

Introduction: Romanticism and the *Library for Reading*

Gogol finishes the first volume of his *Dead Souls* (1841) with a question that he doesn't answer: "Whither art thou soaring away to, then, Russia?" He continues, "Give me thy answer! But Russia gives none. With a wondrous ring does the jingle bell trill; the air, rent to shreds, thunders and turns to wind; all things on earth fly past, and eyeing it askance, all the other peoples and nations stand aside and give it the right of way."¹

Russia as a troika speeding off into unknown space, an empty form ever awaiting content, is a uniquely Gogolian image that captures both the eternal question of Russian identity and a Romantic vision of the sublime. It is also one last expression of the negativity that defines *Dead Souls*, beginning with the description of the hero on the very first page. Chichikov, we are told, "was not handsome, but he wasn't bad to look at either," "he was neither too stout nor too thin," and while "you couldn't say that he was old . . . still he wasn't what you might call any too young either." As the narrator concludes the nondescription that opens the book: "His arrival created no stir whatsoever in the town of N—and was not coupled with any remarkable event."²

My own exploration of Romantic readers and writers, like Gogol's, is framed with a series of "nots." While this book intends to make large statements about European Romanticism generally, my starting point is not located in a more central part of Europe—Germany or France, for example—but on its margins, in Russia. Even within this periphery I have not

chosen to focus on a well-known writer like Gogol or Pushkin, nor have I organized my work around a genre well established in the Romantic canon such as the historical novel or lyric poetry. Instead I have taken for my hero the little-known Osip Ivanovich Senkovskii, and for my quintessentially Romantic form the literary periodical he edited, the *Library for Reading*.

Just like Gogol's fictional Chichikov, the real O. I. Senkovskii was a slippery character with a clear affinity for borders and border crossings. The future Russian writer was born in Poland in 1800 as Józef-Julian Sękowski, a scion of the minor nobility endowed with little money but a great deal of intellectual aptitude. Sękowski's prodigious intelligence and his mother's contacts were enough to bring him to the University of Wilno (Vilnius) at an early age, where he soon joined the Brotherhood of Scamps, a literary and philosophical society that included many of the leading Polish intellectuals of the day. There he showed something of his future journalistic prowess by contributing pieces to the Brotherhood's satirical journal, the *Sidewalk News*. Sękowski's actual course work, however, focused on Oriental languages, and upon his graduation in 1819 he went on to study and travel in the Middle East for another two years, financed in part by the Russian mission in Turkey. His return from the Middle East at the age of twenty-two brought Sękowski to St. Petersburg, where he promptly accepted two posts, the first as translator at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the second as professor of both Turkish and Arabic languages at St. Petersburg University, and he embarked on what promised to be a brilliant academic career.

But Sękowski's interest in literature never left him, and throughout the 1820s he published a number of popular translations and free adaptations "from the Arabic" followed by satirical pieces in the spirit of the *Sidewalk News*, as Józef-Julian Sękowski, Polish Orientalist, gradually transformed himself into Osip Ivanovich Senkovskii, Russian man of letters. In 1834 the widely respected publisher and bookseller A. F. Smirdin ensured Senkovskii's place in the history of Russian literature when he asked Senkovskii to serve as editor of the *Library for Reading* at the unprecedented salary of 15,000 rubles a year. Often under a variety of pseudonyms, Senkovskii was also a major contributor to the journal, publishing articles and reviews on an astonishing array of topics that ranged from science and military history to fiction and literary criticism. With Senkovskii at its helm, the *Library for Reading* was either a great success or an utter disgrace, depending on

the criteria one adopts. While quickly achieving a subscription rate several times that of its nearest competitors, the journal was also widely accused of doing so only by appealing to the least sophisticated elements in the reading public. The heyday of the *Library for Reading*, and of Senkovskii, was the 1830s, as by the 1840s ill health had forced Senkovskii to withdraw partly and then, in 1848, entirely from the enterprise; Senkovskii also gave up his professorship in 1847. In poor health, he soon found himself living in obscurity and, due in part to some poor investments, in actual poverty, a situation only partly rectified in 1856 when the journal *Son of the Fatherland* invited Senkovskii to submit a series of feuilletons under his most famous byline, Baron Brambeus. Senkovskii's almost instant return to literary prominence was cut short, however, by his premature death in 1858.³

