

KULISH'S EVGENIJ ONEGIN NASHEGO VREMENI

(EUGENE ONEGIN OF OUR TIMES)

A STUDY IN LITERARY EPIGONISM

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ABSTRACT

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Few authors as talented and as prolific as Panteleimon Alexandrovich Kulish have remained in literary obscurity to the extent that he has. Yet his works are so prodigious and his style so versatile that he merits closer investigation.

One of his works: Evgenij Onegin Nashego Vremeni (Eugene Onegin of Our Times) is an undisguised imitation of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin. The purpose of the thesis is to study the imitation in this work of Kulish and to attempt to assess the historical, literary, and political circumstances which pre-disposed the highly creative and individualistic Kulish to resort to imitation.

An analysis of pertinent literature and a critical survey of the works of Kulish indicate that his obscurity seems to be more the result of his vacillating literary, political and religious loyalties, rather than the lack of creative or literary ability. Kulish's imitation of Pushkin's novel in verse, Eugene Onegin, leaves the former pale indeed by comparison. An investigation into the creative climate surrounding Ukrainian and Russian contemporaries of Kulish during the severe censorship of Tsar Nicholas I, strongly indicates that Kulish's main reason for emulating Pushkin was to establish rapport with the censors and thus gain freedom for the expression of his creative genius.

## PREFACE

One of the main challenges which confronted the writer of this thesis was the paucity of reference material available on Panteleimon Kulish on this continent. Even though Kulish's prolific works included compilations of songs and folklore, dramas, poems, novels, linguistic theses, historical works and extensive translations, it seems few slavists on this continent have investigated many of his literary contributions. Perhaps his highly unpredictable religious, political, and literary views have led many critics and scholars to maintain a cautious silence. The aim of this thesis specifically is to investigate one of his lesser known works as an example of literary epigonism but it is also hoped that perhaps it will in its very limited way contribute to the lessening of the silence which surrounds this brilliant, obscure, and controversial man.

The reference materials consulted for this thesis employed in addition to English, the Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, German and French languages. The translations of any relevant references will be given immediately after the original. The translation by the writer of Kulish: Evgenij Onegin Nashego Vremeni (Eugene Onegin of Our Times) from the Russian original is found in Appendix A.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of investigating Kulish's Evgenij Onegin nashego vremeni (Eugene Onegin of Our Times) as an example of literary epigonism will be approached by defining the term "epigonism", and by examining the life and work of Kulish with reference to the influence of Pushkin. Pertinent literature will be examined and a comparison of the poems by Pushkin, Eugene Onegin, and Kulish, Eugene Onegin of Our Times, will be made in the light of their literary and historical backgrounds. The summary and conclusion is followed by the writer's translation of Evgenij Onegin nashego vremeni by Kulish from the original Russian into English.

### Epigonism

The 1959 edition of Third International Unabridged Dictionary by D. Webster gives the following information: epigonism - artistic, literary or intellectual imitation, especially by a later generation than the artist, writer, or thinker imitated; a derivative of "epigonas" one born after, an imitative follower, an inferior imitator of a distinguished writer". The prefix "epi" meaning "upon" and "gonos" meaning seed. Literally, the term means "upon ... seed". It conveys the concept of an outgrowth or an issue from a seed that has been produced earlier. The idea is not foreign to Ukrainian literature. Writers have referred to the "fertile soil" of Ukraine in reference to the cultural climate and also Kulish admonished Shevchenko to "seed clean grain (seeds) upon the spritual pastures".

In Russian, the Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar,<sup>2</sup> edited by B. A. Vvedenskiy

(Moscow, 1955) gives the word "epigony" and defines it as "unoriginal imitators of political, artistic, or literary trends." The 1957 edition of the Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopaediya (Gosudarstvennoe Nauchnoe Izdatel' stvo) gives "epigonstva" - works of later followers directed by a common idea - without creative originality - mechanical repetition - at times in changed circumstances".

