

- (8) cancellation of poll tax and arrears;  
 (9) abolition of monopolies on salt and alcohol; permission for free distillation and for the procuring of salt with payment of tax according to the respective amounts of salt and alcohol produced;  
 (10) abolition of recruiting and military colonies....  
 The Provisional Government is instructed to:
- (1) equalize all classes;
  - (2) form all local, Community, County, Gubernia, and Regional administrations;
  - (3) form a National Guard;
  - (4) form a judicial branch with a jury;
  - (5) equalize recruiting obligations among all classes;
  - (6) abolish a permanent army;
  - (7) establish a form of election of representatives to the Lower Chamber which will have to ratify the future of Government.

## AN APPEAL

The Lord took pity on Russia and sent death to our tyrant. Christ said: "You shall not be slaves of men, for you were redeemed by my blood." The world did not listen to this sacred command and fell into misery. But our suffering moved the Lord, and today He is sending us freedom and salvation. Brethren! Let us repent of our long servility and swear: let there be a sole Tsar in Heaven and on Earth, Jesus Christ.

## 25

## APOLOGY OF A MADMAN EXCERPTS

By Peter Chaadaev

Chaadaev (1794-1856) was the grandson of the eighteenth-century historian Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov. In 1811 he became an officer and served in the campaigns against Napoleon. He was involved in the societies which led to the Decembrist uprisings but left Russia in 1823. Upon his return in 1826 he was arrested and interrogated, but released. He settled in Moscow where he remained till his death, one of the most prominent thinkers of his generation. He was a member of no camp, though he must be considered a Westernizer. Because of his admiration for Catholicism, however, he believed in a different order from that desired by most Westernizers.

His literary heritage comprises eight essays and a large number of letters, all in French, the language in which he felt most comfortable. Only one essay, "A Philosophical Letter," was published during his lifetime, in 1836. Herzen described it as "a shot that rang out in a dark night; it forced all to awaken." While all literate Russia discussed the essay, the *Moscow Telescope*, which had printed it, was suppressed, its editor N. I. Nadezhdin exiled, and the censor who had passed it dismissed. Chaadaev was declared insane by order of Nicholas I and put under police supervision. For a year he had to endure daily visits by a physician and a policeman. His next essay was entitled "Apology of a Madman"; reprinted below is an excerpt entitled "The Legacy of Peter the Great." The first two excerpts are taken from his letters.

For a text of additional "Philosophical Letters" of Chaadaev see *Tri-Quarterly*, Spring, 1965, and Volume I of *Russian Philosophy*, edited by James Edie *et al.* Eugene Moskov has written *The Russian Philosopher Chaadaev*. There are chapters on the man in *The Spirit of Russia* by Thomas Masaryk and in Richard Hare's *Pioneers of Russian Social Thought* (paperback). See also Alexander Koyre, "Chaadaev and the Slavophiles," *Slavonic and East European Review*, March, 1927, and Janko Lavrin, "Chaadaev and the West," *Russian Review*, 1963. Raymond McNally has written several articles on the man: "Chaadaev's Evaluation of Peter the Great," *Slavic Review*, 1964; "Chaadaev's Evaluation of the Western Christian Churches," *Slavonic and East European Review*, June, 1964; "The Significance of Chaadaev's Weltanschauung," *Russian Review*, October, 1964; "The Books in Chaadaev's Libraries," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. XIV (1966); and "Chaadaev versus Khomiakov," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1966.

From Hans Kohn (ed.), *The Mind of Modern Russia* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), pp. 38-57. Copyright 1955 by The Trustees of Rutgers College in New Jersey.

## RUSSIA AND THE WORLD

FROM "LETTERS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY," 1829-31

One of the most deplorable things in our strange civilization is that we still have to discover the truths, often very trivial ones, which other, even less advanced peoples discovered long ago. We have never moved in concert with other peoples; we do not belong to any of the great families of mankind. We are not part of the Occident, nor are we part of the Orient; and we don't have the traditions of the one or of the other. Since we are placed somewhat outside of the times, the universal education of mankind has not reached us. . . .

All peoples undergo a time of violent agitation, of passionate restlessness, of action without thought. At that time men wander around in the world like bodies without a soul. It is the age of the great emotions, of the large undertakings, of the grand passions of the people. People then move vehemently, without any apparent aim, but not without profit for posterity. All societies pass through these periods, and from them receive their most vivid reminiscences, their miracles, their poetry, and all their most powerful and most fruitful ideas: these reminiscences are the necessary bases of societies. Otherwise the societies would not have any fond memories to cling to; the dust of their earth would be their only tie. The most interesting epoch in the history of mankind is that of the adolescence of the nations, for that is the moment when their faculties develop rapidly, a moment which lingers in their memories and serves as a lesson once they are mature. Over here we have nothing like it. The sad history of our youth consists of a brutal barbarism, then a coarse superstition, and after that a foreign, savage, and degrading domination of the spirit which was later inherited by the na-

tional power. We have not known an age of exuberant activity and of the exalted play of moral forces among the people as others have. The period in our social life which corresponds to this moment was characterized by a dull and dreary existence, without vigor or energy, which was enlivened only by abuse and softened only by servitude. There are no charming recollections and no gracious images in our memory, no lasting lessons in our national tradition. If you look over all the centuries in which we have lived and over all the territory which we cover, you will not find a single fond memory, or one venerable monument which forcefully speaks of bygone times or retraces them in a vivid or picturesque manner. We live in the most narrow present, without a past or a future, in the midst of a flat calm. And if at times we strive for something, it is not with the hope and desire for the common good, but with the childish frivolity of the baby who stands up and stretches out his hand to grasp the rattle which his nurse is holding. . . .

