

“Diagnosing” literary genius: A concise look at the life and works of Alexander Pushkin

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Abstract

This paper examined the phenomena of literary genius by providing a retrospective case study and an analysis of the creative works of Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837). Taking the readers into Pushkin's unique world, we attempted to elucidate salient points of his short life, to understand his giftedness and his creative evolution, and to solve the mystery surrounding his spectacular downfall. Building on the works of Cesare Lombroso and Howard E. Gruber, we have utilised unique phenomenological method in “diagnosing” Pushkin. We considered several hypotheses relating to a number of neurodevelopmental and psychiatric conditions, and highlighted ADHD-associated cognitive and behavioural profile which may have contributed to Pushkin's creativity and subsequent demise. Recognizing that Pushkin was confronted by psychological tensions and interpersonal issues and both sublimated and sought resolution in his poetry, we argue that the vicissitude of his life and his literature were inextricably interrelated. The riddle of Pushkin's literary genius prompted us to probe further into the nature of literary creativity and freedom of speech.

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Note: The author attests that there are no conflicts of interest, that the data reported here are not used in any other publications and there are no infringements on previous copyrights.

Introduction

"So far I've been reading nothing but Pushkin and am drunk with rapture, every day I discover something new" (Dostoevsky, 1874).

In this paper we examined the phenomena of literary genius by providing a retrospective case study and a concise analysis of the creative works of Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837). We will demonstrate how Pushkin was not only Russia's foremost poet, as well as a playwright and novelist of the Romantic bygone era but also a troubled soul and misunderstood fragile genius of his time. In this article we share with the readers our understanding of Pushkin's unique journey in developing creative intellectual power, his muse and his genius in literature and life. When we explore Pushkin the Man and Pushkin the Creative Genius, we find that the renowned master of literature, his life and his literature are inextricably interrelated, with inseparable connections. In this article we will show how the man and his literature still resonates certainly in Russia but also to readers and scholars the world over as we remember Aleksándr Sergéyevich Púshkin.

"Literature is where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination and of the heart" (Rushdie, 1989).

When it comes to the world masters of psychological genius, Russian literature has a lot to offer. The Russians should be proud, that when the world thinks of Russia, the names of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gogol, Turgenev and Nabokov come to mind, all – Russian prose writers. But when Russians think of Russia, above all they think of great poet - Sasha Pushkin, a hero in the land of his birth and the one who is revered by many as the father of Russian literature, which is no small claim. For Russians - it's easy to appreciate Pushkin's creativity, the originality of his talent and ideas, as well as to feel his vulnerability and

to share his perspective on the vicissitudes of his life and the harsh reality of the world. Pushkin's quick rise to great heights coupled with his tragic downfall lead us to reflect on the concept of Aristotle's hamartia and speculate about Pushkin's own fatal flaws that brought him down, his obsession and his catastrophic failure to avoid "the devil's curse!"¹

In 2017 Russia marked the 180th anniversary of Alexander Pushkin's death. There are still many in Russia and abroad who have a huge interest in Pushkin's works and life, or as Ernest Simmons put it, "the precious life-stream of Pushkin" (Simmons, 1922, p 5) flows on. The culmination of Pushkin's short life in his premature death, his ultimate fate that he could not have escaped from, had a dramatic effect on many of his followers and his life story continues to move and reverberate through history. Pushkin's cultural influence is unprecedented and quintessentially Russian; it is not too dissimilar to an identification process, in that each reader has to discover and define what Pushkin means to them personally at one time or another. In childhood, when immersed in the fantasy lands of Pushkin's fairy tales (*'Tale of the Golden Cockerel,' 'Tale of the Priest and his workman Balda,' 'Tale of the Fisherman,' 'Tale of Tsar Saltan'*) or as romantically inclined young adult crying over Tatyana's faith in his famous novel-in-verse *'Eugène Onegin'*, or maybe as a wise man while enjoying the depth of his historical play *'Boris Godunov'*? The authors' curiosity about Pushkin's colourful life, his distinct voice within Russian literature and his tragic death led us to develop this thesis in an attempt to explore and analyze Pushkin's actions and behaviour in the light of his literary opus and unique socio-historical themes.

"In centuries to come I shall be loved by people" (Pushkin, *Exegi Monumentum*, 1836)

¹ "That I was born in Russia with feeling and talent is the devil's curse!" (Pushkin, 1836, in: Shaw, 1964).

Pushkin is renowned for leaving such lasting impressions on his contemporaries that they enshrined their memories into a written, visual or musical form that stood the test of time. Rigorous research by literary historians and biographers has provided a comprehensive account of Pushkin's life, his work and his personality. But no other source enlightens the true soul of a poet better than his verses. He speaks to us across centuries and continents. A poet standing strong with arms wide open and with a soul for all to see, to use his own words, always ready to share: "cold observations of the mind" and "bitter matters of the heart" (Frank, 1990). So, how best to begin to describe Pushkin, to capture true psychological portrait of this man? To many readers Pushkin appears as a sunlit genius and inspirational romantic who illuminates the love of life and appreciates life for all its richness and multiplicity. To some others who knew him until the end, the unhappy Pushkin, a man with a troubled soul, a poor mortal with a death wish, appears in the dark moments of his life.

