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# THE CONTRIBUTION OF PUSHKIN TO THE HISTORY OF ECONOMIC THOUGHT

Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837) occupies a special place in the development of Russian culture. He was at the same time a great poet, the reformer of Russian literary language, a historian and a political thinker. In the enormous mass of work devoted to Pushkin, a certain number of articles are concerned with his ideas on economics and the reflection of socio-economic problems in his writing.[1] Until now, however, this theme has been studied in only a fragmentary way and less from the point of view of the professional economist than from that of a literary historian. In an attempt to enlarge and complete the idea we may have of Pushkin's economic views, I propose also to show

Translated from the French by Jeanne Ferguson.

[1] S.IA Borovoĭ, on Pushkin's conceptions of economics in the early 1830s, in *Pushkin and his Times*, I, Leningrad, 1962; M.P. Alekseev, " Pushkin and the Science of his Times," *Pushkin: Comparative Historical Studies*, Leningrad, 1972; I.N. Tregurov on the question of the economic views of A.S. Pushkin, in *Collection for Pushkin's Jubilee*, Oulianovsk, 1949.



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the importance the politico-economic thought of Western Europe had for his work. One person comes to the fore when we study the subject from this angle: Nikolai Turgenev,[2] a Decembrist, one of the "masters" of the poet's youth, who played an important role in the *rapprochement* of Russian and Western European cultures.

It is significant that in an American book on the history of Russian economic thought we find repeated references to Pushkin. In a text of about 150 pages, thus relatively short, Pushkin's name is mentioned on 28 different pages, more frequently than other Russian writers and thinkers of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries likely to be especially noticed by economists. The author, J.F. Normano, says: "Pushkin's works, especially *Eugene Onegin*, are an encyclopedia of Russian life of the time, of its economic history, ideas and truths. The study of his economic views would be an enriching task, although difficult. I hope one day to give it my time." [3] As far as I know, this work has not been done, either by Normano or by anyone else in the West. Normano also draws attention to an essential detail of life in Russia: "... poets, novelists and playwrights discuss the economic destiny of the world. Throughout almost all the 19th century, Russian intelligentsia debated and decided the fate of capitalism, the future of Europe, the decline of Western civilization..." [4] He also notes the importance of economic problems in the works of N.G. Tchernichevski and Ivan Turgenev. We will add for our part that Tolstoy was also very interested in the questions of political economy.

## I

The first chapter of *Eugene Onegin* contains one of the most characteristic "economic" passages of Pushkin, in which the author describes the tastes of the aristocratic young freethinker in St. Petersburg in the years 1810-1820. He expresses himself

[2] Not to be confused with Ivan Turgenev, the author of *A Sportsman's Sketches* and other works. The two were not related.
[3] J.F. Normano, *The Spirit of Russian Economics*, New York, 1945, p. 16.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

here with the effective laconism that is one of his characteristics:

> He put to shame Homer, Theocritus
> And preferred to read Adam Smith,
> A profound economist
> He knew how the State became rich,
> What it lived on and why
> It did not have the necessary gold
> When it had the simple product.
> His father did not understand at all
> And mortgaged his estates.[5]

These verses attracted the attention of a number of economists. Karl Marx himself mentions them, in 1859, in the context of his analysis of the similarities and differences in products and money.[6] Without dwelling at length on an analysis of the lines, we ask ourselves to what extent this attestation of Pushkin is *biographical* and to what extent the author is speaking seriously, in other words, how much is irony and exaggeration.

Even though Pushkin definitely dissociates himself from Onegin ("...I was his friend at the time...") (IV, 24) he did, as we know, give many of his own personality traits and biographical facts to the hero of the novel. The moral portrait, intellectual interests and preferred reading of Onegin, especially, have much in common with Pushkin himself. The fact that Onegin was not a poet ("...in spite of all our efforts, I have never been able to distinguish an iamb from a trochee") (IV, 10) points up their resemblance in other areas.

We can imagine that Pushkin had himself in mind when he qualified his Onegin as "a profound economist." Of course, there is a large dose of irony and facetious exaggeration—to be exact, self-irony (no great poet was more prone to self-irony than Pushkin, with the possible exception of Heinrich Heine). Certainly, neither the worldly dandy Onegin nor Pushkin could have been or were economists in the academic sense of the word. However, that is not the question. As far as Pushkin is concerned, the question is one of understanding or even perception of the

[5] A.S. Pushkin, *Works*, ten volumes, Moscow, Arististic Literature, 1974-1978, Vol. IV, p. 10. All the references that follow refer to this edition.
[6] Karl Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy*, K. Marx and F. Engels, *Works*.

role of economic processes in the development of society, of an acquaintance with the great ideas of Western European science, of a taste for economic reflection and economic intuition.