The peoples of Europe have a common physiognomy, a family resemblance. Despite their general division into Latins and Teutons, into southerners and northerners, it is plain to anyone who has studied their history that there is a common bond which unites them into one group. You know that not too long ago all of Europe considered itself to be Christian, and this term had its place in public law. Besides this general character, each of these peoples has its own character, but all that is only history and tradition. It is the ideological patrimony inherited by these peoples. There each individual is in full possession of his rights, and without hardship or work he gathers these notions which have been scattered throughout society, and profits from them. Draw the parallel yourself and see how we can profit

from this interchange of elementary ideas, and use them, for better or for worse, as a guide for life. Note that this is not a question of studying, of lectures, or of anything literary or scientific, but simply of a relation between minds; of the ideas which take hold of a child in his crib, which are surrounding him when he plays, which his mother whispers to him in her caresses; of that which in the form of various sentiments penetrates the marrow of his bones, the very air he breathes, and which already permeates his soul before he enters the world and society. Do you want to know what these ideas are?

They are the concepts of duty, justice, law and order. They are derived from the same events which have shaped society; they are the integral elements of the social world in these countries. This is the atmosphere prevailing in the Occident. It is more than history, it is more than psychology; it is the physiology of the European man. What do you have to put in its place over here? I don't know whether one can deduce anything absolute from what we have just said, or whether one can derive strict principles from it. But it is easy to see how this strange situation of a people which cannot link its thought to any progressive system of ideas that slowly evolve one from the other within a society, of a people which has participated in the general intellectual movement of other nations only by blind, superficial, and often clumsy imitation, must be a strong influence on each individual within that people. . . .

God forbid! I certainly do not claim that we have all the vices and that Europe has all the virtues. But I do say that one has to judge a people by studying the general spiritual attitude which is at the base of its existence, and only this spirit can help it to attain a more perfect moral state or an infinite devel-

opment, and not this or that trait in its character.

The masses are subject to certain forces at the summit of society. They do not think for themselves; but among them there is a certain number of thinkers who do think for themselves, and thus provide an impetus to the collective intelligence of the nation and make it move onward. While the small number meditates, the rest feel, and the general movement takes place. This is true for all the peoples of the earth with the exception of a few brutal races whose only human attribute is their face. The primitive peoples of Europe, the Celts, the Scandinavians, and the Germans, had their druids, their sealds, and their bards; all were powerful thinkers in their own way. Look at the people of North America who are being destroyed by the materialistic civilization of the United States: among them are men of great depth.

Now, I ask you, where are our sages, where are our thinkers? Which one of us ever thought, which one of us is thinking today? And yet we are situated between the great divisions of the world. Between the Orient and the Occident. One elbow leaning on China and the other one on Germany. Therefore, we should be able to combine the two principles of an intelligent being, imagination and reason, and incorporate the histories of the whole globe into our own. However, that is not the role assigned to us by Providence. Far from it she doesn't seem to have concerned herself with us at all. Having deprived the hearts of our people of her beneficent influence, she has left us completely to ourselves; she did not want to bother with us, and she did not want to teach us anything. The experience of the age means nothing to us; we have not profited from the generations and centuries which came before us. From looking at

us it seems as though the moral law of mankind has been revoked especially for us. Alone of all the peoples in the world, and we have not learned anything from the world. We have not added a single idea to the pool of human ideas. We have contributed nothing to the progress of the human spirit, we have disfigured it. From the first moment of our social existence we have not created anything for the common good of man. Not a single useful thought has grown in the sterile soil of our fatherland; no great truth has been brought forth in our midst. We did not take the trouble to devise anything for ourselves, and we have only borrowed deceptive appearances and useless luxuries from the devices of others.

A strange fact! Even in the all-inclusive scientific world, our history is not connected with anything, doesn't explain anything, doesn't prove anything. If the hordes of barbarians who conquered the world had not crossed the country in which we live before swooping down on the Occident, we could hardly have filled one chapter of world history. In order to be noticed we had to expand from the Bering Straits to the Oder. Once, a great man wanted to civilize us, and, in order to give us a taste of the lights, he threw us the mantle of civilization; we picked up the mantle, but we did not touch civilization. Another time, a great prince, in associating us with his glorious mission, led us to victory from one end of Europe to the other; when we returned from this triumphal march across the most civilized countries of the world, we brought back only ideas and aspirations which resulted in an immense calamity, one that set us back half a century. There is something in our blood which repels all true progress. Finally, we have only lived, and we still only live, in

order to give a great lesson to a remote posterity which will understand it; today, despite all the talk, our intellectual achievements are *nihil*. I cannot help but admire this astonishing blank and this solitude in our social existence. It contains the seeds of an inconceivable destiny, and doubtless also man's share of that destiny, as does everything which happens in the moral sphere. Let us ask history: she is the one who explains the peoples.

