowed the output of criticism, and it was not really until the 1950s that new writing begins to appear on *Onegin* in any quantity. What does start to be published finally is not essentially new, but rather rehashes of the 'neoBelinskian' line set down by the decree and the collective volumes of 1941. The same few familiar names reappear again and again: B. Tomashevskii, D.O. Blagoi, author of *Pushkin's Craft*, G.A. Gukovskii, author of *Pushkin and the Problem of Realistic Style*, G. Makogonenko, and B.S. Meilakh.²³

The most important problem in the interpretation of *Onegin* in the 1950s had to do with the character of Onegin. The debate in question revived the old problem of whether he was to be viewed as a positive' or negative character, and, more specifically, whether he becomes, at the end of the work, a Oecembrist. Belinskii, as we have seen, regarded him as a 'nice chap' (*dobryi malyi*) who had fallen victim to his environment. Pushkin, according to the memoirs of one M. Iuzefovich, is reported to have said that according to his 'initial conception' he intended Onegin to die in the Caucasus or become a Oecembrist.²⁴ This information, and a judicious excerpting of Pushkin's cancelled drafts, leads to an extrapolation of Onegin's psychological development that runs roughly as follows. Onegin is horrified at the death of Lenskii. He travels through Russia, learning to love the Russian people and to detest the political system symbolized by the Arakcheev military settlements. When he returns to Petersburg he has been reborn. The new man, a democrat, and an appreciator of literature, falls in love with Tat'iana. She, however, rejects him, seeing only the earlier cold, cynical, and egoistic Onegin. He lays down his life in the Oecembrist cause. This interpretation (as expounded by Gukovskii) has received widespread currency in the Soviet Union, but it has such obvious flaws, and does such violence to the established text, that dissenting opinions have been registered even by such orthodox Soviet critics as O.E. Tamarchenko, IU.M. Nikishov, and B.S. Meilakh.²⁵

Through the 1960s and 1970s the situation in orthodox Soviet criticism of *Onegin* has become increasingly unstable, as the group of critics who developed the unified line has aged, and as the line of criticism itself has become less and less productive. In a country where much importance is attached to the teaching of a single interpretation in schools and institutions of higher learning, the lack of a stable point of view appears not as a challenge and a stimulus to thought and discussion but rather as a source of alarm.

Although Pushkin criticism after 1937 was largely vitiated by the

'monolithic' acceptance of the neo-Belinskian line of the decree, it would be a mistake to assume that no meaningful work was being done in the field. In particular, the problems of Pushkin's language and poetics did offer an interesting area of research, and a number of works on the subject did appear during the Stalin period which add up to a very significant step forward, principally the work of V.V. Vinogradov - *Pushkin's Style* (1941) and *Pushkin's Language* (1935) - and G. Vinokur's loqq study, 'Word and Verse in *Eugene Onegin*' (in *Pushkin: A Collection of Articles*).

Vinogradov's study of Pushkin's language examines the hierarchy of language styles which Pushkin inherited from Russian literature of the eighteenth century and which coalesce in his work (just as the genres which accompany the styles combine to form hybrid genres). Vinogradov's study is refreshingly specific in a critical corpus which frequently exhibits a maddening tendency to generalize. For example, he notes 'in Onegin's speech (Four: XIII-XIV) ... there are many more reflections of the Russo- French style than in Tat'iana's letter even in its draft plan' (Vinogradov 1941, 229). His conclusion is that 'Pushkin portrays Tat'iana the future grand lady using a language which is more folkish [*narodnyi*], more pristinely Russian than that of Onegin' (230).

Vinogradov's volume on Pushkin's language is complemented by his later study of Pushkin's style. In this work Vinogradov traces in detail the development of Pushkin's style from the traditional literary styles of his 'spring' through the period of 'romantic daring' to the 'realistic correspondence of style to the depicted world of historical reality' (111-12). Vinogradov stresses in Pushkin the primacy of concern with 'new forms and combinations' - semantics, syntax, composition - rather than problems of morphology and lexicon, and his highly individual view of the word and its potential for complexity of meaning. Vinogradov's contribution specifically to the study of *Onegin* was to take the form of an analysis of Chapter One that is focused primarily on the problem of Onegin's relationship to the author. This essay, which was published in 1966, is disappointing. Its view of the problem had been superseded by this time (especially by Bakhtin, whom Vinogradov quotes). Vinogradov's main contribution to the study of Pushkin thus remains the two earlier volumes with their wealth of factual observations.

