
This book discusses the Time of Troubles (Smutnoe vremya) period and the pretenders who appeared after the killing of Ivan the Terrible’s legal heir, Ivan, leaving the Empire without leadership. The power struggle began immediately after the death of Tsar Ivan which brought the Rurikid dynasty to an end; rival boyars created a weak government and autocracy. The book discusses these issues and the representations of Dmitry, the son of Ivan the Terrible within the context of Russian literature.

The absence of legitimate royal authority after the demise of the Rurikid dynasty in 1598 caused a dynastic crisis. This period known as the Time of Troubles was characterized by a dynastic struggle that nearly resulted in the shattering of the Muscovite state. It finally came to an end in 1613 with the appearance of the new dynasty, the Romanovs.

The book consists of six chapter. In the Introduction the author states that she will examine the “protagonist”, Dmitry, within the context of Russian literature. She examines Dmitry both as a literary figure and a real historical one, and describes Dmitry as a “tabula rasa” because he died under mysterious circumstances with no credible witnesses to confirm how he died.

In her book, the author conducts her research both chronologically and diachronically. Chapter I is an introductory chapter that provides information on the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Russian texts Tulupov’s Life of St. Dmitry, The Story of Grishka Otrepev and Tale of Recovery that illustrate the prehistory of Dmitry. The author compares seventeenth century text types and arrives at the conclusion that all three works express a political message and that all of them contain a hagiographical structure and explication.
Chapter II examines Russia’s historical experience in the eighteenth century and its literary tradition. In this chapter, the author examines Sumarokov’s tragedy *Dmitry the Pretender* and Narezhny’s *Dmitry the Pretender*. The author compares the main causes of his usurpation and its interpretation in literary works of the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, and concludes that the writers of the seventeenth century crafted quasi-literary, polemical, monological interpretations of the period and determined who was the sole man qualified to rule. Prose treatments of the Dmitry material were the most appropriate way to shape their literature. Eighteenth century writers, on the other hand, recognized a large number of candidates to the throne and their interpretation of the period was multifaceted; tragedy was the most popular literary genre.

In Chapter III, the author examines the body of works discussing Dmitry and the Time of Troubles in the 1820s and 1830s: Alexander Pushkin’s *Comedy about Tsar Boris and Grishka Otrepev*, Faddey Bulgarin’s *Dmitry the Pretender*, Alexey Khomyakov’s *Dmitry the Pretender*, Mikhail Pogodin’s *Historical Portrait of Dmitry the Pretender*. She states that the writers of Russia’s early nineteenth century were fascinated with the Dmitry materials, and each writer depicted him as a man who lived among others and saw him as an alternative to the reigning autocracy. However, they later arrived at the conclusion that there was no viable alternative to the reigning autocracy.

Chapter IV deals with two plays written in response to the Era of Great Reforms in 1866: Alexander Ostrovsky’s *Dmitry the Pretender* and Vasily Shuisky and Nikolay Chaev’s *Dmitry the Pretender*. She criticizes both authors’ works on a number of fronts, regarding all of them as being overly ambitious in that they attempt to treat too many unrelated issues, and that the miscellaneous political issues raised in these dramatic works have no clear connection to one another.

In the Chapter V, the author states that Dmitry disappears from Russian novels and plays for a century and reappears after the demise of the Soviet Union. She examines Daniil Mordovtsev’s *False Dmitry: A Historical Novel of the Time of Troubles*, Vasily Avenarius’s *In Service to the Tsarevich*, Nikolay Alekseev’s *The False Tsarevich* and Alexey Suvorin’s *Tsar Dmitry the Pretender and Tsarevna Xenya*. The author concludes that each writer has presented his own interpretation of Dmitry and his era, that these works are clearly independent and any similarities among them are merely coincidental with no pattern to them. Since each writer has selected his own particular assortment of “facts”, the novels each follow their own unique line of development. On a more general note, the author argues that the collection of late nineteenth century works on the Time of Troubles should be interpreted in the context of both their local frame of reference and national pride in the country’s cultural heritage. However, in the Soviet period Dmitry’s disappearance was the result of the Soviets’ emphasis on shaping the nation’s future rather than linking present realities to the national past.

In the Conclusion, the author points out that all of the works discussed simultaneously deal with two distinct periods in time – the time in which the works are set and the time in which they were composed. For seventeenth century writers, marking the passing of the old dynasty was important, but the establishment of a new dynasty was just as significant. In the two eighteenth century works that were examined, contemporary political issues were treated in the context of Dmitry’s era. Nineteenth century works more closely resemble seventeenth century works in that the contemporary relevance of the historical events these works deal with is their main focus. According to the author, as long as writers continue to deal with political issues in literature or the theater, the
This book is very well written source examining the Time of Troubles period, a period when there was no legal heir to run the state, when dynastic struggle began the process of bringing an end to the Rurik Dynasty and leading to a period pretenders. The author provides different interpretations for the “protagonist”, Dmitry, within the context of Russian literature. The author particularly examines different writers’ works in chronological order and discusses the legitimacy of Dmitry by comparing the treatments of the pretenders. This book should be of interest to anyone interested in the period of the Time of Troubles and usurpation and their interpretation in Russian literature.

*Ayse Dietrich - Professor, Part-time, at Middle East Technical University, Department of History, and Eurasian Studies. Editor and the founder of the International Journal of Russian Studies e-mail: editor@ijors.net, dayse@metu.edu.tr, dietrichayse@yahoo.com