I have chosen to begin my work with this apparently unlikely figure and the journal he produced because the play of center and periphery on many different levels is fundamental to my conception of Romanticism. My broad aim in this book is to show European Romanticism generally to be a construction (or constructing) of fragments and ever-shifting borders, a sort of dance around the margins of an apparently empty center that can be either a sublime locus of potentiality or just that, empty. With their own complicated marginality, Senkovskii and his *Library for Reading* are wonderfully effective tools for explicating this Romanticism in all its possibilities and perils. The two together also serve more specific purposes. To restore Senkovskii to the Russian literary world he once ruled is to change the contours of that world both from within and from without. In Senkovskii's presence we will find that we have to change our understanding of what Russian Romantic literature in the 1830s looks like and why. Perhaps more important, as an insider who was also an outsider to his own literary tradition, Senkovskii also suggests a particular approach to the question of Russian identity and of Russia's relationship to the West.

This question found especially involved expression precisely in the Romantic period, when a rising Russian literature engaged in a highly self-conscious appropriation of a Western European literature, which was in turn marked by a valorization of national originality. While Pushkin could laughingly ask if the hero of his *Eugene Onegin* (1821–31; 1833) was not really just a Muscovite in Childe Harold's cloak, his sublime nonchalance was very much his own. Most of his compatriots were made far more anxious by the fact of their obvious and wholesale borrowing, and the possibility of

the inclusion of Russia in the circle of Europe was an issue hotly debated throughout the 1820s and 1830s.

It is not my aim to present Russia as somehow more central to the European experience as the Russian Romantics themselves often did, either by recasting the borders of Europe or by adopting some sort of teleological stance whereby last shall be first. The example of Senkovskii instead lends itself to the argument that in the Romantic context there is no center, only margins.⁴ Romantic nationalism is a privileging of difference, as various peoples across Europe—from the Germans and the British to the Russians and the Poles—took a leaf from Herder's book and argued for the value of their literature not because it was Greek or Roman or even neoclassical French, but simply because it was theirs, the expression of their own national identity. In one sense, then, each Romantic nation becomes central to itself. Yet when every nation is central to itself, it is also peripheral to all others, and a self-conscious play of self and other as native and foreign finds many different expressions in Romanticism. We might note, for example, the use of dialect in Scott's *Waverley* novels and Gogol's *Dikan'ka* tales, or the Orientalism that marks any number of Romantic writers, from Goethe, Byron, and Hugo to Pushkin and Lermontov.

In other words, if Russian Romantics are concerned with the apparently shifting outlines of their own identity, a certain self-conscious fluidity also marks Romantic conceptions of nationality in general, and our awareness of the latter necessarily complicates our understanding of the former. Certainly if we start with the assumption that the Romantic process of national identity formation was never actually intended to be completed, then notions of originality and authenticity and of a hierarchy of Romanticisms become considerably less useful. I would instead put all these Romantic literatures striving to find (or create) their own essence on an equal footing, and use the particularly Russian anxiety of influence only to argue that absolute presence not only eludes them all but also on a fundamental level was intended to do exactly that.

This idea of nationhood, or national tradition, as an unstable and ongoing process is a valuable tool in reevaluating Russia's place in European Romanticism; it is also an approach that is dictated by Romantic theory itself. As Monika Greenleaf argues in *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (1995), one of the threads that connects the disparate manifestations of Romanticism is Romantic irony, and while irony

is a notoriously difficult word to define, still it clearly refers to a particular construction of the self. Peter Conrad in *Shandyism: The Character of Romantic Irony* (1978) describes the Romantic ironist variously as an intellectual libertine, a moralist in disguise, an improviser, a virtuoso, and an architect of “chimerical, collapsible palaces of thought held aloft briefly by an architecture of mental association.”⁵ Behind these various incarnations of ephemerality, intellectual promiscuity, and a sort of brilliant showmanship is what Gary Handwerk in *Irony and Ethics in Narrative* (1985) calls “a form of discourse that insists upon the provisional and fragmentary nature of the individual subject,” “an intentional decentering of the subject that operates as an opening out to the other.”⁶

