Introduction: Pushkin: Myth and Monument

by

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This is the second of three volumes to come out of ‘Two Hundred Years of Pushkin’, a conference held at Mansfield College, Oxford, in September 1999 to commemorate the poet’s bicentenary. The first volume concentrates on Pushkin’s impact on his literary successors illustrating, with reference to writers as diverse in style and genre as Turgenev, Tsvetaeva, Nabokov and Brodsky, the all-pervasiveness of Pushkin’s influence on subsequent Russian writing, a phenomenon which confirms (and constitutes) his stature as a national and world writer.

The present volume focuses more specifically on the nature of Pushkin’s own inspiration and creative preoccupations. In this context it is probably true to say that Pushkin criticism has often oscillated between the imperative to maximize the creative originality of the poet and a tendency on the part of literary historians to locate him along the predictable ley-lines of literary influence: Byronism for the romantic poetry; French classicism for the prose etc. This latter tendency has also had the effect of ‘biographizing’ criticism of the writer, who is seen as having passed through the successive stages of classicism, romanticism and realism (generically signposted by lyric poetry, narrative poetry/closet drama and prose). The essays gathered here, however, reflect a growing and welcome tendency to view Pushkin within a much broader range of fundamental influences: as an autonomous and unmediated reader of the accumulated inspirational fund which is European culture. Such an approach defines him as an equal to his great European predecessors, rather than their brilliant student. At the same time it does not question Pushkin’s position at the centre of Russian culture, but rather enhances and justifies it.

The chapters which comprise this book are all broadly concerned with the mythic dimension of Pushkin’s work. The striking recurrence in his œuvre of myths and archetypes may be interpreted in part as a manifestation of Pushkin’s overall stylistic economy, wherein myth fulfils on the thematic level the same inferential function as metonymy on the stylistic. Jakobson, in particular, famously demonstrated not merely the specific functioning of one such myth but, by tracing its recurrence and reformulation, established its presence as a structural principle throughout Pushkin’s œuvre. The degree of mythic coherence in Pushkin’s work, suggestive as this might be of inherent ‘system’, is a matter of dispute. Advocates of mythic coherence might agree with Savely Senderovich that ‘… two myths within the bounds of one mythology may reveal a common superstructure. The network of such superstructures,
permeating the whole œuvre of a given author, allows the consideration of his œuvre as one integral mythological system. There is, of course, a long tradition of resisting the extraction of over-arching meaning from Pushkin’s œuvre, but this position (Tomashevskii provides an extreme instance) thrives only when the opposing arguments are unsophisticated. A protean poet is open to protean critical approaches and this is precisely what we see in the work of contemporary commentators such as Greenleaf and Bethea. Greenleaf’s substitution of ‘autoportraiture’ for autobiography reflects a preference for ‘isolated, immanent cross-sections’ and the suppression of discourse over ‘an explanatory theory of the self’s coherent existence in time’. The critic’s attention focuses on recurring ‘clusters’ of ‘imagos’ or ‘psycho-dramas’ which travel over ‘generic and content boundaries’. Bethea, while an admirer of Jakobson, finds that the structural articulation of his sculptural myth neglects important dimensions of Pushkin’s creativity (‘the poet’s awe and enchantment before the idea of living form’) and therefore concludes that he was not ‘successful at realizing the sculptural metaphor in the larger context of the poet’s personal mythology’. Bethea, in fact, may be regarded as supplementing and expanding Jakobson’s basic myth by the addition of others, as his chapter in the present work illustrates.

