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The Poetics of Authority in Pushkin's "André Chénier"

During the spring and summer months of 1825, Aleksandr Pushkin intensified his efforts to end his exile in Mikhailovskoe. Though his friends urged him to produce work that might influence imperial opinion in his favor, Pushkin doubted that his poems could win him freedom.¹ His writings increasingly were concerned with what the function of poetry should be. Pushkin's "crisis" in 1825 turned not only on political issues (the Decembrist revolt at the end of the year upset him greatly) but also on literary decisions. Politics and poetry are intertwined in one of the most problematic poems of that year, "André Chénier." A poem now virtually forgotten, "André Chénier" shows Pushkin working out a formula for asserting his independence as a poet which was to organize his poetics for years to come.

The French poet André Chénier (1762–1794) was seen in the 1820s as an impassioned champion of political liberty who had been martyred for his ideals during the French Revolution. His poetry has strong formal and thematic ties to the classical tradition. Critics then as now have wavered between calling Chénier a neoclassical poet and the first romantic poet.² Pushkin and his contemporaries were struck by the fresh diction and large sweep of Chénier's poems. Because Chénier's poetry was suppressed after his death, the publication in 1819 of the first collection of his verse made him seem suddenly contemporary, all the more so since his ideas were consonant with those of free-thinking Russian aristocratic circles of the time.

Pushkin was fascinated by Chénier. He translated or adapted four of Chénier's poems into Russian.³ The first mention of Chénier occurs in a letter

1. Pushkin responded with disbelief to letters from friends suggesting that *Boris Godunov* might bring about his release; see A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Leningrad, 1939–1949), 13:172–73, 271. Among Pushkin's answers, the letter to P. A. Viazemskii, in which Pushkin compares himself to his Holy Fool, his ears sticking out of any conventional political cap, is the best known. See A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (hereafter *PSS*) (Leningrad, 1977–1979), 10:144–45. This, the most recent Academy edition of Pushkin, will be cited by volume and page number. References to the poem "André Chénier" are given in parentheses by line. All English translations are my own.

2. Chénier's English biographer judges him to be strongly neoclassical; see Francis Scarfe, *André Chénier: His Life and Work* (Oxford, 1965). The introduction to his works in French takes a less firm stand but notes that he is usually seen as the first romantic. See André Chénier, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1950), xxxiii.

3. V. B. Sandomirskaia outlines Pushkin's general interest in Chénier in "Perevody i pere-lozheniia Pushkina iz A. Shen'e," *Pushkin. Issledovaniia i materialy* (Leningrad, 1978) 8:90–106.

Pushkin drafted to Prince Petr Viazemskii on July 6, 1824. Pushkin begins the letter with high praise for French historians, goes on to observe that romanticism has not really taken hold in France, and expresses admiration for two writers often cited as evidence of the growth of the romantic movement in France.⁴ The mention of a poem about a dying poet by Lamartine begins an associative chain which leads to André Chénier, who symbolizes the heroic demise of a poet.

Lamartine is quite good in his "Napoleon," and in "The Dying Poet" he is generally good in his use of a certain new harmony.

No one cares more for the exquisite André Chénier than I do, but he is a classicist among classicists. He is just redolent of ancient Greek poetry.⁵

Pushkin first praises Chénier as the representative of a national literary tradition, and the sense of Chénier as a national poet emerges clearly in Pushkin's poem.

Pushkin polemicizes with those who would label Chénier a romantic either because his previously suppressed verse appeared only in 1819, when romanticism, especially in its Byronic varieties, was reaching new heights of popularity in Russia, or because his poetry was highly personal and often sad, always innovative. Pushkin noted in 1830:

French poets have their concept of romanticism. They assign to it all works which bear the stamp of dreaminess or despair. Others even call neologisms and grammatical errors romanticism. In this manner André Chénier, a poet who has imbibed the spirit of antiquity, whose very insufficiencies derive from a desire to convey the forms of Greek prosody in the French language — they throw this poet in with the romantic poets.⁶

The sense of opposing an erroneous view of Chénier and of romanticism also emerges in Pushkin's poem about André Chénier's execution. To Pushkin, Chénier was a "classicist" because Chénier wrote in forms known to the ancient Greeks and Romans. The label is confirmed by the atmosphere and the events of Chénier's poetry, which recounts activities of gods and muses in elaborate periphrasis. In *L'Invention*, his long poem about the process of poetic creation, Chénier writes of the ancients, "Pour peindre notre idée empruntons leur couleurs."⁷ The very title of the poem discloses Chénier's tendency to rely on the classical terms in aesthetic thought: it invokes the long-standing triad of invention, disposition, and elocution, recalling the stages of rhetorical composition and transmission which marked classical literature.

4. An easily available source for Pushkin's ideas about romanticism is John Mersereau, Jr.'s study "Pushkin's Concept of Romanticism," *Studies in Romanticism*, 3, no. 1 (Autumn, 1963): 23–41. In Pushkin's essays, the central text is the drafted work on classical and romantic poetry (7:24–26) written, significantly, in 1825.

5. *PSS*, 10:75–76.

6. *Ibid.*, 7:352–53.

7. Chénier, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 127.

Pushkin wrote his poem about Chénier during the spring of 1825.⁸ The poem is longer than his lyrics of the 1820s, most of which are less than a printed page long. Not only is the poem formally more complex than other lyrics from the 1820s, but several structural elements of the poem also strive toward a self-importance not found in other nonnarrative works. For example, "André Chénier" is dedicated to Nikolai Raevskii, the son of General Raevskii who befriended Pushkin during his southern exile. The French epigraph is taken from Chénier's late poem *La jeune captive*: "Ainsi, triste et captif, ma lyre, toute-fois/S'éveillait. . . ." Chénier's poem is about a fellow prisoner, Aimée de Coigny.¹⁰ The epigraph gives the first clue that Pushkin draws a parallel between his exile and Chénier's imprisonment: both poets are like the captive who sings despite her lack of freedom, and both have written poems about the sad captive who nevertheless sings on. "André Chénier" is also framed by an introduction and seven footnotes. Each of these components — dedication, epigraph, introduction, footnotes — elevates the status of the poem, and each strengthens a reading of "André Chénier" as a statement about Pushkin's poetic development.

