The Development of Russian Verse explores the Russian verse tradition from Pushkin to Brodsky, showing how certain formal features are associated with certain genres and, at times, specific themes. Michael Wachtel’s basic thesis is that form is never neutral: poets can react to the work of their predecessors positively by means of stylization and development or negatively by means of parody or revision, but they cannot ignore it. Keeping technical terms to a minimum and providing English translations for all Russian quotations, Wachtel offers close readings of individual poems of more than fifty poets. His aim is to help English-speaking readers reconstruct the strong sense of continuity Russian poets have always felt, that transcends any individual epoch or ideology. Ultimately, his book is an inquiry into the nature of literary tradition itself, and how it coalesces in a country that has always taken so much of its identity from its written legacy.

Michael Wachtel is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Princeton University. He is author of *Russian Symbolism and Literary Tradition: Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov* (1994) and he has written articles on Russian Symbolism and poetics in English, German, and Russian.
CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

General editor CATRIONA KELLY

Editorial board: ANTHONY CROSS, CARYL EMERSON, HENRY GIFFORD, BARBARA HELDT, MALCOLM JONES, DONALD RAYFIELD, G. S. SMITH, VICTOR TERRAS

Recent titles in this series include

The Last Soviet Avant-Garde: OBERIU – Fact, Fiction, Metafiction
GRAHAM ROBERTS

Literary Journals in Imperial Russia
edited by DEBORAH A. MARTINSEN

Russian Modernism: The Transfiguration of the Everyday
STEPHEN C. HUTCHINGS

Reading Russian Fortunes
FAITH WIGZELL

Print Culture, Gender and Divination in Russia from 1765

English Literature and the Russian Aesthetic Renaissance
RACHEL POLONSKY

Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author
RUTH COATES

A complete list of titles in the series is given at the back of the book
THE DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN VERSE

Meter and its Meanings

MICHAEL WACHTEL
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgments</th>
<th>page x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note on translations and transliterations</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errata</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction**

1. The Russian ballad: passion, betrayal, revenge, and the amphibrachi c tetrameter line 20

2. The blank verse lyric: “. . . Again I visited” revisited 59
   - Pushkin’s evolution 59
   - Pushkin’s legacy 78

3. The Onegin stanza: from poetic digression to poetic nostalgia 119
   - Origins 120
   - Lermontov 134
   - Symbolist and Futurist Onegin stanzas 144
   - The Onegin stanza in Soviet and émigré poetry 158
   - The Onegin stanza in English 164
   - Conclusions 168

4. Russian Arcadia: the elegiac distich and classical stylization 171

5. Heirs of Mayakovsky: the poet and the citizen 206

**Afterword: the meaning of form** 239

**Notes** 260

**Bibliography** 306

**Index** 318
Acknowledgments

This book has been several years in the making, and I have benefited throughout from the advice of friends and colleagues. My brother Andrew Wachtel was instrumental in determining the book’s overall shape and even its cover. Elena Alekseeva, David Bethea, my tireless colleague Caryl Emerson, Stephanie Sandler, and Barry Scherr took time out of their already overburdened schedules to read the manuscript (in some cases, more than once) and to supply me with detailed and challenging commentary. Annette Pein and Kirill Postoutenko generously shared with me their own unpublished and otherwise inaccessible works. Nikolai Bogomolov, Lazar Fleishman, Roman Timenchik, and Alexander Zhokovskiy gave suggestions that I have gratefully incorporated.

Having written this book in part as a pedagogical aid, I find it particularly appropriate to acknowledge the contributions of my own teachers. John Malmstad, Omry Ronen, and Igor Smirnov introduced me to many of the poets discussed in these pages, and their influence on my specific readings is incalculable. Though I have never sat in his classroom, I consider Mikhail Gasparov both a mentor and a guardian angel. This manuscript developed under his watchful eye and would have been much the poorer were it not for his careful criticisms. I take this opportunity both to express my gratitude for his unfailing generosity and to absolve him of any responsibility for my judgments.

