

ALEXANDER BLOK
A STUDY IN RHYTHM AND METRE

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ALEXANDER BLOK

A STUDY IN RHYTHM AND METRE

by

ROBIN KEMBALL



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Alexander Brown

“He was one of the first to translate the spirit of his stormy age into music. ... he felt the heartbeat of his time.”

(Ilya Ehrenburg, of Serge Prokofiev)

“Peut-être, pour qu’il existe, de par le monde, quelques poèmes immortels, faut-il qu’il se perde ainsi des milliers d’instantanés semblables, qui ne seront jamais dits. C’est dans l’épais limon où ils se déposent que la poésie véritable prend racine. Et si quelques-uns sont sauvés par les poètes, revêtus par eux de la dure carapace des mots, peut-être cet effort serait-il vain si la cadence, la rime, la formule, n’éveillaient, dans les coeurs qui les reçoivent, la résonance d’une vibration bien plus secrète, qui n’avait pas su conquérir l’expression.

Ainsi s’explique cette magie mystérieuse, l’*aura* qui entoure toute grande poésie et la fait rebelle à l’analyse. D’un vrai poème la critique ne saisit jamais que les thèmes rationnels, la méthode, la technique, – la coquille.”

(Daniel-Rops, *Présence et Poésie*)

“What is a poet? – A person who writes in verse? Of course not. A poet is a bearer of rhythm.”

(Alexander Blok)

FOREWORD

This work springs from the most modest beginnings imaginable. Engaged in translating a number of Blok's poems into English verse – and endeavouring to keep to the same metrical details as the Russian originals – I noted down for my own convenience the abstract schemes of the poems in question, on a simple 'short-long' basis. By the time these translations had reached the hundred mark, I could not fail to be struck by the frequent recurrence of certain patterns – though not always with the same rhyme or ending schemes. As a result, I decided it would be worth while investigating the whole of Blok's three *Books* on the same basis. This alone proved a long and laborious undertaking – the more so, as I now realise, because of my lamentable ignorance at that time of the niceties of Russian versification. In addition to a study of the more orthodox metres, it involved a detailed analysis of those eighty or so poems in accentual verse known to Russians as *dol'niki*.

It was during this work that I had the good fortune to light on a copy of Prof. Žirmunskij's *Vvedenie v metriku* – to my mind, in every sense the ideal introduction (as its name implies) to a study of Russian versification. Like all good introductory works, it opened the way to, and stimulated an appetite for, wider reading – Belyj's *Simvolizm*, Šengeli's *Traktat*, and a host of other invaluable works, short and long, on various aspects of Russian metrics.

Side by side with this, the very real problems set by my efforts at verse translation induced me to consult a number of works on English prosody (as it is usually called). The legendary studies of Saintsbury formed an obvious starting-point, but many others, at least as valuable from my point of view, soon came my way – more especially, the works of Egerton Smith and of T. S. Omond.

From these parallel studies, the logical next step was to read the impressions and experiences of others who had ventured into that fascinating field which is Russian-English verse translation – in particular,

those of the late Sir Oliver Elton and of Sir Maurice Bowra. Comparative metrics is a rare enough science at any time, and this particular field is one, I believe, which is still virtually unexplored in detail even to-day.

So, in retrospect, the gradual build-up of the present study appears. The purely objective *metrical* patterns formed the basis for Part IV – this was the first part to be written and constitutes, as it were, the dry material on which the *rhythmical* considerations discussed in Part III are based. The parallel studies of Russian and English versification, together with experience gained in translating Blok's poems, went to form Part II, of which, in a sense, Chapter II roughly 'corresponds' to Part IV, while Chapter III forms the *general* introduction to the (partly subjective) problems of rhythm and cadence which find their *specific* examination (i.e., in relation to Blok) in Part III.

This work was thus composed in more or less the reverse order of its Parts, concluding (chronologically speaking) with the first chapter, which forms a study on its own. Although applied to the specific case of Blok, it inevitably raises the wider and more fundamental issue of the place – even the justification and whole *raison d'être* – of metrical studies such as these. The popular illusion of the 'inspired artist' dies hard and, while agreeing with every word of Sir Maurice Bowra's assessment of the 'literally inspired' nature of Blok's poetry,¹ I have endeavoured, in this first chapter, to put the matter in its proper perspective in relation to Blok's understanding of poetic technique and his painstaking, minute attention to detail.

The ghost of 'pure' inspiration, as applied to the poet, was admirably laid by Edgar Allan Poe in his *Philosophy of Composition*. This is appropriately cited by Percy Scholes in his *Listener's Guide to Music* and, while I cannot quite accept his contention that "the arts are on an equal footing here", Scholes is certainly right in his view that "... we can learn something of the methods of work of the composer by considering ... those of the poet".² The converse is equally true: What could be more appropriate in relation to the problem at hand than these words of Brahms': "There is no real creating without hard work. That which you would call invention, that is to say, a thought, an idea, is simply an inspiration from above, for which I am not responsible, which is no merit of mine. Yet it is a present, a gift, *which I ought even to despise until I have made it my own by right of hard work.*"³

¹ Cf. Ch. I, p. 36, *infra*.

² *The Listener's Guide to Music*, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

If, as is my profound hope, this study leads in some small way to a better *appreciation* of Blok's verse; if it leads even to some *acquaintance* with that verse on the part of English-speaking readers which would otherwise have remained barred; and if, finally, it leads to a better understanding among lovers of Russian and English poetry in both countries (or wherever the two languages are read and understood) of the remarkable rhythmical affinity between the two (an affinity which will probably surprise many) – then, but only then, will it have served some useful, creative purpose. If, in parts – in many parts – it remains a dry and analytical study, this is to some extent the result of the 'scientific' demands set by a doctoral thesis, but largely because – in the absence of any large-scale work dealing *either* with Blok's versification *or* with comparative Russian-English metrics – this one was deliberately confined as far as possible within 'objective' limits, being conceived as the merest starting-point from which, as I hope, more truly creative studies may spring one day.

At the same time, I cherish no illusions: "Aussi la technique de la poésie demeurera-t-elle toujours irréductible à la simple raison: on dénombrera en vain ce qu'un poème contient d'allitérations subtiles, on mesurera en vain le rapport des longues aux brèves, des sons mats aux sonorités éclatantes; on n'aura pas expliqué pourquoi la grande poésie, avec des syllabes qui sont celles de tous les jours, – et la plus grande est souvent la plus simple, – arrive à nous faire pénétrer dans le domaine d'une réalité autre que la nôtre, et dont nous dirions peut-être, si nous en connaissions le secret, que la mort ne l'a pas atteinte."⁴ All this is true – and may readers of this study never forget it! It may be, as one authority on comparative metrics has suggested, that the verse translator has a special part to play in this connection: "... it is the recompense of a verse-translator for his thankless work to arrive at a perhaps sounder understanding as well as to a keener sense of the distinct values of two versifications than he could do by the analytical methods of the metrician. His very shortcomings, his frequent fits of despair, are so many testimonies to the absolute and partly untransmissible virtues of poetry, to the something inherent in its essence, diffuse through all its aspects, felt not in the spirit only but also in the form, not only in the language or the figures of speech but also in the structure of the verse."⁵

At the same time, it is no less true that a knowledge and understanding

⁴ Daniel-Rops, *Présence et Poésie*, p. 143.

⁵ Emile Legouis, *A Short Parallel between French and English Versification*, pp. 17/18.

of the underlying 'technique' of an art immeasurably enhances our appreciation of it, and this is no exception in the case of that art which one critic has described as supreme, "... because it gives us not only sound, like music, and form, like sculpture, and colour, like painting, but unites them all, and affects the senses like reality itself".⁶ For, "... though works of art are not made by rule, yet rules may be made from them; certain definite touchstones and principles can be found in fine work, and we know that Tennyson, for instance, when his poem was finished, examined it by the light of them".⁷ No one, so far as I know, has yet accused Tennyson of formalism!

As for the reader, or listener (if ever verse were made for listening to, it is Blok's!), the problem is excellently summed up once more by Scholes: "Listening is as much an analytical act as the appreciation of architecture; it must, therefore, be *practised consciously until long use and experience enable us to exercise our painfully acquired powers subconsciously*." Scholes, of course, is concerned with the music-listener. *Peu importe*. His ensuing definition of his own aims admirably sums up the hope and purpose that lie behind the present work: "The succeeding chapters teach *conscious* analysis in listening – in the hope that with many readers this process of analysis will eventually become largely subconscious."⁸

Acknowledgements – like so many social conventions – all too easily take on the ring of a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Yet nothing could be more real and more precious than the help and understanding I have received from so many quarters during the long and painstaking preparation of this work and – almost as long again – its virtually complete revision after an unavoidable break of two years just when it seemed on the point of completion.

To the authorities at the British Museum Library – that Mecca of innumerable thesis-writers – go my thanks for their courtesy and helpfulness, including permission to order photostat copies of certain works which time did not allow me to study fully during my visits to London. To all those, more especially, at the Basle University Library, for their infinite patience, understanding, and generosity in the loan of some

⁶ E. A. Greening Lamborn, *The Rudiments of Criticism*, p. 70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸ *The Listener's Guide*..., p. 22 (my italics). Scholes's phrasing, as he explains, is adapted from an analogous passage by Prof. Frederick Corder in his *Modern Musical Composition*.

works for very long periods. To Mr. Alexis Struve, in Paris, for tracking down a large number of extremely rare Russian works – *Blokiana* and metrical studies – and for lending me others from his private collection.

I am also indebted to Professor Roman Jakobson, of Harvard University, for supplying me with a microfilm reproduction of certain pages from his work on Czech verse referring to Blok's *doľniki*. To Professor Kiril Taranovski, also of Harvard, for providing copies of certain works hard to obtain, and for drawing my attention to several others. To Professor Dimitri von Mohrenschildt, of Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.J., for permission to reproduce here some of my own Blok translations which originally appeared in *The Russian Review*. To Professor Gleb Struve, of the University of California, for help in solving some knotty points of accentuation. To Dr. George Ivask, for stimulating criticism on certain aspects of Russian metre and rhythm. To Dr. Avril Sokolova-Pyman, the author of two original studies on English translations of Blok's verse, for her lively comments and helpful suggestions in this domain. To Miss Helène Berg, for help in checking parts of the Russian text. And particularly to Miss Sonia Ryser, without whose invaluable aid I could never have hoped to complete the extensive revision of the manuscript necessitated by the two-year interruption already referred to.

Finally, and above all, to my friend and teacher, Dr. Elsa Mahler. Professor of Russian Language and Literature at the University of Basle, She it was who first introduced me to Blok. She who saw the possibilities inherent in those original 'abstract metrical schemes' of some of his poems. She who – at all times and under all circumstances – remained ready to give generously of her time and energy, her encouragement, her sound advice, born of immense experience, and – not least valuable – her never-failing sense of humour during the long and often difficult period when this work was taking shape. Her unrivalled knowledge of and love for the idiosyncrasies of the Russian language, particularly in its rhythmical and poetical aspects (the fruit of her long and exhaustive study of Russian folk-songs and popular verse) was to prove particularly valuable to me in tackling the formidable problem set by the study of the rhythm and metre of a language that is not one's own. For her selfless and unstinting help at all times I can never be sufficiently grateful, and it is my earnest hope that in the final completion of this work, in the face of so many undreamed-of obstacles, she may see at least a part of her due reward.

In conclusion: I am painfully aware that a study such as this can never hope to be entirely free from errors. There will, too, almost certainly be

expressions of view with which not all prosodists will concur. For all criticism, for all errors called to my attention, and for all inquiries – the author's most satisfying reward – I shall always be sincerely grateful.

“La Pensée”

ROBIN KEMBALL

Blonay sur Vevey

September, 1964

P.S. – During revision of the final proofs, every effort has been made to incorporate references to the more important sources of literature up to and including 1963. These include numerous additional footnotes and – where space allowed – the insertion of brief *Addenda* at the end of certain chapters.