The studies which comprise this volume point in general towards two distinct Pushkinian orientations towards myth: 1. appropriation and reinterpretation of existing European myths either at an explicit or subtextual level: Cupid and Psyche, Cleopatra, Dante and Beatrice, Don Juan; 2. the creation of original mythological figures out of the raw material of Russian history and culture: the protagonists of Evgenii Onegin, The Bronze Horseman and The Captain’s Daughter (and, in an alternative formulation, The History of Pugachev). Importantly, these two categories are constantly melting into one another, with the first often implied by the second and the second valorized by the first; their interpenetration is part of the wider dialogue between European culture in general and Russian culture in particular. We should, however, posit a third mythological pole: Pushkin inserted himself into some of these myths which are not fully interpretable without reference to him. This must be true of Evgenii Onegin, for instance, where it is arguable that he is ‘the primary historical personage of his own novel’ or, as Sandler puts it ‘[his] life was lived between the chapters’. Thus Pushkin is raised (or raises himself) to something like mythic status, acquiring his own heroic plot, ‘a drama played out by other people’, one might say for other people. This heroic myth is inalienable from Pushkin and a cultural fact quite distinct from either his biography or biographically structured critiques of his work. Transcendent national significance is part of heroic myth, as is a space in which the myth can be imagined and realized. It is St Petersburg which becomes the urban equivalent of ‘Pushkin country’ to borrow (if paradoxically) an increasingly common British designation for poietical space. Acmeism was partly founded on the implications of this creative symbiosis. Later scholars have explored the
relationship more analytically. Over half the contributors to the present volume address this phenomenon either directly (Alexandra Smith) or via The Bronze Horseman. Like the Promised Land possession had to be wrested from a predecessor’s grasp: St Petersburg, as Pushkin realized, was first of all ‘Peter’s creation’; Pushkin had first to recognize this before transcending it. Alexandra Smith quite rightly sees here a special form of the anxiety of influence (of which more later) - in this instance, however, transferring the private agon of literary emulation to the grand cultural arena. Pushkin acknowledged this problematic ‘Petri-faction’ by absorbing it into the wider symbolic system of petrifaction wherein the living may survive monumentally and the monumental becomes and remains at a certain level - alive.

Myth in general exhibits such quasi-vital properties, particularly in its capacity for evolution as it is successively re-appropriated and re-animated into contemporary significance. The Queen of Spades, for instance, becomes the archetext for a number of subsequent Russian works11 (Robin Aizlewood speaks of the work’s ‘protean influence’ in subsequent Russian literature). The plot and character structure of Evgenii Onegin becomes a fundamental axiom of the Russian realist novel and the spectral St Petersburg inhabited by the alienated Evgenii in The Bronze Horseman provides the core around which Gogol and Dostoevskii further develop the myth of the city. These, the results of successors poring over his works, are an essential part of our understanding of Pushkin, not an annexe to it: if Pushkin is indeed a rich mine of myth this is verifiable as much by what is extracted from him by later Russian writers as by the insights of criticism. One may conclude that the various explanations for this sublime influence - pure genius, experimentation in a wide number of genres, cultural acuity, linguistic innovation - come together in the single quality of inferentiality: maximal receptional scope: multi-predication between signified, signifier and interpretation; irresolvable aporia; the capacity for inexhaustible re-reading.

