
Literature and the Writer

Boris Eikhenbaum

Translated by Nora Seligman Favorov

“Literature and the Writer” [Literatura i pisatel'] was originally published as the second of a trio of articles in Boris Eikhenbaum’s book *My Chronicle* [Moi vremennik] (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1929). The three articles in order are “The Literary Environment” [Literaturnyi byt], “Literature and the Writer,” and “Literary Domesticity” [Literaturnaia domashnost']. Irwin Titunik’s translation of the first article, “The Literary Environment,” appeared in the 1971 volume *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed., pref. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, intro. Gerald Brunz (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971, 56-65); the other two articles in the three-article section appear in English translation for the first time in this issue of *Lingua Franca*.

There are two levels of notes to this article: author’s notes (i.e. Eikhenbaum’s own notes) and translator’s notes by Nora Seligman Favorov. Author’s notes appear with no additional designation, while translator’s notes are followed by (translator’s note). In author’s notes, abbreviations for cities have been expanded and translated (for example, M is expanded and translated to Moscow). Titles are given in translation, followed by the transliterated Russian title at first occurrence. Italics used for emphasis in the original are preserved in the translation. Square brackets are used for the translator’s brief in-text clarifications. All translations of quoted material are by Nora Seligman Favorov unless otherwise indicated.

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Can't you see that the spirit of our literature partially depends on the status of its writers?

Pushkin to Ryleev, 1825

1

Pushkin's question, as well as his entire argument with Bestuzhev and Ryleev, is still relevant today.¹ The current times have placed before us a whole series of similar questions that have served as the topics of debates and newspaper articles: "the writer and the reader," "the writer and the publisher," "literature and the social commission [sotsial'nyi zakaz]," "the literary profession," and so forth — all components of one big question, one big topic: *literature and the writer*.

There is no such thing as a unified literature, settled and monolithic, always produced based on the same chemical formula. Literary fact and literary eras are complicated and capricious concepts, since the relationships between the elements comprising literature are capricious, as are their functions. One day literature is a coterie of dilettantes getting together to read their verse or inscribing it in the albums of "their lovely countrywomen"; the next it is a thick "literary and social-commentary" journal with an editorial board and accounting department. One day it is lofty "service to the muses,"² diligently shielded from the bustle of the street, and the next it is a small-time press, a furor-of-the-day feuilleton, a cartoon. And, finally, there are times when, in place

¹ Kondratii Ryleev (1795-1826) and Aleksandr Bestuzhev (1797-1837) were the primary editors of the *Polar Star* [Poliarnaia zvezda] literary almanacs. Both were active members of the Decembrist movement: Ryleev was executed after the revolt; Bestuzhev was imprisoned, then exiled, and then released to fight in the Caucasus, where he died in battle. The argument in question centered on the relationship between writers and the court, with Pushkin eager to welcome royal "encouragement" (including the actual financial support other writers such as Karamzin, Zhukovskii, and Krylov were given) and the more radical Ryleev and Bestuzhev fearing such support would be degrading and constricting: "Mental powers weaken at Court, and Genius withers," as Ryleev wrote to Pushkin in June 1825. The epigraph is from Pushkin's response later that summer (translator's note).

² "Service to the muses" [sluzhen'e muz] is a phrase from Pushkin's poem "19 October" [19 oktiabria] (translator's note).

of literature, only its sign [znak] remains, and the question of “how to write” is eclipsed by the question of “how to be a writer.”

As varied and capricious as the very concept of literature can be, its so-called “literary crises” are equally varied in terms of their historical meaning. The entire evolution of literature could, if you like, be understood as a continuous series of crises, insofar as the very *sign* [znak] of *literariness* is continually changing and switching from one set of elements to another, although the evolutionary significance of these crises is always different.

If we are indeed going through one of these crises now, it is distinguished by new and particular historical features. The crisis of literature is currently complicated by the crisis of literary *byt* and, first and foremost, of the literary profession.³ The contemporary writer is faced with the question of the very “*business of literature*” (Gogol’s expression):⁴ Must the writer be a professional, and if so — in what sense? What should writers’ attitude be toward various forms of “the commission” [zakaz], and how should this term be understood? In what sense should the writer be “independent”? V. Shklovskii’s book *Technique of Writing Craft* [Tekhnika pisatel'skogo remesla] opens with a slogan that is noteworthy in this regard: “Don’t be in a rush to become a professional writer.”

There is nothing new about these questions in and of themselves; during the nineteenth century alone, they were raised and discussed many times. What is new is

³ Irwin R. Titunik, who translated the first in the set of three articles to which this one belongs, consistently translated *byt* as “environment,” rendering *literaturnyi byt* as “the literary environment.” This choice is not ideal in the context of “Literature and the Writer” and “Literary Domesticity.” *Byt* can also be translated as “everyday life,” so that *literaturnyi byt* would be more like “literary everyday life.” To quote Bradley A. Gorski, “*literaturnyi byt* refers to a relatively untranslatable category that comprises the institutions, interpersonal relations, and verbal production *surrounding* literature, but still *outside* it; it can be roughly translated as the ‘literary everyday’” (“Authors of Success: Cultural Capitalism and Literary Evolution in Contemporary Russia”, PhD diss., Columbia University, 2017, 195; translator’s note).

⁴ It is worth noting that the word translated here as “business” — *delo* — might also, in other contexts, be rendered as “cause,” “deed,” or “affair” and lacks the negative connotations “business” might have in the context of communist ideology (translator’s note).

the situation in which they are currently being posed; what is new is their evolutionary role. It's as if early twentieth-century literature never came face to face with these questions the way we have. If they were discussed, it was on an academic level. Rather than professionals, writers of this era tended to see themselves as the foremost representatives of "the intelligentsia," as unfettered philosophers. They didn't worry about attracting readers — literature occupied a lofty position and was content serving a small and select circle. Journals scraped by with "second class" fare and were of no literary importance — literature was concentrated in almanacs and poetry anthologies. The literary profession's social problem (its "status" [sostoianie], to use Pushkin's term) was solved by the close connection between the writer and the intelligentsia, its economic problem by support from the enlightened patrons that were typical at that time.

This situation began to noticeably change even before the revolution. Futurism was a violation not only of literary traditions, but of the traditions of literary *byt*. The writer went out "into the street," literary readings began to look more like a raucous free-for-all, the influence of print gave way to the influence of the spoken word. New writers appeared under a different sort of social sign [znak] — they were not and had no desire to be "the intelligentsia." This very word took on an ironic meaning. Futurists were, first and foremost, people of a new behavior, new manners. They came out onto the stage with the intention of insulting readers' accustomed tastes, of demonstrating their scorn for them. The question of professionalism seemed to be beside the point — the futurists at first acted like new dilettantes who had come to mock the "oracles of art" and the "intelligentsia" that worshipped it.

