

**From Triumphal Gates to Triumphant Rotting: Refractions of Rome in the Russian
Political Imagination**

by

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Introduction

The story of classical reception in Russia is quite unlike that of Western Europe. Its earliest manifestations were not part of school education, and, until the eighteenth century, there was little admiration for or even awareness of the famous authors of antiquity. Instead, the introduction of classical literature and history was firmly tied to the development of autocracy and empire. As a result, it was ancient Rome and, especially, imperial Rome that attracted the initial attention. From the start, it was distinguished from ancient Greece.¹ The preface of the very first dictionary to include Greek and Latin vocabulary clearly articulates this distinction: “Greek language,” writes the dictionary’s compiler Fedor Polikarpov, “is the language of wisdom, Latin of autocracy” (“Греческий язык есть язык мудрости, латинский - единоначальствия.”). This text dates to 1704, the period when Peter the Great, the first Russian *imperator*, put classics to use in his imperial spectacles, performing Roman triumphs, commissioning artwork of himself in Roman garb, and importing Roman political terminology.² Antiquity, in Iurii Vorob’ev’s formulation, “had to serve the interests of the new Russia.”³ Since

¹ The same distinction is implicitly or explicitly articulated in the works of a number of writers I discuss. A. Pushkin, as G. Knabe has written, uses Greek references primarily in mythological contexts and Roman ones in historical and political ones (*Russkaia Antichnost'*, 146); Ivan Goncharov likewise distinguishes between the historical and political Rome and the mythological Greece, though, as I show, there is a dynamic dialogue between these categories instead of a simple distinction. Finally, Blok specifically singles out Rome as a model for empire and revolution and only briefly refers to Greece in the context of philosophy ruined by Cicero’s mediocrity.

² In 1711, he founded a Senate, modelled in name though not function on the Roman institution of that name. He also accepted a number of Roman titles, including “imperator,” “pater patriae,” and “maximus.” (Stephen Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, 50). It is important to note that scholars have questioned just how Roman these Roman allusions were. Paul Bushkovitch, for instance, argues that their more immediate significance was the “imitation and rivalry with the Hapsburgs” and Rome’s role as a “background for the birth of Christ.” (Bushkovitch, “Roman Empire in the Era of Peter the Great,” 158 and 161). Without engaging with the theoretical issue of what is or is not authentic reception or authentic use of Rome here, I will just note that Rome always seems to be about something other than Rome itself, as my dissertation will hopefully demonstrate.

³ Vorob’ev, Iu. K. *Latinskii iazyk v russkoi kul'ture XVII-XVIII vekov*, 4.

these interests also included the development of imperial literature and ideology, one of the crucial purposes of the importation of classics⁴ was to provide the vocabulary, genres, and structures for this new literature.⁵

As Russian literature continued growing, the number and functions of Roman allusions became numerous and varied, many of them apolitical. At the same time, however, the initial role and connotations of ancient Rome were never quite forgotten, and, time after time, we see Russian authors turn to Roman history to respond to the political developments in their contemporary Russia. As late as the twentieth century, the Russian Symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanov noted that he felt no kinship to ancient Rome because he was “indifferent to the imperial ideal.”⁶

One of the goals of this dissertation is to explore this persistence and importance of the political Rome from the early days of the Russian Empire to the Russian Revolution of 1917. I offer six case studies from six authors, each of whom served as a prominent literary voice in his generation and historical moment, both in the estimation of his contemporaries and of later scholarship: Mikhail Lomonosov (1711 - 1765), Gavriila Derzhavin (1743 - 1816), Kondratii Ryleev (1795-1826), Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837), Ivan Goncharov (1812-1891), and Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921). Despite the difference in their historical circumstances, each of these writers turns to Roman history and literature to think through and respond to Russian history and politics. However, Rome is a variable rather than a constant, and my more important goal is to draw attention to variability, to *refractions* of Rome, because Russian Romes are

⁴ See Vorob'ev's work or a detailed study of the various functions performed by the Latin language, including its role in the development of science, technology, education and diplomacy.

⁵ Wes, in what seems to be a too extreme but very intriguing formulation, argues "...there was never any question in Russia of a rediscovery of classical antiquity. Antiquity was discovered. The discoverers incorporated their discovery into the frame of reference of their own time. They discovered what fitted into the frame. What did not fit into the frame was not discovered. This frame was in the first place the frame of autocracy" (173).

⁶ Rudich, "Vyacheslav Ivanov and Classical Antiquity," 278.

numerous. They pass through the mediums of changing political circumstances, value systems, literary trends, and legacies of earlier Romes. The Rome of Lomonosov (Ch. 1), for instance, is a proud imperial rival to Russia, the competition with which elevates Russia and its rulers above other nations, but the Rome of Pushkin and Ryleev (Ch. 3) is the land of passionate struggle against autocracy; that of Blok (Ch. 5) is a bloated decomposing corpse awaiting destruction and implicitly negating previous – admirable – Romes.

This multiplicity is important to emphasize because of one sentence that has become "the best known example of a Russian claim to classical credentials,"⁷ "the best-known instance of Russia's self-identification with Rome."⁸ This sentence comes from a letter by a sixteenth-century monk from Pskov and reads: "Two Romes have fallen, but the third stands, and there will not be a fourth" ("Два убо Рима падоша, а третий стоит, а четвертому не быти"⁹). Its ubiquity is a problem. In the first place, as a number of scholars have pointed out, the letter was likely neither written nor interpreted, nor used, to promote the ideas that it has come to represent in later scholarship.¹⁰ More importantly, however, the statement is dangerous because it seems to offer a neat (and profoundly inaccurate) way of characterizing Russia's relationship to reception, especially in the earlier periods. Out of its original context, the sentiment can suggest that Russia was striving to identify itself with Rome. After accepting this attempt at identification, one can find in this "doctrine" the justification of territorial expansion, attempts to claim status among European nations, and other purposes that identifying oneself as Rome might entail.

⁷ Torlone 13.

⁸ Kalb 15.

⁹ Catalano 147.

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the epistle, from its dating to its context and content, see Nikolai Andreev's article "Filofey and his Epistle to Ivan Vasil'jevich." For a more recent emphatic reminder about the inaccuracy of pointing to the idea of "Third Rome" as "an early justification for Russian expansionism" and imperial ambition, see Daniel Rowland's "Moscow – the Third Rome or the New Israel." For an account of how the misunderstanding of the concept arose in the nineteenth century and developed thereafter, see Marshall Poe's "Moscow, the Third Rome: The Origins and Transformations of a 'Pivotal Moment.'"

An assumption of identification, however, is too neat and simplistic, and it erases the dynamic complexity in the creation and negotiation of meanings that references to Rome often contain, regardless of the period in question.¹¹ In the texts that I have studied so far, from the *Tale of the Princes of Vladimir* to Alexander Blok's *Catiline*, Rome becomes drawn into the Russian context and used sometimes as a symbol, sometimes as a model, sometimes as a simile. In none of the cases, however, are the authors attempting to be Roman. The closest they come is erasing the boundaries between Rome and Russia to argue for a certain universality of human history, which is an entirely different endeavor.

In order to understand the symbolic and ideological uses of ancient Rome in Russian literature and, specifically, in the Russian political imagination, I am drawing on scholarship in the fields of comparative literature, Slavic studies, classical reception, and history. My primary interlocutors are the scholars of classical reception and Russian literature, however, and a major motive behind my research is to help bridge the current gap between these two fields. Although there has been a growing interest in the study of classical tradition in Russia, there is still little attention devoted to this subject. Zara Torlone, a scholar of classical influences in Russian poetry, has recently lamented the marginal role that Russian texts play in the study of classical reception in the West. "In a recent 407-page *Companion to the Classical Tradition*," she writes, "the whole of Central/Eastern Europe occupies only 23 pages, and Russia is covered in a few paragraphs."¹²

Torlone's own work, *Russia and the Classics: Poetry's Foreign Muse* (2009), is an

¹¹ The dangers of the emphasis on identification can be illustrated by the following excerpt, which creates an impression that, across historical periods and authors, there was a consistent and identical striving towards identity: "There were many points of identification between Russia and Rome. Rurik, the founder of the first Russian dynasty, was believed to have descended from Augustus. Peter the Great, by assuming the title of emperor in the beginning of the eighteenth century, once again alluded to Russia's identification with Rome. The belief that St. Petersburg is a Northern Rome was shared by Lomonosov, Sumarokov, and Derzhavin." Frajlich 17.

¹² Torlone, *Russia and the Classics: Poetry's Foreign Muse*, 8.

important contribution to the growing field of Russian reception studies, both because it examines the role of the classics in the works of a number of prominent Russian poets and because it acknowledges heterogeneity of Russian approaches to reception yet still offers a possible overarching framework within which to examine this heterogeneity – that of “one of the eternal Russian questions,” East or West? Christianity and Byzantium or Secularization and Western Europe? Since the author’s primary interest is in the poets of the twentieth century, however, the majority of the work is focused on individual poets, such as Ivanov, Tsvetaeva, Mandel’shtam, and Brodsky, so the focus shifts onto these poets and their individual relationships with the classics rather than overarching thematic patterns or frameworks. This focus is particularly useful for those interested in these specific poets or those interested in seeing the variety of approaches to reception in the works of a number of prominent poets of the twentieth century. By bringing together a number of important poets in one work, Torlone also conveys the importance of the classics for modern Russian poetry.

Torlone’s recent *Vergil in Russia: National Identity and Classical Reception* (2014) offers a more narrow focus, arguing that the reception of Vergil in Russia was intimately tied to “Russia’s challenge to define its character and validity of its own civilization,” as “Vergil became [...] a part of solving the problem of Russian national identity in political, social, cultural, spiritual, and personal terms.”¹³ She examines the reception of Vergil from court literature of the eighteenth century to the work of Joseph Brodsky, showing the enduring importance of and engagement with Vergil’s works in Russia.

Anna Frajlich, in her 2007 book *The Legacy of Ancient Rome in the Russian Silver Age*, looks at the works of nine poets of the Russian Silver Age and adopts a distinct individual

¹³ Torlone 5.

approach to each one without imposing an overall framework on her analyses. Her book offers a glimpse into the pervasiveness of classical interests and influences on a variety of important poets of this period.

Another important work devoted to classical reception in Russian is Marinus Wes's *Classics in Russia 1700-1855: Between Two Bronze Horsemen* (1992). The approach here is to provide a comprehensive survey of the role of the classics in Russia in the specified time period, including the extent of classical education, the attitudes of the rulers towards classical education, the allusions to the classics in the works of various writers and thinkers, and even curious anecdotes that are part of the story of classical presences and reception. It is an enormously useful resource, primarily as a survey work. In addition to the historical exposition, there is also an "interlude" where Wes offers his own potential framework for thinking about classical reception in Russian – that of action vs. reaction, the former of which has to do with the classics "as a source of inspiration and life," while the latter sees them as "serving to confirm the status quo." For Wes, classical reception between 1765 and 1835 was originally primarily characterized by the impulse of action, and gradually became dominated by reaction, which continued to dominate the role of antiquity during the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. As Wes himself readily admits, however, such broad dichotomies are rarely perfectly applicable, and there is variation of the function of the classics often even within the works of a single writer. Still, the work has been very valuable to me because it frequently pays close attention to the influence of the political and historical context on the availability and role of the classics.

In Russian, there is G. Knabe's *Russkaia Antichnost'* (*Russian Antiquity*, 1999), which examines Russia's relationship to antiquity from the medieval times through Pushkin's writing, from hesychasm to the imperial St. Petersburg. This work is unique in that it traces the nature

and function of antiquity in the earlier periods and examines the greater historical factors that guided the development of reception (such as, for instance, how the turn away from Byzantium and towards Rome was advantageous to the newly centralized Russian state in its diplomatic relationships or how the classical references in the time of Peter the Great were mediated by the approaches to reception in Western Europe). It also attempts to classify the paths of reception, from the adoption of specific cultural elements to the turn towards general historical periods because they are perceived to be somehow kindred in spirit or circumstances, as well as offer a binary for the two opposing forces that the author sees within classicism: a civic-normative force and an escapist-individualistic force. While I am not convinced by the specific classifications that he offers, the diachronic approach that aligns reception trends with specific developments in Russian history and culture is useful for thinking about the greater underlying factors that guide patterns of reception.

Finally, there is a book that has the closest resemblance to the goals of my project, though it again focuses on the writers of a specific period: Judith Kalb's *Russia's Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890 – 1940* (2008). Much like my project, Kalb's work examines specifically the role of Rome rather than classics in general, and her interest lies in examining how "[t]he texts reveal a striking concern with history, conceived for the most part cyclically and mythically, and with Russia's place in history and culture" and the way Russian modernist writers "[s]eizing upon Rome as a crucial symbol and rewriting it, sometimes anachronistically, to suit their own modern-day purposes, [...] created new, individual, and at times subversive narratives of Russian national identity."¹⁴ By drawing from both the political and the religious contexts of Roman reception in Russia, Kalb shows both the complexity and the multiplicity of

¹⁴ Kalb 33.

approaches to reception in the works of a number of modernist writers, including Merezhkovskii, Briusov, Blok, and Bulgakov.

These are the works that take different approaches to providing a comprehensive portrayal by focusing on different writers and/or time periods to point out patterns and differences. In addition to these, there is a wide variety of texts, both Russian and American, that address specific authors, works, or aspects of reception that have been immensely helpful for the different chapters of this project. As might be expected, the amount of reception scholarship varies widely from author to author. There is a vast amount of work on Aleksandr Pushkin and classical reception, for instance. A recent volume titled *Pushkin and Antiquity (Pushkin i Antichnost')*, for instance, offers a collection of essays exploring a variety of classical allusions in Pushkin's various works and includes a bibliography of roughly two hundred titles dealing exclusively with classical reception. On the other hand, there is very little scholarship devoted specifically to Ivan Goncharov and the classics, with the exception of a chapter from Amy Singleton's book *No Place like Home: the Literary Artist and Russia's Search for Cultural Identity*, which interprets Oblomov's story as a failed Odyssey. Since these various studies are of more local and topical relevance, I will mention them within the particular chapters for which they have been helpful.

Finally, there are two works of Western classical reception whose works have been important for conceptualizing my project. The first is Catharine Edwards's *Writing Rome: Textual approaches to the city* (1996). Edwards divides her book into the different concepts that Rome can embody, becoming "the city of memories," "the city of gods," "the city of empire," and so on. Most importantly, however, Rome is "the city of words." Our responses to Rome, much like the responses of the ancients, have been "profoundly conditioned" by its textual

representations which affect our (and their) relationships with the “material Romes,” the physical topography of the city.¹⁵ Although I am only dealing with textual Romes, Edwards’s articulation of the various essential characteristics that Rome can be imagined to embody has led me to wonder what Rome is a city *of* in the various texts I examine. Is Rome inevitably essentialized to stand for a single concept?

The other inspiration for my project was Charles Martindale’s *Redeeming the Text: Latin poetry and the hermeneutics of reception* (1993). “Meaning,” he writes, “is always realized at the point of reception.”¹⁶ In a way, this idea has become one of the underlying assumptions behind my approach to my project, leading me to try to understand each of the Romes I have encountered on its own terms. Instead of looking to see which period or author saw a more “authentic,” “better informed,” or “less distorted” approach to antiquity, I begin with the premise that “Rome” has no meaning until it is created within a particular text and that all the Romes we encounter have equal status.

Of course, this meaning is not created in a vacuum, and another important concept from this text is the importance of the “chain of reception.” Martindale writes, “We all approach the reading of texts with the baggage of our values and our experience, with certain categories, assumptions, prejudices and ‘fore-understandings,’ and “our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected.”¹⁷ These observations have directed my interest towards the “chain of receptions” within the classical tradition in Russia and the question of the way that new Romes are constructed both in the context of their

¹⁵ Edwards, *Writing Rome*, 1-2.

¹⁶ Martindale, *Redeeming the Text*, 3.

¹⁷ Martindale 5.

contemporary circumstances or values *and* the context of older Romes with their own priorities and value systems.¹⁸

My own approach is somewhat different from the works mentioned above, because I wanted to trace not classical or even Roman reception in general, but rather a specific nexus of concepts and relationships in order to see whether I could find a meaningful and coherent story to tell across a succession of historical periods and writers. Although most of my chapters are dedicated to individual authors, I do not attempt to account for all instances of their classical allusions or their relationship to antiquity. In the first place, I am primarily interested in the allusions to Rome made specifically in a political and historical context and in works that are concerned with understanding and responding to the authors' contemporary Russian reality. Secondly, within this context, the main "character" of my narrative is always Rome, and I try to think not only about the functions of various political allusions and connections to Roman events, figures, and so on, but also about the entity of "Rome" that is created in these different texts.

To accomplish this goal, I approach each chapter with three interconnected but distinct basic questions:

1. What does Rome mean and represent, and how is this meaning related to other imagined Romes?
2. Why is Rome important; what purpose does it serve to evoke it?
3. How are the character and role of Rome constructed; what are mechanisms or modes that govern the reception of Rome?

The last question is the most uncommon and difficult to answer and even articulate, though

¹⁸ I should note, however, that, contrary to the spirit of Martindale's book, I have applied its ideas to the Russian writers rather than to myself.

maybe the most interesting. It is not a matter of content, which has to do with *what* Rome means and stands for in each case. Questions of content include clear variables – the period of Roman history that is evoked, the Roman characters or events that gain prominence, the essential characteristic(s) that Rome is meant to embody. The function or purpose of Roman references is closely connected to the question of content. For instance, references to the figures of Brutus and Cassius, the murderers of Julius Caesar, are evoked by the Decembrists to oppose autocracy because they represent the fight for political freedom and against tyranny.

The question of the underlying mechanisms for approaching reception, however, does not necessarily have any inherent connection to the question of content. It is something akin to Hayden White's notion of "emplotment," meaning "a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole."¹⁹ Instead of arrangement of events or a plot, however, I am referring to the underlying structures that govern the turn to Rome and the way to connect Rome to the Russian reality. These underlying structures may be entirely different even when the content of the allusions or their function is very similar. For example, the Roman Empire appears both during the time of Ivan IV and the time of Peter the Great in order to give legitimacy to the Russian state and autocrat. Yet the way this function relies in entirely different mechanisms. In the first case, which I will discuss in some detail below, the link between Rome and Russia is built literally and materially, through direct blood relationships and physical objects that are passed down from Augustus to the Russian rulers. At the time of Peter, however, the links are figurative, established through spectacle and performance (such as architectural constructions and enactment of triumphal processions), conveying grandeur perhaps *comparable* to or *evocative* of

¹⁹ White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, 21.

that of Rome but not directly physically linked to it.

This question of underlying mechanisms was one of my major motivations for studying texts from a number of different historical moments. I am hoping that I can make up for what I have to sacrifice in terms of comprehensiveness by drawing attention to yet another kind of multiplicity in the practice of reception – that of form in addition to content. My other major motive for a diachronic approach is to show how the content and function of Roman allusions may respond to and evolve alongside Russian historical and political developments, often echoing and engaging with previous meanings and functions to create new Romes that embody new systems of values and serve new purposes (the “chain of reception”).

Before turning to the dissertation itself, however, I want to pause to discuss a “prequel” of sorts - the *Tale of the Princes of Vladimir* – because this discussion will allow me to explain the attitudes towards the classics in pre-Petrine Russia and point out the manner in which the idea of ancient Rome was intertwined with the concepts of autocracy and legitimacy from its earliest appearance.

Classical reception in pre-Petrine Russia

Despite being very brief – about five pages in modern print – this tale is the most obvious early example and arguably the truest harbinger of the future approach to Russia’s reception of classical Rome. Although there is no evidence to show direct influence, this particular tale foreshadows the incorporation of Roman literature, history and imagery into the official ideology of Peter the Great and his successors by aligning Rome with the images of military conquest, world empire, and legitimate political power. At the same time, however, it also makes evident just how little familiarity there was with Roman history and literature in the earlier periods.

This tale, composed during the reign of either Ivan III (1462 – 1505) or Vasili III (1505-

1533),²⁰ gained particular prominence under Ivan IV (1533-1584), now popularly known as Ivan the Terrible. Its importance can be demonstrated by its appearance in a wide variety of sixteenth-century documents, from the foreign correspondence of Ivan IV to the *Book of Degrees of Royal Genealogy*, a history of Rus' presented as a “ladder,” with different generations of rulers occupying different rungs up to Ivan IV, and the great *Reading Menaea*, a selection of readings for every day of the year drawn from hagiographies, chronicles, the Bible, and other works, as well as depictions in murals and carvings of the period.

In some versions, the tale begins its history from the time of Noah, then quickly proceeds to Augustus and lingers on his history in far more detail, suggesting that it is specifically Augustus that was of particular importance as a predecessor. Other versions start with Augustus himself, leaving out the preceding history. The entry of Augustus into the narrative begins with the murder of Julius Caesar, who is presented as Augustus's brother:

Meanwhile, generals Brutus, Pompey and Crassus revolted against Julius in Rome and killed him with their own hands. Soon, the news about Julius' death reached Augustus in Egypt, and he mourned the death of his brother. And, without hesitation, he called all the generals and officials and informed them about the death of Julius, the Roman caesar. And all of them, Romans and Egyptians, cried out with one voice, “O glorious leader, we cannot resurrect your brother Julius the Caesar, but we can crown your majesty with the diadem of the Roman kingdom to

²⁰ Scholars disagree about the authorship and the composition date of this tale. According to the model proposed by Dmitrieva and used mostly recently by Myl'nikov, the first version of the tale appeared in the so-called *Epistle of Spiridon-Savva* in the early sixteenth century (ca. 1505) and was composed by the Kievan metropolitan and writer Spiridon-Savva. In Dmitrieva's view, the tale was commissioned by Vasili III (the father of Ivan the Terrible) or one of his officials, written by Spiridon-Savva in its draft version, and, soon thereafter, given more official form of a tale rather than an epistle, complete with dates and other historical information drawn from historical sources. Other historians, including Zimin and Goldberg, argue that the epistle version is derivative, not original. Goldberg places Spiridon-Savva's epistle into a slightly later category, relying partially on the testimony of the author himself, who claims to have gotten the story from someone else. The likelier author, in Goldberg's view, is Dmitri Gerasimov, a Russian diplomat and translator, who spent some time in Rome as an envoy and whose familiarity with works used in *The Tale of the Princes of Vladimir* is attested in a book written by one of his Italian interlocutors. Zimin, on the other hand, places the original text earlier, into the reign of Ivan III, arguing that the author should be sought among the adherents of Dmitrii, the grandson of Ivan III who was, for a time, intended to be successor and crowned as a co-ruler, but was eventually replaced by Ivan III's son, Vasili III. See Dmitrieva R.P. *Skazanie o kniaz'iaxh vladimirskikh*, Myl'nikov, A. S. “Mifologemy 'Kesar' Avgust' i 'Moskva - tretii Rim,' ili Moskovskaya stranitsa v istorii evropeiskogo izmereniia slavianskogo mira,” Goldberg, A. L. “K istorii rasskaza o potomkakh Avgusta i o darakh Monomakha.”

reward the good and take vengeance on the evil.” And they clothed him in the garments of Seostr, the first king of Egypt: purple robes and byssus, and girded him with a belt studded with jewels, and put on his head the crown of Porus, the king of India, brought from India by Alexander of Macedon, and they also put on him the mantle of king Felix, the ruler of the world, and cried out together with a loud voice: “Rejoice, Augustus, the king of Rome and the entire world!”

[Вставши же ипати на Иулиа кесаря, Вруто и Помпие и Крас и убиста его в Риме. И скоро прииде вестъ к Августу стратигу в Египет о Иулиеве смерти, он же зело опечялися о братне смерти и скоро съзва вся воеводы и чиновники, нумеры и препоситы и възвещает им смерть Иулиа кесаря римскаго. Они же едоногласно реша, римляне и египтяне: “О пресловый стратиге, Иулиа кесаря брата твоего от смерти възставити не можем, а твое величество венчевем венцем римским царствия.” И облекоста его в одежду Сеострову, начялнаго царя Египту, а порфиру и висон, и препоясаста его поясом фелрмидом, и възложиста на главу его митру царя Пора индийска, юже принесл Александр Македон от Индиа, и приодеша его по плещема окровницею царя Феликса, владущаго вселенною. И радостне вси възкликнуша велиим гласом: “Радуйся, Августе царю римский и всеа вселенныя.”^{21]}

It is immediately obvious that this account is, historically speaking, at best grossly inaccurate.

Such inaccuracies and distortions are not particularly striking given the context in which this tale appears – that of hostility to and, for the most part, lack of familiarity with classical literature.

Before returning to the tale itself, it is worth discussing this context in some detail, as it provides a clear idea about the peculiarity of Russia’s relationship to the classics.

Perhaps the major obstacle to classical reception in early Russia was the explicit opposition to secular or pre-Christian literature. This prejudice lasted well into the eighteenth century, when a brochure explaining the mythological and historical imagery on the triumphal gates erected for Peter the Great had to justify the use of such non-Christian imagery to the public.²² Before the eighteenth century, the use of non-Christian authors could be an accusation against which one had to defend himself. Clement, the twelfth century metropolitan of Kiev, for

²¹ Catalano 24.

²² Derzhavina 154.

instance, writes to a priest named Thomas to refute an accusation that he had deviated from respected sources and wrote based on “Homer, Aristotle, and Plato,” the representatives of “Hellenic cunning.”²³ Filofei, the author of the famous “Third Rome” epistle, writes that he “is not familiar with Hellenic cunning, did not read the rhetor's astronomy, and did not hold conversations with wise philosophers, learning instead the books and letters of grace-giving law” (“...еллинских борзостей не протекох и риторских астрономов не читал, и с мудрыми философи в беседах не бывал, а учился книгам и буквам благодатного закона...”).²⁴

The 1531 trial of Vassian Patrikeev, a political and ecclesiastical figure, included the accusation “you have included the [teachings of the] Hellenic wise men into your rules” (“а ты ныне во своих правилах еллинъских мудрецов учение написал”),²⁵ indicating that classical learning was still viewed with suspicion and reproach in the circles that were in charge of literary production. The accusation itself was false and tells us more about the attitude towards the classics than about familiarity with them. The same sentiment is later echoed by the archpriest Avvakum, who, writing in the seventeenth century, takes pride in speaking plain Russian language and lacking familiarity with Greek philosophy. He even goes as far as arguing, “rhetors and philosophers cannot be Christians.”

Given such hostility to the classics, it is hardly surprising that there was little familiarity with ancient history or literature. The works that provided the most substantial amount of information on Greek and Roman history were the two Byzantine chronicles, that of John Malalas (sixth century) and George Hamartolus (ninth century.). The latter of these, translated as early as the tenth century, proved to be more popular of the two, existing in its entirety in a number of

²³ Nikol'skii 103.

²⁴ Catalano 153.

²⁵ Kazakova 363.

manuscripts. The former is known only in fragments in other works and compilations of the XII - XVI centuries.²⁶ Both chronicles begin with the events of *Genesis* and end with the events of the author's lifetime. John Malalas was less concerned with historical or chronological accuracy, adding outstanding episodes from mythology and Christian hagiographies and often introducing gross inaccuracies and misinformation. George Hamartolus starts with Biblical history and proceeds to discuss Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Alexander the Great, Rome and Constantinople, providing a moral Christian framework for understanding world history.²⁷

There was, likewise, a translation of *The Jewish War* of Flavius Josephus, which was translated in Kievan Rus', but did not acquire significant popularity until the XV-XVII century.²⁸ This translation included significant deviations from its Greek sources to imbue the work with Christian explanations and details inspired by Russian environment, architecture, and so on. The growing popularity in Muscovite times may be significant. A manuscript sent to the Hilandar monastery on Mount Athos by Ivan IV includes a compilation of the *History of the Jewish War* and *The Tale of the Sack of Constantinople*, suggesting that these two texts were not only considered important, but were also perceived to belong together for thematic reasons. Perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that both cities, Jerusalem and Constantinople, were thought to have fallen because of their sins and deviations from the true Orthodox faith.²⁹ No doubt, the growth

²⁶ Mescherskii, N. A. *Istochniki i sostav drevnei slaviano-russkoi perevodnoi pis'mennosti IX-XV vv.* Mescherskii argues that the chronicle of Hamartolus was first translated in Bulgaria in the tenth century, then revised in Kievan Rus' in the eleventh century. Another (Serbian) translation was done during the so-called Second South Slavic influence. For a discussion of the two chronicles, see Istrin V. M. *Knigy vremennia i obraznyia Georgiia Mnikha. Khronika Georgiia Amartola v drevnem slaviano-russkom perevode*, and Istrin V. M. *Khronika Ioanna Malaly v slavianskom perevode. Kniga X.* Odessa, 1912.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* and Mescherskii, N. A. *Znachenie drevneslavianskikh perevodov dlia vosstanovleniie ikh arkhetyfov (na materiale drevnerusskogo perevoda 'Istorii Iudeiskoi Voiny' Iosifa Flaviiia).*

²⁹ With regard to Josephus' text, this explanation is, of course, anachronistic; nevertheless, the interpolations that exist in this translation include explicit references to it, leaving little doubt that this is how the fate of Jerusalem was perceived.

and strengthening of Muscovy was meant to be a contrast to the fate of these cities, or perhaps it is evidence of the model of succession of world empires, since there always seems to be only one strong world power at a time.

The translated works listed above were often combined in manuscript compilations of historical nature, which provided an overview of world history starting with Creation or other early Biblical events, such as the Flood. This overview, as Francis Thompson has repeatedly pointed out, was quite distorted.³⁰ This distortion is due both to the sometimes incomplete or outright fictional information provided in these works and to the lack of knowledge, historical, cultural or linguistic, of the Russian scribes translating, copying and reading these works. For example, judging by the contents of the *Illuminated Chronicle Compilation (Litsevoi Svod)* compiled under Ivan IV, an especially enlightened Russian reader would know that “Lukios” (Lucan) wrote that Julius Caesar “made war against Pompey Magnus and, after catching up to him, killed him in Egypt,” that “in those years there lived Luveos (Livy), a most wise Roman historian who wrote a lot about Rome,” and that “at the same time Virgilios (Vergil), a Roman writer, wrote a tale about Aeneas and Elissa, who was from Phoenicia, and about a wooden horse, and the sack of Troy.”³¹ Even these details, however, were copied from the Byzantine sources, and do not imply that Muscovite scribes had any direct familiarity with the Latin authors themselves. None of their works were available in either original or translation at this time.

In addition, mentions of Rome and its emperors occurred quite commonly in lives of martyrs and other Christian works. In these tales, however, the role of the city or the particular emperor was often marginal, serving as a background for the tale of the martyr. The mention of

³⁰ Thompson 303-364.

³¹ *Litsevoi Svod*, vol.1, 513-515.

the emperors seems to be quite one-dimensional. For instance, Diocletian, who makes frequent appearances, is mentioned in the first sentence of the narrative as the emperor who persecuted Christians, disappearing from the narrative after this introduction. Rome here serves as the setting, but the location itself generally seems to be of little importance, providing the location in the same way that other cities are mentioned in similar places and similarly cursory way in other tales. There is no engagement with either the place or the emperor -- they seem to fill a basic role for a historical context and are often indistinguishable from one another. A summary from an epistle of Ivan IV appears to be an apt portrayal of the attitude towards these emperors: “and from the time of Augustus's rule until the years of Maxentius and Galerius there was in Rome a persecution of Christians (“и от Августова царства в Риме даже до лет Максентия и Максимиана Галера сие гонение быст на християни”³²). A possible exception to the pattern is Constantine the Great, who often appears as the main protagonist, portrayed in a positive light, unlike other emperors who are at best neutral figures. Reading compilations include, for instance, the stories of his conversion (variously attributed to a pre-battle vision and a miraculous cure from a disease) and his life. At the same time, there still seems to be no engagement with the figure, since the same translated tales are copied without changes or explicit interpretation, which makes it difficult, perhaps even impossible, to judge whether these names or places had any special significance to the scribes copying them.

It is in this context that the *Tale of the Princes of Vladimir* appears, showing at best a tenuous relationship to Roman history but containing definite signs of engagement and ideologically-significant interpretation of classical references. This latter quality makes the tale a strong candidate for a possible starting place for viable study of reception. Vorob’ev, for instance,

³² Adrianova-Perets, *Poslaniia Ivana Groznogo*, 200.

uses the concept of “tracing [the tsar’s] genealogy to the descendants of ‘Augustus caesar’” (presumably referring to this tale) to represent and dismiss all pre-Petrine classical reception and contrasting this practice with the eighteenth century, when Russians would begin to “think about the content and form of classical antiquity...”³³ Often the pre-Petrine time is left out entirely in the studies of reception. Marinus Wes, for instances, even offers a precise date for what he considers to be the beginning of “West European” classical reception in Russia.³⁴ This date is December 13, 1697, the day when Peter saw an antique art collection in Amsterdam. I would like to make a case, however, for the importance of the *Tale of the Princes of Vladimir* to the story of classical reception in Russia. Let us return to it:

Meanwhile, generals Brutus, Pompey and Crassus revolted against Julius in Rome and killed him with their own hands. Soon, the news about Julius' death reached Augustus in Egypt, and he mourned the death of his brother. And, without hesitation, he called all the generals and officials and informed them about the death of Julius, the Roman caesar. And all of them, Romans and Egyptians, cried out with one voice, “O glorious leader, we cannot resurrect your brother Julius the Caesar, but we can crown your majesty with the diadem of the Roman kingdom to reward the good and take vengeance on the evil.” And they clothed him in the garments of Seostr, the first king of Egypt: purple robes and byssus, and girded him with a belt studded with jewels, and put on his head the crown of Porus, the king of India, brought from India by Alexander of Macedon, and they also put on him the mantle of king Felix, the ruler of the world, and cried out together with a loud voice: “Rejoice, Augustus, the king of Rome and the entire world!”

[Вставша же ипати на Иулиа кесаря, Врутоc и Помпие и Крас и убиста его в Риме. И скоро прииде вестъ к Августу стратигу в Египет о Иулиеве смерти, он же зело опечялися о братне смерти и скоро съзва вся воеводы и чиновники, нумеры и препоситы и възвещает им смерть Иулиа кесаря римскаго. Они же едоногласно реша, римляне и египтяне: “О пресловый стратиге, Иулиа кесаря брата твоего от смерти въставити не можем, а твое величество венчевем венцем римским царствия.” И облекоста его в одежду Сеострову, начялнаго царя Египту, а порфиру и висон, и препоясаста его поясом фелрмидом, и възложиста на главу его митру царя Пора индийска, юже принесл Александр Македон от Индиа, и приодеша его по плещема окровницею царя Феликса, владушяго вселенною. И радостне вси възкликнуша велиим гласом: “Радуйся, Августе царю римский и всеа

³³ Vorob’ev 4.

³⁴ Wes 13.

вселенныя!"]

In his description of the beginning of the reign of Augustus, the author focuses on legitimizing autocratic power and establishing Augustus's credentials to set him up as a worthy ancestor of the Russian princes. The first step in this process is portraying Augustus as the king of "the entire world." By attributing this title to a proclamation by one of the peoples ruled by Rome rather than Augustus himself, the writer portrays the power of the Roman Empire as given voluntarily and, thus implicitly beneficial to the people whom it rules. The expansion of Rome is desired rather than opposed, even by those whom Rome conquers.

The list of previous world rulers that immediately precedes the focus on Augustus plays an important function as well, because the model set up is that of a succession (rather than, for instance, co-existence) of various world powers. The list includes Seostr (a pharaoh of Egypt), a mysterious "Felix," and Alexander the Great. According to this model, there is only one world power at a time, and a legitimate ruler somehow inherits the place of the previous rulers.

While these previous rulers, especially Alexander the Great, whose often fictional military exploits were well known in Russia at this time, acquired this power through military conquest, Augustus receives them for his good character. Curiously, as this tale becomes widely used under Ivan IV, this particular aspect of it, the non-violent acquisition of power, disappears, and it is military strength and divine favor, or the combination of the two, that become explicitly emphasized in state and church documents. The disappearance of this particular aspect of the tale is important because it may point to a desire to avoid certain liabilities that could place restrictions on the ruler. I will return to this point later on.

Equally important is Augustus's first action – he begins his rule by imposing order on the world and appointing suitable rulers to its different regions ("Август же начят ряд покладати

на вселенную”³⁵). After acquiring absolute power, the good ruler can use this power for the greater good of everyone and everything in the world. Needless to say, this account says nothing of the negative consequences of consolidation of power. It is only the establishment of order (that also serves as evidence that the decision to give Augustus power was indeed a morally justified one) that is mentioned. There is an assumption that Augustus has the right to dispose of the world as he pleases. Even though his power was granted by others, he does not have any obligation to consult advisers before distributing his territories. This, too, is important because it frees the ruler from the obligation to rely on others. This motif *does* get repeated in later literature that makes use of the tale.

The appointment of Augustus to this office is furnished with an impressive list of royal ornaments from the entire world (“the garments of Seostr, the first king of Egypt: purple robes and byssus,” “a belt studded with jewels,” “the crown of Porus, the king of India,” “the mantle of king Felix”), which may symbolize, on the material level, the surrender of the entire world to Augustus. Since all of these material objects are specifically attributes of power, a notion emphasized by the mention of their previous owners and their status as rulers of the world, as well as the fact that these objects were part of royal attire. The importance of the material objects and their link to inheritance of legitimacy and power, is mirrored both later on in this tale and in other tales that advance rival claims to legitimacy through a Roman inheritance. Most notably, the tales from Novgorod, which will be discussed later on, rely on the same technique in response to Novgorod's loss of independence to Moscow. The crowning of Augustus with the regalia of previous rulers also reinforces the idea of succession -- the same imperial attire is used for the crowning ceremonies and, logically, can only be worn by one ruler at a time. Thus, the

³⁵ Catalano 24.

transfer of objects does not only symbolize the transfer of power; it also implies *exclusivity* of high power and legitimacy.

After presenting the process of Augustus's being crowned the ruler of the world, the author goes on to establish a direct genealogical line from Augustus to the Russian rulers through a mythical "relative" of Augustus named "Prus," who is appointed to rule over one part of the empire when Augustus is concerned with imposing order on his realm. Centuries later, a dying prince of Novgorod makes it his last wish that his people should go to the lands formerly ruled by Prus to find a descendant of his to rule over Novgorod. The people follow his wish and find Rurik, who comes to Novgorod to become the first Grand Prince of Rus'. Here, the author makes it clear that the importance of Rurik was specifically his blood link to Augustus: "and they found there a certain prince named Rurik who descended from the Roman tsar Augustus." ("и обретоша тамо некоего князя именем Рюрика суца от рода римскаго царя Августа"³⁶). In other words, it was not a mere accident that Rurik became the ruler of Novgorod, but, rather, a conscious intention to find a legitimate ruler for the city. A crucial qualification for a legitimate ruler was apparently a direct blood link to Augustus.

As he recounts the chain of men in the genealogy, the writer pauses to point out the rulers who had power over the whole world, leaving out details about less prominent figures. The emphasis on power as the focus of the story is thus immediately obvious, as it is the only attribute specifically and consistently pointed out. Although there is a break in the genealogical link between Alexander and Augustus, the chain nevertheless remains unbroken because of the unbroken chain of power that connects the two, a chain embodied in the objects that Augustus receives when he is crowned in Egypt. When the author describes the next part of the chain, one

³⁶ Catalano 25.

that connects Augustus to the Russian princes, he makes sure to point out there is both the link of holding power (and voluntarily given power at that) *and* the material link of a blood relationship. Prus was not only one of the members of Augustus' entourage who received a certain area to govern, which emphasizes an unbroken link in the legitimacy of power, but also one of his relatives, someone connected by blood. Rurik, who traditionally stands in the beginning of the tsars' genealogy in Russian chronicles,³⁷ is then linked to Prus and, in turn, to Augustus and the other world rulers.

The second episode from the tale deals with the transfer of imperial regalia from Constantinople to Moscow. Before providing an account of the decline of Rome (due to its fall “away from [true] faith”), the author includes a reference to an earlier legend “about how the grand prince Oleg went and exacted tribute from Constantinople, the new Rome” (“...яко то князь велики Олег ходи и взят Костянтинаполя, с новаго Рима, по главам дань...”). What is crucial here is that Constantinople is *explicitly* identified as the new Rome, so the soon-to-come transfer of regalia from Constantinople continues the Roman line of inheritance. The fact that one of the objects transferred from Constantinople is said to have belonged to Augustus (see the quote below) reminds the reader of the ultimate origin of the genealogy, as does the sentence at the end of the text which summarizes the text and brings up, one final time, the “fact” that the Russian princes are descended “from Augustus, the Roman caesar and tsar, for this Augustus was the ruler of the world” (“...от Августа, кесаря римска и царя, сей бо Август пооблада вселеною”). The use of the title tsar in connection with the Roman rulers is typical, but the fact that the title is here specifically linked to rule over the entire world is intriguing, given that the title 'tsar' was a matter of some controversy during the XV and XVI century. It was insistently

³⁷ Goldberg 205.

sought by Ivan III, but it was not until it was officially ceremonially granted to Ivan IV that it was generally accepted.³⁸

After attributing the legitimacy of proper lineage to the Russian rulers, the author goes on to provide an account of the decline of Rome and Constantinople, perhaps because the scheme of a single world power is necessarily linked to the decline of other world powers. The fall of the first Rome is dated to the year 6553 (1044), when the Pope “fell away from [true] faith.” Saddened by this development, Constantine VII, the Emperor of Constantinople seems to voluntarily give up his place as the head of the empire to the Russian prince Vladimir. This part of the account is rather vague, and there is no explicit explanation of why it is that Constantinople itself cannot be the new head of the Roman Empire. Perhaps this is the case because Constantinople is considered to be a manifestation of Rome. Together, the two may represent the legitimacy of the Roman Empire, one representing imperial power and the other Christian faith, so that, when one of them is no longer a suitable leader, the whole empire is in danger. If this explanation is accurate, then it does indeed appear sensible for Constantine, the emperor of Constantinople, to transfer his power to the Russian sovereign, since it is the Russian Church that is (implicitly) the new head of the Christian faith. Whatever the reasoning may be, the Russian princes, in addition to their lineage from Augustus, receive the artifacts of the Roman Empire, much like Augustus had received the artifacts of world rulers. These objects are the former possessions of Constantine and Augustus, as well as a cross from the wood of the cross on which Jesus himself was crucified. These artifacts show Russia as *both* the political *and* religious heir of the Roman Empire, chosen by the Roman Empire itself:

From his own neck the emperor took the life-giving cross, made from the life-giving tree on which the Lord Christ was crucified; from his own head he took the imperial crown and placed it on a golden salver. The emperor commanded his

³⁸ Dmitrieva 137-8.

servants to bring the carnelian goblet from which the Roman emperor Augustus had drunk his pleasure, and the mantle that he wore on his own shoulders, and a chain forged of Arabian gold, and many other imperial gifts.

He committed all this to Metropolitan Neophytus and the bishops and his noble messengers, and he sent them to Grand Prince Vladimir Vsevolodovich to beseech him and say, “Receive from us, o godly and pious prince, these worthy gifts—the emperor’s share from the beginning of the years of your kin and lineage, which will last forever—for your glory and honor and for the coronation of yourself as free and autocratic emperor. This is what our envoys will beseech you: we ask Your Majesty for peace and loving relations, so that the Church of God will be without turmoil, and so that all Orthodox will remain in peace under the power of our empire and your free autocracy, Great Rus.”³⁹

[...и от своя выя приемлет животворящий крест от самого животворящего древа, на нем же распяся владыка Христос. Снемлет же от своя главы и венець царьскый и поставляет его на блюде злате, повелевает же принести и крабицу сердаликову, из нея же Август кесарь римский веселяшеса, и ожерелие иже на плещу своєю ношаше, и кацию от злата аравийска исковану, [...] и ины многы дарове царьскыя.

И предает их митрополиту Неофиту с епископы и своим благородным рядником. И посылает их к великому князю Владимиру Всеволодичу глаголя: “Приими от нас, о боголюбивый благоверный княже, сия честныя дарове от начяток вечных лет твоего родства поколения на славу и честь и на венчание твоего волнаго и самодержавнаго царствия...”⁴⁰]

It may also be significant, however, that the event immediately preceding the transfer of regalia is an attack on Byzantine Thrace. Thus, even though there is an underlying Christian framework, the more outstanding plot structures deal with military and political power.

There is a repetition of the same motifs within the same rather short tale. The power transfer is portrayed as fitting into the same formula, without any unpleasant interruptions - there are no wars, usurpations, revolts. Instead, there is a steady unbroken line of rulers. When there is a break in blood connection, such as the period between Alexander and Augustus, the void is filled with other material links - objects of power that come directly from a ruler of the

³⁹ Trans. Dan Collins, unpublished.

⁴⁰ Catalano 26-7.

appropriate blood line. After Augustus, the line remains completely unbroken, and the direct descent is pointed out several times.

Overall, there are two related features of Roman allusions that characterize the reception of “Rome” in this period. The first has to do with the establishment of direct physical links. Unlike the later identifications with Rome that we see in the times of Peter and Catherine the Great, which rely on metaphorical or allegorical parallels, Muscovite ones (or at least the more official of them) seem to have been of metonymic nature, focusing on material links to convey authority, legitimacy and connection with the Roman Empire. We can see this focus in the tale discussed above, both in the part that deals with Augustus's rise to power and the part that deals with the transfer of regalia from Constantinople. The use of both of these tales focused precisely on these material objects: the *Illustrated Chronicle Compilation* includes a number of references to the regalia (in at least two different parts of the text), the hat of Monomachus becomes the official coronation object of the Russian princes, the carvings on the “throne of Monomachus” culminate in the coronation of the Russian prince with precisely this object.

The earlier part also focuses on materiality, though of a different sort. Instead of the physical objects, it is blood that provides the legitimization. There is an attempt to show that there is an unbroken physical chain that connects the Russian princes with Augustus - an approach rather different from the later attempts to show that the emperor was *like* or *better than* Augustus (or another Roman figure). Regardless of whether the focus is on the blood or regalia, the key element seems to be the desire to show that this particular physical link has come to Muscovy in an ideologically significant manner. In other words, it is important that the migration of objects is not due to chance and is not a minor byproduct of another event. Instead, intention and purpose behind these events are highlighted throughout the tale and its interpretations.

Another important and related feature of the identification with Rome in this period (as opposed to the later periods) is its literalness, which is evident in the emphasis on the unbroken chain of rulers descending from Augustus, which appears in the *Tale of the Princes of Vladimir*.⁴¹ Of course, there are symbolic associations present in the tale, such as the association between material objects and the office or the power that they present. At the same time, the relationship between the Muscovite princes and ancient Rome is done through literal physical connections that may mask or explain symbolic associations but always insist that the link itself is literal rather than symbolic.

Although other Romes will appear for a similar purpose – to legitimize and glorify the Russian Empire and its rulers – they will rely on very different mechanisms to achieve this goal. Later Romes will be different still, carrying new meanings, functions, and forms. To show the complex and dynamic nature of these Romes, I offer the following five case studies:

Dissertation Outline:

Chapter 1

The dissertation begins with the writings of Mikhail Lomonosov in the middle of the eighteenth century (primarily the reign of Elizabeth, 1741-1762), the period when Russian authors were creating a Russian imperial literature and history. Roman models and allusions played a crucial role in this endeavor, and the Rome that emerges from the works of Lomonosov is a historical and literary rival to Russia, the competition with whom is meant to convey the grandeur of the Russian Empire and its superiority to contemporary Western European nations. This rivalry takes place within the structures of Roman legacy (such as impressive military history, geographical expansion, or literary monuments), which both implies a certain kinship

⁴¹ Adrianova-Perets 378-9.

between Rome and Russia and portrays Russia as a greater state than Rome even by Rome's own standards.

Chapter 2

The second chapter deals with the works of Gavriila Derzhavin, composed primarily during the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796). Whereas Lomonosov turned to Rome to convey the grandeur of the Russian Empire and its literature, Derzhavin introduces moral and ethical considerations into his Roman allusions in order to argue that the Russian rulers must strive not only for military greatness and geographical expansion, but also for moral rectitude and ethical treatment of their subjects. In his works, Roman figures and events become examples of admirable or despicable behavior. While Derzhavin is still working within the existing Russian political structures to improve rather than oppose or radically reform the state, his Rome introduces the possibility of doubt and disagreement into the relationship between the poet and the ruler that will be important for the next generation.

Chapter 3

Soon Rome becomes a source of inspiration for those who openly oppose the status quo, such as the group of aristocrats that attempted a government overthrow on December 14, 1825. A number of these figures, now known as the Decembrists, turned to ancient Rome to find historical precedents of fighters against tyranny. In this chapter, I will examine the works of Aleksandr Pushkin and Kondratii Ryleev to show how these historical precedents, now found in the Republican rather than the Imperial Rome, function as an emotional call to arms in the fight for freedom.

Chapter 4

The penultimate chapter deals with the middle of the nineteenth century, the period that

has been called “The Iron Age” for the classics in Russia. After the suppression of the Decembrist uprising and in response to the political unrest in Europe in 1848, the state began viewing political sentiments and Roman allusions with suspicion. Despite the hostile environment and the resulting overt turn away from political to philosophical concerns, Roman echoes continue, though in a fragmented and associative manner. In Ivan Goncharov’s novel *Oblomov*, we encounter a broken Rome that shows us noble ideals and the destruction of these ideals by the state bureaucracy, hints at the ever-present possibility of political violence, and offers both the justification for and the condemnation of attempts to escape one’s historical circumstances.

Chapter 5

In the final chapter, I offer a reading of Aleksandr Blok's essay *Catiline: A Page from the History of the World Revolution*, written in 1918 shortly after the Russian Revolution. Completing the trajectory from the founding of the Russian Empire to its demise, Rome now becomes conceptually useful not for its greatness, which is itself morally suspect, but for its corruption and violent destruction. Rejecting the Roman events and figures that had been admired by his predecessors, Blok chooses Catiline, an impoverished aristocrat who tried to overthrow the Roman Republic, as the unlikely “hero” of Roman history, someone who senses and is driven to react to the corruption of the “triumphantly rotting Rome.” In attacking Rome, Blok acts both as its judge and its executioner, enacting a violent destruction not only of specific Roman myths of earlier periods, but also the reverential aura that the idea of Rome had possessed for centuries and the tendency to use this aura for the creation of myths about the Russian Empire.

Although these Romes are quite distinct, they form a deeply interconnected chain of reception, as later writers use Roman allusions to respond to and modify the political and social value systems of their predecessors. In this way, Rome becomes an enduring means for intergenerational dialogue with and about political power, dialogue that is highly sensitive to historical change and developments in the Russian intellectual tradition. It is important to note that in none of these cases is Rome used for a static superficial celebratory identification. Instead, it often offers a way to think through, engage with, and respond to pressing political concerns.

At the same time, this chain of reception also shows the fluidity and versatility of Rome as a symbol that is malleable not only in content but also in form, and one that remains crucially important regardless of the extent of these writers' particular familiarity with or interest in the classics themselves. Instead, Rome offers a way to think and talk about *Russian* politics, whether to legitimize autocracy, inspire the fight against it, or reject political involvement altogether. It acquires its own meanings and functions in the Russian literary-political realm. Below, I will show the fascinating ways in which these meanings and functions arise, linger, clash, and evolve.

CHAPTER I

Writing Empire: Lomonosov's Rivalry with Imperial Rome

Although Russia's desire to style itself as the new Rome has become a common assumption among scholars writing on Russian literature and culture of the eighteenth century,⁴² the exact relationship between the two empires is not so easy to categorize. There certainly were many comparisons to Rome in this period, but it is important to distinguish between comparison and identification, since the first preserves and the second attempts to erase the gap between the things being compared. Sometimes, we will find that the gap exists and it is occupied by a polemical rather than imitative attitude. When it is indeed identification that occurs, we should ask what, exactly, is being identified? Stephen Baehr writes of the identification of “eighteenth-century Russia with the glories and powers of ancient Rome – the archetype of empire in the Western mind.”⁴³ Identification with glory and power is not the same as identification with Rome or identification with an archetype of an empire. The concept of *translatio imperii*, which we see in the title of Baehr's article, is yet another possible relationship that is related but not identical to the other three, especially considering that Baehr is linking this concept to Filofei's sixteenth-century “Third Rome” epistles. It is possible that a combination of any or all of these relationships was claimed, and there are similarities and overlaps between all of them, but we

⁴² Judith Kalb, for instance, has recently written of the “large-scale Romanization” and “self-identification,” in her brief survey of eighteenth-century uses of Roman allusions. Kalb, Judith. *Russia's Rome: Imperial Vision, Messianic Dreams, 1890 - 1940*.

⁴³ Baehr, Stephen. “From History to National Myth: *Translatio Imperii* in Eighteenth-Century Russia,” 8.

cannot assume their identity.⁴⁴

There is, as would be expected, quite a bit of variation in the role of the classics in the works of different authors and, in an attempt to provide a more nuanced model of this role, I will first turn to the works of Mikhail Lomonosov (1711 - 1765), one of the most prominent and influential authors of the eighteenth century. Lomonosov is credited with many “firsts” in Russia. According to Pushkin, he not only created but also was himself “the first Russian university;” he has been called the first Russian scientist, creator of the first grammar book and the first prose composition manual, the father of Russian scientific terminology,⁴⁵ “the father of Russian poetry,”⁴⁶ the first full Russian member of the Russian Academy of Sciences,⁴⁷ “Russia's greatest polymath,” and “the founding father of Russian classicism,”⁴⁸ who was crucial in popularizing the classical heritage⁴⁹ and establishing Rome as the primary representative of antiquity in Russia.⁵⁰

To accommodate both his admiration of Rome and desire to magnify the grandeur of Russia, Lomonosov creates a relationship between the two empires that allows him to use Rome

⁴⁴ We especially cannot merge different historical periods and texts to claim a frequent general identification between Russian and Rome taking place in the history of Russian literature, as is done in the introduction to Anna Frajlich's *The Legacy of Ancient Rome in the Russian Silver Age*.

⁴⁵ Fomin, V.V. *Lomonosov: Genii Russkoi Istorii*, 6-7.

⁴⁶ Zapadov A. *Otets Russkoi Poezii: O Tvorchestve Lomonosova* (quoting Belinskii). Moiseeva expresses a similar opinion in *Lomonosov i Drevnerusskaia Literatura*.

⁴⁷ Marinus Wes, *Classics in Russia 1700-1855: Between Two Bronze Horsemen*, 33.

⁴⁸ It is, however, a matter of great controversy whether Lomonosov wrote in the tradition of classicism or the baroque. For various viewpoints, evident from the title, see: J. Bucsele, “The Problems of Baroque in Russian Literature;” Harold Segel. “Baroque and Rococo in Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature;” I.Z. Serman. *Russkii Klassitsizm: Poetika, Drama, Satira*. For a description of different scholarly positions on Lomonosov's affiliation, see P.N. Berkov, “Problema Literaturnogo Napravleniia Lomonosova.” For a thorough overview of the evolution of scholarly thought on the concept of eighteenth-century classicism and an argument in favor of rejecting the notion of ‘classicism’ (and other –isms) entirely, see P.N. Berkov. “Problemy Izucheniia Russkogo Klassitsizma.”

⁴⁹ Frolov, E. D. *Russkaia Nauka ob Antichnosti*, 97.

⁵⁰ Kahn 748. On the perception and legacy of Lomonosov and the way his biography became idealized and mythologized in Russia, see Stephen Usitalo, *The Invention of Mikhail Lomonosov: A Russian National Myth*. Usitalo discusses the particular elements of the myth of Lomonosov, including his humble background and the magnitude of his contributions (primarily to the development of the sciences in Russia), and places them in the context of scholarly and intellectual trends and binaries of Lomonosov's own and later Russian and Soviet periods.

both as a model and as a historical and literary rival. For this relationship to work, it is crucial that the links to Rome remain comparisons rather than identifications and that these comparisons are often expressed in a competitive rather than imitative context. The competition can occur both at the level of content, such as when the Slavs are portrayed as a stronger military force than the Roman Empire or Peter the Great as a more admirable founding figure than Aeneas. It can also occur on the level of form, where Rome can be “displaced” from its own literature, such as when Lomonosov adopts Roman literary precedents (e.g. Vergil’s *Aeneid*) but fills the Roman structures with “better” Russian content. The underlying mechanism of Russia’s relationship to Rome, then, is that exclusive rivalry that elevates Russia above its contemporary neighbors, both because it was *so close* to Rome and because it was better than Rome.

This relationship allows him to acknowledge the greatness of Rome and make use of its attributes in foundational *Russian* texts while keeping it as a separate entity that is often portrayed as only equal or even inferior to the Russian Empire. I believe this strategy to be responsible for the polarized reactions from scholars studying his work -- one of the common disagreements has to do with whether Lomonosov rejected or imitated (or perhaps, as was mentioned above, even wanted to transplant) classical models. The binary is sometimes complicated by the question of French and German influence, which leads some scholars to argue for a sort of “eclectic Classicism,”⁵¹ but the question of imitation or rejection still stands.

Instead of picking a side in this binary, I will try to resolve it by showing that Lomonosov, in fact, does both (or perhaps neither). In order to get a clearer picture of his relationship with Rome, I will look across a number of genres because ancient Rome comes up in all of them, and, even though generic conventions dictate that it does not come up in the same

⁵¹ See Gareth Jones, “A Trojan Horse within the Walls of Classicism: Russian Classicism and the National Specific,” for a discussion of the term and a study of various influences present within Russian Classicism.

fashion, the underlying relationship between Russia and Rome is quite consistent.

Lomonosov's background

Lomonosov's biography and career reflect his immediate historical context and the changes that were taking place in Russia during his lifetime, since many of his works, starting with his very first ode and the poetry composition manual attached to it, were addressed to and/or commissioned by the Court. His own humble beginnings -- his father was a peasant fisherman in a village near Arkhangelsk, in the northwest of Russia -- meant that he had no independent wealth and had to rely on grants from the state for his education (which included two years in Germany), writing projects and living expenses.

The majority of his works were written during the reign of Elizabeth (r. 1741-1762), the daughter of Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725). Elizabeth's program included a restoration of her father's legislation and programs, as well as a continuation of Russia's Europeanization (mixed with a strongly patriotic Russian flavor, designed to show the superiority of Elizabeth over her immediate predecessors⁵²), particularly in the arts and culture, and the development of a cult of Peter the Great that had been started during Peter's own lifetime by Feofan Prokopovich and relied on emphasizing the gap between the old, backward, ignorant Russia and a new, civilized, educated, European empire.

Lomonosov's works reflect these goals, as he attempts to position Russia as an equal among Western European nations by creating an imperial language, developing foundational imperial genres, and writing a proud imperial history. In all of these tasks, he turns to Roman literature and history for missing vocabulary and literary models. In this chapter, I will discuss

⁵² In popular perception, the government was dominated by foreigners, particularly Germans, during the reign of Anna Ioannovna (r. 1730-1740), and unpopular policies were often blamed on this foreign domination. For more information on the anti-foreign sentiments during her reign, see the first chapter ("Government of Foreigners") of Hans Rogger's work *National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia*.

some of the historical and literary works of Lomonosov, which include his *Ancient Russian History*, odes, a panegyric to Peter the Great, inscriptions and excerpts from his unfinished epic poem *Peter the Great*, in order to show the nature and role of Roman allusions in his work.

There are several threads going through many of Lomonosov's works. The most obvious ones are patriotism (or, more specifically, a desire to show the greatness and perhaps even supremacy of the Russian history and language), the desire to give Russia a stable and prominent position among Western European nations, and a palpable sense of responsibility and duty that comes from the author's perception of being among the first to undertake these various historical and philological projects. Given these threads, we can expect the use of Roman allusions to be a delicate matter, and I disagree with Harold Segel, who argues that Lomonosov (together with other eighteenth-century Russian authors who engaged with classical themes) had, as their “prime goal...the transplantation of Western classicism.”⁵³

Given his patriotism (Hans Rogger even argues that nobody “identified his person and his fate more closely with this newly found national pride of place than did Lomonosov, and all of his work was deeply imbued with a sense of Russian greatness and destiny”⁵⁴), it would hardly be suitable for Lomonosov to openly style Russia as a second Rome, or a second anything. Throughout the many genres of his work, he ardently defends Russian language and history, even refusing, when urged, to publish his rhetoric manual in Latin, as was customary for scientific and rhetorical texts. The strongly pro-Russian program of Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter the Great, during whose reign most of Lomonosov's works were written and commissioned, also lent itself to an ostensible distancing from Western European traditions. At the same time, however, one who learns his science and secular literature in Latin from ancient and contemporary Western

⁵³ Harold Segel. “Classicism and Classical Antiquity in Russian Literature,” 54.

⁵⁴ Rogger 258.

European authors is unlikely to do without respect for and reliance on these traditions. These are difficult impulses to reconcile, and a study of Lomonosov's work, with its multitude of genres, is particularly useful for understanding the challenges of reconciling Russia's desire to create a proud national tradition in the arts and sciences, with its need to place itself on equal footing with its Western European contemporaries, whose common vocabulary demanded a knowledge of the classics.

Early Indications of Rome's Role

The earliest indications of Lomonosov's relationship to ancient Rome and to Russia can be found in the short work on the rules of Russian poetry composition *Epistle on the Rules of Russian Versification*, which was appended to the very first ode that Lomonosov sent to the Russian court in 1739. Here, Lomonosov attempts to connect Russian poetry with Latin poetry, as he will later much more obviously align Russian history with Roman history. This first attempt is rather subtle and undeveloped, and the text is quite short, but it is worth taking a moment to consider the Roman presence in it.

The goal of the text is to provide the rules for the composition of poetry in Russian, a task of crucial importance and responsibility in Lomonosov's eyes: "since we are only starting to write poetry, we have to be careful whom and in what we follow, so that we do not introduce anything unsuitable and exclude anything good" ("понеже наше стихотворство только лишь начинается, того ради, чтобы ничего неугодного не ввести, а хорошего не оставить, надобно смотреть, кому и в чем лучше последовать").⁵⁵ In positioning himself as the founder of Russian poetry, Lomonosov rejects all poetry that came before him. Although it seems at first that he is interested in looking for models to follow, we mostly see a rejection of foreign

⁵⁵ Lomonosov VIII, 10.

precedents as well, most notably the Greek ones. Criticizing the metrical instructions of Meletii Smotrickii, the author of an influential Church Slavonic grammar, published in Moscow in 1648, Lomonosov singles out the author's choice of Greek metrics as a model for Slavic ones, choosing, oddly enough, the Roman poet Ovid (43 BC - 17 AD) to support his criticism, since he seems to suspect that Smotrickii based his metrics on a few Ovidian lines written in exile.

Of course, reliance on Ovid should not yield a Greek model. "If Ovid," writes Lomonosov, "wrote poems of the Latin kind in ancient Slavonic, or Bulgarian or Sarmatian language while in exile in Tomis, I don't see why the author of the Slavonic Grammar decided to model the length of syllables on Greek, rather than Latin" ("Ежели Овидий, будучи в ссылке в Томах, старинным славенским, или болгарским, или сарматским языком стихи на латинскую статью писал, то откуда Славенския грамматики автору на ум пришло долготь и краткость слогов совсем греческую, а не латинскую принять, не вижу").⁵⁶

The rejection of Greek is significant, because it signals a change of orientation from Byzantium and the tradition of Greek imitation and translation, characteristic of many centuries of Russian history until the time of Peter the Great, towards Western Europe. At the same time,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* Ironically, much of Ovid's poetry written in exile expresses his displeasure with the tribes and their lifestyle and culture (or the lack thereof), including their languages. See R. Batty's "On Getic and Sarmatian Shores: Ovid's Account of the Danube Lands" for a discussion of Ovid's use of the terms "Getae," "Scythians," and "Sarmatians," as well as their usage and interpretation by other classical authors. Batty argues that the term "Scythian" did not have a specific ethnic content for classical authors and would have "summoned up for Ovid's readers not a specific people, but a way of life: a lifestyle that the average Greek or Roman found unsavory, and indeed slightly disgusting." (98). The other two ethnic labels used by Ovid do not have quite the same broad application but are still difficult to pinpoint: "Both ['Getic'] and ['Sarmatian'] probably had some sort of ethnic content, on a very broad scale, but could be used to cover a variety of individual political units. Both brought to mind images of nomadic marauders, but clearly also related to specific population groups." (99). Batty's conclusion is that "References to [the various tribes'] ethnicity seem extremely muddled" in ancient writings and the confusion persists to this day. (*Ibid.*). In short, even though the Getae and the Scythians are not portrayed as the same people by Ovid, and the poem is specifically said to have been written in the Getic language, there is enough vagueness in Ovid himself and other ancient sources to provide numerous interpretations of their ethnic characteristics. Lomonosov will, in fact, later use ancient classical sources in his historical work in order to identify various ancient groups, including the Sarmatians, as ancient Slavs. Above, he seems to suggest that Slavic and Sarmatian languages were related, since Ovid's use of either would justify turning to Latin meters for Slavic poetry.

