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Alexander Herzen

Editor's Introduction

The Russian European

MARINA F. BYKOVA

3

Herzen and the Russian Philosophical-Political Tradition

IGOR' K. PANTIN

11

Herzen on "the Ragged Improvisation of History"

IRINA N. SIZEMSKAIA

31

The Tragedy of Herzen, or Seduction by Radicalism

VLADIMIR K. KANTOR

40

Herzen: In Search of the Russian Personality

ALEXEI A. KARA-MURZA

58

A Metaphysical Perspective on Herzen's

Drawing Closer to Slavophilism

VALENTIN V. LAZAREV

71

The Philosophical-Historical Views of Herzen as a Problem in the History of West European Philosophy

ERIK IU. SOLOV'EV

83

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VLADIMIR K. KANTOR

The Tragedy of Herzen, or Seduction by Radicalism

The author examines Herzen's political outlook as reflected in his journal Kolokol and discusses his relationships with other revolutionary and reformist Russian thinkers of his time.

To tell the story of Herzen is to understand how the radical movement developed in Russia, to understand the focus, meaning, and contradictions of Russian culture before the two revolutions of 1917. Even then, indeed, both Bolsheviks and liberals swore by Herzen's name. It was knocked firmly into the public mind that—as Ogarev wrote and Lenin repeated—"Herzen was the first to reawaken our slumbering free thought; he gave the first impulse to our demands for the people's freedom and a new civil society.... Herzen awakened the sleepest of minds; everyone was gripped by a single idea—popular emancipation. The matter might be understood in different ways, but the motion could no longer be halted. This is well known to the person who gives the first impulse to the motion. It is a law of mechanics. But the credit for the initial striving for emancipation will remain Herzen's."¹ And then there resounded the

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Translated by Stephen D. Shenfield.

canonic lines of Lenin about how the Decembrists had awakened Herzen. . . . And he started to ring out in *Kolokol*. * It is precisely this image of the man who awakens Russia that irritated Russian dissidents. Thus, a poem appeared by Naum Korzhavin under the same title as that used by Ogarev and Lenin—"In Memory of Herzen" [Pamiati Gertsena].**

Love for the Good soothed his heart.
And Herzen slept, innocent of Evil. ...
But the Decembrists gave him a start.
He didn't get enough sleep. That was the seed.
And, driven wild by their audacious deed,
He raised in an appalling worldwide peal.

At the same time—and with Herzen's help, through his texts—Natan Eidelman and other researchers introduced many themes, figures, and concepts that had been prohibited or suppressed by Soviet propaganda. For a very long time Herzen appeared to be a supporter of liberalism; even now, indeed, he so appears—and it is not without grounds that there is an entry about him in the encyclopedia *Russian Liberalism: Ideas and People* [Rossiiskii liberalizm: idei i liudi]. A. Kara-Murza has rightly called him "a liberal and a democrat simultaneously."² Soviet dissidents took notice of his last work "To an Old Comrade" [K staromu tovarishchu], where he speaks out against Bakunin, Nechaev, and Ogarev, demonstrating the catastrophic character—finally perceived by him—of the radical path. But it was precisely this path that he had previously and with fantastic energy called on people to follow. In 1848 he had written: "But whatever comes, it is enough that in this orgy of madness, revenge, strife, retribution, the world will perish, the world in which the new man cannot breathe or live, which holds back the coming of the future. And that is excellent. Therefore long live chaos and destruction!"*** (Struve once remarked that "Herzen is beloved, dear, and great to us, but not as a publicist, not as a thinker, not as a litterateur. Through all these 'forms' of his existence there emanates something more important, more valu-

**The Bell*, a journal published by Herzen in emigration.—Trans.

**The full title of Korzhavin's humorous poem is "In Memory of Herzen or Ballad of a Historic Lack of Sleep."—Ed.

*** Alexander Herzen, *From the Other Shore and the Russian People and Socialism*, with an introduction by Isaiah Berlin (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956; Digital edition © 2011 Murray Altheim), p. 54. (In Russian: A.I. Gertsen, *Sobr. soch. v30t.*, vol. 6 [Moscow: AN SSSR, 1954-64], vol. 6, p. 48.—) Ed.

able, more indubitable."³ He had in mind something very distinct. If Herzen was talented in everything but first in nothing, then why does he remain a problematic figure in Russian culture? And Struve clarifies his idea: his "struggle, of course, was in the closest connection with his essence, a vivid illumination of this essence. But only as an illumination of something even more important, valuable, and deeply rooted. *Herzen was an embodiment of freedom as an eternal element of the human spirit* (added emphasis—V.K.). He was always struggling, always doubting, always searching—and in this struggle with others and with himself, in this searching he was always free, despite all his ardor and passion."⁴ (It was precisely this craving for freedom that determined his character—a fantastically active character, the character of a man who tried to influence reality.

