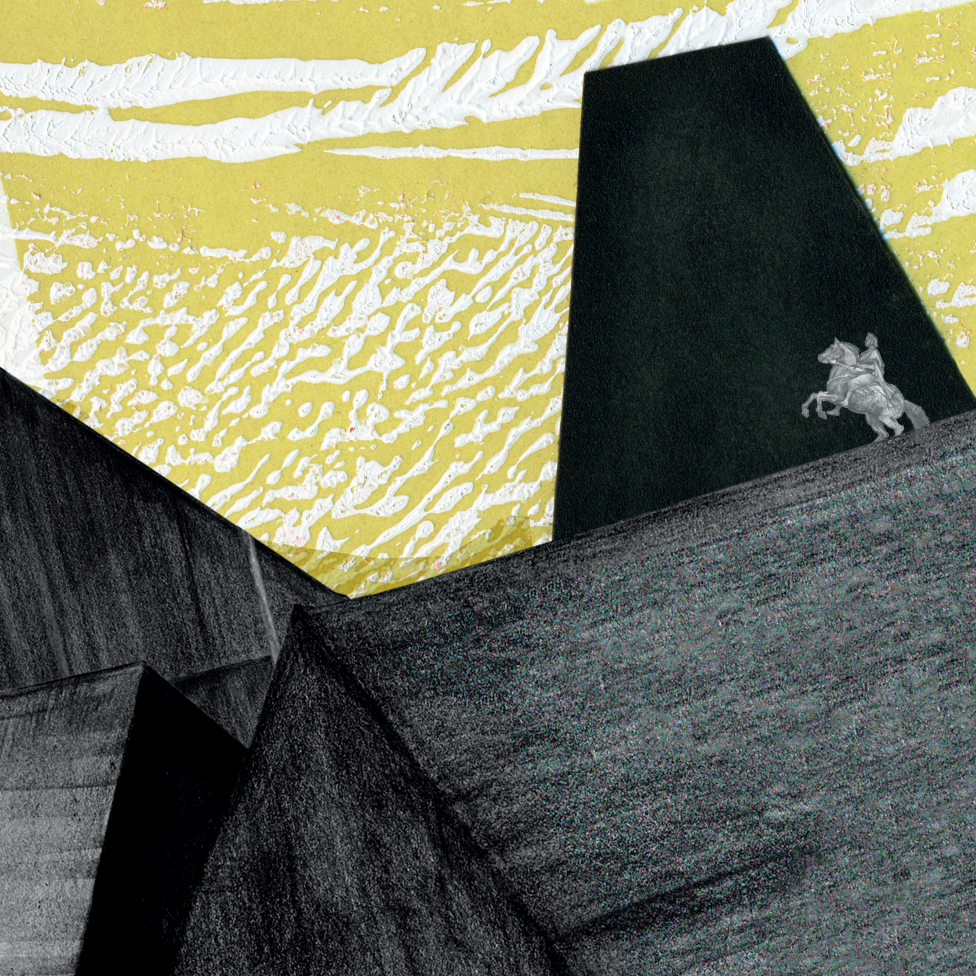

PENGUIN CLASSICS

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

SELECTED POETRY

TRANSLATED BY ANTONY WOOD

PENGUIN CLASSICS

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN
SELECTED POETRY

ALEXANDER SERGEYEVICH PUSHKIN was born in Moscow in 1799. His father, a low-ranking guards officer before early retirement, was of ancient lineage sunk into obscurity. His mother was the granddaughter of a north or north-central African captured as a boy and adopted by Peter the Great – Abram Petrovich Gannibal, who became an eminent military engineer. By the age of twelve Pushkin, given the run of his father's extensive library, was already widely read in French and Classical literature, and during schooling at the Imperial Lycée at Tsarskoye Selo he devoted his energies to mastering all the verse forms of his time.

On leaving school he spent three years in St Petersburg while holding a sinecure in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made lasting friendships at literary societies and wrote anti-autocratic poems which circulated in manuscript and offended Tsar Alexander I, resulting in a six-year exile from the capital, beginning at the age of twenty-one just when he was achieving national fame with his first long poem, the mock-epic fairy tale *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. His four years in the Russian South saw the composition of narrative poems inspired by Byron, and he began the novel in verse *Eugene Onegin*. During his last two years of exile on his parents' estate near Pskov, his mature period as a lyric poet began, and he wrote the historical drama *Boris Godunov*.

After the Decembrist uprising failure of 1825, Pushkin was granted conditional freedom. Over the rest of the 1820s, living in Moscow and St Petersburg and increasingly in debt, he attained the peak of his popularity before losing touch with changing public taste. He wrote some of his finest works in rural isolation, among them the narrative poem *The Bronze Horseman*, verse fairy tales such as *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel* and *Tsar Saltan*, the prose tale *The Queen of Spades*, and a set of miniature verse dramas including *Mozart and Salieri*. In 1831 he married the young beauty Natalya Goncharova, a leading adornment at court balls. In January 1837 he was killed in a duel precipitated by a young guards officer's pursuit of Natalya.

ANTONY WOOD learned Russian at the Joint Services School for Linguists during National Service and read Modern Languages (French and German) and English at Cambridge. After twenty years as a book-commissioning editor in London he worked as a freelance translator and founded the imprint Angel Books, devoted to translations of European literature. Paul Scofield, Simon Callow and Ralph Fiennes have been among those who have participated in readings of his own translations of Pushkin on radio and at literary festivals. He has collaborated in several bilingual publications of the Pushkin State Theatre Centre, St Petersburg. In 1999 he was awarded a Pushkin Medal by the Russian government. His published translations of Pushkin include *Mozart and Salieri: The Little Tragedies* (1982), *The Gypsies & Other Narrative Poems* (2006) and the first version of *Boris Godunov* (in Chester Dunning et al., *The Uncensored 'Boris Godunov'*, 2006; stage production in Princeton, 2007).

