

Giving and Forgiving in A. S. Pushkin's

The Captain's Daughter

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Abstract

Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) more than any other Russian writer served to unite the Russian people by giving them an inclusive vision of themselves that drew upon all levels of society—from Tsar as depicted in *Boris Godunov* (1825) and Empress (*The Captain's Daughter*, 1836) to a peasant nanny (*Eugene Onegin*, 1823-31), simple government functionary ("The Stationmaster" 1830) and Cossack rebel Stenka Razin (1630-1671) (various lyric poems) whom Pushkin referred to as the most poetic figure in Russian culture.

Pushkin was fascinated by another Cossack insurrectionist, Emelyan Pugachev (1742-1771), devoting to him both a historical study (*A History of Pugachev*, 1835) and the novel *The Captain's Daughter* (1836) written in the first-person narrative form of a memoir by the nobleman and military officer, Petr Grinev. Though remaining faithful to the historical record, Pushkin chose to be guided by artistic considerations in his portrayal of Pugachev. Ever true to the classical qualities of restraint and conciseness in his writing, Pushkin makes full use of specific details in his narrative, none more so than the "gift" of the hare-skin coat presented by the narrator as an impulsive expression of gratitude to his "guide"/ rescuer, a Cossack wanderer of the steppe who found him shelter from a raging blizzard. In presenting his gift to a leader and supporter of the peasant class, the narrator/nobleman establishes a lasting bond and the spirit of reciprocity that crosses class boundaries. When Pugachev reappears as the "Tsar"

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himself, the self-proclaimed leader of the Russian people in a war against government and landowners, their bond is both liberating and threatening, bound up with issues of divided allegiance, loyalty, crossing boundaries, forgiveness and magnanimity.

The present study draws upon two essays devoted to the characterization and significance of gift-giving to examine the theme of giving in Pushkin's novel and to explore the nature and motives behind the gift and the givers. Russell Belk ("The Perfect Gift", 1996) provides a definition of the characteristics of the perfect gift: agapic love as an expression and celebration of love for the other; giving as an act that is spontaneous, affective and celebratory rather than premeditated and calculated to obtain certain ends. Belk takes into account both the intention and the intrinsic value of the gift itself in highlighting the gift-object—sealing a friendship.

The insights of Marcel Mauss's ground-breaking study on the gift and gift-giving in primitive societies (*Essai sur le don*, 1923-24) provide focus for an analysis in the novel of the unexpected repercussions of the act of giving, the spirit of reciprocity and the ethics of mutual respect embodied in the gift in the context of historical turmoil. Mauss viewed generosity as the basis of a new ethics founded on mutual respect, one that would foster principles of honor, disinterest and solidarity and create a spirit of reciprocity among givers and recipients of gifts. Such a spirit is essential to ensuring the happiness of individuals and communities. He also coined the expression "noble expenditure" referring to the joy of giving in public, of hospitality, and generosity bestowed and received at public and private feasts. More specifically, he was fascinated by the "force" in the thing given that lends itself to reciprocity, a circularity of giving that forms strong bonds of mutual affection and understanding and a solidarity to community, people and nation.

A second, interrelated theme of forgiveness, as embodied by the many father figures presented in the novel is also explored. Forgiveness, as the very

word suggests, is fostered by the spirit of giving, and serves as a magnanimous response to various acts of insubordination, disobedience and apparent disloyalty in the highly stratified and patriarchal Russia of the 18th century at a time of bitter and often unforgiving internecine strife.

Keywords: gift-giving, “gift-force”, reciprocity, forgiveness,
noble expenditure, allegiance

亞歷山大·普希金《上尉的女兒》中的

施予與寬恕

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摘 要

相較於其他俄國作者，亞歷山大·普希金（1799-1837）更能透過筆下包羅萬象、來自社會各階層的人物，讓俄國人民團結起來。這些人物包括從《鮑里斯·郭多諾夫》（1825）中的沙皇，《上尉的女兒》（1836）中的皇后，《尤金·奧涅根》（1830）中的農婦保姆，〈驛車站長〉（1830）中頭腦簡單的政府官員，以及散見於普希金抒情詩作、也是作者本人認為俄國文化之中最詩意的人物——哥薩克反抗軍領袖斯坦卡·拉辛（Stenka Razin，1630-1671）。

普希金對另一位哥薩克反動份子艾米里安·普加喬夫（1742-1771）也十分著迷，為他寫了一部歷史傳記《普加喬夫傳》（1835）以及一部小說《上尉的女兒》（1836）。後者以回憶錄的方式，由貴族軍官彼得·葛理聶夫（Pyotr Grinev）以第一人稱的敘述觀點寫成。普希金對普加喬夫的描繪雖忠於歷史紀錄的真切性，卻選擇以藝術為考量。這部小說沿用他典型的精鍊且節制的書寫風格，並充分運用特定的細節，其中最顯著的例子就是敘事者在一時衝動下，以野兔毛外套當做「禮物」表達他對「嚮導／救援者」——一個幫助他在哥薩克草原的暴風雪中找到遮蔽處的流浪者——的謝意。在贈送這份禮物給農民階級的領導人與支持者時，身為貴族的敘事者跨越了階級的障礙，建立了一種恆久且互惠的關係。當普加喬夫，這位在對抗地主以及政府的戰爭中自封為俄國人民的領導者，以沙皇之姿再次登場時，他們兩人之間的關係兼具解放與脅迫的本質，陷於分裂的忠貞、忠心、跨越界線、寬恕