The problem thus stated, we may more clearly appreciate the economic knowledge, preoccupations and opinions of the poet, such as we see them reflected in a number of his works. The first chapter of *Onegin* was conceived and written when the author was only twenty-three or twenty-four years old. His formation was limited to instruction received in classical lycee, from which he emerged at eighteen. The years that followed were for him years of juvenile dissipation, intense creation, pilgrimages to the Caucasus and Southern Russia. How was Pushkin able to become a "profound economist," however ironic we may find these words to be? As everyone knows, the study of economics takes no small amount of work and time.

First of all, because he was Pushkin! A genial poet and a man with multiple gifts, with an extraordinarily broad horizon, with a phenomenal ability to absorb and perceive. And so, also, were the *time* and the *place*.

In the unfinished work published with the conventional title, *Epistolary Romance* (1829), Onegin's double (a little older) writes to his friend: "Your speculations and solemn pronouncements belong to 1818. At that time, strict morals and political economy were fashionable." But, continues the author, "[today]... everything has changed. The French quadrille has replaced Adam Smith, and everyone frolics and amuses himself to suit his own taste." (V, 415).

These lines referring to 1818 are a transparent allusion to the Decembrists. "Strict morals" was their devotion to the cause of liberty, their self-abnegation for the service of Russia. There, again, political economy. At that time, these words had a particular resonance. They were associated with ideas of economic and political liberty, with the struggle against serfdom and autocracy. For Nikolai Turgenev, the most eminent economist among the Decembrists, economic science should serve as a basis for "the constitutional liberty of the peoples of Europe." His book, *Essay on the Theory of Taxation*, was published during that very year of 1818. Turgenev admitted, many years later, that "everyone was astonished that the censors let such a book

appear." [7] The fact is that behind the somewhat academic facade was hidden an indignant denunciation of serfdom, a criticism of the entire economic and political structure of Russia. He wrote, and with reason, "I stigmatized detested slavery in sufficiently understandable and strong terms, and to my mind nothing as clear and precise on serfdom had ever been printed in Russian." [8]

It is not known for certain whether or not Pushkin read Turgenev's book on taxes. It is not in the poet's extensive library, which may be easily explained by the fact that Pushkin only began to collect books systematically at the end of the 1820s, when *Essay on the Theory of Taxation* was already on the list of forbidden books. Nonetheless, the theories contained in the work, especially the political and economic ideas, were very near to those of Pushkin. During the years 1817-1819 Pushkin had a close relationship with Turgenev, and some of the verses written at that time were written under Turgenev's influence. This is particularly evident in the celebrated poem, *"The Country,"* (1819), one of the best examples of patriotic lyricism from Pushkin's early period. In it we find not only a condemnation of serfdom but also the very clear elements of socio-economic reflection:

> Blind to tears, deaf to groans,
> Destined by fate for the misery of man,
> Ferocious nobility, insensitive and without law,
> Usurps power by the force of the rod,
> The work, possessions and time of the laborer.
> Bent over another's plow and bowed under the whip,
> An emaciated enslaved people drags through the furrows
> Of the implacable master (I, 82)

We perceive in this poetic imagery the speech of the liberal economy of the time. These verses indirectly express the essential thesis of this political economy, that is, that the income

[7] N.I. Turgenev, *Rossia i Rouskie*, Moscow, 1915, Vol. I, p. 72. This book was written and first published by the author in French in Brussels (1847). It was banned by the czarist censors and did not appear in Russian until the twentieth century.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

from the work of slaves or serfs is low compared to that of salaried workers. Notice also *another's plow*, which inevitably brings up the association with the perfectly contemporary term of *alienation*: the alienation of the worker with regard to the means of production that do not belong to him and serve as instruments for the exploitation of his work. Those were the years in which the hope of seeing the peasants liberated by a decision from on high—by the "whim of the Czar"—was at its height. Pushkin shared these hopes with Turgenev and other future Decembrists. They proved to be illusory, but Pushkin also shared another idea with them—a more important one—that he expressed some years later in a form that showed his greater maturity: "... our political liberty is inseparable from that of the peasants." (VII, 162). In other words, without the abolition of serfdom, no progress in civil liberties was possible in Russia. This thought figured in a sketch of 1822 that appeared with the title, *Russian History in the 18th Century*. Once more political economy appears but in an unexpected light—the poet, reproaching the "cruel activity" of Catherine II's despotism "parading under the mask of sweetness and tolerance," the "repugnant buffoonery of her relations with the philosophers of the century," and various other sins, also reproaches the Czarina for "serious errors with regard to political economy." (VII, 163). We see very well from the context to what Pushkin referred: the concession of Crown peasants (free farmers) to private owners as serfs, the extension of serfdom to the free Ukraine and the Polish provinces. The feudal structure of Russia, based on serfdom, was thus reinforced and made the first steps toward progressive capitalist development all the more difficult.

