

PERFORMING THE NATIONAL PAST:  
HISTORY ON STAGE IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Slavic Languages and Literatures  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2017

Urbana, Illinois

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation closely examines 18th- and 19th-century Russian historical dramas set in the Time of Troubles, which was the era of dynastic crisis and the first civil war in Russian history during 1598-1613. The project demonstrates that this subgenre was essential for the development of modern theatre in Russia and for articulating vital concerns about Russian national identity. Historical drama became the first type of plays developed by the earliest modern Russian playwrights and stimulated the emergence of original stage practices. I discuss several plays that contributed significantly to the national discourse and stage history, written by the following major and minor authors: Alexander Sumarokov, Alexander Pushkin, Matvei Kriukovskii, Nestor Kukul'nik, Aleksey Khomiakov, Mikhail Pogodin, Nikolai Chaev, Alexander Ostrovsky, and Aleksey K. Tolstoy.

I demonstrate that, from its beginning, modern Russian theatre was not an imitative art form but, rather, an amalgamation of various foreign influences and older Russian folk performances. I discuss articles and dramas that display proto-nationalist ideas as early as in the 1790s and 1800s, a few decades before the commonly known Romantic debates on the nation, national literature, and “narodnost’.” I also explore how the historical theatre of the 1860s becomes the experimental grounds where the concept of “historical truth” (historical accuracy) is put into practice. I maintain that this less known and less studied work of playwrights and directors of the 1860s laid the foundation for a wide range of cultural phenomena in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including historical balls, the aesthetic of the Moscow Art Theatre, and the artistic rediscovery of the national heritage during the “Silver Age.”

I offer close readings of the plays and utilize the inventory of performance studies in order to discuss stage productions. I also apply the theories of modern-era nation and nationalism and include elements of cultural history. Generally, my project makes a contribution to the underexplored scholarly area of the history of pre-20th-century Russian theatre and performance.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATIONS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: THE TIME OF TROUBLES ENTERS RUSSIAN THEATRE: MONARCHY AND TYRANNY IN SUMAROKOV’S HISTORICAL TRAGEDY <i>DIMITRII THE PRETENDER</i> .....	13
CHAPTER 2: SEEKING AND FORGING NATION AND “NARODNOST” IN HISTORICAL DRAMA (1800S-1840S).....	73
CHAPTER 3: THE TIME OF TROUBLES REVISITED IN THE 1860S: THE CONVERGENCE OF DRAMA, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND NARRATIVES OF NATIONHOOD.....	142
CONCLUSION.....	227
APPENDIX: A LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	236
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	238

## A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATIONS

I use traditional spelling for the names of the major authors and cultural figures: Alexander Ostrovsky, Vissarion Belinsky, Aleksey K. Tolstoy, and Konstantin Stanislavsky. In all the other cases, I use the Library of Congress's transliteration. All the translations are my own, except for Sumarokov's *Dimitrii the Pretender* and *Epistolas*, Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* and critical notes, and the quotes from Dostoevsky's novels.

## INTRODUCTION

The “Time of Troubles” was an era of dynastic crisis, social unrest, and the first civil war in Russian history that lasted from 1598 to 1613.<sup>1</sup> This turbulent epoch is featured prominently in modern Russian works of historical fiction, as well as in the visual and performance arts. Mikhail Glinka’s opera *Ivan Susanin* (1836) and Modest Mussorgsky’s opera *Boris Godunov* (1874) still hold their place in the repertoires. Mussorgsky’s original source, Alexander Pushkin’s drama *Boris Godunov* (1825), has been internationally regarded as a classic and extensively studied by scholars. The Monument to Minin and Pozharskii, the leaders of the people’s militia that ended the unrest, has stood on Red Square since 1818 as a national landmark.<sup>2</sup>

Starting from the late 18th century and until the early 20th century, the Time of Troubles was the setting for a great number of historical plays, penned by major and minor authors, and for many very successful stage adaptations.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation closely examines plays about the Time of Troubles and demonstrates that this genre was essential for the development of modern theatre in Russia during this extended time period and for articulating vital concerns about Russian national identity. Historical drama became the first genre developed by the first Russian playwrights. Russian historical tragedy stimulated the emergence of the earliest original stage practices.

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<sup>1</sup> All the historical facts about the Time of Troubles are based on Chester Dunning’s *A Short History of Russia’s First Civil War* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004). It is also important to note that the original Russian name for the era is *Смутное время*. The phrase does not have a precise analog in English and literally means “the time of chaos, disorder, unrest.” *Смута* is a now obsolete Russian word for civil unrest and riots.

<sup>2</sup> Among the most recent examples, a historical film titled *1612: Хроники Смутного времени* (*1612: The Chronicles of the Time of Troubles*) was released in Russia in 2007. It alters the historical events to the point where its genre can be defined as “historical fantasy.” The film focuses on the picaresque adventures of the fictitious protagonist. Boris Akunin’s fantasy novel *Детская книга* (*Children’s Book*), released in 2005, features a protagonist who travels from the 20th century back in time to year 1606 and becomes Dmitrii the Pretender.

<sup>3</sup> During the 18th and 19th centuries, “theatre” could refer to spoken drama, ballet, opera, and other musical genres. In this project, I focus on spoken drama only and use the term “theatre” to denote this specific form of stage art.

Firstly, I offer a more nuanced look at the mechanisms of cultural borrowing in early modern Russia. I demonstrate that, from its beginning, modern Russian theatre was more complex than an imitation of Western theatre. Rather, Russian theatre emerged as an amalgamation of various foreign influences and older Russian folk performances.

Secondly, I highlight the importance of the performance arts for shaping modern national discourse and ideas of Russian identity. I have discovered and systematized writings that display proto-nationalist ideas as early as in the 1790s and 1800s, a few decades before the commonly known Romantic debates on the nation, national literature, and “narodnost’.” Some articles from the era of the French Revolution and Terror, as well as the patriotic dramas of 1800s-1810s about the Time of Troubles, express the characteristic concern about Russian uniqueness and construct a discourse on national pride, national “character,” sovereignty, and heroism, before a specific vocabulary was even found for these ideas.

Thirdly, I explore the artistic and ideological implications of the reemerging historical genre during the 1860s. Theatre becomes the experimental grounds where the concept of “historical truth” is put into practice. For the first time, theatre wants to present everyday life and the material culture of a past epoch in accordance with academic discoveries in history, archaeology, and ethnography. I demonstrate how this less known and less studied work of the playwrights and the directors of the 1860s laid the foundation for a wide range of cultural phenomena in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including historical balls, the “naturalist” aesthetic of the Moscow Art Theatre, and the artistic rediscovery of the national heritage during the “Silver Age.”

This wide chronological scope allows us to understand the continuity of the early modern theatre Russia and see the evolution of acting styles and scenography. For in-depth analysis, I have chosen several plays that contributed significantly to the national discourse and the stage history, written by the following authors: Alexander Sumarokov, Alexander Pushkin, Matvei Kriukovskii, Nestor Kukol’nik, Aleksey Khomiakov, Mikhail Pogodin, Nikolai Chaev, Alexander Ostrovsky, and Aleksey K. Tolstoy. Importantly, I study not only the textual sources, but also the stage performances, as well as the responses and reviews of the critics and spectators.

The early 17th century was an era of state degradation, profound social unrest, fights against foreign invaders and marauders, and, eventually, the revival of the state and the newfound unity of the people. I think that these characteristics reflect the contradictions and insecurities in the debates about national consciousness in the 19th century, and the discussed dramas mark the constant repositioning of Russian identity in its relation to Western culture. The performances and the responses to them allow us to distill the widespread ideas about the nation and its identity. I show how acting styles, directing, and scenography reflect the collective perceptions of Russia's past that are inevitably tied to the shifts and the trends in the developing national discourse.

Among the scholarly works dedicated to 18th-century Russia, Harsha Ram's study of the Russian ode and its Romantic modifications in his book *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (2006) is a very important source for my discussion of the perceived sacred status of the Russian monarchy and the category of "imperial sublime." Dan Ungurianu overviews all of Russian historical prose, from Pushkin to Boris Akunin, and concludes that it is a very important and yet understudied genre of Russian literature.<sup>4</sup> The scholar provides many valuable observations on how historical themes permeated the culture. Ungurianu offers a thorough study of the historical novel from its beginning until the Revolution of 1917, but he does not include drama into his content. Remarkably, historical figures and settings appeared in Russian plays earlier than in historical prose.

The most recent scholarship on 18th- and 19th-century drama offers theoretical conceptualizations of the literary process and the emergence of secular theatre. Kirill Ospovat explores the historical and the political functions of the first court theatre in 18th-century Russia. The scholar shows that the court theatres were indispensable for exercising absolute royal power across Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The newly established court theatre in Russia was perceived as a part of that context by its attendants and by Sumarokov who wrote the first tragedies. As a genre that portrayed monarchs and aristocrats, tragedy displayed the mechanics of unlimited power. The extreme emotional states of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ungurianu, Dan, *Plotting History: The Russian Historical Novel in the Imperial Age* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 5.

protagonists reflected the experiences and anxiety of subjects at court in the face of absolute monarchy. Ospovat focuses on the analysis of Sumarokov's first two tragedies, *Khorev* and *Hamlet*. Analyzing the plot of *Khorev*, the scholar concludes that "...Sumarokov displays in the very first Russian literary drama the patterns of violent spectacle that tragedy as a genre shared with the practices of royal terror."<sup>5</sup> He also argues that Sumarokov's *Hamlet* justifies a coup-d'état and political violence as a means of restoring and preserving legitimate royal power, which was a suitable reference to the Empress Elizabeth's ascension to the throne. Overall, Ospovat analyzes the textual elements in the dramas as the basis of his discussion of the political thought and cultural history of Elizabeth's reign. This book provides many valuable observations. My research goes in a different direction and explores theatre's broad appeal for readers and spectators, as well as the technical aspect of performances. I discuss the points of convergence and conflict between the officially endorsed historical narratives and the public perceptions of the "nation" and Russian history.

Generally, very little scholarship exists on pre-twentieth Russian drama and performance that would include a significant theatre-studies component. One of the most important sources for my project is Catherine Schuler's book *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia* (2009). Schuler formulates the purpose "...to investigate the role of theatrical representation in two intellectual projects that traveled hand in glove for most of the century – modernization and the promotion of national identity and culture."<sup>6</sup> She studies not just theatrical but the cultural performance of the Russian nobility and focuses on a number of 19th-century actors and directors, as well as the debates in print media. In my view, theatre does not only promote national identity, but participates in its creation. I provide evidence for that argument by exploring historical plays, official and popular nationalist ideas, and scenography, all of which are outside the scope of Schuler's research.

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<sup>5</sup> Ospovat, Kirill, *Terror and Pity: Aleksandr Sumarokov and the Theater of Power in Elizabethan Russia* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2016), xvii.

<sup>6</sup> Schuler, Catherine, *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 7.



I use Russian-language sources almost exclusively in my work on the stage productions. The existing information on acting, directing, and scenography in the 19th century is more extensive than one would expect. However, it is mostly preserved in a fragmented and unsystematic way. I have gathered all the relevant textual descriptions and illustrations and found supporting evidence to my argument in these materials. The seven-volume *Istoriia Russkogo Dramaticheskogo Teatra* (1970-80s), edited by Yevgenii Kholodov, provides an enormous amount of factual data on early theatrical practices in Russia, framed through a Marxist perspective. For my study of the 18th-century acting and theatrical visuals, I used the invaluable works of Vsevolod Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, an actor turned scholar, who published several books on the 18th-century Russian theatre during the 1910-50s. The scholarship of V.A. Bochkarev on Russian historical drama of the early 19th century contains evidence that historical drama became a mass phenomenon at that time. His research was very helpful for my exploration of the early 19th century. Finally, Isaak Iampol'skii and Flora Syrkina's scholarship is indispensable for the study of Aleksey K. Tolstoy's directorial work and the scenography of the second half of the 19th century.

#### THE TIME OF TROUBLES: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DRAMAS

All the plays that I discuss in my project revolve around the same historical narratives and figures. My account of the events is based on Chester Dunning's succinct narration that he derived from many historians' works. The Time of Troubles was a major political and social crisis that lasted during 1598-1613, from the death of the last Rurikid tsar Fyodor, who was Ivan the Terrible's son and left no heirs, until the election of Mikhail Romanov as the new tsar. Boris Godunov, a nobleman related to the royal family, de-facto ruled the country during Fyodor's reign. After that, Boris managed to defeat all his rivals who also had high positions in the government and could boast a closer relation to the late tsar. Godunov officially ascended the throne in 1600. The rumors and legends persistently blamed him for organizing the murder of the legal heir, Ivan the Terrible's youngest son Dmitrii, in 1591. To this day, historians do not have a definitive answer about the circumstances of Dmitrii's death and Godunov's possible involvement.

Godunov's merciless persecution of his open and suspected rivals caused growing discontent. Besides, the country had already long been plagued by serious economic, social, and political problems that were inherited from the devastating years of Ivan the Terrible's reign. A horrible famine of 1600-1603 diminished the population and sparked unrest and disorder.

In 1604, a mysterious man who named himself the miraculously saved heir Dmitrii appeared at the Southwestern borders, gathered an army of supporters, and began the invasion of Russian territories, paving his way to Moscow. This was the first major popular uprising against a tsar in Russia. Godunov's fear and oppressive measures escalated, so, when he suddenly died in April 1605, "Dmitrii" was soon welcomed to Moscow and crowned as the Russian tsar. He was "...the only tsar ever raised to the throne by means of a military campaign and popular uprisings."<sup>7</sup>

The most widespread historical narrative identifies this False Dmitrii as Grigorii Otrepyev, a low-rank nobleman from Galicia and a runaway monk. His identity still, ultimately, remains a mystery. His one-year reign left a deep impression on his contemporaries. The new tsar was described as a smart and gifted ruler who was initially adored by the people of Moscow and even publicly acknowledged by Dmitrii's mother. At the same time, many people were puzzled by the new tsar's open disregard of the elaborate palace rituals and outraged by his connections with the Poles and his religious tolerance.

Dmitrii was assassinated by a small group of boyars, and Vasili Shuiskii usurped the throne in 1606. However, several more "Dmitriis" immediately appeared and gained supporters. The country descended into a civil war that was aggravated by a Polish and Swedish military intervention. Shuiskii ruled until his death in 1610. For some years, Russia had no tsar, and the boyar factions shared nominal power amidst the chaos.

All these major events were well-known to the historians and authors of the 18th and 19th centuries. Accordingly, Dmitrii the Pretender, Boris Godunov, and Vasili Shuiskii become the recurring protagonists of the plays about that epoch. The documented events, rumors, intrigues, and many omens

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<sup>7</sup> Dunning, *A Short History*, 2.

are so unusual and memorable that, even without any additional inventions, they provide engaging material for fiction and stage.

Dunning also narrates the “second part” of the Time of Troubles when Minin and Pozharskii began fund-raising for the people’s armed forces, reunited the fighting factions and the common people, and organized the traditional Russian medieval gathering of all the estates called Zemskii Sobor, during which the new tsar Mikhail Romanov was elected in 1613.<sup>8</sup> The scholar summarizes the known facts about these leaders’ clever economic and political decisions and notes their apparent selflessness, and the patriotic feeling that was spreading among the people during 1611-13. In contrast to the dark realities and controversies of the events during the 1600s, the next few years had a very reassuring and optimistic mood. Indeed, the story of Minin and Pozharskii’s militia appears to possess the potential for a perfect national narrative that is ready to be used for ideological purposes.

The Time of Troubles becomes such an important and recurring setting because of the convoluted, controversial nature of that era. The accounts of the events are contradictory and defy any finalized interpretations. We know the overall story, but many small gaps remain. My analysis shows that, in drama and performance, the narratives from the Time of Troubles work in two opposite directions. The narrative of the militia’s successful fight against the Polish intervention and the marauders, as well as the subsequent election of the first Romanov tsar, is constructed as the foundational narrative of modern Russia. It is turned into a showcase of the Russian people’s patriotic fervor and their predisposition to monarchy. It also acquires the symbolic meaning of fighting for Russia’s own unique identity. On the contrary, the stories centered on Dmitrii the Pretender or Boris Godunov expose the uncertainties and gaps in the historical narrative, subvert the polished official discourse, and problematize national identity.

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<sup>8</sup> “...[B]y the fall of 1611 in Nizhnii Novgorod a new patriotic movement and a new military force capable of salvaging Russia’s national sovereignty were beginning to take shape.” Dunning, *A Short History*, 292.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 focuses on the major Russian 18th-century playwright Alexander Sumarokov who introduces the Time of Troubles and Dmitrii the Pretender into Russian literature and theatre. I discuss his tragedy *Dmitrii the Pretender* (1770) in the context of his earlier plays and his critical writings. I demonstrate that the fledging secular Russian theatre was not merely transplanted from the French court theatre; rather, it absorbed various influences (French, English, German, and Italian) and merged them with the elements from Russian folk performances, especially in the genre of comedy. Sumarokov's own statements that dismiss "low" Russian culture are inconsistent and should be taken as his way of building his own and the court theatre's authority rather than a strict aesthetic program. I demonstrate how important pre-Petrine culture remains not only as daily reality, but also as a source of the new cultural mythology, because the majority of the first modern Russian plays are set in the mythological times of Kievan Rus' and its first half-legendary rulers.

Importantly, Sumarokov's loose adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* foreshadows his *Dimitrii the Pretender* by portraying Claudius as "the pretender" who usurped the throne from rightful heir Hamlet. Remarkably, for the first time in Russian drama, the playwright inserts the "narod" as a collective character that supports the protagonist. I use Harsha Ram's concept of the "imperial sublime" in order to interpret the hyperbolic villainy of Sumarokov's Dimitrii. Sumarokov's largely invented story works as a pretext for the author to meditate on the nature of tyranny and question the ideal of enlightened monarchy, subtly referring to his discontent about Empress Catherine II. Thus, Sumarokov is at the beginning of a whole tradition in playwriting where the Time of Troubles is used as a frame to explore national identity and offer a vision of Russia's historical path.

The second part of Chapter 1 offers an overview of the theatrical practices in 18th-century Russia, especially for historical tragedies. In this epoch, leading actors were working on adjusting French recitation techniques for Russian verse. The first famous tragic lead Ivan Dmitrevskii studied acting in Paris and was able to work with the leading French actors of the era, most notably Lekain, and with the maître of the British stage, David Garrick. I maintain that British theatre of the era, more oriented to a

broad public, more visual and physical, was also a source of influence that has been underestimated or overlooked.

Producing the plays set in the Russian past, even if nominally, posed an interesting dilemma of how to reconcile the French conventions of good taste and the visual characteristics of medieval Russia. The tension often resulted in eclectic mixes where wigs, for instance, could be combined with vaguely pre-Petrine Russian clothes. It is still remarkable that historical tragedy significantly contributed to the development of particularly Russian-style theatrical costumes in this era. The numerous productions of Sumarokov's *Dimitrii the Pretender* by private theatre companies and amateur troupes acquired the symbolic significance of performing Russian history and laid the foundation for the Russian historical genre on stage for the next hundred years.

Chapter 2 follows the further development in historical drama that is closely tied to the establishment of a new nationalist and patriotic discourse. These ideas formed in drama and stage performances two or three decades earlier than the debates on national literature began. Actor Piotr Plavilshchikov penned an article titled "Something of the Innate Qualities of Russian Souls" in 1795 where he argued against the perceived imitative nature of new westernized Russian culture. He advocated for teaching Russian history through theatre and pronounced the "Russian character" to be unique and superior.

The first Napoleonic war brought a wave of patriotic feeling. Matvei Kriukovskii's play *Pozharskii* (1806) enjoyed enormous success and can be deemed as the ultimate expression of the nationalist ideas of the era. Kriukovskii echoed Plavilshchikov's ideas and gave the public a perfect hero in the character Pozharskii who selflessly fought against foreign invaders and Russian traitors, and celebrated Russia's greatness. The term "narodnost'," which reflected the intensive search for the unique features in Russian culture, did not exist in 1800s.<sup>9</sup> Yet, these concerns and all the characteristics of a nationalist discourse are already present in Plavilshchikov and Kriukovskii's pieces in a quite consistent way, even if not

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<sup>9</sup> Cooper, David L. *Creating the Nation: Identity and Aesthetics in Early Nineteenth-Century Bohemia and Russia*, (Evanston, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 163.

conveyed in any specific terms. This fact further supports my argument about the importance of the performance arts in not just in spreading but in forming the national ideas.

I also analyze Nestor Kukul'nik's patriotic play *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland* (1834) that uses the same narrative of Pozharskii and Minin's militia in order to glorify the Russian monarchy, as well as the patriotism and piety of Russia's common people. This version of the Time of Troubles manifests the ultimate convergence between tendentiously used historical themes and the state's official nationalist program. The visually luxurious production also solidifies the stage formula for the Russian historical genre.

This broad nationalist context allows us to see Pushkin and his followers' historical fiction in a new light. I maintain that, by writing *Boris Godunov* after thorough archival research, Pushkin doesn't only aim at creating an authentically "Russian" drama, but also works against the already established artistic approach in which deliberately invented material about various historical figures simply illustrated an author's ideas, whether that was Kriukovskii's patriotic call or the Decembrists' civil agenda. Pushkin's historical skepticism and attention to the gaps and contradictions in the historical sources remain rare in the succeeding dramas and reappear, possibly, only in Aleksey Tolstoy's tragedies. However, the mystical and supernatural aspect surrounding Godunov's guilty conscience would become one of the most frequent motifs in the dramas and the opera librettos to come.

Pushkin's followers Aleksey Khomiakov and Mikhail Pogodin both wrote plays about Dmitrii the Pretender during the 1830s. They built their narratives about the Pretender around the documented stories, but, at the same time, add their inventions. Khomiakov's Dmitrii is a positive, misunderstood Romantic character who is patriotic and devout to the Orthodox faith. Pogodin's Pretender is a tragicomic adventurer who fails to establish the connection between Russia and the West that is represented by Poland.

In terms of stage practices, Russian historical drama was becoming the most formulaic genre during the 1800s-1850s. In the early 19th century, Russian historical plays curiously converged with the flourishing ancient Greek and Roman drama, so the stage costumes could freely mix "Roman" and

“Slavic” elements. Aside from the few large productions sanctioned personally by the tsars, the whole genre was becoming marginal and minimally funded, so it utilized generic set designs and the standardized, almost carnival-style, costumes, such as high hats for boyars, “kokoshnik” headdresses for women, and brightly-colored fabrics.

Chapter 3 explores the significant shift that happened during the 1860s, when historical drama, fed by the rapidly developing fields of history and archaeology, turns into one of the central genres on stage. Many new historical plays were written in the 1860s and laid the foundation for the national opera. Now, the category of “the national” is understood as the search for “historical truth,” which implies the reliance on scholarly findings and aiming at faithful reconstructions of everyday life and the material culture of the past. The historian and archeologist Nikolai Chaev writes yet another version of *Dmitrii the Pretender* (1865). He offers a faithful presentation of the manuscript sources and the archaic language, often at the expense of character development and without a concern for theatrical timeframe and pace.

Alexander Ostrovsky, who is mostly known as the founder of the original Russian repertoire thanks to his social dramas, wants to rediscover the national heritage, as well. He finds an ideal people’s leader in the eponymous protagonist of his play *Koz’ma Zakharyich Minin, Sukhoruk* (1861, second edition 1866). Similar to Khomiakov, Ostrovsky romanticizes False Dmitrii in his drama *Dmitrii the Pretender and Vasilii Shuiskii* (1867). Overall, Ostrovsky attempts but does not fully succeed at reconciling “historical truth” with his search for the national ideal in the past.

During this decade, Aleksey K. Tolstoy creates his famous dramatic trilogy *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* (1866), *Tsar Fyodor* (1867), and *Tsar Boris* (1870). He works against the mainstream trend and deliberately reinvents the historical narrative in order to create the logical and theatrically engaging plot and plausible psychological motivation for the characters, while generally following the documented chronology of the events. The trilogy becomes a tribute to the whole tradition of the historical genre about the Time of Troubles. Tolstoy’s plays have many features of Romantic drama with their profound and tormented characters. The dialogs about Russia’s path, monarchy, and tyranny allude to the neoclassical aesthetic. Yet, the psychological complexity of the protagonists and the questions posed about human

morality directly connect to the main themes of contemporary Russian Realist writings. Aleksey Tolstoy creates a world of what I call “historical fatality” where his characters represent the conflicting forces of history. *Tsar Boris* is almost an alternative history where Tolstoy laments the tragic but deserved failure of Godunov, who was a gifted ruler and could have brought modernity to Russia a century earlier than Peter the Great.

By the 1860s, the quantity and quality of writings on the theatrical productions make it possible to reconstruct one full production. I argue that Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*, that debuted on stage in 1867, heralded a new epoch in theatre and anticipated its later systematic reform carried out by the Moscow Art Theatre. In his notes, Tolstoy proposes the shift from an actors’ theatre to a directors’ theatre and proclaims the cast “ensemble” as the sole most important feature of a successful production. The actual performances, indeed, exposed the shortcomings of even the most acclaimed actors and the insufficient coordination on stage. For the first time on Russian stage, the category of “historical truth” was consistently applied to all the stage visuals that were created under the supervision of the historians and archaeologists. This approach would become very widespread in the 20th-century theatre and cinema.

The conclusion provides an overview of how the discussed cultural epochs highlighted the perceived different aspects of the Time of Troubles, depending on the shifting cultural agenda. I also recapture the trajectory of the rise, blossoming, and fading of this dramatic genre. Finally, I analyze the famous debut production of Tolstoy’s *Tsar Fyodor* done by Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre. My goal is to show how MAT’s reform grew from the long preceding tradition and, with this particular historical drama, connected Russian theatrical culture of the 19th and the 20th centuries.



## **CHAPTER 1: THE TIME OF TROUBLES ENTERS RUSSIAN THEATRE: MONARCHY AND TYRANNY IN SUMAROKOV'S HISTORICAL TRAGEDY *DIMITRII THE PRETENDER***

### 1.1 SUMAROKOV'S AESTHETIC AND NATIONAL SENTIMENT

Aleksandr Petrovich Sumarokov (1717 – 1777) is one of the founders of modern Russian theatre who was a writer, a director, an administrator, and a stage manager. He wrote and staged the earliest modern secular Russian plays, which are also the first historical and political dramas written in Russian. His first plays are set in the half-legendary times of early Kievan Rus', the state that was the predecessor of modern Russia. His later play *Dimitrii the Pretender* (1771) introduces the controversial and greatly mythologized historical figure of the Pretender into Russian literature, where this figure would later appear many times and in many strikingly different interpretations. In this chapter, I will explore the cultural context in which the intense interest in European and, particularly, French Neoclassical theatre was combined with the search for original Russian themes and characters. I will discuss Sumarokov's aesthetic writings and demonstrate that his discourse on Russian traditional culture and Western "high" culture was complicated and, in practice, inconsistent. He was an avid disciple of French theatre. However, Shakespeare's tragedies and historical chronicles, and some aspects of Russian folk culture constitute other important, and often underestimated, influences on Sumarokov. He turns Dmitrii the Pretender into a hyperbolic tyrant and, in showing his destruction, problematizes the concept of absolute monarchy. Finally, I will show how the burgeoning historical genre, even though only formally set in the Russian past, stimulated the development of the earliest original stage practices in Russia.

Sumarokov's momentum was powerful but short-lived. Russian critics of many generations, starting from the Romantics, disparaged him as a diligent but talentless imitator of little consequence. As a result, the discussion of Sumarokov cannot be separated from talking about his unfortunate reputation that was shaped by critics and scholars. Consistently tendentious, Russian-language scholarship recycled many simplified or outright wrong claims about this dramatist for almost two centuries.

The dismissive attitude toward Sumarokov throughout the 19th century is well expressed in Aleksandr Pushkin's note "O narodnoi drame" (On the national drama): "Sumarokov appeared, the most unfortunate of imitators. His tragedies, replete with absurdities, written in a barbaric effeminate language, pleased Elizaveta's court as a novelty, as an imitation of Patrician entertainments. These cold, flaccid works could not have any influence on the likes of the common people."<sup>10</sup> The generation of the Romantic age possessed a new national sentiment and expressed an aversion toward the archaic language and the normative aesthetics of the previous era. Their successors inherited the same negative attitude. For example, Vissarion Belinsky's positive assessment, in his mixed attitude toward Sumarokov, went largely unnoticed.<sup>11</sup>

Early 20th-century scholarship acknowledges Sumarokov's historical importance. In 1914, Vsevolodskii-Gerngross calls him a patriarch of Russian theatre and a teacher of stage and dramatic art.<sup>12</sup> This rediscovery, most likely, was a result of the general interest in the roots and origins of Russian national culture that was widespread in the early 20th century in Russia. The vibrant contemporary theatrical culture of the time period (Stanislavsky and MAT, Meyerhold) also raised interest in their predecessors. In 1939, Varneke claimed that Soviet scholarship redefined Sumarokov's significance: "Soviet literary scholarship rejected the accusation that Sumarokov had slavishly imitated French models. The most recent research has demonstrated that he attempted a certain degree of independence within the French Neoclassical system, which was expressed in his sparing use of artistic devices, moderation,

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<sup>10</sup> Pushkin, A.S., and Carl R. Proffer, trans. *The Critical Prose of Alexander Pushkin: With Critical Essays by Four Russian Romantic Poets* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 132-33.

<sup>11</sup> Belinsky wrote: "Sumarokov was excessively extolled by his contemporaries and excessively belittled in our time". ("Сумароков был не в меру превознесен своими современниками, и не в меру унижаем нашим временем.") Belinskii, V.G. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii in 13 vols. Vol. 10*, (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1956), 124.

<sup>12</sup> "It [The Society of the Lovers of Russian Literature] gave Sumarokov to Russian theatre... who was a patriarch of Russian tragedy and a teacher of stage and dramatic art." ("Оно [Общество любителей русской словесности] дало русскому театру... Сумарокова – патриарха русской трагедии и учителя сценического и драматического искусства.") Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, V.N., *Istoriia teatral'nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*. (Sankt-Peterburg, 1914), 96.

simplification, and even ‘naturalness’.”<sup>13</sup> However, such conclusions did not have much influence on later research. Sumarokov’s monarchism and elitist position reinforced the dismissive attitude toward him in Soviet scholarship.

To my knowledge, there are two books that depart from the well-established bias against Sumarokov. Those are Inna Vishnevskaja’s *Aplodismenty v proshloe. A.P. Sumarokov i ego tragedii* (1996) [*Applause to the Past: A.P. Sumarokov and His Tragedies*] and Amanda Ewington’s *A Voltaire for Russia* (2010). One of Vishnevskaja’s main purposes is precisely restoring Sumarokov’s role in the scholarly narrative of Russian culture. Her book, however, is a hybrid of a personalized non-fiction essay and an academic monograph, so her statements should be taken with caution. Writing in the early 1990s, Vishnevskaja battles against the limiting and misleading tenets of the Soviet Marxist approach, but she also expresses her own Russian patriotic and somewhat nationalist sentiments. Ewington also redeems Sumarokov’s reputation but does not focus much on drama or theatre. Using these two works and Sumarokov’s own writings, I will demonstrate that the dramatist absorbed multiple influences, including baroque aesthetics, Shakespeare, and the Russian folk tradition, rather than orienting his works on French Neoclassicism exclusively. In fact, while borrowing extensively in terms of genres, techniques, and imagery, he explores typical Russian themes such as the nature and legitimacy of monarchy, as well as the phenomena of tyranny and “samozvanstvo” (an impostor proclaiming himself/herself as a member of the royal family who has the immediate right to the Russian throne). The problematic themes introduced by Sumarokov, such as the relationship between the monarchy and the nobility, anticipate Russian 19th-century literature instead of showing similarities with Western European sources.

There are several foundational characteristics of Sumarokov’s aesthetics that unite his works, which have been underestimated or overlooked by the majority of his scholars. Sumarokov’s approach to French

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<sup>13</sup> “Советское литературоведение отбросило обвинение Сумарокова в рабской подражательности французским образцам. Новейшие исследования показали, что он пытался проявить в рамках французской классической системы известную долю самостоятельности, выразившуюся в экономии художественных средств, сдержанности, упрощённости, даже ‘естественности’.” Varneke B. V., *Istoriia russkogo teatra XVII-XIX vekov* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1939), 100.

Neoclassicism was, in fact, analytical. He did not treat the acclaimed French authors as the bearers of some ultimate artistic truth, but usually praised and criticized them almost from the position of an equal. His connection with the preceding baroque school of theatre has also been largely ignored, and his interest in Shakespeare deserves closer examination.

The principal approach to researching Sumarokov should be the juxtaposition between his theoretical claims and his actual works, which, for whatever reason, has rarely been done. Known as a playwright, Sumarokov contributed to all existing genres of literature, with the exception of fictional prose. The love “songs” and the miscellaneous poems are the least known but, probably, the most interesting works left by the author. Even a brief look at his poetry shows that his practice frequently deviated from his theory. The most characteristic example of that is his repeated denunciation of “low” culture as uncivilized. At the same time, his love poems, some satires, and comedies are deeply rooted within the Russian folk tradition, probably because the tradition was still ubiquitous. Besides, comicality and satire are based on a language, its idiomatic nature, and historical phenomena, which could hardly be learned from foreign examples. Thus, Sumarokov’s engagement with “low” culture provides more evidence of his creative independence.

Sumarokov deliberately “imitated” French Neoclassicism but never treated it uncritically. In his collection of essays titled *An Opinion in a Dream-Vision: On French Tragedies*,<sup>14</sup> which are based on his impressions from attending the Paris theatres, we find both admiration and criticism of the most highly acclaimed French playwrights. For example, this is Sumarokov’s analysis of Racine’s *Iphigenia* and the directing choices, with extended quotes between his remarks. He specifically praises or denounces certain passages and movements on stage:

The beginning of the Tragedy is splendid. The Verses [are] of great taste. The whole Prologue is a matter worthy of Racine. ... In the Second Scene, Clytemnestra and Aegina ascended the Theatre, and Ériphile and Doris left. This contradicts both Theatre and good taste, and all this is utterly forced and strained for the sake of the following Scenes. The Fourth Scene drove my slumber away. What is

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<sup>14</sup> Sumarokov, A.P., “Mnenie vo snovidenii: O frantsuzskikh tragegiakh.” In Sumarokov, A.P. *Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii, v stikhakh i proze*, vol. 4, (Moskva, 1781-1782), 334. Hathi Trust Digital Library. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001730068> (Accessed on December 9, 2016).

excellent and worthy of Racine has begun. ... All the last speech of Clytemnestra is written by The Muses. ... In the Tenth Scene, the obnoxious Ériphile again ascended the Theatre, and Doris with her, and they finished this splendid, after an un-tasty beginning, Act.”<sup>15</sup>

This quote belongs to a corpus of works by Sumarokov that have not been printed since *The Complete Works* of 1781-82 and have only recently been digitized. Sumarokov’s approach to Racine provides an invaluable insight into his general approach to literary analysis and the whole of Russian 18th-century literary criticism, which seems to be full of malice and personal attacks. We can see a very straightforward and nitpicky assessment of Racine’s play and its adaptation, even though the play was an indisputable classic by the mid-18th century. The Russian playwright goes from utter delight to expressive dislike for each scene and passage of *Iphigenia*. It is unclear whether Sumarokov mainly refers to the text itself or the performance, to the characters in the book or their interpretations on stage. Because he speaks so much about “poetry” and “lines,” I assume that he concentrates more on the tragedy as a piece of literature, but sometimes speaks of both the text and the production. The cosmopolitanism and universalism of the epoch let him treat French classics as models, but still potential equals to his own works. His dismissive remarks do not interfere in any way with his overall admiration of Racine and being his dedicated disciple. Extrapolating from this critique of Racine, I conclude that the unrestrained and, at times, snappish critique does not signify disrespect or professional rejection. It was apparently just the typical style of Russian literary criticism during that era.

Interestingly, Sumarokov highly values spontaneous emotional response and the ability of the writer and actors to move spectators. For example, he recounts his own reaction on a scene from Racine’s *Iphigenia* in the following manner: “My hair stood on end, and my heart trembled and missed a beat; and,

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<sup>15</sup> All the translations from Russian are my own, unless otherwise specified.

”Начало Трагедии прекрасно. Стихи великого вкуса. Пролог весь есть дело достойное Расина. ... Во Втором Явлении взшла Клитемнестра с Егиною на Теятр, а Ерифилы с Дорисою сошли. Сие противно и Теятру и хорошему вкусу, и все сие крайне принужденно, и натянуто ради последующих Явлений. Четвертое Явление прогнало мою дремоту. Началось прекрасное и достойное Расина. ... Вся последняя речь Клитемнестры, писана Музами... В Десятом Явлении опять несносная Ерифилы взшла на Теятр и с нею Дориса, и окончили сие прекрасное, по не вкусном начале, Действие.” Sumarokov, *Polnoe sobranie vseh sochinenii, v stikhakh i proze*, vol. 4, 335-339.

as the Scene ended, during the loudest applause, tears poured from my eyes. In this moment, the French Euripides ascended the very top of Parnassus.”<sup>16</sup> The playwright provides a description of his emotions, with a curious emphasis on their physiological manifestations, which directly anticipates Sentimentalist style.

Sumarokov repeatedly refers to “taste” as the principal aesthetic category, which leads us to the contemporary British writings on aesthetics and the theory of art that were very influential across Europe. John Locke and Shaftsbury wrote their philosophical and aesthetic works in the late 17th – early 18th centuries but their ideas began to spread later, and mostly after the thinkers of French Enlightenment became interested in them. Voltaire admired Locke, as documented in his *Letter XIII—On Mr. Locke*, and Diderot translated the works of Shaftsbury.<sup>17</sup> Sumarokov became acquainted with those aesthetic theories and the concept of “taste” via the French authors’ references and French translations. He was extremely interested in the contemporary trends in European philosophical thinking and strove to become a part of that discourse. Sumarokov, therefore, was influenced by sensualism and empiricism as the theories of knowledge. Evidence of this exists in his summary of Locke’s ideas in a note *On Human Reason, According to Locke*. Locke persuades him that human reason is based on senses and emotions:

Reason is enlightened by senses, and the stronger they become, the more enlightenment there is. Anything we understand is embedded into our mind by feelings. Reasoning cannot have any foundation except for what is provided to it by feelings: reason without the help of feelings cannot make even a little move in researching something. Reason is nothing but actions of the soul that are set in motion by feelings. The more a human sees, the more he understands. Would a human understand what is sweet or bitter if he had no taste? Would anyone understand what is white and what is red, in his mind, if born blind? The one who is born deaf has not the smallest idea about music. Everything that exists irrefutably confirms Locke’s view.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Волосы на мне дыбом, сердце затрепетало, замерло; а по окончании Явления, в минуту громчайшаго плеска, полилися из очей моих слезы. В сей статьи возшел Французский Еврипид на самой верьх Парнасса...” Ibid., 339.

<sup>17</sup> See François Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Letters on the English. Letter XIII—On Mr. Locke*. The Harvard Classics. 1909–14. <http://www.bartleby.com/34/2/13.html> (Accessed on December 9, 2016); and Denis Diderot, *Enquête sur la Vertu et le Mérite*. <http://philotra.pagesperso-orange.fr/shaftesbury.htm> (Accessed on December 9, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> “Разумение просвещается чувствами, и что больше они укрепляются, то больше все просвещается. Все то, что мы ни понимаем, выясняется в разум чувствами. Разсуждение кроме данных ему чувствами ни каких

Thus, Sumarokov's "reason" is not pure logic or cold rationalism. There is a chain of "senses – emotions – reason," and "reason" here is regarded as the highest achievement of the Enlightenment and civilization because only an enlightened person can ascend to the highest level of reason.

The Romantics and the subsequent generations of Russian critics dismissed Neoclassical writings as cold and disconnected from feeling. By Pushkin's era, the mode of perception and the idea of artistic creativity had changed so profoundly that these dramas appeared too cold and rhetorical.<sup>19</sup> Yet, Sumarokov himself and his contemporaries perceived them as full of passion and raw emotion, just as his "teacher" Racine was able to move the audience to tears.

For Sumarokov, the emotional responses to the works for art were inseparable from their universal educational mission. However, the Enlightenment's concept of the universal equality of people contradicted the ongoing development of Russian society because, with the simultaneous rapid modernization, the laws were increasingly enslaving serfs during the course of the 18th century, which reinforced the hierarchy of social estates. Sumarokov professes education and intellectual pursuits as the basis of the noble estate's superiority and efficiency. He sees his own literary pursuits as a form of service to the state.

In accordance with his views, the playwright sometimes makes the rulers' attendants and close friends the most positive and honorable characters in his dramas. For example, in *Khorev*, the eponymous protagonist is a tragic but non-controversial character, unlike his ruling brother Kii. In *Dimitrii the Pretender*, Georgii and Kseniia resist the villainous monarch. Sumarokov's characters implicitly suggest that the nobility guarantees the legitimacy of royal power rather than rulers themselves, and the nobles

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освоений не имеет: разсуждение без помощи чувств ни малейшаго движения в изследовании зделате не может. Разум ни что иное как только действия души, в движение чувствами приведенныя. Что больше человек видит, то больше разумеет. Мог ли бы человек постигнуть что сладко, и что горько, ежели бы он не имел вкуса? Может ли кто постигнуть, что бело и что красно, разумом, слеп родившися? Кто глух родился, тот о музыке ни малейшаго понятия не имеет. Все что ни есть, неопровергаемо Локково мнение утверждает." ("О разумении человеческого по мнению Локка"). Quoted in: Berkov P.N. "A.P. Sumarokov" In Berdnikov, G.P. ed. *Russkie dramaturgi XVII-XIX vv.*, in 3 vols. Vol. 1 (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1969), 74.

<sup>19</sup> See Pushkin, "O narodnoi drame", 132.

may have the moral right to dethrone an unworthy tsar. This idea is expressed in a much more extreme form in Kniazhnin's *Vadim Novgorodskii*, where Vadim commits suicide as the ultimate protest against any monarchical rule. Similar ideas can be traced forward to the Decembrists' Revolt when the upper class of Russian society, which was supposed to support the emperor, turned against him in the name of higher social justice.

Sumarokov is straightforwardly patriotic in his "epistola" to the heir Prince Pavel where he proclaims patriotism as the principal civic virtue and the foundation of a state's peaceful existence.<sup>20</sup> In the poem, Sumarokov invokes a widely known concept of the body politic<sup>21</sup> in comparing the state and the whole society to a body, the members of which cannot exist separately. The writer understands the function of a ruler as a service and a mission. It is revealing to compare how Sumarokov expresses

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<sup>20</sup> The love of fatherland is the first virtue  
And the incontestable witness of our honesty,  
Without it, it is impossible to be not only a hero  
But even an honest person.  
The wise destiny gives me a life,  
So that I live and do good to the people [narod].  
A limb asks for another limb's help every minute,  
And the body carries all the burdens wholly.  
We all must love our fatherland,  
And what royal heirs must love even more  
Is the well-being of the people. [narod]

Любовь к отечеству есть перва добродетель  
И нашей честности неспоримый свидетель.  
Не только можно быть героем без нея,  
Не можно быть никак и честным человеком.  
Премудрая судьба довольствует мя веком,  
Чтоб жил и приносил народу пользу я.  
Член члена помощи ежеминутно просит,  
И всяки тягости всё тело обще носит.  
Всем должно нам любить отечество свое,  
А царским отраслям любити должно боле:  
Благополучие народа на престоле.  
Sumarokov, A.P., *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Leningrad: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1957), 131-132,

<sup>21</sup> "According to the "mystic fiction of the 'King's two bodies' as analyzed by Ernst Kantorowicz, kings in England and France had both a visible, corporeal, mortal body, and an invisible, ideal, 'body politic' which never died." Hunt, Lynn. "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution" In Hunt, Lynn, ed. *Eroticism and Body Politic*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 119.



himself differently as an author in different genres. The ode, for instance, requires the full convergence between the portrait of an ideal monarch and a specific monarch. An ideal is depicted as if it fully exists. In this epistola, we see how the poet takes an authoritative position and teaches the foundational virtues and responsibilities to the heir. His tragedies, especially *Dimitrii the Pretender*, take an approach opposite to the odic genre, as they portray the destructive nature of human passions and condemn tyrannical hunger for power. Dimitrii is not simply a bad monarch and a tyrant, he is an anti-heroic version of a ruler. Sumarokov's patriotism cannot be doubted but it does not translate into full compliance to the existing power and may even put itself above it, if that power is tyrannical.

Sumarokov's proto-national agenda is another feature that distinguishes him from his French models. French Neoclassicism prefers ancient mythological or exotic settings for tragedies and does not usually bring French national history on stage. Corneille and Racine's plays have an abstract dimension where Greek and Roman characters represent universal human conflicts and emotions. While Sumarokov's settings can be described as pseudo-historical, he combines the themes of love and human relationships with distinctly Russian topics. Rather than an inhuman "fatum," the political situations created by specific people (usually monarchs) cause the sufferings of the Russian characters and their ambivalent position between feelings and duty. Such plays as *Dimitrii the Pretender* expose the troubles of Russian historical past in connection with the doubts about its present.

Peter the First already liked using historical themes for the specific ideological purpose of promoting his reforms. Catherine the Great also wrote a few tendentious plays that were full of transparent references to the glorious achievements of her rule.<sup>22</sup> Sumarokov and Kniazhnin turn to historical events with the opposite intention of exploring the problematic questions of history and the

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<sup>22</sup> "In the 1786, having read Eschenburg's German translations of Shakespeare's works, Catherine completed three plays "in imitation of Shakespeare." *The Beginning of Oleg's Reign* (1786) was one of two scripts modeled on English chronicle plays, but treating ninth-century pre-Christian Russian history. ... Her other scripts inspired by Shakespeare include *This 'tis to have Linen and Buckbaskets...* and *From the Life of Riurik*." O'Malley, Lurana Donnels, *Dramatic works of Catherine the Great* (Aldershot, England; Ashgate, 2006), 12.

present. Thus, a very prominent feature of the Russian Neoclassicist dramatic tradition is its engagement with its contemporaneous political and social discourse.

Sumarokov's interest in shaping a new, modernized Russian identity can be found in his wish to write a national epic. He began *Dimitriady*, dedicated to Dmitrii Donskoi, in which it appears that he wanted to present a positive national hero who is victorious as the defender of his land, rather than a conqueror or a colonizer. However, he only wrote several lines and never developed this project further. Other substantial evidence of Sumarokov's loyalist sentiment can be found in his patriotic allegorical ballet *The Haven of Virtue*.<sup>23</sup> In this story, Virtue cannot find itself a place in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America and, finally, it finds a place to reside in Russia. This scenario presents a pompous and colorful production, which was created to celebrate Elizabeth's reign. At that time, Sumarokov still had his idealistic aspirations for a newly empowered Russia. Of course, this ballet should not be interpreted literally, but rather as an idealized and optimistic vision of the country. *The Haven of Virtue* and Sumarokov's odes are based on ceremonial, celebratory artistic models and contrast with the dark plots of the tragedies and sarcastic remarks in the comedies written by the later Sumarokov.

Besides following the developments in European philosophy and thorough learning from French dramatists, Sumarokov's works reveal many influences from different aspects of Russian culture, such as older literature, the oral tradition, and historical chronicles. He was definitely well-acquainted with the preceding development of Russian drama. His short play *Pustynnik (The Hermit, 1757)* stands singularly as a tribute to the liturgical and the school drama.<sup>24</sup> *Pustynnik* is a religious play that is set in the unspecified ancient times of Kievan Rus' and features Evmenii, who has recently become a hermit. He has conversations with his parents, brother, and wife who do not want to part with him. Yevmenii remains unmoved in his choice of the religious path.

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<sup>23</sup> See Sumarokov, A.P., *Pribezhishche dobrodeteli*. [http://az.lib.ru/s/sumarokow\\_a\\_p/text\\_0150oldorfo.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/sumarokow_a_p/text_0150oldorfo.shtml) (Accessed on December 9, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> See Sumarokov, A.P., *Pustynnik*. [http://az.lib.ru/s/sumarokow\\_a\\_p/text\\_0200.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/sumarokow_a_p/text_0200.shtml) (Accessed on December 9, 2016).

Another influence that should not be overlooked comes from Russian folk and popular culture. As I demonstrate below, we must be very careful with labeling these cultural phenomena because the 18th century was a transitional period in Russia where folk oral culture, linked to a ritualistic worldview, still existed, and all estates, including nobles, participated in it and shared its codes. At the same time, this oral culture was gradually shifting away from its ritual roots into the realm of pure entertainment. Together with numerous folk traditions, a limited literary popular culture also developed in early 18th-century Russia. Widely circulating translations of Western chivalric novels are a telling example of that.<sup>25</sup> These novels were often dramatized for theatrical performances. Thus, a folk drama, a chivalric novel, or an author's satirical comedy would belong to the "low" culture for the Neoclassical aesthetic but would not be categorized into different levels in the minds of many spectators. Entwining folk and literary traditions are especially characteristic for comedy.

Generally, the 18th century in Russia is so famous for its love of everything foreign that the significant traditional elements of folk culture are overlooked or underestimated. Rather than being largely Gallicized, even the Russian aristocracy still combined new and old elements in their lives and entertainment. The scholar Dmitrievskii, for instance, writes about the popularity of Russian folk dancing in the royal court and even with the empresses.

It is remarkable that Anna Ioannovna considered it necessary to embed the national idea into the public consciousness via luxurious royal entertainment. A contemporary writes about the Shrovetide celebrations, full of Russian games and amusements, folk dancing and old-time songs. Even at the royal court, despite its distinctly Westernizing orientation, the empress tried to preserve Russian rituals. In the palace, the specially selected young guard officers and their wives danced Russian-style. (...) The wonderful tragic actress E. Kolosova who was unsurpassable in the role of Medea enjoyed particular success as a Russian folk-style dancer.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, V.N., "Russkii teatr ot istokov do serediny XVIII Veka" In Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol 1. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1977), 55.

<sup>26</sup> "Примечательно, что через роскошь монарших забав Анна Иоанновна полагала обязательным внедрять в сознание публики национальную идею. Современник пишет о масленичных празднествах, насыщенных русскими играми и забавами, народными плясками и песнями по старине. Да и при дворе, несмотря на отчётливую западническую ориентацию, императрица стремилась сохранять русскую обрядовость. Во дворце по-русски танцевали специально отобранные молодые гвардейские офицеры со своими жёнами. (...) Замечательная трагическая актриса Е. Колосова, непревзойдённая исполнительница Медеи, снискала особый успех в русской пляске." Dmitrievskii, V.N., *Teatr i zritel'i. Otechestvennyi teatr v sisteme otnoshenii stseny i publiky* (Sankt-Peterburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2007), 113.

Even empress Elizabeth who is responsible for numerous French trends was not opposed to some forms of authentic Russian culture, such as, again, dancing: “Elizaveta Petrovna [Empress Elizabeth], who set an example of the correct and gentle dancing for the whole court, also danced authentic Russian dances extremely well; and even though they are not in use at court and in the noble homes any more, sometimes, however, people dance them during the court masquerades.”<sup>27</sup> Yurii Lotman also states that theatricality was a prominent characteristic of Russian noble culture in the 18th – early 19th centuries.<sup>28</sup> Masquerades were an immensely popular form of entertainment, and they could include any elements, Russian or foreign, without distinguishing among them because everything just fell within the temporary artificial masquerade chronotope.

In this context, Sumarokov could not be free from the folk and other “low” influences. He often called traditional entertainment crude and uncivilized and consistently admired “high,” Western, culture. Yet, we should not take his theoretical claims for granted because his practice often departed from them. He definitely rejected the crude, obscene, and violent elements but had to be less harsh about the love plots and social satire in folk performances. Scholars have noted that Sumarokov borrowed chivalric plots for love lines in his tragedies.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Елизавета Петровна, подававшая собою всему двору пример правильного и нежного танцевания; она также чрезвычайно хорошо танцевала и природные русские танцы, которые хотя вообще и не употребляются больше при дворе и в знатных домах, однако же иногда, а особливо во время придворных маскарадов, их танцуют.” Schtelin, Jakob von, *Staroe zhitye* (Moscow, 1897), [http://librebook.ru/zamechatelnye\\_chudaki\\_i\\_originaly/vol2/4](http://librebook.ru/zamechatelnye_chudaki_i_originaly/vol2/4) (Accessed on December 9, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> “In the meantime, the boundary between art and people’s everyday behavior was destroyed in the early 19th century. Theater invaded life and was actively rebuilding how people acted in everyday life. Monolog infiltrates letters, personal journals, and everyday speech.” (“Между тем, в начале XIX века грань между искусством и бытовым поведением зрителей была разрушена. Театр вторгся в жизнь, активно перестраивая бытовое поведение людей. Монолог проникает в письмо, дневники и бытовую речь.”) Lotman, Iu. M., “Teatr i teatral’nost’ v stroe kul’tury nachala XIX veka” In Lotman, Iu. M. *Izbrannye stat’i*, in 3 vols., vol 2. (Tallinn: Aleksandra, 1992), 271.

<sup>29</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia russkoi dramaturgii pervoi poloviny XVIII v.*, 45.

Moreover, Sumarokov often recycles lines from his own love poetry for the characters' monologues about passionate love or the pain of separation. These "songs" (*pesni*) are written in a language reminiscent of actual folk love songs, and even the genre title itself refers to folk tradition and not to Neoclassical poetics. We do not know if this genre definition of "songs" was given by Sumarokov himself or the editors of his *Complete Works* that were published posthumously. In either case, these poems are literary variations of oral poetic tradition.<sup>30</sup>

The satirical songs also belong to the lower realm of the Neoclassicist hierarchy but, still, stay within literary culture. Sumarokov's artistic decision results in a uniquely Russian piece where all the imagery, as well as the meter and sound, are rooted in folklore. He clearly uses the satirical potential of oral culture. In any case, his folk-style poetic heritage is quite extensive and, thus, subverts the widespread idea of him as an intolerant literary elitist. His theatre and his overall views were, indeed, too elitist for the radical critics of the 1860s or Soviet era. Yet, being the propagator of social hierarchy and

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<sup>30</sup> For example, this satirical poem *Другой хор ко превратному свету* (*The Second Choir for Upturned World*) is written in Russian folk tonic meter:

A tomtit flew  
Across the northern sea,  
Across the cold ocean.  
They asked the guest,  
What the customs are like overseas.  
And the guest answered:  
"Everything is upturned in the world.  
Overseas, philosophers are virtuous,  
Which we never see here,  
They do not have superstitions,  
Bigotry, hypocrisy..."  
Прилетела на берег синица  
Из-за полночного моря,  
Из-за холодна океяна.  
Спрашивали гостейку приезжу,  
За морем какие обряды.  
Гостья приезжа отвечала:  
"Всё там превратно на свете.  
За морем Сократы добронравны,  
Каковых мы здесь не видаем,  
Никогда не суеверят,  
Не ханжат, не лицемерят..."  
Sumarokov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 279.

the superiority of the noble class, Sumarokov was never entirely opposed to the older forms of Russian culture per se. He was most indignant about the widespread ignorance and crudeness among the very nobility to which he ascribed the fundamental role in maintaining peace, order, and “civilized” culture.

Many motifs and characters from Sumarokov’s comedies also echo folk dramas. He did not borrow from oral tradition consciously; rather, that tradition was already becoming so fused with literary comedialography that it was impossible to draw a line between them. A fellow contemporary dramatist Lukin even notices ironically that, while Sumarokov expresses his disdain toward “igrishcha” (the old word for all kinds of folk performances), his comedies bear many similarities to those very folk dramas: “I once read some comedies that quite resembled our old-time pieces, about which I was told that they were created by those strict judges who claimed them to fit into theatrical rules and have orderly developed characters, and they offered them as models for comedic works to beginning writers.”<sup>31</sup>

Sumarokov became more accepting in practice, if not in theory, about folk culture toward the end of his life. One of the factors was apparently his disillusionment with Catherine II personally and his fellow noblemen, in general. Earlier in his life, he preached the innate superiority of noble cast. In his late comedies, he satirizes the ignorant and cruel serf-owners. He had possibly hoped that the new ruling noble class in Russia would enlighten and improve itself but, instead, he was observing the somewhat backward development in politics and social freedom. In *Dimitrii the Pretender*, he creates a dark portrait of a tyrant who uses his power to destroy his own country.

## 1.2 SUMAROKOV AND SHAKESPEARE

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Shakespeare’s status was not very high, and many Neoclassical writers criticized him for his lack of fine taste and the heterogeneity of his plays. At the same time, Shakespeare was never out of repertoires because his dramas appealed greatly to diverse audiences.

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<sup>31</sup> “Читал я некогда комедии, на старые наши игрища весьма похожие, о которых мне сказывали, будто бы они сделаны сими строгими судьями, которые почитают их в правилах театральных расположенными и порядочно в характерах выдержанными и предлагают их начинающим писателям в пример комических сочинений.” Quoted in: Berkov, A.P. *Sumarokov*, 126.

British theatres continued to stage his plays because its Neoclassical traditions were not that strong as in France, among other reasons. With no developed concept of canonical texts, Shakespeare's dramas were often reworked for specific productions across Europe. The captivating plots and strong characters inspired many, from wandering actors to French Neoclassicists, such as Delaplace who rewrote *Hamlet* in 1745.<sup>32</sup> Later, Sumarokov developed his own version of the play, working directly with the original.<sup>33</sup>

According to the majority of scholars, Sumarokov, as a Neoclassicist, shared a dismissive attitude to Shakespeare, but I maintain that his attitude was more complex, somewhat contradictory, and, overall, mixed rather than negative. In his *Second Epistola*, inspired by Boileau's normative poetics, Sumarokov lists the canon of writers who should serve as models, and Shakespeare is among them:

Let us ascend the Helicon, ascend, see there  
Creators who are really worthy of honor.  
There Homer reigns, there is Sappho, Theocritus,  
Aeschylus, Anacreon, Sophocles, and Euripides.  
Menander, Aristophanes, and Pindar the ravishing,  
Ovid the dulcet, Virgil the incomparable,  
Terence, Persius, Plautus, Horace, Juvenal,  
Lucretius and Lukan, Tibullus, Propertius, Gallus,  
Malherbe, Rousseau, Quinault, the aforementioned chorus of Frenchmen,  
Milton and *Shakespeare, although unenlightened*, [my italics]  
There Tasso and Ariosto, there Camoens and Lope,  
There Vondel, Gunther is there, there is witty Pope.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Zakharov, N.V., "Sumarokov i Shekspir." *Informatsionnyi gumanitarnyi portal "Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie."* *Filologiya* 5 (2008) [http://www.zpu-journal.ru/e-zpu/2008/5/Zakharov\\_Sumarokov&Shakespeare/](http://www.zpu-journal.ru/e-zpu/2008/5/Zakharov_Sumarokov&Shakespeare/) (Accessed on December 9, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> "Without diminishing or exaggerating Sumarokov's feasible level of fluency in English, we should notice that his *Hamlet* is not an actual translation from Shakespeare. The [Russian] poet wrote his Russian tragedy, using only some motifs from Shakespeare and the functions of his characters. This is probably why he did not mention Shakespeare when he published his play. Moreover, Sumarokov found it necessary to remark that he followed the original only in two scenes: "My *Hamlet* hardly resembles Shakespeare's tragedy, except for the closing monologue in Act 3 and Claudius's genuflection."

"Не уменьшая и не преувеличивая возможную степень владения Сумароковым английским языком, следует отметить, что его «Гамлета» нельзя считать полноценным переводом Шекспира. Поэт сочинил свою русскую трагедию, используя отдельные мотивы и функции героев Шекспира. Вероятно, именно поэтому при издании своей пьесы он никак не обозначил имя Шекспира. Более того, сам Сумароков счел необходимым отметить следование первоисточнику только в двух эпизодах: "Гамлет мой, кроме монолога в окончании третьего действия и Клавдиева на колени падения, на Шекспирову трагедию едва ли походит." Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Translation by Henry M. Nebel, Jr.: *Selected aesthetic works of Sumarokov and Karamzin*. Trans. and with an Introduction by Henry M. Nebel, Jr. (Washington. University Press of America, 1981), 74-75.  
The original verse:

Shakespeare is placed alongside ancient Greek and Roman classics, as well as notable European authors. Of course, Sumarokov has to make the undercutting remark; “Shakespeare, although unenlightened.” This should not be taken as a rejection as much as a cautioning against the use of his works as models for imitation and learning. For Sumarokov, Shakespeare is a “flawed” classic, but still a classic. Sumarokov did criticize *Hamlet*, but he would criticize Racine, or Lomonosov, or anyone else in the same unrestrained way, just for qualitatively different reasons. In his comments to *The Two Epistolas*, Sumarokov expresses a very mixed opinion on the English dramatist.<sup>35</sup> Russian scholars have very recently discovered that the playwright might have had some reading knowledge of English, as there is now evidence that he worked directly with a copy of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the original language.<sup>36</sup>

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Взойдем на Геликон, взойдем, увидим тамо  
Творцов, которые достойны славы прямо.  
Там царствует Гомер, там Сафо, Феокрит,  
Ешилл, Анакреон, Софокл и Еврипид.  
Менандр, Аристофан и Пиндар восхищенный,  
Овидий сладостный, Вергилий несравненный,  
Терентий, Персий, Плавт, Гораций, Ювенал,  
Лукреций и Лукан, Тибулл, Проперций, Галл,  
Мальгерб, Руссо, Кино, французов хор реченный,  
Мильтон и Шекеспир, хотя непросвещенный,  
Там Тасс и Ариост, там Камюенс и Лоп,  
Там Фондель, Гинтер там, там остроумный Поп.  
Sumarokov, *Vtoraia epistola, Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 117.

<sup>35</sup> “Shakespeare, the English tragedian and comedian, in whose works, there are extremely many of both bad and good things”.

“Шекеспир, англиский трагик и комик, в котором и очень худого, и чрезвычайно хорошего очень много.”  
Sumarokov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 257.

<sup>36</sup> “Very recently, a list of books that were being checked out from Academic Library in 1746-48 was discovered. As follows, Sumarokov checked out Shakespeare’s works in English. As in Pushkin’s case, the question about his level of English remains open and requires a separate research project. We may suppose that the poet [Sumarokov], who knew Latin, German (his wife was German), and French, was able to read English texts with a dictionary.”  
“...[С]овсем недавно был найден список взятых поэтом в Академической библиотеке произведений за 1746–1748 гг., из которого явствует, что Сумароков брал Шекспира на английском языке. Как и в случае с Пушкиным, вопрос о степени владения им английским языком остается открытым и требует специального исследования. Можно предположить, что поэт, знавший латынь, немецкий (его жена была немкой) и французский, мог читать оригинальный текст, пользуясь словарем.” Zakharov, *Sumarokov i Shekspir*.



Thus, we now have evidence that Sumarokov at least attempted to study Shakespeare's plays closely and several times admitted to their influence on his own works. Curiously, there are more Shakespearean features in *Dimitrii the Pretender* than in Sumarokov's version of *Hamlet*, the fact of which the author was well aware. Scholar Zakharov quoted Sumarokov's claim that his *Hamlet* had very little in common with the original, and this statement can be accompanied with a highly important but usually overlooked note on *Dimitrii the Pretender*: "This tragedy will show Shakespeare to Russia."<sup>37</sup> *Hamlet* was written much earlier than *Dimitrii*, and I think that these two statements demonstrate the shift in Sumarokov's aesthetics during his lifetime. During the earlier "disciple" period, he subscribed to the opinions of French Neoclassicists. Later in his life, he was developing a more independent artistic vision, as we can see in the passionate, tense, and affected tone of *Dimitrii the Pretender*.

Sumarokov's *Hamlet* (1748) is, indeed, very loosely based on the original. In this version, Claudius is a tyrant, which makes him a typical Sumarokov character. This tyrant is also a pretender (a "samozvanets") who usurped the throne. In the list of *Dramatis Personae*, Claudius is straightforwardly defined as "the unlawful king of Denmark."<sup>38</sup> While the old king was still alive, Claudius seduced Gertrude, who, together with Polonius, helped him murder the king and ascend the throne. Hamlet learns of this from a dream vision. Cornered by him, Gertrude admits everything, repents, and turns against Claudius, seeking revenge together with her son. Claudius then decides to marry Ophelia and replace disloyal Gertrude. The typical Neoclassical dramatic split between feelings and duty is given to Ophelia who is struggling between her love for Prince Hamlet and her father's order to marry Claudius. Claudius genuflects in a fit of repentance, but his evil side wins and he intends to murder Hamlet and Gertrude. In an intense culminating scene, Claudius raises his dagger to stab Ophelia but Hamlet and the indignant

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<sup>37</sup>"Эта трагедия покажет России Шекспира" Sumarokov A.P. "Pis'ma" In Makogonenko, G.P., ed., *Pis'ma russkikh pisatelei XVIII veka*, (Leningrad: Nauka, 1980), 133.

<sup>38</sup>"Клавдий, незаконный король Дании." Sumarokov, *Polnoe sobranie vseh sochinenii, v stikhakh i proze*, vol. 3, 60.

“narod” break into the palace. The Prince kills the tyrant and arrests Polonius who presently commits suicide in prison. Hamlet is to ascend the throne as the lawful heir, restored in his rights.