I should like my last word to be one of praise and sincere appreciation of the almost superhuman efforts made by the printers and publishers in producing a work which can have been little short of a typographer's nightmare.

December, 1964

R.K.

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PART I

INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER I

BLOK'S PLACE IN RUSSIAN PROSODY

"Russian literature," complained Sergej Bobrov, the Moscow poet, in 1916, "is indescribably poor in works dealing with Russian versification. It is easy enough for the French, English, or Italian poet to surround himself with the most adept studies on the history and theory of his native verse; the Russian poet, under similar conditions, finds himself in the most helpless situation."¹ One year earlier, he had written in much the same vein: "... The number of works on Russian versification is extraordinarily small and, as for studies devoted to the examination and description of the technique of any individual poet – such works, alas, can be counted singly. We shall probably not be far wrong if we say that, in the literature so far, there exist five such articles in all – and even these are not all of equal merit."²

That, indeed, was nearly fifty years ago. Since then, much has been done to fill the gap which undoubtedly existed. Poets themselves – Belyj first, but Brjusov and Bobrov himself soon after, to be followed later by G. Šengeli – all made their contributions to the study of Russian metrics. About the same time, scholars began to devote their attention to the same problems. First there appeared the researches of the early Formalists, including notably Jurij Tynjanov and Boris Ejxenbaum, Osip Brik and Roman Jakobson; these were soon followed, and in part accompanied, by studies along more orthodox lines, including a series of valuable works by such trained and erudite investigators as Viktor Vinogradov, the late Boris Tomaševskij, and Viktor Žirmunskij, each of whom, while originally evincing some sympathy with the Formalist school, yet retained an independent and altogether more level-headed approach, avoiding many of

¹ Sergej Bobrov, *Zapiski stixotvorca* (Musaget, M., 1916), p. 69.

² Sergej Bobrov, *Novoe o stixosloženii A. S. Puškina* (Musaget, M., 1915), p. 15. The works Bobrov had in mind were, primarily, N. Ostolopov's *Slovar' drevnej i novoj poezii*, published in 1821 (!), and especially, among more recent works, Andrej Belyj's *Simvolizm* (1910), with which modern Russian versification may fairly be stated to have begun (*vide infra*, Ch. III, pp. 117ff., of the present work).

the excesses into which the strict "Formalists" were, by the very nature of their dogma, bound to fall sooner or later.³ Among these latter studies, particular importance attaches to the work of Žirmunskij, whose *Introduction to Metrics*,⁴ published in 1925, remains to this day the leading work on Russian versification generally, while his study of *Rhyme* (1923) remains unsurpassed in English – and probably in any other language.⁵ Useful work has since been carried out by Soviet investigators (L. Timofeev and others), also in Yugoslavia and in the U.S.A. (K. Taranovski).⁶ Finally, mention should be made in the present context of a small work by B. O. Unbegaun, which – though modest in scope and not setting out to provide anything in the way of original findings – is yet immensely valuable as providing the *English* reader for the first time with a competent survey of the basic principles of Russian versification.⁷

In addition to works of a general nature, the lack of studies dealing with

³ On the subject of the Formalists, their sympathisers and opponents, cf. esp.: Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism. History – Doctrine* (Mouton & Co., The Hague, 1955), *passim*. On the attitude of Žirmunskij in particular, and his final break with the Formalist school, cf. esp. pp. 75–77 of the same work. Žirmunskij, described here as "the most distinguished among the quasi-Formalist moderates", was in fact always careful to draw a distinction between what he dubbed the "formalistic" (*formalističeskij*) approach of the extremists, i.e. the original adherents of Šklovskij and the *Opojaz*, and the "formal method" (*formal'nyj metod*) of metrical study generally, which, he maintained, had far deeper, broader, and, incidentally, older foundations, dating back to the original researches of Belyj, to whom, if to anybody, the honour belonged of being the "founder" of such a system of study. His views are set out in unmistakable form in the Introduction to his collected articles: *Voprosy teorii literatury* (Academia, L., 1928, pp. 7–16), where he concludes: "In any case, for myself personally, the formalistic doctrine of *Opojaz* and the spirit of a 'system' and a 'school' which links scientific study with dogmatic decisions laid down in advance remain, as always, unacceptable. In problems concerning the theory of literature, I reserve the right to go my own way, as hitherto." (p. 15). Cf. also his article: *K voprosu o "formal'nom metode"*, reprinted in the same work, pp. 154–174.

⁴ V. Žirmunskij, *Vvedenie v metriku. Teorija stixa* (Academia, L., 1925). This invaluable study is frequently quoted throughout the present work under the abbreviated title: *VVM*.

⁵ V. Žirmunskij, *Rifma. Eë istorija i teorija* (Academia, P., 1923). (Henceforth: *Rifma*). Cf. René Wellek & Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p. 162.

⁶ For details, see *Bibliography* (III), pp. 489ff., *infra*.

⁷ B. O. Unbegaun, *Russian Versification* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956). The present work was already two-thirds completed before the publication of Unbegaun's study. This fact – together with the (designedly) elementary and non-controversial nature of his book – explains the incorporation in the present study of a certain amount of historical and other explanatory detail concerning Russian versification generally (cf. esp. Ch. II and III of the present work, *infra*). A French edition – in all essentials a reproduction of the English version, but adapted to the needs of the French reader, and including two extra works in the bibliography – appeared in 1958 under the title: *La Versification russe* (Librairie des Cinq Continents, Paris).

the verse of individual poets, so deplored by Bobrov, has also partially been made good – more particularly, as might be expected, in the case of Puškin and of Lermontov; among modern poets, attention has also been directed to the verse structure of Majakovskij and, to a lesser extent, to the work of Anna Axmatova.⁸

All in all, the position had so far improved since Bobrov's time that Unbegaun, writing in 1956, could state without fear of contradiction: "Studies in Russian versification are numerous..."⁹

And yet – amongst this, to-day, formidable array of metrical researches, the absence of any large-scale study of Blok's versification cannot fail to call attention to itself as constituting at once a lamentable and surprising omission in the field of Russian prosodical investigation.¹⁰ Lamentable, because Blok is, by any standards, one of the relatively few first-rank Russian poets ever; surprising, because, over and above this, he is – of all Russian poets, and perhaps of all poets of all times – the outstanding example of one who derives so tremendous a part of his total effect from his uncanny sense of *rhythm*.

This pre-eminently rhythmical quality in Blok's verse is universally acknowledged. "Blok's poems, more than any other Russian poems, must be read, not so much analysing the text as listening to the rhythm – and in any case multiplying the sense by the sound," wrote Georgij Adamovič, *doyen* of Russian *émigré* critics, in 1931. "Blok's text is confused, its literal meaning, in the majority of cases, obscure. Yet, [when] supported by the rhythm – in which case the intonation of the sentence sometimes lends it

⁸ Cf. Bibliography. On Puškin, cf. esp. the works by Tomaševskij. Other studies are given by Žirmunskij on p. 264 of *VVM*.; later studies are mentioned by Unbegaun on p. 159 of his *Russian Versification*, notably that by N. V. Lapšina *et al.* On Lermontov, cf. esp. the works by D. G. Gincburg (*VVM*, p. 264) and I. N. Rozanov. Also that by S. V. Šuvalov (Ch. VI – *Poetika*), and the section *O stixie Lermontova* which appears in the Academy edition of Lermontov's works edited by D. I. Abramovič (Vol. 5, 1913, pp. 206–209). On Majakovskij, cf. articles by A. Abramov and others in: *Tvorčestvo Majakovskogo* (cf. *Russian Versification*, p. 159). On Axmatova, cf. Boris Ejxenbaum, *Anna Axmatova. Opyt analiza*.

⁹ *Russian Versification*, p. 156, where a list of the more important bibliographies of works on Russian versification is given.

¹⁰ The only work dealing specifically with Blok's verse from a structural, or at least an analytical, point of view would still seem to be Žirmunskij's *Poezija Aleksandra Bloka* (cf. Bibliography). But this is not, and was never intended to be, a study in Blok's versification *per se*, though it does contain a brief 'formal' examination of his accentual verse (Ch. VI) and of his rhyme (Ch. VII). A certain amount of technical and statistical data may be found in part V of Sophie Bonneau's *L'Univers poétique d'Alexandre Blok*, pp. 297ff. But these, too, are not of a strictly prosodical nature and are, in any case, by no means always reliable (cf. esp. Ch. II, p. 109, note 172, and p. 110, note 176, of the present work).

ten times as much force – the [same] text becomes dazzling in its brilliance.”¹¹ A quarter of a century later, Blok's rhythm still had not lost any of its power over him. “Blok's [poetical] mastery (*masterstvo*) is first and foremost a rhythmical one, and it would be hard to name a poet in whose work intonation and melody are of greater importance. ... Thanks to his astounding rhythmical gift, to his ‘absolute ear’, Blok acquired a magic all his own...”¹²

An English admirer of Blok, Sir Maurice Bowra, puts it in much the same way. Recalling Valéry's dictum that “a poet's task is simply to transfer to another his own state”, he comments: “That is what Blok does. Through his rhythms and the power of his words he conveys his own unique, extremely private state.”¹³

K. Čukovskij, contemporary and close friend of Blok, has recorded the literally magic spell under which the poet held his admirers. “He did with us what he pleased, because the power of his lyric verse had its roots not so much in its words as in its rhythms.”¹⁴

Rhythm, in fact, was in all Blok's being. The poet, Georgij Čulkov, another close friend of Blok's, once referred, in a striking passage, to the ‘living rhythm of his face’, with ‘its something melodious, harmonious, and well-proportioned’, and even – ‘particularly captivating’ – to the rhythmical nature of Blok's very gestures.¹⁵

Hand in hand with the rhythm of Blok's verse goes its essentially musical quality – the ‘melody’ and ‘harmony’ that are, almost inevitably, mentioned by most commentators in the same breath.

If rhythm was in his being, music was for him very life itself – such stuff, it might fairly be said, as his dreams were made of. “If we... ask ourselves the question: who among Russian poets... most sensed the musicality (*muzykal'nost'*) of the world and tried to communicate that musicality in his poetry? – we inevitably light on Blok. By his own assertion, Blok lived the whole time in [tune with] the ring (*zvučanii*) and the rhythm of

¹¹ Georgij Adamovič, *Aleksandr Blok* (in: *Sovremennyya Zapiski*, XLVII, Paris, 1931, pp. 283–305), p. 300.

¹² G. Adamovič, *Nasledstvo Bloka* (in: *Novyj Žurnal/The New Review*, XLIV, New York, 1956, pp. 73–87), p. 79.

¹³ C. M. Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism* (Macmillan, London, 1954), p. 147.

¹⁴ K. Čukovskij, *Kniga ob Aleksandre Bloke* (izd. 2oe, Epoxa, Berlin, 1922), p. 65. Cf. Prince D. S. Mirsky (on Blok's *Dvenadcat'*): “His supreme mastery of rhythm far surpasses the ordinary limits assigned to poetic expression, and transcends the rational element of speech.” (*Modern Russian Literature*, O.U.P., London, 1925, p. 108).

