HISTORICITY OF PUSHKIN'S "POLTAVA"

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Picture of Mazepa, discovered on the wall of the Lavra Abbey in Kiev.

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"Die Wahrheit sei uns lieb, wo wir finden."
J. W. Goethe

INTRODUCTION

The historic poem *Poltava* (1828, published 1829) is one of Pushkin's most outstanding poetical works. It deals with Mazepa's tragic attempt to win independence for Ukraine and the important Russian victory at Poltava. Since its appearance *Poltava* has been the constant object of either praise or criticism. On every major anniversary of the Russian victory, Pushkin's poem attracts renewed interest of readers and critics.

The year 1959 marked the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Poltava, which was successfully fought by Peter the Great against Swedish King Charles XII, and his ally, the Ukrainian *Hetman* Mazepa,[1] in Ukraine, on July 8, 1709.[2] The same year also marked the 250th anniversary of the death of *Hetman* Mazepa (died on October 2, 1709), who, because of his extraordinary personality, his brilliant although tragic career, and Byron's romantic poem, *Mazeppa* (1818), became one of the most popular, although controversial, subjects in world literature in the 19th century.[3]

Among Russians and Ukrainians heated disputes still take place about Mazepa. The main question involved here is the independence of the Ukrainian people. Undoubtedly, American scholarship will want to treat this subject *sine ira et studio*. At the dawn of Western civilization, about twenty-one centuries ago, Polybius justly remarked: "It is natural for a good man to love his country and his friends, and to hate the enemies of both. But when he writes history he must abandon such feelings and be prepared to praise enemies who deserve it and to censure the dearest and most intimate friends."[4]

4 Historicity of Pushkin's "Poltava"

1. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE OF POLTAVA

For Russia, the Battle of Poltava marked a beginning in the struggle for world power. It fulfilled the ambitious imperialistic dreams of Czar (and since 1721, Emperor) Peter I: to occupy the shores of the Baltic Sea, to open his much desired "window to Europe," and to build up the navy and merchant fleet, which would connect backward Russia with the most advanced countries of Europe, from which she was separated by the once powerful Polish-Lithuanian state. This battle definitely subdued the semi-independent Ukrainian Kozak state, thus interrupting the normal development of the Ukrainian people, and opening for Russia the way to the Black Sea, an event which eventually could have led to the domination of the Orthodox peoples of the Balkan peninsula and the Bosporus Straits.

This victory not only strengthened the Czar's position at home, but also raised the international prestige of previously insignificant Russia, as the first nation able to cope with the brilliant warrior, Charles XII. After that, Russia entered into European affairs and participated in continental diplomacy, taking a definite place in the European balance-of-power system, working her way up to the position of a first rate military power, gaining more lands, augmenting her importance, and by the same token, disseminating suspicion, fear and hate.

It is important to mention here that Peter's transformation of the Czardom of Muscovy into the Russian Empire (1713) followed his travels to Western Europe, where he viewed the Western way of life, ship-building, and technology, and where he recruited Western specialists for Russia. A similar hunger for Western technological knowledge exists in the Soviet Union today, especially since World War II, with N. S. Khrushchev promoting the development of industrial organization and of mass production. The general feeling is different at present, however, because of the fanatic Soviet goal—to promote by all means Communism throughout the world. The result is almost identical. Prior to World War I, the autocratic emperors of Russia with their huge armies cast a shadow of fear over all Europe, and after World War II, the dictators in the Kremlin, with the Marx-Engels "gospel" in one hand and powerful rockets in the other, are disseminating uneasiness throughout the whole free world.

This dynamic growth of Russia had its beginning at Poltava, 250 years ago. Edward Shephard Creasy[5] regarded it as one of the fifteen most important battles of the world. S. M. Solovyov called the Poltava battle "one of the most important events in world history," because, as he said: "Under the thunder of the Poltava victory, was born for Europe a new great nation."[6] Others, like W. Kirchner, who, even while anticipating Swedish victory and occupation of Moscow, conceded that "it is unthinkable that little Sweden could have dominated Peter's growing empire for any length of time or that Charles could have changed the course of history."[7] F. Engels went still further by stating "Charles XII made efforts to penetrate Russia, and by this he ruined Sweden and showed to all the world the invincibility of Russia."[8]

Of course, any objective historian could easily challenge the Engels statement merely by recalling Peter's disastrous defeats at Narva (1700) and on the Pruth (1711). Furthermore, this "invincibility of Russia" grew out of the mistakes of the youthful and adventurous Charles XII, who, more often than not, trusted the bravery of his soldiers and his "guiding star," instead of painstakingly calculating battle strategy as did Peter. After the Swedish victory at Narva (on November 20, 1700), where 8,000 Swedes surprisingly defeated 40,000 Russians, Charles became overconfident and ignored his enemy, Peter I, for seven years (fighting his weaker adversary, Augustus II in Poland and Saxony), thereby giving Peter time to reorganize his army, artillery and supplies. In the autumn of 1708, when Charles XII entered the White Russian and Ukrainian territories, lacking supplies and leading tired, starving troops, instead of the weak and disorganized Russians of Narva, he found a formidable and well-equipped adversary, who defeated his previously unbeatable army first at Lesnaya, on October 9, 1708, and finally at Poltava, on July 8, 1709.[9]

Pushkin, as a poet and not a historian, gave a fairly accurate historical evaluation of the Poltava battle in the preface to the first edition of *Poltava* (1829):

> The Poltava battle is one of the most important and happiest events in the reign of Peter the Great. It delivered him from his most dangerous enemy; strengthened Russian domination in the South; secured the new establishments

in the North, and proved to the state the necessity and success of the reforms accomplished by the czar.

The mistake of the Swedish king has become proverbial. One blames him for incautiousness, finds his march into Ukraine unreasonable. You cannot please the critics, especially after failure. Charles XII escaped the notorious mistake of Napoleon by this expedition; he did not march against Moscow. Could he have expected that Ukraine, which had always been restless, would not follow its *hetman's* example and would not revolt against the recent domination of Peter, that Loewenhaupt would be defeated three days in a row, and that, finally, 25,000 Swedes, led by their king, would run in the face of the fugitives of Narva? Peter himself had long hesitated, avoiding the main battle "as a very dangerous matter" (*yako zelo opansnogo dela*). In this expedition Charles XII, less than at any time, believed in his good fortune, which simply yielded to Peter's genius."[10]

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE POEM *POLTAVA*

Much more could be said about this event, but our subject is the *historicity* of Pushkin's poem, *Poltava,* which bears the name of the city where the battle was fought.

We would like to stress here that we do not expect a historic work from a poet or pure scholarly objectivity in a work of art. Equally, it would be improper, even for Ukrainian patriots, to blame Pushkin for his ardent Russian patriotism, shown in his approach to the subject, although in a historic poem, which *Poltava* undoubtedly is, it is not wrong to expect objective historicity. In 1830, Pushkin himself wrote loftily about truth in art, when speaking of historic drama. This truth in art should be equally valid for a historic poem as well. "The dramatic poet is as impartial as fate . . . He should not be cunning and lean toward one side, while sacrificing the other. Not he himself, not his political opinion, not his secret or open partiality should speak in a tragedy, but people of past days, their intellect, their prejudices. It is not his task to justify, to accuse, or to prompt the speeches of the characters. His task is to resurrect the past age in all its truth."[11] On the other hand, no one can blame the Ukrainians either for their struggle for independence, or for their endeavor to show these events in their true historical light, so long as they are objectively depicted.

The historical nature of the poem is not limited only to the third canto, which depicts one of the most important battles in European history and glorifies its master-mind, Peter the Great, but the whole

poem deals with historical events and almost all the characters are historical. The main character of the poem is undoubtedly the old Ukrainian *Hetman,* Mazepa. The plot of the poem is Mazepa's belated and passionate love for his youthful goddaughter, Mariya (her real name was Motrya), her parents' interference, and his tragic attempt to free Ukraine from the tyranny of autocratic Muscovite Czar Peter I, who—as Julia Sazanova correctly observes—in many ways imitated Ivan the Terrible.[12] Peter was making more and more drastic inroads on the cherished old Kozak liberties, and because of his constant wars[13] was ruining Ukraine by imposing heavy war burdens. Mazepa, like so many European statesmen of his time, believed that the final victor in the Northern War would be the brilliant twenty-seven-year-old warrior, Swedish King Charles XII. Hoping to secure a better future for Ukraine in the alliance with Sweden, Mazepa joined Charles XII just eight months before his fall. Mazepa followed the pattern of alliance which *Hetman* Khmelnytsky made with Swedish King Charles X, in 1654.

Pushkin described the general background of the poem almost with the accuracy of an objective historian with only a few master strokes of his great epic pen. "It was that sad time," Pushkin said, "when young Russia was reaching maturity in the struggles under the genius of Peter." Charles XII was a severe teacher in the lesson of glory. Peter learned how to conquer from his enemy's victories. After withstanding the initial blows, Russia grew stronger. "Crowned by the useless glory of his victories," the daring Charles XII was approaching "ancient Moscow." "Like a whirlwind," he uprooted the Russian brigades. He marched the same road as did "in our days" Napoleon, who suffered horrible defeat on his retreat from Russia.

At that time Ukraine was secretly excited. Sparks of dissatisfaction had gradually kindled into a flame. "Friends of bloody antiquity (that is, of the old Kozak freedom) awaited a national uprising." They were impatiently waiting for Charles XII. "Now is the time" that the Ukrainians should strike the "hated Muscovy!"

> Teper' by gryanut' nam voynoyu
> Na nenavistnuyu Moskvu!

But old Mazepa, pretending that he did not hear the voice of the people, remained as before faithful to Czar Peter. Therefore, the

youth, who blamed Mazepa's old age for his inactivity, regretted that they did not have a *hetman* at that time like one of those war-like leaders, such as old Doroshenko, young Samoylovich, Paliy, or Hordiyenko. "Then the Kozaks would not perish in the snows of distant foreign lands, and the regiments of grievous Ukraine would be free." Such were the murmurings of the daring Kozak youth, but old age is more cautious, and Mazepa, unable to act as a lion, acted as a fox. He contemplated his alliance with King Charles XII very carefully.

Thus far Pushkin depicted events almost parallel to history, except that he failed to mention that Mazepa protested against the Russian abuses in Ukraine. The Northern War was in its eighth year and the Ukrainians were carrying heavy burdens on the front and at home. The Ukrainian historian, Mykola I. Kostomarov (1818-1885), who wrote a monograph on Mazepa and his times, although critical of Mazepa himself, gave the following picture of that period:

> Great Russian officers treated the Kozaks very roughly. They clubbed them, cut off their ears, and abused them in many other ways. The poor Kozaks had to endure many hardships under Peter I. They were forced to do hard labor in building the fortresses. They were constantly worrying about their homes, realizing that in their absence there was no one to harvest the crops. In addition, they were under constant terror. Great Russian armies often marched through Ukraine, gathering recruits and provisions. They raped the Kozaks' wives and daughters at home, took horses and cattle, and even beat the Kozak officials who protested. Colonels Apostol from Myrhorod and Horlenko from Pryluky protested to the *hetman,* taking the side of the Kozaks. Horlenko told Mazepa: "All of us are praying for the soul of Khmelnytsky, because he delivered us from the Polish yoke. But our children will curse your soul and bones if you leave us in this Muscovite slavery."[14]

Mazepa then wrote a letter to the Russian Chancellor, Gavriil I. Golovkin, on September 26, 1706: "From everywhere there are complaints coming to me about the abuses by the Russian soldiers." The *hetman* begged him to find some measures to stop these cruelties, that "your Grace should look pityingly upon the lamentation, moaning, wailing and tears of the poor people and curtail by any measures the self-will of the Great-Russian troops and free the people of my country from further ruin, beatings, and killings."[15]

Pushkin sketched the general background very briefly. Moscow was preparing in vain for a Swedish siege when Charles suddenly

directed his march southward and brought the war to Ukraine. Mazepa, in order to avoid the suspicion of Czar Peter and wishing to remain in Ukraine till the decisive moment, feigned serious illness and even accepted his last Christian rites. The moment he learned that Charles XII and his army had reached the border of Ukraine, a suddenly "buoyant" Mazepa ordered his regiments to the Desna River to join the glorious Swedish king, on November 8, 1708.