When Pushkin died, his friend Prince Odoyevsky lamented on the loss of "the sun of Russian poetry" in his famous obituary (Odoevsky, 1837), and his contemporary, poet Alexi Koltsov exclaimed, "the sun has been shot!" (Koltsov, 1911), writing in disbelief:

"From the giant's shoulders
Head was forced to fall
Not by colossal shove,
But by a single straw"

Pushkin was largely unknown to Western audiences until recent popularisation of his works in film ('Onegin', a 1999 British-American film), wrote sparkling gems of verse in Russian, and was a master of the finest lyric sensations and, as Vladimir Nabokov eloquently put it, of "acoustical paradise" referring to the Eugène Onegin's stanza (Nabokov, 1964). Pushkin was versatile and wrote in a variety of literary genres, including fairy tales. It is well established that Pushkin largely created modern Russian language by bringing closer the conversational and traditional

forms of language and was alone in gaining the title of "Everything" (Grigoriev, 1859) in Russian literature. To attest to the qualities of Pushkin's literary gift, the historian Elaine Feinstein points to the Western reader: "To imagine his qualities as a poet, a reader of English literature would have to invent a writer with the facility of Byron, the sensuous richness of Keats and a bawdy wit reminiscent of Chaucer" (Feinstein, 1998, p.5).

His Creative Merits

If Pushkin is less read outside Russia than Tolstoy, Dostoevsky or even Chekhov, this is mainly because his poetic and creative merits are possibly detracted, diminished and often lost in translation. The sheer cleverness of English translations has the negative effect of removing the allure and originality of Pushkin's silver-tongued and flexible Russian (Binyon, 2003). Acclaimed translations convey as much as possible of Pushkin's liveliness, the sheer wealth of his creation, and the bold unexpectedness of his wit. However, there are some exceptions in which Pushkin's originality have been preserved in apt translation, for instance, below is an excerpt from Eugène Onegin translated by Stanley Mitchell (Mitchell, 2008). where he depicts all of Pushkin's grace, sharpness and allure.

"Semi-ethereal and resplendent,
To the enchanting bow obedient,
Ringed round by nymphs, Istomina
Is still; one foot supporting her,
She circles slowly with the other,
And lo! she leaps, and lo! she flies,
Like fluff she flies across the skies
Blown by Aeolus, god of weather;
She twists, untwists; her little feet
Swiftly against each other beat."

