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IV

Alexander Pushkin's Lyric Verse

From the age of fourteen until his death at thirty-seven Pushkin composed verse. His work forms the most important poetical collection in the Russian language, and one of the major collections of lyric poetry in the world. Like all great poetry, it is in the true sense untranslatable. In narrative or dramatic verse less is lost in transposing it from one language to another; the content is reproducible in the foreign tongue, and the qualities of style and sound which cannot be transposed can be ignored. The more important those qualities of style and sound become in the verse, the more intimately they are bound in with the "meaning"—and often they *are* the meaning—the more hopeless becomes the task of translating. Even narrative verse, as we have seen with Pushkin's *skazki,* when the manner becomes more significant than the matter, becomes untranslatable.

The more ornamental verse is, the more readily can it be translated. The magnificently rhetorical odes of Lomonosov, for example, lose far less in being Englished than, let us say, the artless peasant songs of Koltsov. Pushkin's earliest verse, derivative and imitative, can be read without much loss in English. His best later verse is another matter; the spare style, avoidance of ornamentation, of colorful epithets and images, the extraordinary economy of means, the laconism give this body of verse an almost prosy effect when rendered in another language. *"Il est plat, votre poète,"* complained Flaubert to Turgenev after reading some of Pushkin in French translation. Pushkin is anything but flat in his own language, but he is wholly free from that nineteenth-century French *emphase,* so conspicuous for instance in Victor Hugo and which Flaubert probably missed.

If all "translation is treason," as the Italian proverb has it, the least treasonable is doubtless in Pushkin's case the simplest prose version; for a reader who knows even a little Russian, enough, that is, to be able to read the original metrically with the translation beside him, this is far better than a verse translation with its inevitable padding and distortion. This view may seem inconsistent with what has been said in previous chapters about translations of e.g., *Eugene Onegin* or the "little tragedies," where verse versions were recommended as far preferable to literal prose. There is, however, no real inconsistency here. In the narrative or the drama the "story" can be told in prose, but a verse paraphrase, even if not literally exact, conveys the effect of the original better than does the prose, simply

because the rhythm of the line, the rhyme-scheme, etc., are reproducible in another language, and constitute a major part of the beauty of the work, while because of the length of such a work, the omission or addition of an individual word, image, sound effect or the like has far less importance than it would have in such a highly concentrated form as the lyric. Accordingly in the following discussion of Pushkin's lyric verse, when translations are cited, they will be either those admirably clear versions by Dmitry Obolensky in the *Penguin Book of Russian Verse* or John Fennell's in the Penguin *Pushkin,* or those of Walter Arndt in his *Collected Lyric and Narrative Poetry;* or, where these resources fail, the present writer will supply his own.[1]

One of the most extraordinary things about Pushkin's verse is the rapidity with which it changes, as the poet races through various intermediate stages to full maturity. Several periods can be distinguished, and a quite significant break about the beginning of 1826. Naturally the traits that can be distinguished in the lyric output belong also to the narrative and dramatic poetry of the same periods, and some of these have already been noted. Some of these traits are those of the general Russian literary scene; but to a large extent they are peculiar to Pushkin when they are first observable, and only later make their appearance with others. Pushkin is everywhere a pioneer in his mature work. The earliest piece of verse by Pushkin which is preserved was composed in 1813, when the author was fourteen, and had been already for two years a pupil of the lycée at Tsarskoe Selo. Nothing of his earliest production, until the remarkable ode of 1814, "Memories at Tsarskoe Selo,"[2] was included by the poet in his published works. This the fifteen-year-old author read at a public gathering in 1815, at which the aged poet Derzhavin was the honored guest, and it made a tremendous sensation, not least with Derzhavin.[3] The ode consists of 20 eight-line stanzas of uniform and rather complicated structure. It is full of eighteenth-century conventions, e.g. Graeco-Roman mythology, rhetorical questions, exclamations, and the like. Something of the style can be seen from a translation of the first three stanzas:

> The canopy of gloomy night hung over the vault of the drowsing heavens; in soundless quiet slept groves and dale, the distant forest was in grey mist; the brook, running in the woodland shade, is scarcely heard; the little breeze scarcely breathes, slumbering on the leaves, and the quiet moon, like a stately swan, sails in the silver clouds.
>
> From the flinty hills the waterfalls flow down in a pearly stream; yonder in the quiet lake the naiads are splashing in its lazy wave; and yonder in the silence enormous palaces, resting on their vaults, rise to the clouds. Is it not here that the earthly gods [i.e., the Tsars] passed peaceful days? Is this not the temple of Russia's Minerva [i.e., Catherine II]?
>
> Is not this the northern Elysium, the beautiful garden of Tsarskoe Selo, where, having routed the lion [i.e., Sweden], Russia's mighty eagle reposed on the couch of peace and delights? Passed forever are those golden times when under the sceptre of a great woman fortunate Russia was crowned with glory, blooming beneath the shelter of peace.

The body of the poem is devoted to the exciting events of the Fatherland War and the defeat of Napoleon, ending with the capture of Paris: "The Russian is in Paris! Where is the torch of revenge? Bow your head, O Gaul. But what do I see? The Russian with a smile of reconciliation comes with a golden olive branch." The final stanza of the ode calls on "Russia's inspired skald" to celebrate the momentous victory—"and the proud strings will fill hearts with fire, and the young soldier will seethe and tremble at the sounds of the warlike singer." The "inspired skald," the "warlike singer" is, of course, Zhukovsky, the "Singer in the Camp of the Russian Warriors."

Pushkin's poem is conventional and derivative, but in its technical mastery an incredible achievement for a fifteen-year-old boy. Its author was immediately recognized by the proud faculty and students of Tsarskoe Selo and presently by the leading poets of the capital itself as the coming hope of Russian literature. While still in the lycée Pushkin was elected a member of the Arzamas society, of which his uncle was a member. Zhukovsky wrote to Vyazemsky: "I've made another delightful acquaintance! With our young miracle-worker Pushkin . . . He is the hope of our literature . . . We must all unite to help this future giant to grow, who will outgrow us all . . . Right now he is prowling around other people's ideas and images. But when he stocks up with his own, you'll see what will come of him!"[4] Vyazemsky, with his acid pen, might have been expected to greet with some cynicism Zhukovsky's enthusiasm; but to the contrary: in a letter to Batyushkov he wrote:

> What will you say to Sergei Lvovich's son? What a marvel he is! His "Memories" have turned Zhukovsky's head and mine. What power, what exactitude in expressions, what a firm and masterful brush in the pictures. God grant him health and learning, and he'll go far, and woe to us! He'll crush us, the rascal! Vasily Lvovich [Alexander Pushkin's uncle], however, won't give up, and after his nephew's verses, which he always reads with tears, he never forgets to read his own also, not realizing that as far as verses are concerned, he's the nephew rather than the uncle.[5]

"Memories at Tsarskoe Selo" is a parade piece, and meant for public recitation; it is thus hardly typical of Pushkin's early verse. The reminiscences which catch one's eye in the poem—of Ossian, Derzhavin, Batyushkov, Zhukovsky—are less apparent in the bulk of his unpublished early poetry than those of the French writers of "light verse"—especially Parny.[6] Pushkin, it must be remembered, like most of the Russian nobility of his day, learned French as soon as, and as well as, his native language. His father's library was well stocked with fashionable French literature, with which he familiarized himself probably even before he read the Russian "classics." A very informative piece of verse from the year 1815 is

"The Little Town" [*Gorodok*].[7] This is an epistle, addressed to a friend whose name is indicated only by a row of asterisks, and is in the meter and style of Batyushkov's "My Penates,"[8] that is, a three-foot iambic line with irregular rhyme, in a very free-and-easy "middle style." After excusing himself to his addressee for a two-year silence on the grounds of an extremely busy social life (!), he describes his present semi-rustic retreat in a "little town." The picture may be imaginary, but the details are charmingly realistic:

> An indolent philosopher, far from tumult, I am living in a little town, happy in its lack of notoriety. I've taken a bright house, with a couch and a little fireplace; three simple rooms—there's no gold or bronze in them, and no figured carpets cover its parquet. Windows onto a cheery garden, where ancient lindens and bird-cherry bloom; where in noon-day hours the dark vaults of the birches give cool shade; where the snow-white lilies-of-the-valley twine with the tender violet and the brisk brook, carrying blossoms in its eddies, invisible to the eye, babbles at the fence.

Quite in Batyushkov's style is the bit of Horatian moralizing which follows:

> Happy is he who is cheerful in repose, without worries, with whom Phoebus consorts in secret, and little Eros; happy he who in the spaciousness of a humble nook has no thought of sorrow, wanders about in a nightcap, drinks, eats when he wants to, and doesn't bother about guests: No one, no one prevents his lazing alone in bed; if he takes the notion, he summons the throng of the Muses; if he takes the notion, he sweetly sleeps, bowing over Rifmov [Prince Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, whose works it seems were a sure cure for insomnia!], and peacefully forgetting himself.

"My friends," says the sixteen-year-old philosopher, "are the dead." He goes on to enumerate them. First, "the son of Momus and Minerva," "the grey-haired scamp of Ferney," "grandson of Ariosto and Tasso—and shall I say it?—father of Candide." "On the shelf after Voltaire, Virgil, Tasso and Homer stand together." "Then Derzhavin and the sensitive [*chuvstvitel'nyi*] Horace appear as a couple," and with them "the careless lazybones, that simple-hearted sage, Johnny [*Vaniusha*] La Fontaine!" Then come Dmitriev, Krylov and Bogdanovich, and "the nurslings of Amor, Vergier, Parny and Grécourt hide in a corner." "Here are Ozerov and Racine, Rousseau and Karamzin, with the giant Molière, Fonvizin, and Knyazhnin." Last of his classical masters comes the critic La Harpe "in sixteen volumes." These, however, are only the printed works in the library: "But fenced around by them (you must know this) I've hidden a morocco-bound notebook," which contains a collection of "underground literature": the satires of Prince Gorchakov; Batyushkov's "Vision on the Banks of Lethe"; uncle Vasily Lvovich's "Dangerous Neighbor"; Krylov's mock-tragedy *Podshchipa;* and finally, the obscene parodies of Ivan Barkov!

The epistle ends with some lifelike descriptions of the young poet's neighbors in his "little town"—a gossipy old woman and a seventy-year-old retired major. Finally, a mocking admission: "But, O God! I'm at fault; I recant before you. The priests of the town I shun, I shun their conversation, and I simply can't bear the holy mass for the reason that I do not at all like the rural clergy nor the pope of the Jews, and along with them the pettifogging tribe of legal clerks, rich only through bribe-taking and the mainstay of chicanery."

Perhaps the young poet's Epicurean celebration of the delights of wine and love came in for a certain amount of criticism among the faculty at Tsarskoe Selo. The epistle "To my Aristarchus,"[9] addressed to Nikolai Fyodorovich Koshansky, Professor of Russian and Latin Literature at the Lycée, begins:

> Be merciful, O sober Aristarchus [i.e., critic] of my Bacchic epistles, don't condemn my dreams and the feelings in my frivolous verses; these fruits of a cheerful leisure are not born for immortality, but really kept only for myself, for a friend, and for young Temira. Be merciful, have pity on me—believe me, I have no need of the lessons of your dry erudition. I know my faults myself.

But perhaps the Professor's criticism was mostly prosodical, after all:

> Of course, my genius is poor. Often after an unpaired rhyme, very often, in despite of the laws of composition, three-foot lines run in a throng in *-aiu, -aet* and *-oi*. And a few more admissions: I put in (who is without sin?) empty exclamations for the rhyme's sake, three superfluous verses for the sake of symmetry [*mery*]. It's not right, but permit me humbly to present my justification: are my fugitive epistles going to flower among posterity?

The pose of indolence and carelessness, which marks so much of Pushkin's earliest verse, is most certainly a part of the persona of the writer of light verse, whether borrowed from Batyushkov or from the French masters of both poets. So probably is also, at this date at least, while the boy was still in school, his glorifications of Bacchus and Venus. These attitudes belong to the poet's favorite French writers:

> Beneath the shade of obscure indolence thus that charming singer luxuriated when he sang of Vert-Vert [i.e., Gresset's *La Chartreuse*]. In such an indolent situation the verses flow now this way, now that. Is it possible upon one's creation, suppressing the cheerful tumult of thoughts, to fix the cold eye of reason, to spoil flimsy fables with ornament, the fruit of sportive wandering meditations, and to shorten one's pages? Our friend La Fare, Chaulieu, and Parny,[10] the foes of toil, worries and grief, did not thus once, in former days, sing of their loves. O you delightful singers, sons of indolent unconcern, long since have you been given crowns by the muse of happy idleness, but not the radiant gifts of labor-loving poetry ... The sportive throng of the children of Paphos [i.e., Cupids] has wreathed your brows. But I, inexperienced poet, the careless heir of poor rhymes, am slinking in your footsteps.

Even before finishing the course at the Lycée Pushkin became involved in the literary battle between the "Varangian Russians" of the Beseda and the modernists. The presentation of Prince Shakhovskoi's *A Lesson for Coquettes, or Lipetsk Spa* was the signal for a particularly sharp phase of this battle, which the same playwright's *A New Sterne* had initiated ten years before (1805). In 1815, the year the new comedy was produced, the innovators formed the Arzamas literary society, to which, as has been mentioned, the schoolboy Alexander Pushkin was shortly admitted. His uncle had been in the thick of the literary battle; his "Dangerous Neighbor" contained a murderous thrust at Shakhovskoi, and the dramatist had retaliated by portraying Vasily Lvovich unflatteringly in one of his comedies. It is not surprising, therefore, that Alexander Pushkin should have been drawn into the battle. In 1815 he composed, taking an epigram by Voltaire as his model, a clever jingle in which "the three *shas,*" the outstanding archaists of that date, were pilloried together:[11]

> There is a threesome of dismal singers—
> Shikhmatov, Shakhovskoi, Shishkov;
> There is a threesome of foes to intelligence—
> Our Shishkov, Shakhovskoi, Shikhmatov.
> But which is the stupidest of the malevolent threesome?
> Shishkov, Shikhmatov, Shakhovskoi!

The next year (1816), in an "Epistle to Zhukovsky," Pushkin came to the defense of Karamzin, the titular, though passive, chief of the innovator school, and attacked Trediakovsky and Sumarokov, not as classicists so much as simply bad poets; it must be remembered that the lines between "archaist" and "innovator" groupings are by no means those between "classicism" and "romanticism." Significantly Pushkin cites as the precedent for his attack on Sumarokov Boileau's demolition of Chapelain! In one significant passage of the "Epistle" he derides the criticisms made by the enemy against the innovators:

> Woe to anyone born in the world with a *sensitive* soul! To anyone who has been secretly able to captivate the fair sex with a tender lyre, to anyone who has impudently piped an amusing satire, who expresses himself in correct language and refuses to kowtow to Russian stupidity! ... He is an enemy of the fatherland, he is a sower of depravity! And speeches pour like rain upon the foe.[12]

Admiral Shishkov did in fact accuse the politically quite conservative Karamzin of dangerous radicalism on the grounds of his linguistic innovations!

The Anacreontic inspiration and the model of French *poésie légère* continued to be the formative forces in young Pushkin's verse for a few years. Thus, "The Tomb of Anacreon" (1815), "Amor and Hymen" (1816), "To a Painter" (1815), etc.; to this period belongs also the small "anthology poem" loosely modelled on Plato's epigram (A.P. VI, 1): "Lais to Venus, in Dedicating her Mirror":[13]

> Here is my mirror—accept it, O Cypris! The goddess of beauty will be beautiful forever; the offense of grey-haired Time is no terror to her. She is not a mortal person; but I, submitting to destiny, am unable to see myself in the glass's transparency such as I was—nor such as I am now.