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與包容等複雜的糾葛中。

本論文以兩篇探討「贈與」之特質與含義的論文為基礎，檢視普希金小說中的「贈與」主題，並探討隱匿於禮物與贈與者背後的本質與動機。Russell Belk 在 “The Perfect Gift” 一文中提供了「完美的禮物」之特質的定義：表達並慶賀對另一人的無私的愛；贈與是一種即興、帶有情感且歡樂的行為，而非事先計畫好且為了達成特定結果的算計。Belk 在強調禮物作為友誼的象徵時，也討論贈與者的意圖以及禮物本身所具有的本質上的價值。

Marcel Mauss 在其對原始社會中之禮物與贈與的創新研究（“Essai sur le don”）中深入的探討，恰可用來分析這部小說中贈與行為引發的意外反饋、互惠精神、以及相互尊重的道德價值在混亂的歷史脈絡中於禮物上的體現。Mauss 認為慷慨是在相互尊重下所產生之新倫理的基礎，這樣的基礎可以強化榮譽、無私、和團結的原則，並在給予者與受贈者之間形成一種互惠的精神。這種互惠可以確保個人及社群的幸福。Mauss 亦創造「高尚的花費」(noble expenditure) 一詞，意指當眾施予以及款待賓客帶來的喜悅，以及在私人與公開宴席中慷慨的施與受。更精確地說，Mauss 對於禮物中所含有的「動力」感到著迷，這個動力可以促成互惠，是一種「贈與」的迴旋，進而由相互的情感與瞭解形成強烈的關連，以及社群、人民與國家的團結。

本論文亦探討另一相關主題：原諒，而此主題具現於這部小說的數個父性角色上。「原諒」一詞，來自施與的精神；十八世紀的俄國是一個階級分明的父系社會，充斥各種違抗、不從、及明顯不忠的行為，也是一個充滿仇恨與互相殘殺和鬥爭的時代，而原諒可說是對這個時代的一種寬容回應。

關鍵詞：贈與、禮物動力、互惠、原諒、高尚的花費、忠貞

Alexander S. Pushkin (1799-1837) is Russia's most beloved writer because among other qualities he is a writer of great humanity whose works encourage a sympathetic understanding of the sufferings of "the little people," the otherwise faceless insignificant representatives of Russian society whom he introduces as heroes in a number of his works. Such is Samson Vyrin in "The Stationmaster," (1830) a low-ranking clerk who drinks himself to death after the abduction of his daughter by a nobleman; another such character is Eugene, victim of the merciless elements of the Russian climate and the Russian state, as depicted in "The Bronze Horseman" (1833). Pushkin held a firm belief in a higher justice and a faith in human progress that would alleviate the suffering and backwardness of the Russian people. Pushkin had a profound understanding of Russian society and the deep divisions separating the noble class from the Russian masses. In his later works he came to acknowledge, given the realities of Russia's autocratic state and the obscurantism of its ruler, Nicholas I (1796-1855), the role of an enlightened leader to create a more humane society and foster the values of mercy and compassion.

In his last published work, *The Captain's Daughter* (1836) Pushkin's depicts Russian society at its most brutal and merciless. In particular, he addresses the theme of the schism dividing Russian society in the context of a fratricidal civil war (1773-1775) during the reign of Catherine II (1729-1796) that pitted the peasants and other members of the Russian underclass and their Cossack leader Emelyan Pugachev (1742-1775) against the government and the noble class that supported it. The age-old mutual antagonism

characteristic of noble landlord and peasant serf became exacerbated by Catherine's generous support of nobles who facilitated her violent seizing of the throne in 1762 and the subsequent large-scale enslavement of peasants who found themselves legally subject to the oftentimes capricious will of their noble masters.¹ Historically, a deeply felt sense of injustice and resentment borne by the peasants needed only an effective spokesman and leader to explode into a bloody cataclysm, a periodic occurrence in Russian history. Avrich writes of four such major rebellions in the 17th and 18th centuries: "Each was marked by savage violence and immense human suffering. In each, moreover, religious and social myths played a key part in inciting the rebellion. The lower classes were hungry for a messiah, and the ground swell of popular support that arose about the rebel leaders owed much to the belief that the promised savior had arrived to punish the wicked and purge the land of sin and suffering" (1). The final of these four rebellions, known as *Pugachevshchina* after its leader, was to cast a shadow over the Russian ruling class until the early twentieth century. Peasant rebellions on a lesser scale continued to disrupt the Russian countryside during Pushkin's lifetime,² making the theme for his novel of topical interest.

¹ The cruelty of Pugachev and his peasant followers was matched by the government and its military forces who conducted bloody campaigns and perpetrated widespread summary executions. Pushkin noted in his *History of the Pugachev Rebellion* that 130 Bashkirs had been tortured and executed by General Urusov, head of a Russian army sent to quash the uprising; so as to inflict maximum suffering, he ordered that thousands of others have their noses and ears cut off (*Collected Works*, IX, 373)

² Peasant uprisings took place as recently as August, 1831 in which more than a hundred military officers were killed.

Emelyan Pugachev was a Cossack commander whose call to arms was his response to the injustices and oppression directed against the people. This earned him their love and loyalty and their recognition of him as their sovereign, i.e. Tsar. The historical Tsar Peter III (1728-1762) had been dethroned and murdered at the order of Catherine, and in 1773 he was resurrected in the person of Pugachev. Pugachev was reviled as the last in a line of “Imposters” or “False Tsars”³ and demonized by the authorities and land-owning gentry as a brigand and rabble-rouser. Yet his very name struck fear and terror into their hearts. Such is the setting of Pushkin’s historical novel.

