

## Between Public and Private: Re-Figuring Politics in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*

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Alexander Pushkin went about, quite deliberately, to write an historical drama without the conventional romantic sub-plot. He remarked in 1829 in reference to his *Boris Godunov*: "A tragedy without love has appealed to my imagination."<sup>1</sup> In this, he was probably following the advice of Voltaire who railed against "love intrigues, often foreign to the subject, and so often debased by idle buffooneries."<sup>2</sup> And with his drama *Orestes*, the French playwright made the following claim: "I have at least given my countrymen some idea of a *tragedy without love*, without confidants, and without episodes" (italics mine).<sup>3</sup> The romantic sub-plot, in Voltaire's view, detracted from the *gravitas* of the main political/military plot-line. He therefore argued for a clear separation of romance and politics.<sup>4</sup> But while Voltaire simply omits a romantic sub-plot, Pushkin "lays bare" his rejection of it within *Boris Godunov*, thereby critically engaging the tradition. Furthermore, his inclusion of "buffooneries" in his drama and his indebtedness to Shakespeare, whom Voltaire considered "a barbarian," suggest that Pushkin may have had somewhat different motives in excising romance than did Voltaire.

The absence of a viable romantic sub-plot in an historical tragedy is by no means a minor omission, for it was one of the most stable features of the genre before Pushkin, in both Russia and the West, and, as I will argue, was central in the elaboration of the genre's political messages.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 14 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk, 1937–59), 46. All subsequent references to Pushkin will be given in parentheses in the text by volume and page number.

<sup>2</sup> Voltaire, *Seven Plays by Voltaire*, trans. W.F. Fleming (New York: Howard Fertig, 1988), 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>4</sup> Voltaire's remarks specifically concern the romantic sub-plot in historical drama, rather than romance in general. He wrote in a dedicatory letter to the Marquis Scipio Maffei on the publication of his historical drama *Merope*: "... [love] is certainly of all the passions the most truly theatrical, the most fruitful in sentiments, and admits of the greatest variety; it ought, therefore, no doubt, to be the soul of a dramatic performance, or entirely to be banished from it; if love is not tragical, it is insipid; and when it is tragical, it should reign alone; it was never made for a second place" (*Seven Plays*, 9).

<sup>5</sup> There is ample reason to believe that Pushkin was aware of these issues, for he expressed a profound ambivalence over the conventional conflation of romantic and political rhetoric in a

Specifically, the concept of romantic love had for centuries been an essential component in conceptualizing or figuring monarchic rule.<sup>6</sup> It served as a metaphor of sorts for understanding the relationship of the public and the private spheres, the former traditionally referring to those holding government office and the latter negatively defined as referring to everyone else.<sup>7</sup>

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number of works. His most pointed words on the subject were contained in the opening of his ode "Liberty" (1817) in which the lyric subject banishes Aphrodite, referred to as "Cythera's feeble princess," and then calls on "the proud singer of freedom" to smash his "effeminate lyre." Politics and romance, he makes clear, do not, or should not, mix. Later, in 1825, while at work on *Boris Godunov*, Pushkin prepared a collection of his verses for publication. He chose to open the collection, containing some of his most politically-charged poems, with an epigraph from Horace, which could be innocently translated: "Youth sings of love—the man gives voice to anxieties." However, the final word in the Latin epigram—*tumultus*—carries the more radical meanings of "rebellion" or "uprising" See Iurii Lotman, "Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin. Biografiia pisatel'ia," in *Pushkin* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo–SPG, 1995), 102. Pushkin expresses a disdain for the mingling of romance and politics within the historical drama, in particular in his critique of V. A. Ozerov's *Dimitrii Donskoi*. His sharpest criticism is reserved for the romantic heroine, Kseniia, Dimitrii's love interest: "What national spirit is there in Kseniia, who in the middle of Dimitrii's encampment discusses parental authority with a confidante, in iambic hexameters" (11, 40). Along with the unlikelihood of the scene and the stylized speech of the characters, Pushkin clearly rejects Ozerov's attempt to link the romantic and military or political plot-lines.

<sup>6</sup> This rhetoric was not confined to historical drama, but pervaded the discourse on monarchic power. Consider this letter in praise of Elizabeth I of England written by Sir John Harrington in 1606: "... speech did win all affections and her subjects did try to show all love to her commands; for she would say her state did require her to command what she knew her people would willingly do from their own love to her. Herein did she show her wisdom fully; for, Who did choose to lose her confidence? or, Who would withhold a show of love and obedience when their sovereign said it was their own choice and not her compulsion? Surely she did play well her tables to gain obedience thus without constraint" (quoted in G. Blakemore Evans, *Elizabethan-Jacobean Drama: The Theatre in its Time* [New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1988], 180). Political and romantic discourses are thoroughly fused in this passage. Love is presented as a key ingredient to a happy government as it is to a happy home. Romantic discourse thus creates an idealized space in which public and private identities can mix and mingle in such a way that, as Jonathan Goldberg argues, absolutist rule is "corporealized, familiarized, and naturalized," while private life is granted a certain dignity. See "Fatherly Authority: The Politics of Stuart Family Images," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 4.

<sup>7</sup> My work on the politics of romance is indebted to research in history and the social sciences that has traced the complex, mutually-defining relationship between the public and private spheres. This area of scholarship was inaugurated by Norbert Elias' 1939 work, *The Civilizing Process*, in which the author demonstrates that "the structure of civilized behavior is closely interrelated with the organization of Western societies into states" (trans. Edmund Jephcott [Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1994], xiv). Central to his work and the work of those who followed—Philippe Aries, Jurgen Habermas, Richard Sennett, to name a few—is the idea that the political environment of a society is reflected and refracted in the rituals and representations of private life and that, inversely, the way in which the private sphere is constructed has very real political implications.

In order to fully understand the significance of Pushkin's excision of a traditional romantic sub-plot in *Boris Godunov*, it is necessary to examine (1) the function of the romantic sub-plot in historical dramas before Pushkin; (2) Pushkin's excision of romance from his historical tragedy *Boris Godunov*; and (3) the image of the reader and writer introduced by Pushkin in the drama in order to refigure the political relationship of tsar and people. Pushkin, I would argue, resituates political power outside of the idealized, essentially private realm of romance, inscribing it instead within the critical, confrontational relationship of readers and writers.

