

THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL MYTH IN EXPORT:  
P. A. VIAZEMSKY'S *LETTRES D'UN VÉTÉRAN  
RUSSE DE L'ANNÉE 1812 SUR LA QUESTION D'ORIENT*

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I have always been of the opinion that language is not our gift. In writing we will always look foolish. No wonder *Moniteur* laughs at us. Meanwhile, our actions are somehow no better than our logic and our rhetoric.

*P. A. Viazemsky. Notebook. November 1853.*

In the vast literary legacy left by P. A. Viazemsky, *Letters of a Russian Veteran of the War of 1812 on the Eastern Question*<sup>1</sup> (*Letters*) is a peripheral work. After its publication in the sixth volume of his collected works [Вяземский: VI], never again has it been published in its entirety; it has remained without commentary or particular study<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, the historical fate of *Letters* confirms Viazemsky's reputation as an "outsider", not only of the Pushkin era<sup>3</sup>, but also of the decade following it. In preparing *Letters* for publication in the collected works of Viazemsky, P. Bartenev noted that it "adds a *new, hitherto little known* feature to the characterization of the author" who, in addition to literary pursuits, "always kept up with common affairs" and knew well "both the domestic and foreign political life of contemporary Russian and European society". As the reason Viazemsky's Crimean works are so little known, Bartenev specifies that the book "was not successful abroad and *only a small number came*

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<sup>1</sup> First edition: *Lettres d'un vétéran russe de l'année 1812 sur la question d'Orient*, publiées par P. d'Ostafievo. Lausanne, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters* is only sometimes mentioned in connection with the author's later life. M. I. Gillel'son devoted just under three pages to it in his monograph *P. A. Viazemsky: Life and Works* [Гиллельсон: 331–333], but the book receives no mention in the article he wrote about Viazemsky in the *Russian Writers* reference book [Русские писатели].

<sup>3</sup> This formula comprised the title of Yu. M. Lotman's report on Viazemsky [Лотман].

to us" [Вяземский: VI, VII; italics added]<sup>4</sup>. It is unlikely that an orientation toward a European audience and a small print run were the only reasons Viazemsky's Crimean works were forgotten. After the collapse of Nicholas' system, Viazemsky's position could no longer be leveraged to arouse sympathy from Russian readers and help increase the popularity of *Letters*.

Of course, the fact that Viazemsky wrote his epistolary articles in French made their reception and evaluation more difficult. In publishing an unauthorized translation, Bartenev makes a characterizing stipulation:

Readers will notice that the French style of Prince P. A. Viazemsky is as idiosyncratic as the style of his Russian works. I dare not vouch for the exactness of the translation and admit its shortcomings, but I tried to be meticulous in this matter... (VIII).

One can assume that one of the translator's goals was to widen *Letters'* audience and popularize Viazemsky's works. Presenting the public with a book that had earned no recognition in Europe and was little known in Russia, Bartenev appraises it as:

... an honest and talented fulfillment of the civic duty of the writer, who is earnestly faithful to his fatherland, about the love of which Prince P. A. Viazemsky used to say that it should have more of the properties of paternal than filial love (VII).

The most important thing noted by the publisher-translator is the author's virtue of ideas and good intentions, who "felt the necessity of serving, to the best of his abilities, as the pen of the common Russian cause", to stand against "false news about Russia" and the "twisted interpretations" of official Russian politics [Ibid.]. Bartenev's estimation of Viazemsky is not fully disclosed: he mentions his talent, but what he means by that, whether rhetorical mastery, an elegant style, or the depth and importance of his political observations, is unclear. In characterizing Viazemsky's style, the translator calls him *idiosyncratic* (*своеобычливый*), which can be interpreted in different ways.

Naturally, any attempt to study *Letters* without analyzing Viazemsky's French speech will be necessarily incomplete. However, this article will not attempt to answer every question *Letters* poses to those who would study the work. This article will focus first and foremost on Viazemsky's ideological constructions, his journalistic position, and his views on Russian history and politics in the confrontation between Russia and Europe resulting from the situation in 1812. This position in particular led to the unpopularity of *Letters*

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<sup>4</sup> From here on citations of this volume of *The Complete Works of P. A. Viazemsky* will include page numbers only.

among Russian readers. I believe that this book was nearly completely forgotten not because of the “small number” of copies made, as P. Bartenev so delicately explains. Viazemsky, however he himself defined his position, acted as defender of the official politics of Russia, and his journalism was pro-government, which, after military defeats and a crisis of governance, had lost the confidence of the public.

Viazemsky's position also made *Letters* unpopular among scholars. In the author's life and works, much more interest was aroused by his connections to Pushkin, the era of Pushkin, and, relatively speaking, the “Pushkin line” in the history of Russian culture. Viazemsky's later works were particularly unlucky in Soviet literary studies: his aristocratic conservatism and conflicts with the literary youth, which began as early as the 1830s, became barriers to analysis and historical evaluation. Unsurprisingly, his praise for Russian policies during the Crimean War, which in Soviet historiography symbolized the collapse of Nicholas' regime, put *Letters* out of bounds for research. It is also revealing that in M. I. Gillel'son's monograph, the section devoted to Viazemsky's works of the war period is limited to literally a single line about his poetry (the writer “spoke out during the Crimean War in poetry of an official-patriotic nature”) and he tries to avoid the riskier statements in *Letters*. The “Orthodox-monarchical postulate” of *Letters*, in Gillel'son's opinion, “is obvious and requires no particular clarification”, while conservatism “did not prevent Viazemsky from neatly striking at bourgeois law and order” and in his assessments of Turkey's European allies, there was “much of value and historical fairness” [Гиллельсон: 331–333]. The interpretation of these assessments occupies all of the space allocated to *Letters* in Gillel'son's book. Clearly, reducing Viazemsky's ideas to mere criticism of Europe's political course made it possible for Gillel'son to discuss the journalistic cycle which Viazemsky wrote to justify the actions of the Russian government in the Crimean War.

Of course, *Letters* needs further study. Establishing which factors influenced the direction of Viazemsky's thoughts presents a serious difficulty. At the time (1853–1855), the writer was traveling in Europe, found himself in the middle of arguments, read the current press, and observed the proceedings of the European political arena. To a significant degree, his articles were a direct answer to periodical publications, salon conversations, rumors, etc. The re-creation of this context is necessary in order to comment thoroughly, and is a difficult and multifaceted task. The author's circle of acquaintances and calendar of meetings at that time can be reconstructed, on the whole, from his notebooks (which are published in the *Complete Works of P. A. Viazemsky*, though without satisfactory commentary). It is more difficult to reconstruct the

author's full list of readings: even by outlining the repertoire of French, English, and German periodicals available to Viazemsky, one is unlikely to be able to imagine his most likely course of discussion of the published materials.

