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V. F. ODOEVSKY

His Life, Times and Milieu

Neil Cornwell

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V. F. Odoyevsky

The life, times and milieu of V. F. ODOYEVSKY *1804–1869*

NEIL CORNWELL

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Foreword

The life and works of Prince Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoyevsky deserve far more attention than they have been accorded even in his own country. He is a remarkably interesting figure, both as a man and as a thinker: a gifted disciple of the German Romantic philosophers of his day, he was steeped in both Russian and Western culture more deeply than almost anyone else in Russian history. Odoyevsky was very versatile: a polymath, a talented imaginative writer, one of the two editors of the best and most influential literary journal produced during the golden age of Russian poetry, a musician and an inspired writer on music, the earliest of Russian writers of science fiction, an original and influential theorist of education, and an organizer of charitable enterprises in his country – yet perhaps best known today as a friend of the great galaxy of the Russian writers of his time – from Zhukovsky, Griboyedov, Pushkin, Tyutchev, Lermontov, Gogol', Belinsky to Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy – whom he regularly met in his drawing room and who held him in great affection. He was host to the most famous Western composers of the day – Liszt, Berlioz, Wagner – when they visited St Petersburg.

Mildly eccentric, self-deprecatingly modest, impressionable, responsive, hospitable to people and ideas, he was a man of lasting enthusiasm. A devoted admirer of the philosopher Schelling, he acquired from his writings a view of art as the deepest and most unifying expression of the ever-advancing, self-generating world spirit, a movement incapable of being described or analysed in the language, or by the canons, of ordinary commonsense, or the laws of the natural sciences, a spirit conscious of itself most vividly in poetry and philosophy, but above all in music, which, as the early German Romantics had believed, is the most direct language of the human soul. The two musical essays in the best-known collection of his writings, *Russian Nights* – 'Sebastian Bach' and 'Beethoven's Last Quartet' – are of an order comparable to the richest and most evocative writing of Jean-Paul Richter or E. T. A. Hoffmann.

Dr Cornwell's lucid and scrupulously scholarly and comprehensive study is, in my view, the fullest and most exhaustive account of

Odoyevsky's manifold activities to be found in any language. It is also exceedingly well written. His description of Odoyevsky's relationships with the Russian society of his time – government officialdom, the social problems of Tsarist Russia in his day, but above all, of course, with the imaginative writers, composers and critics – supersedes all other studies of the man and his activities, and is likely to remain authoritative for many years. Odoyevsky has at last received his just deserts at the hands, remarkably enough, of an English writer.

Isaiah Berlin

Preface

I

Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoyevsky was a far more central figure in Russian cultural life of the nineteenth century than has generally been recognized – even in Russia and certainly in the West. A man of many parts and many careers – principally in literature, music, education and public service – Odoyevsky is today mainly remembered as the writer of a brand of romantic philosophical fiction which is proving of greater interest to many present-day readers than it did to some of his contemporaries and their successors.

The following statement on the 'text' by Roland Barthes, in his famous essay 'The Death of the Author' (see *Image–Music–Text* (London, 1977) p. 146), might almost have been written with Odoyevsky's *Russian Nights* in mind:

> We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.

Romantic thought, and romantic literary practice, it may be argued, engendered not only modernism, but modern literary theory as well; and, indeed, certain notions of Odoyevsky's, to be found in both his fiction and his philosophical writings, may well interest readers of such theoretical figures as Tzvetan Todorov and Umberto Eco. The stress placed here, however, on Odoyevsky's thought is not so much forward looking as backward; Odoyevsky is placed in the context of nineteenth-century Russian thinking and his main ideas are traced back, through Schelling, to the Hermetic and theosophical traditions, finding their roots in the philosophy of antiquity.

Given the diversity of Odoyevsky's interests, and the range of material considered, certain sections of this book may tend towards the

abstruse; if this be so, it is hoped that readers will find compensations in the 'lighter' biographical and historical areas.

This study, it should be said, is not primarily either a literary or a philosophical one. It is essentially a thematic biography, or a 'life and times', outlining Odoyevsky's career and participation in various spheres of Russian life. Readers whose interest in Odoyevsky is primarily literary are therefore referred to the chapters here on him as writer and as thinker, and to that on his literary relations with other prominent figures of the time ('all Russian literature', wrote Shevyryov, 'was to be found on the divan at Odoyevsky's'), as well as to articles which I have published elsewhere. A full literary study of Odoyevsky has, of course, yet to be undertaken.

As the first book on this figure in English, and the first of comparable length for many years in any language, the present study details fully, in notes and bibliography, its dependence on the many primary and secondary materials utilized, quoting extensively from obscure, or on occasion unpublished, sources. Despite the length of this study, however, the scope of its subject is such that it in certain respects remains an introductory essay, or series of essays. This is so in two senses.

The first arises from Odoyevsky's status in Western – and particularly British and American – scholarship, in respect of which he has claims to be considered 'the forgotten man' of nineteenth-century Russian culture.

A number of American theses have been written on Odoyevsky; however, these cover only certain (comparatively) restricted aspects of his activities. In terms of published material, nothing of greater than article length has so far appeared in English and the number of items in this category are few and far between. Histories of Russian literature usually accord Odoyevsky's works but a paragraph or two; histories of thought have been more generous but their treatment has tended, in the absence of an overall perspective, to simplify or distort. The first English-language article on Odoyevsky as a music critic appeared only in 1982. His other activities and his relationships with the main figures of his age would appear to be still largely unknown. Despite the volume of Russian and Soviet scholarship on Odoyevsky, and the revival of interest in him in the Soviet Union over the past decade and a half, no book-length study (specialized pamphlets by G. Bernandt and V. S. Virginsky apart) has been published in Russian since 1913.

The second sense in which the present study remains introductory arises from the range of Odoyevsky's writings and undertakings. More

detailed investigations of all or many aspects of his multi-faceted life and works are, of course, still needed. It is hoped that the present study at least will prepare the ground.

II

Any study of V. F. Odoyevsky is inevitably heavily indebted to the labours of P. N. Sakulin, whose colossal unfinished 1100-page opus of 1913 remains an invaluable source. My debt also to the efforts of recent Soviet scholarship will be evident throughout.

Acknowledgements are due to the staff of the manuscript section and the reading rooms of the Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library in Leningrad and the British Library, London; special thanks are due to library staff of Queen's University (Belfast) and the Inter-Library Loans Division of the British Library at Boston Spa (and all who participated in this system for my benefit in libraries at home and abroad).

I should like to thank members of the Department of Slavonic Studies of the Queen's University of Belfast for their constant interest and encouragement; members of the Irish Slavists' Association, the Neo-Formalist Circle and the Nineteenth-Century Literature Study group of BUAS for enduring the reading of papers on Odoyevsky; the editors of *Quinquereme, The Slavonic and East European Review, Essays in Poetics* and *Renaissance and Modern Studies* for publishing articles on the same figure; and Mr Robert Reid for including my contribution in his collection of essays on Russian romanticism. Overlap between the content of most of these articles and that of the present study has been kept, it is hoped, as minimal as possible.