Genealogy and Origins

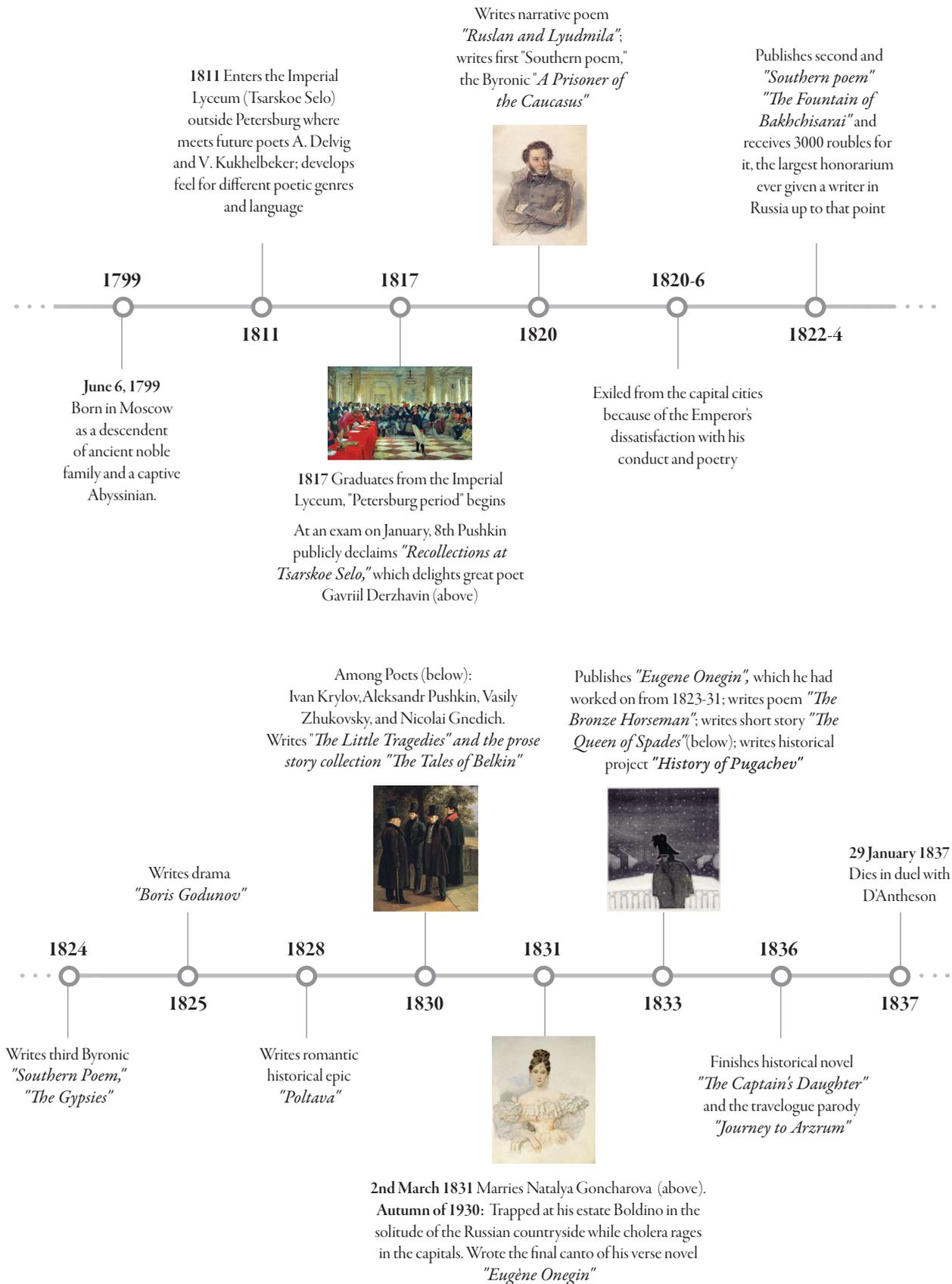
The Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva poignantly noted: "Pushkin's poetic blood was as pure as his actual blood was mixed" (Burgin, 2003, p. 92). On paternal side, Pushkin was a descendent of a known Russian noble family that takes its roots in 12th century. Pushkin's mother Nadezhda Ossipovna Gannibal descended through her paternal grandmother from German and Scandinavian nobility (Lihaug, 2006) and through her maternal roots from Ethiopian royalty. Pushkin's African blood lineage could be traced back to his great-grandfather on maternal side, Abram Petrovich Gannibal, an African page raised by Peter the Great and who became an inspiration for Pushkin's character the "Blackamoor of Peter the Great". In a strange twist of fate seven-year old Abram, the Moorish prince, was kidnapped by pirates and sold to a Turkish sultan only to be rescued by a Russian emissary who offered him to the Peter the Great as a gift. Gannibal was brought up at the court in the atmosphere of a great favouritism and the Emperor himself became his godfather. After education in France as a military engineer, Gannibal deservingly carried the fame of Voltaire's given acclaim as the "dark star of Russia's enlightenment". We know that Pushkin's African ancestry was evident in his appearance. He adopted the endearing nickname "afrikanec" which translates from Russian as "the African" (Lounsbury, 2000), and being "well aware of the strand of rashness and passion in his makeup, ascribed it often and proudly to his black ancestry" (Feinstein, 1998, p.21). In Eugène Onegin he makes reference to two opposing worlds as competing forces in his own nature and speaking of "my Africa", makes himself present "as a Byronic outsider hero" (McAloon, 2017):

"It's time to drop astern the shape
Of the dull shores of my disfavour,
And there, beneath your noonday sky,
My Africa, where waves break high,
To mourn for Russia's gloomy savour,
Land where I learned to love and weep,

Land where my heart is buried deep."
(Eugène Onegin translated by Johnston, 1977).

Being the cultural norm of the period, Pushkin grew up without much parental affection, entrusted to nursemaids, French tutors and governesses. Known as lazy, but an avid, precocious reader, he had extremely rich cultural exposure to literary people, and books from the family's extensive library, as his father and his uncle were men of letters and belonged to Russian nobility. He was particularly delighted by Voltaire and read a great deal including Greek and Latin classics. "A callow lover of all foreign nations, forever calling to account my own..." (Pushkin, 1817). His greatest gift to Russian letters was a colossal act of synthesis - he read French fluently and had good command of German and English; he combined his voracious reading of Western novels with a love for Russian folktales he heard from household serfs and especially from his beloved nanny, his "frail companion", Arena Rodionovna (Pushkin, 1826, edited by Briggs).