In writing a historical novel Pushkin was drawn to the works of his predecessor, Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). Scott began his career as a romantic poet who, like Pushkin himself, turned to prose later in his writing career (beginning with *Waverly* 1814) and was widely considered as the creator of the historical novel. Pushkin, whose library included numerous works by the Scott in both English and French translation, as early as 1824 referred to his works as «пищей души» (“food for the soul”—Nemirovskii, 359). *The Captain’s Daughter* can be seen as a historical novel in the Walter Scott tradition, representing a synthesis of Pushkin’s appreciation of the author of “Two Ravens” (1803) and *Ivanhoe* (1819) (Kornblatt 34). Scott’s greatness for Pushkin lay in the historicism of his thought, his ability to create a historical epoch in concrete terms by becoming familiar with scenes from

³ Pushkin wrote of another such imposter, Grigory Otrepiev, in his dramatic work, *Boris Godunov* (1825). Several references to Otrepiev are made in *The Captain’s Daughter*.

the past in all their domesticity and by his ability to endow his characters with natural-sounding speech patterns in the manner of Shakespeare and Goethe (Wolff, 275; Evdokina, 6). These qualities are all apparent in Pushkin's novel, due in large part to his intimate knowledge of relevant historical sources and the oral tradition of legends and songs inspired by the uprising as well as the accounts of surviving witnesses.⁴

From a Russian perspective⁵ Pushkin's novel can be viewed in the light of Ivan Kireevskii's (1806-1856) understanding of the Romantic historian. For Kireevskii, history in the second quarter of the 19th century was at the center of intellectual pursuits. It served to awaken national awareness and establish a Russian national identity, pursuits that had gathered stimulus and momentum by the Napoleonic Wars, known in Russia as the Great War of the Fatherland, and by European romanticism that fostered the search for cultural origins and valorized folk traditions. From the historian's perspective the romantic view encouraged the use of the poet's imaginative power to discern general connections between events by studying new

⁴ Pushkin's article "Of Walter Scott's Novels," remained unpublished in his lifetime. In it he states that "the chief fascination of Walter Scott's novels lies in the fact that we grow acquainted with the past...in a contemporary, homely manner." Scott has "no slavish passion for kings and heroes." Rather, such a writer as Scott is familiar with the ordinary unaffected circumstances of his heroes' lives (Wolff 275).

⁵ Iu. Lotman outlines the leading Russian critical assessments of the novel, reserving special praise for the studies made by Iu. G. Oksman and G. A. Gukovskii; the theme of Russian uprising, the sympathetic drawing of Pugachev, as embodiment and representative of the Russian people; the theme of the age-long struggle between autocracy and a freedom-loving tradition of the Russian people. See his article Идейная структура «Капитанской дочки» 212-227 in his monograph *Пушкин (Pushkin)* published in 1995.

sources, legends, documents, et al. (Evdokina, 32-34)

Pushkin undertook a thorough study of the historical background of the uprising which led to the writing of a book-length series of essays, *The History of the Pugachev Uprising*, published in 1834, before he began writing the novel. Moreover, in 1833 Pushkin undertook a journey to the Russian east to visit sites of the uprising. There the Russian steppe takes on an increasingly Asiatic coloring peopled by nomadic tribes of Bashkirs and Kalmyks; there also he found a world of “old-fashioned” Russians whose traditional values appeared in stark contrast to the decadent and demoralized life of the fashionable society of European Russia as epitomized by the westernized capital of St. Petersburg, a setting Pushkin describes in his novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin* (1823-31). This was to prove a symbolic journey for Pushkin in his growing fascination with Pugachev and his embrace of the deeply rooted Russianness as well as the Asiatic color of the people and culture in the lands east of the Volga. Pushkin’s journey served to complement his archival investigations of the Pugachev Uprising by providing him with a living oral history through interviews with local survivors of the times, who were united in their enthusiastic support of Pugachev. There also he encountered first-hand evidence of the living legend of Pugachev whose spirit and deeds came alive in the words, anecdotes and songs that Pushkin interweaves throughout his text of *The Captain’s Daughter*. Pushkin endows his Pugachev with the following values: his delight in struggle as an expression of the Cossack ideal, his devotion to freedom, his fierce opposition to any form of slavery and oppression, and a genuine magnanimity and

largeness of heart and spirit that bespeak his self-proclaimed status as "Sovereign." In creating such a hero Pushkin gives expression to the hopes of the people.⁶

One of Pushkin's aims in writing the novel was to straddle the rift between the social classes and ameliorate antagonisms by creating an unlikely alliance in the struggle for freedom in a representative of the noble class and a Cossack of peasant stock. In choosing such a narrator from the noble class, moreover, Pushkin enables himself to present a somewhat rounded portrait of Pugachev, as both peasant leader and as a homely, down-to-earth being with individual qualities. By casting a humanizing light on Pugachev and through him on the Russian folk in general, Pushkin allows the reader to get into the "enemy's" camp. It is the peculiar fate of Petr Grinev, son of a retired army major, to make his own, albeit unwilling, journey to the east. In the course of this journey he happens to encounter a peasant "guide" who helps him survive a blizzard; this chance acquaintance develops into mutual appreciation and admiration and is unexpectedly renewed when the fort to which Grinev is assigned, Fort Belogorsk, is overrun by Pugachev's forces and the peasant guide turns out to be Pugachev himself, the "Tsar" of the Russian people. Grinev, as a nobleman and a military officer with the

