

**ВСЕРОССИЙСКАЯ ОЛИМПИАДА ПО АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ**  
**«Myths about Pushkin»**



Kira Lissitskaya (Photo: Alexander Bryullov; Orest Kiprensky; public domain)

*Read and think and chose the correct answer*

Is it true that Russia's most celebrated poet had a 'Don Juan list' with the names of his lovers and that his debts (running to millions in today's money)

**1)**

- a) had been paid off**
- b) were paid off**
- c) was paid off**
- d) had been paying off**

by the emperor himself? Here are the top five most curious myths about Alexander Pushkin.

**1. Pushkin's father threatened to disinherit him**

There were many legends about

**2)**

- a) the**
- b) a**
- c) —**

Pushkin's gambling addiction and most of them were true. Despite the fact that, by the standards of his time, Pushkin was very wealthy, his love of gambling

**3)**

- a) leaves**
- b) will leave**
- c) leaved**
- d) left**

a significant dent in the poet's budget. He played bridge, faro, ombre and other card games, risking his fortune all the time. Once, he almost lost an as yet unpublished part of '[Eugene Onegin](#)', but managed to win it back in

**4)**

- a) last**
- b) laster**
- c) the lastest**
- d) the last moment.**

This is how Anna Kern, one of his many lovers and muses, described his addiction: “Pushkin was very fond of cards and he used to say that they were his only real attachment.”



Sergei Lvovich Pushkin engraved by K. Gampeln  
Public domain

His father didn't approve of Pushkin's addiction and there were rumors that the poet

**5)**

- a) would disinherit**
- b) would be disinherited**
- c) would have been disinherited**
- d) would have disinherited**

because of it. Pushkin's relations with his father were indeed difficult, but disinheritance would have cast a shadow on the entire family and, in actual fact, even huge debts would not have been a good enough reason

**6)**

- a) to**
- b) of**
- c) for**
- d) with**

such a radical step. Also, there is no documentary evidence to support the idea.

But, he did have many debts: After his death in a duel, it emerged that Pushkin had card debts of almost 150,000 rubles (equivalent to about 240 million rubles today!). Yet, it was not his father who paid them off, but Emperor Nicholas I himself: He cleared the whole amount and, furthermore, supported Pushkin's family out of the state

**7)**

- a) treasury**
- b) coffer**
- c) chest**
- d) public purse.**

## **2. Pushkin had a huge 'Don Juan list'**

This list is not fiction at all and it was even published in 1887 in 'Album of the Pushkin Exhibition, 1880'. Starting in 1829, the poet wrote down the names of women he was attracted

**8)**

- a) with
- b) to
- c) of
- d) without

or was intimate with in two parallel lists. The lists included 37 names, in total. According to some historians, the poet wrote the names of the women he loved most in the first list, while the second was a list of women he was simply attracted to.



Supposed portrait of Anna Kern  
A. Arefov-Bagaev

Historians have managed to identify, albeit not entirely accurately, some of the women with whom Pushkin had

**9)**

- a) some
- b) any
- c) no
- d) many

attachment. Among them were believed to be Ekaterina Karamzina, wife of the prominent historian Nikolay Karamzin; Anna Petrovna Kern, to whom Pushkin subsequently dedicated one of his

**10)**

- a) major
- b) big-league
- c) sartin
- d) best-known

poems, ‘I remember that wonderful moment...’; as well as an actress of the TsarskoyeSelo Theater, a lady-in-waiting to the empress, the daughter of a French Duke, the daughter of an Austrian banker, the wife of the governor of Odessa and other prominent “unattached” or married ladies.



Portrait of Natalia NikolaevnaPushkina-Lanskaya (née Goncharova)  
Alexander Bryullov

### 3. Pushkin was Dumas

Supporters of this theory

**11)**

- a) claim
- b) clamed
- c) had claimed
- d) had been claiming

that Pushkin faked his own death and traveled to France where he started writing novels under the name of Alexandre Dumas. It is alleged that two things could have prompted him to do so: gambling debts - which he was unable to pay off to the end of his life - or a decree by Emperor Nicholas I secretly sending Pushkin to France as

**12)**

- a) the
- b) an
- c) a
- d) \_\_\_\_ “

“spy” and, in return, paying all the poet’s debts and providing for his family.