In the twelve lines which introduce "André Chénier," Pushkin compares Chénier to a poet popular for his romantic temperament, Lord Byron. Pushkin admired Byron's most daring exercise in formal innovation, *Don Juan*, but it is the self-consciously exotic side of Byron which Pushkin imitated in *Kavkazskii plennik* (*Prisoner of the Caucasus*, 1820) and *Bakhchissaraiskii fontan* (*The Fountain of Bakhchissarai*, 1823).¹¹ By 1825 Pushkin had largely outgrown the Byronic mood found in the southern poems. "André Chénier" appropriately begins by conjuring up Byron, who is now dead, not as Pushkin's point of departure but as one who continues to be the idol of others:

Меж тем как изумленный мир
 На урну Байрона взирает,

 Зовет меня другая тень,
 Давно без песен, без рыданий
¹²

Meanwhile, as the dumbfounded world
 Gazes at Byron's urn,

8. Some excellent research exists on the precise dating of "André Chénier." The issue is not without importance because 44 lines which were censored from Chénier's first speech were then circulated separately with the words "December 14" written across the top. As Pushkin pointed out in his own defense when the matter nearly came to public attention in 1828, the poem was completed months before the Decembrist uprising. See V. B. Sandomirskaja, "Andre Shen'e," *Stikhotvoreniia A. Pushkina 1820–1830—kh godov* (Leningrad, 1974), pp. 14–18; and N. Eidel'man, *Pushkin i dekabristy* (Moscow, 1979), pp. 314–27.

9. *PSS*, 2:231.

10. Francis Scarfe, *André Chénier*, pp. 326–35.

11. Viktor Zhirmunskii's study *Bairon i Pushkin*, recently republished (Leningrad, 1978), still offers the clearest analysis of Pushkin's encounter with Byron as one facet of his struggle with romanticism.

12. *PSS*, 2:231.

I am called by another shade,
 Long unsung, unlamented

Byron's tragic death aroused a sense of reverence which Pushkin mocked in a letter to Viazemskii.¹³ Here he turns instead to a nearly forgotten poet. Because the poem begins with the word "meanwhile," it sets itself apart from other works from the beginning. The dedication to Nikolai Raevskii further accentuates the choice of Chénier over Byron: Raevskii introduced Pushkin to Byron's poetry, and his brother became a Russian paragon of Byronic behavior (Pushkin's poem "Demon" is about Aleksandr Raevskii).

The turn toward Chénier for poetic inspiration can be interpreted as an indication that Pushkin was moving away from romanticism; this is the approach taken by canonical Soviet criticism. But the final quatrain of the introduction portends other motivations:

Певцу любви, дубрав и мира
 Несу надгробные цветы.
 Звучит незнаемая лира.
 Пою. Мне внемлет он и ты.¹⁴

To the poet of love, leafy groves, and peace
 I carry graveside flowers.
 An unknown lyre resounds.
 I sing. I am heeded by him and by you.

The one-word sentence in the final line creates a noticeable disjunction. Attention is drawn to the "reading" situation (literally a "listening" situation), which is triangular: the poet (Pushkin) sings, only Chénier and Raevskii listen. Implicitly a kind of eavesdropper status is conferred upon all others, specifically the readers of Pushkin's poem, a device that works well for the dramatic intensity of the scene which follows. Barriers are erected between poet and audience which reappear throughout the poem.

A narrative voice now sets the scene. Chénier awaits death in his prison cell. During the last night of his life, Chénier renews his commitment to the causes which led to his arrest. The narrator returns once more, as the dawn nears, to urge Chénier deeper into his past: Chénier "responds" by reliving happy times spent with friends and companions. The narrator then closes the poem with a lament as Chénier is led off for execution. The bulk of the poem, then, consists of two lengthy soliloquies presented as Chénier's own last words. (It is the first, politically more liberal of these soliloquies which was cut in half by the censors in 1826, and which circulated with the title "December 14" written across the top. Pushkin did not add the title.)

The first monologue consists of two apostrophes, the first of them addressed to the forces of freedom to which Chénier had dedicated himself as a revolutionary. It is a true apostrophe in the sense that an abstract idea (freedom) is personified in order that the poet may speak to it. Chénier then bids farewell to

13. Ibid., 10:107.

14. Ibid., 2:231.

dear and distant friends. He begs them to read his poems and imagines himself as a silent listener in their midst. When Chénier projects himself among his friends while they recite his verse, another kind of personification takes place. So strongly does the poet identify with his verse that he suggests that he will himself live again whenever his poems are read.

The second monologue also hinges on two apostrophes. The first again strengthens the fusion of the poet with his poetry. After a long interlude during which the poet relives the golden days that preceded his fall into ignominy, he commences speaking directly to his poetry and, without any perceptible shift, to himself. As he encourages himself to be proud of his poetry, the monologue moves into the fourth and final apostrophe. Addressing the tyrants who have condemned him, Chénier enjoins them to follow him to the grave. Just as the first apostrophe to freedom culminated in the prophecy that the people would again find their way to the spirit of freedom, so here a condemnation of the forces of evil leads Chénier to predict their violent demise.¹⁵

