

RUSSIA'S PETER AND PAUL FORTRESS:  
FROM HEART OF EMPIRE TO MUSEUM OF THE REVOLUTION, 1825-1930

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by  
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This project is a cultural, intellectual, and spatial history of Russia's Peter and Paul Fortress – the founding site of St. Petersburg, the imperial mausoleum of the royal family, and the most notorious political prison of the Romanov regime. In these citadel cells the empire's most illustrious dissidents – Bakunin, Dostoevsky, Chernyshevsky, Nechaev, Kropotkin, Figner, Trotsky – not only suffered and died, but also wrote novels and treatises, planned future political activities, and reimaged what it meant to be a revolutionary actor in tsarist Russia. Over the course of a century, the Fortress was transformed by dissident actors from a realm of discipline into a stage of radical subjectivity and, eventually, a 'holy site' of the early soviet regime. Excavating exactly how this occurred reveals a rich genealogy of revolutionary agency and subversive self-narration in the tsarist cell. This work is thus not only intended as a new empirical study of this over-determined space – it also argues for a novel understanding of the birth of the Russian revolutionary tradition; the history of modern state incarceration; and the entwinement of symbols, spaces, and subjects in political cultures of dissent.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nicholas Bujalski is a native of New England. He received his B.A. in History and Russian Language from Middlebury College in 2007, during which time he also spent two academic semesters in Yaroslavl', Russia. After a year working in Kyiv, Ukraine, he joined the Department of History at Cornell University, where he specialized in Russia, modern Europe, intellectual history, and spatial theory. Thanks to the Social Science Research Council and the Cornell Institute of European Studies, he was able to reside in St. Petersburg and pursue archival research across Russia and Western Europe for most of 2015 and 2016. Since returning to Ithaca, Nicholas Bujalski has enjoyed the opportunity to lead several undergraduate seminars (on revolutionary Russia, the modern city, and the concept of despair), as well as write – notably, through the support of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies. In the future, he hopes to continue teaching as well as pursue new research on the peculiarities of Trotsky's historical materialism and the history of radical death.

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I cannot imagine a better place than Cornell to have undertaken this strange journey into Russian revolutionary history. The intellectual as well as personal debts I have accumulated here over the years are far too many to adequately mention. I possess immense gratitude towards Claudia Verhoeven, Ray Craib, Camille Robcis, and Enzo Traverso. I would not be where I am today if not for their lasting guidance, support, and faith in me. I must also mention the impact of Holly Case, Durba Ghosh, Paul Friedland, and Robert Travers – as well as thank Barbara Donnell for all of her years of help and patience.

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After leaving the archives – when I first sat down and began to write – the Curtins welcomed me into their home in Cork for two idyllic months. I cannot begin to express my immense gratitude and lifelong affection for Mary, Paul, Rebecca, and Ian.

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Finally, I lack the words to express my appreciation and love for Valeria Dani. I hope she knows that she is my favorite interlocutor – and that her name is to be found here as a sacred inscription in the top right corner of every page.

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It has been said that a finished work is the death mask of its conception. If this is the case, then any vitality present here is thanks solely to the help of those mentioned above. Any *rigor mortis*, on the contrary, is my fault alone.

*To my parents and grandparents.*

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## Introduction

*Redivivus et ultor*



Figure 1: Russia's Peter and Paul Fortress [GARF f. 533, op. 6, d. 5763, l. 2].

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At the very center of St. Petersburg, on a small island in the Neva River, stands the Peter and Paul Fortress.

With its low walls and cathedral spire rising opposite the imperial palace, this citadel was once the symbolic heart of Imperial Russia – an absolutist center of political and religious ritual. It was here that Peter the Great laid the founding stone of his northern capital in 1703; it was here that the autocracy staged grand ceremonies of

state legitimacy; it was here that the Romanov dynasty entombed their dead with all the splendor of an empire.

However, the Peter and Paul Fortress did not solely serve as a sacred imperial site. During the long nineteenth century, this structure also held tsarist Russia's most notorious political prison. Even as a series of Romanov emperors held their pageants within its walls, generations of incarcerated radicals passed through the citadel grounds. In the words of Decembrist A.M. Murav'ev, the Peter and Paul Fortress was "a hideous monument to absolutism, [facing] the imperial palace like a fatal warning that one cannot exist without the other."<sup>1</sup>

The profound struggle between the old regime and its revolutionary opponents was indelibly registered in these stones. In the Peter and Paul Fortress, the empire's most notorious radicals – Bakunin, Chernyshevsky, Nechaev, Kropotkin, Figner, Trotsky – not only suffered and died, but also wrote novels and treatises, planned future political activities, and reimagined what it meant to be a revolutionary actor in tsarist Russia. As the practice of political imprisonment intensified over the course of the long nineteenth century, the Fortress became a central site for Russian revolutionaries to understand the nature of their cause. The carceral heart of the old regime was slowly contested: transformed from a space of mute discipline into a classroom, a writing desk, a stage of the revolution.

It is no accident that the list of those confined in the Peter and Paul Fortress reads as a pantheon of Russian dissent – for radicals themselves here learned to actively craft their incarcerations into political hagiographies. By the 1860s, critics of

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. Murav'ev, "Moi zhurnal," in *Vospominaniia i rasskazy deiatelei tainykh obshchestv 1820-kh godov*, eds. Iu.G. Oksman and S.N. Chernov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'nposelentsev, 1931) 1:141.

the tsarist regime began to see the Fortress as “our sacred dwelling place, our melancholy Peter and Paul Monastery on the Neva.”<sup>2</sup> After the October Revolution, the citadel was not torn down but rather declared a Museum of the Revolution. For the fledgling soviet state, the former heart of empire had been transformed by a century of struggle into a radical “holy of holies, our church.”<sup>3</sup>

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This dissertation is a history of the Peter and Paul Fortress, traced from the year 1825 to 1930: from the moment of the Russia’s first modern mass imprisonment to the citadel’s conversion into a radical museum. In telling this story, the present study has two overarching aims. It not only intends to provide a rigorous empirical account of one of the most overdetermined spaces in Russian history. It also seeks to explore the complex life that the Fortress led in the political cultures of both the Romanov autocracy and its discontents – the practices and narratives through which a heart of empire was symbolically coopted by the Russian revolutionary tradition. As such, it is both a radical carceral history, as well as a *history* of radical carceral history: taking as its object not only the victories and defeats, the heroes and villains of a century of political imprisonment – but also the processes by which the very concepts of martyrdom, sacrifice, and dissident selfhood were first given modern articulation in the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

We could thus call this study an intellectual history of a political space, or perhaps a spatial history of a political culture. I am convinced that entering the grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress with an eye to both its concrete and discursive

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<sup>2</sup> Iskander [A. Herzen], “VII let,” *Kolokol* 187, July 15, 1864.

<sup>3</sup> P.N. Stolpianskii, *Petropavlovskaiia Krepost’: Kolybel’ Peterburga i zashchita samodержaviiia – putevoditel’* (Leningrad: Gos. Izd., 1926), 48.

existence brings new insight not only to our understanding of the Russian past, but also to wider discussions of modern radicalisms and the historical process as a whole. Gazing into and out from these granite walls, we gain an original perspective on the birth of a revolutionary tradition; the nature of political imprisonment in European modernity; and the entwinement of symbols, spaces, and subjects in global cultures of dissent.

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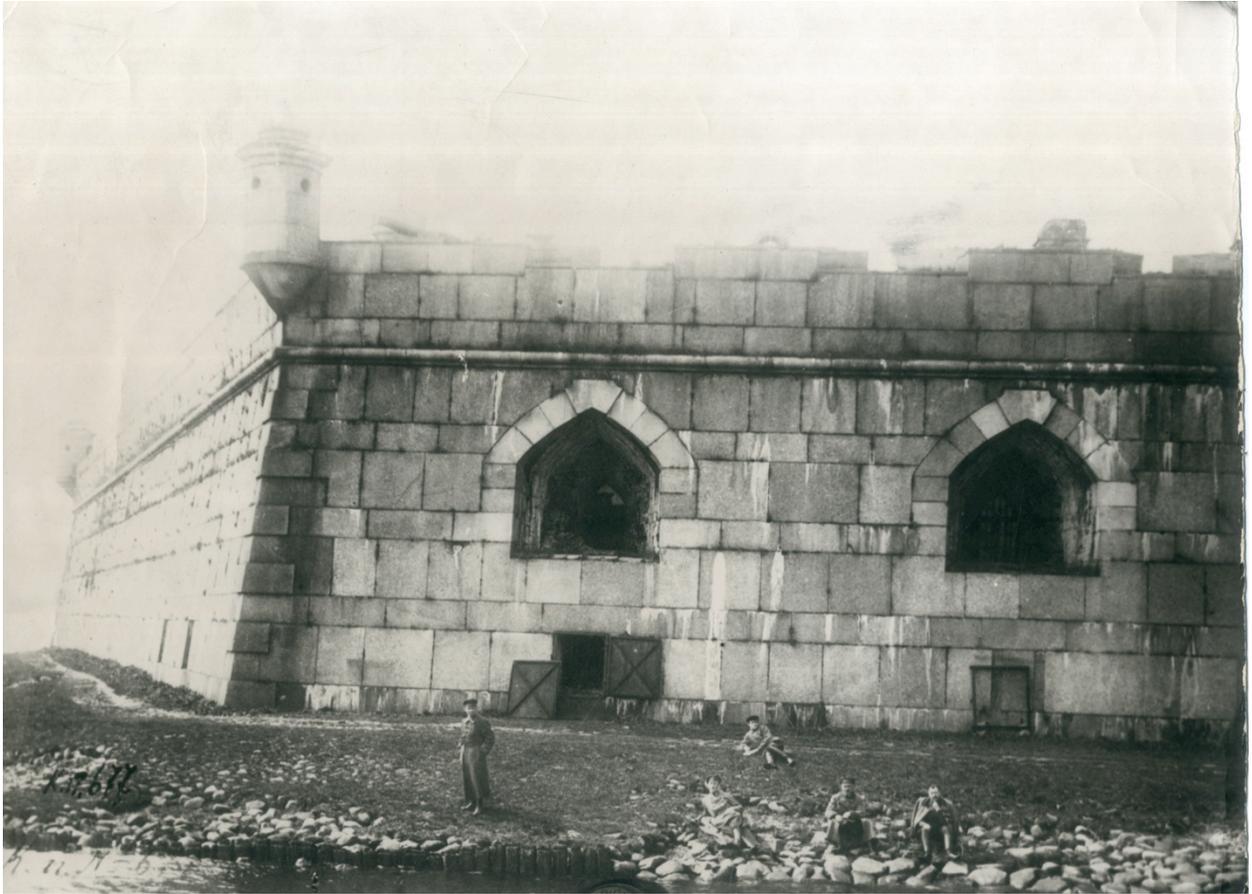


Figure 2: Soldiers of the garrison rest beneath the granite walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress, shrouded in the Baltic fog [GARF f. 533, op. 6, d. 5763, l. 6].

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I cannot recall the exact moment when this project first occurred to me. The Peter and Paul Fortress seems to be ever-present in our histories of modern Russia – a vague shape just off-stage, a dim mass in one’s peripheral vision. We could concur with the words of one populist prisoner: “I am not sure why, but the Fortress always seemed to me to be a dark spot, spoiling the impression of a beautiful painting on the Neva.”<sup>4</sup> This site holds its own black gravity, binding within itself so many paths and stories. A scholar follows the life of an emperor, the career of a revolutionary, the footnotes at the bottom of a page – only to be led again and again to this citadel. Just as its cathedral spire rises over the city of St. Petersburg, so too does the Fortress loom over the history of modern Russia. A central shape, a pressing shape – yet somehow blurred, indistinct.

These hazy edges are surely due, at least in part, to a lack of scholarly attention. Upon visiting Russia in 1858, Alexandre Dumas, *père* – dubbing the Peter and Paul Fortress “the Bastille of St. Petersburg” – claimed that “if ever its secret records are revealed; if the time comes when its dark, foul, icy dungeons are flung open to the light of day like those of our Château d’If, then Russia will begin to learn her true history. All she has now is legend.”<sup>5</sup> The same could be said today. We have no rigorous English-language history of the Peter and Paul Fortress. And while a selection of monographs do exist in Russian, these texts – predominantly written in the first decades after the October Revolution – should be taken more as documents

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<sup>4</sup> P.S. Polivanov, “Alekseevskii ravelin,” in A.A. Matyshev, ed., *Alekseevskii ravelin*, ed. A.A. Matyshev (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990), 2:320.

<sup>5</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Adventures in Czarist Russia* (Philadelphia: Chilton Co., 1961 [1859]), 78-9.

symptomatic of their political moment than last words on the subject.<sup>6</sup> No modern academic study of the Peter and Paul Fortress exists in any language. A key goal of the current project is thus to explore the territory of this ‘dark spot’ for both specialist and non-specialist readers alike. As we shall see, not only do we have need of a new history – this history can also speak new things.

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<sup>6</sup> M.N. Gernet’s *History of the Tsarist Prison* is still the standard work on the Peter and Paul Fortress, despite the fact that its superb empirical work is structured around unquestioningly worshipful vignettes and glowing quotations from Stalin’s collected works. See M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Mos. Gos. izd./Gos. izd. iuridicheskoi literatury, 1941-63). For the other classic study (an earlier, and even more polemical work), see P.E. Shchegolev, *Alekseevskii ravelin: Kniga o padenii i velichii cheloveka* (Moscow: ‘Kniga’, 1989 [1929]). In the cultural-intellectual history of political imprisonment in modern Russia, these texts must be taken as expressive objects of analysis themselves.



Figure 3: An indicative photograph of a Peter and Paul Fortress Cell from the end of the nineteenth century: blurred, dim, overexposed yet indistinct [GMPIR f. III BC-6708/6].

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Over the course of nine chapters, this dissertation develops a holistic picture of the Peter and Paul Fortress' transformation from the heart of an empire into a museum of a revolution – grounding new historiographical insights in a robust historical narrative.

This has been made possible through the use of a wide array of primary sources. Chief among these are the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant papers – over a year was spent at the Russian State Historical Archive reading through hundreds of thousands of internal Fortress documents, most of which have never before been discussed in print. Beyond these texts of the former prison regime, I worked with further collections in fourteen separate institutions across Russia and Western Europe. These archives, libraries, and museums furnished a host of additional primary sources – police reports, radical correspondences, court records, personal testimonies, organizational documents, confessions, poems – that give us great insight into the practical and discursive life of the Peter and Paul Fortress over the course of the long nineteenth century.

Furthermore, in terms of sources, special mention must be made of the memoir literature. To paraphrase Trotsky: revolutionary movements are always verbose. The Peter and Paul Fortress was a privileged site for Russia's radical imaginaries, and a wealth of autobiographies have been written on incarceration in its walls.

Most existent studies of the revolutionary tradition make use of these many memoirs. However, as my project took shape, I slowly began to feel discontent with the usual place afforded ego documents in our histories of the modern cell – as individual records, empirical accounts, or funds of narrative color. I realized that

Russian memoirs of political imprisonment should not be taken as a clean, mimetic inheritance. Rather, these were expressions of a bounded tradition of prison writing in tsarist Russia – a tradition with its own mechanisms and tropes, its own pathways of production and distribution, its own vision of the radical subject and the spaces of the political. I thus began to think of these autobiographies not in terms of individual memoir sources, but rather as a distinct political-aesthetic genre whose rise and fall was itself crucial to the intellectual history of the Peter and Paul Fortress. These reflections lie behind many of the empirical insights and theoretical interventions made over the pages to come. It is with this importance in mind that I have also created a separate, annotated bibliography of Peter and Paul Fortress prison memoirs. My attempt to catalogue this rich tradition is included as Appendix I of the present dissertation.

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From even this brief discussion of primary sources, we have begun to see some of the historiographical stances of the present study raise their heads. Each of the nine chapters attempts to move in the space of both history and theory – to tell a story about the past while also unpacking its significance for the ways we think about the past; to capture both the granite horizontality as well as the cathedral-spire verticality of the Fortress over time. In this task, we will most often find ourselves traveling with companions from three historiographical spheres: cultural-intellectual history, spatial theory, and carceral studies. It is to the thought of these fields that I owe my greatest intellectual debts, and it is to the conversations of these disciplines that I hope to add a word or two of my own.

In attempting a study of modern Russian carceral cultures that eschews top-down statist perspectives for what we could call instead a “history from the side,” I am influenced by several currents in cultural and intellectual history.<sup>7</sup> Recent works by Irina Paperno, Victoria Frede and Claudia Verhoeven have looked to Tartu School cultural semiotics (e.g. Lotman, Uspenskii, Ginzburg) and Frankfurt School critical theory (e.g. Benjamin, Adorno) to examine how new forms of subjectivity and political action arose within the symbolic systems and urban spaces of Russian modernity.<sup>8</sup> My project thus distinguishes itself from older approaches to Russian radicalism – both the idealist epistemologies of the classic mid-century intellectual histories as well as more recent social histories of dissent. While the former problematically treated ideas as detached from their social and material surroundings, and the latter uneasily sought to grasp revolutionary actors as a social class, my project proposes a new history of the Russian intelligentsia as a particular *community of self-narration* – both the producer of a revolutionary discourse and the dialectical product of this same discourse.

In this analysis of how radical selfhood was staged and reproduced within the space of the prison cell, there is also a debt to recent work on ‘Soviet Subjectivity.’<sup>9</sup> However, the present dissertation aims to be more than just a chronological displacement of this optics onto the imperial period. Influenced by the historical

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<sup>7</sup> This phrase is taken from Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), vii.

<sup>8</sup> For an introduction to this new wave of intellectual historians, see Victoria Frede, “Russian Intellectual History since 1991: Overcoming the Left-Right Divide,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 4 (2011): 807-15.

<sup>9</sup> For representative works in this field, see Igal Halfin, *Red Autobiographies: Initiating the Bolshevik Self* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011); and Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

epistemologies of thinkers such as Foucault and Koselleck, this project is not content with simply proposing the existence of distinct revolutionary visions of the self in the long nineteenth century, but also seeks to rigorously reconstruct their narratives, mechanisms, and conceptual conditions of possibility. By its conclusion, this dissertation will in fact propose a new framework for understanding how ideas of self and history change over time: a theory of *uneven and combined development in intellectual history*. It is only through these steps that we can begin to approach the history of an ‘Intelligentsia Subjectivity’ – one which, I argue, was always grounded in the space of the political prison.<sup>10</sup>

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Yes, a *grounded* subjectivity – for intellectual and cultural developments do not occur in a vacuum. Histories of the radical Russian intelligentsia must be rooted in their spaces. In recent years, Russian historiography has made a much-celebrated turn towards spatial history. New studies in this mold have used the ideas of figures such as Lefebvre, Merleau-Ponty, and Massey to examine the social, political, and existential production of place in Russian history.<sup>11</sup> The key insight of these theories is that space is not merely an empty grid upon which history unfolds – rather, spaces are historical artifacts, with their meanings and uses subject to political dispute, lived negotiation, and radical usurpation.

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<sup>10</sup> Thus, while this work is not a pure *Begriffsgeschichte*, it is certainly influenced by this model’s aims.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Malte Rolf, “Importing the ‘Spatial Turn’ to Russia: Recent Studies on the Spatialization of Russian History.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11 (2010): 359-80; and Mark Bassin, Christopher Ely, and Melissa K. Stockdale, eds., *Space, Place and Power in Modern Russia: Essays in the New Spatial History* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

The present project seeks to both complement this growing literature and explore its further potential. For it is not only intended as a spatial history of the Peter and Paul Fortress – a new interpretation of how this site was constructed through particular practices and representations. It also hopes to further spatialize our cultural-intellectual histories of Russian radicalism. Emplacing conceptual developments allows us to understand how the Peter and Paul Fortress became a key site of meaning production for the revolutionary intelligentsia, how this space itself allowed and reproduced particular types of radical self-conception, and how conflicts between dissident political cultures and hegemonic state formations are waged on the level of contested spaces. In this way, I hope to tell a story of a revolutionary Russian carceral culture not only through its epistemological terrains, but also in the lived spaces – both concrete and representational – that structured its development.<sup>12</sup>

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Finally, the Peter and Paul Fortress was above all a functioning carceral institution – and despite my resistance to the label, the present dissertation is very much a prison history. In the past, studies of modern Russian imprisonment have generally taken one of three approaches:

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<sup>12</sup> In this undertaking, I am most indebted to two recent works that also seek to ‘spatialize’ Russia’s intellectual history (or, perhaps, ‘intellectualize’ spatial history) through analyses of a single site: Slezkine’s study of the House of Government and Randolph’s history of the Bakunin family estate. While some of the bolder leaps in the present dissertation may be more reminiscent of the former work, I believe that we must be careful not to simply take individual places as empty ‘stages’ of intellectual history – and that Randolph’s framework presents a more sophisticated approach how concepts and spaces dialectically act upon one another in history. Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); and John Randolph, *The House in the Garden: The Bakunin Family and the Romance of Russian Idealism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

- A. Partisan celebrations of heroic revolutionaries;
- B. Moralistic accounts of individual victims;
- C. Foucauldian structuralism.

If we seek to understand modern carceral spaces as contested, conceptually-invested sites of dialectical struggle, then none of these models are adequate. We should not be satisfied with [A] the unselfconscious reproduction of tsarist-era prison mythologies; or [B] the evacuation of political agency and naturalization of the liberal subject against a horizon of ‘human rights’; or [C] a master narrative of internalized discipline in which there are, in fact, no subjects: only carceral ‘subject effects’ produced by flows of juridico-epistemological power.<sup>13</sup>

This last Foucauldian reading is the most sophisticated – and thus most pernicious – of these three approaches. While the seismic re-ordering of carceral studies after the publication of *Discipline and Punish* has brought much to our understanding of the modern prison – indeed, it remains perhaps the most powerful means for interrogating how structures of domination reproduce themselves within the contemporary prison-industrial complex – its innovations possess many blind spots. In particular, I believe that the top-down histories this optics generates are predicated upon an inaccurate vision of voiceless subjects: a vision that perversely mirrors the intentions of incarcerating states themselves.

Against this erasure of imprisoned selfhoods, I believe that the discipline of carceral studies needs a ‘return to the subject,’ facilitated by cultural and intellectual

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<sup>13</sup> With this final point, I am referring in particular to the Second Part of the Third Chapter of *Discipline and Punish* (‘The Means of Correct Training’), with its discussion of modern carceral practices as “technique[s] for constituting individuals... [who are thus] a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’.” See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995), 194.

history.<sup>14</sup> The present study is an attempt to show how this might be done. For as we shall see in our history of the Peter and Paul Fortress, individuals were not dissolved at prison gates: their means of self-making were not seized by the state. Rather, every imprisoned subject takes with them a set of culturally and historically specific modes of self-narration. The ways in which these ‘technologies of the self’ collapse, persevere, or even thrive in a society’s limit spaces must be carefully investigated within the concrete and discursive conditions of a particular historical moment – they cannot be simply written off, *prima facie*, as ‘disciplined’ into non-existence.<sup>15</sup>

In the case of political imprisonment in tsarist Russia, this dissertation argues that the revolutionary *Bildungs*-memoir genre proved especially amenable to grasping the self in the cell. As we shall see, a tradition of radical autobiographics arose that allowed even the direst solitary confinement to be integrated into political narratives of personal and world-historical development. Indeed, these stories of the self proved themselves so capable of seizing the experience of imprisonment – finding the Peter and Paul Fortress to be not only politically legible, but a fitting stage for the genre’s

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<sup>14</sup> In this task, I am indebted to a series of prison histories that have also sought to move against Foucault and recover incarcerated agencies. In particular, we should look to Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); as well as – in the field of Eastern and Central European History – Anna Müller, *If the Walls Could Speak: Inside a Women’s Prison in Communist Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Padraic Kenney, *Dance in Chains: Political Imprisonment in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Judith Pallot and Laura Piacentini, *Gender, Geography, and Punishment: The Experience of Women in Carceral Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Likewise, we should also be wary of *overvaluing* the concept of agency: of simply flipping Foucault on his head, and replacing one form of structuralism with another. Thus, many of the critiques of his contemporaries – who sought to preserve a space for political subjects by simply positing a metaphysics of agency – should also be avoided by historians. I am thinking, in particular, of Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

further reproduction – that a complex series of mythologies and tropes soon arose around prison walls, taking on powerful discursive lives of their own.

With this in mind, I believe that histories of political imprisonment must return to the incarcerated subjects of approach ‘A’ in order to truly grasp the ways in which individuals have inhabited and shaped the cell over time. To be clear – I am not advocating for a naïve resurrection of old prison hagiographies. Rather, in a Hegelian motion, we must return to this tradition, but in full self-consciousness of its historical specificity. Every imprisoned subject is located – as both producer and product – within the baroque prison mythos of their time. Thus: our task is not, as one recent Foucauldian historian has phrased it, to cut through “a mountain of [radical historiographical] drivel about revolutionaries and their mistreatment.”<sup>16</sup> The dissident martyrologies and subject-imaginaries surrounding the Peter and Paul Fortress do not need to be stripped away like so many layers of soot and graffiti in order for the actual nature of this space to be revealed. Rather, it is in the development of these myth-making apparatuses and prison narratives *themselves* that we find the Fortress’s real historical existence.

We can thus say, strangely enough, that approaching modern prison subjectivities demands that we stand both ‘with and against’ Foucault.<sup>17</sup> That is – we must critique his legacy of structuralist overdetermination through the philosopher’s own contrary insights into discourse theory and historical ‘technologies of the self.’ The status of the imprisoned subject cannot be taken for granted – rather, the experience of incarceration has always been historically understood through (and,

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce F. Adams, *The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia, 1863-1917* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>17</sup> My sincerest apologies to A. Gramsci, P.P. Pasolini, and V. Dani.

indeed, served as a stage for) particular regimes of subject constitution. I thus believe that the field of carceral history can only be re-fertilized through a *sparagmos* of Foucault. We can agree that the prison has been a crucial site for modern processes of individuation without seeing these processes as wholly homogenous and state-driven: the production of subjects in the cells of tsarist Russia involved far more complex, contested flows of discourse and agency. Imprisoned actors escaped the interpolating vision of state discipline – their historians should strive to do so as well.

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Thus do we see some of the larger theoretical goals of the current dissertation – its attempt at an intellectual history reinvigorated by spatial theory, and a carceral history reinvigorated by the history of culture and ideas.

As our study plays cat's cradle with these threads, it will argue for an original understanding of the revolutionary Russian intelligentsia as a community of self-narration arising out of a particular epistemological and political-aesthetic constellation; for a novel approach to how ideas change over time in combined and uneven ways; for a sensitivity to the processes by which concepts cluster around (and dialectically produce) particular spaces; and for a post-Foucauldian approach to prison history. Each of these patterns is pursued within a new story of the Peter and Paul Fortress – and revolutionary Russian carceral cultures more broadly – from 1825 to 1930.

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One of the greatest difficulties in assembling the present study was finding the proper balance between its empirical/narrative and intellectual/theoretical aims. I have settled

on a roughly chronological framework, where we will move from the imperial image of the Peter and Paul Fortress and the first modern mass imprisonment in its walls through the slow development of a radical carceral cosmology and the eventual establishment of a Museum of the Revolution.

Each chapter takes as its object the concrete and discursive existence of the Fortress at one point in its history – a succession of synchronic slices that come together to form a larger diachronic whole. I can already anticipate some lines of criticism regarding this structure. In particular, many of these sections center around the particular imprisonment of a single radical group or revolutionary individual. Let us be clear: this is not a naïve embrace of an outmoded biographical historicism – or, god forbid, history understood as the collected stories of great women and men. Rather, as this introduction has foreshadowed, I will argue that the very concept of radical selfhood was shaped over time on the stage of the tsarist political prison. Each chapter that takes a particular person as its primary object is not positing the ‘human’ as an essential, ahistorical ground. These sections instead approach these individuals as expressions of particular, historically-bounded understandings of the radical self. In this way, while I believe that elements of the present dissertation do promise to intervene in discussions of specific figures within the Russian revolutionary canon, the piece as a whole is not bound by any subject-centric framework. I have not written a biography – this is rather a history of how the prison cell was transformed into a site through which generations of Russian radicals understood the biographical. Thus, while each synchronic moment in this study is able to stand on its own, these are

intended to be taken together to form a picture of the development of a revolutionary political culture that is greater than the sum of its parts.

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Before it became a stage for dissident hagiographies, subversive texts, and radical self-narration, the Peter and Paul Fortress was enshrined as a holy site of Romanov absolutism. Thus, in order to understand the terms of its later radical contestation, Chapter One – “Heart of Empire: The Peter and Paul Fortress and the Sacralization of Political Space in Tsarist Russia” – offers a preliminary history of this citadel’s construction, earliest years, and place within Imperial Russian ‘scenarios of power.’ Special attention is paid here to the ways in which the Russian autocracy pursued projects of spatial consecration – and why these projects arose precisely in the period when a revolutionary intelligentsia began to question the political and epistemological legitimacy of absolutism.

Chapter Two, “Narrating Political Imprisonment in Tsarist Russia: Bakunin, Goethe, Hegel,” is one of the most central points of this dissertation – clearing the terrain for much of the work that follows. In introducing the use of the Peter and Paul Fortress as a political prison, this section asks: how did the modern phenomenon of state incarceration become politically legible? Following this line of inquiry, I identify the *Bildungs*-memoir as the crucial ‘technology of the self’ that first allowed the experience of confinement to be integrated into political narratives of the individual and history – and I identify M.A. Bakunin’s Peter and Paul Fortress *Confession* as the origin point of this new genre of subject construction. By positing an original genealogy of this epistemological and political-aesthetic constellation, we achieve a

new picture of the significance of revolutionary memoiristics for modern ‘politics in the prison’ and for the Russian intelligentsia as a whole.

Chapter Three – “The Students and the Poet: 1861 and the Emergence of a Carceral Culture” – directs its attention towards a relatively understudied moment in Russian political history. In the autumn of 1861, both the popular poet M.I. Mikhailov and a mass of students from St. Petersburg University were incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress. In the literature, these events are usually treated as a minor prologue to the more explosive revolutionary developments of the later 1860s. However, by reconstructing a history of this moment, I make an argument for the importance of these early citadel imprisonments in the social circulation of a new understanding of political dissidence and the tsarist cell. Furthermore, I propose that the texts produced in the Fortress at this time – including a series of poems and a remarkable opera – are some of the earliest expressions of what would soon become a robust public language of heroic incarceration.

Chapter Four, “The Radical Self and the Tsarist Cell: Prison Writers and the Construction of a ‘New People,’ 1862-1866,” takes up one of the more dramatic moments in the history of tsarist political imprisonment. From 1862 to 1866, the most influential leftist journalists in St. Petersburg – Chernyshevsky, Pisarev, Serno-Solov’evich, Shelgunov – were arrested and held in solitary confinement in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Through an extraordinary conjuncture of blind circumstance and political will, these individuals were not silenced. Rather, they found it possible to continue to write critical texts in their years of incarceration. Most famously, Chernyshevsky’s *What is to be Done?* – the most politically influential novel in

Russian history – was published from his tsarist cell in these years. This chapter carefully revisits this period to reconstruct exactly how the Peter and Paul Fortress became transformed into a *writing desk of the revolution*. In doing so, we find that spaces of confinement were not merely an accidental site for the political and literary endeavors of this moment. Ongoing discussions of the radical subject found their continued expression and, indeed, highest articulation within the Fortress cell. Through written works and lived example, these incarcerated writers established a ‘new type’ of revolutionary selfhood that would be forever inflected with a prison discourse of ascetic struggle, political martyrdom, and heroic Left Hegelian development.

In Chapter Five – “*Tuk, tuk, tuk!*: Knocking Language, the Porous Cell, and the Breaking of the Enchanted Interior” – our history moves to what I term Russia’s ‘Age of High Prison Mythology’ and explores the development of subversive prison practices in a period of mass political incarceration. Specifically, it tells a new history of *perestukivanie*: revolutionary Russia’s famous language of knocks and taps for communicating through cell walls. This chapter investigates how this code worked as both a concrete method for coopting prison space as well as a crucial moment in the seizure of narrative agency within sites of solitary confinement.

Chapter Six, “Sergei Nechaev and the Age of High Prison Mythology, 1866-1884,” continues the previous section’s focus on the Peter and Paul Fortress and its prison culture in the period of its political maturity. Here, the space of the cell in radical Russian political cultures is approached through a revisionist history of the notorious S.G. Nechaev. In the first half of his revolutionary career, Nechaev willfully

constructed his own person in the heroic register of political incarceration: exploring this history gives us privileged insight into the discursive life of the Peter and Paul Fortress in these years. In the second half of his revolutionary career, Nechaev was himself incarcerated in the citadel: exploring this history gives us privileged insight into Fortress' concrete existence, as well as an account of the most successful subversion of a prison space in modern Russian history.

Chapter Seven – “The International Construction of a ‘Russian Bastille,’ 1881-1895” – follows the image of the Peter and Paul Fortress as it traveled outside the borders of the Russian Empire during the last decades of the nineteenth century. We find that just as generations of anti-tsarist radicals labored to produce a particular mythology of political incarceration, so too did foreign observers stage a certain understanding of Russian modernity in the imagined space of the Fortress. Significantly, by tracing these pathways of circulation, this chapter argues that an international image of the absolutist prison as a site of gothic horror was not simply a one-way process of political ‘othering’. Instead, it arose out of direct collaboration between radical Russian émigrés and the Anglo-American press – with the former purposefully wielding an Orientalizing discourse against the Romanov regime in order to evoke sympathy and support from the ‘civilizational’ liberalism of the West.

Chapter Eight is another anchor for the vessel of the dissertation as a whole. If earlier sections concern themselves with the birth and development of a revolutionary Russian carceral culture, then this chapter – titled “Uneven and Combined Development in Intellectual History: L.D. Trotsky and the Russian Revolutions in the Peter and Paul Fortress, 1905-1917” – charts its decline. It does so along three arcs.

First, by carefully analyzing the catalogue of Fortress prison memoirs in Appendix I, it argues for a particular conceptual chronology of carceral narration: one that saw its peak in the years 1866 to 1884, and its steady decline afterwards. Second, it explores the reasons for the erosion of older prison autobiographies through a new history of L.D. Trotsky's time in the Peter and Paul Fortress. In this period of solitary confinement – when he wrote his famous essay “Results and Prospects” – we not only discover the ways in which Russian Marxism challenged older populist understandings of self, history, and representation that had once buttressed a rich genre of prison narration. A reading of Trotsky also leads us to a new theory of how political aesthetics and conceptual formations rise and fall over time: a process which I call *uneven and combined development in intellectual history*. Finally, this chapter ends by exploring how the year 1917 passed through the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress – how the royal mausoleum and most infamous prison site of the Romanov regime served as a concrete staging ground for the seizure of power by a revolutionary tradition that had once been confined within its walls.

Chapter Nine – “Curating Dialectics: Russia's Peter and Paul Fortress as Museum of the Revolution” – explores the post-revolutionary fate of this overdetermined citadel space. This section not only gives us a concrete picture of how the victorious revolution preserved one of its central realms of memory – by digging into the precise curatorial logic behind this prison-museum, it raises new questions for discussions of revolutionary memory politics, Bolshevik temporalities, and the principle of montage as a historiographical technology.

Finally, the Afterward ends with a melancholy reflection on the futures of the Peter and Paul Fortress, the discipline of carceral studies, and the Russian revolutionary past. Attached as well are a series of Appendices, which provide a closer look at the literary history of political incarceration in Russia.

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The object of this dissertation – the singular space of the Peter and Paul Fortress – may give this project an outward appearance of reassuring, concrete solidity.

It is not.

Yes, this is a space of stone and mortar – and the pages to come will build an empirical history of these granite walls.

Yet one of the primary arguments of this study is that spaces lead lives far exceeding their physical boundaries – and the Peter and Paul Fortress was historically constructed through the practices, narratives, and political struggles that dwelt within and grew outward from its gloomy bulk. From the years 1825 to 1930, the most secret prison of the tsarist regime proved to be anything but a bulwark. A host of subversive discourses flowed through its porous walls and pooled in its casemate floors – an uneven and combined floodtide that raised up startling new articulations of radical selfhood and revolutionary history; a deluge that eroded the ground beneath an absolutist regime.



# 1. Heart of Empire: The Peter and Paul Fortress and the Sacralization of Political Space in Tsarist Russia

*Iakozhe ustremenie vody, tako serdtse  
tsarevo v rutse bozhiei...*

- *Kniga Pritchei solomonikh* 21:1

But Petersburg will sink.

- Andrei Bely, *Petersburg*

## I. Introduction

What is to be done with the heart of an emperor?

In the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg, one can find a curious text from 1847 tucked away in the files of the Imperial Court. Titled “A note on State funerary Rites in Russia // Regulations for the ceremonial burial of Russian emperors and grand dukes,” this fifty-page document carefully lays out the practices to be followed upon the death of an emperor.<sup>18</sup> Towards the end of its compilation of official procedures – touching upon everything from bell-ringing rituals to mourning apparel – we find a small section titled “The Burial of the Royal Innards. *Secret.*” [*Pogrebenie Tsarskikh Vnutrennostei. Sekretno.*].”

The anonymous author instructs the reader that, after the cleaning and embalment of the deceased emperor’s body,

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<sup>18</sup> RGIA f. 473, op. 3, d. 205 – “Zapiska o pechal’nom Gosudarstvennom Obriade v Rossii // Pravila i tseremonial pogrebeniia russkikh imperatorov i vel. kniazei.”

The Heart and Brain are placed in a Silver Urn into whose body Alcohol is poured and whose lid is afterwards soldered shut; the Urn is then wrapped in Black Cloth and tied with a Silver Cord; the simple organs are stored in a lead-lined Oak Box with a retractable Lid which is then sealed! – this box is also wrapped in Black Cloth and tied with a Silver Cord; these are left in the Embalming Room; place them under Guard!<sup>19</sup>

The timing here was most important. These prepared organs were to remain in the Winter Palace until the night before the tsar's funeral. On that following day, the body of the emperor would be paraded to the tombs of the tsars in the Peter and Paul Fortress with all the fanfare of an empire. However, on the eve, two unheralded funerary carriages would set out under the cover of darkness to conduct a secret, parallel ceremony at the same location.

Just before midnight, guards and priests would meet these carriages at the gates of the Fortress. A requiem service would be conducted in the cathedral, and the autocratic organs buried in small recesses concealed at the bottom of the tsar's grave. And thus would the actual hearts of deceased emperors be buried in the Peter and Paul Fortress, that political center and symbolic heart of Romanov Russia.

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The Peter and Paul Fortress and its eponymous cathedral loom over the topographical and symbolic landscape of modern Russia. This first chapter is an imperial history of the Fortress – as founding site, ceremonial stage, and burial ground of the Romanov regime. While the chapters to come are primarily concerned with the Fortress's role as a political prison, we must begin by exploring imperial, not dissident, scenarios of power. Grasping this site's absolutist existence is necessary in order to understand the ways in which it was later reimagined and contested. Before it became a setting for

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., ll. 19, 19ob, 20.

dissident hagiographies, before it became a space of radical novels and political agitation, before a revolutionary government would declare it a Museum of the Revolution, the Peter and Paul Fortress was an integral site for the performance of Romanov political legitimacy and divine right. It is this – how the Fortress functioned in the ritual practices and symbolic imagination of the Romanov regime – that is the subject of this section.

Of course, when exploring the spatial history of the Peter and Paul Fortress, it would take many more pages than we possess to truly capture the lived environs of the citadel and its cathedral. The guard at their daily post, the baker in their labors, the priest behind the iconostasis – we cannot hope to trace all of the spatio-narrative threads that worked their way through and, in the last instance, produced this site in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century [Figure 4]. Instead, this chapter will focus on what Henri Lefebvre called *representational spaces*: the cultural, intellectual, and political imaginaries which “[overlay] physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” – that is, “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols.”<sup>20</sup> Our object is thus a sort of spatial-political semiotics: not only how the Peter and Paul Fortress was built with stones and mortar, but also how it was built with, and grew to further house, mythologies of tsarist rule. If all narratives have their spaces and all spaces their narratives in the union of the chronotope, if human

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<sup>20</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 39. In readings of Lefebvre’s theoretical framework, *representational space* (space as symbolically used and narratively developed) has sometimes been taken as a mere ‘superstructure’ growing out from the ‘base’ of concrete social and economic *spatial practice*. However, it is clear that Lefebvre sees the terrain of representation as a crucial stage for both the reproduction of hegemonic social regimes as well as their radical contestation – a terrain dialectically linked with concrete practice. See *ibid.*, esp. 32-33.

geography is always a contingently weaved “simultaneity of stories-so-far,” then this section is an exploration of how the tsarist autocracy used the Peter and Paul Fortress to stage particular stories about itself.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publishers, 2005).



Figure 4: Soldiers and officers of the Peter and Paul Fortress garrison – those everyday inhabitants of the citadel space, tasked with safeguarding its disciplinary and ceremonial functions [GMPiR f. III-21588].

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We will begin with a view of the earliest history of the Fortress – the concrete circumstances and political mythologies tied to the founding of St. Petersburg at this site. Doing so will allow us to gain underpinnings for much of the dissertation to come, as well as touch upon the practices and institutions this citadel grew to hold.

From here we will transition into a discussion of the Peter and Paul Fortress as sacred political space in the long nineteenth century. What do we mean when we talk about sacred spatiality, political or otherwise? How did the Russian autocracy produce and perform certain holy sites? What roles did the Fortress play – as mythical origin site, imperial reliquary, ceremonial stage – in a Romanov poetics of power? In exploring these questions, this chapter will take up the crucial spatial dimension possessed by every political theology.

Finally, we will conclude with an extended discussion of the Fortress' most significant role in the ritual life of Russian absolutism – its use as the grand tomb of the tsars. Examining in depth the burial rites of the Romanov house gives us a privileged look into the symbolic universe of the late autocracy. As imperial sepulcher, the Fortress was elevated to a symbolic heart of empire. However, in housing both Romanov dead and narratives of dynastic authority, the citadel also grew to hold a host of political contradictions. This was a sacred space built upon unstable foundations. The chapter will conclude by looking at these cracks in the Fortress and its tsarist myth, and examine how the paradoxes latent in the tsarist production of a sacred political space conditioned its radical contestation.

## II. Mythogenesis

It was May of the year 7211 since the first days of Adam, 1703 years from the birth of Christ. Peter the Great, continuing victorious in his war against the Swedes, surveyed his newly conquered lands along the marshy Gulf of Finland. Ranging the coast, “his royal highness deigned to inspect the shore and islands at the mouth of the Neva river and discerned a favorable island for the founding of a city.” And lo!:

When he passed onto the center of this island, he felt a great noise in the air, and saw a soaring eagle, and it was the noise from the soaring of its wings that had been heard; he took from a soldier a bayonet and cut two strips of turf, placed turf on turf in the image of a cross and, making a cross of wood and driving it into the aforementioned turf, was pleased to say: “In the name of Jesus Christ on this place will be a church to the high apostles Peter and Paul.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus reads an anonymous contemporary account of the origins of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Several days later Peter the Great would return – accompanied by generals, courtiers, and priests – to formalize these founding rituals with much military fanfare and prayer. A set of fortifications was hastily erected, and a small church set at the island’s center. Thus was born a mighty new fortress: and with it, the city of St. Petersburg.

So goes the myth. But let us set aside, for the moment, this baroque political theatre of origins. Through another lens, we find a historical moment driven more by the risks and anxieties of conflict than divine ordination. The founding of St.

Petersburg occurred during the vast conflict of the Great Northern War (1700-1721).

After early victories against the Swedes in Ingria, by 1702 Russia had succeeded in

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<sup>22</sup> “O zachatii i zdanii tsarstvuiushego grada sanktpeterburga,” quoted in Iu.N. Bespiatykh, *Peterburg Petra I v inostrannykh opisaniakh* (Leningrad: ‘Nauka’ Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1991), 258. The original eighteenth-century document is found in OR RNB, Ermitazhnoe sobranie, no. 359.

capturing the fortress of Nöteborg at the confluence of the Neva River and Lake Ladoga.<sup>23</sup> Deeming this site to serve poorly as the sole bastion of Russian power in the region, Peter the Great sought a fortifiable island closer to where the river flowed into the Baltic Sea. It was with this in mind that the emperor traveled the Neva in the spring of 1703: to cement Russia's new foothold in Northern Europe.

At its mouth, the Neva River fans out into a swampy lowland of distributaries, armlets, and islands. Just before it splits in two and reaches the Baltic, there rests a small, marshy island nestled against its northern bank. It was here, on what the local Finnish peoples called 'Hare Island' – *Jänissaari* – that Peter decided to build a series of fortifications.<sup>24</sup> Thus, on May 16, 1703,<sup>25</sup> Peter the Great laid the founding stone of the Peter and Paul Fortress – the origin site of what would become the new city of St. Petersburg.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Originally founded by the Russian princely state of Novgorod in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and known as *Oreshek*, the fortress had been captured by the Swedes in 1611 during the Ingrian War. After being retaken in 1702, the fortress was renamed *Schlissel'burg*, a corruption of the German *Schlüsselburg*, or "Key Fortress" – a title announcing its intended role as the empire's key to further conquests in the region. Our attention will return to this secondary fortress several times in the coming study, for during the nineteenth-century it would also intermittently serve as a state political prison (though not on the scale of the Peter and Paul Fortress).

<sup>24</sup> The original Finnish for 'hare island' was later Russified into its current name: *Zaiachii ostrov*. It appears that in these first years Peter the Great also would refer to it as *Lust Eiland* – 'Happy Island' – demonstrating Peter's well-documented fondness for both the fortress' location and the Dutch language. See S.D. Stepanov, "Stroitel'stvo i perestroika fortifikatsionnykh sooruzhenii Petropavlovskoi kreposti," *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 6 (1998): 23-24.

<sup>25</sup> That is, Pentecost – in the Gregorian Calendar, May 27, 1703. Unless otherwise noted, all further dates in this study shall be given in the 'old style' – the Julian Calendar, used in Russia until 1918.

<sup>26</sup> S.P. Luppov, *Istoriia stroitel'stva Peterburga v pervoi chetverti XVIII veka* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk, 1957) 15. Our anonymous contemporary from the start of the present section records this event as an elaborate ceremonial undertaking, where among liturgical chants and sprinklings of holy water was buried a reliquary of St. Andrew, into which had been carved the words: "By the incarnated Jesus Christ, 1703 May 16 was founded the royal city of *Sanktpeterburg* by the great lord tsar and grand duke Peter Alekseevich, all-

Humble beginnings (one less-than-charitable eighteenth-century writer would describe the island as a marshy thicket, “everywhere sogginess and mire [*mokrota i griaz’]*”<sup>27</sup>) quickly yielded to the tsar’s energetic engineering project. Earthen walls rose with remarkable speed and construction of the city began apace. A small wooden church with prominent spire was soon erected on Hare Island and consecrated on June 29, the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul.<sup>28</sup> The first iteration of the Peter and Paul Fortress, composed of turf-covered earthen walls supported by wood, was completed by September 1703.<sup>29</sup> By 1704, a city had begun to rise around it – an early Admiralty building (the headquarters of Peter’s proposed Baltic fleet) and multiple trading wharfs appeared on the opposite banks of the Neva, lying under the protection of the Fortress. It was in this year that St. Petersburg began to be seen not solely as a future Russian city, but indeed as a potential new capital.<sup>30</sup>

The rapid growth of this built environment was made possible through the labor of hundreds of thousands of serfs brought to the shores of the Baltic for

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Russian autocrat.” See “O zachatii i zdanii tsarstvuiushego grada sanktpeterburga,” in Iu.N. Bespiatykh, *Peterburg Petra I v inostrannykh opisaniakh*, 258-59.

<sup>27</sup> Feofan Prokopovich, “Istoriia imperatora Petra Velikogo...,” in Iu.N. Bespiatykh, *Peterburg Petra I v inostrannykh opisaniakh*, 255. Originally published as Feofan Prokopovich, *Istoriia imperatora Petra Velikogo ot rozhdeniia ego do Poltavskoi batalii i vziatii v plen ostal’nykh shvedskikh voisk pri Perevolochne, vkluchitel’no* (Moscow, 1788), 82-83.

<sup>28</sup> This was also, of course, Peter the Great’s name day. See Lindsey Hughes, edited by Robin Milner-Gulland and Simon Dixon, “The Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 88 (2010): 26. It seems appropriate to note here that the Peter and Paul Fortress was not officially named as such during its founding and construction – it adopted this title, slowly and unofficially, from the church (later, cathedral) within its walls, and was only widely recognized as the ‘Peter and Paul Fortress’ by the end of the eighteenth century. It was otherwise referred to as simply “the Petersburg Fortress” (*Peterburgskaia krepost’*, or even *petrokrepost’*). This original name would also remain in use – albeit infrequently – throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. For example: the citadel commander’s official title was always kept as the “Commandant of the St. Petersburg Fortress.”

<sup>29</sup> Stepanov, “Stroitel’stvo i perestroika fortifikatsionnykh sooruzhenii Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” 26-27; Luppov, 18.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

expressly this purpose. These workers also spontaneously erected homes, bathhouses, and markets – furnishing the city with its first architectures of everyday life. Working conditions in the swamps of Ingria were notoriously poor. Although we have no way of knowing exactly how many workers died in the building of St. Petersburg and its Fortress, contemporaries would record that “they say even, allegedly, that higher than one hundred thousand hereby perished.”<sup>31</sup>

The further construction of the Peter and Paul Fortress was driven by the exigencies of war. On Peter the Great’s birthday, May 30, 1706, the citadel’s earthworks began to be replaced with brick walls under the supervision of Italian architect Domenico Trezzini.<sup>32</sup> While it appears that two of the Fortress’ six bastions were rebuilt in stone by the end of the decade, Russia’s victory over Sweden at the Battle of Poltava in 1709 saw the evaporation of much of the urgency surrounding the citadel’s construction, and the entire project of reconstruction was only completed in the 1720s.<sup>33</sup>

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What sort of citadel was this, then, that lay at the heart of Peter’s new capital? A brief look into the language and practices of early-modern military engineering can be helpful here.

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<sup>31</sup> “Opisanie Sanktpeterburga i Kronshlota v 1710-m i 1711-m gg. [Perev. nemetskoi knizhki, izd. N. G. v 1713 g. v Leiptzig],” *Russkaia Starina* 36 (1882): 36-37. Stories of the horrific casualties in St. Petersburg’s construction – that is, an image of Peter’s capital built on the endless bones of his subjects – would play a large role in the city’s mythology throughout the post-Petrine imperial period, and see a renaissance in the revisionist St. Petersburg *kraevedenie* of the 1920s.

<sup>32</sup> Stepanov, “Stroitel’stvo i perestroika fortifikatsionnykh sooruzhenii Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” 28; Luppov, 18.

<sup>33</sup> The Peter and Paul Fortress fortifications are recorded as complete in 1724 in *Letopis’ Petropavlovskoi Kreposti*, eds. Iu.B. Demidenko, A.V. Zherve, and A.N. Koliakin (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennyi muzei istorii Sankt-Peterburg, 2008), 1:43.

The Fortress plans were in keeping with contemporary European fortification science, which Peter the Great had observed and studied during his travels abroad.<sup>34</sup> The entire island is covered by an all-encompassing fort in the shape of an irregular hexagon. Six main *curtains* or *curtain walls* – made of limestone bricks, and covered with granite slabs at the end of the eighteenth century – rise to heights of 35 to 45 feet.<sup>35</sup> Six *bastions* – pentagonal defenses – extrude at each exterior curtain corner.<sup>36</sup> Two *ravelins* – detached triangular fortifications – protect the eastern and western edges of the island.<sup>37</sup> Lastly, one *crownwork* – an extensive, detached bastion – was erected on the adjacent shore of the Neva, further protecting the Fortress. Thus, adhering to the latest models of European fortification engineering, the Peter and Paul Fortress' complex geometry created large fields of overlapping fire that covered both the Neva River and its shores.

Originally, the citadel could only be reached by a small wooden bridge on its eastern flank, which led to a gate in the heavily fortified Ioannovskii ravelin.<sup>38</sup> We must also note that most of the Fortress' bastions and curtains were hollow, containing

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<sup>34</sup> Peter the Great's personal library contained several French and German works on fortification architecture, and in his correspondence from 1706-1707 we find several letters in which he asks various officials to send him "books by every author on fortification." Quoted in James Cracraft, *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Architecture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 151. For a further discussion of St. Petersburg's place in the European history of fortification and siegecraft, see *ibid.*, 111-14.

<sup>35</sup> Named the *Nikolskaia*, *Kronverskaia*, *Petrovskaia*, *Nevskaia*, *Ekaterininskaia*, and *Vasilevskaia* curtains. See Stepanov, "Stroitel'stvo i perestroika fortifikatsionnykh sooruzhenii Petropavlovskoi kreposti," 34; E.A. Ol'khovaia, "Prirodnyi kamen' v fortifikatsionnykh sooruzheniakh i grazhdanskikh postroikakh Petropavlovskoi kreposti," *Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Muzeia Istorii Sankt-Peterburga* 21 (2010): 141-42.

<sup>36</sup> These were named after Peter the Great and the separate officials who oversaw the construction of each – *Gosudarev*, *Menshikov*, *Naryshkin*, *Trubetskoi*, *Zotov* and *Golovkin*. Several of these were renamed later in the century.

<sup>37</sup> The *Alekseevskii* and *Ioannovskii* ravelins.

<sup>38</sup> See N.I. Pankrashkina, "Mosty Petropavlovskoi kreposti," *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 6 (1998): 137-67.

passages and small rooms – *casemates*. These casemates, with their small window-slots, were intended for either defensive use (as positions for artillery and riflemen), or as storage sites (to hold arms and provisions).<sup>39</sup> Many of these would eventually be refurbished into prison cells for the enemies of the tsarist regime.

Yes, as prisons, and more. For like so many of those prides of early-modern European military science – of which today, as the eponymous character in W.G. Sebald’s novel *Austerlitz* remarks, we lack “the faintest idea of the boundless amount of theoretical writings on the building of fortifications, of the fantastic nature of the geometric, trigonometric, and logistical calculations they record, of the inflated excesses of the professional vocabulary of fortification and siegecraft...”<sup>40</sup> – like so many of these grand fortifications, the Peter and Paul Fortress played many roles in its history, but never truly served its intended purpose. Not once was it called upon to repel an invading force by sea or by land. Thus, while it maintained a military footing throughout its imperial history (with its own commandant, garrison regiment, engineer brigade, and more), the Fortress soon played host to a wealth of other purposes. As early as the 1710s we find visitors to St. Petersburg commenting not only on the “astonishing state” of these new Neva fortifications, but also noting a small stone pharmacy among its walls – the first in St. Petersburg.<sup>41</sup> Alongside regimental housing and artillery one could also soon find structures as various as barns, provision shops,

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<sup>39</sup> See Stepanov, “Stroitel’stvo i perestroika fortifikatsionnykh sooruzhenii Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” 39-42.

<sup>40</sup> W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Modern Library, 2011), 15.

<sup>41</sup> “Opisanie Sanktpeterburga i Kronshlota v 1710-m i 1711-m gg. [Perev. nemetskoï knizhki, izd. N. G. v 1713 g. v Leiptzig],” 37-38; See also M.N. Mikishat’ev, “Pervaia apteka Peterburga,” *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 6 (1998): 245-82.

government offices, firework storehouses, and the imperial mint.<sup>42</sup> From its inception, the space of the fortress was prone to improvisation: made to house the material odds and ends of the autocratic state and its new capital.

To complete our brief survey of the founding and early years of the Peter and Paul Fortress, we must note that not only did the Fortress serve as a military and civic center of the capital from its inception – it was also intended as a crucial religious site. As the island's earthwork fortifications quickly became granite-clad walls, so too did its small wooden chapel expand in size and majesty. On June 8, 1712, the first block was laid of a new stone cathedral to the Saints Peter and Paul.<sup>43</sup> Designed by Domenico Trezzini – the same Italian architect responsible for the stone walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress, and whose influence on the cityscape of St. Petersburg cannot be overstated – and the Dutchman Harman van Boles, the massive baroque cathedral

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, a mid-eighteenth-century account of the interior of the Peter and Paul Fortress in *Istoricheskoe, geograficheskoe i topograficheskoe opisaniie Sanktpeterburga, ot nachala zavedeniia ego, c 1703 po 1751 god, sochinennoe g. Bogdanovym; s mnogami izobrazheniiami pervykh zdaniy; a nyne dopolnennoe i izdannoe, Nadvornym Sovetnikom, Praviashchim dolzhnost' Direktora nad Novorossiiskimi Uchilishchami, Vol'nago Rossiiskogo Sobraniia, pri Imperatorskom Moskovskom Universitete i Sanktpeterburgskogo Vol'nago Ekonomicheskogo Obshchestva Chlenom Vasil'em Rubanom* (St. Petersburg, 1779), reprinted in A.I. Barabanova, ed., *Petropavlovskaiia Krepost': Stranitsy istorii* (St. Petersburg: Art-Palace, 2001), 47-49. The royal mint was housed in various bastions of the Fortress until a dedicated complex was erected in the first decade of the nineteenth century. See Iu.V. Trubinov, "Bastion Naryshkina vo vlasti Monetnogo dvora," *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 6 (1998): 183-214. Information on the curious storage of imperial fireworks in the fortress can be found in V.N. Vasil'ev, *Starinnye feierverki v Rossii* (Leningrad: Izd-vo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 1960). For more detailed information on the various uses of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the nineteenth-century, see the engineering documents and building inventories found in RGIA, f. 1280, op. 2 (*dopolnitel'naia opis'*), d. 186.

<sup>43</sup> These new brick walls were constructed around the old wooden church, which was only removed in 1718-19. Note that there has been some controversy around the exact date of the stone cathedral's construction. For an excellent discussion of this issue and the early years of the Peter and Paul Cathedral, see Hughes, "The Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul," 26-27. The present investigation of the Peter and Paul Cathedral is indebted to the superb scholarship of the late Lindsey Hughes, as well as the rigorous empirical essays found in the second volume of *Kraevedcheskie Zapiski* (1994).

represented a radical rupture with Muscovite church architecture.<sup>44</sup> The rounded orthodox dome at the cathedral's east end is completely overshadowed by the large, boat-shaped nave on its west, which hosts the building's bell tower and spire. The latter is the most astonishing element of the Peter and Paul Cathedral. Rising 400 feet over the Neva, it remains the tallest structure in historic St. Petersburg and makes this the tallest Orthodox church in the world.<sup>45</sup>

The interior of the cathedral marked a similar break with tradition. Trezzini and I.P. Zarudnyi designed the iconostasis, which used both icons and sculptures to present a baroque allegory on the themes of "War and Peace, heavenly intervention and divine retribution."<sup>46</sup> Decorative motifs in pale pastels and gold further marked the interior as foreign to Orthodox church tradition.<sup>47</sup> Not only was this cathedral a wholly new religious center in a wholly new imperial capital – its entire form, inner and outer, was purposefully novel in its design.

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<sup>44</sup> Contemporaries were struck by the peculiarity of a Russian church constructed in the "Dutch manner": see "Opisanie Sanktpeterburga i Kronshlota v 1710-m i 1711-m gg. [Perev. nemetskoj knizhki, izd. N. G. v 1713 g. v Leiptzig]," 38. For more on Trezzini's work in St. Petersburg, and a discussion of importance of European experts more broadly during this 'Petrine revolution' in the built environment, see Cracraft, *The Petrine Revolution in Architecture*, 1-9, 154-60. Note that we should tread carefully here – while it is important to acknowledge the novel architectural forms that accompanied Peter's innovative reign, we should avoid placing too much stress on the *ex nihilo* nature of either. Just as recent political histories have sought to temper the usual narratives of absolute rupture in governing ideas, so too have architectural historians begun to excavate the roots of the Petrine Baroque in earlier Muscovite forms – especially the 'Naryshkin Baroque.' Cracraft's work holds an excellent discussion of this point.

<sup>45</sup> Of course, there is a fair bit of controversy over this claim. Usually, orthodox belfries are detached structures and are thus not factored into surveys of the 'tallest churches.' This has been used to discount the Peter and Paul Cathedral's claim to this title, even though its bell tower is an integrated part of the main building. All pedantry aside, it is undeniable that the cathedral spire towers over the cityscape of St. Petersburg and its history.

<sup>46</sup> Hughes, "The Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul," 30. See also E.N. El'kin, "Ikonostas Petropavlovskogo sobora," *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 2 (1994): 149-59.

<sup>47</sup> See E.N. El'kin, "Dekorativnye rospisi i zhivopis' Petropavlovskogo sobora," *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 2 (1994): 113-48.

While the Peter and Paul Cathedral was the first temple of Peter the Great's new capital, it did not long remain its main place of worship. A smaller Trinity Cathedral, closer to the seat of government, became the central state church in the 1720s. As the imperial period progressed, the construction of the neo-classical St. Isaac and Kazan Cathedrals would further overshadow the city's first religious site.

Despite this dislocation, the Peter and Paul Cathedral would continue to hold a primary place in the imagination of the Orthodox autocracy. By the long nineteenth century – our period of study – this strange space of novelty had accrued not only a new city around its granite walls, but also its own patina of sacred tradition. A single stone on a swampy inlet would give rise to a “Sanctuary of Russian History [*Sviatilishche Istorii Rossiiskoi*]” and “foundation stone of Orthodoxy”: a site of reverence and pilgrimage.<sup>48</sup>

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What makes a site ‘holy’? How did the Russian autocracy imbue particular spaces with a sense of transcendence? In our survey of the first decades of St. Petersburg, we have witnessed how the Peter and Paul Fortress was encoded in myths of sacred founding from its very first moments. It is thus worth considering the use of origin narratives as a state technique of urban sacralization.

If Peter was the rock upon which Christ would build his church, then the Peter and Paul Fortress was the rock upon which Russia would raise up a new, sanctified imperial capital.<sup>49</sup> It was here where St. Petersburg was founded – where a covenant

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<sup>48</sup> Semen Novoselov, *Opisanie kafedral' nago sobora vo imia sviatykh Pervoverkhovnykh Apostol Petra i Pavla v Sanktpeterburgskoi Kreposti* (Moscow: 1857), ix-xi.

<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the iconostasis of the Peter and Paul Cathedral prominently featured the appropriate quote from the Book of Matthew (16:18): “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I

between Peter the Great and the divine, erupting onto the historical and natural landscape, was made material in a mythogenesis of the new Russian state. The contemporary account we examined at the beginning of this section already evidenced key paraphernalia of political sacralization. Oracular eagles, Orthodox rite, a new St. Peter's in a new imperial capital: contemporaries crafted a collage of Roman-Byzantine myths of foundation and legitimacy. Peter the Great's 'politics of novelty' was itself indebted to traditional cosmologies – the birth of St. Petersburg at the Peter and Paul Fortress was consciously clothed in earlier Muscovite and European discourses of sacred center-building.<sup>50</sup>

It is thus clear that a rich foundation myth was one element of the sacralization of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the cosmology of tsarist absolutism. Through an original revelation, the nondescript Hare Island was blasted out of the homogenous continuum of profane space, achieving “an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, this moment of transubstantiation – from raw soil into divine site, from immanence to transcendence – seems captured in the architecture of the Fortress itself: with its radiant spire rising from low walls forever expressing the revelation of the vertical out of the horizontal.

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will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it.” For our present study of the diverse uses of this Fortress, we can also note that the biblical tale of Peter's imprisonment and divine liberation (Acts 12:3-19) did not appear in the Cathedral iconography.

<sup>50</sup> See Iu.M. Lotman and B.A. Uspenskii, “Echoes of the Notion of ‘Moscow as the Third Rome’ in Peter the Great's Ideology,” in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. Ann Shukman, trans. N.F.C. Owen (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), 53-67. Further note Lotman's remark that the Peter and Paul Fortress was intended, deliberately, as “a reflection of the place occupied by St. Peter's in Rome in the semiotics of the city plan.” See *ibid.*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), 26.

However, narratives of extraordinary origination can only go so far in sacralizing a space. To place excessive focus on the founding of the Peter and Paul Fortress risks falling into essentialism. Every political theology gestures towards the transcendent, but these signs are themselves expressed in the profane. Thus, while keeping in mind the rhetoric of sacred founding that conditioned the uses of this space, we must look for this Fortress' political sacrality not in ontology, but in historical practice.

### **III. Divine Material: Accumulations of the Sacred**

The sacred nature of the Peter and Paul Fortress' spatial narrative was rooted in a myth of divine origin. However, divinity is not simply 'held' by holy sites; it is instead something that demands constant reiteration and reproduction in the present. Thus, let us turn now to examine some of the ways in which this space's transcendence was enacted and performed in history.

One of the most striking roles played by the citadel throughout its long history was that of an imperial reliquary – a space encrusted with holy things and holy signs. Through the storage and display of sacred objects, through the constant accumulation of divine materials, the Fortress was further encoded as a politically sacred site of the Romanov regime.

In 1857, the then-acting Plats-Major of the Peter and Paul Fortress – the main assistant of the Fortress Commandant – published a curious book. Titled *A Description of the Church Cathedral of the Most-High Apostles Peter and Paul in the*

*Saint Petersburg Fortress*, this text not only holds valuable descriptions of fortress life, but also examines its collections of objects – item by item – in rapturous detail.<sup>52</sup>

A visitor to the fortress in the nineteenth century would be struck by its sheer mass of, well, *things*. Entering from the northern bank, one would pass under a large icon hung over the central Ioannovskie Gates. This path then carried one to the Petrovskie Gates of the Fortress proper. Here one would be confronted with not only an image of Christ Pantocrator (flanked by the apostles Peter and Paul), but also a massive sculpture of a triple-crowned, two-headed eagle. This was suspended below an early-eighteenth century pediment depicting the apostle Peter throwing down Simon the Magi – a story from the book of Acts, meant here, in Peter the Great’s allegory-saturated scenario of power, to represent the emperor’s victory over Charles XII of Sweden in the Great Northern War.<sup>53</sup>

As one continued into the citadel grounds, the movements of soldiers and civilians would be punctuated with the sight of flags and banners raised above various bastions and battlements.<sup>54</sup> Upon approaching the Fortress cathedral’s narthex [*pritor*] entrance, one would first be confronted with a small, late-baroque pavilion to one’s left. This contained Peter the Great’s ‘little boat’ [*botik*], a small foreign craft repaired and mastered by the tsar in his youth and later mythologized as the

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<sup>52</sup> See Novoselov, *Opisanie*. This narrative account can be read alongside the inventories for military and ecclesiastical use made at regular intervals across the nineteenth century, found throughout RGIA f. 816 and f. 1280, op. 2.

<sup>53</sup> See Novoselov, 165; M.O. Logunova, “Nikol’skie, Vasil’evskie, Kronverkskie vorota Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 6 (1998): 120-31; and N.I. Pankrashkina, “Mosty Petropavlovskoi kreposti.”

<sup>54</sup> See M.O. Logunova, “Traditsiia pod”ema flaga v Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” *Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Muzeia Istorii Sankt-Peterburga* 21 (2010): 184-93.

‘grandfather of the Russian fleet.’<sup>55</sup> Its inclusion beside the cathedral helped further unite the political, military, and religious threads of tsarist narratives of rule.

While weighty in their symbolic language, these preliminary signs must have done little to prepare our visitor for entering the Peter and Paul Cathedral itself. The narrow, lofty nave – with its eight columns and airy, decorative paintings – resembles more a baroque parade hall than the churches of Muscovite Orthodoxy. This is an impression furthered not only by the unique gold-plated *iconostas* made to resemble a triumphal arch, but also by the horde of military trophies that lined the cathedral walls.<sup>56</sup> Both existing nineteenth century narrative accounts and related archival inventories list thousands of objects – ceremonial maces, officer regalia, city- and fortress-keys, and hundreds upon hundreds of banners and flags – taken from victories over Sweden, Poland, France, and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>57</sup> This was imperial history envisioned as a glorious accumulation of *Trümmer auf Trümmer* at the feet of the dead tsars.

And indeed, while traditional sacral decorations and military trophies possessed an astounding quantity and quality in the Peter and Paul Cathedral, its most

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<sup>55</sup> For a mid-nineteenth century inventory of the boathouse (*botnoe zdanie*), see RGIA f. 1280, op. 2, d. 1004, ll. 56-56ob.

<sup>56</sup> For more on the iconostasis, see El’kin, “Ikonostas Petropavlovskogo sobora.”

<sup>57</sup> For an inventory of the cathedral’s military trophies compiled in 1864 and 1865, see RGIA, f. 1280, op. 2, d. 1004, ll. 37-51. The amount of items attached to the Peter and Paul Cathedral and tsarist tombs was so great that most were kept in storage. For a narrative description of these military relics from 1857 (which celebrate “the fact that the Almighty Himself blesses our storehouses of valor”), as well as a painfully overwrought account of how each trophy-earning battle factored into Russian military history, see Novoselov, 165-256. For a study of Petrine-period military commemoration in the Peter and Paul Cathedral, see N.R. Slavitskii, “Prazdnovanie pobed petrovskogo vremeni i sokhranenie pamiati o nikh v Petropavlovskom sobore,” *Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Muzeia Istorii Sankt-Peterburga* 26 (2012): 189-201.

divine materials were the tombs of the Romanovs themselves. As Novoselov commented in 1857:

Usually descriptions of the interior of every church begin with calculations of their size, the details of the altar and iconostas, the decorations on the walls, the domes, and so forth. This is only natural in other churches; but in the Peter and Paul Cathedral every Russian, after entering and bending a knee before the altar, rushes to pay affectionate homage to the tombs of the Benefactors of fatherland, ancestors, and themselves.<sup>58</sup>

The accumulation of absolutist bodies in the Fortress began during the reign of Peter the Great himself. While the style of the earliest tombs was varied, by the mid-nineteenth century large sarcophagi cut from white Italian marble had become the standard form for Emperors and Empresses, Tsareviches and Tsarevnas.<sup>59</sup> Non-ruling members of the Romanov house were interned here as well until 1908, when a Grand Ducal Burial Vault [*velikokniazheskaia usypal'nitsa*] was erected adjacent to the Peter and Paul Cathedral to house these lesser dead.<sup>60</sup> The royal remains possessed their own symbolic gravity, attracting to this site an even greater collection of holy

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<sup>58</sup> Semen Novoselov, *Opisanie kafedral'nago sobora vo imia sviatykh Pervoverkhovnykh Apostol Petra i Pavla v Sanktpeterburgskoi Kreposti*, ix-xi, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Before this period, many of the Grand Ducal sarcophagi had been made from grey Karelian marble, which was poorer in quality and color. For the process of their marble replacement in 1865-1867, see RGIA, f. 1280, op. 2, d. 1139, ll. 6-18, 37-38ob, 46-47ob. Note that the only exception to this standard style were the tombs of Alexander II and his wife, Empress Maria Alexandrovna, made respectively of orlits and jasper.

<sup>60</sup> For information on this structure's construction and its rather short period of use, see S.V. Trofimov, *Petropavlovskii sobor. Usypal'nitsa rossiiskikh imperatorov* (St. Petersburg: 'Beloe i chernoe,' 1998); Iu.V. Trubinov, "Proekt Velikokniazheskoi usypal'nitsy (o tvorcheskom metode arkhitekora D.I. Grimma)," *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 2 (1994): 203-18; and Iu.P. Andreevna and Iu.V. Trubinov, "Istoriia stroitel'stva Velikokniazheskoi usypal'nitsy," *ibid.*, 219-63.

materials. These cathedral sarcophagi were liberally decorated with objects as well – draped in fine fabrics, surrounded by icons, medals, and memorial plaques.<sup>61</sup>

The accumulation of imperial memorabilia in the Peter and Paul Cathedral would reach feverish peaks during periods of special ceremonial importance – most notably, the funerals and mourning periods of deceased Romanovs. While we shall soon speak of the exact practices of tsarist burials in the Fortress, let us briefly here consider the sublime materiality of these moments.