Brockhaus, in German, defines "epigoni" as "Nachfolger, Nachkomme unschöpferischer Nachahmer grosser Vorbilder," and the Berlin 1905 edition of Encyklopadisches Wörterbuch gives the meaning as "descendant" or "imitateur", Merker und Stammer in Realexikon Der Deutschen Literaturgeschichte (Berlin, 1926) give the following: "Epigonendichtung" is next to realism, the widest development of the nineteenth century. It first sprang from the seeds of classicism in romantic soil. Epigonism was at its height in the literary world in 1836. Wherever there are great sources, imitators exist; the epigone "Geist" emits an energy which attracts followers. Epigonism was part of the literary development of Western and Eastern Europe especially in the almanac and journal circles. The first wave was apparent during 1800 to 1830 and the next surge was embodied in epic realism and lyrical individualism. To these can be added the Byron-swarmers and the Italian wanderers, as well as the half-romantic and half-Goethecized writers. A strong example of epigonism is apparent in the drama which followed Ibsen and Hauptmann. Epigones or imitators have always reached for the most famous works ... for the rhetoric of music and heroism of an elegy. With Hegel, the epoch of idealism vanished as did the age of romanticism and with it epigones of the Don Juans. For Heine this was a source of irony; for Immerman a seed for criticism. Both felt that they stood in the shadow of a mountain. "Jedes Stück Vergangenheit hat ein Rock hinterlassen, in jeden wird

geschlupft". The tragedy was the dichotomy which was felt when every particle of contemporary creativity was in fact part of "Epigonentum". Talent abounded but "seeds" were scarce and satirical elegies, sonnets, romances; some polemic and some in subdued tones, echoed and re-echoed. Walter Scott's realism, Holderlins "Form", and Goethe's "Gestalt", could not be re-created, but only imitated. As Schiller reflected Goethe, or as, perhaps, Shakespeare reflected Aristophanes, so every writer of the nineteenth century seemed to imitate some unknown god who often took the form of an "enlightened European". "Was Hebbel's Schritt bedeutet, wird durch Ibsen offenbar".

The 1958 edition of the Reallexikon der Deutschen Literaturgeschichte states on pages 372 - 373: "So ist die Epigonendichtung bis heute aktuell wie je, stellt aber seit langeren keine eigenständigen Fragen mehr. Es gibt denn auch keine eigenständigen Forschungen zum Gegenstand Epigonendichtung, nur middlebare: Zur Nachfolge Klassik und Romantik... ." This statement indicates that very few if any actual studies of literary epigonism are extant and these are indirect rather than independent.

#### Kulish's Life and Work

In order to appreciate any of the works of Kulish, it is necessary to examine some events in his life which may have predisposed him to the ambivalence, aloofness, and unique individuality which characterized his creative efforts.

Panteleimon Kulish was born in 1819 in the village Voronezh, district of Hlukhiv in the government of Chernihiv, Ukraine. The village in which Kulish was born, and to which after a controversial literary career he returned to die, was a heavily forested region, isolated from urban influences and hence an ideal

haven for<sup>the</sup> preservation of ancient folklore and historical legends. His early ancestors were of high ranking Cossack lineage, and the more recent ones who had settled to till their land after years of warfare, were respected landowners, who served as judges, and also in other various responsible positions.

Kulish and his older brother, Timothy, were the only two children of a large family to survive infancy, but Timothy, the father's favorite died when Kulish was four. Though Kulish did not speak until he was three, his father now taught him, along with history and legends, the works of Derzhavin, the Russian poet. The elder Kulish had assumed financial responsibility for his dead brother's family who lived next door. The two families associated as one family and Lesya his cousin, who was four years older than Panteleimon, taught him Old Church Slavic and folklore.

His mother had a lasting effect on his development and imagination. She spoke only Ukrainian but imparted to her son a great wealth of knowledge which had been passed on from generation to generation. Her highly creative artistic nature found expression in her songs, and she is said to have used her singing as a form of communication and conversation.