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

Selected Poetry

Translated and with an Introduction and Notes by
ANTONY WOOD

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Chronology

1799 Born in Moscow on 26 May, eldest of three children (with a younger brother and sister) of Sergey L'vovich Pushkin and Nadezhda Osipovna.

1800–1811 Brought up in Moscow, Pushkin has the run of his father's well-stocked library of French literature and attends his and his father's poet brother Vasily's literary salons frequented by leading figures.

1801 Paul I is killed in a palace revolution. Accession of Alexander I.

1811 Pushkin enters the new Lycée at Tsarskoye Selo founded by Alexander.

1812 Napoleon invades Russia. Battle of Borodino.

1814 Napoleon's defeat outside Paris. Poems by Pushkin published for the first time, anonymously, in a St Petersburg magazine.

1815 The poet Gavrila Derzhavin hears Pushkin read one of his poems and names him his successor.

1816 Pushkin takes a keen interest in the meetings of the literary society Arzamas while at school.

1817 Graduates from the Lycée. Appointed to a sinecure in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Begins work on *Ruslan and Lyudmila*; writes 'Liberty: An Ode'.

1817–20 Leads a dissipated life in St Petersburg; continues to write daring liberal verses, resulting in his exile.

1820 *Ruslan and Lyudmila* published, making Pushkin a national celebrity. Travels with the Rayevsky family in the Caucasus and Crimea on journey to exile in Kishinev, Bessarabia. Begins first Byronic poem, *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*.

1821 Writes the blasphemous poem *The Gabrieliad* (unpublished). Meets Karolina Sobanskaya.

1822 *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* published.

1823 Begins the novel in verse *Eugene Onegin*. Transferred to Odessa under the command of the new governor-general of New Russia (i.e. the South) and Bessarabia, Count Mikhail Vorontsov. Meets Amalia Riznich.

1824 Affair with Vorontsov's wife Yelizaveta. *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray* published, a great commercial success. Death of Byron. After being discovered by the authorities studying atheism, Pushkin is transferred to his mother's estate at Mikhaylovskoye near Pskov. Writes memoirs, later burnt. Writes *The Gypsies*. St Petersburg suffers the most destructive flood in its history.

1825 Receives visit during first winter at Mikhaylovskoye from his close school friend and Decembrist Ivan Pushchin. Meets Anna Kern and writes 'To ***' ('It comes to me again, that moment'). First chapter of *Eugene Onegin* published. Writes *Boris Godunov* and *Count Nulin*. Death of Alexander I; accession of Nicholas I. Decembrist uprising in support of a constitutional monarchy.

1826 Pushkin writes 'The Prophet'. Summoned to meet Nicholas I, who ends his exile and states that he will be his personal censor. First collection of lyric poems published and quickly sells out. The tsar's secret police organ created, responsible for censorship: the Third Department of the Tsar's Chancellery, headed by Count Aleksandr Benckendorff. Five of the Decembrists are hanged and some hundred and twenty exiled to Siberia. Pushkin given official reprimand for reading *Boris Godunov*, unpublished, to friends without permission.

1827 *The Gypsies* published. Becomes friendly with the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz in Moscow.

1828 For the last time Pushkin is accused of suspected authorship of the blasphemous narrative poem *The Gabrieliad*; after a confidential interview with the tsar, no more is said. Writes *Poltava*, a long narrative poem on Peter the Great, the Ukrainian Cossack leader Mazepa and Charles XII of

Sweden; it receives a mixed reception on publication in 1829. Russian victory over Persia brings definitive absorption of Dagestan, eastern Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia into the Russian Empire. Death of Nikolay Karamzin. Pushkin meets Natalya Goncharova.

1828–9 Third Russo-Turkish War. Pushkin travels through Transcaucasia and rides with the Russian army in a skirmish.

1829 Playwright and diplomat Aleksandr Griboyedov lynched by a mob in Tehran. Second collection of Pushkin's lyric poems published. Begins the verse drama *Rusalka*, to be finally revised and completed in 1834.

1830 Betrothal to Natalya Goncharova. French July Revolution; King Charles X replaced by Louis Philippe I. Quarantined on his father's estate of Boldino in Nizhny Novgorod province in the autumn during a cholera outbreak, writes *The Tales of Belkin*, the last two chapters of *Eugene Onegin*, the 'Little Tragedies', *A Little House in Kolomna* and some thirty short poems.

1831 Pushkin marries Natalya on 18 February. Appointed Russia's official historian laureate, succeeding Karamzin. *Boris Godunov* published in censored form, to a mixed reception. Publishes poem 'To the Slanderers of Russia' supporting Russian suppression of the Polish uprising of 1830–31. Writes *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*.

1832 Third collection of lyric poems published, also containing *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* and the blank verse 'Little Tragedy' *Mozart and Salieri*.

1833 First complete edition of *Eugene Onegin* published. Pushkin works on *A History of the Pugachev Rebellion*; the tsar grants him an interest-free loan of 20,000 roubles to cover publication costs, to be repaid in two instalments. At Boldino in the autumn writes in four weeks *The Bronze Horseman*, *The Tale of a Fisherman and a Little Fish*, *The Tale of the Dead Princess and the Seven Champions* and first drafts of prose tale *The Queen of Spades*. The tsar demands radical cuts to *The Bronze Horseman* which Pushkin is unable to make, so the poem remains unpublished,

apart from the prologue, in his lifetime. Appointed to the humiliatingly lowly court post of *kamer-junker* (gentleman of the chamber), necessitating regular appearances at balls with his wife.