Keeping these difficulties in mind, this paper will focus on just one aspect of the author's position in *Letters*, which has hitherto not attracted the attention of historians: the image of the Russian nation presented (constructed) in the text.

The intention of *Letters*, as noted above, is openly polemical. Viazemsky announces this in the introduction. Although it is unknown how the text of *Letters* was produced and when exactly the introduction was written, it reflects the author's vision of the text's pragmatics and may be considered programmatic (it is irrelevant here whether the program was prospective or retrospective):

On pourrait hardiment, de nos jours, appliquer aux journaux, en le parodiant, le mot célèbre qu'on attribue à m. de Talleyrand: "La presse a été donnée à l'homme pour déguiser sa pensée". En effet, vit-on jamais des faits contemporains, qui se passent pour ainsi dire sous nos yeux, aussi indignement mutilés? Si nous révoquons en doute quelque récit des historiens de l'antiquité; si Tacite, ou Suétone nous semblent avoir exagéré la caractère des Césars romains et hyperboliquement chargé le tableau des crimes de quelques-uns, des vertus de quelques autres, nous ne nous étonnons point outre mesure, en songeant qu'à cette époque il n'existait pas de presse périodique, pas de critique, pas de contrôle; que les écrivains étaient peu nombreux et que leurs œuvres étaient réputées des articles de foi irrécusables. Mais aujourd'hui, quand pullulent les écrivains, quand la réfutation suit immédiatement l'assertion, comment se fait-il que la mauvaise foi gagne toujours du terrain sur la logique et la vérité? (1)

What follows is the corresponding passage from Bartenev's translation — presented not so much as an aid to the reader, as an illustration of the translator's reflections quoted above:

Speaking of the newspapers of our time, one may boldly apply to them the famous expression attributed to Talleyrand and say: "Print was given to man in order to mask his thoughts". Truly, has there been a time when current events, that is to say those happening before our eyes, have been so distorted in such an undignified fashion? Several stories of ancient historians have been exposed to doubt, they find that Tacitus or Suetonius inaccurately portray the characters of Roman Caesars, and in their depictions the vices of one or the good deeds of another are exaggerated; and we are not particularly surprised by this: there did not exist then real-time printing, they knew nothing of criticism and verification, there were few writers, and their works were read as immutable. But in our day, when we have no end of

writers, when refutations follow immediately after assertions, how can it be that dishonesty constantly prevails over logic and truth? (265)<sup>5</sup>.

In this excerpt Bartenev drops the phrase “en le parodiant”, transforming Viazemsky’s witticism into a mistake. The author of the introduction offers the undistorted version (*La presse a été donnée à l’histoire pour déguiser sa pensée*), but plays on the words attributed to Talleyrand (*La parole a été donnée à l’homme pour qu’il trahisse sa pensée*). Such imprecisions noted from the very first page force discretion in the use of Bartenev’s translation, though an evaluation of his accuracy shall be left to future scholars.

And so, for the opening of *Letters*, Viazemsky chooses the *mot* of an utterly odious personage (of Talleyrand it was said that he “sold those who had bought him”<sup>6</sup>). Talleyrand’s rephrased witticism should have, according to the author, characterized the essence of contemporary periodical print. The passage following it presents one of the key contrasts in *Letters* — the juxtaposition of history and modernity, *resp.* historiography and journalism. This contrast is highly characteristic of Viazemsky and comprises the foundation of his literary, critical, historical, and cultural constructions. In the new environment of the informational war taking place in European periodical publications, the author uses a familiar system of literary coordinates for journalistic purposes.

At first glance, one may ascertain in *Letters* a bias in Viazemsky’s opinions on the opposing ideas of history and modernity. Viazemsky’s inclination toward literary battles and magazine disputes is well known. Even while he was a member of The Arzamas Society, he was a proponent of literary organization and, above all, of the development of periodicals, since journals in particular were to serve to unite writers and shape tastes. Viazemsky considered journalism and fiction to be the most effective methods of education; once in a letter to A. I. Turgenev he likened current literature to “boiling broth from the womb of modernity”. However, in Viazemsky’s viewpoints, high literature and historiography serve as constant counterweights to current literature. To Viazemsky at the end of the 1820s, journalism, intended for a mass audience and presenting a “general opinion” — the opinion of the “crowd” or “mob” — was already a sign of the degradation of true literature (as evidenced by his unconditional support of the “literary aristocracy” in the fight against “commercial tenden-

<sup>5</sup> Henceforth, Bartenev’s Russian translations will follow Viazemsky’s text in French.

<sup>6</sup> E. V. Tarle conveys this witticism in this form and without citation in the tenth chapter of his book on Napoleon [Тарле: 203]. The collection *L’esprit de M. de Talleyrand: anecdotes et bons mots, recueillis par Louis Thomas* (1909) is its likely source: “Comme on s’étonnait de la fortune laissée par M. de Talleyrand: Rien d’étonnant, dit quelqu’un, il a vendu tous ceux qui l’ont acheté” [Talleyrand: 90]. In Tarle’s version the meaning of the line is somewhat altered.

cies”). Viazemsky maintained the opinion that a literary revolution should proceed “from the top”: it is not an increase in the number of readers that produces writers, but the appearance of writers (individually) that nurtures and shapes the reader. These ideas, developed in relation to the literary situation of the 1820s and 1830s, were transposed onto the politics of the 1850s. Characteristically, Viazemsky described his position as that of an independent individual, outside parties and orders of any kind (from above or below)<sup>7</sup>.

In Viazemsky’s eyes, Russian history and historiography were embodied in N. M. Karamzin. It was Karamzin who founded Russian history, his *History* established (or, more precisely, revealed) great Russia. The younger man’s respect for his brother-in-law Karamzin’s authority gradually grew into veneration; while the authority of other literary figures gradually lost meaning for him, Karamzin’s only increased. In a poem dedicated to the 100-year jubilee of the historiographer, Viazemsky’s “Karamzin-olotry” (“карамзинолатрия”)<sup>8</sup> manifests in full measure:

Нам предков воскресил он лица,  
Их образ в нас запечатлел,  
И каждая его страница  
Зерцало древних дней и дел.  
Своей живительной рукою  
Событий нить связал он вновь,  
Сроднил нас с русскою семьею  
И пробудил он к ней любовь  
< ... >  
Воздвиг он храм сей величавый,  
Прекрасный стройностью частей,  
Сей памятник и русской славы,  
И славы собственной своей [Вяземский: XII, 279].