Much of this material was presented and discussed in my graduate seminars on “The Evolution of Russian Poetic Form” at Princeton University. For helping me not only to formulate the essential questions, but also to answer them, I thank the participants in those courses: Sharon Lubkemann Allen, Mirande Bissell-Siders, Sarah Clovis, Craig Cravens, Thomas Cunningham, Eugene Gurarie, Maryl Hallett, Firoozeh Khazraei, Nina Khrushcheva, Sarah Kube,
Acknowledgments

Inessa Medzhibovskaya, Nicole Monnier, Anthony Prather, Tricia Rattigan, Naomi Rood, Eva Rottmann-Kalenskij, Gabriella Safran, Ludmila Shleyfer, Heather Smith, and my colleague Charles E. Townsend. Special thanks go to Nicole Monnier for proofreading and for compiling the index to this book.

At Cambridge University Press, editors Katharina Brett and Linda Bree deserve encomiums for both efficiency and patience. I am truly grateful to them and to the anonymous readers they selected, who taught me – among other things – the dangers of making generalizations about Anglophone cultures. Series editor Catriona Kelly went far beyond the call of duty by closely reading my manuscript and offering extensive suggestions for its improvement. Karen Anderson Howes was a superlative copy-editor.

I cannot sufficiently thank my wife, who dealt patiently with all manner of manuscript crises and deadlines, and my parents, to whom I dedicate this book.

The following people and organizations have kindly permitted me to quote material under their copyright: Walter Arndt, the translator of Aleksandr Pushkin’s poem “Echo”; Indiana University Press, the publisher of Dmitrii Prigov’s “Kogda ia v Kaluge po sluchaiu byl,” in Gerald S. Smith (ed.), Contemporary Russian Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology; Oxford University Press, the present publisher of James Falen’s translation of Aleksandr Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin. I am particularly indebted to Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. and the Brodsky estate for allowing me to cite Joseph Brodsky’s poem “Ostanovka v pustyni” in its entirety in Russian and to use my own translation of it.
Note on translations and transliterations

In this book, I have used two different types of translation: prosaic and equimetrical. The former, which aims for literal accuracy, needs no introduction, as it is standard practice among American and British Slavists. The latter, in which semantic precision is sacrificed in order to retain formal elements of the original, is generally deemed inappropriate for scholarly writings. However, in a study such as this one, which is based on the premise that meter has meaning, the equimetrical approach has a definite advantage. Whatever semantic freedoms it may entail and however inadequately it may function as poetry, it reproduces the sound of the verse, thereby making my argumentation more accessible to the non-Slavist.

Equimetrical translations can be found in the introduction, throughout the second chapter, in most of the fourth chapter, and where possible in the third chapter and the afterword. I have relied exclusively on prosaic translations in the first chapter (where my own abilities were not equal to the task of equimetrical renderings) and in the fifth chapter, where it was not essential for my purposes to preserve elements like rhythm and rhyme. Except where otherwise noted, the translations are my own. For the convenience of students, translations have been placed wherever possible beside the original Russian text.

When writing Russian names, I use a simplified system of transliteration in the text and expository sections of the notes (essentially that found in Victor Terras [ed.], *A Handbook of Russian Literature* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985], p. xix) and the more exact, but less readable British system in the bibliography and the non-expository parts of the notes. In this way, I hope to simplify pronunciation for readers who do not know Russian without sacrificing the precision necessary for specialists.
Errata

p. 5, 1. 17: “Telega zhizni” (“The Cart of Life”) should be replaced by “V nachale zhizni shkolu pomniu ina” (“I remember school at life’s beginning”).

p. 22, 1. 6: “sehr edeln” should be replaced by “edelsten”.

p. 103, 1. 3–4: the parenthetical comment (“a recurring...that city”) should be omitted. Khodasevich’s poem is set in Moscow, not St. Petersburg.

p. 143, 1. 18: “a married” should be replaced by “another”.

xiii