Lomonosov does not want to choose Latin as a model for Russian and argues that he “would not expect that a poet of such deep wisdom would make such an error as introducing the length of syllables characteristic of Latin or Greek into the poems that he wrote in a foreign and very particular language” (“...однако толь высокого разума пиита не надеюсь, что так погрешил, чтобы ему долготь и краткость слогов, латинскому или греческому языку свойственную, в оные стихи ввести, которые он на чужом и весьма особливом языке писал”).⁵⁷ In the end, Ovid is not useful for Russian prosody. Why, then, does Lomonosov need to mention him in his very short and very patriotic epistle whose “first and most important” rule is that Russian poetry “must be composed according to the nature of [the Russian] language” and that poets should not “bring in from other languages that, which is unnatural to it” (“Первое и главнейшее мне кажется быть сие: российский стихи надлежит сочинять по природному нашего языка свойству, а того, что ему весьма несвойственно, из других языков не вносить”)?⁵⁸

Even though Ovid may not be useful for prosody, he is useful for elevating the status of the Russian language and Lomonosov himself. We now know that a great poet has written imperial poetry in a Slavic language -- we know that it is possible and, therefore, no one can argue that Russian is not good enough for high poetry.

In praising Ovid's wisdom, Lomonosov bolsters his own claims, since this very wise and famous poet must have (according to Lomonosov) adopted the same metrical rules as the ones that Lomonosov proposed for Russian versification. The two poets seem to have been in a similar position -- faced with a Slavic language that has its own natural but still hidden rules, they discovered these rules and used them to write unprecedented poems for the court. It is unclear what exactly Lomonosov means in referring to Ovid's Slavic poems as being “of the

⁵⁷ Lomonosov VIII, 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Latin kind,” (the phrase is a translation of “modis” in the Latin poem,⁵⁹ and it is unclear whether the vagueness in Russian is intentional) but there is still an undefined kinship that emerges out of the reminder that a Roman poet of the Augustan period once may have found an earlier version of Russian suitable for his poetry.⁶⁰

Finally, this early text exhibits the desire to position Russia among other great nations. In order to have a common vocabulary with writers from other traditions (specifically Latin, Greek, and German), Lomonosov, as he himself explains, chooses to use traditional Western metrical feet and traditional terminology -- hexameters, iambs, dactyls, and so on.

Lomonosov's orientation towards Rome became more pronounced in his subsequent works, and his translations of ancient poets, included in his longer work on rhetoric and versification, continued to be almost exclusively from Latin.⁶¹ In his later rhetoric manual, the authors cited most frequently are Cicero, Vergil and Ovid (at 76, 26 and 20 times each, respectively), while Homer and Plutarch appear only four times.⁶²

History

Lomonosov's *Ancient Russian History*, written in the 1750s and published in 1766, deals with the history of the Slavs until the death of Yaroslav the Wise in 1054. There is no explicitly stated starting point, though the reliance on classical Greek and Roman authors for the earlier

⁵⁹ “structaque sunt nostris barbara verba modis,” *Pont.* 4.13.20.

⁶⁰ Lomonosov here presents Ovid's approach to the new language as that of an equal, even though Ovid himself characterized Getic quite differently, writing that he composed and recited a poem in Getic, where “the barbarian words were arranged in our meters” (“structaque sunt nostris barbara verba modis,” *Pont.* 4.13.20, quoted in Stevens, *Per gestum res est significanda mihi: Ovid and Language in Exile*, 168). This process is portrayed as “shameful.” (“pudet” 4.13.19). In fact, Stevens argues that “the image of Ovid composing not in Latin or Greek but in ‘Getic,’ and speaking ‘Sarmatian,’ is, as Nagle suggests, oxymoronic and shocking, ‘an only slightly indirect way of saying a Getic poet is a bad poet.’” Stevens 169. A number of poems written in this period reflect precisely linguistic difficulties, the fears of the decay of his Latin language and poetic skill in the lands of “uncultured barbarity” (“inhumanae barbariae” *Tr.* 3.1.17, quoted in Stevens 174). The corrupting influence of the land is such that “if anyone put Homer himself in this land, believe me, even he would have become a Get” (“si quis in hac ipsum terra posuisset Homerum, / esset, crede mihi, factus et ille Getes.” *Pont.* 4.2.21-2, quoted in Stevens 175).

⁶¹ Segel 55.

⁶² Zapadov 242.

portions of the history suggests that the narrative goes as far back as the fifth century B.C. or even earlier. The text consists of an introduction, where Lomonosov states his intentions in writing this history, part 1, which deals with the history of Russia before Rurik, and part 2, from the reign of Rurik until the death of Yaroslav. Like the *Tale of the Princes of Vladimir*, this text is important as a story of origins.⁶³ It serves to define and legitimize the Russian Empire by inserting military prowess and prestige into its past and creating the impression that the Slavs have existed as a single and proud race longer than any other contemporary nations.

This impression is achieved through strategic references to ancient Rome. Reading this text may give one the impression that there have ever existed only two great peoples -- Rome and Russia. Although there are other groups and nations that make occasional appearances, ancient Rome becomes a consistent partner and competitor in Lomonosov's narrative. As Andrew Kahn points out, Lomonosov's view of the relationship between Russia and Rome tends to entirely discount more recent European traditions.⁶⁴ Lomonosov explains that his reasons for comparing Russia to Rome are not accidental but, rather, based on "certain general similarities" in the historical periods of the two empires. Lomonosov compares the number of kings and the duration of monarchy in Rome and the number of the "Russian" Grand Princes and their reigns. The Roman Republic corresponds to the Russian period of principalities and free cities, and the Caesars to the Muscovite autocrats. The only difference Lomonosov finds between the two empires is that Rome became great during the Republic and was destroyed by the autocracy, whereas Russia was nearly destroyed by license and disagreement and was saved and made great

⁶³ Cynthia Whittaker points out the crucial political importance that histories had in this period: "Russians who wrote histories of Russia figured among the leading articulators of the varying ways in which monarchy was being reconceived in the eighteenth century. These historians were nearly all amateurs, coming from the variety of milieus that the educated elite inhabited. And, since monarchs read their works, they became major participants in the century's political dialogue. . . . In addition, histories in this epoch were unabashedly subjective. For all these reasons, they offer ideal gauges for charting the reconception of monarchy that occurred in this century." (119).

⁶⁴ Kahn 750.

by autocracy.⁶⁵

The relationship between Russian and Rome soon moves from the “general similarities” mentioned in the preface to a close historical relationship and, almost incredibly, to a common mythical origin. Perhaps the most striking of Lomonosov's claims about Russia's roots in this history is the claim that the Slavs were the same people as the Veneti mentioned by classical authors, meaning that they were descended from the followers of Antenor, who, according to the Roman historian Livy,⁶⁶ was one of the only two Trojans whose lives were spared after the Trojan War ended. The second was, of course, Aeneas -- the legendary ancestor of the Romans and the hero of Vergil's *Aeneid*.

The pair – Aeneas and Antenor – appear (as a pair) in the very first lines of the first book of Livy's history:

...after Troy was captured and the rest of the Trojans murdered, two men, Aeneas and Antenor, were spared by the Greeks [...]; from then on, their fates were different. Antenor and the group of the Eneti [...] came to the innermost bay of the Adriatic Sea, and after they expelled the Euganei who inhabited the land between the sea and the Alps, the Eneti and the Trojans took over those lands. And the place where they first disembarked was called Troy, which gave the name to the Trojan region: the whole race was called the Veneti. Aeneas first fled his home because of a similar misfortune but fates led him to better beginnings; he first came to Macedonia, then he was brought to Sicily looking to settle; from Sicily he headed with his fleet towards Laurentum. This place was also named Troy.

[...Troia capta in ceteros saevitum esse Troianos, duobus, Aeneae Antenorique, [...] omne ius belli Achivos abstinuisse; casibus deinde variis Antenorem cum multitudine Enetum, [...] venisse in intimum maris Hadriatici sinum, Euganeisque qui inter mare Alpesque incolebant pulsos Enetos Troianosque eas tenuisse terras. Et in quem primo egressi sunt locum Troia vocatur pagoque inde Troiano nomen est: gens universa Veneti appellati. Aeneam ab simili clade domo profugum sed ad maiora rerum initia ducentibus fatibus, primo in Macedoniam venisse, inde in Siciliam quaerentem sedes delatum, ab Sicilia classe ad

⁶⁵ The convention that autocracy saved Russia dates back to the earliest chronicles, so in itself, it is not a striking sentiment. For more on view of power in early Russian literature, see Cynthia Whittaker's *Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue*.

⁶⁶ Livy wrote a history of Rome from its legendary origins down to his own days in the reign of Augustus.

Laurentem agrum tenuisse. Troia et huic loco nomen est.^{67]}

After the initial reference, Livy puts Antenor aside and goes on to relate the history of Aeneas and his descendants who would eventually found Rome. Lomonosov's history, then, implicitly becomes a complement to Livy's work by discussing the fate of Antenor and the Veneti/Slavs. As a story of origins, the connection to Troy and Rome is a striking reorientation from the origins offered in the *Primary Chronicle*, the only Slavic historical work that Lomonosov cites in this early history. Without explaining the historical paths of the Slavs to the lands around the Danube, the compiler of the *Primary Chronicle* begins his story with the time of Noah, listing the Slavs as one of the groups in the region given to Noah's son Japheth. At a later point in the narrative, there is a brief note claiming that at one time the Slavs lived in Illyricum, the region visited by St. Paul.⁶⁸ Thus, the concern of the chronicle is to link the Slavs to biblical history and

⁶⁷ Livy 1.1.

⁶⁸ The ethnic origins of the Slavs are still disputed, and the debate both about the origins of the Slavs and the origins of the Russian state (loosely defined) begins precisely in the time of Lomonosov. Omeljan Pritsak discusses the appearance of the Normanist and the Anti-Normanist camps in his *Origins of Rus'*, giving an account of the 18th century origins of this debate – in 1749, Russia's imperial historiographer Gerard Muller proposed, in the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, a theory "that the ancient state of Kievan Rus' was founded by Norsemen." Pritsak goes on, "Muller was never to finish this lecture. A tumult arose among the members of the Imperial Academy of Russian national background, who protested such infamy. One of them, the astronomist N. I. opov, exclaimed, 'Tu, clarissime auctor, nostrum gentem infamia afficis! [You, famous author, dishonor our nation!]. [...]' One of the referees was the famous author Mixail Vasil'evic Lomonosov (1711-1762). His testimony was devastating: Muller was forbidden to continue his research in Old Rus' history and his publications were confiscated and destroyed." (5). Briefly: the Normanist hypothesis proposes a Norse origin for Rus', while the Anti-Normanists argue "that the Rus' were Slavs who lived to the south of Kiev from prehistoric times long before the Norsemen appeared on the European scene." (6) The Normanist hypothesis has at various times been considered harmful to the interests of the Russian state (including in official Soviet historiography, according to Pritsak (6)). The author himself proposes a history of interaction between "the nomads of the sea" (Viking/Vaerings/Varangians) who established trading settlements in the north of Eastern Europe and the [former] "nomads of the steppe" (the Avars, the Khazars). The origins of the Slavs themselves are equally murky, and "the controversy over the origin of the Slavs refuses to die." ("Hiding Behind a Piece of Tapestry: Jordanes and the Slavic Venethi," 321). The 12th century *Primary Chronicle*, compiled in Kievan Rus', "implies that the Slavs began to exist during the building of the Tower of Babel, as the grandsons of Noah separated into tribes. Then they are on the Danube, and Volokhs appear to oppress them.[...] it] goes on to imply that the Slavs in the west, east, and north spread from the Danube." The origin or time period of the process is unclear. Lund goes on to say, however, that historians "tells us that at some point, not much earlier than 500 C. E., the Slavs appeared in the north and east and settled along the Danube from the Black Sea to a point probably within modern Germany." Lund 345. Lund goes on to suggest that the Slavs were familiar with the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus's *De Administrando Imperii*, written in the 10th century, which explicitly identifies "Slavic nations" with the "Avars," who live around the Danube, and that some sort of this or similar source inspired the account of Slavic origins in the *Primary Chronicle*. Finally, he points out that it is unlikely

Christianity. By contrast, Lomonosov traces them to the Trojan War, giving them the same ancestry as the Romans.

There is quite a bit of preparation before we are told about the above identification, which appears in the third chapter of Lomonosov's book. Since the Slavs are not mentioned as such by the ancient historians, Lomonosov has to identify them with another tribe or tribes that do appear in the ancient sources. Already in the second chapter, Lomonosov presents evidence from the early historians Jordanes, Pliny, Tacitus, and Claudius Ptolemy to argue that the Slavs, the Venedi (also Veneti) and the Sarmatians are, ultimately, the same people.⁶⁹ Lomonosov is not alone in this claim. Florin Curta, who traced the history of searching for a Slavic presence among the tribes mentioned by the ancient historians, writes,

The cornerstone of all theories attempting to project the Slavs into prehistory is, however, Jordanes' 'Getica.' Jordanes equated the Sclavenes and Antes to the Venethi also known from much earlier sources, such as Pliny the Elder ('Naturalis historiae IV 13), Tacitus ('Germania' 46) and Ptolemy ('Geographia' III 5). On the basis of this equivalence, a Polish scholar, Wawrzyniec Surowiecki (1769-1827) first claimed the Venedi of Tacitus, Pliny, and Ptolemy for the Slavic history.⁷⁰

that the Slavs could have existed as a "identifiable entity" before 500 and yet "were not noticed by Romans or Greeks." The authors, of the chronicle, however, "seem to have had no clear view of the geography or the social groups" they mention, perhaps because they were more concerned with vague symbolic associations and connections. At one point for instance, there is a link of the Slavs to Illyricum, important because the region is briefly mentioned in Paul's writings (Romans 15:19) as one of the locations he visited. See Horace Lund, "What the Rus' Primary Chronicle Tells Us about the Origin of the Slavs and of Slavic Writing." Some authors argue, however, that the Slavs had lived along the Danube as a distinct entry for far longer. Trubachev, for instance, considers it crucially important that there is "no memory that the Slavs had come from afar"(4) and argues that the Slavic entry into the Danube region in the 6th century was a *reconquista*, a return to their native land, often mentioned in the songs of Eastern Slavs despite their lack of familiarity with the region. (11). See Trubachev, O. N. *Etnogenez i Kul'tura Drevneishikh Slavian*.

⁶⁹ Lomonosov VI, 176-7.

⁷⁰ Curta 321. The article offers a fascinating summary of the development of this idea (prompted by political and nationalistic circumstances of its proponents) and the resistance to it, especially because Slavic languages were not accepted as Indo-European until 1833 and scholars were reluctant to believe that Slavic languages or tribes could extend to the times of Tacitus. Some argued that Jordanes identified them simply because the Slavs of his time lived where the Venethi of Tacitus's time had lived (323). However, many scholars even of the twentieth century still follow Jordanes's identification, like Lomonosov had done. Curta, however, analyzes the account of Jordanes and its sources to argue that Jordanes's account shows very little familiarity with the Slavs ("the only thing Jordanes seems to know about Sclavenes is that they have swamps and woods for cities"), that "Venethi" was likely not a contemporary term – there were no people called Venethi in Jordanes's time - and could have signified, rather, "an attempt to link the narrative of the Gothic history to current concerns" by connecting the unknown Venethi to the

It appears that Surowiecki was not the first to claim the Venedi for the Slavic history, after all, as Lomonosov also looks back to the ancient historians to appropriate the Venedi.

In the process of identifying them with Slavs, he mentions alternate viewpoints, such as Tacitus's uncertainty about whether to assign them to the Germans or Sarmatians.⁷¹ Incidentally, Tacitus goes to specify *why* he might characterize the Veneti as Sarmatians, which turns out to be their adoption of Sarmatian customs, in particular that of raiding the territories that lie between their neighbors, the Peucini and the Fenni (“Venethi multum ex moribus traxerunt; nam quicquid inter Peucinos Fennosque silvarum ac montium erigitur latrociniiis pererrant”). Ultimately he concludes that it makes more sense to classify them as Germans (“Hi tamen inter Germanos potius referuntur.”)⁷² Lomonosov, however, does include this information, leaving his mention of Tacitus merely at his uncertainty, which allows a stronger possibility of the Sarmatian Venethi.

He also mentions and discounts the view of “some scholars” (unidentified) that the Venethi might be of Gallic origin.⁷³ The mentions of a possible German or Gallic connection of the Venethi are important to the narrative not only (or so much) as acknowledgements of other viewpoints of other historians but also as evidence that other nations might want to claim a relationship to the Venethi but they would be wrong.

Through the identification of various ethnic groups with the Slavs, we get an image of uninterrupted historical existence, great geographical expanse, and a tradition of military

known Sclavenes and Antes (331). Overall, Curta argues, “Jordanes’ perspective proves to be typically a-historical, for it denies history to barbarian groups living on the fringes of the Empire. Venethi are treated as frozen from times immemorial until the mid-sixth century” (336). In short, though it does not seem likely that Jordanes’s account is reliable, Lomonosov was far from the only one to draw attention to it in thinking about Slavic antiquity.

⁷¹ “I do not know whether to ascribe the Peucini, Venethi, and Fenni to the Germans or the Sarmatians” (“Peucinorum Venethorumque et Fennorum nationes Germanis an Sarmatis ascribam dubito,” Tacitus, *Germania* 46.1).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Lomonosov VI, 176 & 179.

victories that goes back to the times of the Romans and the Greeks. In the sixth century, for instance, “the Slavic name grew famous; and the might of this people not only was feared in Thrace, Macedonia, Histria and Dalmatia, but also contributed much to the destruction of the Roman Empire.” (“В начале шестого столетия по Христе славенское имя весьма прославилось; и могущество сего народа не токмо во Фракии, в Македонии, в Истрии и в Далмации было страшно, но и к разрушению Римской империи способствовало весьма много.”).⁷⁴ Earlier, the Slavs (more specifically the Bulgarian branch) “even before the reign of Justinian the Great, during the reign of King Anastasias, after acquiring lands in Illyricum, fought arduous wars against the Greeks” (“Ибо уже прежде царства Юстиниана Великого при царе Анастасии приобретши себе в Иллирике владение и селение, тяжкие войны наносили грекам”).⁷⁵ The Amazons, whose military prowess is legendary, are also added, with the help of Herodotus, to the Slavic tribe.⁷⁶

Although Goths, Vandals and Lombards are (almost surprisingly at this point) *not* found to be ancient Slavs, we are still assured “that Slavs comprised a significant part of their armies; and not only the common soldiers, but also leaders were of Slavic stock” (“что немалую часть воинств их славяне составляли; и не токмо рядовые, но и главные предводители были славенской породы.”).⁷⁷ The Slavs, then, had almost certainly participated in at least one sack of Rome, not to mention other successful campaigns in Italy. The above claim is repeated again later in the work, with the elaboration that the number of the Slavs in these armies was so large, that some authors even thought, incorrectly, that Goths, Vandals and Lombards were all Slavs.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 176.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 177.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 181.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 178.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 194.

Later, we find out that Alaric, “the conqueror of Rome,” was himself of Slavic descent.⁷⁹

By the third chapter, both the geographical magnitude and the military might of the early Slavs have been established, so it almost comes as no surprise to find out the Trojan origin of the Veneti (and by extension, the Slavs). Still, there is another list of prominent Roman historians prefacing this claim. We are told that Pliny, Cornelius Nepos, and Cato (the Elder), among others, have traced the origin of the Veneti to Asia and, more specifically, Troy. Finally, there is a quotation from Livy, “the great and wise historian” (the first epithet in the text), that “explains in detail” the origin of Veneti, tracing their relocation to the Trojan War.⁸⁰ Thus, without making explicit the inherent connection between Rome and Russia by engaging with the early story of Aeneas and Antenor, Lomonosov makes clear that he wants his readers to think about the beginning of Livy’s work, where the connection between Aeneas and Antenor is made.

Although perhaps it would be going too far to claim a direct descent from Antenor himself (though who knows? He did, after all, travel and settle with the Veneti in a new settlement called “Troy”), the Slavs are still linked to the Trojan War. Though they may not technically be related to the ancestors of the Romans, the association is already there for those who are familiar with Livy's history or Vergil's *Aeneid*. This association and its implications are not stated explicitly (Lomonosov himself does not mention Aeneas in this work, though he does subtly mock him in his epic), but, combined with the earlier claim that the periodization of Russian history is structurally identical to that of Roman history, the chiasmic statement about the role of autocracy in both empires, the emphasis on the size of the territory and military prowess, and the examples of military interactions between the Slavs and the Romans, the reader ends up with the impression that the Slavs and the Romans (and the Greeks before them) have coexisted

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 204.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 179.

and interacted on an equal footing possibly from the Trojan war itself, before either the Slavs or the Romans existed as such. Like the mention of Ovid in the rhetorical treatise above, which also works by subtle implication and association rather than an explicit claim, there is just a suggestion of the special relationship between the two empires.

This association is bolstered by the many Roman names that appear in the narrative. Slavic names, with the exception of Nestor, the author or editor of the *Primary Chronicle*, are mostly absent from this part of the text, because there are no records, either Slavic (for centuries to come) or Greco-Roman that would single out these more or less prehistoric proto-Slavs. Instead we see many famous Roman names, mostly historians but sometimes also rulers. The rulers are quite irrelevant to the narrative itself, but they do provide coordinates, which are the history of the Roman Empire. The historians, on the other hand, allow the author to place himself among the famous names, as he agrees or disagrees with them and pits them against each other.

The history continues to rely on the Romans, and the picture that emergence is that of a thoroughly intertwined relationship. Certain Slavic migrations, for instance, are motivated by the expansion or decline of the Roman Empire,⁸¹ as the Slavs were first eager to escape “the Roman yoke”⁸² and then to avenge their ancestors.⁸³ The name and character of the Slavs became known because of their wars with the Romans and the Greeks.⁸⁴ Some branches were so respected for their valor, that they were kept by the Roman state to defend Rome against barbarians (which, of course, implies that they themselves were not barbarians). The Varangian branch of the Slavs has the distinction of having Odoacer, whose name is synonymous with the downfall of the Western

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 182, 190.

⁸² *Ibid.* 190.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 191.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 183, 189.

Roman Empire, as one of their own.⁸⁵

The resulting model of early Slavic history, then, consists of two great peoples, the Slavs and the Romans. Even though the Slavs did not have a state of their own, and the periodization of their history (which is identical to that of Rome) begins about five centuries after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the impression (though, again, never an explicit claim) one gets from the text is that the two people were more or less evenly matched for many centuries of their common history. Other peoples may make periodic appearances, but the interactions between Rome and the Slavs remain the one consistent historical pattern. Because of the exclusivity of this relationship, there is also an almost intimacy, already visible in Lomonosov's discussion of Ovid's poems written among the early Slavs, that becomes even more pronounced in his odes.

Lomonosov ends this first part of his narrative with an examination of the genealogy proposed by the *Tale of the Princes of Vladimir*. His take on it is scientific, as he tries to explain the possibility of the relationship of the Slavic rulers to Augustus by historical migrations, speculating,

Among [the Romans who migrated to the Varangian shores], there likely were some relatives of some Roman Caesar, all of whom had the name *Augustus*, meaning *majestic* or *autocratic*. Therefore, Rurik could have been a relative of some Augustus, that is a Roman emperor. I cannot deny the possibility, but see no certainty.

[Из них, по великой вероятности, были сродники коего-нибудь римского кесаря, которые все общим именем Августы, сиречь величественные или самодержцы, назывались. Таким образом, Рюрику мог быть коего-нибудь Августа, сиречь римского императора, сродник. Вероятности отрещись не могу; достоверности не вижу.⁸⁶]

Moiseeva sees it as especially brave that Lomonosov dared to question the legend about the descent from Augustus and considers it to be evidence that Lomonosov was only interested in

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 213.

⁸⁶ Lomonosov VI, 216.

objective truth.⁸⁷ By this point in the narrative, however, the Russian readers no longer need a legendary descent from Augustus, since there is now an even earlier ancestor, Antenor, who establishes equality with the Romans rather than descent from them, and, perhaps even more importantly, since the military history of the various branches of early Slavs and their ancestors seems to be sufficient proof of their great history and lineage. The only reason that we do not know of great early Slavs is the failure of Russian authors to match their Greco-Roman counterparts in praising their national heroes:

...everyone who sees in Russian tales deeds and heroes similar to Greek and Roman ones, will not have no reason to belittle us in comparison with them; he should only blame our previous shortcomings in the art by which Greek and Roman writers made their heroes immortal in their glory.

[...всяк, кто увидит в российских преданиях равные дела и героев греческим и римским подобным, унижать нас пред оными причины иметь не будет, но только вину полагать должен на бывший наш недостаток в искусстве, каковым греческие и латинские писатели своих героев в полной славе предали вечности.⁸⁸]

Lomonosov's epic poem can be seen as a follow-up on the above sentiment, since the ability of historical precedent to motivate future generations appears in the preface of the poem and since the epic genre had proven particularly helpful to the ancients in the proliferation of the fame of their heroes. Lomonosov himself suggests the inevitability of the rise of a Russian literature that parallels the Roman works, writing "How could Vergils and Horaces fail to appear now? Augusta Elizabeth is reigning; we have noble patrons similar to Maecenas, through whose care her father's city is provided with an augmentation of new sciences and arts" ("Как не быть ныне Вергилиям и Горациям? Царствует Августа Елисавета; имеем знатных и Меценату подобных предстателей, чрез которых ходатайство ея отеческий град снабден новыми

⁸⁷ Moiseeva 17.

⁸⁸ Lomonosov VI, 170.

приращениями наук и художеств.”).⁸⁹

Epic⁹⁰

Lomonosov began work on his unfinished epic *Peter the Great (Petr Velikii)*, which he referred to as *Petriada*⁹¹, between 1751 and 1756, but no later than October 1756. Shuvalov (who can be said to have occupied the role of the Russian Maecenas) later claimed that he, urged, in turn, by the empress, insisted that Lomonosov take up this project, so we could probably safely assume that it was commissioned by the court,⁹² much as the *Aeneid* was commissioned by Augustus or the Russian translation of the *Aeneid* was commissioned by Catherine the Great. The first canto was published in 600 copies in 1760; the second, also in 600 copies, in 1761.⁹³ Although Gary Marker has shown that eighteenth-century print numbers may not have a direct correlation with the readership,⁹⁴ the text was reprinted soon after the second canto came out, which suggests that it did gain some popularity. The subsequent criticism, defense and imitation of the poem by critics and renown writers (including Derzhavin and Pushkin) is another testimony to its importance in Russian literature.

The preface to this poem is cited both by the scholars who affirm Lomonosov’s classical affinities and the scholars who argue that he rejected his classical predecessors.⁹⁵ It is possible to see both intentions here, even if we only look at what the poet explicitly states about his intentions:

Although I am following the path of Vergil, Хотя во след иду Virgiliю, Гомеру,

⁸⁹ “Предисловие о Пользе Книг Церковных в Российском Языке,” Lomonosov VII, 592.

⁹⁰ For a discussion both of the theoretical writings on eighteenth-century Russian epic and several examples written during this time, see Ed Weeda. “Rulers, Russia and the Eighteenth-Century Epic.”

⁹¹ An obvious allusion to *Eneida (Aeneid)*, *Iliada (Iliad)* and *Genriada (The Henriade of Voltaire)*

⁹² Krasotkina and Blok 1125-6.

⁹³ Weeda 188 .

⁹⁴ See *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700-1800*.

⁹⁵ A. V. Zapadov, for instance, takes these lines as evidence that Lomonosov was choosing to follow not classical models but rather historical sources, as his work was “primarily historical” and could not “make the slightest error in bringing to light historical facts.” A.V. Zapadov, *Poety VIII Veka: M.V. Lomonosov, G. R. Derzhavin*.

Homer,
 I do not find in them a suitable precedent.
 For I intend to sing not fictional gods,
 But rather true deeds, the great labor of Peter.
 To give sufficient praise to this hero
 Is harder than taking Troy in ten years.
 O, if it were only in my power,
 Vergil's Aeneas, fugitive from his fatherland,
 Would hardly compare to Mazepa in my
 verses,
 And Vergil would be ashamed of his fable.

Не нахожу и в них довольного примеру.
 Не вымышленных петь намерен я Богов,
 Но истинны дела, великий труд Петров.
 Достойную хвалу воздать сему Герою
 Труднее, нежели как в десять лет взять
 Трою.
 О, естлиб было то в возможности моей,
 Беглец Виргилиев из отчества Еней
 Едваб с Мазепою в стихах моих сравнился,
 И басней бы своих Виргилий устыдился⁹⁶

In these lines, Lomonosov compares himself to ancient writers, seemingly admitting that he is following them on the epic path. At the same time, he claims that his work is unprecedented, which may seem like a rejection of these classical examples.⁹⁷ As was the case with the treatise on prosody and *Ancient Russian History* above, the text here is presented as a foundational text for Russian writers, because Lomonosov believes that young minds will later follow “in his steps.”⁹⁸ It is also in this preface that Lomonosov speaks about his role in Russian literature, establishing the Russian tradition of adapting a poem by the Roman poet Horace as a summary of one’s poetic achievements. I will return to Lomonosov’s Horatian allusions in a later section.

Although he mentions both Homer and Vergil in the beginning of the above excerpt, Lomonosov is primarily in dialogue with Vergil, as we can see from specific comparisons of his subject matter to Vergil’s throughout the text (the Homeric text, on the other hand, is dismissed as a whole with the statement that telling the story of Peter is harder than conquering Troy). In the lines above, Lomonosov seemingly rejects not only Vergil, but also the hero of his epic. He

⁹⁶ Lomonosov VIII, 696-7.

⁹⁷ This claim, incidentally, is not true, as Voltaire’s *Henriade*, was, in a way, a precedent that Lomonosov had read and even borrowed from. As was the case with the history, Lomonosov makes no mention of more recent Western European traditions in this work, making a direct connection to the Greek and Roman classics instead.

⁹⁸ This statement may be a pun, since the word for step is, in Russian, also the word for a metrical foot. Lomonosov may be foreseeing others using his metrics as much as his literary direction.

implies that Aeneas is not as great of a founder figure by dismissing him with the epithet “fugitive from his fatherland” and comparing him (unfavorably!) with Ivan Mazepa, the leader of the Cossack troops in Peter’s army, who deserted and joined Charles XII during Peter’s war with Sweden. Aeneas, then, becomes even worse than a traitor, likely because he abandons his fatherland. The opening lines of the first canto once again show the inadequacy of Aeneas, as Lomonosov modifies Vergil’s opening lines to show the comparative superiority of his epic’s hero (and his nation’s founder):

I sing the most wise Russian Hero,
 Who, building new cities, armies and fleets,
 From his tenderest youth waged war with
 zeal,
 And, going through hardships, raised up his
 state

Пою премудраго Российскаго Героя,
 Что, грады новые, полки и флоты строя,
 От самых нежных лет со злобой вел войну,
 Сквозь страхи проходя, вознес свою
 страну⁹⁹

We can compare these lines to the opening of the *Aeneid*:

I sing the arms and the man, who first from
 the shores of Troy
 Came to Italy and Lavinian shores, made
 refuge by fate,
 Much tossed about on land and sea
 By the force of the gods, and on the account
 of the unforgiving rage of fierce Juno,
 And having suffered much in war, until he
 should found the city
 And bring his gods to Latium; from where
 stems the race of the Latins
 And the Alban elders and the walls of high
 Rome.

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab
 oris
 Italiam fato profugus Laviniaque venit
 litora – multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
 vi superum, saevae memorem Iunonis ob
 iram,
 multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet
 urbem
 inferretque deos Latio; genus unde Latinum
 Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae

Unlike Aeneas, the fugitive, Lomonosov’s subject is a “hero” (not just a “man”), who does the opposite of fleeing. Although, like Aeneas, he is a founder, not of one (though St. Petersburg would undoubtedly be the one that Lomonosov’s readers would think of) but of many cities, he does his founding on his own land, fighting to defend it from its enemies. He is,

⁹⁹ Lomonosov VIII, 698.

moreover, portrayed as an active agent rather than a passive victim of fate.

And yet, there is much that is Virgilian in this work. Some similarities are formal – the poem is written in hexameter (though iambic, not dactylic), it follows, as Ed Weeda points out, Virgilian and Homeric conventions “in the apostrophes and opening lines (be it with a significant modification of the traditional invocation of the Muses, which is replaced by an invocation of Wisdom).”¹⁰⁰ Even more striking are the echoes of Virgilian terminology and scenes in this work. Like “pater Aeneas,” Peter is a “father” (“отец”). Like Aeneas, he undergoes many trials (*labor*, which is “one of the most versatile and significant words in the Virgilian corpus,” used 73 times in the *Aeneid*,¹⁰¹ becomes “труд,” a frequently repeated noun, meaning “labor,” often with the same connotation of “hardship” in *Peter the Great*). Certain less important phrases migrate from the *Aeneid* as well, such as descriptions of a sea storm or Aeneas’s promise to his men that there will soon be a divinely-ordained end to their suffering, which is almost literally repeated by Peter the Great to his own men. Finally, although Lomonosov claims not to be singing about fictional gods, Roman deities with Latin names (Minerva, Apollo, Neptune) and the Muses make several appearances in his apostrophes and asides.

There are also major plot parallels, though with major deviations, between the first books of each work. Like Aeneas, Peter encounters a dark and terrible sea storm early on in the work (line 81 in Vergil, line 71 in Lomonosov), though while Aeneas is fleeing, Peter is heading to fight the presumptuous and delusional Swedes. Like Aeneas, he makes a speech in a desperate situation, though the two speeches are radically different. While Aeneas envies those fortunate enough to have died before the walls of Troy, Peter successfully encourages his men to be strong and pay close attention to their tasks, overcoming the terror of the storm. Like Aeneas, Peter

¹⁰⁰ Weeda 189.

¹⁰¹ See Scott Goins, “Two Aspects of Virgil’s Use of Labor in the ‘Aeneid,’” for a discussion of this term.

temporarily stops at a new land, though it is now a monastery rather than the kingdom of a foreign queen. Finally, like Aeneas, Peter tells the story of his painful and tragic past to his interlocutor in the new land. In its grand overall structure, then, the first canto of Lomonosov's epic follows the basic plot points of the first two books of Vergil's *Aeneid*, competing, in each one, for the title of a better hero and founder.

Like the structural similarity between Russian and Roman history and the dialogical relationship between the two empires, the imperial literature of the two appears to run a parallel course. It is perhaps important that the relationship is not portrayed as successive. Peter is not portrayed as the next Aeneas but, rather, as an alternative, and better Aeneas. And yet, creating a better Aeneas still requires an Aeneas, and a system of values by which the two founders may be judged. The criteria for evaluation seems to come from Vergil's epic, though, bizarrely, Vergil and his hero actually lose the competition, much as the historical Roman Empire eventually lost the competition with the historical Slavs.

The second canto of Lomonosov's epic does not follow a Virgilian plot, though there are still references to the *Aeneid*, particularly to Book VI, where Aeneas journeys to the Underworld and hears a prophecy about his various descendants and the future greatness of Rome. There will be more explicit references to this part of the *Aeneid* in Lomonosov's odes that I will discuss below, but it is worth mentioning that Peter's behavior here is reminiscent of the attributes associated with Rome in the *Aeneid*. Throughout the canto, he is seen fighting those who have become too proud (the "brazenly arrogant" Swedes¹⁰²), sparing those he had conquered (for instance, we are told that after a victory over the Swedes, he turns meek and provides them with ships so that they can return home¹⁰³), and extending the boundaries of his empire, echoing the

¹⁰² "От дерзкой наглости разгневанным Петром/Воздвигся в западе войны ужасной гром."

¹⁰³ "Победоносец наш жар сердца отложил/И первый кротостью успех свой посвятил:/Снабдил противников

behaviors that were outlined as the Roman talent and destiny by the shade of Aeneas's father

Anchises:

You, Roman, remember to rule peoples with your power; These will be your skills; and to establish the custom of peace, to spare the conquered, and to crush the insolent.	tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento; hae tibi erunt artes; pacisque imponere morem, parcere subiectis, et debellare superbos. ¹⁰⁴
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Additionally, Peter is also credited with giving special attention to the sciences, which are mentioned several times in the narrative. For instance, we are told “At the mouth of the Neva his military sounds/Built this city, raised the Temple of the sciences” (“На устьях Невы его военный звук/Сооружал сей град, воздвигнул Храм наук”). The sciences were explicitly *not* the destiny of the Romans in the prophecy of Anchises:

...others... will plead their causes better, and will chart the motions of the heavens with a rod, and name the rising stars	...alii... orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus describent radio, et surgentia sidera dicent ¹⁰⁵
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The mention of Russia's excellence at what the Romans were supposed to excel at and also what they were not supposed to excel at is likely intentional,¹⁰⁶ because it once again suggests that the Russians were superior to the Romans – they can excel at what was thought to be the talent and destiny of the Romans and what the Romans were not fated to master. It should be noted that the praise of science and Peter's role in the introduction of sciences into Russia is such a commonplace in Lomonosov's and his contemporaries' writings that it possible the insertion of this sentiment is not influenced by the *Aeneid*. However, given the explicit polemic with Vergil in

к отшествию судами.”

¹⁰⁴ *Aeneid* VI.851-3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 849-850.

¹⁰⁶ Here I disagree with Zara Torlone, who argues that the mention of the sciences “is clearly not a Vergilian touch” (Torlone, *Vergil in Russia*, 35). While she is certainly correct in pointing out “Lomonosov's preoccupation with Peter's mission as reformer of Russia and a harbinger of its progress,” the mention of the sciences in this particular passage also has the crucial role of appropriating what Vergil did not give to the Romans.

the beginning of the narrative and Lomonosov's familiarity of this portion of the *Aeneid*, I tend to think that this point was made with Vergil in mind.

Panegyric

The framework of rivalry also guides Lomonosov when he compares Peter the Great to the Roman rulers in his panegyric to Peter the Great, composed between 1754 and 1755 and delivered in a public gathering of the Academy of Sciences. There are two instances of direct historical comparisons between Peter and ancient Romans. In the first, Peter is compared to the emperor Trajan and is argued to be a greater emperor because of his closeness to his people. In the second, Peter is compared to a myriad of Roman leaders:

I see in antiquity and contemporary history rulers called "the Great." And, it is true, that they were great compared to others. But compared to Peter, they were insignificant. One conquered many states, but left his own fatherland unattended. Another defeated his opponent (who had already been called "the Great"), but spilled blood of citizens on both sides for the sake of his ambition and heard, instead of a triumph, laments and weeping of his fatherland. Another was decorated with many virtues, but, far from raising, he could not even bear the weight of a falling state. Another was a warrior on land, but feared the sea [...] I am not using any examples other than Roman ones. But even Rome is insufficient. What was accomplished in two hundred and fifty years between the First Punic War and the reign of Augustus by the Nepotes, Scipiones, Marcelli, Reguli, Metelli, Catones, Sullae, all of that Peter accomplished in the short duration of his life.

[Я вижу в древности и в новых временах Обладателей, великими названных. И правда, пред другими велики. Однако пред Петром малы. Иной завоевал многия государства, но свое отечество без призрения оставил. Иной победил неприятеля, уже великим именованного, но с обеих сторон пролил кровь своих граждан ради одного своего честолюбия и вместо триумфа слышал плачь и рыдание своего отечества. Иной многими добродетелями украшен, но вместо чтоб воздвигнуть, не мог удержать тягости падающего государства. Иной был на земли воин, однако боялся моря. [...] Других не употребляю примеров, кроме Рима. Но и тот недостаточен. Что в двести пятьдесят лет, от первой Пунической войны до Августа, Непоты, Сципионы, Маркеллы, Регулы, Метеллы, Катоны, Суллы произвели, то Петр зделал в краткое время своей жизни.¹⁰⁷]

¹⁰⁷ Lomonosov VIII, 611.

We see here the same dynamic that was present in Lomonosov's *Ancient Russian History*. Once again, there are only two empires being compared, Russia and Rome, which, once again, suggests that there is a particular underlying similarity between the two that serves as a justification for the comparison. Once again, a Roman metric – all the accomplishments of numerous Roman leaders – is used to evaluate a period of Russian history. Finally, Russia is, once again, said to be the greater of the two empires based on the criteria derived from ancient Rome. By using the Roman names in the plural, Lomonosov emphasizes the divide between the two states – the Roman leaders are so inferior that they have to be brought up in undefined numbers, but they still cannot measure up to what Peter has done.

It is curious that Lomonosov chooses to compare Peter's reign to the period between the First Punic War and the time of Augustus. The ending point is clearer, as it suggests that Peter's action were leading up to the times of Elizabeth, during whose reign Lomonosov was living – a sentiment that he will state explicitly in 1758 (quoted on page 49). It is a period where the military conflicts are over and attention is given to the improvement of the city and especially the development of the arts, leading to the emergence of great writers comparable to great Roman authors, such as Vergil and Horace. Lomonosov himself could fulfill the functions of Livy and Vergil, since he offers a story of origins of the Russian people and an epic about the founder of the Russian state. The reference to the First Punic War is less clear, but perhaps is meant to imply that Peter's war with Sweden (the central conflict in the extant parts of Lomonosov's epic) as a military event of magnitude and consequence comparable to the First Punic War.

Ceremonial Texts: Odes, Inscriptions

The ceremonial ode, the genre that Lomonosov's name is connected to most often,

appeared in Russia during the 1730s¹⁰⁸ and has been singled out as the representative of classicism in Russia.¹⁰⁹ Odes were written for certain occasions, such as coronations or celebrations of military victories and, when published, they were published individually.¹¹⁰

When Rome is mentioned in Lomonosov's odes, it is kept as a separate entity, even though, much as in the *Ancient Russian History*, there seems to be a deep bond between Russia and Rome. In the *Ode for the Occasion of Her Majesty Great Sovereign Empress Elizabeth from Moscow to Saint-Petersburg in 1742 for the Coronation*,¹¹¹ Lomonosov addresses Rome in a familiar tone, using the second person and calling his imaginary ancient audience "Quirites" (the term used by Romans to address their fellow citizens):

[...] Quirites, your Marcus¹¹² lives on
In every Russian, who, without fear,
Will leap over fire and abysses.

[...] Квириты, Марк ваш жив
Во всяком россе, что без страху
Чрез огонь и рвы течет с размаху.

Rome here is not personified and abstract; instead, Lomonosov speaks as if to a group of acquaintances, and there is clearly a link between the two, though the link is vague and unidentified, hinting at a relationship without claiming any explicitly. At the same time, he maintains explicit distinctiveness of the two empires by establishing a relationship between "your Marcus [Curtius]" and "every Russian."

There are also poems that exemplify the competitive, polemical attitude towards Rome. One of them, written in 1756, when the royal palace in Tsarskoe Selo was rebuilt, is specifically concerned with the creation of a better Rome in Russia:

Although Rome trampled vanquished
kingdoms,

Хотя по царствам Рим поверженным ступал,
Однако семь веков и больше восставал;

¹⁰⁸ James von Geldern, "The Ode as a Performative Genre."

¹⁰⁹ Serman 26.

¹¹⁰ von Geldern 928.

¹¹¹ "Ода на Прибытие Ее Величества Великия Государыни Императрицы Елисаветы Петровны из Москвы в Санктпетербург 1742 Года по Коронации."

¹¹² A legendary Roman who sacrificed himself to close the gaping abyss that opened in the Roman Forum in 362 BC; episode described by Livy (*AUC* VII.6).

It took seven centuries to become great;
 You, Empress, raise Russia faster
 Without war, with you gentle hand
 Lifting us up in your generosity.
 Without destroying kingdoms, you build
 [a?] Rome in Russia.
 An example of this is the royal palace;
 whoever sees it, marvels,
 Saying that we will soon shame Rome.

Скорее кроткой Ты, Монархиня, рукою
 Россию без войны возводишь за Собою
 И щедролюбием возносишь нас
 Своим;
 Не разрушая царств, в России строишь Рим.
 Пример в том -- Сарской дом; кто видит,
 всяк чудится,
 Сказав, что скоро Рим пред нами
 постыдится.¹¹³

Unfortunately, Russian has no articles, so it is not immediately obvious whether Russia is building *a* Rome, which would suggest something of Rome’s grandeur and fame, or whether there is an attempt to revive Rome and relocate it to Russia. Other aspects of the poem, however, are clearly polemical, since Russia is portrayed as *superior* to Rome in three different ways: the speed with which Russia achieved a comparable status of greatness, the less destructive path of Russian history, and the magnificence of Russian architecture. This polemical attitude suggests that Lomonosov did not mean that Russia was rebuilding Rome, but, rather, than Russia has built something that can be compared to Rome – that will soon surpass Rome and “shame” it, as Lomonosov epic would “shame” Vergil.

Another competitive poem, written in 1757, has to do with a deeper past, as Elizabeth is portrayed as someone who could have saved Troy. The sentiment is expressed by Apollo, who is so impressed by a copper rendition of Elizabeth’s portrait that he rushes from Parnassus to say:

“The city, my and Neptune’s,¹¹⁴ would still be standing,
 If a Queen of Amazons similar to this one
 Came to save Priam’s scepter and throne.
 And the effort of the treacherous Greeks
 would have been worthless
 Elizabeth would defeat them in an instant.”

“Стоял бы и по днесь мой город и
 Нептунов,
 Когда бы защищать Приамов скиптр и
 трон
 Пришла подобна сей царица Амазон.
 И тщетна б вся была коварных греков сила,
 Елисавета б их в один час низложила.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ “Надпись на новое строение Сарского Села.” Lomonosov VIII, 614.

¹¹⁴ Трой.

¹¹⁵ “Надпись на конное, литое из меди изображение Елисаветы Петровны в амазонском уборе.” Lomonosov VIII, 640.

In this inscription Russia is again allied with the Romans, whose roots we know to go back to Troy (and explicitly opposed to Greece, echoing the sentiments of the *Aeneid*) but portrayed as superior to it, because it is depicted as a factor that would have changed the outcome of the Trojan War. This ode is written around the same time as the *Ancient Russian History*, which brings explicit attention to Rome’s (and Russia’s) Trojan background. By portraying Elizabeth as an Amazon, Lomonosov incorporates her into the Greco-Roman mytho-historical tradition, though with the claim that Elizabeth would have the change the outcome of the greatest war known to literature. This image of the Empress as an Amazon will be taken up during the reign of Catherine the Great, reaching the status of a national “myth.”¹¹⁶

Another comparison is found in a poem explaining an illumination display that was supposed to include an image of an amphitheater:

<p>And you, amphitheaters of the great city, The joy of the Latin people after the war, Today, stop your still resounding applause The splendor of Elizabeth shines brighter.¹¹⁷</p>	<p>И вы, великаго амфитеатры града, Народа по войнах Латинского отраде, В сей день скончайте ваш донине слышный плеск: Яснее возсиял Елисаветин блеск.¹¹⁸</p>
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Once again, Russia competes with Rome at something Roman (the amphitheaters, whose most famous incarnation was the Coliseum) and emerges victorious. The difference is so stark that it drowns out the “still resounding” fame of these monuments and supplants it with the splendor of Elizabeth’s Russia.

Finally, another detailed allusion to Vergil appears in an ode written for the name day of

¹¹⁶ Proskurina 16-17.

¹¹⁷ There have been recent arguments that the visual Roman attributes in eighteenth-century illumination and triumph displays were actually supposed to be imitations of Western European practices rather than allusions to the Roman Empire. For this reason, I find it worth mentioning that in two instances Lomonosov specifies in his illumination project proposals that the displays he is proposing are done “according to Roman custom.” While it is likely that the Western audience was an important consideration, Lomonosov himself wanted the public witnessing the displays and the people working on the displays to think that the parallels drawn were meant to be specifically to the Roman Empire (Lomonosov VIII, 523 and VIII, 531).

¹¹⁸ Lomonosov VIII, 532.

Elizabeth's nephew, the future emperor Peter III and husband of Catherine the Great. As Lomonosov's history and epic displace Rome from its past greatness, this ode appropriates Rome's future by engaging with Vergil's famous fourth eclogue, which contains a prophecy of a boy that will come and usher in a Golden Age ("quo ferrea primum / desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo"¹¹⁹). Lomonosov preserves the basic plot of the poem – a boy, who is a descendant of a great man, a god even, will bring about a new Golden Age. In the process, there may be some great wars, as old vicious qualities still have a hold on people and may cause trouble. Eventually (or, in Lomonosov's rendition, if Russia's enemies change their wayward ways), the Golden Age will arrive, and Rome (or, in Lomonosov's rendition, Russia) will have dominion over the world.¹²⁰ There is a crucial difference, however. While Vergil places his Golden Age into the future, for Lomonosov the boy – Peter – has already been born and the prophecy has been fulfilled. The first word of his ode is "already" ("уже"), possibly meant as a response to Vergil's future tense.

In addition to the general structure of the poem, there are some very direct borrowings that make it even clearer that Vergil was the underlying inspiration for this poem. I will mention three of the most significant ones.

The first is the statement of world dominion:

Behold the sphere of the world prostrate	Возри на света шар пространный,
Behold the sea at Your feet	Возри на понт, Тебе подсланный,
Behold the limitless dome of the heavens	Возри в безмерный круг небес ¹²¹

These lines correspond to Vergil's "Behold [...] the lands and the expanse of the sea and the high

¹¹⁹ Vergil, *Eclogues* IV.8-9. For text and commentary, see Coleman, Robert, *Eclogues*.

¹²⁰ For a study of the idea of the Golden Age in the eighteenth century, see Stephen Baehr. *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture*.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 108-9.

heavens” (“aspice [...] terrasque tractusque maris caelumque profundum”¹²²). Here, Lomonosov very clearly borrows the Virgilian formula for holding dominion over the entire world, with the possible implication of displacing Rome from this position because there can only be one ruler of the world and it will be Russia.

Another clear borrowing is the lines:

A Russian brave Achilles
Will besiege another Troy.

Под инну Трою вновь приступит
Российский храбрый Ахиллес.¹²³

These correspond to Vergil’s “and there will be other wars/and again great Achilles will be sent to Troy” (“erunt etiam altera bella/ atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mittetur Achilles”¹²⁴) but introduce the specification that this brave Achilles will be Russian, perhaps suggesting that future great heroes are now bound to come from Slavic stock.

Finally, there are the lines that have been noted by scholars for their exceptionality given that Russian culture was still heavily Christian. They become quite a bit less controversial if we keep the Virgilian model in mind, however:

Mighty Mars and Minerva proclaim:
“He was a God,¹²⁵ he was your God,
Russia,¹²⁶
He took human form, coming down to you
from lofty places
Now he shines in eternity
Cheerfully watching his grandson

С Минервой сильный Марс гласит:
"Он Бог, он Бог твой был, Россия,
Он члены взял в тебе плотския,
Сошед к тебе от горьних мест;
Он ныне в вечности сияет
На Внука весело взирает
Среди Героев, выше звезд.¹²⁸

¹²² *Eclogues* IV.50-51.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 106.

¹²⁴ *Eclogues* IV.35-6.

¹²⁵ Again, the absence of articles in Russian and their presence in English complicated the translation. Doubtless Lomonosov meant to say “a god,” since he would not have claimed that Peter was God (which would mean the Christian God). There is no distinction in Russian, however, so these lines are very striking, even when spoken by pagan deities. The meaning is further complicated by the lines about taking on human form. While classical deities commonly took on a human disguise, and there is, theoretically, nothing strange about the image of a deity taking on a human shape if one is a classicist, the association for most Christians would, of course, be Christ, who is the only divine figure to take human form in the Christian belief system.

¹²⁶ Evidently, this and the following two lines became popular in the XIX century Old Believers’ literature, where they were seen as evidence that Peter the Great was the Antichrist.

¹²⁸ Lomonosov VIII, 109.

From among the Heroes, above the stars.¹²⁷

These lines, with some modification, clearly correspond to Vergil's

he will receive the life of gods, and will see heroes together with the gods, and himself be seen by them, and he will rule the world pacified by his fathers' courage.	ille deum uitam accipiet, diuisque uidebit permixtos heroas, et ipse uidebitur illis, pacatumque reget patriis uirtutibus orbem. ¹²⁹
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The divinity here is put upon Peter rather than his grandson (by the Roman gods, not the narrator himself, which perhaps frees Lomonosov from the charge of blasphemy), but the concept comes from Vergil, especially since the boy in the eclogue is described as "offspring of the gods" ("cara deum suboles"¹³⁰). Lomonosov elaborates the idea of a divine ancestor by combining it with the description of the deified existence among gods offered in lines 15-17 of Vergil's eclogue quoted above.

In this poem, as in many other instances, there is no explicitly-stated connection between Russia and ancient Rome. In fact, there is even no mention of any Roman historical figures or events and, in this way, the ode seems to be very Russia-oriented, focusing on Russian historical figures (most prominently, Peter the Great). On the other hand, the Roman spirit is present both in the imagery and the underlying structure of the poem because they echo Vergil's poem. These characteristics give it a form that is thoroughly Roman at its foundation and it is the form of the narrative that creates the overall impression of grandeur and power that we gather from the

¹²⁷ Sometimes these lines are cited without the crucial specification that it is Mars who is the speaker, not the narrator himself -- a dastardly tactic that contributes to the statement's apparent oddness. A notable exception is I.Z. Serman who interprets Mars and Minerva as representations of war and the sciences, the two fields in which Peter's accomplishments were particularly important in Lomonosov's view. Serman speculates that, even though the idea of Peter's "divinity" was undoubtedly metaphorical, these lines could have been responsible for the delayed publication of this ode (I.Z. Serman. "Poeziia Lomonosova v 1740-e gody.")

¹²⁹ *Eclogues* IV.15-17.

¹³⁰ *Eclogues* IV.49.

poem. It should be emphasized, however, that the borrowings are not made obvious, and there is no mention of Vergil himself. I cannot say with certainty whether Lomonosov was counting on his audience to recognize the allusions and think about their implications or including them because he considered Vergil's eclogue a suitable precedent for appropriation, but it is clear that he considers Vergil and his language a model for how one should write imperial literature.

The instances of deeper engagement and polemic mentioned above occur in the wider context of decorative allusions, such as the transplantation of Roman attributes onto Russia – these attributes are either symbols of Roman power – triumphs, triumphal gates, laurel wreaths, olive branches -- or signs of a classical setting – muses, nymphs, classically-named winds (zephyrs are quite common), all of whom now inhabit St. Petersburg. The Roman gods make figurative appearances as well. Mars and Bellona as representations of war, Bacchus of wine, Ceres of grain, and so on. This technique became common during the reign of Peter the Great and was adopted from the conventions of contemporary Western literature, so Lomonosov's usage of these decorative allusions is not, on its own, an innovation and does not merit special attention in this chapter. There is little contribution to the content of the poems,¹³¹ but it is important to mention these references because the implicit claim of their appropriateness is also an implicit claim that Russia is a recipient of classical heritage, that Russian writers have the right to use classical terminology, and that imperial poetry should be written using this vocabulary.

Lomonosov's Rome

Although Lomonosov can be seen as following Feofan Prokopovich in his arguments for

¹³¹ “The legendary figures of ancient history and mythology are valuable not on their own, but as the means for achieving maximum effectiveness in the expression of the idea of amplified national consciousness.” (Iu. Stennik, “Idea ‘Drevnei’ i ‘Novoi’ Rossii v Literature XVIII Veka,” 27).

the greatness of the Russian empire and the crucial role that Peter the Great played in bringing Russia into the circle of great European nations,¹³² there is much difference between the almost chaotic listing of classical figures (e.g. “Xerxes, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar”) that we find in Prokopovich's sermons, where we find reliance on accumulation rather than discussion or elaboration, and the carefully constructed models of Lomonosov. Though Lomonosov, as well as Derzhavin after him, are still involved in court poetry and individual praises, writing laudatory odes for their respective empresses, they are more concerned with the greatness of the empire rather than the greatness of the ruler.¹³³

In order to praise the empire, however, Lomonosov needed an imperial language – the vocabulary, the genres, the structures needed to write imperial literature for a domestic Russian audience as well as a Western European audience. He finds all of these in the literature of ancient Rome. At the same time, he is very consciously writing a *Russian* literature, one that, if it is to succeed, cannot be simply imitative, so he must be careful in negotiating between Romanness and Russianness in his work.¹³⁴ The result is a delicate and not always straightforward model.

There is a substitution going on, where Rome is displaced by Russia from its own attributes, whether these attributes are superficial trappings of power or the imperial ideology or even the genres that Roman writers used to write about their empire. The substitution can work in different ways. Sometimes Lomonosov takes the structures, as was the case with using Vergil's *Aeneid* or fourth eclogue, and modifies them, filling Roman forms with Russian content.

¹³² For a brief discussion and examples, see Stennik 14.

¹³³ Lomonosov's obsession with Peter almost seems to contradict this idea, but: “Another aspect of Lomonosov's poetry is his belief that the ruler of a country is more than just a representative of the State; he is the actual embodiment of the ideas and ideals, character and personality, hopes and aspirations of the people he represents. Thus, when Lomonosov praised a Russian monarch, he was actually glorifying Russia's greatness and her glorious future” John Bucsele. “Lomonosov's Literary Debut,” 409.

¹³⁴ For this reason, I have to disagree with Anna Frajlich, who, citing P.N. Antsiferov, suggests that Lomonosov and Derzhavin, among others, believed “that St. Petersburg is a Northern Rome” (17).

Other times, he takes the vocabulary (triumphs, wreaths, chariots, muses) and transplants it to a markedly Russian setting. The cumulative effects of these different tactics suggest a close relationship and a historical similarity between the two empires without ever arguing for an identity or a relationship of inheritance. Instead, there is a claim to similarity, whether based on similar historical periodization, or the vast geographical area composed of many peoples, or the presence of nymphs and zephyrs, or the outstanding heroes who should be immortalized in outstanding literature. The polemical and competitive attitude towards Rome (and almost exclusively Rome) solidifies this relationship, because it suggests likeness while preserving separation.

In a way, there is a split that occurs between two Romes in his works. The first is abstract, comprised not so much of values, as Stennik suggests,¹³⁵ but of the *status*, the *grandeur* of Rome. It is the conqueror of many lands, the fatherland of many famous military and political leaders, the producer of immortal literature (whose immortality matters as much or perhaps more than the quality that merited this immortality). For all of these reasons, it is famous, perhaps even archetypal, to use Stephen Baehr's formulation. The second Rome is the historical Rome, with its historical figures and historical events, which, if desired, can be separated from the abstraction of greatness that the long history of classical reception in Western Europe has created. It can even lose in a competition for the title of a better Rome, competition that is based on criteria seemingly derived from Rome itself. Here, too, Lomonosov wants to displace the historical Rome from its status in order to confer the status upon Russia. If we want to say that Russia wants to be Rome, we may have to say that Russia wants to be Rome *by being better than Rome*.

¹³⁵ Stennik 26.

For this reason, it is insufficient, when talking about Lomonosov, to say that Russia was claiming the legacy of Rome or that Russia was trying to identify with Rome. Russia is a competitor rather than an heir. It is equally inaccurate to argue that Lomonosov rejected the classical past in favor of Russian national traditions. Lomonosov did make much use of Russian history and literature, and it is possible to write a study of his literature discussing only his use of Russian historical sources and literary traditions.¹³⁶ Many of his Roman allusions are structural, formal, filled in with Russian content so thoroughly that there is no question of their Russianness.

In talking about Lomonosov's use of Rome, it is crucial to remember the audience he intended for his works. Harold Segel has characterized the study of eighteenth-century Russian literature as being "to a great extent, the study of a rapidly accelerated process of assimilation of Western ideas and literary fashions."¹³⁷ But Russian thinkers were not only assimilating Western thought, they were also engaged in a dialogue with Western Europe, especially Germany and France, trying to find a place for Russia in world history, literature, and science. Bukharkin even suggests that one of the most, perhaps even the most, important feature of Lomonosov's poetry is that it attempts to negotiate between Russian-ness and European-ness, offering a different model, that of a "Russian European," a person who is part of the Western European culture but who remains in touch with traditional Russian culture, language (including Church Slavonic) and history.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ It has, in fact, been done by Moiseeva in *Lomonosov i Drevnerusskaia Literatura*. For a perspective on the importance of ecclesiastical literature, which comprises an enormous part of early Russian literature, in the eighteenth century, see Marcus Levitt. "The Rapprochement Between 'Secular' and 'Religious' in Mid to Late Eighteenth-Century Russian Culture." I have not talked about Lomonosov's use of earlier Russian literature or his borrowings from Biblical texts, since it is not my focus and there are other sources concerned with these topics, but these traditions were present and very important in Lomonosov's work.

¹³⁷ Harold Segel, "Baroque and Rococo in Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature," 556.

¹³⁸ Bukharkin 165.

This attempt to position Russia among Western European nations is very clear not only in Lomonosov's poetry, but also in his other literary projects, both in terms of their creation and their dissemination. His historical works were, to a degree, a response to the disparaging attitude towards Russia that was displayed by Western European historians: "Empress Elizabeth summoned historians to refute German scholars who described the early Slavs as 'barbarians, resembling beasts.'¹³⁹ The defensive tone of the preface to the *Ancient Russian History*, where Lomonosov informs the reader that his intent is to show that ancient Russian history is not characterized by widespread ignorance "depicted by many foreign writers," shows that repudiation of Western stereotypes about Russian is a major goal of his work.¹⁴⁰

Perhaps it is the same desire to contradict the assumption about the barbarity of Russians that Westerners may hold that motivates Lomonosov to portray the wars he writes about as struggles against "barbarians" ("Уже освобожден от варвар был Азов"¹⁴¹), or "Goths"¹⁴² and "Vandals," giving contemporary enemies (primarily Sweden) epithets that would align Russian with "civilization" and, by extension, the West, or, perhaps even more specifically, suggest yet another kinship with the Roman Empire, which was faced with the same enemies.¹⁴³ Stennik has pointed out that the conflicting desire both to show the extent of Peter's reforms and to contradict the opinion that Russia's past had been ignorant and uncivilized led Lomonosov first to write that Peter had brought up the status of Russia, a country that was formerly "barbaric" and then to change this sentiment and say that Russia was "crude" before Peter's reforms.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Cynthia Whittaker, "The Idea of Autocracy among Eighteenth-Century Russian Historians," 152.

¹⁴⁰ Lomonosov VIII, 170.

¹⁴¹ *Petr Velikii*, I.35.

¹⁴² E.g. "Взирая на Него, Перс, Турок, Гот, Сармат /Величеству лица Геройскаго чудится/ И мертвого в меди бесчувственной страшится." (VIII.287)

¹⁴³ This choice, to ally Russia with civilization, will be challenged later in Russian history, when the decay and fall of civilization will become a more prominent attribute of "Rome" than imperial grandeur.

¹⁴⁴ Stennik 11.

We have to keep in mind that some of Lomonosov's works were undoubtedly intended for the German and French audience (as well as the Russian court and aristocracy). The panegyric to Peter the Great, for instance, was sent to Voltaire (and certain scholars) in French translation and published in a German journal in German translation.¹⁴⁵ There is evidence that the *Ancient Russian History* was translated into French and known at least to Diderot.¹⁴⁶ Given this audience, the function of Rome is not only to help create a Russian imperial literary language and literature, but also to make sure that the new language and literature have a vocabulary that is shared with Western Europe. To an extent, it is a choice of orientation, though the choice itself had been made earlier and was made inevitable by the reforms of Peter the Great. Perhaps we can say that it is the self-conscious attempt to reconcile the Western orientation with the Russian past and patriotic aspirations of Russian writers through the creation of proper imperial language.

Authorial Statement

In addition to his many other "firsts," Lomonosov appears to have started the long-lasting Russian poetic tradition of adapting and responding to the lines of Horace's ode III.30 in order to make one's own authorial statement. Pushkin's rendition of the ode is familiar both to scholars of Russian literature and to Russians in general, though only the former are usually aware of its Horatian roots. It has also been recognized that Pushkin's "monument ode" is a response not only to Horace but also to Derzhavin, whose earlier adaptation transplants the Horatian testament to the Russian setting and is generally considered to be the first *adaptation* of the poem.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Lomonosov XVIII, 1048.

¹⁴⁶ Zapadov 202.