He tried to satisfy this craving for influence by setting up an uncensored press in the West, with a print shop in London. There Herzen published various handbooks under the title *Voices from Russia* [Golosa iz Rossii], the almanac *Polar Star* [Poliarnaia zvezda], and, finally, the most popular organ of the emigre press—*Kolokol*. Chaadaev had written that the symbol of Russia was the bell that does not ring (the "Tsar Bell,"* as an expression of the slavish silence of Russian culture). He had also recalled the bell of Great Novgorod, its clapper torn out by order of Ivan the Terrible. As though in response to his great predecessor, Herzen began to peal a bell, ring it, "summoning the living"—those still capable of awakening from the "deathlike sleep" of Nicholas's reign. The epigraph—*Vivos voco***—was taken from Friedrich Schiller's *Songs of the Bell*—more precisely, from the epigraph to this verse, which is fundamental to the German classic.

But whom did it awaken? To whom was it calling?

The first issue of *Kolokol* came out in London bearing the date 1 July 1857; the date on which it really appeared was 22 June 1857. Over the period 1857-65 *Kolokol* was published in London—up to February 1858 every month, after that twice a month or weekly. The last issue appeared on 1 July 1867. Between 1 January and 1 December 1868 Herzen and Ogarev put out fifteen issues of *Kolokol* in French. In 1870 Ogarev, together with Nechaev, made an attempt to revive *Kolokol*, producing six

issues that differed considerably in their orientation and content from Herzen's old *Kolokol*. The issues did not sell out. It is worth noting that the print runs of Herzen's *Kolokol* reached what was for that time the fantastic figure of 2,500-3,000 copies.

In the first issue of *Kolokol* there appeared a "Letter to the Publisher" [Pis'mo k izdateliu] signed "R.P."—that is, "a Russian person." It is well known that this text was written by Ogarev, who had discussed and condemned the liberal tendencies of the first three volumes of *Voices from Russia*. "Your printing press," he addressed the publisher, "is not one of those printing presses that indifferently print announcements about a lost dog and a decree of the governing senate. Your printing press is a reflection of a certain orientation, certain demands. Your printing press has its own color, like a journal, like a book, and you as the publisher cannot accept just any kind of stuff for your publication. Any publisher is a censor, because any book must possess unity."⁵

Through the mouth of Ogarev, Herzen gave himself permission, as it were, to encroach on liberal freedoms should the occasion arise. And yet Herzen created a free Russian print shop—that is, he placed his printing press at the disposal of *all* manifestations of free Russian thought, offering every freethinking Russian person the opportunity to express himself, some guarantee that his thought would not perish. He wished to turn his printing press and his publications into "a refuge for all manuscripts lost in or mutilated by the imperial censorship"⁶ (p. 370). He published even his vehement opponents. But to an even greater degree he frightened the government, thereby hastening reforms. He described the continuing monstrous manifestations of serfdom, and threatened the government with a new mass peasant uprising like that led by Pugachev. In fact, it was with this that he began his free press. The first leaflet to come out of his print shop (1853) sounded a clear threat. Even before any of the unrest in the village of Bezdna, he promised a new mass uprising in a brochure titled "turn's Day! Iurii's Day!" [Iur'ev den'! Iur'ev den'!]: "A mass uprising is also terrible, but let me say frankly: if emancipation of the serfs cannot be bought otherwise, even then it is not dearly bought."⁷ Nevertheless, reformist motifs were stronger, especially at the start.

"What was new in the work of the free print shop," wrote Eidel'man, "was the struggle for the broadest *mass base* possible under those conditions."⁸ Here, I think, Eidel'man was either disingenuous or captive to inertial thinking. As he himself has written in his many studies of *Kolokol*, the journal was read above all by high officials, the emperor—in short,

*The Tsar Bell, which stands on a pedestal in the Kremlin, is the largest bell in the world. Cast in 1735, it is cracked and does not ring — Trans

**I call the living.—Ed.

"the upper ten thousand" (Lenin). Herzen was not addressing a party or seeking to create one.

This was an attempt to influence the course of reforms coming from above. On 15 February 1858, Herzen wrote in *Kolokol*: "As for us, our path is laid down in advance—we go side by side with him *who emancipates and for so long as he emancipates*; in this we are consistent throughout our lives. However weak our voice may be it is nonetheless a *living voice*, and however softly our *Kolokol* may ring it is nonetheless audible in Russia, and therefore we again express our conviction that Alexander I will not receive with indifference the salutation of people who strongly love Russia—but equally strongly love freedom.... They would wish Alexander II to see in them representatives of the free Russian people, opponents of all that hinders development or limits independence—*not our enemies!*"⁹

Addressing himself to the emperor, Herzen utters the celebrated words of Julian the Apostate: "*You have conquered, O Galilean!*"¹⁰ thereby equating the emperor with Christ. What more is there to say?