Another great influence was Ulyana Mushilovska, the wife of a neighboring landowner. Her intelligence, creativity, and native originality all influenced Kulish profoundly. It was she who advised Kulish's father to send the boy to Novgorod-Sivirsk to continue his education. The boy was lodged with an officer's widow, Chlopotova, and later lived at the home of his first teacher Iakov Iakovich. These months were extremely lonely since the teacher and his spinster sister were very dull company. Novgorod was a quiet, not too large city, rich in history, with the monastery of the Trinity near at hand. The director, Timkovsky, was a refugee from the old Kiev Academy and as did most of the educated of the lower classes,



held very old patriarchal views. Kulish found the atmosphere conducive to literary pursuits and openly defied his algebra instructor. He eventually discontinued algebra and redeemed himself in languages and history.

Though as a student he was at best mediocre, he made friendships which he found highly sympathetic to his literary interests. He is said to have been very fond of painting and was excluded from the school for drawing on church walls. Upon being punished in this manner by the deacon, he secluded himself with his friend Glatov, and for a time did no formal studying. Through his friend Serdukov, he learned German, and became interested in reading Goethe in the original. Gogol was also read with enthusiasm along with other Russian and Ukrainian poets. It is small wonder that Kulish abandoned his studies in favor of literature.

During the early part of the nineteenth century, according to Belinsky "the attitude of Russian intellectuals toward Ukrainian literary works was a benevolent one. Ryleev's poems were read almost as widely in the Ukraine as the works of Shevchenko".

Pushkin, however, was the poet read most avidly and discussed by Kulish and his young companions. He planned to complete Pushkin's poem Eugene Onegin and even wrote several additional verses.

In 1834 Maksimovich published a compilation of folk songs which Kulish had heard in his childhood. The ancient history of England and Scotland also claimed his interest and he read Walter Scott both in the original and in Russian translation. Financial problems prevented the elder Kulish from further supporting his son who was forced to withdraw from the school to continue his

education independently. He did this for one year with the help of his friend Krasovsky. His meagre finances were augmented by teaching the two young sons of a landowner in Novgorod, and when Kiev university opened he decided to enrol. Since he did not meet the entrance requirements, he was obliged to continue teaching and was able to enrol the following year. Initially he entered the faculty of arts but later entered the faculty of sciences. Financial problems continued and the rector, Nevolin, maintained that Kulish was not eligible for university admittance since he could not prove his nobility. On the recommendation of Maksimovich, Kulish obtained a teaching position in Lutsk, Volinia. During the next seven months he learned French and Polish, and later also English, German, Italian, Spanish, all the Slavic languages as well as Latin and Hebrew. He began writing Mychailo Charnyshenko, strongly imitating Walter Scott. He seemed to enter a successful episode in his life, teaching at the noble school at Podl' in Kiev, reading during vacations and compiling the songs and legends in the simple language which he loved. He wrote much in Russian though on Ukrainian themes, these being mainly at this time based on historical events between Poland and the Ukraine. The years from 1843 to 1845 seemed his happiest and most productive. His first Ukrainian poem "Ukraina" (Ukraine) was written at this time and shows his love for his people, for his language, and his knowledge of classical literature. He also wrote extensively in Russian, including such works as Chorna Rada (Black Council) and Evgenij Onegin Nashego Vremeni (Eugene Onegin of Our Times). The friendships of Shevchenko, Bilozersky, Kostomarov and others of Kulish's circle gave rise to the secret society known as "Brotherhood of Cyril and Methodius". They advocated Slavic federation, equality, and brotherhood. Their plans for a systematic education of children

in the language and history of Ukraine aroused suspicion and the group was kept under constant surveillance by the tzar.