The seminal study by G. Vinokur of word and verse in *Onegin* may be reckoned one of the principal achievements of Soviet poetics in the Stalin period.²⁶ The study continues the line of research that we find in Tynianov's *Problem of Verse Language* (1924), which had been

concerned, among other things, with the question of the deforming effect of the structure of verse on the semantic features of language. Vinokur applies a similar methodology to the specifics of the verse in *Onegin*. Central to Vinokur's study is the role of the stanzaic organization of *Onegin* on the inter- and intra-stanzaic structure of the language: problems of enjambement, both between the different stanzas and between quatrain and quatrain (or couplet) within the stanza. Vinokur has a number of interesting and important observations, among which one may specifically mention his discussion of the way the stanzaic organization facilitates the form and structure of the work: 'Each new chapter, each new stanza, each new division of the stanza offered the possibility of a new turn in the exposition of the theme, of a shift from one thematic plane to another, of introducing new material without prior preparation, etc., without risking turning the novel into a heap of disjointed fragments and poetic trivia endowed with only a separate significance' (172-3). As an example of sound scholarship based on meticulous research and a sophisticated view of the structure of *Onegin*, Vinokur's article surpassed anything published in the Stalin period.

Mention must be made, however, of another important Soviet contribution to the study of the poetics of *Onegin*, written in 1940 but not published until 1965. This is the essay by M.M. Bakhtin 'From the Prehistory of the Novelistic Word,' part of which is devoted to the novelistic structure of *Onegin*; it was this section that was printed, in 1965, in the periodical *Voprosy literatury*. The entire essay was printed only in 1975 in a volume of essays on aesthetics by Bakhtin entitled *Problems in Literature and Aesthetics*. Bakhtin's approach is based on his theory, developed in the essay 'The Word in the Novel and in Poetry,' of the novel as a polyphony of voices or 'words' corresponding to the individual dramatis personae. On the subject of the lyrical digressions in *Onegin* Bakhtin writes: 'They are not lyrics, they are the novelistic images of lyrics (and of a lyrical poet)' (414). Bakhtin's conclusion is that 'In *Eugene Onegin* hardly a word belongs to Pushkin in that unequivocal sense in which it is the case in his lyrics or long poems. The author (as creator of the novelistic whole) cannot be found in anyone of the language planes: he is located at the organizational centre where the planes intersect' (415).

SOVIET STRUCTURAL POETICS

From about the early 1960s a renewed interest has emerged in the Soviet Union in what has come to be called structural poetics. This

movement has its roots in the work of the Soviet formalists of the 1920s, and we may observe in the work which has appeared on *Onegin* the clear influence of Tynianov's and Bakhtin's essays which were, as we have seen, published only in the 1960s and 1970s. Although Tynianov's work, in particular, represents what Chudakov described in his introduction to it as a rejection of 'the traditional understanding of the character as the direct analogue of a real person,' of 'naive realism,' there has been very little in the way of polemics between structuralist poetics and the accepted realist interpretation of *Onegin*. In this apparently peaceful coexistence we may register an increasing openness in Soviet literary affairs.

The main Soviet exponent of structural poetics to have written on *Onegin* is I.U.M. Lotman. In his 1966 essay 'The Artistic Structure of *Eugene Onegin*,' Lotman develops Tynianov's thesis of an opposition between poetry and prose into a perception of different structural styles which interplay to create the final text: 'This coordination of different stylistic planes makes the reader aware that each of them individually *is* important in creating irony. The dominant place of irony in the stylistic unity of *Eugene Onegin* is clear and has been pointed out by critics' (16). Lotman's discussion of the stylistic structure of the work leads him to an interesting conclusion: 'The sequence of semantic and stylistic shifts creates a point of view which is multiple and dispersed rather than focused, and which becomes the system of a superstructure which is perceived as the illusion of reality itself' (19-20). Lotman is essentially suggesting that the complexity of the text leads to realism (rather than to an estrangement on the part of the reader which would tend to invite disbelief). His goal is to synthesize the formalist approach with the traditional Soviet emphasis on realism. In this Lotman is following to a considerable extent Bakhtin, whose essay 'The Word in the Novel' strives precisely to 'overcome the division between an extreme "formalism" and an equally extreme "ideologism" in the study of the artistic word' (72). Bakhtin's work lays the foundation for the study of the different stylistic systems which Lotman analyses. Clearly, the Lotman/Bakhtin approach requires that the term 'realism' be redefined, at least with reference to *Onegin*.