Kolokol is a result of the stance adopted by the new emperor, Alexander II, who initiated broad reforms in Russia. And the success of *Kolokol* followed naturally from the point that it was needed above all by the reformers themselves. As Herzen later recalled in *My Past and Thoughts* [Byloe i dumy], the reformers turned to him "for memorandums on the peasant question" while the emperor and the empress read his journal as a bulletin of petitions addressed to them. Herzen himself wrote in the same issue of the journal where he compared the emperor with Christ: "Wishing reliable to alert the sovereign to these measures that conceal the truth from him, we are for the first time sending *Kolokol* in a sealed parcel addressed to him and delivering it into his own hands."¹¹ Curiously enough, this means that among Herzen's trusted agents there was someone who had direct access to the emperor. The new reformers needed *Kolokol* as a platform—detached but at the same time of Russian origin, not foreign—done in discussion of social and state problems. That is why it flourished for several years.

But Herzen's appeal to the emperor contained a characteristic note of reservation: "As for us, our path forward is set: we go with the emancipator, but *only for so long as he remains an emancipator*. Herzen lacked historical patience. Of course, he was neither a politician nor a statesman; he was a dreamer and in his dreams everything was simple to do.

The twenty-fifth issue of *Kolokol*, issued on 1 October 1858, con-

tained a "Letter to the Editor" [Pis'mo k redaktoru] marked by an obvious pathos—the government reformers were under pressure. Don't act in haste, they were being told, for that will only make matters worse. "'Do you hear, poor peasants?' the tsar asks you. 'Your hopes in me are absurd.' In whom can you place your hopes now? In the landlords? Certainly not—they are at one with the tsar and the tsar clearly takes their side. Place your hopes in yourselves alone, in the strength of your hands: *sharpen your axes and get to work—abolish serfdom, in the words of the tsar, from below!* [emphasis added—V.K.]. To work, fellows! Waiting is a wretched business: you've already waited a long time and what has it brought you? In our country we hear it said all the time: our peasants are sheep! Yes, they are sheep until the first Eagle Owl appears.* ... Beware that the sheep should not turn into wolves! No troops could overpower such wolves!"¹² The author would seem to be no Ogarev, but he has a characteristic pathos that resembles that of Ogarev. As Eidel'man notes, "it was precisely this part of the letter that caused a big public stir in Russia. A direct response... was the celebrated bill of indictment drawn up against Herzen by B.N. Chicherin."¹³

Herzen thought that unless reforms proceeded sufficiently quickly a revolution was to be expected in Russia. The chief force would be the "beauty of death" to which Bakunin had referred and about which Herzen too wrote: "Preach the tidings of death, show people every new sore on the breast of the old world, every victory of destruction. Show the feebleness of its efforts, the meanness of its ambitions; show that it cannot recover, that it has no support and no faith in itself, that no one really loves it, that it rests on misunderstandings; show that every victory is at the same time a self-inflicted wound; preach *death* as the good tidings of the coming redemption."**

This criminal estheticism in Herzen's attitude toward social life in Russia was very well discerned by the brilliant historian Boris Chicherin. Like Herzen, Chicherin was a student of Hegel's philosophy, but he interpreted it not as an "algebra of revolution" but as a path toward the real freedom of the individual empowered with all necessary means and toward the overcoming of tyranny in life with the aid of the state. His "Letter to the Editor of *Kolokol*" [Pis'mo k izdateliu "Kolokola"],

*Symbol of wisdom and knowledge.—Trans.

**Alexander Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, p. 87. (In Russian: Gertsen, *Sobr. soch.* v 30 t, vol. 6, p. 76.)—Ed.

published in the journal in 1858, merits a close reading; it is here that he indicates for the first time who in his opinion is "calling Russia to the axe": "You are rather indifferent to civic transformations. You do not see citizenship and enlightenment as a precious growth that needs to be carefully implanted and patiently tended as the best gift of social life. Let all this be swept away in life-and-death struggle; instead of respect for right and law, let us establish the habit of taking up the axe—this is of little concern to you. . . . You open the pages of your journal with an insane appeal to brute force; you yourself, standing on the other shore, v/ith calm and contemptuous irony sentence us to the stick and the axe as though to poetic caprices that it is impolite even to obstruct. The stick from above and the axe from below—such is the tawdry end to a political sermon impelled by passion! Oh, from this point of view you will meet with much sympathy here in Russia!"¹⁴

But why the axe? The axe is a weapon of peasant rebellion that has acquired mythological status in the consciousness of the intelligentsia.* And the peasants must rebel because the commune bears within itself elements of socialism—that is, of the future. Herzen believed that the presence of a communal structure in peasant life was a necessary element, an embryo, a special but *living* form of the socialist organization of life that European thought had attained *in theory*. "The commune has preserved the Russian people from Mongol barbarism, from Imperial civilization, from the Europeanized landowners and from the bureaucracy: the organic life of the commune has persisted despite all the attempts made on it by authority, . . . it has survived right into the period that witnesses the *rise of socialism in Europe*."** For Herzen the discovery

*For Dostoevsky this is a provocation of the devil that has a universal, supra-terrestrial, interplanetary meaning. Remember that in the talk that Ivan Karamazov has with the devil about the infinitude of space there suddenly emerges the theme of the axe. "And can there be an axe there?" Ivan Fyodorovich interrupted, carelessly and disdainfully. . . . 'An axe?' the guest asked back in surprise. 'Yes, what would become of an axe there?' Ivan Fyodorovich cried suddenly, with a sort of savage and insistent obstinacy. 'What would become of an axe in space? What an idea! If it were to fall to any distance, it would begin, I think, flying round the earth, itself not knowing why, as a satellite'" (Dostoevskii 1972-90, vol. 15, p. 75). The axe of peasant war—an image fantastic and terrible, senseless ("not knowing why"), and filled with danger to all humanity. Themes from Herzen never left Dostoevsky's thinking.—Ed.