A visitor to the cathedral in the months after the death of Tsar Alexander III would be struck by the sight of over six hundred silver memorial wreathes hanging along the cathedral walls and columns – donated to the emperor’s memory by civic organizations, government departments, and private individuals.<sup>62</sup> Candles would also be used in astounding numbers: during Tsar Nicholas I’s period of lying-in-state in the Peter and Paul Cathedral after his death in 1855, the funerary commission drew up a list of all the lamps, candelabra, and chandeliers that had to be lit in the coming ceremonies – they tallied that the church would require 2,304 candles of various shapes and sizes *per day*.<sup>63</sup> Often, this passion for adornment would exceed the actual physical capacity of the cathedral. Upon visiting the first evening of Tsar Nicholas I’s eight-day memorial service, a member of the commission found that many of these thousands of candles had simply not been lit, and directed an angry letter to the head

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<sup>61</sup> An inventory of these grave coverings from the 1860s can be found in RGIA f. 1280, op. 2, D. 1004, ll. 34, 34na, 35, 35na, 36; and an inventory from 1905 is located at RGIA f. 816, op. 1, d. 376, ll. 1-3.

<sup>62</sup> See the commemorative book listing each wreath’s style, donor, and position in the cathedral at RGIA f. 816, op. 1, d. 236.

<sup>63</sup> See RGIA f. 472, op. 8, d. 76, ll. 7-7ob. 1,682 per day were to be used in lighting fixtures – a host of chandeliers, candelabras, sconces, and lamps. 702 were to be used on the altar and for the cathedral icons.

architect of these funerary services. The architect replied that the sheer quantity of candles and funerary fabric in the cathedral made it impossible to light more without risking a catastrophic fire.<sup>64</sup> The sacral items and artifacts of the Peter and Paul Cathedral reached points of such excess that they threatened to burst out of the very structure itself.

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For over two centuries, the Peter and Paul Fortress served as a vast storehouse of sacred political, military, and religious objects – one of the chief reliquaries of post-Petrine Russia. The significance of the fortress (and, especially, the cathedral) as a repository for sacred political objects cannot be denied. The foremost of these objects was, of course, the entombed bodies of the Romanovs themselves – which, together with the endless military trophies, religious regalia, and commemorative items all functioned in concert to create a powerful semiotic field, where the intertwining of the civic, the military, and religious was given dazzling materiality in gold and candlelight.<sup>65</sup>

However, as we survey the totemic collections of the Romanov regime, we must not leap over-hastily into our own festishization of imperial assemblages. To view these ornaments as somehow essentially containing their own symbolic power and radiating it outwards, self-sufficiently, is to again fall into the realm of ahistoricity. Rather, I would argue that these items must be viewed as semiotic containers, holding worth and meaning only to the extent to which human practices

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<sup>64</sup> See their testy exchange between February 28 and March 1, 1855, in RGIA, f. 472, op. 8, d. 76, ll. 8-11.

<sup>65</sup> For a call to read the interior of the cathedral through cultural semiotics, see S.V. Trofimov, “Semanticheskoe pole Petropavlovskogo sobora (k postanovke problema),” *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 2 (1994): 38-55.

and narratives historically invest them with such and bring them into symbolic and spatial constellations with each other. Holy objects do not impart sacrality to the spaces that contain them. Rather, it is human activity that constantly re-performs and reproduces emplacement, which constantly weaves objects into particular sites and consecrates them both. The material – even the sublime material – needs to be cracked open to reveal the narrative practices and social relations crystallized therein. To valorize the emplaced object yet devalue the practices of its emplacement is to employ the logic of the homogenous, off-white gallery wall. A strictly object-centric understanding of sacred space is ultimately an erasure of space.<sup>66</sup>

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Thus, while narratives of fantastic origins and accumulations of potent artifacts lay witness to the extraordinary nature of the Peter and Paul Fortress, neither approach gives us a complete picture of the historical sacralization of political space in tsarist Russia. As we have seen, to focus solely on mythogenesis is to reject the historical, and to focus solely on objects is to reject the spatial. To truly investigate the transcendent character of this heart of empire, we must turn from these fascinating yet static roles to considerations of the human practices that invested this site with meaning over time. That is, we must look at ritual.

For the Peter and Paul Fortress did not simply sit at the heart of imperial St. Petersburg as an inert centerpiece, or a warehouse for artifacts. This was an island constantly whirring with ceremonial activity. The ponderous citadel walls and baroque

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<sup>66</sup> From this brief discussion, it should be clear that I find little use for ‘Object-Oriented Ontology’ in the study of history. At its best, I believe that this recent academic trend can perhaps lead some scholars back to a more reflective materialist practice. At its worst, I would argue that naïve attempts to relocate historical agency from human actors to dead materials is nothing more than an expression of Stockholm Syndrome for capitalist reification.

architecture of the cathedral were mirrored within by an equally measured yet elaborate pageantry of imperial gesture.

These rituals, processions, and public festivals should be seen as both state performances and technologies of spatial production. Even as they used the Peter and Paul Fortress as a grand stage in the center of the imperial capital, they enacted this space as one imbued with sacred power. Let us thus view sacrality not as a quality bestowed in a single moment or through a set of objects, but rather as a modality of how a particular space is performed in history. In the Fortress was hosted, and made material, a communion between absolutist politics and the divine source of its authority. While not going so far as to label the Russian autocracy a “theater state,” immense rituals were a key spatial rhetoric through which the tsarist regime read and shaped its central citadel, and emplaced visions of their divine authority and eternal legitimacy.<sup>67</sup> It was these rituals that truly constituted, discursively, the Peter and Paul Fortress as a sacred political space.<sup>68</sup>

#### **IV. Space and Ritual: The Blessing of the Waters**

What do we know about the ceremonial life of the Peter and Paul Fortress? Out of all the sites in this citadel, it was the tombs of the tsars that hosted the most significant

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<sup>67</sup> See Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), esp. 102.

<sup>68</sup> Thus we see the larger spatial argument here – that that the Peter and Paul Fortress was not simply an empty stage upon which tsardom performed itself. Following recent thought in spatial theory, we must reject the naïve notion of place as simply the empty background of history, a blank Cartesian grid upon which events neutrally occur. Rather, human spaces are produced historically – invested with meaning through social practices and narratives, and conditioning the possibilities of further actions and imaginaries in a continuous dialectical relationship.

rituals of divine emplacement. We shall turn to these shortly. Before doing so, however, it is worth surveying some aspects of the Fortress' non-funerary existence.

During the long nineteenth century, the Peter and Paul Fortress held a regular set of minor ceremonies. From the changing of the guard to the ringing of cathedral bells, from the performance of regular church mass to noonday cannonfire from the battlements – these were the daily bread of tsarist ritual, the sorts of ornamental practices that clothed so many ruling European regimes at this time.

We will pass by these small rituals of the everyday, for now. They will appear intermittently (and be discussed in turn) over the course of the present dissertation. Let us now move instead to the largest non-funerary ceremony hosted in the Peter and Paul Fortress: *Prepolovenie Piatidesiatnitsy*, or Mid-Pentecost.

This is a moment of some significance in the Russian Orthodox calendar, held at the midway point between Easter and Pentecost. While this 'moveable feast' thus marks a threshold in the flow of liturgical time, it also specifically commemorates the story of Jesus' teachings in the temple during the Feast of the Tabernacle from the Gospel of John. The Christ of this tale is Christ the Teacher, foretelling the coming of his church (i.e. Pentecost): "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. / He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."<sup>69</sup> This Christ is thus also very much a 'liquid' figure. Water is the major emblem of this holy day, found both in its scriptural source and in the festival's position between Easter (the water that brings new life in eternity) and Pentecost (the water that brings

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<sup>69</sup> John 7:36-37

new life in the Church).<sup>70</sup> Appropriately, the central rite of Orthodox Mid-Pentecost is an annual ‘blessing of the waters.’

In imperial St. Petersburg, the annual celebration of this day would take place in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Thousands of individuals from every church in the city would congregate in the citadel for a stately procession of the cross, with many more arrayed in small boats around the Fortress to witness the proceedings. The pageant would march from the Peter and Paul Cathedral to the Neva River, where a small service would pronounce a blessing on the river of the capital. The mass would then proceed along the entirety of the fortress walls, pausing to pray at each fortress gate. A final stop would be made at the citadel’s boathouse to give blessings to the enshrined craft of Peter the Great, and then return to the cathedral. Contemporary accounts paint a vivid picture of how the holiday was experienced by the faithful:

The procession of the bishop and clergy in gold-woven vestments for the sacred singing of the liturgy along the fortress walls, carrying before them holy crosses and icons, with waving banners and before one’s eyes the majestic cathedral which safekeeps the remains of our great Benefactors, - all of this fills one’s soul with reverence. The diversity of the countless people, walking behind the crosses; the views, opening on all sides from the tall ramparts; the Neva at one’s feet, covered in all kinds of water-craft and small boats under green and crimson awnings; the sound of oars moving through water: all this multiplies the greatness of this spectacle.<sup>71</sup>

To witness such a ceremony would have been to act in a sublime bit of religious pageantry - but also to take part in its underlying political theatre.

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<sup>70</sup> In discussing these ‘elements’ of Orthodox liturgy, it is worth noting that while a certain ecclesiastical tradition associates the Holy Spirit with the presence of fire (especially the Book of Acts and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke), the Gospel of John centers more prominently around the ‘Water of Life’.

<sup>71</sup> Novoselov 155-56. Various official documents related to these ceremonies can be found in RGIA f. 1280, op. 2 – see, for example, op. 2 [*Dopolnitel’naia opis’*], d. 60, ll. 161, 161ob, 164, 164ob, 165, 165ob.

For we can see this elaborate blessing of the Neva River as not simply a commemoration of the flowing force of the Holy Spirit. It was a ceremony that pointedly comingled the Russian political present with the waters of several sacral pasts.

For we have seen how the very first blessing of the Neva had occurred during Peter the Great's founding of St. Petersburg – an act of origination here renewed in the present. The inclusion of young Peter's first boat in the procession of the cross also stressed this connection. Not only were participants celebrating the life-giving waters of Christianity, or the fountainhead of sacral time that had spilled forth a new tsarist capital on the Neva – present here was also Peter the Great's vision of a Russian Orthodox state geopolitically reborn through St. Petersburg's new foothold on the Baltic Sea.

I believe that the blessing of the Neva must also be understood alongside Grand Prince Vladimir's baptism of the Rus' in 988 – a crucial moment of sacred center-building in the imperial Russian imagination. Through this ceremony, St. Petersburg was put into constellation with the earliest moment of Russian Orthodoxy. The Neva became the sacred baptismal waters of the Dniepr, and the Peter and Paul Fortress – the site of mediation between city-spaces, past and present, and their holy waters. The religious and political significance of the fortress for the empire was annually performed in these mid-Pentecost celebrations: the Neva waters were domesticated and sacralized, the present was inflected with allegorical weight, and the modern Romanov dynasty was annually re-integrated into the stately, eternal rhythms of the church calendar.

Thus should Mid-Pentecost be seen as a sophisticated emplacement of the tsarist political sacred – wherein state, church, and military grace found their annual display in the Peter and Paul Fortress. However, for all its pageantry, this ecclesiastical holiday was still only a lesser event in the holy life of the citadel and its cathedral. An even grander union of sacred rite and political authority was performed during the high theatre of the tsarist burial. Let us turn now to examine exactly how a nineteenth-century Romanov political theology was reproduced and emplaced in the funerary rituals of the Peter and Paul Fortress – a process in which we find expressed all the aims and contradictions of the production of sacred political space in tsarist Russia.

## **V. Space and Ritual: The Burial of the Dead**

What is to be done with the body of an Emperor?

Peter the Great's political, cultural, and geographical rupture with the Muscovite past brought about not only radical new ways of life in the Russian empire, but also new forms of death. By Peter's will, the tsarist family was no longer to be buried in Moscow – where previous generations had been laid to rest in both the Cathedral of the Archangel and the Ascension Convent of the Kremlin.<sup>72</sup> The first burial to take place in the Peter and Paul Fortress was that of Peter's daughter Ekaterina, who died in her infancy in 1708. Over the coming century, the citadel's cathedral would host the funerary rites and heavy sarcophagi of almost every member

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<sup>72</sup> In the seventeenth century men of the tsarist family were buried in the former, women in the latter. See O.G. Ageeva, "Peterburgskii traurnyi tseremonial Doma Romanovykh v nachale XVIII v.," in *Fenomen Peterburga: Trudy Vtoroi Mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii, sostoiavsheisia 27-30 noiabria 2000 goda vo Vserossiiskom muzee A.S. Pushkina*, ed. Iu.N. Bespiatykh (St. Petersburg: 'Blits', 2001) 492-493.

of the immediate Romanov family, as well as that of the Grand Dukes and Duchesses.<sup>73</sup>

By the nineteenth century, a rigid set of procedures had developed around these burial processes. On the death of a royal in Imperial Russia, a Mourning Commission [*Pechalnaia Kommissiia*] would be immediately established to oversee the various ceremonies and rituals of the coming weeks.<sup>74</sup> This committee would manage the linked series of private and public rites – the imperial embalmment, the funerary procession, the vigils and requiems, a period of lying-in-state, the burial, and the months-long mourning period – that were occasioned by a royal death. The collected papers of each Mourning Commission, preserved in the Russian State Historical Archive, provide us with a wealth of information regarding imperial funerals in the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>75</sup> Let us look at some of the qualities that characterized these ceremonies from 1825 to 1917 – that is, from the reign of Nicholas I to the end of Romanov rule.

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<sup>73</sup> For information on the earliest Peter and Paul Cathedral burial rites, see M.O. Logunova, *Pechal'nye ritualy imperatorskoi rossii* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2011); and V.B. Gendrikov, “Traurnye tseremonii v Petropavlovskom sobore,” *Kraevedcheskie Zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 2 (1994): 306-15. For sources on the construction and use of the Grand Ducal Burial Vault, see n. 59 above.

<sup>74</sup> It’s an open question how welcome being named to this commission would be – this small team of officials would work well into the night for two weeks or more, organizing massive ceremonies, producing vast amounts of documents, and mediating between civil, religious, and military institutions. However, after the tsar had finally been put to rest, each member could count on a healthy amount of prestige and monetary compensation. See, for example, RGIA f. 473, op. 1, d. 1914, “O raskhodakh po ekspeditsii po sluchaiu rasporiazhenii o pogrebenii tela v Boze pochivshogo Gosudaria Imperatora Aleksandra Nikolaevicha i o nagradakh za trudy po semu sluchaiu”.

<sup>75</sup> These documents are held in the larger archives of the Ministry of the Imperial Court (*Ministerstvo Imperatorskogo Dvora*) at RGIA f. 472 and f. 473. Key documents for understanding these rituals can also be found in the archives of both the Peter and Paul Cathedral clergy and the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant (RGIA f. 816 and f. 1280, respectively).

The first thing that strikes us when examining these funerals is their ornate use of space. The ordering of officials and mourners, the transportation of the imperial regalia, the procession of the royal body itself – any and all movement was encumbered with a thick layer of ritual forms.<sup>76</sup>

At the center of funeral preparations was a question of transportation. Ecclesiastical authorities, gentry officials, and military guards needed to be gathered in great numbers; the holy regalia needed to be brought up from Moscow aboard a closed train; and, of course, the body of the dead Romanov needed to arrive at its final resting place in the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>77</sup>

This last movement was certainly one of the key aspects of these elaborate rituals. If the deceased breathed their last in St. Petersburg, only one procession was required. Deaths further afield, however, involved new sets of difficulties. For example: when the eldest son and heir apparent of Tsar Alexander II died in Nice at the age of twenty-one, the funerary ceremonies necessitated close cooperation with the French Government and a mad scramble to organize the necessary Orthodox

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<sup>76</sup> Indeed, even the movement of texts through the Russian graphosphere during these moments was encrusted with symbolic meaning – one of the first actions of any Mourning Commission was to mandate that every official imperial document be bordered with a black stripe, and be sealed solely with black wax, for the duration of the mourning period (which could last from six to twelve months). See, for example, RGIA f. 473, op. 1, d. 1915, ll. 1-3 and *ibid.*, op. 2, d. 429, l. 20.

<sup>77</sup> For a representative picture of the great pomp surrounding the transportation of the Imperial Regalia from the railway station to the Winter Palace (and from there to the Peter and Paul Cathedral), see the associated documents from the funeral of Nicholas I at RGIA f. 473, op.1, d. 554 and all of f. 473, Op. 1, d. 1905.

ecclesiastical figures, military officials, and means of transportation to bring these royal remains back from Western Europe, and then across imperial Russia.<sup>78</sup>

The most famous empire-wide procession occurred after Tsar Alexander III's death at his Crimean palace in 1894. Carried first on foot, then by ship, and finally enclosed with lilies and roses in a mourning train, the body of the tsar traversed almost all of European Russia as it stopped for extended requiems in Yalta, Sevastopol', Simferopol', Khar'kov, Kursk, Orel, Tula, Moscow and Tver.<sup>79</sup> "Every station, even those without planned stops" reported the paper *Moskovskie Vedomosti* "were clothed in mourning."<sup>80</sup> At larger stations, the train was met with choirs, orchestras, and masses of mourners who bedecked the imperial train in countless wreaths. During the extended Moscow ceremony, thousands among thousands gathered along streets where the buildings themselves were robed in black: "one can say with certainty that from the train station to the Kremlin there is not one house without drapes, not one balcony not closed with black cloth, not one wall not hung with mourning flags".<sup>81</sup>

Moscow, however, was only one stop of many along this posthumous pilgrimage. The focal point of tsarism's trans-imperial burial processions was always St. Petersburg – and within the capital itself, all movement and energy was directed towards the Peter and Paul Fortress, that center within a center.

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<sup>78</sup> The body of Tsarevich Nicholas Alexandrovich was eventually transported back to St. Petersburg aboard the imperial Russian frigate 'Aleksandr Nevskii'; the entire process took over a month. See RGIA f. 473, op. 3, d. 819, ll. 183-188, and d. 854, ll.20-25.

<sup>79</sup> Descriptions of the route taken, as well as programs of the ceremonies planned along the way, can be found at RGIA f. 473, Op. 2, D. 429, and *ibid.*, D. 434, ll. 5-7ob, 67-78ob.

<sup>80</sup> *Pamiaty Imperatora Aleksandra III. Sbornik 'Moskovskikh Vedomostei' (izvestiia, stat'i, perepechatki)* (Moscow: Izd. S. Petrovskago, 1894), 48.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

We are already acquainted with the secret organ-burying rites that took place the night before the St. Petersburg funeral. On that eve, heralds would travel the districts of the capital on horseback to publically announce the coming transfer of the late emperor's body from the Winter Palace (or Nikolaevskii railway station) to the Peter and Paul Cathedral.<sup>82</sup> The next morning, as participants and spectators thronged the streets of the capital, three volleys from the cannons of the Peter and Paul Fortress would begin the ceremonies.<sup>83</sup>

The final procession of the imperial body to the Peter and Paul Fortress involved thousands of people and took hours to complete.<sup>84</sup> The procession's actual path depended on both the vagaries of weather and the starting location. Those commencing in the Winter Palace only needed to travel along the embankment, cross the Neva by bridge (or ice), and enter into the Fortress – while the pageant for Alexander III began at the train station and traveled for several miles along the upper length of St. Petersburg's central boulevard, Nevskii Prospect.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Descriptions of these heralds – and copies of their announcements – can be found in RGIA f. 473, op. 1, d. 1900, l. 7, and *ibid.*, op. 2, d. 430, l. 12. The day of this event would also be published in the newspapers of the capital.

<sup>83</sup> This cannon fire is described in RGIA f. 473, op. 2, d. 451, l. 73.

<sup>84</sup> Although it is difficult to estimate the exact amount of participants and spectators, it was certainly in the tens – if not hundreds – of thousands. We can get a sense of the numbers involved in the documents of the Mourning Commissions. During the funeral procession of Alexander II, we can read about the thankless attempts of one official to organize the exact order of 2,000 minor tsarist officials alone. See RGIA, f. 473, op.1, d. 1906, ll. 48-49.

<sup>85</sup> Nicholas I's funeral procession took a right out of Palace Square, a right onto the embankment, crossed over the still-frozen Neva, and entered the Fortress through the Nevskie Gates; Alexander II instead took a left on the embankment and traveled to the Ioannovskie Gates by way of Vasilevskii Island and Aleksandrovskii Park; and Alexander III took a left off of Nevskii to follow Admiral'skii Prospect past St. Isaac's Cathedral and Senate Square, before also crossing through Vasilevskii Island and entering the Fortress through the Petrovskie Gates. See RGIA f. 472, op. 8, d. 69, ll. 12-12ob; RGIA f. 473, op. 1, d. 1903, ll. 90-90ob; and RGIA f. 473, op. 2, d. 434, ll. 67-78ob, respectively.

Either path must have been breathtaking in its grandeur. To the stately rhythms of military drummers and cannonfire thundering from the fortress walls once every minute, a tableau of autocratic political power, social hierarchy, and symbolic gesture embodied itself in full regalia on an imperial stage. Royal family members, government ministers, and provincial officials; generals, admirals, and honor regiments; metropolitan bishops, priests, and church choirs – the civic, military and religious wings of the autocratic state would amass in mourning finery [Figure 5]. In the middle of this tableau would be a funeral carriage drawn by eight horses, escorted by generals, majors, and sixty pages of the imperial household. Within would lie the body of the deceased tsar.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Official programs for the funeral processions of Nicholas I, Alexander II and Alexander III to the Peter and Paul Cathedral can be found at RGIA f. 472, op. 8, d. 69, ll. 77-84; RGIA f. 473, op. 1, d. 1903, ll. 43-54; and *ibid.*, op. 2, d. 434, ll. 67-78ob, respectively.



Figure 5: A print depicting the funeral procession of Dowager Empress Aleksandra Feodorovna in 1860. Note the purposeful movement of this ceremonial mass towards the spire of the Peter and Paul Fortress – with its exterior depicted in the upper left corner, and its sacred interior rising at the heart of the image. [*Vynos tela v Boze pochivshei Gosudaryni Imperatritsy Aleksandry Feodorovny iz tserkvi Chesmenskoi bogadel'ni v Petropavlovskii Sobor, NYPL ID b11767900.*]

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Upon arriving at the Peter and Paul Fortress, the commandant and fortress guard would escort the imperial catafalque into the cathedral. The first of many requiems would be held, attended by the imperial family as well as the most senior-ranking civil, military, and ecclesiastical officials. For the next week or so, the deceased emperor would lie in state within the Peter and Paul Cathedral, surrounded by candles, wreathes, and armed guards. A daily timetable would allow Russian subjects to pay respects at the body of the dead autocrat, with visiting hours ordered by rank in the civil or military service and scheduled between frequent private requiems. The crowds that gathered for these viewings were massive in scope. The budgetary documents for Alexander III's Mourning Commission record that 119,900 official tickets were printed for cathedral visitors.<sup>87</sup> Nicholas I's Mourning Commission frequently complained to the St. Petersburg police about the crowds of common people overstepping barricades and blocking carriage routes in the fortress.<sup>88</sup> During Alexander II's funeral we find correspondence between the Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress and the archpriest of the cathedral scrambling to accommodate the "frequent occurrence of unannounced delegations and individuals arriving in the Peter and Paul Cathedral from various parts of Russia."<sup>89</sup> Increased visitation times were announced through insets in local newspapers to offset the influx of these "society and estate deputies from all corners of the Russian Land."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> RGIA f. 473, op. 2, d. 454, l. 48.

<sup>88</sup> See, for example, two rather passive-aggressive letters from February 28 and March 1, 1855, held at RGIA f. 472, op. 8, d. 65, ll. 12-12ob and l. 37, respectively.

<sup>89</sup> RGIA f. 816, op. 1, d. 197, ll. 26-26ob.

<sup>90</sup> An example of one of these inserts can be found at RGIA f. 473, op. 1, d. 1911, l. 71. The name of the newspaper is, unfortunately, not recorded.

Indeed, it was not just subjects living in St. Petersburg and the surrounding environs that would come to witness the funeral ceremonies of the tsars – deputations would arrive from all corners of the Russian Empire, as well as from across Eurasia and Western Europe. Royal families, heads of state, and foreign ministers would travel to St. Petersburg to watch these luxurious funerary processions and be present during the final, closed burial ceremony. An official pamphlet from the funeral of Alexander III lists the presence of representatives from twenty-four royal houses.<sup>91</sup> In this way, Romanov burials further functioned as showcases for Europe’s persistent old regime.

And it was not just through foreign royals that these imperial ceremonies gained a truly global resonance. The Romanov funerary regime was ready-made for internal and international consumption – for its reproduction in illustrations, commemorative items, and news reports. The organizers of Alexander III’s ceremonies received notice that eleven correspondents from nine British newspapers alone would be covering the events.<sup>92</sup> In the last decades of the regime, royal burials were breathlessly reported to audiences across the world, with the *London Times* declaring the procession of Alexander III to be “the most imposing and solemn pageant of the nineteenth century.”<sup>93</sup> For a brief period, the eyes of the world rested upon the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

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<sup>91</sup> These were kings and queens, dukes and duchesses traveling everywhere from Prussia to Siam. The official pamphlet was printed in French. See RGIA f. 473, op. 2, d. 429, ll. 146-146ob.

<sup>92</sup> These were *The Times*, *The Standard*, *The Daily News*, *The Graphic*, *Daily Chronicle*, *The Morning Post*, *The Daily Telegraph* (three reporters), *Illustrated London News*, and *Pall Mall Gazette*. See the small note found at RGIA f. 473, op. 2, d. 429, l. 253.

<sup>93</sup> *The London Times* (London), Nov. 24, 1894.

Imperial funeral rites were thus among the grandest productions of Russian absolutism's theatrical will. In their form alone, they indelibly marked out the Peter and Paul Fortress as a sacred political space.

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But what, exactly, was the deeper purpose of these funerals? Beyond their grandeur of spectacle, what did these Fortress-centered ceremonies conceptually achieve in the political imagination of absolutist Russia?

I would argue that these grand pageants held two primary functions within Romanov political theology: to symbolically repair the imperial landscape, and symbolically repair the imperial dynasty. In each of these processes, the Peter and Paul Fortress served as the crucial representational space for a necromantic 're-bracketing.'

## **V. Mending the Imperial Landscape**

Traveling sovereignty – the ceremonial movement of ruling personages out from the centers of their reign – has long been a topic of interest to Cultural Anthropology and Critical Geography. It was Clifford Geertz who first analyzed the ways in which royal journeys functioned as one of “the ceremonial forms by which kings take symbolic possession of their realm”<sup>94</sup> – how royal movements, encrusted with thick discursive weight, served to rebind the representational space of autocracy.

I believe that the Russian monarchs achieved this aim not only in their living pagentry, but also in the voyages of the dead.

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<sup>94</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Symbolics of Power,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 125.

Take Tsar Alexander III's funerary procession. With its endless kilometers of black fabric draping a path from Crimea to St. Petersburg, this was certainly intended as an extravagant pageant of all-Russian political and religious unity. Its geopolitical heft could also not be clearer: the royal remains tracked a twilight obverse of the path by which Catherine the Great had taken southern Ukraine into her sovereign possession a century previous.

This process of rebinding the imperial landscape is even more evident in instances of international expiration. After the passing of several Grand Dukes and Duchesses in Western Europe at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, large requiems were pointedly held in the small border towns where their funeral trains first crossed over into imperial territory. These acts not only celebrated the return of the deceased royals to their home country, but also served to demarcate the Russian border and emphasize the Orthodox sacrality of Russian soil.<sup>95</sup> We could also look to the untimely death of Grand Duke Georgii Aleksandrovich in Central Georgia in 1899. The elaborate procession that brought his body back to the capital involved constant ceremonies in the towns they passed in the Caucasus. These church services and military displays in the long-contested borderlands of the empire

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<sup>95</sup> For example, in 1908 tsarist officials and an ecclesiastical delegation held a large mass in the tiny border town of Verzhbolovo (in polish *Wierzbolow*; present day Virbalis, Lithuania) upon the arrival of the funeral train carrying the body of Grand Duke Aleksei Aleksevich, the fourth son of Alexander II. For information on his procession, see RGIA f. 473, op. 3, d. 857, ll. 171-176ob and, especially, d. 875, ll. 197-202ob. A similar border service is recorded for the funerary procession of Grand Duke Alexei Mikhailovich in 1895. See *ibid.*, ll. 84-88ob. Note that upon his return to St. Petersburg and procession into the Peter and Paul Fortress, the abovementioned Aleksei Aleksevich was the first Grand Duke to be buried in the newly-built Grand Ducal Burial Vault adjoining the cathedral.

served to channel the symbolic might of the Romanov house through one of its  
perished bodies.<sup>96</sup>

The end point of each of these rebindings – the crucial spatial knot – was, of course, the Peter and Paul Fortress. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Romanov funerary practices thus consistently served to “locate the society’s center and affirm its connection with transcendent things by stamping a territory with ritual signs of dominance.”<sup>97</sup> Imperial subjects were reconfirmed in their devotion to the royal house; the space of the empire was rebound to the Fortress along the path of a dead emperor’s final voyage.

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This process of posthumous mending did not only occur on the vast scale of the Eurasian imperial demesne. I would argue that it also must be seen in the streets of St. Petersburg itself, where Romanov funeral processions played a definite role within the peculiar representational space of the capital.

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Every city carries its death within it.

Some are fated to die by fire. Others by ice, or pestilence.

Since the day of its founding, St. Petersburg’s doom lay in water.

I do not speak here solely of the very real perils this urban space faced from the grim Baltic dark – although the frequent floods that periodically unraveled the city

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<sup>96</sup> RGIA f. 473, op. 3, d. 875, ll. 94-102. Upon his death from tuberculosis, Grand Duke Georgii Aleksandrovich (as the third son of Alexander III and brother of the then-sonless Tsar Nicholas II) had been heir presumptive to the Russian throne.

<sup>97</sup> Geertz, “Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Symbolics of Power”, 125.

surely left their mark on the nineteenth-century cultural imaginary.<sup>98</sup> What we touch upon here is rather the peculiar apocalyptic imagination of this imperial capital: the stormy dialectic of stone and water that structured the city as a representational space and in turn found expression in its historical practices and political anxieties.

St. Petersburg was always a site of contradictions. From one perspective, this was “the most abstract and premeditated city in the whole world”: one of history’s greatest expressions of the will to spatial reason, cast in stone.<sup>99</sup> Since its creation, St. Petersburg had been architecturally organized with the geometric imperialism of the perspective line and Cartesian plane, the boulevard and the parade ground.<sup>100</sup> In raising up this new capital, Peter the Great had taken on the role of rational demiurge, cleaving formlessness from form.

However, this city of reason dreamed of madness.

Just as Baltic floodwaters periodically mocked its urban geometry, so too did St. Petersburg’s spatial imagination turn time and time again to its fated dissolution. Even when poets were not literally depicting the capital “drowned at the bottom of the sea,” its city-text developed a deep fascination with the formless tides, lapping at the walls of rationality and promising to one day pick its granite bones clean.<sup>101</sup> If the most famous expression of this mythos is surely A.S. Pushkin’s poem “The Bronze

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<sup>98</sup> St. Petersburg has been inundated, on average, every few years since the date of its founding. The most devastating flood occurred in 1824, when the Neva waters rose by over four meters and killed several hundred people.

<sup>99</sup> F.M. Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, trans. Michael R. Katz (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 5.

<sup>100</sup> This characterization is indebted to Denis Cosgrove, “Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 10 (1985): 45-62.

<sup>101</sup> See Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 191-202.

Horseman” – with its literal depiction of death by water – then we must also locate its perpetuation in the nineteenth-century rise of the St. Petersburg Gothic, as well as the grip that the Nietzschean Apollonian-Dionysian binary held on the *fin de siècle* imagination.<sup>102</sup>

Furthermore, as was explicitly developed in the literary canon towards the end of the tsarist regime – think the oceanic masses overflowing the architecture of the tsarist state in Andrei Bely’s *Petersburg* – the spatial *thanatos* of the Romanov capital held a definite political valence. It was in this charged landscape of symbol and space that the Romanov funeral procession achieved a particular intervention.

For the grand pageants of imperial Mourning Commissions not only occurred within space, but can be seen as particular technologies of reading (and writing) the city-text. In the semiotically-charged funeral movement – where every individual had their place, where every gesture had its meaning – the politically geometry of Russian absolutism was given its fullest expression. In the tsarist funeral procession, the ontological ambiguity between water and stone was settled in favor of the latter: for at least one day, the capital was truly transformed into the Cartesian parade ground of autocratic spatial fantasy. The final destination of this funeral trajectory – the Peter and Paul Fortress – anchored the city against the flood.

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<sup>102</sup> A classic example of the latter mood is N.P. Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga* (Petrograd: Izdatel’stvo Brokgauz i Efron, 1922). For contemporary scholarship on the St. Petersburg city-text, see V.N. Toporov, *Peterburgskii tekst russkoi literatury. Izbrannye trudy* (St. Petersburg: ‘Iskusstvo-SPB’, 2003); and Julie A. Buckler, *Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityshape* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

## VII. Mending the Imperial Dynasty

Thus do we see how modern tsarist burial practices served to bind the symbolic landscape of Romanov Empire – to tie its edges and borderlands to the political center, to repress the death wish of the capital’s spatial imaginary. However, Peter and Paul Fortress funeral rites did not solely serve to reinforce an imperial cultural-political topography. Through these ceremonies, the space of the Fortress also played a crucial role in the very logic of dynastic rule.

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What do we talk about when we talk about the Romanov Dynasty in the long nineteenth century? This was, of course, a ruling house of Europe: a line formed in 1613 after the Time of Troubles and whose descendants – inheriting sovereignty through agnatic-preference primogeniture – possessed “autocratic and unlimited” authority in the Russian Empire, “ordained by God Himself.”<sup>103</sup>

But we must be wary here of treating the Romanov dynasty as an undifferentiated object. It can be all too easy to reduce the imperial house to some uniform entity – especially when, in the period of our study, both revolutionary cultures *and* the state had much to gain in painting the autocracy as monolithic and unchanging.

Truly historical understandings of Romanov absolutism should maintain a sensitivity to the granularity and contingency of its political cultures over time. Following the work of Richard Wortman, it is often best to view this regime through its changing succession of ‘scenarios of power’ – that is, how each emperor and

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<sup>103</sup> See Paragraph 1 of the Digest of Laws of the Russian Empire: *Svod Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* (St. Petersburg: Vtorogo otdeleniia Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva kantseliarii, 1857), 1:1.

empress possessed different understandings of political authority, which they performed through personally-adopted ceremonial repertoires.<sup>104</sup>

However, what strikes us about Romanov funeral rites in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century is not their mutability, but rather *the opposite* – how little they changed. While some motifs of each ruler’s individual ‘scenario of power’ were lightly incorporated into their eventual funeral rites,<sup>105</sup> the overall structure of these ceremonies was kept remarkably the same from 1825 to the end of the Romanov regime.<sup>106</sup>

When looking through the documents of various Mourning Commissions, it is remarkable how much effort each committee put into replicating funeral ceremonies of the past. There is no room for innovation here. Official documents, proclamations, and rituals were most often carried forward from the last imperial funeral, with nothing but the pronouns changed.<sup>107</sup> While each emperor envisioned their rule anew, their burial rites were to remain structurally the same.

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<sup>104</sup> Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995-2000).

<sup>105</sup> For an example of a funerary ‘scenario of power’: the St. Petersburg funeral procession and later burial ceremony of Tsar Nicholas I prominently featured several obedient Georgian princes, a minor addition that stressed an imperial narrative of Nicholas as pacifier of the Caucasus (and helped distract onlookers from Russia’s losses in the ongoing Crimean War). See RGIA f. 473, op. 8, d. 69, ll. 61-61ob, 214; *ibid.*, d. 78, ll. 16-17; and *ibid.*, d. 79, ll. 24-24ob.

<sup>106</sup> For example: the St. Petersburg funeral procession and later burial ceremony of Tsar Nicholas I prominently featured several obedient Georgian princes, a minor addition that stressed an imperial narrative of Nicholas as pacifier of the Caucasus (and helped distract onlookers from Russia’s losses in the ongoing Crimean War). See RGIA f. 473, op. 8, d. 69, ll. 61-61ob, 214; *ibid.*, d. 78, ll. 16-17; and *ibid.*, d. 79, ll. 24-24ob.

<sup>107</sup> The very first *delo* of Alexander II’s Mourning Commission archive (RGIA f. 473, op. 1, d. 1898) is solely concerned with procuring and handling documents from his father’s funeral twenty-six years previous. Similar records are to be found in the archive of Nicholas I and Alexander III’s Mourning Commissions as well, where everything from the funerary proclamations to the handling of the imperial regalia was based strictly on previous forms.

If, as Wortman argues, the ceremonial lives of each tsarist regime must be understood as “the individual modes of performance of the imperial myth,” then the funeral rites we have examined in this chapter quite clearly lay outside these bounded symbolic transcripts.<sup>108</sup> Why was this the case? I do not believe that the structural repetition of Romanov burial rites in any way contradicts Wortman’s concept of individual tsarist political cultures. Rather, it points to the fact that while each ruler devised original vocabularies for their personal reigns, there were some transcripts of Russian absolutism that were meant to go deeper than any one individual tsar. In their very logic, burial rites in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century should be understood as ‘inter-scenario’ rituals.

What do we mean by this? It is incontrovertible that the death of an emperor is one of the most unstable moments in the life of an autocracy. For a brief instant, the throne – the seat of political and symbolic power – is physically empty. ‘Inter-scenario’ rituals are those intended as bulwarks against these moments of danger.

Russian absolutism did not develop a legal fiction of the ‘King’s Two Bodies’ – that strange physiology of sovereignty that was essential to the process of succession in medieval England. Rather, in the Romanov Empire, the contradiction between the throne’s sempiternity and each ruler’s temporariness was solved through a robust concept of dynasty. One of the first acts of each Russian tsar was to proclaim their heir. According to nineteenth-century law, this new emperor would ascend to the

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Rough drafts of the relevant texts were often just copies of past documents with the names crossed out and replaced in pencil. See, for example, RGIA f. 472, op. 8, d. 60, l. 1, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, 1:6.

throne on the very day of the passing of their predecessor.<sup>109</sup> Thus did hereditary dynasty – as an uninterrupted temporal ‘verticality’ of sequential rulers; or an incorporated “supra-individual entity comparable to an *universitas* ‘which never died’” – seek to solve the problem of tsarist succession and admit no *interregna* into the Russian lands.<sup>110</sup>

And in this, I would argue, lay the importance of Romanov funerary rites. These grand rituals belonged to no individual tsar’s narrative of rule. They should instead be seen as performative affirmations of dynastic power. These linking-ceremonies – existing within the uncertain space of two emperors – showcased the sempiternal legitimacy that underlay each historically-contingent expression of the Romanov regime. Tsars could die, power could change hands, political situations could alter – but the fundamental authority and legitimacy of the Romanov house was meant to be unchanging.

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<sup>109</sup> “...co dnia konchiny Ego predshestvennika” – See Paragraph 31 of the Digest of Laws of the Russian Empire: *Svod Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 1:6. Thus, while lacking the physiological mystifications of medieval English sovereignty, the particularities of this Russian legal temporality led to its own strange expressions. For example: when Tsar Nicholas I finally announced his ascendance to the throne in his Manifesto of December 12, 1825 (following the various disputes that surrounded this inheritance, and the repression of the Decembrist revolt), his reign officially began retroactively, on the day of his brother’s death nearly one month previous. See the discussion of these peculiarities in N. Korevo, *Nasledovanie Prestola po Osnovnym Gosudarstvennym Zakonom* (Paris: ‘Obshchestva ob’edineniia Russkikh v Nitse’, 1922), 38-39.

<sup>110</sup> See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 312-13, 336. Thus were the emperor’s physical remains not a deactivated husk of the dual-embodied sovereignty analyzed by Kantorowicz – rather, we can see them as fleshy withdrawals from the material stuff of dynasty, returned in the Peter and Paul Fortress to the eternal fund from which each individual dynast was temporarily incorporated, by God’s will. Of course, one could perhaps move past Kantorowicz’ quite precise discussion of politico-theological physiognomy in order to explore how the immortal, super-bodied plane of tsarist sovereignty comingled in the nineteenth century with new visions of the ‘body politic’ (*Pravoslavie, Samoderzhavie, Narodnost*). For an intriguing analysis of the ‘two bodies’ between absolutist and popular sovereignty, see Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

And the Peter and Paul Fortress was the space meant to house this royal lineage – to be the symbolic center of no one dynast, but of the eternal dynasty itself. We can see this not only in the grand, unchanging funeral ceremonies of the tsars, but also in the daily practices of the Peter and Paul Cathedral in the modern period.

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Held under the St. Petersburg diocese (*eparkhiia*) until its transfer to the Imperial Court in 1883, the Peter and Paul Cathedral was headed by a protoiereus (*protoierei*, or archpriest) who led a staff of several priests, protodeacons, deacons, bell-ringers (*zvonari*) and psalm-readers (*psalomshchiki*).<sup>111</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, the Cathedral was also served by a twenty-four-man choir taken from the imperial Life-Guard Grenadier Regiment.<sup>112</sup>

Besides grand funerary celebrations, the main function of the Peter and Paul Cathedral was to perform requiem services for the Romanov house. This was their burial site, and here is where clergy would perform the memorial liturgies of the Orthodox faith, annually remembering past Emperors, Empresses and their families with services on their birthdays, royal name-days (*tezoimenitstvo*), and the days of

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<sup>111</sup> The decree announcing this transfer of the Peter and Paul Cathedral to the Imperial Court in 1883 is located at RGIA f. 816, op. 1, d. 201 (1883), l. 32-33. During the reassignment, the fortress clergy was asked to compile a document summarizing their organizational structure and liturgical practices – this valuable record of the cathedral’s functions can be found at *ibid.*, 135-136ob. The ecclesiastical structure of the Peter and Paul Cathedral is also discussed in A.I. Barabanova, “Pricht Petropavlovskogo sobora,” *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 2 (1994): 282-300. The exact number of clergy-members changed throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, with the protoiereus usually served by between two and four priests, one protodeacon and two deacons. Note that the protoiereus of the Peter and Paul Cathedral was a far from unimportant position, and was usually filled by a figure of some standing. For example: the protoiereus from 1858 to 1871, V.P. Polisadov, was a professor of theology at St. Petersburg University. See *ibid.*, 288.

<sup>112</sup> The details of the partnership between this prestigious regiment and the Peter and Paul Cathedral can be found at RGIA f. 816, op. 1, d. 194, ll. 108-109.

their deaths [Figure 6]. Of course, what must have begun as a feasible series of annual rites grew with each new generation, and had become a massive undertaking by the turn of the twentieth century. One almost feels pity for the clergy of the Peter and Paul Cathedral, who in the last decades of Romanov rule were tasked with over eighty memorial rituals each year.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Catalogues of memorial services can be found throughout RGIA f. 816, op. 1, as well as in the personal papers of Commandant A.F. Sorokin held at OR RNB f. 727, ed. khr. 67.



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Thus, even when the fortress was not catching the world's attention with magnificent Romanov funerals, the cathedral still waited in the background like an idling motor, constantly performing a narrative of dynastic eternity at a low hum. The repetition of tsarist memorials grounded autocracy in the slow, cyclical rhythms of the church calendar – serving to further stress the presence of a tsarist legitimacy that supported and survived the particular trajectory of any one reign. While individual tsars might possess their own personal scenarios of power and heroic histories, the political power and sacred legitimacy of the Romanov dynasty rested in the Peter and Paul Fortress, outside the vagaries of historical change – it was, indeed, ahistorical.

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This, then, was the significance of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the dynastic logic of the Romanov regime. The sacred political space of the Fortress and its cathedral, as enshrined through elaborate funeral ritual and repetitive memorial rite, was made to both embody and safeguard the permanence of Romanov dynastic authority. The Peter and Paul Fortress as politically sacred space from 1825 to 1917 was meant to hold the unchanging and unchangeable permanence of Romanov rule, within which the personal histories of individual tsars were arranged like so many war trophies preserved in perpetuity, or rows of stone sarcophagi arrayed on marble floors. When, after exhaustive empire-wide ceremonies, the body of a dead emperor was finally laid to rest in the Peter and Paul Cathedral, it was transformed into another stone in a Romanov mythos of dynastic permanence. The Fortress' granite walls and marble

cathedral floor were meant to hold not only the physical remains of the royal house, but also the undying foundation of their legitimacy.

### **VIII. Conclusions: Inventing Imperial Tradition**

This political imaginary, however, was not without its contradictions. To conclude, I would like to discuss a few of these conflicts – cracks in the foundation of the Fortress and its tsarist myth.

The most glaring inconsistency here is that of time. Note that the preceding section was very careful to mark chronology from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. For discourses of eternity are always themselves historical – and in fact, the myth of dynastic permanence in Russia was a modern creation.

I would argue that the grand funeral ceremonies of the Romanov regime – those rites which ‘emplaced’ the dynasty in the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress – took on a qualitatively different role in the state liturgy from 1825 onward. Although the cathedral had been ordained as imperial tomb during the reign of Peter the Great, before the death of Alexander I neither funeral rites nor the tombs of the tsars were given foundational importance in a Romanov political theology.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Burial ceremonies were private, religious, essentially non-state affairs for the Muscovite and Kievan Rus’ states. See T.E. Samoiloa, “Sviashchennoe prostranstvo kniazheskogo groba,” in *Ierotopiia: Sozdanie sakral’nykh prostranstv v Vizantii i Drevnei Rusi*, ed. A.M. Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 579-611. While Peter the Great did establish a precedent for larger public ceremonies centered around his newly-built Fortress, in the eighteenth century these were more allegorical tableaux of virtuous life and rule rather than celebrations of dynastic permanence. See Lindsey Hughes, “The Funerals of Russian Emperors and Empresses,” in *Monarchy and Religion: The Transformation of Royal Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Michael Schaich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 395-419. I would like to thank Simon Dixon for his guidance on this point.

Why were imperial funeral ceremonies elevated to such spectacular heights at the beginning of the nineteenth century? I believe this is due to a return (or, indeed, ‘re-invention’) of the concept of dynasty in this period. We should note that this is a matter of both political culture and legal scaffolding.

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Under Peter the Great, the laws of succession were altered to allow the Emperor or Empress to choose their successor from amongst their issue.<sup>115</sup> While still maintaining the dominance of the Romanov House, this innovation effectively displaced royal inheritance from the impersonal logic of family birth to an act of sovereign decision. Indeed, this accorded with Peter’s own ‘scenario of power.’ As a Russian ruler, he had promoted individual energy and will as the key attributes of divine kingship, rather than familial ties. It is no wonder then that the concept of dynasty lost much of its luster in the eighteenth century – as Wortman writes, there was a “fundamental incompatibility between the principle of inheritance and Peter’s own conception and practice of monarchy.”<sup>116</sup>

This situation was only revised at the end of the eighteenth century, when Emperor Paul I issued his own act on royal succession (known as the Pauline Laws) on the day of his coronation, which reestablished dynastic primogeniture.<sup>117</sup> Of course, Paul I would be murdered with the tacit support of his own family just four years later

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<sup>115</sup> See this discussed in M.V. Zyzykin, *Tsarskaia vlast’ i zakon o prestolonasledii v Rossii* (Sofia: Novaia zhizn’, 1924), 73-90.

<sup>116</sup> Wortman “The Russian Imperial Family as Symbol,” in *Russian Monarchy: Representation and Rule. Collected Articles* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 107.

<sup>117</sup> See *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii s 1649 goda* (St. Petersburg: Vtorogo otdeleniia Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva kantseliarii, 1830), 24:587-89; and Korevo, 38-39, 101-103.

– a killing that hardly supported a political culture of sacred dynasty and grand funerary rite.

It was only upon the death of his son Alexander I in 1825 that Russian absolutism would begin a smooth trajectory along family lines that would last until the end of regime – a trajectory that would be uncontested (at least not from *within* the Romanov house) and capable of supporting a political culture of inheritance.

Other developments would congeal from 1825 onwards and further buttress a dynastic conception of tsarist rule. Chief among them was a trans-European revolution in sentiment, which could not but impact the ruling political cultures of this period. The rise of Romanticism brought the valorization of both the cultivation of family life and the embrace of organic ties to personal and national history. Both of these elements supported a renewed Romanov engagement with the concept of dynasty. Past rulers were not to be overleapt (or murdered) by the new tsar, but rather to be commemorated both publically and privately – most notably, in grand new funeral rituals.

Nicholas I's inauguration of a 'Romantic turn' in Romanov rule is amply demonstrated in the following anecdote from the diary of Nicholas' son, the future tsar Alexander II. The heir recalls how in April 1834 his father took him to the Peter and Paul Fortress. Nicholas bid him to kiss the graves of his ancestors and seek their blessing. After this solemn gesture Nicholas spoke: "when I lie there, visit me sometimes."<sup>118</sup> New notions of familial fidelity further supported the strengthening of tsarist succession after 1825.

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Richard S. Wortman, "The Russian Imperial Family as Symbol," in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, eds. Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel (Bloomington,

Once the principle of dynastic legitimacy entered the political vocabulary of one tsar, it was very easily maintained in successive generations through funeral rites and commemorative acts in the Peter and Paul Fortress. As Wortman has remarked, Nicholas I's new scenario "initiated [the Romanov family] in the cult of ancestors, the immortal unity of the dynasty" – new values to be performed in majestic rituals of burial and remembrance, which continued apace until the fall of regime.<sup>119</sup>

Thus we see two of the elements that led to the elevation of Peter and Paul Fortress funerary rites from 1825 onward: a newly stable model of inheritance, and the values of European Romanticism. However, I believe that there was one last cause behind this shift in Romanov political cultures – a shift that not only made the invention of a dynastic tradition possible, but *necessary*. I would argue that elaborate Fortress rituals stressing the autocracy's dynastic permanence suddenly became indispensable amidst great upheavals in the modern Russian political landscape – and it is this that gave shape, in the last instance, to the sacralization of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

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Up until the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, the fundamental permanence of absolutism as a political form had been an implicit assumption of tsarist governance. Wars could occur, disasters arise, emperors perish – but autocratic

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IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 78. Wortman locates the original source, "Aleksander II: Dnevnik, 1834 g." in GARF f. 678, op. 1, d. 280, l. 1

<sup>119</sup> Wortman, "The Russian Imperial Family as Symbol," 78.

rule was the ultimate political plane upon which the events of this history occurred. The king is dead – long live the king.<sup>120</sup>

To this political imagination, the French Revolution and simultaneous rise of critical political thought represented a threat not just to the security of the realm – they destabilized the very epistemological foundations that had sustained it. Reinhart Koselleck coined the term *Sattlezeit* to describe this trans-European moment when new spaces of experience and horizons of political possibility began to arise “out of the shadow of absolutism.”<sup>121</sup> The state of things had become ‘unbracketed’ – autocracy was no longer the unitary plane on which the political occurred.<sup>122</sup>

And while Koselleck wrote mostly of Western Europe – his moment of rupture tracks on to the conceptual legacy of the French Revolution and enlightenment thought – I would argue that we can see 1825 as a critical turning point in a particular Russian *Sattlezeit*. With the Decembrist revolt of this year, a new plurality of historical

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<sup>120</sup> To be clear – I am not stating that the Russian autocracy was never threatened before the nineteenth century. The imperial court had always faced difficulty in holding uncontested transfers of power, and indeed the Romanov house had itself risen out of the chaos of the Time of Troubles (and frequently faced large scale peasant uprisings). However, neither cyclical *jacqueries* (understood as anarchy, the absence of politics) nor palace coups were seen as something outside of the overall framework of political absolutism. For more on the trans-European fracturing of this framework in these years, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998).

<sup>121</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, “Modernity and the Planes of Historicity,” in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 20-21. My thought here is indebted to illuminating conversations with Enzo Traverso on *Sattlezeiten* both past and present.

<sup>122</sup> Carl Schmitt uses the phrase ‘bracketing of war’ (*Hegung des Krieges*) in describing the development of a general framework of international order between the Treaty of Westphalia and the First World War in his *The Nomos of the Earth*. One can see his later lectures on *The Theory of the Partisan* as an exploration of a reverse process of ‘unbracketing.’ Putting Schmitt into dialogue with Koselleck, I use the term here to describe the more general destabilization of reigning European political epistemologies that occurred between 1750-1850. See Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (Candor, NY: Telos Press, 2003), 58, 74-75, 100, 140-51, 246-47.

reason, political experience, and social thought could no longer be denied by the tsarist regime.<sup>123</sup> Absolutism's eternal authority and unquestionable legitimacy had been, well, questioned – and suddenly it needed to defend itself. Hence a crucial impetus to the buttressing of a new dynastic mythos in imperial Russia: grand imperial funeral ceremonies were arguments for the continued authority of autocracy as a symbolic system in an era where this legitimacy had been newly brought into question.

There was thus always a melancholy quixotism surrounding the Romanov sacralization of the fortress – a retreat from the dangers of the present into an increasingly elaborate cult of the dead.<sup>124</sup> This moment of epistemological uncertainty was indeed the origin of so many of the absolutist 'invented traditions,' with their new syntheses of the sacred and the political, which arose in nineteenth century Europe – new-old arguments for worldviews that could no longer be taken for granted.<sup>125</sup> The

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<sup>123</sup> Of course, the conceptual ground underlying the authority of Russian absolutism had begun to dissolve much earlier – one could look to the late-eighteenth-century intellectual labors of A.N. Radishchev and N.I. Novikov as first tremors, and, of course, the shockwaves of the American and French Revolutions did not go unnoticed in the Russian Empire. However, I would argue that it was only with the Decembrist Revolt that tsardom first realized that absolutism's monopoly of the political had dissolved.

<sup>124</sup> This grand historical nostalgia would reach its most painful heights in the 'scenarios of power' of Alexander III and Nicholas II in the last decades of tsarist rule, when the latter essentially renounced the responsibilities of modern statecraft and retreated into a phantasmagoric recreation of pre-Petrine architecture, dress, and images – alongside a continuing Nicolaevan dynastic legend. The melancholy dreamworld of Nicholas I's political culture is amply described in Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 2:395-440. Note that, of course, autocratic rulers were not the only ones who sought to weather the alienating social, political, and economic terrain of modernity in the space of an imagined (national) past – it is no surprise that Slavophile political cultures first arose in the reign of Nicholas I as well.

<sup>125</sup> See the classic E.J. Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); as well as Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). This development is, in the last instance, the source for the title of this chapter. In the conclusion to *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, Emilio Gentile identifies a trans-European trend whereby "from the end of the eighteenth century... politics has tended to construct its own religiously charged symbolic universes." While the consecration of the Peter and Paul Fortress from the reign of Nicholas I onward does not share the same technics or

walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress were elevated to such grand ceremonial heights at precisely the moment when the tsarist symbolic universe first felt itself under siege. The sacralization of the Peter and Paul Fortress could thus be read as the creation of an autocratic *katechon*, as a Romanov dynastic cult and a Russian radicalism arose out of this same *Sattelzeit*.

And, strikingly, as they both grew to occupy the same space. For even as the regime consecrated the Peter and Paul Fortress through its funeral rites, even as it used the citadel as a theatre for the staging of sacred political authority, even as it sought arguments for the regime's continued vitality amongst the tombs of the dead – this same fortress also housed imperial Russia's most notorious political prison. In 1825, as the Fortress was holding the first spectacular funerary rites for Alexander I, it also housed the imprisoned participants in the failed Decembrist uprising. Those whose challenge to tsarist rule had provided the catalyst for the new ceremonial life of the Peter and Paul Fortress now lay imprisoned in its walls.

This dual role is the central contradiction of the fortress. And over the next century, even as the citadel grew into a vast shrine of the Romanov house, imprisoned revolutionaries elevated it into a dissident stage of personal suffering, political martyrdom, and, ultimately, radical redemption. This gradual, old mole's tale - the story of how revolutionary political cultures approached, contested, and eventually

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historical circumstances that Gentile explores in Mussolini's Italy, it is part of a larger project he identifies whereby nineteenth-century absolutist states in Europe instrumentalized the sacred (through ritual and language) to justify and legitimize their continued authority. See Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 153-55. We could also look here to Kantorowicz (who sees modern European sovereignty as an alchemy of politics and divinity "which *mutatis mutandis* was to remain valid until the twentieth century"), and, of course, Schmitt. See Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, xviii; and Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

transformed a Romanov heart of empire into *their own* sacred political space – is the subject of the chapters that follow.



## 2. Narrating Political Imprisonment in Tsarist Russia: Bakunin, Goethe, Hegel

If the author's action consists in disclosing buried meaning, if their heroes must first break out of their prisons and, in desperate struggles or long, wearisome wanderings, attain the home of their dreams – their freedom from terrestrial gravity – then the power of verse, which can spread a carpet of flowers over the chasm, is not sufficient to build a practicable road across it... Only prose can then encompass the suffering and the laurels, the struggle and the crown, with equal power; only its unfettered plasticity and its non-rhythmic rigor can, with equal power, embrace the fetters and the freedom, the given heaviness and the conquered lightness of a world henceforth immanently radiant with found meaning.

- Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*

### I. Introduction

“In the city there is perfect quiet, and, thank God, everything is alright. May God keep you well.” Thus begins a dispatch from the chief of staff of the Russian gendarmes to Prince A. F. Orlov, the head of the Third Section of His Majesty's Own Chancellery – the tsarist secret police – on May 9, 1851.

It was spring in St. Petersburg; the ice had broken on the Neva three weeks before; and the most feared opponent of the Russian autocracy was being transported to the capital in chains. The letter goes on to read:

I notified Nabokov [the Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress] regarding the imminent delivery of Bakunin, and asked that everything be prepared for

his arrival. In the meantime, I sent four more hands so that this bandit could be taken directly to the fortress.<sup>126</sup>

This ‘bandit’ was Mikhail Bakunin, the father of Russian anarchism. Arrested in Dresden in 1849 and handed over to the Romanov Empire a year and a half later, he would spend six years in solitary confinement in the autocracy’s carceral fortresses before being granted the mercy of Siberian exile.

It is clear from the above dispatch that even as Bakunin was being escorted in chains to the Peter and Paul Fortress in the spring of 1851, there was still a sense of anxiety – indeed, incomprehension – surrounding this notorious political offender. The use of the term ‘bandit’ [*razboinik*] by the tsarist security apparatus is especially out-of-joint: it locates Bakunin within the tradition of early-modern peasant revolts, an anachronistic term for this itinerant European revolutionary.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 3a, d. 3209, ll. 2-2ob. The mentioned letter to Nabokov, commanding him to take “all necessary precautions” with this dangerous prisoner, can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 326, l. 2. Note that this I.A. Nabokov – Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress from 1849-1852, during the imprisonment of F.M. Dostoevsky, M.A. Bakunin and others – was the great-uncle of writer Vladimir Nabokov. The novelist was well aware of this family history, and it could indeed be said to give a personal (and slightly-perverse) piquancy to Nabokov’s disdainful treatment of Fortress prisoners such as F.M. Dostoevsky and N.G. Chernyshevsky throughout his oeuvre. See especially Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981); as well as Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift*, trans. Michael Scammell (New York: Vintage, 1963).

<sup>127</sup> This conflation of intelligentsia radical with peasant rebel cannot help but bring to mind Joseph de Maistre’s famous pronouncement that Russia’s greatest danger lay not in a jacquerie, but rather in the emergence of a “Pugachev from the University [*Pougatscheff d’université*].” Joseph de Maistre to A.M. le chevalier de..., August 14, 1811, in *Lettres et Opuscules Inédits du Comte Joseph de Maistre* (Paris: A. Vatou, 1853), 267. De Maistre accompanied his dire warning with an apocalyptic vision of “the Neva foaming with blood” – lapping, one imagines, at the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress. For more on the concept of the ‘University Pugachev,’ see Claudia Verhoeven, “‘Une Révolution Vraiment Scientifique’: Russian Terrorism, the Escape from the European Orbit, and the Invention of a New Revolutionary Paradigm,” in *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions*, eds. Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 200-202.

These high tsarist officials were still grasping for the words through which to understand the new threat Bakunin represented to the Russian autocracy. Little did they know that this ‘bandit’ had already assembled a new language capable of narrating the experience of modern subjecthood-in-revolt – and that he would soon put this novel machinery into practice in the most notorious prison of the tsarist regime, by the very invitation of the emperor himself.

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When and how did imprisonment first become ‘political’? When did a culture of radical incarceration first appear in Russia? From our earlier discussion of sacred imperial space, this chapter turns to the history of modern political imprisonment and radical self-narration in the Peter and Paul Fortress through the figure of M. A. Bakunin.

Only recently have studies of state incarceration begun to shift away from structuralist, top-down discussions of disciplinary regimes to examine the cultural and intellectual histories of modernity’s carceral spaces.<sup>128</sup> Key to this turn has been a renewed interest in agency: the ways in which imprisoned subjects have developed practices to shape their experiences of confinement. In this new approach, the historical politicization of the prison is not merely the result of state classification and interpolation.<sup>129</sup> Imprisonment became political through the development of “a politics *of and in the prison*” – that is, when radical actors first learned to see carceral sites as

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<sup>128</sup> See n. 14 in the Introduction to the present dissertation.

<sup>129</sup> That is, against the optics pioneered in Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

stages for the continuation of their struggles; when they learned to “produce politics in the cell.”<sup>130</sup>

From the beginning of the nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth, no government in the world incarcerated state offenders at a magnitude approaching that of the Romanov autocracy.<sup>131</sup> We lack, however, sustained inquiries into the development of radical Russian practices of imprisonment: how revolutionary political cultures first learned to contest the space of the imperial cell.<sup>132</sup>

But we must be careful in choosing our starting point for such a history. While the recent ‘turn to agency’ in carceral studies is surely aided by cataloging dissident prison practices, this must be coupled with an analysis of the underlying *conceptual terrain* that allowed these subversive repertoires to grow and flourish. That is: in order for the prison cell to host radical politics, it first had to be understood as a space capable of doing so. Our carceral histories must engage not just with the concrete subversion of modernity’s prisons, but also with the larger conceptual and discursive shifts that made this possible. Just as modern state disciplinary practices possess particular genealogies, so too do radical contestations of political imprisonment hold their own intellectual histories. Following this thread, the necessary corollary to the question ‘when did imprisonment become political’ is – when did the modern experience of imprisonment first become *politically legible*?

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<sup>130</sup> Kenney, *Dance in Chains*, 3-11.

<sup>131</sup> Aryeh Neier, “Confining Dissent: The Political Prison,” in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, eds. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 350-80.

<sup>132</sup> One small exception to this rule is the excellent, yet all-too-brief discussion of populist prison experiences in Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova, *A Generation of Revolutionaries: Nikolai Charushin and Russian Populism from the Great Reforms to Perestroika* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2017), 111-44.

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Let us be clear – Bakunin was not the first opponent of the autocracy to be imprisoned in tsarist Russia: the Peter and Paul Fortress had begun to be used as a state prison long before the year 1851.

As we saw in the previous chapter, St. Petersburg’s founding citadel was never used to ward off an invading army. Instead, soon after its construction, this heart of the imperial capital began to be turned over to a host of improvisatory functions: including, remarkably, a space of political confinement. Starting with a moment almost biblical in its allegorical intensity – Peter the Great’s imprisonment of his own son in 1718 – the tsarist regime developed a practice of placing its most threatening opponents within these Fortress walls.<sup>133</sup>

At first, prisoners were placed haphazardly in various casemates and storage rooms around the citadel. These were the sites that held some of the most influential dissidents of the eighteenth century: including I.T. Pososhkov and A.N.

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<sup>133</sup> Tsarevich Aleksei Petrovich was arrested for plotting against his father. He would be sentenced to death by the senate, but die in his Trubetskoi Bastion casemate – most likely from torture – before the execution could be carried out. For more information on the tsarevich’s betrayal and death, see Paul Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great: The Struggle for Power, 1671-1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5, 339-425; and Paul Bushkovitch, “Power and the Historian: The Case of Tsarevich Aleksei 1716-1718 and N.G. Ustrialov 1845-1859”, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141 (1997): 177-212. For a discussion of the mythic afterlife of this event – its vision of sovereignty as filicide, with the tsar-father as a modern-day Saturn devouring his children in the heart of the imperial capital – see Kevin M.F. Platt, *Terror and Greatness: Ivan and Peter as Russian Myths* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), esp. 79-129. Finally, note that while this is the traditional starting point for histories of Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment, it appears that there was one previous incarceration before the tsar’s son: a group of Swedish sailors in the autumn of 1717. See M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1960) 1:172-173; and GARF f. 124, op. 57, d. 82, ll. 2ob, 3.

Radishchev.<sup>134</sup> This only changed in 1797, with the construction of a special prison house by order of Tsar Pavel I.<sup>135</sup> This triangular stone building was located in the Alekseevskii Ravelin – a semi-detached fortification on the western edge of the island [Figures 7 and 8]. As the earliest administrative documents note, this structure’s twenty-four solitary cells were designed to hold “secret arrestees” – that is, “only those prisoners under trial for the most important cases”, who were to be isolated from public attention and all fellow inmates.<sup>136</sup> When a vast conspiracy of disaffected noblemen failed in their attempt to overthrow the autocracy at the end of 1825, it was to the Alekseevskii Ravelin that the ringleaders of these ‘Decembrists’ were brought after their mass arrest.<sup>137</sup> And when the utopian-socialist reading circle of the

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<sup>134</sup> See Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, I: 160-202; and P.N. Stolpianskii, *Petropavlovskaiia krepost' i drugie istoriko-khudozhestvennye ocherki* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Tsentrpoligraf, 2011 [1923]), 238-243. For histories of I.T. Poshokov, see Marc Raeff, “The Two Facets of the World of Ivan Pososhkov”, *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 50 (1995): 309-28; and B.B. Kafengauz, *I.T. Pososhkov: zhizn' i deiatel'nost'* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1951). For texts on Radishchev, see D.S. Babkin, *Protsess A.N. Radishcheva* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952); L.B. Svetlov, *A.N. Radishchev: Kritiko-biograficheskii ocherk* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958); and prison documents held at RGADA f. 7, op. 2, d. 2760 and 2760a.

<sup>135</sup> RGADA f. 7, op. 2, d. 2290, ll. 22-23, 26-28ob, 31-31ob, 63-67. Note that a small wooden prison building may have predated this stone structure, but little is known about its existence.

<sup>136</sup> Early guard regulations from 1797 and 1808 can be found, respectively, at RGADA f. 7, op. 2, d. 2290, ll. 92-95ob; and IRLI RAN (*Pushkinskii dom*) OR f. 627, op. 3, no. 41, ll. 16-21. The latter fund is the personal archive of early-Soviet historian P.E. Shchegolev, which contains many rare and invaluable documents from the history of tsarist imprisonment. This interesting figure will appear several times over the chapters to come as a historical actor in his own right.

<sup>137</sup> See M.V. Vershevskaia, “Mesta zakliucheniia dekabristov v bastionakh i kurtinakh Petropavlovskoi kreposti”, *Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy* 4 (1996): 94; and Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 2:96-211. Instructions for the Alekseevskii Ravelin guards from this year can be found at IRLI RAN OR f. 627, op. 3, no. 41, ll. 6-11.

*Petrashevtsy* were seized in 1849, it was in cell number nine of the Ravelin that F.M. Dostoevsky spent eight months before undergoing an infamous mock execution.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> For archival documents on the arrest and imprisonment of Dostoevsky, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 156, ll. 4-7; RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 66, ll. 124-130. Information on the staged death sentence and reprieve of the *Petrashevtsy* – that hideous performance of the sovereign will of Tsar Nicholas I and its ascendance over all formal legality – see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 156, ll. 62-63ob. The key primary source collections and secondary histories of this moment are V. Desnitskii, ed., *Delo Petrashevtssev*, 3 vols. (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1937-1951); and Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my* 2:212-39.



Figure 7: The façade of the Alekseevskii Ravelin secret prison house [GMPIR f. III-7290].

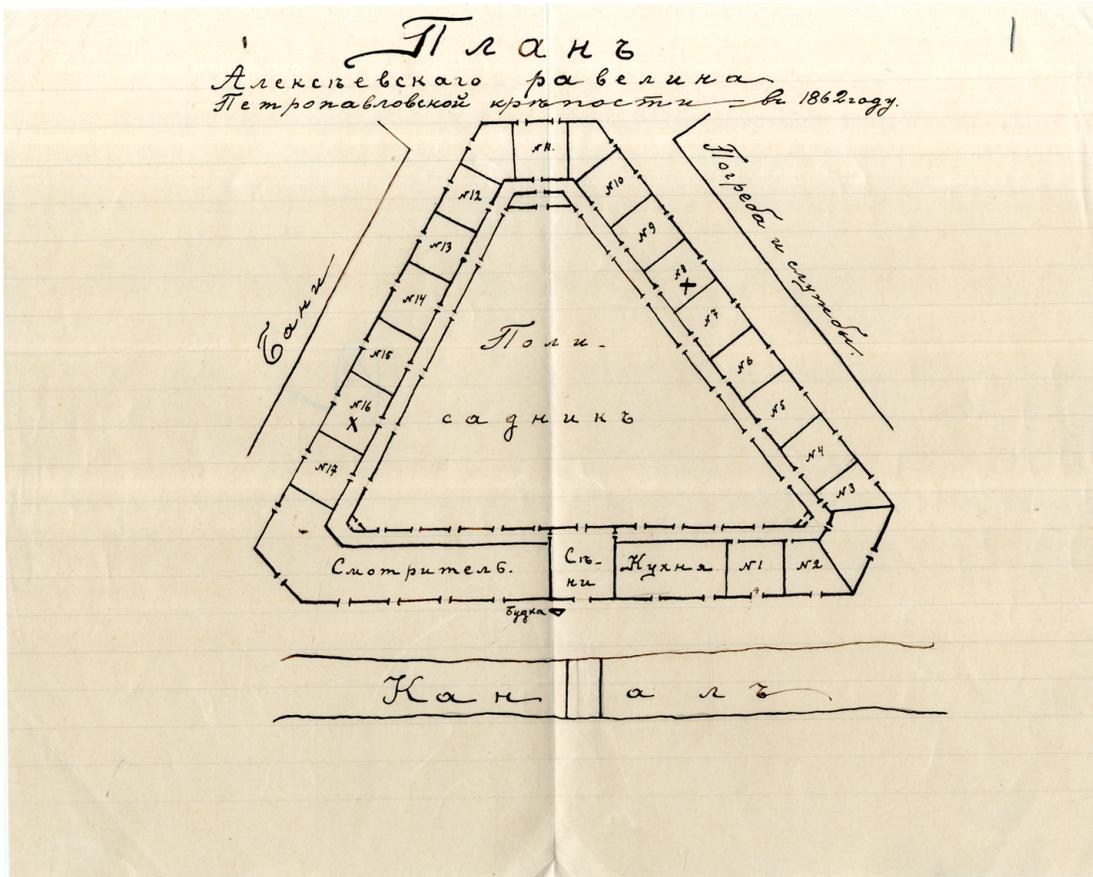


Figure 8: A plan of the interior of the Alekseevskii Ravelin prison, seized by gendarmes during the closure of the revolutionary journal *Vyloe* in 1907 [GARF F. 1167, Op. 1, D. 2428]. The role of this periodical in the circulation of radical Russian cultures of confinement will be discussed in Chapter Eight of the present dissertation.