Now was the right time for the Ukrainian liberation war. Peter, who always trusted Mazepa in spite of many previous denunciations, was shocked to learn that Mazepa had joined the king of Sweden. Peter wrote bitterly to Count F. M. Apraksin: "Mazepa was faithful to me for twenty-one years and now on the brink of the grave has become a traitor."[16]

The General Judge of the Kozak army, Vasyl Kochubey (of Tatar descent), and his brother-in-law, Colonel Ivan Iskra, because of the *hetman's* alleged love affair with Kochubey's daughter, Motrya (1704), and their old personal feud (1691), warned Peter of Mazepa's secret communication with the king of Sweden and his intended alliance (1708). But Peter, accustomed to the previous false denunciations of Mazepa, instead of heeding them, sentenced both officials to death and sent them to Mazepa for execution (July 26, 1708). As Pushkin correctly stated in the 26th footnote of his poem: "The stern measures, which Peter took with his usual swiftness and energy, kept Ukraine in obedience." And then Pushkin carefully quotes from the *Journals of Peter the Great* three examples of these measures: 1. Election (by "free vote") * of a new *Hetman,* Ivan Skoropadsky in Hlukhiv on November 22; 2. Anathema and hanging in effigy of the "traitor" Mazepa on November 24; 3. Execution of the defender of Baturyn, Colonel Chechil "and other traitors," on November 25.

The false propaganda and the "anathema and eternal condemnation of the swindler and traitor, Mazepa," ordered by Czar Peter and pronounced by the Kievan Metropolitan, Josaphat Krokovsky, and

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* After Menshikov's report about Mazepa's grave illness, Peter I issued an order to G. I. Golovkin (about October 20, 1708) to keep Skoropadsky close to Baturyn (. . . *nekhudo, chtob Skuropatskoy nedaleko byl.*), because he was Peter's choice for the next *hetman* by so-called "free vote." Cf. *Pis'ma . . . Petra, op. cit.,* p. 227.

by the bishops of Chernyhiv and Pereyaslav at Hlukhiv, had a cogent meaning for the simple, religious Ukrainian people. Anyone who wished to support Mazepa was exposed to eternal condemnation.[17] But perhaps even stronger than the fear of eternal hell was the fear of ferocious torture, which Peter used so freely against his enemies (a point Pushkin prudently omitted from his poem). The Swedish historian, G. Nordberg,[18] pastor of Charles XII, who was taken prisoner by the Russians, left an eye-witness account of "the most dreadful tortures" imposed on Mazepa's captured followers, such as crushing of the body on the torture wheel, putting men on the post and having them literally torn apart, etc. Kostomarov registered many well-documented "stern measures," like the mass execution in Lebedyn, 1708-9, and throughout Ukraine. The most ghastly reports, however, are recorded about the conquest of Baturyn on November 13, 1708, by A. D. Menshikov, where, according to eye-witnesses, "all people were put to the sword in the fortress and in the city, without sparing the children or the old . . ." Menshikov ordered the bodies of the Kozak officers to be bound to boards and floated down the River Seym in order to remind the others of the fate of Baturyn. The news of the fate of the *hetman's* capital spread horror throughout the Ukrainian lands. The inhabitants of the neighboring towns and villages in panic abandoned their dwellings and ran off aimlessly, shouting desperately, 'Muscovy is raging, Muscovy has sacked all Baturyn, has slaughtered all the local people, not even sparing the little infants.' "[19]

The sight of ruined Baturyn made a deep impression on Mazepa, as we read in the letter of *Hetman* Pylyp Orlyk to his former teacher, S. Yavorsky, the Metropolitan of Ryazan (June 12, 1721).

I see that God did not bless my intention! — said Mazepa to his Secretary Orlyk. — But God is my witness, that I did not want the spilling of Christian blood, but planned it this way: I would arrive at Baturyn with the king of Sweden and from there I would write a grateful letter to the Czar for his protection. In it I would mention all former and present offenses, such as taking away our freedom, extreme ruin and the premeditated destruction of all our people. And finally I would add that we come voluntarily for the sake of Eastern Orthodoxy under the Czar's protection. So now, being free people, we are voluntarily leaving him, thanking him for his protection. We would not cause the spilling of blood and we would wait under the protection of the Swedish king for our complete liberation. I had hoped to attain freedom for Ukraine, not through war,

but through peaceful negotiation; I thought to persuade the Swedish king by any means to make peace with the Czar. But now all would go differently: Ukraine, terrorized by the fate of Baturyn, would be afraid to stay on our side.[20]

There is a reliable report of these happenings written in 1710 by Charles Lord Whitworth, the English ambassador extraordinary to Russia. Speaking of the Kozaks, he said:

The Muscovite nobility and government who by degrees made several encroachments on their liberties, and from hence sprung a universal discontent, and the revolt of Mazepa to the King of Sweden, which being ill-managed; the residence town of Baturyn was immediately taken and burnt, and over six thousand persons put to the sword without distinction of age or sex . . .

When the Kozaks of Ukraine, discouraged by the severe execution at Baturyn sat still, the Zaporozhian Kozaks openly declared for Mazepa, and continued firm to him to the last; two or three thousand followed his fortune to Bender, and are still with the king of Sweden; most of the rest were cut to pieces, so that the remains of that name are at present very inconsiderable.[21]

Although Pushkin was not accurate about Peter's "stern measures" to keep Ukraine in obedience, and did not mention the massacre of Baturyn and the Sich, he was much closer to historical truth than the contemporary Soviet historians, such as S. M. Byelousov, who writes about "the historical friendship of the Ukrainian people with the fraternal Russian people,"[22] or L. G. Beskrovny, who, while making half-true statements, such as, "The Ukrainian people did not support the traitor, Mazepa, and his adherents,"[23] did not even bother to mention the real situation. Similarly, more propaganda than historical truth was presented by V. A. Romanovsky and A. I. Kozachenko in the latest U.S.S.R. Academy publication on *Poltava*.[24]

Mazepa, as a protector of the rich Kozaks and a loyal ally of Muscovy for twenty-one years, was not a popular *hetman* with the common people in Ukraine.[25] Nevertheless, as the English ambassador,Whitworth, correctly reported to his government, the Zaporozhian Kozaks (8,000), who made up the most democratic segment of the Ukrainian population, joined Mazepa and his 4,000 supporters (who had lost their artillery at Baturyn) in their struggle against Russia, because they, like Mazepa himself, saw in Russia's interference in Ukraine's affairs an encroachment on Kozak liberties and eventual enslavement of Ukraine. Excommunication and torture were not the only reasons which made Mazepa's struggle against

Peter unsuccessful. In every larger Ukrainian city, well-fortified Russian garrisons with heavy artillery were stationed. They were able to check every troop movement in the country. Besides, about 20,000 of Mazepa's Kozaks were in the Czar's service outside the borders of Ukraine. Also, the peasants were not attracted by Mazepa's struggle for Ukrainian independence, because in 1701 he had legalized forced labor (two days per week), making them virtual bondsmen of the rich Kozaks. The Swedes, lacking supplies, took all their provisions from the peasants and therefore were not popular with them either. In addition, Russian diplomacy was more skillful than Swedish diplomacy in securing the neutrality of warlike Turkey and her vassal Tartary, two traditional enemies of Russia. In such a situation, the worn-out, starving, disease-ridden Swedish soldiers (20,000) with their desperate cries of "bread or death"[26] had to face the Russian army, which had double the number of men (about 75,000) and artillery, and received a steady flow of fresh supplies (food, ammunition and replacements). Of course, the contribution of Mazepa, although useful, could not have been decisive under these circumstances.[27] The Russians of Poltava were not the band of fugitives of Narva; they were well-disciplined soldiers, experienced in fighting. Pushkin, in his poem, jubilantly and in glowing words depicted this Russian victory at Poltava.

3. PUSHKIN'S MAZEPA AND THE HISTORICAL MAZEPA

Although Pushkin depicted the general events preceding the Battle of Poltava accurately on the whole, Mazepa, the main character of his poem, was portrayed in the damning phraseology of Peter's propaganda letters, the so-called *universals,* which were addressed to the Ukrainian people (1708-9) and exhorted them not to join the uprising.[28] Herein the great Russian poet simply assumed the Russian imperialistic attitude, which at all times was anti-Ukrainian and which the Russian academician, F. E. Korsh, characterized thus: "Unfortunately many of our liberals, always ready to stand up for any non-Russian nationality . . ., never can recognize the same rights for the Ukrainian nationality."[29] Thus, for a Russian, no matter what his political orientation, a Ukrainian struggling for independence from Russia is always a "separatist," "traitor," "villain," etc. So it was in the case of Mazepa.

Alexander Brückner, Slavicist at Berlin University, has stressed the fact that, under Pushkin's pen, "Mazepa has become the conventional ruffian,"[30] and the Pushkinist, Waclaw Lednicki of Berkeley University, justly remarked: "In his poem Pushkin treated Mazepa as a traitor mercilessly."[31] Among Russian historians, one seldom finds an objective attitude towards Mazepa. Nevertheless, M. T. Florinsky candidly stated:

> The union of Ukraine with Russia was anything but a love match, and there were many among the Kozak and non-Kozak population of the southern steppes who shared the dislike of the Russians themselves for the policies of Peter and who suspected, with very good reason, that Moscow was planning new and drastic inroads on their cherished liberties, which had already suffered grievous curtailment. Mazepa, a traitor and a villain, according to the official Russian historiography, was motivated by the legitimate and honorable desire to safeguard the autonomy of his country and to save it from destruction by siding with the probable winner . . ."[32]

Pushkin, following that "official Russian historiography,"[33] had for *Hetman* Mazepa, in his poem, nothing but abusive epithets, such as "villain," 'traitor," "Judas," "viper," "old hawk," "destroyer of tender innocence," "cruel lover," etc . . . Although Pushkin himself loftily wrote that a poet should be "as impartial as fate," in portraying the Ukrainian liberty fighter, the Russian bard discarded his noble convictions and gave free reign to his patriotic bias and imperialistic emotions. In Pushkin's words, Mazepa appears to be a mysterious demon, "a fatal abyss of insidious soul," a personification of all baseness and evil of almost apocalyptic proportion, whom no mortal mind could ever penetrate:

> Not to many, perhaps is it known
> That his spirit is untameable,
> That he is happy, openly or stealthily
> To destroy his enemies;
> That not one offense has he ever forgiven
> Since the day he was born,
> That farsighted criminal schemes
> The haughty old man has contrived;
> That he does not know sanctitude,
> That he never has gratitude,
> That he does not love anything in life,
> That blood he is ready to shed like water,
> That he despises liberty,
> That there is no fatherland for him.[34]

"These verses are killing, this is a death sentence, these are hammer strokes by which Mazepa is nailed to the pillory," cried out the jubilant Russian critic, Yu. Aykhenvald.[35]

Forgetting his previous merciless verdict on Mazepa's "fatherland," in the third canto Pushkin contradicts himself by saying: "His eyes gleamed intensely with emotion as he bade farewell to his native country," which statement implies that "his native country" was in fact very dear to Mazepa.

The last two lines are merely paraphrases of K. F. Ryleyev in his poem *Voynarovsky* (1825), when he spoke in a similar situation thus: "How sorrowful were our hearts, when we saw before us the border of our native land."[36] But this is the only parallel between *Poltava,* which glorifies the Russian victory and Peter's genius, and *Voynarovsky,* which extols the Kozaks' struggle for freedom. Ryleyev's Mazepa is a great Ukrainian patriot and leader, ready to sacrifice his life and honor for his fatherland (*Yeyo spasaya ot okov, ya zhertovat' gotov yey chestyu*). For Mazepa and for the noble Russian revolutionary leader, Ryleyev, Ukraine's struggle against despotic Russia was "freedom's struggle against autocracy" (*Bor'ba svobody s samovlastyem!*). Ryleyev's Mazepa had the same right to live and toil for his native Ukraine as Peter I had for Russia:

Kak on, i ya zhivu dlya slavy,
Dlya pol'zy rodiny moyey.