¹⁵ Georgij Čulkov, *Aleksandr Blok i ego vremja* (in: *Pis'ma Aleksandra Bloka*, Kolos, L., 1925, pp. 91–120), pp. 95/96.

his age ... so much so ... that, as soon as he ceased to hear that rhythm, he ceased writing poetry also." Thus writes K. Pomerancev in an article on *The Essence of Poetry*.¹⁶ Referring to the forebodings of doom and imminent catastrophe in Blok's verse, the same author declares: "... the main feature in these forebodings lies not in the words and not in the sense of Blok's poetry but in its tonalities (*tonal'nosti*), in its melodies (*napevax*) ... Blok was a poet who, in an entirely special way, heard the rhythm of [his] time, the music of [his] age."¹⁷

"Blok," wrote A.V. Lunačarskij on one occasion, "was a musician with all his being, and he apprehended the world as music likewise ... Blok's strength resided precisely in the fact that the symbols he created were primarily musical ones ... This musical conception of the world, this firm conviction that the inner essence of existence (*bytija*) was musical, ... accompanied Blok throughout the course of his life."¹⁸ Čukovskij bears this out to the full, recording that even "... space resounded for him in some way or other. Of objects, he was in the habit of saying: 'that is a musical object' or 'that is a non-musical object'. He even wrote to me once, in reference to some anniversary, that the day had been 'not empty, but musical'. At all times, and not only with his ears, but with his very skin, with his entire being, he perceived the music of the world about him ... he was overflowing with music. He was one of those darlings of [the gods of] music for whom creating meant lending an attentive ear, who experienced neither tension nor effort in creating."¹⁹

'Blok and music' is a theme vast enough to fill a book in itself. This cosmic conception of the role of music – encountered in his writing again and again – is perhaps best summed up in the following extract from his diary for 1919, where he writes, in his characteristic, inimitable way: "In the beginning was music. Music is the essence of the world. The world grows in tensile rhythms. The growth holds itself back, afterwards to 'burst forth'. Such is the law of all organic life on earth – the life of the individual and of humanity [as a whole]. Volitional surges (*volevye napory*). The growth of the world is culture (*kul'tura*). Culture is musical rhythm.

"The whole brief history of humanity retained in our feeble memory is evidently [one of] the changing of periods; in one, music dies away,

¹⁶ K. Pomerancev, *Suščnost' poezii* (in: *Literaturnyj Sovremennik. Almanax. Proza, stixi, kritika*. Mjunxen [Munich], 1954, pp. 214–224), p. 215.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹⁸ A. Lunačarskij, *Aleksandr Blok* (in: *Sobranie sočinenij*. Izd. Pisatelej v Leningrade, 1932, Vol. I, pp. 14–55), pp. 24/25.

¹⁹ K. Čukovskij, *Aleksandr Blok kak čelovek i poet* (Izd. A. F. Marks, Petrograd, 1924), p. 25.

sounds smothered, only to burst forth with a new volitional surge in the one succeeding it."

"Such was the great musical period of humanism – the period of the Renaissance, which followed on the musical lull of the Middle Ages."²⁰

At this point it is essential, if misunderstanding is to be avoided, to define a little more closely what Blok's musical nature was – or, at least, what it was *not*. It is clear, for instance, that he had no 'ear for music' in the normally accepted sense of the term. In this, as Marija Beketova pointed out in her original biographical sketch of the poet, Blok was like his uncle, Pëtr L'vovič Blok: neither of them had 'a musical ear', though both were outstanding for their 'striking sense of rhythm'.²¹

Taking this as his cue, Lunačarskij enlarges on the definition: "... Blok was not a musical person in the ordinary sense of the word, i.e. he was exceptionally fond of music, felt its power over him very strongly, but himself played no instrument and did not possess a good ear, i.e., in particular, was unable to repeat music he heard."²²

There is, in this connection, a famous letter of Blok's to Belyj, in which he once confessed: "My understanding of music is non-existent to the point of despair – bereft as I am by nature of the remotest ear for music, with the result that I cannot talk of music as an art from any point of view. This being so, I am condemned to [a state in which] that which is for ever singing inside me never emerges into the open"²³

To this, Lunačarskij again brings his own interpretation, which – for all its cumbrous wording and laboured style – probably comes somewhere near the truth. "With this," he writes, "Blok declares that within him there lived some kind of continuous song, some kind of musical principle, probably not organised in melodic form [but] evidently consisting rather of a rhythmical exchange of emotions, crescendoes and diminuendoes – in a word, of some more or less dynamically organised life of sensations, moods, affects (*affektov*), very closely related to what Blok evidently experienced when listening to music ... Music called forth in him profound, varying, powerful excitations. But these excitations he experienced even without music; moreover, they strove outwards but, finding no escape in purely tonal creation, found it in verbal creation

²⁰ *Dnevnik Al. Bloka 1917–1921* (II), p. 155. On the same theme, cf. *ibid.* p. 158 and p. 161, and esp. V. Gol'cev, *O muzikal'nom vosprijatii mira u Bloka* (in: *O Bloke*, pp. 259–282).

²¹ M. A. Beketova, *Aleksandr Blok* (Alkonost, Pbg., 1922), pp. 13/14.

²² *Aleksandr Blok*, pp. 21/22.

²³ Andrej Belyj, *Vospominanija ob Aleksandre Aleksandroviče Bloke* (in: *Zapiski Mečtatelej*, No. 6, Pbg., 1922, pp. 5–122), p. 17.

[instead]."²⁴ At this point, Lunačarskij recalls Goethe's suggestion that people with powerful artistic leanings, but untalented in the 'plastic' or musical sphere, tend to become poets and, as it were, tell (in words) of the visual images or sound worlds which they would like to create more directly, not through the intellect, but for the eyes and ears as such.²⁵

However this may be, there is nothing very new or surprising in the fact that Blok – the most 'musical' of poets – should yet have been so 'unmusical' in the accepted sense of the word.²⁶ An obvious analogy from the

²⁴ *Aleksandr Blok*, p. 22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁶ On the totally different – and even, on occasion, mutually antagonistic – nature of the musician's and the poet's "musicality", cf. an interesting article by L. Sabaneev: *O muzike reči*, which appeared in *Russkaja Mysl'* (Paris) on 21.X.1958. Of the leading poets of his time (and he claims to have known nearly all), Sabaneev maintains that only two or three were "musical" in the accepted sense of the term – "Vjačeslav Ivanov and Bal'mont, and, of the younger generation, Georgij Adamovič." "Blok, it is said, was the most musical of poets. Yet as regards music (in the narrow sense of the word), he was in fact extraordinarily unmusical. He had difficulty in memorising the simplest tunes, was little interested in music as such, ..." In a later article (*O prošlom. Serebrjannyj vek russkoj literatury. II. Baltrušajtis*. In: *Russkaja Mysl'* [Paris] 8.XII.1959), Sabaneev returns to the same theme: "... all the other members of the Symbolist group [= except Baltrušajtis] were – unexpectedly and to me incomprehensibly – completely anti-musical: Sologub, Merežkovskij, Brjusov, Belyj, and Blok – some of them simply loathed music (Brjusov), others had [at best] primordial and primitive tastes. This confirms once more [my] belief ... that the 'musicality' of verse and the musicality of musical substance (*tkan'*) are two completely different and at times even opposing factors and stand in absolutely no reciprocal relationship whatsoever."

By the opposite token, Sabaneev argues (*O muzike reči*), musicians are very often 'deaf' to poetry, more particularly to that feeling for the 'music of verse' with which we are concerned here. In this connection, one inevitably thinks of Boris Pasternak – undoubtedly the most *musicianly* musical of modern Russian poets: his mother was an eminent concert pianist, he himself studied music under Scriabin, and for a time seriously considered taking it up as a career. Though he eventually turned to poetry instead, he remained throughout his life not only a great music lover but a brilliant improvising pianist. Yet who would pretend that his verse – for all its undoubted merits, including 'rhythmicity' – has anywhere near the 'musicality' we associate with that of Blok?

The distinction was once drawn by Gogol': "Whatever one may say, the sounds of the soul and the heart, expressed in words, are several times wider in range (*razno-obraznee*) than musical sounds." (*Vybrannyja mesta iz perepiski s druž'jami*, Ch. XIV: *O teatre*, etc.)

On 'music' and 'musicality' in Symbolist poetry – French and Russian – cf. also Georgette Donchin, *The Influence of French Symbolism on Russian Poetry* (Mouton & Co., The Hague, 1958), pp. 105–114. (Blok's attitude is briefly summarised on pp. 110/111.) Further Sir Maurice Bowra, who, discussing Mallarmé, bears out in a sense the view expressed by Sabaneev: "... Mallarmé was certainly deluded by the analogy of music. ... Words are limited by their meanings. The most melodious and associative poetry cannot hope to snatch his honours from the musician. Attempts have been made to justify Mallarmé's belief, but the facts are against him." (*The Heritage of Symbolism*, p. 14.)

realm of English verse would be with Shelley, whose lyrical poems, in the words of Egerton Smith, "... even though not composed for musical setting, and *though he had evidently no ear for musical tones*, were dominated by this ideal of song. He made melodies of words, and therefore chose words which had fine and subtle melodic qualities, both combinative and individual".²⁷ In lyric poetry, the same author tells us, "... a new set of conditions arises ... that leaves the realm of true song ... a poet has to create, by his melodious rhythm and impassioned treatment of a suitable lyric theme, that 'medicated atmosphere' which produces in the reader an exalted mood in which the verse is accepted as something to be sung rather than spoken ..."²⁸ As for rhythm, he reminds us that it may be "both a cause and an effect, and also an intensifier of passionate feeling."²⁹

Blok was like Shelley in at least one other respect: neither poet occupied himself much with problems of versification – at least, not in the sense of consciously or deliberately applied prosodical study. For Saintsbury, Shelley was "the great modern example of prosodic inspiration".³⁰ In much the same way, as Adamovič has rightly pointed out, "even in the realm of rhythm, Blok's approach was intuitive rather than the result of consciously applied calculation and skill."

"This intuition," continues Adamovič, "never betrayed him."³¹ And it is this intuitive gift which almost certainly helps to explain Blok's own negative attitude towards all forms of prosodic study. Zorgenfrej tells us that Blok "... avoided anything in the nature of long discussions on literary themes – the views he expressed were of a fragmentary nature and, with rare exceptions, unimpassioned. ... all literary virtuosity (*masterstvo*), all purely formal(-istic) poetics called forth in him a negative reaction. ... Attainments in the sphere of poetic technique, unless supplemented by other attainments of a different nature, left him profoundly indifferent."³² The late Georgij Ivanov, who knew Blok in his later years, records in his memoirs how, as a young poet, he once asked Blok whether a sonnet required a coda, only to find, to his astonishment,

²⁷ Egerton Smith, *The Principles of English Metre* (O.U.P., 1923), p. 128 (my italics). This invaluable study – of great relevance to Russian verse problems also – is henceforth referred to by the abbreviated title of *P.E.M.*

²⁸ *P.E.M.*, p. 128.

²⁹ *P.E.M.*, p. 128, note 1.

³⁰ George Saintsbury, *Historical Manual of English Prosody* (Macmillan, London, 1914), p. 312. This valuable, refreshing, albeit controversial, study is henceforth referred to by the abbreviated title of *H.M.E.P.*

³¹ *Nasledstvo Bloka*, p. 79.

³² V. A. Zorgenfrej, *Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok* (in: *Zapiski Mečtatelej*, No. 6, pp. 123–154), p. 147.

that "Blok, the famous *maître*, did not know what a coda was ..."³³

"Nothing," writes Sophie Bonneau in her study of the poet, "equals Blok's sovereign indifference to everything concerning the technical [side of verse]."³⁴ Other accounts suggest that his attitude was even one of profound and adamant hostility.

"Not from books," wrote Čukovskij soon after Blok's death, "but from the experience of his entire creative work, he knew that poetry was something more than mere letters, and the fact that the young generation of his day conceived of it as such struck him as being an ominous sign of our times. The present-day approach to poetry, *via* purely formal(-istic) analysis of poetic technique, seemed to him to spell the death of poetry. He detested each one of the schools springing up then, designed for the formal study of poetry, because he sensed in them likewise that same whisper of death that he felt around [him] ..."³⁵

No one, certainly, foresaw better than Blok the fearful dangers of over-specialisation. Four months before his death, in April, 1921, he wrote: "Just as in Russia painting, music, prose, poetry are inseparable, so, too, philosophy, religion, social problems (*obščestvennost*), even politics, are indivisible – from the former and from one another. Together they represent one single mighty flood, bearing with it the precious burden of national culture ... This is a sign of strength and youth; the reverse, a sign of weariness and decrepitude ... More and more dividing up into schools and movements, more and more specialisation – [these are] signs of just such a lamentable state of affairs."³⁶

From this, Blok passed on to a searing attack on Gumilëv and his school of self-styled 'Acmeists', whom he accused of " ... floundering in the cold bog of soulless theories and every kind of formalism; ... in their poetry (and, consequently, in their own selves also), they silence the most important, the only [thing] worth while: *the soul*. ... to talk seriously with any of them or about any of them will only be possible when they quit their 'guilds', renounce their formalism, ... and become themselves [once more]."³⁷

But to return to the specific realm of metrics and prosody: Blok's inveterate opposition to all attempts at 'prosodic study' was undoubtedly

³³ Georgij Ivanov, *Peterburgskie zimy* (Izd. Im. Čexova, New York, 1952), p. 204.