** Alexander Herzen, *From The Other Shore*, pp. 185-86. (In Russian: Gertsen, *Sobr. soch. V 30-ti t.*, vol. 7, p. 323.—Ed.

of the commune as a factor in the "communist organization" of the Russian peasantry signified the departure of Europe (which, it seemed to him, did not possess this form of life) from the historical stage and its replacement by Russia.

Unless people of culture went to meet the revolution of the masses halfway, he asserted, one of two things would happen—either there would be a merciless uprising like that led by Pugachev or the autocracy, relying on the masses deceived by itself, would suppress enlightenment anyway. "In either case you will perish, and with you the education that you earned the hard way, through bitter humiliations and great injustices."¹⁵ The Westernizers accused Herzen of Slavophilism: he was urging members of the intelligentsia to go and learn wisdom from the illiterate Russian masses and forgetting his own European inclinations and sympathies. Herzen replied: "You love European ideas, and so do I. . . . But you do not want to know that present-day life in Europe does not conform to European ideas."¹⁶ To the West he counterposed his faith in Russia.

Sergei Bulgakov spoke rather harshly of this faith of Herzen's: "What does Herzen counterpose to the European philistinism that so deeply offends him? And why does he consider that Russia is called on to realize the ideas of the West? The answer is striking for its irrelevance to the question and again reflects all the narrowness of Herzen's worldview: because by hook or by crook Russia has preserved the agrarian commune and its recognition of the right of all to the land. . . . There is something truly tragic in this fatal disjuncture between question and answer, scope and strike. . . . Again and with all his strength, Herzen hits his head against the limits of his positive world outlook, which is too narrow for the demands that he makes upon it. And the question asked by Faust is unexpectedly answered by Wagner."¹⁷ But Wagner, as is well known, created a homunculus that refused to submit to its creator. Did Herzen have a homunculus? He did, and his homunculus was Nechaev and company. Furthermore, Wagner's answers resemble the arguments of Smerdiakov, who by killing his father Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, so it seemed to him, had made possible the theoretical spasms and torments of Ivan Karamazov.

This Smerdiakov-Wagnerian tendency (as I shall call it) made itself known from the very start of *Kolokaf's* publication abroad. As I mentioned, Herzen began his free book-publishing enterprise with a threat. And what is striking is that on the eve of the emancipation of the peasants Herzen published in *Kolokol* the notorious "Letter from the Provinces"

[Pis'mo iz provintsii]. The author of this "Letter," let us recall, declared in all seriousness: "Our situation is terrible and unbearable, and only the axe and nothing but the axe can deliver us!" (*Revoliutsionnyi radikalizm v Rossii* 1997, p. 84).^{*} And he signed the "Letter" not just by any name, but—in the firm belief that he was expressing the opinion of all—"A Russian person," thereby showing that he sees the essence of the national psyche and the achievement of national unity in bloody butchery. Indeed, the tradition of violence had too many adepts. Clearly, after the Bolshevik revolution this path was entrenched in the Russian mentality by the era of Leninist and Stalinist terror. For a very long time the text of the letter has been attributed to Nikolai Chernyshevsky. But it is possible to imagine another picture: two friends sit in the same room, where one of them writes the "Letter from the Provinces," discussing with the other the most apt expressions; then they try to divert the blow from *Kolokol* in a purely journalistic manner and the publisher composes a rather flabby riposte to his ostensible opponent. It is no coincidence that in his response to the author of the "Letter from the Provinces" (in the same issue) Herzen even seems to extend and strengthen its logic: "Before summoning the peasants to the axe, it is necessary to command a movement, to have an organization and a plan, the strength and willingness to die in battle, to seize not only the hilt but the blade when the axe is worn out. Do you have all this?"¹⁸ Further on he adds—just to make sure and as though renouncing publication—that it is *not from London that the summons to the axe must issue forth* and finishes his text with a hallelujah: "Who but the sovereign has recently done anything worthwhile for Russia? Here too let us render unto Caesar what is Caesar's!"¹⁹ The threat could hardly be more direct. If you fail to complete the task, then look out! Such is the meaning of his missive.

