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PUSHKIN THE HISTORIAN: THE EVOLUTION OF PUSHKIN'S VIEWS ON REBELLION, POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND THE WRITING OF HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Alexander Pushkin devoted the last five years of his life to research in the imperial archives in St. Petersburg, publishing a number of works dealing with such historical figures as Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Boris Godunov, and the rebel leaders Mazepa and Pugachev. This thesis examines Pushkin's historiographical methodology and conclusions and considers Pushkin's writings from the viewpoint of the historian rather than the literary critic. It offers a chronological study of the four fictional and non-fictional works in which Pushkin analysed major figures and events in Russian history and traces the importance he attributed to them for the development of the Russian national consciousness. The themes of rebellion against the state and political legitimacy predominate in this investigation and shed light on how Pushkin's study of history reinforced and, in some instances altered, his own fundamental political and social beliefs.

RÉSUMÉ

Alexandre Pouchkine a consacré les cinq dernières années de sa vie à faire des recherches dans les archives impériales de Saint-Pétersbourg et à publier plusieurs ouvrages consacrés à des personnages historiques comme Pierre le Grand, Catherine II la Grande, Boris Godounov et les chefs rebelles Mazeppa et Pougatchev. Cette thèse est centrée sur la méthodologie historiogaphique et les conclusions de Pouchkine et examine son oeuvre du point de vue de l'historien plutôt que de celui du critique littéraire. Elle propose une étude chronologique des quatre oeuvres fictives et non fictives dans lesquelles Pouchkine analyse les personnages et événements principaux de l'histoire russe et permet de dégager l'importance qu'il leur attribue dans l'épanouissement de la conscience nationale russe. Les thèmes de la rébellion contre l'État et de la légitimité politique prédominent dans cette enquête et illustrent comment l'étude que Pouchkine a faite de l'histoire a conforté et parfois altéré ses convictions politiques et sociales les plus fondamentales.

Table of Contents

CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

1799 Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin born in Moscow.

1802 Suicide of Radishchev, author of *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow.*

Murder of Tsar Paul I. Accession of Alexander I.

1812 French invasion of Russia. Burning of Moscow.

1814 Pushkin enters Imperial Lycée at Tsarskoe Selo.

Abdication of Napoleon. Restoration of the Bourbons.

Byron publishes *Lara* and *The Corsair*. Scott publishes *Waverly*.

1815 Battle of Waterloo. Congress of Vienna. Alexander I initiates Holy Alliance with Austria and Prussia.

1816 Death of Gavrila Derzhavin, court poet to Catherine the Great.

Karamzin publishes first volume of *History of the Russian State*.

1817 Pushkin graduates from the Lycée, moves to St. Petersburg, meets future philosopher Peter Chaadaev.

1818 Joins the society of the Green Lamp, a literary club with liberal political leanings.

Birth of Turgenev.

1819 Publishes "Ode to Fredom". Exiled to southern Russia.

André Chénier's *Poésies* published posthumously.

1820 Publishes *Ruslan and Ludmila*.

1821 Birth of Dostoevsky.

Scott publishes *Kenilworth*.

1822 Writes *The Captive of the Caucasus*, *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* and the *Gavriliada*.

1823 Begins *Eugene Onegin*.

1824 Second exile at family estate Mikhailovskoe.

Death of Byron at Missolonghi.

1825 Publishes first chapter of *Eugene Onegin*. Writes *Boris Godunov*.

Death of Alexander I. Accession of Nicholas I. Decembrist insurrection.

1826 Execution of Decembrist leaders.

Death of Karamzin.

1827 Nicholas I agrees to act as Pushkin's personal censor.

1828 Writes *Poltava*. Works on *The Blackamoor of Peter the Great*.

Russo-Turkish War (until 1829).

Birth of Tolstoy.

1829 Treaty of Adrianople ends Russo-Turkish War.

Lermontov writes *The Demon*. Zagoskin's historical novel *Yuri Miloslavsky* published.

1830 Writes the *Tales of Belkin*, "Mozart and Salieri", "History of the Village of Gorjukhino", 'The Covetous Knight", "The Stone Guest", "Feast During the Time of Plague".

July Revolution in France. Charles X overthrown. Louis Philippe elected king.

1831 Marries Natalya Goncharova. Publishes *Boris Godunov*.

Polish uprising against Russia fails.

Death of Sir Walter Scott.

1832 Begins *The Captain's Daughter*.

Death of Goethe.

1833 Travels to Urals to research Pugachev uprising.

Minister of Education Uvarov proclaims doctrine of "Official Nationality".

1834 Publishes "The Queen of Spades". Completes *History of Pugachev*.

1835 Founds journal *The Contemporary*.

Pogodin becomes first professor of Russian History at the University of Moscow.

1836 Pushkin completes *The Captain's Daughter*.

Chaadaev's "Philosophical Letter".

1837 Pushkin killed in a duel by d'Anthès.

Lermontov writes "The Death of a Poet".

Chapter 1:

Introduction

A significant number of detractors, including both contemporaries of Pushkin and modern scholars, have deplored the poet's reactionary conservatism in the latter part of his life. They have posited a number of alternative scenarios to account for the alleged reversal in Pushkin's thought in the late 1820's and 1830's. Without a doubt, censorship affected the content of Pushkin's literary efforts and public utterances; moreover, Tsar Nicholas I's 1826 decision to act as Pushkin's personal censor served to impose more rather than fewer restrictions on the poet's freedom to criticize government and society.[1] Shortly thereafter, Pushkin embarked on the serious study of Russian history; by the early 1830's, the ideas he derived from this research began to coalesce with his earlier thoughts into a well-integrated political stance.[2]

Pushkin's historiographical methodology, throughout his writings, was marked significantly by the influence of the authors he had read at the lycée. Voltaire and Karamzin remained important sources of inspiration even though Pushkin had, at one point, accused the latter of toadying and showing his readers

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[1] William Mills Todd, "Institutions of Literature in Early-Nineteenth Century Russia: Boundaries and Transgressions," in Gary Saul Morson, ed., *Literature and History; Theoretical Problems and Russian Case Studies*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 82.

[2] Sam Driver, "Pushkin and Politics: The Later Works," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 25.3 (1981), 2.

"the necessity of despotism and the pleasures of the knout."[3] After 1825, however, this youthful hyperbolism tended to diminish. Pushkin's study of eighteenth century Russian history ultimately served to bolster the more conservative elements in his historical and political outlook and complemented his reaction to contemporary historical events. The themes of rebellion, political legitimacy and the fate of the hereditary nobility dominate Pushkin's writings from 1825 to 1837 and, together with historiography proper, are the chief subjects of inquiry in this investigation. The works which will be considered are, in order of composition: the drama *Boris Godunov*, the narrative poem *Poltava*, *The History of Pugachev* and the novel *The Captain's Daughter.*

A chronological approach to his composition, meanwhile, helps to clarify the reasons which caused Pushkin to rethink his views on Russian society. The rebellions in Greece against the Turks and in Poland against the tsar's government, together with the July Revolution in France, provoked a strong conservative reaction from Pushkin and, in turn, strengthened his interest in earlier instances of social turmoil and political upheaval in Russia. By the mid-1830's, the concatenation of political unrest and his own historical research resulted in the formation of a world-view dominated by faith in political legitimacy and the

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[3] Pushkin, "To the Author of *The History of the Russian State*," as quoted by John Bayley, *Pushkin; A Comparative Commentary*, (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971), 143.

belief, with which Dostoevsky was later to agree, that armed uprisings failed to achieve lasting and meaningful social change.

Whatever knowledge of history Pushkin possessed prior to his work in the archives was acquired as part of his general literary education.[4] Instructed in accordance with the standards of French literature of the Age of Reason, Pushkin was acquainted with the historical writings of Voltaire, whom he held in high esteem and whom he considered to have been "the first to follow the new road, and to bring the lamp of philosophy into the dark archives of history."[5] Pushkin contrasted Voltaire's achievements with those of his contemporaries and awarded him precedence over Gibbon, Hume and Robertson.

At the same time, Pushkin tried to follow important developments in European historiography; his library contained, in addition to the authors mentioned above, the works of the English Whig historian Hallam and those of the German and French historians Niebuhr, Barante, Guizot, Thierry, Thiers, Mignet and Michelet. Pushkin also called attention to the debt the "new school" of French

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[4] Michael Karpovich, "Pushkin as an Historian," *Centennial Essays for Pushkin*, eds. Samuel H. Cross and Ernest J. Simmons, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1937), 183.

[5] Alexander Pushkin, "To Peter Andreevich Vyazemsky," 5 July 1824, letter 75 of *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, ed. and trans. J. Thomas Shaw, vol. 1 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 164.

historiography owed to the historical novels of Walter Scott, whose influence on Pushkin was to rival Byron's.[6]

Pushkin's once disparaging evaluation of Karamzin softened somewhat as he matured. Nevertheless, while he defended the historian in the so-called Karamzin-Polevoy controversy, and dedicated his drama *Boris Godunov* (1824) to him, Pushkin was well aware of his limitations. Though he ultimately praised the later volumes of the *History of the Russian State (Istoriya Russkogo Gosurdastva)* and hailed Karamzin as the "Columbus of Russian history", he noticed distinctly anachronistic elements in the *History*.[7] "Karamzin," Pushkin wrote, "is our first historian and our last annalist. In his criticism he belongs to [the world of] history, in his simple-mindedness and in his apothegms, to that of the chronicles."[8] In order to write the historical drama *Boris Godunov*, therefore, Pushkin sought out sources other than Karamzin, including contemporary seventeenth-century chronicles (*letopis'*). These may be seen as Pushkin's first true efforts at historical research and fact-finding. Nevertheless, while he disputed Karamzin's interpretation of the causes and significance of events, Pushkin also felt that the voluminous notes

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[6] Karpovich, 184.

[7] Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov; Transpositions on a Russian Theme*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 34-35.

[8] Pushkin, "*The History of the Russian People*," as quoted by Karpovich, 184-185.

appended to the *History* provided evidence of his colleague's integrity as an amateur historian.[9]

Karamzin's *History of the Russian State,* due to his death, ended with the so-called "Time of Troubles" *(Smuta),* in the early seventeenth century. Elsewhere, in "A Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia," he raised questions relating to Russia's historical development after the death of Peter I. In the "Memoir", Karamzin argued that the supposedly revolutionary changes wrought by Peter I had in fact been built upon an extensive pre-existing foundation laid by his predecessors Ivan I and Ivan III. He also argued that Peter had, in the course of his reign, destroyed national unity by separating the upper classes from the lower. Like Princess Dashkova, Karamzin argued that Peter I's destruction of ancient habits and the authority of the clergy had gravely weakened the Russian polity and undermined the *narod*'s faith in the institutions of law and order.[10]

The subject of *Boris Godunov* captured Pushkin's imagination and provided him with the opportunity to explore issues of political and dynastic legitimacy. It has been suggested that Pushkin, like his contemporaries, used such works to comment allegorically or obliquely on contemporary political conditions. Yet,

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[9] Emerson, 31-32.

[10] Nicholas V. Riazanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 70-72.

even though Pushkin assiduously avoided this temptation, his "generality of reference facilitated the application of suggestive lines to Russian conditions."[11] Karamzin's account of Godunov, for instance, has been seen as a reflection of his impressions of Napoleon and Alexander I. Karamzin wrote of Boris Godunov:

> this unfortunate man, overthrown by the shadow of the tsarevich he had slain, perished amid deeds of great wisdom and apparent virtue, the victim of an immoderate, illicit thirst for power, as an example for ages and peoples.[12]

Karamzin most likely had Napoleon in mind while writing these words but may also have been thinking of Paul I, whose brief and ignoble reign and rumoured illegitimacy provided a modern historical parallel to the reign of Godunov.

The transgression of legitimacy, thus, became an obsession with Pushkin, especially after 1825 when rumours that Alexander I had staged his own death and was living out his days as a monk named Fëdor Kuzmich were rife. In these suggestions, Pushkin noticed not only historical parallels to the "Time of Troubles" but also literary parallels to Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure" in which Duke Claudio supposedly leaves Vienna but remains in the city, disguised as a monk to observe how new draconian laws that have been promulgated are

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[11] George Gutsche, "Pushkin's 'Andrei Shen'e' and Poetic Genre in the 1820's," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies,* 10.2 (1976), 193.

[12] N. Karamzin, "Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia," as quoted by Emerson, *Boris Godunov*, 60.

obeyed.[13] Was it possible that Alexander and Nicholas had devised a similar scheme? Regardless, Pushkin noticed that chaos tended to follow dynastic changes and that pretenders were something of an epiphenomenon in Russian history; he thus began to contemplate whether the interregnum that followed such dynastic changes amounted to a form of political illegitimacy. The deposition and murders of Peter III and Paul I, like the supposed murder of the tsarevich Dmitry, raised extremely complex political and ethical questions.

In Karamzin's account of Godunov's reign, Pushkin found a number of faults; in particular, he deplored the historian's penchant for shaping events into a deterministic pattern. In Karamzin's account, the exposure of Boris's crimes and his defeat are, essentially, foregone conclusions which reflect the operation of historical necessity.[14] Karamzin writes of Boris,

> had he been born to the throne, he would have deserved to be called one of the best monarchs in the world; but born a subject, with an unbridled passion to rule, he could not resist the temptation when evil seemed to his advantage....[15]

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[13] Melissa Frazier, "*Капитанская дочка* and the Creativity of Borrowing," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 37.4 (1993), 475-476.

[14] Emerson, 88.

[15] N. Karamzin, "Memoir," as quoted by Emerson, *Boris Godunov*, 62.

The implication that men who are born to rule must be excused their transgressions while those who are not will inevitably be crushed by the weight of political legitimacy and defeated by their own short-comings reverberates throughout Pushkin's own writings.[16] Clearly, Karamzin may not have been fully aware of how he was using or being manipulated by his own sources, as he did not have the experience of predecessors or professional training to draw upon. Pushkin, however, instinctively perceived that Karamzin was not providing the truth about events but rather the truth about the perception of those events.[17] Thus, while he ultimately incorporated Karamzin's "clear unfolding of events," into the narrative of *Boris Godunov*, Pushkin also drew on seventeenth-century chronicles in an attempt to more accurately capture the thought and language of the time.[18]

A few years later, as Pushkin's historical perceptions were attaining greater clarity, Polevoy reassessed Karamzin's *History* for the journal *The Moscow Telegraph (Moskovsky Telegraf)* and pronounced it obsolete. He did this anterior to the publication of the first volume of his own *History of the Russian People (Istoriya Russkogo Naroda,)* in 1829 which, in itself, constituted a refutation both

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[16] Stephanie Sandler, *Distant Pleasures; Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 91.

[17] Emerson, 86.

[18] *ibid.*, 94.

of Karamzin's methods and his conclusions.[19] Polevoy cast aspersions on Karamzin's scholarship and claimed that his own work brought Russian historiography into line with contemporary western European developments; he identified Niebuhr as his intellectual guide and dedicated the work to him. He deferred to the expertise of Guizot and Thierry and called upon Schelling for inspiration. Most notably, Polevoy took exception to Karamzin's obsequious dedication of his *History,* in which he asserted that "the history of a people belongs to the Tsar."[20] Polevoy was ready to strike a more democratic note and, as the title of his work suggests, believed that the history of a people belongs, instead, to the people themselves.

Pushkin, whose education and general world-view caused him to identify with the Enlightenment rather than with the age of Romanticism, remained, on the whole, ignorant of German idealistic philosophy and was unaffected by the related trends in European historiography. Thus, when he spoke of the role of philosophy in history, he had in mind Voltaire rather than Schelling; he also demonstrated

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[19] Karpovich, 185.

[20] Karamzin, *The History of the Russian State*, as quoted by Karpovich, 185.

consistent hostility toward such generalisations as the idea of "universal history"[21] and remained skeptical of "philosophical meanderings."[22]

As Vyazemsky described to a friend, the properties of Pushkin's mind were "clarity, precision and soberness."[23] Pushkin shunned artificially constructed general systems and concluded that Polevoy's project was built on a flimsy ideological foundation. In the twentieth century, the Karamzin-Polevoy controversy has been re-cast in Marxist terms as a class struggle between the landed gentry, represented by Pushkin, and the rising bourgeoisie, represented by Polevoy.[24] While Karpovich rightfully argues that the controversy was probably not so much a matter of class antagonism as intellectual opposition, it is impossible to overlook Pushkin's sentiments concerning the relations between the hereditary nobility, on the one hand, and the service gentry, non-noble intellectuals *(raznochintsy)* and merchants, on the other.

Class loyalty dictated Pushkin's reaction to the abortive Decembrist coup in 1825 and later became a point of contention in relation to his efforts as a publicist.

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[21] Karpovich, 186.

[22] Maxim D. Shrayer, "Rethinking Romantic Irony: Pushkin, Byron, Schlegel and *The Queen of Spades*," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 36.4 (1992), 400.

[23] Karpovich, 186.

[24] *ibid.*, 185.

The journals with which he was associated, including *The Contemporary (Sovremennik)*, were subjected to hostile scrutiny by the detestable Benkendorf who oversaw the Third Department, the main organ of censorship in tsarist Russia. Polevoy, Grech and Bulgarin, Pushkin's foes in the field and men of humble birth, were allowed to attack the literary organs of refined society with relative impunity thanks to Benkendorf's complicity. The journals with which these men were associated, *The Northern Bee (Severnaya Pchela)* and *The Moscow Telegraph (Moskovsky Telegraf)* were hostile to the aristocracy as a whole. They consistently incensed Pushkin, who believed that literature should be a product of refined society and who only began to accept payment for his works after his financial resources completely disappeared.[25]

Having earlier argued that the patronage system characteristic of the reign of Catherine II had produced a literature that was all but worthless, Pushkin was understandably irate when Polevoy, Grech and Bulgarin described him as a liberal dilettante who had thrown in his lot with the regime.[26] Polevoy's *Telegraph*, moreover, having vilified the aristocracy as a whole began, after 1830, to attack

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[25] Sam Driver, *Pushkin: Literature and Social Ideas*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 17.

[26] Todd, 83.

noblemen individually and to revile their literary productions as a social poison and useless luxury.[27]

Though Pushkin did indeed slough off some of his Byronic hauteur when he was forced to turn to paying journalism, it is a mistake to assume, as Blagoi does, that this indicated a fundamental shift in Pushkin's values and constituted an endorsement of bourgeois morality.[28] To be certain, his continued study of the social development of Russia since Peter I led him to conclude that his own class, the hereditary nobility, was being prevented from fulfilling its historical mandate. Despite the fact that this class had been seriously weakened by Peter I and his successors and that its power had been usurped by the service gentry, Pushkin placed great hopes in an ameliorative program which he termed "the defence of the nobility" *(ograzhdenie dvoryanstva)*. Pushkin's goal was to ensure adequate legal protection for the nobility, thereby guaranteeing its continued viability.[29]

Pushkin's obsession with class, inherited from his father and incorporated into his writings, is best exemplified by his oft-quoted rebuff to the socially

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[27] Driver, 17.

[28] Driver, 19.

[29] *ibid.*, 20.

peripheral Kondraty Ryleev: "You are angry at my bragging of my 600-year-old nobility (N.B.: My nobility is more ancient)."[30]

Pushkin's aristocratism is, understandably, a theme that was largely avoided by Soviet Pushkinists who seem to have been impervious to the idea that the tone of the Imperial lycée could have been simultaneously élitist and liberal. Thus, not only has "the attempt to democratize Pushkin...left some serious gaps in our understanding of the poet's thought," but the attempt to "characterize Pushkin's political views...by their relationship to supposed Decembrist views...calls for more qualifications than one would care to make."[31] One scholar has noted that when class determinants and political interests were set at odds, as in December 1825, the former usually prevailed: "the sense of old virtues perceived as specifically noble ones...was so strong that it hindered or vitiated common sense political initiatives."[32] This plurality of conduct, embracing a fundamental distinction between the practical and the ideological, was characteristic of the progressive (*peredodovoy*) Russian gentleman of the early nineteenth century. The social code of the participants, thus, undermined the effectiveness of the Decembrist cause because it was deemed more important to conduct oneself as a

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[30] A.S. Pushkin, *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 251.