It goes without saying that these "errors" were glaring with regard to political economy as Pushkin conceived it, as Turgenev professed with passion and as Adam Smith, the "Scottish hermit," had stated before them.

For the Decembrists, political economy, at that time closely associated with the name of Adam Smith, was, along with the ideas of the Western philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment, one of the principal sources of their libertarian theses. However, just as the Decembrists were not an isolated group of conspirators, the "fashion" of economy was not limited to their

*milieu.* Political economy enjoyed a great popularity in university, journalistic, literary and worldly circles. As long as its content was not too "liberal," political economy seemed to be a quite respectable and useful science of "wealth," of the most rational means for increasing the wealth of nations and even individuals. Still more important, it seemed to provide the answer to the most delicate question of the time, that of the direction Russia should follow toward social and economic development.

This fashion corresponded to another aspect of the complex personality of the young Pushkin: his worldly side. If the historical and literary circumstances had been favorable, Onegin might have been a Decembrist. However, it is not so much as a revolutionary that we know him but as a man of the world, intelligent and bitter. His infatuation for Adam Smith and economic problems is all the more curious. There is another amusing remark in *Eugene Onegin* apropos the vogue of political economics among the "originals of the *haut monde*":

> Again, someone or other
> May explain Say or Bentham to you,
> But most often their conversation
> Is a torment, however innocent.

Jean-Baptiste Say and Jeremy Bentham were received in Russia in the 1820s as oracles of economic and political liberalism. Say, in particular, was appreciated as the one who popularized Smith and was considered the greatest Western European economist of the time. He was elected to the Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg as a foreign member. Bentham, who had traditional ties with Russia, was more particularly known for his fight against Negro slavery.

The mode of political economy was spread all over Europe, and it was imported to Russia from England and France, like many other articles, tangible and intangible. This popularity sometimes took on amusing forms. An English woman of letters, Mary Edgeworth, records that in London society of the 1820s it had become fashionable to talk about economic themes and that ladies tried to be equal to the task. Wealthy ladies would occasionally require that an applicant for a position as governess be able to teach political economics to the children.

One such governess, who considered herself perfectly qualified, with her knowledge of French, Italian, music, dance and drawing, was disconcerted by such a requirement and answered after some hesitation, "No, Madam, I cannot say that I teach political economy, but if you think it necessary, I shall try to study it." To which the lady replied, "Oh, no, dear, if you do not teach it, you are not suited for the position." [9]

Political economy was taught in the classical lycee of Tsarskoïe Selo, which was reputed to give its students an education in no way inferior to university instruction. Information regarding a teacher might read as follows: "A.P. Kunitsyn, assistant professor, teaches political economics in the upper classes, using his own notes based on Adam Smith." [10] It also fell to him to teach natural law, which several decades earlier had included political economy.

> A toast from our hearts to Kunitsyn,
> He created us, he educated our clan,
> He placed the cornerstone,
> He lighted the illuminating lamp...

Those lines were written by Pushkin for the anniversary of his lycee in 1825. He mentioned Kunitsyn again in the verses he wrote for the last anniversary in which he was to participate, in 1836. As his contemporaries remarked, Pushkin was always enthusiastic about Kunitsyn's course and had an unwavering respect for him as long as he lived.

Kunitsyn had been a fellow student of Nikolai Turgenev at the University of Göttingen, and the two men remained friends, sharing the same ideas during the flourishing years of their respective scientific and literary careers. It was Kunitsyn who wrote the first published review of Turgenev's *Essay*. In it he solemnly declared that from that date political economy was also the work of "native Russians." It is hardly possible to doubt that Pushkin had read the book as well as the review. When in

[9] Quotation taken from D. Ricardo, *Works and Correspondence*, ed. P. Sraffa and M. Dobb, Cambridge, 1955, Vol. X, p. 172.

[10] Quotation from *Pushkin and his Times. Studies and Documents*, I, Leningrad, 1962.