What did we do during the struggle between the energetic barbarism of the northern peoples and religion's high ideals, a struggle out of which rose the edifice of modern civilization? Driven by a fatal destiny, we searched unhappy Byzantium for the moral code which was to educate us, and thus we incurred that people's utter contempt. Shortly before that, an ambitious spirit [Photius] had led this family away from universal brotherhood; thus we adopted an idea which had been disfigured by human passion. At that time everything in Europe was animated by the vital principle of unity. Everything was derived from it, and everything converged on it. The whole intellectual movement of the time tended to bring about the unity of human thought, and all activity originated in this driving need to arrive at a universal idea, which is the essence of modern times. Strangers to this marvelous principle, we became a prey to conquest. Once we were freed from the yoke of the foreigner, we could have profited from the ideas which had blossomed forth during that time among our Occidental brothers, if we had not been separated from the common family. Instead we fell under a harsher servitude, one which was sanctified by the fact of our deliverance.

How many bright lights had already burst forth in the Europe of that day to dispel the darkness which had seemed

to cover it! Most of the knowledge on which humanity prides itself today had already been foreshadowed in men's minds; the character of society had already been fixed; and, by turning back to pagan antiquity, the Christian world had rediscovered the forms of beauty that it still lacked. Relegated in our schism, we heard nothing of what was happening in Europe. We had no dealings with the great event taking place in the world. The distinguished qualities which religion has bestowed on modern peoples have made them, in the eyes of sound reason, as superior to the ancient peoples as the latter were to the Hottentots or the Laplanders. These new forces have enriched the human mind; these principles have made submission to an unarmed authority as gentle as it was brutal before. Nothing of all that took place over here. Despite the fact that we were called Christians, we did not budge when Christianity, leaving the generations behind it, advanced along the path which its divine Founder had indicated in the most majestic manner.

While the world entirely rebuilt itself, we built nothing; we stayed in our thatched hovels. In one word, the new fortunes of mankind did not touch us. Christians, the fruit of Christianity did not ripen for us. . . .

In the end you will ask me: aren't we Christians, and can one become civilized only in the way Europe was? Unquestionably we are Christians; aren't the Abyssinians Christians as well? Certainly one can be civilized in a different manner than Europe was: haven't the Japanese been civilized, even more so than the Russians, if we are to believe one of our compatriots? Do you believe that the Christianity of the Abyssinians or the civilization of the Japanese will bring about that order of things of which I just spoke, or that they constitute the ultimate goal of the human race? Do

you believe that these absurd aberrations from the divine and human truths will make heaven come down to earth? . . .

All the nations of Europe held hands while advancing through the centuries. Today, no matter how many divergent paths they try to take, they always find themselves together. One does not have to study history in order to understand the family development of these peoples. Just read Tasso, and you will see them all bowing down before the walls of Jerusalem. Remember that for fifteen centuries they spoke to God in the same language, lived under a single moral authority, and had the same belief. Remember that for fifteen centuries, each year, on the same day, at the same hour, with the same words, they all together raised their voices towards the Supreme Being, to extol his glory. A wonderful concert, a thousand times more sublime than all the harmonies of the physical world! Moreover, since that sphere where the Europeans live, the only one where the human race can fulfill its final destiny, is the result of the influence that religion had on them, it is clear that up to now our lack of faith or the insufficiency of our dogmas has kept us out of this universal movement, in which the social ideal of Christianity has been formulated and developed. We have thus been thrown into that category of peoples who will profit only indirectly from Christianity's influence, and at a much later date. Therefore, we must try to revive our faith in every possible way and give ourselves a truly Christian enthusiasm, since it is Christianity which is responsible for everything over there. That is what I meant when I said that this education of the human race has to begin once more for our benefit. . . .

Fundamentally, we Russians have nothing in common with Homer, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Germans;

all that is completely foreign to us. But what do you want! We have to speak Europe's language. Our exotic civilization rests so much on Europe's that even though we do not have its ideas, we have no other language but hers; hence we are forced to speak it. If the small number of mental habits, traditions, and memories we have do not link us to any people of this earth, if, in effect, we do not belong to any of these systems of the moral universe, we still, because of our social superficialities, belong to the Occidental world. This link, which in truth is very feeble, which does not unite us so closely to Europe as is commonly thought, and which fails to let every part of our being feel the great movement taking place over there, still makes our future destiny dependent on this European society. Therefore, the more we try to amalgamate with it, the better off we shall be. . . .