The upheaval that early futurism caused in literary *byt* had enormous significance. The questions confronting us today had already arisen during this initial period — the revolution simply gave them a particular socioeconomic urgency and accordingly changed how they were framed. This was when the foundations were laid for what would be the "productivist" theory of art, which later, in simplified form, became the main item

of the LEF platform.⁵ The central, albeit hidden, meaning and thrust of this item related to literary *byt*: writers used it to assert their new professional position and justify their labor — “the business of literature.”

This solution was natural for the revolution’s early years, when literature’s very existence was open to question. Today, it sounds archaic. Today, literature needs to be built rather than saved. Today, it’s not a matter of adapting literature or defending literary ground, but of capturing literary positions.

Life has confronted us with a new theoretical question: how important are the facts of literary *byt* to the evolution of literature? This question, which has by now been somewhat befogged by polemics and public debates, must be taken seriously — material must be collected; facts must be assembled. It is difficult to make generalizations based on current evidence — we must summon the past for analogies. By its very essence, this problem demands rigorous historical research, especially as literature is a social rather than individual phenomenon.

In this article, I limit myself to the question of literary professionalism and have chosen the two historical moments richest in analogs and therefore particularly relevant to us: the late twenties to early thirties and the early sixties. Pushkin stands at the center of the first, Tolstoi at the center of the second. Evidence from these eras should help us, if not directly answer today’s questions, at least frame them.

2

Pushkin wrote in an 1831 draft memorandum: “Ten years ago in our country a rather small number of amateurs was engaged in literature. They saw it as a pleasant and noble

⁵ LEF was the acronym used for the Left Front of the Arts (*Levyi front iskusstv*), an influential grouping of avant-garde artists and writers accepted by the Bolsheviks during the early Soviet period that valued the arts’ utilitarian role over personal artistic expression (translator’s note).

exercise, but not yet a branch of industry.” He repeats this in a later letter to Barante⁶ (1836, in French): “Literature has been a significant branch of industry in our country for only about twenty years. Before that it was viewed merely as an elegant and aristocratic pastime. In 1811, Madame de Staël remarked: ‘In Russia, a few noblemen are engaged in literature.’”

It should be noted, however, that an attempt was made in the late eighteenth century to liberate literature from its dependence on the court and make it more autonomous and professional. I have in mind Karamzin, who strove to solidify “authorship” as a profession, transplanting to Russian soil the forms of Western journals and almanacs and vigorously propagandizing them within what was then a very limited community of readers. But all that was precarious and uncertain, and he ultimately had to abandon not just publishing journals but literature itself. *Moscow Journal* [Moskovskii zhurnal] lasted just two years (1791-92) with 300 subscribers. In a special appeal to readers, Karamzin lamented his position: “If I had 500 rather than 300 subscribers for this year, I would have tried the following year to make the journal’s appearance more pleasing to the reader’s eye... But as 300 subscribers barely compensates me for the printing of twelve issues, in this instance I cannot contemplate either the ordering of type or plates.” He went from one plan to another, from the journal to the almanac, and at one point even worked on putting together a “medley” (feuilleton) for *Moscow Bulletin* [Moskovskie vedomosti]. Finally, disillusioned by his failures, he wrote to Dmitriev in 1798,

Your idea of living off translations made me laugh. Russian literature wanders the world like a beggar, with sack and staff: it’s a meager living!.. If economic circumstances were not forcing me to deal with the printing press, after placing a hand on the altar of the Muses and shedding bitter tears, I would swear never again to serve them through either writing or translation. It’s a strange business! We have the Academy, the University, but literature is a barefoot stepchild...

⁶ Amable-Guillaume-Prosper Brugière, baron de Barante (1782-1866), a statesman and historian who served as French ambassador to Russia 1835-41, had written to Pushkin to ask about Russian copyright laws (translator’s note).

Literature was receding into *byt* — it was becoming an intimate, domestic affair, increasingly residing in letters, album inscriptions, *petits jeux*. This is the same form Pushkin was recalling. It is interesting that even the journals of this era were tinged with domestic informality and a certain cheekiness. Such, for example, was the typical journal of the time, A.E. Izmailov's *The Well-Intentioned* [Blagonamerennyi], which was interesting specifically as a separate homespun literary form. This was an utterly domestic undertaking, akin to a tiny shop, and its proprietor saw it as his own private business [chastnoe delo], palming off all sorts of goods on the reader, whatever was at hand: Khvostov's poetry that he himself poked fun at and the tragedies of the merchant Ganin, whom he bamboozled and forced to subscribe to fifty copies. Izmailov explained himself to his readership with utter familiarity; in advertisements for subscriptions, for example, he justified himself as follows:

Anyone with experience of how hard it is for one man who has other occupations on top of literary ones — such as an entire office on his hands in one of the ministerial departments, not to mention a wife and children and loads of relatives and friends — to publish between eight and ten press sheets per month will surely be forgiving if, among many worthwhile articles, several weak ones will be found, placed not for personal indulgence, but out of necessity.

If an issue was late, Izmailov blamed the pre-Lent festivities, or the fact that he had to deliver his daughter to boarding school, or had to see off his relatives moving to a distant province, and so forth.

By the mid-twenties, the situation began to change. Literary dilettantism was showing a tendency to stray beyond domestic circles and salons — new plans were made for journals and almanacs based on European models; the problem of attracting readers began to be discussed; and the question of paying writers a fee was raised. Ryleev and Bestuzhev's *Polar Star* [Poliarnaia zvezda] almanac (1823) enjoyed great commercial success, and Pushkin's *Fountain of Bakhchisarai* [Bakhchisaraiskii fontan], which came out a year later, prompted a heated polemic not only about romanticism, but also about the fee, and about the relationship between the writer and the publisher or bookseller. This was prompted by the fact that Pushkin received three thousand rubles for *The*

Fountain of Bakhchisarai from booksellers, while *Prisoner of the Caucasus* [Kavkazskii plennik] (1822) had been purchased from him by N.I. Gnedich for just five hundred.⁷ The controversy broke out as soon as the verse tale was released. *The Russian Invalid* [Russkii invalid] reported that Moscow's booksellers "purchased the new verse tale *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, a composition by Pushkin, for three thousand rubles. That comes to five rubles per line. This is proof that it is not just England and not just the English that pay for exquisite works of poetry with a generous hand." Bulgarin's journal *Literary Pages* [Literaturnye listki] proclaimed: "*The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, Pushkin's verse tale, has been drawing a multitude of customers to bookshops. This *fountain* brings to life the fable of Jupiter's golden rain, the only difference being that instead of beautiful Danaë, it is Russian booksellers who are benefitting from its precious droplets. Most likely, this lovely composition will soon be sold out." Next it was the booksellers who spoke out — an odd polemic began "about *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* not from a literary perspective" that, for us, is now also of literary interest. A "young bookseller" in an argument with an "old bookseller" draws a picture of what was then the usual informal relationship between writer and bookseller:

