S. A. FOMICHEV

Soviet Pushkin Scholarship of the Last Decade*

In 1967 the Institute of Russian Literature (the Pushkin House) of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR published a collectively authored monograph, Pushkin: Achievements and Problems in Scholarship (Pushkin. Itogi i problemy izucheniiia), which surveys the work accomplished in Pushkin scholarship over the course of the last one hundred fifty years and identifies the central questions in the study of the poet’s life and work. The numerous reviews this work received both at home and abroad called attention to a soundness and thoroughness in assessing achievements, but also to a certain sketchiness in outlining problems. Be this as it may, it is difficult to overestimate the monograph’s significance: a substantial body of research has appeared in Pushkin scholarship—the most developed area of Russian philology—allowing us to trace the evolution of scholarship concerning the author whose creations laid the foundation for modern Russian literature and continuously exercised a beneficial influence over it.

Since that time ten years have passed. In a single article it would be impossible to analyze in any detail the writing on Pushkin which has appeared during these years: Its quantity is immense—all the more so since in 1974 the one hundred seventy-fifth anniversary of the poet’s birth was widely observed in the Soviet Union and elicited a new “explosion” of both scholarly and popular writing on him.¹ Normally around one hundred articles treating Pushkin appear in various scholarly publications each year; in 1974-75 no less than one hundred books were brought out—monographs and collections dealing with Pushkin’s life and work, the assimilation of his legacy into the culture of our country’s peoples, the problems of teaching his works in secondary school, and so forth. In 1974 more than forty scholarly and popular journals published in Russian commemorated the Pushkin anniversary. The sizes of the editions issued testify to the interest of large numbers of

*Translated by Madison Spach, Jr., The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

readers in Pushkin: for example, the tenth volume of the miscellany *Prometheus* (Prometei), a collection of historical and biographical essays based as a rule on new documentary materials, was devoted exclusively to Pushkin and issued originally in an edition of one hundred thousand; within a year it was followed by another edition of fifty thousand.

It would be possible to cite other examples of the enduring and vital significance of Pushkin's legacy for contemporary culture. What is important in this brief survey is to note the prevailing tendency of contemporary Soviet Pushkin scholarship to address itself frequently not just to specialists and philologists, but to wide circles of readers. As has been noted in the press, this phenomenon has, of course, certain regrettable aspects, for it leads at times to the erosion of scholarly criteria in presenting material: at times original findings are interspersed with the well known solely for the sake of popular appeal and witty hypotheses are "substantiated" more by elegant style than by documentary facts. Yet nonetheless, without disregarding the acknowledged liabilities inherent in a popular approach, we should consider it one of the most important stimuli to the development of contemporary Pushkin scholarship—for it is not the least among factors broadening the scope of scholarly research and infusing new lifeblood into Pushkin studies. As a case in point, more than thirty candidatural and doctoral dissertations have been defended over the course of the last decade in the Soviet Union in the area of Pushkin scholarship.²