

[And woe, woe to the tribes  
Where [the Law] carelessly slumbers,  
Where either the people or the tsars  
May rule over the laws!]<sup>94</sup>

Pushkin expressed most clearly his misgivings about democratic institutions in articles written in 1836 for his journal *The Contemporary*. Following the July Revolution, he wrote that in France "The people (*der Herr omnis*) rules with all the repulsiveness of democracy."<sup>95</sup> Pushkin was alarmed by Tocqueville's prognosis in *La Démocratie en Amérique* (1835) that the future of the western world was bound up with the acceptance of democracy. Pushkin directed his strongest invective against American democracy in his 1836 review of John Tanner's book about captivity among the Indians and his return to the society.<sup>96</sup>

It was astonishing to see democracy in its repulsive cynicism, harsh prejudices, and unbearable tyranny. Everything noble and selfless, everything uplifting the human soul, is repressed by implacable egotism and passion for comfort; the majority brazenly oppressing society; slavery of the Negroes amidst education and liberty; anti-lineage bias of a nation lacking nobility; greed and envy among the voters, faintheartedness and spinelessness among the elected; talent, out of deference for equality, is coerced into voluntary ostracism; a rich man sporting a decrepit gown, so as not to offend haughty paupers in the street, secretly despised by him: such is the picture of the American States recently displayed to us.<sup>97</sup>

In an unsent polemical response to Chaadaev's "Philosophical Letter," Pushkin praised Nicholas I for stemming the western tide: "The present emperor was the first to place a dike (very feeble, so far) against inundation by a democracy worse than that of America. (Have you read Tocqueville? I am still hot and bothered and quite frightened by his book.)"<sup>98</sup>

For the Pushkin of the 1830s, any revolution striving for class leveling, be it one inspired from above by the tsar such as the Petrine revolution ("Pierre I est tout à la fois Robespierre et Napoléon [La Révolution incarnée],<sup>99</sup> or a people's revolution such as Pugachev's rebellion ("God save us from seeing a Russian revolt, senseless and merciless"<sup>100</sup>), or even one led by the radical nobility in the tradition of the Decembrists—all these variants were spurned by Pushkin, who rallied in the 1830s to the defense

of his own class of ancient hereditary nobility. Pushkin made a clear distinction between the ancient "nobility" [dvoriane] and the "new aristocracy" [novaya znat'] that sprang up in the aftermath of Petrine reforms and which Pushkin, a nobleman of six-hundred-year-old lineage, held in disdain.<sup>101</sup> He was alarmed by the disfranchisement of his own class, which had been purged under the first Muscovite princes, persecuted by Ivan IV and Boris, and forced by Peter I to abandon their serfs for service in the capitals, where they were to climb the "Table of Ranks" only to be pushed aside by commoners from the new, meritorious "aristocracy" of civil servants [sluzhilo dvorianstvo]. The ancient nobility was further impoverished by the abolishment of primogeniture under Anna, and through the subsequent policies of Catherine II and her favorites.

By 1830, when Pushkin sketched his "Notes on Russian Nobility," the decline of the ancient families, including his own, seemed complete: "What are the consequences of the gradual decline of nobility?" Pushkin asks. "The ascent of Catherine II, the 14th of December, and so on," is his answer (my emphasis). Pushkin saw the decline of his own class as one of the causes that contributed to the uprising: "Who was at the [Senate] Square on December 14? Only noblemen. How many of them will get involved in the next mutiny? I don't know, but it seems quite a few."<sup>102</sup>

For Pushkin the independent ancient nobility was the only class possessing the will to lead and the only one capable of restraining the excesses of autocracy. But to achieve that, it was necessary to restore its political and material status. The common people too would benefit from this change: "It is clear to everybody that the well-being of the peasant is closely linked to the well-being of the landowners."<sup>103</sup> Pushkin believed that the people would find in the old nobility a powerful protector, one capable of interceding on their behalf before the monarch. In this sense, the "people" [narod] and the enlightened ancient "nobility" [dvorianstvo] emerge in Pushkin's mind as "natural allies in the struggle for freedom."<sup>104</sup>