³⁴ *L'Univers poétique d'Alexandre Blok*, p. 297.

³⁵ *Aleksandr Blok kak čelovek i poet*, p. 29.

³⁶ In the article: *Bez božestva, bez vdoxnoven'ja* (cited here from: *Aleksandr Blok. Sočinenija v dvux tomax* [Gos. Izd. Xudož. Lit., M., 1955, Vol. II, pp. 361–370], pp. 362/3).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

highly coloured by his acquaintance with Belyj, whose absurd exaggerations unfortunately led him (Belyj) more and more away from his originally fruitful ideas towards a conception of metrics akin to an exact science and virtually indistinguishable from a set of abstruse mathematical formulae. This is borne out by the account subsequently given by Belyj himself in his reminiscences of Blok:

"He himself (= Blok) never embarked on the analysis of verse structure, considering it dangerous for a poet to make a detailed study of the anatomy and physiology of [his?] creative work; such study he looked upon as a particular form of suicide; I remember how, when I earlier explained [to him] my approaches to the study of verse rhythm, A.A. listened in silence, not evincing overmuch interest; ... later they told me that A.A. advised young persons against analysing rhythm, pointing to me (at that time I was not writing any poems) in illustration: 'Take Andrej Belyj – there was a poet for you. He embarked on a detailed study of rhythm and – himself stopped writing; it was bound to be.' ..." "on this point," continues Belyj, "I never agreed with Blok." And, citing the young poet Kazin as a brilliant example of the conscious study of rhythemics, he concludes, significantly: "Here, I am with Gumilëv, rather; and – with the formalists."³⁸

Far from abandoning his search for a mathematical *ultima ratio*, Belyj later returned to his cherished dream, producing, towards the end of his life, what may fairly be termed the *reductio ad absurdum* of everything that Blok had castigated – something, indeed, which must have exceeded Blok's worst fears and to this extent abundantly justified them. Of Belyj's *Rhythm as Dialectics*,³⁹ even Žirmunskij – who himself devoted years of his life to serious, scientific, prosodical research – was moved to observe that its author "seemed all too often to proceed on the assumption that there exist in poetry immanent laws of 'mathematical dialectics'. Algebraic symbols ... acquire ... an autonomy of their own, when the critic embarks upon elaborate mathematical operations, the results of which hardly warrant the effort they entailed."⁴⁰

As the first man in the field of modern Russian metrical study, Belyj deserves his full share of credit. By the same token, however, he must accept some share of the blame for the direction in which Russian pros-

³⁸ Andrej Belyj, *Vospominanija o Bloke* (in: *Epopeja*, No. 4, Berlin, 1923, pp. 61–305), pp. 196/7.

³⁹ Andrej Belyj, *Ritm kak dialektika* (Federacija, M., 1929).

⁴⁰ Cf. V. Žirmunskij, *Po povodu knigi 'Ritm kak dialektika'* (in: *Zvezda*, No. 8, 1929). The above account is cited from the paraphrase (?) given by Erlich on p. 22 of *Russian Formalism*. On this point, cf. also Ch. III, p. 117, note 12, of the present work.

ody subsequently tended to develop. By nature strongly disposed towards exaggeration, by heredity imbued with a passion for the mathematical approach,⁴¹ Belyj, in his *Simvolizm*, set a tone which, to a greater or lesser extent, was to colour the majority of subsequent Russian studies in metre and rhythm to the present day. Indeed, in the event he was, as it were, 'out-Belyj-ed' by the 'Belyj-ists' that followed him, and certainly out-formalised by the Formalists themselves, for whom, apparently, his method was not sufficiently 'specialised' – not sufficiently divorced from the soul of poetry and poetics as a whole. Ironically enough, two years before the publication of Belyj's *Rhythm as Dialectics* (which far exceeded in mathematical extremism anything that had appeared in *Simvolizm*), Žirmunskij, taking his stand in opposition to the Formalists, paid tribute, with characteristic fairness, to the 'vital impulse' which Belyj had given to 'methodological research into ... problems of literary form'⁴² – although himself well aware of the shortcomings and dangers of Belyj's original 'method' of prosodic study, to which he had already called attention in his *Introduction to Metrics*.⁴³

Whether partly because of the tone set by Belyj (though it would be unfair to lay the sins of succeeding investigators entirely at Belyj's door); or because of the nature of the Russian language and its verse structure as such (which admittedly *favours* a statistical approach to a far greater extent than English); or because of a national bent towards theoretical discussion rather than practical realities – the fact remains that Russian metrical study (in its briefer but correspondingly more concentrated history, since 1910) has tended to follow a much more 'mathematical' and 'statistical' path than, say, English prosody, which – entirely in keeping with its own national genius – has, by comparison, favoured a more empirical and practical approach.

This brings us to the more general problem of the aims and ideals that prosody should set itself – of its nature and true purpose. It is significant that, in the very same year as Belyj's *Simvolizm* made its appearance, Saintsbury, in his new *Historical Manual of English Prosody*, should have written in a Preface: "The work ... cannot hope to content those who think that prosody should be, like mathematics or music, a science, immutable, peremptory, abstract in the other sense. It will not content those who think – in pursuance or independently of such an opinion – that it should discard appreciation of the actual poetry, on which,

⁴¹ Belyj's father, Prof. Nikolaj Bugajev, was an eminent mathematician, and Dean of the Science (Physico-Mathematical) Faculty at the University of Moscow.

⁴² In the Introduction to: *Voprosy teorii literatury*, pp. 8/9.

⁴³ Cf. *VVM.*, esp. pp. 40–45. Also Ch. III, pp. 117 ff., of the present work.

from my point of view, it is solely based."⁴⁴ This insistence on the artistic, rather than the scientific, basis of prosody recurs again and again in Saintsbury's work. Since, he claimed, at the time at which he wrote, "no authoritative body of doctrine on the subject of English prosody" could be said to exist, he was setting out to provide one – but again, "with the constant proviso and warning that it will be doctrine subject, not to the practically invariable uniformity of Science, but to the wide variations of Art, – not to the absolute compulsion of the universal, but to the comparative freedom of the individual and particular."⁴⁵ In the light of his exhaustive research and immense knowledge, Saintsbury ultimately framed a number of 'rules' on which he considered such a 'body of doctrine' might well be based. But here, again, he was quick to point out that by 'rules' he understood, "not imperative or compulsory *precepts*, but observed *inductions* from the practice of English poets"; to which he added the typically refreshing and mischievous afterthought: "He that can break them with success, let him."⁴⁶

Particularly valuable, too, was his insistence on the dangers of losing sight of the historical background – "which ought to be, but has very seldom been, the basis of every discussion on prosody".⁴⁷ This point was subsequently taken up, and acted upon with admirable results, by Eger-ton Smith: "Metrical theory cannot without danger divorce itself from the history of poetic form, and I have tried to show how the fundamental principles of verse have been modified by different factors ... This has hardly received sufficient recognition, but for the full exposition of so complex a subject an historical as well as an analytical study is required."⁴⁸

For such investigators, clearly, prosody is anything but an exact science capable of definition in terms of mathematical formulae or of explanation outside its historical environment.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ *H.M.E.P.*, p. vi.

⁴⁵ *H.M.E.P.*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ *H.M.E.P.*, p. 30 (my italics).

⁴⁷ *H.M.E.P.*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ *P.E.M.*, p. vii.

⁴⁹ Two examples of Saintsbury's delightful irony, and of his eminently common-sense approach, are worth recording here:

1. Of anisosyllabic substitution in English (and the theory that English verse is basically syllabic): "One difficulty in it, however, could never escape its most peremptory devotees; ... It was all very well to lay down that English verse *must* consist of a certain number of syllables; but it could escape no one who had ever read a volume or even a few pages of English poetry, that it *did* consist of a very uncertain number of them. The problem was, therefore, how to get rid of the surplus where it existed." (p. 16).
 2. Of the shortcomings of Guest's method of prosodic study: "It may seem incredible that a writer of learning and acuteness should not have seen the absurdity of his

This is not to say that the results of their investigations are always beyond dispute, or their deductions uncontroversial. Far from it.⁵⁰ That would be asking too much. The fact nevertheless remains that, with all the controversy to which prosodical theories – in English as in other languages – give rise, the majority of modern English prosodists reveal an equally refreshing and sane approach.

In particular, they have, by and large, avoided the besetting temptation, the ever-present danger, of all purely theoretical, 'abstract' approaches – that of arriving at a point (as ultimately happened to Belyj) where the verse tends to be there for the benefit of the method of scansion (or 'rules') devised, rather than the reverse. This approach was strenuously opposed by David Masson in his study of Milton's versification. "The proper way," he wrote, "is not to *impose* the music upon the lines, but to let the music of each line *arise* out of it as it is read naturally. Only in this way can we know what metrical effect Shakespeare or Milton anywhere intended."⁵¹ In this connection, incidentally, he did not feel that time had basically altered very much in terms of strictly metrical, as opposed to pronounciational, values. "No doubt the reading of English poetry in Milton's time or Shakespeare's differed in some respects from ours. The differences, however, must have been in details of pronunciation rather than in metrical instinct ... For this reason, and also because Milton's poetry is a property which, by his own express intention, we may use and enjoy after our own habits and methods, the right way of scanning his verse is to read it freely and naturally as we should read verse of our own day, subject only to a few transmitted directions, and to register the actual results as well as we can in metrical formulae,"⁵²

Once again, the insistence is, rightly enough, on the subordination of metrical method to its material, and not *vice versa*. This common-sense approach – so obvious that it might seem hardly worth mentioning, were it not for the exaggerations of certain metrical theorists – was dealt with particularly forcefully by Edgar Allan Poe: "The object of what we call *scansion* is the distinct marking of the rhythmical flow ... There *can* be no other object, and there is none. Of course, then, the scansion and the reading flow should go hand-in-hand ... The former represents and ex-

position when he tells beautiful poetry – sometimes admitted by himself as such – that it has no business to be beautiful because it does not suit his rules." (p. 255).

⁵⁰ This applies to Saintsbury in particular. With the views of Egerton Smith, I find myself in *general* agreement.