Most scholars do not discuss the possible reasons behind such a particular reworking. Sergei Danilov notices that a play about a lawful heir finally claiming his rightful position alludes to Elizabeth, Peter the Great’s daughter.<sup>39</sup> The only extensive interpretation I have encountered belongs to Vishnevskaja who researches Sumarokov’s *Hamlet* in the context of all his tragedies and the historical tragedies by the other Russian authors. All such dramas have political overtones and consider the relations between the monarch and the people [*narod*.] According to Vishnevskaja, Sumarokov’s *Hamlet* is a telling example of the thematic difference between Western and Russian drama.<sup>40</sup> Corneille or Racine emphasize the personal motifs of their characters that reflect some universal human conflicts. Shakespeare is much closer to the Russian theatrical versions of history with his glorification of the reigning queen Elizabeth I and the Tudors. In Russian historical plays, two royal lines may also fight for the throne (Sumarokov’s *Khorev*), but they may also represent a clash of the different ideologies (Kniazhnin’s *Vadim*). However, a tyrant not related to the royal family (Sumarokov’s *Claudius*) or an impostor becoming a tsar appear to be specifically Russian characters based on its history. Going even further, Sumarokov’s *Hamlet* adds a culturally specific civic dimension where the noble characters, and

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<sup>39</sup> “In *Hamlet*, all the plot lines and all the rhetoric directly work for the ideological justification of the coup that brought Empress Elizabeth onto the throne.”

“В “Гамлете” все сюжетные ходы, все сентенции прямо направлены к тому, чтобы идейно оправдать дворцовый переворот, возведший на престол Елизавету Петровну.” Danilov, S.S., *Ocherki po istorii russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra* (Moskva-Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1948), 93.

<sup>40</sup> “In the beginning of the tragedy, Hamlet’s few words essentially summarize the whole worldview and the artistic manifesto of Russian tragic theatre: “take revenge on the tyrant and free the citizens” ... Moral rules, that existed in their pure form in ancient tragedy and the neoclassical theatre of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, acquire glaringly civic, ‘political overtones’ in Sumarokov’s tragedy.”

“В нескольких словах Гамлета в завязке трагедии, по существу, уже кратко высказана вся мировоззренческая и художественная программа российского трагедийного театра: “отмсти тирану и освободи граждан”... Нравственные ориентиры, в чистом виде существовавшие в античной трагедии, в классицистском театре Корнеля, Расина, Вольтера, приобретают в сумароковской трагедии резко общественную, ‘государственную окраску.’”

Vishnevskaja, I.L., *Aplodismenty v proshloe* (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo Literaturnogo Instituta imeni A.M. Gor’kogo, 1996), 163.

especially the rulers, are judged not only as humans but also in the light of their civic duty toward the people.<sup>41</sup> Sumarokov's optimistic remaking of *Hamlet* states that the villainous king should be overthrown and the lawful and beloved heir restored.

Thus, early Sumarokov rewrites a Shakespearean plot and characters, using them as pretexts for creating the system of images and motifs that characterized Russian 18th-century drama. Most prominently, the *narod* appears in the story as an active force that plays the crucial role in conquering the tyrant and reinstating Hamlet. The word "narod" itself is very frequent in the text. All the noble characters measure their decisions and deeds against the projected reaction of the people who embody the highest social justice. Gertrude, for instance, says that the people's love for Hamlet outweighs Claudius's disfavor: "The prince's lineage wins him the people's honor. / He is their fondest hope, you are their greatest hatred."<sup>42</sup> This is one of the most explicit examples of how the political doctrines from different epochs synchronized in Sumarokov's mind. The ancient lineage of tsars that is fundamentally defined by blood relation is now supported by "citizens." We can see how the Western civic ideals of Enlightenment, having come to Russia, took root in the minds of intellectuals, but did not replace the older concepts; rather, the new Western civic ideals added to them, creating a complex and, at times, inconsistent understanding of royal power and social hierarchy.

Gertrude further condemns the tyrant calling him "the poison of a Tsar": "But you, Claudius, are the scourge of all your people, / The poison of a tsar, a malady of nature."<sup>43</sup> Such powerful expressions

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<sup>41</sup> "Exactly in Sumarokov's tragedy, personal morals are intertwined with the social morals. Hamlet who avenges his father grows into Hamlet who avenges the tyrannical rule."

"Личная нравственность именно в трагедии Сумарокова тесно переплетается с нравственностью общественной. Гамлет - мститель за отца - вырастает до Гамлета, мстящего за тираническое правление." Vishnevskaja, 163-164.

<sup>42</sup> Sumarokov, A.P., Richard Fortune, and Raymond Fortune, trans., *Selected Tragedies of A.P. Sumarokov*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 101.

*Гертруда*: Ты в ненависти, Князь, мой сын, любим в народе,  
Надежда всех граждан, остаток в царском роде.  
Sumarokov, *Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii, v stikhakh i proze*, vol. 3, 76.

<sup>43</sup> *Selected Tragedies*, 102.

*Гертруда*: А ты, о яд Царя! злодей всего народа,

foreshadow the intensity of *Dimitrii the Pretender*. Claudius is the direct predecessor of Dimitrii in his pursuit of royal power at any price. Polonius justifies the tyranny by equating Tsar to God and stating that the tsar's power is above law. Polonius's opinion foreshadows Dimitrii's malicious justification of his own tyranny:

*Polonius*: Who's to forgive the king? The people are in his hands  
He is not a man, but God through all the realm he rules.  
Whoever gains the crown and the imperial purple  
Knows no law but his own, his will alone is justice.<sup>44</sup>

Sumarokov writes the happy denouement where Hamlet reclaims the throne. His unity with the people ends the dark era of an impostor. Rather than engaging with Shakespearean stylistics, this *Hamlet* is influenced by Shakespeare but also anticipates specifically Russian themes and imagery of Sumarokov's later tragedies, Kniazhnin's plays, and, through *narod*, even of Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. We also know that Sumarokov was familiar with the prosaic retellings of *Richard III* and *Macbeth*.<sup>45</sup> It is highly probable that Shakespeare's chronicles that dealt with English national history were one of the important source materials that contributed to the birth of the Russian historical tragedy, as these types of settings were not typical for the French neoclassical pieces.

Sumarokov's *Hamlet* was being staged in the Saint Petersburg Imperial Theatre, starting in 1750 but very briefly.<sup>46</sup> Very soon, this play and any other reference to *Hamlet* had to be quickly and completely silenced and it left the public sphere for the coming several decades. Fiction and reality

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Котораго им в казнь извергнула природа!  
Sumarokov, *Polnoe Sobranie Vsekh Sochinenii, v stikhakh i proze*, vol. 3, 78.

<sup>44</sup> *Selected Tragedies*, 102.

*Полоний*: Кому прощать Царя? народ в его руках.  
Он Бог, не человек, в подверженных странах.  
Когда кому даны порфира и корона,  
Тому вся правда власть, и нет ему закона.  
Sumarokov, *Polnoe sobranie vsekh sochinenii, v stikhakh i proze*, vol. 3, 78.

<sup>45</sup> "И здесь Сумароков приближался к шекспировским "Ричарду III" и "Макбету," которых также знал в прозаических переводах и пересказах." Vishnevskaja, 185.

<sup>46</sup> Berkov, 105.

clashed, as the next turn of Russian history virtually recreated the plot of *Hamlet*. In 1762, the wife of Emperor Peter III organized a coup-d'état, sanctioned the murder of her husband, and ascended the throne as Empress Catherine II to rule Russia for 34 years. Her relationship with her son, heir Paul, was strained and marked by long-term alienation. According to persistent rumors, Paul was in danger of never inheriting the throne because Catherine strongly preferred his son Alexander and, therefore, contemplated passing the power directly to her grandson. In 1801, Emperor Paul was killed in another coup that was approved by Alexander. The events that unfolded in reality blocked the engagement with Shakespeare in the arts and postponed the dialog with him until the 1820s.

### 1.3 SUBLIME HISTORY IN *DIMITRII THE PRETENDER*

Sumarokov's writings on Russian history provide evidence that the Time of Troubles held a prominent place in oral histories, functioning as a cultural myth. The shift to this historical period and away from Kievan Rus' in playwriting can be explained by Sumarokov's personal interest in the Time of Troubles and also by his growing disagreements with the ruling circle and Catherine personally. He turned to this less remote, but no less mythologized, and fundamentally controversial historical period.

Sumarokov wrote summaries of Russian history in the form of notes that were included into his posthumous *Complete Works*. His encyclopedic approach, which was quite common for 18th century writings, was to list the rulers of Muscovy and Russia chronologically, while briefly characterizing their reigns. Interestingly, he treats the murder of heir Dimitrii by Godunov's people as a given fact.<sup>47</sup> He notes that Otrepyev uncannily fit the verbal descriptions of the heir, and so most people accepted him as the genuine Dimitrii. According to Sumarokov, the Pretender was destroyed purely by his own deeds and not by his false origin.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sumarokov, *Polnoe sobranie vseh sochinenii, v stikhakh i proze*, vol. 6, 175-76.

<sup>48</sup> "And, even though everyone believed that he was real Dimitrii, they saw him as a ruler unworthy of the throne." "И хотя все почитали его подлинным Димитрием, но государем недостойным престола." Ibid.

*Dimitrii the Pretender* is a play that immediately strikes one with the excessively and irrationally villainous protagonist. Sumarokov's other tragedies also feature tyrannical rulers, but Dimitrii surpasses them by deliberately doing evil for evil's sake. This is one of the most studied works by Sumarokov and scholars usually discuss the tragedy in relation to the dramatist's attitude to monarchy and his shifting political agenda. Elise Wirtschafter studies the tragedy in the social context and shows how Sumarokov attempts to bring together the reality of the political system in Russia and the ideals of the Enlightenment.<sup>49</sup> I am going to complicate this argument by demonstrating that, rather than coping with the contemporary issues in purely political terms, Sumarokov challenges the sacred status of monarchy in Russia, as well as its unstable combination with the Enlightenment concepts of secular law and service to the state.

Harsha Ram summarizes the findings of Lotman and his school in relation to the perception of monarchy in modern Russia. The sacred nature of Russian monarchy was a changing, but still a very much alive notion, from Muscovy through high imperial Russia:

The influential Moscow-Tartu school of cultural semiotics has highlighted how persistently both Muscovy and imperial Russia legitimated political rule through recourse to the sacred. This tradition survived even Peter's radical secularization of Russian elite culture, so that the emperor was able to enhance his power further by arrogating himself to the creative force of God. The sacred was thus altered rather than abolished, and secularism, like all western ideas, constituted a transformation of, rather than a complete rupture with, the Russian past.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "...the tyranny broadly condemned in Russian Enlightenment theater is not the systemic despotism depicted by Montesquieu or the political libel of pre-revolutionary France. The tyranny depicted in *Dimitrii the Pretender* emanates from the whims of a single individual and thus can be overcome without structural change." Wirtschafter, Elise Kimerling, *The Play of Ideas in Russian Enlightenment Theater* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 154.

<sup>50</sup> Ram, Harsha, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 29-30.

“The sacred” is profoundly connected to religious identity. Amanda Ewington states that the religious conflict between Orthodoxy and Catholicism is at the center of *Dimitrii the Pretender*.<sup>51</sup> I offer a different reading of the religious themes in this play. Rather than engaging with the polemics about the right and wrong religion, Sumarokov extensively uses religious themes because Dimitrii claims to be the miraculously saved and divinely appointed monarch, and his falsehood turns his claim into a blasphemy of higher order that puts the whole nation under threat. This quite archaic layer of Russian political thought may be the basis for Dimitrii’s “demonism.”

Vishnevskaiia points out that Sumarokov was the first author who introduced the topic of “samozvanstvo” that would later be prominently featured in Russian historical drama. This seems to be a characteristically Russian historical phenomenon, so the term itself does not translate properly into English. *Samozyanets* in Russian history is someone who assumes a false identity of a member of the royal family. In most cases, a *samozyanets* proclaimed himself/herself to be the heir to the throne miraculously saved from presumed death or returning from obscurity. Consequently, such a pretender wanted to dethrone the current ruler who was less eligible by their blood relation.<sup>52</sup> In the 18th century, *samozyanstvo* recurs both in Russian history and in historical dramas. It is always based on the claim to blood relation and a miraculous resurrection of the heir to the throne. A *samozyanets* deliberately assumes the sacred identity of an heir and, by doing so, profanes the divine status of the royal family. Sumarokov riskily chose to portray the character of false Dimitrii during the reign of an empress who herself had no birthright to rule on the Russian throne. Shortly after the tragedy was written, the rebel Pugachev

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<sup>51</sup> “The Catholic-Orthodox conflict, established within a political context in the opening scene, soon crosses into the love intrigue as well.” Ewington, Amanda, *A Voltaire for Russia: A.P. Sumarokov's Lourney from Poet-critic to Russian Philosopher* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern UP, 2010), 150.

<sup>52</sup> “In Sumarokov’s lifetime, two such shocking stories took place: the story of Princess Tarakanova who proclaimed herself to be the daughter of [empress] Elizabeth and Razumovskiy, Elizabeth II, the Sovereign of Russia; and the *épopée* of Pugachev who called himself the murdered/unmurdered [tsar] Piotr Fyodorovich.” “На годы Сумарокова прились два пика подобных потрясений - история княжны Таракановой, объявившей себя дочерью Елизаветы и Разумовского, Елизаветой II, Самодержицей Российской, и эпопея Пугачёва, нарекшегося убиенно-неубиенным Петром Фёдоровичем.” Vishnevskaiia, 178.

uncannily became another notorious *samožvanets* who assumed an identity of the miraculously saved (or resurrected) Tsar Peter III.

In the broader European context, revolutionaries, such as Cromwell or Robespierre, seized enormous amounts of power and established themselves as independent authorities. Yet, it is unthinkable to imagine them claiming blood relation to the royal houses. By contrast, in the 17th- and 18th-century Russia, several pretenders claimed blood relation to the tsar's family first and foremost. On the one hand, Sumarokov states in his tragedy as well as in his historical notes that Dimitrii was assassinated because he showed himself to be a bad tsar and not because of his dubious origin. On the other hand, only the *samožvanets* appears as the most tyrannical ruler, and the only anti-hero, in Sumarokov's tragedies.

Because this tragedy deals with transgressions and conflicts on the national level, I will interpret its artistic originality using the category of *the sublime*, which, to my knowledge, has not been done by scholars before. For Sumarokov, absolute monarchy it grants power that is larger than life or human understanding. The protagonist Dimitrii tests the limits of such unrestrained power, and his incomprehensible villainy is almost absurd. A tyrannical *samožvanets* who understands absolute power very literally disrupts the hierarchy that holds the state and the nation together.<sup>53</sup> I will also use Harsha Ram's concept of "imperial sublime" that brilliantly captures the convergence between immanently artistic, theoretic, and extra-literary (political and social) elements in the works of Russian authors:

[T]he thematics of empire became complexly imbricated in question of *poetics* and *rhetoric*. The imperial theme ... was quickly linked to a range of other questions, from formal problems of language, genre, style, and lyric subjectivity to the connection, within an autocratic state, between authority and authorship. ... This tradition, which I propose to call the *imperial sublime*, was a melding of the Baroque traditions of late Muscovy with the newer literary codes and cultural fashions imported from France and Germany under the monarchs Peter, Anna, and Elizabeth.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> In a similar way, in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, the assassination of the heir may possibly be interpreted (by some of the 17th-century characters, at least), as not only his personal but also a "historical" sin of Godunov that destroys him and many others as well as plunges the whole country into the apocalyptic chaos.

<sup>54</sup> Ram, 4-5. This passing remark also provides further support for my overarching argument about Russian theatre being an amalgamation of various foreign influences and the older Russian traditions.



Possibly, the origins of the imperial sublime can additionally be traced as far back as the medieval idea of Moscow as the Third Rome. Ram focuses on poetry and traces its development from the pompous external sublime of the odic genre, where the lyrical subject exists in full, even if imaginary, unity with the state, to the more internalized elegiac sublime of the Romantic poems set at the imperial borders. According to Ram, the typically Russian sublime is based on the geographical vastness of Russia and, therefore, on the imaginary geography of the Empire. I maintain that not only the ode, but also Russian secular drama, develops this sublimity. However, Russian secular drama explores the sublime in time rather than space, which serves as another explanation as to why the first dramatists chose the Russian past as their setting. Sumarokov and Kniazhnin use historical materials to construct their own narratives that present Russian history as sublime and full of extreme passions and deep controversies.

As Ram points out, the *sublime* is an elusive category within the Russian tradition because, even though it was discussed and referred to by many writers and critics, the term itself has never found a precise analog within the Russian language.<sup>55</sup> The most frequent translation in today's scholarship is "vozvyshennoe." Nevertheless, Sumarokov was very familiar with the Neoclassical understanding of the sublime.<sup>56</sup> In his polemics with Lomonosov, he refers to Boileau's French translation of Longinus's foundational treatise. The understanding of the sublime in the Western European aesthetic treatises is less politically engaged than in the Russian context. Burke, for instance, famously defines the ocean or mountains as sublime.<sup>57</sup> In the Russian context, the sublime, indeed, is connected with the nation and

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<sup>55</sup> "Russia's proverbial vastness, its apocalyptic experience of history, and the genre-defying formlessness of so many of its literary masterpieces would seem to predispose the national tradition toward a discourse of the sublime. Yet despite the powerful, even constitutive place in Russian culture, the sublime has remained a diffuse phenomenon, unevenly conceptualized. One symptom of this under-theoretization is the absence of a single Russian word corresponding to the English *sublime*." Ram, 17.

<sup>56</sup> "In 1759 Sumarokov published a fragment of Longinus's treatise [On Sublime] (translated from Bouleau's French: intended as a polemic against Lomonosov, the piece rendered sublimity as *vazhnost' slova* ("solemnity of language") rather than *vysokost'*." Ram, 18.

<sup>57</sup> "A level plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean: but can it ever fill the mind with anything so great as the ocean itself? This is owing to several causes; but it is owing to none more than this, that the ocean is an object of no small terror." Burke, Edmund. *On the Sublime and Beautiful*. <http://www.bartleby.com/24/2/202.html>

politics. Sumarokov's *Dimitrii* is such an unmeasurably and irrationally evil tyrant that he can be called a sublime villain. "Reason" brings structure and limitation, and Sumarokov uses hyperboles in order to convey precisely the opposite: the limitless, boundless power that defies reason itself and can still exist without reason. Dimitrii is irrational, which perplexes all the other characters in the play. He never justifies his own actions and openly claims that he does evil for evil's sake and enjoys chaos and destruction.

Not only the objects of nature, but also a human, and a monarch, can be a character vast beyond measure. In the text of the play, Dimitrii's principal mode of expression is hyperbole. He openly calls himself a tyrant and expresses utter misanthropy: "Down from my throne descends my loathing for the people / My power grows secure with their increasing bondage."<sup>58</sup> The protagonist ascribes villainy and "barbarianism" to himself: "I have grown used to horrors. Evil is my friend. / The paths of wickedness have stained my soul with blood."<sup>59</sup> In the finale, Dimitrii commits suicide. He does not repent, sends his own soul to hell, and wishes the whole universe to perish with him: "Go, then, my soul, to hell and be forever captive! [*Strikes himself in the chest with a dagger and falls dying into the arms of the guards*] / If only with me now the whole world too would perish."<sup>60</sup> Dimitrii wishes to be equal with the whole universe ["vselennaia" in the original.] Just as the universe is vast beyond measure, Dimitrii, till the end, affirms his own subjectivity that goes beyond the limits of reason or human comprehension.

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The Harvard Classics. 1909–14. Part IV. sect. 3–6. "Terror" (Accessed on December 10, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> *Selected Tragedies*, 193.

"Российский я народ с престола презираю / И власть тиранскую неволей простираю."

Sumarokov, *Dramaticheskie proizvedeniia*. (1.1) (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1990).

[http://az.lib.ru/s/sumarokow\\_a\\_p/text\\_0070.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/s/sumarokow_a_p/text_0070.shtml) (Accessed on December 10, 2016).

<sup>59</sup> *Selected Tragedies*, 194.

"Я к ужасу привык, злодейством разъярен / Наполнен варварством и кровью обгарен."

Sumarokov, *Dramaticheskie proizvedeniia*.

<sup>60</sup> *Selected Tragedies*, 229.

"Ступай, душа, во ад и буди вечно пленна! (*Ударяет себя во грудь кинжалом и, издыхая, падающий в руки стражей.*) / Ах, если бы со мной погибла вся вселенна!" Sumarokov, *Dramaticheskie proizvedeniia*.

This is one of the earliest instances when remarks appear in the text of a Russian play.

The protagonist takes absolute royal power to the extreme. Dimitrii possesses absolute power, but he himself is, in fact, possessed by this unlimited power. The dramatist hyperbolizes all the devastating consequences of the tyrannical rule. Thus, he rhetorically explores the dangers of absolute power and, implicitly, even questions its foundations. Dimitrii refers to the traditional understanding of tyranny where law is below a ruler, which was already expressed in Sumarokov's *Hamlet* by Claudius's confidant Polonius.<sup>61</sup> As a tyrant, Dimitrii proclaims himself entitled to unlimited power: "Before the tsar stands truth in silence, Parmen, silence. / I, not the truth, am tsar! The law, the power, are mine; And how to use the law is for the tsar to say."<sup>62</sup> In Sumarokov's *Hamlet*, the tyrant is either supported or held in contempt by the nobles at court. Polonius denies the right of the people to judge their monarch. In *Dimitrii the Pretender*, the tyrant is in solitary resistance against everyone else, and makes even more maximalist claims where not just law, but truth itself, should submit to his power. Sumarokov offers a darker and more sublime vision of a tyrant, who now becomes a protagonist. Unlike his *Hamlet*, *Dimitrii the Pretender* is a true tragedy that ends with the death of the protagonist. There was no one but the impostor to claim the throne, and no one was crowned in the finale.

Sumarokov possibly gives Dimitrii some characteristics of Ivan the Terrible. This vision of the superiority of a tsar's passion or whim would be understood literally and never questioned by Ivan the Terrible himself or the people of his era. According to Dimitrii, his tyranny is a part of God's celestial order, and there is no one above him except God. Dimitrii sees any independence of the nobility as a

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<sup>61</sup> *Полоний:*

Кому прощать Царя? народ в его руках.  
Он Бог, не человек, в подверженных странах.  
Когда кому даны порфира и корона,  
Тому вся правда власть, и нет ему закона.  
Sumarokov, *Polnoe sobranie vseh sochinenii, v stikhakh i proze*, vol. 3, 78.

<sup>62</sup> Selected Tragedies, 194.

"Димитрий: Перед царем должна быть истина бессловна; / Не истина - царь, - я; закон - монарша власть, / А предписание закона - царска страсть." Sumarokov, *Dramaticheskie proizvedeniia*.

threat to his power. He reminds a nobleman Georgii that all his titles do not matter in front of the tsar, and that he possesses any property only by the tsar's mercy. Dimitrii demands absolute obedience:

*Dimitrii:* You have no property, no land, and no estate  
Scion of Constantine, you prince, Prince of Galicia,  
Before me you are but a shadow and a cobweb.  
All that is God's is mine.  
*Georgii:* Am I not then my own?<sup>63</sup>

Georgii and a few other characters profess the ideals of the Enlightenment in the play, and he is shocked that Dimitrii openly denies him his basic right for life and personal freedom. On the surface, Sumarokov condemns the tyrant who does the opposite of rational self-limitation. In the subtext, the playwright also explores the psychological effects of holding power, especially absolute power. Dimitrii descends further into darkness because of his unstoppable enjoyment of power. When alone, he is terrified of himself but says that the temptation of power is too strong to resist. Sumarokov's tragedy indirectly poses a profound question: can absolute power be exercised in any positive way? In fact, power seems to be most authentic when it overtly and violently limits the power and rights of other people, in the world of this play.<sup>64</sup>

Besides the hyperbolic depiction of tyranny, there are many religious discussions in the drama. Shuiskii expresses deist ideas, whereas Dimitrii malevolently wishes to bring Catholicism to Russia. In conjunction with his hyperbolic mode of being, Dimitrii commits the ultimate blasphemy when he wants to destroy the whole country by submitting it to the Pope. This wish is even more outrageous, coming

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<sup>63</sup> Selected Tragedies, 213.

*Димитрий* У вас имена и собственности нет.

Ты - князь, князь Галицкий и отрасль Константина,

Однако предо мной ты тень и паутина:

Все божье и моё.

*Георгий:* Себе я свой ли сам?

Sumarokov, *Dramaticheskie proizvedeniia*.

<sup>64</sup> I find this submission to power even in Ostrovsky's *Minin* (1865). The pious and virtuous protagonist repeatedly refuses the position of leader but, by the end of the play, outsmarts everyone and secures this position with the thought that no one can preserve and continue all the work already done by him better than himself, and no one can do this selfless duty better than him, so he ought to hold this authoritative post. By Act V, Minin is not any more indifferent to this post as the national leader. Once he accepted it, he cannot give it away because he is convinced that stepping down would mean defeat for everyone. Ultimately, Minin sees himself as an irreplaceable leader.

from a former Russian Orthodox monk.<sup>65</sup> During the Time of Troubles, Catholicism was perceived as the threat not only to sovereignty, but also to the existence of Russian nation itself because Russian Orthodoxy is one of the foundations of its identity and cultural memory.<sup>66</sup> The religious conflict within the text reflects the long-standing hostility of the Russian Orthodox Church to Catholicism. Yet, I cannot agree with Ewington's claim that Dimitrii is damned for eternity because of his Papism.<sup>67</sup> Rather, Dimitrii is damned from the very beginning, and Papism only adds to the list of his vicious deeds. The interactions between the characters in *Dimitrii the Pretender* become a verbal battle of ideologies and even a clash of worldviews. Shuiskii, Georgii, and Kseniia are all voices of the Enlightenment and reason. Georgii expresses his firm belief into equality and human dignity. Kseniia shares all their opinions and also professes an enlightened understanding of marriage based on mutual love, respect, and overall equality between spouses.<sup>68</sup> Shuiskii advocates the purely moral, rather than familial, legitimacy of power. Even Dimitrii's main supporter, who later turns out to be a double agent, emphasizes that Dimitrii should not be concerned about his legitimacy. He states that the origins of a good monarch do not matter, which is,

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<sup>65</sup> Ewington mistakenly calls Dimitrii "a Polish monk." Ewington, 149.

<sup>66</sup> "More shocking to many Russians were his interactions with and toleration of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Especially scandalous was his decision to allow Catholics, even Jesuits, to have a church of their own in Moscow. Although Tsar Dmitrii kept his own contact with the Jesuits in low profile, for Russians brought up to regard the "Latin faith" as a Satanic heresy, Dmitrii's religious toleration must have been a shock." Dunning, Chester, *A Short History of Russia's First Civil War*. (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 140-141.

<sup>67</sup> "In *Dimitrii the Pretender*, in contrast, the eponymous tyrant's demise is clear. There will be no redemption. Dimitrii will not be touched by divine grace." Ewington, 151.

<sup>68</sup> *Георгий*: Но бог свободу дал своей последней твари,  
Так могут ли то взять законно государи?  
Властительны они законы применить,  
Но может ли их власть неправду извинить?

*Ксения*: Великолепен царь, почтен монарх и славен,  
Но быть любовнице любовник должен равен.  
Хотя и узница с царем сопряжена,  
Она рабыня ли иль царская жена?  
Sumarokov, *Dramaticheskiie proizvedeniia*.

possibly, a compliment to cajole Empress Catherine, who made her good deeds the cornerstone in the rhetoric of her legitimacy.<sup>69</sup>

The Pretender himself, in fact, pretends in front of the others to be fearless and quite a one-dimensional villain, whereas, in solitude, he admits to sensing overwhelming terror and having infernal visions. He is not as wholesome of a character as he is usually presented by scholars:

The crown no longer lies secure upon my head.  
My days of greatness draw to an untimely close.  
Each moment brings the threat of unexpected changes.  
O sturdy Kremlin walls! Why do you terrify me? <...>  
Run, tyrant, run! ... From whom? ... Shall I run from myself?  
For no one else is here. There is no one here beside me.  
Run! ... Where shall I run? ... Your hell goes with you always.  
Here's an assassin, run! ... But I'm the murderer.  
I've grown to fear myself! My shadows frighten me.  
I'll seek revenge! ... On whom? .... Myself? How shall I hate me?  
I love myself ... I love .... For what? .... I understand not.  
All cry against me now – injustice, robbery;  
All of the base, fowl deeds, together all cry out.  
I live for wretchedness; I'm dead to joy of near ones.  
Better now seems the lot of my most humble subject.  
The lowly beggar – he – even he sometimes is tranquil,  
while I reign here as tsar, and know but misery.  
I'll live and I will die for my ill-gotten throne!  
I'll drive till driven out – a tyrant to the end!<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “She [Catherine] tried her hardest to prove that she was Peter’s heir not by blood, but by spirit and by the ideological power of reforms which she carried out in Russia.” Proskurina, Nina, *Creating the Empress: Politics and Poetry in the Age of Empress Catherine II*. (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2011), 26.

*Пармен*: Когда тебя судьба на трон такой взвела,  
Не род, но царские потребны нам дела.  
Когда б не царствовал в России ты злонравно,  
Димитрий ты иль нет, сие народу равно.  
Sumarokov, *Dramaticheskije proizvedeniia*.

<sup>70</sup> *Selected Tragedies*, 206-207.

Нетвердо на главе моей лежит венец,  
И близок моего величия конец.  
Повсеминутно жду незапных премены.  
О устрашающи меня Кремлевы стены! (...)  
Беги, тиран, беги!.. Кого бежать?.. Себя?  
Не вижу никого другого пред собою.  
Беги!.. Куда бежать?.. Твой ад везде с тобою.  
Убийца здесь; беги!.. Но я убийца сей.  
Страшуся сам себя и тени я моей.  
Отмщу!.. Кому?.. Себе?.. Себя ль возненавижу?

This is a very expressive monolog where Sumarokov strives to create a powerful emotional effect and convey Dimitrii's suffering and fear of the protagonist through his exclamations and fragmented sentence structure. He manifests a split consciousness. He is scared of himself and wants to escape from himself and from the murders he committed. He wants vengeance but is unable to hate his "demonic" self. Remarkably, Dimitrii does not repent but spitefully decides to live and rule as a tyrant till the end. Dimitrii deliberately continues to test himself and everyone else with the extremes of moral transgressions. As a ruler, he is able to destroy not just himself, but the whole nation, and he claims that this ultimate destruction is precisely his goal. His suicide in the final scene becomes his last and ultimate moral transgression, and even a form of protest, where he, seemingly out of spite, refuses to repent or conform to goodness.

On the one hand, the characters are allegoric manifestations of changing epochs where medieval tyranny inevitably, even if violently, gives way to new "civilized" times, the Enlightened era and modernity. On the other hand, Dimitrii questions the limits of reason and rationality in his refusal to be good or rational until the very end. The whole rhetoric of the play and its dark finale exposes the limits of rationality and this artistic decision may be interpreted in political terms. Dimitrii's abysmal demonism reflects Sumarokov's disappointment with the possibility of applying the ideals of rational rule and social justice in practice. According to Berkov, one of the reasons why Sumarokov creates such a hyperbolic tyrant is his wish to distance Dimitrii from Catherine. The villainous protagonist intoxicated by unlimited power still subtly refers to Catherine and her oppressive policies, and she most likely was aware of these

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Люблю себя... Люблю... За что?.. Того не вижу.  
Все вопит на меня: грабеж, неправый суд,  
Все страшные дела, все купно вопиют.  
Живу к несчастью, умру ко счастью ближних.  
Завидна участь мне людей и самых нижних.  
И нищий в бедности спокоен иногда,  
А я здесь царствую и мучуся всегда.  
Терпи и погибай, восшед на трон обманом,  
Гони и будь гоним, живи, умри тираном! Sumarokov, *Dramaticheskie proizvedeniia*.

references, being the personal censor of the tragedy.<sup>71</sup> Indirect political references by Sumarokov connect him to the whole subsequent Russian literary tradition with its acute social sentiment, self-censorship, and Aesopian tactics.

#### 1.4 DIMITRII THE PRETENDER (1771) AND THE STAGE PRACTICES OF 18TH-CENTURY RUSSIA

Even though it has never been staged since the early 19th century, *Dimitrii the Pretender* is, in many respects, the inaugural play of the modern Russian theatre. This play is one of the few prominent examples in the genre of tragedy that, eventually, never developed in the Russian tradition as fully as comedy or drama. The title role brought fame to the first professional Russian actors and educators, such as Ivan Dmitrevskii and Piotr Plavilshchikov. It was Sumarokov's most successful play, and the first tragedy that became popular beyond school performances or the court theatre.<sup>72</sup>

Because the author died only six years after the play premiered, the fame for *Dimitrii the Pretender* largely came to him posthumously. The more widespread popularity of this piece in Moscow is quite a unique occurrence because, overall, tragedies were most frequently staged in the capital, St. Petersburg, whereas comedies and melodramas became the more developed genres in Moscow.<sup>73</sup> Vsevolodskii-

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<sup>71</sup> "Несомненно, что Екатерина поняла дерзкие намёки Сумарокова, но сделала вид, что рассматривает новую трагедию только в качестве художественного произведения на исторический сюжет. Сумароков намеренно придал черты «злодейства» Дмитрию Самозванцу, чтобы избежать упреков в портретном приближении к Екатерине, но зато вложил в уста положительных персонажей трагедии – Георгия, Пармена – целую систему критических и позитивных политических воззрений, понятных в условиях предпугачёвского времени и вместе с тем всегда сопровождавшихся оговорками, позволявшими отвести упреки в прямых напаках на Екатерину." Berkov, 99.

<sup>72</sup> "*Dimitrii Samozvanets* became quite a solid part of the public theatres' repertoires, in Petersburg and, especially, Moscow. We know the dates of 30 productions in Moscow and 4 in Petersburg. It is also known that *Dimitrii Samozvanets* became one of the popular plays in soldiers' theatres at the turn of the centuries." ("Димитрий Самозванец" довольно прочно вошёл в репертуар публичного театра Петербурга и особенно Москвы. Нам известны даты тридцати постановок в Москве и четырёх - в Петербурге. Вместе с тем известно, что "Димитрий Самозванец" стал одной из популярных пьес солдатского театра на рубеже веков.") Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, V.N., "Russkii Teatr Vtoroi Poloviny XVIII Veka" // Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramatičeskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol 1. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1977), 259.

<sup>73</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 200.



Gerngross states: “The Neoclassical tradition did not fully take root in Moscow; it was discovered during the aforementioned production of *Sinav* on January 31, 1770 that failed, to the great disappointment of Sumarokov.”<sup>74</sup> “Neoclassical” traditions refer to both the aesthetics of Neoclassical tragedy and the French stylized acting. St. Petersburg was the hub of the French-style Neoclassical theatre and its theatrical circles were much more interested in connecting with the French tradition than with Russian theatres elsewhere. The first state-supported theatres appeared in St. Petersburg, whereas Moscow had more private companies during the 18th century.<sup>75</sup> Logically, Moscow theatres were working for a more heterogeneous public and had more freedom in fusing different acting and directing styles. Already around the mid-18th century, we can see how Petersburg and Moscow develop somewhat complementary specializations in genres and even acting styles, with Moscow stereotypically being closer to “the people.”

In this light, Sumarokov’s move to Moscow later in his life acquires symbolic meaning and marks a shift in his poetics. Before, he was the proponent of the privileged court theatre rather than open state theatre.<sup>76</sup> The Moscow premier of *Sinav and Truvor* was a failure that signified the local audiences’ general disinterestedness in French-style tragedy. This experience probably stimulated Sumarokov’s further attempts to blend the form of Neoclassical tragedy with the sheer power of Shakespearean plots and characters. He moved from his experiments in imitation of the French drama to developing a more

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<sup>74</sup> “Классицистские традиции в московском театре вообще не были прочными; это и обнаружилось при упоминавшейся уже постановке “Синава” 31 января 1770 года, которая, к великому огорчению Сумарокова, провалилась.” Ibid., 230.

<sup>75</sup> “In the 1760s, the interest in theatre among the different estates of Russian society has increased. ... Just as in the middle of the century, court theatres still played the leading role, especially in Saint Petersburg. In Moscow, private theatre, founded by the [Lomonosov] university, continued its work. Besides that, people’s theatres existed in both capitals and some provincial cities.”

(“В 60-х годах XVIII века интерес к театру в различных слоях русского общества значительно возрос. ... Как и в середине века, ведущую роль, особенно в Петербурге, играли придворные театры. В Москве продолжал свою деятельность частный театр, основанный университетом. Кроме того, в обеих столицах и некоторых провинциальных городах существовали демократические театры...”)  
Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 195.

<sup>76</sup> Berkov, 90.

independent writing style as a dramatist. *Dimitrii the Pretender* was the first Russian play that successfully blended the poetics of French tragedy and the British concept of theatrical national history with Russian themes and characters. Though unconcerned with historical accuracy, Sumarokov approaches the topic metaphorically. He creates an intense atmosphere to represent the highly dramatic events that defined the Russian monarchy and the history of the country.

Historical materials allow Sumarokov and other early directors to develop the stage versions of traditional Russian sets and costumes. The productions of *Dimitrii the Pretender* reflect the ongoing shifts in European stage practices that gradually move away from ancient plots, stylized acting, and conventional non-historical visuals toward the idea of historical color and presenting everyday life. It is impossible to reconstruct any specific production of *Dimitrii the Pretender*, but the 18th century left some materials that provided a general picture of early theatrical practices. Their most characteristic feature was eclecticism: “In the fifty years of its existence, Russian Neoclassical theatre combined and repeated the path that French theatre accomplished in 150 years; ... instead of progression in its evolution, we can observe its fully chaotic state.”<sup>77</sup>

Because of its accelerated development, the fledging Russian secular theatre absorbed different traditions, but did not necessarily internalize them. In France, Neoclassical theatre developed in several

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<sup>77</sup> “В пятидесятилетний срок своего существования русский театр ложноклассического направления совместил и повторил путь, пройденный французским театром в полтораста лет; ... вместо последовательности в эволюции мы наблюдаем здесь полную хаотичность.” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral'nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 184.

In his book published in 1914, Vsevolodskii-Gerngross uses the obsolete term “ложноклассический” (false-Classical) that corresponds to the term “Neoclassical” that is currently used in scholarship.

To my knowledge, Vsevolodskii-Gerngross's book *Istoriia teatral'nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii* (1914) is the only book that provides a detailed description of the acting styles and techniques of the 17-18th-century Russia and shows their development in connection with the contemporary European theatre. The scholar describes the stages in the development of acting, starting from Ancient Greece and Rome. He then shows how that tradition, preserved in many writings on theatre and rhetoric, directly influenced both European school theatre and French Neoclassical theatre. Analyzing the very few existing treatises on theatrical art and the numerous scattered accounts, Vsevolodskii-Gerngross provides the comparative characteristic of French Neoclassical, English, German, and Italian acting traditions. He collects all the available materials on acting in the 18th-century Russia and shows how it blends several European influences and starts to develop its own style. My discussion of the 18th-century acting is almost entirely based on the facts found in this book.

stages. During each stage, its reformers had to fight against an established and academically endorsed tradition.<sup>78</sup> For example, leading and acclaimed actresses, such as Lecouvreur and Cléron, introduced new styles and techniques into their acting, and they found supporters as well as critics who preferred the older styles and sought no reform for theatre. Russian actors or directors of this time period could not possibly be in such a situation because they did not have any canonized predecessors. I demonstrate that this instability left room for experimentation on stage. From the fragmentary sources, we may assume that the productions of *Dimitrii the Pretender* showcased the newly achieved level of theatrical artistry in acting and scenography that was a result of diligent learning from the French tradition. At the same time, the “national” historical plot encouraged deviations from the French canon. The most prominent actors strove to work out their own style of declamation that suited Russian language. *Dimitrii the Pretender* contributed greatly to the formation of Russian historical color on stage.

#### 1.4.1 Acting and Recitation Techniques in Russian Tragedy

Among all the genres and national schools, French Neoclassical tragedy probably had the most rigid rules of performance. Even according to the ancient authors in Greece and Rome, acting in tragedy was “unnatural” in comparison with comedy, let alone conversational speech.<sup>79</sup> Ancient tragedy was

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<sup>78</sup> For example, this is how Vsevolodskii-Gerngross describes the contribution of actress Lecouvreur: “Lecouvreur’s acting differed significantly from her predecessors’ acting style. She initiated a whole reform of acting in France. ... Lecouvreur was close with Voltaire who, while he was very conservative about acting, preferred affected recitation and did not share the pursuit of [another innovative actress] Cléron to reform the stage costume. However, Voltaire held her [Cléron’s] acting in high regard.”

“Игра Лекуврер сильно отличалась от игры её предшественниц и создала целую реформу сценического искусства во Франции. ...Лекуврер была близка к Вольтеру, который, хотя и был большим консерватором в деле сценического искусства, предпочитал напыщенную читку и не разделял впоследствии желаний Клерон реформировать костюм, однако оценил её игру.” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral’nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 160-161.

<sup>79</sup> “It is known that ancient actors talked, accompanied by musical instruments. This fact testifies that, even though stage recitation was not the same as singing, it was harmonized in its own way.”

“Известно, что античные актёры говорили под аккомпанемент музыкальных инструментов. Наличие их свидетельствует о том, что, хотя сценическая декламация и не была пением, всё же по-своему была гармонизирована.” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral’nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 108.

“According to Strabo, ancient literature was all in verse, and the verses were always sung....”

considered to be a sub-genre of music and the lines were performed as singing, chanting, or recitation, depending on the poetic meter. In 17th- and 18th-century France, tragedy was also performed in a highly stylized manner that was repeatedly described by contemporaries as monotonous and affected chanting. Actors recited their lines rather than acted. For example, the actress Champmeslé melodiously recited her lines, whereas Ducleau's performance resembled singing psalms.<sup>80</sup> The actors wore fashionable French costumes, and their gestures and mimicry were quite limited. Their postures were based on ancient statues. It was literature-centered entertainment for aristocracy that was guided by the principles of "good taste" and moderation.<sup>81</sup>

When the founders of Russian theatre were getting acquainted with French Neoclassical acting in the middle of the 18th century, it was going through a transitional period, where old and new schools of acting co-existed and were polemically engaged. The monotonous style of tragedy was repeatedly attacked as artificial and unnatural. Of course, Neoclassical comedy was performed in a less stylized manner, and Molière's comedies contributed greatly to the shift in acting that also helped to reform other

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"По свидетельству Страбона, в древности вся литература была стихотворной, причём стихи всегда пелись..." Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, 107.

<sup>80</sup> "All the sources on Champmeslé's recitation manner describe it similarly: she sang verses, namely, recited them melodiously, it was vocalization that approximated the recitation of ancient actors."

"О манере Шанмеле декламировать стихи данные сходятся: она пела стихи; т.е. декламировала нараспев, это было мелодирование, приближавшееся к декламации античных актёров." Ibid., 156.

"Ducleau ... did not read her roles but sang them like psalms, recited them with exceptional bombast."

"Дюкло ... не читала свои роли, а распевала их как псалмы, декламировала их с исключительной напыщенностью..." Ibid., 157.

<sup>81</sup> The only known extended theory book and "manual" on the theatrical art of the 17th-18th centuries belongs to Francisco Lang, a Jesuit playwright. It is titled *Dissertatio de Actione Scenica, cum figuris eandem explicantibus, et Observationibus quibusdam de Arte Comica Auctore P. Francisco Lang Societatis Iesu, 1727*. (*A Discourse on Stage Acting, with Explanatory Drawings and Some Observations on Dramatic Art by Rev. Francisco Lang of Jesuit Society*) Ibid., 21.

Vsevolodskii-Gerngross analyzes this treatise and traces its approaches to acting back to Roman theorists of rhetoric, who, in turn, based their performance on the acting of Roman comedians. Lang's text contains numerous descriptions of proper declamation, gestures, posture, etc. The scholar notes that no one was trained as an actor based on the full study of this book. Rather, aspiring actors would use it for general principles. Now, the book offers unique insight into some acting conventions of the time period.

genres. In tragedy, Lecouvreur was the first actress who successfully attempted to perform her roles in a considerably less affected and stylized way. She was widely praised for her “simplicity” and “naturalness.” Lekain was one of the famous actors who followed her pursuit of more “natural” acting, supported by Denis Diderot and some other famous enlighteners. However, the old tradition still persevered in French theatres and was supported by some authoritative cultural figures, such as Voltaire. Sumarokov oriented himself on Voltaire and, most likely, taught actors to recite the lines melodiously. Overall, it seems that he attempted to teach the “correct” technique to the first Russian actors. However, the actor Dmitrevskii, who later based his performance and teaching on Lekain’s version of French acting, left a much more profound impact on actors’ education in Russia than Sumarokov.

Ivan Afanasievich Dmitrevskii (1734-1821) plays a foundational role in the history of Russian theatre. As many other actors of his time, he was also a playwright, translator, teacher, theatre manager, and theorist.<sup>82</sup> Remarkably, he is the first Russian actor who studied in Europe and, therefore, the first professionally trained instructor who influenced the next few generations of Russian actors. His impact on Russian cultural life as a whole was so significant that he was a member of the Academy of Science later

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<sup>82</sup> “One of the champions and direct successors of Volkov’s work was Ivan Afanasievich Dmitrevskii (1733-1821). He was not only an actor but also, a director of a theatre, a stage director, a teacher, a poet, a dramatist, a translator, and a historian of Russian theatre.”

“Одним из сподвижников и прямых продолжателей дела Волкова был Иван Афанасьевич Дмитревский (1733-1821). Он был не только актёром, но и руководителем театра, режиссёром, педагогом, поэтом, драматургом, переводчиком, историком русского театра...” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 223.

“At that time, pedagogical instruction in dramatic art included only [supervised] rehearsals of roles for debuts and, subsequently, for each new premier. According to his contract with Knipper signed in 1781, Dmitrevskii had to teach “stage declamation and recitation” twelve times a month, for three hours. ... When Knipper and Dmitrevskii’s theatre became a state-funded theatre (1783), it is likely that Dmitrevskii [was the person who] wrote the special set of rules for the court theatre. According to these guidelines, actors had three weeks to study big roles, and ten days for minor roles...”

“Преподавание драматического искусства в то время состояло в непосредственном прохождении ролей для дебютов, а затем и для каждой новой премьеры. Дмитревский по контракту, заключённому в 1781 году с Книппером, должен был обучать актёров и актрис «театральной дикции и декламации» двенадцать раз в месяц по три часа. ... Когда театр Книпера – Дмитревского перешёл в казну (1783), вероятно, тот же Дмитревский 1 января 1784 года составил особую инструкцию для придворного театра. По этой инструкции актёрам на изучение большой роли давалось три недели, а малой – десять дней...” Ibid., 187.

in his life and became one of the first historians of Russian theatre.<sup>83</sup> Venerated as an enlightener, Dmitrevskii became the symbol of the first age of modern Russian theatre. Importantly, the Pretender was one of his most successful and recognizable roles.

As a talented and promising member of the first state-supported acting crew, Dmitrevskii was sent to Paris where he attended numerous performances and learned from Lekain, one of the most highly acclaimed French actors. Dmitrevskii was also working with Garrick, the legendary British actor of the 18th century. France and Britain had very different theatrical traditions. The French school was more literary, ritualized, and stylized. In contrast, the British school focused more on naturalism, physical performance, acrobatics, and stunning visuals.<sup>84</sup> Dmitrevskii, therefore, had a very rare opportunity to work with the best actors from both schools. Most likely, as a result of observing such variability in artistic methods, he started developing his own acting style by blending the elements from those schools. As Vsevolodskii-Gerngross concludes, the Russian acting school grew from fusing several different traditions: "...Russian Neoclassical stage art was an imprint from the French one and, toward the end of

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<sup>83</sup> Unfortunately, Dmitrevskii's manuscripts on the history of Russian theatre were lost. *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>84</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross lists many skills that English actors possessed: "...actors' strength and agility was very important because they had not only to scuffle, fight, fence, dance, and jump etc. but they also had to delight spectators with their skills when doing that. ... In addition, they had to constantly play various musical instruments, in the play itself as well as during intermissions. Thus, it turns out that an English actor had to master a whole system of knowledge and skills, and, even if his art was not high-quality aesthetically, it still required much preparation and very hard work."

"...огромную роль играла сила и ловкость самих комедиантов, так как им приходилось не только драться, сражаться, фехтовать, танцевать, прыгать и т.д., но в их задачу входило также восхитить публику тем умением, с которым они должны были это проделывать. ... Если к этому присоединить постоянную игру на всевозможных инструментах, как в самой пьесе, так и в антрактах, то окажется, что английский актёр должен был обладать целой системой знаний и способностей, и что искусство его, если и не было на высоте в отношении эстетики, то во всяком случае, требовало большой подготовки и затраты огромного труда." Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral'nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 82-83.

Cf. the description of the actors in French Neoclassical theatre:

"The did not play but read their roles. The did not 'act', they did not animate tragedy but turned it into a system of conversations, in which they developed some bravura motif, flaunting the beauty of their voices, and their tragedy became a narration in dialogs."

"Они не играли свои роли, а читали их. Они не «действовали», они не одухотворяли трагедию, они приводили ее к системе разговоров, в которых они развивали какой-нибудь бравурный мотив, щеголяя красотой своего голоса, и трагедия у них становилась диалогизированным рассказом." *Ibid.*, 157.

the century, from the added influences of German theatre and the fledging Russian art. The latter, however, was so vague, unclear, and uncertain that it is impossible to discuss it.”<sup>85</sup>

Dmitrevskii’s travels received much attention in the contemporary writings and later became mythologized in multiple anecdotes. According to Dmitrevskii’s own writings, he made enormous personal and professional achievements. He did not just learn acting in Paris, but also was part of the actors’ social gatherings, and a personal friend of Lekain, Garrick, and the other colleagues.<sup>86</sup> Thus, Dmitrevskii learned the reformed version of French Neoclassical acting technique from Lekain and set it as the foundation of acting in Russian tragedy. According to several scholars, he personally preferred the French school and saw Garrick’s acting as too naturalistic.<sup>87</sup> Dmitrievskii adhered to normative poetics as a playwright, too, as he considered tragedies in verse to be the highest genre of theatre.

According to the accounts of his contemporaries, Dmitrevskii had a noble stature very suitable to playing royals in tragedies. One could say that he was the first professional actor in Russia because he developed a theory of acting for himself and thoroughly studied and prepared for each role. Dimitrii The Pretender was one of his most famous roles. Some surviving written responses narrate his spectacular

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<sup>85</sup> “...русское ложноклассическое сценическое искусство представляло собою сколок с французского с присоединением к нему в конце столетия влияний немецкого искусства и зарождавшегося национального русского. Последнее, однако, было настолько туманно, невыясненно, невыявлено, что говорить о нём невозможно.”<sup>85</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral’nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 195.

<sup>86</sup> “Another time, Dmitrevskii told a story about once witnessing a curious competition between actress Cléron and actor Garrick... Cléron recited ... several best scenes from *Medea*, and then Garrick, after thinking a little, got up from the table and recited the scene with the ghost from *Hamlet*. Despite many of the present people not knowing English, he made them feel the horror with his facial expressions.”

“В другой раз Дмитриевский рассказывал, что в Париже случилось ему однажды быть свидетелем любопытного состязания между актрисою Клерон и Гарриком... Клерон... продекламировала ... несколько лучших сцен из «Медей», а Гаррик, подумав немного, ... встал из-за стола и продекламировал сцену с привением из «Гамлета». Несмотря на то, что многие из присутствовавших не знали по-английски, он навёл на них ужас одною своею мимикою.” Ibid., 186.

“The responses about Dmitrevskii’s acting are full of admiration and place him on the level of Lekain and Garrick.” “Отзывы современников об игре Дмитриевского самые восторженные и постоянно ставят его на ряду с Лекеном и Гарриком.” Ibid., 187.

<sup>87</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral’nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 195. Danilov, 35.

appearance in the opening scene, sitting of the throne, wrapped in a mantle, and brooding: “For example, in *Dimitrii the Pretender*, he appeared to the eyes of spectators leaning on the throne and covered with a mantle: via this gloomy posture, he illuminated, so to say, the dark thoughts of the opening monolog.”<sup>88</sup>

When performing in another tragedy by Sumarokov, *Sinav and Truvor*, Dmitrevskii captured the audience by his superb performance of a protagonist terrified by the ghost of his brother. He slowly moved the chair backwards, as if chased by the ghost, and left the audience in complete awe: “In *Sinav*, he was reading the lengthy monolog when the shadow of his brother comes to him, while moving back in his chair, as if chased by the shadow, and finished by raising himself on tiptoes. This simple movement had an astonishing effect on the spectators: they trembled with fear.”<sup>89</sup> The unique physical performance in the scene was, most likely, invented by Dmitrevskii himself. French acting was based more on declamation and playing with voice, so we may assume that Dmitrevskii learned the more physical performance from Garrick and the English school. However, moving the chair is quite minimalistic and works more for the emotional rather than the visual impact of the scene. Dmitrevskii manages to construct the character of the demonic villain through small details or even silence and pauses. In such scarcely preserved instances, we can see the beginnings of Russian acting tradition with its attentiveness to internal feelings of the characters conveyed by carefully thought-out movements and the usage of objects on stage.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Например, в “Дмитрии Самозванце” он являлся глазам зрителей облокотившимся на трон и закрытым мантией: сим мрачным положением освещал он, так сказать, тёмные мысли первого монолога.” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral'nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 188.

<sup>89</sup> “В «Синаве» читал он длинный монолог, когда ему представляется тень брата, подвигаясь со стулом своим назад, как будто преследуемый ею, и оканчивал, приподнимаясь на цыпочки. Сие простое движение производило удивительное действие на зрителей: все трепетали от ужаса.” Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Another fascinating example of freewheeling creativity can be found in the production of Fonvizin’s now classical comedy, *The Minor*. Actor Ozhogin, a favorite of the public, was immensely popular in the role of the old nanny Eremeevna. In one of the scenes, Eremeevna and the minor, Mitrofan, blow soap bubbles. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 409. This action creates comedic effect, opens room for improvisation, and becomes a metaphor for Mitrofan’s childishness.



Sumarokov praised Dmitrevskii for his artistry and wrote a few poems about him, which are another valuable source for studying the theatrical practices of the era. For Sumarokov, Dmitrevskii was probably the first actor who could do justice to his tragedies and match his own aspirations. This is the poem about Dmitrevskii's performance of *Sinav*:

Dmitrevskii, what I beheld! How sad I was  
When the unhappy Sinav in you despaired.  
I called all his misfortunes my own,  
Troubled by your passions, I marveled,  
And I loved and hoped together with you.  
When you were ineffably saddened by Ilmena,  
I also felt your sorrow.  
You induced all your passions in me:  
You led me with you from fear to hope,  
From fury to love, and from love to grief;  
You found new paths to reach hearts.  
Your voice and face, and figure were all concordant.  
Yes, touching a spectator, you inflame his heart.  
All the spectators paid for your weeping with their tears,  
And when crying, everyone tried to praise you.  
Art and nature, united in you,  
Made our hearts move.  
Ah, you left us all delirious!  
In our minds, we all wanted to crown you:  
You endeavored to capture us, and we are all captivated by you!<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> "Стихи Ивану Афанасьевичу Дмитревскому"  
Дмитревский, что я зрел! Колико я смущался,  
Когда в тебе Синав несчастный унывал!  
Я все его беды своими называл,  
Твоею страстию встревожен, восхищался,  
И купно я с тобой любил и уповал.  
Как был Ильменой ты смущен неизреченно,  
Так было и мое тем чувство огорченно.  
Ты страсти все свои во мне производил:  
Ты вел меня с собой из страха в упованье,  
Из ярости в любовь и из любви в стенанье;  
Ты к сердцу новью дороги находил.  
Твой голос, и лицо, и стан согласны были,  
Да, зрителя тронув, в нем сердце воспалить.  
Твой плач все зрители слезами заплатили,  
И, плача, все тебя старались хвалить.  
Искусство с естественством в тебе совокупленны  
Производили в нас движения сердец.  
Ах, как тобою мы остались исступленны!  
Мы в мысли все тебе готовили венец:  
Ты тщился всех пленить, и все тобою пленны.  
Sumarokov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 295.

We can see that Sumarokov, most of all, praises Dmitrevskii's powerful stage presence and his ability to engage the audience into the emotional turmoil of his characters. He also mentions how the actor's voice, face and gestures all work in unity to create the character. The lines "iskusstvo s estestvom" imply that Dmitrevskii managed to blend "nature" and "art," and cultivated his inborn talent through training. Even if this poem, possibly, constructs the ideal rather than giving an accurate unexaggerated account, the aspiration for "naturalness" and direct impact is quite remarkable. What the succeeding generations dismissed as "cold" seemed passionate and "natural" for the Neoclassicals.<sup>92</sup>

Toward the end of the 18th century, tragedy and the chanting style of declamation were both gradually becoming outdated in Europe, as well. As a result, the chanting style did have influence on Russian culture but never fully took root. Dmitrevskii was highly regarded as the best at the Neoclassical craft of acting in Russia, but a number of his contemporaries never fully learned those techniques and were still highly acclaimed. For example, Fyodor Volkov (1729-1763) was a member of the first professional acting crew together with Dmitrevskii. Volkov has been recognized as one of the founders of the Russian acting school, even though his biographers mention that he never mastered French-style declamation and had a "furious temper" on stage.<sup>93</sup> From the little we know, he did recite the lines

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<sup>92</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross writes that all theorists of acting emphasized "naturalness" and sought to find it: "[About Lang's *Discourse*:] Thus, the first rule of declamation is "naturalness, a sort of mundanity." However, even the Neoclassical theatre constantly talked about "naturalness" and the word *naturel*, starting from Boileau, is present in every handbook on dramatic and stage art; at the same time, even Hamlet talked about naturalness, it has been present in the discussions as long as theatre has existed, and each subsequent epoch reproaches the preceding one precisely for its errors in expressing naturalness. A historian of the French 18th century drama, Gaiffé, defines this phenomenon very accurately, saying that "each epoch understands naturalness in its own way but it always stands far from the genuine nature".

"Таким образом, первое положение декламации «естественность, как бы обыденность» её. Но и ложноклассический театр постоянно говорил о «естественности», и слово «naturel», начиная с Буало, встречается в каждом руководстве по искусству драмы и сцены; в то же время и Гамлет говорил о естественности, о ней говорят на всём протяжении существования театра, причём каждая последующая эпоха укоряет предыдущую в погрешности именно в отношении естественности. Историк французской драмы в XVIII веке Ст. Гефф (Gaiffe) очень верно определяет это явление, говоря, что «каждая эпоха по-своему понимает естественное, которое, однако, всегда далеко отстоит от истинной природы»."

Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral'nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 27.

<sup>93</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 155.

melodiously, as was fitting for tragedies, but his chanting could resemble the style of Italian opera or, quite likely, the style of Russian traditional epic poems.<sup>94</sup>

Piotr Plavilshchikov (1760-1812) was another actor famous for his roles in tragedies. He learned from Dmitrevskii, but then developed his own approach that discarded Dmitrevskii's moderate and reserved style in favor of passionate acting and fast shifts between emotional states. This is, for instance, how a spectator described his acting as Oedipus in Ozerov's tragedy written in 1805:

With the terrifying exclamation "The Temple of Eumenides!" Plavilshchikov jumped from his seat and stood for a few seconds, as if numb, all his body shaking. Then he was recovering little by little, with a fixed stare, moving his arms as if pushing the furies away, and he continued with the trembling voice and punctuation: 'Alas! I see them, they come in fury... to have revenge on me... (*sullenly and unevenly*) Snakes hissing in my hands... their eyes are burning. (*strongly*) And dragging me away (*utterly exhausted*) are all the horrors of Gehenna,' and, finishing the verse, he fell on the rock."<sup>95</sup>

Such delirium and frenzy on stage must have made a strong impression on this spectator because such meticulous descriptions of acting are extremely rare. Of course, Plavilshchikov was criticized for being overwhelming and for overacting.<sup>96</sup> Still, this is a telling example of the great range of acting styles even in tragedy and even among the actors who belonged to one school. As mentioned earlier, comedy allowed even more diversified approaches to developing characters. Another remarkable example is the comedian Shumskii, who was an entirely self-made actor but, later in his life, was invited to teach acting as a seasoned and acclaimed professional.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 156.

<sup>95</sup> "С страшным восклицанием «Храм Эвменид!» вскакивал Плавильщикова с места и несколько секунд стоял, как ошеломлённый, содрогаясь всем телом. Затем мало-помалу он приходил в себя, устремлял глаза на один пункт и, действуя руками, как бы отталкивал от себя фурий, продолжал дрожащим голосом и с расстановкою: «Увы, я вижу их... они стремятся в ярости... с отмщением ко мне... (*Глухо и порывисто.*) В руках змеи шипят... их очи раскалены... (*Усиленно.*) И за собой влекут (*в крайнем изнеможении*) все ужасы геенны» и с окончанием стиха стремительно упал на камень." Varneke, 75-76.

<sup>96</sup> Varneke, 76.

<sup>97</sup> "Even though Shumskii never studied dramatic art, he was such a skilled actor that in 1764, he was invited to teach actors who were the students in the Academy of Arts."

"Хотя Шумский нигде не учился сценическому искусству, он владел им настолько, что в 1764 году был приглашён обучать актёров – студентов Академии художеств."  
Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 232.

Before the 1750-60s, female roles were played by male actors, but then actresses appeared. However, accounts of their acting and careers are almost non-existent. The wife of Dmitrevskii, née Musina-Pushkina, achieved fame in comedy and sentimental drama<sup>98</sup>. Her looks and acting manner were deemed not very suitable for tragedy. The first exemplary tragic actress was Tatyana Troepol'skaia (174(?) – 1774). Because she acted in the central Neoclassical genre, she enjoyed the most fame among the first generation of actresses. Sumarokov wrote a poem where he wanted Troepol'skaia to become a legendary actress for Russia, as Lecouvreur became for France:

Worthily you played Russian Ilmena:  
Russia poured tears, eyeing her,  
And beheld how she died in suffering.  
Sighing and moaning, Dmitrevskii  
Showed the beauty of cothurnus to Petropole...  
And you, with pleasantness of charming Venus,  
Trying to surpass the people's praises,  
Go and achieve the name of the beautiful Lecouvreur.<sup>99</sup>

Sumarokov emphasized the connection of Russian theatre with France and ancient Greece and Rome (metaphorically represented by “cothurnus”). He celebrates Russian culture in its imaginary unity with those traditions, quite in the Neoclassical fashion. On the other hand, he says that Dmitrevskii and Troepol'skaia act for the whole Russia, specifically for the *narod*. This logic may seem paradoxical to those in the Romantic and post-Romantic periods, but, for Sumarokov, learning and borrowing from the West provides new tools and forms of expression for the Russian national spirit. It is very important that

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<sup>98</sup> It is interesting to note that some actresses were also famous performers of Russian folk songs. Dmitrevskaia was personally favored as a folk singer by empress Catherine II. Avdotya Mikhailova was also famous for her folk-style singing. Varneke, 76.

<sup>99</sup> ...Достоинo рoсскую Ильмену ты сыграла:  
Россия на неё, слёз ток лия, взирала,  
И зрела, как она, страдая, умирала.  
Пуская Дмитревский вздыхание и стон,  
Явил Петрополю красы котурна он...  
А ты, с приятностью прелестных Венеры,  
Стремясь превзойти похвал народных меры,  
Достигни имени прекрасной Лекувреры.  
 (“От автора трагедии «Синава и Трувора» Татиане Михайловне Троепольской, актрисе российского императорского театра на представление Ильмены ноября 16 дня 1766 года”)  
Sumarokov, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 300.

he appoints them as “national” actors who are not simply accomplished performers but also enlighteners who help advance Russian culture. Sumarokov and the educated class of his time saw new, post-Petrine Russia as a part of the general Western cultural context.

Thus, Russian actors were absorbing all of the existing traditions, learning from them, modifying, or even disregarding and abandoning them. Unlike in France or Britain, Russian theatre had not yet established canons and there was much room for experimentation with acting. It was highly personalized; and personal “methods” in acting and directing could be validated by success. In a similar way, Russian historical drama borrowed many rules but deviated from West European conventions in its attention to specifically Russian themes.

#### 1.4.2 Costumes and Makeup

The European style of modern theatre required European dress, which meant wigs and white face paints. At the same time, the Russian settings of historical dramas stimulated the development of authentically Russian theatrical costumes. In parallel with that, Western theatrical costume was going through a series of changes that led to more diversity and historical accuracy. Initially, the typical costume for an ancient mythological setting was non-historical and based on the contemporary French fashion with some Roman elements. It was called the “Roman costume”:

Creating generic characters in generic circumstances, Neoclassical dramaturgy naturally assumed the same generic approach to stage interpretations. Boileau’s poetic itself stated that theatre required exaggeration in voice as well as declamation and gesture. The costume of a Neoclassical actor was similarly generic, and, for tragedy, resulted in the so-called “Roman costume” that consisted of a cuirass, a short skirt, a hat with feathers and a huge wig. Such costume was brought to Russia by the first foreign actors on tour and was established in theatres for a long time.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> “Создавая условные характеры в условных обстоятельствах, классицистическая драматургия совершенно естественно предполагала такую же условность в её сценической интерпретации. Сама поэтика Буало утверждала, что театр требует преувеличений как в голосе, декламации, так и в жестах. Столь же условен был костюм классического актёра, сводившийся в трагедии к так называемому «римскому костюму», который состоял из кирасы, коротенькой юбочки, шляпы с перьями и огромного парика. Этот костюм был занесён в Россию первыми иностранными гастролёрами и надолго укрепился в театре.” Danilov, *Ocherki po istorii russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, 107.



