

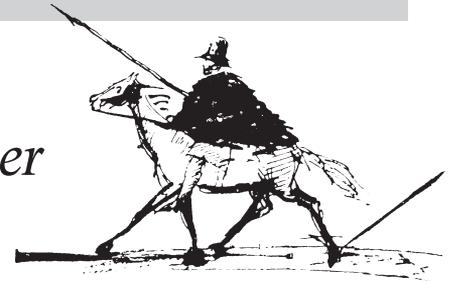
SYMPOSIUM

Alexander Pushkin, Russia's Poet of Universal Genius

A Celebration of the
200th Anniversary of the Poet's Birth

Introduction: Pushkin and Schiller

by Helga Zepp LaRouche



If every man and woman were to look at the intellectual history of other nations with the same loving gaze, with which a patriot looks at his own country, we should no longer have any wars. For then, we should see that every great poet and thinker, who has created universally valid ideas and new beauties in language, has much more to do with a nation's identity, than the long list of its rulers, its government ministers, or its parliamentarians. Naturally, this agapic way of seeing, requires a comprehensive knowledge of other cultures, which, by being comprehended, cease to be foreign.

And so, the Germans would see themselves beloved for Schiller's sake, for Lessing's, Goethe's, Heine's, or Mörike's; and the Russians should be proud, that when the world thinks of Russia, it thinks of Pushkin, Turgenev, Gogol, or

Goncharov.

Above all, at a time like this, in which the frightful events of the Balkans recall the two World Wars, where most people do not think that things are done in Russia for a love of truth, but motivated by quite other interests—at a time like this, remembering Alexander Pushkin, (who is not completely by coincidence the favorite poet of Prime Minister Primačov,) is very useful. The 200th anniversary of Pushkin's birth is a welcome occasion for this.*

Pushkin was the most important influence upon the Russian national culture taken as a whole; he was loved and newly comprehended by each succeeding generation; and perhaps no one has enriched the Russian tongue so much as he. Gogol wrote of him: "Pushkin was for all the poets of his time, as a poetic fire torn from heaven, from which other gifted poets took fire like candles." The reason for this is no mystery: his entire oeuvre speaks from the heart of hearts of the Russian people, which had been reduced to serfdom by an anti-national, oligarchical ruling elite.

In Russia, Pushkin became the "Poet of Freedom" in the same way that Schiller did in Germany. There is an absolutely amazingly close kinship of both poets, not only in ideas, but also in their practical connections to each other, and in the history of the impact they had on their respective nations. Both were ineluctably opposed, in spite of the most difficult personal situations, to any form of despotism; and neither allowed himself, even in the face of most adverse experiences, to be dragged down from humanism, from the optimistic idea of man.

There is a certain irony in the fact that both Schiller and Pushkin attended the elite schools of their time; Schiller the hated Karlschule of Count Eugen von Württemberg, and Pushkin the Lycée in Tsarskoye Selo, where, at the time, the most gifted students and others from the "best families" were being educated for service in the absolutist system. Schiller had just written his "In Tyrannos," however, as a protest against the arbitrariness of the oligarchy that he had experienced first-hand. This protest kindled not only the freedom-loving spirits in Germany, but also captivated the student in Tsarskoye Selo.

* Removed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, May 12, 1999—Ed.

Helga Zepp LaRouche is the founder of the international Schiller Institute. Her article, as well as those of E.S. Lebedeva and V.V. Kozhinov, first appeared in the first quarter 1999 (Vol. 18, No. 66) issue of Ibykus, the German-language sister publication of Fidelio.

Schiller's Works in Russia

That Schiller's poetry and dramas were translated into Russian with often very little time lag, is in part due to the fact that some of Schiller's fellow students at the Karlschule were Russian youth, who had been sent there by Tsarina Catherine II, and who thus were able to directly experience the first poetic works of Schiller.

So, for example, Count Sheremetyev, who had been a student at the same school with Schiller from 1775-77, had *Kabale und Liebe (Love and Intrigue)* translated by a student, Sokolov, and had the play performed at the Moscow University theater. Only a few years later, *Die Räuber (The Robbers)* was translated into Russian, and from then on, in general, the Russian first performance would always, without fail, be staged just a short time after the German.

Schiller never travelled to Russia, even though he clearly considered doing so after his flight from Swabia. He wrote to his fellow student Friedrich Jakobi: "Perhaps in Berlin I might change my plans, and because of the support of important people, go to Petersburg." Although these plans would not be realized, Schiller was to become, as did no other foreigner, a "Russian" poet.