Reading is a process and what is readable is the object of that process. But it is not merely the object which is present to be read in Pushkin, but the process itself. Pushkin furnishes, as well as myth, the secret of transforming the myth. For while there is a nexus of intertextual transformation which runs seamlessly from Pushkin’s own appropriation of myth to his successors’ appropriation of that appropriation, there is, between the termini of this semiosis, a process of self-appropriation on Pushkin’s part, a revisitation of the same mythic archetypes and multiple re-scripting of the same mythic core. This is what A.L. Bem, in another context, called ‘self-imitation’.12 It is certainly possible to approach the manifestations of the sculptural myth in Pushkin’s œuvre from this point of view which clearly differentiates itself from the notion that such manifestations represent multiple recurrence to a central conceptual hub (rather than sequential re-scriptings which can be traced back to a primal mythic source).
The appropriation (or elaboration) of pre-existing myth, as the basis of either plot or character, as opposed to conscious innovation in those areas, or a studied realism, might be thought to be essentially classical in orientation. It suggests deference to pre-existing form. On the other hand Pushkin’s way of dealing with such archetypes is recognizably romantic. The forms are taken, but the writer passionately engages with them so that they become simultaneously self-standing myths and intimate aspects of the transforming artist: they are subjectivized. It is not, as in classicism, that the artist must do homage to the priority of myth; the myth itself is made to do homage to the artist. This is the Copernican revolution wrought by romanticism. However only an animated myth can perform such homage and thus we have in Pushkin the several instances in which the mythic or temporally prior is conjured to life: the Stone Guest, the Bronze Horseman, the animated card and the Countess in The Queen of Spades. Each of these animations corresponds to the deepest wishes or fears of the perceiving subject. Bethea sees affinities between this process and the Pygmalion myth which foregrounds the animation of artefact by artist (rather than, as in Jakobson’s scheme of things, the nature of the animation itself). Yet such animations transcend artifacts and are better seen as the result of a certain kind of artefactation of the objective world. If we cast the net thus widely we can include here the animation of his hoard by the Covetous Knight and that of the Neva by the narrative voice of The Bronze Horseman. This desire to animate, indeed animism, is typically romantic - as are the often unpredictable and deadly consequences of such animation or the desire for it. Its relative circumscription and rationalization in Pushkin’s work may be attributable to the restraining influence of classicism, rather than the aesthetic demands of emergent realism. Certainly the reverse of this process - petrifaction rather than artefactation (where art animates) - evokes the rigidity of classicism. The archaic has a dead quality, but it is a hard deadness that makes it endure: the living corpse of the Countess in The Queen of Spades and Salieri with his austere aesthetic (which itself involves dissecting music like a corpse) are spooky symptoms of outmoded canons which will not give way. Bethea is right to call the sculptural myth ‘double-sided’. However it is arguably true that Pushkin’s myth in general contains this potential for reversibility. It is systemic: the systole requires a diastole and there is therefore no didactic closure in this mythologizing. Between mortification and animation, rigidity and freedom, past and present, authority and autonomy, Pushkin seeks less to choose than to conditionally emphasize. The myths themselves remain animate through this very refusal of closure.

Of the chapters which comprise the present volume Bethea’s probably most closely engages with what has been said above. Bethea here analyses a myth complementary to that of Pygmalion which formed a central part of his Realizing Metaphors. The two are complementary and might be said to represent an ongoing project by the author to ‘map’ the mythological deep structure of Pushkin. The attractiveness of Pygmalion is that it is an artist’s myth (and one
moreover which runs radically counter to the prevalent aesthetics of ancient Greece).\textsuperscript{18} The Cupid and Psyche myth (from Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, a work well-known to Pushkin) is interesting when read against Pygmalion: it can be seen as the creature's reciprocal desire to know the creator. Love is the animating power in both myths, but whereas love concludes the Pygmalion story, it is merely the starting point for Cupid and Psyche.

The power of the psyche myth is that it encapsulates both anthropological and psychological features of human sexuality. The first of these is not of principal concern, although the myth curiously conflates two forms of anonymity in the courtship process: that enforced in some cultures on the betrothed of both sexes before marriage and that enforced on the male in some Caucasian tribes: that he should, for the first months of his marriage visit his wife only at night and as secretly as possible. However, the psychological implications of the myth are developed by Bethea to explore, in particular, the character of Tatiana, for, if Pygmalion is peculiarly fitted to the predicament of the artist, the Psyche myth is especially bound up with the self-realization of its heroine. The myth sets up a binary between having one's lover but not knowing his identity and knowing his identity but not having him. As Bethea rightly perceives, Psyche's self-knowledge is dependent on her knowing who her lover really is (since she has been falsely led to believe that he is a demonic being).\textsuperscript{19} Psyche chooses to find out the identity of her lover and so drives him away; Bethea sees this myth as underlying Tatiana's thrust towards self-knowledge in *Evgenii Onegin*. In particular strong and convincing analogies are drawn between Psyche's enlightenment and that which is acquired by Tatiana when she ponders over the books and ornaments in Onegin's study after the death of Lenskii.