⁶ Aleksandr Radishchev's response to Fonvizin's question «В чем состоит наш национальный характер?» «В мятежности, в вольнолюбии». Radishchev (1749-1802), the first Russian writer to address the question of serfdom posed the following question to his fellow writer Denis Fonvizin (1744 or 1745-1792): "What qualities make up the national character? Rebelliousness and love of freedom" printed in the literary journal *Собеседник любителей российского слова* (1783) (*Lovers of Russian Literature*). Pushkin reprinted the article in his own literary journal, *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) in 1836 n.2 (Makogonenko 71).

prejudices characteristic of his social status, unwittingly discovers that this previous relationship saves him from the gallows—the cruel fate of the fort’s commandant and his fellow officers. The relationship turns into a kind of friendship that enables him to move at will, unharmed, from one hostile side to the other. This allows the novelist to provide the reader with insight into both the public and private life of Pugachev; at the same time it allows Pushkin to expose the narrow-mindedness and ungenerous and self-serving nature of many representatives of both camps who were too quick to resort to the gallows and other extreme measures of summary judgment and execution without due consideration or feelings of compassion for their fellow Russians.

Grinev shares the mentality and values of the Russian nobility. He inherits his father’s strong sense of duty (Russian *долг* with its double sense of “debt” and “duty”) and honor. As a largely untutored youth he is left to his own devices, seeking out pleasure while spurning the wisdom of his superiors, yet as he sets off on the long road to his military post he appears essentially good natured and open minded. As a budding poet, he is sensitive to the world around him, giving it a romantic coloring. The novel revolves around the friendship of Grinev and Pugachev which takes root when the young nobleman unexpectedly and generously gives the older peasant his own fur coat.

The gift serves as the element that creates and cements what is to prove an enduring relationship, one that becomes immortalized in the form of Grinev’s memoirs, i.e., the text of the novel itself. It is a relationship that is characterized by a mutual sense of class consciousness and class differences

but the two individuals transcend those differences to the extent they can, developing a genuinely heartfelt friendship in the process. In a broader sense, in its intrinsic power to elicit selflessness and magnanimous impulses in the concerned individuals, the gift carries within it the seeds of moral transformation and hope for ameliorating the class-based social struggles that continued to plague Russia in the 19th century. Pushkin, in creating such a relationship, enables himself as an artist to draw a much more attractive and humane side of Pugachev than one based strictly on historical accounts; it allows him to make use of folk songs and anecdotes that poeticize the Cossack leader and reveal to his westernized readers how rooted his legend had become in traditional folk culture. The descriptions of Pugachev are all the more effective in that they are related by the nobleman and officer Grinev, a group largely alienated from their Russian cultural roots, and generally mistrustful of peasants, Grinev's own complex relationship with Savelich his peasant servant notwithstanding. Pushkin manages this in a way acceptable to the Russian reader, the Russian censor, and the Russian tsar himself.

At this point in the discussion let us turn to an essay of gifts and gift-giving by Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), whose studied insights allow us to focus on the unexpected repercussions that stem from the act of giving. Mauss, a sociologist by training and an ethnologist by experience, had a classical education, and as a reader of Xenophon and Thucydides, he examined various forms of gift-giving in treaties and exchanges and in the solemnities of primitive civilizations. In his concisely written text entitled *Gift (Essai sur le don, 1923-24)* he observes that "the thing received as a gift,

the thing received in general, connects the donor magically, religiously, morally, and legally to the recipient. Coming from one person, manufactured or appropriated by him, belonging to him, it confers power on him over the one who accepts it" (Fournier 243).

The gift embodies the spirit of reciprocity and the ethics of mutual respect. According to Mauss, the system of gift exchange imposes an obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to return. A gift is endowed with a spirit which cannot be kept, but has to be returned (239). Mauss writes from the perspective of an ethnologist writing on the formation of strong social bonding practices in primitive societies. Mauss also coined the expression "noble expenditure" in referring to the joy of giving in public, of hospitality, convivial sharing, generosity bestowed and received at public and private feasts. For Mauss, the chief or head of a clan has a special obligation to "expend" without limits. Such generosity on the part of the chief is a matter of gaining prestige and honor for himself, and avoiding the risk of "losing face." At the same time a mutual obligation emerges from this social relationship: The obligation to give and the obligation to receive and to return (Fournier 241).

Such acts inspire the beneficiaries of the host/leader's graciousness to view him essentially as a supporter of a new ethics founded on mutual respect and reciprocal generosity that would ensure the redistribution of amassed wealth—a necessary condition for the happiness of individuals and of peoples. This in turn would lead to the types of measures a society would take to create a more equitable, homogenous relationship among its constituents,

including legislative measures and businesses to develop corporate solidarity. Such an aspect of gift-giving appears in the novel when Pugachev assumes the role of Tsar, and after a victorious battle over government forces, announces the end of serfdom and showers the jubilant throng with copper coins (CD 62).