Ryleyev's sympathetic treatment of Mazepa in *Voynarovsky,* in fact, provoked Pushkin to write his *Poltava,* in which his raging emotion, his ardent Russian patriotism and his unsurpassed poetic talent were masterfully used to brand Mazepa forever as "a villain" and "a traitor of the Russian Czar" (*izmennik russkogo tsarya*). But perhaps most revolting of all for the Russian Orthodox reader is Pushkin's picture of Mazepa scheming secretly with the cunning Polish Jesuit, Father Zalenski. The two plotted treason "like thieves in the night." Even Pushkin's treatment of Boris Godunov, the other "villain" in Russian history, and murderer of the Crown Prince Demetrius, cannot match his monstrous description of Mazepa. After Godunov's monologue, "I attained the highest power," he still retains much of the reader's sympathy.

Quite different is the picture of Mazepa left us by the secretary of Charles XII, Gustav von Adlerfeld, 1708, whom Kostomarov calls "an impartial and very objective Swedish historian." Alderfeld describes the Ukrainian *hetman* thus:

> Before us was an old man, sixty-six years of age,* of medium frame, lean, without a beard, but with a mustache worn in the Polish manner. Generally he looked dignified, but sometimes he showed sparks of a gay and vivid temperament, joking with a keen wit and amusing his listeners; in his conversation one noted great tact and much wisdom. It was evident that he was a well-educated man who spoke excellent Latin. King Charles liked him at once."[37]

Mazepa's rebellion is presented in *Poltava* as being of somewhat frivolous origin. It is attributed to personal revenge, stemming from an incident that took place during a feast in the camp near Azov. Peter I, after hearing "a bold word" from Mazepa, is supposed to have pulled Mazepa's mustache in anger. Pushkin is contradicted by Peter himself in a speech delivered to his troops on July 7, 1709, the day before the decisive battle of Poltava, wherein the Czar spoke of Mazepa in terms of the independence of Ukraine:

> The Swedish King and the impostor Leszczynski have swayed to their side the traitor Mazepa and have sworn mutually to detach Little Russia (Ukraine), to create of it an independent principality under the rule of this traitor by incorporating into it Volhynia, and to put under Mazepa's sovereignty the Zaporozhian and Don Cossacks . . .[38]

Much earlier (on November 6, 1708) A. D. Menshikov, Peter's ablest general, learning that Mazepa had joined Charles XII, immediately advised his Czar of the political implication of this step: "It is not for the sake of his person, but for the whole of Ukraine."[39] And the astute Menshikov, in the same letter, counseled Czar Peter:

> After this evil event it is necessary to keep the common people on our side by all kinds of promises through the publication of *universals* revealing all the *hetman's* misdeeds against them, so that they should not be tempted by any of his enticements.

Peter made good and swift use of this advice. Menshikov, his favorite general, had judged the situation accurately.

During his twenty-one years as *hetman,* Mazepa had received the highest honors from Peter, so that the trivial offense, even if it did occur, was probably of little moment. Moreover, the *hetmanate* was the highest office that Ukraine could offer, and that he had al-

* This was merely Adlerfeld's impression, because, according to Orlyk, Mazepa (1639-1709) died at the age of seventy. See Ohloblyn, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

ready. According to Philip Orlyk, Mazepa's secretary, on October 17, 1707, in Kiev, the *hetman* told him of his plan for the uprising, demanding that Orlyk take an oath and swear himself to secrecy on the Holy Cross, which contained relics of Christ's original cross. In the form of an oath, Mazepa revealed to Orlyk his motivation for joining Charles XII:

> I take the Almighty God as my witness and swear to you that: not for my private gain, not for higher honors, not for riches, not for any other caprice, but for the sake of all of you, being under my power and under my rule, for the sake of your wives and children, for the sake of the common good of our poor mother Ukraine, for the benefit of all Zaporozhian Hosts and the Ukrainian people, for the elevating and broadening of our military rights and privileges, I desire with God's help to act so that your wives and your children, and our Fatherland with the Zaporozhian Host, perish not under the Muscovites or Swedes. If I, however, would dare to do this for my private benefit, may I be stricken in my soul and body by God in the Holy Trinity, and by the innocent sufferings of our Lord, Jesus Christ.[40]

Although whenever Pushkin himself spoke, he condemned the defeated Ukrainian hero. Mazepa's aim in his own words—the independence of Ukraine—sounds quite convincing and is in full accord with impartial history. In the second canto of *Poltava,* Mazepa tells Mariya of his secret intentions. He says that the Ukrainians "for a long time have been bending their heads beneath the protection of Warsaw, and under the despotism of Moscow. It is already time for Ukraine to be independent,"* and that was the reason he was raising "the banner of freedom against Peter":

> No nezavisimoy derzhavoy
> Ukrayne byt' uzhe pora:
> I znamya vol'nosti krovavoy
> Ya podymayu na Petra.

The same idea is expressed in a patriotic song—*duma*—composed by Mazepa himself, which Kochubey handed to Czar Peter, while denouncing the *hetman's* intention to break with Moscow. This song was known to Pushkin, who in the fifth footnote to *Poltava* praised it by saying: "It is remarkable not only in a historical sense." In that song Mazepa calls his countrymen to unity under one leader in order to save Ukraine from its enemies and finishes it with an

* These words enlightened many Ukrainians about the position of their country in Russia. This is probably why Pushkin's *Poltava* is omitted in many Soviet textbooks. See Lotots'ky, *op. cit.,* I, p. 98.

appeal to the Kozaks to fight to the death with guns and sabers in hand for their faith and liberties:

> Be it known to all forever,
> We have freedom by the saber.[41]

The similarity of ideas in both passages is quite obvious, except that Pushkin puts in Mazepa's mouth a desire to build a "throne" for himself, for which ambition there is not the slightest evidence in history. Besides, the *hetmanate* was a traditional Ukrainian military-civilian elective office and no crown was ever attached to it.

Pushkin's treatment of Mazepa is characterized by a lack of consistency. When the poet speaks himself, he usually makes use of such damning ephitets as "villain," "Judas . . ." or "Where is the rascal? Why is the traitor not on the block?" Or, "Where is the villain? Where has he fled from the pangs of his viperous conscience?" Yet elsewhere he calls him a "dignified old man, ruler of Little Russia," or speaks about Mazepa's "cautious old age," "sparkling eyes," "soft-spoken words," "proud head," etc., so that the reader is inclined to feel that this is no "villain" at all, but a strong character, a far-sighted leader, a statesman. And then again, Pushkin's passive Mazepa is pressed for action by the war-like Kozaks to save "the grievous Ukraine." At still another time, he is a shrewd master-mind, carefully planning the liberation of Ukraine and undermining the strength of Czar Peter. In the preface to *Poltava,* Pushkin declares, "Mazepa is one of the most remarkable men of that epoch," and in the same paragraph he makes him responsible for uncommited crimes, including the "murder of his unfortunate mistress' father" (who was sentenced to death by Czar Peter). Yet in his own footnote nineteen, Pushkin states: "Secret Counsellor Shafranov and Count Golovkin were friends and protectors of Mazepa; they, in all honesty, should be held responsible for the horror of the trial and execution of the denouncers" (Kochubey and Iskra). "Nevertheless," concludes Pushkin, "the memory of Mazepa, anathematized by the church, cannot escape the curse of humanity." Again in his preface, Pushkin blames his friend, K. F. Ryleyev, for his endeavor in *Voynarovsky* (1825) to make of Mazepa "a hero of liberty"—the new Bohdan Khmelnytsky. Yet Pushkin also defends Mazepa there from E. Aladin, who in his romantic story, *Kochubey* (1828), tried to depict him as "an old coward, getting pale while

confronting an armed woman." Pushkin suggests instead: "It would be better to develop and explain the real character of the rebellious *hetman,* and not distort arbitrarily the historical character" (sic!). Pushkin was quite sure that he himself did not distort him, in a retort to the critics declaring bluntly: "Mazepa acts in my poem exactly as in history . . ."

Pushkin's bias in his explanation of Mazepa's motives and ambiguity in his treatment of Mazepa caused ceaseless criticism in literature, which we shall discuss later. Here we shall merely state that Mazepa has received very contradictory verdicts of history. The attitude of Russian historiography was very well explained by M. T. Florinsky, quoted previously. The Ukrainian historians in Russia were handicapped by censorship, church anathema and the "official line." Some of them, like the populists and socialists, did not like the *hetman's* autocratic methods and aristocratic sympathies, which were common in Eastern Europe at that time. It should be pointed out that the lot of the peasants in Ukraine was markedly better than that of those in all the surrounding countries. It was only outside Russia that the truth about Mazepa could be spoken.[42] But some Western historians were and still are under the influence of Russian historiography, and are too cautious to pass independent judgment. However, the American Slavicist, Clarence A. Manning, after an extensive analysis of Mazepa's life, came to this conclusion:

> In his lifetime both his friends and foes considered him an extraordinary person, a man of winning charm, of great learning, and with a real gift for leadership. In his old age, when he was thrown directly between Charles and Peter, he bore himself with a dignity, even in defeat, that continued to hide the fire that must have burned within him . . . Mazepa became a symbol to the Ukrainians of their own right to exist.[43]

And the contemporary Ukrainian historian of Mazepa's era, Alexander P. Ohloblyn, said this in his latest book:

> There is not the slightest doubt that *Hetman* Mazepa was totally dedicated to the ideal of Ukrainian statehood, and to the ideal of a united Ukrainian independent state . . . At Poltava, on July 8, 1709, Moscow emerged victorious, and that fact decided the fate of Mazepa and Ukraine. But Moscow, both White and Red, failed to defeat Mazepa as a spiritual spokesman of the Ukrainian ideal.[44]

It is evident then that Pushkin's Mazepa is not the historical Mazepa.

4. PUSHKIN'S MARIYA AND MOTRYA KOCHUBEY

Beyond doubt the most charming and at the same time most tragic character in *Poltava* is Mariya, the historical Motrena (in Ukrainian, Motrya) Kochubey. There is ample evidence that Pushkin patterned her physical appearance after and endowed her with some of the spiritual qualities of his platonic "secret love," Mariya N. Rayevskaya (married name, Princess Volkonskaya), who voluntarily joined her husband in Siberia, where he had been exiled for his part in the Decembrist Uprising. Hence the poet's compassion and his enthusiastic description: "There is not one beauty in Poltava who can match Mariya."[45] The story of Mariya in *Poltava* is treated in accordance with historical fact regarding Motrya, until her disappearance from her parents' home. She was the youngest daughter of General Judge Kochubey, a Kozak officer of Tartar ancestry. Strangely, her godfather and the friend of her parents, *Hetman* Mazepa, who was about forty-five years her senior, returned Motrya's love and wanted to marry her. His proposal, however, was rejected by her parents, not only because of his age, but for religious reasons as well (the Orthodox Church strictly forbids marriage between godchild and godparent). Annoyed by the persistent scolding of her mother, Motrya escaped to the *hetman's* palace. Mazepa immediately sent her home with the Czar's representative, Colonel Annenkov. In his letter to the offended Motrya, the *hetman* explained:

> First of all, your parents would have spread the story throughout the whole world that I had kidnapped their daughter by force during the night, and that I am keeping you as a mistress. Secondly, in keeping your Grace, neither you nor I would have known how to act. We would have been obliged to live as a newly-wedded couple, and the blows of the Church and its maledictions would have forced us to separate. What would I have done then? Would I not have suffered, if your Grace had complained of me?[46]

Pushkin utilized this unusual love in his poem, especially this episode, in a fictionalized version (in precisely the way that Mazepa had feared Motrya's parents would misinterpret it), making full use of poetic licence and his great artistic skill to obtain the most dramatic effects. He changed her name, and the final part of the love story completely. The biased history of Bantysh-Kamensky (1822), which contains Mazepa's letters, served as Pushkin's source material, there-

by accounting in part for the distorted information about Mazepa.[47] Mazepa sent gifts to Motrya, such as "a little book," "a diamond ring." He later advised her, "If your accursed parents disown you, take refuge in a convent (which, in all probability, she did after her father's tragic death), and I will then know what to do. I repeat again, let me know what you wish." Her parents' strong disapproval of this hopeless love evidently caused Motrya to change her mind completely, as we can deduce from one of Mazepa's last letters to her, in which he wrote desperately:

> "I expected to die rather than to notice such a great change in your heart. Remember only your words, remember your oath. Look at your little hands; didn't you often give them to me and say, 'Whether I am with you or not, I will love you till I die?' Didn't you promise this? . . . My letters are happier than I; they are in your hands; they are happier than my poor eyes, which cannot see you."