This is just one of Viazemsky’s utterances about Karamzin which represents the historian as a cultural hero who shaped not only the past, but the present and future of the nation. The existence of Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State*, according to Viazemsky, irrefutably proves the rightness of the current Russian

<sup>7</sup> Viazemsky’s sincerity in his assertion of his independent position is unquestioned. However, his journalistic activities of 1854 turned out to be on par with the works of Ya. N. Tolstoy, and agent of the Russian government in France since the 1830s whose fundamental mission was counter-propaganda (about this, see: [Донесения]). Viazemsky had long known Ya. N. Tolstoy, since 1820s. It was Tolstoy who, in a letter dated July 16/28, 1853, informed Viazemsky of the ban on any pro-Russian publication in the French press (pointed out in [Основа: 474]).

<sup>8</sup> A word coined by N. I. Grech, who speaks in his memoirs with extreme hostility of the “Arzamasites” and their veneration for Karamzin.

government and the trueness of its foreign policy (the author of *Letters* maintained a critical attitude toward domestic policy, but commented on it only to his “inner” circle). Viazemsky imputes Russia’s European opponents with an excessive attachment to modernity, an absorption in the interests of the minute, and an unstable political trajectory (which he considers an unavoidable consequence of democracy). In the journalist’s opinion, this should lead to unavoidable defeat, not only on the battlefield, but in a wider historical perspective — as has happened more than once in Russian history. From Letter XXIII (September 1854):

Le préoccupation exclusive de intérêts du moments exerce une singulière et fâcheuse influence, même sur les esprits les plus distingués. Pour arriver plus promptement à une solution qui mette fin aux agitations et aux anxiétés du présent, pour donner gain de cause à ce qu’ils croient être utile et vrai, ces esprits s’accrochent à la première chance venue et ne tiennent plus aucun compte de l’histoire et des conditions qu’elle impose, ou, du moins, qu’elle légitime et consacre. Quand le sacrifice qu’ils ont fait des enseignements de l’histoire n’a pas suffi, c’est la géographie, avec ses vérités matérielles et topographiques, qui tombe sous leur coups (163).

Even the most elite minds succumb to strange passions when their attention is occupied exclusively with current affairs. In order to more quickly arrive at a decisive conclusion and be done with the anxiety and malice of the current day, desiring triumph for that which, in their opinion, is good and true, they attach themselves to the first accident they come upon and have no desire to know about history or the conditions it imposes or, at the very least, legitimizes and sanctifies; but when historical evidence contradicts them too clearly, they take up geography and sacrifice its topographical and material truths to their self-delusion (426).

The resolution of the “Eastern Question” in Russia’s favor is, in the opinion of the “Russian veteran”, unavoidable, since in the end history will unavoidably carry the day against “the daily papers”. From Letter XXX:

Sans doute, une fois le tumulte des passions apaisé, une fois les questions brûlants refroidies, l’histoire vient succéder aux feuilles quotidiennes et aux pamphlets du jour. Mais, dans tous les cas, elle doit les consulter avec prudence et critique, comme pièces du procès qu’elle est appelée à juger en dernier resort (228).

Of course, as soon as the storm of passions subsides and burning questions cool, history will take the place of daily papers and current libels. But, in any case, history must take note of them, discussing them carefully and critically, seeing in them the acts, as it were, of the process it must decide in the last resort (487).

“In the last resort”, victory is on the side of Russia, since in the past it has been victorious more than once over the current adversaries: France and Turkey.

Throughout the series of letters, the journalist submits examples of the superiority and victories of Russia, both military and, relatively speaking, “moral”. The case of England is more complex; here Viazemsky is forced to turn to rhetorical contrivances in order to present Russia as victor. In this way, historical precedents are used to confirm the unavoidability of Europe’s defeat in the impending clash with Russia — history should repeat itself.

In Letter XII Viazemsky presents examples of Russia’s successful Eastern politics. He lists efficacious “political and military relations with the Eastern Empire”, beginning with Prince Oleg’s campaign at Byzance and the marriage of Prince Vladimir to a Greek princess — these examples are intended to uphold Russia’s claim to the right to participate in the fate of contemporary Greeks. Viazemsky projects the failure of the Russian ambassador Menshikov at the talks in Constantinople in March 1853 onto nearly 500-year-old events, when, in 1497, the ambassador Pleshcheev, following the orders of the grand prince, refused to negotiate with the Pashas after having attained an audience with the sultan:

Si le prince Menschikoff a été accusé, de nos jours, d’une fierte exessive, les publicistes européens pourront du moins reconnaître que ses procédés diplomatiques, si toutefois ils sont avérés, ne sont pas de son invention, mais qu’ils appartiennent à la tradition et remontent au quinzième siècle (71).

In our times they accused prince Menshikov of excessive pride; but the little European newspapers must admit that his diplomatic maneuvers (if they would report on them honestly) are not his own ideas, but based on tradition arising in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (335).

The repetition of history is one of the central themes in *Letters*:

Il est curieux de retrouver, au bout de quelques siècles, la répétition des mêmes événements qui se reproduisent de loin en loin avec une similitude parfaite. Ce sont là de petites malices de l’histoire, bonnes à relever à l’usage des médiocrités oubliées et présomptueuses (74).

It is curious to follow how the same events are reproduced and repeated over the centuries with surprising sameness. This is the cruel joke of history, which must be remembered for the instruction of mediocrity, forgetfulness, and vainglory (338).

Viazemsky discovers repeating events not only in large historical intervals; cf. the following excerpt from Letter XXI, which speaks of modern times:

... la Russie est peut-être appelée par la Providence à démontrer *encore une fois* deux choses identiques: aux idées napoléoniennes, que la Russie est le terrain où elles échouent; à l’Europe, qu’elle ne peut ni ne doit être napoléonienne (159).

... maybe, Russia is called by Providence *once again* to clarify two identical circumstances, namely, that Napoleonic ideas are untenable when applied to us, and that Europe cannot and should not be Napoleonic (422).