The notion that Romantic narratives intentionally “use ironic structures to call into doubt the integrity and borders of the subject” is not a given in the scholarly literature on Romanticism.⁷ A perhaps more traditional view would in fact argue the opposite, claiming that if Romanticism offers a fragmented or divided self, it is only because the movement more fundamentally yearns to restore wholeness. Handwerk, however, like Greenleaf, takes the example of Friedrich Schlegel and his friends in the German *Frühromantik* to present a very different sort of Romantic subjectivity. Here, Handwerk argues, subjectivity can only be understood as “intersubjectivity,” as an ongoing and inherently unstable relationship between self and other that in its very fragmentariness offers the only means of (re)encountering the Absolute; in an apparent paradox, the fundamental duality of self and other is only overcome when the subject splits and recognizes both the other within and the self without.⁸ It is the Schlegelian idea of the chameleon-like self (re)creating itself only through ever-changing interactions with other selves that underlies my understanding of how various European literatures, Russian among them, might relate one to another. This idea is also the topic of this book as represented in the ongoing interactions of Romantic writers and readers, above all in the pages of Senkovskii’s *Library for Reading*.

Again, despite Romanticism’s reputation for artlessness and sincerity, it is important that we recognize that these encounters of writer and reader are anything but. Just as Romanticism understands a national literature as the original and unique expression of its people, so does it see a given text as the original and unique expression of its creator. Along with a new concept of authorship, Romanticism also offers an emphasis on authenticity that seemingly grounds the text in the real experiences of a real person.

As suggested above, however, to take the Romantic concept of originality without a good dose of Romantic irony is to ignore the extent to which Romanticism is not about originality nor even imitation, but rather simulation.⁹ Just as Conrad describes it as a kind of virtuoso effect, so Handwerk speaks of irony as “enactment,” and we will see that Romantic writers from Scott and Constant to Pushkin, Gogol, and Lermontov are a paradoxical amalgam of real people and imaginary personae, just as the audience to whom they write is made up simultaneously of personal friends, real customers, and reader-constructs. The result is that “romantic art,” as Maurice Blanchot defines it, that “concentrates creative truth in the freedom of the subject, also formulates the ambition of a total book, a sort of perpetually growing Bible that will not represent, but rather replace, the real.”¹⁰

The later literary periodicals and especially Senkovskii’s *Library for Reading* offer an ideal starting point for a discussion of this Romanticism, although not entirely expectedly so. Indeed, when Romanticism is associated with a periodical, it is never with the *Library for Reading* and rarely with any of its more immediate contemporaries, including in Russia the *Telescope* or *Moscow Observer* or in Great Britain *Blackwood’s* and *Fraser’s*.¹¹ The most obvious candidate for the part is instead the considerably earlier organ of the German *Frühromantik*, the *Athenaeum* (1798–1800). Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, much like Blanchot, openly define Romanticism as “a place (Jena) and a journal (the *Athenaeum*).”¹² Schlegel and the writings in and around the *Athenaeum* also lie at the heart of Greenleaf’s rich contextualization of Pushkin’s work in *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion*. Handwerk, too, begins with the *Athenaeum*, and even a brief glance at one small part would suggest why. The sort of intersubjectivity that Handwerk describes is readily if very concisely evident in the well-known *Athenaeum Fragment* 116 alone, one of a series of fragments that Friedrich Schlegel published in 1798 in the second part of the *Athenaeum’s* first volume.

Athenaeum Fragment 116 typically expresses the ironic interaction of writing and reading subjects on the level of form as well as content. Like the journal itself, the *Athenaeum Fragments* offer a prime example of what the *Frühromantik* called “sympoetry,” as while the *Fragments* appeared anonymously and are usually associated with Friedrich, many were written by his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel and also his friends Novalis and Friedrich Schleiermacher, either singly or sometimes in combination. If these *Fragments* in particular are then literally the product of an ongoing conversation

among reading and writing friends, it is also true that any fragment suggests something of the same. Again, like a single issue of the periodical itself, a fragment opens itself to a response and a completion that would arise from the give-and-take of the various and shifting reading and writing parties.¹³ The form that *Athenaeum Fragment* 116 embodies is then also its topic.

