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## **"National" and "Global" Perspectives in the Works of Alexander S. Pushkin**

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### **Abstract**

This paper provides unique perspectives on the place of A. S. Pushkin in vibrant debates between the two key schools of Russian philosophical thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also known in the scholarship as the "Slavophiles" and "Westernizers." In particular, the author considers these schools as ones eventually representing the two key approaches to the development of Russia as a nation. The first approach is built on the uniqueness and national characteristics of Russia's political and economic development. It perfectly falls within the "Slavophilia" school of thought. The second approach is represented by the group of intellectuals also being called the "Westernizers," who advocated for the "global" (i.e. "Western") path in Russia's development. More than that, the author argues that Alexander Pushkin, a famous a Russian poet and novelist of the Romantic era who lived before the final formation of the two schools, was the pioneer of such both critical perspectives on the "national" and the "global" in Russia's political and economic development as a nation, which finally became the two central issues of Russian philosophy. The author reviews Pushkin's focus on the problem of Russia's role and place in this world, its destiny, as well as the problem of Russia's necessity to recognize itself as a distinct nation. Relying on scholarly research and documents, the author argues that Pushkin was able to successfully accomplish the "west-eastern synthesis." In other words, he was superior to the fundamental contradictions existing between the "Slavophiles" and the "Westernizers." According to the author, Pushkin's philosophy can be considered not only foundation of both schools, but it actually has the power to bring together both "global" and "national" perspectives on the development of Russia as a nation.

**Keywords:** Slavophiles, Westernizers, Pushkin, national history, culture, Russia.

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## Introduction

Dealing with the personality and views of Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin is common for the ones who study the problem of the “Russian idea.” The two key central approaches to the “Russian idea” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are clearly represented by the two opposing movements of Russian philosophical and socio-political thought. The first movement is called “Slavophilia.” Representatives of “Slavophilia” (also called “Slavophiles”) advocated the uniqueness of the historical development of Russia, idealized Slavic culture and. They denied the possibility of Russia's development on the model of Western European capitalist countries (Trubetskoi, 2008; Hughes, 2008; Wortman, 1952; Walicki, 1968; Smirnova, 1988). In contrast, another group of Russian intellectuals, belonging to different political ideologies, recognized, unlike the Slavophiles, the West European capitalist development path acceptable to Russia (Galaktionov & Nikandrov, 1967). They are simply called the “Westernizers.” There is a considerable body of scholarly research arguing that the most vibrant debates between the Slavophiles and Westernizers can be viewed as the beginning of independent Russian philosophy (Yanov, 1976; Malinova, 2008; Rabow-edling, 2004; Lavrin, 1962). They took place in 1840-1850s, 10-20 years after Alexander Pushkin’s death. But the views of both schools had been shaping in his lifetime, and the poet was aware of the future debate’s object. That object happened to be the primary topic of the whole Russian philosophy, i.e. the problem of Russia’s role and place in the world, its destiny and its necessity to recognize itself and express itself in culture (Barabanov, 1992; Pavlov, 1994; Kemball, 1965). Therefore, when it comes to the Slavophiles and Westernists, Pushkin should always be mentioned. In my perspective, no phenomena of the Russian culture and life can be considered without Pushkin.

This paper provides a perspective on developing a comprehensive understanding of the place A. S. Pushkin has in one of the key features and keystones of the Russian philosophy. In particular, I review Pushkin’s views on the “national” and “global” features of the Russian cultural and political development as a nation. This is especially important to study Pushkin’s views given the tremendous impact he has on the Russian culture, which is reflected in the contemporary scholarship in many ways (Kara-Murza, 2019; Gidirinskiy, 2012; Kantor, 2017; Gnamankou, 1997; Kantor, 2019; Moiseenko, 2019; Platt, 2008; Bykova, 2019; Lockett, 1982; Paramonov, 1999). And because of the great impact on the whole culture, there is some research that reviews how A. S. Pushkin influenced some ideas in philosophy of politics developed in the Imperial Russia (Ivanov, 2008; Strakhovsky, 1956; Ianov, 1970; Kantor, 2019; Bojanowska, 2009), no one has studied how Pushkin shaped future debates between the Westerners, those in the political and cultural elite arguing in favor of the “European” path of Russia, and the Slavophiles, those people strongly believing in the “special” cultural and political path of Russia.

Consequently, this paper significantly contributes to the existing scholarship by providing a unique perspective on Pushkin’s cultural heritage with respect to the whole range of “national” (“Slavophiles”) and “global” (“Westernizers”) issues in Russia’s development as a nation. More than that, the paper contributes to the contemporary literature that attempts to build a coherent framework for understanding Russian domestic and foreign policies through the prism of “global” and “national” perspectives (Zimmerman, 2005; Tsygankov, 2015; Pospelovsky, 1979; White, 2007; Senderov, 2009; Shah, 2013; Guins, 1949; Pain, 2016; Lukin, 2015; Mjør, 2014).

