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### Poetry, Prose, and Pushkin's Egyptian Nights

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Poetry, Prose, and Pushkin's Egyptian Nights

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## POETRY, PROSE, AND PUSHKIN'S *EGYPTIAN NIGHTS*

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### I

*The Tales of Belkin* and *Eugene Onegin* are the traditional subjects for a discussion of Pushkin's "transition to prose." However, along with the poet's growing interest both in prose and in prosaic elements in verse, another branch of creative development, largely unexamined by Pushkinists, began to take shape in *Egyptian Nights* (EN).<sup>1</sup> The observation of Eikhenbaum (31) — that Pushkin's prosaic language constantly checks itself against the poetic canon and that the value of his prose lies primarily in its relation to poetry — is expressed most poignantly in this unfinished work. The numerous phases in the genesis of EN betray Pushkin's preoccupation with creating a work that would combine prose and verse in their pure forms. The prose-poetry interface in EN is antithetical to that of texts such as *Eugene Onegin*, where, as Tynianov suggests, prose deforms poetry (and vice versa).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, EN reveals the process of integrating poetry into prose not just as a frivolous diversion of a narrator or a character, or as a poetic epigraph at the beginning of a prose chapter or a block of prose as an epigraph to a poetic work, but as an indispensable element of the work as a whole.

In previous scholarship on EN, it has been assumed that the themes developed in the two formal components of the tale complement each other. I will argue that the literary expression itself is foregrounded and, with it, irreconcilable differences between poetry and prose. These two mutually exclusive modes of artistic creation subordinate other elements in the tale, polarizing the text into two types of world views, poetic and prosaic.

Because the properties of prose will be an important consideration in my analysis, it is necessary first to define the genre of EN and the stylistics it presupposes. The tension between reality and art clearly identifies the work — regardless of its individual components — with the Romantic tradition.<sup>3</sup> The act of improvisation itself is the epitome of Romantic poetics: initial inspiration and final product collapse into a single unit of creative

time.<sup>4</sup> Pushkin's prose, it should be recalled, precedes psychological realism; we must therefore approach the conception of "prosaics" through a Romantic prism. In the 1820's, prose was ill-defined: it was shapeless and everything that poetry was not. Determined by the norms of its 18th-century predecessor, it was perceived as a non-artistic medium of travelogues, letters, footnotes, etc. In many instances prose was synonymous with quotidian reality, with contemporaneity and the temporary, with non-transcendent, physical existence. Wolf Schmid examines the implications of the word "proza" in *Povesti Belkina*, noting that the "prose of life" and "the language of prose" are closely related for Pushkin (213).

Structurally, EN as a whole is a perfect representative of Romantic conventions. Often the tension between art and life in a Romantic tale takes the form of framed narratives. Lotman's notion of a text within a text helps to explain the preference for this type of narrative organization in Romantic prose. Framed texts encourage us to perceive the space of the outer, prosaic tale as "real life" (*Kul'tura i vzryv* 104–122). Verse, to complete this Romantic dyad, taps into the blessed moment of inspiration; it is not hindered by day-to-day existence, it is untouched by historic time.<sup>5</sup> As opposed to a linear development of thinking, poetry is on another more metaphoric and simultaneous plane of understanding, reached only momentarily and immediately. Poetic cognition allows one to escape the banality of life through a surge upward. Contradictions, detected by reason, disappear; everything is in harmony for that synchronic moment. However, while prose speaks a natural language and is all encompassing, only the ordained can achieve the blessed state that is poetry.

The direct pre-texts for EN ("A Tale from Roman Life" and "An Evening at the Dacha"), as well as the tale itself, belong to Romantic prose that, as Charles Isenberg asserts, launches the tradition of framed narratives (13). Isenberg notes that the very act of telling is often the focus in these works. It is emphasized by specifying the time of its occurrence, namely "evenings" or "nights" (e.g. Odoevsky's *Russian Nights* and Gogol's *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*). The critic defines the dynamics at work in framed narratives with the help of the *mise en abyme* effect—a structural device which explains an insert as a reflection of its outer frame in 'text within a text' constructs. The frame-and-insert tales that ultimately lead to EN are organized according to the same principle. There is a decisive difference, however, between the subjects of Isenberg's study and Pushkin's set of texts. The formal relationship between outer and inner narratives does not present major temporal discrepancies when prose frames prose. This set-up allows the same protagonist to drift from frame to the inner story quite freely.<sup>6</sup> The shift from prose frame to prose insert, frequently united by the life span of a single character, does not necessitate a change in chronotope: the space within the tale is potentially real and can

be revisited by the teller, albeit with a somewhat altered world view. (In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Pozdnyshév's space of narration — the train car — is aligned with the train ride within his story, shortly before the murder.)

Once a framed tale in prose is replaced by a *poem*, crossing the border between outer and inner narratives carries different implications. When a character in a prose tale switches to the lyric "I" (e.g. as the Italian does in the first improvisation), he assumes another persona altogether.<sup>7</sup> In the case of EN, the improviser shifts from space that is part of his reality (his unkempt hotel room, the auditorium) to the purely imaginary / self-constructed territory (e.g., the speaker of the first embedded poem lives in metaphoric heights and depths; the subject of the second improvisation is set in the temporal isolation of ancient Alexandria). Subsequently, the maturation period, necessary before a character can tell his story-autobiography, is extraneous for a voice that does not hold itself accountable to "real" time and does not aim for credibility of the stories it tells.

By the mid 1830's, two distinct ways of embedding poetry become apparent in Pushkin's prose. One function of a poetic insert is purely attributive. In this case, a poem is an ornament that helps to depict a particular character, setting, or plot event, with little or no indispensable influence on the story-line. Grinev's love lyric to Masha Mironova in *The Captain's Daughter* is one such example of a poetic insert as a replaceable character attribute. Although the poem triggers the duel with Shvabrin, it is insignificant in the capacity of a poem, for other events could have played the same role. *The Moor of Peter the Great* provides a good example of poetic insert as an attribute of setting. Here, we find an excerpt from a poem by Voltaire, which serves as a historical illustration. It is prefaced by the following words: "Проказы герцога Ришелье . . . принадлежат истории и дают понятие о нравах сего времени" (8: 4).<sup>8</sup> Neither of the works above would be unrecognizably altered if the poetic inserts were to be removed, as long as their function was compensated for elsewhere in the text.

