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Pushkin's Saturnine Cupid: The Poetics of Parody in *The Tales of Belkin*

And what will be: we won't be.
(proverb of the Svyatogorsk abbot; considered
by Pushkin as the lead epigraph to *The Tales
of Belkin*)

Don't frighten us, dear friend,
with the coffin's nearby housewarming.
Pushkin, "To Krivtsov"

PUSHKIN'S place in Russian poetry has never been the object of controversy. To begin with a statement no less true for its lack of originality: in the Russian-speaking world Pushkin may be not only the greatest poet but the greatest cultural phenomenon. If quality and quantity of scholarship are some proof of this stature, then we need only remember that the one literary figure in the West with a comparable bibliography is Shakespeare. Whereas Gogol and Turgenev wrote some of their most "Russian" work while abroad and Dostoevsky and Tolstoy fueled their fierce nationalism by trips to the West, Pushkin, one of the few major Russian writers never to cross his country's borders, was unique precisely for his European outlook.

But Pushkin's reputation as Russia's great man of letters went on the line in the now famous Boldino autumn of 1830, when he made his prose debut with *The Tales of Belkin*. To Vissarion Belinsky, the bellwether critic, it was not a season of mists and mellow fruitfulness but the "barren, muddy, drizzly" autumn of the *Tales* after the "glorious, bountiful, redolent" spring of Pushkin's verse.¹ Shocked by the stories' simplicity, their seeming triviality, Belinsky concluded that they were "not artistic creations." Such assessments, shared by many contemporaries, indeed scotched the reputation of the *Tales* for a time. Only later in the century with the emergence of the Natural School of

Gogol and the early Dostoevsky was there a renewed interest in Pushkin's stories.² The seminal theme of the "little man," linking the hero of one of the *Tales* to Gogol's Akaky Akakievich ("The Overcoat") and Dostoevsky's Makar Devushkin (*Poor Folk*), suggests a wisdom and humanity on Pushkin's part that Belinsky had overlooked. Dostoevsky, for one, considered Belinsky's reaction to the *Tales* a "fatal error."

Not until this century, however, did the *Tales* begin to take on a larger meaning for the history of Russian prose; to become, according to Vladimir Nabokov, "experimental short stories—the first stories of permanent artistic value in the Russian language."³ One of the first to recognize, if not the unity of the *Tales* themselves, then the thematic unity informing all the works produced in the Boldino autumn, was A. Iskoz (A. S. Dolinin) in 1910.⁴ In his view the stories are structured by themes that reemerge in other works—*Evgeny Onegin*, *The Little Tragedies*, and *The Little House in Kolomna*—completed during this period. But gradually the understanding that there is some controlling unity in the stories, and that this unity is both homeostatic and in some sense self-regarding, made its way into the mounting body of criticism of Pushkin's prose. The fictional design of the *Tales* began to undergo systematic study, uncovering a complex web of narrative voices; stylistic, thematic, and compositional parallels; and a multitude of subtexts that yield allusions to major Western literatures, including English, French, German, and American. Thus what fell to later generations of Pushkinists, led by scholars such as V. V. Vinogradov with his classical studies of style and narrative voice, was the task of pursuing the internal structure of the *Tales*. Vinogradov's "On Pushkin's Style" (1934) demonstrates,

among other things, the semantic correspondence between the epigraphs to the stories and the narratives that follow. His *Pushkin's Style* (1941) defines three levels of narrative voice: that of the designated narrators, limited by milieu; that of the editor, whose intelligence and urbanity supply the epigraphs and literary allusions; and that of Belkin himself, who mediates between the other two. Jan M. Meijer has recently developed Vinogradov's theory of narrative voice by drawing attention to the Foreword, which he calls "the sixth tale of Belkin." Belkin, the mediator in Vinogradov, becomes in Meijer a stylized romantic author figure, "a gathering place of [the other] narrators."⁵

For the centennial of Pushkin's death, in 1937, V. Gippius and N. Lyubovich contributed important studies on the role of parody in the *Tales*.⁶ Their work went some way toward exposing various subtexts and made the point that Pushkin, instead of slavishly imitating existing literary models (as his contemporaries believed), follows them only so far, whereupon he regularly frustrates them, inserting unexpected and often comic denouements. A recent critic, Jan van der Eng, considerably expands previous discussions of parody and subtext and provides in addition a theory of the triadic composition governing each tale.⁷ If there is a shortcoming in these admirable, seemingly exhaustive studies of Pushkin's use of parody, it is that consistency or continuity of design is offered in place of *unity*, that an anatomy of Pushkin's parody is presented without reference to an underlying intelligence. Perhaps what is needed is an organon for proceeding from the basic terms to the generating strategy of the parody. Such an organon might be termed a "poetics of parody."

N. Berkovsky sees the unity of the *Tales* in terms of character or, more narrowly, in terms of a Marxist ethos: in his scheme the heroes struggle for a higher rung on the social ladder.⁸ He introduces the concept of a plebeian scapegoat, an "unlucky third," at whose expense the other two heroes of each story are made happy. The last story, "The Lady Peasant," in which the social inequality is feigned and the class struggle a game, provides the epilogue to the *Tales*. Most recently Richard Gregg has shown, with the help of Northrop Frye, that the narratives of four of the stories are "reducible to the

four archetypal *mythoi* of romance, tragedy, irony (or satire), and comedy . . . [and] each *mythos* [is associated] with a particular season of the year: romance with summer, tragedy with autumn, irony with winter, and comedy with spring."⁹ Although Gregg's may be the most elegant attempt thus far to deal with the cycle of the *Tales*, his work raises some unanswered questions. First, why does Pushkin choose to reward the "scapegraces"—the count ("The Shot"), Burmin ("The Blizzard"), and Minsky ("The Stationmaster")—and punish the "scapegoats"—Silvio ("The Shot"), Vladimir ("The Blizzard"), and Vyryin ("The Stationmaster")? The claim that one group's "aristocratic fecklessness . . . is nobly rewarded by the author" (p. 750) while the other group's poverty or social inferiority is punished by unbelievable "bad luck" is *prima facie* true, but taken alone as guiding principle it severely limits the ethos of the *Tales* and makes their maker a capricious god. Thus, we argue, the dispensation governing this little cosmos may involve more than social origin. Perhaps only by elevating questions of plot and character to another level—that is, the level of the author himself, his dialogue with contemporaries, and his view of the developing tradition of Russian prose and the place of the *Tales* in that tradition—can the design of the stories escape the fingerprints of a totally mocking deity. Second, is "The Coffinmaker," that asymmetrical fifth story to which no one has as yet assigned a functional role in the unity of the *Tales*, the "mere anecdote: brief, rudimentary in structure, and inconsequential in significance" (p. 759) as it is commonly considered? It is not unlikely that here, as questions of plot and character dissolve into a "ghoulish little *entr'acte*" (p. 760), the second level of discourse implied by the other stories comes more clearly into focus. In the first part of this essay we investigate the concept of luck, or fate, as it applies to the heroes and heroines of the *Tales*; in the second we attempt to account for this fate by turning to the polemical interplay between the authors of the epigraphs—several of them Pushkin's contemporaries—and Pushkin himself; and finally we offer "The Coffinmaker" as a master key to the various levels of discourse, a key that generates a poetics of parody and a new understanding of the unity of the *Tales*.