Several structural features are uncovered by this summary of the poem's narrative movement. First, the use of apostrophe controls and directs Chénier's monologue. The rhetorical device of turning the speaker's attention away from the scene at hand enjoys perfect psychological motivation: imprisoned, Chénier meditates upon his past actions and creates harmonious visions of the future. But by building the monologues around the trope of apostrophe, Pushkin also adds another level to the already complex "listening" situation. In the introduction, Pushkin claimed to be heard by Raevskii (his friend, the kind of comrade in ideas Chénier has in mind when he invokes *his* friends) and by Chénier. In the monologue, Chénier creates a situation that is nearly symmetrical. He does not identify those who listen (literally, Chénier "speaks" to himself), but he directs his words toward forces which led to his present predicament. Those forces include dear friends (analogous to Pushkin's Raevskii), guiding concepts (Chénier serves as a source of poetic inspiration for Pushkin), and the false friends who betray Chénier in the end. The final role, that of the betrayer, seems to be played by Byron in the introduction, where he is rejected as the source of inspiration. The correspondence here is not political: Byron was himself a singer of freedom, and Pushkin had no reason to doubt the sincerity of Byron's commitment to liberal ideas. Byron does not resemble the Jacobins politically: they sang of freedom falsely, whereas Byron emerges as a false source of poetic inspiration. Pushkin creates an important parallel between false politics and false poetry. Thus the correspondence between the "listening" situations in the body of the poem and that in the introduction compares Chénier's victimization by false politicians with Pushkin's development beyond false theories of poetry. Chénier, the former revolutionary, repudiates Robespierre and his allies because they have failed to inaugurate a new era of freedom. Pushkin rejects Byron because he and like-minded romantics have failed to show the path toward a new, "true" (*istinnyi*) literature.

Pushkin accounts for the failure of romanticism by means of the imagery patterns in Chénier's monologues. In his first line, Chénier greets freedom as

15. Compare Michael Cooke's *Acts of Inclusion* (New Haven, Ct., 1979), pp. 12–18, where he theorizes that elegy and prophecy take up the same essential content during the romantic period.

his guiding light (*svetilo*, l. 21). Attention is drawn to the line not only because it is the opening line but also because it is written in iambic pentameter. That meter appears in the narrator's two descriptions which begin the body of the poem (ll. 13–20), but Chénier's monologue uses only four- and six-footed iambic lines. The line "Privetstvuiu tebia moe svetilo!" ("I greet you my luminary!") begins Chénier's monologue, though its meter links it back to the narrator's lines; the line is markedly apostrophic, and it introduces the poem's central motif of light.

This light of freedom, which arose as a spark (l. 23), is predominantly *seen* by Chénier, in contrast to the chiefly aural imagery of the introduction. There, a chorus of European lyres and the call of another shade were heard. The last two lines, already noted for their asymmetrical cadence and compression, held completely aural appeal ("An unknown lyre resounds./ I sing. I am heeded by him and by you"). Although the introduction opens with the stunned world *looking* at Byron's urn, the onlookers seem to be dumbfounded (*izumlennyi*), looking only because they cannot speak.

In Chénier's monologue, verbs and images rely more on the quality of seeing. Though Chénier hears the holy thunder of freedom's storm (l. 25), this allusion to Zeus's thunder gives way instead to a "dark storm" (*buria mrachnaia*, l. 63) of those who have eclipsed freedom. The poet's relationship to his recollections is primarily one of seeing, as he remembers seeing the sons of freedom taking their oath, seeing the waves of rebirth which they proclaim (both times using the archaic verb *zret'*, ll. 29, 33). They swear and proclaim while he watches and listens: "Ia slyshal bratskii ikh obet" ("I heard their fraternal oath," l. 30) features heavy irony, since these "brothers" later betray Chénier. As the power of those who *say* that they are on the side of freedom increases, Chénier observes that the light of genuine freedom had already *shone* ("Uzhe siial tvoi mudryi genii," l. 37). Freedom is represented as purest light, disembodied and not of this world.

But it is the poet's participation in concrete verbal acts which implicitly leads to the demise of those working for freedom. When they proclaim equality, Chénier adds, "I my voskliknuli: 'Blazhenstvo!'" ("And we exclaimed: 'Bliss!'" l. 44).¹⁶ The lament for lost freedom begins at this moment, triggered by Chénier's having joined the forces of those who proclaim rather than those who "see." These forces are characterized by blindness (l. 51) and darkness (l. 63).

Visual imagery emerges with new forcefulness in the second speech. Chénier comforts himself that his poetry has "shone forth" as it should:

Твой светоч, грозно пламеня,
Жестоким блеском озарил

16. Compare the much-discussed closing of *Boris Godunov*. Pushkin ultimately removed the people's rousing cheers for the new Tsar Dmitrii and left only the comment "Narod bezmolvstvuet" ("The people are silent") as an implicit condemnation of the pretender's reign. An interesting article on this changed ending is M. P. Alekseev's "Remarka Pushkina 'Narod bezmolvstvuet,'" reprinted in his *Pushkin. Sravnitel'no-istoricheskie issledovaniia* (Leningrad, 1972), pp. 208–39. All subsequent commentators follow Alekseev's conclusion that the people's silence demonstrates their awareness that their lot has not been improved by the change in rulers.

Совет правителей бесславных

(ll. 146–48)

Your torch, flaming with menace,
 Lit with a cruel gleam
 The counsel of inglorious rulers

As the connection between poetry-writing and seeing tightens, Chénier moves to include the classical association of writing with singing (l. 153). The narrator also closes the poem "So *sang* the poet in exaltation" (l. 171, my emphasis).

When the executioners come in for Chénier, however, it is the lack of sound which is startling. The rattle of keys and locks precedes an important silence: "Ne slyshat'. Shestvie bezmolvno. Zhdet palach" ("Nothing is heard. The procession is soundless. The executioner waits," l. 182). This line breaks Pushkin's consistent use of the caesura in all of his hexametric lines with two stops and three two-word sentences.¹⁷ The asymmetry is reminiscent of the final line of the introduction (l. 12) and equally significant, since the poem reaches its emotional peak at this moment, as Chénier is led off to his death.

Indeed, the sound which does emerge from this silence as the representation of Chénier's poetry is exaggerated and unexpected. In the lines of prophecy which climax the final apostrophe, a sharp cry is heard, the kind of sound heretofore excluded from the poem:

Мой крик, мой ярый смех преследует тебя!