1819 Turgenev and Kunitsyn had the idea of putting out a magazine, which in fact was to help them spread the idea of the Council of Prosperity (the most important of the early Decembrist revolutionary organizations), they considered obtaining Pushkin's collaboration.

All this should make it easier for us to understand the verses from *Eugene Onegin* at the beginning of this article. In them, Pushkin enthusiastically demonstrates how important the basic idea of Smith's classical political economy was to him, one that he distinguished from older and more primitive theories, such as mercantilism. The true wealth of a nation is not in gold but in the "simple product," that is, in the harmonious development of the forces of production, in the ability to produce large quantities of different products. However, the fact that the well-being of nations "does not lie in money" in no way excludes the difficulty confronting the one who owns the merchandise when he wants to transform it into money, or to put it more simply, at the time of sale. For the hero's father, a small ruined landowner (in whom, by the way, it is not difficult to recognize the poet's father, Sergei Lvovitch Pushkin), this difficulty is insurmountable and forces him to mortgage the family estates, that is, to take out loans against them, presumably from one of the state banking institutions of the time. We may suspect that in the centuries-old history of political economy its truths had never been expressed in such a form!

## II

The Turgenev family played an important role in Pushkin's life. It was the oldest brother, Alexander Ivanovitch, who took little Sasha Pushkin to the lycee; it was also he who accompanied the mortal remains of the poet—during the reign of the *Gendarme*, Nicholas I—in a coffin covered with a straw mat to the monastery of Sviatogorski, near Pskov. For all of Pushkin's life he was the faithful older friend, the recipient of many letters from the poet and the author of important biographical notes on his life. Pushkin also knew Sergei Ivanovitch very well, the youngest brother who died at an early age. Nikolai Ivanovitch, the middle

brother, was ten years older than Pushkin. He attempted to direct the formidable talent of Pushkin toward the good of the nation. Severe and somewhat cold, it seems that he sometimes chastized the rash young man. Pushkin challenged him to a duel after one of these importunities but quickly changed his mind and took back his challenge.

We are not acquainted with Pushkin's letters to N.I. Turgenev, but the allusions to the poet in Turgenev's letters to his brothers show, in spite of their facetious nature, a great respect and a deep understanding of the ideas and activity of Pushkin. In a letter from Pushkin to A.I. Turgenev dated July 9, 1819 (and thus before his departure for Mikhaylovskiy, where he wrote *The Country*) there is an enigma: "I am terribly sorry not to have said good-bye to you, nor to the two Mirabeau." Assuming that one of the two Mirabeau was Nikolai Ivanovitch, who was the other? According to the famous Pushkin scholar, D.D. Blagoĭ, the "two Mirabeau" could only have been one and the same person, that is, Nikolai Turgenev,[11] and it seems likely that this thesis is correct. Nikolai Turgenev would have been at the same time Mirabeau-*père*, an economist of the Physiocrat School and author of a book on taxes, and Mirabeau-*fils*, the tribune of the French Revolution, who, like Turgenev, was lame.

Mirabeau-*fils* was very popular in Russia and in the eyes of Pushkin represented the model citizen and patriot. We know that Turgenev was nicknamed "Mirabeau" in his circle of friends. In this regard, a hasty note by Pushkin dated 1823 and deciphered by an expert as follows takes on a particular meaning: "Only revolutionary minds like those of Mirabeau and Piotr can love Russia the way a writer loves its language. Everything must be created in this Russia and in this Russian language." (VII, 299). Another, no less well-known, Pushkin scholar, B.S. Meillach, not long ago published an article according to which Mirabeau was a code name given by Pushkin to Turgenev, and Piotr (Peter I) must be read "Pestel." [12] Pavel Ivanovitch Pestel was the leader of the most radical wing of the Decembrist movement and, in ad-

[11] D.D. Blagoĭ, *Doucha v zavietnoj lire, Otcherki žizni i tvortchestva Pouchkina*, Moscow, 1977, p. 268.
[12] *Literatournaja Gazeta*, 1979, No. 7, p. 6.

dition, a man who knew and loved political economy. He recommended the reading of Smith to the new members of the revolutionary society. Pushkin knew him well and left a note in his journal of 1821 indicating that he had had a "metaphysical, political, moral, etc., conversation" with Pestel (VII, 262).

Chapter X of *Eugene Onegin*, which was not finished and which Pushkin burned in 1830, fearing persecution in the event that the text fell into the hands of the authorities, contained severe judgments on Alexander I and the situation of Russia during his reign, as well as thoughts and memories of the Decembrists. A sizeable fragment of this chapter was reconstituted following an incomplete copy made by the author himself. It describes the meetings and discussions of the members of the Council of Prosperity in the following words:

> Seeing only Russia in the world,
> And following its ideal,
> Lame Turgenev listened to them,
> And hating the whips of slavery,
> He saw in this noble gathering
> Those who would liberate the peasants.