Of course, Viazemsky did not invent the use of historical parallels and analogies. France's participation in the conflict of 1853–56 and the identical names of the two Napoleons, uncle and nephew, made the Russian press' comparison of the Crimean War with the War of 1812 inevitable. In particular, F. I. Tyutchev, Viazemsky's companion and correspondent, makes this comparison in the fall of 1853:

The last courier who arrived from London brought news that forces the anticipation of an inevitable rupture, and, probably, the same news will come with the courier anticipated tomorrow from Paris. In essence, *1812 approaches once again for Russia*, and it's possible that the attack being prepared against her is no less frightening than the first, although it is not embodied in a single person, not in such a great person as was the first Napoleon... As to the enemy, it is still the same — the West (quoted from: [Леропись], italics added).

The comparison of the Crimean War with the Patriotic War of 1812 is a constant theme throughout *Letters*. It is deployed in most detail in Letters VI and XXI ("February 1854. Émile de Girardin. Memories of 1812 and the following years" and "July 1854. Napoleon III's Declaration of War"). In the first, Viazemsky answers de Girardin's article, which had proposed that the allies hasten their attack in order to avoid a repeat of the 1815 taking of Paris by the Russian army. The "Russian veteran" points out to the French journalist the "gap in mind and memory" inherent to him and to the majority of the French ("comme bien des Français des lacunes dans la mémoire et dans son intelligence"):

... il ne saisit et ne retient bien que les chiffres et les faites qui peuvent lui servir à grouper et à arrondir le total dont il peut avoir besoin pour le moment. C'est ainsi que les Français écrivent, non-seulement des articles de journaux, mais l'histoire. C'est pourquoi notre publiciste saute à pieds joints sur l'année 1812, dont il voudrait la répétition tout en oubliant ses résultats, et qu'il arrive d'emblée au spectre de 1815, dont il veut effrayer la France, oubliant encore une fois que les années 1814 et 1815 n'ont été qu'une suite inévitable et mémorable des événements de 1812 (30).

... he seizes upon and firmly holds to only those dates and events that are of use to him in summing up and rounding off the total needed at the given time. The French write not only newspaper articles in this way, but history itself. That is why our journalist has no trouble skipping over 1812, as if he desires its repetition, forgetting its outcome; he rushes straight to the ghost of 1815 with which he hopes

to scare France, forgetting again, that 1814 and 1815 were only the fatal consequence of blessed memory of the events of 1812 (296).

Viazemsky again refers to the dangerous misconceptions of de Girardin, a spokesman of French politics, as obliviousness of historical events. The author of *Letters* considers the victory over the first Napoleon an incontrovertible foreshadowing of a new victory: “Ce qui s’est vu alors se verrait inévitablement encore une fois, si les leçons du passé devaient être perdues pour le présent” (31) (“What happened then will inevitably happen again, if the lessons of the past are lost on the present” [297]). Winter, which became an important motif in the mythology surrounding 1812, is transformed by Viazemsky into a universal symbol of Russian superiority:

La Russie est un pays tellement bizarre, que l’étranger, sans prévoir ni où, ni quand, risque toujours de se heurter contre un hiver quelconque (159).

Our Russia is a strange land: the foreigner can never calculate where and when winter will come for him, and every time he runs the risk of a winter that will be a hindrance to him (422).

In Letter XXI, dedicated to an analysis of the proclamations and actions of Napoleon III, Viazemsky successively compares him to his predecessor, Napoleon I, and every comparison is to the detriment of the present emperor. Noting the military-strategic and political superiority of the “Emperor of War” over the “Emperor of Peace”, the author of *Letters* once again asserts the inevitability of Russian victory: since today’s adversary is weaker, then it will be possible to defeat him with less effort.

The history of the War of 1812 was a kind of “indulgence” for the possible failures of Russia in the new war. Viazemsky writes of this in Letter VI (in an excerpt entitled “Memories of 1812 and the following years”):

Une fois la grande guerre commencée, il faudra bien nous résigner à voir *nos ennemies remporter sur nous des avantages isolés* que la force numérique doit obtenir, si ce n’est partout et toujours mais *du moins ça et là et quelquefois*. Dieu merci, nous n’avons pas le dogme de l’infaillibilité de la victoire, et voilà pourquoi *nous ne nous laissons pas abattre par les revers*. Mais tout Russe a le sentiment inné du devoir et de la force morale. Il sait, et *son histoire le lui a appris*, qu’un peuple puissant et uni qui tient à ses traditions nationales et conserve celles de la foi religieuse, ne peut être vaincu, s’il ne le veut pas, et qu’en tenant tête à l’ennemi jusqu’au bout, son courage

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<sup>9</sup> Here Viazemsky uses a formula from a speech of then-president Napoleon III, given in Bordeaux on October 9, 1852: “Certaines personnes disent: l’Empire c’est la guerre. Moi, je dis, l’Empire, c’est la paix”.

et sa persévérance doivent finir par lasser l'ennemi et le réduire à l'impuissance (31–32).

As soon as the great war begins, we should anticipate that *our enemies may win partial victories over us* through superiority of forces, though not everywhere and always, but *temporarily, in certain circumstances*. We, thank God, do not profess the dogma of invincibility, and that is why *failures cannot disturb us*. But every Russian has an inborn sense of duty and moral strength. He *knows from the lessons of his history* that a powerful and united people, faithful to their nation and religious tradition, cannot be defeated if it does not want to be, and that, not retreating before the enemy until the end, he will, finally, exhaust and bring the enemy to impotence through his courage and perseverance (297–298).

In this way, according to Viazemsky, the Russian people in the past have already received confirmation that “Russia is called by Providence”, and preserving their loyalty to this call will ensure Russian victory in the future. Time, history, and Providence are treated as synonyms in *Letters*; they protect Russia from external dangers essentially without the efforts of the Russian people. Passivity is almost prescribed for the compatriots of the “Russian veteran”, because strong actions can only disrupt things:

Si des circonstances l'exigent, il nous faut agir vigoureusement; si l'affaire peut être remise au lendemain, il faut attendre patiemment, mais avec vigilance, que le temps vienne à notre aide et dénoue les difficultés. Car dans les questions qui sont vraiment russes, il nous faudrait à plaisir gâter nous-mêmes nos agaires, pour que le dernier mot ne fût pas dit en notre faveur. L'Océan n'a pas besoin de s'agiter pour que les fleuves viennent se verser dans son sein, l'ordre de la nature les pousse à lui. Il y a aussi *des courants historiques qu'on ne saurait détourner de leur direction* (177–178).