From all of the signposts scattered along Pushkin's sinuous political path, one can conclude, along with G. P. Fedotov, that "just as in his pre-Decembrist years Pushkin did not resemble a classical revolutionary, so in the time of Nicholas I, having renounced revolution, Pushkin did not renounce freedom. But the content of freedom was undergoing a metamorphosis" (1937).<sup>105</sup> The fiasco of 14 December did not prompt Pushkin's apostasy from radical solutions but was rather the last link in the chain of events that completed it.

If at the beginning of Pushkin's political path Radishchev loomed in the full glory of his ode "Liberty," he also accompanied Pushkin on the last mile. Radishchev, whose name was still taboo, enters the picture twice in 1836: in the rejected line from "Exegi monumentum"—"In Radishchev's footsteps, I glorified liberty" [Chto vsled Radishchevu proslavil ia svobodu], and in the article "Aleksandr Radishchev" intended for the *Contemporary*. While the former mention is a homage to the bard of "Liberty," the latter is an ad hominem invective against the founding father of Russian radicalism. Yes, in 1817 Pushkin may have rhapsodized Liberty in Radishchev's vein, but in 1836 Pushkin wondered how "the sensitive and ardent Radishchev could not have shuddered at the sight of what happened in France during the Terror? Could he hear without deep loathing his once favorite ideas preached from the heights of the guillotine, to the vile applause of the rabble?"<sup>106</sup> In 1836 it was mainly the difference between the two that Pushkin wished to stress: "Time changes a man in a spiritual as well as in a physical respect. With a sigh, or with a smile, the grown man repudiates the dreams which stirred his youth. . . . Only a fool does not change, for time brings him no development, and experience does not exist for him."<sup>107</sup>

In the last summer of his life, resigned and aloof, Pushkin demanded different rights and a different freedom—no longer abstract, but very concrete—that would combine both Liberty and inner peace [volia i pokoj].

Иные, лучшие мне дороги права;

Иная, лучшая потребность мне свобода:

Зависеть от властей, зависеть от народа—

Не всё ли нам равно? Бог с ними.

Никому

Отчета не давать, себе лишь самому

Служить и угождать; для власти, для лавреи

Не гнуть ни совести, ни помыслов, ни шеи;

По прихоти своей скитаться здесь и там,

Дивясь божественным природы красотам,

И пред созданными искусства и вдохновенья

Третьею радостно в восторгах умиленья.

—Бог счастлив! бог права. . . .

[Quite often, better rights are dear to me,  
I crave quite another, better freedom:

Be subject to a king or to a people—  
Who cares? So let them be.

To no one

Give account thyself alone

Oblige and serve; for power, for a livery

Bend not your conscience, thoughts, or necks;

At your own whim roam here and there,

And tremble joyously in tender ecstasies

At nature's divine beauties marvel,

And tremble joyously in tender ecstasies

Before the works of art and inspiration.

—That is happiness! those are rights. . . .]<sup>108</sup>

Bordeaux has replaced Ai.