Pushkin was educated at the Imperial Lyceum, where the most gifted students and others from the "best families" were being instructed for service in the absolutist Russia. This elite school reflected an inherently Russian structure with its contradiction between the form and content. The form was adopted from the West with its Classical curriculum, but its Western spirit was expunged, as the Lyceum's basic official task was cultivating of Russian patriotism. Pushkin seemed to have gained the most from this institution and later his contemporary friend and poet Tumansky would describe Pushkin as a person "so European in mind, in character, in enlightenment, in poems, in dandyism" (Druzhnikov, 1998, p.57). Pushkin was at the very least extremely intelligent and Tsar Nicholas I described him as "the most intelligent man in Russia" (Derkach, 2021). In his study he was only average, he showed mediocre diligence in his schoolwork. He was good at building up close friendships, and at the Lyceum he made friends who were to last him all his life, notably Ivan Puschin, whose bedroom was next to Pushkin. His



psychological portrait of Pushkin included following perceptions "...he was a mixture of excessive boldness and shyness. Both were often out of place and got him into trouble" (Puschin, 1956).

Consolidation

As an adult, Pushkin wanted to model his life on two European idols, Napoleon and Byron. The main concern for him was ambition. Like his idols, the poet sought the world's appreciation and fame. Early on he was determined to become no less than world-famous poet and asked Voltaire to lend him his lyre. His eccentricity – homage to Byronic influence, upper-class appeal, amorous and poetic excesses that were so contrasting to the hideaways of his exile, his very own "St Helena", that it provided him with an ideal status for forever increasing curiosity in public eye.

At times Pushkin could appear as narcissistic and a shallow misanthrope who was sensitive to social status, in other instances he rebelled against vapid, wicked society and the tyranny of fashion. But Pushkin, was also the most good-natured of men. Few people disliked him, and he had many close friends and women who loved him and most remained on good terms after love affairs ended. Meeting a sixteen-year-old Natalya Goncharova, tall magnificent beauty who was universally admired for her preposterously narrow waist and a clear complexion, Pushkin was determined to make her his wife. He was very much in love and Natalya responded as she was flattered by the attentions of famous poet and developed social ambitions of a similarly unwavering force. They married in 1831 and had four children: his both sons, Alexander and Gregory chose military careers, his daughter Masha became an inspiration for Tolstoy's Anna Karenina (in beauty, not in fate), and daughter Tasha married Prince Nicholas William of Nassau. Pushkin's love letters to Natalya are swift-moving and full of good-natured humour and adoration for her (Shaw, 1963). They reveal an affectionate husband and father; on the margins he sketched the

studies of her proud silhouette and "her dancer's feet, gracefully entwined in ballet ribbons" (Nemtsova, 2012). Recently unearthed letters of Natalya to her brother and her other writings showed that she was neither duplicitous nor uncaring, as some suggested, which brought about a revival of Natalya's reputation (Cherkashina, 2012).

Premature demise: "And how and where shall I die?" (Pushkin, *Exegi Monumentum*, 1836)

Pushkin appeared to suffer internally which manifested in his personal tragedy that is deeply enshrined with jealousy, suspicion and paranoia over the possible infidelities of his wife. These negative distressing feelings were followed by anguish and revenge which ultimately contributed to his premature death. Two unhappy years in St Petersburg (1834-1836), involving humiliation in court circles, mounting debts and decrease in his poetic yield, culminated in this tragic discourse. Natalya Goncharova was his destiny, his obvious choice and he was ready to die for her honour. The anonymous letter informing him of his election to "The Serene Order of Cuckolds" (Vitale, 1998), was a dynamite that made his situation an increasingly farcical and unbearable. In real life, tragedy and farce tend to be not so far apart.

Pushkin was goaded by scandalous rumours into a duel with his brother-in-law, French officer Georges D'Anthès. Could Pushkin have avoided his inescapable predicament, could he ignore the snares, which seem so clearly visible? Alexander Pushkin died in vain on 27 January 1837 as a result of gunshot wounds sustained in a duel two days earlier. On the very next day in St Petersburg everyone knew that the greatest poet of that period had been shot dead. Pushkin's funeral gathered thousands. His contemporaries could not hide their outrage at the unworthiness of Pushkin's antagonist and his premature demise literally shook Russia to its core. Back in those times in Russia and in Europe duels were often illegal but happened often and were socially accepted. Duels were based on a code of honour and were fought not so much

to kill the opponent as to gain satisfaction, that is, to restore one's honour by demonstrating a willingness to risk one's life for it. Sometime, the numbers put things into perspective- with a reputation as a ladies' man, Pushkin kept a list of his female conquests with Natalya being his 113th love (!) as he jokingly called her (Nemtsova, 2012), and it was Pushkin's twenty-ninth duel that ended his life.