As circumstances demand we should act with strength; but if there is the option of being cautious, we will arm ourselves with patience and vigor and will wait until *time comes to our aid and removes our difficulties* [italics added]; because in purely Russian questions, *if only we ourselves do not ruin matters, the deciding word will always belong to us*. The ocean must move nothing to make the rivers flow into its bosom; nature itself chases them there. *There are also such historical rivers which nothing will turn aside* (440–441).

Small failures, according to Viazemsky, can and always should be negligible to Russia. He believes the historical example of failures in the war with Napoleon supports this thesis. This was precisely the case in which Russian “courage and perseverance” “exhausted and brought the enemy to impotence”. In contrasting small failures with the overall victory, one of the fundamental contrasts of *Letters* appears once again — *newspapers vs. history*; from Letter XXVII:

Succès momentanés, échecs momentanés, ne veulent rien dire. C'est beaucoup pour les gazettes et les vanités du jour, mais ce n'est rien pour l'avenir et pour l'histoire. Tout se retrouve et se résume à la fin, ce qu'on a perdu et ce qu'on a gagné. Souvent les échecs d'aujourd'hui sont un gage de succès du lendemain, et le lendemain d'une nation puissante, ne s'accomplit pas dans les vingt-quatre heures. Une puissante nation doit avant tout savoir être patiente (209).

Momentary successes and momentary failures mean nothing. They are important for newspapers and daily bustle, and have no significance for the future and for history. In the end everything is found and counted: both gains and losses. Often today's failure is the key to tomorrow's success, and the tomorrow of a great nation is not realized in twenty-four hours (471).

Thus, Viazemsky interprets the retreat from Silistra and the fall of Bomarsund as expressions of common sense:

Il ne s'agissait pas là d'obtenir un succès de vanité: du moment que de plus grands sacrifices étaient superflus, du moment que l'occupation de Silistrie, dans les circonstances données, devenait pour nous d'une importance secondaire et peut-être même tout-à-fait nulle, le bon sens nous prescrivait de nous retirer. C'est ainsi que notre retrait s'explique et se justifie aux yeux des hommes de guerre et de bonne foi. Quand les alliés, pour faire enfin quelque chose, dirigèrent des forces supérieures sur Bomarsund, dénué de tout moyen de défense, tout le monde en Russie s'attendait à ce que cette place tomberait infailliblement en leurs mains. De pareils échecs et de pareils succès ne prouvent rien. Il y a plus: des échecs et des succès plus sérieux ne sauraient changer ce que l'on convenu d'appeler *la question d'Orient* <...> la question de temps est, pour l'empereur et pour la Russie, d'une importance secondaire.

We did not desire a vain success and senseless spilling of blood, and from the moment that the taking of Silistra in the given circumstances became of secondary importance, and possibly even totally unnecessary, common sense suggested that we leave it. That is how military and conscientious people explain and justify our retreat. When the allies, in order to finally do something, directed their superior forces on Bomarsund, which had been stripped of any means of self-defense, everyone in Russia knew in advance that they would necessarily take that fortress. Such failures and setbacks prove exactly nothing. Further: failures and setbacks of greater importance that these will have no influence on that which is called the *Eastern Question*....For us the time of resolving the issue is of merely secondary importance (439).

In Viazemsky's description, Russians do not rush to victory, and since they do not fear to cede victory, it is always on their side. The "veteran of 1812" is certain that until the Russian people have fulfilled their destiny, they are protected by Providence. What does he see as their destiny? The concluding passage of

Letter XXVII, “The Qualities of the Russian People”, defines this mission as the establishment and maintenance of “balance between East and West” (*l'équilibre entre l'Occident et l'Orient* [208]). This is not the “purely conditional” “balance of cabinets” (such a task is too insignificant, and Viazemsky considers its pursuit the reason for the failures of European diplomats). Russia’s mission is to establish balance between “the providential and the humanitarian” (*providentiel et humanitaire* [208]). According to Viazemsky, the Russian nation holds the patent on this mission’s execution because it is the only nation that combines Slavic heritage with membership in the Eastern Church: “Nous sommes dans la famille humaine les seuls représentants légitimes, indépendants et constitués de la race slave et de l’Eglise d’Orient”<sup>10</sup> (208). The author admits the “seniority” of other Christian nations over Russians, but at the same time points out that the Russians spilled blood on behalf of their church “brothers”. Thus the Russian nation has demonstrated its virtue and confirmed its right to decide the Eastern Question:

La pratique de ces vertues, et l’influence qu’elles doivent avoir sur les destinées du monde, voilà l’équilibre que nous sommes appelés à faire triompher sur les empiétements et les perturbations de l’Occident (209).

Viazemsky is fairly traditional in his listing of Russian national virtues:

Mais tout Russe a le sentiment inné du devoir et de la force morale (32).

... every Russian has an innate sense of duty and moral strength (297);

Le peuple russe a ses défauts, mais il n’est pas orgueilleux dans le sens de l’orgueil de siècle, il est religieux, charitable, simple et généreux, fidèle à son souverain, résigné, brave et humble à la fois; il est toujours prêt à voler à la défense des opprimés: l’Eglise d’Orient et pour lui une mère qui a tout son amour, toute sa vénération; les fils aînés de cette Eglise sont ses frères et il aime à verser son sang pour venger, et s’il est possible pour racheter leur souffrances (208–209).

The Russian people have their shortcomings, but they are not proud, in the sense of worldly pride; they are pious, compassionate, simple and generous, devoted to their sovereign, patient, brave and humble; they are always ready to rush to the aid of the oppressed. The Eastern Church is their mother tenderly beloved and deeply venerated; the older sons of this church are their brothers, and they will gladly spill their own blood on their behalf, and, if possible, redeem their suffering (470).

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<sup>10</sup> Bartenev translates *la race* as *tribe* (cf.: “Nous sommes une race, et les races ne se dispersant et ne disparaissent que sous le main de Dieu” [208] — “We are a tribe; and tribes do not break apart and do not perish but by God’s will” [469]).

Russian shortcomings, as Viazemsky describes them, are at the heart of their merits. Their biggest shortcoming lies in the fact that “Slavs by their very nature are always more or less carefree, and consequently don’t look ahead” (433) (“Le Slave est de sa nature tant soit peu insouciant et, par conséquent, imprévoyant” [170]). “A deep and burning sense of national virtue” (432) (“un profond et ardent sentiment de nationalité et de dignité” [169]) has always existed in Russians, but often “in a platonic condition” (433) (“à l’état platonique” [169]). Upon prevailing over and defeating enemies — both external and internal — “we easily calm down and relax our perseverance” (433). The nature of a “real Slav”, according to Viazemsky, is expressed in the Russian saying “Le Russe ne fait le signe de la croix, que quand il entend gronder le tonnerre” (170) (translated by Bartenev from French as “Русский не перекрестится прежде, чем гром не грянет” [433]).