Падешь, тиран! Негодование
 Воспрянет наконец. Отечества рыданье
 Разбудет утомленный рок.

(ll. 163, 165–68)

My cry, my furious laugh will torment you!

You will fall, tyrant! Indignation
 Will rise forth at last. The lament of the fatherland
 Will awaken weary fate.

Two conventional images are here invested with fresh meaning. Poetry as vision, a widespread notion during the romantic period, becomes poetry as prophetic judgment: Robespierre's government fell immediately after Chénier's execution. Pushkin may be using his advantage of hindsight to give Chénier the gift of prophecy, but the device is effective nonetheless. The other metaphor for poetry, singing, is transformed into utterly unharmonious shrieks and mad laughter. The classical poets and their followers are the ones to refer to poetry as singing, so that Pushkin rethinks both the classical and the romantic metaphors for writing in the space of a very few lines.

17. On Pushkin's consistent use of the caesura in his hexametric line, see S. Bondi, "Pushkin i russkii gekzametr," *O Pushkine* (Moscow, 1978), pp. 310–71.

Other clusters of images also use conventional ideas or objects in new or newly appropriate ways. The tragedy of Chénier's death occasions all sorts of tears. For example, Chénier warns his friends not to let their tears for him be seen (l. 77). He adds, "V nash vek, vy znaete, i slezy prestuplen'e" ("In our age, you know, even tears are a crime," l. 78). Crying has become an act with consequences rather than an expression of grief. Tears of joy contribute to the poet's happier memories (ll. 83–84), especially as he recalls the misty but forgiving eyes of his chiding muse (ll. 124–26). When Chénier envisions himself among his friends as they reread his verse, he says that he will drink of their tears (ll. 99–100), but it is in the final line of "André Chénier" that the idea of weeping reaches its fullest expression. Here, the narrator offers his only apostrophe: he invokes the tears of the presiding muse of poetry ("Plach', muza, plach'! . . ." ("Cry, muse, cry! . . ." l. 185). The line is rhythmically marked not by asymmetry but by the presence of only three iambs, the only such line in the entire poem. The emotional compression resulting from a line of such simple verse shows crying, a predictable activity in lyric poetry, as an act with deep meaning. The tears respond not only to the death of one man on the eve of a governmental change that would have freed him, but also to the very idea of sending poets to their death for political reasons.

One final image cluster, which follows a similar pattern, is the one built around the convivial banquet. Feasts among friends occur often in André Chénier's Anacreontic poems. Pushkin oddly refers to the impending execution as a popular feast (l. 17). He then has the people imbibe nourishment (ll. 57–58), though it is freedom of which they figuratively partake. Feasts occur in Chénier's memories of happier days among friends, rounding out the generally positive association of nourishment with social and spiritual sustenance (ll. 107, 120). Once again, conventional metaphors are redefined in the poem's emotional conclusion. Just after the line in which Chénier describes his poetry as a shrill cry (l. 163), he jeers at the men who have sentenced him: "Pei nashu krov', zhivi, gubia" ("Drink our blood, live by destroying," l. 164). Chénier indicts his accusers for their cruelty by contrasting their bloodthirstiness with the innocent feasts described in the first half of the poem.

By using these three image patterns — light suggesting poetic vision and political freedom, the tears of inspired lament, and the simple banquets of good people — Pushkin derives tremendous emotional impact from traditional metaphors in the closing lines of "André Chénier." Pushkin chooses these images in part because they recur in Chénier's verse and are thus appropriate to a poem about him.¹⁸ Boris Tomashevskii has observed that these images also abound in Pushkin's early poetry and are therefore important elements in the growth of Pushkin's stock of poetic devices.¹⁹ Tears, feasts, and morning luminaries are images associated with all elegiac poetry, and when Pushkin uses them in new ways he is, as always, consciously attempting to renew the genre.

18. See L. P. Grossman, "Pushkin i Andre Shen'e," reprinted in his *Pushkin. Etiudy o Pushkine* (Moscow, 1928), pp. 194–96, for a discussion of images borrowed from Chénier.

19. Boris Tomashevskii argues that the images are more from Pushkin's own early lyrics than from Chénier in his *Pushkin. Kniga vtoraia* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1961), p. 71. Both he and Grossman, as well as Sandomirskiaia and Eidel'man in the essays cited above, have observed that Pushkin's metrical openness and stylistic informality were qualities learned from Chénier.

It is the creation of an authentic elegy which motivates not only the imagery but also the structure of "André Chénier." The footnotes, for example, have a marked scholarly quality which becomes especially apparent in comparison to the note Konstantin Batiushkov appended to his *Umiraiushchii Tasso* (*The Dying Tasso*, 1817).²⁰ Batiushkov simply weaves into a prose narrative details from Tasso's life that are not made clear in the poem. The Batiushkov elegy was Pushkin's chief Russian model for "André Chénier."²¹ Pushkin studied *The Dying Tasso* carefully, and his marginal notes to the poem reveal that he paid attention to the modes of expression in the lament as well as to the music of Batiushkov's lines.²²

Like Pushkin, Batiushkov was drawn to his subject for personal reasons (Batiushkov and Tasso both suffered bouts of insanity). A comparison of the footnotes to the two poems reveals how Pushkin goes beyond the personal connection between Chénier and himself. Pushkin's notes, seven in number, each brief, cite Henri de la Touche, whose introduction to the 1819 collection of Chénier's verse was a major source of information about the French poet. Pushkin also quotes Chénier's works to identify names which figure in Chénier's monologues. The notes are written partly in French, partly in Russian; Pushkin uses French not only to quote de la Touche or Chénier; he writes "Voyez les odes qui lui sont adressées" (n. 2), and "Voyez ses iambes" (n. 4). The use of French here is doubly noticeable since previous notes are in Russian: Abel is identified as "odin iz druzei A. Sh." ("one of A. Sh.'s friends"), with Chénier's name spelled in the Russian way with *sh*, not *ch*.