Thanks are due, for assistance rendered or information supplied at various stages, to Mr David Williams (from his own experiences of Odoyevsky research); Dr John McNair (for pertinent material from the archive of P. D. Boborykin); Dr Chris Thomas (with reference to the fate of the Sobolevsky collection); and Professors Simon Karlinsky, Arnold McMillin, Heinrich Stammler and Vittorio Strada. Soviet colleagues who have given me invaluable assistance with references, information and (in many cases) copies of their published work include: Professor B. F. Yegorov, Yu. V. Mann, M. I. Medovoy and V. I. Sakharov.

Gratitude is due, for secretarial skills and perseverance, to Elizabeth Kelly and Janet Armstrong.

Finally, I wish to thank my parents for their encouragement and support; and, for their patience, Maggie, Katerina and Juliet.

III

Transliteration is intended to follow the SEER guidelines, with very minor modifications, particularly with names (e.g. 'Odoyevsky', but 'Yuriy' and 'moskovskiy'); some conventional spellings have been retained (e.g. 'Tchaikovsky') and the occasional anglicization (in the case of 'Alexander', leading to the infelicity of 'Alexander Aleksandrovich'). Dates are 'Old Style'. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated. Titles of books and stories in the text are normally given in English translation, but names of journals in Russian. In the notes all titles are normally given in Russian. When the language used in the original is French (rather than Russian), this is normally indicated and, where significant, the original French is reproduced in the notes.

N C
Belfast, January 1985

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I am grateful to the Publications Committee of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies for agreeing to accept this book in its London East European Series.

The lie in art, the lie in science and the lie in life have always been both my enemies and my tormentors. Everywhere I have pursued them and everywhere they have pursued me.

V. F. ODOYEVSKY

They laugh at me because I am always busy! You do not realize, gentlemen, how much there is to do in this world; I have to bring down to this world those poetic thoughts which come to me and pursue me; I have to bring out those philosophical thoughts at which I arrived after long experience and suffering; the masses have no books – and we do not have our own music, our own architecture; medicine in Europe as a whole is still in its infancy; the old is forgotten, the new is unknown; our folk tales are being lost; the ancient discoveries are being forgotten; science must be moved forward; its treasures must be extricated from beneath the dust of centuries. There the young do not know the straight and narrow path, here the old are drawn into the mire; the former must be encouraged, the latter made to understand. That's how much there is to do! What? I have carried out only a thousandth part. How can I, after this, look on coolly while people waste time on cards, hunting, horses, promotions, sloth and so on and so forth?

V. F. ODOYEVSKY

Biographical Introduction

> A pen writes slowly if at least a few drops of one's own blood are not added to the inkwell. Any creative art costs a part of one's vital phosphorus. There is no worthwhile activity without self-immolation.
>
> V. F. Odoyevsky

I Introduction

In 1874 N. V. Putyata, when introducing a selection of the unpublished papers of his friend V. F. Odoyevsky, expressed the hope that a 'detailed and punctilious biography' would appear 'before long'.[1] Over a century later, such a biography is still awaited.

In his biography of Johann Sebastian Bach, Odoyevsky wrote:

> Biographers of Bach, as well as of other artists, describe his life as they do the life of any other man. They tell you when he was born, with whom he studied, whom he married. . . . They overlook the sacred life of an artist, the development of his creative power, this real life, only remnants of which manifest themselves in the artist's daily life.[2]

In contrast to this approach, he continued:

> There is only one source for the artist's life: his works. Whether he be a musician, a poet, or a painter – in his works you will find his spirit, his character, his face; in them you will find even those events which have escaped the chronological pen of historians. (p. 106)

The story *Sebastian Bach* is, of course, largely fiction, with an underlying element of romantic philosophy. This is not the intention, it need hardly be said, of the present biographical sketch – nor, indeed, of this study as a whole. At the same time, all the material is not readily

available to compile a biography as such of the former, traditional type. Odoyevsky's views on the subject notwithstanding, however, it is to be hoped that such a biography will be written by a Soviet scholar, sooner rather than later.

In the continued absence of any such thing, a general sketch of Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoyevsky's life can be put together from diverse published sources: Odoyevsky's posthumously published papers, scattered letters, incidental biographical information in Sakulin's monumental volume,[3] and many other sources from the nineteenth century and from more recent scholarship. Odoyevsky's archive is immense and, to some degree, scattered; it is obviously the main source still to be systematically tapped and the wealth of detail ordered. This will only be done, working on the foundations laid by Sakulin, by some person or persons over a lengthy period of time and possessed of certain paleographical skills. Short-term researchers will discover isolated items of interest (such as are included in the present study) but will not acquire the full picture.

Neither will biographers derive great help from Odoyevsky's conscious efforts at autobiography. His memoirs were never written, his diaries are sketchy and devoid of detail (much from his diaries and travel notes remains unpublished), his correspondence has not been collected and his autobiographical writings are fragmentary, to say the least. Autobiography, indeed, he regarded as an impossible exercise in his own case: 'How do people find time to relate in an autobiography what they do? My life is split into thousands of personages and actions and there is not time to note it down!'[4] In detail, too, many of Odoyevsky's own comments and recollections on his life are far from being fully dependable.

II Family and Childhood

The first point in Odoyevsky's biography on which he himself was no reliable authority is his date of birth. This event occurred at the end of July (probably July 31) of either 1803 or 1804; sources are almost equally divided between the two dates and Odoyevsky himself left contradictory statements.[5] Even A. I. Odoyevsky's claim to be a year older than his cousin is inconclusive, as there may be some doubt about the year of his birth, too.[6] The categorical assertion made in 1903, to declare that year Odoyevsky's 'centenary', that 'all sources, apart from the stone on his grave, on which "1804" is to be seen, testify

thus', can certainly not be upheld.[7] The organizers of the commemorative evening of the 175th anniversary of his birth, on the other hand, were not so confident; although the programme was inscribed with the dates '1803–1869', the event was held roughly between the rival dates of August 12 (New Style) 1978 and 1979: on 16 December 1978. For the purposes of the present study, we shall accept the word of the tombstone.

The Odoyevsky family claimed descent from Rurik and was reckoned, by the mid nineteenth century, the oldest family in Russia. V. F. Odoyevsky, as the last of the Odoyevsky line, thus came to acquire the honorary position of 'senior nobleman' of Russia; even before that, we are told, he had been dubbed '*Monmorancy russe*, because of the antiquity of his stock'.[8] According to the 'Genealogy of the Odoyevsky Princes', to be found in Odoyevsky's archive, the descent comes from Rurik through Yaroslav Vladimirovich and the Chernigov grand princes (such as Svyatoslav, d. 1076; and Oleg of Tmutarakan and Chernigov, d. 1115); the name 'Odoyevsky' came to pass from 1227, following the relocation of Prince Roman Semyonovich (son of Semyon Glukhovsky), in the face of the Tatar rampage, from Novosil to the district of Odoyev, in the province of Tula.[9]

Various illustrious Odoyevskys were prominent over the centuries in Russian history; the most notable of these were the princes Ivan Bol'shoy Nikitich Odoyevsky and Ivan Men'shoy Nikitich Odoyevsky – commanders in Novgorod and Vologda respectively around the 'Time of Troubles'; and Nikita Ivanovich Odoyevsky, 'the man chiefly responsible for compiling the Code' (the *Ulozheniye* of 1649) which finally established the system of serfdom.[10]

