Chapter I From Belinsky to Chernyshevsky

1. Introduction

Culture, especially as it mirrors social sensibility, constitutes an important focus of historical analysis. Among the many aspects of culture, it was in the sphere of literature that in the mid nineteenth century, Russia was to acquire a unique position: this was true both of the terms in which such writing influenced the mental make up of entire classes of society as well as the capacity of such writing to transform a long established political system. Considering the limitations of Russian society, in comparison with European nations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in terms of education and literacy, the sophistication of literary output and intellectual debate in Russia was exceptional; such sophistication was also exceptional in the given circumstances of great political and economic constraint. In a backdrop of Autocratic restriction and political repression, literature emerged as the principal progressive force in Russian society which was to mould intellectual and political attitudes in a hitherto unprecedented manner.

The genesis of these developments, as many have pointed out may be traced to policies of the Autocracy. The early eighteenth century endeavour by Peter the Great towards Westernisation as he conceived it, set in motion a process which was to help create an intellectual class ultimately typical of the Russian milieu, who were to present a formidable critique of established authority by a profound rethinking of ideological issues. The social implications of the term 'intelligentsia', as this new politically committed educated class came to be known, indicates the enormous significance that the rise of these new men had for Russian society in general. The intelligentsia in Russia, came to signify men with a high order of intelligence and great depth of thought interested in ideas not only
for the sake of academic discourse, but also for their use for the betterment of society. These were considered to be committed men, thoroughly conscious of the evils pervading society, who were in search of means to mitigate these drawbacks. While the second half of the eighteenth century saw philosophers, thinkers and political polemists as the principal members of the intelligentsia in the nineteenth century the writer and the critic came to be leading figures among these committed intellectuals.

A number of factors were responsible for the writer's exceptional role as an intellectual guide who helped imbue Russian society with a new consciousness. The most obvious among these was the spread of education. This occurred at the instance of the state primarily, and its consequences initially affected the Empire's elite. Considerable attention was devoted to higher education and research in contrast to cursory attempts to improve elementary and primary education. In such circumstances, the top heaviness of Russia's educational system in its developing years has been the usual criticism directed against the enthusiastic attempts by Peter the Great and Catherine II to grapple with the ignorance of their subjects.

Catherine's efforts to fulfill her duties as an enlightened monarch and mould with her own hands a strata of society which would be educated and well-informed, resulted in a rather lopsided growth of an educated public. The founding of the Imperial Academy of Science by Peter much before any really conscious effort was made towards establishing a coherent system of basic elementary education was a reflection of the narrowness of the social response to

accepting learning as an essential part of everyday life. Therefore notwithstanding eighteenth century planning of education at the behest of Catherine II and the formation of a network of schools of various levels in the provinces, it was merely sections of the aristocracy who benefitted from this imperial urge for enlightenment and formed the bulk of the literate public of the time.

This situation changed to a certain degree, as private education which continued as a spill-over from the last century altered somewhat the composition of the educated public. The new literates of the nineteenth century included the gentry in addition to the aristocracy. Along with these, the clergy, who had even in the last century been members of church schools of course continued to form a miniscule part of the educated group in Russian society. When everything is said and done, the conclusion may be drawn that though there was a certain degree of expansion in the reading public in Russia at the turn of the century, members of the peasantry and other rural groups were yet to be encompassed within the orbit of education and of any kind of reading. The uniqueness of the Russian situation at this point of time may perhaps be highlighted by the fact that in England the emergence of a middle-class reading public could be perceived almost a century earlier. With a burgeoning middle-class of clerks, tradesmen, merchants and shopkeepers, the number of readers from this section of society interested in newspapers, periodicals and novels increased considerably from the 1690s. Russia, by contrast, was to experience this sort of general expansion in reading only with the onset of the nineteenth century when post primary education had filtered down from the ranks of the aristocracy and gentry to include a curious middling section of society. This consisted primarily of specialists and

administrators. Where primary education of the ordinary peasant masses was concerned, Russia had to wait till after the 1860s, when the intermingling of private and public enterprise resulted in concrete steps to educate the illiterate masses.\(^3\) Primary schools dominated by peasant communities, as well as by zemstvo activists, sprang up side by side with state schools and church parish schools as a result of a deliberate focus on literacy after the emancipation. Recently scholars have emphasised that after the emancipation there was a marked enthusiasm for the attainment of literacy among the peasant masses, who on their own initiative took the help of local literates for the education of their children.\(^4\) These endeavours, while falling far short of attaining universal mass education, had the net effect of increasing the numbers of the population who could read or could at least partially appreciate the usefulness of being familiar with the written word. Since in rural Russia it was normal to regard as adequate two or three years of school education, literature, especially popular literature turned out to be an indispensable source of general information to the ordinary Russian reader. Thus whatever the level of literary creativity might have been earlier, the increase in readership in the mid-nineteenth century, naturally elevated the social significance of writers, among whom the more serious, although they catered initially to an intellectual public, began to establish close links with social problems in the practice of their art, and attempted to reach out to a broader range of society. It would be pertinent to emphasise here that this entire phenomenon of an increase in the reading public had the distinctive feature that literary tastes remained sharply divided. The reader from the intelligentsia confined himself to belles-


lettres thereby maintaining his exclusiveness from the rest of the low-brow public. This insular group of intellectuals, however, demonstrated a certain degree of dynamism in their attitude towards literature. The latter saw a transformation from the idea of the late eighteenth century (and even earlier, for that matter) that books were meant for inspiring religiosity. Intellectuals now espoused the view that literature was to serve the specific purpose of aiding social rejuvenation.

This particular dimension which was to characterise the development of Russian literature into the second half of the nineteenth century was clearly the consequence of the emergence of a tradition of criticism that was to dominate the art of writing throughout this entire period. In fact this was the other factor responsible for the enhanced significance of the writer who was expected to play the role of a prophet to Russian society. In this entire process of the development of such ideas, and the promotion of the writers position and that of literature as a whole, it was another type of intellectual, the critic, who was to emerge as the arbiter of the fate of the writer. It was the critic who was to become chiefly responsible for the canonisation of a certain kind of literature which he judged to be most fit for the newly expanding reading public placed in a situation of complex social and political constraints. The rise of the critic and the remarkable part played by him in fashioning an entire stream of culture according to his own assessment of what the need of the hour was and the consequent utilitarian ethics that were to permeate literature in Russia can be attributed to one man Vissarion Belinsky, and the promotion he received in a variety of journals of this time.
2. Vissarion G. Belinsky

The critic in fact emerged as the link between the creator of culture and the recipients of a particular cultural form, and was rendered essential in a manner which could be assessed only from a point removed by distance and time. The first of Belinsky's many achievements lay in his ability to forcefully establish the position of the critic as a major power behind the author's hand. It was due to his efforts that the critic found himself in a position of great responsibility in which he was expected to make or break a writer's career and mould the position of the writer's craft. Belinsky was thus able to note.

"Fortunately the public is rapidly ceasing to think that literary greats are degraded by criticism......" 5. This rather secure situation in which the literary critic found himself vis-a-vis public opinion, was the consequence of Belinsky's persevering attempt to find a link between vital literary developments on the one hand and social dynamism on the other. The wide angled perspective with which Belinsky was able to clearly visualise the interdependence of literary and social developments had no precedent in Russia's intellectual history and thus constituted a new ideology of culture in which society was to be the principal platform from which literary development was to take off.

Belinsky's position enabled him to view literature as something much more than just an intellectual exercise and identify it as an integral part of human existence itself. He equated Being with Knowledge and art as consciousness of Being. Literature as assessed by Belinsky was an intrinsic part of this knowledge.

and an encapsulation of the various aspects of human society itself. Russian society in particular developed almost in conjunction with the development of literature, with literature gradually expanding its role to act as a cohesive force and fostering social interaction and a sense of belonging. Belinsky makes this clear when he writes of the growth of fine social feelings from the materialistic beginnings of society. "But the beginning of this rapprochement among the social estates, which in fact represents the inchoation of society, does not by any means belong exclusively to our times: it merges with the beginnings of our literature. A heterogenous society, welded into a single mass by material interests alone, would be a sorry humanless society...." Belinsky traced the rapid development of literature from a stimulant of social finesse into an essential ingredient of culture and finally into the core of society itself. "In speaking of the progress of society's education, we have in mind the progress of our literature, for our education is the direct effect of our literature, upon the ideals and morals of our society. Our literature has created the morals of our society, has already educated several generations of widely divergent character, has paved the way for the inner rapprochement of the estates, has formed a species of public opinion and produced a sort of special class in society that differs from the middle estate in that it consists not only of the manarchy and commoners alone, but of people of all estates who have been drawn together by education, which with us centred exclusively in a love of literature." Belinsky thus saw literature in an all pervasive role, as an inspirer of spiritual dynamism, as a great leveller of society and as the life force of a nation.