The first performance of Act I of *Don Carlos*, in the German language, took place almost simultaneously in Leipzig, and in September 1787, at the Russian court theater in Gatchina, where a friend of Schiller's, Maximilian von Klinger, had just become adjutant to the heir to the throne. Klinger later became Curator of the University in Dorpat, and came to have significant influence on the education of the Russian youth. Professor Johann Georg Schwarz was teaching at Moscow University, where from as early as 1782, he encouraged his students to read the Russian translations of Schiller's works; while Professor Johann Baptist Chad, who had been Schiller's colleague in Jena, worked at the University in Kharkov, and played a major role in making Schiller known in southern Russia.

In March 1788, the famous N.M. Karamzin stayed over in Paris for some four months, and made friends with Wilhelm von Wolzogen—who in turn stood in close contact with Schiller—and together they read the issues of Schiller's journal *Thalia*. In 1791, Karamzin mentioned Schiller for the first time in his *Letters from a Traveller*. Wilhelm von Wolzogen, later to become Schiller's brother-in-law, went on to head up the negotiations for the Weimar court, in the marriage between the heir to the ducal throne of Weimar and the Countess Maria Pavlovna, Tsar Alexander I's sister. Von Wolzogen brought Schiller's works to the court of St. Petersburg,

including *The Bride of Messina*, *Don Carlos*, *Turandot*, “The Homage to the Arts,” and *Wallenstein*. However, because of its “parricide” scene, and given the mysterious circumstances surrounding the murder of Tsar Paul I in 1801, Schiller thought *Wilhelm Tell* unsuitable.

Von Wolzogen’s judgment of the Tsar’s family’s literary depth was, however, less than favorable, even though readings of Schiller’s works took place every evening, at which often numerous members of the Tsar’s family would be present. Von Wolzogen wrote to Schiller on Sept. 27, 1803:

Your *Don Carlos* has been well received, also *The Bride of Messina*. I will take advantage of that as much as I can, even though I don’t think it will do any good, because almost every day I can hear them saying how much of a sacrifice it is, if they have to give something, and how they curse the tasks which would make them do that. On top of that, they do not understand anything beyond the mediocre. What is solidly middle class is what counts around here, and at most, they can stand gaping at the Great and the Beautiful, but grasp it they cannot.

Still, the Tsarina had *The Death of Wallenstein* read to her several times, and had a very high opinion of *Don Carlos*. Finally, she sent by von Wolzogen, a valuable ring to Schiller, as an expression of the esteem in which she held his work.

In the context of these things related to Russia, Schiller hit on the subject of Demetrius, for which he had von Wolzogen send him material. This drama, which remained unfinished owing to Schiller’s untimely death, is about the legitimacy of power, about *nemesis*, which overtakes the ruler when he violates natural law.

Pushkin was born in Moscow on June 6, 1799; Schiller died on May 8, 1805 in Weimar. He was at this time the most beloved contemporary poet in Germany; his noble ideal of man had an immense effect upon the Prussian Reformers, as well as upon the population in general. When soldiers left for the Liberation Wars of 1812-13, they carried with them numerous poems by Schiller,



Friedrich Schiller in Weimar.

because these expressed the ideals of freedom and humanity which they hoped to achieve by winning the war.

It was just this patriotic war of 1812, which had such a lasting influence upon the thirteen-year-old Pushkin, and is interwoven with his first poetic creations. In 1815, after Napoleon had already been defeated, Pushkin recited the ode “Recollections at Tsarskoye Selo” for an examination, in which the following lines occur about Moscow in ruins:

In what was an abode of comfort,
 Where fragrant orchards bloomed, and groves,
 Where myrtle sweetly smelled, and lindens trembled,
 There now are embers, ashes, dust.
 And in the silent, beautiful summer nighttime
 No noisy revels’ cheer will fly there any more,
 The forest glades are dark, no lights flare on the
 stream-bank;
 All’s dead, all’s silent now.

Already at age sixteen, Pushkin was a master of the

paradox. Gavriil Derzhavin, the famous poet, who was guest of honor at the examination, would say later: “Soon the world will see a new Derzhavin: Pushkin, who is still in high school, has surpassed all the other writers.”