While teaching Russian in Petersburg University in 1845, Kulish through Pletnev became acquainted with the leading Russian writers of the time. In "Sovremenik" (Contemporary) and also in the children's journal "Zvezdochka" (Little Star) Kulish wrote an article in which he stated that Pushkin and Pletnev were his main literary heroes. During this period he wrote "Povesti ob ukrain-skom norode" (Chronicles of the Ukrainian People) and also corresponded with members of the Cyril-Methodius Brotherhood. In 1847 he married Vasil Bilozersky's sister Alexandra, a spirited Ukrainian patriot who wrote under the pseudonym Hanna Barvinok. Pletnev offered Kulish the chair of Slavic Studies in Petersburg but this plan did not materialize. During 1846 a certain Petrov reported to the authorities that the Cyril-Methodius Brotherhood was plotting to free Ukraine from Russia, and as a result Kulish was arrested while on his way to Warsaw. He was imprisoned in the Peter-Paul fortress in Petersburg and interrogated at great length by Dubelt and Orlov. Shevchenko, Kvitka and other loyal friends interceded on his behalf, and after a lengthy trial, Tzar Nicholas exiled him to Tula. His works were confiscated and banned, forcing him to earn his living at manual labor. His wife who accompanied him remained loyal, his spirit at no time faltered; and the three years of exile were spent in further polishing his languages and preparing himself for future literary works. His friend, Osip Bodianskyj sent him books and materials and provided moral support.

During the exile Kulish began to write anonymously and also under a number of pseudonyms. In 1855 with the death of Tzar Nicholas I and the accession of Alexander II, a short-lived freedom prevailed. In 1857 he wrote to Galagin saying that he had plans for restoring the Ukrainian language to

its earlier prominence. The letter also contained many references to Pushkin. Kulish had translated Byron's "Childe Harold" into Ukrainian and made plans to translate Shakespeare and other western authors. In his journals he wrote at this time that Ukrainian and English were the only two significant languages on earth. His journal "Khata" (House) folded, but he continued writing for Vasil Belozersky's journal "Osnova" (Foundation), mainly in Russian but on Ukrainian themes. His interest in translating reached the attention of Alexander II who, in 1861, with the emancipation of the serfs, required an official translator to render official documents meaningful to the peasants. Kulish translated too freely, editorialized liberally and lost his position.

The clouds of disharmony which had started to gather earlier were now increasing. In 1862 "Osnova" discontinued publication and Russian suppression of Ukrainian became more overt, while the Polish element militated against Ukrainians also. In 1863 the Minister of Alexander II, Valuev, ordered that all publications in Ukrainian cease forthwith. Kulish's sympathies had shown signs of wavering when, in writing Chorna Rada (Black Council), he doubted Ukrainian sources and he favored the Polish. In his preface to "History of Ancient Ukraine" he stated that he tried to gain a new viewpoint of the history of the wars with the Poles. His attitude to Shevchenko's works also took a drastic reversal.

The suppression of the Ukrainian language forced Kulish to retreat to Galicia and later Bukovina, near the Austrian border. The extreme loneliness which he felt amidst the alien culture and the lack of intellectual activity, awakened in him a sense of national awareness. In 1861 in L'vov he published the journals 'Niva', (Cornfield) and 'Vechernits' (Evening Literary Meeting), which held the same views as "Osnova" had. In 1864 he obtained a semi-official position in Poland but disagreed with the Poles regarding the use of Russian and

Polish in the Ukraine. This sojourn in Warsaw again began to arouse Ukrainian national convictions within him and he openly began to support the Ukrainian national party (Narodovtsi). His attitude toward the Cossacks was changed again in his writings and, where he earlier implied that their own disagreements contributed to the plight of the Ukraine, he now defended them. This led to an ultimatum in 1867. Kulish was told to recant his pro-Ukrainian attitudes or resign his position, and he resigned. In L'vov he again wrote a new series of Ukrainian poems and under the pseudonym of Pavel Pataj began to translate scriptures. His interest in educating the young was still evident in his anthology of poems for the boys' school in Galicia. The following year he was charged with the responsibility of editing the official journal of the Ministry in Petersburg. He had access to the libraries and archives, which he found indispensable for research on his newest work, The History of the Unification of Rus'. He completed only the first three parts and in 1877 abandoned the effort. This work left him with no friends or supporters among the Russians, the Ukrainians, or the Poles. His accusations of Kostomarov and of Shevchenko created a deep rift between himself and his people. Ivan Franko tried to point out to Kulish the errors in the conflicting sources upon which he had based his work, but Kulish seemed adamant in his anti-Cossack views.

