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Under the Sky of My Africa

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN AND BLACKNESS

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The Pushkin of *Opportunity* in the Harlem Renaissance

THE SECOND AND THIRD DECADES of the twentieth century, when “white writers ignored the race question more than at any other time in American history,” marked a vibrant blossoming of African American literature as writers of African descent countered racism with concerted efforts to establish a distinct cultural identity.¹ On the basis of his African blood, Pushkin was drawn into the struggle to overturn prevalent notions about race and to raise African American consciousness. A century after his death, the greatest poet of the Golden Age of Russian literature became part of the cultural ferment of the heady American movement that came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance.

My purpose in this essay is not to rehearse Pushkin’s genealogy, which has already attracted considerable scholarly attention. I will consider instead the significance that this genealogy assumed first for Pushkin himself and subsequently for African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance, when he was introduced to a wide African American reading public, held up as a model for aspiring writers, and invoked to challenge Eurocentric notions of African cultural inferiority. Of interest to us here are the points of similarity that African American writers discerned between their own project and Pushkin’s achievements as we consider what the Russian poet came to signify in the context of the cultural agenda promoted by leading figures of the movement. Naturally, I cannot presume to exhaust the rich topic I introduce here of Pushkin’s role in the Harlem Renaissance. I will therefore base my discussion primarily on Pushkin’s introduction into this fertile cultural terrain as it was accomplished in the pages of *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, a publication that more than any other of its time was dedicated to promoting African American letters.

Because “the Renaissance largely accepted that poetic form was inherently linked to social identity,” it was not Pushkin’s verse, but the fact of Pushkin himself that was of greatest relevance to the movement.² Although

there was naturally an interest in his writings, the potential for African American enablement was seen primarily in Pushkin’s own biography and in the stories that he recorded of his African ancestors. Crucial too was Pushkin’s stature—the fact that a writer of African blood wrote poetry of genius and was hailed as the progenitor of the great tradition of Russian letters.

It is important to understand that Pushkin became an appealing model for African Americans not simply because he had African blood in his veins, but, more important, on the strength of how he himself related to this fact of his genealogy, and the possibilities for self-affirmation he derived from it. The connections that the African American intelligentsia of the Harlem Renaissance established with Pushkin went beyond race and extended, significantly, to the social and political climate in which the Russian poet wrote. Pushkin’s attachment to the program of the Harlem Renaissance in general and to *Opportunity* in particular was thus doubly motivated: the poet’s own highly positive attitude to his African heritage combined productively with what African Americans perceived as significant parallels between his circumstances and their own.

Because our grasp of how Pushkin was regarded by African Americans depends on understanding how he himself related to his ancestry, I will begin by looking at the cultural and historical context in which Pushkin himself shaped the African image that was carried forward into the Harlem Renaissance. This material permits us to recognize those points of similarity that were perceived and elaborated by intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance between their own situation and Pushkin’s. It shows us, too, incidentally, the extent to which assumptions about African character traits held in Pushkin’s time were still intact a full century later in the United States. Pushkin’s invocations of his African heritage in literary affirmations of his own individual creative freedom help us to appreciate the profound appropriateness of the seemingly improbable coalition of the Russian Golden Age poet and aspiring African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance. As we study the meaning Pushkin assigned his African blood, we are alerted to the remarkable continuity in the spirit in which he invoked his African forebears and the spirit in which he was in turn invoked by African American writers. Here we observe the integrity of creative discourse that points beyond questions of race and nationality to the essential question of what the creative individual can do to oppose large-scale oppression.

In an article which is reprinted in this volume, J. Thomas Shaw observes that Pushkin does not devote any single work exclusively to his African ancestry, and that he inevitably embeds his references to Africa in broader contexts.³ We can deduce from this fact that of paramount concern to Pushkin is not his lineage in and of itself, but rather what this lineage can be made to signify in the broader cultural, social, and political milieu in which he writes. Of

primary significance, in other words, is not what Pushkin tells us about his African ancestry, but what he needs to say about himself when he invokes it. Along the same lines, of particular interest is not what African American writers tell us about Pushkin, but what the image they create of the Russian poet reflects of their own agenda.

We can begin by recalling that Pushkin's stance toward his African forebears developed in a sociopolitical setting that was sensitized to the plight of Africans enslaved in the United States. Pushkin's liberal contemporaries took considerable interest in the question of slavery. Indeed, the topic of *Negr v nevole* ("the Negro in bondage") attracted the attention of Russian writers of the 1820s and 1830s and became a popular theme in the press. The Russian image of the American slave was colored by Shakespeare's *Othello*, which highlighted the intrinsic merits of the Moor, but also his ungoverned passions. It derived primarily, however, from French sources that bore the distinct mark of Rousseau's ideas about the "noble savage." French accounts generally emphasized the exotic nature of the race and described the idyllic setting from which it sprang. At the same time they focused on the harsh oppression of sensitive, freedom-loving Africans by narrow, greedy whites who were for the most part inferior by nature to those unfortunates they enslaved. Uncorrupted by Western civilization, free from its prejudices and narrow social strictures was a being more honest, more loyal, and more passionate than the civilized European.⁴ Pushkin's descriptions of his African ancestry, like his African self-representations, are based on precisely such representations. At the same time they engage the politicized image of the American slave that was important to liberals of his time.

As a relative newcomer to the European cultural scene, Russia was naturally inclined to see a kindred spirit in the even newer United States of America. The marginal place accorded the two nations in a Eurocentric world presupposed a certain similarity of outlook and suggested a broad variety of social and cultural parallels between them. Russian liberals who chafed under autocratic rule were especially enthusiastic about the Constitution of the United States, which, although forbidden by the tsarist censorship, was widely circulated. At the same time, these liberals directed intense opprobrium at the institution of slavery, which betrayed those democratic ideals the Constitution espoused. On the strength of the readily drawn parallel between slavery in the United States and serfdom in Russia, American slavery entered the Russian Aesopic vocabulary, providing a convenient vehicle for slipping criticism of serfdom into the press.