The body of texts represented by EN, on the other hand, exemplifies an inseparable frame-and-insert structure, solidified by the mirroring of the outer text in the inner. In the early to mid 1830's, Pushkin often considered the question of positioning poetry as an integral element in a prose narrative, and in this way testing the possibilities of the two forms by way of contrast. This tendency is evident in fragmentary works such as "A Tale from Roman Life" (1833–35), "An Evening at the Dacha" (1835), "Scenes from the Days of Chivalry" (1835); and it culminates in EN (1835), which, although seemingly unfinished, presents the interaction of literary forms most completely and definitively.<sup>9</sup> The embedded poem of this type is indispensable to the plot. Since all of the prose frames share a single *fabula* — a genteel group of people gathering at night to listen to the recita-

tion of poetry—such a poetic insert becomes the pivotal point of a prose tale.

Before incorporating “Cleopatra” into EN, Pushkin tried several other prose settings for this poem; “A Tale from Roman Life” was one of these attempts.<sup>10</sup> The direction which this formal relationship was ultimately to take is difficult to discern. Pushkin planned to use Tacitus’ account of Petronius’ suicide to frame several nights of poetry-reading by the dying hero.<sup>11</sup> The first night of poetry would yield the tale of Cleopatra. The next night would be devoted to Petronius’ most celebrated satire on Nero’s reign, *The Satyricon*, which is itself a curious blending of prose and verse.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Pushkin envisioned “A Tale from Roman Life” along the lines of a classical fusion of literary forms that would in turn incorporate one of the most renowned works of this type, *The Satyricon*. EN was to follow the same formula, although—it would seem—without direct reference to Petronius’ novel.

“An Evening at the Dacha” is the next step toward EN. The general design—a mixture of poetry and prose in which each element would be equal in vigor—is already evident in “A Tale from Roman Life.” However, in the latter work, the multiplicity of plots obscures the poetry-prose interdependence. The stories are only superficially connected by one narrator and by the circumstances that fuel the creative process (i.e. his slow death). “An Evening,” on the other hand, introduces a plot that unifies the two literary forms by utilizing a single story line which splits into two parallel narratives, that of Cleopatra of Alexandria and that of Cleopatra of the Neva. This society tale consists of a casual discussion of Cleopatra’s proposition (in the form of a poem). That which serves as a digression from the plot in Pushkin’s other works, a poetic insert, becomes an essential part of “An Evening.” The *mise en abyme* effect, i.e. the striking resemblance between the two heroines, strongly suggests that, were it to be continued, the interpolated poem would dictate the unfolding of the prose narrative.

Thus, as he moved his earlier poem “Cleopatra” from “A Tale from Roman Life” through “An Evening” and finally to EN, Pushkin preserved the following elements: 1) on the level of plot, an oral recitation in front of an audience; and 2) formally, a place for the poem in a work that oscillates between traditional models of poetry and verse. Although “Scenes from the Days of Chivalry” has no obvious thematic link to the chain that leads toward the creation of the tale of the improvisator, it shares many important components with this group. Two poems, in iambic tetrameter, are inserted into this otherwise prose drama as Franz’s solo numbers, requested by his audience. The first one is a revision of an earlier poem, “Lelenda.” Tomashevsky observes that the incorporation of previous poetic material into EN and “Scenes” at roughly the same time is not an accident. Both poems paint

historical portraits—a knight, locked away in his “remote palace” (“zamok dal’nyi”), and Cleopatra in her Alexandrian palace (“chertog”)—and play an integral role in their respective texts (Tomashevsky 415–16). After all, Franz’s poetic gift saves his life, and subsequently alters the direction of the tale: just before his execution, Franz entertains his captors with his songs, and in this manner lures the lady of the house to petition for his life.

Elements that constitute Franz’s poetry reading, namely the combination of music and verse, as well as the poet’s antagonistic relationship to his audience, also characterize the Italian’s final improvisation. Most importantly for the present argument, however, is that “Scenes” and texts that directly lead to EN exhibit a thematic affinity that is realized formally. An historically distant setting is another aspect peculiar to all of these frame-and-insert tales. Petronius, Cleopatra, and the more recent knighthood of the Middle Ages, are all subjects from a lofty, fictionalized past. However, in “An Evening” and later in EN, historical time is treated differently than in “A Tale from Roman Life” or in “Scenes.” Here a split between different epochs corresponds to the split between literary forms. Prose sections become synonymous with contemporaneity, while poetry is used to depict ancient subjects.<sup>13</sup>

This dyad appears as early as 1827, in Pushkin’s humorous epistle to Del’vig, entitled “The Skull” (“Cherep” 3: 68–72). Structurally, this poem corresponds to the framed poetic texts discussed earlier, only turned inside out, i.e. poetry frames a prose insert. It is a short narrative poem that shifts into prose toward the end, and returns to verse for its conclusion. Baron Del’vig, the addressee’s ancestor, leads a chivalrous life and then is reverently laid to rest, until the narrator’s contemporary steals his skeleton. As the speaker moves from the dignified tale about Del’vig’s forefather to the abduction of his skeleton, the narration switches to prose. The eloquent past becomes nothing more than a disintegrated skeleton used for mundane purposes as it invades the present: “Большая часть высокородных костей досталась аптекарю. Мой приятель Вульф получил в подарок череп и держал в нем табак” (3: 72). The shift from elevated subjects to their burlesque counterparts is a phenomenon that is often accompanied by the switching of forms in Pushkin.<sup>14</sup> What is peculiar to “The Skull” and, later, to EN, is that its mixture of literary forms allows both the elevated subject and its parody to be confined within a single work. Moreover, although “The Skull’s” narration oscillates between forms, aside from the speaker’s passing explanation for abandoning verse (“Я бы никак не осмелился оставить рифмы в эту поэтическую минуту, если бы . . .”; 3: 71), its story-line remains uninterrupted.<sup>15</sup>

Thus two distinct ways of conflating literary forms emerge in Pushkin’s poetics. The former, represented by *Eugene Onegin*, functions according to Tynianov’s concept of deformation. The latter, a body of texts that culmi-

nates in EN, could be categorized as works in which the boundary between prose and poetry is unequivocal. If writings of the first classification result in the “deformation of forms,”<sup>16</sup> then works of the second group belong to a category diametrically opposed. In *Eugene Onegin*, the poetic and prosaic components are intermingled, giving rise to a new genre. EN, on the other hand, functions according to careful preservation of the forms which constitute it. Prose sections strictly adhere to Pushkin's recipe for the genre: “Точность и краткость—вот первые достоинства прозы. Она требует мыслей и мыслей—без них блестящие выражения ни к чему не служат. Стихи дело другое . . . (“O proze” 4: 19). Poetry, as the first improvisation in EN asserts, is “another matter,” i.e. it defies normal logic.