I

Each of the four longer stories begins with the introduction of a literary model. In "The Shot" the demonic Silvio is gloomy, caustic, and sullen, surrounded by an aura of hussar recklessness and consumed by a desire for revenge. Significantly, his library contains a collection of novels and books on military matters, and he seems to the impressionable narrator (Lieutenant Colonel I. L. P.)—himself endowed with a "bookish" (*romanicheskoe*) imagination—"the hero of some mysterious tale."¹⁰ In short, not long after Silvio's story is started, it appears thoroughly emplotted in the British (particularly the Byronic hero) and the French (particularly de Silva in Hugo's *Hernani*) romantic traditions and in the domestic tradition of the *breterskaia povest'* ('duelist tale').¹¹ Furthermore, his extraordinary marksmanship places Silvio by analogy alongside a famous figure of German romanticism: Wilhelm Tell, the hero of Schiller's play of the same name (1804).¹²

The hussar valor and duels that interest a masculine narrator of "The Shot" are replaced in "The Blizzard" by the tender feeling and constancy in love that interest a female narrator (Miss K. I. T.). Recalling Tatyana Larina and her de rigueur authors—Richardson, Rousseau, and Mme de Staël—Marya Gavrilovna, the story's heroine, appears inseparable from the sentimental novels she reads.¹³ "Near the pond, under a willow tree, with a book in her hands," she suggests to the emotional narrator "a veritable heroine in a novel" (p. 173). And her "bookish" (*romanicheskoe*) imagination is shared equally by her lover, Vladimir. With the blind trust that virtue is rewarded à la *Pamela*, the sublieutenant steps off the pages of a sentimental novel into his own adventure in life. According to Vasily Gippius, "Pushkin gives his heroes free rein . . . to play out in life some literary plot" (p. 45). Thus "The Blizzard" begins by promising all that a novel of sentiment and adventure can give: young lovers forced to separate at the hands of cruel parents; their ensuing epistolary romance punctuated with vows of eternal love and concluded by a secret plan; a farewell letter to the parents followed by elopement, marriage,

concealment, and sufferings; and at last the triumphant homecoming and the blessing of the now relenting parents.¹⁴ Vladimir goes into the snowstorm as the "intended" (*suzhenyi*), and he is intended, if by nothing more than the sheer weight of literary convention at his back.

"The Stationmaster" introduces for the first time a hero of low birth and rank, whose position "on the social ladder is almost . . . underneath it."¹⁵ Samson Vyrin is the "honorable old man" (*pochtennyi starik*) and patriarch defended first in Titular Counselor A. G. N.'s florid introduction and then more implicitly in the parable of the Prodigal Son presented pictorially on the stationhouse wall.¹⁶ That Vyrin does not consciously adopt a bookish prototype—as a semiliterate he cannot be expected to read fashionable novels—does not prevent him from laying claim to another literary tradition: the text in question is the Book of Books, the Scriptures, mediated by the four pictures and the "suitable [*prilichnye*] German verses" that adorn them. Hence to the romantic model of "The Shot" and the sentimental model of "The Blizzard" Pushkin seems here to add a third model: the moralistic, with its themes of domestic morality and class distinction.

The last tale, "The Lady Peasant," reintroduces all three models: the *romantic* in the person of Aleksey Berestov, who "appeared . . . gloomy and disenchanting . . . spoke of lost happiness and blighted youth [and] . . . wore a black ring engraved with a death's head" (p. 205); the *sentimental* in the person of Liza, who "[was] brought up in the pure air, under the shadow of . . . apple trees, [and derived her] knowledge of the world and of life from books" (p. 204) and whose English governess, Miss Jackson, "read through *Pamela* twice a year" (p. 205); and the *moralistic* in the Aleksey-Akulina subplot, in which the "peasant girl" doubts "the bounds of propriety" (p. 213) and in which the detailed setting strongly suggests Karamzin's "Poor Liza" (see van der Eng, pp. 23–29). As we discover, Pushkin "punishes" Silvio, Vladimir, and Vyrin, but not Aleksey. In each punishment, curiously, the agent of fate, or "bad luck," is closely linked with the title and the thematic concerns of the story.

In the first story the agent of retribution and poetic justice appears to be the climactic shot,

which is all that Silvio lives for and which he at last fires. It is earlier, however, with the bullets fired in anticipation of the ultimate shot, that Pushkin leads us to the true targets of his parody: the objects—a card, a cap, and a picture—struck by various shots in the story can be reduced to the stage accessories prominent in romantic and hussar literature. We might argue, therefore, that Pushkin has set up a network of theatrical correspondences, for the card, a necessary *prop*, is pelted with bullets; the hussar bonnet, suggesting metonymically a *costume*, is shot through; and the Swiss landscape, providing a typical romantic *setting* (Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, Byron's *Manfred*, and so on), is pierced in the final duel.

What these parallels imply is that "the shot" of the story, the one promised in the epigraph from Marlinsky—"I swore to shoot him, as the code of duelling allows (it was my turn to fire)" (p. 145)—is fired by the author himself according to the code of his own polemical duel with the romantic tradition and its domestic imitators. Because Silvio leads a life so indistinguishable from, and imitative of, its romantic model, he is doomed by fate (Pushkin) to reenact the death of his hero, Byron: he goes to die in the courageous (and hopeless) fight for Greek independence.¹⁷ Since the story makes no reference to Silvio's political convictions, it is difficult to see in his death (on the side of seven hundred hetaerists against fifteen thousand soldiers of the regular Turkish army) anything more than another test under fire, another duel. And this reading is reinforced by a letter (24–25 June 1824) that Pushkin wrote to P. A. Vyazemsky shortly after Byron's death. The letter offers an extremely unsympathetic view of the poet and the cause for which he died:

By your letters . . . I see that you too are Kyukhelbekery and nauseated; you too are sad about Byron, but *I am glad of his death*, as a sublime theme for poetry. *Byron's genius paled with his youth*. . . . He was created completely topsy-turvy, there was no gradualness in him, he suddenly matured and attained manhood, sang his song, and fell silent; and his first sounds did not return to him again. . . . Greece has [been] defiled . . . for me. About the fate of the Greeks one is permitted to reason, just as of the fate of my brothers the Negroes—one may wish both groups freedom from unendurable slavery.

But it is *unforgivable puerility* that all enlightened European peoples should be raving about Greece. The Jesuits have talked our heads off about Themistocles and Pericles, and we have come to imagine that a nasty people, made up of bandits and shopkeepers, are the legitimate descendants and heirs of their schoolfame.¹⁸

This passage casts a peculiar shadow on the story's epilogue and the attempts of Soviet critics to canonize Silvio the freedom fighter. If in the epigraph Pushkin pulls the hammer back, then in the concluding paragraph he pulls the trigger. Thus in addition to the prop, costume, and setting of fading romantic art, the central cliché—the protagonist—is shot through and down by the author's ironic marksmanship. The flat account of Silvio's pyrotechnics and Byronic death offstage is in this context fitting; from beginning to end he is "a hero of some mysterious tale," a literary mask *tout court*.