A reversal in the fortunes of the house of Odoyevsky occurred, however, in the eighteenth century. The responsibility for this seemingly lay with Prince Ivan Vasil'evich Odoyevsky (1710–58, great-grandfather of Vladimir Fyodorovich) who, from being 'one of the wealthiest men of his time, having inherited a large fortune from the Lykov family', not only lost his great house on the Tverskaya (now Gorky Street, Moscow), but, according to his distant relative, the ideologist of the 'Old Nobility', Prince M. M. Shcherbatov:

> . . . so ruined himself by his immoderate voluptuousness (*slastolyubiyem*), that, having sold all his estates, he only left himself with a small number of servants. These were musicians, and by going round to various places to play, and receiving payment, they thereby kept him for the rest of his life.[11]

As well as being an irresponsible spendthrift, this Odoyevsky is also said to have been 'a notorious card-sharper',[12] which fact no doubt is not unconnected with Vladimir Fyodorovich's life-long aversion to cards, reflected in many of his writings; he ho doubt heard plenty of these notorious misdeeds during his childhood, from, one may surmise, his grandfather Sergey Ivanovich who lived until 1811, and with whom he spent his early childhood. Another son of the miscreant, Pyotr Ivanovich, played his own part in finishing off the family fortune by generous acts of philanthropy.[13]

The family heirs were, therefore, obliged to enter government service from necessity, being dependent on the accompanying salary for their livelihood. Vladimir's father, Fyodor Sergeyevich Odoyevsky, was, until his early death in 1808, director of the Moscow Assignation Bank and a State Councillor. Vladimir's failure to enter the service, between 1822 and 1826, seems certain to have caused family tensions (such tensions between literature and the service are reflected in his fiction); from his marriage in 1826, there was no question but that he would enter the service and be dependent on his salary for the rest of his life.

Little more is known of Odoyevsky's father; Vladimir's brief reminiscences can add little:

> He died when I was not yet five years old – consequently I have retained no recollection of him apart from travelling with him to our place at Kalistovo, outside Moscow, along the Troitskaya road, when he took me on his horse for a minute. He died after an operation to remove a stone [*kamennaya bolezn'*] which was carried out . . . rather disastrously.[14]

The one vital fact, as far as we are concerned, is his contracting of an unequal and unlikely marriage with a peasant girl named Yekaterina Alekseyevna Fillipova; we know nothing of the circumstances of this event.

There is one interesting, if brief, surviving description of Odoyevsky's mother, written by his friend V. P. Titov, who visited Odoyevsky at his mother's estate in the country during school-holidays in the early days of their long friendship, which dated from 1818. Soon after the death of her husband, Prince F. S. Odoyevsky, she had married a provincial official named Pavel Ivanovich Sechenov; Titov writes of them:

> I remember very well both her and Sechenov: he, to be quite frank, was an insignificant person, uneducated, having the sort of attitude which would not [illegible] inspire in a young [illegible] any particular respect or sympathy. She was a woman also of little upbringing, weak in body and character, but preserving noticeable traces of the beauty in which must be sought the sole blame for her first marriage, which was obviously a quite uneven match and, it may well be, more or less a fortuitous one.[15]

Titov's somewhat ungenerous attitude to the mother of his friend was coloured, apart from personal impressions and aristocratic prejudice, by 'the oral reminiscences of Princess L'vova' (a relative of the Odoyevskys, who may well have been not totally well disposed towards this intruder from the lower orders). In any event (and a slight element of speculation must enter here and there for want of hard evidence), Odoyevsky appears to have retained a reasonably close relationship with his mother, who lived until some time in the 1850s. Furthermore, her letters to him reveal a certain feel for literature, not to say critical acumen, which must have contributed in some significant measure to his own literary proclivities and gifts.[16]

Literary inclinations were, of course, also to be found on the Odoyevsky side of the family; the most striking instance is that of Alexander Ivanovich Odoyevsky, first cousin of Vladimir and future Decembrist poet (on their relations, see Chapter Six). Mention might also be made, however, of Ivan Ivanovich Odoyevsky (probably Vladimir's great-uncle), who translated the supposed Ossian's *The Death of Cuchullain* into Russian (via French) in 1807; his daughter, Varvara Ivanovna (Vladimir's aunt, who, four years older than he, married S. S. Lanskoy, future minister and Vladimir's future brother-in-law) Lanskaya (née Odoyevskaya), on the other hand, translated Zagoskin's novel *Yuriy Miloslavsky* into English in 1833, dedicating the publication to Sir Walter Scott.[17]

Following his father's death in 1808, Vladimir was placd under the joint guardianship of his great-uncle P. I. Odoyevsky, the philanthropist, and of his mother.[18] We gather from Titov's reminiscences that the young Vladimir lived partly with his mother and partly with his grandfather, Prince Sergey Ivanovich, until the death of the latter in 1811 (Princess Ye. V. L'vova suggested to Titov that the young Vladimir would have felt more at home with his grandfather than in the household of his mother); thereafter Vladimir probably spent more time with his mother, but lived also in Moscow with his other guardian.[19]

Titov never saw the old Prince Odoyevsky and neither, he claims, did any of his contemporaries. All these circumstances suggest strongly that the feelings of loneliness and alienation conveyed by Odoyevsky's early fiction of the 1820s were autobiographical in inspiration.[20]

'I was born prematurely at seven or eight months,' Odoyevsky records, 'and later they told me that at birth I was immediately wrapped in a hot hide, taken from a freshly-killed ram, and that my life cost the lives of at least thirty rams'; Titov was told that the infant Odoyevsky, a seven-month baby, was born so weak that his finger-nails had not formed.[21] Apart from the drastic action of one Richter, who held the young Odoyevsky when afflicted with whooping-cough to an open window in winter 'despite the horror of my mother', the delicate boy appears to have been suitably mollycoddled: a German nanny muffled him in his bed, burnt 'powders' and closed the bed-curtains tight, 'from which it always felt stuffy at night'; he was also subjected to 'bouillon baths' ('which I found very unpleasant' – and which were later to be visited upon the protagonist in *Sil'fida*) and 'white wine baths'.[22]

Odoyevsky considered that the circumstances of his birth made him 'more impressionable than other children' and the treatment accorded him left him with 'extreme fineness of skin, to which I am obliged for frequent attacks of rheumatism, constant sensitivity to cold and general muscular weakness in what is generally a healthy state of the organism'; he adds;

> At the age of 18 to 20, doctors prophesied consumption for me, but here I am past the age of 47, having survived pneumonia – and I am left only with an incurable, abnormal condition of the mucous membranes.[23]

Before leaving the period of Odoyevsky's childhood, we might pause for a moment to speculate on whether the eight-year-old Vladimir was in residence in Moscow around the beginning of September 1812, when the infant Alexander Herzen (aged five months) was temporarily settled, with his father (I. A. Yakovlyov) and family, having been displaced by the Napoleonic troops, in P. I. Odoyevsky's house.[24]

