Complete Lyrics and Shorter Poems

Volume 3
Complete Lyrics and Shorter Poems

Volume 3

Exile at Mikháylovskoye
1824–26

Return to Metropolitan Life
1826–29

Alexander Pushkin

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**RETURN TO METROPOLITAN LIFE 1826–29**

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Foreword

This is one of a series of volumes being published by Alma Classics presenting the complete works of Alexander Pushkin in English. The series is a successor to the fifteen-volume Complete Works of Alexander Pushkin published by Milner and Company between 1999 and 2003, the rights to which now rest with Alma Classics. Alma’s aim is to build on the Milner edition’s work in giving readers of English access to all Pushkin’s writings in readable modern versions, faithful to Pushkin’s meaning and spirit.

This is the third of four planned volumes of Pushkin’s output of over 700 lyrics and shorter poems, replacing volumes 1 to 3 of the Milner edition. Alma are going beyond Milner in providing for the first time Pushkin’s original Russian (or, in a few cases, French) texts of the poems alongside the English translations. Brief fragments, collaborative poems and poems of doubtful authenticity are not included.

The Russian texts reflect up-to-date Russian scholarship. Some of the translations are reprints or revisions of those in the Milner edition; many are new. Also provided are an index of people and places referred to by Pushkin, short explanatory notes on the poems and extra material on Pushkin’s life.

Volume 3 covers Pushkin’s shorter poetry from his years of exile at Mikháylovskoye (1824–26) and his years of rehabilitation, still as a bachelor, in Moscow and St Petersburg (1826–29). It contains 209 poems of varying length, subject matter and metre, translated by twenty translators, whose names and contributions are enumerated on pp. 392–93. Each poem shows something of the sensitivity, intelligence, erudition, wit and technical accomplishment for which Pushkin is famous. Together they provide a fascinating record of his frustrations and recreations while detained in the country and of his preoccupations and diversions while enjoying the relative freedom of bachelor life in Moscow and St Petersburg. They also show the transition in Pushkin’s political standpoint between contempt and defiance towards Tsar Alexander I and gratitude and expectancy towards his successor Nicholas I.

In publishing this new volume Alma Classics wish again to pay a warm tribute to the initiative and drive of the late Iain Sproat, managing director and owner of Milner and Company and chairman of the original project’s editorial board, in achieving the publication of Pushkin’s complete works in English for the first time, thus laying the foundation for the present volumes. Scholars, lovers of Pushkin and general readers wishing to gain knowledge of one of Europe’s finest writers owe him the heartiest admiration and gratitude.

– Alessandro Gallenzi, Publisher; Roger Clarke, Editor
Exile in Mikháylovskoye
1824–26
I lived then in dusty Odessa...
There skies are mostly clear.
There trade is brisk and strong,
filling the merchantmen’s sails;
and the air is heavy with smells of Europe.
The whole place glows with southern brilliance,
shimmering with colour, variety, life.
The language of golden Italy
rings out in the cheerful streets;
where Frenchmen, Spaniards,
and Armenians, Greeks,
ponderous Moldavians – and Moor Ali,
Egyptian-born pirate (retired).

Our friend Tumánsky described
Odessa in musical verses;
but at that time his view of the city
was over-kind.

No sooner arrived, he set off alone,
for a clifftop stroll –
and soon he’d composed
a poem in praise of Odessa’s gardens.
All fine – though in actual fact
it’s bare steppe everywhere!
Only here and there have recent efforts
compelled young twigs in the heat of the day
to give some forcible shade.
[22] But, sorry, I’ve digressed!
In “dusty Odessa” I had said.
I could have said “muddy Odessa” –
and, really, I wouldn’t have lied.
For five or six weeks of the year,
the storm god Zeus wills that Odessa
be swamped and flooded,
drowned in thick mud.
Each house is two foot deep in mire.
Pedestrians need stilts
before they dare to ford the street.
Coaches and townsfolk flounder, founder;
and oxen with lowered horns
pull carriages in place of puny horses.

[23] But rescue’s at hand! Already
are sledgehammers smashing stone slabs;
the city will soon be protected with resonant pavements,
as though with armour plating.
In wet Odessa, though,
there’s one important shortage.
Shortage of what, do you suppose? Of water!
“Major construction works are needed…”
But why? It’s no great hardship,
especially when wine’s
imported duty-free!
Yes, southern sun, the sea…
what more could you want, my friends?
Charmed lands indeed!

[24] In my day, the gun had no sooner
roared its dawn salvo from the guardship
than I’d run down the cliffs
and head for the sea. And after that,
ennlivened by the salty waves,
I’d sit behind a freshly lighted pipe,
just like a Muslim in his paradise,
and drink a coffee thick with eastern grounds.
I’d take a walk. By now the casino club
would, obligingly, be open. From there you’d hear
cups jingling – and out onto the terrace
the billiard-room attendant, half asleep,
would come with broom in hand; and by the entrance steps
already two merchants would have met.
You’d see the square, too, full of colour; the town had sprung to life.
People rushed to and fro on business or no business – but mostly busy anyhow!
Merchants, born to risk and calculation, were on their way to inspect ships’ flags, to learn if Heaven had sent them the vessels they’d been banking on. Which cargoes, freshly come, were undergoing clearance by port-health?
Had the expected casks of wine come in? What news of plagues? Where’d there been conflagrations? And weren’t there famines, wars and suchlike fresh disasters?