Pushkin continues his "unmasking of old novels read to pieces and of those who so read them" (Botsianovsky, p. 187) in "The Blizzard." What has been promised by the *loci communes* of the sentimental novel undergoes step-by-step frustration. Vladimir's plans for elopement and secret marriage run amok, the cruel parents turn out to be kind, and virtue goes unrewarded. Instead of throwing himself at the feet of Marya Gavrilovna's parents, Vladimir falls in the war with Napoleon, and instead of committing suicide on hearing of her lover's death, Marya Gavrilovna "[faints] away," but "Heaven be thanked! the fainting fit [has] no serious consequences" (p. 170). It would seem, therefore, that because Vladimir, like Silvio, is riveted to his mask, too eager to fashion his life on a literary model, he should be sentenced as well by an utterly "inconstant" fate (Pushkin's blizzard) to disappear and die according to the laws of the convention that gave him birth. It may be appropriate that we hear the last from him in a half-insane *letter* and the last of him when he dies, conveniently, at the hands of the French, whose literature he knows too well.¹⁹

But the mischief that the blizzard makes has more to do with the substitution of one convention for another. The "blizzard-fate" (*sud'bametel'*), as M. O. Gershenzon terms Pushkin's snowstorm, "seems to remove Vladimir with one

hand as it leads . . . Burmin to Marya Gavrilovna with the other" (p. 136). The sentimental hero is caught in the typical denouement of a gothic ballad (e.g., Bürger's *Lenore* or its reworking in Zhukovsky's *Svetlana*, which provides the story's epigraph; see Vinogradov, "Ostile Pushkina" [pp. 172-74]). The heroine (Marya Gavrilovna) is married to the ghost of her lover (Burmin) over the grave of her lover (Vladimir).

More important, Pushkin does not seem concerned with the straining stays of verisimilitude. Rather than camouflage under the blizzard's snow the lack of "realistic motivation" (*realisticheskaiia motivirovka*), it is more likely that he intends his parody to lay bare the conspicuous dovetailing of coincidences so typical of the prose of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁰ The Russian proverb recalled by the parents is humorously apropos: "one cannot escape a destined husband even on horseback" (*suzhennogo konem ne ob'edesh'*) (p. 169). With his left hand Pushkin leads Vladimir's horse into the blizzard (and eventually into war and death), while with his right hand, as if meting out the proverbial justice, he leads Burmin's horse safely to the church (and through the war). As both his name (suggesting *buria* 'tempest') and his rank (colonel) imply, Burmin is destined to be a more adequate match for the blizzard, the war, and Marya Gavrilovna. The blizzard's howling wind (*veter*) that "seemed to [Marya Gavrilovna] to portend misfortune" (p. 164) and Burmin's answering inexplicable levity (*vetrenost'*) suggest, finally, the signature of a self-conscious, highly manipulative fate.

The model that governs the life of Samson Vyrin is the patriarchal morality epitomized in the parable of the Prodigal Son; the irony of fate is that sudden "blindness" with which he is afflicted by an unsympathetic god: "The poor stationmaster could not understand how he could have allowed his Dunya to drive off with the Hussar, *what blindness had come over him*, and what had become of his reason" (p. 194; emphasis added). Vyrin should be the "keeper" (*smotritel'*) of his daughter's good name, and yet he sends her benightedly to her "ruin." But the same providence or divine foresight that lays Vyrin low also brings Dunya, his "prodigal child," incredible good fortune. She does not

wear "rags and tatters" or share "provender with swine," nor does she drown herself in a nearby pond as would Poor Liza. Instead the once flirtatious country girl is transformed into a well-bred gentlewoman. Indeed, at the end of the story the prodigal daughter returns to her father's grave triumphant (yet contrite) "with three little children, a nurse, and a little black lap-dog," all driven "in a carriage with six horses" (p. 201).

Ironically, it is Vyrin himself who sins against the morality he preaches and who becomes truly prodigal. Rather than admit that Dunya's fate is the exception that proves the biblical rule and accept and forgive her happiness, he wishes his daughter "in her grave" (p. 199). In his now dilapidated home the ruined father drinks himself into the grave, a pathetic end for which the protective and compassionate narrator is at least partially responsible. At their first visit, the narrator offers Vyrin a drink and, at their next, plies him with more punch, thereby hastening what seems foreordained.²¹ To complete the punishment, Pushkin adds a final, posthumous irony to his story of the "prodigal father" by housing a brewer and his family in the once idyllic stationhouse.

To sum up, the target of Pushkin's parody in "The Stationmaster" is not so much the biblical story as the hero's blind trust in, and at the same time misreading of, the Holy Word as illustrated by the popular prints (*lubki*). The misreading of the Scriptures results from confusing two contrasting biblical parables, that of the Prodigal Son and that of the Good Shepherd: caught by life in the first parable (which advises the father to await patiently the return of his child), Vyrin, as the Good Shepherd, "leaves the ninety-and-nine sheep that are safe in the fold and goes out to seek and bring back the hundredth, which has 'strayed' or is 'lost'" (Shaw, "Pushkin's 'The Stationmaster,'" p. 10). In "The Stationmaster," as in the previous stories, the attempt to translate the printed word into life's reality has lethal consequences for the literal translator: the word and the world, the *Dichtung* and the *Wahrheit*, remain incompatible. The evidence suggests that Pushkin is opposed equally to romantic amorism and moralistic sentimentalism.²² In a letter to P. A. Osipova from the same Boldino autumn of 1830 he expresses a

certain ethical justification for the "cruel" moral of the story:

We sympathize with the unfortunate through a kind of egoism; we see that, after all, we are not the only unfortunate ones. To sympathize with happiness presupposes a very noble and a very disinterested soul.²³

Thus, as Pushkin united first the count and his bride over the grave of Silvio and then Burmin and Marya Gavrilovna over the grave of Vladimir, so now he unites Dunya and Minsky over the grave of Vyrin: in all three tales he proves himself to be successful both as a matchmaker and as a coffin maker.

Now that a pattern has been established for meting out punishment in "The Shot," "The Blizzard," and "The Stationmaster," we can speculate about why Pushkin thwarts our expectations and rewards Aleksey in "The Lady Peasant." Though both Aleksey and Liza have tasted "under the shadow of their own apple trees" (p. 204) the dangerous fruit of knowledge, the books that caused the ruin of their predecessors, and thus seem ideal candidates for similar misfortune, Pushkin does not expel the lovers from his idyllic garden. The reason, it appears, lies in the heroes' attitudes toward the literary models they imitate.²⁴

The leading themes found in the story include a nobleman's love for a peasant girl and a hereditary feud between the families of young lovers. But Pushkin holds his protective hand above Aleksey and Liza and merely hints at the tragic implications of such scenarios. First, Aleksey knows only too well that his father would curse and disown him if he were to pursue the "bookish [*romanicheskaiia*] idea of marrying a peasant girl" (p. 225), and Liza, well versed in Karamzin, must know of the ominous pond, the destination of her poor namesakes who fall in love with noblemen. And second, the family enmity that precipitates the deaths of the lovers in a novel such as Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* is resolved instead in a happy epithalamium: ironically, the restive horse that in Scott's novel brings the feuding families together only to lay the groundwork for eventual tragedy becomes in Pushkin's story a bobtailed

mare that succeeds (miraculously) in bringing the feuding families together for good.

