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14

The Evolution of Pushkin's Political Thought

~ SERGHI DAVYDOV

It is the prerogative of great minds to stir feuds among their heirs. To claim the inheritance, the descendants invoke a great ghost to testify on their behalf, only to find that their rivals have procured the same witness. Thus begins the ideological "body snatching."

Pushkin's posthumous destiny has been no exception. The array of opinions about his sociopolitical loyalties stretches from one extreme to another. D. I. Pisarev, the *bête noire* of Russian letters, declared Pushkin to be "a versifier totally incapable of analyzing and comprehending great social and philosophical questions of the century."¹ At the other end, Pushkin's contemporary Adam Mickiewicz maintained that "when Pushkin spoke about politics, foreign or domestic, one had the impression of listening to a man hardened in the affairs of state and steeped in daily reading of parliamentary debates."²

Over the past two centuries of critical inquiry, Pushkin has been refracted as every hue of the rainbow: as a rabid radical, a rebel, a Decembrist manqué, a Quietist, an apostate and traitor, a friend of monarchy, a servilist and court toady, a spurned courtier, a haughty aristocrat and dandy, and, *pour la bonne bouche*, a disgruntled nobleman who wished he were a bourgeois [*meshchanin*] gulping cabbage soup from a pot. For the greater part of the nineteenth century the scarcity of published sources led to the impression that the poet was a "lightweight" in the field of sociopolitical thought, a field that included Radshchev, Chaadaev, I. V. Kireevskii, and Khomiakov. Pushkin's first biographers, Bantysh-Kamenskii (1847) and Annenkov (1855) neatly sidestepped the poet's involvement in the political process, and their Pushkin came out as a loyal supporter of the government. Belinsky and Chernyshevsky, too, paid little attention to Pushkin's political thought, while

Dobrolubov claimed that "only the lack of solid education" prevented Pushkin from choosing the correct answers to Russia's social problems.³

Abroad, Herzen and Ogarev published Pushkin's political verses in *Poliarnia zvezda* [Pole Star] (1856) and publicized the poet's adherence to the Decembrists' ideals. At home, Bartenev (1861) was the first to mention Pushkin's involvement with the members of the southern Secret Societies.⁴ The memoirs of Pushchin (1859), Vigel' (1865), and V. F. Raevskii (1874), as well as the eventual publication of Pushkin's political verses, added considerably to the poet's political biography.⁵ However, prevalent nineteenth-century critical opinion maintained that Pushkin was a loyal subject of the monarchy.

The inauguration of Pushkin's memorial in 1880 and the August centennial celebration in 1899 produced little more than pious generalities. During the 1880 inauguration, I. S. Turgenev declared Pushkin "the teacher" [*uchitel'*], Dostoevsky hailed the "universality and pan-humanity" [*vesmirnost' i vsechelovechnost'*] of Pushkin's prophetic genius, Veselovskii (1899) proclaimed him "the national poet" [*natsionalnyi poet*].⁶ Only V. E. Iakushkin's 1899 speech on "Pushkin's Social Views" (1899) stirred some controversy. In it the grandson of the Decembrist V. D. Iakushkin claimed that Pushkin remained faithful to the Decembrist ideals of his youth throughout his entire life.⁷

The beginning of this century saw two comprehensive studies by Slonimskii (1904, 1908) that dealt with Pushkin's reconciliation with the tsar after the defeat of the Decembrists, presenting it not as a break with the poet's radical past but as an organic link in the chain of his political evolution.⁸ Soon Lemke (1908) and Shchegolev (1909) exposed as myth the royal pardon and the poet's truce with the monarch, and reaffirmed Pushkin's pro-Decembrist credentials.⁹

The notion of Pushkin-cum-Decembrist became the mantra of scholars after 1917. Modzalevskii (1918, 1922), Brinsov (1919, 1923), Nechkina (1937), Glebov (1941), Melakh (1958), Blagoi (1967), Tsiaylovskaiia (1973), and virtually everybody else.¹⁰ The shortcoming of these studies is that they prefer to deal with poems such as "Vol'nost'" [Liberty], "Derzhiia" [The Village], "Noel," "Kinzhai" [The Dagger], "Vo glubine sibirskikh rud" [In the depths of Siberian mines], and "Arion"—and often gloss over Pushkin's later works. So far the most resourceful treatment of the Decembrist connection can be found in the studies of Vernadskii (1937), Eidel'man (1974), Lotman (1975, 1983), and Nemirovskii (1994).¹¹

The opponents of the pro-Decembrist line—pre-1917 and post-Soviet—cast Pushkin as the bard of liberty turned into a courtier [*tsarredvoretz*]. As a rule, they focus on Pushkin's later works such as "Stansy" [Stanzas], "Druz'iam" [To Friends], "Geroi" [The Hero], "Klevetnikam Rossi" [To the Slanders of Russia], "Borodinskaia godovshchina" [The Borodino Anniversary], and on journal articles of the 1830s: "O dvorianstve" [On the Nobility], "Aleksandr Radishchev," "John Tanner," and so on. It has to be said that Pushkin never became a courtier but paid a steep price for the attempt to find a *modus vivendi* with the tsar. Prince P. A. Viazemskii correctly understood Pushkin's peculiar blend of liberalism and conservatism that left many of his contemporaries perplexed.

Some of our "progressivists"—one has to call them the way they call themselves—cannot understand that it is possible to love progress, yet to dislike them; not only to dislike, but to consider it one's duty to campaign against them, precisely in the name of the idea, and out of love for the idea which they corrupted and vulgarized.¹²

In 1990 R. A. Gal'tseva compiled a comprehensive anthology of emigré criticism of Pushkin that includes the seminal studies by Fedotov, "The Bard of Empire and Freedom" (1937), and Frank, "Pushkin as a Political Thinker" (1937).¹³ Both studies analyzed Pushkin's singular brand of "progressive monarchism."

However, the most satisfying treatment of Pushkin's sociopolitical views can be found in the studies that take into account Pushkin's keen sense of class-consciousness as an aristocrat. Pioneered by Blagoi (1929) and Sakulin (1930)—who soon recanted their views—the class approach was productively continued in the West by Meynieux (1966), Mikkelson (1971), and more recently by Driver (1989).¹⁴ These studies cast Pushkin as the champion of the "aristocratic party," determined to uphold high aesthetic and ethical standards, challenging the ruling class, and trying to stem the tide of middle-class tastes which threatened the "republic of letters" in 1830s.