These are unusual letters, and more unusual still is Mazepa's love at such a late age and his desperate attempt to keep the young girl, as if she were the last hope in his life. Yet it is a historical fact that the whole episode with Motrya was over with by 1704.[48] Outwardly, it seemed that the relationship between Mazepa and the Kochubeys was not affected. They still visited each other, and Mazepa, when participating in Peter's wars, would delegate the civil administration of Ukraine to Kochubey. This apparently friendly relationship lasted until April 18, 1708, when Kochubey denounced Mazepa for conspiring with the Swedes and the Poles. This was the most dangerous blow to Mazepa's liberation plan.

Pushkin arbitrarily transferred the Mazepa-Mariya love episode to the year 1708. Contrary to Mazepa's letter and to history, he has Mariya remaining in the *hetman's* castle as his mistress after her elopement. She leaves him (according to Pushkin) only on July 25, 1708, when her mother tries in vain to save her unfortunate father from execution. Of course, this is only *licentia poetica,* but it is wholly effective. Although some critics called this merely "melodrama," it was powerful enough to arouse the hatred and contempt of whole generations for the defeated liberator of Ukraine—Mazepa. Perhaps nothing makes the reader with a limited knowledge of history more indignant than the scene wherein "the evil-doer," Mazepa, demands the death sentence for the "innocent" Kochubey. "Whose death? . . . Stubborn old man!" shouts angry Pushkin. "Whose daughter is in his

arms? . . ." Yet the real "Mariya" perhaps never was in his arms in the sense Pushkin would have it. Another heart-rending incident describes how the grief-stricken mother, in disguise, begs Mariya in the *hetman's* castle to save her poor father, and Mariya is not even aware that the executioner's axe awaits her father. Or that last meeting of Mariya and the *hetman.* The most objective history in the world can never thereafter quite erase from the reader's memory the simple, Shakespearean condemnation pronounced by Pushkin's Ophelia, the distraught Mariya:

> I took you for somebody else, you old man . . .
> His mustache was whiter than snow,
> But on yours . . . there are blood stains.

Pushkin displayed the greatest compassion for his Mariya, gracing her with such sentiments as: "unfortunate maiden," "poor Mariya," "shy maiden," "peaceful angel," etc. He could not forgive Ryleyev for ignoring her "terrible" fate in *Voynarovsky,* and Pushkin's most powerful accusation against Mazepa was that he had "pleaded for the death penalty for the father of a girl he had seduced." It would seem that by exaggerating Mariya's tragedy Pushkin intended to invoke "the curse of humanity" upon Mazepa's head.

Regarding Mariya's fate, Pushkin somberly said, "Tradition is silent about her"; only when a blind Ukrainian *kobzar* plays Mazepa's songs, in the village, does he "occasionally mention the sinful maiden to the young Kozak daughters." On this point, Pushkin was correct. It is somewhat surprising that such a conspicuous historical romance should disappear completely from the pages of history. Was the church's excommunication of Mazepa responsible, or was it the ill-will of the people, who regarded with revulsion a love between a god-daughter and godfather, or was it perhaps something else? In any event, it will forever remain a secret of the ages.[49]

Pushkin's Mariya aroused much controversial criticism; some praised her, some blamed her, one even called her "murderer." Of this strange love, Brückner has said, "The psychological riddle Pushkin has left unsolved," and he called Mariya "a Romantic puppet." V. G. Belinsky, Russia's most articulate critic, called *Poltava* "a poem without a hero," and criticized its structure, but praised its details. He admired Pushkin's Mariya more than Tatyana (in *Yevgeniy One-*

gin) for her (Mariya's) "proud, firm and decisive character," for her ability to love a true hero against all odds, although, according to Belinsky, her misfortune was that she did not find that hero in Mazepa. "This mistake was her tragedy, but not her guilt. Mariya, as a woman, is great in this mistake."

It seems to us Belinsky came very close to the truth in his interpretation of Mariya's strange yet historical love, but he overlooked one simple fact—she was not a Russian, but a Ukrainian girl. She most certainly did not look, as did Pushkin or Belinsky, upon Mazepa as "a traitor," but as a national hero, capable of saving Ukraine from Russian domination. As a daughter of the man holding the second highest office in the country, Mariya constantly visited the *hetman's* court, where the Kozak officers, or as Pushkin described them, "the friends of bloody antiquity," ceaselessly discussed the fate of Ukraine and "were waiting for a national uprising" against "hated Muscovy." "They demanded haughtily that the *hetman* tear off their chains." Mariya, the Kozak girl, doubtlessly belonged to that patriotic youth which was looking forward to "dangerous changes," and Pushkin himself stated clearly that she "with an unfeminine soul, liked cavalry pageantry, military music, and battle cries before the insignias of the Little Russian ruler . . ." During banquets "she listened only to the *hetman,*" and "sang only those songs which he had composed," and we know those songs were highly patriotic, calling upon the Kozaks to save Ukraine from her enemies, to fight till death for their faith and liberties. The *hetman* no doubt spoke openly about the liberation of Ukraine in the house of his close friend and deputy, Kochubey. This was even reported to Czar Peter in Kochubey's denunciation. Kochubey, being half Tartar, was more interested in the favors of the Czar and possibly in attaining the *hetmanate* for himself than in an independent Ukraine. Motrya, however, was a sincere Ukrainian patriot and believed in the ideas of the *hetman.*

This affair was interpreted altogether differently by a Ukrainian writer, Ludmila Starytska-Chernyakhivska, in her drama *Ivan Mazepa,* where she simply and probably accurately expressed Motrya's enchantment with Mazepa as a leader and liberator of Ukraine, sincerely believing that her adored hero would "throw off the hateful yoke and crown Ukraine with independence."

My soul is obsessed by the fire of your dreams,
And I believe you will conquer all,
That you will break the hateful yoke.[50]

Pushkin, by changing the time and circumstances of the affair, made not only a historical error, but a psychological and logical one as well, and thereby exposed himself to warranted criticism. A thoughtful reader would never quite believe that for thirteen weeks Mazepa could hide from Mariya such fateful news as the arrest of her father for denouncing the *hetman* and the fact that he had been sentenced to death and was awaiting execution. Nor would he accept the notion that a daughter would remain in the arms of her father's executioner to the day of her father's doom. But this love episode had in fact already withered away four years previously.

5. THE GLORIFICATION OF PETER THE GREAT

In the short sketch of the third canto depicting the battle of Poltava (for which the poem was named, in order to avoid confusion with Byron's *Mazeppa*), Pushkin glorified the important Russian victory, but most of all he glorified its master mind, the triumphant Czar Peter. Mazepa, an "enemy of Russia," is depicted in *Poltava* as a devil in the flesh, while Peter is portrayed as a semi-god. His voice is "from above inspired" . . ."he is beautiful, he is like a divine storm." Even his horse "is proud of his mighty rider" . . . and "his Czarist feast is beautiful," he even drinks "for the health of his teachers—enemies . . ." Of course, all this is described masterfully, yet what has happened to Pushkin's noble principle about the poet's "secret or open partiality" in art? Even earlier, in 1826 in his *Stanzas,* Pushkin extolled Peter and so took leave of his liberal convictions, but in *Poltava* he started the unsurpassed Petriad, which reached its zenith in *The Bronze Horseman* (1833), in which he praised the Czar Reformer and his newly built capital in glowing terms: "Be fair, city of Peter, and stand as unshakeable as Russia." True, in the same poem Pushkin's hero, Yevgeniy, crazed with grief after losing his beloved in a horrible flood, threatens the statue of the builder of St. Petersburg, Czar Peter, who—in Yevgeniy's eyes—has put Russia at the edge of a chasm. Basing his judgment on this passage and on Pushkin's notes on the history of Peter the Great, J. Tretiak thought that Pushkin

had condemned the great reformer, who while building his all-powerful empire crushed the happiness of the common man and "any national individualism." For Tretiak, the pulling of *Hetman* Mazepa's mustache by the Czar, described in *Poltava,* reveals Peter as an Asiatic despot, in spite of his Western dress and ideas on civilization.[51] Even if Pushkin at times was critical of Peter, his *Poltava* "might be considered a poetic canonization of Peter the Great as the builder and defender of the Russian Empire," says W. Lednicki.[52]

The evaluation of Peter I and his reforms from the historiosophical point of view later separated the Russian Slavophiles and the Westernizers, with the latter glorifying him for bringing Western civilization to Russia. It is worth mentioning that L. N. Tolstoy attempted a novel of Peter's times on several occasions, but in the course of his research became so disgusted with the person of the despotic Emperor, the embodiment of all Tolstoy hated, that he gave up the project.[53] The philosopher, N. Berdyayev, said of Peter I that "he was a Bolshevik on the throne,"[54] while the Russian common people saw in him the living embodiment of the Apocalyptical Beast, the Antichrist, and for saying as much they were often burned alive or tortured to death in the dreaded chambers of the *Preobrazhenskiy prikaz.*[55] Nevertheless his unique achievements in the modernization of the Russian Empire made Peter a national hero in the eyes of his apologists, such as Prokopovich, Sumarokov, Lomonosov, Pushkin and Belinsky, who regarded him as a superhuman or a divine being. Soviet Russia, on its way to world domination, also has glorified Peter as the builder of a new and mighty Russia. (Cf. the Soviet film *Emperor Peter I*). M. F. Florinsky has observed the striking similarities between Peter's and Stalin's methods in transforming Russia.

Pushkin's contribution to the glorification of Peter I—his magic verses, which have been committed to memory in Russia by generation after generation—is greater than one would suppose. As M. F. Florinsky remarks, "They exercise an influence from which even the trained historian finds it difficult to free himself."[56]

6. MORAL ASPECTS IN THE LIVES OF MAZEPA AND PETER

In discussing the historicity of *Poltava,* we cannot ignore some moral issues in the lives of the two leading characters of the poem.

In this regard, the conclusion of the Soviet critic, B. S. Meylakh, is interesting:

> The contrast between Peter (heroism, simplicity, magnanimity) and Mazepa (egoism, treachery, pride), as two basically opposite types, constitutes the ideological essence of the poem.[57]

If this were Pushkin's intention, then he dealt very carelessly with history, inasmuch as no objective history of Peter could possibly depict him in such a noble light. We refer confirmed skeptics to Florinsky's chapter, "Peter at the Bar of History," in his book quoted previously. Here we mention only a few incidents in Peter's life which should suffice to dispel any illusion of his magnanimity.

First, Czar Peter personally branded Mazepa as a "traitor," writing in his *universal* that he "forgot God's fear and the kissing of the Cross," implying that Mazepa had broken his oath to his sovereign. It is generally accepted that the breaking of an oath is reprehensible. But all revolutionaries and liberators who fight for the independence of their countries first automatically break their allegiance to their sovereigns, yet history does not waste a word of censure on them, especially if they are successful. Thus England regarded George Washington as a "traitor" after he engaged in the revolutionary war against the British Crown. It is important, however, that the American people look upon him as a liberator, the father of their country, and a national hero. Moreover, today, in the heart of Great Britain—before the National Gallery in London—stands a monument of George Washington. Both Americans and Englishmen now place flowers in homage at the base of this statue. Would the Russians ever allow the Ukrainians to erect such a monument to their eventual liberator from Russia in Moscow?

Since 1654, Muscovy has made "new and drastic inroads on cherished Kozak liberties" at every opportunity, with the purpose of abolishing their autonomy, making of Ukraine a Russian province and turning its freedom-loving people into Russian bondsmen. Catherine II finally attained these goals in 1783. Mazepa foresaw all this; yet with the powerful and despotic Peter he could not act as a lion, but only as a fox. In such circumstances he, out of necessity could be only "an unscrupulous politician" in trying to liberate his country.