In our opinion, Pushkin's point in saving his heroes is that they are much more than their masks. Aleksey is not Silvio, though he enjoys the impression he makes when he puts on a Byronic mask; it is something he can take off just as easily and willingly. At base, as we soon discover, "Aleksey [was], in spite of his fateful ring, his mysterious correspondence, and his gloomy disenchantment, . . . a good and impulsive young fellow, with a pure heart capable of innocent pleasure" (p. 214). Likewise, Liza's pranks have no dire consequences (nor, indeed, could they), because they relate to masks that are worn for fun and disposed of easily. Her true character, as Aleksey learns in the final *cognitio*, lies somewhere between her dark-complexioned (*smuglaia*) Akulina and her dazzling, white-faced (*nabelennaia*) Betsy, between the healthy peasant girl and the sophisticated young lady. Here, then, we might say that the masks are in the hands of human beings and are so recognized. No corpse is carried offstage at the story's close: this tale is the only one in which Pushkin's role of matchmaker forestalls that of coffin maker.

Looking back for a moment, we can say that Silvio, Vladimir, and Vyrin are punished because they are flat and nondeveloping, too ready to translate literary models into life. Aleksey, by contrast, throws off the influence foreign to his character and grows out of his mask before our eyes. Then perhaps it is for the same ability that Pushkin rewards the count, Burmin, and Dunya?²⁵ They progress from one state of mind—the foolishness of youth (*vetrenost'* is used specifically to describe Burmin and Dunya and could easily be applied to the count as well)—to another—the wisdom of maturity. They each understand that their recklessness could have, or indeed has had, disastrous results for others, and they all take moral responsibility for their actions: the count knows all too well that his blasé posing in the first duel could cost the happiness of his new wife and, moreover, that he must live with the shame of his extra, undeserved shot in the second duel; Burmin knows that he cannot marry Marya Gavrilovna, whom he loves, because of his thoughtless acting out of a part, and he accepts this punishment; and Dunya knows—

as the final scene in the story underscores—that her happiness with Minsky has been built on the unhappiness of her father. Thus the *cognitio* at the end of each story is more a self-discovery than a discovery of someone else. And the dropping of immature masks (that of the happy-go-lucky aristocrat, that of the breezy flirt) is accompanied by some pain and guilt. So it would seem, in conclusion, that the god of this cosmos neither rewards nor punishes without justification.

II

If through the agency of a capricious fate Pushkin is making a statement about individual characters in the *Tales*, perhaps what underlies this statement is a larger one about the character or ethos of the *Tales* in general. In “shooting down” the romantic Silvio, “snowing under” the sentimental Vladimir, and “blinding” the moralistic stationmaster, Pushkin may be drawing attention to art that slavishly imitates and suggesting as well a direction that Russian prose, in order to outgrow adolescence and be Russian, should take. Silvio, as the narrator quickly tells us, is a *foreign* name; its bearer is the essence of that “strong influence” (*SIL'noe VLIIAnie*) soon ossified into cliché that Pushkin, as artist, probably wishes to avoid. As we move to the level of discourse involving the epigraphs and Pushkin's relation to them, what emerges, we propose, is a sort of Russian prose primer, a method whereby the story and novel, still relative generic newcomers, can grow.

Pushkin's feelings about the prose of one of his contemporaries, and one who provided an epigraph to “The Shot,” can be glimpsed in an often cited letter (May–June 1825) to A. A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky:

Your *Tournament* is reminiscent of W. Scott's tournaments. Away with those furriners [*nemtsy*], and turn to us Orthodox [*pravoslavnye*]; and enough of your writing *rapid* tales with romantic transitions—that is all right for a *Byronic poem*. But a novel requires chatter [*boltovnia*]: say everything out plainly.
(Shaw, *Letters of Pushkin*, p. 224; emphasis added)

This letter suggests that Russian prose should seek simplicity and avoid rhetorical flourish,

what is too baldly “poetic”; it should keep foreign models at a safe distance, finding instead its inspiration in what is domestic, homegrown, “Orthodox”; and it should arm itself with the most disarming of weapons—“chatter.”

What the letter to Bestuzhev-Marlinsky suggests as well is that Pushkin's immediate domestic models—those found in the epigraphs to the stories—may have looked to the cultural heritage of western Europe with too great a reverence. Perhaps a sort of literary “cross-sterilization” had transpired in the years preceding the writing of the *Tales*. Thus, as the domestic models were apt to look outside Russian literature for their inspiration, so Pushkin looks now only in the direction of home—Fonvizin (Foreword), Baratynsky and Marlinsky (“The Shot”), Zhukovsky (“The Blizzard”), Derzhavin (“The Coffinmaker”), Vyazemsky (“The Stationmaster”), and Bogdanovich (“The Lady Peasant”)—for his. But his gaze seems a good deal less than idolatrous: though Pushkin chooses a domestic model for the epigraph to each story, he parodies or undermines the artistic intelligence of that model in every one except the last—“The Lady Peasant.” Furthermore, it is worth recalling that the epigraphs to all the stories are supplied by poets, the one exception being the passage from Marlinsky's “An Evening on Bivouac,” which was written, as Pushkin's letter tells us, in the manner of a Byronic verse narrative. It is likely that Pushkin, while writing prose, is using poetry not only as a point of departure but as a point, in terms of artistic conception and execution, from which inevitably to step down.

To begin with the obvious, the epigraphs to the longer stories create a mood of expectation that Pushkin routinely frustrates. The fatal shot promised by Marlinsky never strikes either adversary literally; the ominous snowstorm of Zhukovsky turns out to be a matchmaker; tricked by Minsky and abandoned by his daughter, Samson Vyrin appears anything but the “dictator” of Vyazemsky's poem. Only with respect to the mutability, sartorially and otherwise, of Bogdanovich's Dushenka does the appearance of Akulina-Betsy-Liza fulfill our expectations. More to the point, the epigraphs' poetic provenance and motivation are “depoeticized” as well. In this context “The Shot” might

be read as a parody both of the Byronic life filtered through its uncritical Russian reception and of Marlinsky's attempt to transplant the language and idiomatic gestures of the Byronic verse tale (of which Baratynsky's *The Ball*, supplying the second epigraph to the story, is a good example) into prose. What is borrowed from Marlinsky—a romantic hero; allusions to Denis Davydov (the hussar poet); an infuriating scapegrace; and the themes of revenge, an unfinished duel, and the right to a last shot—aims in Pushkin for a different result.²⁶ Whereas Marlinsky's story ends in a stirring call to battle, Pushkin's ends in understatement. Thus the author has turned the barrel not only on Silvio, his character, but also on Marlinsky, the domestic epigone. In "The Blizzard" Pushkin plays with the gothic motivation that is appropriate to the ballad form in Bürger's *Lenore* and, mutatis mutandis, in Zhukovsky's *Svetlana* but that is out of place in a prose tale. Here Pushkin's design runs close to that of Washington Irving in "The Specter Bridegroom" (1820), a story that treats the gothic theme of *Lenore* with similar irony.²⁷ What happens in the waking world of Bürger—*Lenore* is carried off on horseback by the ghost of her lover, Wilhelm—is translated into the oneiric world of Zhukovsky—*Svetlana* only *dreams* she elopes with the corpse of her lover (see Vinogradov, "O stile Pushkina" [pp. 172–74]). Yet, held to the waking world and a realistic motivation Pushkin manages his impossible skeining of circumstances by burlesquing the "faith in providence" (*vera v providen'e*) that is the moral of Zhukovsky's ballad. Ironically, the church that is the site of a funeral and that *Svetlana* and the corpse pass by in Zhukovsky appears in Pushkin as the church that Vladimir, soon to be a corpse, cannot find and in which Marya Gavrilovna and Burmin, Vladimir's stand-in, are wed. And in "The Stationmaster," while the polemical interplay between Pushkin and Vyazemsky is not nearly so obvious, there is a suggestion that the author's friend may be too easily drawn to the cultural example of a more Europeanized country and too quick to overlook what is happening at home: in his droll "Stationhouse," Vyazemsky languishes in a banal and unpoetic Russian stationhouse as he recalls the rich decor of a Polish one.²⁸ Wishing perhaps to bring the poet home, Pushkin sets the