Certainly we cannot remain in our desert much longer. Let us do all we can to prepare the way for our descendants. We are unable to bequeath them that which we do not have—beliefs, reason molded by time, a strong personality, opinions well-developed in the course of a long intellectual life that has been animated, active, and fruitful in its results—but let us at least bequeath them a few ideas which, even though we did not find them ourselves, will at least have a traditional element in them, if transmitted from one generation to the next. By this very fact they will have a certain power and a certain profundity which our own ideas did not have. We shall thus be worthy of posterity, and we shall not have inhabited this earth uselessly.

#### RUSSIA'S INTERCOURSE WITH EUROPE

FROM LETTERS TO A. I. TURGENEV, 1833 AND 1835

Here, my friend, is a letter for the illustrious Schelling which I ask you to

forward to him. The idea of writing to him came to me from something you once said about him in one of your letters to her ladyship, your cousin. The letter is open, read it, and you will see what it is about. Since I talked about you in it, I wanted it to reach him through you. It would give me great pleasure if, when you send it to him, you could let him know that I understand German; because I am anxious for him to write to me (if he does me that honor) in the language in which he so often revived my friend Plato, and in which he transformed science into a combination of poetry and geometry, and by now perhaps into religion. And heavens! It is time that all this became one thing. . . .

Please don't be offended, but I prefer your French letters to your Russian ones. There is more free rein in your French letters, you are more yourself. Moreover, you are good when you are completely yourself. . . . Besides, you are essentially a European. You know that I know something about it. You should really wear the garb of a Frenchman. . . .

Like all peoples, we too are galloping today, in our own way if you like, but we are speeding, that is certain. I am sure that in a little while the great ideas, once they have reached us, will find it easier to realize themselves in our midst and to incarnate themselves in our individuals than anywhere else, because here they will find no deep-rooted prejudices, no old habits, no obstinate routines to fight. It seems to me that the European thinker should not be totally indifferent to the present fate of his meditations among us. . . .

What? You live in Rome and don't understand it after all that we have told and retold each other about it! For once, understand that it is not a city like all the others, a heap of stones and of

people; it is an idea, it is an immense fact. One should not look at it from the top of the Capitol or from the gallery of St. Peter, but from that intellectual summit which brings so much delight when one treads on its sacred soil. Rome will then be completely transfigured right before your eyes. You will see the large shadows by which these monuments project their prodigious teachings over the whole surface of the earth, and you will hear a powerful voice resound from this silent body and tell you ineffable mysteries. You will know that Rome is the link between ancient times and new times, because it is absolutely necessary that there be one spot on earth to which, at times, every man can turn in order to rediscover materially and physiological-ly all the memories of the human race, something sensible, tangible, in which the thought of the ages is summed up in a visible manner—and that spot is Rome. Then these prophetic ruins will tell you all the fates of the world; their tale will be a whole philosophy of history for you, a whole doctrine, and more than that, a living revelation. . . . But the

Pope, the Pope! Well, isn't the Pope another idea, a completely abstract thing? Look at the figure of that old man, carried on his litter, under his canopy, always in the same manner for thousands of years, as though it were nothing. Seriously, where is the man in all that? Isn't he an all-powerful symbol of time, not of that time which passes but of the time which does not move, through which everything else passes but which itself remains motionless, and in which and by which everything happens? Tell me, don't you absolutely want a single intellectual monument on the earth, one which lasts? Don't you need something more in the way of human achievement than the pyramid of granite which knows how to fight the law of death, but nothing else?

That great play which is put on by the peoples of Europe, and which we attend as cold and impassive spectators, makes me think of that little play by Mr. Zagoskin whose title is *The Dissatisfied*, which is to be given here and will be attended by a cold and impassive audience. The dissatisfied! Do you understand the malice of that title? What I don't understand is where the author found the characters for his drama. Thank God, here one sees only perfectly happy and satisfied people. A foolish well-being and a stupid satisfaction with ourselves, those are our outstanding traits at the present time; it is remarkable that at the moment when all that the Christian peoples inherited from paganism, the blind and excited nationalism which makes them each other's enemies, is fading away, and when all the civilized nations are beginning to give up their self-complacency; we take it upon ourselves idiotically to contemplate our imaginary perfections. . . .

Take any epoch you like in the history of the Occidental peoples, compare it to the year we are in now [1835], and you will see that we do not embrace the same principle of civilization that those peoples do. You will find that those nations have always lived an animated, intelligent, and fruitful life; that they were handed an idea at the very beginning, and that it is the pursuit of that idea and its development which make up their history; and finally that they have always created, invented, and discovered. Tell me, what idea are we developing? What did we discover, invent, or create? It is not a question of running after them; it is a question of an honest appraisal of ourselves, of looking at ourselves as we are, to cast away the lies and to take up the truth. After that we shall advance, and we shall advance more rapidly than the others because we have come after them, because we have