⁵¹ Cf. *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, Vol. III, p. 214.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 215.

presses the latter; and is good or bad as it truly or falsely represents and expresses it. If by the written scansion of a line we are not enabled to perceive any rhythm or music in the line, then either the line is unrhythmical or the scansion false."⁵³

This view is all the more convincing for its coming from a poet- rather than a scholar-prosodist. It was another poet-prosodist, Robert Bridges, who gave what may well be the answer we are seeking in relation to Blok. "The fact," wrote Bridges, "that rhythm is so much more evident than prosody, and is felt to lie so much nearer to the poetic effects, inclines people to think that prosody is pedantic rubbish, which can only hamper the natural expression of free thought and so on. But in all arts the part that can be taught is the dry detail of the material which has to be conquered; and *it is no honour to an art to despise its grammar.*"⁵⁴

Now it is true, of course, that Bridges, though he wrote some fine verse, does not rank among the really great English poets – any more than does Poe. It would, however, be quite wrong to infer from this that, because some of the greatest and most 'inspired' poets have had little or no need to study the 'grammar' of verse, evidence of such study therefore relegates a poet automatically to the second class, or presupposes that he is not, by nature, in the top rank. As the counterpart, in this sense, to Shelley's 'prosodic inspiration', Saintsbury cites Keats, Tennyson, and Swinburne as outstanding examples of 'prosodic study'.⁵⁵ Now the grace and ease of Keats, like the melody and rhythm of Tennyson, are universally acknowledged. As for Swinburne, he offers the most interesting example of all in relation to the point at issue, combining inspiration and applied technique to an unusual degree, and with no less unusual and strikingly successful results. Saintsbury named him "of all English poets the one who has applied the widest scholarship and study, assisted by great original prosodic gift, to the varying and accomplishing of English metre. Impeccable in all kinds; in lyric nearly supreme."⁵⁶

⁵³ *The Rationale of Verse* (in: Edgar Allan Poe. *The Poems and Three Essays on Poetry etc.* [O.U.P., 1948], p. 239). Not so John Thompson, who considers that a line from *Paradise Lost* "... would be scanned (but surely not read) in this way! ..." (*Linguistic Structure and the Poetic Line*, p. 171).

⁵⁴ Cf. *Milton's Prosody, with a chapter on Accentual Verse and Notes* (by Robert Bridges), Revised Final Edition (O.U.P., 1921), p. 111 (my italics).

⁵⁵ *H.M.E.P.*, p. 312. Among French poets, Baudelaire (incidentally, a great admirer of Swinburne) provides an outstanding example of inspiration and poetic genius allied to consciously applied technique. Cf., *inter alia*, Donchin, *The Influence of French Symbolism ...*, p. 114.

⁵⁶ *H.M.E.P.*, p. 313. Cf. also Richard Church, in his Introduction to: *Swinburne. Poems and Prose* (Everyman's Library, Dent, London, 1950, pp. ix-xvii): "With all

The extent to which poets – including the greatest poets – apply themselves consciously to prosodic study thus varies immensely. In Russian, it is true, not one of the four great poets could really be said to have busied himself with problems of versification *as such*, though Lermontov, in particular, clearly had a keen eye and ear for certain poetic devices coming within the metrical sphere.⁵⁷ Puškin was severely opposed to any purely technical approach which concentrated on outward forms at the expense of the inward 'thought'.⁵⁸ But even those whose technique is predominantly the product of unconscious inspiration still have their lesson to tell. It is in this sense, surely, that we have to understand Saintsbury's penetrating – albeit at first sight paradoxical – observation that "the greatest poets are naturally, and almost inevitably, the greatest prosodists", in which connection he again quotes, as perfect examples of the two 'extreme' approaches, the cases of Keats and of Shelley.⁵⁹ Of the latter, he points out that he "never seems to have studied metre much ... But he touches none that he does not adorn; none that he does not make matter of delight; and none, likewise, in which he does not supply a text for infinite technical instruction as well."⁶⁰ Very much the same might be said of Blok, whose affinity with Shelley *in this respect* has already been touched on earlier.

Every art has its own technique – its 'grammar', as Bridges termed it – the mechanism, to coin a colloquial but effective phrase, that 'makes it tick'. What lies *beyond* this technique is inspiration, genius, divine gift, call it what you will – something intangible, which defies analysis and dissection, but without which no artist, no work of art, will ever be truly great. At the same time, it is no less true that the most inspired and gifted artist – though he *may* achieve 'greatness' – will never achieve *perfection* unless or until he has, by some means or other, mastered his technique.

Again, the proportions vary immensely. Of all the arts, the one that makes the most exacting demands on technique – even more than music – is almost certainly the dance; which goes a long way towards explaining

his prolixity, his metrical technique is impeccable. There is not a poet in our language with a more subtle ear for metre." (p. xiv).

⁵⁷ Cf., *inter alia*, Ch. II of the present work, for Lermontov's adoption of certain typically English metrical devices during the early 1830's.

⁵⁸ Cf., *inter alia*, D. Blagoj, *Masterstvo Puškina* (Sov. Pis., M., 1955), p. 17. Citing the example of Ronsard and Malherbe, both of whom had rendered "indisputable service to their native tongue", but who – having expended their energies "wrestling with the mechanics of versification..." – already lay forgotten, Puškin once remarked: "Such is the fate awaiting writers who occupy themselves with the outward forms of the word rather than with its thought, its true life, regardless of its usage!"

⁵⁹ *H.M.E.P.*, p. 203.

⁶⁰ *H.M.E.P.*, p. 205.

the extreme rarity, in ballet, of a Pavlova or an Ulanova, a Nijinsky or a Nureyev – great artists who ultimately succeed in expressing their genius beyond, rather than within, the confines of the merely technical. At the other end of the scale, almost certainly, comes poetry, of which Enid Hamer has aptly said: “There is no other art in which genius may be so far unaware of the laws and materials by which and in which it works. A painter must know something of a colourman’s chemistry; a sculptor cannot neglect the properties of stone and metal; a musician must school himself in the complex mathematics of harmony. But the poet’s materials are more intimately a part of common life, the sounds of spoken words, and the laws for their manipulation are instinctive. A fine ear is his guide.”⁶¹

At the same time, despite these differences of degree, one axiom remains true of all art and of all true artists – the technique, once mastered, is relegated to a subordinate position, is outshone by the brilliance and genius of the creative, the artistic, the divine, the inspired; and henceforth passes, to this extent, unnoticed.⁶²

Now Blok, of course, is *the* example among poets of just such inspiration. “More than any Russian poet, more than any European poet of his time,” Sir Maurice Bowra has justly said of him, “Blok gives the impression of being literally inspired. The extraordinary originality of his poetry, its endless surprises and startling strength, its inexhaustible music, seem to have been given him by some power outside himself and to owe little to painstaking workmanship.”⁶³

Čukovskij once made much the same point, simultaneously enlarging on the theme and hinting at the deceptive nature of this unobtrusive mastery. “The things he [= Blok] wrote of seemed so penetrated with suffering that, reading them, we failed to notice the subtleties of his poetic mastery. His astounding technique is astounding precisely by reason of its being

⁶¹ Enid Hamer, *The Metres of English Poetry* (Methuen, London, 1930), p. vii. (This work is henceforth referred to by the abbreviated title *M.o.E.P.*)

⁶² “... de même qu’il n’y a pas de recette permettant de faire de la vraie poésie, il ne saurait en exister non plus pour créer une danse colorée, inspirée par la pensée et le sentiment, c’est-à-dire d’expression claire encore que muette et artistiquement belle.

Il va de soi qu’outre l’alphabet, le poète doit aussi connaître la grammaire et le syntaxe de sa langue maternelle. Il doit les manier avec aisance, dans toutes leurs finesses et leurs nuances. De même, l’artiste de ballet. Mais de même qu’une connaissance impeccable de la langue n’est qu’une condition préliminaire à l’œuvre du poète, de même une impeccable maîtrise de sa technique, de son alphabet, n’est qu’une condition indispensable, sans doute, mais seulement préliminaire du travail normal d’un artiste de ballet.” Galina Oulanova, *L’Ecole d’une danseuse* (L’Art soviétique, Editions en langues étrangères, Moscou, n.d.), pp. 17/18.

⁶³ *The Heritage of Symbolism*, p. 178.

almost imperceptible. Only among lesser poets does technique occupy the forefront of the picture in such a way that we involuntarily become aware of it. ... But with a great poet, with a Lermontov or a Blok, the entire technique is so organically welded with what was once called the soul that, though enchanted by it, we are yet unconscious of its existence."⁶⁴

This 'organic welding' is the hall-mark of true greatness. And Blok is great, as Adamovič has truly said, "because, in his best poems, the content – not infrequently mysterious, but not as the result of any deliberate process of obscuration – is fused with all that expresses that content ..."⁶⁵ Of Puškin, Blagoj has said much the same: "For his ideas, Puškin always created the most perfect artistic forms; content and form in his work ... are always inseparable, organically fused with each other; the form unerringly corresponds ... to the creative thought of the artist ..."⁶⁶

It is just this imperceptible nature of the great artist's technique – the 'divine ease' with which he welds every individual component into one perfect whole – which feeds the illusion of genius pouring forth like a flood from some hidden, mystic source, to achieve, unattended and unworked upon, immediate – or at any rate immortal – fame. Yet, if the truth be told, as Tolstoj once told it: "The more glowing the inspiration, the greater the need of minute, painstaking work (*kropotlivoj raboty*) for its realisation. We read Puškin – such smooth, such simple lines, and it seems to us as if they poured out of him into just that form. And we do not see how much labour he expended on them for them to emerge [in a form] so smooth and so simple."⁶⁷

Much has been written about Puškin's method of working – of his insistence on the need for "unremitting labour, without which nothing truly great exists".⁶⁸ Of Blok, by contrast, surprisingly little has been said in this connection. Yet, in his own way, he was no whit less attentive or less painstaking in the labour and loving care he expended upon his verse.

Blok was undoubtedly capable of 'inspired' performances, so intense and so concentrated as to be quantitatively, as well as purely qualitatively, astounding. A few examples are sufficient to illustrate this: –

a) In the 6½ years covered by the First Book of Poems (Jan. 1898

⁶⁴ *Kniga ob Aleksandre Bloke*, pp. 129/130.

⁶⁵ *Nasledstvo Bloka*, p. 80.

⁶⁶ *Masterstvo Puškina*, p. 18.

⁶⁷ N. N. Gusev, *Dva goda s Tolstym* (Posrednik, M., 1912), p. 140 (cited by Blagoj in: *Masterstvo Puškina*, p. 19).

⁶⁸ On this theme, cf. esp. Blagoj's *Masterstvo Puškina*, notably Ch. 2 (*Genij-truženik*).

– June 1904), Blok composed no less than 687 poems – an average of over 100 a year for more than six years running.⁶⁹

b) In the first 13 days of January, 1907, Blok completed no less than 30 separate poems; of these again, no less than 23 were completed on four individual days, namely six each on Jan. 3rd, 9th, and 13th, and five on Jan. 4th.⁷⁰

c) Blok's last great poem, *The Scythians*, was begun on Jan. 29th, 1918. By the evening of the 30th, the poem was virtually complete, differing only in non-essentials from the final version, which appeared in print one week later.⁷¹

d) As for *The Twelve*, completed just beforehand, Čukovskij has recorded his astonishment when, six months before Blok's death, he was able to look at the original manuscript, on which, "in so short a time, so easily and so freely, he had traced out that great poem in pencil, *almost without erasures*."⁷²

Such facts certainly suggest periods of intense and impassioned ('inspired') activity, during which Blok evidently had little time – and apparently little need – for the 'unremitting labour' of amending and correcting.

At the same time, Blok's creative life had its other, very different, side. From the time when, in 1905, the first *Songs of the Lady Beautiful* appeared in a collected edition,⁷³ Blok laboured more or less incessantly (subject only to the interruptions and exigencies of the War and the Revolution) on this and the ensuing books of verse, shortening, adapting, rearranging, lengthening once more, and again recasting into some other, as he considered, more suitable form.

⁶⁹ Of which only 314 were ultimately incorporated in the First Book. Full details will be found in the 12-vol. edition of Blok's works, Vol. I, p. 281, Appendix V (*Aleksandr Blok, Sobranie sočinenij*, Izd. Pisatelej v Leningrade/Izd. Sovetskij Pisatel', L.-M., 1932–1936). (Henceforth referred to simply as: "12-vol. edition".)

⁷⁰ Cf. 12-vol. edition, Vol. V, pp. 273/4 (Nos. 861–890 in the Chronological List of Blok's poems).

⁷¹ Cf., *inter alia*, an introductory note to the present writer's translation of *The Scythians*, which appeared in *The Russian Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April, 1955), pp. 117ff. The details given there are based on those published in the 12-vol. edition, Vol. V, pp. 135ff.