III Education and the 'Lyubomudry' Years

The young Odoyevsky was educated from 1816 to 1822, at the Moscow University *Blagorodnyy Pansion*, in its day (from 1779 until Nicholas I turned it into an official *gimnaziya* in 1830) the top educational establishment of Russia, on a par with the more famous Lycée at Tsarskoye Selo. Under the directorship of A. A. Prokopovich-Antonsky, it shared the best-known Moscow scholars of the day with Moscow University; teachers included I. I. Davydov (recently returned from Germany and steeped in romantic philosophy), M. G. Pavlov (Schellingian philosopher and physicist), and A. F. Merzlyakov (poet and classical aesthetician); later, the poet and translator S. Ye. Raich joined the staff. Students included, over the years, Zhukovsky, Griboyedov, Tyutchev, a number of prominent Decembrists and later Ogaryov and Lermontov. The education given was extremely broad for its day, with a strong artistic bias, involving demanding academic courses in philosphy, languages, literatures and translation, plus theology, psychology, logic and various sciences.[25]

Davydov mentioned Odoyevsky, in 1819, as an outstanding student, especially in the area of 'Russian compositions and translations'.[26] Sure enough, Odoyevsky graduated in 1822 with the *Pansion*'s gold medallion for the year; this achievement entitled him to entry to the government service at the tenth point in the table of ranks (of which privilege he did not avail himself before 1826). S. P. Shevyryov and Titov were the top students of the following batch.

Apart from the early philosophical influences, Odoyevsky's appreciation of Russian literature was cultivated during his *Pansion* years: Zhukovsky and Batyushkov were particularly popular as poets.[27] The *Pansion* had a rich library and issued its own journals and almanacs, in which Odoyevsky was able to make his literary debut; it also had philosophical and literary discussion circles and, through its Director (Prokopovich was the then president), an entrée to the Society for the Lovers of Russian Philology,[28] at whose meetings in the *Pansion* building, M. P. Pogodin recalls seeing Odoyevsky, from 1819 or 1820:

> The meetings, in the spirit of the times, were distinguished by a special solemnity. The President entrusted the senior pupils with the reception of the guests. As though it were now, I remember Odoyevsky: a well-formed, thinnish youth, good-looking, in a narrow-fitting tail-coat of a dark cherry colour; with a senatorial air

> of importance which even then distinguished his attractive appearance, he conducted the ladies, respectfully showing them to their appointed places.[29]

The *Pansion*, therefore, supplied Odoyevsky with a thorough grounding for his encyclopedic interests and literary proclivities and an extensive knowledge of foreign languages.[30] I. I. Zamotin has remarked that 'the questing of his youthful idealism did not find an answer in the family and social milieu which surrounded him';[31] this disillusion, which had found its expression, along with the importance of his relationship with his cousin Alexander, in the unpublished work *The Diary of a Student* (*Dnevnik studenta*), was channelled eventually into a passion for further study – particularly the study of philosophy. According to Ye. V. L'vova, Odoyevsky, even as a youth, always had a staid quality about him beyond his years, preferring the company of his elders whom he liked to engage in debate; some of these, such as his godfather, and L'vova's father, Prince Vladimir Semyonovich L'vov, were far from delighted by this precociousness, accounting its proponent a presumptuous and disorderly 'pedant'.[32] However, the suggestion, made by a number of commentators, of Odoyevsky in the first half of the 1820s playing the role of Griboyedov's Chatsky, the aloof and sharp-tongued social rebel, while an intriguing one, would seem to derive mainly from Odoyevsky's own literary protagonist of that period (named Arist – see Chapter One) and is not easily squared with memoir accounts of his personality in later years.[33]

The years 1822–5 saw Odoyevsky establish himself in the forefront of Russian intellectual life; for all the dilettantish quality of Russian cultural circles of that period, it must be said that Odoyevsky, in those years not involved either in government service or with the distractions of his many other later activities, was more of a full-time (one might almost say professional) littérateur for that brief, but vital, formative period than he was ever to be again. He published stories, apologues, reviews, philosophical essays and his first music reviews; he planned a number of more ambitious projects; and in 1824–5 he edited, with Vil'gel'm Kyukhel'beker, the four issues of the almanac *Mnemozina*.

In 1823 he began to frequent the 'Raich circle'.[34] The adherents included Pogodin and A. I. Koshelev (both of whom have left their reminiscences), Tyutchev, N. V. Putyata, Titov, Shevyryov and A. N. Murav'yov; in the lively discussions, aesthetics and literature took pride of place, but philosophy, history 'and other sciences, by stealth, from time to time dared to raise their voice'.[35] This was an open 'Society of friends', meeting twice weekly.

Membership of the various circles and groupings of Moscow intellectual life frequently overlapped to a considerable degree. Koshelev also recalls the grouping known as 'the youths of the Archive': he began service in the Moscow Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with Ivan Kireyevsky (about 1822); others starting at around the same time included Dmitriy and Aleksey Venevitinov, Titov, Shevyryov, N. A. Mel'gunov, S. Mal'tsov (later the only survivor of the destruction of the Russian mission in Persia, in which Griboyedov was killed), S. A. Sobolevsky, the two Meshchersky princes, Prince N. I. Trubestskoy, I. P. Ozerov 'and other well-educated youths'.[36] Odoyevsky was not an 'archival youth' (contrary to the impression of some commentators), but he was on very close terms with a number of them; many of their names will recur throughout this study.

The other society of the period, in which Odoyevsky played a leading part, and with which he is mainly associated, in this period of life, in the histories of Russian culture, was the Society of Wisdom-loving (*Obshchestvo lyubomudriya* – hereafter the 'Lyubomudry'). This group, Koshelev informs us, met '*secretly*, and of its existence we told *no one*'; the members were Odoyevsky, Ivan Kireyevsky, Dmitriy Venevitinov, N. M. Rozhalin and Koshelev himself; occasional (or fringe) members were Titov, Mel'gunov, Shevyryov and Pogodin.[37] The meetings took place in Odoyevsky's study; Odoyevsky chaired the proceedings and Venevitinov (the secretary) did much of the talking. German philosophy dominated the discussions (Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Oken) and members read their own philosophical compositions. The society was hastily dissolved following the events of 14 December 1825.

Talk of new journals was in the air at the Raich circle; Pogodin recalls:

> Our journal, however, did not come into being. Polevoy, encouraged by Prince Vyazemsky, was already thinking up the [*Moscow*] *Telegraph*, and Odoyevsky, when he met Kyukhel'beker, announced the following year the publication of *Mnemozina*, an almanac in four books.[38]

Mnemozina was conceived largely as a vehicle for Lyubomudry ideas; however, it also attracted contributions from leading writers of the time (Pushkin, Griboyedov, Vyazemsky, Yazykov, Denis Davydov and Polevoy) as well as from the editors (who contributed about half the

copy to each issue) and Shevyryov. It represents a landmark in Russian cultural development, but this was recognized only subsequently. It was the first journal to tackle seriously philosophical and theoretical problems, but its scholarly 'professorish' tone and elitist approach held little appeal for the Russian readership of the day, accustomed to the more low-brow publications of Bulgarin and Grech.[39] *Mnemozina* also allowed itself, rather unwisely, to become embroiled in a somewhat degrading bout of polemics with the publishers just named;[40] this was but the beginning of a long period of bitter personal relations which will be alluded to again elsewhere. The fourth issue of *Mnemozina* had to be delayed until well into 1825; it then folded – largely for financial reasons. At the time of its demise, the almanac had precisely 157 subscribers, of whom just over half were residents of Moscow; many were leading literary figures and many others were friends or relatives of the editors (the journal *Polyarnaya zvezda* [*The Polar Star*], edited by Ryleyev and Bestuzhev, had around 1500 subscribers, while the publications of Bulgarin and Grech enjoyed a readership well into the thousands).

