

Title: Functions of Literacy in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*
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The characters in *Boris Godunov* appear and interact not just as individuals but as typical representatives of various strata of Russian society: (1) bearers of autocratic power (the “two pretenders”), (2) members of the princely aristocracy, (3) ambitious plebeians, (4) various “holy men”, and (5) common people (*народ*). They express, either orally or in writing, the self-serving polemical point of view of their own kind on the events taking place.

All but the last (*народ*) are specifically identified in the text as being literate, and in the most crucial cases we can examine examples of what they write and assess its intended function and authenticity.

This paper will show that the multitude of voices heard in the play constitutes a hierarchy in terms of their veracity and relation to Pushkin's own world view. Some voices are more worthy of our attention because they speak directly to the author's philosophy of history and provide clues to his notion of how Russia can be rescued from its disastrous times of troubles. In his words: «*Все смуты похожи одна на другую*».

What distinguishes the chronicler Pimen's use of the written word from that of the other literate characters in the play is its independence and disinterestedness (*бескорыстие*). The others use their literacy only for practical necessities and to further mercenary aims, for self-aggrandizement. Pimen has nothing to gain from the completion of his writing task except the satisfaction of knowing that he has fulfilled his mission in life.

In assigning to Pimen a central place in his historical drama, Pushkin paid tribute not only to Russia's medieval *letopistsy*, but to the historian Nikolai Karamzin, who established the high standard of integrity and conscientiousness that Pushkin regarded as essential for a man of letters (*грамотей* or *писатель*).