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With this in mind, it may seem that an earlier year – 1718 perhaps, or 1825, or even 1849 – would be the natural starting point for a history of political imprisonment in tsarist Russia. However, a closer look discredits this impulse.

For, in the Decembrist arrests of 1825 – let alone in the confinements of earlier inmates – we find no evidence of a conscious prison politics. Indeed, Yuri Lotman noted that the Decembrists' greatest tragedy was their "total inability to cope with their interrogation and trial" in the Peter and Paul Fortress – this was still an experience of imprisonment for which "there were no literary models", behavioral scripts, or political traditions.<sup>139</sup> Likewise, the *Petrashevtsy* of 1849 did not integrate their incarcerations into a holistic vision of dissent – Dostoevsky understood the punished self through Orthodox mysticism and proto-existential psychologism, not as a political self.

However, this state of affairs was by no means permanent. By 1924, we can find Maxim Gorky remark: "every Russian who has spent a month in a political prison... considers it their sacred duty to gift Russia with a book of memoirs."<sup>140</sup> In the intervening century, something had radically changed. The experience of confinement in absolutist Russia had become legible and had become political. The tsarist prison cell had been transformed from a space of mute discipline into a site of radical autobiographics.

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<sup>139</sup> Ju.M. Lotman, "The Decembrist in Everyday Life," trans. C.R. Pike, in *The Semiotics of Russian Culture* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), 96-97.

<sup>140</sup> Maksim Gor'kii, "V.I. Lenin," in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2nd ed. (Moscow-Leningrad: Gos. Izd. Khud. Lit., 1933) 22:202-203.

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the political prisons of the Russian autocracy became thoroughly semanticized spaces for revolutionary political cultures. In my research, I have collected and analyzed nearly one hundred accounts of Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment alone from this period: a catalogue of these documents can be found in Appendix I. Although widely varying in their modes of production and distribution – from private notes and curtailed accounts during brief thaws in the tsarist censorship regime, to the widely-translated memoirs of V. F. Figner and P. Kropotkin – they share a set of common characteristics.

They comprise a distinct narratological genre – each partakes in a common rhetorical fund, with shared tropes, images, and structures. They speak with one another – each does not undertake to write the prison anew, but tackles state confinement through the examples of past revolutionaries and their memoirs. And finally, they elevate an active, heroic narrator – each rejects an image of passive victimhood by locating the experience of incarceration within a larger story of personal growth and a larger terrain of historico-political struggle.

If our new carceral histories seek not only to document subversive practices but also to grasp the wider discursive and intellectual changes that made contestation possible, then it is clear that the development of the prison memoir genre in the nineteenth century was a crucial element in making confinement radically legible. Our histories of truly *political* imprisonment must begin with the cell's rise to narrative viability.

In studies of modern incarceration, prison memoirs have not been overlooked. However, they have been used primarily as raw material – sources of empirical

information or funds of narrative color. If we instead recognize them as forming a distinct politico-aesthetic genre whose mid-nineteenth-century appearance was crucial to radical experiences of imprisonment, then a set of important new questions appears. What were the concrete and conceptual conditions through which the memoir first entered the tsarist prison? What was it about this novel genre that lent it so well to the narration of political confinement?

And with these questions, we regain step alongside M.A. Bakunin. There is no worthier Virgil to guide us through the early history of the modern prison memoir. Incarcerated in the Alekseevskii Ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1851, Bakunin would pen one of the most curious texts in the history of European prison letters. Given the opportunity to write in solitary confinement, he enacted a startling new genre of self-narration predicated upon a novel political epistemology of self and history. In doing so, he was the first to demonstrate how modern actors could read and write their lives within the cell.

In what follows, I explore the political imprisonment of M.A. Bakunin with two goals in mind. The first is to engage with his Fortress writing as a crucial moment in the development of a new genre of the self – to explore the particularities of his textual labor alongside a genealogy of the original conceptual constellation that made it possible. From here, I widen the lens to broader histories of dissident self-narration and prison legibility, exploring what Bakunin's early carceral autobiography tells us about larger stories of prison agency and radical selfhood. Thus, this chapter is intended as not only a corrective to the curious lack of scholarly attention given to

Bakunin's role in European intellectual history.<sup>141</sup> It also seeks to offer a new vision of the history of modern political imprisonment, the origins of modern Russian autobiographics, the afterlives of Goethe and Hegel, and the nature of nineteenth-century dissident subjectivity: how an intelligentsia-in-becoming first claimed carceral spaces as legible stages of radical selfhood and revolutionary history.

## II. M.A. Bakunin's *Wanderjahre*

The early life of Bakunin is well known.<sup>142</sup> Born of a wealthy landowning family in the province of Tver', his young years were a foment of intellectual activity among the philosophical circles of Moscow.<sup>143</sup> He first came under the attention of the tsarist regime in 1844 for his failure to return to Russia after a period of study in Berlin. Remaining illegally in Central Europe, Bakunin's revolutionary political commitments found embodiment in the growing discontent of the urban classes and the rising nationalist energies of Slavic minorities. Upon the outbreak of revolution, Bakunin

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<sup>141</sup> For all the global significance of his words and deeds, the figure of Bakunin has been strangely peripheralized by the historical discipline. In the Soviet Union, Bakunin studies became ideologically impossible from the 1930s onward – the most exhaustive historical work on Bakunin remains his *Collected Works and Letters*, edited by old Bolshevik Iu.M. Steklov and published by the All-Union Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles from 1934-1935. (Indicatively, only four of the thirty planned volumes were released before the project was halted and the society purged in 1935. See M.A. Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 4 vols., ed. Iu.M. Steklov [Moscow: Izd. vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-posalentsev, 1934-35].) The majority of Anglo-American scholarship tends towards surface-level political biography. One exception is the work of John Randolph, whose groundbreaking study of Bakunin's early years is also a highly original spatio-intellectual history of Russian Idealism. See John Randolph, *The House in the Garden*.

<sup>142</sup> Besides the above-mentioned 'complete works', other primary source collections include Michel Bakounine, *Oeuvres*, 6 vols., (Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1895-1913); and Bakunin, *Oeuvres [CD-ROM]*: International Institute of Social History. *Bakounine. Oeuvres complètes* (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2000), CD-ROM.

<sup>143</sup> See Randolph; Aileen Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin: A Study in the Psychology and Politics of Utopianism* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1982), 1-75; E.H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), 3-93.

chased the tide of 1848 across Europe: attending meetings, delivering speeches, and mounting barricades from Paris to Prague. It was after a failed uprising in Dresden that the Prussian authorities arrested Bakunin in May 1849. Following a period of incarceration in the fortress prison of Königstein (“the Saxon Bastille”), the Prussians sentenced him to death – however, in June 1850 the Austrian Empire also demanded his extradition. With “his head disputed by two emperors,” he soon found himself facing another execution, this time by the Hapsburgs.<sup>144</sup>

In the last act of this theatre of trans-European gendarmerie (cruelly mirroring Bakunin’s own radical internationalist ambitions) the prisoner was now demanded in turn by the Russian tsar. In the spring of 1851, the Viceroy of the Kingdom of Poland was able to secure the handing over of Bakunin from the Austrian to the Russian Empire in Krakow amidst rumors that his revolutionary compatriots were seeking to either free him or poison him.<sup>145</sup> By direct order of Tsar Nicholas I, Bakunin was placed in chains and transported over the border by six gendarmes and one gendarme officer.<sup>146</sup> On the afternoon of May 11, Bakunin arrived in St. Petersburg and was immediately taken to the Peter and Paul Fortress. The emperor was promptly informed by letter: his triumphant scribble – “Finally! [*Nakonets!*]” – is preserved in the

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<sup>144</sup> This turn of phrase comes from Victor Serge, “La confession de Bakounine,” *Bulletin Communiste* 56 (December 22, 1921), quoted in Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenie* 4:420-21.

<sup>145</sup> For the arrangement of this transfer, see GARF f. 109, op. 18 (1843)(1<sup>st</sup> Expedition), d. 116, ch. 2, ll. 3, 3ob, 4. For the rumors in Krakow that spring involving Bakunin’s imminent escape and/or death by poison, see *ibid.*, ll. 12, 12ob, 13, 14, 14ob, 15.

<sup>146</sup> On shackling Bakunin, see *ibid.*, ll. 3, 3ob, 4. His military escort would be decorated for their service: see *ibid.*, ll. 27, 28, 29, 29ob, 30, 31, 31ob, (etc.). A truly unprecedented level of precaution was taken by the Emperor, the Viceroy of Poland, the Third Section, the Corps of Gendarmes, and the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant. As an example: the Third Section archives preserve a discussion of how to transport Bakunin to the Fortress in that event that his arrival in St. Petersburg coincided with the breaking-up of the ice on the Neva river – an unnecessary contingency plan, as the thaw ended up taking place on April eighteenth of that year. See *ibid.*, l. 10; and *Letopis’* 1:163-64.

epistle's margins.<sup>147</sup> Fortress Commandant Nabokov placed Bakunin in cell number five of the secret prison of the Alekseevskii Ravelin, where the radical would spend the next three years of his life in solitary confinement.<sup>148</sup>

Recorded in the archives of the Alekseevskii Ravelin is a long inventory of Bakunin's possessions, taken immediately upon his arrival.<sup>149</sup> From its scattered materials, we can glean a few impressions of this moment of fortress imprisonment. Besides items of clothing and personal comfort – a black frock coat and tailcoat with silk linings, twelve white handkerchiefs, 125 cigars – we also find artifacts of the meandering geographical and intellectual journey that had brought him to his prison cell. His possessions are studded with a hodgepodge of foreign currencies: fifty-five Prussian thalers; złoty and groshen; dozens of guilder and kreuzer from the Austrian Empire.<sup>150</sup> This small international horde is a prime material manifestation of what I call the 'perverse cosmopolitanism' of the Peter and Paul Fortress: the fact that the dark interior of the most notorious tsarist dungeon existed in practice as one of the most outward-looking spaces of the Russian empire.

We also find recorded a few tantalizing hints of his intellectual life at the time. Towards the bottom of his inventory are listed a series of foreign-language books: six

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., l. 22.

<sup>148</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 326, ll. 3, 4, 4ob; GARF f. 109, op. 18 (1843)(1<sup>st</sup> Expedition), d. 116, ch. 2, ll. 21, 22. At this point, there was only one other prisoner in the Alekseevskii ravelin – one 'Leonov,' an Austrian subject held in cell number thirteen. See RGIA F. 1280, Op. 5, D. 7, ll. 17, 17ob.

<sup>149</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 327, ll. 3, 3ob, 4a.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., ll. 4b, 4b ob, 4v, 4v ob. The Alekseevskii Ravelin warden notes that he exchanged the Prussian currency for fifty-one Russian rubles and fifty-two silver kopecks.

in German, six in French, four in English, and a French bible.<sup>151</sup> Unfortunately, the monolingualism of the warden means that the titles of these works are not recorded.

However, this is not to say that we lack knowledge of the textual life that Bakunin carried within himself. An extraordinary event from the earliest days of his imprisonment gives us remarkable insight into the ideas that Bakunin smuggled into the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress – intellectual coordinates that would, I will argue, revolutionize the experience of political incarceration in tsarist Russia.

### III. The *Confession*

In the first months of his imprisonment – most likely at the beginning of July – Bakunin received an unlikely visitor in his cell: Prince Orlov, head of the Third Section. Orlov was there to relate a request from Tsar Nicholas I himself. Many years later, Bakunin would describe this extraordinary encounter in a letter to Aleksandr Herzen:

Two months or so after my arrival, Count [*sic*] Orlov appeared before me in the name of the tsar: “the Sovereign sent me to you and has ordered me to say: ‘tell him to write to me, as a spiritual son to his spiritual father.’ Would you like to write?”<sup>152</sup>

Thus arose one of the most curious textual productions in the history of the modern prison. Given ink and paper, Bakunin spent the next month furiously writing what is

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<sup>151</sup> Record as: “German-language books – 4... Unbound French-language books – 3; Unbound English-language books – 2; French-language books in their binding – 3; English-language books in their binding – 2; German-language books in their binding – 2; A French-language Bible – 1.” See *Ibid.*, ll. 4a.

<sup>152</sup> M. A. Bakunin to Aleksandr Herzen, December 8, 1860, in Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenie*, 4:359-69. Orlov’s visit request is confirmed in an internal report from 1856, held in the archives of the Third Section. See GARF f. 109, op. 18 (1843)(1<sup>st</sup> Expedition), d. 116, ch. 2, ll. 282-286ob.

known as his *Confession* [*Ispoved'*] to the tsar.<sup>153</sup> Densely composed on ninety-six pages in Bakunin's small, messy hand, upon completion the document was given to a gendarme scribe who recopied it in the clear script of the imperial bureaucracy.<sup>154</sup> This was passed on to the emperor on August 13, 1851, who read it with great avidity: his extensive marginal notes have been preserved in the archives of the Third Section. After finishing Bakunin's *Confession*, Nicholas I immediately presented it to Prince Orlov to read, recommending it to the head of the Third Section as "highly curious and instructive [*ves'ma liubopytno i pouchitel'no*]." <sup>155</sup>

"YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY, MOST GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN!" begins this strange text: "What shall I say to the terrible Russian Tsar, to the dread Guardian and zealous Upholder of the laws?"<sup>156</sup> Bakunin begins by announcing his intention to make a full, spiritual confession – but one uncoated by flattery or supplication. After this opening *captatio benevolentiae*, Bakunin goes on to narrate the story of his life.

What is the historian of modern Russia to make of this 'highly curious' document? We should note that its format was not entirely unprecedented: the early-modern Russian legal system had fostered an informal system of petition writing,

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<sup>153</sup> While Bakunin's letter to the tsar is not itself titled a 'confession,' this is the term with which both autocratic officials and Bakunin himself would later refer to it.

<sup>154</sup> Both the original text and the scribal copy are preserved in the State Archive of the Russian Federation: the former at GARF f. 825, op. 1, d. 297, ll. 2-49ob, the latter at *ibid.*, ll. 51-207ob.

<sup>155</sup> GARF f. 825, op. 1, d. 297, l. 50. A copy was also given to the chairman of the State Council and the Viceroy of Poland: see Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenie*, 4:418; and GARF f. 109, op. 18 (1843)(1<sup>st</sup> Expedition), d. 116, ch. 2, ll. 75-75ob.

<sup>156</sup> M.A. Bakunin, *The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin*, trans. Robert C. Howes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 31-32. All citations from this translation have been checked and altered when necessary with the authoritative Russian edition: M.A. Bakunin, "Ispoved' ot iiulia-avgusta 1851," in *Sobranie sochinenie*, 4:99-207.

often used by incarcerated subjects to narrate their past actions and intentions.<sup>157</sup>

However, as we shall see, Bakunin brought something entirely novel to this practice: a traditional format was imbued with very modern conceptual concerns.

These fissures are first felt in the text's surface dualism. The anarchist's style is rooted in formal deference— however, constantly present is a refusal to obfuscate, and in this rests a willful possession of thought and deed. Bakunin uses the ceremonial forms of address required when addressing the tsar, but just the same does not hesitate to tell Nicholas I of his intention to overthrow the autocracy.

There is only one thing that Bakunin refuses to relate to the tsar – the names and activities of his compatriots – and there are only two things he asks: that he be allowed to see his family, and that “if a criminal's plea can touch the heart of YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY, SIRE, do not order me to rot in eternal fortress imprisonment!”<sup>158</sup> Bakunin's approach to the practice of ‘confessing’ was met with great disapproval from Tsar Nicholas I. In the margins he wrote “precisely by this he destroys all confidence: if he feels all the weight of his sins, then only a pure, complete confession [*ispoved'*], and not a conditional one, can be considered a confession.”<sup>159</sup> The emperor found something unpalatable about Bakunin's text; there was something that did not quite satisfy the expectations of a carceral petition. This ‘conditionality’ informed the tsar's responsiveness to his prisoner's requests: while the

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<sup>157</sup> For discussions of the textual life of the pre-reform tsarist legal system, see Nancy Kollman, *Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Richard S. Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); and the late-eighteenth-century carceral autobiography of Nikolai Smirnov recently translated in John Mackay, ed., *Four Russian Serf Narratives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

<sup>158</sup> Bakunin, *The Confession*, 149-50; Bakunin, “*Ispoved'*,” 4:206.

<sup>159</sup> Bakunin, *The Confession*, 33; Bakunin, “*Ispoved'*,” 4:101.

emperor did authorize strictly-controlled visits from Bakunin's family, he decided that the rebel was too dangerous to be released from the Peter and Paul Fortress. Thus would Bakunin remain in his Alekseevskii Ravelin cell for a further three years. Upon the outbreak of the Crimean War, the threat of a British and French military incursion from the Baltic Sea lead to the removal of political prisoners from the Peter and Paul Fortress. On March 11, 1854 Bakunin was transported to a cell in the more-remote grounds of Shlissel'burg Fortress, where he would spend another three years imprisoned.<sup>160</sup> It was not until the spring of 1857 – after the death of Nicholas I – that Bakunin was granted the 'clemency' of Siberian exile, from which he would quickly escape to Western Europe.<sup>161</sup>

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Besides a brief comment in one of his letters, Bakunin's *Confession* was never publically discussed during his lifetime.<sup>162</sup> Its existence was only made known after the fall of the Romanov regime and the opening of the Third Section archives. First discovered by A. Il'inskii in 1919, it provoked an immediate sensation both in the Soviet Union and abroad.<sup>163</sup> Then – as it has until now – scholarly and popular

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<sup>160</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 326, ll. 35, 35ob, 36, 37, 38, 40; GARF f. 109, op. 18 (1843)(1<sup>st</sup> Expedition), d. 116, ch. 2, ll. 168, 169, 171-172ob, 173-174.

<sup>161</sup> On this commuted sentence, see GARF f. 109, op. 18 (1843)(1<sup>st</sup> Expedition), d. 116, ch. 3, ll. 8, 8ob, 37, 37ob, 45. We can note that the navel officer charged with negligence in the escape of Bakunin – a Lieutenant Afonasi'ev – was transported from the Far East to St. Petersburg in the summer of 1864 and himself imprisoned in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress for two months. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 265, ll. 10-11, 12-12ob, 23-23ob.

<sup>162</sup> Although, apparently, after Bakunin's escape from exile the Russian state did at one point consider publishing his "Confession" as a means of discrediting the revolutionary movement. See Lawrence D. Orton, introduction to Bakunin, *The Confession*, 17.

<sup>163</sup> A. Il'inskii, "Ispoved' M.A. Bakunina," *Vestnik Literatura* 10 (1919). Note that Il'inskii's initial piece only contained selections from the text. Complete versions were published in 1921 and 1923: see V. Polonskii, ed., *Ispoved' i pis'mo Aleksandru II* (Moscow: Gosizdat,

attention primarily focused on the question of sincerity: did Bakunin really mean what he wrote in his *Confession*?

The political significance of this document is difficult to untangle. While it is unnecessary here to outline the entire history of its reception, we can note that opinions immediately fell into two warring camps: those who took the *Confession* as a sign of capitulation or even a betrayal of the revolutionary cause; and those who saw it as a piece of strategic dissemblance, a “Machiavellian masterpiece.”<sup>164</sup> The debate was fanned by the political climate of the 1920s, where the question of Bakunin’s moral character and legacy was turned into a referendum on the viability of a European anarchist tradition increasingly finding itself in conflict with ascendant Bolshevism. While positions have nuanced with time, scholarly interest in the *Confession* continues to revolve around what Bakunin may or may not have intended, and how this reflects upon his psychological and political biography.<sup>165</sup>

But are there more interesting questions we can ask of Bakunin’s *Confession*? Curiously, the *structure* of this prison document – the formal nature of this text – has been almost entirely overlooked in speculations on its underlying intentionality. However, I will argue that the historical significance of Bakunin’s *Confession* lies in

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1921) and V. Polonskii, ed., *Materialy dlia biografii M. Bakunina*, 3 vols. (Moscow/Petrograd/Leningrad, 1923-1933), 1:100-248. The most authoritative edition (correcting many of the errors of these early publications) is M. A. Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem 1828-1876*, 4:99-207. The existence of Bakunin’s *Confession* was first brought to the awareness of non-Russophone readers by Victor Serge in 1921: see Victor Serge, “Bakunins ‘Bekanntnis’,” *Das Forum* 9 (1921): 373-80; and “La Confession de Bakounine,” *Bulletin Communiste* (22 December 1921).

<sup>164</sup> Polonskii, “Michael Bakunin und seine ‘Beichte’,” in Kurt Kersten, ed., *Michael Bakunins Beichte aus der Peter-Pauls Festung an Zar Nikolaus I.: gefunden im Geheimschrank des Chefs der III. Abteilung der Kanzlei der früheren Zaren zu Leningrad* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte m.b.H., 1926), XIX-XXVIII.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, Kelly 140-146 and Orton 24-28.

fact in its genre form – in its aesthetics. Let us turn now to an analysis of the *Confession*'s form, bracketing the question of reception until the end of the present inquiry.

#### **IV. Political Imprisonment and the *Bildungsroman***

What is the genre of the *Confession*? Perhaps investigation into the form of this text has been prematurely halted by its title. The idea of a confession – written by a “spiritual son to his spiritual father” – easily shrouds itself in a theological veil: casting this document as a timeless, inner effusion rather than a historical and aesthetic artifact.

However, upon closer reading, what strikes us is the essential ‘timeliness’ of the *Confession*. It is clear why this document did not satisfy the tsar: Bakunin is far more interested in the question of history – both personal and political – than he is in a traditional enumeration of sins. After his introductory appellation, Bakunin immediately sets out to narrate the path that had led him to the position of a political renegade in a tsarist dungeon. Beginning with the education of his youth, he relates to the emperor the arc of his personal, political, and intellectual development. It is, in fact, a narrative of Russian and European history from the early 1830s to the end of the 1840s, as experienced by and mediated through the life of one of its actors.

The content of the work itself has been well covered; what we are interested in here is its form.<sup>166</sup> Structurally, the work is constructed around a series of stages. A particular mode of life arises out of inner impetus and outer stimuli, flowers, and then

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<sup>166</sup> For summaries of the narrative content and events described in Bakunin's *Confession*, see: Polonskii, “Michael Bakunin und seine ‘Beichte’”; Iu. M. Steklov, *Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, ego zhizni i deiatel'nost'*; Kelly, *Bakunin*; etc.

falls into conflict with the circumstances of the world. Through their clash, both terms are sublated – Bakunin as striving subject is forced to reconsider the ways in which both the individual and the world act upon one another, and new pathways of activity and thought spring into being. It is through this dynamic that Bakunin narrates to Tsar Nicholas I the major turning points of his life: his initial exuberance towards German metaphysics; his first travels abroad during which he “abandoned philosophy and threw [himself] into politics;”<sup>167</sup> his dawning national consciousness and involvement with pan-Slavism; and his activities during the European revolutions of 1848-1849. The driving motor of Bakunin’s *Confession* is the relationship – contradictory yet productive – between the individual and history. “I realized,” he philosophizes at one point, “that history has a mysterious movement of its own [*svoi sobstvennyi, tainstvennyi khod*]. This movement is logical, although it is often at variance with the logic of the world; it is salutary, although it does not always correspond to our personal wishes.”<sup>168</sup>

It is no wonder that Tsar Nicholas I found something ‘highly curious’ in this text. The outward garb of a confession hides a tale of both personal and world-historical development, as Bakunin mediates between his individual growth and the socio-political questions of his moment. Herein lies the key to the genre of the *Confession*. I argue that it must be viewed as a *Bildungsroman*: the genre of personal and historical development that was only beginning to work its way into Russia during this period. The traditional vehicle of a prisoner’s petition to the state was made to carry within itself a radically modern narrative form.

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<sup>167</sup> Bakunin, *The Confession*, 35; Bakunin, “Isповed’,” 4:103.

<sup>168</sup> Bakunin, *The Confession*, 86; Bakunin, “Isповed’,” 4:149. Tsar Nicholas I marked the margins of this section in pencil.

Such a claim is supported not only by literary analysis, but also by Bakunin's own words. In the winter of 1860, after his release from Fortress imprisonment, he posted a letter from the Siberian city of Irkutsk to his friend and intellectual interlocutor Aleksandr Herzen. Having been unable to communicate with him since their last meeting in Paris over a decade ago, Bakunin briefly narrates the recent years of his life. When he arrives at his incarceration in the Peter and Paul Fortress, he describes the production of his *Confession* – the only mention of this text that Bakunin would ever put into writing. Stating the tsar's remarkable request, he relates:

I thought for a bit and reasoned, that before a *juri*, before an open judicial process I would need to sustain my role to the end, but in these four walls, in the claws of the bear, I could temper my form without shame. I thus demanded a month of time, agreed, and actually wrote a sort of confession [*rod ispovedi*], something along the lines of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.<sup>169</sup>

The text Bakunin refers to here is the memoir of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *From My Life: Poetry and Truth* – an 'autobiography of development' by the founder of the modern European 'novel of development.'

What does it mean for us to recognize this direct inspiration of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* here – the irruption of *Bildungsroman* self-narration in 1851 within the secret political prison of the tsarist regime? In itself, this represents a pivotal and hitherto unrecognized moment in the intellectual life of Bakunin, as well as in the history of the Peter and Paul Fortress as a site of textual production. However, its significance goes even further. To understand the radical novelty of this moment, let now move to locate the *Confession* within a genealogy of the Russian *Bildungsroman* and its new conception of the historical subject. Doing so reveals a pre-history of

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<sup>169</sup> M. A. Bakunin to Aleksandr Herzen, December 8, 1860, in Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii* 4:366.

intelligentsia *Bildung* in Russia, in which a pre-imprisonment Bakunin personally played a central role. While elements of this story are known, taking Bakunin's prison writing as a starting point allows us to make a series of new interventions into the intellectual history of this period. I will argue that the *Confession* was one of the earliest appearances of modern *Bildungsroman* self-narration in Russia: one of the first texts to embody the original articulation of Goethean apprenticeship and Hegelian phenomenology that I see as the genre's core. Following these threads gives us a new history of how Bakunin helped inaugurate a novel political aesthetics – possessing a new epistemological terrain of self and history – that would go on to revolutionize both the experience of imprisonment and the very notion of the radical subject in nineteenth-century Russia.

## **V. The Subject of *Bildung* in Modern Russia**

Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* [1811-1833] is a *Bildungs*-memoir – the author's tale of his own youth, which traces his emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth from childhood to budding maturity. In this way, it is a companion text to his earlier *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and *William Meister's Journeyman Years* [1795-96; 1821-1829]: novelistic depictions of a modern individual's personal and social development, widely recognized as the origin of the European *Bildungsroman*.

While Goethe's wider writings were passionately received in Russia – starting from the first Russian-language translation of the tragic drama *Clavigo* in 1780, passing through a period of 'Werther fever,' and continuing with the lasting influence of *Faust* through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – his tales of development

only enjoyed a select audience.<sup>170</sup> *Dichtung und Wahrheit* saw a complete translation into Russian only in 1878, as part of a ten-volume edition of his collected works.<sup>171</sup> *Wilhelm Meister* was also translated relatively late: although small extracts were variously published in Russian periodicals, a complete version did not appear until 1870.<sup>172</sup>

Thus, for more than a half-century after their publication, Goethe's *Bildungs-* texts were only available in the original German, limiting their consumption primarily to university students and the nobility. However, its restricted reception in Russia was more than made up for by its passionate readership – which included, in the 1830s, a young Mikhail Bakunin. It is clear that in his youth Bakunin read both *Wilhelm Meister* and *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in German, and was greatly affected by them. Goethe appears in Bakunin's letters as early as 1835, when the twenty-one-year-old was taking his first independent intellectual steps in the philosophical circles of Moscow.<sup>173</sup> Over the next few years, Bakunin's youthful interlocutor V.G. Belinskii had cause to mention how Bakunin “was in raptures over *Wilhelm Meister*,” seeing in

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<sup>170</sup> See V.M. Zhirmunskii, *Gete v Russkoi literature* (Leningrad: ‘Nauka’ Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1982 [1936]), 30, 23-41, 410-32. The first of these was translated by O.P. Kozodavlev, who had become personally acquainted with Goethe during his travels in Europe in the 1770s. On the late-eighteenth-century cult of suicide that arose around *The Sorrow of Young Werther*'s reception in Russia, see Irina Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), esp. 1-19.

<sup>171</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sobranie sochinenii Gete v perevode russkikh pisatelei*, ed. I.V. Gerbert, 10 vols., (St. Petersburg, 1878-80); Zhirmunskii, 433.

<sup>172</sup> As *Godov uchenie Vil'gelma Meistera*. The second part, *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years* – as *Godov stranstviia Vil'gelma Meistera* – only received a full translation in 1876. See Zhirmunskii, 378-79.

<sup>173</sup> In a letter to his sister in March 1835, Bakunin first relates that he has moved in with Nikolai Stankevich, and that “We are reading German writers together: Goethe, Jean Paul Richter, Hoffman, etc.” Quoted in Zhirmunskii, 181-82.

it a “life revelation [*otkrovenie zhizni*].”<sup>174</sup> There was even discussion in their circle in 1840 about producing a complete translation of this novel for the journal *Otechestvennie zapiski*, which unfortunately came to naught.<sup>175</sup>

What was it about these narratives that inspired such a passionate reception? It was, in a word, *Bildung*: the concept of development in Goethe’s prose entailed a revolutionary new articulation of the modern subject in the world.

I see the conceptual history of *Bildung* in Russia as having been articulated along two separate trajectories. The term first entered the Russian intellectual lexicon at the end of the eighteenth century through the works of Johann Gottfried Herder and his followers.<sup>176</sup> Herder popularized the idea of human peoples not as entities organized abstractly across a static geographical and temporal plane, but rather as dynamic communities following organic pathways of development along a historical continuum. This represented a fundamental shift in the way in which European Romanticism viewed the lives of nations and peoples. Indeed, the Russian term *obrazovanie* (that is, ‘development,’ or ‘education’) was coined by analogy with Herderian ‘*Bildung*,’ with both words rooted in the term for ‘form’ or ‘image’ [*obraz / Bild*].<sup>177</sup> Thus was the thought of Herder responsible for the first articulation of the

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<sup>174</sup> V.G. Belinskii to M.A. Bakunin, September 10, 1838, in V.G. Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Izd. Akademii Nauk, 1956) 11:291.

<sup>175</sup> V.G. Belinskii to V.P. Botkin, April 16, 1840, in *ibid.*, 11:507. Note as well that Belinskii decided to study the German language solely to be able to read all of *Wilhelm Meister*: see V.G. Belinskii to V.P. Botkin, August 12, 1838, in *ibid.*, 11:263, as well as Zhirmunskii, 379.

<sup>176</sup> See Lina Steiner, *For Humanity’s Sake: The Bildungsroman in Russian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 4-5.

<sup>177</sup> Steiner 4n7. The concept of *Bildung / obrazovanie* was held apart from *vospitanie* (also commonly translated as ‘development’) in nineteenth-century Russia, with the latter term signifying a more formal terrain of education that lacked the former’s sense of organic totality. The classic nineteenth-century essay on this difference is “Vospitanie i obrazovanie” in L. N.

concept of *Bildung* in Russia: development writ large, in the sphere of the political and the world-historical.<sup>178</sup>

The second trajectory along which the concept of *Bildung* was first articulated in Russia was less grandiose, but just as radical – that of individual, subjective development. The major impetus here was from the sphere of belletrism: early *Sturm und Drang* Romanticism and the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (especially *Julie, or the New Heloise*; *Emile, or On Education*; and *Les Confessions*). In these texts’ focus on the development of the inner subject, they represented “a generally new conception of self” possessing an inner, emotive momentum.<sup>179</sup> As such, they were instrumental in effecting a sea change from the Enlightenment’s more static visions of individual character to an early-Romantic vocation for sentiment and cultivation.<sup>180</sup>

Thus did two strands of *Bildung* – world-historical development and personal development – enter the conceptual paraphernalia of Russian thought in the late-

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Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Gos. Izd. ‘Khudozhestvennaia literature,’ 1936) 8:211-46.

<sup>178</sup> This new Herderian vision of history gained widespread purchase in Russia in the 1830s, filtering into official culture through Nicholas I’s nationalities policy and the concept of *narodnost’*. See Nathaniel Knight, “Ethnicity, Nationality, and the Masses: *Narodnost’* and Modernity in Pre-Emancipation Russia,” in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, eds. David Hoffman and Yanni Kotsonis (London: MacMillan Press, 2000), 41-66; and Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, “‘Nationality’ in the State Ideology during the Reign of Nicholas I,” *The Russian Review* 19 (1960): 38-46.

<sup>179</sup> Huck Gutman, “Rousseau’s *Confessions*: A Technology of the Self,” in Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), 100. For more on the narrated subject in Rousseau, see Lydia Ginzburg, *On Psychological Prose*, trans. Judson Rosengrant (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 153-94.

<sup>180</sup> Rousseau’s novel vision of the human subject as site for continuous, reflective self-cultivation found a steady stream of admirers upon its appearance in Russia. See Steiner, 10-11; Priscilla Meyer, *How the Russians Read the French: Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008); Thomas Barran, *Russia Reads Rousseau, 1762-1825* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002); and Iu.M. Lotman, “Russo i russkaia kul’tura XVIII veka,” in *Epokha prosvesheniia: Iz istorii mezhdunarodnykh sviazei russkoi literatury*, ed. M.P. Alekseev (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo ‘Nauka’ Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1967), 208-81.

eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. However, as of yet these two threads were still disarticulated. The radical innovation of the Goethean *Bildungs*-text lay in uniting these two strands.

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In the short preface to *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe explicates his philosophy of writing the human self:

For the chief goal of biography appears to be this: to present the subject in his temporal circumstances, to show how these both hinder and help him, how he uses them to construct his view of man and the world [*wie er sich eine Welt- und Menschenansicht daraus gebildet*], and how he, providing he is an artist, poet, or author, mirrors them again for others.<sup>181</sup>

For Goethe, the site of the self is a stage of subjective and historical development, where both the individual and the world act upon one another in tandem. In *Wilhelm Meister* and *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, the Herderian and Rousseauian concepts of *Bildung* were wedded in the figure of the historical individual – Goethe represents both the subject and their concrete world as terrains of development, composing (*bilden*) one another in dialogue.<sup>182</sup>

One cannot overstate the radically innovative nature of this aesthetic and epistemological moment. As Erich Auerbach argued, Goethe's work should be seen as

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<sup>181</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *From My Life: Poetry and Truth*, trans. Robert R. Heitner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 17.

<sup>182</sup> In a lecture at the University of Dorpat in 1819, Karl Morgenstern coined the term *Bildungsroman* precisely in order to understand this new vision of the self in Goethe's literary works: "The task of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*," he remarked, "appears to be nothing else than to depict a human being who develops toward his true nature by means of a collaboration of his inner dispositions with outer circumstances." See Karl Morgenstern and Tobias Boes, "On the Nature of the 'Bildungsroman'," *PMLA* 124 (2009): 656-57. Morgenstern also quotes enthusiastically from an early review of *Wilhelm Meister* by Christian Gottfried Körner, published in Schiller's literary journal *Die Horen* in 1796: "Neither is character merely the result of a string of circumstances, nor fate merely the result of a given character. Personality develops from an independent and inexplicable seed, and this development is merely abetted by external circumstances." See *ibid.*, 657, 659.

“a first attempt to make an individual destiny echo the fullness of contemporary reality.”<sup>183</sup> For Mikhail Bakhtin, “behind the whole of [*Wilhelm Meister*] stands the large, real wholeness of the world in history” for the very first time.<sup>184</sup>

It is thus as a vehicle for a radically original vision of the self in the world that we can understand how Goethe’s prose occasioned a “life revelation” for the young Bakunin, and through which we can begin to grasp the new philosophical commitments underlying Bakunin’s own prison self-narration. But there is more to this story. As a Goethean concept of *Bildung* and its novel narrations of the historical subject flashed upon the Russian intellectual life of the 1830s, the concepts of both ‘subject’ and ‘history’ were under an intense level of scrutiny from a second direction. Goethe’s prose subject was made to labor alongside a new mode of philosophical inquiry sweeping Russia at this time.

The second figure in this changing terrain of historical subjecthood was G. W. F. Hegel, who was being simultaneously discovered by a generation of Russian thinkers. It was in this climate that the *Bildungsroman* immediately suggested itself as the proper attendant aesthetic regime for an ascendant German metaphysics.

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<sup>183</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. William Trask (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953 [1946]), 388.

<sup>184</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel),” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 45. A few words on this latter essay may be of interest. In the 1930s, M.M. Bakhtin – perhaps the twentieth century’s foremost scholar of aesthetico-epistemological regimes – prepared a massive study of the eighteenth-century novel centered on Goethe and the *Bildungsroman*. A Moscow publishing house accepted the text just before the outbreak of the World War II. After the war, it was discovered that this manuscript had been destroyed during the German invasion – much to the chagrin of Bakhtin, who in the meantime had used the only remaining drafts of what might have been his *magnum opus* as cigarette paper. The above-cited essay is an English translation of the only surviving fragments of this lost work.

### The Novel in the Alekseevskii Ravelin: An Archival Intermezzo.

*We have clear evidence that the pivotal works discussed here were familiar to Bakunin from his early Lehrjahre in Moscow. However, a question arises: were any of these texts available to Bakunin during his period of imprisonment itself? The correspondence between the Third Section and Commandant Nabokov of the Peter and Paul Fortress at the time of Bakunin's transfer to Shlissel'burg Fortress reveals that during Bakunin's incarceration in the Alekseevskii Ravelin, he had been permitted to read "French and German novels; mathematical, physics, [and] geographical [works]; and the newspaper Russian Invalid" [RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 326, ll. 38, 40]. These would all be held within the library of the ravelin, to which political prisoners had access.*

*Which "French and German novels" may Bakunin have read during his time in the Peter and Paul Fortress? The earliest surviving inventory of the Alekseevskii Ravelin library dates from 1864. It lists 455 volumes, divided into three categories – those of 'Spiritual Content' (189), 'Secular Content' (128), and 'Various Content' (138) [Dukhovnogo, Svetskogo, and Razlichnogo sodержaniia]. While the first of these contains various religious tracts and devotional pamphlets; and the second encompasses Russian-language works of history, popular science, and classical literature; it is the third of these that is the most tantalizing (and frustrating) for the historian – under this final category is listed simply "[Works] in the German Language – 28 / In French – 105 / In English – 4 / in Hebrew – 1" [RGIA f. 1280, op. 8, d. 752, ll. 6ob-8ob]. Unfortunately, we are thwarted again by the monolingualism of the Ravelin warden.*

*However, we can make some educated guesses regarding these untitled volumes based upon other evidence of foreign-language texts read in the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress throughout its history.*

*In the fortress archives exists a list from 1864 of the French and English books read by radical author N.G. Chernyshevsky during his period of imprisonment, which include Bleak House, Great Expectations, and A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens; Sterne's Sentimental Journey and Tristram Shandy; and The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (!) [RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 108, ll. 300, 300ob]. The last of these would actually be the object of an unfinished translation project by Chernyshevsky during his period of imprisonment [f. 1280, op. 5, d. 108, l. 301ob – see Chapter Four and Appendix III].*

*We also know that by the early 1880s – just before the closure of its prison house – the Alekseevskii Ravelin carried a host of foreign belletristic works in Russian translation. This included large collections of Byron, Dickens, Hugo, Dumas, Schiller, and Goethe – the last of these being the recently-published ten-volume Collected Works (1878-1880), carrying the first complete Russian translation of his Dichtung und Wahrheit (!) [RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 213, ll. 6-9, 24, 30].*

*Thus, during his time in the Alekseevskii Ravelin from 1851 to 1854, it is quite likely that Bakunin had access to some early European tales of development – most likely Rousseau's Confessions, and perhaps copies of Goethe in the original as well. For a more intensive picture of the libraries in the Peter and Paul Fortress, see Chapters Four and Six of the present dissertation.*

## VI. Russian Hegelianism: Between Metaphysics and Prose

The development of Hegelian thought in Russia is well documented in the memoir literature.<sup>185</sup> In the mid-1830s, an informal philosophical circle developed in Moscow around the aristocrat N. V. Stankevich. In impassioned study of Romantic Idealist philosophy, these young noblemen found solutions not only to the contradictions of Kantian metaphysics – they also found an arena for alternate forms of elite sociability and intellectual exploration outside of the reactionary socio-political constraints of the Nicolaevan public sphere.

In 1837, Hegelian texts first found their way into the hands of this Stankevich circle, and they were immediately devoured. As Aleksandr Herzen later recalled: “Every insignificant pamphlet published in Berlin or other provincial or district towns of German philosophy was ordered and read to tatters and smudges, and the leaves fell out in a few days, if only there was a mention of Hegel in it.”<sup>186</sup>

What Hegel represented for these young thinkers was not only a further refinement of the post-Kantian Idealist project, but also a return to reality from the speculative heights of Fichte and Schelling. These two earlier philosophers had placed immense faith in the ability of the thinking subject to grasp the Real – envisioned by the former as the unbounded activity of an infinite Ego, and by the latter as the organic totality of Nature actualized as Spirit and manifested through human activity.

However, Hegel was the first to posit reality as unfolding at the juncture of the

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<sup>185</sup> See Aleksandr Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. Constance Garnett, 4 vols., (New York: Knopf, 1968); and P.V. Annenkov, *The Extraordinary Decade*, trans. Irwin R. Titunik (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1968). The best work on Russian Hegelianism continues to be D. I. Chizhevskii, *Gegel’ v Rossii* (St. Petersburg: ‘Nauka’, 2007 [1939]). For more recent scholarship, see “Hegel in Russia,” special issue, *Studies in East European Thought* 65 (2013).

<sup>186</sup> Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, 2:398.

developing individual and the developing world. His metaphysical project is thus both deeply personal and grandly world-historical, tracing the dialectical movements of Absolute Spirit as it develops over time in the space of mediation between self and history. For Russian intellectuals of the 1830s, Hegel's philosophical project was read as a *Bildungsroman* of consciousness, through which for the first time they could trace their own lives entwined within Russian socio-political reality.

The early Russian Hegelians took 'reality' as the watchword of a new conception of the historical subject: a re-embeddedness in the world after the hermetic activity of earlier German idealist thought. And while the Stankevich circle became the seedbed for this new philosophical moment, its torchbearer was not N.V. Stankevich, who by 1837 had left Russia to treat the tuberculosis that would end his life just three years later. The popularizer of Hegelian thought amongst the student circles of Moscow at the end of the 1830s – the first Russian Hegelian – was none other than Mikhail Bakunin.

It was the young Bakunin who first introduced Hegel's 'reconciliation with reality' to this circle, and who produced some of the philosopher's earliest Russian translations. In 1838, Bakunin's rendering of Hegel's "School Addresses" was published in the journal *Moskovskii nabliudatel'* and accompanied by a short foreword. Called "the first manifesto of Russian Hegelianism," this was also Bakunin's very first text to ever see publication.<sup>187</sup> In his introductory remarks, Bakunin traces a history of Western thought whose *telos* is German metaphysics and the philosopher who wields it. In his understanding, the play between materialism and

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<sup>187</sup> See D. I. Chizhevskii, *Gegel' v Rossii*, 115-17.

idealism in the past had foreclosed the possibility of organic communion between individual consciousness and actuality. Hegelian thought is held aloft as the solution to this impasse – both insofar as it provides a concept of reality that brings the subject and the world together as a developing unity, and as Hegelianism itself sublates and rises above past knowledge orderings. The preface ends with a call to truly inhabit this position of mediation between the particular and the universal, between subjective will and objective world: “Reconciliation with reality in all respects and in all spheres of life is the first task of the age. Hegel and Goethe were the leaders in this process of reconciliation, in the return from the state of death to life.”<sup>188</sup>

Bakunin’s role in the reception of German Idealist thought in Russia is known – however, the present study is an attempt to anchor it in the question of ‘development’ for the first time: to sift this history with an eye for its radical new vision of the historical self between both Hegel and Goethe.<sup>189</sup> For Bakunin, Hegelian philosophy would provide the theoretical framework through which to understand the subject at the juncture of the individual and history – and Goethe’s concept of *Bildung* would offer the genre through which to tell it.

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<sup>188</sup> Quoted in Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 119.

<sup>189</sup> The most sophisticated work on the emergence of Russian Hegelianism continues to be that of Lydia Ginzburg, who was the first to recognize the 1830s and 1840s as the period when “the question of personality as a historical phenomenon and as an individual psychological unity was first posed in earnest.” However, we should note that it is the latter terrain – the space of the subjective – that receives more attention than the concept of history in Ginzburg’s analysis. Furthermore, her rich study of the shift from “romantic consciousness” to psychological realism does not take into account the future *Bildungs*-labors of the *Confession*, thus leading Ginzburg to identify Bakunin solely with a pre-Hegelian concept of the subject. See *On Psychological Prose*, 27-106.

It is clear that a novel constellation of Hegel and Goethe was crucial to the intellectual history of this period. But – how natural was this union? Indeed, it has often been remarked that Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be read as a *Bildungsroman* of consciousness, as it progresses from immediate sense-certainty to absolute knowledge. Indicative here is Franco Moretti’s remark that the *Bildungsroman* “is the narrative equivalent of Hegelian thought.”<sup>190</sup> But if Hegel’s metaphysical practice was truly tied to the novel of development – a connection, we have seen, immediately made by his Russian readers – the philosopher himself was reticent to admit it. Hegel personally had very few words to spare on the genre of the novel, and those that he did were far from complimentary. In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel assigns a trivial place to prose in the development of the arts. For him, the novelistic protagonist seeks “to change the world, to improve it, or at least in spite of it to carve out of it a heaven upon earth” in their period of ‘apprenticeship.’ However, these early conflicts dissolve into resignation – by the story’s end, the subject falls

Into harmony with subsisting relationships and their rationality, enters the concatenation of the world, and acquires for himself an appropriate attitude to it. However much he may have quarreled with the world, or been pushed about in it, in most cases at last he gets his girl and some sort of position, marries her, and becomes as good a Philistine as others.<sup>191</sup>

As such, for Hegel the modern novel was a lesser form of art, far below drama in his aesthetic philosophy.

I bring this up here not to charge Bakunin with a misappropriation of Goethe and Hegel in his union of the two. Rather, Hegel’s ambivalence towards the novel

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<sup>190</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), 7.

<sup>191</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1:593.

already demonstrates some of the fault lines in his conception of the subject, the political, and the world that would condition his further reception in the nineteenth century. Understanding this tension sheds a final ray of light onto our understanding of how the nascent Russian intelligentsia found a new regime of self-narration in the thought of Hegel and Goethe.

## **VII. Developing the Subject in Right and Left Hegelianism**

Hegel's disdainful description of novelistic 'philistinism' bears a striking resemblance to a particular strand of his reception in mid-nineteenth-century Europe: namely, that of Right Hegelianism. In the first decades after Hegel's death, the dominant trend in Idealist thought was politically conservative in nature, seeing in Absolute Idealism an imperative to embrace contemporary political regimes as rational movements of the World Spirit in history.

Indeed, this is precisely the way in which young Bakunin first read Hegel alongside Goethe. In its first years, Russian Hegelianism was a Right Hegelianism: from 1838 to 1840 Bakunin and Belinsky embraced the tsarist state, following the dictum that "the real is the rational and the rational is the real."<sup>192</sup>

It is certainly true that Goethe's *Bildungs*-texts are, in the last instance, conservative in nature. Auerbach recognized as much when he drew attention to the "conservative, aristocratic, and anti-revolutionary views" that caused Goethe to idealize harmonious development – and, ultimately, a calm reconciliation with reality

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<sup>192</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. Alan White (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002), 8. This is especially evidenced in Belinskii's journalistic works from 1839 to 1840, such as V. G. Belinskii, "Review of 'Borodinskaia godovshchina. V. Zhukovskogo. Pis'mo iz Borodina ot bezrukogo k beznogomu invalid,'" in *PSS* 3:240-50.

– while being unable to represent this self-same development as it occurred in sharp moments of rupture and revolution.<sup>193</sup> Does this mean, however, that there is something essentially conservative to the political aesthetics of the *Bildungsroman*? Is ‘development’ always destined to end in ‘resignation’? Moretti believes so: he identifies “*compromise*” as the essence of the genre.<sup>194</sup> The present study, however, proves this view to be incorrect. Nineteenth-century narratives of development were just as politically malleable as Hegelianism itself. Indeed, after a brief period of ‘reconciliation with reality,’ the young Moscow thinkers quickly jettisoned any political commitment to the existing tsarist order – without, crucially, rejecting the Hegelian-Goethean notion of development that had led them there.

At the beginning of the 1840s, both Bakunin and Belinsky pivoted from Right to Left Hegelianism. Influenced by thinkers such as Strauss and Feuerbach, they sought to preserve the dialectic – its novel vision of the developing subject, mediating between the personal and the world-historical – while jettisoning the absolute horizons that held its energies in check. A pivotal moment in this shift is the 1843 essay “Dilettantism in Science” by Aleksandr Herzen. It describes how his acceptance of a Hegelian metaphysics-of-becoming led him to develop *beyond Hegel*. Herzen argues

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<sup>193</sup> Auerbach 395.

<sup>194</sup> Moretti 6-10, 15-17. Note that Moretti’s work on the novel wholly (and unjustly) neglects the space of Russian letters, which he excludes due to “a marked religious dimension... in ways unthinkable in the fully secularized universe of the Western European *Bildungsroman*.” I believe this unconvincing rationale to hide a missed opportunity, and stems from Moretti’s hesitance to examine either memoir literature or the *political aesthetics* of the novel form. See Moretti 3n1. We can also note that Auerbach’s seminal study of aesthetic realism also does injustice to the genre’s Russian history – when he briefly touches upon Russian realism, it is as the overdetermined expression of an essentialized (and almost racialized) culture, swinging immaturely in its prose between the monstrous and the vegetative. See Auerbach 459-63. With this in mind, I believe that the present dissertation takes some necessary steps in bringing the tradition of Western European novelistic studies back into dialogue with the history of Russian political aesthetics.

that Hegelian metaphysics both successfully depicts and is itself the fruits of a truly scientific understanding of humankind in the world. However, in a move prefiguring that made by Marx two years later in his “Theses on Feuerbach,” Herzen claims that this same philosophical framework must *itself* be overcome in a further stage of development – having attained science, the individual must now return to the world as a terrain for active political practice.<sup>195</sup> Beyond static resignation, the subject must continue developing ever forward: as Herzen would famously phrase it in his memoirs, “the philosophy of Hegel is the algebra of the revolution.”<sup>196</sup>

Thus, Left Hegelianism allowed Bakunin and his contemporaries to free an image of the developing historical self from the prison houses of statist *teloi* and conservative irony. With the dialectic unchained, Hegelian metaphysics and Goethean aesthetics together formed a dynamic motor of self and world perfectly suited to narrating the upward momentum of subjecthood-in-revolt.

### **VIII. Narrating the Self in the Cell**

Thus, Bakunin’s penning of a *Bildungsroman* in the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1851 must be seen as the climax of an intense reconsideration of the subject’s place in history that had occurred in Russia over the previous fifteen years – a process in which Bakunin had personally played a pivotal role. I argue that we must see him at the head of a novel synthesis of Hegelian thought and Goethean self-representation, with his

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<sup>195</sup> Alexander Herzen, “Dilettantism in Science,” in *Selected Philosophical Works*, trans. L. Navrozov (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), 15-96. Note that this first appearance of Russian Left Hegelianism is actually headed by an epigraph from Goethe: “Nichts ist drinnen, nichts ist draußen, den was innen, das ist außen” – a recognition of the unity of subjective interiority and external reality between Goethe and Hegel.

<sup>196</sup> Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, 2:403.

*Confession* reflecting a new understanding of subjecthood dialectically acting upon and being acted upon by a historically-dynamic reality. Furthermore, it was only through this constellation that incarceration became *politically legible* for modern revolutionaries. In bringing these intellectual coordinates into the Peter and Paul Fortress, Bakunin undertook the first Russian attempt to narrate the developing self in the cell: the first instance of a tsarist prison being used as a site of modern *Bildungs*-autobiographics.

Let us be clear: we cannot claim that the *Confession* was the first Russian ‘prison memoir.’ The content of Bakunin’s autobiography ends with the author’s apprehension by the Prussian state, and does not encompass the experience of incarceration itself. Thus, it is more accurate to think of the *Confession* as a ‘memoir in the prison.’ However, it was not accidental that one of the first Russian *Bildungs*-texts appeared at this moment within a prison cell; nor that the mass of revolutionary prison narratives that appeared in the decades to follow would all adopt the Goethean-Hegelian framework first inaugurated by Bakunin. There was something specific about solitary confinement that lent itself to crafting life narratives in this new vein, as well as something specific to the genre that allowed it to become the primary politico-aesthetic medium for narrating political imprisonment.

While the history of Russian prison memoiristics after Bakunin will be encountered in the chapters to come, here we can touch upon how, structurally, Left Hegelian narratives of development could take root so firmly in spaces of confinement. Doing so will also allow us to gesture towards the significance of the *Bildungs*-memoir for the wider development of a Russian intelligentsia, as well as

conclude with an examination of the broken pathway of reception that has caused the importance of Bakunin's *Confession* to escape our intellectual histories until now.

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Bakunin's *Confession* was the first modern Russian 'memoir in the prison'. It would not be the last. What was it, exactly, that made the prison cell so amenable to revolutionary autobiographics?

At its most basic level, the forced inactivity of incarceration has long made it congenial to the task of writing. "These were my best hours," recalled L.D. Trotsky in his memoirs. "I left the hermetically sealed cell of solitary confinement in the Peter and Paul Fortress with a tinge of regret; it was so quiet there, so eventless, so perfect for intellectual work."<sup>197</sup> Incarceration provides necessary time for written labors, as well as a removal from the world that engenders the distancing of novelistic narration. Bakunin himself informed the Tsar that, after his capture by Prussian gendarmes, "I was able to rethink many things, and I can say that never in my life did I think so seriously as during this time."<sup>198</sup> Of course, the fact that incarceration lends itself to scholarly labor does not necessarily entail the writing of ego documents. However, once the conditions of possibility had been opened for the *Bildungs*-memoir, it rapidly became the dominant type of prison text in pre-revolutionary Russia.

What was it about this new genre that would lend itself so well to grasping the experience of political imprisonment? Could we speak of a carceral specificity to the modern memoir between Goethe and Hegel?

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<sup>197</sup> Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 273.

<sup>198</sup> Bakunin, *The Confession*, 86; Bakunin, "Ispoved'," 4:149.

Without the direct invitation of Tsar Nicholas I, it is impossible to say whether Bakunin would have tried his hand at a *Dichtung und Wahrheit* during his years of solitary confinement. However, when asked to produce a life account, a novel assemblage of Goethean historical subjectivity and Left Hegelian metaphysics immediately suggested itself. Indeed, this new genre proved to have an affinity with the space of the prison that went beyond the summer of 1851.

Above all, the *Bildungs*-memoir allowed Bakunin and those that followed to make sense of defeat. Political incarceration was no longer experienced as atomized, mute suffering, but rather was made legible through the linkages between the individual self and what Bakunin calls “the logic of the world.”<sup>199</sup> In the Goethean-Hegelian narrative of development, contradictions and setbacks – be they socio-political (Russia’s backwardness; autocratic repression) or personal (arrest and imprisonment in a tsarist cell) – became comprehensible moments of a universal process. As one Peter and Paul Fortress prisoner from the end of the century would remark in his memoirs, “prison and exile are logical, natural stages in the life of a revolutionary.”<sup>200</sup> Conflict was inevitable, but so too was its resolution in a higher stage of individual and historical development. It became possible for radicals to identify their personal setbacks with world-historical impasses: to see in their political struggles the dialectical progression of history. The Peter and Paul Fortress was not only first made legible in this mode, but indeed appeared as *especially* comprehensible – for here, in the secret prison of the tsarist autocracy at the heart of the imperial

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> V.N. Katin-Iartsev, “V tiur’me i ssylke,” *Katorga i ssylka* 2 (1925): 183.

capital, the skin separating the life of the individual and the life of world history was particularly thin.

For Russian radicals after 1851, prose held out new possibilities for representing incarceration as at once personal and historical. And while one could argue that the history of the novel has in some ways always occurred under the shadow of the prison, its mid-nineteenth century *Bildungsroman* form promised a new *political* aesthetics, capable of embedding experiences of hardship and defeat into grand narratives of future victory.<sup>201</sup> This radical potential was perhaps first recognized by Lukács:

If the author's action consists in disclosing buried meaning, if his heroes must first break out of their prisons and, in desperate struggles or long, wearisome wanderings, attain the home of their dreams – their freedom from terrestrial gravity – then the power of verse, which can spread a carpet of flowers over the chasm, is not sufficient to build a practicable road across it... Only prose can then encompass the suffering and the laurels, the struggle and the crown, with equal power; only its unfettered plasticity and its non-rhythmic rigor can, with equal power, embrace the fetters and the freedom, the given heaviness and the conquered lightness of a world henceforth immanently radiant with found meaning.<sup>202</sup>

It was prose – specifically, the novel of development – that allowed radical subjects to resignify individual tribulations into steps in a future history of liberation.<sup>203</sup> The

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<sup>201</sup> The prison and the novel have always been intertwined – both in the genre's earliest narratives (what is Robinson Crusoe's island if not a prison?), and in its production (it is no accident that Cervantes claimed *Don Quixote* to have been conceived in a cell). For further discussions of incarceration and the European novel, see Sean Grass, *The Self in the Cell: Narrating the Victorian Prisoner* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Victor H. Brombert, *The Romantic Prison: The French Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

<sup>202</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 58-59.

<sup>203</sup> This new genre's ability to claim victory in defeat is one of the factors that would allow the Russian revolutionary tradition to develop such a robust tradition of political martyrdom – especially from the 1860s onwards, with A. Herzen's 'invention' of the Decembrists and the further elaboration of a radical prison mythos. To thus assert Goethean-Hegelian roots for this phenomenon is thus also to take a particular stance on the perennial historiographical question

prison cell was no longer a space of mute immobilization, but one capable of being integrated into an agency-laden life journey. The new politico-aesthetic format constructed by Bakunin would prove a ‘practicable’, dialectical road between self and world, fetters and freedom.<sup>204</sup>

Furthermore, we should note that the amenability of Left Hegelian self-narration to representing the prison cell lay not only in its unique ability to narrate political struggle. The intellectual terrain first cleared by Bakunin proved capable of fostering an entire lineage of prison memoirs also through this narrative form’s essential *reproducibility*.

The *Bildungs*-memoir is, conceptually, an astoundingly egalitarian genre. One of the major innovations of its theory of the self lies in its claims to organic totality. Once its conditions of possibility were established and circulated, one did not have to be an elite to craft a self-narrative of development. In fact, it was seen as a common model of human existence. As Friedrich Schlegel asserted in his reflections on *Wilhelm Meister*, “every human being who is cultivated and who cultivates himself contains a novel within himself.”<sup>205</sup>

Taking the democratic pretenses of the *Bildungsroman* into consideration allows us to understand the pedagogical imperative of the genre. As we saw earlier in

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of the religious origins of the Russian intelligentsia. While I do believe that theology contributed much to the cultural semiotics of revolutionary struggle in the long nineteenth century, I would argue that trans-European intellectual shifts such as those analyzed here bear far greater responsibility for the birth of the Russian intelligentsia than any Orthodox *Sonderweg*. This question is treated in more detail in further areas this dissertation.

<sup>204</sup> In this way, one could argue that the relationship between self and history in the *Bildungs*-memoir was one of the necessary preconditions for European radical political cultures to find political sustenance in suffering and defeat. See Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>205</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 10.

our discussion of Bakunin's youthful introduction to the form, the novel of development was a remarkably contagious vehicle of self-narration. The *Bildungsroman* contains a structural argument for readers to cast their own lives within its metaphysics and aesthetics; it teaches that one should understand one's selfhood in the world as an ongoing apprenticeship.

Highlighting the essentially pedagogical nature of the *Bildungsroman* genre allows me to briefly venture my own speculation on the reoccurring question of the 'intentionality' behind Bakunin's *Confession*. I believe Bakunin's immediate goal was to *teach* Tsar Nicholas I. Recall how the emperor circulated the text in his court as an "instructive document" – consciously or unconsciously, Bakunin held hope that the tsar would recognize his own subjecthood as belonging to the same times as his prisoner, would see himself as a site of development between the personal and world historical, and would reimagine the role he could learn to play in the upwards striving of humanity towards freedom.<sup>206</sup>

Such a moment of radical identification between tsar and anarchist, of course, never occurred – however, generations of future radicals would prove themselves eager pupils of the *Bildungs*-memoir's pedagogy of the self. For beyond inaugurating the reader into its particular epistemology, the genre also promised to guide its readers concretely through life. As Goethe himself claimed, the modern 'autobiography of

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<sup>206</sup> Such an aim is hinted at in a few crucial sections of the *Confession*, where Bakunin relates fantasies of a tsar who would throw off the mantle of petty state affairs and lead a war for the emancipation of all Slavic peoples. The idea of the *Confession*'s instructiveness is also present in its author's letter to Herzen from 1860: Bakunin states how he "related to Nicholas all of my life abroad, with all of my plans, impressions, and feelings, and not without many instructive remarks [*pouchitel'nykh zamechaniï*] for him about his interior and foreign politics." See M.A. Bakunin to Aleksandr Herzen, December 8, 1860, in Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii* 4:366.

development' not only shows a single subject's struggles within the world, but also serves to "[mirror] them again for others."<sup>207</sup> Once a particular series of experiences had been made legible in a *Bildungs*-memoir, this first ascent provided the narratological anchors for future integration by other life writers.

We see this purpose frankly stated in the autobiography of G.A. Gershuni. Upon his escape from a Siberian labor camp in 1906, this leading SR terrorist decided to write a prison memoir – not for “the idle curiosity of idle people”, but rather for his comrades facing incarceration:

It would be a great relief in those moments [of imprisonment] to know that it was not you alone who had to live through this. . .

Of course, we revolutionaries do not consider ordeals in tsarist dungeons to be a misfortune, but rather a natural, inevitable consummation of our activity. Nevertheless, a tale of how one felt and lived through “the other side of life” might be useful for young workers.<sup>208</sup>

Thus holding up the autobiography as a form capable of modeling the experience of confinement for other radical actors, Gershuni immediately launches into a detailed narrative of his fifteen months in the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>209</sup>

It is this logic that allowed the memoir of development to fully saturate Russia's political prisons in the second half of the nineteenth century. Once true prison memoirs – and not just ‘memoirs in the prison’ – began to see widespread circulation from the 1860s onwards, the tsarist cell was given lasting legibility. Each *Bildungs*-account of incarceration invited its revolutionary readers to ‘write’ their own potential future imprisonment in this form. The genre thus auto-generated a lineage, with each

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<sup>207</sup> Goethe, *From My Life: Poetry and Truth*, 17.

<sup>208</sup> Grigorii Gershuni, *Iz nedavnego proshlogo* (Paris: Izdanie Tsentral'nago Komiteta partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov, 1908), 6-7.

<sup>209</sup> His dates of Fortress imprisonment are recorded at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1134, l. 10ob.

prisoner reading their incarcerations not as solitary trials, but as linked with the larger politico-aesthetic tradition of all those who had come before.

This is well expressed in the self-narrations of Prince P. Kropotkin. Upon being immured within the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortres in 1874, the anarchist's thoughts immediately go to the ranks of his predecessors:

Here the Decembrists... underwent their first experiences of martyrdom... Here were imprisoned the poets Ryléeff and Shevchénko, Dostoévsky, Bakunin, Chernyshévsky, Písareff, and so many others of our best contemporary writers...

All these shadows rose before my imagination. But my thoughts fixed especially on Bakúnin... 'He has lived it through,' I said to myself, 'and I must, too; I will *not* succumb here!'<sup>210</sup>

While his particular pathway to the Fortress was all his own, the transmissible genre of incarcerated selfhood allowed Kropotkin to maintain a legibility in his private story of development as it passes through citadel cells, to 'mirror' the struggles of his predecessors. Indeed, Kropotkin's own later contributions to the prison memoir genre – *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* and *In Russian and French Prisons* – became touchstones for further life-writings in this form.

Thus, through the reproducibility and transmissibility of the *Bildungs*-memoir, the tsarist prison cell ceased to be a space of mute discipline and incomprehension. Through the intellectual coordinate first assembled by Bakunin in 1851, not only could Russian revolutionaries make sense of political confinement through a dialectic of

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<sup>210</sup> Petr Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1889), 2:141-42. Internal documents relating to his imprisonment are held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 383, ll. 187, 188, 188ob, 189, 190; d. 399, ll. 136b, 136b ob, 136v. The curious prison experience of Kropotkin is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

personal and world historical development – their own writings of the self could also be organically integrated into a larger inter-generational arc of carceral struggle.<sup>211</sup>

It was the invention of the *Bildungs*-memoir that fostered the birth of a political culture of imprisonment in pre-revolutionary Russia. Goethe and Hegel themselves – in their solidly bourgeois personal lives – would surely have been surprised to learn how a concept of ‘development’ synthesized from their work could generate a highly-communicable narrative genre of self and history that would crack open the prison cells of tsarist Russia to dissident legibility.

## **IX. Conclusion: Bakunin’s Children**

And not just prison cells. The coordinates we see gathered in Bakunin’s *Confession* proved themselves remarkably capable of representing radical Russian selfhood in all its varied spaces and struggles. I argue that the birth of the *Bildungs*-memoir in this period – with its novel vision of development, its ability to narrate political struggle between self and history, and its essential reproducibility – formed the basis for an even wider community of meaning in Russia’s long nineteenth century: the radical intelligentsia.

A mature, transmissible concept of ‘development’ was the necessary precondition for a group of educated young men and women to learn how to narrate

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<sup>211</sup> We can remark here that the classic radical *Bildungs*-memoir as first elaborated by Bakunin persisted even through the Stalinist period. As late as the 1930s, past experiences of political imprisonment in Russia were filtered through this politico-aesthetic lens. At a presentation given at the Leningrad division of the All-Union Society for Former Political Prisoners and Exiles in February 1934 on the topic “How to Write a Historico-Revolutionary Memoir,” comments by the elderly audience constantly returned to Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and Herzen’s *Past and Thoughts*: how to negotiate a position between subjective experience and the world horizons of revolutionary progress. See TsGA SPB f. 506, op. 1, d. 582, esp. ll. 15, 19, 26, 30, 34.

Russian socio-political reality as *historical*, and thus politically changeable. The many leftist autobiographies that sprung up from the 1850s onwards – both within prisons and without – should be understood as products of what we could call, in Foucault’s terms, the *Bildungsroman* as a “technology of the self.”<sup>212</sup> They are artifacts of the new epistemological horizons within which the fledgling intelligentsia labored, and a testament to the centrality of political aesthetics in our attempts to understand them. In this approach it would appear that the Russian intelligentsia should be best grasped not as a static social class or a fleshless collection of ideas, but rather as a radical new narrative community that arose in mid-nineteenth-century Russia.

The question ‘what is the intelligentsia?’ is one of the perennial specters of Russian historiography – one of those eternal windmills at which each new theoretical ‘turn’ tilts. We can divide Western scholarship on the question into two major trends – mid-century intellectual history and the optics of social history.<sup>213</sup> Both lack satisfactory explanations for the birth of the Russian intelligentsia. The weakness of the former is that its disembodied catalogue of ideas too often reverts to an unconvincing thesis of what I call ‘ideational excess’: that the intelligentsia arose when a group of educated youths somehow accumulated ‘too many’ ideas, became

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<sup>212</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). We thus see how new histories of radical subjectivity and political incarceration must strike a particular relationship with Foucault: one that exorcises the Foucault of top-down disciplinary power with the help of the Foucault of discursive subject construction.

<sup>213</sup> For the former, see Richard Pipes, ed., *The Russian Intelligentsia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812-1855* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961); Allen McConnell, “The Origin of the Russian Intelligentsia,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 8 (1964): 1-16; Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From Enlightenment to Marxism*; and Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (New York: Viking, 1978). The classic work of the latter tradition is the crucial work here being Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1966).

‘too alienated.’ The weakness of the latter is that it cannot explain why an intelligentsia arose without falling into normative developmental accounts or the idea of a Russian *Sonderweg*. Both, I believe, lack a sufficient understanding of how human subjects engage in projects of self-fashioning whose conditions are shaped by the epistemological horizons of a historical period; how actors take up social practices, intellectual programs, and ways of life at the juncture of text and context.<sup>214</sup>

This article thus proposes that a new type of ‘intelligentsia subjectivity’ arose from a novel relationship between self and history at the juncture of Goethe and Hegel.<sup>215</sup> The intelligentsia could only appear when the burning questions of the Russian present could be posited as *historical* in nature: and a critical subjecthood rooted in this same history, diagnosing and contesting reality, could be posited alongside it. The present article has sought to provide a new intellectual genealogy for this moment through the life and texts of one of its earliest adherents. This novel epistemological terrain and its attendant narrative forms quickly saturated the lives of Russia’s dissident actors, who found in it something uniquely powerful and modern.<sup>216</sup>

If we thus recognize the centrality of the concept of development in Russian intellectual history, we are brought to a new idea of an *intelligentsia-in-becoming*.

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<sup>214</sup> It is at this crossroads - between Tartu School cultural semiotics, Foucauldian genealogy, and Frankfurt School political epistemology – where I have searched for the origins of the Russian intelligentsia and their narratives of political imprisonment.

<sup>215</sup> The recent historiographical turn to examining regimes of subject-formation in the Soviet Union – ‘Soviet Subjectivity’ studies – can and should be brought to bear upon the imperial period as well. In my attempt to do so here, I am indebted to works such as A. Krylova, “The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1 (2000): 119-46; Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2000); and Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*.

<sup>216</sup> For more on the question of the ‘Russian modern’, see David L. Hoffman and Yanni Kotsonis, eds., *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

This term possesses two modalities: first, a sensibility for the lived, contingent development of the intelligentsia, as opposed to visions over-determined by social relations or particular teleologies; second, a recognition that the historical invention of an idea of development is key to understanding its birth and self-narration.<sup>217</sup> A novel philosophical tradition and regime of self-narration that arose in the mid-nineteenth century provided the necessary epistemological conditions for the birth of a new form of historical subjectivity. If the Russian intelligentsia is thus most productively viewed as a “collective representation,” then Hegel provided the structure and Goethe the genre of this self-fashioning.<sup>218</sup> The structure of the *Bildungsroman* circulated contagiously around the Russian empire – both within and outside of the prisons that it found so habitable – and formed the basis for this new narrative community.

Bakunin’s textual self-fashioning in the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress should be seen as an originary image of the Russian subject-in-revolt, and his *Confession* taken as one of the founding ego-documents of a paradigm shift towards intelligentsia self-narration, capable of representing tsarist-era dissent in both fetters and freedom.

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But one last problem remains: can we really draw any sort of genealogy that stretches back to Bakunin, when the text of his *Confession* lay unread until after the Russian Revolution? It is true that this memoir was unknown to the generations of radicals that

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<sup>217</sup> My notion of an ‘intelligentsia-in-becoming’ is indebted to philosophical existentialism’s language of contingency and self-fashioning – recently brought to bear on Russian history by Slavoj Žižek, who has called us to imagine a Kierkegaardian Lenin, a “*Lenin-in-becoming*.” See Slavoj Žižek, “Introduction: Between the Two Revolutions,” in V. I. Lenin, *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917* (London: Verso, 2002), 6.