[31] Driver, 7.

[32] *ibid.*, 8.

gentleman than to advance the position of the movement.[33] Pushkin faced the same problem in his own life; as much as high society might disappoint him, he could never abandon his place in it; society *(svet)* held him fast.[34]

Pushkin's interest in his own genealogy obviously bespeaks vanity and hatred of the Petrine reforms, yet also reveals a belief in the importance of recognizing one's intimate connection with the past.[35] As Pushkin wrote,

> an educated Frenchman or Englishman cherishes every line of an old chronicle in which the name of his ancestors is mentioned. But the Kalmucks have neither nobility, nor history. Only barbarism, villainy and ignorance do not respect the past, cringing before the present alone.[36]

Pushkin saw in the history of his own family, both the maternal and paternal lines, the history of Russia itself in microcosm. Two Pushkins, one historical and one fictional, are included in the *dramatis personae* of *Boris Godunov* while the unfinished *The Blackamoor of Peter the Great (Arap Petra Velikogo).* Pushkin's first attempt at an historical novel, provides a fictional account of the life of his great-grandfather Gannibal, the African in Peter I's service. Evgeny, in *The Bronze*

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[33] *ibid.*, 9.

[34] Dmitry Shlapentokh, "Pushkin and Voltaire: the Writer as Existential Model," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, (1989-1990), 101.

[35] Karpovich, 182.

[36] A.S. Pushkin, "An Attempt to Refute Certain Non-literary Accusations," as quoted in Karpovich, 182.

Horseman (Medny Vsadnik), meanwhile, is a semi-autobiographical figure whose tragedy is inextricably connected to the fact that he is the bearer of a once-famous name, the scion of an extinguished house.

While Soviet critics have stressed the "little man" aspect of Evgeny and drawn attention to his sufferings at the hands of the autocrat, *The Bronze Horseman* is in part about the futility of protest and an endorsement of political legitimacy, beliefs which came increasingly to the fore in Pushkin's writings during the 1830's. His study of Godunov, Mazepa and Pugachev, among the most infamous (or famous) figures in seventeenth and eighteenth century Russia, intensified his fear of popular uprisings and led him to endorse traditional institutions of law and order even as he chafed under tsarist restrictions.

Pushkin's historiographical interests were thus wide-ranging and ideologically focussed. While, in his application for access to the State Archives in 1831, he spoke of his desire to write the history of Peter the Great and his successors down to Emperor Peter III, the cynosure of his interests remained almost exclusively the first emperor himself.[37] Pushkin was fascinated by Peter's dynamic personality and was aware of the centrality of his reign in Russia's historical development.

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[37] A.S. Pushkin, "To P.V. Nashchokin," 21 July, 1831, letter 380 of *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 570.

In an unfinished note, dating from 1834, Pushkin summarized his views of the significant events in Russia's history. He spoke of Russia's long isolation from Western Europe and the fact that it had known neither the "beneficial shock" of the Crusades nor the glories of the Renaissance.[38] He did argue, however, that, in times of crisis, both the tsar and the boyars usually agreed on the utility of establishing closer contact with the West. History eventually produced Peter I who, by virtue of his "beneficial and fruitful wars," brought these earlier attempts at state-building to fruition.[39] Pushkin concluded: "the success of the national reform was the direct result of Poltava, and European education landed on the shores of the conquered Neva."[40] Poltava, a crucial turning point, thus became an important topic in Pushkin's investigation of formative developments in Russian history.

While his views on the subject were not as extreme as those expressed by Chaadaev, Pushkin clearly felt that Russia needed Europe and Europe Russia; he also sensed that Russia needed Peter I. Pushkin regretted the flaws in Peter's

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[38] Pushkin, "On *The History of the Russian People* by N.A. Polevoy," as quoted by Karpovich, 188.

[39] Pushkin, "On Russian Literature, in Relation to French," as quoted by Karpovich, 188-189.

[40] Pushkin, "On Russian Literature, in Relation to French," as quoted by Karpovich,,189.

schemes and pointed to the great dichotomy between the beneficence of the emperor's permanent institutions and the arbitrariness and brutality of his temporary ukazes.[41] This dichotomy and Pushkin's own divided feelings are best represented by his assessment of Peter I in "Stanzas" *(Stanzy)* (1826): "with an autocratic hand he daringly sowed Enlightenment."[42]

Pushkin's untimely death prevented him from writing a history of Peter I, an idea proposed by Nicholas I himself. Pushkin was granted access to the state archives in 1831 by the Tsar's express orders and was attached officially to the College of Foreign Affairs with the rank of titular counsellor. Nicholas presented Pushkin with *The Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire* and left him to work, largely unfettered, sifting through many of the most important sources relating to Russian government in the eighteenth century. Pushkin worked his way through the more than 7,000 documents relating to Peter I's reign and left extensive notes for the projected study; Belinsky was doubtless correct in assuming that "if he had succeeded in writing a history of Peter the Great, we would have a great historical creation."[43] The only purely historical study Pushkin

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[41] Karpovich, 189.

[42] Pushkin, "Stanzas," as quoted by Riazanovsky, 88.

[43] V. Belinsky, *Collected Works*, as quoted by Gerald Mikkelson, "Pushkin and the History of the Russian Nobility," (diss., U of Wisconsin, 1971), 82.

managed to complete during these years, however, was his work on the Pugachev uprising.

Pushkin's study of the *Pugachevshchina*, was originally titled *A History of Pugachev*, but was later changed to *A History of the Pugachev Uprising* on the orders of Nicholas I who declared proclaimed: a rebel has no history. Pushkin's research on the *Pugachevshchina* is especially noteworthy because he was the first person to be granted access to areas of the archives sealed by Catherine II. The *History* itself is, however, only one facet of Pushkin's investigation of the subject.

Having conceived of the idea for his novel *The Captain's Daughter*, Pushkin decided that it was impossible to write an historical novel about a person and a period of which the average reader was completely ignorant. Filling in the lacunae in the historical record, Pushkin "rescued from government-imposed oblivion the memory of Pugachev" and placed at his readers' disposal not only "a concise account of events relating to one of the most crucial turning points in Russian history" but also many of pertinent historical documents.[44] Pushkin felt that, armed with the facts, readers could better evaluate the objectivity of the narrator of *The Captain's Daughter,* Pëtr Grinëv. With regard to Pugachev, the

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[44] Gerald Mikkelson, "Pushkin's *History of Pugachev*: the Littérateur as Historian," *New Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Russian Prose,* ed. George J. Gutsche and Lauren G. Leighton, (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1982), 36-37.

novel presents a view of the hetman that is more psychologically revealing than the strictly factual account contained in the *History*. Pushkin firmly believed that it is possible to verify fact through poetry and that so-called "historical" facts are insufficient for the delineation of truth; the efforts of the creative genius could be brought to bear in order to make the convoluted sequence of historical events psychologically coherent and articulate.[45] Without a doubt, "Pushkin must be the only great writer to have written a history and a novel on the same subject. And he keeps the two separate. History is one thing and the novel another: each has its own laws and its own truth."[46] It is a testament to Pushkin's brilliance and protean energies that, with no formal training as an historian, he could write a history that is engaging and can be so seldom faulted for factual errors. *The History of Puagchev* "represents a significant event in Russian historiography" which "retains its interest today not only because it was written by Pushkin but because of its merits as a work of historical scholarship."[47]

The cost of printing the *History* was defrayed by the Tsar himself who admired Pushkin's creation, yet it failed to sell. Despite lackluster sales, however,

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[45] Virginia M. Burns, "Pushkin's *Poltava*: A Literary Interpretation," (diss., U of Toronto, 1977), 332.

[46] Bayley, *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary*, 350-351.

[47] Mikkelson, "Pushkin's *History of Pugachev*," 36.

Pushkin was able to take comfort in the fact that his first attempt at writing *bona fide* history was not unacknowledged or unappreciated. In our own day, it has been seen as "an outstanding work, not only by the standards of Pushkin's own time, but also by those of modern scholarship,"[48] rightfully ensuring its author "a respectable place in the early development of modern Russian historiography."[49] Applying his literary genius to the field of history, moreover, Pushkin succeeded in "reform[ing] the style of scholarly historical writing --by making it resemble to some degree artistic prose."[50]

While it was not until 1831 that Pushkin began his research in the government archives, he had, by this time, already produced one work dealing with the Petrine era. In *Poltava* (1828), Pushkin portrayed Peter I as almost superhuman; he approved of his deeds and marvelled at his glory, despite his methods.[51] Strangely, Pushkin's view of the first emperor did not vary once he became immersed in the archives. The Peter I portrayed in *The Bronze Horseman*

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[48] Paul Debreczeny, *The Other Pushkin*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 247.

[49] Mikkelson, "Pushkin's *History of Pugachev*," 26.

[50] *ibid.*

[51] Louis J. Shein, "Pushkin's Political Weltanschauung," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 10.1 (1968), 74.

is, thus, not altogether different from the emperor portrayed in *Poltava*. In both works Peter is endowed with superhuman attributes that separate him from the rest of mankind and make resistance to his will seem futile.

Pushkin was most definitely a foe of tyranny and coercion yet his interest in individual freedom has consistently been confused with modern definitions of egalitarianism. Confusing the two, critics have accused Pushkin of hypocrisy and have implied that he betrayed the Decembrists' memory. This line of reasoning, however, confuses Enlightenment concepts of freedom with nineteenth- and twentieth-century notions of egalitarianism and is in dire need of clarification. Pushkin's understanding of personal freedom was grounded in an Enlightenment view not incompatible with a condescending attitude toward the service gentry and non-noble intellectuals (*raznochintsy)*. Pushkin's liberalism, thus, was both limited and class specific; his support for political rebellion was tempered by the very real fear that a popular uprising in Russia might lead not to broader freedoms and the implementation of lofty ideals but instead to violence and bloody reprisals. Many of his commentators in later years, especially in the Soviet period, however, "overlooked the fact that Pushkin never sang glory to revolutions but only to freedom."[52]

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[52] Leonid I. Strakhovsky, "Pushkin and the Emperors Alexander I and Nicholas I," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, (1956), 27.

Even before the Decembrist rebellion (1825), Pushkin's revolutionary zeal was tempered by the experience of exile and by first-hand knowledge of political revolutionaries, to wit, the Greek insurgents he met in Kishinëv. Pushkin's disgust with the rebels as individuals begot disenchantment with the entire Greek cause and he could not fathom how Byron could stand to live amongst the thieving insurgents. Pushkin's faith in the Decembrist cause suffered as a result of this disillusionment but he remained committed to his colleagues, at least in spirit. He therefore expressed class solidarity even as he questioned the rebels' political motives. His assurance to Nicholas I that he would have stood with his friends, had he been in Senate Square, thus, did not reflect his political but rather his social convictions.[53] The failure of the rebellion, meanwhile, only served to confirm his emerging doubts about the effectiveness of violent political radicalism. In Pushkin there always existed a "perfect blend of liberal ardour and conservative wisdom;"in tune with the zeitgeist of the world forged at the Congress of Vienna.[54]

After 1825, the more Pushkin delved into the Russian past the more he was led to endorse the political status quo and to denounce armed uprisings as an effective means of achieving social and political goals. His fear of the mob, meanwhile, came close to fever-pitch even before violence erupted across Europe

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[53] Driver, 36-37.

[54] Strakhovsky, 16.

in 1830-1831. He came to advocate the education of the peasants and the gradual abolition of serfdom as one means of avoiding open warfare between the state and its subjects.[55] At times, Pushkin gave credence to the reports of Fonvizin and others, who maintained that not only was the lot of the average Russian peasant improving but that, compared with the French peasant and the British industrial labourer, the Russian peasant was comparatively well-off.[56] Such reassurances did not lull him into complacency, however, and the spectre of mob violence was never very far from his mind.

While it can be maintained that some of Pushkin's last writings contain deterministic elements, *Poltava*, published in 1828, still portrayed history largely as the interaction of individual personalities. References to fate, meanwhile, exist side by side with the presentation of individuals as the driving force of historical change. These apparent contradictions, however, are synthesized by Pushkin into a general philosophical system in which one's character is or becomes one's fate. The Soviet scholar Firsov chastises Pushkin for all this, accusing him of attributing

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[55] Driver, 39.

[56] Driver, 47.

far too much importance to the influence of individuals on events.[57] Firsov overstates his case though and fails to pay adequate attention to the occasions on which Pushkin does convey a sense of historical necessity.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that, like Shakespeare, Pushkin is intimately concerned with the personalities and actions of great men. He did not believe these elements were incompatible with the writing of history or historical drama and insisted that "great art, in any event, takes men as the measure of the historical process, and sees public consequences in their private weaknesses and desires."[58]

Firsov's notes to the *History of Pugachev*, in the Academy edition of Pushkin's works, constitute a rather severe assessment of Pushkin's scholarship and professional methodology. Firsov faults Pushkin for clinging to Karamzin's antiquated historical theories and for failing to assimilate the new findings of Polevoy, the populariser of contemporary French historiography.[59] He is unsympathetic to the fact that, to Pushkin "the idea that one had to study the history of popular masses and not of outstanding personalities, and to seek in the historical development for regularity rather than for accidents, remained entirely

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[57] Firsov, Introduction to *The Collected Works of Alexander Pushkin,* as quoted by Bayley, 121.

[58] Bayley, 121.

[59] Karpovich, 192.

alien."[60] He is seemingly oblivious to the fact that Pushkin was by no means exceptional in his view that the actions of great men were proper subjects of investigation.

Moreover, Pushkin was by no means insensitive to the social forces behind the uprising. Having noted serious discontent among the Cossacks at the time, Pushkin concluded the first chapter of the *History* by writing: "All foreshadowed a new revolt. Only a leader was lacking. He did not fail to appear."[61] Thus, while Pushkin saw the rebellion itself as essentially inevitable, at the same time he attached great importance to the character of its leader. Pushkin convincingly argued that Pugachev was a product of the Cossacks, who "had no other merits but a certain amount of military experience and extraordinary daring."[62] Pushkin relied on the testimony of eye-witnesses to the rebellion, including General Bibikov who observed that "not Pugachev but general discontent [was] of importance."[63]

> Discussing the period following the capture of Pugachev, Pushkin writes: never was his success more formidable, never did the rebellion rage with greater force. It passed from one village to another, from one

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[60] *ibid.*

[61] Alexander Pushkin, *The History of Pugachev*, trans. Earl Sampson, (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983), 17.

[62] *ibid.*, 19.

[63] *ibid.*, 62.

province to the neighbouring one....Everywhere bands of rebels were formed, and *each had its own Pugachev.*"[64]

Despite Firsov's intransigence, other Marxist critics seized on Pushkin's apparent suggestion that the roots of the rebellion lay in class conflict. Pushkin further noted that not only did the rebellion quickly spread from the Cossacks to the peasantry at large but that the chief aim of the rebels was, in fact, to exterminate the landowning gentry.[65] In a note prepared for Nicholas I, Pushkin summed up his view of the social aspects of the rebellion as follows: "the popular masses as a whole (весь черный народ) were for Pugachev....The gentry (дворянство) alone openly sided with the government."[66]

The fictional account of the *Pugachevshchina*, *The Captain 's Daughter (Kapitanskaya dochka)*, meanwhile, is just as impressive and informative as Pushkin's historical treatment of the same events. The underlying theme in both works is the attempt to "distil the moral quintessence of a historical process that is caught at a moment of social turmoil."[67] Pushkin's contemporaries realized the significance of his contribution yet, ironically, made a stronger case for the

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[64] *ibid.*, 94-95.

[65] Karpovich, 194.

[66] Pushkin, "Notes on the Rebellion," as quoted by Karpovich, 194.

[67] Svyatoslav Belza, "The Principles of Historical Authenticity in Pushkin's Prose," *Social Sciences (U.S.S.R.)*, xviii, 1 (1987), 141-142.

historical relevance of the novel than the *History*. Klyuchevsky, for instance, made the famous quip that Pushkin came closest to being an historian when he was not intentionally acting as one and that in *The Captain's Daughter*, "there is more history than in the *History of Pugachev*."[68]

The character of Mironov, in *The Captain's Daughter*, in part because he has been seen as a mouthpiece for Pushkin's assessment of rebellion *per se*; surveying the course of events, Mironov remarks: "the best and most lasting changes are those which proceed from an improvement in moral custom, without any violent upheaval."[69] This statement clearly reflects Pushkin's opinion of the legitimacy of the rebellions in Greece, France and Poland, ca. 1830-1831, the last of which provoked his wrath. His anger was born, in part, from envy and, in this sense he was not alone. The constitution that Alexander I had granted the Poles in 1815 was one of the most liberal in Europe; the Tsar had also referred to Poland as a more civilized country than Russia, to the horror and shame patriotic Russian writers and thinkers. It is therefore easy to understand the frustration that Pushkin and his fellow intellectuals experienced when these freer, more civilized subjects rose up in revolt against their "indulgent" masters on November 17, 1830.[70]

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[68] Klyuchevsky, *Collected Works*, as quoted by Belza, 142.

[69] Pushkin, *The Captain's Daughter*, as quoted by Bayley, 337.

[70] Strakhovsky, 18.

Denouncing the Polish rebellion and its foreign supporters, Pushkin was, in turn, chastised by his friends Vyazemsky and Turgenev. Unlike Turgenev, Pushkin was able to believe in individual autonomy while still retaining a strong sense of patriotism. He was able to defend the government's actions in Poland on the grounds that the rebellion threatened Russia's political stability. Most significantly, he was able to argue logically, dispassionately and without recourse to personal vituperation against the Poles.[71]

Together with Chaadaev, Pushkin demonstrated unconditional support for the Russian government in the wake of the Polish rebellion, thereby frustrating posthumous attempts to portray either one as an radical egalitarian. That Pushkin and Chaadaev, together with the majority of Russian intellectuals, followed the nationalistic mood of the capital, moreover, tends to confirm Riazanovsky's theory of the "monolithic unity" of the government and educated public in Russia at this time.[72]

Pushkin's views of the rebellion were clearly expressed in both *To the Calumniators of Russia (Klevetnikam Rossii)* and *The Anniversary of Borodino (Borodinskaya godovshchina)*, published together in a work entitled *On The*

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[71] Shein, 74,.

[72] Nicholas V. Riazanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia: 1801-1855*, (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1976), 55.

Conquest of Warsaw (Na vzyatie Varshavy) in 1831. In these writings, Pushkin expressed the view that the state provides a sense of meaning to man's life by organizing human history into the rational form of political institutions; arguing thus, Pushkin detached the national history of individual peoples from the history of the state. In *On the Education of the Peasants (O Narodnom vospitanii)*, moreover, Pushkin urged that the fundamental differences between nations and states be clarified so that the young could learn to avoid misguided revolutionary temptations.