The force of the last two lines, so sharp in the Greek original ("since to see myself as I am I do not wish, and as I was I am not able") is sadly blunted in the Russian, probably by way of Voltaire's version, which was Pushkin's original here: the phrase *ne v silakh*—"am unable" in the penultimate line has to be taken in its more colloquial meaning "can't bear to" in the final one.

Évariste Parny, of all the French poets of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was Pushkin's favorite—a taste which he never entirely outgrew, although he soon outgrew imitating him. One of the Parny imitations—almost a free translation of *A mes amis* ("Rions, chantons, ô mes amis!") is the 1820 Pushkin poem, "Good Advice":[14]

> Let us drink and make merry, let us play with life; what though the blind mob fusses, it is not for us to imitate their witlessness. What though our flighty youth drowns in pleasure and wine, what though fickle joy smiles at us but in sleep—when youth like a light smoke, whirls through the delights of our young days, then let us take from old age everything that can be taken from it.

The poem "To Her" (1815), beginning "Elvina, my darling, come, give me your hand," is a typical piece in the Parny style:[15]

> Elvina, why, in the hours of deep night, can I not come to embrace you with rapture, fix my langorous eyes on my darling, and tremble with passion?
>
> And in wordless delight, in the bliss of intoxication, hear your sweet whisper and quiet sigh, and in the modest darkness fall asleep in voluptuousness, for a voluptuous waking, beside my darling?

It may well be that "Elvina" had only an imaginary existence, but one must grant the sixteen-year-old a quite heated imagination!

Not all the pieces from these years, however, are in the light Anacreontic vein. The 1815 satire "To Licinius,"[16] which the poet in evident imitation of such models as Milonov's 1810 satire "To Rubellius" labelled "from the Latin," although only such references as "people of Romulus," "lictors," etc., give it a faint classical flavor, is presumed to have been, like others of its kind, directed against the hated favorite Arakcheev. It is a moderately successful imitation of Juvenal.

In view of Pushkin's later interest in the Russian common people and their language and lore, it is interesting that even as early as 1814 his ballad "The Cossack" contains reminiscences of quasi-popular material of the kind utilized by Zhukovsky in *Lyudmila* and elsewhere. The poem[17] is full of conventional phraseology, with occasional surprisingly original notes, e.g.: "Now before him there are two or three little log huts, a broken-down fence; here's the road to the little village, yonder the one to the thick pine-wood." The Cossack elopes with a forlorn village maiden, and—"He was true to her for two weeks; in the third he was unfaithful." Another 1814 poem, "Romance," sympathetically portrays the grief of an unmarried peasant mother as she abandons her little son on a strange door-step.

The vogue of sentimentalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Russia led, as we have noted, to a rash of elegies. Typical of the elegiac persona is lamentation over the passing of youth and the unrewarding nature of love. Pushkin tried his hand at this sort of thing too, but evidently did not find it congenial. An example, fortunately short, is entitled simply "Elegy":[18]

> Fortunate is he who in passion dares to acknowledge himself to himself without horror; whom in unknowable destiny a quiet hope lulls; but for me in my dreary life there is no comfort in secret delights; the early flower of hope has withered; the flower of life is drying up from torments! Youth is flying away sorrowfully, and with her the roses of life will fade. But I, forgotten by love, will not forget love's tears!

Pushkin finished the Lycée in 1817 and proceeded to an uninspiring and undemanding post in the civil service. In the next few years he had become acquainted with all the major literary figures of St. Petersburg, including those who were a few years later to form the nucleus of the Decembrist conspiracy. Along with continued devotion to wine and women, Pushkin's verse now begins to show traces of the rebellious anti-governmental turn of mind which for a time at least allies him with the active Decembrists. The chief monument of this phase of his creative life is the ode "Freedom" [*Volnost'*; 1817],[19] a title that consciously echoes that of Radishchev's of 1794. Pushkin's "Freedom: An Ode" is one of his few attempts at the typically eighteenth-century form, and is entirely in the style of the preceding century. It is, as Vladimir Nabokov rightly calls it, "the greatest poem of the first two decades of the nineteenth century."[20] (Nabokov's own excellent translation of the ode, together with his comments, may be found in his four-volume work on *Onegin*.[21]) Pushkin's ode begins with an energetic determination to have done with enervating love-songs and to take up the celebration of freedom. Borrowing some of the phraseology from the *Marseillaise*, Pushkin exclaims: "Tyrants of the world! Tremble! And you, fallen slaves, be men and hearken, rise up!" He celebrates the execution of Louis XVI, who "laid down his royal head for the sins of his ancestors," and ends with the poetical account of the murder of Paul I in St. Petersburg. His attitude is ambivalent: Paul deserved the death that was meted out to him—but it should have been meted out, as was that of Louis, by the law, not by a band of private assassins: "O shame! O horror of our days! Like beasts the Janissaries have burst in! . . . Their inglorious strokes fall. The crowned villain has perished." It should be noted that "Freedom" is no revolutionary document, as Soviet critics are prone to make it. As Nabokov picturesquely puts it, the poem's protagonist is "the law," to which even kings are subject. It is precisely the contrast between the *lawful* execution of Louis XVI and the just, but *lawless* murder of Paul I that the ode emphasizes.

To the same inspiration belongs the poem "The Dagger" (1821),[22] which the poet views as the final recourse when the Law fails. Three famous assassinations are recalled: of Julius Caesar by Brutus, of Marat by Charlotte Corday, and of Kotzebue by Ludwig Sand, the last only two years before.

"The Village" (1819),[23] with its indignant picture of the landlord oppression of serfs, can also be reckoned with Pushkin's politically motivated poems. The picture of rural Russia here, it may be noted, is strikingly abstract—e.g., "Here the brutal rule of the lord [*barstvo*], without feeling, without law, has appropriated for itself with a violent rod both the labor and the property and the time of the tiller of the soil. Here gaunt slavery drags itself along the furrows of the inexorable possessor," etc. This is altogether in the tradition of the eighteenth-century ode, e.g., Kapnist's "To Slavery."[24] It was pieces such as "Freedom," "The Dagger," and "The Village" which impelled Alexander I to exile the young poet, still in the capacity of a government clerk, to the southern provinces of the Empire, Moldavia and Bessarabia.

As might be expected, Soviet critics make a great deal of the "freedom-loving" verse of Pushkin's first St. Petersburg years. It certainly should not be minimized: Pushkin was always in love with liberty, and something of a frondeur. He was not, however, a revolutionary, and the famous "Stanzas" which he addressed to Nikolai I after his accession in 1827, comparing the new Tsar with Peter the Great, were not meant cynically. Many of Pushkin's close friends were revolutionaries, and some of them were executed, all of them severely punished. He might very well have been one of them, had he not—most fortunately—been in exile (at Mikhailovskoe) on December 14, 1825. But he was never one who could have said with Ryleev: "I am a citizen, not a poet." Pushkin was a poet first and foremost, and his poetical ideals diverged farther and farther during the years of his exile from the agitational and didactic direction characteristic of Ryleev and others of his circle, such as Bestuzhev and Küchelbecker. Even during the first St. Petersburg years—1817-20—"civic verse" is the exception amidst the light Anacreontic material.

The body of poetry which Pushkin composed during the years at the Lycée and immediately afterward has interest primarily as showing the influences which were operating upon him during those years, and also for the amazing technical mastery which it exhibits. As art its value is so overshadowed by the work of the later years that it is customarily passed over quite cursorily in studies of Pushkin's poetry. The young genius was, in Zhukovsky's words, "prowling around other people's ideas and images." He continued prowling for a year or two after the Lycée, becoming ever surer of himself. The poem addressed "To Chaadaev" (1818)[25] is a notable example of his "civic verse" with its lapidary line: "In the weariness of hope we await the moment of holy freedom, as the young lover awaits the moment of a faithful tryst." Though he assures his philosopher friend in the third and fourth lines of his epistle that "youthful diversions have disappeared like slumber, like the morning mist," this is evidently something of an exaggeration, as the poem addressed to Olga Masson (1819),[26] one of St. Petersburg's fashionable courtesans, attests, or the little version of a French original, "Seclusion" (1819),[27] with its pose of sloth and contempt for society. The best and most original piece of these years is certainly the "Rusalka" (1819),[28] which recounts a pious old hermit's unsettling vision of a water-nymph rising from the lake: "He gazes, involuntarily filled with fright, and cannot understand himself... and sees: the waves seethed and suddenly grew quiet again... And suddenly... light as a shadow of the night, white as the early snow of the hills, emerges a naked woman and sits silently on the shore." The old man sees the vision again the next day, but waits vainly for it on the third. The hermit disappears, "and only a grey beard was seen by some boys in the water." The restraint and understatement of the ending are typical of the mature Pushkin.[29]

In many ways the year 1820, the first of Pushkin's "southern exile," marks a turning-point in his poetry. The story is told that the poet Batyushkov, then in Naples, upon reading a copy of Pushkin's epistle "To Yurev" (1820), crumpled the paper convulsively in his hands and exclaimed: "How that rascal has learned to write!" There are still occasional traces of other poets in his work (e.g., Zhukovsky's "The Fisherman" was obviously the model for *Rusalka*), but these are inincreasingly fewer as the years go on.

In 1819, the year before Pushkin left St. Petersburg, there was published in Paris a posthumous edition of the poetry of André Chénier, who had lost his life to the guillotine in the Terror of 1794. Chénier was the son of a French diplomat and a Cypriot Greek woman, and he had been born in Constantinople. He learned Greek early and his entire body of verse reflects his devotion to this heritage. His classicism is genuine, not refracted through Latin imitations of Hellenic originals, and is comparable to that of Friedrich Hölderlin in German. As a conscious reaction against

the pseudo-classicism of the French eighteenth century, Chénier's poetry became immensely influential in the nascent French romantic movement. Pushkin became acquainted with Chénier's poetry before he began his "southern exile," and he recognized in the French poet a kindred soul.[30] Chénier had been a revolutionary and republican, but was rightly revolted by the Jacobin terror, and fulminated against the monster Robespierre and his minions in a set of poems, mostly written in prison, called *Les Iambiques*. This side of Chénier's genius found an echo in Pushkin, who loathed Alexander I and deeply resented the tyrannical treatment he himself had been accorded. But even more, the classical restraint of Chénier, the visual, almost tactual, concreteness of his images, which have often been called "plastic," and the extreme musicality of his verse coincided with Pushkin's own traits and reinforced them. One of the finest examples of the Chénier style is Pushkin's 1820 verse, the six-line poem "The Nereid,"[31] composed while he was in the Crimea:

> Amid the green waves which caress Tavrida,
> In the light of dawn I saw a Nereid.
> Hidden among the trees, I scarcely dared to breathe;
> Above the bright water the demigoddess reared her young
> Breast, white as a swan,
> And in a stream wrung the foam from her hair.

Pushkin's use of adjectives is almost classical, not only here but everywhere in his best poetry—precise and definite, not mood-provoking in the Zhukovsky manner. Here they are all—"green," "bright," "young," "white"—exact and definite; and the gesture, as the Nereid raises her arms to wring the water from her hair, is caught as though in marble. There is not a word too much; the economy is genuinely classical, and the poem could be translated into Greek and put into the Anthology with no sense of strangeness.

Another Chénieresque poem of disputed date (Pushkin himself dated it 1820, but the manuscript copy of it is in a notebook among verse written in November, 1824) is "Vinograd" ("Grapes"):[32]

> Let us not be sorry about the roses
> that withered with light-footed spring.
> As well am I pleased by the grapes on the vines
> whose bunches have grown ripe in the lee,
> the beauty of the fertile valley,
> the joy of golden Autumn,
> slim and transparent
> like the fingers of a young maiden.[33]

Although several years later in date, another Pushkin poem may be considered here, significant not only in its relation to Chénier, but also as a

statement about poetry as Pushkin viewed his art. It is a translation of a Chénier fragment intended as the beginning of an "idyll";[34] a comparison of the original and Pushkin's version is revealing:

> Près des bords où Venise est reine de la mer,
> Le gondolier nocturne, au retour de Vesper,
> D'un aviron léger bat la vague aplanie,
> Chantant Renaud, Tancrède et la belle Erminie.
> Il mime les chansons, il chante. Sans désir,
> Sans gloire, sans projets, sans craindre l'avenir,
> Il chante, et, cheminant sur le liquide abîme,
> Sait égayer ainsi sa route maritime.
> .... Comme lui je me plais à chanter.
> Les rustiques chansons que j'aime à répéter
> Adoucissent pour moi la route de la vie,
> Route amère et souvent de naufrages suivie.

In Pushkin's free version[35] Chénier's poem becomes:

> Near the places where golden Venice is queen, solitary, the rower of the night, steering his gondola, in Vesper's light [Vesper is the evening star] sails along the sea-shore, and sings of Godfrey, Rinaldo and Erminia [all characters, along with Chénier's Tancred, from Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*]. He loves his song, he sings for entertainment, without distant thoughts; he knows neither of fame, nor of fear, nor of hope, and, filled with his quiet Muse, he knows how to sweeten his path over the abyss of the waves. Upon the sea of life, where storms so cruelly pursue in the darkness my solitary sail, like him, without response I sing for consolation, and love to think up secret verses.

Note that in Chénier the poet, like the gondolier, merely sings to enliven his often dangerous path. There is nothing in the French to which Pushkin's phrase *bez otzyva uteshno*—"without response, for consolation"—would correspond; and this is true also of the emphatic *odin*, "solitary" of the second line, and the *tainye*, "secret" of the last. The emphasis has been changed from the simple notion of poetry as a private diversion without thought of fame or fortune, to the more complicated one of poetry that is not understood, that evokes no response, that the poet must keep secret in his own heart.

Pushkin's infatuation with Byron, and the influence of the English poet on the "southern poems"—*The Prisoner of the Caucasus, The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* and *The Gypsies*—has been noted in connection with Pushkin's narrative verse. When *Ruslan and Lyudmila* was written (1818-1820) its author was still not acquainted with Byron. This acquaintance was made during the southern exile, through Alexander Raevsky, although both Batyushkov and Vyazemsky, friends of Pushkin, had earlier than 1820 become interested in the English romantic. For the most part Pushkin's lyric verse shows little trace of Byronic influence, which is scarcely surprising since Byron's own lyric verse was everywhere

far less regarded than his narrative poems. During a sea voyage from Kerch to Yurzuf on the Crimean coast, Pushkin composed an untitled elegy beginning: "The luminary of day has gone out" *(Pogaslo dnevnoe svetilo)*,[36] which echoes in one or two places Byron's lyric "Adieu, adieu! My native shore—," inserted in stanza xiii, Canto I of *Childe Harold*. The repeated refrain in Pushkin's elegy, "Roar, roar, obedient sail, surge beneath me, sullen ocean," is slightly reminiscent of Byron's lines, and the typically Byronic sentiment:

> With thee, my bark, I'll softly go
> Athwart the foaming brine;
> Nor care what land thou bear'st me to,
> So not again to mine.

is definitely repeated in Pushkin's: "Fly, O ship, carry me to distant shores, over the terrible fickleness of the deceitful seas, only not to the sorrowful shores of my misty native land."

