

In Defense of Empire: “The Bronze Horseman” and “To the Slanderers of Russia”*

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Pushkin’s status as imperial poet has been much explored in his “southern” works; to write about Russia’s southern conquests was to address and continually reestablish Russia’s “European” identity. On the other hand, Pushkin’s poetic assertions of the Russian Empire’s rights over Poland in his 1831 anti-Polish poems was long purposely ignored or glossed over by scholars, since it did not match Pushkin’s idealized portrait.² Nor was much sense of ambiguity, of potential alliance with the colonized Other, to be found in such poems as “Klevetnikam Rossii” and “Borodinskaia godovshchina.” The assertions and tropes are balder, indeed strident, displaying sentiments much rarer to find in Pushkin’s “southern” works, except for the odic epilogue to “Kavkazskii plennik.”³

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2 See L. Frizman, “Pushkin i Pol’skoe Vosstanie 1830–1831 godov. Neskol’ko vstupil’nykh slov,” *Voprosy literatury* 3 (1992), pp. 209–237.

3 See G. Fedotov, “Pevets imperii i svobody,” in R. A. Gal’tseva, ed., *Pushkin v russkoi filisofskoi kritike: konets XIX – pervaiia polovina XX v.v.* (repr., Moscow, 1990), pp. 356–375.

Yet Pushkin's "Klevetnikam Rossii" is a bookend to his status as imperial poet vis-à-vis the Russian Orient, although a bookend with which critics, and some contemporaries, have been quite uncomfortable. As Megan Dixon points out, Pushkin's anti-Polish poems of 1831, "Pered grobnitseiu sviatoi," "Klevetnikam Rossii," and "Borodinskaia godovshchina," have been considered essentially self-explanatory, mimetic versions of Pushkin's (frequently unwelcome or embarrassing) opinions, or simply condemned as substandard, rather than being analyzed as poetic texts.⁴ Dixon, as do others, classifies them as odes, and finds for the poems a poetic statement of Pushkin's call for a kind of national unity and national narrative.

I would like in particular to look at some of the allusions in "Klevetnikam Rossii" in the context of Pushkin's role as imperial poet. The first two stanzas of the poem are as follows:

О чем шумите вы, народные витии?
Зачем анафемой грозите вы России?
Что возмутило вас? волнения Литвы?
Оставьте: это спор славян между собою,
Домашний, старый спор, уж взвешенный судьбою,
Вопрос, которого не разрешите вы.

Уже давно между собою
Враждуют эти племена;
Не раз клонилась под грозою
То их, то наша сторона.
Кто устоит в неравном споре:
Кичливый лях, иль верный росс?
Славянские ль ручьи сольются в русском море?
Оно ль иссякнет? вот вопрос.⁵

4 Megan Dixon, "Repositioning Pushkin and Poems of the Polish Uprising," in David L. Ransel and Bozena Shallcross, eds., *Polish Encounters, Russian Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 49–73.

5 Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, tom. 3, vyp. 1 (Moscow, 1948), p. 269.

Speaking, as Dixon notes, “right past” the Poles and addressing himself to the Europeans who considered the Polish insurrection a matter of national independence, Pushkin chides them for interfering in a “domestic, ancient dispute,” one which is moreover already decided by fate.⁶ Citing past battles that have been won by both sides, Russia and Poland, against each other, stretching back centuries, Pushkin assigns for the Europeans (and, many commentators note, for the Russian audience⁷) quite a distinct role for each group: “kichlivyi liakh” (conceited or bumptious Liakh, a derogatory and simultaneously archaic term for Pole) or “vernii ross,” a true Russ. Pushkin, as he had also done in *Boris Godunov*, uses Karamzin’s term for the Poles. When Karamzin describes how the Poles burned Moscow in 1611, he calls them “liakhi.” Where Karamzin, in the same description, uses “rossiian,” Pushkin uses the more archaic (and odic) “ross.” Pushkin’s lines in the poem, aside from alluding to the Polish role in supporting Dmitry the Pretender in his quest to take over the Russian throne and to Pushkin’s own play about Boris Godunov, may well refer to specific Karamzinian passages. “Na razvalinakh pylaiushchei Moskvy,” for example, a line of the poem that we will examine below, evokes not only the Moscow burned during the war with Napoleon, but the Moscow burned by invading Poles during the Time of Troubles. As Karamzin describes it,