The task of sorting out Pushkin's political loyalties is a daunting one, for his "liberal conservatism"¹⁵ was a unique blend of Ai and Bordaoux, of Clignot and Laffitte. It strove to unite "sword with lyre" (Stokrat vsishchen soluz mecha i lir), Empire with Liberty (Fedotov), the order of the state with the elemental freedom of Nature. The royal censorship and Pushkin's heightened circumspection, too, exacerbate this task: "Whatever

my political and religious thoughts may have been, I am keeping them for myself, and have no desire to foolishly oppose the generally accepted order of things and necessity"¹⁶

Let us begin by sampling the different political vintages of *Al* and *Bordeaux* from the end, with the poem "From Pindemoni." Written in the last summer of Pushkin's life (5 July 1836), this poem fittingly coincides with the tenth anniversary of the execution of the Decembrists (13 July), and in many respects, it rounds out the poetic evolution of Pushkin's political views.

Не дорого ценю я громкие права,
 Ор коих не одна кружится голова.
 Я не ропщу о том, что отказали боги
 Мне в слабой участи осоривать наложь,
 Или мешать царям друг с другом воевать;
 И мало горя мне, свободно ли печать
 Морочит олухов, или чуткая цензура
 В журнальных замыслах стесняет балагура.
 Всё это, видите ль, слова, слова, слова.*
 *Gambler [Pushkin's note]

[I value little those much vaunted rights
 Which dazzle heads and send them spinning.
 I do not fret because the gods refuse
 To let me wrangle over revenues,
 Or keep king from fighting king.
 I care but little if the Press is free
 To dupe the oafs, or if some wary censor deems
 To cross the hoaxter's journalistic schemes.
 All this, you see, is "words, words, words."
 *Hamlet (Pushkin's note)]¹⁷

The opening lines suggest that there is something fundamentally wrong with the "much vaunted rights" that Pushkin so cavalierly dismisses. The rejected variant, "As if inebriated, nations are bedeviled / By the resounding names of *Egalité* and *Liberté*,"¹⁸ leaves little doubt that Pushkin was speaking about the most cherished civic ideals rather than some pseudo-rights deserving of the poet's scorn.

There was, of course, a time when Pushkin sported a "democratic gown"

("To V. L. Davydov" [1821]) and his head spun at the mere sound of these abstract words, especially if pronounced by the brother of Jean Paul Marat, Monsieur de Bourdy, a fervent republican and Pushkin's French teacher at the lyceum, or by the liberal Knutitsyn in his lectures on natural law. At the lyceum, during The Green Lamp period, and in Kishinev, Pushkin was, for all practical purposes, one of the liberals of his day. His political epigrams and poems such as "Liberty," "Noël," "The Village," and "The Dagger" served as political manifestos for the secret societies preparing the December 1825 uprising.

Indeed, Pushkin's ode "Liberty" (1817), titled and subtitled after Radishchev's seditious ode (1790), seems to continue the tradition of the founder of Russian radicalism. Following in Radishchev's footsteps, Pushkin exhorts, "Tyranis of the world! Tremble! . . . Rise up, fallen slaves!" However, there is an essential difference between the two odes; Pushkin proposes only to "strike vice upon thrones" [Na tronakh porazit' porok] rather than to abolish the throne, as did Radishchev: "The people run to the assembly [*vechel*], / And destroy the pig iron throne" (stanza 23).

If in "Liberty" the "eternal guardian" of the throne was the "sword of law" in the hands of virtuous citizens, then in the poem "The Dagger" (1821) the poet brandished a much less figurative weapon: "Freedom's secret sentinel, / The avenging dagger, / The final arbiter of shame and offense." "The Dagger" established Pushkin's most radical credentials. However, this poem—just like its prototype, André Chénier's ode to the assassin of Marat, "À Marie-Anne-Charlotte Corday" (1793)¹⁹—called for the death of the tyrant, not regicide, and the dagger was summoned only as a last resort when both the law and the gods failed to intercede.

In his teens and early twenties Pushkin shared the civic indignation of his radical friends, but he himself was not an implacable radical. A. I. Turgenev called Pushkin's political bravado "vulgar free-thinking" [ploshhadnoe vol'nodumstvo],²⁰ and this is how Prince Viazemskii put it in 1875: "Many of his so-called liberal verses were a mere echo of the time, rather than an echo or confession of his inner feelings and convictions. He was often the Aeolian harp of liberalism at the feasts of the youth, and reverberated the whiffs and voices that blew by."²¹ Pushkin's close friend, the Decembrist I. I. Pushchin, characterized the poet's posturing as "chatter and balderdash": ". . . but that nonsense, resembling light teasing, passed from mouth to mouth and generated all kinds of rumors that took on a life of their own and, as a result, a certain goal was achieved toward which he unconsciously contributed."²²

In 1820 Alexander I intended to banish Pushkin to Siberia for "deluging Russia with shocking verses; all the youths are learning them by heart," but dispatched him to the South instead.²³ No matter how much Pushkin might have disliked and satirized Alexander I, his political course of this period advocated constitutional monarchy—a prospect once entertained by the tsar himself. Pushkin's call for abolishment of serfdom "by the Tsar's fiat" [po manniu tsaria] in the poem "The Village" (1819) was applauded by the tsar as well as by his staunchest opponents. Alexander I remarked apropos "The Village," "Remerciez Poushchine des nobles sentiments qui inspirent ses vers."²⁴

While these fine points might have been missed by Pushkin's radical friends, no one could have misread the unambiguously imperialistic epilogue to *The Prisoner of Caucasus* (1821) in which the author of "Liberty" glorified the bloody conquest of the freedom-loving Caucasian tribes. This thoroughly unromantic attitude expressed in the epilogue of Pushkin's most Byronic work left perplexed even those who could not be suspected of revolutionary sympathies. Prince Viazemskii justly regretted that "Pushkin has stained with blood the last verses of his tale. . . . Poetry is not an ally of the henchmen . . . poet's hymns should never be a panegyric to carnage."²⁵

While Pushkin's personal loyalty to his friends—many of whom became future Decembrists—was always beyond reproach, his attitude toward their cause was often ambivalent. The setbacks to the revolutions in Spain, Italy, and Germany in the early 1820s, where monarchies turned out victorious and the people betrayed their rebels, gave little reason for optimism at home. ("The People desire quietude, / And their yoke will not shatter soon!" [To V. L. Davydov" (1821)].) Long before the December fiasco, Pushkin began to suspect that the uprising was a romantic concoction of noblemen, questioned the usefulness of revolutionary propaganda, and also doubted the people's readiness for liberty. Not many Decembrists would openly subscribe to Pushkin's unflattering words about the people in poems such as "The Demon" or, as can be seen below, in the unpublished "Freedom's Sower" (Svobody setatel' pustynnyĭ) (both 1823):

К чему страдам дары свободы?
Их должно резать или стирать.
Наследство их из рода в роды
Дрмо с гремушками да бич.