The notion that the complexity of the text of *Onegin* leads ultimately to an illusion of reality is an underlying thesis in Lotman's writings on the subject. These are gathered together in a short book, *Pushkin's Novel in Verse 'Eugene Onegin'* (1976), which is a series of lectures given by him at the University of Tartu. In it material published in earlier articles is subsumed into a new text and systematically presented to cover a series of important problems posed by *Onegin*.²⁸

Such problems are covered as the 'principle of contradictions/ point of view, intonation, the unity of text, and man in Pushkin's work. In a chapter on 'literature and literariness/ Lotman examines the way in which the literary allusions in the work serve to create an expectation in the reader which is then frustrated. A contrast is described between the expected conventional literary structure invoked by the allusions, and the textual reality. The actual principle of structure, Lotman suggests (following Tynianov), is that of accretion of new episodes and chapters, and the relationship of *Onegin* and *Taieiana* as key characters to the paradigm of other figures or groups. Discussing the 'unity of text' Lotman points out (in an argument that shows his indebtedness to Bakhtin) the peculiar ambivalent nature of the *Onegin* text, especially as far as the non-authorial speech is concerned. He writes: 'the text of *Onegin* may be read as a polyphony - whereupon those features come into play which characterize the text as the contrapuntal interplay of various forms of non-authorial speech - and as an authorial monologue in which the "non-authorial voices" serve to indicate the extent of the diapason of the narrator's voice. The peculiarity of *Onegin* is that either approach is equally correct' (87). Lotman goes on to discuss the problem of the integrity of the characters, and is led to conclude that it is only the conditioning of the reader by conventional literature that maintains the characters as characters.

This view is subsequently developed further, when the problem of literature versus reality is discussed: 'the abundance of metastructural elements in the *Onegin* text does not let us forget that we have to do with a *literary* text: immersing ourselves in the immanent world of the novel, we do not receive the illusion of reality, since the author tells us not only about a particular sequence of events, but continually draws us into the discussion about how one might otherwise structure the narrative.' These remarks are then qualified by the observation that *Onegin* nevertheless has a tendency to 'tear itself from the purely literary sphere into the world of reality' (95). This Lotman attributes to the conditioning of the reader and the expectations absorbed from the novel tradition. This tendency on the part of the reader (which became the mechanism of its influence on the nineteenth-century Russian realist novel) goes, Lotman suggests, against the authorial intent. Although Lotman's book is brief, limited in scope, and has had little circulation, it discusses some essential problems and proposes novel solutions.

There is, however, at least one other critic working in the field of structural poetics whose work is of equal importance: S.G. Bocharov,

whose two articles devoted to *Onegin* break new ground. In the first, entitled 'The Form of the Plan,' Bocharov, like Lotman, examines the structure of the text as it relates to reality. He finds that it is composed of at least two 'worlds' or 'novels' - the 'novel of the author' and the 'novel of the protagonists.' He asserts: '*Eugene Onegin* portrays the consciousness of the author, a universal sphere which unites the worlds of reality and the "second reality" of the novel' (1967, 217). It is in this way that Bocharov is able to describe the curious structure of *Onegin* in which the author is at the same time consciousness, narrator, and drama tis persona. Bocharov sees the reason for such a structure as the need to create distance in a work which treats 'unrealized contemporaneity.' He concludes: 'The novel of the protagonists is not equal to the novel of Pushkin, their limits do not coincide. The novel of Pushkin is "greater" (or "broader") than the novel of the protagonists: the image of the world "in the third person" is subsumed by the image of the author "in the first person." ,

In the second essay, 'The Stylistic World of the Novel,' Bocharov develops Lotman's analysis of the prose/verse opposition in *Onegin*.