1834 *A History of the Pugachev Rebellion* published. Pushkin begins work on a history of Peter the Great. Continuously mounting debts. A letter from Pushkin to Natalya with a disparaging reference to Nicholas's two predecessors and the poet's appointment as *kamer-junker* is opened by the authorities, causing tensions between Pushkin and the tsar. Attempts to resign the new post and retire from the capital to the country to write and work refused by the tsar with the threat of withdrawal of access to state archives. Writes *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel*.

1835 Publication of selected works in volumes of narrative verse, lyric poems and prose. The tsar grants Pushkin's request for an interest-free loan of 30,000 roubles, soon to be repaid, in lieu of salary. Georges d'Anthès, adopted son of the Dutch envoy Baron Jacob van Heeckeren, begins to pay court to Natalya.

1836 Pushkin launches quarterly journal *The Contemporary*, in which he publishes his own and others' work, including his novel *The Captain's Daughter*, Gogol's story 'The Nose' and early lyrics by Fyodor Tyutchev. Writes the 'Stone Island cycle' of poems. In November receives an anonymous round-robin letter announcing his 'cuckoldry'.

1837 In January, Pushkin provokes a duel with d'Anthès. He is severely wounded in the duel and dies two days later (29 January). The tsar pays off Pushkin's debts, grants a pension to Natalya and further sums to his four children, and undertakes to bear publication costs of his works.

1838 Pushkin's published works unreliably reprinted.

1841 Publication of posthumous works in three volumes edited by Vasily Zhukovsky; also unreliable.

1855–7 First attempt at a comprehensive edition of Pushkin's works in seven volumes edited by P. V. Annenkov: lacking in editorial rigour, and corruptions remain.

1887 Expiry of Pushkin's copyrights. A number of unrigorous and unreliable collected editions follow over the next forty years.

1937–59 *The Complete Works* in seventeen volumes, with textual annotation only, published by the USSR Academy of Sciences, its launch marking the centenary of Pushkin's death; it remains the most thorough and reliable complete edition; reissued Moscow, 1994–7.

Introduction

To non-Russians Pushkin is the most elusive of Russian writers. It is over a century since the Russian novelists began to change our lives in Constance Garnett's translations of Tolstoy (*War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*) and Dostoyevsky (*The Brothers Karamazov*, followed by other leading works). But one of the summits of Pushkin's achievement, the novel in verse *Eugene Onegin*, has had to wait until the present century for the first truly representative English translation, by Stanley Mitchell,[1] and the rest of his verse is much less well known in English.

Pushkin was born into what is known as the Golden Age of Russian poetry, broadly speaking the first three decades of the nineteenth century, in which he became its central figure. The beginnings of generally accessible Russian poetry were made in the eighteenth century by Mikhail Lomonosov, Aleksandr Sumarokov and Gavrila Derzhavin. But by the end of the century the Russian language still lacked words with subjective and emotional meanings, such as 'touching', 'influence', 'nuance', 'interesting'. The influential literary figure Nikolay Karamzin (1766–1826) then introduced a layer of new words modelled on French into the Russian literary language, which Pushkin's immediate predecessors and older contemporaries such as the fabulist Ivan Krylov, the poet-translator Vasily Zhukovsky and the distinguished poet Konstantin Batyushkov used in their verse. But it was Pushkin most of all who brought the new vocabulary into currency.

What is special about Pushkin's poetry? He once wrote about himself: 'I am perhaps elegant and *comme il faut* in my writing, but my heart is wholly *vulgaire* and all my tastes

third-estate.'[2] This statement would seem to fit, in its way, with an opinion given in 1897 by the poet and philosopher Vladimir Solovyov:

> The very essence of poetry – that which strictly constitutes poetry or which is poetic in itself – has never appeared in a purer form than in Pushkin, although there have been greater poets [. . .]. Pushkin's personality never held any [. . .] dominating central content: his was simply a living, open, extraordinarily receptive and responsive soul [. . .]. The basic distinguishing characteristic of this poetry is its freedom from any preconceived tendency and any affectation.[3]

This profile is perceptive about Pushkin's nature as a poet. However, it would be totally misleading if we were to take it as suggesting that his verse lacks a core of individuality. The topics that drew poetry from him give us a most powerful sense of such a core: love and friendship; the spectacle of human foibles; political ideals allied to a painful sense of his own deprivation of privacy; the history of his country and his own genealogical place in it; his relationship with three tsars; the literature of Classical Antiquity, the Renaissance and contemporary Europe and curiosity about foreign cultures; the Gospel story as a metaphorical and parodic framework for autobiographical inquiry.

The young Gogol described the impact one of his elder contemporary's lyric collections made on him:

> This is not eloquence, this is poetry; without surface brilliance, everything simple and fitting, everything filled with internal brilliance, which does not reveal itself at once; everything is laconic, just as pure poetry always is. Words are few, but so exact that they express everything. Each word contains its own immensity of space; each word is as boundless as the poet himself. This is what makes you read and reread these short poems, and gives them an attraction not possessed by work in which a single leading theme is predominant.[4]

Dostoyevsky, in his famous speech at the unveiling of the monument to Pushkin (by A. M. Opekushin) erected in Moscow by public subscription in 1880, saw in him a unique quality of 'panhumanity', a universal sympathy for people of diverse cultures, and claimed that this made him not only Russia's national poet but the world's. Some have commented that much in this speech is really about Russia and the author himself; nevertheless, it contains much about Pushkin too.[5]

Eighteenth-century Russian poets followed stylistic consistency. Pushkin mixes style and diction at various levels, and his themes in lyric verse are considerably more varied and personal than those of even the most original of his contemporaries. His short poems are typically of the present moment and constitute a kind of emotional diary throughout his life. Without obvious baggage, he was free to respond uninhibitedly in accordance with his own human experience. In the post-Soviet era the eminent dissident Andrey Sinyavsky put across the freedom and sheer variety of Pushkin's writing in this way:

> Lightness is the first thing [. . .] we get out of his works [. . .]. Before Pushkin there was almost no light verse [in Russia] [. . .]. And suddenly, out of the blue, there appeared curtsies and turns comparable to nothing and no one, speed, onslaught, bounciness, the ability to prance, to gallop, to take hurdles, to do splits [. . .].[6]

Pushkin is central not only to Russian culture, but to Russian identity. He gave the Russians their own language, a classical literature and an inspirational demonstration of human claims against state power. His extensive and varied oeuvre fertilised the soil for Russian literature throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and the twentieth. His completed work includes over eight hundred lyric poems, a dozen long narrative poems (*poemy*), five folk or fairy tales (*skazki*) in verse, six verse plays, a novel in verse, a novel in prose, six short prose tales and a history of the Pugachev Rebellion of 1773–5. Like a number of other writers of his period, he was an internationalist, steeped in West European culture from medicine to aesthetics. Much of

his inspiration and thinking is drawn from Western and Classical literature and ideas, making him a powerful influence in the tug-of-war between Westernisers and Slavophiles that has gone on in Russia from his death to the present day.

LIFE

Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin was born on 26 May 1799 in Moscow. On his father's side he was descended from an old boyar family (next below princely rank) that had sunk into obscurity. On his mother's he was the great-grandson of Abram Petrovich Gannibal (1696?–1781), who had been taken as a boy from Turkish captivity in some part of north-central Africa (until recently believed to have been Abyssinia/Ethiopia, now thought to be Chad), brought to the Russian capital and gifted to Peter the Great, who educated him to pursue a career as a military engineer; he was ultimately a decorated general.

Pushkin's father, Sergey L'vovich (1767–1848), already retired from the army when he married, had taken up a low-paid administrative post by the time his children were born. An indolent, sociable wit, he had a deep love of French literature and gave literary evenings that were attended by leading writers. His brother Vasily had a minor talent for mildly obscene light verse; his racy narrative poem *A Dangerous Neighbour* (1811) in colloquial Russian, about a brawl in a brothel, is still anthologised.[7] Pushkin's mother Nadezhda (1775–1836) was the daughter of Gannibal's dissolute third son Osip, who abandoned her mother Mariya and contracted a second, bigamous marriage; legal proceedings brought against him by Mariya resulted in his estate of Mikhaylovskoye near Pskov becoming her property (albeit encumbered with debt) on his death when Pushkin was seven years old. Nadezhda, well read and an excellent French speaker, known in Moscow society as 'la belle Créole', was charming, strong-willed and perpetually restless; during Pushkin's childhood she was forever moving the family (Pushkin had a younger brother and sister) from lodging to lodging and shifting furniture from room to room in a chaotic household.[8]

Pushkin's was a neglected childhood; his pronounced African features may have reminded his mother of her bigamous father and turned her against her first son. With his brother and sister he was brought up largely by his grandmother Mariya, who taught him Russian, and a freed serf, Arina Rodionovna, who told him folk tales (the model for Tatyana's nanny in *Eugene Onegin*); a succession of émigré French tutors made no impact. He seems to have been a moody, explosive child. The best times of his early years were spent in his father's extensive library of French literature listening to the conversation at literary evenings.

At the age of twelve, Pushkin was admitted to the Lycée for boys from cultured and noble families newly set up by Tsar Alexander I, with free tuition and board, in a wing of his palace at Tsarskoye Selo outside St Petersburg, with the aim of producing loyal officers of state – a less successful idea than had been hoped; some of Pushkin's school friends would later be found in rebels' ranks. Nearly one-sixth of all Pushkin's lyric poems were written during his years at the school, in the course of which he acquired his extraordinary fluency and ease in writing verse. When in 1815 Russia's greatest living poet, the aged Gavrila Derzhavin (1743–1816), paid a visit to the Lycée and heard the fifteen-year-old read his twenty-stanza ode 'Recollections in Tsarskoye Selo', he hailed him as his successor. Much of this early work is love poetry. During his school years, and indeed for the rest of his life, Pushkin showed himself to be highly responsive to females. 'Pushkin was so susceptible to women at this time,' a classmate notes, 'that when only fifteen or sixteen, by merely touching the hand of his dancing partner at a Lyceum ball, his glance grew passionate, and he snorted and wheezed like a high-spirited horse in a drove of colts.'[9] He excelled in Russian and French literature and in fencing but took little interest in other subjects, his performance in the final examinations earning him an insignificant post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

After six years at the Lycée – never going home for holidays – Pushkin spent three years in St Petersburg, where his parents had now moved; he lived in a tiny room above their apartment on the Fontanka river. His free lifestyle was more dissipated

than that of Onegin as later to be depicted in the same capital. His physical appearance, which didn't change much throughout his life, was distinctive – he was short, just under five foot six, with a shock of curly black hair, thick lips, a dark complexion and riveting eyes. Swift-moving, his features and whole figure constantly in motion, he alternated rapidly between brooding silence and high spirits; he cultivated strikingly long fingernails. His behaviour as a young adult was by all accounts an out-of-control schoolboy's. He would disturb his neighbours at the theatre, on one occasion applauding by pounding the bald head in front of him; he was forever drawing his fencing rapier against someone he had just met over some trivial slight, real or imagined.[10]

