Week 3
DAY 1: Mon. Feb. 19:

Pushkin’s play *Boris Godunov*, I: the writing (1825-1831)

Agenda:
- **Alexander Pushkin** (1799-1837): Aristocrat, Romantic-age rebel, exotic one-eighth black Abyssinian, politically suspect, Russia’s greatest poet
- Pushkin on drama and successful theater (what’s needed: scandal, strong emotions, movement, free conversation, but a dramatist as “dispassionate as fate”)
- Pushkin on history (and on the best-selling History of the Russian State, 1818-1824, by Nikolai Karamzin, in which the “Rise and Fall of Boris Godunov” was the top story)

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**READINGS:**

- Chronology of Pushkin’s life .................................................. pp. 13-15 R
- Pushkin, “My Remarks on the Russian Theater” [1820] and “On National-Popular Drama ...” [1830] [ignore the details about Pogodin’s mediocre play] ... pp. 82-88 R
- From *Pushkin on Literature*, Wolff’s headnote about “‘Shakespearean Strides’ in Mikhailovskoe” [August 1824-1826] on BG (pp. 104-107), and some personal letters to friends on his hopes and fears for his historical-drama-in-progress:
  - To Zhukovsky (August 1825) .... p. 158
  - To Vyazemsky (September 1825) ..... p. 159
  - To Zhukovsky (October 1825) ..... p. 161
  - To Vyazemsky (November 1825) ..... pp. 161-62
- Dunning, Ch. 2, “The Exiled Poet-Historian and the Creation of his Comedy”
  In *The Uncensored Boris Godunov* ...... pp. 51-80

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**SLA 537** for Tues. Feb. 20: + «Мои замечания об русском театре» (1820)
Наброски предисловия к Борису Годунову (French and Russian)
«О народной драме и драме Марфа Посаднича»

«Заметки на полях М. П. Погодина 'Об участии Годунова в убийстве Царевича Димитрия'»
[Pushkin's dissenting marginalia on Pogodin's 1829 essay, which claimed that Godunov was not responsible for the death of Dmitry of Uglich]. Why does Pushkin need the guilt?
DAY 2: Wed. Feb. 21:

Discussion of critiques.

- If you are familiar with the history of European theater, try the first half of Clayton, “Boris Godunov and the Theater,” from his Dimitry’s Shade
  ................ pp. 67-74 (R)

From Victor Hugo’s “Romantic” reform of the French stage in the 1820s to Meyerhold in 1936. Clayton claims that Pushkin’s dramatic ideal is not Shakespearean, Romantic, nor neoclassical, but a critique and recombination of all three.

At last, sneaking in to the play itself:

- Understanding the historical and political references in two scenes:

  o The opening Shakespearean Scene 1, “Palace in the Kremlin.” Princes Shuisky and Vorotynsky.

    Boris’s “reluctance” to take the crown (p. 251)
    Shuisky sent to investigate the Uglich murder (253)
    “The nun-tsaritsa was implacable” (251)
    BG, “Maliuta’s son-in-law, he too at heart a hangman” (255)
    … “in due course, like my uncle, put to death …” (155)
    [We are] “princes of the blood, of Riurik’s blood” (255)

  o The conspiratorial Scene 10, “Moscow. Shuisky’s House” (a scene that Meyerhold compulsively rehearsed in 1936)

    The Loyalty Prayer (p. 319)
    The servants paid to eavesdrop and denounce their masters (321)
    [Afanasy] Pushkin’s long and dangerous speech (325-27):
    — BG becoming like Ivan the Terrible in his reign of terror
    — “Sitskys, Shestunovs, Romanovs” exiled or executed
    — St. George’s Day abolished (peasants can no longer leave their masters on this one day a year; de facto beginning of serfdom)
    — A Pretender who can undo all this (“the returning True tsarevich”) 

    Note how Shuisky always plays the pro- and contra-BG card simultaneously.