¹⁴⁷ See, for instance, G. V. Morozova, who has compiled a very helpful list of eighteenth-century Russian translations of Horace in "Ody Goraciia v russkih perelozheniiah XVIII veka." Zapadov makes a similar observation, citing the versions by Derzhavin and Pushkin as adaptations and noting the accuracy of Lomonosov's translation (170). More recently, P.E. Buharkin has mentioned Lomonosov's translation of Horace but argued that Lomonosov was otherwise indifferent to Horace's poetry (*Mikhail Vasil'evich Lomonosov v Istorii Russkogo Slova*).

Finally, it is also known that Lomonosov was the first Russian author to translate this particular ode into Russian in 1747. The translation, in unrhymed iambic pentameter, is fairly close to the letter of the original. The existence of the translation is definitive testimony that Lomonosov not only knew the poem, but also singled it out from the Horatian corpus as the only one worth translating in its entirety.

More importantly for the establishment of the tradition of *adaptation* of Horace are certain lines in the preface of Lomonosov's unfinished epic (*Peter the Great*), which are the lines where he stakes his claim to world fame and the reasons for his lasting legacy. The reliance on Horace is not as obvious here as it is in the Derzhavin's and Pushkin's poems, but we see here the elements and changes that will appear in the later adaptations.

<p>Whom will I follow, then? The path of Peter's feats And with the new heroic verses I will convince the whole world That I will deserve the wreaths of Parnassus By being the first to sing the deeds of such a Man, Who has no precedent in any land [...]</p>	<p>За кем же я пойду? В след подвигам Петровым И возвышением стихов Геройских новым Уверю целые вселенныя концы, Что тем я заслужу Парнасские венцы, Что первый пел дела такого Человека, Каков во всех странах не слыхан был от века [...]¹⁴⁸</p>
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<p>Wishing to remember Peter's resounding deeds, Later generations will read them described in my verses. Bountiful fields, and beautiful riverbanks And only the places inhabited by Russian people And peoples that respect Russia, Among whom Peter the Great is famous for his labors, Will give praise suitable to him to these verses</p>	<p>Желая в ум вперить дела Петровы громки, Описаны в моих стихах прочтут потомки. Обильные луга, прекрасны бреги рек И только где живет Российский человек И почитающи Россию все языки, У коих по трудам прославлен Петр Великий, Достойну для него дадут сим честь стихам¹⁴⁹</p>
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Horace's version is worth quoting in full because it is important not only here but also in the next

¹⁴⁸ Lomonosov VIII, 697.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

two chapters:

I have built a monument more lasting than
bronze
and higher than the royal pyramids,
Which neither the devouring rain, nor the
unruly north wind, nor the numberless
succession of years or passage of time could
demolish.
I will not die completely, and a large part of
me will avoid Libitina;¹⁵⁰
I will remain, continuously growing in later
fame, as long as the pontifex climbs the
Capitol with a silent virgin.
I will be said (where the violent Aufidus¹⁵¹
roars,
And Daunus,¹⁵² poor in water, once ruled over
rustic peoples) to have become great from
humble beginnings,
And to have been the first to lead forth
Aeolian verse to Italian rhythms. Embrace
well-deserved pride, Melpomene, and
willingly crown my hair with Delphic bays.

Exegi monumentum aere perennius
regalique situ pyramidum altius,
quod non imber edax, non aquilo impotens
possit diruere aut innumerabilis
annorum series et fuga temporum.
non omnis moriar multaque pars mei
vitabit Libitinam; usque ego postera
crescam laude recens, dum Capitolium
scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex.
dicar, qua violens obstrepit Aufidus
et qua pauper aquae Daunus agrestium
regnavit populorum, ex humili potens,
princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos
deduxisse modos. sume superbiam
quaesitam meritis et mihi Delphica
lauro cinge volens, Melpomene, comam¹⁵³.

Although all three adaptations (Lomonosov's, Derzhavin's, and Pushkin's) make a number of changes to the poem in order to place it into the Russian context (such as altering the geography to refer to locations relevant to the Russian rather than Roman Empire; Lomonosov, for instance, specifies that his verses will be read everywhere that Russian people live), the most crucial change and point of dispute in Lomonosov's, Derzhavin's and Pushkin's adaptations is the precise reason why the poet merits everlasting fame.

It has been pointed out that Horace's poem is intimately connected to the Roman state – the reference to the pyramids recalls the recent annexation of Egypt, while the reference to the

¹⁵⁰ Goddess of funerals.

¹⁵¹ A river in Apulia.

¹⁵² Mythical Apulian king.

¹⁵³ For the poem's context, sources, and commentary, see Nisbet, R. and Niall Rudd. *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book III*.

high priest reminds us of the Roman rituals and the mention of the Capital is “a symbol of Roman *imperium*.”¹⁵⁴ Horace’s own legacy will continue existing as long as there is a Roman state. The *explicit* claim that he makes about *why* he will be remembered and what will be said about him by the later generations, however, is literary – he is proud of being the one who “was the first to lead forth Aeolian verse to Italian rhythms.”¹⁵⁵

Although Lomonosov could make a similar claim about his own importance to the development of Russian poetry, he instead identifies his importance as “being the first to sing the deeds of such a Man,” linking his importance and fame not only to the state and politics in general, but also specifically to his praise of Peter the Great and, even more specifically, “his deeds.” Strikingly, his relationship with the ruler is so close that he chooses to follow not a literary precedent or even literary motivations but rather “the path of Peter’s feats,” implying that his work will be a merging of politics and literature, a process in which the former is primary and superior and the latter can only follow in admiration. Finally, the emphasis on “deeds” is parallel with Lomonosov’s focus on the external actions and perception of empire (such as military conquests and famous literary depictions) that guides his approach to ancient Rome.

There is another important model for Lomonosov’s presentation of his achievement, however, – Vergil’s programmatic statement about a future epic work in the third book of his *Georgics*,¹⁵⁶ where he writes, “soon, however, I shall prepare to tell of the blazing battles of Caesar” (“*mox tamen ardentis accingar dicere pugnas/ Caesaris*”¹⁵⁷). He, too, insists that he will

¹⁵⁴ Nisbet and Rudd, 366-7, 373.

¹⁵⁵ The terms “*potens*” and “*princeps*” may remind us of political power, possibly placing Horace in competition with political leaders or portraying his role in poetry as similar to the role of a political leader in matter of state. However, Horace does not explicitly connect his own achievement to political subject matter, unlike the Russian authors I will discuss.

¹⁵⁶ A long poem in four books that deals with agriculture and animals husbandry, guided by underlying philosophical and didactic concerns.

¹⁵⁷ *Georgics* III.46-7, quoted and translated in David Meban’s “Temple Building, *Primus* Language, and the Proem to Virgil’s Third *Georgic*,” 150.

be “the first” (“*primus ego*”¹⁵⁸) to attempt such an endeavor. Vergil then goes on to develop a metaphor of himself as a triumphant victor who will erect a temple, in the middle of which will be Caesar¹⁵⁹ (“*In medio mihi Caesar erit templumque tenebit*”¹⁶⁰).

Although Lomonosov relies more on the structures of Horace’s poem than on Vergil’s proem to structure his own statement (for instance, he refers to “deserving” the wreathes of Parnassus, echoing Horace’s final line; he also mentions the geographical area in which the verses will be read by the later generations, tying his legacy to the existence of the Russian Empire), he adapts these structures to once again compete with Vergil and his project – praising the battles of Caesar, which also aligns authorial fame with a political leader, whose deeds will be admired and read by the future generations. By changing Vergil’s “battles” to “deeds,” Lomonosov seems to suggest that the Russian emperor is greater than Vergil’s Caesar because his accomplishments go beyond battles (in the same way that the destiny of the Russian Empire goes beyond military prowess to encompass the skills left to other peoples in Book VI of the *Aeneid*).

These lines will be reinterpreted both by Derzhavin, who maintains the connection between himself and the ruler but transfers the emphasis from the “deeds” to internal qualities, the “virtues” of the monarch, and by Pushkin, who emphatically connects his fame to “the people” *in opposition* to the ruler. Echoing and responding to Lomonosov, these few lines in a very short poem become a way for the poets to express what they see as essential about their work and its relationship to their own political values and circumstances.

¹⁵⁸ *Georgics* III.10.

¹⁵⁹ See Meban’s article for parallels between Vergil’s metaphor and actual temple building practices, triumphal rituals, and other extra-literary practices. For a study of Vergil’s precedents and models, see Ryan Krieger Balot, “Pindar, Virgil, and the Proem to “Georgic” 3.”

¹⁶⁰ *Georgics* III.16.

Conclusion

For Lomonosov, Rome provides the model for what a great empire looks and sounds like. It is an empire with a great military history, with vast territorial possessions, with a language in which great literature can be written, and with heroes who are admired by many later generations in different lands. It is of crucial importance that an empire must have a proper literature, because Roman fame and grandeur survive in the works of its great writers and historians. Accordingly, Lomonosov perceives an urgent need to create a suitable imperial history and literature, turning to Roman models for the vocabulary and structures he needs. In writing his *Ancient Russian History*, he turns to Livy and other ancient historians to insert Russia's past into the history of the Roman Empire, tracing the origin of the Slavs to the Trojan War and arguing for their existence and impressive military prowess during Roman times. The Roman poet Vergil becomes an important model in Lomonosov's search for literary models, and Lomonosov creates his own epic about Peter the Great, the founder of the Russian Empire, in dialogue with Vergil's account of the wanderings of Aeneas, the legendary ancestor of the Romans. Finally, he turns to Horace's formulation of the importance of his poetry to offer us his own interpretation of his role in Russian literature and the reason for his enduring future fame.

Since Lomonosov is not interested in portraying Russia as "second best" to Rome or any other ancient or modern state, however, his attitude to Rome is emphatically competitive rather than imitative. The underlying framework he adopts is that of constant rivalry, whether historical or literary, explicit or implied, and this rivalry is retrojected to the very early days of Slavs, long before the Russian Empire begins to exist as such. The Slavs contribute to the fall of Rome, Peter is a far more admirable founder than Aeneas, Lomonosov's epic is a more challenging and worthwhile project than Vergil's "fable," and Rome and Romans would be ashamed of their

inferiority had they ever encountered the Russian Empire and Peter the Great. Even though Lomonosov adopts Roman vocabulary and structures, he does so in order to supplant Roman greatness with Russian greatness and to prove that the Russian Empire is superior both to ancient Rome and its contemporary Western European interlocutors.

CHAPTER II

Qualifying Empire: Morals and Ethics of Derzhavin's Romans

Derzhavin's Rome comes into being several decades after Lomonosov's and introduces an ethical and moral dimension to the question of imperial greatness. While military might and other external characteristics of empire are still important, they are no longer perceived as the most admirable or useful qualities of ancient Rome. Instead, it is the virtues and vices of Roman rulers and heroes that merit close attention because they can teach a careful reader about proper moral and ethical behaviors. This change of emphasis underlies the two central and related aspects of Derzhavin's approach to Rome. The first is that the underlying mechanism of reception is exemplarity – instead of the empire as a whole, we usually encounter admirable or despicable Roman individuals that can be used for didactic purposes. The second is the explicit turn away from Vergil, whose poetry is presented as political flattery, and towards Horace, whose work is coded as a philosophical and ethical endeavor that may occasionally get involved in political matters but only for the purposes of exposing vices or advocating a more thoughtful and fulfilling life than the life at court.

Derzhavin's "Monument"

Before turning to Derzhavin's relationship to Rome, I want to discuss his adaptation of Horace's ode III.30 as a response to Lomonosov's adaptation, because it encapsulates the difference in the two authors' approaches to empire and, ultimately, also guides their approach to and use of ancient Rome. Lomonosov was the first to tie his poetic legacy to his hero and, by

extension to the political-imperial subject of his poetry. For him it is the praise of Peter and his feats that becomes the guarantee of later generations' appreciation of his work. Derzhavin follows Lomonosov's precedent of establishing the connection between the poet and the ruler (in his case, Catherine the Great), but with important modifications. The poem is worth quoting in its entirety, partly because I will also return to it in the next chapter, when talking about Pushkin's response to Derzhavin in the next link of the chain of "Monument" reception.

Monument

I erected for myself a wondrous, immortal monument,
Harder than metals and higher than pyramids;
No tempest, no sudden thunder will break it
And the flight of time will never crush it.

So it is! – Not all of me will die: the greater part,
Escaping ashes, will live on after death
And my fame will grow, without wilting
As long as the world honors the Slavic race.

They will hear of me from the White waters
to the Black,
Where there is Volga, Don, Neva, Ural
flowing from the Riphean Mountains;
Among the countless peoples, every man will remember
That I came from obscurity, **and became known**

**For being the first to dare, in the amusing Russian verse,
To proclaim the virtues of Felitsa,¹⁶¹
To speak about God with honest simplicity
And tell the truth to the Tsars with a smile.**

O Muse! Be justly proud of your merits,
And scorn those who scorn you,
With an unhurried, easy hand
Crown your brow with the dawn of

Памятник

Я памятник себе воздвиг чудесный,
вечный,
Металлов тверже он и выше пирамид;
Ни вихрь его, ни гром не сломит
быстротечный,
И времени полет его не сокрушит.

Так! -- весь я не умру: но часть меня
большая,
От тлена убежав, по смерти станет жить,
И слава возрастет моя, не увядая,
Доколь Славянов род вселенна будет чтить.

Слух пройдет обо мне от Белых вод до
Черных,
Где Волга, Дон, Нева, с Рифея льет Урал;
Всяк будет помнить то в народах
неизчетных,
Как из безвестности я тем известен стал,

**Что первый я дерзнул в забавном
Руском слоге
О добродетелях Фелицы возгласить,
В сердечной простоте беседовать о Боге,
И истину Царям с улыбкой говорить.**

О Муза! возгордись заслугой
справедливой,
И презирать кто тебя, сама тех презирай;
Непринужденною рукой, неторопливой

¹⁶¹ Catherine II.

The lines in bold present a response to Lomonosov. The word “deeds” (“дела”), which Lomonosov singled out as his poetic subject (and that is echoed in the rest of the fragment of his epic, which focuses on “deeds,” “labor,” and “feats”) becomes, in Derzhavin’s poem, “virtues” (“добродетели”), implying that virtues and not feats make a ruler that is worth praising – this focus on virtue will rule both Derzhavin’s odes in general and his approach to the reception of ancient Rome. This change is also a reflection of Derzhavin’s approach to the role of the poet, reflecting his perceived task of serving as “an instructive panegyrist.”¹⁶³

Another important alteration is the reference to Horace’s first satire in the final line of the same stanza, “tell the truth to the Tsars with a smile.” This line alludes to Horace’s “what stops one from telling the truth while laughing” (“ridentem dicere verum /quid vetat”¹⁶⁴) and carries several possible implications. As a response to Lomonosov, it suggests a departure from epic, which Lomonosov had chosen as the genre that will immortalize him, and towards satire, the genre that is concerned with exposing “the truth” rather than offering praise. This line places addition emphasis on the earlier “virtues” by suggesting that Derzhavin will offer praise only if it is true, and will not withhold criticism otherwise. In the greater context of his work, we may also momentarily place the emphasis on “with a smile” rather than “the truth,” as a reminder of his essentially close and amicable relationship with Catherine the Great – his criticisms work within the status quo and the figures he uses in his works are the noble and patriotic heroes who defend and preserve their state rather than attempt to bring about political change. Still, the mention of “the truth” includes potential for disagreement with the rulers, something that we never

¹⁶² Levitsky 330.

¹⁶³ Hart 87.

¹⁶⁴ *Sat.* I.1.24-5.

encountered in the works of Lomonosov.

Catherine and Classics

The Roman presence in the Russian court continued to grow during Catherine's reign (1762-1796), including the performance of grandeur during public ceremonies, imperial art and architecture, increase in translations of classical works and contemporary scholarship about Roman history, and a reliance on classical allusions for Russian political myths. Marinus Wes, illustrating the first of these uses, that of public ceremonies, writes,

The night of New Year's Day 1 January 1763 was, as usual, graced with fireworks in St. Petersburg. It opened with an allegorical representation of a 'Trajan's Column,' erected in honour of Catherine and surrounded by altars where the 'blessed nations of the Russian empire' brought their offerings. It was the first time that Russia celebrated the turn of the year under Catherine. She was by no means still a virgin, but this did not prevent the organizers from making the fireworks symbolic of the return of the Golden Age and devoting a scene to the rise of the 'salutary sun' under the returned Virgin Catherine. By way of an explanation for the spectators, the famous sixth line of Virgil's fourth eclogue was added as a caption:

*Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna*¹⁶⁵. Since not everybody knew Latin, a translation was also supplied: 'Astraea will return, the Golden Age returns.'¹⁶⁶

A number of classical references were developed into what Vera Proskurina calls "myths of empire." Catherine could be portrayed as an Amazon (in an extension of a poem by

¹⁶⁵ This is the sixth line of Virgil's fourth eclogue. The translation identifies Virgil's "Maiden" ("Virgo") specifically with Astraea, who is not present in the eclogue. The mention of Astraea occurs in the works of Ovid and the Greek poet Aratos, who mentions that Astraea, "the virgin patron of Justice," leaves the earth once the Iron Age arrives (*Ph.* 133-6; Ovid: "ultima caelestrum terras Astraea reliquit." *Met.* I.150). Aratos connects Astraea to the constellation Virgo. Later poets continue to link Astraea with the Virgo. If one reads the eclogue together with the *Aeneid's* prophecy of Rome's world domination and future golden age to be ushered in by the reign of Augustus (*Aeneid* VI.791-5), Astraea can be called "an imperial virgin," since "The golden age is the Augustan rule, the Augustan revival of piety, the peace of the world-wide Augustan empire." See Robert Coleman's commentary in *Virgil. Eclogues* for the basic provenance of the association between "Virgo" and "Astraea" and Frances Yates, "Queen Elizabeth as Astraea" for its interpretation and afterlife, particularly in England.

¹⁶⁶ It is unclear why Wes translates the first part of the quote using future tense, since it is crucial to the message to posit that the Golden Age has already arrived, so the entire quotation is in present tense. Stephen Baehr's translation is "Astraea is already descending, and the golden age is returning to us" (Baehr, *Paradise Myth*, 45). Wes 45. Wes also points out that the reference had become common under Elizabeth but became especially associated with Catherine. On a discussion of eighteenth-century paradise motifs, including the Golden Age, see Stephen Baehr's *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture*.

Lomonosov about Elizabeth), tying Russian monarchs to the story of Troy.¹⁶⁷ Her portraits could be modeled on Scipio Africanus and Alexander the Great (in an attempt to make her more masculine and, thus presumably more fit to rule).¹⁶⁸ During the Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774), the odes celebrating Russian victories compared the times of Catherine to those of Augustus, on the basis of territorial expansion and the entry into Golden Age.¹⁶⁹ The portrayal of the empress as Minerva and Astraea was ubiquitous (the last allusion had already been common in Elizabethan England, among the Hapsburgs and France during the reign of Louis XV, and was introduced to Russia by Lomonosov, thoroughly developed by his literary rival, Sumarokov, and employed by other writers, including Petrov, Maikov and Kheraskov.¹⁷⁰) A stanza of Derzhavin from 1767 reflects the commonality of these two titles:

<p>Rightly we call you Minerva When we behold your wise laws. Rightly we call you Astraea: Under your scepter, we live in the golden days.</p>	<p>Достойно мы тебя Минервой называем, На мудрые твои законы как взираем. Достойно мы тебя Астреею зовем: Под скипетром твоим златые дни ведем.¹⁷¹</p>
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The number of translations of classical authors soared under Catherine the Great. A Society for the Translation of Foreign Books was founded in 1768, which saw a number of translations of ancient (Livy, Tacitus, Homer, Cicero) and contemporary European (Corneille, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Hume, Swift) authors.¹⁷² The major projects, according to E. Frolov, who has studied the evolution of classical scholarship in Russia, were translations of Vergil and Homer.¹⁷³ These projects were commissioned by the empress herself or by her favorites. Perhaps

¹⁶⁷ Proskurina, Vera. *Mify Imperii: Literatura i Vlast' v Epohu Ekateriny II*, 1-18.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 36.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 46.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 62-5.

¹⁷¹ Derzhavin, III, 240.

¹⁷² John T. Alexander, "Catherine the Great (Ekaterina Alekseevna), 'The Great,' Empress of Russia." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*.

¹⁷³ Frolov, E. D. *Russkaia Nauka ob Antichnosti*, 102.

the best known of these translation projects was the *Aeneid*, translated by Vasilii Petrov, a teacher in the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy, who became famous for his ode developing the Amazon myth mentioned above and gained the (perhaps dubious) distinction of being the “Russian Vergil.” Catherine was personally involved in this translation project, supervising and perhaps even ‘correcting’ the translation. In a wonderful twist of sources, Petrov used Lomonosov’s epic, *Peter the Great*, in his translation of the *Aeneid*, reminding the audience of Lomonosov’s work and making “recent Russian reality” speak through the Virgilian text.¹⁷⁴

Due to the topical foreign concerns – war with the Ottoman Empire – there was a temporary spike in Greek allusions within a political context, but even these allusions often maintain a Roman connection. One of the key discourses surrounding the war, was “the restoration of the intellectual cradle of mankind – ancient Hellas – from the religious and cultural yoke [of the Turkish barbarians], since the war was waged over the famous lands of antiquity.”¹⁷⁵ While Catherine was hoping to inspire the Greeks to revolt against the Turks, her own personal Vergil began comparing her to Pallas rather than Minerva.¹⁷⁶ Keeping the Greek territories in mind, Catherine even named her second grandson, born in 1779, Konstantin, after Constantine the Great, and the hope that he would occupy the throne in Constantinople echoed in literary works of the period (Derzhavin, for instance, wrote of “return[ing] Constantine’s city to Konstantin” (“Афинам возвратить Афины,/Град Константинов Константину”)¹⁷⁷ and expected him “to build Rome again” (“Сей вновь построит Рим.”)¹⁷⁸. The expeditions to the newly acquired Archipelago islands in the Mediterranean provided opportunities for excavations

¹⁷⁴ Proskurina 47.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 152.

¹⁷⁶ Proskurina 170.

¹⁷⁷ “На Взятие Измаила,” 1790, I, 357.

¹⁷⁸ “Описание Потемкинского Праздника,” 1791.

(there was even a discovery of “Homer’s tomb”¹⁷⁹), search for antique columns, statues, and monuments “with ancient Greek writing” and a chance for practical application of the discourse of restoring Greek learning, which manifested itself in projects on educating Greek children.¹⁸⁰

And yet, since the underlying context is that of empire and the military, it seems that the relationship of Russia to Greece was closer to the relationship of Rome to Greece than Greece itself.¹⁸¹ Constantine was, after all, a *Roman* emperor and, as we saw above, appears as someone who will restore a *Rome*, even if it is in formerly Greek territory. Throughout the war, there was a sense of following in the footsteps of ancient Roman heroes reflected in odes, panegyrics and even official correspondence, domestic and foreign, of this period.¹⁸² Battles, campaigns, individuals, courage and the general grandeur of Russia were consistently praised through comparisons with the Roman Empire. In the second installment of the war (1787-1792), the Russian general Potemkin was greeted, upon his return to Petersburg, by triumphal gates modeled on the triumphal arch of the Roman Emperor Titus, who captured Jerusalem in 70 A.D.¹⁸³ Certain conventional celebratory constructions, such as the temple of Janus, had become so commonplace that Catherine herself grew bored with them.¹⁸⁴

This intimate relationship between the Russian court and the classics has led Marinus Wes to conclude,

It was only in the time of Catherine the Great and Alexander I that antiquity could gain a firm foothold in Russia. It was the antiquity of enlightened monarch, an antiquity which was permitted to function as a mind-expanding element in the processes of human imagination, in architecture, in sculpture, in literature, as long as the expanding effect did not exceed the frame of autocracy.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ Constantine, David. *Early Greek travelers and the Hellenic Ideal*, 215-218.

¹⁸⁰ Elena Smilianskaia, unpublished.

¹⁸¹ Proskurina expresses the same sentiment, arguing that Greece that appears in Russian literature of this period is a Roman Greece, Greece when it was already part of the Roman Empire (Proskurina 171).

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 164-5.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* 167.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 198.

¹⁸⁵ Wes 173.

This brief survey should be sufficient to demonstrate the pervasiveness of Roman references in the Russian court during the reign of Catherine the Great. It would be misleading to think of this period as one of abandonment of Russian traditions in favor of becoming a Rome, however, as we are still dealing with a period during which significant effort was put into dispelling foreign ideas about Russia's backwardness, ignorance, historical insignificance, and other unflattering characteristics. Catherine herself sponsored and even wrote works defending Russian culture, language, history and literature.¹⁸⁶ Alongside the performers of operas portraying classical heroes, there were *gusli*¹⁸⁷ players in her court, and a "discovery of the folk"¹⁸⁸ was taking place at about the same time as the discovery of Homer's grave in the Greek Archipelago.

The strong emphasis on Roman (and sometimes Greek) connections, combined with patriotism, the desire to find and extol Russia's own identity, and strong criticism of an unthinking mimicry of the foreign is the general overall context in which Derzhavin and his contemporaries are writing. We can already see the reflection of these concerns in the "Monument" poem quoted above, especially the lines, in which Derzhavin speaks of his accomplishment:

...being the first to dare, in the amusing
Russian verse,
To proclaim the virtues of Felitsa,
To speak about God with honest simplicity
And tell the truth to the Tsars with a smile.

Что первый я дерзнул в забавном Руском
слоге
О добродетелях Фелицы возгласить,
В сердечной простоте беседовать о Боге,
И истину Царям с улыбкой говорить.

¹⁸⁶ On Catherine's *Antidote*, see, for instance, Marcus C. Levitt. "An Antidote to Nervous Juice: Catherine the Great's Debate with Chappe d'Auteroche over Russian Culture." See Hans Rogger, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, for details on the development of Russian history, language and other factors important to a forming "national consciousness." It was also of crucial importance for Catherine herself to appear emphatically Russian, especially since she was actually German and had dubious rights to the throne of the husband whom she overthrew.

¹⁸⁷ An old Russian stringed instrument often associated with folk music.

¹⁸⁸ Rogger 161-2.

There is of course the underlying Roman connection, the Horatian model, a poem written during the Roman Empire that assumes and demands the existence of this empire, with its geographical expanses and continuous existence.¹⁸⁹ But Derzhavin does not simply translate the poem, he takes the structure and imperial background of the original, but fills it with Russian content. It is the *Russian* verse that now guarantees the poet's everlasting fame, and this fame will be among the geographical expanses of the Russian Empire, the *Slavic* race. In the process of adapting Rome's legacy to suit Russia's contemporary needs, Derzhavin will also implicitly raise the question of whether it is necessarily desirable to follow Roman models, pointing both to the admirable and the vicious qualities of Roman figures and the dangers of human ambition and arrogance.

Brief Biography

Like Lomonosov, Derzhavin is usually perceived to have a crucial role in the development of Russian literature. Those not fond of Lomonosov will begin their literary histories with Derzhavin as he is often (and rightly) seen as the immediate predecessor of Pushkin and other major nineteenth-century writers. He is often considered the greatest poet of the eighteenth-century,¹⁹⁰ both by later scholars and his contemporaries, who considered his poetic achievement "the crowning jewel of an entire epoch, one that stretched from the reforms of Peter I to the Napoleonic era."¹⁹¹ Frequently, he is credited with being the poet who finally opened up Russian poetry to its potential, freeing it from the stricter generic and other prescriptions and conventions imposed by his predecessors (Lomonosov, Sumarokov). In the words of Pierre Hart,

¹⁸⁹ Pumpianskii even argues that this poem shows "the Roman character of Russian history during the time Catherine." L. V. Pumpianskii, "Ob Ode A. Pushkina 'Pamyatnik,'" 204.

¹⁹⁰ In the words of Iakov Grot, "Eighteenth century had only one poet of great power. It was Derzhavin." I.viii.

¹⁹¹ Aleksandr Levitsky, "Gavrila Romanovich Derzhavin." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*.

Derzhavin's repeated transgression of Neo-classical norms imparted new vitality to the solemn ode at the same time that it introduced a greatly expanded poetic realm to the Russian reader. His depictions of countryside and city, his translation of diverse visual and aural sensations into words, his juxtapositions of sublime and commonplace experience were of considerable importance to the progress of poetry toward its first great florescence in the early nineteenth century.¹⁹²

As was the case with Lomonosov, Derzhavin's life and literary career were closely tied to the court, and his literary fame was inextricably tied, in his own time and in the perception of later generations, to Catherine the Great. Although he was of noble descent, his family was poor, and he received little formal education (with the exception of two years in a gymnasium in his native Kazan'). He followed his father's career path by becoming a soldier in the Preobrazhenskii Regiment, spent eleven years in the army, and personally participated in two of the major political events of his lifetime -- the coup that placed Catherine the Great on the throne in 1762 and the suppression of the Pugachev rebellion in 1773.¹⁹³

His chosen genre was the ode.¹⁹⁴ His first odes were heavily influenced by Lomonosov, but he soon turned away from Lomonosov (due, in his own words,¹⁹⁵ to the inability to follow Lomonosov's lofty style and pathos) and chose Horace as his odic model.¹⁹⁶ Though it is perhaps only a question of a poetic temperament, there is also cause to think that the age in which Vergil, Homer and Pindar were the preferred models for court poetry and became associated with flattery, pompousness, and dishonesty,¹⁹⁷ invited a writer concerned with ethics and morals to seek other models for imitation. I will return to the question of Derzhavin's poetic allegiances in

¹⁹² Pierre Hart, *G.R. Derzhavin: A Poet's Progress*, i.

¹⁹³ On the influence of Pugachev's rebellion on Derzhavin's poetry, see Zapadov *Poety XVIII Veka*, 172.

¹⁹⁴ "Odes served him for purposes of career advancement; they established his fame as a poet; toward the end of his life they served him as a testing ground to prove himself as a literary theoretician; and, perhaps most important, they provided him with a mean of expressing his deepest spiritual and intellectual concerns." Levitsky 72.

¹⁹⁵ Derzhavin VI, 443.

¹⁹⁶ Derzhavin was not alone in his preferences, as the nature and context of the ode as a genre was undergoing a transformation at this time. On the change from the ceremonial, performative odes to the didactic, philosophical odes as a preferred genre, see James von Geldern, "The Ode as a Performative Genre."

¹⁹⁷ The odes of Petrov, for instance, were heavily satirized by his contemporaries.

a later portion of this chapter.

The major turn in Derzhavin's career came with the ode *Felitsa*, written in 1782, which celebrated the virtues of Catherine the Great.¹⁹⁸ He went on to hold a number of administrative positions (including being a member of the Law Commission, president of the Commerce Department, minister of Finance, member of the Supreme Council and Minister of Justice)¹⁹⁹ though he did not hold any of them for long (due to his "inordinate sense of justice, coupled with a hot temper"²⁰⁰) and, finally, was dismissed and dedicated himself to poetry from 1803 on.

Derzhavin and Rome

The kinship with Rome appears in a number of poems, and the appropriateness of Roman comparisons no longer needs to be proven. What Lomonosov had to justify on the basis of historical similarity is now clearly accepted and commonplace enough not to need justification, and can become the background to further questions and evaluation. Derzhavin accepts this general kinship between Russia and Rome, and the praise of Russia remains an important function of his Roman allusions. It is no longer the main function, however, and the tone of many of these references is no longer exclusively celebratory, as the chosen figures may be either positive or negative and, ultimately, they serve to exemplify the moral criteria for a good ruler or nobleman. Pumpianskii has argued that these Roman allusions, unlike the historically-motivated

¹⁹⁸ "'Felitsa' is one of Derzhavin's best-known and most anthologized poems. Its name was taken from an allegorical children's tale written by Catherine and published in 1781. The tale recounts how the young Prince Khlor, aided by an agent of Princess Felitsa (from the Latin, suggesting 'felicity' or 'good fortune'), ultimately succeeds in his quest for virtue, symbolized as a thornless rose, which he finds on a distant mountaintop. In Derzhavin's ode, virtue is unmistakably connected with Catherine. As opposed to the previous tradition of serious, lofty panegyrics, Derzhavin's ode was rendered in a delightfully light and humorous way whenever the focus of his attention shifted from the idealized, yet human, portrait of Catherine to her courtiers to the poet himself, who is portrayed as replete with such forgivably human vices as excessive beer drinking, oversleeping, card playing, womanizing, and laziness. Although this portrait was in itself a profound departure from the previously abstract pose of the odic persona, lost in the heights of lyrical rapture, the great novelty of the ode also lay in the fact that it offered unambiguous satiric portraits of some of Catherine's main courtiers, depicted as embodiments of corruption, sloth, and ineptitude." Levitsky 77.

¹⁹⁹ Levitsky 78.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

allusion of Lomonosov, are the result of Derzhavin's moral notion of "two worlds" or "two paths" that lie before every person (the path of, for instance Regulus,²⁰¹ and the path of, for instance, Catiline²⁰²).²⁰³

It is not only a moral binary that guides these choices. The additional considerations include the dangers of power and ambition, or meditations on the worth of earthly power, where Roman examples may serve as an epitome of glory and status. The Roman figures may also be useful for contemplating the poet's relationship with the rulers, and the choice of Horace rather than Vergil as an object of imitation is significant for outlining Derzhavin's take on this relationship. In all of these nuances, which are ultimately related to ethical and existential exploration of political power, we can see important changes from the time of Lomonosov. Military successes, geographical expansion, and other external accomplishments of the monarch and empire, which had been so prominent in the works of Lomonosov, take a back seat to the question of the ruler's virtuousness, though they are still present and prominent.

The commonly assumed connections between Russian and Rome make negative Roman examples even more poignant. Building a relationship to Rome is no longer taken as a purely positive practice. Rome, though it still stands for military power and imperial grandeur, now becomes an ambivalent symbol. On the one hand, it was an unparalleled world power, with many noble heroes immortalized in the works of great authors. On the other hand, however, Roman leaders, especially its emperors, were sometimes overcome by ambition and immortalized not for their greatness but for their heinous treatment of their subjects and their dubious morals.

²⁰¹ The Roman general who was captured during the war with Carthage, and went back to Rome as part a Carthaginian embassy. He proceeded to convince the Romans not to agree to the peace proposed by Carthage, returned to captivity, and was subsequently tortured to death.

²⁰² An impoverished aristocrat who tried to overthrow the Roman Republic during Cicero's consulship.

²⁰³ L. V. Pumpianskii, "K istorii russkogo klassitsizma," 129.

As a result of these new concerns, it can no longer be taken for granted that we know what Rome means. Is Rome still a suitable model if one looks at its *bad* emperors? Might military fame disguise ambition and corruption? And how does one reconcile the immortality that being a Rome seems to promise with the inevitable mortality of people? Of course, none of these questions is impossible to answer, and they need not interfere with the reliance on Rome for imperial language and imagery. They are, however, questions that prevent an easy identification of Rome with a single concept or cluster of concepts, because they also signal different approaches – imperially, ethically and existentially important Rome. There is much overlap between these approaches, but they are nevertheless different concerns.

Modified Praise of Russian Empire

Both the competitive attitude and the use of Roman models and precedents that we saw in the works of Lomonosov were still widespread among Derzhavin's contemporaries and are also present in those odes of Derzhavin that are written in response to political events or for public occasions. These ceremonial and laudatory kinds of allusions coexist with ones that carry significant modifications and signal a change of purpose and values.

In praising the rulers, Derzhavin turns several times to the descriptions of the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan, an important change from the praises of Peter the Great as an Augustus or the label "Augusta," that Lomonosov applies to Elizabeth, since the link to Augustus highlights the reforms to infrastructure and imposition of peace and other external improvements to the empire, while Derzhavin's turn to Trajan is clearly motivated by Trajan's treatment of his subjects and the quality of life under the emperor – it was, in his view, a "happy" and "rare" time when autocracy was mixed with liberty, and one could speak freely and live without fearing for one's life and safety.

The first reference to Trajan is the epigraph to the manuscript of poems that Derzhavin presented to Catherine the Great in 1795 and, again, to the first volume of his collected works, published in 1808, which is composed of fragments from two different works of Tacitus,

Historiae and *Agricola*:

O, happy and uncommon times, when it was not forbidden to think or talk; when incompatible things, autocracy and freedom, co-existed; when, under the lightest rule the public safety consisted not of hopes and wishes, but of certain fulfillment of the desired.

[О время благополучное и редкое, когда мыслить и говорить не воспрещалось; когда соединены были вещи несовместныя, владычество и свобода; когда при самом легком правлении общественная безопасность состояла не из одной надежды и желанія, но из достовернаго получения, прочным образом, желаемаго.²⁰⁴]

In the works of Tacitus, these lines partially apply to Trajan and to his predecessor Nerva. In the *Historiae*, he mentions “the principate of divine Nerva and the rule of Trajan [...] the rare happiness of times when it is allowed to think what you want and say what you think” (“principatum divi Nervae et imperium Traiani [...] rara temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet.”²⁰⁵). In the *Agricola*, there is once again mention of the reigns of both Nerva and Trajan: “at the beginning of the most blessed age Nerva Caesar mixed once incompatible things, the principate and liberty, and [now] Nerva Trajan daily augments the happiness of the age, and not only has public security encouraged hopes and wishes but the times also have given us confidence in the fulfillment of the wishes” (“primo statim beatissimi saeculi ortu Nerua Caesar res olim dissociabiles miscuerit – principatum ac libertatem – augeatque cotidie felicitatem temporum Nerua Traianus, nec spem modo ac uotum securitas

²⁰⁴ Derzhavin I, xlii. Grot notes that Tacitus was not yet translated into Russian, so Derzhavin either used the original or a German translation.

²⁰⁵ Tacitus, *Hist.* I.1. Text: Fisher, C. D., ed. *Tacitus: Historiae*.

publica, sed ipsius uoti fiduciam ac robur aetas suaserit.”²⁰⁶).

Combining the features of two emperors and from two works, Derzhavin creates an image of an ideal state that offers both security and freedom to its subjects. Even though these sentiments span the reigns of two different rulers, Derzhavin chooses only Trajan to represent the ideal relationship between the ruler and the people, perhaps influenced by Pliny’s panegyric (a translation of which already existed in Russia), which is specifically concerned with Trajan; Pliny even insists that one should talk about the ruler in such a way that the words cannot apply to anyone else,²⁰⁷ meaning that the praise should be honest and specific, unlike generic formulations prompted by fear.²⁰⁸

In Derzhavin’s work, the function of this epigraph is likely partly laudatory²⁰⁹ and partly didactic, praising exaggerated and idealized conditions in order to encourage their realization, since Derzhavin’s own literary and bureaucratic experience and desire “to tell the truth” caused a number of rifts between him and the empress in the late 1780’s and the early 1790’s.²¹⁰ The former function frames the desired result as unequivocal praise, striving to repair the poet’s relationship with the ruler and allowing the latter function to appear in an unobjectionable form that does not place any demands and only appears to laud what has already been done. The latter function, however, still draws attention to the specific conditions that the poet portrays as the

²⁰⁶ Tacitus, *Agr.* 3.1 For text, context, and commentary, see Woodman, A. J., *Tacitus: Agricola*.

²⁰⁷ "ne quid de principe nostro ita dicant, ut idem illud de alio dici potuisse videatur." *Panegyricus* 2.2.

²⁰⁸ "Quare abeant ac recedant voces illae quas metus exprimebat" *Ibid*.

²⁰⁹ Cardy harshly points to Derzhavin’s need to “prostitute his talents to gain the recognition and reward from his sovereign.” (126).

²¹⁰ See Cardy’s biography of Derzhavin for a discussion of his tumultuous relationship with Catherine. It is sadly ironic that Derzhavin himself later explains that the reason his poems were not published in 1795, when he originally offered them to Catherine, was that “there were people, who convinced the Empress that these poems contained satirical expressions about her.” (“были люди, которые уверили Государыню, будто бы въ сочиненияхъ сихъ были на счетъ Ея сатирическия выражения.” “Объяснения на Сочинения Державина, имъ самимъ диктованныя родной его племяннице, Елисавете Николаевне Львовой, въ 1809 году.” F. L’vov, ed. Saint-Petersburg, 1834, 1).

essential conditions for being worthy of this praise.

The dedication poem to the empress originally ended with a mention of Trajan as well:

You deserved true praise in your rule.	Ты истинной хвалы в царях была достойна.
The world will remember you as it does	Вспомнит о тебе, как о Траяне, свет. ²¹¹
Trajan.	

These lines were removed in a later publication, becoming, instead, part of the epigraph quoted above, which, instead of vaguely alluding to Trajan, specifies the specific conditions within the empire that the poet wishes to emphasize. The adjective “true” in “true praise” also recalls Pliny’s panegyric, emphasizing the sincere rather than formulaic nature of the comparison and possibly signaling that the poet’s concern is to respond to actual conditions of life rather than offer ceremonial praise.

A hidden comparison to Trajan had appeared even earlier, in the poem *Felitsa*, where Derzhavin praises the empress, writing,

[You] allow people to know and think	...И знать и мыслить позволяешь
And don’t forbid them	И о себе не запрещаешь
To speak truth and falsehood about you.	И быль и небыль говорить. ²¹²

Later, in his own note to these lines, Derzhavin explain that Catherine, “like the emperor Trajan, was very forgiving of people who spoke ill of her weaknesses” (“Императрица, подобно императору Траяну, весьма снисходительна была к злоречивым к ея слабостям людям”).²¹³

We could perhaps think of these comparisons to Trajan, particularly their later instances, as another take on what Derzhavin could have meant by “telling the truth with a smile” – not satire, but rather praise and idealization that carry instructions about what a good ruler should prioritize in her reign.

²¹¹ Dezhavin, “Приношение Монархине,” 1795, I.717 . Grot points out that these lines were included in original manuscript but not in the edited version of the poem published in the 1808 anthology (*Ibid.*)

²¹² “Фелица,” 1782, I, 142- 3.

²¹³ Levitsky, 440.

A number of scholars have, in fact, offered similar readings of Pliny's panegyric, acknowledging the reality of wanting to offer instruction and having to do it in a way that would still be palatable to the emperor. Betty Radice argues that the panegyric "is no idle flattery in conventional form; it is rather a sort of manifesto of the Senate's ideal of a constitutional ruler, one chosen to rule because he is qualified to do so, with emphasis on his *obsequium* to the people's will and his sense of service to his country," "a subtle blend of fact and 'wishful thinking.'" ²¹⁴ Although it would be misleading to consider Derzhavin's brief quotation a "manifesto" (or to think of Derzhavin composing manifestoes in general), his use of Pliny's *Panegyricus* ²¹⁵ for the 1808 epigraph dedicated to Emperor Alexander I, Catherine's grandson, offers a laudatory yet humbling portrait:

We have no intention of flattering him, like a highest being or some deity: for we speak not of a tyrant, but of a Citizen, not of an Autocrat, but of a Father of the fatherland, who considers us equal to him, and surpasses us all the more by making himself equal to us.

[Мы не намерены ласкать ему нигде, яко существу высочайшему, или яко некоему божеству: ибо говорим не о тиране, но о Гражданине, не о Государе, но об Отце отечества, который почитает себя нам равным, но тем паче нас превышает, чем более равняет себя с нами. ²¹⁶]

Pliny's lines read: "We should never flatter him as a god, or a divine spirit: for we speak not of a tyrant but of a citizen; not of a master, but of a father. He thinks of himself as one of us, and in thinking this surpasses us and stands out all the more" ("Nusquam ut deo, nusquam ut numini blandiamur: non enim de tyranno, sed de cive; non de domino, sed de parente loquimur. Unum

²¹⁴ Radice, "Pliny and the Panegyricus," 168. Mark Morford even credits the *Panegyricus* with being a "new kind of oratory" in a new kind of context – "the first time that a living princeps had been eulogized in his presence by means of a speech that was designed to persuade rather than to flatter." "Tubes Esse Liberos: Pliny's Panegyricus and Liberty," 578.

²¹⁵ Grot suggests that Derzhavin probably used A. A. Nartov's 1777 translation from German as his source for the first portion of the quotation. Derzhavin, II.viii.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

ille se ex nobis, et hoc magis excellit atque eminet, quod unum ex nobis putat...”²¹⁷). Even while reiterating the ruler’s superiority to his subjects, Derzhavin reminds him that he should think of himself as one of the citizens rather than a master or some sort of a deity. Once again, he contrasts this sentiment with mere flattery, both increasing its effect as flattery and bringing the praise and the underlying conditions of that praise into the realm of actual contemporary court dynamics.

The “good” Roman emperors appear in another comparison. In talking about the recently crowned Paul I, the son of Catherine, Derzhavin predicted his future greatness (wrongly) by seeing great Roman emperors in him:

In his valor and generosity,
We can see Aurelius²¹⁸ and Titus²¹⁹.

По доблести и по щедроте
Аврелий зрится в нем и Тит.²²⁰

In this case, Derzhavin is using the Roman emperors primarily admired for their virtues to offer an example of what Paul’s early behavior hinted at and what he could strive to become. He once again exaggerates and presents a wishful future outcome as a given. His hopes would prove to be false, however, and Paul would soon be assassinated and remembered as a Caligula or a Nero rather than a Marcus Aurelius. I will briefly return to Paul and his legacy in the next chapter.

In none of these cases does Derzhavin base his comparison on military victories,

²¹⁷ *Panegyricus* 2.3-5.

²¹⁸ An often quoted example of the perception of Marcus Aurelius in later reception is Matthew Arnold’s nineteenth-century characterization of him as “perhaps the most beautiful figure in history,” a representative of “high human goodness” (Henry Ebel, “Matthew Arnold and Marcus Aurelius,” 559). He has become a figure remembered for his philosophy rather than his campaigns.

²¹⁹ The reference to Titus allows Derzhavin to combine military legacy (capture of Jerusalem) and moral goodness, such as the generosity reported by Suetonius and the positive evaluations of his reign in this and other Roman sources. (“The most striking thing about the accounts of Titus is the consistently favorable tone of all,” “He used all possible means to relieve the unfortunate victims of the disasters of his time [...] and gave the ornaments of his own villas for the restoration of the city after the fire [...] Even against the warnings of his friends and household, he gave favorable replies to all applicants for assistance.” For an overview of the accounts of his reign, see Helen Price, “Titus, ‘Amor Ac Deliciae Generis Humani.’”)

²²⁰ Derzhavin, II, 24. Eventually Derzhavin explained that he and others were deceived by Paul’s early admirable behavior that was later reversed.

territorial conquests, subjugation of proud nations, or even introduction of new institutions. Instead, the focus is internal, and the basis of comparison is how the ruler treated her or his own subjects and how she or he dealt with having absolute power.

These modified kinds of praise coexist with the more general, unspecific praises that glorify Russia through Roman comparisons. Rome continues to be useful in highlighting the grandeur and especially military achievements of the Russian Empire; the ancient figures in these instance tend to appear in lists and express amazement, which emphasizes said grandeur and achievements. Below are three examples from three different poems:

1.
Luculluses, Caesars, Trajan, Octavius, Titus,
Seemed to come down from the walls in their
amazement
And ask: For whom does the world provide
this feast?
Who else dares to possess the world?
Лукуллы, Цезари, Траян, Октавий, Тит,
Как будто изумясь, сойти со стен желали
И спросить: Кого так угощает свет?
Кто, кроме нас, владеть отважился
вселенной?²²¹
2.
From the Stygian darkness appear
Eugene,²²² Caesar, Hannibal;
The crossing of the Alps
Has overcome them with its glory.
“Who, who,” – they question in amazement,
“Wish such courage, such zeal
Went against the forces of nature
And scorned countless obstacles
Who is greater than us?” – Your splendor,
Suvorov,
Forced them to bow their heads.
Из мраков встают Стигийских
Евгений, Цесарь, Ганнибал;
Проход чрез Альпы войск российских
Их души славой обуял.
"Кто, Кто," - вещают с удивленьем,
"С такую смелостью, стремленьем
Прешел против природы сил
И вражьих тьмы попрал затворов?
Кто больше нас?" - Твой блеск, Суворов,
Главы их долу преклонил²²³
3.
Arise from your graves, Caesar, Hannibal,
Charles, Friedrich,
And turn you amazed gaze from the darkness
To the power of the Russian phalanxes
Встань, Цезарь, Ганнибал, Карл, Фридрих,
из могилы!
И изумленный взор из мрака бросьте свой
На движующиеся фалангов русских силы,

²²¹ “Описание Потемкинского Праздника,” I, 417.

²²² Most likely Eugene of Savoy (1663 – 1736), a military commander who crossed the Alps in 1701 during the War of the Spanish Succession.

²²³ “На Переход Альпийских Гор,” 1799, II, 292-3.

To these splendid ranks!
Admit, without the passion of vanity,
That to put the whole world under one's
command
Was possible only for the son of Zeus
And now for a Russian tsar.

На сей блестящий, красный строй!
И в том признайтесь вы без самолюбья
страсти:
Чтобы вселенную своей подвергнуть
власти,
То Диев только сын возмог
И может разве русский царь.²²⁴

The Roman references in these examples border on decorative, highlighting Russian greatness by showing that Russians surpass various great leaders chosen from various time periods and geographical areas. For the crossing of the Alps, Hannibal, Caesar and Eugene are relevant precedents because they themselves had previously done the same (in reverse chronological order). The combination of Hannibal, the Cathaginian general and great enemy of Rome, and Caesar in the same lines suggests that there is probably no greater ideological or symbolic significance to this series of generals; they are listed because they had previously accomplished an impressive military feat and can admire the Russian general who has just joined their ranks.

The line “Luculli, Caesars, Trajan, Octavius, Titus” borders on nonsensical, however. The order is purely metrical, not content- or chronology-driven, the figures mentioned are Romans, but they occupied different positions in different circumstances, and there seems to be no compelling underlying reason for this particular list other than offering a list of prominent Roman political and military figures who, once again, can appreciate Russia's grandeur. The combination “Caesars” and “Octavius” is at best redundant, since Octavius (later known as Augustus) was also a Caesar, much like other emperors.

The list “Caesar, Hannibal, Charles, Friedrich,” also out of chronological order, makes sense as a list of well-known generals, but there is no particular reason why it is these four that

²²⁴ “Маневры,” 1804, II, 490.

are chosen, because they are watching maneuvers rather than serving as precedents for a particular event or character trait. In short, these names evoke the idea of greatness and place the Russian military on at least equal footing with the great militaries of the past. The enumeration itself is motivated by the cumulative impressive effect of this bouquet of military superstars rather than particular significance of the individual figures. Their amazement (which could, on its own, perhaps be taken as a sign that the ghosts of leaders past had especially low expectations for the abilities of Russian generals) is strengthened by the explicit pronouncement and behaviors that Derzhavin attributes to them (“who is greater than us?”, “forced them to bow their heads,” the feat that was only possible for a son of a deity that may now be repeated by the fully human Russian tsar), to show that, in fact, Russia overshadows the rest of the world with its military feats.

There is a bit more specificity when we come to the personal qualities of Russian soldiers and generals. In these instances, Russian heroes are compared to specific Roman heroes based on the particular traits of valor and, especially, willingness to sacrifice themselves for their country. However, in these laudatory patriotic comparisons, there is a similar list-like approach that is not limited to ancient Romans; contemporary European figures are added to the series, perhaps motivated by rhyming considerations of a typological approach to human history and character:

What could defeat a Russian?	Чем может отражен быть Росс?
One scales a wall, climbing a trunk	Тот лезет по бревну на стену,
Another flies from the wall into an abyss,	А тот летит с стены в геену;
Each a Curtius ²²⁵ , a Decius ²²⁶ , a Bois-Rose ²²⁷	Всяк Курций, Деций, Буароз! ²²⁸

Likewise:

²²⁵ A legendary Roman who sacrificed himself to close the gaping abyss that opened in the Roman Forum in 362 BC; episode described by Livy (*AUC* VII.6).

²²⁶ A Roman who sacrificed himself to inspire his troops in the war against the Samnites and the Latins in the fourth century BC; episode described by Livy (*AUC* IX.40).

²²⁷ A French captain who scaled a cliff to take a fort at Fécamp during the French Wars of Religion at the end of the 16th century.

²²⁸ “На Взятие Измаила,” 1790, I, 346.

Through you, [Courage,] the glorious Slavic
 race
 Came to possess half the world,
 Master of eight seas, countless lands;
 Its soul, enflamed by you,
 Could perform any miraculous feat.
 Here, Hermogenes²²⁹ suffers, like Regulus;
 There, Il'in,²³⁰ craves death like Decius;
 Rezanov²³¹ will take the place of Gama.²³²

Тобой преславный род Славян
 Владыкой сделался полсвета,
 Господь осми морей, тьмы стран;
 Душа его, тобой нагрета,
 Каких вновь див не сотворит?
 Там, Гермоген, как Регул, страждет;
 Ильин, как Деций, смерти жаждет;
 Резанов Гаму заменит.²³³

While there are sometimes mentions of the bases for comparisons between the Russians and their earlier counterparts, these remain cursory, intended to impress the reader with the valor of the Russian soldiers rather than discuss these men or their individual traits. In the first example, for instance, we are told that, regardless of their individual actions, each of the Russians is simultaneously “a Curtius, a Decius, a Bois-Rose,” implying that they surpass previous heroes in valor and patriotism because they embody the virtues of several of them. In the second, the comparisons are individual but the selection is difficult to follow, since both the Russians and their counterparts are chosen from different time periods, and once again the two Roman military heroes are joined by a later European – Vasco de Gama, a Portuguese explorer.

The praises of individuals, still more commonly compared to Romans than to representatives of other nations, are based on a lingering underlying assumption of a connection to Rome. This underlying connection is sometimes made more explicit, though these instances are rare. One example that stands out is the description of a feast organized by Potemkin, a favorite of Catherine the Great:

²²⁹ Hermogenes (1530-1612) was the Patriarch of Moscow during the Time of Troubles, who played a role in placing the first Romanov on the throne.

²³⁰ A Russian navy lieutenant in the Battle of Chesme (1770), who sacrificed himself to set fire to the Turkish fleet.

²³¹ Nikolai Rezanov was a Russian nobleman, ambassador to Japan, and one of the commanders during the first Russian circumnavigation of the world in 1803.

²³² Vasco de Gama, Portuguese explorer (1460-1524).

²³³ “Мужество,” 1804, II, 476.

The spacious and magnificent building, in which the celebration took place, was extraordinary. Anyone who wants to know about it should read descriptions of the suburban villas of Pompey and Maecenas.

...and if any ruler of the all-powerful Rome, having conquered the whole world, desired to celebrate the sound of his arms or pay a feast for his fellow citizens: he could not create, for his celebration, a bigger house or to display greater magnificence. It seemed, that all the riches of Asia and all the art of Europe were compiled there...

[Пространное и великолепное здание, в котором было празднество, не из числа обыкновенных. Кто хочет иметь об нем понятие, прочти, каковы были загородные дома Помпея и Мецената.²³⁴

...и если бы какой властелин всемогного Рима, преклоня под руку свою вселенную, пожелал торжествовать звуку своего оружия или отплатить угощения своим согражданам: то не мог бы для празднества своего создать большего дома или лучшего великолепия преставить. Казалось, что все богатство Азии и все искусство Европы совокуплено там было к украшению храма торжеств Великой Екатирины.^{235]}

In the above comparison, it is clear that, even though Russia is not Rome, there is an external similarity between the two empires that allows someone reading about the grandeur of Roman buildings and celebrations to understand the magnificence of their Russian counterparts.

Finally, in line with his predecessors and contemporary traditions, Derzhavin's poems still make use of Roman vocabulary. We still encounter triumphs, laurels, muses, zephyrs, chariots, cohorts²³⁶ – the vocabulary specific to military conquests, as well as more general terminology reminiscent of classical poetry. The Romans gods also continue to appear – a victorious general may be called “the Russian Mars” and a Russian admiral may become “Neptune.” And yet, as was the case with Lomonosov, there is also a background assumption that, despite their similarities, Russia is certainly distinct from Rome and can be argued to be greater than Rome. The chains of heroes that go beyond the Roman heroes to include later European ones suggest that Rome alone

²³⁴ “Описание Потемкинского Праздника,” 1791, I, 385.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 391.

²³⁶ Cohorts were introduced by Catherine after the Roman example. See Grot II.475.

may no longer be sufficient for the expression of Russian glory. Sometimes Russia appears explicitly without precedent (despite the Roman imperial echoes in its description):

O blood of Slavs! [You are a] son of great
ancestors,
An invincible colossus,
Who has no equal in grandeur,
Whose home is half of the world. A Russian.
Though your ancient deeds are famed,
Present victories sound louder.
I see around you a forest of laurels;
You subjugate the Caucasus and the Taurus,
Step on the middle of the world,²³⁷
And reach the heavens.

О кровь Славян! сын предков славных,
Несокрушаемый колосс,
Кому в величестве нет равных,
Возросший на полсвете Росс!
Твои коль славны древни следы,
Громчай суть нынешни победы.
Зрю вокруг тебя лавровый лес;
Кавказ и Тавр ты преклоняешь,
Вселенной на среду ступаешь,
И досягаешь до небес.²³⁸

In another ode, Derzhavin even pits the Russian military directly against the Roman Empire, as Lomonosov had done in his history. In an ode celebrating the defeat of Napoleon, Derzhavin reminds France (“the West”) that “the North” has defeated it before, and explains, in a note, that even Rome itself fell to Northern peoples (“Известно по истории, что всегда северные народы одолевали западных, -- и самый Рим пал от них”²³⁹).

Exemplarity of Rome

When we examine more detailed descriptions than the above lists of heroes, however, we soon see that Derzhavin’s primary interest in Rome is not laudatory. It is, rather, ethical, and his reinterpretation of Horace’s ode III.30 and the epigraphs taken from Tacitus and Pliny embody this change of direction.

As was probably already evident from most of the above quotations, the mode of Roman allusions in Derzhavin’s poems usually works by the process of reductive exemplarity, where individuals are used to represent a particular trait. Although, he, like Lomonosov, also uses

²³⁷ Constantinople.

²³⁸ “На Взятие Измаила,” 1790, 1, 354.

²³⁹ “Гимн Лиро-Епический,” 1812, III, 154.

Roman references to highlight the might of the Russian Empire or praise its rulers, Rome for him is already part of common vocabulary, both national and international. In becoming common vocabulary, Rome loses much of its specificity and history, becoming represented, instead, mostly by the associations of its individual heroes and villains. The figures are stripped of biography and historical circumstances in which they lived, and they usually appear in solitude (that is, they do not interact with other Romans) and without their context. There is, however, usually moral evaluation present, whether or not there are any historical details included; these figures personify a trait and give the narrator a chance to admire or criticize it, and it is the trait and not the specific figure that is important.

It is a pool of portraits, or, in Petrov's formulation "a school of famed heroes" (славимых училище героев)²⁴⁰ reduced to their essential (as perceived by the later generations) characteristic. The main importance of Rome is to help understand and illustrate proper virtuous behavior, which is considered timeless. The names often appear in the plural and sometimes become supplemented by contemporary Europeans. The information about them, when at all provided, is usually contained in a brief phrase, taking up one or two lines. There are, for the most part, two kinds of Romans that show up: the good Romans and the bad Romans.

Exemplary Romans: The Good Ones

We already saw some of the good Romans above: the heroes Regulus, Decius, Curtius, and the emperors Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and Titus. The heroes are generally the ones who exhibited courage or virtue for the benefit of their fatherland and for which they became known in antiquity and in later generations, while the good emperors are the ones whose reigns were considered prosperous and beneficial to their people. In the instances below, the names are no

²⁴⁰ Quoted in Proskurina 176.

longer used as a precedent or parallel for a particular Russian figure, intended to praise that specific figure. Instead, they appear in meditations on what makes a good ruler or a good citizen.

Let us first consider the rulers.

Peters, and Henrichs, and Tituses
[alternative ms. version: Peters, Trajans,
Henrich, Tituses]
Forever live in people's hearts
Catherines, not forgotten
Will live on for a thousand centuries

Петры и Генрихи и Титы
[alt. Петры, Траяны, Генрих, Титы.]
В народных век живут сердцах;
Екатерины не забыты
Пребудут в тысяще веках.²⁴¹

The first line of the above stanza is interesting in that it places Peter in the historical list of immortal rulers, giving him the status comparable to that of the Roman emperors. It is also notable that the ruler's immortality is granted by the people, by their *hearts*, which suggests a different benchmark from accomplishments listed in history books or praised by historians. The fame of the good Roman emperors has not lasted because of their writers or their victories, but because they were loved by their people. The use of the names in the plural suggests that these good rulers, regardless of their individual circumstances, represent a particular type, distinct from another type or types of less admirable rulers. In fact, the bad Romans that show up below will also be historically admired for their feats, but it is virtue and relationship to the people will become the ultimate evaluation of their worth for Derzhavin.

Even when he employs the familiar comparison of Peter the Great to Augustus, he reinterprets the importance of Augustus:

Had Octavian not exchanged
His evil intrigues for beneficial deeds,
He would not still be called Augustus;
And Peter would not be called "the Great"
If, after so many feats
He did not educate his people.

Когда б Октавий козни злыя
Не пременил в дела благия,
Поднесь бы Августом не слыл;
И Петр не назвался б Великим,
Когда б по подвигам толиким
Он свой народ не просветил.²⁴²

²⁴¹ "На Новый Год," 1781, I, 119.

²⁴² "На Коварство Французскаго Возмущения и в Честь Князя Пожарского," 1790, I, 323.

These lines are ambiguous because they do not specify to what exactly “evil intrigues” or “beneficial deeds” actually refer. It seems reasonable to assume that “evil intrigues” refer to his early political maneuverings and his involvement in the civil wars during the period when he is still known as “Octavian” (before 27 B.C.) and has not yet assumed the title “Augustus.” The “beneficial deeds” are even more vague, but, if we assume parallelism between Augustus and Peter, then we have to look to Augustus’s “beneficial” relationship to the inhabitants of Rome, such as his improvements to the city infrastructure, a program whose value is now presented not in terms of a magnificent appearance but of public benefit, such as, perhaps, improved safety and building laws,²⁴³ or his attempts to legislate a return to “traditional morality” and “curb bribery, conspiracy, extortion, violence, adultery, and extravagance.”²⁴⁴ It is notable that Augustus’s foreign conquests are simply omitted, as Derzhavin implies that he is remembered for his beneficence, not being “the ruler of the world.”

Obviously, military victories are no longer enough, so the imperial archetypes have to be revised and improved to exhibit the truly important traits. In a poem address to Alexander I, Derzhavin enumerates some of these values, which include a rejection of military ambition:

<p>And, being Alexander, be the conqueror of the world, O leader of giants! But not through war and blood: But, let love, dressed in compassion And wisdom, be your might. Like Zeus, hold a thunderbolt and make it shine across the skies; But, styling yourself more after Phoebus, Shine in the world, like the god of light,</p>	<p>Так, Александром быв, будь победитель света, О исполинов вождь! Но не чрез брань и кровь: А милосердием и мудростью одета Пусть будет мочь твоя, -- любовь. Как Зевс, держи перун и им сверкай по небу; Но благотворному подобясь больше Фебу, Свети на свете, как света бог, Миря грозой мятежну тварь!²⁴⁵</p>
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²⁴³ On Augustus’s urban care, as well as its limitations, see Diane Favro. “Pater urbis”: Augustus as City Father of Rome.”

²⁴⁴ Richard I. Frank. “Augustus’ Legislation on Marriage and Children,” 43-4.

²⁴⁵ “Маневры,” 1804, II, 491.

Bringing peace to rebellious creatures!

In a note later accompanying the poem, Derzhavin added, “the author thought that, given the might and expanse of the Russian Empire, it has no need for conquest, but it should be a mediator between warring European nations, calming them with peace.” (“Автор думал, что по силе и пространству Российской Империи нет ей нужды в завоеваниях, но она должна быть посредницей всех воюющих европейских народов, успокоивая их миром”²⁴⁶). He hoped in vain, and his later poems will reflect his disillusionment with continuous warfare.

In a poem celebrating peace with Sweden, Derzhavin once again emphasized the value of peace over that of war, writing,

O angel of our quiet days,
Catherine! We are your witness:
You did not cause deaths;
You did not seek military glory,
You improved our character
And decorated yourself with silence.
A tear, provoked by your generosity,
Pleases you more than a universe
Acquired by war.