One can see how unscrupulous Peter himself was when he was planning the unprovoked Northern War, in setting up a secret coalition with August II of Poland and Denmark against Sweden. He "deceived the Swedes with a show of friendship till the moment he was able to end his war with Turkey," said B. Pares.[58] He declared war on Sweden the day (August 19, 1700) after he had concluded the peace treaty with Turkey in order "to avenge the insults" suffered at the hands of the Swedish governor in Riga in 1697, when he, during his travels incognito (as Captain Peter Mikhaylov), penetrated the secrets of that fortress. Thus he started a war out of personal pique. (That journey Klyuchevsky called "the secret burglar expedition to steal from Western Europe naval and technological knowledge.") Peter himself cynically told A. Ostermann: "We need Europe for several decades, and later we must turn our backs on it."[59]

When Peter's son, Czarevich Alexis, escaped from his father to Naples, Peter swore "solemnly before the altar" his "greatest love" and complete forgiveness and freedom. Yet when Alexis returned, he put him in the torture chamber, where he was flogged to death on June 26, 1718, and as Menshikov noted in his journal, three days later the "divine" Czar celebrated and was "particularly gay" on his name day, after having committed the heinous crime of filicide. Nuns were flogged mercilessly; his former wife, Czarina Eudoxie, was flogged and exiled to a convent in Arctic Russia, and Alexis' friend, Dosipheus, the Bishop of Rostov, was broken on the wheel.[60] The sadism and cruelty of Peter had no limits. He hanged friends of his wife and supporters of his step-sister, Sophie, in front of their bedrooms, poured water on his victims in winter and let them freeze to death, was proud of chopping off heads with one ax stroke, enjoyed watching executions, impaling and the breaking of his unfortunate victims on the wheel. "For everything," writes Klyuchevsky, "for sending a petition to the Czar through an improper office, for the unauthorized chopping down of a large oak or mast tree, for the absence of a nobleman from a parade, for the selling of Russian clothes, there followed the confiscation of property, the loss of all civil rights, the knout, hard labor, the gallows, political or physical death." Admiral Apraksin, one of his closest collaborators, wrote in 1716 about the general despair in Russia: "In all cases we are walking as if blind, and do not know what to do . . ."[61] Peter changed his mistresses like gloves, but

woe to those whom he found unfaithful to him. Anne Mons was thrown into prison, Marie Hamilton was executed in his presence. His second wife, Martha Skovorotski, renamed Catherine by Peter, was more fortunate. She was a gay, robust Polish or Latvian peasant girl, a servant of pastor Glück. After the Russian capture of Marienburg in 1702, Martha passed through several hands before she became Menshikov's mistress. Peter met her in 1703, took her, renamed her, and by 1705 sired two children whom he recognized as his own. Catherine, who became a real trooper's wife and accompanied him on all his campaigns, bore him eleven children (most of whom died in infancy). Peter finally married her in 1712, crowing her solemnly on May 18, 1724, and bestowing upon her the title of empress. In November, however, he caught the Empress with a handsome lover, young chamberlain William Mons, a brother of his former unfortunate mistress. Raging, he decapitated Mons and ordered that his head be put in alcohol and kept in Catherine's chamber as a warning.[62] Peter's sudden illness and death, caused by a severe cold and chronic venereal disease, most probably saved her life.

Examples of Peter's atrocious crimes against humanity could be multiplied endlessly. His treatment of the body of Ivan Miloslavsky, an uncle of his step-sister Sophie was outrageous. The corpse was exhumed and publicly drawn by pigs and placed under the execution block, so that the blood of Sophie's followers could run over the body.

His attitude toward religion and the clergy was cynical and blasphemous; he used the Church only as a tool of autocracy. There were drunken orgies, "The Most Drunken Synod," led by Peter, where, attired in liturgical vestments, he publicly mocked the divine services and the highest clergy, drank from sacred chalices while paying homage to Venus and Bacchus in the company of prostitutes, and then hastened to the torture chambers of Preobrazhenskoye to mutilate the bodies of his victims. Truly, Peter was "a Bolshevik on the throne," and had no right to speak of "God's fear." One can only wonder how in his *Stanzas* (1826) Pushkin could possibly have spoken of Peter's "unrevengeful memory" (*pamyat'yu nezloben*).

There is no intention here to minimize the extraordinary talent, energy and ability of Czar Peter I, who for Russia, no doubt, was "Great." Yet history shows that there was nothing in the life of Ma-

zepa that could compare with the wild barbarities and sadism that raged in Peter.

Mazepa was a great man who lived in a very difficult time—the time when the Russian sphinx began to test its muscles and to sharpen its claws. Ukraine was surrounded by traditional enemies, eager to possess that "bread basket." To reiterate, Pushkin himself admitted, "Mazepa is one of the most remarkable men of his epoch," and Mazepa was highly respected by Peter himself. Educated in Western Europe, Mazepa was a famous patron of culture, the Church and the arts, in the unruly steppes of Ukraine. All signs indicate he would have brought peace, order and prosperity to Ukraine had not Peter exhausted Ukraine by constant wars. Confronted, however, by false denunciation at the hands of some Kozaks eager to undermine his autocratic power and to take his place, Mazepa became too subservient to Muscovy, began to placate the Kozak nobility by a policy of land grants, and paid too little attention to the common people and the poor Kozaks. His Machiavellian policy misled even the shrewd and suspicious Peter for many years, although Annenkov, Golitsyn and Menshikov had been ordered to watch him. At the same time, the Kozak officers did not know what Mazepa was really planning and thus were unprepared to understand him and to act swiftly and in concert at the right hour. Mazepa ordered his Church to pray for the safety of Ukraine from the invasion of the enemies of Orthodoxy, and advised the population to hide their provisions in the ground. This confused the people when the Swedes came to Ukraine. The supplies for the Swedes, stored in the cities, were lost when the cities were quickly captured by the Russians. Thus, by his exaggerated cautiousness, Mazepa outsmarted himself and hurt his own cause. Mazepa missed the best opportunity to attack the Czar in 1707, when Peter's merciless exploitation of the people caused the rebellion of the peasants on the Volga and of the Don Cossacks, led by K. Bulavin. Instead of helping the Don Cossacks, Mazepa sent his troops to suppress them as ordered by Peter. In fulfilling the Czar's drastic orders, Mazepa was often blamed by the people. On the other hand, because he did not break with Peter openly, he was in no position to oppose his orders. Pushkin's main accusation, that Mazepa pleaded "for the punishment of the father of the girl seduced by him," is half true at best. The leading historian of the era, O. P. Ohloblyn,

proved that Mazepa warned Kochubey and Iskra through Apostol, giving them a chance to escape from the Russian investigations to the Crimea. Both of the denouncers, however, were so positive they would succeed in deposing Mazepa that they went to the Czar willingly, only to find the death sentence awaiting them.[63]

Cynical and blasphemous in the extreme was the text of the excommunication of Mazepa ordered by Peter and prepared later by the Russian Orthodox Church. In it Mazepa was called "the second Judas," "devil in the flesh . . .", while Peter was venerated as "Lord," "Christ . . ." In that text we read:

> . . . a devil in the flesh, but not a man, thrice damned apostate Mazepa, who left the Lord's Christ, his Lord (Peter) and benefactor, and joined the enemy.

And here is the prayer for Peter:

> . . . on the fields of Poltava, when to our help descended the Lord of Heavenly Hosts, and armed himself against our powerful enemies and defeated them, doing grace to His Christ—Peter.[64]

In reality, Mazepa was the greatest benefactor of the Church, and his attitude toward religion was unfailingly one of reverence. He even composed a psalm of great sincerity and devotion:

> Oh God, let us always have love,
> And let us glorify Thy name.[65]

This psalm became a permanent part of Ukrainian lyricism.

Reared in a home of serenity and magnificence and educated in Western Europe, Mazepa was free of any religious bigotry. He respected the Catholic Church, yet he was devoted to his Orthodox Church. His mother was the Abbess Mary Magdalen at the Ascension Convent in Kiev, and one of his sisters was a nun. Mazepa, as *hetman* of Ukraine, spent millions for churches, monasteries and schools in Ukraine, Byelorussia, Serbia, Greece, Syria, and Palestine. He bought a chalice of pure gold, a lamp, and a silver altar for the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and published a Gospel in the Arabic language for the Patriarch of Alexandria. To this day the artistic silver plate is in use on high holidays as an *antimins* in the same Basilica, with the inscription: "Donated by His Grace Ioannes Mazepa, Russian (sic!) *Hetman.*" Czar Peter himself called

Mazepa "a great builder of churches." Yet an anathema that was unlawfully ordered by Peter I, whom his own Russian people had nicknamed "Antichrist," made Mazepa "damned," in the eyes of the church Mazepa had so generously supported.

Vae victis! Woe to the vanquished, the ancient Romans used to say. And this is especially true in the case of Mazepa. Had he defeated Peter on the battlefield of Poltava, history would have spoken of him with great respect and would have smiled tolerantly at his autumnal love for his goddaughter, Motrya, and his breaking of his oath of allegiance to Czar Peter. However, a double moral standard in judging success and failure still operates, a principal reason some opinions of Mazepa are so harsh.

7. CHARLES XII

History is almost unanimous in its judgment of the Swedish King Charles XII. Usually he is described as a daring adventurer, a brilliant, though merciless conqueror, who at the age of eighteen achieved great victories with his gallant Swedish army on the battlefields of Europe, and until he lost his decisive battle at Poltava (1709), was regarded as the invincible, furious warrior—"the madman of the North." This martial renown was one of the reasons why Mazepa joined Charles in the last phase of the latter's anticipated triumph, hoping thereby to secure the independence of Ukraine with the help of "the probable winner" of the Northern War (1700-1721).

Pushkin treated Charles XII realistically, with civility and even with some respect (he wrote similarly of Napoleon, 1821), unlike the German lyricist, R. M. Rilke, who much later idealistically described "the young king of the North, defeated in Ukraine," as a mysterious, almost legendary horseman, who"enthusiastically followed the thunder of battle with the eyes of a lover."* The Russian poet depicted with bold, decisive strokes and rich, vivid colors, "the daring Charles" as Peter's "severe teacher" of the lesson of glory. "The Swedish Paladin" caused "the young Russia" of Peter many "unexpected and bloody blows." "Like a whirlwind," Charles swept down the Russian brigades in several battles, but was never able to achieve the final victory. Peter's genius transformed "the fatal blows" into lessons of victory for the Muscovite armies. Pushkin also took a philosophical

* *Karl der Zwölfte von Schweden reitet in der Ukraine,* 1900.

view of Charles' furious cavalcade through Europe—a cavalcade which doubtlessly was inspired by the immortal deeds of Alexander the Great. Likewise, with remarkable laconism, he compared the doom of the Swedish conqueror with the fate of Napoleon: "Crowned by useless glory, the daring Charles glided along the edges of an abyss. He went against ancient Moscow . . .," and met the same end as that of "the man of destiny" in Pushkin's days.

Of course, "the useless glory" of Charles, who defended the previously conquered southern shores of the Baltic with fury, had the same moral value as Peter's struggle for a new conquest—his "window to Europe," dictated by strategic and economic considerations. Although the brutality of war—the slaying, burning and destroying in enemy territory—was engaged in by both monarchs to an equal extent, Pushkin's patriotic muse nevertheless felt that the Russian cause was a just cause, and that the God of War was on the Russian side. Thus Peter's thunderous command to his troops: "For the cause, with God!", sounded very convincing to the Russian ear.

After entering the scorched earth of White Ruthenia on the road to Moscow, near Smolensk, "Charles suddenly turned southwards and brought the war into Ukraine."

Peter I (and after him many historians) thought that Charles XII was persuaded by Mazepa to turn his march into Ukraine. But Count Carl Pipers, Chancellor of Charles XII, wrote in his journal under July 27, 1709: "Mazepa was completely unknown to us until we came into Ukraine near Kark, when he sent his representative to H. R. M. with the proposal to join us." Pipers explained their march into Ukraine by the fact that the Russians had "burned everything within a radius of seven to eight miles" on the Swedish route, thus "we would have perished from starvation, and so the king was forced to turn to Ukraine," hoping to arrive there before Peter could burn that area as well.* Mazepa was shocked when he learned that Charles had marched into Ukraine and exclaimed indignantly: "The devil brings him here!"