We have noted in *The Gypsies* the passage put in the form of a Moldavian legend told by Zemfira's old father, and relating the sad fate of the Roman poet Ovid, exiled by Augustus to the shores of the Black Sea. Pushkin liked to compare his own fate with Ovid's, although he does so with considerably less self-commiseration than the Roman, whose *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* reek with it. Pushkin's 1821 elegy "To Ovid"[37] begins: "Ovid, I am living close to the quiet shores to which you once brought your exiled homeland gods, and left your own ashes." He paints a vivid picture of the homesick Italian in the strange wintry north—a picture echoing in large part *Tristia* III, 10. Turning in the second part of the poem to himself, he writes: "A stern Slav, I shed no tears; but I understand them." In the third and last part of the elegy he disclaims any thought of matching Ovid's fame: "Like you, submitting to an inimical fate, I am your equal not in fame but in my lot."

In 1815 Pushkin had written a rather pompous quasi-ode, "Napoleon on Elba," in which the fallen emperor meditates revenge upon his foes in his temporary exile, as he sees the boat speeding toward him that will take him back to France. Napoleon died on May 5, 1821, and Europe reacted everywhere to the news. Like so many poets, Pushkin also composed an ode, which he titled simply "Napoleon."[38] There is here no gloating over the man whom so many Russians, not unnaturally, regarded as a monster: "The wondrous lot has been fulfilled; a great man's life is quenched," he begins. With a true understanding of the historical importance of Napoleon, as well as a remarkable insight into the man's psychology, Pushkin then evaluates his career. Coming to the events of 1812, he no longer, as in earlier pieces, glorifies Alexander I as the great conqueror of Napoleon; now it is Russia and her people who bring about the tyrant's

downfall, and there is no mention of the Tsar. The last stanza of the ode sums up the mood and theme of the whole: "May that man be darkened with ignominy, that man of little soul who on this day shall disturb with witless reproach the uncrowned shade! Praises! He showed the Russian people their high destiny and to the world proclaimed eternal freedom from the darkness of exile."

An 1821 poem which Pushkin never attempted to publish, and which exists only in a fair copy from which a page of some 40 lines seems to have been torn out, is the epistle entitled "To my Ink-Well."[39] The poet recalls the delights of composing, which make him forgetful even of "drunken revelry and the festive goblet." He says to his ink-well: "My treasures lie hidden in your bottom. You I have consecrated to the occupations of leisure and I have reconciled you with idleness; she is your friend." He regrets that too much preoccupation with verse-writing has led him to neglect his correspondence, and he urges his ink-well, "with chatter careless and giddy and tender, comfort the hearts" of his neglected friends. At the end of the epistle, which was written a week after another epistle specifically addressed "To Chaadaev" *(V strane, gde ia zabyl trevogi prezhnikh let),*[40] Pushkin directs his ink-well to go after his death to "my dear friend Chaadaev. . . . the gloomy," and "dried up, empty, between his two pictures, remain forever dumb, and beautify his mantelpiece."

To the year 1822 belongs a tale which is printed in most anthologies as representative of Pushkin's interest in Russian ancient history—"Song of Oleg the Wise."[41] The legend on which Pushkin's poem is based comes from the Primary Chronicle, under the year 6420 "from the beginning of the world," i.e., A.D. 912. After a long and glorious reign Oleg, Prince of Kiev, meets his death as had been prophesied:[42] "And autumn came on, and Oleg remembered his horse, which he had sent out to be pastured and had not ridden on him. For he had questioned warlocks and sorcerers: 'From what am I to die?' And a certain sorcerer said to him: 'Prince! The horse that you love and ride on, from him you shall die.'" The chronicle goes on to tell how Oleg from the day of this prophecy no longer rode on or even saw the horse, which he had put out to pasture. When he recalled the old war-horse in the autumn of 912, he asked his grooms if it was still alive and well and was told that it had died. He then began to mock the sorcerer who had prophesied his death from the animal, and said: "'However, I shall see the bones.' And he came to the place where its bones were lying bare and its skull bare, and he dismounted from his horse and mocking said: 'From this skull was I to receive my death?' And he set his foot on the skull; and from the skull came forth a snake and stung him in the foot. And from this he fell ill and died." Pushkin tells the story with considerably more elaboration than the old chronicler, using a six-line stanza of alternate four- and three-foot amphibrachs, rhyming AbAbCC. Notable in Pushkin's version is the Prince's touching love for the horse, with which he parts most reluctantly, and remembers with great affection:

> The Prince quietly approached the skull of the horse and said: "Sleep, solitary friend! Your old master has outlived you; at his funeral feast, no longer far distant, you will not beneath the axe empurple the feather-grass and with your hot blood give my ashes to drink!
>
> So here is where my death was hidden! A bone threatened me with death!" From the dead skull a sepulchral snake, hissing, crawled out meanwhile; like a black ribbon it wound around his leg, and stung; the Prince gave a sudden scream.

The banishment to which Alexander's decree condemned him, although not a severe punishment, irked Pushkin by the consciousness that he was not free to go and come as he pleased. The pathos of this situation comes out strikingly in the poem "The Prisoner" (1822).[43] The prisoner behind his bars shares his captivity with an eagle, which he imagines saying to him: "Let us fly away! We are free birds; it is time, brother, it is time! Thither, where the mountain is white beyond the cloud, thither where the regions of the sea are blue, thither, where only the wind roams—and I!" Similar in theme is the "Little Bird" (1823),[44] which treats the poet's liberation of a caged bird, an act which consoles him—"for what reason should I rail against God, when I have been able to give freedom to so much as a single creature!"

Pushkin's love poetry, like Goethe's, constitutes a significant portion of his total lyric production, and comes from all periods. It is a matter for the biographer to worry over the particular woman who inspired each piece, but of little literary concern. The poems are usually short and intense, and as the poet matures, less and less adorned with the typically romantic phraseology of passion. A delicate piece from 1823 is "Night,"[45] which reveals the poet writing by the light of "a mournful candle"; "My verses flow, pouring forth and murmuring, brooks of love, full of you."

Until about 1820 Pushkin's verse has been patterned after either the classical verse of the eighteenth century or after that of the early Russian romantics Zhukovsky and Batyushkov, or the more revolutionary young men who were to become "Decembrists." When he went into his southern exile Pushkin was still faithful to the romantic view of the world: the poet's task was a noble and lofty one, to bring enlightenment to his fellow-men and fame to himself; liberty could be won by self-sacrificing devotion and bestowed "from above" on a suffering people; true love, uniting two souls, was eternal; the solitary contemplation of nature could replace for the poet the heartless society of man, etc. etc. The psychological anguish which Pushkin endured in exile, and which was a combination of many factors, as references in letters, anecdotes of acquaintances and the like give evidence, is also associated with a breakdown of the essentially optimistic faith of the romantic. The poet's own future seemed bleak and hopeless, at least as long as Alexander I remained on the throne; he became increasingly disillusioned about the poet's high mission and about the eternity of love; and very disquietingly, he became convinced of the uselessness of altruistic efforts,

such as those of his revolutionary friends, to bring "liberty" to an ignorant and submissive people—this, it should be noted, a year or more before the tragedy of December 14 demonstrated how well founded this pessimism was.

The most typical verse of the period 1821-24, when the poet was floundering in this psychological crisis, is marked by a deep pessimism and cynical despair. It seems at times as though Pushkin is deliberately and savagely unmasking the very ideals he had hitherto cherished. What increasingly separates Pushkin during this period from contemporary romantics is this ironic view of the world and himself. Beside his enthusiastic and optimistic earlier self he came to feel the presence as of another self which, like Faust's Mephisto, "always denied." This feeling is unforgettably enshrined in "The Demon" (1823).[46] The poem begins with a succinct summary of the romantic ideals which had inspired his youthful poetry: "In those days when for me new were all the impressions of existence—the glances of maidens and the forest's murmur and the nightingale's song at night; when exalted feelings, freedom, fame and love and the inspired arts so powerfully agitated my blood,—then, darkening with sudden ennui the hours of hopes and delights, some malevolent genius began in secret to visit me." This "demon" destroys the poet's faith in all that had been his inspiration:

> Sorrowful were our meetings; his smile, his wondrous aspect, his venomous discourse poured a cold poison into my soul. With inexhaustible slander he tempted providence; he called the beautiful a dream; he was contemptuous of inspiration; he believed in neither love nor freedom; he looked mockingly upon life, and nothing in all nature was he willing to bless.[47]

When one compares this frank disclosure of the "Spirit that always denies" in Pushkin's own nature—as in Faust's—with the picture of young Onegin in his relations with the romantic enthusiast Lensky and the naive Tatyana, we can readily see that though Onegin and the poet are not the same, they are certainly related. The cold demon of negation is never very far from either of them—but Pushkin never surrendered to him, as Eugene did. For a while, however, a mood of cynicism amd futility possessed him. This mood has its sharpest political expression in the untitled piece beginning "A sower of freedom in the wilderness."[48]

The epigraph for the poem is the line from Jesus's parable: "A Sower went forth to sow his seeds." Putting himself in the sower's place and making "freedom" the precious seed, the poet records his disillusionment: "Into the enslaved furrows I scattered the life-giving seed—but I merely lost my time, kindly thoughts, and labors . . ." The second strophe is a contemptuous dismissal of the "peaceful peoples" who refuse to awake to the call of honor. They are mere herds, whose fate is "to be slaughtered or shorn." "Their heritage from generation to generation is the yoke with

jingles and the whip." Doubtless this profound skepticism over the possibility of rousing the people to the call of liberty lies in part behind Pushkin's non-involvement with the active aims of the Decembrists.

Pushkin, like all the romantics, had always abhorred the intrusion of commercialism into the sanctuary of literature. Unfortunately at about this time his own financial position (he was jobless and his father refused to allow his son more than a pittance—and his debts were large) forced him to make a bitter reappraisal of his position. The record of this is the colloquy entitled "Conversation of Bookseller with Poet,"[49] which was written in September 1824, and published by way of a foreword to the first chapter of *Eugene Onegin*. It is the same cynical deflation of the poet's mission as "A Sower of Freedom in the Wilderness" is of the mission of the would-be liberator of "the people."

The Bookseller accosts the Poet with a crass business proposition: "A poem, they say, is ready, the new fruit of the mind's ventures. So decide, I'm waiting for your word: you yourself name the price. The little verses of the favorite of the Muses and Graces we exchange in a moment for rubles, and we turn your little pages into a bunch of cash bank-notes." The Poet, however, is distrait: "I was far off; I was remembering the time when, rich in hopes, a careless bard, I wrote from inspiration, not for pay." "Then, in the silence of my toil, I was not ready to share my fiery raptures with the mob, and I did not degrade the Muse's sweet gifts with ignominious commerce." The Bookseller reminds him that he has now become famous and his works circulate from hand to hand, while other people's prose and verse wait in vain for buyers. This is no consolation to the Poet, who opines that "that man is happy who conceals his soul's lofty creations for himself and away from people, as from the tomb . . . What's fame? The whisper of a reader! The pursuit of a base ignoramus? Or the admiration of a fool?" "Lord Byron was of the same opinion," remarks the Bookseller, "and Zhukovsky said the same thing"; but they became best sellers. Fame may not be to your taste, but just think how it dazzles the ladies—write for them. It is true, sighs the Poet, that I used to go into raptures over the fair sex—"But enough! The dreamer will sacrifice his freedom to them no longer." Now it has become clear that they don't understand me at all, and "I'm ashamed of my idols." Why did I ever waste time with them? "I like your anger. Such is a poet." rejoins the Bookseller. But aren't there any exceptions? "Isn't there even one of them who is worth your inspiration, your passion?" Hereupon the Poet launches into a series of impassioned rhetorical questions which seem to indicate that there is indeed at least one: "She alone would have understood my obscure verses! She alone would have kindled my heart with the pure torch of love!" So then, the Bookseller observes, you have abandoned your inspired lyre, left the fashionable world and the Muses—"What then will you elect?" "Freedom," replies the Poet laconically. "That's fine," agrees the Bookseller, "but here's some advice: give heed to

the profitable truth. Our age is mercenary [*torgash*]; in this iron age without money there isn't even any freedom." All writers recognize this and trade on their produce—"And I acknowledge, I foresee a good deal of profit from yours." The conversation comes to an end with a rush as the Poet, completely convinced, sinks from his inspired verse into the baldest prose, and says: "You're perfectly right. Here's my manuscript. Let's talk terms." The poem is of course a reluctant admission that "poetry pays"; but it is much more. The flamboyant utterances of the Poet are almost a parody of the kind of romantic verbiage which poets like Küchelbecker turned out and took seriously. The Bookseller represents the cool voice of common sense, which can be heard so clearly also in Onegin's conversations with Lensky, written a few months later.

Pushkin's "demon" called the beautiful a dream; he was contemptuous of inspiration; and "he believed in neither love nor freedom." Love's turn to be unmasked and deflated came some months later, when Pushkin had already recovered from his crisis of cynicism and despair, in the poem called "A Scene from Faust."[50] As Bondi notes,[51] "This poem was written by Pushkin in 1825, after he had come out of the crisis, but in it (as was frequently the case with Pushkin) are conveyed not his feelings and thoughts of that time, but those which had already passed, but were retained in his poetical memory."

"A Scene from Faust" is entirely Pushkin's own invention, utilizing the ready-made and familiar plot elements of Goethe's great poem. This device, which frees the poet from any need for tedious exposition, is precisely that used in the "little tragedy," *The Stone Guest,* where it is the Don Juan legend which furnishes the basic plot. In the "Scene," which takes place on the seashore, Faust begins abruptly with the remark: "I'm bored, devil." Mephistopheles replies that such is the universal law: "Every rational creature feels boredom, one from sloth, one from activity." Faust refuses to submit to this "universal law," and in accord with his pact with the demon, orders him to "find some means of distraction." Mephisto tries to evade the hopeless task by pointing out that previous efforts have all failed: "You wanted glory—and you got it; you wanted to be in love—and in love you fell. You've taken every possible tribute from life—and have you been happy?" "Cease!" cries Faust, "do not poison my secret wound." All other earthly hopes and ideals have proved false and illusory, but—"there is a genuine goal; the union of two souls—." Mephistopheles breaks in with: "No doubt the one you have in mind is Gretchen?" The name evokes a torrent of enraptured memories from Faust, in the fullest romantic vein. "Heavenly Creator," cries Mephistopheles, "You're raving, Faust, and wide awake!" "Didn't I devise for you a way of satisfying your desire," he continues, "and at the very moment when she was fainting with ecstasy in your arms—do you want to know what you were thinking?" "Well, what? Tell me," answers Faust.

> You were thinking: my submissive lamb! How avidly I wanted you! How slyly I stirred up the daydreams in the heart of the simple-minded maid!—She has guilelessly surrendered herself to involuntary, irreproachable love.—Why is *my* heart now full of depression and odious boredom? Upon the victim of my caprice I look, drunken with enjoyment, [yet] with unconquerable revulsion. Thus a heedless feather-brain, having futilely resolved on an evil deed and murdered a beggar in the woods, curses the mutilated body; thus the debauchee looks fearfully askance at a mercenary beauty, when he has hastily sated himself with her . . . And then, from all this, you drew only one conclusion . . .

Furiously Faust interrupts this evidently all too accurate reading of his thoughts when they should have been on the ineffable "union of two souls," and vents his spite on a distant ship which he descries on the horizon. This he bids his obedient demon to sink, together with the "three hundred scoundrels, two apes, casks of gold, and a rich cargo of chocolates, and the fashionable disease that was lately given to you," as Mephistopheles enumerates its contents. What was the "one conclusion" which Faust's disillusioned meditation led him to? The devil was not given the chance to state it, but it could hardly be other than this: the exalted notion of love as a genuine "union of two souls" is romantic humbug; it is no more than a sexual instinct, "the union of two bodies," and like every other satisfaction, brings only satiety and disgust.