Contrasting Russia to its European opponents<sup>11</sup>, Viazemsky particularly stresses its innate unity. Unity of faith determines unity in other respects:

Quant à nous, en nous disant orthodoxes, nous avons tout dix. C’est là notre profession de foi religieuse, nationale et politique (14);

We are Orthodox, and this word says it all. It is our symbol of faith, national and political (279).

Viazemsky’s reasons for discussing Russian Orthodoxy so thoroughly are understandable — protection of the Orthodox inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire was a reason for the outbreak of the war. This made it easy for the author to avoid the issue of people of other ethnicities and faiths in Russia.

In other passages of *Letters*, Viazemsky mentions such people in order to demonstrate that national origin is of little significance to the Russian tsar’s subjects, as they are united in the imperial whole. In Letter XX, written in July 1854 in rebuttal to Eugène Forcade’s article in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Viazemsky denies the existence of a “German party” in contemporary, military Russia, and then goes on to deny completely any national differences within the empire:

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<sup>11</sup> Remarkably, like Tyutchev and many other Russian thinkers and journalists, Viazemsky considers the West to be Russia’s main opponent in the Eastern War. The introduction to *Letters* states that in actuality, the Eastern Question is mainly the English Question. Above, an excerpt from Letter XII was quoted, in which Viazemsky lists historical precedents of successful interactions between Russia and the East. He explains these successes as resulting not only from the particular merits of the Russian nation, but also from the similarity between Russians and Turks (more on this below). Thus, in the Crimean War, Turks for Viazemsky are not the main enemy, they are merely following French and English instigators.

Quant à la présence d'un certain nombre d'Allemands en Russie, les uns indigènes. Les autres implantés, elle est incontestable. Que dans le temps calmes et ordinaires, que dans le transactions de la vie privée la communauté de religion, de langage, de moeurs, puisse établir quelques nuances qui distinguent les Allemands de la masse nationale et primitive, c'est tout naturel. Voudrait-on même affirmer que dans des questions municipales, de privilèges spéciaux et de localité, d'intérêts de clocher, quelques légères dissensions, quelques tiraillements se font quelquefois sentir, nous ne dirons pas non. Mais dans toutes les grandes questions de dignité nationale, toutes les fois qu'il s'agit de l'Etat <...>, toutes les nuances s'effacent ou plutôt se confondent et s'unissent dans une expression commune à tous. Il n'y a pas plus alors de camp allemand ou de camp russe; il n'existe plus qu'un seul camp et une seule bannière: l'année 1854 en fait foi, aussi bien que l'année 1812<sup>12</sup> (154).

As to the fact that a known number of Germans live in Russia, both our natives and newcomers, that is true; ... in usual, peaceful times, in private life they stand out a bit from the masses due to their faith, language, and customs — this is also completely natural. I also do not deny that in matters of self-governance, as regards well-known entitlements and local isolation, now and again one can feel mild dissatisfaction and hear discord. But in all the important matters of national virtues, in every case pertaining to the government <...> all differences disappear, or more accurately, the same sense is aroused in all. Then there are no more German and Russian camps: there is one camp and one banner. This is evidenced by 1854, just as 1812 (417).

Later, Viazemsky asserts that Russia's national policies are fundamentally different than Europe's:

Loin de suivre l'exemple des autres gouvernements, le nôtre a toujours eu pour principe de favoriser, autant que le permettait l'intérêt général de l'Etat, les nationalités incorporées à la mère patrie. Sous plus d'un rapport, ce n'étaient pas les vainqueurs, mais les vaincus, qui étaient privilégiés (154–155).

Contrasting the example of other powers, our government has always provided patronage to the nationalities that have entered the ranks of our state <...> Entitlements, in many respects, were provided not to the victors, but to the vanquished (417).

As evidence, he gives the example of the special rules of self-governance and trade in the Baltic provinces, Finland, and Asian regions (see [155; 417–418]). Poles, according to the author, destroyed with their own hands the benefits they'd received from Russia. National differences between subjects fall away, and the peoples become a single race under the authority of the Russian emperor:

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<sup>12</sup> Note yet another parallel Viazemsky draws between the years 1812 and 1854.

Tout Allemande faisant partie de la Russie, tout Finlandais de bon sens, seront toujours fiers et heureux de tenir à un grand empire qui les associe à sa puissance (155).

Any German subject of Russia, any sensible Finn, will always be proud and happy to be part of the great empire which has joined him to its might (418).

Religious and national unity is reinforced by linguistic unity, by which Viazemsky means political discourse, not language itself. This also works to contrast Russia with its opponents, Germany, France, and England. The unity which the author ascribes to Russian subjects is attributed also to the language (or rather, to the system of values and judgments it expresses) used by “Russia and its government”:

... qu’il est consolant pour tout Russe de voir l’exemple donné par la Russie et son gouvernement. Là tout est simple et édifiant de vérité, beau de dévotion. À chaque action, à chaque parole, on retrouve la conviction qu’un seul sentiment, qu’un seul devoir anime, soutient et guide le souverain et la nation. Comparez le dernière manifeste émané le 14 décembre 1854 avec d’autres manifestes et documents publics qui ont paru depuis le commencement de la guerre. C’est toujours la même langage, car quand on est dans le vrai on ne saurait varier d’opinion et de principe (224).

... The actions of Russia and its government are reassuring to every Russian person. There everything is simple, instructive in righteousness, perfect in self-denial. In every measure, in every word it is felt that the sovereign and the people are animated and guided by a single motive, a single duty. Compare the latest declaration of December 14, 1854 with other declarations related to the beginning of war: everywhere one and the same language, because when truth reigns, there is no reason to change opinions or rules (484).

Viazemsky depicts a utopian image of national unity that is beyond the influence of social status, gender, and age — a unity founded on the language of “original policies for all”:

Ce langage simple, vrai et énergique, est à la portée de tout le monde; il fait vibrer en Russie les mêmes cordes dans le cœur du patricien et de l’homme du peuple, du soldat et du laboureur. <...> Ceci n’est pas de la politique transcendante, ni abstraite: c’est de la politique élémentaire et populaire. Tous, jusqu’aux femmes et aux enfants, la comprennent en Russie (224–225).