The mixture of French and Russian in the footnotes has the same informality as some of Pushkin's Arzamas letters, where much banter is interspersed with serious discussions of poetry. The notes to "André Chénier" have the appearance of having been jotted down and never having been revised. Because "André Chénier" is written in Pushkin's most elevated style, the casual tone is all the more striking. But the footnotes do not threaten the serious character of the poem; rather, they elevate the portrait of Chénier by proving that the subject has been well researched, that Pushkin knows much about Chénier's life and work. These brief notes authenticate Pushkin's elegy in a way not attempted by the kind of marginal narrative which Batiushkov appended to his poem about Tasso. By telling his readers which sources he has consulted, Pushkin asserts that his poem about Chénier is "true," that its facts can be verified. Surely the notes address the wider reading audience, whom the introduction seemed to exclude. Here, then, is the final textual apostrophe, straight from the poet to his readers, directing them to the documentation for his poem. It is in this sense that "André Chénier" is a historical elegy, as it is curiously labeled by most scholars: it uses information that can be checked in other documents.

While the footnotes suggest that "André Chénier" strives for a kind of historical authenticity, the discussion of poetry within the body of the poem

20. K. N. Batiushkov, *Opyty v stikhakh i proze* (St. Petersburg, 1817) reprinted in the "Literaturnyi pamiatnik" series (Moscow, 1977), pp. 325–33.

21. V. B. Sandomirskaia, "Andre Shen'e," p. 18, lists other "prison poems" written during the period, but she concludes that they also go back to Batiushkov for the basic model.

22. PSS, 7:390–411.

speaks to the issue of poetic authenticity. After the monologue has listed various forces which led to Chénier's imprisonment, the poet turns to his own works as the ultimate repository of blame. Immediately after the narrator's interruption, Chénier begins a long series of couplets in hexameter. He asks, "Kuda, kuda zavlek menia vrazhdebnyi genii?" ("Where, where has my hostile genius lured me?" l. 110). The contrast between his days of naive freedom and the confined, frightening hours separating him from the guillotine is punctuated by such exclamations as "kak sladko zhizn' moia lilas' i utekala!" ("how sweetly my life has flowed and streamed past!" l. 127). Chénier begins to resent the poetry which led to his arrest, but when anger moves him to turn against his verse, an immediate reversal takes place.

И что ж оставлю я? Забытые следы
 Безумной ревности и дерзости ничтожной
 Погибни, голос мой, и ты, о призрак ложный,
 Ты, слово, звук пустой . . .

О нет!

Умолкни, ропот малодушный!

Гордись и радуйся, поэт:

.

(ll. 137–42)

And what will I leave? Forgotten traces
 Of insane jealousy and insignificant daring.
 O perish, my voice, and you, false specter,
 You, the word, hollow sound . . .

O no!

Silence, thou fainthearted complaint!

Poet, be proud and rejoice:

.

In the very line which would assert the emptiness of his poetry by calling it a "hollow sound" (l. 141), an abrupt shift occurs from six- to four-footed iambs.

The shift is abrupt for several reasons. The preceding thirty lines had moved smoothly in hexametric couplets without irregularities in caesura or in rhyme. At line 141, a new grouping begins which mixes quatrain forms freely (AbAb, AbbA, and AAbb) through the end of the poem. The "hollow sound" line fits into neither series but subtly links them. "Pustoi" looks back to the preceding couplet ending in "nichtozhnoi"/"lozhnyi" to form a kind of de facto rhyme. But the rhyme is incomplete because of the end stress in "pustoi" and because it would rhyme the ending "oi" with a pair of feminine rhymes in "ozhnoi"/"ozhnyi," and because the word falls technically in the middle of the line. The actual last word, "net," could rhyme with the ensuing "poet"/"let" pair ("Ty ne ponik glavnoi poslushnoi/ Pered pozorom nashikh let"), but an odd fifth line would still result. "Ty, slovo, zvuk pustoi . . . / O net!" ("You, the word, hollow sound . . . / O no!") remains the marked line, all the more so since it is broken off after the third foot to correspond with the break in Chénier's thoughts.

That the line is marked in so many ways is curious in itself. The poet who curses his work in a moment of extreme despair would not seem noteworthy. It is the radical dissocation of the poet from his poetry that is new: Chénier addresses his verse as if it were an entity separate from himself. Until this point,

he has identified his fate with that of his verse. Not only has Chénier implied that he will live when his friends recite his verse, he has told them to say as much: "skazhite: eto on;/ Vot rech' ego" ("Say: it is he;/ These are his words," ll. 95–96). In this penultimate apostrophe to his poems, Chénier separates himself from them with sufficient distance to judge their success. As the apostrophe turns into an address to himself as the poet, Chénier moves toward a prophecy of doom for his executioners:

Гордись, гордись, певец; а ты, свирепый зверь,
Моей главой играй теперь:
Она в твоих когтях. Но слушай, знай, безбожный:
Мой крик, мой ярый смех преследует тебя!

(ll. 160–63)

Singer, be proud, proud; and you, violent beast,
Play now with my head;
It is in your talons. But listen, know, godless one,
My cry, my furious laugh will follow you!

Chénier's moral superiority here is vast. His condemnation of those who would condemn him depends on the assumption that his powers of prophecy as a poet exceed the temporal might of any government. Pushkin makes much of this contrast in *Boris Godunov*.²³ The fact that he worked on that play and on "André Chénier" at a time when his relationship with his tsar was at a crisis point begins to explain the presence of this conflict in both works. In "André Chénier," it is the dissociation of Chénier from his poetry which enables him strongly to condemn his government. After repudiating the idea that his poetry is a "hollow sound," Chénier affirms the power of the word to predict and to encourage the unseating of tyrants. Thus, Chénier's assertion of prophetic powers greater than those of the rulers depends on the separation of his personal fate from that of his poetry.