By 1824 and Pushkin's return north to a new phase of exile in his own country estate at Mikhailovskoe, in the Pskov province, he had fully matured and pretty much outgrown all the literary influences which had directed his early writings. To this period belongs his final work on the best of the "southern poems," *The Gypsies,* and on the middle chapters of *Eugene Onegin*. The lyrics of this period are both more numerous and better than those of the southern exile. Themes from the earlier period recur, however, as in "To the Sea,"[52] Pushkin's valedictory to the fascinating element which had meant so much to him while he was in the Crimea and Odessa. "Farewell, free element!" he cries, "For the last time you roll your blue waves before me and glitter in proud beauty." The thought of the sea recalls to the poet the dreams he had once had of escaping from his odious exile to the West. "For what should I mourn? Whither would I now have directed my careless path? One object in your waste would have struck my soul." This one object in the vast ocean was the island where Napoleon died, St. Helena. "There he rested amid torments. And in his wake, like the noise of the storm, another genius dashed away from us, another sovereign of our thoughts." The other genius is Byron, who died April 18, 1824, at Missolonghi. "He has disappeared, mourned by freedom, leaving his crown to the world. Roar, be turbulent with storm: he was, O sea, your singer." In the last strophe of the poem Pushkin, now returned to the inland north, declares: "Into the forests, the silent wildernesses I shall bring, filled with you, your rocks, your bights, and the glitter and the shadow and the talk of the waves."

During his southern exile Pushkin, as has been mentioned, was continued in his civil service appointment, under the direction of the governor-general of the Crimea, Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov (1782-1856). Vorontsov was the son of a one-time Russian ambassador to England, had been born and educated in England and retained a passion for everything English all his life. It was he who built, from the plans of an English architect, the fabulously ugly palace on the Crimean coast west of Yalta, an incongruous combination of Moorish and Tudor English styles. Pushkin and Vorontsov disliked each other intensely, but the beautiful Mme Vorontsova was quite a different matter, and her husband's animosity toward Pushkin may have been in part fired by the ardent court which the poet paid to Elizabeth Vorontsova. It was the manoeuvering of Vorontsov that resulted in Pushkin's being ordered from Odessa to his estate at Mikhailovskoe in 1824.

Two interesting pieces from 1824 reflect this background. The first is a four-line epigram on Mikhail Semyonovich, very artfully composed with both internal and external rhymes:[53]

Polu-milord, polu-kupets,
Polu-mudrets, polu-nevezhda,
Polu-podlets, no est' nadezhda,
Chto budet polnym nakonets.

["Half 'My-lord,' half tradesman, / Half-sage, half-ignoramus / Half-scoundrel—but there's hope / that he'll be a whole one at last."]

The other reminiscence of the Vorontsovs is a short and perhaps fragmentary elegy addressed to Elizabeth. It begins with an atmospheric description: the poet is far away in the cold and cloudy north, thinking nostalgically of the South and the woman who made it so attractive:[54]

The rainy day has ended; the dark of the rainy night spreads over the sky like a garment of lead; like a phantom, behind the pine grove the misty moon has risen . . .

Everything inspires a sombre melancholy in my soul. Far away, yonder, the moon is rising in brightness; there the air is filled with the warmth of evening; there the sea moves like a sumptuous shroud beneath the blue skies . . .

Now is the time: now she is walking along the hill toward the shore, drowned by the sounding waves; there, at the foot of the familiar rocks.

She is now sitting sorrowful and alone . . . Alone . . . No one, forgetting himself, kisses her knees: alone . . . to no one's lips does she now offer shoulders or moist mouth, or breast as white as snow. [Since there is no autograph of the poem, it is uncertain whether the three lines of dots printed at this point represent a real lacuna, or whether they are, like the similar line at the end, an intentional device of suspense.] "It is true, isn't it, you are alone . . . you are weeping . . . I am calm . . . But if . . .

The abrupt last words more eloquently than any elegiac complaint represent the torturing reality behind the self-deluding "I am calm." Pushkin was the first in Russian poetry to use this kind of deliberate break for emotional effect.[55]

Earlier in this study, in discussing the lyrical poetry of Fyodor Glinka, that poet's imitations of Hebrew poetry were mentioned—the Psalms and Prophets. The exotic Oriental coloration of this verse was part of its attraction for Glinka, and in his imitations he consciously picks out picturesque details to emphasize the vast differences between the pastoral life of the Holy Land and the life of modern Europe. Glinka was also attracted, as we have seen, by the possibilities which imitations of the invectives of Hebrew prophets afforded for concealing the poet's own denunciations of contemporary evils. Glinka's numerous scriptural imitations bear the same relation to the genuine ethos of Hebrew antiquity that Ozerov's Greek tragedies bear to the genuine Hellenic spirit—that is, they are external, a matter of costume and accessories, with no true understanding of the essential differences in character which time and geography necessitate. That Pushkin was conscious of these differences is evident from *Eugene Onegin,* and almost programmatically from *Boris Godunov.* Another piece of evidence is the set of nine short poems entitled "Imitations of the Koran" (1824).[56] In these the nineteenth-century Russian poet makes a remarkable and generally successful effort to suppress everything that characterizes his own age and place and to recreate the atmosphere of seventh-century Arabia. In this he departs altogether from Glinka's practice, and even more from that of the minor romantic Alexander Rotchev (1806-1873), whose like-named collection of "Imitations of the Koran" (1826-28) is obviously rather "Imitations of Pushkin." Both these poets utilize the Oriental disguise to mask their contemporary concerns; Pushkin's "Imitations" are not spoiled by *arrière-pensées.*

The first of the nine poems which constitute the collection is Allah's voice addressed to his Prophet:

I swear to you by odd and even, I swear by the sword and the righteousness of battle, I swear by the morning star, I swear by evening prayers:

No, I have not forsaken you. Whom indeed have I led into the shade of repose, loving his head, and concealed from keen-sighted pursuit?

Did I not give you to drink of waters in the desert on the day of thirst? Did I not give your tongue a mighty dominion over minds?

Be manful, then; despise deceit, cheerfully follow the path of truth; love the orphan and preach my Koran to trembling creation.

The ninth "Imitation" is the longest of the group (six six-line stanzas) and the most personal. Behind the Oriental imagery and in a purely objective statement with nothing overtly referring to the poet himself one may sense Pushkin's emergence from the mood of pessimism which marks particularly the parable of the "Freedom Sower." The first strophe of the poem

begins abruptly with the words: "And the weary traveller railed against God." He has wandered three days and three nights in the desert toward an oasis, tormented by thirst. At last he reached his goal, refreshed his burning tongue and eyes with water and fell into slumber. When he woke in the morning a mysterious voice revealed to him that he had slept for years: the palms of the oasis had decayed, the well dried up and had been covered with sand, "And the bones of your she-ass are white." The traveller groans and bows down his trembling head. "And then was performed a miracle in the desert: what had passed was revived in new beauty; once more the palm's shady head waves up and down; once more the well was filled with coolness and shadow. And the old bones of the she-ass rose up, were clothed with a body, and gave forth a bray; and the traveller felt both strength and gladness; youth resurrected played in his blood; sacred raptures filled his breast; and he went forward on his way with God."

Of similar inspiration, but serving a quite different purpose, are the two short poems from 1825 which Pushkin originally bracketed together as "Imitations"[57]—this time from the Song of Songs. The first, beginning: "The garden of my sister is a solitary garden," echoes a good deal of the original (Song of Sol. 4:12-16). The second[58] freely elaborates the first verses of the first chapter of the old Hebrew lovesong into a universal celebration of desire.

The year 1825 was an extremely productive one for Pushkin, and the body of lyric verse of that year is of extremely high quality. It was during this year that, almost alone with his old nurse at Mikhailovskoe, the poet for the first time came really close to the Russian people, their lore and their language. The charming and touching "Winter Evening," addressed to old Arina Rodionovna, gives evidence of this new relation to the common folk.[59] The poem is in trochaic tetrameter, in eight-line stanzas with alternating feminine and masculine rhymes—a meter that is suggestive of popular verse. Such *skazki* as *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* and *The Golden Cockerel,* it may be remembered, also utilize the four-foot trochaic verse, though with different rhyme schemes and without stanza divisions. The poet calls on his old companion to sing her song about "the blue-tit which lived quietly beyond the sea," and about "the maiden who went to fetch water in the morning"—genuine peasant songs which Pushkin in fact heard from his nurse.

Another literary memento of the poet's encounter through his nurse with genuine popular lore is the "*skazka*" or "ballad" written in 1825, "The Bridegroom."[60] This piece, which Pushkin at its first (1827) publication subtitled "*prostonarodnaia skazka,*" or "a folk tale of the common people," is in fact at least in part based on Russian folk tales about a maiden and a band of robbers. It was to have formed part of a projected collection of such tales, which never materialized. It has, however, been demonstrated conclusively[61] that the German folk tale "Der Räuberbräutigam," which is

one of the Grimm Brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812-13), played a part in the genesis of Pushkin's poem. From what source he might have derived knowledge of the German tale is uncertain; it has been suggested that Zhukovsky might have transmitted it. It is also quite possible that the Russian tale itself as Pushkin heard it from Arina Rodionovna may have been contaminated with motifs from the German story, as is known to have happened quite frequently. In any case one German element in the tale is of certain origin: the eight-line strophe of alternating four- and three-foot iambic lines, with rhyme-scheme AbAbCCdd is the meter of Bürger's famous ballad *Lenore.* Neither Zhukovsky's *Lyudmila* nor his *Svetlana,* both avowed imitations of *Lenore,* reproduces the original meter; Pushkin must have known enough German to get it from Bürger's own ballad.

The tale relates how the merchant's daughter Natasha is missing from her home for three days; on her return, weary and frightened, she refuses to tell her father and mother where she has been. After a time she resumes her usual mode of life until one day, on the street with other young girls, she sees a dashing young man riding by in a troika; she suddenly grows pale and runs home with the cry: "It's he, it's he! I recognized him!" Soon after, a matchmaker arrives to ask for Natasha's hand for a "fine young man, well-built and alert, not quarrelsome, not disreputable." The parents consent, Natasha calls for a wedding feast; the guests come, but the bride is downcast. When the bridegroom inquires the reason, she tells what is ostensibly a dream: she was lost in the woods, by chance discovered a log hut which was deserted, but full of gold and silver and other treasures. As she heard the approach of the cabin's occupants, she took refuge behind the stove and then watched with horror as one of the group ("the eldest brother") took his knife and cut the throat of a beautiful maiden, their captive, and then cut off her hand. The bridegroom tries to make light of Natasha's grisly "dream," but she suddenly demands of him: "From whose hand comes this ring?" The bridegroom's confusion gives him away, and he is seized as a robber and executed. The restraint and the quick, understated ending are remarkable.

The poem is developed entirely in the spirit of a genuine popular *skazka*; traditional features such as repetition of key words, diminutives, doublet compounds of the type *dusha-devitsa* ("soul-maiden") and the like, folk epithets such as *likhaia troika* ("spirited troika") etc., mark the language. But at the same time it is artful beyond anything of genuine popular origin. Nabokov calls attention to the extreme musicality of the verse and such strikingly onomatopoeic passages as the description of the robbers' feast:

> Krik, khokhot, pesni, shum i zvon,
> razgul'noe pokhmel'e"
>
> ["Shouts, laughter, din and clangor, / and drunken revelry"]

or the "forest murmurs" passage (almost Wagnerian in another medium!):

> S tropinki sbilas' ia; v glushi
> ne slyshno bylo i dushi
> I sosni lish' da eli
> vershinami shumeli.
>
> ["I strayed from the path; in the deep woods / not a breath could be heard / and only the pines and the fir-trees / rustled with their tops."]

In the second passage the "s" and "sh" sounds together with the liquid "l" marvelously and untranslatably reproduce the gentle murmur.[62]

A considerable number of the 1825 pieces are satirical epigrams or verse polemics directed against Pushkin's foes, literary and otherwise.[63] There are also some Bacchanalian verses[64] and some love poems, most notably the beautiful lyric addressed to Anna Petrovna Kern, beginning "I remember a wonderful moment."[65] A major poem is the long rhapsody entitled "André Chénier."[66] Arndt translates the first three stanzas of this, in which the poet declares his intention of honoring the forgotten ashes of a poet other than Byron, whose recent death all Europe was mourning. The body of the poem "André Chénier" consists of a monologue put in the mouth of the young patriot as he waits in the prison of St. Lazare the morning of his execution. A good deal of the language echoes Chénier's own words in *Les Iambiques.* He speaks of the intoxication of the first days of freedom and the downfall of the monarchy: "And the fiery tribune prophesied, filled with rapture, the resurrection of the earth." The disillusion was bitter as the revolution fell into the hands of the Jacobins: "O woe! O foolish dream! Where are liberty and law? Over us only the axe has dominion!" It is not safe even to mourn the victims: "Fear to awaken suspicion with your tears; in our age, you realize, even tears are a crime." Chénier thinks back over his youth and regrets that he, "born for love, for peaceful temptations," has let himself become involved with politics, and by his early death will be doomed to oblivion: "I shall wholly die," he cries despairingly, reversing Horace's *non omnis moriar*: "Was it for me to govern refractory horses and strain tight the powerful reins? And what do I leave behind? The forgotten traces of a mad zeal and a worthless daring. Perish, my voice, and you, O lying phantom, you, O word, empty sound. . . . " Then suddenly the doomed poet catches himself up and cries:

> Oh, no! Be silent, faint-hearted complaint! Be proud and rejoice, poet. You have not bowed an obedient head before the infamy of our years; you have despised the mighty evil-doer; your torch, terribly flaring, has illumined with pitiless brightness the council of inglorious rulers; you called out against them, you glorified Nemesis; you sang to the priests of Marat the dagger and the maiden [i.e., Charlotte Corday].

The monologue breaks off as the executioners enter the prison: "Now I go . . . It is time . . . But you [i.e., Robespierre] come after me: I wait for you." The final section of the poem returns to the third person narrative, and Pushkin dwells on the tragic irony: "They call . . . wait, wait; only a day, one day—and there are no more executions, there is freedom for all, and a great citizen is alive amid a great people." [Chénier was executed on 7 Thermidor; on the 9th Robespierre's dictatorship fell and the dictator himself promptly went to the guillotine.]

Although "André Chénier" is an objective depiction of a tragedy that took place five years before Pushkin was born, and although there is nothing in the poem that overtly suggests an equation of Chénier's fate with Pushkin's own, there is no doubt that the reader who knew the facts would draw the inference, and was meant to.[67] After the death of Alexander I (December 6, 1825) Pushkin wrote to Pletnyov[68]: "My soul! I'm a prophet, so help me God, a prophet! I shall order 'André Chénier' to be printed in ecclesiastical letters in the name of the Father and of the Son, etc." The prophecy is of course the grandiose invective against Robespierre and beginning: "And you, ravening beast!" in which the dictator's fall is foretold.

Although the lyrical production in 1826 is only about half as extensive as that of the previous year, there are some of Pushkin's most superb verses among it. One is the marvelous sixteen-line poem in which he records his feelings at receiving news of the death in Italy of Amalia Riznich, the beautiful Dalmatian lady who had been one of his many loves.[69] "From indifferent lips I heard the tidings of death, and indifferently I heard it." He asks himself, almost indignantly, "Where are the torments, where the love?" and answers: "Alack! in my soul for the pale, readily trusting shade, for the sweet memory of days that shall never return I find neither tears nor reproach."