Like his liberal contemporaries, Pushkin too took considerable interest in America and the question of slavery. Familiar with accounts that appeared regularly in the Russian press of the time, Pushkin was also personally acquainted with P. I. Poletika, secretary of the Russian mission in Philadelphia

from 1809 until 1811, ambassador from 1817 to 1822, and author of "The State of the Society in the United American States" ("Sostoianie obshchestva v soedinennykh amerikanskikh oblastiakh"), which appeared in the *Literary Gazette* (*Literaturnaia gazeta*) in 1830.⁵ Pushkin spoke highly of Chateaubriand's writings on America, read James Fenimore Cooper avidly, and was especially enthusiastic about de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, the first two volumes of which appeared in Pushkin's lifetime. Pushkin seems to have been especially interested in the question of slavery, for he cut only the opening forty-five pages of the first volume of de Tocqueville's study in which the structure of the government is described, but all of the pages of the second volume, which is devoted to the institution of slavery.⁶ Pushkin also appears to have read the now-forgotten, but then-popular *Marie, or l'Esclavage aux États-Unis, tableau de moeurs Américaines*, which was written by de Tocqueville's traveling companion Gustave de Beaumont. *Marie, or Slavery in the United States, a Novel of Jacksonian America*, as the English version was entitled, is a fictional work augmented with an appendix of the author's sociological observations. Both parts of the work focus almost exclusively on the plight of the African in American society. Examples of deep-seated racial intolerance abound in the appendix, while the recurring motif in the novel itself is the African blood that at significant junctures of Marie's life stands tragically in the way of her self-fulfillment. Central to the novel are the adamant refusals of Marie and her brother to disclaim their African heritage, although neither looks African and could easily pass for white. This loyalty to their bloodline invests Marie and her brother with personal dignity. It serves as a sign of an innate nobility which Beaumont's characters are not prepared to surrender for personal gain. Their staunch loyalty to their own selves stands in sharp contrast to the mercantilism of the surrounding world. Pushkin, as we will see, draws on just such an opposition between innate nobility and a willingness to sell out in order to reorient the concept of slavery from its literal sense to a metaphoric one. His own pride in his African ancestry and his public avowals of his African blood became exemplary for aspiring African American writers. We have only to recall Athol Fugard's play *The Blood-Knot* to appreciate the crucial role a minority individual's racial self-affirmation plays in the resistance to pressures from a dominant culture and to realize the extent to which this theme, in endless variations, remains relevant in our own times.

Pushkin absorbed representations of the African that were current in his day into the images he shaped of his maternal great-grandfather Abram Gannibal and into what he construed to be his own inherited African characteristics. Popular conceptions abundantly perpetuated by the current press fleshed out the material he gleaned from family archives and figured also in the poet's creation of a self-image. Thus, for example, in his 1820 poem "To Yur'ev" ("Yur'evu"), Pushkin speaks of his physical unattractiveness and pas-

sionate sensuality, while in "To Dawe, Esq." (1828) he insists that his *arapskii* ("Negro") profile makes him unsuitable for sketching.

Pushkin was fully aware that the situation of the American slave was in many ways comparable to that of the Russian serf, and M. Eremin's contention that the criticism of America in the opening of Pushkin's essay "John Tanner" ("Dzhon Tenner") implicitly extended to Russia is certainly plausible.⁷ For Pushkin, however, this sociopolitical issue took on an additional, intensely experienced personal dimension. The poet was quick to recognize that the questions of liberty and bondage that centered on the oppressed Russian serf and the abject American slave applied with compelling immediacy to the frustrating, arbitrary, and demeaning restrictions to which he himself was subjected. He saw too the analogical possibilities that the theme of slavery afforded him for registering protest against his own situation. Thus, for example, in a letter he wrote to his friend and fellow poet Petr Viazemsky from Odessa in June 1824, Pushkin hinted darkly at his own situation when he compared the plight of the Greeks with the oppression of "my Negro brothers" (*moia brat'ia negrov*) in America and added, "we can wish both sides liberation from insufferable slavery" (*mozhno i tem i drugim zhelat' osvobozhdeniia ot rabstva nesterpimogo*; PSS 12:157).

If for his liberal contemporaries the institution of slavery furnished an Aesopic vocabulary to criticize Russian serfdom, for Pushkin it became an Aesopic language for protesting his own treatment by the tsarist regime. Combined, the two conventional aspects of the American slave—the noble savage of Rousseau's philosophy and the political emblem of Russian liberals—provided him with the means to register his own defiance of the limitations placed on his personal liberty. "His" Africa, as he refers to it in canto 50 of the first chapter of *Eugene Onegin*, became a hospitable destination for voyages of the imagination, a genealogically motivated escape route from the cold, hostile climate of Russia beyond whose borders he was never granted permission to travel. A subversive analogy suggested an underlying similarity between the unjust treatment to which Africans were subjected in America and those barbarous limitations to personal liberty Pushkin himself endured in what he increasingly felt to be his Russian captivity. The Africa of his ancestor emerged as a complex metaphor that conveyed Pushkin's own sense of bondage and alienation, offered him the chance to criticize his oppressors, and embodied the intense longing for escape that fueled much of his creativity.

When the opening chapter of *Eugene Onegin* came out in separate publication in 1825, Pushkin supplied the mention of "his" African skies in canto 50 with an extensive explanatory note that chronicled his maternal great-grandfather's extraordinary life from the time of his abduction from the shores of his native land at the age of eight to his death in his mid-eighties in Russia in the year 1781. Pushkin wrote the stanza in question in the autumn of 1823,

when he was in exile in Odessa, and penned the note to it the following year at his Mikhailovskoe estate to which he was banished in 1824, having been dismissed from the service.⁸ The ostensible function of the note is to supply concrete historical data from sources unavailable to the general public. Yet the note does considerably more, for with his thumbnail sketch of his maternal great-grandfather Abram Gannibal, Pushkin smuggles subversive criticism of the ruling tsar past his censors.

It is appropriate that Pushkin should recollect his African ancestor during his own exile at Mikhailovskoe. The estate had belonged to his African forebear, and descendants of his who could provide Pushkin with invaluable source material still lived in the area.⁹ The information Pushkin supplies in his note to *Onegin* about his great-grandfather is highly suggestive when considered in the specific context of his own uncomfortable political situation. By juxtaposing the era of Peter the Great with his own times, Pushkin creates a highly advantageous parallel between himself and Gannibal and at the same time presents Alexander I—who could not but fare poorly in juxtaposition with his august predecessor—in a particularly bad light. Peter the Great is shown to appreciate, cultivate, reward, honor, and befriend his African subject, in implicit contradistinction to the sovereign of Pushkin's own time, who suspiciously regards the descendant of the illustrious African as an insidious, unruly subject in need of restraint.¹⁰

Shaw remarks on the parallel that Pushkin suggests between his own creative activity and his great-grandfather's unauthorized return from Siberian exile: "In the *Onegin* passage in verse, Pushkin, utilizing a 'poetic flight' of the imagination, is hinting at voluntarily breaking that kind of exile in order to flee to 'my Africa.'"¹¹ This is a daring gesture, to be sure, but Pushkin does more here than hint at breaking his exile. He indicates the essential unlawfulness of the restraint imposed on him and asserts that the loyalty of a subject must be earned and not simply commanded. On the strength of his own creative integrity—an analogue of his great-grandfather's personal integrity—Pushkin eludes the confinement imposed on him by what he implies to be an unlawful political order and suggests a longing not only for Africa but also for a monarch who could value him, who could win his loyalty, and against whom there would be no cause to rebel.

