

Title: "Imperial Pushkin"

Author: Katya Hokanson, University of Oregon

Abstract:

Despite frequent reluctance on the part of scholars and readers to accept Pushkin's most imperialistic and nationalistic works, such as "To the Slanderers of Russia" and "The Anniversary of Borodino," as integral to his artistic production, his role as a national poet relies on the consciousness of the Russian nation brought about by such texts. From his earliest publicly recited poem, "Vospominaniia v Tsarskom sele," to such late works as "Exegi monumentum" (1836) and "Polkovodets" (1835), Pushkin's imperial consciousness was an important part of his identity as a poet and a prose writer. The war of 1812 is a constant motif; the common ideological portrayal of that war, positioning Russians as merciful and reluctant victors, runs through Pushkin's work. This ideology bridged otherwise unbridgeable gaps, creating a sense of unity between state and people, and presenting a picture of the multi-ethnic empire as Russian nation. Assimilating imperial subjects into the "Rus' velikaia," the nation expanded into an empire, as "Exegi monumentum" portrays it. A parallel was drawn between the defeat of Napoleon by a combined effort of Russians and other peoples and the cultural victory of a united poetic legacy. Pushkin was of course never a one-note thinker; he also focused on the gaps among these seams. His "Polkovodets" addressed the fact that Barclay de Tolly, despite his patriotism, was treated as a foreigner by Russians, who preferred to focus on Kutuzov as the architect of Napoleon's defeat.