I recall a conversation with Eidel'man in which I said that I did not agree that Chernyshevsky had written this letter, because its author lets slip that during the Crimean War he was living in "a remote part of the provinces" and Saratov has never merited this description. By this time, moreover, Nikolai Gavrilovich [Chernyshevsky] had already moved to St. Petersburg. The man stuck in the provinces was someone else entirely, a future emigre. "Are you hinting at Ogarev?" Eidel'man asked

thoughtfully. "'R.P.' and 'a Russian person' are, indeed, his constant pseudonyms. But that this should be a friend of Herzen's—hardly. . . . In any case, it is clearly not Chernyshevsky." I was not then thinking of Ogarev, but the quick reaction of my interlocutor showed that *he* was thinking of him.

It is a generally known fact that Ogarev's constant pseudonyms were "R.P." and "a Russian person." It should also be added that one of Ogarev's first publications in the free press—a piece published in *Poliarnaia zvezda* in 1857—was titled "Letter from the Provinces." So the appearance in *Kolokol* in 1860 of a new piece with the same title over the signature "A Russian person" quite transparently informed readers that both texts were by the same author. Let us also not forget that by the end of the 1850s Ogarev—and not Chernyshevsky—was already one of the chief enthusiasts for the creation of a secret revolutionary organization on a national scale. It is pertinent to add that in the note "From the editor" that preceded the notorious letter Herzen more than once calls this letter "friendly"; this is hardly how he would have referred to the authors of *Sovremennik*, Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov, about whom he had published an article just a year earlier under the heading "Very Dangerous!!!" In this article he had called his opponents "darling clowns" and predicted that they would enter government service and have the Order of Saint Stanislav hung round their necks. These people were hardly capable of issuing a summons to the axe—that did not form part of their repertoire.

And indeed this letter was more characteristic of Ogarev—who during his second life in emigration befriended not Herzen but Bakunin, an active supporter of Nechaev and author of the maxim that "the passion for destruction is a creative passion"—than of the ironic and cautious Chernyshevsky, who attached greatest importance not to death but to human life. At the end of the 1860s, Ogarev now openly issued the most rabid appeals to violence in a stylized proclamatory verse entitled "Good cheer, fellows, Russian people!":

Get strong nooses ready
For slender gentry necks! . . .
Rise up, good fellows,
For the great cause of robbery!

Herzen's stance in the prereform and reform period (1857-63) is rather contradictory. He alternated between placing his hopes on Alexander II

^{*}The "Letter from the Provinces" appeared in the 1 March 1860 issue of *Kolokol* over the signature "A Russian person."—Ed.

and making revolutionary appeals of the Bakuninite variety. Believing in the power of the "educated minority" and viewing "superfluous people" as a sort of revolutionary ferment, he did not accept the consistent "enlightenment pathos" of Chernyshevsky, who held that while revolution was inevitable a serious preparatory period was necessary. "A sober understanding of the enormous difficulties that impeded the historical development of Russia from Asiatic despotism to civilization (and only then to socialism)," writes I.K. Pantin, "sharply distinguishes him [Chernyshevsky—V.K.] both from his contemporaries—in particular, from Herzen—and from the following generation of Russian revolutionaries. It was ridiculous to exaggerate the significance of the peasant commune when the country lacked the elementary conditions of civilization—for example, a literate population. It was ridiculous to hope that Russia, while remaining backward, would be able to reach socialism more quickly than the more developed countries of Europe."²⁰ In the same year, Chernyshevsky traveled to London to visit Herzen and try to wean him from his anarchist-radical pathos and remind him of his European principles of polemic: Herzen apologized to *Sovremennik* but a year later attacked its ideas again in his article "Superfluous Men and Bilibious People" [Lishnie liudi i zhelcheviki].

It is worth recalling a line from Tiutchev—a line written in a different context but also applicable to this situation: "It is not given to us to foresee / How our voice will echo." Herzen's voice did not echo where he expected. His statement that it was "necessary to command a movement, to have an organization and a plan" had an impact on a quite different part of society—not on the reformers but on the radicals. It was the attentive readers of precisely these words who would become the demons of the future.

The voluntarism of Herzen's stance also affected the appeals that appeared in *Kolokol* in 1861. This was a time of scattered peasant uprisings and student disturbances, which were suppressed by the autocracy in a cruel and bloody manner. Chernyshevsky took the view that these spontaneous outbursts would lead to nothing but unnecessary sacrifices. This is why in his celebrated proclamation "Homage to the Serfs from their Well-Wishers" (March 1861) he urged: "Until the hour has arrived, you must preserve your strength and avoid futile misfortune. . . . This can only damage the cause and bring ruin down on your own heads. . . . But we are all Russian people and live among you, only for the time being we do not reveal ourselves, because we are preserving ourselves for

the good cause, just as we beg you too to preserve yourselves."²¹ In this context Herzen's appeals in *Kolokol* to the students sounded extremely radical and pitiless: "Do not spare your blood. Your wounds are holy; you are opening up a new era in our history; by your efforts Russia is entering its second millennium, which may easily begin with an expulsion beyond the sea" ("Tret'ia krov'," 10 November 1861).²² This referred to an expulsion of the German dynasty, for this was how Herzen, following Bakunin, perceived the reigning House of the Romanovs. This rabid anti-Europeanism was altogether typical of Russian radicals, who viewed Europe with contempt. There was, of course, an occasion for outright radicalism, for direct statements without the mask of a pseudonym.

