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N. M. Iazykov as a Slavophile Poet

On his return to Russia in July 1843 after a period of convalescence in Western Europe, Iazykov was confronted by a literary situation which bore little resemblance to the one he had left in July 1838, five years earlier. Many important nineteenth-century poets had already died by the time of Iazykov's departure: Ryleev (1826), Venevitinov (1827), Griboedov (1829), Delvig (1831), Gnedich (1833), Pushkin, Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, the fabulist Dmitriev (all in 1837), and Polezhaev (early 1838). Nevertheless, poetry continued to be the dominant form of literary expression, at least until April 1840, when Lermontov first published the full text of *Geroi nashego vremeni*. By late 1843, however, the tide had turned decisively in favor of prose. Many more poets had died—Davydov and Alexander Odoevsky (1839), Kozlov and Stankevich (1840), Lermontov himself (1841), and Koltsov (1842). Baratynsky and Krylov were to die in 1844. Moreover, a number of others had ceased to exert a significant influence as poets: Zhukovsky (who emigrated permanently in 1841), Viazemsky, and lesser figures such as Glinka, Katenin, and Küchelbecker. By 1843 most of the journals and almanacs that had first published the great lyric poetry of the Pushkin era had gone out of existence. During Iazykov's years abroad many influential publications, such as the journal *Moskovskii nabliudatel'* (1835–39) and the almanac *Utrenniaia zaria* (1839–43), had disappeared from the literary scene.

In these same years (1838–43) Romantic prose continued to flourish, notably through the inspiration of Gogol, who in 1842, for example, published not only two new stories—*Rim* and *Shinel'*—and an expanded version of *Taras Bul'ba*, but also the first volume of *Mertvye dushi*. Other prose writers in the Romantic style, such as Vladimir Odoevsky and Vladimir Sollogub, did much of their best work in the early forties. But more important, during these years the “Natural'naia shkola” group of writers moved toward the forefront and assured that in the succeeding decades committed literature (*ideinaiia literatura*), as well as prose, would predominate. The periodicals that came into being at this critical time reflected the new mood and outlook. While *Otechestvennyye zapiski* (1839–84) espoused “progressive” attitudes, *Moskvitianin* (1841–56) soon became the organ of *ofitsial'naia narodnost'*. The only prestigious journal to survive from Pushkin's day was *Sovremennik*. But it did so only at the expense of radical changes in editorial policy, especially during the years 1847–66, while it was in the hands of Nikolai Nekrasov.

In order to maintain a position of importance, poetry too had to be involved in the social problems and ideological preoccupations of the age. This in fact began to happen before the decade was very far advanced. The earliest attempts in the direction of "civic" poetry had already been published before Iazykov's return to Russia—the most important of them by Ogarev and Nekrasov.¹ The manner in which Iazykov adapted to these changes is a problem that has been unduly slighted by literary historians.

When he arrived in Moscow in late July 1843, Iazykov had little more than three years left to live. During this final period his health steadily deteriorated. Already by April 1844 his illness had reached the stage where his doctor forbade him to travel, even to visit his family in Simbirsk Province. But although it was painful for him to walk, he continued to participate actively in the literary and philosophical salons of the old capital, and during the winter of 1843–44 held a salon of his own on Tuesdays for Moscow's eminent literary figures. He wrote some poetry, yet hardly as much as during his "first Moscow period" (1829–32).² Among his late poetic works are a series of verse letters (*poslaniia*) addressed to his old Moscow friends (including P. A. Viazemsky, M. P. Pogodin, and A. P. Kireevskaia-Elagina) and the still young poet Ia. P. Polonsky, two rather unimpressive narrative poems, two religious poems of considerable power,³ and a small but significant cycle of poems defending the ideological position of the Slavophiles.

Iazykov's Slavophile cycle, which consists entirely of polemical *poslaniia*, was written mainly in December 1844. This was the time of the bitterest quarreling between Moscow's Slavophiles and Westernizers. The confrontation was initiated by the Westernizer T. N. Granovsky, who in the winter of 1843–44 gave his first course of public lectures on medieval history. The following winter S. P. Shevyrev responded to Granovsky with a Slavophile-inspired survey of the literature of pre-Petrine Russia. So sternly did Iazykov

1. For a discussion of why Tiutchev, Fet, and the other so-called art-for-art's-sake poets stand apart from the main currents of Russian poetry after 1840 see Maximilian Braun, "Der Daseinskampf der russischen Lyrik im 19. Jahrhundert," *Die Welt der Slaven*, 1, no. 3 (1956): 308–21.