О ангел наших тихих дней,
Екатерина! Мы свидетель:
Не ты виной была смертей;
Ты бранной не искала славы,
Ты наши просвещала нравы
И украшалась тишиной.
Слеза, щедротой извлеченна,
Тебе приятней, чем вселенна,
Приобретенная войной!²⁴⁷

Instead of war, then, the monarch should aspire to provide care and moral instruction to her subjects. In his earlier poem to Catherine, Derzhavin makes this function clear by requesting that she become a teacher of what it means to live a good life (perhaps alluding to the stoic philosophy of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius):

Give us, Felitsa, instruction
On how to live magnificently and honestly
How to tame the passions
And be happy in this life.

Подай, Фелица, наставленье,
Как пышно и правдиво жить
Как укрощать страстей волненье
И счастливым на свете быть.²⁴⁸

And asks,

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ “На Шведский Мир,” 1790, I, 312.

²⁴⁸ “Фелица,” 1782, I, 132.

Where do virtues shine?
Only by your throne!

Где добродетели сияют?
У трона разве твоего!²⁴⁹

Here Derzhavin presents as embodiment of virtue as a core function of autocracy, which is embodied by the throne. The virtues are then expected to permeate the rest of the state through the example and direct instruction of the ruler motivated by a beneficent attitude towards her or his subjects.

Thus, despite the continual reliance on Roman allusions in praising Russian military victories, other considerations now challenge the primacy of war-based praise. Since Rome has become a default comparison, it is still drawn in to illustrate the new moral and ethical concerns that underlie the evaluation of a ruler's merits. The same holds for non-emperors who are also urged to be virtuous and patriotic – these two qualities are indistinguishable for Derzhavin. In his ode “On Greatness,” he writes,

To suffer patiently and die
With an unwavering soul,
And burn with the zeal
From which Regulus took courage –
It is glorious to end one's days this way!

Терпеть, страдать и умереть
С непоколебимою душою,
Такою ревностью гореть,
Мужался Регул каковою, --
Преславно тако кончить дни!²⁵⁰

Although Regulus is a military figure, he appears not as an example of a military victory (he was, according to tradition, tortured and put to death), but as an example of a patriot who was willing to die for his country and remained steadfast in the face of suffering.

Another military figure evoked for moral reasons is Cincinnatus. Derzhavin asks the French generals,

But where, where are your Cincinnatuses²⁵¹?
You only dream of riches:
A true hero is a stranger to self-interest.

Но где ж, где ваши Цинциннаты?
Вы мните только быть богаты:

²⁴⁹ “Фелица,” 1782, I, 148.

²⁵⁰ “Ода На Великость,” 1774, III, 292.

²⁵¹ A Roman best known for holding the office of the dictator multiple times, but resisting the corruption of supreme power and relinquishing it, willingly, as soon as the military threat was gone, to retire to his farm.

While the general context of these lines is military, the evocation of Cincinnatus draws attention not to his military success but to the underlying motivations. Military success is only impressive, in other words, if it is driven by selfless patriotism. Military prowess once again become a secondary consideration in Derzhavin's ode on the desirable traits of a nobleman:

And in our times, too,
I see that famed Camillus²⁵³
Whose spirit was not exhausted by labors,
War or old age.
From the thunder of resounding victories
He went back to his hut
And now lives by his wooden plow
In the field of Mars.

И в наши вижу времена
Того я славного Камилла
Котораго труды, война
И старость дух не утомила.
От грома звучных он побед
Сошел в шалаш свой равнодушно
И от сохи опять послушно
Он в поле Марсовом живет.²⁵⁴

Camillus (or more likely, again Cincinnatus) is exemplary not because of his “resounding victories” but because he was guided by his patriotism and not selfish ambition, which we can see from his willingness to give up political power and return to a humble life.

As Derzhavin knows, however, such virtue is rare:

Alas! When, in what ages
Did evil not oppress the good?
Where are those great men
Whose hearts could
Foresee all sorts of passions?
Where are the Leonidases²⁵⁵, the
Aristideses²⁵⁶?
Where are the Epaminondases today,
Where are those Catos, Scipios,
Whose honor shines upon us

Увы! когда ж, в которы веки
Добра не угнетало зло?
Где те велики человеки,
Которых сердце бы могло
Предусмотреть страстей все виды?
Где Леониды, Аристиды?
Где те Эпаминонды днесь,
Где те Катоны, Сципионы,
Которых чрез времен запоны,
Как огонь, нас озаряет честь?²⁵⁷

²⁵² “На Переход Альпийских Гор,” 1799, II, 295-6.

²⁵³ I think he actually means Cincinnatus and not Camillus here. Cincinnatus (519 – 430 BC) was a Roman leader who became legendary and exemplary by relinquishing his dictatorial powers and returning to his farm. Camillus (ca. 446 – 365 BC) was another famous Roman general, but, as far as I know, this is not his legend. However, he is mentioned by Horace as someone who was strengthened by poverty and farm labor, so perhaps Derzhavin did mean Camillus, or perhaps he merged two legends.

²⁵⁴ “Вельможе,” 1794, I, 635.

²⁵⁵ The leader of the 300 Spartans who perished fighting the much larger Persian army of Xerxes at Thermopylae.

²⁵⁶ Athenian statesman and general in the Persian War, nicknamed “the Just.”

²⁵⁷ “На Коварство Французскаго Возмущения и в Честь Князя Пожарского,” 1790, I, 327.

Like a flame, across the veils of time?

Here Derzhavin puts together Cato and Scipio, two figures who are not usually combined, as Cato is generally a representative of moral incorruptibility and defender of traditional values, while Scipio tends to show up as an allusion to military might because he defeated Hannibal in the Second Punic War. It is possible that Derzhavin wants to emphasize that the particular accomplishments and field of action are not as important as one's moral goodness and devotion to one's country, regardless of whether these characteristics manifest in great military campaigns or domestic political involvement.

Virtue, however, may face obstacles even if it appears. There is another reference to Cato in a later poem that points to the difference between Cato's circumstances and those in Russia:

In the Roman Senate, there was Cato,²⁵⁸
In the Russian – he.
The first fought for what is right with his
equals;
The second, a slave before the tsar,
did not debase himself when he was right.

В сенате римском был Катон,
А в русском - он.
Тот с равными себе за правду состязался;
Сей, раб перед царем, быв прав, не
унижался.²⁵⁹

One that aspires to be a Russian Cato has to fight for righteousness in conditions of unequal status, where one might have to choose between virtue and security.

This poem was not published in Derzhavin's lifetime.

Exemplary Romans: The Bad Ones

The bad Romans are more interesting than the good Romans, because they introduce doubt into the greatness of Rome and the greatness of empire and its rulers in general. Although Derzhavin is certainly not questioning the concepts of empire or autocracy themselves, he points

²⁵⁸ Roman politician (234-149 BC) known for his conservatism, the defense of older traditional values and political outspokenness.

²⁵⁹ “К Портрету Сенатора Князя Якова Федоровича Долгорукова,” 1797, III, 372.

out that immortality (in the sense of being remembered by later generations) is not necessarily a positive thing, and that ambition, immorality, and disregard of his subjects can create a ruler that is universally hated rather than admired. A ruler is not considered great by default, and past examples prove that ethical and moral qualities are of crucial importance in determining his or her worth. These examples also show the limits of the lessons that one can derive from Roman history and even the limitations of Rome's usefulness as an imperial symbol, because it is, essentially, an ambiguous symbol. It offers examples of the best and of the worst, and precisely to the superlative degree.

Qualifying the sentiment expressed by Petrov (about Rome's role as the school of famed heroes), Derzhavin appeals to a different Rome, one where power and corruption sometimes were closely tied. He also points out that the worst of rulers can appear great if we only look at their military achievements, forgetting that military prowess can be a façade of destructive and murderous ambition:

In a triumph, glory, under a wreath
Did Pompey's conqueror
Julius, greedy with his sword,
Not stain the whole Rome red?
It is better to be Catherine,
Who, no longer a threat to foreign borders,
Ordered widows to wipe away their tears,
And gave us back our bliss.

В триумфе, в славе, под венцом,
Герой, Помпея победитель,
Июлий, жаждущий мечем
Не стал ли Рима обагритель?
Славней Екатериной быть:
Преставь быть чуждым страх границам,
Велела слезы стерть вдовицам,
Блаженство наше возвратить.²⁶⁰

There is nothing terribly controversial about the above lines, since the Roman general that is criticized began (in Derzhavin's perception, at least) a civil war in his own country to satisfy his ambition. At the same time, however, Derzhavin already suggests even in this early ode that military prowess is not a sufficient characteristic, and the attributes of power and victory may not be fully positive symbols. Although Catherine is explicitly portrayed as a better ruler, and there is

²⁶⁰ "Ода на Знатность," 1774, III, 296.

no criticism towards her, the terms that are ubiquitous in Russian eighteenth-century odes – “triumphs,” “glory” and “wreath” – are no longer exclusively laudatory. In fact, they become suspect, as the poet ponders at what cost they may have been acquired.

Ambition may lead men to resort to deception in order to acquire political power and the consequence of this ambition is inevitably bloodshed and moral dissolution. Those who want to be considered great in the judgment of later generations need to think about righteousness rather than political power:

You [treachery] order, and Caesar, shedding
tears,
Unfurled the banners of insurrection;
You order, and Nero, faking
Obedience, seized the throne.
Creatures of pride, dissolution
Often give themselves luster
Through your art.
One murdered throngs of his citizens,
The other pierced his mother’s womb;
But they are drowned in people’s applause.

[...]

Oh you, who desire to distinguish yourself
Through power or rank,
And live forever in chronicles
As a giant rather than a pygmy!
Although your deeds are still known,
If later descendants don’t see
Righteous paths in them, -
You will not be counted among the gods:
Unjust paths
Do not lead to the temple of eternal glory.

Велишь -- и Цезарь, прослезясь,
Знамена бунта развернул;
Велишь -- и Нерон, притворяясь,
Смирением трона достигнул.
Исчадья гордости, распутства,
Посредством твоего Искусства
Дают себе нередко блеск.
Тот тьмы граждан поверг ко гробу,
Сей матерню пронзил утробу;
Но им гремит народов плеск.²⁶¹

О ты, который властью, саном
Себя желаешь отличить,
И из пигмея великаном
Безсмертно в летописях жить!
Хотя дела твои днесь громки,
Но если поздние потомки
Путей в них правых не найдут,--
Не будешь помещен ты в боги:
Несправедливые дороги
В храм вечной славы не ведут.²⁶²

By contrasting earthly power with the “eternal glory” here, Derzhavin instructs his readers to think about the greater, longer context than immediate political cravings. Through deception, ambitious rulers can temporarily fool people in their immediate contemporary setting, but their

²⁶¹ “На Коварство Французского Возмущения и в Честь Князя Пожарского,” 1790, I, 320.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 320.

true motivations will inevitably be exposed by the later generations. We also see, once again, the contrast between “deeds” and “righteousness.” Despite the resounding glory of their *deeds*, those who are not righteous will be sooner or later be despised.

The list of the bad emperors turns out to be as long as the list of the good ones and they, too, can appear in the plural to suggest that there is also a particular “type” of bad rulers, as there is of the good ones. In the poem inspired by the “bronze horseman” monument erected to Peter the Great in St. Petersburg (and modelled on the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in Rome), Derzhavin once again explicitly reminds us that the ruler’s relationship to his subjects is the ultimate benchmark of his worth:

Whenever Nero, Caligula, or Commodus Are seated on the thrones, Although remembered by later generations, They are remembered like plague and famine. [...] Let the tyrant sound fear All over the world with his wealth, If the people hate him, His armies and money are dust.	Нерон, Калигула, Коммоды, Когда на тронах где сидят, Хоть поздние их помнят роды, Но помнят так, как мор и глад. [...] Пускай в подсолнечную трубит Тиран своим богатством страх; Когда кого народ не любит, Полки его и деньги -- прах ²⁶³
--	--

Bad emperors are so despicable that they can even be ridiculed, despite their status:

Among the dishes of a golden feast Was Caligula, imagined a god, Not equal to his beast?	При блюде в пиршестве златом Калигула, быть мнимый богом, Не равен ли с своим скотом? ²⁶⁴
--	--

In fact, power without virtue is so worthless that it would be better to be born a slave than a Nero:

If fate did not give you The chance to occupy the throne And do the deeds of Titus, Pouring generosity onto your people, -- Even in a lowly life You can be higher than when wearing the	Судьбина если не дала Кому престолом обладати Творити Титовы дела, Щедроты смертным изливати, -- И в нижней части можно быть Пресвыше, как носить корону:
---	--

²⁶³ “Монумент Петра Великаго,” 1776, I, 37-38.

²⁶⁴ “На знатность,” 1774, III, 295.

crown:
It is better to be considered an Epictetus²⁶⁵
Than be similar to Nero.

Чем быть подобному Нерону,
То лучше Епиктетом слыть.²⁶⁶

In almost every case, the bad Romans are those who have been led by ambition to seek political power at the expense of virtue and well-being of their fellow citizens. The primary examples of such disastrous ambition and corruption are those who managed to achieve their immoral goals, so there is only one poem where we see a bad Roman who is not a ruler. To demonstrate the importance of a subject's loyalty to the state, Derzhavin turns to Catiline:

What good are talents and intelligence,
If your spirit is full of treachery?
What good is all the noise of a leader
If he is not a shield of his state?
Emel'ka²⁶⁷ and Catiline are vipers;
Bandits, sowers of dissension, thieves
And a tsar who oppresses the innocent, -
Is equally a villain of the whole universe.

К чему способности и ум,
Коль дух наполнен весь коварства?
К чему послужит вождя шум,
Когда не щит он государства?
Емелька с Катилиной -- змей;
Разбойник, распренник, грабитель
И царь , невинных утеснитель, --
Равно вселенной всей злодей.

Derzhavin denounces those who lead political insurrections against their rulers instead of becoming their "shield," once again reminding us of the connection between virtue and patriotism. At the same time, however, we are told that an unjust and tyrannical tsar is just as bad. It is as if these universally hated figures are meant to illustrate not only the reprehensibility of revolt but also the extent of the heinousness of a bad ruler.

All of the figures mentioned above, perhaps with the exception of Caesar, are uncontroversially morally corrupt, and Derzhavin is simply selecting these examples to illustrate his points about the importance of moral behavior. He is not re-evaluating admired figures or offering new interpretations of their actions to undermine existing models. However, when we

²⁶⁵ Greek Stoic philosopher, born a slave.

²⁶⁶ "Ода На Великость," 1774, III, 292.

²⁶⁷ Pugachev – leader of an insurrection during Catherine's reign.

remember that we are dealing with a time when “when the glory-that-was-Rome iconographically signified the glory-that-was-to-be-Russia,”²⁶⁸ a reminder that there was more to Rome than glory would perhaps make one more careful about wanting to link Russia’s future to Rome’s past. There is much reason to look at Rome as a warning, sometimes even a counter-example, especially since Derzhavin’s criticisms of the Russian nobility make it clear that moral corruption is not only a hypothetical concern. It also seems important that Derzhavin is paying particular attention to bad Roman rulers rather than bad Roman subjects, so I would disagree with Pumpianskii’s statement²⁶⁹ that the Romans are meant to illustrate the moral paths in front of *everyone*. Pumpianskii chooses Catiline to represent the immoral path, though it is quite apparent that Nero or Caligula or Commodus or Caesar would be more appropriate as a single representation of the bad Romans in Derzhavin’s poetry. The worst Romans were the emperors (and Caesar, who was perhaps an emperor in fact if not in name).

I should also note the conspicuous absence of Brutus and the aversion to political change in general in Derzhavin’s works. There is a condemnation of the much less controversial figure of Catiline, but there is neither praise (which is perhaps expected), nor condemnation of Brutus and Cassius, who were certainly known at this time, and would soon become the main representatives of the Rome imagined by the Decembrists. Although Derzhavin does condemn Caesar and his treachery and ambition, blaming him for spilling the blood of his citizens, he still does not mention his murder, even when, in a poem discussed below, he contemplates the vanity of Caesar’s ambition and writes about his death with some detail. In general, the heroic figures that he mentions are ones who are not controversial, and perhaps here we see the limits of what Rome could be used for in the eighteenth century.

²⁶⁸ Baehr, Stephen, “From History to National Myth: Translatio Imperii in Eighteenth-Century Russia,” 8.

²⁶⁹ Pumpianskii 129.

The figures that appear are those who were morally outstanding, who were militarily famous, who were patriots, who were willing to sacrifice themselves for their fatherland, but not those who made political changes, who were tribunes of the people (such as the Gracchi brothers), who criticized the political *status quo*.

As it is, there is a conspicuous gap in the Roman references. Reading the descriptions of the bad Romans, many of whom were bad rulers, one may wonder what is to be done in these situations. We know that a tyrant's "armies and money" are "dust" if his people hate him, but does this sentiment suggest actual opposition to immoral power? We are told that it is better to be a generous Titus or even a lowly slave than a Nero, but this observation is made from the perspective of the ruler's legacy and the judgment of the later generations that will remember bad rulers as "plague and famine." But what are the people to do in the immediate situation of a bloody tyrannical reign? Derzhavin provides no answer, but his descriptions do begin to hint at the formulation of the question, and he will be respected and admired by the Decembrists, by whom he will be considered not a court poet of Catherine, but a lover of truth, someone not afraid of rulers and tyrants.²⁷⁰

Rome's power, transience, and mortality

The only poem in which Derzhavin explicitly speaks of Russia's relationship to Rome, as a whole, is also the poem primarily concerned with transience and mortality. The poem is "Waterfall," and it speaks about the death of the Russian general Potemkin ("the Russian Mars").

In speaking of Potemkin's death, Derzhavin describes the ambition of Potemkin:

Was it not you who dared to balance
The might of a Russian, the spirit of
Catherine,
And, leaning on them, wanted
To bring your thunder to those dalles,

Не ты ль, который взвесить смел
Мощь Росса, дух Екатерины,
И, опершись на них, хотел
Вознестъ твой гром на те стремнины,
На коих древний Рим стоял

²⁷⁰ Zapadov 297.

Where ancient Rome had stood,
Shaking the whole world?

И всей вселенной колебал? ²⁷¹

On the one hand, these lines can be read as a claim to grandeur and magnificence. The last line reminds us of Rome's influence over the entire world, and highlights the courage and ambition of Potemkin, who, in his single person, combined the best of Russian heritage, and wanted to give Russia that same influence over the entire world.

And yet, the poem is written for the *death* of Potemkin, and his aspirations are placed in the context of the inevitable downfall of Potemkin himself and other important military leaders and their aspirations. Even the unconquerable Caesar, when he seemed at the very height of his power, had to succumb to fate:

They'll fall, - and the unconquerable leader
Caesar, surrounded by praise,
Fell in the Senate, covering his face with his
cloak,
At the moment he desired the diadem;
His plans and hopes disappeared,
And his eyes, craving the throne, closed!

Падут, - и вождь непобедимый,
В сенате Цезарь среди похвал,
В тот миг, желал как диадимы,
Закрыв лицо плащом, упал;
Исчезли замыслы, надежды,
Сомкнулись алчны к трону вежды!²⁷²

These lines are not explicitly subversive, as their concern is not political criticism but, rather, philosophical meditation on human mortality, but the question of mortality has, by default, an undermining effect on the ideology of empire, the *imperium sine fine* promised by Vergil's Jupiter to the Romans in the *Aeneid*. For the most part, Derzhavin's meditations on mortality do not involve Rome or Romans, so I will leave them aside, noting only that the temporal limit works, in a way, like the moral qualifications above. Both are limitations on the ideology of empire without any explicit criticism. They work, instead, by introducing doubt into the previously

²⁷¹ "Водопад," 1791, I, 474.

²⁷² "Водопад," 1791, Levitsky 306.

exclusively positive model of ancient Rome.

Derzhavin & Horace

Perhaps it is this awareness of the vanity of ambition that motivates Derzhavin's turn to Horace as his model. Derzhavin himself explains his choice of genre as a matter of talent and natural inclination, but there are hints of other – ideological – motivations. In a note found among Derzhavin's papers that accompanied the ode "Felitsa," Derzhavin, writes, distinguishing himself from others who write laudatory odes: "In order to weave praises, one must be a Vergil" ("Чтоб плестъ хвалы, то должно быть Виргилию"²⁷³).

This brief comment, followed by a disclaimer that he cannot sacrifice to gods who have no virtue or praise rulers, links Vergilian poetry with at least exaggeration and at most dishonest flattery. Horace, by contrast, becomes a model for honesty. Derzhavin's Muse is:

Cheerful, young,
Sincere, simple,
A friend of Flaccus and daughter
Of sense that life gave me.

Веселонравная, младая,
Нелицемерная, простая,
Подруга Флаккова и дщерь
Природой даннаго мне смысла!²⁷⁴

The choice of Horace is both stylistic (cheerful, young) and moral (honest, simple). The two axes – that of aesthetics and that of virtue become linked, suggesting that a certain style, that of a simpler and lower register, is more likely to speak the truth rather than flattery. This conclusion is not Derzhavin's invention, as during this period the excessively bombastic language of odes of Petrov (and others), as well as Petrov's translation of the *Aeneid*, were satirized by Maikov (and others). Their implied criticism was usually aesthetic, however, while for Derzhavin the aesthetic becomes merged with the moral, which we have already seen in his rendition of Horace's poem on poetic immortality.

²⁷³ Приложение к оде: "Фелица," I, 150.

²⁷⁴ "Решемыслу," 1783, I, 170-1.

For Derzhavin, Horace is the poet of morality, who is opposed to greed and corruption of his contemporaries, the poet of the golden mean and moderation, as well as friendship and loyalty.²⁷⁵ He is also the poet who deals with “the brevity of life, the suddenness of death, its finality, and its universality,” and deals with them “by celebrating man’s temporal existence as part of an eternal life process.”²⁷⁶

This coding of Horace as the poet who turns away from politics and towards ethics and philosophy is, of course, an artificial one, as Horace’s poetry is permeated by political themes so thoroughly that some scholars have argued that there is a fusion of the literary and the political in his work. Ellen Oliensis argues, “Horace correlates Rome’s passage from civil war to the Augustan principate with his own progress from a poetics of *impotentia* to a poetics of potency; and he founds his newly secure lyric domain on the same conjunction of spatial and moral mastery that underwrites Roman imperialism.”²⁷⁷ The relationship between Horace and Vergil is also not the easy binary that Derzhavin implies. Brian Breed, for instance, offers an analysis of a particular ode of Horace (IV.15) that, he argues, “projects the *Aeneid*, or a sanitized version of it, as the Roman people’s everlasting hymn in praise of Augustus and his age.”²⁷⁸ And yet, Horace’s relationship to power is complex and multi-faceted. If we compare his ode III.30 to Vergil’s programmatic statement in the proem of the third book of the *Georgics* (the two texts quoted in the the discussion of Lomonosov’s portrayal of his legacy in the previous chapter), we might see a striking difference: “Where Virgil dedicates his pride to Caesar, Horace offers up his, in a gesture of celestially

²⁷⁵ On these topics, see the Maya Pait’s 2004 dissertation *Problemy recepcii od i epodov Gorazii v Rossii VIII-nachala XIX vv.:na primere tvorchestva G.R.Derzhavina*.

²⁷⁶ Hart 29.

²⁷⁷ Ellen Oliensis, *Horace and the Rhetoric of Authority*, 102. Raymond Marks follows up with a study of the voices within a particular ode (III.14) to argue that we can no longer separate the public and the private voice of Horace and that there is, instead, a Horatio-Augustan composite that reflects the formative influence of Augustus and his order: “Horace, like Rome, has been shaped by the Augustan ideology too.” (“Horace and ‘Horatian’ Identity in ‘Odes’ 3.14.”)

²⁷⁸ Brian Breed, “*Tua, Caesar, Aetas*: Horace Ode 4.15 and the Augustan Age,” 245.

qualified modesty, only to the self-reflecting figure of the Muse (*sume superbiam*, C. 3.30.14)."²⁷⁹

Derzhavin's own adaptation of Horace's monument works as a fusion of the literary and the political, tying his legacy to his poetry praising or instructing the rulers. And yet, Horace becomes a symbol of poetry that is concerned with ethics and philosophy and that rejects the vices of political life in Rome. In his turn to Horace, Derzhavin seems to ignore the political odes of Horace, those that praise Augustus. Augustus himself, who appears with some frequency in the works of Horace, is almost entirely absent from Derzhavin's works (and totally absent from the those works that have Horatian allusions). The poems he adapts are, for the most part, those which deal with the concerns mentioned above, and when Horace himself appears, he appears in contrast with poetry of praise and flattery. Perhaps this increasingly frequent turn to Horace is motivated, not only by the popularity of Horace in the literary circles to which Derzhavin belonged, but also by a conscious turn away from court, which has led to disappointment ("self-love" and "brawling"!).

Horace's widely popular second epode is among the poems that allow for an apolitical or anti-political perception of his work. The poem begins with a contrast of city life and country life:

Blessed is the man who, far from business
hassles,
works his parental land with his oxen,
as did the ancient race of men,
free from all monetary interest,
and who is not summoned, a soldier,
by the fierce sound of the trumpet,
nor fears the raging sea, and who avoids
the forum and the proud thresholds
of more powerful men

Beatus ille qui procul negotiis,
ut prisca gens mortalium
paterna rura bubus exercet suis
solutus omni fenore
neque excitatur classico miles truci
neque horret iratum mare
forumque vitat et superba ciuium
potentiorum limina²⁸⁰

Horace's version goes on to undermine the idealized descriptions that his speaker offers by

²⁷⁹ Oliensis 105.

²⁸⁰ See David Mankin's *Horace. Epodes*, for text, context, and commentary.

informing the reader that this account of country life is a fantasy of a usurer who promptly returns to his regular affairs. I will discuss this subversive approach to the binaries presented in the poem in the fourth chapter, when I discuss its use by Ivan Goncharov. For now, I will just note that in the eighteenth-century Russian translations and adaptations, including Derzhavin's, the distinctions are taken at face value or, at least, found to be more useful when taken at face value, so much so that the final lines of the poem could be omitted from translations.²⁸¹

This poem became one of the most commonly “imitated, translated, and set to music” of Horace’s poems²⁸² in Russia. It was among the first Horatian poems to be translated into Russian in the eighteenth century,²⁸³ and quickly became involved, according to Newlin, in the campaign “to prod the Empress Elizabeth into abolishing compulsory service and allowing the Russian nobleman to retire to his estate,” a campaign that “took on the form of an insistent idealization and ‘poeticization’ of country life and rural solitude, and a concomitant denigration of city and court life and of worldly pursuits in general (fame, wealth, and so on).”²⁸⁴ The “escapist, anticivic impulse” also “signaled...a certain newfound wariness with regard to utopian schemes to save, reform, or reorganize Russia or mankind in general” and “took friendship and the garden, rather than the state and the city-polis, as its model and its ethical and moral center.”²⁸⁵

In the most famous adaptation of this epode, titled “To Eugene. Life at Zvanka,” Derzhavin, too, describes the pleasures of country life in contrast to city life, denouncing the life that one must lead at court:

Blessed is he, who depends on people less,	Блажен, кто менее зависит от людей,
Free from debts or bureaucratic hassles,	Свободен от долгов и от хлопот
Who doesn't look for gold or honors at court	приказных,

²⁸¹ Baehr 69.

²⁸² Mankin 64.

²⁸³ G. V. Morozova, “Ody Goratsiia v russkikh perelozheniakh XVIII veka,” 56-61.

²⁸⁴ Newlin 28.

²⁸⁵ Newlin 98.

And is free from various trivialities.
 [...]
 Is it possible to compare anything with golden liberty,
 With the solitude and quiet of Zvanka?
 Prosperity, good health, agreement with my wife,
 I need repose at the end of my days.

Не ищет при дворе ни злата, ни честей
 И чужд сует разнообразных!
 [...]
 Возможно ли сравнивать что с вольностью златой,
 С уединением и тишиной на Званке?
 Довольство, здравие, согласие с женой,
 Покой мне нужен — дней в останке.

The turn away from the court allows the poet to engage in literary pursuits and philosophical reflection. The result of this reflection is a condemnation of political involvement as “vanity”:

From there, I come to the sanctum of the Muses,
 And seated in a divine feast with Flaccus and Pindar,
 I soar up to the tsars, or friends, or the heavens,
 Or extol country life on my lyre;

Оттуда прихожу в святилище я Муз,
 И с Флакком, Пиндаром, богов возседши в пире,
 К царям, к друзьям моим иль к небу возношусь,
 Иль славлю сельску жизнь на лире;

Or, in the looking glass of time, shaking my head
 I look upon the passions and the deeds of ancient and new ages,
 Not seeing anything, except
 Love for oneself, -- and brawls of men.

Иль в зеркало времен, качая головой,
 На страсти, на дела зрю древних, новых веков,
 Не видя ничего, кроме любви одной
 К себе, -- и драки человеков.

“All vanity of vanities!” I sigh;
 But, casting my gaze on the luster of the midday sun:
 “How beautiful the world is! Why do I burden my spirit?
 The Creator is taking care of the world.”

"Все суета сует!" я, вздыхая, мню;
 Но, бросив взор на блеск светила полудневна:
 "О, коль прекрасен мир! Чтож дух мой
 бремению?
 Творцом содержится вселенна."²⁸⁶

These philosophical and literary pursuits are intimately tied to the rejection of politics. The first of these stanzas points to both styles that Derzhavin sees in his poetry – the Pindaric ode, which is the lofty, “thunderous” ode associated with court performance and praise,²⁸⁷ and the

²⁸⁶ “Евгению. Жизнь Званская,” 1807, II, 637.

²⁸⁷ In a poem dedicated to Lomonosov, Derzhavin calls him a “Pindar” (also “Vergil”), noting that we can “still hear” the “thunder” of his “fiery images” (“В восторгах он своих где лишь черкнул пером,/ От пламенных

Horatian ode, which is the “sincere, simple” ode of morality, moderation, and country life – suggesting perhaps an equality between the two, as the poet spends his time both “soaring” and singing the pleasures of country life. However, the next stanza introduces disillusionment with the grand subjects, as the great deeds of history are reduced to self-love and brawling (the word *draki* is of a markedly low register, reducing martial conflict to petty vain fighting). Of course, the fact that the entire poem is of the second kind, the kind that praises country life, daily concerns, sensory pleasures, shows that, ultimately, the poet chooses to distance himself from life in the capital and the court largely because of their moral corruption. In the end, Derzhavin concludes, there is little space for righteousness in the capital; peace and the good life can be found only on one’s own estate.

Conclusion

By the time Derzhavin transforms the genre of the ode, the Roman connection is already taken for granted; it is the time that, in the words of Pumpianskii, “dared to think of itself: we, here, in the North, are the same as they, in Rome!”²⁸⁸ Although we still see the same attributes of power and superiority of Russian military feats over those of ancient Romans and the same competitive attitude that was established by Lomonosov, we find, in the works of Derzhavin, the beginning of doubt about the greatness of Rome and the limitation of Roman allusions. The imperial grandeur of Russia is already established, so Derzhavin turns to the inner workings of the empire. For him, the decisive factor of greatness and immortality is not wars or splendor, but rather virtue, both for rulers, who should provide moral instruction and take care of their subjects, and for the subjects, who should dedicate themselves to patriotism and righteousness over selfishness and ambition.

картин поныне слышен гром.” (“К портрету Михаила Васильевича Ломоносова,” 1779)).

²⁸⁸ Pumpianskii 91.

To illustrate his concerns, Derzhavin turns to Roman examples. For him, Rome is no longer a purely positive model used only to glorify Russia. Instead, he shows us examples and good Romans, both aristocrats and rulers, and bad Romans. The first are to be admired and emulated, but the second, even though they were mighty and are still remembered, are to serve as a warning. This moral qualification, combined with reminders about the inevitable downfall of empires and the turn away from the court and its vices toward the simpler, purer country life represented by Horatian poetry, all pave the way for doubt about the greatness of Rome and, by extension the Russian Empire and its rulers. Although Derzhavin himself was a “genuine monarchist,”²⁸⁹ his doubt will inspire the Decembrists, whose poetry will offer a possible answer to the question of what one is to do about tyrants.

For Derzhavin himself, however, Rome is still intimately tied to empire and autocracy, which appears as the only mode of rule in their works. Despite all of Derzhavin’s criticism of corruption, he still does not mention Brutus or the murder of Caesar. His negatives can still be seen as warnings, trying to give advice to rulers and citizens; they are not a call to action, nor are they a prediction of the decay and fall of the Russian Empire. This period does not yet create a Rome that symbolizes political change, revolution, or tyrannicide. In fact, the close tie between courtly praises and classical allusions during this period has led Marinus Wes to conclude,

In the coordinate system of action and reaction this rhetorical juggling with a mythical antiquity scores more points on the axis of reaction than on that of action. It is more the varnish of a triumphalistic craving for power, as it repeatedly was, for that matter, in the real Rome of antiquity and its poetry, than a conscious effort to explain the ‘condition humaine’ which is the hallmark of a truly classical body of thought...²⁹⁰

I have shown, I hope, that, despite its ties to political power, the function of ancient Rome was far

²⁸⁹ Hart 3.

²⁹⁰ Wes 47.

larger than a “varnish of a triumphalistic craving for power.”

CHAPTER III

Freedom, Tyrannicide, and Roman Heroes in the Works of Pushkin and Ryleev

An important reevaluation and re-appropriation of Rome, which can be viewed as either a rejection or a continuation of Derzhavin's approach, occurs among the Decembrists, a group of aristocrats who unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow the autocracy on December 14, 1825. Although their motives and ideologies were varied²⁹¹ and the movement never became cohesive enough to present a well-defined and articulated ideology, the goals of the majority could be said to include either a limitation or abolition of autocracy (to be replaced by either a constitutional monarchy or a republic, depending on the particular inclination of the individual participant), abolition of serfdom,²⁹² and, especially, a guarantee of personal rights and freedoms.²⁹³

In this chapter, I will consider the poems of the two prominent poets most often associated with Decembrist ideology to examine the role that Roman figures played in this ideology. The first of these is the poet Kondratii Ryleev, one of the five leaders of the uprising

²⁹¹ Volk, S. *Istoricheskie vzgliady dekabristov*, 26.

²⁹² On the opinions and debates about serfdom in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, see Susan McCaffray, "Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution: Projects for Serf Reform in the Time of Alexander I." *Russian Review* 64.1 (2005): 1-21. The Emperor himself was interested in the reform of serfdom and encouraged discussion of the subject, at least in the earlier part of his reign. According to an early biographer, quoted by McCaffray, he once even said, "I want to leave the state of barbarism in which the traffic in human beings puts us. I will go even further. If civilization were sufficiently advanced, I would abolish this slavery, even were it to cost me my head." (5). At the same time, however, there were practical difficulties, acknowledged even by those who advocated reform and abolition of serfdom, including some of the future Decembrists.

²⁹³ "It is now clear that the criticism of the Decembrists was focused on one single basic feature of the Russian situation, the source of all the evil: lack of security and respect for the individual, his dignity, his honor, his property, his work, and even his life. The main cause for this situation was the autocracy and the arbitrariness and whims of its agents. [...] In condemning particular abuses, the Decembrists condemned absolutism in general, demanding greater respect for the enlightened and useful members of Russian society (meaning mainly the educated nobility) on the part of the Autocrat and his officials." Raeff, M. *The Decembrist Movement*, 15.

who were executed for their participation in the conspiracy. The second is the far more famous Aleksandr Pushkin, who did not participate in the rebellion directly, but who shared the ideals of the Decembrists and whose poems were an important inspiration for them.²⁹⁴ Since Pushkin's body of work is vast and varied, I will focus on those of his poems that precede the Decembrist rebellion, reflect its concerns, and allude to historical Roman figures or episodes.²⁹⁵

The Decembrists' approach to Rome has a number of distinctive features. The most notable is the turn away from the Roman Empire and the choices to appeal, instead, to the Roman Republic and the figures of Brutus, Cassius, and Cato – those who fought against Caesar.²⁹⁶ Though Roman Emperors do sometimes appear, they are used negatively, as examples

²⁹⁴ On Pushkin's revolutionary poetry as an inspiration to the Decembrists, see Paul Debreczeny. *The Social Functions of Literature: Alexander Pushkin and Russian Culture*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997. On Pushkin's political thought and relationship to the Decembrists, see V. Pugachev. "K voprosu o politicheskikh vzgliadakh A. S. Pushkina do vosstaniia dekabristov." For an examination of Pushkin's revolutionary inclinations and sympathies, see Nechkina M. "Pushkin i dekabristy." For a more balanced discussion of Pushkin's blend of liberalism and conservatism through a discussion of his changing relationship to the court and different tsars, see Leonid Strakhovskiy. "Pushkin and the Emperors Alexander I and Nicholas I." Meilakh, in *Dekabristy i Pushkin: Stranitsy geroiko-tragicheskoi istorii*, draws parallels between the evolution of Pushkin's poetry and the evolution of Decembrist thought. For a discussion of Pushkin's continued literary correspondence with and support of the Decembrists and their cause during their exile to Siberia, see Gurevich, A. "Dekabristy v sibirskoi ssylke i Pushkin." For an interpretation of Pushkin's play *Boris Godunov* and its reflections of the political climate, including Pushkin's Decembrist sympathies, see Chester Dunning, "Rethinking the Canonical Text of Pushkin's Boris Godunov."

²⁹⁵ For overviews of Pushkin's classical education, influences, and allusions, see Marinus Wes's chapter "Aere Perennius: Alexander Pushkin" and Zara Torlone's chapter "From Russian Classicism to Alexander Pushkin." On the evolution of Pushkin's relationship to the classics, from his education in the Lyceum and the superficially decorative use of classical terminology to his identification with Ovid during his own exile and the use of classical episodes as a way to think about history in his more mature works, see Iakubovich, D. P. "Antichnost' v tvorchestve Pushkina." For Pushkin's interpretation of Tacitus in the context of the evolution of his historical thought, see G. Knabe "Tatsit i Pushkin" and G. W. Bowersock. "The Roman Emperor as Russian Tsar: Tacitus and Pushkin." For a discussion of satire and the relationship of Pushkin to Horace and Juvenal, see Stepanov L. A. "Pushkin, Goratsii, Iuvenal." For a study of Pushkin's relationship to Ovid, see Vulikh N. V. "Obraz Ovidiia v tvorchestve Pushkina." A recent collection examines Pushkin's use of mythology and his relationship to several ancient authors, include Homer and Horace. See I. V. Shtal', A.S. Kurilov. *Pushkin i Antichnost'*. Andrew Kahn examines Pushkin's and briefly the Decembrists' attitudes toward the Roman historians in "Readings of Imperial Rome from Lomonosov to Pushkin." On the "almost negligible" (compared to Horace and Ovid) and mostly mocked presence of Virgil in Pushkin's works, see Vasily Rudich. "On Pushkin and Virgil." Rudich argues, however, that while an intertextual search would be fruitless, certain similarities of lived experience and a concern with "the labor and cost of history" led to some similarities between the *Aeneid* and the *Bronze Horseman*.

²⁹⁶ The turn to these figures echoes their earlier appearance in the French Revolution, where images of Brutus could be found "in Jacobin clubs, public buildings, and popular societies," and even "plates [and] playing cards;" "in keeping with Revolutionary fervor, towns were renamed Brutus, even babies were named Brutus." Denise Amy Baxter, "Two Brutuses: Violence, Virtue, and Politics in the Visual Culture of the French Revolution," 51-77. On the

of tyrants. In the narrative arc of this dissertation, this moment also signals a turning point when Rome becomes used in opposition to the status quo – while Lomonosov’s appeals served to legitimize the Russian Empire and its history and rulers, and Derzhavin’s poetry strove to find and offer the proper ethical and moral qualifications for rulers and nobility within the existing political and social structures, the Decembrists looked to Rome to find precedents for opposing, limiting, and overthrowing the autocracy. This and the next two chapters will offer three different models for this opposition. In the case of the Decembrists, Rome will provide historical models for political overhaul and tyrannicide. For Goncharov, who lived in a period when open opposition was not a viable option, the rejection of the historical Rome will become a way to reject and condemn involvement in Russian politics. Finally, for Blok, Roman history will offer a way to judge contemporary Russian society and call for its annihilation.

Other distinctive features of the Decembrists’ Rome include its linking with the struggle for undefined political and social freedom, the focus on a particular cluster of Roman figures, and the essentially emotional and inspirational mode of evoking these figures. These particular features reflect both the passion of the desire for change and the absence of a coherent and concrete ideological program. Before turning directly to the Decembrists’ relationship with Roman history (since it is specifically historical figures that are important for their ideology), I will discuss the response of both of these poets to Derzhavin and, specifically, to two of his adaptations of Horatian odes that were discussed in the previous chapter. Their approach to Derzhavin and his legacy points us towards the new value system that also guides their approach to ancient Rome and Romans. Although Pushkin uses Derzhavin’s adaptations of Roman poems

role of classical models in the rhetoric, law, and politics of the French Revolution, see, for instance, Lynn Hunt, “The Rhetoric of Revolution in France,” and Mortimer Sellers, “Classical Influences on the Law and Politics of the French Revolution.”

to contrast his own value system to that of his predecessor²⁹⁷ and Ryleev reassesses Derzhavin's own estimations of his importance and appropriates him as a precedent, both writers promote similar underlying values, such as care for the people as opposed to the rulers, the praise of freedom, and the poet's responsibility to promote virtue and offer a critique of the status quo.

The poets' response to Derzhavin

Two of Pushkin's poems are important responses to Derzhavin's adaptations of Horace's poems. In his 1819 poem "The Village"²⁹⁸ ("Деревня"), Pushkin engages with Derzhavin's "To Eugene: Life at Zvanka" ("Евгению. Жизнь Званская") the adaptation of Horace's second epode that juxtaposes life in the country to life in the city.²⁹⁹ Derzhavin's adaptation expands Horace's ode by adding numerous Russia-specific details, such as, famously, a list of distinctly Russian foods, to juxtapose his free and peaceful life in the country with the luxurious, immoral, and constricted life in the city and, more specifically, at court. Pushkin's poem begins in a way that signals solidarity with Horace's and Derzhavin's sentiments, though his prime interlocutor is Derzhavin, as I will show below. The beginning of the poem relies on the same distinction between the city and the country and includes a number of direct references to his predecessors:

I greet you, deserted corner,
The haven of tranquility, labor, and
inspiration,
where the invisible stream of my days flows

Приветствую тебя, пустынный уголок,
Приют спокойствия, трудов и
вдохновенья,
Где льется дней моих невидимый поток

²⁹⁷ There are, I should mention, also numerous praises of Derzhavin in Pushkin's other poems; e.g.: "Meanwhile Dmitriev, Derzhavin, Lomonosov, Immortal bards, honor and glory of the Russians, Nourish a healthy mind and all instruct us" ("Меж тем как Дмитриев, Державин, Ломоносов, Певцы бессмертные, и честь и слава россос, Питают здравый ум и вместе учат нас..." "К Другому Стихотворцу," 1814), or "Derzhavin, the scourge of the nobles, with the sound of his fearsome lyre/ exposed their proud idols ("Державин, бич вельмож, при звуке грозной лиры/ Их горделивые разоблачал кумиры." "Послание Цензору," 1822). Numerous scholars have pointed to Pushkin's indebtedness to Derzhavin, as well. He appears particularly praiseworthy in Pushkin's works when he criticizes the vices of courtiers, but in the poems I will discuss he is implicitly criticized for his blindness to the plight of the common people and his excessive closeness to Catherine the Great.

²⁹⁸ Full text: A.S. Pushkin. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*. T. 1. M.: Gos. Izd-vo Khud. Lit., 1959. 78-79.

²⁹⁹ Iakubovich argues that Pushkin's interpretation of and relationship to Horace was mediated by both Lomonosov and Derzhavin, though it is Derzhavin whom he identifies with Horace. Lomonosov, for him, is reminiscent of Pindar. See Iakubovich 108-9.

in the bosom of happiness and oblivion.
I am yours: I traded the vicious court of
circes,
Luxurious feasts, amusements, errors
For the peaceful noise of the groves, the
silence of fields,
Free leisure (the friend of reflections)

I am yours: I love this shady garden
With its coolness and flowers,
This meadow, with its fragrant haystacks
Where light brooks sound in the brush.

На лоне счастья и забвенья.
Я твой: я променял порочный двор цирцей,
Роскошные пиры, забавы, заблужденья
На мирный шум дубров, на тишину полей,
На праздность вольную, подругу
размышленья.

Я твой: люблю сей темный сад
С его прохладой и цветами,
Сей луг, уставленный душистыми
скирдами,
Где светлые ручьи в кустарниках шумят.

Pushkin refers to the village as the place of “tranquility, work, and inspiration,” the aspects of country life explicitly emphasized by Derzhavin, though the first two are also present in the Horatian ode. The peacefulness of country life is implicitly highlighted by Horace, who contrasts it with war, sailing, political involvement, and the need to court powerful men,³⁰⁰ but Derzhavin explicitly refers to “tranquility” or “repose” (“покой”) as what he seeks in going to the country, writing “What I need is repose/tranquility” (“Покой мне нужен”). “Labor” (“труд”) is described both by Horace and Derzhavin, who list a number of tasks and occupations of country-dwellers. Finally, “inspiration” (“вдохновенье”) is a clear reference specifically to Derzhavin’s poem, which includes lines about reading and writing poetry at Zvanka:

From there, I come to the sanctum of the
Muses,
And seated in a divine feast with Flaccus and
Pindar,
I soar up to the tsars, or friends, or the heavens,
Or extol country life on my lyre.

Оттуда прихожу в святилище я муз,
И с Флакком, Пиндаром, богов восседши
в пире,
К царям, к друзьям моим, иль к небу
возношусь,
Иль славлю сельску жизнь на лире.

Although Pushkin’s poem is about four times shorter than Derzhavin’s, the echoes of “Zvanka” are numerous, evident not only in the larger themes and concepts (as above) but also in

³⁰⁰ “neque excitatur classico miles truci, / neque horret iratum mare, / forumque vitat et superba civium / potentiorum limina” (Horace, *Epodes* II.5-8)

the specific words and phrases that leave no doubt that Pushkin wanted the reader to recognize the kinship of the two poems. He mentions cultivated and uncultivated fields and a cultivated garden (“сад”) with flowers, the superficially alluring nature of life at court (Derzhavin’s “sirens” (“сирен”) become Pushkin’s “circes” (“цирцеи”), a pluralized “Circe” used as a common noun in a context nearly identical to Derzhavin’s – a personification of the enticements of the capital), the prisonlike atmosphere of the court (Derzhavin’s “shutters” (“затворы”) become Pushkin’s “shackles” (“оковы”), the triviality of court life (both authors mention its “vanity” – “суетные оковы” in Pushkin and “суета сует” in Derzhavin), and the particular characteristics of life in the country – the “quiet” (“тишина” is important for both) and the “freedom” (“свобода” is evoked in various grammatical forms and contexts) that can only be found away from the capital. These echoes are concentrated in the first half of Pushkin’s poem, and their frequency creates the impression that Pushkin is specifically attempting to provide a summarized parallel to Derzhavin’s poem, going over the same territory in much less space. There is no doubt, therefore, that when the focus of the poem changes drastically, the change is intended as a challenge to the image Derzhavin presents and Pushkin summarizes. Moreover, the fact that Pushkin provides such a brief summary suggests that the narrator is in a rush to evoke a familiar image but ultimately move beyond it to the true focus of his poem.

Approximately halfway through the poem, there is a line that, once again, signals an allusion to Derzhavin’s poem: “Oracles of ages, I ask you here!” (“Оракулы веков, здесь вопрошаю вас!”). This line is reminiscent of Derzhavin’s “Or, in the looking glass of time, shaking my head / I look upon the passions and the deeds of ancient and new ages” (“Иль в зеркало времен, качая головой,/ На страсти, на дела зрю древних, новых веков”), as both writers turn to history to begin reflecting on the nature of life. This turn to history allows their

conclusions to acquire a seemingly universal significance, because they are examining not only their specific historical moment but also preceding history. These conclusions, however, are drastically different. Derzhavin's reflections become a philosophical judgment of the selfishness and vanity of human endeavors and political involvement: Not seeing anything, except /Love for oneself, -- and the brawling of men" ("Не видя ничего, кроме любви одной/К себе и драки человекoв").

Derzhavin's narrator sees that the motivations behind human history are petty and selfish. This observation leads him to reject this human commotion (and specifically life at court, since that is what he uses as a representation of history and contrast to life in the country) and, instead, turn to the contemplation of the divine and the eternal:

All vanity of vanities!" I sigh;	Всё суета сует! я въздыхая, мню,
But, casting my gaze on the luster of the	Но, бросив взор на блеск светила
midday sun:	полудневна,
"How beautiful the world is! Why do I burden	О, коль прекрасен мир! Что ж дух мой
my spirit?	бременю?
The Creator is taking care of the world.	Творцом содержится вселенна. ³⁰¹

Pushkin, instead, exposes the social oppression and inequality of this idealized image of country life. This second part of the poem was censored and did not appear in print until after his death,³⁰² though the poem was known and played an important inspirational role among the Decembrists.³⁰³ In it, Pushkin challenges the easy binary of the evils of court and the good of country life, exposing the suffering of the people on these country estates:

But a terrible thought casts a shadow on my	Но мысль ужасная здесь душу омрачает:
soul:	Среди цветущих нив и гор
Among the blooming fields and hills	Друг человечества печально замечает
A friend of humanity will notice with sadness	Везде невежества убийственный позор.
The murderous shame of ignorance.	Не видя слез, не внемля стона,
Not seeing the tears, not hearing the moans,	На пагубу людей избранное судьбой,

³⁰¹ Derzhavin, II, 637.

³⁰² T. Sedinkina, "Kompozitsionnyi analiz stikhotvoreniia Pushkina 'Derevnia,'" 2.

³⁰³ Nechkina 158.

The savage gentry, appointed by fate to be the
destruction of the people,
Without feeling, without law,
Appropriated, with its violent vine,
The labor, property, and time of the peasant.
Leaning on an alien plow, obeying the whips,
Emaciated slavery drags itself along the
furrows of the merciless owner.
Here everyone bears the oppressive yoke until
their grave...

Здесь барство дикое, без чувства, без
закона,
Присвоило себе насильственной лозой
И труд, и собственность, и время
земледельца.
Склонясь на чуждый плуг, покорствуя
бичам,
Здесь рабство тощее влачится по браздам
Неумолимого владельца.
Здесь тягостный ярем до гроба все
влекут...

The façade of the country life praised by Derzhavin (emphasized once again by the mention of the idyllic landscape) hides the slavery, violence, and hunger of the peasants, whose labor, property, and time are usurped by the landowners. In contrast to Derzhavin’s philosophical detachment and abstraction, Pushkin wants to evoke indignation and horror in his reader by pointing to the historical reality of country life and the concrete signs of suffering of the people (their tears and moaning) and the murderous inhumanity of the landowners. His vocabulary emphasizes destructive violence (“murderous” (“убийственный”), “destruction” (“пагубу”), “violent vine” (“насильственной лозой”), “whips” (“бичам”), “oppressive yoke” (“тягостный ярем”)) and any “friend of humanity” could not be indifferent to this suffering. It is also worth noting that Pushkin gives a universalizing title to his poem in order to show the extent of the abuse. “The Village” could refer to any Russian village, unlike Derzhavin’s poem, which is specifically concerned with his own Zvanka.

At the end of the poem, Pushkin ties the passion of indignation that one must feel when faced with this suffering to the responsibility of the poet to act on this emotion and evoke feeling in others:

O, if my voice could only trouble hearts!
Why does a fruitless passion burn in my
chest?
Why was I not granted the terrible gift of

О, если б голос мой умел сердца
тревожить!
Почто в груди моей горит бесплодный жар
И не дан мне судьбой витийства грозный

rhetoric? O, friends, will I ever see an unoppressed people, And slavery fallen by the decree of the tsar, And will the magnificent dawn of enlightened freedom Finally rise above my native land?	дар? Увижу ль, о друзья! народ неугнетенный И рабство, падшее по манию царя, И над отечеством свободы просвещенной Взойдет ли наконец прекрасная заря?
--	--

The final lines of the poem express the hope of seeing “enlightened freedom” in the land. Though the poem is mostly focused on the particular kind of oppression (serfdom), the final lines perhaps offer a broader idea of freedom, hoping to see “a people free from oppression” and a “dawn” of “an enlightened freedom.”³⁰⁴ The particular cluster of concepts – the struggle between freedom and oppression, the emotional response to the current situation, and the task of the poet as someone who exposes injustice and inspires his readers to react to it – is Pushkin’s response to both Horace and especially Derzhavin. The crucial binary is no longer that of the city and the country. Pushkin’s poem suggests that this distinction is a superficial one, because it hides a much more problematic binary, that of oppression and freedom.

We find the same cluster of concerns in an untitled poem (sometimes referred to as “Monument”) that dates to 1836 and is perhaps Pushkin’s best-known poem and certainly the most famous adaptation of a Horatian ode into Russian.³⁰⁵ Even though it is one of his final poems, it is remarkably close to the civic poetry of his youth, such as the poem discussed above and the poems that will be discussed below. Here Pushkin presents a summary of his own accomplishments as a response to his predecessors. As Derzhavin had engaged both with

³⁰⁴ These final lines bear a strong resemblance to the final lines of Pushkin’s 1818 poem “To Chaadaev,” which expresses a similar hope of freedom; in this latter case, the idea of freedom is also undefined, though it is contrasted specifically with autocracy: “Мы ждем с томленьем упования/Минуты вольности святой[...] Пока свободною горим,/Пока сердца для чести живы,/Мой друг, отчизне посвятим/Души прекрасные порывы!/Товарищ, верь: взойдет она,/Звезда пленительного счастья,/Россия вспрянет ото сна,/И на обломках самовластья/Напишут наши имена!” А. С. Пушкин. *Собрание сочинений в 10 томах*. Т. 1, М.: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1959, 65.

³⁰⁵ For a book-length study of the poem, including its publication history, reception, and analysis, see M. Alekseev. *Stikhotvorenie Pushkina “Ja pamiatnik sebe vozdvig...”*: *Problemy ego izucheniia*.

Lomonosov and Horace to highlight the particular nature of his own legacy, so does Pushkin look back both to Horace and his Russian predecessors to offer his own value system, the central axis of which is the opposition of the poet to autocracy. Not surprisingly, Pushkin’s version could not be published at the time of its composition. An altered version, edited by Zhukovskii to exclude any politically charged lines, was published in 1841 and remained the only known version until 1881.³⁰⁶

The censored lines included the last two lines of the first stanza and the whole fourth stanza (below). The fourth stanza contains the lines in which Pushkin contrasts his own accomplishments with those of Derzhavin and Horace.³⁰⁷

Exegi Monumentum

No hands have wrought my monuments; no weeds
Will hide the nation’s footpath to its site.
Tsar Alexander’s column it exceeds
in splendid insubmissive height.
[...]
And to the people long shall I be dear
because kind feelings did my lyre extol,
invoking freedom in an age of fear,
and mercy for the broken soul.³⁰⁸

Exegi monumentum

Я памятник себе воздвиг нерукотворный,
К нему не зарастет народная тропа,
Вознеся выше он главою непокорной
Александрийского столпа.
[...]
И долго буду тем любезен я народу,
Что чувства добрые я лирой пробуждал,
Что в мой жестокий век восславил я
Свободу
И милость к падшим призывал.³⁰⁹

The first important alteration Pushkin introduces to the poem is the object to which he compares his poetry. Whereas Derzhavin, following Horace, says of his “monument” that it is

³⁰⁶ Alekseev 8

³⁰⁷ The epigraph, “exegi monumentum,” is the first two words of Horace’s ode. This direct quotation makes it clear that Pushkin wants the reader to be aware of the Horatian version of the poem, even though the main contention is once again with Derzhavin. Zara Torlone compares Horace’s and Pushkin’s versions and analyzes a number of similarities and differences (Torlone 50-54). In my reading, I focus on the comparing Pushkin’s version with Derzhavin’s, since the response to Derzhavin’s political allegiances and the summary of Pushkin’s own are, for me, the central concern of this poem.

³⁰⁸ This is an early translation by V. Nabokov, which he would renounce after adopting his “literal” approach to translation. I think it does an impressive job negotiating between meaning and sound, so I wanted to quote it here. One important inaccuracy, however, is in the last line quoted above. Pushkin refers to mercy “for the fallen” rather than “the broken soul”; I would also translate the second line to say “the people’s footpath to its site.”

³⁰⁹ Full text: А. С. Пушкин. *Собрание сочинений в 10 томах*. Т. 2, М.: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1959, 460.

“Harder than metals and higher than pyramids” (“Металлов тверже он и выше пирамид”), Pushkin insists that his legacy is greater than Alexander’s Column, the monument erected in St. Petersburg in 1834 to commemorate the victory of Alexander I over Napoleon,³¹⁰ whose unveiling Pushkin had intentionally avoided.³¹¹ Although Alekseev argues that we should not exaggerate the importance of this line, since it was not uncommon for writers to ridicule public monuments in the 1830s,³¹² the characterization of his “monument” as “insubmissive” right before the comparison to Alexander’s Column suggests an adversarial relationship rather than mere mockery. Likewise, the later label of the poet’s age as a “cruel age” gives a somber and weighty tone to the poem and its characterization of the status quo.

The poet’s allegiances are made even clearer in the fourth stanza, which is both a response to Derzhavin and a reiteration of concepts important to “The Village” and Pushkin’s political and civic poems. The corresponding stanza in Derzhavin’s adaptation, despite modifying the sentiment of unwavering allegiance to the ruler expressed by Lomonosov’s adaptation, still ties the legacy of the poet to his relationship with Catherine the Great. Derzhavin claims that the reason he will be remembered is:

For being the first to dare, in the amusing
 Russian verse,
 To proclaim the virtues of Felitsa,³¹³
 To speak about God with honest simplicity
 And tell the truth to the Tsars with a smile.

Что первый я дерзнул в забавном русском
 слоге
 О добродетелях Фелицы возгласить,
 В сердечной простоте беседовать о бже
 И истину царям с улыбкой говорить.

³¹⁰ Though this interpretation is the more common one, there have been some arguments that Pushkin was actually referring to Alexandria rather than Alexander. See, for instance, Alekseev 60-65 for the origin and evolution of the debate. Given the content of the poem and, especially, the preceding phrase “главою непокорной,” it seems far more likely that Pushkin was referring to Alexander’s column, though it is possible that the reference was intentionally ambiguous to avoid a direct challenge to the tsar, as P. Chernykh and D. Iakubovich have argued (see Alekseev 62). For a more recent scholarship overview and argument in favor of “Alexander’s Column,” though with an intentional allusion to Alexandria and Alexander the Great, with whom Alexander I was often identified, see Proskurin O. A, *Poeziia Pushkina, ili podvizhnyi palimpsest*, 275 – 288.

³¹¹ Alekseev 66.

³¹² Alekseev 72.

³¹³ Catherine II.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Derzhavin's emphasis on "virtues" (as opposed to Lomonosov's emphasis on "deeds") and the insistence that he "told the truth to the tsars," a reference to Horatian satire, suggest that Derzhavin wanted to be remembered not only for praising the virtues of Catherine II but also for challenging the rulers and exposing the vices of the court. This last point does not necessarily claim an adversarial relationship, however, and the specific mention of the "virtues" of Catherine leaves the impression that the poet had a strong and favorable relationship with the monarch. Pushkin, on the other hand, explicitly emphasizes his allegiance to the people *in opposition* to the rulers. He mentions "the people" twice: "the people's path" ("народная тропа") and "And to the people long shall I be dear" ("И долго буду тем любезен я народу"), leaving no doubt of who his intended audience has been.³¹⁴

His other accomplishments include the praise of "Freedom" rather than a ruler. Perhaps Pushkin's capitalization of "Freedom" is meant not only to personify it or give it additional emphasis, but also to contrast it with Derzhavin's "Felitsa," since both are the explicitly singled out objects of the poets' praise and the only capitalized nouns in the fourth stanza of their respective poems. This contrast leads us to understand that the freedom mentioned by Pushkin refers specifically to the freedom of the people from the ruler, freedom *in opposition* to the ruler. Finally, the reference also recalls Pushkin's early poem "Liberty," which threatens despots with their inevitable downfall and advocates for a constitutional monarchy in which the people and the rulers are equally free under the protection of laws. "Liberty" played a large part in Pushkin's exile and the "cruel age" mentioned in the poem reminds us both of the penalty that Pushkin himself had paid for praising freedom, which once again pits the poet against the autocrat, and, especially, of the fate of the executed and exiled Decembrists. The final line is also

³¹⁴ For a discussion of "the people" as a "central and essential problem in Pushkin's entire oeuvre" and the evolution of his views, see Gorodetskii B. P. "Problema naroda v tvorchestve Pushkina," 282-300.

thought to refer to Pushkin's attempts to procure a pardon for the exiled Decembrists after their failed conspiracy.³¹⁵ These references once again affirm Pushkin's allegiance to the cause and its ideals, regardless of the evolution of Pushkin's political views and relationships in the time since the uprising.

There may be a number of reasons why Pushkin chooses to explicate his values in Horatian adaptations. V. Rudich, for instance argues, "One may say that poetry of Horace served Pushkin as a vehicle to enhance and validate his public persona, that of a lofty bard, the Horatian vates."³¹⁶ Alekseev, meanwhile, suggests that Pushkin may be invoking Horace in order to point to tradition and defend himself (as Derzhavin had) against possible accusations of self-aggrandizement,³¹⁷ as well as offer a concrete example of the possibility of such lasting fame.³¹⁸ Of course, it is also important to remember that Pushkin does not choose to engage with Horace directly. By choosing to offer his own values in an adaption of Horace's ode, he places himself in a chain of writers that includes not only Horace but also Lomonosov and Derzhavin. His testament is also a debate with the values of his predecessors and a kind of "update" to the relationship between the poet, the rulers, and history. It reminds the reader of the previous tradition but offers a new definitive interpretation for what the task of the poet should be.

Unlike Pushkin, Ryleev does not polemicize with Derzhavin in Roman adaptations. He does, however, also use the very same poems by Derzhavin ("Monument" and "To Eugene: Life at Zvanka") in his own poem "Derzhavin" in order to reassess Derzhavin's legacy and portray him as an early defender of the values that will be important to the Decembrists. The poem

³¹⁵ See Tsiavlovskaja's commentary to the poem in А. С. Пушкин. *Собрание сочинений в 10 томах*. Т. 2, М.: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1959.

³¹⁶ Rudich 35.

³¹⁷ Alekseev 101.

³¹⁸ Alekseev 103.

introduces a young bard, presumably Ryleev himself, who mournfully contemplates Derzhavin's tomb and begins to reflect, in admiration, on Derzhavin's poetic legacy:

A thoughtful bard was looking, gloomily,
At the sad monument.
And suddenly proclaimed, in rapture,
"Why do I pine here in vain?
Our wondrous bard did not die:
He sang and glorified holy Rus'!
He considered the common good to be
Above all else on earth
And in his fiery verses
He glorified holy virtue."

Певец задумчивый глядел
На грустный памятник угрюмо.
Но вдруг, восторженный, вещал:
"Что я напрасно здесь тоскую?
Наш дивный бард не умирал:
Он пел и славил Русь святую!
Он выше всех на свете благ
Общественное благо ставил
И в огненных своих стихах
Святую добродетель славил."

It is, of course, true that Derzhavin made it a point in a number of his poems to expose immoral and selfish behavior of the aristocracy and argue for the importance of virtue, patriotism, and dedication to the common good. What is notable, however, is that the above estimation of Derzhavin's importance is introduced during a contemplation of Derzhavin's tomb, the image that also introduces Derzhavin's own meditations on what would be said about him after his death in "Zvanka." Derzhavin's expectations are quite different from Ryleev's evaluation, however:

...and you, waking your descendants with
your pen, in the North of the capital,
Will whisper to a stranger, from afar, like
quiet thunder:
"Here lived a bard of God, – Felitsa."

...и ты, будя твоим пером
Потомков ото сна, близ севера столицы,
Шепнешь в слух страннику, в дали как
тихий гром:
"Здесь бога жил певец, — Фелицы."

And yet, in the long and repetitive list of Derzhavin's admirable qualities offered by Ryleev, which, in addition to the concerns in the lines quoted above also includes criticism of the nobility, speaking the truth, fighting evil, protecting the laws, and defending the defenseless, there is not a single mention of what Derzhavin himself judged to be his legacy. In other words, Ryleev reevaluates the importance of Derzhavin, pointing to what his poetry aimed to do for the people and against the corrupt noblemen, and leaving aside his close relationship to Catherine

the Great and his philosophical meditations on the divine, which were crucial to Derzhavin both in “Zvanka” and in the “Monument.”