Here Pushkin expressed the central idea of the entire activity of Turgenev (liberation of the peasants) and even opposed, up to a point, the "reformism" of Turgenev to the political and terrorist actions at that time proposed by two eminent members of the secret society, Lunin and IAkushin.

Turgenev did not suffer the fate of the other Decembrists, since he was on an extended holiday abroad in 1824-1825. He refused to appear before the board of inquiry charged with the Decembrist affair and was condemned to death by default, a sentence that was later commuted to forced labor for life.

The last forty years of his life Turgenev lived in France, where he died in 1871. His obituary in *Le Temps* related that he was known for having participated in the "conspiracy of 1825" and for having written a book on taxes. A friend of Turgenev in Russia, the economist Hyppolite Passy, former Minister of Finance, informed his colleagues during a meeting of the Political Economics Society of the death of one of the earliest mem-

bers of that organization, one who had participated in its work up until the last moment.[13]

During the summer of 1826 while Pushkin was in exile at Mikhaylovskiy, he was informed (mistakenly, fortunately) that Turgenev had been delivered to the Czarist government by England and trasported by ship to St. Petersburg. He reacted to this news with sorrow and anger in a letter to their mutual friend, Prince P.A. Viazemski. The letter contains a famous sentence: "... hanged men are hanged, but the forced labor inflicted on one hundred and twenty of our friends, brothers and comrades is horrible" (IX, 222). Using every possible means at his disposal (quite limited) to relieve their situation, Pushkin also tried—thus giving proof of a great civic courage—to obtain Turgenev's pardon from Nicholas I. In the memo he wrote "by orders from above" on national education (the end of 1826), he indirectly took on the defense of the criminal against the state by endeavoring to convince the czar of the "morality and moderation" of Turgenev and let it be clearly understood that the latter, with his brilliant education and remarkable abilities, could render great service in the management of government affairs. The czar put a question mark in the margin after this passage and, in all, we find forty question marks and one exclamation point in the hand of Nicholas I. Others with considerably more influence also intervened in behalf of Turgenev, especially the poet and courtier V.A. Joukovski. But in vain.

Outlining the curriculum for secondary schools, lycees and university seminars, Pushkin wrote: "The terminal years will be spent in teaching higher political science, law, political economy, according to the completely new system of Say and Sismondi, statistics, history." (VII, 311).

Pushkin continued to think of political economy as a means for educating the *citizen*. The "completely new system" was the liberal ideas of Say and the humanistic and critical views on capitalism of the Swiss thinker Sismondi, views that he set down in an extensive work published in 1819. How well and in what detail did Pushkin know the works of Say and Sismondi

[13] *Archives of the Turgenev Brothers.* Private journals of N.I. Turgenev, St. Petersburg, Vol. II (1811-1816), pp. 16-18.

(and Smith's book on the wealth of nations)? We do not know. However, it is hard to believe that he could mention these names in a carefully reflected official memo without having a sufficiently clear idea of them.

Sismondi was not only an economist but also a historian and literary critic, which could only make him more sympathetic to Pushkin. In a letter to his brother Lev, dated March 14, 1825, Pushkin asks him to send, among others, a "Sismondi (literature)," that is, the work of Sismondi on Southern European literature (IX, 133). The following passage, taken from his article "*From Moscow to St. Petersburg,*" written in 1833-1834, and not published during the life of the author, is in spirit close to Sismondi's ideas: "Read the complaints of English factory workers: your hair will stand on end. How many revolting tortures, incomprehensible torments! What cold barbarism on the one side, and on the other, what dreadful poverty! Do you think it is a matter here of the building of the pyramids, of Hebrews working under the whip of the Egyptians? Not at all. It is the woven cloth of Mr. Smith or the needles of Mr. Jackson. And note well that there is no abuse, no crime; no, all this takes place within the strict limits of the law. It seems that there has never been a more unfortunate man in the world than the English worker, but look what happens over there when a new machine is invented, suddenly liberating five or six million people from forced labor and depriving them of their last means of livelihood..." (VI, 349).