Shortly after leaving school in 1817, Pushkin was formally elected to the literary society Arzamas, whose affairs he had already followed at school and whose membership comprised some of Russia's leading poets and writers, such as Vasily Zhukovsky (1783–1852), Konstantin Batyushkov (1787–1855) and Pyotr Vyazemsky (1792–1878), and even included his uncle Vasily. Arzamas was formed in 1815 in opposition to the conservative Symposium of Amateurs of the Russian Word, which was dedicated to the defence of Russian literature against foreign 'infection' such as Karamzin's linguistic reforms based on French. Arzamas's programme was firmly founded on French neoclassical canons of the previous century, and its imitative approach to poetry helped to form Pushkin as a poet, as we shall see later. He also joined another literary society cum drinking club known as the Green Lamp, some of whose members were also (unknown to Pushkin) members of a secret society, the Union of Salvation, aiming at constitutional reform in Russia. He made friends for life at both Arzamas and the Green Lamp. He himself was never a member of a secret society; notoriously talkative (he later became known as a great conversationalist), he was not trusted in secret circles. However, he soaked up the liberal, anti-autocratic ideas gathering strength in Russia at this time. His close friendships with serious figures older than himself, intellectuals such as Aleksandr Turgenev (1784–1845) and Pyotr Chaadayev (1794–1856), turned

the brilliant but frivolous schoolboy into a passionate and politicised energy source.

The middle of the second decade of the nineteenth century saw a sharp change of political mood in Russia. After a far-stretching empire had been built up under Catherine the Great (r. 1762–96), the brutal rule of the unbalanced Paul I had been ended by his assassination in a palace revolution in 1801, and in 1812 Alexander I was victorious over Napoleon, Russian autocracy looked firmly established. However, the seeds of opposition to the spread of harsh bureaucracy in all aspects of daily life had been sown among the intelligentsia and army officers returning from Western Europe. Their tsar, in contrast, so recently 'the liberator of Europe', relapsed into a mode of political repression and religious bigotry in the latter part of his reign.

Pushkin continued to write verse after leaving school. As unrestrained as his lifestyle (he was laid low from time to time with a venereal infection) were his poems against autocracy, which were widely copied and gave voice to the attitudes of a whole new generation in military and civil service. Some of them fell into the hands of the authorities and would have landed him in Siberia had it not been for the efforts of high-placed friends, including Zhukovsky, now Russian tutor to Tsar Alexander's German-born wife, who also played a part in the decision to send Pushkin to the more congenial South. Once again he was appointed to a humble bureaucratic post, a supernumerary in the chancellery of the shortly to be appointed governor of Bessarabia in Kishinev; Russia had recently wrested back this semi-Asiatic territory from Turkey in the latest hostilities between the two empires. Pushkin's superior at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Count Capo d'Istrias, who happened to be an honorary member of Arzamas, had supported this milder form of exile which was accepted by the tsar, and then commented in a letter to Pushkin's new master:

> Certain poems, especially an ode on freedom [1817], have brought Mr Pushkin to the attention of the government. [. . .] this poem reveals dangerous principles issuing from that contemporary school, or perhaps it would be better to say, from

> that anarchical system which people maliciously call a system of the rights of man, of freedom, and of the independence of people. [. . .] his patrons suppose that his penitence is sincere and that, removed for some time from Petersburg, provided with an occupation, and surrounded with good examples, one may make of him a fine servant of the government or, at least, a writer of the first rank.[11]

It was the latter expectation that was to be realised.

On his way south to Kishinev, in a Tatar village on the edge of the Black Sea in the company of the jovial family of General Nikolay Rayevsky, a hero of 1812, with his three daughters and two sons, Pushkin spent perhaps the happiest three weeks of his life. He fell in love, with varying degrees of seriousness, with each of the daughters in turn, and in their company read Byron in French prose translation and visited the historic ruined palace of the Tatar khans in the town of Bakhchisaray, with its famous fountain.

By the time he arrived in Kishinev in the autumn of 1820, a long poem he had worked on for three years in St Petersburg, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, was published. It was customary at this time for an ambitious new poet to become established with a long, typically narrative poem, a *poema*, rather than scattered lyrics, and Pushkin's older writer friends, who had great faith in his poetic gift, had urged him to make his mark in this way. The mock-heroic verse tale of the ravishing of a princess by a wicked wizard shocked some critics by its frivolity, but the perfection of its poetry delighted everyone else and made Pushkin famous overnight.[12] Another accolade came from his friend and mentor Zhukovsky, who gave him his own portrait inscribed: 'To a victorious pupil from a defeated master.'

Pushkin was intoxicated by the atmosphere of Kishinev, a multi-ethnic garrison town with a population of Moldavians, Bulgarians, Albanians, Turks, Greeks, Jews and gypsies as well as Western Europeans. His forays among the young Moldavian girls caused frequent complaints from their parents; in response to these his kindly guardian, General Inzov, in whose household

he lived, had his boots removed from time to time to prevent him from leaving the house.

Settling down and inspired by Byron's verse tales, Pushkin wrote his three finished Southern *poemy* in Kishinev, *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, *The Fountain of Bahkchisaray* and *The Gypsies*, as well as the first three chapters of *Eugene Onegin*; also *The Gabrieliad*, a blasphemous treatment of the Annunciation in which Satan, the archangel Gabriel and the dove of the Holy Spirit successively have their way with the Virgin Mary. This poem was of course unpublished in Pushkin's lifetime but became well known to the authorities, who were to pursue him long and wearisomely as the suspected author, which was never officially established. *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* soon sold out in its first edition as a booklet (1822), praised by everyone for its vivid portrayal of Circassian life and landscape but disappointing some critics unconvinced by the character of the hero, a Byronic fugitive from the 'civilised' world (Pushkin agreed with them). *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray*, however, made publishing history two years later, earning Pushkin the princely sum of 3,000 roubles and unanimous critical praise. Its commercial success decided Pushkin in his pioneering endeavour to make his living as a poet; the rest of his life was to be spent in increasing debt.