Pushkin's quixotic political credo emerges clearly in *To the Calumniators of Russia*: the war with Poland was a war of traditional domestic antagonisms, as both Russians and Poles are part of the same Slavic family and Russia's stability depends upon its ability to successfully combat internecine strife. Pushkin's hostility to the rebellion, therefore, suggests that faith in statehood *(gosudarstvennost')* is the fundamental notion governing his concept of history.[73]

In Pushkin's mind, the events of 1830-31 resembled the events of 1812, when misguided Western liberalism, in the form of Napoleon, had also threatened Russia. Both *To The Calumniators of Russia* and *The Anniversary of Borodino* are propagandistic in their response to Poland's Western supporters. Chaadaev's

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[73] Julia Brun-Zejmis, "The Russian Idea' and 'The Polish Question': Some Views on the Polish Insurrection of 1830," *East European Quarterly*, 14.3 (1980), 315-316.

response to these events shocked the public as much as Pushkin's; it was especially surprising in comparison to the sentiments he had expressed elsewhere, especially in the *First Philosophical Letter,* a sort of touchstone for nineteenth-century Westernizers. Chaadaev's views meshed with "Pushkin's imperialistically-inspired attitude toward the Polish uprising" and "contrasted sharply with earlier views of the man who, in the eyes of his contemporaries, symbolized a living veto on narrow Russian chauvinism."[74]

Like Pushkin, Chaadaev was severely disillusioned by the July Revolution in France which they both felt had served to undermine cultural values and political stability. Chaadaev's disappointment stemmed, in part, from the fact that he embraced a Messianic view of history behind which lay an as yet undiscovered guiding moral force. Like Pushkin's writings, however, Chaadaev's essay on the Polish insurrection is a polemic against distorted views of the conflict held by Western Europeans. Like Pushkin, he argued that Russia played a crucial political and historical role as the only independent Slavic power and he insisted that Poland acted naively and in defiance of what would now be termed geopolitical factors.[75]

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[74] *ibid.*, 318.

[75] Brun-Zejmis, 321.

Lunin, a former Decembrist and Siberian exile, writing at the same time, pointed out that the gap between the oppressed Russian nation and the Russian government was a major source of conflict and confusion. Lunin observed that the Polish uprising was directed against the Russian authorities rather than the Russian people. Lunin wisely demanded tolerance for the insurrectionists, arguing that, all too often, "the sufferings of the persecuted lead to violent upheavals."[76]

Thus, Pushkin, Chaadaev and Lunin, witnessing the same historical events, differed somewhat in their views but, together, expressed a mutual sense of consternation at Russia's confrontation with the West. As a result, they became deeply involved in a search for the basis of the Russian national identity. Each believed that Russia was duty-bound to protect her Slavic neighbours and each reminded Western Europeans of the sacrifices which Russia had made for their sake in 1812. All three believed that Russia had a particular historical mission and that Poland's struggle for independence was, in effect, an obstacle to her fulfilment of that role. Poland's attempt to gain independence was a usurpation of Russia's historically determined leadership on the eastern marches of European civilization.

Herzen later noticed the narrow nationalistic approach shared by the three and wrote, in *The Bell (Kolokol)* that, having completely misunderstood events in Poland, the most progressive Russian liberals, including the Decembrists, "were

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[76] Lunin, *Compositions and Letters*, as quoted by Brun-Zejmis, 323.

misled about the Poles, and without noticing, took the side of...narrow official patriotism."[77] He perceptively suggested that "to some extent, they envied the Polish nation" and acted out of jealousy rather than hatred.[78]

Though a liberal in certain respects, Pushkin was never bound by political dogma nor held in check by a slavish and uncritical reaction to western political ideals like many of his liberal contemporaries and later Westernizers. Moreover, Pushkin's very awareness of the radical divergence between Russian and Western history kept him from judging Russian events in accordance with Western political doctrines. Yet, despite the force of his character and his words, Pushkin was eventually co-opted by conservative writers and politicians, who eagerly sanitized his biography and screened his works for those appropriate for presentation to the masses.

A comparison of the 1880 Pushkin celebration with the Pushkin Jubilee of 1899 vividly illustrates this process. Whereas representatives of the literary élite had dominated the 1880 celebration , not a single writer of stature agreed to participate in the Jubilee of 1899. Bereft of such participation, Pushkin was presented as an apologist for autocracy and an obedient subject of the Tsar. His biography was stripped of the fundamental attributes which separated his writings

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[77] Herzen, *Collected Works*, as quoted by Brun-Zejmis, 324.

[78] Herzen, *Collected Works*, as quoted by Brun-Zejmis, 324.

from those of Karamzin.[79] The poet thus presented to the Russian public in 1899 bore a strange resemblance to the lackey historian of the Nicolaevan era who adopted his views to suit the regime, who did not fall into disfavour with the Tsar and from whom Pushkin sought to distance himself ideologically. The gulf formed between them, by the very different interpretations of Russian history was, thus, posthumously bridged.

Elsewhere, in his *Historical Observations (Istoricheskie Zamechaniya)*, Pushkin discussed the political and personal failures of Peter I's successors.[80] The "illiterate" Catherine I, the lubricious Elizabeth and the rogue Biron hardly merit attention yet Pushkin displayed particular hostility to Catherine II, whose depravity and "despotism under the guise of gentleness and patience" he found particularly galling.[81] Pushkin accused Catherine II of having plundered the treasury, enslaved Little Russia and suppressed free thought. The reign of Paul, meanwhile, proved that "Caligulas can be born even in enlightened times." In reference to the

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[79] Adrei Sinyavsky, *Strolls with Pushkin*, trans. Catherine Nepomnyaschy and Slava Yastremski, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 33.

[80] Shein, 70.

[81] *ibid.*

termination of Paul's reign, Pushkin quoted Madame de Staël: "en Russie le gouvernement est un despotisme mitigé par la strangulation."[82]

Though greatly interested in the lives of the Russian monarchs Pushkin concentrated extensively on the careers of rebels whose actions had brought the Russian empire to the brink of collapse. At the same time, Pushkin did not fail to appreciate the role played by the *narod* in these upheavals. Compiling his notes on the *Pugachevshchina*, Pushkin fine-tuned views of relations between the various classes in Russia that had emerged during his work on *Boris Godunov* and *Poltava*.

Pushkin addressed from an historical viewpoint what the Slavophiles later came to discuss as a spiritual and metaphysical issue, namely the peasants. Slavophiles argued that the peasantry was, though economically debased, the ultimate repository of truth and spirituality. Pushkin, on the other hand, was not a Romantic and did not believe in the spiritual missions of peoples or the individual genius of nations. He was interested in finding ways in which the peasantry could be steered away from violent rebellion and conscripted in the effort to build a stronger, more equitable state. Pushkin was keenly aware that serfdom was not merely immoral but also a cumbersome and inefficient economic system which prevented the modernization of the Russian economy and provided Russia's

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[82] Staël as quoted by Shein, 70. It should, perhaps, be noted that Mme. De Staël, who visited Russia on the eve of Napoleon's invasion, praised Alexander I and thought highly of many of the country's characteristics.

labourers with no incentive.[83] He further realized that under present conditions of land tenure, the equal division of land between sons impoverished the peasant as much as the proprietor.[84]

Pushkin not only feared that economic pressures could once again drive the peasants to rebel against the landowning gentry; he also feared the destructive effects of the *raznochintsy* whose growing social and economic power directly threatened the survival of his own class. The peasantry and *raznochintsy*, either separately or together, could only lower the cultural level of the nation. The only effective way for the monarchy to combat this problem, Pushkin argued, was to strengthen the hereditary nobility and embrace an enlightened social policy; together they could form a bulwark against democratic radicalism and Jacobinism.[85]

The character of Vladimir in *Dubrovsky* became a mouthpiece for Pushkin's view of the class system in Russia. Vladimir describes how "the dereliction in which we leave our peasants is unforgivable" and insists that "the more rights we

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[83] Driver, 47-48.

[84] *ibid.*, 49.

[85] Shein, 77.

have over them, the more obligations we have in relation to them."[86] The current arrangement is an unmitigated economic disaster: the overseer, to whom responsibility is delegated, robs his master; the landowner live at the expense of future income and old age finds him destitute. Pushkin argues that primogeniture is an absolute necessity if the decline of the nobility is to be averted; without primogeniture "the grandfather was rich, the son is in want, the grandson goes abegging."[87]

These concerns are, of course, reflected in Pushkin's own history. In any event, Pushkin sincerely hoped that his writings might have a positive and ameliorative social impact. He believed that the interests of his own class could be served at the same time that the social fabric of the nation was strengthened. At the very least, the creation of a commonwealth in which the various classes would work together in pursuit of individual and collective interests, would become a means of averting bloodshed and the rise of Pugachevs and Cromwells.

Dubrovsky, thus, presents the all-too familiar case of a noble reduced to his last holding by the operation of the present system of land tenure, inheritance and favouritism. Pushkin drew on actual legal records of a case in Byelorussia in which

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[86] Pushkin, "Dubrovsky," *The Captain's Daughter and Other Stories*, trans. Paul Debreczeny, (New York: Knopf, 1992), 313.

[87] *ibid.*

a nobleman named Ostrovsky went to law with a neighbour over disputed land, was deprived of his estate and, left only with his serfs, resorted to robbery and brigandage.[88] What Pushkin found truly intriguing, however, was that Ostrovsky, in the end, led his own loyal peasants in rebellion against the state and, in an altogether new and intriguing manner, united the themes of rebellion and the decline of the nobility that so obsessed him.

[88] Belza, 140.

Chapter 2:

Boris Godunov

In his retrospective on Pushkin, written between 1843 and 1846, Vissarion Belinsky originated views that would later become the stock-in-trade of Pushkin studies. Among his more notable observations was the statement that *Evgeny Onegin* constituted a "picture that was true to the reality of Russian society in a certain epoch."[1] This assessment, identifying the verse novel as "an encyclopedia of Russian life at the time, of its economic history, ideas and truths," has since been adduced by other critics.[2] Just as Pushkin sought to depict faithfully the manners and morals of contemporary Russian society in *Evgeny Onegin* so too he endeavored to create an accurate portrait of Russian life in the past, and this he did at a crucial point in Russia's historical development. The outcome, Pushkin's historical drama *Boris Godunov* is perhaps the most significant work produced by the poet during the period up to the Decembrist insurrection of 1825.

Pushkin's thematic goal of attempting to portray historical events faithfully while detaching them from the sort of ideologically motivated readings usually composed by his contemporaries is a daunting task at the best of times. Russian and Soviet interpretations of the drama, unfortunately, have tended to ignore

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[1] Belinsky, "Article Five," as quoted by Andrei Sinyavsky, *Strolls with Pushkin*, trans. Catherine Nepomnyaschy and Slava Yastremski, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 30.

[2] Andrei V. Anikin, "The Contribution of Pushkin to the History of Economic Thought," *Diogenes*, no. 107 (Fall, 1979), 66.

Pushkin's understanding of history and the remarkable historical sense he often displays. Such erroneous opinions are reflected, for example, in the view that Pushkin was attempting to demonstrate, in his depiction of the "Time of Troubles", the conflict between people and authority that would adumbrate the modern development of a proletarian consciousness. The *Smuta* saw a flurry of pamphlets, contemporary records, annals and chronicles and the period itself became a symbol of political convulsions within Russia in the centuries that followed, the term being rather too freely applied to the chaos that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, for example.[3] Not only did civil and international conflict ensue from the struggles over the throne following the depredations of Ivan the Terrible but also a dual spiritual and cultural crisis; European ideas and practices came to Russia along with the Poles and Roman Catholicism, posing a challenge that was not decisively faced until Peter the Great. The connection between the *Smuta* and the political ideologies developed after Pushkin's demise, however, is tenuous.

Contemporary writers, chronicling that chaotic era, regarded the reigns of both Boris Godunov and Dmitry (Samozvanets) as fundamentally evil; the extant annals are a mixture of propaganda, superstition, doom-saying and blasphemy.[4] As

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[3] Ervin C. Brody, "Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*": The First Modern Russian Historical Drama," *Modern Language Review*, 72 (1977), 857.

[4] *ibid.*

Pushkin realized, the contemporary annalists wrote vastly different interpretations of the same events to accommodate their political patrons, shifts of opinion being adopted to fit the transient political tastes of the day. Ascription of sainthood depended, in large part, on the politics of the writer. It is further conjectured that some rulers deliberately destroyed such historical records as were deemed unflattering or incriminating.[5]

Aside from preoccupations with the problems of transmitting and recording historical events there exists also, in Pushkin's work, an interest in questions of a metaphysical nature relating to Russia's historical development which have since also obsessed historians. As Pushkin understood it, Ancient History consisted of the history of Egypt, Persia, Greece and Rome while Modern History was coterminous with the history of Christianity.[6] As Pushkin concluded: "woe to the country that finds itself outside of the European system."[7] Russia's historical purpose, in light of these distinctions, was to pursue a western orientalist mission to civilize Asia; this would, in turn, assure her place, as an equal, in the European

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[5] Brody, 857-858.

[6] M.F. Greenleaf, "Pushkin's Journey to Arzrum: the Poet at the Border," *Slavic Review*, vol. 50, (Winter, 1991), 946.

[7] A.S. Pushkin, "On the Second Volume of Polevoy's *History of the Russian People*," as quoted by Greenleaf, 946.

order. Pushkin, however, feared that Russia, in the process of conquering the East in the name of Christianity, risked becoming a part of the East and passing outside the modern European-Christian historical system.[8]

A comparison of Pushkin's opinions with those of Pëtr Chaadaev regarding Russia's past and troubled present reveals several critical disparities. While Pushkin feels himself to be in agreement with Chaadaev on the significance of the classical heritage, the Renaissance and the Reformation, he nevertheless has certain crucial reservations. With regard to Chaadaev's concept of history, Pushkin writes: "votre manière de concevoir l'histoire m'étant tout à fait nouvelle, je ne puis toujours être de votre avis."[9] By way of a response to Chaadaev's arguments, Pushkin composed (but never sent) an article entitled "On the Insignificance of Russian Literature."[10]

Though he begins the article by seemingly accepting the main tenets of Chaadaev's argument, he then deviates from the logical path outlined by his colleague and speaks of the "great destiny" that was prepared for Russia by its very

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[8] Greenleaf, 953.

[9] A.S. Pushkin, "To Peter Yakovlevich Chaadaev," 6 July, 1831, letter 376 of *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 500.

[10] Michael R. Katz, "The Raven's Eye: Pushkin and Chaadaev," in *The Contexts of Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin*, eds. Peter Barta & Ulrich Goebel (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 104.

isolation.[11] Its role was, accordingly, to absorb the Mongol invasions so that Western European civilization might survive and prosper, a service for which the West remained unaccountably ungrateful. In Russia itself, the results of the Mongol yoke are seen to consist in the fact that learning retreated to monasteries "spared by the Tatars' extraordinary percipience."[12] Consequently, Pushkin argues, the events of Russian history were not "conducive to the free growth of culture."[13]

Thus, while Pushkin agrees with Chaadaev as to the latter's assessment of what was lacking in Russia's historical development, he disagrees with him in relation to the overall importance of those events. Pushkin agrees with Chaadaev that the *Raskol'* indeed helped to separate Russia from the West but admits to only one negative consequence: that "...nous n'avons pas participé à aucun des grands événements qui l'ont remuée."[14] Pushkin, summarizing what he considers to be the great events of Russian medieval history, concludes with the "sublime drama begun at Uglich and concluded at the Ipatiev Monastery."[15] Subsequently, Pushkin

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[11] Alexander Pushkin, *Pushkin on Literature,* ed. and trans. Tatiana Wolff (London: Methuen, 1971), 352.

[12] Pushkin, *Pushkin on Literature,* 352.

[13] Katz, 105.

[14] A.S. Pushkin, "Letter to P. Ya. Chaadaev," 19 Oct. 1836, letter 637 of *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 779.

[15] A.S. Pushkin, "Letter to P. Ya. Chaadaev," 19 Oct. 1836, letter 637 of *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, 780.

uses what he regards as the last great event of Russian medieval history to explore questions of political legitimacy and Russia's relationship with the West, issues which lie at the heart of both *Boris Godunov* and the events of 1825.

Thus, according to one critic, it is in *Boris Godunov* more than in any other piece of writing that Pushkin "both articulates and demonstrates his own ideas on the subject of Russia's past."[16] Instances of misinterpretation regarding Pushkin's ultimate goals, meanwhile, are rife. It has been argued, for example, that *Boris Godunov* is "an authentically folk-historical tragedy, which not only tells the story of the clash of Godunov, the Pretender, the Russian boyars and the Polish interventionists over the throne, but which also draws a picture of the people as the *basic agent of history*."[17] A similar view is maintained by Balashov, who suggests that "Pushkin's tragedy is constructed as the radical conflict of the people and anti-people authority."[18] This line of reasoning, naturally, proved useful in the Soviets' appropriation of Pushkin as a national hero. It fails, however, to adequately account for Pushkin's unique methodology. A reduction of the play's significance to the conflict between people and power ("vlast'") fails to address the ancillary

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[16] Katz, 100.

[17] I.Z. Serman, "Paradoxes of the Popular Mind in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*," *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol 64, no. 1, (January, 1986), 25.

[18] N. Balashov, "The Structure of *Boris Godunov*," as quoted by Serman, 25.

themes present in *Boris Godunov,* including: falsification of history, the significance of literacy as a tool for gaining power, problems in the development of the folk-historical consciousness and, naturally, Russia's relationship with the West.

Dr. Serman, in an article entitled "Paradoxes of the Popular Mind in *Boris Godunov*," suggests that the sociological and political interpretations that became standard to Soviet assessments of *Boris Godunov* were directly connected with the events surrounding the first Russian Revolution of 1905.[19] Shortly after this, in 1907, the historian Pavlov-Sil'vansky argued that "*Boris Godunov* demonstrates, for the first time, not only Russian literary, but Russian historical scholarship as well, the decisive role of the people in the historical process and the possibility of victory over autocracy."[20] Pavlov-Sil'vansky, then, attributes to Pushkin the desire to demonstrate that "'such a disunity between people and authority' is a characteristic feature of all Russian history."[21]

Contemporary political convictions and the projection of these onto past historical events, then, help explain how such erroneous evaluations of Russian

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[19] Serman, 26.

[20] N.N. Pavolv-Sil'vansky, "People and Tsar in Pushkin's Tragedy," as quoted by Serman, 26.

[21] Pavlov-Sil'vansky, "People and Tsar in Pushkin's Tragedy," as quoted by Serman, 26.

"folk consciousness" from the early seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries eventually became platitudes in Soviet assessments of Pushkin's drama. As Serman states "the conflict between autocracy and people is a very late phenomenon, born in the twentieth century."[22] That the Soviet view is unhistorical becomes apparent when one examines the transformation of the masses in Pushkin's drama. In it, as in Boris Godunov's time, their transformation into a force for political action is not sustained. The people, insofar as they become "agents of history," nevertheless revert into a passive mob, into the sort of "historyless" peoples written of by Spengler. Were not "all popular uprisings...of this nature until the appearance of the proletariat on the historical scene"?[23] So one Soviet Pushkinist characteristically asserts. Since the working classes in Europe did not become politically organized until the nineteenth century, the historical conditions necessary for a proletarian struggle during the Time of Troubles clearly did not exist.

While Pushkin was to become an amateur historian, by virtue of his archival research on Pugachev and Peter I, *Boris Godunov* can be seen as the first key point in the development of a profound historical consciousness. Curiously, the year leading up to the Decembrist insurrection, by which time Pushkin had

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[22] Serman, 26.

[23] S. Bondi, "The Dramatic Works of Pushkin," as quoted by Serman, 27.

already completed the drama, has been characterized as a period of crisis in the poet's life. His intertwined political and literary convictions are expressed in another poem, written in the same year, entitled *André Chénier.*

Its eponymous hero, whose works had been suppressed after his death and first published in 1819, is hailed by Pushkin as a champion of political liberty, martyred for his ideals during the French Revolution. The topic of Chénier's conflict with Robespierre is used as a means for Pushkin to articulate his own role in Russia and in his relations with Alexander I. Together, these musings underscore the dilemma presented in *Boris Godunov*: who has the legitimate authority to command Russia?