Since the Renaissance, the romantic sub-plot had been structured so as to reflect and comment upon the political or military plot-line in the historical drama or tragedy. And while so insightful a scholar as Catherine Belsey argues that in Renaissance drama "[a]s an intimate, private relationship, love is the repudiation of the political, its antithesis,"<sup>8</sup> the traditional juxtaposition of the two plot-lines suggests the opposite conclusion. The echoing of vocabulary and imagery that occurs between the plot-lines encourages one to see them as mirroring one another and as raising related issues concerning the nature of patriarchal authority. Consider Shakespeare's *Henry V* which ends, not with the young king's glorious victory over the French army at Agincourt, but rather with his successful wooing of the French princess. His display of gentleness and vulnerability in private does not, I would argue, contradict his identity as a political leader in public; it completes it. The ideal king must be gentle as well as strong.

In this way, the romantic subplot suggests a metaphor for good government in the "marriage" of mercy, typically gendered as feminine, to power, typically gendered as masculine, within the soul of the monarch/father/husband. In Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, for example, the eponymous hero learns to temper his strict martial code with mercy, to marry Venus and Mars, under the influence of the lovely Zenocrate. In the final scene, he frees his military foe, Zenocrate's father, and prepares to marry his beloved, declaring to his lords: "Cast off your armour, put on scarlet robes, / Mount up your royal places of estate, / Environed with troops of noble men, / And there make laws to rule your provinces."<sup>9</sup> Tamburlaine's private experience of love is immediately translated into public policy: the good ruler must "marry" military might and responsible rule. He must make laws as well as war. The public and

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<sup>8</sup> Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Difference: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Routledge, 1985), 206.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part One*, in *Classics of the Renaissance Theater*, ed. J. Dennis Huston and Alvin B. Bernan (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969), 104.

private realms are thus enfolded in a single metaphor expressing the rights and obligations of patriarchal authority.<sup>10</sup>

In a host of historical dramas, such as Schiller's *Don Carlos*, the abusive exercise of authority on the part of kings, fathers or husbands is contrasted to the respectful, gentle authority exercised by romantic lovers. Coercion is opposed to persuasion. In fact, Pushkin's first attempt at historical drama was organized around just such an opposition. While in exile in the south of Russian, Pushkin took Novgorod as his subject and invoked the traditional romantic plot-line in which the heroine is torn between duty and love. However, Pushkin radicalizes the opposition by choosing as his romantic lover someone who was not only a gentle and idealistic lover, but a republican. In any case, Pushkin must have realized, in the judgment of Simon Karlinsky, that this mingling of love and politics "had no future,"<sup>11</sup> and he abandoned the play.

Virtually without exception, Russian dramatists before Pushkin organized their works around the relationship of romance and politics, as is illustrated by A. P. Sumarokov's historical drama, *Dimitrii Samozvanets* (1771), a work that deals with much of the same historical material as Pushkin's drama. Presented according to the strict norms of French neo-classical theater which Sumarokov introduced in Russia in the 1740s, this drama is structured around a conflation of the private and the political spheres: Kseniia is the symbolic counterpart of Russia herself, described as a ravaged woman in Act 2, scene 2, just as Dimitrii's wife, betrayed by an unfaithful husband, is the symbolic counterpart of the Russian Orthodox Church, betrayed by Dimitrii when he accepts support from the Pope.

The plot-lines are symbolically joined in the heart of the monarch, which functions as a unique place where public and private spheres meet. Sumarokov's Dimitrii is advised by his counselor Parmen to be like a father to his people: "If something in your heart entices you to error, Rise over it—become a father to your people!"<sup>12</sup> Parmen's conviction that politi-

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<sup>10</sup> Speaking of the English king, James I, Goldberg (n6) writes: "If James' subjects were his children, his kingdom was his wife. The connection between the two family images probably derives from an analogy found first in his 1597 treatise on kingship and repeated frequently thereafter, the comparison of king and country to head and body: 'The head cares for the body, so doeth the King for his people.' Addressing his first parliament in England, the king declared: 'I am the Husband, and all the whole isle is my lawfull Wife; I am the Head, and it is my Body.' 'What God hath cojoynd... let no man separate,' his sentence had begun, and coins of his reign proclaim the same text: 'Quae Deus Coniunxit Nemo Separet'" (3).

<sup>11</sup> Simon Karlinsky, *Russian Drama from Its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 317.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Sumarokov, *Dimitrii Samozvanets*, in *A.P. Sumarokov. Dramaticheskie sochineniia* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1990), 248. All subsequent citations will be included in the text. The translations of Sumarokov's *Dimitrii Samozvanets* are taken from the translation

cal change must occur in the heart of the monarch, not on the public square, limits his political activity to persuasion. He advises and even scolds Dimitrii, but does not threaten or coerce him: "You have not tried to check or to restrain your rage" (264). Parmen's critique of Dimitrii's tyranny, however, remains purely rhetorical. Dimitrii must restrain himself. This explains why, despite his disappointment over Dimitrii's excesses, Parmen is nonetheless willing to arrest Shuiskii, Georgii and Kseniia in order to preserve the social order. He states: "If you upset the order of society, Accept the punishment" (284). Parmen clearly condemns the radical and violent solution they support: "People!" Kseniia cries in Act 2, scene 2, "Rip off the crown from the tormentor's head!" At the very end of the play, when Dimitrii threatens Kseniia's life, Parmen does at last take up the sword. However, he is not required to use it. Sumarokov avoids the staging of a regicide by having Dimitrii kill himself.

Kseniia provides the most impassioned condemnation of Dimitrii's tyrannical excesses. But her rejection of Dimitrii, a tyrant, must be read against her love for Georgii. If Dimitrii is a bad patriarch, Georgii is a good one. Kseniia willingly places herself in his power, addressing him as "my beloved prince" (268), and telling him: "In the same way, beloved, my prince, rule over me" (271). Kseniia's choice of words is significant, suggesting that lover and tyrant are in fact two sides of the same patriarchal coin, the difference being that the tyrant forces his subjects to obey, while the lover inspires obedience. The opposition invoked is not that of tyranny versus liberty but of coercion versus persuasion.