[For what to herds are the gifts of freedom?
They need to be slaughtered or shorn.
Their heritage from generation to generation
Is the yoke with jingles and the whip.]²⁶

Such lines of disillusionment over the lack of popular sympathy for the revolutionary cause continue to embarrass the liberal interpreter.²⁷

The years 1824–1825 found Pushkin at a crossroads. The revolutionary South, the "free element" of the unharnessed sea, and his apprenticeship to Byron had been left behind. While the secret societies were preparing an armed insurrection, Pushkin, exiled to his ancestral estate deep in the Russian heartland, learned a different and thoroughly antimimetic lesson. Reading Shakespeare and Karamzin's *History of the Russian State* gradually convinced him that above individual will—noble or ignoble—ultimately stands a meaningful, although not always just, historical destiny. In *Boris Godunov* (1825) murder of children and usurpation of the throne are presented as fatal historical sins. A mythical retribution is visited upon Russia for shedding the blood of the last heir of the house of Rurik. The murdered tsarevich Dimitrii, reincarnated as the False Dimitrii, haunts Godunov and his claims to legitimacy, just as in *The Captain's Daughter* the bearded reincarnation of the murdered emperor Peter III—the pretender Pugachev—will avenge himself for his "death" on the dowager usurpress Catherine II. This idea transpired already in "Liberty," where the tragedy that befalls France in the person of the usurper Napoleon was presented as a mythical retribution for the execution of the legitimate king. When Pushkin wrote *Boris Godunov* he was convinced that in the consciousness of the people monarchy was and would remain the foundation of Russian political life. Next to the semilegitimate, star-crossed Tsar Boris and the romantic usurper Dimitrii, it was the humble monk Pimen that fascinated Pushkin: "In him I collected features that had captivated me in our old chronicles: naïveté, touching humility, something both child-like and wise, an almost devout zeal for the power of the tsar given to him by God. . . . It seemed to me that this character was at once new and familiar to the Russian heart."²⁸ After a turbulent youth as a warrior and a carouser at Ivan the Terrible's court, the pious chronicler looks at the past with that supreme poise ("Heeding to good and evil with equanimity, / Knowing neither pity nor ire") which Pushkin himself strove to achieve. This new historical insight also begins to tinge Pushkin's attitude toward the failed

Decembrist uprising: "Let us be neither superstitious nor one-sided, like the French tragedians; let us look on tragedy with the eyes of Shakespeare."²⁹ Instead of wringing hands and pulling one's hair, sober words of the future king: "Enter their bodies as becomes their births: / Proclaim a pardon to the soldiers fled / That in submission will return to us" (act 5, scene 5, *Richard III*). "My hopes are on the coronation," wrote Pushkin, "the hanged are hanged, but hard labor for one hundred and twenty friends, brothers, and comrades is a terrible thing."³⁰

Hoping that the interrogations of the insurgents had proved him innocent, Pushkin appealed in May 1826 to the new tsar for the termination of his exile, and on 8 September was whisked to Moscow. The first person Pushkin saw was Nicholas I himself. Their audience at the Chudov Palace resulted in a truce of sorts. The tsar declared Pushkin "Russia's most intelligent man," terminated his exile, and offered to be the poet's personal censor, which turned out to be a mixed blessing. From his side, Pushkin presumably confirmed his pledge "not to contradict the accepted order" expressed already in his 11 May 1826 letter to Nicholas I.³¹ G. V. Vernadskii called the tsar's act a "political masterpiece": "It was only gradually that Pushkin began to realize that he had fallen into a trap. Ostensibly he was free, but actually he was the tsar's hostage under the supervision of General Benckendorff, and before long he was to be entangled in a net of suspicion, intrigue, and blackmail."³²

For the time being, however, the poet was encouraged and turned to his liberator with hope. In this he was hardly alone. Even some Decembrists were impressed by the new tsar, who said to them during their interrogation: "What do you need a revolution for? I am your revolution: I will do everything you were trying to achieve through revolution."³³ It has to be stated for the record that Nicholas I, having ascended the throne, formed not only the infamous Third Section of the Secret Police but fulfilled a number of liberal aspirations. Here are some accomplishments of this revolution "from above": The new emperor fired the hated Arakcheev ("vsei Rossii pritesnitel"), removed the archimandrite Photius ("polufanatik, poluplut"), returned to the court the liberal Speranskii to conduct juridical reform. The orthodox tsar declared war on Turkey in support of the Greek insurgents, for which the poet Heine called him the "knight of Europe."³⁴ In 1828 Pushkin wanted to transfer to the army, but his request was denied.

The December affair, however, remains the darkest spot of Nicholas's rule, and there is little consolation in his commuting the sentence of death by

quartering to death on the gallows for the five leaders. However, for the remaining 120 mutineers, Nicholas I commuted the death penalty to exile. A year later he freed them from hard labor in the mines and transferred them to a facility specially built for them (Petrovskii zavod), where the wives were allowed to live with their husbands in the cells. It also should not be forgotten that Nicholas I kept helping financially the widow of the hanged Ryleev, his daughter, and even his grandchildren.

Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that in "Stanzas," written on the occasion of the coronation (1826, published in 1828), Pushkin sincerely turned to Nicholas I "in hope of glory and of bliss." He enjoined the new tsar to follow the example of Peter the Great in "firmness and magnanimity" toward the foe. This was an appeal for mercy for the exiled Decembrists, whom Pushkin compared in "Stanzas" quite unflatteringly to the rebellious *strel'tsy*.³⁵ The poem "The Hero," written in Boldino in 1830 and published anonymously in 1831, was another tribute to Nicholas. On the surface it was a hymn to Napoleon's heroism, for which Pushkin chose a scene in the hospital in Jaffa where Napoleon shook hands with his plague-afflicted soldiers. The date and place ("29 September 1830, Moscow"), which Pushkin appended to the poem, were fallacious and contained a cryptic homage to Nicholas I, who on that day returned to cholera-ravaged Moscow to help with the epidemic.

Poems like "Stanzas" did not endear Pushkin to his liberal contemporaries, who saw in the poet's *pas de deux* with the tsar a *faux pas* unworthy of the author of "Liberty." Pushkin paid dearly for the attempt to establish a utopian union between "sword and lyre," "empire and liberty": "Unable to gain the court, he has lost also a part of the liberal audience."³⁶ This undeserved reputation pursued Pushkin into the next generation of Russian intelligentsia. Belinsky's 1847 observation is a revealing testimony: "All it took to suddenly lose the people's love was to write two or three syco-phantic [*vernopoddannicheskie*] poems and to don the livery of a Gentleman of the Bedchamber."³⁷

In the poem "Druz'iam" [To Friends (1828)], Pushkin was compelled to defend himself against the calumny that he had become a court toady or worse still, an informer:

Нет, я не льстец, когда царю
Хвалу свободную слагаю:
Я смею чужьства выражать,
Дязьком сердца говорю.