A treatment of the trends in poetry in the 1840s more detailed and sophisticated than mine is given by B. Ia. Bukhshtab in his introduction to *Poety 1840–1850–kh godov* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1962; *Biblioteka poeta*, malaia seriia, 3rd ed.), pp. 5–86.

Note added to galley proof: The bol'shaia seriia, 2nd ed., of this collection has just become available (Leningrad, 1972). Bukhshtab here introduces some new material on Slavophile poetry, but otherwise made few revisions (pp. 5–60).

2. A term first used by M. K. Azadovsky, in his introduction to N. M. Iazykov, *Sobranie stikhotvorenii* (Leningrad, 1948; *Biblioteka poeta*, bol'shaia seriia, 1st ed.), p. xvi.

3. One of these, "Zemletriasen'e," can be considered a Slavophile manifesto. See also note 11.

defend Shevyrev's assertion of the value of Russia's cultural past that some contemporaries even claimed that his polemical poems, in particular the one addressed to P. Ia. Chaadaev, provoked the final breakdown of relations between the two groups.⁴

The poems of this cycle form an integral part of Iazykov's work, both in theme and in style. It is an unfortunate commonplace of recent literary criticism of Iazykov that this late group of poems—indeed the poetry of his final years as a whole—is regarded only as an appendix to his work of the 1820s, if it is mentioned at all.⁵ Actually Iazykov's espousal of the Slavophile cause had deep roots in his past. During his first Moscow period he had stayed with the Kireevsky family, where he not only came into contact with all the prominent literary figures of the era, but also played an important role in preparing the basic working material of the future Slavophile ideology. He was an active worker for the journal edited by Ivan Kireevsky, *Evropeets*, which was banned in 1832 (the year it was founded) because its third number contained a pessimistic editorial article on Russian civilization.⁶ At about the same time Iazykov became a leading participant in a project to collect Russian folk songs for publication by the younger of the Kireevsky brothers, Peter. This project, inspired by Pushkin himself,⁷ was designed to show that Russia did have its own original cultural heritage from the pre-Petrine era. It is significant that the scholar who has contributed the most to a true evaluation of Iazykov and his poetry, the distinguished Soviet folklorist Mark Azadovsky, was first drawn to Iazykov by his song-collecting activity. Azadovsky even says at one point: "The name Iazykov is very closely connected with folklore. Without a doubt one can say that it belongs not only to the history of Russian literature but also to the history of Russian folklore studies. Along with Peter Kireevsky, Iazykov can be considered one of the initiators and most ardent advocates of the idea

4. See, for example, D. N. Sverbeev, "Vospominaniia o Petre Chaadaeve," *Russkii arkhiv*, 1869, no. 6, cols. 992–93.

5. V. N. Orlov, at least, devotes the last two pages of his article on Iazykov to the period beginning in 1833: "Iazykov," in B. S. Meilakh et al., eds., *Istoriia russkoi literatury*, vol. 6 (Moscow and Leningrad, 1953), pp. 430–47. However, Meilakh, writing in B. P. Gorodetsky, ed., *Istoriia russkoi poezii*, 2 vols. (Leningrad, 1968–69), 1:329–42 ("N. M. Iazykov"), limits his discussion almost entirely to the Derpt (Tartu) period, 1822–29. And in the chapter on Iazykov in her book *Poety pushkinskoi pory* (Moscow, 1970), pp. 181–220, I. M. Semenko concentrates on the more purely lyrical aspects of the poetry.

6. The logical conclusion of Ivan Kireevsky's thesis was that Russia had a great destiny. See Alexandre Koyré, *La philosophie et le problème national en Russie au début du XIX^e siècle*, Bibliothèque de l'Institut français de Léningrad, vol. 10 (Paris, 1929), pp. 174–93 (chap. 6: "L'Européen").

7. See the section by A. D. Soimonov on Pushkin in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 79: *Pesni, sobrannye pisateliami: Novye materialy iz arkhiva P. V. Kireevskogo* (Moscow, 1968), pp. 171–230.

of collecting and publishing the works of folk literature."⁸ Iazykov's relations with the members of the nascent Slavophile movement grew still stronger after 1836, when his younger and favorite sister Ekaterina married the poet Aleksei Khomiakov, who in the next decade was to become the leading Slavophile theorist.