Approximation does not, of course, mean direct borrowing, but this passage proves that Pushkin was perfectly aware of the results and contradictions of the development of capitalism at the time of the industrial revolution. Had he lived a little longer, with his turn of mind and broadness of view he could probably have become interested in the work of young Engels, *Condition of the Working Classes in England*, which appeared ten years later and was discussed in Russian magazines in the 1850s. Some articles devoted to this question were published in *Contemporary*, the magazine founded by Pushkin in 1836.

The article quoted above again mentions political economics as a science. Ironical and critical as it is, the mention again proves that Pushkin knew the literature relative to this subject.

Comparing the magazines of Moscow and St. Petersburg, he came out in favor of the first: "... Petersburg magazines judge literature as they do music, music as they do political economy, that is, off-handedly and no matter how, sometimes appropriately and wittily, but most of the time superficially, without depth" (VI, 339).

## III

The Pushkin of the 1830s was not only a poet and novelist but also a historian, publicist and literary critic. His reflections on the past, present and future of Russia, on the fate of Western European civilization, on social conditions and the role of literature and men of letters, constantly led him back to economic and social problems. Experience and intuition told him that the economic basis and material conditions of existence largely determined politics, ideas and culture.

The *History of Pugachev* is preceded by a description of living conditions among the Cossacks in the Ural River region, among whom the insurrection began. In the appendix, which he did not include in the published edition but presented to the authorities separately, Pushkin makes the following observation, astonishing as much for its daring as for its profundity, on the class structure of Russian society and on the social reasons for the peasant uprising of 1773-1775: "All the little people were for Pugachev. The clergy was also favorable to him, not only the priests and monks but even the archimandrites and archpriests. Only the nobility was openly on the side of the government. Pugachev and his companions had initially hoped to carry the nobles with them, but their respective interests were too conflicting. (The administrative employees and petty functionaries were as yet few and indisputably belonged to the people. The same may be said for officers risen from the ranks: they were very numerous in Pugachev's forces.)" (VII, 129).

Pushkin belonged to one of the oldest noble families of Russia and was proud of it. The fate of the nobility, its place in the future of the country, were of deep concern to him, and this is seen in his artistic works (for example, his tale, *Dubrovsky*, and

selections from his *Epistolary Romance*); in his political articles (*Remarks on the Russian Nobility*, 1830); and in his private journal. He saw with sadness the decadence of the nobility in which he would have liked to see the hereditary superior order of the *people*, legitimized "by the people or their representatives"... "in order to have powerful defenders or direct representatives close to the seat of authority" (VI, 310). He saw the nobility as mediator between the people and autocracy, responsible for the interests of a peasantry that was illiterate and without rights. His hero Dubrovsky becomes through the force of circumstances a typical hero of chivalry. Unfortunately, the winner in the conflict drawn by Pushkin is not Dubrovsky, but the proponent of slavery Troyekurov, in whom Pushkin reunited all the negative traits he abhorred in the new nobility of arrogant lords who had not acquired their wealth and power in military compaigns nor in serving the State with honor but in the palaces of St. Petersburg, in the bedroom of the czar or that of his lackeys.

The economic reasons for the decline of the nobility were seen by Pushkin to be the suppression of the right of primogeniture in Russia (as opposed to England, for example), that is, the great domains passing entire and undivided to the oldest heir. However, he well knew that a more profound reason existed: namely, the crisis of economy based on serfdom, the impossibility of developing the country's economy on a feudal basis resting on serfdom. All his work is strewn with precise observations and bitter reflections on this theme. He was always indignant about the half-way, or even completely, forbidden peasant uprisings, revolts and insurrections. In fact, this is the subject of his *History of Pugachev* and *The Captain's Daughter*, and it is also present in *Dubrovsky* and many other works that did not appear during his lifetime because of censorship. The *Journey from Moscow to St. Petersburg*, the article we quoted above, ends with a short account of a landowner attempting to convert serfdom into slavery pure and simple and to *encasernement*: "The peasant no longer possessed anything of his own—he worked with the plow of the *barine*, hitched up to the horse of the *barine*, his livestock had been sold, he took his meals at the spartan table set up in the courtyard of the *barine*, he had

neither house, nor soup, nor bread. His clothing, what he wore on his feet, all was distributed to him by the lord..." And how did it all end? "The lord was killed by his peasants during a fire." (VI, 359)

Pushkin had mixed feelings about the slow but sure advent of capitalist forms of economy and the reinforcement of the middle class. A realist in literature as in life, he could not help seeing that the future lay there. Depicting the decline of seignorial Moscow with an ironic nostalgia, he saw signs of a new prosperity: "... industry, strongly protected, became animated and developed with an extraordinary power. The merchant class became wealthy and began to move into the abandoned palaces of the nobility." (VI, 338-339). Was this good or bad? Pushkin wisely refrains from answering, from giving his opinion: after all, that was life, reality, historical necessity.