[O]ur booksellers, of whom there are very few in all of Russia, very rarely have commercial relations with the *producers*, that is the writers; they buy the works in manuscript form very rarely and are instead content to sell books on commission. As soon as a new book appears in the world and customers begin to ask for it in shops, one of our confreres immediately pays the writer or publisher a call and offers him *profitable terms* — to give the shop ten copies on commission allowing twenty percent for the effort, in other words for taking the books from the writer's home to the bookseller's shop. The money is paid to the writer only when another five copies are needed; if that is not the case, the proceeds go toward a different transaction. (*Literary Pages*, 1824, nos. 11-12)

The year 1825 indisputably took literature out of its past insularity. In Moscow, the new journal *The Moscow Telegraph* [Moskovskii telegraf] began publication with the close

⁷ Nikolai Gnedich (1784-1833) was a poet and translator, most notably of Homer's *Iliad*. Pushkin was in exile in Chişinău when Gnedich "helped" him publish *Prisoner of the Caucasus* on such unfavorable terms (translator's note).

involvement of P. Viazemskii; in Petersburg, Bulgarin's *Northern Bee* [Severnaia pchela] appeared. Lines were drawn between the literary camps and a polemic developed that often touched on questions involving literary *byt*. This was the year of Pushkin's argument with Bestuzhev and Ryleev on the status of the writer in Russia — or to put it in contemporary language, on the literary profession.

Pushkin was one of the first to set out on the path of literary professionalism, and he did so decisively, although he understood it somewhat differently than Bulgarin and his camp ("the shopkeepers of literature," as Pushkin expressed it). For him, the main question was how to achieve "*independence*" [emphasis in the original]. His situation was complicated: he was fighting on two fronts — against both the literary hucksters heeding the public's tastes and against the court grandees who continued to see literature as a "pleasant exercise." The word "*independence*" turns up frequently in his letters during 1823-25. Especially representative are the letters, including rough drafts, to Kaznacheev, director (in 1824) of the chancellery of Count Vorontsov, on whose whims Pushkin's fate largely depended during that period:⁸

For seven years I have not been engaged in government service, have not written a single document, have not dealt with a single superior. These seven years, as you know, have been lost for me. It would be out of place for me to complain. I blocked my own path and chose a different aim. For God's sake, don't think that I have regarded the writing of poetry with the childish vanity of a rhymester or as a form of relaxation for the man of sensibility: it is simply my trade, a branch of private industry that has afforded me a living and domestic independence. I do not think that Count Vorontsov would want to deprive me of either of those.

In another draft (in French), he is even more explicit: "Since my literary pursuits can make me more money, it is utterly natural on my part to sacrifice my work in government service for their sake. You speak to me of patronage and friendship (apparently on the

⁸ Count Mikhail Vorontsov (1782-1856), a successful commander during the Napoleonic wars, was serving as *namestnik* or viceroy of New Russia (Novorossiia), which encompassed Kishinev (Chişinău), where Pushkin was exiled. Pushkin petitioned to be moved to Odessa to serve under Vorontsov and moved there in 1823. Displeased with Pushkin's behavior (including a rumored affair with his wife), Vorontsov had the poet's place of exile changed to the Pushkin family estate in Mikhailovskoe (translator's note).

part of Vorontsov) — two concepts that, in my opinion, are incompatible... I strive solely for independence.” Around the same time he wrote to Viazemskii,

What you are saying about a journal has been fermenting in my mind for a long time. The problem is that Vorontsov can't be counted on. He is cold toward everything that is not him; and patronage has gone out of fashion. None of us wants the *magnanimous patronage of an enlightened grandee*. That grew old back with Lomonosov. Today's literature is and must be nobly independent.

Interestingly, in his argument with Bestuzhev and Ryleev, Pushkin, from a purely professional perspective, defends the system of patronage or “encouragement,” but under different social conditions, given a different class relationship. Raising objections to an article where Bestuzhev with great emotion and in his usual florid manner argues that “encouragement can invigorate only ordinary talents,” Pushkin cites evidence: “As *encouragement*, Derzhavin and Dmitriev were made ministers. Catherine's age was the age of encouragement: that does not make it worse than any other. Karamzin, it seems, was encouraged; Zhukovskii cannot complain, nor can Krylov... The only unencouraged I see are myself and Baratynskii — and I don't say ‘Thank God.’”⁹ He goes on to cite instances of patronage toward Tasso, Ariosto, Shakespeare (“based on Elizabeth's commission”), Molière, Voltaire. “Derzhavin was shown patronage by three tsars.” The crux of the matter, as Pushkin saw it, was not patronage in and of itself, but the nature of the relationships:

Here, writers are drawn from society's highest class — aristocratic pride mixes in them with authorial vanity; we do not want to be patronized by our equals. This is what that scoundrel Vorontsov fails to understand. He imagines that the Russian poet will show up in his vestibule with a dedication or ode — instead the fellow shows up demanding to be respected as a nobleman with a six-hundred-year lineage — a devil of a difference.

⁹ Pushkin is responding to a statement made by Bestuzhev in his “View of Russian literature in 1824 and early 1825” [Vzgliad na russkuiu slovesnost' v techenie 1824 i nachale 1825 goda] published in *The Polar Star* (1828) in which he “thanked God” that writers were not being encouraged (translator's note).

In response to Ryleev's reproaches ("You've cast yourself as an aristocrat; that makes me laugh. Are you really one to boast of a five-hundred-year noble lineage?"), Pushkin writes:

You are annoyed with me for boasting of a six-hundred-year noble lineage (NB: my line is older). Can't you see that the spirit of our literature partially depends on the status of its writers? Our writing cannot cater to grandees as we consider ourselves their equals by birth. This leads to pride, etc. Russian writers should not be judged the way foreign ones are. There, they write for money, and here (other than me) they write out of vanity. There, they can make a living on poetry, and here, Count Khvostov has run through his living on it.¹⁰ There, if you're going hungry — write a book; here, if you're going hungry — go into service and don't write. My dear friend! You're a poet and I'm a poet, but I am more prosaic in my reasoning and therefore am probably right.