Pushkin's death left so many of his admirers with anguish, a sense of painful loss and paralysis, unable to reconcile the literally genius with a distinct voice who created a 'Tatyana' with an individual who was clearly unable to communicate with his own wife and was succumbed by jealousy, suspicion, paranoia and revenge. This was a divisive subject for all who loved Pushkin who felt the pain of his early departure. Given that "in Russia the love of Pushkin is simply an anthropological fact" (Khan, 2004), it is true to say that most Russians find it hard to address Pushkin's tragic circumstances in a realistic and coherent way and so many accounts, truths and half-truths have been written about it. There were many of Pushkin's followers, such as great Anna Akhmatova, who spoke of "making a taboo", of it: "I am one of those students of Pushkin who believe that his family tragedy should not be discussed. Surely by making it taboo we would be fulfilling the poet's wish" (Vitale, 1999, opening epigraph).

Two methodological approaches of 'pathography' and 'phenomenology'

In the nineteenth century the influential work "Genio e follia" (Lombroso, 1864) which translates from Italian as "genius and insanity" by a criminologist from Turin, Professor Cesare Lombroso, led to speculations that genius was a "hereditary taint" transmitted in families alongside mental illness and that "Genius is one of the many forms of insanity". This notion followed by the promotion of 'pathography' in 1917, the term

was coined by the Leipzig neurologist, Paul Moebius, when writing about gifted people such as Goethe and Schumann in the form of retrospective case study. It would be difficult to propose a prospective study design in order to examine relationship between creativity and mental illness, thus opinion can be drawn only retrospectively from biographical materials, personal letters, creative works, historical and contemporaneous judgements – all, flawed with subjectivity and interpretation and could not withstand the scrutiny of critical analysis.

Sixty years later, Professor Howard E. Gruber, an American developmental psychologist from Columbia University and follower of Jean Piaget, posited the evolving systems approach to creativity. He had convincingly argued that much can be learned from the case studies of accomplished figures whose creativity was widely accepted, such as Charles Darwin. His "theory of the individual" focused on the nature of "the how and not the why of creative work" (Lavery, 1993). Using his unique phenomenological method, Gruber attempted to demystify creative process by studying individuals whose creativity was widely accepted, such as Charles Darwin, and "reconstructing events from the subject's point of view and then understanding them from our own" (Gruber, 1980). The strength of his approach was in preserving the role of the critical appraisal by the analyst who carefully mapped this process on a timeline that was highly significant for subject's creative breakthroughs. Gruber cautioned against the pursuit of some special unique ability or personality trait that "itself, unexplained, which explains creativity - the path of Holy Cow!" (Gruber, 1988). Instead, he moved the creative studies into more measurable and pragmatic domain by linking them with his systems theory and introducing new domain of moral creativity (Gruber, 2003). Here, in our Pushkin's case study, we combined Moebius's and Gruber's methods to determine the following diagnostic constructs.

The four verdicts:

I. Oppositional tendencies, mood swings and impulse control disorder

Passionate, cynical, and self-deprecating, Pushkin may have been quite the character. Highly sociable, he was a novelty and a sensation seeker; he enjoyed his verbal banter – “always with a smile on his lips and a glow of pride in his pale eyes” (Vitale, 1999, p. 107). His lifestyle was somewhat chaotic and dissolute and hinted towards the accounts of his state of mind.

This contrasted with the orderliness of fashionable salons of St Petersburg that Pushkin was accustomed to, with its polished parquet and full-length mirrors that created the atmosphere of grandeur but was ruled by rich “bluestockings who asked questions like “haven’t you written some new little something?” (Vitale, 1999, p. 107). Freedom was a fundamental value of the whole of his existence and he was refractory to systems that ruled his habitat. We know that changes of his mood were unpredictable and instantaneous, one minute impulsively joyous, the next dark and irritable, “there were times when the blood rushed so violently to his head that he had to hurry to douse in cold water” (Vitale, 1999, p. 109).

Pushkin was known to be very oppositional with a disregard for authority, and on the account of it, he was subsequently forced to live in exile, calling himself “the Odessa hermit” (Feinstein, 1998, p. 84). It was an unhappiness that fed his poetry; he never missed an opportunity to exhibit his courage and mercilessness in his epigrams and was often the ringleader in pranks. “When he wasn’t writing, Pushkin was always on edge: he couldn’t stay still for more than a few minutes, shuddered if an object fell, became irritated if the children made noise” (Vitale, 1999, p. 76). Pushkin couldn’t tolerate constraints and had an inherent aversion to even the slightest ranks of authority,

openly proclaiming his hatred of oppression and calling for freedom, equality and brotherhood in the ode “Liberty”, which was written in 1817, a hundred years before the Russian revolution. Pushkin may have simply defied the “genio e follia”, as a concept, be it in opposition to official labels as he couldn’t tolerate any negative opinion of him or simply by denying the seriousness of his mental decline, it is hard to imagine Pushkin accepting our crude attempt at diagnosis.

In his lyrical satire “*Tsar Nikita and His Forty Daughters*” (Pushkin, 1822) Pushkin used irrepressible lyrics and wrote about the 40 daughters of the Tsar who lacked their female parts. This asserts the notion that some of Pushkin’s work belongs to a transgressive genre that was designed to provoke an outrage and to shock basic morals and sensibilities of the time. It could even be suggested that he ignored the societal influences against cross-gender expression and paraded his own feelings of gender incongruence as an oppositional response to fundamental societal rules.