<sup>218</sup> The term “collective representation” used here is borrowed from Nathaniel Knight’s invaluable recent *Begriffsgeschichte* of the Russian term ‘intelligentsia.’ See “Was the Intelligentsia Part of the Nation? Visions of Society in Post-Emancipation Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7 (2006): 733-58.

would soon adopt its genre to narrate their own lives. However, this simply reinforces my argument: that what we have here is a larger epistemological shift. This chapter has not been a study in reception. If we can speak of ‘origins’ in the Peter and Paul Fortress, it is not in the sense of a prime causal force but rather that of a Benjaminian *Ursprung*.<sup>219</sup> In the 1850s, a novel conception of the historical subject arising out of Hegel and Goethe formed the conditions of possibility for a new intelligentsia genre of self-narration especially suited to conditions of incarceration: and Bakunin’s *Confession* was simply one of the first of its many manifestations.

This stance both complements and moves beyond existing literature on this subject. While the study of Russian ego-documents was long neglected by Western and Soviet scholarship, several recent works have begun to recognize the importance of its development for nineteenth-century regimes of subjectivity.<sup>220</sup> Historians have found that the French Revolution and the War of 1812 perhaps first set in motion a drive towards new historical understandings of the self, which boiled beneath the

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<sup>219</sup> “Origin [*Ursprung*], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [*Entstehung*]... Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis... There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history. Origin is not, therefore, discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their history and their subsequent development.” Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 45-46.

<sup>220</sup> See Martin Aust and Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, eds., *Imperial Subjects: Autobiographische Praxis in den Vielvölkerreichen der Romanovs, Habsburger und Osmanen im 19. und frühen* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2015); Jochen Hellbeck and Klaus Heller, eds., *Autobiographical Practices in Russia – Autobiographische Praktiken in Russland* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2004); and A.G. Tartakovskii, *Russkaia memuaristika i istoricheskoe soznanie XIX veka* (Moscow: ‘Arkheograficheskii tsentr’, 1997). This push towards the history of subject formation has also seen a renewed interest in biographical writing: see D.Ia. Kalugin, *Proza zhizni: russkie biografii v XVIII-XIX vv.* (St. Petersburg: Izd. Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2015); as well as “Writing Russian Lives: The Poetics and Politics of Biography in Modern Russian Culture,” special issue, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 96 (2018).

surface for several decades. However, there is also agreement that these energies only truly broke open in the 1850s. These years would see the publication of both Lev Tolstoy's *Childhood* and the first sections of Aleksandr Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts*: works that embodied a reconfigured relationship between self and history crucial for the invention of the Russian intelligentsia. These, indeed, have recently been read as the first proper Russian *Bildungs*-memoirs. Irina Paperno has argued that Herzen's work is not only Hegelian in structure (as it erupts at "the convergence of 'intimacy' and 'history'"), but also a crucial document in the production and re-production of the intelligentsia regimes of self-narration: "Gercen created the image of an *intelligent*... *Byloe i dumy* has been used by generations of Russians caught in the historical dramas of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to arrange their own lives and to write them in memoirs and novels."<sup>221</sup> As widely-read tales of intellectual life between the personal and the world-historical, the texts of Tolstoy and Herzen would become the models in whose vein new generations would translate their selfhoods into *Bildungsromane*.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Irina Paperno, "Introduction: Intimacy and History. The Gercen Family Drama Reconsidered," *Russian Literature* 61 (2007): 2-3, 6. In making this argument, Paperno is expanding on Lydia Ginzburg's earlier analysis of the Hegelian "conscious historicism" in Herzen's text. See Ginzburg, *On Psychological Prose*, 195-217. The present article – in its study of prison narrative, epistemologies of the self, and the politics of aesthetics – is consciously seeking to build upon the insights of these two scholars.

<sup>222</sup> It is clear that Herzen's much more famous autobiographical text was shaped by exactly the same intellectual coordinates as Bakunin's *Confession*. We have seen in this article how a young Herzen passed through the crucible of Hegelian thought, reaching a synthesis of German idealism and radical political praxis. In light of this article's original argument, we should also recognize his debt to the *Bildungsroman*. Goethe appears in Herzen's published work as early as 1834, where in a discussion of *Werther* and *Wilhelm Meister* he crowns the author "the Napoleon of literature" (a World Spirit in Weimar?). Quotations and references to Goethe appear throughout Herzen's *oeuvre*, including in *My Past and Thoughts*. Perhaps the most telling line Herzen penned on the tension between Goethe's Right Hegelian metaphysico-aesthetics and his own political commitments is the short musing: "Rousseau

However, up until now, M. A. Bakunin and the space of the prison have been absent in these histories. Yet the *Confession* is the product of the exact same radical shift in Russian technologies of the self, written *before* the more-recognized *Bildungs-*memoirs of Tolstoy and Herzen (published in 1852 and 1856, respectively). Even as a generation of revolutionaries began to parse their ‘past and thoughts’ in the drawing rooms and journals of the empire, one of the individuals most responsible for this new epistemological terrain was discovering the political aesthetics of Hegelian-Goethean self-fashioning in a tsarist cell. While it would be going too far to argue that Russian *Bildungs-*subjectivity was invented in the Peter and Paul Fortress, it is clear that it found an early home there: intelligentsia prison narratives are as old as the intelligentsia itself.

Thus does Bakunin deserve a central place in our new histories of both modern political imprisonment and the discursive practices of dissent. Asked for a confession in the Peter and Paul Fortress, Bakunin pursued a virtuosic path of carceral self-fashioning that clearly demonstrated the vitality of a genre which he had helped assemble. In the Russian revolutionary tradition, the *Confession* should be seen as an uncanny, unknown ancestor: an essential text in the history of the intelligentsia, the first Russian ‘memoir in the prison’, indeed one of the very first modern Russian memoirs, at the head of an entire tradition of radical political aesthetics which possessed no knowledge of its primogenitor.

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said that man is born *free*, and Goethe said that man *cannot be free*, both are right, both are wrong.” See Zhirmunskii 257-76.

With this in mind, we can conclude with a reading of one of the earliest Soviet responses to the appearance of Bakunin's *Confession*. In a 1921 essay, Vera Figner – herself a former Peter and Paul Fortress inmate and author of a widely-read prison memoir – registered her political disappointment at the revelation of the *Confession* with the words: “One could say that all of us – admirers and detractors of Bakunin – created a fantasy, an illusion of the unity of his nature and his life, and the *Confession* tore this illusion in two.”<sup>223</sup> By these words, Figner had in mind a rupture between an image of Bakunin as a “revolutionary monolith” and a Bakunin of psychological weakness. Our current chapter reaffirms, in a different way, this idea of a divided and non-identical Bakunin in a cell of the Alekseevskii Ravelin.

For writing the *Confession* was clearly an act of self-division on the part of Bakunin – however, not between strength and weakness, but rather the self-division of the alienated historical individual, the self-division of the prose autobiography's subject and object. In writing the first Russian political prison memoir, Bakunin embodied a new type of self, torn asunder: between the personal and the world-historical, activity and consciousness, freedom and captivity, past and thoughts, poetry and truth. The radical memoir of development arose out of Hegelian metaphysics and the Goethean *Bildungsroman* as the promise of mediation – as a means of self-narrating a non-identical subjectivity ascending along the politico-historical path towards an unalienated future. Bakunin was the first to assemble the conceptual conditions of possibility for this new regime of self-narration. He was also the first to demonstrate the space of the political prison as a fitting stage for the textual

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<sup>223</sup> V.N. Figner, “‘Ispoved’ M.A. Bakunina,” *Biulleten' knizhnogo magazina 'Zadruga'* 1 (1921): 4-6, republished in *M.A. Bakunin: Pro et Contra*, ed. P.I. Talerov (Moscow: RKhGA, 2015), 342-45.

production, chronotopic representation, and self-investiture of this new intelligentsia-in-becoming.

As we pass now from the 1850s to the next decade in the Peter and Paul Fortress, let us turn to explore how this orphaned canon – this genre of the radical self – rapidly developed, allowing revolutionary political cultures to represent, contest, and indeed appropriate sites of tsarist imprisonment that had now become politically legible.



### 3. The Students and the Poet: 1861 and the Emergence of a Carceral Culture

#### I. Introduction

Very rarely do developments in the history of ideas and revolutionary cultures possess clean chronologies. The landscape of what is politically conceivable so often lurches in starts and fits, with a staggered, combined, uneven movement. Attempts to locate clear timelines and origin moments in these processes are, more often than not, futile – speaking more to the orderly desires of a historian’s moment rather than to the past’s causal ambiguity and dialectical interplay of texts and contexts. We saw some of these complexities clearly in the previous chapter: while Bakunin’s *Confession* was the first moment of Russian state imprisonment’s political legibility – the first moment when a newly assembled epistemological and aesthetic constellation demonstrated its ability to narrativize the experience of incarceration – its broken reception history meant that this particular *Bildungs*-memoir had no *direct* inheritors. Bakunin had been the first to illuminate the tsarist cell through sparks raised from a new metaphysics and a new aesthetics, but it would take another set of actors to wield this flint and tinder towards a larger conflagration.

This would occur in 1861.

Remarkably, the *public* debut of a politics of imprisonment in Russian public discourse is something that we *can* locate at an exact temporal moment. In the autumn of 1861, a wave of university protests and revolutionary pamphlets swept the city of St. Petersburg. In connection with these disorders, both a large cohort of students and the popular poet M.I. Mikhailov were arrested by tsarist authorities and placed in the

Peter and Paul Fortress. Over the course of just a few months, these actors turned the autocratic cell into a classroom of modern dissidence: a site for those confined to explore new rhetorics and self-narratives of dissent, a site for a sympathetic public sphere to invest new meaning in the figure of the radical prisoner. The present chapter tells the story of these crucial events.

Of course, we must still be sensitive to the complexities of intellectual origination. Even if the historian can locate a new societal understanding of incarceration in the last months of 1861, this was still a strange, fluid moment. The (self-) narrative of the heroic prisoner had not yet congealed into the solid political aesthetics that would take form by the end of the decade (and which we will explore in the chapters to come). What we find in 1861 is far more diffuse – a series of dramatic arrests leading to the first public exploration of the concept of dissident incarceration, the first gathering of a discourse of political martyrdom. Some of this language would take root: the persistent idea of the cell as a space of radical solidarity, societal sympathy, and revolutionary initiation has its origins in the events of this year. Some of this language would not: the students and the poet in the Peter and Paul Fortress would cast their experiences in lyric and in opera, remarkable yet ephemeral genre experiments that would soon be displaced by the *Bildungsroman* prison memoir. All of these developments – eddies that flowed in and around the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1861, presaging a new political culture of imprisonment in tsarist Russia – will be discussed here.

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This portentous year has not been ignored in the historical scholarship, but neither has it been given the attention it deserves. Of course, in a discipline known for its decennial thinking, the Russian 1860s have long been seen as a pivotal moment in pre-revolutionary political history. The arrests of M.I. Mikhailov and the St. Petersburg University students in 1861 are duly given their place in classic Anglo-American and Soviet accounts of this decade. However, these particular events have long been treated as mere ripples in the larger currents of Russian and European radicalisms – peripheralized for their brief duration, treated apart from one another, taken as minor prologues to the more famous revolutionary developments of the later 1860s. Focus, when given, gathers around the disorders that caused the arrests of that autumn – not on the resulting incarcerations themselves.<sup>224</sup>

This chapter seeks to flip this state of affairs on its head. Just as the present dissertation as a whole aims to locate the space of the political prison at the heart of our understanding of modern radicalisms, so too does the present section argue that the events of 1861 are of great significance to our histories of Russia precisely *because of* their orbit around the Peter and Paul Fortress. Approaching M.I. Mikhailov and the students of St. Petersburg University through their experience of incarceration

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<sup>224</sup> Thus, for example, Franco Venturi's classic history of Russian radicalism spends little time on the student unrest of 1861 and treats Mikhailov as only a footnote to N.G. Chernyshevsky's life; and while Abbot Gleason devotes much of a chapter to discussing the student disorders of the capital, his narrative only discusses the events leading up to their mass imprisonment, not the imprisonment itself. Even M.N. Gernet's *Istoriia tsarskoi tiurmy* (which remains the best single source on the history of Russian political imprisonment) relegats Mikhailov's imprisonment to a simple prologue to the more well-known "writers / revolutionary democrats of the 60s in the Peter and Paul Fortress," and spends a mere page on the students in a later chapter on "prisoners of the bastions and curtains of the Peter and Paul Fortress," with the key textual works of both of these movements barely mentioned. See Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, translated by Francis Haskell (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966) 177, 181, 226-29; Abbot Gleason, *Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860s* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 146-59; and M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my* 2:242-52, 347-48.

proves not to limit the scale of this history, but rather broaden it – revealing pathways of activity and empathy that reached out from the Fortress as far afield as Siberia and London, and resonated temporally throughout the rest of the century. To capture this significance, the present chapter presents a narrative history of the year 1861, rooted in extensive archival research – but a narrative history constantly sensitive to this year’s role in the development of dissident carceral cultures.

For three brief months at the end of 1861, the political energies of imperial Russia gathered rapidly around the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress. As M.I. Mikhailov and the students of St. Petersburg crossed personal Rubicons from civil society to political activism – and from the drawing rooms of the capital to the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress – they were accompanied by the attention and imagination of a fledgling public sphere. This is a story with two arcs, but one timeline. A group of students turned the Fortress into a university and taught one another a new rhetoric of carceral solidarity and righteous struggle; a popular poet was publically invested with a new discourse of prison martyrdom. I argue that through these two incarcerations a new prison imaginary began to coalesce around the space of the Fortress during the great retreat of Alexandrine reformism. Let us now move to pick up first one thread, then the other. Taking them both in hand gives us not only a new account of a critical moment in Russian political history, but also privileged insight into the early development of a culture of radical incarceration in the infancy of its political legibility.

## II. “Daily Excesses” and “Outrageous Proclamations”: The Students’ Path to the Prison

Let us begin our story some distance from St. Petersburg – at quite a remove, in fact.

It is mid-September of the year 1861. The royal family is vacationing in the Crimean town of Livadia, just outside of Yalta. Many high officials have joined them at their palace there, including Prince P.A. Dolgorukov – head of the tsarist secret police.<sup>225</sup> We can assume that this spell of rest on the Black Sea coast was proving much needed to Prince Dolgorukov – it had been a long year for the chief gendarme of Russian absolutism.

Tsar Nicholas I had died in 1855. The new emperor – his son, Alexander II – had ascended the throne with a series of liberal ambitions. The largest of these, the long-awaited emancipation of the serfs, had finally been undertaken in February 1861 – but five slow years of debate and compromise had resulted in a muted reform which pleased absolutely no one, and the Third Section was kept busy that year tracking murmurs in the capital and disorders in the countryside. In St. Petersburg, the popular poet M.I. Mikhailov had just been taken into custody under suspicion of distributing seditious pamphlets – a flashpoint that we shall examine in the course of the present chapter. Furthermore, considerable tension was building in the Kingdom of Poland, with frequent demonstrations disrupting the peace. Indeed, 1861 had been a difficult year thus far for the leader of the tsarist secret police.

The most vexing problem of all, however, was the student question.

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<sup>225</sup> Prince V.A. Dolgorukov [1804-1868], Chief Commander of the Third Section and Chief Gendarme from 1856 to 1866, was by all accounts a rather nasty individual. A member of the famous princely family, he is witheringly described in L.N. Tolstoy’s *Hadji Murat* as a man with a “bored expression on a dull face, decorated with the same sideburns and moustaches as Nicholas I.” See Leo Tolstoy, *Hadji Murat*, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 2012), 65.

The events of the autumn of 1861 had their roots in the Russian autocracy's long-standing ambivalence towards educational institutions. As semi-autonomous sites mediating between civil society and the state, imperial classrooms were sensitive markers for the prevailing political mood: the first areas to feel the liberal thaws and repressive frosts of absolutist policy in the long nineteenth century.

The ascension of Tsar Alexander II had brought a brief liberalization of the Russian university system. Not only were students given greater freedom, but matriculation was opened to persons of any social class who could pass the qualifying exams and shoulder the university fees – resulting in St. Petersburg University's student body nearly tripling in size from 1854 to 1859.<sup>226</sup> However, the year 1861 saw the promises of Alexandrine reform run aground on the rocks of reaction. As the state faced dissent towards its lukewarm abolition of serfdom alongside rising discontent in Poland, parochial permissiveness towards the growing liberties of university life in the capital was replaced with state suspicion. In order to curtail this growing student autonomy, that year the state developed a set of new regulations for St. Petersburg University – student libraries and journals were to be

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<sup>226</sup> While this did represent a remarkable change for the Russian educational system, we should be aware that these gains were still modest in scope. By mid-century there were still only five Russian universities – in Moscow, Kharkov, Kazan, St. Petersburg, and Kiev – and all were relatively young (founded in, respectively, 1755, 1804, 1804, 1819, and 1834). Furthermore, while growing exponentially at this moment, as a whole enrollment was still incredibly low (especially compared with other European states). In 1861, there were only about five thousand university students in the empire. See Gleason, *Young Russia*, 118-19. On the topic of the Alexandrine reforms: despite the very real 'thaw' that occurred in 1855, we must be careful not to depict this year as a radical break in Russian political history (even though it did seem that way to many contemporaries). While a series of moderate reforms only began with the reign of Alexander II, already in the last decades of Nicholas I's rule we can find the development of a new notion of professional state service among the educated Russian gentry, which acted as one of the major motors behind the societal and legal shifts of 1855 onward. This is the point convincingly argued in Richard S. Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness*.

closed; unofficial gatherings and assemblies were to be forbidden within university walls; women were no longer to be allowed to audit lectures; and each student was to be required to carry with them, at all times, a registration book [*matrikula*] listing their enrollment status, overall conduct, and grades.<sup>227</sup>

These rules had been stealthily passed over the summer holidays. By September – as the Romanov regime’s highest police official was seeking some much-needed relaxation on the Crimean coast – university students were just returning to St. Petersburg for the fall semester and discovering the abrupt restriction of their previously-enjoyed freedoms. Little could Prince Dolgorukov have known of the conflict that was about to unfold.

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Just before 4 am, on the morning of September 25, Prince Dolgorukov received an urgent, encrypted telegram from his second-in-command in the capital.<sup>228</sup> St. Petersburg University was in chaos.

Upon returning from their holidays to find the state’s new restrictions in place, the students of St. Petersburg University students had risen in open revolt, “allowing themselves daily excesses in the auditoriums” and “composing outrageous proclamations, which they are nailing to the walls.”<sup>229</sup> In response, the temporary

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<sup>227</sup> For contemporary reactions to what became known as the ‘May Rules’ – which caused “all student life to be paralyzed to its roots,” see VI. Sorokin, “Vospominaniia starogo studenta (1858-1862),” *Russkaia starina* 128 (1906): 450-51; and A.M. Skabichevskii, *Literaturnye vospominaniia*, ed. V. Kuz’min (Moscow-Leningrad: ‘Zemlia i Fabrika,’ 1928), 148.

<sup>228</sup> This was Count P.A. Shuvalov [1827-1889], Managing Director of the Third Section and Chief of the Corps of Gendarmes. He would eventually take over Prince Dolgorukov’s position in 1866 and go on to become quite an influential (and reactionary) member of Alexander II’s court, with his opponents dubbing him ‘Arakcheev II.’

<sup>229</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, ll. 2; 4-4ob. The former text (l. 2) is a copy of the decoded message, while the latter (l. 4-4ob) is the actual encrypted telegram. Underlining

authorities in the capital had proclaimed the university to be closed for the foreseeable future.

The functionaries in Crimea had no time to act before the results of this action made themselves known. Just the next day, Prince Dolgorukov received another coded telegram detailing the dramatic escalation of events in St. Petersburg:

To General-Adjutant Prince Dolgorukov. Livadia.  
For immediate delivery to the residence of His Majesty.

Today there was a large student disorder, as over one thousand five hundred gathered at the closed University and loudly demanded that the university Curator (*Popechitel'*) explain the reasons for the closure. Having met a strong contingent of Police and Gendarmes, the students headed as a crowd down Nevskii [Prospect] to the residence of the Curator. The arrival of the Police there aroused violent cries and curses. Filipson [the university curator] proposed that they return to the University, and there on the arrival of the General Governor it was announced that if the students did not leave, they would be dispersed by troops. The students left for their homes.

We are expecting a recurrence of disorders tomorrow. A Council of the Grand Duke is taking strict measures to prevent this. The main instigators will be arrested tonight.

*Count Shuvalov*  
25 September 1861.<sup>230</sup>

Thus did the chief gendarme of Russian absolutism watch impotently from afar as St. Petersburg spun into disorder. This was the start of an escalating cycle of protest and reaction, pitting the youth of the capital against the tsarist educational authorities and disciplinary apparatus. The next three months would see this conflict break open completely. Prince Dolgorukov would rush back to St. Petersburg; public opinion would turn firmly against the autocracy; and hundreds of students would be sent to the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the largest mass political arrests since the

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(which is present in the transcriptions) signifies those words that were encrypted in the original.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., ll. 3-3ob; 5, 5ob, 6. See above for the significance of the underlines.

Decembrist revolt of 1825. The imprisoned students of 1861, however, would face very different concrete and narrative conditions than their forebears – and in the most notorious prison of the tsarist regime, they would begin to unfold a modern politics of incarceration.

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The student march of September 25 was something completely unheard of: a massive, spontaneous demonstration through the very center of St. Petersburg. As participants protested for the restoration of their former university freedoms, little did they know that the path that took them down Nevskii Prospect led directly to the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

The arrests began that very night. Thirty-three accused of ringleaders of the march were seized by the Third Section and sent to the Fortress.<sup>231</sup> This only served to set in motion a feedback loop of further protest and repression.

Each day, students gathered at the shuttered university building on Vasil'evskii Island to demonstrate against both its closure and the imprisonment of their comrades. Each night, more arrests were made: two on the 27<sup>th</sup>, four on the 28<sup>th</sup>, six on the 30<sup>th</sup>, and thirty-four after especially vehement protests on the second of October.<sup>232</sup>

We should note here that this spiraling cycle imprisonment did not quarantine the rising criticism of the tsarist regime. News of the protests and arrests consumed the

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<sup>231</sup> The Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant's papers show 33 individuals brought to the citadel between September 25 and 26. Of these, twenty-seven are listed as students of St. Petersburg University, together with two noblemen, one clerk, two university auditors, and one student of the Fifth Gymnasium. All were placed in the Nikol'skii Kurtin, with at least two in each cell. RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 237, l. 3. See also GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, ll. 54-54ob.

<sup>232</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 237, ll. 3-5. In this last case, four artillery officers were among those arrested – an especially worrying sign for the autocracy. See GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, ll. 158, 207-207ob.

capital, rapidly spreading through social strata. Student circles were understandably outraged, with sharp lines of inter-university solidarity springing up throughout the empire<sup>233</sup> – but discussions of the protests were not limited to the youth. It preoccupied salons and streetcorners, drawing rooms and offices – traveling across the social topography of the capital’s fledgling public sphere.

“In all of Petersburg talk was only of the students,” literary memoirist E.A. Shtakenshneider recorded.<sup>234</sup> “The matter took on, as it were, the character of a general educational question,” another contemporary recalled, “and aroused further and further sympathy for the students.”<sup>235</sup> Undercover Third Section agents expressed similar sentiments in their secret reports: “in the city public opinion is completely opposed to the actions of the police against the students.”<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Representatives from all sorts of educational institutions were present in the daily protests at St. Petersburg University – as well as in the prison cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Files show imprisoned youths coming from the Medical-Surgical Academy, the Academy of Arts, the Engineering and Artillery Military Academies, and various gymnasiums – with many participants not even of university age. On October 4, five students between the age of 13 and 17 were released from the Peter and Paul Fortress after spending almost a week within its cells. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 237, ll. 3-5, 53-53ob, 106-106ob, 107, 108-108ob. The secret police was worried enough of an all-empire student revolt to send urgent telegrams to the general-governors of Moscow, Kharkov, Kazan, and Kiev on September 26, warning each that “we have received evidence that disorders are being prepared amongst the students of [your] university.” GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, ll. 25 and 26. And they were right to be apprehensive: although not nearly as widespread, similar protests were briefly held in Moscow, and many young students traveled from Moscow and Kazan to St. Petersburg in the following weeks to support their peers. See a discussion of this in “IX. Universitetskaia letopis’: iz Moskvyy,” *Kolokol*, 15 January 1862 (119/120).

<sup>234</sup> E.A. Shtakenshneider, *Dnevnik i zapiski (1854-1886)*, edited by I.N. Rozanov (Moscow-Leningrad: Academia, 1934), 297.

<sup>235</sup> N.V. Shelgunov, “Iz proshlego i nastoiashchego,” in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, edited by V. Panov (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo ‘Khudozhestvennaia Literatura’, 1979) 151.

<sup>236</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, ll. 127-128ob. The quoted report also records rumors that dissident literary critic N.G. Chernyshevsky was preparing to present a formal list of student demands to the tsar; and that a union of students, officers, and liberal professors were stockpiling weapons. Rumors of Chernyshevsky’s involvement in the student disorders circulated at all levels of imperial society – see, for example, Aleksandr Nikitenko, *The Diary*

Two weeks passed in this manner before matters reached their climax. As the authorities tentatively attempted to re-open the university (yet maintain all of the new student regulations), a large crowd of students gathered at the main building on October 12. Companies from the Preobrazhenskii and Finnish guard regiments were summoned to halt the protests. These soldiers managed to corral the largest group of students within the university courtyard, and promptly informed all 172 of them that they were under arrest. However, as the report (marked “secret”) of a gendarme officer describes:

As the crowd of arrestees left the gate, it was met by another waiting crowd of over 100 people, which began to shout ‘Hurrah!’ and tried to break through the convoy, demanding that either they free those arrested or detain each and every one of them. Seeing this mess, I ordered the gendarmes to separate and surround this new group. At this, the students picked up sticks and began to beat our horses around the head, waving their hats and their scarfs with shouts of ‘Hurrah!’ A platoon of the Preobrazhenskii regiment that was waiting in the rear rushed to the aid of our gendarmes, and thus 108 more were arrested as well and sent to the fortress.<sup>237</sup>

Thus were two great crowds of students seized by imperial soldiers, and led under convoy to the Peter and Paul Fortress. This was one of the largest mass political arrests in Russian history. Witness accounts describe five hundred, or even one thousand students apprehended by the state.<sup>238</sup> Although the exact number was ‘only’ 245, these wild estimates give us a sense of the mood of that day – for the subjects of

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*of a Russian Censor*, trans. and ed. Helen Salz Jacobsen (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 230. The threads that bound N.G. Chernyshevsky to the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress are discussed in the next chapter of the present dissertation.

<sup>237</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, ll. 286-287ob. Note that several students were injured in the clashes, but none terribly. See a description of these wounds – heavily favoring the soldiers and their actions, of course – in the official military report in *ibid.*, ll. 280-282.

<sup>238</sup> T.V. Vol’fson, “Peterburgskie studenty v Petropavlovskoi i kronshtadtskoi krepostiakh v 1861 g.,” *Vestnik Leningradskogo Universiteta* 1 (1949): 135. The exaggerated estimates are given in K. Golovin, *Moi Vospominaniia* (St. Petersburg: M.O. Vol’f, 1908-10), 1:90; and Sorokin, “Vospominaniia,” 461, respectively. Both of these are discussed briefly in Vol’fson.

St. Petersburg, it must have felt like the entire student population was being rounded up and sent to the Fortress.<sup>239</sup>

Despite the seriousness of the situation, a general celebratory mood and air of youthful bravado reigned. As the convoy was taken from the university to the fortress, many students who had not been involved in the initial protests approached the group and “forcibly pushed through into the convoy, explaining that they had no desire to remain free and wished to share the common fate.”<sup>240</sup> With horror, a military report from that day relates: “the impudence of the students reached the point where they... dared to issue threats to the officers, e.g. that their names will be known all over Europe, that [Herzen’s] *Kolokol* will print about them, that they’ll leave a report of this for posterity, etc.”<sup>241</sup> Thus St. Petersburg’s student population entered the empire’s most notorious prison with a show of youthful bravery.

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<sup>239</sup> Indeed, A.M. Skabichevsky records an amusing anecdote in his literary memoirs which, while doubtful in its veracity, speaks to just this feeling. Apparently, a few days after the arrests of October 12, he was taking a walk along Bol’shoi Prospect wearing his student uniform. He passed an elderly lady and her young granddaughter; upon seeing him, the child exclaimed “Grandma, look, there’s still one left [*Babushka, smotri-ka, odin-to esche ostalsia!*]!” See Skabichevskii, *Literaturnye vospominaniia*, 150.

<sup>240</sup> Sorokin, “Vospominaniia,” 461.

<sup>241</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, ll. 280-282. Interestingly, all of the Third Section reports on the events of October 12 contrasted the outrageous behavior of the student youth with the attitudes of the common people. Each depiction of this day’s arrest mention that the students, while being led in a convoy to the Peter and Paul Fortress, bid farewell to the peasant laborers they passed (“*Proshchaite, bratsy!*”). Each account reports with satisfaction that such cries were met with insults and “vigorous folk cursing (*energicheskie narodnye rugatel’sтва*).” See *ibid.*, ll. 297-303ob. Of course, it was in the best interest of these gendarme bureaucrats to include stolidly pro-tsarist peasants in their reports – an edifying binary of the simple Russian folk against the deviant, westernized youth of the capital would help soften the blow of these disastrous events on the autocratic ego (as well as on their professional careers). However, these reports are not the only place where we see a divide depicted between the student protestors and the lower classes during the events of 1861. In his literary memoirs, Skabichevskii records that the peasants looked on these disorders with hostility, as it was rumored among them that the sons of landowners were revolting against the good tsar because he wished to take away the nobility’s serfs. See Skabichevskii, *Literaturnye vospominaniia*, 149. Of course, Skabichevskii’s memoirs are not the most reliable of sources – indeed, one has

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In the wide disorders and triumphal convoy that brought hundreds of university students to the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1861, we can already begin to see the differences that separated the events of this autumn from earlier political incarcerations in tsarist Russia. It is worth pausing for a moment on the new discourses surrounding what we could call the dissident ‘path to the prison’ – as they will play a large role in the larger legacy of 1861 for the development of a radical Russian carceral politics.

First, it is worth noting the reigning mood of these students. There is a peculiar mixture of light-heartedness and sincere earnestness in these street dramas. The university closure was, indeed, treated like a school holiday – the opening up of a space for boisterous sociability and a carnival mood in the face of the hated administration. However, in key moments of these protests – when arrests seemed immanent, or when faced down by mounted gendarmes and guard regiments – the students banded together in self-sacrificial solidarity. These micro-social dynamics differed greatly from the individualized acquiescence of the Decembrists or the absolute isolation of Bakunin at the moments of their imprisonment.

Second, it is interesting to note the extent to which the tsarist state fell into disarray during these events. With the Romanov family and its highest police officials vacationing in Crimea, no one quite had any idea how to handle these waves of student rebelliousness. Each attempt at a solution – be it shutting down the university or arresting the supposed ringleaders – simply added fuel to the fire. This muddled

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to ask where exactly a literary critic working in the capital was picking up peasant rumors. However, even if just an intelligentsia anecdote, this story does demonstrate the continued perception of a political gap between student politics and the *narod* in these years.

disarray of the tsarist response is mirrored in the rushed, uncertain nature of the bureaucratic correspondences surrounding these events. This raises interesting questions regarding the development of radical prison cultures – namely, the particular influence of looseness and rigidity in disciplinary regimes – that we will explore throughout the present dissertation.

Third, we should remark upon the wide scope of these student arrests. What began as a localized protest of student corporatism against a reactionary administration spilled onto the streets of the capital, and from there to university towns throughout the empire. And its impact was not only felt domestically. Note the threatening mention of the journal *Kolokol* in the police report on the arrests of October 12. In the minds of the students, their struggle had grown into something of trans-European relevance, calling for articles from Aleksander Herzen's critical London periodical. And in our history of Russian political imprisonment, this journal was not simply a neutral medium. As we saw in the previous chapter, Herzen was a contemporary of Bakunin whose own memoirs played a decisive role in disseminating a Goethean-Left Hegelian model of radical self-narration in the 1850s and 60s. By 1861, he was not only issuing leftist commentary on current events in his illegal émigré journal – he was also beginning a project to gather and publish Decembrist memoirs.<sup>242</sup> This endeavor was crucial in what we can think of as the 'invention of the Decembrists,' as Herzen crafted an image of these noblemen as revolutionary forebears – one that

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<sup>242</sup> The precise Decembrist autobiographies published in Herzen's journal *Poliarnaia zvezda* – most prominently in the years 1861 and 1862 – can be found in the catalogue of Peter and Paul Fortress prison memoirs that comprises Appendix I.

highlighted their tragic imprisonments and first made them ‘political’ in precisely these years.<sup>243</sup>

And indeed, the student protests and arrests would not escape Herzen’s attention – just three days after the mass arrests, the article “St. Petersburg University is Closed!” would appear in the October 15, 1861 issue of *Kolokol*. Over the next three months, the periodical would devote thirteen more articles to the ‘student affair.’<sup>244</sup>

Furthermore, belief in the transnational resonance of these events can be found not only in the hopes of the students, but also in the anxieties of the autocracy. Many of the Third Section reports from this period stress the fear that *Polish* students were particularly responsible for the disorders.<sup>245</sup> The autocracy’s belief that they were rounding up a host of non-Russian elements in the Peter and Paul Fortress is just another small page in the long history of this citadel’s ‘perverse cosmopolitanism.’

Finally, the ‘path to the prison’ taken by the university students of the capital in 1861 holds great significance for its impact within imperial Russia’s fledgling public sphere. As we have illustrated above, the students was widely supported by

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<sup>243</sup> For more on Herzen’s precise role in creating a mid-century image of Decembrist martyrdom and fostering a Russian tradition of heroic political imprisonment, see Liudmila A. Trigos, *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), esp. 1-35; Chapters Two and Four of the present dissertation, and the latter sections of the current chapter.

<sup>244</sup> See especially the updates in *Kolokol* 22 November 1861 (113) and 15 January 1862 (119/120). Indeed, Herzen’s presence in these events was not limited to his publishing activities. The perennial bogeyman of mid-century tsarist absolutism, we find several Third Section agent reports from these months noting rumors that Herzen himself had snuck back into the city to lead the students in open revolt against the government(!). See GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, ll. 30; 439-440, etc.

<sup>245</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, ll. 280-282. Indeed, fears of solidarity between student activists and Polish revolutionaries had been one of the reasons for the implementation of the controversial university regulations in 1861. In March 1861, a demonstration had been held in St. Petersburg to protest the shooting of several youths in Warsaw: Russian, Ukrainian and Polish students were all in attendance, and joined together to sing “Poland Has Not Yet Died.” See Gleason, *Young Russia*, 149.

high society – people discussed the rebellious youth through the streets and salons of the capital, with educated sympathies largely favoring them over the police and state. One diarist notes that after the events of October 12, members of the Preobrazhenskii imperial guard did not dare to show their faces around St. Petersburg society.<sup>246</sup> This should be taken as a novel moment in the public reception of political imprisonment in tsarist Russia. The closing of the prison gate behind the students did not sever the newly-articulated filaments of social solidarity and concern.

For the first time in Russian history, imprisonments in the Peter and Paul Fortress had occasioned the rapt attention and political sympathy of a wide swathe of society. We could venture reasons why this was the case – the essentially non-militant aims of the student protestors, the perceived overreaction by the tsarist authorities, the massive scope of the arrests that directly impacted much of educated society – but what is most important to highlight is that this was the first time such a broad public gaze had invested itself in the Peter and Paul Fortress: a development that would ground much of the future development of Russian revolutionary carceral cultures in the years to come.

However, we must also note that this surprising development in the autumn of 1861 was not solely due to the students and their demonstrations. A second dissident affair, a second arrest, a second Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment was occurring simultaneously with the shuttering of St. Petersburg University.

The arrest of popular poet M.I. Mikhailov on September 15, 1861 also provoked outrage, further conditioned the public understanding of political

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<sup>246</sup> Shtakenshneider, *Dnevnik i Zapiski*, 301.

incarceration, and was viewed as distinctly entwined with the student persecutions. Before our narrative itself follows all of these actors into the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress, let us turn to the case of M.I. Mikhailov and the particular reception of his own ‘path to the prison.’

### **III. “We Are Standing on the Edge of the New”: The Poet’s Path to the Prison**

On the night of September 3, 1861, hundreds of copies of a thick pamphlet – “To the Young Generation” – appeared on buildings around the capital. These were quickly taken and circulated amongst the leftist youth, accumulating particularly in university halls and regimental barracks. When the St. Petersburg University protests began two weeks later and the authorities stood aghast at illegal proclamations openly circulated and nailed to classroom walls, “To the Young Generation” was chief among the texts of student revolt. The state immediately attempted, with no success, to destroy all existing copies of this “outrageous and villainous proclamation” whose “paper and typeface are clearly from London.”<sup>247</sup>

The tsarist secret police were correct in discerning the pamphlet’s place of origin. It appeared that the unnamed author had worked closely with A. Herzen and N. Ogarev in London to print several hundred copies through their Free Russian Press. Expectedly, many points in “To the Young Generation” echo Herzen’s longstanding criticisms of the tsarist autocracy. The bulk of the pamphlet is a call for greater social and political liberties in the Russia Empire, with its most radical demands being the

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<sup>247</sup> See the frantic, coded telegrams of the tsarist political police in GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 274, ll. 1-1ob, 2a-2b, 3-5ob. Also preserved here in the Third Section files is a sheet from A. Herzen’s *The Bell* [*Kolokol*] (specifically, a bookselling supplement from the January 1, 1861 edition), which was used for textological comparison with this alarming pamphlet. See *ibid.*, 28a-28a ob.

communal redistribution of the land and an elected government. “We need not a Tsar,” it proclaims, “not an emperor, not an anointed-by-god, not an ermine robe draped over a hereditary incompetence – we want to be led by a mere mortal, a man of the earth who understands life and the people who have chosen him.”<sup>248</sup>

Reflecting the general disappointment in Tsar Alexander II’s attempts at peasant reform, “To the Young Generation” puts no faith in top-down social interventions. No, the pamphlet’s main argument is that the catalyst of political progress in Russia is to be neither the tsar nor the nobility, but rather the empire’s youth, who are exhorted to form blocs of solidarity amongst the students, soldiers, and lower classes. Indeed, the constant thread throughout this pamphlet is that it is only through youth that Russia will find its salvation. By this was intended not only the actual youth of the empire and the social energies of this young generation, but also the very immaturity of the Russian nation itself. “We do not have a political past, we are not tied to any traditions, we are standing on the edge of the new,” states the pamphlet; “we are a belated people, and in that lies our salvation [*my narod zapozdalyi, i v etom nashe spasen’e*].”<sup>249</sup>

This focus on the political potential of an immature people and an immature nation clearly echoes the language and political concerns of Mazzini, 1848, and the trans-European ‘Young Nation’ movements of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>250</sup> It also,

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<sup>248</sup> “K molodomu pokoleniu,” reprinted in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 1:333.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 1:338-339.

<sup>250</sup> For a discussion of these political currents in a connected, trans-national framework, see Richard Stites, *The Four Horsemen: Riding to Liberty in Post-Napoleonic Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), and C.A. Bayly and E.F. Biagini, eds., *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

however, exists in slight tension with another curious facet of “To the Young Generation” – its elevation of the Decembrists as political martyrs. For the pamphlet’s epigraph is the poem “I shall, in that fatal time...” by executed Decembrist K.F. Ryleev that explicitly valorizes republican tyrannicide, and the pamphlet’s last line calls for the nation’s youth to be prepared “if necessary for a glorious death for the salvation of your homeland, reflecting the martyrs of December 14!”<sup>251</sup>

Thus, in this moment of great possibility and risk, we find in “To the Young Generation” a curious play between the idea that Russia is a blank slate – with horizons of political expectation as wide as its vast borders – and a proposed already-existent political hagiography. However, this is not in fact a contradiction, but rather a call to arms. As discussed in the previous chapter, a radical hagiography had failed to truly congeal around the Decembrists during the time of their desperate uprising and imprisonment. Still amorphous, still untethered, a new political aesthetics of martyrdom is wielded in this pamphlet as a way of emotionally appealing to a youthful audience, as well as imagined as a cornerstone for the construction of a new radical cosmology on young Russia’s fertile yet empty soil.

And indeed, while the 1860s would see the *post facto* construction of a Decembrist hagiography (a point to which we shall return), the first widely recognized prison martyr in Russian political history would not be a nobleman from the past exalted by “To the Young Generation,” but rather the author of this pamphlet itself.

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<sup>251</sup> “K molodomu pokoleniu,” 1:350.

On September 14, 1861, the tsarist authorities arrested popular poet M.I. Mikhailov in connection with this illicit text.<sup>252</sup> Initially taken for questioning to the headquarters of the Third Section, he was soon transferred to solitary confinement in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Occurring less than two weeks before the boiling over the student disorders, Mikhailov's incarceration would be understood alongside these larger student demonstrations – serving together in tandem to catalyze public opinion against the tsarist regime, to crystallize a new relationship towards tsarist disciplinary practices. These events would assemble around themselves a powerful discourse of carceral martyrdom within the semi-public Russian cultures of political dissent for the first time – with Mikhailov himself becoming one of the first dissident saints, and the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress his holy ground.

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Let us quickly spare a few words in biographical sketch, if only to get a better sense of the man soon to be turned, through his imprisonment, into a myth. Born in 1829 in Ufa, of mixed Russian and Kyrgyz descent, M.I. Mikhailov moved to St. Petersburg as a teenager and by 1852 was working for the popular critical journal *Sovremennik* [*The Contemporary*].<sup>253</sup> Amidst the fractious social world of the St. Petersburg literati, Mikhailov was something of an anomaly. In a profession filled with bridge-burning

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<sup>252</sup> Mikhailov would insist that he was the sole author of this pamphlet during later interrogations and the case brought against him. Research has shown, however, that this was clearly a collaborative labor, closely worked on as well by N.V. Shelgunov and L.P. Shelgunova – his close friends, housemates, and fellow radicals (who will be discussed in greater length in the following chapter). For a review of questions of authorship and provenance regarding “To the Young Generation,” see N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 1:482-85.

<sup>253</sup> Note that, strangely enough, there seems to be some confusion in the secondary literature regarding Mikhailov's patronymic, with it variously given as ‘Illarionovich’ or ‘Larionovich’ – that is, M.I. Mikhailov or M.L. Mikhailov. Following the version favored in government documents and by his contemporaries, I will be using the former.

and ego-stroking, Mikhailov was a figure of poise and tact. The memoir literature paints the picture of a young, slight poet – energetic and opinionated, but never one to offend – that had been welcome throughout the circles and salons of the capital.

“Mikhailov was short, thin and slender,” recalls Shelgunov:

He held himself somewhat straight, like all people of small stature. In his elegant figure was something that informed all his manner and movements with harmony, grace, and a sort-of neatness... Mikhailov was not handsome: small and narrow like the Kirghiz, his cut eyes and pale-swarthy complexion had something of the Eastern steppe of Orenburg about it... [Yet] this ugly face was illuminated with inner beauty, radiant with a soothing tenderness and softness, with something sympathetic and almost femininely attractive, that no one could help but love Mikhailov.<sup>254</sup>

It was not only his charming physiognomy that rendered him popular amongst his peers. As a journalist and critic, Mikhailov was most famous as one of the first to take up the nineteenth-century ‘Woman Question’ in Russia – arguing forcibly for gender equality, and specifically criticizing the anti-feminist stances of many contemporary leftists (especially Proudhon).<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> N.V. Shelgunov, “Iz proshlogo i nastoiashchego,” in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova, and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 1:111-12. We can briefly remark here on the curious gendering of contemporary accounts of Mikhailov. Despite its open struggle for women’s liberation, the nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary tradition was structurally bound to a problematic binary of ‘feminine’ passivity and ‘masculine’ activity – the passive *object* of social-historical processes versus its willful *subject*. The nature and ramifications of this problematic discourse will be discussed further along in the present dissertation. For now, we can simply note how the case of Mikhailov crucially shows us some of the ways in which this gendered discourse did not map simplistically onto gender identity. Unlike the rigorist voluntarism of the 1870s and 80s that saw both radical women and men described in ‘masculine’ terms, the passive pathway of Mikhailov’s earlier prison martyrdom saw contemporaries use a far more ‘feminine’ discourse. An interesting parallel would be depictions of Jesus during this same period (think, for example, of the gendering involved in Dostoevsky’s Prince Myshkin).

<sup>255</sup> See Mikhailov, “Zhenshchiny, ikh vospitanie i znachenie v sem’e i obshchestve,” *Sovremennik* (1860) no. 4, 5, 8. See also Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism 1860-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 38-48. In passing, we can note that Mikhailov actively sought to combat the institution of marriage in his personal life, with him and his comrades L.P. Shelgunova and N.V. Shelgunov holding an open, George-Sandian relationship.

However, Mikhailov's greatest fame came from his labors as a poet and translator. Specializing in Heine, his work embraced the emotional inner landscape of the new Russian left. His popularity, especially among educated youth, was only furthered through the socially-tinged Romanticism of his translations and poems. For many of the less political members of the St. Petersburg literary elite, it was "unimaginable" that the "small, slender, dark [*malen'kii, khuden'kii, chernen'kii*]" Mikhailov could be involved in the production and distribution of seditious pamphlets.<sup>256</sup> However, Mikhailov's anti-tsarist pedigree was not lacking – he had met and collaborated with Herzen and Ogarev during trips to London, and post-1917 research has shown that, for all the exaggerations and brutality of the tsarist justice system, Mikhailov was indeed responsible for 'To the Young Generation' (most likely with the help of N.V. Shelgunov and A.P. Shelgunova).<sup>257</sup>

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Immediate public outcry followed his arrest. On the very day that his seizure became known, thirty authors, journalists, publicists and editors came together to register their outrage. A formal letter of protest was drafted and co-signed, and submitted the following day to the Minister of Education. Through him, it would shortly make its way to the Third Section, before being read by the emperor himself.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Shtakenshneider, *Dnevnik i Zapiski*, 293-294.

<sup>257</sup> "Shelgunovy, Mikhailov i ikh vospominaniia," in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova, and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 1:8-16

<sup>258</sup> This history is pieced together through documents found in the Third Section files on Mikhailov, which include a copy of this letter as well as the various correspondences between departments regarding its significance. See GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 274, ll. 43, 44-46ob, 47-48.

This is a subtle, cautious text. Written in highly formal terms, it expresses confusion at Mikhailov's sudden arrest, defends the poet as a noble figure, and seeks to expose the contradictions between these police actions and the Alexandrine project of judicial reform:

We do not know what M.I. Mikhailov is accused of, and doubt Mr. Mikhailov himself knows. We only know that all of the literary activity of this writer was directed towards the most lofty and noble goals, and was always aimed at reducing, not increasing, suffering and crime amongst humanity. Thus we can in no way suppose that Mr. Mikhailov could possibly be guilty of any sort of extreme transgression for which it was necessary to toss aside all of the regulations established for judicial investigators.<sup>259</sup>

The explicit aims of this letter also reveals the limits to public politics at the beginning of the 1860s – the writers simply ask for a reasonable explanation regarding the arrest, and that the Minister of Education “take under [his] protection the fate of Mr. Mikahilov, one of the best and noblest representatives of our literature.”

However, this letter holds a place in the history of political imprisonment and tsarist Russia – not for its limited liberal horizons, but rather for the very act of its production itself. There was no precedent for this sort of public literary protest in the Russian 1860s – for the “editors and staff of St. Petersburg’s journals” to make a collective statement on government affairs. Signatories included everyone from firebrands tied to the journals *Russkoe Slovo* [*Russian Word*] and *Sovremennik* [*The Contemporary*] to the more moderate editors of *Otechestvennyi Zapiski* [*Notes of the Fatherland*] and *Vremiia* [*Time*]. Lower-class feuilleton-writers and satirists appear beside pedagogues and philanthropists from the gentry.<sup>260</sup> This was the sort of

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., ll. 44-46ob. Note that selections of the above letter are quoted in M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my* 2:242-43 – unfortunately, with rather vague archival notation.

<sup>260</sup> A full list of signatories, in their original order, with annotations where possible: N.A. **Albertini** [1810-1889], an Anglophone lawyer and correspondent for *Otechestvennye zapiski*;

collective action that speaks to the development of political voice outside of state arenas; a closing of the ranks around their own in the face of perceived maltreatment by the autocracy.<sup>261</sup>

And it was a dangerous gesture at that. The representatives who presented this letter to the Minister of Education were disciplined by order of the tsar, and Mikhailov

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**A.S. Afanasyev-Chuzhbinin** [1816-1875], a Russian-Ukrainian poet, ethnographer, and editor of *Peterburgskii listok*; **G.E. Blagosvetlov** [1824-1880], editor of *Russkoe slovo*; **Konstantin Bestuzhev-Riumin** [1829-1897], St. Petersburg historian, correspondent for *Otechestvennye zapiski*, and nephew of hanged Decembrist Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin; **N.Kh. Vessel'** [1834-1906], editor of the pedagogical journal *Uchitel'* and later founder of the St. Petersburg Pedagogical Society; **A.S. Gieroglifov** [1825-1900?], an editor of minor journals in the capital; **S.S. Gromeka** [1823-1877], correspondent of (licitly) *Otechestvennye zapiski* and (illicitly) A. Herzen's *Kolokol*; **V.R. Zotov** [1821-1896], popular Russian playwright; **D.E. Kozhanchikov** [1819-1877], bookseller; **A.A. Kraevskii** [1810-1889], publisher and editor of *Otechestvennye zapiski*; **V. Kreshnin** [?], unknown; **V.S. Kurochkin** [1831-1875], satirist and founder of the magazine *Iskra*; **N.S. Kurochkin** [1830-1884], poet and co-editor (with his brother, Vasilii) of *Iskra*; **G. Eliseev** [?], unknown – perhaps a relation of the famous grocer family; **N. Kron** [?], also unknown; **Count G.A. Kushelev-Bezborodko** [1832-1870], writer, philanthropist, and former editor of *Russkoe Slovo* – he had hosted Alexander Dumas, père upon his trip to Russia in 1858; **P.L. Lavrov** [1823-1901], political theorist and philosopher; **S.V. Maksimov** [1831-1901], travel-writer, ethnographer and correspondent of *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*; **D.D. Minaev** [1835-1889], satirist and correspondent of *Sovremennik*, *Russkoe slovo*, and *Iskra*; **I.I. Paul'son** [1825-1898], Swiss-born pedagogue; **S.N. Palauzov** [1818-1872], Russian-Bulgarian historian; **M.M. Stolpanovskii** [1830-1877], correspondent of *Iskra* and *Otechestvennye zapiski*; **N.A. Stepanov** [1807-1877], editor and caricaturist for *Iskra*; **V.V. Tolbin** [1821-1869], journalist and former Petrashevets; **N.A. Dobroliubov** [1836-1861], famous progressive literary critic; **M.M. Dostoevsky** [1820-1864], writer, editor of *Vremia*, and older brother of the more famous F.M. Dostoevsky; **A.M. Maikov** [1821-1897], Russian poet; **A.F. Pisemskii** [1821-1881], novelist and editor of *Biblioteka dlia chtenie*; **I.I. Panaev** [1812-1862], writer and original co-editor of *Sovremennik* in the 1840s; and **N.A. Nekrasov** [1821-1878], poet, editor of *Sovremennik*, and arguably the most influential publicist in Russia at the time.

<sup>261</sup> Note that the composition of this petition was not kept secret, but became a matter of rumor and discussion in the literary salons of the capital. See their mention in the memoirs of E.A. Shtakensneider, *Dnevnik i zapiski (1854-1886)*, edited by I.N. Rozanov (Moscow-Leningrad: Academia, 1934), 294. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that Count Putiatin received a *second* petition the following day. Written by P.L. Lavrov in his capacity as editor of an encyclopedia to which Mikhailov was contributing, the petition asks that Mikhailov be allowed to continue his literary works during his imprisonment, and is signed by Lavrov and nine other contributors. This request was denied. See GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 274, ll. 56-56ob; 57-58ob; 59.

quickly disappeared from the public eye – his fate, for the next few months, unknown.<sup>262</sup>

However, even if this type of liberal petition proved unable to intervene against the tsarist disciplinary regime, it gives us another example of how Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment was beginning to emerge as a clear political object in the fledgling public sphere of this time. Mikhailov's 'path to the prison' was invested with attention and sympathy – and like his student contemporaries of that same autumn, this larger social discourse would prove crucial in allowing an image of prison heroism to achieve wide currency in the last months of 1861.

Of course, it was not just the 'path to the prison' that conditioned this new discourse. Public concern followed both Mikhailov and the students into the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress itself. These incarcerated figures would find the opportunity to produce a series of literary texts in their cells – texts that demonstrated the newly-legible nature of political imprisonment for cultures in revolt; texts that would travel outward and further cultivate a public discourse of the sympathetic revolutionary; texts whose early elements of a radical prison discourse shall be explored now, as we walk with Mikhailov and the students into the Peter and Paul Fortress.

But first – a few words on the concrete conditions of St. Petersburg's citadel during the events of 1861.

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<sup>262</sup> The letter had been delivered by Count Kushelev-Bezborodko, Gromeka and Kraevskii – the first of these being by far the highest-ranking signatory. On September 30<sup>th</sup>, Putiatin received a response from the head of the Third Section, saying that the emperor had read the letter and, "finding it completely impertinent," had asked for Kushelev-Bezborodko to be expelled from his role at court (where he had been a *kamer-iunker*, or court valet), Gromeko to be removed from state service, Kraevskii to be placed in a military prison for a week, and all other participants given a "severe reprimand" on behalf of the tsar. See *ibid.*, ll. 47, 47ob, 48.

#### **IV. The Disordered Prison**

As 1861 drew to a close, the Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress was one General K.E. Mandershtern, a decorated war hero descended from the Estonian gentry. However, the 76-year-old general's health had been failing for quite some years, and he had departed several months previously for the spas of Wiesbaden (where he would pass away in the spring of 1862). As the student disorders erupted onto the streets of St. Petersburg, the Peter and Paul Fortress was being provisionally commanded in his stead by Engineer-General A.F. Sorokin – a veteran of the Turkish, Polish, and Crimean campaigns under Nicholas I.<sup>263</sup> As we shall see, the acting Commandant's inexperience affected the state's ability to enforce a regular prison regime within the citadel, which itself conditioned the languages of incarceration that were allowed to flourish in this period.

The arrest of a dissident poet was one thing – the archival documents show us that M.I. Mikhailov was held for interrogation by the Third Section before being transferred over to a cell in the Nevskaiia Curtain of the Peter and Paul Fortress on

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<sup>263</sup> The character of A.F. Sorokin is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. For now, we can note that to be named commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress was quite the prestigious appointment. They were officially responsible for the defenses of the Peter and Paul Fortress, the incarceration of political prisoners, and the protection of the sacred Peter and Paul Cathedral. Those appointed would usually be granted a swift promotion near the top of the imperial table of ranks – e.g. Sorokin went from being a General-Lieutenant to an Engineer-General shortly after being named commandant (that is, a move from the third to the second highest military rank, just below Field marshal). In the mid-nineteenth century, a commandant of the Fortress would have a staff of between twenty and thirty individuals directly reporting to him, including aides, junior officers, scribes, and a half-dozen horses. This appointment was usually for life, and besides the royal family, Peter and Paul Fortress commandants were the only figures allowed burial within the Fortress grounds. See, for example, an annual report for 1862 on the Peter and Paul Fortress staff alongside a career overview of Sorokin in RGIA f. 1280, op. 2, d. 979, ll. 23-23ob, 27-39ob.

October 14, 1861.<sup>264</sup> For the next few months, the administration succeeded in keeping Mikhailov in strict isolation (except for one curious incident, which we shall discuss towards the end of the present chapter).

However, the student affair was another matter entirely. In 1861, the Peter and Paul Fortress was simply structurally unprepared to deal with mass imprisonment on this scale. Up to this point in time, the Fortress had functioned as something of a ‘boutique’ prison, handling at most a few dozen prisoners at once.<sup>265</sup> The waves of student arrests that shook the capital that autumn were completely beyond the bounds of this prison’s normal operations.

The archival record of these months reflects a rising panic on the part of Sorokin and other prison authorities. As early as September 26 (that is, the day immediately after the student march down Nevskii Prospect), we find the administration scrambling to handle thirty-three newly-arrested students. Letters were quickly dispatched to both a team of St. Petersburg city engineers, asking them to perform maintenance on the cells in the Nikol’skii and Nevskii curtain walls. An appeal was also sent to the local military hospital requesting that they send over “another fifteen beds with all of their accessories, that is: tables, stools, tableware, and linens (both to be worn and for bedding).”<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 238, ll. 1-1ob, 2.

<sup>265</sup> The exception to this is, of course, the Decembrist Revolt of 1825.

<sup>266</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 237, ll. 16; 28-28ob. The hospital in question is the Second St. Petersburg Infantry Hospital, which had a long-standing agreement with the Peter and Paul Fortress in the nineteenth century, treating those fortress prisoners who fell ill as well as supplying additional cell furnishings when necessary. These hospital items requested in 1861 – swollen to a much larger number (70 beds, 140 mattresses, etc.) following further appeals from Sorokin in the coming days – would finally be delivered on October 4. See *ibid.*, ll. 122; 123-124. However, this would still not be enough – in a letter to the General-Governor of St. Petersburg on October 15, Sorokin complained that “due to the large number of arrestees, the

The fortress administration was also unsure about the basic regulations regarding this influx – what sort of provisions should they receive daily, and would they be allowed to write letters or receive visitors? We see this confusion in a flustered report sent by Sorokin to the General-Governor of St. Petersburg on September 28, asking: “regarding the arrested students and others imprisoned within the casemates of the fortress: under what regime are they to be kept, that is, are they secret prisoners or not?”<sup>267</sup> However, even when the General-Governor responded that same day to inform the commandant that these were indeed secret prisoners – to be forbidden packages and visitations for the time being, and to be strictly kept in separate cells – the fortress lacked the proper accommodations to do so. Already as early as late-September we find, against regulations, two or even four students placed together in single casemates in the Nikol’skii Curtain.<sup>268</sup>

And this confusion was the product of only the first trickle of arrests. Sorokin and the prison administration muddled through the next two weeks, placing incoming students in whatever open casemates they could find. Then, on October 12 – the day of the mass arrests – everything fell into chaos. The influx of over two hundred more students saw the prison regime collapse entirely, with the guards unable to even properly count or register all the arrestees, let alone sequester them in the individual cells demanded by their status as secret state prisoners.<sup>269</sup> With now over three

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Hospital is unable to deliver enough clean changing linen, and thus it has been necessary for prisoners to stay in one pair for up to a week or more...” Ibid., ll. 162-162ob.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., ll. 29-30.

<sup>268</sup> For the response of the General-Governor, see *ibid.*, 40-40ob. For multiple prisoners being held in a single cell, see the list of imprisoned students found at *ibid.*, ll. 3-5.

<sup>269</sup> See, for example, the attempt at a registry of incoming prisoners from October 12, 1861 at *ibid.*, ll. 176-190 – what starts as an orderly list quickly collapses into a jumble of names and signatures.

hundred students crowded into the cells of the Nevskii, Nikol'skii, and Kronverkskii curtain walls, the state quickly realized that they had imprisoned far more than could be realistically housed, and on the seventeenth of October, 240 of these students were transported to confinement on the island of Kronstadt.<sup>270</sup> However, this still left 87 prisoners in the fortress – much too many for the administration to handle. The prison authorities, unable to sequester them in individual rooms or keep the arrestees from communicating, were reduced to utter helplessness. The regime's attempt to defuse the St. Petersburg student disorders through mass imprisonment had only resulted in the 'disordering' of its central prison.

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In the chaos of these first weeks of imprisonment, the General-Governor of the city and the Fortress Commandant expressly forbid visitations, letters, or parcels.<sup>271</sup> Sympathetic members of educated society began to grow deeply concerned over their incarcerated friends and relatives; rumors began to circulate in the capital that students were being tortured, poisoned, and dying in droves in the citadel.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> For the location of these incoming prisoners within the Fortress, see GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, l. 332. Note that three of the students seen as most dangerous (Svirichevskii, Dannenberg, Lobanov) were actually imprisoned in the secret Alekseevskii Ravelin prison of the Peter and Paul Fortress prison at this time, and were thus kept apart from the ensuing chaos. This is described in RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 98, l. 144, 155. Information on the transportation of prisoners on October 17 to Kronstadt (via four steamboats) can be found in GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 277, ch. 1, l. 321; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 237, l. 170. For a graph showing the exact number of prisoners in the Peter and Paul Fortress on each day in October 1861, see *ibid.*, l. 338, 339.

<sup>271</sup> See the correspondence between Commandant Sorokin and the General-Governor of St. Petersburg on prison visitation rights in *ibid.*, 218-218ob, 228. Officially, it was deemed that relatives could visit imprisoned students twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

<sup>272</sup> For rumors regarding student deaths, see the "City Rumors" compiled by the secret police in October 1861, found at GARF f. 109, op. 3a, d. 3238 (see esp. ll. 27-28ob). For a more general discussion of this public concern, see Shtakenshneider, *Dnevnik i Zapiski*, 302-304.

When visitors were finally permitted in the citadel at the end of October, they were shocked at what they found. Passing through the Fortress gates, friends and relatives were faced not with the dread dungeon of Romanov absolutism – but rather a holiday scene, something halfway between a lecture hall and student lodgings.

The atmosphere is best described in the memoirs of a student visitor from this time:

In the dense tobacco smoke flashed the cheerful, excited faces of young men. The most lively discussions, the merry peals of ringing young laughter, jaunty student laughter – all this, as they say, was hanging in the air. Under the noise, beer and all sorts of food was widely divided amongst the students, and such did these students in their originality literally feast. There was also no lack of books, journals and newspapers.<sup>273</sup>

Imprisoned in mass in the autumn of 1861, the students had succeeded in completely taking over the Peter and Paul Fortress. The freedoms accorded these students are clearly seen in letters written to their comrades outside of the prison. We find requests to send them paper and pencil, specific books, chessboards, musical instruments, and, constantly, more tobacco.<sup>274</sup> One imprisoned student in a letter from November 14<sup>th</sup> tells a friend to stop by and visit with a bag of tobacco and rolling papers, assuring them that there is nothing to fear about the Fortress.<sup>275</sup> Another mid-November letter is worth citing in full, both for its extravagant requests and general air of youthful nonchalance:

Mikh. Ant.! Tell my cook that I've received the linens she sent; take from my place around three pounds of tobacco, 150 cigars, and also my pipe, cigarette case (as well as two boxes of matches and a candlestick), and linen; - also, buy three pounds of fresh cheese, a bit of fried gelatin, Italian bread; stop by

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<sup>273</sup> Sorokin, "Vospominaniia," 462.

<sup>274</sup> Indeed, the above list is taken from a single student: one "Vlad. Arnolad.[?]," in a message sent to a friend of his in the Izamilovskii guard regiment. "Please ask Nadia for her accordion" ends the letter, found in GARF f. 109, op. 36, d. 277, ch. 1, l. 338.

<sup>275</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 237, l. 289.

Alexandrov at the Univ. and ask him for the September journals, as well as *Sovremen. Let.* and newspapers from the past two weeks. Bring all of these things (as soon as you can) to the Comman. Pet. Paul. Fortress for him to give to me. We're both in good health.

*Iv. Okhanov.*<sup>276</sup>

Any disciplinary regime in the Peter and Paul Fortress had clearly dissolved. Thus, when we read Commandant notices from the same period informing his subordinates that “walks outside are not to be allowed for more than twenty prisoners at one time,” or that in the cells “games, singing and the like should not be allowed,” it is clear that these rules came less from a place of authority than one of desperation.<sup>277</sup> The university students had, essentially, occupied the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

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This state of affairs lasted a little more than two months. Perhaps due to this prison subversion, or the presence of wide public pressure, or the recognition that the authorities had responded to these non-violent student protestors a bit too harshly, the cases brought against these hundreds of youths were remarkably lenient. Almost all were released by the end of the year with little more than a slap on the wrist, besides a handful of ringleaders who were exiled from the capital.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., I. 275. There is an attached text in the Peter and Paul Fortress archives noting that this letter was never delivered – as the intended recipient, a certain Mikhail Ostrovskii, was himself imprisoned in Kronstadt at this time.

<sup>277</sup> These quotes come from a list of rules sent on December 1 to a new Platz-major of the Fortress. See *ibid.*, 294, 294ob, 295. For the commandant reprimanding his staff for their lax treatment of the student prisoners, see *ibid.*, Op. 2 (dopol'nitelnaia opis'), D. 60, ll. 64, 64ob, 83.

<sup>278</sup> Two non-students who were arrested in the disorders – Felister Orlov and Mikhail Pokrovskii – were exiled to Perm and Arkhangel'sk provinces, respectively. Five students found to have “deliberately intended to resist the orders of the state” – E. Mikhaelis, K. Zen, A. Gerike, A. Frenskel', and M. Novoselitskii – were expelled from the university and sent to “separate provincial cities of remote *gubernii*” under the aegis of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Chief Gendarme. Nine more were forbidden from continuing their studies. All

Thus stands the major contours of the ‘student disorders’ of 1861. Attempts to quarantine university disorders in the capital had only led to the disordering of the capital’s central political prison – transformed into a boisterous student residence.

This is, however, a fact not in itself possessing an explicit political content. If the affair ended here, it would stand as a curious yet essentially minor moment in our history of the Peter and Paul Fortress. It would remain, as one contemporary noted, a strange incident that “strongly electrified society, bringing them, in short, as much to indignation as to laughter – for really, this all took on the aspect of an operatic farce.”<sup>279</sup>

But let us pause here, on these words. This characterization as an ‘operatic farce’ is not accidental. In the disordered Fortress regime of 1861, the young prisoners not only walked freely amongst their cells, reading journals and discussing politics with their comrades. In one of the most peculiar events in the long history of Russian radicalism, in the autumn of 1861 a group of imprisoned students composed and performed an opera within the Peter and Paul Fortress.

The next section discusses this incredibly curious cultural production – an operatic glorification of the dissident students and their struggle against university administrators and tsarist state, produced within the very disciplinary heart of the Romanov autocracy. Through this strange text, the student prisoners in fact gave their period of incarceration an explicit political coding. Half university entertainment, half

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of the hundreds of others were permitted to return to the university – as long as they accepted the new regulations – after being given various warning and degrees of police surveillance. See a full description of the different punishments and categories of offenders in RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 237, ll. 303-306ob. The only worse fate was that of student N. Spasskii, who died of typhus in the military hospital at the end of November. See Sorokin’s letter to the emperor regarding this last occurrence, at *ibid.*, l. 299.

<sup>279</sup> Skabichevskii, *Literaturnye vospominaniia*, 149.

political manifesto: this performance gives us insight (through its content) into the rise of a popular discourse of heroic imprisonment in this period – and insight (through its form) into the early reimagining of the prison cell as a stage and classroom of radical self-narration. This opera libretto holds crystallized within itself the central issues at play during the unrest of 1861, and the opera genre-form plays a curious role in the development of heroic prisoner narratives within nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary political cultures.

## V. The Students' Prison Opera

The existence of a Peter and Paul Fortress prison opera is almost entirely absent from our histories – it has never before been discussed in English.

Several memoirs touch upon the story of this strange text from the autumn of 1861. Shelgunov briefly mentions that students had the freedom “to arrange various entertainments: literary evenings and even performances.”<sup>280</sup> Sorokin recalls that “the students spent the mornings in reading and various lessons, and after lunch organized vocal exercises, dramatic scenes, and even composed an entire opera.”<sup>281</sup>

Skabichevskii tells us that “the students even composed an opera from popular motifs taken from Italian operas, and performed it in costumes made of cigarette paper”.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Shelgunov, “Iz proshlego i nastoiashchego,” in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova, and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 1:153-154.

<sup>281</sup> Sorokin, “Vospominaniia,” 462-63.

<sup>282</sup> Skabichevskii, *Literaturnye vospominaniia*, 149. While the construction of costumes out of cigarette paper is rather unbelievable (although, according to memoirs and letters, the students were perhaps consuming enough tobacco to make this feasible), the practice of writing on cigarette paper *would* have an afterlife in the history of Russian political imprisonment – something that we shall see as the present dissertation continues.

Besides these brief allusions, our best source on the writing and performance of a Peter and Paul Fortress prison opera comes from former student L.F. Pantelev. Unlike those individuals cited above, Pantelev spent several months in the Peter and Paul Fortress after being arrested on October 2, and experienced the disordered citadel conditions first-hand.<sup>283</sup> In his papers, preserved in the Manuscript Division of the Institute of Russian Literature (*Pushkinskii dom*) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, we find a set of small, handwritten notes discussing the opera.<sup>284</sup> In this text, Pantelev describes how the first forty or so students imprisoned in the student demonstrations formed a small circle in their cells in the Ekaterininskaia Curtain. “Somehow – he writes – they succeeded in getting from the city not only suitable costumes, but even a piano.”<sup>285</sup> In what we can estimate as late October or early November, 1861, after weeks of secretive labor, their work was finished:

And thus one beautiful day the largest room [in the Ekaterininskaia Curtain] was cleaned, and that evening all were called together for a performance... The opera was an extraordinary success and was given several times in the Ekaterininskaia Curtain, and afterwards in those casemates looking out on the Neva in which by November they had gathered up all of the remaining students, about ninety in total.<sup>286</sup>

Pantelev goes on to mention the production’s main scenarists and actors, as well as assert that they would later stage the opera several times in St. Petersburg’s literary salons after regaining their freedom.<sup>287</sup> This movement of the prison opera outside of

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<sup>283</sup> Pantelev is also mentioned briefly in “Studentskoe delo,” *Kolokol*, Nov. 15, 1861 (112).

<sup>284</sup> IRLI RAN OR f. 224, no. 590. This well-composed description of the student opera was included in the footnotes for the 1958 publication of Pantelev’s memoirs: L.F. Pantelev, *Vospominaniia*, ed. M. Blinchevskaia (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1958), 761-62.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 761.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> Pantelev specifically mentions a successful performance in the household of E.A. Shtakenshneider, who held an influential literary salon in her family apartments on Millionnaia ulitsa. The Shtakenshneiders possessed fairly progressive views and the published

the Peter and Paul Fortress and into the drawing rooms of the capital is corroborated elsewhere – Sorokin recalls how “numerous copies of this opera circulated around the city” – and explains its appearance in the memoirs of many non-imprisoned contemporaries.

Pantelev’s notes give us a more concrete understanding of the opera – its invention and the nature of its performances. More spectacularly, however, is that in his archives survives a copy of the opera libretto itself, with notes indicating the musical accompaniment.<sup>288</sup> This crucial document allows us to now turn to the contents of this opera.

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First, a brief description. The opera – in three acts and five scenes – is titled *From Student Life (Iz zhizni studentov)*. With parts for various villainous tsarist officials, blundering university administrators, and heroic students, it is essentially a dramatization of the events of the past months in St. Petersburg – a re-telling of the

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diaries of Elena Andreevna – which we have quoted several times this chapter – are an excellent source for the general mood of the capital and public perceptions towards the student unrest during the autumn of 1861.