Again in 1824, in "The Conversation between the Bookseller and the Poet", he states:

> Our mercantile century. In this century of iron
> There is no liberty without money. (I, 223)

Half a century earlier, Edmond Burke had written: "The time for chivalry is past, that of the sophists, economists and calculators has come." [14] With his artist's intuition Pushkin felt and translated this historical turn of events, and the epithet "of iron" is a happy phrase which, taken up a century later by Blok, seems a forgery:

> Nineteenth century, century of iron,
> A cruel century, in truth...[15]

We have additional proof of Pushkin's interest in economic theory and practice in the observations he wrote in the margins of the book Mikhail Fedorovitch Orlov, *Of State Credit*. A general on active duty, a friend of N.I. Turgenev, a member of the earliest circles and revolutionary societies, Orlov escaped the lot of most of the Decembrists, coming out with six months'

[14] P. Samuelson, *Economics. An Introductory Analysis*, 7th ed., New York, 1967, pp. 222.

[15] Alevander Blok, "*Vozmezdie*," in *Stikhotvorenia, poemy, teatr*, Leningrad, 1936, p. 351.

detention at the fortress of Petropavlovsk and exile on his own estates, thanks to the intercession of his brother, the favorite of Nicholas I. Orlov ended his days in Moscow, uninvolved in affairs and under police surveillance. Pushkin was very close to him during his own exile at Kichinev and maintained friendly relations with him during the 1830s. Pushkin's library contains two copies of Orlov's book, published in 1833, one of which bears a dedication.

In his book, edited so as to satisfy the requirements of censorship, in spite of which it was disfigured by the censors, Orlov barely touched on the condition of affairs in Russia. On the other hand, he endeavored to show the advantages of the free development of capitalism and upheld that a large State credit (loans to the State by private capitalists and other creditors) was the means to assure such a development.

To Orlov's statement that credit is a means of exchange, Pushkin replied: "Of course, no one invented credit or confidence. It invented itself, as a condition, as a rapport. It was born at the time the first exchange took place." [16] This opinion of Pushkin is quite correct; it shows the evolutive and spontaneous nature of economic processes, in the production of which new social phenomena arise.

Neither was Pushkin in agreement with Orlov's idea that there was a fundamental difference between private and State credit—the lender in the first case hoping to regain the money he lent and in the second being primarily concerned with the regular revenue that interest on his capital would insure. Pushkin points out: "The restitution of capital is obviously not the predominant idea in *private credit*, but the increase in capital thanks to interest." [17] There again, Pushkin sees more clearly than the author. When all is said and done, when the lender has good guarantees, there is no essential difference between a loan to the State and to a private party (or to an enterprise). This has been confirmed by the later development of capitalist credit, by the competition between State and private loans and by the equalization of the interest rates of both. These remarks of

[16] A.S. Pushkin, *Complete Works* (in Russian, 4th ed.). *Khoudojestvennaja Literatoura*, 1936, Vol. VI, p. 531.
[17] *Ibid.*

Pushkin are worthy of a professional and touch on concrete, even technical, questions. If he had not been a great poet, who knows whether Pushkin might not have become a proficient economist? However, we would not have gained by it.

On the personal level, Pushkin was very preoccupied with the question of credit, his finances having been extremely difficult during the last years of his life. He was able to confirm the extraordinary lack of credit in Russia, where private banks did not even exist. He would have liked to offer his pay and the revenue from his writing as guarantees, but he could find no one to lend him money. We read in a rough draft of the letter to Count A. Kh. Bendendrof (his intermediary with the Czar) dated April-May, 1835 that he needed 100,000 rubles to organize his family affairs and to work in tranquillity, but, he adds with melancholy, "It is not possible in Russia." (X, 223, original in French).

Pushkin was also interested in industrial development in Russia, especially in the construction of railroads. He took up the question as editor of *The Contemporary*, in which he published a number of articles on economy and technique. At a time when the first signs of the railroad "boom" were appearing (Russia was ten to twenty years behind Europe in that area), he came out against State financing of railway building: "I am obviously not against railroads, but I am opposed to the government's building of them." (X, 309) He was even interested in the details, such as the need to invent a snow-plow, considering Russia's climate and the big problem presented by snowdrifts.