## II

The principal oppositions that define the formal polarization in the works leading up to EN are: 1) contemporaneity versus antiquity and 2) autobiographical mode versus fictional artifact. In the previous section I have identified the tendency in this group of texts to separate poetry and prose into mutually exclusive temporal categories. In this section I will trace the development of the second opposition by analyzing both the final version of EN and the steps taken to arrive at it. Here I will suggest how the state of the manuscript itself supports the poet's formal concerns documented on its pages.

At this point it will be helpful to investigate more closely Lotman's assessment of the text-within-text structure. When one text is introduced into another, he suggests, the frame is immediately aligned with “reality.” The inserted text, by virtue of being framed, is recognized as an artifact. EN is a perfect illustration of this configuration. The contrast between the two halves—the very lyrical poems and their extremely casual prose settings—causes the focus to shift from the poetic subject matter to the frame. As might be expected of a tale about two poets, the creative act itself takes center stage. Before the improviser composes the concluding poem, the reader is constantly reminded that a show (“predstavlenie”) is about to begin. Technicalities of a theatrical performance—such as the search for an auditorium, the printing and selling of tickets, the improviser's tastelessly dramatic appearance backstage, the stage on which he stands, the audience itself—eclipse the actual improvisation.

The poetic segments, on the other hand, provide a stark contrast to the ordinariness of the prose. Both poems are in iambic tetrameter—almost a cliché of Pushkin's poetics by 1835. The 1824 version of “Cleopatra” alternates between tetrameter and hexameter, while the 1828 revision (and the 1835 unfinished variant) are entirely in tetrameter. Efim Etkind has noted that these later revisions move away from Classicism.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the 1835 “Cleopatra” is closer to Pushkin's earlier Romantic period, especially to



the character of Zarema in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. This retrogressive gesture is indeed very puzzling. Most scholars agree that such a backward glance casts the poem, in the context of EN, as a stylization.<sup>18</sup> In this instance, stylization is a reminder of the artificiality of the text. The style itself carries meaning and takes precedence over the represented subject once the poem is set in prose. But even the subject matter of the two improvisations (a poet's relationship to his audience, an exotic woman), harks back to Pushkin's Romantic period.

In contrast to the stylization of the poetic sections, the prosaic narrator is inseparable from the voice of the biographical Pushkin. Bondi insists that the initial sketch of Charsky's character in "A Fragment" is the author's own polemic with Bulgarin (200). Upon his return from Arzrum in 1829, Pushkin was attacked by journalists, who expected him to bring home verses that would praise Russian military prowess; instead, he presented the public with the seventh chapter of *Eugene Onegin* and a number of lyric poems. "A Fragment" ("Otryvok," as this first portrait of Charsky has come to be known), was written shortly after the poet's return. It contains indisputably autobiographical passages, e.g.: "при возвращении его [из деревни] первый встречный спрашивает его: не привезли ли вы нам чего-нибудь нового?" (8: 409). When Pushkin included "A Fragment" in EN, he removed the most obvious autobiographical passages, such as the following section: "Явится ль он в армию, чтоб взглянуть на друзей и родственников—публика требует непременно от него поэмы на последнюю победу, а газетчики сердятся, почему долго заставляяет он себя ждать" (8: 409). Moreover, a personal letter to an anonymous addressee, in which Pushkin discussed his plans for a newspaper (which did not materialize), was glued to the manuscripts of EN.<sup>19</sup> Pushkin had written in it: "Браниться с журналистами [я буду] всего раз в год; [но остальное время]—угождать публике восхищениями, пошлым балагурством Булгарина и бессмыслицей Полевого,—было-бы слишком низко." Bulgarin's name surfaces again and again in connection with the tale. Autobiographical details surrounding the inception of the work indicate that the prosaic narrator voices Pushkin's own concerns of the time, almost wholly unmediated by stylization.<sup>20</sup>

The next sentence of the letter recalls Charsky's understanding of the poet in relation to his society: "Стихов печатать в ней не буду: и Бог запретит метать бисеру перед публикой, на то проза—мякина." In Pushkin's understanding, a newspaper is not a place for poetry, since it is geared towards a mass readership. Prose is compared to "chaff" ("miakina") and, by analogy, the reading public to swine. All efforts to write verse would be lost on such an audience. In short, the conception of prose in EN originates in journalistic rather than literary writing. The prose sections conform to real

time and combine shapeless accounts of the everyday. The interpolated poems ostentatiously contrast to this prosaic amorphousness.

Finally, the condition of the manuscript suggests that the two poems were ready-made inclusions. Pushkin did not even bother to write them out. Hence the manuscript presents the most serious textological problems in the poetic sections. The draft of the prose sections, on the other hand, is in its final stage, which indicates that, by the time Pushkin was working on the tale, he was concerned more with the idea of setting the poem into a prose work than with the poem's independent value.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the formal aspect of the work was an important consideration in the process of creating EN.

### III

It has been suggested that the interaction between the two realms in EN ultimately leads to their convergence.<sup>22</sup> To assume some unity between these two worlds is indeed attractive. After all, they do mirror each other, as is so often noted. But upon closer examination, one recognizes that the parallel settings are merely distorted reflections of one another. The contamination of prose by poetry, or vice-versa, is generally absent from this work. On a thematic level, this absence is personified by Charsky's obsessive separation of his poetic self from his prosaic one. (The dandy-poet waits for his moment of inspiration in the safe, spatial-temporal haven of his study. His worst fear is to be caught red-handed in the act of writing poetry. In social situations, he tries to act as un-poetically as possible, pretending to be nothing more than a gambler and a gourmand.) EN is a combination of two completely separate modes of cognition, presenting collision, rather than synthesis, of the prosaic and poetic imaginations.

The conditions surrounding the first improvisation expose the conflict between these two ways of thinking. The subject—a poet's autonomy—is ironic from the point of view of the frame, or the prose tale, for the Italian's on-demand performance calls into doubt his claim to self-sufficiency within the poem. The act of improvisation, as a rule, depends for its themes on the audience. However, once the improvisation begins, this irony disappears. Something that seems contrived through the prosaic *bytovoi* prism appears utterly sincere from the perspective of the poem. Charsky muses at the Italian's ability to transfigure a general statement into an individualized poetic expression: “Как! Чужая мысль чуть коснулась вашего слуха, и уже стала вашею собственностью” (8: 270).