Pushkin's adulation for André Chénier and other martyrs for liberty should, of course, correspond with Soviet critics' evaluation of Pushkin as a foe of autocracy and serfdom--at least with those who gave him the benefit of the doubt. This is complicated, however, by Pushkin's basic feelings regarding the class structure of Imperial Russia and questions of political legitimacy. Pushkin's pride in his lineage, which surfaces continually in his correspondence with friends, and his contempt for the parvenu aristocracy of his own day, form distinct components in his political ideology. They cannot easily be reconciled with the positive Soviet assessment of Pushkin as a friend of the people.

Although André Chénier had been critical of Louis XVI and had welcomed

the Revolution, the execution of the king and a host of other excesses forced him to withdraw his support from the Revolution. His writings in defence of Charlotte Corday and those critical of Robespierre put him under suspicion and led to his eventual execution in July, 1794. Certain deleted lines of Pushkin's elegy "Andrei Shen'e" were found circulating under the title "14th of December" not long after the Decembrist revolt, causing Pushkin some difficulty with authorities. Yet, as a whole, the poem is by no means a challenge to authority. Chénier, in the poem, looks back in amazement to see that his poetry has been interpreted as a political act. Pushkin's lines clearly indicate a sense of alienation from poets who use their art to further political aims. Thus, in Pushkin, the Decembrists never found the hymnist to liberty that they sought.

While Pushkin despised the upstart aristocracy created in the wake of Peter I's reforms, he alternately envisaged an important role for a hereditary nobility as mediator between the Tsar's government and the *narod*. He viewed with sadness the decadence and ignorance of the nobility in which he longed to see the "hereditary superior order of the people legitimized."[24] Moreover, the hatred of serfdom which Soviet commentators took to be a clear indication of Pushkin's solidarity with the "people" was largely a pragmatic position. Pushkin saw serfdom not necessarily as a moral abomination but as an outdated and inefficient economic

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[24] Anikin, 79.

arrangement, hampering Russia's financial rather than her moral development.[25]

Yet, together with these convictions, Pushkin ultimately maintained a firm belief in the historical legitimacy of the monarchy. Despite the arbitrary sufferings and indignities inflicted by the autocrat Peter I, Pushkin concluded that Russia's first "imperator" was "in the right, historically" and should therefore be exempt from modern attempts to attach blame to his actions.[26] As Pushkin realized, the very attempt to hold, in retrospect, a seventeenth or eighteenth century Tsar to a modern standard of moral accountability is a profoundly unhistorical act. Pushkin held firmly to a belief that the history of a given period, the "true facts and the atmosphere of the age," cannot simply be revised and rewritten because we now hold contrary notions about the forces involved.[27] History "cannot be made to conform, post factum, to the political convenience of the passing moment."[28] Tellingly, in relation to Pushkin's subject matter, the historian Sergei Platonov notes that, by the standards of his own time, Boris Godunov was guilty of neither

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[25] *ibid.*

[26] Jurij Striedter, "Poetic Genre and the Sense of History in Pushkin," *New Literary History*, vol. 8, 301.

[27] Brody, 869.

[28] *ibid.*

crime nor sin.[29]

Through the fictional character Pimen, in *Boris Godunov*, Pushkin expresses his belief that an "objective view of history must encompass not only heroes, but also villains, not only great epochs but also unpleasant realities so that posterity should know 'all' the deeds of the great Tsars, their glory and their sin."[30] Accordingly, Pushkin's aim is not to judge his characters, the Tsar, boyars and the *narod*, but to attempt to understand and portray their fundamental beliefs, motivations and patterns of behaviour as well as the violent and lawless period in which they lived. Thus, in light of his personal convictions regarding the role of the Russian nobility, and with regard to his view of historiography, it would seem that Pushkin's main focus is not a plebeian challenge to political authority. This obviously complicates the arguments relating to Pushkin's political affiliations with the Decembrists adduced by Soviet critics over the better part of this century.

While he borrows many of the details of his drama directly from Karamzin, Pushkin, according to Jurij Striedter, adds a stronger "*historico*-political

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[29] Sergei Platonov, *Boris Godunov: Tsar of Russia*, as quoted by Caryl Emerson, "Pretenders to History; four plays for undoing Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*," *Slavic Review*, 44.2 (1985), 278.

[30] Emerson, 278.

dimension" to his version.[31] Pushkin, who later came into conflict with Polevoy over the role of general principles and ideas in history, presents Boris Godunov as the embodiment of political rationalism. The play itself portrays the failure of enlightened progress to gain ascendancy over the irrational in both politics and history. Ironically, Boris does not fail "*in spite of* his sensible reforms but, rather *because of* them."[32] In ideological terms, Pushkin thus moves away from both the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the power of rational government and sensible historical progress, and from Romanticism, with its belief in the wisdom and spirituality of the *narod*. Pushkin chooses, instead, a third way, mapped out dramatically by Shakespeare, with whom Pushkin was becoming increasingly familiar at this time. Shakespeare's dramatic models thus make possible Pushkin's exploration of an historical personality that is simultaneously dynamic and susceptible to the machinations of ineluctable fate.

The aged monk and chronicler Pimen, who dominates scene V of *Boris Godunov*, is one of the few characters not taken directly from Karamzin. Pimen is, however, of the utmost significance both to the action of the play and as a mouthpiece for Pushkin's basic understanding of historical methodology. In scene V, Pushkin dramatizes the concept that history must be understood as a product of

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[31] Striedter, 298.

[32] Striedter, 298.

two "separate but colluding aspects": as historical event and as narrated account.[33] Pimen, though a fictional character, is ultimately made responsible for the judgment of the world as posterity will use his account as evidence against Boris. Pushkin's goal, in fashioning both the character and situation, is to suggest that whoever controls the written record is in a position to control posterity's verdict. Pushkin's and Pimen's roles thus coincide; they both act as creator with respect to future judgments of Boris.[34]

While it can be maintained that truthfulness is the "fundamental quality that Pushkin imparted to Pimen," Pushkin elsewhere claims that he is himself a chronicler, a recorder of true stories (правдивые сказанья).[35] It is Pushkin's own interpretation of the period which inspires Pimen's reflections on the life of Ivan the Terrible and the monk's lecture to Grigory Otrep'ev on the truthfulness of the historian. Through the eyes of Otrep'ev, Pushkin observes Pimen, his ideal historian, at work:

> Calmly he contemplates alike the just
> And unjust, with indifference he notes

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[33] *ibid*, 299.

[34] Kevin Moss, "The Last Word in Fiction: On Significant Lies in *Boris Godunov*," *Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2. (1988), 190.

[35] *ibid.*, 193.

Evil and good, and knows not wrath nor pity.[36]

Subsequently, Pimen exhorts the young Otrep'ev:

> To thee I hand my task. In hour exempt
> From the soul's exercise, do thou record,
> And without sophistry, all things whereto
> Thou shalt in life be witness.[37]

Pushkin's later experimentation with the historical novel corresponded to a shift in the dominance of literary genres which, in turn, reflected a shift in the perception of history itself at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[38] As long as history was understood to consist of the objectively recorded actions of historical personalities, drama was an appropriate literary form. The growth of a new sense of history, however, that was conscious of historical distance, led to the adoption of a different means of expression; the historical novel in the manner of Walter Scott, then, presented itself as the most appropriate literary vehicle.[39]

While Pushkin's choice of genre in *Boris Godunov* raised questions pertaining to the relationship between history itself and the literary form used in communicating past events, Pushkin himself introduced a number of equally

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[36] Pushkin, "*Boris Godunov*," trans. Alfred Hayes, (New York: Viking, 1982), 28.

[37] *ibid*, 33.

[38] Striedter, 308-309.

[39] *ibid.*

complicated issues. According to Emerson, Pushkin designed the play to be as "problematic to audiences raised on neo-classical drama as Karamzin's *History* was to scholars accustomed to the 'Schlözerian' norms of Russian historiography."[40] Rejecting the "moral-sentimental framework" of Karamzin's work, the influence of which should not be overestimated, Pushkin opted for the belief that history did not necessarily progress or cohere.[41] In the end, however, he lamented the fact that the public failed to understand and properly esteem both his "faithful portrayal of characters and of the time"[42] and his efforts to remain "studiously aloof and independent."[43]

Thus, while in *Boris Godunov* Pushkin tried to imagine a perspective on the past that was ignorant of subsequent events, the epigone dramatists who followed him in choosing the "Time of Troubles" as their subject matter completely forsook Pushkin's well-articulated concept of history. Instead, they recreated the recorded sequence of events in accordance with contemporary political ideologies, imposing a didactic purpose on their writings. Their heroes, accordingly, speak as if they

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[40] Emerson, 259.

[41] Emerson, 262.

[42] A.S. Pushkin, "Letter to the Editor of the *Moscow Herald*," as quoted by Emerson, 261.

[43] Brody, 862.

were fully aware of their own historical relevance. Khomiakov, Lobanov, Alexey Tolstoy and Aleksandr Fedotov impose upon the Boris Godunov subject matter the nineteenth century ideological framework of the Slavophile, political iegitimist, Westernizer and mystical Christian, respectively.[44] In defiance of Pushkin's caveat, these authors provide their historical characters with an awareness of their roles in art and life, making them spokesmen for the ideologies of the time.

As scene V of *Boris Godunov* indicates, whoever controls the written account of history controls the judgment of posterity. Almost ironically, Pushkin elsewhere suggests that what is certainly a challenge to the historian can be seen as a potential benefit to the poet. The latter can, if he chooses, isolate single episodes, discard the moral and avail himself of a ready-made literary subject.[45] Mikhail Lobanov's 1835 *Boris Godunov* is an example of the unhistorical, poetic approach to subject matter which does just this. Lobanov's version, in effect, works backwards, imposing modern ideological constructs onto the events of the early seventeenth century. Thus, in Lobanov's play, Godunov's fall is presented as pre-determined and historically necessary because it leads directly to Romanov glory; the Romanovs, in the process, become history's mouthpiece, voicing Lobanov's own convictions while simultaneously imparting to them moral and historical

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[44] Emerson, 274.

[45] Striedter, 297.

sanction. The major events of Lobanov's play are cast as crimes against legitimacy which Lobanov considers the "sacred property of peoples," the violation of which causes ruinous consequences.[46] The reigning dynasty of the nineteenth century, founded on the ruins of the Godunovs, thereby gives a sense of order, purpose, even historical necessity to the events of 1605, a sense that the same events could not have possessed in reality.

What Pushkin notices at the beginning of the seventeenth century, above all else, are the first signs of a separation between the "immobile weight of the mass mind, which sees in life only joyless sufferings from which one can occasionally be rescued by a miracle" and the dynamic currents of a new understanding of life, personified in the Pretender, Grigory Otrep'ev.[47] Otrep'ev represents a new type in Russian life.[48] Cut off from the religious beliefs of the *narod*, from traditional passivity, from the habit of waiting for miracles to transpire, the Pretender is, in Pushkin's view, the first European ruler of Russia. Pushkin stresses the significance of the conflict between the traditional folk mind with its inherent inertia and the will of this solitary, self-sufficient individual.[49] The significance of

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[46] Mikhail Lobanov, *Boris Godunov*, as quoted by Emerson, 267.

[47] Serman, 38

[48] *ibid.*

[49] *ibid.*

the conflict extends, chronologically, far beyond the period of the Time of Troubles and becomes, in Pushkin's view, one of the chief conflicts in the spiritual life of the Russian nation, linked with the mid-seventeenth century Church Schism (*Raskol'*).

In contrast with Karamzin, who also realized that "folk consciousness" thrived through its faith in miracles, Pushkin sought neither logic nor consistency in that consciousness. He understood that a faith in the miraculous released people from the necessity of seeking rational explanations for events.[50] Accordingly, what intrigued Pushkin most, in relation to the Time of Troubles, was the fact that two mutually irreconcilable sets of ideas cohabited in the popular consciousness. In the first instance, the people were seemingly able to believe both that Boris Godunov had killed the young Dimitry and that the Tsarevich had been resurrected.[51] In the second, Boris is confronted with the dilemma that he can signify that the Tsarevich is dead by transferring his relics to Moscow, but only if he acknowledges the latter as a saint; the Tsarevich can only be a saint, however, if he has been martyred, ie., murdered at Boris' behest.[52]

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[50] Serman, 35.

[51] *ibid.*, 34-35.

[52] Moss, 194.

Thus, the existence of mutually irreconcilable beliefs in seventeenth century Russia's narod, problems in the writing and falsification of history, and an interest in mentalités, rather than the struggles of the "people" with authority constitute the chief foci of *Boris Godunov*. As Caryl Emerson points out, in *Boris Godunov*, "events matter less than rumours about events and everyone with a story to tell is aware of the power of storytelling."[53] With this in mind, the play becomes comprehensible as less of a drama of action than a dialogue among conflicting versions, a struggle between oral and written accounts, all of them vying together for the status of truth.[54] Pushkin assiduously avoids the habit of projecting modern misconceptions onto past events and stresses how this can seriously hamper the writing of history. While Belinsky was right in suggesting that *Evgeny Onegin* was a perfect expression of the *Weltgefühl* of the Russian landowning gentry, he was mistaken in dismissing *Boris Godunov* as a failed attempt to realize the romantic potential of the subject matter.[55] Pushkin not only illuminated Boris' character and the period in which he lived but developed a balanced and sympathetic study of intellectual and social conflict. His Pimen is the fruit of a search for a genuinely

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[53] Emerson, 187.

[54] Emerson, 187.

[55] Victor Terras, "Pushkin and Romanticism," in *Alexander Pushkin; Symposium II*, eds. Andrej Kodjak, Krystyna Pomorska & Kiril Taranovsky (Cloumbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1980), 53-54.

impartial observer, "intended for the edification of contemporary historians," many of whom would have done well to heed Pushkin's example.[56]

[56] Brody, 874.

Chapter 3:

Poltava

While Pushkin wrote *Boris Godunov* at the height of his career, he did not publish it until the following decade. Judging from the reception it met with when it finally appeared, it is easy to imagine the hostility he likely would have encountered had he published it upon completion in 1824. However, since it was not approved for publication, the public was adverted neither to Pushkin's incipient repudiation of Romanticism nor to his drift away from narrative poetry and the political liberalism of his youth. A short time later, though, in 1826, Pushkin's poem "Stanzas" (*Stanzy*) was approved by the censors; readers were, for the first time, presented with an adumbration of his future ideological moderation which, coupled with increasing generic innovativeness, would seal Pushkin's fate with the reading public.

"Stanzas" shocked and saddened friends and colleagues who condemned its sycophantic tone and were unable to reconcile this new Pushkin with the author of the Romantic "Southern Poems" and *Evgeny Onegin*. *Poltava*, written two years later, in 1828, was a poem of much greater significance than "Stanzas" and elicited an even more visceral response from critics. *Poltava* reiterated many of the same convictions regarding compromise, political order and historical inevitability found in "Stanzas" and became perhaps the most loathed of Pushkin's published works.

Poltava, therefore, can justifiably be seen as a watershed in Pushkin's

artistic and psychological development. It was at this point, ironically, that while imitations of his romantic poems were being rapidly produced, while his own works were, for the first time, being rejected by the reading public.[1] Readers' antipathy stemmed, in part, from unfulfilled expectations, and, to a large extent, from a lack of intellectual finesse. Not only were readers confronted with a poet who mercilessly frustrated their preconceived notions of literary decorum but also with an ideologist whose reconfigured relationship with the state caused consternation amongst those who regarded Pushkin as Russia's Byron--somewhat foppish and haughty but hardly an apologist for despotism. By castigating *Poltava*, a "semi-educated public that thought it knew all the answers was asserting its common-place morality."[2] Meanwhile,

> If romantic criticism could not fully comprehend Pushkin during his most popular period, between 1820 and 1827, when his southern tales were published in succession, all hope of understanding was lost when he moved into the more rarefied region of his mature work, beginning with *Poltava* and *Boris Godunov*.[3]

Pushkin's juvenile odes to freedom and liberty had caused him great difficulty and his personal history had forced upon him an association with

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[1] David Glenn Kropf, *Authorship as Alchemy; Subversive Writing in Pushkin, Scott, Hoffman*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 74.

[2] Paul Debreczeny, "The Reception of Pushkin in the 1820's," *Slavic Review*, 28.3 (1969), 400.

[3] *ibid.*, 405.

political opposition. Exile had irretrievably "branded him as the author of dangerous verses" and constituted "a form of punishment that acknowledged [his] possible importance in rousing unwanted activism."[4] This identification of Pushkin with liberal opposition to the monarchy changed dramatically, however, and he came to be seen as a traitor to his former friends and colleagues, seeking a separate peace with an illiberal regime. Yet, if the Decembrists looked to Pushkin as a Russian Tacitus, ready to pour scorn on a corrupt monarch, they looked in vain.[5]

Pushkin's more pusillanimous detractors accused him of dissimulation and attempting to improve his somewhat shaky social position by way of facile, slavish panegyrics, lauding the Tsar's government and the Romanov family whilst vilifying all those, including the exiled rebels, with the temerity to challenge consecrated authority. Regarding *Poltava*, it was alleged that Pushkin meant it to be a "palatable sop" for Nicholas I at a time when his sacrilegious *Gavriliada* was still under investigation.[6]

Literary critics, meanwhile, augmented the denunciation of Pushkin's opportunism and rejection of liberalism in *Poltava* with a hostile enquiry into his

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[4] Debreczeny, 68.

[5] Andrew Kahn, "Readings of Imperial Rome from Lomonosov to Pushkin," *Slavic Review*, 52.4 (1993), 760.

[6] Walter N. Vickery, *Alexander Pushkin; Revised Edition*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 71.

historical methodology. Ultimately, there were as many voices raised in protest against Pushkin's "uncritical use of biassed historical sources" as against his aesthetic choices.[7] Mazepa, critics claimed, was presented in the lurid melodramatic colours of a gothic villain. Critics further faulted Pushkin for failing to unite the personal and historical aspects of his character into a realistic whole; he was accused of haphazardly mixing Romantic poetry with those elements of plot and style more appropriate to the heroic ode.[8]

A comparison of *Poltava* with Kondraty Ryleev's narrative poem *Voynarovsky,* meanwhile, raises a number of interesting questions regarding authorial objectivity. Both poems reflect an extended reconsideration of social and political convictions and allegiances on the part of its author. Ryleev's poem on the one hand, reflects his new-found liberal convictions; the fictionalized Mazepa's actions embody the author's growing commitment to the Decembrist cause.[9] *Voynarovsky* may even be read, despite obfuscations imposed on the text by the censors, as a statement of Ryleev's political credo.[10] Pushkin's initial

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[7] Vickery, 70.

[8] *ibid.*

[9] Hubert F. Babinski, *The Mazeppa Legend in European Romanticism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 95.

[10] *ibid.*, 96.

assessment of *Voynarovsky*, it might be noted, was favourable even though he tended to ignore the obvious political implications of the work.

Ryleev's reorientation toward more democratic principles of government (e.g., constitutional monarchy) occurred over a span of time and was not precipitated by any single event. Pushkin's reorientation, of course, occurred in the wake of the Decembrist uprising yet was not triggered solely by this crisis, as has sometimes been suggested. As early as 1822-23, Pushkin had come to doubt the viability of the methods endorsed by the Southern Section of the Decembrists with whom he fraternized during his first exile. After 1825, meanwhile, Pushkin did not simply align himself with the regime and its official political ideology but devoted a great deal of thought to the subject of political legitimacy and the historical necessity of Russia's political institutions.