If the lesson to the monarch is to wed mercy to power, Sumarokov's Dimitrii fails to get the message. He reacts to Shuiskii's advice to soften his behavior with the words: "What has royal purple to do with tenderness? Proud soul! You, too, are subject to love" (263). He seems to understand the conventional solution to such crises—softening the heart—but ultimately refuses to marry mercy to power, ordering Shuiskii to tell Kseniia: "Command your daughter to kneel before me" (263). Dimitrii chooses coercion over persuasion. His unwillingness to rule over his passions, subjecting them to the laws of love, confirms Dimitrii as an unreformable tyrant. According to the logic of romance, Dimitrii's brutality toward his people is reflected in his merciless treatment of the woman he would have for his lover: public and private personae perfectly mirror one another.<sup>13</sup>

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by Richard and Raymond Fortune in *Selected Tragedies of A. P. Sumarokov* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 189–229.

<sup>13</sup> The essential connection made in the European cultural imagination between sexual debauchery and political despotism is reflected in a whole sub-genre of oriental tragedies, like Maikov's *Femist i Ieronima* (1769), in which, to quote Karlinsky, "a foreign, usually Christian woman is imprisoned in a seraglio by an amorous Turk" (78). In fact, the image of women in a harem, presented as a sort of sexual prison, effectively connects the themes of sexual

The political messages encoded in the romantic sub-plot are not aimed solely at the abuses of the tyrant, but may be directed at the rebellious subject as well. While Sumarokov's Parmen criticizes Dimitrii's political and sensual excesses, he nonetheless arrests the young, rebellious lovers, Kseniia and Georgii. If a monarch must temper power with mercy, a subject must temper love with obedience. This latter message is key to Ozerov's *Dimitrii Donskoi*, whose romantic sub-plot Pushkin sharply criticized.<sup>14</sup> In this work, the political plot-line involving the subjugation of the Russian people by the Tatars and the romantic plot-line in which Kseniia is forced to marry against her will are both structured on the opposition of individual freedom to patriarchal authority. The connection between the two plot-lines is brought home by the juxtaposition of the words *otechestvo* and *otets* and the frequent use of the terms to enslave, freedom, tyrant, power, rights, will/freedom (*volia*), and law to describe both political and personal relationships.

Early in the drama Dimitrii launches a scathing attack on traditional patriarchal authority, describing it as tyrannical and the children who suffer under it as slaves: "I consider offensive those rights that make tyrants out of fathers / And that introduce their children to the grumbings of slaves."<sup>15</sup> He then goes further, appealing to matriarchal authority in order to free Kseniia from an arranged marriage to Tverskoi. He claims that, while Tverskoi was promised Kseniia's hand by her father, Dimitrii was promised her hand by her dying mother: "He was chosen by the father; I was chosen by your / Dying mother before her end" (249). However, Dimitrii's opposition to Kseniia's father threatens the fatherland, as her marriage to Tverskoi was to cement an alliance of Russian princes. Tverskoi therefore accuses Dimitrii himself of being "autocratic" (*samovlastnyi*; 263), willing to sacrifice Russia for the satisfaction of his personal, romantic desires.

Dimitrii finds himself in a double-bind: in standing up to tyranny, he appears as a tyrant himself. In the end, he proves incapable of striking such a serious blow to the patriarchal order and, in what appears as a rather startling and improbable reversal, renounces his claim to Kseniia, thus keeping the alliance of Russian princes together to fight the Tatars. He defers to Kseniia's father in order to prove his love for his fatherland. As a consequence, Tverskoi gives Kseniia back to Dimitrii following the

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avarice and political tyranny, a connection that remains a central and enduring feature of European stereotypes of "oriental" cultures. The oriental despot is typically portrayed as unable to control his passions, for food, for women, for blood.

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 5.

<sup>15</sup> Vladislav Ozerov, *Dimitrii Donskoi*, in V. A. Ozerov. *Tragedii. Stikhotovoreniia* (Leningrad: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1960), 262. All subsequent references to this work will be given in the text. All translations are mine.

victory of the Russians over the Tatars, rewarding him for having reigned in his autocratic spirit.

Dimitrii's capitulation to Kseniia's father suggests the limited nature of the critique of patriarchal authority in the traditional historical drama before Pushkin: monarchs must learn the lesson of love, but subjects must likewise recognize the need for order and obedience. While historical dramas may offer a moving condemnation of tyranny and despotism, they almost invariably re-affirm and redeem the institution of patriarchy, and this redemption typically comes through the romantic sub-plot.<sup>16</sup> And so, in presenting love as a political category, the romantic sub-plot can be seen to participate in what Richard Sennett refers to as "the ideology of intimacy," which functions to "transmute political categories into psychological categories."<sup>17</sup> It is this ideology, Sennett argues, that spells the demise of a healthy public culture of political debate and action.<sup>18</sup>

As this brief examination of the tradition of historical drama before Pushkin suggests, the rhetoric of romance supported what was, in many ways, an essentially conservative view of politics, conservative in the sense that political change takes place, not on the public square or in political association, but privately, in the heart of the hero or heroine, typically a great public figure. Romantic love serves to collapse public and private identities and presents the heart of the public figure as a unique and privileged site for political change. Therefore, in rejecting the traditional romantic sub-plot in his historical tragedy, *Boris Godunov*, Pushkin can be seen, at some level, as necessarily challenging the traditional conception of politics embedded therein.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, Pushkin does not merely omit a romantic sub-plot; he dramatizes the omission. This is most obvious in scene thirteen where the pretender is to confess his true identity to Marina Mniszek. The romantic

<sup>16</sup> Karlinsky makes a similar point in his discussion of the theme of serfdom in eighteenth-century Russian drama: "Now, criticism of mistreatment of serfs by their owners and of other abuses of serfdom was permitted and expected in that age to a degree that would seem unbelievable in the early nineteenth century. But it was permitted only provided that the abuses were attacked, not the institution itself" (121).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 259.

<sup>18</sup> Sennett's argument is not entirely new. In the Renaissance, Etienne de La Boetie argued in his treatise *On Voluntary Servitude* that love or feelings based on the model of private friendship for one's sovereign made possible the tyranny of one man over another (*Discours de la servitude volontaire*, ed. Gayard-Fabre [Paris: Flammarion, 1983]).