7. Matlaw 1962, pp 5 & 6, "Thoughts and Notes on Russian Literature". Belinsky PSS, vol 9, p 432, "Mysli i zametki o russkoi literature-1846."
Tracing the history of literary development within Russia, Belinsky clarified the position of writer as "representatives of different epochs of our society" whose literary and worldly conceptions were vitally linked to one another. Russia's literary output which graduated rapidly from Lomonosov, Kantemir and Karamzin through Dimitriev, Ozerov and Batyushkov to Pushkin, Lermontov and Gogol reflected the pace of society's fast developing sensitivity towards ideas and its inclination towards the spiritual. The satire which was evident in the literary works of Kantemir and which found echoes in the stories of Sumarokov, Fonvizin and Kapnist were soon to be replaced by humour, deftly interwoven into "artistic portrayals of life's reality," exemplified by the works of the great master Gogol. In Belinsky's view it was to the credit of Russian educated society that it was able to absorb within a short span of time quick changes in literary form, ranging from the poem, odes and epic of the eighteenth century (Lomonosov, Kantemir, Derzhavin), to the sophisticated novel and drama (Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol) of the nineteenth. The mental makeup of Russian society had progressed so swiftly, that standing at a point of time in the mid nineteenth century, it would be difficult for a Russian connoisseur of literature to read with satisfaction tales such as Poor Liza, Natalia the Boyar's Daughter, and Martha the Mayor's Wife by Nikolai Karamzin. Of the first generation of Russian writers, Belinsky singles out Kantemir and Fonvizin as possessors of a universal talent with the ability to make a lasting impact on literary development through their innovative and modern scintillating styles.

With literature developing at its own pace, and in the process helping society to progress towards maturity, (the fables of Krylov displaying typical Russian characteristics and contributing greatly in the process) Russians were ready to accept, in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, a totally new genre in creativity - the novel. "The novel and the story now stand ahead of all other genres of poetry"\(^{10}\) - wrote Belinsky about Russian literature in 1847. The happy coexistence of artistic imagination and reality gave the novel a lyrical emotional characteristic which was balanced by the anchorsheet of the realities of everyday life. These qualities placed the novel in an exalted position in Belinsky's scheme of things. To him the novel seemed the ideal medium with its elements of drama and emotion for communication between the creative writer and the sensitive reader and a spontaneous instrument of influence over the individual and through him over society as a whole. It was here that magazines and journals had come to acquire a prominent role - since most literary activity had of late found expression in magazines. Of these, many enjoyed immense popularity and circulated among a large number of readers and hence exercised a marked influence on public opinion. In fact this particular phenomenon of the Russian world of publishing and reading was to last even decades later when we find that even though the number of books that were printed increased remarkably, the Russian reader was generally book starved. The educated reader, not only in the provinces, but also in the capitals read not books, but cheap supplements to journals like Rodina and Niva in which stories of authors like Lomonosov, Fonvizin and Karamzin were published. This somewhat appalling condition was remarked on by N.A. Rubakin in 1893, who commented that there was a scarcity of books and that educated families "from the clean public" existed "without books and far from books"\(^{11}\).


Belinsky takes care to point out that the popularity of journals depended in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century in Russia, on their partiality to the printing of novels of the natural school\textsuperscript{12} which was a pointer to the significance of naturalism as a new literary trend that was to dominate the comparatively young literary format of the novel in the intellectual milieu of contemporary Russian society. This triumph of naturalism which Belinsky discerned in his survey of Russian literary output in the 1840s signified to him a major break from the earlier emphasis on rhetoricism and an advancement in the entire thinking process of the era, rich enough to enable literature to raise itself to the level of a powerful inspirer of social progress. It was through this naturalism, forcefully represented in the writings of Nikolai Gogol, that Belinsky felt literature had surpassed itself, becoming “a fruit of conscious thought”. “However,” he contended, “it did not stop at this, but strove constantly to originality and nationality; from a rhetorical literature, it strove to become a natural literature. It is the striving, attended as it is by noticeable and constant successes, that the sense and soul of the history of our literature.”\textsuperscript{13}

In the comparatively brief, but rapid period of Russia's cultural development, Belinsky selected as prominent authors such as Kantemir, Lomonosov, Karamzin, Pushkin and finally Gogol as the principal lynchpins around whom the struggle for a national literature revolved - and who were together responsible for placing Russia in an important position in the cultural map of Europe. Kantemir the first of these talents, was according to Belinsky “the prelude, the prologue to Russian literature.”\textsuperscript{14} Writing in a society which was


\textsuperscript{13} Belinsky SPW, p 412. “A View on Russian Literature, 1847 (Article 1)”. Belinsky PSS, vol 10, p294. “Vzgliad na ruskuyu literaturu 1847 goda. Statia pervaia”.

\textsuperscript{14} Belinsky SPW , p 348, “A View on Russian Literature, in 1846”. Belinsky PSS, vol 10, p 8, “Vzgliad na russkyu literaturu, 1846 goda.”
just beginning to feel the impact of Peter the Great's reforms, he was able to absorb Western influences and morals and successfully merge them with Russian morals. While leaving not a very lasting impression in the realm of verse, Kantemir never-the-less represented the first efforts of Russian poetry to strike out on its own. It was left to Lomonosov to set out a path which the others could follow. Belinsky assesses Lomonosov's contribution to Russian culture thus - "... Lomonosov's ode struck everybody as being the first verses in the Russian language to be written in regular metre. Lomonosov's influence on Russian literature was similar to Peter the Great's influence on Russia in general; literature for a long time trod the path which he had pointed out, until it ultimately escaped from his influence and took a path which Lomonosov himself could neither have contemplated or forseen."^{15} While conceding Lomonosov's claim to the title of father of Russian literature, Belinsky in his attempt to define ideal Russian literature, nevertheless criticised Lomonosov for being responsible for encouraging an artificial cultural colonialism by imbuing his country's literature with an imitative Europeanism. Fortunately for Russia, "the entire movement of Russian literature up to the time of Pushkin consisted of a striving, albeit an unconscious one, to free itself from the influence of Lomonosov and come nearer to life and reality, in other words to become original, national and Russian."^{16} Sumarokov, who based his writings on Russian morals and fables seemed to have taken the first faltering (but mediocre) steps in this regard to be followed by Derzhavin, Fonvizin and Karamzin who together provided the backdrop for the emergence of Pushkin, the first creator in Belinsky's assessment, of a national

15. Belinsky SPW, p 348, 349, "A View on Russian Literature in 1846". Belinsky PSS, vol 10, pp 8, 9, "Vzgliad na russkyu literaturu, 1846 goda".

literature in Russia. The diversity of poetical content in Derzhavin's works and the
sheer enjoyability of Fonvizin's comedies were accompanied by an unconscious
connection with reality, while Karamzin's literature actually introduced a new
trend in the art of writing. Belinsky writes “we shall say briefly that each of them
reveals a gradual liberation from the bookish, rhetorical drift which Lomonosov
imparted to our literature and a steady approach of literature to society, life and
reality.”17

The background to this development, and Belinsky's awareness of it,
might, in an oblique manner, be found in the indigenous folk literature which
characterised Russian culture in the late middle ages and reached its high point in
the seventeenth century. 18 Versions of such literature were presented to the
Russian reading public in anthologies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth
centuries. The rise of the feudal Russian state had its cultural accompaniment in
the discovery of the Slavic alphabet in the ninth century and the beginning of a
system of education in the tenth. Kiev and Novgorod the two initial principal
centres of culture of medieval Russia, remained the centrepoints of a gradually
expanding cultural radius encompassing south west, west and north east of Kiev.
The literature that emanated from this cultural ambit took the form of the folk epic
which in turn had oral folk poetry and literary Christian culture as its principal
sources of inspiration. The dynamics of this early literature was influenced by a
rather well developed Eastern Slavonic oral culture as well by Byzantine Christian
ideology which filtered into Russia by way of the Southern Slavic people -
the Bulgarians in particular. The literature of this period was steeped in the rich

na russkyu literaturu, 1846 goda”.

18. An excellent survey of Russian folk literature can be found in Vladimir Kuskov, A History of Old
Russian Literature, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Translation into English (c) Progress Publishers
1980.
imagery of oral folk poetry on the one hand, as well as allegorical insinuations about the good and evil in this world. These features led to moral injunctions and often moralistic preaching. Russian literature at this juncture imbibed the Byzantine Christian influence more positively, and began to produce religious literature of its own in the form of lives of saints. More revolutionary were apocrypha or works with an inference of secrecy in them which were often used as instruments for the transmission of heretical ideas criticising orthodox Christian dogma. Of special import in Russia was the Bogomil heresy of Bulgaria - a theistic movement which indirectly protested against social exploitation by ecclesiastical and feudal classes. Emphasising spiritualism and morality and a negation of materialistic aspirations this movement generated a number of narratives in Russia, in the eleventh century, based on Biblical story-telling. The Tale of Bygone Years, and How God Created Adam dealt with the story of man's creation while Near Eastern legends of King Solomon were immensely popular with the writers of this period. Tales relating the triumph of Christianity over the pagan world found expression in works like Aphroditian's Tale of a Miracle in Persia, while the concept of life in the other world and the consequence of sin was stressed in moralistic works such as The Vision of Paul, The Tale of Macarius of Rome, The Journey of the Virgin to Purgatory etc; the last presenting a fearsome picture of the torments of Hell.

