



The Gypsies & Other Narrative Poems

Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin, Antony Wood, Simon Brett

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Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), Russia's greatest writer, wrote much more than his novel in verse *Eugene Onegin*. In this selection of five of his finest narrative poems, all his essential qualities are on display: his ironic poise, his stylistic variety, his confounding of expectations, his creation of poetry out of everyday language.

The Gypsies is modern Russian literature's first masterpiece. Telling the anti-Romantic tale of an effete city-dweller whose search for unspoiled values among a band of gypsies ends in tragedy, it is the major but unacknowledged source for Bizet's *Carmen*. In *The Bridegroom* Pushkin turns the Romantic ballad into a whodunnit filled with sexual dread and subconscious terror. In *Count Nulin*, a deliciously comic tale of country life, he stands Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* on its head: what would have happened if Lucrece had slapped Tarquin's face? *The Tale of the Dead Princess* (Pushkin's version of the Snow White story) transforms Russian folk tale into purest art, and its companion-piece, the eerie *Tale of the Golden Cockerel* (inspired by his bitter experience in exile with Tsar Nicholas I), savagely politicizes the folk-tale form.

Antony Wood is one of the very few translators who can bring Pushkin authentically alive in English. If, as *The Tablet* has said, he comes close to the translator's ideal, so Simon Brett comes close to the illustrator's. This well-known engraver has captured the essence of each of these poems in a single dramatic image, from the firelight reverie of the title poem to the grisly action of *The Bridegroom*. *The Gypsies* is a double masterpiece: a masterly translation of Pushkin for today and a triumph of the illustrator's art.

Antony Wood is publisher of Angel Books, London. His previous translations of Pushkin's poetry include *Mozart and Salieri: The Little Tragedies*, *Boris Godunov*, and a number of lyric poems. He was awarded a Pushkin Medal by the Russian government in 1999, the bicentenary year of Pushkin's birth.

Simon Brett has been making wood engravings since 1961. His prints, bookplates, and book illustrations are among the finest of the present time, and he writes frequently on the history, practice, and current condition of the engraver's art.

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