Ryleev makes a direct reference to the “Monument” as well, agreeing with Derzhavin’s claim that his memory will survive after his death, but once again deviating from Derzhavin’s own professed reasons for his immortality (which, once again, were “To proclaim the virtues of Felitsa, / To speak about God with honest simplicity/ And tell the truth to the Tsars with a smile” (“Что первый я дерзнул в забавном русском слоге/О добродетелях Фелицы возгласить,/В сердечной простоте беседовать о боге/И истину царям с улыбкой говорить.”)). Like Pushkin, Ryleev also introduces, though much more humbly, his own values and concerns. Unlike Pushkin, however, he wishes to be remembered not in contrast to Derzhavin but for his pale imitation of what made Derzhavin immortal – not Derzhavin’s own reasons, but rather Ryleev’s re-interpretation of Derzhavin’s true importance, which consists of inspiring future generations to be passionately concerned with the common good:

“Bard, you are right: you will live on,
You have erected an eternal monument,-
It cannot be destroyed
By thunder, or by the swift winds.”
[...]
“O, it does not matter if I will not be in my
poems
Like Derzhavin, amazing, resounding, -
As long as an enlightened descendant could
say about me:
‘His thought soared through history,
Conjuring up hoary antiquity,
And inflaming in young hearts
Passion for the common good!’”

“Ты прав, певец: ты будешь жить,
Ты памятник воздвигнул вечный, -
Его не могут сокрушить
Ни гром, ни вихорь быстротечный.”
[...]
“О, пусть не буду в гимнах я,
Как наш Державин, дивен, громок, -
Лишь только б молвил про меня
Мой образованный потомок:
‘Парил он мыслию в веках,
Седую вызывая древность,
И воспляял в младых сердцах
К общественному благу ревность!’”

As a result of Ryleev’s changes, Derzhavin becomes appropriated and serves as a sort of a proto-Decembrist, though obviously without any revolutionary inclinations and concrete intentions of changing the underlying structures of the regime. His work becomes primarily

important not for its philosophical meditations or even its didactic intentions, but rather for *inflaming passion* with his examples of virtue, the passion that will be crucial for the Decembrists' opposition to the unjust status quo.

Thus, each in his own way, Pushkin and Ryleev both “update” Derzhavin’s values to reflect their own concerns, the concerns that were shared by the Decembrists in general and that motivated the uprising, the poetry of its supporters and participants, and the allusions to the Roman figures in this period.

Decembrists and the Roman Republic

For the Decembrists, ancient Rome and its Republican figures became the epitome of the ideal of freedom and the struggle against oppression. They were well familiar with the classics – many of them knew Latin³¹⁹ and read and referenced Roman history and literature to justify and promote their goals. Iakubovich specifically points to the role that antiquity played in the formation of the Decembrists' historical and civic ideas, writing, “It is well known that antiquity had an enormous formative role in their circles, and played an important role in the development of their *historical*, i.e., primarily, *civic* and *political* views.”³²⁰ This argument is supported by the words of the Decembrists themselves, who were interrogated about the origin of their ideas after their arrest. A number of testimonies specifically mention the influence that the classics, together with later Western history, had on the development of their thought:

Petr Kakhovskii :“Ideas are formed with age. I cannot specifically say when my notions were developed. Studying the history of the Greeks and Romans from childhood, I was fired up by the heroes of antiquity.”³²¹

Pavel Pestel: “[...] I recalled the happy period of Greece when it consisted of republics and its miserable conditions later. I compared the great destiny of Rome in the days of the republic with its lamentable fate under the Emperors. The history of Great Novgorod also strengthened in me

³¹⁹ Ludmilla Trigos. “Historical Models of Terror in Decembrist Literature,” 32.

³²⁰ Iakubovich 154.

³²¹ Marc Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement*, 49.

republican ideas.”³²²

Petr Borisov: “The reading, since childhood, of Greek and Roman history and of the lives of great men by Plutarch and Cornelius Nepos implanted in me a love for freedom and popular sovereignty.”³²³

The importance of Roman history can be seen in the abundance of references that the Decembrists continued to make both in their writings and in real life. There were a number of functions of these allusions. Volk argues that Decembrist poetry in particular treated history as a way to agitate and instruct.³²⁴ Andrew Kahn refers to the “Decembrist attraction to the moral qualities of the ancients, their models of valor, decorum, courage and statesmanship.”³²⁵

Following Lotman, Trigos adds that for the Decembrists ancient Roman figures provided “productive sources for [...] self-fashioning,” and that by turning to these figures “they could try on various stances of political resistance as they explored Russian and ancient history for appropriate models.”³²⁶ This argument is supported by Bestuzhev’s account of Ryleev’s words to his mother before he left for the Senate Square:

...perhaps ... history will write my name next to the names of great men who died for humanity. In it, the name of Brutus stands above Caesar’s, so bless me!

[...может быть, ... история запишет имя мое вместе с именами великих людей, погибших за человечество. В ней имя Брута стоит выше цезарева - итак, благословите меня!"³²⁷]

And yet, despite the desire to frame their historical situation as one that corresponds to ancient history³²⁸ and themselves as the followers of classical heroes, there is little influence of

³²² *Ibid.* 54.

³²³ *Ibid.* 55.

³²⁴ Volk 20.

³²⁵ Kahn 766.

³²⁶ Trigos 30.

³²⁷ Щеголев П.Е. (ред.) - *Воспоминания братьев Бестужевых / Воспоминания братьев Бестужевыхъ*, Огни, 1917, 9.

³²⁸ In addition to giving themselves the names of Roman Republican figures in their writings or comparing their aspirations to those of the ancient heroes, the Decembrists also identified the rulers with Roman Emperors. For instance, “В глазах членов тайного общества самовластный Александр 1 вполне отождествлялся с жестоким

the classics on the practical political documents and intentions of the Decembrists.³²⁹ This lack of practical influence suggests that the importance of the classical precedents was largely meant to be an inspiration, a call to action, rather than necessarily a pragmatic blueprint for the methodology of an uprising and political action.

The language that we see in the works of the Decembrists and scholars studying this group reflects this function, since it often points to an *emotional* connection to the classics. In the testimonies quote above, Kakhovskii explains that he “was *fired up* by the heroes of antiquity” and Borisov credits ancient historians with “*implant[ing in him] the love* of freedom and popular sovereignty.”

Scholars point to the same sentiments. Raeff, for instance, writes, “The *infatuation* with classical antiquity, which had been merely superficial decorative veneer for their fathers, now – under the impact of the French Revolution and Napoleon – assumed vital existential meaning for the Decembrists and became their *inspiration* and model for action.”³³⁰ Volk writes, “In their opposition to despotism, the Decembrists *were inspired* by the classical examples of courageous republicans and fighters against tyranny.”³³¹ Trigos, too, speaks of inspiration when discussing the Decembrists relationship to antiquity: “*Inspired* by the mythic figure of Brutus, Ryleev’s colleagues styled him as a model freedom fighter and romantic-era hero who placed civic duty above all else.”³³² Finally, Irina Chistova, writing about the “agitatory role” (“агитационная роль”) that several of Pushkin’s poems (in particular “The Village” and “Liberty”) played during the formation of secret societies that culminated in the uprising of the Decembrists, argues,

римским императором Тиберием..." (Volk 155).

³²⁹ Volk 171.

³³⁰ Raeff 22, my emphasis. Though this is not the place to engage with Raeff’s claim that the earlier uses of classical allusions had been superficial, I hope my previous chapters have demonstrated that there was meaningful engagement with ancient Rome in the works of Lomonosov and Derzhavin.

³³¹ Volk 145, my emphasis.

³³² Trigos 35, my emphasis.

“‘Liberty’ was not read as a dry, logically strict exposition of a political doctrine; Pushkin’s ode attracts attention primarily as an expression of *heroic, civic emotion*.”³³³

In my reading of the political poems of Pushkin and Ryleev below, I will examine this inspirational role of Roman heroes in closer detail and analyze the other key features of the Decembrists’ interaction with Roman history – the identification of Rome with freedom, the emphasis on individual exemplary heroes (especially Brutus), and the focus of attention on the Roman Republic in general and, often, the murder of Caesar in particular.

The overall importance of Roman examples as an inspiration to the Decembrists is well established by the scholars mentioned above, and my aim here is not to offer a new framework for understanding this importance. Instead, I want to pay closer attention to the inner workings and development of this new Rome, because it is not static – it gradually evolves both in the works of Pushkin and of Ryleev. A closer look at this evolution will provide a more nuanced view of both the content and the mode of Roman allusions, since saying that Rome or Brutus inspired the Decembrists does not automatically explain how this Rome was constructed and functioned, or what mechanisms convey the new role of Rome as “inspirational.” In addition, within my project, this new Rome does not exist on its own; it is, rather, a link within a chain of Romes, a response both to its own circumstances and the earlier Romes of Derzhavin and Lomonosov.

Rome and the Romans in the political poems of Pushkin

Although the works of Pushkin and Ryleev share many themes and concerns, including their choice of Roman figures and associations, I will discuss these poets separately in order to show the evolution of their views. In the case of Pushkin, there is a gradual escalation to the

³³³ I. S. Chistova. “Oda ‘Vol’nost,” my emphasis.

figure of Brutus and the concept of tyrannicide: in “To Licinius” (1815), a poem addressed by one fictional inhabitant of Rome to another, he makes an explicit identification between Rome and the passionate struggle for freedom, lamenting tyranny and corruption in still general terms. In “Liberty” (1817), he threatens tyrants with inevitable demise, using the figure of Caligula (as a thinly veiled reference to Emperor Paul, assassinated in 1801) to exemplify the fate that tyrants must suffer. Although his passionate language and express hatred of tyrants make the poem sound like a call to action, there is still an explicit condemnation of political murderers. In the “Dagger” (1821), however, we finally see the figure of Brutus, who offers a model for morally justified tyrannicide and whose passion for freedom inspires future struggle against tyrants. Finally, in an unfinished poem “An immobile guard was dozing on the tsar’s threshold...” (“Недвижный страж дремал на царственном пороге,” ca. 1824), Pushkin has the emperor Alexander identify *himself* as Caesar and mockingly ask about the whereabouts of Brutus, arguably inviting tyrannicide.

Both Pushkin and Ryleev make an explicit identification between ancient Rome and freedom early in their poetry. Pushkin does so in his 1815 poem “To Licinius,”³³⁴ which Iakubovich singles out as an important step in the evolution of Pushkin’s relationship to antiquity, as well as his use of antiquity to comment on his own contemporary society, writing, “Pushkin’s task is to paint an image of ancient Rome, giving it a sense of political satire that could reflect its own contemporary reality ... the civic pathos of this epistle ... is expressed with remarkable energy, foreshadowing the Decembrists’ civic poetry hidden behind an antique veneer.”³³⁵ Iakubovich goes on to connect the Roman allusions in Pushkin’s and Ryleev’s later

³³⁴ Full text of the poem: А. С. Пушкин. *Собрание сочинений в 10 томах*. Т. 1, М.: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1959, 14-16.

³³⁵ Iakubovich 122-3

poems precisely to this poem and its epigraph “After the Latin,” since Pushkin uses a Roman setting to protest corruption and oppression by evoking the idea of Roman freedom.³³⁶ As Wes points out, Pushkin’s addition of “after the Latin” as a subtitle, much like Ryleev’s later claim that his “To the Favorite” was an imitation of a satire by Persius, was likely meant for the censors, since these poems are rather concerned with the poets’ own contemporary reality.³³⁷ The importance of “To Licinius” is especially evident in the fact that Pushkin not only chose to republish it soon after the execution of the Decembrist leaders in 1826 but also placed it first in the compilation.³³⁸ At the same time, however, this early poem does not make any concrete references to the Russian reality. Instead, it establishes the importance of a free society and establishes Rome as the example and symbol of that freedom.

In this poem, written from the perspective of an ordinary Roman citizen of an undefined historical period who despises the immorality, venality, and slavish behavior of his fellow Romans, Pushkin’s narrator proclaims, “I am a Roman in my heart; freedom burns³³⁹ in my chest;/The spirit of the great nation does not slumber in me” (“Я сердцем римлянин; кипит в груди свобода;/ Во мне не дремлет дух великого народа”). These lines imply that the essential characteristic of a Roman is the desire for freedom. This desire is primordial (as the speaker refers to the “spirit” (“дух”) of his people) and emotional rather than intellectual, as he places the freedom in his chest rather than his mind. Moreover, this desire is not a passive one. The verb “кипит,” perhaps best translated as “burns,” suggests passionate and perhaps even violent/destructive love for freedom, one that is bound to react violently against oppression.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ Jakubovich 125.

³³⁷ Wes 164.

³³⁸ Wes 162.

³³⁹ Literally “boils.”

³⁴⁰ This vocabulary of passion and “civic exaltation” often expressed through the vocabulary of burning and fire will become a common feature of Decembrist poetry. See A. Ianushkevich. *Istoriia russkoi literatury pervoi treti XIX veka*, 163.

The connection between Roman-ness and freedom is so strong that that the abandonment of it is portrayed as the downfall of the entire people: “O Romulus’s people, tell me, how long ago did you fall?/ Who enslaved you and shackled you by [his] power?” (“О Ромулов народ, скажи, давно ль ты пал?/Кто вас поработил и властью оковал?”). The invocation of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome, hints at the foundational role that freedom must have had at the inception of Roman society, which has now been destroyed by the chains of power. Although the narrator bemoans other vices of his compatriots, the root of the corruption is ultimately their willingness to become servile. The poem goes on to “prophesy” the future fate of Rome, whose demise is once again explicitly linked to the disappearance of freedom:

Rome will disappear; deep darkness will engulf it;
And a traveler, looking at the pile of stones,
Will exclaim, immersed in dark reflection,
“Rome was made great by freedom and destroyed by slavery.”

Исчезнет Рим; его покроет мрак глубокий;
И путник, устремив на груды камней око,
Воскликнет, в мрачное раздумье углублен:
“Свободой Рим возрос, а рабством погублен.”

The reflection is spoken by an outsider, presumably a non-Roman, who echoes the sentiments of the Roman narrator, legitimizing the idea that the essence and greatness of Rome were both inextricably tied to the freedom of its people. In fact, the only thing that remains of Rome in the memory of later generations is this binary of freedom vs. slavery, and the history of the empire ultimately serves as a tale not of its military conquests or geographical might, which are forgotten, not of its architectural accomplishments, which have been reduced to rubble, but of the greatness of freedom and the destructive effects of losing sight of that freedom.

Even though the term “freedom” appears multiple times in this poem, it is difficult to figure out what the narrator means when he speaks of freedom. This concept remains undefined throughout the poem and it is part of a conceptual matrix that involves hints towards political oppression, the rule of money, the duplicitous and immoral behavior of political sycophants, and

the people's worship of a young and popular "idol." There are a number of political terms, suggesting that the central concern of the poem has to do with the subjugation of the people by the rulers. For instance, we are told of the "enslavement" by "power" ("власть"), a term that refers specifically to rulers. We are told of the misery of "the people," and the poet uses "the people" ("народ") rather than "people" ("люди"), invoking the term that is often used in political discourse and that is important for Decembrist poetry in particular (Pushkin's "Monument" poem, as I mentioned above, makes a point to emphasize the poet's relationship to the *narod* rather than the rulers, for instance). We hear about symbols of power, such as purple clothes and lictors. There are mentions of a "despot" and "a weak Senate." The combined effect of political terminology is the understanding that a crucial problem of Rome is the "yoke" imposed on the people by the ruler.

At the same time, however, the complaints about the lost freedom are intertwined with complaints about the immoral and venal behavior of Roman society that worships popular figures as "idols." The complaints about the people being oppressed are often preceded and followed by criticisms of these people's behaviors. For instance, the speaker contemplates leaving "the immoral city" ("развратный город") "where everything is for sale: laws, righteousness/ And the consul, and the tribune, and honor, and beauty" ("Где всё продажное: законы, правота,/И консул, и трибун, и честь, и красота"). He complains about the behaviors of "shameless" Romans who "crawl" between the houses of the rich. The condemnation of the oppression of the people is combined with the condemnation of the people themselves, and the question about who enslaved the Romans is followed with the more ambiguous "The proud Quirites bowed to the yoke" ("Квиристы гордые под иго преклонились"), where the active verb may suggest that the people themselves are complicit in the surrender of their freedom.

There are a number of consequences of this imprecision. On the one hand, the vagueness at first seems to weaken the political thrust of the poem because the narrator's complaints do not expose a specific problem or advocate a particular course of action. On the other hand, however, the variety of manifestations that the concept of freedom has in this poem might reflect the pervasiveness of this notion and its essential role in society. In other words, freedom is important not only in the political relationship of the rulers to the subjects, but also as the foundation of the entire society, whose morals and character disintegrate in an atmosphere of subservience. The constant movement between the complaints about the lack of freedom and the laments about the immorality of society suggest that the two conditions are mutually dependent, that a society is bound to be corrupt without freedom (and can only be free when morally sound). We will see the sentiment in the works of Ryleev.

Although this early poem does not yet call for a violent fight for freedom, we can see the emotional, passionate response of the narrator, who cannot help acting against the status quo. He is driven to fight it, though he will do so by abandoning the city and engaging in writing literature that will do the fighting for him by exposing the vices of contemporary Rome: "I will expose vice in righteous satire/And bare the morals of our times to later generations" ("В сатире праведной порок изображу/ И нравы сих веков потомству обнажу"). In subsequent poems, literature and fighting are even more merged. In his famous 1817³⁴¹ poem titled, not very subtly, "Liberty" ("Вольность"³⁴²) Pushkin writes, "I want to sing Freedom to the world,/ To strike vice

³⁴¹ There is some dispute about whether the ode was written in 1817, 1818, or 1819. For arguments in favor of 1817, see Tsiavlovskii, M. A. "Khronologiiia ody 'Vol'nost'," 66-81. For an argument for a later date, see Oksman Iu. G. "Pushkinskaia oda 'Vol'nost'" (K voprosu o datirovke)."

³⁴² For an analysis of central concepts and figures in the poem, its relationship to Radischev's earlier "Ode to Liberty," and the ambiguities of the extent to which this poem can be called "revolutionary," see Skatov Nikolai "Ода А. С. Пушкина Вольность в свете событий Великой французской революции," 103-111. For an account of the poem's background and inception, see I. S. Chistova. "Oda 'Vol'nost.'" For a comparison between Pushkin's poem and the identically titled poem of Radischev, inspired by the American Revolution, see Danovskii, A. V. "'Vol'nost' u Radischeva i Pushkina."

on the thrones” (“Хочу воспеть Свободу миру,/На тронах поразить порок”). The verb “to strike” (“поразить”) suggests specifically a violent physical confrontation, giving the poet the role of a fighter.

The lines above can also be used to summarize this poem. It is written in the first person and contains passionate insistence on the importance of freedom and equally passionate threats and warnings to tyrants, whose fate is shown through allusions to the French Revolution and the assassination of Paul I. There are a number of references to the Marsellaise (the French revolutionary song), who is presented as Pushkin’s muse, and to the rulers of the world, who are instructed to safeguard the freedom and laws in their land and threatened with demise should they choose to become tyrants.

There is a curious feature of this poem pointed out by a few scholars. Both Skatov and Debreczeny, for instance, persuasively argue that the poem is an argument for constitutional monarchy, and that it actually shows pretty obvious distaste for political assassins. Similarly, Pugachev analyzes the allusions to the French Revolution in the beginning of the poem to argue that the initial emotional excitement for the beginning stages of the revolution turns into a condemnation of lawlessness that eventually leads to new despotism. For him, the references to the French Revolution are meant to “remind [the reader] of its lessons.”³⁴³ At the same time, however, the poem was and still often is read as a passionate call to revolution, something that both Skatov and Debreczeny bring up. Their explanations for this apparent contradiction are different, though not mutually exclusive. Debreczeny argues that certain psychological factors, such as the experience of collective reading by the Decembrists and the effect of specific

³⁴³ Pugachev V. V. “Predystoriia Soiuza blagodenstvii i pushkinskaia oda ‘Vol’nost’,” 133-135. Pugachev’s article includes a discussion of the political theory behind the poem. See Skatov for a discussion of the relationship between “freedom” and “law” in the poem.

historical references, particularly to the French Revolution and to Radischev's criticism of autocracy and subsequent exile (making him a victim of tyranny), were crucial in the reading of the poem and have affected the perception of its nature, making it appear more revolutionary than it in fact was. Skatov's explanation argues that this perception is not a misreading but, instead, a consequence of certain ambiguities of the poem's language that make Pushkin's attacks appear neither so general as to be read as a meditation on the corruption of power nor so concrete that it could only be applied to a specific historical moment.

The ambiguity of the poem's language and the particular resonance of its historical references are amplified by the essentially emotional, passionate, and martial vocabulary of the poem.³⁴⁴ As Chistova argues, "the ode attracts attention primarily as an expression of heroic, civic emotion," a feature that is common to Decembrist civic poetry.³⁴⁵ The combination of these three factors results in the perception of the poem as a call to action. For example, the poem begins, Pugachev and Oksman have argued, with a reference to the Marseillaise, which is personified as "the proud singer of freedom"³⁴⁶:

<p>Where are you, where are you, the bane of tsars, The proud singer of freedom? – Come, tear off my wreath, Break the pampered lyre... I want to sing Freedom to the world, And strike vice on the thrones.</p>	<p>Где ты, где ты, гроза царей, Свободы гордая певица? — Приди, сорви с меня венки, Разбей изнеженную лиру... Хочу воспеть Свободу миру, На тронах поразить порок.</p>
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The subsequent lines of the poem contain references to French history that place the "proud singer of freedom" in the context of the French Revolution and suggest that the above

³⁴⁴ In fact, Debrezeny's observation about the importance of the emotional appeals in "The Village" could be equally applied to this poem: "the concrete intellectual content was obscured by a general emotional impact." Debrezeny 9.

³⁴⁵ "The poetics of 'Vol'nost'" are driven by excitement, lyrical tension, heroic pathos – the elements that form the Romantic pathos of the pre-Decembrist and Decembrist civic poetry (cf. Ryleev's ode 'Civic Courage'.)"

³⁴⁶ Iu. G. Oksman, "Ot 'Kapitanskoi dochki' A. S. Pushkina k 'Zapiskam okhotnika' I. S. Turgeneva," 184. Pugachev, V. "Predystoriia Soiuza blagodenstviia i pushkinskaia oda 'Vol'nost'," 132-133.

scholars are correct in their analysis. For instance, in the very next stanza Pushkin refers to “the noble Gaul” who was inspired to write “a brave hymn.” The very next lines include a clear allusion to the Marsellaise itself. Pushkin writes, “Tyrants of the world! Tremble!” echoing the Marsellaise’s “Tremblez, tyrans.” A few stanzas later, Pushkin refers to the execution of Louis XVI (“Восходит к смерти Людовик”). In other words, there is little doubt that Pushkin wants his readers to think of the French Revolution here. In fact, until Pushkin turns directly to Russia, the only specific historical allusions in the poem are to the Marsellaise and to Louis XVI, suggesting that Pushkin’s meditations on the importance of law for the peace and well-being of nations are firmly grounded specifically in the historical example of the French Revolution and its bloodshed. At the same time, however, there is enough ambiguity to allow the poem to be read as a warning to tyrants everywhere rather than simply a case study.

Let me return to the beginning of the poem quoted above. These lines are in the present tense and include three imperatives, which suggest immediate and current relevance rather than a historical overview. Three of the verbs allude to progressively more violent actions: “tear off” (“сорви”), “break” (“разбей”), “strike” (“поразить”); the first two are simply violent, destructive actions, but the last, as mentioned above, foreshadows a battle that this poem is to fight – the poet’s goal of praising freedom is identified with attacking vice on thrones; in other words, the freedom is opposed specifically to the abuses of power. This goal is presented as an active immediate aspiration, suggesting that the poet is preparing for an impending fight rather than contemplating the virtues of freedom or mourning its demise as a passive observer, as Radischev had done in his ode.

There are similar markers of immediate relevance through the poem despite its ostensibly French context. For instance, when Pushkin writes, “Pets of capricious Fate,/Tyrants of the

world! Tremble!” (“Питомцы ветреной Судьбы,/Тираны мира! трепещите!”), the temporality (the time to which they are meant to refer) is, once again, ambiguous. The exclamation marks, the imperative mood, the direct address, and the use of plural to address “tyrants of the world” all suggest a general and immediate threat to those practicing oppressive rule. Later, there is another similar apostrophe to a similarly unnamed despot, variously conjectured to be Napoleon I, Alexander I³⁴⁷, or a generalized tyrant³⁴⁸: “Autocratic Villain!/I hate you and your throne” (“Самовластительный Злодей!/Тебя, твой трон я ненавижу[.]”). The emotional charge of the poem – the passionate hatred of tyrants, the warning that tyrants should “tremble,” the mentions of tyrannicide, the condemnation of the “shamefulness” of despotic rule (“You are the horror of the world, the shame of nature” (“Ты ужас мира, стыд природы”)), the “cruel joy” the poet feels seeing the death of tyrants (“I see your death, the death of your children/With cruel joy” (“Твою погибель, смерть детей/С жестокой радостью вижу”))– inspires the reader to share the poet’s indignation and his goal of attacking the “villains” who oppress the people. The direct addresses, fighting vocabulary, and ambiguous temporality allow this indignation to be applied to the contemporary situation, especially since Pushkin ends his poem with the allusion to the assassination of Paul I (which I will discuss below), bringing the reader into recent Russian history.

Not surprisingly, Rome makes an appearance in this poem and is once again implicated in the binary of oppression and freedom and, specifically the violent struggle against oppression. There is, from the beginning, a ghostly presence of Brutus through the obvious allusion of the poem to Radischev’s ode of the same name, which includes a prophesy of Brutus’s awakening in

³⁴⁷ For an argument against Alexander I and in favor of Napoleon I, see B. Tomashevskii. *Pushkin. Kniga Pervaia (1813-1824)*. Б. Томашевский. *Пушкин. Книга первая (1813—1924)*, 144-150.

³⁴⁸ Pugachev, “К вопросу о политических взглядах Pushkin do vosstaniia dekabristov,” 224-5.

the very first stanza.³⁴⁹ However, Brutus does not make an explicit appearance in this incarnation of “Liberty,” perhaps because at this point in history Pushkin, like many others, still believed that constitutional monarchy and rule of law could be achieved through peaceful, legal means.³⁵⁰ At this point, Pushkin warns that neither the rulers nor the people should go beyond the law: “And woe, woe to those tribes,/[...]Where either the people or the kings/Can hold power over the law” (“И горе, горе племенам,/... Где иль народу иль царям/Законом властвовать возможно!”). This belief will soon dissipate, both because of the dissatisfaction with the lack of progress in Russia (in terms of securing a constitution)³⁵¹ and the examples of revolutionary movements in Spain and other Western European countries in the 1820s,³⁵² leading to the introduction of Brutus and the murder of Caesar to two later poems. In the meantime, the readers would perhaps think of Brutus and tyrannicide as an always looming possibility, though not a desirable one at this point.

As Pugachev argues, however, despite the warnings against lawlessness by either the rulers or the people, the main attack and strongest criticism of the poem is targeted at the former.³⁵³ The direct threats and emotionally charged accusations mentioned above are directed exclusively at the rulers, without a call for specific actions from the people. As a result, at this point in Pushkin’s political poetry, Caligula is more useful than Brutus. Still, ancient Rome continues to play a central role in the allusions to tyrannicide and provides a historical model and blueprint for this undesirable but ultimately inevitable outcome. Caligula appears when the poet

³⁴⁹ The figure of Brutus, so important to the French Revolution, began appearing in Russian literature in the early nineteenth century and gradually “became a signal-[word] of the rapidly developing theme of struggle against tyranny.” He became known to Pushkin and the Decembrists through both ancient (Plutarch and Suetonius) and later (primarily Shakespeare and Voltaire) sources. See Ospovat A. “Pavel I’ – potentsial’nyi ziuzhet Pushkina.”

³⁵⁰ Pugachev, , “K voprosu o politicheskikh vzgliadakh Pushkin do vosstaniia dekabristov.”

³⁵¹ Strakhovskiy 18, Gorodetskii 284, Raeff 17-18.

³⁵² Nechkina 162.

³⁵³ Pugachev, “K voprosu o politicheskikh vzgliadakh Pushkin do vosstaniia dekabristov,” 224.

is contemplating the lessons of history while looking at the abandoned palace of Paul I:

When the star of midnight
Shines upon the dark Neva,
And restful sleep make heavy
Carefree heads,
The thoughtful singer looks upon
The tyrant's monument,
Ominously sleeping in the fog,
The palace abandoned to oblivion –

Когда на мрачную Неву
Звезда полуночи сверкает,
И беззаботную главу
Спокойный сон отягощает,
Глядит задумчивый певец
На грозно спящий средь тумана
Пустынный памятник тирана,
Забвенью брошенный дворец —

And he hears the fearsome voice of Clio
Behind these fearsome walls,
Seeing the last hour of Caligula
Play out before his eyes

И слышит Клии страшный глас
За сими страшными стенами,
Калигулы последний час
Он видит живо пред очами

It has been persuasively argued that the lines above refer to the 1801 murder of Paul I,³⁵⁴ whose abandoned palace is said to have inspired Pushkin's composition of this ode. Ending the poem with a veiled reference to Russian history "where the example of the murdered Emperor Paul, father of Alexander I, [is] held up as a lesson to tyrants"³⁵⁵ naturally emphasizes the immediate relevance of the poem to the contemporary Russian situation. There is an ominous tone in these final stanzas as the "thoughtful" poet contemplates the "sleeping" palace of the tyrant, hearing the "terrible voice" of history. The participle "sleeping," "*ominously* sleeping," in fact, presents the palace as still threatening and suggests that the abandonment of the palace is temporary, that another tyrant could occupy it. The "terrible voice" of history behind the "terrible walls" conveys the poet's fear of this possibility. It then becomes the task of the poet to warn aspiring tyrants that retribution will inevitably find them, a direct address that once again implies immediate contemporary relevance and conveys a concrete threat:

Learn from this, o tsars:

И днесь учитесь, о цари:

³⁵⁴ See commentary on the ode in А. С. Пушкин. Собрание сочинений в 10 томах. Т. 1, М.: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1959, p. 563. Moreover, as Irina Chistova writes, "In the archive of N. I. Turgenev, there is a hand-written text of the ode with Pushkin's drawing in the line 'the crowned villain perished,' which depicts a caricatured portrait of Paul I." See I. S. Chistova. "Oda 'Vol'nost.'" ³⁵⁵ Strakhovsky 19.

Neither punishments, nor rewards,
Nor the cover of prisons, nor the altars,
Are reliable protection for you.

Ни наказанья, ни награды,
Ни кров темниц, ни алтари
Не верные для вас ограды.

Although these stanzas are obviously meant to evoke Russian history (the mention of the Neva leaves little doubt about the location of the “tyrant’s monument”), the explicit references in the stanza are to Clio, the mythological muse of history, and to a Roman emperor, placing us in the ancient context. One reason is, most likely, censorship. The desire to avoid mentioning Paul, however, does not automatically translate into the choice of Caligula as a stand-in for the Russian tsar, and it is peculiar that scholars tend to treat this figure exclusively as a transparent mask for Paul.³⁵⁶

So, why Caligula? Martin Lindner, writing about the reception of Caligula, points out that Caligula comes out as the most “sinister” of the emperors described by Suetonius in his biographies³⁵⁷ and illustrates his point with a telling quotation from Suetonius: “So much about [Caligula] as a *princeps*, the rest has to be told about the monster.” In popular reception, he is consistently “the archetype of an intolerant and deranged tyrant, [...] corrupted by his omnipotence.”³⁵⁸ It may be that he was chosen by Pushkin specifically as an *archetype*, a tyrant with no redeeming qualities. Among the poems published to express joy at the death of Paul, who “was remembered as a despot who had acted according to personal whim and had ignored the rights and dignity of the members of the elite,”³⁵⁹ there are references that seem to be made exactly for this purpose. In one poem, he is briefly compared to Commodus³⁶⁰: “The meek race

³⁵⁶ The author of the monograph dedicated exclusively to the poem refers to a “St. Peterburg Caligula” or “Paul-Caligula” while talking exclusively about Paul. See V. Morov. *Oda Pushkina “Vol’nost’” i “Arzamas.”* Marinus Wes refers to the mentions of Clio and Caligula as “incidental” and leaves them without further comment (165).

³⁵⁷ Martin Lindner. “Power beyond Measure – Caligula, Corruption, and Pop Culture.” *Seduction and Power: Antiquity in the Visual and Performing Arts.*

³⁵⁸ Lindner 220.

³⁵⁹ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, 95.

³⁶⁰ Roman emperor 180-192 AD; allegedly exhibited megalomaniacal, dictatorial, capricious, and murderous behavior and was eventually assassinated; his memory was cursed. Due to the near absence of contemporary

of Russians is freed from him/He inherited the throne, lived, and died like Commodus”

("Избавлен от него прекроткой россов род./Наследил он престол, жил, умер как Комод"). In

another, he is compared to both Caligula and Nero³⁶¹ to show the extent of his tyranny. The

absence of any specific details about any of the emperors involves, as well as the vague and

hyperbolic claim that Paul implemented everything that Caligula and Nero could “know [only] in

theory” suggests that the author of the poem was not drawing thoughtful parallels but rather

wanted to shock his reader with the extent of Paul’s despotism and evil:

Here you see the remains of that ruler,
In whom Russia saw its tyrant,
What Caligula, Nero knew in theory,
The Russians experienced from him in
practice.

Се видишь, смертный, прах властителя
того,
Россия зрела в ком тирана своего.
Калигула, Нерон в теории что знали,
То россы от него на деле испытали.³⁶²

More frequently, however, poems refer to him simply as a tyrant, without any particular identification with past historical rulers, and it does not seem that there was a tradition of associating Paul specifically with Caligula, though one could draw certain broad superficial parallels, and it may be that Pushkin was using Caligula as an exaggerated example of Paul’s actions and characteristics, such as the concentration power under his personal control, public performances of domination and authority, humiliation of the court, and volatile moods and eccentricities.³⁶³ However superficial these similarities are, however, they are intensified by the identification (not even the similes that we saw in the two poems above) with Caligula and imbued with insinuations of the enormous and incredible cruelty, murderousness, and depravity

accounts and the extreme hostility of the two that survive (Cassius Dio, for instance, insists that Commodus was worse for Rome than any plague (LXXII.15)), Commodus continues to be a strong candidate for the role of “the ultimate delinquent of the classical world.” Michael Kustow, “A Beast in the Coliseum,” 236. His enduring suitability as a villain is attested by the recent film *Gladiator*.

³⁶¹ Lindner argues that reception often conflates and combines the figures of Caligula and Nero to offer a sort of “compound emperor” (212). This seems to be the approach of this poem as well.

³⁶² Both anonymous poems are published in V. P. Stepanov. “Ubiistvo Pavla I i ‘vol’naia poezia.”

³⁶³ See Wortman 85-97 for a discussion of Paul’s reign. For the Life of Caligula, see Suetonius, *Gaius*.

that permeate Suetonius's account of Caligula, whose favorite saying (according to the biographer) was "oderint dum metuant,"³⁶⁴ "let them hate, as long as they fear." By presenting Paul as Caligula, the author instills in the reader the fear that he himself feels and that motivates the twice-repeated adjective "fearsome" ("страшный"), in the memories of Paul-Caligula's reign. Likewise, he perhaps evokes (and legitimizes) the hatred that dominates the immediately preceding stanza ("Autocratic Villain! I hate you and your throne" ("Самовластительный Злодей! Тебя, твой трон я ненавижу")). The identification with Caligula, then, seems especially appropriate given that fear and hatred are the dominant emotions of this part of Pushkin's poem.

Of course, Caligula is mentioned exclusively in the context of his murder, preserving Rome's status as the site of the struggle for freedom. By beginning the stanza with a reference to Clio, the muse of history, Pushkin may be giving this episode a universal significance, especially since the preceding stanza opens with an apostrophe to a generalized "Autocratic Villain" and the following stanza is once again a generalized lesson to current and future rulers – "Learn from this, o tsars" ("И днесь учитесь, о цари"). In other words, the episode of the murder of Caligula is placed in the context of generalized universal statements. All rulers who do not pay sufficient attention to preserving liberty and laws become identified with this extreme example of a violently destructive reign that will not last long and that is bound to end tragically. The inclusion of Caligula, then, not only shows us a tyrant but also, and perhaps more importantly, teaches a lesson of the violent and justified response to tyranny.

Two later poems make the connection between Rome and freedom even more explicit by praising tyrannicide and, finally, by overtly connecting contemporary Russia with one particular

³⁶⁴ Suetonius, *Gaius* 30.1.

episode of Roman history, that of the murder of Caesar by Brutus. “The Dagger,”³⁶⁵ written in 1821, makes Rome not only the source of freedom but also of the violent fight for freedom and against oppression; it is here that we finally encounter Brutus. Wes, for instance, calls it “a frankly revolutionary poem glorifying tyrannicide”³⁶⁶ and Gorodetskii singles it out as the “strongest” of Pushkin’s revolutionary poems.³⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, “The Dagger” circulated only in handwritten copies,³⁶⁸ but, nevertheless, became a major inspiration for the Decembrists, many of whom knew it by heart.³⁶⁹

In this poem, Pushkin offers models for tyrannicide and praises the dagger, which metonymically represents tyrannicide. The poem opens with an apostrophe to the dagger:

The god of Lemnos³⁷⁰ forged you
 For the hands of the immortal Nemesis,³⁷¹
 The hidden guard of Freedom, the punishing
 dagger,
 The last judge of shame and humiliation.

Лемносский бог тебя сковал
 Для рук бессмертной Немезиды,
 Свободы тайный страж, карающий
 кинжал,
 Последний судия позора и обиды.

Where Zeus’s thunder is silent, where the
 sword of the Law is asleep,
 You fulfill curses and hopes,
 You hide in the shadow of the throne,
 Under the splendor of festive attire.

Где Зевса гром молчит, где дремлет меч
 Закона,
 Свершитель ты проклятий и надежд,
 Ты кроешься под сенью трона,
 Под блеском праздничных одежд.

Like a hellish ray, like the lightning of the
 gods,
 The silent blade shines into the villain’s eyes,
 And, looking around, he trembles,
 During his feasts.

Как адской луч, как молния богов,
 Немое лезвие злодею в очи блещет,
 И озираясь он трепещет,
 Среди своих пиров.

The initial lines of the poem, as Nemirovskii points out, offer a universal prototype of

³⁶⁵ Full text: A. С. Пушкин. *Собрание сочинений в 10 томах*. Т. 1, М.: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1959, p. 142-3.

³⁶⁶ Wes 167.

³⁶⁷ Gorodetskii В. Р, *Lirika Pushkina*, 244.

³⁶⁸ Wes 167.

³⁶⁹ Nemirovskii 195. For an analysis of the poem and the choice of its central figures, see Nemirovskii, I. “Ideinaia problematika stikhotvoreniia Pushkina ‘Kinzhал.’”

³⁷⁰ Vulcan/Hephaestus, who forged the weapons and armor of the other gods and certain heroes.

³⁷¹ The goddess and personification of divine retribution.

tyrannicide, with subsequent examples showing concrete applications of this prototype to particular situations.³⁷² Once again, the emotional charge of the poem strikes the reader right away. There are references to many of the same emotions and passions that we have already seen in “To Licinius” and “Liberty,” such as the shame of oppression (“judge of *shame* and *humiliation*”), the curses that tyrants elicit (“You fulfill curses”), the fear that tyrants should feel (“looking around, he trembles”), the passionate love of freedom (“But the freedom-loving Brutus rose up,” see below). We also see the familiar labels of tyrants as “villains” (“The silent blade shines into the villain’s eyes”). The crucial difference, however, is that while the narrator of “To Licinius” is driven by his love of freedom to leave the oppressive city and fight its vices *with his writing* and the narrator of “Liberty” praises freedom and threatens tyrants with inevitable and just demise while also condemning the assassins, “The Dagger” focuses on the specific instances of tyrannicide and praises the very instrument of the act.

The dagger, moreover, is presented as a tool used by humans but delivering *divine* retribution (“The god of Lemnos forged you,” “For the hands of the immortal Nemesis,” “like the lightning of the gods”), a characteristic that, combined with the vilification of tyrants, imbues the act of tyrannicide with higher moral authority and elevates it above the notions of human murder. The tone of the poem is correspondingly elevated. Gorodetskii writes, “the pathos of this struggle is matched by the solemnity and grandeur of the restrained nervous oratorical intonation.”³⁷³ This tone contributes to the feeling of crisis, of the importance of these historical moments, and the immediate relevance to the contemporary situation. Paul Debreczeny even sees a veiled threat pointed at the Russian throne, though none of the examples listed are drawn from

³⁷² Nemirovskii 197.

³⁷³ Gorodetskii, B. P. *Lirika Pushkina*, 245.

Russian history.³⁷⁴

Although there are quantifiers that impose strict limitations on this act – we are told, for instance, that the dagger is “the last judge” (“Последний судия”), meaning that it is only to be used as the last resort – the praise of an instrument of tyrannicide, written once again in present tense and in passionate language condemning the injustice of despotism, evoking the inevitability of retribution, and offering past examples as inspiration, gives an impression of a call to violent action. There are no peaceful, legal alternatives presented. Moreover, there is a reminder that the dagger is a “hidden guard” (“тайный страж”) that always strikes unexpectedly (“Your unexpected blow will find him everywhere” (“Везде его найдет удар неожиданный твой”)) and in any imaginable location (“On land, at the sea, at the temple, under the tents/Beyond secret locks,/ In your bed, among your family” (“На суше, на морях, во храме, под шатрами,/ За потаенными замками,/ На ложе сна, в семье родной”)). By stressing the idea of a potential attack, Pushkin creates an atmosphere of an immediate danger that is now, and always, a real possibility.

After discussing the mythical origins of the dagger and praising its role in history, Pushkin offers three historical illustrations of admirable political assassinations. The first and most important of the three examples discussed in the poem is the murder of Caesar by Brutus:³⁷⁵

The coveted Rubicon sounds under Caesar,
The sovereign Rome fell, the law bowed its
head;
But the freedom-loving Brutus rose up:
You struck Caesar – and he, dead, embraces
the proud marble of Pompey.

Шумит под Кесарем заветный Рубикон,
Державный Рим упал, главой поник закон;
Но Брут восстал вольнолюбивый:
Ты Кесаря сразил — и, мертв, объемлет он
Помпея мрамор горделивый.

Since the opening lines of the poem present the mythological and divine origins of the

³⁷⁴ "This reference suggests that the dagger can strike close to the Russian throne, too, for Kotzebue was assassinated as a suspected agent of Alexander I." Debreczeny 6.

³⁷⁵ I will focus only on this first example, since the next two are drawn from more contemporary history. Nemirovskii discusses in detail the choice of the other two figures, Charlotte Corday and Karl Sand.

dagger (in the vocabulary of classical mythology, giving legitimate political murder a Greco-Roman origin), the introduction of Caesar and Brutus also signals the move from the universal to the historical. By presenting Brutus's action as the first historic example that illustrates the mission of the dagger, Pushkin creates the impression that Brutus was the first embodiment of that mission, the point of contact between the divine and the human. This one Roman episode, in turn, has been disseminating its ideals throughout history, becoming the source and underlying blueprint that inspires the future struggles for freedom of other historical figures in other times.³⁷⁶ Because the poem portrays history as a chain of heroic actions,³⁷⁷ the reader is left wondering what the next link in the chain will be. Combined with the earlier general threats against tyrannical rulers, this question may turn the reader towards contemplating Russian history and autocracy.

Nemirovskii rightly emphasizes the importance of Brutus's virtue and character for Pushkin and the Decembrists, who were well familiar with the account of Plutarch and Shakespeare's portrayal of Brutus, both of which highlight the nobility of his character.³⁷⁸ As Nemirovskii goes on to argue, the other two figures chosen as examples of praiseworthy political assassinations were also known specifically for their impeccable morals and willingness to sacrifice themselves for the common good.³⁷⁹ All of this is true and undoubtedly crucial to remember while reading the poem and understanding its premises and context. As the dagger was said to be the last resort in an otherwise hopeless situation, so do those who wield it need to be exceptional figures, driven by the notion of the common good and not personal ambition. In fact,

³⁷⁶ It is attested in Charlotte Corday's own writing that she connected her actions to the precedent of Brutus. See Gérard Walter, ed., "Le procès de Charlotte Corday," in *Actes du tribunal révolutionnaire* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1968), 23.

³⁷⁷ Nemirovskii 200.

³⁷⁸ Nemirovskii 196-7.

³⁷⁹ "Thus, Brutus, Ch. Corday and Sand belong to one type in Pushkin's perception. The main features of this type are immaculate personal virtue and complete selflessness, which may include intentional refusal to save one's own life after the act of tyrannicide." Nemirovskii 200.

we see here that the two Romans who were vying for power in Rome, Caesar and Pompey, are portrayed as driven by personal motives of ambition and pride (“covetous Rubicon” (“заветный Рубикон”), “proud marble” (“мрамор горделивый”)), while Brutus acts in response to the oppression of Rome and its laws (“The sovereign Rome fell, the law bowed its head” (“Державный Рим упал, главой поник закон”)). Thus, as was the case in “To Licinius,” there is an inseparable connection between concern for the common good, personal virtue, and the love of freedom.

At the same time, however, Pushkin himself offers only one characteristic of Brutus – “freedom-loving.” It is as though this one characteristic is all that we need to know about Brutus to understand and learn from this historical episode. This one characteristic is imbued with great power, as Brutus manages to do alone what entire Rome could not. Perhaps this point too was intended as potential evidence of (and inspiration for) what one person motivated by true love of freedom can accomplish despite the seeming hopelessness of his circumstances.

In another, unfinished, poem known by its first line, “An immobile guard was dozing on the tsar’s threshold...” (“Недвижный страж дремал на царственном пороге”³⁸⁰) and probably written in 1824, the urging to act escalates to an explicit identification of contemporary Russia with Caesar’s oppression of Rome. A large portion of the extant poem is a monologue by “the ruler of the North” (meaning Alexander I). This identification, therefore, is all the more powerful because it is spoken by Emperor Alexander *himself*, who mocks aspirations of freedom, rejoices at the suppression of European revolutionary movements, and delights in his tyranny:

“Has it been long since the decrepit Europe
raged?
Germany boiled with new hopes,
Austria swayed, Naples revolted,

“Давно ли ветхая Европа свирепела?
Надеждой новою Германия кипела,
Шаталась Австрия, Неаполь восставал,
За Пиренеями давно ль судьбой народа

³⁸⁰ Full text: А. С. Пушкин. *Собрание сочинений в 10 томах*. Т. 2, М.: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1959, p. 20.

Freedom ruled the fate of people
Beyond the Pyrenees,
And only the north preserved Autocracy?

Has it been long – and where are you,
bringers of Freedom?
Well? Bring your oratory, seek natural rights,
Trouble the senseless crowd –
Here is Caesar – and where is Brutus? O,
fearsome orators.

Kiss the scepter of Russia
And the iron foot that tramples you.”

Уж правила Свобода,
И Самовластие лишь север укрывал?

Давно ль — и где же вы, зиждители
Свободы?
Ну что ж? витийствуйте, ищите прав
Природы,
Волнуйте, мудрецы, безумную толпу —
Вот Кесарь — где же Брут? О грозные
витиИ.

Цалуйте жезл России
И вас поправшую железную стопу”

According to Gorodetskii, this poem and especially the lines above should be read as evidence of Pushkin’s complete disillusionment with the “cult of a hero” who will bring freedom to his people,³⁸¹ brought about by the suppression of the revolution in Spain in 1823 and the increasingly reactionary policies in Russia.³⁸² This notion is debatable, especially since, as Gorodetskii goes on to say, Pushkin did not abandon his political ideals; instead, he saw that they were not achievable by the originally intended means.³⁸³ Since the poem remained unfinished, it is difficult to judge the overall effect that it was supposed to have, but Alexander’s statements can also be easily read as provocation and yet another call to action. The latter was the interpretation of Iurii Lotman, who considered Alexander’s question to be an “easily decoded [...] program for a future act.”³⁸⁴ After all, the mockery of the ideals of freedom and the arrogance of the open defense of oppression are bound to provoke indignation. Finally, the suppression of the revolutionary movements in Europe did not necessarily mean an end to the aspirations of making political changes in Russia, as the uprising of the Decembrists, still in the making, would soon show. Around this same time, Ryleev,

³⁸¹ Gorodetskii 284.

³⁸² *Ibid.* 263.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ Iu. Lotman. “Dekabrist v povsednevnoi zhizni (Bytovoe povedenie kak istoriko-psikhologicheskaia kategoriia,” 41.

writing in response to the failures of the revolutionary movements in Southern and Western Europe, ends with a thinly-veiled threat – "now there is a deadly silence in Europe - but it is the same silence as there is on Vesuvius."³⁸⁵

Alexander's megalomania ("Kiss the scepter of Russia/ And the iron foot that tramples you" ("Цалуйте жезл России/И вас поправшую железную стопу")) aims to engulf the whole world in slavery, "bring[ing] quiet servitude to the world as a gift" ("И миру тихую неволю в дар несли"). Alexander's insatiable territorial ambitions may have been intended to recall Caesar's military conquests, while his open delight in oppression may allude to Caesar's alleged monarchic and dictatorial ambitions that provoked his murder. These similarities support Alexander's own identification of himself as Caesar and serve to emphasize the danger that he poses to Russia and the world.

The image of the "iron foot" with which Alexander steps on revolutionary movements around the world may be crucial in understanding the response that Alexander's similarities to Caesar, openly stated ambitions, and mockery of freedom were supposed to elicit in the poem's readers. This image closely recalls a characterization of Caesar in Cassius's speech to Brutus in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar":

Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about.³⁸⁶

It is precisely this speech that is intended to (and does) provoke the indignation of Brutus in Shakespeare's play and ensure his participation in the conspiracy. Shortly after portraying

³⁸⁵ Ryleev, quoted in O'Meara 94.

³⁸⁶ *Julius Caesar*; Act I, Scene 2. The 1821 French translation by F. Guizot, which Pushkin is known to have used since he did not know English, preserves the image: "Eh quoi, mon cher, il foule comme un colosse cet étroit univers, et nous autres petits hommes nous circulons entre ses jambes énormes" *Œuvres complètes de Shakspeare*, Vol. 2, 347. On Pushkin and Shakespeare, including his use of the Guizot translations, see M. Alekseev's "Pushkin i Shekspir."

Caesar as the oppressor of the entire world, Cassius reminds Brutus of their agency, the fact that it is their own fault that they have been tolerating Caesar's tyranny:

Men at some time are masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.³⁸⁷

This allusion to Shakespeare play and, in particular, the speech of Cassius *at the crucial moment of Brutus's choice to join the conspirators* is very telling, since the readers of the poem would have been familiar with the play and would likely remember not only the likening of Caesar to a Colossus but also the subsequent point that they, and only they, are responsible for their inaction and the persistence of the oppression. Perhaps the readers were also meant to realize at this point that they now find themselves in an identical situation that Brutus, the original archetype of a fighter against tyranny, was once in. It is now up to them to make the right choice – to follow Brutus's precedent. By mockingly asking for a Brutus, Pushkin's Alexander makes it clear that the act of tyrannicide is the only possible action against his tyranny.

Brutus's response (which shows "fire," in Cassius's evaluation) in Shakespeare's play ends with lines that strongly resonate with the sentiments of Pushkin's earlier *To Licinius*:

Brutus had rather be a villager
Than to repute himself a son of Rome
Under these hard conditions as this time
Is like to lay upon us.³⁸⁸

Unlike the speaker in Pushkin's early poem, however, Shakespeare's Brutus makes the opposite choice. He does not try to escape oppression, he remains in Rome and kills the tyrant.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.* In Guizot's version, "Les hommes, à de certains momens, sont maîtres de leur sort ; et si notre condition est basse, la faute n'en est pas dans nos étoiles ; elle est en nous-mêmes." 347.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.* In Guizot's translation, "Brutus aimerait mieux être un villageois, que de se compter pour un enfant de Rome aux dures conditions que ce temps doit probablement nous imposer." 348-9.

Would there be a Russian Brutus willing to do the same?

Rome and the Romans in the political poems of Ryleev

The same question also came to plague Kondratii Ryleev, “the poet of the Decembrist cause,”³⁸⁹ in his own work, which, as Patrick O’Meara argues, “bears witness to - indeed, it articulates - his political aspirations and those of many of his generation.”³⁹⁰ Ryleev’s biography includes active participation in a Decembrist secret society and the conspiracy itself. Shortly after resigning his military post and moving to St. Petersburg in 1821 to work as an assessor in a criminal court, Ryleev began publishing civic poetry denouncing oppression, joined the ranks of and eventually was elected to the editorial board of the Free Society of Lovers of Russian Literature, whose members took an active interest in political topics (and whose meeting were also attended by Pushkin), and in 1823 became a member of the Decembrists’ underground Northern Society.³⁹¹ His poetry continued to promote Decembrist ideals until the uprising, in which he himself took part and after the failure of which he was imprisoned and executed.

In Ryleev’s poems, we can see more clearly a number of the themes, moods, and purposes that were present in Pushkin’s poems above,³⁹² especially the final two, “The Dagger” and “An immobile guard was dozing on the tsar’s threshold...” There is the same enthusiastic embrace of freedom³⁹³ and the struggle for this freedom, conducted by individual freedom-

³⁸⁹ For a detailed examination of Ryleev’s life, education, influences, and political outlook, see Patrick O’Meara. *K.F. Ryleev: A Political Biography of the Decembrist Poet*.

³⁹⁰ O’Meara 89.

³⁹¹ O’Meara 155-164.

³⁹² In fact, the similarity of certain concerns shared by Pushkin and Ryleev can be seen in the Gofman’s attempt to prove that a poem traditionally considered to have been written by Pushkin (“To Chaadaev”) was actually composed by Ryleev. See Гофман М. Л. “Пушкин и Рылеев.” *Недра*. М., 1925. Кн. 6. For a rebuttal, see Гроссман Л. П. “Пушкин или Рылеев?” *Недра*. М., 1925. Кн. 6.

³⁹³ Maimin, writing about the concept of freedom in Pushkin and Ryleev, argues that it was central to both Ryleev’s and Pushkin’s work, though it is important to note that there are also differences between the two authors in their approach to it. For Maimin, the main differences between the two is that Pushkin praised freedom without teaching it, unlike Ryleev and that Pushkin was concerned with the complex and sometimes problematic nature of freedom, both political and personal. See Е. Маймин. “О теме свободы в романтической лирике Пушкина.”

loving heroic figures,³⁹⁴ whose actions are central to the historical process. We can also see similar “pent-up feelings of civic indignation, of anger and frustration,”³⁹⁵ often expressed with identical vocabulary, as well as an emotional, inspirational presence of Rome and its heroes as models for translating these feelings into action and joining the struggle against oppression. The call to action often comes to the foreground of his poetry.³⁹⁶ O’Meara, writing about Ryleev’s thought, even argues that the poet “formulated no systematic program for revolt or for subsequent reforms. Yet he was not short of ideas and opinions. He was primarily an enthusiast, a man of action yearning to act.”³⁹⁷ Polina Rikoun sees this impulse to act and inspire action in others as the defining characteristic of Ryleev’s work: “Virtually all of Ryleev’s mature writings aim to convert readers into self-abnegating fighters for freedom.”³⁹⁸ Since Ryleev subordinated his poetry to its civic, revolutionary message and was far more explicit than Pushkin in his intentions, there is less ambiguity and nuance in his political poetry³⁹⁹ than there is in Pushkin’s, though he, too, had many doubts about the use of political violence.⁴⁰⁰ As is the case with

³⁹⁴ On the role of individual historical actors in Pushkin’s work, see Svetlana Evdokimova. *Pushkin’s Historical Imagination*. The interest in heroic personalities was influenced by and in turn led to great interest specifically in the historian Plutarch: “The book *Plutarch for Youngsters, or The Lives of Great Men of All Nations from the Most Ancient to Our Own Times* was translated from French into Russian in 1808; it then underwent two more republications (in 1814 and again in 1819-23), both of which included biographies of worthy Russian men as well. Under the influence of these models, the Decembrists cast themselves as *tiranobortsy* (fighters against tyranny), in the tradition of the heroic figures of Greco-Roman history. For them Brutus was the ideal, a noble and virtuous man who risked all for the good of his country. They were well aware of Brutus from a variety of sources, ranging from Plutarch to Shakespeare to Voltaire, but it appears that Plutarch held sway for them, whether they read him in the original, in translation, or through the filter of Rousseau, who popularized Plutarch in Russian during the eighteenth century.” Trigos 32.

³⁹⁵ O’Meara 169.

³⁹⁶ This feature was singled out by Gabov as a defining feature of the Decembrists, whose patriotism “was alive, active, revolutionary. They thought that to love their fatherland and people meant taking part in the struggle against the oppressors...” Gabov G. *Obschestvenno-politicheskie i filosofskie vzgliady dekabristov*.

³⁹⁷ O’Meara 89.

³⁹⁸ Polina Rikoun. “The Maker of Martyrs: Narrative Form and Political Resistance in Ryleev’s ‘Voinarovskii.’”

³⁹⁹ And considerably less attention paid to the aesthetic aspects of his poetry, which was often schematic/formulaic and for which he was criticized by Pushkin, as well as later critics. Grossman, for instance, labels Ryleev’s style as “heavy-handed,” “almost prosaic” and “rhymed prose” (p. 215). However, there is a recent argument in favor of paying more attention to Ryleev’s form and artistic skill: Polina Rikoun. “The Maker of Martyrs: Narrative Form and Political Resistance in Ryleev’s ‘Voinarovskii.’”

⁴⁰⁰ Tseitlin characterizes Ryleev’s poetry as a struggle between the revolutionary and the legal approaches, showing

Pushkin's poems, however, Ryleev's poetry becomes gradually more radicalized, "as he moves from supporting a constitutional monarchy to advocating [...] regicide and republicanism."⁴⁰¹

A poem written shortly before the Decembrist uprising, "Voinarovskii," evokes many of the concepts and emotions we saw in Pushkin's poems above (I have italicized the familiar vocabulary). Though the poem is ostensibly set in sixteenth-century Ukraine, both scholars and Ryleev's contemporaries saw it as a clear expression of contemporary concerns.

But I am not able to forgive
The *tyrants* of my fatherland
For the centuries of insults
And leave the *shame of injury*
Without *just retribution*.
Only a slave can be so despicable and weak.
Can I calmly look
At my *enslaved* countrymen?...
No, no! This is my lot: *to hate*
Tyrants and slaves, without distinction.

Но вековые оскорбленья
Тиранам родины прощать
И *стыд обиды* оставлять
Без *справедливого отмщенья*,
Не в силах я: один лишь раб
Так может быть и подл и слаб.
Могу ли равнодушно видеть
Порабощенных земляков?..
Нет, нет! Мой жребий: *ненавидеть*
Равно тиранов и рабов.⁴⁰²

The role of the poet is to promote that freedom, and, like Pushkin, Ryleev writes that his task will be to praise the hero who defeats the tyrant: "O, how I will try to praise with my lyre/Him who frees my fatherland from you [tyrant]" ("O, как на лире я потщусь того прославить,/Отечество моё кто от тебя избавит!")⁴⁰³ This quote is from an early poem, however, and Ryleev soon goes much further than Pushkin, creating the concept of a "citizen-poet"⁴⁰⁴ and subordinating his poetic aspirations to his duties as a citizen. In his famous

a clear preference for the former: "Борьба между революционными и либеральными тенденциями идеологии Р. проходит через всю его творческую деятельность. «Мятежному» «вольнoлюбивому», «гражданскому» содержанию его поэзии приходилось пробивать себе дорогу сквозь толщу неблагоприятных для его развития тенденций — через стремление к легальной борьбе с существующим режимом." Цейтлин А. Рылеев // Литературная энциклопедия. Т. 10. — [М.: Худож. лит., 1937]. — Стб. 453—459.

⁴⁰¹ Trigos 34. In an 1821 poem "To Alexander I," he expresses a sentiment similar to Pushkin's warnings in "Liberty," writing "Равно ужасны для людей/И мятежи и самовластье./Гроза народов и царей/Не им доставить миру счастье!" By 1824, however, he sees a violent uprising as the inevitable and only means to secure freedom and rights (see poem "Я ль буду в роковое время..." below).

⁴⁰² See O'Meara 190-3.

⁴⁰³ "To the Favorite" (see discussion of this poem below).

⁴⁰⁴ "The citizen in the Decembrists' sense was above all an eloquent orator, a public tribune, convincingly demonstrating the allure of liberty and the intolerable nature of slavery." Bazanov's definition, cited in O'Meara 169

dedication that accompanied “Voinarovskii,” Ryleev explains his priorities:

As Apollo’s stern son,
You will find no art here:
But there will be living feelings, -
I am not a Poet, but a Citizen.

Как Аполлонов строгий сын,
Ты не увидишь в них искусства:
Зато найдешь живые чувства, -
Я не Поэт, а Гражданин.

There is an explicit contrast of priorities here, that of art versus feeling.⁴⁰⁵ The feelings are then identified as the feelings of a citizen, and presumably refer to the civic duty and the participation in the fight against tyranny. Across the poems written in 1824 and 1825, we can see the poet become consumed by the desire for freedom and the preparation for the coming struggle for this freedom. Soon he will write, “[My] soul, troubled by heavy thoughts/Now only aches for freedom” (“Душа в волненьи тяжких дум/Теперь одной свободы жаждет”⁴⁰⁶). This progression is clearly reflected in the poems that evoke Roman figures.

Like Pushkin, Ryleev makes an explicit connection between Rome and freedom. Out of the ancient figures, Cato and, especially, Brutus, make the most frequent appearances in his poetry.⁴⁰⁷ In his 1823 poem “Civic Courage,” he explicitly refers to Rome as “This land of freedom” (“Сей край свободы”) suggesting, as Pushkin had, that freedom is the defining quality of ancient Rome. Roman figures become important for their virtue, their love for their fatherland and, especially, their struggle for freedom. Before turning to Rome directly, Ryleev, likely following Derzhavin, condemns those leaders whose actions were guided by military ambition.

⁴⁰⁵ Polina Rikoun has demonstrated that the very narrative structure of one of Ryleev’s poems works to encourage “political conversion” by offering “a chain of framed narratives, where each frame both describes a story of a character’s conversion into a fighter against tyranny and helps convert another important character in the next frame,” a chain that is intended to extend “into the real world” and draw the reader in as part of the next episode in the fight against tyranny. She uses this observation to argue that Ryleev’s poetic skill deserves more attention, which it does, though, of course, we could also take this observation to show the extent to which Ryleev’s perceived duty as a citizen permeated his poetry.

⁴⁰⁶ “К. N. N.” (1824 or 1825)

⁴⁰⁷ The hero of the poem “Voinarovskii” above, for instance, singles out Brutus as the central influence on the development of his character: “I have respected Brutus from my childhood:/[He was] a noble defender of Rome./Truly free in his soul,/ Truly great in his deeds” (“Чтить Брута с детства я привык:/Защитник Рима благородный,/Душою истинно свободный,/Делами истинно велик”).

It is notable that the figures that Ryleev chooses to illustrate those military leaders whose behavior is to be abhorred are not Romans, while those who illustrate proper civic duty and virtue are exclusively the inhabitants of the Roman Republic:

Alas, every century, in turn,
Saw Attilas⁴⁰⁸ and Napoleons⁴⁰⁹:
They appeared in thrones...
But how many Ciceros⁴¹⁰ have there been?

Увы, Атил, Наполеонов
Зрел каждый век своей чредой:
Они являлися толпой...
Но много ль было Цицеронов?

Only Rome, the master of the world,
This land of freedom and laws,
Was able to produce, alone,
Two Brutuses and two Catos.

Лишь Рим, вселенной властелин,
Сей край свободы и законов,
Возмог произвести один
И Брутов двух и двух Катонов.

Whereas Derzhavin had used both positive and negative examples of Roman figures to illustrate proper behavior and virtues of a nobleman,⁴¹¹ Ryleev offers us an idealized Rome for a moment by describing it as a free land of virtuous men who fought for freedom and protected their fatherland. Although Rome is introduced with the epithet “master of the world,” it is ultimately more notable and worth-mentioning for being “the land of freedom,” a sentiment that is in line with the preceding lines that contrast military might with civic virtue.