The Christian consciousness quite emphatic in the orientation of medieval Russian literature partially resulted from the fact that most of these works were authored by clergymen such as the Kiev Crypt Monastery monks Nikon, Feodosy and Nestor and Bishop Kirill of Turov, Bishop Luka Zhidyata of Novgorod etc. Exceptions like Vladimir Monomakh, author of Instruction and the unknown author of The Lay of Igor's Host of course existed. On the whole however, in between the lines of religiosity much secular influence was imbibed from the
historical and scientific literature of the times emanating from the Byzantine world. Hamartolos' Chronicle in *The Tale of Bygone Years* and *Christian Topography*, which was essentially a travelogue, helped the literary output of this period to transcend devotional or moralistic purposes and offer works of quality much appreciated by contemporary 'literate' society. 19

The essentially Byzantine and Greek influences operating upon the embryonic phase of medieval Russian literature were to leave an indelible imprint on the future shape of literary output within this geographical area, right upto the nineteenth century, aiding in the development of what Belinsky conceptualised as a national literature. Notwithstanding the fact that *The Tale of Bygone Years* represented a spirit of revolt in the sense that it tried to extricate itself from the shackles of Byzantine imperial as well as cultural assumptions, the chronicle remained conceptually a product of the Greco-Byzantine and East European cultural pattern. This, mingled with a sustained interest in indigenous tribal lore, ritual poetry, ancient folklore and heroic tales constituted elements of local literary genres. It was in these that Russian literature of the later period remained essentially embedded and, in Belinsky's view, in spite of interaction with the West, maintained a kind of exclusiveness. Thus, medieval literature such as *The Tale of Bygone Years* found its reference points in toponomical legends which connected the Radimichi and Vyatichi Slavic tribes to legendary heroes Radim and Vyatko; and it also was enmeshed in local Novgorod legends describing the call of the Varangian princes to rule over Rus. Modern Russian literature, meanwhile, it was argued, beginning with Pushkin was similarly grounded in a typical Russian ethos. In Belinsky's own words "Pushkin was the perfect

19. Ibid, Passim
expression of his time. Endowed with sublime poetic feeling and an amazing faculty of receiving and reflecting all possible sensations, he assayed all the timbers, all the tones and chords of his age; he paid his due to all great contemporary events, phenomena and thoughts, to everything that then moved Russia." 20 These strains of realism in Pushkin's works which were products of an era of primarily classicist and romantist influence were to give way to a still more explicit depiction of reality in literature, through the creations of the natural school. This was lauded by Belinsky as a progress in the right direction with Russian literature quietly passing through the Pushkin period which included within its fold, Zhukovsky, Lermontov, into an epoch of naturalism in art and poetry. Gogol, who was the foremost representative of this phase achieved the right and precise synthesis of imagination, nationality and depiction of reality in his works which corresponded to the Belinskian ideal of good as well as useful literature.

The Karamzin period in literature, as Belinsky terms the first two decades of the nineteenth century, was adjudged by him to be significant for a major reason. With his penchant for "writing the language the way it was spoken", 21 "Karamizin made an effort to develop in the Russian public a reading habit." 22 In applauding this, Belinsky applied his characteristic dexterity in judging works of literature in accord with his self-imposed task as an intellectual, morally bound to work for the spiritual betterment of Russian society. This was a natural corollary of Belinsky's theory of literary criticism which expected creativity to be both

22. Belinsky SPW p 45, "Literary Reveries". Belinsky SS, vol 1, p 82, "Literarnii mechtania."
artistic as well as solid. Hence he had an unbounded admiration for Pushkin's works like *Eugene Onegin*, *Ruslan* and *Ludmila*, the *Robber Brothers* etc. For he discerned here high artistic qualities, as well as a pictorial representation of true Russian life and a “newly awakened social consciousness.”  

Belinsky accepted, certainly, that the superimposition of Western ideas and literary constructs on the ethnic aesthetics latent in Russian creativity, imparted a new ambience to modern Russian literature in its formative phase. He acknowledged that classicism made its presence felt in eighteenth century Russian which quickly adopted verse ode and tragedy as the principal literary formats. This was followed by the aesthetic ideas of the Enlightenment which swept away the constraints of Classicism to make prose writing increasingly more important. More recently, it has been pointed out that an entire gamut of translated Western literature which began to infiltrate into the Russian milieu from the eighteenth century contributed to the dynamics of change in literary development of the later period. This trend received major impetus in 1768, when Empress Catherine II founded the Assembly Promoting the Translation of Foreign Books into Russian thereby enhancing the volume of ideas transmitted from the West.

The heightened prestige of translations as a profession made English, French and German literature increasingly accessible to Russian writers and readers. Voltaire's *Candide*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Defoe's *Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* became well-known to Russians in their own language in the second half of the eighteenth century. Often novels in one

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European language were translated into another which reached the hands of Russian translators who utilised the second version instead of consulting the original one for purpose of translation. Thus the anonymous English novel, *The History of Charlotte Summers the Fortunate Parish Girl*, was refracted through a French version into the Russian *Sirota angliiskaya, ili Istoriia O Sharlotte Summers* in 1763. Similarly some of Henry Fielding's works such as *A Journey from this World to the Next* was presented to the Russian reader from a shortened German translation by Vladimir Zolotnitskii. In fact Henry Fielding turned out to be one of the major English novelists to be accepted by the Russian reading public among whom his novels *Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews, Jonathan Wild* and *Amelia* achieved immense popularity. The famous English humorist Lawrence Sterne whose first novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristam Shandy*, earned him fame, was widely read in Russia. His *Sentimental Journey* first translated in 1793, was retranslated by D. Averkiev almost a century later in 1891.25

This new Western orientation as distinct from the Greco-Byzantine influence on medieval Russia imparted a new eclecticism in cultural attitudes which accommodated the Enlightenment, Romantist and Naturalist philosophies within its ambit. The introduction of the translated Western novel among the Russian literati encouraged a trend towards synthesis of western literary formats with typically Russian ideas. Belinsky points out that it was in this period of flux that Pushkin first envisaged the need to change format and style and replace epic poem with prose and romance. This he did by portraying the moral aspects of modern Russian society which, in Belinsky's view, signified representation of that aspect of society which reflected the advancement of intellectuality. In Belinsky's

25. Ibid, Passim.
view, every nation had its own distinctive characteristics, encapsulated in its literature, which reflected the essence of its national spirit. For him, French literature “has always been a true reflection, a mirror of society.... for their society is the supreme manifestation of their national spirit, of their national life.” ^26 By contrast German literature was more an expression of the people than of society which constituted the essence of German nationality. Belinsky went on to say “And if nationality constitutes one of the highest merits of political works, we must undoubtedly look for real national works among such political compositions whose subject matter has been taken from the life of the estate created as a result of Peter the Great's reforms, the estate that adopted for itself the forms of cultivated life.” ^27 Thus Belinsky did not equate nationalism in literature with depiction of plebeian society as such but emphasised after Gogol that “genuine nationality consists not in a description of the sarafan, but in the very spirit of the people; a poet may be national when he is describing an entirely alien world, which however he regards through the eyes of his national element, the eyes of the whole his nation, when he feels and speaks in a way which make his countrymen believe that it is they themselves who are thus feeling and speaking.”^28

It is worth mention here that Belinsky was quite right in sensing new opportunities of assimilation as the influx of Western literature into Russia remained a continuous process, right from the late eighteenth century onwards. Prolific interaction with the West left a positive impression on the minds of Russian intellectuals who became well-versed in the writings of Rousseau,

Schiller, Goethe, Balzac, George Sand, Dickens and Thackeray. Dickens *Dombey and Son, David Copperfield* appeared in *Contemporary* in 1847 and 1848, while his complete collected works were translated by Rautsov and published under the aegis of Pavlenkov in 1893. Biographies of Dickens by various European writers were also published in Russian in the late nineteenth century.  

Recent research dealing with Tolstoy's interaction with the West records his admiration for Zola as a novelist of importance in France as well as his appreciation of American literature. Thoreau and Emerson were some of the writers whose works attracted the attention of the Russian novelist. Tolstoy even had plans of extending the scope of the *Intermediary* whose object was to provide good literature to the people at a low cost and publish a Universal Classical Library in Russian, French, English and German. Apart from Greek and Latin works, Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Mathew Arnold, Dickens, Scott and George Elliot were to be presented to the readers. Even through this idea did not materialise ultimately, this preoccupation with Western literature reflected the extent of the exposure of Russian intellectuals to their counterparts in the West and continued throughout the nineteenth century. A number of periodicals such as *Vestnik Evropii, Petersburgskie Zhizni,* and *Novosti* began publishing translated versions of Henrik Ibsen's plays in different issues throughout the 1890s. Maupassant who had close relations with Turgenev was highly acclaimed by no less than Count Tolstoy himself. This constant dialogue with the West in which philosophers like Schelling, Schopenhauer, Rousseau and Kant left a

31. *Enciklopediceskij Slovar,* op cit, vol 24, 1894, p 748 and vol 38, 1896 p 822
positive imprint, did not in any way jeopardise the intrinsic qualities of literary discourse in Russia. Russian literature developed in conjunction with and often as a part of the total reaction to particular philosophies which Russia had imbibed from time to time from the Western world. Yet the literature of imperial Russia had a philosophy of its own, an orientation derived from a long heritage of indigenous literary development which remained constant in the Russian consciousness.