The writer and memoirist I. I. Panayev, who did not know Odoyevsky until later, maintains that Odoyevsky's 'spirits fell' after the folding of *Mnemozina*:

> Odoyevsky in the 20s was editor of a journal, together with V. Kyukhel'beker. He promised to become a serious literary figure, but after the closure of *Mnemozina* and his move to Petersburg his literary energy weakened. . . . Many of his relatives and friends were exiled. . . . The blow of 14 December resounded over the whole of Russia: everyone took a grip on themselves and moderated. In Petersburg Odoyevsky continued to engage in literature, but as nothing more than a dilettante.[41]

Despite the literal truth of Panayev's remarks, Odoyevsky's main literary accomplishments lay still ahead of him; nevertheless, the two events referred to by Panayev effectively brought to a close the early phase of Odoyevsky's career and the first Moscow phase of his life.

IV Marriage and Government Service

Odoyevsky's relationship to the Decembrist events is discussed in Chapter Five. However, coincidentally or otherwise, a completely new era in his life began in 1826: he married, he entered government service, and he moved to St Petersburg, which was to remain his abode for the next thirty-five years.

His life over this period can be said to have been shared, for the first decade and a half, evenly or unevenly as the case may be, between the service and literary pursuits; thereafter literary activity assumed a lesser importance – and indeed virtually ceased for a considerable period – as the encroachments of philanthropic and pedagogical affairs increased. Odoyevsky approached everything he did extremely conscientiously; thus he was always overworked, weary and delicate of health, while very many of the countless projects in all conceivable areas of his multifarious range of interests remained unrealized.

The niece of Prince P. I. Odoyevsky (and, therefore, the aunt of Vladimir) Varvara Ivanovna, had married Sergey Stepanovich Lanskoy (a future minister of Alexander II).[42] In March of 1826 the engagement was announced between Vladimir Odoyevsky and Ol'ga Stepanovna Lanskaya (Lanskoy's sister).[43] Odoyevsky informed his mother, in a letter dated 10 August, that permission for the marriage had now been received from the Empress ('as a fitting reward for our firmness and patience').[44] What story may be behind this comment, we do not know. On 17 September 1826, Ol'ga Stepanovna became the Princess Odoyevskaya.

Nothing would appear to be known about the circumstances of the match, romantic or otherwise. We may only remark that the family connection already existing between the Odoyevskys and the Lanskoys may suggest that the choice made was less than a wholly imaginative one (though this in itself would have been by no means unusual in the circles of the Russian nobility). Furthermore the age difference (Ol'ga Stepanovna was born in 1797 and outlived Vladimir by three years) of some six or seven years (in 1826, Vladimir Odoyevsky was still only twenty-two) may suggest a connection with the remarks of Ye. V. L'vova, mentioned above; by choosing an older woman, Vladimir may have been continuing an urge to make himself seem older than his years; if so, this may be linked to the less than satisfactory family circumstances of his childhood. The couple had no children.

The available evidence suggests that the marriage was probably a happy one in the early stages, and perhaps again later on; however, there were certainly tensions and stormy passages in the middle.

On his arrival in Petersburg in late September 1826, Odoyevsky wrote to Sobolevsky in Moscow, expressing his disappointment in just missing Griboyedov and exhorting him to:

> Tell him about my marriage, describe to him the woman who alone has had the courage to understand me, to take a hand in me, a woman with a lucid mind and a warm heart – in a word, tell him everything you know, tell him what I cannot myself express in words.[45]

Venevitinov, Odoyevsky's closest friend at the time, sent the following description in December of that year to Sobolevsky:

> I haven't forgotten that I promised to describe to you Odoyevsky's daily life. . . . You should see him; he's like a fish in water, caressing his wife like a lover, paying court to the ladies like a suitor. She is a very cheerful and sweet woman in everyone's eyes, so what must she be in the eyes of our perceptive Odoyevsky? You arrive to see them in the mornings; they sit next to each other like a pair of doves, joking and kissing; I just laugh. It's rather an amusing scene. You arrive in the evening; she pours the tea, he entertains his ladies. It should be said that he is in great favour at his relatives' house, and receives people in the evenings.[46]

In a joint letter with Venevitinov to friends in Moscow, Odoyevsky joked to Titov: 'the children are asking for porridge and the wife – for I won't say what'.[47] The joke may have been wearing slightly thin, however, by 1829, when the composer A. N. Verstovsky wrote to Odoyevsky, adding as a PS 'kiss the children'.[48] The following ecstatic impressions of the Odoyevskys were written in 1832 by A. G. Lavalle:

> Pr. Od. is younger than his wife, whom he adores. . . . He spends a lot of time on literature and even more on his service duties, which he considers sacred. . . . The Princess is an excellent woman, very pleasant in society, with a fine spirit. She lives only for her husband. This union of all there is of the very highest – of mind and spirit – enchants and delights me.[49]

Ol'ga Stepanovna is said to have looked after Odoyevsky 'with a maternal tenderness'.[50] However, there were limits to this, as when Pogodin wrote to her in 1831, suggesting that she 'take her husband in

hand'; this not only provoked a reply from Odoyevsky that an irregular lifestyle was part of the Russian nature, but from Ol'ga Stepanovna the riposte: 'the more you scold Vladimir, the more disorderly a life he will lead'.[51]

Nevertheless, a considerable amount of scolding must have taken place over the decade of the 1830s, justifiably or otherwise, for Odoyevsky to have written in French the following pompous epistle, addressed to his wife in the third person:

> Considering that life is too short for suffering, that, moreover, the duties of service and of social position impose obligations on us which demand for their accomplishment peace and quiet during the day and rest during the night; that, besides, alterations in domestic routine, arrived at from a case of the simple question of one's inner life to the case of noisy scenes, cannot at a certain age fail to bring upon us ineradicable ridicule, I have given myself my word of honour that if once more all my efforts to prevent such scenes should be ineffective, and should my wife allow herself once more the kind of monomania which causes her to run barefooted and in her nightdress for half the night around the entire house and to wake the whole household as well as the neighbours with her cries and imprecations, preventing me from working by day and reposing by night after the fatigues of the day – I have given myself, I say, my word of honour, certain as I am of the justice of my claims to peace and domestic quiet, to quit this house in the course of the 24 hours following such a scene, leaving my wife full mistress of the abode, and to transport myself to some place wheresoever I may devote myself calmly to the occupations which are imposed on me by my social status, abjuring the impardonable weakness which up to the present has made me sacrifice my duties to the monomania of my wife which only grows worse by dint of this same weakness. Having once left this house – it will be *never* to return.
> Spb.
>
> Pr[ince] V. Odoyevsky[52]
>
> 5 October 1840

This letter, the fact and the manner of its writing (and, indeed, the language in which it is written – a salutary reminder that even a writer who struggled to uphold the use of the Russian language as a literary and a conversational medium conducted much of his private life in a foreign tongue) afford a fascinating glimpse into an intimate rela-

tionship of which little is known. Whether the letter was even delivered it is, of course, impossible to say. Certainly there would appear to be no record of a dramatic exit from the Odoyevsky apartment.