### **Pushkin's "national" and "global" perspectives**

The problem of choosing Russia's development path is acute again. It is necessary to look at the Slavophiles-Westernizers debate closer. A more focused view on Russian philosophy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century allows to note one exception. Pushkin. The only representative of the Russian culture who accomplished to express the truth of the antinomic and bordering nature of Russia in its unity. The poet was a European, but he was also engrained on Eastern grounds, particularly the Slavonic east. He successfully accomplished the "west-eastern synthesis" in the Russian consciousness. For Pushkin, a national origin is realized through the global origin, and that is the only way. As Dostoevsky said in his famous speech in 1880 during the ceremony of the Pushkin memorial unveiling, "To become a real Russian, perfectly Russian, may mean only to become... an all-human, if you like. Oh, that great Slavophile and Westernism confusion is our only confusion, even though it is historically justified. For a real Russian, Europe... is as precious as Russia itself, as a piece of one's home ground, because our piece of land is worldwide" (Dostoevsky, 1992, p. 145). However, it is well known that Dostoevsky was certainly leaning towards Slavophiles and couldn't resist from calling Pushkin a "Slavophiles' lead" in his speech draft, although he crossed it out of the final text. In turn, in the article "Pushkin on Relationships Between Russia and Europe," S. L. Frank said that "Considering his direct ambitions and given characterization, Pushkin definitely was a "Westernist" (Frank, 1990a, p. 453).

Everyone has always had the urge to define Pushkin as a supporter of various movements, giving characteristics on his political views. One may find poetry and statements suggesting that he could be anyone – a liberal, a conservative, a revolutionary. Strictly speaking, he came through a serious ideological and political evolution from liberalism to conservatism, but such definitions and close links to politics or any ideology at all as applied to Pushkin relieve their imperfection and relativity. The Slavophiles blamed him for ideological uncertainty, as they used to say, his "lack of character." As the head of Slavophiles, A. S. Khomyakov wrote, "The shortness of bass chords was not in Pushkin's head or talent but in his soul, too unstable and weak, or depraved too soon, unable to reemerge again" (Khomyakov, 1900, pp. 381-382). That is why, for example, for the Russian Slavophiles, Nikolai Gogol was a more important figure. To them, he was a true nation's artist who encouraged everyone to change the reality by picturing the whole range of its antagonist characters.

Even though Nikolai Gogol was amazed by Pushkin's genius, he used to say that his poetry lacks personality. Particularly, Mr. Gogol says, Pushkin's poetry is an "armory full of the poet's instruments". "Step in there, choose a weapon, and come out for a fight: but the poet himself... did not come to fight." In his best pieces Pushkin, as N. Gogol suggested, "had nothing to say to his time, and nothing good was intended for his fellow people" (Gogol, 1847).

The reproach was answered by Frank in the article "Pushkin and the Spiritual Way of Russia." He writes, "The Russian consciousness has taken the way of indignation towards the universal evil, unmasking this evil and fighting it right after Pushkin (Gogol, Lermontov, Dostoevsky)... This consciousness is filled with universal grief... and spirit of fighting for the truth. Pushkin is different ..." (Frank, 1990b, p. 496). Indeed, he "did not come to fight", and not because of the weakness of his soul, but because the position of this "battle" did not match his spiritual orientation. As Frank says,

the poet expressed the main principle of his world view clearly in the article 'Alexander Radishchev,' which was dedicated to Radishchev's book 'Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow'" (Pushkin, 1957, p. 360).

Even if we admit that such a worldview does exist in Pushkin's works, we do not agree that he "did not come to fight." In my perspective, it would be right to mention the point of view of V. S. Nepomnyashchiy, a theorist of literature and Pushkin's works researcher. He points out that every political, philosophical, or artistic movement has always tried to introduce Pushkin as their delegate, to interpret him in their own way. Hence the wide exploitation of the concept "my Pushkin" (these are the words of Marina Tsvetaeva, but others also have compiled "their own" Pushkin). Mr. Nepomnyashchiy writes, "The differences in people's views of Gogol or Tolstoy, Dostoevsky or Chekhov can be of any degree, but it is clear to both arguer and reader in every case that they talk about the same thing. It is different with Pushkin. We discord in every fundamental moment". "My Pushkin" is not just my opinion, a scientific theory or my special interest and personal favors; "my Pushkin" is my self-portrait, my system of values..., the doors into my spiritual world, this is my faith. And all the serious arguments about Pushkin eventually happen to be axiological; they involve a conflict of the world images, life stances and beliefs" (Nepomnyashchiy, 2001, p. 404).

The point is in what context, what scale and coordinates the Pushkin phenomenon should be discerned: in accordance with my personal opinion and my "psychology," or with experience and values of Russian culture that gave us Pushkin? If you think of it, there is an image on this special "Russian spirituality" that is described particularly in the classic Russian literature. What is more, this image was not created and implanted by the Russians. Meanwhile, no one denies the existence of German, Italian, or Japanese spirituality. But a certain peculiarity is implied in every such case. As for the "Russian spirituality," its character is seen as something out of order: either it compiles other different peculiarities, or it is just something extraordinary.