<sup>288</sup> To be more precise, it appears that at least four copies of the libretto have survived: two in the Pantelev collections in the manuscript division at Pushkin House (IRLI RAN OR f. 224 no. 590, 592), a drastically abbreviated version held in the general Pushkin House collections, and two copies preserved in the Senate archives at GARF. All of these vary, sometimes widely. I had the opportunity to examine those manuscripts held at IRLI RAN, the first of which Soviet textologist S.A. Reiser believed to be the ur-text (indeed, that it is entirely possible that “this exemplar was in the hands of the ‘Fortress opera’ performers”). It is this version that I consulted when writing the present chapter. The only scholarly work that discusses this student opera in any detail is S.A. Reiser, “Studencheskaia opera ‘Iz zhizni studentov’,” in *Osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie v Rossii: Mezhvuzovskii nauchnyi sbornik*, vol. 7 (Saratov: Izdatel’stvo Saratovskogo Universiteta, 1979), 125-46. Although I am indebted to Reiser for his meticulous textual work and publication of the libretto (which I quote from below), he is far more concerned with questions of attribution and textual variation than he is with this piece’s wider culturo-political significance.

student protests in opera form by its participants.<sup>289</sup> The creators here did not undertake any real musical composition of their own – the rhymed verses of their libretto were put to popular motifs cut and pasted from fashionable Italian operas and other well-known songs.

The curtain first rises on a council of tsarist officials and university administrators. To the solemn tones of liturgical music, the uniformed Minister of Education chants:

Come, brothers,  
And advise me,  
How to extinguish enlightenment,  
And murder science! (1-4)

Shifting suddenly to the energetic rhythms of Verdi's *La traviata*, the university trustee presents the plan to close student assemblies and force them to carry registry books – a motion which rouses a grave 'Amen' from the assembled officials. Their council is then suddenly interrupted by news that the students are rejecting these regulations – to the Orthodox notes of "Kol' Slaven," the officials agree that the university must be closed and the students arrested. This first scene then ends, to a melody from *Guillaume Tell*, with the officials dashing off to gather the necessary soldiers.

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<sup>289</sup> One of the only major differences between this student opera and those that its participants would have been familiar with from the St. Petersburg stage was the lack of its leading player – the soprano. This is in many ways a reflection of the gender composition of St. Petersburg's student youth as well as its dissident actors. Women students had only just begun to be allowed to audit university classes in the capital the year previous. And while we can see the events of this autumn as foundational for the development of a prison myth in Russian political cultures (a prison myth that would soon be utilized and reproduced by both men and women), in 1861 this was still very much a masculine enterprise, both in terms of myth-making and actual imprisonment. The first woman radical to be held in the Peter and Paul Fortress would only be imprisoned at the end of the 1860s, as discussed in Chapter Six.

Already here we can see some of the comedic strategies of *From Student Life*. The self-satisfied tsarist officials and university administrators – represented musically by pious orthodox songs – are revealed in all their pompousness and venality by the mocking juxtaposition of popular tunes from the Italian opera. As Julie Buckler notes in her monograph on nineteenth-century Russian opera, the great genre divide amongst St. Petersburg theatre-goers in the second half of the nineteenth century was between Italian and Russian opera. The Italian style (whose base in the capital was the St. Petersburg Bolshoi theatre) was far more popular in the 1860s. However, these foreign productions were critiqued as too light-hearted – ‘mere entertainment’ – by the patrons of the rising Russian opera scene, which had just received a permanent home in the Mariinsky theatre.<sup>290</sup>

The first half of our prison opera is clearly in the style of these Italian works. Not only are the majority of motifs taken from the works of Bellini, Rossini, and Verdi, but the mocking depiction of bumbling authority figures clearly belongs to the Italian tradition of *opera buffa*. Placed alongside popular Romantic arias, the solemn Russian Orthodox songs of reactionary officialdom appear simply ridiculous – a satirical effect rooted in what we could call the student opera’s “Italianization” of current events.

However, as the opera moves on to its second and third acts, this ironic distancing gradually dissolves. When student first appear on stage, it is in a moment of carefree merriment, singing “our passion is for wine and song.” However, on hearing of the first wave of arrests from their peers, these revelers unanimously decide to burn

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<sup>290</sup> Julie A. Buckler, *The Literary Lorgnette: Attending Opera in Imperial Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 36-56.

their registry books together as they acclaim the victory of science over ignorance,  
swearing

Let persecution from the authorities  
Fall upon us,  
Even imprisonment  
Cannot frighten us. (229-233)

The mood has changed: the previous elements of satire gradually drop away as the students are shown heroically facing arrest.

The final scene takes place within the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress. The curtain rises on a single student singing of loneliness and isolation to a melody from Verdi's *Rigoletto*. However, he is quickly reunited in his cell with several university comrades. Each pledge their solidarity to the cause: they still support the protests, and none have given in under police questioning. The finale sees them joyously join together in a large choir to sing:

Honor and glory to all students,  
Who refused the registry,  
Who fear not the prison  
And have not yet lost heart.  
...  
We will fearlessly bring  
The word of truth to the people  
And die, if necessary,  
For their freedom. (466-469; 474-477)

In an extraordinary move, these penultimate lines were sung to the tune of “Poland has not Yet Died,” at that time the unofficial hymn of Polish Romantic Nationalism.<sup>291</sup>

This then shifts directly into a melody of Russian nationalism – the final chorus of Glinka's 1836 opera *A Life for the Tsar* – as the students end with:

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<sup>291</sup> Technically titled “Dobrowski's Mazurka [*Mazurek Dąbrowskiego*],” this 1797 patriotic verse set to a folk tune was often known by its incipit “Poland has not yet died.”

Glory to you, native Rus'  
But fear neither tsar nor whip.  
No, to arms, my home, to war!  
Arise quickly, homeland, arise!  
...  
How could we not seek to take part  
In the great fate of self-rule!  
Freedom! Freedom! (478-481, 484-486)

The tune of “Poland Has Not Yet Died” is especially provocative here, considering the growing unrest in the Kingdom of Poland in this period. Indeed, as we have seen throughout this chapter, ties between St. Petersburg studentdom and Polish dissidence – real or imagined – played a large role in the political imagination of 1861.

Significant also is the choice of the final chorus from Glinka’s *A Life for the Tsar*.<sup>292</sup>

This tale of a crafty Russian peasant heroically sacrificing himself to thwart a Polish invasion during the seventeenth-century Time of Troubles is known as the first ‘Russian’ opera. The piece as a whole – and the ‘Slav’sia chorus’ in particular – had by this period become indelibly associated with Nicholas I’s national conservatism and the absolutist state: a staple at court celebrations and St. Petersburg opera houses alike.<sup>293</sup> *From Student Life* reappropriates this opera’s final chorus and combines it

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<sup>292</sup> In Glinka’s original, the accompanying text is:

Glory, Glory to our Russian Tsar!  
Our God-given Tsar-lord!  
Let your Royal line be eternal,  
By them prosper the Russian people.

<sup>293</sup> Indeed, when St. Petersburg’s Mariinskii Theatre had opened just eleven months prior in October 1860 – an event which many of our students undoubtedly attended – Glinka’s *Life* was the inaugural performance. Perhaps no other piece of music was made to more prominently represent the Romanov autocracy in this period. For an analysis of its role in the ritual life of the Romanov court – a centrality that makes its critical appropriation in the Peter and Paul Fortress so fascinating – see Wortman, *Scenarios of Power* 1:388-95; and Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 25-47. It was not only the subject-matter of *Life* that made it so beloved by slavophiles and the autocracy, nor solely the fact that the libretto was entirely in Russian. Perhaps most discussed of all was the orchestration. As Marina Frolova-Walker

with the melody of Polish dissidence not to partake in the rites of official nationalism. Rather, this creative re-coding works to both claim solidarity with the rising radical energies in Poland and envision an ethical-national community both prior and opposed to tsarist political authority.

Thus Russian and Polish melodies return at the very end – not to be satirized by Italian motifs, but rather to add immense political gravity to the performance. If the beginning of the opera saw the ‘Italianization’ of Russian social reality, then the finale sees the ‘Russification’ of the opera form, with the Romantic tragedy or comedic denouement of Italian dramas replaced with a sudden shift to a grander political and social stage.<sup>294</sup> By the time the opera ends, contrast is no longer used for humor, but rather for gravity – not for inciting laughter, but for inciting one to action.

Thus arose a prison-opera in the autumn of 1861 – the Peter and Paul Fortress proved a strange opera house, located between the genre poles of Milan and St. Petersburg and along the acoustic borderlands of the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Poland. As we can see in the brief summary above, the content of this work is remarkably radical for its time. Not only do the students take a progressive stance on

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analyzes, Glinka was the first court composer to “deliberately and painstakingly [attempt] to create a Russian national music.” However, in doing so, Glinka utilized a style of ‘Russianness’ already produced by the popular music of the early-nineteenth-century for foreign and elite consumption. This push for national ‘authenticity’ had its roots in Western markets and Western concepts. Thus, we can think of this tonal shift away from the West and return to an ‘authentic national culture’ along the lines of Andrew Sartori’s “culture concept” – that is, here we see the appropriation of a Western European conceptual model precisely in order to articulate an ‘indigenous’ cultural, political, and epistemological space from which to critique Western European modernity. Indeed, Sartori himself notes the similarities between Bengali culturalism and nineteenth-century Russian Slavophile thought. See Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 76-91; and Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 43-44.

<sup>294</sup> In this way, the denouement is strikingly reminiscent of *A Life for the Tsar*’s conclusion – where the particularities of the plot likewise dissolve upwards into a larger political synthesis. The major difference, of course, is the content of this motion.

questions of empire, contrasting (as we have seen) autocratic doctrines of conservative nationalism with the radically democratic energies of romantic nationhood in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>295</sup> Furthermore, *From Student Life* consistently directs itself to the people (*narod*) as both repositories of a national spirit and bearers of a latent political energy – as both sites and fulcrums for radical change. In this way, the opera should be seen as an early cultural artifact of Russian populism. Indeed, many of the participants in the seemingly-localized student protests of this autumn – as well as performers in the opera itself, such as Panteleev and E.I. Utin – would go on to take part in the later populist circles of the 1860s, including the first iteration of *Land and Freedom* that would form just the following year.<sup>296</sup> This populism was felt not only in the Fortress. Writing from London, N. Ogarev’s retrospective on the events of this autumn – “They are Closing the Universities!” – uses the student unrest to call for a political pedagogy that could spill out of the urban classroom and into the towns and villages of the empire.<sup>297</sup>

Finally, in terms of content, the appearance of the romantic prisoner as a protagonist – not in a historical novel, but in a work depicting contemporary Russia –

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<sup>295</sup> We should quickly note, however, that the appearance of nationalism in this opera is not unambiguously positive. Specifically, in the first act of the opera the head of the Third Section is approached by a student informer (named *Student Shpion*). While the appearance of a student spy is accurate for the time (as even a quick perusal of the Third Section archives clearly shows), the opera unfortunately calls for a ‘Jewish motif’ to play upon this informer’s entrance, and his lines are spoken in a Ukrainian accent (74-75). Even as the unrest of 1861 is used by *From Student Life* to stage a rapprochement between Polish and Russian dissidence, there are still ethnic groups clearly excluded from this union of national spirits, and the nineteenth-century European romantic nationalist imagination as a whole. In other words, we are reminded that anti-semitism in this period was part of the cultural paraphernalia of not only *official* nationalisms.

<sup>296</sup> See the discussion of this leap from Fortress imprisonment to radical circles in Panteleev, *Iz vospominanii proshlogo*, 288-310: “Reaction, especially arrests... not only didn’t scare us, but actually drove us forward [in our political activities].”

<sup>297</sup> N. Ogarev, “Universitety zakryvaiut!” *Kolokol*, Jan. 15, 1861 (119/120).

possessed an innovative political energy. Significantly, the finale of the opera casts the prison cell not as a space of narrative despair, but the highest stage upon which the St. Petersburg University students attain political consciousness. *From Student Life* thus goes far beyond satire – indeed, in it we can see early evidence of imprisonment itself as a politicizing and radicalizing force, a social and narrative mechanism that would continue to have a large effect on Russian revolutionary political cultures in the coming decades, especially in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

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Thus, the prison opera *From Student Life* is clearly rather radical in content. However, there still remains a question of form. How are we to think about the genre of opera in a revolutionary, carceral context – and why would these students choose to self-narrate their experience of political imprisonment through this medium? Is there something significant here, or is this piece revolutionary *despite* its form – with opera simply a curious vessel, uneasily filled with its political substance?

Today there is a general notion that opera is an essentially conservative aesthetic form. The roots of this tacit belief are clear – opera in the twenty-first century is hardly a space of innovation, resembling more a museum piece than a living artform. Through history, the labor and capital intensive opera genre has most often been sponsored by the state (and has thus favored conservative themes). Finally, adding to this persistent coloring are the European composers from the second half of the nineteenth century who viewed opera as a worthy site for forging together textual and musical elements into reactionary visions of the national spirit – a path notoriously developed in Wagner, but also present to a greater or lesser degree in the work of

Glinka and the composers of the ‘Mighty Handful’ in Russia.<sup>298</sup>

However, each of these points should not distract us from the historical experience of opera in mid-nineteenth-century Russia. Despite the conservative valence it may possess today, this was an artform that did possess a degree of emancipatory potential at that time.

First of all, while seeped in Romantic genre conventions, mid-century Italian operas were known for tackling political themes – Rossini’s *William Tell* and Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, both appropriated in *From Student Life*, possessed a certain level of social critique and were only barely tolerated by imperial Russian censors.<sup>299</sup>

Second, opera houses in 1861 provided educated youths with a stimulating space of sociability in a urban environments otherwise lacking in public forums. While the lasting image of imperial Russian opera is certainly contained in aristocratic scenes from such works as *Anna Karenina*, these were spaces defined by a diverse social geography. Even as members of the gentry traded charged looks and gestures in their box seats, students finding themselves in the upper rafters of St. Petersburg’s Bolshoi Theater in the 1850s and 60s – the highest seats for the lowest class, in the reversed

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<sup>298</sup> See Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*; and Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*.

<sup>299</sup> This reception history of Italian opera in Russia is briefly discussed in Reiser, “Studencheskaia opera,” 144. In this discussion of the genre’s political valence, we can look beyond Russia as well – in Italy, opera was associated with both the radical and liberal nationalisms of the *Risorgimento*. See Carlotta Sorba, *Il Melodramma della Nazione. Politica e sentimenti nell’età del Risorgimento* (Rome: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 2015); and Axel Körner, “Opera and nation in nineteenth-century Italy: conceptual and methodological approaches,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17 (2012): 393-99.

social topology of the opera house – used this space to rowdily discuss the political questions of the day.<sup>300</sup>

Finally, we see in *From Student Life* that opera could provide students with a potent genre for radical self-narration – and *this* is what is so historically fascinating about the current chapter’s prison work. The opera here gives us a stylized vision of the student rebel. This is not a hero who reconciles themselves with the conventions and expectations of the social – or tragically collapses under their weight – as audiences would expect from the romantic protagonists of official opera. Rather, in *From Student Life*, the injustices of the present propel our dissident youths ever forward, ending with grand new political horizons.<sup>301</sup>

The opera form allows the students to physically embody the movement from collective, to individual, to collective. In this voyage, students begin as an undifferentiated, immediate mass: content with wine and song. They are then disoriented and atomized by tsarist oppression: arrested and confined in separate cells, hopelessly individuated. However, when the prison regime falls apart the students are joined together once more: again in a collective, but this time one of conscious participants bound together by political commitment into a new ethical community. The entire text possesses a powerful ascending motion. This is a tale of crossed thresholds, of ascent to political consciousness and maturity. With St. Petersburg

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<sup>300</sup> See remarks on this in Julie A. Buckler, *The Literary Lorgnette: Attending Opera in Imperial Russia*, 8.

<sup>301</sup> It appears that the only precedent for a prison opera in the European canon is Beethoven’s *Fidelio*. This work envisions the political prison as a site of personal struggle, sacrifice, and triumph. However, as has been argued, this is not the staging of an actual narrative of politico-historical development, but rather an operatic allegory for the republican virtues of the French revolution in the abstract. That is, it adheres far more to the political aesthetics of the Enlightenment than to those of the age of the novel. See John Bokina, “Opera and Republican Virtue: Beethoven’s ‘Fidelio,’” *International Political Science Review* 12 (1991): 101-16.

University closed, the Peter and Paul Fortress (in life as in art) became a space for the student youth of the capital to stage their dialectical progression. *From Student Life* should be seen, in fact, as an opera tinged with the logic of the *Bildungsroman*.

A decade previously, M.A. Bakunin had first demonstrated the power of the ‘self-narrative of development’ to make the experience of imprisonment politically legible. By 1861, the epistemological terrain and personal-political logic of the *Bildungsroman* had diffused throughout educated Russian society, and now appeared in the Peter and Paul Fortress in the strange garb of an opera.

However – how strange was this genre, truly? Quite often are the two great aesthetic innovations of nineteenth-century Europe – the novel and the opera – taken by contemporaries as diametrically opposed: print vs. performance, private vs. public, ‘realist’ vs. ‘romantic.’<sup>302</sup> However, our Peter and Paul Fortress text seems to evidence a greater affinity than this easy binary allows. *From Student Life* circulated just as much in libretto form throughout the capital as it did in its few performances. It was experienced in the semi-public, semi-private spaces of the prison and the literary salon (not to mention that the experience of radical politics transmitted in its form and content were predicated upon a sublation of private and public life within a great unity of political activism). Finally, in the mid-nineteenth century dialectic of text and context which shaped these young Russians’ genres of personal-political self-

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<sup>302</sup> See the description (and critique) of this rather persistent binary in Herbert Lindenberger, “Opera and the Novel: Antithetical or Complementary?,” in *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 62-83. For an excellent introduction to debates over the nature of opera in the aesthetic treatises of this period – especially within German Idealist thought – also see his *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 107-33.

narration, the lines between romanticism and realism were constantly being drawn and redrawn, bleeding into one another in art as in life.<sup>303</sup>

Even if opera was the nineteenth century's social genre of the phantasmagoria, these fantasies did not necessarily stand opposed to a more 'realist' novelistic tradition – nor were they necessarily the fantasies of the ruling class.<sup>304</sup> Far from being opposed, we have seen how the opera in fact charts the same journey of personal and world-historical development through which the radical Russian intelligentsia, by way of the *Bildungsroman* form, was just learning to narrate their own rise to revolutionary subjecthood and political commitment. As its own take on the left-Hegelian novel of development, our prison opera in fact shares a strange logic with the prison memoir as first inaugurated by Bakunin in his Alekseevskii Ravelin cell.

Thus, the opera *From Student Life* shares with the nascent social novel of the 1860s not only its forms of narration, but also a greater metaphysical yearning towards personal and world-historical freedom. Adorno recognized as much in a brief comment on these genre's secret affinity:

[The] interlocking of myth and enlightenment defines the bourgeois essence of opera: namely, the interlocking of imprisonment in a blind and unselfconscious system and the idea of freedom, which arises in its midst. Opera's metaphysics is not to be simply separated from this sociality. Metaphysics is absolutely not a realm of invariance which one could grasp by looking out through the barred windows of the historical; it is the glimmer – albeit a powerless glimmer – of light which falls into the prison itself...

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<sup>303</sup> This is convincingly argued in Irina Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

<sup>304</sup> That the opera functioned phantasmagorically in the nineteenth-century – that is, that it tended towards a 're-enchantment of the world,' for good or ill – is an argument made by both Theodor Adorno, and, more recently, Mladen Dolar. See Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1981); and Mladen Dolar, "If Music be the Food of Love," in Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1-102.

In the nineteenth century, the bourgeois yearning for freedom had successfully escaped to the representative spectacle of opera, just as it had escaped to the great novel, whose complexion opera so frequently recalls...<sup>305</sup>

Thus did the opera form possess the potential to narrate the experience of political imprisonment as an experience of hope and solidarity in the year 1861. In this strange piece, we can see how cultures of political dissent were first learning how to seek the “glimmer” of the universal-metaphysical goal of human freedom even within the suffering spaces of the profane.

*From Student Life* would remain the only operatic text written – let alone performed – within the Peter and Paul Fortress. However, we can now see that this was not because the form was some sort of structural dead-end. The fact that the prison opera did not become a persistent genre of the Russian revolutionary tradition is certainly due far more to the material difficulties – the investment of time, people, and capital – that such works entail (especially as compared to the solitary, resource-light practice of penning a memoir). Thus, I argue that the irruption of the opera in the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress is not just a peripheral curiosity in our history of revolutionary Russian carceral cultures. Rather, it presages the wider entrance of a political logic into this citadel that had first appeared a decade previously with M.A. Bakunin.

In his *In Russian and French Prisons*, Kropotkin remarks that the Peter and Paul Fortress “obtained the nickname of ‘St. Petersburg Imperial University’” during

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<sup>305</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Bourgeois Opera,” in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 34, 36. Contrast this with Adorno’s critique of Wagner, whom he thrusts down as a false prophet of immanence – “in Wagner, for the first time, the bourgeois imagination disavows the impulse toward escape and resigns itself to a situation in which he himself conceived as worthy of death.”

these events.<sup>306</sup> We can now see that this title possesses two valences. Not only should it be taken as a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the vast amount of students housed in the citadel walls. It also speaks to the political pedagogy that continued here after the closure of the capital's university. In *From Student Life*, we see one of the first instances of an imperial political prison being used as a site for the production and circulation of a new template of the committed revolutionary subject.

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A template, yes – but not quite a model. For this opera was only one of the first steps in the development of political-prisoner martyrologies in imperial Russia. And while *From Student Life* is extremely significant for constructing a politico-aesthetic framework through which to celebrate the struggles of a heroic prisoner, this narrative did not track with the concrete experiences of the students themselves.

These young offenders were treated rather leniently by the state – they succeeded in ‘disordering’ the Peter and Paul Fortress prison regime, and most were released by the end of 1861 with little to no punishment. These students formulated a script for overcoming prison suffering, but experienced very little suffering of their own. They found solidarity in the cell in a climactic self-sacrificial pledge, but underwent no true sacrifice. For these students, the events of 1861 provided a hagiographical model – but one that lacked saints.

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This vacuum in their template was swiftly filled by the events of 1861 – not by the students themselves, but by the poet M.I. Mikhailov. As the St. Petersburg University

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<sup>306</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 87-88.

youths prepared their social opera a few hundred yards away, a series of different texts would begin to coalesce around Mikhailov. Imprisoned simultaneously in the same citadel, he would be given the mantle of revolutionary Russia's first living prison martyr.

## **VI. The Poet's Prison Verse**

When we last left Mikhailov, it was mid-September, 1861 – less than two weeks before the closing of St. Petersburg University. To the general outrage of the capital's literary world, he had been suddenly detained by the tsarist secret police under suspicion of spreading anti-tsarist political pamphlets. Despite the bold petition submitted on his behalf, his whereabouts remained unknown and no aid was forthcoming. As the month wore on, Mikhailov began to fade in public perception, especially in the face of the student disturbances that were beginning to frighten the authorities and electrify society. This is not to say that the literary world felt any less concern – simply that there was little they could do, limited as they were to rumors and gestures.<sup>307</sup>

We now know that Mikhailov was being held, from mid-October onward, in the Nevskaiia Curtain of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Despite being in the midst of student upheaval, the Fortress authorities succeeded in keeping Mikhailov in isolation,

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<sup>307</sup> After the failure of the initial petition, it looks like there were several other attempts to raise support for Mikhailov. Besides the second petition headed by P. Lavrov mentioned in a previous footnote, we find the following curious incident in the archives: a Third Section agent, spying at the funeral of poet Dobroliubov on November 20, 1861, reports to his superiors that the editor of *Russkoe slovo* Blagosvetlov appeared to have been passing around a subscription to benefit Mikhailov. I have been unable to find any other word on this matter. See GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 274, ll. 117b, 117b ob, 117v [note these documents' unorthodox notation].

living only on scraps and whispers. We know that during his initial transfer by carriage to the Peter and Paul Fortress he heard some word of the student unrest.<sup>308</sup>

We also know that towards the end of November, a sympathetic guard informed him of the death of his close friend, N.A. Dobroliubov. However, as a whole, Mikhailov was isolated from the St. Petersburg literary world he considered his own.

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And so he would have remained – if not for the mass student arrests and subsequent ‘disordering’ of the Peter and Paul Fortress prison regime.

It appears that while Mikhailov’s isolation was maintained during this period, the free-ranging students very quickly learned that the popular poet was being held in a nearby cell. One of the students – the sources disagree on their exact identity<sup>309</sup> – wrote a short poem to their fellow prisoner and succeeded in having it delivered to him by a sympathetic guard. Remarkably, the touched Mikhailov was able to produce and pass along a short, parallel poem in response.<sup>310</sup> Even more astonishingly, both of

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<sup>308</sup> Mikhailov, “Zapiski,” in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 2:306-7.

<sup>309</sup> The exact attribution is contested between imprisoned students I.A. Rozhdestvenskii and N.I. Utin. See Mikhailov, “Zapiski,” 2:559-60; and Panteleev, *Vospominaniia*, 179, 313.

<sup>310</sup> Let me quickly note that this is not the sole poem Mikhailov wrote while imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress. After hearing the news of his friend N.A. Dobroliubov’s death, he was able to jot down his reaction in verse: “In Memory of Dobroliubov [*Pamiati Dobroliubova*].” This text was eventually smuggled out of the prison, traveling around the capital and published later in *Kolokol*. The poem’s tone is incredibly bleak, beginning with a note of futility in the face of death – but ending with the corpse of Dobroliubov urging his living friends to continue their political struggle out of love for him. One of the first, if not the original copy of this poem can be found preserved in IRLI RAN OR f. 457, no. 8, ll. 1-8. Unlike all printed copies of this poem that I have seen, this handwritten verse in tiny letters on thin cigarette paper is prefaced by an epigraph by the German poet Chamisso, and contains as well a quick note that it appears he penned in the Fortress: “These verses involuntarily formed in my head on the evening of the funeral of poor Vova, and I wrote them down to respond to our general grief from my private cell. Send these verses to friends of the deceased. Don’t look here for aesthetic beauty, as he was not one to search for such, but surely they will find

these poems were smuggled out of the Fortress and quickly spread around St. Petersburg that December.<sup>311</sup> This poetic dialogue between confined student youth and dissident poet became perhaps the major pivot in the further revolutionary investiture of Mikhailov – assuming trans-national aspects, inspiring the spread of further poems and lithographs, and cementing the autumn of 1861 as the beginning of a new tradition of prison martyrdom in revolutionary Russian political cultures.

To support this argument, let us first look at these poems themselves. The initial dialogue within the prison already held raw elements of hagiography – saintly reverence, resigned suffering, and brooding eschatology.

The student address to Mikhailov is generally called “To the Prisoner [*Uzniku*].” This short poem is composed of five verses of four lines each, in an alternative rhyme sequence.<sup>312</sup> The first three verses, especially, are worth quoting in full:

From the walls of our prison, from the walls of captivity,  
We send you our brotherly greetings.  
Let these ease the weight of this evil hour,  
For you, our native poet!

The cursed yoke of autocracy  
Keeps us from giving you our embrace,  
And from repaying you, our teacher,

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here feelings akin to their own. Poor, poor Vov; I can see his dear face with tears on his cheeks. Yes, it is bitter to die in years like these.”

<sup>311</sup> The exact pathway of these poems – the means in which they were passed between the students and Mikhailov within the Peter and Paul Fortress, and then sent out to the wider St. Petersburg public – cannot be known for sure. However, it seems most likely that this circulation was achieved with the help of one (or more) sympathetic Fortress guards. This was the suspicion of the tsarist Third Section, which discovered a copy of Mikhailov’s poem by late December and immediately began to inquire into the reliability of the citadel wardens. See GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 274, ll. 131-131ob; 132-133ob; as well as OR RNB f. 727, ed. khr. no. 22, ll. 1-1ob.

<sup>312</sup> ABAB CDCD EFEF etc. – Please forgive my poor translations, which do not preserve this structure.

With our love and sympathy.

But the day is coming, when in freedom,  
We will tell everyone about you,  
We will tell the Russian folk [*narod*]  
How you suffered for its sake.

...<sup>313</sup>

This is a crucial document for understanding the early years of revolutionary Russian carceral cultures. Mikhailov the individual has already begun to transform, in these stanzas themselves, into Mikhailov the martyr, Mikhailov whose life becomes a pedagogical example through which the Russian people will be raised to consciousness. Like the opera *From Student Life*, here we see the prison cell imagined as both a site for forging bonds of personal and political solidarity, as well as an observation point for gesturing towards a Russian future beyond autocracy.

Mikhailov's verses in response accomplish similar political ends. He replies to the students in the exact same poetic structure, with a short personal note attached at the end. A very early copy of this – perhaps the original – can be found in the Manuscript Division of the Institute of Russian Literature (*Pushkinskii dom*) of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This tiny, five inch by eight inch piece of paper – folded over and over again until it was one twenty-fourth the size, approximately as large as a pencil eraser – could have been easily hidden and passed along in the Peter and Paul Fortress during these chaotic days. This untitled poem (sometimes called “The Reply [*Otvet*]”, among other names<sup>314</sup>) is noteworthy not only for its lyricism – it

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<sup>313</sup> Reprinted in Mikhailov, “Zapiski,” 2:440-41.

<sup>314</sup> Interestingly enough, the Third Section documents refer to it as “Farewell to the Young Generation” – a name that stresses the affinity between Mikhailov's political pamphlet and later prison poetry. See GARF, f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 274, ll. 131-131ob.

is also far less grandiose, and far more personal, than the political verse of the St. Petersburg students. We see these elements in a representative verse, as well as in the short appended note:

Firmly, warmly I would clasp  
All you, my brothers, in embrace  
And all of my hopes and oaths  
With you, my brothers, parcel out.

...

Thank you for the tears called forth from me by your brotherly greetings. I must bloodily tear away from my heart all that is dear to me in this bright life! God grant us better times – although, perhaps, I am not fated to return.<sup>315</sup>

Mikhailov's response to the St. Petersburg students is a far more emotive document than "To the Prisoner" – one would imagine that months of solitary confinement and the looming threat of further imprisonment and exile kept him from indulging in grand political visions. However, even as this deeply individual poem offers up a taste of Mikhailov's personal emotional life, in doing so it manages to stress the existence of lines of solidarity and seeds of political consciousness taking root even in the darkest spaces of tsarist oppression – radicalism expressed through shared sentiment.

And very quickly, these lines would stretch out from the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

## **VII. Traveling Hagiography**

This chapter began by exploring how the Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonments of 1861 – and their public reception – were conditioned by the particular paths that lead the students and the poet to citadel cells. Now, let us bookend this study with a parallel

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<sup>315</sup> IRLI RAN OR f. 547, no. 9, ll. 1-1ob.

discussion – the formal pathways and discursive forms through which a concept of M.I. Mikhailov’s prison martyrdom traveled *outward* from the Fortress.

The momentum for this movement was first provided by the exchange of verses detailed above. Although the exact dates of this lyrical conversation are unknown, it is thought that it occurred in either late November or early December, 1861. Even though the poet and the students would remain for quite some time in the Peter and Paul Fortress, their texts would quickly slip the bars of their cells.

Rapidly, by mid-December of that year, both poems had been smuggled out of the prison and were being circulated around St. Petersburg. These verses were read in literary salons, circulated in manuscripts, and copied between students.<sup>316</sup> Remarkably, in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art in Moscow, one can find the personal albums of writer A.N. Peshkova-Toliverova for the year 1862: and here, just before the details of her trip abroad to Germany that spring, a friend had hastily written out copies of Mikhailov’s requiem for Dobroliubov and his untitled reply to the students – a rare material record of how illicit texts such as these circulated in this period.<sup>317</sup>

We should note that this is just around the same time when salon performances of *From Student Life* were also taking place in the capital. Like this semi-public opera debut, the circulation of Mikhailov’s prison poems demonstrates a growing appetite for ways of envisioning if not directly political, than at least emotional solidarity with the plight of the politically imprisoned in tsarist Russia – as well as, indeed, demonstrating a growing power of narratives formed within the Peter and Paul

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<sup>316</sup> See Mikhailov, “Zapiski,” 2:566.

<sup>317</sup> RGALI f. 1674, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 1-4.

Fortress walls. As one student prisoner recalled while reflecting on the wider social solidarity of the time, “the famous verses of M.I. Mikhailov, addressed to us students from within the Fortress, not only expressed his personal feelings but also reflected the common mood.”<sup>318</sup> Sainly rhetoric began to accumulate around the figure of Mikhailov and his poems. Looking back on these heady months, Shelgunov averred:

Political martyrdom... formed the halo over Mikhailov’s head. Mikhailov... became a saint even for those who hadn’t read a single of his lines. But what lines! One could feel a political electricity in the air, everything was agitated, no one felt the ground beneath their feet, everyone felt the need for something, to get ready and go somewhere, to wait for something – that is, definitely not today, but tomorrow would appear an unknown messiah... And suddenly in the midst of this general agitation came this abrupt sacrifice, like a peal of thunder. Everyone felt in Mikhailov a piece of themselves, and his affair became a personal matter for us all.<sup>319</sup>

Mikhailov and the students were not simply state criminals– rather, there was a sense that their very suffering at the hands of the state consecrated them with an alternate form of authority – political, cultural, even spiritual.<sup>320</sup>

This, at least, is the point made in a third poem from this period: “To Mikhailov [*Mikhailovu*].” It appears that copies of the Peter and Paul Fortress poetic dialogue between Mikhailov and the students quickly traveled not just around Russia, but also to political émigré communities abroad. The January 15, 1862 issue of

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<sup>318</sup> Panteleev, *Vospominaniia*, 248.

<sup>319</sup> N.V. Shelgunov, “Pervonachal’nye nabroski,” in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 1:241.

<sup>320</sup> Of course, with figures as invested with revolutionary narrative weight as these, it can be too easy for the historian to take one’s subject matter too seriously – to be seduced by the solemn, brass tones constantly encountered in period sources and echoed in the secondary Soviet literature. We thus must not neglect to remark that as the image of Mikhailov spread through the student circles and salons of the capital, his image was taken up in ways that were not always politically rigorous. Apparently, at a costume party held in the capital a few days after Mikhailov’s sentencing, *two* separate individuals arrived dressed in the grey coat and hat of a state prisoner. See “Shelgunovy, Mikhailov i ikh vospominaniia,” in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 1:17

*Kolokol* carried a special supplement in which both poems were published alongside one another. N.P. Ogarev decided to write his own verses on the subject – and this third poem was printed directly next to the original two pieces of prison dialogue in the *Kolokol* supplement.<sup>321</sup>

Unconstrained by the demands of prison writing, Ogarev’s poem is more than three times as long as either of the originals; unconstrained by the demands of personal modesty, Ogarev’s poem praises Mikhailov from afar as a new type of political martyr.<sup>322</sup> “Fear not the executioners” it exhorts Mikhailov towards the beginning of the poem, “nor prisons, nor exile, nor death, / Your deed was not for nothing - / It broke the spell of fear.” Praising the path of the poet, these verses end by switching over to four final rhymed sestains which are worth quoting in full:

Bound in irons with a heavy chain,  
You go, exile, to the cold reaches,  
You go to the endless snowy steppe,  
You go to the miners to labor and mourn.  
    Go without gloom, go without murmur,  
    Your deed is beautiful and your suffering holy.

And believe unflaggingly, my exiled martyr,  
There is another martyr who did not disappear, was not extinguished –  
Invisible, yet audible, everywhere, all-powerful,  
The mysterious spirit of the people’s freedom.  
    Go without gloom, go without murmur,  
    Your deed is beautiful and your suffering holy.

It digs with thoughts, labors with words,  
It awakens the youth in the silence of the night,  
It prophesies of a tribe, strong and new  
That will ruthlessly bury the old.  
    Go without gloom, go without murmur,  
    Your deed is beautiful and your suffering holy.

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<sup>321</sup> In fact, “To Mikhailov” is actually laid out first in the organization of this page.

<sup>322</sup> The structure for the first half is AABBCC; in the second, ABABCC.

It formed you and will not abandon you,  
It will disperse the guards and unravel the chain,  
It will push the stone away from the prison entrance,  
And on the people's holiday you will be called forth.  
Go without gloom, go without murmur,  
Your deed is beautiful and your suffering holy.<sup>323</sup>

It is in these verses from an illegal leftist publication abroad where we see the full flowering of a Mikhailov prison myth. While the poet and the students themselves ventured a more muted vision of incarcerated sacrifice in their own texts, Ogarev's poem explicitly casts Mikhailov in the role of a saint and entreats him to take up the martyr's mantle. Mikhailov is imagined here in a moment of doubt, a crisis of political faith – and Ogarev channels the voice of the people's will as holy spirit to exhort Mikhailov to drink his bitter cup to the last. Mikhailov is Jesus, and the Peter and Paul Fortress (as prison and starting station of exile) is Gethsemane and Golgotha and Tomb of Arimathea all at once. His passion promises a social and political Easter, a true people's holiday and national resurrection. In Ogarev's biblical verses, in the fertile intellectual links between St. Petersburg and London, Mikhailov became canonized as a true prison-martyr of a fledgling Revolutionary political culture. It was also the beginning of a wide circulation of texts that additionally cemented Mikhailov in this role. These further documents – gathered for the first time in the present dissertation – deserve to be discussed as semiotic containers of a fledgling culture of Russian political imprisonment.

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Poetry is a far more wieldy medium for radical political beliefs than the opera – far more easily produced, distributed, and consumed than a libretto, let alone an actual

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<sup>323</sup> N. Ogarev, "Mikhailovu," *Kolokol*, Jan. 15, 1862 (119/120).

performance. As Mikhailov's prison poetry began to travel around St. Petersburg, talk quickly arose of reproducing his earlier poems and translations.

It appears that as early as December 1861, one of the Serno-Solov'evich brothers began to collect material for an edition of Mikhailov's translations, to be printed with a high-quality portrait.<sup>324</sup> The censor initially accepted this proposal, as each of these translations (of Schiller and Goethe, Byron and Longfellow, etc.) had already appeared in Russian journals. His only stipulation was that the portrait be excluded.<sup>325</sup>

However, after reviewing this proposal, the Third Section decided to forbid it. "Returning those writings of M. Mikhailov forwarded to me alongside your [earlier] message" wrote Prince Dolgorukov to the head of the Imperial censors in early-January, 1862, "I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that I find their proposed publication to be untimely [*nesovremennom*]." <sup>326</sup> The real reason was the exact opposite, of course – the public circulation of Mikhailov's words and image was altogether *too timely* for the state to allow. Another attempt was made to illegally print an edition of his poems in 1866; these were seized and destroyed.<sup>327</sup> Mikhailov's poetry would not be legally printed in Russian until 1890.

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<sup>324</sup> This literary family would itself encounter the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress by the end of the following year. The brother being discussed here is presumably Nikolai, but it may have been Aleksei before he fled abroad – the sources do not give a first name.

<sup>325</sup> The precedent cited here was A.A. Bestuzhev, a former Decembrist who in 1839 was permitted to publish a volume of poetry on the condition that he use a pseudonym; when the printed volume contained a recognizable portrait alongside the false name, the resulting scandal led to the dismissal of then-head of the Third Section A.N. Mordvinov. See GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 274, ll. 136-136ob.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 143.

<sup>327</sup> A discussion of this rushed, illegal attempt can be found in the archives of the Chief Censorship Administration of Imperial Russia: RGIA f. 777, op. 2 (1866), d. 93, ll. 1, 9-10.

Thus did the dissident sympathy surrounding Mikhailov see the state act in alarm at the reproduction of a martyr's words. Indeed, the present chapter has concentrated so far solely on textual examples – Mikhailov in albums and articles, poetry and epistle. However, the discussion of his published verses by the Imperial Censors above reveals that the state was almost more concerned with *images* rather than *words* – in their view, a printed portrait held far more subversive force than a poetic verse.

The censor's anxieties were not baseless – in the material culture of the Russian 1860s, the reproducible political portrait was beginning to grow in importance as a significant talisman for demonstrating one's politico-intellectual affinities.<sup>328</sup> In Mikhailov's fragmentary reminisces, the poet himself recalls how Third Section agents discovered a portrait of Herzen during a search of his quarters – noting in particular the fright it gave to the gendarmes, who admitted to never having seen one before.<sup>329</sup>

As Mikhailov's radical currency took off in St. Petersburg, it is no surprise that portraits of this prison martyr also began to rapidly circulate. In December 1861, an anonymous correspondent sent a lithograph of Mikhailov to Aleksandr Herzen in London. Next to the serviceable portrait – a pensive, scholarly Mikhailov drawn from the torso up in three-quarters profile – the correspondent wrote:

I am forwarding you this portrait simply to show you the public's love for Mikhailov. In just two days over three hundred copies of this badly lithographed, secretly printed portrait were distributed. Many, many

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<sup>328</sup> While demanding further study, we can hypothesize that the political portrait of the mid-nineteenth century lay at the center of a curious constellation: the religious icon, the popular liubok print, the new technology of the lithograph, and – in the sphere of opera – the diva picture.

<sup>329</sup> See Mikhailov, "Zapiski," 2:261-262. Mikhailov relates how he actually willingly sacrificed this portrait to the gendarmes in order to preserve an album containing the actual signatures of Ogarev and Herzen, which was far more precious to the poet.

people would be extremely grateful if you published a small portrait, and one that more closely resembled him. We supporters of Mikhailov ask from the bottom of our hearts for you to fulfill this wish.<sup>330</sup>

While it is very possible that the figures used by the anonymous author here veer towards hyperbole – as this was an attempt to convince Herzen to use his London press for lithograph printing – it is quite clear that there were several portraits of Mikhailov illegally circulating in Russia by 1862.

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<sup>330</sup> A fine reproduction of this not-so-fine portrait is included in *Ibid.*, 2:320-321 [illustration 7].



Figure 9: "Lithographed Portrait of Mikhailov, Imprisoned" [IRLI RAN (*Pushkinskii dom*)  
OR f. 547, no. 9, l. 2].

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Besides the maligned picture described above, a higher-quality picture of Mikhailov has survived from this period [Figure 9]. This is a far more heroic image of a dashing poet-prisoner. Bundled in loose winter clothing, Mikhailov sits on a Peter and Paul Fortress bench awaiting his carriage into exile.<sup>331</sup> The portrait is taken from a perspective within the prison cell – Mikhailov’s nonchalant pose might lead one to mistake this for the view across a literary salon, if it were not for the ankle chains peaking out beneath the hem of his coat.<sup>332</sup> In this way, the unknown artist invites the viewer to place themselves within the same cell alongside Mikhailov, and witness from alongside him the poet’s air of abstract determination and conscious dignity.

Although it is unknown if this is indeed the picture requested from Herzen in the note quoted above, the existing evidence makes this more than likely. Even if our lithograph was not printed in London, its hagiographical visual vocabulary as well as the fact that copies from both Moscow and St. Petersburg have been preserved is ample evidence of Mikhailov’s enshrinement as a noble prison-martyr in the traveling illicit portraiture of the time.

In the turbulent events of the autumn of 1861, we thus see how the poet Mikhailov found himself at the center of a rich textual confluence – of poetry and journalism, opera and image – as the martyr-protagonist in a new political genre of suffering and resistance in the prison cell.

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<sup>331</sup> It being winter, Mikhailov was provided with a set of warm clothes before his expulsion from the capital: including mittens, a hat, and a sheepskin coat. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 238, ll. 33-33ob.

<sup>332</sup> Note that this is accurate – in the archives of the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant we find a receipt for leather-lined leg shackles, received on December 14, for use in Mikhailov’s journey into exile.

## **VIII. Conclusion: Farewell to Mikhailov**

1861 was truly the year when Alexandrine liberalism proved itself to be ‘a sunset mistaken for a dawn.’ As the hopes of reform that had begun Alexander II’s reign rapidly evaporated, progressive society realized that the political terrain it had been inhabiting was not necessarily shared by the state. Like crabs exposed by a sudden drop in the waterline, many scuttled for shelter and safety. Many others, however, finding themselves suddenly thrust into a new landscape, sought out new political communities and commitments. As this chapter has shown, the imprisonment of M.I. Mikhailov and capital’s student youth in the Peter and Paul Fortress became some of the key events in immediate post-emancipation Russia through which educated society attempted to articulate their shifting relationship to the retreating promises of tsarist reform ‘from above’. The story of the autumn of 1861 is very much the story of the contingent intellectual blocs, spaces of socialization, and genres of political dissent that arose and flourished in the uneasy tidal lands of receding Alexandrine liberalism.

And one of the primary sites of this historical formation was the most notorious prison of the tsarist autocracy – the Peter and Paul Fortress.

However, this iteration of the Fortress was far from the mute space of discipline once inhabited by the Decembrists. The autumn of 1861 saw the space of the cell become a site for educated society to imagine new sources of political legitimacy at the limits of official reformism – and a stage for those imprisoned to themselves uncover and enact new forms of political self-narration at the confluence of opera and poetry. The story of the autumn of 1861 is not simply an account of state violence – it is also a story of how a heroic culture of political imprisonment arose

from within the very disciplinary spaces of nineteenth-century Russia, and coalesced around the figures of the St. Petersburg University students and the poet M.I. Mikhailov.

And as such a cultural role seems to necessitate, Mikhailov's fate would ultimately not be a happy one. Unlike the majority of the student prisoners who escaped with little to no punishment, Mikhailov was sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. After being expelled from St. Petersburg in the last days of 1861, an arduous journey would take him to the gold fields of Transbaikalia. He died in 1865, at the age of thirty-six.<sup>333</sup>

However, let us note that after his sentencing yet before his departure, Mikhailov was permitted a single visitation day in the Peter and Paul Fortress. As he had no family in the capital, the General-Governor of St. Petersburg permitted several of his friends to see him off.<sup>334</sup> Thus, in the prison archives we have the extraordinary records of Mikhailov being visited in the Peter and Paul Fortress the day before exile by the flowers of the leftist Russian literary world – N.A. Nekrasov, N.G. Shelgunov, A.A. Serno-Solov'evich, and N.G. Chernyshevsky.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Sources list his cause of death variously as kidney disease or tuberculosis. It is worth mentioning one last example of political idolization from his immediate post-imprisonment period. Along his path to the Russian Far East, he was held for a time in the central prison of Tobolsk. Here, it appears that the sympathetic salon society generously feted him – young women brought flowers to his cell, the prison guards let him leave in the evenings to attend literary dinners, and upon his departure he was toasted with liberal amounts of champagne. See the Third Section investigation into these remarkable events in GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 274, ll. 175-176, 182-187ob, etc.

<sup>334</sup> See the permission granted in GARF f. 109, op. 36 (1861), d. 275, ll. 125-125ob.

<sup>335</sup> This was December 13, 1861 – from around one o'clock in the afternoon until eleven thirty in the evening Mikhailov entertained guests in his cell. For many, this was the last time they would see their friend again. A quick list of visitors is found in GARF *ibid.*, l. 126; a more complete list along with the actual signed passes used by visitors to his cell are preserved at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 238, ll. 36, 37-45.

Although we lack records of what actually occurred during these meetings, it is a fitting way to end the present chapter. For of those thirty literary comrades who petitioned on Mikhailov's behalf at the start of his imprisonment, of those close friends who visited him in his last day of incarceration, a great many would find *themselves* political prisoners in the Peter and Paul Fortress in less than a year.

The importance of 1861 in the story of radical Russian history lies in the construction of the prison-martyr as a certain political subject-position and object of societal interest. But while the poet Mikhailov may have played its debut role – backed by a student chorus – this was not to be the last performance.

As an accelerating cycle of resistance and repression swept Romanov Russia over the next five years, the idea of the heroic political prisoner took on greater and greater importance for understanding a political present thrust more and more into the cell. The ephemeral genres of poetry and opera would be superseded by more robust *Bildungsroman* self-narrations, finally attaining wide use in the second half of the 1860s.

In 1861, the curtain had risen on a new political culture of incarceration in imperial Russia. Now, in our next chapter, let us trace the variants brought forth from this opening theme – the new visions of prisoner authority and incarcerated agency that arose in the spaces between pedagogy and literature, Romanticism and Rigorism, and the bourgeois apartment, editorial office and prison cell from 1862 to 1866.



## 4. The Radical Self and the Tsarist Cell: Prison Writers and the Carceral Construction of a ‘New People,’ 1862-1866

### I. Introduction

In the spring and summer of 1862, St. Petersburg was awash in images of fire and blood.

It was a contentious political moment. The events of the past autumn still lay heavily on the capital: St. Petersburg University remained closed, public opinion was firmly aligned with the students and progressive intelligentsia, and paranoia had begun to take hold in the corridors of autocratic power. In a report to Tsar Alexander II in April 1862, Prince Dolgorukov – the head of the Third Section – darkly forewarned that the government was heading “more and more for the destruction prepared for it by the tireless efforts of revolutionary propaganda and the aggressive actions of the dissatisfied.”<sup>336</sup>

The most immediate cause of concern was a wave of radical pamphlets that had begun to sweep the capital. When M.I. Mikhailov was arrested the previous year for his manifesto “To the Young Generation,” this had only been the beginning of what would later be called “the time of proclamations [*proclamatsionnoe vremia*].”<sup>337</sup> Throughout 1862, the imperial cityscape of St. Petersburg was

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<sup>336</sup> Quoted in N.A. Alekseeva, ed. *Protsess N.G. Chernyshevskogo. Arkhivnye dokumenty* (Saratov: Saratovskoe oblastnoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1939), 17.

<sup>337</sup> N.V. Shelgunov, “Iz proshlogo i nastoiashchego”, in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova, and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia* 1:160.

continually blanketed with illegal counter-texts – “Velikoruss,” “Free Word,” “Officers!” “Freedom” – calling for radical action against the state.<sup>338</sup>

The most incendiary of these pamphlets by far was “Young Russia [*Molodaia Rossiia*].” Appearing simultaneously in both St. Petersburg and Moscow on the fourteenth of May, 1862, this long proclamation openly called for “a bloody and inexorable revolution” and the construction of a socialist, democratic Russian republic on the ashes of the old order: “They will pay with their blood for the poverty of the people, for their long despotism, for their incomprehension of contemporary needs. The heads of the entire Romanov house will serve as a purifying sacrifice!”<sup>339</sup>

Two days later, the fires began.

The first to burn was Ligovskii prospect, then Bol’shaia Okhta, followed by the soldier’s district of Malaia Okhta. By the end of the month, St. Petersburg was experiencing several fires a day. When Apraksin Dvor – the city’s largest trading center – went up in flames on May 28, arson began to be suspected. The state and the press quickly blamed Poles, leftist students, and radical literary figures.<sup>340</sup> Suspicion

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<sup>338</sup> An excellent trove of materials for studies of this “time of proclamations” are the personal papers of writer and critic I.A. Piotrovskii, located at IRLI RAN (*Pushkinskii dom*) OR f. 8. A student of St. Petersburg University and correspondent for the journal *Sovremennik*, Piotrovskii was arrested in the disorders of 1861 and committed suicide in penury the following year. His archive contains well-preserved originals of most of the major proclamations of this period.

<sup>339</sup> For more information on the creation and circulation of this pamphlet by a group of radicalized Moscow students, see B.P. Koz’min, *P.G. Zaichnevskii i ‘Molodaia Rossiia’* (Moscow: Izd. vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl’no poselentsev, 1932). An original copy is located at IRLI RAN OR f. 8, no. 27. From the quality of the document compared to other proclamations from this period – small, clear type printed in three columns on both sides of a large broadsheet – it is understandable why the tsarist authorities originally suspected that it had been printed on Aleksandr Herzen’s radical press in London.

<sup>340</sup> Public opinion rapidly swung against the left. For example: during the public sentencing of V.A. Obruchev on May 31 – a progressive journalist arrested during the disturbances of the previous year and held until this time in the Peter and Paul Fortress – the public took him as an arsonist and cried for his violent execution. See V.A. Obruchev, “Iz perezhitogo. I.

centered around the capital's leading leftist journals, *Sovremennik* [*The Contemporary*] and *Russkoe slovo* [*Russian Word*]. These periodicals – with their increasingly bold mixture of positivistic natural science, moral utilitarianism, early socialism, and Feuerbachian materialism – were widely viewed as being, if not concretely responsible, then at least morally culpable for the disturbances in the capital.<sup>341</sup>

The reaction from the already-paranoid autocracy was swift and unequivocal. On the twenty-fourth of May, a high commission was established in the officer's quarters of the Peter and Paul Fortress with the task of administering state justice.<sup>342</sup> Conscious of the student disorders that had occurred in the citadel the previous year,

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Peterburg,” *Vestnik evropy* 42 (1907): 150-51; and L.F. Panteleev, *Vospominaniia*, 278-80. For the official Peter and Paul Fortress documents on Obruchev's civic execution, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 100, ll. 57-57ob, 61, 62, 65, 73, 74-74ob. For a wider discussion of the panic that swept St. Petersburg during these months, see N.G. Rozenblium, “Peterburgskie pozhary 1862 g. i Dostoevskii (Zapreshchennye tsenzurnoi stat'i zhurnala ‘Vremia’,” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 86 (1973): 16-54.

<sup>341</sup> Attempts by leftist intellectuals to defend their innocence – see, for example, N.A. Serno-Solov'evich's article “*Eshche po-povodu pozharov*,” held in the censor archives at OR RNB f. 833, ed. khr. 158 – were to no avail. The most famous episode related to this moment of public outcry involves the novelist F.M. Dostoevsky. In a notorious scene, he allegedly dashed to the apartment of N.G. Chernyshevsky towards the end of May and imploring him to stop ‘his’ radical youth from destroying the city. In a later autobiographical sketch, Chernyshevsky would write that after assenting to Dostoevsky's request with bemused condescension, the latter responded “with rapturous expressions of his personal gratitude towards me, that out of respect for him I had saved Petersburg from the fate of being incinerated.” Apparently rumors of this hysterical meeting circulated widely for years to come, to the point where Dostoevsky felt the need to explicitly counter them (and present a far different picture of his relations with Chernyshevsky) in a number of his *Writer's Diary*. See N.G. Chernyshevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v piatnadtsati tomakh* (Moscow: Gos. izd. ‘Khudozhestvennaia literature,’ 1939), 1:777-79; and F.M. Dostoevskii, “Nechto lichnoe,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Leningrad: Izd. ‘Nauka’ Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1980), 21:23-30. The true cause of the fires will likely never be known, although it is widely accepted that there was no premediated revolutionary campaign behind them. Soviet scholarship asserted that even if these were not state-sponsored arsons – false flags to justify a suppression of the press – that the government quickly jumped at the possibility of utilizing this occasion to imprison the capital's left. See S.A. Reiser, “Peterburgskie pozhary 1862 goda,” *Katorga i ssylka* 10 (1932): 79-109.

<sup>342</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 246, ll. 1, 2-2ob.

the commission quickly worked with Fortress Commandant A.F. Sorokin to prepare as many cells as possible – going so far as to request sixty additional beds from a local hospital in anticipation of mass arrests.<sup>343</sup>

They did well to plan ahead. In mid-June, the journals *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe slovo* were suspended for eight months due to their “systematically harmful direction and constant efforts to spread harmful anti-religious and anti-state theories.”<sup>344</sup> By the end of the summer, eighty political prisoners would be sent to the casemates of the Peter and Paul Fortress proper and fifteen to the secret cells of the Alekseevskii ravelin.<sup>345</sup> Among those incarcerated were the leading writers of *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe slovo*: N.G. Chernyshevsky, D.I. Pisarev, and N.A. Serno-Solov’evich. With these arrests – and the imprisonment of radical intellectual N.V. Shelgunov at the beginning of the following year - the leftist luminaries of the St. Petersburg literary world were confined in the Peter and Paul Fortress. These publicists would be held in solitary confinement – many without trial – for the next several years.

However, political imprisonment did not mean the end of their written labors. Astoundingly, through a strange conjecture of blind circumstance and political will, many of these figures found it possible to read, write, and legally publish a host of critical texts during their periods of incarceration. Most famously, it was during his

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., ll. 49-49ob, 50-51(ob), 61-61ob, 70.

<sup>344</sup> These lines are taken from a missive between the Ministry of National Enlightenment and the St. Petersburg Censorship Committee on June 15, 1862. Quoted in N.M. Chernyshevskaiia, *Letopis' zhizni i deiatel'nosti N.G. Chernyshevskogo* (Moscow: Gos. izd. khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1954), 259-61. See also Charles A. Ruud, “A.V. Golovnin and Liberal Russian Censorship, January-June 1862,” *The Slavonic and East European Journal* 50 (1972): 216-19; and information on the suspension of *Russkoe slovo* in RGALI f. 1027, op. 1, d. 2, ll.1-1ob.

<sup>345</sup> For documents regarding the initial arrests of this summer, see See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 102, ll. 200-200ob; RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 245, ll. 71-74(obs).

nearly two years of solitary confinement that N.G. Chernyshevsky would pen *What is to be Done?* – generally recognized as the most politically important novel in Russian history. From 1862 to 1866, the flower of Russian radicalism flourished in the Peter and Paul Fortress – and the nature of this radicalism was forever shaped by space of the cell.

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This chapter tells a story of state repression and unorthodox literary production in modern Russia. I will argue that if the links between dissident struggle and political imprisonment were first publically assembled in the autumn of 1861, then it was the five years that followed that saw the rapid maturation of a radical carceral culture. In this period, St. Petersburg's leftist intelligentsia coopted the Peter and Paul Fortress into a writing desk of the revolution – and, in their literary output and lived example, shaped a new image of the revolutionary self indelibly tied to the space of the prison.

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Some of the characters in this tale may be familiar to readers. As the tsarist state moved against the most influential journalists of the capital in the summer of 1862, the canon of Russian radicalisms and the prison roll of the Peter and Paul Fortress became essentially indistinguishable.

N.G. Chernyshevsky [1828-1889] was the chief contributor to the leftist journal *Sovremennik* at the time of his arrest. The son of a priest from Saratov, he had flashed upon the St. Petersburg literary scene several years earlier with his controversial program for a materialist aesthetics. Chernyshevsky's imprisonment on July 7, 1862 was due less to any actual political transgression (the only evidence being

a letter from Aleksandr Herzen offering his London printing press to the recently-suspended *Sovremennik*) than to the state taking the opportunity to dispose of a dangerous critic during a period of crisis in the capital.<sup>346</sup>

Chernyshevsky's popularity at this time was perhaps only rivaled by D.I. Pisarev [1840-1868]. The scion of an impoverished gentry family, Pisarev's bellicose style had turned the journal *Russkoe slovo* into the leading voice of the 'nihilist' current among the young generation. "That which can be smashed should be smashed," ran his famous call to critical intransigence: "that which withstands the blow is fit, that which can be dashed to pieces is trash. In any case, strike to the right and the left, no harm will come of it."<sup>347</sup> Pisarev's arrest came when, in despair over the closure of *Russkoe slovo*, he openly applied this precept to the tsarist regime in an anonymous pamphlet: "The Romanov dynasty and Petersburg bureaucracy must perish... what is dead and rotten must of itself fall into the grave. It remains for us only to give a last push and throw the dirt over their stinking corpses."<sup>348</sup> Seized by the state on July 2, 1862, he would be held in solitary confinement in cell number nine of the Nevskaiia Curtain Wall until 1866.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Chernyshevsky would be placed in cells no. 11 and 12 of the Alekseevskii Ravelin – see GARF f. 109, op. 37 [1862], d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 1, l. 10; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104, ll. 4, 5, 6, 6ob, 7, 8. The best document-based Soviet studies of Chernyshevsky's arrest and prosecution are Mikhail Lemke, "Delo Chernyshevskogo," in *Politicheskie protsessy v Rossii 1860-kh gg. (po arkhivnym dokumentam)* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1923), 161-502; and N.A. Alekseev, ed., *Protsess N.G. Chernyshevskogo*. See also the useful N.M. Chernyshevskaiia, *Letopis' zhizni i deiatel'nosti N.G. Chernyshevskogo*.

<sup>347</sup> D.I. Pisarev, "Skholastika XIX veka," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvenadtsati tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 2000), 2:284.

<sup>348</sup> Pisarev, "Glupaia knizhonka Shedo-Ferroti...," *PSS*, 2:275.

<sup>349</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 37 [1862], d. 230, ch. 44, ll. 3-3ob, 17, 20; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 246, ll. 119, 120.

The other two Peter and Paul Fortress prison authors of this period were radicals of the same stamp. N.A. Serno-Solov'evich [1834-1866], a frequent contributor to *Sovremennik* whose family owned a progressive bookstore on Nevskii Prospekt in St. Petersburg, was arrested on July 7 alongside Chernyshevsky and placed in the Alekseevskii Ravelin.<sup>350</sup> N.V. Shelgunov [1824-1891], a writer for both *Russkoe slovo* and *Sovremennik*, was imprisoned slightly later. A close friend of the poet M.I. Mikhailov, he would be seized at the start of 1863 for attempting to organize his comrade's escape from Siberia.<sup>351</sup>

With the incarceration of these four figures, the flower of Russian critical thought was confined in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

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In turning to these individuals, the present chapter may first appear to be moving on well-trod historiographical soil. Scholarship has long recognized the years 1862 to 1866 as crucial to the development of Russian radicalism – a time for the new articulation and wide dissemination of critical stances against the tsarist state.

Our political and intellectual histories have made this a tale of ideas. The classic studies that dominated Western historiography for much of the twentieth century focused on the precise contours of the new social thought circulated in the

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<sup>350</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 37 [1862], d. 230, ch. 54, l. 8; RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104, ll. 4, 5, 6, 6ob, 7, 8. Serno-Solov'evich would be first placed in cell no. 16, and later moved to cell no. 8. For more on Serno-Solov'evich, see Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, 253-68.

<sup>351</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 37 [1862], d. 230, ch. 28, ll. 84, 85; RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104, ll. 234, 235-235ob. Shelgunov was immediately sent to cell no. 1 of the Alekseevskii Ravelin on April 15, 1863 before being relocated to cell no. 15. See also M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 2:256-63.

pages of *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe slovo*.<sup>352</sup> Still constrained by the tsarist censorship, this witch's brew of Feuerbach, Comte, Fourier, and Mill – grounded in an Enlightenment faith in autonomous human reason – found its main expression in belletrism and literary criticism. Thus, the great Russian social novels of this period – exemplified in I.S. Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* – became sites for journalists to hold forth on the burning questions of the day. Our intellectual histories have done excellent work in reconstructing the play of concepts in this period: but all too often in an abstract idea-space, where texts float in idealist fashion above their contexts.

On the other hand, our social histories have made this period a story solely about individual class positions. In this approach, the (ultimately failed) reforms of the early Alexandrine period had allowed the fledgling Russian public sphere to host not only new ideas – it had also begun to host new people. The liberalization of the imperial university system and the growth of public journalism created a growing population of educated urbanites who made their living through intellectual labors outside of the traditional positions of the rigid Russian class structure.<sup>353</sup> These *raznochintsy* ('people of various ranks') played a central role in the critical journalistic endeavors of this time. Social historians have taken *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe slovo* (guided by figures such as Chernyshevsky and G.E. Blagosvetlov, both *raznochinets* sons of priests) as giving voice to, or even expressing the spirit of, the iconoclasm of

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<sup>352</sup> See, for example, Andrezej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, 183-221; and Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 129-203.

<sup>353</sup> Of course, the importation of a language of classes and estates (Russian: *soslovie*) brings its own problems to the study of nineteenth-century Russia. See Gregory L. Freeze, "The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History," *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 11-36.

this new *déclassé* intellectual.<sup>354</sup> While adding much to our histories, I believe that this approach also boils down to an idealist position – a lopsided valorization of class *mentalité* that cannot address the complex dialectic of texts, contexts, and spaces through which ideas change over time.

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What further unites all of these previous histories is that they only fleetingly touch upon the imprisonment of their main actors. The Peter and Paul Fortress enters our historiography only obliquely: as a curious or tragic set of circumstances, yet something incidental to the politics, ideas, and conflicts of this moment. This chapter seeks to correct this state of affairs.<sup>355</sup>

In what follows, I will argue that the history of the radical Russian 1860s is a carceral history. I believe that bringing the Peter and Paul Fortress back into our stories of this period does not only fill a gap in the scholarship, but also gives us a deeper understanding of this moment of historical change.

First, the present chapter will assemble a comprehensive picture of the Peter and Paul Fortress as a site of literary production from 1862 to 1866. In exploring the concrete pathways by which carceral texts were distributed, as well as the strange circumstances that even allowed this to occur, we will gain a clear picture of how St.

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<sup>354</sup> There is a vast literature on the Russian *raznochintsy*. For a worthy survey of this social-historical problematic, see Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Imperial Russia's 'People of Various Ranks'* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994). The most original recent work in this paradigm is Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

<sup>355</sup> In parallel fashion, those historians who have specifically examined political imprisonment in this period – notably P.E. Shchegolev and M.N. Gernet – have likewise pursued this scholarship as a detached terrain of study, distinct from the larger cultural and intellectual histories of the time.

Petersburg's central citadel was transformed into a *writing desk of the revolution* in this period. Next, we will examine the content of the texts that arose out of these porous prison cells. In doing so, we will find that the Fortress was not merely an incidental setting for the critical thought of this period. I will argue that the contentious semi-public political discourse of the Alexandrine period not only persisted in the prison, but found its highest fulfillment here. In the cell, questions of new agencies, new pedagogies, and 'new people' achieved both continued textual articulation as well as evocative lived performance. In this way, I propose that Chernyshevsky, Pisarev, and their cohort should not be understood merely as writers, imprisoned – but as *prison writers*.

Through this new history, we will find that the 1860s were a pivotal moment for the symbolic investment of political incarceration in modern Russian history – as well as for the indelible imprint of a carceral culture onto the larger revolutionary tradition. Through their imprisoned words and deeds, a group of intellectuals explored what it meant to be a revolutionary actor in an autocratic state, notably crafting a mature language of political martyrdom and the radical self. If tsarist incarceration had only become legible in the 1850s, and first gained public resonance in 1861, then it was from 1862 to 1866 that we find the cell truly transformed into a stage of the political: a site for the performance and reproduction of dissident texts and dissident subjectivity. Thus, this chapter offers not only a new picture of a crucial moment in the history of the Peter and Paul Fortress and modern Russia as a whole – by seriously investigating patterns and pathways of prison agency, it also intervenes against the reigning Foucauldian orthodoxy in contemporary carceral studies, as well as offers a

novel understanding of modern European radicalism at the juncture of text, space, and self.

## II. Russian Prison Texts, 1862-1866: The Porous Cell

After the mass political arrests of the summer of 1862, how were texts written in the Peter and Paul Fortress? In concrete terms, how were the cells of St. Petersburg's carceral citadel transformed into platforms for leftist socio-political criticism?

Prisoners in the Alekseevskii Ravelin prison and the casemates of the Nevskaiia Curtain Wall were held in spartan conditions during this period. Wooden or iron cots with straw-stuffed mattresses and a small table would be the only objects of furniture.<sup>356</sup> Inmates were fed reasonably well, with thirty kopecks a day spent on Fortress arrestees and fifty for those in the Alekseevskii Ravelin: enough for soup, grains (rice or buckwheat), and meat (usually beef), with tea served twice a day.<sup>357</sup> During the long St. Petersburg winters, heat was provided through large Russian stoves, and light was given by small, smoky oil lamps in each cell.

The defining characteristic of these rather grim cells was their silence. The carceral regime of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the nineteenth century was centered around the preservation of mute isolation. Prisoners were placed in solitary confinement, with all possible precautions taken to prevent any form of verbal or non-verbal communication with other arrestees. The only permissible human contact came

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<sup>356</sup> These descriptions are derived from the inventory documents preserved at RGIA f. 1280, op. 2 [*dopolnitel'naia opis'*], d. 186; RGIA f. 1280, op. 8, d. 752, ll. 4-9; as well as M.I. Mikhailov, "Zapiski", in N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova, and M.L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 2: 309-11.

<sup>357</sup> See, for example, the catalogue of food served in the Alekseevskii Ravelin in July 1863, preserved at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 102, ll. 131-132ob. Provision budgets for this period can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 245, ll. 58-58ob; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104, l. 14.

from frequent guard observations (through one-way peepholes embedded in each cell door, referred to as the ‘judas’); visits from the prison wardens; and, irregularly, heavily-monitored meetings with relatives.<sup>358</sup>

However, this atmosphere of silence and isolation did not preclude all communicative acts. The walls of St. Petersburg’s citadel were textually semi-permeable; there existed several channels for the circulation of the written word.

The Fortress possessed two prison libraries – one for the Alekseevskii Ravelin, and one for those incarcerated in other location in the citadel. While limited to non-political texts on religion, history, and the natural sciences, prisoners could request and receive books in their cells from these prison library catalogues.<sup>359</sup> Also, at times, prisoners were allowed to receive particular monographs from friends and relatives.

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<sup>358</sup> For regulations regarding visitors in the Alekseevskii Ravelin during this period, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 108, ll. 169-170ob.

<sup>359</sup> An inventory of the Alekseevskii Ravelin library from the beginning of 1864 can be found in RGIA f. 1280, op. 8, d. 752, ll. 4-9. Its several hundred volumes are divided into “Books of religious content”, “secular content”, and “various content.” The secular collection contains various histories and contemporary belletristic works (including poetry and prose by such figures as A.S. Griboedov and A.S. Pushkin), while the third (‘various’) section lists 28 volumes in German, 105 in French, 4 in English, and 1 in Hebrew (all, unfortunately, unnamed). And while we lack an inventory for the Fortress-wide library in this period, a picture of its probable contents and organization can be taken from an 1883 catalogue preserved in the Commandant’s archive. This inventory is divided into seven sections: “1. Scientific Content; 2. Travel and Ethnography; 3. Novels and Stories; 4. Textbooks – Dictionaries; 5. Essays on Technology, Chemistry, and Physics; 6. Journals; 7. Essays in Foreign Languages.” These divisions appear to be rather haphazard – religious texts (including fifty separate copies of the gospels) were shoehorned into section four. The final part contains a wide range of books in French, German and English. Finally, to this particular catalogue is appended a fascinating list of books “to be destroyed” – presumably due to poor condition, ideological suspicion, or both. While it is uncertain which of these volumes were present in the Peter and Paul Fortress in the 1860s and which entered the library after this period, several remarkable texts appear: the collected works of radical *Sovremennik* publicist N.A. Dobroliubov, the materialist physiology of I.M. Sechenov’s *Reflexes of the Brain*, Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, and J.S. Mill’s *Political Economy*. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 408, ll. 16-28.

Political prisoners were likewise permitted to write, send, and receive letters. For this purpose they were provided with writing materials upon request: in the 1860s, this meant tin inkwells and pre-cut goose feather quills.<sup>360</sup> There were, however, strict limits placed on this activity: contact could only take place with family members; any discussion of their trial or contemporary political events in general was strictly prohibited; and all correspondence was liable to examination by a Fortress scribe, the official body responsible for the individual's prosecution, and perhaps even the tsarist secret police.<sup>361</sup>

Thus, engagement with the word was allowed for political prisoners in the Peter and Paul Fortress in this period, but on a controlled basis. However, soon after the arrests of the summer of 1862, textual expression started to appear at the uncertain margins of these permitted practices.

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On October 4, 1862, Fortress Commandant A.F. Sorokin sent a brief letter to the state investigatory commission regarding the prisoner N.A. Serno-Solov'evich. Before his arrest, he had been one of several translators working on a Russian edition of the Friedrich Christoph Schlosser's *World History*, edited by his brother Vladimir. As part of this project, N.A. Serno-Solov'evich had secretly used his letter-writing materials to complete a translation in his Alekseevskii Ravelin cell – 75 half-sheets on the history of the crusades – and was requesting that it be sent to his brother for publication.

Unexpectedly, the commission agreed to view the text and eventually sent it to the

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<sup>360</sup> These writing instruments are described in Iv. Borisov, "Alekseevskii ravelin v 1862-65 g.g. (Iz moikh vospominanii)," *Russkaia starina* 12 (1901): 576.