prose tale of the Prodigal Son in the *Russian* stationhouse that the scoffing Vyazemsky finds so unfit for poetry. He reworks the latter's humorous battle cry, "Umizgaj się!" (roughly, "Pay court!"), for which the prince would "gladly give up all our [Russian] vocabulary," and his infatuation with the lively eyes of a Polish stationmaster's wife or daughter into the question of Dunya's behavior. And finally, whereas Vyazemsky states in a postscript that poetry and prose are different by nature and that, if his poem is prosaic, the reason is that he wasted "a good seven hours" waiting in the stationhouse, Pushkin has his narrator close by "no longer regret[ting] the journey or the seven roubles . . . spent on it" (p. 201).

But, as we suggested earlier, Pushkin's relation to Bogdanovich, his domestic model in "The Lady Peasant," is different.²⁹ *Dushenka* is already a parody, and its author takes neither himself nor his model, La Fontaine (*Les Amours de Psyché et de Cupidon* [1669]), too seriously. Thus far Pushkin's targets have been writers who tended to be too enamored of foreign models; in Bogdanovich, by contrast, a classical Amour falls in love with *Dushenka*, a Russian Psyché. Her story is an insouciant, mischievous hybrid of French neoclassicism and Russian folk motifs, of the highbrow and the homegrown. Plagued by a jealous Venus, she undergoes trials that include confrontation with the legendary monsters of Russian folklore—Zmey Gorynych and Koshchey Bessmertny. Venus, however, gets her revenge when the too curious *Dushenka* disobeys instructions and opens a pot of soot, which blackens her white face and bosom. Still, the travesty ends happily: at last Venus sees that her son loves *Dushenka* for the "beauty of her soul" (*krasota dushi*), takes pity on her, and washes away the soot with the dew of heaven. The message, counterpoised by much wit and humor, provides the epigraph and frame for "The Lady Peasant": "You're pretty, *Dushenka*, no matter what you wear" (p. 202).

With the disarming "chatter" of which he wrote to Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, Pushkin expands the motifs of *Dushenka* into a prose tale that resolves in an epithalamium—the traditional end of romantic comedy—what can only be viewed up to now as the elements of an improper

match: there can be no marriage of true minds until both partners, foreign and domestic, are on equal footing. Bogdanovich's delight in the Russian nature of his Dushenka suggests the parity between foreign and domestic art that is the keynote of Pushkin's last story. Therefore the marriage of Liza (Dushenka-cum-Akulina) to Aleksey (Amour-cum-Byron) unites not only the foreign and domestic elements separating them from each other, that is, the two hostile fathers—Muromsky, the anglophile, and Berestov, the xenophobe—but also the foreign and domestic elements separating them from their true selves, their proper identities. Liza wears the same peasant *sarafan* as does Dushenka, but she is no Akulina. To destroy Akulina's rival Liza whitens her own face (as Dushenka has hers blackened), thereby upstaging the foreign Miss Jackson (a sort of shriveled and hilarious Venus), but she is no Betsy. Both and neither, her true self is a marriage of the two. Amour and Dushenka are married by the gods; Liza and Aleksey are married offstage, in mortal terms, for their god only looks on, drolly demurring at the obvious denouement. Because the domestic and foreign elements in the final tale have made a match, Pushkin suggests that it is time to break his wand, Prospero-like, and reenter the stream of life. "Go release them, Ariel: / My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore, / And they shall be themselves."

III

As a fifth story whose thematic concerns we expect to echo those of the other four stories symmetrically straddling it, "The Coffinmaker" appears at once ill-suited and "unmotivated." To accept the obvious is to agree with most commentators that Pushkin's aim here is primarily comic relief. And, to be sure, "The Coffinmaker" is diverting, containing no duel, blizzard, elopement, or romance, the story offers a singularly prosaic "hero," whose clientele, the imaginary corpses, do not intrude on the waking world. But the obvious is not fundamentally, if at all, what Pushkin is about in the *Tales*. Thus we may assume that what this story lacks in literal seriousness it atones for with ironic overlay.

The epigraph from Derzhavin's ode, "The Waterfall," grand and elegiac in tone, expands coffins to metaphysical generality. It is deflated of course by the presence of Prokhorov, an artisan with no interest in "the gray hairs of an aging universe" (p. 179). This coffin maker is a master, not of ideas but of a trade: Derzhavin's cosmic poetry is reduced to Pushkin's comic prose. There is, however, something questionable, even absurd, about Prokhorov's *métier*, and the details presenting his profession to us suggest that things are not what they seem. Very suspicious, to begin with, is the sign that hangs over Prokhorov's shop "representing a plump Amour with an inverted torch in his hand and bearing this inscription: 'Plain and colored coffins sold and upholstered; *coffins also let out on hire, and old ones repaired*'" (p. 178; emphasis added). The grotesquely foreign Amour, the god of love, is coupled with a Russian inscription that makes little sense in the context of literal coffins.³⁰ If we are to believe this sign, Pushkin's coffin maker—like Walter Scott's artistic artisan, a gravedigger who doubles as a violinist at weddings—combines romance with his dismal craft.³¹ But there is nothing, at least literally, in the text to justify an amorous Prokhorov or his renting out of used coffins and repairing of old ones.

Perhaps another craftsman is plying his trade under Prokhorov's sign, namely, the enigmatic editor, A. P. Not by chance, it seems, are his initials the same as those of the literal coffin maker. Even more intriguing, the initial of their patronymics (Simeonovich, Sergeevich) is the same.³² And Pushkin has Prokhorov begin his career as coffin maker in 1799, the year of Pushkin's own birth. If indeed the author is a literary coffin maker posing as a literal one, then the cryptic sign begins to make more sense. At the level of plot and character, for example, it has already been shown how Pushkin plays Amour even as he buries Silvio, Vladimir, and Vyrin. Once inside Prokhorov's shop, we can expect the web of ironic correspondences to expand. Thus, as the literal craftsman sees his coffins as *proizvedeniia*—"works" artistic take the same name—so the literary craftsman may be transforming his *proizvedeniia*, the *Tales* themselves, into coffins. As early as 1815 Pushkin compared a bookcase to a graveyard: it is not a large

metonymic leap backward to view individual works of literature as coffins as well ("Gorodok [The Little Town]," *Complete Works*, I, 99). So perhaps it is at the level of the epigraphs that the inscription under Prokhorov's sign comes into play: is not Pushkin telling us how, why, and for whom his prose parodies are coffins? By 1830, when he was writing the *Tales*, the author, like Prokhorov, had been practicing his trade for eighteen years: "When he crossed the unfamiliar threshold and found his new home in the greatest confusion, he sighed for his old hovel, where for eighteen years the strictest order had prevailed" (p. 177).³³ Russian prose, a house managed according to the strict order of romantic, sentimental, or moralistic canons but soon to be managed according to as yet unknown conventions, must seem to its new tenant in a state of confusion. Pushkin's household effects, especially the parodies in which he buries the domestic models, are like Prokhorov's coffins moved four times in the *Tales*: in each of the four longer stories the author crosses a threshold from poetic to prosaic, from established to "novel" narrative schemes.³⁴ It is tempting in this context to see Pushkin taking the advice of Liza, his heroine in *An Epistolary Novel (Roman v pismakh)*:

I read a great deal. You [Sasha, her correspondent] can't imagine how strange it is to read in 1829 a novel written in 1775. It seems that suddenly from our drawing room we enter an old hall covered in brocade, take seats in downy satin arm-chairs, see around us strange dresses, but familiar faces, and recognize among them our uncles and grandmothers, now grown youthful. In the main these novels have no other merit. . . . *A smart man could take a ready-made plan and characters, improve the style, clear up the absurdities, and fill in what is left out—and what would emerge would be a first-rate, original novel.* . . . [Mr. R.] has wasted enough thought conversing with English girls. *Let him embroider the old canvas with new patterns and present within a small frame a picture of the people and the world he knows so well.*

(*Complete Works*, VIII, 49–50; emphasis added)

By borrowing and reworking the old literary schemes, Pushkin actually repairs them—as coffin parodies—and in so doing makes good on the promise inscribed over his shop.

In the letter to Bestuzhev-Marlinsky Pushkin had advised his friend, "Away with those furriners [*nemtsy*], and turn to us Orthodox [*pravoslavnye*]." Now he demonstrates by his own example how the housewarming (*novosel'e*) for Russian prose is to come about. First invited to celebrate the wedding anniversary of Schultz, a German (*NEMETSKii*) artisan, Prokhorov is insulted when one of the guests exclaims "Come, old man! Drink to the health of your corpses!" (p. 181). In retaliation for the slander of his profession and the disagreeable reception at the hands of "furriners," Prokhorov does not return the favor, making instead another, unorthodox invitation: "why did those heathens [*basurmane*] laugh? . . . I wanted to invite them to my new house and give them a feast, but now I'll do nothing of the kind. Instead I'll invite those for whom I work: the Orthodox dead [*pravoslavnye mertvetsy*]" (p. 182). In terms of the interplay between epigraph and text, which constitutes an ironic filter for the *Tales*, this statement indicates that Pushkin will avoid celebrating the *basurmane* and that he will invite only the *pravoslavnye mertvetsy* to his housewarming.

The Orthodox dead arise at the invitation to visit Prokhorov's (and Pushkin's) new home. Their homes, the coffins "of all colors and of all sizes," represent the full range of the master's workmanship. At this point it is intriguing to imagine that, entering the field of prose fiction to bury through parody a grand poetic tradition now in eclipse, Pushkin returns for a moment to the first themes of his verse. Thus we might speculate that the "little skeleton . . . [whose] skull smiled affably at the coffin maker . . . [and who] stretched out his bony arms" (pp. 184–85) to embrace him is Derzhavin, the poet of the story's epigraph, since it is this poet to whom Pushkin "sold [his] first coffin," the imitation of the old poet's grandiloquent manner in "Memories of Tsarskoe Selo" (1814), and who tried unsuccessfully to embrace the young genius after the latter's declaiming of the poem.³⁵ Likewise, the spokesman for the Orthodox dead, the Brigadier, might be Fonvizin, author of a play by the same name, whose words about storytelling serve as the lead epigraph to the *Tales*. Here it is also worth remembering that a precocious and irreverent Pushkin suggested his future métier

very early in his career, in "Fonvizin's Shade" (1815), a marvelous burlesque in which the playwright returns from the underworld to observe the sad state of Russian poetry, including that of the now anachronistic Derzhavin.³⁶

But Pushkin, a literary coffin maker, not only buries the dead in his parodies. More important, he gives them new life. As Schultz says punningly, "the dead cannot live without coffins" (p. 179). It is at this level of meaning that the sign over Prokhorov's shop is finally decoded and the larger design of the *Tales* comes clear. At once both saturnine coffin maker and puckish god of love, A. P. weds his fortunate couples over the graves of stock heroes and weds Russian prose to a western European tradition over the graves of domestic poets. He has repaired

old coffins to serve as cradles for the offspring of this divinely orchestrated match. Through the parodistic structure of *The Tales of the Late I. P. Belkin* Russian prose has entered a new era of maturity. And the late Ivan Petrovich, born on April Fools' Day³⁷ and buried by an editorial sleight of hand before the tales begin, must have, from his grave, the last laugh.

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Notes

¹ Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1953-59), I, 139-40.

² See, e.g., A. Grigor'ev's description, in 1862, of "The Coffinmaker" as the "nucleus of naturalism" ("The Development of the Idea of Nationality in Our Literature since the Death of Pushkin," in *Russian Views of Pushkin*, ed. and trans. D. J. Richards and C. R. S. Cockrell [Oxford: Willem A. Meeuws, 1976], p. 48).

³ Nabokov, trans., *Eugene Onegin*, by A. Pushkin (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), III, 180.

⁴ Iskoz' (Dolinin), "Povesti Belkina," in *Pushkin*, ed. S. A. Vengerov (Petersburg: Brokgauz-Efron, 1907-15), IV, 184-200. For the thematic and stylistic integrity of the works produced during the Boldino autumn see as well A. L. Bem, "Boldinskaia osen'" ("The Boldino Autumn"), in *O Pushkine* ("On Pushkin") (Uzhgorod: Pismena [Letters], 1937), pp. 63-103.

⁵ Vinogradov, "O stile Pushkina," in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* (Moscow: Zhurnal'no-gazetnoe ob'edinenie, 1934), XVI-XVIII, 171-91, and *Stil' Pushkina* (Moscow: OGIZ, 1941); Meijer, "The Sixth Tale of Belkin," in *The Tales of Belkin*, ed. J. van der Eng (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), pp. 110-34. The quotation from Meijer is from p. 134.

⁶ V. Gippius, "Povesti Belkina," *Literaturnyi kritik*, 2 (1937), 19-55, and N. Liubovich, "Povesti Belkina" kak polemicheskii etap v razvitii pushkinskoi prozy," *Novyi mir*, 2 (1937), 260-74.

⁷ Van der Eng, "Les Récits de Belkin: Analogie des procédés de construction," in *The Tales of Belkin*, pp. 9-60.

⁸ Berkovskii, "O 'Povestiakh Belkina': Pushkin 30-kh godov: voprosy narodnosti i realizma," in *Stat'i o literature* (Moscow: GIKhI, 1962), pp. 242-356.

⁹ Gregg, "A Scapegoat for All Seasons: The Unity

and Shape of *The Tales of Belkin*," *Slavic Review*, 30 (1971), 753.

¹⁰ Pushkin, "The Shot," *The Captain's Daughter and Other Stories*, trans. T. Keane (New York: Vintage, 1936), p. 148. Hereafter all references to the *Tales* are to this edition and are noted parenthetically within the text. The English has been checked against the *Complete Works*, Academy ed., 17 vols. in 21 (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1937-59), and where necessary slight changes introduced to make the translation conform more literally to the original.