The lofty tone of the improvisation, once it spills over into a discussion, struggles with and is finally defeated by banalities.<sup>23</sup> While the Italian replies to Charsky's initial demand for improvisation with poetic eloquence, he stumbles when Charsky challenges him to explain the nature of poetic talent: “Всякий талант неизъясним. . . . эту тесную связь между собственным

вдохновением и чуждой внешнею волею—тщетно я сам захотел бы это изъяснить. Однако . . . надобно подумать о моем первом вечере” (8: 270). Prosaic language gravitates toward the subject that is most compatible with it—the mercantile side of the performance. Any attempt at explaining poetry has to segment instantaneousness into a logical sequence of thoughts—an impossible task. The improviser asserts, “Так никто, кроме самого импровизатора, не может понять эту быстроту впечатлений” (8: 270). In this context, the verb “to comprehend” (“poniat”) does not imply rational understanding. “The rapidity of impressions” (“bystrota vpechatlenii”) can only be experienced. Charsky’s depiction of the poetic process, “мысль чуть коснулась слуха,” suggests that reason (“mysl”) is replaced by the physical senses (“slukh”) in the moment of inspiration. Any explication of lyricism would necessarily assume the form of another poem. And since this time Charsky demands a prosaic answer, the poetic genius suddenly loses his command of communication skills. The first few sentences of the Italian’s attempt to explain the creative process nearly take off into another poem:

Каким образом ваятель и куске каррарского мрамора видит сокрытого Юпитера и выводит его на свет, резцом и молотом раздробляя его оболочку? Почему мысль из головы поэта выходит уже вооруженная четырьмя рифмами, размеренная стройными однообразными стопами? (8: 270)

The similarity in construction of the above two sentences is striking: a long clause which presents the mystery of artistic vision is followed by a shorter clause that illuminates the technique employed to realize this mysterious vision. Thus, a certain poetic diction is established, especially when the contemplative nature of the excerpt quoted above is juxtaposed to the every-day concerns voiced later in the same paragraph. This passage stands out from the established prosaic language of the text. In fact, the inquisitive tone, the open-endedness of the question, and the subject of inquiry itself, is closer to the poem which precedes this attempted explanation. The questions “Каким образом . . . ?” and “Почему мысль; . . . ?” correlate to the poem’s “Зачем кружится ветр в оваре?” or “Зачем арапа своего . . . ?” In his poetic treatment of the same theme the improviser is able to answer these questions (“*Затем* что ветру и орлу / И сердцу девы нет закона”; emphasis added). When they are transposed into prose, however, he cannot find a satisfactory reply: “тщетно я сам захотел бы это изъяснить” (8: 270). Within poetic logic, “нет закона” is an adequate reply. Prosaic thinking, on the other hand, demands “laws.” As the answer to the first improvisation claims, an account of the mysterious creative process in prose is impossible. After unsuccessfully attempting to analyze his calling, the improviser leaves

poetic concerns to poetry, and turns to the subject that better suits the present prosaic conversation — the price of tickets.

The subject of the final improvisation draws attention to the gap between poetry and prose through its parallels to the contemporary society in the audience.<sup>24</sup> The prose sections, so firmly grounded in the spatial-temporal framework of the plot, progress in a linear manner. Charsky's age ("Ему не было еще тридцати лет") is the second introductory statement of his character, as well as the second sentence of the tale itself. The opening sentence roots Charsky spatially: "Чарский был один из коренных жителей Петербурга" (8: 263). The obtrusive ticking of time clearly marks the linear progression of the story. The first chapter closes with the words: ". . . и в тот же вечер он поехал за него хлопотать" (8: 267). In direct succession, the second chapter starts with "На другой день. . . ." The epigraph to the final section contains yet another time designation, "Цена за билет 10 рублей; начало в 7 часов" (emphasis added; 271). The price of tickets serves to underscore the pragmatism of the events in prose.

The number of days is easily traced within the prosaic sections of the story. Each chapter covers a distinct twenty-four hour period; thus, the prose tale takes the reader through three separate days (or evenings)—which reflect the number of nights that are sold by Cleopatra. The poem of Cleopatra, in contrast, unfolds indefinitely. The time of day is not clear, nor is the length of the scene. In a single moment, the fates of the three lovers, which will implicitly unravel in three subsequent days, are sealed.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the reader is never actually walked through the three nights of Cleopatra—in contrast to the title's implications. Indeed, based on the plot, a more appropriate title might be "Petersburg Nights," which in turn are famous for erasing the distinction between day and night.

Charsky's characterization is contained within the every-day conception of time, hence the frequently noted casualness of the prose sections, as opposed to the lyricism of the two poems. This is not to suggest that Charsky is assigned solely to the prosaic realm. After all, he is also a poet, with all the torments of the craft. However, not once do we see his poetry directly.

Conversely, the improviser presents a complete collapse of time. The essence of his art combines a beginning, a middle and an end into a single, uninterrupted whole; the stages of inspiration, of polishing and perfecting, and of presenting the work to the public are one. In addition, the delivery itself combines three different branches of art: drama, music and poetry. This instantaneousness opposes Charsky's artistry: "он имел несчастье писать и печатать стихи" (8: 263). The acts of writing and presenting his work to the audience are spread out in time and, furthermore, accomplished through an intermediary publisher. Moreover, the reading public is

not gathered, as at a performance, but rather is dispersed. Thus, an immediate theatrical impact is impossible.

Charsky's discomfort around the improviser stems from a collision of these two incongruous temporal zones. After the first improvisation, he is bothered by the Italian's ability to make the transition from poet to merchant so effortlessly: "Неприятно было Чарскому с высоты поэзии вдруг упасть под лавку конторщика" (8: 270). Derzhavin's epigraph to the chapter, "Я царь, я раб, я червь, я бог" (8: 268), emphasizes poetic synchronicity that enables a poet to occupy simultaneously positions that are separated into a rigid vertical hierarchy by society.

In contrast to the horizontal development of prose, inspiration is described as a surge of feelings that is outside time. Just before the first improvisation, the Italian's face betrays "выражение мгновенного чувства" (8: 268). The second improvisation is preceded by the phrase "И вдруг . . ." "Вдруг" introduces the improviser's initial arrival to Charsky's study, where Charsky is himself in the middle of his poetic moment: "Чарский запирался в своем кабинете и писал с утра до поздней ночи" or "Чарский погружен был душою в сладостное забвение." Unnoticed, day changes into night. Contrary to such oblivion, in the absence of inspiration the ticking away of minutes is clearly marked: "Остальное время он гулял, . . . слыша поминутно . . ." (8: 264).

