

Title: O. I. Senkovskii and Romantic Empire
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O. I. Senkovskii (1800-1856), professor of Oriental languages at the University of St. Petersburg and editor of the *Library for Reading*, has long been cast as a villain of Russian literature. Senkovskii's detractors most often focus on what they see as his pretense of being a Russian writer when he was really an émigré Pole only trading in Russian literature. Senkovskii's unsteady relationship to Russian-ness becomes especially problematic when the topic turns to *narodnost'*, and Senkovskii's contributions to the discussion of Russian identity have most often been dismissed as self-serving attempts to curry favor with Nicholas I's repressive regime. I would argue that Senkovskii's vision of an all-encompassing and yet fundamentally empty Russian nation in the *Library for Reading* as elsewhere is also quintessentially Romantic.

Before its adoption by Nicholas I, *narodnost'* was a central tenet of Russian Romantic writers, the Russian expression of a principle more often called Romantic nationalism. As Katya Hokanson has argued, though, in the Russian context Romantic nationalism proves surprisingly imperial. In the writing of Russian Romantics like Orest Somov, the space of the Russian nation is exactly commensurate with the Russian Empire; in Viazemskii's reading, Pushkin's poetry reaches westward even beyond the borders of the Russian Empire to create something truly national in a kind of all-absorbingness which then becomes the marker for all of Russian literature. The Russian Romantic expression of their national identity in terms of a unique ability to imitate may seem like a perversion of Romantic nationalism, and indeed many Russian Romantics feared that it was. I would argue instead that Romantic nationalism across Europe contained the same paradoxical conflation of national and universal, perhaps because the idea of the Romantic nation itself was almost entirely the invention of the multi- or extra-national, Senkovskiiian type.

Among the many exiles and expatriates who perhaps paradoxically promoted the idea of Romantic nationalism, two are particularly striking both for their impact and for their convoluted relationship to empire: Mme. de Staël and Sir Walter Scott. While both de Staël and Scott based their careers on the particular charm Romanticism lent to the notion of indigenous cultures, both were also life-long denizens of empires, the first as a Swiss married to a Swede in the French Empire, and the second as a Scot in Great Britain. Like Russian Romantics, both also blurred the edges of national specificity in various, sometimes troubling ways: de Staël advocated an originality which could obtain only through imitation, while Scott offered only an ersatz Scotland, what Cairns Craig has called a "fantasy surrogate" which served "to anaesthetize Scotland against real nationalism."