Fig. 1.1. Postures of actors in classical tragedy. From the book by Fransisco Lang, *Dissertatio de Actione Scenica*, Munich, 1727.

In the middle of the 18th century, Lekain and Cléron were the actors in France who reformed not only the declamation, but also some elements of costuming practices.<sup>101</sup> During the French Revolution, François-Joseph Talma radically changed costuming practices and challenged the old ideas of good taste and decency, quite in keeping with the spirit of his epoch. In an ancient setting, he once appeared on stage

<sup>101</sup> "Cléron and Lekain were advocating for the reform of cosumes during their whole lives but did not succeed, and evey they themselves most frequently used the costumes that reflected current fashions."

"Клерон и Лекен всю свою жизнь сражались за реформу костюма, которая, однако, им не удалась и сами они, в сущности говоря, чаще всего пользовались модными в то время сценическими костюмами."  
Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral'nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 180.

in “authentic” Roman attire, with naked arms and legs.<sup>102</sup> Across Europe, the new trend of sentimental drama brought both contemporary settings and contemporary costumes onto stages.

Russian theatre was going through similar changes at an accelerated pace. Initially, “Roman” costumes were used for tragedies. Only three drawings survived and we do not definitely know that the actual costumes reflected these sketches. Still, there is indirect evidence that the costumes did not follow the French models.<sup>103</sup> The very concept of historical color did not exist at the time, which makes “historical” elements more unique and remarkable. Besides, the Russian past was apparently perceived as analogous to Greek and Roman settings of the French tragedies.

However, from the very beginning, the actors and the playwrights tackled different options for the costumes of the historical dramas. For example, Sumarokov’s drawings on the front page of *Khorev* show “Oriental” turbans.

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<sup>102</sup> “The costume was finally reformed by Talma in the age of French Revolution. Inspired by the contemporary fashionable archaeological trend, he once appeared in front of the public wearing the costume made of woolen fabric, cothurni, and with naked legs and arms, and thus, he opened the new era of stage costumes.” “Реформа костюма была окончательно произведена Тальма в эпоху революции. Вдохновлённый современным ему и модным археологизмом, он появился однажды перед публикой в костюме из шерстяной материи, в котурнах с голыми ногами и руками, положив тем самым начало новой эры в области сценического костюма.” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral’nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 180.

<sup>103</sup> “Sumarokov’s precise guidelines pointed out that “Roman” costumes were made for Sinav and Truvor. ... Apparently, Roman costumes had to emphasize the Norman origins of the both princes. ... Three sketches of the stage costumes, hats, and make-up survived, that were drawn for [the productions of] *Khorev* and *Sinav and Truvor* by Sumarokov on the title pages of those very plays. ...The characters wore hats that resembled turbans with feather plumes, and kaftans (or iepanchas) that resembled boyars’ clothes. As for *Khorev*, the title page shows costumes and hats resembling those of Zaporozhye Cossacks. Finally, a note from Shliakhetskii Korpus’s records has been published (the original had not been found), according to which “Cossack” theatrical costumes were sewn. Apparently, this note refers to the costumes for *Khorev*. All this evidence allows us to conclude that stage costumes for Russian tragedies of that time were not *a la française*, but strove to approximate the historical ones.” “Имеются точные указания Сумарокова, что для Синава и Трувора делались костюмы «римские». ... Римские костюмы, очевидно, должны были подчёркивать нормандское происхождение обоих князей. ... Имеются три эскиза театральных костюмов, головных уборов и гримов к «Хореву» и «Синаву и Трувору», сделанные рукой Сумарокова на титульных листах тех же пьес. ... на головах у героев нечто вроде чалмы с перьями в виде султанов и кафтаны (или епанчи) наподобие боярских. Что же касается «Хорева», то на фронтисписе изображены костюмы и головные уборы наподобие запорожских. Наконец, опубликована выписка из дел Шляхетского корпуса этого времени (подлинника нам найти не удалось), в которой говорится о том, что шились театральные костюмы «казацкие». Речь, очевидно, идёт о костюмах к Хореву. Всё это позволит с уверенностью говорить, что театральные костюмы русской трагедии того времени были не *a la française*, но стремились каким-то образом приблизиться к историческим.” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 159.



Fig. 1.2. Sketches of hats and make-up for tragedies *Khorev* and *Sinav and Truvor*, by Sumarokov

It is puzzling to see turbans designed for the princes of ancient Rus'. Voltaire wrote a few plays set in the fantastical Orient, and Sumarokov also has a play with the same setting, *Artistona*. Such costumes would be logical for those plays. I think that antiquity was perceived as “exotic.” Another possible explanation is self-Orientalization. The West had already established a trend of imagining the Orient (for example, Diderot’s *Persian Letters*). In Sumarokov’s mind, the half-legendary times of old Rus’ could coincide with something remote, strange, and, therefore, exotic. New Russia was Western and old Rus’ was Eastern. In the end, we do not know if these designs were turned into actual costumes. The portrait of the serf actress Zhemchugova in extravagant attire with big feathers on her head suggests that it was quite possible.



Fig. 1.3. Actress P.I. Zhemchugova as Eliana in André Grétry’s comic opera *The Samnite Marriages*



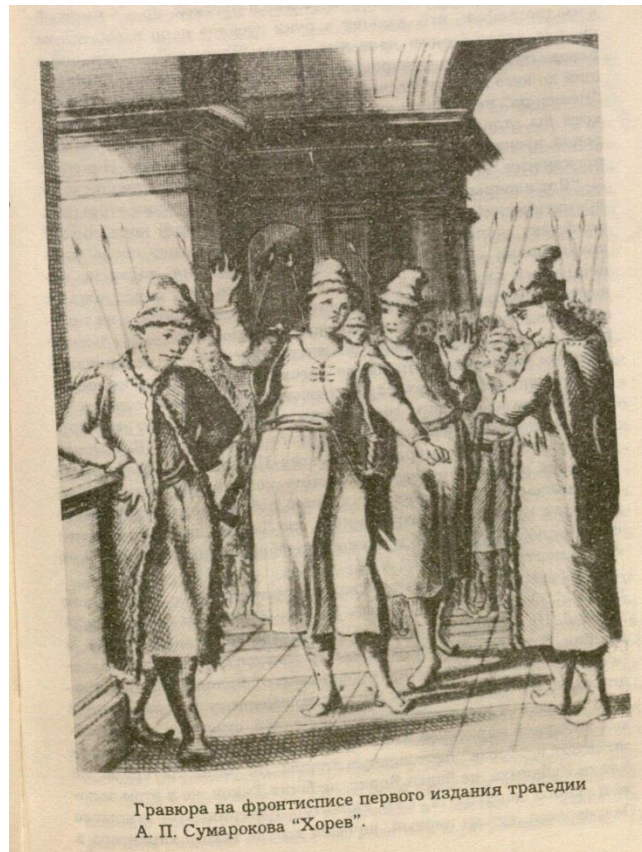


Fig. 1.4. The print on the frontispiece of the first edition of Sumarokov's *Khorev*.

A uniquely Russian development for tragedies were the “Cossack” costumes. On the front page of Sumarokov's *Sinav and Truvor*, the characters wear such clothes. There is evidence that these attires were, indeed, used in the productions. Russian scholars claim that the drawing resembles the contemporary Cossack clothes of Zaporozhye. Because the capital of old Rus' was Kiev, situated on the Ukrainian territory by the 18th century, it is logical that Sumarokov would use Ukrainian motifs for the costumes in his drama. We can see how costumes for tragedies are gradually departing from the French models and include more and more elements from Russian and Slavic traditional clothes in their more colorful and ornamented versions.<sup>104</sup> For example, Dmitrevskii played Dimitrii in 1795 wearing a

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<sup>104</sup> To my knowledge, no sources of the 18th century mention costumes for comedies. It is very likely that they were based on the contemporary urban fashions. A good example is the portrait of Dmitrevskii in the role of Starodum from Fonvizin's *Minor*. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 159.

costume that looked like a combination of Western fashion with typically Russian elements: “Dmitrevskii acted as the Pretender, wearing a small moustache drawn with ink, powdered, hair uncurled and tied behind with bow-knotted black ribbon, what was then called *queu de renard* [a fox’s tale]. He wore a hat with hermine ourlet, hanging scarlet velvet top and the beaded gland; and golden samit half-kaftan with folded sides on small bouffants. All actors were powdered. The beard dared not to appear on stage yet.”<sup>105</sup> Without a doubt, Dmitrevskii himself actively participated in developing this production, and he was quite conservative. This costume of the Pretender looks like an attempt to find a compromise between historical color and a “fine taste.” Wigs did not exist in the depicted early 17th century Russia, and the actual impostor would not curl his hair. Yet, the hairdo still mirrors the current off-stage fashion. Fur, scarlet and gold colors refer to the traditional attire of pre-Petrine noblemen. At the same time, small “bouffants” add to the whole Westernized version of Russian kaftan. The quoted passage emphasizes that all actors whitened faces for stage. White face paint was a must of the era, both in high-society gatherings and on stage. Actors also used rouge and eyeliner. Beards were too low-class for any genre, and authenticity could not yet stretch that far.

During the second half of the 18th century, the stage version of the Russian peasant costume was developing. At one point, Empress Catherine II herself provided guidance for the production of her comic opera, *Fevci*. She warned against using the authentic clothes of the commoners, and suggested the old clothes of nobles as a model, with expensive fine fabrics and rich ornaments:

Your opera is very good,” the Empress wrote, “but, in the first scene, the nannies and the mammas are dressed as vulgar people, our old-time nobles were not dressed this badly, order to dress them differently, I have it in the state book and there are the portraits for how to dress them, sleeves

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<sup>105</sup> “Дмитревский представлял Самозванца с маленькими усиками, написанными тушью, в пудре, незавитых волосах, перевязанных на затылке чёрной лентой с бантом, что называлось тогда *queu de renard*. На нём была шапка с горностаевым околышем, с висячею алою бархатною тульею и с большою бусовою кистью, и золотое глазетовое полукафтаны с загнутыми полами на маленьких бочечках или фижмах. Все актёры были напудрены. Борода тогда ещё не смела появляться на сцене.” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 263.

have to be ornamented, and the weskits on their shoulders, and “feriaz” and veils on the mammas should be muslin and not of some vulgar kind, or you will not escape Critique in the Bolshoi theatre.<sup>106</sup>

Thus, the peasant costumes were established as colorful and highly idealized versions of the actual clothes. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross notes that they looked more like attires of court maids and palace servants.<sup>107</sup>



Fig. 1.5. Ivan Dmitrevskii as Starodum in Fonvizin's *The Minor*.

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<sup>106</sup> “Ваша опера очень хороша, писала Государыня, но в первом явлении няни и мамы одеты как подлый народ, у нас в старине Барини не так дурно одевались, прикажите их одеть иначе, у меня есть в казённой книге да и портреты есть как их одеть, рукава должны быть наборные, да сверх телогреи на плечах, ферези а фаты на мам кисейные а не иные подлые, а то на Большом феатре не уйдете от Критики.” Quoted in: Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 194.

“Наборные” may refer to a traditional Russian weaving and embroidering technique. “Телогреи” and “ферези” (“ферязь” in standard spelling) are Russian traditional pieces of clothes.

<sup>107</sup> “Similar to peasant costumes on the paintings of Heisler and Atkinson, set designs that depicted rural landscapes or the insides of traditions peasant houses [izba] were stylizations, the improved versions of reality, “the idyllic-peasant-style” visuals. The tell-tale evidence can be found in the descriptions of Sheremetyev Theatre’s costumes for Kniazhnin’s comic opera *Misfortune from a Carriage*. Aniuta looked not so much as a peasant girl but rather as a palace waiting maid, Lukyan resembled a marquess’s page of the chamber, Aniuta’s father, who was an old poor man, was also dressed elegantly.”

“Так же, как костюмы крестьян у художников Гейслера и Аткинсона, театральные декорации, изображавшие сельский пейзаж или внутренность изб, были стилизацией, «облагороженной» действительностью, «пейзанством». Одним из красноречивых доказательств этого является описание шереметевских костюмов к комической опере Княжнина «Несчастье от кареты». Анюта выглядела не столько крестьянкой, сколько придворной камеристкой, Лукьян – камер-пажем маркизы, отец Анюты – старик бедняк – также был нарядно одет.” Ibid.

From this fragmentary information about the stage costumes of the time, we can see how unstable and changing the perception of the historical genre was. The European ideas of propriety and fine taste clashed with the growing interest in historical color and authenticity. The gradual change, of course, was leaning toward the latter, which mirrored the change in fashion to a simpler and more comfortable style in everyday life toward the end of the 18th century.

#### 1.4.3 Set Designs and Props

Stage designs in the 18th-century Russia have been studied very little but we firmly know that most elaborate sets were designed by invited Italian masters who created them for the Russian theatres until the early 19th century. In his article *Perspektivisty i dekoratory* (1911), Kurbatov notes that the art of stage designs was a part of the architectural field.<sup>108</sup> During the 18th century, painters and decorators were exploring the complex techniques of painting architectural ensembles in the correct perspective, and designing sets was perceived as a similar “mathematical” problem of creating the layers of set frames that would give the illusion of the vast three-dimensional space. Kurbatov further writes that, being perishable, very few sets or their drawings survived their time, and the names of their designers are often unknown because they were treated as craftsmen rather than artists.<sup>109</sup> Valeriani, Quarenghi, and Gonzago, all of whom lived and worked in Russia, are well-known because they were not only set designers, but also skilled architects, painters, and interior decorators who worked on the luxurious royal palaces in St. Petersburg.

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<sup>108</sup> Kurbatov, V., "Perspektivisty i dekoratory." In *Starye gody* (July-September 1911), 114.  
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924112820463> (Accessed on December 11, 2016)

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

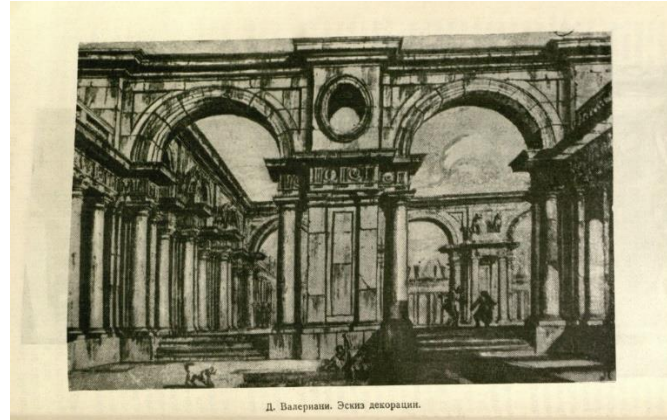


Fig. 1.6. I. Valeriani. A drawing of a set.

Vsevolodskii-Gerngross notes that coloring of the sets was very meagre.<sup>110</sup> This was probably related to the whiteness of the rediscovered ancient temples and statues, which was perceived as the ideal. Also, no sets were customized for particular plays. Gonzago was the first designer who discussed the importance of surroundings for actors and audiences, but his ideas were very much ahead of his time, and the sets remained typified and recyclable until the end of the 19th century, especially for dramas that were traditionally produced on considerably smaller budgets than operas and ballets.<sup>111</sup>

Vsevolodskii-Gerngross even classifies opera and ballet sets and drama sets into two different categories: 1) opera and ballet; 2) spoken drama.<sup>112</sup> According to his findings, stage designs were integral

<sup>110</sup> "The painting techniques were hardly used for set designs in the 18th century. The graphic frameworks were hardly colored."

"Средства живописи в декорационном искусстве XVIII века почти не использовались. Графический остов расцвечивался скупо." Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 193.

<sup>111</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>112</sup> "Russian theatre of the second half of the 18th century had two genres of set designs. One is still used, till this day, in opera and ballet, and the other one is used in spoken drama. The first genre is accurately described by the concept of "decoration" [*dekoratsiia*], namely "means of decoration." Such sets with perspective projections are of the same type as in the 1730-40s. Set designs for comedies and comic operas were simple, they did not serve for decoration purpose but merely pointed out a location. Set designs for tragedies were a sort of transitional type. They were simpler than opera and ballet sets but more elaborate than comedy sets because action usually took place in palace chambers. The unity of place was initially observed, as one set design was used for a whole play." "Для русского театра второй половины XVIII века характерны два оформительских жанра. Один применяется и до нашего времени в оперно-балетном театре, другой – в драматическом. Первый жанр точно определяется понятием «декорация», то есть «средство украшения» спектакля. Это перспективные декорации того же типа, что были и в 30-40х годах XVIII века. Декорации к комедиям и комическим операм отличались простотой; они служили не для украшения спектакля, а для определения места действия.

for opera and ballet performances, whereas the drama sets initially simply pointed out the setting. From all the factual materials, I conclude that opera and ballet sets were indistinguishable from the Western examples, and comedy and sentimental drama were the genres that contributed the most to the developing sets that showed recognizably Russian urban and rural settings. The sets for tragedies were in a transitional state. When the unity of place was still observed, paintings of symmetrical palaces were the only sets used for each tragedy.

It appears that the Russian-themed sets first appeared on stage for comedies and then influenced the historical genre. However, the first Russian-style historical sets appeared later in Sentimentalist historical drama, in the early 19th century. Similarly, comedies allowed more creativity with props. For tragedies, props were very minimal: a throne, swords, daggers, goblets.<sup>113</sup> Sentimental dramas and comedies recreated familiar interiors on stage with furniture and kitchen utensils.<sup>114</sup> As mentioned above, the comic characters could do various things on stage, even blow soap bubbles.

*Dimitrii the Pretender* was staged by the Moscow state theatres, and was popular in the soldier and the people's theatres.<sup>115</sup> We may assume that its productions were limited by budgetary concerns and used modest sets. Yet, it is very important to realize the sheer mastery of staging that both European and Russian theatres were capable of, when allowed a sufficient budget. Before cinema, theatre was the main

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Декорации в трагедиях занимали как бы промежуточное положение. Они были проще оперно-балетных, но наряднее комедийных, так как действие обычно происходило в дворцовых покоях. При этом первоначально соблюдалось единство места – декорация была одна на весь спектакль.” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka.*, 189.

<sup>113</sup> “Tragic actors played their roles while standing; besides an armchair, no furniture or accessories were present on stage. Only a few objects were used as props: daggers, swords, goblets, and letters.”

“Трагедийные актёры играли стоя; на сцене, кроме кресла, не было никакой мебелировки, никаких аксессуаров. Из бутафории и реквизита применялись лишь немногие предметы: кинжалы, мечи, кубки, письма.” Ibid., 157.

<sup>114</sup> “Thus, new types of set designs appeared in the adaptations of comedies: an ordinary room with furniture, utensils, and dishes; or a simple rural landscape.”

“Так и в постановочную практику комедий входили новые декорационные сюжеты: обыкновенная комната с обстановкой, мебелью, утварью и посудой, простой сельский пейзаж.” Ibid., 191.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 259.

art responsible for illusion and special effects that aimed at the experience of immersion. The complicated stage machinery could make things fly or pop up from below. As early as in the court theatre of the 17th century, such effects were used as, for example, showing Joseph's scriptural dream vision as shadow play on white cloth or spilling fake blood when a character was murdered.<sup>116</sup> It was possible to imitate rain, smoke, and thunderstorms on stage.<sup>117</sup> Sound machines could imitate howling wind, stormy sea, or horses galloping away.<sup>118</sup>

The most pompous productions that used all the most advanced effects were always big events at court, sponsored and even organized by the empresses themselves (Anna, Elizabeth, and Catherine II). These performances had political significance and celebrated the Russian empire and its power. For example, in the aforementioned ballet scripted by Sumarokov, *The Haven of Virtue*, the description of the setting has the figure of Virtue sailing to the Russian shores, and then the sea had to turn into a magnificent building. The Russian eagle was then supposed to descend from the clouds and symbolize the

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<sup>116</sup> "The stage effects, used for this adaptation, are interesting. Joseph's dream was presented through a "cloth," as shadows. On the cloth, one could see seven fat cows and seven lean cows, and the harvesting scene... Besides, there is a description of how to build a ditch, "where Joseph should sit, and how to make paper wool of sheep and goats, and how to make one goat appear as alive, with wool. Under his throat, there should be a bubble filled with red wine. When the goat is killed, the wine should splash, as if it were blood, and that should not be seen [by spectators.]"

"Интересны сценические эффекты, применённые при постановке. Сон Иосифа изображался сквозь «полотно», т.е. на транспаранте. На полотне показывались семь тучных и семь тощих коров, изображалась сцена жатвы... Кроме того, описано, как сделать ров, «где Иосифа посадить, и овец сделать шесть и коз шесть из бумаги, да одного козла сделать таким образом, как живого с шерстью. Под горлом пузырь, который бы налит бы красным вином. Как заколют, чтобы вино вместо руды вышло, а было бы не видеть на колёсах." Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, V.N., *Russkii teatr ot istokov do serediny XVIII veka*. (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1960), 159.

<sup>117</sup> "There is another interesting stage machine, which was used to show rain. A trough with water hung over the stage, and a sieve was placed below. With the help of a cord, the water was poured from the trough to the sieve, and the thin streams of water fell down on stage."

"Интересно ещё одно сценическое преспособление, применявшееся Айрером для изображения дождя. К дереву подвешивалось корыто с водой, а под ним решето; с помощью шнура, привязанного к корыту, воду переливали оттуда в решето, а из решета мелкими струйками вода падала на сцену. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Istoriia teatral'nogo obrazovaniia v Rossii*, 83.

<sup>118</sup> Reconstructed for the exhibition at St. Petersburg Museum of Theatre and Musical Arts (Summer 2014).



patronage of sciences. It is true, though, that not all such descriptions were carried out in the actual productions.<sup>119</sup>

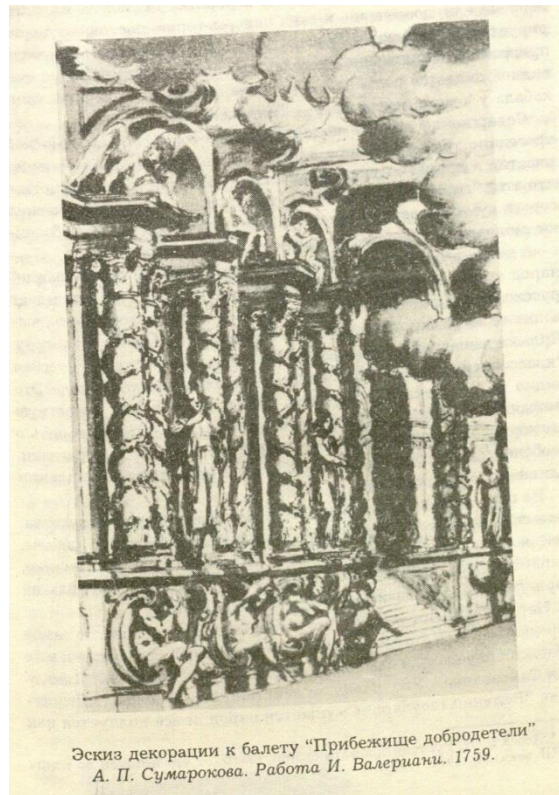


Fig. 1.7. I. Valeriani. A drawing of the set for Sumarokov's ballet *The Haven of Virtue*.

Catherine II left directing remarks for her own play *The Beginning of Oleg's Reign* (*Nachal'noe upravlenie Olega*) that glorified her wars with Turkey. For the second-act sets, she envisioned a meadow and the Dnepr River, with a part of Kiev on the opposite bank, and the mountains on the horizon. The costumes had to be made of fine fabrics and embroidered with gold and pearls, and the ritual dancing had to be performed with precision.<sup>120</sup> Thus, Russian national color and folk rituals were also celebrated as the part of Russian imperial identity.

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<sup>119</sup> "We should remember that set designers rarely followed all the remarks left by authors."

"Следует лишь иметь в виду, что авторские ремарки далеко не всегда и не полностью реализовывались декораторами." Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, *Russkii teatr vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, 158.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.



#### 1.4.4 The Reception of Russian Historical Plays

Early in his life, Sumarokov was more interested in creating French-style court theatre. The court welcomed his first dramas, such as *Khorev* and *Sinav and Truvor*. As discussed earlier in the chapter, *Dimitrii the Pretender*, as a tragedy, marked a shift from the limited audience of high society toward more diverse audiences, such as the gentry, urban merchants, craftsmen, and soldiers. This play can be seen as the pinnacle in the development of Russian tragedy. It was one of the most popular plays outside of comedic entertaining genres, liked for its sublimity and intense emotional impact on the spectators. Nevertheless, audience accounts of the play are very scarce and fragmented. We may assume that the common people who became actors and musicians at the serf theatres were also acquainted with the play. The most interesting aspect of the public response is the universalism. I have not encountered 18th-century accounts that commented on the mixing of European and Russian elements. Rather, they celebrated the spread of theatre as a popular pastime, simply rejoicing in the fact that Russia's noble society was joining the ranks of refined Europeans who enjoyed civilized entertainment.<sup>121</sup> The moral and educational role of theatre was at the center.

The few accounts by foreigners that I managed to find assess the Russian project of theatre quite positively. For example, the British ambassador Maccartney recalled that he enjoyed Sumarokov's version of *Hamlet*. Unconcerned about the total remaking, the ambassador defines this *Hamlet* as a good imitation and a suitable adaptation for the Russian stage: "English Ambassador (1764-66) at the Russian court Sir Maccartney wrote about our theatre: 'I watched with pleasure the performances of *Hamlet* and *Merope*, even though these plays are no more than imitations, they are wonderfully adapted for Russian stage... Sumarokov reformed Russian theatre in terms of decency, rules, the richness of sets...'"<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> In his 1804 article "An Essay on Education in Relation to Russia" ("Опыт о просвещении относительно к России)," P. I. Pnin compared theatres to schools in their enlightening and educational mission: "With rational supervision, theatre may influence general education no less than schools that are established for this purpose." "[Т]еатры, при благоразумном попечении, не менее могут иметь влияния на успехи всеобщего образования, как и училища, для сего заводимые." Quoted in: Vochkarev, V.A., *Russkaia istoricheskaia dramaturgiia nachala XIX veka (1800-1815)* (Kuibyshev, 1959), 27.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in: Varneke, 124. (My translation). The original source of the quote: *Russkaia Starina*. 1887, No. 9, 522.

Curiously, the most holistic account of a Russian 18th-century stage production belongs to the French diplomat Charles Masson,<sup>123</sup> who was astonished by the incredibly extravagant production of Catherine's own play about the founders of old Rus':

Among the dramatical pieces of her composition, and which she caused to be acted in the theatres of Petersburg, one was of a novel species: it being neither tragedy, nor comedy, nor opera, nor play but a miscellany of all sorts of scenes, and entitled: O L E G, *an historical representation*. Upon the celebration of the last piece with the Turks, it was got up by her direction with extraordinary pomp and the most magnificent decorations: upwards of seven hundred performers appearing on the stage. The subject is entirely drawn from Russian history, and comprises an entire epocha of it. In the first act, *Oleg* lays a foundation of Mosco; in the second, he is at Kief where he marries [off] his pupil *Igor*, and settles him on the throne. The ancient ceremonies observed upon the marriage of the tzars furnish an opportunity for introducing some striking scenes, and the national dances and sports, which are exhibited, produce a number of pleasing pictures. *Oleg* then sets out upon an expedition against the Greeks: he is seen filing off with his army, and embarking. In the third act, he is at Constantinople. The emperor Leo, obliged to sign a truce, received the barbarian hero with the greatest magnificence. He is seen feasting at his table, while various companies of young Greeks, boys and girls, sing in choirs to his praise, and exhibit before him the ancient dances of Greece. The next scenic decoration represents the hippodrome, where *Oleg* is entertained with the spectacle of the Olympic games. Another theatre then rises at the far end of the stage, and some scenes from Euripides are played before the court. At length, *Oleg* takes leave of the emperor, fastening his shield to a pillar in testimony of his visit and to invite his successors to return one day to Constantinople.

The piece is truly Russian and particularly emblematical of the character of Catharine: her favourite projects are represented in it, and the design of subjugating Turkey is alluded to, even when celebrating a peace with that country. Properly speaking, the performance is nothing more than a magic lantern, exhibiting different objects in succession to the eye of the spectator: but to me such exhibitions, in which the great events of history are introduced as in a picture on the stage, are more interesting than the strainings of the throat of our opera singers, and the amorous intrigues of our tragedies.<sup>124</sup>

We may assume that such pompous stage events were developed partially with the motive to surprise foreigners at the court, in order to demonstrate the political and cultural advancement of Russia and to introduce them to Russian folk customs. As we can see, the fantastically reworked materials from

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<sup>123</sup> Masson lived in St. Petersburg for many years and had a chance to observe Catherine II and her close circle. His *Secret Memoirs* discuss not just the politics but also Catherine's private life in great detail. This book was widely read at the turn of the 19th century, as it enjoyed several editions and was translated into English. I have discovered this account by pure chance. To my knowledge, this source on Russian theatre has never been researched before.

<sup>124</sup> Masson, Charles. *Secret Memoirs of the Court of Petersburg Particularly towards the End of the Reign of Catharine II and the Commencement of that of Paul I.* Trans from French. In 2 vols., Vol 1. (London, 1801), 73-75. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc1.1010692983;view=1up;seq=1> (Accessed on December 11, 2016).

Russian history were deemed very suitable for such tasks. It is unclear how aware Masson is about the vast historical inaccuracies, but he immediately understands the transparent message of imperial “propaganda.” Politically, it obviously refers to Russia’s position as the Third Rome (the medieval doctrine suddenly reappears), and justifies the expansion and the conquest of Turkish territories and Constantinople (Istanbul), the Second Rome. Culturally, it emphasizes the connection of Russian theatre to the Neoclassical ideal model, ancient Greek tragedy. Interestingly, Masson praised the performance as “uniquely Russian.” The performance unprecedentedly blended several art forms and involved dozens of actors. The Olympic games and the play enacted within a play are astounding, even if overbearing. Overall, this production is multifunctional. It is a demonstration of the techniques learned from European theatres and the representation of the vast and sublime Russian empire. It reveals the unstable and utterly eclectic aesthetics of the period that allowed free play with its different elements. I see this combination of eclecticism, free creativity, and imperial agenda as the first specifically national characteristics of the early modern Russian theatre.

## 1.5 CONCLUSION

The first secular Russian plays that marked the birth of modern theatre in Russia were modeled on French Neoclassical tragedies, but concentrated on the events and rulers from Russian history that marked the fundamental shifts for the Russian state and power. The characteristic features of this first period were extensive borrowing, the mixing of different European traditions (French, English, Italian), and eclectic aesthetics that resulted in experimental elements used for some theatrical productions. This eclecticism can be viewed as the first “national” characteristic of Russian theatre.

Sumarokov’s *Dimitrii the Pretender*, one of the most successful Russian Neoclassical tragedies, introduces the tragic and unstable Time of Troubles and the ever controversial Pretender into Russian literature and dramaturgy. This setting would come to dominate Russian historical drama for the next 150 years. Sumarokov combined the formal features of French tragedy with the intensity of Shakespearean

chronicles, and created a play where the sublime tyrant overpowers the positive and enlightened characters.

Historical settings are inevitably socially and politically charged. *Dimitrii* marked Sumarokov's growing disagreements with Catherine and her circle. Kniazhnin radically questioned the system of monarchy in his *Vadim Novgorodskii*. On the contrary, Catherine uses historical settings for her overtly tendentious theatrical projects that glorified her politics and cultural patronage.

On stage, stylized declamation and the somewhat rigid French acting was appreciated by many and mastered by some founders of Russian acting, such as Dmitrevskii, but never became widespread. Other actors, such as Plavilshchikov, advocated more passionate acting, and the comedians frequently drew on Russian folk acting and Italian improvisation. The borrowed European techniques co-existed with the consistent attempts to incorporate recognizably Russian elements from the pre-Petrine and contemporary urban and folk culture, first in comedy and sentimental drama, and then in historical tragedy. The interest in Russian history and the "proto-national" agenda will intensively develop in the subsequent cultural epoch.

## CHAPTER 2: SEEKING AND FORGING NATION AND “NARODNOST” IN HISTORICAL DRAMA (1800S-1840S)

### 2.1 PROBLEMATIZATION OF MODERN RUSSIAN IDENTITY DURING 1780S-1800S

In Chapter 1, I demonstrated that the first Russian historical dramas, written in the 18th century, began as the celebration of Russia’s venerable ancient origins. History was not distinguishable from national mythology in many plays that were set in the half-legendary times of the first rulers of Kievan Rus’. Historical relevance was not important to the first playwrights, Sumarokov and Kniazhnin. An ancient setting appeared suitable for the depiction of tormented characters and their stories told within the conventions of Neoclassical tragedy. The rulers from Russian historical narratives were presented as the noble tragic protagonists, analogous to the Greek and Roman heroes in French tragedy. However, the fact itself of turning to the history of Rus’ and medieval Russia gave these plays some „proto-national“ overtones. Later but still within the same cultural epoch, Kniazhnin in his *Vadim Novgorodskii* and Sumarokov in his *Dimitrii the Pretender* used historical figures and events as premises to create acute tragic conflicts and powerful characters, and explore the categories of tyranny, law, and freedom in the universalizing fashion of the Enlightenment.

The question of the international status of Russian culture becomes a sore subject as early as in the 1770s. European travel narratives became one of the major impulses for that. The majority of them were very overt and unapologetic about Russia’s backwardness and barbarity, and mocked the idea of “new Russia”’s civilizational equality with the West. *A Journey to Siberia* (1770) by Chappe D’Auroche, for instance, caused such a stir in Russia that a rebuttal was published, in which Empress Catherine actively participated. It was titled *Antidote, or The Examination of a Malign book, Excellently Issued under the the Title „A Journey to Siberia...“*<sup>125</sup> Such European travel books were probably written without the Russian

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<sup>125</sup> “Противоядие, или Проверка дурной книги, превосходно изданной под заглавием ,Путешествие в Сибирь...” Stennik, Yu. V., *Idea “drevnei” i “novoi” Rossii v literature i obshchestvennoi mysli XVIII – nachala XIX veka* (Sankt-Peterburg: Nauka, 2004), 144.

audience in mind but educated Russians read and discussed them. The Russian reading public gradually became very much aware of the disparity between their own perceptions of newly achieved equality with European nations and the almost ubiquitous denial of that equality found in the European writings on Russia.

Yurii Stennik notes that writer Denis Fonvizin engaged in discussions of Russian national character. The scholar quotes the dialog between Fonvizin and Catherine II that was printed in a journal titled *A Companion for the Lovers of Russian Language* [*Sobesednik liubitelei russkogo slova*]. In a peculiar format, Fonvizin sent questions to Empress. After that, the journal printed the questions and her answers. One of the questions was about the national character: “20. What is our national character? ... Sharp and quick understanding of everything, exemplary docility, and the root of all the virtues given to men by the Creator.”<sup>126</sup> Stennik then analyzes the implications of this exchange and states that, in a way, Fonvizin gave an examination concerning Russian mentality to Catherine, who herself was German. She cleverly answered to her own advantage: “For Catherine II, who was German by nationality, it was an examination of her understanding of the Russian nation’s spirit. ... In fact, she made a programmatic statement about the ideal traits in Russian character.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, a Russian monarch contributes into the establishment of the concept of “Russian character.” Catherine based her argument on a popular idea that Russian people were very good at learning new things, as I am going to demonstrate below. Catherine articulates docility (implying, among other things, obedience to high power) as a Russian “national” characteristic. This was written a few years before the French Revolution, and Catherine already propagated the idea of Russian predisposition to monarchy. Stennik does not address the fact that this is a very early usage of the term “national character” in print. Also, “nation” was not a common term for the cultural discourse until much later.

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<sup>126</sup> “20. В чём состоит наш национальный характер? ... В остром и скором понятии всего, в образцовом послушании и в корени всех добродетелей, от Творца человеку данных.” Quoted in: Stennik, 144.

<sup>127</sup> “Для Екатерины II, немки по национальности, это был экзамен на понимание духа русской нации ... Она фактически программировала представление об идеальных свойствах характера русского человека...” Ibid., 145.

In the 1790s, some writers were already under the influence of the fledging idea of national originality and anxiously realized how much in their contemporary Russian culture was directly borrowed from the West, including the whole concept of „theatre.“ Some early ruminations on the originality of Russian character and art belong to an actor and journalist, Piotr Plavilshchikov. He became famous for his roles in tragedies, the least original genre of Russian drama. His article titled “Something on the Innate Qualities of Russian Souls,”<sup>128</sup> written in 1792, offers a terminologically vague but surprisingly accurate extract of modern-era nationalist and imperial ideas that became widespread in the 19th century. This piece can almost be seen as programmatic for the subsequent wave of patriotic historical dramas. Plavilshchikov addresses the accusations of the backwardness and imitative nature of Russian culture and proclaims Russian supremacy, instead. His article opens with a passionate polemic against Western writings on Russia:

If the people of Russia were distinct from all the earthly tribes only by imitation and had no other abilities, then how would they manage to surprise the world that is looking at them with jealous eyes? The Whole of Europe, the capital of learnedness and taste, involuntarily does justice to Russia, - admires her virtues that do not exist outside Russia. If learning meant only imitation, then all the sciences would fall long ago because imitation is always weaker than its original. Where there is no creative spirit, there is no [new] production, but we can observe the totally opposite: sciences are becoming more perfect with every passing hour; a disciple can be much more knowledgeable than his teacher. Thus, we can see that, even though the people of Russia have borrowed some knowledge from foreigners, this is no proof that they only imitate.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> “Нечто о врождѣнном свойстве душ российских”

<sup>129</sup> “Если бы российский народ отличался от всех племен земнородных единым только подражанием и никакой другой способности не имел, то чем бы он мог удивить вселенную, которая смотрит на него завистными глазами? Вся Европа, столица учености и вкуса, противу воли своей во многом отдает справедливость России, — восхищается добродетелями ее, которых вне России нет. Если учиться — значит только подражать, то давно бы науки упали, поелику подражание всегда бывает слабее своего подлинника: где нет творческого духа, там нет и произведения; но мы видим совсем тому противное: науки час от часу приходят в совершенство; ученик бывает несравненно знающее своего учителя; из чего видно, что когда россияне заняли некоторые познания от иностранцев, сие не доказывает, что они только подражают.” Plavilshchikov, P.A., “Nechto o vrozhdennom svoistve dush rossiiskikh.” In Plavilshchikov, P.A. *Sobraniie dramaticheskikh sochinenii*. (Sankt-Peterburg: Giperion, 2002), 636.

We can see the great shift that occurred in a few decades. Sumarokov saw Russian culture as a part of universal context, whereas Plavilshchikov is concerned about Russia's distinct cultural identity and its contribution into the Western culture rather than only participation in it.

Plavilshchikov offers Russia's military power and imperial conquest as additional evidence for its equality with the Western states. He boldly states that Russian people are the bravest warriors and the most merciful victors. These ideas foreshadow the official ideologies that would be built around the defensive wars, such as the Napoleonic wars. Like so many patriotic dramas later, Plavilshchikov's rhetoric is reminiscent of grandiose odic style.<sup>130</sup>

Importantly, Plavilshchikov criticizes the predominance of foreign materials in the education of Russian nobility and calls for using Russian history in teaching children and cultivating patriotism: "Ask a youngling about *Alexander the Great, Julius, Cicero, Voltaire, Vestris, Lekain*, and he will, at least, say something. But not a word about *Riurik or Vladimir*."<sup>131</sup> This article provides a good context for understanding the success of Ozerov and Kriukovskii's historical dramas in the 1800s. The fact itself that ancient Russian princes and war heroes, such as Dmitrii Donskoi or Pozharskii, were shown on stage was refreshing and satisfying for the audience.

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<sup>130</sup> "I want to ask the entire world: whom did Peter the Great imitate in his fearlessness, in his determination for his great projects, in the unparalleled quickness of his eyes that surveyed everything at a glance, in creating the solid foundation for his subjects' bliss, in the projects surpassing almost the whole of mankind? ...Let them provide evidence: whom Russians imitate when they take up arms against the enemies of their Tsar and, therefore, of their Fatherland? Who could withstand the bravery of Russians? Everyone ran from them; they inherit only the glory. Who is more dreadful than them in fight, and who is more merciful to the defeated? ...Is it possible at all to learn this? ...No! A mortal can only be born with such traits."

"Я хочу спросить у всего света: кому подражал Петр Великий в неустрашимости, в твёрдости великих своих предприятий, в неимоверной быстроте объёмлющий всё единым взором очес, в создании на незабываемом основании блаженства подданных своих, в предприятиях почти человечество превышающих? ...Пусть докажут мне, кому подражают россияне, когда ополчаются на врагов Государя и, следовательно, Отечества? Кто устоял против мужества россиян? Перед ними все бежало; едина слава на следах у них. Кто ужаснее россиянина в сражении, и кто милосерднее его к побежденному? ...А сему разве можно научиться? ...Нет! С этим свойством должно родиться смертному." Plavilshchikov, 635.

<sup>131</sup> "Спроси у сего птенца об *Александре Великом, об Юлии, о Цицероне, о Вольтере, о Вестрисе, о Ле Кен*, он еще нечто скажет. Но о *Рюрике, о Владимире* ни слова." Ibid.



In 1804, critic Andrei Turgenev explicitly recommended writing plays about Russian history. He thought that they would provoke a much stronger emotional response from the audience than some widespread plays based on the Greek and Roman mythology and history:

It has long been time for our writers to present the downfall of Novgorod instead of the downfall of Troy. [It is time] to present Marfa Posadnitsa who doesn't want to live after Novgorod's freedom is gone instead of a heroic Spartan mother who is happy that her son has died for their fatherland. Who wouldn't be interested in seeing their ancestors coming alive (even if only on stage)? The public is yawning at *Titus's Mercy* but will never get bored of *Dimitrii the Pretender*.<sup>132</sup>

At that time, Sumarokov's play *Dimitrii the Pretender* still remained popular, and Nikolai Karamzin and his circle had already launched the new historical trend. Karamzin's novella *Natalya the Boyar's Daughter* was written in 1792. It is very likely that Turgenev is thinking about the dramatization of Karamzin's other story, *Marfa Posadnitsa*, that came out in 1802. However, the Time of Troubles soon became the preferred era for the playwrights.

Turgenev articulated quite a popular opinion because several Russian historical plays appeared in print and on stage in the coming years, such as *Dimitrii the Pretender* (1804) by Dmitrii Narezhnyi, *Pozharskii* (1806) by Matvei Kriukovskii, and *Dimitrii Donskoi* (1807) by Vladislav Ozerov. The first war with France during 1805-06 triggered big interest in the heroic dramas of Kriukovskii and Ozerov that depicted the Russian heroes fighting against the foreign invaders. These plays contributed to the early development of nationalist sentiment that preceded the later debates about national art and Russian identity.

Starting in the 1820s, one of the most important and most discussed aspects for historical drama was the category of *narodnost*'. According to David Cooper, the term "narodnost'" was coined by Piotr

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<sup>132</sup> "Давно бы пора нашим артистам, - пишет А.И. Тургенев, - вместо разорения Трои представить разорение Новгорода; вместо той героической спартанки, радующейся, что сын её убит за отечество, - Марфу Посадницу, которая не хочет пережить вольности Новгородской... Кому не интересно видеть своих праотцов оживлённых (хотя бы то было и на сцене)? Публика зевает на «Титовом милосердии», но «Димитрий самозванец» ей никогда не наскучит." Quoted in: Rodina, T.M., "Vvedenie" // Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol 2. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1977), 268.

Viazemsky in his 1819 letter to Andrei Turgenev.<sup>133</sup> Even though the word had existed before that, it was rarely used and had not functioned as a cultural concept. The term quickly took off to become central in the heated debates about the national qualities of Russian literature during 1820s and 30s. However, I demonstrate that the surprisingly systematic and modern proto-nationalist discourse and the concerns about the creative independence of Russian culture existed 2-3 decades before the word “narodnost” was established in the critical discourse.

Before the term *narodnost*’ was found and established, the journal writers and dramatists already grappled with the problem of Russian identity and national character during 1770s-1800s. The discourse on Russian identity and “character” emerged since the late 18th century as a reaction to the French Revolution, the wars with Napoleon, and to the European, mainly French, critique of Russia’s civilizational development. I maintain that the nationalist, nominally historical, dramas of the first decade of the 19th century manifest early national sentiment, in the form of cultural nationalism, that becomes the foundation for the national discourse of the Romantic writers and critics.

Long before the abstract idea of *narodnost*’ was formulated, the *narod* literally began to appear in Russian plays, for example, in Sumarokov’s rewriting of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1748) where the people burst into the palace and demand Hamlet be crowned as the rightful king. By the 1800s, the city square scene with anonymous voices from the *narod* became a characteristic feature of Russian dramas with a historical setting, even though they remained largely pseudo-historical.<sup>134</sup> Still, a sheer number of such

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<sup>133</sup> “Credit for “inventing” the word as a term of literary criticism ... has been traditionally assigned to Prince Petr Vyazemsky (1792-1878)” Cooper, David L. *Creating the Nation: Identity and Aesthetics in Early Nineteenth-Century Bohemia and Russia*, (Evanston, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 2010), 166.

<sup>134</sup> Bochkarev names the insufficient interest toward Russian local color, the absence of a broad historical perspective, and the rigidity of neoclassical poetics as the three factors that make the discussed plays only nominally “historical”:

“The biggest of the shortcomings is almost entire absence of national color ... in the plays that depict Russian history. Recreating foreign life and customs on the basis of existing sources, Russian playwrights showed insufficient interest in those, though scarce, materials about everyday life and customs that historical studies had discovered at the time. The moral and political criteria, that the authors used to assess their characters’ actions, were vague and arbitrary. The playwrights’ inclination to observe the Neoclassical rules for tragedies also impeded them from observing the historical truth.”

“Крупнейшим из этих недостатков являлось почти полное отсутствие национального колорита ... в пьесах,

dramas does demonstrate a concern about a distinct Russian identity. The turn to pre-Petrine Russia automatically signified “the national” because pre-18th-century Russia embodied the authenticity and self-sufficiency that had to be lost for the sake of westernization: “Every culture wants to be self-sufficient and use this imaginary self-sufficiency in order to shine forth on the others and appropriate their patrimony...”<sup>135</sup> The early 17th-century Muscovites who shunned foreign customs, knowledge, and faith are a perfect example of such imaginary self-sufficiency, which Russian culture could not boast as much after Peter the Great. Also, because the reforms did not touch the common people, the *narod* turned into the signifier of the national authenticity that was preserved through the centuries. In the imitative and tendentiously patriotic dramas of the 1800s and 1810s, the mere presence of the *narod* channeled the national and patriotic sentiment that was welcomed by the spectators.

By the 1820s, the popularity of those dramas subsided and their portrayal of Russian themes was deemed artificial and not genuinely national. The writers and critics began the quest for “true” *narodnost*. Many of those who attempted to conceptualize *narodnost*’s (Viazemsky, Somov, or Pushkin) agreed about one aspect of it, namely, its cultural novelty and progressive value linked to the rediscovery of the national past and affirming the continuity of the national history and identity. As David Cooper notes, “...functionally, in its use in Russian criticism, *narodnost*’ operated as a collector of all those qualities that marked the national individuality of Russian literature – just what those qualities were was

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написанных на темы из русской истории. Воспроизводя на основе имевшихся источников иноземные быт и нравы, русские драматурги проявляли недостаточный интерес к тем, правда, довольно скудным материалам, которыми располагала в области изучения быта и нравов тогдашняя историческая наука. ... Зыбкими и произвольными [были] те морально-политические критерии, которыми руководствовались драматурги при оценке поступков своих героев... Соблюдению исторической истины нередко препятствовало и стремление драматургов неукоснительно выполнять при написании трагедий правила классицизма.” Bochkarev, V.A., *Russkaia istoricheskaia dramaturgiia nachala XIX veka (1800-1815)* (Kuibyshev, 1959), 452-453.

Bochkarev analyzes the literary process from the perspective of vulgar Soviet Marxism. Thus, he classifies all the playwrights as “conservative” or “progressive.” For the scholar, Neoclassical poetics is the most conservative and backward, Romantic movement is more progressive, and Realist poetics is the best and most preferable. However, this book contains very valuable factual data on historical drama.

<sup>135</sup> Antoine Berman, quoted in: Cooper, 182.

the subject of much disagreement.”<sup>136</sup> The aesthetically conservative writers as well as the Decembrists still understood *narodnost*’ and historical themes quite mechanically, as they used historical plots and figures to advance their agenda that ranged from conservative to oppositional.

The first half of the 19th century saw a seminal shift in the poetics of historical drama, from a mythological understanding of history and superficially visual representations of it on stage toward a new approach that required a degree of historical accuracy and entailed Romantic creative originality. This shift occurred thanks to Alexander Pushkin and his followers, Mikhail Pogodin and Aleksey Khomiakov. Khomiakov and Pogodin both wrote dramas about Dmitrii the Pretender under the influence of *Boris Godunov*.

Nevertheless, the Time of Troubles was also used as a setting for the historical dramas written in the 1820s and 30s that made explicit politically conservative statements. During the Time of Troubles, the dynastic crisis and the absence of a legitimate tsar put Muscovy on the brink of the civil war and brought the Pretender who had connections with the Polish nobility and was very tolerant toward the Catholic faith. After the Nizhnii-Novgorod militia’s campaign and the election of Mikhail Romanov, the turmoil subsided. In these events that ended the Time of Troubles, 19th-century patriotic writers, such as Nestor Kukol’nik, found the perfect expression of *narodnost*’, understood as political conservatism and patriotism. That era suited very well to celebrate the early consolidation of modern Russian nation, the monarchical idea, and the establishment of the Romanov dynasty. Nicholas I and his officials could fashion their conservative slogan “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality [*Narodnost*’]” in the 1830s with the help of the patriotic dramas about Pozharskii, Minin, and the election of Mikhail Romanov. I argue that theatre not only helped promote the nationalist agenda but also was one of the most important cultural tools for shaping it. The patriotic dramas consolidated the collective national sentiment.

In terms of its poetics, Russian historical drama of 1800s-1840s is defined by eclecticism and a tension between the search for originality and the continued absorption, study, and internalization of

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<sup>136</sup> Cooper, 165.

European models. Approaches to writing and staging dramas were incredibly eclectic. The main influences include Russian 18th-century Neoclassical drama (even though harshly criticized by the supporters of Romanticism since the 1820s), the Russian tradition of odic poetry, European sentimental melodrama, European Romantic drama, Shakespeare reinterpreted by the Romantics, and, importantly, ancient Greek and Roman drama perceived through the tradition of French Neoclassicism.

The whole relationship of early 19th-century Russian culture to Neoclassical aesthetics needs to be re-evaluated, especially for the history of theatre and dramatic arts. In Soviet scholarship, historical dramas were inscribed into the teleological narrative of developing Realism.<sup>137</sup> As a result, Soviet scholars often interpreted the early 19th-century critique of some versions and aspects of Neoclassicism as a complete rejection of Neoclassical aesthetics. They equated Neoclassicism to political conservatism, whereas Romanticism came to signify the opposition to tsardom. While the situation was much more complicated, the politically conservative dramatists did, in fact, adhere to Neoclassicism the most. Many of them were minor playwrights who wrote derivative pieces under the strong influence of precisely Russian, not French, Neoclassicism and its odic idealization. Because of such writers, Neoclassical poetics in drama came to be associated with servile and uncreative, explicitly para-governmental plays. Among the „teatraly“<sup>138</sup> of the 1800s-20s, Russian Neoclassical drama and its recent patriotic versions were seen as derivative, dated, and embarrassing.

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<sup>137</sup> G.P. Makogonenko provides a typical Soviet Marxist interpretation of the cultural development in the preface to the collection of essays “Russkie dramaturgy”:

“During the four decades, Neoclassicism was the dominant literary movement. Starting in the mid-1760s, the situation began to change. Neoclassical literature was now less able to respond to the demands of time. Writers, such as enlighteners and *raznochintsy*, began to search the new paths in art. ...The crisis of Neoclassicism began.”

“В течение четырёх десятилетий классицизм был господствующим литературным направлением. С середины 1760-х годов положение начало меняться. Всё менее могла отвечать требованиям времени литература классицизма. Писатели-просветители и писатели-разночинцы стали искать иных путей в искусстве. ...Начался кризис классицизма.”

Макогоненко, Г.П., “Предисловие” // Бердников, Г.П. ed. *Russkie dramaturgi XVII-XIX vv.*, in 3 vols., Vol. 1 (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1969), 21.

<sup>138</sup> Catherin Schuler uses the word “teatraly” as a term and convincingly shows how “teatraly” formed a kind of self-aware circle of writers, critics, and educated theatre buffs: “The *znatoki teatra* – or *teatraly*, as they came to be known, represented a new social type born in the first decade of the nineteenth century. ... Due in large part to the enthusiasm of *teatraly* for all aspects of plays and production, theatre became a frequent topic of the

The early 19th century in Russia also saw the Renaissance-like discovery of Greek and Roman heritage and the continued establishment of classical education. Translations of plays from the various theatrical traditions (ancient Greek, French, Shakespearean) were seen as utterly important by theatre theorists. Ozerov and Katenin's Russian versions of Greek and Roman dramas were highly appreciated and seen as formative for Russian theatre. The concept of "national" actor first appeared and entailed the ability to emulate foreign acting styles as well as project an actor's own "Russian character."<sup>139</sup>

In stage productions, the attitude to „national“ and „historical“ color remained fairly mechanical throughout the great part of the 19th century. „Russianness“ was created by using any non-Western visuals: pre-Petrine or lower-class traditional costumes or simply their elements, background paintings of Russian churches, traditional interiors. The whole pre-Petrine and folk aesthetic was so distinct from the borrowed Western culture that any element from it was easily recognized and became a theatrical marker of „Russianness“ or *narodnost'*. The conflation between classical Greek and Roman and Russian elements in costumes and props continued as well as the influence of current fashions, the latter being especially true for actresses. The cultural elites were already so Westernized in their tastes that they would not tolerate accurate representations of the lower-class on stage, be it clothes, speech, or manners, especially in such a serious genre as historical drama. This is a peculiar struggle where authentic Russian expressions were also perceived as low and vulgar.<sup>140</sup> The preference for „high style,“ verse, and highly decorative visuals perennially defined the genre of historical drama on stage and even later, in film.

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conversations, dialogues, and disputes that arose in various salons, *kruzhki*, and even the occasional coffeehouse in St. Petersburg and Moscow.” Schuler, Catherine, *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 66.

<sup>139</sup> “...[Actors] Iakovlev and Semenova were framed by *znatoki teatra* as untutored native geniuses (*samorodki*)... [B]oth were thought to have great reservoirs of authentic emotive power; thus, in contrast to the studied artifice of the French, they seemed to embody (*perezhivat'*) rather than play (*igrat'*) their roles. On the basis of these shared characteristics, Iakovlev and Semenova quickly came to signify the inherent brilliance, cultural superiority, and uniqueness of the Russian people.” *Ibid.*, 62.

I discuss this perception of the actors in more detail in the last section of this chapter.

<sup>140</sup> I have found indirect evidence that authentic representations of poverty could not appear on stage. In 1867, the premier of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* featured the commoners in dirty, ragged clothes, which was celebrated as the new level of “artistic truth.” The contemporaries reacted like they had never seen such poverty

## 2.2. PATRIOTIC HISTORICAL DRAMA: HEROIC PATHOS IN MATVEI KRIUKOVSKII'S *POZHARSKII* (1806) AND MONARCHIC NATIONALISM IN NESTOR KUKOL'NIK'S *THE HAND OF GOD SAVED THE FATHERLAND* (1832)

In the early 19th century, Russian authors wrote a truly enormous number of plays, quite a few of which enjoyed big, even if short-lived, success in theatres. Some stayed on stage for a decade or more, for example, Ozerov's Russian rendition of the ancient Greek tragedy, *Oedipus in Athens*; Kriukovskii's patriotic drama *Pozharskii* set in the Time of Troubles; and Shakhovskoi's comedy from the everyday life of Russian high society, *The Lesson for Coquettes*. Still, the overwhelming majority of the plays have not retained their artistic value beyond their epoch. Most of them have been largely forgotten since the 1850s and are only interesting for scholarly purposes now.<sup>141</sup>

Many new plays had historical settings. Writers explored plots from ancient Greek and Roman history and mythology, Biblical narratives, and the different periods of Russian history. It seems that dramatists were eager to rework any interesting and previously unused episode from Russian or world history into a dramatic form. For example, Matvei Kriukovskii wrote the play *Elizaveta, Yaroslav's Daughter* set in 11th-century Rus'. The conservative minor author Sergei Glinka<sup>142</sup> penned such pieces as *Sumbeka, or The Destruction of Kazan*, which depicted the Russian conquest of the Tatar state in the 16th century, and *Mikhail, Prince of Chernigov* that told the story of the 14th-century Russian ruler who was murdered after he refused to worship Tatar idols. The playwright presented the protagonist as a Christian

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shown on stage: "...начиная от золотого, глазетового, унизанного драгоценными камнями облачения Иоанна до действительно грязных и разорванных полушубков и кожухов народа." Iampol'skii, I.G., "Pervaia postanovka 'Smerti Ioanna Groznogo' A. K. Tolstogo (1867)." In Iampol'skii, I.G., *Poety i prozaiki* (Leningrad: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1986), 242.

<sup>141</sup> Scholars Simon Karlinsky and Catherine Schuler champion Shakhovskoi as an underrated playwright and early director who deserves more attention from readers and scholars.

<sup>142</sup> There are three cultural figures with the last name *Glinka* in this chapter: Glinka, Sergei (1776-1847), a minor conservative Russian playwright and publicist. Glinka, Fyodor (1786-1880), his younger brother, also a minor writer, and a Decembrist. Glinka, Mikhail (1804-1857), a major classical Russian composer, known for his opera *Ivan Susanin* (1836).

martyr. Another writer, Fyodor Glinka created a quite popular play based on an episode from Dutch history titled *Velzen*, or *The Liberated Holland* (1810). The famous poet Gavrila Derzhavin also wrote a few unsuccessful plays. One of them is also about the Time of Troubles and is titled *Pozharskii*, or *The Liberation of Moscow*.<sup>143</sup> The examples of Derzhavin's other little-known plays are *Tyomnyi*, dedicated to the Russian feudal war of the 15th century, and *Atabalibo*, or *The Destruction of Peruvian Empire* based on Marmontel's history of the Spanish conquest in South America.<sup>144</sup> All these works have faded into complete obscurity. However, it is interesting that the earliest exploration of historical process in Russia are connected with stage performances.

I maintain that this fascination with historical narratives in theatre corresponded with the establishment of modern historiography and the academic and cultural concepts, such as historical process, historical color, and the Russian variation of "the national" formulated as *narodnost'*. At the same time, the concept of "historicity" was still in its infancy. On the one hand, the authors became more faithful to historical narratives and the personalities of historical figures, as they were described in the chronicles and old manuscripts. On the other hand, authentic historical documents were still used as mere inspirational sources for plotlines that were freely modified and reworked into mostly fictionalized narratives. The writers were also fascinated with the idea of historical parallels between ancient and contemporary monarchs, heroes, and warring countries.<sup>145</sup>

Despite such an unprecedented variety of settings, these and many other historical dramas display the similarities in their poetics, themes, and types of characters and plots. Almost all of them deal with the topic of fighting against foreign invaders or a tyrant. "The people" [*narod*] frequently appear in the plays. In some plays, none of which are discussed in this chapter, there was literally "the people's chorus"

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<sup>143</sup> Bochkarev, 377-382.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 392-400.

<sup>145</sup> The parallels between the Polish intervention of the early 17th century and the wars against France in the early 19th century are characteristic for all the patriotic dramas about the Time of Troubles written in this era.



analogous to a Greek chorus.<sup>146</sup> The motifs of divine providence, omens, and prophetic dreams are quite common. In accordance with sentimentalist fashion, the characters are more emotional and expressive than in the works of the earlier 18th-century authors. Yet, in accordance with the Neoclassical poetic, there is always a love intrigue and the struggle between feelings and duty in the minds of the noble protagonists.<sup>147</sup> Open moralizing, the “high” style of speaking, and topics dealing with whole countries and their rulers still dominate the stage, where the Neoclassical poetics perseveres.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> “An extremely prominent characteristic of Russian historical drama is the presence of choir in quite a few historical plays. It is known that the theorists of French Neoclassicism misunderstood the requirement of plausibility and, as a result, reproved the presence of choir in ancient tragedy. Choir is absent even in those French tragedies that are based on ancient plots. On the contrary, Russian authors include choirs not only in the tragedies based on classical plots ... but also when they depict Russian history. For example, V.A. Ozerov’s tragedy *Iaropolk and Oleg* features “the people’s choir.” ... Generally, analysis of the historical plays that feature the people’s choirs, confirms an opinion of critic Butyrskii who thought that introduction of choir was justified for those dramatic pieces that portrayed the fate of a whole country.”

“Чрезвычайно характерной особенностью русской исторической драматургии является наличие хора в целом ряде исторических пьес. Известно, что теоретики французского классицизма, исходя из дурно понятого требования о соблюдении правдоподобия, порицали наличие хора в античной трагедии. Хор отсутствует даже и в тех написанных французами трагедиях, в которых разрабатываются античные сюжеты. Наоборот, у русских авторов хор выступает не только в трагедиях, написанных на античные темы, ... но и в пьесах, посвящённых отечественной тематике. Например, “хор народный” имеется в трагедии В.А. Озерова “Ярополк и Олег” ... Вообще же анализ исторических драм, содержащих хор народа, подтверждает мнение критика Бутырского, полагавшего, что введение хора оправдано в тех драматических произведениях, в которых изображается судьба целого народа.” *Bochkarev*, 463.

<sup>147</sup> “Dramatists allowed themselves considerable deviation from historical facts because they exaggerated the role of the emotional expressions, since a love line was almost required for tragedies.”

“Серьёзное нарушение исторической истины допускалось драматургами благодаря тому преувеличению роли любовных переживаний, которое было связано с почти обязательной в трагедиях любовной интригой.” *Ibid.*, 454

<sup>148</sup> “Based on its content, historical drama required artistic forms that could express heroism and pathos of grand historic events. ... The authors of historical plays could not find such forms in Sentimentalist art, that was predominantly individualistic and intimate, so they naturally turned to Neoclassical dramatic forms, and thus, their existence in the genre [of tragedy] was considerably prolonged.”

“Историческая драма по самому своему содержанию требовала форм, способных выразить героизм и патетику великих исторических событий. ... Не находя таких форм в искусстве сентиментализма, в значительной мере индивидуалистическом и камерном, авторы исторических пьес совершенно естественно обратились к драматическим формам классицизма, историческое время которого было, таким образом, в данном жанре значительно продлено.” *Ibid.*, 469-470.

Historical themes remained an important trend in drama during 1790-1830s. The plays set in the Time of Troubles are the following: *Dimitrii the Pretender* (1804) by Dmitrii Narezhnyi; *Pozharskii, or The Liberated Moscow* (1798) by Mikhail Kheraskov; *Pozharskii* (1806) by Matvei Kriukovskii; *Minin* (1810) by Sergei Glinka.<sup>149</sup> Later, Aleksey Khomiakov wrote *Dimitrii the Pretender* (1832), Mikhail Pogodin created *The History of Dimitrii the Pretender in Drama [Istoriia v Litsakh o Dimitrii Samozvantse]* (1835), and Nestor Kuko'link wrote *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland* (1832).

Ironically, the plays that are now considered classical and still performed, did not always receive immediate recognition, for a number of reasons, such as censors' ban or lukewarm reception by the critics and the spectators. The only historical drama from this period to have classical status now is Pushkin's seminal play *Boris Godunov* (1825, first published 1831). It was censored for publication and banned from staging until 1866, and then banned again until the very late 19th century. The tragedy was initially quite popular because of Pushkin's fame but quickly faded from the general public's attention.<sup>150</sup> At the

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<sup>149</sup> I do not include analysis of the most obscure plays that were very derivative and went largely unnoticed.

For example, Narezhnyi in his *Dimitrii the Pretender* appears as an epigone of Sumarokov. This play was published once in Smolensk, staged once, and never republished or staged again. During the 1800s, Sumarokov's play about the tragic fate of a tyrant remained popular in the provincial theatres and various amateur productions. An imitative play is another proof of Sumarokov's popularity, the fact of which seems to be completely forgotten by the 1820s. Bochkarev., 91-92.

<sup>150</sup> Nikolai Smirnov-Sokol'skii provides a very detailed account on the publishing history and initial reception of *Boris Godunov*:

"*Boris Godunov* appeared five years too late, having lost its acuteness. Thus, even close friends, such as V.K. Kukhel'beker or P.A. Katenin, did not understand Pushkin's genius work very well. Pushkin was very irritated by that, and his draft notes preserved several attempts to write an explanation of his intention, and his opinion on Russian tragedy, in general. *Boris Godunov* was properly understood and accurately assessed much later. The success of the first edition of the Pushkin's tragedy, so pronounced during the first days after it was published, was gradually fading, and in the 1840s, Smirdin's book-store registry offered it with a discount. Later, in the 1870s, after Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* appeared, the lifetime editions of the Pushkin's tragedy were bought up by its lovers, and, in the antiquarian book stores, the book became one of the rarest pieces among the lifetime editions of Pushkin's works."