In the same poem, Pushkin goes on:

Russians in Paris! Torch of vengeance!
Oh, Gaul, now lower your proud head!
What’s this I see? The Russian smiles, with peaceful offering,
He comes with olive branch in hand.
The battle’s thunder still resounds far in the distance,
The city Moscow mourns, like steppes in midnight gloom,
But he unto the foe not ruin brings—salvation,
And beneficial peace on earth.

Patriotism yes, but not vengeful chauvinism; if one thinks about the traumatic effect of the burning of Moscow, and of the scorched-earth policy which was the basis of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia, then you can see here the all-embracing humanity of the sixteen-year-old, and you can descry the spiritual kinship with Schiller, who wrote in the fragment “German Greatness”:

It is not Germany’s greatness
To find victory with the sword;

But to penetrate into the realm of the spirit
To defeat prejudice,
To fight like a man against illusion,—
That is worth the effort.

A Kinship of Souls

What is the substance of this kinship of souls and the closeness of the ideas of these two poets? It seems that some of the literary historians of the former Soviet Union had some trouble answering this question, in part because they had to emphasize the “independence” of Pushkin, in part because they thought to have found “contradictions” in Schiller’s worldview, and difficulties in his relationship to the French Revolution. Schiller had turned away with horror from the Jacobin Terror, and judged that a great moment had found a little people.

I, on the other hand, believe that the works of Pushkin taken as a whole, leave no doubt that Schiller—his dramas, his poems, and his writings—belonged as much to the cultural climate around Pushkin, as air does to breathing. For example, Pushkin wrote in a poem for the anniversary of Tsarskoye Selo on Oct. 19, 1825, in memory of former comrades, from whom he now had been



Copyright © George Mitrevski, Auburn University

“Alexander Pushkin at Tsarskoye Selo,” painting by Ilya Repin, 1911. The aged poet Gavriil Derzhavin is leaning forward at the left.

separated by his banishment, and many of whom, shortly thereafter, as a consequence of the uprising of the Decembrists, would be killed or sent to Siberia:

Come here; and with your magic, fiery story
Rekindle our traditions of the heart;
Of stormy Caucasus days shall we speak then,
Of Schiller, and of glory, and of love.

In *Yevgeni Onegin*, Pushkin has the young poet Lensky, the night before he is killed by Onegin in a duel, read Schiller when he is unable to sleep.

Even more manifold are the relations and resonances between a whole array of poems and dramas. For example, Pushkin's "To Chaadayev," a new poem, entirely unique, is based on the same idea that lies at the foundation of Schiller's "Die Ideale" ("The Ideal")—even if Pushkin ends his poem with a call to revolution, and excludes the possibility of attaining freedom by peaceful means. The same theme of the lost ideals of youth, rouses Lensky in *Yevgeni Onegin* shortly before his death:

"Ah, whither have you now receded,
Whither, my golden days of spring? . . ."

A similar, new working-through of a poetical idea, is also to be seen in Pushkin's *Dubrovsky*, in which the theme of Schiller's *Robbers* is transplanted to a Russian milieu, as an attack on serfdom and feudal relations. There is another such kinship in theme between Schiller's poem, "Ritter Toggenburg," and Pushkin's "Scenes from the Age of Chivalry," which deal with love, even in the face of death.

And, even though, of course, the themes of *The Maid of Orleans* and *Yevgeni Onegin* are different—Schiller's play deals with Joan's heroic action of liberating her fatherland from the invading English; the subject of Pushkin's novel in verse, is a portrait of social life in Russia, and the personal transformation of Yevgeni Onegin through the feeling of guilt—yet, the theme of the innocent country girl, ennobled to greatness, is similar in the two works.

When Joan accepts her divine mission, she speaks the following parting words:

Farewell, ye mountains, ye beloved swards,
Ye quiet and familiar vales, farewell!
Johanna will now no more o'er you wander,
Johanna says forever fare you well!

When Tatyana must leave her beloved countryside, in order to get married in the city, she says:

Farewell, you peaceful valleys,
And you, familiar hilltops,

And you, familiar forests;
Farewell . . .

Tatyana, whose first love was Yevgeni Onegin, to whom she revealed herself and was rejected, meets Onegin again after an arranged marriage has made her a lady of high society, which now awakens his interest in her. And, even though Onegin has matured through the torments of the soul which he suffered from having snuffed out the life of a young and gifted poet when he killed Lensky, Tatyana sees through to the reason for Onegin's sudden interest in her. Besides, it is completely foreign to her nature to betray her husband, even though she does not love him. In Tatyana, Pushkin created a noble image of woman, which reminds us of Gertrude in *Wilhelm Tell*, or Elizabeth in *Don Carlos*.