During the romantic period, a strong link between the poet and his work was forged in an attempt to justify the writing of short poems about the self. In doubt about the validity of other kinds of experience, romantic poets could write with greatest certainty about their own lives. The trend begins as early as Rousseau's *Confessions*, and it is Wordsworth who sees how complex a task this actually was, seeking to express himself ". . . by words/ Which speak of nothing more than what we are."

In Russia, poetry focusing on the self was closely associated with Lord Byron, especially his *Childe Harold*, *Manfred*, and some of the more melancholy lyrics of 1816. Pushkin hence takes his very negative stance against Byron in "André Chénier" in order to challenge excessive egoism in poetry. In a note about Byron's dramas, Pushkin wrote: "Byron threw a one-sided glance on the

23. *Boris Godunov*, the fourth chapter of *Evgenii Onegin*, and "André Chénier" are all found in a single notebook, along with the poems "Ya byl svidetelem zlatoi tvoei vesny" ("I was witness to your golden spring"), "Segodnia bal u Satana" ("Today is a ball at Satan's"), and the imagined conversation with Alexander I. Comparisons of these works, for instance Eidel'man's *Pushkin i dekabristsy*, emphasize the political connections among them.

world and on the nature of man, then turned away from them and became buried in himself. He presented us with the shade of his own self.”²⁴ Pushkin also describes Byron’s poetry as self-indulgent in a letter to Viazemskii. He refers to an article in which Viazemskii lamented the fact that Thomas Moore had carried out Byron’s wish that his memoirs be burned. Pushkin finds the loss good riddance: “Why do you regret the loss of Byron’s notes? the devil with them! Thank God that they were lost. He was confessing in his verse, unintentionally, carried away by the ecstasy of the poetry.”²⁵ Pushkin deprecates the public’s inordinate fondness for confessions and he mocks the writers who pander to that taste: “There is no one one loves, no one one knows like one’s own self. An inexhaustible subject.”²⁶ The letter is not an attack on Byron’s writing in general — it opens with high praise for *Don Juan*. Pushkin objects only to the works in which Byron, and other writers, can write only, and unselfconsciously, about themselves.

Pushkin condemns Byronic egoism with such force, especially in the closing lines of the letter to Viazemskii just cited, that one wonders whether he is not taking himself to task for some of his own youthful lyrics. Pushkin wrote a poem, for example, at the beginning of his southern exile (precisely when Raevskii introduced him to Byron’s poetry), which qualifies easily as the kind of lyric repudiated in the letter to Viazemskii. “Pogaslo dnevnnoe svetilo” (“Day’s luminary has faded,” 1820) invokes the fading morning sun, the lost confidantes of youth, and the tears of intense feeling.²⁷ Though the style differs noticeably from that of “André Chénier,” where rhetorical exclamations and Church Slavonic diction elevate a highly complex message, the images in “Day’s luminary has faded” are precisely those found in “André Chénier.” In the first poem, there are countless ellipses, in contrast to the elaborations of “André Chénier,” as if the poet were so overpowered by the emotions of his poem that he could not write about his feelings in a more articulate manner. Here, too, apostrophe dominates, but it is to the supremely romantic image of the sea that Pushkin addresses “Day’s luminary has faded.” Pushkin’s experience in the south was, of course, a journey to the sea, but the vast expanse of water is clearly associated with romantic poetry in this poem, and Byron’s influence is readily apparent. In the poem traditionally cited as Pushkin’s farewell to his Byronic period, “K moriu” (“To the Sea,” 1824), the sea is the object of the poet’s address, the emblem of the south and all that it meant in Pushkin’s early development as a poet.

Pushkin uses the same images that occur in “Day’s luminary has faded” (except for the sea) when he writes “André Chénier” partly in parody of the earlier poem, whose emotions Pushkin might well have regarded as trivial in 1825. But in rejecting “Day’s luminary has faded,” Lord Byron, and all falsely self-oriented poetry, “André Chénier” also takes on the burden of replacing their subject matter. The poem sets out to explore and to exemplify the “true” elegy.

24. PSS, 7:37.

25. Ibid., 10:148.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 2:7–8.

Although Pushkin himself appears to have had a clear idea of what the elegy represented as a metrical category in ancient times,²⁸ many writers in the 1820s regarded the elegy as synonymous with the "elegiac." Nikolai Grech's definition in his four-volume textbook on literature reflects the very general notions of the era: an elegy is defined as any "lyric poem depicting the mixed feeling of joy and sadness." Grech adds that the tone is to be *tomnyi* ("languid") and that a language of the heart designed to affect the reader should reign.²⁹

Pushkin's textbook from his lycée days, Laharpe's *Cours de littérature ancienne et moderne*, gives an even broader definition of the elegy.

Quoique le mot *élégie* vienne du grec *ελεος*, qui signifie *complainte*, cependant elle n'était pas toujours plaintive; elle fut originairement, comme aujourd'hui, destinée à chanter différents objets, les dieux, le retour d'un ami ou le jour de sa naissance, ou, comme a dit Boileau, elle *gémissait sur un cercueil*. . . . L'élégie fut souvent le chant de l'amour heureux ou malheureux.³⁰

Laharpe's definition seems designed to challenge the supposed narrowness of those who see elegies as inherently sad, but he conforms to the notion that a definition of the elegy can be achieved by looking at the emotions it seeks to evoke.

These definitions might apply best to Pushkin's early efforts in the genre, poems which he called elegies and which mixed the languid tone of yearning for past loves and distant lands with the ever-present foreboding of death. A perfect example is his "Elegiia" of 1817 ("Opiat' ia vash, o iunye druž'ia," "Again I am yours, o young friends"), though there are several others, including "Day's luminary has faded." When Pushkin uses the term "elegy" or even "elegiac" in his critical writings, it is usually in a broad sense, to label entire groups of poems, or to characterize the writings of poets like Del'vig or Baratynskii. There is no article of definition, as there is for such equally problematic terms as "romanticism," "nationalism," or for other modes of literature, like drama or fiction.