"Опоздав на пять лет, «Борис Годунов» потерял для современников свою остроту, и гениальное творение Пушкина не очень хорошо поняли даже такие близкие друзья поэта, как В. К. Кюхельбекер или П. А. Катенин. Пушкина это очень раздражало, и в черновиках его сохранилось несколько попыток написать объяснение своего замысла и своего взгляда на русскую трагедию вообще. Подлинное понимание и верная оценка «Бориса Годунова» пришли значительно позже. Успех первого издания трагедии Пушкина, столь ярко выраженный в дни появления книги, стал постепенно падать, и в сороковых годах она замелькала в книготорговых реестрах Смирдина даже со скидкой против номинала. Позже, в семидесятые годы, в связи с появлением оперы Мусоргского «Борис Годунов» первые прижизненные издания трагедии Пушкина

same time, it inspired many literary imitations and became most well-known in the form of the eponymous opera by Modest Mussorgsky that was created much later, in 1874.

Another famous historical work from the earlier 19th century is Mikhail Glinka's opera *Ivan Susanin (A Life for the Tsar)* (1836) that entered the canon as the first Russian national opera and brought international recognition to Russian classical music. The story glorifies the mythologized hero of the Time of Troubles, a commoner who allegedly led away the Polish invaders and voluntarily sacrificed his life to save Mikhail Romanov, the first tsar of the Romanov dynasty. It is remarkable that some of the foundational national narratives of modern Russian culture are set in the Time of Troubles. The little-known but numerous historical plays became precursors to grand projects like these two operas that are still performed today.

The choice of Pozharskii as a protagonist in many historical dramas, including Kriukovskii's immensely popular play titled *Pozharskii*, is logical and particularly symptomatic for the era of the Napoleonic wars. It is important that he was not a member of the royal family, which secured this choice from censorship problems. Historically, Pozharskii was a high-ranking nobleman who successfully led the people's militia against the Polish troops in 1612 in the battle for Moscow and later participated in the election of the new tsar, Mikhail Romanov. Readers and spectators welcomed Pozharskii as a selfless national hero. In many plays written during the 1800s, the protagonist is a leader who embodies patriotism and inspires the Russian people to fight in a just defensive war. Pozharskii is portrayed in an idealized unity with the whole nation. It is quite logical that the Pretender hardly ever appeared in the plays written during the wars with Napoleon. Such a controversial protagonist did not fit into the atmosphere of 1800-1810s.

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подобрались любителями, и на антикварном рынке книга эта стала одной из редчайших среди книг, напечатанных при жизни поэта.”  
Smirnov-Sokol'skii, Nikolai, *Rasskazy o prizhiznennykh izdaniakh Pushkina* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznoi knizhnoi palaty, 1962), 260-261. <http://feb-web.ru/feb/pushkin/biblio/smi/smi-001-.htm?cmd=p> (Accessed on December 22, 2016).

In Kriukovskii's three-act play, very little action takes place. First, Pozharskii is preparing the siege of Moscow, and his officer Zarutskii is secretly plotting treachery. Later, Pozharskii's wife and son are kidnapped but Pozharskii still gives orders to begin the siege at the planned time, risking the murder of his family that was taken as hostages. Yet, Kriukovskii's protagonist is not a tormented hero. He firmly chooses his duty for the Russian people. After the battle, his wife and son safely return, the traitor is dead, and Pozharskii refuses the crown offered to him by the *narod*. Instead, Pozharskii organizes the gathering to elect the new tsar and proclaims his absolute loyalty to the Russian monarchy.<sup>151</sup> By inserting this scene, Kriukovskii shows the moral ideal of an exemplary nobleman who serves his fatherland and the Russian monarchy:

How could I steal the scepter, forget the duty of a nobleman,  
And darken the shining royal crown?  
No, no, the people of Russia, [you are] blinded by your exaltation!  
Tsars are given to us by God.<sup>152</sup>

The protagonist affirms the sacred status of monarchical power in Russia. In this quatrain, we can find all the components of the hierarchical structure "God – Tsar – nobility – the people." In the original, the high-style vocabulary ("skiptr," "vel'mozha," "tsarskii venets") and the complex sentence structure with many inserted clauses are reminiscent of Sumarokov's and even Lomonosov's verse.

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<sup>151</sup> Triple rejection of the offered crown or high position is a recurring trope in Russian historical genre. It happens in Kniashnin's *Vadim Novgorodskii* and in Mussorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov*. I have not found the information about its origins and possible connection with the actual medieval court ceremonies. This question deserves a separate research project that may require extensive archival work.

<sup>152</sup> "Чтоб я, похитив скиптр, вельможи долг забыл  
И царского венца сиянье помрачил?  
Нет, нет, россияне, восторгом ослепленны!..  
Цари от бога нам бывают нареченны..."  
Kriukovskii, Matvei, "Pozharskii." In Bochkarev, V.A. ed., *Stikhotvornaia tragediia kontsa XVIII – nachala XIX v.* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1964), 283.

Importantly, there are pervasive statements about Russian national character and unwillingness to borrow from the other nations. Kriukovskii's verse reiterates Plavilshchukov's critique. Both condemn imitation and are concerned about the loss of Russian uniqueness:

Why borrow vain customs

And slavishly follow someone's example?

Unlike some people think, we do not benefit from that

But lose our Russian spirit in such a lowly exchange.<sup>153</sup>

In a simplifying, unrealistic, and even overcompensating way, Kriukovskii claims that the Russian people are self-sufficient and do not tolerate or need any cultural borrowing: "I have comprehended the gift of the Russian people: / They do not tolerate borrowing, as a Russian [*ross*] is great by himself!"<sup>154</sup> The word "ross" is reminiscent of the elevated vocabulary of odes. The words "ruskii" and "Rossiia" are very frequent in Kriukovskii's text and signify both ethnic and imperial identity. Pozharskii's wife Olga calls herself "rossiianka." The motifs and vocabulary of the 18th-century Russian literature are generally prominent in the play. For example, the Russian imperial eagle guides the Russians to their fame.<sup>155</sup> Or, Peter the Great's idea of meritocracy is used to present Minin as a virtuous commoner and educate Pozharskii's son: "Teach him to be proud of his soul, not his titles; / And to advance not by his lineage but by his own merit only..."<sup>156</sup> Besides alluding to the 18th-century patriotic discourse, Kriukovskii even adds a possible reference to the apostrophe to the Russian land in *Slovo o Polku Igoreve*: "O Russian

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<sup>153</sup> "Обычай суетный почто перенимать  
И рабски чуждому примеру подражать?  
Не пользу от сего, как мыслят, обретаем,  
Но русский дух в мене толь низкой мы теряем."  
Kriukovskii, 263.

<sup>154</sup> "Народа русского способность я проник: / Заимства не терпя, собою росс велик!" Ibid., 267.

<sup>155</sup> "The flight of this eagle shall show you the path to glory." "Полёт сего орла вам к славе путь явит..." Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> "Внушай, чтобы душой, не титлами гордился; / Не родом, а одной заслугой возносился..." Ibid., 271.

land! O dear Fatherland!”<sup>157</sup> *Pozharskii* becomes a sort of patriotic inter-text, as Kriukovskii references the various Russian cultural layers. The play exhibits all the proto-nationalist ideas of its time.

Kriukovskii’s poetics is eclectic and demonstrates that Neoclassical normative aesthetic was already falling apart. Later, in his famous note on drama, Pushkin notices the conservatism of critics and spectators.<sup>158</sup> Yet, it appears that the most furious defenses of the Russian Neoclassical style with its three unities were done in articles rather than in practice. For example, Kriukovskii’s play has the subtitle “Tragedy in three acts,” which breaks the convention of five-act structure. The location is different for each act, and the author specifies in the beginning that all the events happen during “a few hours.” It is possible that Kriukovskii did not feel bound Neoclassical poetics but the simplistic plot allowed him to keep the unity of time and action.

Overall, this play’s structural features, just as its ideas, are a combination of all trends in Russian playwriting that were widespread during the 1800s. It is still created under the influence of Sumarokov’s rules. Writing in rhymed alexandrine verse, Kriukovskii widely uses archaic Slavonic words and divides his characters into heroes and villains. Zarutskii is a one-dimensional villain who does evil for evil’s sake. For example, he anticipates “treachery to gladden [his] soul.”<sup>159</sup> One more influence is the direct comparison of *Pozharskii* to the heroes of ancient Greece and Rome that was, most likely, inspired by the wave of Russian renditions of the ancient Greek and Roman plots, such as Ozerov’s *Oedipus in Athens* (1805). For example, *Pozharskii*’s wife Olga imagines his glorious death in the battle: “They will carry your bloody shield out of the battle, / Your spear, and your sword, and your beaten helmet, / And they

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<sup>157</sup> “О русская земля! Отечество драгое!” Kriukovskii, 263.

<sup>158</sup> “Although since the time of Kant and Lessing esthetics has developed with such clarity and breadth, we still remain with the concepts of the ponderous pedant Gottsched; we still keep repeating that the *Beautiful* is an imitation of refined nature and that the main value of art is *usefulness*.” Pushkin, A.S, and Carl R. Proffer, trans., *The Critical Prose of Alexander Pushkin: With Critical Essays by Four Russian Romantic Poets* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 129-130.

<sup>159</sup> “And, in the meantime, make haste, together with the Poles, / and do the new treachery that gladdens my soul!”

“А ты меж тем спеши, с поляками во граде/ Устроить новый ков, души моей к отраде!” Kriukovskii, 258.

will put your body on the shield in front of me...”<sup>160</sup> Kriukovskii here references the famous ancient Greek poetic trope of a fallen hero being carried home on his shield.

At the same time, the play is obviously influenced by the genre of melodrama, as the characters often describe their powerful feelings. For example, the protagonist talks about his love for his wife and son:

Are not the feelings for my fatherland  
The same as the feelings for you in my heart?  
Wife’s cordiality and son’s tender love  
Bind a citizen closer to his fatherland.<sup>161</sup>

The protagonist establishes the idealized connection between familial love and patriotism, seeing the nation as the big family. Patriotism becomes an emotion, too. When Pozharskii first appears on stage, he proclaims fervent love for Fatherland as the prominent trait of a Russian character:

Love of Fatherland has a great power in our hearts!  
It is the passion of Russian warriors.  
This ardent feeling that creates a hero,  
We will soon show it amidst the bloody battle.<sup>162</sup>

This monolog received lengthy applause during the premier, performed by the popular actor Iakovlev.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> “Твой с битвы вынесут окровавленный щит, / Копьё блестящее, и меч, и шлем избит... / И тело на щитах положат предо мною...” Kriukovskii, 270.

<sup>161</sup> “Не теми ль чувствами к отечеству дышу,  
Которые всегда я в сердце к вам ношу?  
Приветливость жены и ласки нежны сына  
С отечеством тесней спрягают гражданина.”  
Ibid, 269.

<sup>162</sup> “Любви к отечеству сильна над сердцем власть!  
Российских воинов она едина страсть.  
То чувство пылкое, творящее героя  
Покажем скоро мы среди кровава боя.”  
Ibid., 260.

<sup>163</sup> “A.S. Iakovlev who played Pozharskii greatly contributed to the success of the play by his acting.”

Interestingly, the rise of patriotism converged with the sentimentalist movement in literature that cultivated emotionality and sensitivity as the features of a virtuous person. Consequently, loyalty to the state and readiness to fight against its enemies was rendered as strong patriotic feeling.

Kriukovskii does not follow one of the most persistent rules of Russian tragedy that required a love conflict to be the main driving force behind the plot because love was somehow forbidden and stood in the way of a character's familial or social duty. The overwhelming majority of the other contemporary playwrights blindly followed that rule and, therefore, had to invent love plots for their historical characters. Kriukovskii also depicts the protagonist's struggle between love and duty but modifies it in a way that allows him to downplay the theme of love and focus on the war heroism. Kriukovskii invents an episode where the villain Zarutskii takes Pozharskii's wife and son as hostages. Nevertheless, Pozharskii risks their lives and orders the beginning of a fight for Moscow. He is ready to sacrifice his family for the sake of his country. This readiness is sufficient in the play, and everything resolves in a happy-ending. Yet, the motif of sacrifice would become one of the principal characteristics of the narratives of the nationhood.

Kriukovskii's drama has very little artistic value and even his contemporaries understood that its popularity was mostly due to good timing and the choice of themes. In 1810, a critic wrote a negative review about Kriukovskii's historical piece, noting its lack of character depth and plot development: "There is no tragic story, there are no characters, and, consequently, there is no tragedy, even if the word "tragedy" would be written in the title in capital letters. The liberation of Moscow is certainly the most memorable event of our national history; yet, it is insufficient for tragedy, which can do without cannons, alarm bells, trumpets, fights, fires and even without conflagrations. The author struggled to write three acts and had to stretch even them in order to make the story more dramatic."<sup>164</sup>

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"Немало способствовал успеху пьесы своей игрой А.С. Яковлев, исполнявший роль Пожарского." Vochkarev, V.A., "Primechaniia" In Vochkarev, V.A. ed., *Stikhotvornaia tragediia kontsa XVIII – nachala XIX v.* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1964), 625.

<sup>164</sup> "Нет трагического содержания, нет характеров, следовательно, нет и трагедии, хотя бы самыми крупными буквами поставлено было в заглавии поэмы слово трагедия. Освобождение Москвы есть, конечно, достопамятнейшее событие в отечественной нашей истории; но оно недостаточно для трагедии,



Nevertheless, this drama reflects very well theatre's role in the formation of the new national ideology, developed and promoted by the imperial government. Andrei Zorin states that, even though the Time of Troubles has always fascinated Russian writers, "...[S]pecifically starting 1806-07, the liberation of Russia from the Poles and the enthronement of the Romanov dynasty are perceived as the key event of the national [*narodnaia*] history."<sup>165</sup> Kriukovskii's drama was also performed much later at the opening of Aleksandrinskii Theater in St. Petersburg in 1832 when Minin and Pozharskii's campaign was officially sanctioned as one of modern Russia's foundational narratives.

Wars and the rise of patriotism marked the rule of Alexander I, whereas his successor Nicholas I consciously began to use the patriotic narratives about the Time of Troubles and more recent war of 1812 for ideological purposes, with the emphasis on heroism and the people's sacrifice for the sake of the Russian monarchy. Kiseleva notes that the early 1830s face a whole series of events that articulated and systematized the new conservative ideology („Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality“) that was based on specific interpretations of history: „...[T]he creation of a national anthem, Emperor Nicholas's trip around Russia, the celebration of the heir's coming of age, the opening of Alexander Column in St. Petersburg, building up the Napoleonic wars' cult and its climax, „Borodino's anniversary“ in 1832.“<sup>166</sup> Nestor Kukol'nik's play *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland* appeared precisely in 1832. Nicholas saw the

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которая может обойтись без пушечной пальбы, без набатных звонов, без трубных звуков, без сражений, без пожаров и даже без сильных пожаров. Сочинитель едва мог набрать три акта и их принуждён был растянуть, чтобы сколько-нибудь походили на драматические.” „Pozharskii – „Vestnik Evropy“ 1810 No. 23. Quoted in: Rodina, T.M., „Repertuar.” In Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol 2. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1977), 235-236.

<sup>165</sup> „...[и]менно в 1806—1807 гг. освобождение России от поляков и воцарение династии Романовых начинают восприниматься как ключевое событие народной истории.” Zorin, Andrei, „„Beskrovnaia Pobeda' Kniazia Pozharskogo' (Sobytiia Smutnogo Vremeni v Russkoi Literature 1806-07 gg.) In *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*. 1999, No. 38. <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/1999/38/zorin.html> (Accessed on December 22, 2016).

<sup>166</sup> „... создание национального гимна, путешествие императора Николая по России, празднование совершеннолетия наследника, открытие Александровской колонны в Петербурге... нагнетание официального культа Отечественной войны и его апогей – «бородинская годовщина» 1832 г.” Kiseleva, L.N., „Stanovlenie russkoi natsional'noi mifologii v nikolaevskuiu epokhu (susaninskii siuzhet)“ In Permiakov, E.V., ed., *Lotmanovskii sbornik* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo RGGU, 1997), 279.

play as a good expression of the official ideology and became the playwright's personal patron.<sup>167</sup> The stage version was pompous and big-budgeted, and stayed in the repertoire thanks to its official sanction and middle-class urban audiences, even though the intellectuals despised the play for its utter servility and almost comical religious fervor.

Kiseleva summarizes the role of the arts in shaping national ideology in that era: "In order to become a given fact within national consciousness, the proclaimed ideology needed support from arts, authoritative works of art that embodied the ideological system. The fact itself that such works appeared signifies that, in the 1830s, the people also felt a distinct need to create national (nationally colored) art, and, thus, these two processes were developing in parallel, even though they frequently intersected with each other."<sup>168</sup> I agree with Kiseleva that the demand for the national art and the national ideology supported by such art was a two-way process. I would add that, more specifically, performance arts become one of the principal modes for articulating and promoting the official ideology. To be established and cultivated, nationhood had to be performed. Kiseleva gives such examples as the new national anthem and the celebration of the heir's birthday. National anthems are a form of modern-era rituals that have performance quality by definition because they are distinguished from other songs by a system of rules such as collective singing, and certain posture (while standing and, possibly, with some gestures). Mass celebrations are also performed events. Not surprisingly, the national narratives were also performed on stage, in the form of plays and operas.

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<sup>167</sup> "По существу, это было переложение на язык драматургии и сценического действия пресловутой уваровской формулы 'православие, самодержавие, народность'." Danilov, S.S., *Ocherki po istorii russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra* (Moskva-Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1948), 248.

<sup>168</sup> "Чтобы стать фактом национального сознания, провозглашённая концепция нуждалась в поддержке искусства – в авторитетных художественных произведениях, которые явились бы воплощением заданного комплекса идеологием. Возникновение такого рода произведений свидетельствует о том, что в 1830-е гг. существовала также отчётливо осознаваемая потребность в создании национального (национально окрашенного) русского искусства, и эти два процесса шли параллельно, хотя порой достаточно тесно переплетались между собой." Kiseleva, 279.

Nestor Kukol'nik's play *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland* (1832) bears many similarities to Kriukovskii's piece. It also depicts the gathering of militia in Nizhnii Novgorod by Minin and Pozharskii, their fight for Moscow, and the election of the new tsar, Mikhail Romanov. The text is notorious for the pervasive presence of conservative religiosity unified with the ideas of monarchism, and personal and civil loyalty to power. The main force in this drama is the Divine Will that expresses itself very literally. For example, there are several collective prayers. The wounded Pozharskii miraculously recovers after Minin's prayer. The traitor Zarutskii is killed by the cannonball precisely at the moment when he is about to carry out his villainous plans. During the election, all the boyars unknowingly but unanimously vote for Mikhail Romanov, and then the *narod* runs up to them, also demanding Mikhail Romanov to be their tsar.

Kukol'nik's text is a perfect example of jingoism, and it was perceived as non-artistic and ridiculous by the contemporary literati.<sup>169</sup> At the same time, this play contains a conveniently distilled

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<sup>169</sup> Nikolai Polevoi's review mocked this play for its melodramatic excess and pseudo-historical nature: "In 1834, to publish such a drama as Mr. Kukol'nik's new drama *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland!* How can one have so little mercy upon himself and think so little of his own dignity! *There is only a step from grand to laughable.* ... In this drama, Mr. K. went not a step further than his three predecessors. The only difference is the free Romantic change of locations, and the collection of ten plotlines, without any principal one that would hold the unity of his drama. ... We do not comprehend why Mr. K's drama is called "borrowed from our country's history." *There is nothing historical whatsoever in it:* neither its events nor its characters. What purpose did the Romantic freedom and such horrible deviation from history serve for Mr. K.? Merely to set up *several theatrical scenes.* We are giving credit to Mr. Kukol'nik: his play does have such scenes; but this is the last merit of a drama, and such *effects* can be found in any melodrama. This is not what we demand from a true poet: we demand a poetic creation, a genuine drama."

"...[В] 1834 г. *издать* такую драму, какова новая драма г-на Кукольника: "Рука Всевышнего Отечество спасла"! Как можно столь мало щадить себя, столь мало думать о собственном своем достоинстве! *От великого до смешного один шаг.* ... Г-н К. нисколько не подвинулся далее трех предшественников в сей драме. Вся разница в том, что, по вольности романтизма, он переносит действие повсюду, и что в его драме собрано вдруг десять действий, когда нет притом ни одного основного, на чем держалось бы единство драмы. ... [М]ы не постигаем, для чего драма г-на К. названа заимствованною *из отечественной истории?* Тут *нисколько и ничего нет исторического* -- ни в событиях, ни в характерах. К чему же послужили г-ну К. романтическая свобода и такие страшные изменения истории? К тому, чтобы изобразить *несколько театральных сцен.* В этом нельзя отказать г-ну Кукольнику: такие сцены у него есть; но это самое последнее достоинство драмы, и подобные *эффекты* найдете в каждой мелодраме. Не того требуем мы от истинного поэта: требуем поэтического создания, истинной драмы."

Polevoi, N.A., "Ruka vsevyshnego otechestvo spasla. A Review" In Kuleshov, V.I., ed., *Russkaia kritika XVIII-XIX vekov* (Moskva: Prosveshchenie, 1978). [http://az.lib.ru/p/polewoj\\_n\\_a/text\\_0090.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/p/polewoj_n_a/text_0090.shtml) (Accessed on December 22, 2016).

system of the mythological constructs of Russian nationalism. One of the crucial concepts in the play is sacrifice. The word “zhertva,” which may mean “sacrifice” or “victim” in Russian, appears very frequently in the text. The play is full of hyperboles, and the exemplary patriotism of the protagonists is unconditional and excessive. Both Pozharskii and Minin are ready to sacrifice their families for the sake of Russia. For example, Pozharskii asks to burn his wife and son to save them from imprisonment and violence: “I give, by will, everything to you: my wife, my son.../ And burning Rus’ in flames of vengeance, - / Burn them, as well!”<sup>170</sup> In a similar way, Minin prays for Pozharskii’s miraculous recovery and offers his wife and children as sacrifice:

I have a wife and children... O God!

Take me and them, we are not needed here;

Tell me, and I will sacrifice to Thee

What you command... But save his life!<sup>171</sup>

This heroic readiness for sacrifice references the Old Testament story of Abraham who is ready to give his own son Isaac to God. Another famous national patriotic narrative that belongs to the Time of Troubles is also based on voluntary sacrifice: Ivan Susanin gives his life to save Mikhail Romanov. Kiseleva demonstrates that this national myth has little grounding in the historical evidence but has cornerstone significance from the ideological perspective. Mikhail Glinka’s initial title for his opera was *Ivan Susanin*, and it was Nicholas I who personally suggested the extended title, *Ivan Susanin (A Life for the Tsar)*. Such narratives of voluntary heroism establish the foundational sacrifice for the Russian

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<sup>170</sup> “Вам завещаю всё: жену и сына... / И Русь огню отмщенья предавая, - / Сожгите их!” Kukul’nik, Nestor, *Sochineniia*, in 3 vols., Vol 1 (Sankt-Peterburg, 1851), 163.

<sup>171</sup> “Есть у меня жена и дети... Боже!  
Возьми меня и их, мы здесь не нужны;  
Скажи, я принесу Тебе на жертву,  
Что повелишь... Но жизнь ему продли!”  
Ibid., 164.

monarchy and also, according to the religious interpretation of the events, redeems the sins of the country and its people.

The motif of fire is prominent in Kukol'nik's play. It simultaneously alludes to scriptural burning of sacrificial offerings, the divine fire that burns Sodom for its sins, and the burning of Moscow in 1812. Moscow of the Time of Troubles is depicted as sick and sinful: "Moscow is burning / Moscow is sick with temptation, / Sodom nestles in it..."<sup>172</sup> In Act 1, Minin's speech frames the militia's goal as the desperate heroic attempt to save Russia and redeem the whole land's sins by accepting death and purifying Rus' by fire:

O Rus, arise! Young and old,  
You, our dead and tortured brothers,  
You, drowned in our fatherland's rivers,  
You, put to sleep by poison or treason,  
All of you, arise! Vengeance resurrects the dead!  
The earth will arise with its dead fields;  
The rivers will arise with their cloudy waters;  
The forest will burn from vengeance!  
The skies will burn from lightning!  
Execute the fiends! Without order or leader,  
We will flow to Moscow, embraced it with fire,  
And in that fire, give all our Rus' to God.<sup>173</sup>

There is obvious apocalyptic imagery and the references to The Last Judgment. Nature itself standing against the enemy is another allusion to God's vengeance against Sodom. Pious Russian people

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<sup>172</sup> "Москва горит, Москва болит соблазном, / Содом в ней угнездился..." Kukol'nik, 155.

<sup>173</sup> "Восстань же, Русь! – От мала до велика:  
Вы, мёртвые, затерзанные братья,  
Вы, потопленные в реках отчины,  
Вы, спящие отравой и изменой,  
Восстанье все! Мечь воскрешает мертвых! ...  
Земля восстанет с мертвыми полями;  
Восстанут реки, мутными волнами;  
Отмщением воспламенится лес  
И молнией займется свод небес!  
Казнь извергам! Без строя и вождя,  
Мы потечем, Москву огнём обьемем,  
В ней всю Русь мы Богу предадим."  
Ibid., 156.

become the instrument of vengeance. This passage also captures the contradictions in Kukol'nik's ideological message. On the one hand, Russian people are righteous in their piety and love of god. On the other hand, they are sinful as any other humans. The narrative oscillates between “vengeance” and “redemption.”

This is almost a morality play where the characters are not so much living humans as the ideal representatives of their social strata. The Zemskii Sobor in the drama symbolizes the idealized people's legacy and their influence on higher power. The people endorse power: “In Rus', who could be a governor / Without the orthodox people's will?”<sup>174</sup> Pozharskii is the embodiment of a patriotic and loyal nobleman. Minin personifies the patriotism of the *narod* and its righteous vengeance against the heretical and devilish enemies of “Holy Rus'.” Censorship absolutely prohibited having any representatives of the clergy on stage.<sup>175</sup> Thus, in such a highly religious play, Minin also functions as a religious authority. The war against the Polish people is explicitly called a “holy war”<sup>176</sup> against “heretics” and “rebels.” who are, not coincidentally, taken as equivalent.<sup>177</sup>

The word “Russian” [*russkii*] is very frequent in the text and is by no means a marker of ethnicity only. The word “Russian” comes to signify an ideal person who is a virtuous Orthodox Christian, an unconditional patriot, and perfectly fits into a social hierarchy. *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland* becomes a eulogy to political conservatism and loyalty to monarchy that are portrayed as authentically Russian characteristics, ascribed to the *narod* and set as an example for upper classes. According to Kukol'nik and Nicholas I's agenda, the hierarchical structure “God – tsar – noblemen – narod” is the foundation of the Russian state that has its roots in medieval Russian history. This idea is identical to Kriukovskii's agenda and expressed even more explicitly. The rupture of that hierarchy leads to chaos and

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<sup>174</sup> “Кто на Руси быть может Воеводой / Без воли православного народа?” Ibid., 192.

<sup>175</sup> Rodina, “Repertuar,” 98.

<sup>176</sup> Kukol'nik, 193.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 154.

civil unrest. Overall, Kukol'nik's play is the epitome of the propagandist pseudo-historical genre in Russian theatre and a systematic consolidation of all the nationalist and conservative ideas of his time. Kukol'nik approaches theatre, art, and history, in general, in a utilitarian way.

*The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland* also demonstrates the evolution of the genre of tragedy and heroic drama on stage. It is written in blank verse but shows the fading of Neoclassical poetics. Most prominently, it takes place in the many locations and does not adhere to "the unity of place." Instead, it attempts to show the panorama of events and represent Russia in its geographical vastness.<sup>178</sup> The list of the regions of Russia and their military leaders references the *Iliad* and *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*. These allusions emphasize the epic scale of the depicted events.

Very likely under the influence of Pushkin, this play completely departs from the Neoclassical tragic conflict between love and duty. By the 1830s, even Kukol'nik, who was one of the least innovative playwrights, did not include such a love plot, even though he still inserts the "leading female lover" character Marina Mnishek. The character of Marina is definitely written within the Romantic tradition. During her first elegiac monologue, she remembers happier times as the tsarina of Moscow and laments her fall and humiliation.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> "Koz'mich: Well, Prokofii Petrovich Liapunov set out for Moscow  
With the people of Riazan', Nashchokin with the Vologda people;  
Izmailov with the people of Suzdal' and Vladimir;  
Prince Pronskii with Romanov's army; with the Yaroslavl' people  
Ivan Ivanovich Volynskii; the Murom people  
Went with Masal'skii; the Galich people  
Went with Mansurov... it is impossible to count everyone!"  
"Козьмич: Да вот, Прокофий  
Петрович Ляпунов пошёл к Москве  
С Рязанцами, Нащёкин с Вологдой;  
С Владимиром и Суздаем Измайлов;  
С Романовым Князь Пронский, с Ярославлем  
Иван Иванович Волынский, Муром  
Пошёл с Окольничим Масальским; Галич  
С Мансуровым... да где всех перечесть!"  
Kukol'nik, 148-149.

<sup>179</sup> "Read! You will not understand Marina,  
You will not feel the passions

Later, Marina comes to Pozharskii and unsuccessfully tries to manipulate him into making her son the ruler and Pozharskii himself his regent, thus, tempting him with power and using her feminine charms. Finally, Marina goes insane and becomes reminiscent of Ophelia. Her appearances are completely out of tune with the patriotic fervor of the rest of the play, and are, most likely, included for their performance value, as a role for a famous leading actress.

The final speeches of Pozharskii in Kukol'nik's drama are constructed according to the laws of the Russian odic tradition. It seems very dated by the 1830s but, while the ode as a genre had become obsolete, its elements could still be found in Russian works, such as Pushkin's epilogue to his exemplary Romantic, Byronic, poem *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* written in 1820-21.<sup>180</sup> Generally, Kukol'nik's play can be seen as a convergence between the genres of historical drama and ode.

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Granted to her as a punishment!  
You will not think the horrible thoughts over and over,  
Those are immeasurable ghosts in my mind  
That chase me constantly!  
I do not have merry Polish girls with me anymore,  
For entertainment, for my heart's consolation...  
All, all of them are covered with shame,  
Under arrest, or they thrash rye  
In the distant lands of the unmeasured Rus' –  
And they curse at their Tsarina! –  
O youth, my youth, return to me!...”  
“Читай себе! Ты не поймёшь Марины!  
Тебе не перечувствовать страстей,  
Дарованных Марине в наказание!  
Тебе не передумать дум ужасных,  
Тех умственных, безмерных привидений,  
Что неотвязно следуют за мной!  
Нет у меня моих весёлых Полек  
Для развлечения, для утехи сердца...  
Все, все оне, как я, стыдом покрыты,  
Прядут под стражей или рожь молотят  
В далеких областях Руси безмерной --  
И все свою Царицу проклинаят!— ...  
О юность, юность, воротися!...”  
Kukol'nik, 166.

<sup>180</sup> Ram writes that the poem begins “...in an elegiac vein, then shifting to the mode of epic narrative, ... and then abruptly giving vein again to a first person (“*ia vospoiui*”) that seems to reclaim the Lomonosovian tradition of the ceremonial ode.” Ram, Harsha. *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 195.



Kukol'nik accomplished more or less the same goal as Kriukovskii in 1807 with his *Pozharskii*. Kriukovskii's drama was a success, whereas Kukol'nik experiences a severe backlash from the literati and the well-read educated public. Kriukovskii's technical choices were in tune with the newest development in playwriting during his time. Kukol'nik's Neoclassical aesthetics appears very dated for his time. Kriukovskii's play was welcomed as the timely expression of patriotic sentiment during the first unsuccessful war with Napoleon, whereas Kukol'nik's play was criticized as too artificial and extreme in its glorification of loyalty to the state and religious piety. Still, such "propaganda" from the stage was aimed beyond the noble classes and did work to reinforce conservative thinking among the provincial gentry and the urban classes.<sup>181</sup> These less sophisticated audiences responded positively to the production of this play, since many of them favored the obvious ideological message and were stunned by the visuals, the luxurious settings, and the various stage effects.

### 2.3 PUSHKIN AND HIS FOLLOWERS KHOMIAKOV AND POGODIN: SEARCHING FOR HISTORICITY, AUTHENTICITY, AND TRUE *NARODNOST'*.

Pushkin wrote his *Boris Godunov* as the dramatic incarnation of *narodnost'* and an example of how Russian drama should develop, according to his vision. His note "O Narodnoi drame" points out the common "folk" origin of any drama because it grows from street performances. Even the French court drama grew from the people's theatre but its Russian version is artificial because it was borrowed from the French culture and did not develop naturally.<sup>182</sup> He thinks that Shakespearean poetics, less restricted

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<sup>181</sup> "Nevertheless, the external success among the [merchant] public of Apraksin Dvor and Gostinyi Dvor was enormous. For political reasons, this success was artificially maintained by the government that created an image Kukol'nik as a patriotic poet."

"Тем не менее внешний успех у апраксинской и гостинодворской публики был грандиозным. По политическим соображениям этот успех искусственно поддерживался правительством, окружившим Кукольника ореолом поэта-патриота." Danilov, 249.

<sup>182</sup> "We saw that national tragedy was born in the public square, that it developed, and only afterward was called to aristocratic society. In our country it would be the other way around. We would want to lower the Sumarokovian court tragedy to the public square – but what obstacles!" Pushkin, *Critical Prose*, 133.

and closer to a broad audience, beyond aristocratic courts, is best suited for the necessary and pending reform of the Russian theatre, as it had to exit the dead end of artificial Neoclassical plays. Corneille or Racine's dramatic form is national for France but not for Russia. Shakespeare serves as a model of preserving the living connection with the popular national culture while creating a more elevated literature and theatre.

Speaking about Ozerov's plays set in the Russian past, Pushkin notes the simplistic approach to national themes that was very characteristic of the majority of dramas in that age, including the pieces discussed in this chapter: "He [Ozerov] attempted to give us a national tragedy and imagined that for this it would be enough if he chose a subject from national history, forgetting that the poet of France took all the subjects for his tragedies from Roman, Greek, and Hebrew history, and that most national tragedies of Shakespeare were borrowed by him from Italian novellas."<sup>183</sup> That was one of the new ideas for its time: Russian history as a subject does not, by default, make a drama "national." Yet, the earliest attempts were precisely driven by such a thematic component, and, in the initial period, were not only acceptable but very popular. Pushkin registers a cultural shift when that simplistic approach did not satisfy the authors and educated audiences any more.

Pushkin writes that a truly national [*narodnaia*] drama should grow naturally from popular, street entertainment, be it comedy or tragedy. He further notes that the best plays written in Russia so far are comedies because they are rooted in Russian popular entertainment. He finds no true national tragedy in the Russian corpus of plays and explains it by the unredeemable artificiality of Russian tragedy that was simply transplanted from French tradition into the Russian court theatre. Pushkin's observation is confirmed by the whole history of Russian theatre in the 18th and 19th centuries where tragedy remained underdeveloped in comparison with comedy or drama from contemporary life. The earliest plays that are

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<sup>183</sup> Pushkin, *Critical Prose*, 133.

considered classical today, and still read and staged, are almost all comedies (by Fonvizin, Griboedov, and Gogol). Even the early draft of Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* had a stronger comedic element.<sup>184</sup>

Pushkin systematized the circulating ideas about historical truth and historical authenticity. These ideas would guide approaches to writing and performances for many decades to come. He praises Pogodin's play *Marfa Posadnitsa* for these qualities:

As dispassionate as fate, the dramatic poet had to depict the rebuff to perishing liberty as a carefully considered blow which set Russia on her huge foundation – and he was served well by a study of the truth which was as honest as it was profound and conscientious, and by the vividness of his youthful, fiery imagination. He had to avoid being clever or tending to one side, sacrificing the other, it was the people of past days, their minds, their prejudices which had to speak in the tragedy – not the author, not his political opinions, nor his secret or open bias. It was not his task to justify or accuse, to prompt the speeches. It was his task to resurrect a past age in all its truth.<sup>185</sup>

Pushkin criticizes the usual explicit position of a dramatist that always distorted and simplified historical narratives in drama. In the overwhelming majority of plays, the “culprit” was the monarchical idea. Pushkin praises Polevoi's *Marfa Posadnitsa* for the balanced handling of what is probably the most sensitive subject for historically-themed plays of the era. Karamzin in his prose, and Kriukovskii and Kukol'nik in drama, built their stories around the affirmation of monarchy. The Decembrists, on the contrary, idealized the ancient Roman and the Russian Novgorod Republic. In contrast, Pushkin wanted to incorporate an independent artistic interpretation of history into a drama. Pushkin's emphasis on historical complexity was taken by Pogodin and Khomiakov for their plays about the False Dmitrii.

Pozharskii and Minin were the most popular protagonists of historical dramas about the Time of Troubles written during 1800s. However, Russian historiography of the early 1830s had a fashion for

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<sup>184</sup> “The two versions were titled, realized, and received in quite different ways. The 1825 *Comedy about Tsar Boris and Grishka Otrepyev*, written in exile, smuggled into the capital, and recited in a thrillingly unpretentious manner by the poet himself, was an immediate aural experience, and a sensation. Pushkin was hailed as a daring radical, in his history and his dramaturgy. By contrast, the 1831 *Boris Godunov*, although not wholly new to the reading public (excerpts had been published in 1827 and 1829), was a silent in-print affair, received in a perfunctory way.” Dunning, Chester, et al., *The Uncensored “Boris Godunov”: The Case for Pushkin's Original Comedy, with Annotated Text and Translation* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 3-4.

<sup>185</sup> Pushkin, *Critical Prose*, 135.

pretenders, paying especially close attention to the False Dmitrii who ruled Russia for a year in 1605-06. O. Senkovsky even penned a whole article, titled “Dramy iz Epokhi Samozvantsev” in 1839, where he noticed the sheer amount of scholarship on the Pretender and the trend for writing plays about that era.<sup>186</sup> The False Dmitrii was a very mythologized and highly controversial figure in Russian history, a real-life picaresque character. There is a profound lack of verifiable sources about him and, generally, the 1600s, but chronicles and early historians documented many oral histories and legends. Karamzin depicts Dmitrii as inconsistent and irrational, summarizing all the available information about him from the old chronicles.<sup>187</sup>

This is what, probably, fascinated Pushkin, who himself was fond of historical myths.<sup>188</sup> In *Boris Godunov*, he turns Dmitrii into a Romantic character who is ready to risk everything for his love. Of course, there is no evidence for that but the actual Dmitrii married the Catholic Marina Mnishek and had his wedding ritual with his Catholic bride in a Russian Orthodox cathedral. This fact speaks of the degree of Dmitrii’s personal involvement as well as his lack of cultural sensitivity and disregard for traditions and religion.

Pushkin was the first author who chose Boris Godunov as his protagonist for a historical drama. The Pretender can easily be deemed as his second protagonist. Pushkin’s drama directly inspired two plays: *Dimitrii the Pretender* (1832), by Slavophile philosopher Aleksey Khomiakov, and *The History of*

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<sup>186</sup> “The Pretenders decidedly attracted the imagination of our authors: recently, the best dramatic works and the best research in history are dedicated to the Pretenders.”

“Самозванцы решительно привлекли к себе воображение наших писателей: с некоторого времени лучшие драматические произведения, лучшие труды по части истории посвящены самозванцам.”

Quoted in: Lebedeva, E.K. “Tragedii o “Smutnom vremeni” v massovoi istoricheskoi dramaturgii 30-kh gg. XIX veka.” // Ianushkevich, A.S., ed., *Problemy literaturnykh zhanrov, chast' 1* (Tomsk: Izdatel'stvo Tomskogo universiteta, 1999), 206.

<sup>187</sup> I am using Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State* for the reference. It was one of the main sources for Pogodin and Polevoi.

<sup>188</sup> For example, Pushkin’s *Captain’s Daughter* is framed as a manuscript with the first-person narrative of a deceased Piotr Griniov. Pushkin establishes multiple mediators, which leads to blurring of history and fiction.

*Dmitrii the Pretender in Drama [Istoriia v Litsakh o Dmitrii Samozvantse]* (1835) by historian Mikhail Pogodin.

Khomiakov and Pogodin's dramatic works should be analyzed in the context of their other writings. Pogodin was an acclaimed historian and professor. Khomiakov was a philosopher and a journalist as well as one of the founders of Slavophile philosophical movement in Russia. Both were extremely interested in the cultural and religious clash between Muscovites and Poles during the Time of Troubles. In their other works and essays, Khomiakov and Pogodin are very interested in shaping Russian identity in its relation to the Western civilization.<sup>189</sup> I see their plays as creative experiments with rendering social and political ideas in the dramatic form.

Khomiakov's *Dmitrii the Pretender* is written in blank verse and imitates Pushkin's poetics on many levels: the vocabulary, the principles of characterization, and the presence of multiple characters from all the main social strata. Khomiakov portrays the False Dmitrii in a positive light and envisions him as a patriot who collaborated with the Poles out of necessity. This Dmitrii sincerely wants to be a good ruler for Russia but does not succeed to connect either with the boyars or the people. Khomiakov rewrites and simplifies history and uses Dmitrii's story as a case study for Russian identity.

In choosing the Pretender, Khomiakov possibly wanted to distance himself from the topics and characters that had already been overused in patriotic dramas. Dmitrii's complicated and failed mediation between Poland and Russia reflects the anxious attitude to the West that was expressed by Khomiakov and the other Slavophile thinkers. His play was read in salons during the 1830s and well-received. Some

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<sup>189</sup> Aleksey Khomiakov wrote the following essays and articles with the telling titles: *An Opinion of Russians on the Foreigners* (*Мнение русских об иностранцах*, 1846); *A Few Words of an Orthodox Christian about Western Religions* (*Несколько слов православного христианина о западных вероисповеданиях*, 1853). Mikhail Pogodin is the author of such articles as *On the Question of Slavophiles* (*К вопросу о славянофилах*, 1873), *Notes on the Russian Politics* (*Записки о политике России*, published posthumously in 1894). Pogodin's historical works explore the Time of Troubles and Peter the Great's reign: *Peter the First and National Organic Development* (*Петр Первый и национальное органическое развитие*, 1863), *More in Defense of Minin* (*Еще за Минина*, 1873), *In Defense of Susanin* (*За Сусанина*, 1873).

considered it inferior to *Boris Godunov*. Baratynsky greatly praised Khomiakov's drama in a letter.<sup>190</sup>

Unlike Pushkin, Khomiakov did not leave any evidence that he wanted to see his *Dmitrii the Pretender* on stage.

Khomiakov's piece shows much influence from Shakespearean and, generally, Romantic drama. His philosophy is grounded in the Romantic ideas of nationhood, national history, and national character. Khomiakov chooses the most memorable episodes from Dmitrii's life that serve well to create an emotionally charged atmosphere and demonstrate the difficulty or even the impossibility of making the right political decisions and moral choices.

In terms of its plot, the play falls apart into a series of scenes. It opens with Dmitrii enjoying his royal life with celebrations and hunting and ends with Dmitrii's tragic death in the hands of the frenzied crowd. Khomiakov develops the psychological motivation of the characters. Yet he goes into lengthy explanations in some scenes and does not explain the characters' motives in others. Act 2 retells the famous documented episode when Prince Vasilii Shuiskii was sentenced to death for plotting against Dmitrii but pardoned at the last minute, on the execution spot. In Khomiakov's interpretation, this pardoning happened because Marfa threatened Dmitrii to denounce him as not her real son. Their

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<sup>190</sup> "On May 30th, 1832, Baratynsky is again excited about the same work: "I cannot imagine what Khomiakov's tragedy is like. Dmitrii the Pretender is a famous historical figure; our imagination involuntarily pictures him accordingly to the chronicles' tales. Idealization of him is the pinnacle of art. Lord Byron's Sardanapalus is an obscure figure whom the poet could interpret as he likes. No one could say: he was not like that. But all of us feel as if we saw him [Dmitrii] and judge the poet as a portrait artist. Khomiakov chose a fascinating approach; it provides the wide frame for poetry. But it seems to me that [his play about] Ermak is in a better shape than [his play about] Dmitrii. Is he going to publish his tragedy soon? I impatiently want to read it, let alone that its release contradicts all my ideas, and I hope to draw completely new poetic impressions from it."

"30 мая 1832 года Баратынский снова волнуется по поводу того же произведения: 'Не могу вообразить, что такое трагедия Хомякова. Дмитрий Самозванец — лицо отменно историческое; воображение наше поневоле дает ему физиономию, сообразную с сказаниями летописцев. Идеализировать его — верх искусства. Байронов Сарданапал — лицо туманное, которому поэт мог дать такое выражение, какое ему было угодно. Некому сказать: не похож. Но Дмитрия мы все как будто видели, и судим поэта, как портретного живописца. Род, избранный Хомяковым, отменно увлекателен: он представляет широкую раму для поэзии. Но мне кажется, что Ермаку он приходится лучше, нежели Дмитрию. Скоро ли он напечатает свою трагедию? Мне не терпится ее прочесть, тем более что ее издание противоречит всем моим понятиям и я надеюсь в ней почерпнуть совершенно новые поэтические впечатления'."

Quoted in: Florenskii, Pavel, "Okolo Khomiakova." In *Simvol* 16, December 1986, 196.

[http://www.odinblago.ru/okolo\\_homakova](http://www.odinblago.ru/okolo_homakova) (Accessed on December 27, 2016).

conversation is excessively long and, at times, repetitive. For some reason, the writer omits the explanation of how and why Marfa acknowledged the Pretender as her son. In another scene, that is also based on Karamzin's narrative, Dmitrii is extremely offended by the Polish ambassadors for not being addressed as "Emperor" and starts to plan a war with Poland.<sup>191</sup> Later, Marina Mnishek uses her influence on Dmitrii and redirects his anger at Poland onto the ambitious plans of conquering new lands from Muslim Turkey. Dmitrii's subsequent withdrawal from the conflict with the Poles turns the boyars and many people in Moscow into his enemies, and the mood escalates into a rebellion, orchestrated by Vasilii Shuiskii, that leads to the death of the Pretender.

Khomiakov's Dmitrii is a good-willed Romantic character. He is free-spirited, brave, intelligent, and sincerely wishes to be a good monarch. The play opens with a conversation between the servants about the new tsar's skilled handling of weapons and love for hunting. They also notice the disapproval of the boyars when Dmitrii put himself in danger while killing the bear. Thus, Dmitrii is introduced as an active and strong character who affirms his individuality over tradition. He has great military ambition and warrior spirit:

But for me is the calling voice of trumpet,

And my good sword, and a horse, and a soldiers' camp,

And a bloody battle in an enemy's land...

I feel confined in Russia, my friend Basmanov, so confined!<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Karamzin narrates this episode in his work and retells the Pretender's words in the following way:

"I do not see anyone equal to me in the Northern countries; only God is above me. Do not all the European Monarchs call me Emperor? Why does not Sigismund want to? Pan Olesnitskii! I am asking: would you accept a letter addressed to you if your noble rank was not written in its signature? ... Sigismund had me as his friend and brother, such as the Polish Republic had never had before; but now I see Him as my ill-wisher."

"...Не вижу себе равного в странах полунощных; надо мною один Бог. И не все ли Монархи Европейские называют меня Императором? Для чего же Сигизмунд того не хочет? Пан Олесницкий! спрашиваю: мог ли бы ты принять на свое имя письмо, если бы в его надписи не было означено твое шляхетское достоинство?... Сигизмунд имел во мне друга и брата, какого еще не имела Республика Польская; а теперь вижу в Нем своего зложелателя." Karamzin, N.M., "Tsarstvovanie Lzhedmitriia. Gody 1605-1606." In Karamzin, N.M., *Istoriia Gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*, in 12 vols., Vol 11, Chapter 4.

[http://az.lib.ru/k/karamzin\\_n\\_m/text\\_1110.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/k/karamzin_n_m/text_1110.shtml) (Accessed on December 23, 2016).

<sup>192</sup> "Но для меня трубы призывный глас,

Dmitrii's personal ambition and love of war seems to be his driving force. In some respects, he resembles the historical Peter the Great, mainly in his disregard of court rituals and his concern for Russia's sovereignty and international power. Interestingly, this play features not only the theme of defending the Russian state and identity but also the theme of imperial conquests, framed as war plans against non-Christian countries. Dmitrii dreams about a Russia that is more powerful than every other European state: "...And my Rus' shall be the head of the other states, / And the Russian tsar shall be the head of the other tsars!"<sup>193</sup>

However, Khomiakov's Dmitrii is also anti-Catholic. The author rewrites history because, according to many accounts, the Pretender was not religious and allowed the Polish Catholics to freely practice their religion and even establish their church in Moscow. In the play, Dmitry adheres to Orthodox Christianity and proclaims its crucial role for shaping Russian national consciousness:

A Russian dearly loves  
His family, his fatherland, and his tsar; but even more,  
More ardently he loves  
The promise of the different, better life – his faith.<sup>194</sup>

The Pretender explicitly voices his Russian identity as the reason for refusing Catholicism. This is the instance where Khomiakov's social ideas converge with the conservative nationalism of the patriotic

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И верный меч, и конь, и стан военный,  
И в вражеской земле кровавой битвой час...  
В России тесно, друг Басманов, тесно!"

Khomiakov, Aleksey, *Dmitrii Samozvanets. Tragediia v piati deistviiakh* (1832), I.2.

[http://az.lib.ru/h/homjakow\\_a\\_s/text\\_0050.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/h/homjakow_a_s/text_0050.shtml) (Accessed on December 23, 2016).

The digital version of the play has no page numbers, so, instead, I provide the numbers of acts (in Roman numerals I-V) and scenes (in Arabic numerals).

<sup>193</sup> "...И Русь моя других держав главою, / И русский царь главой других царей!" Ibid., I.3.

<sup>194</sup> Русский любит горячо  
Семью, отчизну и царя; но боле,  
Но пламенней, сильнее любит он  
Залог другой и лучшей жизни – веру.  
Ibid.



dramas that were discussed earlier: “But I am Russian, not Western blood / Is running in these veins; the Russian land / Is hundred times dearer, more beautiful to me than any other lands.”<sup>195</sup>

The word “Russian” is very common in the play, and Orthodox Christian faith is formative for Russian identity for Khomiakov. However, Khomiakov is not very consistent in the depictions of his protagonist’s patriotic stance. In many instances, Dmitrii’s Romantic independence and individual heroism are presented as more important than his traditionalism. For example, Dmitrii agrees to a union with the Pope, tempted by the promise of military help for the campaign against Turkey. The international status of Russia based on its military power appears to be extremely important for Khomiakov’s protagonist. Dmitrii’s openness and bravery are seen as highly positive values. Another character, Liapunov, is always in doubt and changing sides in the play, and even Liapunov wonders if the False Dmitrii is still a better tsar for Russia than the intriguing and hypocritical boyars:

*Liapunov:* Is not a valiant pretender,  
Who has a high and fervent soul, better  
Than lowly and pompous boyars,  
Than this Shuiskii, a cold hypocrite?<sup>196</sup>

The same motif of ubiquitous “pretense” is prominent in Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov* where everyone, from the boyars to commoners, consciously follow the system of rules and rituals. For example, a commoner in Pushkin’s text sees that everyone is crying while asking Godunov to become their tsar, and,

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<sup>195</sup> Но русский я, но в этих льётся жилах  
Не западная кровь; но русский край  
Мне всех земель сто раз дороже, краше.  
Khomiakov, I.3.

<sup>196</sup> *Ляпунов:* Не лучше ли отважный самозванец  
С высокою и пылкою душой,  
Чем низкие и пышные бояре,  
Чем Шуйский сей, холодный лицемер?  
Ibid., IV.6.

not being able to shed a tear, wishes to get a piece of onion for bringing tears.<sup>197</sup> Khomiakov's Dmitrii is idealistic, open, and honest, and this is what destroys him. To compare, Pushkin's whole tone is much more skeptical: everyone inevitably pretends and plays a role.

The unusual addition is the character of the jester in Khomiakov's drama, most likely inspired by Shakespeare's plays but also, I would suggest, by Peter the Great's legendary jester, Balakirev. Holy fools (*iurodivye*) appear in many Russian works but Khomiakov's character is precisely a court jester. Jester (named only by this word in the play) engages in a critique of all the royal affairs, speaking in prose or folk-style rhymed lines: "No, brother Piotr, it's dark in my eyes from the German wines, my ears are clogged from the Polish music."<sup>198</sup> Such lines are also reminiscent of Russian street theatre. This jester is a Russian version of the iconic Shakespearean character but also rooted in the Russian oral tradition of social satire. Unfortunately, Jester's statements are straightforward rather than witty.

Khomiakov develops the jester motif further by showing the theatrical nature of Dmitrii's assumed identity. His love for Polish clothes and dances is one of the reasons leading to his assassination, which turns him into a tragic jester. One of the characters is ashamed of Dmitrii's behavior:

Like a jester in Polish clothes,  
He danced with that Marina of his.  
And with the Poles in such a ways, that I could not help  
Blushing for him.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Pushkin, A.S., "Boris Godunov." In Puskin, A.S., *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. In 17 Vols., Vol. 7 (Moskva: Voskresenie, 1994) 37.

<sup>198</sup> "Нет, брат Пётр, от немецких вин в глазах темно, от польской музыки в ушах залегло." Khomiakov, IV.1.

<sup>199</sup> Как шут в наряде польском,  
Он так плясал с Маринкою своей  
Да с ляхами, что за него невольно  
Я покраснел.  
Ibid., IV.9.

Again, Khomiakov is either inconsistent in creating Dimitrii's character or does not properly articulate how Dimitrii's self-proclaimed Russianness can be reconciled with his love for Polish culture. I maintain that Khomiakov's Dimitrii the Pretender becomes a metaphor for the struggle of the contemporary Russian elites, educated within the Western tradition, to rediscover and preserve their separate Russian identity. The Pretender represents a Westernized Russian nobleman who feels misplaced and even lost. He has a fluid identity and struggles to reconcile his Western and Russian sides. Khomiakov's Dimitrii is desperately trying to create a balance between cajoling his Polish supporters and affirming the political and religious independence of Russia. Yet, he is too passionate and inconsistent. Dimitrii is a good monarch with a reforming spirit who is destroyed by his temper, excessive ambitions, and the failure of his diplomacy. Khomiakov himself is seemingly in search of genuine rather than artificial patriotism but, eventually, his largely imitative and, at times, self-contradictory drama did not receive any lasting attention from the public.

Mikhail Pogodin was heavily influenced by Karamzin and Pushkin, and his play is almost a sequel to Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. Pogodin takes Pushkin's False Dimitrii and makes him a protagonist of his own drama. A historian himself, Pogodin, like Khomiakov, values historical accuracy in terms of the characters and the events. For example, he chooses the most curious and "theatrical" details about Dimitrii's actions, habits, and lifestyle that are mentioned in Karamzin's chapter: the crowd remembers the whirlwind on the road during Dimitrii's first arrival to Moscow as a bad omen; Dimitrii is offended by the Polish ambassadors who refuse to call him "emperor;" the people are indignant about his wedding with the "unbaptized bride;" the tsar and his Polish court eating veal; Dimitrii not attending church services.<sup>200</sup>

As noted earlier, Chester Dunning offers a thorough analysis of Pushkin's early full draft of *Boris Godunov* and shows how it initially contained stronger comedic element. In Pushkin's final version, it can

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<sup>200</sup> Karamzin, N.M. "Tsarstvovanie Lzhedmitriia. Gody 1605-1606." // Karamzin, N.M., *Istoriia Gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*, in 12 vols., Vol 11, Chapter 4. [http://az.lib.ru/k/karamzin\\_n\\_m/text\\_1110.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/k/karamzin_n_m/text_1110.shtml) (Accessed on December 23, 2016).

be detected, for instance, in the humorous scene “Korchma na Litovskoi granitse” where Dmitrii mocks and tricks the authorities by pretending to read the description of his own looks but describing one of the travelers instead, and then escaping. In Pogodin’s play, this comedic element is deliberately very pronounced. The whole play is written in prose and, therefore, departs from the solemn tone that was characteristic of almost all previous historical dramas. Pogodin’s Dmitrii is a fop, a comical vain character. Lebedeva makes the very interesting and convincing observation that Pogodin’s Dmitrii resembles Gogol’s Khlestakov.<sup>201</sup> By curious coincidence, both plays were created around the same time. Khlestakov is also a “samozvanets,” and Gogol was very likely influenced by the contemporary fad for the pretenders. Even in the chronicles and the stories from the 17th century, the historical Pretender is presented in such a way that he bears some resemblance to the theatrical type of the fop. Karamzin, among many others, writes that the historical False Dmitrii was known for his wastefulness and love of luxury and women.<sup>202</sup> In the play, his light-mindedness and vanity are established in the opening scene that presents him and his loyal supporter and friend Basmanov:

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<sup>201</sup> “[The Pretender] ...in Pogodin’s piece is not only the continuation of Pushkin’s False Dmitrii. He surprisingly shares some traits with Gogol’s Khlestakov. Of course, we cannot talk about the direct influence of Pogodin on Gogol’s creation of Khlestakov (let alone that Gogol’s comedy was written approximately at the same time as Pogodin’s *History*). However, Pogodin developed the comedic traits of Pushkin’s False Dmitrii, [such as] his frivolity and his assuredness of his own success, that characterized him in the last scenes of *Boris Godunov*, and created a character of the Pretender in tune with the “Khlestakov” type. ...This hypothesis is further proved by the fact that Gogol did read Pogodin’s *History* and left a flattering review of the Pretender as a character, in a letter.” “[Самозванец] ...у Погодина выступает не только продолжением пушкинского Лжедмитрия, но удивительным образом оказывается наделён чертами гоголевского Хлестакова. Конечно, нельзя говорить о прямом влиянии Погодина на создание Гоголем образа Хлестакова (тем более что комедия Гоголя была написана примерно одновременно с «Историей» Погодина), однако Погодин, развив комедийные стороны пушкинского Лжедмитрия, легкомыслие и веру в собственный успех, характеризовавшие его в последних сценах «Бориса Годунова», создал образ Самозванца хлестаковского типа. ...Это предположение тем более обосновано, что Гоголь читал «Историю» Погодина и лестно отзывался об образе Самозванца в письме.” Lebedeva, 207-208.

<sup>202</sup> “The people criticized the Pretender’s unmeasured extravagance: he splurged and rewarded anyone without a second thought; the foreign musicians were paid better than the highest state officials; loving luxury and splendor, he was constantly buying, ordering all kinds of luxury goods, and in three months, spent more than seven million rubles – and the people disliked extravagance of tsars because they were afraid of taxes. ...Contradicting our customs and prudence, False Dmitrii despised even the most sacred laws of morality: he did not want to restrain his crude desires and, aflame with voluptuousness, explicitly violated the traditions of chastity and decency, as if he wanted to imitate his pretended parent, he dishonored wives and maidens, the court, the families, and the holy convents with impudent debauchery.”

*The Pretender (starts to speak thoughtfully and quietly, and gradually raises his voice): That Cossack... Vishnevetskoi... Jesuits... Marina... The king... The army... Tsar of All Rus'! (shaking off his pensiveness) It has been worth the trouble! It has been worth one or two sleepless nights, and going hungry! Look at me, brother! – I wanted this – and I am a Tsar! – Thank you, too, Piotr Fiodorovich (hugs him). But this golden adornment is heavy! (takes off the necklace and slouches in the armchair). Oh, it is nice to rest and laze now!... Where is Kseniia? Hurry and show me this beauty!*<sup>203</sup>

Even though Pogodin follows the documented sequence of events, he unprecedentedly modernizes the speech and the behavior of the characters. Not only is the whole play written in prose, but this prose has a distinct conversational tone with ellipses and short sentences. Instead of emphasizing the historical differences or old pre-Petrine Russian mentality, the author creates the effect of human proximity and bridges contemporary times and the past.

The quoted passage also demonstrates the abundance of stage directions throughout the drama. The notes on the gestures, movements, and intonation of the Pretender are so extensive and specific that they anticipate the style of Ostrovsky and even Chekhov. Lebedeva claims that Pogodin did not write this play for stage because so many aspects of the play would make it impossible. For example, the killing of Dmitrii is too detailed and naturalistic.<sup>204</sup> Most likely, Pogodin realized that the censors would not allow

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”Осуждали еще в Самозванце непомерную расточительность: он сыпал деньгами и награждал без ума; давал иноземным музыкантам жалованье, какого не имели и первые Государственные люди; любя роскошь и великолепие, непрестанно покупал, заказывал всякие драгоценные вещи и месяца в три издержал более семи миллионов рублей - а народ не любил расточительности в Государях, ибо страшится налогов. ... Действуя вопреки нашим обычаям и благоразумию, Лжедмитрий презирал и святейшие законы нравственности: не хотел обуздывать вожделений грубых и, пылая сластолюбием, явно нарушал уставы целомудрия и пристойности, как бы с намерением уподобиться тем мнимому своему родителю; бесчестил жен и девиц, двор, семейства и святые обители дерзостию разврата.” Karamzin, *Tsarstvovaniie Lzhedmitriia*.

<sup>203</sup> Самозванец: (в задумчивости начинает говорить тихо и постепенно возвышает голос) Казак... Вишневецкой... Иезуиты... Марина... Король... Войско... Царь всяя Руси! (выходя из задумчивости) Стоило труда! Можно было и не поспать ночку-другую, поголодать! Каков, брат, я? – Захотел – и Царь! – Спасибо и тебе, Пётр Фёдорович! (обнимает его) Но мне тяжело в этом золотом окладе! (снимает с себя ожерелье и разваливается в креслах) А приятно отдохнуть теперь, понежиться! ... Где Ксения? Покажите мне скорей эту красавицу! Pogodin, M. *Istoriia v litsakh o Dimitrii Samozvantse* (Moskva, 1835), 2. [Electronic Resource] [https://www.litres.ru/static/or3/view/or.html?art\\_type=4&file=1197525&art=526785&user=159735123&cover=/static/bookimages/01/19/75/01197535.bin.dir/01197535.cover.jpg&uuiid=c013b8aa-1540-11e0-8c7e-ec5afce481d9](https://www.litres.ru/static/or3/view/or.html?art_type=4&file=1197525&art=526785&user=159735123&cover=/static/bookimages/01/19/75/01197535.bin.dir/01197535.cover.jpg&uuiid=c013b8aa-1540-11e0-8c7e-ec5afce481d9) (Accessed on December 23, 2016).

<sup>204</sup> Lebedeva, 207.

the murder scene and ban this play from staging. Yet, I disagree that Pogodin necessarily envisioned his play as not suited for stage. After all, Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* has often been called unstageable by scholars.<sup>205</sup> However, there is evidence that Pushkin was thinking about staging and the actors to be cast.<sup>206</sup> Pogodin's remarks are overtly directed at actors. In the theatre of that era, mass scenes and visual illusions were very common on stage. They simply depended on budgets and were mostly used in operas and ballets. Pogodin's piece does have potential for staging and performance.

Pogodin's Pretender openly favors the customs of the Polish nobility and wants to introduce them to the Russian people: "And we shall introduce balls, banquets, and masquerades here! I shall have my boyars accustomed to the merry, open Polish life! It's time to abandon Moscovian barbarity."<sup>207</sup> The False Dmitrii is never verbally compared to Peter the Great but this quote about holding balls and masquerades is reminiscent of Peter's forcing the Western entertainment onto Russian nobility in his attempts to

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<sup>205</sup> In 1956, scholar Gozenpud noted that the unstageable nature of *Boris Godunov* had become a widespread idea since the play was first published:

"*Boris Godunov* used to appear (and still appears) on stage only sporadically, and even then, mostly for its anniversaries, and then falls out of repertoires. Theatres stage this tragedy rather reluctantly and without the expectations of success. This disbelief is based on the conviction that *Boris Godunov* is an unstageable play for reading only. The situation is paradoxical because literature scholars are the ones who insist on purely theatrical value of the tragedy, whereas the practitioners of theatre prefer to evade this discussion. Nevertheless, theatres should have the last word on the question. The debate on *Boris Godunov's* theatricality began when the tragedy was first published (1831) and has not ended till this day."

"«Борис Годунов» появлялся (и появляется) на сцене лишь спорадически, и то по преимуществу в дни юбилейных дат, и вслед за этим выпадает из репертуара. Театры обращаются к трагедии без большой охоты и без глубокой веры в успех. Неверие это обусловлено убеждением, что в «Борисе Годунове» якобы отсутствует сценичность, что это только пьеса для чтения. Парадоксальность ситуации усугубляется тем, что на чисто театральных достоинствах трагедии настаивают преимущественно литературоведы, тогда как практики театра предпочитают уклончивую позицию. Между тем именно театры должны сказать в этом вопросе решающее слово. Спор о театральности «Бориса Годунова», возникший при появлении трагедии в печати (1831), не завершился и в наши дни."