We shall return shortly to further consideration of the personalities of the Odoyevskys, in the light of surviving evidence.

We now turn to a brief outline of Odoyevsky's career in the government service.[53] Odoyevsky entered the service on 5 July 1826, assigned to work at the Deputies' Assembly of the Moscow Nobility. He soon moved to St Petersburg and from 17 October 1826 was appointed to the Censorship Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a year later becoming Secretary to the General Meeting of the Censorship Committee. In 1828 he became section-head in the Department of Spiritual Matters Related to Foreign Creeds [!] and shortly afterwards Librarian to the Committee of Foreign Censorship, a post he held for several years. In 1833 he was made a member of the General Meeting of the Economic Department and served on diverse committees and commissions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, looking into such matters as the development of a new fish glue, economy stoves and mechanical kitchen ranges. He moved in 1838 to the Ministry of State Domains, serving as an educational consultant and heading a committee on children's homes, and was appointed to the Second Department (not to be confused with the Third, but concerned from 1826 with the codification of law) of His Majesty's Own Chancery. In 1846 he managed to transfer from his main post at the Second Department to the quiet backwaters of the Imperial Public Library and the Rumyantsev Museum, of which institutions he became Deputy-Director and Director respectively. Odoyevsky thus held an extremely varied range of posts, often two or more simultaneously. Some of these official activities will be mentioned again in Chapters Four and Five.

Overwork and the complaint of lack of time to pursue his true interests and projects of real importance to him was, not surprisingly, a constant refrain throughout Odoyevsky's working life, beginning quite soon after the establishment of his fixed Petersburg lifestyle. In a letter to N. A. Polevoy (of late 1828 or early 1829), he lamented:

> In my sphere, into which fate has thrown me, I am often bored and tormented by work which is frequently constrained, almost always dry and usually fruitless. I recall with sadness that time when I dedicated my mental activity to the arts.[54]

The composer Verstovsky was given a similar story in 1828. The younger Lavalle daughter, Aleksandra Kossakovskaya, reported in 1833 on the current lean patch in Russian literature (due largely to Pushkin's 'incomprehensible' laziness, following his marriage) to her sister in Siberia, adding: 'Odoyevsky promises us a few more stories of the *Variegated Tales* type, but he does not have too much time to get on with them, since he is very busy in the service.'[55] Odoyevsky finished a letter to Shevyryov, in 1836, with the words:

> Farewell, I've no time to write, snowed under with work: I carry on my shoulders the *Journal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs*, and now they are sticking me on a Learned Committee of the Ministry of State Domains. Well, you know that now I'm hardly a literary man at all, but rather a chemist and a mechanic.[56]

Odoyevsky's plight was not, however, universally recognized: P. A. Pletnyov, in 1840, advised his constant correspondent, Ya. K. Grot, who was awaiting a story from Odoyevsky for a Finnish collection, not to rely on it in view of the latter's 'drowsiness', and further reports, after a midday visit to Odoyevsky: 'indeed, he was sprawled on cushions with his cat'.[57] Odoyevsky's close friend of that period, Countess Yevdokiya ('Dodo') Rostopchina, the poetess and authoress of society tales, on the other hand, remembered him from the salubrious environs of Pyatigorsk in May 1839 with an 'if only you were here too' letter: 'But you, meanwhile, are stifling behind your pen and papers – official ones at that; you are bored in deserted Petersburg and wasting your poor self away over a thousand unpleasant and annoying troubles.'[58] Odoyevsky himself considered the question, in a jotting dated October 1840, and came up with an answer:

> Sometimes I am asked why I work so assiduously since, in the last analysis, people are convinced that I am not ambitious: Ladies and Gentlemen, I do it: firstly, because of a thing which is completely unknown to you and which is called conscience and, secondly, to have no need of any of you.[59]

Odoyevsky noted his ability to do without sleep when immersed in work and to take brief naps during the day; although this facility may well have been 'highly important in the anxious and back-breaking life' which he led ('*. . . v zhizni trevozhnoy i chernorabochey*'),[60] it may well also have contributed to domestic tensions.

The 1831 cholera epidemic Odoyevsky observed with a horror strongly tinged with curiosity, describing the Boccaccio-type sores, the jolly faces of the coffin-makers counting their money and the crowds of people by the churches 'who had discovered the art of making devotion look repulsive'; all in all there was a Walter Scott novel written in the faces.[61] When the 1854 cholera epidemic occurred, in which he was a sufferer, Odoyevsky treated it as an opportunity for moral and spiritual self-examination, worked and dictated from his bed and, when he felt all was lost, wrote of his indifference to life and inclination for death, observing that it was a golden opportunity to bid farewell to various scoundrels and tricksters: 'that is the oblique good which scoundrels bring to this world; they help honest people to die more peacefully'.[62]

In the 1830s, Odoyevsky played a prominent part in the expansion of literary journalism, particularly by his involvement in the founding of *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) and the refurbishing of *Otechestvennyye zapiski* (*Notes of the Fatherland*). He had also been due to contribute to Ivan Kireyevsky's *Yevropeyets* (*The European*, abruptly closed down, soon after its opening in 1832), and in 1835 had signed an application, along with Vyazemsky, Gogol', Zhukovsky and Pushkin, to set up a new publication to be called 'The Northern Spectator' ('Severnyy zritel''), for which permission was not granted.[63] He enjoyed close relations in this period with the Pushkin Pleiad,[64] with Gogol', and later with Lermontov, as well as with Glinka, Dargomyzhsky and the Viel'gorsky brothers and other prominent figures in literary and musical circles. Many of these points and personalities will be dealt with in some detail in subsequent chapters.

The 1830s and the beginning of the 1840s were a particularly hectic period in Odoyevsky's life, during which time his literary output, his government committee work, his journalistic activity and the social and cultural life of the Odoyevsky salon were all in full swing. Foreign visitors frequented the gatherings and left their impressions; the French writer, Hippolyte Auger, had been told of Odoyevsky: 'An excellent musician, you always find him in time . . . at the piano', and recalls how (about 1840):

> And indeed, one evening when he had invited me to take tea with him, he made music until daybreak. A Monsieur Opotchinine, an officer in the imperial navy who possessed a charming voice and the great art of charming the ears, did not allow us to notice the time pass from the night before to the next day.[65]

In 1842 Odoyevsky obtained four months' leave and travelled to Europe for, it would seem, the first time; Pletnyov wrote to Grot on May 29: 'Odoyevsky is soon leaving by the dry route with his wife for Germany and Italy for treatment (God knows for what!).'[66] The main event of the trip, at least as far as the biographer is concerned, would appear to have been the meeting with Schelling (described in Chapter Two). On the return journey, stranded for a while in a blizzard at a post house, Odoyevsky took to reflecting on nature, philosophy and life:

> Once what a wide scope there would have been for my pride! And now what a sad feeling! . . . to be certain that one must sell one's talent and double it, and meanwhile be afraid of squandering it in vain. . . . Oh! narrow is your path; inexpressible! – and people think my life is all roses! . . . Phew, how foul you are, human clothing.[67]

Odoyevsky finally produced his three-volume collection of 'Complete Works' in 1844 (*Sochineniya v tryokh chast'yakh*). The collection had been promised for several years; one may assume that the delays were caused by a combination of excess work and procrastination plus, in the latter stages, illness.[68] Many works were not included, especially from the early period, and the reception given the collection was mixed. Odoyevsky's career as a writer of fiction had now, to all intents and purposes, come to a premature close. Educational activities, particularly the production of *Rural Reading* (*Sel'skoye chteniye*), and the administration of the philanthropic enterprise, the Society for Visiting the Poor of St Petersburg, took over as Odoyevsky's most time-consuming occupations. Attempts to link the cessation of his fiction writing with observations of depression and philosophical pessimism, such as that noted above, do not really stand up to examination.

