Among those works written by Pushkin during his exile at Mikhailovskoe in 1824-25 is the long historical elegy, "Andrei Shen'e." The poem raises a number of interesting problems relating to Pushkin's poetic technique, his understanding of genres, his views of the French Revolution, and his attitudes toward the French poet Chénier. The poem was to raise problems for Pushkin himself when copies of politically suggestive lines, which were removed by the censor when the poem was submitted for publication, were found circulating under the title "14th of December" not long after the Decembrist revolt of 1825. Pushkin's difficulties with the government over the circulation of these lines, which could be understood as referring to events in Russia as well as in late eighteenth-century France, are well documented elsewhere and need not concern us here. Rather, the focus in this study will be on the significance of Pushkin's choice of the historical elegy as the genre for his tribute to Chénier. What will be shown is that his use of this genre had implications in the literary context of the mid-1820s which have not been examined before.


2. Most interpretations have focused on the relationship of the events described in the poem to Russian reality of the time, and the possibility that Pushkin was, in most of the poem, offering his own thoughts and views through the persona of Chénier. Boris Tomashevskii, in his Pushkin, 2 vols. (Moscow-Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1956-61), II, 65-73, covers many of the parallels. The "allegorical" and political implications of the poem are beyond the scope of this paper. See also V. B. Sandomirskaia's "Andrei Shen'e," in Stikhotvoreniiia Pushkina 1820-1830-kh (Leningrad: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1974), pp. 8-34.
the French literary press in the early 1820s, most poetic commemorations were to come after 1825, the year in which Pushkin published his poetic tribute.3

Writing tributes to poets who had recently died was a conventional practice, but in the early 1820s in Russia these poems were dedicated almost exclusively to Byron, whose death in Greece in 1824 had been commemorated in verse by many poets, including Ryleev, Kiukhel’beker, Venevitinov, Kozlov, and Pushkin (in “К мориу”). In the dedicatory quatrains to “Andrei Shen’e” Pushkin makes it clear that it is not Byron who calls him now, but one who had gone to the executioner’s block in “days of suffering”:

Меж тем, как изумленный мир
На урну Байрона взирает,
И хору европейских лир
Близ Данте тень его вникает,

Зовет меня другая тень,
Давно без песен, без ряданий
С кровавой плахи в дни страданий
Сошедшая в могильную сень.

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

(II, 397; lines 1-12)

Pushkin’s introduction in fact echoes, with its reference to Byron’s “shade” and Dante, the fifteenth stanza of Kiukhel’beker’s ode, “Smert’ Bairona” (1824), in which the poetically resurrected Byron is seen with the “shades” of his heroes, Dante, Tasso, the Giaour, and Manfred:4

Всех, всех воскресших вижу вас,
Героев, им воспетых,—тени!
Зловещий Дант, страдающ Тасс
Исходят из подземной сени;
Гяур воздвигся, встал Манфред:
Их озаряет грозный свет.

3. The Deschamps brothers, Sainte-Beuve, Musset, Hugo, and Prudhomme all wrote poems dedicated to Chénier after 1825. The text of “Andrei Shen’e” used for this study is from A. S. Pushkin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 16 vols. in 20 (Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1937-49). Volume and page numbers refer to this edition.