Его я просто полюбил:
Он бодро, честно правит нами;
Россию вдруг он оживил
Войной, надеждами, трудами.

[No flatterer am I,
When I freely praise the Tsar:
I courageously express my feelings,
I speak the language of my heart.

I am simply fond of him:
He is ruling over us vigorously, honestly,
He suddenly enlivened Russia
With war, hopes, and toil.]³⁸

The censor showed, for once, more taste than the censored. Nicholas I decried: "Cela peut couir, mais pas être imprimé."³⁹ Despite the dubious artistic merit, these verses harbor Pushkin's cherished hope for a close alliance between the two anointed beings, the poet and the tsar:

Беда стране, где раб и льстец
Одни приближены к престолу,
А небом избранный певец
Молчит, потупя очи долу.

[Woe to the land, where only the slave and the flatterer
Are favored by the throne,
While the bard, chosen by heaven,
Keeps silent and lowers his gaze.]⁴⁰

Were Pushkin's aspirations realistic, or merely grand delusions? Pushkin was convinced that Tasso, Ariosto, Shakespeare, Molière, and Voltaire all benefitted from the patronage of their sovereigns.⁴¹ In recent Russian history each reign had its first poet, and some were allowed to play Plato to their kings. Catherine I had Trediakovskii; Anna, Lomonosov; Elisabeth, Sumarokov; Catherine II, Petrov and Derzhavin; Alexander I, Karamzin. But how about Nicholas I and Pushkin?

After his return from exile, Pushkin made repeated attempts—mostly

futile—to cleanse his tarnished reputation. Of course, the vision of the five Decembrists hanged by Nicholas I haunted Pushkin, but so did the fate of André Chénier, who in 1789 welcomed the revolution but soon turned against the Jacobin corruption of its ideals and was guillotined by the revolutionary tribunal for his loyalty to his king ("André Chénier" [1825]). The fate of the fellow poet was a poignant lesson for Pushkin, who was turning away from the transcendent notion of "Liberty and Equality" in its absolute form and now perceiving the French Revolution as an abstraction run amok—a "union of reason and fury" [soiuz uma i furii ("K vel'mozhe" [1830])]. This formula refers, in E. G. Etkind's words, to "the abstraction-ridden speculations of the Enlightenment philosophy which, in the name of Liberty—mistaken for absolute good—unleashed bloody instincts and a neglect of the Law, the very foundation of state and society [Svobodoi groznoi u 'rovezheniui' zakon]."⁴² A similar apprehension about the "Law trampled by grisly Freedom" also seems to run through Pushkin's attitudes toward the Decembrists and their cause.

In 1827 Pushkin wrote two poems, one directly, the other obliquely, addressed to the Decembrists: "Deep in Siberian mines" and "Arion." The first was a verse epistle sent to a far off penal colony:

Во глуьине сибирских руд
Храните гордое терпенье,
Не пропадет ваш скорбный труд
И дум высокое стремленье.

[Deep in Siberian mines,
Preserve proud patience:
Not lost shall be your woeful toil,
Nor the lofty surging of your meditations.]⁴³

Pushkin never missed an opportunity to lighten the ordeal of his sentenced friends "with a ray of bright lyceum days" ("My first friend, my priceless friend" [1826]). Pushkin and Kinkhel'becker would pick up, even "deep in Siberian mines," the echo of their "Graduation Hymn" (1817) composed by their classmate Del'vig and sung a capella in the presence of Alexander I.⁴⁴ This private token of attention to his classmates remained obscure to the other Decembrists, who heard in the epistle only a *cri de guerre*:

Оковы тяжкие падут,
Темницы рухнут—и свобода
Вас примет радостно у входа,
И братья меч вам отдадут.

[The heavy fetters will fall,
The jails will crumble—and freedom
Will joyfully hail you at the entrance,
And brothers will return to you the sword.]⁴⁵

Pushkin's lofty diction indeed resembled the Decembrists' martial rhetoric. Prince A. I. Odоеvskii replied to Pushkin with a battle cry of his own:

Мечи сжужем мы из цепей
И пламя вновь зажжем свободой!
Она нагрянет на царей,
И радостно вздохнут народы!

[We shall forge swords out of shackles
And ignite anew the flame of freedom:
It will swoop down upon the Tsars,
And nations will sigh with relief.]⁴⁶

Pushkin's poem and Odоеvskii's reply became the standard lore of Russian revolutionists. In 1900 Lenin borrowed a line from the prince's reply, "A spark will set ablaze a flame" [*iz isky vozgoritsia plama*], as an epigraph for his Bolshevik newspaper *Iskra* [Spark].

However, notwithstanding the revolutionary appeal of the "sword," it seems that Pushkin was calling not so much for arms, as for patience, and was evoking, perhaps, a different "sword." According to the Russian military code, army officers under arrest had to surrender their swords, and during the ritual of "civil execution" [*grazhdanskaja kazn'*] of the Decembrists, their pre-filed swords were broken over their heads as a sign of loss of their titles and privileges.⁴⁷ The "returned sword" would then mean amnesty and the full restoration of the Decembrists' rights as officers and noblemen,⁴⁸ and as V. S. Nepomlashchii aptly remarked, the sword could be returned "only [by] the one who took it in the first place."⁴⁹ Thus, it was Pushkin, not Odоеvskii, who turned out to be right. Not struggle,

only "proud patience" brought about the desired result. The "heavy fetters" were removed from the prisoners in 1829 and "freedom hailed" the last Decembrists only in 1856, by then under the new Tsar Alexander II. The second poem linked to the Decembrists is the well-known "Aton," written on 16 July 1827, on the first anniversary of the hanging of the five insurgents (13 July 1826):

Нас было много на челне;
Иные парус напиртали,
Другие дружно упирали
В лубль молныя веслы. В тишине
На руль склонясь, наш кормщик умный
В молчаньи правил грузный чолн—
А я—бесечной веры полн—
Пловцам я пел.... Вдруг лоно волн
Изъял с налету вихорь шумный....
Погиб и кормщик и пловец!—
Лишь я, гвинтственный певец,
На берг выброшен трозюю,
Я гимны прежние пою
И ризу влажную мою
Сутю на солнце под скалою.