Mauss also writes of the concept of *mana* as the spiritual power of things given as gifts. He characterizes this power as a virtue that forces gifts to circulate, to be given and returned: "To present something to someone is to present something of oneself...One understands clearly and logically within that system of ideas that it is necessary to return to the other what is in reality part and parcel of his nature and substance, for to accept something from someone is to accept something of his spiritual essence, his soul" ("Essai sur le don" 24).

In the novel, the most symbolic element, together with that of the gallows,⁷ is a hare-skin coat (заячий тулуп).⁸ The giving of this coat appears as a spontaneous expression of gratitude of the narrator Grinev as a youthful traveler to his "guide"/rescuer upon their serendipitous meeting in

⁷ In the novel's "Omitted Chapter" is the following description of a gallows fixed to a raft floating along the Volga River with three bodies hanging from a crossbeam. The depiction echoes the first mysterious appearance of Pugachev: "What on earth is it?... Not quite a sail, not quite a mast...' Nailed to the crossbeam above the men's heads was a black board on which was written in large white letters: THIEVES AND REBELS...The gallows remained visible for a long time, blacker than the surrounding darkness" (106).

⁸ See *Прогулки с Пушкиным* (*Strolls with Pushkin*, 1975) in which Abram Tertz writes of the "chance gift," declaring that "everything spins around chance, around a flimsy coat. The whole trick is that Grinev's life and his bride are saved not by strength, courage, shrewdness or money, but by a flimsy hare-skin coat" (361).

the steppe. A peasant appears seemingly out of nowhere in the midst of a blizzard to come to the assistance of the stranded Grinev, together with his traveling party of his servant Savelich and a peasant driver. It is significant that initially neither Grinev nor the driver can distinguish the approaching stranger from his surroundings: “What’s that over there, that black thing?...Lord only knows sir...Not quite a cart, not quite a tree...Must be either man or wolf” (13). The ambiguous and ambivalent characterization is apropos as the reader confronts a dual nature in the mysterious man, both humane and cruel. The animal-like nature of the man is reinforced by his acute sense of smell which allows him to detect a human dwelling in the snow-drifts serving them all as shelter for a night fit for neither man nor beast.

Grinev is beholden to the as yet unnamed Pugachev since the young man himself was responsible for getting his traveling group stranded. His boyish impatience to journey on, his lack of wisdom in not heeding the urging of his two peasant companions and his inability to read the warning signs of nature could have proved fatal. His own act of generosity assuages a sense of guilt and debt and helps him regain a sense of equanimity. It also serves to connect him with the impressive masculine stature and bearing of the peasant in the prime of life, an embodiment of untamed freedom and masculine self-assurance.

Grinev, in fact, rewards Pugachev twice. Upon their arrival at the inn, Grinev notes the ragged appearance of his guest, realizes how cold he must be feeling and offers him a cup of hot tea. “Cold, brother?” Grinev asks his new

companion. "How could I not be cold, with only this thin coat? To be honest with you, I once had a sheepskin but I pawned it last night in a tavern." (15) Pugachev however expresses his preference for something stronger and Grinev complies by ordering vodka. Cup in hand, Pugachev offers his benefactor a toast: «Ваше благородие, за ваше здоровье» ("Your Honor, to your health" 15). Pugachev acknowledges Grinev's superior social status in the title of respect, while at the same time taking pleasure in being invited to share a drink with a nobleman, an act which confers equal status. He continues to refer to Grinev as "Your Honor" in a gracious and respectful tone, even when their social roles change, when Pugachev appears as "Tsar" and Grinev as military officer engaged in putting down the uprising.

The following day as Grinev and his party and Pugachev are ready to go their separate ways, the young nobleman feels the need to express his gratitude to his guide by giving him a tip—"for vodka" as the Russians say. His guardian Savelich, marked by a peasant frugality, controls the purse strings and is loathe to part with half a ruble. The spontaneous spirit of generosity is not to be denied in Grinev. Mindful of the poorly dressed Pugachev's plight in the Russian winter, he offers him instead the much more valuable gift of his hare-skin coat (заячий тулуп⁹), one in which Grinev had wrapped himself the day before in the open carriage. This offering seems to fly in the face of the advice his father had given him upon his departure from home: "Take care of your clothes when they are new and your honor when

⁹ According to the Explanatory Dictionary of Vladimir Dal', such a fur coat covers the entire body (Тулуп: «полная шуба обнимающая все тело» (Даль, т. 4, 442).

you are young” (7). Grinev’s spontaneous gesture elicits a strong rebuke from Savelich, who feels duty-bound to keep the boy’s apparent waywardness in tow: “Mercy on us...Your hare-skin coat! He’ll trade it for vodka, the dog, at the first tavern he comes to” (17). Pugachev is much too pleased with the coat—“a nobleman’s coat”—to allow Savelich to influence his master and tells him bluntly: “His Honor is obliged to favor me with a fur coat off his own back. That is his gentle pleasure, while your duty as a serf is to hold your peace and obey” (17). The notion of “gentle pleasure” pleases Pugachev; the coat as a gift from a nobleman allows him to take on a noble demeanor himself and a condescending attitude toward the servant Savelich. The ultimate rise in his own status is hinted at here by his possession of the coat together with its noble associations.