Bocharov offers a motivation for the stylistic structure of the work by viewing it as the struggle with the Karamzinian periphrastic style, and analyses the meaning of Lenskii in these terms, concluding that 'the author of the novel constructs the image of a particular poetics from which he distances himself here in the novel' (1974, 56). Bocharov pushes this commonplace of *Onegin* criticism a step further by showing that the problem is one of the relationship of poetic style to life: 'Onegin finds in Lenskii's choice of Ol'ga a stylistic contradiction, a "misalliance." The misalliance is not in life, where Lenskii and Ol'ga are, apparently, suited to each other, but precisely in the integrated sphere of Lenskii's poetic consciousness and his empirical life, his everyday existence' (58). Tat'iana, by contrast, suits Onegin, or rather would suit him if he were a poet.

It is the interplay of different stylistic realities, e.g. Lenskii's and Onegin's descriptions of Ol'ga, that Bocharov sees the stylistic meaning of the novel, which he characterizes as 'translation.' He writes: , "Translations" are the *creative* force of Pushkin's novel, the text and the world of which they are built, constructed of "translations," shifts from one stylistic language to another and, ultimately, from each and every "subjective" language into, as it were, the "objective" language of life itself. The structure of the world of the novel as a whole is thus described by the concept of "translation," and in certain places the word itself figures with particular significance'

(71). Bocharov uses this insight to inform his analysis of such problems as the 'multilingual' nature of the work, the influence of foreign literature on the characters (Onegin as a 'Muscovite in Harold's cloak' and Tat'iana's search for the 'word' in her ponderings on Onegin's character. The search for the 'word' amidst a paradigm of stylistic choices is, as Bocharov points out, the 'discovery of reality.' It is this linking of the stylistic problem to the essential meaning of the novel which makes Bocharov's analysis important: 'We observe, reading the text, how the action of the novel advances amid many possibilities which, in the course of the narrative, are constantly sketched by the author around the unfolding plot' (93).

Another study of *Onegin* with a structuralist orientation that merits discussion is I.U.M. Chumakov's essay 'The Composition of the Artistic Text of *Eugene Onegin*.' Chumakov builds on Tynianov's notion that 'Onegin's Journey' is an integral part of the text. Chumakov notes that Pushkin twice published the text that we have, and he therefore assumes that the author wished the reader to consider it complete. Chumakov points to the contrapuntal effect of the Journey, e.g., Pushkin's day in Odessa contrasted with Onegin's day in Petersburg. Although Chumakov's belief that the contrast is created in order to criticize Onegin seems pushed to an extreme, his comment on the ending seems just: 'The true finale of the novel, glowing with rapture and joy, does not detract from the mournful, heart-rending finale of Chapter Eight, but rather interacts with it to create a complex, tragic yet bright, ambivalent note' (1970,27). Chumakov's is the first criticism to give the Journey its proper weight and try to evaluate its effect.

The work of reevaluation of *Onegin* which has gone on in the Soviet Union in the past twenty years has been the product of some of the best literary scholarship in the Soviet Union. It has been characterized by its originality and a willingness to break with accepted views. In addition, it has led to a much finer (or more tenuous) definition of the 'realism' of *Onegin*. A culmination of the process of reevaluation is Lotman's *Commentary on Onegin* (1980), in which the insights of the structuralist scholars are disseminated to a wider audience for the first time.²⁹ It is to be expected that the next period of time will see the gradual permeation of the ideas of the Lotman school into wider circles of the Soviet educational system, which is still largely oriented towards the Marxist sociological approach.

EUGENE ONEGIN IN THE WEST

The study of Pushkin in the West has been woven out of two strands: the emigres who have left Russia in succeeding waves, bringing with them a significant part of her intellectual life, and the home-grown Western scholar - frequently a student first and foremost of his own literature - who has been attracted primarily through his reading of the works of later and more accessible authors - Tolstoi, Chekhov, Dostoevskii, Gogol' - to the more difficult task of decoding Pushkin's elusive charm.^{3D}