If the poet was momentarily unmoved by the death of the passionately loved Riznich, it was not that his capacity for emotion had cooled, as the poem "Confession"[70] evidences. It is addressed to Alexandra Ivanovna Osipova, a step-daughter of Pushkin's neighbor Mme P. A. Osipova, of the Trigorskoe estate near Mikhailovskoe. "Alina," as the addressee was called, was much younger than the twenty-seven-year-old poet, and he rebelled furiously against the attraction, but in vain: "It's unbecoming for me and unsuitable for my years—it's time, it's time to have more sense! But I recognize by all the signs the disease of love in my soul: without you I'm bored, I yawn; with you I'm melancholy, I suffer; and I can't help it, I want to say, my angel, how I love you! When from the drawing-room I hear your light footstep or the rustle of your dress or your girlish, innocent voice, I suddenly lose all my wits." The affliction is the worse because he knows it is useless to look for reciprocation: "Alina! Have pity on me! I dare not ask for love. Perhaps, for my sins, my angel, I'm not worthy of love! But

pretend ... oh, it isn't hard to deceive me! ... I'm happy myself to be deceived!"

Mention has been made in connection with Katenin of Pushkin's "Stanzas,"[71] addressed to Emperor Nikolai I, which roused such a furor among friends and foes of the poet, who regarded them as either capitulation or hypocrisy. They are certainly sincere, and after the hated Alexander I his untried younger brother probably did at the time seem to Pushkin a great change for the better. However, the four-line epigram which Arndt prints immediately after the "Stanzas," and which would certainly reflect on the honesty of Pushkin's sentiments in 1826 toward Nikolai I, is a false attribution and does not belong to Pushkin. Blagoi and Bondi reject it, and the recent collection of *Epigrams* in the "Poet's Library" series attributes it to "an unknown author."[72]

In the "Imitations of the Koran" there is no doubt that Pushkin in his own mind thought of the "Prophet" less as the concrete religious reformer Muhammad than as "the Poet." He always put a high evaluation on his own calling, though he could deride the mystical romantic ideas of real divine inspiration. To the year 1826 belongs one of his most famous and often-quoted poems, "The Prophet."[73] The poem is the only surviving one of four pieces which Pushkin composed in connection with the government's punishment of the Decembrist conspirators, to which the original reading ("*Velikoi skorbiiu tomim*"—"Weary with great sorrow") of the first line refers. The other three parts of the set the poet must have prudently destroyed.[74]

In discussing the Hebrew imitations of Fyodor Glinka we pointed out the great similarity between Glinka's poem "The Prophet" and Pushkin's, a similarity which extends to the meter of the poem and the abundant use of a richly connotative Slavonic vocabulary and imagery drawn from the Scriptures. Glinka's poem is not a masterpiece; Pushkin's is. Whatever influence the older piece had on Pushkin's "Prophet" was assimilated and appropriated into a harmonious whole. There is a free translation of the poem in prose by Maurice Baring[75] which to my mind conveys even better than his verse version[76] the flavor of the original:

> My spirit was weary and I was athirst, and in the dark wilderness I went astray. And a seraph with six wings appeared to me at the crossing of the ways. And he touched my eyelids and his fingers were as soft as sleep; and my prophetic eyes were awakened like those of a startled eagle. And the angel touched my ears and he filled them with noise and with sound; and I heard the Heavens shuddering, and the flight of the angels in the height, and the moving of the beasts under the waters, and the noise of the growing vine in the valley. He bent down over me and he looked upon my lips; and he tore out my sinful tongue, and he took away all the idle things and all evil with his right hand, and his right hand was dabbled with blood; and he set there in its stead, between my perished lips, the tongue of a wise serpent. And he clove my breast asunder with a sword, and he plucked out my trembling heart and in my stricken breast he set a live coal of fire. Like a corpse in the desert I lay. Then the voice of God called out and said unto me: "Prophet, arise, and take heed, and hear. Be filled with my will and go forth over the sea and over the land, and set light with My word the hearts of the people."

Glinka's prophet was a Decembrist, who sits at the beginning of the poem "grieving over the destiny of man." When God's voice comes to him out of the burning bush he hears: "Arise, my prophet! Thou shalt be the mouth of God. Go, unmask vice!" Pushkin's is the Poet. The miraculous and terrible touch of the seraph destroys all ordinary senses and replaces them with that heightened awareness that makes the poet's life a delight and a torment. There is no commission to "go, unmask vice!" This is not the poet's part. Instead, the solemn last line enjoins him: *Glagolom zhgi serdtsa liudei*—"Burn with the Word the hearts of men." The "word"—*glagol, Verbum*—is the Poet's own implement: it is not the religious word, nor the political, but the revelation that is in art; and if ever a poet "burned with the Word the hearts of men," Pushkin did.

Shortly after his return to Mikhailovskoe from his southern exile Pushkin wrote a short and touching little tribute to Arina Rodionovna, his sister's nurse and for the term of his stay on the Pskov estate his own constant and devoted companion.[77] The poem is titled simply "To Nurse":[78]

> Comrade of my grim days, my decrepit darling! Alone in the remoteness of the pine forests for long, for long you wait for me. Under the window of your lookout room [*svetlitsy*] you watch, grieving as though on sentry-duty, and minute by minute the knitting needles slow up in your wrinkled hands. You look out through the forgotten gateway at the black and distant road: sadness, forebodings, worries continually oppress your breast. Now you imagine....

The poem breaks off in mid-line and the old woman's imaginings are left to us to supply—no difficult task.

Another masterpiece of 1826 is the poem "Winter Road."[79] Where the untranslatable essence of "The Prophet" lies in the solemn scriptural vocabulary with its reminiscences of the book of Isaiah, what renders "Winter Road" impossible to put adequately into another language is the sound. The poem is a mood picture: the sombre landscape of the winter night, the monotonously tinkling bells of the troika, the coachman's mournful singing all contribute to the poet's despondency. Even the remembrance that in the morning he will again be with his beloved fails to lighten the gloom. The entire construction of the piece emphasizes the oppressive sense of monotony; thus in the third and fourth lines of the first stanza the same word occurs in different forms, reinforced in the third line by alliteration: *Na pechal'nye pol'iany / L'et pechal'no svet ona* ("it [i.e., the moon] sorrowfully pours its light on the sad fields"). The second stanza begins with the line: *Po doroge zimnei, skuchnoi* ("along the dreary winter road"), the fifth begins with *Skuchno* ("dreary"). The phonetic character of

the words seems to call up the "coachman's long-drawn-out songs": *Skuchno, grustno* ("it's dreary, it's cheerless") begins the fifth stanza, and the long "u" sound is twice repeated. The monotonous sound of the sleigh-bells is reproduced in the light "o" pronounced ä) sound in the first two syllables of *kolokol'chik,* followed immediately by two other repetitions of the same sound: *odnozvuchnyi*. Finally, in the last stanza all the themes and all the phonetic devices of the whole poem are brought together—the tedium of the journey, Nina—the poet's beloved—the coachman's singing, the monotonous bells, and the pale moonlight. And in this resume the same long "u" sound is repeated in the first line, the second line is "instrumented," in the Russian phrase, by a predominance of the three liquid consonants "ł," "n," and "m" which also appear in the last line; and the bell-sound reappears in the third line: "Grustno, Nina; put' moi skuchen, / Dremlia smolknul moi iamshchik, / Kolokol'chik odnozvuchen, / Obtumanen lunnyi lik." What sounds, in plain prose translation quite flat and characterless, is actually, through the wonderful mingling of sound with sense, a poetical miracle.

Early in 1827 Pushkin composed a memorable epistle to the exiled Decembrists, which he sent to them in the keeping of the wife of one of them, who journeyed to Siberia to be with her husband. This poem, beginning: "In the depths of the Siberian mines,"[80] has been commented on earlier, in connection with Alexander Odoevsky's reply to it. Other echoes in the lyrics of this period of the poet's relations with the Decembrists are contained in the poem "Arion,"[81] in which the old Herodotean legend of the poet who was saved from a watery grave by a dolphin is rather drastically altered to serve as a symbol of Pushkin's own survival when so many of his friends have been lost. The fragment beginning: "What a night! The frost is brittle-hard"[82] was apparently designed to be the beginning of a historical poem on the grim reign of Ivan the Terrible. The contrast is startling between the beautiful winter night and the horrors of the Moscow square littered with the bodies of Tsar Ivan's executed foes.

Many of the lyrics of Pushkin's mature period are concerned with the nature of poetry and the poet. "The Poet"[83] employs eighteenth-century allegory—Apollo as the giver of inspiration—with echoes of "The Prophet." In a fashion reminiscent of Baudelaire's "Albatross" Pushkin describes the poet as "the most insignificant" "among the insignificant children of this world"—until inspiration is granted him. "But no sooner does the divine word touch his keen hearing" than he is transformed. The "divine word" *(bozhestvennyi glagol)* is that with which the Prophet "burns the hearts of men," and the poet's "keen hearing" *(slukha chutkogo)* seems to echo the acuteness of the Prophet's ear after the seraph's touch. But now, instead of going forth among men, the poet, "wild and austere," shuns human society and flees into the wilderness.

The theme of "The Angel"[84] recalls that of "The Demon"; here even "the spirit of denial, the spirit of doubt" is moved by the angel's innocent beauty and declares: "Not everything in heaven have I hated, not everything on earth have I despised." But Pushkin's pessimism, brought on by the realization on his return from exile that nothing has changed, is reflected in the untitled piece beginning "In the world's wasteland—."[85] The poem, which is sometimes given the title "Three Springs," was written as a rejoinder to the similarly allegorical "Three Roses" of Pushkin's ill-fated young friend, Dmitry Venevitinov. "Three Springs" is an extraordinarily tight and condensed expression of the poet's pessimism. In eight lines symmetrically constructed as four pairs we have: first pair, exposition; second pair, the first spring; third pair, the second spring; fourth pair, the third spring. The rhythm of the sentences varies in conformity with the content: thus, *kliuch iunosti, kliuch bystryi i miatezhnyi / kipit, bezhit, sverkaia i zhurcha* ("the spring of youth, spring rapid and tumultuous, boils, races, glittering and gurgling"). and the halting penultimate line: *poslednii kliuch—kholodnyi kliuch zabven'ia* ("the last spring—the cold spring of forgetfulness"). The strict formalism of the construction harmonizes with the classical allegory: the "second spring" is Castalia, the fountain of poetic inspiration, and the third is Lethe, which, the quiet last line declares, "slakes the heart's thirst most sweetly of all."

Returning to Moscow and St. Petersburg after seven years of exile, Pushkin felt himself painfully isolated. Some of his most intimate friends had been implicated in the Decembrist conspiracy and were now in Siberia; others had died or become estranged. Although never morbidly introspective, Pushkin suffered at times in his life from moods of severe depression. The poem "Remembrance" (1828)[86] is filled with a despairing consciousness of a wasted life and the futility of regretting it. The first four of the poem's sixteen lines picture the night as the time of sleep for most mortals, their "reward for the day's labors"; the next four contrast the poet's case as he lies sleepless, prey to "the serpent of the heart's remorse." In a striking figure "Remembrance" is personified as silently unrolling before him "its long scroll"; reading the contents of this scroll, the poet trembles with horror and curses and weeps bitter tears—"but I do not blot out the sorrowful lines." "Foreboding" (1828)[87] reflects Pushkin's anxiety over the possible outcome of the Senate investigation of the publication of his poem "André Chénier," a portion of which had appeared without his authorization or knowledge with the inflammatory heading "14 December, 1825." The poet queries gloomily whether he will be able to "keep his contempt for destiny" as in his "proud youth." "Wearied with a life of tempests, I await [this] tempest indifferently." Perhaps it will pass, but perhaps I must go to "my angel" for the last time. In the final stanza the poet bids his "angel": "Tell me quietly 'Farewell'"; "the remembrance of

you will replace for my soul the strength, the pride, the hope and the valor of my youthful days."

Perhaps the most notable literary record of this black time in Pushkin's life is the poem which he wrote on his twenty-ninth birthday, and published headed simply by the date: "26 May, 1828."[88] The three short stanzas are filled with reminiscences of the Book of Job, which was a great favorite of Pushkin's—he even contemplated at one time studying Hebrew in order to read it in the original:

> Useless gift, casual gift, life—why were you given to me? Or why by a mysterious destiny have you been sentenced to execution?
>
> Who with hostile authority called me out of nothingness, filled my soul with passion, agitated my mind with doubt?
>
> There is no goal before me; my heart is empty, my mind idle, and I am worn out by the tedium of life's monotonous noise.

To Pushkin's alarm, an important churchman, Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow, took cognizance of the poem's gloomy skepticism, and using the same meter and the same rhymes, wrote a Christian refutation. Life, says the Metropolitan's rejoinder, is God's gift, neither casual nor useless, and death is decreed by His mysterious will. The middle stanza answers the poet's query as to responsibility: "I myself with self-willed authority called out evil from the dark abysses; I myself filled my soul with passion, agitated my mind with doubt." In the final stanza the poet is made to call on God "whom he has forgotten" for forgiveness and purification. The alarm which this ecclesiastical intervention caused was, however, uncalled for; beyond this gentle and genuinely sympathetic response nothing happened.

To this same period belongs the strange and powerful *Anchar* ("The Upas Tree," (November 9, 1828).[89] The image which generates the poem Pushkin derived from a description by the physician F.P. Foersch, of the Dutch East India Company, of the "poison tree" locally called *pogon-upas,* of the island of Java. The description is of course highly colored and exaggerated, but, as Pushkin rightly supposed, it does refer to a real tree, *Antiaris toxicaria,* used by the Javanese as a source of arrow poison. In the first five stanzas of his poem Pushkin factually describes the tree, following Foersch's ostensibly botanical description and adding little. The sixth stanza, after the note that all creatures shun the poison tree, opens with the startling and highly significant line: "But man sent man to the upas-tree with commanding glance." The Foersch article stated that Javanese princes used to send criminals under the death sentence to collect the poison; if they survived the sentence was revoked. Pushkin's victim is a "poor slave," who carries out the deadly mission, returns with the poison, and falls dead at the feet of "the invincible lord." The lord then uses the poison to smear his arrows and carry destruction to his foes. The poem is

cryptic and mysterious. What does Pushkin mean by the symbol of the slave's blind obedience in bringing the poison at the cost of his life to the "invincible lord"? The Soviet critic D. D. Blagoi[90] uses twenty pages largely to prove that (1) the original publication of the poem put the explanatory words *"drevo iada,"* "tree of poison" after the title *Anchar*; and (2) that the subject in the first line of the final stanza was originally *"Tsar',"* and not, as in the *Collected Poems, "kniaz',"* "Prince." From these undisputed facts Blagoi infers that the upas-tree is meant as a symbol for the evil of unbridled autocratic power—specifically, of course, that of the Russian Tsar. This last inference, however, seems to me highly questionable. The upas-tree is of course a symbol, and the poem is not an allegory, requiring consistency in all its parts; nonetheless, for the "Tsar" to send a "poor slave" to a tree symbolizing his own autocratic power from which to obtain poison with which to subdue his neighbors seems too muddled to be good symbolism. Something concretely evil but distinct from the "Tsar" seems called for (if "atomic fission" had been known in 1828, it would fit nicely!). Would it be too fanciful to suggest that the upas-tree might symbolize war, which always destroys the "poor slaves" who obediently wage it for the "invincible lord"? It is perhaps no coincidence that Tsar Nikolai I declared war on Turkey in April 1828, and that when the poem was written in November, his "poisoned arrows" were "spreading ruin for his neighbors in foreign lands."