all their experience and all the work of the centuries which precede us. The people in Europe are strangely mistaken about us. There is Mr. Jouffroy, who tells us that we are destined to civilize Asia. That is all very well; but, I beg you, ask him what Asian peoples have we civilized? Apparently the mastodons and the other fossilized populations of Siberia. As far as I know, they are the only races we have pulled out of obscurity, and that thanks only to Pallas and Fischer. Some Europeans persist in handing us the Orient; with the instinct of a kind of European nationalism they drive us back to the Orient so as not to meet us any longer in the Occident. Let us not be taken in by their involuntary artifice; let us discover our future by ourselves, and let us not ask the others what we should do. It is evident that the Orient belongs to the masters of the sea; we are much farther away from it than the English, and we no longer live in an age when all Oriental revolutions come from the middle of Asia. The new character of the India Company will henceforth be the true civilizing element of Asia. On the contrary, it is Europe to whom we shall teach an infinity of things which she could not conceive without us. Don't laugh: you know that this is my profound conviction. The day will come when we shall take our place in the middle of intellectual Europe, as we have already done in the middle of political Europe; and we shall be more powerful, then, by our intelligence than we are today by our material forces. That is the logical result of our long solitude: great things have always come from the desert.

#### THE LEGACY OF PETER

##### THE GREAT

From "APOLOGY OF A MADMAN," 1837

For three hundred years Russia has aspired to consort with Occidental Eu-

rope; for three hundred years she has taken her most serious ideas, her most fruitful teachings, and her most vivid delights from there. For over a century Russia has done better than that. One hundred and fifty years ago the greatest of our kings—the one who supposedly began a new era, and to whom, it is said, we owe our greatness, our glory, and all the goods which we own today—disavowed the old Russia in the face of the whole world. He swept away all our institutions with his powerful breath; he dug an abyss between our past and our present, and into it he threw pell-mell all our traditions. He himself went to the Occidental countries and made himself the smallest of men, and he came back to us so much the greater; he prostrated himself before the Occident, and he arose as our master and our ruler. He introduced Occidental idioms into our language; he called his new capital by an Occidental name; he rejected his hereditary title and took an Occidental title; finally, he almost gave up his own name, and more than once he signed his sovereign decrees with an Occidental name.

Since that time our eyes have been constantly turned towards the countries of the Occident; we did nothing more, so to speak, than to breathe in the emanations which reached us from there, and to nourish ourselves on them. We must admit that our princes almost always took us by the hand, almost always took the country in tow, and the country never had a hand in it; they themselves prescribed to us the customs, the language, and the clothing of the Occident. We learned to spell the names of the things in Occidental books. Our own history was taught to us by one of the Occidental countries. We translated the whole literature of the Occident, we learned it by heart, and we adorned

ourselves with its tattered garment. And finally, we were happy to resemble the Occident, and proud when it consented to count us as one of its own.

We have to agree, it was beautiful, this creation of Peter the Great, this powerful thought that set us on the road we were to travel with so much fanfare. It was a profound wisdom which told us: That civilization over there is the fruit of so much labor; the sciences and the arts have cost so much sweat to so many generations! All that can be yours if you cast away your superstitions, if you repudiate your prejudices, if you are not jealous of your barbaric past, if you do not boast of your centuries of ignorance, if you direct your ambition to appropriating the works of all the peoples and the riches acquired by the human spirit in all latitudes of the globe. And it is not merely for his own nation that this great man worked. These men of Providence are always sent for the good of mankind as a whole. At first one people claims them, and later they are absorbed by the human race, like those great rivers which first fertilize the countryside and then pay their tribute to the waters of the ocean. Was the spectacle which he presented to the universe upon leaving his throne and his country to go into hiding among the last ranks of civilized society anything else but the renewed effort of the genius of this man to free himself from the narrow confines of his fatherland and to establish himself in the great sphere of humanity?

That was the lesson we were supposed to learn. In effect we have profited from it, and to this very day we have walked along the path which the great emperor traced for us. Our immense development is nothing more than the realization of that superb program. Never was a people less infatuated with itself than the Russian people, such as it has been

shaped by Peter the Great, and never has a people been more successful and more glorious in its progress. The high intelligence of this extraordinary man guessed exactly the point of our departure on the highway of civilization and the intellectual movement of the world. He saw that lacking a fundamental historical idea, we should be unable to build our future on that important foundation. He understood very well that all we could do was to train ourselves, like the peoples of the Occident, to cut across the chaos of national prejudices, across the narrow paths of local ideas, and out of the rusty rut of native customs; that we had to raise ourselves, by one spontaneous outburst of our internal powers, by an energetic effort of the national conscience, to the destiny which has been reserved for us. Thus he freed us from previous history which encumbers ancient societies and impedes their progress; he opened our minds to all the great and beautiful ideas which are prevalent among men; he handed us the whole Occident, such as the centuries have fashioned it, and gave us all its history for our history, and all its future for our future.