Charsky is very much a part of the mob mentality when he visits the improviser backstage. After describing the Italian's theatrical attire, the narrator adds, "Все это очень не понравилось Чарскому, которому неприятно было видеть поэта в одежде заезжего фигляра" (8: 271). This visit parallels the scene in which the Italian intrudes on Charsky's moment of inspiration. In both instances, one artist enters the other's creative space and finds that it does not meet his expectations. Just as Charsky is unpleasantly surprised by the Italian's appearance right before the performance, the Italian is taken aback when he catches Charsky in his study:

Бедный итальянец смутился. Он поглядел вокруг себя. Картины, мраморные статуи, бронзы, дорогие игрушки, расставленные на готических этажерках,—поразили его. Он понял, что между надменным dandy, стоящим перед ним в хохлатой парчовой скуфейке, в золотом китайском халате, опоясанном турецкой шалью, и им, бедным кочующим артистом, в истертом галстуке и поношенном фраке, ничего не было общего. (8: 266)

Notice that just before stepping on stage, the improviser's dramatic presence—the sharp contrast between his black attire, black beard and white skin ("голая шея своею странной белизною ярко отделялась от густой и черной бороды; 8: 271)—replaces his earlier appearance that reflected the passage of time: his "черный фрак, побелевший уже по швам," "истертый черный галстук" and "желтоватая манишка" (8: 265).

Both instances present backstage glimpses of inspiration, one in the form

of a study, the other literally “backstage.” However, as soon as the Italian comes out on stage, Charsky's perception of him changes:

. . . он заметил, что наряд, который показался ему так неприличен, не произвел того же действия на публику. Сам Чарский не нашел ничего в нем смешного, когда увидел его на подмостках, с бледным лицом, ярко освещенным множеством ламп и свечей. (8: 272)

The theatrical moment suspends Charsky's humdrum state of mind. This altered view of the improviser, however, does not necessarily suggest that logic is altogether absent. Charsky's transition in this scene is a perfect illustration of Pushkin's definition of inspiration: “Вдохновение есть расположение души к живейшему принятию впечатлений, следств. <венно> к быстрому соображению понятий, что и способствует объяснению оных. Вдохновение нужно в поэзии как и в геометрии” (11: 41–42). The crucial components of this understanding of inspiration are conceptualization and, more importantly, speed. Charsky needs to grasp the performance at once in order to reconcile the images of a foreign dandy and a poet. His receptivity to the improviser's state of inspiration helps him transcend the prosaic order that imposes itself on a poet's life just as much as it does on anyone else's.<sup>26</sup>

Both Charsky and the Italian, when thinking in prose, have to create a context for the other. The Italian assumes that he is entering a “conventional” poet's study, just as Charsky hopes to find some indication of an inspired genius backstage. In both cases, their expectations are disappointed. Thus the propensity for both modes of perception — poetic isolation and prosaic continuity — is present in both artists. However, a relationship of opposition is established when they interact. They are polarized along this formal axis. Charsky is generally prosaic, but is able to tap into a poetic mode of being; the improviser is a poet who is forced to cross over into a prosaic realm. These transitions are strained and maximally awkward.

#### IV

The two temporal schemes within EN — synchronic and diachronic — assume two very different codes of ethics. Debreczeny correctly notes that the poetic stance in EN echoes Keats' “negative capability” of a chameleon poet (295). Inspiration, which is above natural time, is not liable to societal judgment, i.e. moral categories. This is not to suggest that, for Pushkin, society, in contrast to the poet, epitomizes ethics. However, morality is the only measure it has. A paraphrase, which the public needs in order to entertain the illusion of understanding poetry, transposes poetic timelessness into prosaic temporality. Such a transposition distorts the blissful moment, stretches it and endows it with the concerns of everyday life. Because the public does not comprehend that poetry is defined as above time, an unbridgeable gap opens up between the poet and his audience. Here the

tragedy of a Romantic poet is formulated by bringing the two literary forms into an antagonistic relationship.

The analytical mind constructs categories, and expects a poet to fit into them. The demands below force the poet to go into hiding:

он находил в них слишком много притязаний у одних на колкость ума, у других на пылкость воображения, у третьих на чувствительность, у четвертых на меланхолию, на разочаровательность, на глубокомыслие, на филантропию, на мизантропию, иронию и проч. (“Отрывок” 8: 411)

The juxtaposition of morally tinged words, “philanthropy” and “misanthropy,” illustrates the public’s tendency to think only in terms of right and wrong. A poet is indiscriminate in this respect, as the Italian states in his poetic response to Charsky’s “zakaz.”

The first improvisation presents an interesting inversion of Pushkin’s 1828 poem “Poet i tolpa.” Although the speakers of both poems adopt similar attitudes toward their interlocutors, their own positions are directly opposed. In “Poet i tolpa,” the speaker-poet is an elevated “son of the heavens” (“syn nebes”), born for prayer. In the improvisation, the poet switches his position. He answers the passer-by demand for an “elevated subject” (“vozvysheennyi predmet”) with images of the physically lowest points, “Зачем крутится ветр в овраге,” “Зачем от гор . . . / Летит орел . . . / На чахлый пенъ” (8: 269). While the speaker of “Poet i tolpa” serves some higher law, in this improvisation the poet is not bound to it. In EN, the emphasis shifts from a contrast between the spiritually pure and the debased (i.e., between “poet” and “tolpa”) to simply those who cannot think outside of a logical progression and those who can. The improviser does not accuse the crowd of baseness, as the speaker of “Poet i tolpa” does; in fact, an overt belittlement of the mob is absent altogether. Indeed, the Italian’s petty concerns indicate that he is part of the crowd. Nor does he posit himself as the righteous one. The two opposing stances, assumed by the speakers in these thematically connected poems, attest to the poet’s universality. Poetic integrity is in the form itself, not in any specific poetic content. The prosaic-minded audience holds the poet accountable to a certain world-view, while poetry itself liberates him from this.

Poetry lifts themes from prosaic reality. It is not the material, but its rearrangement that individuates it; the subject is ultimately irrelevant and thus translation from the Italian is unnecessary. This is the essence of EN: passing the same themes through different modes of presentation. Cleopatra is one such theme — the mystical beauty in verse remains forever youthful, while her prosaic equivalent in the text, the attendance taker with rings on every finger, ages.

Dostoevsky’s reaction to EN is typically historical and prosaic (“Otv

'Russkomu vestniku' 199–200). Though the novelist recognizes the crucial role that momentariness plays, his inclination to turn Pushkin into his intellectual twin endows the moment with a precise historical significance. For him, EN depicts a religious crisis, the solution to which lies in Ancient Rome's turn to Christianity. Such a view dismisses the capriciousness of the moment in Pushkin's tale. In EN, the poetic *mig* does not carry historical consequences or influence reality. If it has any relationship to ethics, it is that of flagrant non-participation. In this respect, Dostoevsky comes dangerously close to one of the "prosaic" thinkers in the improviser's audience.