Москва пустая горела двое суток. Где угасал огонь, там Ляхи, выезжая из Китая, снова зажигали, в Белом городе, в Деревянном и в предместьях. Наконец везде утхло пламя, ибо все сделалось пеплом, среди коего возвышались только черные стены, церкви и погребка каменные. Сия громада золы, в окружности на двадцать верст или более, курилась еще несколько дней, так что Ляхи в Китае и Кремле, дыша смрадом, жили как в тумане – но ликовали; грабили казну Царскую: взяли всю утварь наших древних Венценосцев, их короны,

6 Dixon, “Repositioning Pushkin,” p. 59.

7 Olga Murav’eva, “‘Vrazhdy bessmyslennoi pozor’: Oda ‘Klevetnikam Rossii’ v otsenkakh sovremennikov,” in *Novyi mir* 6 (1994), pp. 198–204.

жезлы, сосуды, одежды богатые, чтобы послать к Сигизмунду или употребить вместо денег на жалованье войску; сносили добычу, найденную в гостином дворе, в жилищах купцов и людей знатных; сдирали с икон оклады; делили на равные части золото, серебро, жемчуг, камни и ткани драгоценные, с презрением кидая медь, олово, холсты, сукна; рядились в бархаты и штофы; пили из бочек венгерское и мальвазию. Изобиловали всем роскошным, не имея только нужного: хлеба! Бражничали, играли в зернь и в карты, распутствовали и пьяные резали друг друга!..⁸

Karamzin's sense of insult is palpable here; the Poles relight any fires that might be going out, they steal even the coverings of religious icons, they strike at the heart of Russian government, wealth, church, and history itself. They destroy culture. The Russians are very much “we”—“взяли всю утварь наших древних Венценосцев.” For Pushkin, the possibility that the “Liakhi” are superior to Russians, or simply the guiltless victims of Russians, is inadmissible. The Poles had taken sides with Napoleon, another reason for their unworthiness, in Pushkin's mind, to be independent of Russia. The question that, as Pushkin notes, “you [Europeans] will not decide” (“ne reshite vy”), is: will the Slavic rivers flow into the Russian sea, or will it dry up? The Russian Empire is quite firmly composed not only of all of Russia's Eastern dominions, but of Poland as well, and it must be, he affirms, the leader of the Slavs as well. The only way forward is to affirm the “Russian sea.”

Pushkin with “Klevetnikam Rossii” asserts a local, tribal history that precedes and trumps the ideology of East and West or Russia and Europe. He resituates the issue of Russia's battle to control Poland: it takes place entirely within the Russian Empire, within the Slavic world. It is not an issue of East versus West but of the Slavic world versus the non-Slavic world, with Poland affirmed as a part of the Slavic world.

8 N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo* (repr., Moscow, 1989), vol. 12, chap. 4, columns 173–174.

Оставьте нас: вы не читали
Сии кровавые скрижали;
Вам непонятна, вам чужда
Сия семейная вражда;
Для вас безмолвны Кремль и Прага;
Бессмысленно прельщает вас
Борьбы отчаянной отвага—
И ненавидите вы нас...⁹

As Dixon notes, speaking of all of Pushkin's poems of the Polish uprising,

What Pushkin creates in the poems is not just partisan poetry, not just anti-Polish propaganda, but the elevated voice of historical necessity. The poems reflect Pushkin's desire to pull the cultural center of gravity eastward, closer to Russia and away from exclusive location in Europe. Ironically, it is again Poland's stubborn uprising against Russian rule that gave Russia, and by extension Pushkin, the opportunity to make this desired shift in gravity visible to the rest of Europe and to Russian society.¹⁰

Pushkin reverses the typical Russia/West roles. Here, it is not Russia that is ignorant of history, or lacking it—it is the West that fails to appreciate the intricacies of a Slavic past of which it is ignorant. The Kremlin and Praga, the area of Warsaw that both Suvorov (in 1794) and Paskevich (in 1831) seized in their respective wars, are “wordless” (Для вас безмолвны) to Europeans, but speak volumes to Russians and Poles. Indeed, this “bezmolvie” has important connotations; a “fixed expression in Karamzin,”¹¹ it becomes the all-important ending to Pushkin's *Boris*

9 Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, bk. 1, p. 269.

10 Dixon, “Repositioning Pushkin,” p. 64.

11 Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 138.