Pushkin, in the preface to *Poltava,* found that strategic plan very reasonable, because "Ukraine, which had always been rest-

* Cf. "Grefve Carl Pipers dagbok hallen under hans fangenskap i Ryssland 1709-1714," *Historiska Handlingar,* XXI/1, 14, according to: *Zapysky NTSh,* Vol. XCII, bk. VI, (Lviv, 1909), p. 70 ff.

less"—a phrase echoing Voltaire's well-known statement: *L'Ukraine a toujours aspiré à être libre*—could rise by "following its *hetman's* example." Events, however, steered a different course. Charles' "good fortune simply yielded to Peter's genius," even though Ukrainian patriots "waited for Charles impatiently," in vain "hoping for a national uprising," and "demanding haughtily that the *hetman* break their sheckles." For "proud Charles" Pushkin forsesees an end:

> And you, the lover of martial glory,
> Who exchanged the crown for a helmet,
> Your end is near. You finally sought afar
> The walls of Poltava.

Here, at Poltava, comes the thunderous climax of the poem's political drama. After facing Peter's main forces, "the mighty Charles" in his fury recognizes "no more the unfortunate fugitives from Narva," whom he had defeated by surprise nine years ago, "but instead the excellent Russian regiments and the forest of countless bayonets."

Pushkin's Mazepa clearly sees his own mistake here, realizing before the battle that he had been too much enchanted by "the courage and faithless fortune of a military vagabond, who was measuring the new enemy's forces by past success." Charles now is no more than "a daring, little boy," who, out of sheer overconfidence, receives a severe wound before the final battle. "It is not for him to conduct the war against the autocratic giant." Suffering from his wound, carried by faithful servants, the pale and motionless Charles is surprised by Russian resistance in the battle he had so eagerly awaited. He is unable to arouse enthusiasm among the Swedes, while his opponent, Czar Peter, vigorous, mighty, swift, decisive, his voice thunderous, is as "wonderful as a divine storm" to his soldiers. As the Swedes retreated hastily, Charles "forgot his severe wound" and with bent head galloped so fast that "his faithful servants could hardly keep pace with him." Later he appeared composed, as if he had "forgotten the loss of Poltava . . ."

In the epilogue, from the perspective of a hundred years, Pushkin raised the question: "And what remained of these strong, proud men so obsessed by willful passions? Only the hero of Poltava, Peter I, erected a huge monument for himself."

Pushkin, during his exile to Kishinev, visited Bendery in December, 1821, seeking traces of Charles XII and Mazepa, and "near the military cemetery" he found "remnants of the ruined vestibule, three trenches and a few moss-covered stairs" as a memory of the Swedish king. From these vantage points "the mad hero" (Charles XII) alone in a crowd of domestic servants formerly fought off the noisy attack of Turkish warriors and finally "threw his dagger under their standard."

Pushkin did not deviate far from history in recreating Charles XII, although some of the poet's critics strongly objected to Mazepa's negative remarks about the Swedish king, although they are, in a sense, psychologically understandable.

8. OTHER CHARACTERS

The other characters in *Poltava* are sketchy and on the whole do not deviate too much from history. Vasyl Kochubey and his wife are depicted as "rich and famous" people, who have more pride, however, in their "beautiful daughter," Mariya, than in their wealth. The mother is very religious and tries to discourage Mariya from loving "the shameless, sinful old man, who should have been a father and friend to his innocent goddaughter rather than a husband." After Mariya's elopement both mother and father live only for revenge. Madame Kochubey, accurately enough, is depicted as the driving force behind her husband's plan for denunciation. Kochubey's replies to Orlyk regarding money, during the interrogation, are exquisite and are no doubt Pushkin's creation. The darkest character in the poem, after Mazepa, is his trusted Secretary Orlyk, who later, in exile, became the *hetman.* Pushkin made of him "a fierce inquisitor" of Kochubey, which was not too probable because Orlyk's main duties centered around the *hetman's* chancery. Moreover, he was in Vitebsk at that time.

The other historical characters, such as Hordiyenko (in *Poltava,* executed in 1708, but who actually died in 1734 in Turkey), Chechel, Paliy, Voynarovsky, the Polish Princess A. Dolska, and the Jesuit Zalenski are only mentioned briefly. The young Kozak, whose platonic love is rejected by Mariya, is a complete poetical invention. That he delivers "the denunciation of the villain *hetman* to Czar Peter from Kochubey" is definitely not in accordance with historical truth.

Pushkin also made a topographical error. After the defeat at Poltava, Mazepa and Charles XII are described as escaping to the southwest to Turkey. Thus Mazepa could not have seen Kochubey's estate in Dikanka, which is located to the north of Poltava and was then occupied by the Russians.

9. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE LITERARY CRITICISM

Since its appearance, *Poltava* has been controversial. The first glowing welcome was voiced by Nikolay Polevoy, in the *Moscow Telegraph* (1829), who said: "We see in it, in addition to other merits, something new — the nationality. *Poltava* from beginning to end is permeated with the Russian soul, with the Russian understanding."[66] Similarly, his brother, Xenofont Polevoy, saw in it "an unseen power of the Russian spirit" and "the Russian viewpoint of the poet on the matter." Interestingly enough, these first voices about *Poltava* became the standard official opinion of Czarist and Soviet Russia. The Soviets now see in it "strict historicity" (*strogiy historism*), and "the spirit of the true nationality," but they like above all "the ideological content of the poem, its patriotic trend."[67] For A. Slonimsky, Pushkin is "an objective historian," and even the distorted Mazepa-Mariya love story is "an objectively rendered historical fact" (*obyektivno peredannyi istoricheskiy fakt*).[68] In the diaspora, G. V. Vernadsky was careful enough not to voice an opinion on *Poltava,* but in general he thinks: "Historicity is the distinguishing feature of Pushkin's creativity, the main element of his genius."[69]

But other contemporary critics were less kind to *Poltava.* In the *Son of the Fatherland* (1929), an anonymous critic highly praised Pushkin's earlier works, but gave his reasons why *Poltava* did not impress him: the poet did not have to account for fictitious characters and situations in earlier works, but "for historical persons, we demand fullness of character and wish to see events in their genuine, probable aspect, even in the magic mirror of fiction. This does not exist in the poem, *Poltava.*" Then he proceeded to censure Pushkin for mixing different epochs and actions, for painting them too sketchily, for a lack of consistency in his characters, as e.g., "The hero (sic!) of Little Russian history, Kochubey, is shown to be worse than Mazepa himself, because the *hetman* had told his secret to Kochubey as

to a friend, and had honestly asked the hand of his daughter before he decided to abduct her from her parents' home, not by force, but by mutual agreement with her. Even the revolt initiated by Mazepa resulted from the constant urgings of his officers, as is stated in the poem." Further, "Mazepa is brutally abused, and is not depicted as history depicts him. One poem, composed by Mazepa and published in *History of Little Russia* by Bantysh-Kamensky, reflects Mazepa's character more accurately than all the profane epithets applied to him by the author of the poem, *Poltava.*" Regarding further inconsistencies on the part of Pushkin, the critic did not agree with the words the poet put in Mazepa's mouth about Charles XII, namely, "a dashing and daring lad," although Pushkin himself in his preface said that Charles XII "escaped the notorious mistake of Napoleon" and that Peter I was afraid of him, avoiding a pitched battle "as a very dangerous matter."[70] The last remark was so uncomfortably accurate that it caused Pushkin to delete his preface from subsequent editions.

In the *Herald of Europe* (1829), N. Nadezhdin criticized Pushkin for having written too little about the actual battle to justify the name of the poem. Then he disagreed with those who likened Pushkin's Mazepa to that of Byron. Byron's Mazepa "casts a gigantic shadow," while Pushkin's Mazepa is "nothing but a hypocritical, soulless, little old man." Nadezhdin thought that Pushkin, even with his "genius for caricature," had tackled a problem too big for his talent. "It would be sinful to think," he continued, "that there was 'no fatherland,' 'no freedom' for a man playing with the idea:

> Be it known to all forever,
> We have freedom by the saber."[71]

To the defense of Pushkin's historicity in *Poltava* came his friend, M. Maksimovich, Professor of Botany at Moscow University and an ardent Ukrainian folksong collector. In *Ateney* (1829), he took the official Russian line, based on the servile and biased authority of Bantysh-Kamensky, stating: "The characters of the persons appearing in Pushkin's poem are exactly as depicted in history."[72] Furthermore, he even disagreed with Pushkin that Ukraine had ever been "waiting for Charles."

In 1831 Pushkin himself wrote a *Retort to the Critics,* stating:

Habent sua fata libelli. Poltava was not a success. Perhaps it did not deserve it; but I was spoiled by the welcome shown my earlier, much weaker writings; besides, this composition is completely original, and that is why we are fighting.

Then Pushkin proved that Mazepa's love was a historical fact and cited many examples in literature where a young girl genuinely loved an old man, as, for example, Shakespeare's Desdemona, who loved an old Negro, Otello.

Mariya (or Matrena) was fascinated, I was told, by vanity and not by love; a great honor for the daughter of the General Judge to be a mistress of the *hetman!* Then I was told that my Mazepa is a wicked and foolish little old man. That I depicted Mazepa as a wicked man, that I regret. I cannot find him good, especially at the moment he petitions for the execution of the father of the girl he seduced. A man shows his foolishness either in his actions or in his words: Mazepa acts in my poem exactly as he did in history, and his speeches explain his historical character.

Pushkin insisted that Mazepa would have sought revenge for a tug on his mustache by the Czar:

Mazepa was educated in Europe at a time when notions of a nobleman's honor were at their peak—Mazepa could have remembered for a long time an offense by the Muscovite Czar and could have sought revenge for it, given an opportunity. His whole character is revealed here as being insidious, cruel and unchanging. Pulling the mustache of a Pole or a Kozak was the same as grabbing a Russian by the beard . . .

Pushkin continued:

In the *Herald of Europe,* there was a remark that the poem's title was inappropriate and that I probably did not name it "Mazepa" in order not to associate it with Byron. Rightly so, but there was also another reason: an epigraph . . .[73]

Then Pushkin gave his view on Byron's *Mazeppa*:

Incidentally, in speaking of *Poltava,* the critics also mentioned Byron's *Mazeppa;* but how did they understand him! Byron knew of Mazepa only from Voltaire's *History of Charles XII.*[74] He was struck only by the picture of a man bound to a wild horse dashing through the steppes. The picture, of course, is very poetical, but look what he did with it. However, do not seek here either Mazepa, or Charles, or this somber, hateful, poignant character who appears in almost all of Byron's works, but who (to make matters worse for one of my critics), just as if intentionally, does not appear in *Mazeppa.*[75] Byron did not even think about it; he displayed sequences of sketches, one more striking than the next—

that's all: but what an ardent creation, what a broad, swift brush! If he had known the story of the seduced daughter and her executed father, then in all probability no one after him would have even dared to touch this horrible subject.

Continuing his polemics, Pushkin said:

Having read in (K. F. Ryleyev's poem) *Voynarovsky* these lines for the first time:

> The wife of the martyr Kochubey
> And their seduced daughter,

I was astonished how a poet could have by-passed such a horrible incident.

To burden historical characters with invented horrors is neither wise nor generous. Defamation in poems has always seemed to me unpraiseworthy. But in the description of Mazepa to omit such a striking historical fact was even more unforgivable.

Then Pushkin expressed his own opinion of *Poltava*:

But what a hideous subject! Not one good, benevolent feeling. Not one comforting feature! Temptation, enmity, treason, craftiness, cowardice, atrocity . . . Delvig wondered how I could have taken such a subject. Strong characters and a deep tragic shadow enveloping all these horrors, this is what captivated me. I wrote *Poltava* in several days; for a longer time I would not have been able to stay with it, and I would have dropped everything.[76]

Yet the criticism of *Poltava* did not stop even after the death of the poet. In *Galateya* (1939), an anonymous critic insisted that many have a "twisted opinion" of the poem. "This is, if not the weakest, at least one of the weakest of his epic writings, because of the creation, the characters and the composition itself." Most of the arguments that followed were repetitions of former ones. The critic finished with a bitter and unjust reproach:

And there are still people who with all confidence assert that Pushkin is the poet, not only of Russia, but of all humanity, that he is not one bit lesser than the poets of all ages and all nations.[77]

Criticism of *Poltava* has never ceased completely. A unique opinion of Pushkin's attitude toward Mazepa was expressed by D. N. Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky, who praised the poet's "objectivity and benevolence" in creating Mazepa's character, and even his:

> . . . objectivity as a historian as well as an artist, an objectivity which does not exclude the judgment of history and moral sentence, but neither does it permit one to resort to the stereotype of the conventionally moral and to paragraphs of the criminal code in the appraisal of a historical character.[78]

The critic thought also that Pushkin was compelled to write about the "crimes of Mazepa" in order to make "reservation for censorship," but that the poet's real opinion was expressed in his preface: "Mazepa is one of the most remarkable persons of that epoch," or in his *Retort to the Critics*: "To burden historical characters with invented horrors is not wise and not generous."