<sup>19</sup> That Pushkin was contemplating the nature of patriarchal authority during this period is obvious from a fragment written somewhere in 1825–26: "I hold that under a despotic government there are slaves and free men, that is to say, those whose property and will are subject to the laws of the sovereign and those who are the property of certain individuals. This state of affairs obtains in a patriarchal regime and spares the government endless worries, clashes, simplifies the administration and lends it a great deal of vigor. Take care then not to abolish slavery, above all in a state. The freedom of peasants..." (12, 194–95).

setting of the scene is stylized—"Night. A Garden. A Fountain"—as is the pretender's rhetoric, filled with adjectives, rhetorical questions and repetitions. It does not take long before he invokes the traditional opposition of love and ambition: "I look indifferently now / Upon his throne, his autocratic power. / Your love... what's life to me without it, / The gleam of glory, or the Russian realm?" (7, 60). Marina, however, refuses to let the pretender cast himself in the role of the romantic lover who could then be a foil to Boris, the tyrant. Rather than encourage the pretender to show himself to be tender and merciful, Marina challenges him to play the part of the traditional patriarch. And he finally does, repeating his claim to be the son of Ivan IV. Understanding the workings of patriarchy, the pretender then tells Marina that neither king, nor pope, nor courtier will investigate the truth of his claims: "Well then, know / That neither king nor Pope nor noble lord / Is thinking about the truth of what I've said." (7, 65). Men in power stick together. Satisfied, Marina exclaims: "Finally I hear a man, and not a boy, talking" (7, 65). Her comment vaguely echoes the Horatian epigraph from Pushkin's 1825 collection of verse: youth talks of love, men talk of rebellion.

Like Grigorii, Boris is similarly denied access to romance and thus the opportunity to redeem himself. In fact, the embattled tsar is continually associated with tragic or failed romance. Despite his presentation in the drama as a gentle, loving father, rumors arise that he was involved in the death of his daughter Kseniia's fiancé. Pushkin thus suggests a split between Boris' private self and his public persona. It is as if Boris has been trapped by those traditional plot-lines that insist that the political tyrant be a cruel father and a tyrannical lover as well. The association of Boris with Kseniia's tragic romance is continued later in the drama when he is described by a palace guard as a "girl waiting to get married" because of his irrational fears and superstitions.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in his first soliloquy, Boris describes his relationship to "the highest power" as a love affair that has cooled over time. There will be no redemption of the patriarch or of the institution of patriarchy through romantic love.

The drama's non-romances suggest a rejection on Pushkin's part of the idealizing politics of romance and effectively block access to the heart or soul of the main characters, where a traditional plot resolution would take place. Stephanie Sandler demonstrates how, even in Boris' soliloquy, the dramatic form in which a character typically lays bare his soul, Boris reveals the absence of a stable inner self: "... the first soliloquy has become famous in part because, though he fails at so much else, Boris

<sup>20</sup> Boris is described here as a woman, suggesting his powerlessness. Moreover, he is, at the beginning of the drama, at the Novodevichii Monastery—the Monastery of the Young Maids. Dmitrii, on the other hand, is described in masculine terms by Marina, suggesting perhaps an intention on Pushkin's part to further play with the traditional romantic plot-line by gendering his two male heroes—Grigorii and Boris—as male and female, respectively.

demonstrates impressive powers of multiplicity. An absence of authentic voice remains nevertheless. For Boris there can be only one source of sadness, and it is that wherever he turns he finds nothing he can encompass as his own.”<sup>21</sup> Interpretation of the soliloquy’s rhetoric as a function of repression on Boris’ part of his role in the murder of the tsarevich is itself complicated by Pushkin’s refusal to provide unambiguous confirmation of Boris’ guilt, either in the form of a confession or irrefutable testimony. As Monika Greenleaf states: “... the most feared accusation—that [Boris] killed Dmitry—is omitted, leaving a nightmarish residue of images, fractured syntax, and avoidance of the first-person predicate altogether.”<sup>22</sup> Pushkin thus appears to preclude a romantic resolution to political conflict, not by simply omitting romance from his drama, but by blocking access to the site at which such resolution would take place—the heart or soul of the hero. In this way, he prevents the easy conflation of the public and private realms that the romantic sub-plot typically achieves.

Indeed, strikingly absent in the drama is any expression of love and sentimental attachment. Few of the political players are motivated by a love of country. There is, in fact, no mention of selfless love for the Russian people or the Russian land except by Kurbskii’s son in scene fourteen. Shuiskii, for example, offers Boris the following unflattering assessment of the folk in scene ten:

... the thoughtless mob  
 Is fickle, mutinous, and superstitious,  
 Given easily to idle hopes,  
 Obedient to the suggestion of the moment,  
 Deaf and indifferent to the actual truth,  
 A beast that feeds on fables (7, 46).

This is echoed in a passage later edited from the 1830 edition in which a monk states: “our people are stupid, gullible: happy to marvel at miracles and novelty” (7, 264). And the folk themselves express emotions for the tsar out of a sense of obligation, not sincere feeling. Their behavior is blindly imitative, as in scene three where the folk fall to their knees in waves or where a peasant looks for an onion to produce the tears he feels obliged to shed. A peasant woman goes so far as to throw her child on the ground so that he will cry with the others. Emotions in the drama are almost never spontaneous, direct, sincere, as in ideal romance. Clearly, romance in *Boris Godunov* does not offer—as it did in historical dramas

<sup>21</sup> Stephanie Sandler, *Distant Pleasures: Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 91–92.

<sup>22</sup> Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 186.

before Pushkin—an opportunity to redeem the institution of autocracy by teaching the autocrat to love and the rebel to obey. Moreover, it assures that the drama will not be resolved *in private*, through a change of heart on the part of the hero.

In place of romantic union, Pushkin foregrounds acts of reading and writing in *Boris Godunov*, thus re-figuring the relationship between public authority and private individuals, between ruler and realm, in the absence of the idealizing rhetoric of romance. Unlike romantic love, reading and writing in Pushkin's drama do not serve to idealize the political and to redeem patriarchal authority. Rather, they are presented as fundamentally critical, even oppositional, practices. Moreover, if romance tends to "privatize" political problems, suggesting solutions that involve a change of heart, reading and writing in *Boris Godunov* involve the relentless publicizing of those political problems. As Sandler, Greenleaf, and Kevin Moss, among others, have emphasized, this is a drama about telling stories.