Godunov: “Narod bezmolvstvuet.”¹² The bezmolvie here, however, belongs to Europe. The allusion to Boris is important, for he, brought down by the Polish-supported False Dmitry, as well as the unruly portions of southern and southeastern Russia,¹³ is a composite figure.

Caught between the two great mythic forces of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, between oriental despot and westernizing monarch, the received image of Boris combines elements of both.¹⁴

The very story of Boris itself, so obviously alluded to here, “joins an ancient, Orthodox defense of autocracy with the more contemporary image of Napoleon the Usurper,” as Caryl Emerson describes it.¹⁵ In 1812, the Poles once again supported a usurper, Napoleon himself, and Pushkin reminds his readers that Russia must rely on its autocratic, orthodox, and I would argue, imperial identity, to overcome the threat, and in so doing, save Europe, even if Europe itself may be ignorant of the fact. Boris himself, of course, is potentially also a usurper, but destruction comes with the appearance of the pretender.

Some commentators find that “I nenavidite vy nas” is inclusive of the Poles. In the poem, the Russians and Poles are first linked by the corresponding Polish taking of the Kremlin and the Russian taking of Praga, then further linked by being hated together by Western Europe.¹⁶ Europeans have not read the “bloody tables” of the ugly wars among the Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Russians, and they are foreign to the “family quarrel.” They are “thoughtlessly dazzled” by displays of desperate courage; their consideration is all surface. In the next section of the poem, both the burning ruins of Moscow and the allusion to

12 Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, p. 98.

13 Emerson, *Boris Godunov*, p. 17.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

15 *Ibid.*

16 See Dixon, “Repositioning Pushkin,” p. 59.

Napoleon are made explicit:

За что ж? ответствуйте: за то ли,
Что на развалинах пылающей Москвы
Мы не признали наглой воли
Того, под кем дрожали вы?
За то ль, что в бездну повалили
Мы тяготеющий над царствами кумир
И нашей кровью искупили
Европы вольность, честь и мир?..¹⁷

The burning of Moscow by the French, unbeknownst to them, is actually a reenactment of the burning of Moscow by the Poles, both events at the time indicating Russian weakness, but a weakness that was ultimately followed by strength, presaging a later victory. The second enactment of this burning has saved the West; by recognizing Napoleon for the tyrant he was, which the West did not, and in defeating him, Russia paved the way towards Waterloo. And the defeat has required sacrifice on the part of Russia, as the burning ruins of Moscow attest. Not Russia, but the West, produced the ultimate usurper, whom the Russians, because of their experience with pretenders, not only recognized but also did not fear to fight. These attacks also taught the lesson of the need for Russians to tell their own version of history, of the role taken by the historian, and by the poet. The history of the people belongs to the poet, as Pushkin famously said in a rejoinder to Karamzin's inscription to Alexander I that history belongs to the tsar.¹⁸

The final section of the poem intensifies the rhetoric:

Вы грозны на словах — попробуйте на деле!
Иль старый богатырь, покойный на постеле,
Не в силах завинтить свой измайльский штык?

17 Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, bk. 1, p. 270.

18 Emerson, *Boris Godunov*, p. 141.

Иль русского царя уже бессильно слово?
Иль нам с Европой спорить ново?
Иль русский от побед отвык?
Иль мало нас? Или от Перми до Тавриды,
От финских хладных скал до пламенной Колхиды,
От потрясенного Кремля
До стен недвижимого Китая,
Стальной щетиною сверкая,
Не встанет русская земля?..
Так высылайте ж к нам, витии,
Своих озлобленных сынов:
Есть место им в полях России,
Среди нечуждых им гробов.¹⁹

The Russia that asserts its claims over Poland, bidding the West to be quiet and cede Russia's matters to Russia, stands as a mighty empire. The references in the poem are to the vast size and past expansion of the Russian Empire: Perm', in the Urals, was annexed by Muscovy in 1472, whereas the Crimea and Georgia had come under Russian control by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Pushkin refers as well to the taking of the Turkish fort of Ismail in Bessarabia in 1790:

Иль старый богатырь, покойный на постеле,
Не в силах завинтить свой измаильский штык?

Pushkin had been exiled in Bessarabia, and while there, had made a special trip to Ismail to view the battle site. At least two scholars see in these lines a "riposte to *Don Juan VII and VIII*,"²⁰ in which Byron

19 Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, bk. 1, p. 270.

