

Title: On the Present Calamity of the Russian State: Mirzoev and Pushkin
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The 1825 fair draft of Pushkin's play generally known as *Boris Godunov* bore the title *Komediia o tsare Borise i Grishke Otrep'evе*. In a preliminary title of the work the phrase *o nastoiashchei bede rossiiskogo gosudarstva* ("on the present calamity in the Russian State") was inserted after *Komedia*. Its omission in the fair draft is eloquent. What was the "present calamity" of the Russian state other than the brewing revolutionary movement that was to reach a climax on December 14? In other words, Pushkin was encoding in his historical play an allegory of the impending conflict between revolution and autocracy, with tsar Alexander (Pushkin's *bête noire*) in the role of Boris and the future Decembrists in the role of Grishka. The hint was, however, too dangerous to be stated overtly in a draft that was likely to fall into the hands of the Third Division.

Most productions of *Boris Godunov* have ignored this carefully concealed "double-bottom," viewing it simply as a historical pageant about an episode in Russian history. It is only in his 2011 film that Vladimir Mirzoev brilliantly exploits the potential buried in Pushkin's text by the device of setting it in contemporary Russia. Immediately in the opening scene, where we see Shuisky and Vorotynsky as New Russians with mobile phones and black limousines, the pertinence of Pushkin's play and Mirzoev's acuity are revealed: this is not a drama about a distant historical event, but rather about the "calamity" (*beda*) that is always present in Russia: the eternal cycle of combat between would-be revolutionaries - Grishka, the Decembrists, the Naval'nyis and Sobchaks - and the all-powerful autocrat. The *narod*, as in Pushkin's work, is passive: reduced to either chanting sycophantic slogans or silently munching chips in front of the television.