But the poem's meaning, like that of any good symbol, cannot be exhausted by a single interpretation. Anyone who has read Turgenev must remember the meaning that his heroine Anna Pavlovna *(A Quiet Spot)* reads into the words: "But man sent man to the upas-tree with commanding glance." For her, it is the terrible authority that love gives "man" over "man" and that sends him, as it does her, to his death.

The ballad, which after Zhukovsky had become almost the favorite romantic vehicle, is only sparingly represented in Pushkin's work. One example, previously commented on, is "The Bridegroom." Two others belong to the year 1828. "The Drowned Man"[91] is notable for its "popular" language. The words of the children who discover the hideous corpse and report it to their father are genuine rustic language; in fact the whole poem, even in the purely narrative portions, is written in the vernacular. Unlike "The Bridegroom," however, it does not embody any popular superstition or folk story.[92] Neither poem is "atmospheric" or provided with supernatural adjuncts, like the ballads of Zhukovsky; the apparition of "the drowned man" at the muzhik's window can be read as a nightmare brought on by the repulsive sight of the blue and swollen body. The second ballad of 1828 is a different sort—a translation of a portion of a French prose version of Walter Scott's Scottish ballad "The Twa Corbies." In Pushkin's Russian this becomes: "Raven Flies to Raven" or sometimes simply "The Two Ravens."[93] While remaining close to the original, Pushkin contrives

to suggest a solution to the mystery which is wanting in Scott's ballad:

> Raven flies to raven, raven cries to raven: "Raven, where are we to dine? How are we to provide for this?"
>
> Raven answers raven: "I know; we shall have dinner. On the clear plain beneath the furze lies a slain knight.
>
> By whom slain and why only his hawk knows and his raven-black mare and his young mistress.
>
> His hawk has flown away to the wood, his foe has seated himself on the mare, and his mistress is waiting for her lover—not slain, but alive."

Pushkin's typical succinctness and avoidance of all needless ornamentation are most notable in this poem.

A quite different sort of ballad is that beginning: "Once upon a time there lived a poor knight" (1829),[94] the hero of which, after a one-time vision of the Virgin Mary, renounces service to all other women and even addresses his prayers neither to Father nor to Son nor to Holy Ghost, but only to his heavenly lady. When the Devil comes to claim the soul of the idolatrous knight, the Virgin intervenes to save it. Although the theme appears similar to that of Zhukovsky's "Knight Toggenburg"—i.e., the apotheosis of knightly devotion to a lady—there is an element in Pushkin's poem which gives a rather different tone to it. Not only is there an unusual authorial intervention in the last line of the sixth stanza ("he was a strange man") but the Devil's accusation: "He did not pray to God, he did not observe the fasts; *excessively he courted the mother of Christ*" seems to point to an almost morbid eroticism in the knight's relations with his heavenly mistress. This element removes the ballad altogether from the company of the naive medieval glorifications of Mariolatry. An abbreviated form of this ballad, as we have noted elsewhere, is given to Franz, the hero of *Scenes from the Age of Chivalry*.

The year 1829 was a momentous one for Pushkin; he fell in love with the young woman who was two years later to become his wife and eight years later, perhaps, the cause of his death; he made his first unsuccessful try at writing a novel in prose; and he escaped for a brief time from Russia, and as a civilian, joined the army as observer in the campaign in Armenia which was the culminating phase of the war against Turkey. The first and last of these events left lasting traces in his lyrical output of the year. The renewed experience of visiting the magnificent mountainous lands of Georgia and Armenia is reflected in a number of poems written either at the time or immediately after. These are, in contrast to those dating from his first encounter with the region in 1820, restrained, factual, realistic, and free from the romantic exaltation of the earlier group. His prose record of the experience, *Journey to Arzrum*, which we shall consider presently, almost programmatically frustrates the romantic expectations associated with the Caucasus. Several of the best lyrics of this year are vivid

evocations of the mountain landscape, so novel and exciting to a Russian. Particularly notable are "The Avalanche"[95] and "The Monastery on Mount Kazbek."[96] In "The Avalanche" the poet describes most vividly the occurrence, which he mentions in *Journey to Arzrum*, of a snow-slide two years before, which had temporarily blocked the course of the Terek river until the stream had succeeded in burrowing beneath the obstacle, leaving the mass of ice above as a "wide path" for men and beasts. Precise and objective, the description is wholly free from romantic metaphor or mood-evoking adjectives. "The Monastery on Mount Kazbek" has more atmosphere. The great pyramid of the mountain is called a "royal tent," and the monastery perched on its height "soars like an ark hovering in the sky"—an evident allusion to the legend that Noah's ark had landed after the Flood on Mt. Ararat. Thought of the ark, the Biblical refuge of earthly life from catastrophe, turns the poet's thoughts to his own need for such a refuge, and he cries: "O distant, longed-for shore! Oh, to rise thither to the free summit, saying good-bye to the ravine! Oh, to hide myself in a cell beyond the clouds, a neighbor to God!"

Inspired by the mountains and permeated with thoughts of the poet's beloved is the beautiful lyric "On the hills of Georgia lies the dark of night."[97] This was headed in its first printed form with the word "Fragment," and it is indeed a fragment, revised, of a longer poem, different in style and probably in inspiration.[98] The fuller form,[99] which was published only after Pushkin's death, consists of two eight-line stanzas, only the first of which was revised and printed:

> All is still—upon the Caucasus is coming the dark of night, the stars are rising over me. I am sad and serene—my sorrow is bright, my sorrow is full of you—of you, only of you. Nothing troubles or disturbs my dejection, and my heart once more burns and loves, because it is unable not to love.
>
> Days after days have gone by. Many years have passed from sight. Where are you, priceless beings? Some are far away, others in the world no longer, and only memories are with me. I am yours as before. I love you once more both without hope and without desire. Like the sacrificial flame, pure is my love and my tender, virginal dreams.

It may be noted that only the first two lines of the first stanza are changed: "On the hills of Georgia lies the dark of night; beneath me resounds the Aragva"—a perfectly precise location for the poet instead of the general and atmospheric original opening. Of the second stanza the last two lines—a classically inspired simile—are notably weak and were properly discarded; the theme of distant memories, appropriate to the original addressee, is obviously out of place with Natalia Goncharova, whom Pushkin had met only the year before.

Of all Pushkin's lyrics perhaps the most universally known and loved is the eight-line gem which begins: "I loved you; love still, perhaps. . . ."[100] While there is debate among Pushkin scholars as to the identity of the

woman addressed,[101] it seems most likely to have been to Natalia Goncharova, the seventeen-year-old girl who at this date had refused the poet's hand and whose family treated him very coldly after his return from the Arzum journey.[102] The poem is filled with a sad resignation, without hope and without reproach, and with a tenderness that contrasts strongly with the ardent passion of many of the earlier love poems. The haunting beauty of the verse is the effect partly of the classical symmetry of construction, partly of the transparent simplicity of the language, and partly of its marvelous musicality. The story is told[103] that someone once asked Tchaikovsky why he never set to music Pushkin's wonderful verses. His answer was that "they were music already."

In the poem "On the hills of Georgia lies the dark of night" the poet declares: "my sorrow is full of you—of you, only of you" *(toboi, odnoi toboi). "Ia vas liubil"* ("I loved you") is the beginning of the new lyric. The change goes unrecognized in English, but is striking in Russian. In the one poem the second person *singular* is used throughout, in the other the second person *plural.* The lover, jolted back into formality by the coldness of his beloved, returns to the propriety of the plural pronoun—the "empty *vy,*" as he calls it in the little ditty "Ty i vy" ("Thou and You").[104] Probably he could say, as in the earlier verse, "I say to her: how dear you [*vy*] are! And I think: how I love thee [*tebia*]!"

The lyric, "When noisy rumor defames your youthful years,"[105] is not a love poem, but is addressed to a woman to whom several of Pushkin's 1828 poems had been addressed, Agrafena Fyodorovna Zakrevskaya. The addressee had apparently committed some serious social indiscretion and suffered ostracism. Pushkin assures her of his continued sympathy. Perhaps the lady didn't need it; T. G. Tsyavlovskaya, the commentator of the second volume of Pushkin's lyric verse, remarks of her: "She was renowned for her passionate nature and her contempt for prejudice."

Upon his return from Georgia and Armenia Pushkin in November 1829 stopped for a time at a friend's estate near Tver and there wrote two wonderful "winter sketches." The first which begins: "It's winter—what's there to do in the country?"[106] is a vivid record of the boredom of country life at a time when the only outdoor diversion is an unsuccessful hunt, and when the poet can find no inspiration even to write verse. Finally the scene takes on an unexpected and most welcome liveliness as a neighbor with her two pretty daughters comes on a visit and the poet's doldrums abruptly disappear. The poem ends with admiring words about the rosy cheeks of Russian girls in the winter, which will be echoed in the "praises of St. Petersburg" in the first part of *The Bronze Horseman.* Both poems, but particularly the first, are perfect examples of Pushkin's realistic style in the depiction of country life, very much in the manner of the Larin passages in *Eugene Onegin.* The second of the pair, composed two days after the first, is entitled "Winter Morning,"[107] and is, in mood as in time of day, an

intended contrast with "Winter Road" (1826). Here, instead of the monotony and depression of the night journey over the snowy fields we have the bright exhilaration of a snappy winter morning. The second and third stanzas contrast the scenes of night and morning:

> Last night, you remember, the blizzard raged, darkness was carried over the turbid sky; the moon, like a pallid patch, shone yellow through the dark clouds. And you sat sorrowful—but now... Just look out the window.
>
> Like a magnificent carpet beneath the blue sky the snow lies, gleaming in the sun. Only the transparent forest is black, and the fir-tree through the hoar-frost is green, and beneath the ice the brook glitters.

In the third stanza the poet turns to the scene indoors, which is just as cheery: "The whole room is illuminated by an amber glow. The stove, just lighted, gives a cheerful crackle. It's pleasant to lie in bed and think. But you know—shouldn't one give orders to have the brown mare hitched to the sleigh?"

The briskness and gaiety of these poems are deceptive, for Pushkin was seldom far from thoughts of death, though still only a young man. It did not appall him nor does he sentimentalize it. In a marvelous lyric written in 1829 which begins: "If I wander along the noisy streets—"[108] there are none of the elegiac clichés of dear dead youth and blighted hopes, and none of the attitudinizing that mark so much of the romantic verse about death. Pushkin faces the prospect steadily, a little saddened by its imminence and the thought that life will go on, while he will be no part of it. He wishes only that his body rest "nearer to those places which I love." In the last stanza every word is telling. He has not Zhukovsky's mystical dream of a better life beyond the grave—but life will go on after his own death, and still be beautiful; and this will suffice: "And at the entrance to the grave let young life play and let indifferent nature shine with everlasting beauty." The epithets are perfectly chosen. Nature looks on "indifferently" at the death of any creature, but the "young life" of the renewed race will continue to play; and nature's beauty will be "everlasting."

The last of Pushkin's great lyric periods was the year 1830. This was the year also of the "little tragedies" and The *Little House in Kolomna* and *Tales of Belkin.* Although in April of that year Natalia Goncharova at length consented to be his wife, the poet's moods of depression did not immediately cease. Typical of his feeling that he was, like Keats, one "whose name was writ on water," are the verses written for Karolina Sobańska's album, in which like other fashionable ladies of the time she kept the names of celebrities with appropriate sentiments: "What is my name to you?"[109] The poet expects his poetical name to be soon forgotten, or read like a sepulchral inscription in an unknown tongue; yet sometime "on a day of grief, in quiet" let her pronounce his name and say: "There is a memory of me, there is in the world a heart where I live."

As he pondered his impending marriage with an innocent young girl, and knew of the sly innuendoes which Natalia and her family were hearing as to his probable future infidelity, the poet was despondent and remorseful. A powerful expression of his feelings at this time is the piece entitled "Verses Written at Night During Insomnia."[110] Lying sleepless, he is aware of the surrounding darkness and the "irksome sleep" of others, luckier than he. There is nothing in his consciousness but the monotonous ticking of the clock, for which he has a brilliantly telling metaphor—"the old wives' babble of the Parcae." To the vague "trembling of the sleeping night," "the mousy scurryings of life" he addresses the anxious query: "Why do you disquiet me? What is your meaning, tiresome whisper?" "Is it the reproach or the murmuring of the day I have wasted? Are you a summons or a prophecy?" But there is no reading the riddle.

In 1830 Pushkin wrote a short piece which he titled "Elegy."[111] It is surely one of the oddest elegies in the language. In the first place it consists of only fourteen lines, which might suggest a sonnet. Pushkin wrote his first sonnet at about this same time, and it is tempting to look at "Elegy" as a sort of reversed sonnet—sestet followed by octet. Then, although the subject of the six-line first portion of the poem is traditionally elegiac—regret over the vanished past—and in the eight-line second portion the poet voices his reluctance to die, these well-worn themes are treated in a highly unconventional way. "The burnt-out gaiety of my thoughtless years," he begins, in quite conventional elegiac language, "is oppressive to me as a dull hangover [*pokhmel'e*]." For vividness the simile would be hard to match, but such a vulgar, prosaic word—and idea—is startling in an elegy, for which "agreeableness" is canonical. And to reinforce the impression, the next lines elaborate with a new comparison: "But like wine, the sorrow of my past days is stronger in my soul the older it is." The "sestet" ends with a transition from past to future: "My course is gloomy. The future's turbulent sea promises me toil and grief." The traditional elegist often gloomily contemplates his inevitable end: the "octet" of Pushkin's "Elegy" begins with a protest: "But I do not want to die, my friends"—not a surprising sentiment,—but for what reason? Pushkin's answer is startling: "I want to live, *so as* to think and suffer." Thought and suffering are paired as inevitable companions—and as the purpose of life. Here is an answer to the despondent query, "Useless gift, casual gift, life, why were you given to me?" But even in suffering, he foresees, there will be consolations: the exaltation of creating, and—"perhaps upon my sorrowful setting love will shine with a farewell smile."

During his enforced stay at his father's Boldino estate in 1830 (the cholera epidemic raging nearby prevented his leaving) Pushkin worked on some poems begun earlier but left unfinished. One of these is entitled *Besy* ("Devils.")[112] The poem is decisively not a ballad, although Belinsky considered it such, and a modern critic chooses to follow him.[113] It is a

first-person account of a winter journey through a blizzard, echoing many of the motifs of the earlier "Winter Road," such as the fitful moonlight, the scudding clouds, and the eery howling of the wind; even some verbal echoes may be noted, such as the onomatopoeia of the troika bells: *kolokol'chik din-din-din.* The meter, too, is the same trochaic tetrameter as that of "Winter Road." The element that gives the poem its name, and which for Belinsky outweighed other considerations, is contained in the coachman's words to his passenger (the "I" of the poem). In language that tends somewhat to the vernacular, the coachman describes the whirling gusts of snow as a throng of devils that have blinded him and made him lose his way on the trackless plain. The sound effects, with the recurring lines that seem to suggest the futile circling of the troika in the blizzard, are not as striking as in "Winter Road," but nevertheless contribute a great deal to the powerful atmospheric effect. In the penultimate stanza the traveller himself describes the "devils": "Numberless, ugly, the various devils are whirling in the dim playing of the moonlight-like leaves in November... How many there are of them! Where are they rushing? Why are they singing so mournfully? Are they burying a house-spirit [*domovoi*] or marrying off a witch?" The poem ends with still another reference to the plaintive sound of the storm: "The devils are rushing, swarm after swarm, in the boundless height, rending my heart with their mournful screeching and howling."