It is quite true that censorship in Imperial as well as Soviet Russia would not allow one to write objectively or positively about Mazepa. Furthermore, Pushkin had had enough trouble with his government (exile to the South and to Mikhaylovskoye, the letter on atheism, *Gavriliada,* friendship with the Decembrists, Nicholas I as his personal censor, etc.). Yet considering everything Pushkin wrote about Mazepa, it is difficult to see any sign of "objectivity and benevolence." Pushkin's intense chauvinism and his negative attitude toward liberation movements were unveiled during the Polish struggle for independence from Russia: in a letter to Madame Ye. M. Khitrovo dated February 9, 1831, he bluntly stated: *"Delenda est Varsovia!"* In addition, by his anti-Western and anti-Polish odes, *To the Slanderers of Russia and the Anniversary of Borodino* (1831), Pushkin infuriated his liberal Russian friends. They regarded these efforts as "barrack-room ballads," as a "blot on his poetic reputation." A. I. Turgenev called Pushkin "a barbarian regarding Poland." This dismayed the great poet, who remarked sadly: "No longer does the decay or glory of the Fatherland stir any response in the Russian heart . . ."[79] Pushkin had also written contemptuously about the struggle for independence of the Caucasian people. Thus it would be naive to believe that Pushkin sympathized with Mazepa's attempt to liberate Ukraine.

Of the non-Russian critics, worthy of mention is A. Brückner, who in discussing *Poltava* stressed the shortcomings of the poem, such as: the negative, "conventional" portrayal of Mazepa, the depiction of Mariya as "a Romantic puppet," the "unsolved psychological riddle" of their love, and the fact that "the private feud passes unexpectedly into the glorification of Peter the Great," but for all this:

. . . the poet repays us by the wonderful ring of the verse, by the sharply outlined figures that pass before us as if alive; the style is wholly changed. With the simplest means, with a naturalness regularly affected, and an absence of art that is the greatest art, he narrated and depicted at a rapid rate with loosely flung strokes which yet produced the greatest clearness, an epical distinctness; his picturing of the scenery of Ukraine, the glamor of its still summer nights, of the hot raging of battle, showed the sure hand of the master.[80]

The greatest eulogy of Pushkin's *Poltava* came from the pen of a French critic, Viscount E. M. de Vogüè, in his essay, *Mazeppa, la legende et l'histoire* (1889), where, in discussing Byron's and Hugo's *Mazeppa,* he stated:

A Russian poet fully master of his subject was to surpass his Western rivals and fix forever the epic figure of Mazepa. In Pushkin's masterpiece, it is again brought to life with all the intuitive truth that belongs to great art, which as Alfred de Vigny justly remarks is frequently more true than historic truth itself.[81]

Time passed and the cult of Pushkin grew stronger in Russia with each generation, and with it love of the patriotic poem, *Poltava.* Just criticism of the historical and other shortcomings faded before the artistry of Pushkin's words, which glorify Russia's proud victory and perpetuate the national myth.

10. CONCLUSIONS

On the whole Pushkin's *Poltava* depicts the historical epoch and the historical events accurately. But the qualities, motivations and details of the lives of the main characters are often flagrantly distorted and colored by the poet's personal likes and dislikes. "Pushkin was not a historian, although he wished to be one," said Russian Academician A. N. Pypin.[82] One can hardly expect strict historicity from a work of art, and perhaps it would have been improper to raise this issue had not Pushkin himself demanded that the poet be "as impartial as fate." Furthermore, in his beautiful poetical testament, *Monument* (1836), the great Russian bard emphatically stressed that he, in his "cruel age, glorified freedom and called for mercy for the fallen." Pushkin nonetheless condemned both Mazepa's struggle for an independent Ukraine (1709) and the Polish war of liberation (1830-31).

Pushkin proved to be not only a partial poet, but an inaccurate prophet as well. In his closing of *Poltava* he stated solemnly, "Mazepa is forgotten . . ." (*Zabyt Mazepa s davnikh por*). Yet one need only read the servile message of the "Academy" meeting, commemorating the 230th anniversary of the battle of Poltava, sent from Poltava in 1939 "to the great scholar, wise leader, beloved father and teacher—comrade Stalin." It says in part:

> Despicable traitor of the Ukrainian people, blood hound Judas—Mazepa, whose direct descendants are the thrice cursed bourgeois nationalists and other agents of capitalism, dreamed then to fulfill his black thoughts—to break the historical friendship (sic!) of the Ukrainian people with the fraternal Russian people.[83]

One will see that Mazepa is indeed not forgotten. He has descendant-patriots, who in the vulgar Soviet jargon must be defamed with epithets similar to those appearing in Peter's anathema.

In writing about the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of Mazepa's death (1959) in the diaspora, the well-known scholar, Yaroslav B. Rudnyckyj, gives a summary of rather impressive Ukrainian achievements, especially in America, to preserve Mazepa's memory and to pass on his legacy to future generations.[84] Thus Mazepa is not forgotten.

An excuse for Pushkin, perhaps, is that he used biased sources. O. Ryabinin-Sklarevsky provides evidence that the poet wrote *Poltava* as an expression of his gratitude to Emperor Nicholas I for granting him freedom from exile on May 18, 1926.[85] In such a case Pushkin could not have written "benevolently" about Mazepa—"the traitor of the Russian Czar," condemned by the Russian government and the Russian Church. But it is safe to assume that the ardent patriot Pushkin, out of personal choice, would have taken "the Russian viewpoint on the matter" in any case. Whether deliberately or not, Pushkin "fixed forever the epic figure of Mazepa," and influenced the Russian opinion of Mazepa,[86] from which even "the trained historian finds it difficut to free himself." In so doing Pushkin performed a great disservice to the pursuit of truth in history. As Walter C. Langsam states:

> Truth is not easy to reach, in history
> or in any other sphere of human endeavor.
> But the effort to strive in its direction
> is one of man's loftiest goals.[87]

It would seem that Pushkin did not strive enough in this direction.

Some Polish writers and historians, such as B. Prus, W. Nalkowski, O. Gorka and Z. Szyjkowski, proved that *Ogniem i mieczem* (*With Fire and Sword*) by Henryk Sienkiewicz distorted Ukrainian-Polish history. Nevertheless, Polish opinion of Ukraine was and is shaped not by the objective and dry facts of history, but by the highly artistic and patriotic words of this great novelist.[88]

The same analogy holds for Pushkin's *Poltava.* From the day of its appearance up to the present, in spite of its many distortions of fact, it is regarded as the work of an "objective historian" (A. Slominsky) and will always remain such. The legend created by *Poltava* can be dispelled only by a work of higher artistic merit. The paradox inherent here is well expressed by Alfred de Vigny: "Great art is frequently more true than historic truth itself."

REFERENCES:

[1] Despite the fact that *Hetman* Ivan Stepanovych Mazepa used double "p" when signing his name this publication uses the standard spelling with one "p."

[2] All dates in this article are according to the new style calendar.

[3] Ivan Sydoruk, "Mazepa in Foreign Literature," *Almanac of Svoboda,* (Jersey City, 1959), pp. 77-87.

[4] Walter C. Langsam, "Truth in History," *Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio,* Vol. 16, No. 2, (Cincinnati, April, 1958), p. 98.

[5] E. S. Creasy, *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* (London, 1851).

[6] S. M. Solovyov, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremen* (Moscow, 1865), Vol. XV, p. 44.

[7] W. Kirchner, *An Outline — History of Russia,* 2nd ed (New York, 1950), p. 80.

[8] K. Marks i F. Engels, *Sochineniya,* Vol. XVI/2, p. 9.

[9] M. T. Florinsky, *Russia, A History and An Interpretation,* Vol. I (New York, 1953), p. 336 ff., and L. G. Beskrovny, "Poltavskaya pobeda," *Voprosy istorii,* No. 12, U.S.S.R. Academy (Moscow, 1959), p. 53.

[10] A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy* in 10 volumes, U.S.S.R. Academy, (Moscow, 1956-8), Vol. IV, p. 518 f. Hereafter Pushkin's *Poltava* will be quoted from Vol. IV, without referring to it.

[11] *Pushkin-Kritik* (*Pushkin o literature*), ed. by N. V. Bogoslovsky, U.S.S.R. Academy, (Moscow, 1934), p. 230.

[12] Yu. Sazanova, *Istoria russkoy literatury,* (New York, 1955), Vol. II, p. 355.

[13] During the 43-year reign of Peter I, Russia was at war constantly, except for the 15 months just prior to Peter's death. See V. O. Klyuchevsky, *Sochineniya,* (Moscow, 1958), Vol. IV, p. 223 ff.

[14] N. I. Kostomarov, *Mazepa i mazepintsy* (St. Petersburg, 1885), 2nd ed., p. 305.

[15] Ibid., p. 302, (Archives of Foreign Matters, Original Documents).

[16] *Pis'ma i bumagi Imperatora Petra Velikogo,* U.S.S.R. Academy (Moscow, 1948), Vol. VIII, part I, p. 238.

[17] Yu. Gerych, "Kanonichnyi rozhlyad anatemy Mazepy," *Logos* (Yorkton, Sask., 1959), Vol. X, No. 3, pp. 173-188. The author proved here that the anathema was unlawful, dictated by Peter I, and against the canons of the Church.

[18] G. Nordberg, *Histoire de Charles XII* (La Haye, 1728), Vol. IV, p. 315.

[19] N. I. Kostomarov, Ibid., p. 450 ff.

[20] Ibid., p. 466 f. For the historical evaluation of this letter, see: O. Ohloblyn, *Hetman Ivan Mazepa ta yoho doba* (New York, 1960), p. 301.

[21] Charles Lord Whitworth, *An Account of Russia as it Was in the Year 1710* (Strawberry-Hill, 1758), p. 24 ff.

[22] S. M. Byelousov, *Poltavskaya bytva* (1709-1939), ed. by the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR (Kiev, 1940), pp. 13 ff., 21 ff.

[23] L. G. Beskrovny, "Poltavskaya pobeda," *Voprosy istorii,* No. 12, U.S.S.R. Academy (Moscow, 1959), p. 52.

[24] *Poltava (K 250-letiyu Poltavskogo srazheniya), Sbornik statey,* U.S.S.R. Academy (Moscow, 1959), pp. 286 ff., 223 ff. Also *Poltavskaya pobeda (Iz istorii mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy na kanune i posle Poltavy)*, U.S.S.R. Academy (Moscow, 1959).

[25] He was called *hetman dukiv* — *"hetman* of the magnates" by the Ukrainian common people. See M. Drahomaniv, *Politychni pisni ukrainskoho narodu* XVIII-XIX st. (Geneva, 1883), Vol. I, p. xii. Cf. also M. Hrushevsky, *A History of Ukraine* (New Haven, 1948), p. 307, where he quotes a contemporary Ukrainian song about the social conditions in Ukraine:

> "Ah, dukes, you are indeed dukes!
> To you belong meadows and pastures;
> Nowhere can my poor brother,
> The landless Kozak, stop to graze his horse."

See also: Leon Wasilewski, *Ukraina i sprawa ukrainska* (Cracow, 1911), p. 32, 39, where the point is stressed that the rich Kozaks did not care about the Ukrainian peasants and soon assumed the role of the Polish nobility, which previously under the leadership of Khmelnytsky and with the help of the peasants, they had expelled. At that time, the peasants were enslaved everywhere and in Ukraine serfdom was just beginning. It is worth noting that in 1691, Mazepa issued an order forbidding the rich Kozaks and monasteries to enslave poor landless Kozaks. Cf. *Akty Baryshpilskoho mistsevoho uryadu, Kievskaya Starina* (Kiev, 1892), book XXXVI. Also *"Starshyna i pospilstvo"* in: M. Hrushevsky, *Ilustrovana Istoriya Ukrainy* (Winnipeg, 1918), pp. 362 ff.