Amid those anxious merchants, we carefree youngsters, on the other hand, were just awaiting oysters from the beds round Istanbul.
“What about oysters? They’ve arrived! Oh joy!” And off we’d fly, young gluttons, to swallow down those plump recluses live from their seashells, with lemon lightly sprinkled.
Then uproar, argument – Automne, ever attentive, had placed on our table a light-bodied wine fresh from the cellars.
The hours flew by; and all the while the awesome bill, unheeded, mounted up.

But soon the evening dimmed to indigo – time now to hurry to the opera. Rossini’s on there with his heady tunes, darling of Europe, Orpheus of today. He pays no heed to hostile critics – always the same, yet always fresh! He pours forth melodies that fizz and froth and sizzle – like youthful lovers’ kisses, lingering, incandescent; or like the hissing streams and golden spray of champagne from Aÿ… (But, gentlemen, are we allowed to liken notes of music to a wine?)
Music was not the only fascination there. What of those prying opera glasses? those backstage assignations? The prima donna, the ballet? And what of the box, where a businessman's young wife (so vain, so yielding) gleamed beatifully amidst a mob of devotees? She heard, and didn't hear, the aria; she heard, and didn't hear, their pleas, their banter mixed in equal part with flattery... The husband? He dozed on at the back behind her, half-woke to shout "encore" – then yawned and snored again.

Thunderous finale over, the theatre emptied; carriages clattered as they rushed away. By light of lanterns and the stars crowds flockted into the square. Young revellers from Italy were crooning a catchy tune they couldn't get from mind; we others roared a recitativ... But now it's late. Odessa's sleeping softly. The voiceless night is warm and muggy. The moon is up; a thin, transparent veil enshrouds the sky. No sound is heard, save for the Black Sea plashing on the shore...

And so I lived then in Odessa...
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listless, jealous and alone.
In the goddess’ path a youngster shyly dropped down on his knees. Even goddesses are tempted: mortal youth took this one’s fancy, so the underworld’s proud queen gave the lad a look of welcome, took him in her arms, then off they both sped in the coach to Hades. Wrapped in cloud they raced along, through the Blessed Fields, past Lethe’s somnolent and sluggish stream, lighting in Elysium, place where heroes live, forgetful, lives of everlasting bliss. Proserpine, ecstatic now, shed her queenly robes and crown, and, surrendering to desire, yielded her once hidden beauties to the youngster’s kisses, whilst swooning in intense delight, falling silent, faintly moaning… but love’s hours were running short… Waves on Phlegethon are tossing, shuddering are Hades’ halls. Pallid Pluto’s team of horses speed the god of death back home. Time for Proserpine’s departure: from Elysium she led him, happy lad, back up to earth by a footpath little known. Then the lad, still happy, opened gingerly the ivory door – door (alas) that lets swarm through all those dreams that don’t come true.

Why is it, fearsome Aquilo, you flatten reeds against the ground? Why do you furiously blow a little cloud to heaven’s bound?

---

Potekla putem одном.
Потекла путем одним.

Пред богинею колена
Пред богинею колена

Робко юноша склонил.
Ада гордая царица

И богиням льстит измена:
Вззором юношу зовет,

Прозерпине смертный мил.
Обняла – и колесница

Ада гордая царица
Вззором юношу зовет,

Уж к Аиду их несет:
Обняла – и колесница

Мчатся, облаком одеты;
Видят вечные луга,

Там бессмертные, там забвенье,
Там утехам нет конца.

Прозерпина в упоенье,
Без порфиры и венца,

Там бессмертные, там забвенье,
Там утехам нет конца.

Прозерпина в упоенье,
Без порфиры и венца,

Повинуется желаньем,
Предает его лобзаньям

Сокровенные красы,
Сокровенные красы,

В сладострастной неге тонет
И молчит и томно стонет...

По бегут любви часы:
По бегут любви часы:

Плещут волны Флегетона,
Плещут волны Флегетона,

Своды Тартара дрожат:
Своды Тартара дрожат:

Кони бедного Плутона
И Кереры дочь уходит.

Быстро мчат его назад.
И счастливца за собой

Из Элизии выводит
И счастливца за собой

Потаенною тропой;
И счастливца отпирает

Осторожною рукой
Дверь, откуда вылетает

Сновидений ложный рой.
Сновидений ложный рой.

356

АКВИЛОН

Зачем ты, грозный аквилон, 
Тростник болотный долу клюнишь?
Зачем ты, грозный аквилон, 
Тростник болотный долу клюнишь?

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АКВИЛОН

Why is it, fearsome Aquilo, 
you flatten reeds against the ground?
Why is it, fearsome Aquilo, 
you flatten reeds against the ground?

1824
Not long ago the louring sky hung overcast and dully glowered, not long ago upon the height an oak, still proud and stately, towered.

You rose, though, and, exulting loud, in awesome majesty you spoke — you put to flight the heavy clouds and overthrew that mighty oak.

From now on may the sun display his cheering face and shine forth brightly, may Zephyr waft the small cloud lightly, and gently may the reed bed sway.

The homeland of my spirit’s choosing!

O how I loved your muffled calls, the voice of bottomless recesses, the calm that reigns as evening falls and your impetuous excesses!

A fisher’s humble sail, serene, by nothing but your whim upheld, will glide across your rippling stream, but when your waters rise supreme, a host of ships is overwhelmed.