After the Manifesto of 19 February (1861) announced that the peasants would be emancipated in April of the same year, a peasant uprising took place in the village of Bezdna under the leadership of Anton Petrov, who declared that the Manifesto was a deception, that no quitrent should be paid any longer, and so on. The uprising was suppressed by troops. Herzen, who a couple of months earlier had called on the students to spill their blood, was full of indignation at "the spilling of peasant blood in Bezdna"²³ and wrote in the 15 June 1861 issue of *Kolokol*: "We do not recognize Russia. . . . Blood steams, corpses topple over! . . . And why such haste to execute Anton Petrov? Who has sentenced him? For what crime has he been sentenced? Evidently they are washing away the bloody traces. What kind of instructions did the soft-hearted tsar really give?"²⁴ A complete break with the imperial reformer—or so it would appear! But on 15 August 1862, in his article "Journalists and Terrorists" [Zhurnalisty i terroristy] (*Kolokol*, 1. 141) he again addresses himself to the emperor and not to the radicals: "If the tsar places himself at the head of the people's cause, where will a power be found mighty enough to fight and resist him in the name of the selfish interests of a caste or estate?"²⁵

In his proclamation "Homage to the Serfs from their Well-Wishers" Chernyshevsky proposed something else to the peasants—that they should take as their model the social and political order of Western Europe (the French and the British): "Among the French and the British there are no serfs. . . . Among them the tsar does not rule over the people: it is the people that rules over the tsar. Because among them the tsar is an elder for the whole people, and the people is in command of this elder, the tsar. . . . And under a tsar it is also possible to live well, as the British and the French live."²⁶ The nihilists (in the leaflet "To the Young Generation"

[K molodomu pokoleniiu]) sharply objected: "They want to turn Russia into Britain and nourish us with British maturity.... No, we do not want British economic maturity—the Russian stomach cannot digest it. . . . We not only can but must arrive at another destination. Our life rests on principles that are quite unknown to the Europeans. The Germans assure us that we shall reach the destination at which Europe has arrived. This is a lie. . . . Europe does not—indeed, cannot—understand our social strivings. Therefore it cannot teach us about economic questions. No one ventures so far in negation as we Russians. . . . We have no fear of the future, as they have in Western Europe. That is why we go boldly forward toward the revolution; we even desire it."²⁷ And in this desperate extremism even Herzen was remote from them.

The young wolves of the emigration had already bared their teeth at Herzen, declaring that he had outlived his time and was incapable of real action. The only thing that they needed from Herzen was material support for their extremist projects. But Herzen was a courageous man, a real fighter. He did not fear the autocracy, nor was he afraid of Nechaev and company; and he did not yield to the persuasion of his old friends—Ogarev and Bakunin. He categorically refused to hand the Bakhmet legacy over to Nechaev. What is more, Herzen wrote a cycle of four letters *To an Old Comrade*, which he addressed to Bakunin, in part to Ogarev, but also to himself, to his own inner depths. In this cycle he reconsidered with an insightful wisdom the same problems he had once raised.

Just as Dostoevsky moved throughout his life toward his "Pushkin" speech (the motifs of which are clear in his earlier works), Herzen may be said to have moved throughout his life toward two texts, diametrically opposed in pathos—*A Letter from the Provinces* and *Letters to an Old Comrade*. Both these texts are associated with the name of Ogarev.

This is one of Herzen's best works. *From the Other Shore* [S togo berega], which Herzen himself regarded as his best book—a young book, full of bitterness, sarcasm, horror, and nostalgic longing in face of the "ruin of Europe"—has been compared (as Herzen himself observed²⁸) to the prophetic books of Jeremiah and Isaiah. *Letters to an Old Comrade* might with equal justification be compared to the Book of Ecclesiastes. In these letters Herzen, as it were, sums up his conclusions. A Testament and a Warning. This was perhaps the heaviest blow against the emerging Russian extremism—a blow, moreover, from an unexpected direction. Herzen's word had too much weight in revolutionary circles. Having

written this work, he suddenly died. This short but extraordinarily dense cycle of letters had used up a great deal of his inner strength. The demons, it should be said, were frightened when they heard of the existence of this text. They did all they could to halt the publication of Herzen's last papers. I shall not speculate about the causes of Herzen's death, but the reaction of Nechaev is very indicative. Let me cite an excerpt from the memoirs of Tuchkova-Ogareva: "At that time we were engaged in printing a posthumous edition of Herzen. Somehow Nechaev and company learned that this volume would contain an article about the nihilists, and so I received in the mail from Germany a paper headed "The People's Retribution"; this missive, evidently written in Geneva, prohibited publication of the works of the thoughtless but talented parasite Herzen; if I and his family ignored this warning, then decisive measures would be taken against us."²⁹ Through the efforts of Herzen's elder son Alexander Alexandrovich, these works came out that same year (1870).