Remarkable though the myth is in terms of Pushkin's transformation of content, the formal conditions of the appropriation are also striking. Where Psyche's plot follows the following order: 1 told her lover is a demon; 2 in love (after pricking herself with Cupid's arrow); 3 discovers his identity; 4 is rejected; 5 seeks him out, Tatiana's plot represents a re-arrangement: 1, 2, 5, 4, 3. This remarkable discrepancy shows the importance of plot sujetization in the revision and re-animation of myth; in this case the inversion of the three terminal components suffices to provide the modern heroine with an intellectual dialectic denied to her mythic archetype. The curiosity which animates both heroines recalls Hobbes' contention that it is a uniquely human quality (in that it directs animal desire to a purely intellectual end: knowledge for its own sake).\textsuperscript{20} This goes to the heart of Pushkin's use of myth; it is not merely for aesthetic effect: these 'unexpected changes and metamorphoses ... go to the centre of a hero or heroine's identity'.\textsuperscript{21}

A different myth, applied to the same novel by Marguerite Palmer activates a quite different metaphorical system, intimately involving the creative status of the hero himself. Palmer sees *Evgenii Onegin* as deeply structured by Dante's great work on two distinct levels: the relationship between the poet and
his heroine; the relationship of the poet to other poets. The second of these - a poet's preoccupation with his own canonical status - was clearly a matter of aesthetic as well as personal concern to Pushkin. Bethea, for instance, has dealt elsewhere convincingly with Pushkin's consciousness of his own literary position vis-à-vis Derzhavin in terms of Bloomian anxiety of influence. However, there is evidence too that Pushkin viewed the artist's relationship to his predecessors and successors as fundamental to creative consciousness. *Mozart and Salieri* is clearly a meditation on this theme but with strikingly original elaborations. Two Bloomian anxieties manifest themselves in Salieri, an 'orthodox' urge to emulate his predecessors, and a far more profound reaction to the threat posed by Mozart. Mozart, of course, threatens to deprive Salieri of his influence on later generations and he himself is younger in years and possessed of youthful vitality. *Mozart and Salieri* therefore realizes in a particular artistic context that more generalized anxiety between old and young which is typically Pushkinian and pervades works as diverse as *The Stone Guest*, *Evgenii Onegin*, *The Queen of Spades* and *The Bronze Horseman*.

Palmer starts from the position that Dante's negotiation of the Inferno under Virgil's guidance represents for Pushkin the archetypal relationship between poet and predecessor and models the creative relationships in *Evgenii Onegin*. The most obvious such relationship in the novel is that between Pushkin and Lenskii and it is Lenskii who is sent Lethe-wards by his creator, while the latter is left to elegiacally lament his passing. However, Palmer contends that there is a creative triangulation in the novel between Pushkin, Lenskii and Onegin and argues in favour of the poetic credentials of the latter. Lenskii is briefly the satellite of Onegin and 'could be viewed as a parody of Virgil, allowing Onegin to adopt the role of Dante'. Here we encounter the other major Dantean motif - Tatiana as Beatrice and therefore muse. In the emulation between these three male figures, victory goes to him who wins the favour of this muse incarnate - a privilege reserved, inevitably, for Pushkin himself.

If Tatiana embodies a chaste and virtuous form of female empowerment, Cleopatra is its demonic counterpart. The incomplete narrative poem of this name (1824) is founded on the apocryphal tradition that the Egyptian Queen sold herself to those who were willing to sleep with her for a single night and to pay with their lives the next morning. This is enhanced as a myth of female empowerment when read against the more widely known *One Thousand and One Nights* in which it is a woman who is to pay this forfeit. Although this work is fragmentary and unfinished, Burnett sees it as importantly anticipating *The Queen of Spades* in its linking of risk, sexual attraction and financial gain. Here is a good example of mythic evolution in Pushkin. The characterization of Cleopatra, who is introduced as vocal and animated, but then, seemingly responding to the crowd's 'idolization' of her, becomes impassive and statue-like, aligns the work with later ones based on the statuary myth: *The Stone Guest* and *The Bronze Horseman* as well as with those lyrics (*Exegi monumentum*,
Poet and the Crowd) which grow out of the theme of mass appraisal or adulation. In this respect the three-stage semiotics of the poem are interesting: while living she is treated as an idol; when, however, she responds like an idol the crowd grows apprehensively silent; in response to this silence she re-animates, but as something demonically superhuman. The three distinct personas which participate in this dialectic - the living person, the idol and the living idol, are functionally similar to those that are found in The Bronze Horseman. This dynamic structure may indicate something fundamental about Pushkin’s view of the historical process and its relation to myth, but only because the contexts are here historical, even imperial. However, we see variations of this same process in contexts shorn of explicit historical significance (The Queen of Spades, The Stone Guest). Burnett is inclined to view the work from the much wider perspective of eros and thanatos, but he also argues that it highlights tensions in Pushkin’s aesthetic between the pathos of rapture and passion and the detachment or serenity which Pushkin felt necessary for the appreciation of beauty.