Gozenpud, A.A., "O stsenichnosti i teatral'noi sud'be *Borisa Godunova*" // Meilakh, B.E., ed., *Pushkin: issledovaniia i materialy*, in 14 vols., Vol. 5 "Pushkin i Russkaia kul'tura" (Leningrad: Nauka, 1967), 339.

<sup>206</sup> "However, Pushkin was writing *Boris Godunov* for theatre, seeing this tragedy as the beginning of the reform in drama and stage practices."

"«Между тем Пушкин «Бориса Годунова» создавал для театра, рассматривая трагедию как начало драматически-сценической реформы." Ibid., 341.

<sup>207</sup> "И мы начнём здесь балы, банкеты и маскарады! Я буду приучать моих Бояр к весёлой, открытой Польской жизни! Пора покидать Московское варварство." Pogodin, 13.

westernize their whole lifestyle. Another common trait between Pogodin's Dmitrii and Peter is their disregard of religion. Pogodin's Dmitrii does not care about the rituals and faith differences between Poles and Russians.

Curiously, Khomiakov's Dmitrii is a "Slavophile," whereas Pogodin's Dmitrii is a "Westernizer." Pogodin's protagonist is a Russian man who is unconcerned about his own Russian identity and embraces Western Polish culture as more developed. He is a modern-era man who values individuality and meritocracy over traditions and rituals. His lack of connection with the beliefs of the Russian people makes him almost anachronistic, and the allusions to Peter the Great strengthen that impression. In Pogodin's text, Dmitrii is blinded by power and relies on the sacred status of a tsar and his benevolent deeds: "Why would they be angry at me? I do not execute nor hang them, I do not force them to work, I shower them with money..."<sup>208</sup> He refuses to listen to Basmanov's warnings about the rebellion.

The theatricality of Dmitrii's reign culminates in the long and detailed scene of the masquerade, with multiple characters and complex interactions. The Poles mock the boyars and their wives for lack of skill in Western dancing and salon conversation. The boyars' discontent and embarrassment become one of the factors in their turn against Dmitrii. Pogodin concentrates on the small mundane interactions and their role in the bigger events. The play, as a whole, presents the unsolvable clash of two cultural identities and Dmitrii's overconfident but failed attempt to reconcile them.

By the 1830s, scenes with the anonymous representatives of the *narod* talking and discussing the events had already become commonplace in historical dramas. In Pogodin's play, the *narod* also appears in several scenes that are similar to Pushkin's depictions. In *Boris Godunov*, the people are passive, have a vague idea of the ongoing events, and can be manipulated by the noble leaders. In the finale of his play, Khomiakov also demonstrates how such a manipulation works. In his version, when the Pretender is murdered, Vasilii Shuiskii pays money to some Moscow commoners, and they speak in support of Shuiskii's coronation on the streets, thus, creating the illusion of the people's will.

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<sup>208</sup> "За что же им злиться на меня? Я их не казню, не вешаю, работать не заставляю, деньгами осыпаю..." Pogodin, 161.

In Pogodin's drama, the anonymous conversations in the crowd function as the litmus test for the city's atmosphere and register the growing adversity toward Dmitrii. For example, they make a comment about Dmitrii not behaving or speaking like a tsar: "His manner is not one of a tsar! / And his speech is insolent."<sup>209</sup> They further call him "scoundrel" and "rogue."<sup>210</sup> Later, the common people address the rumors about their tsar being a former monk: "a tsar, or else an unfrocked monk."<sup>211</sup> In the final act, Shuiskii condemns Dmitrii as "satan" and "heretic," and the crowd echoes Shuiskii's speech in their readiness to fight against the "villain."<sup>212</sup>

To conclude, Dmitrii the Pretender, as a number of the other pretenders in Russian history, assumes the identity of the heir to the throne. He *performs* the identity of the royal heir. The historical Dmitrii entertained himself with Polish-style ballroom dancing and favored skhomorokhs, traditional entertainers who were frequently condemned by the church and even officially persecuted by some tsars. A tsar's behavior itself by that time was guided by many expectations.<sup>213</sup> However, the False Dmitrii was outrageously inconsistent in his performance of the tsardom. Pogodin writes a detailed scene of a masquerade that acquires the symbolic meaning of playfulness and subverted hierarchies. The whole era of the False Dimitrii is portrayed as a tragic macabre carnival. In history and drama, the tsar turns into his own opposite, a skomorokh, a jester. Karamzin writes that, when Dmitrii's corpse was left on the street

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<sup>209</sup> "Ишь, не царская хватка у него!/ И речь-то какая дерзкая." Pogodin, 26.

<sup>210</sup> "Пострел," "шатун" Ibid., 28.

<sup>211</sup> "...не то царь, не то расстрига..." Ibid., 66.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>213</sup> "He aggrieved the boyars by his rudeness but, at the same time, conversed with them with such freedom that was unusual and unfitting for a tsar's high rank, as it was perceived by the Russian people. Thus, he did not respect the boyars, and the boyars respected him less than his royal predecessors."

"Грубостию огорчая Бояр, Самозванец допускал их однако ж в разговорах с ним до вольности необыкновенной и несогласной с мыслями Россиян о высококости Царского сана, так что Бояре, им не уважаемые, и сами уважали его менее прежних Государей." Karamzin, *Tsarstvovaniie Lzhedmitriia*.



for public abuse and mockery, a mask was lying on him.<sup>214</sup> The Pretender profaned the Russian monarchy, and his body was left to be defiled.

Thus, Khomiakov and Pogodin interpret the Pretender's character and historical role in the very different ways but both follow Pushkin in their more nuanced depictions. This new approach marks an important shift in historical playwriting toward more critical treatment of historical narratives. All three writers want to show complexity rather than portray historical figures as heroes or villains. Pushkin addresses the philosophical questions about our knowledge, historical sources, human morality and power. Khomiakov and Pogodin use the Time of Troubles and the figure of the Pretender to address the dilemma of Russia's relations with the West. Khomiakov attempts but does not fully succeed in affirming Russia's immanent value and distinct identity, whereas Pogodin notices the westernizing aspirations in the False Dimitrii and sees them as the cause of his fall. Both Khomiakov and Pogodin's dramas pose questions about Russian identity and the Western influence, and reflect the continuing cultural anxiety that was first articulated by Plavilshchikov decades earlier.

#### 2.4 THEATRICAL PRACTICES IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

In the first half of the 19th century, Russian theatre became diversified in terms of genres and acting styles. Yet, mainstream stage practices of the era did not evolve significantly. Rather, they also became more diverse, absorbed more influences, and solidified the approaches to staging that were first developed in the 18th century. This is especially true about historical dramas that adhered to their templates and, as Stanislavsky noted much later, were the most conservative and clichéd genre on

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<sup>214</sup> "The furious mob grabbed the naked corpses, carried them out of the Kremlin, and put them near the place of execution: the unfrocked monk [the Pretender] was put on the table, with a mask, a pipe, and a bagpipe, which signified his love for pagan entertainment [*skomoroshество*] and music; and Basmanov was put on a bench, at the Pretender's feet."

"Яростная чернь схватила, извлекла сии нагие трупы из Кремля и положила близ лобного места: расстригу на столе, с маскою, дудкою и волынкою, в знак любви его к скоморошеству и музыке; а Басманова на скамье, у ног расстригиных." Karamzin, *Tsarstvovanie Lzhedmitriia*.

stage.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, historical plays remained marginal for the development of innovative techniques, for a long time. For example, Shakhovskoi is important for the history of directing during the discussed time period but he did not work in the historical genre. Later, Alexander Ostrovsky made a significant contribution not only as a playwright but as a director and manager, as well. However, his most successful projects had contemporary, not historical settings. Aleksey Tolstoy developed many valuable and innovative ideas on directing but did not manage to establish the new practices for stage productions.

Theatre blossomed as a form of popular entertainment in the early 19th century, for all the estates of society, with the exception of peasants.<sup>216</sup> Especially in spoken genres, theatre was about quantity rather than quality. An actor joined a troupe as someone assigned to play a certain type, and typecasting was included into the official regulations.<sup>217</sup> The word “character” [Russian: *kharacter*] itself came from French theatre and was commonly used in the meaning of “type.” Typically for “mass” culture, most plays and productions simply enjoyed evanescent success and were discarded and forgotten after one

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<sup>215</sup> “In staging *Tsar Fyodor* and *The Death of Ioann the Terrible*, our main concern was to get away from the usual clichéd style of production used for historical plays about boyars in old Russia. It must be said that this style was particularly displeasing, persistent, and contagious.” Stanislavsky, K.S., and Benedetti, Jean, trans. and ed., *My Life in Art* (London and NY, Routledge, 2008), 184.

<sup>216</sup> “In the first years of the 19th century, the attention of the public was focused on theatre incomparably more than ten or twenty years earlier. The majority of the journals, that were issued during those years, published reviews of plays, responses to the new plays; original and translated articles on the history and theory of theatrical art.”

“В первые годы XIX века театр несравненно в большей мере, чем десять-двадцать лет назад, занимает собой общественное внимание. Большая часть журналов, выходящих в эти годы, помещает на своих страницах театральные рецензии, отклики на новые пьесы, печатает оригинальные и переводные статьи по вопросам истории и теории театрального искусства.” Rodina, “Vvedenie,” 30.

<sup>217</sup> An excerpt from the 1803 law that regulated state theatres:

“For actors: leading role, young lover, second lover, noble father, demi-caractère and comical reasoner, rude comedian, fop, first and second servant, comical peasant and simpleton, confidant and extra; for actresses: leading role, young lover and first coquette, second lover and duenna, innocent role, noble mother and demi-caractère, comical old woman and character role, first maid and frolic role, and second maid.”

”Для актёров – первая роль, молодой любовник, второй любовник, благородный отец, демикарактёрный и комический резонёр и грубый комик, петиметр, первый и второй слуга, комический мужичок и простак, конфидант и аксессуар; для актрис – первая роль, молодая любовница и первая кокетка, вторая любовница и дуэнья молодой, роль невинных, благодатная мать и демикарактёр, комическая старуха и роль де карактер, первая служанка и резвая роль и вторая служанка».

Pogozhev, V. *Proekt zakonopolozhenii ob imperatorskikh teatrakh*, Vol. 3 (1803), 275, Quoted in: Rodina, “Vvedenie,” 43.

season in the repertoires. Actors still belonged to the lower social estate and were dependent upon the management. A sped-up production process that did not give actors enough time to prepare for each role, and harsh theatrical censorship particularly for the Russian historical genre also greatly impeded its stage development. Yet, patriotic historical drama developed its own conventions and continued to exist as a separate stage genre, valued for its visuals and national themes.

Catherine Schuler repeatedly emphasizes that in the first half of the 19th century, the elites still preferred foreign entertainment and foreign actors, with only a few exceptions.<sup>218</sup> For example, she writes about the self-taught Russian actor Iakovlev and, based on her research on spectators' responses, concludes that the upper-class "teatraly" considered him vulgar and his acting too exaggerated.<sup>219</sup> At the same time, she notes, Iakovlev was the leading tragic actor in the 1800s, popular among merchants and lower urban classes who also attended theatres. In my opinion, that these acting styles and productions of Russian theatre should be studied as a form of popular culture and judged accordingly. Theatre is an evanescent and elusive form of art, so scholars rarely mention the vibrancy of this popular theatrical culture in Russia but do provide copious indirect evidence of that fact. Historical plays were undoubtedly part of that "mass" culture. It is almost ironic how they descended into that realm from Sumarokov's project of elite court theatre.

One original development in the historical genre is choruses of "the people" that frequently appeared on stage since 1800s.<sup>220</sup> This is a uniquely Russian theatrical feature because French Neoclassical plays did not feature choruses. The Russian people's chorus revived the aesthetic of ancient Greek tragedy. Russian culture was still intensively learning the mythological and artistic heritage of ancient Greece and Rome. In addition, the historical dramas now depicted the turning points of Russian history, such as the battle for Moscow in 1612. The chorus appears only in the plays that show large-scale

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<sup>218</sup> Schuler, 46.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>220</sup> See Footnote 21.

historical events. It is very likely that the choruses existed earlier, in the synthetic performance productions at the royal court, like the one based on Catherine II's play that was described in Chapter 1. To my knowledge, no detailed descriptions of the choruses were preserved. Because the verses in tragedies were often chanted, we may assume that the people's choruses on stage were also doing some kinds of chanting or singing. Even ballet scenes could appear in historical dramas.<sup>221</sup> Generally, the theatrical aesthetic of the era was very eclectic. Neoclassical traditions still remained strong, sentimental melodrama was ever popular, and Schiller and Shakespeare, even though usually abridged and badly translated, were associated with the new Romantic trend. All these elements interacted and could often be combined in one stage production.

One of the main characteristics of this epoch is the growing disparity between the conservatism of actual theatrical productions and the debates in print that were persistently calling for the reform of acting and stage practices. Nikolai Gogol, the actor Mikhail Shchepkin, and the critic Vissarion Belinsky articulated initial, not yet systematic, reformative ideas on acting and staging. They developed them, using individual examples of the actors (his own work, in Shchepkin's case) who aimed at creating interesting characters and diligently worked on their roles.

The new plays that later became classics sometimes received a lukewarm reception, faced censorship problems, and required totally new stage practices that complicated the staging process and defied spectators' expectations. The Aleksandrinskii Theatre's production team, for instance, was developing costumes and sets specifically for Gogol's *The Government Inspector*: "It is known that special set designs and costumes were prepared for *The Government Inspector*, and that happened not because of any particular reverence for Nikolai Gogol but because even the theatre's officials realized

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<sup>221</sup> "The Romantic dramatists of the 1830-40 used ballet and singing very excessively, so they turned historical drama and tragedy into a sort of variety entertainment. Belinsky repeatedly protested against this overuse [of ballet and singing]."

"Особо злоупотребляли балетом и пением драматурги-романтики 30-40х годов, превратившие историческую драму и трагедию в своего рода дивертисмент. Против этого злоупотребления не раз выступал Белинский." Vochkarev, 44.

that such a play could not be performed in a generic set and in such costumes as no Russian ever wore in real life.”<sup>222</sup> It was unprecedented at that time to design something for one specific play. It did not grow out of anyone’s particular fondness for Gogol but because the play itself demanded a totally new and unfamiliar approach to staging.

#### 2.4.1 Theories and Practices of Acting

For acting, theory also went ahead of practice, as the best actors and a number of writers and journalists projected a reform of acting and began to conceptualize a new approach to preparing for a role and performing on stage. These ideas are prominent in the writings of Shchepkin, who is arguably the most influential teacher and theorist of acting in 19th-century Russia. Nicholai Gogol and some critics, such as Izmailov,<sup>223</sup> wrote about the importance of actors’ education. They envisioned the methods and acting culture that fully developed in practice only several decades later, and continues to be foundational in today’s theatre. Unlike the average spectators and many actors, Gogol, Shchepkin, or Polevoi (who contributed as a translator, playwright, and critic) viewed theatre as a socially and culturally important form of artistic expression.

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<sup>222</sup> “Известно, что для «Ревизора» изготовлялись специальные декорации и шились костюмы, и это происходило не от особого почтения к Гоголю, а потому, что даже театральные чиновники понимали, что такая пьеса не может ставиться в условном павильоне и в таких костюмах, которых никто из русских в действительной жизни никогда не носил. Dmitriev, T.M., “Stsenicheskoe iskusstvo” // Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol. 3 “1826-1842” (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1978), 90.

<sup>223</sup> “An idea is being asserted more and more about an actor being an independent artist who should understand the complex problems of a play and create an original stage interpretation. Hence, the need for actors’ education arises. In connection with that, A.E. Izmailov’s article is very characteristic. He wrote that all the best actors of the past had a solid knowledge of literature and mingled in the society not only for pleasure but also for “perfecting their art,” that an actor should be able to enter a role, otherwise he acts forcedly and with pretended fervor.” “Всё больше утверждается мысль, что актёр – самостоятельный художник, который должен по-своему уметь разобраться в сложной проблематике пьесы и по-своему интерпретировать сценическое произведение. Отсюда и возникает необходимость образования для актёров. В связи с этим характерна статья А. Е. Измайлова. Он писал о том, что все лучшие актёры прошлого основательно знали словесность и бывали в обществе не только для удовольствия, но и для «усовершенствования в своём искусстве», что актёр должен уметь войти в роль, в противном случае он будет играть с принуждением и притворным жаром.” Dmitriev, T.M., “Stsenicheskoe iskusstvo. Chast’ 2.” In Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol. 2. “1800-1825.” (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1977), 364.

The idea of “perevoploshchenie” and the ability of “living into a role” [*vzhitsia v rol'*] were already articulated. They sound remarkably similar to Stanislavsky’s system that appeared almost a hundred years later. However, these initial ideas about “perevoploshchenie” relied either on actors’ personal talent or external characteristics. Visuals, scenography, and emotional acting were very valued: “In the beginning of the [19th] century, the critical reviews about acting expressed the widespread conviction that emotional acting equaled true acting. They usually did not pay attention to the fact that emotionality sometimes characterized an actor himself and not the portrayed character. The problem of dramatic identification was often perceived externally – appropriate costume, make-up, manners.”<sup>224</sup> This approach to acting also aimed at eliciting a direct emotional response from the audience. At the time, the spectators were not even expected to pay close attention, which had to be won. Affected acting could engage the public and also fit well into the Sentimentalist cult of emotion, and the Romantic aesthetic of extreme situations and powerful characters. From this external emotionality, an idea of “embodiment” is starting to grow. Even though education of actors was seen as more and more important, another powerful idea was individual talent. So many layers and aesthetic criteria co-existed that it seemed impossible to reconcile them. For example, Karatygin’s acting even in the 1830s was apparently very much in tune with Neoclassical conventions. Many saw his acting as old-fashioned and even obsolete but he still enjoyed great success.<sup>225</sup>

The concept of “character” in drama was developing in parallel with its elaboration in many other cultural discourses. In the beginning of the chapter, I discussed the polemic about the national character in the Russian journals. Plavilshchikov, Fonvizin, and Catherine II took for granted the parallel between an individual and a nation’s character traits. The idea of Russian character, naturally, came to theatre very quickly. For example, contemporaries saw the famous comic actor Ozhogin as someone who himself was

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<sup>224</sup> “В начале века в критических отзывах об актёрском искусстве преобладало убеждение, что эмоциональная игра – это и есть игра правдивая. При этом обычно не обращалось внимания на то, что иногда эмоциональность была присуща не столько изображаемому персонажу, сколько самому актёру. Проблема перевоплощения актёра в образ зачастую рассматривалась чисто внешне – соответствующий костюм, грим, манера держаться.” Dmitriev, Vol. 2, 365.

<sup>225</sup> Schuler, 136.

“genuinely Russian” in character and successfully projected those qualities onto his stage roles. Ozhogin had a great comedic talent and was an outstanding mime and improviser. He became particularly famous for his role of the old nanny Eremeevna in Fonvizin’s *Minor*.<sup>226</sup>

Spectators found the first expressions of the “national character” in the stage representations of common people that were possible in such genres as comedy and comic opera. In another account, an actor is praised for a role in the very successful Ablesimov comic opera, *The Miller*. According to a spectator, the actor Krutitskii had a talent to present typical character traits of millers in a very recognizable and entertaining way.<sup>227</sup> It is interesting how the concepts of a character and a type emerges

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<sup>226</sup> Vsevolodskii-Gerngross references several archival sources that praised Ozhogin’s “truly Russian national character”:

“A.G. Ozhogin (1746-1814). Nikolaev, Makarov, Gorchakov, Kotzebue, Richter, and an author of *Dramatic Dictionary* all wrote about him. The information is fragmentary but very telling. ... He was the public’s favorite; the responses about him are uniformly delighted. He was especially loved for being an actor of “national character” (Richter). Some time later, Makarov noted that Ozhogin was “a one-of-a-kind, perfectly Russian, “native” person.” Dramatist Gorchakov wrote: “Ozhogin’s artistic simplicity, his unexpected jokes, improvisation, and even ad-libbing did not make any of us ashamed. His masks and his hints were playful and witty, and always harmless and familiar.” ... Ozhogin was very successful in the role of Eremeevna in *The Minor*.”

“А.Г. Ожогин (1746-1814). Сведения о нём находим у Николаева, Макарова, Горчакова, Коцебу, Рихтера и автора «Драматического словаря». Данные отрывочны, но красноречивы. ...

Ожогин был любимцем публики; отзывы о нём неизменно восторженны. Особенно привлекало в нём то, что это был актёр «национального характера» (Рихтер). Несколько позже Макаров отмечал, что Ожогин – «натура неподражаемая, совершенно русская, родовая». Драматург Горчаков писал: «Художественная простота Ожогина, его неожиданные шутки, импровизации и отсебятины не стыдили никого из нас. Его маски и его намёки были игривы и остроумны и всегда безобидны и привычны». ... Большим успехом пользовался Ожогин и в роли Еремеевны в «Недоросле».”

Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, V.N., “Russkii teatr ot istokov do serediny XVIII veka” // Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol 1. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), 232.

A note: Older female characters were played by men. Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> “Very much thanks to him [the actor Anton Krutitskii], Ablesimov’s comic opera *The Miller: A Sorcerer, Charlatan, and Matchmaker* enjoyed success and became especially popular at the time. As the Miller, Krutitskii demonstrated his mastery of a type from *narod*: “His manner of speaking, gestures, jokes, dancing while singing a folk song’s chorus, in a word, everything to the smallest detail, that are characteristic for our Russian millers, could be seen in him.”

“Во многом именно ему [актёру Антону Крутицкому] была обязана своим успехом ставшая особенно популярной в это время комическая опера Аблесимова «Мельник-колдун, обманщик и сват». В роли мельника Крутицкий демонстрировал своё мастерство воссоздания народного типа: «Выговор, ухватки, шутки, пляска с припевом простонародной песни, словом, все даже и малейшие оттенки, свойственные нашим русским мельникам, в нём видны были».”

Rodina, T.M., “Stsenicheskoe iskusstvo, Chast’ 1.” In Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol. 2. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1977), 168-169.

in the responses to theatrical productions a few decades before they were conceptualized by the “natural school” and the Realist movement in literature.

The development of characters in tragedies and historical dramas was more problematic because they were disconnected from contemporary everyday life, and the genre adhered to the most rigid rules. The comedians who were praised for their expressions of national character or recognizable social types on stage acted physically, with mimicry and gestures, and improvised part of their lines. The recitation of lines remained central for tragedy, and such focus on the rhetorical side did not encourage its evolution. Reizov says that a reform of theatre advocated by the Romantics was aiming at moving away from recitations and descriptive mode toward more holistic characterization: “The main goal of the reform in theatre was to replace narration, in other words description, with showing, in other words action.”<sup>228</sup>

I would like to add that this anticipated change was especially welcomed in the genres of tragedy and drama. Unlike comedy, tragedy or historical drama could not freely draw from the tradition of Russian folk performances. The French Neoclassical rules were seen by as a dead end by a number of the critics, and Shakespeare’s approaches to characterization were seen as the prospective new model.

Catherine Schuler describes in detail how Russian theatre and its actors gained importance in connection with the idea of nationhood thanks to the anti-French impulse during the wars with France: “...Alexei Iakovlev and Ekaterina Semenova were not only the first celebrity actors of the Russian theatre but also the first celebrity signifiers of national patriotism.”<sup>229</sup> During the 1800-1810s, they both starred in Ozerov’s very successful historical drama *Dmitrii Donskoi*, and Iakovlev was wildly popular as Pozharskii in Kriukovskii’s piece. However, even these two actors were, otherwise, mostly famous for their roles in translations and adaptations. Iakovlev’s emotionality, which was perceived as “overacting”

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<sup>228</sup> “Основной задачей романтической реформы театра была заменить рассказ, то есть описание, показом, то есть действием.” Reizov, B. *Frantsuzskii istoricheskii roman v epokhu romantizma*. (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1969), 401.

<sup>229</sup> Schuler, 48.



even by some contemporaries, turned him into a perfect lead for Kotzebue's, Fedorov's, and Il'in's sentimental melodramas.

Semenova was the leading tragic actress who, in the eyes of the majority of Russian spectators, did justice to French Neoclassical theatre. She also was the first actress who enlivened powerful ancient Greek heroines in Ozerov's Russian adaptations. As Catherine Schuler demonstrates in her book, such achievements were equally or even more important on stage than Russian historical heroines because these renditions signified the ability of Russian culture to emulate the highest achievements of ancient Greek and European theatre.

Schuler demonstrates that the nationalist concept of "Russian soul" was very important for pre-20th-century theatrical criticism: "Although *dusha* – the mysterious Russian soul – may seem like a stale relic of Russian Romanticism, the word and concept were pervasive in nineteenth-century discourse on Russian national character."<sup>230</sup> "Dusha" was a highly frequent word in critical and amateur responses to stage productions and can be linked to *narodnost'* as the elusive manifestation of national uniqueness. This is a summary of the recurring ideas found in many responses and reviews: "Perhaps, *dusha* cannot be articulated rationally in verbal or written language, but an authentic Russian can easily feel or intuit its presence."<sup>231</sup> This vision of a uniquely Russian quality translated into an interesting perception of acting. Besides the ideal of a trained actor, performers like Iakovlev were welcomed precisely for their natural talent that made formal training unnecessary and let an actor project true Russianness onto the stage via his or her own character. Such successful actors could not teach acting nor establish any acting school or tradition because their stage life stemmed from their real-life Russian character. At the same time, this approach to acting did not impress the elite society. As I mentioned before, the upper class spectators

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<sup>230</sup> Schuler, 59.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

often despised Iakovlev as vulgar.<sup>232</sup> Unlike him, Semenova was popular among all spectators, and loved by the nobility, as well.

The nationalist impulse of the 1800s and 1810s turned into a literal rivalry between Semenova and Mlle [Mademoiselle] George who was the acclaimed and very loved French actress. She was invited to St. Petersburg in 1811, so that the Russian court and the aristocracy could enjoy superb and authentic French theatre. Initially, George outshined Semenova and demonstrated a superior acting technique as well as a powerful stage presence. In response to that, the patriotic theatre-lovers started a contest. Semenova diligently studied all the techniques and styles of Mlle George by attending her rehearsals and during study sessions with Gnedich. Very soon, George and Semenova were almost put into a ring because they played the same roles in the same French Neoclassical plays on different nights of the same season in Moscow. With high anti-French sentiment on the verge of the new war, Semenova was pronounced the winner because she could both master French acting, achieving George's level, and express herself emotionally and naturally, laying her true Russian soul out on stage.<sup>233</sup> This is a very telling example of how elusive and convoluted was the concept of the national theatre. One prominent feature of this newly found identity was the best Russian actors' (and also writers') protean quality, their ability to master and perform anything foreign.<sup>234</sup> Semenova's admirers heralded her as the ultimately

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<sup>232</sup> Schuler, 62.

An actor of the next generation, Mochalov, seems to have many similar characteristics with Iakovlev. He was inconsistent and most successful only in certain types of roles. His role of *Hamlet* was interpreted by Belinsky as an incarnation of Russian superfluous man and the expression of Russian national character.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Much later, Dostoevsky expressed a very similar idea about the protean ability that he as a Russian national characteristic:

"I repeat, I did not want to diminish from the universal significance of a Shakespeare and a Schiller when I pointed out Pushkin's wonderful faculty for reincarnating himself in the genius of foreign nations: I only wanted to point out the great and prophetic indication for us in this faculty and its perfection, because 4. This faculty is a completely Russian faculty, a national faculty. Pushkin only shares it with the whole Russian people; but as a perfect artist, he most perfectly expresses this faculty, in his sphere at least, in the sphere of his art. Our people does truly contain within its soul this tendency to universal sympathy and reconciliation; it has already given voice to it more than once in the two centuries since Peter's reforms."

Dostoevsky, Fyodor, and John Middleton Murry, trans. *Pages from the journal of an author*. Dublin and London, 1916. [Electronic Resource] Accessed on December 22, 2016.

better actress because she could become French-like, whereas George could never possibly become Russian-like.

Accounts about more mainstream acting and average stage productions are very scarce. To my knowledge, Zhikharev's memoirs may be the only source on the productions of historical dramas in the early 19th century. Zhikharev provides additional evidence for the aforementioned disparity between progressive critical debates and actual practices, as he is very critical about the dated aesthetic inspired by Sumarokov and the thin plot of Kriukovskii's *Pozharskii*: "I myself know that Kriukovskii's play is mediocre, and the very verse in Pozharskii's role, that delighted the public so much, smell of Sumarokov's verse. ... And only now, having seen the performance of Pozharskii, I begin to understand: all that is needed for tragedies to succeed on Russian stage is their timeliness and Iakovlev."<sup>235</sup> His ironic commentary points out that the system of celebrity actors has already been established, and repertoires reflected the current social climate and various cultural fads. Zhikharev gives us a rare insight at a theatrical production of a patriotic historical play from the early 19th century:

The performance began: the scene of Zarutskii (Shusherin) and esaul (Shchennikov) went coldly. But finally, Pozharskii (Iakovlev) appeared. He stopped in the middle of the stage, cast a mournful look on golden-domed Moscow, excellently painted on the background, sighed deeply, and pronounced the first line, "Love of Fatherland has a great power in our hearts!", with such determination and dedication that the audience burst into applause. But hearing the following lines

It is a passion of Russian warriors.  
That ardent feeling that creates a hero,

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[https://archive.org/stream/pagesfromjourna00murrgoog/pagesfromjourna00murrgoog\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/pagesfromjourna00murrgoog/pagesfromjourna00murrgoog_djvu.txt)

"Повторяю, не на мировое значение Шекспиров и Шиллеров хотел я посягнуть, обозначая гениальнейшую способность Пушкина перевоплощаться в гении чужих наций, а желая лишь в самой этой способности и в полноте ее отметить великое и пророческое для нас указание, ибо 4) Способность эта есть всецело способность русская, национальная, и Пушкин только делит ее со всем народом нашим, и, как совершеннейший художник, он есть и совершеннейший выразитель этой способности, по крайней мере в своей деятельности, в деятельности художника. Народ же наш именно заключает в душе своей эту склонность к всемирной отзывчивости и к всепримирению и уже проявил ее во все двухсотлетие с петровской реформы не раз." Dostoevsky, F.M., "Pushkinskaia rech'." In Dostoevsky, F.M., *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, in 30 vols., Vol 26. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984), 131.

<sup>235</sup> "Я сам знаю, что пьеса Крюковского посредственна, да и самые стихи в роли Пожарского, которые приводили в такой восторг публику, пахнут сумароковщиной. ... И лишь теперь, увидев представление «Пожарского», я начинаю понимать, что для полного успеха трагедий на русской сцене только и нужно, чтобы они были «кстати» и чтобы играл в них Яковлев." Zhikharev, S.P., *Zapiski sovremennika* (Moskva-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1955), 543.

We will soon show it amidst the bloody battle.  
It is time to return what was stolen from us!  
the people started stomping, tapping their canes, and shouting “bravo! bravo!” It was so deafeningly loud that Iakovlev had to stay motionless and silent for about two minutes. Almost all his lines, that consisted of the aphorisms and expressions of the love of fatherland, were received with such exaltation. The public paid no attention whatsoever to the logic of the plot or the roles of the other actors...<sup>236</sup>

This passage further shows how theatrical culture centered on leading actors who directly communicated with the audience as themselves more than “in character.” The public’s reaction is polarized, from cold silence to crying, clapping, stamping feet, even tapping their canes. Such unapologetic and straightforward reactions shed light on the necessity of the exaggerated acting style in the era, with its attention-grabbing pauses, loud sighs, and passionate cries of leading characters.

Another prominent actor, Pavel Mochalov, was incredibly popular in the 1830s and 40s in the leading roles of tragic Romantic characters, such as Schiller’s Karl Moor and Shakespeare’s Hamlet. He gave similar depth and inner conflict to the protagonist of Kukol’nik’s patriotic nationalist play, *Prince Skopin-Shuiskii*, that was very similar in style to *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland*. There is very little evidence about Mochalov’s role of Liapunov in *Prince Skopin-Shuiskii* but, apparently, he turned him into a doubting, tortured character: “Playing Prokopii Liapunov in Kukol’nik’s tawdry tragedy *Prince Skopin-Shuiskii*, Mochalov turned this “savage lord” (whom the author initially created in order to deafen the spectators with his loud monologs) into a genuinely and profoundly tragic character. The

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<sup>236</sup> Представление началось: сцена Заруцкого (Шушерин) с есаулом (Щенников) прошла холодно. Но вот, наконец, появился Пожарский (Яковлев). Он остановился посередине сцены, прискорбно взглянул на златоглавую Москву, прекрасно изображённую на задней декорации, глубоко вздохнул, и с таким чувством решимости и самоотвержения произнёс первый стих своей роли: Любви к Отечеству сильна над сердцем власть! что театр затрещал от рукоплесканий. Но при следующих стихах: То чувство пылкое, творящее героя, Покажем скоро мы среди кровава боя. Похищенно добро нам время возвратить! начались топанья и стучанья палками и раздались крики «браво! браво!» до такой степени оглушительные, что Яковлев приуждён был оставаться минуты с две неподвижным и безгласным. С таким востогом приняты были почти все стихи из его роли, которая состоит из афоризмов и декламаций о любви к отечеству. На трактацию сюжета и роли других актёров публика не обращала никакого внимания...” Zhikharev, 544.

spectators saw a man tormented by the unsolvable, cursed questions.”<sup>237</sup> Thanks to Mochalov, this production enjoyed great success. However, it was Mochalov’s study of Hamlet and other famous characters of the theatrical Romantic tradition that fed into his independent departure from Kukol’nik’s one-dimensional dramatis personae. This Liapunov was more of an archetypal Romantic protagonist than a Russian historical figure. Thus, Mochalov acted in historical dramas, as well, but they remained very marginal for his contribution into the history of acting.

#### 2.4.2 Theatrical Costumes in the Early 19th Century

The quantity of performed plays was rapidly increasing during the early 19th century, and so was the amount of props available in the permanent theatres of Moscow and St. Petersburg. The first half of the 19th century is the time of a very unsystematic and arbitrary approaches to stage costumes. French Neoclassical fashion that reflected the conventions of the 18th century style in clothing (most prominently, wigs) remained strong. The idea of historical or any other authenticity was almost non-existent, and the idea of the reconstruction of historical outfits for stage would not arrive until later. The elements from ancient Roman styles and Russian historical attires could be freely worn simultaneously by an actor, regardless of the play being an ancient tragedy or a Russian historical drama:

For example, in M.V. Kriukovskii’s play *Pozharskii*, Pozharskii’s wife appeared on the battlefield wearing a very long train that was obviously inappropriate for the setting. The critics justly reprehended such theatre where one could see Dmitrii Donskoi armed with a Roman sword, Antigone wearing a Russian veil, Othello in short boots, or Amenaïda with a diamond comb. A bridegroom sometimes appeared wearing a French 18th-century jacket, a powdered wig, and a sword at his side, while his bride would be dressed in the latest fashion of the second quarter of the 19th century.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> “Играя Прокопия Ляпунова в лубочной трагедии Кукольника «Князь Скопин-Шуйский», Мочалов превращал этого «дикого господина», призванного, по замыслу автора, оглушать зрителей трескучими монологами, в образ большой трагической силы. Перед зрителем появлялся человек, которого мучали неразрешимые, проклятые вопросы.” Al’pers, Boris. *Akterskoe iskusstvo v Rossii* (Moskva-Leningrad, Iskusstvo, 1945), 134.

<sup>238</sup> “Так, в спектакле «Пожарский» М.В. Крюковского жена Пожарского появлялась на ратном поле в платье с длиннейшим шлейфом, явно не идущим к месту действия. Критика справедливо порицала театр за то, что в нём можно было увидеть Дмитрия Донского, вооружённого римским мечом, Антигону – в русской фате, Отелло в полусапожках, Аменаиду с бриллиантовой гребёнкой. Жених иногда появлялся во французском кафтане XVIII века, в напудренном парике и со шпагой на боку, а невеста оказывалась одетой по последней моде второй четверти XIX века.” Dmitriev, Vol. 3, 90.

Dmitriev provides this brief summary as a conclusion to his study of numerous notes and articles in the periodicals of the era. Some critics and spectators were dissatisfied with such chaotic mixtures but it persevered, probably, because it satisfied the general taste and was a part of frugal budget planning for the productions. Costumes simply had to reference certain epochs and traditions rather than be accurate historical attires. Mixing of ancient Roman and Slavic elements demonstrates that both types of drama were perceived as expressions of the same genre of tragedy or heroic play. Antigone was one of the most famous roles of Semenova who was elevated as the national actress. She was especially famous for her roles as ancient Greek and Roman mythological heroines but, even by playing them, she celebrated Russian nationhood that was exploring that classical culture. As we can see from the quote above, the Russian element of Antigonona's costume expressed that symbolic significance in such a mechanical way that looked inappropriate even to some contemporaries.



Fig. 2.1. Ekaterina Semenova as Kseniia in Ozerov's *Dmitrii Donskoi* (1807)

A portrait of Semenova as Kseniia, the leading female character in Ozerov's *Dmitrii Donskoi*, captures the eclecticism in the costumes of the epoch. We can see the traditional Russian hat, veil, and fur mantel combined with a dress that resembles a medieval or modern low-class Russian dress (sarafan),

only sewn in accordance with the fashions of the empire style of the 1800s, when female dresses sported high waists. Stage fashion was especially arbitrary for female dresses due to many factors: the setting of the play; propriety; current fashions; and visual attraction.

When a leading actress wore a fashionable dress in a historical drama, even if totally unsuitable for the setting and the scene, it still contributed favorably into the success of the production. In the celebrity system of the era, a leading actress was the center of the attention and a number of spectators purposefully attended her performances as her admirers. Her acting could be equally or less important than her outward appearance. This is why female characters were more likely to be dressed according to the latest fashion, even being out of tune with the rest of the cast. For example, reviewer Filomafitskii praised actress Lykova for uniquely choosing a natural-looking costume for her role of an old peasant woman in a Shakhovskoi's comedy: "[She acted] with a feeling, and, indeed, in her stature and everything, resembled an old peasant woman. ... Her very costume was not fancy, even though all actresses are obsessed with that, but plain."<sup>239</sup> The reviewer implies that luxurious and even flamboyant clothes were commonly worn by actresses on stage. He welcomes the shift away from that and toward more authentic representations. This was the first glimpse of "naturalism" that would fully take off in theatres only in the 1860s.

According to my findings, theatre was much more closely connected with masquerades than present-day theatre. Masquerades were a very popular form of entertainment at court and among the upper classes throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Similarly to the described elements of the stage productions, masquerades took arbitrary and eclectic approach to costumes, and the main goals were also the visual effect and the deliberate removal from the rules pertaining to everyday clothes.

The idea of stage costumes and settings customized for a specific play and everyday life was novel and even alien at the time, as evident from the commentary on the production of Gogol's *The Government*

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<sup>239</sup> " [Она играла] ...с чувством и натурально, по фигуре и по всему, походила на старую крестьянку... Самый костюм её не был даже наряжен, на чём все актрисы помешаны, а прост." Quoted in: Klinchin, A.P., "Provintsial'nyi teatr." In Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol. 2. "1801-1825." (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1977), 277.

*Inspector* that was quoted above. One of the main criteria for stage costumes in the era was precisely their “theatricality” and artificiality. A vaudeville or a comedy often took place in a contemporary setting but it was still a generic location with the events happening in a separate theatrical universe.

It almost seems that plays, in general, and historical dramas, in particular, made a step back in terms of projected historical authenticity, in comparison with the 18th century. Theatre traded quality for quantity. A number of the critics even in the early 19th century pointed out that the custom of putting up a new play every week decreased the overall quality of acting and production because there was not enough time for rehearsals.<sup>240</sup> As a result, historical dramas were staged in a hasty and standardized way.

One interesting innovation in costumes was occasionally practiced by Pavel Mochalov. Generally, he chose his costumes rather randomly but sometimes his choices were based on his understanding of a character and the emotional tonality of the play.<sup>241</sup> We can observe here the first manifestation of the systematic understanding of roles and an actor’s preparation. However, this was a singular example, and the costume designs that expressed mood rather than any “authentic” location did not come into practice until Modernist theatre.

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<sup>240</sup> “The circle of spectators in Petersburg and Moscow, let alone the provincial cities, was steadily growing but still remained rather small. For that reason, theatres’ repertoires needed constant renewal. The quantity of premiers was very high, out of necessity. For example, sixty new plays were staged during the season of 1842-43. This number is especially huge if we remember that theatrical season only lasted half a year. Theatres closed for ten weeks during Lent, summer vacation lasted about three months, and there were no performances on Saturdays.” “Так как круг зрителей в Петербурге и в Москве, не говоря уже о провинциальных городах, неуклонно расширяясь, остаётся всё ещё весьма узким, репертуар театров нуждается в постоянном обновлении. Количество премьер по необходимости было очень велико. Так, например, в сезон 1842/43 года в Петербурге было поставлено шестьдесят новых пьес. Цифра эта особенно внушительна, если учесть, что активный театральный сезон продолжался всего около полугода – театры не играли десять недель поста, примерно три месяца уходило на летние отпуска; к тому же спектакли не давались по субботам.” Dmitriev, T.M., “Repertuar.” In Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol. 3. “1826-1842” (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1978), 28.

<sup>241</sup> “From the theatre’s wardrobe, he took the jacket or the camisole, the hat or the shoes, which in their own character, not aesthetically, created the necessary acting condition for a role, helped his acting, corresponded with the ideation of a role, whether it came by intuition or strictly thought through – it did not matter...” “...[О]н брал из театрального гардероба тот сюртук или камзол, ту шляпу и туфли, которые по самому своему характеру, а не по эстетической форме создавали ему нужное, актёрское самочувствие в роли, помогали его игре, находились в соответствии с замыслом образа, интуитивно ли найденным или строго обдуманым – всё равно.” Al’pers, 132.



### 2.4.3 Set Designs and Props in the First Half of the 19th Century

The main developments in historically-themed stage designs during the 1790-1810s are the following: the departure from Neoclassical palaces in favor of rural landscapes and images of nature; more elaborate techniques in lighting and perspective painting; and the establishment of conventional Russian-style backgrounds. Unfortunately, since the 1820s, we can observe the subsequent lack of innovation and the adherence to typified sets, due to budgetary constraints and the general marginal status of Russian historical drama in theatres, with the exception of patriotic pieces.

As in the 18th century, Italian artists, who also worked as professional stage architects and house decorators, made the most notable contributions into the construction of set designs. During the late 18th and early 19th century, the most important designers were Pietro Gonzago and Antonio Kanoppi.<sup>242</sup> Kanoppi perfected the techniques of Neoclassical set designs that depicted abstract ancient settings. He worked for grand projects, mostly operas and ballets, later in his life. His later work shows some experiments with Romantic aesthetic and lighting: he designed ruins and liked to add moonlight or a distant fire.<sup>243</sup>

Gonzago was acclaimed for his outstanding ability to paint in perspective. His bucolic Russian rural settings, in the style of the famous descriptions of nature in Karamzin's *Poor Liza*, were used for the stage adaptation of the story by Il'in and earned Gonzago particular praise.<sup>244</sup> Gonzago's original idea was the

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<sup>242</sup> "Постановки трагедий Озерова связаны с деятельностью известного декоратора-перспективиста Пьетро Гонзаго (1757-1831) ... Чудом живописного искусства считалась его грандиозная декорация русской деревни, выставленная у Розового павильона. Иллюзия реальной деревни была доведена здесь до предельного совершенства, укрепив за Гонзаго славу «оптического живописца». ...В своих грандиозных архитектурно-перспективных фантазиях Гонзаго обращался к разным эпохам, причём при оформлении «Димитрия Донского» Озерова им была сделана попытка обратиться к русской старине. А с 1812 года основным декоратором петербургских театро становится Антонио Каноппи (1774-1832), обрусевший итальянский архитектор, живописец и скульптор. Как один из последних представителей классицизма, Каноппи осздаёт средства живописи традиционные архитектурные композиции." Danilov, 174.

<sup>243</sup> "Каноппи ещё шире, чем Гонзаго, применяет живописные световые эффекты: лунное освещение, отблеск пожара и т.п. С течением времени в декорация Каноппи начинают отчётливо проступать преромантические тенденции. В этом плане он создаёт «декорацию темницы», где полукруглая арка-свод затемнена и, ограничива пространство, оттеняет игру света от подвешенного фонаря." Ibid., 175.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 174.

connection between the set and actors: “In his theoretical works, Gonzago points out that the impression from the most perfect acting can be weakened or strengthened by the surrounding set, ... that set designs have to be connected with the stage action.”<sup>245</sup> An idea that sounds so commonsensical to us was new at that time and was only put into practice several decades later. Gonzago was generally interested in exploring traditional, non-Western Russian styles and created designs for Ozerov’s *Dmitrii Donskoi*.



Fig. 2.2 (left). Gonzago’s drawing of the design for Ozerov’s *Oedipus in Athens*.

Fig. 2.3. Gonzago’s drawing of the design for *Ozerov’s Dmitrii Donskoi*.

Fig. 2.3 presents the irregular forms of natural objects the create an emotionally charged mood, and the set is considerably different from the Neoclassical sets. However, rather than one replacing the other, both depicted sets continued to exist in parallel and came to represent the different standardized designs used for the different types of dramas. It is hardly possible to define how accurately the costumes on these

<sup>245</sup> “В своих теоретических трудах Гонзаго указывает, что впечатление от игры самого совершенного актёра может быть ослаблено или усилено декоративной обстановкой,... что декоративное оформление должно быть связано со сценическим действием.” Danilov, 174.

drawings represent actual costumes. Still, we can see that the recognizable attire of a Medieval Russian warrior is characteristically reminiscent of Roman theatrical costumes.

Sentimental melodramas and romantic tragedies were gaining popularity, and abstract geometrical palaces did not suit those dramas. These shifts also influenced the stage designs for historical dramas. With the rise of interest in national history and the search for *narodnost'* and the national character, sets began to display the recognizably Russian elements that were, however, usually combined with earlier Neoclassical elements. One example of such Russian set is the painting of a Moscow church and its golden cupolas that was used as a background for Kriukovskii's *Pozharskii* and described by Zhikharev in his *Zapiski Sovremennika*.<sup>246</sup> Another example is this preserved drawing that Danilov calls a typical setting used for Russian Romantic historical dramas.



Fig. 2.4. N. Fedorov. A drawing of the “Slavic room” for Romantic historical drama.

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<sup>246</sup> See Footnote 107.

We can see the curious combination of pre-Petrine elements of architecture and the Neoclassical theatrical conventions of their time. The vaults of the windows and their ornaments, and the rather peculiar fireplace-like traditional stove reference typical pre-Petrine houses. Yet, Neoclassical aesthetic dominates this set with its open space, symmetry, vertical lines, and plain, non-ornamented, surfaces. Again, there is tension between the wish to channel Russian authenticity and the perception of traditional Russian architecture and ornaments as unsuitable for theatre or fine taste.

It is known that Nicholas I was personally involved in the promotion and financial management of Kukol'nik's *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland*. As a result, the production was allocated a big budget and featured luxurious sets customized for this play: "The production was generously funded, the newly painted sets depicted the square in Nizhnii Novgorod, The Moscow Faceted Chamber, the Kremlin etc., new costumes were made."<sup>247</sup> Still, there is no evidence of any original or innovative designs for this adaptation. After all, the play itself celebrated tradition and conservatism.

As mentioned, further innovation for historical drama and dramatic theatre, in general, was not encouraged for the greater part of the 19th century: "They [Gonzago and Kanoppi] were succeeded by A.A. Roller (1805-1891), a leading theatre artist of the 19th century who specialized exclusively in opera and ballet. In drama, the usage of "typical" backgrounds has now been established as a tradition. Designing sets for a specific play would become a rare exception."<sup>248</sup> New developments in scenography would first occur in the 1860s and become widespread only toward the end of the 19th century when the

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<sup>247</sup> "The production received special funding, the new sets were painted that depicted the square in Nizhnii Novgorod and The Palace of the Facets in the Moscow Kremlin etc., new costumes were made"

"На постановку были ассигнованы специальные средства, были написаны новые декорации, изображавшие площадь в Нижнем-Новгороде, Грановитую палату в Москве, Кремль, и т.д., изготовлены новые костюмы." Danikov, 248.

<sup>248</sup> "The biggest theatre artist of the 19th century, A.A. Roller came after them [Gonzago and Canoppi]. He predominantly specialized in opera and ballet. For drama, the tradition of "standardized" sets was being established, and it would last for many years. The sets design for a specific play are becoming a rare exception." "Сменивший их [Гонзаго и Каноппи] крупнейший театральный художник XIX века А.А. Роллер (1805-1891) специализируется исключительно на оперных и балетных спектаклях. В драматическом же театре начинает устанавливаться традиция подборки из «дежурных» декораций, сохраняющаяся долгие годы. Изготовление специальных декораций к данному спектаклю встречается уже в виде редкого исключения." Ibid., 175.



ban on organizing private theatre companies in Moscow and St. Petersburg would be lifted and those companies would have material resources and greater creative freedom for their productions.

#### 2.4.4 Perceptions and Public Response

In terms of stage history, we can only discuss patriotic dramas, as they were the only version of plays about the Time of Troubles that passed the increasingly strict theatre censorship. During the 1800-1810s, the patriotic wave was so novel and booming, that even very minor plays were welcomed: “When a small play *Minin*, written by S.N. Glinka, was performed, the spectators exuberantly clapped to every verse that alluded to the events in the grand theatre of national war.”<sup>249</sup> All such plays were based on transparent allusions to the ongoing war campaigns, including Ozerov’s *Dmitrii Donskoi* and Kriukovskii’s *Pozharskii*.

Kukol’nik was a very successful and frequently staged playwright during 1830s. Opinions about him varied, depending on the social background of the audience. The nobility and literati scorned and ridiculed Kukol’nik for open servility and a lack of true talent. When the dramatist debuted with his play *Torquato Tasso*, Belinsky and many others praised the budding playwright.<sup>250</sup> But later, Belinsky was largely disappointed and wrote that Kukol’nik would not be so popular if he were outright bad but assessed his playwrighting talent as consistently mediocre.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> “Когда давали небольшую пьесу «Минин» сочинения С.Н. Глинки, зрители хлопали с восторгом каждому стиху, имевшему отношение к тому, что происходило на великом театре отечественной брани.” Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, V.N., *Teatr v Rossii v epokhu Otechestvennoi voiny* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1912), 145.

<sup>250</sup> “Kukol’nik’s *Torquato Tasso* pleased the lovers of arts as a nice, even if childish, fantasy.” “...«Торквато Тасс» г. Кукольника порадовал было любителей изящного, как приятная, хотя и детская греза.” Belinsky, V.G., “39. Arabeski N. Gogolia – Mirgorod N. Gogolia” // Belinsky, V.G. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, in 13 Vols., Vol 1., 172. Elektronnoe nauchnoe izdanie “V.G. Belinsky.” <http://www.vgbelinsky.ru/> (Accessed on December 23, 2016).

<sup>251</sup> “Талант Кукольника не так слаб, чтобы ограничиться безделками, доставляющими фельетонную известность, и не так силён, чтобы создать что-нибудь, выходящее за черту посредственности.” Quoted in: Danilov, 249.

On the contrary, conservatism was widespread among the provincial gentry, merchants, and urban classes who did not write articles or responses but, apparently, consistently attended such patriotic plays and secured Kukol'nik's short-lived but extraordinary fame. Danilov summarizes it in the following way: "Nevertheless, the outward success among the public of Apraksin Dvor and Gostinyi Dvor [shopping arcades] was enormous. Out of the political concern, this success was artificially maintained by the government that glorified Kukol'nik as a patriotic poet."<sup>252</sup> Kholodov notes that the nobility still generally looked down on the Russian plays. By the 1840s, different theatres were dominated by different sorts of audiences. The Aleksandrinskii Imperial Theatre, which was patronized by the royal family and became the hub for patriotic productions, was considered "low" and shunned by the educated nobility as a place for unsophisticated petit-bourgeois and merchants.<sup>253</sup> The nobles frequented Mikhailovskii Theatre in St. Petersburg, instead.

As the broad public was getting used to theatre and developing a more sophisticated taste, patriotic plays appeared less and less satisfactory, let alone that no new pieces were written in this genre. After the French Revolution of 1848, officials attempted to resurrect the old patriotic dramas in the repertoires. The spectators literally boycotted the drama titled *The Memory of the Borodino Battle* penned by a minor author Velikopolskii. No one applauded throughout or after the performance. Even the famous Karatygin in the leading role could not save the situation.<sup>254</sup> By the 1850s, old patriotic dramas did not interest even

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<sup>252</sup> "Тем не менее внешний успех у апраксинской и гостинодворской публики был грандиозным. По политическим соображениям этот успех искусственно поддерживался правительством, окружившим Кукольника ореолом поэта-патриота." Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Kholodov, E.G., "Vvedenie." In Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol. 4. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1979), 26.

<sup>254</sup> "After Karatygin read the patriotic monolog in the finale, no one applauded. As the curtain fell, the audience remained in deathly silence. Nicholas I demanded explanations from the theatre managers who tried to offer excuses about the actor not feeling well and the playwright having many enemies in the audience but that did not satisfy the tsar. Just in case, fearing that such situation would repeat, he forbade to sing the anthem in such [similar gingoist] plays as Viskovatov's *Minin* and Antz's *Salvaged Banner*."

"После патриотического монолога в финале пьесы, который читал Каратыгин, не раздалось ни одного аплодисмента. Занавес был опущен при гробовом молчании зрительного зала. Николай I затребовал объяснений у дирекции, которая пыталась сослаться на то, что артист был не в ударе, что среди зрителей было немало врагов автора, но царя эти объяснения не удовлетворили. На всякий случай, опасаясь

merchants or commoners, and disappeared from the repertoires. Now, with a few exceptions, no plays set in the Time of Troubles were allowed on stage till the brief period in the 1860s, and then until the late 1890s.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

In the 18th century, the Time of Troubles was a relatively rare setting for historical dramas. Yet, it became very common for the whole next century. During the 1800s-1810s, it was used as the main historical reference for the ongoing war with France. The narratives of the Time of Troubles were framed in chronicles as a conflict between Orthodox Russia and Catholic Poland. Since the 1800s, the authorities, with the help of conservative authors, began to officially frame the Napoleonic wars in a similar way. The bulk of dramas reveals the search for a historical national hero during war time. In the early 19th century, the figure of Pozharskii in drama represented such an exemplary hero. In the 1820-30s, historians and writers were fascinated with Dmitrii the Pretender. Independence from the officially promoted national ideology appears to be the common feature for those dramas of the era (in any genre, not just historical) that are still read and performed today. On the contrary, the openly moralizing and officious pieces were quickly forgotten, even if overwhelmingly popular in their age.

The dramas written before Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* and Khomiakov's *Dmitrii the Pretender* can be named mythological historical plays. Even though Sumarokov was very fond of reading old chronicles and writing his own notes on Russian history, he did not use that knowledge in his dramas. The historical plays of the 18th century and the 1800-1810s feature mostly invented plots and do not reflect the complexities of historical process. Sumarokov and his contemporary playwrights freely created characters, combined historical figures and fictitious ones, and usually divided them into good and bad ones. Sumarokov, Ozerov, or Kriukovskii saw the Russian national past as a source of narratives and

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повторения такого рода демонстраций, он запрещает исполнение гимна в таких спектаклях, как «Минин» Висковатова и «Спасённое знамя» Анца." Brodskii, A., ed., *Sto let: Aleksandrinskii teatr – Teatr Gosdramy* (Leningrad: Izdaniie direksii leningradskikh gosudarstvennykh teatrov, 1932), 58-59.

characters that allowed them to inscribe events from Russian history into the universal categories of antiquity, state sovereignty, and heroism. The 1800s saw the infusion of Sentimentalism and patriotic sentiment into the still largely Neoclassical historical drama.

The 1820-30s mark an important shift for historical plays. Starting from Pushkin, Khomiakov, and Pogodin, playwrights set the standard of historical competence for themselves, and the readers and critics expect them to comply with “historical truth.” Consequently, the new generation of dramatists focuses on actual historical characters and their actions that were documented in the archival and academic sources. In a way, such plays were an antidote against pseudo-historical patriotic “propaganda.” In this particular genre, historicity converges with artistic and national authenticity, which becomes the criterion of a drama’s artistic value.

The first half of the 19th century also shapes the conventional cast of the *dramatis personae* of the Time of Troubles. The peculiar situation where the characters themselves constantly act, lie, and pretend adds an interesting dimension to dramas and their stage performances. For example, Vishnevskaiia notices that Vasiliu Shuiskii is a character who does not change throughout many plays because he fits the theatrical archetype (almost in a sense of *dell’arte* types) of a “cunning courtier”: “In the character of Shuiskii, as we can see, the historical foundation is embedded most powerfully. Let us notice that this character is the most stable in all the works about the Pretender, from Sumarokov to Pushkin. Ostrovsky would not change his whimsical fate, either. ... As we can see, this cunning courtier, as interpreted by the historians, was already genuinely theatrical. A character of Shuiskii was invented by history itself, together with the Pretender.”<sup>255</sup> On the contrary, the False Dmitrii is the most protean character who appears in many guises: a tyrant, a misunderstood good monarch, a fop, a tragic Romantic hero, or a

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<sup>255</sup> “В образе Шуйского, как видно, наиболее сильно запечатлелась историческая основа истинной жизни, обратим внимание, что характер этот наиболее стабилен во всех драматических произведениях о Самозванце, начиная от Сумарокова до Пушкина. Не изменит этой прихотливой судьбы и Островский. ...Как видно, эта театральная маска хитрого коварного царедвоца уже сам по себе была подлинно театральной, подобный персонаж как бы выдуман самой историей в паре с Самозванцем.” Vishnevskaiia, I.L., *Aplodismenty v proshloe* (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo iteraturnogo instituta imeni A.M. Gor’kogo, 1996, 197-198. A note: Vishnevskaiia uses a phrase from Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov*, “лукавый царедворец”.



combination of such types. The Pretender is a character who also plays a role of the heir and tsar. He is, ultimately, a parody of a monarch and could serve for subtle social or political critique.

The stage productions in the historical genre preserve the nationalist historical trend (hence, the conservatism in productions) on stage and lay the foundation on which this stage genre bloomed in the 1860s, and then in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. Because of censorship, rushed production process, and the already established conventions and techniques for historical costumes and stage designs, the practices of production or directing did not see much development in this particular genre. Pushkin, Gogol, and many progressive intellectuals envisioned theatre as an expression of serious, aesthetically intricate, high culture with an original Russian repertoire. Yet, the actual practices remained more conservative, simplistic, and sensitive to the broad public taste. Historical drama on stage became a genre that belonged to the realm of popular culture.

Patriotic historical dramas were the only variation of the genre allowed on stage during the first half of the 19th century. They were highly popular during the patriotic rise of the 1800-1810s. Later, the educated elite became very disappointed by the overt nationalism and mediocre quality of historical plays written in the 1830s. By the 1840-50s, the continued attempts to promote patriotic dramas were completely failing, as all spectators lost interest in them. As a result, the patriotic historical genre fell into oblivion until the emergence of the new type of national and historical discourse in the 1860s.

**CHAPTER 3: THE TIME OF TROUBLES REVISITED IN THE 1860S:  
THE CONVERGENCE OF DRAMA, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND NARRATIVES OF  
NATIONHOOD**

In the previous chapter, I discussed the early development of “historicity” in playwriting and the rise and fall of patriotic historical drama. In the first half of the 19th century, the cultural debates reflected the search for new dramatic forms. Drama was essential to the early development of nationalist and imperial sentiment as well as the establishment of the Russian brand of conservatism. By the 1850-60s, outwardly propagandist dramas naturally faded, but the exploration of the Russian past continued. The movements of the Slavophiles and Westernizers, as well as diversifying political movements among the new educated class, greatly influenced perceptions of Russia’s past and, consequently, new historical plays. In the context of the ongoing reforms, playwrights turned to depicting the abrupt social changes brought by the Time of Troubles. Writing about this historical epoch became an allegorical way to address the turmoil of their own time. Without a doubt, less strict censorship during late 1850s and part of the 1860s also stimulated dramatic art.

This chapter will discuss the new developments in the genre of historical drama during the 1860s. More than 40 new original pieces were written during the decade, and more than half of them debuted on stage in Moscow and St. Petersburg during 1865-1868.<sup>256</sup> Furthermore, virtually all historical plays that triumphantly returned to the repertoires at the very end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were written in the 1860s.

Historical and national themes shape many internationally acclaimed works of art created in Russia during the second half of the 19th century. For example, Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* was written and published during the 1860s. However, the majority of the historical pieces that are set in Medieval Russia or Kievan Rus’ belong to the sphere of music. Kholodov summarizes the findings of Soviet scholars and

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<sup>256</sup> Kholodov E.G., “Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra (1862-1881)” In Kholodov, E.G., ed. *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vol, Vol 5. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), 129.

concludes that historical themes, in fact, dominated Russian musical theatre during the 1860s, especially in opera.<sup>257</sup>

Musical genres are outside the scope of this research project. Yet, historical plays in spoken-word theatre were no less popular at the time, and became the foundation from which this music culture grew. I will discuss the significance of historical drama for the history of theatre and explore its cultural context and the implications of this largely forgotten aspect of 1860s culture that was overshadowed by the spectacular developments in prose, social drama, criticism, and music.

I will conduct an analysis of the literary and stage poetics of five plays set around the Time of Troubles that made a major contribution to the subgenre, namely, *Dimitrii the Pretender* (1866) by Nikolai Chaev, *Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin, Sukhoruk* (1861, 2nd edition 1866) by Alexander Ostrovsky, and the dramatic trilogy by Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy.<sup>258</sup> These plays revisit the Time of Troubles, offer new interpretations for Minin, Dmitrii the Pretender, and Boris Godunov, and reflect the authors' differing visions of the historical process.

I will discuss how these three authors' historical narratives relate to each other and to their predecessors. I show that each of the three playwright has a different concept of playwriting and theatre in their relation to concurrent historical studies. Together, these plays show the range of possible approaches to reworking historical sources for drama that had developed by 1860s. Chaev, Ostrovsky, and Tolstoy also connect differently to a whole range of extra-literary phenomena, such as political views, the nature of art, and the education of the public.

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<sup>257</sup> A.N. Serov, for instance, finished his opera *Rogneda* in 1865, and began writing a new opera, *Taras Bul'ba*. He also considered turning Ostrovsky's historical romance drama *Tushino* into another opera. Pyotr Chaikovsky wrote his opera *The Governor (Voevoda)* based on Ostrovsky's eponymous historical play, and began to work with Lazhechnikov's novel *Oprichnik*. Historical works were central to the emerging Russian opera canon. Rimsky-Korsakov wrote his *Pskovitianka*, Mussorgsky created *Khovanshchina* and *Boris Godunov*. Borodin started to work on another still famous piece, *Prince Igor*. Kholodov, Vol. 5, 129.

<sup>258</sup> In this chapter, the name "Tolstoy" will refer to Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy (1817-1875), unless otherwise specified.

Chaev experiments with reworking historical sources into drama. He provides detailed accounts of customs, rituals, and the language of the era. His numerous characters are the expressions of the complex forces of history, with the strong presence of the anonymous commoners who represent the people, *narod*. In *Koz'ma Minin*, Ostrovsky focuses on the people's role in the historical process. He chooses Nizhnii Novgorod as the setting, and uniquely shows history from the perspective of the common people, not the tsar or the boyars. I will demonstrate how this play strangely combines progressive ideas about the people's movement with the elements of religious conservatism. Ostrovsky draws parallels between the contemporary and the 17th-century urban classes, and paints an idealistic picture of communal unity in the past. Another drama, *Dmitrii the Pretender and Vasilii Shuiskii* (1866), was Ostrovsky's most popular and most staged play, written very much in the tradition of Romantic drama. In a way, it summarizes the whole tradition of Russian plays about the False Dmitrii. It is well-written and engaging but not innovative.

Finally, I will examine the character of Boris Godunov in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* (1866), *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich* (1867), and *Tsar Boris* (1870). The first two plays explore the roots and causes of the Time of Troubles and depict Russian history as a manifestation of archetypal power relations and human conflicts. The considerably less-known *Tsar Boris*, however, turns to issues of the Russian national path and reforms and, thus, closely connects to the many preceding dramas that feature Dmitrii the Pretender or Boris Godunov.

It is symptomatic that all three authors abandon the idea of identifying False Dmitrii with Otrepyev. Chaev does not find sufficient evidence and simply omits the discussion of Dmitrii's origins and focuses on more verifiable information. Ostrovsky is also concerned about remaining faithful to the historical sources. Dmitrii's obscure origin also adds Romantic flair. Tolstoy never depicts Dmitrii but finds it necessary to explicitly state the falsehood of the rumors about Otrepyev. He turns the Pretender, who only briefly appears in one scene, into a shadow of Boris's sin.

Nikolai Aleksandrovich Chaev (1824-1914) was a playwright as well as a historian.<sup>259</sup> His profession gave him the authority to write least fictionalizing adaptation of historical records, which was very important at the time. He represents the archeological and educational trend in literature that used historical narratives to present recent discoveries in historiography, archeology, and linguistics. At that time, historical studies broadened their scope and became interested not only in politics but also in the everyday life and material culture of the past centuries and present-day peasants and merchants. This trend in history and literature directly influenced theatrical productions. For the first time in this genre, faithful representations of everyday life become no less important signifiers of nationhood than the narratives about the tsars and the boyars and their politics. Chaev contributed to the establishment of the “dramatic chronicle,” a new type of historical genre in drama: “...[D]ramatic chronicle was destined to become the dominant genre of historical drama in the 1860s. ... Strict documentary-ness, reliance on historical facts discovered by the sciences, accurate chronology, - all this was used to regain readers’ trust in historical drama that was lost after the long years when all kinds of “dramatic fantasy” dominated the genre.”<sup>260</sup> In the name of historical objectivity, he depicts actual events, chronicles them, and often refrains from offering finalized interpretations.