A somewhat bizarre interest of Odoyevsky's, which came to prominence in the mid 1840s, was that of culinary science. 'Science' is the appropriate word here, as Odoyevsky considered gastronomy to be a branch of chemistry, distilling his sauces in retorts. Memoirists have left a record of what this meant to the Odoyevskys' dinner guests; V. A. Sollogub recalls, with an acute absence of relish, the monthly occasions when Odoyevsky would regale his victims with his latest dishes:

> and our stomachs would writhe, even in advance; at these dinners there would be served in alimentation some sort of chemical sauces,

> invented by the host himself, which were so revolting that even now, almost forty years later, my heart contracts at just the recollection of them.[69]

In the period 1844–6, Odoyevsky published a number of gastronomical pieces in *Literaturnaya gazeta* and *Otechestvennyye zapiski* under the name of 'Mister Puff, doctor of encyclopedias and other sciences', covering such topics as the preservation of meat, eggs, greens, the pickling of vegetables and fruits for winter, and old-style Russian pies; recipes featured, as did such concepts as table etiquette and 'kitchen morality', comprising such salutory declarations as: 'What is needed, all the same, for a good dinner? What is needed are conscientiousness, good management and a little enlightenment.'[70] Doctor Puff (the name probably derives from E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Kater Murr*) suddenly disappeared from the scene, to the distress of *Otechestvennyye zapiski*'s editor, A. A. Krayevsky, to be replaced by his 'pupil' (*'ad"yunkt* Skaramushev').[71]

In 1846 Odoyevsky, along with his job as Director of the Rumyantsev Museum, acquired there an apartment. In the same year he bought a modest country estate, named Rongas, in Finland, which, his financial position being what it was, he would let out when he was not in residence.[72] Here he would spend the summers, attempting 'to break the strings which hold me tied to Petersburg'; loath to put pen to paper, he would study insects under the microscope and dream of establishing a new system of botanical classification; he wrote from Vyborg in 1850 to an unknown correspondent: 'The Petersburg threshing-machine has worn me down and plagued me beyond the extent of human patience . . . it's time to consider a salary-less existence in Finland.'[73]

Odoyevsky's acquaintances did not tend to have complete confidence, by the 1840s, in any extra projects which he might undertake. Pletnyov wrote to Grot in 1841 of a plan by Krayevsky and Odoyevsky to compile a collection of all writers to have mentioned Russia, from the Arabs to the Swedes, of all centuries, in the original and in translation: 'these people are for ever up to their ears in enterprise and debts'.[74] In 1849, of Odoyevsky's proposal to save the publishing house 'Illyustratsiya', Grot, for his part, told Pletnyov:

> I cannot believe that Odoyevsky's enterprise could be successful. How could he conduct a business which demands constant attention and thoroughness! Even without that, he cannot manage to deal with all his own affairs.[75]

Odoyevsky had also become unusually short-tempered during this strenuous period; in 1847, Pletnyov reports on strained relations between Odoyevsky and the prickly memoirist, F. F. Vigel' (which had never been smooth): 'Odoyevsky and Vigel' can't stand one another, and even curse at each other – something which has never occurred before with Odoyevsky, under any circumstance.'[76]

In an interim assessment of his life, dating from the early 1850s, Odoyevsky remarks that he had committed the blunder of attempting to do something in this world, had taught art to do something, but had forgotten the art of blowing his own trumpet. He observes that he had had the good fortune to achieve quite a lot ('not counting the failures'): he was the first to attack scholasticism and classicism, he had spelt out the significance of Russia in the world ('which now many subsist on'), had helped put out many an edition; in the administrative realm he points to the 1828 censorship statute, authorial copyright ('which no one thought of before me'), the Nobility Elections Statute, the company shares statute, the life insurance society ('which everyone laughed at') and the children's homes ('which no one had ever wished to believe were possible'). He also mentioned projects then still in progress: the Society for Visiting the Poor, the Mariiskiy Institute, his 'dry' pedagogical work, books for the people ('which no one had thought of') etc. etc. . . . ('I forget them all myself'). All this was undertaken, not for any thanks it might bring, 'but to attempt to placate that worm which sits in my chest'. He concludes: 'Am I really not allowed a spark of self-esteem in this world? Is there after all a certain tie between mother and child, a tie for life?'[77]

Much had changed, both in Odoyevsky's life and in Russian society, by 1850. The surviving liberals, and moderate conservatives even, of the Pushkin period felt the political and social atmosphere to be stultifying. Pletnyov wrote (this time to Zhukovsky) in that year:

> Odoyevsky, as I informed you, is lost to our circle, having transferred his allegiance to a new circle of people, calling themselves a society for visiting the poor. Even I more willingly stay at home in the family rather than seek society. Pure radiant literature bound all of us together and gave us life. Now it is no more. All interests are turned to mastery of getting rich and being profligate. Obviously the good old days are never going to come back to us.[78]

V The Odoyevsky Personality

We pause now to see what picture emerges of the personality of the Odoyevskys from the letters and memoirs of their contemporaries. Let us first turn to Ol'ga Stepanovna.

The most favourable comments on Princess Odoyevskaya tend to come, not surprisingly, from Odoyevsky's oldest and closest friends. Pogodin, who probably scarcely saw her until the couple returned to live in Moscow in the 1860s, describes her as Odoyevsky's beloved, 'who became his good genius, guardian, keeper and wet-nurse' for the rest of his life; it should also be remembered that these reminiscences were delivered at a commemorative evening of the Society of the Lovers of Russian Philology (in 1869, shortly after Odoyevsky's death, while Ol'ga Stepanovna was still alive).[79] Similarly, Sollogub remembers her as the perfect salon hostess, against whom Glinka's attempt at a salon had to be measured: 'what he needed was a nanny, a hostess, very nearly a sick-nurse, as was the unforgettable Princess Ol'ga Stepanovna, that model of goodness and devotion, and not a woman of the world.'[80] An exception to this tendency would seem to be another very old friend, Ivan Kireyevsky; in a letter of 1854 (by which time Odoyevsky had long had serious differences with the Slavophiles), in which he is anxious to patch up a quarrel and assure Odoyevsky of his continued friendship, he adds:

> I ask you also to tell the Princess that her feelings towards me do not change one iota mine towards her, and tomorrow when they sing in church: 'and let us forgive those who trespass against us', I shall be thinking of her with a feeling of most sincere favour.[81]

It might be added that Gogol', Lermontov and Turgenev would all appear to have been on good terms with Ol'ga Stepanovna.