[26] N. I. Kostomarov, op. cit., p. 534.

[27] "Mazepa, the prince of the Kozaks, supplied them with provisions; without his assistance the army must have perished from want and hunger." Voltaire, *The History of Charles XII* (New York, 1901), p. 167. See also: I. Kimber, *Peter the Great* (Windfor, Vermont, 1811), p.173.

[28] B. Kentrschynsky, "The Political Struggle of Mazepa and Charles XII for Ukrainian Independence," *The Ukrainian Quarterly,* Vol. XV, No. 3 (New York, 1959), p. 249 ff.; and *Pisma,* op. cit., p. 238 ff.

[29] O. Lototsky, *Storinky mynuluho,* II, *Pratsi Ukrainskoho Naukovoho Instytutu,* Vol. XII (Warsaw, 1933), p. 345.

[30] A. Brückner, *A Literary History of Russia* (London, 1908, 1908), p. 189.

[31] W. Lednicki, *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman* (Berkeley, 1955), p. 58.

[32] M. T. Florinsky, op. cit., p. 339 ff.

[33] Pushkin's basic sources were: D. N. Bantysh-Kamensky, *Istoriya Maloy Rossii*, 1822; I. I. Golikov, *Deyaniya Petra Velikogo*, 1788-9; M. M. Shcherbatov, *Zhurnal . . . Petra Velikogo*, 1770; D. P. Buturlin, *Voyennaya istoriya . . . 18 st.*, F. M. A. Voltaire, *History of Charles XII*, 1728 (sympathetic to Mazepa), and his: *History of the Russian Empire under Peter the Great*, 1759 ("The court of St. Petersburg . . . charged with compiling this work" — thus hostile to Mazepa). Pushkin also consulted *Istoriya Rusov*, and *Works* by T. Prokopovich.

[34] Pushkin's *Poltava* can obscure the thinking of one not well versed in Eastern European history, as can be seen in the foreword to a poor translation of the poem by J. Krup in *Six Poems from the Russian* (New York, 1936), in which on p. 118, the translator said of Mazepa: "A man who though he rose from obscurity to the highest office of his country, gained for himself the woman he loved, for whom there was nothing left but to rest on his laurels, still he threw everything away on a mad gamble. And why? The only comment the average man would make is 'that pride goes before a fall,' and that his mind and judgment were obscured." It was not Mazepa's mind that was obscured, but the translator's by Pushkin's biased *Poltava*. Another example: A young American Pushkinist, a student of R. Jacobson, and editor of a Slavic journal, in a discussion with the author (Chicago, Dec. 27, 1959), refused to believe that Pushkin could be inaccurate in *Poltava* because he had used "historical" sources. One can see what a powerful impact good poetry has.

[35] S. A. Vengerov, *Pushkin*, Vol. II (St. Petersburg, 1909), p. 2 ff.

[36] Yu. N. Verkhovsky, *Poety-dekabristy* (Moscow, 1926), p. 90.

[37] N. I. Kostomarov, op. cit., p. 438.

[38] Ibid., p. 543.

[39] Ibid., p. 441 ff. (State Archives, Menshikov's letter to Czar, October 26, 1708).

[40] Ibid., p. 326 ff.

[41] *Hetman* Ivan Mazepa, *Pysannya*, ed. by Ye. Yu. Pelensky (Cracow, 1943), p. 30.

[42] D. Doroshenko and A. Ohloblyn, *A Survey of Ukrainian Historiography* (*The Annals of the UAAS*), Vol. V-VI (New York, 1957), p. 71 ff.

[43] C. A. Manning, op. cit., pp. 224, 226.

[44] A. Ohloblyn, op. cit., pp. 394,397.

[45] P. E. Shchegolev, *Utayonnaya lyubov' Pushkina*, Pushkin (St. Petersburg, 1911), 2nd ed., pp. 35-195; W. Lednicki, *A. Pushkin* (Cracow, 1926), pp. 226-263; and J. P. Pauls, *Pushkin's Dedication of "Poltava" and Princess Mariya Volkonskaya*, Milwaukee, Marquette University, Slavic Institute, 1961.

[46] D. N. Bantysh-Kamensky, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 575 ff., and C. A. Manning, *op. cit.*, p. 127 ff.

[47] His chapter on Mazepa contains numerous derogatory epithets, such as: "Sly, cautious, spiteful, revengeful, vain, honor-seeking, unthankful," etc. He dedicated the 2nd edition of his history (1830) with a most submissive and servile

preface to Emperor Nicholas I, and was later given the offices of Governor of Tobolsk, Vilna and Counsellor of the Ministry. Bantysh-Kamensky's ancestors immigrated to Ukraine from Moldavia during Mazepa's *hetmanate*. Cf. C. Bida, *Treaty of Hetman Ivan Mazepa and Charles XII,* Winnipeg, 1959, p. 41.

[48] N. I. Kostomarov, *op. cit.,* p. 363.

[49] D. N. Bantysh-Kamensky, (*op. cit.,* Vol. III, pp. 379, 577), wrote vaguely that young Chuykevych married Kochubey's daughter (without mentioning their first names). That Chuykevych was captured at Poltava, 1709, and was sent to Siberia, where he later became a monk, and his wife returned to Ukraine and also entered a monastery. This gave an excuse for some popular historians, such as, M. Arkas (*Istoriya Ukrainy*, 4th ed., 1947, p. 418) to think it was Motrya Kochubey.

The contemporary Ukrainian historian of that era, O. P. Ohloblyn, in his letter of October 9, 1960, wrote the author it was Katerina Kochubey, who married Semen V. Chuykevych in May, 1707; his father, General Judge Vasyl Chuykevych was captured at Poltava and sent to Siberia. This was already clarified by Modzalevsky in his *Malorossiyskyi Rodoslovnik.* Ohloblyn said: "The fate of Motrya Kochubey remained indeed unknown. Perhaps, she really went to a monastery, where she died." We respectfully acknowledge this valuable information.

[50] L. Starytska-Chernyakhivska, *Ivan Mazepa,* Drama in 5 Acts (Kiev, 1929), p. 78.

[51] J. Tretiak, *Mickiewicz i Puszkin* (Warsaw, 1906), p. 274.

[52] W. Lednicki, *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman* (Berkeley, 1955), p. 57.

[53] D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature* (New York, 1949), p. 261.

[54] N. Berdyayev, *The Russian Idea* (New York, 1948), p. 15.

[55] A. N. Pypin, *Istoriya russkoy literatury,* 3rd ed., Vol. III (St. Petersburg, 1907), p. 307 ff.

[56] M. T. Florinsky, *op. cit.,* Vol. I, p. 340.

[57] *Istoriya russkoy literatury,* by U.S.S.R. Academy (Moscow, 1953), Vol. VI, p. 238.

[58] B. Pares, *A History of Russia,* 5th ed. (New York, 1945), p. 190.

[59] V. O. Klyuchevsky, *op. cit.,* Vol. IV, p. 214.

[60] M. T. Florinsky, *op. cit.,* Vol. I, p. 332 ff.

[61] V. O. Klyuchevsky, *op. cit.,* Vol. IV, p 217.

[62] M. T. Florinsky, *op. cit.,* Vol. I, p. 334. Also: R. N. Bain, *The First Romanovs* (London, 1905), which we quote according to M. I. Mandryka, *Mazepa,* a Poem (Winnipeg, 1960), p. 87.

[63] O. P. Ohloblyn, *op. cit.,* p. 297.

[64] O. Kupranets', *Vyklyatyi Hetman Mazepa* (Toronto, 1958) pp. 11, 15.

[65] Hetman I. Mazepa, *op. cit.,* p. 34 ff.

[66] V. A. Zelinsky, *Russkaya kriticheskaya literatura o proizvedeniyakh A. S. Pushkina,* in 7 Vols. (Moscow, 1887), Vol. II, pp. 136-148.

[67] *Istoriya russkoy literatury, op .cit.,* Vol. VI, pp. 240-242.

[68] A. Slonimsky, *Masterstvo Pushkina* (Moscow, 1959), pp. 276, 293.

[69] G. V. Vernadsky, *"Pushkin kak istorik," Uchenyya zapiski* (Prague, 1924), Vol. I, No. 2, p. 61.

[70] V. A. Zelinsky, *op. cit.,* Vol. II, pp. 149-156.

[71] *Ibid.,* pp. 167-185.

[72] *Ibid.,* pp. 185-191.

[73] The following is the epigraph from Byron's *Mazeppa* (1818):

> The power and glory of the war,
> Faithless as their vain votaries, men,
> Had pass'd to triumphant Czar.

[74] There is evidence that Byron also used other sources on Mazepa, such as *Memoirs of the Life of Peter the Great,* by John Barrow (1764-1848), and had oral information about him from the Polish poet, A. Malczewski. Cf. I. Sydoruk, *op. cit.,* p. 81.

[75] As early as July, 1825 (3 years before writing *Poltava*) Pushkin in a letter to his friend, N. N. Rayevsky, Jr., expressed some disillusionment with Byron, after comparing him with Shakespeare:

> . . . how wonderful is Shakespeare! I am overwhelmed. How insignificant in comparison with him is Byron—the tragedian! Byron, who created in all, but one character (women do not have character; they have frequent passions in their youth; that's why it is so easy to depict them), the same Byron distributed among his heroes the individual traits of his own character—to one he gave his pride, to another his hatred, to a third, his melancholy, etc., and in this way, from one full character, somber and energetic, he made several insignificant ones—this is not tragedy at all.

The realistically minded Pushkin depicted Mazepa according to official Russian historiography (an exception was Voltaire, whose weak influences are noticeable in the preface, first and second cantos). Thus, D. Chizhevsky erroneously calls *Poltava* a "Byronist poem." See his: *Outline of Comparative Slavic Literatures* (Boston, 1952), p. 97.

[76] "Retort to the Critics," in Pushkin's Works, *op. cit.,* Vol. VII, p. 190-93.

[77] V. A. Zelinsky, *op. cit.,* Vol. III, p. 89.

[78] D. N. Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky, *Istoriya russkoy literatury XIX v.* (Moscow, 1911), Vol. I, p. 355. Quite opposite is the view expressed by the ardent critic: V. G. Belinsky, *Sochineniya* (Kiev, 1913), Vol. III, pp. 554-74.

[79] H. Troyat, *Pushkin,* A Biography (London, 1951), p. 345.

[80] A. Brückner, *op. cit.,* p. 189.

[81] E. M. de Vogüè, "Mazepa as Known in Legend and in History," in English in the book: *Czarevitch of the 18th Century* (London, 1913), p. 175.

[82] A. N. Pypin, *Istoriya russkoy etnografii*, (St. Petersburg, 1891), Vol. I, p. 399.

[83] S. M. Byelousov, *op. cit.*, p. 13. That "historical friendship" is well expressed by a Ukrainian proverb: *"Z Moskalamy druzhy, ale i kamin' za pazukhoyu derzhy."* (You should keep your friendship with the Russians, but have a hidden stone ready for them in any case).

A historian should answer the biased article by A. I. Kozachenko, *"Sobytiya 1708-1709 gg. na Ukraine v osveshchenii ukrainskoy dvoryansko-burzhuaznoy istoriografii," Poltava* ed. by U.S.S.R. Academy (Moscow, 1959), pp. 322-350. We would like merely to stress here his distortions of T. Shevchenko, historical songs and proverbs.

[84] In his preface to: M. I. Mandryka, *Mazepa,* a Poem (Winnipeg, 1960), p. 5.

[85] O. Ryabinin-Sklarevsky, *"Ukrainski motyvy v poemi O. S. Pushkyna 'Poltava,'" Ukraine,* ed. by VUAN (Kiev, 1928), Book 1, No. 26, p. 42.

[86] "Pushkin's *Poltava* became the source and pattern for later authors who treated the history of Mazepa's treason," stated O. I. Biletsky, in his *"Pushkin i Ukraina," Vid davnyny do suchasnosty,* Vol. II, (Kiev, 1961), p. 143.

[87] Walter C. Langsam, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

[88] Z. Switalski, *"'Ogniem i mieczem' a prawda historyczna," Przegląd humanistyczny* (Warsaw, 1959), No. 6 (15), p. 147.