After three years in what had become a backwater for him, Pushkin requested and was granted a transfer to Odessa. In this sophisticated Black Sea port, he was given his usual modest post in the offices of Count Mikhail Vorontsov, the recently appointed governor-general of New Russia (i.e. the South), an Anglophile and veteran of the Battle of Borodino, someone his unruly charge never got on with, secretly lampooning him and conducting an affair with his younger wife. The vivacious and sociable Yelizaveta was one of two beautiful and prosperous married women Pushkin met in Odessa and fell deeply in love with; the other was a shipping merchant's wife, Amalia Riznich. Lyrics inspired by both of them are among Pushkin's most deeply felt love poems. His relationship with a third woman, the brilliant and flamboyant Karolina Sobanskaya, who was rumoured to be a government spy, might have developed had he not been distracted by each of the other two in turn.

From his immediate post-Lycée period to the end of his life, Pushkin was constantly under government surveillance. During his fourth year in the South, the authorities got wind that he was 'taking lessons in pure atheism' according to new scientific principles – ironically enough, with Vorontsov's personal physician.[13] In fact, Pushkin had simply shown a passing curiosity in ideas new to him. But Orthodoxy being one of the ideological pillars of the state ('Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality', as Tsar Alexander had laid down), there was once again a cloud hanging over the poet. To minimise any possible dissemination of atheism, the tsar, in his religious zealotry, decided to change Pushkin's place of exile to his mother's estate of Mikhaylovskoye, tucked away in the north-west in the province of Pskov. Here Pushkin spent two years in the company of his childhood nanny Arina Rodionovna, walking, riding and noting down folk tales told to him by the old woman. Early in 1825 the first chapter of *Eugene Onegin* was brought out by his friend the publisher Pyotr Pletnyov. It was enthusiastically received by the critics but the booklet considerably undersold its ambitious print run, largely due to trade mismanagement, including an excessively high price. However, Pushkin's first collection of lyric verse, from the same publisher at the end of 1825, containing a hundred or so poems, including several of his most famous, sold out within two months despite the book's pricing and the fact that many of the poems would have been widely familiar from initial publication in a journal.

During the last year of his exile at Mikhaylovskoye, Pushkin wrote the blank verse historical drama *The Comedy of Tsar Boris and Grishka Otrep'yev*, to be known since its first publication bowdlerised by the censor in 1831 simply as *Boris Godunov*, in which form it was unsurprisingly a critical and commercial failure. The censor's removal of the carefully researched but politically unwelcome theme of the people's espousal of the Pretender rather than Tsar Boris made it seem like something it wasn't – a one-sided neoclassical tragedy focusing (like Mussorgsky's later opera) on the unhistorical given of Boris's personal guilt after murdering the young heir to the throne.

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In November 1825, Alexander I died unexpectedly. Hoping that the new tsar might release him from exile, Pushkin set out alone for the capital but superstitiously turned back when two hares and a priest crossed his path. He distracted himself by writing the comic narrative poem on rural moeurs *Count Nulin* instead.

This may have saved his life. As he was courageously to tell the new tsar, Nicholas I, when summoned for interview the following year, if he had been in St Petersburg he would surely have joined his friends in the uprising that took place when 3,000 troops assembled on Senate Square on 14 December. The complete failure of the disastrously underprepared rising and severe punishment of the leaders of the rebels, known thereafter as the Decembrists – five were executed and some hundred and twenty sentenced to hard labour, including some of Pushkin's closest friends – cast all educated Russia into a depression for the rest of the decade. The fact that Pushkin was fortunate enough to be well out of the way, and so missed sharing the punishment of his friends and allies, gave him a profound sense of guilt for the rest of his life.

The interview with the tsar took place in the Kremlin, Moscow, in September 1826. Impressed by Pushkin's honesty about his Decembrist sympathies, Nicholas put an end to his exile but extracted an undertaking from him 'to think and act in a different fashion'[14] in future; he also declared that henceforth he would be Pushkin's personal censor. The sovereign wasn't to keep to his side of the bargain; it turned out that Pushkin had to submit all his work to Count Aleksandr Benckendorff, head of the newly created Third Department of the Tsar's Chancellery, the secret police, the responsible body for censorship, a lasting source of bitterness for the most popular literary figure in the country at this time.

The 1820s saw a transformation of the writer's world from a manuscript culture to a literary market. The Russian poets and writers of the eighteenth century had written in a world of patronage, dependent on a sovereign, a wealthy or powerful figure or a circle of friends. They were treated like servants by their noble masters – and on occasion ill-treated; the poet Vasily

Tredyakovsky (1703–69) is recorded as being caned for failing to deliver an ode on schedule.[15] In his early years, Pushkin's poems were read in such a culture. Literary salons, modelled on those of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Paris, and literary societies, often with a political fringe, played a leading role in intellectual life. These private circles began to publish their own journals and almanacs, which developed into periodicals in their own right – the origin of the thick literary journals of modern times. On Pushkin's return to Moscow and St Petersburg in 1826 after six years in exile, bookshops and literary periodicals were in full flow in a highly competitive open market.

In Moscow, Pushkin renewed his friendships with poets and writers from his pre-exile St Petersburg days, in particular his closest literary school friend Anton Delvig (1798–1831), and got to know up-and-coming Moscow literati such as Nikolay Polevoy (1796–1846) and Mikhail Pogodin (1800–1875), founders of the new literary journals the *Moscow Telegraph* and the *Moscow Herald*. He also met the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), exiled to central Russia for several years from his Lithuanian birthplace, under Russian rule since the Third Partition of Poland (1795). The two admired each other and became warm friends until Pushkin's literary response to the Polish uprising of 1830–31 led to mutual antagonism – which was to prove especially productive for Russian literature (see below).