In *Athenaeum Fragment* 116 Friedrich Schlegel sets out to describe the “Romantic kind of poetry” as an inherently fragmentary and heterogeneous genre. This fragmentariness and heterogeneity derives from what Schlegel himself terms the genre’s “sociability.” The aim of the ideal Romantic form, as Schlegel explains at the beginning of this long aphorism, “isn’t merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric.” Instead its mission is to “mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical; poeticize wit and fill and saturate the forms of art with every kind of good, solid matter for instruction, and animate them with pulsations of humor.”¹⁴

What Schlegel offers us is literature not as the product of a single writer but as itself an ongoing social interaction. He adds, “Romantic poetry is in the arts what wit is in philosophy, and what society and sociability, friendship and love are in life.”¹⁵ Evidently the model for Schlegel’s literary genre are the real encounters of the real friends and lovers at Jena that gave rise to the entire *Athenaeum* project in the first place. Yet a real gathering and its literary representation are not one and the same. When the members of the *Frühromantik* met at August Wilhelm Schlegel’s house in Jena to read their works to one another, author and audience were present in the flesh and their exchanges took place in real time. In their literary and philosophical incarnations, however, the shifting parts of writer and reader are played by figures less real and more virtual, not by actual bodies but instead by elements of the text that they themselves then infinitely reproduce.

While Schlegel’s prose is as always dense and allusive, *Athenaeum Fragment* 116 has nonetheless long been read as a kind of statement of purpose, an explanation of Schlegel’s intent not just in the movement we now know as Romanticism, but also in the collaborative, generically inventive, and periodical endeavor of the *Athenaeum* itself. As Greenleaf describes the project as a whole:

The *Athenaeum* considered itself an ongoing experiment. . . . Ignoring old generic prescriptions, just as socially they ignored class, racial, gender, and

conjugal borders, they envisioned forms that would do away with the old-fashioned idea of an author altogether, that would preserve the impromptu, witty, collective inspirations of the group as a whole: aphorisms and fragments whose authorship was attributed to the entire collective; philosophical dialogues that recorded the oral spontaneity and mutual fertilization of their thoughts; symposium-like novels through which the society's many voices would speak; fragments of lyrical poetry that would resemble Sappho's in their decontextualized, impersonal intimacy, like fossils involuntarily bearing the imprint of their historical time.¹⁶

I should acknowledge from the start that the *Library for Reading* does not quite reach these heights, nor does it ever offer the sort of abstract statement of Romantic interests and aims presented in *Athenaeum Fragment 116*. What the *Library for Reading* does offer are open expressions of intentions of a far more pragmatic kind, as it most strikingly represents the strange synergy that occurs when Romanticism meets an apparently rising marketplace.

It is of course largely because the later literary periodicals such as the *Library for Reading* deliberately present the exchanges between readers and writers in commercial as well as more purely social terms that they have often been considered less than entirely Romantic, perhaps above all by the Romantics themselves. Indeed, the average Romantic seems to have met the rise of the increasingly market-oriented literary periodicals with something more like revulsion. In 1831 the English Thomas Carlyle complained that "all Literature has become one boundless self-devouring review," while in 1840 the Russian V. G. Belinskii despaired that "the journal has now swallowed up our entire literature—the public doesn't want books—it wants journals—and in the journals they publish whole plays and novels, and the issues of the journals—each one weighs forty pounds."¹⁷ Similarly Balzac in *Lost Illusions* (1837–43) famously showed a France of the early 1820s where all-consuming and entirely mercenary journals were indeed in the process of "swallowing up" all of literature.

It is in fact precisely because of their commercial leanings that I find the example of the later literary periodicals especially illuminating, as in direct contrast to Carlyle I would argue that this act of "self-devouring" represents not the end of "all Literature" but rather the extreme point of a certain kind: in the later literary periodicals we find that same "Romantic kind of poetry," only now with certain underlying tendencies made especially clear. It is first of all not true that Romantic writers of an earlier and more canonical type

were immune to commercial considerations, and indeed, looking backward from the *Library for Reading* it becomes evident that Romanticism even in the apparent absence of a literary marketplace was quite fascinated with the possibilities of a professional writership and mass readership. It might be argued that the particular features that mark the later literary journals such as *Library for Reading* nonetheless derive not from any Romantic notions but rather from what is taken to be the real literary marketplace that provided their most immediate context. As I will argue in Chapter One, however, it is then also the case that any attempts to derive artistic effects from this particular socioeconomic cause prove to be at the very least problematic.