As a number of scholars have pointed out, there is a generalized image of a fighter for freedom in Ryleev’s poetry. In the words of Bazanov, this hero “was a generalized and abstract figure.”⁴¹² We can see this tendency in the fact that Ryleev refers to historical figures in the plural in the lines above. Moreover, there is a list-like quality to his references, where historical details of the individual figures are erased and only a particular quality that is perceived to unite

⁴⁰⁸ The leader of the Huns, who invaded Europe in the fifth century, causing widespread death and destruction.

⁴⁰⁹ Emperor of France, who invaded a number of European countries, and Russia, during a series of wars between 1803 and 1815. Both he and Attila are used here to represent greedy ambition that leads to warfare and bloodshed.

⁴¹⁰ Roman orator of the 1st century B.C., admired by the Decembrists as a patriotic defender of republican freedom and values. For Ryleev, he appears to be particularly important as the savior of Rome from Catiline (as will be evident in two poems quoted below).

⁴¹¹ See discussion of the odes “Nobleman” and “On Nobility” in the previous chapter for examples.

⁴¹² Introduction to Ryleev’s collected works, В. Базанов, А. Архипова. “Творческий путь Рылеева.”

them is important. The “two Brutuses” mentioned above are Lucius Junius Brutus, who lived in the 6th century B.C. and, according to tradition, was instrumental in overthrowing the monarchy to become the first consul of the Roman Republic, and the far more famous Marcus Junius Brutus, who lived in the 1st century B.C. and was involved in the conspiracy against Caesar. The “two Catos” are Marcus Porcius Cato “the Elder,” who lived in the 3rd-2nd century B.C. and is remembered as a staunch defender of traditional Roman values, morality, and discipline, and his great-grandson Marcus Porcius Cato “the Younger” who lived in the 1st century B.C. and was a major opponent of Caesar, finding it preferable to die fighting for the republic than to submit to Caesar.

The details – such as their specific beliefs, actions, and life circumstances – are not important, however, and perhaps would be detrimental to the spirit of the poem.⁴¹³ Instead, the figures, are made identical to each other through a kind of mathematics – a “Brutus” and a “Cato” become human units of freedom-loving and virtue. In the process, their best individual associations with or exhibitions of patriotism, morality, and defense of freedom become amalgamated into a generalized ideal citizen to provoke admiration and emulation. This amalgamation also seems to suggest that these particular qualities – excellent moral character, patriotism, and love of freedom – are inseparable and each one entails the others, the same sentiment that we saw in “To Licinius” and “The Dagger.”

We can see this inseparability in another, earlier, stanza, where civic courage is portrayed as “the strength” of free souls and the spirit of ancient peoples (presumably ancient Greece and Rome) that had saved Rome from Catiline’s conspiracy and made the Catos famous. All of these concepts are so intertwined that it is then no longer surprising that the Brutuses and the Catos are

⁴¹³ Cato the Elder’s work on agriculture, for instance, included instructions to sell old and sick slaves – hardly a point suitable to the anti-serfdom platform of the Decembrists.

equally admirable and interchangeable figures:

Is it not you, civic courage,
Of unwavering, noble citizens,
Is it not you, who was the genius of ancient
states,
Who is the strength of free souls,
O courage, the gift of gracious heavens,
The mother of heroes, the cause of miracles,
Was it not you who made the Catos famous,
Who saved Rome from Catiline,
And who remain, in our days,
The firm pillar of the laws.

Не ты ль, о мужество граждан,
Неколебимых, благородных,
Не ты ли гений древних стран,
Не ты ли сила душ свободных,
О доблесть, дар благих небес,
Героев мать, вина чудес,
Не ты ль прославила Катонов,
От Каталины Рим спасла
И в наши дни всегда была
Опорой твердою законов.

Cassius – another participant in the conspiracy against Caesar – joins the ranks of freedom-fighting abstractions in the poem that made Ryleev famous, “To the Favorite,” written in 1820 as a thinly-veiled attack on Alexander I’s extremely unpopular minister and counselor Count Arakcheev:

It is not rank, or blood, – only virtue is
venerable;
Sejanus! Even the tsars are despicable without
it;
And in Cicero I respect not the consul,
But rather the savior of Rome from Catiline.
O, worthy man! Why can you not appear
again,
To save your countrymen from a dire fate?
Tremble, tyrant! He could be born –
Cassius, or Brutus, or Cato, the enemy of the
tsars.

Не сан, не род – одни достоинства
почтенны;
Сеян! и самые цари без них – презренны;
И в Цицероне мной не консул – сам он
чтим,
За то что им спасён от Катилины Рим.
О муж, достойный муж! почто не можешь,
снова
Родившись, сограждан спасти от рока
злого?
Тиран, вострепещи! родиться может он,
Иль Кассий, или Брут, иль враг царей
Катон!

Instead of addition, we see substitution here, but the underlying effect of creating human units of freedom-loving virtue is the same. By prophesying the birth of a “Cassius, or Brutus, or Cato,” Ryleev suggests that any one of these figures will do and nothing about the individuals themselves is particularly important. Instead, they once again represent a type of a man who is an embodiment of personal virtue, love of freedom, and patriotism. The role of these figures is

rhetorical and emotional effect – they serve as inspiration to the noble (perhaps inflamed by Ryleev’s rhetorical question and hope for a similar figure) and a direct threat to the tyrant. The abundance of exclamation points and the use of direct address convey the emotional charge of the poem, and emphasize the expectation of impending crisis suggested by the historical allusions. The references to Sejanus (the prefect of the Praetorian Guard who came to hold enormous and oppressive power under the emperor Tiberius in the 1st century A.D. but was eventually executed) and the conspiracy of Catiline (an impoverished nobleman who tried to overthrow the Roman Republic in the 1st century B.C.) are important not only as illustrations of men whose immoral ambition was destructive to their homeland but also because they conjure up past instances of conspiracy and violent political confrontation.

The transition to the Russian context echoes the previous examples by the repetition of the verb “to save” (“спасти”) and the reference to “dire fate” (“от пока злого”), suggesting that there either will or should (perhaps intentionally left unclear) also be a confrontation between the tyrant and the noble heroic savior. The insistence that Russia will soon face a critical moment of its own makes the need for a Russian incarnation of Cassius, Brutus, or Cato even more pressing.

There is a curious blurring of villains to create a composite object of opposition in the poem as well. The identification of Arakcheev with Catiline and Sejanus implies that he is an enemy of Russia and its people and that whoever attacks him will be acting to save the state. Thus, ostensibly, the tyrant is not identified with the ruler but rather with a perfidious ambitious individual acting to further his own ambition even against the legitimate authorities. The very next lines, however, attempt to call forth a Brutus, Cassius, or Cato, all of whom are remembered for opposing a dictatorial ruler. Moreover, Ryleev mentions “tsars” twice in this except, a reference that is definitely not applicable to an emperor’s minister. As a result, there is once

again a blurring that erases specific historical details and circumstances in favor of an abstract generalized image of an immoral oppressor who is guided by ambition and will eventually be opposed and deposed by a virtuous citizen. For instance, Sejanus, who otherwise is a more apt comparison to Arakcheev because of his involvement in the military and close relationship to the emperor Tiberius, was put to death not by a noble citizen but by Tiberius himself, whose dictatorial tendencies, as described by Tacitus, were well-known to the Decembrists.

This generalized and universalized struggle soon becomes more precise and concrete. As was the case with Pushkin's poem "An immobile guard was dozing on the tsar's threshold..." ("Недвижный страж дремал на царственном пороге"), Ryleev's last political poem that evokes Rome also openly connects it to contemporary Russia and shows the need of a Brutus in an explicitly Russian context. This poem, "Will I, at this fateful time" ("Я ль буду в роковое время") was probably composed in 1824 or even 1825; according to several of the Decembrists, it was written in December 1825, the very month of the uprising.⁴¹⁴ Due to its "political suggestiveness," it could not be published in Russian until 1893.⁴¹⁵ The poem is worth quoting in full:

Will I, at this fateful time,
 Shame the title of a citizen
 And mimic you, pampered tribe
 Of degenerate slaves?
 No, I cannot spend my life
 In the embrace of lust, in shameful leisure
 And to suffer with a burning soul
 Under the heavy yoke of autocracy.
 Let those youths, who are unable to guess
 their fate,
 Let them fail to understand the destiny of
 these times,
 Or to prepare for the future struggle
 For the oppressed freedom of man.

Я ль буду в роковое время
 Позорить гражданина сан
 И подражать тебе, изнеженное племя
 Переродившихся славян?
 Нет, неспособен я в объятых
 сладострастьях,
 В постыдной праздности влечить свой век
 молодой
 И изнывать кипящею душой
 Под тяжким игом самовластья.
 Пусть юноши, своей не разгадав судьбы,
 Постигнуть не хотят предназначенье века
 И не готовятся для будущей борьбы
 За угнетенную свободу человека.

⁴¹⁴ Mordovchenko, "Ryleev," 81.

⁴¹⁵ O'Meara 195.

Let them look coldly, with a cold soul
Upon the misfortunes of their fatherland,
And fail to see in them their future shame
And just reproaches of future generations.
They will repent, when the people, rising,
Catch them in the embrace of leisurely bliss
And, seeking free rights in tumultuous
insurrection,
Cannot find among them their Brutus or
Riego.

Пусть с хладною душой бросают хладный
взор
На бедствия своей отчизны,
И не читают в них грядущий свой позор
И справедливые потомков укоризны.
Они раскаются, когда народ, восстав,
Застанет их в объятьях праздной неги
И, в бурном мятеже ища свободных прав,
В них не найдет ни Брута, ни Риеги.

Like much of Ryleev's civic poetry and certainly the poems above, this poem is written as a passionate monologue that prophesies an imminent violent uprising of the oppressed against "the heavy yoke of autocracy" specifically in Russia. The coming struggle for freedom and rights is portrayed as the fated, defining moment of the age ("the destiny of these times" ("предназначенье века")), the preparation for which should be one's only concern. The narrator's passionate opposition ("to suffer with a burning soul" ("изнывать кипящею душой")) to autocracy turns into a passionate accusation of those who do not share his passion and are indifferent to the plight of the people and the impending struggle. Ryleev uses the word "shame" ("позор") twice here in order to condemn those who are not willing to fight and presumably shame them into playing their part in the coming revolt.

Strikingly, and certainly in contrast to Pushkin's poems above, Ryleev writes himself into this poem, drawing attention to his own position as a citizen who, unlike many of his compatriots, is prepared to join the fight. This development echoes a draft version of the poem "Voinarovskii" mentioned above, which included the explicit turn away from writing and towards action: "There is no peace, no conditions/Between a tyrant and a slave;/ We need not ink, but blood,/ We have to use the sword" ("Нет примиренья, нет условий/Между тираном и

рабом;/Гут надо не чернил, а крови,/Нам должно действовать мечем”⁴¹⁶). In a way, this poem becomes the point of transition where the poet delivers a rallying cry before joining the battle himself. He now identifies himself not as a poet but as a citizen and a fighter and we are told that the only figures that matter now are Brutus and Riego, those who have personally served as leaders in the struggle against tyranny.

Brutus appears here in a particularly important role, though there is once again a list-like quality to the final line where Brutus is now interchangeable with Rafael del Riego, the Spanish general who led the 1820 revolt that briefly re-established the Spanish Constitution of 1812 before French intervention restored absolute monarchy. These names focus the various themes of the poem (the passion for freedom, the understanding of one’s civic responsibility, and an active role in the fight against tyranny) and, as Bazanov and Arkhipova argue, serve as a call to action.⁴¹⁷ Perhaps the departure from exclusively ancient history as inspiration is meant to remind the reader that recent history, too, has seen such heroic behavior from citizens of other countries, and it is now the Russians’ turn to become the next link in the chain of exemplary freedom fighters. The autocracy has become intolerable, the people are ready to fight for their freedom, and it is up to the readers to understand their civic duty right *now*, at this defining historical moment, and step into the role that Brutus and others have played in their respective societies. It is no longer enough to admire Brutus; one must become him.

It seems this poem had precisely the effect that Ryleev had hoped for: one of the Decembrists will later write in his memoir,

“The echoes of ‘Citizen’ were heard on December 14 in the Senate Square. As he was leaving his house, the Decembrist A. M. Bulatov said to his brother, ‘We, too, will have Brutuses and Riegos, and they might be even greater than those revolutionaries.’”

⁴¹⁶ O’Meara 191.

⁴¹⁷ V. Bazanov, A. Arkhipova, Introduction.

“Отзвуки ‘Гражданина’ слышались 14 декабря на Сенатской площади. Выходя из дому, декабрист А. М. Булатов говорил своему брату: ‘И у нас явятся Бруты и Риеги, а может быть, и превзойдут тех революционистов.’”⁴¹⁸

Conclusion

For both Pushkin and Ryleev, then, Roman history came to represent the struggle for freedom and provide a model for opposition to the Russian autocracy. Although their attention to the outstanding character and patriotism of their chosen heroes can be considered a continuation of Derzhavin’s approach to ancient history, the Decembrists introduce major changes to the understanding and use of Roman allusions by focusing their attention on the Roman Republic and its heroes to actively oppose the status quo. As it becomes increasingly clear that there are no available legal means for implementing a constitutional monarchy and introducing greater personal freedoms in Russia, both authors turn to the example of Brutus to legitimize the notion of tyrannicide, appeal to the noble sentiments of their fellow men, and inspire a Russian Brutus. The intent to inspire is responsible for the essentially emotional, agitational function that Rome plays at this time.

The importance of Roman examples to the Decembrist thought was immediately perceived by the state, and classics came to be regarded with great suspicion, contributing to the political Rome’s virtual disappearance from the public discourse in 1826-1855. Hints of it remain, however, and in the next chapter I will examine the continuing, though fragmented and elusive, presence of Rome in the novel “Oblomov” by Ivan Goncharov.

⁴¹⁸ Dovnar-Zapol’skii, ed. *Memuary dekabristov*, 238.

CHAPTER IV

Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* and the Rejection of the Political [Rome]

Goncharov's Rome is a broken Rome. It stands for youthful civic dreams crushed by bureaucracy, for the everpresent echoes of ever-looming violence, and for the unrealizable and morally suspect desire to escape. It is broken in form as well as content, as Roman allusions in the novel are indirect and brief, working through associations and hints rather than overt narrative. There is, perhaps, a glimmer of hope offered by an aesthetic approach to Rome that, combined with classical Greek and later European art and literature, can remain a repository of the noble and the beautiful, but even this Rome now has to fight for existence in a hostile environment, and the question of whether it can be useful for the contemporary Russian context remains unresolved.

By this period, mid- to late nineteenth century, the classics, especially Latin classics, had become inextricably bound with Russian political thought, and both were distrusted by the government. The relationship between intellectuals and the state, in general, was gradually worsening, as the Decembrist revolt of 1825 and the European events of 1848 made the emperor progressively more fearful of potential oppositional ideas.⁴¹⁹ In 1833 the Minister of Education proclaimed the doctrine of "Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality," writing,

Our common obligation consists in this, that the education of the people be conducted, according to the Supreme intention of our August Monarch, in the joint spirit of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality. I am convinced that every professor and teacher, permeated by one and the same feeling of devotion to throne and fatherland, will use all

⁴¹⁹ For a more detailed account of the effect to the events of 1848 in Russia, see Isaiah Berlin, "Russia and 1848," 1-21.

his resources to become a worthy tool of the government and to earn its complete confidence.⁴²⁰

Becoming a worthy tool of the government was not a pleasant experience, however. State service was viewed with disdain as a swamp of petty bureaucracy and incompetence, since there was a sense that meaningful involvement in the political life and thought was impossible. Censorship was strict, especially after 1848 until Nicholas's death in 1855, and “Uvarov's brief formula dominated most of the Russian press.”⁴²¹ These conditions were understandably hostile to the kind of uses that Roman history and literature had been put to before now. Since these general circumstances are well known and thoroughly discussed in historiography, I will limit myself to citing a few contemporary testimonies about the intellectual and political atmosphere of the time when Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* was written in order to demonstrate the underlying trends that existed in the background of the novel.

Contemporary testimonies from the mid-nineteenth century paint a bleak picture, often employing the metaphor of suffocation to convey an inability to express oneself freely. Boris Chicherin, a jurist, scientist, and professor of the Moscow University, paints a dark picture in his memoir:

At the time there was no public life in Russia, no practical interests that could attract the attention of intellectuals. All external activity was suppressed. State service consisted of routine ascent up the bureaucratic ladder, in which protection played an enormous role. Young people who initially passionately embraced it soon became disillusioned because they saw the uselessness of their efforts and only necessity could force them to remain on this path. Public service, likewise, was empty of any substance and served as a field for personal ambition and petty intrigue. [...] Censorship excised everything that could appear to contain even a distant hint of a liberal mindset. No deviation was allowed from the views of the government and the demands of the Orthodox Church.

[В то время в России не было никакой общественной жизни, никаких

⁴²⁰ Cited in Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801-1855*, 108.

⁴²¹ Riasanovsky 110.

практических интересов, способных привлечь внимание мыслящих людей. Всякая внешняя деятельность была подавлена. Государственная служба представляла только рутинное восхождение по чиновной лестнице, где протекция оказывала всемогущее действие. Молодые люди, которые сначала с жаром за нее принимались, скоро остывали, потому что видели бесплодность своих усилий, и лишь нужда могла заставить их оставаться на этой дороге. Точно так же и общественная служба, лишенная всякого серьезного содержания, была поприщем личного честолюбия и мелких интриг. [...] При тогдашней цензуре немилосердно отсекалось все, что могло бы показаться хотя отдаленным намеком на либеральный образ мыслей. Не допускалось ни малейшее, даже призрачное отступление от видов правительства или требований православной церкви.^{422]}

This distrust of dissent extended to the arts and sciences, since they often seen as the sources of political unrest, and censorship grew stricter. In a diary entry dated December 20, 1848, the censor, professor, and literary critic Aleksandr Nikitenko laments this distrust, writing,

Today there is a fashion for the kind of patriotism that rejects everything European, including science and art, and insists that Russia is so blessed by God that it will live only by Orthodoxy, with no science or art. Such patriots know nothing about history and think that France proclaimed itself a republic and German rebels because there are in the world such things as physics, chemistry, astronomy, poetry, panting, and so on.

[Теперь в моде патриотизм, отвергающий все европейское, не исключая науки и искусства, и уверяющий, что Россия столь благословенна богом, что проживет одним православием, без науки и искусства. Патриоты этого рода не имеют понятия об истории и полагают, что Франция объявила себя республикой, а Германия бунтует оттого, что есть на свете физика, химия, астрономия, поэзия, живопись и т. д.^{423]}

An entry from December 6 provides an extreme example of such “patriotism”:

Yesterday one of our young master’s students...was defending a dissertation: “On the embryo in general and the embryo of the gastropod slug” ...As is common, his talk included some Latin, German, and French terminology, which he put in parentheses when talking about technical subjects. From this Professor Shihovskii drew the conclusion that Varnek does not love his fatherland and despises his language, which he pompously announced to the author of the dissertation. The latter was so puzzled by this new method of scholarly disputation that he could not think of anything to say. The professor then began hinting that the disputant has materialist leanings and in conclusion announced that the dissertation was so

⁴²² Boris Chicherin, *Vospominania*, 40-1.

⁴²³ Nikitenko, A. *Zapiski i dnevnik*.

nonsensical and confusing that he could not understand anything at all.

[Вчера один из молодых магистров...защищал в университете диссертацию: "О зародыше вообще и о зародыше брюхоногих слизняков."...Диспутант, по обыкновению, сопровождал свою речь в иных местах латинскими терминами, иногда немецкими и французскими, которые ставил в скобках при названии технических предметов. Из этого профессор Шиховский вывел заключение, что Варнек не любит своего отечества и презирает свой язык, о чем велеречиво и объявил автору диссертации. Последний был до того озадачен этим новым способом научного опровержения, что растерялся и не нашел, что отвечать. Тогда профессор начал намекать на то, что диспутант якобы склонен к материализму, а в заключение объявил, что диссертация так нелепа и темна, что он не понял ее вовсе.⁴²⁴]

In this climate, the classics were viewed with particular hostility. Marinus Wes has called this post-Decembrist period from 1826 to 1855, and particularly 1848-1855, "The Iron Age" for classics in Russia, and not without reason.⁴²⁵ Roman allusions were viewed with suspicion, particularly when they could be interpreted to contain political statements, even when these statements were purely historical. Roman history was heavily edited to erase politically dangerous episodes. One censor was engaged in erasing the names ("not the ideas but the very names and facts") of ancient Greeks and Romans who "fought for the freedom of their fatherland or had a republican way of thinking in the republics of Greece and Rome."⁴²⁶ Roman emperors were no longer "assassinated," they simply "perished." The censors also monitored translations. Even the Minister of Education, Sergei Uvarov, encountered trouble when he tried to translate the Greek term *demos* with *narod* ("the people"). He was instructed to write "citizens" instead and had to engage in a long dispute with the censor to keep his original translation, since he thought the latter term would be a gross mistranslation of the original.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Nikitenko 316.

⁴²⁵ Wes 196-250.

⁴²⁶ "I went to the censorship committee. There are strange things happening there. For instance, the censor Mehelin is erasing from ancient history all great people who fought for the freedom of their fatherland or had a republican way of thinking in the republics of Greece and Rome. He is not erasing the ideas, but the very names and facts." Nikitenko 326.

⁴²⁷ "Count Uvarov was telling me the other day about his struggle with the censorship in the publication of his book,

Of course, there were those who attempted to defend the importance of classical learning and arts and sciences in general. A number of prominent intellectuals, including Belinsky, Herzen, Gogol, Goncharov⁴²⁸, Granovsky, Uvarov, and many other critics, writers, and professors believed that Greek and Latin classics should remain an integral foundation of one's education. Because the chief opposition to the teaching of Greek and Roman literatures and history was their potential to inspire anti-autocratic sentiments and important European political upheavals into Russia, those who defended the classics had to address the relationship between classics and politics and argue that there was no direct causation between classical learning and political events in Western Europe, particularly the French Revolution and the political upheavals of 1848. Of course, these events often did, however superficially, evoke the classics. Images of Brutus, one of the murderers of Julius Caesar, had been commonly 'displayed' during the French Revolution.⁴²⁹ In Russia, too, Roman figures had recently been used as a call to action against autocracy by the Decembrists, who repeatedly evoked the figures of Brutus, Cassius, and Cato as precedents and inspiration for their aspirations. Such proliferation of classical imagery made it difficult to separate the classics from the way that the classical figures had been used, and, in fact, the attempts to argue for such a separation ultimately proved unsuccessful.

In such a climate, Rome no longer had space to be an explicitly political Rome that could

'On the Green antiquities discovered in southern Russia.' He had to translate a few Greek inscriptions into Russian. He came upon the word *demos* – the people. The censor would not allow this word and changed it to 'citizens.' It took the author a lot of effort to convince the censor that that was not a translation but a distortion of the original. The censor also would not allow him to say that the murdered Roman emperors were murdered, he had to write that they perished, and so on." Nikitenko 342.

⁴²⁸ Goncharov lamented the contemporary state of the classics in *The Precipice*, where the figure of Kozlov exemplifies their sad fate: "In Kozlov's character I had the self-effacing Russian scholar in mind [...] Without response, without the fertile soil and the company of soulmates in which scholarship may develop itself, he makes his way through life, painfully and miserably, exiled to the countryside, forgotten, without books, without money, surrounded by people who are absolutely not interested in scholarship." Quoted in Wes 320.

⁴²⁹ On their presence in the visual culture of the French Revolution, see Denise Amy Baxter, "Two Brutuses: Violence, Virtue, and Politics in the Visual Culture of the French Revolution." On the role of classical models in the rhetoric, law, and politics of the French Revolution, see, for instance, Lynn Hunt, "The Rhetoric of Revolution in France," and Mortimer Sellers, "Classical Influences on the Law and Politics of the French Revolution."

openly serve as a meditation on Russian history, though, of course, it does not disappear completely. The association between Rome and autocracy remains – the emperor Nicholas I was still being “compared to Jupiter, Neptune, Apollo,”⁴³⁰ much like his predecessors were compared to various Roman emperors and deities. At times, one could also get away with Aesopian criticism. Timofei Granovsky, a history professor at the University of Moscow, for instance, used his lecture on the Roman Empire to point out, implicitly, the flaws in the Russian educational system⁴³¹ under the conditions of autocracy, though it was expected that he would instead “bring out the grandeur of the Roman Empire, which has not yet been understood by historians, and which lacked only one thing, hereditary succession!”⁴³²

Rome, and the classics in general, were on safer ground as a Romantic aesthetic realm that serves as an escape from the bureaucratic nightmare of government service, the “red specter of censorship,”⁴³³ the disillusionment with contemporary society, and other political and social concerns. As an aesthetic realm, Rome loses much of its specificity, and becomes joined with ancient Greece and later Western European traditions to exemplify artistic ideals. Importantly, here we often encounter ancient art and mythology rather than ancient history. One traveler to Rome, the poet Apollon Maikov, reflects in his “Roman Sketches” both the aesthetic perception of Rome and its merging with ancient Greece:

How marvelous the sky is above this classical Rome!
 Under this sky one must become a painter.
 Nature and people seem different here, as if they are paintings
 From an anthology of bright verse from ancient Hellas.⁴³⁴

Ах, чудное небо, ей-Богу, над этим классическим Римом!
 Под таким небом невольно художником станешь.
 Природа и люди здесь будто другие, как будто картины
 Из ярких стихов антологии древней

⁴³⁰ Wes 196.

⁴³¹ Priscilla Reynolds Roosevelt, “Apostle of Russian Liberalism: Timofei Granovsky” 83.

⁴³² From a letter to Herzen written in 1850, quoted in Wes 342.

⁴³³ Herzen, preface to *Letters from France and Italy*.

⁴³⁴ Maikov, *Ocherki Rima*, 189.

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Here we see the identification of Rome with aesthetics, since one must inevitably become an artist (not, for instance, a revolutionary) when one visits Rome. This transformation occurs automatically, regardless of the visitor's inclinations and intentions, which suggests that there may be no other possible reactions to Rome except the move into an exclusively aesthetic realm. The people and landscapes are then compared to "paintings" that, curiously, arise from Greek poetry. The last two lines both contribute to the impression of Rome as an aesthetic location and merge classical Greece and Rome into a single aesthetic realm.

At the same time, however, the political is rarely entirely absent.⁴³⁵ Andrew Szegedy-Maszak, in his study of the impressions and motivations of nineteenth-century foreign, particularly British and French, tourists in Rome, argues that for most foreign visitors of this period, "the basic tone remains one of romantic elegy," and the "dominant emotion...a satisfying melancholy."⁴³⁶ For these tourists, the dilapidation of the Colosseum was a crucial feature of the monument, bringing to mind the notions of transience, passage of time, the interaction of nature (which could be seen in the flowers growing among the ruins) and human endeavors, and other such subjects.⁴³⁷ Importantly, these concerns are not particularly important to the Russian writers visiting Rome in this period. For Alexander Herzen, a Russian political thinker, for instance, the Colosseum remains a clear reminder of Rome's imperial grandeur, and the perception of the

⁴³⁵ While the impression of Italy as "the country of the arts" was common among travelers from other countries as well, the authors I discuss present the desire for the aesthetic and the arts specifically as an alternative to the political, rather than something that has its own merit. For an account of the impressions of British tourists in Rome, see C.P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics: The Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth-Century England*.

⁴³⁶ Andrew Szegedy-Maszak, "A Perfect Ruin: Nineteenth-Century Views of the Colosseum," 121, 124.

⁴³⁷ See, for instance, Roland Mayer, "Impression of Rome," on the expectations and subsequent impressions and reactions of various foreign visitors to Rome. Mayer includes an account by Charles Dickens and other nineteenth-century writers, who expressed strong disappointment at the absence of general "desolation and ruin," the features that they expected of Rome.

contemporary Rome, though introduced as an aesthetic escape from the political, remains inextricably tied to Roman and Russian history. Even the anthology of Maikov, who found himself becoming “a painter” in Rome, includes a poem originally named “The Colosseum,” which reminds the readers of the tyrants and the martyrdoms associated with imperial Rome.

Moreover, even in the instances where Rome becomes ostensibly de-politicized and aestheticized, the escape to Rome becomes a political statement, a desire to escape the environment where the aesthetic is constantly suspected of being politically subversive. In the works of Goncharov, the flight to Rome is an alternative to the retreat inward, into one’s imagination. In fact, in figures such as Oblomov and Raiskii (the protagonists of his two major novels *Oblomov* and *The Precipice*, respectively) the two impulses are inextricably intertwined, because the flight into imagination and fantasy appears with a desire to go abroad to Italy.

The reverse is also true, however. The political Rome is rarely strictly political, even in the broadest understanding of the term. Andrzej Walicki argues that, disillusioned with political ambitions, Russian writers of this period turned to philosophical questions instead.⁴³⁸ In many cases of Roman allusions, what we see is a sort of a merging of the political, the philosophical and the ethical. These writers are concerned with the individual’s role in society, his involvement or the lack thereof in social and political matters, his response to change and historical events around him. These concerns are intertwined in a variety of combinations, but they are essentially inseparable, as they are inseparable in much of the criticism during this time.

Oblomov⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Andrzej Walicki, "Russian Social Thought: An Introduction to the Intellectual History of Nineteenth-Century Russia," 6.

⁴³⁹ The novel was published in 1859 and deals primarily with the inaction of an impoverished and “superfluous” member of the aristocracy. For the most part, we see the protagonist on his sofa, avoiding any activity other than daydreaming. He receives visitors, including his childhood friend Stoltz, who try to draw him out of his house and into society, but for the most part they fail, as he comes up with a series of delays and excuses to justify inaction. In the second part of the novel, Oblomov falls in love with Olga, an acquaintance of Stoltz, and their romance temporarily leads him to become more involved in the world. However, once the prospect of marriage becomes a

Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* is a fruitful text to explore in terms of its relationship to the classics because it embodies all of the trends I discussed above. While it is not obviously and overtly concerned with the classics, much like other novels of this period, it nevertheless includes a number of allusions to ancient history and literature, and I will speculate about the way that these allusions contribute to the more prominent concerns of the novel. The allusions are never as explicitly explained or justified as they are in the other works I've dealt with. They are usually seemingly minor, always oblique, and easy to overlook. I believe that these qualities are responsible for the fact that there is, on the one hand, definite if scattered recognition that classics are indeed very important to the novel,⁴⁴⁰ and, on the other hand, a lack of any dedicated and systematic treatment of their role. They work on the level of hints and possible rather than definite associations, a method that is not surprising given that Goncharov himself had once worked as a censor. And yet, these hints and associations form definite patterns in this and his other works.

My task in this chapter is to try to explore these patterns and offer a reading different from the dominant ones that think of it as a representation of a "superfluous man"⁴⁴¹ and

serious consideration and Oblomov has to consider its practical aspects, he ends up backing out and returning to inaction. Despite all these ostensible failings, he remains a deeply sympathetic figure, because he is kind and honest and a stark contrast to many of the more pragmatic characters in the novel whose motivations are greed and ambition. The motives for his departure from public life and a preference for his dream world reflect the common complaints about bureaucracy and moral corruption of state service, and his refusal to participate in it often seems noble, though the impression is undercut, time after time, by his laziness, apathy, and helplessness. The novel became popular immediately after its publication and was considered by many of its early critics to be an accurate depiction of the failings of a particular stratum of Russian society (or the Russian "character" in general).

⁴⁴⁰ Marinus Wes, for instance, dedicates one of his two individual author sections to Goncharov in the chapter on this period. Amy Singleton has dedicated a full chapter to the resemblances between the novel and Homer's *Odyssey* in her *No Place Like Home*. Other scholars, such as Milton Ehre and Christine Borowec, draw occasional attention to some of Goncharov's classical references in their bigger arguments.

⁴⁴¹ Nikolai Dobrolyubov's 1859 article "What is Oblomovism?" (*Что такое обломовщина?*), which was written shortly after the publication of the novel and which was endorsed by the Goncharov himself, provided the model for this reading and interpretation. Dobrolyubov argued that the central feature of Oblomov is "utter inertness resulting from apathy towards everything that goes in the world. The cause of this apathy lies partly in Oblomov's external position and partly in the manner of his mental and moral development. [...] He became accustomed to lolling about at a very early age because he had people to fetch and carry for him, to do things for him. Under these circumstances

“Russian laziness and apathy.”⁴⁴² Instead of focusing on the moral and social virtues or, more frequently, failings of the central character,⁴⁴³ I will try to explore the circumstances and underlying models for his choices and behaviors, models which appear to be classical and carry evaluative content independent of the satirical portrayal of the main hero. More specifically, I will look at the Roman and Greek allusions in the novel in order to see how they function to give particular meaning to Oblomov’s understanding of contemporary circumstances and escapist fantasies, suggesting a darker interpretation than the comical and hyperbolic pronouncements of the main character may lead us to expect. Milton Ehre, a leading Goncharov scholar, has called the novel “a comedy of alienation,”⁴⁴⁴ and I would like to explore how classical references and genres complicate the idea that the novel as a “comedy” and provide a way to understand the “alienation” of its main character.

Although most of these allusions remain in the background of the novel, they appear at crucial moments where Oblomov talks about his motivations and ideals, as well as moments where Oblomov is nearly provoked into action by either his far-more-socially-active friend Stoltz or his love interest Olga. Because they appear at such crucial moments, these allusions supply the concepts and binaries that serve as the underlying structure, the foundation of the novel, and offer a hidden movement from the dangerous historical and political Rome, to the transitional

he lived the idle life of a sybarite even when he did not want to...he really does not know how to do anything and cannot do anything; he is really unable to undertake any useful task.” Nikolai Dobrolyubov, “What is Oblomovism?” 333 & 335. For a discussion of the term and the phenomenon “superfluous man,” see F. Seeley, “The Heyday of the ‘Superfluous Man’ in Russia.” Seeley dates this “heyday” to the period between 1815/1820 to 1855, “the period of uncertainty and comparative inaction marking the transition of the intelligentsia from its 18th-century function as an instrument of the autocracy to its 19th-century function as protagonist of a new order.”

⁴⁴² Miliukov, A. P. “Russkaia apatiia i nemetskaia deiatel’nost’.”

⁴⁴³ Not surprisingly, since Oblomov is the central character of the novel, most scholarship focuses specifically on him or the way that he functions as a representative of a social phenomenon, “of the man wholly alienated from society, who can neither know or need to render social service nor fulfill a social function” or a psychological attitude. See F. D. Reeve “Oblomovism Revisited,” Milton Ehre, *Oblomov and His Creator: the Life and Art of Ivan Goncharov*, and Leon Stilman, “Oblomovka Revisited.” See Helen Rapp, “The Art of Ivan Goncharov,” for a biographical reading of Goncharov’s works. For a collection of criticism contemporary to Goncharov, see M. Otradin, ed. *Roman I.A. Goncharova Oblomov v russkoi kritike*.

⁴⁴⁴ Milton Ehre, *Oblomov and His Creator: the Life and Art of Ivan Goncharov*, Chapter 7.

idyllic (Horatian) opposition of the country to the city (the reliance on the pastoral here continues a long-standing pattern of members of the Russian nobility “retreating from the clamor and complexity” of the “increasingly impersonal and abstract public realm”⁴⁴⁵), and, finally, the attempted escape into Greek mythology.

The oppositions we see rely on an identification of Rome with the historical, political, active, temporally linear and violent, whereas the Greek offers a mythological, perhaps philosophical, apolitical, passive, cyclical and safe alternative. The turn from Roman to Greek, then, also means a rejection of all these attributes of Roman and, by extension, Russian life. This rejection is significant because it seems to be complete – the author does not turn simply to a different period of Roman history to find a more suitable example, as was the case with the Decembrists. Instead, the political is rejected entirely. This movement away from the Roman (historical), through the idyllic, and into the Greek (mythological) realms is one of two underlying structures of classical references here.

The second is another, wholly separate trend of Roman reception, one that continues the Romantic tradition of relating to Rome as a repository of cultural and artistic ideals. This Rome is quite different – it is composed not only of ancient Roman artifacts, but also Hellenistic ones, as well as later Renaissance, Baroque, and other masterpieces.

These two ways of approaching Rome at first seem to run parallel courses, since their nature and role in the novel are quite different. On the one hand, we see a Rome that fuses the classical past (both Greek and Roman) with later (Renaissance and beyond) art to create a repository of artistic and cultural ideals. This Rome is associated with youthful idealism and, importantly, with Stoltz’s attempts to revive his friend’s ambitions and immerse him in active

⁴⁴⁵ Thomas Newlin, *The Voice in the Garden: Andrei Bolotov and the Anxieties of Russian Pastoral, 1738-1833*.

social and perhaps political life. On the other hand, we see a Rome of the 1st century B.C., the time of bloody civil conflict, proscriptions, and the transformation of the Roman Republic into an empire – a transition to autocracy. This Rome and the turn away from it through escape into the idyllic and the mythological are much more concrete and grounded in Rome’s political history.

Despite the essential difference between these two approaches to Rome, there may be a reason for their coexistence in the novel, especially because they are united by Oblomov’s rejection of them; in both cases, moreover, the rejection is motivated by a certain disillusionment. It may be that the underlying purpose for both Romes is to show that classical ideals are incongruous with contemporary circumstances. However, since this similarity is a very broad one and the particulars of the two approaches to Rome in the novel are essentially different, I will treat them as distinct in this chapter.

Goncharov’s references to antiquity, then, are not a straightforward matter, and it is worth paying more attention to Stoltz’s exclamation “You reason like one of the ancients: they wrote this way in the old books,” (“Ты рассуждаешь, точно древний: в старых книгах вот так всё писали”⁴⁴⁶) to ask which ancients and books he might have in mind, and what this mode of reasoning might be.

The idealized aesthetic Rome

The life of Il’ia Oblomov consists of nostalgia and avoidance of practical matters. We first meet him at home, where he is usually found. Most of the time, he does not bother to dress or get off the sofa, spending his days daydreaming of a free and peaceful existence in the country, where he would not be bothered by practical concerns, such as keeping accounts, paying bills,

⁴⁴⁶ Goncharov 174.

and so on. What makes Oblomov's stagnation (which I will discuss at a later point) even more poignant is not only his occasional inspired monologues, but also his conversations with Stoltz, in which the two friends remember the plans they once shared and provide a glimpse into Oblomov's earlier motives and views of an ideal life, where political and social involvement coexist with, and are complemented by, the aesthetic side of life, the prime artifacts of which are found in Europe and, especially, in Rome.

We find out that Oblomov himself had aspirations of government service in his youth, and that he even worked for two years, before becoming disillusioned with the nature of the work and the transformation that he saw in himself as the result of this work. The revelation comes as a surprise, because we have seen Oblomov's distaste for service and, in general, for any kind of active involvement in society. The satirical portrayal of his daily routine, which consists of lying on his couch in a robe, intending and failing to accomplish even the most simple practical tasks, such as putting on his shoes and writing a letter, gives us the impression that his inaction is a matter of indolence, of a weak and spoiled character. And yet, Oblomov had initially come to St. Petersburg in order to enter the service. He was preparing "for an occupation, a role – mainly, of course, in service, which was the goal behind his arrival in St. Petersburg. Then he also thought about a role in society..." ("к поприщу, к роли -- прежде всего, разумеется, в службе, что и было целью его приезда в Петербург. Потом он думал и о роли в обществе..."⁴⁴⁷). The word "of course" ("разумеется") presents this goal in a matter of fact tone, suggesting that it is a given that Oblomov, as any young man, would have the ambition of entering state service. The fact that this ambition is presented as the desire for a "role" tells us that there is an expectation of making a difference. In other words, Oblomov dreamt of entering

⁴⁴⁷ Goncharov 55.

service because he wanted to make an active and important contribution to the functioning of government and society.

At a later point, in his attempts to reawake his friend's interest in life, Stoltz reminds Oblomov that he had once intended "to serve as long as he can, because Russia needs hands and heads to make use of its inexhaustible resources" ("служить, пока станет сил, потому что России нужны руки и головы для разработывания неистощимых источников"⁴⁴⁸) and, having fulfilled his duties, he had intended to travel around Europe and enjoy art and poetry. The first part of the statement brings us back to the motivation behind state service, linking it with the notion of necessity. While the earlier statement had only referred to Oblomov's desire to make a contribution, this iteration of his motivation paints a situation where he is needed.

In the ideal world that he had imagined, the political and the aesthetic are supposed to complement each other. The travel and aesthetic experience were supposed to culminate in a trip to Rome. Stoltz continues,

Was it not you who, with tears in his eyes, looked on the engravings of Raphael's madonnas, Correggio's night, the Apollo Belvedere, and said: 'My God! Will I never be able to see the originals and grow mute from horror that I am standing before a creation of Michelangelo, Titian, with the soil of Rome under my feet? Will I live out my whole life and only see myrtles, cypresses, and orange trees in greenhouses rather than their homeland? Will I never breathe the air of Italy, revel in the blue of its sky?

[Не ты ли со слезами говорил, глядя на гравюры рафаэлевских мадонн, Корреджиевой ночи, на Аполлона Бельведерского: "Боже мой! Ужели никогда не удастся всглянуть на оригиналы и онеметь от ужаса, что ты стоишь перед произведением Микеланджело, Тициана и попираешь почву Рима? Ужели провести век и видеть эти мирты, кипарисы и померанцы в оранжереях, а не на их родине? Не подышать воздухом Италии, не упиться синевой неба!"⁴⁴⁹]

This view of Italy, which merges the classical and later traditions in order to present Rome as the cultural capital of the world, that emphasizes the authenticity of experience, foresees emotional

⁴⁴⁸ Goncharov 180-181.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

responses, and foregrounds the Italian sky, echoes the expectation of Romantic travelers in Rome, with the notable difference of excluding the themes of ruins, transience and decay that we find in the works of many visitors to Rome, including, for instance, Byron.⁴⁵⁰ The Rome that is important here is a place where art, from the classical Apollo Belvedere to the later works of Raphael and Titian, lives continuously and organically.

This Rome is, of course, an imagined realm. It is represented only by the best-known examples and masters of painting and sculpture, such as the Apollo Belvedere, which had been singled out of by a number of writers, including Goethe, who is included in the list of exclusively Romantic writers that Oblomov was reading in his youth – “Rousseau, Schiller, Goethe, Byron”⁴⁵¹ – and for whom, as for the other writers in this list, Rome was an important source of aesthetic and intellectual inspiration. It is important, however, that this aesthetic experience in *Oblomov* exists not independently, not for its own sake, but in an underlying binary relationship with government service. The trip to Rome is intended to replenish the energy that Oblomov has spent and will continue to spend in his service.⁴⁵² Both of these are part of an active life, and Stoltz, in his attempts to inspire Oblomov to return to a more active life, continues to remind him of his youthful aspirations and to call him to Italy, which is again represented as the culmination of the journey:

Oblomov received another letter from Stoltz, which began and ended with the words: “Now or never!,” and contained accusations of immobility and an invitation to come immediately to Switzerland, where Stoltz was intending to go, and then finally to Italy.

⁴⁵⁰ Catharine Edwards, *Writing Rome*, 14-15.

⁴⁵¹ Goncharov 183.

⁴⁵² This attitude towards Italy was quite widespread and is reflected in letters and other writings from this period. Alexander Herzen, for instance, wrote in the fifth of his *Letters from France and Italy* “And as soon as I stepped on Italian soil, I was enveloped in another world, one that was full of life and energy, that filled me with strength and health. I healed morally after crossing the border from France; I owe to Italy the renewal of my faith in my strength and the strength of others, many of my hopes again reappeared in my soul, I saw inspired faces, tears, I heard passionate words.”

[Обломов дома нашел еще письмо от Штольца, которое начиналось и кончалось словами: "Теперь или никогда!", потом было исполнено упреков в неподвижности, потом приглашений приехать непременно в Швейцарию, куда собирался Штолец, и, наконец, в Италию.⁴⁵³]

It is important to remember, however, that it is Stoltz's memories that paint an energetic and restorative picture of this journey. Oblomov's recollections of such intention have a markedly different tone:

Yes, – he said suddenly, remembering the past, – after all we intended first to travel across all of Europe, to cross Switzerland on foot, to burn our feet on Vesuvius, to descend into Herculaneum. We were almost mad! Such nonsense!

[Как же, — сказал он, вдруг вспомнив прошлое, — ведь мы, Андрей, сбирались сначала изъездить вдоль и поперек Европу, исходить Швейцарию пешком, обжечь ноги на Везувии, спуститься в Геркулан. С ума чуть не сошли! Сколько глупостей!⁴⁵⁴]

Unlike Stoltz, Oblomov refers to his former plans as “nonsense,” conveying the disillusionment that he feels about such aspirations. The hyperbolic description (burning ones legs on the volcano, traveling everywhere across Europe) conveys youthful and unrealistic idealism. It is also notable that the two final points of his journey are a destructive volcano and an Italian town destroyed by the volcano - even this never taken journey ends in ashes and death. Even the excitement of the journey is tainted by pessimism. Unlike Stoltz, Oblomov now views the trip as madness; given that the trip itself was a part of a certain lifestyle – “to work so that the rest would be sweeter, and to rest by living another, artistic, elegant kind of life, the life of painters and poets” (“работать, чтоб слаще отдыхать, а отдыхать - значит жить другой, артистической, изящной стороной жизни художников, поэтов”⁴⁵⁵), the other half of an active political and social life, the madness can be extended to include all of these youthful intentions.

⁴⁵³ Goncharov 265.

⁴⁵⁴ Goncharov 181.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

While we may be inclined to blame Oblomov's laziness for the failure of these plans, Oblomov's own past experience and present encounters with his acquaintances, who are involved in state service, suggests that there may also be the nature of service that leads to disappointment and escapism. After all, in his account of the decline of his enthusiasm and participation in life, Oblomov singles out his work in the chancellery as the moment when his spiritual death began.⁴⁵⁶ The pattern of triviality, incompetence, and, especially, fear reigns among the state employees, and Oblomov's immediate reaction is disillusionment:

...he was bitterly disappointed on the very first day. As soon as the supervisor appeared, the commotion began; everyone became embarrassed, ran around, straightened themselves in fear that they don't look good enough to be seen by the supervisor [...] This happened, as Oblomov noticed later, because such supervisors see in terrified faces not only respect but also earnestness and aptitude for service.

[...он жестоко разочаровался в первый же день своей службы. С приездом начальника начиналась беготня, суета, все смущались, все сбивали друг друга с ног, иные обдергивались, опасаясь, что они не довольно хороши как есть, чтоб показаться начальнику [...] Это происходило, как заметил Обломов впоследствии, оттого, что есть такие начальники, которые в испуганном до одурения лице подчиненного, [...] видят не только почтение к себе, но даже ревность, а иногда и способности к службе.⁴⁵⁷]

Instead of playing an important role, the employees lose their individual identities in the "commotion." The label *sueta* emphasizes the pointlessness of such activity. This commotion is not merely meaningless, however, it is actually harmful because it changes people:

And P'ia P'ich suddenly grew timid without knowing why when the supervisor entered the room, and his voice began disappearing and a different voice appeared instead, thin and nasty, as soon as the supervisor spoke to him.

[И Илья Ильич вдруг робел, сам не зная отчего, когда начальник входил в комнату, и у него стал пропадать свой голос и являлся какой-то другой, тоненький и гадкий, как скоро заговаривал с ним начальник.⁴⁵⁸]

Oblomov's visitors, whom we see in the very beginning of the novel, suggest that the nature of

⁴⁵⁶ Goncharov 183.

⁴⁵⁷ Goncharov 56.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

state service has changed little since Oblomov left it. One of his visitors, a certain Sud'binskii, who appears in the novel only once to speak to Oblomov about his job, gives us a picture of what government service entails: trivial tasks, endless hours, and fear. The speaker, answering Oblomov's question about news and changes in the service, first suggests that there have been many important changes. His list, however, includes only superficial rule changes that address formalities rather than any practical issues:

Yes, there are a lot of changes: they got rid of "your faithful servant" in letters, now you have to write "please accept the assurance"; we are no longer supposed to provide two copies of the service records. They are adding three offices and two special assignment officials.

[Да много кое-чего: в письмах отменили писать "покорнейший слуга," пишут "примите уверение"; формулярных списков по два экземпляра не велено представлять. У нас прибавляют три стола и двух чиновников особых поручений. ⁴⁵⁹]

The triviality of the changes, especially the change in how one is required to sign one's letters, appears particularly comical when juxtaposed with the expansion of the staff and the long hours that Sud'binskii has to work (eight to five in the chancellery, then eight to midnight at home). Because there is no mention of any changes that actually seem to demand the long hours or additional staff, the news of the expansion prompts us to agree with Oblomov's judgment that Sud'binskii is drowning in triviality:

You, my dear friend, are stuck in the mud up to your ears, - Oblomov thought watching him leave. - He is blind, and deaf, and mute to everything else in the world. But he'll become important, he will be in charge of things, racking up titles... We call that a career! But how little of a person is needed there: who needs a mind, a will, feelings - what for? A luxury! He will live out his life and feel nothing stir inside him... and meanwhile he works from eight to five in the chancery, from eight to midnight at home - that poor man!

[Увяз, любезный друг, по уши увяз, - думал Обломов, провожая его глазами. -- И слеп, и глух, и нем для всего остального в мире. А выйдет в люди, будет со временем ворочать делами и чинов нахватает... У нас это называется тоже

⁴⁵⁹ Goncharov 22.

карьерой! А как мало тут человека-то нужно: ума его, воли, чувства -- зачем это? Роскошь! И проживет свой век, и не пошевелится в нем многое, многое...А между тем работает с восьми до пяти в канцелярии, с восьми до двенадцати дома -- несчастный! ^{460]}

The meaninglessness of the job ensures, for Oblomov, that Sud'binskii entire life will be equally wasted. He reduces Sud'binskii's interests to finishing his tasks and getting promotions, concerns which take up all his time and prevent any development of his mind, will or emotions. His conclusion, "how little of a person is needed there," creates an unbridgeable gap between government service and being a decent human being, the gap that is made especially prominent in the case of another minor character, Tarant'ev.

Tarant'ev is the only character engaged in service whose background and motivations are revealed to the reader. He is also one of the only two characters in the novel who are portrayed as thoroughly despicable. Tarant'ev ambitions, we find out, have to do with abusing his fellow men. Curiously, one of the things we hear about his background has to do with his unfinished classical education. At first, it seems that knowledge of Latin is tied to the boy's potential, though we soon find out that his Latin learning ended right around the time when he was beginning to try to make sense of one of the basic Latin texts used in schools:

The boy was naturally gifted and mastered Latin grammar and syntax in three years. He was starting to work on Cornelius Nepos, but his father decided that what he already knew was enough and would give him a huge advantage over the older generation and that future studies might hurt his chances of working in a government office.

[Способный от природы мальчик в три года прошел латинскую грамматику и синтаксис и начал было разбирать Корнелия Непота, но отец решил, что довольно и того, что он знал, что уж и эти познания дают ему огромное преимущество над старым поколением и что, наконец, дальнейшие занятия могут, пожалуй, повредить службе в присутственных местах. ^{461]}

⁴⁶⁰ Goncharov 25.

⁴⁶¹ Goncharov 38.

This approach to the classics is a stark contrast to that of Oblomov and Stoltz portrayed above, because it is linked not to ideals but to gaining an advantage over one's fellow men in state service. The interest is not in the works themselves, but in using the superficial familiarity for abusing others. Moreover, it seems that any real knowledge of the classics was viewed as a possible obstacle. Accordingly, Tarant'ev begins to forget his Latin: "The sixteen-year-old Mihei did not know what to do with his Latin and began to forget it while living in his parents' house" ("Шестнадцатилетний Михай, не зная, что делать с своей латынью, стал в доме родителей забывать ее") and, once he joins the service, he abandons it entirely: "His Latin was useless in Petersburg service" ("В петербургской службе ему нечего было делать со своею латынью")⁴⁶² Here, there is an explicit opposition between service and a classical education, an opposition that was also present in Oblomov's experience and that he will bring up again when talking to Stoltz about his country estate.

It is also important that the abandonment of classical learning happens simultaneously with the gradual decline of Tarant'ev moral qualities and his involvement in state service. As he begins service, he both becomes an increasingly bitter and abusive person and abandons his Latin learning, and the simultaneity of these developments suggests at least a strong correlation. Classical learning, then, is closely tied to a moral and noble life, as we see both in the example of Oblomov and Stoltz and the counter-example of Tarant'ev.

The historical Rome

There is another Rome present in *Oblomov*, however, and it is a much more concrete, historical and darker Rome than its Romantic artistic alternative. In this respect, the novel differs from other works of Goncharov. In most cases, classical references are positive and connected

⁴⁶² Goncharov 39.

with ideals (in the case of Raisky, Kozlov, Aduiev and other characters of *The Precipice* and *A Common Story*, the two other novels that are often grouped together with *Oblomov* in a sort of a trilogy, though *Oblomov* is by far Goncharov's best known work), as they were in the youthful aspirations of Oblomov and Stoltz. References to Roman history are uncommon in the works of Goncharov, and they occur more frequently in *Oblomov* than in Goncharov's earlier or later writing.

These references to the historical Rome point primarily to the 1st century B.C, a tumultuous period characterized by political instability, civil war, proscriptions, bloodshed and the official demise of the Republic. Importantly, all of these references are reminders of the negative aspects of this period, and they form another alternative to Oblomov's inaction and refusal to participate in political and social life. Unlike the Romantically-conceived Rome of his youth, however, this active, historical ancient Rome is destructive rather than restorative, both to the individual and to society. This use of history complicates the readings of the novel that point to "historical time as the triumphant force in the temporal realm"⁴⁶³ (as opposed to Oblomov's idealized cyclical time in the country). Although this force may be triumphant in that it overcomes other approaches to life and attempts to escape it, its moral standing can no longer be taken as unambiguously positive. At the very least, it will lead us to ask at what human cost this triumph is achieved.

The references to historical Rome occur in the narrative moments where we see a possibility of an active involvement in society or a drastic change in Oblomov's life and behavior. They occur at points where either Stoltz or Olga, the two catalysts that could, but ultimately fail to, inspire Oblomov to abandon his escapism in favor of an active life. At first,

⁴⁶³ A view that comes out in Aleksandr Tseitlin's *I. A. Goncharov*, as Christine Borowec points out. See "Time after Time: The Temporal Ideology of *Oblomov*."

they seem humorous and out of place, a reflection of Oblomov's delusions of grandeur. For instance, during Stoltz's first visit, Oblomov compares him to Brutus, one of the assassins of Julius Caesar. The comparison is completely incongruous, since Stoltz is simply trying to get Oblomov to leave his house and, eventually, take charge of his life, yet Oblomov perceives this encouragement as a murderous betrayal. Throughout the novel, Stoltz acts as Oblomov's protector, keeping track of his estate and finances and protecting him against those who try to take advantage of his incompetence and gullibility. Oblomov's comparison here is mostly humorous, though he is prone to seeing himself in opposition to the world, so the joke is likely to contain a measure of accusation. An allusion to Caesar lies in yet another evocation of Roman history by Oblomov. In contemplating his life with Olga, Oblomov compares his decision to get married to crossing the Rubicon, the act that signaled the beginning of the civil war in Rome in 49 B.C. As in the previous case, the comparison seems incongruous and is, therefore, comical. On its own, it would likely be merely amusing rather than provocative.

However, though Oblomov is certainly no Caesar and there is no reason to think that the allusions are meant to characterize Oblomov himself, these references remind us of a specific period of Roman history, and the choice is so consistent that it does not seem coincidental. In a conversation with Stoltz, where Oblomov paints a picture of his ideal life and opposes his imaginary ideal life to what he perceives to be the reality of an active political life, he once again refers, in what seems to be a less delusional way, to the same period of Roman history. In his picture of his life in the country, Oblomov uses words and images that signal a Roman context. Significantly, it is Rome of the same period, the first century B.C. For instance, in mentioning the pleasant silence that comes during a conversation he includes the specification that the silence is not related to a senatorial case, and that the conversations, when they happen, are never

“philippics with foam on the lips.”⁴⁶⁴ The philippics were vitriolic condemnations of Mark Antony composed by Cicero in 44 and 43 B.C.⁴⁶⁵, intended to “induce the Senate to declare war on Antony and proclaim him a public enemy.”⁴⁶⁶ Ultimately, Cicero did not succeed and was eventually proscribed and assassinated. Although the term “philippic” itself may, in common usage, refer only to a vehement speech against someone, the term itself carries very specific historical associations, much like “Brutus” or “the Rubicon.”

Strikingly, even the aria that Oblomov loves and imagines sung in Oblomovka (and then hears Olga perform when they meet), “Casta Diva,” suggests similar associations. This aria is from Bellini’s 1831 opera, *Norma*, set in 50 B.C. in Gaul shortly after Caesar’s conquest. Although Oblomov points exclusively to an emotional and aesthetic experience of the aria (“There is so much sadness in these notes!...And no one around knows anything...She is alone...Her secret is a burden, she entrusts it to the moon...” (“Какая грусть заложена в эти звуки!...И никто не знает ничего вокруг...Она одна...Тайна тяготит ее; она вверяет ее луне...”⁴⁶⁷)), the setting of the opera once again brings in a number of associations of historical political violence, which are so pervasive that they have found their way even into Oblomov’s imagined state, which tries to exclude both politics and history.

Although none of these allusions are elaborated upon explicitly and, in fact, they seem to play a relatively minor role in their specific immediate context, there is nevertheless a combined effect that associates the historical Rome and, in turn, participation in Russian public life with political violence and fear, because all of the historical Roman references are linked to war,

⁴⁶⁴ Goncharov 178.

⁴⁶⁵ They were based on earlier speeches of Demosthenes, but because Oblomov also mentions the senate and makes use of a Horatian epode in the same passage, it is safe to conclude that the philippics he was alluding to are the ones composed by Cicero.

⁴⁶⁶ Conte 185.

⁴⁶⁷ Goncharov 179.

gladiatorial combat (see below), and political persecution – all different forms of political violence. Incidentally, the same can be said of Oblomov’s “sequel” to *Oblomov*, the novel *The Precipice*, where the only historical reference to Rome alludes to the destruction of Jerusalem, once again linking the historical Rome specifically to death and destruction, even though, once again, the allusion is made in passing rather than elaborated upon extensively. Curiously, it seems that these allusions only convey this particular effect when viewed separately from their immediate usage, because the seemingly hyperbolic and comical usage of them, combined with the general unreliability of Oblomov as a narrator, obscures the specific pattern of these allusions. It is only when they are combined that one can feel their effect, which is important less for the specific events (there is, after all, no civil war that Oblomov has any chance of beginning in Russia) than for a general impression, a sense of fear of lurking death and violence that is associated with participating in public life. There are no specific allusions either to other periods of Roman history or to less violent Roman history, and this absence of alternatives suggests that any involvement in history will inevitably be a destructive one, even if the particular way of perishing might be different.

In a striking confirmation of Oblomov’s otherwise apparently hyperbolic views, the narrator (who is said to be recounting Stoltz’s account of Oblomov’s life) makes the following unexpected announcement after Oblomov’s death: “He was born and raised not to be a gladiator for the arena but a peaceful spectator of the fight” (“И родился и воспитан он был не как гладиатор для арены, а как мирный зритель боя”⁴⁶⁸). This pronouncement is striking because it once again relies on a Roman allusion, not exclusively linked to the first century B.C. but one that certainly evokes violence and death, to characterize an active life that would be the

⁴⁶⁸ Goncharov 474.

alternative for Oblomov's inaction. The same characterization is repeated in the second half of the quote, where "the battle" underscores the image of violence evoked by "gladiator" and "arena." The reference to the arena is likely to evoke in the reader the image of the Colosseum, the best known of the arenas, and an imperial project; the gladiatorial games themselves are often associated with imperial spectacles. This characterization is surprising, because such pronouncements have, until now, been only made by Oblomov and it was unclear whether they were merely a product of his hyperbolic imagination. And yet, it does suggest that we cannot consider *Oblomov* simply a reflection "of the progressive idea: criticism of the inertia, laziness, apathy...so characteristic for Russian gentry,"⁴⁶⁹ that his comical and hyperbolic opinions may actually reflect an understanding, whether rational or intuitive, of a deeper underlying context of his historical circumstances.

What is to be done? (Not much)

The escape from the political occurs through the idyllic and mythological approaches, which are combined in Oblomov's dream and descriptions of his country estate. Classical references are by far most prominent in these episodes of the novel, so, in a way, they offer us the underlying foundation for the distinctions on which the novel relies. The nature of these allusions is no longer historical, as Oblomov first retreats into the idyllic realm, which functions as a transition for the escape from active political life, and then into the mythological realm. While the idyllic still has a Roman historical connection because it is based on Horace's second epode (inflected by the previous Russian tradition of the "pastoral impulse," advocating retreat "into the self, into the family, into the benign, quiet, familiar landscape of the estate"⁴⁷⁰), the mythological is Greek, which perhaps emphasizes the extent of Oblomov's escapism.

⁴⁶⁹ A. Tseitlin, *I. A. Goncharov*, 152.

⁴⁷⁰ Newlin 5.

This distinction between the Roman and the Greek seems significant because at the end of the novel, when the narrator tells us that Oblomov had not been born a “gladiator for the arena,” Oblomov is also referred to as a “Plato of Oblomovka” (“обломовский Платон”⁴⁷¹), a label that is specifically in opposition to “gladiator” in the passage. Although the comparison is ironic, because the narrator goes on to say that such philosophy lulled him to sleep and let him avoid dealing with life’s questions, the basic distinctions remain the same as they are elsewhere in the novel: the Roman reference is historical and violent, whereas the Greek reference provides an escape from this historical violence. At the same time, however, it is also soporific – a prevalent characteristic of Oblomov’s escapist fantasies. I will discuss this sleepy escapism after examining the idyllic allusions in Oblomov’s conversation with Stoltz.

As I mentioned above, the historical Rome appears in Oblomov’s justification for choosing his country estate over an active political and social life, and may provide an answer to the question of which of the ancients Stoltz was referring to when he said that Oblomov reasons like them. The rejection of an active life is itself patterned on a Roman literary example – there are strong allusions to Horace’s poetry informing Oblomov’s reasoning, specifically to Horace’s second epode. Horace himself participated in the events alluded to by the historical references to ancient Rome discussed above, fighting for the losing army at Philippi in 42 B.C.,⁴⁷² receiving a pardon after the war but losing his estate, and living through the years of proscriptions, confiscations, and continuous civil conflict.⁴⁷³

The epodes were composed between 42 and 31 B.C., and were likely a “‘response’ to the crisis of the end of the Republic,” since five of the seventeen *Epodes* explicitly address recent

⁴⁷¹ Goncharov 474.

⁴⁷² The battle where Brutus and Cassius were defeated by Octavian and Mark Antony.

⁴⁷³ For Horace’s biography, see Lindsay C. Watson, *A Commentary on Horace’s Epodes*.

history.⁴⁷⁴ The second epode, then, is firmly entrenched in historical and political experience, even though there is disagreement about what the connection is and how the poem is to be read. Moreover, it may be important for Goncharov that Horace himself was a witness, a participant, and a victim of political violence. Finally, regardless of the historical reality of Horace's relationship to power and his pro-Augustus poems, his poetry had been coded as a rejection of political involvement (and, in this, a contrast to Vergil's endorsement of and affiliation with the emperor) by a number of earlier Russian writers, including Derzhavin and Pushkin, so it may likewise be important that he chose the Horatian model to portray the turn to the idyllic even though Vergil's *Eclogues* could offer an equally valid "highly civilized urban sensibility" that is "a reaction against certain aspects of the culture and material environment of the city."⁴⁷⁵ The appearance of this poem as the foundation for Oblomov's reasoning, combined with his early enthusiasm for and subsequent criticisms of state service, suggests that we cannot simply dismiss him as "a mere dreamer (albeit an attractive one), unable to take action and participate in life."⁴⁷⁶

From its early appearance in Russia in the eighteenth century, the pastoral tradition was fully implicated in a political struggle and the opposition to state-dominated life by presenting a better, more ethically and morally sound alternative. I have already discussed its most famous Russian adaptation, Derzhavin's "To Eugene. Life at Zvanka," in an earlier chapter. Curiously, it seems that Goncharov is actually alluding both to the original Horatian poem, with which he would have been familiar from his university education, and the expanded version of Derzhavin, which transferred the poem specifically into the Russian countryside, to Derzhavin's estate of Zvanka. The question of which poem he is actually referring to (or how he combines the two) is

⁴⁷⁴ David Mankin, *Epodes*, 6.

⁴⁷⁵ Robert Coleman, *Eclogues*, 1.