Suggestions of Russia's philosophical isolation had been mooted as early as the 1830s by Petr Chaadaev in his *Philosophical Letters*. Neoplatonic ideas and his reading of Schelling, Kant and Hegel formed the backdrop of Chaadaev's philosophical ideas. Noted for his liberal outlook Chaadaev highlighted the Kantian concept of society transcending individual aspiration. Man, according to him was not naturally inclined towards individual freedom but was more prone to subordinating himself to the dictates of society. Chaadaev's belief in the "universal mind" implied the individuals' attempt at fusion with God and through it towards complete sociality. Through this critique of individualism, Chaadaev may have given an a-priori strength to the later Belinskian vision of enhancing social cohesion and using literature as the major instrument towards achieving this purpose.

In his assessment of Russian society, Chaadaev expressed concern over the fact that Russia lacked historical continuity, had isolated herself from universal society, by breaking away from the universal church and adopting Orthodox Christianity. This lack of internal development had encouraged forcible Westernisation by Peter which Russian traditionalism was too weak to resist. Chaadaev's views sparked off Slavophile reaction which asserted that Russia's only way of baling herself out of this artificiality (created by Westernisation) was
through reintegration with the common folk tradition and distinct forms of nationalism.

The Slavophiles stressed that the West due to excessive individualism had sacrificed its inner wholeness and the capacity for profound spiritual concentration. By contrast, Russia with its belief in Orthodoxy was able to retain its internal integration (The Slavophiles with their persistent efforts to maintain a purely Russian identity for Russian culture as a whole, traced this concept to the Greek Church fathers, though echoes of this idea of the integral personality could be found in German conservative romantic thought as well). In the ultimate analysis of the Slavophiles the Russian folk tradition and Orthodox Christianity had stood the test of time inspite of Chaadaev’s assertions to the contrary. 32

Thus whatever doubts about Russia’s cultural heritage that may have been expressed through the debates regarding The Polemic about Old and New Style, which basically probed the issue of a national identity, to many contemporaries, the existence of a national literature was beyond question. Dostoevsky for example in his eulogy of Pushkin at a meeting of the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature, hailed Pushkin as the true founder of meaningful literature in Russia, a poet with a “prophetic” vision. Imbuing his works with a nationalist spirit, (for instance in his personification of Aleko, the main character of the poem The Gypsies who is “a true and unmistakably conceived character, a lasting character long since native to our Russian land”33), Dostoevsky felt that Pushkin served the purpose of true art by infusing this national stereotype with

"universal aspirations". Pushkin remained to Dostoevsky a truly national poet who was "the first among the Russian writers...[who] showed us a whole gallery of genuinely beautiful Russian characters which he discovered in the Russian people. Their principal beauty [lay] in their incontestable and tangible truth, so that it is impossible to deny them and they stand there as though sculptured." 34 Dostoevsky here reads very much like Belinsky with his comments about true art being real and rational and displaying a nationality which would serve to inspire one's common reader. And it again appears an echo of Belinsky when Dostoevsky holds that Pushkin's real genius lay in his "universal responsiveness". "Nay, I assert emphatically that never has there been a poet with such universal responsiveness as Pushkin. But it is not only a matter of susceptibility but also of its amazing depth - that reincarnation in his spirit of the spirit of foreign nations, an almost complete, and therefore miraculous reincarnation." 35 Here, according to Dostoevsky, it was really the "principle of universal humanity"36 that finds a place in literature that raises it to the level of true art - and Pushkin was one of the first poets to recognise and accept this rule. Dostoevsky thus spontaneously accords the title of 'national poet' to Pushkin, for his depiction of Onegin, "a child of his epoch", and through him the portrayal of "the whole epoch that for the first time consciously had a good look at itself."37 The existence of a national literature was here firmly affirmed by Dostoevsky, as it was by others elsewhere.

34. Dostoevsky, Diary of a Writer vol 2, p 975. Dostoevsky PSS, vol 26, pp 143, 144.
36. David Magarshack, Selected and translated, Dostoevsky, Occasional Writings, Vision London 1963. (Henceforward Magarshack DOW) p 157, "Five Articles from Time, Article II, Pedantry and Literacy".
The special role of Pushkin in the development of a national literature, which became universal over time, received exceptional stress in Belinsky's writing. Belinsky points out that it was in fact Pushkin who first envisaged the need to change format and style and replace epic poem with prose and romance. This he did by portraying the moral aspects of modern Russian society which in Belinsky's view signified representation of the aspect of society which reflected the advancement of the intellectual movement. Elsewhere, along with Eugene Onegin, Belinsky ranked Griboyedov's Wit Works Woe and Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time as subscribing to the ideals that were to push Russian literature forward. Discerning an indirect link between Krylov's fables and Griboyedov's comedy, Belinsky placed this drama at an important juncture in the "organic historical development of literature."......

With Pushkin's Onegin his (Griboyedov's) Wit Works Woe was regarded as the first model of poetical portrayal of Russian reality in the broad sense of the word. In this respect both these works laid the foundation for subsequent literature, and formed the school from which Lermontov and Gogol evolved. Belinsky was clear on this point. "Without Onegin there would have been no A Hero of Our Time, just as without Onegin and Wit Works Woe Gogol would not have felt himself prepared for the so deep and faithful portrayal of Russian reality which he has given us".

According to Belinsky, the consciousness of the need for a new literary format as displayed by Pushkin in his prose works (since the true essence of Russian society no longer found adequate expression through poetry) gradually bore fruit in the maturing of the novel in the 1840s and 50s. Prose writing, as exemplified by the novels and stories by Narezhny, Marilinsky, Bulgarin,


Zagoskin, Polevoy and Pogodin initially went through a phase of struggle with a common aim of attempting to “bring the novel closer to life, make it a faithful mirror of that life”. This period of mutation so far as new emergent creative trends were concerned was characterised by a tendency to bolster up narodnost’ (a sense of the people) by depicting the colloquialism of the multifarious layers of society. This trend towards narodnost’ assumed a much more sophisticated form in the writings of Nikolai Gogol. “We shall assert without prevarication that in no other Russian writer was this striving so successful as it was in Gogol”, Belinsky contended. He heralded this onset of naturalism in literature with great

40. F. V. Bulgarin (1789-1859) was a writer and journalist. Novels such as Ivan Vyzhigin and historical tales such as Dimitry the Pretender established his reputation as a great prose writer, though later this judgement of him was revised.

M. N. Zagoskin (1789-1852) was a dramatist, novelist and short story writer as well as a playwright. His Yury Miloslavsky or the Russians in 1812 are regarded to be the first Russian prose novels. Zagoskin was considered to be one of the first Russian historical novelists.

N. A. Polevoi (1796-1846) was a journalist, critic, dramatist and historian. Polevoi’s History of the Russian People written as a dissent to Karamzin’s History of the Russian State was marked with controversy. The Vestnik Evropy founded by Karamzin engaged in constant polemics with Polevoi’s Moskovsky Telegraf. Polevoi authored a number of sentimental melodramatic tales.

M. P. Pogodin (1800-1875) was a historian and journalist. He was professor of history at Moscow University. His most important historical work dealt with the earliest period of Russian history.

N. I. Grech (1787-1867) was a journalist writer and philologist. From 1812 to 1839, Grech published and edited Syn Otechesva, one of the first thick journals. On the other hand he also co-edited Severnaya Pchela which was in official control. Grech wrote a number of novels which remained quite insignificant. However his History of Russian Literature (1822) was one of the first efforts at literary history.


42. Belinsky SPW, p 412, “A View on Russian Literature in 1847”.

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enthusiasm, for to him literature was a serious artistic form meant specifically for the dissemination of truth and historical consciousness. Throughout, Belinsky was eager to allow romanticism only a backseat in the process of artistic development and to conceive of "reality" and nationality with a distinct bearing on life, as the real virtues necessary for literary excellence. Working on the conception that "what personality is in relation to the idea of man, nationality is in relation to the idea of humanity", Belinsky regarded society and ultimately nationality as the most significant expression of human identity. Society, displaying the various aspects of human substance through the lives of each and every individual which it encompassed within its fold, provided security to man as well as strengthened itself through "an inner, immediate organic link - nationality". Arguing along these lines, Belinsky asserted that pure art, especially that which found expression through literature was an impossibility, and that aestheticism was a part of human society and had perforce to be a reflection, albeit an elegant and refined one, of that society. Hence, he wrote, "...but while fully admitting that art must first of all be art, we are nevertheless of the opinion that the idea of a pure abstract art, living in its own sphere and having nothing in common with other aspects of life is a dreamy abstraction." 