#### Notes

1. Pisarev *Sochineniia*, 3:415.
2. Viazemskii, "Mitskevich o Pushkine" (1873), in Vatsuro et al., comps, *Pushkin v vospominaniakh sovremnikov*, 1144. Hereafter abbreviated as "Pvvs."
3. Dobroliubov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 1237.
4. Bartenev, "Pushkin v uzhnoi Rossii" (1861).
5. Pushchin, "Zapiski o Pushkine"; Vigel, *Zapiski*; Raevskii, "Moi arest"
6. Turgenev, "Rech' na pushkinskom prazdnike" > (7 June 1880), *Polnoe sobranie*, 12350. Dostoevsky, "Pushkin. Ocherk" (8 June 1880), *Polnoe sobranie*, 26:147–148. Veselovskii, "Pushkin—natsional'nyi poet" (1899). See also Gorodetskii, Izmailov, Meliakh, eds., *Pushkin. Logi i problemy izucheniia* (Pitri), 79–83, 89 and Levitt, *Literatura i politika*, 104–162.
7. Iakushkin "Obshchestvennye vzglady Pushkina" (1904). See also Gorodetskii, Izmailov, Meliakh, eds., *Pushkin. Logi* (Pitri), 88 and Levitt, *Literatura i politika*, 177.
8. Stominskii, "Politicheskie vzglady Pushkina" (1904) and "Pushkin i dekabrist'skoe dvizhenie" (1908).
9. Lemke, *Nikolaevskie zhandarmy* (1908); Shchegolev, "Pushkin v politicheskom protsesse" (1909).
10. Modzalevskii, "Pushkin v doneseniiakh agentov" (1918) and *Pushkin pod tainym nadzorem* (1822); Britusov, "Politicheskie vzglady Pushkina" (1919) and "Pushkin i isarizm" (1823); Neshkina, "Pushkin i dekabristy" (1937); Glebov, "Ob 'Arlione'" (1941); Meliakh, "Pushkin i dekabristy" (1958); Blagoi, *Tvorcheskii put' Pushkina* (1967); Tsiaulovskaya, "Otkhiki na sud Pu dekabristov" (1975).
11. Vernadskii, "Pushkin and the Decembrists" (1937); Eidel'man, *Pushkin i dekabristy* (1974); Lotman, "Dekabrist v povsednevnoi zhizni" (1975) and *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin* (1983); Nemirovskii, "Dekabrist ili servilist?" (1994).

12. Quoted in Frank, *Pushkin kak politicheskii myslitel'*, 45.
13. Fedotov, "Pevets imperii i svobody" (1937); Frank, *Pushkin kak politicheskii myslitel'* (1937).
14. Blagoi, *Sotsiologiya tvorчества* (1929); Sakulin, "Klassovoe samoopredelenie" (1930); Meynieux, *Pouchkine* (1966); Milkkelson, "Pushkin and the Russian Nobility" (1971); Driver, *Pushkin: Literature and Social Ideas* (1989).
15. Viazemskii, in Vatsuro et al., comps., Pwvs, 1134.
16. Letter to Zhukovskii, 7 March 1826, in Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13:265-266. Hereafter referred to as Pss.
17. Pushkin, Pss, 3:420.
18. *Ibid.*, 3:1029.
19. Motifs of Chénier's ode reverberate through Pushkin's "The Dagger": "Le glaive arma ton bras, fille grande et sublime, / Pour fair honre aux Dieux, pour réparer leur crime" [Sword in hand, grand and sublime daughter, / To shame the Gods, to avenge their crimes]. See Etkind, "Soiuz una i furii," 75.
20. In a letter to Zhukovskii, 12 November 1817, Modzalevskii, ed., *Pushkin. Pis'ma*, 1191, and Veresaev, *Pushkin v zhizni*, 1100.
21. Viazemskii, "Pripiska k stat'e 'Izglyany. Poema Pushkina'" (1875), quoted in Vatsuro et al., comps., Pwvs, 1134.
22. Pushchin, "Zapiski o Pushkine," quoted in Vatsuro et al., comps., Pwvs, 1198.
23. *Ibid.*, 1103.
24. "Express my gratitude to Pushkin for the noble sentiments that these verses inspire." *Russkii vestnik* (November 1862): 126; Alexander I quoted in Tsiavlavskii, *Stat'i o Pushkine*, 367.
25. Viazemskii's letter to A. I. Turgenev 27 September 1822, *Ostaf'evskii arkhin*, 2:274-275; quoted in Vatsuro and Fomichev, eds., *Pushkin v prizhiznennoi kritike*, 379. Hereafter "Pypk."
26. Pushkin, Pss, 2:302.
27. For similarities between Pushkin's and Chénier's attitudes toward a "narod" unworthy of freedom, see Etkind, "Soiuz una," 72-75.
28. Pushkin, Pss, 11:68.
29. Letter to Del'vig, February 1826, in Pushkin, Pss, 13:259.
30. Letter to Viazemskii, 14 August 1826, in Pushkin, Pss, 13:291.
31. See the excellent reconstruction of this audience by Eidel'man, *Pushkin. Iz biografi*, 24-64.
32. Vernadskii, "Pushkin and the Decembrists," 64.
33. Blagoi, *Tvorcheskii put'*, 45.
34. *Ibid.*, 32-38.
35. See Gutsche, "Pushkin and Nicholas," 193.
36. Milinkov, *Zhivoi Pushkin*, 121.
37. Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie*, 10:217.
38. Pushkin, Pss, 3:89.
39. "This may circulate but should not be printed." Tomasherskii, *Pushkin*, 2:253.