⁴⁷⁶ A conclusion that Christine Borowec also finds unreasonable (Borowec 561).

important because of the overall tone of the poem, which determines whether one takes its assertions as earnest statement about the virtues of country life or as satire containing “misgivings about the possibility and morality of escapism.”⁴⁷⁷ As has been pointed out, one way to interpret Horace’s second epode is satirical, since the speaker turns out to be a money lender who is unlikely to spend any time in the country.⁴⁷⁸ This tone underlies Oblomov’s idyllic narrative as well, since we suspect that he, too, will never return to his country estate, and that he has neither the experience nor the ability to run this estate.

Derzhavin’s version, on the other hand, contains no irony. It is written at Zvanka, not in St. Petersburg, and there is no sense that the narrator, presumably the author himself, since the poem is written in the first person and contains biographical information, is incapable of living in the country. Instead, it conveys sincere disillusionment and rejection of a political courtly life, with which the poet was intimately familiar, in favor of a moral, philosophical, and artistically rich life in the country.

It may be that Goncharov wants to combine the tone of both poems – from Derzhavin, he borrows the sincere, familiar disillusionment with state service and the life that one is expected to live in the city, whereas from Horace he borrows the satirical portrayal of the escapist fantasies of the speaker and the implication that these are merely fantasies that will not be fulfilled.

The beginning of Horace’s epode lists what the speaker wishes to avoid by moving away from the city:

Blessed is the man who, far from business
hassles,
works his parental land with his oxen,

Beatus ille qui procul negotiis,
ut prisca gens mortalium
paterna rura bubus exercet suis

⁴⁷⁷ Mankin 64.

⁴⁷⁸ S.J. Heyworth, “Horace’s Second Epode,” 71-85. The same point is made in the commentaries and other scholarship.

as did the ancient race of men,
free from all monetary interest,
and who is not summoned, a soldier,
by the fierce sound of the trumpet,
nor fears the raging sea, and who avoids
the forum and the proud thresholds
of more powerful men

solutus omni fenore
neque excitatur classico miles truci
neque horret iratum mare
forumque vitat et superba civium
potentiorum limina⁴⁷⁹

Oblomov follows a similar formula in articulating what his estate will allow him to avoid:

Just think, you would not see a single pale, suffering face, no troubles, no questions about the senate, the exchange, bonds, reports, visits to the minister, ranks, or raises. Only sincere conversation!

[Ты подумай, что ты не увидел бы ни одного бледного, страдальческого лица, никакой заботы, ни одного вопроса о сенате, о бирже, об акциях, о докладах, о приеме у министра, о чинах, о прибавке столовых денег. А все разговоры по душе!
480]

Several of the concerns replicate those of Horace – the obligation to visit the powerful figures, for instance, identifies visits to a minister with the position of a client in Rome; the concern with profit is present in both texts, the Senate corresponds to the Roman Forum and, of course, echoes the Roman institution of the same name. He also substitutes a number of concerns, mostly of a financial and bureaucratic nature for the aversion to war and seafaring. It is possible that by “downgrading” Horace’s concerns, Goncharov points, agreeing with Derzhavin, to the more trivial nature of contemporary urban concerns. There is no need to worry about land or naval warfare; instead, it is bureaucracy that is threatening one’s life. On the other hand, the substitution can be taken to mean that the mire of bureaucracy is as destructive to one’s life as warfare, or it can be read as another piece of evidence that Oblomov is prone to exaggeration. Perhaps it is a combination of all of these purposes, since we see the trivial nature of contemporary state service, its soul-killing effect, and Oblomov’s hyperbolic imagination in other parts of the novel. At the same time, however, we may recall that much of the novel was

⁴⁷⁹ Mankin 28.

⁴⁸⁰ Original: (Oblomov 180)

written during or immediately after the Crimean War (1853-1856), so the concerns about war and violence are not as remote as *Oblomov*'s overt content might suggest.

Regardless, *Oblomov*'s main concern appears to be philosophical, as was the case with Derzhavin – his explicit concern is not so much the practical effects of these various events but the emptiness and superficiality of such occupations. In this he echoes Derzhavin's formulation: "Everything is vanity! I reflect with a sigh" ("Всё суета сует! я, вздыхая, мню"). Both speakers experience disillusionment with state service and its meaninglessness at best and destructiveness at worst. Whereas Horace's narrator merely lists what he wishes to avoid by leaving the capital, Derzhavin and Goncharov explain *why* leaving these behind is admirable and, in both cases, the motivation is moral. They are both part of the tradition of placing the ethical and moral center away from the political, depicting and condemning ambition and hostility as the underlying motivations for such activities:

Derzhavin:

I look at passions, at the deeds of ancient and new times,	На страсти, на дела зрю древних, новых веков,
And I see nothing except love for oneself	Не видя ничего, кроме любви одной
And brawls of men	К себе и драки человеков"

Goncharov:

No one has a clear, calm gaze [...] everyone infects each other with some tormenting worry, anguish, they keep seeking something. And if they at least sought the truth, or some good for themselves or others – no, they grow pale hearing about the successes of their acquaintances. One worries about making it to a government office tomorrow, his case has been going on for five years, the other side is winning, and for five years he has carried a single thought in his head, a single wish – to trip his opponent and to build his own well-being upon the fall." And underneath these various concerns, "there lies an emptiness, an absence of sympathy for anything!"

[Ни у кого ясного, покойного взгляда [...] все заражаются друг от друга какой-то мучительной заботой, тоской, болезненно чего-то ищут. И добро бы истины, блага себе и другим - нет, они бледнеют от успеха товарища, У одного забота: завтра в присутственное место зайти, дело пятый год тянется,

противная сторона одолевает, и он пять лет носит одну мысль в голове, одно желание - сбить с ног другого и на его падении выстроить здание своего благосостояния.⁴⁸¹ [...] кроется пустота, отсутствие симпатии ко всему.⁴⁸²]

And yet, Goncharov's disillusionment is so profound that it also undermines the alternatives – both the idyllic alternative that Oblomov paints and the paradise for which his escapism strives. While there is much evidence that Oblomov is correct in his criticisms of state service and contemporary society, he is not permitted to follow the pastoral conventions to simply criticize reality and escape into fantasy. In part, this criticism is already present in Horace's epode. Horace's narrator "betrays the speaker's ignorance of authentic country life" and his descriptions occur in a "such a way as to minimize the effort and maximize the pleasure involved."⁴⁸³ To a large extent, this criticism can be applied to pastoral writing in general. As Newlin writes, "it is an essentially *literate* and *literary* act, [originating], pretensions to simplicity notwithstanding, from a vantage point of sophistication," "from a city," "for it is precisely this distance that makes it possible to look back and yearn."⁴⁸⁴

Oblomov's description goes even further. Unlike Horace's or Derzhavin's narrators, he does not even attempt to claim that he will be performing other work as an alternative to these concerns of urban life. While earlier Russian writers relying on the pastoral tradition proposed an alternative and nobler work, such as writing, or gardening, Oblomov seems more concerned with doing nothing. This change points to the extent of Oblomov's escapism and makes us question the underlying morality of his motives. In fact, we mostly see him watching others work for him – it is the gardener who is doing the gardening, not Oblomov himself. The only activities we see Oblomov perform consistently are talking and eating. So, while the criticisms of the political and

⁴⁸¹ Goncharov 174.

⁴⁸² Goncharov 175.

⁴⁸³ Watson 93.

⁴⁸⁴ Newlin 20.

social life that Oblomov seeks to escape seem to be supported by his own personal experience, the portrayal of other characters who are somehow involved in service, and by allusions to other writers and their criticisms, the response to them is portrayed as inadequate because the ultimately goal of this escape no longer appears to be noble.

In the early, eighteenth-century adaptations of this epode, the concluding lines were often left out. By the time of Pushkin and his contemporaries, however, there was quite a bit of irony caused by the discrepancy “between a poeticized, pastoral vision of Russia and rural life and the prosy, unpastoral reality of the Russian countryside.”⁴⁸⁵ In short, the genre itself had been subject to criticism and irony for quite a while before *Oblomov*. It had also been subjected to a social and political reassessment, as we saw in the case of Pushkin’s response to the epode – “The Village” – which introduced historical reality and its underlying oppression and exploitation into the idyllic depiction of life in the country, pointing to the discrepancies between the narrative and the lived reality.

In Goncharov, however, the overt criticism is focused not so much on these discrepancies, though they must linger in the background, as on Oblomov and his motives – in a way, Goncharov restores Horace’s conclusion by bringing attention not to the inadequacies or social dynamics of the Russian countryside but to the speaker himself. The narrator does not allow complacency, and we see the shortcomings of this idyllic picture, in the way that is implied by Horace’s conclusion. These shortcomings and escapism are exposed more explicitly in *Oblomov*, as Stoltz actually engages with Oblomov’s pronouncements. When, before describing the toil-less paradise, Oblomov offers a criticism of the motivations of city life and suggests instead that one should “choose a modest hard-working path” (“избрать скромную, трудовую тропинку”),

⁴⁸⁵ Newlin 32 & 36.

perhaps suggesting the humble work in the country, Stoltz questions this intention and its fulfilment, to which Oblomov can only say, “Well as soon as I finish...the plan...” (“Да вот я кончу только...план...”⁴⁸⁶) and continue offering uncertain excuses punctuated by ellipses. When Stoltz offers practical suggests for making the dream a reality, Oblomov refuses and finds excuses for not going:

Oblomov: I would go to the country.

Stoltz: What’s stopping you?

Oblomov: The plan is not finished. Plus I wouldn’t go alone, I’d go with a wife

Stoltz: Ah! I see! Well, Godspeed. What are you waiting for? In three or four years no one will want to marry you...

Oblomov: Well, I guess it’s not meant to be! – [...] – My finances don’t allow it

Stoltz: What do you mean, what about Oblomovka? Three hundred souls!

Oblomov: So what? That’s not enough to live on with a wife!

Stoltz: That’s plenty for two!

Oblomov: - And when we have kids?

Stoltz: You’ll bring them up and they’ll provide for themselves...

[-- Да как! Уехал бы в деревню.

-- Что ж тебе мешает?

-- План не кончен. Потом я бы уехал не один, а с женой.

-- А! вот что! Ну, с богом. Чего ж ты ждешь? Еще года три -- четыре, никто за тебя не пойдет...

-- Что делать, не судьба! -- сказал Обломов, вздохнув. -- Состояние не позволяет!

-- Помилуй, а Обломовка? Триста душ!

-- Так что ж? Чем тут жить, с женой?

-- Вдвоем, чем жить!

-- А дети пойдут?

-- Детей воспитаешь, сами достанут; умею направить их так...]

By having Stoltz actually offer practical advice about going to Oblomovka, Goncharov allows the possibility of turning the idyllic into the real rather than a distance and impossible ideal. It is now not a dream but a real choice and an opportunity to go beyond the limitations imposed by the pastoral genre. The fact that Oblomov refuses this option brings to light what is often suggested but not explicitly stated in the pastoral genre – that the speaker has no interest of

⁴⁸⁶ Goncharov 175.

fulfilling his ideal. In the end, it is clear that Oblomov's ideal is important to him not as a goal but as a justification for refusing to act.

Oblomov's dream and the escape into mythological time[lessness]

Oblomov's flight from his contemporary reality does not end in the pastoral genre – it transports us all the way into the mythical paradise that his idyll aims to recapture, and this paradise, in turn, gets scrutinized and is likewise shown to be an inadequate and morally suspect alternative. At first glance, however, it seems that the imagined Oblomovka exists in a Golden Age, the mythological timeless space free from suffering and toil that is alluded to by the first word of Horace's epode that serves as the transition from the historical to the mythological.⁴⁸⁷ The beginning of Oblomov's dream, which serves as an illustration of life on his estate, begins with an echo of the beginning of Horace's epode: "Where are we? In what blessed corner of the earth did Oblomov's dream transport us?" ("Где мы? В какой благословенный уголок земли перенес нас сон Обломова?"⁴⁸⁸). The word "blessed" ("благословенный"), is a direct translation of "beatus," and the fact that we have already been transported to this place implies that the goal has been reached, that we have managed to escape into a place that still exists in a Golden Age.

The paradise myth, as Stephen Baehr points out, has a long history in the Russia, especially starting in the eighteenth century, when Biblical and classical sources (such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Vergil's *Aeneid* or, more commonly, his fourth eclogue) became blended and used interchangeably, "whether labeled 'paradise,' 'golden age,' 'Elysium,' 'Fortunate Islands,' 'promised land,' 'Eden,' 'heaven on earth,' 'Arcadia,' 'peaceable kingdom,' or even 'Hesperides,'

⁴⁸⁷ "Beatus reflects the common belief that the life of the farmer was a throwback to the felicity of the Golden Age" Watson 87.

⁴⁸⁸ Oblomov 98; Heather Buckser, too, calls attention to this sentence and the way it connects the dream to the tradition of "genuinely grateful pastoral scenes" (Buckser 180).

the ideal place or time [...] described through identical details, drawn from a single reservoir of paradisaal motifs.”⁴⁸⁹ Baehr goes on to list a number of other features of this paradise myth, such as the abundance reflected on “lexical level” conveyed by details, the “negative formula, which defined ideal places and times not through the presence of positive qualities but through the absence of negative ones” and “provided a particularly good vehicle for social criticism, picturing paradise as excluding undesirable qualities present in society of the author,” the theme of harmony between humans and nature, paratactic syntax, “adding one paradisaal detail to another with no logical or inevitable order, and, the “panegyric and propagandistic purposes” for which these myths have been used.⁴⁹⁰ Mikhail Lomonosov, for instance, adapted Vergil’s fourth eclogue in his panegyric of Elizabeth and Peter, which I discussed in my first chapter.

In the nineteenth century, however, we find implicit commentary on the “impossibility of a golden age in an era of autocracy,” an opposition we find, for instance, in Pushkin’s “Bronze Horseman,” “which overturns many of the eighteenth-century themes and patterns [by] portraying Peter the Great creating *not* a golden age but an age of bronze, the forerunner of the (contemporary) iron age.”⁴⁹¹ Thus, Goncharov is writing after both the construction of the paradise myth and its rejection, and it seems reasonable to think that we are meant to have both of these in mind when we read about Oblomov’s paradise, especially since Goncharov makes use of a number of the paradise myth features (harmony with nature, accumulation of positive details conveying abundance, absence of work and suffering, the triumph of good over evil), while ultimately undermining the ideal and making it seem impossible given the current circumstances.

⁴⁸⁹ Stephen Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture*, 2.

⁴⁹⁰ Baehr 2-9. See his chapter on “The ‘Language’ of Paradise” for more specific features and examples of these features in various European sources.

⁴⁹¹ Baehr 165. In his epilogue, Baehr links the turn to Republican Rome (and away from the Imperial Rome) to the “new Rome theme to challenge the autocratic myth of Russia as Rome restored and the official paradise myth of which it had become part.”

Again, however, we are dealing with associations, echoes and suggestions rather than any explicit commentary from the narrator.

Goncharov departs from the straightforward paradise myth tradition in important ways. In the first place, he gives his paradise myth a more specific foundation. Although he does make use of a number of sources both in the classical and the Russian tradition, he ties the introduction of his paradise dream specifically to Horace's poem and the rejection of a political and social life, generalized to participating in history. He also undermines a number of these features – the “locus amoenus” is no longer very pleasant, nature ultimately seems threatening rather than harmonious, and, perhaps most importantly, the paradise eventually seems to take on a number of negative characteristics that Oblomov wishes to escape by refusing to participate in state service.

Classical references are more numerous in the description of Oblomov's dream than elsewhere in the novel, but, significantly, we mostly encounter explicitly *Greek*, and specifically *Greek mythological* allusions here, in contrast to the *Roman* allusions used to refer to actual contemporary life. These allusions are merged with Russian folklore of legendary, pre-historic times, placing Oblomov into a different temporality than that of history; the preference of one also signifies the rejection of the other. At the same time, however, the escape is imperfect, and we soon see that the atmosphere of fear pervades even this mythological realm that is supposed to be safe and comfortable. Perhaps because the escape is merely a reaction to Oblomov's reality, the dangerous alternative circumscribes and threatens its existence. Even more strikingly, however, we can notice a number of similarities between this supposed fulfillment of the paradise myth and the criticisms of social life that Oblomov offers us – we see the same sleep, the same stagnation, loss of agency, loss of identity, and fear that he wants to avoid. The Golden

Age paradise myth ends up actually being the same thing as its alternative, which undermines the binaries of Horace, Derzhavin, and the pastoral tradition in general, and suggests that the circumstances of life as they currently are cannot be escaped, whether in a city or outside of it.

At first glance, life in Oblomovka appears calm and satisfied, never changing and proceeding according to a cyclical temporal pattern which emphasizes sameness, repetition, and reliance on familiar patterns. One may conclude that the inhabitants “live their lives in peace and quiet,”⁴⁹² a striking contrast to the commotion and danger of urban life. A number of details emphasize this cyclical temporality, including the placement of the description into a dream. Dmitrii Likhachev gives special significance to this placement, arguing, “The dream serves as the justification of the slow flow of time in this Oblomovka. A dream is a method of typification, the main component of which is the indication of slow change or unchangeable slowness, rhythmic alternation, repeatability and lack of responsibility for events, which seem submerged in slumber. It’s not Oblomov who is asleep – it is nature, Oblomovka, life.”⁴⁹³

This dreamlike and timeless state is emphasized by the mythological allusions in this part of the novel. Borowec briefly mentions these classical allusions, arguing, “references to classical authors and myths made specifically in conjunction with the dream-like idyllic stages in Oblomov’s life emphasize his cyclical time system...”⁴⁹⁴ It seems notable to me that she notices only these Greek allusions, not the Roman connections, with the exception of the reference to a gladiator at the end of the novel, which she mentions but does not explain, treating it as part of the cluster that emphasizes Oblomov’s cyclical temporality. Still, her remark is accurate for this part of the novel, though, again I would want to say *Greek* rather than *classical* allusions to

⁴⁹² Wes 311.

⁴⁹³ Dmitrii Likhachev, *Поэтика древнерусской литературы*.

⁴⁹⁴ Borowec 570.

distinguish them from the Roman ones.

The Greek references appear both as stories and as similes for the way of life in Oblomovka. The comparisons here evoke a number of Greek tales, including the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the journey of the Argonauts, the distant land of Colchis, and the labors of Hercules:

[The nanny] told him about the fears of our Achilleses and Ulysseses, about the prowess of Il'ya of Murom, Dobrynia Nikitich, Alesha Popovich, about Polkan-bogatyр, about the Pilgrim Cripple, about how they traveled around Rus', defeated scores of infidels, how they competed to see who could drink a goblet of bitter wine in one breath...

With the simplicity and good-naturedness of Homer, with the same lifelike authenticity of the details and depth of images she put into his memory the *Iliad* of the Russian life, composed by our Homeridae of those distant times when man still could not deal with the dangers and mysteries of nature and life, when he trembled before the werewolf, and the forest spirits, and sought protection from Alesha Popovich from the misfortunes that surrounded him when wonders ruled the air, the water, the forest and the fields.

Listening to his nanny's stories about our golden fleece – the Firebird, about the obstacles and the secrets of the magic castle, the boy either imagined himself the hero of the feat, feeling goosebumps on his back, or suffered along with the brave man's misfortunes.

[[Няня] повествует ему о подвигах наших Ахиллов и Улиссов, об удали Ильи Муромца, Добрыни Никитича, Алеши Поповича, о Полкане-богатыре, о Колечище прохожем, о том, как они странствовали по Руси, побивали несметные полчища басурманов, как состязались в том, кто одним духом выпьет чару зелена вина и не крякнет...⁴⁹⁵

Она с постотою и добродушием Гомера, с тою же животрепещущею верностью подробностей и рельефностью картин влагала в детскую память и воображение илиаду русской жизни, созданную нашими гомеридами тех туманных времен, когда человек еще не ладил с опасностями и тайнами природы и жизни, когда он трепетал и перед оборотнем, и перед лешим и у Алеши Поповича искал защиты от окружавших его бед, когда и в воздухе, и в воде, и в лесу, и в поле царствовали чудеса.⁴⁹⁶

Слушая от няни сказки о нашем *золотом руне* — *Жар-птице*, о преградах и тайниках волшебного замка, мальчик то бодрился, воображая себя героем подвига, — и мурашки бегали у него по спине, то страдал за неудачи

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 116.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 117.

храбреца.^{497]}

Blending real everyday life in Oblomovka with these mythical tales, Goncharov compares geographical locations with places from Greek tales, the inhabitants of Oblomovka to Olympian gods, and their perception of the world to that of “the ancients”:

At certain times the peasants brought their bread to the near dock on the Volga, which was their Colchis and their Pillars of Hercules; twice a year some of them went to the fair, and, beyond that, they had no contact with anyone. They knew that there was a “province” eighty miles away, that there was the provincial capital, but very few of them ever went there; they also knew that farther away there were Saratov and Nizhnii; they had heard of Moscow and Petersburg, and that beyond Petersburg there are Frenchmen and Germans. Beyond that, for them as for the ancients, began the dark world, the unknown lands, populated by monsters, two-headed people, giants; then there was darkness – and, finally, everything ended with the fish that is holding up the world.

... Their way of life was prepared and given to them by their parents, who accepted it from their grandfather, who received it from his great-grandfather, with the bidding to guard its integrity and sanctity like Vesta’s⁴⁹⁸ fire...

... everyone remembered the amusing incident, everyone is roaring with laughter, for a long time, together, like the Olympian gods...

[Крестьяне в известное время возили хлеб на ближайшую пристань к Волге, которая была их Колхидой и геркулесовыми столпами, да раз в год ездили некоторые на ярмарку, и более никаких сношений ни с кем не имели. Они знали, что в восьмидесяти верстах от них была «губерния», то есть губернский город, но редкие езжали туда; потом знали, что подальше, там, Саратов или Нижний; слышали, что есть Москва и Питер, что за Питером живут французы или немцы, а далее уже начинался для них, как для древних, темный мир, неизвестные страны, населенные чудовищами, людьми о двух головах, великанами; там следовал мрак — и, наконец, всё оканчивалось той рыбой, которая держит на себе землю.⁴⁹⁹

Норма жизни была готова и преподана им родителями, а те приняли ее, тоже готовую, от дедушки, а дедушка от прадедушки, с заветом блюсти ее целость и неприкосновенность, как огонь Весты.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 118-9.

⁴⁹⁸ Vesta is the only Roman deity to appear in this part of the novel. I cannot think of a possible intentional reason for this particular irregularity, since we are still firmly rooted in the mythological realm and Vesta does not stand out from other instances of mythological allusions.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 103-4.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 122.

... все вспомнили забавный случай, все хохочут долго, дружно, несказанно, как олимпийские боги.^{501]}

One possible function of these literary allusions to timeless works of literature is to underscore, once again, the timeless and ahistorical nature of life in Oblomovka. The first aspect of this timelessness is in the nature of idyllic literature itself. Because it portrays an ideal scenario, and because perfection does not allow for change, an idyllic depiction is by nature a static depiction.⁵⁰² By linking the seemingly insignificant country life with magnificent ancient works (though only those of mythology and the oral tradition), Goncharov makes Oblomovka seem like a place that exists outside of ordinary time and place. It acquires mythical dimensions, with its cyclical time marked by seasonal holidays, activities and visits.⁵⁰³ As Christine Borowec points out, “references to classical authors and myths, made specifically in conjunction with the dream-like idyllic stages in Oblomov’s life emphasize his cyclical time system.”⁵⁰⁴ Any event that seems singular creates disturbance, regardless of how minor it seems to be, and the unexpected letter that sends the household into a panic can serve as a prime example of the aversion to the changes in the routine.⁵⁰⁵ The rarity of such disturbances is a stark contrast to the sleepy and quiet predictability of this mythical life. In Amy Singleton's formulation, the set-up of Oblomovka is one where “a sense of timeless stasis derived through ritual repetition describes the beauty and significance of life.”⁵⁰⁶

Another plausible function matches Milton Ehre's observation about the immensity of

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.* 130.

⁵⁰² E. Liapushkina, *Russkaia Idillia XIX Veka i Roman I.A. Goncharova <Oblomov>*, 15.

⁵⁰³ For a thorough study of the cyclical and linear temporalities in Oblomov, see Christine Borowec, “Time after Time: The Temporal Ideology of Oblomov.”

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 570

⁵⁰⁵ Goncharov 134.

⁵⁰⁶ Amy Singleton, *No Place like Home: the Literary Artist and Russia’s Search for Cultural Identity*, 71.

objects in Oblomov's dream.⁵⁰⁷ By the virtue of their immensity these figures may overwhelm reality, whether it is the literal immensity evoked by the imagination when thinking about mythical deities and heroes, or the immensity of their fame, the figurative weight that Homer and ancient heroes carry with their names, their legacy, and their authority. This immensity in turn provides a sense of immobility, stasis, and security.

Upon a closer examination, however, we find a darker undercurrent in this supposed paradise. The magical atmosphere evoked by the references to mythologically-resonant places like Colchis and the Pillars of Hercules stand here not for the heroic feats performed by Hercules but for the irrational fear of darkness and monsters that may be lurking beyond (“and beyond for them, like for the ancient, began a dark world, unknown lands, populated by monsters, two-headed people, giants; then there was darkness.” The same is the case with the allusion to the Argonauts – the story leads Oblomov not to adventures (though, of course, there is the temporary inspiration of imagining himself as the hero performing various feats), but to fear – “he sadly looks around and sees harm and misfortune in life, he keeps dreaming about that magical land where there is no evil, troubles, sadness.” Goncharov himself points out that this approach to life originates in fear, the times “when people could not handle the dangers and mysteries of nature and life, when he trembled before the werewolf, the forest spirits, and sought protection from Alesha Popovich from the misfortunes that surrounded him.”

The fear turns out to be pervasive, together with other dark undertones: the stillness, the dreamlike atmosphere, the fear of change that borders on paranoia, the obsessiveness over every step of the child (as Oblomov returns to his childhood in this dream). All these qualities suggest a lining of death and terror that is hidden behind the continuously asserted happiness and affection

⁵⁰⁷ Milton Ehre, *Oblomov and His Creator: the Life and Art of Ivan Goncharov*, 169.

in the household. There are, after all, complicated connotations to the concept of *son*, which can mean both “dream” and “sleep,” and includes associations both with idyllic fantasy and with the changing stillness of death. Despite the positive aspect of stillness – security – that Oblomov clings to so desperately because of his fear of change, the imagery of the dream is increasingly disturbing, as the silence becomes overwhelmingly ubiquitous:

How quiet, how sleepy things are in the three-four little villages that make up this corner! [...] Everything in the village is quiet and sleepy: silent houses stand with open doors; there is no one around, only clouds of flies are flying and buzzing in the stuffy air. You might go inside and call loudly, but it will be in vain: a deathly silence will be your answer; in a rare house an old woman living out her days above the stove might respond with a pained moan or muffled cough, or a long-haired three year-old child, wearing only a shirt, might show up from behind the partition, look silently and closely at the visitor and shyly hide again.

[Как все тихо, все сонно в трех-четырех деревеньках, составляющих этот уголок! [...] Тихо и сонно все в деревне: безмолвные избы отворены настежь; не видно ни души; одни мухи тучами летают и жужжат в духоте. Войдя в избу, напрасно станешь кликать громко: мертвое молчание будет ответом; в редкой избе отзовется болезненным стоном или глухим кашлем старуха, доживающая свой век на печи, или появится из-за перегородки босой длинноволосый трехлетний ребенок, в одной рубашонке, молча, пристально поглядит на вошедшего и робко спрячется опять.⁵⁰⁸]

The explicit associations with death (the *dead* silence, the buzzing flies, the dying old woman) in the very beginning of the description of the dream prime us for mistrusting the excessively happy descriptions of the family and we soon see the layer of fear that guides much of the behavior that adults display towards the young boy. He is barely allowed to go outside. Most importantly, argues Ehre, the child is prohibited from going near the ravine, which may function as a symbol of death.⁵⁰⁹ In a world that is perceived as essentially hostile, despite its supposed quiet and comfort, the child’s mere safety becomes sufficient grounds for continuous

⁵⁰⁸ Goncharov 102-3.

⁵⁰⁹ Ehre 177. See the following pages (177-182) for a discussion of the role that fairy tales play in the dual nature of the dream and a Freudian reading of this duality.

gratitude and displays of affection.

The affection and the fear are inextricably linked, and the child learns both, as we see in the anxiety that the adult Oblomov displays from the very beginning of the novel, when he continuously questions his guests about the weather outside. In short, Oblomov's dream encapsulates both the warmth and affection that the adult Oblomov longs for throughout the novel and the deeply engrained fear that cripples him and prevents him from actually acquiring the objects of his desire. In the end, Oblomov's dream shows us that life in Oblomovka does not just fail to live up to Oblomov's expectations but, also, that it shares many of the very same problems that Oblomov wishes to escape – the fear, the stagnation, death, insects – many of the criticisms of society that he offers us throughout the novel and the accompanying metaphors and similes are actually also the underlying patterns of life in Oblomovka.

Finally, the criticism of this life is also evident in the fact that the fantasy is thoroughly infantilizing and relies on a surrender of agency. It is especially evident in the prominence of childhood and childishness that appear in the description of Oblomov's dream. We first see Oblomov himself as a small child:

И'ia И'ич woke up in the morning in his little bed. He is only seven years old. Life is comfortable, happy. How adorable he is, how red, how plump! His little cheeks are so round...

[Илья Ильич проснулся утром в своей маленькой постельке. Ему только семь лет. Ему легко, весело. Какой он хорошенький, красненький, полный! Щечки такие кругленькие...⁵¹⁰]

The diminutives here reflect the speech that adults often employ when addressing a loved child and convey the tone of joy, affection and pride in which Oblomov wishes to dwell. The fact that the sentence starts with his full name and patronymic, however, reminds us that he is, in fact, an

⁵¹⁰ Goncharov 106.

adult who should be able to take care of himself that there is an incongruity between the fantasy and the reality. The dream is marked as a *desire* to return to childhood and leave the regular world filled with obligation and responsibilities. In short, even though Oblomovka is portrayed as an ideal for Oblomov, neither the dream nor the motives behind it are portrayed in a positive light. The resulting conclusion may be that while Oblomov's fear of politics and service may be justified, and while the bureaucracy he wishes to escape may indeed be poisonous,⁵¹¹ the aristocratic escapist fantasies are not a suitable alternative, both because they are not as idyllic as may be expected and because the underlying motives behind these escapist fantasies are themselves morally suspect.

The questions of who is to blame and what is to be done remain left open at the end of the novel, though there is a sense that something must be done.

Conclusion

Oblomov fails at his odyssey, because he never makes it home, to his estate. And yet, if we remember the ending of the *Odyssey* and the bloodbath that precedes the establishment of the proper order, we may wonder whether this return is even desirable, or whether Oblomov's avoidance is the only ethically responsible behavior. Christine Borowec argues that the combination "of the [cyclical and linear images of time] throughout the work suggests that Goncharov refused to give either one greater moral, psychological, or aesthetic value" by juxtaposing Oblomov and Stoltz,⁵¹² the first of whom attempts to live within cyclical time and the second within linear time. Since the portrayal of Stoltz is undoubtedly positive, if not terribly

⁵¹¹ The way Oblomov's context and circumstances are portrayed may lead us to agree with N. Ahsharumov, who wrote, "At times you might start thinking that Oblomov fell asleep not only because he was brought up in Oblomovka or was well taken care of, but also because he felt enormous disharmony between himself and others, between his crystal soul and the fever of egotism and unsatisfied ambition that was raging all around him." See Ahsharumov's 1859 review "Oblomov. Roman I. Goncharova" in *Roman I. A. Goncharova "Oblomov" v russkoi kritike*, 172.

⁵¹² Borowec 565.

interesting or developed, this argument is convincing when viewed through this juxtaposition, and it is tempting to share her optimistic conclusion about “the value of combining the cyclical and linear temporal modes.”⁵¹³ However, if we instead pay attention to historical and mythological allusions, the linear, historical progression of time appears as undoubtedly more sinister of the two. It also seems unlikely, especially if we keep in mind Horace’s epode and Derzhavin’s adaptation of it, that the two temporalities and thus the two lifestyles, the active and the escapist, the political and the apolitical, could ever be combined successfully, precisely because there is a different morality attached to each.

Thus, rejecting any political involvement, whether in its contemporary form of destructive and abusive bureaucracy or in its Roman form of imperial conquests and ambitions, both of which are destructive to those involved, Goncharov turns instead to the question of moral values and ideals, for which classical literary references and genres can provide the models. He uses a number of his characters, including Oblomov, to show the incompatibility of the current state of society with classical ideals. This incompatibility is not quite straightforward, however, because the turn to these ideals may lead one to become blind to reality or try to escape it, usually with unhappy results. It is not enough simply to follow a pastoral tradition and complacently reject political and social obligations in favor of a fantasy. It is likewise impossible to escape into mythology. The old genres are neither viable nor morally justifiable, though neither is their rejection. The question of how one is to incorporate ideals into reality for the most part remains an open question for Goncharov and the impression that the reader is left with at the end of the novel is that of thorough rejection, both of contemporary circumstances and of the currently available and used alternatives.

⁵¹³ Borowec 570.

There is, however, a note of optimism, though it is found in the other thread of Roman reception – that of art and culture. Wes remarks that Goncharov’s “references to classical antiquity always occur in his descriptions of moments and situations that are part of the romantic side [of life], the side of feeling and heart,”⁵¹⁴ and even though I think this perspective ignores a number of other functions of classical references, many of which I discussed above, Wes’s argument is a testament to the frequency with which such references occur. The aesthetic Rome, which serves as a repository of art and high culture, does, in the end, retain its potential to be beneficial, though this potential and the mechanism for fulfilling it are not revealed until Goncharov’s next and final novel, *The Precipice*, whose protagonist, Raiskii, described by Goncharov as “an awakened Oblomov,”⁵¹⁵ actually makes it to Rome by the end of the novel. He seems to provide a model both for an understanding and interpretation of the classics through the memory of real people who are important to him. Even more importantly, he seems to be able to integrate classical literature and art into his everyday life.

Immersed in this passionate artistic life, he never betrayed his family, his group, he did not grow into the foreign soil, he saw himself as a guest, a foreigner. Often during the times of rest from his work and the new strong emotions caused by the provocative beauty of the south, he felt a longing for home. He wanted to gather up this eternal beauty of nature and art, to soak up the spirit of frozen legends and take it all back with him, to his Malinovka. [...] Behind all that there were three figures that kept calling to him, his three figures: his Vera, his Marfin’ka, his grandmother. And behind them stood another giant figure that summoned him even more urgently, his other great “grandmother” – Russia.

[И везде, среди этой горячей артистической жизни, он не изменял своей семье, своей группе, не вращался в чужую почву, всё чувствовал себя гостем и пришельцем там. Часто в часы досуга от работ и отрезвления от новых и сильных впечатлений раздражительных красот юга — его тянуло назад, домой. Ему хотелось бы набраться этой вечной красоты природы и искусства, пропитаться насквозь духом окаменелых преданий и унести всё с собой туда, в свою Малиновку [...] За ним всё стояли и горячо звали к себе — его три фигуры: его Вера, его Марфинька, бабушка. А за ними стояла и

⁵¹⁴ Wes 306.

⁵¹⁵ Goncharov, “Luchshe pozdno chem nikogda,” quoted in Wes 316.

сильнее их влекла его к себе — еще другая, исполинская фигура, другая великая «бабушка» — Россия.^{516]}

While Oblomov had, in his youth, dreamed of traveling to other places “in order to better know his own,”⁵¹⁷ Raiskii actually accomplishes this goal. In the end, it is Russia that calls him to herself, personified as a giant, great “grandmother.” “Russia” is the final word of the text, underscoring that it is the Russian aspect of his life that is the most important in Raiskii's perception. And yet, it is his estate that he wants to return to, so it is never made clear how Raiskii will use his newfound knowledge and whether there is any space for it outside of his own estate. Though one may find a way to reconcile his personal life with his ideals, there is still no clear way to incorporate them into state service.

⁵¹⁶ *Обрыв* 772.

⁵¹⁷ Goncharov 181.

CHAPTER V

Blok, Catiline, and the Decomposition of Empire

Rome once again came into prominence at the end of the nineteenth century and during the first decades of the twentieth century, when a number of major political events, combined with "a revival of interest in classical studies"⁵¹⁸ prompted many major writers of the newly emerging Symbolist movement⁵¹⁹ to once again turn to Roman history to interpret, encourage, judge, or criticize their own contemporary events. These writers, as Judith Kalb writes, "inhabited a world in which the classical past was a living, powerful presence in cultural discourse," "seizing upon Rome as a crucial symbol, rewriting it, sometimes anachronistically, to suit their own modern-day purposes" and "[creating] new, individual, and at times subversive narratives of Russian national identity."⁵²⁰ The "decline and fall" of the Roman Empire provoked particular interest,⁵²¹ and was often used to prophesy the end of the old world, variously interpreted.

In this chapter I will focus on one treatment of the significance of Roman history for the end of the "old world" – the essay "Catiline: A Page from the History of the World Revolution," written in April 1918 by one of the most prominent Russian poets of the twentieth century, Aleksandr Blok. I have chosen this essay as the final chapter of the dissertation not only because

⁵¹⁸ Frajlich, Anna. *The Legacy of Ancient Rome in the Russian Silver Age*, 20.

⁵¹⁹ For the most complete comprehensive history of Russian Symbolism see Pyman, Avril. *A History of Russian Symbolism*.

⁵²⁰ Kalb, Judith. *Russia's Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890-1940*, 33. Judith Kalb's excellent book examines the various appeals to Rome made during this period by a number of prominent writers, including Blok.

⁵²¹ Lodge, Kirsten. "Russian Decadence in the 1910s: Valery Briusov and the Collapse of Empire."

it is a fascinating reinterpretation of Roman history and systematic attack on the admiration Roman figures often elicit, but also, and especially, because it responds specifically to the end of the Russian Empire, offering a particularly appropriate endpoint for a narrative that began with the solidification of the empire and its ideology.

“Catiline” is an essay written towards the end of a brief period when Blok was a passionate believer in change and the revolution, not for any specific political or social reason,⁵²² but because he hoped that the destruction of the old world could bring with it a radical transformation of life. In an earlier essay, written in January 1918, he insists, “[We must] *change everything*. Make it so that everything becomes new; so that our dishonest, dirty, boring, ugly life becomes a just, pure, happy and beautiful life” (“*Переделать всё*. Устроить так, чтобы всё стало новым; чтобы лживая, грязная, скучная, безобразная наша жизнь стала справедливой, чистой, веселой и прекрасной жизнью”⁵²³). He quickly lost this hope, however, and his enthusiasm for the revolution turned to disillusionment and horror at its violence and complete failure to enact the transformations he thought it could bring.⁵²⁴ In “Catiline,” we see both the passion for that cleansing destruction of the old, corrupt world, exemplified by ancient Rome, and, already, the signs of fear and despair at the possibility that the revolution will ultimately fail to bring about any real change, much as Catiline’s attempt to overthrow the Roman Republic ended with his death and accomplished nothing.

Blok’s prose, in general, and “Catiline,” in particular, have so far attracted far less attention than his poetry, both among his contemporaries and among scholars,⁵²⁵ though there

⁵²² In fact, it has been pointed out that there are no characters even in Blok’s ostensibly political works that are motivated by rational understanding of and concrete goals for the revolution. See Stepun, F. “Istoricheskoe i politicheskoe mirosozertsanie A. Bloka,” 603.

⁵²³ “Intelligentsiia i revoliutsiia,” *Blok o Literature. Proza*, 310.

⁵²⁴ See Anatolii Iakobson, *Konets Tragedii*, for a discussion of Blok’s thoughts, disillusionment, and writing in the last years of his life.

⁵²⁵ See Aleksandr Etkind’s chapter on Blok in Aleksandr Etkind. *Khlyst. Sekty, Literatura, i Revoliutsiia*, for an

have been recent attempts to remedy this neglect. Aleksandr Etkind points out that Blok's prose, usually viewed simply as "evidence of [Blok's] literary tastes," also contains "mysticism, political philosophy, and a rather unique anthropology," in addition to literary criticism.⁵²⁶ "Catiline," specifically, was singled out by Blok himself as his favorite prose piece among everything he had written,⁵²⁷ a sentiment that seems to warrant closer attention to this piece. The neglect of "Catiline," in turn, may be responsible for the omission of Blok from some of the works on classical reception in this period,⁵²⁸ though there have been studies of Blok's classical education and the influence of the classics on Blok's poetry.⁵²⁹

There are a few notable exceptions: Judith Kalb devotes an entire chapter to Blok's "Catiline" in her book on classical reception in the Russian Silver Age,⁵³⁰ M. Gasparov briefly discusses several major influences in his introduction to the recent edition of the essay,⁵³¹ Boris Romanov, whose article "Letiaschii v bezdnu Rim: Mif o Katiline Aleksandra Bloka" is included with the recent reprint of Blok's essay,⁵³² Renée Poznanski, who describes Blok's depiction of Catiline as a revolutionary,⁵³³ and Aleksandr Etkind, who offers an interpretation of the relevance

overview of approaches and responses to Blok's prose. Tynianov even goes as far as arguing that there is a division between "Blok the poet" and Blok who wrote the now-ignored prose, in which he functioned as a "publicist, even historian, and philologist." He himself goes on only to discuss Blok's poetry however. Tynianov Yu. N. "Blok." *Poetika. Istoriiia literatury. Kino*, 118-123.

⁵²⁶ Etkind 315

⁵²⁷ V. Orlov. *Gamaiun: Zhizn' Aleksandra Bloka*, 243.

⁵²⁸ He is entirely absent, for instance, from Anna Frajlich's *The Legacy of Ancient Rome in the Russian Silver Age*, as well as the 2010 compilation of essay on Classical reception during the Silver Age *Antichnost' i kul'tura Serebriannogo veka*.

⁵²⁹ The author of a recent MA thesis, for instance, points out that the interest in Blok's classical influences arose only at the end of the twentieth century and remains largely unexplored; she herself addresses some ancient images and influences in Blok's works, though, like most studies of Blok's writing, she deals primarily with his poetry. See Nadezhda Demenkova. *Antichnye konteksty mifopoetiki A. Bloka*.

⁵³⁰ Judith Kalb, *Russia's Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890-1940*. Kalb's chapter is an excellent holistic approach and introduction to the essay, addressing questions of its modernist context, the influence of Nietzsche, Viacheslav Ivanov, and Ernest Renan, Blok's concept of a revolutionary, and the nature of poets – Catullus and Blok himself – as people who can perceive and reflect the spirit of the revolution.

⁵³¹ M. Gasparov, "Predislovie," 121-130.

⁵³² Boris Romanov, "Letiaschii v bezdnu Rim: Mif o Katiline Aleksandra Bloka," 177-219.

⁵³³ Renée Poznanski, "Catilina, le bolchevik romain."

of Catullus's "Attis" poem to Blok's essay in his chapter "Revoliutsiia kak kastraciia: mistika sekt i politika tela v pozdnei proze Bloka."⁵³⁴ For the most part, however, the essay remains neglected. This neglect is unfortunate because, like his contemporaries, Blok also uses Roman history and literature as an underlying model for interpreting and criticizing the events around him,⁵³⁵ going as far as casting a figure from the Roman Republic as the first *bolshevik* and modeling the impending destruction of Russia on that of the ancient Rome.⁵³⁶ For him, as for many others, Rome appears to be "the world," in the sense that it can be used as a manifestation of universals, a way to find the underlying binaries and patterns of history and shed light on the necessity of the Russian Revolution.

Summary of the essay

"Catiline" is roughly divided into three parts. The first and longest part is concerned with retelling and reevaluating the story of Catiline, an impoverished and, according to tradition, despicable nobleman who, after an unsuccessful bid for office, led an unsuccessful conspiracy to overthrow the Roman Republic in 63 B.C. The two major sources for our information about this episode are the four orations of Cicero, intended to convince the Senate to act against the conspirators, and an account of the conspiracy by the historian Sallust written roughly twenty years after the event. Blok adheres to the traditional account of the conspiracy in his brief summary of the events themselves. The brief factual account, however, is only present because it gives Blok the opportunity to show the "true" significance of this episode and the real motives of

⁵³⁴ Etkind, Aleksandr. *Sodom i Psikheia: Ocherki intellektual'noi istorii Serebriianogo veka*.

⁵³⁵ For an analysis of the different ways that Blok combines the past and the present in his general philosophy of history, see Isupov, K. G. "Istorizm Bloka i Simvolistskaia Mifologiiia Istorii," 3 – 21. Isupov also points out that for Blok, as for the other Symbolists, the most popular historical analogy for their time was "the fall of the Roman Empire" (17).

⁵³⁶ Reeve points out that parallels between Roman and Russian history form a common thread across Blok's writings in the Revolutionary period (207). In an unsent letter to Z. Gippius, for instance, he wrote "Don't you know that 'Russia will cease to exist' in the same way that Rome did?" ("Нежели Вы не знаете, что 'России не будет' так же, как не стало Рима...?" May 31, 1918, quoted in Orlov 235).

its participants, which, in Blok's view, were misunderstood both by the participants themselves and the later historians.

The retelling of the episode quickly turns into a condemnation of Roman society. To give more weight to his condemnation, Blok lingers on a number of historical figures. Cicero, who was consul in 63 B.C. and played an instrumental part in uncovering the conspiracy and putting several of the conspirators to death without a trial, and Sallust merit particular attention, because the former was directly involved in the event and the latter shaped the enduring perception of it. Other politicians and writers, such as Caesar, Marius, Sulla, and Plutarch, also make an appearance to represent various states of Roman society. Condemnations of individuals are paired with denunciations and mockery of the Roman society and state as a whole. By drawing frequent parallels between Rome and Russia, Blok extends his criticisms to include contemporary society and demonstrate the inevitability and desirability of its impending destruction.

In addition to condemning Roman society, Blok also reinterprets the nature of Catiline's rebellion. Following the ancient sources, he denies the possibility of any positive motivations of Catiline's actions, such as social equality or love of the people. Instead, Blok presents Catiline's transformation into a revolutionary as precisely that – a transformation, an event in which Catiline himself has no agency. Instead, he is taken over, possessed even, by the fury, the madness of the intolerable conditions of Roman life and the spirit of the looming destruction of the old world. Without being consciously aware of the true motivations of his actions, he is driven to attempt to destroy the corrupt and decaying civilization around him, but this early attempt ends in failure.

The second part of the essay deals with a poem (# 63) by the Roman poet Catullus that, according to Blok, is the only remaining Roman monument that captures the atmosphere of those

days and the true spirit of Catiline's rebellion. The poem tells the story of a young man called Attis who sails to Phrygia and castrates himself in a fit of madness, becoming a devotee of the goddess Cybele. After reaching the temple of the goddess, however, Attis falls asleep and wakes up to realize what he (now "she") had done and weeps for his/her former homeland, parents, friends, and past life in general. Cybele, seeing this change of heart and mind, sends her lions to once again instill madness and bring Attis back into her dominion, and Attis remains her servant for the rest of his/her life. In the final lines of the poem, the narrator speaks to the goddess Cybele asking that she keep her madness far away from him.

Blok offers a summary of the poem but does not engage with its content, focusing instead on its rhythm, in which, he argues, we can hear the spirit of Catiline. This part includes reflections on the special sensitivity of poets that allows them to perceive the underlying rhythms of history that remain hidden from the general population (represented in this essay by Cicero and Sallust, who were unable to see the real meaning of Catiline's actions). In one of the central moments of the essay, the revolutionary and the poet are merged because of their ability to feel these rhythms; there is a fusion of the historical episode and the poetic reflection of its spirit, namely Catullus's poem. Blok, for the first and only time in the essay, addresses his reader directly, asking,

Can you hear the uneven, hurried steps of a man fated to die, the steps of a revolutionary, the steps where a storm of rage spills into broken musical sounds?

Listen to them:

*sŭpĕr āltā uĕctŭs Āttīs cĕlĕrĭ rātĕ mārĭā
Phrŷgĭum ūt nĕmŭs cĭtātō cŭpĭdĕ pĕdĕ tĕtĭgĭt...*⁵³⁷

⁵³⁷ These lines are the first two lines of Catullus's *Attis*. They are quoted in Latin with no translation because Blok wants the reader to listen to rhythm of its meter. I have included a scanned version with long (*ā*) and short (*ă*) syllable markings (not present in Blok's essay) in case you would like to sound it out. (Blok 56)

The physical feet of Catiline thus become the metrical feet of Catullus, giving voice to the underlying rhythm of the Late Republic. In the end, the only thing that remains from the period and the only thing that accurately conveys both the spirit of that period and the universal pattern underlying all of world revolutions is the orgiastic meter of the most “Romantic” of Latin poets.⁵³⁸

Finally, there is a brief final section that discusses Henrik Ibsen’s retelling of Catiline’s story and reinterpretation of Catiline’s character, as well as a mention of a few times Catiline’s story has resurfaced in history, inspiring other – also unsuccessful – rebellions. The essay ends with a reminder that in Ibsen’s play Catiline is deemed worthy of entering the Elysian Fields after his death.

Blok’s condemnation of Roman society

As M. Gasparov notes in his introduction, focusing on historical facts and Blok’s treatment of them would simply “turn into a very long list of factual inaccuracies and fictionalizations,” stemming not from Blok’s ignorance but from the fact that he disliked scholarly approaches to literature and “wrote to spite [scholars],” as well as the fact that he could count on his readers to be familiar with the traditional accounts of this historical episode.⁵³⁹ His intention is not to provide a new factual account. Instead, he uses Roman history and literature to put forth his own views about revolutions, the nature of a revolutionary and a poet, the rhythms of history, the synthesis of politics and art, and other related concerns. Judith Kalb has written a persuasive reading of a number of these topics, paying particular attention to Blok’s depiction of

⁵³⁸ Blaiklock, E.M. “The Romanticism of Catullus.” *University of Auckland Bulletin* 53, "Classics Series" 1 (1959), 37.

⁵³⁹ Gasparov 121-2. Romanov, however, points out that Blok did make extensive notes while working on the essay, though he too ultimately writes that we are dealing with “historiosophic etude, poetic prose” rather than a “philological study” (201).

the archetype of a revolutionary, driven by “holy anger,” and the role of a poet, for both of whom there is no separation between life and art. Her essay, which has been developed into a chapter in her book, is an excellent analysis of these aspects of “Catiline.”

My own reading of the essay has evolved to develop a different focus, one that remains grounded in the Rome that Blok creates. I am interested in how he conveys the pervasiveness of corruption in Roman society (and, by analogy, contemporary Russia), which is now portrayed as “triumphantly rotting” in order to make its destruction seem both inevitable and desperately needed. By using Roman history, Blok offers a much more damning judgment of contemporary civilization, creating the sense that it is not only the incidental contemporary events that are a problem. Instead, it is the very roots of Western civilization that are rotten, that have always been rotten.

The judgment and condemnation of Rome rely on a number of techniques. First, Blok places the episode into a frame of a final judgment by using Biblical allusions and identifying the fall of the empire as the inevitable punishment for its corruption. He himself takes on the role of judge in the essay, condemning and discrediting a number of prominent and often admired Roman figures, as well as the entire underlying structures of Roman society. By focusing both on individuals and the society as a whole, Blok conveys the extent of corruption that has turned Rome into a bloated rotting corpse rather than the great empire that it is traditionally considered to have been. It is especially telling that the best “hero” Rome could hope for is Catiline – an impoverished aristocrat of highly questionable morals who was unaware of the true reasons of his actions.

The extent of Roman corruption makes its destruction seem both inevitable and necessary, and Blok delights in the thought of the coming barbarians and the violent cleansing

that Catiline, caught up in and transformed by the spirit of the revolution, attempts to bring about. Blok's text, in turn, performs the same destruction with respect to the legacy and cultural capital of Rome. He approaches this task in a number of ways, including placing ancient Rome in an explicitly anachronistic context, using bodily metaphors to refer to its "fall," and ridiculing many of its traditionally admired politicians and writers with personal attacks, all of which lends a consistently irreverent and contemptuous tone to this essay. The jarring effect that this irreverence produces makes us aware of the reverence with which Rome is usually used as a symbol, whether of great good or great evil. By portraying Rome as a prosaic, quotidian example of inequality, immorality, and hypocrisy, Blok attacks not only the status of Rome in the Russian imagination, but also the foundations of the "old world," all previous ideological positions built on the ideals symbolized by Rome and the Romans.

In addition to showing us the necessity of destroying the old civilization, however, Rome can also teach us about the futility of such endeavors. Rome fell, but the transformation of life into something new, just, and pure never happened. Now, after so many centuries, Europe and Russia are still *exactly* where Rome had been, suggesting that it is unlikely that the Russian Revolution will end differently. In the end, Blok's essay demonstrates not only the intolerability of the status quo and the need for a violent overhaul of the current structures, but also, implicitly and perhaps unintentionally, the hopelessness of the attempts to bring about a new world order.

Rome, Russia, and the nature of history

Throughout the essay, Blok explicitly insists on the relevance of his chosen episode from Roman history to contemporary events, so much so that he invites the readers to supplement the picture he paints with what they know of contemporary life: "I would like the readers to fill in

the gaps with the help of their imagination; let our current European reality lend them a hand”⁵⁴⁰ (“Я хотел бы, чтобы читатели сами дополнили их, при помощи воображения; в этом пусть поможет им наша европейская действительность”⁵⁴¹).

In fact, it is precisely the perspective of contemporary events that can elucidate ancient history that would remain obscure to someone who is only looking at a specific isolated period: “Through the prism of my own time I can see and understand more clearly those details that are bound to escape a scholar approaching the subject academically” (“Сквозь призму моего времени я вижу и понимаю яснее те подробности, которые не могут не ускользнуть от исследователя, подходящего к предмету академически”⁵⁴²). Paying too much attention to historical “facts” can even lead one to lose this perspective, and it’s the task of a true artist to expose what would be obscured by “objective” academic scholarship: “The task of the artist ... is to restore the connections, clear the horizons of that messy pile of worthless facts that, like deadfall, get in the way of all historical perspectives” (“Дело художника [...] восстанавливать связь, расчищать горизонты от той беспорядочной груды ничтожных фактов, которые, как бурелом, загораживают все исторические перспективы”⁵⁴³).

The underlying aspect of this perspective includes the perception of analogousness of ancient Rome and contemporary Russia, the idea that Blok returns to a number of times; Orlov even refers to the parallels between the fall of Rome and the fall of tsarist Russia as Blok’s “favorite historiosophic thought.” While working on this essay, Blok wrote in his diary, “What a close, FAMILIAR, sad world”⁵⁴⁴ (“Какой близкий, ЗНАКОМЫЙ, печальный мир”). The

⁵⁴⁰ For examples of Blok’s thoughts on the decrepit state of Europe in his other works, see Kalb 110.

⁵⁴¹ Blok 45.

⁵⁴² Blok 57.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ Blok, *Zapisnye Knizhki*, 402.

essay reflects this sentiment, as Blok repeatedly blurs the differences between Rome and Russia (and Europe in general), implying not simply parallelism or similarity, but actual identity (the branding of Catiline as a Bolshevik and the pronoun "our" in "our contemporary Europe" in the quote above suggest that Russia is included in the same category).⁵⁴⁵ There are even more explicit comparisons as the essay progresses, such as the comparison of the Roman "intelligentsia" to their Russian counterparts.⁵⁴⁶ Events from either period are used interchangeably, and, to make the similarities even more obvious, Blok consistently and anachronistically applies contemporary vocabulary to present his version of Roman history. Catiline is a "Roman revolutionary" ("римский революционер"), Sallust – an "offended bureaucrat" ("обиженный бюрократ"), Cicero – an "assistant attorney" ("помощник ... присяжного поверенного") and a "clueless intellectual" ("непрозорливый интеллигент"), Marius – an "NCO" ("унтерофицер"); the Roman "proletariat" ("пролетариат"), we are told, is in conflict with the Roman "bourgeoisie" ("буржуазии").

This vocabulary is striking, since it does not bring ancient concepts and terminology to the contemporary circumstances, lending prestige or validity to the author's claims (such as when, for instance, Lomonosov portrays historical Russian competition with Rome to present Russia as a strong empire with impressive history, or when the Decembrists evoked Brutus to inspire others to join their cause). As Kalb notes, Blok "did not seek to bring European or 'Roman' values into his vision."⁵⁴⁷ Instead, we look back to see that Rome was actually an earlier but mostly identical version of contemporary Russia, governed by the same underlying

⁵⁴⁵ See Orlov 217ff.

⁵⁴⁶ Blok 29. Romanov speculates on whom Blok could have referred to as "contemporary Ciceros," arguing that there were "plenty of revolutionary orators" around. He mentions Kerenskii, Lenin, Trotskii, and Lunacharskii (208). However, since Blok is using Cicero to represent *non*-revolutionary oratory, it seems likelier that Blok was referring more generally to the members of the intelligentsia who were unable to perceive the necessity of the revolution.

⁵⁴⁷ Kalb 128.

political and social forces. Instead of Roman concepts' bringing cultural prestige to Russia, Russian concepts are used to invalidate the exceptional status and cultural prestige of Rome and put forth a claim of the universality of historical patterns. The markedly Russian vocabulary also ensures that the focus remains on contemporary Russia, where the latest iteration of the world revolution is currently taking place.

At the same time, Blok also insists on the continuous relevance of ancient concepts, particularly that of a metamorphosis. In a striking blending of historical moments, Blok tells us of Catiline's rage that takes hold of him and transforms him, while he listens to Cicero's condemnations: "The fury that gripped [Catiline] also helped him shake off the weight of [Cicero's] abuse; he underwent a metamorphosis, a transformation, so to speak. He felt lighter, for he 'renounced the old world' and 'shook off the dust' of Rome from his feet."⁵⁴⁸ To adequately explain Catiline's experience, Blok brings up the Ovidian concept of metamorphosis and links it to the first lines of the "Workers' Marseillaise," a Russian revolutionary song, with the melody of the original French Marseillaise but different lyrics.⁵⁴⁹ The different temporal markers united in a description of a single historical moment manage to create a sense that there is an underlying sameness between events separated by centuries of history, from ancient Rome to the French and the Russian Revolutions. Because of these explicit and implied associations, everything that Blok says about Rome becomes a clear commentary on his own contemporary history, and his insistence that Rome not only was but also *needed* to be destroyed becomes both a prophesy of and a demand for the destruction of old Russia.

The framework of judgment

⁵⁴⁸ Blok 54.

⁵⁴⁹ Blok alludes to the first two lines of the song, "Let us renounce the world world/shake its dust off our feet" ("Отречёмся от старого мира,/Отряхнём его прах с наших ног!").

Blok begins his essay with a sentence that signals the tone and a number of concerns that will be important for this essay: "Lucius Sergius Catilina, a Roman revolutionary,⁵⁵⁰ raised the banner of armed rebellion in Rome sixty years before the birth of Jesus Christ" ("Люций Сергий Катилина, римский революционер, поднял знамя вооруженного восстания в Риме за 60 лет до рождения Иисуса Христа"⁵⁵¹). Instead of providing a date, Blok uses the temporal marker "sixty years before the birth of Jesus Christ," placing the events he will discuss into a context of higher, divine, moral authority. A few paragraphs into the essay, Blok once again turns to the same temporal marker, writing: "a few decades before Christ, poor Catiline was fated to revolt against the old world and try to explode the decomposed civilization from within" ("за несколько десятков лет до Христа бедному Катилине выпало на долю восстать против старого мира и попытаться взорвать растленную цивилизацию изнутри"⁵⁵²). By speaking of the two events together, Blok creates an impression that they are somehow associated, that Catiline's attempt to destroy the Republic was a precursor to the judgment that would be delivered by the advent of Christianity.

It is important to note, however, that he is not here concerned with the teachings or values of the Christian church.⁵⁵³ As V. Orlov points out, "this is not an ecclesiastical Christ; Blok was not trying to give a religious justification and blessing to the revolution."⁵⁵⁴ For Blok, Jesus was a figure separate from the institution of Christianity and important for being a symbol of justice,

⁵⁵⁰ M. Gasparov notes the influence of T. Mommsen's *History of Rome* on Blok's depiction of the Roman Republic both in the "naturalistic picture of political stagnation [and] corruption" and in branding the end of this period as a "revolution." While Mommsen singled out Caesar as the representative of the new world, however, Blok's choice was Catiline (Gasparov 124).

⁵⁵¹ Blok 5.

⁵⁵² Blok 7.

⁵⁵³ Reeve, and others, point out, however, that Blok "uses Christian symbols in a non-Christian or even antidoctrinaire understanding," and the poem even includes ridicule of institutionalized religion (213). Gasparov argues that Blok's image was synthesized from Ernest Renan, Nietzsche, and Viacheslav Ivanov (Gasparov 126). For a detailed discussion of these three influences on Blok's portrayal of a revolutionary, see Kalb 116-120.

⁵⁵⁴ Orlov 215.

democratic beginnings, and violent rebellion against the status quo.⁵⁵⁵ In this essay, he appears in the role of a just judge who will condemn and convict Rome: “in several decades [Rome would hear] its eternal and immutable sentence [...] in the just court of Jesus Christ” (“которой через несколько десятков лет был произнесен навеки и бесповоротно приговор [...] на суде нелицемерном, на суде Иисуса Христа”⁵⁵⁶). Elsewhere we are reminded that the Roman Empire “was living out its last days, when the old civilization was about to hear the merciless judgment from Nazareth” (“римская империя поживала последние дни, когда готов был прозвучать из Назарета беспощадный приговор старой цивилизации”⁵⁵⁷).

By framing his narrative with references to the eventual judgment, Blok claims the authority of this (chronologically later) judgment for his own condemnation of Roman society. Neither the judgment itself nor its specific consequences are ever discussed. What is important, instead, is the knowledge that it will happen, that the Roman civilization will receive a just death sentence, and this knowledge colors the entire historical episode that is inexorably moving towards this judgment.

In addition to the temporal markers that insistently date events with reference to the sentencing and destruction of Rome, Blok from time to time uses Biblical phrasing in his narrative to perhaps reiterate the importance of the overarching higher morality for the interpretation of these events. In writing about Caesar and summarizing the end of his life, for instance, Blok writes, “glory works in ineffable ways” (“пути славы неисповедимы”) echoing the Biblical expression about the unfathomable ways of God.⁵⁵⁸ The passage then goes on to talk about the reversal of Caesar's fortune and his “fall,” recalling Derzhavin's poem “the Waterfall”

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 216.

⁵⁵⁶ Blok 31.

⁵⁵⁷ Blok 41.

⁵⁵⁸ Romans 11:33.

that, too, juxtaposes human ambition (also with reference to Caesar) with the unpredictability of fate and the ever-present threat of death.⁵⁵⁹ In Blok's rendition, however, there is an emphasis not on human frailty but rather on justice, as the author points out that Caesar “still fell – at the very moment when he was about to be proclaimed the tsar of all Roman provinces; and the hand that struck him belonged to that same “popular party” in whose affairs he himself once clandestinely took part” (“все таки пал—в ту самую минуту, когда его должны были провозгласить царем всех римских провинций; и рука, сразившая его, принадлежала к той самой „народной партии”, в делах которой когда то тайно, как заговорщик, Цезарь сам принимал участие”⁵⁶⁰). The phrase “*still fell*” (“*все таки пал*”) and the linking of Caesar’s demise with his earlier secret activities suggest a higher intervention and just punishment for his earlier actions.⁵⁶¹

Other phrases, too, have a Biblical origin, as Blok refers to sowing the wind,⁵⁶² the Ecclesiastes proverb about everything having its time under the sun,⁵⁶³ the weakness of man, and so on. The accumulated effect of these allusions, combined with the frequently evoked temporal markers of judgment, place the events he discusses into a context of something greater than human ambition. Once again, however, the references are not used to bring up any Christian teachings or values (there is no mention of faith, mercy, compassion, humility, etc. in this essay),

⁵⁵⁹ In Derzhavin’s version: “They’ll fall, - and the unconquerable leader/Caesar, surrounded by praise,/Fell in the Senate, covering his face with his cloak./At the moment he desired the diadem” (“Падут, - и вождь непобедимый,/В Сенате Цезарь среди похвал,/В тот миг, желал как диадимы,/Закрыв лице плащом, упал;/Исчезли замыслы, надежды,/Сомкнулись алчны к трону вежды”).

⁵⁶⁰ Blok 40.

⁵⁶¹ Gasparov argues that because of Mommsen’s influence and admiration for Caesar, Blok was unable to provide a truly scathing description of Caesar (Gasparov 124). I’m not sure this is necessarily the case, however, since Caesar is very firmly placed into the context of guilt and divine punishment, and he is treated with as little respect as the other characters. There are others, too, who are portrayed as mildly rather than enormously contemptible (Sulla and Plutarch, for instance), so I do not see any evidence of Caesar’s exceptionalism here.