The connection between reading, writing and opposition is relentlessly drawn throughout *Boris Godunov*. In scene six, the Patriarch makes the point that, in Moss' words, "power is connected specifically with writing,"<sup>23</sup> when, upon hearing of Grigorii's imposture, he utters in exasperation: "I've had enough of these learned people!" (7, 24). The use of the Russian word *gramotei* inseparably links learning and literacy. The abbot declares that Grigorii's literacy is not from God. And indeed, Grigorii's view of literature is Western and secular as he reveals in scene eleven, where he reacts to a gift of Latin verses from a poet by exclaiming: "A hundred times blessed is the union of sword and lyre" (7, 54).<sup>24</sup> The False Dimitrii then goes on to reveal his own poetic temperament and tastes: "Though I was born beneath the northern sun, / The Latin muse's voice is known to me, / And I adore the flowers of Parnassus. / I believe in poets' prophecies" (7, 54).<sup>25</sup> Dimitrii's opposition to Boris is here encoded in literary or cultural terms.

The connection between writing and political opposition is perhaps most evident in the figure of the old chronicler-monk, Pimen. In scene five, Pimen relates to the novice Grigorii what he knows of the death of the

<sup>23</sup> Kevin Moss, "The Last Word in Fiction: On Significant Lies in *Boris Godunov*", *Slavic and East European Journal* 32.2 (1988): 187–97, 190.

<sup>24</sup> Caryl Emerson stresses the oppositional stance of the poet, who challenges, by his very nature, the traditional social order: "A poet was a creator of roles in a society where all roles were supposed to be fixed" See *Boris Godunov: Transpositions on a Russian Theme* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 125.

<sup>25</sup> This comment on the prophecies of poets can be related to Pushkin's thoughts on the political potential of poetry. As Sandler explains in her discussion of the poem "The Countryside," Pushkin redefines his poetic rhetoric, begrudgingly, "from speech to rhetoric" (34). If the poet can not instigate political change, he can, at least, envision a just future.

tsarevich Dimitrii, accuses Boris Godunov of ordering his murder and calls the Russian people to repent for having called a murderer to the Russian throne. Pimen's challenge to a reigning monarch in his chronicle history, written within the very walls of the Kremlin, is treasonous. Moreover, his opposition to Boris' claim to the throne in turn begets other acts of opposition. The novice Grigorii is inspired by Pimen's tale to oppose Boris himself, not, as Pimen suggests, through prayer and penitence, but by passing himself off as the tsarevich Dimitrii. As Caryl Emerson puts it: "Pimen's chronicle is midwife to the event."<sup>26</sup> Grigorii seems to literally embody Pimen's literary act of defiance.

The link between writing and political opposition is also suggested in a number of less direct ways. For example, the presence in the pretender's camp of Prince Kurbskii's son—like Pimen, an invention on Pushkin's part—calls to mind his father's stormy relationship with Ivan IV.<sup>27</sup> It is significant that Kurbskii's opposition to Ivan IV was carried out in writing; his most famous works are his epistles to the tsar and his history of Ivan's reign, which have earned him a place in Russian letters as well as history. In his letters to the Russian tsar, Kurbskii not only attacks Ivan's policies, but his literary style as well, accusing him of illiteracy and barbarity and drawing a direct connection between politics and culture, public authority and personal enlightenment. Indeed, Ivan's letter is, to quote Victor Terras, "a rambling and stylistically uneven epistle (it ranges from pompous Slavonic to outright vulgarisms)."<sup>28</sup> Kurbskii, on the other hand, tended to avoid elaborate rhetoric and, while in the West, "quickly acquired a Ciceronian taste for simple elegance and wise moderation in the use of rhetorical figures,"<sup>29</sup> a description that might well refer to the literary style of Pushkin himself.

One senses a possible identification with Kurbskii when Pushkin stresses the isolation (*uedinenie*) in which both exiled writers worked. In scene eleven, Kurbskii's son tells the pretender: "My father / Spent the remainder of his life in Volynia, / On the estates Batory granted him. / Peaceful, and in solitude, he sought / Consolation for himself in study" (7, 52). Of himself, Pushkin would write in notes for a foreword to *Boris Godunov*: "Written by me in strict isolation, far from the dampening

<sup>26</sup> Emerson, 122.

<sup>27</sup> Ervin Brody suggests this same point, albeit more tentatively than I: "The inclusion of the unhistorical young Kurbskii may be due to Pushkin's sympathy with the plight of Andrei Kurbskii, statesman, soldier, and writer, who fled to Poland to escape the wrath of Ivan the Terrible." See *The Demetrius Legend and Its Literary Treatment in the Age of the Baroque* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), 240.

<sup>28</sup> Victor Terras, *A History of Russian Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 83.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

effects of society, this tragedy gave me everything that is permitted a writer to enjoy” (11, 140).

In addition to his letters to Ivan IV, Kurbskii was known for his history of Ivan’s reign entitled *Istoriia o velikom kniaze Moskovskom*. This is a polemical work in which Kurbskii relates not only historical events but his political views favoring limitations on princely power and cooperation with the boyars. His views on the participation of boyars in politics had much in common with those of Pushkin himself who complained that his ancient boyar family had been long ago displaced from the inner circles of power by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century courtiers (11, 141). In fact, Pushkin would later write: “I absolutely will write a history of Peter I, but of Aleksandr—with the pen of Kurbskii...” (italics mine).<sup>30</sup>

Pushkin clearly saw in the writing of history a form of opposition to power. Of course, the presence of Pushkin’s own ancestors in the drama on the side of the pretender encourages another, albeit oblique, connection to be drawn between the poet and political opposition. Boris drives the connection home in scene ten: “I hate the whole rebellious tribe of Pushkins” (7, 45). Later, in scene 15, Boris will refer to the Pretender’s military aggression and to his written threats side by side, as if the two are of equal weight: “Is it possible? An unfrocked, runaway monk / Leads a host of criminals against us / And dares write threats to us!” (7, 68) In fact, the use of the verb *derzat’* (‘dare’) suggests that the pretender’s written threats are the greater affront.

In the dramatic world of *Boris Godunov*, where writing is polemical, interested, oppositional, it should not be surprising that reading too is presented as an essentially critical practice. The ability to “read” events, to decipher motives and separate fact from fiction is a prized political skill. As Stephanie Sandler puts it: “Penetrating the pretenses of others becomes a necessary form of acquiring power [in *Boris Godunov*].”<sup>31</sup> In scene ten, Boris compares two versions of events in order to read the truth “between the lines.” He tells Shuiskii: “I want to consider all the news; otherwise we’ll never Know the truth” (7, 70). Here truth is not self-evident, but rather the product of interpretation.

