

A23

Three Russian Poets: Selections from Pushkin, Lermontov and Tyutchev Pushkin Lermontov Tyutchev: Poems

Within months of arriving in America in May 1940, Nabokov struck up a friendship with the American critic Edmund Wilson. In the fall, at one of their first meetings, Wilson encouraged Nabokov to translate Pushkin's verse-drama "Mozart and Salieri" (here, work #6, and also appearing in *The New Republic* on 21-Apr-1941, both with a short preface from Wilson). A few months later Nabokov wrote, "Your suggestion regarding *Mozart and Salieri* has worked havoc with me. I thought I would try with the idea—and then suddenly found myself in the very deep waters of English verse. After a week of hard work I have finished the first scene. Will you please tell me whether it is worth while going on?" (*NWL* 35, before 12-Dec-1940)

In further letters to Wilson in 1941, Nabokov mentioned other translations, from Pushkin and Tyutchev that eventually appeared in *Three Russian Poets* (*NWL* 50, 52, 29-Apr-1941, 18-Jul-1941).

In May of 1942, James Laughlin, the proprietor of New Directions, the eventual publisher of *Three Russian Poets* (and having recently published *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*), commissioned Nabokov, for a small advance, to produce two volumes: translations of Pushkin and Tyutchev and a critical study of Gogol. Nabokov squeezed the translations between his lepidoptery and teaching at Cornell. In the fall of 1943 he sent off his finished manuscript (with Lermontov added) to New Directions.

Soon after, Nabokov wrote Wilson, "I am sending a first batch [footnote: on second thoughts I am sending you the whole book) of translation, mainly from Tyutchev as the rest of Pushkin still needs some pruning. You will see that I have delicately toyed with one or two images—greatly improving them. (*NWL* 119, 9-Nov-1943)

Over the next several years in letters to Wilson, Nabokov detailed his dealings with Laughlin, both before and after publication: "I have corrected and returned the proofs of Pushkin-Lermontov-Tyutchev to Laughlin." (*NWL* 160, 11-Oct-1944); "Laughlin writes he is doing his best to have the book of poems out... In my contract with him there is one clause saying that if the book is not out the the 1st of January 1945, he loses his right to publish it—and the moneys he paid me. I shall wait till the 1st of February." (*NWL* 164, 20-Jan-1945); "Laughlin asks me 'what's the future on (*sic*) the *Three Russian Poets*?' He has apparently sold out the ed[ition] and anyway the time limit I set him is up." (*NWL* 195, 21-Jun-1946); "Laughlin wants to reprint my *Three Poets* but also wants a five year 'protection.'" (*NWL* 197, 13-Sep-1946) New Directions published the collection on 14-Feb-1945.

With the exception of the 1969 edition for the library market, there were no further American issues of the book. In fact, as Nabokov's ideas about translations evolved, he refused to allow his rhymed translations to be reprinted at all.

The 1947 British edition from Lindsay Drummond has a different title, three more Pushkin translations, and seven more from Lermontov. In a vituperative reaction to its publication, Nabokov wrote to David Higham, his London literary agent (*SL* 83–85, 24-Mar-1948):

...my name modestly appears following that of the lady who supplied a number of entirely awful and out-of-place illustrations...

There is no mention of me in the blurb. A Mr. Stefan Schimanski is named as "editor"—who the deuce is Mr. Schimanski and what has he been "editing" in my book? Apart from a couple of hideous misprints,

due to the fact that I never saw the proofs, the translations appear exactly as I made them. Incidentally, since I get nowhere any credit for the three introductions, that credit automatically goes to the mythical editor.

Can you suggest what is to be done about it? Never in my life have I been subjected to the cavalier treatment these publishers seem to reserve for their authors. Frankly, I would very much prefer not being published at all in England to being published like this! Tell me what is to be done in order to stop them. Can you obtain that they display prominently, on all copies still in their possession, my name as the author of the translations *and introductions*? Can you stop them from ever repeating this offensive blunder, should another batch of the book be printed? And—should they be willing to present the book with due mention of what had been done by me in all the places where it is natural to do so—would you prevail upon them to divorce the text from the incredible illustrations? If all or any part of these conditions cannot be accepted by the publishers, what can you do towards cancelling the agreement? I signed it very much against my better judgment and sorely regret having done so...