[There were many of us in the bark;
Some trimmed the sails,
Others plunged in harmony
The mighty oars into the deep. In the calm,
Leaning over the rudder, our wise helmsman
Steered in silence the weighty bark;
And I—full of carefree trust—
I sang to the shipmates. . . . Suddenly a roaring gale
Ruffled with a blow the bosom of the waves. . . .
The helmsman and the sailors perished!—
I alone, the mysterious singer,
Was swept ashore by the storm;
I sing the former hymns
And dry my damp garment
In the sun beneath a cliff.]⁵⁰

Unlike his epistle to Siberia, Pushkin never sent "Arion" to his sentenced friends and published it anonymously in *Literaturnaiia gazeta* [Literary Gazette] (no. 43, 30 July 1830). In addition to the poem's essential ambiguity, the very uncertainty of its addressee has continued to puzzle investigators. Because of its many loose ends, "Arion" can be interpreted in several clefs: (1) free of all political connotation; (2) as an allegory of the crushed Decembrist rebellion; (3) strictly within a mythological context.

In the first clef at face value, "Arion" can be read without any reference to the political events of the day. A bark set adrift in a storm and the miraculous salvation of a sailor are traditional metaphors in Greek, Roman, and later, romantic poetry. A number of foreign and Russian subtexts were pointed out by In. P. Suzdal'skii, who proposed Horace's ode 14 of book 1, "O navis, referent in mare te novi," as the primary subtext for "Arion."⁵¹ Walter Vickery added to the list Horace's ode to Pyrrha, "Quis multa gracilis te puer in rosa," which Pushkin's uncle Vasilii Lvovich translated into Russian. Its final lines, "Ot gibel'i spasennyi, / Bogam kovarnykh voln / Ia rizn omochennu / V vostorge posvatiu!" [Saved from destruction, / To the gods of the treacherous waters / My soaked raiment I / Consecrate in ecstasy] (ode 5, book 1), anticipate the ending of "Arion."⁵² Zhukovskii's "Plovet's" [The Swimmer (1812)], a poem about a bark "without rudder and oars" amidst a storm, and about the providential rescue of one of the crew, can be considered a blueprint for poetic variations on this theme. Zhukovskii used the metaphor of a drowning man reaching the shore in his letter to the exiled Pushkin long before December 1825:

To everything that has happened to you or what you have caused yourself, I have one answer: POETRY. You have not a gift, but genius. . . . You were born to become a great poet: be worthy of it. . . . Life's circumstances, fortunate or unfortunate, are mere husk. You will say that I am preaching from a calm shore to a *drowning man*. No, I am standing on an empty shore and see in the waves an athlete [*silach*]: I know he *won't drown*, if he applies all his strength; I am only pointing to him a *better shore* that he will reach without fail, only if he himself so desires. Swim, athlete!⁵³

In this sense, "Arion" is a hymn to the miraculous invulnerability that only art can provide. The motif of a poet surviving a calamity and singing "former hymns" also echoes a rather startling moment in the biography of the exiled poet. On 28 December 1825, exactly two weeks after the insurrection,

his first collection of poems, *Sikhovoreniiia Aleksandra Pushkina*, came out (with the year 1826 on its title page).

In the second clef, however, "Arion" is commonly interpreted as an allegory of the crushed Decembrist revolt, "a metaphorical protocol" of what happened to the poet's friends and to himself.⁵⁴ According to this standard interpretation, the poet is one of the mutinous crew, survives the cataclysm, and carries on the revolutionary mission of his perished comrades by singing their "former hymns" (Nechkina, Glebov, Tomashevskii, Tsiavlovskaya, Blagoi, and others). Some critics have gone so far as to speculate whether the "wise helmsman" is Pestel' or Ryleev.

If we assume that the poem's addressees are the same Decembrist friends as in "Deep in Siberian mines," then the two poems are linked by several additional, not readily apparent parallels. Like the epistle to Siberia, "Arion" contains a private message to Pushkin's lyceum friends, Pushchin and Kniukhel'beker, one which was not intended for the other Decembrists. The image of the boat and the rescued swimmer would remind them of



Illustration 1. Milchevskii's drawing of the drowning Kniukhel'beker being rescued by lyceum professors. Courtesy of Pushkinskii Dom, fund 244, op. 25, no. 152, l. 82.

Kiukhel'beker's attempt to drown himself in the pond in Alexander Park in 1817. A colored caricature by A. D. Illichevskii depicting the rescue of Kiukhel'beker (his teachers are pulling him aboard a dinghy) was featured in the students' handwritten journal the *Lycium Sage* (illustration 1).⁵⁵ In addition, Kiukhel'beker might have recognized in the Arion legend an episode from his 1822 poem "To Pushkin," in which "a murderous gondolier" almost drowned the hapless poet. Kiukhel'beker appended an explanatory note for Pushkin: "Sailing from Villafranca to Nice in gloomy weather, I faced the danger of being cast into the waters."⁵⁶

However, unlike "Deep in Siberian mines," the addressee and message of "Arion" remain equivocal. Pushkin's poems to his Decembrist friends all reached their addressees deep and far beyond Baikal.⁵⁷ If "Arion" was indeed intended for them, Pushkin would have found a way to reach them, just as he had on previous occasions. He chose not to, instead publishing "Arion" anonymously three years later in *Literary Gazette*. Although the Decembrists regularly followed the press, no one realized that "Arion" was addressed to them or identified Pushkin as its author. Pushkin became aware of "Arion" (referring to the poem as "The Bark" [Chehn]) only in 1855.⁵⁸ Not once in his lifetime did Pushkin include "Arion" in his collection of poems. It appeared for the first time under Pushkin's name thirty years after the poet's death. What was the cause that warranted such circumspicion? If "Arion" was addressed to the Decembrists, why did Pushkin *not* send it to Siberia—and then wait three years to publish it? And, after having published the poem anonymously, why did Pushkin exclude "Arion" from his poetic heritage? Could it be that the reason lies in the underlying legend itself?

In the third cleft, it is commonly believed that Pushkin chose the mythological title "Arion" in order to conceal from the censor its true Decembrist content. The title, indeed, seems to be a misnomer, for Pushkin's "mysterious singer" [ains'tvennyi pevets] resembles far more Orpheus, playing to the Argonauts who "to the sound of Orpheus's lyre smote with their oars the rushing sea-water."⁵⁹ However, Pushkin entitled his poem "Arion," and therefore it should be read through the prism of this classical legend, even if such reading leads to a rather disturbing interpretation of Pushkin's relationship with the mutineers.