II. ADHD and associated cognitive profile that fosters creativity

The business of Pushkin's body and mind, together with his natural giftedness, yet only mediocre academic results at school prompt us to suggest the likelihood of what we call now “attention deficit hyperactivity disorder” (ADHD), which characterised by mismatch between innate potential versus actual performance and attainment. We know that having keen intelligence did not stop Pushkin from being “irascible, flippant, giddy and careless, as reported by his teachers” (Simmons, 1937, p. 44). There are many written accounts of Pushkin’s non-verbal behaviour and his depictions as a short man with fidgety and jumpy gestures and who moved quickly and “pirouetted in a waltz or mazurka” (Vitale, 1999, p. 109). He was a real chatterbox, which earned him

a nickname of a "Cricket" (Druzhnikov, 1998, p. 18). His mind had tendency to rush and accelerate at a fierce speed, quality that gave his lyrics a rarefied feel of just felt senses, as if transporting a raw nerve, a flesh and blood into the timeless air of poetry. Vijel who later became a high government official described Pushkin as follows "the conversation of Pushkin was like electricity making contact with the black preoccupations inside me; it suddenly produced a 1000 lively happy and youthful thoughts, so that we suddenly seemed almost the same age. Often, in the midst of some idle, amusing conversation, a bright new idea flew from his soul which astonished me with the wide range of his intelligence . . . little by little I discovered a whole buried treasure of sound reasoning and noble ideas, which he concealed under a soiled cloak of cynicism" (Vijel, 1928, pp. 204 – 205).

Pushkin's literary mastery is clearly at odds with the fact that children with ADHD are at higher risk of developing language problems, including deficits in higher order language skills, as well as making inferences and determining causes (Randell et al., 2018). Certainly, not all available description supports the theory of ADHD. Indeed, Pushkin was a fast writer but, also, an obsessive and careful creator and an observant and talented drawer – sketcher. His magnum opus was a novel written entirely in verse, *Eugène Onegin*, and he had to be extremely focused to master the unity of styles in the eight years that it took him to complete. The literary critics seem to appreciate the seamless harmony of Pushkin's style and the originality of his improvisation that resulted into an airy and elegantly laced fourteen lined stanzas that are full of wit, suspense and rhyme (Mitchell, 2008). This master work of *Eugène Onegin* has a depth to it and 'more than meets the eye', on account of clever social commentary and philosophical notions behind the character development.

The concept of the hyperkinetic syndrome is relatively young and was first described by George Still in 1902, 65 years after the poet's death and might

seem redundant from a historical perspective. Often referred to simply as "hyperactivity", the diagnosis was used to characterise children, almost exclusively little boys, who seemed unable to sit still, listen to adults, and refrain from disrupting their school classrooms. Recently researchers have begun to recognise that ADHD persists into adulthood and may have wide-reaching negative consequences for academic achievement, career progression and social relationships. Rather than being seen as a singular attention/concentration problem, it is now conceptualised as a diffuse brain disorder that affects multiple functional circuitry networks, in particular, those involving parietal and prefrontal cortex, cerebellum and the striatum of the basal ganglia (Furlong & Chen, 2020). ADHD is essentially a disorder of self-control affecting attentional, cognitive, emotion regulation and conduct domains. The pathogenesis involves the neuro-developmental impairment of executive functions: the management system of the brain's metacognitive and regulation functions that is linked to cognitive, behavioural and emotional sensitivity, all together, much more complex and subtle condition. One way of thinking about executive dysfunction is to picture a symphony orchestra without a conductor. The music will not be harmonious without a conductor who integrates the efforts of individual musicians, getting them to play their respective parts at the same time – one who can bring in the strings and the tympani and then fade them out at the proper moment (Brown, 2006). This probes a question, would an original freethinker with executive dysfunction comply with the orchestra's conductor, even if there is one?

New understanding of unexpectedly favourable influence of ADHD on Pushkin's gifted mind lies in the common linkage that ADHD shares with creativity, as persons with attention deficit disorders tend to be highly creative and highly focused on topics that are intrinsically interesting to them (Fitzgerald, 2001), this trait is also known as a phenomenon of 'hyper-focus'. It is no surprise that many creative

people have ADHD (Fitzgerald, 2009), as when affected individuals follow through on their original ideas, they think more freely and imaginatively and the focused work-rate that ADHD produces enables creative genius to flourish. The recognised cognitive creative triad include (1) divergent thinking, (2) conceptual expansion and (3) overcoming constraints that are imposed by knowledge and silencing 'inner critic' thought process (White & Shah, 2020). The lack of inhibition control is well described in ADHD, but rather than deficit it serves as an inbuilt strength when it comes to creativity and freedom of expression.