⁷² *Aleksandr Blok kak čelovek i poet*, pp. 25/26 (my italics). Here, Čukovskij maintains that *The Twelve* was also written in the space of two days, but this probably arises from a confusion with the case of *The Scythians*. While he brings some detail in support of his statement, there seems little reason to doubt the accuracy of the account given in the 12-vol. edition (Vol. V, p. 111 *et seq.*), according to which this poem altogether occupied Blok for a period of three weeks (Jan. 8th–28th, 1918). It is, of course, still possible that the essentials of *Dvenadcat'* were in fact put together in two days, as Čukovskij alleges.

⁷³ Aleksandr Blok, *Stixi o Prekrasnoj Dame* (Izd. Grif, M., 1905).

This applied particularly, though by no means exclusively, to the First Book of poems, which for ever retained a special place in Blok's affections.⁷⁴

In a foreword designed for a new edition of this Book (never actually published), Blok himself referred to the unremitting labour which this work of revision had cost him. "Each new edition of the book," he wrote, "gave me the opportunity of working over it once more; on the first occasions, I was concerned with clarification of the content on as broad a scale as possible; *on subsequent occasions, I occupied myself a great deal with [problems of] poetic technique; ...*"

In the event, neither of these approaches ultimately satisfied him. "In the former case, I lost myself in a mass of material; in the second, I replaced isolated expressions by others, more adroit from the literary point of view [but] to the detriment of the underlying sense."⁷⁵ Whereupon he hit on the idea of compiling a commentated edition of the *Songs*, somewhat on the lines of Dante's *Vita Nuova*; in fact, he even made a beginning on this monumental labour, which, to the misfortune of posterity, he was destined never to complete.⁷⁶

Nor – as has already been mentioned – was this work of amendment and improvement confined to the First Book alone. A glance at the *Variants and Other Versions* collected in the complete edition of Blok's poems shows that these cover no less than 95 pages of small print; of these, 39 concern the Third Book of poems and a further 32 the Second Book.⁷⁷

As a result of the meticulous care expended throughout this long period of his creative life, Blok ultimately supervised the lay-out and preparation of no less than 5 editions of the First Book, 4 of the Second, and 3 of the Third. The last of each of these editions represent, as it were, the

⁷⁴ Cf. *inter alia*, the account given by Vl. Pjast, according to which Blok once remarked to his mother, during the last years of his life: "You know what? I wrote one volume – the first. All the rest were mere trifles." (Vl. Pjast, *O pervom tome Bloka*, in: *Ob Aleksandre Bloke*, Pbg., 1921, p. 213). Blok's reference to his later poems is, of course, a patent exaggeration, but the remark is of interest as showing how much the First Book meant to him.

⁷⁵ From a draft foreword to a projected new edition of the First Book, dated August 15th, 1918; cited, *inter alia*, on pp. 269/270 of Vol. I of the 12-vol. edition (Appendix III: *Predislovie [Nabrosok] k predpolagavšemu novomu izdaniju pervoj knigi*). (My italics).

⁷⁶ Cf. Blok's diary for August and September, 1918, in: *Dnevnik Al. Bloka*, Vol. II, pp. 122–136 (also reproduced in Vol. I of the 12-vol. edition as Appendix IV, pp. 270–280). A brief account is given in: K. Močul'skij, *Aleksandr Blok*, YMCA Press, Paris, 1948, pp. 66/68.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Aleksandr Blok. Polnoe sobranie stixotvorenij v dvux tomax* (Izd. Sovetskij Pisatel', L., 1946), Vol. II, pp. 391–485. For further details of this edition, henceforth referred to as: *Pol. Sob. Stix.*/1946, cf. esp. note 79 on p. 40, *infra*.

sum results of the countless alterations and amendments carried out by him in the course of his lifetime. As such, they may be considered 'canonical' as regards both text and arrangement, neither of which should, as Vl. Orlov once rightly remarked, be tampered with.⁷⁸ *It is on these three Books in their canonical form – comprising, for purposes of metrical analysis, a total of 766 poems – that the present study of Blok's versification is based.*⁷⁹

"One must admit", wrote Vl. Orlov in his detailed study of Blok's *Literary Heritage*, "that Blok himself did much to lighten the task of those called upon to edit his works. Blok's manuscripts were preserved, not, it is true, in their entirety, but none the less in large measure – and were preserved in perfect order ..." "To the task of editing his works," the same author assures us, "Blok always devoted the most extraordinary care and attention" – at times, he considers, even to the point of "pedantic exactitude".⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Cf. Vl. Orlov, *Literaturnoe nasledstvo Aleksandra Bloka* (in: *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, No. 27/28, M., 1937, pp. 505–574), p. 506. For Orlov's subsequent interference with Blok's own lay-out, cf. note 79 below.

⁷⁹ It was obviously essential, for a detailed study such as the present work entails, to have some brief and simple means of identifying each individual poem concerned. For this reason, I have adopted the system of serial numeration given in the complete edition of Blok's poems referred to in note 77 above (*Pol. Sob. Stix./1946*). This edition is in two volumes, the first of which covers the whole of Blok's 3 Books of lyrical poems mentioned above, together with the 3 longer poems (*poemy*), *Vozmezdje*, *Dvenadcat'*, and *Skify*. The latter are occasionally referred to in the present work, but are not included in the statistics of the 766 poems mentioned. The poems contained in Blok's 3 Books are numbered as follows:

Book I. Nos. 1–314

Book II. Nos. 315–518

Book III. Nos. 519–760

The total figure of 766 is explained by the fact that poem No. 344 (*Eja Pribytie*) consists of 7 parts which, metrically, constitute separate entities. In order not to interfere with the 'standard' numeration, these parts are referred to here as Nos. 344^a to 344^g inclusive. The same system of numeration (at least as far as No. 760) is used in two other (1-volume) editions of Blok's (selected) works, also edited by Vl. Orlov: *Aleksandr Blok: Stixotvorenija/Poemy/Teatr ...* (Gosizd., L., 1936, and Gosizd., L.-M., 1946). The same order (but without numeration) is retained in most other editions of Blok's poems, including the first 3 volumes of the 12-vol. edition, but excluding two 1955 editions edited by Orlov, in both of which – *pace* the editor's protestations to the contrary – the structure and lay-out on which Blok expended such loving care are arbitrarily destroyed. These editions are: a) *Aleksandr Blok. Sočinenija v dvux tomach* (Gosizd., M., 1955); and b) *Aleksandr Blok. Stixotvorenija* (Biblioteka poeta, bol'saja serija, izd. 2oe, Sovetskij Pisatel', L., 1955). A new 8-vol. edition of Blok's works has recently appeared (cf. Bibliography); from this it appears that Blok's own arrangement has been restored to its rightful place once more. (Cf. also Numerical List of Blok's Poems, pp. 520ff., *infra*.)

⁸⁰ *Literaturnoe nasledstvo Aleksandra Bloka*, p. 505.

Others, too, have testified to the almost unbelievable *order* that reigned in Blok's literary kingdom – the meticulous accuracy which Blok – the 'wild', the 'chaotic', the 'gipsy-lover' – yet maintained and retained in this other life of his. For Blok, as Georgij Čulkov once wrote, did, in fact, have two lives – the one, down-to-earth, homely, tranquil; the other, out-of-this-world, the life of the streets and taverns, of gipsy-girls and heady wine. In Blok's home, all was order, tidiness, and outward felicity. "True," Čulkov continues, "there was no genuine felicity even here, but he valued this semblance of it. Beneath the mask of correctness and pedantry there lurked the fearful stranger – chaos."⁸¹ This last remark is misleading. According to Georgij Ivanov, the same Čulkov – "quite unable to accustom himself to Blok's methodical manner" – once suggested that it might be due to the German blood in him. To which Blok, after mature reflection, allegedly made the striking reply: "German blood? I don't think so. More likely – self-defence against chaos."⁸²

In contrast to Čulkov, Ivanov insists rather on the fact and the genuine nature of Blok's orderliness and precision. "Blok," he writes, "the most seraphic, the most 'unworldly' of poets, was precise and methodical to a strange degree." In illustration, he tells of the care with which he would wipe each glass before pouring out his red wine, holding it up to the light to make sure no speck of dust remained; of the book he kept in which were entered full details of every letter he received, whether from friends, acquaintances, or perfect strangers, together with date of receipt and of answering; of Blok's own handwriting – "even, beautiful, legible"; of the 'exquisite' nature of all his writing utensils; and of the scrupulous tidiness of his desk.⁸³

German blood, self-defence against chaos – whatever its origins, this precision was no less a part of the real Blok. It was simply, as Čulkov has rightly said, that Blok's own brand of exactitude was of a different order from that of "outwardly more temperate souls".⁸⁴ In fact, in this as in many other ways, Blok was following, not the dictates of his German ancestors, but nothing less than a great Russian tradition, dating from at least the time of Puškin. "When we come to Russian poetry," writes Sir Maurice Bowra in a brief but penetrating study, "from English or French or Italian, we feel at first that its tones are quieter, its colours more subdued ... even in the nineteenth century the world revealed in

⁸¹ *Aleksandr Blok i ego vremja*, pp. 119/120.

⁸² *Peterburgskie zimy*, p. 203.

⁸³ *Peterburgskie zimy*, p. 202.

⁸⁴ *Aleksandr Blok i ego vremja*, p. 119.

Russian poetry is much quieter, much closer to common life, than we should expect in the age of Shelley and Hugo ... Though its two greatest exponents, Pushkin and Lermontov, lived lives at least as romantic as Byron's ..., their poetry is more straightforward and more truthful than his. ... *However the poets behaved in their lives, in their work all is order and sincerity ... The most frankly emotional of European peoples has given to the arts the discipline which it sometimes shuns in its life.*"⁸⁵

Certainly, Blok's spirit of order and discipline was something more than outward show, extending as it did in his own work to the tiniest details of spelling and punctuation. Where Puškin had spoken of the need for inspiration 'in poetry as in geometry', Blok insisted on the need to recognise that words, too, had their own science of mathematics. "Correctors and publishers," he once wrote reproachfully, "who have any respect for the word must know that there exists a [science of] *word-mathematics* (*matematika slova*) (just as all other arts have their mathematics) – especially *in verse*. This being so, to change them according to their personal whim, whatever their nature from their own point of view, [betrays], to say the least, a lack of culture."⁸⁶ To one such publisher (the late S. K. Makovskij, editor of the review *Apollon*), Blok once wrote: "All my grammatical negligence (*oplošnost*) ... *is not just chance*; behind it lies that something which, *inwardly*, I am unable to sacrifice; in other words, it 'sings inside me' in this way (*mne tak «poëtsja»*)."⁸⁷

This 'inward melody' led Blok to adopt – and to insist on his publishers' adopting – a number of unusual features as regards orthography and punctuation. Certain words, for instance, he would spell in two different ways, depending on the context in which they occurred. Thus, on the manuscript of poem No. 158 ("*Ja ukryt do vremeni v pridele*"), Blok made a note insisting on the absolute need to retain here his spelling of *мятели*, "in contrast to the Snow Mask (1910)", where he required the alternative spelling, *метели*.⁸⁸ Similar dual spellings used by Blok from time to time include: *жолтый* and *желтый*; *рѣшотка* and *рѣшетка*; *сгорая* and *сгарая*; and even *дышетъ* (!) as well as *дышитъ*.⁸⁹ To these

⁸⁵ C. M. Bowra, *A Book of Russian Verse*, pp. xiii/xiv (my italics).

⁸⁶ From the original version of Blok's *Autobiography*, the main part of which he wrote in Oct. 1909, subsequently discarded by him in the course of revision in 1915. Cf., *inter alia*, *Pol. Sob. Stix.*/1946, Vol. I, pp. 612/613.