There is both a specious and genuine goal to Cleopatra’s actions: while her victims fancy they will enjoy her charms for their own sake, Cleopatra sees herself as an acolyte of Aphrodite (Kiprida): they are to take part in a sacred, rather than a profane act, and the death which seems Cleopatra’s whim is a sacrifice to the god and therefore the end and justification of the process. The Stone Guest shares with Cleopatra a theme which focuses on obsessive eros, but whereas in Cleopatra there is rationalization to be found in the enactment of sacrificial mysteries, no such logical explanation presents itself for the amorous activities of Don Juan. However, one may argue that none is required: Don Juan is himself the archetype of promiscuous male behaviour and, as such, serves nobody but himself. He is exemplar rather than example. He is moreover a romantic, rather than classical myth, thus representative of self-definition rather than derivation from higher authority. André van Holk sees this in processive terms as ‘the agent’s orientation towards a goal or object … [and] the orientation from object or goal back to the agent…’. The romantic system envisaged here only works if it is fully circular, so that the subject’s emotional output is matched by reciprocal input from the goal sought. This is a useful model and we can test it against a number of love plots in Pushkin, where (as in Evgenii Onegin) the reciprocity fails or (as in The Blizzard) it is deferred. Van Holk argues that ‘the compactness and intensity’ of The Stone Guest marks it out ‘as one of the jewels of Pushkin’s œuvre’ and he makes a convincing case in favour of its structural elegance, particularly as regards characterization. The Stone Guest exhibits typical features of recurrent Pushkinian motifs: the triangle of Don Juan, Anna and the Comendador has a similar structure and psychological dynamics to that of Onegin, Tatiana and Tatiana’s husband. However, here it is the third of these figures who is foregrounded and the play thus also resonates against other of Pushkin’s works which centre on the problem of precedence, priority and the dominant persistence of the past. As in Cleopatra and The Bronze Horseman it
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is the onlooker who animates. However in contrast to these works it is the blasphemous insouciance of the immoral Don Juan which brings the idol to life, coupled with the catalogue of dishonour which he has suffered (and continues to suffer) at Don Juan’s hands. To that extent he is an objective agent of retribution who comes to re-assert the laws which the hero has violated. The continuing mastery of the present by the past, symbolized by an animated petrifact, is not unique to The Stone Guest; however the work’s almost provocative romanticism aestheticizes the temporal confrontation: in Don Juan we see the quintessentially romantic hero, the breaker of every rigid convention, disciplined and destroyed by the rigid effigy of priority and precedence. It is substantially the same confrontation as in The Stone Guest’s stable-mate Mozart and Salieri and lays bare Pushkin’s problematic relationship to the two dominant aesthetics which shaped him.

The most complex reconfiguration of the mythic elements of The Stone Guest is to be found in The Queen of Spades. Hermann, like Don Juan, wrestles with the past, but it is a complex past which contains the ambiguous romantic image of Napoleon as well as the relics of pre-romanticism; his implied imitation of the former and violation of the latter produce a belated reprise of the confrontation in The Stone Guest but on a more broadly cultural level. Robin Aizlewood investigates the relationship between these two works in depth and analyses the multi-layered parallels between them. In particular, he stresses the ‘desacralization’ of The Queen of Spades relative to its predecessor: although questions of life and death, good and evil, are present in the story, they are clouded in ambiguity and, whereas Don Juan is ‘an archetypal transgressor’ Hermann represents something more morally ambiguous and less easily definable. Aizlewood’s study of doubles in The Queen of Spades lays bare the polyvalent nature of Pushkin’s mythology. Hermann, for instance, functions as a Don Juan to both Lizaveta and the Countess as well as a death-bearing stone guest; on the other hand the Countess herself also has idol-like qualities both before and after her death. Interestingly Aizlewood concludes that the ‘very obviousness’ of the onomatopoeic doubling of Hermann and St Germain in the story suggests that it is functioning less as a double in its own right than as an ‘emblematic sign of doubling’ - a laying bare of the device. Significantly the full gamut of doublings in The Queen of Spades only emerges intertextually, when read against The Stone Guest which functions in this comparison less as archetext than parallel manifestation of common mythic substructures determining plot and characterization, among them petrifaction (and its reverse) in both literal and figurative form.