<sup>361</sup> These points are sternly enforced in a letter from the head of the Third Section to Commandant Sorokin in the autumn of 1863: "those held under arrest can write only about their health and needs, concisely and clearly." See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 108, ll. 29-29ob.

family bookstore.<sup>362</sup>

This exchange seems to have set a new precedent for permissible scholarly activity within the Peter and Paul Fortress. Serno-Solov'evich submitted another 58 half-sheets on November 16, 1862.<sup>363</sup> And on December 7, N.G. Chernyshevky – who had also taken part in this project before his arrest, and now sat just a few cells away from Serno-Solov'evich – requested that his completed translation of Volume 15 of Schlosser's *World History* be sent out for publication as well.<sup>364</sup>

These translations appear to have been undertaken tentatively at first. It was only at the very end of that year that literary activity in the Alekseevskii Ravelin would be officially sanctioned from on high. For after completing his first text, N.G. Chernyshevsky asked to continue his work as a translator. At this juncture, Commandant Sorokin felt it prudent to receive a decision on the matter from the tsarist secret police. On December 20, 1862, the Third Section informed Sorokin that they had decided to permit Chernyshevsky “to purchase and translate Volume XVII of Schlosser's *World History*, as well as continue a belletristic story which he has begun.”<sup>365</sup> The historical monograph was soon purchased for Chernyshevsky by his cousin and literary colleague A.N. Pypin. The state prisoner also began to work in earnest on this newly begun “belletristic story” – which was, in fact, the start of what would become the novel *What is to be Done?* [*Chto Delat'?*]. The above-quoted letter is the first written evidence of its existence.

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<sup>362</sup> RGIA, f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104, ll. 114, 115, 116.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., l. 140.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., l. 147.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., ll. 150-150ob.

It was these early permissions that allowed for the explosion of Peter and Paul Fortress texts – translations, scientific essays, and artistic works – over the following four years. But how exactly was this allowed to occur? The historian must locate this surprising state tolerance within the uneven terrain of Alexandrine liberalism.

One of the major reasons why these Peter and Paul Fortress texts were permitted to see the light of legal publication was the simple fact that all of these writers had not yet been found guilty. In these confused years of Tsar Alexander II's reformist period – where the state was attempting, unsuccessfully, to preserve the traditional power and authority of the autocratic emperor while also grounding the workings of the state in an enlightened legal code – an uncertain respect for the presumed innocence of political prisoners weaves its way through official correspondence, introducing a measure of hesitation into the idea of forbidding prison writings altogether.<sup>366</sup>

Also at play during this period was a fluid ambiguity regarding the state's responsibility for policing the press. At the start of 1862, the autocracy was haltingly working through a series of official reforms, including that of the censorship regime. Despite the alarming events of the previous year (i.e. the arrest and exile of poet M.I. Mikhailov and the closure of St. Petersburg University), the newly-appointed Minister of Education sought to liberalize state censorship practices in order to avoid further alienating the burgeoning intelligentsia and educated youth: going so far as to solicit

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<sup>366</sup> Thus, when Serno-Solov'evich in the Alekseevskii Ravelin turned from translation work to his own original literary activity in the spring of 1863 (with the essays "A Plan for Financial and Economic Reform" and "The Metaphysical Hallucinations of Criminalists"), the tsarist secret police ruled that "taking into consideration, that Serno-Solov'evich is imprisoned in the Ravelin due to a verdict which has not yet taken place and that before this occurs his rights are not specifically abridged," he would be permitted to continue writing and sending texts to his brother Vladimir. See GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1862), d. 230, ch. 4, ll. 192, 192ob, 193.

the advice of the St. Petersburg journalistic world, including the editorial boards of *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe Slovo* before their suspension in the summer of 1862.<sup>367</sup>

However, while plans for this new censorship regime were settled upon in the spring of 1862, it was decided that their implementation would have to wait for the end of the then-ongoing judicial reform: new press regulations only went into effect in 1865. In the interim, a series of complex “temporary regulations” took the place of a full-fledged overhaul. These shifting measures – which allowed some officially-sponsored publications to be printed without preliminary censorial review, and ambiguously reordered bureaucratic areas of responsibility – injected a heavy dose of confusion into how tsarist officials were to respond to the new phenomenon of prison authorship.

Finally, it should be stressed that tsarist officialdom was neither structurally monolithic, nor homogeneously repressive, especially during the contingent administrative and political atmosphere of Tsar Alexander II’s early reign. When Serno-Solov’evich, Chernyshevsky, Pisarev and Shelgunov first submitted texts for potential circulation, their words were not simply inserted into a unified bureaucratic machinery. Depending on the nature of the charges against each individual, their prison texts were floated around the Senate, the Third Section, the Censorship Bureau, the Governor-General’s office, and the Ministry of the Interior. Confusion over proper jurisdiction and official responsibility for this unprecedented carceral literature fills the official correspondence of the period, and this indeterminacy was surely

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<sup>367</sup> See Charles A. Ruud, “A.V. Golovnin and Liberal Russian Censorship, January-June 1862,” 198-219.

instrumental in allowing Peter and Paul Fortress prisoners to openly publish from 1862 to 1866.<sup>368</sup>

Similarly, the officials that made up the imperial bureaucracy during this period of transition did not possess a single, consistent ideological stance. At times, the political views of individual functionaries served to either halt or further the publication of essays and novels from within the regime's central political prison. Commandant A.F. Sorokin of the Peter and Paul Fortress, a veteran of the 1830 Polish Uprising, possessed a conservative and cautious approach to his responsibilities.<sup>369</sup> His military mindset, however, saw him often defer to officials of higher rank. These included the Governor-General of St. Petersburg at that time, Prince A.A. Suvorov, a man of a very different stamp. Of known liberal leanings, this grandson of the famous eighteenth-century general was highly critical of reactionary elements within Tsar Alexander II's government.<sup>370</sup> It was Prince Suvorov who personally intervened to

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<sup>368</sup> See, for example, the rather heated exchanges between the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant and the Governor-General of St. Petersburg regarding whether texts in the Alekseevskii Ravelin should be submitted to the latter official's chancellery or rather through the hands of the Third Section, preserved in RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104, ll. 194, 194ob, 195; and IRLI RAN OR f. 97, op. 1, no. 157, ll. 10, 10ob, 11; 12, 12ob, 13.

<sup>369</sup> A copy of Engineer General-Lieutenant A.F. Sorokin's complete service information from January 1, 1863 can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 2, d. 979, ll. 26-39ob.

<sup>370</sup> Prince Suvorov's liberal tendencies were well known in the capital. Many of the students arrested in the autumn of 1861 credited their rather lenient treatment to his personal intervention (see the memoir of L.F. Panteleev, where he characterizes him as "not a man of wide political horizons, and it cannot be said that he was a subtle or visionary politician; but Suvorov was a kind man, humane and with a remarkable trust towards our youths; and towards students he displayed positively fatherly tenderness.") Suvorov's opposition to certain conservative tendencies within the tsarist state was also put on display during the autumn of 1863. When Count M.N. Murav'ev – the official responsible for the violent suppression of the January Uprising in Poland – was gifted with a silver-gilt religious relief by eighty members of high Petersburg society, Suvorov openly broke relations with each and every well-wisher, in an event which became a public scandal. The reactionary Murav'ev is also the subject of blistering attacks in the Governor-General's private writings from the time, where he is referred to as a "cannibal" and an "ogre." See L.F. Panteleev, *Vospominaniia*, 282-83; A.I.

allow D.I. Pisarev to write and publish while imprisoned in the Nevskaiia Curtain, after receiving a letter of supplication from the arrestee's mother in the summer of 1863.<sup>371</sup>

These interventions by individual tsarist officials did not only descend from the top of the imperial hierarchy. The first reader of the majority of prison writings in this period was the scribe of the Alekseevskii Ravelin. A young man from Pskov by the name of I.A. Borisov, he began working in the Peter and Paul Fortress in July 1862 at the age of seventeen.<sup>372</sup> In his memoirs, Borisov remembers reading Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* in the Commandant's chancellery (he was surely the first individual to do so) as well as all of Pisarev's critical works: recalling the handwriting of the former as "squeezed" yet "large", while that of the latter as "light, precise, and beautiful." These texts had a profound political effect on the teenager. He would later recall: "Pisarev's essays wielded a terrible influence over me – still a youth – to the point where I burned everything that I had previously worshiped."<sup>373</sup> Not once did this ecstatic young scribe mark a text as potentially dangerous. This curious moment of political pedagogy within the administration of the Peter and Paul Fortress not only foreshadows the profound influence that these prison

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Feduta, "Gumannyi vnuk voinstvennogo deda' (A.A. Suvorov-Rymnikskii v russkoi poezii)," *Philologica* 21/23 (2012): 38-54; and RNB OR f. 257, ed. khr. no. 5, ll. 9-18ob.

<sup>371</sup> Prince Suvorov wrote to Commandant Sorokin on June 5, 1863, paraphrasing the request of Pisarev's mother (which argued that the critic's literary labors were the only means of support for both him and his family). He remarked that he saw no objections to this as long as Pisarev's texts were reviewed by a censor, "especially since several prisoners in the fortress, for example: Chernyshevsky, held in the Alekseevskii Ravelin, have already been allowed to engage in literary work." Commandant Sorokin acceded to this request, so long as these prison writings were reviewed by both a censor and the imperial senate. See RGIA, f. 1280, op. 1, d. 254, ll. 133-133ob; 134. Prince Suvorov also corresponded on this matter with the Third Section, who gave their approval to his course of action: see GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1862), d. 230, ch. 44, ll. 50-50ob.

<sup>372</sup> For this scribe's biographical background, see his service information from January 1, 1863, preserved at RGIA f. 1280, op. 2, d. 979, ll. 49, 49ob, 50.

<sup>373</sup> Iv. Borisov, "Alekseevskii ravelin," 576-77.

writings would soon have on the fledgling Russian public sphere. It also demonstrates the role of personal political leanings in a particular moment, which – alongside the confusion wrought by delayed judicial and censorship reform, as well as a contested network of bureaucratic jurisdiction – allowed so many Peter and Paul Fortress texts to be legally published during the years 1862 to 1866.

This overall play of confusion and contingency is clearly visible in the publication pathway of the most famous text of this period, Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?*. Despite the efforts of generations of Soviet historians, the precise pathway that this manuscript took from the Alekseevskii Ravelin cell where it was composed to public circulation in the journal *Sovremennik* is still murky. From the documentary evidence that has survived, it is clear that Chernyshevsky began writing the novel in December 1862, when – as noted above – his efforts were first brought to the attention of the Third Section. He submitted the first selection on January 26, 1863, and continued to send them in installments up to its concluding pages on April 6.<sup>374</sup>

What exactly occurred when Chernyshevsky submitted texts to Fortress Commandant Sorokin? Selections were initially passed along to both the Third Section and the commission responsible for his prosecution. Apparently, however, both of these offices only reviewed his texts for material referring directly to his case. After discerning that such elements were not present, the writings of Chernyshevsky were forwarded to the St. Petersburg Censorship Committee for standard observation before being passed on to Pypin and *Sovremennik*'s editorial board.

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<sup>374</sup> See S.A. Reiser, “Nekotorye problemy izucheniia romana ‘Chto delat’?,” in N.G. Chernyshevsky, *Chto Delat’?* (Leningrad: Izd. ‘Nauka’ Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1975), 786-87; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104, ll. 226, 228, 229.

While the existing archives of the St. Petersburg Censorship Committee contain no materials pertaining to this novel, we know that it was reviewed by the censor B.N. Beketov.<sup>375</sup> Later in life, Beketov would recall that upon receiving the manuscripts for *What is to be Done?* – covered with the imposing seals of the tsarist secret police and the high commission – he “looked at [the texts] superficially and blindly signed, without cutting a word.”<sup>376</sup> This lack of clarity regarding interdepartmental responsibility allowed the novel to be sent to Pypin at the editorial office of *Sovremennik*. Finally, the first drafts of *What is to be Done?* had to undertake one last voyage before reaching circulation. Famously, these papers were nearly lost by N.A. Nekrasov prior to publication. In the first days of February, 1863, he accidentally forgot the only copy of the manuscript in a carriage in St. Petersburg. It was only regained after Nekrasov printed a notice in a local newsheet promising a fifty-ruble reward for its safe return.<sup>377</sup> Thus, while the distance between the Peter and Paul Fortress and the editorial offices of *Sovremennik* on Liteinyi Prospekt was less than three kilometers, the writer N.S. Leskov was not mischaracterizing when he remarked at the time that “Mr. Chernyshevsky, from his great remove, has sent us a novel.”<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> See Reiser, “Nekotorye problemy”, 783-84. These imperial censor archives are located at RGIA f. 777. While the complete lack of material might seem strange, we can note that this committee only saved the manuscripts of those texts that they forbid, and that as a whole this particular collection is in uncharacteristic disarray.

<sup>376</sup> E.G. Bushkanets, “Pervaia bibliografiia sochinenii Chernyshevskogo,” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 67 (1959): 216-17. The same reason for this “strange misunderstanding” leading to the approval of *What is to be Done?* is given in the memoirs of a colleague of Beketov in the censor office: see O.A. Przhetslavskii, “Vospominaniia O.A. Przhetslavskogo. Tsensura. 1830-1865.,” *Russkaia starina* 24 (1875): 154.

<sup>377</sup> This episode is described in detail in Avdot’ia Panaeva, *Vospominaniia. 1824-1870* (Leningrad: ‘Akademia’, 1928), 446-51.

<sup>378</sup> N.S. Leskov, “Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevskii v ego romane ‘Chto delat’?,” in *Sobranie Sochinenii* (Moscow: Gos. Izd. Khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958) 10:20.

We thus have a sense of the peculiar circumstances that allowed political prisoners to write and publish texts from the Peter and Paul Fortress in the years from 1862 to 1866. In Chernyshevsky's case, the sensation provoked by *What is to be Done?* – discussed later in the present chapter – saw the curtailment of his carceral belletrism.<sup>379</sup> However, this did not prevent him from taking translation commissions, nor from pursuing a host of private literary exercises.<sup>380</sup> Furthermore, it did not prevent other Peter and Paul Fortress prisoners from continuing to take advantage of this uncertain administrative environment to receive books, write texts, and submit pieces for publication in the capital's journals. N.V. Shelgunov was imprisoned in cell no. 1 of the Alekseevskii Ravelin on April 15, 1863, and after less than a month he was granted permission to obtain books and journal issues as well as continue his literary studies.<sup>381</sup> He and Pisarev were continuous contributors to the journal *Russkoe slovo* up until the spring of 1866. If anything, the carceral regime of the Peter and Paul Fortress became only more lenient over time: by 1864 and 1865, these political

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<sup>379</sup> After the publication of the first third of *What is to Be Done?*, the censor O.A. Przhetslavskii wrote an internal review where he warned that this “apologia for nihilism” could very well “have a not-unharmful influence on the reading masses, especially on the young generation of inexperienced thinkers.” However, he believed it would be more dangerous to cut off publication of such a popular novel *in medias*, and favored releasing it to the end. See V. Evgen'ev-Maksimov and G. Tizengauzen, *Poslednie gody 'Sovremennika'. 1863-1866* (Leningrad: Gos. Izd. 'Khudozhestvennaia literature,' 1939), 57-58.

<sup>380</sup> Documents relating to his continued literary endeavors can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104 and 108; and GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1862), d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 1 and 2. Most interesting is a letter from one of the capital's publishers asking for Chernyshevsky's services, praising him as the most diligent translator in St. Petersburg (despite his incarceration!). Also of note are references to another unfinished novelistic project of Chernyshevsky's, titled *Povesti v povesti*, regarding which a censor remarked: “from Mr. Chernyshevsky's manuscript it is clearly visible that he has, as they say, lost all reason [*um za razum zashel*].” See GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1862), d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 1, ll. 175-176; 195-196ob. For an overview, documents detailing the materials found in his prison cell upon his removal are reproduced and translated in Appendix III of the present dissertation.

<sup>381</sup> See the correspondence between Commandant Sorokin and the Third Section held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104, ll. 264-264ob; and GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1862), d. 230, ch. 28, ll. 100, 103.

prisoners were able to receive the latest copies of both *Russkoe slovo* and *Sovremennik* from friends and relatives, as well as copies of the most controversial literary works of the day, including F.M. Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead*.<sup>382</sup> In the first months of 1866, the chief editor of *Russkoe slovo* G.E. Blagosvetlov was personally visiting D.I. Pisarev in the Peter and Paul Fortress to bring him reading material and discuss his contributions to the empire's most critical journal.<sup>383</sup> It was only D.V. Karakozov's attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander II on April 4, 1866 that put a definite end to the legal publication of Fortress prison texts: *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe slovo* were finally shuttered, and the latter's editor was himself imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> When Shelgunov and Serno-Solov'evich left the Peter and Paul Fortress (on November 24, 1864 and June 5, 1865, respectively) they donated the books they had received from friends and family to the Alekseevskii Ravelin library. These included Belinskii's literary criticism and Karl Christoph Vogt's scientific materialism, as well as thirteen issues of *Russkoe slovo* from 1863-1864 (containing articles written by Shelgunov and Pisarev within the Fortress), as well as the third number of *Sovremennik* from 1863 (containing the first part of Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?*). Astoundingly, these were all admitted to the Ravelin library, making the fruits of this period's prison literature available to future political arrestees in these same cells— they are still present in a surviving library catalogue from the following decade. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 8, d. 752, ll. 28, 29, 54-54ob, 55; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 179, ll. 33-36. Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead* was first serialized in the journals *Russian World* [*Russkii mir*] and *Time* [*Vremia*] between 1860 and 1862, before being published in its entirety in 1862 in two volumes. It was this last version that G.E. Blagosvetlov gave to Pisarev in the Fortress (with the approval of Governor-General Prince Suvorov) on January 27, 1866. Pisarev proceeded to write a review of Dostoevsky's work – titled “The Dead and the Dying [*Pogibshie i pogibaiushchie*]” – which was published in the literary collection *Luch* [*The Ray*] in 1866. Notably, this same volume – edited by Blagosvetlov and filled with works by frequent contributors to *Russkoe slovo* – also contained an essay by Shelgunov titled “The Cellular Prison [*Keleinaia tiur'ma*].” In this piece, the recently-freed Shelgunov discusses the psychological and physiological degradation brought about by solitary confinement (ostensibly concerned with the London Millbank prison). See *Luch. Ucheno-literaturnyi sbornik*. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Riumina i comp., 1866), I:1-54, II:32-96; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 265, ll. 107, 108-108ob, 109, 111-111ob, 114.

<sup>383</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 265, ll. 104, 113.

<sup>384</sup> On the closure of these two journals, see RGIA f. 777, Op. 2 [1865], d. 65, l. 29; and RGIA f. 777, op. 2 [1865], d. 76, l. 20. Thus, *Russkoe slovo* editor G.E. Blagosvetlov went from visiting D.I. Pisarev in the Fortress to being imprisoned there himself, in the Ekaterininskaia curtain wall, from April 13 to June 2 1866. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 296, ll. 20, 290. More

Between 1862 and 1866, political prisoners within the Fortress submitted nearly one hundred individual essays, poems, stories, and reviews for publication. I have created a chronological digest of these texts, which is included in the present dissertation as Appendix II. Indeed, during these years the archives of the Peter and Paul Fortress resemble far more those of an editorial office than a secret political prison. In this remarkable period, the most notorious cells of autocratic discipline were transformed into the capital's most significant literary space. And this significance lay not merely in formal terms – the Word ascending from carceral depths – but truly in the content of these texts as well.

### **III. Russian Prison Texts, 1862-1866: Form and Content**

The imprisonment of Chernshevsky, Pisarev, Serno-Solov'evich and Shelgunov did not mark a break or rupture with their previous literary labors. As we have seen, within the Peter and Paul Fortress they continued the same translation projects, pursued the same genres, and published in the same journals with the same editors as they had before their incarcerations.

As for form, so too for content. The imprisoned publicists of this period followed the same lines of inquiry and chased the same burning questions that had

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on the life of this curious figure can be found in N.V. Shelgunov, "Grigorii Evlampievich Blagosvetlov. (Biograficheskii ocherk)," in *Sochineniia G.E. Blagosvetlova* (St. Petersburg: tipografiia E.A. Blagosvetlovoi, 1882), i-xxviii. The arrest of Blagosvetlov and the shuttering of *Russkoe slovo* is also discussed in a curious, anonymous letter to L.P. Shelgunova – living at that time in Switzerland to avoid arrest – that was seized by the tsarist secret police and which can be found today in the Third Section archives at GARF f. 109, op. 1, d. 271, l. 3ob. For further information on the seismic changes that Karakosov's shot brought to modern Russia, see Claudia Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

given them such popularity with the young generation (and such enmity from the state) before their arrests.

We remarked earlier in the present chapter that the politico-philosophical projects of these ‘people of the 1860s’ [*shestdesiatniki*] were nourished by a mixture of early-European socialist critique, utilitarian moral theory, and materialist positions in the sciences. We could say that this entailed an epistemological (and practical-literary) landscape rimmed by two horizons.

The first of these were ‘universal’ inquiries. Each of these journalists trusted that the spread of scientific knowledge would lead to the progressive development of individuals and society (as well as undermine ungrounded belief systems) – a faith whose intellectual lineage can be traced back to the French Encyclopedists.<sup>385</sup> As such, from the late 1850s onwards the pages of St. Petersburg’s left-wing journals commonly held book reviews and popular exposés of recent developments in the human and natural sciences. Between 1862 and 1866 these articles continued to appear: many issuing from within the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

It is in this same ‘universal’ sphere that we can also locate the translations of historical monographs that Chernyshevsky, Shelgunov, and Serno-Solov’evich pursued at various points during their incarcerations. These included several volumes of F.C. Schlosser’s *Weltgeschichte in zusammenhängender Erzählung* as well as Lord

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<sup>385</sup> As, indeed, Pisarev explicitly acknowledged in his Peter and Paul Fortress essay “Popularizers of Negative Doctrines [*Populiarizatory otritsatel’nykh doktrin*],” published in the collection *Luch* in 1866. Here (in continuation of an earlier prison article by Pisarev, “Times of Metaphysical Argumentation”), Diderot as a philosophical skeptic and “extreme materialist” is explicitly held up against Rousseau’s flabby sentimentalism and implicitly marked as the key progenitor for the “negative doctrine” of Pisarev’s own nihilist social criticism. See D.I. Pisarev, “Populiarizatory otritsatel’nykh doktrin,” *PSS*, 7:380-87; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 265, l. 116.

Macaulay's *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second* with its Whig historiography.<sup>386</sup> Socio-anthropological studies (Pisarev's "Notes from the History of Labor" and Chernyshevsky's translation of Georg Ludwig Kriegk's *Die Völkerstämme und ihre Zweige nach den neusten Ergebnissen der Ethnographie*) and disciplinary overviews (Serno-Solov'evich's "Does the Current State of Knowledge Require a New Science?" and Pisarev's "Our University Science") belonged to the same mode. So too did Pisarev's materialist works on biology and anatomy: his "On Progress in the Animal and Vegetable Worlds" was the first major Russian review of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, and was written in the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>387</sup>

The opposite horizon of this period's literary activity was devoted to expressions of the 'particular': that is, works subjective in scale. This tendency too was continued within the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress: Serno-Solov'evich sent his brother a series of emotive, Romantic poems; Chernyshevsky dived into the life of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and translated a portion of his *Confessions*; and each of these

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<sup>386</sup> One could argue that the importance of historical scholarship for this generation of the Russian intelligentsia was twofold. On the one hand, it allowed contemporaries to place the present socio-political moment within a synoptic vision of human civilization transforming (and progressing) over time (this lay at the root of the above-mentioned translation projects). On the other hand, more particularized histories gave readers the necessary context to pursue critical analyses of distinct social moments, including that of the present (this was the case for translations of Karl Friedrich Neumann's *History of the United States of America* [*Geschichte der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*], which both Shelgunov and Chernyshevsky worked on in the winter of 1863/64 as the American Civil War unfolded). See RGIA, f. 1280, op. 5, d. 108, ll. 126, 127, 180, 199 200, 201.

<sup>387</sup> D.I. Pisarev, "Progress v mire zhivotnykh i rastenii," *PSS*, 11:7-175; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 272, ll. 126, 147b. On Pisarev's major role in the reception of Darwin in Russia, see Alexander Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 8-31.

prisoners carried out highly-personal correspondences with friends and family members (Pisarev even attempted to court a young women through prison epistles).<sup>388</sup>

If we thus approach the carceral writings of this period through the concept of scale, we can clearly see an intellectual terrain bounded by ‘universal’ scientific texts on one edge and ‘particular’ subjective pieces on the other. It is where these two tendencies met, however – the point of their mediation – that is of most interest to us, as it was of most interest to the writers of this time.

In the intellectual landscape of the Russian 1860s, abstract scholarly labor and emotional self-exploration were not to be pursued in separation from one another.<sup>389</sup> Rather, they were to be brought together by and within *a new vision of the radical subject*. This was the developing individual embedded in a developing history: the fruits of the turn to *Bildung*, which had made its first appearance in the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1851. And this question of revolutionary selfhood – a project of becoming, at once political, aesthetic, philosophical, and ethical – continued to be explored

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<sup>388</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 109, l. 144; RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 108, l. 301; and Peter C. Pozefsky, *The Nihilist Imagination: Dmitrii Pisarev and the Cultural Origins of Russian Radicalism (1860-1868)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 95-100.

<sup>389</sup> Indeed, even the ‘edge cases’ we have identified above do not allow themselves to be kept in strict quarantine. Serno-Solov’evich’s poem “The Confession [*Izповед’*]” (alongside which, for his jailors, he carefully noted “Do not take this as a picture of my condition. It is just a poem”) contains not only a picture of the great despair and “exhausted organism” of a political prisoner. The poem’s narrator also reaffirms his commitment to a sick nation and suffering people, refusing to disavow the political “thorny path” that has led him to prison and death. Likewise, the scientific pursuits of this generation were oriented just as much towards the self as they were towards institutional scholarship. Nihilist physiology and biology were performative rituals of one’s commitment to cutting through surface appearance to arrive at truth. Let us recall that the famous frog dissections of Bazarov (whose character Pisarev fascinatingly finds echoed in Darwin’s personality) were done with no conceivable practical or professional purpose. For Serno-Solov’evich’s poetry, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 109, l. 144; and N. Bel’chikov, “I. Neizdannye stikhotvoreniia N.A. Serno-Solov’evicha,” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 25/26 (1936): 419-33. For Pisarev’s description of Darwin as a radical subject comparable to Bazarov, see Pisarev, “Progress v mire zhivotnykh i rastenii,” *PSS*, 6:78-9.

within the Peter and Paul Fortress through the same textual genre that had been its proper stage before the prison: the novel.

In the pre-imprisonment period, a particular literary dynamic had arisen whereby novelistic depictions of the young generation (notably Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*) and critical reviews dissecting these characters' significance had fueled burning debates on the nature of the revolutionary self. This project would continue to be pursued in the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress between Pisarev and Chernyshevsky, with the famous publication of the latter's novel, *What is to be Done?*

#### **IV. Russian Prison Texts, 1862-1866: *What is to be Done?* and the “Thinking Proletariat”**

As examined above, *What is to be Done?* was written between December 1862 and April 1863 in the Alekseevskii ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress, and published in three installments in *Sovremennik* between March and May 1863. Subtitled *From Tales of New People* [*Iz rasskazov o novykh liudiakh*], the work should be understood as a Left Hegelian *Bildungsroman* of the progressive young generation of the 1860s (the titular “new people”).<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> This characterization of *What is to be Done?* as a Hegelian text may seem surprising, given Chernyshevsky's career-long battle (begun with the 1855 publication of his university thesis, “On the Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality”) against the idealist (Hegelian) aesthetics of the Russian academy in favor of a new conception of art rooted in concrete existence. However, we should recall that the ‘realism’ Chernyshevsky championed is, in its pretense to immediacy, perhaps the most mediated of all aesthetic genres. As we shall see, Chernyshevsky's novel preserves (in a transformed state) structures of self, history, and time first elaborated within the German idealist metaphysics of the first half of the nineteenth century. In this way, we should see Chernyshevsky's rejection of Hegel for the ‘real’ to be itself a Hegelian move, comparable to the rejection effected by his contemporaries Herzen and Marx, as well as their co-predecessor, Feuerbach. For more on the relationship between aesthetic realism and philosophical mediation, see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The*

In brief, the plot traces the life and development of a young woman named Vera Pavlovna as she ascends to political consciousness. Through an anti-sentimental education, she learns to dispassionately parse the social, economic, and emotional fabric of her time in order to construct a life dedicated to the values of moral dignity and political freedom. The story follows Vera Pavlovna's personal journey from the dark cellar ["*syryi, temnyi podval*"] of her petit-bourgeois upbringing into the radical forefront of her generation, and traces a vision of human history that moves from millennia of domination into a bold future of crystal palaces and social equality. Essentially, the novel is a philosophical ethnography of the young generation, as well as a persuasive pedagogy for readers looking to craft their own critical selfhoods and gain initiation into the ranks of the 'new people.'

It must be said that *What is to be Done?* possesses little artistic merit. Both present-day readers and the author's contemporaries have remarked at length on the novel's clumsy style and repellent didacticism.<sup>391</sup> But this was beside the point.<sup>392</sup> The

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*Representation of Reality in Western Thought.* For a study of Chernyshevsky's realist aesthetics – as well as a brilliant example of the use of cultural semiotics in understanding this period, a project with which the current paper is aligned – see the landmark Irina Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism.*

<sup>391</sup> See *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>392</sup> Chernyshevsky himself would admit as much, in a note to the editors of *Sovremennik* appended to the last submitted section of his novel: "If I had talent, I would not have to resort to such [clumsy] effects in the style of Alexandre Dumas *père*, author of *Monte Cristo*." Indeed, Chernyshevsky's self-consciousness of his rather ungainly style is woven into the novel itself, which sees the narrator at times sarcastically harangue an implied pompous ('perspicacious') reader for their artificial literary expectations, making his own artlessness a virtue. I would argue that this can be taken as one of the formal mechanisms whereby Left Hegelian *Bildungsromane* subverted the political function of irony in the genre's subject-reader relationship. The above quotation has been included here not only for reiterating this point, but also for its intriguing reference to Dumas – Chernyshevsky was surely familiar with the exploits of the Count of Monte Cristo, and could hardly have not reflected upon his personal position within tsarist Russia's own Château d'If. This interesting note – in which Chernyshevsky goes on to sketch out plans for future writings – is republished as "Dopolnenie," in N.G. Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo 'nauka')

tale was not meant to be beautiful (in the sense of its formal aesthetics): its intention was to affirm, describe, and spread word of a new social type. Chernyshevsky is explicit on this account, openly inviting his readers to follow his characters' example: "Come up out of your godforsaken underworld [*trushchoby*], my friends, come up. It's not so difficult. Come out into the light of day, where life is good; the path is easy and inviting. Try it: development, development [*razvitie, razvitie*]." <sup>393</sup>

The novel's clarion call was immediately recognized by contemporary readers. Reviewers quickly took up the question of its social content: its characters, behaviors, and intentions were politically dissected at a level not seen in Russian letters since the appearance of Bazarov's nihilism. Out of all of these reviews, most significant was a piece published in *Russkoe slovo*: titled "Thinking Proletariat [*Mysliashchii proletariat*]," it appeared in the October 1865 issue. <sup>394</sup> It was written, extraordinarily, by the imprisoned D.I. Pisarev.

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It is unclear exactly how Pisarev received a copy of *What is to be Done?* in his Peter and Paul Fortress prison cell. We can assume that it was purchased by either his

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Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1975), 744. The strange threads that tie Alexandre Dumas *père* to the history of the Peter and Paul Fortress are explored in greater depth elsewhere in Chapter Seven of this dissertation.

<sup>393</sup> Note that Chernyshevsky's consistent language of 'development [*razvitie*]' further demonstrates this novel's place within the Russian intelligentsia's genre of *Bildungs* self-narration. N.G. Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?*, 233 [English translation: Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What is to Be Done?*, trans. Michael R. Katz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 313].

<sup>394</sup> Written in the winter of 1864-65, this article's title was changed for its first publication in *Russkoe slovo* to the evocative "A New Type [*Novyi tip*]." Also included in this journal number was an essay by Pisarev on Auguste Comte's positivism as well as pieces by Shelgunov on alcoholism as a social problem in modern Russia and the history of China. See Pisarev, "Novyi tip," *PSS* 8: 205-47; and RGIA, f. 1280, op. 1, d. 272, l. 307. An English-language translation can be found at Dmitry Pisarev, "Thinking Proletariat," in *Selected Philosophical, Social and Political Essays* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), 624-75.

mother or *Russkoe slovo* editor G.E. Blagosvetlov and delivered to him through the Commandant.<sup>395</sup> No matter the pathway, he read Chernyshevsky's radical novel with utmost care: Pisarev's critical exegesis would become a touchstone for the novel's reception.<sup>396</sup>

As a literary critic, Pisarev had made a name for himself for his analysis of Turgenev's Bazarov as a new 'nihilist' individual. In "Thinking Proletariat" he turned the same lens onto *What is to be Done?*, and similarly proclaimed it the first literary expression of a rising social type. For Pisarev, the brilliance of Chernyshevsky's novel lay in the normalcy of his characterizations: the protagonist and her comrades showed the slow, internal and external progress of societal change, and demonstrated that "this is what common people can be like and this is what they ought to be like if they wish to find abundant happiness and enjoyment in life."<sup>397</sup> Pisarev announced that finally, with *What is to be Done?*, modern Russia had a vision of steady personal and historical development. For him, it was beyond doubt that a generation of young men and women would encounter Chernyshevsky's *Bildungroman* and begin to craft their own lives in its mold: "the future will show whether the new type of man really exists

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<sup>395</sup> Despite being officially forbidden, the latest copies of both *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe slovo* circulated within the Peter and Paul Fortress during this period. In book inventories made after prisoner releases, copies of the former journal were noted in the possession of Serno-Solov'evich (including the first issue containing *What is to be Done?*), and copies of the latter journal for 1863 and 1864 were found in the belongings of Shelgunov. Remarkably, all of these numbers were then donated to the Alekseevskii ravelin library – meaning that at least a partial copy of *What is to be Done?* as well as Pisarev and Shelgunov's prison writings were maintained within the Peter and Paul Fortress for future arrestee use. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 8, d. 752, ll. 28, 29, 54-54ob, 55; as well as n. 382 in the present chapter.

<sup>396</sup> Note that "Thinking Proletariat" is not the first evidence we have of Pisarev's familiarity with *What is to be Done?* – the novel is briefly mentioned in an earlier essay, "Realists," published over three numbers of *Russkoe slovo* in the autumn of 1864. See Pisarev, "Realisty," *PSS*, 6:222-353 (the character Rakhmetov is mentioned on page 226); and RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 272, ll. 211, 218.

<sup>397</sup> Pisarev, "Novyi tip," *PSS*, 8:240.

or whether it has only been thought out by villainous nihilists to spite respectable people.”<sup>398</sup> Thus, in public conversation between two cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress, Chernyshevsky and Pisarev plotted a new socio-literary typology for future generations of leftists.

*Russkoe slovo* and *Sovremennik* had already been two of the most-read journals in imperial Russia at the start of the decade, and with this publication event their popularity soared. In his memoirs, the scientist Ivan Pavlov (of later canine fame) recalls waiting as a youth outside his secondary school library for hours in order to read Pisarev’s prison articles in *Russkoe slovo*.<sup>399</sup> *What is to be Done?* was read with even more fervent passion – while the novel was quickly banned and its original *Sovremennik* issues became treasured as relics, five editions were printed abroad between 1867 and 1898 to be smuggled into Russia.<sup>400</sup> Further texts were prepared by dedicated disciples, who would copy out the entire novel by hand.<sup>401</sup>

Just as Chernyshevsky had intended and Pisarev explained, the popularity of *What is to be Done?* lay in its role as a guide for life. As this dissertation has argued from several different perspectives, the entire Russian revolutionary tradition was, at its heart, a pedagogical project. From scientific essays to personal writings, generations of leftists strove to articulate visions of the self and world and communicate these ideas to their contemporaries as models for their behavior. From 1862 to 1866, the seat of a radical pedagogy of dissident subjectivity was the Peter and Paul Fortress and its political prisons.

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Quoted in Pozfsky, *The Nihilist Imagination*, 199.

<sup>400</sup> See Reiser, “Nekotorye problemy,” 788.

<sup>401</sup> Described in Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism*, 28.

Recall the effect that Pisarev's essays had on the young Fortress scribe who first read them; it does not surprise us that, a decade later, Shelgunov would characterize the essays of Pisarev as "a code of behavior, a catechism for believers, a kind of Koran in which every realist could find instructions for any given circumstance."<sup>402</sup> Russian populist S.L. Chudnovskii stated unequivocally that "D.I. Pisarev was an idol and a god for the gymnasium youth."<sup>403</sup>

And if this was true of Pisarev's critical essays, the effect of *What is to be Done?* was orders of magnitude higher. Petr Kropotkin remarked that "for the Russian youth of the time [Chernyshevsky's novel] was a revelation and it became a program."<sup>404</sup> The language of spiritual guidance reappears throughout memoirs of this period: "we made the novel into a kind of Koran in which we looked for and found not only a general guide to a correct life, but also exact instructions on how to act in specific situations."<sup>405</sup>

In distilling the politico-philosophical outlook of his generation and embodying it within a group of living characters, Chernyshevsky harnessed the power of the *Bildungsroman* to set in motion a powerful dialectic between art and life for the progressive youth of the day. The characters of *What is to be Done?* became cultural templates and models of behavior; the novel was an exercise in constructing a radical self, to be studied and imitated. With this prison novel, Chernyshevsky synthesized the

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<sup>402</sup> Quoted in Prozefsky, *The Nihilist Imagination*, 192. In this vein, we can note that when a book of Pisarev's collected pedagogical essays was published in 1951, every single article included in the volume had been written by the author from his Peter and Paul Fortress prison cell. See D.I. Pisarev, *Izbrannye pedagogicheskie sochineniia* (Moscow: Izd. Akademii pedagogicheskikh nauk RSFSR, 1951).

<sup>403</sup> S.L. Chudnovskii, *Iz davnykh let. Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, 1934), 8-9.

<sup>404</sup> Quoted in Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism*, 27.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

universal pursuits and subjective demands of Russian radicalism into a “guide to life” which reverberated across several generations of revolutionaries: it is enough to note that when a young V.I. Lenin was first sent into exile, he took with him “several photos of Chernyshevsky.”<sup>406</sup>

And it was not just supporters of Chernyshevsky’s critical *Lebenswelt* who recognized the importance of *What is to be Done?* A host of conservative rebuttals soon followed.<sup>407</sup> The most famous of these by far is F.M. Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*. In this claustrophobic novella, Dostoevsky – himself a former Peter and Paul Fortress prisoner (see Chapter Two) – dives into the consciousness of a protagonist of this ‘new type.’ Taking progressive dreams of rational egoism and crystal palaces to their extremes, the collapse of this ‘underground man’ into paranoia, resentment, and fantasy was meant to stand as a living rebuttal to the social doctrine of Chernyshevsky.

Besides *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky composed another, oft-overlooked critique of *What is to be Done?*. Immediately after *Notes*, in the first months of 1865, he published the short story “The Crocodile.” It tells the farcical tale of a Petersburg man swallowed alive by a crocodile in one of the capital’s arcades. Surviving the ordeal but unable to free himself, he takes up home in the creature’s stomach. Here, he turns to radical letters. The man soon becomes a famous leftist publicist, issuing nonsensical essays from the belly of the beast. The similarities with the current political situation – at this point Chernyshevsky had been exiled less than a year before, and both Pisarev and Shelgunov were still writing for *Russkoe slovo* from

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<sup>406</sup> N.K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, translated by Bernard Isaacs (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 40.

<sup>407</sup> See Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism*, 26-28.

the Peter and Paul Fortress – were not lost on contemporaries, and the ensuing outrage (combined with its financial toll) forced Dostoevsky to shutter the self-run journal *Epokha* [*Epoch*] where the story had appeared.<sup>408</sup>

The Fortress as crocodile; the belly of the tsarist beast – Dostoevsky’s story helps us reorient towards the current chapter’s specific intervention into the history of Russian political incarceration. For while the reception of *What is to be Done?* is a well-trod story, its terrain of the political prison is not. Scholarship on the radical subjects in the 1860s – whether intellectual, social, or political – have essentially despatialized the emergence of these ‘new people’.

However, as we have seen, the textual production from which this moment arose took the Peter and Paul Fortress as its primary workshop. From 1862 onward, the dialogue over the nature and aims of the ‘new people’ was a carceral dialogue. And the space of the prison was not merely an accidental setting – the realities of tsarist confinement imprinted themselves on this new vision of dissident selfhood in patterns both large and small.

## **V. A ‘New Type’ in the Peter and Paul Fortress**

While explicit references to prisons appear infrequently in the Peter and Paul Fortress writings of this period, its reality was omnipresent element in the production and consumption of these texts. One could search through works for coded references to

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<sup>408</sup> F.M. Dostoevskii, “Krokodil. Neobyknovennoe sobytie, ili Passazh v Passazhe,” *PSS*, 5:180-207. Also of interest is Katia Dianina, “Passage to Europe: Dostoevskii in the St. Petersburg Arcade,” *Slavic Review* 62 (2003): 237-57. Dostoevsky would eventually attempt to deny any political content to this story. In 1873, in an episode of his “Writer’s Diary,” he claims that “The Crocodile” was a pure Gogolian farce, and that all similarities to Chernyshevsky’s imprisonment were unintended. I find this claim unpersuasive. See Dostoevskii, “Nechto lichnoe,” *PSS*, 11:23-30.

carceral states.<sup>409</sup> However, of far more value to the historian is an examination of how prison conditions structured the character and reception of the ‘new people’ typology. This influence is most clearly visible in one of Chernyshevsky’s characters from *What is to be Done?* – not the protagonist Vera Pavlovna, but the curious figure of Rakhmetov, ‘the rigorist.’

The mysterious Rakhmetov enters the novel like a force of nature, only to disappear again just as quickly. A taciturn young man in the orbit of Vera’s circle of ‘new people,’ Chernyshevsky dedicates a small section titled “An Extraordinary Man [*Osobennyi chelovek*]” to a discussion of this character. We discover that Rakhmetov is the son of a wealthy gentry family who turned to radicalism as a young Petersburg student. Since his conversion, he has obsessively pursued a program of political action.

His primary project, however, is himself: Rakhmetov treats his own subjecthood as a revolutionary endeavor. He ruthlessly suppresses any action or desire

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<sup>409</sup> The reality of the author’s incarceration could not have been far from readers’ minds when, for example, Shelgunov published on British penitentiaries (see n. 382). The same is undoubtedly true of the allegorical spaces within *What is to be Done?*: Vera Pavlovna’s liberation from the “dark cellar” of Russian social reality is made all the more urgent by being narrated from Chernyshevsky’s own space of enclosure. Pisarev’s longest mediation on the history of imprisonment appears in his “Popularizers of Negative Doctrines,” where he asks the question: is the legal situation of critical thought in Western Europe better today than in the past? His answer is ambivalent. On the one hand, writers in the eighteenth century suffered far worse punishments – years of solitude in the Bastille (not to mention torture and death) is indeed a fate worse than a modern trial-by-jury. However, Pisarev stresses that earlier judicial regimes were far weaker, far more improvisatory – the systemic application of the law weighs far more heavily on contemporaries than it did on figures from the past, who could often avoid encountering the state altogether. In this discussion of Western Europe, the unspoken comparison is of course with a tsarist Russia in which progressive critics faced the worse aspects of both times: an active, modern state enforcing repressive, pre-modern punishments. Pisarev, “Popularizatory otrizatel’nykh doktrin,” *PSS*, 8:349-52. Of course, the present dissertation is far more interested in grasping the complex historical dialectics between text and context – as well as between literature and self-representation – rather than engaging in the largely fruitless search for Aesopian political messages in works from this period.

that do not serve the radical cause to which he has devoted his life. Enjoyment is forbidden for him, as the disciples of revolution must not be mistaken for selfish pleasure-seekers. His body must be trained: he worked as a barge hauler on the Volga river – the most *lumpen* of professions – building up his strength and his ties with the common people. This ‘rigorist’ must be prepared to face any test that his path might call for: famously, he lays for a night on a bed of nails. “A trial”, he tells his horrified friends, “It’s necessary. Improbable, of course, but in any case necessary. Now I know I can do it [*Vizhu, mogu.*].”<sup>410</sup>

Chernyshevsky had intended the figure of Rakhmetov to primarily serve as a contrast to the other characters of *What is to be Done?*: a truly ‘extraordinary’ individual whose presence would underline the ‘ordinariness’ of the other ‘new people’ and the feasibility of their goals.<sup>411</sup> However, the character clearly exceeded these intentions. In elaborating this strange new figure, Chernyshevsky brought a novel inflection into the quest of self-construction within radical Russian political cultures. With Rakhmetov, it was announced that truly titanic radical selfhood – subjects capable of facing a repressive political reality unflinchingly – would require personal asceticism to the point of mortification. Rakhmetov’s rigorism was widely read as a preparation for martyrdom.

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<sup>410</sup> N.G. Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?*, 212 [288].

<sup>411</sup> Indeed, this is explicitly stated in *What is to be Done?* as a narratorial aside: “If I hadn’t shown you the figure of Rakhmetov, the majority of readers would have misunderstood the main characters of my story. I’d bet that up until the last sections of this chapter most of the public considered Vera Pavlovna, Kirsanov, and Lopukhov to be heroes, people of a higher nature, perhaps even idealized figures, maybe even inconceivable in reality because of their very great nobility. No, my friends, my mean, base, pitiful friends, you’re quite mistaken: it’s not they who stand too high, but you who stand too low. Now you see that they’re simply standing at ground level; they appeared to be soaring above the clouds because you’re sitting in some godforsaken underworld.” N.G. Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?*, 233 [313].

Let us be clear: this is not an argument for a case of naive imitation: that progressive Russian youths after 1863 sought to simply copy Rakhmetov in their own selves (although there is at least one documented account of a young student constructing his own bed of nails in this period<sup>412</sup>). Rather, Rakhmetov immediately assumed a role in the charged discourse of self production and social types which had begun in the thick journals of the capital and continued from 1862 to 1866 in semi-licit prison writings issuing from the Peter and Paul Fortress. With this figure, the idea that political commitment also meant preparing oneself for physical suffering received its first explicit formulation in the Russian revolutionary tradition.

And not only by novelistic characters, but by novelists themselves:

Chernyshevsky's own imprisonment within the Peter and Paul Fortress was read as embodying the same affinity between personal suffering and political sanctification heralded by Rakhmetov. Thus, at the juncture of Chernyshevsky's lived example and novelistic labors arose a model of asceticism towards martyrdom, which was quickly taken up by contemporaries to read the experience of political incarceration and perform the role of the 'new person' in the tsarist cell.

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The rise of an affinity between radical selfhood and prison suffering through the matrix of Chernyshevsky and Rakhmetov finds ample evidence in the archives and memoir literature.

A startling example of this novel formulation appears in the words of another Peter and Paul Fortress Prisoner from this same period. I.A Andrushchenko was a

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<sup>412</sup> Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism*, 29-30.

young surveyor's assistant from a gentry family who fell into the radical currents of the time, was arrested for his involvement in a conspiratorial society, and imprisoned in the Alekseevskii ravelin while under investigation from August 2 to December 4, 1863. During his incarceration, he sent a letter of confession to the tsar, which is preserved in the archives of the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant. This confession – dated August 31, 1863 – is an extraordinary document, as Andrushchenko relates within how he first came to follow the revolutionary ideas of the 1860s, and speaks specifically about the image of the political prisoner amongst the circles of that time.<sup>413</sup>

In this deeply personal text, Andrushchenko describes his turn to revolt as stemming from social pressure. As was the “universal fashion [*vseobshchaia moda*]” of youth culture, his friends and acquaintances exposed him to “new ideas, carried from the West” which he accepted as political truths. Most persuasive to him, however, was the way in which his social circle talked of political prisoners:

...when the first arrests began to occur and I heard, from my acquaintances, sympathy for these arrested individuals, I myself felt concern for them, I began to consider them extraordinary people [*osobennymi liud'mi*], I myself inwardly wished to be arrested in order that my acquaintances might express a similar concern towards me, that I would be glorified like others were glorified.<sup>414</sup>

These words speak powerfully to image of the political prisoner circulating amongst the progressive youth of the time. Incarcerated radicals were not unfortunate victims,

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<sup>413</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 104, ll. 1-2; op. 1, d. 253a, ll. 69; 70-70ob; and A.A. Shilov and M.G. Karnaukhova, eds., *Deiateli revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii. Bio-bibliograficheskii slovar'* (Moscow: Izd. Vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'no poselentsev, 1928), 1.2:18-19. After being released, Andrushchenko would be re-arrested for a senate trial in the spring of 1864 – only to fall sick and die, in prison, at the age of 24.

<sup>414</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 253a, ll. 70-70ob.

but rather people of incredible stature – to be spoken of, sympathized with, glorified, and even emulated. It is especially important to note the language used by Andrushchenko here as well – in calling political prisoners “extraordinary people [*osobennye liudi*],” he is using the exact phrase with which Chernyshevsky titled his section on the radical ascetic Rakhmetov in *What is to be Done?*. It is very likely that this choice of wording is deliberate; Andrushchenko would have surely either read the relevant issues of *Sovremennik* or at least been exposed to discussions about the novel’s content in the months leading up to his arrest. A new inflection of martyred revolutionary subjectivity was crafted by the prison writers of this period in the Peter and Paul Fortress; Andrushchenko’s confession is remarkable evidence of this, written to the tsar just a few cells away from where this new culture of political imprisonment was being given textual production and lived performance by Chernyshevsky.

A similar will to glorify and emulate political prisoners as martyrs – tied once again to the figure of Chernyshevsky in the Peter and Paul Fortress – is at the heart of another curious text from this period.

On April 26, 1864 – during the last months of Chernyshevsky’s imprisonment – Tsar Alexander II received a most curious letter. “Most gracious ruling Emperor Sovereign Aleksandr Nikolaevich. Forgive my boldness, that I dare write to You and ask of You.” Thus begins its single sheet, in an awkward, naïve hand and smudged with what might either have been water or tears:

My whole request consists of the following: give justice to Nikolai L’vovich [*sic*] Chernyshevsky, held in the fortress... If it is necessary to send someone into exile, then it is better to exile me and leave untouched a person whose mind can be of great benefit to society. Sovereign! Be the father of Your subjects – bring happiness to one of them and then, if necessary, take her life.

But since I do not value life and losing it would be no great punishment for me, put me in a cage [*konurka*] where I would be able to barely move; starve me; deprive me of my only happiness, books; do with me anything that you want, only save, save Chernyshevsky!<sup>415</sup>

Fascinatingly, the emperor himself read this unprecedented letter. His marginal notes are preserved on the original text: “Give her plea no mind, but I would like to know what her relationship was with Chernyshevsky.” With this request, the letter made its way to the Third Section, in whose archives it is still preserved to this day.

The tsarist secret police soon discovered that the author of this bold petition was a certain Liubov’ Kovediaeva, a seventeen-year-old gymnasium student living with her father and two brothers in the Vasilevsky Island district of the capital. An agent report makes sure to note that she is “pretty, brunette, and tall; she spends much time reading at home.” More to the point of the emperor’s query:

Miss Kovediaeva does not have any sort of personal connection to Chernyshevsky, she does not even know his name, calling him Nikolai L’vovich in her letter while it is Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky. Miss Kovediaeva is now all of seventeen years, and Chernyshevsky has been imprisoned in the fortress for almost two years now, thus when he was free she was only fifteen years old. Surely she read his essays and, especially, the novel *What is to Be Done?* and, imbued with the convictions of those surrounding her, decided on this rash action.<sup>416</sup>

Thus, the letter is not from a personal friend of Chernyshevsky. Rather, a young reader of *What is to be Done?* was so affected by the content of this prison novel that she decided to write to the emperor of her own accord to plead for the fate of its author. Pivotaly, Kovediaeva’s letter attests to the dramatic power of Chernyshevsky’s imprisonment for the dissident youths of this period – to its emotional impact and

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<sup>415</sup> The letter is preserved in the Third Section’s Chernyshevsky files at GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1861), d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 1, ll. 204-204ob.

<sup>416</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1861), d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 1, ll. 205, 205ob, 206.

emulative force. The letter is a doubled fantasy of political martyrdom. Chernyshevsky is painted as a saintly ascetic, undergoing unjust punishment – and Kovediaeva indulges in an exalted, almost libidinally-charged dream of her own redeeming sacrifice which would mirror Chernyshevsky's own sufferings and in doing so bring his salvation. Thus did the concrete prison environment of this generation's social role models imbue the 'guides to life' that circulated from their cells with a compelling drive towards redemptive carceral suffering.

Kovediaeva's letter also speaks to the gendering of the dissident mythos of political imprisonment in this period. At this point in its history, the inmates of the Peter and Paul Fortress had been almost entirely men; women would only begin to be held in its cells at the end of the decade.<sup>417</sup> However, despite this gap – and notwithstanding the masculinist rhetoric surrounding Rakhmetov's rigorism – Chernyshevsky's 'new people' were both men and women, and the utopian vision he presents in *What is to be Done?* is of a future free from gendered domination. In this way, his typology of the radical self invited identification from every member of the young generation, and later imprisoned radicals – notably Vera Figner – found in Chernyshevsky's work the foundation for narrating their own heroic incarcerations.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> One of the first instances of the political imprisonment of women in modern Russian history appears to have been in 1869, when several individuals tied to the trial of the *Nechaevtsy* were incarcerated in the Ekaterininskaia curtain wall and Alekseevskii ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress. For information on these arrests, as well as a curious correspondence between the Fortress Commandant and the Third Section on how to conduct these prisoners' trips to the bathhouse, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 330, ll. 29, 31-31ob, 32, 34-34ob, etc.

<sup>418</sup> Of course, the story of gender in the Russian revolutionary tradition is more complicated than this. The mythos of the 'rigorous' political martyr clearly evidences a still-operative binary between willful, 'masculine' agency and emotive, 'feminine' passivity. Even as women radicals took up the example of heroic carceral suffering, they were to be valued to the extent to which they had stripped themselves of 'feminine' qualities. This is one of the binds that

A third example further speaks to the new links tying revolutionary selfhood to prison martyrdom. L.N. Nikiforov was a student associated with the radical movements of the end of the 1860s. His later memoir – titled “My Prisons [‘*Moi tiur’my*’]” gives us the most well-developed picture of the cult of martyrdom that grew out of Chernyshevsky’s life and writings, as well as the currency it held for this generation:

Strange is the existence of a man, even more so a Russian, and most strange of all that of a Russian intellectual of my generation [*ruskii intelligent moego pokoleniia*]... In our dreams we paint pictures not of triumphant victory, but only of sufferings, and these sufferings we consider trophies which must crown our struggle for the happiness of the people.

I vividly remember the mood, that feeling of joy, with which more than forty years ago [in 1869] I traveled to Petersburg knowing that a prison there awaited me. It was the feeling of a twenty-year-old youth, going to receive – if not a laurel wreath – then oak branches for the struggle to which he had given himself.<sup>419</sup>

Nikiforov further illustrates this valorization of political incarceration and revolutionary martyrdom – what he later calls “medals in the shape of prison and exile” – with an experience taken from his time in the Peter and Paul Fortress. During his incarceration, he remembers borrowing a book from the prison library only to find that someone had sketched a portrait of N.G. Chernyshevky in its margins with a crown upon his head. Alongside the drawing, another prisoner had heaped abuse upon

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haunts the Russian revolutionary tradition: individuals such as S.L. Perovskaia and V.I. Zasluch famously crafted themselves as ‘Lady Macbeths’, and in doing so willfully challenging gendered patterns of domination in imperial Russian society while simultaneously adopting and reproducing an imprisoning conceptual binary of ‘masculine’ action and ‘feminine’ sentiment. For a detailed exploration of the ambiguities and tragedies of gendering revolution, see Robin Morgan, *The Demon Lover: The Roots of Terrorism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989).

<sup>419</sup> L.N. Nikiforov, “*Moi tiur’my*,” *Golos minuvshogo* 10 (1914): 168. Nikiforov, a former student from Moscow University, was brought to the Peter and Paul Fortress and placed in a solitary cell in the Ekaterininskaia curtain wall on September 23, 1869: see RGIA f. 1280, op.1, d. 330, ll. 21, 22.

the artist, calling him a “fool” and worse words besides. This second prisoner did not object to the glorification of Chernyshevsky, but rather the terms of veneration. The trappings of secular power were not for this revolutionary martyr – the commentator ended his diatribe by solemnly writing: “it only was a crown of thorns that came to his stern brow.” Nikiforov goes on to explain the meaning of this strange exchange preserved in the margins of a Fortress volume. Anger arose because the paraphernalia of victory was seen by his generation as something illicit and unearned, while the suffering of a martyr “was our highest prize.”<sup>420</sup> Here, we can see how the agonies of the political prisoner became the ideal expression of revolutionary commitment, with Chernyshevsky’s writings and example bringing to the ‘new people’ a language of asceticism and resistance bound to the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

We could continue this catalogue for many more pages – but let us stop here. It is clear from a multitude of sources that an operative model of carceral sacrifice and struggle coalesced around the figure of Chernyshevsky in the 1860s. We can further note that this image did not halt at the borders of St. Petersburg, nor did it end at the edge of the decade. Throughout the Russian memoir literature of the years to come, we find this ‘new type’ constantly used to give meaning to experiences of political incarceration – from Shlissel’burg inmates and polish socialists, to Russian-American anarchist Alexander Berkman adopting the pseudonym ‘Rakhmetov’ in Pennsylvania’s Western Penitentiary in the 1890s.<sup>421</sup> Moreover, this potent image not only arose from and attached itself to the figure of Chernyshevsky, but also inflected

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<sup>420</sup> L.N. Nikiforov, “Moi tiur’mi,” 168-69.

<sup>421</sup> See Vera Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991) 208; Padraic Kenney, *Dance in Chains: Political Imprisonment in the Modern World*, 24; and Alexander Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970) 9-10.

the legacies of each member of this imprisoned cohort. As early as 1864, it appears that Blagosvetlov began illegally producing and selling hagiographic prints of Pisarev in the Peter and Paul Fortress – and future revolutionaries would also model their experiences of incarceration around this ‘nihilist’s’ prison writings and lived example.<sup>422</sup>

Before moving forward in our present history of prison writings and imprisoned actors, let us take account of one last occurrence that crystallizes the novel articulation of the revolutionary subject that arose between 1862 and 1866. For in an extraordinary turn of events, the tsarist prison was newly imagined as a stage of Russian radicalism not solely through *Bildungs* texts or images of their incarcerated authors at a silent remove. At the end of his prison sentence, Chernyshevsky was given the chance to publically perform this new social type and its carceral martyr’s mantle.

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<sup>422</sup> See the secret police discussion of these illegal images in GARF f. 109, op. 1a, d. 253. An excellent source for the long vitality of Pisarev’s carceral legacy is the autobiography of worker S.I. Kanatchikov – who, when imprisoned in the House of Preliminary Detention in 1900, happens upon a short biography of this ‘nihilist.’ Not only does Kanatchikov gain strength from reading of Pisarev’s four years in the Peter and Paul Fortress – this template also allows him to symbolically integrate his own experience into a longer heritage of dissident carceral struggle. See Reginald E. Zelnik, ed., *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 126.

## VI. Chernyshevsky and the Stage of Prison History

The morning of May 19, 1864 brought poor weather to the capital of the Russian Empire: gloomy, overcast skies punctuated by “light Petersburg rain.”<sup>423</sup> This was undoubtedly the reason why the execution started late.

The previous day, St. Petersburg’s newspapers had announced that N.G. Chernyshevsky – having been found guilty of “preparing and planning to disseminate an outrageous proclamation for secret printing, and taking measures for the overthrow of the existing Russian order” – was to have his sentence carried out at eight o’clock the following morning on Mytninskaia Square.<sup>424</sup>

The public began to gather in the early morning: by the scheduled time, between two and three thousand people filled the capital’s smallest square. It was only at 8:45 am that two carriages arrived from the Peter and Paul Fortress. Escorted by an armed guard, the state criminal was led up a small scaffold, at the center of which hung an iron chain from a black pillar.<sup>425</sup> This was Chernyshevsky’s first appearance in public after nearly two years of solitary confinement in the Alekseevskii Ravelin.

Let us be clear – the crowd had not come that morning to see a man be put to death. For his crimes, Chernyshevsky had been sentenced to seven years of hard labor in the mines of Siberia and eternal exile.<sup>426</sup> However, this punishment also carried

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<sup>423</sup> V.G. Korolenko, “Grazhdanskaia kazn’ Chernyshevskogo (Po rasskazu ochevidtza)”, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie T-va A.F. Marks, 1914), 1:387.

<sup>424</sup> *Birzhevye vedomosti* (St. Petersburg), no. 131, 18 May 1864. The dissemination of this announcement in St. Petersburg’s newspapers is also discussed in GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1861), d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 1, ll. 220-220ob.

<sup>425</sup> The most detailed description of Chernyshevsky’s scaffold is found in M.P. Sazhin, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izd. Vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl’no-poselentsev, 1925), 16.

<sup>426</sup> A copy of the *Ukaz* can be found in IRLI RAN OR f. 97, op. 1, no. 166, ll. 165-208ob. This invaluable source is the original file of the Chancellery of the St. Petersburg Military

with it a complete stripping of all ranks and status. According to the criminal code of the Russian empire, this was to be achieved through a public cashiering, or ‘civil execution’ (*‘grazhdanskaia kazn’*). This was the reason for the gathering on Mytninskaia square on May 19: to witness the performance of Chernyshevsky’s ‘political death’ [*‘politicheskaia’* or *‘grazhdanskaia smert’*]; the ritualized “dissolution of all his former ties with society and family.”<sup>427</sup>

But there was something not quite right about this Petersburg morning.

In reports later filed after the incidents of that day, undercover gendarmes and agents of the tsarist secret police noted the suspicious makeup of the crowd. Besides curious passers-by and respectable onlookers, among the congregation were “writers and journalists, a large amount of students from the Medico-Surgical academy,” noblemen in “Slavophile costumes,” as well as “many ladies with sheared hair – nihilists women (*nigilistki*) – all of whom were in black dresses and black hoods and tried to make their way as close as possible to the scaffold.”<sup>428</sup>

The masses was kept at a distance from the proceedings by a row of armed soldiers. Chernyshevsky’s sentence was read aloud by a tsarist official; sympathetic witnesses recalled with satisfaction how the prisoner surveyed the crowd with a dignified, dispassionate expression, reaching up once or twice to wipe the rain from his glasses.<sup>429</sup>

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General-Governor on N.G. Chernyshevsky, donated to the *Pushkinskii dom* by the critic’s son Mikhail Nikolaevich in 1920. See also the material held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 108, ll. 271, 271ob, 272.

<sup>427</sup> *Svod Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 15.2.541:101-102.

<sup>428</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1861), d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 2, ll. 242-244ob, 244-245ob.

<sup>429</sup> V.G. Korolenko, “Grazhdanskaia kazn’ Chernyshevskogo,” *PSS*, 1:386.

And then, something extraordinary occurred. A disturbance had been planned. From out of the crowd, a bouquet of flowers was thrown to the political prisoner. The young woman responsible was quickly arrested by a plainclothes police officer, as was a man who took the opportunity to try and rush the scaffold.<sup>430</sup>

The remainder of the ceremony was hurriedly completed – the political prisoner was placed in the pillory chain for a short while, and a sword was broken over his head – but the mood of the proceedings had utterly changed.<sup>431</sup> As Chernyshevsky was hastily escorted off the scaffold, many in the crowd removed their hats in deference. As his carriage alighted to take him once more to the Peter and Paul Fortress, three or four more bouquets were thrown, landing in and around the vehicle.<sup>432</sup> The form and significance of what was meant to be a solemn ceremony of tsarist discipline had been utterly disrupted.

We can read this disordered civic execution as the first public appearance of the active Russian prison martyr on the stage of history. The varied crowd that assembled that morning had not come to witness autocratic justice – rather, they had

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<sup>430</sup> The first throwing of a bouquet of flowers – small, yet “very fine (*ochen’ koroshen’kii*),” according to one tsarist secret police agent – is attested to in a number of official documents and later memoirs: see IRLI RAN OR f. 97, op. 1, no. 166, ll. 158-158ob; GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1861), d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 1, ll. 223-223ob, 242-245ob; and V.G. Korolenko, “Grazhdanskaia kazn’ Chernyshevskogo.” The woman responsible for this act was one Mariia Mikhaelis, cousin of the wife of N.V. Shelgunov. For these flowers, Mikhaelis was expelled from St. Petersburg and kept under police surveillance at her parent’s village (near the town of Shlissel’burg) for nearly a year. See M.N. Chernyshevskii, “K delu N.G. Chernyshevskogo,” *Byloe* 5 (1906): 137; IRLI RAN OR f. 97, op. 1, no. 166, ll. 159-159ob; and GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1861), d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 2, ll. 240-240ob.

<sup>431</sup> The third aspect of the civic execution ceremony – the ritual changing of the prisoner into the clothes of an exile – had to be foregone, as the officials responsible had apparently forgotten the necessary dress. See *Svod Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* XV.2:101; and GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1861), d. 230, ch. 26, pr. 2, ll. 242-244ob. The ritual was also lacking a necessary priest, as Chernyshevsky had refused to give confession in the Peter and Paul Fortress the week before his public sentencing. See RGIA, f. 1280, op. 5, d. 108, l. 275.

<sup>432</sup> See M.P. Sazhin, *Vospominaniia*, 17; as well as the above-cited accounts in IRLI RAN (*Pushkinskii dom*) OR and GARF.

come to witness (and celebrate) the suffering radical self both written and embodied by the politico-literary celebrity of the era. The youthful crowd, with its ‘nihilist’ fashions, gathered to view the martyrdom of the journalist who had, in prison, authored the ‘guide to life’ which they themselves followed. The bouquets and adoration thrown to Chernyshevsky were lines of empathy and affinity tossed across the gap between civil society and the Peter and Paul Fortress: tokens of veneration that materially embodied the radical contestation of tsarist sites of discipline.

Chernyshevsky, in his life and texts, had turned cell and scaffold into a stage for the performance of ascetic revolutionary subjecthood – and the young generation that gathered before him were both audience and understudies, ready to take up the script of revolutionary self-construction and the mantle of political martyrdom that saw the prison as not the end of the political, but one of its highest spaces.

## **VII. Conclusion: Agency and Martyrdom**

The choice to end this chapter with a discussion of Chernyshevsky’s ‘execution’ – even one only civic in nature – is not accidental. In both this formal structure and wider significance, it is part of the present dissertation’s wider goal to flip Foucault on his head.

*Discipline and Punish* famously begins with a thick descriptive account of the drawing and quartering of the French regicide Damiens in 1757. In depicting the brutal corporality of the early-modern state’s encounter with the body of the condemned, Foucault sets the stage for his argument that modern disciplinary

practices act upon, interpolate, and juridico-epistemologically construct modern selves in a fashion even more invasive than the physical punishment of earlier eras.<sup>433</sup>

One of the problems with this model – which has become *the* reigning theoretical optics in carceral studies – is that it evacuates all agency from the site of the individual. Historical actors are structurally overdetermined by state power, and are thus only the objects, never the subjects of history. This chapter – and the present dissertation as a whole – has sought to complicate this account of modern carceral regimes and its picture of modern selfhood.

Yes, Chernyshevsky and his cohort were subject to a highly-repressive disciplinary regime: their fields of action, spatial pathways, and very selves were cordoned off by the state within the Peter and Paul Fortress. However, this was not the last word on the modern self. From within the most notorious political prison of the Romanov autocracy, these individuals found the space to live and write their own counter-discourses of the political subject.

From 1862 to 1866, not only was the Peter and Paul Fortress remarkably porous. It also served as a powerful stage for the discursive investment and lived performance of dissident selfhood. The present chapter has assembled a history of both of these aspects: the rise of the modern Russian prison cell as both *writing desk* and *stage* of the revolution. This is not only a story with great concrete significance for our ongoing history of the Fortress – it also sheds new light on how prison spaces

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<sup>433</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

were first imbued with revolutionary patinas; were first invested with languages of asceticism, resistance, and martyrdom in modern radical political cultures.<sup>434</sup>

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Of course, the figure of the martyr was not new to radical thought – it did not appear *sui generis* in the cells of the 1860s. The arrested Decembrists of 1825 were widely viewed as the original political sacrifices of tsarist modernity. Additionally, the Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment of poet M.I. Mikhailov in 1861 had sparked a wave of hagiographic outpourings, notably from Herzen's foreign press.

However, there was something quite different about the Fortress imprisonments of Chernyshevsky, Pisarev, Shelgunov, and Serno-Solov'evich from 1862 to 1866. First of all, there was the question of quantity. M.I. Mikhailov had been a solitary, suffering figure; an individual martyr. Indeed, his tragic isolation was woven into his prison myth. The arrested journalists of the later part of the decade were, on the other hand, multiple. Of course, they were held in strictly isolated cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress. However, in life (as a cohort of prisoners) and in art (in their articulation of dissident selves) they proffered up a vision of the radical martyr as a collective *political type*, multiple and reproducible.

Second – and more importantly – there was a qualitative difference in the figure of the Chernyshevskian martyr. Mikhailov and the Decembrists had been, above all else, victims. Their imprisonments were written by later individuals; their

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<sup>434</sup> In this way, the current paper encounters one of the crucial ambiguities of the 'realist' political aesthetics of the 1860s. Not only did scientific materialism carry with it its own idealist metaphysics: a project of radical political disenchantment proved enormously successful at constructing its own myths.

mythologies portrayed them as noble souls crushed by a repressive tsarist regime.<sup>435</sup>

Their political significance arose after – and because of – the erasure of the self.

Chernyshevsky and his comrades were also victims – of unjust incarceration and squalid Fortress conditions – but their textual activity made them something more. By continuing their political struggle within a space of extreme repression, they challenged this space and sanctified themselves as willing, laboring individuals. Martyrdom was no longer a veil to be cast over the dead, but a crown of thorns to be worn with pride by the most advanced representatives of the ‘new people.’ By claiming radical agency within the Peter and Paul Fortress, Chernyshevsky and his contemporaries broke the space of political imprisonment outside of a matrix of victimhood.

Thus, between 1862 and 1866, a new typology of the Russian radical self was bound to the space of the political prison. Chernyshevsky and Pisarev, Shelgunov and Serno-Solov’evich: before their imprisonments, these leftist critics had already been steadily laboring to understand forms of critical subjecthood under Russian absolutism. With their arrests, the notion of what it meant to be a radical actor in tsarist Russia lay fully under the shadow of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

Ideas do not occur in a vacuum. Understanding Chernyshevsky and his cohort as *prison writers* pushes us towards a reintegration of intellectual and spatial history in the historiography: that is, an understanding of how sites of lived experience, textual

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<sup>435</sup> For more on the ‘invention’ of the Decembrists in precisely this period, see Chapter Three of the present dissertation (especially n. 243). Indeed, it was the carceral events of the 1860s that led Herzen to begin his canonization of these figures from afar: the years when he announced in *Kolokol* that “we, with the piety of medieval copyists of the apostolic works and the lives of the saints, are embarking on the printing of the ‘Notes of the Decembrists’.” See Herzen, “Zapiski Dekabristov,” *Kolokol*, Sept. 1, 1862 (143).

production, and conceptual investment were both formed by the actors of this period and dialectically shaped the terrain of their activity. Thus ‘spatializing’ the thinkers of the 1860s reveals a structural affinity between their discussions of ‘new people’ and the stage of the prison cell. As Chernyshevsky and others crafted a novel image of the radical, the Peter and Paul Fortress was the space for its intellectual articulation, textual dissemination, and lived performance.