In scene eight, Pushkin again presents reading as a necessary survival skill in a world of pretenders and power-seekers, a world in which, to quote the policeman in that scene: “not every word gets written in” (7, 35). In this scene, Grigorii, now incognito, finds himself in a tavern on the Lithuanian border with a pair of rowdy, bawdy monks. When the police arrive with a warrant for the arrest of Grigorii Otrep’ev, it turns out that

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion*, p. 211. For the original sources, see “Zapis’ A. N. Wul’fa ot 16 sentiabria 1827 goda,” in “Vyderzhki iz dnevnika,” in *Russkaia starina*, Mar. 1899: 512; and Feinberg, *Nezavershennye raboty Pushkina*, 397.

<sup>31</sup> Sandler, 84.

he is the only one sufficiently literate to read it. He seizes the opportunity and alters the description contained in the warrant so that it corresponds to one of the drunken monks. Grigorii seems to have pulled off the ruse until the frightened monk musters the rudiments of literacy he acquired long ago in school in order to expose him. As Varlaam stumbles through the warrant, Grigorii has time to escape. While the scene certainly suggests, as Kevin Moss argues, “the importance of literacy as a tool for power,”<sup>32</sup> it also suggests the importance of literacy in opposing power. Like Sandler, Moss discusses reading and writing in terms of the acquisition or loss of power, while the complex, oppositional relationship between the two practices as presented in *Boris Godunov*, I would argue, fundamentally re-figures traditional conceptions of patriarchal power. Reading and writing serve as a kind of model of oppositional politics, for Pushkin continually highlights the role played by readers in constructing meaning in an act of writing, meaning that is quite often at odds with the author’s original intention.

The figurative link between reading, writing and ruling is made again in scene ten by Boris himself. In this scene the tsar encounters his son in their private quarters where the boy has been drawing a map of Russia. Boris compliments the boy’s studiousness and declares: “All the provinces and regions you / Today so deftly drew out on the paper, / All will fall beneath your hand” (7, 43). Like the pretender, Boris offers a metaphor linking monarchic power and writing. However, Boris’ inability to read the map—he can not identify the Volga river—bodes ill for his reign. Like the scene in the tavern, an initial association of writing and power is undercut by an act of reading. Moreover, the scene with Boris’ son echoes the earlier scene with the palace guards who mock Boris for turning to fortune tellers in a desperate attempt to divine or “read” the future. Pushkin’s Boris appears doomed by his inability to read and ultimately by his inability to stop the stories being told about him.

The impotence of Tsar Boris to control these stories must be contrasted with an alternative version of patriarchal authority put forward by Pushkin at various points in his literary career. Literary fathers, in Pushkin’s idealization, do not attempt to control the stories their “sons” will tell. For example, in an unpublished letter about *Boris Godunov* to the editor of the journal *Moskovskii Vestnik*, Pushkin claims Shakespeare as one of his literary “fathers”: “Firmly convinced that the outmoded forms of our theater demand reform, I ordered my tragedy according to the system of our Father—Shakespeare” (11, 66). The capitalization of father and the first person plural pronoun suggest a playful blasphemy on Pushkin’s part, appropriate in the sense that Shakespeare for Pushkin was not a traditional, autocratic father-figure, one who demanded obedience.

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<sup>32</sup> Moss, 190–91.

Rather, in opposition to French neo-classical theater with its strict conventions, Shakespeare seemed to represent sanctioned rule-breaking, creative freedom. Shakespeare was a father who himself flouted the rules. As Caryl Emerson puts it:

Shakespeare appealed in large part for what he was not; it was presumed that since he was not bound by the constraints of classicism he could express “real life” on the stage in a direct and unmediated way... The plays, in short, were perceived less as artistic structures than as antistruktures, as celebrations of the right to violate rules.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, it is clear from a draft article on *Boris Godunov* that central to Pushkin’s dramatic enterprise was the “romantic” education of a Russian public that had come to place too high a value on the conventions and rules of neo-classical drama: “Raised under the influence of French literature, Russians have grown used to rules, ratified by the critics, and are unwilling to look at anything that doesn’t conform to these laws. Innovations are dangerous and, it seems, unnecessary” (11, 68). The Russian public, Pushkin suggests, must become more comfortable with rule-breaking, for the great writers, like Shakespeare and Dante—to whom he significantly refers as “il gran Padre Alighieri” (11, 67)—are radical violators of literary convention. In that same article, Pushkin writes:

Should the literary conscience be superstitiously subject to conventions and forms? Why should the writer not comply with the accepted literary customs of his people, just as he complies with the laws of his language? He must be in command of his subject in spite of the difficulties presented by rules, as he is compelled to master his language, in spite of the shackles of grammar. (11, 66)

Elsewhere he encourages grand violations: “There is nothing more useless, in my opinion, than minor alterations to the rules” (13, 197).

The dramatic tradition of Father Shakespeare appears then as a sort of “alternative patriarchy,” celebrating creative daring and play over obedience and unthinking respect for tradition.<sup>34</sup> And indeed, Pushkin’s pretender, whom Pushkin created, according to Ilya Serman, “as a poet,”<sup>35</sup> re-

<sup>33</sup> Emerson, 10–11.

<sup>34</sup> It is not only in *Boris Godunov* that Pushkin presents literature as an alternative patriarchy. In *Evgenii Onegin*, Derzhavin appears in Chapter 8, stanza two as a benevolent literary father blessing the younger generation of poets. These lines are significant in the overall context of Pushkin’s novel in verse, insofar as biological fathers are virtually absent.

<sup>35</sup> Ilya Serman, “Pushkin i russkaia istoricheskaia drama 1830-kh godov,” in *Pushkin: Issledovanie i materialy*, vol. 6 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1969): 118–49.

fuses to treat the father figures who surround him with simple obedience. Grigorii first appears in the monastery with father Pimen, then in the tavern with fathers Mikhail and Varlaam and then in Poland in the company of a Roman Catholic priest, referred to as Pater. The first father he blithely disobeys, leaving the monastery; Father Varlaam he attempts to frame; and the Polish pater he “leads by the nose,” telling him he will convert Russia to Catholicism. Boris, on the other hand, first appears in the play expressing his humility toward the Patriarch: “You, father patriarch, all you, boyars, My soul is bared before you” (7, 15).