What is particularly noticeable in this argument is the fact that Pushkin sees the promoting of his "nobility" as an essential principle of professional self-defense under the specific conditions of the "status" of writers in Russia at the time. He insists on the idea that, unlike others, he writes "for money" and that his reasoning is "more prosaic" — in other words, more professional. Where he differs from the "shopkeepers of literature" is that, rather than defining professionalism as serving the public, he demands "independence" as a mandatory condition. In a later article, written after Bulgarin's bitter feud with the "literary aristocracy," Pushkin plainly stated a preference for the system of patronage preserved in the customs of English literature (Crabbe dedicating his poem to "His Grace the Duke," etc.) over the huckstering Russian journal system. He returns to the earlier argument and introduces new ideas into his response:

Here, writers cannot seek charity and patronage from people they consider to be their equals and cater their writing to grandees and the wealthy in the hope of getting five hundred rubles or a gem-studded ring from them. What does that mean? That today's writers are more noble in their thinking and sensibilities than

¹⁰ According to Tatiana Wolff (*Pushkin on Literature* [London: 1971], 153): "Count D.I. Khvostov used to publish his works at his own expense and then buy up remainder copies to send to his friends" (translator's note).

the thinking and sensibilities of Lomonosov and Kostrov? Permit me to have my doubts.

This is followed by a portrayal of Russian literary mores (particularly interesting in the draft text) full of bile and indignation, after which Pushkin asserts: “Furthermore, for some time now, literature has been a profitable trade here, and the public is in a position to offer more money than his Highness such-and-such or his Excellency someone-or-other. Be that as it may, I repeat, that forms have no meaning” (*Thoughts on the Road* [Mysli na doroge], ch. 3).¹¹

All this material (here I have included only a small part of it) shows what a huge role the issues and interrelations of literary *byt* played during this era (approximately the decade from 1825 to 1835), in particular the question of what constituted literary professionalism. Aspects of literary *byt* made their way into the evolutionary process itself and determined a great deal in the literary struggle and, at times, in the literary works. The Bulgarin camp, Bulgarin first and foremost, walked the simple path of “hackwork” — directly fulfilling the reader’s “commission” at a time when the main reader was the “middle estate,” which occupied a low cultural level. The bookseller Ovsianikov says of the twenties: “The only thing that kept sales up was the mere fashion of having libraries in aristocratic and wealthy houses. Prosperous merchants read nothing at all, the middle estate read little, and the aristocracy read exclusively foreign books.” Bulgarin used any means to lure readers and thereby vanquish his enemies, the literary “aristocrats,” for whom the concept of “the commission” was much more complicated. The division into these two camps mirrored the division of the day’s literature into prose and poetry: in the Bulgarin camp, which catered directly to the reader, it was prose that reigned supreme, while among the “aristocrats,” it was poetry. Pushkin could see the declining interest in poetry and understood the importance of

¹¹ In saying “forms have no meaning,” Pushkin is drawing a contrast between, for example, Crabbe, who dedicated poems to “his Grace the Duke,” and a writer “not ashamed to publicly shake the hand of a journalist generally considered disgraced but capable of harming the sale of a book or whose praise can attract buyers” (A.S. Pushkin, *Collected Works in 10 Volumes* [Sobranie sochineniia v 10 tomakh; Moscow: 1959-62], vol. 6, 392) (translator’s note).

prose as a way of strengthening the very position of literature (which explains why he was constantly talking about prose in his letters to Viazemskii, Bestuzhev, and Pogodin), but he felt that Russian literary language had not yet attained the precision and conciseness the language of prose should have.

In this regard, the year 1829 was a milestone — the year Bulgarin’s *Ivan Vyzhigin*, Pushkin’s *Poltava*, and Zagoskin’s *Lurii Miloslavskii* came out. *Vyzhigin* was a huge commercial success — everyone was reading it. In A. Shakhovskoi’s farce *Mercury Again, or Novels Masquerading* [Eshche Merkurii, ili romannyi maskarad] (1829), characters from currently fashionable Russian and translated novels paraded before the audience — including Vyzhigin, who recommended himself as follows:

I’m Vyzhigin, Ivan, at your service,	<i>Ia Vyzhigin Ivan, k uslugam vsekh,</i>
From masters to servants, from landlords to	<i>Ot bar do slug i ot dvorian do dvornei:</i>
house serfs:	<i>Ia vmig skhvatil finansovyi uspek;</i>
I instantly gained financial success;	<i>No avtorskii daetsia poupornei</i>
But authorial success is harder to come by.	

Around the same time, Pogodin wrote to Shevyrev: “Pushkin’s *Poltava* has come out, but it has not been given the reception it deserves... Bulgarin’s *Vyzhigin* has made much more of a splash. As a literary work it is worthless... A few things about mores loosely stitched together... It holds relative merit for our public, and after seven days the author started a second printing.” Pushkin himself wrote: “*Poltava* has not had success.” Meanwhile, there is reason to believe that *Poltava* (and to some extent *Boris Godunov*) was written with an eye toward “the commission” and therefore with hope of success. Pushkin wrote it quickly, but not because he was particularly caught up in it: “I wrote *Poltava* in a few days; I wouldn’t have been able to work on it longer and would have totally abandoned it.” Considering Pushkin’s literary situation in 1829, it is safe to assume that work on *Poltava* was undertaken with the intention of creating a contrast between Bulgarin’s “hackwork” and something worthy of literature but that also responded to the time’s “social commission.” It is also curious that Zagoskin’s *Lurii Miloslavskii* was warmly welcomed by Pushkin — that was evidently a tactical step in his struggle with Bulgarin.

So, what was central for Pushkin was the question of professional independence, of writers' ability to maintain their dignity, and of their duty, not to what readers were "commissioning" them to write (as seen in his disdain for contemporary French literature, whose influence on society he attributed to "a striving to adapt to the reigning taste, to the opinions of 'the public'" — compare a draft formulation: "How shamelessly they grovel before the reigning people!"), but to the commission of literature [zakaz literaturnyi]. In this light, the principle Pushkin was promoting around 1825, a principle that he stubbornly maintained and reiterated despite the reproaches of close friends — the emphasis on his "nobility" — takes on a specific meaning for literature. This had nothing whatsoever to do with "class consciousness" per se;¹² the point was that Pushkin, in his struggle for professional independence, was mobilizing all available resources: for his struggle with Bulgarin — the journal, prose, the feuilleton, and so forth; for his struggle with Vorontsov — his dignity as a nobleman. In other words, at this moment "nobility," for him, became important as a weapon in the struggle for "the business of literature"; it became a sort of professional slogan. Specifically in this regard his argument with Bestuzhev and Ryleev is emblematic ("I am more prosaic in my reasoning"), and specifically from this perspective Pushkin's "*klassovost*" is important for the literary historian.¹³ It is important to consider the practical circumstances of literary *byt* [literaturno-bytovye uslovii] under which Pushkin started invoking his "nobility." Neither the position of the déclassé writer accommodating himself to the public taste nor the position of a writer being patronized by "an enlightened grandee" featured in his conception of the literary profession. In his struggle for the sort of position as a writer he had in mind, Pushkin was willing to compromise and make concessions —

¹² D. Blagoi, *Pushkin's Class Consciousness* [Klassovoe samosoznanie Pushkina] (Moscow, 1927).