Unfortunately, what we might call the facts pertaining to an apparent rise of the literary marketplace are so colored by contemporary Romantic rhetoric as to render their later interpretation quite difficult. The standard argument would seem to be that the later literary periodicals, Senkovskii's among them, replace imaginary encounters between idealized reader- and writer-collaborators with more real (because more commercially viable) encounters between readers and writers of a more material, more numerous, and more democratically constituted sort, in the process producing an entirely new kind of literature, one stretched to fit the Procrustean bed of literary capitalism. As I hope to show, however, it is in the end not entirely clear that the later readers and writers really are of a more material, more numerous, and more democratically constituted sort—although neither is it clear that they are not—and this confusion in level or type of reality is not accidental. Instead, as I will argue in Chapters Two and Three, it is the deliberate blurring of writerly and readerly identities that marks Romantic intersubjectivity from the start.

Certainly there is a difference in the “Romantic kind of poetry” as produced by Senkovskii and his like, but the difference seems to lie less in the realities of a newly arisen literary marketplace than in the rise in cynicism that accompanies that marketplace's increasingly active simulation. Even allowing for a certain amount of polemical exaggeration, the anxiety expressed by Carlyle, Belinskii, and Balzac reflects a darkening of the atmosphere particularly evident in Senkovskii's case. Senkovskii vividly renders Conrad's image of the Romantic ironist on any number of levels, from his polyglossia and encyclopedic erudition to his endless play of masks and apparent lack of principle, as, in the crowded space of his mind, Senkovskii is exactly the antiquarian turned showman. But with his particularly slippery adoption

in the *Library for Reading* of impersonations of all kinds, Senkovskii also offers a much more cynical version of Romantic subjectivity, one that has less to do with the Absolute than with his own desire for critical omnipotence. Still, as we will see, the difference between irony as a plenitude of meaning and as what Paul de Man defines as “the systematic undoing . . . of understanding” is crucial but almost impossibly small, and Senkovskii’s darker brand of irony serves to cast its more idealistic renderings in high relief.¹⁸ Perhaps more important, the difficulty at times in distinguishing his play of personalities from that practiced by Pushkin, say, or Friedrich Schlegel, serves also to emphasize the extent to which critical omnipotence was Romanticism’s aim all along.

Handwerk argues that the Schlegelian construction of subjectivity as an ironic intersubjectivity is ultimately an ethical as well as an aesthetic act, a recognition of the other both without and within that posits the creation (or creating) of the self only in the context of an entirely nonhierarchical community. Without in any way contradicting Handwerk, I would nonetheless note a certain bent in Schlegel’s work, as in Romanticism as a whole, that is somewhat at odds with this ethical stance. For the reader- and writer-friends, whose collaboration on the creation of the work so often figures the process of intersubjectivity, tend also to collapse into an all-encompassing critical consciousness. Indeed, Romanticism, Schlegelian and otherwise, never loses sight of the fact that the critic is that strange creature, a reader who is also a writer and so potentially contains intersubjectivity within him- or herself alone.

With its emphasis on the critic, Romanticism characteristically produces not a work but rather a work about the work or, in Blanchot’s formulation, “the work of the absence of the work.”¹⁹ This sort of literature might not be quite “one boundless self-devouring review,” but it is at the very least, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy define it, “*theory itself as literature* or, in other words, literature producing itself as it produces its own theory.”²⁰ It is finally this fundamental absence lying at the center of Romanticism that Senkovskii and his *Library for Reading* exemplify especially well. Senkovskii latched always onto those aspects of Romanticism that lent themselves to his own self-aggrandizement, and as the apparent commercial success of the *Library for Reading* stretched the tension between writers and readers, real and imaginary, almost impossibly thin, any actual literature seems to disappear. Instead, Senkovskii’s brief period of dominance notoriously emptied

much of his journal and even a significant part of Russian letters of anything other than his own critical content.²¹