By the mid-1820s the elegy was clearly becoming problematic for Pushkin, partly because it became a vehicle for excesses of self-expression and thus was associated with the false definition of romanticism along thematic lines. Though Pushkin labeled several of his pre-1820 works as "elegies" (three in 1816, one each in 1817 and 1819), the only work called an elegy in 1825 was a disrespectful litany on the death of Anna L'vovna Pushkina. Pushkin disavowed this work in a letter to Viazemskii, claiming that it was more the doing of Del'vig.³¹ Another poem of 1825, "Solovei i kukushka" ("The nightingale and the cuckoo"), also jokes about the ubiquity of elegiac sadness. Its last lines read, "Izbav' nas bozhe, / Ot elegicheskikh kuku!" ("Save us, o lord, / From the elegiac cuckoos!")³² Other

28. Ibid., 7:24, 37.

29. Nikolai Grech, *Uchebnaia kniga russkoi slovesnosti* (St. Petersburg, 1830), 3:160.

30. J. F. Laharpe, *Cours de la littérature ancienne et moderne* (Paris, 1816), 1:594.

31. PSS, 10:144.

32. Ibid., 2:250.

pejorative references to the elegy can be found in some of his letters,³³ and in *Evgenii Onegin*, when the narrator mocks Lenskii's devotion to his sad muse.³⁴

Pushkin was impatient with the elegy, but he never rejected it completely. He went on to write at least one extremely successful poem which he called an elegy, "Bezumnykh let ugasshee vesel'e" ("The faded joy of heedless years," 1830). Pushkin also wrote reviews about elegies and favorably mentioned such works by friends in letters to them.³⁵ In one letter, Pushkin concludes that the mere fact that imitators of elegies are intolerable does not mean that the genre itself should be banished from the "poetic oligarchy."³⁶

"André Chénier" takes a stand against false elegies and, in a way typical of Pushkin's poetic principles, offers an alternative which may not be a pure elegy but which is somehow a more authentic elegiac poem. Certainly the poem is not an elegy in the classical sense: its meter approaches the elegiac distich only in the long section of couplets. "André Chénier" uses metrical transpositions freely to call attention to particular ideas or to achieve greater emotional intensity. The poem resembles the elegy defined by Grech, at least in terms of mood and subject matter. But the speaker moves farther into the realms of political indictment and impassioned prophecy than popular definitions of the elegy allow.

Tonally, "André Chénier" better fits Grech's definition of the ode: "A lyrical depiction of known feelings, in which the exalted Poet, forgetting all that is of the Earth, is transported into the eternal world of the mind."³⁷ The sense of soaring emerges in Chénier's exalted prophecy, and a feeling of imagined escape from the prison cell is present throughout his monologue. Moreover, the epigraph which Pushkin chooses is not from Chénier's elegies or even from his *Iambes*, but from *La jeune captive*, Chénier's last ode. In "André Chénier," the high diction, the stately progress of ideas, the burning prophecy at the last — all lift this poem out of the range of personal poetry associated with the elegy in the 1820s. Without the strophic divisions of the ode, and depending on narrative flow and dramatic intensity more than on the declamatory style of the ode, "André Chénier" still reaches far beyond the elegy as Pushkin knew it.³⁸

There are several possible explanations for the mixing of ode and elegy in "André Chénier." First, the poem becomes a bridge between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by fusing the two genres which typified each age. In chapter 4 of *Evgenii Onegin*, Pushkin writes that he does not want to set two centuries quarreling by pitting the ode against the elegy.³⁹ Here Pushkin shows himself expressing the two genres as conflicting literary ideals, but it is the

33. Ibid., 10:90, 135, 210.

34. See especially *Evgenii Onegin*, 4:31–33. Pushkin wrote chapter 4 in 1825, again in the same notebook mentioned above (n. 23).

35. Examples are too numerous to cite in the text. Among them: 7:59–60, 81, 118, 153, 165, 184, 205, 244, 287; 10:36, 58, 314.

36. PSS, 7:36.

37. Nikolai Grech, *Uchebnaia kniga russkoi slovesnosti*, 3:34.

38. Boris Tomashevskii has written about the "hybrid elegy" in Pushkin's time. See especially his "Strofika Pushkina," *Stikh i iazyk* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1959), p. 265. Compare the recent textbook by N. B. Fridman, *Romantizm v tvorchestve A. S. Pushkina* (Moscow, 1980), pp. 33–34, where "André Chénier" is viewed in the traditional way as a historical elegy, though Fridman cites many of the same facts which have caused me here to move away from that belief.

39. PSS, 5:78–79.

characteristic elegy which Pushkin wishes to temper with an admixture of elements from the ode. He seeks in "André Chénier" to avoid the false elegies which arise from false sentiments. Pushkin had judged Batiushkov's *The Dying Tasso* a failure for its lack of feeling.⁴⁰ In the movement away from Byron, Pushkin sought not purity of genre but purity of feeling. By evoking genuine, significant emotions, Pushkin seeks a "true" elegy in "André Chénier" analogous to a "true" (*istinni*) romanticism. The presence of features from another genre does not diminish the intensity or purity of feeling in the poem; on the contrary, it elevates the meaning of these feelings.

While the false elegy is self-indulgent, "André Chénier" achieves another improvement in the genre by assuming a point of view other than that of Pushkin.⁴¹ The poem's structure and complexities of apostrophe discussed above affirm that otherness by creating several barriers between Pushkin and the lines spoken by Chénier. The poem's reliance on apostrophe calls attention to its separate levels of speaker-listener relationships. Pushkin further validates the highly emotional content of the poem by adding footnotes which authenticate the information given about Chénier, and he intensifies the emotional impact of his poem by using traditional images with unexpected power.