¹³ Eikhenbaum is making playful use of an anachronistic word. Among adherents of Marxism, *klassovost* (classness) became a buzz word in early-twentieth-century debates about the role of art in serving the class struggle. In reference to Tolstoy and Nekrasov (below), the word richly hints at these writers' complicated attachment to their variously interpreted roles as members of the Russian nobility (translator's note).

and he ultimately died amid that struggle, almost copying Karamzin's path, but tragically deviating from it.

Literature took a different turn — bypassing Pushkin's principles. Senkovskii's *Library for Reading* [Biblioteka dlia chteniia] appeared — an utterly “commercial” journal targeting the provincial reader. In this sense, the Bulgarin approach was victorious — the writer was transformed into a professional artisan. No Pushkin *Contemporary* [Sovremennik], no *Moscow Observer* [Moskovskii nabliudatel'], no efforts by “the aristocrats” (including Gogol' — see his letter to Moscow writers and his article in *The Contemporary*, 1836, no. 1) could change anything. The old generation, with Shevyrev as its mouthpiece, shouted out their anathema (see his article “Literature and Commerce” [Slovesnost' i torgovlia] in the *Moscow Observer*, 1835, no. 1) — and faded away. The “commercial direction” was ascendant. Gogol' emigrated, and the traditions of “lofty” literature were maintained within an environment of new dilettantes, which is what, for example, Lermontov was and later Fet consciously became. The era of journalism, the feuilleton, the sketch, the competition among social commentators, the era of the struggle among editors and their staff — a professional era in the full meaning of that word — was approaching.

3

In 1840, Polevoi wrote to his brother: “The time of journals has ended, my dear brother, at least in the form that started with the *Telegraph* [Telegraf] and will end with *Notes of the Fatherland* [Otechestvennye zapiski]. Different days, different years!”

The early forties in literature were a time of reckoning. Belles-lettres lacked confidence and looked to the past; poetry was even less sure of itself. This was a time of philosophical discussion groups, the development of a new “intelligentsia,” a time of theory, criticism, a time of Stankevich, Belinskii, a time of people with complicated spiritual lives and even more complicated conversations about them, people with “a

fate” but no “biography,” a time of “reflection,” of anguish. In literature, a time of hesitation. So it continued until at least 1846-47, when the signs of a new movement were discerned.

Suddenly, a decision was made — to cut ties with the past, to break free from the hypnosis of “lofty” literature, to move away from both Pushkin and Gogol'. “Different days, different years.” Russian writers transformed themselves into professional writers and publishers. Bypassing traditional journals, which were oblivious to all this, new anthologies and almanacs were created — along the lines of the *Physiology of Petersburg* [Fiziologiia Peterburga] or *The Petersburg Anthology* [Peterburgskii sbornik]. In his “introduction” to *Physiology*, Belinskii, who had joined forces with Nekrasov, raised an emblematic rallying cry: “*light literature*” had to be produced, “ordinary talents” were needed, in keeping with the model of French literature. After listing the names of our “brilliant” writers and their most important works (“the creations of rigorous art”), Belinskii wrote:

Lofty talents, especially geniuses, operate based on inspiration and capriciously follow their own path; they cannot be invited to collaborate on publishing a book; you can't ask them: “Write us an article with content involving Petersburg life, but what you're offering for our book doesn't fit and we don't need that.” What's more, there will never be enough geniuses and great talents to keep the public supplied with sufficient literary works to meet the needs of their daily leisure. Sometimes an entire century will go by with barely a single genius appearing: should that really mean that there will be times when society has to go without literature for an entire century? No! Literature in the broad sense of the word represents an entire living world filled with variety and nuances, just like nature, whose works are divided into genera and species, classes and phyla, extending from the massive elephant to the miniature hummingbird. Any literature not abundant in brilliant names is poor; but a literature in which everything is either a work of genius or a talentless and vulgar work is also not rich. Ordinary talents are necessary for a literature's richness, and the more of them there are, the better it is for literature. Yet — we repeat — it is they who are in short supply, which is why the public has nothing to read.

So, the bet was placed on “ordinary talents” and an ordinary public. Belinskii's article is an entire program, a manifesto. The anthology itself represents a sort of manifesto or program as well. And it was out of this program that, in 1847, a new journal — *The*

Contemporary — was born. The writers who had entered literature earlier (in the early forties) and were looking over their shoulders at the “classics” were taken aback. Such was the case, for example, with Turgenev, who recalls forming

[The] firm intention of leaving literature altogether; it was only at the request of I.I. Panaev, who did not have enough to fill the miscellany section in the first issue of *The Contemporary*, that I left him a sketch titled “Khor and Kalinych.” (The words “From a Huntsman’s Notebook” [Iz zapisok okhotnika] were thought up and added by that same I.I. Panaev to encourage the readers’ indulgence.) The sketch’s success inspired me to write others; and so I returned to literature.

But that was only the start of a process that, by the mid-fifties, had taken clear form and confronted writers with the same difficult questions that faced Pushkin in a different form and that our generation is once again facing: just what is “the business of literature” and how is a writer to be a writer?

What Belinskii and Nekrasov had been calling for became a reality to a greater degree than they themselves had probably anticipated. Literature came pouring in from every direction — a true flood built up, enough to drown in. The era of “masters” had ended — literature had become not just public fare but a public affair. The “novella” [povest'] was replaced by sketches and feuilletons. A new writer had arrived for whom the linguistic culture of the twenties and thirties was not only alien, but unknown. Such was the historical necessity.

An unbelievable number of journals propagated and proliferated. N. Leikin recalled: “Small journals back then arose quickly, suspended operations, passed from hand to hand, and just as quickly perished in new hands. Publishers for some reason thought they could begin publishing a journal at no cost, that subscribers would immediately come running and the journal would pay for itself from the outset, but that was not the case.” All sorts of people from various levels of society became publishers — Count Kushelev-Bezborodko (*The Russian Word* [Russkoe slovo]) and Lev Kambek (*The Petersburg Herald* [Peterburgskii vestnik]), who came out of the woodwork — he had been immortalized in Dostoevskii’s *The Demons* [Besy] and later ended his career at the Khutorok entertainment establishment (on Kamennooostrovskii Prospect), where he