Pushkin's turn towards conservatism caused shock and surprise while Ryleev's about-face seemed quite natural. Liberals, critical of Pushkin's reactionary drift in 1828, could no more comprehend his new-found political convictions than account for his inaction in December, 1825. Yet, Pushkin's romanticised notion that he would have stood with his comrades on Senate Square is made irrelevant by the testimony of the Decembrists themselves who made a more reliable estimation of Pushkin's commitment to revolution.

Both contemporaries and modern critics, thus, have blundered trying to

attribute clear-cut political loyalties to Pushkin. Most have ignored the fact that Pushkin's political views were unexceptional and that he was typical of his milieu insofar as he chose to attack abuses of the system rather than the system as such. It has often been overlooked that Pushkin was a liberal in an era and at an age when it was fashionable to be liberal and did not, after 1825, repudiate a deeply felt political liberalism so much as defend an extremely personal liberalism based on the same Enlightenment values that remained forever the foundation of his world-view.

When Pushkin, earlier in his career, had incorporated such semi-mythical champions of liberty as Vadim the Russian Viking into his romantic verse tales, for instance, he was following a literary trend common among the opposition-oriented young noblemen of his day.[11] Those who subsequently sought to claim Pushkin as a standard-bearer for oppositionist or democratic politics did so either by ignoring his later conservative writings or by suggesting that these were the necessary result of manipulation, intimidation or despair. Mickiewicz, in his lectures at the Sorbonne, related how "the painful end of the conspiracy...had a negative influence on Pushkin's mind" and "robbed him of courage and political

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[11] Gerald Mikkelson, "Pushkin and the History of the Russian Nobility," (diss., U, of Wisconsin, 1971), 65.

enthusiasm."[12] Even in his short lifetime Pushkin had begun to repudiate his earlier Romantic writings like Goethe his Werther or Tolstoy his great novels. Surely, it would have been unusual if Pushkin's heady, youthful sentiments had not given way to more sober judgments in the face of accumulated personal and historical experience.

With the failed Decembrist uprising very much in mind, Pushkin, after 1825, turned his attention again and again to armed uprisings in Russian history, seeking historical precedents for the failure of the insurrection. *Poltava* was the first such venture in which Pushkin presented historical figures in the leading roles in a completed verse tale; it has been routinely vilified for what many see as a malicious, bathetic portrait of Mazepa.[13] While Byron and Voltaire had provided Pushkin with portraits of the rebel Cossack somewhat less constrained by official Russian propaganda, the majority of available Russian sources were indeed a collection of tendentious, melodramatic fictions. Mazepa's contemporaries, including Feofan Prokopovich, had repeatedly demonized the rebel Cossack, leaving to posterity little more than a caricature.

Pushkin's use of such sources need not have been but, unfortunately, did

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[12] Adam Mickiewicz, "Lecture XXVIII, 7 June 1842," as quoted by Waclaw Lednicki, "Pushkin, Tyutchev, Mickewicz and the Decembrists: Legends and Facts," *The Slavonic Review*,(1951), 396.

[13] Mikkelson, 69.

become extremely problematic in light of his much vaunted claims to historical verisimilitude. He seemingly transgressed the historiographical framework established by his professional avatar Pimen in *Boris Godunov*, who insisted that the historian be as impartial as fate, echoing Pushkin's personal belief that the poet and the poet's work should be equally impartial.

It is, of course, possible Pushkin felt that the truth was available only to the eye-witnesses of a given event and that subsequent writers could change the historical record at will, turning history itself into a sort of palimpsest. Nevertheless, he incorporated such dubious relics as the anathema proclaimed against Mazepa by Peter I's chief ideologue and prelate into *Poltava*. Later, ignoring the author's prerogative to take liberties with a subject, Pushkin insisted that his work be evaluated by the standards appropriate to contemporary history. Finally, like Walter Scott, his chief mentor at the time, he transgressed the historical record transferring the Mazepa-Maria love affair from 1704 to 1708; Scott had taken similar liberties with chronology when he incorporated Shakespeare and Elizabeth I into the *dramatis personae* of *Kenilworth*.

Had Pushkin not made such grandiose claims for the accuracy of *Poltava*, insisting that the "poem is steeped in historical fact,"[14] had he not asserted that

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[14] Babinsky, 112.

"Mazepa acts in my poem exactly as in history,"[15] he might not have invited such stinging invective from critics. Indeed, why should Pushkin have claimed historical accuracy for a fictional work in the first place? Why should he have exposed himself to such opprobrium by claiming

> The dramatic poet is as impartial as fate...He should not be cunning and lean toward one side, while sacrificing the other. Not he himself, not his political opinion, not his secret or open partiality should speak in a tragedy, but people of past days, their intellect, their prejudices. It is not his task to justify, to accuse, or to prompt the speeches of the characters. His task is to resurrect the past age in all its truth.[16]

While one eminent scholar argues that narrative poetry was, for Pushkin, the genre most conducive to harmonizing and integrating history into "the full canvas of his poetic world," the majority of critics disagree.[17] The net result of Pushkin's experiment in *Poltava*, according to the consensus, is a narrative poem that is generically unsuited to the vast panorama of events contained within it and which has been described as "the most judgmental of Pushkin's tales."[18]

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[15] A.S. Pushkin, "Preface to *Poltava*," as quoted by John P. Pauls, "Historicity of Pushkin's 'Poltava'," *The Ukrainian Quarterly*, 17.3 (1961), 245.

[16] Alexander Pushkin, "On Literature," as quoted by John P. Pauls, *Pushkin's Poltava*, (New York: Shevchenko Scientific Society, 1962), 40-41.

[17] Mikkelson, 62.

[18] Paul Debreczeny, "Narrative Voices in Pushkin's *Poltava*," *Russian Literature*, XXIV (1988), 319.

Such criticism notwithstanding, *Poltava* exerted a profound influence on Russian readers. While Nicholas I declared *Poltava* to be "divine", and "as grandiose as the *Iliad*,"[19] it was more often argued that *Poltava* "irrevocably obscured one page of history" so extensively that even historians found it difficult to conceive of Mazepa in terms other than those established by Pushkin.[20] Pushkin was purported to have fixed in the historical conscience of Russia an image of Mazepa as hideous, depraved and distorted as that which Shakespeare himself had bequeathed to posterity in his portrait of Richard III.

At the time of *Poltava*'s composition, coincidentally, Pushkin's interest in Shakespeare was at its height. What Pushkin valued, above all, in Shakespeare's works, was the dispassion which he perceived to be the chief virtue of the historical dramatist and which he himself was accused of wantonly violating in *Poltava*.[21] In so far as poets are formed by the times in which they live, it might be argued that the biographies of Shakespeare and Pushkin reveal some striking similarities. Both men lived in times of growing national self-awareness founded

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[19] Tsar Nichloas I, as quoted by Leonid I. Strakhovsky,"Pushkin and the Emperors Alexander I and Nicholas I," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, (1956), 24.

[20] John P. Pauls, "Two Treatments of Mazeppa: Ryleev's and Pushkin's," *Slavic and East European Studies*, 8, no.1-2 (1963), 108.

[21] John Bayley, *Pushkin; A Comparative Commentary*, (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971), 108.

on unexpected triumph over formidable foes attacking their countries; both witnessed the emergence of their respective nations as major European powers. Both lived in an era of threatened rebellion, disputed succession, peasant unrest and censorship. Shakespeare's importance in Russia, it has been suggested, stemmed from the fact that he allowed not only Pushkin but "a whole generation of Russian people to feel that they were intelligent human beings capable of comprehending the historical process and the essential conditions of human existence."[22]

While Pushkin became gradually aware of Byron's intellectual and artistic limitations, however, he did not subject Shakespeare to the same critical scrutiny. Ironically, while Pushkin sought consistently to avoid making his literary excursions vehicles for discreet propaganda or allegorical allusions to contemporary events, he overlooked the extent to which Shakespeare himself was involved in endorsing a Tudor view of the state and English history.[23]

While it would be impossible to see either *Poltava* or *Boris Godunov* as an objective presentation of history, nevertheless important historical considerations are examined in these works. The theme of rebellion, that unites *Poltava* with

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[22]Yuri D. Levin, "Shakespeare and Russian Literature: Nineteenth Century Attitudes," *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, XXII (1989), 117.

[23] Bayley, 109.

Boris Godunov, The History of Pugachev and *The Captain's Daughter*, remains a constant focus in Pushkin's later writings. These works, taken together, encompass a thorough examination of the dynamics of popular revolt and raise a number of questions regarding the nature of legitimate sovereignty.

Unlike Byron, who tended to take an historical figure and make him into a modern champion of liberty as well as a projection of his own ambitions and self-image, Pushkin's rebels, Dmitry Samozvanets, Mazepa and Pugachev, are not timeless subverters of political order; rather, they are time and place specific and "have special significance for Russia and Russian history."[24] In writing *Poltava*, moreover, Pushkin felt that he was attempting to set the historical record straight, by correcting the erroneous depiction of the eponymous hero that Byron, relying on Voltaire's *History of Charles XII*, had created in his own *Mazeppa*. From Scott's introduction to *Marmion*, in which he propounded his mystical enthusiasm for the past, meanwhile, Pushkin derived a great deal of inspiration.[25]

Further distancing himself from Byron, Pushkin found it essential to distinguish carefully between his characters; there is, consequently, no single Pushkinian type to correspond with the Byronic hero. In *Poltava*, then, Pushkin continued to experiment with the sort of psychological character study he had

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[24] Bayley, 111-112.

[25] *ibid.*, 113-114.

begun in *Boris Godunov*; he attempted to make private, often fictional characters as convincing as public ones and to make characters fit into their historical surroundings.[26] A number of critics were led to conclude that, in terms of character study, Maria, the heroine of *Poltava*, was admirably folkish *(narodnaya)* and found that Pushkin's Mazepa had the depth of a Shakespearean portrait.[27] The depiction of a man without a country, who is indifferent to love and to freedom even suggests the possibility of allusions to *Othello*.

The notorious Faddey Bulgarin, assessing the merits of *Poltava*, found both the structure and the content wanting. He concluded that, structurally, Pushkin had been unable to bind his episodes and characters into a meaningful whole while the characters themselves were not true to history: Kochubey was seen to be a revengeful blackguard, his wife, a fury.[28] Mazepa had turned against Peter because the latter had pulled his beard--all of which was a figment of Pushkin's imagination, according to Bulgarin.[29] The use of historical figures in fiction

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[26] *ibid.*, 114.

[27] V. Belinsky, "Literary Reflections," as quoted by Bayley, 119.

[28] Faddey Bulgarin, "*Son of the Fatherland*, nos. 15-16, 1829), as quoted by Paul Debreczeny, "The Reception of Pushkin in the 1820's," *Slavic Review*, XXVIII, no.3 (Sept, 1969), 406.

[29] F. Bulgarin, "*Son of the Fatherland*, nos. 15-16, 1829), as quoted by Debreczeny, 406.

demanded, Bulgarin maintained, "completeness (*polnost'*) of character and accuracy in the presentation of events."[30] He lamented that the historical personages involved had been limned with "reprehensible 'low' features, which were both incorrect historically and unpleasing aesthetically."[31]

The more respectable and perspicacious Kireevsky, similarly, took issue with the lack of loftiness *(vozvyshennost')* and sublimity *(vysokost')* in Pushkin's portraits as well as the overall lack of unity.[32] Belinsky, despite his regard for Pushkin's character study, regretted that *Poltava* appeared to be a poem without a hero; nevertheless, he felt there might be some redemptive value in Pushkin's portrayal of the first emperor.[33] Belinsky suggested that, in Pushkin's depiction, Peter the Great could logically be viewed as an expression of historical determinism, as the very incarnation of the social changes he begot.[34] In this

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[30]F. Bulgarin, "An Analysis of A.S. Pushkin's Poem *Poltava*," as quoted by Virginia M. Burns, "The Narrative Structure of Pushkin's *Poltava*: Toward a Literary Interpretation," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 22.1 (1980),16.

[31] F. Bulgarin, "An Analysis," as quoted by Burns, "The Narrative Structure," 16.

[32] I.V. Kireevsky, "Something About the Character of Pushkin's Poetry," as quoted by Burns, "The Narrative Structure," 16.

[33] V. Belinsky, as quoted by Pauls, "Two Treatments of Mazeppa," 105-106.

[34] V. Belinsky, as quoted by *Russian Literary Attitudes from Pushkin to Solzhenitsyn*, eds. Richard Freeborn, Georgette Donchin and N.J. Anning, (London: MacMillan, 1976), 32.

interpretation, Belinsky came closer than perhaps anyone else to understanding Pushkin's methodology and his fundamental beliefs concerning the role of the individual in history.

The historian Mikhail Maksimovich was one of Pushkin's few contemporary defenders. Maksimovich asserted, in an article entitled "Concerning Pushkin's Poem *Poltava* in Terms of History", that "the characters of the *personae* in Pushkin's Poem [*Poltava*] are shown just as history presents them."[35] Maksimovich's assessment echoes Pushkin's own defence of *Poltava*, of which he wrote: "Mazepa acts in my poem exactly as in history, and his speeches elucidate his historical character."[36] The publications of both *The History of Pugachev* and *The Captain's Daughter* elicited a similarly negative if somewhat more subtle response in the 1830's. Yet, little more was said on the matter for the remainder of the nineteenth century and the subject of Pushkin the historian was largely ignored.[37] The one notable exception, of course, was Klyuchevsky whose remarks on the unveiling of the Pushkin statue in Moscow in 1880 were reprinted in an article entitled "The Importance of Pushkin for Russian Historiography". In his

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[35] Mikhail Maksimovich, "Concerning Pushkin's Poem *Poltava* in Terms of History," as quoted by Mikkelson, 92.

[36] A.S. Pushkin, "*Dawn,* (1831)," as quoted by Mikkelson, 92-93.

[37] Mikkelson, 94.

speech Klyuchevsky made two memorable if unsubstantiated observations: first, that in Pushkin's works "we find a rather coherent chronicle of our [Russian] society in personae for more than 100 years"; second, that Pushkin came closest to being an historian when he was not intentionally acting as one, namely in *The Captain's Daughter*.[38]

Modern assessments of *Poltava*, meanwhile, have continued to echo these earlier feelings of resentment regarding Pushkin's use or abuse of historical sources. Ukrainian critics have been particularly vocal in their denunciations of Pushkin's Great Russian chauvinism and inept use of biassed documents. Mirsky, tellingly, noted that *Poltava* suffered the same fate as most works of historical fiction, arguing that the better a history seems as literature the less it is generally esteemed as a work of non-fiction.[39] Karamzin had faced the same problem. The more he, as an historian, delved into the inner workings of the minds of his subjects, the more he seemed to be fictionalizing the thoughts and motivations of eminent men and women.[40] If Karamzin and Pushkin were mere littérateurs ineptly

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[38] Klyuchevsky, "The Importance of Pushkin for Russian Historiography," as quoted by Mikkelson, 94-95.

[39] D.S. Mirsky, *Pushkin*, as quoted by Liudmila Prednewa, "Pushkin's 'Captain's Daughter': Pushkin's Historical Outlook," (diss. U of Penn., 1982), 147.

[40] Stephanie Sandler, "The Problem of History in Pushkin: Poet, Pretender and Tsar," (diss., Yale, 1981), 170.

trying their hand at writing history, Gogol' was imprudent enough to accept an appointment as adjunct professor of History at the University of St. Petersburg. Yet this incident serves to illustrate several important points: first, that history was an extremely prestigious subject in the 1820's and 30's; second, that Gogol's ability to win such a post without any formal training indicated both the underdevelopment of Russian historiography and the extent to which Russian writers were accepted as historians at the time.[41]

Recently, a few critics have been bold enough to defend the structural and artistic merits of a work they consider to have been revolutionary and innovative rather than irredeemably faulty. This effort to rehabilitate *Poltava* has, moreover, been coupled with an effort to comprehend and, possibly, map out the various paths of constructive social and political activity open to Pushkin and his peers in the wake of the events of 1825.

Such efforts help to elucidate how a certain type of Russian intellectual could have been expected to respond to the threat of monarchical "unbounded might", especially when his position was as precarious as Pushkin's.[42] As Pushkin firmly believed, literature was an appropriate forum in which to discuss the

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[41] Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 95-96.

[42] Debreczny, 340.

restructuring of government and society.[43] Scott's literary innovations had made this highly practicable. The extensive use of footnotes in *Poltava,* moreover, serves not merely to give an authentic account of the events fictionalized in the body of the text[44] but also to introduce a dialogue between poetry and history.[45] *Poltava* can further be seen as a prelude to the full-fledged use of intergeneric discourse in Pushkin's work--a characteristic both typically Russian and typically Pushkinian.[46] This tendency would, ultimately, reach its most complete development in Pushkin's study of the *Pugachevshchina* in both the novel *The Captain's Daughter* and the non-fictional study *The History of Pugachev.*

Pushkin's notion that it is possible to verify fact through poetry and that so-called "historical" facts are insufficient for the delineation of truth may seem quixotic, but it is best to recall the work of his predecessors in the areas of history and historical fiction.[47] For all their individual faults, Karamzin and Walter Scott were Pushkin's main guides to these respective forms. Historical investigations formed the dominant intellectual concern in this period while the demand for

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[43] Babinsky, 107.

[44] Sandler, 157-158.

[45] Debreczeny, 322.

[46] Wachtel, 66.

[47] Virginia M. Burns, "Pushkin's *Poltava*; A Literary Interpretation," (diss., U. of Toronto, 1977), 332.

narodnost' in literature was understood to be a demand for historicity proper. Belinsky made history the foundation of the new discipline of literary criticism, concluding "Istoriya est' nauka nashego vremeni, i potomu nauka novaya."[48] (Trans:"History is the science of our times, and for that reason, a new science.")

Walter Scott's impact on Russian writers in the 1820's and 30's, including Pushkin, Vyazemsky, Belinsky and Bestuzhev, meanwhile, was nothing short of profound. The use of prefaces and footnotes in historical novels was only one of the many innovations introduced into Russian literature as a result of the dissemination of Scott's novels.[49] Such devices "allowed writers to address the status of history in their fiction and to assert their individual authority as to the nature of the narratives at hand."[50] Scott had demonstrated innovative new uses of historical data and European historians were greatly in his debt. Furthermore, Scott stimulated an entirely new interest in documents as a part of literary discourse, helping to precipitate the move towards Realism in literature.[51]

In *Waverly* and elsewhere Scott used local colour *(*what Russians would call *bytopisanie)* in order to "convey a sense of historical atmosphere by the use of

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[48] V. Belinsky, as quoted by Sandler, 154.

[49] Sandler, 162.

[50] *ibid.*

[51] *ibid.*, 167.

concrete details,"; this greatly helps account for Pushkin's defence of the historical accuracy of *Poltava*.[52] Historical verisimilitude, for Pushkin, encompassed descriptions of historically neutral events such as the floods that, from time to time, ravaged St. Petersburg. Pushkin inexplicably felt the need to rely on first-hand accounts of a particular natural disaster in order to convey a sense of realism. In his understanding of the subject, historical accuracy embraced what others might see as completely irrelevant details.

As previously mentioned, both Scott and Pushkin allowed anachronisms to creep into the chronology of their historical fiction. Like Scott, who placed Shakespeare prematurely at the court of Elizabeth I, in *Kenilworth,* Pushkin allowed for such deviations when the anachronism conveyed a deeper truth about life during the epoch.[53] In *Poltava*, he moves Mazepa and Maria's love affair from 1704 to 1708 in order to enhance our understanding of Mazepa's intellectual make-up.