According to the well-known legend, Arion, the favorite minstrel of the Corinthian tyrant-king Periander (ca. 600 B.C.), was sailing home, bringing his precious gifts won at music contests in Italy and Sicily. At sea the

helmsmen and crew hatched a plot to rob Arion of his treasures and to throw him overboard. Arion begged for permission to sing a last hymn, donned his crown and the splendid robe of the poet [trizai], and played his lyre. In the midst of the song Arion jumped into the sea, but he was saved by a dolphin which, charmed by his music, delivered him to safety. Back in Corinth, Arion denounced his would-be murderers to Periander. The king did not believe the poet and kept him under arrest until the day the ship returned, when the treachery was exposed and the poet vindicated. Some versions of the legend include an epilogue: According to one, the king *executed* the sailors; according to another, Arion appealed for *mercy*, and the tyrant spared their lives, *exiling* them instead to a remote barbarous land. Arion's lyre and the dolphin became constellations.⁶⁰

Reading Pushkin's "Arion" closely in this mythological context suggests that the relationship between the crew and bard was less harmonious than has been traditionally assumed. The legend was too well known to sidestep the fact that Arion was actually robbed by the sailors and nearly lost his life. Although Pushkin's "mysterious singer" considers himself one of the crew ("There were many of us in the bark," "our skillful helmsman," and the like), he is not directly involved in the running of the ship. The lines, "And I—full of carefree trust—/ I sang to the shipmates," sets him apart from those who steer, row, or tend to the sails. In one of the variants Pushkin even tried to transpose the poem into the third grammatical person: "There were many of them in the bark . . . And he—full of carefree trust—/ Sang to the shipmates."⁶¹

This distribution of labor concurs more accurately with Pushkin's own status among his rebel-friends. It is well documented that Pushkin craved to belong to, but was never admitted in, their secret society; he remained only on the fringes of the movement. In the enciphered fragment from the burned chapter 10 of *Evgenii Onegin* (1830), Pushkin insulted in a similar way his role among the conspirators. Lunin "was daringly offering his radical measures," Iakushkin "bared his regicidal daggers," the lame Nikolai Turgenev "foresaw in this crowd of nobles the liberators of the serfs," Pestel' was "mustered troops against the tyrant," the bold Murav'ev "hastened the revolt" while the poet Pushkin, somewhat aloof, "read to them his noëls" [chital svoi noëli Pushkin] (stanzas 15–16).⁶² The Decembrist V. I. Davydov recalled in 1837 in Siberia his words to Pushkin: "We won't admit you into our society, but you will sing for us" [My tebia ne primem v svoe obshchestvo, no ty budesh' nam pet'].⁶³ Pushkin's reputation was

especially tarnished among the southern Decembrists. I. I. Gorbachevski, who did not know Pushkin personally, claimed that their "Supreme Duma explicitly forbade them to associate with the poet Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin." They were warned that Pushkin, "due to his character, faint-heartedness, and lewd lifestyle, would immediately inform the government about the existence of the Secret Society."⁶⁴

It is relatively easy to cull out instances of tension and irony between Pushkin and his radical friends. Let us not forget that Pushkin fought his first duel with Kiukhel'beker. In 1819 Kiukhel'beker challenged Pushkin for an epigram in which Pushkin, grousing about overeating, feels "kiukhel'bekery and nauseated" [*i kiukhel'bekerno i toshno*]. The bumbling Kiukhel'beker missed, but his bullet pierced the cap of his second, Del'vig: "You are worth friendship, not gunpowder," remarked Pushkin and refused to shoot.⁶⁵ In 1820 Pushkin possibly duelled with Ryleev for allegedly spreading rumors about Pushkin's having been whipped by the police. In his letter to A. A.

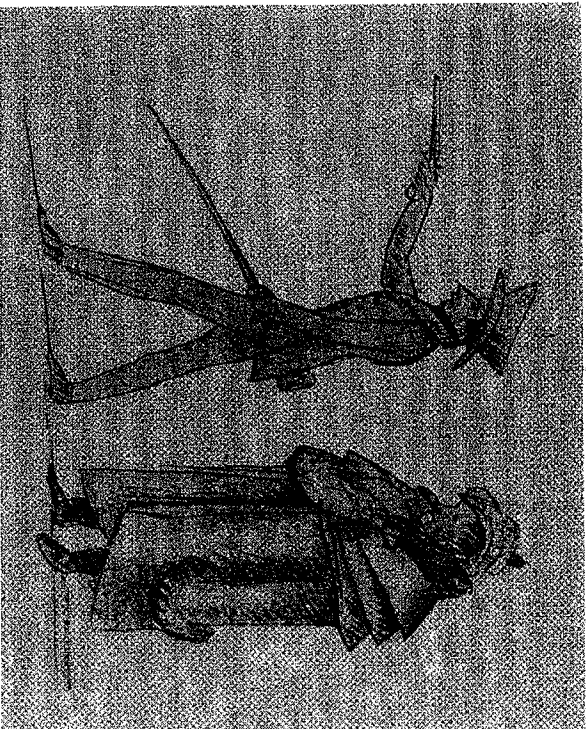


Illustration 2. Pushkin's drawing of Kiukhel'beker and Ryleev on the Senate Square, 14 December 1825. Courtesy of VMP KP-22327/A-434.

Bestuzhev (24 March 1825) Pushkin ironically regrets not having shot Ryleev: "zhalaiu ochen', chto ego ne zastrail, kogda imel tomu sluchai" ["I regret very much that I did not shoot him when I had the chance].⁶⁶ Pushkin declared Ryleev's most important poetic opus "Dumy" [Meditations] "rubbish" [*drani*], and claimed that "the title came from the German word *dumm*."⁶⁷ Pushkin defended before Ryleev his own "600-year-old nobility" and the benefits of patronage for poets.⁶⁸

The gawky Kiukhel'beker (or "Kiukhlia," as he was nicknamed at the lyceum) was the favorite laughing stock of his classmates, and Pushkin's irony toward his ill-starred friend was not canceled by the 1825 tragedy. Ryleev accepted the ecstatic and politically naive Kiukhel'beker into the Northern Union three days before the uprising, and for his attempt at the life of the Grand Prince Mikhail, the novice-rebel almost ended up as the sixth hanged man. In his turn, Kiukhel'beker, who was the teacher of Pushkin's younger brother Lev, tried to recruit his pupil into the Union on the day of the uprising. Amused by Lev's stories, Pushkin drew a well-known caricature of Kiukhel'beker and Ryleev on the Senate Square. Kiukhel'beker, in tailcoat and top hat, with a long pistol in one hand and a police sword in the other, resembling a marionette duelist, takes aim at an invisible target. Behind his back stands the instigator Ryleev, enshrouded in an antique overcoat with multiple folding collars, and in bemused indifference observes the quixotic combat (illustration 2).⁶⁹ Pushkin liked to tease Kiukhel'beker but always loved him, a fact borne out by the dedication of "K drugu stikhotvortsu" [To a Versifying Friend (1814)], Pushkin's first published poem, to him. Quite unexpectedly fate arranged for their paths to cross in 1827 when Pushkin embraced his friend for the last time. The two met at the station Zlazzy during Kiukhel'beker's transfer to another fortress. Pushkin remained a true friend; in the 1830s he succeeded in publishing several of Kiukhel'beker's works and attempted to send to him in Siberia—via the Third Section—his own works.⁷⁰ But let us return to "Arion."