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<sup>259</sup> For many years, he worked as the head administrator of The Armory collection in the Kremlin and a repertoire planner for Alexandrinsky Theatre, Danilov, S.S., *Ocherki po istorii russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra* (Moscow-Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1948), 385.

As a fiction writer, Chaev specialized in historical plays and prose. His dramatic works are the following: “Father-in-law Fadeich” (“Сват Фадееч. Предание в лицах,” 1864); (Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Tverskoi) (“Князь Александр Михайлович Тверской,” 1864); “Dmitrii the Pretender” (“Дмитрий Самозванец,” 1865); “The Terrible Tsar Ivan Vasil’evich” (Грозный царь Иван Васильевич,” 1869); “Mother-in-law. A Tragedy from the Age of Disunity” (Свекровь. Трагедия из времён уделов,” 1870); “Tsar and Grand Duke of All Rus’ Vasilii Shuiskii” (“Царь и великий князь всея Руси Василий Шуйский,” 1886). His plays were never republished or staged in the 20th century but he was quite a successful author during his lifetime.

Lotman, L. M., *Ostrovsky i russkaia dramaturgiia ego vremeni* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 271-3.

<sup>260</sup> “...именно драматической хронике суждено было стать в 60-е годы главенствующим жанром исторической драматургии. ... Строгая документальность хроники, опора на добытые наукой исторические факты, точная датировка событий – всё это призвано было вернуть исторической драме доверие читателей и зрителей, утраченное за долгие годы господства в этом жанре разного рода “драматических фантазий,” далёких от исторической достоверности.” Kholodov, Vol. 5, 140-141.

Aleksey Tolstoy's approach is the opposite, in many respects. His knowledge of the epoch was, most likely, on par with that of professional historians, but he programmatically distinguished "historical truth" from "artistic truth".<sup>261</sup> He objected to the concept of the "dramatic chronicle" itself and consistently polemicized with the propagators of utilitarian art. In history, he found human characters and moral controversies interesting, and he wanted to convey the spirit of the epoch rather than meticulously recreate its chronology or rituals. Out of the three authors, Tolstoy is the most concerned about creating psychologically complex characters and selecting and reworking the historical material into theatrically appealing plot lines.

In position Ostrovsky's approach to historical plays in the middle between Chaev and Tolstoy. It appears that he wanted to provide accurate historical accounts, but also create immanently valuable works of art. His first historical drama, *Koz'ma Minin*, displays an historiographical approach that is very close to Chaev's oeuvre, but he shifts to more fictionalized stories in all his subsequent works within the genre.

Importantly, Russian theatre now had its own history with a hundred years of secular tradition and older folkloric roots. Writing on theory and history of theatre becomes more systematic in 1860s. The critics' contributions are essential for our understanding of this time period. For example, memoirist and critic Pavel Annenkov offers an analysis of two freshly staged historical plays, both of which revisited the Time of Troubles in drama. It was published in *Vestnik Evropy* in 1866 and titled "Chaev and Count A.K. Tolstoy in 1866: *Dmitrii the Pretender* and *Death of Ivan the Terrible*." In the opening, Annenkov claims that these two plays herald the advent of new, genuine historical drama. He also formulates the artistic categories that were very important for the playwrights and the theatrical critics of the decade:

Many things have changed since Russian historical drama, Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, was first published. Now, it [historical drama] appears not as a result of a genius's *insight* into the

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<sup>261</sup> "A poet has only one duty: to stay true to himself and create such characters that do not contradict themselves: *human truth* is his law; he is not bound by *historical truth*."

"Поэт ... имеет только одну обязанность: быть верным самому себе и создавать характеры так, чтобы они сами себе не противоречили: *человеческая правда* – вот его закон, *исторической правдой* он не связан." Tolstoy, A.K., "Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*." In Tolstoy, A. K., *Sobranie sochinenii in 4 Vols., Vol. 3 Dramaticheskaiia trilogiia. stat'i*. (Moskva: Izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1964), 449.

people's life – beyond the written history and its established texts, as it was in Pushkin's case, and not as a result of the more or less lucky guesses mixed with the more or less dreamy and fantastical ideas, as it was in his followers' works, but as some kind of a new study of history, only processed not academically but artistically. Contemporary Russian historical drama has developed such a character, for one reason, thanks to the fact that, behind the historical figures and events, our writers felt a previously overlooked force, namely, the people's [*narodnaia*] culture and turned all their attention to it. Secondly, besides its initial goals and objectives, our historical drama now serves as expression of serious historical views on the past epochs and their main representatives. ... In the works, the titles of which we put above [Chaev and Tolstoy's dramas], these new principles of historical drama that we have pointed out are present in a very tangible way. Even if we do not count their significant success among the public, these characteristics are completely sufficient to justify our attempt to review them and define their merits.<sup>262</sup>

It is notable that Annenkov sees Pushkin as the founder of historical drama. The whole passage reflects the canonical status of Pushkin by the 1860s and reaffirms the full dismissal of the 18th-century form of the historical tragedy, which was first voiced by the critics in 1820s. Annenkov acknowledges Pushkin's vision of history as the expression of Romantic genius, even though Pushkin did extensive research in archives, and sees the works of his successors as the mix of historical facts and pure fiction. While it is true for Kukol'nik's brand of pseudo-historical patriotic pieces for the stage, we do not know if Annenkov was familiar with Pogodin or Khomiakov's plays. In any case, the latter two authors did not have any significant impact on the subsequent playwriting or stage productions.

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<sup>262</sup> "Многое изменилось с тех пор, как русская историческая драма вышла впервые в свет с «Борисом Годуновым» Пушкина. Она представляется теперь уже не плодом гениального *прозрения* в народную жизнь – поверх писанной истории и утверждённого ей текста, как у Пушкина, не результатом более или менее удачных догадок, перемешанных с более или менее мечтательными и фантастическими представлениями, как у писателей, следовавших за ним, но чем-то в роде новой исторической науки, только обработанной не по приёмам учёного специалиста, а художественным способом. Современная историческая русская драма получила этот характер, благодаря, во-первых, тому, что писатели наши почувствовали за историческими лицами и событиями присутствие доселе ещё неизвестного деятеля – именно народной культуры, и обратили на него всё своё внимание; а во-вторых, тому, что драма наша уже служит, кроме осуществления своих ближайших целей и задач, ещё и средством для выражения весьма серьёзных исторических взглядов на былые эпохи и их главных представителей. ... В произведениях, заглавия которых мы привели выше [пьесы Чаева и Толстого], начала новой исторической драмы, указанные нами, отражаются весьма ощутительно."

Annenkov, P.V., "Chaev i Gr. A.K. Tolstoy v 1866: Dmitrii Samozvanets i Smert' Ioanna Groznogo." In Annenkov, P.V., *Vospominaniia i kriticheskie ocherki, in 3 vols., Vol. 2.* (SPb, 1879), 323. Hathi Trust Digital Library. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015014429206> (Accessed on December 14, 2016)

In a similar fashion, Annenkov is not interested in showing the continuity with the debates about *narodnost*' of the first half of the 19th century. He proclaims that Chaev and Tolstoy create a whole new type of drama that becomes a branch of new historical studies. This acute feeling of novelty certainly reflects the whole post-emancipation atmosphere when prose, criticism, political writing, and also historical research were blossoming.<sup>263</sup>

The new understanding of historical theatre that Annenkov formulates can be summarized as the conflation between "historical truth," which signified the accurate study and representation of academically systematized materials about an epoch, and artistic truth, which entailed the creation of plausible and psychologically rich narratives. Of course, there is a lot of tension in this attempt to bridge archival research and stage conventions. For example, Annenkov criticizes Chaev's agnosticism and moral neutrality that result in plot gaps and make this piece a mere "illustration of chronicles,"<sup>264</sup> rather than a wholesome play. According to the critic, Tolstoy, on the contrary, sways too much toward fiction. Annenkov provisionally praises Tolstoy for writing a very stageable play, but scrutinizes his inventions. He especially dislikes the invented scene that vilifies Boris Godunov. In that scene, Godunov deliberately voices bad news to the agitated Ivan the Terrible, which, just as Godunov hoped, results in the tsar's prompt death.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> "Works of the historians of the so-called "state school," that had been established in the 1840s by K.D. Kavelin, the capital *History of Russia from the Earliest Times* by S.M. Soloviev, and the works of N.I. Kostomarov, A.P. Shchapov and some others attracted attention of the wide intelligentsia circles, including the artistic intelligentsia. Undertaken by the Academy of Science, the publication of historical sources in the multivolume project *Acts Collected from Libraries and Archives of Russian Empire by the Archaeographic Expedition* was very important. The authors of almost all historical plays used these sources."

"Труды историков так называемой "государственной школы," начало которой было положено ещё в 40-х годах К.Д. Кавелиным, капитальная "История России с древнейших времён" С.М. Соловьёва, работы Н.И. Костомарова, А.П. Щапова и ряда других привлекали внимание самых широких кругов интеллигенции, в том числе интеллигенции художественной. Большое значение имела публикация исторических источников в многотомном издании, предпринятом Академией наук, - "Акты, собранные в библиотеках и архивах Российской Империи археографической экспедицией." Авторы большинства исторических пьес широко этими источниками пользовались." Kholodov, Vol. 5, 130.

<sup>264</sup> Annenkov, 338.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 339.



Annenkov formulates the three laws of dramatic aesthetics: 1) poetic truth and careful moral judgement; 2) thoughtful selection of historical materials; not overburdening a play with characters and plotlines; 3) avoiding inventions, whenever possible. He particularly warns against the vilification of any historical figure, unconfirmed by historical sources, but added for the sake of fictitious plot and stage effects. Thus, Annenkov proposed a certain moral code for a writer of historical fiction that could be a subject for debate. For example, Tolstoy obviously disagreed with this approach. Annenkov's article is useful not only for a study of drama but also for better understanding of the Russian cultural situation. During the 1860s, the writers and critics often saw literature as a means of exploring Russian society, its structure, history, and problems. The critic articulated the main aesthetic problems for historical dramas, against which each dramatist builds his own vision.

### 3.1 NIKOLAI CHAEV'S *DIMITRII THE PRETENDER* (1865): THE FORCES OF HISTORY AND THE TRUTH OF LANGUAGE

Chaev's *Dimitrii the Pretender* was published only one time, in Mikhail and Fyodor Dostoevskys' journal *Epokha* in 1865. It is written in prose and, once again, narrates the rise and fall of the False Dimitrii, from his triumphant arrival to Moscow until the rebellion orchestrated by Vasilii Shuiskii a year later, and Dimitrii's death. This play is an exemplary piece in the genre of the "chronicle," for which historical accuracy and an academic basis were the most important criteria. For Chaev, accurate representation of events, as they were related in the original sources, seems to be more important than subjective interpretation or speculating about the gaps in our knowledge of events.

I will demonstrate that the play functions on three levels. Firstly, it summarizes the well-known historical episodes that were documented in original writings from the Time of Troubles and repeatedly used by Chaev's predecessors in dramas about the Pretender. The omens, the intrigues, the clashes with the Poles, Dimitrii's notorious unpredictability, and his open disregard of the traditions had been often employed as elements in dramatic works that were historically accurate, but also had good potential for fiction. Chaev does not add anything new, in this respect. Secondly, he is the first author who focuses so

much on language, depictions of everyday life, and various cultural practices. Each of the five acts of the play is organized around one major historical event, but also recreates cultural practices in a peculiar “documentary” style. Thirdly, Chaev implicitly engages with some very acute topics of the era, such as the historical role of the *narod* and the articulation of Russian identity in relation to the West.

In my analysis, I will discuss the interaction between the dramatic plot and the archeological, historicist side. This merging of discourses became Chaev’s most notable contribution to the genre and to the new understanding of historical authenticity, even though this type of historical play only had short-lived success. I will also demonstrate how the differentiated linguistic features of the characters and the use of archaic language become a new important signifier of Russian identity. Conversational Russian in the play is reminiscent of 19th-century dialects and low-class language. The clash of cultures is partially presented via linguistic differences. For the first time in historical drama, Russian medieval writings are referenced to affirm the unique Russian cultural tradition.

In Act 1, the people of Moscow listen to Dimitrii’s proclamation and send their representatives to his camp to pledge loyalty. The people want a new tsar but also comply because of their fear of the Pretender’s military force. We hear a variety of opinions from Moscow commoners, many of whom want to believe in the return of the true heir. Act 2 shows Dimitrii’s first days on the throne, and then narrates Shuiskii’s intrigue against Dimitrii, its discovery, the investigation procedures, and the execution that was canceled at the last minute by the tsar’s order. In the central scene of this act, the boyars discuss Shuiskii’s crime, question him, and juxtapose the sources of evidence. The cultural component of this part centers around medieval legal practices in Russia. The action slows down in Act 3, as Chaev meticulously recreates the elaborate court rituals and the lengthy speeches that constituted the reception of the Polish ambassadors. As documented in historical sources and included into other plays about the False Dmitrii, the tsar was furious because the Polish king did not call him “Emperor” in his message. Dimitrii threatened to cut ties with Poland, but soon composed himself and grudgingly accepted the ambassadors’ requests.

In Act 4, Marina Mnishek arrives for the wedding, and the play shows the Russian ritual of dressing a girl's hair for wedding, as the servant girls sing a traditional Russian wedding song. The wedding takes place behind the scenes, but numerous characters bring news about the fights and religious clashes between the Muscovites and the Poles. Later, Dimitrii has a quarrel with Marina after she proudly claims her high rank that should make the Russian tsar honored by this marriage.<sup>266</sup> Act 5 is very similar to the ending of Mikhail Pogodin's play. The cultural clash between the Russians and the Poles escalates during the Polish-style ball and the masquerade. In the meantime, the rebels that were organized by Vasiliu Shuiskii successfully begin the coup, which results in fights around the palace and the assassination of Dimitrii.

The rich language and the frequent shifts in register and vocabulary deserve particular attention. The play opens with a conversation between the nameless urban commoners, "posadskie," about Dimitrii's letter to the people where he proclaims himself the true heir and calls everyone to swear allegiance to him:

1-ый посадский: Слышал грамоту-то?

2-ой посадский: Не слыхал. Пришёл уж к концу. А где он? Далеко ещё?

1-ый посадский: Како далеко? К Туле идёт.

2-ой посадский: Дело. Недолго ждать заставил. «Буду, говорит, к Москве, как станет лист на дереве развёртываться». А де бояра-те, что с грамотой-то приехали?»

1st Townsman: Have you heard about the missive letter?

2nd Townsman: I haven't. I came already toward the end. And where is he? Is he far away still?

1st Townsman: What do you mean "far"? Getting to Tula.

2nd Townsman: Good. Didn't make us wait long. "I will, said he, be at Moscow when the trees are sending out their leaves." And where are the boyars who brought the letter? <sup>267</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> "Marina: ...Do you know, do you know... that I am a million times prouder about my family's rank than the title of Tsarina of your savages? ... Even the most powerful monarch would not shun a chance to unite his coat-of-arms with the coat-of-arms of the princess from that, as you impudently called it, hinterland."

"Марина: ...Да знаете ли вы, знаете ли... в миллион раз больше я горжусь фамильным титулом своим, чем званием царицы ваших дикарей? .... Ни один из сильных монархов не погнушался бы соединить свой герб с гербом княжны с этих, как вы имели дерзость называть, с каких-то кончиц." Chaev, N.A. "Dimitrii Samozvanets (Drama v piati deistviiakh)" In *Epokha*. No.1 January, (Sankt-Peterburg, 1865), 82.

<sup>267</sup> Chaev, 5.

This short dialog has the distinct structure of spoken language (short elliptical sentences) and is full of colloquial expressions. Some of them are even reflected in spelling: “de” instead of “gde,” and “boiara” instead of “boiare.” This language is likely similar to what Chaev heard from the contemporary speakers of Russian dialects who belonged to the lower classes. This was the first time that “low” colloquial speech found its way into historical drama. As I demonstrated in the previous chapters, the genre itself originated from high tragedy and was bound by the many conventions of court theatre.

In Chaev’s drama, it is also significant that the common people open the play and introduce the story to the readers and spectators. Chaev’s remark defines the scene as “skhodka” (peasant gathering), which further emphasizes the linguistic and social continuity between his low-class contemporaries and their 17th-century ancestors. These artistic choices are very much in tune with the discourse of the 1860s about the *narod* and its role in social processes. “The people” embody the national spirit because they preserve national memory in their very language, rituals, and general lifestyle. Chaev was, most likely, influenced by the language of Ostrovsky’s merchant dramas and employed the idea of linguistic identity of the different characters for his historical plays. Ostrovsky famously used folk proverbs and sayings to enrich the language in his works.<sup>268</sup> In a similar fashion, Chaev’s characters often speak in proverbs.<sup>269</sup>

Chaev’s drama generally features a large number of characters as it strives to represent many social and ethnic groups, including commoners, Cossacks, boyars, and Poles. The writer clearly wants to demonstrate the sheer complexity of the historical process and the involvement of many people in it. However, such a “realistic” approach clashes with the limitations of a dramatic text. As a result, most of the characters are not memorable, as they do not say enough lines to show any interiority. Similarly, the

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<sup>268</sup> A number of Ostrovsky’s plays feature Russian proverbs as their titles: *Stay in Your Own Sled* (*He в свои сани не садись*); *It’s a Family Affair – We’ll Settle It Ourselves* (*Свои люди – сочтёмся*); *Sin and Sorrow Are Common to All* (*Грех да беда на кого не живёт*).

<sup>269</sup> The original Russian proverbs are underlined.

“*Васманов*: God helps those who are careful. *Дмитрий*: And God gives to those who are brave.”

“*Басманов*: Бережёного бог бережёт. *Дмитрий*: А смелым бог владеет.” Chaev, 21.

“*Prince Golitsyn*: A house is famous not for its look but for its pies.”

“*Кн. Голицын*: Не красна изба углами, а красна пирогами.” Chaev, 73.

leading figures, such as Vasiliu Shuiskii or Dmitrii himself are portrayed in a psychologically simplistic way. Moreover, Chaev mostly narrates the events and leaves out motivation, which makes the plot incoherent at times. In Act 2, we never learn why Shuiskii openly testifies against himself and why he is pardoned at the last moment before the execution. Marina Mnishek is hardly mentioned until she arrives for the royal wedding in Act 4. Dmitrii's love serves as an explanation for this decision in the other plays, but Chaev does not dwell on that. In this respect, Chaev's "dramatic chronicle" literally chronicles the events.

In keeping with such a strict understanding of historical truth, the text includes sample versions of medieval historical documents. Reading from the Pretender's letter in front of a crowd, for instance, constitutes a lengthy part of Act 1. It is accompanied by the comments of the listeners. Chaev uses archaic language features in order to faithfully adapt the known original content of Dmitrii's messages, which were being sent out as he was conquering his way to Moscow. Chaev even recreates the real-life time frame, minimally adapted for stage. This unique "documentary" approach is present throughout the play. In another instance, a large part of Act 3 is dedicated to the reception of the ambassadors, which is an example of many speeches that simulate medieval rituals with their attention to lengthy titles and the elaborate etiquette.<sup>270</sup>

Initially, this drama enjoyed success because such depictions were welcomed for their commitment to historical authenticity. Yet Chaev's plays were only successful for a short period of time. The "documentary" style could not be reconciled with the limits of theatrical space and time. The play was

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<sup>270</sup> This is how the Polish ambassadors greet Dmitrii, name the titles of their king, and introduce themselves: "Your Great Highness, Most Powerful Autocrator, Grand Sovereign Tsar Dmitrii Ivanovich, by God's will, Great Caesar, Duke of All Rus', Ruler and Owner of many tatar lands and states. From His Great Highness, Great Sovereign Zhigimont III, by God's will King of Poland, Grand Duke of Lithuania, the ambassadors, Nikolai Olesnitskii and Aleksandr Gonsevskii, make obeisance at the throne of your royal Majesty." "Всепресветлейший и могущественнейший Самодержец, великий государь царь Дмитрий Иванович, Божиею милостью, великий цесарь, князь всея Руси, многих татарских царств и государств государь, царь и обладатель! Всепресветлейшего и великого государя Жигимонта III, Божией милостию короля Польского, великого князя Литовского, послы, Николай Олесницкий и Александр Гонсевский, бьют челом у престола твоей царской милости." Chaev, 59.

never reprinted, which proves that the text was not engaging enough even as a drama for reading. Even with little remaining evidence about the productions of Chaev's plays, we can imagine that keeping track of all the minor characters and listening to the lengthy recitations of the documents could test the spectators' attention.

Among the other False Dmitriis found in dramas, Chaev's protagonist is a lucky adventurer who was a product of the historical process and embodied the commoners' faith in the tsar and their displeasure with the boyars. In a monolog that opens Act 2, Dimitrii remembers his recent campaign for the Russian throne but sees it as a part of his providential path or witchcraft, rather than his own personal victory:

Moscow. Hard to remember myself. Alarm-bells, trumpets, drums, the ominous sound of shells is still in my ears. And somehow, look at this, I feel ill at ease under these arches: as if I am not in a palace but buried alive in a stuffy vault... The dark autumn night, the blaze, the gunfire, and then, the prized call "those thieves are running, Tsarevich" – I like that life better than this silence of a hundred-year-old chamber. I feel just like a monk in his cell, - the oil lamps and the icons... A tsar is no monk... (...) However, this is odd. Now, how not to believe in sorcery? Is it not you, magic force, that carried me, a vagabond from Zaporozhye, here, to the throne? ...I was about ten years old, or less... Once I was walking, and there appeared an old woman, a beggar or a sorcerer, she called me up, stared into my eyes, stroked my head, and said: "You will be greatly honored, child, you will be happy for thirty-four years." All my life I couldn't forget those words and the old woman's black eyes. And look at this! The old witch was right. I'm in glory! It came true."<sup>271</sup>

The conversational, elliptical structure of Dimitrii's speech is more reminiscent of Ostrovsky's merchant dramas than the earlier historical tragedies. This quote references Dimitrii's military talent, bravery, love for adventure, and his preference for a soldier's life. He also expresses distaste for Russian

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<sup>271</sup> "Москва. Не вдруг опомнишься. Набаты, звуки труб, литавр, зловещий стук снаряда доселе стоят в ушах. И как-то, вот поди ты, неприятно мне под этими сводами: словно я не во дворце, а в душном склепе заживо похоронен... Осенняя ночь тёмная, да зарево, пальба, а тут заветный клик: «бегут, царевич, воры» - такая жизнь мне больше по душе, чем эта тишина палат столетних. Ни дать, ни взять как в келье схимника, - лампы да иконы... Царь не монах... (...) Чудно, однако. Не верь вот, чародейству-то. Не ты ли, сила пододонная, не ты ли уж несла сюда меня, гуляку запорожца, на царский трон?... Был я лет эдак десяти, эй меньше.... гуляю раз, - идёт старуха, не то нищая, не то ворожея, подозвала меня, взглянула мне в глаза таково пристально, погладила по голове, и говорит: «ты будешь, говорит, в большом почёте, дитятко, тридцать четыре годика тебе, мой сокол, ликовать». Я этих слов и чёрных глаз старухи всю жизнь забыть не мог. Поди ты! Ведь угадала старая колдунья. Во славе я! Сбылось." Chaev, 20.

religiosity. Pushkin, Pogodin, and Khomiakov emphasized one or two of these known traits of the Pretender in order to create their Dimitriis, but Chaev chose to unite all of them.

In Chaev's Dimitrii, nonchalant confidence and belief in the people's unfailing support coexist with fatalism. In one instance, he despises everyone's gullibility: "So easy to trick these jackasses, hah!.. I can only come out and say some nice words, and they'll cry, as before: 'Greetings, our father; our sun, Tsar Mitrei'."<sup>272</sup> In the quoted monolog, Dimitrii sees his life differently, namely, as the fulfillment of the obscure prophecy that he heard as a child from a strange woman. In this light, his actions do not create history, but only follow some predestined patterns. This monolog also represents the persistent attention to omens, prophecies, and magic that characterizes the original Medieval sources on the subject. Even the inanimate objects of the palace are alien and threatening to the Pretender who feels that the palace is like a tomb for him, as he foresees his death.

Interestingly, Tolstoy also organizes his trilogy around a prophecy of Godunov's ascent to the Russian throne and his tragic end. The prediction fuels his ambition in the first play and fully comes true in the third one. The theme of fate goes back to Greek tragedy and, in these cases, converges with the medieval Christian understanding of providence. In Chaev's play, Dimitrii and his troops enter Moscow, and a whirlwind ("vikhr") stops the procession and becomes the first bad omen.<sup>273</sup> However, Chaev does not develop this motif of fate further. It appears that the author wants to insert numerous historical references into his text, which results in a kaleidoscopic play of multiple underdeveloped themes and motifs.

The protagonist often speaks not just in the low informal register, but crudely: "You did it the wrong way with Iov: you broke into the church, dolts; the people say he burst into tears and took his panhagia [a medallion with the image of Christ] off in front of the icon. The people must have heard all that. <...> And Sheferetdinov... they barely did away with Fed'ka and his mother, and he climbed

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<sup>272</sup> "Этих баранов-то не провести, – ххе!.. Вот только выйду да ласковое слово молвлю – и заревут по-старому: «здравствуй, отец наш; солнце наше красное, царь Митрей»." Ibid., 21.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 18.

straight onto the porch and yelled to the people “The Godunovs poisoned themselves...” Couldn’t even do that properly. Bears.”<sup>274</sup> By using actual conversational, “street” language, and the low invectives unimaginable in any preceding historical play, Chaev alludes to the False Dimitrii’s involvement with outlaws and his alleged cynicism. Dimitrii is upset not about the assassination of Godunov’s wife and son, but about the indiscretion. Moreover, these lines almost immediately follow his melancholic monolog about his fate that was quoted above. The main trait of this character is, indeed, his unpredictability that reaches inconsistency. This is a very telling example of how Chaev’s Dimitrii can appear as a deep character, reminiscent of noble Romantic heroes, but then act as a lowlife. In other scenes, he is persistent in trusting Shuiskii after his pardon, but then displays abrupt changes in mood during the reception of the ambassadors. As a whole, Dimitrii’s character appears as a combination of a multitude of details and examples derived from the medieval writings about him and usually noted by historians, starting from Karamzin.<sup>275</sup>

Chaev frames the wedding of Dimitrii and Marina, as well as the following Polish-style celebrations at court, as a close examination of a cultural clash. Unlike his predecessors, the writer indulges in great detail and openly celebrates the Russian rituals. The boyars explain to the Polish guests

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<sup>274</sup> “С Иовом неладно дело сделали: полезли в церковь, дурачье; он, говорят, расплакался, панагию снимал перед образом. Народ, небось, всё это слышал. А Шеферединов... не успели порешить Федьку с матерью, да прямо на крыльцо, и лезет к народу: «опилися зельем, Годуновы православные»... И того не сумели сделать. Медведи.” Chaev, 20.

<sup>275</sup> For example, Karamzin narrates the mystical scene with a whirlwind:

“But suddenly, when False Dmitrii was crossing Living Bridge and going through Moskvoretzkie Gates, a horrible whirlwind came; the riders could barely stay on their horses, and the dust whirled in a pillar and blinded their eyes, so the Tsar’s procession stopped. This natural occurrence shocked the soldiers and the citizens: scared, they were crossing themselves and saying to each other: ‘Lord, save us from misfortune! This is a bad omen for Russia and for Dmitrii!’”

“Но вдруг, когда Лжедмитрий чрез Живой мост и ворота Москворецкие выехал на площадь, сделался страшный вихрь: всадники едва могли усидеть на конях; пыль взвилась столбом и заслепила им глаза, так что Царское шествие остановилось. Сей случай естественный поразил воинов и граждан; они крестились в ужасе, говоря друг другу: ‘Спаси нас, Господи, от беды! Это худое предзнаменование для России и Димитрия!’” Karamzin, N.M. “Tsarstvovanie Lzhedmitriia. Gody 1605-1606.” // Karamzin, N.M., *Istoriia Gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*, in 12 vol. Vol 11, Chapter 4. [http://az.lib.ru/k/karamzin\\_n\\_m/text\\_1110.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/k/karamzin_n_m/text_1110.shtml) (Accessed on December 14, 2016).



that Russian churches have no seats, and a bride is supposed to stand while waiting for the groom.<sup>276</sup> On the streets, someone dislikes Marina for being too skinny, “sukhoparaia.”<sup>277</sup> These scenes are comical, but the later street talk about the Poles’ disrespectful behavior, especially in the churches, foreshadows the inevitable tragic denouement.

Marina Mnishek has to wear a sarafan, and sit through the traditional hair-dressing as the maids are singing a ritual song.<sup>278</sup> Chaev turned the scene it into a representation of wedding folk ritual. He combines the approaches of a historian and a folklorist. He apparently draws the connection between the rituals, which were still observed by the peasants in the 19th century, and the old pre-Petrine customs. In his historical imagination, the pre-Petrine royal court observed the same original folk rituals as the commoners.

The discourse of the cultural comparison culminates in the argument between Governor Mnishek, Marina’s father, and Vasili Shuiskii at the ball:

*Governor Mnishek:* Wouldn’t you agree that our way of life is above yours? One cannot pray all the time. Joyfulness is no obstacle to virtue.

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<sup>276</sup> “*Prince Mstislavskii:* Tell them not to sit, at least. They sent to ask: ‘Where are we going to be seated in the church?’”

*Dmitrii:* Thell them: ‘No one sits in our churches’”.

“*Кн. Мстиславский:* Хошь садиться-то им не вели. Они прислали спросить “где, слышь, нас посадят в церкви?”

*Дмитрий:* На это сказать: “В наших-де церквах не сидят...”” Chaev, 65.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>278</sup> “*Dmitrii:* I did it your way, I gave in: ceasar’s bride will wear a sarafan.”

“*Дмитрий:* Сделано по вашему, я уступил вам: цесарева наденет сарафан.” Ibid., 65.

“*The girls (sing):*

The trumpet blew  
Long ago, in dew,  
The young princess cried  
Dear Marya Iuryevna,  
For her fair braid...”

“*Девушки (запевают):*

Вострубила трубонька  
Давным-давно по росе,  
Расплакалась молода княжна,  
Свет Марья Юрьевна  
По своей русой косе...”

Ibid., 67.

*Prince Vasilii Shuiskii:* We have our law, and you have yours. You should live your way, and we are going to live our way.

*Governor Mnishek:* However, isn't it already time for Muscovy to imitate the educated states and become enlightened.

*Prince Vasilii Shuiskii:* How do we become enlightened? For us it is like this: ascend to Heaven, and you shall be enlightened.

*Governor Mnishek:* Thus, you should remain coarse?

*Prince Vasilii Shuiskii:* In our understanding, we are not coarse. <...> This "light" that you are talking about is only some superficial knowledge [*vneshnee liubomudrie*]. Have you, Pan, by any chance, read the Life of Antonii the Great?

*Governor Mnishek:* I have not.<sup>279</sup>

Mnishek pronounces Polish customs superior and Russian life backward. He anachronistically states the value of education and "enlightenment." Shuiskii calmly objects and confidently affirms the equal standing of Russian traditions. He shrewdly changes the meaning of "enlightenment" to a path to heaven and salvation. This whole dialog resembles Dostoevsky's similar preoccupation with preserving Russian identity in the process of westernization. Since the play was printed in his journal, we may assume that Chaev was close to "pochvennichestvo," or the "soil-bound" school. As in the case with the wedding folk ritual, here Chaev also goes beyond his position of a "chronicler." Like his predecessors in the genre, he cannot avoid at least hinting at his own political standing that influences his interpretation of that historical period. Pushkin was historically skeptical, Kriukovsky and Kukol'nik were conservative, Khomiakov's Dmitrii reflected early Slavophile ideas, and Pogodin's False Dimitrii was a "Westernizer." Chaev celebrates the uniqueness of Russian culture and, it seems, he wants to keep the non-Western cultural identities separate and equally valid.

Importantly, Shuiskii mentions a saint's life in the quoted scene. This is one of several examples where the play alludes to Russian and Slavonic medieval writings. They become the basis for the

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<sup>279</sup> "Воевода Мнишек: Не правда ли, наш образ жизни не то, что ваш? Нельзя же всё молиться. Весёлость не мешает быть добродетельным.

Кн. В.И. Шуйский: У нас свой закон, у вас свой – Вы живёте, как ведаете, а мы по-нашему жить станем.

Воевода Мнишек: Но, однако же, время и Московии подражать образованным государствам, просвещаться.

Кн. В.И. Шуйский: Как просвещаться? Придите к Небу, и просветитесь, по-нашему, а это...

Воевода Мнишек: Стало, так вы и должны оставаться грубыми?

Кн. В.И. Шуйский: Да мы, по своему разумению, не грубы. Ведь этот свет, что вы говорите, это ведь одно внешнее любомудрие. Вот вы читывали ли, панове, житие Анония великого?

Воевода Мнишек: Не читал."

Chaev, 88.

affirmation of Russian identity. Besides, elements of Old Church Slavonic are also prominent in the text. Chaev demonstrates how Russian and Slavonic were used as different registers of the same language by the educated characters.<sup>280</sup> Overall, Chaev's insights into the language of the early 17th century is very new for drama, even if they make it a less readable and stageable piece.

The Poles' speech is marked by the usage of Polish and Latin words.<sup>281</sup> When talking with the Poles, Dimitrii mirrors their way of speaking and uses Polonisms, such as "bud' laskov," and Latin expressions, written in the Latin alphabet in the text.<sup>282</sup> Dimitrii is a Protean character who easily navigates different languages. In doing so, he alienates himself from his Russian supporters. The lack of understanding culminates in the comical scene between Prince Mstislavskii and the German guard

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<sup>280</sup> When talking about faith and state matters, the characters switch their linguistic register by inserting Slavonic words and endings, while using more elaborate sentence structure. In the quote above, Shuiskii uses such form as "приидите" and the literary word "любомудрие."

In another example, Prince Bekbulatovich, Dimitrii's fervent opponent in exile, uses Slavonic style and quotes the Scripture to inspire Shuiskii for the righteous rebellion: "Behold, - the prophets see: the days are coming when Earth, as a martyr, will greatly suffer but rise and conquer the enemies... Because 'to the believers,' 'heart and soul are one,' and according to The Apostle [the book]."

"Глядите, - чует вешее: дние грядут, Земля, что мученик, вельми постраждет, но воспрянет, одолеет ворогов... 'Народу веровавшу,' 'ведь, 'и сердце и душа едина,' и по Апостолу." Chaev, 27.

Chaev and other historians could take examples the original writings of the era, particularly the letters of the educated elite. The correspondence between Ivan the Terrible and Andrei Kurbskii shows how both of them switched between Russian and Old Church Slavonic and often mixed both. For example, Kurbskii writes: "Он есть Христос мой, сидяще на престоле херувимстем одесную величества в превысоких, — судитель межу тобою и мною." [The underlined word is the Russian interference into the Old Church Slavonic text. Old Church Slavonic form would be "между."]

*Pervoe poslanie Andreia Kurbskogo Ivanu Groznomu*. Electronic Publications. Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinskii dom). <http://lib.pushkinskiydom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=9105> (Accessed on December 14, 2016).

<sup>281</sup> I put the polonisms in bold:

*Ensign's Wife*: His Mightiness made us forget that we were not in Poland, not at the king's court.

*Governor Mnishkek*: Yeah, I said [that] to pani. And we will teach Polish to princess Mstislavska."

*Хорунжина*: Его **мосць** заставил нас позабыть, что мы не в Польше, не при дворе короля его милости. *Воевода Мнишек*: Ага! Я **мувил** пани. А княгиню Мстиславску мы выучим по-польски." Chaev, 85.

<sup>282</sup> *Dmitrii*: Slonskii? Yes... The Buchinskis will stay here. Bene... Please, prepare the instructions for him. I will look through them. Take the orders for Afanasii Vlasyev, that Buchinskii has, as a sample.

*Chernikovskii*: Libentissime. I do not dare to stay here any longer, vestra majestas."

*Дмитрий*: Слонский? Да... Здесь у меня Бучинские останутся... Вене... Приготовь ему, **будь ласков**, инструкцию. Я просмотрю. Возьми для руководства у Бучинского наказ Афанасью Власеву.

*Черниковский*: Libentissime. Не смею больше затруднять своим присутствием, vestra majestas." Ibid., 24.

Knutsen who doesn't understand Russian.<sup>283</sup> German phrases are printed in the Gothic script, which further diversifies the visual presentation of the text. As the boyars and the people of Moscow fear "polonization" more and more, the Poles become more present toward the end of the play. First, Polish words are transcribed into Cyrillic but, in the ball scene, some phrases are printed in the original Polish. Even graphically, the text of the play is "invaded" by Latin and Polish scripts.

Generally, this play becomes a singular theatrical experiment that redeems historical drama as a serious genre, distances it from the previous tendentiously patriotic pieces, and further subverts the conventions of high heroic plays. Chaev once again retells the story of the False Dmitrii. He explores the possibilities of blending fiction and theatrical art with historiographical research and educational materials.

### 3.2 THE LEGACY OF "THE PEOPLE" IN ALEXANDER OSTROVSKY'S HISTORICAL PLAYS

Historical plays belong to Alexander Ostrovsky's least successful and least known dramas. However, they reflect his search for the "true Russia" in the provinces and urban middle-classes and allow us to better understand his political and social agenda. He is very critical of provincial hypocrisy and backwardness in *The Storm* (1859) and of new capitalist relations in *Without Dowry* (1879) but he idealizes olden times in his play *Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin, Sukhoruk* (1861). In *Dmitrii the Pretender and Vasilii Shuiskii* (1866), similar to Khomiakov and Pogodin, Ostrovsky shows the False Dmitrii in a positive light and even creates a story in which Dmitrii is not a pretender, but a nobleman of some

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<sup>283</sup> "Prince Mstislavskii: So, Tsar is not there, then?

Knutsen: Guten morgen.

Prince Mstislavskii: More troubles! Who is this fool?

Knutsen: Hauptmann Knutsen."

"Князь Мстиславский: Нету, знать, государя-то?

Кнутсен: Guten morgen.

Князь Мстиславский: Это что ещё? От часу не легче? Что за шут гороховой?

Кнутсен: Hauptmann Knutsen."

Chaev, 32.

obscure origins. This Pretender sincerely wants to be a good ruler, but his aspirations of reform and a connection with the West meet rejection and cost him his life.

*Koz'ma Zacharyich Minin, Sukhoruk* was Ostrovsky's first historical chronicle written during 1856-61 and based on his thorough research of archival and academic sources. Koz'ma Minin, of unknown but most likely lower-class origin, was lauded in the old annals as the leader of the people's militia. He fought against the Polish intervention of 1611-12 and supported Mikhail, the first tsar of the Romanov dynasty, in his ascension to the throne in 1613 that ended the age of interregnum, after which the social unrest began to subside. Minin was canonized as a national hero in the Monument to Minin and Pozharsky, his noble ally, erected on Red Square in 1818. Minin first appeared in fiction as a supporting character in Mikhail Zagoskin's first Russian historical novel *Yurii Miloslavskii, or the Russians in 1612* (1829).<sup>284</sup> The novel was modeled on Walter Scott's historical prose and enjoyed enormous success. Another instance is found in Kukol'nik's *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland* (1832). Generally, Minin was one of the less popular figures for the historical genre, and Ostrovsky was the first author who made him a title character.

The events of the drama take place in Nizhnii Novgorod during 1611-12 and describe the process of gathering volunteers and funds to fight the Polish military intervention and marauders. The dramatic personae are mostly middle-class tradesmen and craftsmen, and a few officials from Moscow. Unlike all his predecessors, Ostrovsky does not portray the noble elites and their fighting for power in Moscow, but chooses instead to depict his characters as observers and helpers who discuss the situation and make a collective decision.

In the first act, the people learn the latest news about the continuing pillage, sacrilege, and anarchy in Moscow. Minin, as the head of the local self-ruling community ("*starosta*"), starts to consider gathering an army to save the capital city and the whole country. In the subplot, feelings of love develop

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<sup>284</sup> Reviakin, A.I. "*Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin, Sukhoruk, Kommentarii*" // Ostrovsky, A.N., *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, in 12 vols., Vol. 4 (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1950), 401.

between a boyar's son, Pospelov, and the pious widow Marfa Borisovna, both of whom are active supporters of Minin. Pospelov proposes to her but she postpones her answer and later decides to become a nun. There is no motivation for this other than her piety.

Some parts of the play depict domestic scenes, for example in Marfa's house, where the people discuss the recent events, tell stories and rumors, pray, and sing folk songs. Prayers and religious formulas are never omitted in the rituals of greetings and goodbyes, which leaves less room for plot and character development. As a result, similar to Chaev's text, the characters differ by their last name and social status but, otherwise, just represent the unified voice of the community.

In the second act, minor conflicts arise because some of the characters, such as the merchant Birkin, are against sending help. Eventually, his opposition is subdued by the decision of the majority. In a lengthy monologue, Minin grieves about the misfortunes of all the people in his land and says that "divine will" appoints him to become their leader and fight for the good of everyone. Yet he doubts his ability and asks for strength and blessings from God in a prayer.

In the following acts, Minin is organizing the army and collecting money for it. Afterward he plans to step aside, but everyone elects him as the army's head. According to the traditional ancient ritual, he refuses the people's request twice and accepts it the third time. In the epilogue, Pozharsky and his people join Minin's army, and they depart together for Moscow. Ostrovsky chooses an open ending for his play, possibly, because he is mainly interested in the hero's development. Still, it is a very unusual decision for a dramatist of his time.

Ostrovsky's chronicle resembles Chaev's "archeological" approach. Dramatic conflict is virtually absent from the plot, where the protagonist has only to surpass some obstacles, rather than resolve an external or internal conflict. Minin has to work against inertia, but does not encounter any serious resistance or intrigues. There are only such opponents as Semenov, who converts into a supporter, and Birkin, who objects but complies. The play is anti-climactic because we do not see the triumph, but only know about it from other sources.

Ostrovsky's Minin is an ideal national leader and a medium of divine justice. Remarkably, he is not shown as a military hero in the text. He is responsible for the economy and supplies, which refers to Ostrovsky's perennial interest in people who arrange the flow of money and goods. Having been elected as the leader, Minin is afraid to become corrupted by power, but he remains unshaken. The narrative emphasizes Minin's disinterestedness through the praise, said in unison, of the other characters:

*Aksyonov*: The earth stands long, but never  
Has there been such a deed in our Holy Rus'.  
And thou art serving an unheard-of duty.  
So, pray, accept the title from us,  
Of which our grandfathers have never heard,  
And our grandsons will not hear it,  
And call yourself the chosen by our whole Russian Land!  
*Voices*: You have been chosen by the whole great land!<sup>285</sup>

This passage represents the rhetorical excess of the play well, as well as the persistence of religious imagery. The supporting voices perform the function of the Greek chorus and create the effect of perfect communion. Also, the quote hyperbolizes the election of Minin as a unique event in Russian history. Possibly, Ostrovsky offers a subtle critique of the long tradition of autocracy in Russia. The election of the leader by the people remains a rare case, even though it is remembered as one of the most efficient political decisions.

This is not the only subtle reference to the present-day situation, and these suggestive passages eventually became the reason for banning the performance of *Koz'ma Minin* in 1861. Ostrovsky's Minin is concerned with the disastrous conditions of the peasantry, and he anachronistically mentions the barge

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<sup>285</sup> “*Аксёнов*: Давно стоит земля, а не бывало

Такого дела на святой Руси.

И небывалую ты служишь службу.

Прими ж такое звание от нас,

Какого деды наши не слыхали,

И внуки не услышат, и зовись

Ты выборным всей русскою землёю!

*Голоса*: Ты выборный от всей земли великой!”

Ostrovsky, A.N., “*Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin, Sukhoruk (pervaia redaktsiia)*” // Ostrovsky, A.N., *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, in 12 vols.*, Vol 4. (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1950), 126.

haulers<sup>286</sup> who had become a symbol for the people's hardships in 19th-century Russian Realism. Another example can be found in the conversation of the tradesmen at the beginning of Act One:

*Lytkin:* Now such a time has come, Piotr Aksyonych, -  
Do not believe the good things, but if something evil  
You hear – that, my brother, is the real truth. <...>  
*Aksyonov:* There's no end to the misfortunes. Our Lord, it seems,  
Will not redeem our sins  
And wants to ruin us to the very end.  
*Pospelov:* Yes, Piotr Aksyonych, the times now are bad!  
Moscow is devastated, the people waver  
And diverge, not knowing what to stand for;  
And kiss the cross not knowing to whom!  
*Aksyonov:* To heretics, and latins, and to thieves, -  
To anyone. <...>  
But what about the host that gathered near Moscow?  
Where are the governors?  
*Pospelov:* They all dispersed –  
Some returned home, others started robbing.  
What thieves have not yet taken, they  
Will steal from the righteous Christians.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Ostrovsky, *Koz'ma Minin*, 38.

<sup>287</sup> *Лыткин:* Теперь такое время, Пётр Аксёныч, -  
Хорошему не верь, а что дурное  
Услышишь, это, брат, уж верно правда.  
*Аксёнов:* Бедам конца не видно. Знать, господь  
Нам прегрешений наших не отпустит  
И до конца нас хочет погубить.  
*Пospelov:* Да, Пётр Аксёныч, времена плохие!  
Москва разорена, в народе шатость  
Да рознь, за что стоять не знают;  
Целуют крест неведомо кому!  
*Аксёнов:* Еретикам, латинцам да ворам, -  
Кому попало. <...>  
А что же рать, что под Москвою в сборе?  
Что воеводы?  
*Пospelov:* Розно разошлись –  
Которые домой, другие грабить.  
Что воры не успели, то они  
У православных христиан растащат.”  
*Ibid.*, 8-9.



Lytkin's lines especially displeased the censors, who suspected a critique of contemporary state ideology and censorship in them.<sup>288</sup> The images of the demoralized official army and the devastated capital city, where people are unable to unite and defend themselves, were very unwelcome. Ostrovsky portrayed the free citizens as the independent makers of history, and the officials did not allow the staging of the play in the year when serfdom was abolished: "The play was considered untimely for staging. ... In the time of peasant uprisings and the reforms of 1861, the anti-aristocratic people's ethos of Minin appeared dangerous for the ruling circles."<sup>289</sup> The quote above also brings together the most important aspects of the play: the religious motifs, the idealized and timeless image of the provincial community, and the idea of salvation coming from the provinces. Reference to the Lord's punishment and the other numerous ritualistic invocations of God create the picture of medieval mentality and give the play historical color. However, the drama is not consistent in reconstructing the atmosphere of the epoch. Ostrovsky's Nizhnii Novgorod mainly becomes a timeless symbol of the people's power and freedom, rather than an accurate depiction of the actual place. Interestingly, the Time of Troubles does not affect this city in *Koz'ma Minin*: "Here, we have peace and quiet, and God's grace <...> / Among our people, there is no disturbance."<sup>290</sup> This approach almost links the play with the Neoclassicist rhetorical drama, where the events do not happen on stage but only appear in the narration of the characters.

Ostrovsky portrays this city as its geographical namesake, the new Novgorod Velikii. That Novgorod was a wealthy trade center famous for its local government elected from free citizens during the 9th-16th centuries. In the city, the elements of democratic rule remained strong in later monarchical periods, until Ivan the Terrible violently ended that tradition. Before that, Novgorod Velikii could boast

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<sup>288</sup> Reviakin, 402.

<sup>289</sup> "Пьесу признали несвоевременной для сценического воплощения. ... В условиях крестьянских волнений в связи с буржуазной реформой 1861 года, противобоярский, народный дух «Минина» показался правящим кругам опасным." Ibid., 403.

<sup>290</sup> "Здесь тишь да гладь, да божья благодать. <...> / Да и в народе смуты не слышать." Ostrovsky, *Koz'ma Minin*, 9.

certain independence and sometimes rebelled against the central power. The Novgorod Republic became a symbol of the political struggle for freedom in Russian literature and culture, which was widely used by the Decembrists, and any allusions to that symbol clashed with the official ideology.

Because Ostrovsky chooses to join this cultural tradition, his play contains many non-historical elements. S.I. Kormilov points out that "... [the playwright] depicts reality in such a way, that the play manifests historical and anti-historical aspects simultaneously."<sup>291</sup> The play develops in two incompatible directions: it accurately relates the sequence of events, but offers an idealized image of the self-governing community that elects its leader, who represents the whole land and selflessly fights for the good of the common people.

It is very difficult to uncover the reason behind these artistic decisions. This historical event offers a unique example of the harmonious and just relationship between the people and power. Ostrovsky possibly chooses to concentrate on this symbolic meaning. The existing accounts on Minin are very scarce but positive. Ostrovsky used that premise to construct the image of the national hero. Because the information on Minin is insufficient to construct a hero based on established facts, Ostrovsky gives him some characteristics of a generalized and idealized epic hero. Thus, the play features the accounts of documented events, scenes from medieval life, contemporary references, and allusions to the timeless symbol of Novgorod. However, all these additions challenge the play's artistic unity and theatrical nature because the heterogeneous aspects do not necessarily connect with each other or work together, even for a reader.

Ostrovsky finished the second version of *Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin* by 1866, and the text received such a considerable reworking that he called it "almost a new play."<sup>292</sup> Contrary to his own initial claims

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<sup>291</sup> "...[Островский] так изображает действительность, что в пьесе одновременно сказываются и историзм и антиисторизм." Kormilov, S.I. "Printsip Istorizma v Istoricheskikh Dramakh A.N.Ostrovskogo 'Koz'ma Zakhar'ich Minin, Sukhoruk, 'Dmitrii Samozvanets' i 'Vasilii Shuiskii.'" *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, Seriya 9, Filologija*. 2 (1981): 3-13, 7.

\*The Russian term *istorizm*, "historism," that is used in Kormilov's article is not related to "historicism" or "New Historicism." Kormilov uses the word *istorizm* as the term for „historical accuracy.“

<sup>292</sup> Quoted in: Reviakin, 404.

about creating a piece for reading only, he endeavored to stage it. The new version was written to receive permission for staging, and Ostrovsky succeeded this time. Other reasons for a new edition were creating an adaptation suitable for the stage and responding to the critics. In the second version, Ostrovsky removed all the allusions to the Novgorod Republic and the peasants' poverty, and toned down the religious aspect. Prince Pozharsky, the second leader of the militia who was almost absent in the first edition, now receives more attention, and his importance is emphasized. The dramatist was also apparently returning to more traditional poetics. He added some action scenes and the celebration of the victory in the epilogue, which was done to conform with the public's expectation of clear and concise denouements. In this finale, Minin receives a high noble rank and estates with villages as a reward.<sup>293</sup> Owning the villages signified owning serfs and, therefore, Minin now became the owner of the people whom he tried to liberate earlier. I see this change as a sacrifice made for the censors in order to show how the new tsar rewarded the hero by including him into the power structure.

Generally, Ostrovsky's ideological stance for his first historical chronicle, *Koz'ma Minin*, is rather peculiar and convoluted. Unprecedentedly for historical dramas, Ostrovsky moves the setting away from Moscow and turns all representatives of power and nobility into minor characters. He demonstrates how the common people unify and consolidate independently and elect Minin as their spiritual leader and treasurer, with Pozharsky as their military commander. Minin's ethic that combines earning money as a merchant or craftsman and remaining virtuous seems almost Protestant. If summarized like this, the play promises to please the contemporary democrats and revolutionaries. However, it received many lukewarm and negative responses and was better liked by the conservatives, for many other reasons.

Together with the politically subversive motifs that have already been described, the play emphasizes the religiosity of its heroes and frames Minin and Pozharsky's campaign as a divine mission and a holy war against foreign invaders and Russian "collaborationists." A large part of the play consists of conversations about God, the Orthodox faith, and prayers. These words themselves are present

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<sup>293</sup> Ostrovsky, *Koz'ma Minin*, 244-45.

virtually on every page and in almost every conversation between the characters. They seem redundant and slow down the action. Quite a few passages resemble sermons. In the minds of the educated readers of the 1860s, such persistent religiosity had to signal the author's Slavophile affiliation or even officious conservatism. Pisarev gave a negative review to *Koz'ma Minin* and even compared it to Kukol'nik's servile pieces: "In truth, I do not see very well how *Koz'ma Minin* is different from Kukol'nik's drama *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland*. Both Kukol'nik and M-r Ostrovsky depict historical events in the same way as our home-grown artists and engravers draw the valorous generals. Thus, M-r Ostrovsky has the colossal Minin at the forefront... Behind Minin, there are his real-life suffering and his dream visions, and, in the background, one or two tiny tots represent the Russian people who are saving the fatherland."<sup>294</sup> Ostrovsky cannot be accused of conservatism, as he consistently ran into censorship problems with his dramas, and depicted the rise of the *narod* in *Minin*. Accusations of conservatism were probably an involuntary reaction to the repetitive religious references that Ostrovsky did not foresee.

I offer a few possible reasons for why Ostrovsky focused so much on the religious overtones. Firstly, he simply tried to present the medieval mentality and reflect the ideas of actual chroniclers who lived during the Time of Troubles. Secondly, he wanted to establish a connection to the religiosity of commoner spectators and his contemporaries.<sup>295</sup> This idea should be valid in connection with Ostrovsky's intention to establish educational theatre. Thirdly, he could have emphasized Christian themes in an attempt to cajole the censors. However, the drama still somehow turned out to be closer to the patriotic pieces by Kriukovskii and Kukol'nik than to Pushkin or Pogodin's dramas. Ostrovsky's positive and heroic characters, including the protagonist, are all flawless Christians who are willing to sacrifice

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<sup>294</sup> "По правде сказать, я хорошенько не вижу, чем "Козьма Минин" отличается от драмы Кукольника "Рука всевышнего отечество спасла". И Кукольник и г. Островский рисуют исторические события так, как наши доморожденные живописцы и граверы рисуют доблестных генералов... Так у г. Островского на первом плане колоссальный Минин, за ним его страдания наяву и видения во сне, а совсем назади два-три карапузика изображают русский народ, спасающий отечество." Pisarev, D.I., "Motivy russkoi dramy." // Pisarev, D.I., *Literaturnaia kritika*, in 3 vols., Vol 1. "Stat'i 1859-1864 gg." (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1981), [http://az.lib.ru/p/pisarew\\_d/text\\_0240.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/p/pisarew_d/text_0240.shtml) (Accessed on December 15, 2016).

<sup>295</sup> For example, Katerina is very religious in Ostrovsky's *The Storm*.

themselves for the common good. The pathos of the play is based on the perceived divine patronage and the ubiquitous rhetoric of good Christian deeds. The characters show readiness to bond their wives and children to servitude in order to get the money necessary for a militia.<sup>296</sup> Consciously or unconsciously, Ostrovsky repeats some passages from Kukol'nik *The Hand of God Saved the Fatherland* almost verbatim. Ostrovsky's text fits well into the "orthodoxy" and "nationality" components of the old conservative formula, while omitting "autocracy" in favor of the people's power.

*Dmitrii The Pretender and Vasilii Shuiskii* was the most acclaimed among Ostrovsky's three historical pieces and occasionally appeared on stage in the 19th and the early 20th centuries.<sup>297</sup> It significantly differs from *Koz'ma Minin* and stands closer to the earlier "Pretender" plays. It is written in blank verse, features all the stock characters, and, once again, tells the story of Dmitrii's rise and fall. In fact, this is the last Russian play, with the possible exception of some extremely obscure pieces, that features the False Dmitrii as the protagonist. This play can be read as a tribute to the century-long Russian tradition of "Pretender" dramas, as well as their intertextual summary, enhanced by brief meditations on the shifts between historical epochs.

As I mentioned before, Ostrovsky breaks from the tradition of identifying False Dmitrii with Otrepyev and leaves his origins obscure. Pushkin, Pogodin, and Chaev depicted Dmitrii as a picaresque

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<sup>296</sup> *Minin*: And if we want to help, my brethren,  
Let's not grudge our fortunes!  
Let's not grudge our treasury and lives!  
We will sell our yards and houses!  
And if it is not enough, we will bond our wives and children!  
*Voices*: We will bond our wives! We will bond our children!  
*Минин*: И аще, братья, похотим помочь,  
Не пожалеем наших достояний!  
Не пощадим казны и животов!  
Мы продадим дворы свои и дома!  
А будет мало - жён, детей заложим!  
*Голоса*: Заложим жён! - Детей своих заложим!  
Ostrovsky, *Koz'ma Minin*, 98.

<sup>297</sup> Reviakin, 403.

adventurer, Khomiakov imagined him as a good-willing ruler, and Sumarokov made him an ultimate tyrant. Ostrovsky's protagonist unites all those characteristics. He has noble intentions but gradually becomes a villain.

All the familiar scenes find their way into the plot. In the beginning of his reign, Dmitrii is popular and generous. He sincerely wants to become a good ruler and ignores Basmanov's warnings about his secret enemies. He turns the heir's mother tsarina Marfa into his supporter, then uncovers Shuiskii's intrigue and pardons him right before the execution. The street scenes with the people traditionally show the growing discontent about the Poles and the Catholic services that were allowed in Moscow. The play ends with a feast and the subsequent rebellion, during which Dmitrii is murdered.

The play echoes Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* in many instances: Dmitrii acts as a Romantic lover who obeys Marina's orders; the *narod* is passive and gullible; Shuiskii is sly, cynical, and hungry for power. When the Pretender shows himself to be an ambitious military leader who dreams of fighting the Turks, he resembles Khomiakov's version of this historical figure. When Dmitrii openly favors Polish customs and ignores the reports of rebellion during the masquerade, he displays the qualities on which Pogodin and Chaev focused. Finally, Dmitrii's ambition for reform and new order links him to Tolstoy's vision of *Boris Godunov*, which I will discuss later.

In many instances, Ostrovsky adheres to Pushkin's narrative, to the extent of close textual references, for example: "Heavy it is, the Monomakh's crown."<sup>298</sup> Pushkin's historical skepticism is also prominent in the text. For example, Vasilii Shuiskii cynically proclaims a relativist attitude to truth and falsehood: "At our choice, both lies and truth / In our hands they serve as tools / For the people's good."<sup>299</sup> Shuiskii openly states that the people have to be manipulated for the sake of their own good. The other lines become a meta-textual moment where Ostrovsky reminds readers that historical

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<sup>298</sup> "Тяжка она – корона Мономаха!" Ostrovsky, A.N., "Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii" In Ostrovsky, A.N., *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, in 12 vols., Vol. 4. (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1950), 269.

<sup>299</sup> "По выбору и ложь и правда служат / У нас в руках орудием для блага / Народного." Ibid., 348.

documents should be assessed critically as they may easily and deliberately contain lies: “And among the people, our lies will be truth / And it will go as truth to the chronicles.”<sup>300</sup> This quote implies the impossibility of knowing the historical truth, which directly echoes Pushkin’s subtext. In his *Boris Godunov*, no one except Pimen is interested in knowing or telling the truth, and Pimen spent much of his life enclosed in a monastery. An indication of Pimen’s incompetence is his description of Ivan the Terrible as a pious, meek tsar because the monk only saw the tsar during one of his repentance periods. The quoted passages indicate that Ostrovsky adheres to a similar historical skepticism.

The playwright still idealizes the people and depicts them as the bearers of some inherent Russian identity. In this play, the commoners embody authentic Russian values and faith, which makes them superior to the calculating and cautious nobility. In the first scene, scribe Osipov is astonished at Vasilii Shuiskii’s cynical acceptance of the Pretender:

*Osipov:* Oh, boyar,  
You have mortified me! How could you  
Serve the heretic! Our holy church  
Orders to stand against them until your Christian death.<sup>301</sup>

Shuiskii mocks this intention to die for faith and dismisses it as the disobedience:

...Look at the new martyr!  
You fancy you’ll become a Moscow saint?  
Too much of an honor for your mug! Such nonsense  
One should not say, nor listen to...  
Do serve the tsar upon your Christian oath,  
And wish all good to him!<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> “И наша ложь в народе будет правдой, - / В хронографы за правду перейдёт.”  
Ostrovsky, *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii*, 349.

<sup>301</sup> “*Осипов:* Боярин! Ты убил меня! Ну как же / Еретика служить! Святая церковь / Противиться велит до смерти крестной.” *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>302</sup> “*Василий Шуйский:* ...Вот новый страстотерпец!  
В московские угодники задумал?  
Не к рылу честь! Таких речей нелепых  
Ни говорить, ни слушать непригоже...  
Служи царю по крестной клятве, вправду,  
И всякого добра ему желай!”  
Ostrovsky, *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii*, 264.

This clash between social duty and some ultimate moral truth, which is embodied by the people's piety, becomes Ostrovsky's main contribution to the historical genre that was consistent with the mainstream discourse of *narod* in the 1860s. The play *Koz'ma Minin* focuses on the portrayal of the lower classes and their role in the historical process. *Dmitrii the Pretender and Vasilii Shuiskii* combines the idealization of the *narod* with the conventions of Romantic dramas about the False Dmitrii. Ostrovsky is also very interested in the people's religious identity and Christian worldview, and, in this aspect of their mentality, he finds the living connection between his contemporaries and their ancestors.

### 3.3 HISTORICAL FATALITY IN ALEKSEY K. TOLSTOY'S DRAMATIC TRILOGY

Chaev's experiment with "archeological" drama had brief success, but his dramas quickly faded into complete obscurity. Ostrovsky is regarded as one of the founders of modern Russian theatre for his numerous plays that depicted contemporary life, for bringing recognizable 19th-century social types onto the stage, and for his commentary on the changing Russian society. His few historical dramas remained very marginal.

In comparison with them, Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy is best known precisely for his work in the historical genre that depicts the epoch from Ivan the Terrible's reign to Boris Godunov's reign. His historical novel *Prince Serebrianyi* enjoyed lasting popularity. The first two plays from his famous dramatic trilogy, *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* and *Tsar Fyodor*, are indispensable for the history of Russian theatre, especially the latter piece. It remained under the censors' ban until 1898. Once directors succeeded at receiving permission, *Tsar Fyodor* was immediately staged by Suvorin in his Malyi Theatre with Pavel Orlov as Fyodor.<sup>303</sup> A few months later, Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko staged a production of this play in the newly opened private Moscow Art Theatre that displayed innovative directing and staging techniques. MAT's first production, *Tsar Fyodor*, brought fame to the theatre, was

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<sup>303</sup> Solovyeva, I.N., *Khudozhestvennyi teatr: zhizn' i priklucheniia idei* (Moskva: Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi teatr, 2007), 16.



shown during international tours, and remained enormously successful for the first half of the 20th century. *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* also enjoyed frequent productions.

These plays substantially differ from the majority of the preceding historical dramas, though Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* directly influenced Tolstoy. Ivan the Terrible and Fyodor appear as the protagonists for the first time.<sup>304</sup> Tolstoy focuses on character development and the complex relations between the main participants in the historical events, namely, the tsars and their closest circle of noblemen. On the one hand, Tolstoy's poetics have an affinity with Romantic and even neoclassical drama. His protagonists are the tsars and the boyars, and his dramas display a relative "unity of action," as the events always happen in the course of a few days, with the focus on two or three main characters. Tolstoy writes his plays in blank verse in the age when prose became central. He also defines his plays as "tragedies" in the subheadings, which is rare by the second half of the 19th century. Tolstoy explores the theme of tyranny, which links him to 18th-century playwrights, particularly Sumarokov and Kniazhnin. On the other hand, his understanding of historical process is consistent with contemporaneous historiography, and the psychological complexity of his characters is on par with the achievements of Russian Realist writings.

Tolstoy wrote two essays that are titled "The Project of Theatrical Production of the Play *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*" and "The Project of Theatrical Production of the Play *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*."<sup>305</sup> In them, Tolstoy formulates his concept of art, in general, and dramatic art, in particular. He also provides detailed analysis, an explanation, and interpretations of his dramas from the perspective of a director. I will analyze Tolstoy's dramas and his own critical examination of them in his commentaries.

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<sup>304</sup> Censorship influenced the choice of historical plots for the dramas. Besides the picaresque circumstances of his crowning and reign, Dmitrii The Pretender was also not a member of the royal family or the high nobility. Therefore, it was easier to receive censors' permission. Pushkin and A.K. Tolstoy's dramas that portrayed the tsars and the boyars were banned from stage for the longest periods of time.

<sup>305</sup> "Проект постановки на сцену трагедии 'Смерть Иоанна Грозного'" and "Проект постановки на сцену трагедии 'Царь Фёдор Иоаннович.'"

One of Tolstoy's foundational and recurring ideas is his belief in the immanent value of art. He sees history as an inspiration for works of fiction and thinks that a poet should not strive to be a historian. In addition, he says: "A poet has only one duty: to stay true to himself and create such characters that do not contradict themselves: *human truth* is his law; he is not bound by *historical truth*."<sup>306</sup> Tolstoy's statement is at odds with the understanding of "historical truth" that dominated the theatrical discourse in the 1860s and entailed meticulous faithfulness to original sources. Tolstoy formulated a problem that appeared in the "academic" approach to historical fiction. The original sources may contradict each other and be unverifiable, which is why Chaev's play, for instance, displays some inconsistencies. As we know now, Tolstoy's approach to historical fiction resulted in one of the most successful contributions into Russian historical drama.