Long before Scott's tales began to enchant Russian audiences, Karamzin himself had attempted to incorporate historical elements into the fictional tales *Natalya the Boyar's Daughter (Natal'ya boyarskaya doch')* (1792) and *Marfa the*

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[52] *ibid.*, 164-167.

[53] *ibid.*, 177.

Mayoress (Marfa Posadnitsa) (1803). Having reconciled himself to Karamzin's more obvious flaws, Pushkin, by 1827, was able to see him as an "inspiring thinker and writer" if not as a "literal guide to the past."[54]

What is perhaps most intriguing about the numerous volumes of Karamzin's History is the discrepancy between the author's conclusions and the appendices. Time after time, events in the body of the text are made to conform to a predetermined narrative pattern while the appendices, a trove of useful source materials, stand in glaring contrast to the conclusions reached within the narrative itself. Pushkin could not have failed to notice the antagonistic relationship between the sources and the author's interpretation. Pushkin's reliance on Karamzin's history, however, was of little relevance after 1825 as Pushkin tended to concentrate on historical figures not dealt with by Karamzin.

Karamzin's history ended with the "Time of Troubles" *(Smuta)*. Pushkin turned his attention to the eighteenth century, concentrating on the reigns of Peter I and Catherine II. Like Karamzin, he continued to be fascinated by the quirks of individual psychology and by the hidden motivations which lay behind various acts. Like Karamzin, he strove to present psychologically authentic fictional characters against an otherwise "objective" historical background. And, like Karamzin, he endured the wrath of critics who felt that psychologically convincing

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[54] *ibid.*, 172.

portraits made such histories read like novels and should be dismissed *tout court.*

Even before his appointment as court historian in 1831, then, Pushkin had begun his own historical researches. In the last decade of his life Pushkin continued to write brilliant verse yet, as he increasingly focussed on historical narrative, his star began to wane as both the reading public and the literary establishment lamented his departure from Romanticism and his ventures into uncharted literary territory. Seeking mastery over a number of literary genres was *de rigueur* for a writer in Pushkin's circle. Tastes were also rapidly changing as readers displayed a new interest in drama and the novel. And yet, the public was unable to appreciate Pushkin's innovations and unwilling to condone what they saw as his endorsement of Russian expansionist imperialism. This impasse he parodied in the comical *Tales of Belkin* in which the fictitious, semi-autobiographical hero Charsky is unable to slough off the shackles attached to him by a society which thinks that it owns its artists.[55]

Returning to the accusations lodged against him in 1828, that *Poltava* was intended to be a bribe, sop or red herring at a time when his political loyalties were under suspicion, we would do well to remember that Pushkin did not revert to the liberal sentiments of his youth once the crisis had passed. Pushkin's fundamental

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[55] Kropf, 76-77.

beliefs concerning the importance of the monarchy *per se* and the need for the state machinery, if anything, solidified. This is borne out not merely in the writings intended for publication but also in his correspondence with friends and colleagues.

That the public was unwilling to accept such changes in Pushkin's outlook is evident from the shock and outrage expressed over Pushkin's attitude toward the Polish insurrection of 1830-31. Pushkin's denunciation of the Poles and their western European supporters, naturally, antagonized his liberal acquaintances, many of whom revered the Polish patriot Adam Mickiewicz as Pushkin's equal. Pushkin's writings, however, are not merely the reactionary screed of a sycophant; they reiterate certain basic assumptions concerning Russian history and Russia's place in the European political system already sketched out in *Poltava*.

Pushkin tends to dismiss the efforts of Poles, Ukrainians and others to gain autonomy not because of a hatred of Catholics or Slavic minorities but, rather, because of basic assumptions about historical necessity and inevitability. He tends to see such efforts at self-determination not in terms of illegitimacy but rather in terms of futility. Pushkin's nationalism is a curiously apolitical one; it is more of a cultural nationalism but the subtlety of this distinction has eluded critics, past and present, who have sought to make Pushkin into an apologist of radically divergent political doctrines.

As previously mentioned, Pushkin's historical writings, both fictional and non-, include references to both the actions of the importance of the individual in effecting historical change and the operation of fate. These apparent contradictions, however, are synthesized by Pushkin into a general philosophical system in which one's character is or becomes one's fate. Given their respective personalities, such figures as Mazepa, Maria or Kochubey could not have acted or decided otherwise. Even Peter the Great, as he is presented in *Poltava*, is mythologised as an elemental force, a divine wind *(bozhiya groza)*, sent by God, unleashed over the land.[56] Peter's portrait was, ironically, the only one that readers of *Poltava* found acceptable. This may have been because it was the only one that lacked complexity and ambiguity. The difference between readers' acceptance of Peter and their rejection of the other characters indicates that criticism of the poem's historicism was centred not on Pushkin's interpretation of history but rather on the verisimilitude of his portrayal of the various historical figures.[57] Confusion surrounding the author's relationship vis-à-vis the narrator and other characters further clouds the issue.

One reviewer finds a certain causational logic in the structure of the poem itself when it comes to reconciling fate with monumental, seemingly autonomous

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[56] Debreczeny, 335.

[57] Burns, "Pushkin's *Poltava*," 42.

historical figures. She suggests that Canto I contains a multiplicity of possibilities which gives way in Canto II to a number of emerging probabilities; these, in turn, give rise to the sense of historical inevitability depicted in Canto III.[58] She sagely maintains that discussion of the poem's historicity has been muddled because a comprehensive discussion of the poem *qua* poem is lacking and that it is necessary to determine what Pushkin is actually saying before attempting to compare his use of historical sources with conclusions drawn by other professional historians.[59]

Much of the confusion over the message and meaning of *Poltava* derives from its structural complexity. Characters are not revealed subjectively by the author; they are revealed objectively, by the action itself and by dramatic clashes with one another. The separation of the author-narrator from the heroes, furthermore, accounts for a great deal of misinterpretation regarding Pushkin's actual sympathies. Many who have condemned the poem on artistic grounds, meanwhile, doubtless have been disagreeing more with Pushkin's interpretation of historical characters and events than with legitimate aesthetic considerations.[60]

The necessity of regarding *Poltava*, "above all, as a literary work, not as a historical pastiche, was clearly in Pushkin's mind when he rightly accused critics

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[58] *ibid..*, 266.

[59] Burns, "Pushkin's *Poltava*," 56.

[60] *ibid.*, 65.

of confusing the narrator's words with the characters' and vice-versa."[61] *Poltava* revolves around contrasts and the juxtaposition of one element with another, counterpoint being an organizing principle. It is not in single discreet statements but only in "the interplay of different perspectives and conflicting allegiances that meaning is contained."[62]

Because *Poltava* is an historical poem, it focuses on man in time, a complex problem involving the interaction of individual personalities, the collective identity of a nation and the ever-changing realities of political history.[63] The use of historical characters, thus, is fraught with peril (and with promise). Historical characters must "retain their essential historical identity in order to be meaningful" yet may also enrich the poet's "imaginative understanding of the nature of man and his growing comprehension of collective human experience."[64] It is no mere coincidence that Pushkin's growing interest in and study of history coincided with increasingly complex depictions of the human character. Individual personality is seen to have a profound impact on historical events and in *Poltava* Pushkin attempts to reveal the inter-relationship between the two.

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[61] *ibid.*, 105.

[62] *ibid*, 126.

[63] Burns, "Pushkin's *Poltava*," 177.

[64] *ibid.*

While most of *Poltava*'s critics have found that the romantic and political themes do not sit well together, they fail to realize the significance of the former in helping us to understand the latter. The Mazepa-Maria love affair is emphatically not an incongruous interlude in a story of war and political intrigue; it closely parallels the political situation of the Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia. The relationship and the rebellion both fail because they are founded on an unstable basis, namely passion (*strast'*). The romantic plot of the poem is thus an inextricable and essential component. There are not two interwoven plot lines in *Poltava*; there is, rather, a single plot line expressed on different levels.[65]

Pushkin's description of historical events in the poem is brief and perfunctory for a specific reason. He mimics the telescopic descriptions of the old Russian chronicles in which there are few depictions of historical and political events *per se*. The implication of this technique seems to be that the historian or writer *cum* historian, like Pushkin, only records significant changes and developments in history.

> He cannot predict or interpret the general course of history in accordance with any generalized historical laws, nor would he seem to be able to draw inferences about the future destiny of nations from the evidence of particular events.[66]

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[65] Burns, "Pushkin's *Poltava*," 183.

[66] *ibid.*, 205.

While the connection between individual psychology and historical events was unprecedented in the Russian literary tradition upon which Pushkin drew, he felt compelled to explore the mechanism of causation in public and private destinies. The majority of the battle descriptions in *Poltava*, therefore, are devoted to examining the role of the leader of a nation in its historical development. Destiny, thus, becomes an individual creation that one cannot escape. Voluntary actions determine both individual fate and the outcome of historical events.

> Since Maria and Kochubey symbolically represent the Ukraine, the mechanism of destiny in their private lives reinforces the poet's view ...that the Ukraine as a collective of individual wills likewise acted on emotion (i.e., without comprehension of political realities) but withal, in character, which made the outcome of the battle of Poltava inevitable and beyond anyone's control.[67]

One's destiny may be unknown, yet paradoxically it is one's own creation and simultaneously inescapable. The law of destiny, for Pushkin, applies to both men and nations. Mazepa asked too much not only of himself but also of the Ukraine; no one man, Pushkin implies, can bring a nation to independence if that nation is not ready to receive it. The leader of genius is "he who accurately estimates his country's capacities and capabilities, who brings her to the fulfilment of her identity and does not push her beyond her intrinsic limitations."[68] How are

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[67] Burns, "Pushkin's *Poltava*," 252.

[68] *ibid*, 314.

men and nations to know when their hour has come? This question is left unanswered yet Pushkin seems to suggest that change can only come from the top and cannot be based on passion or on patriotism, different sides of the same coin. Success on the battlefield, moreover, has little to do with the force of arms or military preparation but stems from a series of actions and choices made by individuals prior to the appointed hour which are unavoidable in their eventual implications.

Past reality, in the final analysis, is not reproducible factually; it requires artistic expertise to render it convincing and meaningful. Great art, meanwhile, "must have greater substance than what pure imagination can provide."[69] This conviction was "exemplified by the growing frequency from about 1824 on of [Pushkin's] concern with historical themes" and, moreover, helps to explain his move from poetry to prose, a genre more conducive to the treatment of such themes.[70]

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[69] Burns, "Pushkin's *Poltava*," 332.

[70] *ibid.*, 333.

Chapter 4:

The History of Pugachev and *The Captain's Daughter*

The commercial failure of *Poltava*, though discouraging, did not cause Pushkin to abandon his attempts to incorporate historical themes into his fictional works. In the very same year that he published *Poltava* (1828), Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Fair Maid of Perth* appeared; the latter was translated into French within the year and reached Russia shortly thereafter. Pushkin had, by this time, already become fascinated by Scott's work and was among the many who considered the novel one of Scott's finest. *The Fair Maid of Perth* was not only praised for its plot and structure but was also considered outstanding in its "penetrating historical analysis." [1]

The following year, 1829, was arguably a turning point in Russian literary history; Zagoskin's *Yuri Miloslavsky* was published, marking the appearance of the first native Russian historical novel. Pushkin himself had been working sporadically on an historical novel based on the life of his great-grandfather Abraham Gannibal. Pushkin never completed this novel, known to posterity as *The Blackamoor of Peter the Great (Arap Petra Velikogo)*, and found it impossible to reconcile his Romantically coloured portrait of Gannibal with a Realistic presentation of historical events.[2] If Zagoskin did nothing else, he at least inspired

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[1] Mark Altshuller, "Motifs in Sir Walter Scott's *The Fair Maid of Perth* and Pushkin's 'Tazit'," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 32.1 (1988), 42.

[2] S.L. Abramovich, "K voprosu o stanovlenii povestvovatel'noj prozy Puskina," as quoted by Paul Debreczeny, "*The Blackamoor of Peter the Great*:

Pushkin to try his own hand at an historical novel..

By the early 1830's, Pushkin had not only had come to realize the great potential of the historical novel but had, more importantly, begun to move away from a predilection for Romantic heroes who could not extricate themselves from the moral and psychological patterns determined by environment, upbringing and social status. By the time he began writing *The Tales of Belkin*, he was able to develop a wholly different type of protagonist whose actions could be formed independently and at variance with historical and societal determinants.[3] In *Poltava*, Pushkin had tried to insinuate personal tragedies in the midst of great historical events and was chastised for the incoherent nature of the resulting work. Later, however, Pushkin made a similar attempt in *The Captain's Daughter* and met with success. The depiction of the *Pugachevshchina* and of the relationship which develops between the narrator Grinëv and Pugachev himself is every bit as successful as Scott's depiction in *Waverly* of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion and of the eponymous hero's relationship with the exiled claimant to the throne, Prince Charles Edward Stuart. While the Scotland of 1745 and the Russia of 1773 seem worlds apart, there are nevertheless some interesting similarities between the

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Pushkin's Experiment with a Detached Mode of Narration," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 18.2 (1974), 123.

[3] Altshuller, 51.

rebellions and between Scott's and Pushkin's novels. Both novels include the depiction of semi-independent subjects at war with the state, both explore the themes of mercy and forgiveness on the one hand and cruelty and retribution on the other and both present a protagonist who moves between opposing camps exposing the virtue and the folly common to both.

What makes Pushkin's novel unique, however, is the fact that though a full and independent creation, *The Captain's Daughter* represents only part of Pushkin's interpretation of the events in question. The novel presents a view of Pugachev that is more psychologically revealing than the strictly factual account of him contained in *The History of Pugachev*. Taken together, the novel and the history provide the most definitive example of intergeneric dialogue in Pushkin's entire opus.

Contemporary political events, meanwhile, continued to weigh on Pushkin's mind. His reaction to the July Revolution in France was one of horror and disgust; the Polish rebellion of 1830-1831, meanwhile, inspired him to write the jingoistic tracts *To the Slanderers of Russia (Klevetnikam Rossii)* and *On the Anniversary of Borodino,* both of which provided adequate fodder for conservative critics who sought to place Pushkin firmly in the legitimist, imperial or pro-government camp. Pushkin had lost none of his earlier fascination with challenges to autocratic supremacy and had begun to develop a deep-seated fear of popular

uprisings that threatened not only the monarchy but the nobility as well. Taking a cue perhaps from Walter Scott, whose novel *Waverly* was subtitled "'tis 60 years since", Pushkin began to contemplate the possibility of treating the *Pugachevshchina*, (virtually 60 years since), in a similar fashion.

In choosing the rebel leader Emelian Pugachev as his subject of inquiry, Pushkin was rather bold. The *Pugachevshchina.* was, by the 1830's, *terra incognita* not only for the artist but, more problematically, for the historian as well. The details surrounding the rebellion were largely unknown in the 1830's due to the government's suppression of information relating to it. In the wake of the events in Poland, moreover, it might have seemed impolitic to display too great an interest in a disaffected rabble-rouser from the borderlands of Russia who had nearly brought the Russian empire to its knees. Yet, contrary to the beliefs of some Soviet critics, it was never Pushkin's desire to see the state destroyed; he endeavored to use such historical contretemps instructively-- as corrective examples-- to show the Tsar and his advisors how a repetition of such events could best be averted.

Even though the legal compilation Nicholas I had given him contained a list of the sentences given to participants in the Pugachev rebellion and other classified documents were made available to him, Pushkin was at times compelled to use subterfuge in pursuing his research. He used the excuse of writing a biography of

Suvorov, who had participated in the suppression of the rebellion, in order to gain access to other, more delicate pieces of information.[4] He cajoled personal memoirs out of eye-witnesses or their heirs and even obtained suppressed foreign sources such as Kaster and Masson, the latter of whom supported monarchism *per se* even though he reviled Catherine the Great.[5]

Biographies of those who participated in the suppression of the rebellion, including Bibikov, Suvorov and Mikhelson, thus, provided Pushkin with crucial information. He availed himself of Bantysh-Kamensky's as yet unpublished *Dictionary of Noteworthy People of the Russian Land* (1836) which contained about twenty short biographies of figures involved in the rebellion as well as numerous eye-witness accounts, including I.I. Dmitriev's account of the execution of Pugachev and P.I. Rychkov's account of the siege of Orenburg. A.I. Levshin's 1823 survey of the Ural Cossacks provided useful background information on the sources of discontent fueling the rebellion and these details were incorporated into Pushkin's introduction to the *History*. Radishchev, Scherbatov and Fonvizin also left manuscripts pertaining to the military and civil maneuvers against Pugachev. In Moscow, Pushkin heard of the exploits of a certain Shvanvich, an officer in the

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[4] Paul Debreczeny, *The Other Pushkin; A Study of Alexander Pushkin's Prose Fiction*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 241.

[5] Liudmila Prednewa, "Pushkin's 'Captain's Daughter': Pushkin's Historical Outlook, (diss: U. of Penn., 1982), 75.

Grenadiers and godson to the empress Elizabeth who was captured by the rebels in 1773 and subsequently switched allegiance to Pugachev. Shvanvich was initially designated to be the protagonist of *The Captain's Daughter* but Pushkin ultimately decided to split him into two characters: the hero Grinev and the villain Shvabrin.[6] In the novel, Pushkin pretends to have received Grinev's memoirs from his grandson; in actuality, he received the memoirs of a certain Galakh--a Captain of the Guards to whom Catherine II delegated the responsibility for documenting important contemporary affairs--from the Captain's grandson.

Perhaps the most interesting source of all, for Pushkin, was Dmitriev's account of the part played in the rebellion by the eighteenth century poet Gavrila Derzhavin. Derzhavin had volunteered and had been dispatched to the Volga in furtherance of covert intelligence operations; once there, he had taken an active part in suppressing the rebellion. In the course of events, however, Derzhavin was accused of both treason and of barbaric reprisals against rebels near the village of Malykovka in Saratov *guberniya*. He was acquitted of the first charge but never managed to fully clear himself of the second. By virtue of his findings, however, Pushkin felt that he was able to acquit Derzhavin of responsibility for illegal actions against the rebels. In the end, he decided to omit Derzhavin's name from *The Captain's Daughter* even though Grinëv's personal history, including his

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[6] Prednewa, 72.

poetic endeavors and encounter with Tredyakovsky, is strongly reminiscent of Derzhavin's.[7]

With such resources at his disposal, Pushkin had produced an annotated draft of the *History of Pugachev* by the summer of 1833 but still felt that it lacked certain essentials, including local colour and the reflections of surviving Cossacks. For this reason, Pushkin undertook a trip to Orenburg and Kazan' where he visited some of the sites of the revolt and interviewed a number of surviving eye-witnesses. Pushkin traveled approximately 2,300 miles in six weeks and was able to finish writing the *History* by the beginning of November, 1833.[8] His travels and interviews, it might be noted, did not fail arouse the suspicion of authorities in Orenburg and Kazan'. One elderly Cossack woman, to whom Pushkin gave a gold coin in compensation for her assistance, was persuaded to denounce him to her interrogators; he was clearly the Antichrist, she asserted, his long, manicured fingernails were sufficient proof of the fact.[9]

Ultimately, despite the historic sensitivity of the subject matter, contemporary events at home and abroad and Pushkin's sometimes ill-advised

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[7] Irina Reyfman, "Poetic Justice and Injustice: Autobiographical Echoes in Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 38.3 (1994), 468-469.

[8] Prednewa, 79-82.

[9] *ibid.*, 81.

method of fact-gathering, he was eventually granted permission to publish his *History*. Nicholas I not only gave his approval but agreed to a government loan to cover the cost of printing. In return he made only one demand, namely, that Pushkin change the title.

