PAUL DEBRECZENY

The Three Styles of Dubrovskii *

The facts surrounding Pushkin's work on his unfinished novel Dubrovskii are generally known. Its idea was conceived in October 1832 when Pushkin heard a true story about a Belorussian nobleman, Ostrovskii, who had lost his property in a lawsuit and had become an outlaw.¹ In search for further details about dispossessed landowners, Pushkin managed to get hold of the transcript of court proceedings in a similar case, and he inserted this document into the manuscript of his novel as he worked on it, changing only the names and dates.² These court cases, which obviously reflected corrupt practices, interested him very much as possible factors in generating social unrest. The French and Polish revolutions as well as the cholera epidemic followed by riots in the inner provinces of Russia were in the center of his attention in the early 1830s, and he chose a theme for his novel which would give him an opportunity to study social conditions leading to rebellion. The basic idea for Dubrovskii was, then, an exploration of corrupt litigations and subsequent riots;³ but Pushkin evidently did not consider that idea sufficient for a novel, and he appended a romantic plot to it. Work on the project, however, proceeded smoothly only as long as he was dealing with his original idea. With Volume One—completed by 11 November 1832—he had exhausted his topic;⁴ in fact even the last two chapters of that volume were already leading into the love intrigue which had very little to do with litigation or riot. Work on the project stopped until 14 December; then it was resumed and continued until 22 January 1833; and finally, on 6 February one more paragraph was added to the last extant chapter (see pp. 832-33). With that, Pushkin abandoned his novel never to show any further interest in it.⁵

To take this unfinished piece of writing and analyze it as if it had been fully intended for publication is unfair to the author. Yet even scholars who present all

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2. See A. S. Pushkin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 16 vols. in 20 (Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1937-49), VIII, 764. All subsequent quotations from Pushkin will be identified by page numbers of this edition, given in parentheses within the text.
3. This has been argued most persuasively by B. Tomashevskii in Pushkin: Kniga vtor- aia; Materialy k monografii (1824-1837) (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1961), p. 146.
4. This is the conclusion of, among other critics, N. L. Stepanov; see his Proza Push- kina (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1962), p. 122.
5. The extant parts were to be published only after Pushkin's death, from his manu- script in a form mutilated by censorship, in Sochineniia Aleksandra Pushkina 11 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tip. zagotovleniiia gosudarstvennykh bumag, 1838-41), X. For subsequent history of publication of the restored text, see Iu. G. Oksman's commentary in A. S. Pushkin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 6 vols., ed. M. A. Tsiavlovskii (Moscow: Academia, 1935-38), IV, 734.
the relevant facts about Pushkin’s work on the novel proceed to treat it as a monolithic whole. The present article is an attempt to show that the novel’s text is a compound of at least three different approaches resulting in at least three different styles which reflect both originality and a compromise with literary convention.

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The large natural rock of an actual document which provided the initial inspiration for Dubrovskii sits squarely in the middle of Chapter Two, leaving little room for anything else in it; indeed the whole of Volume One had to be landscaped around it. Since it was the cause, with the riot as its effect, it was imperative that both it and the action surrounding it should be presented objectively: no valid revelations about social processes could be made otherwise. The material itself demanded an omniscient mode of narration, the kind Pushkin had employed earlier in The Blackamoor of Peter the Great. (1827-28)

Although in Dubrovskii, as in Poltava (1828), there is a villain, his vices are not exaggerated, nor does the responsibility for the subsequent riot rest with him alone. In order to make this clear, the narrator emphasizes the similarity between Troekurov and his eventual victim, Andrei Dubrovskii: “Being of the same age, born to the same class, brought up in the same way, they were also alike, to a certain extent, in character and inclinations” (p. 162). Troekurov is, of course, ungracious allowing his servant to snub Dubrovskii, but we must not forget that it was the latter who had initiated the unpleasant exchange out of jealousy, and that it is his intransigent arrogance that stands in the way of reconciliation. The narrator is emotionally above their quarrel, relating it as a “witness of many years” (a phrase applied to Pimen in Boris Godunov, 1825). Yet, though detached, he is not entirely impersonal. He does not hesitate to judge as he describes Troekurov’s “lordly idleness,” his “wild entertainments,” the “faults of a man to whom culture means nothing,” and who has a “rather limited mind” (p. 161). But the epithets conveying the value judgments are applied without irony or any other emotional coloring: they are simply statements about the hero as any educated person would see him. Details designed to moderate our dislike of Troekurov are introduced just as calmly. We are told, for instance, that Troekurov’s peasants “were devoted to him, proud of their master’s wealth and reputation” (p. 161), that “he was not avaricious by nature” (p. 176), and that during the litigations against his neighbor “satisfied vengeance and the love of power smothered his more noble sentiments up to a point, but at long last these latter triumphed” (p. 177). The changes in the manuscript indicate that Pushkin was aiming at a calm, balanced view of the character, for he added the detail about the devotion of Troekurov’s serfs to their master later

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6. See, e.g., T. P. Soboleva’s conclusion: “Dubrovskii, in the shape it came to us, is perceived as an integrated, logically concluded narrative,” Povest’ A. S. Pushkina “Dubrovskii” (Moscow: Akademiia pedagogicheskikh nauk RSFSR, 1963), p. 4. B. M. Berezin, in his turn, gives no warning at all that the text he is analyzing was not intended by its author to be a textbook example; see “Rabota nad iazykom povesti A. S. Pushkina Dubrovskii v srednei shkole,” Russkiy iazyk v shkole, 9, No. 3 (May-June 1949).