Do you believe that if he had found in his country a rich and fertile history, living traditions, and deep-rooted institutions, he would have hesitated to pour them into a new mold? Do you not believe that faced with a strongly outlined and pronounced nationality, his founding spirit would have demanded that that nationality itself become the necessary instrument for the regeneration of his country? On the other hand, would the country have suffered being robbed of its past and a new one, a European one, being put in its place? But that was not the case. Peter the Great found only a blank page when he came to power, and with a strong hand he wrote on it the words *Europe and Occident*: from

that time on we were part of Europe and of the Occident.

Don't be mistaken about it: no matter how enormous the genius of this man and the energy of his will, his work was possible only in the heart of a nation whose past history did not imperiously lay down the road it had to follow, whose traditions did not have the power to create its future, whose memories could be erased with impunity by an audacious legislator. We were so obedient to the voice of a prince who led us to a new life because our previous existence apparently did not give us any legitimate grounds for resistance. The most marked trait of our historical physiognomy is the absence of spontaneity in our social development. Look carefully, and you will see that each important fact in our history is a fact that was forced on us; almost every new idea is an imported idea. But there is nothing in this point of view which should give offense to the national sentiment; it is a truth and has to be accepted. Just as there are great men in history, so there are great nations which cannot be explained by the normal laws of reason, for they are mysteriously decreed by the supreme logic of Providence. That is our case; but once more, the national honor has nothing to do with all this.

The history of a people is more than a succession of facts, it is a series of connected ideas. That precisely is the history we do not have. We have to learn to get along without it, and not to vilify the persons who first noticed our lack. From time to time, in their various searches, our fanatic Slavophiles exhume objects of general interest for our museums and our libraries; but I believe it is permissible to doubt that these Slavophiles will ever be able to extract something from our historic soil which can fill the void in our souls or condense the vagueness of our spirit. Look at Europe

in the Middle Ages: there were no events which were not absolutely necessary in one way or another and which have not left some deep traces in the heart of mankind. And why? Because there, behind each event, you will find an idea, because medieval history is the history of modern thought which tries to incarnate itself in art, in science, in the life of men, and in society. Moreover, how many furrows of the mind have been plowed by this history! . . .

The world has always been divided into two parts, the Orient and Occident. This is not merely a geographical division, it is another order of things derived from the very nature of the intelligent being—Orient and Occident are two principles which correspond to two dynamic forces of nature; they are two ideas which embrace the whole human organism. . . .

The Orient was first, and it spread waves of light all over the earth from the heart of its solitary meditations; then came the Occident, which, by its immense activity, its quick word, its sharp analysis, took possession of its tasks, finished what the Orient had begun, and finally enveloped it in its vast embrace. But in the Orient, the docile minds, who were prostrated before the authority of time, exhausted themselves in their absolute submission to a venerated principle, and one day, imprisoned in their immovable syntheses, they fell asleep, without any inkling of the new fates in store for them; whereas in the Occident the minds proudly and freely advanced, bowing only to the authority of reason and of God, stopping only before the unknown, with their eyes always fixed on the unlimited future. And you know that they are still advancing, and you also know that since the time of Peter the Great we believe that we are advancing with them.

But here comes another new school.

It no longer wants the Occident; it wants to destroy the work of Peter the Great and again follow the desert road. Forgetting what the Occident has done for us, ungrateful towards the great man who civilized us, towards the Europe which taught us, this school repudiates both Europe and the great man; and in its hasty ardor, this newborn patriotism already proclaims that we are the cherished children of the Orient. Why, it asks, do we have to look for lights among the peoples of the Occident? Don't we have in our midst the germs of an infinitely better social order than Europe has? Why don't we leave it to time? Left to ourselves, to our lucid reason, to the fertile principle which is hidden in the depth of our powerful nature, and above all to our saintly religion, we shall soon go beyond those peoples who are a prey to errors and to lies. For what should we envy the Occident? Its religious wars, its Pope, its chivalry, its Inquisition? Truly beautiful things! Is the Occident the native land of science and of all deep things? It is the Orient, as is well known. Let us then withdraw to the Orient, which we touch everywhere and from which erstwhile we derived our beliefs, our laws, and our virtues, all that made us the most powerful people in the world. The old Orient is fading away: well, aren't we its natural heirs? Henceforth it is among us that these wonderful traditions will perpetuate themselves, that all these great and mysterious truths, with whose safekeeping we were entrusted from the very beginning, will realize themselves. Now you understand whence came the storm which beat down upon me the other day, and you see how a real revolution is taking place in our midst and in our national thought. It is a passionate reaction against the Enlightenment and the ideas of the Occident, against that enlightenment and

those ideas which made us what we are, and of which even this reaction, this movement which today drives us to act against them, is the result. But this time the impetus does not come from above. On the contrary, it is said that in the upper regions of society the memory of our royal reformer has never been more venerated than it is today. The initiative, then, has been entirely in the hands of the country. Whether will this first result of the emancipated reason of the nation lead us? God only knows! If one truly loves one's country, it is impossible not to be painfully affected by this apathy on the part of our most highly developed minds towards the things which brought us our glory and our greatness; and I believe that it is the duty of a good citizen to do his best to analyze this strange phenomenon.

