

Monika Greenleaf. *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. Pp. viii+412.

Until quite recently, one of the commonplaces of Pushkin criticism was to argue that the poet's inborn classical instinct enabled him to avoid the "excesses" of Romanticism. D.S. Mirsky, the great historian of Russian letters, insisted that Pushkin be isolated from, even elevated above, the imported literary fashions that prevailed by the 1820s in Russia. Mirsky employed the terms *tochnost* and *kratkost* to define Pushkin's style. These terms refer to Pushkin's elegant precision and impeccable economy of language, and like the poet's style, they elude real translation. The efforts to monumentalize Pushkin into a classic, however, inevitably backfired on the poet. Like the tanks each October on Red Square, Soviet *Pushkinists* rumbled along, flattening Pushkin under the dead weight of their biographical and philological findings. Many of Pushkin's more experimental texts, the late "Kleopatra" tales for example, were tagged as literary anomalies and left out of the corpus. Formalist critic Boris Tomashevsky warned that Pushkin's works were particularly prone to ideological interpretation and should never be read out of context. It is only in the last twenty-five years that Soviet scholars, most notably Lidya Ginzburg and Yuri Lotman, have been able to begin mapping out Pushkin's place within the context of Russian Romanticism, basing themselves in part on their Formalist precursors' highly innovative research. In the United States, some excellent studies stemming from these critics' work have been published, including monographs by William Mills Todd III (*Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin*, Harvard UP, 1986) and Stephanie Sandler (*Distant Pleasures: Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile*, Stanford UP, 1989).

Monika Greenleaf's fascinating new book goes one step further than previous studies by arguing not simply for Pushkin as a Russian Romantic writer but by attempting to position the poet within the larger discursive field of European Romanticism. Much of the ambiguity surrounding the periodization of Pushkin's work stems from the writer's intriguing authorial subjectivity. Pushkin's speakers do not consistently coincide with the stock figure of the Romantic lyric poet, a role to be played only after Pushkin's death by Lermontov. Pushkin, as so many critics have pointed out, still belonged to the culture of eighteenth-century France, a culture dominated by what William Mills Todd has called an "ideology of polite society" (10). Such an ideology emphasizes the separation of genres and a necessary fluency in all forms of writing. Greenleaf describes Pushkin's persona as that

of a carefully cultivated *improvisatore*, whose polymorphous *oeuvre* gradually alienated readers seeking a more stable lyrical hero. Rather than focusing on Pushkin's "classical" features — his *tochnost* or *kratkost* — however, Greenleaf stresses the more open-ended, characteristically Romantic aspects of his writing — his fragmentariness (*otryvochnost*) and irony. Such an approach allows one to read Pushkin in tandem with other European Romantic movements, and in particular with the project of the Athenaeum group. Greenleaf claims that Pushkin came closer than any other European artist to realizing what the Jena writers prescribed as a poetics of modernity (19).

The open-ended quality of Pushkin's writing, argues Greenleaf, allowed critics, beginning with Belinsky, to read into Pushkin whatever suited them best, thus turning him into a "closed text" (5). Among the more famous or eccentric examples of closure are Dostoevsky's 1880 speech, which transforms Pushkin into a Russian Christian prophet, Nabokov's outrageously excessive annotations to his translation of *Eugene Onegin*, and, as noted above, D.H.Mirsky's reading of Pushkin as a neo-classical poet. In *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion*, Greenleaf seeks to show that Pushkin's distinctive feature as a writer is his *refusal* of closure and that his heterogeneous works are "an endlessly counterpointed exploration of his own individuality" (345). She loosely organizes her approach into four theoretical paradigms or "fashions," including fragmentariness, elegy, Romantic irony, and Orientalism. Because Pushkin arrives relatively late on the European Romantic scene, he is able to master the above elements and syncretize them with indigenous norms. Central to Greenleaf's thesis is the fact that Pushkin never abandons any of these "fashions"; rather, he develops an "elegiac" language to return to and "dramatize the extremes of his various identities" (16).