Their vision of the incarcerated self proved to be remarkably persistent, working over the nineteenth and early-twentieth century to provide a genre of self-narration through which Russian radicals understood their political commitments in the face of autocratic repression. The tsarist prison was not merely a blank site for this new dialectic of revolutionary self-narration: the mechanisms of subject production put into place by Chernyshevsky and others also worked to powerfully contest spaces of tsarist confinement. As Russian political cultures further radicalized in the years after 1866, the discursive architectures and lived examples of these early prison writers provided fundamental in effecting a gradual transformation of the Peter and Paul Fortress: from a site of mute discipline into a space of revolutionary praxis and stage for the production of the radical self. The next two chapters take up these threads, and examine two crucial moments in the concrete and discursive subversion of the tsarist prison space in the years 1866 to 1884.



## 5. *Tuk, tuk, tuk!*: Knocking Language, the Porous Cell, and the Breaking of the Enchanted Interior

Kierkegaard no more discerned the element of semblance in all merely reflected and reflecting intrasubjective reality, than he sees through the semblance of the spatial in the image of the *intérieur*... It is not by accident that he readily compares inwardness with a fortress.

- Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*

The Fortress slept. The walls spoke.

- Aptekman, “Iz vospominanii zemlevol’tsa (Petropavlovskaiia krepost’)”

### I. Introduction

One of the overarching arguments of the present dissertation is that individual places possess peculiar discursive gravities. Space is not a dumb mutable vessel, a neutral container for the flow of history. Bricks and mortar catch hold of narratives as events flow around them, accumulating thick layers of meaning that in turn shape this flow. These residual representations can be entire stories – or pieces and fragments, lone characteristics, stray adjectives.

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From the long nineteenth century to the present day, one of the most common features accorded the modern prison space is that of *silence* – a negative trait, the absence of sound. This association is undoubtedly due both to the acoustic discipline of prison

regulations, as well as the political silencing and physical isolation of the incarcerated. Exurban sites of confinement are deliberately placed outside of the acoustic hum of social activity and everyday life; city prisons rise as breakers against the tide, rocks against which the noise of the city crashes but cannot penetrate.

The prisons of the Peter and Paul Fortress were no different. To be fair – in one sense, the great citadel of the tsars was in fact quite loud. As a politically sacred space of the Romanov dynasty, it spoke plenty – from the grand artillery salutes that punctuated high holy days, to the noonday cannonfire and cathedral bells that set the capital to the acoustic rhythms of the autocracy.<sup>436</sup>

However, for prisoners kept in solitude within its walls, the Fortress was designed to hold nothing but an unbearable silence. A host of regulations existed to preserve the empire's most notorious political offenders in absolute aural isolation. Almost all Peter and Paul Fortress prison memoirs remark upon this heavy fact. Upon entering the citadel, the first impression was of its “truly grave-like silence [*voistinu mogil'noi tishiny*]” – a space filled with “the silence of the dead.”<sup>437</sup> This was a site devised to dampen and remove transgressive voices: and those imprisoned seemed fated to an entombment where “no living sound comes to break the grim silence that

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<sup>436</sup> A mid-century inventory of the Fortress' canonry – with its dozens of 24- and 12-lb cannons – can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 2 [*dopolnitel'naia opis'*], d. 1, ll. 177-177ob. For information on the cathedral bells in this period, see D.I. Forinskii, *Sobor vo imia sviatykh pervoverkhovnykh apostolov Petra i Pavla v S.-Peterburgskoi kreposti* (St. Petersburg: V. Golovina, 1869), 4-13. Finally, for an excellent study of the historical soundscape of St. Petersburg, see V. Lapin, *Peterburg. Zapakhi i zvuki* (St. Petersburg: 'Evropeiskii Dom,' 2007).

<sup>437</sup> Chudnovskii, *Iz davnikh let. Vospominaniia*, 125-27; Vera Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 185.

hangs over this place of desolation” except cannon fire and the “lugubrious canticle” of the cathedral bells.<sup>438</sup>

Except – as we have seen – the life of the Peter and Paul Fortress was not molded solely through tsarist intention. Over the course of its modern existence, the primary political prison of the autocracy was constantly contested, coopted, and recoded by the radical cultures that it sought to contain. In this history, the realm of sound was no exception. In the second half of the nineteenth century, just as the experience of political confinement began to achieve widespread dissident legibility, a set of subversive prison practices were developed that broke the silence of the citadel from within.

The most significant item in this repertoire was revolutionary Russia’s ‘knocking language’: a sophisticated technique whereby prisoners learned to communicate between their cells. Through coded taps, radical actors found voice within the deathly citadel still. Solid granite barriers were transformed into porous pathways of political communication. This chapter tells the history of this practice – a crucial part of the larger story of how Russian radicalisms taught the prison to speak.

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In the previous chapter, we saw how the Peter and Paul Fortress fully emerged as a stage of Russian revolutionary history in the first half of the 1860s. We should note that the particularities of this period – the brief flourishing of the prison as a ‘writing desk of the revolution’ – came to an end in 1866. After Karakozov’s shot against the tsar, never again would prisoners enjoy the improvised, mass freedom of the St.

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<sup>438</sup> Stepniak [S.M. Kravchinskii], *Russia Under the Tsars*, translated by William Westall (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1885), 140; P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 2:152.

Petersburg University students of 1861, nor the opportunity to consistently write and publish texts from these Fortress walls.

However, this does not mean that the citadel suddenly hardened into a site of monolithic state discipline. The experience of political incarceration had been solidly emplaced within revolutionary Russia's cultural imaginary and metanarratives of personal-historical development. From 1866 to 1884, even as the prison regime harshened – and even as hundreds of revolutionaries (the *nechaevtsy*, the *chaikovtsy*, the fifty, the 193, the ‘first-of-Marchers’) found themselves immured in these cells – the Peter and Paul Fortress would never again be mute. It had attained the full maturity of its political legibility, and each further incarceration was understood within (and itself reproduced) a growing radical carceral culture. This burgeoning political moment – which I will describe elsewhere as the ‘High Age of Russian Prison Mythology’ – is the subject of the next few chapters.

The present chapter explores this juncture through Russia's prison ‘knocking language’ – a technique that arose in these years that allowed revolutionaries to break the silence of the Fortress and communicate between its walls. As far as I have been able to tell, the history of this practice has not yet been written. Thus, by considering its origins, circulation, and manifestations, this chapter hopes to fill a wider gap in our knowledge of Russian revolutionary cultures.

Exploring this curious method of prison subversion also compliments the present dissertation's larger critique of top-down carceral studies. Far from immobilized, atomized, silenced individuals, Russian revolutionaries found in ‘knocking language’ a means of acoustic agency within the disciplinary regimes of the

tsarist state. In this way, a fuller picture of how this practice arose and functioned compliments the recent ‘turn to agency’ in carceral studies, as well as its critique of Foucauldian structuralism.<sup>439</sup>

However – we must be careful in how we approach such a history. In attempting to recover moments of political agency within the disciplinary spaces of modernity, we cannot be satisfied with abstract catalogues of dissident prison practices. As this dissertation has consistently asserted, these activities must be constantly grounded in the underlying discursive and narrative shifts that allowed them to grow and flourish. Our new carceral histories must engage not just with concrete subversions, but also with the larger conceptual soil that made them possible.

Thus, as we turn now to a history of knocking language in the Peter and Paul Fortress – how Russian revolutionaries learned to speak amidst the disciplinary silence of the dead – we will pay particular attention to the ways in which radical subjects narrated and understood this practice of acoustic agency: the ways in which a dialectic of silence and voice, of interiority and the political, functioned within the great cooption of the Peter and Paul Fortress during the ‘High Age of Russian Prison Mythology.’

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<sup>439</sup> For an overview of this turn, see the Introduction. In regards to the topic of the present chapter, we must also mention the excellent Judith A. Scheffler, ed., *Wall Tappings: An Anthology of Writings by Women Prisoners* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986). Interestingly enough, this volume – which uses the concept of ‘wall tapping’ as a synecdoche for its goal of recovering voices and agencies that are doubly-marginalized (e.g. as prison literatures and women’s literatures) – contains two texts that contain knocking language: excerpts from the memoirs of Vera Figner and Evgeniia Ginzburg, both of which shall be discussed in the present chapter.

## II. Isolation and Communication in the Peter and Paul Fortress

To understand the ways in which incarcerated radicals developed techniques to subvert Peter and Paul Fortress isolation in these years, we must first grasp the concrete situation of this prison regime itself from 1866 to 1884.

In these years, political offenders who entered the grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress would be placed in various locations in the citadel, depending on the severity of the accusations against them. The Ekaterininskaia and Nevskaia Curtain Walls saw constant use, as did the Trubetskoi Bastion. Records from the spring of 1866 show that a set of converted casemates at each of these sites – nineteen, fifteen, and nine, respectively – were used as prison cells.<sup>440</sup> This was still the primary infrastructure by the end of the decade, when 104 individuals passed through the Fortress during the ‘Nechaev affair’: an event demonstrating the need for a more robust prison architecture.<sup>441</sup>

On June 19, 1870, the first stone was laid for a new structure intended to solidify the Fortress’ role as a modern carceral space [Figures 10, 11, and 12].<sup>442</sup> The Trubetskoi Bastion prison – an independent building constructed flush against the eponymous corner of the citadel – was a great stone pentagon with a large inner courtyard (housing both a prisoner bathhouse and a yard).<sup>443</sup> Its two floors held seventy-two solitary cells, each starkly furnished with a pine table, a stool, and a metal bedframe. Windows – barred, with thin glass – looked out on the bastion walls and provided poor light (especially in the long St. Petersburg winters). The massive doors

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<sup>440</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 296, l. 42.

<sup>441</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op.1, d. 348, ll. 1-6ob. For more on the *Nechaevtsy*, see Chapter Six.

<sup>442</sup> *Letopis’ Petropavlovskoi kreposti*, 1:205.

<sup>443</sup> Information on the stone bathhouse can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 294, ll. 13-13ob.

of each room featured a slit for passing on prisoner meals, as well as a small peephole (nicknamed the ‘Judas’ by prisoners) whereby guards would periodically look in on inmates. Besides the rows of cells, the building also contained several storage spaces, the head warden’s apartment, a room for visitations, and the prison kitchen. The guarded entranceway to the prison was enclosed by an elaborate iron gate.<sup>444</sup>

The construction of a modern carceral facility in the Peter and Paul Fortress brought an end to earlier, more improvisatory prison practices. No longer would converted casemates serve as the primary cells of the Fortress. From its completion in 1871 to the fall of the Romanov regime, the Trubetskoi Bastion prison would hold nearly all of the political offenders brought to these citadel grounds.<sup>445</sup> After the revolution, Soviet prison historian M.N. Gernet – working with the Museum of the Revolution in Leningrad – tabulated that 2,084 prisoners had passed through its walls between 1873 and 1917.<sup>446</sup>

We should note that the vast majority of these prisoners were held for relatively short periods of time – nearly all of them for less than a year and a half, and more than half of them for periods of less than six months. This speaks to the new

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<sup>444</sup> This brief description of the Trubetskoi bastion prison and its construction is derived from an anonymous, contemporary chronicle of Fortress events (recently published as *Letopis’ Petropavlovskoi kreposti*), as well as internal Commadant files relating to the building’s construction: see especially RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 294 (“*O prime v Komendantskoe vedomstvo vnov’ ostrannogo v Trubetskom bastione zdaniia dlia politicheskikh arestantov*”) – especially the narrative description held at ll. 14, 14ob, 15 and the prison inventory at ll. 15-20ob.

<sup>445</sup> During periods of mass arrests, political prisoners awaiting trial would also be housed in the House of Preliminary Detention (*Dom predvaritel’naia zakliucheniia*) on Shpalernaia Street, which was completed in 1875 and could house several hundred arrestees. See, for example, the movement of detainees between these two institutions during the Trial of the 193, evidenced by the prisoner lists held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 449, ll. 255-258ob.

<sup>446</sup> M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur’mi*, 3:178-79. Note that while this table spills over the chronological markers of the current chapter – and contains, for example, the many individuals incarcerated in the Bastion during the 1905 Revolution – the vast majority of this number were held in the 1870s and 1880s.

Trubetskoi Bastion prison's primary role as a site of preliminary detention. The highest punitive cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress – housed within the secret prison of the Alekseevskii Ravelin, where Bakunin, Chernyshevsky, and Serno-Solov'evich had all sat – were relatively underused for most of the years between 1866 and 1884. After the execution of the failed regicide D.V. Karakozov, the Ravelin only guarded two prisoners for nearly two decades.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> These were S.G. Nechaev and M. Beideman. For a history of these curious individuals, see Chapter Six.

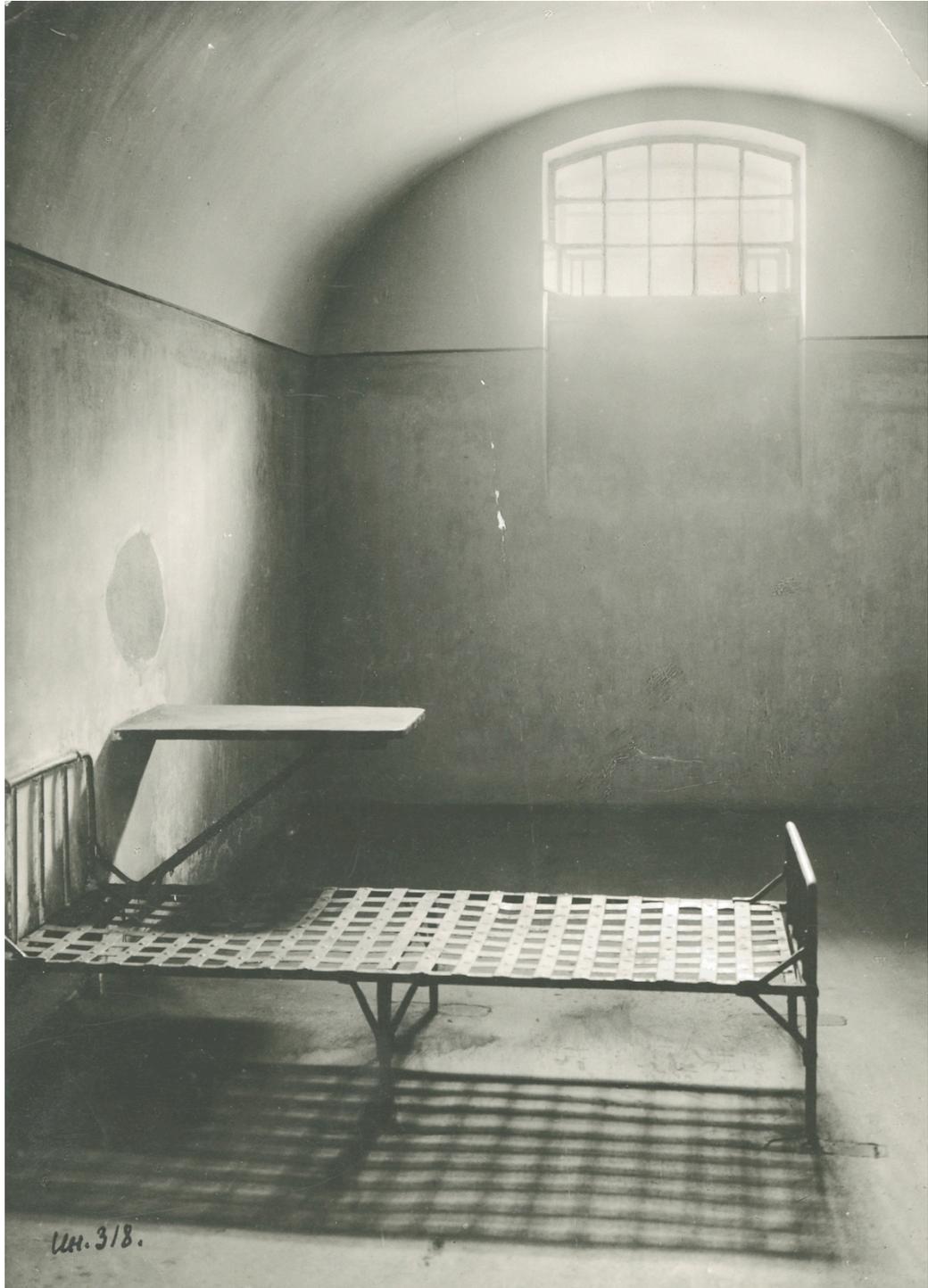


Figure 10: One of the 72 cells of the Trubetskoi Bastion prison [GMPIR f. III BC-6708/7].



Figure 11: A cellblock of the Trubetskoi Bastion prison [GMPIR f. III BC-6708/2].



Figure 12: The iron entrance gate of the Trubetskoi Bastion prison [GMPIR f. III BC-6707/6].

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Regardless of where political prisoners were held in the Peter and Paul Fortress in this period, the experience was meant to be one of absolute solitude. A set of guard regulations distributed in the spring of 1870 (*Pravila o poriadke soderzhaniia v SPeterburgskoi kreposti arestovannykh lits*) spends much of its twenty pages regulating inmate isolation.<sup>448</sup> Thus, not only were the most secret prisoners (held in the Alekseevskii Ravelin) forbidden meetings or any form of communication, but their cells could only be accessed by “the [Fortress] Commandant, the Head Gendarme, the Head of the Third Section, a priest from the Peter and Paul Cathedral, and the Fortress doctor.” Their very imprisonment itself was meant to be secret – outside of the Fortress grounds, they could only be discussed with the head of the tsarist secret police or with the emperor himself.

Secret political prisoners of the second order – those held in the casemates of the Fortress, as well as the soon-to-be-built Trubetskoi Bastion prison – were “to be placed in solitary confinement... deprived of any possibility of knowing about other prisoners in the fortress or seeing them.”<sup>449</sup> In their spartan cells, political offenders were expressly forbidden from possessing “any sort of metal, glass, or simply unnecessary things, as well as paper, ink, featherpens, pencils, and tobacco, unless the Commandant has given permission to smoke.”

Kept under the strictest isolation, the monotony of the prison day was only interrupted by a few well-regulated events. Guards were tasked with giving prisoners

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<sup>448</sup> These are located at RGIA f. 1280, op. 2 [*dolpolnitel'naia opis'*], d. 1, ll. 186-195. The original letter with which they were forwarded is also of interest, and can be found at *ibid.*, l. 185.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 188ob.

“normal soldier’s fare” – tea twice a day, with a lunch and dinner of two to three courses prepared in the prison kitchens (“roasts, beef, etc. are to be served pre-cut into small pieces, as the use of forks and knives by prisoners is strictly forbidden.”).<sup>450</sup> A catalogue could be requested and books ordered from the prison library (limited to “spiritual-moral, historical, and pedagogical works”), and at certain periods arrestees were allowed to receive volumes from family members (after they had been thoroughly examined by the Fortress administration). Correspondence and visitations (with immediate family only) required official permission. At regular intervals – usually once a month – the barbers of the Fortress Commandant’s staff would go from cell to cell to give shaves and haircuts. Trips to the prison bathhouse were given twice a month. And, dependent on the weather and the relative crowding of the prison, solitary walks in the yard were given once a day.<sup>451</sup> Arrestees who flouted prison regulations could be deprived of tobacco, tea, books, walks, the right to correspondence or meetings, and – in extreme cases – could be taken to an isolation cell (*kartser*) in the Fortress.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 188ob-189. Some prisoners were also permitted to purchase additional food and tobacco, based on the Commandant’s discretion.

<sup>451</sup> While the regulations quoted here are from 1870, this overall focus on prisoner isolation was constantly enforced during the period under examination in the current chapter. We can see the same intent in a letter from the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant to the State Senate sent in January, 1878: “Political prisoners and other important types kept in the St. Petersburg Fortress, held on a stricter regime compared to [other tsarist] prisons, are not allowed to pursue any sort of occupation. They are not permitted to possess knives or any metal objects and are held in solitary cells under individual lock and key, and have forfeited the right to not only visit and see one another, but even to enter into communication with one another either by letter or through the prison staff.” See RGIA, f. 1280, op. 1, d. 450, ll. 168-168ob.

<sup>452</sup> This was constantly stressed in all nineteenth-century guard regulations. Take, for example, the correspondence between the Fortress Commandant and chief warden during the early months of 1884: RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 620, ll. 218-218ob.

The rigid nature of the prison regime was not limited to the arrestees alone. The guards – taken from local St. Petersburg regiments – were strictly regulated in order to prevent lines of sympathy arising between the jailors and the jailed.<sup>453</sup> Precautions were taken to prevent these soldiers from being alone for any length of time with secret prisoners, and guard duties were rotated every two weeks to snuff out familiarity. The regulations from this period expressly stipulate that “the lower ranks of the Fortress guard responsible for prisoner care, supervision, and food preparation must be the most honest, capable, reliable people, and by no means born in the Kingdom of Poland.”<sup>454</sup>

These guards coordinated all cleaning and feeding tasks amongst themselves, and also escorted prisoners on any activities that brought them outside of their cells. They were also responsible for continual supervision of the various prison Curtains and the halls of the Trubetskoi Bastion prison, where they frequently peeked through

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<sup>453</sup> See the above instructions, as well as the set of guard regulations from this same period (“*Instruktsiia dlia karaul'nogo unter-ofitsera pri sekretnykh arestantakh*”) held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 2 [d.o.], d. 1, ll. 196-200. Higher officers within the Fortress were often chosen from veterans wounded in Russia’s wars.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-194ob. This last provision – dating originally from 1827 – reflects the social volatility of Poland in the nineteenth century and widespread perceptions of the Poles’ political unreliability. We can note that while the staff of the Peter and Paul Fortress was almost entirely Russian (with infrequent individuals of Baltic German descent), the prison population was far more varied. This ‘perverse cosmopolitanism’ of the tsarist cell – touched upon in many different places in the present dissertation – is reflected throughout the documentary record: in the multilingual prison libraries, the foreign currencies seized after each arrest, and the confessional demands of incarcerated individuals. On this last point: prison regulations permitted meetings with spiritual advisors, which most often took place on religious holidays and just before sentencing. Prisoners of the Orthodox faith would commonly meet with the *protoierei* (protoierius, or archpriest) of the Peter and Paul Cathedral. However, at times the Fortress Commandant would have to send out for Jewish rabbis or Catholic and Lutheran priests from the wider St. Petersburg community to meet the needs of this multi-ethnic and multi-confessional prisoner population.

the ‘Judases’ of each cell to make sure no prisoners were singing, shouting, knocking, or “committing any illegal actions.”<sup>455</sup>

Thus, the overriding goal of the Peter and Paul Fortress prison regime of this period was to enforce absolute solitude for each of its prisoners. However, for all of these precautions, the Fortress guards were never able to assure complete isolation. Radical actors displayed a remarkable resourcefulness in developing methods to illicitly speak with their neighbors – often the very compatriots with whom they had been arrested. As a personal activity, these lines of dialogue served to break through the terrible monotony of the solitary cell, rendering imprisonment more existentially bearable. As a political practice, prison communications worked to subvert tsarist disciplinary regimes: allowing revolutionaries to plan dissident activities, forge new bonds of solidarity, and coopt the Peter and Paul Fortress as a stage of revolutionary development.

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Making contact with other inmates was always a primary concern for political prisoners brought to the Peter and Paul Fortress. Archival documents and memoirs abound with accounts of illicit communication methods. Speaking and shouting between cells was always forbidden, and could be easily staunched by the prison guards. Thus, prisoner efforts were largely channeled through texts.

Arrestees frequently attempted to take advantage of the circulation of books through the prison library. While guards were charged with checking each returned volume to make sure that no alterations had occurred, arrestees would often attempt to

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<sup>455</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 2 [*d.o.*], d. 1, ll. 199ob.

leave notes or underline particular letters, thus inscribing personal messages for any future readers. The populist S.L. Chudnovskii, imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress as part of the ‘Trial of the 193’ in 1876 and 1877, recalled stumbling upon just such a “letter” from S.G. Nechaev in a copy of the journal *Delo*: “having traced and selected letters underlined by fingernail on different pages, I received a mournful tale of an extraordinarily harsh imprisonment, bound hand and foot, in the awful Alekseevskii Ravelin.”<sup>456</sup>

When not using the official circulation of books to smuggle messages, library volumes were also a ready source of paper – small scraps ripped from the margins of pages were often used to write secret texts. For example: in March 1878, the Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress forwarded nineteen miniscule notes to the head of the Third Section. These had been written in a tiny hand by political prisoner Ippolit Myshkin: “several of them were found in the yard of the political house [i.e. the Trubetskoi Bastion prison], embedded in soft black bread and affixed to the building’s drainpipes, and others in Myshkin’s bed.”<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> See S.L. Chudnovskii, *Iz davnikh let. Vospominaniia*, 127-28. Interestingly enough, it appears Chudnovskii was not the only Russian revolutionary to decipher a message from Nechaev in the volumes of the Fortress library – similar occurrences are also recorded in S.I. Martynovskii, “Na katorzhnom polozhenii,” *Katorga i ssylka* 12 (1924): 189; N.A. Golovina, “Moi vospominaniia (70 i 80 gody),” *Katorga i ssylka* 6 (1923): 37; and S.F. Kovalik, “Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. ‘razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii’),” in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, vol. 40 (6): 163-88. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927. The Fortress fate of S.G. Nechaev is discussed further in Chapter Six of the present dissertation. Finally, let us note that the practice of illicit book inscriptions was not just limited to this one individual. The right to receive volumes was used to smuggle messages throughout the Fortress’ existence: see, for example, the 1905 official correspondence regarding a secret note written by an anarchist in a volume of the Trubetskoi Bastion library, at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 918, ll. 36-36ob, 37.

<sup>457</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 450, ll. 296-296ob. See also A.A. Kunkel’, “Iz perepiski I.N. Myshkina s tovarishchami po zakliuchniiu,” *Katorga i ssylka* 5 (1930), quoted in Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur’mi*, 3:145-46.

Cigarette papers also proved useful for secret correspondence, and the common spaces of the Fortress prisons afforded the opportunity to circulate them. In the autumn of 1880, the Fortress Commandant received a letter of warning from the Ministry of Justice. A secret note had been found on a political prisoner in the House of Preliminary Detention, L.A. Kobylanskii. On anticipation of being sent back to a cell in the Peter and Paul Fortress, this *Narodnaia volia* member and veteran prisoner had sought to inform a comrade of the best means for secretly communicating within the citadel: “save a pencil to write notes and hide these notes near the bathhouse – under the corner, on the south side.” These future messages were to be written on cigarette paper, as was the one confiscated at the House of Preliminary Detention.<sup>458</sup>

This is only to list a fraction of the evidence we have of prisoner communications in the Fortress. With a bit of luck and persistence, illicit texts could be circulated around the citadel. However, by far the most common, secure, and lasting method for illicit communication by tsarist political prisoners did not involve writing at all. For in the Peter and Paul Fortress, Russian radicals taught the walls to speak.

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<sup>458</sup> See the official correspondence surrounding this secret message – as well as the original note itself – held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 482, ll. 252-252ob; 253-253ob; 256, 256ob, 257. It is uncertain which comrade Kobylanskii sought to reach with this note. He had been held in the Trubetskoi Bastion from July 12, 1880 to mid-October of that year, and would be returned to the Fortress on November 1: see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 487, ll. 36-37ob; d. 482, ll. 233-233ob; d. 497, ll. 26-26ob. Two of his fellow *narodovol'tsy* – A.A. Kviatkovskii and A.P. Presniakov – would be executed at the citadel shortly afterwards, on the morning of November 4, 1880. See the files pertaining to their hanging at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 486.

### III. Knocking Language: Uses and Origins

Knocking language [*perestukivanie*] – also referred to as “wall alphabet [*stennaia azbuka*]” or “prison alphabet [*tiuremnaia azbuka*]” – was the most widespread form of illicit communication in the political prisons of the tsarist regime, and was especially tied to the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Prisoners would communicate with individuals in neighboring cells through a system of knocks, in which patterns of taps would correspond to individual letters of the alphabet. The exact code varied: it could be as primitive as a system whereby each letter was represented by a number of taps corresponding to its position in the alphabet (i.e.  $a=1$ ,  $b=2$ ,  $v=3$ ,...  $ia=36$ ), or as complex as a pattern of alternating short and long signs. By far the most common code, however, involved setting the Russian alphabet into a grid of five or six rows. To signal a letter, an inmate would knock out two numbers: with the first usually indicating the column, and the second the row, of the letter’s position within the table [Figures 13, 14, and 15].

These knocks were often simply made with the palm or knuckles of one’s hand against the walls of a cell. At times, prisoners might use other materials – metal bedframes, buttons, manacles – to amplify their knocks.<sup>459</sup> The stone of the Peter and Paul Fortress’ casemates and Trubetskoi Bastion prison proved particularly conducive to light sounds, allowing tapping inmates to communicate both horizontally (through

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<sup>459</sup> Knocking with stools and bedframes is attested to in RGIA F. 1280, Op. 1, D. 482, ll. 9, 9ob, 10. M.A. Bestuzhev, the inventor of this knocking language (see below), used his manacles and hands to tap at first, and later used a burnt broom bristle. (Before leaving the Peter and Paul Fortress for Siberia, Bestuzhev passed this stick to his sister, saying “*prenez, c’est ma langue.*”) See M.A. Bestuzhev, “Zapiski M.A. Bestuzheva,” *Russkaia Starina* 1 (1870): 273. A.I. Faresov recalled splitting the knuckles on his hand “almost to the bone,” before removing a button from his prison jacket to tap with more ease. See A.I. Faresov, *V odinochnom zakliuchenii* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. Merkusheva, 1905), 53.

the walls to adjoining cells) and vertically (through the floor and ceiling to those held above and below). If enough prisoners were familiar with the ‘wall alphabet’, this conductivity could allow wide swathes of the prison to communicate, with messages moving across floors and cells.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Thus, held in a central cell of the Trubetskoi Bastion, Chudnovskii described taking on the role of a “transmission point [*peredatochnyi punkt*] from one corner of the prison to the other.” See Chudnovskii, *Iz davnykh let*, 127.

Вотъ эта шифрованная азбука, которой заключенные перестукиваются между собою:

А	Е	Л	Р	Х	Ы
Б	Ж	М	С	Ц	Ю
В	З	Н	Т	Ч	Я
Г	И	О	У	Ш	
Д	К	П	Ф	Щ	

Тотъ же вопросъ, «кто ты?»—при полной азбукѣ требуетъ слѣдующихъ цифръ: 10 (к), 18 (т), 14 (о), 18 (т), 26 (ы)=86 ударовъ; по сокращенному же способу нужно стучать: 2+5 (к), 4+3 (т), 3+4 (о), 4+3 (т), 6+1 (ы)=35 ударовъ.

а	з	п	ц
б	и	р	ч
в	к	с	ш
г	л	т	щ
д	м	у	ы
е	н	ф	ю
ж	о	х	я

Каждую букву приходилось передать двояко: въ первый разъ кружка мелькала для обозначенія столбца, въ которомъ стоитъ буква; во второй разъ—обозначали самую букву въ этомъ столбцѣ. Буква «ж» равнялась одному + шесть; «п» = 3 + 1 и т. д.

### Тук, тук, тук!

- 1) а, б, в, г, д
- 2) е, ж, з, и, к
- 3) л, м, н, о, п
- 4) р, с, т, у, ф
- 5) х, ц, ч, ш, щ
- 6) ы, ь, ю, я, ѝ

Figures 13, 14, and 15: Visualizations of Knocking Language in Political Prisoner Memoirs. The first two images are from A.I. Faresov, *V odinochnom zakliuchenii* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. Merkusheva, 1905), 54, 98; and the third is from N.A. Morozov, *Povesti moei zhizni. Memuary*. (Moscow: Izd. Akademii nauk SSSR, 1961), 2:53.

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From 1870 onward, accounts of knocking language appear in almost every Russian prison memoir, an innovation which fundamentally altered the experience of political incarceration.

At its most basic level, knocking language served as a medium of human recognition: as a way to break the dreadful isolation of solitary confinement. Before learning this prison grammar, inmates would often knock mutely to one another as a way of asserting their own existence and reaching out to other imprisoned individuals. For initiates, acquaintanceship between prison walls would often begin with an exchange of names and life stories. This lifeline within the absolute isolation of the tsarist prison cell fostered remarkable levels of intimacy: the *narodovolets* N. Bukh recalled how he knocked with his neighbors in the informal ‘you [ty]’: “In freedom, we would have spoken with ‘vy,’ as we were very little acquainted with one another... [But] it seemed to me, that this sort of intimacy between those struggling for a united cause, held in the same prison, was sincere.”<sup>461</sup> The health of one’s neighbors – especially during times of particularly harsh prison regimes – was always a concern; S.L. Chudnovskii, in his memoirs, recalled talking a fellow radical back from the brink of suicide through a long knock-based conversation.<sup>462</sup>

Alongside interpersonal care, this illicit political prisoner language also allowed individuals to break the monotony of solitary confinement with social activities forbidden by the prison regime. Tapping out poetry to one another – either

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<sup>461</sup> N. Bukh, “V Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” *Katorga i ssylka* 68, no. 7 (1930): 118.

<sup>462</sup> Chudnovskii, *Iz davnykh let*, 130.

original works or dissident classics – was a common creative outlet.<sup>463</sup> More complex diversions were feasible as well. In 1874, A.I. Faresov described games of chess and checkers, with moves broadcast through knocks, as a widespread practice in his Saratov prison.<sup>464</sup> Social pastimes could be given a political and pedagogical weight as well: Prince P.A. Kropotkin claimed that, during the brief period in which he was held in the House of Preliminary Detention in 1876, he tapped out the entire history of the Paris Commune to a young neighbor.<sup>465</sup>

Finally, the ability to subvert the isolation of tsarist political prison regime through knocking language was often used for directly political purposes. As revolutionary cells were swept up in tsarist investigations, leftists often found themselves sharing prison wings with their co-conspirators: knocking language allowed them to maintain their bonds and continue their dialogues after their arrests. For radicals brought from the provinces to the larger imperial prisons of St. Petersburg and Moscow, lines of new solidarity between revolutionary circles was formed through tapped conversations. And, practically, this illicit wall language allowed

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<sup>463</sup> In her memoirs, Vera Figner describes an extraordinary flowering of knocking poetry during her imprisonment in the Fortress of Shlissel'burg in the late 1880s. Having just been allowed pen and paper for the first time in years, all of her comrades began to write poems and transmit them through the walls of their cells: "Verses poured in from all sides. Sixteen poets appeared, and each one tuned his lyre to his own pitch and played; Schlüsselburg was transformed into Parnassus. Every one tapped away so busily on the prison walls that Morozov, who was living in one of the lower cells, did not know what to make of it: it sounded, so he said, as though the whole place was possessed of spirits." After this initial outburst died down, these Shlisselburg inmates still frequently exchanged verses through the walls, especially in honor of their comrades' birthdays and namedays. See Vera Figner *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 213-16.

<sup>464</sup> Each player would scratch out a chessboard with bootnails, make figures from matches or bread, and tap out moves on the game grid to one another through their cell walls. See Faresov, *V odinochnov zakliuchenii*, 59-60.

<sup>465</sup> P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 2:163-64.

revolutionaries to directly subvert the judicial process, coordinating approaches and trading strategies on how to conduct oneself during interrogations.<sup>466</sup>

As we have seen, throughout the modern existence of the Peter and Paul Fortress, guards were constantly vigilant against attempts at prisoner communication. Cells would be searched during inmates' walks and visitations. Any violations would be brought to the attention of the Fortress commandant, who often forwarded reports on these infractions to the Third Section or the official body responsible for the prisoner's case. However, the tsarist state was slow to pick up on the use of knocking language. It was only at the beginning of the 1880s that these illicit acoustics began to be seriously discussed in the correspondence of the Peter and Paul Fortress administration. On June 8, 1880, in a secret report to the head of the High Administrative Commission [*Verkhovnaia Rasporiaditel'naia Komissia*, an organ formed to preserve public order after the Winter Palace explosion in February of that year], the Fortress commandant notes that ten political prisoners in the Trubetskoi Bastion have been recently caught knocking on their doors and with their stools on the floor of their cells "with the goal of communicating by means of a code previously arranged amongst political criminals."<sup>467</sup> A response from the Third Section later that month sees tsarist officials attempting to understand how this code was formed, learnt, and transmitted. The secret police official proposes that, since, "the arrestees in the

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<sup>466</sup> The young Pavel Miliukov – who would later found the Constitutional Democratic Party [*Kadety*] in the waning years of tsardom and serve as foreign minister to the Provisional Government after the February Revolution – recalled learning through tapped messages in the House of Preliminary Detention in 1901 "how interrogations are conducted, the tricks of investigators, and how the accused can avoid them." See P.N. Miliukov, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: 'Sovremennik,' 1990) 1:209.

<sup>467</sup> The Commandant affirms that these individuals were duly punished for their attempts at knocking: denied tobacco, books, visitations, and even isolated in the *kartser*. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 482, ll. 9, 9ob, 10.

Fortress surely draw on the wall or somewhere else the alphabet for this method of communication, as has been noted in other sites of incarceration,” the commandant is instructed to search the cells of any prisoner caught using knocking language in order to find and destroy any such markings.<sup>468</sup>

By the middle of the decade, awareness of the subversive potential of this communication method had risen to the point where tsarist officials took special precautions to prevent its use.<sup>469</sup> When Vera Figner – member of the executive committee of *Narodnaia volia* – was imprisoned in the Trubetskoi Bastion in 1883-84, the two cells adjoining her own and the room beneath her were kept purposefully empty “with the goal of isolating her from other arrestees and eliminate any possibility of secret communicating with prisoners by means of knocking on the walls or floor.”<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 482, ll. 49-49ob. Indeed, a few months later just such a code would be discovered in a prisoner’s Fortress cell: “on the wall above the wash basin [was found] some sort of alphabet, with the signature ‘Maliutin’ [the prisoner’s name] underneath, and on another wall a code in this order: 1///, 2///, 3///, etc., under which were written six lines in a foreign language.” This is very clearly a key for some variation of knocking language – a fact that the Fortress commandant seems not to have recognized, remarking that inscriptions of all sorts were “extremely common.” See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 497, ll. 56-56ob; 57-57ob.

<sup>469</sup> In this regard, several memoirs of Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment describe felt being affixed to cell walls in order to prevent inmates from knocking. However, I have been unable to find evidence for this intention in the Commandant archives – it is just as likely that this insulation was installed to guard against the cold Petersburg climate. See F.V. Volkhovskii, *Druz’ia sredi vragov. (Iz vospominanii starogo revoliutsionera)* (St. Petersburg: ‘Budushchnost’, 1906); A.I. Faresov, *V odinochnom zakliuchenii*, 149; and Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons*, 93-94.

<sup>470</sup> This situation is detailed in a letter from the Fortress commandant to the Director of the Department of Police from April 19, 1884. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 620. We can note that after decades of silent confinement in the Peter and Paul and Schlissel’burg Fortresses, Vera Figner became pathologically sensitive to noise: “my reaction to sound, which had before been keen, became unbelievably more poignant. Instead of shuddering nervously at every sudden sound, as I had done before, I would scream, and later even burst into sobs, which disturbed and excited the entire prison.” See Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 226.

Tsarist officials in this period were faced with a burning question: how was this prisoner code learnt and transmitted? It is this same question that is also of great interest for our present history of revolutionary Russian carceral cultures.

Knocking language was invented in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Its first attested use was in 1825-26, when arrested Decembrist M.A. Bestuzhev – held in the secret prison of the Alekseevskii Ravelin – used a complex system based on naval bells to communicate with his brother in an adjoining cell [Figures 16 and 17].<sup>471</sup>

Curiously, however, this Decembrist code appears to be an outlying phenomenon. There is a hiatus after 1826 – accounts of knocking language disappear, only to resurface in memoirs and official documents in the last third of nineteenth century. This interruption is surely due to the particular publication history of the Russian prison memoir genre.

1870 saw the founding of a new historical journal in St. Petersburg: *Russkaia starina* [*Russian Antiquity*]. Headed by M.I. Semevskii, a diligent historian who had once printed with Herzen's Free London Press, the journal's goal was to provide primary documents on the Russian past to an increasingly historically-minded public. Accordingly, the very first number of the journal contained selections from the memoirs of M.A. Bestuzhev: one of the first instances of Decembrist materials being legally printed in Russia. "The Notes of Bestuzhev [*Zapiski Bestuzheva*]" consists of two sections. The first is a conventional biographical narrative of the five Bestuzhev

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<sup>471</sup> After learning that he shared a wall with his brother Nikolai, Mikhail attempted to tap out to him a passage from Karamzin's *Russian History*, to no avail. It is only when an identically-phrased letter arrives to each of them from their mother that they are able to use it as a Rosetta Stone, formulating a shared knocking language. Mikhail's attempts to teach this code to his other neighbor – the Decembrist A.I. Odoevskii – are thwarted by the fact that this Francophile prince did not know the proper order of the Russian alphabet. See Bestuzhev, "Zapiski Bestuzheva," 262-74.

brothers, while the second – titled “Wall Alphabet [*stennaia azbuka*] in the Peter and Paul Fortress” – describes the invention of knocking language.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> M.A. Bestuzhev, “Zapiski M.A. Bestuzheva: I. Brat’ia Bestuzhevy. II. Stennaia azbuka v Petrop. kreposti,” *Russkaia starina* I (1870): 253-74. Also of interest are the brief prison recollections of Mikhail’s brother: N.A. Bestuzhev, “Vospominanie o Ryleeve,” in *Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh* (Moscow: Nauk, 1951), 7-41.

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·	Б.	В.	Г.	Д.	Ж.		А.	Е.	И.	О.
·   .	З.	К.	Л.	М.	Н.	—	У.	Ы.	Ю.	Я.
·   .	П.	Р.	С.	Т.	Ф.					
·   ·   .	Х.	Ц.	Ч.	Ш.	Щ.					

	·	· ·	·  ·	·  · ·	·  ·  ·	·	··	···	····
	Б.	В.	Г.	К.	М.	А.	И.	О.	У.
	Н.	Р.	С.	Т.	Ш.				

Figures 16 and 17: The (quite complex) system of knocks first used by the Bestuzhev brothers in the Alekseevskii Ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1825-1826. M.A. Bestuzhev, "Zapiski M.A. Bestuzheva," 272 and 276.

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Thus, the first printed description of this prison alphabet – with a detailed story of how it was created, along with two tables displaying the code – appeared in 1870, at the same historical juncture when the language began to re-appear in the memoir literature (and, later that decade, in the archives of the tsarist prison regime).<sup>473</sup> This chronological accordance suggests a pivotal role for “The Notes of Bestuzhev”: that Russians in this period read, absorbed, and put into mass use the subversive technique detailed in this article.

Indeed, we can note that the year this article appeared was a period of relative laxity for the Peter and Paul Fortress regime. Specifically, the commandant at the time widely approved prisoner requests for outside books and journals: including *Russkaia starina*. The journal’s first issues entered the prison on at least two separate occasions in 1870.<sup>474</sup> It is thus highly probable that prisoners in the Fortress read Bestuzhev’s description of a knocking language and – across a gap of nearly fifty years – adapted it to their own confinement in the same citadel.

Furthermore, we can note that this fractured chronology speaks to the present dissertation’s larger history of Russian cultures of political imprisonment. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Decembrists began to be taken as a

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<sup>473</sup> We can note that Bestuzhev’s account of his knocking language soon became an integral part of Decembrist histories, appearing in new studies as early as the following year. See, for example, S.V. Maksimov, *Sibir’ i katorga* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. Transhelia, 1871), 1:431-35.

<sup>474</sup> That is, in March and June. See the booklists held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 330, l. 483; d. 347, ll. 195-195ob. We can also hypothesize that, after being read by individual inmates, these issues of *Russkaia starina* may have been placed in the Fortress prison library. However, the closest preserved library catalogue – from 1880, a decade later – only lists three numbers of the journal from 1876. Earlier numbers may have never entered general circulation, or may have been removed and destroyed at an earlier date. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 408, l. 22ob.

prototypical image of the heroic political prisoner. However, this myth – as we have seen – was the later construction of a revolutionary carceral experience probing backwards for a galvanizing historical lineage: an invented tradition.<sup>475</sup> And, just as Russian revolutionaries in the age of mass imprisonment had rediscovered the Decembrists as an originary moment in the history of political incarceration, so too did they rediscover a Decembrist technique for subverting tsarist disciplinary regimes.

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Reflecting on this fragmented inheritance – with its chronological rupture, invented tradition, and reinvestment of the past – leads us to the second goal of the present chapter. Knocking language was a fundamental technique in the radical subversion of state incarceration in tsarist Russia. However, while the present section has sought to present a new empirical history of this practice, let us be clear – the significance of this knocking language cannot be fully grasped through a simple catalogue of its various manifestations. Political agency – especially in such fraught scenarios as the prison cells of an autocratic regime – is not a binary affair, a quality either abstractly present or absent. Subversive voice always is understood, attained, and achieves effect within the particular cultural and material terrain of a historical context. The Fortress' knocking language must be grasped alongside the political narratives that were both its conditions of possibility and its realm of activity.

With this in mind, let us supplement our empirical history of this carceral code with a discussion of its discursive existence. In doing so, we will find that it played two crucial roles in the practice of radical self-narration. In the burgeoning prison

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<sup>475</sup> See, especially, Chapter Four.

memoir genre, knocking language functioned – beyond its concrete uses – as both a vehicle of revolutionary initiation and a weapon against the bourgeois interior. Grasping these two elements is central in understanding this technique’s subversive power and its place within dissident cultures of confinement.

#### **IV. Knocking Language: Revolutionary Initiation**

How did individual radicals learn to knock?

Curiously, highlighting the Decembrist origins and eventual rediscovery of this technique can only take us so far. Even if the first number of *Russkaia starina* was fundamentally responsible for the reemergence of prison knocking language, this technique does not appear to have been widely studied outside the cell, nor primarily circulated through texts.

Indeed, I have only been able to locate a single account of an individual being taught knocking language before their time in prison. This is *narodovolets* N. Bukh, who recounts how a comrade and close friend who had spent time in the House of Preliminary Detention tried to teach him a “prison alphabet [*tiuremnaia azbuka*].” But Bukh himself neglected this instruction: “I did not engage with his explanation, believing that there was no great wisdom in doing so and that I wouldn’t have to use it in the near future.” Bukh, of course, goes on to lament his lack of attentiveness when he finds himself in the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>476</sup>

Furthermore, while published guides to prison knocking language do exist, these only began to be printed in émigré presses at the start of the twentieth century –

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<sup>476</sup> N. Bukh, “V Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” 116.

long after the code's widespread circulation.<sup>477</sup> It seems that the vast majority of Russian revolutionaries did not learn knocking language outside the prison, either in discussion with comrades or from written sources.<sup>478</sup> Instead, knowledge of the code was circulated within tsarist cells.

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In the robust genre of Russian prison memoir literature, revolutionaries constantly recall having learnt knocking language while already imprisoned. In fact, these accounts consistently repeat many of the same elements in their retellings. The presence of a common structure is strong enough that we can identify this 'narrative of initiation' as a sub-genre unto itself, located within the larger genre of the nineteenth-century prison memoir – a sub-genre which gives us crucial insight into the role of knocking language in the dissident imaginaries and carceral cultures of this period.

The political arrestee's first encounter with knocking language usually occurs very soon after entering the prison – their very first day or night. After exploring the environment of their cell, the memoirist's solitary musings are intruded upon by a series of incomprehensible noises: "separate, intermittent, obscure sounds"; "precise strikes, with breaks and pauses"; "a light chirping, like the knock of a woodborer"; "some sort of knocks on the wall."<sup>479</sup> The most overwhelming account of this initial

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<sup>477</sup> For examples of knocking language guides designed so that "political prisoners can continue their sacred struggle," see the brochure V. Bakharev, *O shifrahk* (Geneva: Izd. 'Soiuz russkikh sotsial-demokratov za granitsei,' 1902); or the digest *Obysk, tiur'ma, i ssylka* (Geneva: Izd. G.A. Kuklina, 1903), 34-38.

<sup>478</sup> Indeed, N.A. Morozov reflects in his memoirs that "not once in Russia nor abroad in our many evening and afternoon conversations was knocking language mentioned in my presence, and none of my comrades from Moscow or abroad, evidently, thought about this method of communication." See N.A. Morozov, *Povesti moei zhizni. Memuary*, 2:49.

<sup>479</sup> Bukh, "V Petropavlovskoi kreposti," 116; Faresov, *V odinochnom zakliuchenii*, 42; Morozov, *Povesti moei zhizni*, 2:50; Miliukov, *Vospominaniia*, 1:209.

state of ignorance is found in the memoirs of Chudnovskii, who after being transported from Odessa to St. Petersburg's House of Preliminary Detention in 1876 is persecuted by the noise:

“Even though I was exhausted from the road, I was completely unable to sleep that first night: an incomprehensible, rhythmic, unceasing, muffled rumble [*ritmicheskii bespreryvnyi glukhoi gul*], resounding from all directions, acted extremely painfully on my nerves. It seemed to me that all the walls themselves were knocking, all the ceilings, all the windowsills, that everything around me had transformed into a continuous, tormenting knock.”<sup>480</sup>

This is the first stage of each knocking language narrative in the memoir literature: incomprehension.

Soon after this initial encounter – a moment provoking curiosity, annoyance, or dread – the political prisoner arrives at the second stage: illumination. The purpose of these noises, their secret logic, suddenly becomes revealed. In radical autobiographics, this moment of recognition occurs along one of either two pathways – one material, the other ideational.

For many memoirists, initiation comes about through a physical gift. Taking pity on this mute newcomer, the community of political prisoners writes out the code to the knocking alphabet on a piece of paper. This is then passed to the arrestee, usually by a sympathetic guard. Thus was Faresov taught to communicate in his Saratov prison, and Chudnovskii aided in giving order to the tormenting noise of the House of Preliminary Detention.<sup>481</sup> These keys are also evidenced in the archives of

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<sup>480</sup> Chudnovskii, *Iz davnykh let*, 121-23.

<sup>481</sup> Faresov, *V odinochnom zakliuchenii*, 45-51; Chudnovskii, *Iz davnykh let*, 122. The latter recalls his “inexpressible sense of appreciation and gratitude towards these invisible ‘friends’.”

the Peter and Paul Fortress – on several occasions in this period, prisoner searches turned up written codes [Figure 18].<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> For example: on February 10, 1884, the Fortress commandant reported to V.K. von Plevé that a prisoner arriving to the citadel from the House of Preliminary Detention was found with a written key to the “alphabet for criminal conversations by means of knocks [*azbuk prestupnykh peregovorov posredstvom stuka*].” See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 620, ll. 79, 80.

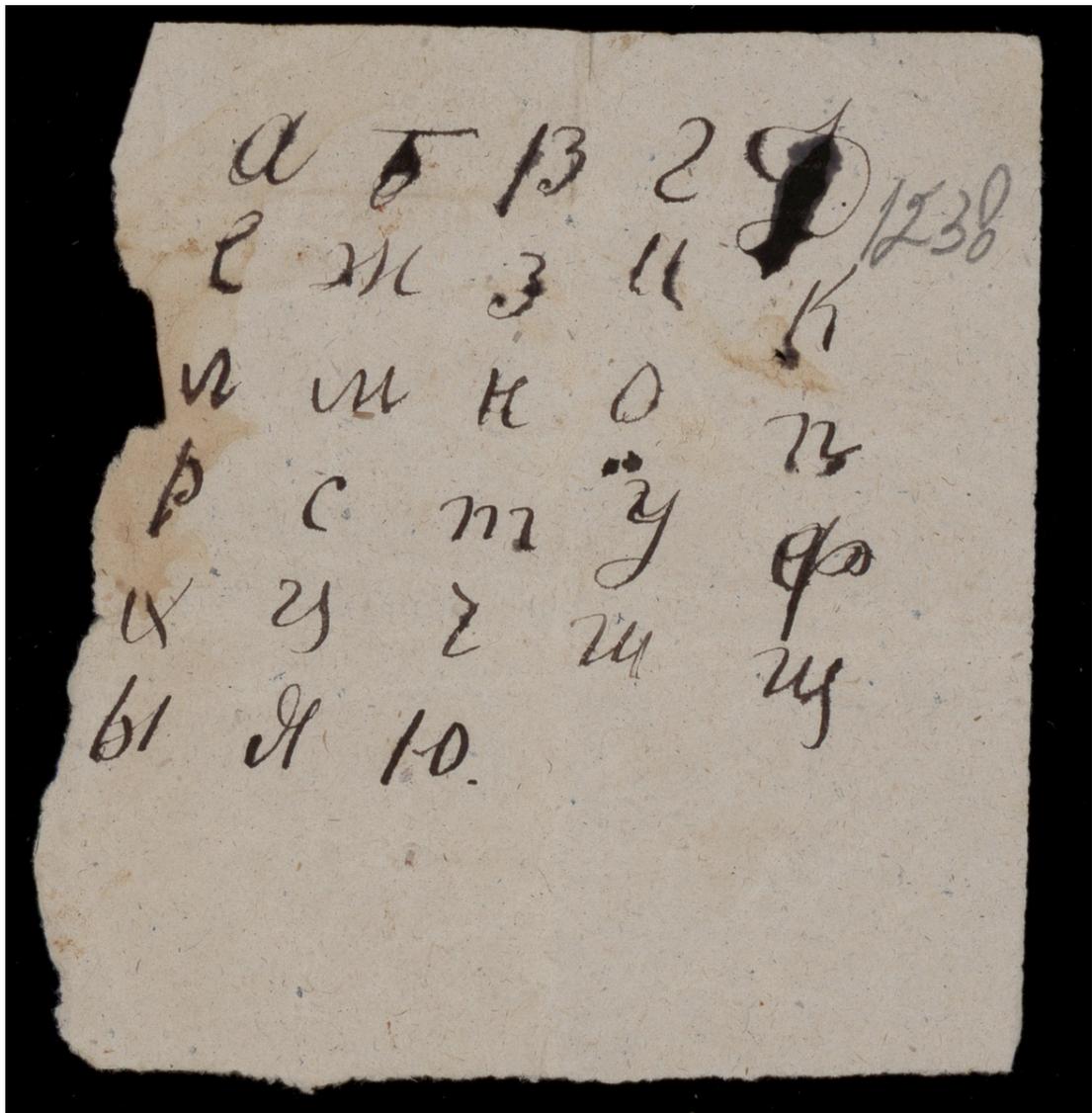


Figure 18: A knocking language key seized by a Peter and Paul Fortress guard on August 9, 1905. It was found in the clothing of a political prisoner named Chaichenko while he was in the Fortress bathhouse [RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 926, ll. 122, 123a, 123b, 123v, 123g].

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For other memoirists, the key to knocking language was grasped independently. After a period of listening uncomprehendingly to tappings from a neighboring cell, patterns would begin to emerge from the static. In a moment of inspiration – “suddenly, an unexpected thought flashed through my head,” recalled Morozov – the political prisoner would ask themselves: what if the number of knocks corresponded to letters of the alphabet?<sup>483</sup> With this insight, the inmate had all the tools necessary to communicate with those around them. Their first attempts would often be hesitant and primitive: “If, I thought, my neighbors have not guessed or lack the possibility to teach me this prison alphabet, then I will try to create my own alphabet, consisting of all 36 letters of the Russian alphabet, without abridgment.”<sup>484</sup> Able to make first contact through these clumsy codes, those in nearby cells (who, if anything, had time to spare) were able to instruct the newcomer to use a less-cumbersome, row-based system.

Either way, after this moment of illumination the memoirists would move towards mastery. With the key to knocking language, the experience of solitary political imprisonment would be entirely transformed. They were no longer surrounded by gibberish tappings – rather, the acoustic networks of the prison had, as Chudnovskii recalled, “came to life for me and took on flesh and blood.”<sup>485</sup> With practice came greater and greater familiarity: many memoirs recall systems of abbreviations adopted to speed up the pace of knocking communiqués, which could

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<sup>483</sup> As Morozov would go on to characterize this revelation: “how I suffered from hunger, yet I couldn’t postpone for a minute the pursuit of ‘my breakthrough,’ which seemed a stroke of genius to me.” Morozov, *Povesti moei zhizni*, 2:50-51.

<sup>484</sup> Bukh, “V Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” 117.

<sup>485</sup> See Chudnovskii, *Iz davnykh let*, 121-23.

quicken to the point of “coming out something along the lines of a grasshopper chirping.”<sup>486</sup>

It is with the slow-yet-sure mastery of this language that arrestees shaped the space and rhythm of prison life. In her memoirs, Vera Figner records immense gratitude “for those light tapings on the wall, which destroy the stone barrier separating person from person.”<sup>487</sup> From this point onward in Russian revolutionary autobiographics, the experience of political incarceration changes. Tsarist cells, once marked by “the silence of the dead,” could now host all the chatter and discussion of a revolutionary circle.

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Incomprehension, illumination, mastery: thus we see the structure of the ‘knocking language initiation’ narrative – a story common to nearly all Russian political prison memoirs from 1870 to 1917. This pattern of self-narration is presented here not only to give insight into how prison codes were encountered, learnt, and used. The practice of knocking language was indeed a pivotal tool through which radicals subverted the isolation of an autocratic prison regime. However, the lasting power of this secret alphabet lay not solely in its concrete uses.

Learning the prison knocking language meant initiation into an illicit subtext that made comprehensible the experience of political incarceration. From darkness to light, from muteness to voice: this is the same dramatic arc by which the Peter and Paul Fortress itself was gradually made legible – as a stage for the performance of the radical self – in the Russian revolutionary tradition. The ‘knocking language initiation’

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<sup>486</sup> Morozov, *Povesti moei zhizni*, 2:53.

<sup>487</sup> Vera Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 196.

narrative that fills prison memoirs repeats, in miniature, a larger awakening to political consciousness and agency. Induction into this prison alphabet was both one element of, and a synecdoche for, entrance into a revolutionary narrative community that over the course of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century contested and claimed the carceral spaces of tsarism as its own.

### **V. Knocking Language: Against Interiority**

There is one final role that knocking language played in the narrative and conceptual logic of nineteenth-century Russian radicalism. In order to grasp this, we must broaden our gaze for a moment and examine the scenes that directly precede stories of initiation into this code.

There is another common structure to the Russian prison memoir genre that we have not yet had the chance to explore: the cell description. In narratives of radical political incarceration, the first words after entering solitary confinement are almost always devoted to visual impressions. “The door slammed shut, the bolt thundered, the lock clicked... I was alone. I looked around [*Odin. Osmotrelsia.*].”<sup>488</sup> Finding solitude at last after the chaotic events of an arrest and processing, the revolutionary pauses at length to describe the interior of their cells or casemates: “The furnishings of the cell were of the most ordinary type...”; “a [water] closet of a far-from-advanced type”; “a tin mug with a lid, for water”; “The room held an iron bed, a small oak table, and an

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<sup>488</sup> Bukh, “V Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” 114.

oak stool... the floor was covered with painted felt, and the walls with yellow paper”;  
etc., etc., etc.<sup>489</sup>

At first, these omnipresent passages may seem unremarkable: mere environmental observations, common to every sort of modern memoir. However, in cultural and intellectual histories, it is often the things taken as the most ‘normal’ that themselves hold key insights into the underlying logics of the past.

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For upon further reflection, the ‘cell description scene’ – the visual inventory taken of the Fortress casemate in nearly every revolutionary autobiography – clearly arises from a particular understanding of how individuals dwell within spaces and encounter their assembled objects: a particular understanding of how narratives of the self are entwined with scenes of the interior. This is a specifically modern conception. In fact, it evidences the precise relationship towards lived spaces and their accumulated things that historians have identified as belonging to that primary site of Europe’s long nineteenth century: the domestic *interieur*. Indeed, I would argue that prison memoirists describe their cells with the exact same eye that they would use to approach the space of the bourgeois apartment – those environments assembled with such meticulousness in the daily life and popular novels of the nineteenth century.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Nikiforov, “Moi tiur’my,” 182; Chudnovskii, *Iz davnykh let*, 124; Mikhailov, “Zapiski,” 310; Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 2:143.

<sup>490</sup> See Michelle Perrot, ed., *A History of Private Life. Volume IV: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1990), esp. 339-450. And here, one of the most intriguing constellations of the present history begins to take shape. As we saw in Chapter Four, from 1862 to 1866 the Peter and Paul Fortress cell began to take on the spatial-conceptual qualities of the editorial office. In this same period, the editorial office of *Sovremennik* – the journal that published Chernyshevsky’s carceral texts – was held in the apartments of N.A. Nekrasov on Liteinyi prospekt. Thus do the bourgeois apartment, the editorial office, and the prison cell begin to congeal together into the

Recognizing the secret links tying the narrated cell to the narrated apartment should not only be taken as further evidence of the organic links between the prison memoir tradition and the history of the novel. As Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno remind us, the space of the interior must always be understood in two senses. When modern subjects carefully assemble and narrate their dwellings, this is not solely in the service of social capital, personal comfort, or mimetic fidelity. In the nineteenth century – that century “addicted to dwelling” – spatial interiors were taken as extensions of personal-psychological interiority, reflecting the individual in the same way that “the shell bears the impression of the occupant.”<sup>491</sup> Thus should the described-cell (with its stark objects and bare walls announcing the subjective distress of the newly imprisoned) be recognized as the dark twin of the bourgeois apartment (with its personal affects and cluttered kitsch composing the interior life of the nineteenth-century subject): two examples of the dwelt room as a “cave of subjective immanence.”<sup>492</sup>

However: we must remember that, in both instances, this is a false immanence. In this nineteenth-century regime of interiority, both world history and subjective experience are collapsed down into inert objects; human experience dreams it has found immediacy within the walls of a cell. The life interior was always-already a phantasmagoria.

And it is here that we return to knocking language

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primary narrative chronotope and site of literary production for the mid-nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia.

<sup>491</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999), 220.

<sup>492</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 13.

In the prison memoir literature, accounts of tapped codes – the ‘initiation’ narratives described above – almost always begin immediately after descriptions of the cell. A sharp ‘*tuk, tuk, tuk!*’ breaks the narrator’s ‘internal’ reverie.

This should not be seen as a solely narrative interruption, a shift in the plot. Revolutionary narratives of the self in this period were always in danger of reverting to Right Hegelian grounds: of falling into personal acquiescence, political resignation, false immediacy, psychologism. A knock sounds in the cell: and awakens prisoners from daydreams of subjective inwardness and cell environments, calling them back to radical struggle. In carceral spaces of deprivation and solitude – where there was always great peril that a revolutionary might fall back into the false immediacy of subjective experience – the first knock from a neighboring prisoner erupted into the space of the Fortress, breaking the fatal enchantment of the bourgeois interior.

## **VI. Conclusion: The Persistence of Sound**

Thus do we see how knocking language functioned as a crucial practice in the radical subversion and discursive experience of state confinement in tsarist Russia. After its invention in the Peter and Paul Fortress, this carceral code not only broke the silence of an autocratic disciplinary regime: it was understood within, and itself helped buttress, a larger political culture of radical imprisonment that invested the experience of confinement with ample voice and agency in Russia’s ‘Age of High Prison Mythology.’ When the walls were taught to speak, they communicated not only tapped fragments – a political acoustics broke the enchantment of the cell interior, and

the stones of the Fortress divulged rich narratives of the revolutionary self-in-becoming.

And just as a political culture of incarceration and image of the heroic dissident prisoner circulated across the Russian Empire after being first developed in the Peter and Paul Fortress, so too did variegated pathways of lived and textual transmission spread this knocking language across the tsarist penal system and beyond. As this chapter comes to a close, let us briefly examine some of the evocative afterlives of this dissident alphabet.

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Soon after its return to the Fortress in 1870, knocking language became a widespread practice. Many of the accounts presented in this chapter occurred in peripheral locales – from district police prisons in St. Petersburg to Saratov’s jail on the Volga. Inmates held in the House of Preliminary Detention during the Trial of the 193 constantly tapped to one another. When the empire’s most notorious political prisoners began to be transferred from the Peter and Paul Fortress to Shlissel’burg in the mid-1880s, they brought with them the tradition of knocking language. In her memoirs, Vera Figner recalls the profound moment when “the dumb walls of Schlüsselburg began to speak.”<sup>493</sup>

Notably, the knocking language that had developed in Russian prisons also spread outside of the tsarist empire. The most significant example takes us to the summer of 1914 to a Sarajevo military prison, with Europe slouching towards war. As the co-conspirators of *Crna ruka* awaited trial for the assassination of Archduke Franz

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<sup>493</sup> Vera Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 187.

Ferdinand, they initiated one another into a knocking code. They had learned this “strange correspondence [*chudnovata korespondentsija*]” through accounts of the Russian revolutionary movement, and now used it to confer with one another before their interrogations and trial.<sup>494</sup> Thus did a powerful tool for the subversion of prison regimes fan out from its origins in the Peter and Paul Fortress: from 1825 to 1914, from St. Petersburg to Sarajevo.

Indeed, Russia’s knocking language ranged over not only geographical borders, but also chronological boundaries. Fascinatingly, this system of prison communication makes several strange appearances after the revolutions of 1917. Knocking language survived the autocratic regime it had been invented to subvert.

Let us conclude by listening for these tappings during the first decades of the Soviet project. There are two stories that can be told of knocking language after the October Revolution.

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The first is a story of victory.

On March 5, 1927, the keels were laid down for the very first Soviet submarines. Three of these underwater vessels were constructed at the Baltic Shipyard

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<sup>494</sup> The interwar Italian historian Luigi Albertini claimed that Vaso Čubrilović had told him how “after the first days of their arrest the defendants began to communicate among themselves by an alphabetical system made up of long and short knocks on the wall on a method they had all learnt from Stepniak’s *Underground Russia*.” We must note that nowhere in *Underground Russia* – that celebrated account of the Russian revolutionary movement by one of its participants, the terrorist S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii – is knocking language mentioned. The Bosnian radical had surely intended a later work by the émigré Stepniak: *Russia under the Tzars*, which narrates in detail the use of tapping to communicate in St. Petersburg’s House of Preliminary Detention. In either case, this is powerful evidence of the international circulation of Russian political prison narratives at the turn of the twentieth century: the subject of Chapter Seven of the present dissertation. See Borivoje Jevtić, *Sarajevski atentat. Cećnja i utictsi* (Sarajevo: Izdanje Petra N. Gakovića, 1923), 54-56; Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, trans. Isabella M. Massey (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) 2:59; Stepniak [S.M. Kravchinskii], *Russia Under the Tzars*, 80-85.

on St. Petersburg's Vasil'evskii Island: just a few kilometers from the Peter and Paul Fortress. With their names, they traced a chronology of the revolutionary movement: *Dekabrist* ['The Decembrist'], *Narodovolets* ['The Member of the People's Will'] and *Krasnogvardeets* ['The Red Guard'].

Hidden in the bellies of these submersibles was a strange fragment from the Russian radical past. For while each possessed an early radio system, there was need of a means to communicate between compartments when the bulkheads were closed, or during an accident. Their choice? Knocking language: a table was mounted in each submersible ("*tablitsa perestukivaniia*") with the alphabet divided into five rows and six columns; a direct use of the code developed by revolutionaries in tsarist political prisons.<sup>495</sup> On the date of its commission, Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Naval Forces sent a telegram to Leningrad: "I am certain, that in the hands of the revolutionary Baltic sailors *Dekabrist* will be a terrible weapon against our class enemies, and in the battles for socialism to come will cover its red flag with glory."<sup>496</sup>

Thus, ten years after the fall of the Romanov autocracy, we see knocking language return in a strange guise. This is history, shuffled, repeating itself: first as tragedy, then as triumph. Here are 'Decembrists' and 'Members of the People's Will' tapping to one another in isolated cells – not those of a pre-revolutionary prison, but of a Soviet war machine. The knowledges and practices that helped overthrow an autocracy are now put into the service of a new state. In this strange historical

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<sup>495</sup> More information on these first Soviet submarines can be found in G.M. Trusov, *Podvodnye lodki v Russkom i Sovetskom flote* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe soiuзное izdatel'stvo sudostroitel'noi promyshlennosti, 1963), 312-23; and V.I. Dmitriev, *Sovetskoe podvodnoe korable-stroenie* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1990), 32-63. One of these early submersibles (the *Narodovolets*) has survived and is exhibited as an affiliate of the Central Naval Museum in St. Petersburg; its knocking-language table has been preserved.

<sup>496</sup> Quoted in Dmitriev, *Sovetskoe podvodnoe korable-stroenie*, 55.

doubling it is almost as if weaponized cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress – fully hijacked by the subversive practices of its radical inhabitants – had broken off from the tsarist citadel, dove into the Neva, and set out onto the high seas in pursuit of the enemies of the revolution.

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Alongside this victorious – and almost Gogolian – narrative, we can trace another. The second story of knocking language after 1917 is a story of defeat.

E.S. Ginzburg was swept up in the Stalinist Terror in 1937. In her autobiography, she recalls how at the time “all I knew of such things [i.e. political imprisonment] was what I had read in the memoirs of old Bolsheviks or in books about the ‘People’s Will’.”<sup>497</sup> It is these prison memoirs that flash to mind when, held in a Kazan prison, she first hears tapping emanating from an adjoining cell. She immediately recalls the appropriate pages from Vera Figner’s memoirs and rapidly learns how to communicate with her fellow prisoners. As she follows a treacherous pathway through the GULAG system, Ginzburg finds herself soon having “brought to exquisite perfection the technique of wall tapping.”<sup>498</sup>

Knocking language thrived in the Soviet carceral system. Just a few decades after the overthrow of tsardom, a prison language invented for the revolutionary struggle returned in the cells of the revolutionary state. The cold irony of this development is a crucial component of Arthur Koestler’s novel *Darkness at Noon*.<sup>499</sup> When the Old Bolshevik protagonist is led to solitary confinement on the first page of

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<sup>497</sup> Eugenia Semyonova Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind*, trans. Paul Stevenson and Max Hayward (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 51.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-73, 211.

<sup>499</sup> In another cruel twist, Koestler’s deeply anti-leftist story is today the most widely-known portrayal of knocking language in world literature.

the novel, his first move is to investigate his cell's acoustics with a studied hand: "The walls on both sides were of solid brick, which would stifle the sound of tapping, but where the heating and drain pipe penetrated it, it had been plastered and resounded quite well."<sup>500</sup> Throughout the course of his tale, wall conversations are held with a motley collection of fellow prisoners. There is, however, a weary melancholy in its use – where once these coded taps had subverted the prison regimes of autocratic empires and fascist states, they now echoed futility in the belly of a revolution devouring its own.

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Thus did knocking language persist after 1917: as a weaponized tool of the revolution triumphant, as a death rattle of the revolution betrayed.

Both are true.

This ambiguous survival of a vestigial prison language speaks to the larger contradictions of a revolution that both elevated and denied its heritage. We shall return to this topic – the uncertain persistence of histories and spaces of tsarist imprisonment in the first years of the Soviet experiment – in the final chapter of the present dissertation.

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<sup>500</sup> Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, trans. Daphne Hardy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 9. For all of the assuredness with which Koestler presents the Russian knocking language (his descriptions of solitary confinement came from both his familiarity with revolutionary literature as well as several months spent in a Francoist prison during the Spanish Civil War), there are a few points he gets wrong. For example: when the protagonist's neighbor taps out a request for his name, the character lectures that "according to the revolutionary etiquette, he should have started with a political tag; then given the news; then talked of food and tobacco; much later only, days later, if at all, did one introduce oneself." This is not held up in the historical record, where we see that the most common first knocking message was "who? [*kto?*]." See *ibid.*, 26-27.