Delvig and Pushkin launched a new journal, the short-lived *Literary Gazette*, doing battle with the hack writer Faddey Bulgarin (1789–1859), a police spy, who denigrated Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* to his paymaster the tsar and then plagiarised it in his own historical novel *Dmitry the Pretender* (1830). Many of Pushkin's lyric poems of the 1820s were first published in Pogodin's *Moscow Herald* and especially Delvig's almanac *Northern Flowers*, a showcase for him and the circle of poets who were his friends and contemporaries and known to posterity as the Pushkin Pleiad. Both these publications were at the more discerning, small-subscription end of the Russian literary journal spectrum.

The 1820s saw the composition of most of Pushkin's poetry,

and two further collections of his verse were published in 1829 (containing short poems both new and reprinted after appearing in journals and almanacs) and 1832 (with short poems and also first printings of *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* and the blank verse 'Little Tragedy' *Mozart and Salieri*). By this time, however, the peak of his lifetime popularity had passed. Before he was thirty, the public had lost its appetite for verse tales and lyric poetry and was turning firmly to prose. Historical novels began a new era for the reading public, and Gogol's early stories met with immediate success. Prose translations of popular fiction thrived. In the 1830s, Pushkin himself turned to prose with the innovative *Tales of Belkin*, five stories of great parodic sophistication, but they were not appreciated by their first, disappointingly small readership. The intriguingly ambiguous short tale *The Queen of Spades*, a gambling story, was more successful, appearing in the omnivorous publisher Aleksandr Smirdin's new monthly *Library for Reading*, covering literature, arts, science, news and fashion, which was winning a solid middle-class readership and was by far the most read Russian journal for the next decade, casting its net widely enough to publish some of Pushkin's lyrics written in the 1830s in its first issues.

Pushkin's numerous amatory relationships in St Petersburg after his return from exile have been well documented. They overlapped with his courtship of a young girl who soon became one of the most celebrated beauties of St Petersburg society. Two years after his return from exile, he met the sixteen-year-old Natalya Goncharova, whose large family – she had two sisters and three brothers – had become impoverished since the heyday of her great-great-grandfather, a rich and powerful manufacturer. After more than two years of distractions on other fronts and haggling with her mother, Pushkin married her, without a dowry – a key point in his favour. Natalya had no interest in literature; her passion was the ballroom. Exceptionally, magnetically beautiful, she even turned the head of the tsar. A young observer, a Count Vladimir Sollogub, has this description of her from the year of her marriage, included in a memoir published exactly a century later (1931):

> I have seen many beautiful women, have met many women even more charming than Mrs Pushkin, but I have never seen a woman who combined to such perfection classically regular features and figure. She was tall, with a fabulously narrow waist, and luxuriously developed shoulders and bust, and her small head, like a lily on its stem, swayed and graciously turned about on her slim neck [. . .].[16]

The Pushkins must have made an odd pair, the shorter, carelessly dressed, jerkily moving figure of Pushkin alongside such a picture-wife. Four children, two daughters and two sons, were born in five years.

In the summer of 1830, Pushkin's father had settled 200 serfs on land he had inherited near his modest Boldino estate in the province of Nizhny Novgorod on his son to try to help his financial situation for marriage. That year and in 1833, alone in the autumn months at Boldino, he wrote a number of the works that would eventually be seen as his greatest, among them the four blank verse dramas the 'Little Tragedies' (including *Mozart and Salieri*, the inspiration for Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus*), the narrative poem *The Bronze Horseman* and the last two chapters of *Eugene Onegin*.

Marriage saw Pushkin with continually increasing debt, arising from the expenses of keeping a sizeable family, low income from falling sales of his work, and Natalya's extravagances, but most of all his own gambling losses. In 1831, reading and approving (in censored form) *Boris Godunov* for publication, Tsar Nicholas had appointed Pushkin Russia's official historian laureate in succession to Nikolay Karamzin, author of the monumental *History of the Russian State* (at twice the latter's salary, but still inadequate).[17] At this time Pushkin planned to write a history of the reign of Peter the Great, for which task he was now granted permission to use the state archives. But three years later, the tsar appointed him to the additional and humiliating court post of *kamer-junker* (gentleman of the chamber), traditionally an eighteen-year-old's position, necessitating his attendance at balls with Natalya, who had become a favourite court beauty, thus tying him to the capital when he wanted to

work in the country. When he tried to resign from this post, Nicholas insisted that would mean forfeiting his indispensable access to the imperial archives.

Pushkin set high hopes on sales revenue from his long-contemplated journal for serious literature, *The Contemporary*. Four issues came out under his editorship in the last year of his life, the first including poems by Fyodor Tyutchev (1803–73), this great poet's debut, and the third Gogol's fantastic story 'The Nose'. However, the journal was stifled by competition not only from the *Library for Reading* but also from Bulgarin's popular journal *Son of the Fatherland* and his newspaper the *Northern Bee*. The public had lost the taste for poetry and for Pushkin's unvarnished, essentially classical writing in particular.

The last part of Pushkin's life is the best known. In autumn 1835, after nearly five years of marriage, Natalya met a French guards officer in Russian service, Baron Georges d'Anthès, tall, blond and blue-eyed, who was claimed by the Dutch envoy in St Petersburg, Baron Jakob van Heeckeren, to be his adopted son, some suspected his lover. She was attracted to him too, and allowed him to flirt with her. D'Anthès made at least one attempt on her virtue, which was rebuffed in a striking echo of Tatyana's rejection of Onegin as written six years earlier.[18] After continued intrigue, including the dissemination of an anonymous round-robin letter declaring in mock-officialese that Pushkin had been 'unanimously nominated coadjutor to the Grand Master of the Order of Cuckolds',[19] and also d'Anthès's astounding move in suddenly marrying one of Natalya's sisters – presumably to divert attention from his real intentions towards Natalya – Pushkin was goaded into challenging d'Anthès to a duel. The latter fired first and severely wounded Pushkin in the stomach. Pushkin's return shot, taken lying on the ground, hit his opponent in the right arm but was then harmlessly deflected, probably by a silver button on the latter's regulation tunic.[20] D'Anthès quickly recovered but Pushkin died two days later, on 29 January 1837, at the age of thirty-seven.