served as manager. The writers were also diverse, once you looked beyond the editorial offices of *The Russian Herald* or *The Contemporary*, where the “generals of literature” were, despite everything, still concentrated back then. It would be no exaggeration to talk about “*Gostinii Dvor*” literature in the late fifties — and this literature wasn’t just behind the counter — it made it into print (*The Russian World* [Russkii mir], *The Illustrated Gazette* [Illiustrirovannaia gazeta], *The Petersburg Herald*, among others); it was from here that Leikin emerged.¹⁴ Some of the shops of the Gostinii Dvor’ or the Mariinskii market turned into literary clubs — the professions became intermingled. A. Ivanov (a poet who used the pseudonym “Classic”) had a fabric shop on Chernyshevoi Lane — here writers and actors gathered to talk about literature and buy themselves cloth for pants. “At Ivanov’s shop,” Leikin recalled, “the only thing they ever talked about was literature, so the actual customers who witnessed this were also given an education.” The poet and humorist Zhulev and the playwright Chernyshev (who were also young actors at the Aleksandrinskii Theater) got to know Leikin at the shop of the used-bookseller Terskii: when he found out that Leikin worked in Gostinii Dvor’, Zhulev said to Chernyshev: “So that means we now have three Gostinii Dvor’ merchant acquaintances: the perfumer Mikhail Ivanovich Pyliaev, the clothmaker Aleksei Fedorovich Ivanov, and the wholesaler Leikin, beside the bookseller Rykushin... we buy perfume, pomade, and bandoline from Pyliaev, and from Ivanov, tricot for pants. A clothmaker and poet. He writes verse. You should get to know him.”

The concept of poetry was broadly defined. There was an adaptation into verse, for example, of... Saltykov (A. Rozenstrem’s “Story of an Arrestee” [Rasskaz arestanta], based on *Provincial Sketches* [Gubernskie ocherki] — *The Petersburg Herald*, 1861) — yielding:

In my village, I worked and played as any does,	<i>la v derevne svoei rabotal i gulial,</i>
But a drunkard is something that I never was!	<i>Tol'ko p'ianitse i nikogda ne byval!</i>

¹⁴ The *Gostinii Dvor*’, literally “Guest’s Court,” was an indoor shopping center in most major Russian cities, so named because early merchants tended to be foreigners (guests). The writer Nikolai Leikin (1841-1906) was born into the merchant estate, from which he drew heavily in his fiction (translator’s note).

I was happy-go-lucky, with nary a concern,
And I shared with my family whatever I could
earn.
A fondness sprung up 'tween a soldier's wife
and me,
And to tell you the truth, she was fair pretty.
To that add the fact that her man was away,
And with the village menfolk, she acted free
and gay...

*Bezzabotno ia zhil, ni o chem ne tuzhil,
I s sem'eiu svoei zarabotki delil.
Poliubilas' mne u soldata zhena,
Da i pravdu skazat' ved' byla ne durna,
Nu i muzh-to pritom byl v otluchke u
nei;
Obrashch alas' ona s muzhikami
vol'nei...*

But in other corners, far from Gostinii Dvor', it was the non-noble intellectuals [raznochintsy] who were writing and wasting away as they cursed the publishers and editors—including Nekrasov. N. Uskenskii recalled of Levitov:

A.I. [Levitov] was mad at the whole world, especially the publishers and editors, whom he labeled “exploiters.” His energy for labor and literary productivity was noticeably waning with every day, even though his name enjoyed such clamorous renown that every new publisher felt it his duty to invite the author of *Sketches from the Steppe* [Stepnye ocherki] to work for him; for his part, Levitov considered it essential to “get an advance out of” the new “exploiter,” as he put it. “That’s how you have to deal with them,” A.I. explained. “They build themselves houses, ride around in carriages, while our sort barely has a boot to walk in... That Nekrasov has bought himself a huge estate and set up a distillery — that’s the poet who bewailed our little fellow man.

Another scene — Pomialovskii at N. Uspenskii’s:

“Listen, Uspenskii,” Pomialovskii suddenly asked me. “You and I are a force... isn’t that so? Let’s quit literature!... After all, you know perfectly well that its future is being determined by the exploiters who’ve been sucking our blood...”

“Well, and what are you and I going to do?”

“The first thing is we’ll open a bakery... I’m telling you, that’s very profitable... because there, what matters is the leavening expansion, and then, we’ll publish our own journal or newspaper...”

Just reading this one book of reminiscences (scenes with Nekrasov, Tolstoi, Turgenev) will be enough to understand how difficult and tense the relationships of literary *byt*

were in that era.¹⁵ And they came to a dreary end — N. Uspenskii, whom everyone had forgotten by the late sixties, lived another twenty years on alms from playing the accordion and telling stories of folk scenes in train cars, before slitting his own throat in 1889.

4

What was the behavior of other writers for whom literature, albeit literature cut off from Pushkinian traditions, was still “lofty service” [to the muses], and how did they resolve these questions?

In the early sixties, Saltykov¹⁶ wrote a sketch, “Philistine Writers” [Literatory-obyyateli], drawing a satirical portrait of “the Korytnikovs” to illustrate a common variety of journalist at the time: the denouncer (Belinskii called them “hummingbirds”). This, in essence, was not just a sketch, but also a sort of practical, albeit irony-laced, handbook. Saltykov recommended to the Korytnikovs that they write their articles in the following manner:

“January, on the ... day, year of 18... Town of Halfwits. On this day, Udar-Erygin, right in front of everyone, swallowed a sword, or, to be precise, swiped an entire case file (of someone or other); he demonstrated in the process such remarkable deftness that nobody so much as gasped. (*A Native*).” And that would do it! Do you really think that this article, despite its dry, chronicle-like form, will be less galling to Udar-Erygin than the same article watered down with editorializing about how “in our time, when one might think that thievery is being universally combated,” or how “in our time, when the habits of legality are little-by-little penetrating all administrative slums,” and so forth.

¹⁵ N. Uspenskii, *From the past. Memories* [Iz proshlogo. Vospominaniia] (Moscow, 1889).

¹⁶ Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin published the sketch in 1861 in *The Contemporary*, no. 2 (translator’s note).

An intriguing interpretation of this sketch, which caused quite a stir at the time, was offered by G. Eliseev in his memoiristic jottings (as described by N. Mikhailovskii):¹⁷

Some discerned in the sketch the illegitimate, scornfully aristocratic attitude of a general of literature toward the literary small fry, even though they were doing the very same thing as he. Others were glad to see that Shchedrin, a patriarch and pioneer of the literary exposé, had finally decided to use his mockery to staunch the flow of tiresome exposés. Eliseev has a rather different and, of course, much more accurate interpretation of Shchedrin's sketch. His argument was approximately as follows: Writers who, like Shchedrin, began to work during the forties, were, in most cases, people of noble birth who were brought up on a readymade living and, in some cases, brilliantly educated, and that brilliant education opened up broad horizons and placed on them a certain set of demands. These people felt oppressed by the gloom of the pre-reform regime and passionately longed for the renewal of the motherland, a renewal that they imaged in forms that were, perhaps, indistinct, but nevertheless marvelous and sublime. But when this renewal began in the late fifties, some of them failed to even recognize it, because it brought to the surface elements from the very lowest strata of Russia's everyday sea that offended their highly refined taste. They fully shared the best hopes for a new time, but regarded the flood of nonnoble conveyors of these hopes with squeamish astonishment and at times took it too far. Their squeamishness was so great that they failed to see the very essence of the matter due to its unsightly form. Saltykov was not guilty of this sin, but he too was given to squeamishness. And it did leave its mark on the sketch *Philistine Writers*.