The properties of Grinev’s gift to Pugachev include the following: the sacrifice of the giver; the giver’s wish to please the recipient; the gift as luxury; the recipient is genuinely surprised and delighted by the gift; the recipient desires the gift. The hare-skin jacket would appear to be appropriate to the recipient, given the fact that the burly peasant had pawned his own shortly before; yet, it is but a “child’s” coat, one that Pugachev’s broad shoulders tear the stitching of the first time he tries it on for size. Nevertheless, the gift takes into account both the intention and the gift itself together with its intrinsic value. The gift-object acts to seal a friendship, though given the spontaneous nature of the act and the unlikelihood that they would cross paths again, the friendship at this point remains moot, and the gift’s “magical powers” for the time being unrealized.

The gift not only implicitly confers noble status on Pugachev, but it comes to endow him with kindly paternal feelings for the young man. Grinev, in divesting himself of the coat, gives to Pugachev what his own mother has given to him in preparation for the journey. Yet he has two fur coats, so this one, though worth 15 rubles by Savelich's shrewd calculation, is expendable. There is no doubt that Grinev wishes to please the stranger. He finds himself mysteriously attracted to the older man. The deep impact that he makes on the young boy is revealed in the dream he experiences immediately after their initial meeting, when he places himself in the hands of Pugachev as they set off in the carriage. In the dream Pugachev literally replaces the father, and confers on him his blessings for a happy and prosperous life, blessings his own father initially refused. Significance lies in the fact that in giving Pugachev the coat, Grinev disregards his father's parting "wisdom" to take care of his clothes when they are new. In transferring his coat to Pugachev, he invests Pugachev with a regard for him that ultimately becomes fatherly. The dream becomes prophetic when Pugachev makes it possible for Grinev to secure his life's happiness by marrying the Captain's daughter. Pugachev shares in the prospective joy of Grinev as evident by his spontaneous proposal of "giving" the bride away: "'Well, Your Honor?' Pugachev said with a laugh. 'We have rescued the fair maiden. What do you think? Hadn't we better send for the priest now...I'll give her away myself if you like... We'll feast and drink as if there's no tomorrow. We'll feast and drink and bid farewell to sorrow!'" (85) His generous, sing-song words are in stark contrast to the chilling refusal of Grinev's father to countenance his son's request for

his blessing in marriage. The father writes harsh words to him, dashing his hopes and making him feel like an unruly boy: “Not only have I no intention of giving you either my blessing or my consent, but I intend to take you in hand and punish you for your pranks” (35).

The gift, from Pugachev’s perspective is truly a luxury; it comes from the back of a nobleman and would be impossible to obtain given his own meager resources. Since the gift is endowed with the status of its giver, the recipient shares in this elevated status, empowering him to stifle Savelich’s objections and inform him of his duties as a serf, namely, to do his master’s bidding.

The gift, however, is not entirely appropriate for Pugachev; the “hulking great shoulders of the man” are too broad to ensure a comfortable fit of the “child’s” coat, underscoring Pugachev’s physical prowess and maturity vis-à-vis Grinev; yet as previously mentioned, Grinev knows it will please his new friend and will serve him well in the long Russian winter. The gift is also selfless in the sense that Grinev never expects to encounter the peasant once they take their leave and the fur coat is not mentioned until the reappearance of Pugachev several chapters later. In the meantime, the peasant is genuinely impressed and moved by a nobleman’s act of kindness and wears the coat proudly: “...never shall I forget your charity, Your Honor” (17). Pugachev is true to his word.

One of the distinctive features of the friendship between Grinev and Pugachev is the change in status of the latter upon their subsequent encounter. From a peasant Pugachev undergoes a magical transformation; he has become

proclaimed Tsar, or rather he has made a self-proclamation (*самозванец*, the Russian word for “imposter” or “false tsar,” could be literally translated as “the self-proclaimed one”). In assuming the identity of Peter III, Pugachev places himself in a position of absolute power; his simple gesture results in the execution of his captured “enemies”—Russian officers who refuse to recognize his sovereignty by kissing his hand. Such an officer is Grinev, and as his sworn enemy, he soon finds a noose placed around his neck. Only with the last-minute recognition of Grinev as his “friend” does Pugachev pardon him.

As it turns out, forgiving is an essential part of giving, and for Pugachev, a characteristic magnanimity helps define him as a “good Tsar.” His acts of forgiving also underscore Pugachev’s constant awareness of his debt to Grinev. The very position of Grinev as nobleman and official “enemy” of Pugachev compels the latter to repeatedly forgive Grinev for what Pugachev’s advisors consider acts of treason. Though his generous feelings for Grinev are tested on more than one occasion, the generosity wins out: “When I hang a man, I hang him. When I pardon him, I pardon him.” Grinev cannot fail to remain in Pugachev’s good graces.

Pugachev remembers and reciprocates Grinev’s gift on every possible occasion. He regales him with food and drink in his own quarters with the gracious hospitality of a grateful host. He allows Grinev to leave behind the carnage perpetrated by Pugachev’s men at Fort Belogorsk by providing him with a horse and, significantly, a sheepskin coat. When Grinev has occasion to thank him for his generous gifts, Pugachev is as pleased as a well-fed lion.

The kind-hearted exchange gratifies him and he responds with a pair of proverbs: “One good turn deserves another and a debt repaid is a handsome thing” (78). Basking in his good feelings and proud of his relationship with a nobleman, he tells his old cronies “His Honor and I are old friends” (78).

Grinev has difficulty coming to grips with the paradoxical nature of his relationship with Pugachev in his capacity as officer in the Empress Catherine’s army whose duty it is to destroy Pugachev. He finds himself walking a fine line between personal friendship and official duty. For Pugachev, friendship has triumphed from the first in his mind over the advice of his counselors who repeatedly cajole the “Tsar” into having him tortured and hanged. Pugachev dismisses all such notions and confides in Grinev: “But I didn’t agree because I remembered your glass of vodka and the hare-skin coat” (80). The power of the gift transcends time and difficulties as an expression of good will.