After giving a brief but useful genealogy of previous Pushkin research in her Introduction, Greenleaf then devotes two chapters to a discussion of Russia within the larger European discursive field. In Chapter One, she addresses what she terms a shared Romantic "deep structure." In other words, Pushkin, who (much like Byron) disliked German and anything even remotely connected to German theory, drank from the same well as the theorists of the Athenaeum project, i.e., from Diderot and Voltaire. She makes a good case for the *salons philosophes*'s proto-irony and penchant for a collective, dialogic style of writing later to be known as the Romantic fragment. As Greenleaf convincingly shows in her readings in the following chapters, Pushkin's irony is as radical as Schlegel's and functions as a "fixed psychic drama" (29), a subjectivity as parabasis around which Pushkin fashions all his creations.

Chapter Two covers in great depth the role of the Greek Anthology in early nineteenth-century Russia, in order to elaborate on Greenleaf's notion of "psychic drama." She argues that Pushkin's so-called "classicism" is in fact a highly self-conscious re-working of the classical fragment through the intermediary of French poets Chénier and Parny. In response to Kukulbecker's polemical question of 1824 — why so many elegies? — Greenleaf hypothesizes that Pushkin "was addicted . . . to elegiac repetition itself" (91). She tries to explain this hypothesis through a slightly murky, over-determined, "psychological-anthropological" (106) reading of the poem "Proserpine" that combines Freud, Lacan, biographic details of Pushkin's Odessa love triangle, and Greek mythology as interpreted by Peter Sacks. In this, as in a few other passages, the argument suffers from an excess of erudition, if such a criticism may be made.

The remaining four chapters apply the above theoretical model to four very different works by Pushkin: the Oriental narrative poems, the historical drama *Boris Godunov*, *Eugene Onegin*, and the obscure, rarely-read "Kleopatra" tales. Greenleaf's varied choice of texts not only gives us insight into the rich multiplicity of Pushkin's creativity, his constant re-fashioning, but also confirms her thesis about an elegiac "psycho-drama" at the core of much of his writing. For example, in Chapter Three on Pushkin's Orientalism, she juxtaposes the poem "The Fountain of Bakhchsirai" (1823) with the prose piece "Journey to Arzrum" (1835) in order to show how the later work inverts its predecessor, returning to the Oriental topos in an ironic gesture that mourns a lost youth while disengaging itself from "an overly crowded, metaphorically predictable" Orientalist landscape (150). The chapter on *Boris Godunov*, Pushkin's remarkable hybrid drama, argues for a representation of subjectivity/history that is contingent, fragmentary, fluid. As a dramatic re-working of Scott, Machiavelli and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, *Boris Godunov*'s twenty-three short scenes or partial visions place the audience in the role of chronicler, destabilizing the very possibility of a unified narrative, be it that of classical drama or of Karamzin's monumental history of Russia.

Greenleaf's reading of *Eugene Onegin* is the *piece de resistance*, a brilliant, persuasive example of criticism that leaves us wondering how we ever could have interpreted the work differently. The irresistible appeal of her argument stems in part from the fact that theory and biography become so convincingly intertwined within the plot of *Onegin*, whereas in the previous chapters, theory, biography, cultural history and text do not always gel together quite so convincingly. Greenleaf relies less heavily here on theory, employing only a "a mildly deconstructive" (53) critical apparatus, derived principally from Paul de Man. Her approach to irony in *Onegin* is

far more radical than that taken in previous readings, by Nabokov or Lotman for instance. She claims that, as a "novel in verse," *Onegin* subverts both genres: it constantly wavers between poetry and prose, elegy and irony, its plot allegorizing the origin of linguistic creation as well as Pushkin's own poetic maturation. Before the duel, poetic language as figured by Lensky is mocked by Onegin for being inadequate to the full reality of experience. After Lensky's death, however, the lyric "interludes" multiply: Pushkin reclaims and expresses elegiac emotion through Tatiana. The story ends with an elegy for elegiac inspiration itself, as if Pushkin worried that prose writing would dry up his creative powers. De Man's principles of allegory and irony work especially well in Greenleaf's interpretation of Tatiana's letter, which inverts the traditional male writer/erotic subject binary structure, and in her passage on the "little feat" stanzas, in which elegiac and erotic repetition become one and the same. My only gripe with this chapter is that it never cites Russian phenomenologist Sergei Bocharov, whose work on *Onegin* in the 1970s bears interesting parallels with Greenleaf's argument.