Alexandre Dumas in 1855

Public domain

Yes, on the one hand, Pushkin

**13)**

- a) would be
- b) would have been
- c) would have been being
- d) is

perfectly capable of playing this “role”: He had a perfect command of the French language and was acquainted with the manners of the higher echelons of society that he was supposed to gain access

**14)**

- a) against
- b) to
- c) onto
- d) towards

- he just needed to create a convincing persona for himself. That, according to the theory, is how Alexandre Dumas appeared on the scene.

Nevertheless, despite the arguments of the adherents of this legend (similarities of appearance, references to Pushkin's life in the works of Dumas, among others), there are

**15)**

- a) a
- b) the
- c) \_\_\_\_
- d) an

equivalent number of counter-arguments. For instance, Alexander Dumas was already fairly well known as a writer in the 1830s and many of his plays had already reached Russian theaters by that time. Moreover, the writer took part in the 1830 July Revolution, while, at that time, Pushkin himself

**16)**

- a) was preparing
- b) prepared
- c) had prepared
- d) had been preparing

for his marriage to Natalia Goncharova.

After the fateful duel, many of Pushkin's friends and relatives visited him at home and as many as eight doctors attended Pushkin in his last days, so the chances of everyone who saw Alexander Sergeyevich at that time

**17)**

- a) to be persuaded
- b) being persuaded
- c) persuading
- d) being persuading

to keep things a secret would have been extremely small.

**4. Pushkin was an African**

This was partly true because Pushkin's great-grandfather, Abram Petrovich Gannibal, was born

**18)**

- a) anywhere
- b) nowhere
- c) where
- d) somewhere

in the region of present-day Cameroon (or Ethiopia - there are sharply conflicting accounts of the exact details). In the early 18th century, he was captured and then the merchant Sava Raguzinsky brought Gannibal to Moscow. Within a year, he had been baptized and the

**19)**

- a) sponsor
- b) cross
- c) godfather
- d) baptismal

was Emperor Peter I himself. In Russia, he was to become the chief military engineer of the Russian army and his son from his second marriage was Ossip Gannibal, the poet's grandfather.



Portrait, attributed by some researchers as a portrait of A.P. Hannibal  
Public domain

This is the only circumstance

**20)**

- a) that
- b) what
- c) which
- d) whose

justifies the assertion that Alexander Pushkin was an African poet. And, although he really did hark back to his historical roots in his works fairly frequently, in reality, he was just one-eighth African and indeed a further one-eighth German, with the remaining 75 percent of his family tree being purely Russian. Many people still aren't convinced that the story is

**21)**

- a) a
- b) an
- c) \_\_
- d) the

true, but there is documentary evidence of the existence of Abram Gannibal, so there is no reason to doubt Pushkin's partial African ancestry.

### **5. A hare saved Pushkin from arrest or death**

There is a myth that if a hare

**22)**

- a) didn't run
- b) wasn't run
- c) doesn't run
- d) had not run across

the path of a carriage Pushin was traveling in from Mikhailovskoe (where he was living in exile) to St. Petersburg, the poet would most likely have been sent to Siberia or executed for involvement in the Decembrist Uprising. And, although he was not regarded as a Decembrist and did not take part

**23)**

- a) in
- b) on
- c) onto
- d) towards

political protests, Pushkin's freedom-loving poetry could have backfired on him, so going to St. Petersburg (particularly when he was supposed to be in exile) was



dangerous. A hare crossing one's path was seen as a very bad omen and the superstitious poet turned the carriage back.



Yuri Belinsky/TASS

However, as good this legend

**24)**

- a) can
- b) might
- c) may
- d) could

sound, in reality, things turn out to be a bit more complicated. The poet's friend Sergei Sobolevsky wrote that the hare crossed Pushkin's path not on the way to the capital, but when he went to say goodbye to his neighbors. And that it wasn't a hare that stopped the poet, but something else considered a bad omen in the 19th century - a priest at the gates of the estate. It was only then that the poet decided to stay.

For all that, the hare has, nevertheless, gained an immortal place in history. In 2000, not far from Mikhailovskoe, a monument was

**25)**

- a) casted up
- b) thrown up
- c) arised
- d) put up

to the hare as the poet's "savior" from an early death. But, as is known, it did not help him for long - Pushkin would still die at the very young age of 37.