As the bonds of friendship strengthen between the two, a deep poignancy develops as both are quite conscious of the rebel leader’s impending doom. Pugachev’s awareness that a cruel fate awaits him is expressed allegorically in the folktale of the raven and the eagle: the former lives for 300 years by feasting on carrion, dead and putrefying flesh, whereas the eagle lives a short but free life, as he drinks living blood. Pugachev has the power and ruthlessness to kill the Commandant and his wife and the mercy and good-heartedness to save their daughter, set her free and make possible her future happiness. Among his final words are those that testify to his benevolence and fatherly intentions towards Grinev and his betrothed:

"Take your sweetheart, go with her where you will. God grant you love and concord" (86). The image from Grinev's dream of Pugachev as his father has become realized.

The dual nature of Grinev's relationship with Pugachev, the private friendship based on generosity and mutual admiration vs. the official relationship of sworn enemies, is paralleled in a certain sense by the very nature of the gift, especially when taking into account the German word for gift. As Mauss informs us, "gift" in German has two opposed meanings: "present" and "poison"; in other words, a gift is something with the capacity to produce both pleasure and displeasure, to enliven on the one hand and to elicit enmity and even to destroy and kill (30). Grinev's personal friendship with what is officially perceived to be the enemy leads to his arrest and an official judgment disparaging of his honor. He is condemned for having received gifts from Pugachev—a fur coat, a horse, half a ruble. The prosecutor inquires with insinuating disdain: "How did this strange friendship come about?... Upon what was it based, if not upon treason or, at the very least, upon base and criminal cowardice?" (96). The general suspiciousness of the times, the common understanding of officialdom that an individual who fraternizes with the enemy in any way is either a renegade or a spy worthy of contempt, is one guilty of dishonor and deserving of the full severity of the law; the gifts become the poisonous evidence that nearly destroys Grinev's life. His father expresses the harshest judgment on his son since his view of the boy has become poisoned as well; in his eyes the boy has been declared guilty of the most grievous sin: "But for a nobleman to betray his oath of

allegiance and ally himself with brigands, murderers and runaway serfs! Shame on our family! Shame on our name!” (99). The military mind bound by a strictly disciplined sense of duty and honor becomes rigid, depriving itself of the capacity for a generous view of things. It all too often sees things in black and white, failing to discern the possibilities a magnanimous heart is capable of realizing.

This being said, what remains is the need to devote some words to the third main character in the novel, Grinev’s servant, Savelich, a *крепостной, дворовый человек* (an enserfed peasant assigned to the manor house). He appears as a comic character, somewhat in the nature of Sancho Panza to Grinev’s Don Quixote. Yet what best characterizes Savelich is his complete lack of self-regard and identity save as the guardian of his pledge, the young Grinev, and his representativeness as a Russian peasant that Pushkin is keen on presenting to his Russian readers.

Russell Belk provides an intriguing definition and the characteristics of the *perfect gift* that perhaps is most characteristic of Savelich’s brand of generosity. The perfect gift “is an embodiment of agapic love—an expression and celebration of love for the other. Such a gift is spontaneous, affective and celebratory; it is not “premeditated” or “calculated” to obtain certain ends” (60).

Savelich, significantly, is the boy’s instructor of Russian, and he is characterized by his fatherly and motherly love and sincere concern for the boy. His Russianness appears in his pithy, down-to-earth Russian sayings, most evident when he tries to repair the hostile relations between father and

son by imploring the father's forgiveness for Grinev's youthful sins: "A horse has four legs and even a horse stumbles" (38). It is noteworthy that the characteristically magnanimous Grinev appears cruelly un-magnanimous only in relation to Savelich. After his ill-fated duel with Shvabrin together with all of its unpleasant consequences, stung to the quick and filled with bitterness by his father's harsh reproaches, Grinev cruelly and most unfairly attempts to shift all blame to Savelich. What pains Savelich most is his young master's accusations of treachery, of deliberately incurring his father's wrath and being the cause of his mother's sickness. Grinev's words, "So it's not enough for you to have been the cause of a wound that kept me at death's door for an entire month. Now you want to finish off my mother as well" (36), are unkind, undeserved, and completely misdirected; this, together with the attacks on his integrity made by the father, Andrei Petrovich, reveals Savelich at his most authentic and most pathetic. The terrible humbling he receives is met with stalwart dignity and an affirmation of his faithfulness as a servant and a demonstration of his unflagging concern for his master's welfare.

The Russian poet and novelist Fedor Sologub (1863-1927) has written the following about Savelich:

гнусный, но несомненно подлинный Савельич. Усердный холоп, «не льстец», верный своим господам, гордый ими, но способный сказать им в глаза, с холопской грубостью, которую господа простят, и слова правды, направленные всегда к барскому, не к своему интересу. Ведь потому-то господа и прощают грубость старого холопа Савельича, что

она бескорыстна, что она вся для господской выгоды. (409) ¹⁰

This total lack of self-interest, this selfless agapic love that Savelich has for Grinev is demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice his life for the boy. When Grinev accuses him of being responsible for his wound in his duel with Shvabrin, Savelich responds by swearing: “As god is my witness, I was running to shield you with my own body from Aleksey Ivanich’s sword. It was only my age—damn it—that made me too slow” (36). The mild oath “damn it” appears to affirm his genuine intention as Pushkin relieves the heightened tension of the scene with a touch of humor.