Apart from these concrete indications of Iazykov's affinity with Slavophilism, there are numerous passages in his poetry and correspondence of all periods which betray his rather highly developed xenophobia and his pride in all things Russian. One of the more striking instances is found in a poem he addressed in 1840 to the Rhine ("К Рейну"):

Я волжанин: тебе приветы Волги нашей
 Принес я. Слышал ты об ней?
 Велик, прекрасен ты! Но Волга больше, краше,
 Великолепнее, пышней,
 И глубже, быстрее, и шире, голубая! . . .⁹

On the whole, Iazykov's political attitudes and ideals came from his heart rather than his head; for this reason he contented himself with writing only poetry and not prose. To label Iazykov a "kvasnoi patriot," then, is not too ungracious. Although his appreciation of foreign literature was genuine enough,¹⁰ it seems he had not really enjoyed living in Derpt (Tartu) during his student days (1822–29), and his five-year stay in various parts of Europe in a wretched state of health did nothing to lessen his prejudice toward the West. That Iazykov turned to religion in his final years¹¹ makes his sympathies for Slavophilism all the more understandable. For him the most important aspect of the Slavophile doctrine was the pre-eminence it assigned to

8. See Iazykov, *Sobranie stikhotvoreniĭ*, p. xxv (my translation). Iazykov's main collecting activity was during the years of his semiretirement in Simbirsk Province (1832–38).

9. For the full text see N. M. Iazykov, *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvoreniĭ* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1964; *Biblioteka poeta, bol'shaia seriia*, 2nd ed.), pp. 367–69. This, the latest and best researched edition of Iazykov, will be referred to below simply as the 1964 edition.

10. For a thorough account of his attitudes toward German literature based on published materials see Günther Wytrzens, "Nikolaj Michajlovič Iazykov und die deutsche Literatur," *Wiener slavistisches Jahrbuch*, 10 (1963): 73–85. Professor Wytrzens used as his main source E. V. Petukhov, ed., *Iazykovskii arkhiv*, part 1: *Pis'ma N. M. Iazykova k rodnym za derptskiiĭ period ego zhizni (1822–1829)* (St. Petersburg, 1913). However, Iazykov's voluminous correspondence with his family for the remaining years of his life is of even greater significance for this and many other themes. As yet unpublished, these letters are housed in the Manuscript Section of the Institute of Russian Literature of the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad (Pushkinskii dom), fond 348, 19.4.9–19.4.27. Much of the factual information presented in this article is taken from these materials.

11. See his two religious poems, "Zemletriasen'e" (1844: 1964 edition, pp. 384–85) and "Sampson" (1846: 1964 edition, pp. 411–13).

the Orthodox Church—hence his especially bitter attack on Chaadaev's infatuation with Catholicism.

There is no reason to assume, however, that the style and genre of Iazykov's Slavophile cycle of poems represent any kind of inconsistency with his earlier work. He was a poet who had mastered the problems of versification—especially of rhythm and poetic syntax—at a very early stage, and whose diction throughout can be described as “Slavophile.” It should come as no surprise that the late polemical cycle, like much of the poetry Iazykov had written previously, is marked by Church Slavonic and Old Russian forms (used largely for their sonority), and is entirely free of words borrowed from the West that cannot be used for comic and satirical effects. Also, Iazykov's predilection for creating neologisms from native roots can be seen to continue right up to the end of his poetical career.¹²

Recent scholarship finds Iazykov best characterized as an “objective” poet. In his work he concentrated on the external events of his life, on nature, and on the people about him. The author of the first dissertation on Iazykov, Albert Leong, came to the following conclusion: “Unlike true Romantics, Jazykov's poet-persona does not dominate his universe of discourse: he is hardly a god-like creator or a prophet proclaiming cosmic truths, but instead is a passive instrument for the expression of Divine Reason.”¹³ In this respect as well, it can be said that the transition to the Slavophile cycle was not only slight, but also smooth and easy.