Here again we have the familiar themes, the talk of a "literary aristocracy," of "the nobility," but now in a form more fraught with social conflict. And indeed, Turgenev, Tolstoi, Saltykov, Fet, Druzhinin, Annenkov, and Botkin... For them, "the business of literature" was something very different from what it was for N. Uspenskii, Pomialovskii, and Levitov. Nekrasov wound up in a "dual" role and provoked hatred from both sides.

Starting in the late fifties, Turgenev, who had considered quitting literature back in 1847, was getting ready to quit it after almost every new work, and in his sketch

¹⁷ Nikolai Mikhailovskii was a social commentator and critic who collaborated with Saltykov-Shchedrin and fellow journalist and social commentator Grigorii Eliseev in editing the journal *Notes of the Fatherland* after Nekrasov's death in 1877. Mikhailovskii was charged with preparing his friend Eliseev's archive for publication, but the book was destroyed by government decree, which is presumably why Mikhailovskii is describing Eliseev's views rather than quoting them word-for-word (translator's note; see footnote 3 on the linked page). http://az.lib.ru/m/mihajlowskij_n_k/text_0320.shtml

“Enough!” [Dovol'no!] he announced that for all to hear. In 1860, there came a sort of general inclination toward “retirement,” a general panic and escape. Turgenev wrote to Fet:

I'm not undertaking any literary endeavors for now; and judging by the reviews by the so-called young critics, it's time for me to submit my resignation from literature. After all, you and I have joined the ranks of the Podolinskiis,¹⁸ Trilunnyis and other esteemed retired majors. What are we to do, my dear man! It's time to concede the road to the young. But where are they, where are our heirs?

However, it was Lev Tolstoi who was most vexed, reacted the most eccentrically, and vexed others the most. After Sevastopol, he immersed himself in literary affairs, became friendly with Druzhinin, took part in organizing the Literary Fund, wrote, published, and was getting ready to organize a journal. Other writers were keeping an attentive eye on him and discussing his every move — he was younger than they; he hardly knew “the forties.” And suddenly, Tolstoi quit literature, *The Contemporary*, and Petersburg, and set out for Iasnaia Poliana to teach peasant children. By 1857 he wrote to Botkin, “Thank God I didn't listen to Turgenev, who tried to convince me that a writer should be nothing but a writer.” Meanwhile, Turgenev was writing to Annenkov, telling him about Tolstoi's forest project: “In response I asked him what he was: an officer, a landowner, and so forth?... It turns out he's a forester. I just worry that by jumping around like this he could dislocate the spine of his talent.” Later, in 1860, Turgenev wrote to Fet again, this time about Tolstoi: “Lev Tolstoi continues to play the eccentric. That seems to be his natural inclination. When will he do his final flip and land on his feet?”

I am limiting the material here — it is colossal and would only fit into a book. The point is, the era I am speaking of confronted writers like Tolstoi, Turgenev, Fet, Saltykov, and Nekrasov (“the aristocracy”) with questions relating to practical challenges of literary *byt* — first and foremost the question of literature as a profession and of the writer's “independence.” For some, the answer was to attach themselves to a journal, with all

¹⁸ Andrei Podolinskii (1806-86) was a civil servant and fairly popular poet whose works were also being hostilely received by critics in 1860. Trilunnyi was the pseudonym used by the poet and music critic Dmitrii Struiskii (1805-56) (translator's note).

the literary and literary-*byt*-related consequences that entailed. For others, the problem was more difficult, most of all for Tolstoi. Even by 1856, he was already finding the atmosphere surrounding journals and the profession oppressive. Diary entries from this period (1856-58) are particularly telling: “I went to see Druzhinin and Panaev; the editorial office of *The Contemporary* is despicable... They were arguing with Botkin over whether or not the poet is able to imagine the reader... The underpinning of literature is despicable... People should write quietly, calmly, without the goal of publishing.” He was dissatisfied with what he was writing. He was appalled by *Family Happiness* [Semeinoe schast'e] (1858) after it appeared in print. And that is when the thought emerged of “fleeing” professionalism and literature in the “Nekrasov” sense of the word. He reversed course — going back to his class, to the business of being a landowner, to his “second profession.” In terms of literary *byt*, Iasnaia Poliana was the polar opposite of the editorial office of *The Contemporary*, with all its squabbles and fallings-out among literary professionals.

In Tolstoi's article “Progress and the Definition of Education” [Progress i opredelenie narodnogo obrazovaniia] (1862), the underlying basis of his new occupations, so seemingly extraneous to literature, are clearly evident:

It is obvious to me that the proliferation of periodicals and books and the unceasing and immense progress in book printing has been advantageous for writers, editors, publishers, proofreaders, and typesetters. Immense sums have gone by indirect means from the public into the hands of these people. Book publishing is so profitable for these people that all manner of means are devised to increase the number of readers: poetry, novellas, scandal sheets, exposés, gossip, polemics, gifts, prizes, literacy societies, the distribution of books, and schools to increase the ranks of the literate. No other form of labor offers such an easy return on investment as literary labor. No investment offers a better return than literature. The number of people employed in literature increases by the day. The triviality and pettiness of literature keep step with the growth of its outlets... Like the liquor franchises, literature is nothing but skillful exploitation, advantageous only for its participants and disadvantageous for the people. There is *The Contemporary*, there is *The Contemporary Word* [Sovremennoe slovo], there is *The Contemporary Chronicle* [Sovremennaia letopis'], there is *The Russian Word* [Russkoe slovo], *The Russian World*, *The Russian Herald*, there is *Time* [Vremia], there is *Our Time* [Nashe vremia], there is *The Eagle* [Orel], *The Little Star* [Zvezdochka], *The Garland*

[Girlianda], there is *The Literate* [Gramotei], *The People's Reading* [Narodnoe chtenie], and *Reading for the People* [Chtenie dlia naroda], there are words that are combined and rearranged in certain ways as the titles of periodicals and newspapers, and all these periodicals firmly believe that they are conveying some sorts of thoughts and viewpoints.