Yet the ultimate display of his own magnanimity takes place when his master is about to be executed at the hands of Pugachev. “Pugachev was sitting in an armchair on the porch of the commandant’s house. He was wearing a red Cossack *kaftan* trimmed with braid and—pulled low over his glittering eyes—a tall sable hat with gold tassels. His face seemed familiar” (52). Just when Grinev readies himself to meet his doom with a noose placed around his neck and the order “Hang him!” ringing in his ears, it is Savelich who fights for his master’s life: “Stop you heathens! Wait!” (53). As Savelich throws himself before the feet of Pugachev, the servant implores him: “‘Father, dearest father, what will you gain from the death of a noble

¹⁰ “Savelich, however vile, is undoubtedly an authentic character. He is a devoted serf, ‘an unflatterer’ true to his masters, proud of them but capable of speaking to them frankly, right to their faces, with a serf’s crude bluntness, which his masters’ forgive, and his words of truth are always made for the benefit not of himself but of his masters. After all, the masters forgive the crude bluntness of the old serf Savelich precisely because (they realize) it is without self-interest, that it is all for their own benefit.”

child? Let the child go; they'll pay you a ransom. And if you just want to string someone up to spread fear—then hang an old man, hang an old man like me!” (53). In response to this request Pugachev, having failed previously to recognize his “friend” Grinev, recalls the servant who is always looking after his master’s interests and declares: “Our Dear Father pardons you” (53). The spontaneous act of love, in the midst of mayhem, kindles the gentle forgiving side of Pugachev.

It takes a long time and numerous misadventures for Savelich to accept the idea that the hare-skin coat rightfully belongs to the peasant and not his master; that it is a token of the magical power endowed in a gift that creates a lifelong bond. Pugachev is recognized by Grinev as his benefactor. Grinev has no choice but to make use of Pugachev’s power and good will to the fullest to secure the happiness of the Captain’s daughter and his own: “the man in whose hands my destiny lay and to whom, by a strange confluence of events I had become so mysteriously bound. The wanton, bloodthirsty Cossack who had volunteered to rescue my beloved” (88).

Grinev comes to realize his full maturity when he comes to offer Savelich a gift; by so doing, he recognizes the humanity of Savelich and their normal master-servant relationship is suspended. Grinev, having left the relatively safe confines of Orenburg, intends to go off to Pugachev’s headquarters to seek his assistance in securing the freedom of the Captain’s daughter. In the face of unknown dangers, he instructs Savelich to take his bag of silver, count out the money and keep half for himself: “Don’t grieve Savelich; God willing, we will meet again. Now don’t be overly scrupulous or

stint yourself. Buy everything you need, even if you have to pay three times the price. I make you a present of that money...” (90). Grinev’s gift is an expression of his thoughtfulness and regard for a fellow human being who in the exchange is deemed his equal.

The novel’s fairy-tale ending pays homage to the ultimate benefactor in Russian society, the enlightened autocrat.¹¹ Through the personal appeal of the Captain’s daughter to the Empress Catherine, Grinev is released from confinement and allowed to marry Masha. Catherine’s gift to Grinev, a letter to his father, restores his honor and good name, putting an end to their estrangement, just as she provides for the material well-being of the young couple. In Pushkin’s portrayal of the Russian autocrat, her imposing stature notwithstanding, she is accessible to her people, graceful and wise, the ultimate embodiment of magnanimity and generosity. Her far-seeing wisdom and justice, her fair- and open-mindedness allow her to ascertain the truth, in this case the innocence of Grinev. A nation’s leader, Pushkin’s hopeful ending suggests, in the spirit of generosity, has the greatest capacity to provide for the well-being of her people.

¹¹ Pushkin himself had a “personal” relationship with and was dependent on the apparent generosity of Nicholas I. After six years of exile he sent a plea for magnanimity to Nicholas on 8 Sept 1826, seeking the tsar’s personal intervention, somewhat in the manner of Masha, in regaining his freedom. Pushkin was touched by the personal magnetism of the Tsar who, he felt, preserved his honor. His later confession to Nicholas of his writing of the blasphemous *Gavriliada* (1821), led him to beg for forgiveness, duly obtained. Pushkin felt a personal loyalty to the Tsar, coming to his defense in the latter’s harsh suppression of the Polish uprising of 1831. Nikolai’s appreciation took the form of appointing Pushkin as historiographer, which in turn gave Pushkin access to the State archives, leading him to the records concerning the Pugachev Uprising. (See Vickery 2-14.)

Pushkin, more than any other Russian writer, sought to unite the Russian people by giving them an inclusive vision of themselves that drew upon all levels of society—from Tsar and Empress to peasant, from noble officer to Cossack rebel and from master to servant. As Pushkin demonstrates in *The Captain's Daughter*, the gift, with its powerful qualities and in its various forms, is capable of forging lifelong bonds that transcend class boundaries. In so doing he expresses the hope that generosity can serve as the basis of a new ethics founded on mutual respect, one that would foster principles of honor, disinterest and solidarity and create a spirit of reciprocity among givers and recipients of gifts. Such a spirit is essential to ensuring the happiness of individuals and communities. Such is his hope for his fellow Russians and for all humanity.

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