Four of the contributors to this volume chose to write about the most celebrated manifestation of this substructure - The Bronze Horseman. Jakobson, as is well known, referred to Pushkin’s treatment of statuary as ‘the sign of a sign’. Tatiana Smoliarova places The Bronze Horseman in a broad and ancient tradition of ekphrasis - poetry about artefacts - which has classical origins. The
aesthetics of ekphrasis imply not merely the description of statues, pictures or buildings, but eulogy, since what has been chosen for description must have been deemed worthy of description. At the same time, as Smoliarova points out, ‘the crucial notion, the key-word for such a description would be the Greek word pneuma ... the animation of the statue in question. One should say that it is energetic as if it were alive ... as if it has just jumped or will be jumping in the next few minutes’. Thus traditional ekphrastic aesthetics foregrounds not so much realistic representation as transformational potential: the statue is not merely life-like; it seems about to come to life - in Bethea’s terms the aesthetics of Pygmalion. Smoliarova demonstrates that Falconet himself aimed for just such an effect in sculpting Peter’s monument, wishing to extract from his spectators the ultimate ekphrasis: ‘It’s alive!’ However, Pushkin elaborates this semiotics in such a way that it is impossible to conclude that Evgenii in the Bronze Horseman is somehow an aesthetically correct viewer of the statue. Pushkin adds a preliminary metaphoric semiotic in which Evgenii (and Don Juan) address their statues as though they were alive; it is this provocative communication which animates their statues; or by corollary one may conclude that Pushkin verbalizes the aesthetic criterion of ekphrasis - to be life-like is to understand words. Moreover, as Alexandra Smith notes, some contemporary commentators (breaking the canons of Lessing) referred to Peter’s statue as ‘Falconet’s epic poem’, a sculpted ekphrasis of a virtual text, so that Pushkin’s poem becomes (to paraphrase Jakobson) an ‘ekphrasis of an ekphrasis’ or the re-animation of a text fixed in stone.

The theme of the statue’s animation is a focused aspect of the broader theme of Peter the Great’s continual survival in the fabric of his city - petrifaction in both senses of the word. Alexandra Smith, however, argues that there is also a Pushkinian Petersburg and that, in the broadest terms, the city can be seen as the joint creation of these two figures. In a sense it is Pushkin who imparts cultural and historical perspective to the city: in different but complementary ways The Queen of Spades and The Bronze Horseman chronicle its growth and evolution, while (via, for instance, Evgenii Onegin and again The Bronze Horseman) Pushkin’s own paradigmatic biography is inscribed in it in phases which also mirror the country’s political evolution.

Yet, as Basker and Meyer demonstrate, Pushkin himself had shadowy co-adjutors in the creation of the civic myth, and the poem as a whole is more indebted to literary influence than is often suggested. Basker’s scrutiny of Pushkin’s notes to The Bronze Horseman reveals an implied acknowledgment of Mickiewicz whose poems about the city touch the same mythic chords (flood and monument) to produce anti-imperialist undertones which are thus mutely present in Pushkin’s work too. Meyer detects in Pushkin’s description of the flood the influence of Aimée Harelle’s ‘The Flood at Nantes’. Here again, however, subversive ideas adhere to the intertext: the Nantes description is bound up with French revolutionary ideas and the description of Nantes suggests
a city in which there is a wide gulf between rich and poor. For Meyer these resonate with the later Pushkin’s broad political interests: Peter the Great (as destroyer of the old); the Decembrists (as revolutionaries); the Pugachev revolt (as mass democratic movements). This intertextual dimension if anything complicates a definitive reading of the poem. Meyer sees it as synthesizing these major concerns of Pushkin; Basker’s reading leads him to conclude that Pushkin, in affirming creativity, aligns himself with the creative Peter ‘rather than Evgenii’s descent into meaningless incoherence’. Smith inclines to the view that there is no clear ideological position in the poem.