III. A fragile genius: The signs of depression and immature personality

Pushkin composed poetry similar to the way Mozart composed music; by all accounts writing became his self-esteem regulator. He was known as a poet of genius, people were mesmerised by his verbal gymnastics, but he was also a wounded genius, in that the trepidations of his life like the vicissitude of the seasons had often brought to him a change in fortune. When gripped by depression, as he was more often in the latter years of his life, he referred to the influence of his low mood: "How sad I am, what anguish!" (Vitale, 1999, p. 109).

I have outlasted all desire,
 My dreams and I have grown apart;
 My grief alone is left entire,
 The gleanings of an empty heart.
 The storms of ruthless dispensation
 Have struck my flowery garland numb-
 I live in lonely desolation
 And wonder when my end will come...
 1821 (Pushkin, 1821)

Pushkin was linguistically a mature poet, but personality-wise, displayed an immaturity. His poems,

in particular, give a vivid portrait of a young man struggling with the big questions in life. "He felt life deeply, and he gave to it all his passion, all his genius. He approached it directly and fearlessly" (Simmons, 1922, p.5). With enemies he was merciless, displaying distant attitude and treating them with lethal rhetoric, with friends he was generous and tender.

Pushkin displayed financial extravagance, spending entirely irresponsibly and gambling way more than he could afford. Pushkin was known as a jealous and promiscuous man, a Don Juan of his time, and these personality traits have strong association with a destructive paranoia and delusions. It is not an unreasonable assumption to consider that Pushkin suffered from the Othello Syndrome, a psychiatric and neurological condition named after the character in Shakespeare's play that is marked by morbid, pathological, or delusional jealousy arising from perceived infidelity of a spouse. The descriptive term is used interchangeably with delusional or morbid jealousy, while neuro-anatomically Othello's Syndrome has recently been linked to the dysfunction of the frontal lobes, in particular to the right frontal lobe' localisation (Graff-Radford et al., 2012).

IV. His death wish and maternal deprivation hypothesis

Pushkin was known to be proud and courageous, but also hypersensitive and subject to rages with a known tendency of wanting to fight a duel at the drop of a hat. His countless duels point towards his compulsion to repeat, but the big question is, in his repetition - what was he acting-out or attempting to master? This we will never know. Pushkin paints the tragic picture of an individual experience as endless repetition in the *The Gypsies* (1824), the last of his "Southern Poems" (Pushkin, 1962). Was he trying to master his fear of death? Could have death symbolically represented the

highest form of sensation of novelty for Pushkin? Was he so caught up in his novelty seeking behaviour and so detached from reality in the days that preceded his death that he was not able to see beyond an intrigue? But could there be another explanation for Pushkin willingly embracing the duel as a passive suicide? While we may never be able to answer these questions with certainty, they allow us to focus more on the human factor of Pushkin's tragedy. "He was a man without a childhood" (Lotman, 1995), nowhere in Pushkin's poetry is there any reference to his mother and father. Pushkin's possible death wish could have been borne out of his depression, his loneliness and his early parental abandonment.

Pushkin's emotional vulnerability was related to his childhood. His mother who said to be scatty and spiteful woman with odd tendency to "irascibility and eternal absentmindedness" (Korff, 1887). made no secret of her preference for Pushkin's two siblings. Olga and Lev. It may be relevant that Pushkin's two other brothers died in 1807 and 1810, leaving his mother grieving and unavailable to him. It is also likely that Pushkin's unusual looks that resembled those of his maternal grandfather, triggered the childhood trauma in his mother who was victimized by her father's uncaring attitude towards her and his unpredictable whims (Feinstein, 1998, p. 14-15). Pushkin was known to be deprived from maternal affection; he was childlike around women and was always ready to receive womanly affection. In his poetry Pushkin romanticised the concept of the noble savage in his poem *Gypsies* where his character was yearning for a life in harmony with nature in a more simple, childlike and blessed existence (Pushkin, 1962). Pushkin's relationship with his mother was considered by all accounts to be complex and turbulent, but it seemed that he made peace with her later in life and forgave her when he sent her on her last journey.

What are the effects of fundamental absence of love? The effect of loss of the mother on the developing child had been considered by Freud and other

psychoanalysts, but it was John Bowlby's maternal deprivation hypothesis that revolutionized our thinking about a child's tie to the mother and its disruption through separation and deprivation (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby pointed towards long-term cognitive, social, and emotional difficulties for the child and originally believed the effects to be permanent and irreversible. Pushkin's yearning for an antidote in the form of caring and humanistic connection that fosters attachment and trust could be found in his endearing feelings towards his nanny Arena Rodionovna, described by him as "doting sweetheart of my childhood, companion of my austere fate" (Pushkin, 1826, translated by Pyman). Such trustful figures were sadly missing in his adult life, which may be critical to the likely manifestation of anaclitic-type depression in his later years.