In "To Yazykov" ("Yazykovu"), another poem written during his Mikhailovskoe exile, Pushkin similarly invokes his great-grandfather in protest at his own situation. The message he addresses to his fellow poet delineates the fundamentals of unfreedom and suggests that it is the monarch who makes the slave. Thus Pushkin's African great-grandfather who is a *pitomets* (foster child) to Peter the Great is regarded as but a *rab liubimyi* (favored slave) by the unnamed monarchs who follow Peter. In the period after Peter's reign—a debilitating period of problematic successions—the famous

ward of the great tsar is exiled, rendered useless, and forgotten. Like his gifted African ancestor in post-Petrine times, so too Pushkin in the time of Alexander I finds himself at the mercy of autocratic whim which transforms potentially loyal and worthy subjects into threatening slaves. By means of the connection he establishes between himself and his great-grandfather, Pushkin condemns the arbitrary rule that debases both those who wield it and those who are subject to it. At the same time, the ties Pushkin establishes with Gannibal enable him to proclaim his freedom from the here and now and to shake off the restrictions imposed on him by the authorities as the Africa of his ancestor is once again aligned with the creative imagination—the warmer, more hospitable elsewhere well beyond the reach of tsarist police that is the poet's rightful home. "His" African homeland hearkens back to an ideal state that antedates enslavement and which, although no longer accessible literally, becomes the destination of metaphysical poetic flight. Realized in Pushkin's African references is the liberating force of individual creativity—both as it is enacted in the process of writing and as it remains encoded in his verse.

Pushkin repeatedly engages his African forebears in self-presentations that challenge the authorities and assert his personal and creative independence, as he draws on Gannibal to generate statements that throw his own political difficulties into relief and point more broadly to the larger problem of asserting personal liberty within an inimical setting. Yet even as Pushkin synchronizes Gannibal's past with his own present to generate his self-assertive statements, he opens himself to scurrilous attack. Neither the sympathy that the plight of the American slave aroused among liberal nobles nor the nobility acceded the "savage" in accord with Rousseau could eradicate completely the contempt aroused by the demeaning social status of slave. Pushkin was referred to as "*afrikanets*" by friends and enemies alike, but the latter gave a pejorative twist to this distinctive feature of his genealogy, using it to barb epigrams and satires directed against him. Pushkin, who, as we have seen, had recourse to metaphorical manifestations of freedom, responded with a redefinition of enslavement, one that moved the concept from the concrete world into the ethical. From this perspective he maintained that literal bondage denigrated the enslaver, not the enslaved, and that it was the slave mentality that was despicable and not the state of being held captive against one's will. In a five-stanza "Post Scriptum" appended to "My Genealogy" ("Moia rodoslovnaia"), Pushkin replies to a scurrilous squib in which Faddei Bulgarin—in transparent reference to Pushkin's ancestry—writes of a slave purchased for a bottle of rum. Turning the tables on his would-be detractor, Pushkin asserts that although his African forebear was indeed *kuplennyi* ("purchased"), he proved to be *nepodkupen* ("incorruptible"). It is one thing to be sold, but another to sell out.

Pushkin composed *The Blackamoor of Peter the Great* (*Arap Petra Ve-*

likogo), a fictional tale based on his maternal great-grandfather, in 1827. It is no coincidence that he wrote "The Poet and the Mob" ("Poet i tolpa") in the same year, for this lyric emphatically connects slavery not with imposed bondage, but with a state of mind. The definition of slavery that emerges in this poem hinges on a complacent, narrow-minded rootedness in the here and now, opposed to which is the genuine freedom of poetic inspiration that we have seen Pushkin align repeatedly with his African ancestry. Enslaved by exclusively pragmatic concerns (*rab nuzhdy, zabor*—"slave to need and cares"), the *chern* ("mob") remains insensible to the poet's creative flights of imagination and demands that he use his lyre for concrete ends. The mob that the poet confronts here remains complacent in its mercantilism and pragmatism, forms of slavery that Pushkin attributes directly to the absence of imaginative faculties. Pushkin's conviction that the creative imagination remains the most powerful manifestation of genuine freedom was reaffirmed in "The Poet and the Mob" and continued to inform his writings as ever more constraints closed in around him.

Lest Pushkin's interjection of a personal, poetic dimension into the large and troubling issue of human bondage seem self-centered or frivolous, we must remember that Pushkin's public insistence on his African blood specifically in connection with his assertions of individual creative freedom became a compelling source of enablement—one on which African Americans drew during the Harlem Renaissance and in which they continue to engage to the present day.¹² A century after Pushkin referred to "my Negro brothers" in his letter to Viazemsky, his fraternity with disenfranchised African Americans was fully realized when, on the strength of his distinctive genealogy, the Russian poet became a participant in the Harlem Renaissance, a heady cultural movement that, in the words of one historian, "succeeded in laying the foundation for all subsequent depictions in poetry, fiction, and drama of the modern African American experience."¹³ What I have said thus far of the meaning Pushkin himself attached to his African heritage has prepared us to recognize the profound appropriateness of this seemingly improbable coalition. In the struggle that the African American intelligentsia launched in the face of ignominious constraints, we find an alignment of the creative imagination with the exercise of individual freedom and the assertion of personal dignity that is fully in keeping with Pushkin's philosophy. In the literary endeavors of African American writers of this period we find a complex interrelation of culture, politics, and racial identity that accords well with the dynamics of Pushkin's projections of an African self-image.

