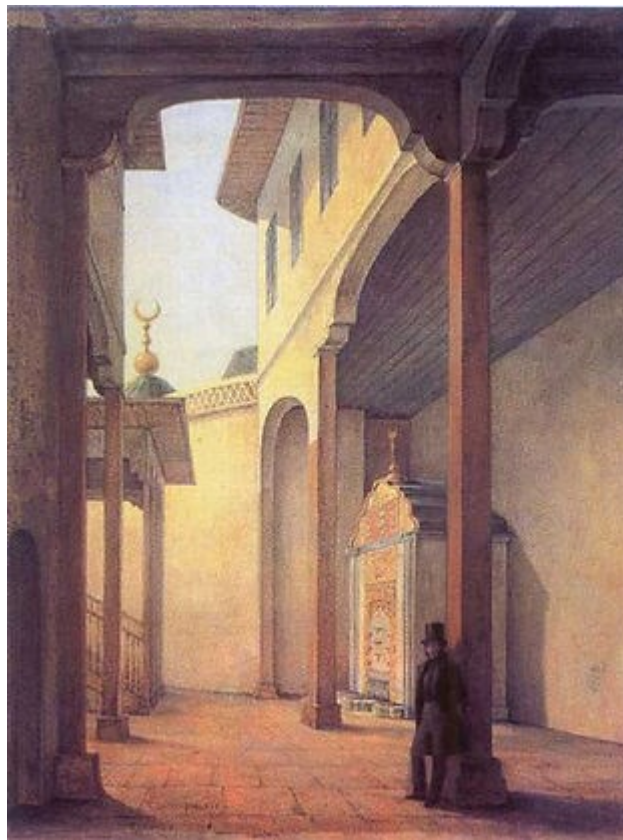




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TRANSNISTRIA
WAR AND PEACE BETWEEN PUSHKIN AND MICKIEWICZ

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Hitler created Transnistria. Putin wants it for the Russian Federation.

In August 1940, Germany assigned the Hungarian speaking areas of Romania to Hungary, notably Transylvania. (the second Vienna Award). In exchange, Romania was allowed to annex an area beyond the Dniester River, the traditional eastern border of Romania. The new area, Transnistria, would include lands reaching the Southern Bug River (on whose shore Mykolaiv stands).

Soviet troops conquered Transnistria in spring 1944. The wider area was divided between Moldova and Ukraine. In 1990 a much reduced Transnistria declared



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independence. There has been a ceasefire in place since 21st July 1992. On Wednesday 28th February 2024, it appears the Congress of Transnistria is going to request the annexation to the Russian Federation. It is the first meeting of the Congress of Transnistria in the last eighteen years.

Transnistria, as part of Russia, would be a thorn in the side of Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania. It is already, albeit as a non-recognized state under Russian control. It would confirm the geographic separation between Odessa and the rest of Ukraine. Putin, like all Russians, does not think much of these areas, other than distant memories of poetry and prose learned as a school child. If they were annexed, they would be soon forgotten within the immense Russian Federation.

Pushkin (1799-1837) was exiled to Bessarabia (then part of Russia and now part of Moldova) where he wrote the first chapters of *Evgenii Onegin*. He was sent there as in internal exile, as a dangerous element, a political dissident. He wrote the 'southern poems' in this period (*A Prisoner of the Caucasus Кавказский пленник* 1822, *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai Бахчисарайский фонтан* 1824, *Gypsies Цыганы* 1827). These poems are in the style of Byron and are well known today in Russia.

Pushkin was had been sent into internal exile because of his ideas of freedom, which found a favourable ear with the polish poet Adam Minciewicz (1798-1855). They met in Russia and shared their support for the ideas behind the Decembrist uprising of 1825, which included common friends. Many of the conspirators had copies of Pushkin's poems, among which *On Liberty (Вольность* 1817). Here are some lines from this poem:

Самовластительный Злодей!
Тебя, твой трон я ненавижу,
Твою погибель, смерть детей
С жестокой радостью вижу.
Читают на твоём челе
Печать проклятия народы,
Ты ужас мира, стыд природы,
Упрёк ты Богу на земле.

You autocratic psychopath,



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*You and your throne do I despise!
I watch your doom, your children's death
With hateful, jubilating eyes.
Upon your forehead they descry
The People's mark of true damnation.
Stain of the world, shame of creation,
Reproach on earth to God on high!*

Pushkin is famous because he expressed his dissent against authoritarian rule from the freedom of exile imprisoned in a penal colony. Mickiewicz admired him for it.

When the Polish Uprising occurred in 1831, Pushkin blamed Ukrainians, Poles, and the French for attempting to overthrow the Russian occupation. His poem on the *Poltava* (*Полтава* 1829) and *To the Slanderers of Russia* (*Клеветникам России* 1831) became symbols of Russian national and reactionary. Mickiewicz wrote a poem to Pushkin questioning this change (*To the Friends of Moscow Do przyjaciół Moskali*)

Pushkin began as the poet of liberty and a symbol of dissidents, especially when he was living in the remote areas of Bessarabia and close to Transnistria. The poems he wrote at this time earned him a reputation among similar minded European poets. Once he had left the direct experience of exile and returned to the politics of promotion and bureaucracy, he found another audience and turned back to his European friends and their common ideal of freedom. It was his Bessarabia exile which placed him at the centre of Europe. It appears politics once more wishes to remove all specificity and interest for those who live along the Dniester River, free from the squabbles of power.

The status of Transnistria is a symbol of tomorrow's Europe. It will be decided on Wednesday.