Aside from those of Dostoevsky's frame of mind, most readers of EN do not view Cleopatra's offer from a moral standpoint. Although she overtly states that she is "prostituting" her body ("На ложе страстных искушений / Простой наемницей всхожу"; 273), a stance such as this cannot be interpreted in terms of positive/negative values. After all, her price could not be any higher. (She is not subject to the concerns of the Italian, who wants to set a price that is high enough to make a profit, yet low enough to attract an audience.) The improviser is confused when his innocent comment about Cleopatra's numerous lovers elicits vulgar laughter from the men in the audience. Dostoevsky passes similar judgment on Cleopatra's conduct, albeit in a more sophisticated manner.

The pre-texts for EN point out the discrepancy between these antagonistic world views. The tension between Vol'skaia and her social circle in "The Guests Gathered at the Dacha" anticipates the tension between the literary forms that the later versions of the tale were to take. Vol'skaia invites societal scorn by resisting the natural passage of time: "Но годы шли, а душе Зинаиды все еще было 14 лет. Стали роптать" (8: 275). While social norms are marked by time, where every stage of human life has to correspond to specific rules of conduct, Zinaida lives in poetic atemporality.

In "An Evening at the Dacha," such discord is even more evident in the guests' responses to Cleopatra's promiscuity. The narrative begins with the retelling of an anecdote about Mme de Staël, who asks Napoleon "кого почитает он первую женщиною в свете." Napoleon answers: "Ту, которая народила более детей" (8: 420) After discussing the tasteless coquetry of Mme de Staël's question, the mistress of the dacha poses the same question. A certain Aleksei Ivanych replies: "Cleopatra." The guests attempt to make him explain his choice, but he becomes too embarrassed to expound on that quality of the queen which he finds so intriguing. After some persuading, Aleksei begins by noting that he has come across an interesting reference in Aurelius Victor on Cleopatra's offer to sell her nights at the price of death. The statement begins with the words: "Она отличалась такою похотливостью, что . . ." (8: 421). Notice that the prosaic restatement of the subject contains a moral judgment of Cleopatra,



stressed by the term “lustfulness” (“pokhotlivost’ ”), which the audience unjustly superimposes on the antiquated, lofty, and by now utterly fictionalized character. “Что ж из этого хотел он извлечь? Какая тут главная идея” (8: 422), asks one of the guests innocently. Aleksei, who has suggested to his poet-friend to write a poem on this particular aspect of Cleopatra, recites bits of it from memory instead of answering the question in the natural language of prose. As soon as the reading stops, one of the ladies attacks Cleopatra: “Этот предмет должно бы доставить маркизе Жорж Занд, такой же бесстыднице, как и ваша Клеопатра” (8: 423). The phrase “shameless creature” summarizes a prosaic pronouncement on poetry. Here we see the audience confuse the categories delineated earlier in this essay, i.e. antiquity versus contemporaneity (section I) and artifact versus autobiography (section II). The audience attempts to take Cleopatra out of her fictional world of Alexandria and subject her to the court of its peers. The earlier attempt to extrapolate a “main idea” seems to fuse with these ethical interpretations in the voice of the mob. For them, ideas and ethics are part of the same language.

Leslie O’Bell’s question — i.e. how should we understand Pushkin’s gesture of incorporating a poem of his earlier Romantic period into a tale of the mid-1830’s — remains to be answered. Pushkin strongly denounced Romanticism by the time he wrote EN. Yet, not only are EN’s two improvisations undeniably Romantic, but the tale in its entirety, as has been suggested in the first section of my argument, looks back to the Romantic tradition of tales about artists. We have to consider Pushkin’s own relationship with his reading public in the 1830’s in order to better understand this retrogressive move. From the beginning of the reign of Nicholas I to the end of Pushkin’s life, the poet felt increasingly enslaved both by censorship and by the market of mass readership. Both of these spheres converged in the figure of Bulgarin.<sup>27</sup> Bulgarin, who was surely the subject of Pushkin’s polemic in “A Fragment,” and later in EN, had a monopoly on the literary and journalistic culture of the day. By 1831, his newspaper *Northern Bee* was issued daily. In response to this monopoly, Pushkin helped organize and wrote for Del’vig’s *Literary gazette*. Pushkin’s goal was to return to the reader some of the purity of literary mores. However, in the age of growing mass readership and denunciation of “aristocratic” literary values, Del’vig’s aesthetically-oriented publication could not compete with the popularity of Bulgarin’s journal (nor could Del’vig compete with Bulgarin’s crude business practice of pandering to his audience). In light of this atmosphere, Pushkin’s resurrection of earlier Romantic positions could be viewed as an answer to the Bulgarians of his time. By drawing distinctions between prosaic and poetic perspectives and reintroducing the irreconcilable gap between “poet” and “tolpa” into EN, Pushkin entertains the possibility of creative freedom from censorship and the marketplace, despite his increasing material dependence on it.

## V

Lotman's article on Pushkin's *poemy* will help to sum up the major points of my argument and place the branch of formal concerns, epitomized by EN, in the context of the poet's development ("K structure" 381–88). Pushkin's plan to polarize literary forms and engage them in dialogue — which gradually unfolds in a number of texts of the mid 1830's and culminates in EN — is set in motion some ten years earlier. Lotman asserts that Pushkin strove to lock his more monologic *poemy* of the Romantic period into a prose frame, i.e. to preface or annotate them, and in this way to present another perspective on the same subject by shifting from poetry to prose.

In order to accomplish this effect, Pushkin solicited Viazemsky to write an introduction to the first edition of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*: "Твоя проза обеспечит судьбу моих стихов" (quoted in "K structure" 383). Viazemsky's "Vmesto predisloviia," subtitled "Разговор между издателем и классиком с Выборгской стороны, или с Васильевского острова," anticipates the gesture of peaking behind the curtain at the more mundane aspects of authorship (*Poln. sob. soch.* vol. II, 1915: 189–191).<sup>28</sup> The prose excerpt from Ivan Murav'ev-Apostol's *Journey Through the Tauride* serves as an afterword to the editions that appeared during Pushkin's lifetime, providing factual information on the present state of the Bakhchisarai palace (vol. II, 201–204). Pushkin's own "Otryvok iz pis'ma," which accompanies the third edition (1830), is a banal counterpoise from the poet's own life to a fictionalized depiction of the fountain within the poem: "К\*\* поэтически описывала мне его, называя *la fontaine des larmes*. Вошел во дворец, увидел я испорченный фонтан; из заржавой железной трубы по каплям падала вода . . ." (vol. II, 204).