(Also see *VNTRY* 19–20, 44, 61, 66; *GCVN* 709–714; *VB* 127–29.)

Edition Summary

- A23.1 Three Russian Poets: Selections from Pushkin, Lermontov and Tyutchev** FIRST EDITION (NEW DIRECTIONS), 14-Feb-1945, 2 issues
- A23.2 Pushkin Lermontov Tyutchev: Poems** FIRST BRITISH EDITION (LINDSAY DRUMMOND), Aug-1947, 1 issue
- A23.3 Three Russian Poets: Selections from Pushkin, Lermontov and Tyutchev** NEW AMERICAN EDITION (FOLCROFT PRESS), 1969, 1 issue

Vladimir Nabokov: A Descriptive Bibliography, Revised

Three Russian Poets: Selections from Pushkin, Lermontov and Tyutchev Pushkin Lermontov Tyutchev: Poems

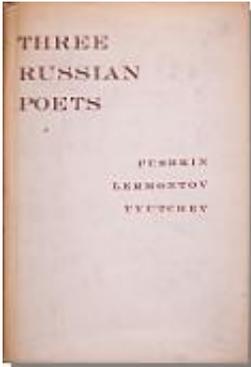
A23.1

FIRST EDITION (NEW DIRECTIONS)

¶ First printing, variant a, 14-Feb-1945

POINTS

Variant a is a boards issue with dust jacket; variant b is a pamphlet issue with dust jacket. They have different pricings.



A23.1 First printing, variant a, 1945, cover, front



A23.1 First printing, variant a, 1945, title page



A23.1 First printing, variant a, 1945, copyright page

Collation: (22.0 X 15 cm), [1]²⁰, 20 leaves, pp. [1–4] 5–35 [36] 37 [38–40]

Title page: THREE | RUSSIAN POETS | *Selections from Pushkin, Lermontov | and Tyutchev* | IN NEW TRANSLATIONS BY | *Vladimir Nabokov* | NEW DIRECTIONS *The Poets of the Year* NORFOLK, CONN.

Copyright page: COPYRIGHT 1944 BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV | MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES | *New Directions Books are published by James Laughlin* | New York Office — 67 West 44 — 18

Colophon: qp | This edition was designed by Ernst Reichl | and printed at the Profile Press in New York City. | The types used are Linotype Janson | and Engravers' Roman.

Binding: Gray paper over boards. White endpapers. All edges trimmed.

Front cover: THREE | RUSSIAN | POETS | PUSHKIN | LERMONTOV | TYUTCHEV. **Back cover:** \blank\. **Spine:** \none\

Covering: Gray paper dust jacket. **Front cover:** THREE | RUSSIAN | POETS | PUSHKIN | LERMONTOV | TYUTCHEV. **Back cover:** \blank\.

Front flap: \$1.00 | THREE | RUSSIAN POETS | translated by VLADIMIR NABOKOV | \book description\. **Back flap:** THE POETS | OF THE YEAR | SERIES | THE SERIES FOR 1944 | \list of six books and their prices\ | Published by NEW DIRECTIONS | 67 W 44, NYC-18. **Spine:** \none\

Contents: [1] half-title, [2] blank, [3] title page, [4] copyright page, 5–35 text, [36] text, 37 biographical notes, [38] biographical notes, [39] list of books in series for 1941, 1942, 1943 [40] colophon

Series and Number: The Poets of the Year 1943

Price: \$1.00

Description: This variant's dust jacket front flap has "\$1.00" printed in the upper-right corner. The lower-right corner is blank.

I have examined one copy of each of the eleven other pamphlets in the 1943 series. Each one is priced at 50 cents. Eight are clipped in their lower-right corners. Two are clipped in their upper-right corners. Only one is unclipped in either corner. This strongly suggests that these dust jackets, at least, were double-price printed and clipped as necessary.

An examination of the dust jacket back flap information in other pamphlets in the 1943 series suggests that the Nabokov volume was originally supposed to have been printed by the Powgen Press instead of the Profile Press. Also, it appears to have been a late addition to the series: It is mentioned on only five of the dust jackets; the series is for 1943; it was copyrighted 1944; it was issued in February 1945.