40. Pushkin, Pss, 3:90.
41. Cf. Pushkin's letter to A. A. Bestuzhev, May-June 1825, in Pushkin, Pss, 13:177-80.
42. Etkind, "Soiuz una," 77.
43. Pushkin, Pss, 3:49.
44. "Khranite, o druž'ia, khranite / To zh k pravde pylkoe stremlenie, / Tu zh inunut ko slave kroy; / V neschaste gordoe tepenie, / A v schast'e vsem ravno hubov." Quoted in Grot, *Pushkinskii listei*, 101; my emphasis. When Pushkin wrote "Vo glubine . . ." (December 1826-January 1827), he did not know that Kutshel'beker was not yet in Siberia with the rest of the Decembrists.
45. Pushkin, "Vo glubine sibirskikh rud" [Deep in Siberian mines], Pss, 3:49.
46. Odoevskii, "Orvet na poslanie A. S. Pushkina 'V Sibir'" [Reply to Pushkin's Epistle "To Siberia" (1828-1829)], *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 73.
47. Levkovich et al., eds., *Pisatel'i—dekabristy v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, 1264, 267, 27. Hereafter "Paws."
48. See Pklsanov, "Dvoriankaiia reaktsiia," 148.
49. Nepomniashchii, "Sud'ba odnogo stikhotvoreniia," 168.
50. Pushkin, Pss, 3:58.
51. Suzdalskii, "Arion Pushkina," 16.
52. Vickers, "Arion: An Example of Post-Decembrist Semantics," 79.
53. Letter of November 1824, in Pushkin, Pss, 13:120; my emphasis.
54. Blagoi, *Tvorcheskii put'*, 158.
55. The caricature is reproduced in Grot, *Pushkinskii listei*, 338. (Original: Pushkin'ski Dom, PD fuid 244, op. 25, no. 152, l. 83). For Kutshel'beker's rescue, see Tsiavlavskii, *Letopis'*, 1105, 128.
56. "Ja v noch', bezmolven i unyi, / S ubitiem-gondol'erom pnyi . . . Opravliias' iz Villafranki v Nistsu morem, v glukhuiu pogodu, ia podvergisa bylo opasnosti byt' broshennyam v vodu" (Gerasimov et al., eds., *Poety—dekabristy*, 132). Kutshel'beker used an image analogous to the bark in "Arion" in his poem "On Iakubovich's Death" (1846): "Ty otradalsia, vyshel ty na bereg; / A reet vse eshche sred' chernykh voln / Moi bednyi, utyi, raznaashchennyi chehr" (Gerasimov et al., eds., *Poety—dekabristy*, 158).
57. See Pushkin, Pss, 3:132, 1151, 1137.
58. Eidel'man, *Pushkin i dekabristy*, 201; Pugachev, "Iz evoliutsii mirovozzreniia," 52-53; Nemirovskii, "Dekabrist ili servilist," 170.
59. Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 1540-541.
60. The story shows up in Herodotus (1:23-24), Ovid (*Fast*, 2:83), Plutarch, Aelian, and others. According to Modzalevskii's catalogue, Pushkin had in his library the Herodotus version in French (no. 981) and the Ovid version in French and in the original (nos. 1232-1233). (Modzalevskii, *Biblioteka A. S. Pushkina*.) The legend was also retold by Pushkin's lycium teacher Koshanski in his anthology *Tsvety grecheskoi poezii* [Flowers of Greek Poetry]. An article on mythology in the 1827 issue of Pushkin's favorite almanac *Sverniata lirai* [Northern Lyre] mentioned the legend in detail. Simeon Polotskii's verses, "Plyvi v Rossiu po morskoi puchine,