Pushkin’s presentation of acts of reading and writing within *Boris Godunov* as well as his discussion of contemporary drama encourage the questioning of conventions, rules and traditional practice. Critical of established power, reading and writing are thus situated somewhere between the traditional categories of public and private, for they are neither at the service of the state, nor are they restricted to the private sphere. While it is tempting to focus here on Romantic motifs such as the poet as rebel, Pushkin’s emphasis on the critical nature of reading and writing and his concern for the education of the Russian public can be understood in the context of eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy, in which the writer’s task to enlighten the public is not only inherently political, in the most general sense of the term, it is political in an historically new way, for it forces a retracing of the traditional boundary between public and private.<sup>36</sup>

The essentially oppositional or critical nature of reading in Enlightenment thought is perhaps most succinctly described by Emmanuel Kant in his essay of 1784, “What is Enlightenment?” Kant insisted that an enlightened reading public has the power to influence and critique political authority through the expression of public opinion. Political or public authority, as Kant conceived it, resides in private citizens who come together as a *reading public* capable of compelling “public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion.”<sup>37</sup> Kant completely reverses the traditional definitions of public and private in which the former referred to the duties and station of one holding a government post or position at court and the latter negatively defined as referring to the duties and station of individuals not in the government employ. Kant writes: “The public use of our reason must always be free, and it alone can bring enlightenment to man... By public use of reason I mean the use that

<sup>36</sup> Some of the most important and insightful work on Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov* has centered, overtly or not, on such general Romantic themes and motifs as the poet as rebel (Caryl Emerson and Monika Greeleaf); the duplicity of language (Kevin Moss); and solitude (Stephanie Sandler).

<sup>37</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 25–26.

one makes of reason as a scholar before the reading public. I call private the use that one is entitled to make of one's reason in a civil post or office."<sup>38</sup> He thus politicizes what had been a private identity, effecting what Roger Chartier describes as a "startling reversal" and a "semantic inversion."<sup>39</sup> Kant wholly re-defines the public and private spheres: the "private" reader takes on public authority as a member of a reading public so that "public and private are no longer opposed as they were in the seventeenth century. Instead, practices once characterized as private define the realm of public reflection and political affirmation."<sup>40</sup>

Works by Lotman and William Mills Todd, among others, have shown how, in Russia of the Golden Age, this re-negotiation of traditional concepts of public and private was reflected in the institutionalization of literature. The enlightened reading public defined itself in opposition to the language and culture of the chancelleries, on the one hand, and of the clergy, on the other. When society constituted itself in the salon as opposed to the court or government chancelleries—as was happening in Russia in this period—the private sphere of society became "publicly relevant."<sup>41</sup> Society came to occupy a place somewhere between the traditional public and private spheres of state and family.

The central role played by Pushkin in the emergence of a more or less independent profession of letters in Russia—André Maynieux describes him as Russia's first "professional writer, in the full sense of the term"<sup>42</sup>—thus placed him in the middle of a re-organization of the traditional spheres of the public and private. Writers of the period situated themselves betwixt and between these spheres; with their constant calls for independence from government censorship and reliance on patrons, and their insistence on the separation of "sword and lyre," they sought to be "public" in a new way.<sup>43</sup> That Pushkin was aware of these issues and, specifically, of the political significance of a mass reading audience, the

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Roger Chartier, introduction to *Passions of the Renaissance*, in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 3, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University), 17.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Habermas, 19.

<sup>42</sup> André Maynieux, *Pouchkine: Homme de lettres et de la littérature professionnelle en Russie* (Paris: Librairie des Cinq Continents, 1966), 15.

<sup>43</sup> The cry for independence was common among eighteenth-century philosophers and men of letters. As Peter Gay puts it: "Both as writer and reformer the *philosophe* required a wide audience, free expressions, and respectable status" (57). Voltaire said it more succinctly: "I have always preferred freedom to everything else" (quoted in Gay, 69). Pushkin expressed a similar sentiment in a draft of his article "Notes on popular drama and on M. P. Pogodin's *Martha, the Governor's Wife*": "What is necessary to a dramatist? A philosophy, impartiality, the political acumen of an historian, insight, a lively imagination. No prejudices or preconceived ideas. *Freedom*" (10, 419).

bearer of public opinion, is undeniable.<sup>44</sup> The poet's familiarity with the entire complex of enlightenment issues is clearly expressed in an article printed in the *Almanakh* for 1830, published by Maksimovich. In this article, Pushkin praises an article by I. V. Kireevsky, who, as Pushkin puts it "belonged to the young school of Moscow *literati*, a school which was founded under the influence of the latest German philosophy" (11, 103). Pushkin cites a rather lengthy passage from Kireevsky in which he discusses N. I. Novikov and his contributions to Russian society. The paragraph is lengthy but I will quote it in its entirety as it illustrates so well the concept of enlightenment as outlined by Kant:

Novikov did not extend our love of learning and our desire to read; he was the first to instill them. Before him, according to the testimony of Karamzin, there were only two bookstores in Moscow, which sold 10 thousand rubles' worth of books a year: in only a few years there were 20 bookstores selling 200 thousand rubles' worth. Moreover, Novikov opened bookstores in other Russian cities, even in the most remote ones, circulated almost for free those works he considered to be especially important, had useful books translated, dispatched his helpers in all directions, so that soon, not only all of Russia, but Siberia as well, had begun to read. Then our fatherland witnessed an event that was not to endure for long, an event almost unique in the annals of our history of our enlightenment: the birth of popular opinion (11, 104).

The rise of the book trade led to the creation of a large reading public, resulting in the birth of popular opinion. The association of books, enlightenment and public opinion undeniably point to the ultimate origin of Kireevsky's ideas in Enlightenment thought.