The "Kleopatra" tales provide the occasion for elegant closure to a critical narrative that seeks, paradoxically, to free Pushkin from closure. Greenleaf writes that "the 'Kleopatra' tales are the best illustration I know of the idea that 'the self writes to find its own center'"(329); they thus make the most convincing case for Greenleaf's earlier assertion that, of all European poets, Pushkin comes closest to realizing the ambitions of the Athenaeum group. By "Kleopatra" tales, she means the three unfinished stories — "We were spending a night at the dacha," "A Tale of a Roman Life" and "Egyptian Nights" — that Pushkin wrote from 1832 to 1835, which, in their obsessive attempts at framing his "Kleopatra" poem, also re-work texts written at a happier time in Pushkin's life. The "Kleopatra" poem itself is emblematic of poetic inspiration. Greenleaf argues that Pushkin, much like E.T.A. Hoffmann with "Don Juan," turns the society tale into an ironic representation of the poet's declining role in 1830s society. The late "Kleopatra" fragments thus may be read as "historical elegies" that mourn the loss of poetry, as well as Pushkin's identity as a poet. If the poet "fashioned or retranslated his own creative energy, preoccupations . . . [and] individuality into the kaleidoscope array of his 'hallucinatory worlds'"(345), it is always to return to that same lyrical core, the "psychic drama" of loss at the heart of creation.

By inserting Pushkin and Russian Romanticism within the larger discursive field of European Romanticism, Monika Greenleaf's *Pushkin and the Romantic Fragment* does a great service both to Pushkinists and to Comparatists more generally. Although her book is a densely-textured study

that goes into much detail and assumes a certain degree of *a-priori* knowledge of Pushkin, it can nevertheless be used as a fascinating launching point into the poet's multifaceted body of writings. Anyone interested in the fragment, the elegy or the Greek Anthology may benefit from the first two chapters. Hopefully, Greenleaf's brilliant exegeses of Pushkin's work will also persuade Romanticists that Pushkin is a central Romantic figure who needs to be taught in the classroom alongside Goethe and Wordsworth. In her conclusion, Greenleaf lucidly acknowledges that her reading of Pushkin performs its own act of closure. Yet her post-structuralist version of Pushkin helps unravel stylistic and textual questions that went unanswered or ignored until recently. Pushkin the fashioner of *otryvki* has finally been given his rightful place alongside Pushkin the classical poet, master of *kratkost* and *tochnost*.

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Bénédicte Monicat. *Itinéraires de l'écriture au féminin. Voyageuses du 19e siècle*. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996. Pp. 149.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in the French travel narrative. This can be seen both in the new collections created by French publishers to edit or re-edit travel narratives from the past and in the numerous critical studies of the genre in all its aspects that have appeared during the past few years. *Itinéraires de l'écriture au féminin*, Bénédicte Monicat's study of nineteenth-century French travel narratives written by women, participates in both these literary and critical trends. First, through its ample bibliography of narratives hitherto ignored or neglected, this book makes a not negligible contribution to literary history, in particular to women's literary history and the history of the French travel narrative. Second, as an interpretative work, the study makes a very useful and interesting contribution to French studies, addressing a number of theoretical problems posed by a particular type of writing practice by traveling women, that is, when one category of "Other" writes about yet another. Examining the intersection of colonial and feminine discourses, the study seeks to determine whether female travelers write the "Other" differently than male travelers.