There remains the question of genre. Until Iazykov's time poetic invectives had usually been written in a form closely resembling the ode. Outstanding examples include Radishchev's “Vol'nost” (1783), which he quoted in his *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu* (1790), Kapnist's “Oda na rabstvo” (1783), Derzhavin's “Vel'mozha” (1794), and Pushkin's “Borodinskaia godovshchina” (1831). In all of these invectives the poets are no less concerned with the conventions and conceits of the odic form than with the expression of political ideas and ideals. With Lermontov the invective is expressed a little more directly. Yet although a polemical poem such as “Smert' poeta” (1837) points to the overthrow of the odic canon, the reader is not always sure of Lermontov's intention—to write a poetic necrology of Pushkin and praise his poetry, to reflect on the fate of poets, or to attack d'Anthès and the authorities as well (for knowing of the duel and doing nothing to prevent it). Now Iazykov had chosen the *poslanie* as his predominant genre. And he had used it as

12. There is a discussion of Iazykov's neologisms in Dmitrij Tschizewskij, “Einige Aufgaben der slavistischen Romantikforschung,” *Die Welt der Slaven*, 1, no. 1 (1956): 23–24. See also his more recent analysis in *Russische Literaturgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1: *Die Romantik*, Forum slavicum, vol. 1 (Munich: Eidos Verlag, 1964), pp. 82–83.

13. “The Poetics of N. M. Jazykov” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1970), p. 88.

an occasional type of poetry above all to express his relation to society, as a means of communicating with friends and acquaintances.¹⁴ Among these *poslaniia* are several in which Iazykov indulges in literary and political polemics in a most direct way. As early as 1828 he had written a violent denunciation of the journalistic policies of N. A. Polevoy in a poem addressed to Baron Delvig.¹⁵ It is, in fact, this poem that is the closest stylistic antecedent of the Slavophile invectives of 1844–45. Turning to Polevoy, Iazykov exclaims:

А ты, прихвостница талантов,
И повивальница стихов,
Толпа словесных дур и франтов,
Нецензурованных глушцов,—
Не ты ль на подвиг православный
Поэта-юношу зовешь
И вдруг рукой самоуправной
Его же ставишь на правеж?

The Slavophile cycle proper consists of six polemical *poslaniia* of varying degrees of bitterness, addressed in order of writing to “the enemies of Slavophilism” (“K nenashim,” of December 6, 1844), to Shevyrev (mid-December 1844),¹⁶ to Konstantin Aksakov (December 20, 1844), to Chaadaev (December 25, 1844), to Peter Kireevsky (February 11, 1845), and to Aleksei Khomiakov on his birthday (May 1, 1845). The poem to Shevyrev praises him for his course of public lectures,¹⁷ the one to Aksakov advises a diligent worker for the Slavophile cause not to associate with the Westernizers,¹⁸ the *poslanie* to Kireevsky encourages him to continue his song-collecting activity,¹⁹ and the last in the cycle is a simple poem of congratulation to the main theoretician of the movement.²⁰ These four are far less impressive than the two poems in which Iazykov attacks his ideological enemies (“K nenashim,” “K Chaadaevu”), and where his polemical talents were unleashed to the fullest extent. Although copies of both poems circulated widely at the time, the actual texts

14. See my M.A. thesis, “Druzheskie stikhotvornye poslaniia N. M. Iazykova: K izucheniiu literaturnogo byta 1820–1840-kh godov” (Monash University, Australia, 1971).

15. “Baronu Del'vigu”: 1964 edition, pp. 262–63. Delvig shared Iazykov’s view on the matter.

16. Without sufficient documentation, Kseniia Bukhmeier, the editor of the 1964 edition, proposed the beginning of 1845 as the date of composition of this poem. However, already in mid-December 1844 Iazykov indicated in a letter to his family that he had written a *poslanie* to Shevyrev (Pushkinskii dom, f. 348, 19.4.25, letter 83).

17. 1964 edition, pp. 401–2.

18. 1964 edition, pp. 396–97. Aksakov rejected Iazykov’s accusations. His reply (in verse) was first published only quite recently, in *Poety krushka N. V. Stankevicha* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1964; *Biblioteka poeta, bol'shaia seriia*, 2nd ed.), pp. 383–84.

19. 1964 edition, pp. 400–401.

20. 1964 edition, pp. 402–3.

were not published until 1871, when most of the protagonists in the controversy were long dead.