The nineteenth century novel fulfilled a special role, then, and was therefore hailed by Belinsky as a great step forward in cultural evolution. "Art and literature in our day have more than ever before become the expression of social problems, because in our day these problems have become more general, more

accessible and clearer.....”^6 Gogol and his natural school, bypassing all
traditional formats and styles assumed in Belinsky's eyes that pivotal role that was
to make Russian literature “the fruit of conscious throught” and “base itself
exclusively on real life”^47 “Gogol’s influence on Russian literature was
tremendous. Not only all the young talents hastened along the path he had
indicated, but some writers of repute abandoned the path which they had hitherto
trodden to follow the new one.”^48 According to Belinsky, Gogol and his
contemporaries found new sources of inspiration in Russian reality with ideals that
were particularly Russian and unencumbered by foreign influences. Belinsky was
convinced that creative impulses would mutate and be restructured in future but its
fidelity to nature and reality would remain constant.

Having formulated this ideology of creativity, Belinsky proceeded to reject
as inferior, literature which normally did not subscribe to his connotations of the
right kind of artistic activity. He picked out novels such as Lugansky's *Nebyvaloye
V Bylom ili Byloe V Nebyvalom* and *The Russian Muzhik* and Grigorovich's *The
Village* as significant literary productions and reject Weltman's *Adventures Drawn
from the Sea of Life* as unable to keep up to the required standards of the time. 49
His sense of the problems of emerging talent led him to fix on the potential of
Dostoevsky's powerful writing in novels such as *Poor Folk* and *The Double* and at
the same time equipped him to explain the reasons for the lack of
enthusiasm for them among the readers of the *Fatherland Notes* when the

na russkyu literaturu 1847 года. Statia pervaia.”
na russkyu literaturu 1847 года. Statia pervaia.”
na russkyu literaturu 1847 года. Statia pervaia”.
49. Belinsky SPW, p 387, “A View on Russian Literature, 1846”. Belinsky PSS, vol 10, pp 42, 43,
“Vzgliad na russkyu literaturu, 1846 года.”
Belinsky was quick to lash out at him for what he felt were unforgivable compromises with morality in Gogol's *Selected Passages From My Correspondence with Friends*. The book in Belinsky's scheme of things was all the more harmful as it was foisted on a still adolescent nation striving with various odds in order to acquire maturity and intellectual self-sufficiency.

The net result of Belinsky's intellectual pursuits was the formation of a new environment of culture-consciousness which manifested itself in (1) the proliferation of journals for widespread readership among the educated classes and (2) the growth of criticism as a special discipline serving as moderater of cultural tastes in the context of different types of literature which was made available to the public in general through these very journals.

Belinsky himself allocated to journals a significant place in the making or breaking of the reputation of a writer and the stylistic cum ideological school to which he belonged. For instance in his argument to bolster up the utility of nationalism in enhancing the quality of a literary product, Belinsky cited ideological preferences of journals, as an indicator of the credibility of a certain stream of thought in literary expression. He pointed out: "What do our magazines mostly treat of? -of nationality and reality. What do they mostly assail? romanticism, day-dreaming and abstraction."

Journals like the Petersburgskii Sbornik, Otechestvennye Zapiski, Biblioteka dlia Chtenija, and

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Sovremennik, dealt with creative writing as well as with scientific articles while the Moscow Literary and Scientific Symposium and Severnaia Pchela handled primarily non-art material and essays on popular science.

A periodic review of literature was Belinsky's means of gauging change in this particular creative sphere. Such a review could also be a significant guide for future historians of literature. It was in the 1820s that this trend towards surveying and assessing all creative output as far as the written word was concerned, began. Marlinsky in Polarnaia Zvezda wrote critical articles entitled Glances on Russian literature which raised questions regarding problems of style and language. This was emulated by other journals, most of which began to include a criticism section in their pages. The Moscow Telegraph for instance, published evaluative writings of the criticism section of the last years. Sovremennik opened with a review of Russian literature in 1846; and announced that "the first issue for each year will contain a similar review of literary activities for the first year." By this time both literary output and criticism as a regular academic discipline subject to intellectual discourse, were gradually becoming voluminous. Belinsky noted that "annual reviews appeared in our almanacs as a consequence of the critical spirit that was arising in our country." This was in sharp contrast, he pointed out, to the first decades of the nineteenth century when Grech's Review of Russian Literature in 1814, published in Syn Otchestva in


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1815, summed up the scientific and literary output of 1814 was only a few pages. Belinsky lamented that even though that particular year saw the publication of quite a good number of serious works, there was a marked shortage of belles lettres. The criticism of these years was prone to praising didacticism in poetry which was however later to be discarded both for literary reasons, as well as for political ones as it was rendered unsafe to make any serious political insinuations through these works. Commenting on these early reviews, Belinsky writes "At that time it was both very easy and very difficult to write such reviews. Easy because it was all limited to airy opinions which expressed only the personal taste of the reviewer; difficult or rather dull, because it was a piecemeal and minute task, calling for the enumeration of positively everything, both original and translated, that had been published separately in alamanacs and magazines during the year under review."

By the 1840s, Belinsky through his own efforts alone was able to bring about significant changes in the tone of Russian criticism of literature. Writing regularly and in vast quantities in the most important journals of his time, such as Moskovsky Nabлюдател, Otechestvennye Zapiski, and Soverennennik Belinsky instilled into the critic the tendency to exercise his judgement and shortlist the literary productions at the initial stages before actually beginning a review. "When writing an annual review of literature, the critic is no longer bound to take note of number of works published, or to trouble to give an evaluation of each and every event for fear lest the public, without the critic's guidance, should not know...

56. Belinsky SPW, p 401 "A View on Russian Literature, 1847". Belinsky PSS, vol 10, p 284, "Vzgliad na russkuyu literaturu 1847 goda. Statiia pervaia".

what to consider good, and what bad.” In fact Belinsky remarked with a sense of satisfaction that the reading public had maturity enough by the end of the 1840’s, to be able to judge for itself the merit of a particular book, notwithstanding the kind of critical appreciation it received or who its author was. “Mediocre and poor works attract no attention and die their own deaths without the aid of critics. Literary criticism should keep pace with this trend in literature, so different from what it was some twenty years ago.” While, in Belinsky’s assessment, Russian academic writing in the form of belles lettres had improved greatly in quality as well as quantity, creativity in terms of literary output had undergone a period of stagnation immediately before the onset of naturalism as the main framework of literary expression. Naturalism and the novel through which this trend was manifested saved the day for Russian literature which was soon to reach out towards newer horizons which contemporaries, Belinsky included, were unable to predict.

In the 1840s, Belinsky argued that nature ought to provide a permanent model for the creator, be he poet, novelist or artist. The latter, with the help of knowledge gained through education, would internalise the moral inspiration which he received from nature into his medium of creativity. In doing this the artist could never divorce himself completely from his social surroundings and thereby raise art to a level of pure abstraction. Literary criticism likewise, had been forced to turn away from pure aestheticism and had to take into consideration instead, the place and time “when the poet wrote and the

circumstances which paved the way for his poetical career and influenced his poetical activities ..........” 60. Answering the charge of deterioration in the quality of art that served as a means of “expression of social problems”, Belinsky while admitting to lapses on the part of the artist in the past, rationalised these by saying that the writer’s weakness had lain in his attempts “to substitute existing reality by a Utopia and in consequence, make art represent a world which existed only in his imagination.” 61. Having blamed the creator and not the methodology of artistic output and criticism for the decline in standards, Belinsky was thus to set a seal of disapproval on non-utilitarian art for decades to come in a politically charged atmosphere which was quick to find multifarious merits in a literature which could be used for political propaganda.

2. Nikolai G. Chernyshevsky

Belinsky’s views on literature and literary criticism was taken up with enthusiasm, from the 1850s, by a group of intellectuals who emphasised his ideas regarding the link between art and society; but these figures were to impart a novel and more inflexible element into their definitions of the new ideal in literary creations. Most prominent among these were Nikolai G. Chernyshevsky and N. A. Dobrolyubov who were to set the literary standards of the epoch of the sixties and consequently mould artistic thinking and literary tastes through their monitoring of the kind of reading material which certain journals of the time published.


Here, Nikolai Chernyshevsky was to emerge as the inheritor of the Belinskian mantle and play the role of prophet to a generation of Russian intellectuals. Chernyshevsky, as the prime intellectual stalwart of sixties, had his own contribution to make in the evolution of a Russian public consciousness concerning the arts and their social implications in more ways than one. While it had been Belinsky's particular forte to place literature and literary criticism in the socio cultural fabric of Russia, Chernyshevsky's prolific writings on his mentor served to immortalise Belinsky in the eyes of his contemporaries and opened up for posterity new avenues leading to what the acolyte considered a more “objective” and “mature” assessment of the contributions of the master. Secondly, Chernyshevsky was instrumental in reviving philosophical criticism which, since the writings of V. F. Odoevski, I.V. Kireevsky and N.I. Nadezhdin, had suffered an eclipse in the context of the recent preoccupation with the connection between literature and social development. In writings such as The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy and The Character of Human Knowledge, Chernyshevsky was to concern himself totally with the utilitarian aspects of aesthetics, was to proceed well beyond Belinsky's theorisation on art and nationalism and reject totally almost any aspirations to pure beauty in art in the absence of material motivations.