Yes, Pushkin might have waxed ironical over some of his Decembrist friends and their cause. And yes, one can even claim that Pushkin's relationship with Nicholas I ("You are now my Pushkin") bore a certain affinity to Arion's liaison with Perianther—that is, both bards interceded before their king on behalf of a third party. However, to argue the case of robbery or an attempt on the poet's life remains a daunting task. This is presumably why critics dismiss the connection between Pushkin's poem and the Arion legend as loose and irrelevant, disregarding how meticulous Pushkin usually was in rendering mythological subjects.⁷¹ Reluctant to dismiss offhand the

Arion legend as irrelevant to Pushkin's "Arion," I would like to suggest a possible reading which would be more consonant with the original legend.

In the aftermath of the Decembrist uprising it became clear to Pushkin that the mutineers not always selflessly and honorably embraced the hymns of the "mysterious singer."⁷¹ All incendiary manuscripts circulated under my name," complained Pushkin to Viazemskii, while others appeared under false titles and in mutilated versions.⁷² The line from "The Village" (1819) in which Pushkin called for "serfdom fallen by the Tsar's fiat" [I rabstvo padshее po maniu tsaria] became in the apocryphal version a seditious exhortation: "And fallen serfdom and the fallen Tsar" [I rabstvo padshее i padshęgo tsaria]. "The Dagger" was recited in the Secret Society of the United Slavs as a pledge of readiness for regicide.⁷³ We know also that in 1820, before his interrogation by the Military Governor General of St. Petersburg Count Miloradovich—the one shot on 14 December by Kakhovskii—Pushkin burned his "contraband poems" but gallantly restored them from memory for the count. "Ah, c'est chevalresque," laughed Miloradovich and pardoned him on the spot in the tsar's name.⁷⁴ Thanks partially to Miloradovich's intercession, Alexander I spared Pushkin banishment to Siberia. Instead, he assigned the young collegiate secretary to the South as an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a yearly salary of 700 rubles and 1,000 rubles for the journey. Pushkin's unusual zeal in Miloradovich's chancellery can be explained by his desire to avert future damaging misattributions. In "An Imaginary Conversation with Alexander I" (1824), Pushkin complained that "every illegal work was ascribed to [him], while every witty concoction to Prince Tsitsianov."⁷⁵

The abuse continued also after Pushkin's return from exile. The elegy about the French Revolution "André Chénier" (1825) was written and partially published before the December events. The censor excluded from it 44 lines (lines 21–64), but the purged section, including verses such as "Where are freedom and the law? / Our only ruler is the axe. / Tyrants are dethroned, but we chose murderers and hangmen / for our tsars," circulated under the apocryphal title "On the 14 of December."⁷⁶ The biblical poem "The Prophet" (1826), based on Isaiah 6:1–13, made rounds with a counterfeit stanza that evoked the specter of the hanged Decembrists:

Встань, встань, пророк России,
Позорной ризой облекись,
И с веревкой вокруг скривленной выи
К царю явись!

[Arise, arise, O Russia's prophet,
Put on your dishonored vestments,
And with a rope around your humbled neck,
Appear before the Tsar!]⁷⁷

Pushkin knew how readily his verses fell prey to causes that he no longer endorsed. "It's not much fun to end up in the dungeon because of ditties," he complained to his brother.⁷⁸ Quite understandably, especially after the Decembrist fiasco, Pushkin wished to put distance between himself and the rebels. Even at his most radical Pushkin called only for the abolition of "vice" rather than of the "throne," for the assassination of a tyrant rather than the royal family and their children, as was the plan of the more extreme among the Decembrists.

Not long after his audience with Nicholas I in September 1826, Pushkin drew a picture in the manuscript of chapter 5 of *Eugenie Onegin* of five corpses dangling from the gallows and wrote above it the following inscription: "And like [a clown] I might have . . ." [I ia by mog, kak (shut na)] (illustration 3).⁷⁹ The specter of the gallows and the iambic line from which

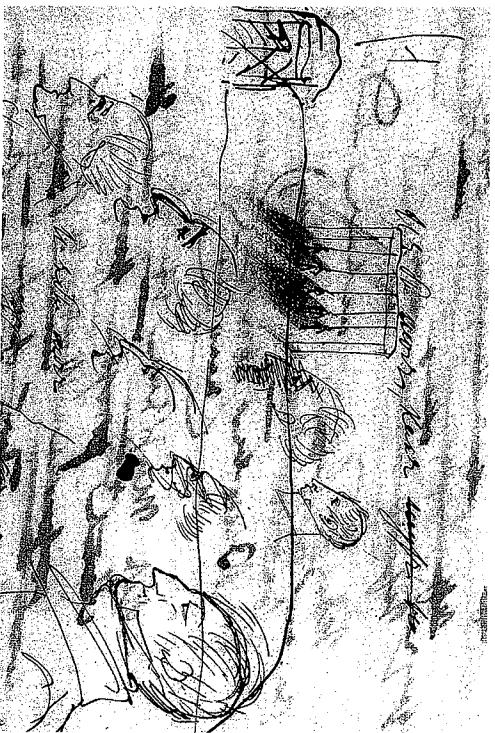


Illustration 3. Pushkin's drawings from chapter 5 of *Eugenie Onegin* after 13 July 1826. Courtesy of Pushkinskii Dom, no. 836, I. 37.

Pushkin crossed out the words "shut na . . ." are an ominous realization of what he was spared. This enigmatic verse contains an allusion to the eighteenth-century mock-heroic epic "Elisei, or Bacchus Embraced" by V. I. Maikov, in which Zeus threatens one of his mutinous vassals "to hang him upside down. / And mid the gods he'll dangle like a clown" [. . . poveshu verkh nogami, I budet on viset, kak shyt, mezhdu bogami].⁸⁰ Being called "shyt" was the most humiliating insult for Pushkin, who repeated in his diary Lomonosov's words, "I can be a subject, even a slave—but I won't become a groveler and jester even before God Almighty himself" [a mogu byt' poddannym, dazhe rabom,—no khodopot i shuton ne budu i u Tsarja Nebesnogo].⁸¹

In 1790 Radishchev used in his ode to "Liberty" [Vol'nost'] the image of a storm to describe a victorious revolution:

Внезапну вихри восшумели,
Первая покойство тихих вод,
Свободы плаги так втрескени,
На вече весь течет народ,
Престол чулуный разрушаеи.