The initial problem for the assimilation of *Onegin* in English has been one of accessibility. Although a number of translations have been made, of greater or lesser fidelity and charm, the problem does not reside precisely in the creation of an equivalent text in the target language, but in the fact that the importance and meaning of the Russian original is intimately bound up with the specifics of style and language. It is precisely the importance of the stylistic texture, the complex stanzaic form, and the nuances of the language that render the translation so difficult. Pushkin's early poetry, especially, was littered with attempts to imitate various foreign models, and he had before him the example of Zhukovskii, whose 'translations' of such writers as Gray and Schiller were rather poetic recreations of the original (with varying degrees of fidelity to the latter). He lived in an age when translators took considerable liberties with the text of the original and when the transplanting of a work of literature from one language to another could take the form of 'free' translation, rewriting, recognized imitation, through the pastiche to original work in which elements of the foreign model could be discerned. Against this background Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* is a radical exercise in what may almost be called anti-translation, the appearance of which sparked a furious debate. Nabokov's version, which sacrificed all considerations of grace and charm to the requirements of accuracy of literal reproduction, is essentially, as K.J. Skovajsa has shown in his 1971 dissertation on the subject, designed to prove a point - that of the primacy of style over content in *Onegin*. The point is well taken, but it must be said that the difference between the aesthetic experience derived by the English reader from Nabokov's text and that derived by a Russian reader from the original is analogous to the difference between reading the score of a Beethoven symphony and hearing it played. Perhaps an additional hidden motive for the polemical nature of Nabokov's translation may be found in the reproachful impatience of the polyglot scholar and writer with those

who, for reason of lack of past education or present energy, are unable to read the work in the original.

As it stands, Nabokov's translation is more important for the framework of notes and commentary (e.g., on the stanza of *Onegin*) than for the translation itself, although that will go down in the history of Russian studies in English as a cause celebre and had the very salutary effect of attracting the attention of the English-speaking reader to the importance of the work. In particular, the notes and commentary provide massive evidence of the importance of Pushkin's background in French literature, in the allusions and reminiscences that form a considerable part of the substance of the work. Apart from this, the major contribution of Nabokov's commentary is the new reconstruction which he offers of the fragments known as Chapter Ten. This reconstruction has now been accepted by Soviet scholars. Nabokov's formidable erudition does not, however, add up to a critical portrait (if anything, it tends to create a scholarly smokescreen, the expression of Nabokov's own aversion to critics and critical exegesis). Nevertheless, traces of Nabokov's influence can be seen here and there in many subsequent writers on the subject. These influences are not always to the good, especially as they have led to the increasing use of what one might call the irrelevant novelistic aside.

Although a number of critics, such as D.S. Mirskii (in his English period) and Edmund Wilson, had previously written, in English on *Onegin*, it was only in the 1960s that English-language criticism began, with the appearance of several monographic studies on Russian literature, to approach the topic in any depth. Even then, some critics, such as A.F. Boyd, have little that is new to offer, preferring to stick to the well-worn topics of the untranslatability of *Onegin*, *Onegin* as the superfluous man, and Tat'iana as 'a Russian soul, quickened by contact with European culture' (Boyd 1972, 19). F.D. Reeve, in his 1966 book *The Russian Novel*, seems likewise to place *Onegin* in the traditional role of realistic precursor of subsequent Russian novelists (although it is, as Mirskii points out, really only the last scene between Tat'iana and *Onegin* that is influential in this regard).

A much more original analysis than these is provided by Richard Freeborn, who, in *The Rise of the Russian Novel from 'Onegin' to 'War and Peace'* (1973), follows up Shklovskii's remark on the 'play with the *fabula*' by pointing out the two 'disciplines' that ensure integrity of text: the formal features of verse and stanza, which give what he characterizes as a 'dance rhythm' to the text and which are in harmony with the 'musical-box mechanism' of the plot; and the role of the poet

in the plot structure as 'biographer who was at one time his [Onegin's] close friend and who is concerned to describe the most important episode in his life' (14). Freeborn's remarks on the verisimilitude of the 'cameos of Russian life' are equally perspicacious and nuanced, as he points to the distance which is preserved in the readers' view of them. **In** general, Freeborn shows a precise understanding of the difference between *Onegin* and later Russian fiction. Like Mirskii, he sees in the last scene the kernel of the future. But here too his observations are precise, and he points to the moral statement by Tat'iana, which he sees as the ultimate value of the work: 'Tat'iana asserts ... the privacy of conscience, the singularity of all moral awareness and certitude, the discovery of the single, unique moral self which opposes and withstands the factitious morality of the mass, of society, or the general good' (37).