I will analyze the character of Boris Godunov in the trilogy and particularly focus on the national themes in *Tsar Fyodor* and *Tsar Boris* for the purpose of this project. In the first play, the themes of the nation and Russia's historical path are quite marginal. They are more noticeable in the second piece and becomes one of the most important topics in *Tsar Boris*. This is the least successful piece among the three, and it cannot boast the prolific stage history of its two prequels. Tolstoy himself did not leave much commentary on it. Scholars have also paid little attention to it. However, this text makes an important contribution to the discussion of national identity.

I maintain that Tolstoy combines the idea of the inevitability of the historical process with the theme of moral transgression and subsequent retribution. On the one hand, he has a teleological vision of history where the Time of Troubles is a part of the overall movement toward modernization. It is the struggle between the old and the new where the latter is fated to win. Tolstoy positively assesses Boris Godunov's policies and envisions him as the reformer who could have started modernization in Russia a hundred years before Peter the Great. On the other hand, Tolstoy accentuates the moral aspect. Godunov

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<sup>306</sup> "Поэт ... имеет только одну обязанность: быть верным самому себе и создавать характеры так, чтобы они сами себе не противоречили: *человеческая правда* – вот его закон, *исторической правдой* он не связан" Tolstoy, "Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Smert' Ioanna Groznogo*," 449.

fails because he chooses an ultimately destructive path: he believed that many good deeds would redeem the murder of the heir. Tolstoy emphasizes that the tragic ending is brought not by “fate,” but as a consequence of the characters’ choices and deeds.<sup>307</sup> I will demonstrate that Tolstoy utilizes the classical concept of “fatality” that shaped Greek tragedy, but applies it to the historical process and ties it to the ideas of personal sin and a guilty conscience.

Boris is one of the main characters in all the three plays and, thus, ties the whole trilogy together. His long path to the throne and the psychological effects of having such power constitute one of the central topics of the trilogy. Boris betrays Ivan the Terrible, breaks oaths, destroys his political opponents, and, ultimately, orders the murder of the heir Dmitrii in hopes of redeeming this sin later with his benevolent rule. Having achieved his goal, he finds himself becoming a cruel and oppressive tyrant. Tolstoy follows Pushkin’s vision but, unlike Pushkin, elaborately describes Godunov’s good intentions and early success, and his gradual transformation into a suffering villain. Pushkin is skeptical about the possibility of historical knowledge, whereas Tolstoy’s vision of history is tragic. His morally superior characters are powerless and lose to their less scrupulous opponents.

*The Death of Ivan the Terrible* and *Tsar Fyodor* examine the historical circumstances that led to the Time of Troubles. Tolstoy is preoccupied with psychological plausibility and the moral choices that the characters make. Tsar Ivan is a tragic villain who is tormented by his own cruel deeds but unable to turn away from his path. Tolstoy depicts him as a multidimensional, complex, troubled character. In his novel *Prince Serebrianyi*, the writer depicts Ivan the Terrible’s reign as an epoch of degradation and the inversion of moral values, when servility and betrayal became widespread and favored by the tsar.

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<sup>307</sup> “In this tragedy [*The Death of Ivan the Terrible*], everyone is guilty and everyone is punished, not by some higher power that strikes them from outside but by the force of things, by the result that comes as a logical consequence of each character’s actions... Only Godunov and his myrmidon Bitiagovskii are triumphant but spectators have presentiment that they, too, will have to reap what they sow.”

“В этой трагедии [*Смерть Иоанна Грозного*] все виноваты и все наказаны, не какую-нибудь властью, поражающею их извне, но силою вещей, результатом, истекающим с логическою необходимостью из образа действий каждого... Торжествуют один Годунов и клевет его Битяговский, но зритель предчувствует, что и им придётся пожать плоды посеянного ими семени.”  
Tolstoy, “Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Smert’ Ioanna Groznogo*,” 448.

Tolstoy sees the beginning of the Time of Troubles in this moral descent.<sup>308</sup> He openly expresses this idea in the closing chapter of his novel *Prince Serebrianyi*.<sup>309</sup>

In the first play of the trilogy, Boris is Ivan's trusted adviser, whose secret ambition is for the throne, and we can observe Boris's uncanny ability to influence people more and more toward the end of the story. In one scene, fortune-tellers ("volkhvy") predict the death of Tsar Ivan on Cyril's day. Later, Boris privately questions them about his own future. In the dynamic dialog, the fortune-tellers' answers predict Boris's crowning, seven-year reign, and the fall caused by a mysterious, murdered-but-alive rival.<sup>310</sup> Hearing the prediction of his seven-year reign, Boris exclaims: "Even if only seven days!" This is

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<sup>308</sup> Prince Nikita Serebrianyi in the novel, boyar Nikita Zakhar'in in *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*, and Ivan Shuiskii in *Tsar Fyodor* belong the same type of honest, brave, and virtuous character. These characters are un-heroic and unable to fight against the "regime," but they serve as the measure of the moral state of the epoch and as examples of people who manage to preserve their honesty and kindness, eventually at the cost of their lives.

<sup>309</sup> "Let us forgive the sinful ghost of Ivan Vasilyevich but let us kindly remember those who, depending on him, persisted in their goodness, because it is hard not to fall down at such times, when all the ideas are perverted, when meanness is called virtue, betrayal becomes a law, and the very honor and human dignity are considered to be the criminal violation of the duty! Rest in peace, honest people! Paying tribute to your age, you saw Ivan the Terrible as the manifestation of God's anger and bore it patiently; but you walked the straight path, not fearing disfavor nor death, and your lives did not pass in vain."

"Простим же грешной тени Ивана Васильевича, но помянем добром тех, которые, завися от него, устояли в добре, ибо тяжело не упасть в такое время, когда все понятия извращаются, когда низость называется добродетелью, предательство входит в закон, а самая честь и человеческое достоинство почитаются преступным нарушением долга! Мир праху вашему, люди честные! Платя дань веку, вы видели в Грозном проявление божьего гнева и сносили его терпеливо; но вы шли прямою дорогой, не бояся ни опалы, ни смерти; и жизнь ваша не прошла даром..." Tolstoy, A.K., *Prints Serebriannyi*. (Moskva: Gos. izdatel'stvo detskoj literatury, 1959), 349.

Tolstoy expresses the same idea in his article:

"This is the curse of the times of moral degradation: they paralyze the best energies of the best people."

"В том-то и проклятие времён нравственного упадка, что они парализуют лучшие силы лучших людей."

Tolstoy, "Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Smert' Ioanna Groznogo*," 466.

<sup>310</sup> G o d u n o v Magi! Tell me openly,  
What awaits me in the future?  
B o t h m a g i (*fall on knees*)  
When you ascend the tsar's throne,  
Remember your servants, boyar!  
G o d u n o v Are you insane!  
T h e 1 s t m a g u s The divination says so! <...>  
G o d u n o v Will there be many years  
Of my reign?  
T h e 2 n d m a g u s You shall reign  
For seven years.

the first insight into his love for power and readiness to sacrifice everything for his ultimate goal, the Russian throne. The prediction becomes the departing point from which the subsequent plot unfolds.

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G o d u n o v Even if only seven days!  
But how will I achieve the highest power?  
T h e 1 s t m a g u s We do not know.  
G o d u n o v Who should I be afraid of?  
T h e 2 n d m a g u s Do not ask us.  
G o d u n o v I want to know who  
My main rival is.  
T h e 1 s t m a g u s His features are obscure.  
G o d u n o v Tell me!  
T h e 1 s t m a g u s He is weak but powerful.  
T h e 2 n d m a g u s Himself and not himself.  
T h e 1 s t m a g u s Innocent in front of everyone.  
T h e 2 n d m a g u s The enemy of the whole land and the cause of many misfortunes.  
T h e 1 s t m a g u s Murdered but alive.  
G o d u n o v These words do not make sense!  
B o t h m a g i The divination says so,  
We are not allowed to know more.  
Г о д у н о в Волхвы! Скажите прямо,  
Что ожидает в будущем меня?  
О б а в о л х в а (*становятся на колени*)  
Когда на царский сядешь ты престол,  
Своих холопей помяни, боярин!  
Г о д у н о в В уме ли вы!  
1-й в о л х в Так выпало гаданье. <...>  
Г о д у н о в Много ли мне лет  
Царить придётся?  
2-й в о л х в Твоего царенья  
Семь только будет лет.  
Г о д у н о в Хотя б семь дней!  
Но чем достигну я верховной власти?  
1-й в о л х в Не ведаем.  
Г о д у н о в Кого бояться мне?  
2-й в о л х в Не спрашивай.  
Г о д у н о в Я знать хочу, кто главный  
Противник мой?  
1-й в о л х в Темны его приметы.  
Г о д у н о в Скажите их!  
1-й в о л х в Он слаб, но он могуч.  
2-й в о л х в Сам и не сам.  
1-й в о л х в Безвинен перед всеми.  
2-й в о л х в Враг всей земле и многих бед причина.  
1-й в о л х в Убит, но жив.  
Г о д у н о в Нет смысла в сих словах!  
1-й в о л х в Так выпало гаданье. Боле знать  
Нам не дано.

Tolstoy, *Smert' Ioanna Groznogo*, 119-121.

Boris remembers and quotes this prophecy several times later in the trilogy, as it is being fulfilled. Initially, the prediction about the mysterious rival is obscure to him. He only manages to decipher it when the prophecy fully comes true. In this way, Tolstoy constructs the motif of fatality. For example, in the last act of *Ivan the Terrible*, the characters talk about the comet, and Ivan claims that it heralds his own death.<sup>311</sup> Tolstoy reflects the prominent presence of omens and fortune telling in the medieval world-view that expressed in historical sources from the era. Besides that, this prediction for Boris is essential for our understanding of Tolstoy's historical vision.

As I mentioned before, Tolstoy invents scenes where Boris talks to Ivan's doctor and learns that any agitation is dangerous for the sick tsar.<sup>312</sup> On Cyril's day, Ivan feels better, plays chess with a boyar and dismisses the prophecy because he is still alive. Dazed by the favorable prediction, Boris tests his own luck and tells Ivan that the fortune-tellers insist on their prediction of the tsar's death, because Cyril's day has not yet ended. In a fit of anger and fear, Ivan dies and, therefore, fulfills the prophecy.<sup>313</sup> Fyodor immediately relies on Boris. Tolstoy's Boris thus begins his ascension to power with an adventurous but psychologically calculated betrayal. This plot line has no grounding in any historical sources. The sequence of events is very "theatrical." If presented on stage, such intense action unfolds on a very fast pace and captures the spectators visually and emotionally.

In the second drama of the trilogy, Fyodor's story becomes the historical paradox where his humane and kind nature leads to the disintegration of the state no less than the tyranny of his father. Boris is the de facto ruler of the country who is manipulative and fully controls Fyodor. The historical opposition between the old and the new is explicit in the struggle between Ivan Shuiskii and Boris

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<sup>311</sup> "И о а н н: Do you see the star? / It has come to proclaim my death!"  
"И о а н н: Вы видите звезду? / Она мне смерть явилась возвестить!"  
Tolstoy, *Smert' Ioanna Groznogo*, 91.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

Godunov. In the first scene, Ivan Shuiskii sees the salvation of the land in adhering to tradition. This position becomes his self-justification for plotting against Godunov:

... We, the Shuiskiis, stand  
With all our land for olden times, for the Church,  
For good order in Rus',  
As it came from our ancestors; but he  
Is turning whole Rus' upside down.<sup>314</sup>

This character and his supporters embody the resistance to change and accuse Godunov of introducing too many novelties that ruin the old order and cause the social turmoil. Boris's point of view is exactly the opposite. He understands the old state of Rus' as chaotic. His self-proclaimed mission is bringing a better life and prosperity by establishing the new rational order. For Boris, the conservatism and the inability to launch and carry out the necessary reforms is precisely what stirs unrest and thwarts the natural course of development:

With great effort, I am building an edifice,  
An illuminated temple, a powerful state,  
A new, rational Rus' ... <...>  
'Tis all in vain! I'm building above the chasm!<sup>315</sup>

The Time of Troubles has not started yet but we can see all the premises and its beginnings unfolding. The tragic irony of the situation is the fact that Ivan Shuiskii and Boris Godunov see each other's actions as destructive and deliberately malicious. In the author's logic, the unavoidable collision between Godunov and the Shuiskiis becomes the underlying historical reason for this crisis. At times, Tolstoy

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<sup>314</sup> ...Мы, Шуйские, стоим  
Со всей землей за старину, за церковь,  
За доброе строенье на Руси,  
Как повелось от предков; он же ставит  
Всю Русь вверх дном.  
Tolstoy, A.K., "Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich." In Tolstoy, A. K., *Sobraniiie sochinenii in 4 Vols.*, Vol. 3 *Dramaticheskaiia trilogiia. Stat'i.* (Moskva: Izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1964), 151.

<sup>315</sup> С трудом великим здание я строю,  
Тот светлый храм, ту мощную державу,  
Ту новую, разумную ту Русь... <...>  
Напрасно все! Я строю над провалом!  
Ibid., 271.

portrays Godunov almost as an embodied force of history that fails in the early 17th century, but which inevitably manifests itself and eventually takes over and brings changes.

This war of ideologies in Tolstoy, which is absent in Pushkin, can also be interpreted with the help of Iu. Lotman and B. Uspensky's article "The role of dual models in the dynamics of Russian culture" where they summarize the mechanism that defines Russian culture: "Among the oppositions that structured Russian culture from the conversion to Christianity straight through to Peter's reforms, one of the most stable oppositions has been the opposition between the 'the old and the new'."<sup>316</sup> According to their scholarship, Russian culture oscillates between ascribing positive value to old and new aspects of life. Every reversal is established through a time of crisis because of the rigid dual model of Russian culture.

Even though this model itself is schematic and simplifies the historical process, I find it applicable specifically to Tolstoy's trilogy because he also simplifies historical process for the fictitious narrative and for staging purposes. Ivan Shuiskii and his supporters still belong to the old Muscovy with its conservatism that ascribes positive value to everything old: "starina," "tserkov'," "predki."<sup>317</sup> Godunov, on the contrary, favors such categories as "novaia," and "razumnaia." This dual perspective allows Tolstoy to refer to many other epochs of Russian history. The Time of Troubles, as shown by Tolstoy in his trilogy, foreshadows the controversial reforms of Peter the Great and the continuing polemics of the 19th century: Slavophiles and Westernizers, the old gentry and the new radical intelligentsia.

The references to the 19th century become even more obvious as Godunov shows himself to be a pragmatic politician who envisions his country as a powerful empire and acts almost in a "Capitalist" way. For example, he opposes the isolationist policy and, instead, broadens trade with European countries. Economic profit matters more to him than the fact that the tradesmen were accused of heresy. He

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<sup>316</sup> Lotman, Iu., and Uspensky, B., Shukman, Ann, trans. and ed., "The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture" In Lotman, Iu., and Uspensky, B., *The Semiotics of Russian Culture (Up to the End of the Eighteenth Century)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1984), 33.

<sup>317</sup> Tolstoy, *Tsar Fyodor*, 271.



argues with patriarch Dionisii about that matter.<sup>318</sup> For Dionisii, matters of religion are extremely important and should guide the tsar's actions. Boris openly favors economic profit. He appears religiously

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<sup>318</sup> D i o n i s i i Great tsar, we know your zeal;  
Unfortunately, not all deeds come  
from you. (*Looks at Godunov*)

The other day,  
The Novgorod merchants, whom  
We, as a council, sentenced for heresy,  
Were freed and sent back  
To Novgorod, as if they were righteous,  
For the temptation of all Christians.  
G o d u n o v Your holiness, those merchants  
Have trade with the German cities  
And bring profit to the state,  
Which is not small. Whole Novgorod would go bankrupt  
If we took them.

D i o n i s i i And is their heresy  
Nothing for you?  
G o d u n o v God forbid, your holiness!  
The tsar has already sent orders to the governors  
To arrest the teachers of that heresy.  
But the tsar sees the difference between the seduced  
and the seducers.

Д и о н и с и й Великий царь, усердие твое  
Нам ведомо; дела же, к сожаленью,  
Не все исходят от тебя. (*Смотрит на Годунова*)

Намедни  
Новгородские купцы, которых  
За ересь мы собором осудили,  
Свобождены и в Новгород обратно,  
Как правые, отпущены, к соблазну  
Всех христиан.

Г о д у н о в Владыко, те купцы  
С немецкими торгуют городами  
И выгоду приносят государству  
Немалую. Мы с ними разорили б  
Весь Новгород.

Д и о н и с и й А ересь ни во что  
Ты ставишь их?  
Г о д у н о в Избави бог, владыко!  
Уж царь послал наказы воеводам  
Той ереси учителей хватать.  
Но соблазненных отличает царь  
От соблазнительей.

Tolstoy, *Tsar Fyodor*, 169.

tolerant but tries to persuade Dionisii by speaking in his language and assuring him that he will eradicate the heretical teachers rather than persecute their deceived followers. Boris tries to show that trade affairs should be managed separately from religious issues. Tolstoy's Godunov is a modern ruler who rejects medieval religious values and wants to broaden the secular sphere of life.

In Act 3, Boris guides Fyodor through foreign policy matters. Fyodor constantly asks about the religion of the countries in question, whereas Boris reasons pragmatically. He persuades Fyodor to accept Georgia's allegiance emphasizing the shared religion, Orthodox Christianity, but then argues for diplomatic relationship with Poland out of pure political interest.<sup>319</sup> At one point, Godunov professes the purely rational approach to royal power:

I know no vengeance,  
I listen to neither friends, nor enemies;  
For me, I only see my work,  
And I destroy not the enemies of me,  
But of my work.<sup>320</sup>

Ivan the Terrible and his son Fyodor are very different rulers but both of them were often guided by emotions. In contrast to them, Godunov likes to see himself as an unbiased and rational ruler. He states that an overall good result is more important than personal relationships or religious identity, which, once again, presents him as a modern man who rejects medieval traditions and values. Tolstoy constructs an antithesis between the gullible and emotional Fyodor and the pragmatic and calculating Boris, which we can see in the scene of reconciliation with Ivan Shuiskii. Fyodor sincerely rejoices at the restored friendship, whereas Boris complies entirely out of political necessity.

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<sup>319</sup> "You should not disdain their throne, / In order to turn them from enemies to servants."  
"Престолом их ты брезговать не должен, / Чтоб слугами их сделать из врагов." Tolstoy, *Tsar Fyodor*, 220.

<sup>320</sup> Я мщения не знаю,  
Не слушаю ни дружбы, ни вражды;  
Перед собой мое лишь вижу дело  
И не своих, но дела моего  
Гублю врагов.  
Ibid., 272.

Nevertheless, Boris schemes, breaks his promises, and mercilessly removes his enemies, and his wish for common good cannot be separated from his enjoyment of personal power. When the Shuiskiis and the Nagies prepare a coup and want to replace Fyodor, who cannot produce an heir, with the little Dmitrii, Godunov decides to get rid of the child who is his own biggest rival. Coincidentally, he remembers the prophecy, says its lines aloud, and is now able to decipher it:

It always comes to my mind  
That in the day when tsar Ivan  
Died, there was a divination to me.  
It is coming true now: my hindrance  
in everything, my enemy –  
He is in Uglich... <...>  
“Weak but powerful, innocent but guilty –  
Himself and not himself – then murdered!” <...>  
Well.. I’ll take a sin upon my soul,  
I’m not squeamish, I don’t have white hands.  
While he is alive, the Shuiskiis and the Nagies  
Will not leave us in peace.<sup>321</sup>

In Tolstoy’s dramatic world, the predicted fate is inseparable from Godunov’s selfish pursuit of the throne, as well as his rational reasoning about the benefits of the state, and, therefore, it is also inseparable from the historical process, in general. His enjoyment of absolute power is also combined with an earnest wish to be a good tsar. As shown in another quote, Boris is striving to build a “new, rational” country. His pragmatism is almost ahead of his time.

In the third part of the trilogy, *Tsar Boris*, Tolstoy’s eponymous protagonist begins as a well-meaning ruler and becomes a tyrant, much like Khomiakov and Ostrovsky’s Pretenders. Importantly,

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<sup>321</sup> Мне всё на ум приходит,  
Что в оный день, когда царя Ивана  
Постигла смерть, предсказано мне было.  
Оно теперь свершается: помеха  
Моя во всём, вредитель мой и враг –  
Он в Угличе... <...>  
“Слаб, но могуч – безвинен, но виновен –  
Сам и не сам – потом – убит!”  
Пожалуй – что ж! Грех на душу возьму!  
Я не брезглив – не белоручка я!  
Пока он жив, от Шуйских и Нагих,  
Не будет нам покоя.  
Tolstoy, *Tsar Fyodor*, 242-243.

Tolstoy also constructs the image of Russia as a powerful, influential, and benevolent state. Such broad representations or large-scale statements about Russia's political status cannot be found in any preceding plays in the genre. Some of them presented idealized heroes, but Tolstoy creates the idealized vision of the whole state. In Tolstoy's dramatic world, the first years of Godunov's reign were a brief moment of exemplary domestic and international politics.

In the extensive scenes with many foreign ambassadors in the beginning, Tolstoy meditates on Russia's identity in relation to Western and Eastern states. In the dialogs of Godunov's daughter Kseniia and her fiancé Christian, who is an heir of Denmark, Tolstoy offers his interpretation of the origins of Russia and the country's prospects for a connection with the West. These scenes are strangely reminiscent of Sumarokov's *Dmitrii the Pretender*, where the virtuous characters support the ideas of enlightened monarchy and freedom of citizens.

The play's trajectory goes from the evanescent idyllic unity of a benign new tsar, nobility, and the people to a descent into oppressions and civil unrest. The first scene of the play has a celebratory tone. During Boris's coronation, boyars Voeikov and Saltykov praise Boris for his long and humble refusal to ascend the throne, for bringing order, and ending famine. As Boris first appears in front of the people as the tsar, he promises to inherit all the best from his predecessors, Fyodor and Ivan the Terrible.<sup>322</sup>

In the following lengthy scene, Boris accepts news and ambassadors from many countries. He learns about the successful conquest of the territories in Siberia. The British ambassador offers a dynastic marriage for Godunov's son. Then, Boris politely rejects the prospective of a church union from the Pope's nuncio. After that, Godunov criticizes the Austrian ambassador for Austria's unreliability in the recent strategic alliances, and proposes an alliance in the crusade against the Turkish sultan. Then, the new tsar gladly accepts the peace treaty from the Lithuanian messenger Sapega. Boris also works to

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<sup>322</sup> "So that I could reign righteously and wisely, / For Rus's' peace, like Tsar Fyodor, / For enemies' fear, like The Terrible Ioann."

"...Чтобы царил я праведно и мудро, / На тишину Руси, как царь Феодор, / На страх врагам, как грозный Иоанн!" Tolstoy, A.K., "Tsar Boris" // Tolstoy, A. K., *Sobraniiie sochinenii in 4 Vols., Vol. 3 Dramaticheskaiia trilogiia. Stat'i.* (Moskva: Izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1964), 294.

establish a diplomatic relationship with Sweden on the basis of equality. He settles the trade taxes with the merchants from Hanseatic League. Finally, he discusses the territorial conflicts with the Persian and the Turkish ambassadors.

With these scenes, Tolstoy portrays an influential and respected Russian state that becomes the essential link between European and Asian powers. The author emphasizes Boris's political talent. The ruler works on political, territorial, religious, and trade matters, all of which he solves rationally and peacefully. The opening scenes offer an idealized positive picture. In my view, Tolstoy wants to convey not the real state of affairs but the elevated mood of the people and their hopes for Boris, and also Boris's subjective perception and joy at achieving his ultimate goal. The new tsar himself has an unprecedentedly grand vision of Russia's path:

Ivan Vasilyich the Third  
Liberated Rus' from the Tatar Horde,  
And founded the powerful state  
Anew. But in two hundred years  
The Tatar yoke had cut us off  
from the rest of the Christian world. I intend  
To chain this broken link with the West again;  
For Kseniia, out of many fiancés,  
I chose the heir of Denmark,  
Not without reason. In line with the European powers  
Our land should stand again, and in the future, with God's help,  
Surpass them.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Иван Васильич Третий  
Русь от Орды татарской свободил  
И государству сильному начало  
Поставил вновь. Но в двести лет нас иго  
Татарское от прочих христиан отрезало. Разорванную цепь  
Я с Западом связать намерен снова;  
Для Ксении из многих женихов  
Недаром мною датский королевич  
Уже избран. С державами Европы  
Земля должна по-прежнему стать рядом,  
А в будущем их, с помощью божьей,  
Опередить.  
Tolstoy, *Tsar Boris*, 313.

This passage summarizes Tolstoy's perspective on Russian history. According to Boris Godunov and, as I will show later, Tolstoy himself, Russia was initially, as Kievan Rus', a part of the Western world but then the Tatar invasion and yoke separated it from the West and made it backward. Here, Tolstoy expresses one of the mainstream ideas of his epoch, according to which Europe was the most progressive and developed part of the world, and non-European civilizations were backward. Boris strives to restore this lost connection to Europe. He wants to see his country equal to the other Western states, which entails a degree of religious tolerance, territorial expansion, and military success, as shown in the scenes with the ambassadors.

Unlike the Slavophiles, Tolstoy sees Russia as part of the West in its very origins. Unlike the Westernizers, Tolstoy still emphasizes Russia's uniqueness and claims that the country should reconnect itself with the West as a state in equal standing, rather than seeing the West as a model. Overall, Tolstoy supports general progress and modernization. Having studied the sources about Godunov, the playwright appears to find his own ideas resonate with Godunov's understanding of Russia's goals and its place in the world.

From the very beginning of *Tsar Boris*, Godunov rhetorically emphasizes his success in order to reason with himself against his guilty conscience. Later in the play, Boris repeatedly reminisces about his path to the throne and justifies the murder of heir Dmitrii as a necessary sacrifice for the common good:

Remembering Tsar Ivan's Rus',  
Now, who would curse me  
That, to protect and save it,  
I brought myself to sacrifice  
One child? On my soul, more than once,  
That dark deed lay like a heavy rock,  
And I thought: What if I do not  
Achieve what I want? What if I committed  
That sin in vain? But no! My fate did not  
Give me away. Today I've settled  
Accounts with my conscience, and I'm not scared  
To present the final count of my merits and my sins!  
Now, I can pursue the virtuous path!<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Кто, вспомя Руть царя Ивана, ныне  
Проклятие за то бы мне изрёк,  
Что для её защиты и спасенья

Godunov repeatedly emphasizes his merits and the thriving of his country. Such redundancy ties the whole story to the theme of guilty conscience.<sup>325</sup> Reflecting the tradition of Soviet scholarship, Isaak Iampol'skii states that Tolstoy's Boris agrees with Karamzin's didactic interpretation of the historical figure: Boris's sin is unacceptable and eventually destroys him.<sup>326</sup> I would like to point out that Tolstoy goes much further and explores the general acceptability of violence for the sake of common good. This was a very heated topic for the 1860s that faced the rise of political terrorism. The image of a child as a foundational sacrifice echoes Dostoevsky's famous idea, articulated in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).<sup>327</sup> Even Tolstoy's phrasing about sacrificing just one child for saving the country is astonishingly similar to Dostoevsky's language.

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Не пожалел ребёнка я отдать  
Единокого? Мне на душу не раз  
Ложилось камнем тёмное то дело,  
И думал я: Что, если не достигну,  
Чего хочу? Что, если грех тот даром  
Я совершил? Но нет! Судьба меня  
Не выдала! Я с совестью счёты  
Сегодня свёл – и не боюсь поставить  
Моих заслуг и винностей итог!  
Могу теперь идти стезёю чистой!  
Tolstoy, *Tsar Boris*, 309-310.

<sup>325</sup> For example:

In the greatness that was never seen before  
Rus' is rejoicing. Both friends and enemies  
Marvel at its power. Today I am acquitted  
By the people's love and the success  
Of my work for the stardom.  
В величии, невиданном поныне,  
Ликует Русь, её дивится силе  
И друг и враг. Сегодня я оправдан  
Любовию народной и успехом  
Моих забот о царстве.  
Tolstoy, *Tsar Boris*, 317.

<sup>326</sup> Iampol'skii, I.G., "Primechaniia." In Tolstoy, A. K., *Sobranie sochinenii in 4 Vol, Vol. 3 Dramaticheskaiia trilogiia. Stat'i.* (Moskva: Izd-vo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1964), 553.

<sup>327</sup> "While there is still time, I hasten to protect myself, and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind God'!" Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ebook. Project Gutenberg. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28054/28054-h/28054-h.html#toc83> (Accessed December 16, 2016)

As we can see from the quotes, Tolstoy's Boris makes a deal with his conscience and refuses to repent, in which he resembles, for instance, Raskolnikov. Tolstoy's Godunov literally uses "financial," quantitative terms ("svesti schoty," "itog") to reason with his conscience. He insists that one moral transgression can be redeemed by a subsequent virtuous life and good deeds for the state. He openly refuses to admit that the assassination of Dmitrii was an act of villainy. He hopes that his own reign will prove that Dmitrii's life was taken for the sake of the whole country and its future.<sup>328</sup> It is also possible that, in presenting one case of murder supposedly for the people's sake, Tolstoy meditates on the tragic inevitability of sacrifices in the process of reforms and, generally, historical development.

In the play, Godunov also wants to reform the idea of royal power. He wants to be a benign tsar and instill this idea in his subjects, and even initially refuses to persecute his suspected opponents. "I want to rule the people not with fear / But with love."<sup>329</sup> In Godunov, Tolstoy finds a new, progressive philosophy of royal power. However, the protagonist fails to put this philosophy into practice.

This tragic vision of monarchical power in Russia, where good intentions and programmatic statements do not successfully transition into practices, links Tolstoy's trilogy to many preceding plays about this epoch. In Sumarokov's *Dimitrii the Pretender*, many characters voice the ideas of freedom and

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"Пока еще время, спешу оградить себя, а потому от высшей гармонии совершенно отказываюсь. Не стоит она слезинки хотя бы одного только того замученного ребенка, который бил себя кулачком в грудь и молился в зловонной конуре своей неисккупленными слезками своими к "боженьке"!" Dostoevsky, F.M. *Bratya Karamazovy*. Part 2, Book 5, Chapter 4, "Bunt." [http://az.lib.ru/d/dostoewskij\\_f\\_m/text\\_0110.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/d/dostoewskij_f_m/text_0110.shtml) (Accessed on December 16, 2016).

<sup>328</sup> ...Who is right,  
You or me, the passage of time  
Will show us. Whether I committed the villainy  
Or paid tribute to Rus's greyness,  
Our land will decide in the hour of trials.  
...Кто прав –  
Ты или я – то времени теченье  
Покажет нам. Злодейство ль совершил  
Иль заплатил Руси величью дань я –  
Решит земля в годину испытанья.  
Tolstoy, *Tsar Boris*, 320.

<sup>329</sup> "Не страхом я – любовью хочу / Держать людей." Ibid., 315.



benevolent monarchy, but none of them are able to influence the actual monarch. Earlier in the chapter, I discussed Ostrovsky's drama *Dmitrii the Pretender and Vasilii Shuiskii*. In his play, Ostrovsky also expresses very similar ideas. His Dmitrii resembles Tolstoy's Boris in his sincere wish to be a good tsar and to reform the whole understanding of tsar's power in Russia:

My fathers and grandfathers, the sovereigns,  
In the Tatar Horde, across the wide Volga,  
In the khans' quarters got their fear,  
And learned from the Tatars to rule with fear.  
The other way is better and more reliable –  
To rule with generosity and benevolence.<sup>330</sup>

We can see that Ostrovsky and Tolstoy share the same critical, orientalist attitude that blames the Tatar influence for Russian backwardness and the Time of Troubles. However, Ostrovsky does not fully develop this concept, and Tolstoy is more consistent in this portrayal. Importantly, this similarity signifies the popularity of such a historical vision during the 1860s.

Act 2 of Tolstoy's drama *Tsar Boris* opens with a conversation between Godunov's children, Fyodor and Kseniia, and Kseniia's Danish fiancée Christian. This scene renders the author's historical and political views in a form of a dramatic conversation, which signals an unexpected return to the poetics of the 18th-century drama. The three characters represent the union between Russia and the West, projected by Boris. They echo Boris's words, summarize the history of Russia, and admire pre-Mongolian Rus' that held close connections with Scandinavia and Europe, especially in its trade and dynastic marriages. They praise Boris for his pursuit of relations with the West that also should return Russia to its genuine path from which it deviated because of the Tatar yoke. Fyodor persistently blames the Tatars for the tradition of tyrannical rule, and even for some Russian customs, such as arranged marriages. Christian

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<sup>330</sup> Отцы мои и деды, государи,  
В орде татарской, за широкой Волгой,  
По ханским ставкам страха набирались  
И страхом править у татар учились.  
Другое средство лучше и надёжней –  
Щедротами и милостью царить.  
Ostrovsky, *Dmitrii Samozvanets i Vasilii Shuiskii*, 287.

and Kseniia love each other, so their feelings happily add to the political necessity of their betrothal. They represent the hope of peaceful union with other countries.

In Act 3, Boris and the people of Moscow learn about someone who calls himself the miraculously saved heir Dmitrii. Starting now, everything quickly falls apart. The Pretender is never shown and only appears in accounts of his military advancements and messages to the commoners and the boyars. Tolstoy leaves the Pretender's origins a mystery and, like Ostrovsky, states that he is not the runaway monk Otrepyev. In Tolstoy's version, Godunov officially spreads the rumor that this "saved" Dimitrii is Otrepyev in order to discredit this rival.<sup>331</sup> Godunov understands the final part of the prophecy that he

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<sup>331</sup> S e m e n G o d u n o v We can find that.  
There was a monk in Chudov, named Grigorii,  
A soldier's son, from Galich. He ran away  
Recently, and, while drunk, was bragging:  
"I will be a tsar in Moscow!"  
B o r i s Why  
Did no one send a word to me?  
S e m e n G o d u n o v Tsar,  
That was a vain and dissolute rogue,  
A braggart and a liar, all the monks  
Were laughing to his face.  
B o r i s But what if, maybe,  
that is him?  
S e m e n G o d u n o v No, Tsar, not him.  
That thief is clever, skilled with sword,  
But this one only drank and lied. <...>  
B o r i s What did they call him?  
S e m e n G o d u n o v Otrepyev.  
B o r i s He's suitable for us. That is  
How we will call that thief. We are afraid only  
Of what is in a fog; what we can touch  
Or name – loses its power.  
Send a messenger to Luthiania, to the king:  
Say that he should rein in his nobles;  
That it is a shame to help  
A wretched and dissolute rogue;  
That Grishka Otrepyev, a runaway monk,  
Is fooling them; that if they want to be  
In peace with me – they must give him away!  
С е м е н Г о д у н о в Найти такое можно.  
Был в Чудове монах, Григорьем звали,  
Стрелецкий сын, из Галича. Бежал  
Недавно он и, пьяный, похвалялся:  
"Царём-де буду на Москве!"  
Б о р и с Зачем

received many years ago: “Murdered but alive!”<sup>332</sup> This mysterious Dmitrii becomes the shadow of Boris’s sin, almost an embodiment of his deeply concealed fear and guilt: “And now, the ghost wants to claim his right! / I have to fight the name, the sound!”<sup>333</sup> The Pretender stays behind the scenes and turns into a symbol of Godunov’s guilt and tyranny.

The remaining parts of *Tsar Boris* refocus on the moralistic and didactic themes, moving away from the political and national discourse. The action is also full of external effects that resemble 17th- and the 18th-century dramas. For example, Christian learns about Boris’s crime and is torn between his love for Kseniia and his moral obligation to renounce the marriage. Kseniia’s brother Fyodor defends his father and the two men even fight with swords. Later, Christian feels unwell and dies, poisoned by Godunov’s opponents. Here, Tolstoy invokes a typical neoclassical plot device, where a character is tormented by the irreconcilable conflict between love and duty. All the fighting and poisoning also

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Меня не известили?  
Се м е н Г о д у н о в    Государь,  
То был пустой, беспутный побродяга,  
Хвастун и враль; монахи все ему  
В глаза смеялися.  
Б о р и с    Но, может быть,  
То он и есть?  
Се м е н Г о д у н о в    Нет, государь, не он.  
Тот вор умён, мечом владеть умеет,  
А этот только бражничал да лгал. <...>  
Б о р и с    Как прозывался он?  
Се м е н Г о д у н о в    Отрепьевым.  
Б о р и с    Он нам пригоден. Им  
Того пока мы вора назовём.  
Лишь то, что нам является в тумане,  
Смущает нас; что осознать мы можем  
Или назвать - свою теряет силу.  
Гонца в Литву отправить к королю:  
Чтобы скорей свою унял он шляхту;  
Что стыдно-де пособие чинить  
Негодному, беспутному бродяге;  
Что Гришка-де Отрепьев, беглый инок,  
Морочит их; что если в мире быть  
Со мной хотят - чтоб выдали его!  
Tolstoy, *Tsar Boris*, 351-353.

<sup>332</sup> “Убит, но жив!” Ibid., 376.

<sup>333</sup> “А хочет тень взойти в свои права! / Я с именем, со звуком спорить должен!” Ibid., 356.

alludes to the poetics of many 17th- and 18th-century dramas and is very characteristic for Shakespearean plots. For example, the shadow of Dmitrii that reveals Godunov's moral conflict is reminiscent of the Father's Shadow in *Hamlet*. Generally, Tolstoy uses theatrical models that were rather archaic by his time, which may explain the lack of success for this particular play.

At the moment of Christian's death, Godunov laments not only the loss of his life but also the lost chance for a dynastic marriage with the Scandinavian royal family:

He is that link that I would have used to fix  
The ancient, broken chain  
Between the West and the Russian state!  
Through him, I would have reclaimed  
The Varangian Sea. What Iaroslav had gained,  
What we lost when we were under the yoke,  
*Without war, without fight*, I would have returned [my italics]  
to Rus' again!..<sup>334</sup>

Tolstoy makes Boris seek to redeem the legacy of Kievan Rus', which the author himself obviously prefers over "Asianized" medieval Muscovy as the more genuine, "true" Rus'. Boris's ambition to return the "Varangian" (Baltic) Sea refers to Peter the Great's campaign to conquer the Baltic Sea region. Tolstoy almost writes an alternative history where Boris Godunov is even better than Peter the Great, because the former advocates peace, and where Russian "return" to the West would have begun a hundred years earlier. Tolstoy's protagonist wants international power and influential status for Russia. Curiously, this is another instance where Tolstoy's play summarizes the whole development of Russian historical drama and refers to its 18th- and early 19th-century origins. The 18th-century playwrights were fascinated

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<sup>334</sup> Он то звено, которым вновь связал бы  
Я древнюю, расторгнутую цепь  
Меж Западом и русскою державой!  
Через него ей возвратил бы море  
Варяжское! Что Ярослав стяжал,  
Что под чужим мы игом потеряли,  
Без боя то, без спора возвратил бы  
Я вновь Руси!...  
Tolstoy, *Tsar Boris*, 408-09.

by the era of Kievan Rus', where they found the ancient origins of the Russian state. The Romantics also favored that epoch for being the mythical beginning of Russian statehood and folk culture.

As a tragic hero, Godunov is tormented by his transgression and dies in the end. His tragic story culminates in the realization that he has transformed into a cruel and suspicious tyrant. Trying to stay in power, Boris persecutes the people and orders the torture and execution of anyone suspected of supporting the Pretender. Previously, his ultimate argument against his sin was his benevolent rule and kindness. He loathed tyranny, and now he is ruling by fear and turning into a tyrant himself:

Tear out their tongues!  
Or, do they think they'll scare me  
With their number? But even if the hundreds of thousands  
Call me a murderer to my face –  
I will force them all to be silent and humble  
In front of me. They call me Tsar Ivan?  
Then I will really remind them  
of him!<sup>335</sup>

Boris is furious and resorts to oppression that seems to return Russia to Ivan the Terrible's time. He sees arrests and executions as the only way to preserve his power. Previously, he betrayed, lied, and murdered in order to ascend the throne. In the third play, Tolstoy constructs a detailed account of Godunov's moral undoing by showing how he loses control and finds himself capable of more evil. The finale of the play becomes the didactic conclusion. Weak and dying, Boris finally repents his sins. He does not justify his evil deeds anymore. In his vision, anything immoral, whether it is done for the personal achievement or even for the sake of the state as a whole, harms the ruler and the country: "Only evil is born from evil – it

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<sup>335</sup> Рвать им языки!

Иль утратить тем думают меня,  
Что много их? Но если б сотни тысяч  
Меня в глаза убийцей называли –  
Их всех молчать и предо мной смириться  
Заставлю я! Меня царём Иваном  
Они зовут? Так я ж его не в шутку  
Напомню им!  
Tolstoy, *Tsar Boris*, 367-368.

is all the same: / Whether we want to serve ourselves or the state – / It will not be well neither for ourselves nor the state!”<sup>336</sup>

Boris Godunov’s involvement with the murder of the heir and his subsequent guilt had long been one of the common tropes of this historical narrative by the time Tolstoy was writing his dramas. The moral corruption of high power is a recurring topic in all the historical plays discussed in this project. Godunov is morally ambiguous, and this is how he manages to succeed, but this readiness to make deals with his conscience lead to his moral descent. What makes the writer’s contribution unique is his historical revisionism and the convergence between the idea of historical process and the classical dramatic concept of “fate,” which I call “historical fatality.” From the perspective of national development, Tolstoy laments Godunov’s reign as a failed chance for Russia to become powerful and modernized in an earlier historical period. Arguably, Tolstoy has a pessimistic vision of history. Each of the three reigns begin with joy and new hope and end with uncertainty, persecutions, and social turmoil. It is possible that Tolstoy subtly refers to Alexander II’s era, which began with reforms and the hope for the modernization of Russian society. By the end of the 1860s, the emerging radical movements were destabilizing the country, and strict censorship and persecutions returned.

### 3.4 NEW THEATRICAL PRACTICES IN THE 1860S: SEARCHING FOR “HISTORICAL TRUTH”

During the 1860s, many historical dramas appeared on stage. The descriptions of the theatrical productions and the analyses of their aspects became more detailed and reflect a considerable shift in aesthetics. The pursuit of historical accuracy, based on archeological research and reconstructions of material culture, emerged as the dominant trend for this genre during this decade. For example, even though Tolstoy creates a fictitious version of the historical events and reshapes them for his artistic

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<sup>336</sup> От зла лишь зло родится - все едино:  
Себе ль мы им служить хотим иль царству -  
Оно ни нам, ни царству впрок нейдет!  
Tolstoy, *Tsar Boris*, 444.

purposes, the visuals designed for his plays showcased the latest findings in the history of Russian costumes, architecture, and pre-Petrine everyday life.

Previously, the theatrical genre of “costume plays” became established during the 1800-30s. The stage productions were initially eclectic, and later “exotic” and pompous. For example, the adaptations of Kukol’nik’s dramas delivered a patriotic message with artificial, bright visuals that did not aim at exploring the Russian past. This theatrical trend faded during the 1840-50s. The new historical genre in the 1860s apparently wanted to oppose itself to the earlier pseudo-historical theatre and rediscover the national past.

The emerging historiographical research on medieval Russian customs, various folk traditions, and material culture is part of the general growing interest in the peasant and merchant cultures and traditions that is evident in the prose of the 1860s and the enormous success of Ostrovsky’s dramas. These minimally westernized social groups were now valuable in the eyes of the educated class as the bearers of national memory. As I demonstrated earlier, Chaev, Ostrovsky, and Tolstoy search for the basis of Russian identity in the older Russian language, medieval culture, or Kievan Rus’s European connections. Stage productions promote this idea. They celebrate “Russianness” and promote education in history because now national identity is tied to the idea of national collective memory. The new understanding of “historical truth,” linked to academic disciplines, and the ideological importance of historical fiction in the performance arts would only be increasing in the coming decades and will directly influence “The Silver Age” and the historical genres in Soviet theatre. I will also demonstrate how the cultural figures of this era prepare the internationally important reform of theatre brought by MAT three decades later.

I will reconstruct one production, the first staging of Tolstoy’s *Death of Ivan the Terrible* in February of 1867, and analyze the reception of it by critics and spectators. It is, arguably, the most important staging of a historical drama from the era, for a number of reasons. First, Tolstoy accompanied the play by a long essay titled “The Project of Theatrical Production of the Play *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*.” In this piece, he develops a director’s interpretation of the play and proposes no less than a systematic reform of theatrical production. He articulates many revolutionary ideas that directly anticipate

Stanislavsky's work. This production became the centerpiece for heated debates in print about acting. Second, Tolstoy supervises the preparations for the production, thus broadening the functions and the authority of a director. The theory of theatre is still very much ahead of practice at this time, and, eventually, Tolstoy is unable to fully bring his proposed directing system into practice. Still, this production was extremely successful and was perceived as the pinnacle of innovation for the historical genre.<sup>337</sup> Third, the financial aspect was crucial to this achievement. Tolstoy personally knew many higher officials, and his patron for this project was Emperor Alexander II himself.<sup>338</sup> As a result, the theatre allocated a very generous budget, which had almost never happened for the historical dramas. To my knowledge, it was the first large-scale production of a historical play that was not outwardly conservative or tendentiously patriotic. Its success further stimulated the shift from the standard types of visuals to a more customized approach to the historical drama. Lastly, unlike Chaev and Ostrovsky's historical dramas, *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* remained in the repertoires for several decades, and was still performed during the Soviet era.<sup>339</sup> Together with Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor* and Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, this play became one of the very few historical plays that directly linked the theatrical cultures of the 19th and the 20th centuries.

When *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* was first published, contemporary critics immediately noticed the great stage potential of Tolstoy's dramatic work. As I demonstrated in the textual analysis, the play's

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<sup>337</sup> "The production of *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* was perceived as a big event in the history of Russian theatrical art. Finishing his article "A Decline of Russian Theatre", V. Ivanov noted that a few days earlier, Petersburg theatre 'drew attention with an event that may open a new era in its work'."

"Постановка «Смерти Иоанна Грозного» была воспринята как событие в истории русского сценического искусства. Заканчивая свою статью «Упадок русской сцены», В. Иванов отметил, что несколько дней назад петербургский театр «ознаменовался событием, с которого, может быть, начнётся новая эра его деятельности." Iampol'skii, I.G., "Pervaia postanovka 'Smerti Ioanna Groznogo' A. K. Tolstogo (1867)." In Iampol'skii, I.G.. *Poety i prozaiki* (Leningrad: Leningrad UP, 1986), 238.

<sup>338</sup> "Alexander II's personal order to stage this play conduced to the allocation of special personnel and funding." "Личное распоряжение Александра II осуществить этот спектакль способствовало тому, что для него были выделены специальные силы и средства." Danilov, S.S., *Ocherki po istorii russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra* (Moscow-Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1948), 391.

<sup>339</sup> Iampol'skii, *Primechaniia*, 543.



pace accelerates toward the denouement, thanks to coincidences and some sensational plot turns. Annenkov claims that this is the first play about the Russian past that so broadly and skillfully uses the theatrical devices of European drama: “The most brilliant aspect of Count Tolstoy’s new work is, undoubtedly, theatrical. In Russian literature, we have not previously met such an adroit, masterful, and glib application of the typical forms of Western European drama to the Russian world, its history, legends, and everyday life. For some people, there is still a question that can be formulated in the following way: can all usual subject matter of Russian life fit into this form? For Count Tolstoy, there is no such question.”<sup>340</sup> 18th-century pieces were modeled on French neoclassical drama but had very different aesthetic and were altogether omitted by Annenkov. Those plays aside, I agree that *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* must be the first historical play in the 19th century where the author pays equal attention to both the textual aspect and the spectators’ perspective. Previously, authors such as Kriukovsky and Kukul’nik focused on external effects, but applied a simplistic approach to their texts. On the contrary, Pushkin and Ostrovsky’s historical dramas are elaborate literary pieces, but not specifically customized for stage in terms of pace or projected mise-en-scènes.

Annenkov points out the profound influence of European drama on Tolstoy in order to engage in the debate about the originality of Russian dramatic genres: “This drama is fully ready for any European theatre, despite its purely Russian content. Hence, its enormous success among Russian readers. ... Having lost a part of its national image [*narodnyi oblik*], they [Tolstoy’s dramas], instead, gained amazing theatricality.”<sup>341</sup> The concept of “national image” is very elusive. What Annenkov probably means are the

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<sup>340</sup> “Самая блестящая сторона нового произведения гр. Толстого, есть, без сомнения, сценическая. Мы ещё не встречали в русской литературе такого ловкого, мастерского и вместе бойкого приложения обычных форм западной, европейской драмы к русскому миру, его истории, преданиям и быту. То, что составляет ещё для некоторых вопрос, который можно выразить так: укладывается ли в эту форму вполне покойно и удобно всё обычное содержание русской жизни – не составляет для гр. Толстого никакого вопроса.” Annenkov, 338.

<sup>341</sup> “Это – драма совсем готовая для любого европейского театра, несмотря на своё чисто русское содержание. Отсюда ... и причина её громадного успеха в среде русских читателей. ... Утерев часть своего народного облика, они взамен приобрели потрясающий сценический характер.” Ibid., 339.

recognizable types and collisions of the European theatre. Tolstoy's *Godunov*, for instance, bears some resemblance to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in his hunger for power and moral corruption. In Act 3, an abrupt sword fight between Christian and Fyodor reminds us of the "cloak-and-dagger" type of plays.

Apparently, Annenkov represents those critics who are cautious about such resemblances and perceive them as borrowing.

Tolstoy objects to the critique of the diminished "Russian" quality in his works: "...To vindicate myself, I want to point out the spreading doctrine about some *Russian principles*, based on which our science and arts are supposed to develop. There are Russian customs, a Russian physiognomy, Russian history, Russian archeology; there is even Russian art but *Russian principles of art* do not exist, in the same way that a Russian multiplication table does not exist. Strictly speaking, there are no European principles of art either, but there are absolute, general, "eternal" principles."<sup>342</sup> Tolstoy criticizes the nationalist discourse on Russian art and expresses the same idea that his protagonist Boris Godunov professes in the play. Namely, the writer emphasizes the common origins of Russian and European art and wants to reconnect them. It is fascinating how artistic choices are understood ideologically. What Tolstoy defines as the universal principles of art, Annenkov sees as the abandonment of some unspecified "Russian" forms in favor of theatrical effects.

Tolstoy's extensive essay on the adaptation of *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* covers all the aspects of the projected stage production. The author's greatest innovation is his systematic approach. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, theatrical culture was centered around leading celebrity actors. Tolstoy's key idea is the coordination between all the members of a cast: "The holistic and meaningful production can only appear in front of the public when not a single performer is limited in his rights. Each one, without exception, should get a chance to express his talent as much as it is necessary in order to

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<sup>342</sup> "...в оправдание себе укажу на распространившуюся доктрину о каких-то *русских началах*, на которых у нас должны развиваться наука и искусство. Есть русские нравы, русская физиогномия, русская история, русская археология; есть даже русское искусство, но нет *русских начал искусства*, как нет русской таблицы умножения. Нет, в строгом смысле, и европейских начал, а есть начала абсолютные, общие, 'вечные'." Tolstoy, "Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*," 531.

contribute to the unity and the harmony of the whole.”<sup>343</sup> In another instance, Tolstoy calls a stage production a “symphony.”<sup>344</sup> The main idea expressed in the quote is the teamwork that should replace actors’ autonomous preparation and their individual interaction with spectators. The playwright comes very close to the concept of ensemble that Stanislavsky formulated decades later.

The reconstruction of the debut production of *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* lets us see how Tolstoy’s aspirations met resistance and how he struggled to overcome the existing theatrical conventions. Everyone welcomed the new approach to making visuals and set designs, whereas acting proved to be more inert. In addition, my analysis of this play allows us to contextualize all the new tendencies in Russian theatre of the era.

### 3.4.1 New Approaches to Acting

After *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* went on stage, Tolstoy wrote the directing guidelines for *Tsar Fyodor* where he assessed the success and the failures of the production. In the Preface, he wrote a telling note about the actors’ treatment of the text: “In the project of the theatrical production of my previous play, I cautiously mentioned, toward the very end, that all the performers should know their roles by heart. The practice showed that, not only was this reminder not superfluous, but that I didn’t emphasize it enough.”<sup>345</sup> Apparently, many actors still recited the text approximately, even verse. Frequent premiers did not leave enough time for rehearsals, and many plays were of mediocre quality. The quote also reflects the low status of the actors and the theatre’s affiliation with the sphere of the popular art and

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<sup>343</sup> “Тогда только возникнет перед публикою цельное и осмысленное создание, где не только ни один из исполнителей не понесёт ущерба в своих правах, но где каждому без исключения представится случай показать себя настолько великим художником, насколько он будет способствовать к единству и гармонии целого.” Tolstoy, “Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Smert’ Ioanna Groznogo*,” 447.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 490.

<sup>345</sup> “В проекте о постановке последней пьесы я, в самом конце, очень осторожно упомянул о необходимости всем исполнителям знать свои роли наизусть. Опыт показал, что не только напоминание не было лишним, но что я не доволен на нём настаивал.” Tolstoy, “Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*,” 494.

entertainment. This individualistic mentality of leading actors proved to be the most inert and unwilling to change. Still, a major shift was happening during the 1860s that prepared the ground for the elevation of theatre into a high art form and a more respected occupation later.

This change was inspired by the developments in Russian literature and criticism that promoted the idealized and even venerated discourse on the common people, the *narod*. Acting styles of the era were greatly influenced by the “natural school” and Realism. In 1869, writer and critic Bazhenov wrote that simplicity and the truth of life became the most important criteria of acting: “The school of “routinier” actors... is ready to rest in peace... It has been replaced by a school of actors who recreate and interpret real life and keep the simplicity and truth of life on stage.”<sup>346</sup> However, older, more polished, and even clichéd styles of acting were not yet fading, contrary to what Bazhenov suggested. He documented the new tendencies that co-existed with the persevering old styles. The tradition of “academic” acting was still very strong. For example, this is how a critic describes the leading actors in *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*: “...[T]heir acting displayed the usual traditions of the Aleksandrinskii Theatre. ...[N]ot a single actor had any moves that would express the individuality of their characters. They all were horrified, indignant, or held themselves in the presence of [Tsar] Ivan in exactly the same way.”<sup>347</sup> This note provides evidence that the actors perceived this play as a heroic romantic tragedy that, in its turn, grew from neoclassical tragedy. Apparently, stylized acting was still widespread. By 1860s, the “academic” acting style entailed the usage of a limited set of standard learned expressions that already appeared too artificial.

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<sup>346</sup> “Школа актёров-рутинёров... готова отойти с миром в вечность... На смену ей явилась школа актёров-воспроизводителей, толкователей истинной жизни, блюстителей на сцене жизненной простоты и правды” Bazhenov, A.N., *Sochineniia i perevody*, in 2 vols., Vol 1. (Moskva: 1869), 230.

<sup>347</sup> “...[И]гра их “отзывалась обычными традициями александринской сцены. ...[Н]и у одного актёра не было ни одного движения, выражающего индивидуальность изображаемых ими лиц. Все они одинаково приходили в ужас, в негодование, все одинаково держали себя при входе Иоанна” Iampol’skii, “Pervaia postanovka *Smerti Ioanna Groznogo* A. K. Tolstogo,” 248.

“Natural” acting in the 1860s opposed itself to the academic training that was still ubiquitous in the state theatres. New approaches to acting, therefore, often implied the rejection of stylized tradition and formal acting techniques. The ideas of “non-learned” acting became widespread. At that time, famous critic Apollon Grigoryev wrote that “knowledge of life” was fundamental for acting and even criticized the focus on speech exercises and stage manners for actors: “[M]iscellaneous tatters... known under the name of good manners, articulation, the ability to carry oneself on stage etc. – in a word, all the scholastic routine with singsong intonation, flashy gestures, gallant manners...”<sup>348</sup> Grigoryev expressed an extreme reaction against the stylized academic acting that was less and less satisfying.

Catherine Schuler provides a detailed account on the leading actors of the 1860-70s. She convincingly argues that the new aesthetics elevated actors as the embodiment of the national spirit and the representatives of Russian society outside of the Westernized educated minority. Even the birth and origins of actors and actresses had to connect to “the people.” For example, Polina Strepetova, who was very famous for her roles in Ostrovsky’s dramas, was raised in a family of freed serfs. In her own perception, which was widely supported, that background entitled her to play national types.<sup>349</sup> The preference for good looks on stage was also replaced by a more ideological attitude to actors’ physical appearance. Non-aristocratic, unrefined, and sometimes even plain appearances received a positive connotation, as they became associated with genuine Russianness.

The new generation of actors also rejected formulaic approaches to constructing their roles. Both theorists and the public saw the unsuitability of the old acting for Ostrovsky’s dramas that featured the

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<sup>348</sup> “...[M]ногообразная ветошь... известная под именем хороших манер, дикции, умения держать себя на сцене и проч. – одним словом, вся школьная рутина с певучими интонациями, с эффектными жестами, с галантерейностью обхождения...” Quoted in: Shakh-Azizova, T.K., “Vvedenie.” In Kholodov, E.G., ed., *Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, in 7 vols., Vol. 5. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), 32.

<sup>349</sup> “...Strepetova was raised in the provinces by a family of freed serfs who made their living in the local provincial theatre. Deprived of formal education, she was fanatically religious and profoundly superstitious... she proudly preserved the manners and image of an authentic *narodnitsa* with all of the attendant qualities of vulgarity, indelicacy, and peasant cunning. Within the representational frame of theatre, Strepetova’s authenticity satisfied a populist aesthetic: she did not have to perform the people; she simply was the people.” Schuler, Catherine, *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 229.

new types of merchants and serfs. Great emphasis was now placed on natural talents that were often expected to originate from one's personal connection (even a genetic one) to Russian merchants, the petty bourgeoisie, or peasants. This talent had to be cultivated through the committed study of "characters" in fiction and real life. The reputed actors who, according to the critics, possessed the necessary qualities were Prov Sadovskii, Pavel Vasilyev, Polina Strepetova, and Glikeriia Fedotova.

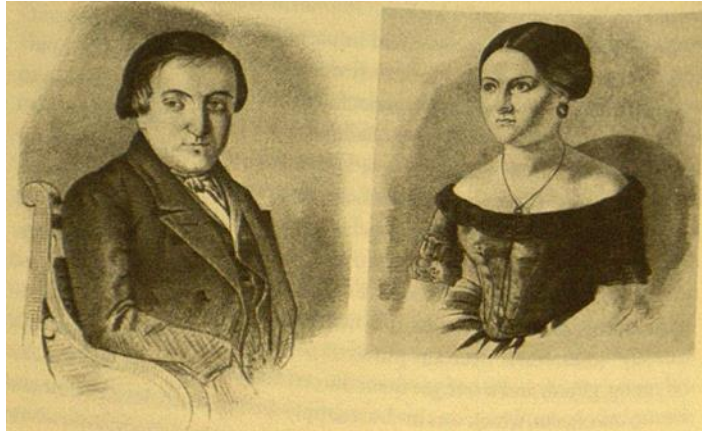


Fig. 3.1. Prov Sadovskii (1818-1872)  
Liubov Nikulina-Kositsyna (1829-1868)  
Famous actors, known for their roles in  
Ostrovsky's plays.



Fig. 3.2. Glikeriia Fedotova (1846-1925)  
as Katerina in Ostrovsky's *The Storm*



Fig. 3.3. Polina Strepetova (1850-1903)  
as Katerina

Sadovskii was praised for creating complex and well-rounded characters, and especially for managing to show the connection between individuality and the environment that shaped it. Vasilyev's acting was

described as passionate; he was noted for channeling the exceptionality even of the minor characters and dramatizing even the comical heroes. Fedotova and Strepetova both rejected any systematic methods of acting and emphasized sincerity, naturalism, and passion. For example, Strepetova's interpretation of Katerina from *The Storm* was based on emotions on the verge of mental illness, with the purpose of creating a direct psychological effect on the audience and making the spectators *feel* the tragedy of the heroine.<sup>350</sup>

This attitude resembles the Romantic concept of art and genius. Indeed, Romantic tendencies were still noticeable in theatre. Heroic Romantic dramas remained an established part of the repertoires, and scholars acknowledge the influence of Romantic drama on Ostrovsky and Tolstoy.<sup>351</sup> The theatrical connection to the lower classes shows the influence of Realist prose and the special place of the *narod* in it.

Finally, some actors pursued a “naturalism” that was influenced by the study of physiology. For example, the famous French actress Rachelle strove to copy the physical symptoms of actual deaths that she even went to observe for artistic purposes. Tolstoy represented the part of the public that consistently rejected such a degree of “the truth of life”: “In the finale, she dies from poison and, as amateur, copies the agony, the near-death hiccup, and the convulsions. To achieve this magnificent result, she used to visit hospitals and observe the deaths of the young pauper women. In a word, I think that she [Rachelle] is an unpleasant and anti-aesthetic actress.”<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Schuler, 231.

<sup>351</sup> Lydia Lotman, who writes as a Soviet Marxist scholar and is, therefore, biased toward Realist tradition, still discusses the Romantic conflicts and types of characters. She notes that his early plays are full of “Romantic elements and literary conventions,” in comparison with his later dramas:

“...in them, there are more Romantic elements and literary conventions, than in the plays that depict a sharp protest, a collision of strong people who actively fight for their rights.”

“... в них оказалось больше романтических элементов и литературных условностей, чем в пьесах, рисующих резкий протест, столкновение сильных, активно борющихся за свои права людей.”

Lotman, L.N. *Ostrovsky i Russkaia dramaturgiia ego vremeni* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 125.

<sup>352</sup> “В конце она умирает от отравы, и, как любитель, подражает агонии, предсмертной икоте и конвульсиям. Чтоб дойти до этого великолепного результата, она ходила в большицы смотреть, как умирают бедные молодые женщины. Одним словом, по-моему, она [Rachelle] – артистка неприятная и антиэстетичная.”

In relation to acting styles, the production of *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* is especially valuable. The responses to acting in this piece range from admiration to rejection. The production triggered a clash of the critical opinions about the concurrent approaches to acting: “academic” (meaning still influenced by Neoclassicism), Romantic, Realist, and even Naturalist. It would not be accurate to separate these styles into separate acting schools. Rather, I conclude that they were perceived as the sources of various acting techniques and approaches that each actor could use, according to genres and personal preference. Using this inventory, Tolstoy and the leading actors searched for a style of acting that was best suitable for the new type of historical drama.

Acting techniques are central to Tolstoy’s directing notes. In one of his essays, he summarizes the contemporary approaches to acting as unsystematic and contradictory.<sup>353</sup> Tolstoy then proceeds to explain his view of these general principles of art, and references Aristotle, Lessing, and Goethe. He sees the underlying principle of art as “the interpenetration of idealism and realism.”<sup>354</sup> Tolstoy never fully developed his understanding of art, but his main argument, as in many other notes he left, is the objection to the realist and naturalist trend. As we see, he names “idealism” as the necessary component of art in an era when this word itself could have a negative connotation. Iampol’skii even calls Tolstoy “the late Romantic.”<sup>355</sup> Tolstoy was profoundly influenced by Romanticism and was often at odds with the dominant trends in Russian literature. Still, I maintain that the psychological aspect in his dramas goes

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Quoted in: Iampol’skii, I.G., “Ob esteticheskikh vzgliadakh i literaturnykh mneniiakh A.K. Tolstogo.” In Iampol’skii, I.G., ed., *Poety i prozaiki* (Leningrad: Leningrad UP, 1986), 220.

<sup>353</sup> “With our theatrical criticism being not well-established, with the absence of the generally acknowledged theory of acting, our actors are permanently confused about the very different views not only on acting but on the general principles of art.”

“При не установившейся ещё у нас театральной критике, при отсутствии общепризнанной теории драматической игры, артисты наши бывают постоянно сбиваемы с толку самыми разнородными взглядами не только на исполнение, но и на основные правила искусства.” Tolstoy, “Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*”, 529-30.

<sup>354</sup> “взаимное проникновение идеализма и реализма” Ibid., 530.

<sup>355</sup> Iampol’skii, “Ob esteticheskikh vzgliadakh i literaturnykh mneniiakh A.K. Tolstogo,” 228.



beyond the Romantic tradition, and his views on acting combine many archaic elements with some very innovative ideas that anticipated the development of theatre in the 20th century. His old-fashioned opinions also reflect the fading of the historical genre in literature.

Tolstoy criticizes the literal, “photographic” understanding of truth in art. For him, theatre should relate to life like artistic paintings, not photography.<sup>356</sup> The statement on moderation and the attention to every movement and intonation are strangely reminiscent of the neoclassical style of acting, in which Dmitrevskii succeeded in the 18th century and Karatygin in the 19th century. The acclaimed contemporary actors, such as Sadovskii or Strepetova, on the contrary, strove for powerful emotion and free expression on stage. At the same time, Tolstoy states that one general idea should guide an actor’s whole performance, and he articulates such an idea for each dramatis persona in his essays. This “idea” foreshadows Stanislavsky’s “super-objective.”