Although the political ramifications obviously could not be elaborated in the Russian context, the term "public opinion" is in italics in Pushkin's citation. This is a term whose origins are intimately connected with Enlightenment thought on the critical and politically adversarial role of private citizens drawn together as a reading public. As Jurgen Habermas explains: "Criticism itself was presented in the form of *öffentliche Meinung*, a word formed in the second half of the eighteenth century in analogy to *opinion publique*. In Great Britain 'public opinion' arose at about the same time."<sup>45</sup> The eighteenth-century French historian Claude Rulhiere celebrated the event in France: "It was then [1749] that there

<sup>44</sup> I do not insist that Kant was the direct source of these ideas for Pushkin, although his discussion of Kant and Lessing in his incomplete article on popular drama and Pogodin's *Marfa Posadnitsa* suggests the possibility that Pushkin was aware of Kant's writing on enlightenment.

<sup>45</sup> Habermas, 26.

rose among us what we have come to call the empire of public opinion.”<sup>46</sup> If the conflation of *romantic* and political rhetoric resolved the problem of tyranny in historical drama before Pushkin, such phrases as “republic of letters” and “empire of public opinion” suggest an alternate resolution in the conflation of *literary* and political rhetoric.

The autocratic form of government in Russia, however, made the relationship between popular opinion and public action especially problematic and the “process of merging of public and private,”<sup>47</sup> that Sandler examines in Pushkin’s works, written while he was in exile, would never be fully completed. Civil society in the West, according to Habermas, “came into existence as the corollary of a depersonalized state authority.”<sup>48</sup> State authority in autocratic Russia, however, would remain personalized until the fall of the Romanovs as the personal patrimony of the tsar-batiushka.

An attempt to re-negotiate public and private, however, can be glimpsed in *Boris Godunov* in the introduction of characters whose social identities fall outside the spheres of government and family, or public and private, as traditionally defined. These are private individuals who speak publicly “against the policies of the prince”:<sup>49</sup> the chronicler, Pimen; the son of the exile Kurbskii; the holy fool; and the prisoner of war who relates to Dimitrii the popular opinion among the soldiers that he is both a thief and a fine fellow. These characters represent intermediate social identities “*between* the family and the state” (italics mine).<sup>50</sup> While not public in the traditional sense, as they do not occupy positions in government service, these characters insist on their political relevance. Moreover, they are unique in the drama for their willingness and ability to speak honestly and sincerely, despite the very real risk attendant on their words. These characters have independence of character if not actual financial or social independence. Their sincerity distinguishes them both from Boris and the pretender, on the one hand, and from the folk, on the other.

The number and importance of such intermediate social identities in Pushkin’s drama challenges the traditional separation of public and private. It is those very identities that would constitute modern civil society, or the *Publicum der Lesewelt* to which Kant refers,<sup>51</sup> and civil society, as

<sup>46</sup> Gay, *The Enlightenment*, 83.

<sup>47</sup> Sandler, *Distant Pleasures*, 38.

<sup>48</sup> *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Chartier, 17.

<sup>50</sup> Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West, introduction to *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>51</sup> The presence of public opinion in Russia continues to be debated well into the twentieth century. Lidiia Chukovskaia recounts the following discussion in the third volume of her *Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi* (Moscow: Soglasie, 1997): “‘There you go, talking as if there was no public opinion in Russia,’ remarked Paustovsky. ‘That’s not so. There is.’ I said that if

Clowes, Kassow and West argue, “implies agreement on two things: the state should not and can not do everything, and people are public as well as private creatures.”<sup>52</sup>

But despite the presence of the intermediate social identities mentioned above, there is no true reading public in *Boris Godunov*, no *Publicum der Lesewelt*, the bearer of popular opinion. Clearly the illiterate folk as presented in the drama are most definitely not a *Publicum* in the Kantian sense.<sup>53</sup>

While Pushkin did not present a viable public in his drama—and he could be scathing indeed in his descriptions of the contemporary Russian public<sup>54</sup>—he was relentless in refusing a private resolution to the dramatic tensions in his play, one in which the monarch learns to wed mercy and power. In order for there to be such a private resolution, one that would preserve the institutions of patriarchy while condemning its excesses and abuses, the reader must have access to either the heart or soul of the main characters. Sandler and Greenleaf both emphasize the fact that Boris’ “sin” is never clearly confirmed or confessed in the drama, problematizing a reading of the play as a traditional morality tale. Despite Boris’ theatrical statement to the patriarch in scene four that he has bared his soul, the reader or viewer of *Boris Godunov* is ultimately denied access to the recesses of Boris’ inner self: he never admits to killing the tsarevich and we are never given the ultimate proof of his guilt. Moreover, his tender relationship with his children problematizes any simple connection between his public and private selves: they do not mirror one another.

On the other hand, Marina’s refusal to allow the False Dimitrii to open his heart to her denies the drama a romantic resolution in which the pretender is cast as a gentle lover in opposition to a cruel patriarch. Because the ontological status of the historical events themselves is left

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there were public opinion, it was only among a small portion of the intelligentsia, and among them only in a limited sphere of behavior or that it did not yet exist, it was only now penetrating, being born” (48). And later: “‘There has always been public opinion in our country,’ answered Akhmatova. ‘But the government has never listened to it. To the contrary: the louder and clearer public opinion is, the more savagely the government pounces on society’” (213).

<sup>52</sup> Clowes, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Pushkin does perhaps suggest in scene eight how a *Publicum der Lesewelt* might serve as a critical opposition to ruling power. The setting of this scene in a tavern is itself significant, as the tavern is a fine example of those intermediate social spaces in which civil society would constitute itself. The tavern was the place where Shakespeare’s Prince Hal learned to “speak with any tinker in his own language.” It belongs together with “the coffee houses, the salons, and the Tischgesellschaften (table societies)” in which, according to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere was to be constituted. Moreover, its location on the border places it at the very limits of state control. And it is in this unique social space that readers and writers confront one another when Varlaam exposes the writerly fraud of Grigorii Ostrep’ev, albeit in a highly comic, even parodic, light.

<sup>54</sup> See Pushkin’s article of 1820, “Moi zamechaniia ob russkom teatre.”

uncertain, we encounter only texts, texts that require interpretation. The plot of Pushkin's drama will *not* be resolved in the heart or soul of its heroes. By refusing access to those private places, Pushkin forces his drama to take place in the essentially public confrontation of readers and writers. The problem of tyranny requires a public solution, a point made by Pushkin in his ode "Liberty" in which, after having dismissed the traditional combination of romance and politics, he calls for the union, not of mercy and power, or of Venus and Mars, but of "sacred Liberty and mighty laws."

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