Barvinsky chided him for having broken his Ukrainian pen. Kulish having completely alienated himself from his Ukrainian supporters, returned to Russia hoping to publish a journal entitled "Journal of P. A. Kulish" both in Russian and Ukrainian, but was thwarted by the very Russians whom he had praised. He wrote bitterly to Professor O. Kistiakovskij saying "neither the Poles nor the Germans could have devised a more effective way to disrupt rather than to unify...." Completely disillusioned about unification, he advised the Ukraine to join

Austria along with Galicia and, while Galicia was in disagreement with the Poles, Kulish attempted to bring about a reconciliation between Poland and the Ukraine. Back in L'vov in 1881 he published "Khutornaya Poeziya" (Village Poetry) and also some poems in praise of Peter the Great and Catherine. In 1882 a brochure appeared in which Kulish addressed himself to the Galician landowners. It was very coldly received and seemed to ruin any hopes of renewing the support or even tolerance of Shevchenko and Mickiewicz. Poland, with the exception of a few aristocrats, rejected his views; the Ukrainians at best remained aloof. When Pope Leo XIII showed an interest in the Galician unification with Poland, Kulish left L'vov for Vienna where he published a brochure in German "Vergewaltigung des Basilianerordens in Galizien durch Jesuiten" (Violation of the Order of Basil in Galicia by the Jesuits). This pamphlet was confiscated by the Austrian authorities and Kulish returned to his ancestral village in the Ukraine out of favor with everyone. His complete withdrawal from politics and religion left him free in 1882 to work on translations of Shakespeare. The situation was highly conducive to complete dedication to translating. Kulish rarely went to Kiev and maintained only a sparse correspondence with scholars interested in literature. Since he had no income, as his Ukrainian literature did not appeal to his countrymen, and his Russian work was forbidden by the censors, he leased a portion of his farm to a Pole who proved unreliable, and Kulish along with his loyal wife were forced by circumstances to perform all the tasks required to operate the estate. In 1886 the ancestral farm was completely destroyed by fire, forcing Kulish to move into a shed. The greatest tragedy was the destruction of his manuscripts, only a few of these, awaiting publication in Geneva were saved. He wrote to a friend, Stepan Nos, of his frustration at having no works published. His only other hope lay in a number of manuscripts

which had been sent prior to the fire to Vasil Tarnovskij, who was collecting items for a literary museum. The isolation from primary sources left little new material for his historical writings and his translations assumed greater importance. At the age of seventy he began to rewrite the translations of the Scriptures, the manuscripts of which had been burned, and continued with translations of Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe, Schiller, Walter Scott, Pushkin and other Russian poets.

The winter of 1896 - 1897 was very severe and, in the midst of his unrelenting efforts to rewrite lost works, Kulish was smitten with pneumonia and died, with his wife and old friend, Vasil Bilozersky, at his side. His funeral was conducted according to ancient Cossack rites and he was buried in the ancestral fields under an oaken cross.

His life since early childhood was one of increasingly demanding challenges and since many dilemmas were of his own making, he was forced to find unique ways of solving them. He had an unrelentingly single-minded approach to tasks, and, in spite of his extreme self-reliance, integrity, and cold lack of trust in any of his contemporaries as well as predecessors, he was capable of genuine friendships and sympathies, such as those he felt toward Stepan Nos, to the blind Kobsar, Ostap Veresaj, to Michail Pavlyk, Vasil Tarnovskij and to anyone who seemed misunderstood or oppressed. His egotism and arrogance were tempered with the religious convictions of a humanitarian. In trying to break with the past he found it difficult to keep in step with the present and became an anachronism in his own time. Unlike Pushkin, whom he so greatly admired, he was unable to come to terms with himself and his milieu. In his soul he constantly relived the seventeenth and eighteenth century upheavals of a people fated to live in an area with no natural geographical boundaries, and no strong political