Chernyshevsky was to record in detail his ideological inheritance in his Essays on the Gogol Period of Russian Literature. In fact he used his writings here to analyse the evolution of Belinskian thought and highlight the philosophical influences on Belinsky and the Stankevich circle of intellectuals, beginning with Hegel and German philosophy, to Belinsky's final emancipation from Western ideology and the creation of a totally Russian viewpoint. Chernyshevsky admitted that exposure to German philosophy in general and the absorption of the Hegelian “dialectical method of thinking”62 was an important stepping stone in the training

of Russians towards independent thinking. "The essence of this method (the Hegelian dialectical method of thinking) lies in that the thinker must not rest content with any positive deductions, but must find out whether the object he is thinking about contains qualities and forces the opposite of those which the object had presented to him at first sight. Thus the thinker was obliged to examine the object from all sides and truth appeared to him only as a consequence of a conflict between all possible opposite opinions." Chernyshevsky continued, "To explain reality became the paramount duty of philosophical thought. As a result extraordinary attention was paid to reality, which had been formerly ignored......Thus conscientious tireless search for truth took the place of former arbitrary interpretations." The end result of this search was Belinsky's particular approach to literature and life. Hegelian philosophy in Chernyshevsky's view "...served as a bridge from barren, scholastic philosophizing that bordered on apathy and ignorance to a simple and lucid conception of literature and life." Chernyshevsky lauds Belinsky for being instrumental in bringing about the "independence of Russian thought" which he achieved partially through his association with Ogarev and other important members of the Stankevich circle who were no longer interested in theorising solely on philosophy but were prone to emphasising the "contemporary problems of historical life." Important also, was Belinsky's emigration to St. Petersburg, where he felt the "real" problems of life more. "The essential feature of the development of Belinsky's

63. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 465, "Essays on the Gogol Period of Russian Literature".
64. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 465, "Essays on the Gogol Period of Russian Literature".
65. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 466, "Essays on the Gogol Period of Russian Literature".
66. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 485, "Essays on the Gogol Period of Russian Literature".
67. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 475, "Essays on the Gogol Period of Russian Literature".
criticism in the *Otechestvennye Zapiski* and in the *Sovremennik* is that it became more and more imbued with the living interests of our reality and as a consequence became more and more positive.” 68.

Having placed Belinsky on this pedestal, which created an aura around him for contemporaries, Chernyshevsky proceeded to systematically undo the dialectic and historical views of Hegel and argue in favour of a “system” imbued with abstract rationality. He insisted that “Philosophical strivings have now been almost forgotten by our literature and literary criticism. We do not wish to decide how much literature and literary criticism have gained by this forgetfulness - we think they have gained absolutely nothing but they have lost a great deal. But whichever way one has decided for himself the question of the significance of philosophical world outlook for the present time, everyone must agree that domination of philosophy over all our intellectual activities at the beginning of the present period of our literature is a remarkable historical fact that deserves careful study.”69 Setting out his own philosophical system, Chernyshevsky highlighted “rational egosim” in human nature as the basic instinct mankind exhibited in order to improve his lot. “A careful examination of the motives that prompt people’s actions shows that all deeds, good and bad, noble and base, heroic and craven, are prompted by one cause - a man acts in a way that gives him most pleasure, in order to obtain a larger gain or a greater pleasure.” 70 And it is in the achievement of this pleasure that ‘utility’ overshadowed ‘good’ and imparted a certain degree

of durability to mankind's striving for pleasure. This doctrine of utility turned out to be the underlying principle of all Chernyshevsky's theorisation, be it on philosophy or on art and aesthetics. Aesthetics turned out to be the focus of mature deliberation on the part of Chernyshevsky, from which he set about defining the terms beauty and reality. The conclusions reached by him as a result of these deliberations were accorded with Feuerbach's inclination towards regarding the individuals as real and the universal as abstractions. Chernyshevsky denied the Hegelian concept of ideas being truly real and individuals, being pure abstraction: ".........beautiful is that being in which we see life as it should be according to our conceptions, beautiful is the object that expresses life, reminds us of life......" 71. He goes on to write "Nature and life create beauty without thinking about beauty, it appears in reality without effort....." 72. Therefore the principal object of art in Chernyshevsky's scheme of things is to reproduce reality "... not in order to eliminate flaws, not because reality as such is not sufficiently beautiful, but precisely because it is beautiful ..... Thus the first object of art is to reproduce reality" 73 Chernyshevsky however qualifies this statement by saying that this position that "art is the reproduction of reality" 74 defines only the formal principle of art; to define the content of art, it is necessary to examine the question of "the essential purpose of art." 75 He answers the queries this poses by stating: "The first and general purpose of all works of art..... is to reproduce phenomena of real life that are of interest to man. By real life we mean ... not only man's relation

71. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 287, "The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality".
72. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 357, "The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality".
73. Chernyshevsky SPE, pp 364 & 365, "The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality".
74. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 365, "The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality".
75. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 373, "The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality".
to the objects and beings of the objective world, but also his inner life." The second purpose of art was "to explain life" and to pronounce judgement on the phenomena that are depicted, thereby placing art "...among the moral activities of man." Having redeemed his position as a thorough utilitarian and an advocate of uncompromising naturalism, somewhat, by this last point on the functions of art, Chernyshevsky set the trend for subjectivism in fine arts, be it literature, painting or sculpture. Chernyshevsky clarified his position by saying - "The essential purpose of art is to reproduce what is of interest to man in real life. But being interested in the phenomena of life, man cannot but, consciously or unconsciously, pronounce judgement on them. The poet or artist, being unable to cease to be a man, cannot even if he wanted to, refrain from pronouncing judgement on the phenomena he depicts. This judgement is expressed in his work - this is another purpose of art which places it among the moral activities of man." Taking his cue from Belinsky, Chernyshevsky displayed an almost matching enthusiasm for integrating literature into the psychosocial fabric of Russia and moulding it into an instrument for the painstaking progress of society.

Chernyshevsky perhaps more than Belinsky had an even more complex situation to reckon with, considering that he was witness to a series of failed attempts at agrarian reform by the autocracy resulting in peasant discontent as well as rejuvenated intellectual unrest in the context of reversion to repression of thought after a brief period of concessions to liberalism. He therefore played a multifaceted role: first as an intellectual leader of young activists, eager to reform

76. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 373, "The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality".
77. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 374-375, "The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality".
78. Chernyshevsky SPE, pp 374, 375, "The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality".
the conditions of economic development and secondly as a mentor of writers and thinkers of the sixties, through his novel *What is to be Done* as well as by his writings on art, aesthetics and philosophy which appeared in the so called "thick journals" of the time.

Undoubtedly, one must note here, it was the phenomenon of the proliferation of journals which was to give Chernyshevsky's ideas a broad reach (as it had done in the case of Belinsky before him). The phenomenon was commented upon by Belinsky in his articles on the state of Russian literature of the 1840s, and it persisted thereafter. The journals were to acquire a specific categorisation in the eyes of those who wrote in them with the specific purpose of acting as guardians of literary sensibilities of the educated Russian public. Journals came to be categorised as either "thick" or "thin" depending on the seriousness and intellectual quality of the material that they published. The "thick" journals, meant for the discerning and superior reader were at this time, dominated by the prevailing populist rhetoric and concern; and they were geared to the dual purpose of projecting purposeful literature among their readers and of imbuing a socio-national consciousness among them. Deriving its roots from the Belinskian model in a broad sense, this new trend, in its didactic and tendentious aspects, was to be rejuvenated by Chernyshevsky, who as member of the editorial staff of *Contemporary*, began to press for critical, committed literature as a symbol of intellectual maturity. *Fatherland Notes, Russian Wealth* and *Russian Word* were the leading publications of the time, and, true to their populist ideologues, were partial to printing reviews by men like Chernyshevsky and Mikhailovsky whose political viewpoints were quite clearly exposed between the lines of their essays. Writings on rural society and economy found pride of place
in these journals, as did the writings of N. A. Nekrasov, M.E. Saltykov, Shchedrin, G.I. Uspensky and N. N. Zlatovratsky.