Pushkin requested that he would be buried next to his mother and this could be significant in the light of his wish for an afterlife "reunion" with his mother who allegedly abandoned him. He succeeded to re-enact his unresolved original trauma in his final act of forever leaving humanity behind. Sadly, it would appear after the multiple duels, Pushkin may have unconsciously been in a greater hurry during his life to be with his dead mother, or away from his troubled life? There is a true sense of finality that is evident in his later published poetry. Many perceive his 'Exegi Monument' below as a requiem, as a suicidal note or a tomb stone that he erected on his own grave, it represents Pushkin's imitation of Horace's Ode 3.30 (Horace, 1882), or, rather more directly, Pushkin's take on Derzhavin's earlier imitation of Horace's Ode.

I have erected a monument to myself
 Not built by hands; the track of it, though trodden
 By the people, shall not become overgrown,
 And it stands higher than Alexander's column.
 I shall not wholly die. In my sacred lyre
 My soul shall outlive my dust and escape corruption-
 And I shall be famed so long as underneath
 The moon a single poet remains alive...

And to the people long shall I be dear
 Because kind feelings did my lyre extol,
 Invoking freedom in an age of fear,
 And mercy for the broken soul...
 (Pushkin, *Exegi Monumentum*, 1836)

Epilogue

As we look at Alexander Pushkin's life with all its frivolity, "we see a generosity of spirit which is far removed from the calculations of the evil". "He opposed evil, but he never preached a crusade against it. In him there is nothing of Christian humility, mysticism, or nihilism. The brotherhood of man would have appealed to Pushkin, if he had thought about it at all, as an excellent subject for a satiric poem" (Simmons, 1922, p.5).

We have seen in what preceded a parallelism between Pushkin's psychological and creative evolution. His way of writing was a result of a synthesis of intellectual premise, his unflagging industriousness and instinctive creation, but the end product of his work was even more. It was deeper rooted in a vital sphere of his whole being, biologically founded and interwoven in his whole existence, his whole *vitae*, his conflicts, contradictions and his unhappiness. His symptoms are understandable in psychological terms and their trajectories have their origins in life events and situations that were deemed traumatic to his sensitive personality. Pushkin sought resolution for his symptoms in his poetry, his love life and his passions. In Pushkin's case, the riddle of his genius prompted us to examine the nature of moral creativity. Exiled for his political poems, Pushkin oppressed dogma and tyranny by staying true to his words and beliefs, and he paid high price for his principles and determination. Literary genius also constitutes the domain of freedom because literature reveals different aspects of moral truth by symbolising the words we can't say out loud. The perceived seditiousness of Pushkin's writings and his lifelong battle against

ensorship, made him a target for the watchful eye of the government, placing further pressure on a poet who was profoundly at odds not only with his society but also with himself. A man and a poet, Pushkin "knew both weakness and greatness, but his genius towered triumphantly above everything that was small and mean in his nature" (Simmons, 1922, p 6), here, we must not overlook another important ingredient in Pushkin's 'recipe' for greatness, it's his courage, honesty ('the truth of the tale') and above all, his sincerity – saying the unsayable on our behalf without judgement or moral pathos or vanity. We've come full circle; this winning combination of Pushkin's human qualities gives new meaning to the opening quote by Salman Rushdie.

While we had gone to the great length in our "deeply phenomenological" (Gruber, 1980) case study and hypothesised about Pushkin's diagnosis from the position of knowledge and new scientific discoveries on why prominent creative figures pay emotional costs for their greatness, Pushkin simply protected his legacy by his spoken word that stood the test of time "in splendid insubmissive height" (Pushkin, *Exegi Monumentum*, 1836); and he did it in style, with irony and suspense.

Befittingly, we would like to conclude with an excerpt from Pushkin's poetic short drama "Mozart and Salieri" that gave an inspiration for Peter Shaffer's "Amadeus" (Shaffer, 1980). Pushkin agreed to write this drama if he lived long enough, as it was known to him that Raphael, Mozart and Byron died by the age of 37. The structure of the "Little Tragedies" was designed with one fundamental element in play, as not to distract attention from the plot of the story that revolves around the fateful choice of a central figure. In the case of "Mozart and Salieri", the drama is about a man in black who requests his own requiem and disappears without a trace, yet continues to haunt the composer.

Pushkin's wit and intelligence shines in this exert below (Pushkin, 1830, translated by Shaw, p.11), which highlights an intriguing juxtaposition in Salieri and supports one of the main principals that Pushkin embodied himself, that villainy and genius can't co-exist together.

Mozart

Besides, he was a genius,
Like you and me. And genius and villainy
Are two things incompatible, aren't they?

Salieri

You think so?
(Pours the poison into Mozart's glass)

Financial support & sponsorship

None.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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