Senkovskii's nonetheless entirely Romantic aspirations for critical omnipotence were clearly exaggerated by the possibility, if not necessarily the reality, of a literary marketplace. His critical tyranny also gained a particular force for being based not in a more traditionally Romantic locale such as Germany, Great Britain, or France but rather in Russia. Russian writers of Senkovskii's own day regularly bemoaned a literature that, unlike those more enlightened literatures further West, was made up almost entirely of criticism. Well before his 1840 protest that "the journal has now swallowed up our entire literature," Belinskii was busily excoriating what he saw as a uniquely Russian failing to criticize in the absence of any literature in the first place. In his 1834 essay "Literary Reveries" Belinskii famously cried, "We have no literature"; and while this plaint is indelibly associated with Belinskii's more radical stance, it also quite clearly echoes a line of criticism heard in Russian literature throughout the 1820s.²² When Romanticism is defined as an essentially critical movement, however, this objection sounds more like praise, as it is then Russian literature that most strikingly expresses the literary tendency of its time in the very lack that marks the Russian nation as well.

For Romantic readers and writers can only encounter one another in some sort of space, and in Chapters Four and Five I attempt to delineate its possibilities. Chapter Four operates within the confines of the library in the *Library for Reading* to describe the virtual space where readers and writers neither entirely real nor entirely imaginary meet to create literature in terms of Schlegel's "Romantic kind of poetry," the literary marketplace, the antiquarian past, and the Orient. Chapter Five then moves outside the library to consider the broader expanse wherein the *Library for Reading* operated: the space of Senkovskii's own self-imposed exile and of Russia. At this point it becomes evident that the instability of Romantic identities that Senkovskii and his *Library for Reading* so effectively display is finally also the instability of the Romantic nation, as I return here to the issue of imitation and originality that I raised at the start of this introduction. Senkovskii's own uncertain Russianness, like his wildly vacillating reader- and writer-figures, is inevitably as always only his own extreme version of something else. That something else is first of all Russianness of a more indigenous or at least more mainstream kind, as the great anxiety that drives Russian

Romantics even when not of Polish extraction is the fear that there is nothing indigenously Russian at all. That something else is also Romanticism as a whole, not only as it develops in an allegedly second-tier nation like Russia, but even as it shapes itself in those purportedly more authentic and more original nations farther West.

When Romanticism is imagined as a library, hitherto submerged features gain special prominence, not only a creeping tendency toward commercialism but also a persistent sense of literature as a site of collection and display. Casting Romanticism in the larger terms of Senkovskii's Russia produces still more dramatic results, above all as it makes strikingly apparent the strange fact that the Romantic nation itself was almost entirely the invention of the multi-, or extranational, Senkovskiiian type. Senkovskii's own manipulation of peripheral status in order to better ingratiate himself with his imperial center has long served as evidence of an utter lack of principle. But the comparison of his practice with that of the many other Romantics shaped by the related experiences of exile, expatriation, and empire suggests that Romanticism as a whole was also marked by an essential and ineradicable otherness in space, a kind of constant oscillation between center and periphery that played itself out both within and also across so-called national traditions.

In the end Senkovskii's marginality proves surprisingly central, or perhaps the concepts of "center" and "periphery" simply lose their meaning. Either way, as Senkovskii can only layer imitations one on top of the other, his critical practice points straight to a Romanticism that only posits a notion of originality without ever actually delivering on it. As readers and writers, libraries, and literary traditions multiply and overlap, we find instead that Romantic originality and authenticity only ever recede from us and were even largely intended to do so. To borrow again from Blanchot, the intent of Romanticism was not to represent but to replace the real, and if this absence of presence sounds thoroughly post-Modernist, I think that it is. Yet it is also quintessentially Romantic, as the unanswered question that ends Gogol's *Dead Souls* expresses an emptiness fundamental to the movement as a whole.

"Whither art thou soaring away to, then, Russia?" Gogol asks. "Give me thy answer! But Russia gives none." Nor does Romanticism provide an answer, as from the point of view of the *Library for Reading* the lack that Gogol casts in terms of both Russia's own anxiety of influence and its messianic aspirations functions also in more broadly European terms. Blanchot describes

Romanticism as the moment when “literature encounters its most dangerous meaning—which is to interrogate itself in a declarative mode.”²³ Certainly Senkovskii and his *Library for Reading* will not serve to answer a question that we were never meant to answer in the first place. The two together can, however, help us to pose the question as dangerously as possible.