Although Iazykov never stated publicly or in print against whom his poem "К nenashim" was directed, it seems safe to rely on the informed opinion of Alexander Herzen, who named the three "enemies" as Chaadaev, Granovsky, and himself.²¹ In the first part of the poem (lines 1–20) Iazykov alludes to their failings in very colorful language. Of Granovsky he says:

... Иль ты, сладкоречивый книжник,
Оракул юношей-невежд,
Ты, легкомысленный сподвижник
Беспутных мыслей и надежд...

In the remainder of the polemic he emphasizes the failings of the Westernizers and predicts how Slavophilism will survive all the onslaughts of its attackers. Since the Westernizers at that particular stage had the greater part of Moscow's literary society on their side, it seems that Iazykov's confidence was unjustified:

Святыня древнего Кремля,
Надежда, сила, крепость наша—
Ничто вам! Русская земля
От вас не примет просвещенья,
Вы страшны ей: вы влюблены
В свои предательские мненья
И святотатственные сны!...

Умоляет ваша злость пустая,
Замрет неверный ваш язык:
Крепка, надежна Русь святая,
И русский Бог еще велик!

If "К nenashim" impresses by its torrent of strong language, "К Chaadaevu" is especially significant for the very personal way in which Iazykov attacks his ideological enemy, and for the poem's rather rigid construction—it is arranged in eight quatrains, but with some enjambement.²² Besides the elements already noted in "К nenashim" we find the image of Chaadaev as an admirer of Catholicism, a religion which greatly offended Iazykov's national pride. In order to vent his rage adequately he resorts to a touch of grotesque caricature. This technique anticipates one of the typical features of the "civic" style:

21. 1964 edition, pp. 394–95, and see the notes, pp. 665–66. For further reactions by contemporaries to "К nenashim," see M. I. Gille'son, "N. V. Gogol' v dnevnikakh A. I. Turgeneva," *Russkaia literatura*, 1963, no. 2, p. 143.

22. 1964 edition, pp. 397–98.

Ты лобызаеть туфлю пап,—
 Почтенных предков сын ослушный,
 Всего чужого гордый раб!

Свое ты все презрел и выдал,
 Но ты еще не сокрушен;
 Но ты стоишь, плешивый идол
 Строптивых душ и слабых жен!

It is indeed because of these grotesque touches that the poem's existence was a closely guarded secret. As far as we know, it never fell into the hands of Chaadaev.²³

There is no doubt that Iazykov's Slavophile cycle was appropriate to the mood of the time, both in theme (at least as far as the Slavophiles were concerned) and in style. It seems that none among either the Slavophiles or the Westernizers remained apathetic to these poems. Even an outsider, the poetess Karolina Pavlova, whose parents were of West European origin, could not keep herself from telling Iazykov how affronted she felt. Iazykov pleaded that he meant no personal offense to her and had simply been defending his most cherished ideals. Nevertheless Pavlova broke off their correspondence in verse and with that a friendship which dated from 1829, the very beginning of his life in Moscow.²⁴

The more liberal members of educated Russian society had justifiably taken issue with Iazykov's uncompromising acceptance of tsardom and Orthodoxy, along with other aspects of Russian culture and tradition. Consequently his stylistic achievement went largely unnoticed, especially by radical critics such as Belinsky and Herzen. But at least some of the "civic" poets could see that Iazykov had been able to use poetry as an effective political weapon, and sought to continue his stylistic tradition. It was not by chance that at the outset of his career Nekrasov tried his hand at parodying the themes of Iazykov's verse letters. For he was at the same time imitating Iazykov's style, and thereby learning how to write poetry about some of Russia's most pressing problems in a colloquial and down-to-earth manner.²⁵

23. M. I. Zhikharev, "Petr Iakovlevich Chaadaev: Iz vospominanii sovremennika, II," *Vestnik Evropy*, 1871, no. 9, p. 46.

24. For details, see my thesis, pp. 127-37.

25. See Nekrasov's parody of the Gogol *poslanie* in *Russkaia stikhotvornaia parodiia (XVIII-nachalo XX v.)* (Leningrad, 1960; *Biblioteka poeta, bol'shaia serii*, 2nd ed.), pp. 458-61. See also the article by B. Ia. Bukhshtab, "Nekrasov v bor'be so slavianofil'stvom: K istorii stikhotvoreniia Nekrasova 'Poslanie k drugu (iz-za granitsy),' " *Doklady i soobshcheniia Filologicheskogo instituta Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, no. 3 (Leningrad, 1951), pp. 55-69.