Mythologizing is at some level invariably connected to historical perspective: individual attainment of mythic status implies historical process. The situation therefore frequently arises when, as Nebolsin puts it, the artist is a historian despite himself. Contrariwise, to quote Mills Todd, the reader may approach Evgenii Onegin as a historical novel in which social tyranny replaces the brutality of more dramatic historical events. In his contribution to the present volume, Mills Todd focuses on The History of Pugachev, a work which is inevitably read against its fictionalized counterpart The Captain’s Daughter. Curiously, however, as Todd points out, there is a well-established critical view that Pushkin’s novel somehow better catches the spirit of the Pugachev period than the History; in particular The History fails to convey the personality of Pugachev himself which cries out for dramatic, even romantic treatment. Todd argues that Pushkin deliberately wrote his History using ‘self-effacing conventions of normal history’ although this was at odds with the prevailing taste for the ornamentations of romantic history. This ‘narratorial reticence’, as Todd terms it, was, of course, a feature, too, of his fictional prose. By studiedly refusing to maintain an omniscient point of view, Pushkin creates a complex interplay of multiple perspectives on a historical episode which many of his contemporaries felt should have evoked an unequivocal and passionate authorial judgement. The ‘polyperspectivalism’, and ‘ironic and troubling lack of confusion’ which the work creates is a receptive outcome familiar enough in Pushkin’s fictional works, but is unconventional in historical discourse where the reader is not used to applying ‘cognitive effort’.

However formulated, even the most abstract co-ordinates which make a historical perspective possible may be found on closer scrutiny to be furtively anthropomorphized. The persistence of myth in culture, and the continued emergence of myths, is only an extreme instance of this tendency. As Reid seeks to demonstrate, Dilthey’s views of time are of particular relevance here because they associate the three temporalities - past, present and future - with major human cognitive processes (understanding, value, and purpose respectively). The most crucial of these modes is value: by valuing past events and experiences we maintain them in presentness. This is equally true of negative valuation (hatred or revenge for instance). Reid shows that many of Pushkin’s narratives hinge upon the hero’s elevation of a past event or experience to a level of
unparalleled personal significance, thus permitting it to abide in the presentness of consciousness. Such intensely valorized episodes are not allowed to escape into the inertia of the past; they remain animate. This is as true on the personal level (Hermann’s obsession with the Countess’ winning secret) as on the civic (Russia’s continuing obsession with Peter the Great).

Many of the mythic images in Pushkin do indeed come from the obsessive retention in the present of realia, persons or concepts which objectively reside in the past. It is the values of the protagonist - the intensity of his ethos - which invest these elements with such power: it is a measure of Don Juan’s passionate nihilism, causing him to violate the most basic social taboos and restrictions, that it can bring the outraged dead to life; it is a measure of Evgenii’s despair and hatred that it can animate a monument to a historical figure, thus emphasizing the continuing presentness of that figure for the whole nation; it is a measure of Hermann’s mental obsession with a past secret that a ghost visits him to resolve it for him. But there is also reciprocity in these animations: for the dead too must somehow transcend the past in order to be able thus to requite or avenge posthumous insults.

While it is not possible to derive the sort of coherent moral and philosophical conclusions from Pushkin which we can, for instance, from Tolstoi or Dostoevskii, a sense of value, mediated through characters animated by strong desires and passions, is a pervasive feature of his narratives. This exploration of passionate action, shorn of judgment or conclusion, is something Pushkin’s works share with myth; but this is as it should be - Pushkin, as we have seen, is drawn to myth for this very reason, builds upon its existing foundation and himself adds to the mythic fund.
NOTES

1. This is not necessarily to validate the insights produced by either of these approaches. Briggs, for instance, combines them in an original manner. His study addresses head-on the over-assertion of Pushkin's originality or 'Pushkinolatry' by daring to point to the overestimation of the poet's romantic works in particular. This leads him to stress the positive nature of the development away from Byronism towards the realism of Count Nulin and The Bronze Horseman. See A.D.P. Briggs, *Alexander Pushkin: A Critical Study*, Croom Helm, London, 1983, p. 103.