According to Lotman, this early attempt to mark the presence of various perspectives formally gives way to a second group of narrative poems, characterized by works such as *Count Nulin* and *The Little House in Kolomna* which no longer need extra-textual prose because "novelistic" elements are injected into the text proper. If Lotman is correct, then the structure in EN is a compromise between these two models for combining literary forms. The poet returns to his earlier solution to the problem of delineating various points of view with the help of a clear prose/poetry divide. The language of EN retains the attributes of prose which, in the poet's conception of the early twenties, belong outside an artistic text. This type of prose casually presents a poet in his autobiographical time, concerned with physical means of production as much as, if not more, with the mental processes of creation.<sup>29</sup> The chatty, conversational tone presents objects of a poet's sober observation (e.g. the fountain) as they appear before they are recast in a verse medium.

In "A Tale from Roman Life," "Evening at the Dacha," "Scenes from the Days of Chivalry" and finally EN, prose prepares the scene for recita-

tion of poetry that, in turn, comments on its frame. In the capacity of a commentator, the function of such an insert is similar to that of an epigraph. However, not only is this type of poem now included in the text proper, it now becomes the tale's center piece. Verse quoted within the space of Pushkin's previous short stories and novellas is little more than an artifact, much like a painting on a wall. It may be a pivotal point in a story, as the picture with one bullet upon the other in "The Shot," but it is not an irreplaceable plot event. The interaction of literary forms in prose narratives that switch to verse narratives is significantly different. As the genesis of pre-texts for EN indicates (Pushkin began with a poem, e.g. "Cleopatra," and wrote a frame around it), verse serves as an initial impulse and a model for the prose story. As in the writing of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, the prose frame is a secondary step that, in the case of the group of works leading up to EN, becomes a significant part of the primary text.

Moving prose into the main body of a text results, as Tynianov suggests, in the "deformation" of verse. Lotman claims that works such as *Count Nulin*, *Eugene Onegin* and *The Little House in Kolomna* do not depend on prose epilogues as a source of another perspective precisely because the verse is already infused with elements of prose. In Lotman's view, this group of works represents a higher stage in Pushkin's evolution toward a dialogic poetics. I propose that EN reflects the poet's final considerations of his two literary media. This work reconciles the early tendency of formal polarization with the later one of "deformation," offering yet another possibility for dramatizing two antipodal points of view, separated into poetry and prose, within the space of a single artistic text.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Michael Wachtel and Caryl Emerson for helpful comments and criticism on earlier drafts of this paper.

- 1 In a recent article on EN, David Herman offers a socio-historical analysis of the text. The reader is referred to this comprehensive account of the dilemma Pushkin faced as an artist dependent on the reading public. It should be borne in mind that the present study concerns itself with a different set of problems. Namely, the framework of this analysis stems from the tradition of scholarship that focuses on Pushkin's conflation of literary forms.
- 2 Yurii Tynianov argues that prosaic and poetic elements merge in this "novel in verse," giving birth to a new form. The most important component of the word in a prose text, the meaning, is deformed in verse, where the sign itself acquires significance (89–90).
- 3 Ralph Matlaw examines the ways in which Pushkin combines elements from both Classical and Romantic traditions in EN. He concludes, however, that EN is a Romantic work in its entirety, with conventionally Romantic themes such as exoticism and a protest against society that forces a particular position on a poet (117–119). Petrunina attributes the tale to the later Romantic period of the 1830's, in the tradition of works that oppose

- two types of artists, a pragmatic and idealist. She ranks EN together with Odoevsky's "Bakh," Polevoi's "The Painter" and Gogol's "The Portrait" (38).
- 4 See Weintraub, "The Problem of Improvisation in Romantic Literature," 119–37.
  - 5 Chicherin looks at Pushkin's unfinished prose retrospectively, as the beginnings of a plan that would be realized in a Tolstoyan socio-psychological novel. To suggest that Pushkin's turn to prose is a move toward realism of the latter half of the nineteenth century is misleading. Pushkin's prose is "realistic" only in its opposition to the poetic canon, not in its anticipation of later realists such as Dostoevsky or Tolstoy.
  - 6 The majority of protagonists chosen for Isenberg's book (Vladimir of Turgenev's *First Love*, the pawnbroker of Dostoevsky's *The Gentle Creature*, Pozdnyshhev of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*) are both authors of their tales and actors in them. The two stages within a single life span of such characters—telling and acting—are, as a rule, separated by a time gap, often demarcated by several years. Character change is underscored by the lapse of time itself. For example, when we think of the narrator's development in *Notes from Underground*, the number twenty immediately comes to mind as the difference in years between the first and second parts. Furthermore, the time that passes between the telling and what is being told is in direct proportion to the success of a narrative, as instanced by the lack of cohesion in the story of the gentle creature, where—due to the immediacy of the narration—the body is still stretched out on the table.
  - 7 The protagonist of Karolina Pavlova's *The Double Life* escapes the humdrum and pettiness of the life that surrounds her, unfolded in the prose sections of the novel, into the imaginary space presented in the verse fragments.
  - 8 Unless noted otherwise, references to Pushkin's texts cite the 1937 Academy edition. Numerals in the citations refer to volume and page number.
  - 9 I largely follow the genealogy presented in Leslie O'Bell's *Pushkin's "Egyptian Nights"*: *The Biography of a Work*. I diverge from this genealogy in adding two other works: "Scenes from the Days of Chivalry" and "The Skull" (discussed later in this section). Although these texts are beyond the scope of O'Bell's book, they exhibit the same formal concerns as EN.
  - 10 For a discussion of Pushkin's plan for "A Tale from Roman Life," see Cherniaev's "Tsezar' puteshestvoval."
  - 11 According to Tacitus, Petronius cuts his veins and wraps them to slow the blood flow and in this way to prolong his dying. Pushkin's Petronius makes use of his last few days to recite poetry in front of his friends (Cherniaev 429).
  - 12 Pushkin was surely aware of this element of the work's construction. He had *The Satyricon* in a French translation that preserved its poetic and prose components (Modzalevsky 309). O'Bell cites *The Satyricon* as Pushkin's primary model for the combination of literary forms in "A Tale," "An Evening" and, ultimately, in EN (80). It may also be noted that the use of improvisation to link poetry to a prose tale might have been suggested by another source. Pushkin also had in his library Coleridge's "The Improvisatore," a drama in prose that incorporates poetic meditations (Modzalevsky 198). Paul Debreczeny mentions that this drama, as well as works on the subject of improvisation such as Madame de Staël's *Corinne* (1807) and V. F. Odoevsky's "Improvisatore" (1833), must have had its share of influence on Pushkin (291).
  - 13 This type of relationship between forms corresponds to Bakhtin's epic/novel temporal divide. Poetic time is confined to the "absolute past" (15), while events in prose correspond to the narrator's (and possibly the reader's) time. In her chapter entitled "The 'Kleopatra' Tales," Monika Greenleaf discusses the temporal structure of EN in the context of the fashionable literary currents that accompanied the July Revolution of 1830 in France. Greenleaf points out that frame tales were used to juxtapose contrasting