The main pathos of this work is rejection of the anarchistic and voluntaristic approach to revolution. "The slow and confused nature of the course of history infuriates and oppresses us," he writes to Bakunin, but this "us" is characteristic: he is also addressing himself. "We find it unbearable, and many of us, betraying our own reasoning faculties, hurry and hurry others. Is this good or not? Therein lies the whole question."³⁰

In his previous works, Herzen—impatiently awaiting a socialist revolution in Russia—had expressed great doubt regarding the proletariat of Western Europe, hoping that no such class would arise in Russia and that all problems of socialist reconstruction would be resolved by the peasantry and by rejecting the city as an outmoded structure of social development: "It seems to us that the rural populations of the West are its reserve, the people of the *future* Europe, *beyond* urban civilization and the urban mob, beyond the governing bourgeoisie, and beyond capital cities that steal all of a country's strength."³¹ Now, by contrast, he viewed the peasantry as the reserve and defense of the old order: "It is more difficult to fight the conservatism of the people than the conservatism of the monarchy and the church. . . . The further removed a people is from the movement of history, the more stubbornly it holds fast to what is known and familiar."³² So in saying: "I do not believe in the previous revolutionary methods and am trying to understand the *human step* in the past and present in order to know how to keep pace with it."³³ Herzen was already changing his attitude toward the idea of a retreat into barbarism, which had once seemed to him so productive: "That for which thinking people

have forgiven Attila, the Committee of Public Salvation, and even Peter I will not be forgiven us. We have heard no voice from above summoning us to fulfill our destiny, nor do we hear any voice from below showing us our path. For us there exists a single voice and a single authority—the *authority of reason and understanding*. By rejecting these, we become exiles from science and renegades of civilization."³⁴

Herzen adopted this stance in response to the clear predominance at that time of "left radicals" in the Russian revolutionary movement—radicals who threatened not only to destroy the entire culture of the past but also to erase history in general: Nechaev's orientation toward Bakunin with his idea of violent anarchic destruction was not a matter of chance. But Herzen, in pointing out the groundless and Utopian nature of Bakunin's constructions, asks Bakunin an ironic and at the same time frightening question about the *methods* of his future order: "Will you not embark on the new life by preserving a special corps of gendarmes?"³⁵ Theory must base itself not on a concocted and ideal people but on the people as it really is; and therefore schemas taken out of books cannot be imposed on history. Now Herzen writes of such preachers: "Old students living in their enthusiasms, they have moved further away from the people than its accursed enemies. The priest and the aristocrat, the policeman and the merchant, the boss and the soldier have more direct ties with the masses than they do."³⁶

Affirming the complexity of the historical process, Herzen doubts whether it is right totally to destroy the past—above all, art and culture. "The new order must come into being not only by the slashing sword but also by the *power of preservation* [emphasis added—V.K.]. In striking against the old world, it must not only save everything in it that is worthy of salvation but leave to its fate all that does not impede necessary change, all that is diverse and distinctive. Woe to the revolution that is poor in spirit and devoid of artistic sense—the revolution that turns the entire legacy of the past into a boring workshop. . . . And who can say without flagrant injustice that there has not been much of beauty in the past and that it must perish together with the old vessel?"³⁷ The tradition of Herzen in this struggle for culture remains relevant today—all the more so in view of the fact that he himself, while a very broadly educated and many-sided person, was at first willing to welcome the "approaching Huns," to accept and approve the destruction of the new Rome of Europe and imperial Russia. But he was visited by a sort of historical fear, a sort of historical insight. The real experience of clash-

ing with "the young petrels of the coming storm" changed his mind, and his words sounded all the weightier and more cogent for being deeply rooted in his inner struggles.

The new radicals' rejection of "the word" in favor of "the deed" demonstrated to Herzen their spiritual bankruptcy. "As though a *word* were not a *deed*! As though the time for the word may pass? Our enemies have never separated word from deed and have punished people for their *words* not just in the same manner but often more fiercely than for their deeds. . . . The separation and forced counterposition of *word* and *deed* will not withstand criticism, but they do suggest the unfortunate assumption that everything is clear and understood, that nothing remains to be explained and it is necessary only to act."³⁸ To the reproach that he was in essence defending capital, Herzen replied that he was defending "the capital in which the personality and creativity of various ages had been embodied."³⁹ Just a few years earlier it had seemed to Herzen that total destruction could not be avoided. But his strength as a personality manifested itself in the way that seeing the development of life and being persuaded by experience that he had been wrong, he was not afraid to say this openly, even reneging on his earlier defense of the rebel Anton Petrov: "We cannot honestly assume the role of Attila or even the role of Anton Petrov. . . . Wild appeals to close the book, abandon science,* and enter into some sort of senseless battle of destruction belong among the most unrestrained and most harmful kinds of demagogy."⁴⁰ Herzen speaks out against destructive anarchistic ideas and upholds the achievements of civilization: "The unleashed force of extermination will destroy, together with landmarks, those *limits* of human powers that people have attained in all areas . . . since the start of civilization." And art, which he considered—as a means of emancipating the personality—a truly revolutionary phenomenon in the spiritual life of humanity, must not be subject to annihilation: "It is enough that Christianity and Islam should have wreaked havoc upon the ancient world; it is enough that the French revolution should have executed statues, pictures, and memorials; there is no need for us to play the part of iconoclasts."⁴¹

