

Title: The Ethical Dimension of Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*

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Several studies over the past few decades have called attention to the moral dimension of Pushkin's writing (e.g., Erlich, Gutsche, Jackson); these studies can be linked to a trend in current western literary criticism toward reintegrating literary interpretations with a consideration of ethical questions and subtexts. (Hadfield is a prime example.) *Boris Godunov*, which treats moral questions on a grand, political scale as well as on the intimate level of the individual, is perhaps the work in which Pushkin's ethical inquiries find their fullest development—but no one yet has subjected the work's moral themes to a sustained analysis. On the contrary, distinguished critics disagree even on the interpretation of the play's most basic moral facts, such as the guilt or innocence of Tsar Boris in the murder of Tsarevich Dmitrii (for example, Virolainen reads Boris's personal guilt as a core fact of the play, while Aranovskaia argues that Boris is a scapegoat of the nation's collective guilt); interpretations of the Pretender's moral status are similarly divergent. Recent western critical readings of *Boris Godunov* shy away from the consideration of moral judgments altogether, focusing instead on the way both speech and silence in the play render all meanings private, fluid, and contingent. I offer a new reading of *Boris Godunov* that places ethical issues front and center, arguing that Pushkin was struggling to make his own sense of the interrelationship between words and actions, poetic inspiration and political efficacy, freedom and responsibility, as he composed and, later, revised his drama for publication. In my reading, the Pretender and Boris represent for Pushkin opposite poles of the moral spectrum, and, thus, alternate (and mutually exclusive) ethical models for the poet—both of which models he nevertheless values and, paradoxically, desires to emulate in his own life.

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