We are situated to the east of Europe; that is a positive fact, but it does not mean that we have ever been a part of the East. The history of the Orient has nothing in common with the history of our country. As we have just seen, the history of the Orient contains a fertile idea which, in its time, brought about an immense development of the mind, which accomplished its mission with a stupendous force, but which is no longer fated to produce anything new on the face of the earth. . . .

Believe me, I cherish my country more than any of you. I strive for its glory. I know how to appreciate the eminent qualities of my nation. But it is also true that the patriotic feeling which animates me is not exactly the same as the one whose shouts have upset my quiet existence, shouts which have again launched my boat—which had run aground at the foot of the Cross—on the ocean of human miseries. I have not learned to love my country with my eyes closed, my head bowed, and my mouth shut. I think that one can be useful to



X one's country only if one sees it clearly; I believe that the age of blind loves has passed, and that nowadays one owes one's country the truth. I love my country in the way that Peter the Great taught me to love it. I confess that I do not feel that smug patriotism, that lazy patriotism, which manages to make everything beautiful, which falls asleep on its illusions, and with which unfortunately many of our good souls are afflicted today. I believe that if we have come after the others, it is so that we can do better than the others; it is so that we may not fall into their faults, their errors, and their superstitions. . . . I believe that we are in a fortunate position, provided that we know how to

appreciate it. It is a wonderful privilege to be able to contemplate and judge the world from the height of independent thought, free from unrestrained passions and petty interests which elsewhere disturb man's view and pervert his judgment. More is to come: I am firmly convinced that we are called on to resolve most of the social problems, to perfect most of the ideas which have come up in the old societies, and to decide most of the weighty questions concerning the human race. I have often said it, and I like to repeat it: in a way we are appointed, by the very nature of things, to serve as a real jury for the many suits which are being argued before the great tribunals of the human spirit and of human society.

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### LETTER TO GOGOL

By Vissarion Belinsky

In 1847 Nikolai Gogol (1809-52), whose *Dead Souls* and *The Inspector General* had been hailed by Belinsky (1811-48) as a crusade "against all that is bad in Russia," published his *Selected Passages from a Correspondence with Friends*, a defense of serfdom and autocracy, of Orthodoxy and mysticism. Belinsky could not but criticize this attempt to glorify all that he hated. Surprised at the vehement attacks which met his book, Gogol wrote: "I cannot understand how it happened that I have aroused the anger of all Russians." It was then that Belinsky wrote the letter, printed below, of which Alexander Herzen said: "It is a work of genius—and, I believe, his testament as well." Belinsky's death a few months later saved him from official persecution. In 1849 Dostoevski was condemned to death for "having circulated the letter of the journalist Belinsky full of insolent expressions against the Orthodox Church and the Emperor." The sentence was commuted to penal servitude at the last moment.

Despite government reprisals, the letter circulated in many copies. After much travel through Russia the Slavophile Ivan Aksakov wrote his father: "There is not a high school teacher in the Russian provinces who does not know Belinsky's 'Letter to Gogol' by heart."

For a biography of Belinsky, see Herbert Bowman's *Vissarion Belinsky*. For Belinsky's place in the history of the intelligentsia, see a series of articles by Isaiah Berlin, "A Marvellous Decade," *Encounter*, June, November, and December, 1955, and May, 1956; the third instalment is devoted to Belinsky. See also H. Cloutier, "Belinsky, Advocate of Liberty," *Russian Review*, VIII, 20-33. For a Soviet view, see Z. Smirnova, *The Socio-Political Views of Belinsky*, and E. Kresky's article, "Soviet Scholarship on Belinsky," *American Slavic and East European Review*, VII, 269-75. See also Ralph Matlaw's paperback anthology, *Belinsky, Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov*. There are chapters on Belinsky and the so-called "democratic criticism" in George Lukacs, *Studies in European Realism*, as well as in *Studies in Rebellion* by Evgenii Lampert, and *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* by Rufus Mathewson. There are three paperback biographies of Gogol, by Vladimir Nabokov, Vsevolod Setcharev, and Janko Lavrin, all entitled *Nikolai Gogol*.

You are only partly right in regarding my article as that of an angered man:

From V. Belinsky, *Selected Philosophical Works* (Moscow, 1956), pp. 536-46.

that epithet is too mild and inadequate to express the state to which I was reduced on reading your book. And you are entirely wrong in ascribing that state to your indeed none too flattering references to the admirers of your talent. No, there was a more important reason for this. One could suffer an outraged sense of self-esteem, and I would have had sense enough to let the matter pass in silence were that the whole gist of the matter; but one cannot suffer an outraged sense of truth and human dignity; one cannot keep silent when lies and immorality are preached as truth and virtue under the guise of religion and the protection of the knout.