Zhukovsky wrote to Nicholas I seeking his charity for Natalya and the children and suggesting that a complete edition of

Pushkin's works should be published. The tsar concurred on the latter and most of his proposals for the family's welfare, but refused Zhukovsky's idea of an imperial pronouncement on the national importance of Pushkin's work such as he had composed for Karamzin. 'What a crackbrain Zhukovsky is!' Nicholas is recorded as saying. 'He will not understand that Karamzin was a man who was almost a saint, but what was Pushkin's life like?'[21]

Nicholas nevertheless paid off Pushkin's debts, granted Natalya a pension, settled further sums on the four children until they came of age, and decreed that Pushkin's works should be published at state expense, with net proceeds going to Natalya and the trustees of the estate. All four children lived on well into the twentieth century, with one granddaughter marrying a grandson of Nicholas I.[22]

Soon after Pushkin's death, d'Anthès was court-martialled and sentenced to death for participation in a duel and for killing Pushkin, a decision commuted by Nicholas, on the ground that the accused was a foreign subject, to expulsion from the Russian army and return to France, where he would continue his military career. Natalya, following advice Pushkin had given her on his deathbed, left the capital, taking the children to live in the country for two years. Seven years later, she married a friend of d'Anthès, Pyotr Lanskoy, an officer in the horse guards, by whom she had three daughters. The marriage, heartily approved by the tsar, who promoted Lanskoy to commander of the horse guards and stood godfather to the eldest daughter, appears to have been harmonious.

Zhukovsky, whom Natalya had asked to be a trustee of Pushkin's estate, prepared a posthumous edition of his works. The first part, containing all Pushkin's published work, appeared in eight volumes in 1838; produced in a hurry and with editorial collaborators, it was full of mistakes and misprints, and texts remained in their original censored forms. The second part, in three volumes containing hitherto unpublished work, also edited by Zhukovsky, came out in 1841, having undergone not only cuts and amendments imposed by the censor but

also Zhukovsky's editorial changes reflecting his own taste. In 1855–7 the first comprehensive edition of Pushkin's works appeared in seven volumes, edited by the literary critic P. V. Annenkov (1813–87) with materials for a biography, once more a far from reliable edition; while most previously censored passages were restored, some were not, and overall Zhukovsky's personal changes remained.[23] It was not until the centenary year of Pushkin's death in 1937 that a reliable edition of the complete works in seventeen volumes began to appear, produced by the USSR Academy of Sciences.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PUSHKIN'S POETRY

Pushkin's lyric poetry closely reflects his life experience, and his poetic development and the emergence of his themes are clearly to be seen within the chronology of his life. The poems in this book are placed in each of the three parts in chronological order of writing (as far as may be ascertained), and this chronology can enhance our reading – for example, in the poems on a past love written on the uneasy eve of Pushkin's marriage or the growing impatience with his public seen in poems on the poet's calling, or the distancing from Byron that takes place between the narrative poems *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray* and *The Gypsies*.

Behind Pushkin's formal perfection lie not only his early practice in writing verse as a prospective and then a full member of Arzamas, but also his lifelong reading of French and Russian poetry of the eighteenth century and European and Graeco-Roman literature. Arzamas upheld the 'correctness' of eighteenth-century French-based neoclassical tradition, and, writing in this context, Pushkin became a master of imitation and parody.[24] In his hands the clarity, elegance and precision of French are organically joined to Russian, with the latter's stress patterns miraculously disposed over the metres of the accentual-syllabic scansion system established in Russian verse

in the eighteenth century, which followed English tradition. At the same early stage he acquired perfect command of verse styles and genres used by his Russian predecessors. Here lie the foundations of the prosodic mastery displayed throughout Pushkin's poetry, from the present selection to his best-known work, *Eugene Onegin*, the novel in verse about an idle young St Petersburg dandy and the country girl he spurns, which contains much of Pushkin himself and surveys, with light irony, much of contemporary Russian life.

At the age of sixteen, in the same year (1815) that Derzhavin heard the young poet's reading of his recently written ode on Tsarskoye Selo, Pushkin wrote a dazzlingly witty and accomplished mock-epic account of a literary descent into hell, the comic playwright Denis Fonvizin (1745–92) being the Virgilian guide to the narrator (Pushkin), with encounters with three untalented Russian writers and Derzhavin. Pushkin imitates and parodies the style of all of them in turn, including, respectfully, the last. Later in this same year he wrote another long poem in a similar irreverent spirit, this time a bawdy ballad, *The Shade of Barkov*, which has always been considered outside the canon and only recently accepted as Pushkin's work. Both poems are harbingers of things to come. The ballad tells of a defrocked priest's visit to a brothel, where the ghost of the celebrated (by male readers) obscene poet Ivan Barkov (1732–68) appears to him in a morale-boosting visitation. Critics Russian and Western have uncovered Barkov's influence on nineteenth-century Russian poets only in recent decades, especially during the post-Soviet era.[25] Reminders of Pushkin's Barkovian ballad, not in its language or immediate subject matter but in certain verse patterns and rhyme echoes, have even been found in one of his greatest poems, 'The Prophet' (1826), and an astonishing claim has been made that both poems are linked by their author's fundamental urge, to be thwarted throughout his life, towards personal independence and freedom from any political or social restraint.[26]

Parody, then, is central to Pushkin's poetry. The first long narrative poem he published, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, was conceived partly as a parody of Zhukovsky's supernatural but