⁵⁶² A. Blok. *Sobranie Sochinenii*. vol. 6, Moscow: Gos. Izd-o Khud. Lit., 1962, 70.

⁵⁶³ Blok 71.

but rather to point towards the existence of a greater authority that will one day deliver violent retribution and destruction. In fact, the only thing we are explicitly told about the advent of the “new morality” is that it will be “like an all-consuming fire” (“как ‘огнь поедающий’”), a phrase that is a direct reference to Hebrews 10:27, which delivers a reminder of a “terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.”⁵⁶⁴ It is this “terrifying expectation of judgment” and destruction that is meant to frame our reading.

Blok then usurps this greater context to bolster his own position as a judge, a role that he often takes on explicitly, and the condemnations that he will deliver. These condemnations extend to nearly all the individuals that he mentions in the essay, though the specific “sins” they are guilty of vary from person to person. It is possible that the figures he chooses to attack also metonymically represent the various strata of society and that, by attacking them, Blok shows the pervasiveness of corruption in Rome.⁵⁶⁵ For instance, Sallust, the historian responsible for one of the two extant accounts of Catiline’s conspiracy, is labeled a “bureaucrat.” Cicero, the other source of information about Catiline, is “an intellectual.” The Roman generals Caesar, Marius, and Sulla represent the military and ruling forces of different backgrounds. In addition to attacking them in general, Blok also devotes some time in discrediting them as representatives of their roles, so that their personal flaws, such as hypocrisy and blindness to reality, are paired up with their failings as public figures.

The most attention is devoted to the life, character, and fate of those whose accounts condemn Catiline – Sallust and Cicero. Sallust, as I mentioned earlier, is portrayed as a representative of Roman (and all other) bureaucrats, and Blok offers us an unflattering portrait of

⁵⁶⁴ Hebrews 10:27, text from the *New American Standard Bible*.

⁵⁶⁵ Poznanski notes the representative role that Sallust (“la gent bourgeoise est d'abord représentée par Salluste”) and Cicero (“le prototype de l'intelligent bourgeois”) play in the essay, but does not pursue this observation further (637).

his career and motivations. Sallust, we are told,

had held a fairly important post in a province, and, by the way, left a very bad impression: he managed to squeeze all the juices from the rich country with his bribes and taxes; the amounts of the bribes were so exceptional that they attracted attention even in this time when this method of enrichment was considered ordinary and universally accepted.

[...занимал довольно высокий пост в провинции, причем оставил по себе очень плохую память: ему удалось выжать все соки из богатой страны взятками и поборами; размеры этих взяток были так исключительны, что на них обратили внимание даже в то время, когда такой способ обогащения считался делом обыкновенным и общепринятым.⁵⁶⁶]

Through this description of Sallust, Blok condemns not only Sallust's own enormous corruption, but also the general exploitative conditions that Rome imposed on the provinces and the universal corruption of its officials. Blok then offers a brief summary of the remainder of Sallust's career – he was tried, acquitted through the patronage of Caesar, managed to keep much of the money he had stolen, and eventually retired to write his histories.

By including an account of Sallust's career, Blok brings attention to what he sees as hypocrisy in Sallust's condemnations of the corruption around him, and he condemns Sallust for the moralistic tone he assumes in his writing. In fact, Blok goes on to “explain” what Sallust's “true” motivations for writing his histories must have been:

Naturally, Sallust, snubbed by the aristocrats, could not forgive Sulla for [his victory over Marius].⁵⁶⁷ He takes his opportunity to mourn the demise of ancient Roman valor, the disintegration of discipline in the army; basically everything that is mourned by officials who all their lives got by on having the right convictions and suddenly found themselves superfluous after a hostile party came to power.

[Естественно, что всего этого не мог простить Сулле обойденный аристократами Саллюстий, который скорбит по этому случаю и о падении старинной римской доблести, и об уничтожении дисциплины в войсках; вообще обо всем, о чем свойственно скорбеть чиновникам, которые всю

⁵⁶⁶ Blok 10.

⁵⁶⁷ Blok uses the conflict between the generals Marius and Sulla as a representation of the conflict between plebeians and the aristocracy; they are mentioned in passing and are not important to the main narrative.

жизнь грели руки около правых убеждений и вдруг оказались не у дел, по случаю победы партии, им враждебной.^{568]}

Here, Sallust's behavior is generalized to include officials in general, making him a *representative* example and extending the criticism to a wider stratum of society. By suggesting that Sallust's proclaimed concerns (degradation of Roman society) were actually just a knee-jerk reaction to the failure of his career aspirations, Blok undermines the moral authority that Sallust had attempted to claim in his exposition of Roman vices. After all, Sallust (as we saw above) had attempted to take advantage of the general corruption himself and only began to denounce it after he failed in this endeavor.

After his criticisms of Sallust's career and the motives for his writing, Blok introduces the question of whether Sallust should be "forgiven" for hypocrisy and decides that, ultimately, the affectation of his moralizing is unforgivable:

Man is weak and can be forgiven everything except the lack of culture; perhaps we could forgive Sallust his dissipation, and corruption, and sycophancy; indeed, one British historian already forgave Sallust all of this because of his "talent;" there is one single thing that cannot be forgiven: the moralistic and patriotic tone assumed by him. "Whether out of shame or annoyance, I don't want to waste words describing Sulla's actions," whines Sallust; it is difficult to forgive the gifted stylist and bribe-taker for this affectation.

[Слаб человек, и все ему можно простить, кроме хамства; так и Саллюстию можно, пожалуй простить и разврат, и взяточничество, и подхалимство; все это ему и простил уже один английский историк — за его „талант“; нельзя только простить ему одного: принятого им нравственного и патриотического тона. „От стыдали, от досадыли, я не хочу терять слов на описание того, что делал Сулла“, ломается Саллюстий; вот это ломание даровитому стилисту и взяточнику простить трудно.^{569]}

The word "forgive" is used five times in two sentences, conveying the intensity of the judgment.

It is perhaps curious that Blok insists on such a scathing account of Sallust, who was quite vocal

⁵⁶⁸ Blok 14.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

in criticizing the vices of his contemporary Rome and providing a “diagnosis of the decadence that gripped Roman society.”⁵⁷⁰ In fact, Ramsey argues, the choice of Catiline as a subject for his history was felicitous precisely because it gave Sallust “an opportunity to examine the moral degeneracy of the late Republic,”⁵⁷¹ a goal that is much in line with what Blok’s description of Roman society tries to establish.

In fact, Blok does not contradict Sallust’s account of Catiline or the contemporary social vices. He actually appears to agree with both. For instance, even while he is criticizing Sallust’s “true” motivations, he still implicitly accepts the accuracy of his condemnations and descriptions:

Sallust did not spare any hues to depict the extent of the fall of the aristocracy in his portrayal of Sulla. The historian was very successful in this task, because the material was truly plentiful.

[Саллюстий не пожалел красок для того, чтобы изобразить в лице Суллы всю глубину падения аристократии. Историк преуспел в этом деле, потому что материал был, действительно, богатый. ⁵⁷²]

Thus, even though Sallust is writing his account because he was personally wronged and wants to take out his bitterness on the people whom he holds responsible for the offenses, his observations about the immorality of the aristocracy seem to be accurate – by saying that Sallust had plenty of material for a successful depiction of the aristocracy’s corruption, Blok implies that he does not disagree with Sallust’s assessment.

The insistence on attacking not the content of Sallust’s account but the personality, behavior, and motivations behind it suggests an underlying approach – all the negatives (but only

⁵⁷⁰ Ramsey J. T., *Sallust’s Bellum Catilinae*, 68. Christopher Krebs points out that Sallust’s depiction of Catiline “reinforces Sallust’s notion of the interconnection between society and individual. For, sociologically, the conspirator (as much as Sallust) is ‘a product of the times’: he is spurred on by the *corrupti ciuitatis mores* (BC 5.8).” (“Catiline’s Ravaged Mind: ‘Vastus Animus’ (Sall. ‘BC’ 5.5),” 683.

⁵⁷¹ Ramsey 8.

⁵⁷² Blok 13.

the negatives) are allowed to remain. Sallust's scathing depictions of society are allowed to stand even though he himself, as a member of that society, is judged to be corrupt and immoral. The resulting conclusion seems to be that only destruction (such as one planned by Catiline) can remedy the situation, since criticism, *even if it happens to be accurate*, is delivered by equally corrupt hypocrites driven by petty and immoral motivations. As a result, this criticism does not and cannot lead to any actual change, as its author is only interested in revenge rather than any productive positive changes.

Cicero also receives a scathing treatment. He is judged not only for putting the conspirators to death without a trial, but also for his morals and motivations, his attitudes toward the Rome of his day, his blindness to the true state of things, and even his writings that, according to Blok, were harmful to later generations.

As was the case with Sallust, Cicero is also placed into an overarching framework of guilt and judgment, first in the context of his actions during the conspiracy and then in terms of his blindness to reality. In terms of his political actions, Blok tells us: "Cicero was not forgiven for the execution of the conspirators. It was one of the rare examples when "white terror,"⁵⁷³ which usually remains unpunished, did not escape punishment" ("Цицерону не была прощена казнь участников заговора Катилины. Это - один из редких примеров того, как 'белый террор', обыкновенно безнаказанный, не остался без наказания"⁵⁷⁴). The reference to "white terror" once again aligns Roman history with later events, as "white terror" is likely a reference to the repressive measures of the royalist forces in France in 1815 after the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, which included assassinations, executions, sentences of exile, mob attacks, and

⁵⁷³ For a discussion of white terror in the Russian context, see Viktor G. Bortnevski. "White Administration and White Terror (The Denikin Period)."

⁵⁷⁴ Blok 41.

lootings.⁵⁷⁵ This alignment drastically reinterprets Cicero's role in the conspiracy by suggesting that he should be remembered not as a savior of his fatherland, but, rather, the source of violent and unnecessary reactionary repressions ("white terror"). By pointing to Cicero's "punishment" in the context of his "terror," moreover, Blok presents Cicero's actions as essentially criminal and deserving of retribution.

The punishment that Blok refers to here is Cicero's temporary exile in 58 B.C. It was brought about by unrelated personal enmities and political intrigue, and Cicero's actions in the conspiracy five years prior served merely as a pretext to drive him from Rome, to which he was soon recalled. Blok, however, does not discuss the context of Cicero's exile, merely citing it as evidence that Cicero was "not forgiven," as though there is some higher authority that could judge Cicero and find him deserving of punishment.

After his return, Cicero, according to Blok, continues to be tormented by guilt. We are told that Cicero drastically decreased his involvement in public life, perhaps because "he was tormented by his conscience" ("его мучили упреки совести"). In the very next sentence, Blok reminds us that Cicero was living in the days "when the merciless judgment of the old civilization was ready to sound from Nazareth" ("когда готов был прозвучать из Назарета беспощадный приговор старой цивилизации"). The judgment of the individual is again placed in a context of the judgment of the world, and again the author's moral condemnation seems interchangeable with the eventual judgment and destruction of the entire civilization.

Blok's condemnation of Cicero extends beyond his specific role in the suppression of the

⁵⁷⁵ For more on white terror in France, see Daniel P. Resnick. *The White Terror and the Political Reaction after Waterloo*. "White terror" is also a term that refers to "the repressive actions carried out by the enemies of the Bolsheviks during the Civil War," but given the composition date of this essay, it is unlikely that Blok would already be speaking about Russia here since most of the acts that historians cite as example of "white terror" happened at a later point. For a discussion of white terror in the Russian context, see Viktor Bortnevski, "White Administration and White Terror (The Denikin Period)."

conspiracy and the execution of the conspirators, however. While he is not a hypocrite like Sallust, he is guilty of (in addition to murder) unforgiveable blindness towards the conditions in Rome and the advent of the new world order. His writings, moreover, are portrayed as harmful to future generations: “The middle ages suffocated in the philosophy expounded by Cicero” “В философии, изложенной Цицероном, задохнулись средние века”⁵⁷⁶). By adding the detail about the future harm of his work, Blok seems to suggest a connection between Cicero’s general blindness to reality and the resulting quality of his work, since no specific alternate explanation is offered for this harmful effect.

Like Sallust, Cicero becomes a representative of a whole stratum of society – in his case, the intellectuals, who are presented as being out of touch with reality and unable to perceive and respond to the underlying causes of a revolution. There is once again an explicit parallel with Russia, where there is an explicit identification of Cicero with the Russian intelligentsia, who, remarkably, are portrayed as being even more out of touch, though perhaps less to blame than their Roman counterpart:

There are Ciceros in Russia today [but because] Rome had already been under Republican rule for four hundred years, the Roman intelligentsia, which developed more naturally, was not so removed from the soil; unlike ours, it did not break under the strain of the endless fighting against something vague, dull, bureaucratically-idiotic.

[Цицероны есть в России и в наше время; может быть, это можно объяснить тем, что в Риме был уже четыреста лет республиканский образ правления, и римская интеллигенция, развиваясь более естественно, не была так оторвана от почвы; она не надорвалась так, как наша, в непрерывных сражениях с чем то полусуществующим, тупым, бюрократическиидиотским.⁵⁷⁷]

Here we may recall the criticisms of state service in *Obломov* and the disintegration of Obломov’s youthful patriotism and desire to serve his people and country in the face of precisely

⁵⁷⁶ Blok 42.

⁵⁷⁷ Blok 29.

something “bureaucratically-idiotic.” The end result for Oblomov is complete isolation from and uselessness to society. By crediting the Republican way of life with the development of a more functional intelligentsia, Blok implicitly blames the autocracy for the establishment of the circumstances that led to the alienation of the intelligentsia in Russia, since the only difference that Blok offers us to account for the difference between Rome and Russia is the political system of the state.

Though it is Cicero and Sallust who merit particular attention and vitriol, the representatives of other public roles and social strata also appear to be briefly criticized, even when they have no particular connection to the story of Catiline. For instance, the generals and political leaders Marius and Sulla appear as military leaders from opposite backgrounds to represent their entire respective classes. Marius, a plebeian, is described in a way that foregrounds his ignorance and lack of education: “Marius was a man created by and for war; that is, a senseless and noxious creature,” guided “by a deep disdain for all education – a disdain typical of undeveloped people” (“Марий был человек, созданный войной и для войны; т. е., создание бессмысленное и вредное [...] питавший глубокое презрение ко всякому образованию—презрение, свойственное людям неразвитым”⁵⁷⁸). Marius, then, is used as a type to represent uneducated military and public figures and dismiss them as thoughtless and harmful. Sulla, on the other hand, was a member of aristocracy, and appears as an example of “the extent of the fall of the aristocracy” (“Саллюстий не пожалел красок для того, чтобы изобразить в лице Суллы всю глубину падения аристократии”⁵⁷⁹). Like the other figures, he is portrayed as a representative of his class, since his behavior is used to describe the vices of the entire aristocracy. His (and their) sins include the excessive love of luxury and entertainment,

⁵⁷⁸ Blok 12.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

dishonesty, and general immorality. These two figures are completely peripheral to the story and are mentioned almost in a side note mentioning Sallust's political allegiances in order to discredit the motivations behind his writing. The way they are portrayed, however, extends Blok's judgment of individuals to other types of public figures not covered by the condemnation of Cicero and Sallust.

The decomposing state

The judgment of the individual representatives and strata of Roman society is accompanied by extensive scathing criticism of the Roman Empire as a whole. We see that it was plagued by underlying and widespread corruption and decay, the descriptions of which aim to destroy the idealized myth of Rome. By showing corruption in individuals *and* the entire state, Blok conveys the extent of the corruption that permeates not only the upper layers, individuals (which could be outliers), or greater structures (which could allow individual exceptions), but really the entire society, on the big and the small scale. He reinterprets the traditionally evoked characteristics of Rome, such as its military might, to show not greatness but pathological tendencies. Consistently throughout the essay, Blok uses imagery of decay and disease to describe Roman political and social life, eliciting a visceral disgust and aversion in addition to intellectual condemnation. This imagery of decomposition insistently implies that there is no hope for this society, that its death has already taken place and, since it continues to rot, total purging destruction is the only possible positive development. At the same time, the allusions to disease may suggest an ongoing danger, which adds a sense of urgency to the sense of inevitability.

In discussing Cicero's opposition to Catiline, Blok writes, "of course he had to save his fatherland – that is, the rapidly bloating body of Rome that was beginning to show definite signs

of decomposition” (“надо ведь было спасти свое отечество, то есть безмерно разбухавшее и начинающее выказывать явные признаки разложения государственное тело Рима”⁵⁸⁰). Here Blok may be using the term “fatherland” in order to allude to the rhetoric of Cicero’s orations against Catiline after the discovery of the conspiracy, where “fatherland” (“patria”) is one of the most frequently invoked terms. Reminding the reader of Cicero’s rhetoric, Blok appropriates this term in order to show the “real” Rome, undermining the validity of Cicero’s claims about the greatness of his fatherland (and, implicitly, his condemnation of Catiline, since we now see that Catiline’s was trying to burn a decomposing corpse rather than a flourishing Republic). There is also considerable irony in Cicero’s attempts to save something that is already dead and decomposing, and his endeavor allows Blok to once again remind us of and mock his blindness to reality.

The image of a corpse appears a number of other times, ensuring that the readers remember that the Roman state “made its demise inevitable through its own growth, its unstoppable bloating, similar to the bloating of a corpse” “обрекло само себя на гибель собственным ростом, неудержимым распуханием, напоминающим распухание трупа”⁵⁸¹). Curiously, even though Rome is compared to a decomposing corpse it is still *blamed* for its post-mortem bloating, as if its guilt overcomes the laws of nature.

Here and elsewhere Blok juxtaposes the “reality” of a rotting organism with the traditional perceptions of Rome’s grandeur. He includes the commonly evoked descriptions of ancient Rome, perhaps in order to make his descriptions more convincing (and more destructive) by first acknowledging and then destabilizing the more traditional epithets and characteristics with which Rome is often evoked. He refers to such common and familiar characteristics as

⁵⁸⁰ Blok 31.

⁵⁸¹ Blok 42.

military might and geographic expanse, but reinterprets them as symptoms of decomposition and pathological compulsion rather than evidence of prowess. In the two quotes above, he likens the geographical expanse to the bloating of a corpse, and it is this image of “unstoppable bloating” that underlies the references to expansion:

And so, Rome, the happy possessor of Republican liberties and powerful conqueror of nearly all of the known world, as it always happens, had no control over its own sweeping ambitions of mastery over the entire world and its own imperialistic appetites; it continued to fight.

[Итак, Рим, счастливый обладатель республиканских вольностей и великодержавный завоеватель почти всего известного в то время мира, уже сам, как это всегда бывает, не имел власти сдержать размах собственных притязаний на окончательное мировое владычество и свои империалистические аппетиты; он продолжал воевать.⁵⁸²]

The military prowess of Rome, according to Blok is a symptom not of greatness but of the inability to control its appetites and bloating. The ironically used pompous epithet “powerful conqueror” (“великодержавный завоеватель”) refers to the perceived greatness, setting us up for the surprises of “reality” – that the expansion was pathological, driven not by reason or strategy but by some sort of unstoppable compulsion. By referring to “appetites” Blok once again brings us to the physiological realm (as he had done with the mentions of bloating and decomposition), evoking an image of an enormous bloated body that compulsively continues binge-consuming everything that surrounds it.

The external bloating of the state is accompanied by a diseased and degenerating society within Rome, which is hardly surprising since, as we had already seen, the individual members of this society are driven by corruption and hypocrisy:

The result was evident in Rome, as it is evident to us: the majority becomes gradually more stupid and bestial, the minority becomes weaker, emptier, loses its sanity. The eyes of Rome, like our eyes, did not see this; and if anyone did see it, he would not be able to anticipate that terrible disease that is the clearest symptom

⁵⁸² Blok 7.

of a civilization's decrepitude: the disease of *degeneration*.

[результат [...] был на глазах у всего Рима, он на глазах и у нас: большинство - тупеет и звереет, меньшинство - хиреет, опустошается, сходит с ума. Глаза Рима, как и наши глаза, не видели этого; а если кто и видел, то не умел предупредить страшной болезни, которая есть лучший показатель дряхлости цивилизации: болезни *вырождения*.⁵⁸³]

This image of disease and degeneration that, in various forms, permeates all levels of society, suggests not only the inevitability of demise, but also its desirability, the need for destruction. Since the entire society has been affected by this degeneration, it can no longer be fixed from within the existing structures (as we already saw with the specific individual example of Sallust), and the only solution offered by the text is to raze the old world and build something completely new.

Those who can think otherwise and defend Rome (and, by extension, old Russia) are shameless hypocrites:

Despite all this, these citizens of this great state dared to wistfully speak of ancient Roman valor; they had the gall to speak of their love for their fatherland and national pride, they were shameless enough to be pleased with themselves and their fatherland: the triumphantly rotting Rome.

[При этом, все эти граждане великого государства имели смелость сокрушаться о древней римской доблести; у них хватало духу говорить о любви к отечеству и народной гордости, у них хватало бесстыдства быть довольными собой и своим отечеством: триумфально гниющим Римом.⁵⁸⁴]

The “triumphantly rotting Rome” is a striking summary of Blok’s approach to Rome. The adverb “triumphantly” evokes, of course, the triumphs, the celebrations of military conquests and victorious generals, as well as the “grandeur that was Rome”⁵⁸⁵ in the perception of many later generations. Blok, however, applies the term to Rome’s rotting, suggesting that the

⁵⁸³ Blok 17.

⁵⁸⁴ Blok 44-45.

⁵⁸⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, “To Helen.”

triumphant, victorious appearance was merely a façade that was hiding decay and decomposition. The attack includes not only Rome, however, but also the vast majority of its citizens who remained blind to this reality.

In Blok's description, there are no positives, redeeming characteristics, or fluctuating circumstances. Though he discusses a specific period, he extends his condemnation through all Roman history, because he discusses this specific episode and then suggests that, after the death of Catiline, everything continued exactly as before. The only future events mentioned are the birth of Jesus and the fall of Rome to the barbarians, which are blurred into a single event of the destruction of Rome (I will discuss the sameness of subsequent Roman history and the allusions to the destruction of Rome in more detail at a later point in the chapter). Since we know that everything continued as before and Rome continued decomposing for a few more centuries, we can assume that the entire history of the Roman Empire was essentially identical to the episode described by Blok.

Social inequality and revolutionary rhetoric

Mixed in with these various condemnations of Roman figures and society is another important feature of Rome that also serves to connect it to contemporary circumstances and revolutionary rhetoric. The Roman society, we are told, was an example of consistent and worsening social inequality. This characteristic is not something that Blok attempts to prove or analyze, however. Instead, it is taken for granted and mentioned in passing when Blok is trying to make a different point or establish a general context for his narrative. For instance, when he tries to show the conditions of Roman life before or after Catiline's conspiracy, Blok gives a brief general overview that refers to social and economic problems:

...the majority of the citizens grew poorer, while a few were amassing enormous capital [...] the numbers of the urban proletariat were growing rapidly...

...oligarchs remained in power even though the slaughter of the bourgeoisie had been going on for a number of years...

...slaves, whose number and plight grew with each new triumph of the Roman arms, those faceless, cunning and wretched Roman poor...still deserted, speculated, sold itself...

...the aristocratic swine, painting its eyebrows with red paint, continued to look through their lorgnettes at the strapping healthy barbarians bought at a discount...

[...большинство граждан беднело, а в руках немногих сосредоточивались громадные капиталы [...]рост городского пролетариата усиливался с непомерной быстротой...⁵⁸⁶

...несмотря на то, что в столице, в течение ряда годов, происходила резня буржуазии, у власти продолжали оставаться олигархи...⁵⁸⁷

...рабы, число и бедственное положение которых росло с каждым новым триумфом римского оружия, вся эта безлика, лукавая и несчастная римская беднота...попрежнему дезертировала, спекулировала, продавалась за деньги...⁵⁸⁸

...аристократическая сволочь, сурмившая брови красной краской, попрежнему лорничировала с любопытством рослых и здоровых варваров, купленных в рабство по сходной цене...⁵⁸⁹

The result of these descriptions is an impression that Roman society was permeated by social inequality, though this inequality remains on the level of general context and is not tied into the central narratives of the text, in the sense that, with one exception, there are no explicit ties between this general context and the specific events within the text, no causality or consequences that show specifically how this social inequality impacted the stories of the individuals and specific events that Blok discusses and, for the most part, condemns.

The one exception at first seems striking. At one point in the narrative, Blok outright

⁵⁸⁶ Blok 8.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁸ Blok 44.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

credits the emergence of the conspiracy to Roman inequality, arguing that Catiline was the direct product of "social inequality": "he was created by social inequality, nurtured in its suffocating atmosphere" ("он был создан социальным неравенством, вскормлен в его удушливой атмосфере"⁵⁹⁰). The implication here may be that "social inequality" (the term remains undefined) is bound to result in destructive, violent opposition, and that it itself is to blame for the consequences. This pronouncement is certainly important for the use of Catiline's story as a precursor to the Russian Revolution, since it grounds the episode in class struggle. And yet, there is not a single description of the mechanism that led from these general structures of social inequality to Catiline's conspiracy.

There is, however, an explanation that is not in any immediate way related to social inequality. Catiline himself, Blok argues, was not someone who wanted to expose social inequality or punish the vices of those around: "Obviously, Catiline was not a defender of the people, he did not dream of social equality" ("О том, что Катилина был народолюбом, или мечтал о всеобщем равенстве, речи, конечно, быть не может"⁵⁹¹). Blok bypasses the question of exact mechanisms and connections, however, by arguing that one cannot look for reason in a true revolutionary, that he is a product of greater forces of which he himself is unaware and which cannot be explained with logic: "the conclusions of the brain and the heart appear wild, incidental, unfounded. Such a man is a madman, a maniac; he is possessed. His life flows according to different laws of causality, space, and time" ("выводы мозга и сердца представляются дикими, случайными и ни на чем не основанными. Такой человек— безумец, маниак, одержимый. Жизнь протекает, как бы, подчиняясь другим законам

⁵⁹⁰ Blok 22.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*

причинности, пространства и времени”⁵⁹²). The transformation into a revolutionary is something that completely bypasses agency, intentions, and our understanding of causality. Perhaps by refusing to be specific Blok is attempting to infuse the episode with universal significance – the specific circumstances and details are not known or relevant; it does not matter what Catiline was trying to accomplish or why he was trying to accomplish it. The important impression is that social inequality will somehow inevitably eventually breed extreme violent opposition that will and should lead to the destruction of the status quo.

Similarly, none of the extensive targeted condemnations that we saw above, such as those of Sallust and Cicero, have much to do with any stated social inequality. While it is a concern that insistently appears in the general descriptions and that makes Rome unquestionably relevant to Russia, Blok's actual and specific accusations towards individuals are usually about hypocrisy, corruption, immorality, ignorance, and other character flaws, not their participation in social oppression. Perhaps Blok is trying to create a sense of the inseparability of social inequality and other types of corruption in such a society by placing the individual episodes of his narrative in the general explicit context of inequality. Or perhaps he is more invested in showing that Rome had to fall because its corruption was varied and ubiquitous, whether one looks at social and political structures, the corpse-like bloating of the state, or the motives and behaviors of individual figures.

Destroying the myth of Rome

While demonstrating the inevitability and necessity of the destruction of Rome that was intended by his Catiline, Blok also performs this destruction in his descriptions, attacking the status, even the memory of the society he has condemned and ensuring that the destruction is

⁵⁹² Blok 23.

indeed total. In the process of destabilizing the perception of Roman greatness by comparing it to a diseased rotting organism, Blok also mocks its great figures. This tactic is different from the extended and elaborate moral condemnation that I discussed above. In addition to explaining the faults and “sins” of the specific people or strata of society, Blok undermines various heroes, values, accomplishments, or notions of status and prestige that these might evoke, and the tone here is often one of banter and ridicule. At times, its lightness may suggest playfulness, but its aim is rather a systematic undermining of the usually reverent tone with which Rome is discussed (after all, even the negative portrayals often reflect a sense of awe, of grand proportions; Rome is grand even in its immorality, as Hollywood films never fail to show), and there is a palpable bitterness behind much of the humor. The bitterness and the mockery are mostly of a petty kind, aiming to place Rome and its revered writers and politicians in the realm of triviality and even banality.

For example, with a single epithet devoted to each, he dismisses the writings of Sallust, Cicero, and Plutarch as irrelevant to any actual concerns of their society: “We won’t find a word about this in the blathering of Sallust, the prattle of Cicero, or the moralizing of Plutarch” (“Мы не найдем об этом ни слова ни в разглагольствованиях Саллюстия, ни в болтовне Цицерона, ни в морализировании Плутарха”⁵⁹³). This dismissal is very much different from mere disagreement or criticism. Instead, it is as if these historians are so clueless and irrelevant that their entire corpus of work is worthless for understanding the real history of ancient Rome.

Other Romans are often presented with concise scathing descriptions as well. The general Marius, as I mentioned above, was “a senseless and noxious creature” (“создание бессмысленное и вредное”⁵⁹⁴), who “filled his army with the lowest of lowlives” (“набирал в

⁵⁹³ Blok 56.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 12.

свои войска последнюю сволочь”⁵⁹⁵), Caesar’s main quality is his “cunning head” (“хитрая голова”), Sulla spent his days “chasing dancing girls” and “creeping into [Marius’s] confidence,” managing “to snatch victory from under Marius’s nose.”⁵⁹⁶ The aristocracy is called “aristocratic swine” (“аристократическая сволочь”),⁵⁹⁷ whose main pastime consists of lusting after slaves, who had been bought at a discount (the detail about the buying of slaves at a discount lends a particularly prosaic and quotidian tone to the immorality of the aristocracy). Roman society, in general, consists of “a few dozen degenerates,” who are “finishing on its back their shameless, degenerate, patriotic dance” (“дотанцовывали на его спине свой бесстыдный, вырожденный, патриотический танец”⁵⁹⁸).

These insults, vulgarisms, and trivializations are aimed at stripping Rome of its mythical status and the reverence with which its legacy is often treated. The trivialization is a more destructive tactic than demonization because the latter still includes an aura of reverence while the former implies that there is nothing worthy even of close attention in this civilization, that its supposed values are delusions and its heroes are ultimately either corrupt or pathetic or, more often than not, both.

Catiline as the agent of destruction

Given the magnitude and extent of corruption in Blok’s Rome, it is perhaps not surprising that Blok chooses Catiline as the “hero” of his narrative, though he himself readily admits Catiline’s flaws and vices. Still, the choice is noteworthy if we think about whom Blok could have chosen as a hero in an essay ostensibly concerned with social inequality and personal virtues. The last century of the Roman Republic was a turbulent period characterized by a

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid* 18.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid*. 13

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid*. 44.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*. 45.

number of vibrant figures with strong convictions against the status quo. Why choose Catiline if one could write about Brutus or Cato, the perennial symbols of political freedom, who had been frequently and emphatically evoked by the Decembrists in their opposition to autocracy? Cato the Younger does merit a mention in this essay, though it is only as someone who, together with Cicero, had insisted on a death sentence for Catiline and, therefore, loses all moral credibility as another perpetrator of “white terror.” Why not the Gracchi brothers, “the founding fathers of the popular movement,”⁵⁹⁹ who would be a more logical choice as precedents for the struggle against social inequality? These figures, though not mocked like a number of other Romans, are curiously completely absent from Blok’s narrative, and their absence allows him to offer an insistently bleak picture of Roman society that lacks any positive heroes with any real, pragmatic motivations. There is no mention of Brutus even when Blok writes about the eventual murder of Caesar in the passage quoted above.

Instead of any of Rome’s more traditional heroes, Blok turns to the figure who was hateful even to the Decembrists – Ryleev, for instance, praises Cicero for saving Rome from Catiline in several of his poems (discussed in the third chapter). One of the reasons for choosing Catiline is likely the desire to destabilize and re-evaluate the existing perceptions and accounts of Roman history. From the very beginning of the essay, Blok signals this intention, writing, “Scholars of recent times think that Catiline’s life has not yet received a just evaluation” (“Ученые нового времени полагают, что жизнь Каталины не получила до сих пор справедливой оценки.”⁶⁰⁰). As it turns out, of course, Blok’s re-evaluation goes far beyond Catiline himself, as he mocks Rome’s perceived greatness and great figures in order to condemn Rome and, with it, his contemporary civilization. Catiline himself may be a useful starting point

⁵⁹⁹ Odahl, Charles. *Cicero and the Catilinarian Conspiracy*.

⁶⁰⁰ Blok 5.

for such an evaluation because his reputation hinges on the accounts of Cicero and Sallust, who, for Blok, are representative of the flaws of ancient Roman society. Rehabilitating Catiline's rebellion (if not Catiline himself), then, necessarily involves discrediting these sources, which is in line with Blok's intentions for the essay.

Another, perhaps even more important reason, is that there is a precedent for re-evaluating Catiline – Henrik Ibsen's 1849 play *Catilina*, which presents Catiline as a Romantic hero and which is explicitly cited by Blok as a more accurate understanding of this figure. It may be significant that Ibsen's retelling was influenced by his own interest in the 1848 revolutions.⁶⁰¹ Though Blok himself does not discuss this point, the choice of a previous account that was influenced by the spirit of revolution seems appropriate given that the subtitle of Blok's essay is "A Page from the History of the World Revolution." He dedicates the final pages of his essay to Ibsen, noting that even though no one could argue that Ibsen was a socialist, "there could hardly be any doubt that Ibsen was a revolutionary" ("Но едва ли могут быть сомнения в том, что Ибсен был революционером."⁶⁰²) Ultimately, his own portrayal of Catiline is not totally aligned with Ibsen's interpretation, despite his claims to the contrary, and I will discuss some differences between the two accounts at a later point. First, however, a few words about Ibsen's initial reinterpretation.

Like Blok, Ibsen relied on the two extant accounts, those of Cicero and Sallust, to tell his fictionalized version of the story. His task was made easier by the fact that these sources already contain potential for reinterpretation. The speeches of Cicero are filled with hyperbolic polarization,⁶⁰³ establishing Catiline and his followers as the very antithesis of Rome and the

⁶⁰¹ McLelland 40.

⁶⁰² Blok 61.

⁶⁰³ For a defense of Catiline against Cicero's "wild charges" and "efficient propaganda machine," meant to exaggerate the threat Catiline posed and thus glorify Cicero's role in averting this threat, see K. H. Waters, "Cicero,

Senate. The “most beautiful and flourishing city” (“urbem pulcherrimam florentissimamque”⁶⁰⁴) of Rome and the “most sacred and dignified assembly” (“sanctissimo gravissimoque consilio”⁶⁰⁵) of the Roman senators, are contrasted to the vile conspirator, driven by an “unbridled and furious desire” (“cupiditas effrenata ac furiosa”⁶⁰⁶), whom “nature bore [...], desire has trained [and] fortune preserved [...] for this madness” (“Ad hanc [...] amentiam natura peperit, voluntas exercuit, fortuna servavit”⁶⁰⁷).

Cicero establishes these binaries in order to alienate Catiline from the rest of the senators and portray him as the enemy of the traditional Republican values. These binaries, however, easily lend themselves to a Romantic re-interpretation, once the relative merit of these categories becomes reversed and urban civilization, with its laws and courts, is now considered the source of oppression and discontent, while the return to nature, a reliance on internal instincts, passions, dreams and even madness is now desired and explored, especially in literature.⁶⁰⁸ Important for this re-evaluation, too, is precisely the uncontrolled, excessive, immoderate nature of Catiline’s passion and will.⁶⁰⁹

The other main source of information about the Catilinarian conspiracy is Sallust’s monograph *Bellum Catilinae*,⁶¹⁰ which was written relatively soon after the conspiracy and which became the main source for Ibsen’s account.⁶¹¹ Unlike Cicero’s account, Sallust’s work does not glorify contemporary Rome and, perhaps consequently, it is not built around dualities. It is,

Sallust, and Catiline.”

⁶⁰⁴ Cicero *In Catilinam* II.28.

⁶⁰⁵ Cicero *In Catilinam* I.9.

⁶⁰⁶ Cicero *In Catilinam* 1.25.

⁶⁰⁷ Cicero *In Catilinam* 1.25.

⁶⁰⁸ Hauser, A. *The Social History of Art*, 163.

⁶⁰⁹ Gasparov 124.

⁶¹⁰ For background, sources, text, and commentary, see Ramsey, J. T. ed. *Sallust’s Bellum Catilinae*.

⁶¹¹ See McLelland, Samuel. On *Catilina*: A Structural Examination of Ibsen’s First Play and its Sources.” *Scandinavian Studies* for a study of Ibsen’s sources and influences, as well as commentary on the “romantic mode” of the play.

however, full of information that leaves just enough room for doubt about Catiline's true nature to be useful to a writer seeking to reinterpret the event. Sallust presents the following portrait of the man:

L. Catiline was of noble birth, and had a great mental and physical power, but an evil and depraved character. From his youth, internal struggles, murder, rape, and civil discord were pleasing to him and it was in such a setting that he spent his youth. His body could endure hunger, cold, and lack of sleep to an incredible degree. He had an audacious, crafty and changeable spirit, capable of simulating and dissimulating anything, eager for others' property, wasteful of his own, burning with wants; enough eloquence, too little wisdom. His enormous⁶¹² spirit always desired things that are immoderate, incredible, too high. After the dictatorship of L. Sulla, he was taken by a strong desire to seize the state...

[L. Catilina, nobili genere natus, fuit magna vi et animi et corporis, sed ingenio malo pravoque. Huic ab adulescentia bella intestina, caedes, rapinae, discordia civilis grata fuere, ibique iuventutem suam exercuit. Corpus patiens inediae, algoris, vigiliae, supra quam cuiquam credibile est. Animus audax, subdolos, varius, cuius rei lubet simulator ac dissimulator; alieni adpetens, sui profusus; ardens in cupiditatibus; satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum. Vastus animus inmoderata, incredibilia, nimis alta semper cupiebat. Hunc post dominationem L. Sullae libido maxuma invaserat rei publicae capiundae...⁶¹³]

This description, much like Cicero's orations, establishes Catiline as a rebel against civilization, propriety, and rationality. He is said to be motivated by greed and enormous desires, including, significantly, a desire for things "immoderate, incredible." The man's reliance on the instinctual rather than the rational, while abhorrent to a traditionally-minded Roman, finds a ready acceptance among the Romantics, who prized precisely this desire to move beyond the limits of the intellect.⁶¹⁴ Catiline's disregard for societal norms, furthermore, can be easily interpreted not as delinquency but as a Romantic opposition to "everything clear-cut and definite" and a desire to explore the "unfulfilled possibility" of a more dynamic approach to life.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹² For a discussion about the interpretations and translations of "vastus," which can refer to immensity or desolation, see Christopher Krebs, "Catiline's Ravaged Mind: 'Vastus Animus' (Sall. 'BC' 5.5)."

⁶¹³ Sallust, *BC*, 5.1-6.

⁶¹⁴ Hauser 155.

⁶¹⁵ Hauser 171.

Using the potential for reinterpretation available in these two original sources, Ibsen presents his own Romantic version of Catiline, who is “torn apart by passions and rushing towards his demise.”⁶¹⁶ Samuel McLellan, who has studied the relationship between Ibsen and the Latin sources, argues that, overall, Ibsen includes and compounds the flaws and crimes, but, at the same time, also “depicts a noble side of Catiline,” ultimately providing a conflicted but sympathetic portrait.⁶¹⁷ The revolt of *his* Catiline is not against the glorious Roman Republic, but, rather, against the hopelessly corrupt people and institutions of a degenerate, abusive and artificial social/political construction. The rebellion here is the product not of debt and dissolute living but, rather, of a Romantic idealization of the earlier days of Roman glory and a desire to return to the past unfettered by the “complication, conflict, [and] oppression” of civilization and its social institutions.⁶¹⁸ At several points in the text, Catiline addresses the audience with a monologue revealing his dreams (both literal and figurative) of “something better,/Something far nobler than this present life.”⁶¹⁹

Because of this quest, he is set apart from his co-conspirators, who are, quite in line with Cicero’s and Sallust’s condemnations, motivated by greed or other base lusts. This alienation from both his enemies and his friends emphasizes the individualistic and tragic nature of Catiline’s struggle. He feels dissatisfied and superfluous, wondering whether he shall die “without first having lived”⁶²⁰ and, ultimately, his conspiracy becomes the manifestation of his attempt to escape into the world of fantasy, an attempt that is destined to fail because it cannot be reconciled with reality. Ibsen’s Catiline’s final lines summarize his life as that of a dreamer who

⁶¹⁶ Romanov 197.

⁶¹⁷ Samuel McLellan, “On *Catilina*: A Structural Examination of Ibsen’s First Play and its Sources.”

⁶¹⁸ M. Abrams. *Natural Supernaturalism*, 199.

⁶¹⁹ Henrik Ibsen, *Early Plays*, 9.

⁶²⁰ Ibsen 39.

has, somewhere inside him, a childlike innocence that got lost but did not disappear completely:

Oh, how sweet! Now I remember my forgotten dream,/ How the darkness was dispersed before a radiant beam,/ How the song of children ushered in the new-born day./ Ah, my eye grows dim, my strength is fading fast away;/ But my mind is clearer now than ever it has been: / All the wanderings of my life loom plainly up within./ Yes, my life a tempest was beneath the lightning blaze;/ But my death is like the morning's rosy-tinted haze.⁶²¹

Though Blok himself talks about Ibsen as someone who has done an accurate re-evaluation of Catiline, there are important differences in his own portrait of Catiline. Although Blok is sympathetic to the reversal of the narrative about the greatness of Rome, his account does not attribute any of these positive characteristics or idealistic motivations to Catiline.⁶²² Blok's Catiline also does not have any patriotic aspirations; as we saw earlier, Blok openly mocks those who continue to love Rome or mourn the loss of traditional Roman values.

In fact, Blok implicitly accepts the negative characterization of Catiline left by Sallust, writing, "Even if three quarters of all this is malicious gossip, the remaining quarter would be enough" ("Если даже три четверти всего этого - злобная сплетня, но и остающейся четверти довольно"⁶²³). Unlike Ibsen, he is not trying to redeem Catiline, and I cannot agree with Romanov's assessment that Blok "does not simply rehabilitate Catiline, he makes him a hero."⁶²⁴ His Catiline is certainly not a dreamer, he is a product of his hopelessly corrupt society. In fact, he even "combined all the vices [of his contemporary society] and turned them into legendary monstrosity" ("Он соединил все пороки [современного общества] и довел их до легендарного уродства"⁶²⁵), he is a "criminal and a murderer" ("беззаконник и убийца").

⁶²¹ Ibsen 94.

⁶²² There was also a Russian precedent for a positive interpretation of Catiline - Nikolai Dobrolyubov had earlier portrayed Catiline as a "true revolutionary" driven by "noble aims." Though this account was known to Blok, it is neither mentioned nor followed in this essay. See Romanov 196.

⁶²³ Blok 19.

⁶²⁴ Romanov 202.

⁶²⁵ Blok 23.

Moreover, Blok also makes it clear that he thinks Catiline did not have any productive or socially-conscious intentions. Perhaps this refusal to portray Catiline as a noble figure also reflects the desire to portray the pervasiveness of Roman corruption – even its hero is despicable – and suggest, once again, that violent destruction is the best and only desirable outcome.⁶²⁶

Most importantly, however, Catiline is the agent of destruction. He is important because he wanted to *burn* Rome and the references to burning place Catiline's actions into the context of retribution established by the reference to Hebrews 10:27, mentioned above. Blok makes the connection clear by describing the entire conspiracy as a fire, writing, "The conspiracy [...] flared up for a minute; its fire was drowned out, crushed, trampled; the conspiracy was extinguished" ("Заговор Катилины – бледный предвестник нового мира—вспыхнул на минуту; его огонь залили, завалили, растоптали; заговор потух"⁶²⁷). There are three different words that refer to fire in this description ("flared up," "fire," "extinguished"), so we know that Blok really wants to emphasize this particular metaphor. Burning is a key notion for two reasons. The first is the context of punitive destruction inflicted by a higher force that I already mentioned. The other is the cleansing function and effect of burning – it completely destroys what existed before. It is the only approach that can purify a site of decomposition, cleanse the civilizations that are so thoroughly permeated by corruption that they can no longer be changed from within the existing structures. This is why Blok looks to Catiline and why the traditional heroes evoked by earlier writers are no longer suitable.

Finally, Catiline is also a figure of failure, and though Blok himself seemingly tries to

⁶²⁶ Judith Kalb also points out that Blok accepts "Sallust's unflattering physical description," but argues that Catiline becomes a revolutionary "despite these flaws," "because of his awareness of his surroundings" (258). I think, rather, that Catiline is chosen not despite but *because* of his flaws in order to show the extent of Roman decay and the need for thorough purification.

⁶²⁷ Blok 43-4.

mitigate this failure (by placing Catiline in the chain of great revolutions, for instance, or by mentioning his influence on a later generation), there seems to be an underlying sense of despair pervading this essay, which comes out from the stories about the lack of meaningful change, figurative blindness, misunderstanding, and, finally, destruction that does not seem to be followed by anything new.

Despair

This sense of despair may be responsible for a number of things that Blok does *not* do in this essay. He does not either fear or look forward to the advent of the barbarians that will eventually destroy Rome. He does not romanticize the fall of Rome, which for other Symbolists appeared “sensational and apocalyptic.”⁶²⁸ His hero is hardly heroic, more useful for destabilizing the greatness of the traditional notable Roman figures and carrying out destruction than exemplifying any values of his own. This essay is essentially a story of decay and failure, and though Blok uses the phrase “triumphantly rotting Rome,” the text emphasizes the rotting over the triumphs. Judith Kalb mentions that Blok anticipated and feared the dissipation of the revolution, citing Blok’s notebooks and the mention of Catiline’s ultimate failure, though she argues that Blok nevertheless kept his faith in the power of the artist.⁶²⁹ I would like to pursue the notes of disillusionment and hopelessness more extensively because they seem to me to be more pervasive than first appears, and the essay seems to undermine the revolution that it so passionately demands and justifies, both in terms of its motivations and its ultimate outcome. It is worth thinking about whether Rome might, in the end, become a symbol of hopelessness, since we already know the ending of its story and can use it to predict an equally bleak ending for all stories that use it as a model.

⁶²⁸ Lodge 286.

⁶²⁹ Kalb 122.

As is evident in “Catiline,” Blok dreaded what he considered a degeneration and debasement of spirit, a kind of pettiness that he saw in historical figures like Cicero and Sallust, as well as in the world immediately around him and that led to his disillusionment with contemporary history, the epoch of “great hopes and ‘collapses.’”⁶³⁰ He had responded similarly to World War I, which “had turned out to be prosaic and petty, devoid of any sense. It was fit neither to inspire heroic deeds or patriotism, nor to transform man. ...there was a mechanical feeling to events; they appeared to develop without human influence, and their inner meaning was hidden from man.”⁶³¹ The same disillusionment, and for the same reasons, took hold of him after the October Revolution, even though he had been originally very enthusiastic about it, going as far as getting involved in political and social activism.⁶³² Though he never joined the Communist Party, he worked on the Soviet government's board of directors of the State theaters, and as chairman of the Petrograd division of the All-Russian Union of Poets and a director of the Petrograd division of the All-Russian Writers' Union.⁶³³ Eventually, however, “He came to see [it] as a failure, the product of abstract economic theories and bourgeois intellectuals who, like himself, had no real contact with or understanding of ordinary people.”⁶³⁴ Blok’s final years and writings are filled with frequent, though not invariable, references to disillusionment, despair and

⁶³⁰ Kolobaeva, L. “Polifunktional’nost’ neomifologizma v tvorchestve simvolistov (V. Briusov, Vyach. Ivanov, In. Annenskii).” *Antichnost’ i kultura Serebrianoogo veka*. Moscow: Nauka, 2010.

⁶³¹ Hellman, Ben. *Poets of Hope and Despair: The Russian Symbolists in War and Revolution (1914-1918)*. Helsinki: Institute for Russian and EE Studies, 1995, p. 238.

⁶³² He was not alone in his enthusiasm; there was a widespread excitement especially after the February Revolution: “Writers like Gippius and Briusov went out among the crowds, attended demonstrations and meetings and talked to soldiers and workers. The atmosphere was electrifying. Gippius felt this initial stage of the revolution to be ‘bright as the first moments of love.’ Blok, who had arranged a swift return from the front, walked the streets of Petrograd as in a dream, intoxicated by the freedom and joy. The sight of disciplined revolutionary soldiers filled the usually reserved Merezhkovskii with rapture. Sologub felt as if he were in a temple when watching ‘the good-natured faces’ around him. People appeared to be completely changed and class barriers seemed to have disappeared. As in 1914, there was again the feeling of a wonderful, instantaneous metamorphosis, bordering on a metaphysical miracle.” (Hellman 249).

⁶³³ F. D. Reeve, *Aleksandr Blok: Between Image and Idea*, 16.

⁶³⁴ Reeve 14.

ill health, both physical and mental.⁶³⁵ His notebooks from 1918 already often register a sense of despair and boredom, with the word “anguish” appearing as the most commonly expressed mood.

It may be that the turn to Rome and to Catiline is connected to the anticipation of failure, since his story reflects both the need for something new and the ultimate failure to bring about any changes. Blok’s notebook has several brief remarks about the essay, the earliest of which conveys a sense of enthusiasm about the topic, which promises to be fascinating: “Catiline (again). The topic is just too magnificent” (“Катилина (опять). Тема уж очень великолепна.”⁶³⁶). And yet, the very next day he writes: “Catiline. What a close, FAMILIAR, sad world! – And right away – the bitterness of failure. How boring, familiar. [...] Catiline wanted something not boring, not lavish, not beautiful, unreachable. And that, too, is boring” (“Катилина. Какой близкий, ЗНАКОМЫЙ, печальный мир! - И сразу - горечь падения. Как скучно, известно. [...] Катилина захотел нескучного, не пышного, не красивого, недостижимого. И это тоже скучно”⁶³⁷). The world of Catiline appears sad precisely because the desire for change and the bitterness of failure are so familiar. As Etkind points out, it is not Catiline’s story that is boring, “but rather the eternal return of historical episodes.”⁶³⁸ Boris Romanov speculates, and I think rightly, about a possible connection between this sentiment and an earlier (1909) poem of Blok, where he turns “a famous medieval proverb into a prophecy”⁶³⁹:

The circle of existence is tight:
As all paths lead to Rome,
So do we already know
That we will slavishly repeat everything

Кольцо существованья тесно:
Как все пути приводят в Рим,
Так нам заранее известно,
Что все мы рабски повторим

⁶³⁵ Forsyth, James. *Listening to the Wind: an introduction to Alexander Blok*, 117-8.

⁶³⁶ Blok, *ZK*, 402.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁸ Etkind 66.

⁶³⁹ Romanov 189.

By extending the proverb to the paths and permutations of history, Blok predicts the inevitability of repeating Rome's history and perhaps conveys either the horror or the despair caused by having an awareness of this inevitability (suggested, for instance, by the image of the tight ring of existence or the adverb "slavishly"). Though this poem predates the essay by almost a decade, it conveys a similar sentiment to that found in this essay, when Blok discusses the failure of Catiline's revolution. He explains that this episode was "one of the numerous unsuccessful revolutions, one of the many suppressed uprisings" ("Это - одна из многочисленных неудавшихся революций, одно из многих подавленных восстаний"⁶⁴⁰). The terms "numerous" and "many," combined with the absence of any other successful precedents, make us wonder if a similar fate awaits the Russian Revolution, especially since there have been insistently repeated parallels between the two worlds throughout the essay. Blok goes on to point out that the rebellion was only suppressed, but also failed to change anything about Roman society: "The circumstances in which [the conspiracy] flared up remained, it seems, the same, its hues did not change" ("Тот фон, на котором он вспыхнул, остался, повидимому, прежним, окраска не изменилась"⁶⁴¹).

In describing the subsequent behavior of "aristocratic swine" and other inhabitants of Rome, Blok uses the word "still," "as before" ("попрежнему") five times, emphasizing the sameness of the situation after Catiline's failed attempt to change his world:

The Republic was still ruled by a useless, venal, and decrepit Senate. The slaves, whose number and misfortune grew with every new triumph of the Roman arms, this faceless, cunning, and miserable throng of the Roman poor [...] still deserted, speculated, sold itself for money [...] aristocratic swine, painting their eyebrows with red paint, still curiously examined strapping healthy barbarians, bought into slavery at a discount; Roman matrons still painted their hair yellow, since

⁶⁴⁰ Blok 38.

⁶⁴¹ Blok 43-3.

Germanic hair color was in vogue. Wealthy bourgeois still kept a lapdog and a Greek; these, too, were in vogue.

[Республикой попережнему управлял никуда негодный, подкупный и дряхлый сенат. Рабы, число и бедственное положение которых росло с каждым новым триумфом римского оружия, вся эта безлика, лукавая и несчастная римская беднота [...] попережнему дезертировала, спекулировала, продавалась за деньги [...] аристократическая сволочь, сурмившая брови красной краской, попережнему лорнировала с любопытством рослых и здоровых варваров, купленных в рабство по сходной цене; римские барыни попережнему красили волосы желтой краской, так как германский цвет волос был в моде. Состоятельные буржуа попережнему держали у себя в доме комнатную собачку и грека; то и другое тоже было в моде.^{642]}

The terrifying thing about the episode, however, is that we know that the modern world is very much the same as the ancient world, and so we may expect its people to be similarly invested in clinging to the status quo:

Among the people of that old world, there was – much like among the people of our old world – a mutual guarantee, a silent agreement, passed on from one generation to the next: this guarantee consisted and consists in pretending that nothing happened and everything stayed the same: there was a conspiracy, there was a revolution, but the revolution was suppressed, the conspiracy was exposed, and now everything is back to normal; so it was with Catiline's rebellion.

[Между людьми того старого мира, также как и между людьми нашего старого мира, была круговая порука, безмолвное согласие, передаваемое по наследству от одних мещан к другим: эта порука заключалась и заключается в том, чтобы делать вид, будто ничего не произошло и все осталось по старому: был заговор, была революция; но революция подавлена, заговор раскрыт - и все опять обстоит благополучно; так случилось, конечно, и с восстанием Катилины.^{643]}

One can sense the bitterness towards these people who are invested in the charade of wellbeing of the old world; they are the ones actually responsible for the general stagnation, they make sure that attempts at change “of course” fail. Blok describes their actions as a pretense in order to show that this way of thinking is dishonest and even harmful because it hides the underlying

⁶⁴² Blok 44.

⁶⁴³ Blok 46.

problems and represses all possibility of change.

We could perhaps think that Catiline was a precursor of the true revolution and fiery destruction that would be ushered in by the advent of Christianity or the barbarians, that the change is yet to come and will be described later on. And yet, there is actually a resounding silence about any future Rome. It is telling that there is nothing in the narrative about the aftermath of the destruction, either of ancient Rome or of contemporary Russia, even though the allusions to the destruction of the Roman Empire are numerous:

...a few decades after Christ, it would be up to Tacitus to mourn the fall of the old world and the sick civilization.

The heart of Rome stopped beating when Christ was born. The organism of the monarchy was so enormous that it took centuries for all the limbs to stop seizing.

But centuries passed; the empire stopped not only living but also existing. The barbarian hurricane covered much with earth and ruins.

[...через несколько десятков лет после Христа, Тациту уже выпало на долю оплакать падение старого мира и больной цивилизации.⁶⁴⁴

Когда родился Христос, перестало биться сердце Рима. Организм монархии был так громаден, что потребовались века для того чтобы все члены этого тела перестали судорожно двигаться...⁶⁴⁵

Но века прошли; империя прекратила не только бытие, но и существование. Варварский вихрь занес многое землей и развалинами...⁶⁴⁶]

Several scholars have pointed to Blok's curious lack of clarity about the exact mechanisms and aftermath of the destruction. Mikhail Gasparov writes, "It is unclear how exactly Blok understands this transformation of the world by the fire of Christ, or how this understanding fits into the historical frame; it seems that the ideal people of this Christian future are only the

⁶⁴⁴ Blok 7.

⁶⁴⁵ Blok 58.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

‘strapping, healthy barbarians’ with their ‘might and freshness.’”⁶⁴⁷ Boris Romanov, too, notes that Blok “does not know” what the old world will transform into.⁶⁴⁸

We can contrast Blok’s silence about this topic with another poem, “Transubstantiation” (“Преосуществление”⁶⁴⁹), also written in 1918. Its author, Maksimilian Voloshin, also compares the Russian Revolution to the fall of Rome but ends his analogy with the description of the new, transformed (by Christianity) Rome and the anticipation of a new, spiritually transformed Russia:

[...]	[...]
When the last light faded	Когда последний свет погас
At the bottom of silence and oblivion,	На дне молчанья и забвенья,
And ancient Rome disappeared in darkness,	И древний Рим исчез во мгле,
A transubstantiation was occurring	Свершалось преосуществленье
Of universal power on earth:	Всемирной власти на земле:
The eagle’s claw opened	Орлиная разжалась лапа
And the world fell out. And the Pope accepted	И выпал мир. И принял Папа
The state and erected a throne.	Державу и престол воздвиг.
And a new Rome flourished – great	И новый Рим процвёл — велик
And immense, like a force of nature.	И необъятен, как стихия.
Like a seed, which must	Так семя, дабы прорасти,
Perish in order to grow,	Должно истлеть...
Perish, Russia,	Истлей, Россия,
To bloom into a kingdom of spirit.	И царством духа расцвести!

Given his numerous invocations of Christianity and the end of the old world, we might expect a similar pronouncement from Blok. Instead, there is silence. Perhaps this is because the destruction of the Roman Empire did not ultimately produce the changes that he hoped to see and there is, in fact, no historical precedent for a positive outcome of a revolution. All Rome can teach us about is need for the destruction of the old world.

Conclusion

One of the entries in Blok’s notebook reads “CATILINE – all day. Swan song of the

⁶⁴⁷ Gasparov 127.

⁶⁴⁸ Romanov 209.

⁶⁴⁹ I am grateful to Romanov’s essay for bringing this poem to my attention.

revolution?" ("КАТИЛИНА - весь день. Лебединая песня революции?"). There are a number of ways to interpret this question mark. Etkind, for instance, sees it "not as a sign of doubt but more likely a sign of hope,"⁶⁵⁰ but, given the signs of failure in the essay, I do not believe that much hope can remain. To me, this note conveys the sense that the "death" of the revolution is coming, and the Roman precedents used in the essay foreshadow the inevitability of this outcome.

Before the despair sets in, however, Rome can also provide the model and the inspiration for the revolution – it can be used to show exactly how corrupt its society and values, which have become the values of the Western world, really were, and how much its inevitable destruction was needed. In this role, Blok's Rome is a stark contrast to most earlier Romes, because his approach no longer looks at a different period or different figures to admire – even Goncharov's broken and disillusioned Rome still looked up to at least the aesthetic ideals that Roman art and literature could offer, even if these ideals were untenable in contemporary Russian circumstances. Blok's Rome, instead, represents the entire Western civilization, including Russia, but only to demonstrate the extent to which this civilization has rotted and the need for its destruction. In order to convey this impression, Blok takes on the role not of a rival, student, or emulator, but that of a judge. He finds Rome and, by extension, Russia guilty of corruption, physical and moral, and calls for its annihilation.

Postscriptum

Blok's enthusiasm for destruction did not last very long. The following excerpt from a letter to an acquaintance, written in January 1921, shows that his initial enthusiasm soon turned into

⁶⁵⁰ Etkind 67.

horror:

There still remains in me 1/100 of something that I should pass on to somebody else; I want to express this best part of me in my wish for your child, a person of the near future. My wish is this: let him, if it is at all possible, be a person of peace and not of war, let him calmly and slowly create what was annihilated by the seven years of horror. If this proves impossible, if his blood continues to boil and mutiny and destroy, as it does in all of us, sinners, - then let him always and constantly be tormented by his conscience, let it at least neutralize his venomous, terrible impulses, so common in our times and, perhaps, in the near future.

[Но во мне еще, правда, 1/100 того, чтобы надо было передать кому-то; вот эту лучшую мою часть я бы мог выразить в пожелании Вашему ребенку, человеку близкого будущего. Это пожелание такое: пусть, если только это будет возможно, он будет человеком мира а не войны, пусть он будет спокойно и медленно созидать истребленное семью годами ужаса. Если же это будет невозможно, если кровь все еще будет в нем кипеть и бунтовать и разрушать, она во всех нас, грешных, - то пусть уж его терзает всегда и неотступно прежде всего совесть, пусть она хоть обезвреживает его ядовитые, страшные порывы, которыми богата современность наша и, может быть, будет богато и ближайшее будущее. ⁶⁵¹]

⁶⁵¹ Blok 94.

Conclusion

Ferdinand de Saussure once argued that in language there is only difference, and it is this difference that creates meaning.⁶⁵² We could say the same about the reception of ancient Rome. The meaning of Rome appears in contrast to other Romes, both existing and possible, and a diachronic comparative approach is particularly useful for examining how and why various Romes are created. In this dissertation, I have offered readings of five different Romes in five different historical moments. In each case, I have considered the historical circumstances that may have guided these five manifestations of Rome, as well as the way that they speak to other Romes in order to articulate and distinguish their own ideological priorities and values.

The Romes that frame the narrative are those of Lomonosov and Blok, and they stand, respectively, at the beginning and the end of the Russian Empire. In Lomonosov's Rome, we see grandeur, which is then transferred onto Russia through historical and literary rivalry between the two empires. Lomonosov himself takes on the role of the Russian Livy and the Russian Vergil, competing with these authors to provide Russia with a proud story of origins, history, destiny, and literature. Blok's Rome, on the other hand, is an empire of decay and corruption, offered as a case study for the corruption of contemporary Russian civilization. Its expansion is now portrayed as the bloating of a corpse, its literature shows delusions of grandeur and blindness to reality, and its great figures are petty and ignorant hypocrites. Blok concludes that

⁶⁵² de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Roy Harris. London: Duckworth, 1983 [1916], 119.

this Rome and this Russia both have to be destroyed, and he himself performs this destruction in his writing by attacking the admirable Romes created by Lomonosov and the generations that followed him.

Between these two Romes are those of Derzhavin, Pushkin and Ryleev, and Goncharov. Each of these responds to its own historical moment. Derzhavin modifies Lomonosov's Rome to teach the rulers and subjects of the Russian Empire that what makes an empire truly great is not its military prowess but rather the ethics and patriotism of its inhabitants. Although Russian military triumphs continue, it is time to look inward and evaluate the inner workings of the state and the individual. This look inward, however, is not intended to destabilize the status quo, and Derzhavin simply encourages rulers to care for their subjects. His Rome is still an imperial Rome that should be defended rather than opposed by its citizens, even if its greatness is no longer a given.

As frustration with the existing structures grows, those who want to see political change turn for inspiration to the Roman Republic. For a group of young men, later known as the Decembrists, the figures of Brutus, Cassius, and Cato become examples of patriots willing to fight tyranny and sacrifice themselves for the sake of their fatherland. Their names become a way to inspire the Russians to act against tyranny in their own land. The failed attempt of the Decembrists to oppose the state, however, leads the government to become greatly suspicious both of political sentiments and Roman references, which are so closely linked in the writings of the Decembrists and their sympathizers (and which also frequently appear in various revolutionary movements in Europe).

As a result, there can be no overt political or civic Rome. In Goncharov's *Oblomov*, however, there is a curious case of a ghostly Roman presence that delivers criticisms of

contemporary circumstances by showing the incompatibility of Roman ideals with the Russian reality. Without offering a clear narrative, these Roman allusions still manage to convey disillusionment, fear, and paralysis, crushed hopes and forgotten dreams.

These are a few of the Romes that have appeared in the Russian Empire. I have intentionally avoided the term “evolution” in my narrative, because I want to avoid the implication that there was a linear, teleological progression from the first of these Romes to the last.

And yet, as I have shown in the case studies above, these Romes do form a “chain of reception,” in the sense that later Romes are informed by the earlier ones and often directly respond to them. Although the ways of creating new Romes are numerous, they may engage with much earlier rather than more recent Romes, and, often, very different Romes can co-exist within the same generation or even the works of the same author, there is a clear intimate connection between the Romes that I have discussed. This connection shows not only the enduring importance of Roman history and literature for thinking through and responding to Russian history, but also the continuous and dynamic accretion and negotiation of meanings, connotations, and functions that guide the reception of Rome in the Russian Empire.

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