Like any significant cultural phenomenon, the Harlem Renaissance was too complex and diverse to lend itself to strict, exhaustive definition. Cary Wintz describes it as "basically a psychology—a state of mind or an attitude—shared by a number of black writers and intellectuals who centered their ac-

tivities around Harlem in the late 1920s and early 1930s.” “There was no common bond,” he explains, “of political or racial ideology, personal experience, background, or literary philosophy that united the various elements in the Renaissance. What they held in common was a sense of community, a feeling that they were all part of the same endeavor.”¹⁴ The cultural—rather than sociological or political—bias of the movement privileged individual self-expression over adherence to a particular ideology. The fruits of this self-expressivity were folded into a two-pronged plan designed to bolster confidence in and respect for the creative capacities of the African American individual and to create an overarching sense of cultural unity among the distinctive voices it encouraged.

It was not until the Harlem Renaissance that African American readers gained familiarity with Pushkin’s life and work, but the poet had already been invoked in African American circles well before that movement.¹⁵ Already in 1849, the anthology *Wheatley, Banneker, Horton*, which, in the words of Henry Louis Gates Jr., “sought to refute intellectual racism by the act of canon formation,” noted Pushkin’s achievements—together with those of Placido and Augustine—as part of an African tradition and thus also of the African American heritage.¹⁶ Such multiculturalism became an important facet of the African American identity that was developed over the course of the Harlem Renaissance. Torn forcibly from their roots, African Americans needed to establish themselves in their present surroundings and yet also to connect with their origins and the African diaspora. At the same time, they sought not simply passive acceptance in a rapidly changing American culture, but an active role in its development. To this end, much attention was devoted to the language of African American self-expression and to the evolving cultural identity of the United States in general and of the African American writer in particular. It was thus highly relevant to the African American cause that Pushkin was credited with developing both a literary language and a cultural identity for Russia. Indeed, the fact that a writer of African descent had played a crucial role in establishing a Russian literary tradition provided an example of the fruitful assimilation of African roots into national identity. It is scarcely surprising in our increasingly multicultural world that the question of such assimilation remains central and that Pushkin continues to be of interest to African scholars in precisely this regard. Thus, for example, Molefi Kete Asante, writing on the bicentennial of Pushkin’s birth, explains:

I am interested in him as a Russian of mixed heritage, African and European, who activated an entire nation with the eloquence of his poetry as in *Eugene Onegin* and other lyrical works. This is not merely a biological interest, but a cultural one inasmuch as Pushkin was evidently visibly of African descent. Nevertheless, he captured Russian sentiments and myths and created the most fundamental literature of his age.¹⁷

Although shared African blood was the point of origin for African American interest in Pushkin, this interest soon led beyond questions of racial origin to the broader social, cultural, and political contexts in which African American identity was to be defined. It was not only because Pushkin had African blood, but because he championed individual freedom in a socially and politically inimical climate that he became important. I have noted already that within a Eurocentric context Russia and the United States saw their marginal status as a common bond. For the African American, the affinity with Russia was clearly focused: “The tsarist Russian and American black intelligentsia have also shared an intense sense of alienation, because they compare their respective societies to others considered more advanced and free.”¹⁸ The similarities between American slavery and Russian serfdom were obvious, but for the Harlem Renaissance, a movement spearheaded by a group of intellectuals, another resemblance suggested itself: “Black American intellectuals can instinctively relate to the plight of the Russian intelligentsia in so many of its facets. There is a direct parallel in DuBois’s notion of the ‘talented tenth,’ and in the need to speak for and raise up a largely rural, uneducated mass population.”¹⁹ The responsibility that the elite ought rightly to assume for the less fortunate was projected onto Pushkin, making him a champion of the oppressed masses. The poet’s well-documented calls for personal freedom were seen to apply, by extension, to disenfranchised social orders. In the 1920s and 1930s, this image—and I will have more to say on this subject—was actively promoted by Soviet propaganda targeted specifically at African Americans.

In the early stages of the Harlem Renaissance, Pushkin was still relatively little known in the United States, and the African American community was in the vanguard of his discoverers. The review of Ernest J. Simmons’s biography of the Russian poet in the April edition of the *Journal of Negro History* in 1937, the centennial of Pushkin’s death, noted the paucity both of works about Pushkin and of translations of his poetry then available to the English-speaking public. By this time, however, the Russian poet figured importantly in the pages of *Opportunity*. In the remainder of this essay I will consider specific representations of Pushkin that appeared in this important journal, in order to provide concrete examples of his engagement in the broad areas I have delineated thus far.

Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life, as it was titled in full, was published continuously from January 1923 through the winter of 1949. It was the official organ of the National Urban League, an interracial organization devoted to improving the condition of urban African Americans. The two closely interrelated meanings carried by the motto of *Opportunity*, which read “not alms but opportunity,” captured the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance. To begin with, it indicated that African Americans were to take an active role in

creating their own opportunities and making responsible use of them. Second, it suggested that members of this sector of American society had something of value to contribute to the culture by which they had been marginalized. The journal was thus to be seen as offering opportunity not only for developing African American writers, but also for the developing culture of the United States. The point was to draw on individual creativity in order to raise African American consciousness—individual and collective—and in so doing to challenge prevalent notions about race that upheld the segregation of Americans of African descent.

The editor of *Opportunity* for the crucial five and a half years of its Harlem Renaissance period was the World War I veteran Charles S. Johnson, the chief promoter of the Renaissance who is credited by Langston Hughes with having done “more to encourage and develop Negro writers during the 1920s than anyone else in America.”²⁰ There had been but little African American fiction and poetry in print before the Harlem Renaissance, and Johnson made it his mission to rectify this situation. The significance of literature to the African American cause was widely recognized by prominent figures who came to be associated with the Renaissance. Like James Weldon Johnson, who maintained that “no race can ever become great that has not produced a literature,”²¹ so too, Charles S. Johnson insisted that a flourishing African American cultural movement was “an effective means of combating racism and advancing the political objectives of the black race.”²² Nor did the importance of the material side of the enterprise escape him. As the poet Arna Bontemps summarizes, Johnson “promptly detected a relationship between artistic labors and the doctrine of useful, gainful employment as built into the aims of the Urban League.”²³ Accordingly, Johnson devoted considerable energy to stimulating a much-needed market for the new literature and to serving as a liaison between African American writers and white publishers. It was to this end that Johnson instituted a series of literary contests and banquets that became a moving force on the Harlem literary scene, launching the careers of young writers and drawing the high quality of their achievements to the attention of the public. His purpose in establishing the contests was not to stimulate propaganda or protest, but to foster serious literature that would develop increased awareness of African American life and the creative potential of African Americans.