Tolstoi needed both his agricultural and pedagogical work not in and of themselves but as a means of creating the atmosphere he needed to be a writer — to write *War and Peace* [Voina i mir]. The novel is polemical through and through — in terms of its eighty press sheets, its material (no sketches, no serfdom, no contemporaneity), and its construction. In 1863, Tolstoi wrote to Fet with proud self-satisfaction: “I am living in a world so distant from literature and its criticism that when I receive a letter like yours, my first feeling is amazement. Who was it, after all, who wrote *The Cossacks* and ‘Polikushka’?”

In his *Memoirs* [Vospominaniia],¹⁹ Fet wrote of the late fifties and addressed the topic of non-nobles [raznochintsy] appearing in journals and publishing houses: “The nobility’s literature itself, in its enthusiasm, reached the point of opposing its own fundamental interests, which is what provoked Lev Tolstoi’s fresh, unaffected instinct to this indignation.” For the literary historian, Tolstoi’s *klassovost'* took a particular turn — the same Pushkin’s was seen to take. Rendered déclassé by his professionalism, Nekrasov manifested his “*klassovost'*” outside of literature; Tolstoi, in his struggle against the professionalism of the journal writer, made his “*klassovost'*” a fact of his literary *byt* and held this literary path up in contrast to Turgenev’s — the compromising, unprincipled approach of an exasperated writer of the “forties.”

Anyone inclined to view these as unrelated instances, or to doubt the significance of the issues these problems of literary *byt* caused for the era, should take a look at the journals from the years 1859-65 — they abound in articles about literature as a profession, about journalism, about literary property, and related topics. An 1861 issue

¹⁹ Published as *My Memories* [Moi vospominaniia] in two volumes in 1890 and posthumously in 1893 (translator’s note).

of *The Contemporary* (vol. 89) includes an article by T.Z. (N. Shelgunov), “Literary Workers” [Literaturnye rabochie]. The author is appalled at the turn periodical publications had taken — his article is almost identical to Tolstoi’s in some places:

Try printing *The Century* [Vek] in the same format as *The St. Petersburg News* [S.-Peterburgskie vedomosti], in the same font as *The News*, and at the end put “editor Ochkin” and “printed by the Imperial Academy of Sciences Printing House” — and believe me: not a single regular subscriber to *The St. Petersburg News* will notice the subterfuge. Do the same with *The St. Petersburg News*, in other words print it in the size and font of *The Century*, sign it “editor Veinberg” and “printed by the Bezobrazov and Co. Printing House,” and not a single subscriber will guess that he is reading *The St. Petersburg News* instead of *The Century*. Just as exactly *The Century* can be transformed into *Son of the Fatherland*, and *Son of the Fatherland* into *The Century*... Why do we need such a multitude of newspapers and periodicals, why does Russia alone publish close to two hundred of them? Why do they all keep saying the same things over and over in unison?

Shelgunov asks what the difference is between a literary artisan and an ordinary factory worker, and answers:

He entered the field of literature only because, after all, a person needs something to live on — he speaks the language, is familiar with history and politics, is able to dash off a bit of poetry on occasion — why not write? Of course, if he had money, a factory, something promising a greater return than literature, it would be better to take up manufacturing; but if that’s not the case, literary labor will also do... A lot of people are eager to get into publishing because, in the past, some editors have built themselves a house, bought themselves carriages... The impoverished staff who have taken up literature, translation, and putting together original articles, since that work strikes them as easier than other work, have turned themselves into literary day laborers, and with every new journal there is a proliferating number of useless people convinced that milling the wind is actually accomplishing something, and once they become involved in this work, these pitiable toilers even begin to take pride in their position: the literary proletariat does not want to be anything but a writer, to live exclusively through literary labor.

The author’s practical proposal is that the journals band together into associations, based on their particular leanings.

Time (1861, vol. VI) published a venomous response, “Literary Legislators” [Literaturnye zakonodateli] (N. Kosi, i.e., Strakhov),²⁰ where Shelgunov is compared to Caliph Omar, who ordered the burning of the Library of Alexandria. What Shelgunov is advocating is cast in stark terms: “1. To reduce the number of books and journals being released; 2. To reduce the number of people engaged in literature.” Strakhov pokes fun at Shelgunov’s proposal and ends his polemic with a witticism:

May everyone labor to the extent of their strength and ability. I would be reluctant to force Mr. Chernyshevskii, despite his magnificent gifts, to write about agriculture. I would not give Mr. T.Z. the right to say to whomever he pleases, now that he has resolved all these questions: “There’s no point in you writing!” No, not for anything in the world!

Then, Chernyshevskii spoke out in *The Contemporary* (1862, vol. 92), in an article titled “Literary Property (A Fantasy)” [Literaturnaia sobstvennost' (Fantaziia)]. He defended Shelgunov and, strange as it may seem to see these names together (this is typical of the evolution of attitudes within the literary environment), he forces us to recall Shevyrev’s famous article, “Literature and Commerce.” Not only was Chernyshevskii against laws governing “literary property”; he was even against “the literary industry” and against the “commercial” direction it was taking.

What is harmful in this case is specifically the fact that literature has become a form of commerce, that it is being treated as livelihood... It is not just the talents of brilliant and greatly gifted people that are harmed by the mercantile nature of the literary business. Are there really so many such writers? Then all the others writing for money exhaust their last drop of strength, expending it on verbosity and a profusion of writing... These days, everyone everywhere is writing verbosely, since that is more profitable than writing concisely... There is one way out of this literary dissipation: literature shouldn’t serve as a means toward a daily crust of bread. People should earn it some other way... Nobody should be devoting themselves exclusively to literary work, not knowing any occupation other than the never-ending writing of articles and stories.

²⁰ The literary critic and philosopher Nikolai Strakhov (1828-96) published under the pseudonym “N. Kositsa,” which he abbreviated here to “N. Kosi...” (translator’s note).

I will juxtapose this with a quote from a recent book:

Today, there are several thousand writers. That is a very large number. The contemporary writer tries to become a professional by around eighteen and to have no profession other than literature... In order to write, you have to have another profession other than literature... The writer should have a second profession not to avoid dying of hunger, but in order to write literary things.²¹

Shevyrev — Tolstoi — Shelgunov — Chernyshevskii — Shklovskii. A surprising sequence? Such are the laws of history and, in particular, the history of literature.

Here I am not drawing, nor do I wish to draw, general conclusions — neither theoretical nor practical. This article is the draft of a book, a *brouillon*, as they said in the old days. I wish to show only the portion of material that absolutely must be studied in order to resolve the questions related to literary *byt* currently confronting us. My sole argument is that these questions are complex and multifarious and that they must be approached with great caution — especially under the circumstances and conditions of our time, which has lent them unprecedented urgency.

²¹ V. Shklovskii, *Technique of Writing Craft* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1927).