The History of the Pugachev Uprising, as it was restyled, first appeared in December, 1834 and, like so many of Pushkin's later works, sold poorly. Regarding this, Pushkin dispassionately reflected:

> I wrote it for myself, not imagining that I would be able to publish it. My only concern was to arrive at a clear account of rather tangled events. Readers love anecdotes, local colour, etc., but I relegated all that to the notes. As for those wise men who are upset because I have presented Pugachev as Emelka Pugachev, and not as Byron's Lara, I am happy to refer them to Mr. Polevoy, who will no doubt be willing to undertake, for the appropriate price, to idealize this personage according to the latest fashion.[10]

Despite the lackluster sales of the *History*, Pushkin was at least able to take some comfort in the fact that his first attempt to write *bona fide* history did not go totally unacknowledged or unappreciated. Nevertheless, there was no dearth of detractors ready to find fault with Pushkin's main historiographical endeavor, whether for professional or personal reasons. Belinsky, in one of the very first reviews of the *History* inquired:

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[10] A.S. Pushkin, "To I.I. Dmitriev," 14 Feb., 1835, letter 551 of *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, ed. and trans. J. Thomas Shaw, vol. 3 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 706.

> Is an author of talent justified in not paying attention to the present that surrounds him and in continually endeavoring to resurrect the past; to move backwards and not forwards? Can such a tendency meet with success? Is a writer justified in condemning the public for not sharing his aspirations towards the Past, and for its ingratitude and indifference to his difficult struggle against the age....[11]

Despite such reservations, Belinsky's overall assessment of Pushkin the historian was favourable and he posthumously described Pushkin as a "poet, conforming to historical truth" who portrayed evenhandedly the dark as well as the majestic side of rulers and ages.[12]

Belinsky was also the first to predict the diversity of ideas and opinions attributed to Pushkin in light of subsequent changes in the Russian political and literary arenas, writing:

> Every epoch proclaims its own judgment of those who continue to develop in the awareness of society and despite the sincerity of its apprehension, the epoch that follows cleaves to a new and definitive voice--but no single one can, nor will one ever, be able to express it all.[13]

By the later part of the nineteenth century Pisarev and his ilk were ready to establish, on the basis of utilitarian principles, correspondences and rates of

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[11] Belinsky, "Messenger of Europe" as quoted by Liudmila Prednewa, *Pushkin's Captain's Daughter*, 92.

[12] Belinsky, "*The Contemporary*," as quoted by Prednewa, *Pushkin's Captain's Daughter*, 94.

[13] Belinsky, "*The Contemporary*," as quoted by Prednewa, *Pushkin's Captain's Daughter*, 95.

exchange between Pushkin's works and a crate of nails. Populist and Marxist critics, predictably, found fault with *The History of the Pugachev Uprising* for the same reasons they disliked *Boris Godunov* and *Poltava*. Due to either incomprehension or indifference, such writers as Pisarev and his intellectual heir Firsov upbraided Pushkin for concentrating excessively on the movement of the opposing forces and on the words and actions of the principal leaders instead of examining the rebellion in light of the eternal class struggle. It is indeed true that Pushkin paid considerable attention to military maneuvers in the later stages of the rebellion at the expense of other considerations; his decision, in this instance, was motivated by the fact that he was able to obtain only patchy information relating to the final stages of the rebellion and its suppression. Meanwhile, it need not be repeated that Pushkin was writing with the censors in mind and had, at any rate, come to see any undirected mob action against the state as an unmitigated disaster.

With regard to the specific charge that Pushkin depicted only the great personalities and not the class struggle, there is little room for debate. Pushkin did not write about the class struggle because he was intelligent enough not to attempt to impose modern ideologies retroactively on sixty-year-old events and always tried to let the past speak for itself and in its own voice. Polevoy was within his rights when he refuted Karamzin and instead declared that the history of a people belongs to the people; the responsible historian, however, could not legitimately

put these words into the mouths of Catherine II's contemporaries. Pushkin, at least, realized this.

As far as the depiction of great men as the driving force in history is concerned, one would have to be imperturbably dogmatic to either miss or ignore what Pushkin actually wrote. Having taken great care to expose the social and economic conditions which made the *Pugachevshchina* possible, having detailed the exploitation of the Cossacks by Russian officials and the first stirrings of rebellion, Pushkin concludes Chapter 1 of the *History*: "Everything promised a new mutiny. Only a leader was lacking. A leader was found."[14] Aware of the great resilience of royal imposters throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from the false Dmitrys of the early seventeenth century up through the rumours surrounding the death of Peter III, the Cossacks decided to forgo defection to the Turks and to instead challenge the legitimacy of their sovereign. As Pushkin writes: "Imposture seemed to them to be a promising springboard. All they needed was a bold and resolute rogue, as yet unknown to the people."[15] He then goes on to describe the alienation of other minority populations, as well as a host of other conditions conducive to the uprising including military conscription, various

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[14] Alexander Pushkin, *The History of Pugachev*, trans. Earl Sampson, (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983), 17.

[15] *ibid.*, 21.

epidemics and the timidity and unpreparedness of Catherine's lackeys. Yet, even after the rebellion was in full swing, Pushkin clearly asserts:

> Pugachev did not have absolute authority. The Yaik Cossacks, the instigators of the rebellion, controlled the actions of this rogue, whose only merits were some military knowledge and extraordinary audacity. He did not undertake anything without their assent; while they often acted without his knowledge and sometimes even contrary to his will...Pugachev felt oppressed by their guardianship. 'My street is narrow," he told Denis Pianov when celebrating at his younger son's wedding. Not tolerating outside influence on the tsar *they had created* (italics mine), they didn't allow the pretender to have any other favorites or confidantes.[16]

In case of the failure of the rebellion, Pushkin writes, Pugachev "intended to flee, leaving the rabble to their own fate."[17] Suspecting this, the Yaik Cosscks themselves resolved to get the upper hand and planned "in case of failure to hand Pugachev over to the government and thereby earn mercy for themselves. They guarded him like a hostage."[18] Both for personal and historical reasons Pushkin was unable to glorify the common man or the struggle against tyranny yet he was certainly capable of demonstrating the limitations placed on history's key figures by their compatriots and by the force of events. Bibikov, one of the key players in the drama, had realized all this, writing to Fonvizin: "Pugachev is nothing more

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[16] Pushkin, *The History of Pugachev*, 37-38.

[17] *ibid.*, 61.

[18] *ibid.*

than a straw-man that the thieves, the Yaik Cossacks, play with. It's not Pugachev that's significant, it's the general discontent."[19]

Thus, if Pushkin concentrated to some extent on the actions and words of the illustrious army officials who managed to finally crush the rebellion, he did so for a valid reason. Figures like Bibikov, Suvorov and Panin left valuable memoirs, accounts and letters which Pushkin used to great advantage. And, as is clear from the preceding, Bibikov was able to provide the exact sort of historical perspective retroactively demanded by Populist and Marxist critics. Pushkin by no means failed to call attention to the social conditions that determined the character of the revolt and allowed the down-trodden of various regions and ethnic groups to join forces in defiance of a mutual foe. It is impossible to peruse *A History of Pugachev* and fail to notice the scope given to such considerations.

While Pushkin was not a slave to any particular ideology, it cannot be denied that his history of Pugachev

> has a distinctively polemical bias and that its contents are continually informed and interpreted by Pushkin's view of Russian history, especially that of the eighteenth century. The central tenet of this view is the conviction that, however illustrious Peter I and Catherine II may have been as historical figures, their policies and those of the lesser monarchs reigning between them, led to the downfall of two venerable institutions, the Russian *boyarstvo*, and, coincidentally, an

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[19] *ibid.*, 62.

autonomous , though loyal, Yaik Cossackdom.[20]

Pushkin was bold to criticize Nicholas I's own grandmother in print but he was also remarkably consistent in his assessments of Catherine II. While his thoughts on Peter I had changed somewhat over the years, there was little variation in his impression of Catherine II; ten years after writing "On Russian History of the Eighteenth Century," (1822), he still believed that no monarch had done more than Catherine to destroy the very fabric of Russian society.[21] That the *History of Pugachev* was not designed to reassure or flatter those in power is evident from the final paragraph of the text; Pushkin does not mince words but adverts to the "inexcusable negligence of the authorities."[22] Furthermore, Pushkin uses the *History* as yet another opportunity to promulgate his views on the debasement and possible rehabilitation of the Russian nobility. He draws a distinction between good and bad nobles and makes a case for the reinstatement of the rights and privileges of the old nobility by drawing attention to their disproportionately large role in suppressing the rebellion. Russia itself "was saved from ruin only when Catherine, as a last resort, relieved her favorites Shcherbatov and Golitsyn and

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[20] Gerald Mikkelson, "Pushkin and the History of the Russian Nobility," (diss., U of Wisconsin, 1971), 227 ff.

[21] Mikkelson, "Pushkin and the History of the Russian Nobility," 232.

[22] Pushkin, *The History of Pugachev*, 109.

turned to noblemen of an older, different stripe."[23] Pushkin implies that leaders like Panin and Bibikov were available but that "their efforts were utilized and appreciated only in a dire emergency" and that Catherine had "too long relied upon the wrong people and had pursued a policy of keeping the true patriots and aristocrats away from the levers of state."[24] In short

> the situation was rescued , the rebellion defeated, and order restored, only after Catherine II replaced her originally-chosen, but inept, military leaders, with distinguished gentlemen who were previously in disgrace, but had long since proven their mettle not only in combat, but in public service and private endeavors....[25]

The question still remains: Why did Pushkin feel compelled to write both an historical and a fictional account of the same series of events? The suggestion that Pushkin was driven, by the commercial failure of the history, to re-work the material in a more popular form is contradicted by the chronology of the composition of *The Captain's Daughter*. It is clear from the notes and workbooks he left behind that Pushkin had conceived of writing the novel at the same time that he had begun work on the *History*.[26] A different but related theory holds that

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[23] Mikkelson, "Pushkin's *History of Pugachev*; The Littérateur as Historian," 34.

[24] Mikkelson, "Pushkin's *History of Pugachev*," 34-35.,

[25] *ibid.*, 35.

[26] Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession with History; Russian Writers Confront the Past*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 74-75.

Pushkin, following Walter Scott's example, began writing an historical introduction to his novel, similar to the one found at the beginning of *Rob Roy*, and that this eventually grew into a separate project.[27] The latter theory is not contradicted by the chronology of his composition but inevitably tends to downplay the significance of the *History* itself.

Ultimately, however, Pushkin was not so much unwilling as unable to write the novel until he had completed the history. This decision was dictated by the public's incomprehension of the facts surrounding the *Pugachevshchina*. When Pushkin sat down to write *Boris Godunov*, in 1825, he did not have to contend with a reading public ignorant of the events that he sought to dramatize; the last volume of Karamzin's *History of the Russian State* contained an account of the "Time of Troubles" which enabled Pushkin to take certain liberties, to reshape and dramatize a set of events with which the public was already familiar. Since the play was designed to be dramatic, Pushkin "could afford to be elliptical, confident that his target audience could easily fill in the gaps that were the inevitable result of his decision to concentrate on specific scenes."[28]

Having achieved his preliminary objective by writing *The History of Pugachev*, Pushkin was thus able to take greater liberties with personalities and

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[27] Petrunina, *Pushkin's Prose*, as quoted by Wachtel, 77.

[28] Wachtel, 75.

with the epic series of events. By writing a novel, he was able to explore issues of character and psychology that must remain outside of the professional historian's purlieu; history demanded a "distanced, objective, inclusive version of the story, while the novel lent a personalizing, subjective view of events." It should perhaps be stressed that *The Captain's Daughter* is cast is the form of a memoir, given to the author by the fictional Grinëv's grandson; casting it thus, Pushkin was able to "present a subjective view" of the illiterate Pugachev (who clearly left no memoirs of his own), "which reveals him more fully than the factual account."[29]

The difficulties Pushkin faced while writing about Pugachev were not completely unique or unheard-of. Indeed, one of the main challenges facing Russian literature in the 1820's was the necessity of demarcating the boundary line separating private life from public or historical life. Such concerns are implicit in Pushkin's portrayal of various characters in *The Captain's Daughter*; his characters are true to life because they continue to be affected by quotidian, domestic cares even as they are surrounded by the clash of arms. His interview with eyewitnesses in the Urals, meanwhile, convinced him that political loyalties were often dictated by a reasonable estimation of the strength of the various forces and that peasants could not be convinced Pugachev was the Antichrist if he had done them no personal harm.

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[29]Bayley, 344.

If it is possible to ignore Klyuchevsky's famous quip that there is more history in *The Captain's Daughter* than in *A History of Pugachev*, a close reading of the two will demonstrate that the research that went into writing the history is discernable behind every line of the novel. If he had discarded some of his sources in writing the history because they were too colourful, he did not hesitate to incorporate these into the novel. Moreover, he continued to find and receive pertinent information; if it could not be incorporated into the history, then it could at least serve some purpose in the novel. Pugachev's companion in Beloborodov, for example, is treated more fully in the novel simply because Pushkin had managed to locate additional material on him after sending the *History* to the printers. Colorful details, phrases and folk elements, on the other hand, completely bypassed the history and made their way straight into the novel.[30] Pushkin even inserted a grieving mother, suggestively named Razina, into chapter 5 before the Tsar himself demanded that he remove her.[31]

While it cannot be denied that "history is one thing and the novel another," each having "its own laws and its own truth," it is by no means certain that history itself "is used and misused in the process" of writing historical fiction. Pushkin clearly reserves for *The Captain's Daughter* whatever admiration he had begun to

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[30] Debreczeny, *The Other Pushkin*, 255.

[31] *ibid.*, 249.

feel for Pugachev's reckless courage while researching and writing *A History of Pugachev*; it does not intrude into the realm of fact and objectivity.[32] Meanwhile, as has been previously noted, a full understanding of Pushkin's views of the rebellion and its participants emerges only when the works are read in tandem. A sympathetic view of the rebels, placed in the mouth of Grinëv, a hero with divided allegiances who moves between opposing camps, while relevant to our understanding of Pugachev, could only be expressed in the context of a novel. Pushkin would never have allowed such statements to intrude on the historical record, but was free to explore his own impressions and intuitions in a work of fiction.

The fictional framework allowed Pushkin considerable freedom: he could either enhance or deflate historical figures whose actions and reputations could not be handled in so cavalier a fashion in an historical study. Thus, while the Tsar might demand that Pushkin omit Razina from the novel or retitle the *History*, he could not chastise Pushkin for portraying Pugachev in certain scenes as an affable, Robin Hood-like folk hero. To his credit, the "Gendarme of Europe" did not insist that Pushkin anathematize Pugachev in the novel any more than he insisted that Pushkin omit negative references to Catherine II and her misprision of crucial

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[32]Richard Freeborn, Georgette Donchin and N.J. Anning, eds., *Russian Literary Attitudes from Pushkin to Solzhenitsyn*, (London: MacMillan, 1976), 35.

matters in the *History*.

With regard to the principle of verisimilitude and its place in Pushkin's historical fiction, *The Captain's Daughter* must be carefully considered in order to comprehensively address this issue. Pëtr Grinëv, like many a Scott hero, is an observer of monumentous events; in this capacity, he

> heightens the historical realism of *The Captain's Daughter* and brings the reader closer to the action: the storming of Belogorskaya, the siege of Orenburg, the action of the rebels and the military strategists during the course of the rebellion, Russia's internal condition during that time, and the nature and consequences of the rebellion.[33]

That Grinëv is thoroughly unremarkable as an individual further enhances the realism of the tale; like Waverly, Grinëv is an average, down-to-earth, (*domashnyi*) character whose personal development is set against a specific historical background but who does not have any impact on the events with which he is associated.[34] Grinëv bears a close resemblance to the prototypical Scott hero who,

> is always a more or less mediocre, average English gentleman. He generally possesses a certain, though never outstanding, degree of practical intelligence, a certain moral fortitude and decency which even rises to a capacity for self-sacrifice, but which never grows into a sweeping human passion, is never the enraptured devotion to a

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[33] Prednewa, 115.

[34] Roger Anderson, "A Study of Pëtr Grinëv As the Hero of Pushkin's *Капитанская дочка*," *Canadian Slavic Studies*, 5.4 (1971), 478.

great cause.[35]

Pushkin's own remarks on the historical novel add further emphasis to these expectations. In a review of *Yuri Miloslavsky,* he expressed dislike for the works of Victor Hugo and Alfred de Vigny, both of whom, Pushkin felt, used history as a "gaudy prop", a backdrop for the complex yet ultimately ahistorical experiences of their fictional characters.[36]

Grinëv also serves another purpose as he, like Waverly, moves between the opposed camps, and that is to provide a neutral or common ground upon which opposing forces can be brought into relation with one another. By doing so, both Waverly and Grinëv become unique participants in the drama; both characters embody impartiality and the refusal "to submerge human relationship in ideological struggle, to rigidify human response in the stereotype of ideal commitment."[37] This refusal, in the long run, allows them to survive the violent polarization of their times. Grinëv not only moves between the government's forces and Pugachev's band, but offers commentary on the similarities between the two sides. Issues of loyalty, honour and humanity are seen to be common concerns

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[35] Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, as quoted by Anderson, 478-479.

[36] Pushkin, "Yuri Miloslavsky," as quoted by Anderson, 478.

[37] Francis Hart, *Scott's Novels*, as quoted by Anderson, 479.

and Grinëv does not condemn one and absolve the other; "he speaks convincingly of the atrocities committed by both sides during the rebellion, exposing each with the same vigor."[38]

Many scholars, over the years, have studied the gestation and mutation of the character of Grinëv from Pushkin's initial conception to his final draft of the completed novel. A certain pattern tends to emerge in the redactions; in each successive version Grinëv's political and social involvement in the events at hand is further reduced. It has been suggested that Pushkin decided not to allow his main character to join the rebels because he feared that this would reflect negatively on his own loyalty to the Tsar. Yet, as is clear from his remarks on Catherine II and her supporters, he did not seek to conceal any inflammatory political sentiments but rather sought to create in Grinëv the most objective narrator possible. Grinëv emerges from his adventures with a more complete understanding of social and political institutions and, "free from stereotyped commitment to any single social program...comes to appreciate the best qualities of both sides and criticize their worst tendencies."[39] The period portrayed in the novel, meanwhile, the Russia of Catherine II, is neither dominated nor distorted by the overweening presence of the sort of titanic hero who would typically have been

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[38] Anderson, 485.

[39] Anderson, 486.

chosen for a romantic reworking of this theme.[40]

This last detail proved a point of serious contention in the critical reception of Pushkin's novel. To readers accustomed to the historical fiction of Lazhechnikov and Zagoskin, whose main characters were unfailingly larger-than-life and directly influenced the course of history, Pushkin's Grinëv seemed a vapid non-entity. Wrapped in personal concerns, he appeared to be no more than a bystander; Belinsky voiced disapproval concerning Grinëv's lack of engagement with the events in which he was swept up, and most pre-revolutionary critics of *The Captain's Daughter* followed suit.[41] That Pushkin had clearly cast Grinëv's testament as a *memoir*, counted for little, it seemed. The romantic hero continued to assert himself in the literature of the 1830's; Byron still loomed large in the hearts and minds of Russian readers.

Soviet scholars perpetuated this antipathetic view of Grinëv but found a protagonist to their liking in Pugachev whom they idealized as the "personification of social protest, the apotheosis of class revolt."[42] For many of these scholars, Grinëv is made deservedly and intentionally inconspicuous in order to act as an

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[40] Gerald Mikkelson, "The Mythopoetic Element in Pushkin's Historical Novel *The Captain's Daughter*," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 7.3 (1973), 297.

[41] V. Belinsky, *Collected Works*, as quoted by Anderson, 477.

[42] Anderson, 477.

objective chronicler of events. His credibility stems, in part, from his quotidian familiarity.