⁸⁷ Letter to S. K. Makovskij, Peterburg, Dec. 29th, 1909. Reproduced, *inter alia*, in: *Sočinenija v dvux tomax* (M., 1955), II, p. 639. For Makovskij's reaction, cf. *Aleksandr Blok* (in: *O Parnase* etc.), pp. 151ff.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Pol. Sob. Stix.*/1946, Vol. I, p. 623.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Pol. Sob. Stix.*/1946, Vol. I, p. 607, and *Sočinenija v dvux tomax* (M., 1955), I, p. 704.

peculiarities must be added the spellings of *ты, она*, etc. sometimes with small, sometimes with capital, letters (notably in the First Book of poems).

As for punctuation, Blok's extreme attention to detail may be judged from the emphasis he placed, in a note on the manuscript of his *Boyhood Poems*, on the need to adopt there, as a punctuational device, "four dots, and not the usual three".⁹⁰

The significance of these and others of Blok's idiosyncrasies has been recognised, in particular, by Vl. Orlov, who has been responsible for the editing and preparation of the vast majority of Soviet editions of Blok's works, as well as being the author of the article on Blok's *Literary Heritage* already referred to. Conscious of the moral obligation incumbent on those editing Blok's works to act in accordance with the poet's clearly expressed wishes, he has, on the whole, been careful to preserve all such details and peculiarities in the various editions he has supervised – the more so since, as he himself has rightly said, "punctuation in verse composition always has an intonational significance, in addition to a strictly grammatical one".⁹¹

In view of this extreme attention to detail – this wholly admirable respect for Blok's own wishes in matters as minute as those concerning a single letter or a single point – it is at once surprising and regrettable to find that none of these editions has preserved what would seem to be the *sine qua non* of all such exactitude and fidelity – namely, *the retention of the old orthography*, in which, when all is said and done, Blok originally wrote every one of his poems (including those composed after the 'reformed' orthography had been officially introduced). If one is going to respect Blok's 'word-mathematics' at all, it seems fair to ask: Why leave the process half finished?⁹²

⁹⁰ Cf. *Pol. Sob. Stix.*/1946, Vol. I, p. 607.

⁹¹ Cf., *inter alia*, *Aleksandr Blok. Stixotvorenija* (Sov. Pis., L., 1955), p. 666. Compare the following English 'parallel' (in relation to Pamela Frankau) from an article by J. W. Lambert in *The Sunday Times* of May 14th, 1961: "'Grey' to her ... carries a suggestion of blue, whereas 'gray' has a tinge of brown. And it is good to read her blasts of indignation against those faceless men in publishers' offices who blithely make her spell both words in the same way, who delete commas or scatter exclamation-marks about a writer's text..."

⁹² In an editorial note to Vol. I of the new 8-vol. edition of Blok's works (*vide supra*, p. 40, note 79), Vl. Orlov writes (p. 567): "The text of the works of A. Blok is reproduced in accordance with the currently accepted rules of orthography, but with due allowance for certain individual peculiarities of orthography and punctuation on the part of the author, on the strict observance of which he resolutely insisted." Having dealt with some of these peculiarities in detail, he admits that, though one may not always share Blok's "mystical interpretations", "... those anxious to ensure the

The imperative need to retain, within reason, the poet's original orthography was convincingly demonstrated by Brjusov in relation to the works of Puškin. Brjusov summed up his investigation by saying: "Puškin's orthography stands in indissoluble union with Puškin's language, and with his verse. In changing Puškin's orthography, we deprive ourselves of the chance of learning many sides of the poet's personality ... to change the aspect of Puškin's language is in itself a crime, and we involuntarily do change his language if we change the orthography." His inescapable conclusion was that, "... in publishing Puškin's works, there is only one orthography to be adhered to – Puškin's own ..." It would, Brjusov added, be just as wrong to change Puškin's spelling as it would be reckless to change the orthography of the *Slovo o Polku Igoreve*.⁹³

Admittedly, the reasons in the case of Puškin are somewhat peculiar, and are not directly applicable, say, to Blok; Brjusov himself suggested that, in respect of another poet, the matter would 'perhaps not be over-important'. Yet, if the same *general* considerations apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to any one Russian poet, that poet is surely Blok – if only for the reasons just stated.

There are, however, other reasons besides – reasons of a general nature, which make it eminently desirable that all *prosodical* or metrical studies of a poet's work – involving, as they do, detailed analysis of such factors as pause and compensation, rhythmic acceleration and retardation, exact and inexact rhymes, etc., etc. – should, ideally, make use of the same orthography and punctuation as that used by the poet in question.⁹⁴

To all these factors of a logical, objective, nature must be added the more subjective – but no less cogent or impelling – reason that the use of the old orthography would undoubtedly correspond with Blok's own wishes in this respect. Blok, in fact, was forced to weigh very deeply the problems set by the juxtaposition of the 'old' and 'new' orthographies at the time when, in January, 1918, he sat on the committee appointed to deal, *inter alia*, with just this question. The entries in Blok's diary at this

authenticity of the text of his works have no grounds for ignoring the clearly expressed wish of the author" (p. 568). These laudable sentiments, however, are promptly belied: "Of the peculiarities in A. Blok's orthography, we have retained in the text, in principle, [only] those which in some way or other reflect peculiarities of pronunciation." (p. 568). The same unhealthy compromise, the same fatal half measures, are also applied in respect of Blok's punctuation (pp. 568/9).

⁹³ Cf. Valerij Brjusov, *Zapiska o pravopisanii v izdanii sočinenij A. S. Puškina* (in: *Moj Puškin*, Gosizd. M.-L., 1929, pp. 207–212), p. 212.

⁹⁴ Of English prosody, Enid Hamer warns: "In many cases modernisation of the text makes a considerable difference to the metre ..." (*M.o.E.P.*, p. viii).

time make it abundantly clear where he, personally, took his stand – a stand, in keeping with his whole nature, typified by sound common sense, healthy instinct, and fearless artistic independence.

"I raised the question of orthography," he wrote in his diary for Jan. 18th, 1918. "My main objection is that this is something which concerns the technique of creative endeavour, in which the government should not meddle."

"The older writers, who used *jat'* [= ѣ, R.K.] as one means of their creative endeavour, should be published in the old orthography. New writers, who will write in the new style, will transfer their creative energy (*élan*) into other devices"⁹⁵

Nor was Blok's view based, as Benois' was based, on any personal dislike of the new orthography as such (though it is significant that Blok continued to use the old spelling until his dying day). Where Benois experienced a *personal* loathing (Blok underlined the word) of "Известия", and even loved "the Molière-type orthography of XVIIth-century editions", Blok wrote of himself: "I am not personally attached to the old [style], and it may be that I shall even learn [the new one] myself; but I fear for the objective loss of something for the artist, and, *consequently*, for the people also."⁹⁶

If any lingering doubts remained regarding Blok's wishes in respect of his own works, they should be dispelled once and for all by a glance at the notes and instructions he made, as late as April 16th, 1920, for the 5th edition of his First Book of poems. There, together with other detailed comments regarding the spelling of *мятель* with *я* and of *жолтый* with *о*, of the positioning of epigrams, the dates of poems, and the print to be used for them (*petit*, italic, etc.), we find at the end the two unmistakable words: *Orfografija staraja*.⁹⁷

For each and every of the reasons listed, it was considered essential to base the present study on an examination of Blok's poems in the exact form in which he himself created them and, having created them, re-read them, amended them, and approved them for the last time for publication. *Such approval carried with it, beyond all shadow of possible doubt,*

⁹⁵ *Dnevnik Al. Bloka 1917–1921* (II), p. 99.

⁹⁶ *Dnevnik Al. Bloka 1917–1921* (II), p. 99.

⁹⁷ Cf., *inter alia*, Vol. I of the 12-vol. edition, Appendix V, p. 281. In this connection, it is worth noting that the last edition of Blok's *Book the Third* approved by him during his lifetime, though published as late as 1921, was also printed in the *old* orthography (*Aleksandr Blok, Stixotvorenija, Kniga tret'ja* [1907–1916], *Izdanie tret'e, dopolnennoe*. Alkonost, Peterburg, MCMXXI).

the assumption that the old orthography in which he had written his poems would be retained. This orthography has accordingly been used throughout the present work in all quotations from Blok's verse. No other solution seemed compatible with the demands of serious, detailed, prosodical research – or commensurate with the dictates of elementary ethics in respect of a great artist.⁹⁸

The details assembled above regarding Blok's creative life – his manner of working, his extreme industry and minute attention to detail, his methodical workmanship, his orderly mind – are of interest and importance not only for themselves, for the glimpses they afford us of this less known (or at least less publicised) side of Blok's nature, but also for the wider and more general context of our present study. One fact of overriding importance they establish clearly and beyond doubt: that, at heart, no one knew better than Blok the technical demands made of the artist striving to achieve perfection; no one, at heart, recognised more clearly, and accepted more readily, that need for 'incessant labour' originally postulated by Puškin (with whom, in this respect, Blok displays many characteristics in common).

Maxim Gorkij, recommending Blok as a model to a youthful poet, once emphasised his utter trustworthiness and his "fearless sincerity".⁹⁹ It was this inborn, inalienable sincerity, this detestation of all humbug and artificiality, which aroused Blok's wrath and his scepticism of the sort of 'poetic technique' exemplified by, say, Belyj's mathematical *obiter dicta* on the one hand and Brjusov's purely technical *tours de force* on the other. Indeed, it may well be that, for this and related reasons, the very mention of the word 'technique' – conjuring up visions such as these – aroused negative, even hostile, feelings in Blok's soul.

It would, however, be as wrong to infer from this that Blok never bothered himself with matters of 'poetic technique' in the broader and more human sense as it would be to suppose (a view I took care to dispose of earlier) that he merely wrote from 'inspiration' and left it at that.

⁹⁸ For purposes of convenience, it is the text, lay-out, and numeration of the *Pol. Sob. Stix.*/1946 version, 'reconverted' to the old orthography, that has, generally speaking, been utilised for the present study. In doubtful cases, reference has been made to other editions, notably the 12-vol. edition of Blok's works, and – for the old orthography – certain earlier editions mentioned in the Bibliography to the present study. For Blok's own ethics when editing other poets, cf. esp. Ivan Rozanov, *Blok – redaktor poetov*, and E. F. Knipovič, *Blok i Gejne* [= Heine] (both in: *O Bloke*, pp. 21–59 and pp. 165–181 respectively).

⁹⁹ Cf. Dm. Semenovskij, *A. M. Gorkij. Pis'ma i vstreči*, M., 1938 (cited by Vl. Orlov in: *Aleksandr Blok, Stixotvorenija i poemy* [Bibl. poeta, malaja serija, izd. 2oe, Sov. Pis., L., 1951], p. 6).

Such a view is belied, not only by everything we know of Blok's untiring work of revision and correction, but by his own words – the admission (already referred to) that, in the later revisions of his First Book (and presumably, of his other Books also), he “occupied (himself) a great deal with problems of poetic technique”; or, say, his explanation of how he *deliberately and consciously* chose the iamb as the metre for his autobiographical poem, *Vozmezdie*.¹⁰⁰

Nothing, incidentally, could illustrate more strikingly the difference in the concept of ‘rhythm’ as cherished by Belyj on the one hand and by Blok on the other. Where, for Belyj, a poet's rhythm – or ‘rhythmicity’ (*ritmičnosť*) – was a simple matter of mathematical calculation (based on the number of deviations from the metrical norm),¹⁰¹ for Blok, it was, as we have seen earlier, a *human*, even a *cosmic*, conception, intimately bound up with, and deriving from, the events of the world around him and the ‘spirit of the time’ in which he lived, betrayal of which, as he once remarked, was the only sin which his century would never forgive a man.¹⁰²

This cosmic conception of rhythm Blok then transferred into the ‘technical’ sphere of his own creation. As Orlov himself recently put it: “Even the rhythmical structure of his poems he set in intimate union with the ‘rhythm of the age’.”¹⁰³

Enumerating, in the *Foreword* to *Vozmezdie*, the many and varied events of 1910 and 1911 which formed the background to the first part of the poem, Blok continued:

“All these facts, however different they may seem, for me have one musical significance ... I think the simplest expression of the rhythm of that time – when the world, preparing itself for unheard-of happenings, was so strenuously and systematically developing its physical, political, and military muscles – was the *iamb*.”