At the same time, Johnson sought “to bring these writers into contact with the general world of letters to which they have been for the most part timid and inarticulate strangers.”²⁴ It is specifically in this vital area that Pushkin was invoked. The Russian poet was a highly appropriate model in two ways. To begin with, as a writer of African descent who was credited with shaping Russian cultural identity, Pushkin demonstrated the feasibility of the larger cultural agenda of the Harlem Renaissance. At the same time, the fact that his

personal biography included public avowals of African blood and a struggle for personal freedom made him an ideal model for individual writers. It was thus fitting that Pushkin’s name should be invoked both to stimulate African American creativity and to bring it to the attention of a wide reading public.

In 1925 *Opportunity* sponsored a round of literary contests with precisely these ends in mind. The enterprise was hailed as a tremendous success: “It marked, rather dramatically, the awakening of artistic effort among the newer Negroes,” announced *Opportunity*, adding, “The world is hearing more of this sector of American life than it ever thought existed.”²⁵ One of the judges of the 1925 contests was the white novelist Edna Worthley Underwood, a prolific translator who was instrumental in bringing a sizable body of world literature to an English-speaking public and who did much to introduce Pushkin to the readers of *Opportunity*. Her enthusiastic assessment of the entries she judged led her to speak of “the entrance into the domain of art of a new race, differently dowered, but with something we can not well do without. In the future we must learn to look—more and more—to the black races for art, because joy—its mainspring—is dying so rapidly now in the Great Caucasian Race.”²⁶ Though it was not without its problems, the idea that an anemic American culture could be revitalized by an infusion of African blood suggested new possibilities to many cultural leaders.

In light of the success of the contests—for *Opportunity* received no fewer than 800 entries “from nearly every state in the union”²⁷—Casper Holstein, resident of New York and president of the Virgin Islands Congressional Council, pledged funds to expand and continue such literary competitions. The announcement of his pledge underscored the twofold mission of the journal to encourage individual writers and to make a cultural statement to the surrounding world:

Encouraged by the remarkable record of these young writers in their first impassioned effort at self expression, Mr. Casper Holstein . . . has exactly doubled his original gift, making possible an increase in the awards and further funds for reaching an even greater number of writers. This is a faith and service deserving of more than casual appreciation. A Negro who is by no means a millionaire has faith enough in the future of his own developing race to give of his means to encourage it.²⁸

Among the additional categories Holstein’s largesse made possible was the Alexander Pushkin Poetry Prize. The terms in which this category is announced leave no doubt as to the high esteem in which the Russian poet was held: “This section is expected to call forth the most ambitious and most mature work of the Negro poet, and it is requested that to this section only the best work be sent.”²⁹

It was perhaps no coincidence that the October 1925 issue of *Opportunity* that announced the Pushkin Poetry Prize also carried "The light of day grew pale and paler—died," Edna Worthley Underwood's excellent translation of Pushkin's lyric "Pogaslo dnevnnoe svetilo." Thematically this lyric was very much in harmony with the journal's efforts to encourage aspiring African American writers. The romantic elsewhere of poetic inspiration for which the persona of the poem longs is closely identified with the distant shores of what might easily be read as Pushkin's African homeland. Implicit in this identification is that rather than impede his self-expression, Pushkin's African blood enables it. Indeed, as was repeatedly suggested, Pushkin was a genius of universal stature not in spite of his African lineage, but because of it. It was the breadth he gained from the conjunction of African blood and Russian nationality that made Pushkin truly great. Thus, by implication, African Americans similarly stood to gain much from the confluence of their African heritage and their American nationality.

When the Pushkin Prize was first announced in October 1925, the Russian poet's name was already familiar to readers of *Opportunity*. The February 1924 issue had carried a biographical sketch of the poet Alexis Sergiewitch Pushkin (sic) written by Edna Worthley Underwood, whose translation of *Arap Petra Velikogo*, "The Negro of Peter the Great," was published serially in the February, March, and April issues of that year. Underwood records Pushkin's genealogy at the opening of her biographical sketch without placing particular emphasis on it. The portrait of Pushkin that was published next to Underwood's biographical sketch is one in which Pushkin looks far less "African" than those we are accustomed to seeing. This rather low-key treatment of Pushkin's racial profile was in keeping with the overall program of the Harlem Renaissance, which sought to achieve what George E. Kent describes as "a dissociation of sensibility from that enforced by American culture and its institutions," but to do so without lapsing into the propaganda and self-isolationism against which Charles S. Johnson repeatedly cautioned.³⁰ The Pushkin that Underwood presented to readers of *Opportunity* was a genius who could not be contained by racial or national boundaries. This was a writer who asserted himself as an individual in an inimical political environment and amongst what Underwood describes as the "dissipated and frivolous courtiers, who looked down with something of contempt upon his poet's calling and who were unable rightly to estimate his intellectual worth."³¹ In the context of the Harlem Renaissance, this vivid example of a gifted individual faring badly at the hands of a distinctly inferior group urged aspiring African American writers to look beyond their immediate detractors with self-assurance as they worked to realize their own potential. Such agency is further promoted in the suggestion that Pushkin was largely self-taught. Underwood devotes considerable attention to the remarkable breadth of

influences that Pushkin absorbed: his famous Russian nanny, Voltaire, Rousseau, the French Encyclopedists he "devoured" at the age of nine in his grandfather's library, Byron, Goethe, and Shakespeare.

Although Underwood notes Pushkin's difficulties with the authorities, she chooses to focus on the benefits that he was able to derive from his enforced banishment to Mikhailovskoe. "The two years of enforced solitude spent here," she writes, "had a salutary influence upon his excitable and stormy nature, taught him in some measure, self-control, which he greatly needed, and helped to ripen and perfect his genius."³² In the detail of the poet's "excitable and stormy nature" we recognize an "African" trait that was first broadcast in Shakespeare's *Othello* and that subsequently remained a constant of African stereotypes.³³ The Pushkin who emerges from Underwood's account is a Russian writer of world stature who has African blood, who freely assimilates a broad variety of national cultures, and who, far from succumbing to harsh treatment, turns to good stead the regrettable limitations imposed on him by the tsarist government. And this portrait is in full harmony with the cultural program of the Harlem Renaissance that neither segregates aspiring African American writers from world literature by focusing exclusively on race nor limits the form of their self-expression to tirades against the limitations imposed on them by American society.