20 Peter Cochrane, "Byron's Version of Russia," (revised version of a paper given to the London Byron Society) [http://www.internationalbyronsociety.org/pdf_files/russia.pdf] (accessed January 19, 2007), p. 13; Waclaw Lednicki, *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman: The Story of a Masterpiece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), p. 104, note 8.

mocks Russian imperial rapaciousness and Suvorov, the Russian commander who took the fort. For example, Byron writes:

Suwarrow chiefly was on the alert,
Surveying, drilling, ordering, jesting, pondering;
For the Man was, we safely may assert,
A thing to wonder at beyond most wondering;
Hero, buffoon, half demon and half dirt,
Praying, instructing, desolating, plundering;
Now Mars, now Momus, and when bent to storm
A Fortress, Harlequin in Uniform.²¹

Momus, the Greek God of satire, is clearly to the point in Byron's mocking description of Suvorov. It was Suvorov, of course, who also took Warsaw in 1794, and hence for symbolic reasons, Paskevich sent Suvorov's grandson to tell the tsar the news of the fall of Warsaw in 1831, upon which the tsar promoted him from captain to colonel. Hence Pushkin creates a rejoinder to Byron along with his other interlocutors here, and directly links Russia's southern expansion with the control of Poland. West is linked with East.

By using the term "bogatyř," Pushkin also places the taking of Ismail into a kind of mythic space, and simultaneously asserts Russia's historic specificity; these are Russian wars, Russian accomplishments by Russian bogatyřs, that the West neither shares nor understands, and which Western poets, such as Byron, only mock. Hence this is a political and a poetic answer. By asserting the links between Suvorov as victor at Ismail and Suvorov as victor in Warsaw, Pushkin links Russia's Eastern and Western dominions as cocreators of Russia's imperial identity. Not only have these battles, both Eastern and Western, been resolved in Russia's favor, but they put Poland on an even keel with Turkey and the Crimea in order to undercut European claims to Poland as part of the West. The "shaken" Kremlin, shaken not only by Napoleon but by the

21 Byron, *Don Juan*, canto 7, stanza 55.

earlier Polish attacks, is equated to the wall of China, the place on which Chaadaev (who incidentally wholeheartedly approved of Pushkin's anti-Polish poems) noted Russia rested one elbow, and between them, stretches the Russian land, ready to sparkle with bristling steel at a moment's notice. As Waclaw Lednicki points out, the description of the Russian Empire stretching "from Perm to the Taurides / from the cold Finnish cliffs to fiery Colchis," from the Kremlin to the Wall of China, is also a direct response to Jean-François Casimir Delavigne's "La Varsoivienne," a poem written to embolden the Polish insurrectionists,

in which he mentioned places and regions (Egypt, the Kremlin, from the Alps to Tabor, from the Ebro to the Black Sea) where Polish soldiers fought and perished.²²

One might add, Polish soldiers *under Napoleon*. Delavigne (1793–1843), was a French poet and dramatist who was very famous in his own time; his anthem "La Parisienne" rivaled "La Marseillaise" in popularity.²³ Delavigne's "La Varsoivienne," written as a companion piece to "La Parisienne," is a Marseillaise-like anthem encouraging the Poles to rise against the Russians. It includes the stanza

Pour toi, Pologne, ils combattront, tes fils.
Plus fortunés qu'au temps où la victoire
Mêlait leur cendre aux sables de Memphis,
Où le Kremlin s'écroula sous leur gloire.
Des Alpes au Thabor, de l'Èbre au Pont-Euxin,
Ils sont tombés, vingt ans, sur la rive étrangère;
Cette foix, ô ma mère,
Ceux qui mourront pour toi dormiront sur ton sein.

Polonais, à la baïonnette!

22 Lednicki, *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman*, p. 104, note 10.

23 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casimir_Delavigne] (accessed January 19, 2007).

IN DEFENSE OF EMPIRE

C'est le cri par nous adopté;
Qu'en roulant le tambour répète:
A la baïonnette!
Vive la liberté!²⁴

For you, Poland, they will battle, your sons.
More fortunate than at the time when victory
Mixed their ashes in the sand of Memphis,
Or the Kremlin crumbled under their glory.
From the Alps to Tabor, from the Ebro to the Black Sea,
They have fallen, twenty years, on the foreign shore;
This time, o my mother,
Those who will die for you will sleep in your bosom.