- moments in history “in order to show that what seemed like overnight change from a contemporary perspective had been long in the making” (310).
- 14 It is important to bear in mind Pushkin’s choice of forms when comparing “The Stone Guest” and “The Coffin-Maker.” Both works were written in 1830 and share many plot elements. In the latter, the drunk protagonist summons his deceased clients to his housewarming party, as Don Juan flippantly invites the statue of Donna Anna’s murdered husband to drop in on their rendezvous. In each story, the addressee miraculously accepts the invitation. However, two different modes of rendition, the drama in blank verse and the prose short story, necessitate different conclusions. The supernatural element of the former—the appearance of the Commander’s statue on his wife’s doorstep—is perceived as perfectly “logical” within the framework and carries “real” consequences for Don Juan. The short story, on the other hand, has to justify its fantastic occurrence (the skeletons’ acceptance of the coffin-maker’s invitation) rationally. The protagonist wakes up, and is taken for a lunatic by his servant when he alludes to the happenings in his dream. The grand statue of the Commander, once translated into prose, turns into the skeleton which disintegrates in front of the coffin-maker’s eyes. As suggested by the opposition of this short story to its loftier complement, and by the interaction of the two forms in the narrative poem “The Skull,” prose time, which is closer to real time, is more equipped to handle skeletons in Pushkin’s poetics.
  - 15 It is interesting to note that *Eugene Onegin* operates inversely: the unitary form of narration (aside from the two letters and “The Song of the Girls”)—the Onegin stanza—is opposed to endless digressions from the plot.
  - 16 Boris Eikhenbaum adds *Count Nulin* and *The Little House in Kolomna* to this category (44).
  - 17 Etkind suggests that this metrical alteration changes the nature of Cleopatra’s utterance. While the neo-classical associations of the hexameter add a certain stateliness to her words, the tetrameter underplays her position of power and simply presents her as a passionate woman (70).
  - 18 O’Bell suggests that this stylization is not one of ironic distance, as some of Lensky’s passages are in *Eugene Onegin*. Instead of perceiving “Cleopatra” as “old romanticism,” she proposes to view it as “timeless romanticism” (77).
  - 19 A partial description of the manuscript is found in *Russkaia starina*, 1884.
  - 20 Vainshtein and Pavlova emphasize the biographical setting of another pre-text for EN, “The Guests Gathered at the Dacha” (Countess Laval’s literary salon at her summer house, where Pushkin read his *Boris Godunov*, 37).
  - 21 Because Pushkin did not publish EN himself, editors have had to guess the author’s intent in some portions of the manuscript. Disagreements arise mainly over the final improvisation: which version of “Cleopatra” (1828 or 1835) should fill the space intended for a poem. It is customary to use the 1828 variant, although Nabokov, in his commentary on *Eugene Onegin*, points out the arbitrariness of this accepted practice (vol. 3, 383). Gofman’s publication of EN includes the prose descriptions of the setting of Cleopatra’s feast from the unfinished 1835 revision and ends with the 1828 version of the poem. For details on the state of the manuscript, see Annenkov (387–93) and Bondi (148–205).
  - 22 Greenleaf sees “Kleopatra” as an allegory of the poet and audience’s interaction found in the prose frame (339–340). O’Bell notes that the final improvisation merges the two worlds within the text, as well as the works that lead up to the creation of EN (earlier versions of the Cleopatra poems, “The Guests Gathered at the Dacha,” “Evening at the Dacha,” and “A Tale from Roman Life,” 103). Irvin Weil traces the fusion of the two components as the tale progresses. The initial prosaic narrator is aloof and casual, introducing the protagonists with a certain amount of ironic distance. As the story progresses,

- however, the passionate voice of the Italian consumes all other tones, uniting the external narrator (Pushkin), Charsky and the improviser in its poetic finale (90). Herman suggests that the union of the two worlds in EN is achieved in yet another way. For him, EN presents an alternative to the relationship established earlier by Pushkin between "poet" and "tolpa." The critic claims that Pushkin / Charsky is impressed with the improviser's ability to work with the crowd creatively even as his poetic talent is subsidized financially by it (668).
- 23 Weil deals with the prosaic passages that set the two improvisations. The theme of inspiration does influence the prose, infecting it with a highly emotive language. However, this effect is limited to the sections that directly precede the two poems (and, in the case of the first improvisation, the passage that follows the poem). Weil notes that they are in striking contrast to the casual tone of the rest of the prose (88). Instead of seeing a fusion of the two literary forms here, I propose that these transitional passages present a struggle between the two forms that constitute this work. Prose holds victory in this struggle after the first improvisation. Conversely, the last few prose lines of EN surrender to the inspired poetic genius, erasing the vertical hierarchy with the words "God's approach" ("priblizhenie boga").
  - 24 Valerii Briusov also notes that the parallels between the modern and the ancient worlds are established only to emphasize the differences (444–446). Not without his Symbolist biases, he argues that the cowardice and hypocrisy of contemporary society set off the courage and loftiness of antiquity.
  - 25 In examining three very different readings of EN, by Dostoevsky, Briusov and Modest Gofman, Lewis Tracy notes that all three authors sense the crucial role that the "moment" (*mig, mgnovenie*) plays in the text (456).
  - 26 Sidiakov (178) and Matlaw (110) draw parallels between Charsky and the speaker of Pushkin's 1827 poem "Poet" ("Poka ne trebuet poeta").
  - 27 See Lotman's *Pushkin* (160–179) for a detailed account of Pushkin's polemic with Bulgarin.
  - 28 The foreword is reprinted in the 1827 edition of the poem.
  - 29 According to a Romantic sensibility (e.g. the publisher's comments in Viazemsky's introduction), the means of production have no place in a work of art: "Вам не довольно того, что вы перед собою видите здание красивое: вы требуете еще, чтоб виден был и остов его. В изящных творениях довольно одного действия общаго; что за охота видеть производство?" (*Pushkin. Poln sob.*, vol. II, 191)

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