Important contributors to these journals were two disciples of Chernyshevsky, N.A Dobroliubov and Dmitri Pisarev. Intensely dogmatic in his approach, Dobroliubov asserted that the critics’ sole task was to adjudicate on the extent to which a literary work adhered to reality and to desist from passing judgement on the aspects of reality which emerged from these writings. The methodological orientation of the critic should ideally be an objective analysis of a piece of creative writing as a sociological document. Dmitri Pisarev who emerged as a strong believer in nihilism, and idealised Turgenev’s famous hero Bazarov highlighted the need for social goals and an automatic negation of the motive of pleasure. Any striving for aestheticism was considered to be a waste of human effort by Pisarev who felt that music and the art in general had very little role to play in the upliftment of the “intellectual and moral standards of humanity”. 79

The “sketch” became the principal format of literary expression utilized by these writers to portray real and true to life characters. F.M. Reshetnikov, V.A. Slepstov, N.G. Pomialovsky and A.I. Levitan were prominent among the writers of this genre, and contrasted with liberal writers such as A.A. Potekhin and V.A. Sollogub. Chernyshevsky's influence through his novel What is to be Done found literary record in the work of Ivan Turgenev, whose Fathers and Sons portrayed the character of Bazarov representing the “new men and women” who were regarded as the prime movers of Russian society. Pomialovsky's Bourgeois Happiness and Molotov were other tales highlighting the “progressive” force that

these new men and women were in society. G. I. Uspensky's writings from 1877 to 1882, reflect subtly the imperceptible fluctuations within Populism and reflect the broader dilemmas bedevilling the radical intelligentsia in the course of their movement. Uspensky in the early sixties (in works such as Manners of Rasteryaev Street) displayed the typical cynicism of the populist mentality towards ordinary everyday Russian existence. The sense of hopelessness of the common man in Russia without any prospect of the situation being redeemed emerged quite vividly in his early writings. In his From a Village Diary, which was serialised in Fatherland Notes, Uspensky brought out in sharp relief the crude realities of peasant life which were harsh enough to shock the sensibilities of the innocent radical activist from the town and harden him somewhat to face sordid reality during his actual involvement in the revolutionary movement among the peasantry. Down-to-earth reflections of the limitations of the peasant mind

80. F. M. Reshetnikov (1841-1671) began his literary career with sketches in the local journal of the district of Perm where he was brought up. His later important work The People of Podlipnoe detailed the life of poverty-stricken and downtrodden Finnish peasants. The Miners which he wrote in 1866 and the Glumovs (1866-67) which described the life of mine workers in the Ural and portrayed striking Ural workers after the reforms of 1861 respectively, acquired moderate success. V. A. Slepstov 1836-1878 published a number of sketches Around Vladimir and Klyazma in Russian Speech in 1861, portraying the poverty of the masses and the loneliness of the gentry. Later on sketches of city life, Petersburg Notes, News of Petersburg Life, In the Slums were published in Fatherland Notes where he worked from 1868 to1872. Realistic depiction combined with artistic skill constituted the chief characteristic of Slepstov's writing.

N. G. Pomialovsky's (1835 -1863) novelette Bourgeois Happiness which appeared in the Contemporary marked the true beginning of a literary career. In Molotov, Pomialovsky depicted the life of a typical product of the 1860s whose love affair with the heroine ended in success. The triumph of individualism constituted an important theme of the story. Pomialovsky's death at a young age cut short a potentially successful literary career.

A. A. Potekhin (1829-1908) was a writer and playwright. Potekhin's stories, sketches, novellas and novels were often dominated by peasant themes. Two Hunters, Poor Gentry as well as his novel A Peasant Girl followed by Sheepskin Coat, Human Heart all highlighted the various potentialities of the Russian peasant. Potekhin also produced a number comedies such as The Most Recent Oracle, Around Money, In The Village Commune, Young Shoot, which sometimes featured themes such as the superstition of the gentry as well as the stories of rural proletarisation.

V. A. Sollogub (1813-1882) published his short stories Three Bachelors and Two Students in the Contemporary in 1837. Later he attracted the attention of Belinsky by publishing in Fatherland Notes. The Little Dog 1845 and The Tarantas 1845 turned out to be very successful and were regarded to be part of the natural school of writing.
also emerged in the article *Bez Svoi Voli* which appeared in *Fatherland Notes*, where Uspensky wrote “I say that our own peasants and our people live without proper will and proper thought.” In *Peasant and Peasant Labour* published much later in *Derevenskaia Neuriaditsa* (1881) however, Uspensky reverted to an idealisation of peasant life as personified in the life of Ivan Yermolaevich in the context of which Uspensky sermonised that the only real contribution that the *intelligentsy* could make in the rural scenario was to preserve the “natural harmony of the countryside.” In *Bez Svoi Voli* a village character remarks “I will live in the village - do we not have the river, though a small one, with fresh water fishes....?...... we do not have astronomy, altruism ....” Conferring that the true force in Russian life was represented by peasant existence, Uspensky had written his story *The Incurable* in 1875 where he depicted a village character - a deacon experiencing moral truth of his own accord without the help of any kind of influence from the urban intelligentsia. Ultimately, Uspensky, in his what has been regarded as his important major work by many, *Vlast Zemli* (The Power of the Land), mourned the loss of the ideal peasant life which he had depicted in the Yermolaev sketches, through the loss of the land, where the levelling influence had been negated. In *Vlast Zemli*, which was serialised in *Fatherland Notes*, Uspensky was unable to conceal the limitations of rural society. He wrote “I understood from land, from natural indications, the morals of peasants, ie agriculturist peasants have limited liberty and have to work against their will. Peoples’ lives have too many dark sides, quiet brutality, greed etc. Muzhiks exploit their wives because they are weak, sick, lazy and cannot keep the house properly ..........” The ideal intelligentsia would in Uspensky’s scheme of

81. *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no. 11, November 1882, p 272.
82. *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no. 11, November 1882, p 280
83. *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no 1, January, 1882, p 145
things, have to integrate with the peasantry and hold out to them prospects of hope and help. Uspensky's writings provided volumes of material on the peasantry and the attitude of the intelligentsia to the peasantry which would have been difficult to ignore for contemporary writers with a radical bent of mind. 84

Nikolai Nikolaevich Zlatovratsky was another major writer to be influenced by Chernyshevsky's scheme of useful literature. During the 1870s and the 1880's, his faith in the Chernyshevskian ideal was amply evident in his writings, which were a source of inspiration for the intelligentsia. In Hearts of Gold, published in 1877, which presented for his readers an image of himself in the character of Bashirkov, he depicted the latter as a figure ill at ease among university students, who loved the people because he knew them well and in reality embodied the simplicity and wisdom of the peasantry. In 1877, Zlatovratsky began to write a major novel which carried in it all his impressions about country life. Zlatovratsky's Peasant Jurors and The Foundations were written with the especial intention of depicting the Russian reality in the form of peasant virtue and of providing an almanac of the Russian countryside to the interested young urban intelligentsy. N. N. Zlatovratsky in his story Ustoi which was serialised from 1878 to 1882, was unequivocal in his denouncement of Russia's separation from communal life which according to him was the source of all her miseries. The need of the hour on the part of the intelligentsia was to submit completely to these popular institutions. 85

In the story *Kaban* for example Zlatovratsky brought out through the observations of a city-bred narrator the experiences of a typical rural scenario. The narrator spoke about the Russian people thus, “People labour tirelessly and have a thirst for life” even though they are exploited by few who have power over them. In “Filashka, a muzhik, humble, godfearing, an abstainer and diligent” Zlatovratsky identified the typical peasant type. In *Derevenskii Avraam* Zlatovratsky idealised rural life to the extent of saying that even though the sons of the patriarch Avraam had left to work in the urban areas “love and peace is maintained in a family blessed by the village Patriarch. Evidently the whole village accepts this fact”. The narrator of the story comments on the gradually changing scenario of rural life in the context of changes in village structure and the peasant’s constant struggle for existence. However the essence of village life and the beautiful world of the peasant comes out in the following description by the author. “It was a sunny day in mid August. The village looked gay as if surrounded by a garland of golden bread. The muzhiks were emotional with happiness. It was with God’s grace that this summer, the harvest was bountiful. This unexpected prosperity in the economy of the peasant folk filled Avraam’s soul with untold happiness. After the elders and the women gathered together and talked about next year’s harvest........... festivities began and continued till morning when people went back to their daily chores. The elders expressed deep

86. *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no 6, August 1880, p 309.
87. *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no 6, August 1880, p 332
88. *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no 11, November 1878, p 18
89. *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no 11, November 1878, p 13
gratitude for the labour of the peasants which yielded good results”. The rich picturisation of the countryside in this work acted as a source of inspiration to the intelligentsia and served to familiarize them with the peasant masses. This kind of unalloyed glorification of agrarian society by Zlatovratsky induced Korolenko to remark that his works presented “contemporary pitiful insignificant populism”. *Everyday Life in the Countryside*, published in *Fatherland Notes* in 1879, however revealed certain dilemmas in Zlatovratsky's personal views regarding country life. His penetrating analysis of rural life brought to the surface certain contradictions of rural Russia which proved beneficial to the intelligentsia in the sense that it provided the city-bred radicals with a better understanding of the problem of organising a revolution through the people, that they aimed at tackling. Though Zlatovratsky attempted to stress on the fact that the ultimate resolution of the peasant question lay in its dependance on the peasant commune, his concern with the peasantry diminished gradually. His later writings centred on the intelligentsia and according to Victor Terras displayed a distinct Tolstoyan influence.