In the end, however, Tolstoy did not have much influence on the leading actors. They were popular and acclaimed, and felt entitled to their own artistic choices. They worked on their roles independently and did not fully coordinate with the director or the rest of the cast. Still, their interpretations of Boris Godunov and, especially, the title character Ivan the Terrible were scrutinized in print. The old approach to acting was now unsatisfactory. The interpretations of the other characters hardly received any attention. The critics and spectators often sided with their favorite actors. Their assessment also reflected their

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<sup>356</sup> “Art should not *contradict* the truth but it does not take it *all in, as it is*. It takes only the typical features from each phenomenon and casts off everything unessential. This is the difference between pictorial art and photography, poetry and history, and drama and dramatic chronicle. ...For a serious role, an actor should not forget that, within the limits of dramatic frame, each movement and each intonation of his are meaningful; he should not allow himself any excess, nor should he omit anything essential: in a word, he should be imbued with an *idea*, that he presents, and keep at its height, having in mind the *ideal*, not the real truth.”

“Искусство не должно *противоречить* правде, но оно не берёт её в себя *всю, как она есть*. Оно берёт от каждого явления только его типические черты и отбрасывает всё несущественное. Этим живопись отличается от фотографии, поэзия от истории и, в частности, драма от драматической хроники. ...Исполнитель серьёзной роли не должен забывать, что, при ограниченности драматической рамы, каждое его движение, каждая его интонация имеют значение; он не должен позволять себе ничего лишнего и не должен упускать ничего существенного: одним словом, он должен проникнуться *идеей*, им представляемой, и постоянно держаться на её высоте, имея в виду *идеальную*, а не реальную правду.”

Tolstoy, “Proekt Postanovki na Stsenu Tragedii *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*”, 530-531.

personal preference for academic or “natural” acting. These numerous sources allow us to see many nuances in the creative process.

Iampol'skii uses many available critical responses to reconstruct and compare the acting styles of Pavel Vasilyev and Vasilii Samoylov in the role of Ivan. The former worked to establish an emotional connection with spectators, and the latter relied on more traditional academic techniques. For the first time in historical drama, Vasilyev departed from the conventions of heroic drama and portrayed his regal protagonist in a way that resembled his other characters in contemporary social dramas. Even his looks and voice were hardly suitable for tsar Ivan, as Vasilyev was quite short, plump, and had quiet voice.<sup>357</sup> This was an unprecedented departure from the previously required physical characteristics of a tragic lead. Vasilyev's ability to give an emotional performance was deemed sufficient for this role.

Many responses showed the dissatisfaction with Vasilyev's looks and his portrayal of the cruel and fearful tsar, which was deemed too meek and mundane. The critic F. M. Tolstoy stated that Vasilyev “...deeply felt, *suffered* through the role, partially absorbed the *psychological* aspect of the role, but failed to play the fear-inspiring type of [Ivan] the Terrible.”<sup>358</sup> Others mocked this interpretation of Tsar Ivan for resembling Vasilyev's famous Liubim Tortsov from Ostrovsky's social comedy *Poverty is No Vice*.<sup>359</sup> Some other writers admired Vasilyev's passion on stage and his concern about the role rather than the success with the public.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Iampol'skii, I.G., "Pervaia postanovka *Smerti Ioanna Groznogo* A. K. Tolstogo," 249. All the subsequent references to acting, directing, and scenography in this production are taken from this article, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>358</sup> “...глубоко прочувствовал, *выстрадал* роль, *психическую* сторону роли отчасти себе усвоил, но воплотить страшный тип Грозного он не мог.” Quoted in: Iampol'skii, 251.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>360</sup> An anonymous reviewer concludes: “If he were showy and used some tricks, he would get more admiration from the kind of public that is more perceptive toward the external side than the internal one.” “Он был бы эффектен, прибежал бы к фокусам и, верно бы, больше восхитил ту публику, которая более чутка к внешней стороне, чем к внутренней.” Quoted in: *Ibid.*, 255.

The supporters of Vasilyev describe the moments when he captured the audience's attention. According to another critic, he managed to make spectators feel Ivan's profound, supernatural fear: "It was frightening to look at Mr. Vasilyev when he was tossing in his armchair, possessed by insuperable, superstitious horror, when his face was convulsing, and his mouth was praying [to the people] to not be scared of him... This prayer left a shocking impression, this horror captured you entirely, and you involuntarily thought of a comparison with a man locked in a cage and tortured. We will never forget this scene."<sup>361</sup> Vasilyev managed to convey the extreme emotional state of Ivan by balancing his intonations and the physical component, such as facial expressions and body movements.

The responses often praised Vasilyev's remarkable mimics<sup>362</sup> and physical acting but disliked his monotonous delivery of the lines.<sup>363</sup> Generally, Vasilyev's main achievement is the departure from the stylized portrayal of the tragic protagonist. Still, his performance was deemed not powerful enough and leaning too much toward the "everyday" [*bytovaia*] drama.

Samoylov as Ivan, on the contrary, based his performance on the traditional academic techniques. He was tall, had excellent diction, moved gracefully, and generally paid a lot of attention to the external effects. For example, he demanded that all the boyars stand far within a large distance from his throne. He also inserted a few scenes. In one of them, Ivan furiously throws an axe into the messenger Garaburda. In another scene, as Godunov reads the document, Ivan holds the candle so that half of his face is lit and the other half is dark.<sup>364</sup> Samoylov found his supporters but, overall, his performance was criticized even more than Vasilyev's, for the lack of feeling and passion. F.M. Tolstoy even recalled someone's witty

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<sup>361</sup> "Страшно было смотреть на г. Васильева, когда он заворочался в своём кресле, объятый неодолимым, суеверным ужасом, когда лицо его стало подёргиваться судорогами, а уста молили, чтоб не боялись его... Эта мольба производила потрясающее впечатление, этот ужас сообщался вам всецело, и невольно приходило на мысль сравнение с человеком, запертым в клетку и испытывающим ужасные муки. Мы никогда не забудем этой сцены." Iampol'skii, 255.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 263.

comment: “I see Ivan the *Angry* but I do not see Ivan the *Terrible*.”<sup>365</sup> Suvorin claimed that Samoylov’s Ivan lacked typical “Russian” passion and resembled the theatrical Louis XI or Richelieu.<sup>366</sup> This is a symptomatic comment that shows the convergence of certain acting styles with the idea of Russian nationhood. I previously demonstrated how Belinsky viewed Mochalov’s own character and his Hamlet as an expression of genuinely Russian qualities. Now, we see that less regulated and more passionate acting further becomes associated with uniquely Russian national characteristics.

In the responses, we can see the heightened expectations of the public. Old acting conventions were not satisfying any more, even in historical drama, but no one could coherently articulate the way to overcome them. In the end, neither Vasilyev nor Samoylov succeeded in the role of Ivan. An epigram by N. Sherbina mocked them:

I hopefully will not offend our talented actors  
If I tell them the truth to their faces  
That I saw Pavel Vasilyich, I can see Vasilii Vasilyich  
But I have not seen Ivan Vasilyich.<sup>367</sup>

This quatrain not only marks the actors’ failure, but also registers the growing dissatisfaction with the celebrity culture. As it suggests, Vasilyev idiosyncratically played Vasilyev, and Samoylov played Samoylov. They stepped onto the stage as their own famous and beloved persons and not as Ivan the Terrible.

Tolstoy was quite displeased with both versions of Ivan, even though, according to his traditional taste, he preferred Samoylov.<sup>368</sup> Tolstoy saw Samoylov’s problem in his insufficient work on the role. From the very beginning, Tolstoy’s vision came into conflict with the personalities of the well-established

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<sup>365</sup> Iampol’skii, 265.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>367</sup> Талантливых наших актёров, наверное, тем не обижу,  
Когда бы им правду в глаза я сказал,  
Что Павла Васильича видел, Василья Васильича вижу,  
Ивана ж Васильича я не видал...  
Quoted, in: Iampol’skii, 269.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

actors who had internalized many theatrical conventions and, importantly, the sense of a lead actor's autonomy. Eventually, *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* quickly left the repertoires, despite the ubiquitous adoration of its costumes, set designs, and directing. Three decades later, Stanislavsky would manage to put to practice many of Tolstoy's aspirations. Rather than working with the professional actors who already had careers, he began from training his own troupe, where the director's authority had to be above actors' independence or rivalry.

### 3.4.2 Searching for "Historical Truth" in Costumes

The new approach to costumes and set designs makes the 1867 adaptation of *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* truly a landmark event for Russian theatre. It opened the era of the "historicist" approach to the visuals that remained significant for theatre for a very long time, well into the 20th century, and is present in cinema and on television to this day. Previously, standard costumes simply referenced the amorphous past with no attempt to reflect the particular era. The accessories were colorful and exotic, in a "masquerade" fashion: "...[A] prominent feature of productions that dealt with old Russian history and everyday life was the absolute predominance of artificial head-dresses [*kokoshnik*], sarafans, masquerade-style coachmen's hats with peacock feathers, coats [*poddyovka*], and other things that said nothing about the bygone ages."<sup>369</sup> These costumes were often worn-out and shabby, unlike the costumes for opera and ballet that were rich and colorful.<sup>370</sup> Now, historical national opera and particularly spoken historical drama that narrated a series documented events set in specific years became more important for cultivating the historical accuracy. Historically faithful visuals on stage had to educate the audience and celebrate the Russian culture and national identity.

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<sup>369</sup> "...[O]тличительной чертой постановок из древнерусской истории и древнерусского быта было безраздельное господство условных кокошников и сарафанов, маскарадных ямщицких шапок с павлиньими перьями, поддёвок, и прочего, которые не давали никакого представления о подлинной старине." Iampol'skij, 242.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

The diligent study of traditional Russian clothes, which emerged in the mid-19th century as a part of archeology, directly influenced theatrical costumes. The faithful representation of Russian costumes and architecture for each specific historical period became a new important creative goal for the historical plays. For the first time, this goal was consistently realized for *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*. In his directing essays, Tolstoy consistently refers to academic sources for the visuals.<sup>371</sup> For the first time, professional archeologists and the scholars, such as Kostomarov, personally consulted the production crew. The artists and decorators who worked on the set specialized in historical painting. For example, all the costume sketches were made by V. Schwartz, an artist who specifically did research on the 16th and the 17th centuries.<sup>372</sup> Syrkina points out that Realist movement in art directly influenced the historical genre. Historical paintings became one of the leading genres during 1860s and directly influenced the theatre: “In the visual arts of the 1860s, Russian Realist art gains special significance while it was forming under the direct influence of Realist social [*bytovoe*] art, which, at that time, became the leading, dominant genre in Russian art. . . . The work of V. G. Schwartz . . . considerably influenced not only painting and drawing but also theatre”.<sup>373</sup>

As we can conclude from the available sources, everyone was fascinated with this new concept of “historical accuracy.” One reviewer even describes it as “slavish faithfulness to the preserved samples.”<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> “The details of furniture can be found in Kostomarov’s booklet *A Sketch of the Home Life and Customs of the People of Great Russia*, and also in Zabelin’s work *The Everyday Life of Russian Tsars*, the drawings of utensils and weapons can be taken from Solntsev’s *Russian Antiquities*.”

“Подробности мебелировки можно найти в брошюре Костомарова: «Очерк домашней жизни и нравов великорусского народа», а также и в сочинении Забелина «Домашний быт русских царей», а рисунки утвари и оружия в «Русских древностях» Солнцева.”

Tolstoy, “Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Smert’ Ioanna Groznogo*,” 490.

<sup>372</sup> Iampol’skii, 242.

<sup>373</sup> “В изобразительном искусстве 60-х годов особое значение приобретает русская реалистическая живопись, формировавшаяся под непосредственным влиянием реалистической бытовой живописи, которая стала в то время ведущим, передовым жанром в русском изобразительном искусстве. . . . Творчество В.Г. Шварца . . . оказало существенное влияние не только на живопись и графику, но и на область театра.” Syrkina, F. IA., *Russkoe Teatral’no-Dekoratsionnoe Iskusstvo Vtoroi Poloviny XIX veka*. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1956), 36.

<sup>374</sup> “...рабскою верностью сохранившимся образцам.” Iampol’skii, 242.

The whole project in theatre was so popular that it was covered in the media even before the premiere. A reviewer claimed that some costumes would be precise “to-the-button” copies of Ivan the Terrible and Godunov’s actual attires that were kept in The Armory in Moscow.<sup>375</sup>



Fig. 3.4, 3.5. V.G. Schwartz, The drawings of Ivan the Terrible’s costumes.

The presented sketches are much more detailed than the known drawings from the preceding decades. The meticulous replication of the ornaments, the posture, and the addition of the written notes provide material for actors to work on the role. The critic Stasov, who was an avid supporter of this new historical style, recalled that the costume designer Schwartz tried to develop a synthetic portrait of each character and create a unity of clothes, gesture, movement, and facial expressions. Ideally, an actor would adjust all his body movements to embody a person from the past.<sup>376</sup> The unity between the psychological and the physical sides of acting, as well as the costume, was a rather new idea that, at this time, was planted but not elaborated or fully put to practice.

<sup>375</sup> “...два из костюмов Иоанна и Годунова . . . будут воспроизведением, пуговица в пуговицу, подлинных одеяний этих исторических лиц, сохранившихся в московской Оружейной палате.” Quoted in: Iampol’skii, 242.

<sup>376</sup> Iampol’skii, 243-244.

Costumes become individual. A leading character may now change a few times throughout the performance. In his essay, Tolstoy pays a lot of attention to every character's clothes. Ivan the Terrible is supposed to wear a monk's robe in the opening scene where he repents, and change into full ceremonial dress when he receives the ambassador. Unlike with acting, there was general agreement about the costumes and props for the play. Tolstoy's suggestions were welcomed as guidelines for the costumes. One aspect that Tolstoy and the production crew successfully changed was the theatrical convention for flamboyant, exotic attire. One of Tolstoy's comments on Ivan's costume provides an example: "Not under any circumstances should he wear a high hat, in which all the boyars of any epoch appear on our stage. No one wore such hats in Ivan's time. His hat, as all hats of that time, was low, round and soft, trimmed with fur, similar to what we can see on Gerbershtein's portrait of Vasilii Ioannovich, Ivan the Terrible's father."<sup>377</sup> Apparently, these distinct high hats that belonged to a specific historical period came to signify any pre-Petrine noble clothes, and the writer wanted to move away from that convention. He pointed out that such hats did not exist during this reign, and, therefore, could not be shown on stage.

The biggest change occurred in the costumes of commoners and servants: "The rejection of fancy costumes for commoners was destroying the established canon of artificial *narodnost'*."<sup>378</sup> During the 18th and early 19th centuries, the requirements of "good taste" led to the development of brightly-colored commoner attire for the stage. Tolstoy rejects them as inauthentic.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> "Шапка ни в каком случае не должна на нём быть высокая, в каких обыкновенно во все эпохи являются у нас на сцене бояре. Таких шапок при Иоанне не носили. Его шапка, как и все тогдашние шапки, низкая, круглая и мягкая, с меховой опушкой, какую мы видим у Герберштейна на портрете Василья Иоанновича, отца Ивана Грозного." Tolstoy, "Proekt Postanovki na Stsenu Tragedii *Smert' Ioanna Groznogo*," 455-456.

<sup>378</sup> "Разрушением создавшихся канонов условной народности был решительный отказ от парадных народных костюмов." Iampol'skii, 242.

<sup>379</sup> "No one ever wore the cherished little kaftans of camel color, with blue or rose lapels, in which the common people appear on our stage in historical plays. Nor anyone wore such coachman's hats as the one Goltz dances his pseudo-Russian dance in. The commoners have to wear round hats or felt caps." "Заветных кафтанчиков верблюжьего цвета, с голубыми или розовыми отворотами, в каких народ является у нас на сцене в исторических пьесах, никто никогда не носил. Не носил никто также и кучерских шляп вроде той, в которой балетмейстер Гольц танцует мнимую русскую. На простолюдинах должны быть круглые шапки или поярковые грешневики." Quoted in: Iampol'skii, 243.



Before the 1860s, poverty was not allowed on stage. Now, the “peredvizhniki” artists strove to accurately show the peasants’ poverty and struggles. In *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*, the commoners come on stage in dirty and torn clothes, which, in addition to introducing Realism, created a stark visual contrast with the nobles. Iampol’skii quotes Zaguliaev who greatly approved of such a faithful representation of social inequality: “...beginning from Ivan’s attire, that was golden silky, and adorned by gemstones to the actually *dirty* and *torn* coats of the commoners.”<sup>380</sup>



Fig. 3.6. Shishkov, M.A., “The Tavern at the Luthuanian Border.”  
A drawing of the set design for *Boris Godunov*.

Soviet-era scholars Iampol’skii and Danilov demonstrate a bias for the “historically accurate” approach to the visuals. Thus, they positively assess the achievements of the 1867 production of Tolstoy’s piece. Moreover, they point out the mistakes of the production crew that were caused by the gaps in their knowledge. The available sources depicted the tsars and the nobles in their ceremonial clothes. The

<sup>380</sup> “...начиная от золотого, газетового, униженного драгоценными камнями облачения Иоанна до действительно *грязных* и *разорванных* полушубков и кожухов народа.” Ibid., 242.

scholars conclude that the costumes are generally accurate, but present what the noble people used to wear on special occasions, for example, for holidays and formal events.<sup>381</sup>

If we analyze the production visuals from a more neutral perspective, I think that these creative decisions possess some important functions. Social inequality is one of the central topics in Realist prose and paintings at the time. When the striking contrast of the noble's luxury and the commoners' misery was visualized on stage, it created a social message that was appreciated by the spectators of the era. It was also the expression of the new sensationalist aesthetic. Theatre sought to capture the audience by creating an emotionally intense experience, and the visuals became an important part of that experience. Finally, making the pre-Petrine ceremonial clothes required skillful craftsmanship. Bright colors, gemstones, and complex ornaments were based on Russian traditional crafts and celebrated the rediscovered continuity of Russian culture. The historical performances reinforced a living national memory.

### 3.4.3 New Types of Set Designs: The Influence of Russian Realist Art

The development of the sets for *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* followed the same trajectory as the reform of costumes. For a long time, historical dramas were staged in front of generic backgrounds. The same set could even be used for both a Medieval and a 19th-century scene: "At that time, sets were one of the weakest aspects of dramatic theatre. They were moved from one play to another, frequently without any regard for the setting or the depicted place. P.P. Gnedich remembers an anecdotal episode. The set for *Woe from Wit* was 'of such generic style that it was used later for Ostrovsky's play *The Pretender and Shuiskii*, so Dmitrii's feast took place in Famusov's living room'."<sup>382</sup> At the time, the most luxurious sets

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<sup>381</sup> "Everything was historically accurate but this accuracy was of a formal and ostentatious kind: holiday-like, festive."

"Всё было исторически точно, но это была точность официально-показной стороны – праздничной, нарядной." Danilov, 392.

<sup>382</sup> "Декорации были в ту эпоху одним из самых слабых мест драматического театра. Их переносили из пьесы в пьесу, нередко совершенно не считаясь ни с эпохой, к которой относится действие, ни с изображаемой средой. П.П. Гнедич вспоминает, например, такой поистине анекдотический случай.

were designed for opera and ballet, many of which had fairy-tale-like or generic settings. Roller was the acclaimed designer of such sets for the imperial theatres and the founder of a whole school that specialized in theatrical visuals. The space of the stage was ubiquitously based on coulisses and arches.<sup>383</sup>



Fig. 3.7. K.F. Waltz. A drawing of the standardized set design.

As a result, a palace or a peasant house always appeared as a pavilion with high ceilings and as a large open space. It was also a norm to assign the different backgrounds for the same play to different specialists.<sup>384</sup> The 1867 production of *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* became the first theatrical project where the visuals began to depart from these conventions and were mainly based on the new Realist aesthetic.<sup>385</sup>

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Декорация сцены бала в «Горе от ума» «упобреблялась настолько неопределённою стилия, что когда потом давали пьесу Островского «Самозванец и Шуйский», то пир у Дмитрия был поставлен в зале Фамусова.» *Iampol'skii*, 238-39.

<sup>383</sup> “кулисно-арочная система” *Syrkina*, 57.

<sup>384</sup> “Landscape artists painted landscapes for set designs, artists who specialized in perspective created architectural backgrounds, costume artists drew sketches of costumes.”  
“Пейзаж писался декоратором-пейзажистом, архитектурная декорация – декоратором-перспективистом, эскизы костюмов рисовал художник по костюму и т.д.” *Syrkina*, 67-68.

<sup>385</sup> “First staged in the Mariinskii Theatre in 1867, *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* was the drama, in which the new Realist method was fully expressed.”

With its chronological precision, historical drama was a very suitable genre for the emerging new approaches to sets and props that were opposed to the techniques of the academic style and influenced by the rise of archeology and Realist art. As a result, historical drama, which used to be a neglected and marginal genre, was now essential for the innovative development in Realist set designs.<sup>386</sup> A group of artists from Petersburg's state theatres worked on the sets for *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*. Shishkov and Gagarin were the main artists who created the initial sketches for the sets. "Crafting artists" ["*khudozhniki-ispolniteli*"] then drew and painted the actual backgrounds. The crew of "crafting artists" included Bocharov, Bredov, Bakh, Prokhorov, and also Shishkov.<sup>387</sup> Among them, Matvei Shishkov became the most famous and acclaimed background artist who reformed the approach to sets under the influence of Realist art. He was an apprentice in Roller's workshop, but was not satisfied by the established style. He had profound knowledge of medieval Russian architecture and initially designed the backgrounds for Russian operas.<sup>388</sup>

Shishkov worked as a background artist for many years but, unfortunately, only three drawings of his sets for *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* survived: "Throne Room" ("Prestol'naia palata"), "Bread Square in Zamoskvorechye" ("Khlebnaia Ploshchad' v Zamoskvoreche"), and "Tsarina's Chamber"

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"Постановкой, в которой новый реалистический метод получил своё яркое выражение, ...была драма "Смерть Иоанна Грозного" А.К. Толстого, впервые показанная на сцене Мариинского театра в 1867 году." Syrkina, 80-81.

<sup>386</sup> "It is characteristic and remarkable that, similar to how the Academy [of Arts] bred the new art of *peredvizhniki* who were opposed to the Academy's principles, Roller's school of set designs educated the artists who began to fight with it and strove to replace ornamentality for its own sake with historically accurate, and then genre-specific set designs."

"Характерно и весьма примечательно то, что, подобно тому, как из недр старой Академии выросло новое, противостоящее ей искусство передвижников, так и самой роллеровской декорационной школы вышли декораторы, которые первыми начали борьбу с ней, противопоставив сценическому украшательству ради украшения на первых порах правдивую историческую, а затем жанровую декорацию." Ibid., 66.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>388</sup> "An expert in Novgorod and ancient architecture, Shishkov became one of the specialists in the set designs for Russian opera."

"Знаток московской и новгородской древней архитектуры, Шишков стал одним из специалистов по декорированию русских опер." Ibid., 74.

(“Pokoi Tsaritsy”).<sup>389</sup> Even these three sketches let us see how Shishkov approached the different types of backgrounds. All the paintings boast his meticulous attention to the details. Shishkov paints the low arched ceilings and traditional ornaments on the walls and furnaces. He utilizes the traditional color scheme and generously uses bright red and gold colors for “Throne Room.”<sup>390</sup> However, his artistic goals are not limited to archeological faithfulness. I maintain that he seeks to discover a connection with some aspects of his contemporary culture that should make the past more familiar and relatable. For “Tsarina’s Chamber,” Shishkov innovatively inserts many casual objects, such as flowers, curtains, utensils, that altogether paint a vivid picture of the medieval nobility’s everyday life.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Syrkina, 87.

<sup>390</sup> “The chamber shone with golden and red colors. There was gold on its domes, on the ceiling, on the utensils, there were the red-and-golden tsar’s throne, the raspberry-red mask-border, the bright-red carpet runners on the floor, the red fabric covering the benches near the walls.”

“Палата сверкала золотыми и красными красками. Золото на сводах, на потолке, на утвари, красное с золотом царское место, малиновый бархат его драпировок, малиновая падуга, ярко-красные ковровые дорожки на полу, красная ткань, покрывающая лавки вдоль стен...” Ibid., 88.

<sup>391</sup> “The dark blue walls, decorated with paintings and carvings, the wooden ceiling, the ornate tiled traditional stove [*pech*] in the corner, the icons of saints in head-dresses above the door – all this was made with an intention to give the national character to the action. It is obvious that the artist studied the chambers of the Kremlin but also wanted to show Tsarina’s chamber as a habitable, lived-in place. There were two pot plants on the two windows, the table with the tablecloth, the curtain hanging on the door to the left, the rug on the floor, the massive carved armchair, and the shelves with the miscellaneous expensive utensils. Tsarina’s wealthy chamber is cozy in its own way, especially in comparison with the magnificent and solemn Throne Room.”

“Синие расписные стены, украшенные живописью и резьбой, дощатый потолок, нарядная изразцовая печь в углу, изображения святых в кокошнике над дверью – всё это выполнено с явным стремлением воссоздать национальный характер действия. Очевидно изучение художником кремлёвских покоев и в то же время его намерение сделать покой царицы жилым и “обжитым” помещением. На двух окошках растут в горшках цветы, стол покрыт скатертью, на двери слева висит занавеска, на полу разостлан коврик, стоит массивное резное кресло, полочки уставлены всевозможной дорогой утварью. В богатом покое царицы по-своему уютно – особенно по сравнению со следующей за нею великолепной и торжественной Престольной палатой.” Ibid., 87-88.

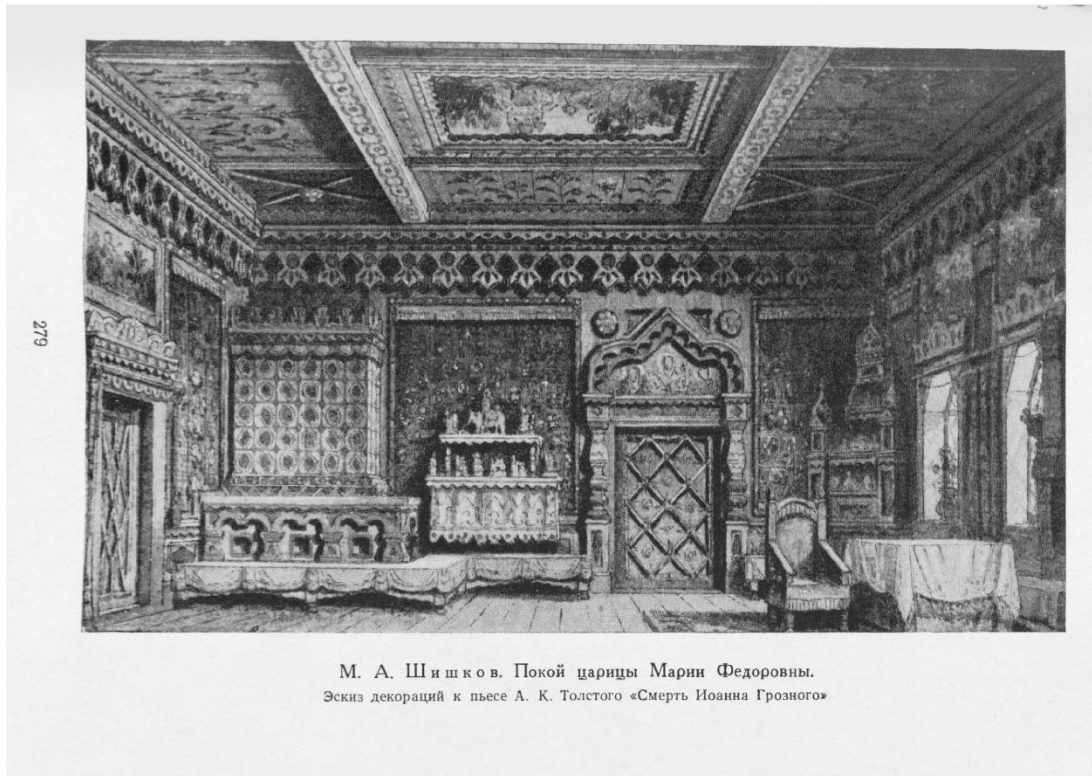


Fig. 3.8. Shishkov, M.A. “Tsarina Maria Fyodorovna’s Chamber.” A drawing of the set design for A.K. Tolstoy’s play *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*.

Remnants of similar interiors could probably still be found in some old merchant houses. The throne room was inspired by the actual throne of Ivan the Terrible and other antiquities preserved by The Armory’s collection in Kremlin.<sup>392</sup> It is important that Shishkov customizes the palace sets, according to each scene’s themes and tonality.

The third surviving background painting deliberately presents the historically unspecific view of the Moscow neighborhood Zamoskvorechye. Nothing refers to the 16th or the 19th centuries. Rather, we see some timeless “iconic” elements of an old Russian neighborhood: wooden houses, a church, a narrow street, a sledge. The picture very much resembles the urban landscapes of the “*peredvizhniki*.” In the 19th

<sup>392</sup> Stasov, V.V., “Po povodu *Ioanna Groznogo* na russkoi stsene.” In Stasov, V.V., *Sobranie sochinenii*, in 3 vols., Vol. 3. (Sankt Peterburg, 1894), 932.



century, merchants and craftsmen lived in Zamoskvorechye, and the neighborhood had already been brought onto stage in Ostrovsky's merchant dramas. Syrkina states that Shishkov used his personal recollections of the neighborhood for this set.<sup>393</sup> We may assume that the spectators also recognized the view and the connotation of "living history" that it acquired.



Fig. 3.9. Shishkov, M.A. "Bread Square in Zamoskvorechye." A drawing of the set design for A.K. Tolstoy's play *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*.

All these sets received much praise from critics and the spectators alike. However, the gaps in archeological knowledge, the persistent theatrical conventions, and the different visions brought by several artists in the crew led to some inconsistencies. The consulting historian Kostomarov disliked the background for "The Chamber at Ivan's Palace" for depicting historically incorrect big "Venetian"

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<sup>393</sup> "No matter how that old Zamoskvorechye of the 16th century was supposed to look, as it had to be shown in the play, it was still the same Zamoskvorechye, and in the artist's eyes it preserved the likeness with the contemporary one, which he was very well familiar."

"Каким бы ни было то старое Замоскворечье XVI века, которое должно было быть показано в пьесе, это всё же было Замоскворечье, и оно в глазах художника сохраняло большое сходство с современным и хорошо известным ему." Syrkina, 90.

windows and ornaments in the shape of golden eagles.<sup>394</sup> Still, the background designs for *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* paved the way for the “historical trend” in theatre for the next several decades. The very attention to small details speaks of the heightened expectations toward performance arts and their rising status as a cultural phenomenon.

#### 3.4.4 New Practices in Directing and Rehearsals

As we know, theatre of the era was centered around the leading actors who often prepared for their roles independently. The profession of a director did exist, but it did not encompass any leading function and was limited to some facilitation during the few full rehearsals. In the first half of the 19th century, Shakhovskoi introduced some new approaches to directing. Ostrovsky was also frequently involved in the rehearsals for his plays.

The 1867 production of *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* became the next step in the continuous development that led to the 20th-century rise of directing. Tolstoy wrote his essays from the position of a director. His letters and notes contain many additional ideas, even though he never formulated them systematically. He also participated in the rehearsals but we do not know the extent of his involvement.<sup>395</sup> It is also very significant that the public noticed and praised the director’s contribution.<sup>396</sup> I think it is

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<sup>394</sup> “Kostomarov pointed out that some details failed to depart from “theatricality.” The large semicircular windows in the Venetian style, for instance, did not fit with the 16th-century palace that would have small windows with lead frames and small windowpanes that were sometimes made of mica.”

“...Костомаров указал, что кое в чём не удалось всё же избежать “театральной рутины.” Большие полукруглые окна вроде венецианских с изящными переплётами совершенно не вяжутся с дворцом XVI века, где были небольшие окна со свинцовыми переплётами, маленькими стёклами, а иногда и слюдой.” Quoted in: Iampol’skii, 241.

<sup>395</sup> “We know that Tolstoy participated in directing *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* and attended the rehearsals but we do not know the scale of his involvement, nor the details.”

“Мы знаем, что Толстой принимал участие в постановке «Смерти Иоанна Грозного» в Александринском театре, бывал на репетициях, но нам неизвестны размеры этого участия и подробности.” Iampol’skii, 224.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 246.



possible to see Voronov and Tolstoy as the two collaborating directors for the debut production.<sup>397</sup>

Voronov was the officially appointed director of the Aleksandrinskii Theatre who created the highly acclaimed *mise-en-scènes*. Tolstoy contributed through his writing, presence at the rehearsals, and individual work with the actors, costume designers, and background artists.

Tolstoy's most innovative proposal was the new understanding of a director as the head figure in the production process who had to guide the actors through their interaction: "This agreement of roles, for which we use an unpleasant name: *ensemble*, and which we may replace with the word *unitedness* [*druzhnost'*] is predominantly the concern of a director. It is so utterly important that no artistic performance is possible without it."<sup>398</sup> Tolstoy even uses the word "ensemble" in the exact same meaning that Stanislavsky later employed in his system.

In another note, Tolstoy addresses the widely accepted idea that bad acting, intonation, or diction of minor performers highlights the mastery of the leads. He passionately speaks against this prejudice: "...the higher the talent is, and the more accurate dramatic ear he has, the more difficult it is for him to maintain himself on his own high level if the other actors are off-key."<sup>399</sup> The necessity of this argument demonstrates how alien the idea of an ensemble initially was. Tolstoy even cautiously suggested that leading actors should occasionally take minor roles. It was another outrageous idea for that time, and

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<sup>397</sup> "According to Nil'skii's memoirs, Voronov, who was a director in the Aleksandrinskii Theatre, 'directed the crowd scenes beautifully, masterfully, and magnificently.' Under his directions, the crowd lived, and its lively faces closely participated in the events."

"Режиссёр Александринского театра Воронов, по воспоминаниям Нильского, 'мастерски эффектно и великолепно ставил народные сцены.' Под его управлением толпа жила, это были живые лица, принимавшие близкое участие в ходе событий'." Kholodov, 146.

<sup>398</sup> "Это согласование ролей, которое называется у нас неприятным именем: *ансамбль* и которое можно заменить словом *дружность*, есть преимущественно дело режиссёра. Оно так важно, что без него никакое художественное исполнение немислимо," Tolstoy, "Proekt postanovki na stsenu tragedii *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*," 547.

<sup>399</sup> "...чем талант выше, чем вернее его драматическое ухо, тем труднее ему удержаться на своей высоте, когда играющие с ним фальшивят," Tolstoy, "Proekt Postanovki na Stsenu Tragedii *Smert' Ioanna Groznogo*," 494.

Tolstoy himself sees that as a “sacrifice” from leading actors’ side.<sup>400</sup> To my knowledge, Tolstoy’s idea of an “ensemble” acting is one of the earliest discussions of performance as an essentially collective work that greatly depends on coordination between all the members of a cast and, therefore, makes rehearsals extremely important.

The production process for *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* took much longer than usual. The whole crew dedicated a lot of time and effort. Iampol’skii summarizes the information about the preparations and notes the surprise of the actors at the number of rehearsals: “‘We had countless rehearsals,’ as we read in actor A.A. Alekseev’s memoirs. Nil’skii [another actor] points out that there were over thirty rehearsals, whereas a play was usually shown after five or six rehearsals in those years. Tolstoy was almost always present at them. According to Burdin’s [a famous actor] response, the play was “wonderfully rehearsed.” A contemporary perceived the final dress-rehearsal as an unheard-of fact – ‘an unprecedented exception that certainly will not become a general rule’.”<sup>401</sup>

Many critics noticed the directing as the important aspect of the production. Interestingly, they mirror many of Tolstoy’s observations and suggestions. For example, the newspaper *Nedelia* praised the street scenes [*narodnye stseny*] that required thorough preparation: “In the crowd of actors, one could notice life and movement, to which we had not been accustomed on the Russian stage... Generally, it was impossible not to be convinced that the directing of the play and the creation of what the French call *ensemble* was done with great skill and with love for this work.”<sup>402</sup> Before this performance, the limited

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<sup>400</sup> “It would be very desirable if good actors made a sacrifice and played the [minor] roles of the magi and the doctors.”

“Весьма было бы желательно, чтобы хорошие артисты пожертвовали собой и взяли на себя роли волхвов и врачей.” Ibid., 479.

<sup>401</sup> “‘Репетиций сделано было бесчисленное множество’, – читаем в воспоминаниях артиста А.А. Алексева. Нильский указывает, что их было больше тридцати, тогда как обычно пьеса ставилась в те годы с пяти-шести репетиций. Почти неизменно на них присутствовал Толстой. Пьеса, по отзыву Бурдина, была «срепетована прекрасно». Как небывалый факт отмечалась современником генеральная репетиция в костюмах – “исключение доселе неслыханное и которое, конечно, не делается общим правилом’.” Iampol’skii, 237.

<sup>402</sup> “В массе играющих была заметна жизнь и движения, к которым нас не приучила русская сцена. . . . Вообще нельзя было не убедиться, что в постановке пьесы и в придании ей того, что французы называют *ensemble*, руководили знание дела и любовь к нему.” Ibid., 248.

time allowed for the rehearsals apparently resulted in bleak and slow mass scenes. Such great success of the carefully directed *mise-en-scènes* advocated for the change in rehearsals.

The critic Zaguliaev was less celebratory than *Nedelia*, while he compared the success of the *mise-en-scènes* featuring minor actors and the mediocrity of the *mise-en-scènes* featuring the leading actors: “Things were going fine when the director had to supervise the extras, that is, the persons who completely and passively obeyed his instructions. The crowds of people were pushing, swarming, and rushing about in a uniquely true and natural way; and the calls “[bring out] the director!” that could be heard after that scene, were the deserved gratitude for his effort.”<sup>403</sup> Iampol’skii summarizes Zaguliaev’s conclusion about the lack of ensemble among the actors in the leading roles.<sup>404</sup> Curiously, Zaguliaev suggests that having fewer celebrities in the performance would improve its quality. We can see that the stage presentation eclectically mixed the new techniques with the old academic style that was represented by the famous actors.

The innovative approach to *mise-en-scènes*, costumes, and set designs highlighted the lack of coordination among the leading characters as well as the lack of depth in their interpretations of the roles. Thus, the dynamic between the actors and the director became unsatisfying and started to change. Still, old traditions persevered in theatres for the next few decades. Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko managed to shed them by doing exactly what Tolstoy and Zaguliaev suggested more or less in passing. Namely, the founders of MAT formed a troop of beginner actors who had to undergo training and internalize the headship of a director and the commitment to ensemble.

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<sup>403</sup> “Там, где режиссёру приходилось иметь дело главным образом с статистами, то есть с личностями, вполне и пассивно повинующимися его указаниям, дело шло прекрасно. Народные массы толкались, кишили, метались из стороны в сторону с редкою правдою и естественностью, иллюзия была полная, и крики «режиссёра», раздававшиеся после этой сцены, были вполне заслуженною благодарностью стараниям его.” Iampol’skii, 248.

<sup>404</sup> “In Zaguliaev’s opinion, the ensemble was absent in the performance, which whold have been possible with the presence of the “second-rate” talents in the troupe.” “Именно ансамбля, для которого необходимы отсутствующие в труппе «второстепенные дарования», не было, по мнению Загуляева, в спектакле.” Ibid.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

The historical genre became central in Russian performance arts during the 1860s. This phenomenon appeared in the context of the developing historiography and the rapid social changes that occurred in the decade after the emancipation of serfs. The cultural discourse of the epoch was preoccupied with the peculiarities of Russia's national path and the search for true Russian identity in the pre-Petrine era as well as among the contemporary merchants and peasants as the social classes that were least touched by the Westernization. The historical drama returned as the genre that sought to rediscover the national past, with the help of dedicated academic research, and recreate the past through performances.

The most important aspects that shaped the new historical narratives in writing and on stage were "historical accuracy" and the importance of the *narod*. "Historical accuracy" entailed the author's ability to also be a scholar of history and uncover the historical process through the faithful rendering of the events and the chronology of the archival sources. The Time of Troubles is still explored as the turning point in Russian history, but the focus is shifting away from the already exhausted story of the False Dmitrii toward the artistic interpretations of the characters of the tsars and the exploration of Russia's struggle in balancing national autonomy with Western influence.

The three major playwrights of the decade who wrote about the Time of Troubles are Nikolai Chaev, Alexander Ostrovsky, and Aleksey Tolstoy. Chaev was a professional historian who represented the "archeological" approach to historical fiction. His drama *Dimitrii the Pretender* is more concerned about the accurate presentation of the customs, traditions, language, and the known historical documents than about the plot or character development. Chaev aims for the highest possible objectivity and wants to avoid any biased conclusions. The inconsistencies and the gaps in the original historical sources become the inconsistencies and the gaps in his story. Chaev's "dramatic chronicle" records the known facts and often omits the explanations of the characters' motivation or the causes of some events and decisions. The play features numerous commoner characters that are probably meant to represent the *narod* at large. Chaev also introduces descriptions of court rituals, folk customs, and shifts between the language

registers (Old Church Slavonic, formal, and conversational language) into the genre. He affirms the existence of a unique Russian identity through references to Russian medieval literature and the adherence of most major characters to Russian traditions.

Ostrovsky's two plays, *Koz'ma Zakharyich Minin, Sukhoruk* and *Dmitrii the Pretender and Vasili Shuiskii*, become the author's two different attempts at historical narratives. In *Minin*, his approach is closer to Chaev's documentary style. For the first time, the story takes place away from the capital and presents the commoners' militia in Nizhnii Novgorod. Ostrovsky finds exemplary Russian characters in Minin and his supporters. He depicts their honesty, religiosity, and mutual support. However, his attempt at literal historical faithfulness leads to a slow-paced and anti-climactic plot. In *Dmitrii the Pretender and Vasili Shuiskii*, Ostrovsky rejects the hypothesis about Otrepyev and depicts the False Dmitrii as a Romantic lead of unknown but noble origins who becomes an aspiring but failed reformer.

Opposing the mainstream trend, Aleksey Tolstoy separates academic "historical accuracy" from "artistic truth" in his very successful dramatic trilogy. Tolstoy combines the traditions of Shakespearean, Romantic, and even neoclassical drama with the achievements of Realist psychological prose. He finds rich material and multi-layered characters among the Russian historical figures and centers his fictitious version of the story around the rise and fall of Boris Godunov. Tolstoy is preoccupied with the characters' moral decisions and with the theme of Boris's sin and guilty conscience after the murder of the heir. Initially, Boris's conscience allows this crime for the sake of the common good but, eventually, he is destroyed by his own evil deeds. The prophecy of Boris's reign, which appears in the first play and is fulfilled by all the subsequent events, creates the effect of fatality, which symbolizes the fatality and inevitability of the historical development. As a tsar, Boris strives to modernize Russia. In this, Tolstoy made him the mouthpiece for his own idea. According to Tolstoy, Kievan Rus' was initially a part of Western culture that deviated from its progressive path because of the Tatar yoke and "orientalization." The country now needs to reconnect with its Western heritage. The ideological aspect of the trilogy, especially of its last play *Tsar Boris*, reaffirms the tradition of the political and social engagement of historical plays that goes back to their 18th-century beginnings.

During the 1860s, historical drama made a significant contribution into the evolution of stage practices. In the first half of the 19th century, its performances were very conservative in terms of staging techniques. In the 1860s, the historical performances demonstrated all the innovative methods of stage production. The first adaptation of *Tolstoy's Death of Ivan the Terrible* that took place in 1867 is particularly important.

The idea of historical accuracy was fully realized in the visuals. The generic and exotic costumes and the sets were abandoned in favor of carefully designed clothes and high-quality background paintings. The artists who specialized in the historical genre, Schwartz and Shishkov, meticulously recreated the actual clothes and artifacts from the past and customized them for each specific scene and character in the play.

Tolstoy also attempted to reform acting and promoted a novel idea of an ensemble cast. However, the previous academic training and the solidified acting habits of the leading actors persevered. The innovative decisions for the visuals and the directing highlighted the flaws of the simplistic and clichéd traditional acting. This production also turned out to be one of the earliest stage performances where the spectators paid attention to directing and favorably responded to the *mise-en-scènes* and the overall organization of the performance. Being a mixture of creative victories and failures, this production foreshadowed the later achievements of Moscow Art Theatre in the historical genre and its systematic reform of theatre.

## CONCLUSION

The dramas about the Time of Troubles were being written and staged for more than a hundred years and constitute a profoundly significant part of Russian theatre until the first half of the 20th century. I have discussed several such plays that made important contributions to the national discourse and stage history. Benedict Anderson points out that the search for a nation's past through the arts and historical narratives is essential to nation-building in the modern era: "...print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build the image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation."<sup>405</sup> One of my goals has been to demonstrate that the methods of theatre and performance studies can also be very productively applied to the study of the national discourse in modern Russia.

After disappearing from theatres during the 1870-80s due to very strict censorship, the Time of Troubles reappears on stage in the late 19th and early 20th century. There are no new original plays, but theatres start to perform the pieces by Tolstoy and Ostrovsky written three decades earlier. In 1898, the newly opened Moscow Art Theatre debuted with a production of Aleksey K. Tolstoy's historical drama *Tsar Fyodor* (1868). This production was very well-received and universally praised for its historical accuracy and new staging techniques. It heralded an era when Russian historical dramas again became one of the central genres on stage. In the next few decades, this and a few other plays were frequently produced and enjoyed unprecedented popularity.

*The Death of Ivan the Terrible*, produced in 1867, aimed at "historically true" visuals, and the leading actors attempted different representations of the tsar, though not very successfully. Stanislavsky succeeded much more at developing the "human" side of historical characters, rather than showing their heroic experiences, and conveyed historicity through antique physical objects and stylizations that were based on research that was now conducted by the theatre crew itself and not scholars. This renewed interest in Russian history reflects the general fascination with Russian national culture and another shift in the understanding of the "nation" and Russian authenticity. These new concepts of Russian culture

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<sup>405</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 44.

were greatly influenced by the most recent achievements in folklore studies and employed an ethnographic perspective. At the same time, Stanislavsky did not credit the artistic experimentation in scenography that was taking place in the 1860s and emphasized MAT's innovation.

In *My Life in Art*, Stanislavsky says that, by the late 19th century, the Russian historical genre on stage was based on clichés, and overcoming them was one of the main artistic goals of his theatre: “In staging *Tsar Fyodor* and *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*, our main concern was to get away from the usual clichéd style of production used for historical plays about the boyars in old Russia. It must be said that this style was particularly displeasing, persistent, and contagious. The least contact with it and it took hold of you. It crept into your brain, your heart, your eyes, your ears.”<sup>406</sup>

To my knowledge, there are not many scholarly works that discuss the emergence and early development of this stenciled theatrical “Russian style” that Stanislavsky repeatedly criticizes. According to my own findings in the previous chapters, this style first spontaneously emerged in the 18th century. The first modern Russian dramas, written by Sumarokov, were nominally set in the times of the first Russian princes and early statehood, and represented the Russian analog of Greek and Roman antiquity, where the mythological and historical origins converged. The myth of Russia's origins was central to the 18th-century consciousness and symbolized a new civilized and cultured Russia that still had original and respectable ancient roots. Costumes and props of that era were an odd mix of traditional Russian clothes, current fashions, and elements of “Roman” theatrical style. The era of the Napoleonic Wars brought new historical plots on stage that now revolved around fighting the foreign invaders. Historical themes had value mainly in connection with patriotic messages and shaped a distinct “pseudo-historical” visual style.

Before MAT's work on historical drama, the “Russian” style had further developed within the national opera during the 1850-80s. Private theatres were banned in Moscow and St. Petersburg for the larger part of the 19th century, and the management of state theatres traditionally invested much more into opera and ballet than plays. Historical dramas were rarely allowed on stage because they were

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<sup>406</sup> Stanislavsky, Konstantin, and Benedetti, Jean, trans. and ed., *My Life in Art* (London: Routledge, 2008), 184.



especially pricy and it was almost impossible to pass them through theatrical censorship. All these factors contributed to the marginal status of Russian historical dramas during the 1870-90s, and the domination of clichés in them.

As it was with Peter the Great and other Russian monarchs, Alexander III had influence on the cultural landscape.<sup>407</sup> The emperor endorsed many projects that celebrated Russian culture. He founded the tradition of Russian-themed royal costume balls. The first such ball celebrated his coronation in 1883, and the Romanovs held historical costume balls every several years, as long as the dynasty lasted. The guests had to wear pre-Petrine clothes, and the emperor's family dressed as the tsars of the 16th and the 17th centuries. Historians note that these costumes were historical reconstructions based on thorough archival research.<sup>408</sup> Thus, the "historical" and "Russian" trends, which were later prominent during the "Silver age," can be traced back to historical masquerades and costume balls.

In contrast with the previous waves of the historical trends' popularity, Russian culture had reached such a point by the late 19th century where its own past was perceived as a different culture, remote and exotic. Now, it could be studied ethnographically, performed, and acted out. This could be one of the reasons why the ban on historical plays was lifted. The Time of Troubles finally could be detached from the immediate ideological concerns of the government, unlike in Pushkin or Ostrovsky and Aleksey K. Tolstoy's times. The political subtext of historical performances subsided, partially due to the still existing censorship, whereas, the moral one remained.<sup>409</sup> Now, the study of the Russian past and the

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<sup>407</sup> "The program of Alexander III's reign was set forth in the manifesto of April 29, written by Constantine Pobedonostsev. Reaffirming the principle of autocracy, the manifesto evoked a new founding period of the Russian empire—an idealized version of seventeenth-century Moscow. It referred not to the Russian state or empire, but to the "Russian land," *zemlia russkaia*, conjuring a Slavophile picture of the unity of all estates in Russia, a single people, living in harmony with their tsar." Wortman, Richard, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995), 263.

<sup>408</sup> Zimin, Igor', "Baly v imperatorskikh dvortsakh." In Zimin, Igor', *Vzroslyi mir imperatorskikh rezidentsii. Vtoraia chetvert' XIX – nachalo XX Veka* (Moskva: Tsentrpolitgraf, 2011), <http://statehistory.ru/books/Vzroslyi-mir-imperatorskikh-rezidentsiy--Vtoraya-chetvert-XIX--nachalo-XX-v/40> (Accessed on December 23, 2016).

<sup>409</sup> Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor* was under a permanent ban for theatres, since it was first printed in 1868, and went almost unnoticed. However, such bans only existed for state theatres. Almost simultaneously with Stanislavsky, N. Gnedich was preparing the production of *Tsar Fyodor* in Malyyi "Suvorinsky" Theatre in Petersburg, after finally

performances of Russianness had a positive didactic dimension because they educated people and even the performers themselves.

Besides, this was the time when old Russian culture and traditional arts and crafts were gradually dying out. The antiquarian trend for old Russian artefacts, especially the pre-Petrine ones, was on the rise. Stanislavsky tells stories of how he conducted “field work” and visited national fairs where old monasteries and estates were selling pieces of old fabrics, embroidered clothes, and utensils.<sup>410</sup> Many of the sold artefacts were a few centuries old and hand-crafted. At that time, oral fairy-tales and bylinas were being recorded and rewritten into literary and stage versions. In a similar fashion, historical themes also finally found their niche in theatres. Now, all the manifestations of this “Russian style,” including MAT’s productions of historical plays, were seen as very efficient approaches to *preserving* historical memory and national heritage, which was not the main concern in the previous cultural epochs.

The opening production of MAT’s *Tsar Fyodor* was a visual feast, and the audience saw it as much more historically accurate than anything they had ever seen on stage before. It enjoyed great success, even internationally, and soon was deemed an exemplary production of the historical genre on stage. Stanislavsky later wrote: “The curtain of our theatre rose first on the tragedy *Tsar Fyodor*, written in a somewhat cinematographic manner.”<sup>411</sup> The new approach represented a large shift from the generic “type” of Russian historical drama to elaborate and visually stunning productions that aimed at creating the effect of immersion for the viewers. This effect was the earliest, still mostly external, manifestation of such concepts as “authenticity” and “artistic truth,” which would become the key terms in the system later formulated by Stanislavsky.

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having received permission from the censors. It premiered only two days before MAT’s opening. Part of the play’s initial success on stage, especially for the more traditional production by Gnedich, can be attributed to the cancelation of this long ban. Danilov, 343.

<sup>410</sup> Stanislavsky, 183.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 185.

Kriukovskii, Kukol'nik, Ostrovsky, and, to some extent, Tolstoy created romanticized narratives, and MAT consciously wanted to depart from that elevated tonality in favor of "Realism" on stage that was inspired by Russian Realist and Naturalist literature and arts of the late 19th century. MAT's interpretation of the play departs from Aleksey Tolstoy's original creation a remarkable amount. Tolstoy was working within the tradition of historical tragedy in verse and commented on the political and social development of Russia. The writer constructed a logical and psychologically detailed narrative of the intrigues, betrayals, state decline, and creates the image of a weak tsar who was meek, the total opposite of his father Ivan the Terrible. At the same time, Fyodor was also tragic and incapable of saving his country.

Stanislavsky's version presents Fyodor's story as a human drama rather than a historical tragedy. Very successfully played by Ivan Moskvín, this Fyodor is simple, kind, hesitant, and childish. A reviewer wrote that Fyodor was "...a weak man, a family man who is simply exhausted under the yoke of tsars' power."<sup>412</sup> According to Inna Solovyeva's convincing interpretation, this tsar laments the inevitable disjoint between morality and historical action.<sup>413</sup> Nemirovich-Danchenko even named Moskvín's Fyodor as his favorite stage character, together with Hamlet.<sup>414</sup> It is interesting how the reimagining of the Shakespearean Hamlet, first begun by Sumarokov, continued throughout the 19th century, and led to the development of this "Russian Hamletian type" in drama.

The production focuses on showing scenes from the quotidian life of Medieval Muscovy with unprecedented variety and detail. All the intrigues and betrayals, torture and executions are marginalized and only rendered as scary stories from the remote past. The whole production was ultimately a

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<sup>412</sup> "...[П]росто изнемогающий под игом царского величия семьянин и слабый человек." Quoted in: Solovyeva, Inna. "Rabota khudozhestvennogo teatra nad piesami A.K. Tolstogo." // Solovyeva, I., and Vilenkin, V., eds., *Rezhisserskie ekzempliary Stanislavskogo*. in 3 vols., Vol. 1 "1898-1899." (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1980), 39.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

celebration of national culture and possessed overall positive and affirming tone.<sup>415</sup> The positive tone of the play also symbolically represents the optimistic expectations of the newly opened theatre company.

Tolstoy's play begins in Prince Shuiskii's house where the boyars are plotting against Godunov, the de-facto ruler of the country during Fyodor's reign. Directing the play, Stanislavsky chooses to frame this episode as a large feast. He later recalls it as one of his luckiest findings for the first *mise-en-scène* that immediately engaged spectators. Stanislavsky later remembered the feisty atmosphere the crew created during the performances: "The boyars' bright costumes, the servants bearing great platters with geese, whole pigs, whole barons of beef, fruit, vegetables, the barrels of wine that were rolled onto the stage, the wooden dishes and goblets I have brought from Nizhnii Novgorod, the slightly drunken guests, the beautiful Princess Mstislavskaia, as hostess, who passed among the guests with a huge glass of wine, the sound of happy and serious discussions, joking, and laughter, a long line of boyars signing the petition [for Tsar Fyodor to divorce tsarina because their marriage was childless], all this was new and unexpected at the time."<sup>416</sup>

The break that Stanislavsky referred to, but never quite explained, from the traditions of the "boyar" plays, according to my findings, generally means the final departure from the tradition of high heroic tragedy that still lingered even in Tolstoy's trilogy. The first Russian historical dramas in the 18th century were neoclassical pieces understood as "national" analogs to Greek and Roman plots that shaped the French theatre of the era. Tsars and boyars on stage were immediately associated with classical heroes, and had to act accordingly. "The boyar plays" on stage were solemn, minimalistic, and full of the conventions of "high" theatre, such as certain reciting techniques. Even Ostrovsky's idealized portrayal of Minin and Pozharsky, and Aleksey Tolstoy's choice of blank verse and "tragedy" as a genre subtitle owe

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<sup>415</sup> "The tragedy is generally stage in the major key." "In *Tsar Fyodor*, we see the spring of the people's and the state's life."

"Общий тон трагедии мажорный," "В "Фёдоре" – весна народной и государственной жизни."  
Quoted in: Solovyeva, 24.

<sup>416</sup> Stanislavsky, 181.

to that strong tradition. By the end of the 19th century, these stage conventions deteriorated into hollow and obsolete clichés, and their removal was quite welcome. In other words, Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko chose a genre that was ready for sweeping reform. Stanislavsky stated that he sought a break with tradition as much as possible: “Down with the old! Long live the new!”<sup>417</sup> Now, MAT took royal characters down from the pedestal and showed them eating, drinking, and living “normal” human life.

The great success of the play means that spectators quickly connected with such “humanized” historical figures. This play became a culturally significant experience of connection with the national past. In the mass consciousness, this experience quickly converged with the idea of historical accuracy, which was first welcomed by the spectators thirty years earlier when *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* debuted on stage. In fact, Stanislavsky achieved his grand artistic goal, believability, even with this very first project of his theatre. He made the spectators *believe* in the historical authenticity of what was being performed on stage, while it was a well-crafted artistic image of medieval Russia and not exactly a historical reconstruction: “Even if not everything is historically correct on stage, the most important thing is spectators’ belief.”<sup>418</sup> Even though we cannot categorize these productions as full-scale reconstructions they were still on a totally different level in comparison with most preceding historical performances, and created a strong theatrical effect of authenticity. In this case, we can observe the tension between authenticity and theatricality, which is artificial by definition.

Previously, set and prop design was more often considered to be work for craftsmen and not artists, with the brief exception of the discussed 1867 adaptation. In theatre, typical backgrounds used for any Russian historical plays showed the kremlin-style towers and walls that could be seen in many old Russian cities and towns, and the space on stage was organized and used in a conventional way. Now, the space on stage was designed for the specific production. MAT’s innovation was the usage of diagonal

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<sup>417</sup> Stanislavsky, 185.

<sup>418</sup> “Пусть на сцене будет не совсем исторически верно, главное, чтобы этому поверили.” Simov, Viktor. “Stanislavsky.” In Gurevich, L.I.A., ed., *O Stanislavskom. Sbornik vospominanii*. (1863-1938) (Moskva: VTO, 1948), 284.

perspective and lines. In the opening scene, “[t]he set consisted of a covered terrace, Russian style, with wooden columns, which occupied the right half of the stage and was cut off from the footlights and the auditorium by a balustrade, which hid the actors from the waist down.”<sup>419</sup> Luxurious background paintings, light and sound, and stage machinery for “special effects” were widely employed in theatres before but the Moscow Art Theatre started using them very differently, strictly in rhythm with all other aspects of a performance (mise-en-scènes, recitation, etc.).

Costumes in *Tsar Fyodor* gained a fame of their own because they were perceived as real pieces worn by medieval tsars and boyars, unlike the typical and often cheap-looking fare used in the state theatres. Again, Stanislavsky criticized clichés that existed before this production: “Costume, at that time, was equally bad. Almost nobody was interested in period, or collected antiques, fabrics and books. Costume suppliers only had three styles – ‘Faust’, ‘Huguenot’ and ‘Moliere’ – apart from our own boyars.”<sup>420</sup> MAT probably greatly helped to launch this antiquarian trend, but it was definitely emerging before that, during the 1860-90s, as we can see, for example, in the aforementioned royal costume balls. The costumes for *Tsar Fyodor*, however, were indeed “authentic,” in the sense that they could not be bought or ordered. Instead, they had to be designed, sewn, and embroidered by the members of the troupe. They conducted book research, studied the samples that were sold at fairs and sales, and did their best to recreate old sewing techniques. They also deliberately based their costumes on the most luxurious samples, probably originally worn mostly for special occasions. The results were spectacular, as all the costumes were extremely detailed and handcrafted, just as they would have been in the past.

Thus, the production was centered less on acting and more on the visuals: the costumes, the sets, and the props. Later, Stanislavsky admitted that this was a deliberate decision because the troupe was still inexperienced and its members had only recently begun to work, so they chose not to focus on acting. It was a good way to introduce the public to a different type of theatre (not centered around celebrity actors,

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<sup>419</sup> Stanislavsky, 180.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

let alone that there were still none in the MAT troupe), while still securing the initial success and attention through the production's entertainment value. Finally, we should remember that the founders of MAT emphasized their revolutionizing goals and downplayed their connection with the preceding theatrical traditions. For example, they worked in conjunction with the emerging historical and ethnographic trend. Still, this production of *Tsar Fyodor* opened a new era when the "Russian style" and national heritage were once again rediscovered and redefined in drama. The play remained in the MAT's repertoire for the next 51 years. Together with Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, Aleksey K. Tolstoy and MAT's *Tsar Fyodor* are the main historical dramatic pieces that connect the Russian theatrical cultures of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Thus, the plays about the Time of Troubles form a subgenre of historical drama that was developing in Russia in the course of 150 years. In the first such play, Sumarokov explored the nature of monarchy and extreme evil in humans in the character of the tyrannical tsar, Dmitrii the Pretender. Curiously, Stanislavsky's *Tsar Fyodor* is the inversion of that, namely, he is a portrayal of the tsar as a mere human burdened by the monarchical mission. During the 1900-1940s, MAT's production of Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor* becomes the final stage in the life of this subgenre in drama. Generally, the plays set in the Time of Troubles are very important for the history of modern Russian theatre from its emergence in the mid-18th-century until the early 20th century. On the one hand, Russian theatre of the high imperial era is commonly and justly known as a borrowed cultural practice that functioned as a form of popular entertainment. On the other hand, I have discovered that, earlier than any other cultural phenomena, Russian historical drama began to explore the Russian historical past and create the modern national and imperial myths that are based on the country's ancient roots, its fights for political independence, and an emphasized exceptionality. I have demonstrated that Russian theatre, the critical writings around it, and various other forms of performance (masquerades, patriotic memorial events, and historical balls) were integral to the creation of the national discourse, collective memory, and the problematization and exploration of modern Russian identity in the global context.

**APPENDIX:**  
**A LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

All the illustrations belong to the public domain.

CHAPTER 1.

Fig. 1.1. Postures of actors in classical tragedy. From the book by Fransisco Lang, *Dissertatio de Actione Scenica*, Munich, 1727.

In Vishnevskaiia, I.L. *Aplodismenty v proshloe*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo literaturnogo instituta imeni A.M. Gor'kogo, 1996, 107.

Fig. 1.2. Sketches of hats and make-up for tragedies *Khorev* and *Sinav and Truvor*, by Sumarokov.  
In Vishnevskaiia, 79

Fig. 1.3. Actress P.I. Zhemchugova as Eliana in André Grétry's comic opera *The Samnite Marriages*  
In Danilov, S.S. *Ocherki po istorii russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*. Moskva-Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1948, 112

Fig. 1.4. The print on the frontispiece of the first edition of Sumarokov's *Khorev*.  
In Vishnevskaiia, 73.

Fig. 1.5. Ivan Dmitrevskii as Starodum in Fonvizin's *The Minor*.  
In Danilov, 64.

Fig. 1.6. I. Valeriani. A drawing of a set.  
In Danilov, 80

Fig. 1.7. I. Valeriani. A drawing of the set for Sumarokov's ballet *The Haven of Virtue*.  
In Vishnevskaiia, 199.

CHAPTER 2.

Fig. 2.1. Ekaterina Semenova as Kseniia in Ozerov's *Dmitrii Donskoi* (1807)  
In Danilov, 128.

Fig. 2.2 (left). Gonzago's drawing of the design for Ozerov's *Oedipus in Athens*.  
In Danilov, 128.

Fig. 2.3. Gonzago's drawing of the design for *Ozerov's Dmitrii Donskoi*.  
In Danilov, 128.

Fig. 2.4. N. Fedorov. A drawing of the "Slavic room" for Romantic historical drama.  
In Danilov, 144.



### CHAPTER 3.

Fig. 3.1. Prov Sadovskii (1818-1872); Liubov Nikulina-Kositsyna (1829-1868). Famous actors, known for their roles in Ostrovsky's plays.

In Schuler, Catherine. *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2009, 230.

Fig. 3.2. Glikeriia Fedotova (1846-1925) as Katerina in Ostrovsky's *The Storm*.

In Schuler, 230.

Fig. 3.3. Polina Strepetova (1850-1903) as Katerina.

In Schuler, 230.

Fig. 3.4, 3.5. V.G. Schwartz, The drawings of Ivan the Terrible's costumes.

In Syrkina, F. Ia. *Russkoe teatral'no-dekoratsionnoe iskusstvo vtoroi poloviny XIX veka*. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1956, 48-50.

Fig. 3.6. Shishkov, M.A., "The Tavern at the Luthuanian Border." A drawing of the set design for *Boris Godunov*.

In Syrkina, 59.

Fig. 3.7. K.F. Waltz. A drawing of the standardized set design.

In Syrkina, 102.

Fig. 3.8. Shishkov, M.A. "Tsarina Maria Fyodorovna's Chamber." A drawing of the set design for A.K. Tolstoy's play *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*.

In Syrkina, 279.

Fig. 3.9. Shishkov, M.A. "Bread Square in Zamoskvorechye." A drawing of the set design for A.K. Tolstoy's play *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*.

In Syrkina, 47.

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