There can be no doubt that there is more in "The Devils" than a vivid picture of a ride through a snowstorm. Dostoevsky, who took the title and epigraph for his novel from the poem ("The Possessed" is of course only a Victorian euphemism for *The Devils*) gave it an interpretation of his own: "the devils" are the misguided liberals who are leading the Russian troika around in circles to its destruction. Blagoi, while not excluding the possibility of an autobiographical interpretation, leans toward a political reading: Russia hopelessly floundering in the "dead end" *(tupik)* of reaction after the failure of the Decembrist coup. But he also makes a very interesting observation:[114] just at the time when "The Devils" was written, Pushkin was reading Dante; and the picture of the devils whirling in endless swarms on high corresponds strikingly with Dante's vision of the souls in the Fifth Canto of *Inferno,* tossed about forever in a whirlwind of passion. It even appears that in one original variant of the poem a key line read: *mchatsia, v'iutsia teni razny,* "the various *spirits* scurry and whirl." Blagoi does not follow this clue further; but if the Dantean passage was in Pushkin's mind, he can hardly have failed to recall that the spirits in the first circle of Hell, which Canto V describes, are the lustful, undergoing a punishment suited to their sin. Dante symbolically punishes himself in this circle when Francesca's story causes him to faint in pity and "fall, as a dead body falls." Pushkin may be doing the same thing in getting lost in a blizzard. But one of the beauties of symbols is that they are not mutually

exclusive. "The Devils" can have a personal and a political meaning at the same time.

Mention has been made of Pushkin's first sonnet, written early in 1830. He had earlier been quite hostile to a form that he associated with the strict genre canons of classicism, but perhaps under the influence of his friend Delvig, who composed numerous excellent sonnets, he decided to try his hand at it. His model was Wordsworth's "Scorn not the sonnet, critic."[115] His effort is not a translation, but a free reworking. Of the sonneteers whom the Wordsworth poem enumerates—Shakespeare, Petrarch, Tasso, Camões, Dante, Spenser and Milton—Pushkin retains "stern Dante," Petrarch, "the creator of Macbeth," and Camões, but for the other three substitutes Wordsworth himself, Mickiewicz (the "Crimean Sonnets") and Delvig. The last tercet notes that the sonnet is still a strange form to Russians: "With us, maidens have not yet come to know it, nor how for its sake Delvig has already forgotten the sacred cadences of the hexameter."

Pushkin's second sonnet is headed "To the Poet"[116]—that is, first and foremost, to himself. It is a proud admonition, beginning: "Poet! Do not hold dear the people's love." Soviet critics are, of course, at pains to point out that the word *narodnyi* does *not* mean "of the common people"; the poet must mean instead the despicable crowd of bureaucrats and courtiers. That he doesn't mean "the common people"—illiterate and scarcely likely to love a poet!—is perfectly obvious. He means "of the nation." Without distortion the word cannot be restricted to any one narrow class.

In the second quatrain the poet adjures himself: "You are a tsar: live alone. Go your free way where your free mind leads you . . . Ask no rewards for your noble exploit. They are within you yourself." The poet's proud self-sufficiency culminates in the last tercet: "Are you satisfied? Then let the crowd abuse it [i.e., your work] and spit on the altar where burns your fire, and in their childish playfulness shake your tripod." In the solemn language and classical imagery (sacrificial fire, prophetic tripod) the sonnet is one of Pushkin's most eloquent utterances on the poet's function.

A third sonnet, "Madonna"[117] is addressed to the poet's betrothed, who, according to a letter of July 30, 1830[118] bore a striking resemblance to a Renaissance Madonna, a painting attributed to Raphael, which he had seen in a St. Petersburg shop. The conclusion of the sonnet is that he has always longed to own the painting, and God has answered his prayers and given him a living replica of the Madonna to be his wife.

In the embittered polemics of the period between the "aristocratic" circle of poets to which Pushkin belonged and their proletarian enemy Bulgarin, Pushkin took part by the composition of some deadly epigrams. His poem "My Genealogy"[119] is also interesting for its connection with this literary battle, and because it evidences Pushkin's pride in his ancestry, which he displays for both sides of his family in the poem, although he insists everywhere throughout it, "I am a petty bourgeois."

In 1826 the poet, sunk in grief at the fate of his Decembrist friends, reacted with only a dull indifference to the news of the death in Italy of Amalia Riznich. Now, four years later, recollection of this woman, who had promised him at their parting a welcoming kiss when he should join her in Italy, returns to him and rouses in him an emotion that he did not feel in 1826. In the poem beginning "For the shores of your distant country . . ."[120] he recalls the agony of their parting, and her last words to him: "On the day of our reunion, beneath a sky that is forever blue, in the shade of the olive trees, my darling, we shall once more join the caresses of love." Now in that lovely land to which he will never go she lies in "the funeral urn," and with her lies "the kiss of our reunion . . . But I wait for it: it is due from you."

The love poems of this year, as might be expected, are addressed to Pushkin's betrothed. In the one beginning "When into my embraces"[121] he speaks of Natalia's "mistrustful smile" when he caresses her. She evidently knows too much about his past affairs, which he curses in the last lines of the piece.

More and more in these years Pushkin tried to withdraw his own immediate experiences and feelings from his verse. It becomes increasingly objective, and more and more frequently the poet chooses, as in his earlier "Imitations of the Koran" to put himself into another age and culture. Note, for example, "The Fountain at Tsarskoe Selo,"[122] which is a four-line poem in the elegiac distich of the Greek Anthology, and so perfectly in harmony with the spirit of antiquity that it could readily be put into Greek and fit into Book IX of the Anthology with no incongruity. In this year when Pushkin composed his "little tragedy" *The Stone Guest,* Spanish models seem to interest him. The two-stanza piece beginning "Before a noble Spanish woman . . . ,"[123] in the style of the Spanish *romances,* is one evidence of this. Another is the serenade beginning "I am here, Inezilla,"[124] the first verse of which is taken from "Barry Cornwall" (Brian Waller Procter), the English poet whose *Dramatic Scenes* may have suggested to Pushkin the form of his "little tragedies." Perhaps the strikingly impersonal character of Barry Cornwall's verse seemed particularly congenial to Pushkin at this time. Another poem, more closely connected with Cornwall's verse, is entitled "Conjury."[125] This is something between a translation and an imitation of a similarly named piece by the English poet, ostensibly put in the mouth of an Arabian lover. Parts of Pushkin's three-stanza poem are quite faithful to the English, though the whole is much condensed; parts of it, however, e.g., the lines in the last stanza: "I summon you, not to reproach people whose malice killed my darling, or to find out the secret of the grave," are completely missing in the original, and evidently refer to the circumstances of the death of Amalia Riznich, whose husband abandoned her and left her to starve. Pushkin's poem maintains the pretence of an Arabian background (the shade evoked is that of

"Leyla") but the warmth of the poet's feeling is a far cry from Barry Cornwall's cold objectivity.

After 1830 Pushkin's lyrical production almost ceases and most of the later poems are impersonal in character. Mention may be made of two rather inferior patriotic pieces, "Before the sacred sepulchre..."[126]—a hymn of praise to General Kutuzov, the savior of Russia in 1812; and "To the Slanderers of Russia,"[127] an "occasional poem" called forth by the European denunciation of Russia's suppression of the Polish uprising of 1831. The anti-Polish and thus by implication anti-libertarian character of Pushkin's verses outraged the liberal intelligentsia. Another Barry Cornwall imitation of 1831 is "Echo," the theme of which is Echo's readiness to answer every kind of sound, without ever herself obtaining a response.[128] "Such are you too, poet!" is Pushkin's final pessimistic comment.

Many of the lyrics of 1832 and 1833 show Pushkin turning increasingly to Greek and Roman antiquity for models. The extreme succinctness and the objectivity of the classical epigram particularly attracted him, and it is at this time that after years of frustrating experiments he at last mastered the accentual dactylic hexameter which is the substitute in modern accentual languages for the quantitative classical meter.[129] One of the 1832 poems is a translation of Catullus's poem *Ad pocillatorem,* which begins: "Minister vetuli, puer, Falerni." The Catullan title is "To my Cup-bearer"; Pushkin reduces this to the simple: "To a Boy."[130] He makes no attempt in this case to preserve the original meter (hendecasyllabics), but in the spirit of the poem's Bacchic content renders it in the Anacreontic acatalectic trochaic tetrameter. Pushkin's 1833 experiments with classical themes and meters climaxed with three short pieces drawn from the vast miscellany of Athenaeus, the *Deipnosophistai,* or "Dinner Savants."[131] The longest of these, a drinking song of Xenophanes of Colophon, Pushkin rendered in excellent accentual dactylic hexameters; he used the elegiac distich in translating a short epigram of Hedylus, and the trochaic tetrameter in putting into Russian a passage from a lost comedy by the fourth-century dramatist Eubulus. Since Pushkin was working from a French translation of Athenaeus, he of course did not know the meters of the Greek originals, but used those which he deemed appropriate to the content. The two-line epigram in elegiac meter,[132] "O youth, feast modestly, and mix the Bacchic juice with a sober stream of water, with prudent conversation," seems to be a composition of Pushkin's own, in the spirit of the Anthology.

The endeavor to think and feel himself into another time and place, which is evident in Pushkin's prose (*The Negro of Peter the Great,* 1827; *The Captain's Daughter,* 1833-35; *Egyptian Nights,* 1831-35) is apparent in the Greek and Roman imitations mentioned; it is even more evident in the cycle *Songs of the Western Slavs* (1834).[133] This work has a curious

history. Pushkin's headnote to the collection of sixteen pieces informs the reader that the poet was inspired by an anonymous publication in France entitled *La Guzla, ou Choix de Poésies Illyriques* (1827): The author of these prose "translations" from the Serbo-Croatian language proved to be Prosper Mérimée. *La Guzla* was, like Mérimée's first publication, *Le Théâtre de Clara Gazul,* a literary hoax: Clara Gazul was a non-existent Spanish dramatist, and the "Illyrian songs," supposedly collected in Bosnia, Dalmatia and Herzegovina, were compositions of the French writer, who at the time of writing them had never been in "Illyria." Pushkin was taken in at first, and translated most of Mérimée's collection into Russian verse, using in all but three of the sixteen pieces an unrhymed tonic line quite close in effect to the actual Serbian folk meter.[134] Two of the *Songs of the Western Slavs,* nos. 10 ("The Nightingale") and 14 ("Sister and Brothers") were derived from the collection of genuine South Slavic folk songs compiled by Vuk Karadjich.[135] Pushkin published with his song cycle a letter in French from Mérimée to a common friend in which he admits the hoax, but at once perpetrates another: according to this letter, the *Guzla* poems were tossed off in a few weeks with only the most superficial knowledge of either Serbian or the country. Actually, the composition took some seven years and was supported by an impressive amount of research into South Slavic history and folklore.

Whatever the origin of the *Songs of the Western Slavs,* Pushkin succeeds in making them sound authentic in most cases: exceptions are the "Funeral Song of Iakinf Maglanović" (a probably fictitious gusla-player about whom Mérimée gives a most circumstantial account) and "The Vampire" (no. 13), which are too clever and cynical to be possible as folk-poetry. There is apparently no existing English translation of the collection; some idea of it may be conveyed by a prose version of "The Steed" (no. 16):[136]

> "Why do you neigh, my fiery steed, why have you bowed your neck, do not shake your mane, do not bite your bit? Do I not cherish you? Do you not eat oats as much as you want? Is not your harness beautiful? Are not your reins of silk, your shoes of silver, your stirrups of gold?"
>
> Answers the sorrowful steed: "The reason that I have grown quiet is that I hear a distant trampling, the sound of the trumpet and the singing of arrows; the reason that I neigh is that I have not long to run free, pass my life in beauty and affection, flaunt my bright harness; for soon now the stern foe will take away all my harness, and the silver shoes he will remove from my light feet; this is the reason that my spirit aches, because in place of a saddle-cloth the foe will cover my sweating sides with your skin:" [The Turkish custom of flaying a distinguished enemy and using his skin for some humble purpose is a theme of several of the *Songs of the Western Slavs.*]

Despite the prominence of objective verse in Pushkin's last years, there are a number of impressive examples of the personal lyric. Some are addressed to women, e.g., "Were it not for the troubled urging—" (1833)[137]

or "I thought my heart had quite forgotten"(1835);[138] one, "God grant that I not lose my mind,"[139] is a tormented cry at the awful possibility of insanity, accompanied by the dehumanization of nineteenth-century treatment of lunatics. In commenting on this, which he calls "one of his [Pushkin's] greatest short poems," Vladimir Nabokov[140] notes that a verbal echo from Batyushkov in the piece indicates that Pushkin had Batyushkov's pitiful insanity in mind while writing it.

Two longer and more elaborate poems deserve particular mention: "Voevoda" (1833)[141] and "Autumn" (1833).[142] The first of these is a ballad, labelled "imitation of Mickiewicz." It is a rather free translation of the Polish poet's *Czaty, Ballada ukraińska.* The Voevoda, returning home unexpectedly, finds his wife outside the castle, and in the garden with another man. From the words of the lover it appears that he has been her betrothed before she chose to marry the governor. From ambush the Voevoda and his servant listen, and the Voevoda bids his servant take aim and shoot the faithless wife while the husband simultaneously shoots the lover. But—"A shot rang out forcefully. The servant did not wait for his master; the Voevoda staggered. The servant evidently had missed his mark: he hit him [i.e., the Voevoda] right in the forehead." This, and another Mickiewicz ballad, "Budrys and His Sons,"[143] are again evidences of Pushkin's growing desire to get away from the purely subjective lyric and think himself into other times and places.

"Autumn," which is labelled "a fragment," addresses itself to the matter of writing verse, a subject not often so specifically present in Pushkin's verse. The poem is couched in the Italian *ottava-rima,* a meter he had used before in *The Little House in Kolomna* (1830) and the translations from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1826). The successive octaves of the beginning pass the several seasons in review and announce the poet's preference for autumn above all. He tries to explain his feeling for late autumn by comparing the season to a consumptive girl whom you love because she is beautiful and—"alive today, but gone tomorrow." Then comes a description of autumnal activities in the country, ending with the poet closeted with his Muse:[144]

> And I forget the world, and in the sweet silence am sweetly lulled by my imagination; and poetry awakens within me; my soul is gripped by lyric excitement, it trembles and resounds, and, as in a dream, seeks to pour itself out at last in free expression; and here there comes to me an invisible throng of guests, acquaintances of old, the fruits of my dreams.
>
> And the thoughts seethe boldly in my head, and the ready rhymes run to meet them, and my fingers demand a pen, and the pen paper; a moment, and the verses are flowing freely. Thus a ship drowses unmoving on the unmoving water,—but hark—suddenly the sailors are in motion, they are clambering upward and downward, and the sails are blown out, full of wind; the mass is in motion and cleaves the waves.
>
> It sails. Whither are we to sail?

Following octave 10 Pushkin enumerates some of the "acquaintances of old, fruits of dreams" in an octave which he dropped from the published version; it detracts from the poem as a whole, but has considerable interest in itself:[145]

> Knights in steel, gloomy sultanas, monks, dwarfs, Moorish kings, Greek girls with beads, corsairs, warlocks, Spaniards in capes, Jews, bogatyrs, captive princesses and evil giants. And you, darlings of my golden dawn—you, my young ladies, with uncovered shoulders, with smooth temples and languid eyes.