Chernyshevsky's advocacy of the integration of science with all aspects of social life seems to have borne fruit in the efforts of A.N. Engel'gardt whose letters *From the Countryside*, were published in *Fatherland Notes*, in which he searched for a more ethical way of life and a more sympathetic attitude in relation to the peasants whom he met in the running of his estate. On the latter, he actively promoted the cause of scientific enlightenment. Apart form founding a chemistry

91. Quoted in KLE vol 2, p 1024.
92. Terras Handbook, p 533,
journal and the first public chemistry laboratory Engel'gardt, put into practical use his theories regarding the better utilization of science in the countryside by actually bettering the harvest of crops in infertile areas of the Smolensk region through the application of rational techniques. During this period Saltykov-Shchedrin wrote *Signs of the Times* and *Pompadours and Pompadouresses*. His piercing evaluation of Russian life found their place in his novel *The History of a Town*. The town whose 'history' he professed to write was named *Glupov*, symbolising the utter degradation and oppression of autocratic government. Apart from the novels and *belles lettres* published in different journals of the time, the theory of a social content in art was to infiltrate into the realm of poetry as well. N.A. Nekrasov, D.D. Minaev and V.S. Kurochkin were the leading poets of the time who emerged as nonbelievers in pure art. The satirical journal *Iskra* and the satirical section *Svistok* in the *Sovremennik* had important roles to play in a vigorous polemic that came to take shape between liberals and populists.

93. N. A. Nekrasov (1821-78) was regarded as the foremost representative of the "realist school" in Russian poetry. Nekrasov assumed co ownership of *Sovremennik* in 1846 and became its chief editor. He was encouraged by Belinsky to write poetry and wrote a number of poems with themes about the lot of the peasants. Poems like *Unreaped Row*, *Vlas* and *A Forgotten Village* were manifestations of Nekrasov's concern for the peasantry. In 1867, Nekrasov acquired *Otechevennye Zapiski* and became its editor.

D. D. Minaev (1835-89) was a poet, journalist and playwright. Minaev's wit and capacity for writing was embodied in his poems and articles, many of which were published in *Otechevennye Zapiski*. Minaev wrote a book on V. G. Belinsky. His well known plays were *The Liberal*, *Finished Songs* (1870) while his other works were entitled *Ballads and Songs*, (1863-64) *Songs and Poems* (1870) *Songs and Satires* 1878.

V. S. Kurochkin (1831-75) was a poet and journalist who worked for *Syn Otchestva* where his poems and articles mainly concerned with literary criticism were published. His reputation as a writer increased as the social and political content of his satirical verses became apparent. Later Kurochkin became the editor of the journal *Iskra*. 
That this polemic was very much a part of the literary scene in the seventies and eighties is indicated in the writings of Chernyshevsky himself. In other words, in spite of the dominance of a cognitive literature as visualised by Belinsky and actually witnessed by Chernyshevsky, in the years following the establishment of the Land and Freedom Society, the more or less constant presence of a group of liberal critics such as A.V. Druzhinin, P.V. Annenkov and V.P. Botkin is a fact that cannot be totally ignored. Chernyshevsky, in a series of articles entitled *Polemical Gems*, categorically answers M. Katkov's article in the February issue of *Russkii Vestnik* in which he criticises Chernyshevsky's economic opinions: "... I am afraid the *Russkii Vestnik* is mistaken in assuming that my economic opinions are becoming rectified .... I decline it with thanks." 94 In another article by M. Katkov in the *Russkii Vestnik*, entitled *Polemical Gems in Sovremennik*, Katkov argued against the socio-political views of revolutionary democracy. In *Prospects of an Entente Cordiale with the Sovremennik* Katkov, on behalf of liberal, and conservative journalists, denounced Chernyshevsky for "mocking at Orthodox religion". 95

*Russkii Vestnik*’s publication of *From the Science of the Human Spirit* by P. Yukrevich sparked off a debate between its author and Chernyshevsky, with the latter's *Anthropological Principle in Philosophy* as the subject of dispute 96. These together with literature negating the absolute necessity of “the idea” in any work of art, clearly displayed the existence of alternative attitudes even in the era of populist domination which were to make their mark felt more prominently in the very near future.

94. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 140, "Polemical Gems (First Collection)".
95. Chernyshevsky SPE, p 567, Explanatory Notes to Polemical Gems No. 1.
The initial signs of such a shift came with the publication of certain novels which were contrary to the populist ideology, such as N.S. Leskov’s At Daggers Drawn and No Way Out, A Pisemsky’s A Troubled Sea, V.P. Kliushnikov’s The Mirage and V.V. Krestovsky’s The Bloody Lie. The most significant contribution to the literature of this period however was made by L.N. Tolstoy whose creative works at this initial phase of his career were to display positive pointers to his future position as the greatest phenomenon in Russian literature. Writing at the height of populist fervour, Tolstoy encompassed within the genre of the novel both social content and artistic grace, elevating his own position far above that of his contemporaries.

97. A. F. Pisemsky (1821-1881) achieved fame as a writer with Sketches of Peasant Life in which he highlighted the life of the common people. However his most famous works were the novel One Thousand Souls (1858) and the play A Bitter Fate. In the former, Pisemsky depicted the rise to power of an ambitious man from the provinces and his final fall which was the consequence of his overpowering self-interest. In A Bitter Fate, Pisemsky explored the social construct of serfdom and the humiliation of mankind resulting from it. In the 1860s, Pisemsky through his portrayal of radical minded activists as self-centred and oppressive like their opponents whom they criticised incurred the wrath of the so-called progressive intelligentsia. They denounced his “Troubled Seas” and ignored his artistically excellent novels Men of the 1840s and In the Whirlpool.

Nikolai Leskov (1831-95) began his literary career as a journalist and later wrote short stories and novels as well. Innovative in his techniques of narration, Leskov wrote A Case That was Dropped in 1862, whose main characters constituted colourful personalities from provincial Russia. From the very beginning of his literary career, Leskov fell out with the radicals on the issue of an editorial which he wrote for Severnaya Pchela apparently condemning certain strategists of the revolutionaries. As such his novel No Way Out (1864) was unequivocally condemned by social democratic literary critics. However Leskov’s literary career did continue with Lady Macbeth of Mtsenk District a story of crime and passion, The Battleaxe and his play The Spendthrift. His fight with the radicals continued in At Daggers Drawn while his stories, The Sealed Angel and The Enchanted Pilgrim reflected Leskov’s interest in religion. A series of stories aiming at the propagation of virtue through art, in the later years of his life imparted a didactic and religious trend to his literature - a didacticism which was different from that of the radical democrats.

V. P. Kliushnikov (1841-92)’s first novel Mirage (Marevo) (1864) depicted the idealistic visions of young revolutionaries passionately committed to attaining justice which were however devoid of any realistic assessments of the circumstances under which these aims were to be pursued. This anti-nihilistic character of the novel was vehemently denounced by critics of the radical camp (Pisarev, Salykov Shchedrin) and his later novels Another Life, Gypsies, and Non-Mirage were met with very little enthusiasm.

V.V. Krestovsky (1840-95) in his novels Two Forces and The Bloody Lie investigated the aspirations of the radical Russian youth of the 1860s and the backdrop of the Polish uprising. His judgement about the Russian revolutionaries emerges clearly in these novels where he pinpoints the uselessness of the nihilistic approach to political problems.
Chernyshevsky inspite of his almost dogmatic theorisation about utility and reality in art, was quick to make qualifications when faced with this phenomenon. In his view, Tolstoy was a master at analysing human psychology, his distinguishing feature being that "Count Tolstoy is primarily interested in the psychic process itself, its forms, its laws, or to express it in terms of a definition, in a dialect of the soul." He continued: "The particularity of Count Tolstoy's talent consists in that he does not limit himself to depicting the results of the psychic process. The process itself interests him and Count Tolstoy masterfully depicts the evanescent manifestations of that inner life that replace each other extremely rapidly and with an inexhaustible variety." 

It is important to note, however, that Chernyshevsky found enough social morality in Tolstoy's tales such as *Childhood* and *Boyhood* as well as in *Notes of a Billiard Marker*, to suit his own prescriptions of good literature. “Only a talent that had maintained its pristine purity could have conceived and written so strikingly and truthfully, could have created with noble intentions the story of man's fall.” "...... Moral feeling for him [Tolstoy] is not to re-establish only through reflection and experience in life; it has never wavered; it has been maintained in all freshness and immediacy." However Tolstoy's art was never for a moment hampered by sermonising and, perhaps ironically, Chernyshevsky's words themselves perhaps best describe the true nature of Tolstoyan talent.

98. Matlaw, op. cit. p 97, N.G., Chernyshevsky, "L. N. Tolstoy's Childhood and Boyhood and Military Tales".
100. Ibid, p 103.
101. Ibid, p 103.
“Count Tolstoy possesses a real talent. That means that his works are artistic, that each of them very fully expresses precisely the idea that he wanted to express in that work. He never says anything irrelevant, because that would be contrary to the conditions of art; he never disfigures his works with the admixture of scenes and figures foreign to the idea of the work. Precisely therein lies the main demands of art.” 102

The overwhelming success of one of the foremost representatives of the golden age of Russian literature, in the time of the Chernyshevskian ideological/intellectual leadership itself - recognised in the genuine aspects of his talent by none less than Chernyshevsky himself was a sure indicator of the superficiality of the populist view of literature and the ultimate triumph of trends leading to true art for art's sake in as vital a sphere as literature in the Russian consciousness.