Strakhov, meanwhile, classified *The Captain's Daughter* as a family chronicle, arguing that Pugachev and Catherine II, as Pushkin presents them, appear wooden and almost trivial, just as Kutuzov and Napoleon appear in *War and Peace*. Strakhov maintains that the not only are the Grinëvs and the Mironovs developed much more successfully than Pugachev and Catherine but that events themselves "are presented only to that degree to which they affect the lives of these simple people."[43] Yet, Strakhov greatly overstates the case; while Pushkin was clearly concerned to show the impact of the rebellion on the lives of those incapable of effective means of redress, he had no intention of glorifying popular revolt.

Prince Mirsky argued that Pushkin's literary and intellectual classicism was responsible for this, preventing him from presenting "the social background and social mainsprings of the Rebellion...in the generalized and abstract terms of 'mass movement' and 'class struggle'."[44] Soviet scholars, however, have argued differently, imagining that empathy for the class struggle was a natural outgrowth of Pushkin's earlier, supposedly radical sentiments and that to "reaffirm the

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[43] Prednewa, 131.

[44] D.S. Mirsky, *Pushkin*, as quoted by Prednewa, 138-139.

senselessness of the people's struggle for freedom in his literary work--would be to distort history."[45]

It is hardly surprising that Soviets were interested in accounts of popular uprisings against autocracy, especially when they were by writers as illustrious as Pushkin. Yet they read selectively, either ignoring or missing the point consistently made by Pushkin whose interest in popular revolt stemmed not from enthusiasm but from profound horror and detestation and a premonition of just how destructive a successful revolution could prove to members of his own class. Lenin's pro-revolutionary reading is made ludicrous by the concluding sentence of *The Captain's Daughter*: "May God not bring to be seen another Russian rebellion, senseless and merciless."[46]

Even if this sort of conclusion had been demanded by the censors, and it was not, there is no reason why Pushkin should have voiced this concern so emphatically, and in so heartfelt a manner unless he truly dreaded this eventuality. If, as previously mentioned, the conditions necessary to ensure the success of a popular rebellion did not exist in the 1770's, then why did it occur? One of the main reasons was the questionable legitimacy of Catherine's reign. While Pushkin's portrayal of Catherine II in *The Captain's Daughter* is almost

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[45] Prednewa, 139.

[46] Alexander Pushkin, *The Captain's Daughter*, 119.

sympathetic and greatly at odds with everything else he had written about her, she is ultimately seen to be capricious in her political decisions as well as in the mercy shown to Grinëv and Masha. Meanwhile, Pushkin points out that the degree of self-interest, malevolence and vanity evidenced by the rebels is comparable if not identical to the behaviour and motivations of Catherine's courtiers. Regarding the question of legitimacy *per se*, Pugachev indicates, that he feels a sense of kinship with Grigory Otrep'ev, the False Dmitry who figures so prominently in *Boris Godunov*. Like Godunov, Catherine II was not born to rule; moreover, she ascended the throne by devious means. Given this state of affairs, it is easy to comprehend why Pugachev would assert that "even if he suffers the same fate his attempt will have been worthwhile." These details unite *The Captain's Daughter* with *Boris Godunov* ; together they seem to presage continued violence and challenges to the legitimacy of Russia's rulers.

A number of Soviet scholars have argued that the novel is built on the principle of opposing class interests. Additionally, they identify the constituent elements of Realism in so far as Pushkin portrays the *Pugachevshchina* not in terms personality but in terms of broader social antagonisms. As Gukovsky argues: "the concrete examination of the class forces of revolutionary movements ...constituted the methodological essence of Pushkin's approach to the problem" in

The Captain's Daughter.[47] While Gukovsky is too precipitate in making Pushkin an outright Realist, it can justifiably be maintained that Pushkin was indeed moving in that direction; this is evident in his depiction of both historical and fictional characters in *The Captain's Daughter*.

Grinëv, Pugachev, the villainous Shvabrin--all are formed, to some extent, by their surroundings and experiences. Grinëv is the most realistic of the three, however, because he is the least static; he is able to transcend the limitations imposed by class and in him may be glimpsed "traits of a larger, more humane organization, which extends beyond the limits of his time."[48] Though he split the original, treasonous Shvanvich into the villain Shvabrin and the hero Grinëv, Pushkin never seemed to jettison completely his original concept of portraying a "thinking nobleman, who, by the force of events, is linked with the people's insurgency." Grinëv's participation in and comprehension of events leads him towards sympathy for the rebels if not the rebellion.

Grinëv condemns the errors made by both sides during the conflict but can never bring himself to condone the rebellion itself. He can ultimately be seen as one of the "good" noblemen whose deeds are dramatized in the novel in order to

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[47] G.A. Gukovsky, "Pushkin and the Problem of Realism," as quoted by Mikkelson, "The Mythopoetic Element," 297.

[48] Mikkelson, "The Mythopoetic Element," 298.

further Pushkin's ancillary goal of rehabilitating and safeguarding the hereditary nobility. As *The Captain's Daughter* demonstrates, the sycophants and parvenu aristocrats spawned by Peter I and cultivated by his successors prove incompetent and ineffective when put to the test. The formerly disgraced Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Ivanovich Mikhelson manages to do what Catherine's favorite Potemkin, cannot. Soviet commentators have tended to overlook or to ignore such vital distinctions despite the fact that Pushkin "clearly discriminates between those Russian military leaders of high and low rank, who take timely, resolute, and courageous action against the rebel forces, and those who vacillate, wait timidly ensconced behind fortress walls, or abandon their troops altogether to seek refuge away from the field of battle."[49]

The fictional Grinëv, like the rehabilitated generals, "represents all politically and spiritually disaffected noblemen, especially those of ancient origins."[50] Grinëv's meetings with Pugachev, meanwhile, have even been seen as representing the faint hopes of an idealized coalition between "good" noblemen and "good" peasants, a view derived form Pushkin's understanding of the role traditionally played by the hereditary nobility in fostering harmonious social relations. The deleted chapter of the novel, which Pushkin knew would alarm the

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[49] Mikkelson, "Pushkin's *History of Pugachev*," 30-31.

[50] *ibid.*, 31.

censors, deals with this issue in strident tones. Pushkin details the enmity that had crept into relations between the serfs and gentry before the rebellion and laments the manner in which the peasants, caught between the forces of Pugachev and those of the government were trapped in a situation in which the value of human life was meaningless.

Thus, when Pushkin submitted the novel to the censors in October, 1835, he wrote to them: "My novel is based in tradition...it is a historical romance."[51] At the very centre of the novel lies the dark side of that tradition: "the tragedy of recurring revolution and destruction; the suffering of Russia's people; and the hopelessness of those who are denied justice and freedom."[52] *The Captain's Daughter*, accordingly, underscores essential elements of Pushkin's political philosophy, recapitulating the unfortunate Russian historical conditions he discovered in the course of his research. Through this novel, "set in tradition," Pushkin "clarified and defined the essence of Russia's tragedy and pointed to an alternative to violence as a way of achieving stability and peace."[53] The tragedy of the *Pugachevshchina* becomes a symbol of the larger tragedy of Russian history.

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[51] A.S. Pushkin, "To Peter Alexandrovich Korsakov," 25 Oct, 1836, letter 639 of *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, ed. and trans. J. Thomas Shaw, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 782.

[52] Prednewa, 98.

[53] *ibid.*, 101.

Although Pushkin candidly noted in the supplementary "Notes on the Rebellion," prepared for Nicholas I, that Pugachev chose the most viable means possible to obtain his goal, he ultimately concluded that violence simply begets more violence.[54] Tomashevsky, for one, seemed surprised by this conclusion, writing

> It is extraordinary, that sympathy for peasant revolution did not flow spontaneously from the stream of Pushkin's political thought, he who was a liberal follower of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Benjamin Constant, and de Staël, and himself repeatedly speaking out for a moderate constitution of the English type.[55]

One Soviet critics even suggested that Pushkin was hesitant to endorse such action because he, as a sort of Marxist *avant la lettre* understood the necessity of a proletarian revolution as opposed to peasant rebellion.[56] This, needless, to say misses the whole point of the *History*, the novel and Pushkin's entire historical and political philosophy, dominated as they all were by the conviction that another Pugachev was usually nearby, waiting in the wings.

If the quasi-historical figures presented by Pushkin at times seem uncanny, it is due to the fact that in real life we are not granted the opportunity to explain

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[54] *ibid.*, 118.

[55] Boris V. Tomashevsky, *Pushkin: Book II; Materials and Monographs*, as quoted by Prednewa, 119.

[56] G.P. Makogonenko, *A.S. Pushkin's* The Captain's Daughter, as quoted by Richard Gregg, "Pushkin, Victor Hugo, The Perilous Ordeal, and the True-Blue Hero," *Slavic and East European Journal*, 38.3 (1994), 444.

ourselves to the arbiters of history. Grinëv and his inamorata Masha are history's beneficiaries in large part because they are given the chance to speak to the ultimate powers-that-be and are heeded when they do so. Their actions dramatize Pushkin's own efforts, in the latter part of his life, as he continually sought to explain himself and his country to the arbiters of history, particularly Nicholas I.

Realizing the limitations of flattery, he turned to history as an alternative means of persuasion. In Grinëv's conversation with Pugachev, which the author quite possibly modeled on his own interview with Nicholas I early in 1825, Pushkin allows Grinëv to appeal to Pugachev's sense of reason, urging him to judge for himself (сам ты рассуди). In the *History*, Pushkin had done this by other means, without explicit instructions; the letters, memoirs and eye-witness accounts contained within the *History* allow the reader to judge for himself. In the novel, meanwhile, Pushkin does the same: "the rule is simple enough: in the privileged space where Pugachev and Petrusha [Grinëv] meet, judging for oneself leads to the truth, and this suggests the reasonable (which becomes the honorable) thing to do."[57]

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[57] Caryl Emerson, "Grinev's Dream: *The Captain's Daughter* and a Father's Blessing," *Slavic Review*, 40 (1981), 71.

Conclusion

Throughout his life, Pushkin remained wary of the confessional style of writing that had come into vogue with Rousseau and reached its apex with Lord Byron. After Byron died, Pushkin had written to his friend Peter Vyazemsky that the destruction of Byron's papers by friends concerned for his reputation was not to be regretted. According to Pushkin, the world had seen Byron in all his glory; why should it be permitted to see him in moments of weakness? Pushkin argued: "The crowd greedily reads confessions, memoirs, etc., because in its baseness it rejoices at the abasement of the high, at the weakness of the strong. It is in rapture at the disclosure of anything loathsome."[1] Pushkin himself avoided full disclosure of his views on most subjects and remains, partly for that reason, fascinating and elusive.

Pushkin's contemporaries were the first to lament this state of affairs, and later generations, for whom everything in literature revolved around ideology, found it impossible to categorize Pushkin. His would-be expositors discovered that

> In order to master and assimilate Pushkin it was essential to interpret him and to ascribe to Pushkin some philosophy which would serve as his passport for entry into literature and as his patent of the title of a Russian classic. The elusiveness of his thought served merely to intrigue investigators: the more difficult the task, the more tempting

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[1] A.S. Pushkin, "To Peter Andreevich Vyazemsky," letter 163 of *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin*, vol. 1, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 263.

> it became. Pushkin's poetry appeared as a sort of rebus which had to be deciphered and as an object for "analysis in depth."[2]

Pisarev and his epigones, whose strident tones came to drown out reasoned discourse in the latter part of the nineteenth century, "neither could understand nor would forgive art devoid of some didactic, but preferably political, purpose;" they, subsequently, "had no use for all the Petrarchs with their Lauras, the aesthetes," or the Pushkins.[3] Those who did not denounce Pushkin as an opportunist, selected their arguments arbitrarily, their speculations deriving "solely from the author's wit rather than from a rigorous and methodologically sound study...Each author would appropriate Pushkin to his own party and support this by random quotations out of which he would reconstruct his personal system."[4]

Nearly a century after his death, Pushkin was made into a prophet of revolution. Lenin himself wrote: "The epoch of restoration in France" had "brought to the fore a rank of historians who, depicting what had passed, could not avoid admitting that the struggle of the classes was the key to the understanding of

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[2] Boris Tomashevsky, as quoted *Modern Critical Views; Alexander Pushkin,* ed.
Harold Bloom, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 125.

[3] Boris Brasol, *The Mighty Three: Poushkin, Gogol, Dostoievsky,* (New York:
William Farquhar Payson, 1934), 38.

[4] Tomashevsky, 126.

all French history."[5] Lenin argued that Pushkin, through the study of history, had come to understand the crucial fact that "no single power. No matter how benevolent and humane, can later the course of events without the participation and support of the people."[6] This line of thought sees Pushkin's main shortcoming as his reluctance or inability to demonstrate the conditions necessary to avoid defeat. It necessarily contradicts Gukovsky's conclusion that Pushkin was the first Russian writer apart from Radishchev to comprehend the nature of a peasant revolt "which must indeed be 'hopeless, and therefore meaningless,' before the historical process had produced those enlightened few who can both inspire and control it."[7]

Pushkin's multi-faceted role as imperial advisor, historian, poet, noble and intercessor further complicated attempts to determine his political and intellectual position during his lifetime. He had been obliged to speak in a different voice in each genre and his tone necessarily changed according to his listeners. Determining his views on Nicholas I and post-Decembrist Russia is extremely challenging while "claims that appeal to the facts or the 'texts themselves' seem ludicrous when the facts and the texts have so much potential for multiple

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[5] Lenin as quoted in Ludmila Prednewa, "Pushkin's *Captain's Daughter*: Pushkin's Historical Outlook," (diss., U of Penn., 1982), 140.

[6] Prednewa, 140.

[7] Gukovsky, *Pushkin and the Problems of Realism*, as quoted in Bayley, *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary*, (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971), 344.

meanings."[8] All too often, his characters' words have been confused with his personal convictions and many critics have managed to detect a discordant note where none is to be found.

Since his days at the lycée, Pushkin had been impressed by the guiding principles of Hellenism--order and beauty. His sane, Hellenic approach to the problems of man and society was atavistic even during his lifetime, however, and, for this reason, his writings became something of a curiosity to his literary descendants, plagued by the rise of pessimism, nihilism and anarchism. His detractors were unwilling to forgive "the ineffable aristocratism of his spirit, his sincere aversion to human vulgarism, which J.S. Mill caustically labeled 'conglomerated mediocrity'."[9] He was buffeted by storms of criticism because he, like Milton, survived political upheaval and endeavored to point the way rather than destroy the past. He managed to follow the recommendation he himself made in "The Monument"in which he counseled

> To praise and blame alike thou shoulsdt indifferent be,
> And let the fool have his own say.[10]

His keen understanding of human nature made him a consummate artist and

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[8] George J. Gutsche, "Pushkin and Nicholas: The Problem of 'Stanzas'," *Pushkin Today,* ed. David M. Bethea, (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1993), 185.

[9] Brasol, 39.

[10] A.S. Pushkin, "The Monument," as quoted by Brasol, 40-41.

a perceptive historian. His ability to let men and ages speak for themselves and in their own voice is proof of his extraordinary integrity in both capacities. For Pushkin realized that both poetry and history must be concerned with truth. To this degree they enrich each other.

The birth of a new conception of history with Leopold von Ranke, who thought of it as a science, has long overshadowed this fruitful connection. The unfortunate repercussions of the modern view in its Marxist variant require no comment here: in Russia they have been passionately rejected with the collapse of communism and the U.S.S.R. Unexpectedly, this has made Pushkin's supposedly archaic views on the writing of history, rebellion and political legitimacy seem fresh and again relevant.

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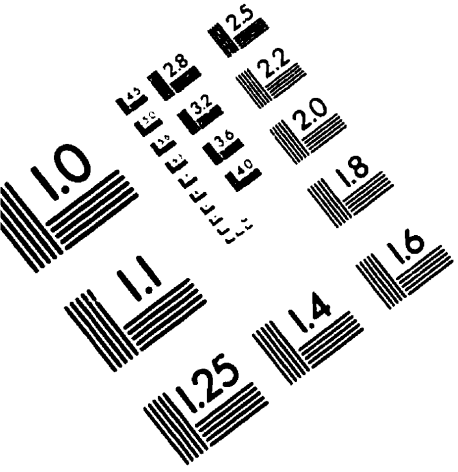

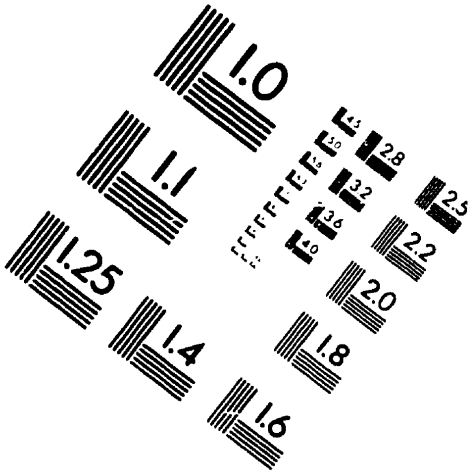

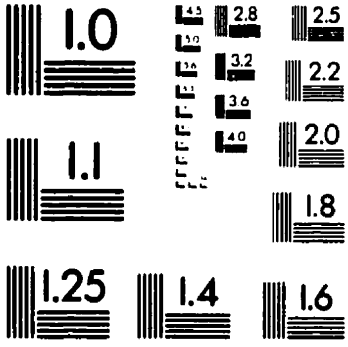

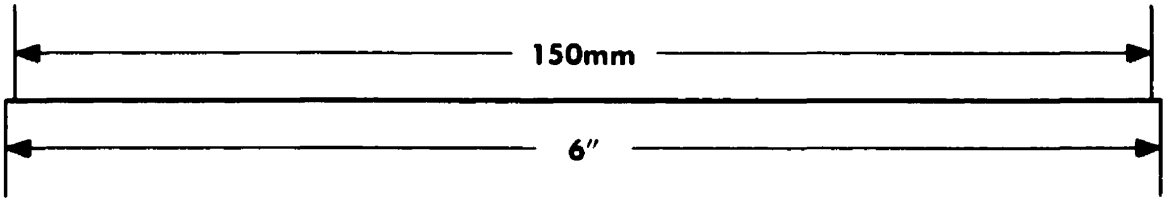

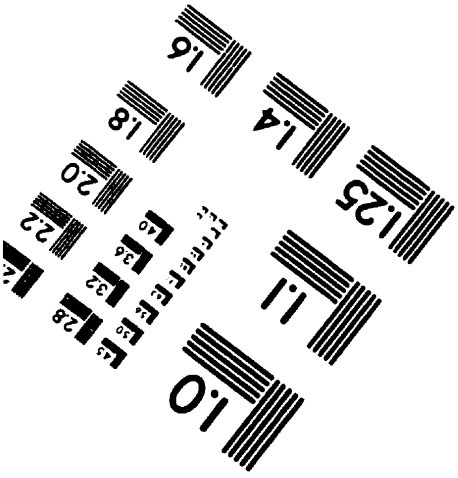

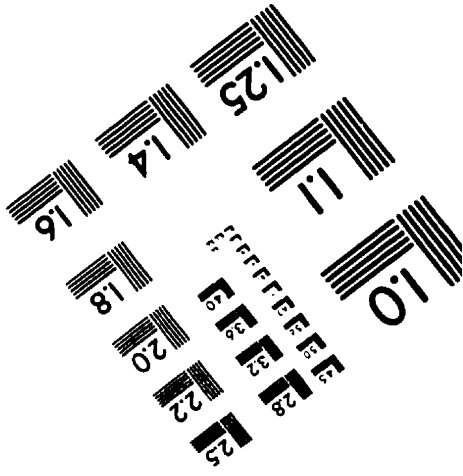

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