[Suddenly the roaring gales
Broke the calm of the quiet waters.
Voices of freedom burst in thunders,
All people run to the assembly
And destroy the pig iron throne.]
("Liberty," stanza 25; my emphasis)

In "Arion" Pushkin used the same metaphor to describe a failed rebellion: "Vdrug lono voln / Izmial s naletu vikhor' shumnyu" [Suddenly a roaring gale / Ruffled with a blow the bosom of the waves]. At the end of "Arion" one hears Pushkin's sigh of relief that he "remained safe and sound in the midst of the general storm"⁸² and miraculously escaped the fate of the Decembrists. In the initial variant the line "I sing former hymns"⁸³ reads "I sing a hymn of deliverance" [Gimn izbavleniia poiui]. A similar relief can be heard in Pushkin's "Akafist to E. N. Karamzina" (1827): "Having at last reached the land, / I was saved from the storms by Providence" [Zemli dostignuv nakopets, / Ot bur' spasenyu providen'em].

When Pushkin wrote "Arion" he knew full well that the hand that pulled the strings of his good fortune was the same that yanked the noose around

the Decembrists' necks. In October 1827 an informer reported to the Chief of Gendarmes Benckendorff Pushkin's words said during a literary dinner: "I should be nicknamed Nikolaev, or Nikolaevich, because without him I would not be alive. He gave me life and, what is more important, freedom: Yvati!"⁸³

It would be appropriate to mention in this context Écouchard Lebriun's ode "Arion" (1811), which praises the king Perikander as a sage and patron of the arts:

Jeune Arion, bannis la crainte;
Aborde aux rives de Corinthe;
Perikandre est digne de toi.
Minerve aime se doux rivaage:
Et tes yeux y verront un sage
Assis sur le trône d'un roi.⁸⁴

According to the *Notes of A. O. Smitnova* [Zapiski A. O. Smitnovo], recorded by her less than reliable daughter, Pushkin allegedly quoted this fragment during a conversation about the Decembrists and drew a parallel between Perikander and Nicholas I.⁸⁵ However, according to Glebov and Tomashkevski, Écouchard Lebriun's ode, praising the tyrant, has nothing in common with Pushkin's "Arion."⁸⁶ Indeed, and contrary to the classical legend and to Écouchard Lebriun's ode, Pushkin rejected from his "Arion" the line, "Saved by the Dolphin, I sing" [Spasen Dei'fonom, ia poiui], and thus left the poet's rescue unmotivated. Thanks to this important dissociation Pushkin has gracefully spared us from the tacky temptation of assigning to the tsar of all Russia the role of the dolphin—no matter that in French the word *douphin* means both "dolphin" and "royal heir." How much sadder it is to claim that Pushkin was spared the Decembrists' ordeal with the help of a hare.⁸⁷

Thus, in the poem "Arion," commemorating the first anniversary of the execution of the five Decembrists, several discourses, soliloquies, and musings come together. The "mysterious singer" begins like Orpheus, playing to the Argonauts, but ends like Arion. The poem "reflects Pushkin's inclination to reassess both his own earlier willingness to be associated with those who were plotting against the established order and to reexamine the Decembrist movement as a whole in the light of subsequent developments."⁸⁸ The poem's title may have hoodwinked the censor, camouflaging under its mythological veil a tribute to the fellow Decembrists (the Orpheus

story). However, the story of Arion's miraculous deliverance from the clutches of his shipmates undermines this pro-Decemberist reading, without, however, subverting it entirely. Pushkin was able to vent through the Arion legend some of his resentment accumulated over the years, which begged to be released, but could not be publicly avowed. As the manuscript attests, Pushkin felt from the very beginning uneasy about the title. Originally it was "Orion," but he changed it to "Arion" and added the line "Spasen Del'finom, ia poiut." The "dolphin" was later dropped, but the title "Arion" stayed.⁸⁹ After that Pushkin never referred to this poem as "Arion." In the two lists he compiled in 1831 for an edition of his poems, he referred to it by its first line, "Nas bylo mnogo,"⁹⁰ but never published "Arion" under his name. Later too, Pushkin tried to downplay the significance of the name "Arion." In 1835, when suggesting to Pleneva a title for their new almanac, he wrote: "Let's call it Arion or Orion; I like nonsensical names; there is nothing for jokes to stick to."⁹¹ By publishing the poem *anonymously* three years after it was written and excluding it subsequently from his printed heritage, it seems that Pushkin tried to avoid snubbing his exiled friends who could accuse him of double-crossing. At the same time, by retaining the title "Arion" Pushkin avoided being misunderstood by their jailer, who could suspect him of rebellious intentions. Most important, the poet did not wish to resolve the contradiction between tribute and reproach. In a truly protean—and seemingly disingenuous—manner the "mysterious singer" is both: Orpheus, singing to his rowing comrades, and Arion, miraculously saved from the murderous crew. As far as Pushkin himself is concerned, he remained an honorable man, selflessly appealing for royal "mercy for the fallen ones."

It can be said with certainty that by 1830, as Pushkin was completing *Evgenii Onegin*, his head was no longer spinning over the much-vaunted Decemberists' ideals and their "mutinous science." This is what he chose to preserve—perhaps as an alibi for his political rectitude—from the burned chapter 10 of his novel:

Начала эти заговоры
Между Лафитом и Кликко
Лишь были дружеские споры
И не входила плутою
В сердца митрежная наука

[Всё это было только] скука
Безделье молодых умов
Забавы взрослых шулунов

[At first these conspiracies
Between Lafitte and Clicquot
Were no more than friendly arguments
And their mutinous science
Did not sink deeply into hearts
[All this was merely] boredom
The idleness of youthful minds
Pastime of grown-up pranksters]⁹²

Despite these wry disclaimers, one hesitates to speak of the poet's change of face or faintheartedness before the authorities. During his tête-à-tête with Nicholas, Pushkin bravely admitted that he would have joined his rebel friends had he been in St. Petersburg on 14 December ("Nepremeno, gosudar' vse druž'ia moi byli v zagovore, ia ne mog by ne uchastvovat' v nem").⁹³ Pushkin showed here more "guts" than the elected "Dictator of the Uprising," Prince V. S. Trubetskoi, who failed to show up for the event. Nor was Pushkin like his hero Evgenii in *Bronze Horseman*, who braved his fist at the royal effigy and then ran in terror from the Senate Square. Pushkin's unceasing appeals for royal mercy for the mutineers became a mantra in the poet's dealings with his tsar.

The cult of friendship stood high on Pushkin's moral scales and his unequivocal loyalty to friends was a matter of patrician honor. However, remaining loyal did not mean that Pushkin had to share their convictions. The more extreme among the Decemberists planned to establish a federal republic modeled after the United States. For the Pushkin of the 1830s, the word "democracy" was synonymous with "anti-nobility" in the best case, and with "people's rule" [*narodovlastiie*] in the worst. Even during his most radical period, Pushkin championed only the freedom of the people but was far from granting them real power.

И горе, горе племенам,
Де дремлет он [Закон] неосторожно,
Де иль народу иль царям
Законом властвовать возможно!