¹¹ Silvio was often viewed by nineteenth-century critics as a "demonic figure" in the Byronic tradition. A. Grigor'ev described him as "the last reflection of the Byronic theme in Pushkin's work; of all the heroes in *The Tales of Belkin* he alone embodies the traits of a 'demonic personality'" (cited in N. Liubovich, p. 270). And Dostoevsky wrote that "Pushkin borrowed this hero from Byron, and out of his character there entered into our literature a whole series of 'evil men,' including Pechorin" (*The Diary of a Writer*, Feb. 1876; cited in N. O. Lerner, "K genezisu 'Vystrela,'" *Zven'ia*, 5 [1935], 126). More recently van der Eng has linked Silvio to "l'homme sans mœurs et sans religion à la Byron" and has compared him to the revengeful Giaour (pp. 13-14).

The Byronic tradition alone, however, does not exhaust Silvio's literary provenance. Apparently, French romanticism too left its mark on him. In Hugo's *Hernani* the old duke, Don Ruy Gomez de Silva (note the similarity in names), can be seen as a coprototype for the Byronic Silvio. (See Lerner, p. 133, and Berkovskii, pp. 281-83. The premiere of *Hernani* in February 1830 occasioned one of the great romantic battles: the *Tales* were written in the fall of that year.) Although

de Silva is jealous of the young nobleman Hernani, a rival in love for Doña Sol, he once saves Hernani's life. For this magnanimity Hernani pledges his life—which can be claimed at any time—to the old duke. Not forgetting the young man's words, de Silva only postpones taking revenge until Hernani's wedding day. Before the nuptial night he appears to claim Hernani's pledge. Hernani keeps his word and together with Doña Sol drinks poison. The lovers die in each other's arms, whereupon de Silva kills himself too. Silvio's name ("he was Russian, but bore a foreign name"), his postponed shot, and his well-timed appearance before the honeymooning couple closely resemble the story of de Silva and Hernani. Pushkin's denouement can be seen as a parody of the fifth act of Hugo's play.

Along with the foreign romantic models that Silvio so successfully imitates, there should be mentioned as well one related domestic model, the *breterskaia povest'* (duelist tale) popularized by A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, the nineteenth-century romantic prosaist: "The gloomy Silvio . . . is a tragicomic portrait of the duelists active both in the life and literature of that time" (V. F. Botsianovskii, "K kharakteristike raboty Pushkina nad novym romanom," in *Sertum bibliologicum v chest' prof. A. I. Malenina* [Petersburg: GIZ, 1922], p. 190). Pushkin chooses as epigraph to his story a characteristic sentence from Marlinsky's duelist tale, "An Evening on Bivouac." For the relationship between "An Evening on Bivouac" and "The Shot" see Vinogradov, "O stile Pushkina," pp. 188–91, and J. Thomas Shaw, "Pushkin's 'The Shot,'" *Indiana Slavic Studies*, 3 (1963), 124–26.

¹² Pushkin's camouflage seems only too transparent: "Had [Silvio] offered to shoot a pear off somebody's forage cap, not a man in our regiment would have hesitated to expose his head to the bullet" (p. 146). Yet we have no record of Pushkin ever speaking about Wilhelm Tell as man or as subject of a play or an opera (Rossini's opera was performed in Paris in 1829, the year before the *Tales* were written), and neither work was in his library as preserved. The assumed connection between Schiller's play and Pushkin's story is also made in Andrej Kodjak, "O povesti Pushkina, 'Vystrel,'" *Mosty*, 15 (1970), 109–212.

¹³ *Evgenii Onegin*, III, 10. See in addition *Evgenii Onegin*, VIII, 5: "And lo! in my garden she / appeared as a provincial miss [*baryshnia*], / with woeful meditation in her eyes, / with a French book in her hands" (Nabokov, trans., *Eugene Onegin*, I, 283).

¹⁴ "Vladimir Nikolayevich in every letter implored her to give herself up to him, to get married secretly, to hide for some time, and then throw themselves at the feet of their parents, who would, without any doubt, be touched at last by the heroic constancy and unhappiness of the lovers, and would assuredly say to them: 'Children, come to our arms!'" (p. 162). See Vinogradov, "O stile Pushkina," pp. 171–75; Liubovich, p. 263; van der Eng, pp. 16–23.

¹⁵ M. S. Al'tman, "Bludnaia doch': Pushkin i Dostoevskii," *Slavia*, 14 (1937), 407.

¹⁶ The relationship between the parable of the Prodigal Son and the plot of "The Stationmaster" is discussed

in Iulii Aikhenval'd, *Pushkin*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1916), pp. 149–50; M. O. Gershenzon, *Mudrost' Pushkina* (Moscow: Knigoizdatel'stvo pisatelei v Moskve, 1919), pp. 122–27; Al'tman, pp. 405–15; and, most recently and exhaustively, J. Thomas Shaw, "Pushkin's 'The Stationmaster' and the New Testament Parable," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 21 (1977), 3–29.

¹⁷ Both Silvio and Byron join the Greek insurgents and die, the former in Skulyani in 1821, the latter in Missolonghi in 1824.

¹⁸ The emphasis is ours. *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1967), ed. and trans. J. Thomas Shaw, p. 161. As for the phrase "Kyukhelbekery and nauseated": "Pushkin is here playing on the concluding phrase of an epigram (1818), attributed to Pushkin, and on Kyukhelbeker. . . . The epigram is said to have been called forth by Zhukovsky's commenting that 'I was a little nauseated somehow last night; besides Kyukhelbeker came'" (p. 124, n. 13). The mention made of "my brothers the Negroes" is an "allusion to Pushkin's Abyssinian blood" (p. 176, n. 8).

¹⁹ Among the sources, foreign and domestic, providing a fitting scenario for the removal and replacement of Vladimir there have been suggested Nivelle de Chausée's *La Fausse Antipathie* and Guyot de Merville's *Les Epoux réunis* (W. Lednicki, "The Snowstorm," *Bits of Table Talk on Pushkin, Mickiewicz, Goethe, Turgenev and Sienkiewicz* [The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1956], pp. 52–54); Karamzin's "Natal'ia, boiarskaia doch'" and V. Panaev's "Otecheskoe nakazanie" (Gippius, p. 38); and M. Pogodin and A. Vel'tman's "Doch' matrosa" (Liubovich, pp. 265–66). Here perhaps the plot of Pogodin and Vel'tman's story deserves special mention:

. . . A drunken officer turns up by chance at a church where the wedding of a sailor's daughter is taking place; they await the groom (who happens to have gotten himself drunk); the bride is "neither dead nor alive"; the officer gets married, but on the next day flees from his wife, and only after many years does fate bring them together, and they are reunited.

(Liubovich, pp. 265–66)

²⁰ "Masha, Burmin, and Vladimir were . . . aiming from three different 'positions' toward the same goal. But the dice sent Masha and Burmin to Zhadrino, while Vladimir fatally missed . . . the place particularly 'magnetized' by *fatum*" (Lednicki, p. 38).

²¹ As it turns out, ironically, the narrator is also one of the earliest to "corrupt" Dunya and set the story of the prodigal father in motion. When he takes leave of the happy family for the first time, he coaxes the girl into a long, elliptical kiss, which summons the following comment: "I can reckon up a great many kisses 'Since first I chose this occupation,' but not one which has left behind such a long, such a pleasant recollection" (p. 191).