“It is my habit to set alongside one another facts from all the [different] spheres of life accessible to my ken at a given time, and I am certain that together they produce one single musical impulse.”¹⁰⁴

Such was Blok's own ‘rhythm’ – and such, it seems, was his understanding of rhythm in others, or, as he once termed it, the inward ‘beat’

¹⁰⁰ Aleksandr Blok, *Vozmezdie* (Alkonost, Peterburg, 1922), p. 12.

¹⁰¹ On Belyj's ‘method’, *vide infra*, Ch. III, pp. 117ff., of the present work.

¹⁰² In the article, *Rycar'-Monax* (1910). Cf., *inter alia*, *Sočinenija v dvux tomax* (M., 1955), Vol. II, p. 167.

¹⁰³ In an article, *Aleksandr Blok*, in: *Sočinenija v dvux tomax* (M., 1955). Cf. Vol. I, p. XXXI.

¹⁰⁴ Foreword to *Vozmezdie*, p. 12.

(*vnutrennij 'takt'*) of a writer, the loss of which he considered "the most dangerous of all things".¹⁰⁵

Blok's conception of rhythm was – as stated – a fundamentally different one from that of Belyj. Blok spoke of rhythm in the capacity of the poet, artist, creator; Belyj, in terms of the prosodist, 'scientist', analyser. But the two approaches, as I have tried to show earlier (citing Swinburne and Tennyson as brilliant examples, and Robert Bridges as a convincing spokesman), are in no way mutually exclusive, and not *necessarily* even antipathetic. Blok listened to the 'music of his time' and, by a combination of 'inspiration' and serious application, transformed it – welding its different melodies in the process – into the medium of verse; Belyj tried to take this transformation one stage further in the direction of more objectively, 'scientifically', definable terms. Where Belyj failed, he failed largely through the exaggeration and extremism inherent in his own nature – but this is not to say that these failings are an inseparable part of prosodical research *as such*.

What Blok objected to – and rightly objected to – was, in essence, the same one-sidedness and overspecialisation against which Puškin had protested in his time – the busying of oneself with purely technical problems *for their own sake*, or for originality's sake, but out of context with the soul, the 'true life', of poetry as a whole. We should do well to recall Zorgenfrej's words: "Attainments in the sphere of poetic technique, *unless supplemented by other attainments of a different nature*, left him profoundly indifferent."¹⁰⁶

After emphasising, in a passage referred to earlier, the oneness – the perfect welding – of form and content in Puškin's work, Blagoj continues: "If we remember this, there need be no danger, in analysing the forms of Puškin's creative work, incomparable in their artistic beauty, of 'sinking into formalism'. Moreover, studying Puškin's creative endeavour, following his creative path, the rich and captivating 'technology' of his poetic mastery, we plunge ... into what in fact constitutes the *specific* of artistic literature; one penetrates, as it were, into the most secret recesses of artistry."¹⁰⁷

And again: "... the truly inspired 'geometry' of Puškin's compositions remains completely unnoticed and hidden from the eyes of the reader, and can be revealed only as the result of special analysis. But it is precisely the

¹⁰⁵ In the article, *Duša pisatelja* (1909). Cf., *inter alia*, *Sočinenija v dvux tomach* (M., 1955), Vol. II, p. 105.

¹⁰⁶ *Vide supra*, p. 28, note 32, of this chapter. (My italics.)

¹⁰⁷ *Masterstvo Puškina*, p. 18.

existence of that 'geometry' which also communicates that infinitely satisfying aesthetic sensation of unusual wholeness and proportion, completeness and fullness, outward and inward harmony, that one experiences when reading Puškin's artistic work".¹⁰⁸

From this point of view, poetry merely reveals, once again, its fundamental kinship – despite differences of emphasis and degree – with the arts as whole. "No work of art," writes Enid Hamer, "can be truly enjoyed till we experience in regard to it that sense of possession which comes of knowing *why* we enjoy, and how the artist has achieved certain effects upon the mind and senses. The so-called *appreciation* which shrinks from technique, and repudiates the function of the brain in artistic experience, is a vain and idle illusion."¹⁰⁹ In poetry, as in every art – be it music or painting, sculpture or the dance – a knowledge and understanding of (and, *a fortiori*, a direct and personal acquaintance with) the underlying technique immeasurably enhances our appreciation of that art, and of the innumerable components of which it is composed.

At the same time, it is not easy to define exactly what the aims of 'technical' investigation should be. Enid Hamer insists on "the function of the brain", and the advantage of "knowing *why* we enjoy". But it is something more complex, more subtle than mere rational explanation – as Gilbert Highet once put it: "A good poem, a fine play, the movements of a dancer, cannot be explained."¹¹⁰

Robert Bridges referred to "the dry detail of the material which has to be conquered" as "the part that can be taught". But it is doubtful even how much falls within the province of *instruction*.

Eric Blom put this aspect of the matter very clearly in relation to music: "In teaching, it is true, the attempt is constantly made to impose rules as though they were *a priori* laws – made by God or by God knows whom – which those who want to become composers have only to follow in order to produce great works of art. In their heart of hearts, of course, even the teachers know that this is nonsense: that great composers, though aware of certain laws of nature and of valid precedents, constantly modify and expand their art as they find it."

"There was fugue before Bach, but nothing precisely like a Bach fugue; for that is a vital thing following rules in spirit but not to the letter and not establishing anything like its own fixed rule. It is possible to write a fugue, with different material, tracing every turn taken by a given Bach

¹⁰⁸ *Masterstvo Puškina*, p. 265.

¹⁰⁹ *M.o.E.P.*, pp. vii/viii.

¹¹⁰ *The Mind of Man*, p. 94.

fugue; but what results will not sound in the least like Bach, much less convey a Bachian message. His rules, or anyone else's, are teachable; there is something else behind his music, or that of any other great master, which can be neither taught nor learnt."

As for the man setting out to provide a guide to musical composition, "... even he cannot tell us whether the devices he discusses as the basis of this or that work add up to great music, or, if they do, why. These are aesthetic matters, which can be written about more or less well, though always a little vaguely or disputably, but remain ultimately unteachable."¹¹¹

In relation to poetry, Sir Oliver Elton likewise pointed out that it was more than just a matter of devices reducible (as Belyj virtually implied) to mathematical formulae. "The student...", he wrote, "... will learn the rhythmical habits of many writers; one thing he will never learn, a recipe for the production of beautiful effects". "But," he added, "*his ear may be made more sensitive by the discipline.*"¹¹²

It may indeed. Here, we are getting closer to the core of the matter; and – which is no mere coincidence – to Blok's own concept of the role that research and training should play. "To train the inward ear tirelessly, to accustom it as it were to the distant music, is the essential condition of a writer's existence," he wrote in his study of the writer's soul. Nor was it enough just to listen for the 'rhythm of the age'. One must learn to recognise it: in one's own self, because "to know *one's own* rhythm is for the artist the surest shield against all praise and obloquy"; in others, because it is the basis of all real understanding of them and their work: "... the prerequisite condition of all artistic and critical research consists essentially in defining the 'rhythmical funds' of an artist ..." (... *opredelenie «ritmičeskix fondov» xudožnika* ...)¹¹³

It is just these 'rhythmical funds' of Blok's that it is the aim of the present study to define – in so far, that is, as they be capable of definition in universally acceptable metrical terms.

In attempting to arrive at such a 'definition', no one school or method has been slavishly followed; various approaches have been adopted, various means brought to bear, in accordance with what seemed to offer the most fruitful line of investigation in any given instance. Where these means include (as they frequently do) studies of a purely statistical nature, these

¹¹¹ In an article, *The Unteachable*, which appeared in *The Observer*, London, Jan. 16th, 1955.

¹¹² Oliver Elton, *English Prose Numbers* (in: *A Sheaf of Papers*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1922, pp. 130–163), p. 143 (my italics).

¹¹³ In the article, *Duša pisatelja* (1909). Cf., *inter alia*, *Sočinenija v dvux tomax* (M., 1955), Vol. II, pp. 105/106.

have been undertaken *with one clear object in view*: that of passing fair judgment on certain theories already enounced by previous investigators in the field, both as regards Russian prosody generally and Blok's verse in particular. Obviously, such views can be proved or disproved only by 'objective' methods of analysis analogous to those employed by their authors in the first instance.¹¹⁴

At the same time, let it be stated quite plainly that *I cherish no illusions whatever regarding either the nature or the fertility of such purely 'objective', 'formal' approaches*, and have endeavoured, wherever it seemed possible and permissible, to introduce other currents more closely bound up with the *soul* of Blok's work as a whole. In so doing, I have tried to be ever mindful of the protests and warnings of Blok himself, and of Puškin before him, and have steadfastly opposed the view that prosody should discard appreciation of the actual poetry, on which, as Saintsbury rightly emphasised, it should in fact be based.¹¹⁵ In this respect, there is not only much new soil to be tilled, but many weeds and much deadwood first to be cleared away. If the present study appears rather one-sided, the reason must be sought in the fact that so much still remains to be done. A vast region still remains to be explored, and in this respect the present investigation does not set out to be more than the merest beginning; in particular, the entire purely *musical* side of Blok's work – rhyme, assonance, alliteration, repetition, and a dozen other melodic devices – still awaits investigation. It very soon became clear that this comprised sufficient material for a complete study in itself, for which reason it was decided *to confine the present work to purely metrical-rhythmical considerations as such*.¹¹⁶

In investigating these, an attempt has been made to introduce something of those currents from English prosodic study which, it seemed, might help to enrich and enliven previous purely Russian studies in the field. In so doing, three main objects were kept in view. In the first place, to infuse into Russian versification (still mindful of Blok's reproaches!) something of that generally more empirical, more refreshing, at once more 'artistic' and 'realistic', English approach to prosodic study. Of this, some-

¹¹⁴ An obvious instance is the alleged triple-time basis of Blok's so-called *dol'niki*, the whole problem of which is dealt with at length in Ch. VIII of the present work. Incidentally, as Victor Erlich has pointed out (*Russian Formalism*, p. 21, note 24), there is an 'honourable precedent' for the use of statistical techniques in the metrical analysis of ancient verse.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *H.M.E.P.*, p. vi (also pp. 31/32 and note 44, *supra*).

¹¹⁶ In this connection, it is interesting to note that Žirmunskij's *Introduction to Metrics* fills a book of 284 pages; his study of rhyme (*Rifma*), a further separate book of no less than 337 pages!

thing has been said already. Secondly, to enrich the *theory* of Russian versification with the results of certain English prosodic explorations which, *mutatis mutandis*, were felt to apply in equal, or nearly equal, measure to the conditions of Russian verse. (Such include, *inter alia*, Egerton Smith's brilliant analysis of so-called 'trochaic substitution' in iambic verse.)¹¹⁷ Thirdly and lastly, to render the present study – dealing as it does with a Russian poet and Russian verse – more easily accessible and acceptable to the English reader, in the hope of thereby arousing a greater interest than has hitherto been shown, not only in the prosody of Blok himself, but in problems of Russian versification as a whole.

It is to a brief comparative study of the two 'schools' of prosody – Russian and English – that we must next turn. Before doing so, as a link and a point of departure, we should do well to recall the words used by Saintsbury in relation to Shelley and which, as mentioned earlier, so admirably apply to the case of Blok: "... it is in his lyrics that Shelley's prosodic, like his poetic, power shows highest ... Shelley never seems to have studied metre much, and ... his first pattern is the merest starting-point for him. But he touches none that he does not adorn; none that he does not make matter of delight; and none, likewise, in which he does not supply a text for infinite technical instruction as well".¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ *Vide infra*, Ch. III, pp. 130ff., of the present work.

¹¹⁸ *H.M.E.P.*, pp. 204/205.

PART II

ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN VERSIFICATION

A GENERAL COMPARISON