Underwood's biographical sketch introduces Pushkin's own account of his African ancestry in the prose piece Underwood translates as "The Negro of Peter the Great." In this historical romance, Underwood explains, "it was Pushkin's intention to tell the true life story of his great-grandfather, the Abyssinian Negro who, by his bravery and fine intelligence, won the favor of Russia's cruel and capricious ruler."³⁴ The October 1923 issue of the *Journal of Negro History* had already carried Albert Parry's article "Abram Hannibal, the Favorite of Peter the Great," which, as its title suggests, was devoted to Pushkin's remarkable ancestor.³⁵ Chronicled in this essay is the life of a man who began, as Parry summarizes, "under yoke in Africa but died a general and wealthy landlord of the frozen North, leaving his children and grandchildren to be prominent in the politics and literature of Russia."³⁶ Like Parry's essay on Gannibal, so too, Underwood's biographical sketch of Pushkin urges not the overthrow of a sociopolitical system, but rather the individual creative self-affirmation that can overcome the limitations imposed by that system. It insists too on the self-mastery and self-fulfillment that are necessary to such an enterprise.

Underwood's translation of "The Negro of Peter the Great" brought to the readership of *Opportunity* the text that Parry recommended as the best source available on Gannibal. That this text was a fictionalized account of Gannibal's life mattered less than the fact that it presented a rags-to-riches story of a historical figure who had much to offer African American readers.

The “Ibragim” of Pushkin’s narrative exemplifies native intelligence, integrity, and diligence—qualities that win him a place of honor in the Russian court and in the heart of Russia’s formidable ruler. His deep-seated sense of honor and duty and his loyalty to the tsar are seen in everything he does. For his part, the “cruel and capricious” autocrat rightly earns this loyalty precisely because he denies Ibragim neither the freedom nor the opportunity to develop his innate capacities. With this model of mutual respect between the Caucasian ruler and his African subject, Pushkin, as we have seen, projected his own ideal of individual liberty and the ideal state. In Pushkin’s representation, the sterling qualities of his ancestor are only one half of the equation. The responsibility for supplying the second half falls squarely on others who must prove capable of perceiving his gifts. (We have seen already that Pushkin applies this equation also to the poet and the milieu in which his work is received.) In *The Blackamoor of Peter the Great* only Peter—and this is what makes him truly great—is capable of appreciating Ibragim fully. Ibragim, for all his innate gifts and unprecedented rise to glory, experiences also the alienation of an African in a white society, for there are few like Peter the Great who rise above prejudice to recognize his exceptional personal qualities.

Ibragim’s story, like Pushkin’s own identification with his African forebear, carried, as we have seen, considerable political significance in the Russia of Nicholas I. In the context of a segregated American society, the life of Gannibal resonated once again and with particular urgency. Both the larger cultural context of the Harlem Renaissance and the more immediate context created by Underwood’s introductory biographical sketch suggested a reading that brought Pushkin’s text close to home. Considered within the framework of the Renaissance, the unfinished tale Pushkin based on his African ancestor offered an entire series of axioms that were central to Pushkin himself and that were now cogent to his “Negro brothers,” who could recognize in Gannibal’s story a concrete realization of the enabling strategies promoted by leaders of the Harlem Renaissance. Individual strength and personal integrity make it possible to overcome externally imposed restrictions, while a sense of personal dignity can offset the sense of alienation. An individual or a society that allows perceived difference to interfere with the appreciation of a person’s merit demonstrates only its own uncontestable inferiority. The creative imagination provides the surest path to self-affirmation and the attainment of inner freedom under even the harshest of circumstances.

Warrington Hudlin states that the philosophy of the Harlem Renaissance “in essence rested on a single axiom: It will be necessary for blacks to change their perspective of their selves before whites will change their image of them.”³⁷ Through the agency of *Opportunity*, Pushkin and his great-grandfather were engaged to change the perspective of both sides. Gannibal and especially the great-grandson who recorded his life emerged as models that remain vital to this day.

Thus, almost two centuries after Pushkin’s death and seventy years after the Harlem Renaissance, John Oliver Killens’s *Great Black Russian: A Novel on the Life and Times of Alexander Pushkin* shows us how closely this major African American novelist identifies with the Russian poet, while the prominent Afrocentric scholar Molefi Kete Asante lauds Pushkin for what he continues to teach marginalized groups:

If there is one lesson to be learned from the centeredness and agency of Pushkin it must be that regardless of the environmental and social conditions of our lives we can always rise to the challenge of transforming ourselves and the world in which we live. Even in this lesson we see the energizing and flourishing of the most African of all attributes, the creative science of effective human relationships.³⁸

While we cannot objectively evaluate the inspiration young African American writers might have drawn from Underwood’s biographical sketch and her translations of Pushkin’s works, the poetry prize established in his name inspired the composition of many hundreds of lyrics by aspiring African American poets who entered the contest. The winner of the first round in 1926 was Arna Bontemps, whose “Golgotha Is a Mountain” was selected by a panel of judges that included William Rose Benet, William Stanley Braithwaite, Witter Bynner, Robert Frost, James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, Vachel Lindsay, and Clement Wood. Bontemps, whose poem “The Return” won him the Pushkin Prize for a second time the following year (1927), described his decision to enter the competition in terms that clearly reflect its significance for beginning writers: “I took my courage in my hands, and my life has never been the same since.”³⁹ Although there is no evidence in Bontemps’s writings that his knowledge of Pushkin extended beyond what might have been gleaned from the pages of *Opportunity*, the career of this major African American writer who became a leading figure in the Renaissance was successfully launched by the prize he was awarded in the Russian poet’s name.

Precisely when the Harlem Renaissance came to an end remains in dispute among scholars. Some designate the stock market crash of 1929 as its terminus, others cite the Harlem race riots of 1935 as signaling its end, while others still insist that it persisted, albeit with some breaks, into the 1960s.⁴⁰ In any event *Opportunity* continued its publication through the winter of 1949, and although a decade had passed since the last Pushkin Prize was awarded, the February 1937 issue marked the 100th anniversary of Pushkin’s death with Guichard Parris’s tribute “In Honor of Alexander Pushkin: 1799–1837.”⁴¹

The essay opens with an impressive list of festivities planned in both the United States and the Soviet Union to mark the centenary of Pushkin’s death. Parris’s note that he “is indebted to Soviet government reports for this infor-

mation,"⁴² reminds us that even as African Americans were deriving creative support from their distant but sympathetic Russian model, the government of his native land was promoting him for its own political ends. The U.S.S.R. Society for Cultural Relations (Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kul'turnoi svyazi s zagranitsei; VOKS), which came into being in April 1925, had its own agenda as it readily supplied materials intended to familiarize African Americans with Pushkin, who was revered as the greatest of all Russian poets and who was of African descent. Here was a golden opportunity to claim that the racial prejudice, discrimination, and cultural marginalization to which African Americans were subjected in the United States were not to be found in enlightened Soviet society. The flow of African Americans from the rural South into urban centers in the North and the riots that shook major cities in the early twentieth century were powerful manifestations of a newly emerging working class that seemed rife for indoctrination into the Marxist cause. In this context, Pushkin suggested a possible link between Soviet Russia and urban African Americans. The Russian futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, one of several writers who represented VOKS during his journeys abroad, drew attention to this possibility in "My Discovery of America" ("Moe otkrytie Ameriki"), his travel account of a visit to the United States in 1926:

Recently the Negro publisher Caspar Holstein announced a one-hundred-dollar prize in the name of the greatest Negro poet, A. S. Pushkin, for the best Negro poem.