To date the most important piece of critical writing on *Onegin* in English is that by John Bayley in his book *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary* (1971). Bayley's study is comparative not in the sense of investigating 'influences' but in that it creates as it were a map of European literature in which to situate Pushkin and offers some illuminating points of reference and juxtapositions. The analysis of *Onegin* is, fittingly, divided into two parts: in the first the work is discussed *qua* novel. Here Bayley's comparisons are especially revealing. He points out that it is the type of novel 'which keeps our attention fixed on its medium' (other such novels are *Tristram Shandy*, *Dead Souls*, *Don Juan*, *Finnegans Wake*, and *The Waves*) and notes the necessity of a complex stanza: 'The impression is one of constant and brilliant improvisation, problems and contingencies recurring in endless permutation, and being solved and disposed of with an ever renewed cunning, labour, and expertise.' On the question of the genre, Bayley places it as a novel of sentiment, comparable to Austen - 'The stylization of their art conveys the real as part of its *insouciance*' - and thus distanced from realistic fiction. Bayley brings an equal precision to his descriptions of the narrative voice ('The complex tone of the novel is kept in continuous balance between objectivity and confiding engagement') and of the role of what the Russian commentator would call *byt*, which he sees in a 'tragi-comic' relation with the literary aspect of the novel.

Having discussed the novel 'in naturalistic terms' Bayley, sensitive to its dual nature, turns to Shklovskii's formula of the 'play with the *tabula*.' To Bayley, *Onegin* has an existence both as story and as parody. Shklovskii's formula is, as Bayley shows, ultimately inexact. To Bayley, the parodistic elements of the work are concentrated in the figure of

Onegin: it is Tat'iana who is related to life beyond the poem and who rescues it from simple artifice. Over Onegin Pushkin passes an aesthetic judgment which is, Bayley suggests, expressive of the poet's disdain for romanticism. As he shows, in the use of the poetic formulae of classical genres Pushkin is far from the dishevelled insouciance of romanticism - the romanticism of Onegin is encapsulated and ultimately rejected. Bayley's analysis of *Onegin* stands as one of the most sensitive and subtle. He takes account of previous critical attitudes and pushes them a step further. His remarks have also a completeness in the sense that, however brief, they suggest a reading of the totality of the work.

The remainder of Western criticism consists of brief studies of different aspects of the work - some of them important. Predominant among these are comparative studies of the 'traces' of different (Western) writers on *Onegin*: Goethe (*Werther*), Dante, Benjamin Constant, Chateaubriand, Byron.³² There are a number of articles on structure and genre: by Ettore Lo Gatto (1955, 1958, 1962), whose formula of 'diario lyrico' has formed a useful, though one-sided, antidote to the novelistic interpretation; and by Jan M. Meijer (1968), who reexamines the problem of the digressions. Tat'iana's dream has also prompted three articles by Gregg (1970), Nesaule (1968), and Matlaw (1959). In sum, one may say that the body of critical work in English on *Onegin* has brought some new light to different aspects of the work, but that the task of creating a definitive critical line of seeing the work as a whole in all its complexity has, with the exception of Bayley's and Freeborn's contributions, barely begun.

If this is true of English-language criticism in the West, it is not for the Russian-language writing on *Onegin*, since the publication of an article by Leon Stilman, 'The Problems of Literary Genres and Traditions in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.' Stilman's article was read at the 1958 International Congress of Slavists in Moscow. It was a polemic against the reigning orthodoxy of Soviet realism, and challenges the concept of typicality in *Onegin*. Stilman operates with the commonly held Western view of the 'suspension of disbelief,' pointing out: 'Realism assumes a contract between author and reader as to what will be assumed to be reality, and this contract, once concluded, is observed to the end. It is precisely this effort to create an illusion of reality which is lacking in *Onegin*' (330). Stilman's critique of the realist interpretation of *Onegin* was very timely, for it was precisely at this period that Soviet scholarship began to feel the inadequacy of that new

orthodoxy. The paper is known and quoted in the Soviet literature, but has, undeservedly, not yet been translated into English. I should add that it has served to a considerable extent to inspire my own views on *Onegin* as expressed in this present study.



Drawing by Pushkin, apparently of Eugene Onegin. 1830