²² Pushkin's less than compassionate attitude toward Vyrin has not prevented several generations of critics from viewing "The Stationmaster" as the headwaters

of a future Russian Natural School that would embrace the unfortunate and downtrodden. See, e.g., A. Iskoz, "Povesti Belkina," p. 199, and N. L. Stepanov, *Proza Pushkina* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1962), p. 69. Also telling in this regard is the reaction of Makar Devushkin to the character of Vyryin in Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*.

²³ Shaw, *Letters of Pushkin*, p. 439. See also Gippius, p. 35.

²⁴ Possible subtexts for "The Lady Peasant" include, e.g., Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) and *St. Ronan's Well* (1823) (D. Iakubovich, "Reminisentsii iz Val'ter Skotta v 'Povestiakh Belkina,'" in *Pushkin i ego sovremenniki*, 37 [1928], 100-18); Voltaire, *Le Droit du seigneur* (1792) (Gippius, p. 36); W. Irving, "The Student of Salamanca" (1822) (Liubovich, p. 276); Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (B. Eikhenbaum, "Problems of Pushkin's Poetic Style" [1921], in *Russian Views of Pushkin*, p. 143); A. La Fontaine, "Miniatiurnyi portret" (Vinogradov, "O stile Pushkina," pp. 177-78); P. Marivaux, "Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard" (1730) (P. A. Katenin, cited in Iakubovich, "Obzor statei i issledovaniï o proze Pushkina s 1917 po 1935 g.," *Vremennik pushkinskoi komissii*, 1 [1936], 308); Mme Montolieu, "Le Baron d'Aldestan; ou, Le Pouvoir de l'amour" (M. Speranskii, "Baryshnia-krest'ianka' Pushkina i 'Urok liubvi' g-zhi Montol'e," *Sbornik Khar'kovskogo Istoricheskofilologicheskogo obshchestva v pamiat' prof. E. K. Redina*, 19 [1910], 125-33); and Karamzin, "Natal'ia, boiarskaia doch'" (M. Altman, "Baryshnia-krest'ianka," *Slavia*, 10 [1931], 782-92). Most of these works were translated in *Moskovskii telegraf* and *Vestnik Evropy* during Pushkin's time, though it is likely that Pushkin himself read them in French.

²⁵ Gregg bases his argument in large part on the "scapegoat"-scapegrace" opposition, which, in terms of "The Stationmaster," seems to reward the self-serving Minsky (pp. 748-51). But as Pushkin's ironic reworking of the parable of the Prodigal Son makes clear, it is Dunya's unconventional behavior that is the more spectacularly "rewarded."

²⁶ See Vinogradov, "O stile Pushkina," p. 189, and Shaw, "Pushkin's 'The Shot,'" pp. 124-26.

²⁷ See Berkovskii, pp. 289-92. In Irving's tale the young Count von Altenburg, accompanied by his friend Herman, is on his way to marry the daughter of the Baron von Landshort. (The couple were betrothed without a meeting.) The young men are attacked by robbers in a dense German forest and the count is mortally wounded. With his dying breath he asks his companion to ride to the castle of his bride. On arrival the messenger falls in love at first sight with the "widowed bride" and invents an ingenious scheme. Masterfully "inspecting" the ghost of the groom, Herman stands in for the dead count, apologizes for being dead, and leaves for his own funeral at the Würzburg Cathedral. He comes back several times at night and eventually elopes with the lovesick bride, who believes in "all the chivalric wonders" and knows "all the tender ballades of the Minnelieders by heart." Ultimately, however, the repenting couple return, fall

at the baron's feet, and—to the great surprise and relief of everyone—Herman reveals that he is no ghost. The baron pardons them forthwith.

Ironically the idea for the substitution was suggested to Herman by the ballad *Lenore*, with which the bride's father regales his guests. (This "dreadful story, which has since been put into excellent verse, and is read and believed by all the world" was rendered freely into English by W. Scott as "William and Helen" [1796].) Thus in addition to the clear similarities in plot, the parodistic role played by Bürger's ballad in "The Specter Bridegroom" is paralleled by the role of Zhukovsky's adaptation of Bürger in "The Blizzard."

²⁸ P. A. Viazemskii, *Stikhotvoreniia* (Leningrad: Biblioteka poeta, Sovetskii pisatel', 1958), p. 177: "Why, dear friends, am I not traveling in Poland! Fate has not carried me far along the highways of Europe (which, truth to tell, is a great pity)." See Vinogradov, "O stile Pushkina," pp. 184-87.

²⁹ We catch a glimpse of Pushkin's feeling for Bogdanovich in *Evgenii Onegin*, III, 29: "To me will Galliscisms remain as dear / as the sins of past youth, / as Bogdanovich's verse" (Nabokov, trans., *Eugene Onegin*, I, 163).

³⁰ Other juxtapositions of foreign and domestic elements set Prokhorov's Russian *kaftan* against his daughter's European dress; Yurko's booth with its Doric columns against the native description from Izmaylov: "with his ax and armor of coarse cloth" (p. 180).

³¹ Scott's gravedigger appears in Chapter xxiv of *The Bride of Lammermoor*. The relationship between Scott and Pushkin is discussed in Iakubovich, "Reminisentsii iz Val'ter Skotta v 'Povestiakh Belkina,'" *Pushkin i ego sovremenniki*, 37 (1928), 111-14.

³² *Complete Works*, VIII, 635. The patronymic is found only in a variant of the text.

³³ Pushkin wrote his first poem in 1813; 1830 would be his eighteenth year as a writer.

³⁴ The idea of changing domains is an important one in the four longer tales: Silvio's house after the first duel is changed to the count's house after the second duel; Marya Gavrilovna's house (close to Vladimir) before the blizzard is changed to her new house (close to Burmin) after the blizzard; and Vyryin's stationhouse is changed to Dunya's new house in Petersburg. In "The Lady Peasant" there is no change of domain, but after all masks are dropped in the final *cognitio*, the hostile houses are unified in marriage.

³⁵ Pushkin's official poetic debut is generally considered to be his reading of "Memories of Tsarskoe Selo" to Derzhavin on 8 Jan. 1815, on the occasion of the qualifying examination to the upper school at the lyceum. In "Table Talk" (*Complete Works*, XII, 158) Pushkin reminisces, "I recall neither how I finished my reading nor where I fled. Derzhavin was ecstatic; he asked after me, wanted to embrace me. . . . They looked for me, but I was nowhere to be found." Derzhavin is reputed to have said, "I am not dead" (V. P. Gaevskii, *Sovremennik*, No. 8 [1863], p. 370) and "This is the one who will take Derzhavin's place" (F. N. Glinka, *Recollections* [1873], cited in E. J.

Simmons, *Pushkin* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1937], p. 56. See *Evgenii Onegin*, VIII, 2: "And with a smile the world received her [the Muse]; / initial success gave us wings; / the aged Derzhavin noticed us— / and blessed us while descending to the grave [literally: 'coffin']" (Nabokov, trans., *Eugene Onegin*, I, 282).

³⁶ *Complete Works*, I, 156–64. Fonvizin, a representative of prose, goes to examine the state of poetry.

Pushkin speaks mockingly of Derzhavin, whose arrival in the underworld is long overdue: "Denis! [Derzhavin] will ever be famous, but why oh why must he live so long?" (p. 163).

³⁷ We learn of Belkin's birthday (assuming he is the same Ivan Petrovich Belkin) only in "The History of the Village of Goryukhino" (*Complete Works*, VIII, 127).