The poem makes no hint of the dream-ship's destination, but another beautiful piece, one of Pushkin's most anthologized poems, uses the same theme, of escape from the hateful contemporary reality. "It's time, my friend, it's time!" (1834),[146] addressed to his wife, is full of premonitions of death ("You and I are making plans for a life together—and look: suddenly—we shall die!") and disillusion ("Happiness does not exist on earth, but there is repose and freedom"). The poem ends with the words: "Long have I, a weary slave, been pondering flight to a distant land—of toil and pure bliss." This is the goal of Pushkin's dream-ship—a distant land "where there is peace and freedom," but not a life of idleness—the harried poet wants nothing so much as leisure and tranquillity to practice his own sacred craft. He was never to find it.

The last year of Pushkin's life, 1836, saw the composition of several of the poet's lyrical masterpieces. This rank can scarcely be accorded to the poem which he saw fit to attribute to the mild-mannered Italian poet Pindemonte (1753-1828),[147] but the theme of escape to a land of peace and freedom marks these verses too; the poet views with contempt the "rights" over which democratic theorists squabble—"other, better, rights are dear to me." He then enumerates these freedoms: "To nobody to be accountable"; to have no need of bowing mind or conscience to power; "at one's own whim to wander here and there, marvelling at the wondrous beauties of nature, and before the creations of art and inspiration trembling joyfully in raptures of pleasure. There is happiness! There are rights!" Such rights were certainly not to be had in the Russia of Nikolai I, and one wonders if perhaps Pushkin actually meditated a genuine break for freedom into the western world that he had never seen. That he chose the Anglophile Pindemonte as his blind perhaps lends some color to the possibility.

The perhaps fragmentary poem in Alexandrines beginning: "When I wander, meditating, outside the city..."[148] makes use of an old elegiac theme—meditation in a graveyard—but in a fresh, unhackneyed way. The first and longer portion of the poem describes the city graveyard, with its pretentious monuments, the fulsome praises of the dead inscribed on their tombs, etc. The sight of all this induces a weary disgust, so that the only impulse is "to spit and run away." In contrast to this is the village scene:

But how dear to me in the autumn season, in the evening stillness, to visit in the village the ancestral graveyard, where the dead sleep in solemn repose. There the unadorned graves have room; the pale thief does not slink toward them in the dark of night; beside the age-old stones, covered with yellow moss, the villager pauses with a prayer and a sigh; instead of useless and trivial pyramids, noseless genii, dishevelled graces, the oak-tree stands broadly over the important graves, swaying and soughing. . . .

Profoundly moving is the magnificent sixteen-line Alexandrine poem beginning: "Desert fathers and virtuous women . . . ,"[149] in which the poet paraphrases the liturgical prayer that he loves, recited in Lent. This is called "The Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian," and a comparison of the original Church Slavonic form with Pushkin's paraphrase will reveal the extent to which the flavor of the original is kept:[150]

Gospodi i vladyko zhivota moego, dukh" prazdnosti, unyniia,
liubonachaliia i prazdnosloviia ne dazhd' mi.
Dukh" zhe tselomudriia, smirenomudriia, terpeniia i liubve, darui mi rabu Tvoemu.
Ei Gospodi Tsariu, darui mi zreti moia pregresheniia, i ne osuzhdati brata moego,
iako blagosloven" est vo veki vekov". Amin".

["O Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of idleness, despondency, ambition or vain talking. But rather a spirit of purity, humility, patience and love, bestow on me Thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou to the ages of the ages. Amen"]

This prayer, the poet avers, comes "more often than all others to my lips, and when I have fallen it strengthens me with untold strength." Then comes the paraphrase:

Vladyko dnei moikh! dukh prazdnosti unyloi,
liubonachaliia, zmei sokrytoi sei,
i prazdnosloviia ne dai dushe moei,
no dai mne zret' moi, o Bozhe, pregreshen'ia,
da brat moi ot menia ne primet osuzhden'ia,
i dukh smireniia, terpeniia, liubvi
i tselomudriia mne v serdtse ozhivi.

["O Master of my days: Grant not unto my soul the spirit of despondent idleness, the love of power, that hidden serpent, and of vain talking. But grant me to behold, O God, my transgressions; let not my brother receive condemnation from me; and revive in my heart the spirit of humility, patience, love and chastity."]

When Horace published the first three books of his *Odes,* he set at the end of the collection his famous claim to immortality—*Exegi monumentum aere perennius* (III, 30). It has furnished poets with a model for all the generations since 23 B.C. In Russia Lomonosov had translated it quite faithfully, with no attempt to substitute native names for the Italian: *Ia znak bessmertiia vozdvignul.*[151] Derzhavin in turn had utilized Horace more freely in his *Pamiatnik* ("Monument").[152] Almost as though he knew that his work was done, Pushkin in the last year of his life composed his imitation, for which Horace's first line furnishes the epigraph.[153]

The poem follows the construction of Horace's original and Derzhavin's copy: first, the superlatives to describe the height and permanence of the monument; then Horace's *non omnis moriar* (line 6), which both Derzhavin and Pushkin render exactly: "I shall not wholly die." The poet's better part—his poetry—will survive to all ages. Horace describes his fame as spread over all Italy, because he was the first *Aeolium carmen ad Italos deduxisse modos*—"to have brought the Aeolian [i.e., Lesbian] song to Italian measures." Derzhavin makes the reason for his boast his two most famous poems, "Felitsa" and the ode "God." Pushkin (stanza 4) prophesies: "For a long time I shall be dear to the people for having roused noble thoughts with my lyre, for having glorified Freedom in my harsh age and called for mercy for the fallen." At the end of his ode Horace complacently calls on the muse Melpomene to crown his head with laurel. Derzhavin has some misgivings, and directs his Muse: "And if any despise you, you yourself despise them"; but in the last two lines confidently enjoins the Muse to crown her brow "with the glow of immortality." Pushkin follows the same arrangement, but displays no confidence in the immediate verdict of the crowd: "Hearken, O Muse, to the commandment of God; fearing not insult, asking for no crown, receive with equanimity both praise and calumny, and do not argue with a fool."[154] Pushkin made no attempt to publish his poem, and evidently did not expect it to be published until after his death, for the fourth stanza carries an unambiguous reference to his youthful ode "To Freedom," which had led to Alexander I's sentence of exile. Indeed, in a rough copy, line fifteen of the poem reads: "because in Radishchev's wake I celebrated Liberty." When Zhukovsky published Pushkin's verse after the poet's death, he was obliged by censorship to emasculate the fourth stanza to: "And long shall I be dear to the people because I wakened good thoughts with my lyre, because I was useful for the lively charm of my verses, and called for kindness for the fallen." The last reference was vague enough to escape change, but concerned Pushkin's unavailing efforts over many years to obtain from Nikolai I some mitigation of the punishment meted out to the Decembrists. Thus Pushkin's claim to immortality rests in his own mind chiefly on political considerations.[155]

One aspect of the poem deserves a special note. Derzhavin's ode begins: "I have reared me a monument wondrous, eternal: stronger than metal it is, and higher than the pyramids." This closely parallels Horace's "more lasting than bronze, higher than the royal pomp of the pyramids." But Pushkin's first line is startling: *Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi*—"I have reared me a monument *not made with hands.*" The

adjective is hieratic; it translates the Greek *akheiropoietos,* and is the Byzantine appellation for a miraculous icon sent down from Heaven directly and untouched by human hands. It is the word that St. Paul uses in II Corinthians v, verse 1: "For we know that when our earthly house, this hovel, is destroyed, we have from God a dwelling in Heaven, a house not made with hands[*dom nerukotvorennyrï*], eternal." Pushkin's monument, by the use of this Slavonic word with its ecclesiastical connotations, is a *sacred, heavenly* monument, sent down like a holy icon from God Himself.

In this brief survey of Pushkin's lyric verse it has been possible to examine only the highlights and a few pieces which, if not themselves masterpieces, are significant as examples of particular trends. Yet even this cursory review has, I hope, made clear the extraordinary speed with which Pushkin matured as a poet, and the rapidity with which he passed from one literary phase to the next. In little more than twenty years he had outgrown the trivial rococo elegance of late classicism, passed through a brief period of romantic subjectivism, and ended in a cool and restrained devotion to life as it is, uncolored by dreams or roseate ideals. Yet in all these transitions Pushkin remains Pushkin; he is no chameleon, taking on new colors with every change around him. The style which he developed in his teens—light, precise, succinct, understated—remains the same to the end of his life. In the broadest sense of the word Pushkin's verse is classical. If ever the Delphic maxim *mēden agan,* "nothing too much"—had a living literary embodiment, it was in Pushkin.

In his earliest verse he wears the conventional masks appropriate to the French tradition of *poésie légère;* in his romantic period it is a more or less Byronic persona that he affects, but with an un-Byronic irony. In his latest lyrics we are conscious of a reluctance to display strong feeling directly, in his own person: Greek, Arabic, Spanish, Yugoslav disguises enable him to avoid doing so. There is always apparent a tension between the lyric poet's yearning to communicate what he most deeply feels, and a chaste reticence that shuns emotional display. In contrast to the young Lermontov, Pushkin never wears his heart on his sleeve.

The themes that his verse treats pass from the conventionally prescribed and acceptable lyric subjects—the evanescence of youth, the melancholy beauty of a moonlit night, the vision of a blissful future society, love in all its manifold variety—and by the latest period comprise aspects of life never before deemed worthy of poetical treatment: a ride over a rutty winter road, a dull autumn day in the country, the exhilaration of a brisk winter morning. By 1836 there is no trace left of the conventional genres of subjective lyric verse—the elegy, the epistle, the Anacreontic, the stanza, etc.; and in the same way there is nothing left of the conventions of linguistic propriety. Pushkin's language is literary, not vernacular; but into it have percolated many words and expressions from the popular

language, just as in it are retained many elements of Slavonic vocabulary and morphology. But the rigid prescriptions which demand a "high style" for one genre and a "low style" for another have been scrapped forever. With Pushkin the poet's inborn sense of propriety and good taste, not a rhetorician's iron-clad rules, dictates the choice of words.

Although it is a rather futile task to attempt a general summary of Pushkin's prosodic usages, yet a consideration of his lyric verse can hardly dispense with something of the kind. One of the most surprising things, in view of his readiness to innovate in other fields, is his conservatism in metrical matters. According to Bondi:[156] "Pushkin wrote almost exclusively in iambics and trochees. Iambic verses constitute 84 percent of the total of his verses; iambics and trochees together, 90 percent; thus there is left only 10 percent for all the three-syllable meters, for the imitations of antique verse [i.e., hexameters and the elegiac distich] and for popular measures." Bondi goes on to say that the four-foot iamb makes up 54 percent of all Pushkin's verse, and that almost the only trochaic verse he wrote was also in the four-foot measure. This conservatism is in striking contrast with the practice of Zhukovsky, for instance, or even of Pushkin's close friend Delvig, who experimented widely with three-syllable measures, as well as with antique meters and the literary combinations which were conventionally supposed to represent the rhythms of popular song.

Bondi's two essays on Pushkin's experiments in prosody, "Pushkin and the Russian Hexameter"[157] and "Popular Verse in Pushkin,"[158] reveal a very interesting and quite surprising fact. It took the poet seventeen years to learn the technique of writing correct accentual dactylic hexameters! Early experiments, none published in his lifetime, are often accompanied in his rough notes with schematic models of the verse forms to be followed. Although Pushkin did not know Greek, he certainly knew Latin, and it seems odd that the meter of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* should have occasioned so much difficulty. Doubtless his strong orientation toward French verse accounts for it. Nothing at all similar to an accentual dactyl—or indeed to any ternary meter—is possible for French, while French verse, though entirely syllabic, often gives the effect, to a non-French ear, of iambic or trochaic verse, depending on the number of syllables in the line. With the entirely accentual popular meters Pushkin was much more at home: in some of his earlier attempts he utilized the approximations that eighteenth-century poets contrived for their pseudo-popular songs, but in later attempts, e.g., *Songs of the Western Slavs,* the fragments of an early version of *Rusalka,* and two of the *skazki,* he actually succeeded in reproducing various forms of authentic tonic verse. Here his interest in folklore models of all kinds, including traditional popular song, accounts for his success.

Although it is focussed on the meter of *Eugene Onegin,* Vladimir Nabokov's masterly discussion of Pushkin's handling of the four-foot

iamb (Appendix 2 of his *Onegin* Commentary) is applicable to over half of the poet's verse, and its principles can be applied quite readily to about ninety per cent of it. There is no better work on the subject, and because of the author's familiarity with English verse and English prosody, it is also the easiest of all works on Russian metrics for an English-speaking reader to use.

On January 29, 1837 Pushkin was killed in a duel with an emigre Frenchman named D'Anthès, who had paid such ardent court to the poet's wife that under the code of honor of the day the aggrieved husband had no alternative but to issue a challenge. One may speculate on what Russian literature would have been like had this tragedy not happened. Of one thing I think we can be sure: the situation with poetry would not have been much altered. Pushkin was weaning himself from verse, and had very likely reached his limit in that realm. He had gone all the way from eighteenth-century neo-classicism through phases of sentimentalism and romanticism, to a strikingly objective and unadorned verse style that is inalienably his own—and all in the space of some twenty-four years. Russian poetry could never be the same again, and indeed shortly after 1837 the great age of poetry comes to an abrupt end and the age of prose begins. This Pushkin inaugurated, and had he lived we might have inherited a series of novels to have rivalled those of his illustrious successors of the second half of the century. As it is, his prose work, to which we shall now turn, important as it is, is only a sketch of what he might have done. The imperishable monument which he erected is, as he himself knew, that of his unapproachable verse.

V

Alexander Pushkin as a Writer of Prose

Alexander Pushkin's fame as a poet was well established before he ever undertook to write prose fiction. It was in 1827 that he started what was intended to be a historical novel in which his own Abyssinian great-grandfather Hannibal should have been the principal hero, *The Negro of Peter the Great.*[1] The novel was carried through only six chapters and a page of a seventh, and then abandoned for unexplained reasons. Earlier than 1827, however, he had evidently given thought to the writing of artistic prose, for his unfinished treatise "On Russian Prose" was composed in 1822. It is a caustic criticism of the kind of Russian prose favored by Karamzin and the sentimental school. The treatise begins with a famous anecdote:[2]

> D'Alembert once remarked to La Harpe: "Don't praise Buffon to me; that fellow writes: 'The noblest of all man's acquisitions was that animal, proud, fiery, etc.' Why not say simply: 'the horse?'" La Harpe was amazed at the philospher's dry judgment. But D'Alembert was a very intelligent man—and I admit that I am almost in accord with his opinion.
>
> I shall note in passing that the matter had to do with Buffon—the great painter of nature. His style, florid, full, will always be a model of descriptive prose. But what shall we say of our writers who, deeming it a meanness to explain the most ordinary things simply, think they are enlivening their childish prose by supplements and flaccid metaphors? These people will never say "friendship" without adding: "that sacred feeling, whose noble flame," etc. Where they should say "early in the morning," they write, "scarcely had the first rays of the rising sun gilded the eastern borders of the azure sky"—oh, how fresh and novel this all is! So much the better, I suppose, the longer it is.

Pushkin's short fragment ends with a decisive credo which could hardly have been more opposed to the current practice of Russian prose writers:

> Exactness and brevity—these are the prime merits of prose. It requires thoughts and more thoughts—without them the most brilliant expressions serve no end. Verses are another matter (incidentally, in them too it wouldn't hurt for our poets to have a sum of ideas a good deal more significant than is ordinarily their practice. With reminiscences of lost youth our literature won't get far forward).

Just before the essay breaks off comes the remark: "The question is: whose prose is the best in our literature? The answer: Karamzin's. This is still no