And, even if Schiller's *Demetrius* is quite different from Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, in that the lack of inner authority of the hero in *Demetrius* only becomes apparent at the moment he himself discovers that he is an imposter, whereas in *Godunov*, the pretender operates as such from the beginning; still, both poets were working on one of the central themes of Russia's national poetry.

A close investigation of the reception of Schiller in Russia, and particularly Pushkin's relationship to him, would be a fruitful field for research, especially since only a few Russian poets were well-enough versed in German to be able to read Schiller in the original. It is said that Pushkin read Schiller's "Die Ideale," and the German-language biography of his great-grandfather, Ibrahim Hannibal the Abyssinian prince, in the original. But, in general, following in another poet's footsteps—as always when translating from one language to another—presents a considerable problem. Nonetheless, the difficulties which arise from this, such as vagueness and, perhaps, here and there a shifted emphasis, are secondary.

The great themes of the Classical poets, the idea of beauty, of truth, and justice, concepts such as natural law—against which even the most frightful despot is powerless; concepts such as the ideal of individual freedom within the context of necessity, the effect of natural beauty on the human spirit; these notions are the ingredients of the mankind's history of ideas, and are realized as universal history.

If we think, for example, of the effect of the Greek Classical tragedies, of Aeschylus or Sophocles on Shakespeare or Schiller, or for example how all the Classical composers after Mozart had to take into account Mozart's method of composition, which he had presented in the "Haydn" Quartets as a new method of contrapuntal composition and "further elaboration" of Bach's studies as published in *A Musical Offering*—then the coherence will

be clear. Poetry itself is the individual act of the poet's sovereign spirit, but he deals with one universal idea, which can be further unfolded, and is ever amenable to being reworked. The poet—if he dares to take that name after Schiller—if he is to have a predictable effect upon his audience, must himself, at least when he is making poetry, have been elevated to ideal man, and deal with universally valid themes.

In this sense, it is clear that Schiller and the German Classics were for Pushkin and all those whom he “enkindled,” as Gogol put it, the spiritual well-spring and the nourishing soil, which allowed for a true explosion of poetic genius—mediated by Pushkin—in Russia.

Pushkin's teacher and friend, Vasili Zhukovsky, who among other things was the Russian teacher of the Empress Alexandra, a hereditary Prussian princess, and who translated Schiller's and Goethe's poems into Russian, had without doubt an immense part in German literature's becoming, alongside the English, a model for the new Russian national literature (which till then had been dominated by French literature and the “Enlightenment”). Moreover, as a Lieutenant, Zhukovsky had taken part in the general levy to defend Moscow during the war against Napoleon, and embodied in his person the humanistic outlook of the German and the Russian freedom fighters. The fact that it was he, who obtained the freedom of the Ukrainian nation-

al poet Taras Shevchenko from being a serf bound to the land, opens a further chapter in the history of the effect of poetic ideas.¹

The Battle Against the Oligarchy

When you read Pushkin, it has to be love at first sight. He joins together the finest lyric sensations, with the most heart-wrenching sympathy, and the noblest strivings of mankind. He is just as ready to think about the great scope of mankind, as with non-malicious irony about the weaknesses of his fellow man. Pushkin is worthy of our love, but he is also, without doubt, a tragic figure. The question is, if, under the circumstances in which he found himself, he might have been something else.

From his earliest years, he was a carefree child. His fearless verses, in which he trained his sights on the oligarchical ruling stratum, began to circulate in all freedom-loving circles when he was still in high school. After the uprising of the Decembrists, Pushkin himself—although they had never brought him in on their plans—barely escaped capital punishment or banishment to Siberia; although, over the course of his life, he did have to spend many years banished to the south of Russia or to the countryside, where he was quite often unhappy—which, however, he faced bravely, and produced a considerable amount of poetry.



The Decembrist uprising, Senate Square, St. Petersburg, Dec. 14, 1825. The equestrian statue of Tsar Peter I can be seen in the background. (Watercolor by Kolman.)

If you consider the apparent constraints through which he had to navigate in the last years and months of his life until his death in the duel with d'Anthès, you cannot escape a mixture of anger and shock. In a certain respect, what befell the living Pushkin, was what happened to the dead Schiller with the Carlsbad Decrees—total censure by the restoration of the system of the Holy Alliance.

