Stalin was looking over various designs for a monument to Pushkin. The first design was Pushkin reading Byron.

—It's historically correct but politically incorrect: where is the general line?

The second design was Pushkin reading Stalin.

—It's politically correct but historically incorrect: in Pushkin's time Stalin hadn't yet written any books.

The third design turned out historically and politically correct: Stalin reading Pushkin. . . .

While the Stalinist state never actually considered erecting the statue of A. S. Pushkin described in the epigraph during the centenary of the poet's death, the rededication of Opekushin's famous 1880 monument to the poet in the center of Moscow on February 10, 1937 was only slightly less cynical. Superimposed over its original cautious inscription were lines Pushkin wrote a year before his death: "Rumor of my fame will sweep across great Rus' / And my name will resound in every language that they speak / By the proud

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* Research for this essay was supported in part by a grant from the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the United States Department of State, which administers the Russian, Eurasian, and East European Research Program (Title VIII). This essay has benefited from collaboration with Katia Dianina, as well as communications with Stephanie Sandler, William Mills Todd III and Golfo Alexopoulos. Conclusions and errors contained herein remain the sole responsibility of the author.

1. Istoriia SSSR v anekdotakh, 1917-1992 (Smolensk: Smiadyn', 1991), 42. The original joke from Stalin's time probably resembled the following: "On the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of Pushkin's death, an all-union competition was launched for designs for a monument to the great poet. From several hundred, the jury picked only one. It looked like this: sitting in a chair with a volume of Pushkin in his hands was . . . Stalin." E. Andreevich, Kremlin i narod: politicheskie anekdoty (Munich: Golos naroda, 1951), 77.
grandson of the Slavs, the Finn, the still savage / Tunguz, and the friend of
the steppe — the Kalmyk.”2 It seems quite paradoxical that the nineteenth-
century colonial vision of the Romanov empire expressed here by Pushkin —
of an imperial expanse of western Finns, southern nomads and small peoples
of the north united culturally by the Russian people — could ever be consid-
ered compatible with Soviet Marxist internationalism. Nevertheless, these
lines from Pushkin’s “Monument” were ubiquitous during the centennial, be-
coming an official mantra of sorts during the late 1930s.

Although little has been written that might resolve this particular paradox,
there is a growing corpus of material dealing with the 1937 Pushkin com-
memoration. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most traditional accounts skirt the
Pushkin politics of 1937 to focus tightly on the era’s scholarly achieve-
ments.3 Recent discussions have more directly addressed the state’s manipula-
tion of the Pushkin canon,4 authorities from Katerina Clark to Stephanie
Sandler noting that Pushkin was even styled as, anticipating Socialist Real-
ism5 and the revolutionary mores of Soviet society.6 Detailing how the com-
memoration reflected preceding cultural forms, commentators including Mar-
cus Levitt have looked back to Pushkin celebrations under the old regime.7
Others have called attention to the poet’s increasing prominence in the post-

2. Zhukovskii’s editing of the next stanza of “Exegi monumentum [Unto myself I erected a
monument]” was restored to Pushkin’s 1836 original as well: “And long will the people re-
member me / That with my lyre good feelings I stirred / That in my cruel age I hailed freedom/
And called for mercy for the injured.” See “Dvadtsatipiatitysiachny miting u pamiatnika A. S.

3. E. P. Chelyshev, “Pushkinovedenie: itogi i perspektivy — k 200-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia
poeta,” in Puskin i sovremennia kul’tura, ed. E. P. Chelyshev et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1996),
7-8; Pushkin: itogi i problemy izucheniiia, ed. B. P. Gorodetskii et al. (Moscow and Leningrad:
Nauka, 1966), 137-42; and so on.

4. A. V. Blüum, “‘Sniat’ kontrrevoliutsionnuiu shapku...’: Pushkin i leningradskaia tsen-
zura 1937 g.,” Zvezda, no. 2 (1997): 209-15; Helena Goscilo, “The Gendered Trinity of Rus-
sian Cultural Rhetoric Today — or the Glyph of the H(j)eroine,” in Soviet Hieroglyphics: Vi-
sual Culture in Late Twentieth Century Russia, ed. Nancy Condee (Bloomington: Indiana Univ.
Press, 1995), 83; Karen Petrone, “‘Life has become more joyous, comrades’: Politics and cull-
ture in Soviet celebrations, 1934-1939” (Ph.D. diss, Univ. of Michigan, 1994), 165-84, 212; S.
A. Fomichev, “‘Zvezda plenitel’nogo schast’ia’,” Russkaia rech’ no. 2 (1993): 3-7; L.
passin, esp. 233; Vladimir Papernyi, Kul’tura Dva (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985; Moscow: NLO, 1996),
225.

5. Katerina Clark, Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

Pushkine (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1994), 123-26; Stephanie Sandler, “Remember-
bing Pushkin: Russia’s Myth of a National Poet” (forthcoming).

7. Marcus C. Levitt, Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880 (Ithaca,