/ Arion slavyu, khotia na del'ne" might have been known to Pushkin. Most likely, Pushkin also was familiar with Écouchard Lebriun's ode "Arion."

61. Pushkin, *Pss*, 3:594.

62. Pushkin, *Pss*, 6:524–526.

63. Bartenev, "Iz rasskazov A. O. Rossetta," *O Pushkine*, 378; my emphasis. Vatsuro questions the veracity of V. I. Davydov's words because during Pushkin's stay in Kishinev, Pushkin might have had only an inkling but no direct knowledge of the existence of the secret society. See Vatsuro et al., *comps.*, *Pvvs*, 2:493.

64. Eidel'man, *Pushkin i dekabristy*, 148; Lotman, *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin*, 46.

65. Tsiavlovskii, *Letopis'*, 1:160.

66. See Tsiavlovskii, *Letopis'*, 1:167; Lotman, *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin*, 47–48; Nabokov's commentary to *Evgenii Onegin*, 2:433–434; and Pushkin's unsent letter to Alexander I of July–September 1825 (Pushkin, *Pss*, 13:227–228). Only in the South in 1820 did Pushkin learn that the rumor originated from F. Tolstoy ("The American"), and from that point began diligently practicing for a duel with him (Tsiavlovskii, *Letopis'*, 1: 167, 169, 287, 294; see also Pushkin's letter to Viazemskii of 1 September, 1822, Pushkin, *Pss*, 13:43; Sobolevskii eventually reconciled the two, and in 1829 Tolstoy was Pushkin's matchmaker with Natalie Goncharova.

67. To Viazemskii, 25 May 1825, Pushkin, *Pss*, 13:184.

68. Letter (draft) of July–August 1825, Pushkin, *Pss*, 13:218–219, Faddai Bulgarii, Ryleev's comrade from the *Pole Star*, soon after repeated similar attacks against Pushkin's "aristocratism."

69. Reproduced in Tsiavlovskiaia, *Risunki Pushkina*, 294. Kinkhel'bek'er is presumably aiming his pistol—it refused to fire—at the Grand Prince Mikhail. He offered this same sword (confiscated from a policeman) as a weapon to his pupil Lev, asking Prince Obolenskii—the leader by default—to accept "his youthful warrior" into their ranks (ibid., 295). The Decembrist Pushchin describes his lycem comrade-in-arms in a similar vein: "If I were to tell you all Wilhelm's antics on that day and on the day the sentence was announced, you would simply die of laughter, regardless of how tragic and important was that scene. . . . It was Ryleev's blunder to accept Kinkhel'bek'er into the Society" (Levovich et al., eds., *Pdvvs*, 2:284). And Kinkhel'bek'er almost entangled in the affair Pushkin's brother Lev!

70. Tsiavlovskii, *Letopis'*, 4:192.

71. He used his poetic license only once to fabricate a myth. In the poem "Rifma" [Rhyme (1830)] Pushkin invented a daughter of Apollo and Echo and named her Rifma.

72. In letter of 10 July 1826, Pushkin, *Pss*, 13:286.

73. Eidel'man, *Pushkin. Iz biografi*, 37.

74. "Oh, how chivalrous!" Pushchin, "Zapiski o Pushkine," quoted in Vatsuro et al., *comps.*, *Pvvs*, 1:103.