*Thus, Bakunin, addressing himself to young radicals in March 1869, wrote in his pamphlet *A Few Words to Young Brothers in Russia* [Neskol'ko slov k molodym brat'iam v Rossii]: "Do not trouble yourselves with science, in the name of which they would like to bind and weaken you. This science must perish together with the world of which it is an expression. A new and living science will undoubtedly be born later, after the victory of the people, out of the emancipated life of the people" (Rudnitskaia, ed., *Revolutsionnyi rudikalizm v Rossii*, p. 213).—Ed.

Works of this kind belong to the treasure house of the historico-philosophical thought of humanity. They cannot escape the notice of the thinker concerned with the paths of human development. The misfortune is that the so-called makers of history do not wish to accept such texts. But humanity writes its eternal book in which are collected the best texts by thinkers from various countries—a sort of Historical Testament. This work of Herzen's is undoubtedly in that book, and is perhaps being taken into account in some kind of supreme investigation of the fate of humanity. Of course, all of Herzen's literary-philosophical works are capable of giving pleasure by their flight of thought and by their breadth of historical and cultural associations. At the same time, this thinker does not provide solutions to the problems that he poses. He himself remains a problem. The spiritual lesson of his work, however, lies in the sharpness of his thought, its exploration of extremes, and its openness to the experience of history. The task of his successors is to master this lesson.

I would like to conclude this essay with a line from P.B. Struve: "The free spirit of Herzen knew no idols and feared no truth."⁴² More broadly, these words could be applied to practically all major Russian thinkers.

Notes

1. N.P. Ogarev, "Pamiati Gertsena," in N.P. Ogarev, *O literature i iskusstve* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1988), p. 159.
2. A.A. Kara-Murza, "Svoboda litsa—velichaishee delo; na nei i tol'ko na nei mozhnet vyrasti deistvitel'naia volia naroda," in *Russkii liberalizm: idei i liudi* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2000), p. 142.
3. P.B. Struve, "Gertsen," in P.B. Struve, *Patriotica. Politika, kul'tura, religiiia, sotsializm* (Moscow: Respublika, 1997), p. 282.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
5. *Kolokol* 1957,1. [sheet] 1, pp. 3-4, 15 July 1857.
6. A.I. Gertsen, "S togo berega," in idem, *Sobr. soch. v 30 t.* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1954-64), vol. 12, p. 270.
7. E.L. Rudnitskaia, ed., *Revoliutsionnyi radikalizm v Rossii: vek deviatnadsatyi. Dokumental'naia publikatsiia* (Moscow: Arkheograficheskii tsentr, 1997), p. 57.
8. N.Ia. Eidel'man, *Tainxekorrespondenty "Poliarnoizvezdy"* (Moscow: Mysl', 1966), p. 238.
9. Gertsen, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 13, p. 197.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
12. *Kolokol*, 1. 25, 1 October 1858.
13. N.Ia. Eidel'man, *Svobodnoe slovo Gertsena* (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 1999), p. 271.
14. B.N. Chicherin, "Pis'mo k izdateliu 'Kolokola,'" in idem, *Filosofiiia prava* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1998), p. 368.

15. Gertsen, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 12, pp. 83-84.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 425.
17. S.N. Bulgakov, "Dukhovnaia drama Gertsena," in idem, *Soch. v2t.*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), p. 129.
18. Gertsen, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 14, p. 243.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
20. I.K. Pantin, *Sotsialisticheskaia mysl' v Rossii: perekhod ot utopii k nauke* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1973), pp. 100-1.
21. Rudnitskaia, ed., *Revoliutsionnyi radikalizm v Rossii*, pp. 91-92.
22. Gertsen, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 15, p. 185.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8.
25. *Ibid.*, vol. 16, p. 225.
26. Rudnitskaia, ed., *Revoliutsionnyi radikalizm v Rossii*, pp. 89, 100.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 99, 100.
28. Gertsen, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 5, pp. 223-24.
29. N.A. Tuchkova-Ogareva, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1959), p. 260.
30. Gertsen, *Sobr. soch.*, vol. 5, p. 576.
31. *Ibid.*, vol. 14, p. 173.
32. *Ibid.*, vol. 20, p. 584.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 586.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 589.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 585.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 589.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 581.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 587.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 593.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 588, 592.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 593.
42. Struve, "Gertsen," p. 291.