The view taken by more casual visitors to the Odoyevsky circle of the Princess tends not always to be so favourable. The German musician, Wilhelm Lenz, referring to his visits of 1833, mentions Ol'ga Stepanovna pouring the tea herself (her tea-pouring is made much of by memoirists, as we see in Chapter Six) and informs us that 'she was called *la belle Créole*, since her complexion was like that of a Creole girl and she had once been renowned for her beauty'.[82] Yuriy Arnol'd, the musician, comments that the Lanskoys were descended from Tatar khans and that Odoyevskaya, combining ancient descents, felt it incumbent on her to preserve 'all the purity of her aristocratic

resplendency'; an intelligent and educated nineteenth-century woman, proud of her husband's lineage and his 'little branch of the laurel grove of the Russian Parnassus', she at the same time sought to preserve him from the idea of equality with all those called by the muse: this was her real outlook, Arnol'd maintains, despite her reputation as 'the most tolerant, affectionate, humane and courteous *lady aristocrat*'.[83] The division of the Odoyevsky salon into the cultural wing and the society wing, and Odoyevskaya's attendant snobbishness, as alleged by Arnol'd and A. Ya. Panayeva, is elaborated upon in Chapter Six. Pletnyov, too, reports the Princess's replying to Grot's suggestion of providing her with a Finnish lady's companion with the retort: 'I hate companions. That breed disgusts me.'[84]

It would be intriguing to learn more of the relations between Princess Odoyevskaya and Countess Rostopchina, whom Pletnyov considered a 'coquette'; the one clue is the reported remarks of Rostopchina in 1840 with reference to a decorative box (evidently made by herself) which she had given to Odoyevsky: 'your wife doesn't like my work! Your wife is a monster!'[85] V. S. Serova (wife of the composer), visiting the Odoyevskys in the 1860s refers to Ol'ga Stepanovna as 'a rather obese personage [*tuchnaya osoba*], rarely parted from her armchair and her ever-present lap-dog'.[86]

Of course, there were people who just did not like Ol'ga Stepanovna, or who disapproved of her from their own social or political standpoint. F. F. Vigel' (whose dislike of Odoyevsky is referred to here on more than one occasion) would no doubt have enjoyed telling Hippolyte Auger: 'Prince Odoevski is an elegant personage; Monsieur Blondoff believes him to be very capable and the princess, his wife, claims that he is not: it is not our business.'[87] In Slavophile circles, the fact of Belinsky's being presented to Princess Odoyevskaya appears to have occasioned a certain mirth; and finally, the radicals: Nekrasov writes to Ivan Turgenev in 1856 of confusion in the Odoyevsky household over the fate of a Turgenev letter to Odoyevsky:

> The Princess came in and announced that *she* had recently received a letter from you . . . 'such a charming letter' (her own words) . . . Oh, you crackpot, Turgenev! Why on earth were you writing to that silly woman?[88]

While Pogodin's somewhat hagiographic statement, referred to above, undoubtedly contains an element of truth, it is only one side of the story and, as we have seen, the story did not please everyone. V. I.

Sakharov may well have placed Ol'ga Stepanovna in something of a nutshell by terming her 'an imperious and ambitious woman'.[89]

I. I. Sreznevsky records a visit to the Odoyevskys in 1839; apart from mentioning their involvement in the founding of children's homes (in which Ol'ga Stepanovna may have been the driving force – seven had been formed by 1839, housing up to 1000 children, aged three to nine), commenting on the 'rich library' and their collection of pictures, he left the following description of the couple:

> . . . the Princess comes in, looking something like a swarthy fur hat. The Prince, in a black, second-hand dressing-gown-cum-frock-coat, in a dark cap beneath which another white one was visible, in all of which he looked very like a German sausage-maker – he was also thin, hamster-like and ordinary; his face, though, was nice, kind and wise.[90]

This picture, for all its rather extravagant imagery, is nevertheless not discordant with other impressions. I. I. Panayev writes: 'Odoyevsky's very attire struck me: the black silk pointed cap on his head and a long frock-coat to his heels made him look like some sort of medieval astrologist or alchemist.'[91]

Panayev's feelings towards Odoyevsky were ambivalent: affectionate, yet tinged with mockery at times; nevertheless, he left perhaps the fullest account of Odoyevsky and his gatherings. A. P. Pyatkovsky, however, whose admiration for Odoyevsky cannot be doubted, also recalls at their first meeting, in 1860: 'the rather small figure of the host, dressed in some sort of eccentric costume with a little cap on his head and in large old-fashioned spectacles, worn on his forehead'. What would have seemed in anyone else pretentious eccentricity, in this case 'harmonized fully with his actual originality of personality'.[92] Panayev leaves the following personal description:

> When I was at Odoyevsky's for the first time he made a strong impression on me. His attractive, sympathetic appearance, the mysterious tone in which he spoke about everything under the sun, the concern in the movements of the man, preoccupied by something serious, the constantly pensive, meditative expression of the face – all this could not fail to affect me. . . . I felt an inner fever when he started talking to me.[93]

Yuriy Arnol'd leaves quite a full, if idiosyncratic, depiction (relating to the 1840s):

> Odoyevsky was not broad in the shoulders, but generally frail-looking. In order not to look younger than his wife, who was six years older than he, one mutual acquaintance whispered to me, he always walks rather bent, with his head drooping, as if from tiredness. His hands and legs are pure-bred: small and narrow. His face is similar to the type of the famous old portaits of the Grand Princes of Vladimir and Moscow . . . that same wide large forehead, straight nose and small mouth with the thickish, good-natured, smiling lips; except for the dark brown, shot almost with black, smooth hair, especially at the temples. The eyes are blue–grey, intelligent but not peaceful enough, rather they timidly, almost timorously and absently look round . . . his flat and rather hurried speech sounds some note of indecision, lack of self-assurance; the timbre of his tenor voice in itself is pleasant, affectionate. But the absence of any intonation in his speech, when he speaks for long, produces in one a certain languor which, of course, furthers the note of haste already mentioned.[94]

These traits do not go, Arnol'd considers, with his general character, which consists rather of honour, staightforwardness, generosity and 'angelic patience'. The most strikingly, no doubt idealized description comes from the German traveller, König, relating to 1837:

> If you were to visit Petersburg, you would certainly meet in society especially in its upper circles a handsome young man of medium height with expressive blue eyes, a pale face and black hair; he is elegantly dressed, takes but little part in life's distractions, looking somewhat absent-mindedly and sometimes filled with Byronic derision for his surroundings. If you look closely, you will notice that his absent-mindedness is explained by his inner concentration, the reverie which at times transforms his face. It is Prince Odoyevsky.[95]

V. P. Titov referred to what he termed Odoyevsky's 'feminine gentleness of heart'; F. I. Timiryazev talked of his 'feminine-tender nature'; while I. Ye. Betsky commented in 1842: 'there's something too *feminine* about Odoyevsky'.[96] This feature, no doubt connected in part at least with Odoyevsky's sensitive skin, must have provided him, for quite some time at least (and perhaps contrary to his own efforts),