The New Directions "Poet of the Month" series consisted of thin volumes of either lengthy individual poems or small collections of poems by one author, and were released on a monthly basis. Each volume was published by a different small press and released by New Directions. The Series was discontinued after a few years. [Wikipedia]

See *VNTRY* 44, 61, 66; *GCVN* 709–714; *VB* 127–29.

Additional Works: With a one-paragraph introduction to "Mozart and Salieri" by Edmund Wilson

Works:

1) Exegi Monumentum. "No hands have wrought my monument; no

- weeds”
- 2) The Upas Tree (*Antiaris toxicaria*, Lesch. 1810). “Deep in the desert’s misery,”
 - 3) A scene from “The Covetous Knight”. “Just as a mad young fellow frets awaiting”
– From Scene 2 of *The covetous knight*.
 - 4) A Feast During the Plague
 - 5) Mozart and Salieri
 - 6) Farewell. “Farewell! Nevermore shall we meet,”
– Lines 1–4 of the first octave and the third octave.
 - 7) My Native Land. “If I do love my land, strangely I love it:”
 - 8) The Triple Dream. “I dreamt that with a bullet in my side”
 - 9) Nightfall. “Down from her head the earth has rolled”
 - 10) Tears. “Friends, with my eyes I love caressing”
– With an epigraph, “O, lacrimarum fons.,” from Thomas Gray.
 - 11) The Journey. “Soft sand comes up to our horses’ shanks”
 - 12) Silentium. “Speak not, lie hidden, and conceal”
 - 13) Last Love [1]. “Love at the closing of our days”
 - 14) Dusk. “Now the ashen shadows mingle,”
 - 15) The Abyss. “When sacred Night sweeps heavenward, she takes”
 - 16) Autumn. “When Autumn has just come, there is”
 - 17) Appeasement. “The storm withdrew, but Thor had found his oak,”
 - 18) Tears. “Human tears, O the tears! you that flow”
 - 19) Pushkin
 - 20) Lermontov
 - 21) Tyutchev

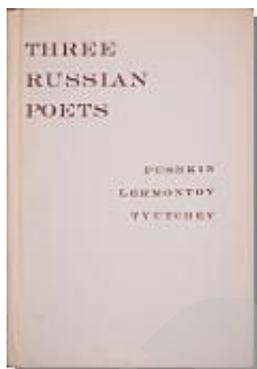
¶ First printing, variant b, 14-Feb-1945

Binding: Tan pamphlet saddle-stitched with two staples. **Front and back covers:** \blank\

Covering: Dust jacket. **Front flap:** \upper-right corner clipped, “50 cents” in lower-right corner\

Price: \$0.50

Description: This variant’s dust jacket was printed with “50 cents” in the lower-right corner of the front flap. It is unknown if “\$1.00”, or anything else, was printed in the upper-right corner.



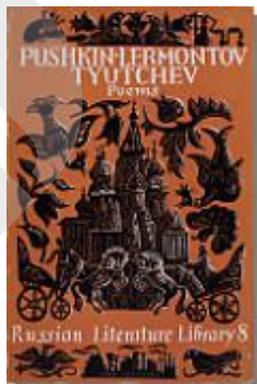
A23.1 First printing, variant b, 1945, cover, front

A23.2 FIRST BRITISH EDITION (LINDSAY DRUMMOND)

¶ First printing, Aug-1947

POINTS

The British edition contains 10 additional translations not in the American edition.



A23.2 First printing, 1947, dust jacket, front

Collation: (18.5 X 12.2 cm), [A–B]⁸ C–D⁸, 32 leaves, pp. [i–iv] [1–4] 5 [6] 7–56 [57–60]

Title page: PUSHKIN • LERMONTOV | TYUTCHEV | \device\ | Poems | \group drawing of the three poets\ | Lindsay Drummond Limited | London 1947 | \device\

Copyright page: *Drawings by* | DONIA NACHSHEN | *Translated from the Russian by* | VLADIMIR NABOKOV | THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE | CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORISED | ECONOMY STANDARDS | MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN | BY HARRISON AND SONS LIMITED | PRINTERS TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING | LONDON, HAYES AND HIGH WYCOMBE