The prize will be awarded 1 May 1926.

Why shouldn't the Negroes consider Pushkin one of their own writers? After all even now Pushkin would not be admitted into a single "decent" hotel or living room in New York. After all Pushkin had kinky hair and a Negro bluishness under his nails.

When the so-called scales of history dip, a lot will depend on which side the 12 million Negroes put their 24 million weighty hands. The Negroes heated over Texas bonfires provide gun powder that is dry enough for explosions of revolution.⁴³

Even a hundred years after Pushkin's death, the political authorities of his homeland still had their eye on him and still sought to bend him to their own purposes.

Parris's assertion that "for Pushkin political liberty was intimately bound up with the freedom of the peasant, and the desire of a general amelioration of social conditions required a union of all classes against social injustices" must surely have come from a "Soviet government report."⁴⁴ Yet it is clear from Parris's conclusion that Pushkin's works take him beyond the narrow confines of Soviet politics. Modestly noting his own lack of expertise in Rus-

sian literature, Parris, who obviously did a good bit of research in preparing his essay, perceptively observes that, "as one reads the criticisms on Pushkin's works, one becomes a bit puzzled at the divergent and sometimes totally opposite views that are expressed regarding his social philosophy." "But," he continues, "anyone with a not too biased mind who is at all familiar with Pushkin's own writings will not do him the injustice of putting a special party label upon him. His many-sidedness is the one certain indication of his universal genius."⁴⁵ In this regard Parris shows himself to be a model reader of Pushkin's poetry. Apparently the Soviets were mistaken in their decision to incorporate Pushkin into their propaganda machine, for his poetry opened minds where they sought to close them. A brief digression from the pages of *Opportunity* provides another telling example in this vein.

The African American journalist Homer Smith conducted extensive research on Pushkin and interviewed the poet's surviving descendants during his sojourn in Russia in the 1930s and 1940s. (Among other things, Smith researched Pushkin's ancestry in an attempt to disprove assertions by scholars such as E. J. Simmons that Pushkin was Abyssinian and therefore not black.) Receiving no answer to his question of how Pushkin would have reacted to the Soviet regime, he arrived at his own conclusion that the poet "would have been too much of a freedom lover to like it."⁴⁶ Yet this is not to say that the great Soviet socialist experiment failed to attract significant attention from African Americans. In the 1930s, the revolutionary social and political goals of African Americans "were associated almost exclusively with communism."⁴⁷

Like Underwood's biographical sketch, Parris's essay on Pushkin highlights the poet's broad cultural background, his commitment to individual liberty, and his pride in his African ancestors. Parris, however, places far greater emphasis on Pushkin's African lineage and focuses particular attention on its relevance to the African American cause:

The nation-wide observance of this centenary should be of particular interest to the American Negro and it may very appropriately serve to direct his attention to some of the intellectual and literary contributions of the *Occidentalized* African or his descendants to the common fund of human progress and culture. Pushkin was a Negro.⁴⁸

Both Pushkin and his illustrious African forebear are now drawn not into African American consciousness-raising, but into a direct struggle against racism, a circumstance that reflects the growing frustration of the African American intelligentsia and the increasing politicization of the cultural agenda of the Harlem Renaissance. What was implicit in earlier descriptions of Pushkin is now made explicit in forceful terms:

The amazing intellectual development of Hannibal in Paris, his brilliant career at the court of Peter and later the distinguished contribution of his great grandson to the world of letters should eradicate from the prejudiced mind the thought that the African and his descendants are, by nature, incapable of the highest mental exercise.⁴⁹

Parris's tribute to Pushkin was preceded on the pages of the February 1927 issue of *Opportunity* by two reviews that similarly emphasized the Russian poet's race. The first of these was Elbert Aidline-Trommer's "'Alexander Pushkin' and Alexander Pushkin," a review of Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theater production of Valentine Carrera's play *Alexander Pushkin*. Writing the play off as a "silly, ridiculous pseudo-Pushkin melodrama," Aidline-Trommer devotes the bulk of his review to Pushkin's life and African ancestry in terms suggestive of the changing mood of the Harlem Renaissance.⁵⁰ Hailing the poet as a "sweet singer and martyr of Freedom," Aidline-Trommer credits him with bringing "the fire of his Negro ancestry" to the "altar of Russian letters."⁵¹ Visible here is a shift from the earlier emphasis on the poet's universal, many-faceted genius to what were regarded as his expressly African traits. The second review was devoted to Natalie Duddington's translation of *The Captain's Daughter*. The reviewer, Alice Dunbar Nelson, demonstrates an impressive command of Russian literature and provides a superb account of Pushkin's text and its place in the Russian tradition. She too focuses above all on the significance of the Russian poet to her own people. Her treatment of this aspect is far more direct and politicized than what we have seen in earlier representations of the poet.

The importance Pushkin's African blood had come to carry by 1937 is perhaps most forcefully expressed in the epigraph with which Parris opens his homage to the African Russian poet on the 100th anniversary of his death:

To some it will be a surprise to learn that one of the great figures in world literature and the greatest of all the Russian poets had Negro blood and, according to American theories of race, was a Negro. What will be more surprising still to others is that he was proud of it.⁵²

It must give us pause to realize that had Pushkin, a century after his death, appeared in the United States not on the pages of *Opportunity* but in the flesh, he would have been barred from all areas designated "for whites only" and subjected to incalculable indignities because of that African ancestor in whom he took such pride and whom he engaged in his own assertions of liberty. Yet it was also on the strength of that ancestor that Pushkin inspired in his African American brethren the very creativity that had been his own

way to freedom. And it was on the strength of that ancestor that Alice Dunbar Nelson could proclaim:

To the Americans of darker skin, Pushkin's name connotes more than a Russian poet and novelist. Pushkin is one of the gates of liberation of the race from the fetters which bind it earthward.⁵³

Notes

1. Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1988), 2.