Poles, to the bayonet!
That is the cry we have taken up;
So that as we roll the tambourine repeats:
Poles, to the bayonet!
Long live liberty!

Pushkin's response to Delavigne created a long-lasting poetic pattern. Dixon, though she does not refer to the Delavigne poem, notes:

Prefiguring the geographical reach [Pushkin] would later claim in "Exegi monumentum" in 1836, he stretches Russia from Perm' to the Taurides, from the cold Finnish cliffs to burning Colchis, from the Kremlin to the Great Wall of China. Poland itself disappears and becomes insignificant compared to the vast extent of the empire. Questions become assertions as Pushkin asks, using anaphora with the particle "il'," "Has the word of the Russian tsar lost its power? Or is it new for us to quarrel with Europe? Or has the Russian lost the taste of victory? Or are there so few of us?" The

24 Casimir Delavigne, *Poésies de Casimir Delavigne de l'Académie française*, nouvelle édition: Messéniennes, chants populaires, poésies diverse, dernier chants, poèmes, ballades sur l'Italie (Paris: Didier, Libraire-Editeur, 1856), pp. 140–143, p. 141.

pronoun “*nas*,” “we,” again links the poet-speaker firmly with the people or “*narod*” for whom he is speaking: he is becoming the “*glas narodnoi very*,” “*nash vernyi glas*.”²⁵

“*Klevetnikam Rossii*” ends with perhaps the strongest language to be found in the poem: an invitation to send Europe’s resentful/embittered sons to take their place amongst the “not unfamiliar” graves of their countrymen, a clear reminder of the multitudes of fallen French soldiers in their disastrous retreat from Russia. This, too, uses imagery from Delavigne, who speaks frequently of the young Polish soldiers dying in foreign lands. In fact, Pushkin takes Delavigne’s praise of the fact that for once, young Poles will be dying on their home soil in the Polish uprising and inverts it, “inviting” them to come and take their place amidst the French (and Polish) graves of 1812. “*Klevetnikam Rossii*,” whatever its other qualities, is a clear objection, on Pushkin’s part, to what he sees as injurious poetic attacks by the West via such poets as Byron and Delavigne.

“*Klevetnikam Rossii*,” of course, is tightly bound up with a whole series of poems and events having to do not only with Russia’s control over Poland but also with Pushkin’s relationship to Mickiewicz, which was by turns friendly, rivalrous, and antagonistic. “The Bronze Horseman,” written primarily as a response to Mickiewicz’s “Digression” in Part III of his “Forefathers’ Eve,” was a further example of that poetic and personal dialogue—Pushkin’s rejoinder to Mickiewicz. The “*kumir*” of “*Klevetnikam Rossii*” perhaps presages the use of that term for the equestrian figure of Peter in “The Bronze Horseman.” Lednicki and many others have commented on the specifics of Pushkin’s responses to, and revisions of, in “The Bronze Horseman,” many particular lines, images, and critiques of Mickiewicz’s “Digression.” These include the description of the flood, the autocratic creation of Petersburg, the marshy location and cold weather, the rosy cheeks rather

25 Dixon, “Repositioning Pushkin,” p. 59.

than the “crab-scarlet” ones, the Field of Mars, the depiction of the equestrian statue, and the identification of Russia with Peter’s horse.²⁶

Mickiewicz draws particular attention, in “Digression,” to Russia’s babel of foreign languages, its empire composed of “backward” Orientals among other mocked ethnic groups, and its imperial rapacity. Speaking of the snow, a sign, as commentators have pointed out, of the metaphor of the cold climate as “lifeless, autocratic oppression,”²⁷ Mickiewicz writes:

At times this vast, engulfing hurricane
Sweeps from the very poles; unchecked and swift
As far as the Black Sea it scours the plain,
Piling its swirling snow-clouds drift on drift.
Oft it engulfs kibitkas in its path,
Like Arabs smothered by the simoon’s wrath.²⁸

Czasem ogromny huragan wylata
Prosto z biegunów; niewstrzymany w biegu
Aż do Euxinu równinę zamiata,
Po całej drodze miecąc chmury śniegu;
Często podróżne kibitki zakopie,