75. Pushkin, *Pss*, 11:23.

76. Pushkin, *Pss*, 2:398; Eidel'man, *Pushkin i dekabristy*, 328.

77. Pushkin, *Pss*, 3:1055, my emphasis. These four lines should belong to dubia. The archaic word "yria" (the neck) is rather unusual for Pushkin. In his entire

work he used it only twice (see Il'inskaia et al., eds., *Stoviar' izzuka Pushkina*, 1:455). The tone and lexicon of these dubious verses are more in the vein of A. I. Odoevskii's and Kinkhel'bek'er's civic rhetoric.

Odoevskii:

Лишь вспыхнет огонь во глубине сердца,  
Пять жертв встает пред нами: как венеч,  
Вкруг вли ветися синий пламень.

Сей огонь пожжет чело их пагачей,  
Когда пред суд властителя царей

И палачи и жертвы станут рядом . . .  
"Nedvizhimu, kak mertvye v grobakh," 1831

Kinkhel'bek'er:

Порька судьба поэтов всех племен;  
Тяже всех судьба каанит Россию:  
Для славы и Рылев был рожден;  
Но юноша в свободу был влоблен . . .  
*Сиянула неприя дерзостную вно.*  
"Uchaet' russkikh poetov," 1845.

Both poems can be found in Garasimov et al., eds., *Poety—dekabristy*, 296–297, 155; my emphasis.

78. Letter of December 1824, Pushkin, *Pss*, 13:130.

79. Pushkin, *Pss*, 3:461. Reproduced in Tsiavlovskiaia, *Risunki*, 179–181. The original is in Pushkin House archive: PD no. 836, I, 38. Tsiavlovskiaia reads this line as follows: "I ia by mog, kak [shut, vi<set'> <?>]" [And I could have hanged like a clown], Tsiavlovskiaia, *Risunki*, 183.

80. Maikov, *Camto 2*, lines 409–410; my italics; quoted in Nabokov, trans., *Evgenie Onegin*, 3:348. Maikov's subtext was suggested by Tsiavlovskii, *Rakoin Pushkina*, 160, while Sergei Bondi suggested as a possible source of Pushkin's phrase, "I ia by mog, kak [shut na], the childrens toy "jumping jack" (*shur na veretke*), literally "clown on a string" (ibid.). See also Tsiavlovskiaia, "Otkliki na sud'bu," 202–203. Maikov's image and Pushkin's truncated phrase also call to mind the tarot card of the jester, hanging from the noose upside down by one foot.

81. 10 May 1834, Pushkin, *Pss*, 12:329.

82. In Viazemskii's words: Pushkin, *Pss*, 13:285.

83. Modzalevskii, *Pushkin pod iznyim nazovom*, 73; Blagoi, *Tvorcheskii put'*, 52; Nemirovskii, "Dekabrist ili servilist," 179.

84. "Young Arion, chase away your fear; / Set sail for Corinth! / Perander is worthy of you. / Minerva loves that quiet shore; / And there your eyes will see a sage! / Sitting on the royal throne." Mazade, ed., *Antologie des poètes français*, 1:260. Pushkin was familiar with Écouchard Lebriun's works. In a letter to his brother Lev he asked for Écouchard Lebriun's odes and elegies (1–10 November 1824, Pushkin, *Pss*, 13:118).