This simple, truthful, and strong language is understood by all, and in Russia is equally in the hearts of the aristocrat and the common man, the soldier and the plowman. <...> Here there are no philosophical, abstract policies, here policy is original and for all. Everyone in Russia understands it, women and children (484–485).

Although this passage is not about natural language, an obvious parallel can be drawn between these thoughts in *Letters* and Viazemsky's 1848 lyrical manifesto, "Святая Русь". The fundamental theses put forward by this poem (as interpreted by L. N. Kissel'jova: "Holy Rus is 1) faith, the church; 2) autocracy ["the Tsar's Throne is hereditary"]; and 3) Russian history and language as manifestations of the ideas of the fatherland" [Киселева: 139]), are developed in *Letters* in an extensive textual space. Of course, fundamental differences between the lyric and journalistic statements do not allow for direct correlations (*Letters* does not use the key formulae of "Святая Русь"), but the continuity of these texts is undeniable.

The unity of the people and the throne described in Letter XXIX is contrasted by the author with the wild discordance of Europe: France has been occupied for the last sixty years with nothing but one revolutionary government after another (78–79, 342–343); in England the government is surrounded by revolutionary contagion, the people eschew it and so are disunited with the government (79, 343); Germany is also ruled by parties, each pulling in its own direction (344–345); moreover, several German newspapers are possessed by fear of the French<sup>13</sup>. Everywhere in Europe contradiction, masking as "public opinion", splashes across the pages of periodicals. Public opinion is a bogey to Prince Viazemsky. In *Letters* he uses an example from the Gospels to show the unfairness and insolvency of relying on the majority (who did they choose to pardon? Barabbas). Since each of the debaters pulls in his own direction, public opinion fluctuates and political leanings constantly change; this Viazemsky interprets as a continuous betrayal (not only of Russia by its former allies, such as Austria, but also the betrayal by European governments of their peoples). Unity, as manifested by the Russian people, should be the natural antidote to the treason and contradiction reigning in Europe. The author of *Letters* attempts to demonstrate that war is the only way remaining to spread Russia's beneficial influence.

Viazemsky uses various arguments to justify the necessity of war. For example, he calls war a "sacrifice" brought by the Russian people for the salvation of their co-religionists. In addition, in Letter XII he focuses specifically on Rome's attempts to convert Russians to Catholicism. Finally, in Letter IV he declares — appealing to his own experiences in the East (a pilgrimage in 1850) and

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<sup>13</sup> Viazemsky compares these papers, obsessed with phantom menaces, with Evgeny from Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman*: they also see visions everywhere of the tramping and neighing of French horses.

to the reviews of European travelers — that only Russians make pilgrimages to the sacred Christian sites of the East:

Je le demande à tout voyageur impartial et consciencieux qui, ainsi que moi, a été à Jérusalem: y a-t-il rencontré beaucoup de *vrais pèlerins* si ce n'est parmi les Russes. Vous y trouverez sans doute des Français curieux et oisifs, des hommes de science qui viennent explorer ce terrain pour le soumettre à leurs investigations géographiques et historiques. Vous y trouverez des Anglais touristes <...> qui vont à Jérusalem comme ils iraient au Monomotapa. Mais la Russie seule voit partir <...> des légions de pèlerins qui vont faire leurs dévotions et communier au pied du Saint-Sépulcre. Non-seulement vous rencontrez peu des Français parmi les pèlerins laïques, mais on y voit même peu des prêtres (22–23).

Ask any impartial and conscientious traveler who, like me, has been in Jerusalem: was he met by many *true pilgrims*, except for Russians? Without a doubt, one encounters inquisitive or leisured French people, men of science who had come to research this land for their geographical or historical investigations. You will find here English tourists <...> who wander about Jerusalem as if they'd gone to Monomotapa<sup>14</sup>. But only from Russia <...> come entire crowds of pilgrims to fast and partake of Holy Communion at the Holy Sepulchre. There are few French among the lay pilgrims, and even few clergy (288–289).

From these statements Viazemsky concludes that Russia's debt to Europe has been paid and their future paths will inevitably diverge (regarding this, see the concluding passage of Letter XXIV, "A Return to Nationalism. A Break with the West" [173–178, 436–441]). According to the author's conception, "Europeanization" gave much to Russia, above all education (Russians became "enlightened Russians"), but, of course, much was borrowed that was extraneous — now the time has arrived for movement in the opposite direction, a separation from Europe (especially since Europe itself did much to distance itself from Russia). Viazemsky believes that Russia has no common language with modern Europe. Here he recalls J. J. Rousseau's response to the Archbishop of Paris: "Quelle langue commune pouvons-nous parler? Comment pouvons-nous nous entendre? Et qu'y a-t-il entre vous et moi?" (177). A "divorce" that goes in Russia's favor follows this "marriage of convenience". Viazemsky believes isolationism must become the next stage in Russia's political existence. Everything stated above confirms the conclusion that in the Eastern Question, Viazemsky was really most interested in the "Western", or European, question.

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<sup>14</sup> During the Middle Ages, Monomotapa was an extensive kingdom in southern Africa (the lands of modern-day Zimbabwe and part of Mozambique). It flourished during the 13<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the beginning of Portuguese colonization, Monomotapa had already split into smaller kingdoms.

What place in the conflict among governments and, in the end, civilizations, did the “Russian veteran of 1812” assign to Turkey? Here Viazemsky proves himself a fairly resourceful demagogue. As a consequence of Russia’s divorce from Europe, he pulls together Russians and Turks. In his depiction, these two nations have many things in common; from Letter III:

Il est entre les Turcs et les Slaves des affinités orientales qui ne peuvent être ni méconnues, ni détruites. Les vrais Turcs sont doux et francs; les rapports de voisinage et, abstraction faite de la religion, les mœurs patriarcales communes aux deux nations, bien d’autres rapprochements encore, pourraient, les circonstances aidant, favoriser l’union des deux races aujourd’hui divisées. La Russie ayant déjà des millions de Musulmans sous sa domination, n’en serait plus à étudier et à comprendre le naturel et la caractère musulman. Une Turquie gréco-russe est donc encore le seul qui aurait quelque chance de vitalité (18).