## IV

In conclusion, let us read his tragedy, *The Bronze Horseman*, with the eyes of the historian and the economist. To be sure, it is a tragedy of human passions, of the collision of strong characters, but it is also the tragedy of the power of money, of the phenomenon and pathology of the need to accumulate. The action takes place, apparently, in France in the 15th-16th centuries, or in neighboring countries. The period is that which is called the one of initial accumulation, in which the instrument of capitalist production is prepared. We still see the old feudal world of suzerains and

vassals, of tournaments and beautiful ladies but at the same time a world in which money has already begun to rule, in which "there is no liberty without money." The brave knight Albert is reduced to impotence by his poverty.

The old baron is not only a miser, belonging to the great literary family of Shylock, Harpagon and Plyushkin, not only a usurer, like the Jew Solomon, but a "hoarder" of treasure. Money (at that time precious metals, paper money not having been invented) is important to him not in circulation but "in repose." He says, adding a handful of gold to his sixth money chest, not yet full:

> Go, you have run enough risks in this world
> Serving the passions and needs of man.
> Sleep here the sleep of power and peace,
> As the gods sleep in their remote heaven. (IV, 270)

For the baron, the value of gold is in the potential power it holds, in the *possibility* of obtaining the most extravagant things with it: palaces, gardens, flocks of nymphs, the services of the muses and geniuses... The capitalist-miser living like an ascetic and possessed by the passion for accumulating capital is not a new figure in life nor in literature. Such is Balzac's Gobseck. But Pushkin's baron is different; he is not only ascetic in his needs but he tries not to let go of his money *as capital,* as an instrument of increasing value. We can imagine his torment when he must take a handful of gold from his coffer to lend it—even at a high interest rate. There is no doubt that he accumulates money less as a usurer than as a feudalist, thanks to the fines he extorts from his vassals, peasants and traveling merchants.

According to Marx: "This aspiration to riches in the absolute, this passionate quest for valuables, are common characteristics of the capitalist and hoarder [such as our baron], but while the *hoarder is only a lunatic capitalist* [the underlining is ours], the capitalist is a rational seeker after money. The continuing increase in value that the hoarder tries to obtain in retiring his money from circulation, the more aware capitalist obtains by keeping it in circulation." [18]

[18] Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Vol. I, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Works*, Vol. XXIII, p. 164 (Russian edition).

The baron's behavior is not only madness but an *economic crime*. The economic development of Western Europe at the end of the Middle Ages and up until the 16th century was hampered by the lack of precious metals. As we know, the hunger for gold was the drive that launched the Spanish and Portuguese on the seas, that led to the discovery of America and the sea route to India. According to experts, the "civilized world" of Western Europe had, at the time of the discovery of America, a circulation of around 300 to 600 tons of gold.[19] What fraction of this mass of gold that should have been "lubricating" the developing economic machine of an entire continent was sleeping in the six money boxes of the baron?

The prodigal son who spent the inert wealth of his father would have been economically more useful, since the money he threw into circulation would have been transformed into capital in other hands and would have animated sluggish resources. What from one point of view seems a virtue (extreme economy) may be a sin from the point of view of a national economy. Inversely, the personal vice of the usurer may have beneficial consequences for the economy of a country. Could not the death of the baron be considered as punishment for the economic crime of accumulating a useless treasure?

The essential social problem at the end of the Middle Ages and in modern times—the passage from feudalism to capitalism—is seen in a number of ways in Pushkin's works. If at the time of Pushkin this problem had been resolved in Western Europe, it was quite otherwise in Russia. The poet's interest in social history is proved by a sizeable dramatic fragment inspired by medieval Europe, written in 1835 and published with the title, *Scenes of Courtly Times*. In it we find this characteristic dialogue:

> *Berthold* (monk, disinterested erudite and alchemist):
> I do not need money; I am looking only for the truth.
> *Martin* (bourgeois): For my part, truth can go to the
> devil; it is money I need. (IV, 353)

At the time of feudalism, gold was the materialization of wealth and the aspiration of the dawning *bourgeoisie*, still de-

[19] H. Quiring, *Geschichte des Goldes*, Stuttgart, 1948, p. 203.

prived of political rights. As such, it was opposed to the lands and sword of the feudal lords. For the *bourgeoisie*, gold was first of all a monetary capital that could and should be put into circulation to increase the initial capital. The loan of 150 florins that Martin makes to Berthold after long hesitation is also an investment for him: he believes that the alchemist will discover the secret for making gold and thus he will receive, as a lender, an enormous dividend.

Pushkin's universe is extraordinarily vast. The few observations we have made here on his economic preoccupations are far from exhausting the subject; they only sketch in the outlines. A more thorough study could be made and would be desirable.