85. Smirnova, *Zapiski A. O. Smirnovoi*, 176.
86. Glebov, "Ob 'Arione,'" 297; Tomashvskii, *Pushkin i Frantsiia*, 326.
87. In early December 1825, a serf Aleksei Khokhlov, accompanied by a certain Arkhip Kurochkin, set out for St. Petersburg. A few versts past the village of Mikhailovskoe a hare crossed their road. Due to this bad omen, the superstitious peasants returned home (see Tsiavlovskii, *Letopis' 2100*). Pushkin traveled incognito under the name of Aleksei Khokhlov. Were it not for the hare, Pushkin would have arrived at Ryleev's apartment on the eve of the December 14 uprising (Vaisuro et al., comps., *P'vys*, 1153, 27; Surat, "Kto iz bogov mne vozvratil," 110). As far as I know, this hare did not become a constellation; therefore, I am seconding A. Bitov's proposition to erect a monument to it in Mikhailovskoe (*Vychitanie zaitisa*, 37).
88. Mikkelson, "Arion: A Lone Survivor's Cry," 10.
89. Pushkin, *Pss*, 3:593.
90. Tsiavlovskii, *Rukoiu Pushkina*, 256-260.
91. Letter of ca. 11 October 1835, Pushkin, *Pss*, 16:56.
92. Pushkin, *Pss*, 6:525-526.
93. Eidel'man, *Pushkin i dekabristy*, 343.
94. Pushkin, "Vol'nost'" [Liberty (1817)], *Pss*, 2:46.
95. Pushkin, *Pss*, 12:66.
96. Tanner, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner during Thirty Years Residence among the American Indians* (New York, 1830), of which a French translation (Paris, 1835) was known to Pushkin. See the enlightened discussion of this topic in Shaw, "Pushkin on America."
97. Pushkin, *Pss*, 12:104.
98. Letter of 19 October 1836, Pushkin, *Pss*, 16:261.
99. "Peter I is at the same time Robespierre and Napoleon [the Revolution incarnate]." Pushkin, *Pss*, 12:205.
100. *The Captain's Daughter* (from the deleted chapter 13), Pushkin, *Pss*, 8:383.
101. See Mikkelson, "Pushkin and the Russian Nobility," 132-138; Driver, *Pushkin: Literature*, 11-14.
102. Diary 1834, Pushkin, *Pss*, 12:335.
103. Pushkin, *Pss*, 11:258.
104. Tanner, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner during Thirty Years Residence among the American Indians* (New York, 1830); Lotman, "Ideinaia struktura," 4-5. See also Driver's original reading along similar lines of Pushkin's much earlier "Notes on Russian History of the Eighteenth Century" (1822), in *Pushkin: Literature*, 14.
105. Fedotov, "Pevets imperii," 245.
106. Pushkin, *Pss*, 12:34.
107. *Ibid.*
108. Pushkin, "Iz Pindemonti" [From Pindemonti (1836)], *Pss*, 3:420. The word "saria" that appears in the third line of this quotation, "zavisei' ot saria, zavisei' ot naroda," is not a standard version (see Tomashvskii, Bondi, and Fomichev). In the version of *Pss* edited by V. D. Bonch-Bruевич (1937-1959) a different word is used.

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## 15

## Pushkin as Critic

~ CARYL EMERSON

In 1828, in a letter drafted but never sent to the *Moscow Herald* [Moskovski vestnik], Pushkin wrote: "I confess that in literature I am a skeptic (so as not to say worse)."<sup>1</sup> This celebrated phrase, with its hint of nihilism, has served more to mystify than to clarify Pushkin's position as critic. In literary matters, Pushkin was no relativist. Although slow to condemn, he was always eager to define. A practical critic rather than a systematic aesthetician, he nevertheless held that "criticism was a science," the science of "uncovering beauties and shortcomings in works of art and literature"; as such, it could not be based on the tastes or subjective reactions of the critic but only on "a full, complete knowledge of the rules by which the artist or writer is governed in his works, a profound study of models, and an active observation of noteworthy contemporary phenomena."<sup>2</sup>

From this definition we might surmise that good criticism served readers in much the same way that inspiration (or so Pushkin claimed) served the poet.<sup>3</sup> What mattered in the critical response to art was not "ecstasy" or a powerful free expression of personal emotion but something more akin to cognitive receptivity, an ability to "grasp new concepts rapidly" and thus to facilitate the efficient explication of complex, organized impressions. For unlike the famous critics who followed hard upon his death (Belinsky in their lead), Pushkin did not believe that literature best served life when it proclaimed a moral dogma or summoned readers to sociopolitical reform. Nor should art be reduced, as in the later aesthetics of Leo Tolstoy, to communication or interpersonal good feelings. And yet for Pushkin, a wholly aesthetic being, art did have an ethical function. It was a practicing ground for the virtues—and especially for those virtues that