Between the Turks and the Slavs there is something common in their Eastern origins which is impossible not to recognize and impossible to destroy. Real Turks are kind-hearted and honest. Close cohabitation and, with the exception of faith, common patriarchal customs, and many other similar characteristics could, under favorable circumstances, lead to the union of the two races that today are divided. With millions of Muslims among its subjects, Russia is familiar with the Muslim character and nature. And so, it must be admitted that a Greco-Russian Turkey has the best chance of vitality (283).

Viazemsky notes that Russia and Turkey have made war more than once; however, he believes that when necessary, Turks will trust “Muscovites” more readily than Europeans. He sees the proselytizing of the Catholic Church as the reason for this: after providing military aid, the European allies will attempt to convert the Turks to Catholicism, therefore the Muslims will avoid fraternization with the infidels. The closeness of Russians and Turks, exaggerated by Viazemsky, along with other historical precedents (the political successes of Rus/Russia in Eastern politics), in his eyes is evidence of the unavoidability of Turkey’s absorption into Russia.

Russia, understanding Turkey well, thanks to the presence of several million Muslims among its subjects and thanks to its longstanding presence on the Eastern political scene, will be able to achieve its goals and complete its providential mission as defender of the Orthodox Church; from Letter IX:

Si le pouvoir ottoman doit tomber en Turquie, que nous y aidions ou non, ce n’est qu’en notre faveur que cette chute peut s’accomplir. Ce n’est pas une conquête que nous convoitions, c’est un *héritage historique* que tôt ou tard nous avons à recueillir. Nous ne pressons pas l’usufruitier de nous céder la place. Mais après lui, *l’histoire à la main*, nous vienfrons légalement en prendre possession (55).

If Ottoman power must fall in Turkey, its fall will certainly be accomplished in our favor, whether we facilitate it or not. We are greedy not for victories, but for the *historical inheritance* which will pass to us sooner or later. We do not rush the current proprietor to cede his place to us; but after him, *with history in our hands*, we will come to begin our legal possession (319–320)<sup>15</sup>.

This passage shows how Viazemsky rhetorically draws a contrast between Turkey and its European allies. In fact, he uses the same method to describe France and England. In his political picture, only the Russian side is endowed with unity: the Russian government, authorities, and people are united (this is expressed particularly in unity of language, as described above). In England and France, the people and the government are divided; the “Russian veteran” ascribes to them a different understanding of modernity and divergent political aspirations (the governments of England and France move toward revolution, while the people do not share this destructive aspiration). This same method is used in the case of Turkey: to Turks as a people, Viazemsky attributes traits similar to those of Russians, softening the conflict of civilizations and transferring it onto the political plane (*pouvoir ottoman* is differentiated from *Turquie*).

Of course, the conflict has not diminished during this time; its easing in *Letters* was necessary for the journalistic task. The contrast of Eastern Christianity to Islam and Western Christianity excludes the possibility of reconciliation, and this, according to Viazemsky, is also explained by historical precedents:

Les population orthodoxes orientales ont une répulsion presque tout aussi vivace et aussi profonde pour la civilisation occidentale que pour la barbarie musulmane. Si l'on demandait pourquoi? Je répondrais: étudiez l'histoire (57).

The Orthodox races of the East feel almost the same deep and living aversion to Western education as to the barbarism of Islam. They ask me why that is; I reply: read history (321).

In his poetry about the Crimean War, the author of *Letters of a Russian Veteran of the War of 1812* expresses his opinion of the adversary much more sharply, due not only to the orientation of these texts toward an “internal market”, which allowed him to ignore diplomatic conventions, but also due to the author’s poetic attitudes. Viazemsky was sure that Count Rostopchin’s vulgar style would be more effective in conversation about politics with ordinary peo-

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. also a note from his diary of 1853: “Only idiots talk of autonomy and independence for Turkey, or unscrupulous journalists. Turkey cannot stand on its own, it can only fall. It has only the strength of gravity. And the obvious purpose of Providence — when its fatal hour strikes — is for it to fall into Russia’s arms. Until that time, its best ally, its most loyal guardian, is Russia” [Вяземский: X, 72–73].

ple than Karamzin's refined rhetoric<sup>16</sup>. In one Crimean War poem, the Turks are presented as caricatures; no mention is made of any similarity with Russians:

Заспесивился турчонок,  
Он зафыркал, поднял нос,  
И ревет: я не ребенок,  
Я и сам теперь подрос.  
Вырос ты — чресчур не бреди!  
А к чему ж, скажи-ка нам,  
Взял к себе ты в няньки — леди,  
Да французскую мадам?  
Из-за них на нас ты лезешь,  
Кажешь кукиш вгорячах  
И победы сдуру грезिшь  
На полях и на морях [Вяземский: XI, 114].

In another poem addressed to Nakhimov and Bebutov, the poet sees in their actions evidence that, “Что не отвыкли мы турить пашей по шее, / Что не отвык орел луне сшибать рога!” [Ibid.: XI, 98].

The Crimean poems form an essential background for *Letters* and are, in a way, a poetic self-caricature of the work. During the war, Viazemsky constantly published new poems on the topic of the day in Russian newspapers, and some of them also came out in separate reprints. These texts were, of course, intended for a Russian audience. Viazemsky chose a poetic form for his compatriots — in Russia he was known specifically as a poet. Moreover, he chose a genre and style that, in his opinion, were the clearest and closest to the Russian reader. Thus these two courses, *Letters* and the Crimean songs, characterize Viazemsky's literary and journalistic work during the Crimean War.

The final genre in which the Crimean theme appears in Viazemsky's writing is his notebooks. In them, he articulates that which is hidden behind journalistic conventions in *Letters*, but is more freely expressed in the poetry intended for his compatriots:

From the very beginning of our escapades I said and wrote that if we rely on the success of our negotiations, then the joke will be on us. Our negotiations with the Turks: after the first word that didn't receive a satisfactory answer, grab 'em by the beards! There's our diplomacy. And it doesn't do to sit quietly and wait for the right case. With the Turks and Europe we have one language in common: bayonets. In this language it still isn't clear whose speech will come first. Yet in any other lan-

<sup>16</sup> I refer the reader to my article on P. A. Viazemsky's Crimean “songs” [Степанищева].

guage they talk over, under, and around us and, to our misfortune, convince us [Вяземский: X, 75].

In light of the subsequent fate of *Letters*, this note can be read as prophetic — the book was unsuccessful among its intended audience, and quickly lost relevance in Russia. Lofty declarations in *Letters* hid Prince Viazemsky's attempts at “grab 'em by the beards” (“хватать в рожу да и за бороду”) literary diplomacy.

*Translated by Allison Rockwell*

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