Binding: Red cloth over boards. White endpapers. All edges trimmed. **Front cover:** \gilt stamping of group drawing of the three poets\ **Back cover:** \blank\ **Spine:** \gilt stamping running up\ \device\ PUSHKIN • LERMONTOV • TYUTCHEV • Poems \device\

Covering: White paper dust jacket. **Front cover:** \drawings of Russian motifs over reddish-brown background, lettering in white\ PUSHKIN • LERMONTOV | TYUTCHEV | Poems | Russian Literature Library 8. **Back cover:** \reddish-brown background with group drawing of the three



A23.2 First printing, 1947, cover, front



A23.2 First printing, 1947, title page



A23.2 First printing, 1947, copyright page

poets\ **Spine:** \running up over reddish-brown background\ \publisher's device\ \all white lettering\ PUSHKIN • LERMONTOV • TYUTCHEV • Poems. **Front cover:** \two lines reddish-brown\ RUSSIAN | LITERATURE LIBRARY | \rule\ | \book description\ | *Illustrated by Donia Nachshen* | \reddish-brown\ 5s. **Back flap:** \list of three other books, publisher information\

Contents: [i–ii] blank, [iii] list of books in series, [iv] blank, [1] half-title, [2] “*This edition first published 1947*” [3] title page, [4] copyright page, 5 table of contents, [6] illustration, 7–56 text, [57] blank, [58–59] books in series, [60] blank

Series and Number: Russian Literature Library, 8

Price: 5s

Description: Nabokov’s notes on each of the three poets appear in this edition just before each of their poems. The additional translations in this edition are works 7–9 under Pushkin and works 14–20 under Lermontov.

The 24 drawings distributed throughout the volume are by Donia Nachshen.

Additional Works: With a one-paragraph introduction to “Mozart and Salieri” by Edmund Wilson and 24 drawings by Donia Nachshen

Works:

- 1) Pushkin
- 2) Exegi Monumentum. “No hands have wrought my monument; no weeds”
- 3) The Upas Tree (*Antiaris toxicaria*, Lesch. 1810). “Deep in the desert’s misery,”
- 4) A scene from “The Covetous Knight”. “Just as a mad young fellow frets awaiting”
– From Scene 2 of *The covetous knight*.
- 5) A Feast During the Plague
- 6) Mozart and Salieri
- 7) Epigram (On Vorontsov). “Half-merchant and half-prince”
- 8) The Name. “What is my name to you? ’Twill die:”
- 9) Winter Morning. “A magic day—sunshine and frost—”
- 10) Lermontov
- 11) Farewell. “Farewell! Nevermore shall we meet,”
– Lines 1–4 of the first octave and the third octave.
- 12) My Native Land. “If I do love my land, strangely I love it:”
- 13) The Triple Dream. “I dreamt that with a bullet in my side”
- 14) Imitation of Heine. “A pine there stands in the northern wilds”
- 15) The Sky and the Stars. “Fair is the evening sky,”
- 16) The Wish. “Open the door of my prison,”
- 17) The Sail. “Amid the blue haze of the ocean”
- 18) Thanksgiving. “For everything, for everything, O Lord,”
– Nabokov translates the original eight lines as 16 lines.
- 19) The Angel. “An angel was crossing the pale vault of night,”
- 20) The Rock. “The little golden cloud that spent the night”
- 21) Tyutchev
- 22) Nightfall. “Down from her head the earth has rolled”
- 23) Tears. “Friends, with my eyes I love caressing”
– With an epigraph, “O, lacrimarum fons,” from Thomas Gray.
- 24) The Journey. “Soft sand comes up to our horses’ shanks”
- 25) Silentium. “Speak not, lie hidden, and conceal”
- 26) Last Love [1]. “Love at the closing of our days”
- 27) Dusk. “Now the ashen shadows mingle,”
- 28) The Abyss. “When sacred Night sweeps heavenward, she takes”
- 29) Autumn. “When Autumn has just come, there is”
- 30) Appeasement. “The storm withdrew, but Thor had found his oak,”
- 31) Tears. “Human tears, O the tears! you that flow”

A23.3 NEW AMERICAN EDITION (FOLCROFT PRESS)

¶ First printing, 1969

Unexamined

Copyright page: First published 1944 | Reprinted 1969

Description: Apparently marketed for libraries.

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(Draft of 28 Mar 2013)

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