The thought comes to mind that what we see here is two phenomena similar in their essence. The peculiarity of Pushkin's genius and his place in Russian culture is as extraordinary as the peculiarity of Russian spirituality among other kinds of spiritualities. Let's think again of Pushkin's omnitude, frankness, panhumanism, that Dostoevsky considered unique but also regarded them as features of Russian consciousness in general. The acknowledged "peculiarity" of Pushkin definitely "replicates" such feature of Russian spirituality. The conclusion is obvious: both phenomena – "Russian spirituality" and Pushkin – are of the same kind. It is no wonder they are equally mysterious to the whole cultural world and to ourselves (Nepomnyashchiy, 2001, p. 405).

It is also clear that without knowing the Russian language and culture, it is almost impossible to understand Pushkin, his works are difficult to translate into other languages. Some certain successful translations can't change this fact: the spirit of the original work can't be put perfectly into other tongues. But there is a definition of Pushkin's "individuality" that can only be applied to him. It was found in the only published obituary by V. F. Odoevsky right after the poet's death, "The sunshine of our poetry." The sun as something that inspires, lights up, and warms up everything around, becoming the center of all.

His core role in our culture is doubtless – but after all, why did it work out like that? Mr. Nepomnyashchiy says, "Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, and others are the greatest

geniuses, but... not one of them takes such place in any nation's life as Pushkin does in Russia's one; he is the only one who is not only the symbol, but the actual factor of his culture's unity... waking the most vivid feelings... who is the starting point, point of attraction and repulsion, the cause or unity and struggle, a national hero, a character of legends and anecdotes, a national myth and... a national idol, almost a religious treasure – and after it all he is a real person" (Nepomnyashchiy, 2001, pp. 406-407).

200 years after the obituary by Odoyevskiy, in his article "Prophetic destiny of Pushkin," I. A. Ilyin wrote: "We were given him to create the solar center of our history" (Ilyin, 1990, p. 353). He seemed to be just a poet, a writer, and suddenly everyone says that he created the center of the national history and culture! Let's quote Dostoyevsky again, "If there was no Pushkin, there would have been no new talents after him" (Dostoyevsky, 1992, p. 143). And then he continues, "But it is not only about poetry, not just creative work." Thus, the understanding of the Russian literature being the consciousness itself is put in these words. The real art is always more than just art, and Pushkin is at the point where the question of art becomes unacceptable.

"If Pushkin lived, we would have had less misunderstandings and arguments than we have now", said Dostoyevsky (Dostoyevsky, 1992, p. 146). But even the poet's early death was a benefit to Russian culture: it grew faster and gained a worldwide recognition in just a few years or a few decades! Everything in it was becoming mature, as if after an elder and stronger family member's death. It was a natural process of the cultural core disintegration, and the core was Pushkin. But he was still a guide, a way to measure, a starting point and attractor.

Pushkin appeared at the moment when Russia, after Peter the Great's "revolution," needed to restore the cultural unity, the "native" one. It needed to bring back the unity of historical time that happened to be broken. In this way, the national consciousness would recover and go to a higher level, it would proceed to be national, only being enriched with European experience.

As it was mentioned before, Pushkin had a European education, he didn't speak Russian as a child, and was called "French" during his lyceum days. The first lyrics he ever wrote were in French. And so, the European traditions were the foundation of his personality. His whole life he referred to the word "European" as a synonym for "educated" and "progressive" (Pushkin, 1957, p. 86).

And thus, learning a new culture early, Pushkin makes this way by his own will, driven by his own artistic desire. The way that will be promoted by the Slavophiles and Narodniks. This can bring us back to our culture and, at the same time, develop it and show it to the world as a high culture. All the Russian writers and philosophers will follow his way. Many will succeed. But Pushkin's way will still be unique. It's not just that he learned the Russian language – he made it the way it is now. Approximately in 1822, at the age of 23 he wrote, "I can't decide, which language to favor, but we have our own, with its customs, history, songs, tales and so on" (Pushkin, 1957, p. 527). Even earlier, at 18, he started the poem "Ruslan and Lyudmila," the introduction to which was added later.

## **Conclusion**

The research conducted demonstrates that even before the debate between the Slavophiles and Westernists, A. S. Pushkin started getting insights on the topic that later became the primary object

of the whole Russian philosophy. It is a problem of Russia's role and place in this world, its destiny, and a problem of Russia's necessity to recognize and express itself in culture. In my opinion, Pushkin is the first representative of the Russian culture who could successfully accomplish the "west-eastern synthesis" in Russian culture. The author of the article agrees with V. S. Nepomnyashchiy on the conclusion that Pushkin's works and Russian spirituality are the two key phenomena similar in their essence. The peculiarity of Pushkin's genius and his place in Russian culture are as difficult to grasp as the peculiarity of Russian spirituality among its other kinds. Having learned the western culture at the early age and having a European education, Pushkin made his way entirely by himself in a few years. The presented research provides highly valuable insights into the place of Russia in Eurasia, including its numerous borders with both Western and Eastern countries. Apparently, A. I. Herzen was right when he said that Peter's reforms were answered by Pushkin's appearance. What Peter was trying to do with the country (and caused the split of the nation), Pushkin did in culture. He accomplished a synthesis of the "national" and "global," restoring the continuity of historical time.

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