2. Steven Nardi, "Expanding Cultural Spaces: James Weldon Johnson and Poetry as Palimpsest," in "Inciting Meter: Race, Music, and the Re-Invention of Aesthetics in the Harlem Renaissance" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University), available at www.princeton.edu/~snardi/pdf/weldon.pdf (accessed October 2, 2001).

3. J. Thomas Shaw, "Pushkin on His African Heritage: Publications during His Lifetime," is reprinted in this volume.

4. For a study of representations of America in general and the issue of slavery in particular in the Russian press of the time, see Dieter Boden, *Das Amerikabild im russischen Schrifttum bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Cram, De Gruyter, 1968).

5. Boden, *Amerikabild*, 75.

6. See B. L. Modzalevskii, *Pushkin i ego sovremenniki: Biblioteka A. S. Pushkina* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Kniga, 1988).

7. M. Eremin, *Pushkin publitsist* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1963), especially 278–80. For an extensive discussion of "John Tanner" and Pushkin's attitude toward America, see J. Thomas Shaw, "Pushkin on America: His 'John Tanner,'" in *Orbis Scriptus: Dmitrij Tschizewcskij zum 70 Geburtstag*, ed. Dietrich Gerhardt et al. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1966), 739–56. Shaw provides a list of Pushkin's references to America and considers what sources might have been available to the poet.

8. Pushkin wrote the first chapter of *Eugene Onegin* in 1823, and the note to it in 1824. A summary of its publication history can be found in Shaw's essay, which is reprinted in this volume. For additional discussion of Pushkin's references to his African ancestors, see N. Teletova, "Afrikanskaia prarodina v tvorcheskom osoznanii Pushkina," in *Alexandre S. Pouchkine et le monde noir*, ed. Dieudonné Gnamankou (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1999), 53–62.

9. On this, see Teletova, "Afrikanskaia prarodina," 57–58.

10. Pushkin again compared Peter the Great and Alexander I, much to the latter's detriment, in his long poem *The Bronze Horseman*.

11. See Shaw's essay, reprinted in this volume.
12. Thus, for example, the contemporary scholar of African history Allison Blakely cites the passage from Pushkin's letter to Viazemskii in his discussion of Pushkin's significance to African American writers and artists. See his essay "John Oliver Killens's *Great Black Russian*: Afro-American Writers and Artists and the Pushkin Mystique," in Gnamankou, ed., *Alexandre S. Pouchkine*, 159–60.
13. Arnold Rampersad, introduction to *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1992), xxii–xxiii.
14. Wintz, *Black Culture*, 2.
15. See Anne Lounsbury's essay in this volume.
16. Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Canon-Formation, Literary History, and the Afro-American Tradition: From the Seen to the Told," in *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*, ed. Houston A. Baker Jr. and Patricia Redmond (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 32.
17. Molefi Kete Asante, "The Cultural Location of Alexander S. Pushkin," in Gnamankou, ed., *Alexandre S. Pouchkine*, 64.
18. Blakely, "Killens's *Great Black Russian*," 164.
19. *Ibid.*, 163–64.
20. Langston Hughes, *The Big Sun: An Autobiography* (New York: Knopf, 1940), 218.
21. "The Opportunity Dinner," *Opportunity*, June 1925, 177.
22. Cited in Wintz, *Black Culture*, 123.
23. Arna Bontemps, "The Awakening: A Memoir," in *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered*, ed. Arna Bontemps (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972), 9.
24. "An Opportunity for Negro Writers," *Opportunity*, September 1924, 258.
25. *Opportunity*, October 1925, 291.
26. *Opportunity*, May 1925, 130. For a cogent discussion of Worthley's assessment, see Nardi, "Expanding Cultural Spaces."
27. *Ibid.*, October 1925, 291.
28. *Ibid.*, 292.
29. *Ibid.*, 309. The same wording announced the Pushkin Prize, which was offered the following year as well.
30. George E. Kent, "Patterns of the Harlem Renaissance," in Bontemps, ed., *Harlem Renaissance Remembered*, 9.
31. Edna Worthley Underwood, "Alexis Sergiewitch Pushkin," *Opportunity*, February 1924, 54.
32. Underwood, "Alexis Pushkin," 54.
33. The tenacity of this detail is well illustrated by the fact that it is still in place in John Oliver Killens's novel *Great Black Russian: A Novel on the Life*

- and *Times of Alexander Pushkin* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).
34. Underwood, "Alexis Pushkin," 54.
 35. Albert Parry, "Abram Hannibal, the Favorite of Peter the Great," *Journal of Negro History*, October 1923, 350–66.
 36. Parry, "Hannibal," 359.
 37. Warrington Hudlin, "The Renaissance Re-Examined," in Bontemps, ed., *Harlem Renaissance Remembered*, 276.
 38. Asante, "Cultural Location," 68.
 39. Bontemps, "Awakening," 20.
 40. Wintz, *Black Culture*, 1.
 41. Guichard Parris, "In Honor of Alexander Pushkin: 1799–1837," *Opportunity*, February 1937, 48.
 42. Parris, "In Honor of Pushkin," 48.
 43. Vladimir Maiakovskii, "My Discovery of America," in *America through Russian Eyes*, ed. O. Hasty and S. Fusso (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 194–95 (with slight adjustments to the translation).
 44. Parris, "In Honor of Pushkin," 50.
 45. *Ibid.*
 46. This information on Homer Smith is drawn from Blakely, "Killens's *Great Black Russian*," 161.
 47. Arnold Rampersad, "Introduction to the 1992 Edition," in Arna Bontemps, *Black Thunder* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), xii.
 48. Parris, "In Honor of Pushkin," 50.
 49. *Ibid.*, 49.
 50. Elbert Aidline-Trommer, "'Alexander Pushkin' and Alexander Pushkin," *Opportunity*, August 1928, 241.
 51. Aidline-Trommer, "'Alexander Pushkin' and Alexander Pushkin," 241.
 52. Parris, "In Honor of Pushkin," 48.
 53. Alice Dunbar Nelson, "*The Captain's Daughter* by Alexander Pushkin," *Opportunity*, January 1930, 25.