26 Lednicki, *Pushkin’s Bronze Horseman*; Maria Banerjee, “Pushkin’s ‘The Bronze Horseman’: An Agonistic Vision,” *Modern Language Studies*, 8, no. 2 (Spring, 1978), pp. 47–64. A recent book by D. P. Ivinskii, *Pushkin i Mickiewicz: Istoriia literaturnykh otnoshenii*, goes into great detail comparing “Digression” with “The Bronze Horseman.” D. P. Ivinskii, *Pushkin i Mickiewicz, Istoriia literaturnykh otnoshenii* (Moscow, 2003), see in particular chap. 10, and “‘Mednyi vsadnik’ i ‘Otryvok’ III chasti ‘Dziadov,’” pp. 287–324. Maria Banerjee notes that “within the enclave of Pushkin’s poem, the symbolic presence of Poland as the victim lends its tragic burden to the Russian Imperial Idea, thus assuring it at least a literary permanence,” p. 51.

27 Michael Basker, “Notes of Confusion: On the Footnotes to *The Bronze Horseman*,” in Robert Reid and Joe Andrew, *Ashgabat Two Hundred Years of Pushkin*, vol. 2, *Alexander Pushkin: Myth and Monument* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 139–157, p. 142.

28 Lednicki, *Pushkin’s Bronze Horseman*, p. 110.

Jak symuni błędnych Libów przy Kanopie.²⁹

This Orientalization of Russia, the Arab desert of the North, becomes more and more overt:

Whither they march, or why, they do not know—
And no one asks. Here a Mongolian
Is seen, with slanting eyes and puffy face;
And there a homesick Lithuanian,
With pallid brow and slow, uncertain pace.
Some men have bows, some English muskets hold;
The Kalmucks carry bowstrings stiff with cold.
Their officers?—A German in a coach,
Humming his Schiller's sentimental lays,
Whacks on the back the men as they approach;
A Frenchman, whistling his brisk Marseillaise—
A strayed philosopher—seeks a career,
And asks the Kalmuck chief, who stands near by,
How they may get supplies most cheaply here.³⁰

Żaden z nich nie wie, gdzie idzie i po co;
Żaden nie pyta. Tu widzisz Mogoła
Z nabrzmałym licem, małym, krzywym okiem;
A tam chłop biedny z litewskiego siola,
Wybladły, tęskny, idzie chorym krokiem.
Tu błyszczą strzelby angielskie, tam łuki
I zmarzłą noszą cięciwę Kalmuki.
Ich oficery? — Tu Niemiec w karecie,
Nuąc Szyllera pieśń sentymentalną,
Wali spotkanych żołnierzy po grzbiecie.
Tam Francuz gwizdząc w nos pieśń liberalną,
Błądny filozof, karyjery szuka

29 Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziela*, vol. 3: *Utwory dramatyczne* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1955), "Dziady," part III, "Ustęp," p. 268.

30 Lednicki, *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman*, pp. 111–112.

I gada teraz z dowódczą Kałmuka,
Jakby najtaniej wojsku żywność kupić.³¹

In Petersburg itself, of which Mickiewicz says “such a pile demons alone could raise,”³² there is a babel of languages and advertisements:

From every housefront here a signboard calls:
Amid so many tongues, such varied script,
The eye and ear find Babel. “There,” one tells,
“A Khan of the Kirghiz, a Senator,
Head of the Polish Office, Achmet dwells.”
“Here Monsieur Joco,” states another door,
“Gives lessons in Parisian French. He plays
Bass viol in the band; he overlooks
Distilleries and schools; he also cooks.”³³

Na domach pełno tablic i napisów;
Śród pism tak różnych, języków tak wielu,
Wzrok, ucho błądzi jak w wieży Babelu.
Napis: *Tu mieszka Achmet, Chan Kirgisów,*
Rządzący polskich spraw departamentem,
Senator. — Napis: *Tu monsieur Żoko*
Lekcyje daje paryskim akcentem,
Jest kuchtą dworskim, wódczanym poborcą,
*Basem w orkiestrze, przy tym szkół dozorcą*³⁴

Here is the ultimate fear of the Westernized Pole: that Achmet, a Kirghiz, will be head of the Polish office—Poles, too, will be Orientalized and subject to the whims of other imperial subjects. In the section on the Field of Mars and the review of the army, which takes up a large portion