A certain distance between Pushkin and his subject is encouraged, then, by several structural features of the poem. There is something typically Pushkinian about this act of distancing. Analyses of *Evgenii Onegin* normally comment on the narrator's claim that he is not to be confused with his hero. Dissociation is not limited to its playful varieties in the novel in verse: poetic distance is a key element of Pushkin's relationship to the dominant literary movement of his time, romanticism.

The presence of elements of the ode fortifies and magnifies Pushkin's argument for the powers of the poet in "André Chénier." The theme is not one which Pushkin annexed from Chénier's work; *La jeune captive* and the *Iambes* are nonpolemical works suffused with a kind of religious bliss. Pushkin's celebration of the power of the poet, the grand recognition toward which "André Chénier" as an ode builds, is marked in the poem by an opposition to the forces which rule France at the time of Chénier's death. By extension, Pushkin contrasts his own powers as a poet, demonstrated with great confidence in "André Chénier," with that of Russia's tsars.

Pushkin seems to have been meditating on some kind of connection between the tsar and himself in 1825. The theme is central to *Boris Godunov*; in this work no one commands the real authority to govern Russia, and characters like Pimen and the Holy Fool exemplify the potentially visionary power of art. In the notebook which contained the autographs of *Boris Godunov*, "André Chénier," and the fourth chapter of *Evgenii Onegin*, Pushkin also wrote out an imagined conversation with Alexander I, in which he imagines what he might say to himself if he were tsar.⁴² Pushkin here suggests that fate connected him to

40. Ibid., 7:411.

41. See Fridman, *Romantizm v tvorchestve A. S. Pushkina*, pp. 32–34. Fridman finds a poet's choice of historical subjects over contemporary themes typical of the romantic urge toward escape. Compare L. S. Fleishman, "Iz istorii elegii v pushkinskuiu epokhu," *Pushkinskii sbornik* (Riga, 1968), pp. 31–35.

42. PSS, 7:51–62.

Alexander I because they had the same first name: he even plays on the coincidence in a letter to his wife written in 1834 about their son, another Aleksandr.⁴³

Pushkin depends on an opposition between the power of the poet and the authority of the government in some of his earlier political lyrics, for instance, "Vol'nost. Oda" ("Liberty. An Ode," 1817) and "Derevnia" ("The Countryside," 1819). In letters from the 1820s Pushkin uses metaphors that suggest deepened parallels between the political and poetic realms. He speculates about the "republic of letters," probably alluding to Chénier's *République des lettres*.⁴⁴ Pushkin calls the changes in prevailing artistic tastes a "change in the ministry on Parnassus."⁴⁵

In another remark about his children's names, Pushkin's preference for literary over imperial names is telling. When Natal'ia Nikolaevna wanted to name their second son Nikolai, Pushkin objected. Rather than naming his son after the reigning tsar, Pushkin gave his wife a choice of two names full of personal significance: Gavril and Grigorii.⁴⁶ Gavril Pushkin was an ancestor who helped the False Dmitrii to the throne during the Time of Troubles; he is included in the cast of characters for *Boris Godunov*. Grigorii was the given name of the monk who became the False Dmitrii.

In "André Chénier," Pushkin presents a poet with greater moral authority than that of the government which exerts overwhelming political force. While on the intertextual level "André Chénier" reveals an underlying conversation with Byron, in terms of political authority it suggests a conversation between Aleksandr Pushkin and Alexander I as one kind of ruler to another. The imagined conversation between Pushkin and his tsar, including both the possible conversation which he wrote out and the dialogue suggested by "André Chénier," has as its subject the conditions for Pushkin's release from exile.

By displaying the powers of the poet in "André Chénier," Pushkin offers new imperatives for his release. Rather than penning a work whose political ideology might please the tsar, as some of his friends urged, Pushkin may have sought to encourage his release by writing literature of such magnitude that no ruler would dare to keep him in Mikhailovskoe. Such personal reasons further account for the elevated style of "André Chénier," as of *Boris Godunov*, works which Pushkin knew would have an imperial audience. "André Chénier" plays grandly with the trope of apostrophe, projecting its ultimate addressee as a ruler whose government is empowered to release the author from exile. Yet another triangle emerges, this one dependent on a reading, not a listening situation. Pushkin writes "about" Chénier for the benefit of his tsar. Distance from the subject remains crucial, since Pushkin cannot possibly win over Alexander I if he is too closely linked to the liberal ideas behind Chénier's monologues. We as readers again take on secondary status as witnesses to a complex exchange between poets and their governments, but once more the role only seems small. Without other readers and writers telling Alexander I that Pushkin is a great poet, his efforts may well be in vain. As later incidents

43. Ibid., 10:370.

44. Ibid., 10:94; compare *ibid.*, 10:98, 363.

45. Ibid., 10:98.

46. V. Veresaev, *Pushkin v zhizni* (Moscow, 1936), 2:232.

provoked by Faddei Bulgarin sadly suggest, Russian tsars tended to trust others in judgments of literary talent and political intent.

As much as Pushkin played with the notion that his literary power might achieve his release, he was sufficiently realistic and politically aware to know that his talents were of no actual use to any ruler so long as he remained the independent poet he always was. Politics never overwhelm poetry in Pushkin's work, and it is his commitment to the priority of aesthetic considerations which separates Pushkin from the Decembrist poets. In "André Chénier" a sense of alienation from revolutionary poets emerges, especially when Chénier looks back at his poetry, amazed that it has been interpreted as a political act. "André Chénier" is a great poem precisely because it could not be "used" for any external aim, political or otherwise. Perhaps Pushkin sensed as much and included the parallel between poets and kings not only to show who was more important, but also to advance his own claims to a commanding position in the "republic of letters" which comprised Russian literature. Pushkin made impressive gains in the year 1825, and "André Chénier" shows Pushkin becoming a true "author" — a voice speaking with a sense of authority of its own definition.