Pushkin escaped the fate of his Decembrist friends, only because, above all, Tsar Alexander I and then Nicholas I, had to keep asking themselves, if it were not opportune to bind to the throne a poet so beloved of the people. Even though Nicholas I acted as Pushkin's patron to a degree, yet he used one of Pushkin's writings on universal education which he had commissioned, as a kind of test of his conscience, and rejected Pushkin's argument—that "Enlightenment and Genius" alone should serve as the basis of perfecting the population—as "a threat to public safety." If there ever was a litmus test, this is it: the oligarchy's fear of a system of universal education aimed at the creation of geniuses.

It is also a fact, that Chief of Police Benkendorf's so-called "Third Section," under orders of the Tsar, shadowed Pushkin's every step; and that for the majority of his life Pushkin was subject to continuous harassment. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to think that when Pushkin accepted the duel with d'Anthès, he had been lured into a trap by anti-national circles in the Russian oligarchy around Nesselrode.*

Their setting of such a trap would cohere with the research and publication tasks that Tsar Nicholas I gave to Pushkin, but also, moreover, the possibility that Pushkin's humanistic worldview might become an enduring influence upon the Tsar. Schiller's thesis was, that the best way to understand universal history, is to ask questions of things operating in the present, and in this way seek to answer the problems of the past. With this as background, it is clear that the oligarchy most often reaches for murder as a remedy, when they wish to destroy a potential which might become dangerous to their power.

Let us not forget that Nesselrode belonged, with Capodistria and Castlereagh,† to the most embittered opponents of Freiherr vom Stein and of the Humboldts at the Congress of Vienna, which annihilated all the freedom fighters' hopes for a unification of Germany as a

constitutional state, and instead of this, inaugurated, with the Holy Alliance, a most evil period of restoration and reaction. And, why should a European anti-nationalist oligarchy, which in Vienna had conspired against the Prussian Reformers, and which in 1819 with the Carlsbad Decrees banned Schiller's works, not see the closeness of Pushkin to Nicholas I as threatening in the highest degree? Besides the role which the salon of Nesselrode in St. Petersburg played in setting the stage for the fatal duel, what also surely merits a closer investigation, is the fact that Pushkin's murderer, d'Anthès, was a nephew of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte.

Could Pushkin have avoided the snares, which from our distance in time seem so clearly visible? His tendency of wanting to fight a duel at the drop of a hat, was well-known. Could he have not changed this behavior? Might he, who created a Tatyana, not have been able to discuss with his wife the possibility of an intrigue, a set-up? That these questions must remain unanswered, is the more painful, since the death of young poets only makes more clear, what they might have yet been able to give to the world, had they been granted a longer period for their creations.

Ideals, the great ideas of the dignity of man, freedom, good government under the law—such as thought by poets like Schiller and Pushkin—are the blueprints from which, in the best cases, rulers and politicians create their reality. Chernyshevsky, later banished to Siberia for intervening in favor of the peasant, wrote in 1857: "The works of Schiller are now being translated by us—and that is a joy, to hold Schiller as our own poet, as someone who has taken part in our own spiritual development. A feeling of just gratitude obliges us to acknowledge, that our society owes more to this German than to any of our lyric poets except for Pushkin."

If we, today, when Western civilization as a whole has been thrown into an existential crisis, make the thoughts of Schiller and Pushkin our own, we will also find the way out of the crisis.

—translated from the German by Rick Sanders

1. Taras Shevchenko, the national poet of Ukraine, was born into serfdom in 1814. He became the page-boy of his master Pavel Engelhardt, the brother of Pushkin's friend Colonel Vasili Engelhardt. Shevchenko's connection to Pushkin continued throughout his life. He secretly listened to the poet Vasili Zhukovsky recite works of Pushkin and Schiller, during literary evenings at his master's home. Zhukovsky later played the leading role in securing his freedom from serfdom.

The first translation into German of Shevchenko's poetry appeared together with Pushkin's, in a book entitled *Thoughts*. Shevchenko's passionate poems for freedom—written to inspire what he called "*bratoliubie*," or love of one's fellow man—are sung still to this day.—Irene Beaudry

* See "The Mystery of Pushkin's Death," page 74, this issue.

† Vide P.B. Shelley's "The Masque of Anarchy":

"I met Murder on the way—

He had a mask like Castlereagh—"—Ed.