Yes, I loved you with all the passion with which a man, bound by ties of blood to his native country, can love its hope, its honour, its glory, one of the great leaders on its path of consciousness, development and progress. And you had sound reason for at least momentarily losing your equanimity when you forfeited that love. I say that not because I believe my love to be an adequate reward for a great talent, but because I do not represent a single person in this respect but a multitude of men, most of whom neither you nor I have ever set eyes on, and who, in their turn, have never set eyes on you. I find myself at a loss to give you an adequate idea of the indignation which your book has aroused in all noble hearts, and of the wild shouts of joy which were set up on its appearance by all your enemies—both the non-literary—the Chichikovs, the Nozdrevs and the mayors<sup>1</sup> . . . and by the literary, whose names are well known to you. You see yourself that even those people who are of one mind with your book have disowned it. Even if it had been written as a result of deep

<sup>1</sup> Chichikov and Nozdrev: characters in Gogol's *Dead Souls*; The Mayor: one of the characters of his *The Inspector-General*.

and sincere conviction it could not have created any other impression on the public than the one it did. And it is nobody's fault but your own if everyone (except the few who must be seen and known in order not to derive pleasure from their approval) received it as an ingenious but all too unceremonious artifice for achieving a sheerly earthly aim by celestial means. Nor is that in any way surprising; what is surprising is that you find it surprising. I believe that is so because your profound knowledge of Russia is only that of an artist, but not of a thinker, whose role you have so ineffectually tried to play in your fantastic book. Not that you are not a thinker, but that you have been accustomed for so many years to look at Russia from your *beautiful far-away*,<sup>2</sup> and who does not know that there is nothing easier than seeing things from a distance the way we want to see them; for in that *beautiful far-away* you live a life that is entirely alien to it, you live in and within yourself or within a circle of the same mentality as your own which is powerless to resist your influence on it. Therefore you failed to realize that Russia sees her salvation not in mysticism, nor asceticism, nor pietism, but in the successes of civilization, enlightenment and humanity. What she needs is not sermons (she has heard enough of them!) or prayers (she has repeated them too often!), but the awakening in the people of a sense of their human dignity lost for so many centuries amid the dirt and refuse; she needs rights and laws conforming not with the preaching of the church but with common sense and justice, and their strictest possible observance. Instead of which she presents the dire spectacle of a country where men traffic

<sup>2</sup> Gogol went abroad in 1836 where, with short trips to Russia, he lived for many years.

in men, without even having the excuse so insidiously exploited by the American plantation owners who claim that the Negro is not a man; a country where people call themselves not by names but by sobriquets, such as Vanka, Vaska, Steshka, Palashka; a country where there are not only no guarantees for individuality, honour and property, but even no police order, and where there is nothing but vast corporations of official thieves and robbers of various descriptions. The most vital national problems in Russia today are the abolition of serfdom and corporal punishments and the strictest possible observance of at least those laws which already exist. This is even realized by the government itself (which is well aware of how the landowners treat their peasants and how many of the former are annually done away with by the latter), as is proven by its timid and abortive half-measures for the relief of the white Negroes and the comical substitution of the single-lash knout by a cat-o'-three-tails.<sup>3</sup>

Such are the problems which prey on the mind of Russia in her apathetic slumber! And at such a time a great writer, whose beautifully artistic and deeply truthful works have so powerfully contributed towards Russia's awareness of herself, enabling her as they did to take a look at herself as though in a mirror—comes out with a book in which he teaches the barbarian landowner in the name of Christ and Church to make still greater profits out of the peasants and to abuse them still more. . . . And you would expect me not to become indignant? . . . Why, if you had made an attempt on my life I could not have hated you more than I do for these disgraceful lines. . . . And after this, you

<sup>3</sup> The knout with a single lash used as an instrument of punishment was replaced by the cat-o'-three-tails in the Russian criminal code of 1845.

expect people to believe the sincerity of your book's intent! No! Had you really been inspired by the truth of Christ and not by the teaching of the Devil you would certainly have written something entirely different in your new book. You would have told the landowner that since his peasants are his brethren in Christ, and since a brother cannot be a slave to his brother, he should either give them their freedom, or, at least, allow them to enjoy the fruits of their own labour to their greatest possible benefit, realizing as he does, in the depths of his own conscience the false relationship in which he stands towards them.

And the expression: "*Oh you unwashed snout, you!*" From what Nozdrev and Sobakevich<sup>4</sup> did you overhear this, to give to the world as a great discovery for the edification and benefit of the muzhiks, whose only reason for not washing is that they have let themselves be persuaded by their masters that they are not human beings? And your conception of the national Russian system of trial and punishment, whose ideal you have found in the foolish saying that both the guilty and innocent should be flogged alike? That, indeed, is often the case with us, though more often than not it is the man who is in the right who takes the punishment, unless he can ransom himself, and for such occasions another proverb says: *guiltlessly guilty!* And such a book is supposed to have been the result of an arduous inner process, a lofty spiritual enlightenment! Impossible! Either you are ill—and you must hasten to take a cure, or . . . I am afraid to put my thought into words! . . .

Proponent of the knout, apostle of ignorance, champion of obscurantism and Stygian darkness, panegyrist of Tartar morals—what are you about! Look

<sup>4</sup> Sobakevich—another figure from *Dead Souls*.