31 Mickiewicz, “Ustęp,” pp. 270–271.

32 Lednicki, *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman*, p. 116.

33 Ibid.

34 Mickiewicz, “Ustęp,” pp. 277–278.

of the “Digression,” Mickiewicz combines East and West in their imperial victimhood to Russia (emphasis mine):

For here the tsar removes his lancet’s rust,
Ere forth from Petersburg his arm is thrust
And by his slashing is all Europe maimed.
But ere he tries how deep the wound may go,
Ere he finds means to stanch the bloody flow,
He cuts the pulse of sultan and of shah,
And drains the life blood of Sarmatia.³⁵

Bo tu car naprzód lancety szlifuje,
Nim wyciągnąwszy rękę z Petersburga,
Tnie tak, że cała Europa poczuje;
Lecz nim wyśledzi, jak głęboka rana,
Nim plastr obmyśli od nagłej krwi straty,
Już car puls przetnie szacha i sultana
I krew wypuści spod serca Sarmaty.³⁶

Sarmatia is another name for Poland/Lithuania; Lednicki, in a footnote placed at the end of the final line quoted, writes:

The poet alludes in these two lines to the wars of Nicholas I against Turkey and Persia and his reprisals against Poland. See pp. 104 [“To the Slanderers of Russia”], 107–108 [“The Anniversary of Borodino”], above, for Pushkin’s glorification of these wars.³⁷

Pushkin, in his own description of the Field of Mars in “The Bronze Horseman,” rewrites Mickiewicz’s harsh critique as praise for the Field of Mars and the “odnoobraznaia krasivost’” of the troops, turning Mickiewicz’ criticism of the monotony of the uniforms into a positive.

35 Lednicki, *Pushkin’s Bronze Horseman*, p. 123.

36 Mickiewicz, “Ustep,” p. 286.

37 Lednicki, *Pushkin’s Bronze Horseman*, p. 123, note 27.

Люблю воинственную живость
Потешных Марсовых полей,
Пехотных ратей и коней
Однообразную красоту,
В их стройно зыблемом строю
Лоскутья сих знамен победных,
Сиянье шапок этих медных,
На сквозь простреленных в бою.
Люблю, военная столица,
Твоей твердыни дым и гром,
Когда полнощная царица
Дарует сына в царской дом,
Или победу над врагом
Россия снова торжествует,³⁸

In the last two lines quoted, Pushkin also may well be referring to the grand celebration held on the Field of Mars by Nicholas, with nineteen thousand troops and eighty-four guns,³⁹ to rejoice over the defeat of Poland, a celebration that was also commemorated by an official painting. Mickiewicz, in “Digression,” responds very strongly to Pushkin’s linkage of Eastern and Western parts of the Russian Empire in his poems of the Polish uprising, and attempts rhetorically to turn Russia into something quite separate from Poland, something once again Oriental, backward, and laughable. Pushkin, in turn, responds to Mickiewicz’ “Digression” by asserting the beauty of the city, the appropriateness of the Finnish marshes for its creation, and creates a mythic, yet also problematized, vision of Peter the Great. Clearly, “The Bronze Horseman” is only partly odic, whereas the anti-Polish poems are odes, and the terms of the response, as so often noted, are therefore in

38 Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, p. 137.

39 See T. J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 380. He also notes that a special painting of the event was commissioned, which included Pushkin in it.

different poetic registers in different parts of the poem. Harsha Ram notes:

For all their conventionally odic belligerency, Pushkin's poems of 1831 also signal a new kind of politics, for which the Polish uprising paradoxically became an occasion to proclaim the existence of a common Slavic world and to signal a profound cultural fissure between Russia and western Europe.⁴⁰

Although Mickiewicz declares himself to be on the opposite side of the fissure, "The Bronze Horseman" seems to signal a consolidation of the reaffirmation of Russia's imperial and autocratic stature with a concomitant appreciation for some of its costs. As Dixon says of the 1831 poems,

The thrill of battle was part of the energy in Pushkin's creative process. His confrontation with Poland propelled him into the position of national poet and confirmed his sense of poetic mastery.⁴¹

Hence "The Bronze Horseman," a response to Mickiewicz's own response to Pushkin's poems of 1831, successfully takes on the powerful national meaning that Pushkin had hoped to forge with his 1831 poems, poems that were complexly constructed and led to one of Pushkin's greatest works, but that ultimately found favor with only part of their intended audience.

40 Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 214.

41 Dixon, "Repositioning Pushkin," p. 66.