2. Bethea and Davydov's article is an important landmark here. Among the many useful points it makes about the Tales of Belkin in particular there is the more general one about Pushkin's orientation towards the influence of literary movements and styles: the fates of the protagonists being wry warnings about the dominance of a range of romantic and pre-romantic mind sets. The Pushkin that emerges from such a reading is self-emancipated from the influences often attributed to him. See David Bethea and Sergei Davydov, 'Pushkin's Saturnine Cupid: The Poetics of Parody in The Tales of Belkin', *PMLA*, XCVI, 1, 1981, pp. 8-21.


12. Bern applied this to Lermontov: see ““Samopovtoreniia” v tvorchestve Lermontova’ in Istoriko-literaturnyi sbornik. Posviashchennyi V.I. Sreznevskomu 1891-16, Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk, Otdelenie russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti, 1924, pp. 268-90. Imitation and self-imitation are the twin sources of poetic inspiration: one exogenous and the other endogenous (or in strict intertextual terms direct and self-mediated influence).


15. Lezhnev sees the psychologized tropes used in the nature description in *The Bronze Horseman* as being typically poetic. This is in contrast to the view, typified by Bayley, that *The Bronze Horseman* is in scope and aspiration typical of a ‘modern’ work of prose despite its poetic form. See Abram Lezhnev, *Pushkin’s Prose*, translated by Roberta Reeder, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1983, pp. 36 ff.


17. Bethea, loc.cit.

18. For instance *Phaedrus*, 275 c-d: ‘... for the characters of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence’.

19. In this respect the parallels between this myth and Lermontov’s *The Demon* are very striking, and, as far as I know, unexplored.


21. We also see here the beginnings of that psychological realism which will come to full development in Tolstoi and Dostoevskii. As Debreczeny points out Tatiana’s reading is a complex process embracing author, character and reader: ‘In Tatiana we watch a fictional character reading fiction. Not only is she adapting her reading matter to her needs as she creates the narrative of her life, but the whole description is coloured by Pushkin’s ironic view of the kind of literature she reads’. See Paul Debreczeny, *Social Functions of Literature: Alexander Pushkin and Russian Culture*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1997, p. 28. The reader is made to see Tatiana as a fellow reader and thus she is animated by a kind of lectorial cogito (of powerful rhetorical, if of dubious logical force): I read and (therefore now) exist; she too reads and therefore exists. The suppressed axiom is that reading implies intellection.


23. On the aesthetics of *Mozart and Salieri* see the present author’s *Pushkin’s ‘Mozart and Salieri’*: *Themes, Character, Sociology*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1995.

24. We see this bifurcation in *The Queen of Spades* too: the erotic plot in which Lizaveta will spend a night with her Napoleon which is but a means to the real plot which has the Countess and her ‘mysteries’ as its goal and Lizaveta, predictably, as merely the acolyte.

25. This is in marked contrast to Briggs’ appraisal of it as Pushkin’s weakest masterpiece: Briggs, op. cit., p. 178.


27. Simmons regards the plot of *The Bronze Horseman* as a ‘fantastic device’ and ‘pure poetry’ in contrast to the ‘realistic’ imagery and language. Paradoxically, however, the animative theme of the poem appears fantastic only if subjected to an uncompromisingly realist or reductionist reading. See Ernest J. Simmons, *Pushkin*, Vintage Books, 1964, p. 357.


29. If Andrew Kahn (*Pushkin’s ‘The Bronze Horseman’*, Critical Studies in Russian Literature, Bristol Classical Press, 1998, p. 4) is right in maintaining that Pushkin wrote *The Bronze Horseman* because he felt ‘stymied in his historical work’, we should indeed expect this text to be less historical than para-historical.