For the time being, let us return our focus to the years 1866 to 1884. From this exploration of the concrete and discursive power of knocking language, we now move to a wider discussion of radical selfhood and the tsarist cell during Russia's "Age of High Prison Mythology."



## 6. Sergei Nechaev and the Age of High Prison Mythology, 1866-1884

Anything that does not wish to wither should take on itself the stigma of the inauthentic.

- Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

### I. Introduction

From 1866 to the fall of the Romanov regime, the Russian revolutionary imaginary revolved around the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress. A prison site of horror and heroism ascending over St. Petersburg, dissident actors felt intense measures of both repulsion and attraction towards its gloomy bulk.

So much of the radical struggle of the mid-nineteenth century was intangible, immaterial – flowing through texts and the minds of the youth, diffusing over the vast geographies of the Russian Empire. In this political landscape, the suffering cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress marked an end to ambiguity. Revolt against the state was condensed and concretized: the carceral subject and their granite wall. Proper radical selfhood and sacrifice could not be doubted, as revolutionary commitment was branded onto each incarcerated day.

Political imprisonment gave the fight against absolutism a nightmarish yet compelling materiality, embodiment, emplacement. In the memoir literature of this period, again and again we encounter this dual movement – this constant attraction and repulsion – that characterized Russian radicalism's orbit around the Fortress prison cell.

“In the first years of my arrival in Petersburg,” recalled populist-terrorist N.K. Bukh, “when I happened to pass through the Peter and Paul Fortress, I usually gazed at it with a feeling close to reverence. I knew, that somewhere here, just a few *sazhins* from me, behind those walls, in cells, sat and did sit at that moment fighters for socialism.” When – like his radical objects of veneration – Bukh himself is arrested, the symbolic weight of the Fortress completely colors his experience:

And now, in anticipation, as the doors opened before me, as I was taken into this holy of holies – a feeling of awe and curiosity dampened the depression and vexation caused by the consciousness of my loss of freedom, the victory of my enemies, and my fast approaching punishment.<sup>501</sup>

For Bukh, fear is tempered with fascination, anguish with anticipation.

Likewise, in his early Petersburg days, Prince Petr Kropotkin had seen the Fortress as a “huge stone coffin,” towards whose profile “a sensation of horror is felt by the inhabitants of St. Petersburg.”<sup>502</sup> However, upon being immured himself within its walls, Kropotkin cannot contain a morbid curiosity. His first action is to pause and reflect: “this was, then, the terrible fortress where so much of the true strength of Russia had perished during the last two centuries, and the very name of which is uttered in St. Petersburg in a hushed voice.”<sup>503</sup> He then recounts, with a note of perverse satisfaction, the lurid prison history of the Peter and Paul Fortress. For it is in this long story of death and defiance – the “annals of this mass of stone” from the

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<sup>501</sup> N. Bukh, “V Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” 113.

<sup>502</sup> P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 1:210; Peter Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons*, 84-85. More on Kropotkin’s long and complex relationship with the Peter and Paul Fortress is found in Chapter Seven of the present dissertation.

<sup>503</sup> P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 2:141.

Decembrists through Bakunin, Chernyshevsky and Pisarev – that he has suddenly found carved his own name.<sup>504</sup>

Most piquant of all the accounts of this mixture of dread memory and desire towards the Peter and Paul Fortress comes from N.A. Morozov. After his first arrest in St. Petersburg for populist agitation in 1875, the twenty-one-year-old Morozov experienced what can only be described as elation: “I had expected to become a martyr for the civic freedom of my motherland... to make myself her national hero, another William Tell.”<sup>505</sup> However, after a preliminary interrogation, he learns that his place of imprisonment is not the Peter and Paul Fortress, but rather a small district police station in the capital. His distress at this discovery is illuminating:

To take me not to a damp dark room within a grey bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress, with a deep, cave-like embrasure and a view on the wide-flowing Neva... but to a normal police station, of the kind where, every day, they place drunks they pick up from the street and any petty thief! Oh, who could have invented a more grievous insult for me!<sup>506</sup>

Indeed, being refused the black romanticism of Fortress imprisonment is a crushing blow to the youth’s self-image:

I had yet to read in a single novel of a hero imprisoned in a police station, and, if I escaped from here, not a single person would celebrate me. “He escaped from the Kolomenskoi Police Station!” – it sounded altogether less mighty than “he escaped from the Peter and Paul Fortress”...<sup>507</sup>

While later recounted with considerable irony, these prison fantasies of a young radical speak volumes to the powerful pull that the Peter and Paul Fortress exerted upon Russian political cultures in the years 1866 to 1884. In this age of high prison

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 2:141-42.

<sup>505</sup> N.A. Morozov, *Povesti moei zhizni. Memuary*, 2:45.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid., 2:46.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., 2:48.

mythology, the Fortress meant both brutal deprivation and lasting glory – a concrete encounter with the hated autocracy and a concrete marker of radical commitment. With dark fascination, the Russian radical imagination spun around the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>508</sup>

And while we have touched upon the words of Bukh, Kropotkin, and Morozov, no other person in this period occupied so close an orbit around this site – at once actual and mythological – than the infamous figure of Sergei Gennadievich Nechaev.

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<sup>508</sup> As a final example of this peculiar gravity, we can look to the poetry of I.S. Turgenev. While having spent no time in the Peter and Paul Fortress himself, his piece “The Threshold [*Porog*]” from 1878 brilliantly captures the prison imaginary circulating amongst the youth in this period. In the short piece, a young girl stands at the entrance of an “enormous building,” resembling a citadel. From within, a cold voice asks her if she truly wants to enter – if she truly wants to endure the hardship, deprivation, and self-sacrifice that this step implies. She does: and voices cry both “fool” and “saint” as she walks inside. In this haunting proto-symbolist text, we see a prison entrance standing as synecdoche for entrance into the ranks of the revolutionaries; crossing the threshold (the Russian word for crime, *prestuplenie*, means ‘to step over’) is a noble, ritualized, almost sacred act. See I.S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridtsati tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), 10:147-48. I would like to thank Michael Katz for sharing his illuminating reading of this piece with me, many years ago.



Figure 19: A political arrestee being taken to a cell of the Peter and Paul Fortress, 1890s-1910s [GMPiR f. III BC-4778/13].

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This chapter explores the Peter and Paul Fortress during what I call Russian radicalism's "Age of High Prison Mythology" – the years between 1866 and 1884<sup>509</sup> – through the notorious revolutionary career of S.G. Nechaev. To utilize an individual lens is not, however, a recourse to the flat biographical model that has characterized so many previous scholarly accounts of Fortress imprisonment; the human subject is not uncritically taken here as a monadological unit of analysis. Rather, as we have seen in the present dissertation, the Fortress existed for revolutionary Russian cultures as a primary stage for the narration and practice of radical selfhood.

Nechaev, as a political actor, was shaped to an extraordinary degree both against and within the discursive and concrete space of the tsarist prison. In the first half of his revolutionary career, he proved a virtuosic manipulator of the revolutionary Russian prison myth: using falsehoods and self-dramatizations to wield the symbolic currency of political imprisonment to further his own ends. In the second half of his revolutionary career, he himself was incarcerated within the Peter and Paul Fortress: and here he managed to mount perhaps the boldest challenge ever faced by the tsarist disciplinary regime. Tracing his life in the shadow of the Fortress provides us with a crucial understanding of the possibilities and limits of the carceral mythos woven into the fabric of Russian revolt in the second half of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>509</sup> That is, the period of both accelerating radical activity and mass political incarceration bookended by D.V. Karakozov's attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander II in the spring of 1866 and the closure of the Fortress' Alekseevskii Ravelin secret prison in 1884.

## II. S.G. Nechaev: His *Catechism* and his Historians

Before we explore how the image of the political prison reflects and refracts through the short life of S.G. Nechaev, it is best that we take measure of his strange place in the historiography. There is an aura of the monstrous surrounding Nechaev – a horror and an excess that spill out from attempts to integrate him into traditional histories.

For those unfamiliar with his later career, Nechaev’s origins give little to suggest his demonic reputation. Born in 1847 to an impoverished family in the small textile city of Ivanovo, he was one of the many young men and women from the provinces who moved to St. Petersburg in the second half of the 1860s to pursue higher education, and who were politically radicalized in the capital’s student circles. These initial steps give us little indication of what is to come: the explosive writings, the public outrage – falsifications, murder, and death in prison.

Nechaev is best approached through his most famous text. Fleeing Russia to avoid arrest in 1869 – and covering his tracks with a sophisticated set of mystifications, which we shall soon dissect in the present chapter – it was in a first period of emigration in Geneva that he produced the document that would secure his notoriety and which so often serves as the entry-point into studies of Nechaev: *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* [*Katekhizis revoliutsionera*].

This document is a programmatic vision of radical conduct. Over the course of twenty-six theses, Nechaev commands the would-be radical to mercilessly purge themselves of every value that does not serve the goal of revolution. “The revolutionary is a doomed man,” begins his *Catechism*, and must “[break] every tie with the civil order and the entire cultured world, with all its laws, proprieties, social

conventions, and its ethical rules.”<sup>510</sup> As a Mephistophelean spirit of negation, the radical needs to give themselves fully to the “science of destruction,” combining utmost passion with cold calculation in the task of “terrible, total, universal, and merciless destruction.”<sup>511</sup> While an enemy of the world, a revolutionary must still travel within its confines in order to assure its bloody end. Towards this goal, any and all actions are justified. The *Catechism* contains a dissection of social categories – part infernal sociology, part dark Linneaus, part Old Testament judgment – whereby the human community is divided into groups based upon how best they might be used in the service of millenarian annihilation. Thus, while all capable enemies of the revolution must be immediately put to death, the most brutal agents of tsarist repression should be kept alive “solely in order that their bestial behavior shall drive the people to inevitable revolt.”<sup>512</sup> Talentless members of the social order who possess wealth or public power should be manipulated, blackmailed, and enslaved in the service of the cause.<sup>513</sup> Finally, not even fellow revolutionaries escape Nechaev’s vicious calculus. Comrades must be pushed to irreversible actions to weed out empty posturers, and even those who prove their utmost commitment must never be viewed with human warmth. Their energies and abilities should be treated as an expendable resource, a “fund of revolutionary capital” in the pursuit of destruction – the only goal and the only good.<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Sergey Nechaev, “Catechism of the Revolutionist (1869),” in Walter Laqueur, ed., *Voices of Terror* (New York: Reed Press, 2004), 71 [republished from Michael Confino, *Daughter of a Revolutionary*].

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>513</sup> Tied to this category of “high-ranking cattle” are the lukewarm progressives and “liberals of all hues,” whose influence must be also exploited to create disorder in the state.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

Thus does Nechaev exhort the radical subject to burn away any and all frictions within themselves to the progress of revolution. We are left with a Romantic demonism standing on the corpse of Romanticism, an individual for whom “all the tender and effeminate emotions of kinship, friendship, love, gratitude, and even honor must be stifled by a cold and single-minded passion for the revolutionary cause.”<sup>515</sup> Nechaev’s future political career, which we will discuss in this chapter – his constant recourse to self-aggrandizing falsehoods, his manipulation of the older radical generation, his staging of the murder of a student dissident – has been continuously read as growing out of the dark seeds of his *Catechism*.

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It is, in fact, in order to discuss these ‘readings’ that we have briefly presented Nechaev’s most radical text. Any attempt to write a history that touches upon ‘Nechaevism’ must first unladen itself from an excessive quantity of historiographical

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid., 72. The phrase “tender and effeminate emotions” is worth pausing on here. While the original Russian possesses a less explicitly gendered coding (“*nezhnye, iznezhivaiushchie chuvstva*”: more accurately translated as “tender, pampered feelings”), it still raises the questions of the masculinist discourse behind radical subject-construction in revolutionary Russia. In this period, there is a clearly operative binary between emotiveness and rigorism. This functioned within the radical cause itself: see the third and fourth chapters of the present dissertation, where M.I. Mikhailov’s passive Christ-like martyrdom is coded as feminine, and later opposed by the willful, ‘masculine’ agency of Chernyshevsky in the political prison. As we see with Nechaev, this binary was also mapped onto the borders of radicalism, where becoming a true (i.e. manly) revolutionary entailed purging oneself of all feelings and “tender” attachments. What makes these constructions so interesting and ambiguous is the powerful link between anti-tsarism and women’s liberation in this same era. Indeed, even the masculinist *Catechism* includes a paean to those women who have achieved “a real, passionless, and practical revolutionary understanding”: for Nechaev, these radicals are to be “regard[ed] as the most valuable of treasures, whose assistance we cannot do without.” Yet even in this praise, contradiction raises its head: women radicals are to be valued to the extent to which they have stripped themselves of ‘feminine’ qualities. This is one of the binds that haunts the Russian revolutionary tradition: individuals such as S.L. Perovskaia and V.I. Zaslulich famously crafted themselves as ‘Lady Macbeths’, and in doing so willfully challenging gendered patterns of domination in imperial Russian society while simultaneously adopting and reproducing a conceptual binary of ‘masculine’ action and ‘feminine’ sentiment.

baggage. In the annals of the Russian revolutionary tradition – and global histories of modern radicalism – there is nothing quite like the *Catechism*'s call for merciless transvaluation: and there is something in its violence that has prevented historians from integrating Nechaev into their stories of the past. He is an irritant in the eye of the 'dispassionate' historicist gaze, a fire in the workshop of the political genealogists.

At their best, Western historians have treated Nechaev as a narrative villain or marginal criminal (Isaiah Berlin: "a violent terrorist and a mindless fanatic"; E.H. Carr: "an unparalleled and bewildering combination of fanatic, swashbuckler, and cad").<sup>516</sup> At their worst, Nechaev's career has been fodder for the unhealthiest excesses of 'psychohistory' and Cold War attempts to trace damning political *Bildungsromane* of Soviet power.<sup>517</sup> In many ways, Anglo-American historiography is still under the spell of F.M. Dostoevsky's *Devils* [*Besy*], published in 1871-72. This is the great novelist's most artful (and vitriolic) treatment of the radical political thought of his time, directly inspired by the widely-publicized trial of Nechaev's associates. In Dostoevsky's work, young 'nihilists' of the Nechaev type are depicted as both infernal possessors and unfortunate possessed, conduits for a sickly assemblage of Western ideas (materialism, utilitarianism, atheism) whose fullest expression leads to unbridled tyranny, spiritual degeneration, and physical destruction. Dostoevsky's belletristic approach to this radical subject has stood as a further barrier to rigorous historical

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<sup>516</sup> Isaiah Berlin and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (London: Peter Halban Publishers Ltd., 1992), 165; E.H. Carr, *The Romantic Exiles* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1933), 24.

<sup>517</sup> For example: Philip Pomper, *Sergei Nechaev* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979); Adam B. Ulam, *In the Name of the People* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977); Michael Prawdin, *The Unmentionable Nechaev* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961). We can note that Cold War Sovietology – its intellectual forebears and conceptual terrain; its institutional loci and funding networks; its political temporality and epistemological horizons – has yet to find its historians.

analysis. The individuals in his novels are always within history until they are not: psychological-intellectual vessels of their time yet genuflecting, in the last instance, before a reactionary Christian ontology.

Outside of conservative literatures and the Anglophone academy, Soviet historians possessed a slightly more ambiguous relationship to the figure of Nechaev: caught as they were between the imperatives of excavating a useful lineage from the revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century while simultaneously policing the borders of a gradually-calcifying political orthodoxy (that strange play of Soviet historiography between subsumption and auto-immunity).

Thus, while the opening of the tsarist archives after 1917 saw a brief flurry of scholarship into the grounds of Nechaev's radical career and political imprisonment, by the end of the 1930s the first edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* was characterizing him as an enemy, a conspirator "guided by personal ambition and an interest in his own glory," making sure to note that Engels had referred to Nechaev as a "scoundrel" in one of his letters.<sup>518</sup> This opprobrium survived the collapse of the Soviet Union. F.M. Lur'e's *Sozidatel' razrusheniia* [*Creator of Destruction*], published in 1994, is the most rigorous contemporary biography of Nechaev. However, its superb archival research is shot through with personal and political repulsion, to the point where "the devilish breath of Nechaev [*besovskoe dykhanie Nechaev*]" is depicted as the animating force behind the "lying politicians" and "gangsterism" of the infernal Russian 1990s.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> B. Koz'min, "Nechaev, Sergei Gennadievich," *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, ed. O.Iu. Schmidt, 1st ed., vol. 41 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi Institut 'Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia', 1939), 812-13.

<sup>519</sup> F.M. Lur'e, *Sozidatel' razrusheniia* (St. Petersburg: Petro-RIF, 1994), 24.

Thus stand the peculiar contours of Nechaev scholarship. This chapter seeks to break their spell. I will argue that beginning a history of Nechaev – as a radical subject and object, actor and symptom of the nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary tradition – from a standpoint of moral horror has concealed far more than it has illuminated. In a sense, we can say that all previous approaches to Nechaev have come down a path both ahistorical and all too historical: ahistorical to the extent that residual psychological and emotional revulsion has prevented scholars from locating his career in the complex webs of texts and contexts, choices and contingencies from which his time was woven; too-historical in the sense that these studies have been shot through with what Dominick LaCapra has called historians’ transference, whereby scholarly activity towards the past becomes hopelessly entangled with the political and moral concerns of a present moment thus revealed in its historicity.<sup>520</sup> In both cases, contemporary studies have yet to penetrate the original cloak of mystification that surrounded Nechaev in his time. We have been left not with history, but parable: a grim yet satisfying tale of an individual who preached merciless destruction and would (as we shall see) himself be mercilessly destroyed in the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

I see two pathways forward for histories of Nechaev. Both seem to promise much value for the study of Russian revolutionary cultures and European modernity more broadly.

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<sup>520</sup> The clearest accounts of this theory of the historian’s darkly lens can be found in Dominick LaCapra, “History and Rhetoric,” in *History & Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), esp. 21 and 36-7.

The first of these would be to locate Nechaev's texts and actions (as well as their reception) within a larger conceptual history. Alongside his lies and deceit, one of the prime 'horrors' of his *Catechism* is the way in which he views human beings: as tools, as objects, as 'capital' for the revolution. While the end goal of radical struggle may be a liberated humanity, this future horizon in no way colors a present moment in which all other individuals must be treated as expendable resources if the revolution is to succeed. While there is surely much that is ghastly to this vision, there is also something deeply honest and radically symptomatic here. With the traits of a catechist mixed with those of an industrialist or a mathematician, Nechaev's worldview is a dark twin of the instrumental reasoning which buttressed both of his enemies: the Romanov state and Russia's incipient capitalist relations of production. In this way, Nechaev can and should be understood as an early and highly original figure in the story of modern European anti-humanism: a pivotal moment within the intellectual history of reification as it manifested itself through both capital and its discontents. As such, a genealogy from Nechaev to Lenin asks to be traced not through the weak lens of moral indignation in the present, but rather through a study of the ambiguities of quantification and the stripping away of European romanticism from the revolutionary *Lebenswelt*: the idea of humans as resource running from Nechaev's praxis through the Second International's economism and beyond.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> In this way, a future study of Nechaev could speak in interesting ways to recent scholarship on the history of modern anti-humanism. See, for example, Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism that is not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). The lynchpin of such a history may prove to be Albert Camus: his quixotic political position within the crucible of the twentieth century, that led him to attempt to salvage a kernel of moral beauty in certain elements of the Russian revolutionary tradition, also saw him sputter with bile and incomprehension when faced with Nechaev. See *The Rebel*:

The second pathway forward for studies of Nechaev – and the one that shall be pursued in the present chapter – also treats him as a crucial subject/object in modern European intellectual history, but from the standpoint of cultural semiotics. The starting point for this analytic arc is that to call him a dissembler, a liar, a fraud: these are undoubtedly the least interesting things we can say about Nechaev. For yes – Nechaev spun a complex web of mystifications around his own person for the purpose of revolutionary aggrandizement. But lying is always a historical phenomenon.<sup>522</sup> And Nechaev’s dissemblance was, I would argue, a deeply rational continuation of his *Catechism’s* radical precepts. It was not only human others who were to be treated as resources – the radical’s own ‘self’ was to be viewed as raw material in the service of the revolution. The present dissertation has approached the rise of a radical Russian intelligentsia as a process of self-narration; this optics allows us to explore how Nechaev sought to craft his own identity in the service of political ends. For in his career he displayed an intuitive grasp of the discursive toolkit, the cultural semiotics, of radical individuation – and indeed, I would argue, understood and played with the logic of revolutionary self-production in a way equaled by no dissident figure before or since. Nechaev was not only one of the first figures to strip the trappings of Romanticism away from the radical subject – he viewed these disenchanting scraps as

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*An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage International, 1991), esp. 149-76.

<sup>522</sup> In recent years, there have been several excellent cultural histories that have taken a sophisticated approach to the idea of deceit – exploring how the ways in which people lie about themselves is always-already embedded within (and sheds light upon) a particular historical context as well as its understanding of the human subject. We can highlight, in particular, the excellent Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006). In the field of Russian History, we can also look to Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Making a Self for the Times: Impersonation and Imposture in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2 (2001): 469-87.

further material to be actively repurposed in the service of revolution. Entering the stage of history as he did in an age of high prison mythology, his demonic activity took place entirely in the orbit Peter and Paul Fortress. The fantasy of political incarceration was a rich theme to be tapped into for Nechaev's self-mystifications, a strange site of revolutionary power towards which, in the end, he flew too close.

Thus, by approaching S.G. Nechaev as a virtuosic writer of the self in an age of revolt, this current chapter seeks to (1) reevaluate our histories of this controversial figure, (2) nuance our understanding of revolutionary practices of self-production in nineteenth-century Europe, and (3) further elaborate the role of the Peter and Paul Fortress and political imprisonment more broadly – as both discursive marker and concrete experience – in the history of Russian radicalism. In Nechaev, we see boldly delimited the possibilities and limits of revolutionary Russian political imprisonment mythologies. His career was a dangerous play with the concept and fate of Fortress incarceration, until it swallowed him alive. We shall finally see that even then he struggled within its belly, seeking to turn the disciplinary entrails of the tsarist state against themselves: attempting to weaponize the concrete prison cell, just as he had once weaponized its myth.

### **III. The Discursive Space of the Peter and Paul Fortress**

S.G. Nechaev's first arrival on the stage of revolutionary history was marked by an unparalleled performance. It was the beginning of 1869, and the universities of St. Petersburg were nearing open revolt. Hotbeds of student activism since the events of the autumn of 1861, the capital's spaces of higher education had become training

grounds for small political actions and sounding boards for the latest discussions in critical social thought.<sup>523</sup> As the academic year turned from 1868 to 1869, St. Petersburg University was swept with talk of walkouts: over student fees, the poor condition of the library, and the increased gendarme presence that accompanied these ‘critiques and crises.’ In private circles, the most radicalized youths debated the latest words on populist solidarity and discussed the potential for revolutionary action in Imperial Russia’s post-Karakozov political landscape.<sup>524</sup>

The young S.G. Nechaev was one of a handful of prominent actors amidst this gathering storm. A recent transplant to the capital, and officially an ‘auditor’ at St. Petersburg University, Nechaev was quickly making a name for himself with his organizational energy and uncompromising political positions.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> For more on the student protests at the start of the decade, see Chapter Three of the present dissertation.

<sup>524</sup> The Romanian radical Zamfir Arbore – a student in St. Petersburg at the time – gives us insight into the particular material culture and hagiographical imagination of this moment: “... we specifically set up a particular environment in the apartment where we began our meetings: on the table were placed photographic postcards of Robespierre, Saint-Just, etc., on the walls were hung framed cards of the poet Mikhail Larionovich, A.I. Herzen, Chernyshevsky, and others.” Especially noteworthy here is the presence of Mikhailov and Chernyshevsky – both being prison martyrs from the beginning of the decade. See Zemfira Ralli-Arbore, “Sergei Gennad’evich Nechaev. (Iz moikh vospominanii),” *Byloe* 7 (1906): 142.

<sup>525</sup> In these early years of Petersburg politicization, Nechaev maintained a close friendship with P.N. Tkachev, a figure of great historical interest in his own right. Tkachev was a maximalist agitator who had spent time in the Peter and Paul Fortress at the start of the decade, written for *Russkoe slovo* during the period of its greatest popularity, and would soon once more be incarcerated within the Fortress walls. It is more than likely that his experience of the political prison left a deep impression on the young Nechaev. In the historiography, Tkachev is given the sobriquet “the Russian Jacobin” (or, more problematically, “the First Bolshevik”) for his particular articulation of a ‘politics of the deed’ within the terrain of early populism. In a fitting coda to a life devoted to conspiratorial action, Tkachev supposedly suffered a nervous breakdown after attending the funeral of Louis Blanqui in 1881, and spent the last years of his life in a Paris asylum. See Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 59. For information on his first period of incarceration from November 20, 1862 to February 2, 1863, under suspicion of involvement in the radical pamphleteering and fires in the capital that summer (from which he was freed without punishment), see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 245, ll. 86, 97-97ob, 239-239ob; and *ibid.*, d. 1135, l. 32.

That is: until he suddenly disappeared.

One January afternoon, a radical student – the seventeen-year-old Vera Ivanovna Zaslulich<sup>526</sup> – received a strange letter through the city post. It was a doubled message: “an envelope with two small notes [*zapisochkami*]: one – on a scrap of grey paper, the other – written in pen.”<sup>527</sup> The more formal note read:

Crossing a bridge, I met a carriage that was carrying arrested individuals; a piece of paper was thrown to me from this carriage, and I recognized the voice of a person who is dear to me: ‘if you are an honorable person, deliver this’; a request I hastened to perform and in my own turn I implore you, as an honorable person, to destroy my note this very minute so that I cannot be discovered from my handwriting. A student.

The next missive – pencil on a grey scrap – read, simply:

They are taking me to the fortress. Do not waste your energy, friend and comrades, worrying over me! God willing, we will see each other again.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> This is the same Vera Zaslulich who, in 1877, would achieve lasting fame for shooting the Governor-General of St. Petersburg in protest over the city’s treatment of political prisoners – and who would, astoundingly, be acquitted at her trial by a sympathetic jury. For more on this later revolutionary career, see Richard Pipes, “The Trial of Vera Z.” *Russian History* 37 (2010): v-82; Ana Siljak, *Angel of Vengeance: The Girl Who Shot the Governor of St. Petersburg and Sparked the Age of Assassination* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008); as well as the hagiographical portrait of Zaslulich in Stepniak [S.M. Kravchinskii], *Underground Russia* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1883), 106-14.

<sup>527</sup> Vera Zaslulich, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl’no-poselentsev, 1931), 25.

<sup>528</sup> This version of these messages is taken from testimony later given in court by Zaslulich, as quoted in B.P. Koz’min, ed., *Nechaev i Nechaevtsy. Sbornik materialov*. (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel’stvo, 1931), 67n12. A slightly different description of the two letters is given in Zaslulich’s posthumously-published memoirs: (1) “Walking today through Vasil’evskii Island, I met a carriage carrying arrestees, from whose window reached a hand which threw out a scrap of paper, after which I heard the words: ‘If you are a student, deliver this as addressed.’ I am a student, and consider it my duty to fulfill this request. Destroy my note.” (2) “They are taking me to a fortress – which, I do not know. Spread the word to our comrades. I hope to meet with them; let them continue our cause.” It is clear that, in these later remembrances, Zaslulich sought to distance herself from the figure of Nechaev, writing that these notes had been sent to “one of his acquaintances” – when she herself was in fact the recipient. See Zaslulich, *Vospominaniia*, 25, 25n38b.

Vera Zasulich immediately recognized the handwriting of the second note – that of twenty-one-year-old S.G. Nechaev, her friend and frequent interlocutor in the radical circles of the time.

These two romantic communiqués were immediately circulated around the capital, and sparked a sensation. Upon the news that Nechaev had been arrested and had called for solidarity “as he was being taken to the Peter and Paul Fortress,” students staged an assembly at St. Petersburg University and demanded that the Rector obtain his release.<sup>529</sup> A formal protest was planned, student delegates were sent to agitate in Moscow, and Nechaev’s own teenage sister traveled from Ivanovo to the capital to petition the authorities for his release.<sup>530</sup> This last recourse found no success. The Peter and Paul Fortress commandant, the officers of the Third Section, district police officials: no one could give an account of Nechaev’s whereabouts. This official silence was taken as evidence of their comrade’s secret, illegal imprisonment, and became further fuel for student protests. In the face of these continued disturbances, St. Petersburg University was closed in April.<sup>531</sup>

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What had happened to the young Nechaev? The truth of the matter was that the letters were a complex piece of dissemblance. He had never been arrested at all, let alone imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress. With the possibility of police detention looming, Nechaev had staged a story of his own arrest and incarceration with the help

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<sup>529</sup> For an account of the diffusion of this news and the student response, see L.N. Nikiforov, “Moi tiur’mi,” 170-73.

<sup>530</sup> See *ibid.*, 172-73; and Zasulich, *Vospominaniia*, 25-26.

<sup>531</sup> For a detailed account of the student protests of this spring, see S.G. Svatikov, “Studencheskoe dvizhenie 1869 godu (Bakunin i Nechaev),” *Nasha Strana. Istoricheskii Sbornik* 1 (1907): 196-222.

of a few close comrades. Traveling incognito, he then escaped St. Petersburg and made his way south to Odessa. There, he appears to have secured a berth on an English ship and found passage to Europe.<sup>532</sup>

None of this, however, was known to the students in the Russian capital. We can only imagine their surprise when, three months after his disappearance and desperate letter from a ‘Fortress-bound prison carriage,’ he suddenly resurfaced in Switzerland.

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When Nechaev next appeared, he was in Geneva. With a proclamation in hand directed towards his friends and comrades in St. Petersburg, he had no intention of backing away from his nascent prison myth; rather, he sought to quickly build upon its mystique. “TO THE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY, ACADEMY, AND TECH. INSTITUTE OF PETERSBURG” begins the four-page pamphlet:

Having escaped, thanks to a stroke of luck, from the frozen walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress, to the chagrin of the dark forces that threw me there, I send you, my dear comrades, these lines from a strange land, a land where I will not cease to work in the name of the great cause that binds us together.<sup>533</sup>

While rumors of his arrest and imprisonment had already passed through St. Petersburg’s circles, Nechaev himself now openly proclaimed this ordeal, and cast himself as the first individual in the history of Russian radicalism to successfully escape from the Peter and Paul Fortress. From this position of intense political pathos,

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<sup>532</sup> Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 67-70.

<sup>533</sup> Upon arriving in Switzerland, Nechaev immediately began to look for a publisher for his pamphlet. It was eventually printed on the radical press of Liudvig Chernetskii in June, 1869, after which copies were quickly smuggled back into Russia. See Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 98n10; and Zasluch, *Vospominaniia*, 28. All quotations are taken from an original copy of this pamphlet held in the pre-revolutionary illegal literature files of the State Archive of the Russian Federation: GARF f. 1741, op. 1, d. 344, ll. 1-2ob. The text has also been published in Svatikov, “Studencheskoe dvizhenie 1869 godu”, 228-31.

Nechaev turns to the current student situation. He sets out to stress the political contradictions of receiving an education from a repressive state, and implores his student audience to concretely act on behalf of the people [*narod*]:

Having developed our brains on the people's wealth, been fed by its bread, taken from its field, will we stand as before in the ranks of its persecutors? "No!" we said. From now on, let the task of the student no longer be a diploma, no longer be a cozy bureaucratic position, but rather be a life for the people and a struggle for their interests...

[Deconstruct] friends and enemies according to the position that they occupy, and not by their words<sup>534</sup> – believe in facts, friends, and declare yourself with facts, not with phrasemaking [*slovoprenie*], in order to gain the trust of those on whose bread you are fed, whose hands have laid the walls of your auditorium, who print your little books.

From here, Nechaev builds to a discussion of direct action: students should continue their meetings, build up their cadres, and prepare for the coming revolution alongside and on behalf of the people. The pamphlet ends with an exalted appraisal of the struggle to come:

There are no true deeds without sacrifices. Perfect safety can only be found in idle actions, such as those that occupy complacent liberals, as they arrange bourgeois associations and think to cultivate social roses in the swamp of despotism. Let each individual... be deeply convinced that those that have remained and survived will continue the cause and achieve repayment for every victim, avenging their sufferings a hundredfold, just as I am thus convinced.

Your  
Nechaev.

Nechaev's student proclamation is both highly unoriginal and wholly unique. In its political concepts, the historian finds little that is new. The text holds a nihilism-tinged critique of Imperial Russian educational institutions, a call for populist solidarity with the *narod*, a sanctification of direct radical action, and a prodding of gentry guilt – all

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<sup>534</sup> This insistence upon the importance of a friend-enemy distinction hints at a certain curious prefiguration of Schmitt's concept of the political – so too, we can say, does Nechaev's larger rejection of the Rousseau *terroir* of the Russian revolutionary tradition.

existing elements of the progressive discourse of the Russian 1860s, which would culminate in the grand student politics of the 1870s.

Thus, it can be read as a rather symptomatic political document. However, as revolutionary theatre, it is entirely engrossing. Nechaev's first lines color the entire text. Here was a young man whom all thought was incarcerated in the autocracy's most dread political prison – and who now announced his escape from the Peter and Paul Fortress, a feat never before accomplished. Gone were the days of impassioned student conversations in courtyards and apartments. Nechaev was now marked with the pathos of the political prison, by the weight of all those who had died within its walls. He had truly suffered in the service of the cause, and all talk of consequences and action – victims and vengeance – took on manifestly different weight. As Vera Zaslich would recall in her posthumously published memoirs, “the piquancy of his secret abduction by the government soon made him into a sort of legendary individual [*kakuiu-to legendarnuiu lichnost'*].”<sup>535</sup>

Furthermore, he had not only faced the Fortress, but had even escaped from the clutches of the beast. His call for radical struggle was thus doubly marked: Nechaev spoke for the victim and the victor, the avenger and the avenged. In his very person, he now crystallized a budding thought amongst Russia's radical youth: that perhaps the path from the university classroom to the space of the ‘people’ passed through the political prison. Nechaev thus re-emerged in Switzerland with an immense stock of revolutionary currency: a personal myth constructed from the trappings of radical Russia's carceral discourse.

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<sup>535</sup> Zaslich, *Vospominaniia*, 26. The spread of this tale of Nechaev's Fortress imprisonment and escape is also discussed in S.L. Chudnovskii, *Iz davykh let. Vospominaniia*, 25.

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And this was a fund of cultural currency that Nechaev would soon seek to invest. For in fact, his invented tale of Fortress escape in the spring of 1869 was not directed solely towards his comrades in St. Petersburg. His choice of Switzerland as a waypoint was not accidental: the Cantons had long been a destination for political émigrés fleeing tsarist persecution.<sup>536</sup> Here lived a large community of Russian exiles, including Aleksandr Herzen, N.P. Ogarev, and M.A. Bakunin: the lions of the previous generation of Russian dissent. While the stars of these first two figures had fallen in recent years due to their hesitation before the most radical formulations of contemporary leftist thought, their dissident journalistic practices were still suffused with a sacred patina.

This power was not lost on Nechaev. In fact, before having his student proclamation independently published, he had first approached Herzen and Ogarev about the possibility of printing it under their aegis. “Yesterday,” Ogarev wrote to Herzen on April 1, 1869,

A letter arrived for you with a request to print a message to the students by one student who has just escaped from the Peter and Paul Fortress. The message is perhaps a bit exalted, but it is impossible not to print it; I am deeply convinced that on this matter turns the resurrection of our émigré press...<sup>537</sup>

Herzen was not nearly so enthused by Nechaev’s proclamation, and the two did not end up backing the piece.<sup>538</sup> However, even in this exchange we can see the power given to the space of the political prison. For Nechaev, it was a key – immediately

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<sup>536</sup> The classic work on these communities is E.H. Carr, *The Romantic Exiles: A Nineteenth-Century Portrait Gallery*.

<sup>537</sup> Quoted in S.V. Zhitomirskoi and N.M. Pirumovoi, “Ogarev, Bakunin i N.A. Gertsen-doch’ v ‘nechaevskoi’ istorii (1870 g.),” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 96 (1985): 418. At this point, their journal *Kolokol* had not been issued for several years due to a declining readership.

<sup>538</sup> See a discussion of Herzen’s more critical approach in Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 95.

brandished – promising entrance into the circle of revolutionary luminaries living in Geneva. For these elder statesmen of Russian radicalism, it was a mark of distinction for their young visitor: a sign of dedication and commitment, the crucial line on his revolutionary *curriculum vitae*, a signifier that he was one of their own. And one cannot perhaps imagine a more enthusiastic welcome than that given by the Geneva-based M.A. Bakunin to this ‘prison-escapee.’

Let us recall that Bakunin had spent a long stretch of his youth in the prisons of tsarist Russia, including three years of solitary confinement in the Alekseevskii Ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>539</sup> And while the terms on which Nechaev became introduced to Bakunin in Geneva have not been preserved, it is safe to assume that the former’s patina of recent political incarceration played a large role in his passionate reception by Bakunin. Nearly two decades had elapsed since Bakunin’s escape from tsarist prison and exile, and in the interim period he had become an internationally-renowned political thinker. However, an aura of melancholy had begun to suffuse the twilight years of the colossal anarchist: a figure of great passions and appetites increasingly distanced from the concrete struggles of his native land. Within this political and existential conjuncture, Nechaev’s appearance played an almost overdetermined role for Bakunin. Here was an energetic, rough young radical: a former Fortress prisoner like himself, unbent by his ordeal, and carrying fresh news of political developments in the Russian Empire. Here was a measure of soil for this aging Russian Antaeus.

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<sup>539</sup> For a discussion of Bakunin’s Fortress imprisonment – as well as his role in establishing the political-prison mythos of which Nechaev himself was a product – see Chapter Two of the present dissertation.

Upon meeting Nechaev in the spring of 1869, Bakunin (alongside the always-impressionable Ogarev) could barely contain his excitement. He would later recall his reception of the young revolutionary's iron will and strength of purpose: "Nechaev is one of the most active and energetic people whom I have ever met. When it is necessary to serve what he names *the cause*, he does not hesitate or stop in the face of anything, and shows himself as merciless towards himself as he is to all others."<sup>540</sup> Bakunin had found a living conduit to the Russian struggle. In Nechaev's boldness, the elder preacher of creative destruction – this old Hegelian who had broken with Hegel – envisioned a living spark of the radical energies animating his homeland. And this conduit seemed to promise passage in both directions. That spring, Bakunin quickly set to work drafting a series of pamphlets in collaboration with Nechaev: "To the Russian Peasants [*Muzhikam*] and all Simple Working People," "A Few Words to Our Young Brothers in Russia," and "The Direction of the Revolutionary Question in Russia," to name a few.<sup>541</sup> This was also the period when Nechaev – with the help of Bakunin – wrote his famous *Catechism*. Through Nechaev, Bakunin glimpsed a revolutionary Russian present, as well as a pathway to speak in its debates and participate in its propagandistic work. His writings that spring represent his most sustained involvement with the politics of his long-departed homeland in years.

Ogarev was also swept up in this exalted encounter with Nechaev. Most notably, the young radical inspired Ogarev to pen the poem "The Student." Dedicated to "my young friend Nechaev," its rather sentimental verses (written in couplets) trace the story of a poor youth who, animated by "the living labor of science," travels

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<sup>540</sup> S.G. Svatikov, "Studencheskoe dvizhenie 1869 godu (Bakunin i Nechaev)," 226.

<sup>541</sup> See further discussion of these publications in I.I. Frolova, ed., *Kniga v Rossii, 1861-1881* (Moscow: Kniga, 1988), 1:156-65.

Russia preaching radical solidarity amongst the peasants. The short piece ends with the protagonist's martyrdom ("He ended his life in this world – / In the snowy camps of Siberia..."). In his suffering and death, however, the struggle for human emancipation is sanctified and continues.<sup>542</sup>

Despite (or perhaps because of) these effusions from the revolutionary old guard, Nechaev had no intention of laying down roots in Geneva. As the summer of 1869 waned he traveled east, and crossed once more over the Russian border in the last days of August. His sights were set on Moscow. He had left the empire nine months before on the wings of a self-invented prison escape – he now returned garbed in an open celebration of his character by the grand elders of Russian dissent, bearing a collection of propagandistic works to his name (Nechaev's student pamphlet and *Catechism*, his collaborations with Bakunin, and Ogarev's poem all began to be smuggled into Russia that summer<sup>543</sup>), and amidst the full maturation of his carceral myth.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>542</sup> Quoted in S.G. Svatikov, "Studencheskoe dvizhenie 1869 godu (Bakunin i Nechaev)," 225-26.

<sup>543</sup> Lur'e, *Sozidatel' razrusheniia*, 129.

<sup>544</sup> In addition, we should note one last item in Nechaev's possession. Famously, upon learning of his intention to return to Russia, Bakunin gifted him with an additional marker of revolutionary prestige. This came in the form of a small card, upon which was written that its bearer was "one of the trusted representatives of the Russian division of the World Revolutionary Union." This token was signed by Bakunin, under the aegis of the "*Alliance revolutionnaire europeenne. Comite general*," and numbered 2771. This curious document allows us to remark that conspiracy and mystification was not an invention of 'Nechaevism': in reality, there was not and had ever been any sort of 'Union' or '*Alliance*', let alone one with nearly three thousand members. With this card, Bakunin wittingly lent Nechaev a powerful stage prop for his continuing performance of revolutionary prestige. See Lur'e, *Sozidatel' razrusheniia*, 130; as well as Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 370.

Before turning to the second and third acts of this individual's revolutionary career, it is worth pausing to examine the peculiar logics that both shaped and are expressed within Nechaev's activities in 1869. Traditionally, conservative histories of Nechaev have taken this moment to adopt a stance of moral condemnation: to depict his patterns of dissemblance as rooted in either psychopathology or Machiavellian villainy (and thread the former backward to Nechaev's childhood, or thread the latter forward in order to condemn future anti-tsarist movements in imperial Russia). What these approaches have obscured is that Nechaev's self-mystifications have much to teach us: both the legends with which he garbed himself, and the way in which he wove them together, speak to the history of subjectivity and imprisonment in nineteenth century Russia.

After first meeting Nechaev in Geneva, Bakunin had enthused: "they are marvelous, these young fanatics – believers without God and heroes without rhetoric (*veriushchie bez Boga i geroi bez fraz!*)"<sup>545</sup> Enthralled by this young figure from St. Petersburg, Bakunin sought in him a breath of forthright, honest radical energy. With hindsight, we can see that the revolutionary elder was not quite correct: however, in evoking the 'young fanatic's' relationship with the word, Bakunin inadvertently touched upon an essential element of Nechaev's original formulation of radical selfhood. For in these first nine months of 1869, Nechaev proved himself not as an individual "without rhetoric," but rather one constantly conscious of the cultural semiotics of dissident identity.

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<sup>545</sup> Lur'e, *Sozidatel' razrusheniia*, 97.

One of the major arguments of the present dissertation is that the revolutionary Russian intelligentsia is best understood not as a social class or formal politics, but rather as a group of individuals who adopted a particular genre of self-narration. Beginning with the actors of the 1840s – amongst whom we must not forget Herzen and Bakunin – a novel configuration of German Idealist philosophy and the European *Bildungsroman* set the epistemological horizons for a new form of radical autobiographics. New structures of telling the self arose, in which the subject and her time – the personal and the world-historical – were read as fundamentally intertwined, emerging through and with one another. The most important novels in nineteenth-century Russian history were those that each revolutionary told about themselves – in lived activity or published memoir – as a radicalized intelligentsia formed itself as a shared narrative community. The story of one’s ‘political education’ became an essential historical document, encapsulating within itself the larger societal momentums of its time.<sup>546</sup>

What developed in nineteenth-century Russia can thus be seen as a political aesthetics of revolutionary selfhood. As with any genre, this fledgling tradition soon collected a set of tropes: narrative tics and rhetorical patterns, codes and chronotopes.

It is within this terrain of political aesthetics that we must locate S.G. Nechaev in the year 1869. His self-aggrandizing stories of tsarist arrest and prison escape did not spontaneously appear from a space outside of both history and morality: rather, each were part of the common rhetorical fund of radical self-production during the turbulent 1860s.

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<sup>546</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the Russian intelligentsia as a genre of self-narration – as well as of this genre’s original links with the space of the political prison – see Chapter Two of the present dissertation.

The historical uniqueness of Nechaev lies in his original relationship with the burgeoning narrative activity of modern radicalism. That is, Nechaev was perhaps the first modern revolutionary to comprehend the grand significance that autobiographics was coming to assume in the struggle against repressive state structures. And not only comprehend – in Nechaev’s calculated web of self-mystifications, we see a purposeful manipulation of the discursive mechanisms and narrative elements of his time: an attempt to seize the means of radical self-production in the service of revolution. When, in the *Catechism of the Revolutionary*, he speaks of the need to “[break] all bonds which tie [the radical] to the social order and the civilized world... with all its generally accepted conventions,” these hated fetters are not only Russia’s social etiquettes and codes of honor, but also its *narrative conventions*. In being “tyrannical towards [oneself],” not even the sense of inviolable self-unity should be spared the axe.<sup>547</sup> Perhaps Nechaev should be remembered not only for his belief in radical destruction, but also radical *deconstruction*. His dissemblance evidences a campaign to stand outside of his own selfhood, take apart the tropes and mechanisms of dissident self-narration, and repurpose this machinery to conscious ends.

Nechaevism was the rejection of Romanticism not only in content, but also in form – his radical innovation came in refusing the unspoken enshrinement of ‘authenticity’ at the heart of radical practices of self-production, allowing him to transform revolutionary ‘technologies of the self’ into further tools in the service of the struggle. From the 1840s onwards, a tradition of revolutionary autobiographics had found its textual home in the birth of the modern (prison) memoir, and its lived

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<sup>547</sup> Sergey Nechaev, “Catechism of the Revolutionist (1869),” 72. It is no accident that the first subsection of Nechaev’s *Catechism* is subtitled “The Relationship of a Revolutionary to Themselves [*Otnoshenie revoliutsionera k samomu sebe*].”

example in the discursively-invested lives of political martyrs. With his radical anti-humanism – by severing the genre’s unspoken link with subjective authenticity while embracing its mechanisms and its tropes – Nechaev stands as the rejection and ultimate culmination of this tradition. Nechaev’s dissemblance thus represents a fascinating limit case for our histories of revolutionary Russian subject formation. If Nechaev was truly “without rhetoric,” it can only be said in the sense that even while being shaped by the rhetorics of Russian revolutionary commitment, he sought to master and willfully wield these cultural semiotics as themselves instruments in achieving political change. When the elderly Bakunin met Nechaev in Geneva in the spring of 1869, little did he know that this young radical – whom he took as bold yet coarse – in fact possessed a sophisticated relationship with the genre of radical self-narration that Bakunin himself had helped inaugurate in his youth and had honed within the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

This leads us to our second meditation on Nechaev’s early revolutionary career: for his patterns of dissemblance tell us much not only about radical subjectivity in imperial Russia as a whole, but also about the discursive space of the prison in this political-semiotic landscape.

#### *A. Romantic Myth*

From 1866 to 1884 – the Age of High Prison Mythology – the Peter and Paul Fortress rose as a space of dark fascination and dramatic allure in the autobiographies of young radicals. Patterned with images of redemptive martyrdom, echoing with strains of gothic romanticism, the possible fate of Fortress incarceration represented the

intrusion of the novelistic upon the nineteenth-century political imagination just as its cathedral spire interrupted the St. Petersburg skyline.<sup>548</sup> Recall the words of N.A. Morozov from the beginning of the present chapter. Arrested by the tsarist police just a few years after the start of Nechaev's revolutionary career, the young Morozov was entirely invested in fantasies of martyrdom – of purposeful, dramatic revolutionary suffering in “a damp dark room within a grey bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress, with a deep, cave-like embrasure and a view on wide-flowing Neva...”<sup>549</sup> Recall as well his shame and disappointment at being held in a district police station rather than the Fortress: “I had yet to read in a single novel of a hero imprisoned in a police station...”<sup>550</sup> To escape from such a lukewarm fate would have none of the high drama of a Fortress flight.

When Nechaev decided to flee St. Petersburg on the pretext of an invented arrest and prison escape, his choice of the Peter and Paul Fortress as stage for this narrative was not accidental. In a narrative community where political incarceration possessed such a tragic allure, the ‘Russian Bastille’ was the novelistic space *par excellence*. The ‘grey bastions’ of the Fortress worked to seep Nechaev’s self-image in a wholly romantic light. The power of the citadel as a terrain for narratives of radical selfhood is further attested to by the fact that the story of Nechaev’s supposed escape soon began to take on a life of its own. By the start of the next decade, this prison myth had sprung even more details and novelistic contours: revolutionary rumors

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<sup>548</sup> These developments are discussed in greater depth in other locations in the present dissertation. For a genealogy of Russian carceral martyrdom in the Peter and Paul Fortress, see Chapters Three and Four. For a discussion of the role of Gothic Romanticism in the political aesthetics of this period, see Chapter Seven.

<sup>549</sup> Morozov, *Povesti moei zhizni*, 2:46.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:48.

spoke of him in a “frozen casemate of the Peter and Paul Fortress”, where sadistic interrogators pried apart his clenched teeth with a knife to drug him during questioning, and from which he finally escaped by stealing a general’s uniform.<sup>551</sup> Even the form through which he transmitted his original story of Fortress imprisonment – the doubled letter to Vera Zasulich – is a manipulation of the mechanisms of non-omniscient narration in the European novel. In choosing the Peter and Paul Fortress as stage for his self-aggrandizement, Nechaev was not inventing anew, but rather tapping into an already overinvested site for radical political cultures. The further romantic narratives generated off of his original deceit additionally demonstrate the centrality of the political prison in the stories revolutionaries were telling at this time: about their forebears, each other, and themselves.

### *B. Radical Filiation*

Nechaev’s Fortress tale also speaks to the increasing role of political imprisonment as a chronological and generational linkage in the self-narratives of Russian radicalism. Let us recall Kropotkin’s experience of the Peter and Paul Fortress as recounted at the start of the present chapter: when the prince entered its cells in the 1870s, he did not do so alone, but in the company of a genealogy of past radical actors. Revolutionaries of this period saw in the citadel an archive of their own movement: “here the

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<sup>551</sup> This elaborate story of Fortress imprisonment was recounted during the trial of the *Nechaevtsy* (Nechaev’s followers) during the summer of 1871. By this point, the legend surrounding Nechaev had grown to such proportions that he was said to have escaped from *two* prisons: he was purported to have been taken to – and fought his way out of – an Odessa jail as well, just after his flight from the Peter and Paul Fortress. (We should also note that, at this point, government circles in Russia were beginning to cast doubt upon this increasingly-exaggerated Nechaev mythos.) See V.D. Spasovich, “Rech’ v zashchitu Alekseia Kuznetsova,” in *Sochineniia* (St. Petersburg: Knizhnyi magazin Br. Rymovich, 1893) 5:142.

Decembrists...underwent their first experiences of martyrdom...here were imprisoned the poets Ryléef and Shevchénko, Dostoévsky, Bakunin, Chernyshévsky, Pisareff... All these shadows rose before my imagination.”<sup>552</sup> Past experiences of death and suffering coalesced around this space, serving as elements with which radical political cultures had begun to construct developmental narratives of their own movement, and within which they could emplace their own incarcerations as part of a larger arc of historical struggle.

In wrapping himself in a myth of Fortress imprisonment, Nechaev thus was not merely investing his own character with a dark romanticism – he was also locating his own person within an emerging lineage of dissident struggle and sacrifice.

Fascinatingly, Nechaev not only implicitly inserted himself into this pedigree: by meeting Bakunin and receiving this elder’s blessing, he became one of the few ‘imprisoned’ radicals to actively link disparate generations of carceral history. From Bakunin, to Nechaev: the Peter and Paul Fortress moved through them as a persistent chronotope of revolutionary self-narration. In Nechaev’s career, we glimpse two types of radical filiation attached to the citadel: a dark birthright passed down from Fathers to Sons, through which a common revolutionary heritage was recognized and constructed; and the prison itself as birthsite, a crucible wherein true radicals were initiated and forged.

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<sup>552</sup> P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 2:141-42.

### *C. Revolutionary Power*

Throughout the present dissertation, the Peter and Paul Fortress has often been characterized as a *stage* of the Russian revolutionary tradition. This concept can be explored in two, intertwined, senses. Across the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the political prison served as a site for the performance of revolutionary subjecthood. Simultaneously, it functioned as a stage in the life of the ideal radical: a moment of high tension in the *Bildungsroman* of the developing leftist, an ordeal that tested a revolutionary's strength, and a threshold which burned away any doubts regarding their political commitment. For those who survived incarceration, passing through the fires of the tsarist gaol amplified the force behind each of their future radical projects.

Nechaev's construction of his own prison story demonstrates the existence of this mythic power with remarkable clarity. The uniqueness of Nechaev is that he severed this stage-like/stadial quality of political imprisonment from the concrete space of the prison itself. In 1869, he tapped into the symbolic fund of Russian radicalism's carceral myth as a discursive currency capable of being invested in practical revolutionary ends – in strengthening each and every one of his pronouncements, in amplifying his power as a dissident organizer.

While we have no evidence of the immediate effect that Nechaev's Fortress narrative had on fellow revolutionaries upon first meeting, we can gauge the power that he gained by this association through the memoir literature. Specifically, after his lies had come to light and his "friends and comrades" attempted to understand

Nechaev's mythmaking, the raw political power of imprisonment was frequently recognized.

Fellow leftists attempted to rationalize a comrade's dishonesty through appeal to the power of his particular legend. "The spread of this [imprisonment] rumor", justified one contemporary, "was due to Nechaev's sincere conviction that it was necessary to create for himself a certain prestige for the sake of the greater productivity of his future revolutionary activities."<sup>553</sup> Even non-sympathetic witnesses of Nechaev's early career begrudgingly recognized the power of his lies. At the trial of the *Nechaevtsy* in 1871, defense attorney V.D. Spasovich presented Nechaev's prison legend as a reprehensible yet masterful piece of self-aggrandizement: "already in January 1869 he grasped a brilliant thought, he planned (this lively person!) to create a legend for himself, to craft himself as a martyr and make himself known as such throughout all the Russian lands."<sup>554</sup>

What unites these attempts at explaining Nechaev's dissemblance is that they each bear witness to the *success* of his calculated project of radical self-invention. Nechaev's early self-mystifications would not have elicited such responses – either hostile or in defense – if there had *not* been a recognizable link between the experience of political imprisonment and the accumulation of revolutionary prestige. This power that Nechaev gained from his invented proximity to the political prison speaks deeply to the privileged space given the Peter and Paul Fortress in the lifeworlds of nineteenth-century Russian radicalisms.

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<sup>553</sup> Chudnovskii, *Iz davnykh let*, 25.

<sup>554</sup> Spasovich, "Rech' v zashchitu Alekseia Kuznetsova," in *Sochineniia*, 5:142. In an interesting example of the sinews of art and life surrounding Nechaev's revolutionary career, we can note that this Spasovich was the model for the fictional defense attorney Fetiukovich in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*.

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Thus, the early revolutionary career of S.G. Nechaev provides us with a fascinating glimpse into the mechanisms of radical self-invention in tsarist Russia's age of high prison mythology. By wiping away the grime of political transference and moral sermonizing from the historiographical lens, we encounter the young Nechaev in 1869 as a masterful writer of the revolutionary self.

And this was a genre, as we have seen, that was dominated by the granite walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress. In Nechaev's sophisticated campaign of constructing himself, there is explicit recognition of the central role played by political imprisonment in the cultural imaginary of his contemporaries. The specific articulations of Nechaev's legend further speak to the particular contours of this space: a site of Romantic myth, radical filiation, and revolutionary power.

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But – let us stop here, at the edge of a precipice. Up to this point, the conceptual language of the present chapter has been one of engagement and approach: of breaking through the historiographical barriers erected to keep Nechaev at bay, and entering into the workshop of his subject-production. However, we must treat this momentum carefully. The danger here is to reduplicate in theory what Nechaev performed, in 1869, in practice: that is, to become lost in the rich symbolic space of the Peter and Paul Fortress, and to begin to see it as a site possessing a solely discursive existence.

For if on the one hand the Peter and Paul Fortress led a rich, operational mythic life in the history of Russian radicalism, on the other hand it was still a very real political prison: a place where real individuals truly suffered and died. This was a

fact that Nechaev would come to learn all too well. In a perverse piece of narrative symmetry, just as the first half of S.G. Nechaev's revolutionary career orbited around the prison cell in its symbolic dimensions, the last decade of his life was shaped by Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment as concrete, suffering experience. As we turn now to these later years – a shift from the abstract to the real, as it were – it will be my argument that Nechaev's extraordinary activities as an actual political prisoner proved just as historically significant to the tsarist disciplinary system as his earlier narrative actions were to the Peter and Paul Fortress as discursive object.

#### **IV. Arrest, Trial, and Sentencing**

From the shores of 1869, let us now quickly jump ahead a few years before refocusing our attention on S.G. Nechaev. (This sort of chronological short-circuiting is an unpardonable offense in traditional biography, but a more-than-permissible leap in our present constellatory project.)

Upon returning to Russia that autumn, Nechaev spent a spell living incognito in Moscow. Here he attempted to organize a network of revolutionary cadres, wielding the conceit of an international conspiratorial movement that had been gifted to him by Bakunin. These labors ended in bloodshed: in November 1869, Nechaev and a small group of compatriots murdered one of their own, an agricultural student named I.I. Ivanov. The ostensible reason for the killing was that Ivanov had become a police spy; however, it is more likely that Nechaev had seen this undertaking as a way to bind his circle in blood. In any event, Ivanov's body was soon discovered and traced back to the radical student milieu of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Over one hundred

individuals linked to Nechaev were arrested and sent to the Peter and Paul Fortress, including Vera Zasulich and Petr Tkachev.<sup>555</sup> The hearing of the *Nechaevtsy* in 1871 – the first jury trial of political defendants in tsarist Russia – proved a public sensation, painting a picture of demonic revolutionary activity and directly inspiring Dostoevsky to write his novel *Besy*.<sup>556</sup>

Nechaev, however, was not among the defendants. After the killing of Ivanov he had again fled abroad, arriving back in Switzerland in the first months of 1870. Here he once more joined the circle of Bakunin, Herzen, and Ogarev – but this time approached them with a cruel imperiousness quite different from his earlier supplication. Over the course of the next year, he would attempt to manipulate these elder luminaries for his own personal gain: stealing letters to use as blackmail, chasing

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<sup>555</sup> Tkachev and Zasulich's sister Ekaterina were arrested on December 1, 1869; Vera Zasulich was imprisoned on May 29, 1870. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 330, ll. 62, 64-65; and d. 347, ll. 125, 127. In this lead-up to the trial of the *Nechaevtsy*, individuals were held primarily in the cells of the Ekaterininaia curtain wall and the Trubetskoi bastion. The Peter and Paul Fortress carceral regime at this time was characterized by a certain degree of mildness: provision funds for each individual were raised from 30 to 50 kopecks a day; prisoners were allowed to receive books from friends and relatives; and the nobleman Tkachev was given permission to smoke cigars and pursue small literary labors in his cell, penning the essays "The Utopian Government of the Bourgeoisie," "What is the Party of Progress?," and "The Science of Poetry and the Poetry of Science" (although requests for writing materials by other detainees were denied). See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 345, ll. 1-2(obs), 4-4ob; d. 346, ll. 162, 170-170ob, 241, 251-251ob, 225-225ob; d. 347, ll. 143, 174, 181-181ob, 211, 278, 344, 392. This period is also noteworthy for the first modern incarceration of women in the Fortress: see the resulting administrative confusion regarding the prison bathhouse regime at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 330, ll. 29, 34-34ob, 37, etc.; d. 346, l. 230. In general, the nature of the Fortress regime from 1869 to 1871 – distinguished by its improvisatory practice: intent on isolation, yet administratively overwhelmed and arbitrary in its enforcement of regulations – foreshadows the functioning of this prison during the vast political arrests that would occur just a few years later. For overall lists of those incarcerated during the trial of the *Nechaevtsy*, as well as correspondence between the Fortress commandant and the Third Section regarding the stretched resources of the citadel, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 330, l. 328; d. 343 ll. 1, 2-4(obs), 49-52(obs); d. 348, ll. 1-6ob.

<sup>556</sup> The richest source on this trial remains B.P. Koz'min, ed., *Nechaev i Nechaevtsy*.

after their common monetary fund for revolutionary activity, and attempting to seduce Herzen's daughter.<sup>557</sup>

One of Nechaev's most curious accomplishments during this period is that, after the death of Herzen in January 1870, he managed to take hold of the reigns of the famous journal *Kolokol* (which had at this point been defunct for several years). A series of issues appeared at this time, under the editorial control of him, Bakunin, and Ogarev. This brief run – announced as “Edited by Agents of the Russian Cause,” and issued six times between April 2 and May 9, 1870 – is not distinguished by any novel political positions or, indeed, any great quality of its writings. However, it does hold a point of interest for the present study, as it contains perhaps the last gasp of Nechaev's mythmaking activity.

In the very first number of the re-forged *Kolokol*, an open letter is printed from S.G. Nechaev. The editorial introduction characterizes this figure as an individual who would “offer himself as a redemptive sacrifice, if by perishing he could unite all peoples in a general struggle against the [European] governments which have long worked in concert”: the conceit of the editorial board hiding the fact that this introduction was likely written by Nechaev himself. The published letter – ostensibly written somewhere in France – is a self-depiction of a selfless combatant of Russian and European despotism. With no word on the killing of Ivanov, it states that Nechaev had indeed returned to Russia in the autumn of the previous year to spread socialism among the common people, only to have been “seized in one of the provincial towns

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<sup>557</sup> For an overview of these activities, see Michael Confino, ed., *Daughter of a Revolutionary: Natalie Herzen and the Bakunin-Nechaev Circle* (LaSalle, IL: Library Press, 1973); and Carr, *Romantic Exiles*; impressions of Nechaev during this time are also recorded in M.P. Sazhin, *Vospominaniia*, 62-74.

and, as often happens with our political arrestees, was immediately sent off to hard labor without any trial.” Here, apparently, a high official of the tsarist secret police intervened and ordered his death – it was as this summary justice was being carried out, and his “[his] life hung by a thread,” that an energetic comrade appeared to bribe his guards and deliver Nechaev “haggard but alive from the hands of the executioner.”<sup>558</sup> From here, he had ostensibly escaped abroad. This story was, of course, a complete invention. And despite the further publication of this fabricated tale in the French press, Nechaev’s new political romance appears to have had far less impact than his earlier story of Fortress imprisonment. Likewise, the Nechaev-lead resurrection of *Kolokol* failed to attract readers and ceased publication in the spring of 1870.

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Alienating his former supporters and harried by Russian police agents, Nechaev spent his last year of freedom moving through Europe as a shadow of his former radical stature. Finally, this act too came to a close – on August 2, 1872, he was arrested by Swiss gendarmes in Zurich.<sup>559</sup>

The Swiss motioned their willingness to extradite Nechaev to the Russian Empire: but only on the condition that he would be tried as a common criminal, and not for political offenses. Following a series of delays, the Romanov autocracy agreed to these terms.<sup>560</sup> Thus, after an imaginary career populated by fictitious gendarmes

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<sup>558</sup> S.G. Nechaev, “Pis’mo Nechaeva,” *Kolokol* 1 (April 2, 1870). Reprinted in I.A. Teodorovich, ed., *Kolokol* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politkatorzhan, 1933), 12.

<sup>559</sup> See the account of his arrest in Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 242-43.

<sup>560</sup> See GARF f. 124, op. 1, d. 344, 2-3; 4. This matter traveled to the highest offices of the state: the terms of Nechaev’s extradition were eventually confirmed by Tsar Alexander II himself. See *ibid.*, ll.10g-10g(ob).

and fantasized prisons, Nechaev truly fell into the hands of the Russian secret police. Guarded by agents of the Third Section and local gendarmes, with the entire Warsaw railway line put on high alert, a closed prison train carried Nechaev back to St. Petersburg towards the end of October 1872.<sup>561</sup>

The tsarist state was right to take special precautions with this arrested revolutionary. News of the arrest had quickly swept Russian émigré communities that summer and fall, and – despite Nechaev’s notoriety – a group of sympathizers drafted a letter of protest against their compatriot’s seizure and extradition.<sup>562</sup> More ominously, on the occasion of Nechaev’s transport back to Russia it seems that a band of radicals had stopped his gendarme convoy in Zurich and demanded his release – sabers were drawn, and several were wounded.<sup>563</sup>

These disturbances surely contributed to the extreme precautions taken around Nechaev upon his return to Russia. From the Warsaw Station he was quickly brought to the Peter and Paul Fortress, whose threshold he now crossed for the first time on October 19, 1872.<sup>564</sup> As the government gathered its case against him, Nechaev was held in a cell of the Trubetskoi Bastion, with a special unit assigned solely to his guard.<sup>565</sup> This first true encounter with the Peter and Paul Fortress was brief: after two

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<sup>561</sup> See GARF f. 109, op. 154 (*3-ia ekspeditsiia*), d. 115, ch. 23, ll. 22, 24.

<sup>562</sup> See *ibid.*, ll. 12-12ob; and Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 244-49. Despite his cooled relations with Nechaev, Bakunin was particularly shocked by this collaboration between the Swiss republic and tsarist absolutism – an event that evoked the unholy alliance between Austrian and Russian gendarmerie that had occasioned his own extradition and Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment nearly two decades previously. See Chapter Two of the present dissertation.

<sup>563</sup> See GARF f. 109, op. 154 (*3-ia ekspeditsiia*), d. 115, ch. 23, ll. 35-35ob, 36-37. The gendarmes responsible for Nechaev’s successful extradition were eventually given medals and promotions for their service: see *ibid.*, ll. 137-138.

<sup>564</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 480, ll. 2, 3, 5.

<sup>565</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 154 (*3-ia ekspeditsiia*), d. 115, ch. 23, ll. 25, 27, 28-28ob, 29, 34, etc.

months, Nechaev was removed from his cell and taken to Moscow to stand trial as a common criminal for the murder of Ivanov.<sup>566</sup> He arrived in Moscow on December 23, and his public proceeding began shortly after the New Year.<sup>567</sup>

The trial was nothing short of a farce. Before the Moscow District Court, a jury of his peers, a crushing crowd, and journalists from across the empire, Nechaev explicitly refused to recognize the formal legitimacy of the proceedings.<sup>568</sup> Claiming the status of political prisoner, Nechaev both declined any court-assigned defense and refused to represent himself. The trial commenced at noon on January 8, 1873, and was over by 5 pm. It surely would have been even briefer if Nechaev had not frequently interrupted the proceedings with protests against their illegality and cries of “long live the Zemsky Sobor” and “down with despotism!”<sup>569</sup> Despite, or perhaps because of, this strategy of protest, Nechaev was found guilty of the murder of Ivanov and sentenced to twenty years of hard labor.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 480, ll. 18, 19, 20.

<sup>567</sup> In Moscow, Nechaev was held in a solitary cell of the Sushchevskii prison house, with a private guard of three gendarmes. See *ibid.*, 63, 65, 71.

<sup>568</sup> The jury— composed mostly of merchants and craftsmen — is discussed in Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 254. While the trial was an open affair, members of the public quickly took all available tickets. Nevertheless, crowds of ticketless onlookers gathered inside and around the judicial building, and had to be dispersed by the Moscow gendarmes. See GARF f. 109, op. 154 (*3-ia ekspeditsiia*), d. 115, ch. 23, ll. 95-95ob.

<sup>569</sup> These remarks are the subject of several urgent, coded telegrams sent between the Moscow gendarmes and the Third Section headquarters in St. Petersburg: see GARF f. 124, op. 1, d. 344, ll. 54-54ob; GARF f. 109, op. 154 (*3-ia ekspeditsiia*), d. 115, ch. 23, ll. 74-74ob, 76-77, 82-82ob, 87-87ob, 89-90, 91, 93-93ob. The gesture towards the *zemskii sobor* here — hearkening to the early-modern Russian assemblies that many progressives at this time saw as a potentially-resurrectable native tradition of anti-absolutist political representation — is a reminder to the historian that, despite all his innovations of strategy and selfhood, S.G. Nechaev must still be located within the political horizons of Russian populism.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. Indeed, it seems that — perhaps due to the hysteria surrounding the earlier press coverage of the *Nechaevtsy* trial — the public reception of Nechaev was almost uniformly hostile. The Third Section archives do not hold a single note of anxiety regarding any possible sympathy towards Nechaev. Rather, his “insolent escapades” were apparently received with distaste; if anything, agents reported that the public demanded an even stricter sentence for

The last stage of Nechaev's sentencing was his 'civil execution,' or public cashiering.<sup>571</sup> Here, as one Moscow gendarme would later report in a telegram to St. Petersburg, Nechaev "carried himself even worse than at his trial."<sup>572</sup> At dawn on January 25, the convicted revolutionary was transported to Konnaia Square with a placard around his neck reading "for murder [*za ubiistvo*]." As he ascended the scaffold, had his sentence read, and stood for ten minutes chained to a black pole (he refused the final element of the ritual, a blessing by a priest), Nechaev sought one final opportunity to reach the ears of the public. Gendarme reports on the proceedings all note that even the accompanying drummers could not drown out the voice of Nechaev. Alongside slogans against the tsar and the state ("Down with the tsar, he drinks our blood!;" "You are slaves of a despot, until you free yourselves from the yoke of Alexander II and his so-called pious reign"), as well as attempts to paint himself as a martyr ("It is for you that I go to Siberia!"), there was a note of dark menace to Nechaev's cries. Notably, upon the scaffold, it appears that Nechaev gestured several times to the officials surrounding him and exclaimed "not three years will pass before all of their heads, at this exact place, will be severed by the first Russian guillotine."<sup>573</sup>

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Nechaev. This reception is confirmed in the newspapers of the day, which portrayed the extradited radical as lacking all intelligence and dignity. See GARF f. 109, op. 154 (*3-ia ekspeditsiia*), d. 115, ch. 23, ll. 88, 109, 110-111; and, for example, "Delu Nechaev predshestvovalo..." *Moskovskaia vedomost'* (Moscow), Jan. 8, 1873.

<sup>571</sup> This punitive ritual is discussed in further detail in Chapter Four of the present dissertation.

<sup>572</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 154 (*3-ia ekspeditsiia*), d. 115, ch. 23, ll. 116.

<sup>573</sup> Horrified reports on Nechaev's civic execution can be found at GARF f. 124, op. 1, d. 344, ll. 54-54ob, 56, 56ob, 57; GARF f. 109, op. 154 (*3-ia ekspeditsiia*), d. 115, ch. 23, ll. 130-130ob. Interestingly, this ceremony seemed to have elicited none of the public sympathy that had characterized the civic executions of radical publicists earlier in the decade (see Chapter Four of the present dissertation). While secret police reports are not the most trustworthy sources in this regard – functioning, as they were, under an imperative to present a picture of a united, tsar-backing people standing against alien intelligentsia radicals – there are no recorded outbursts of empathy for the sentenced Nechaev. Rather, it appears that the crowd

It was these last phrases that appear to have sealed Nechaev's fate. While destined – as, ostensibly, a common criminal – to twenty years of hard labor in Siberia, when Tsar Alexander II heard of these violent outbursts he decided to personally intervene. On the basis of a telegram reporting on the disruption of Nechaev's public sentencing, the Emperor passed a secret resolution:

After this we possess every right to sentence him anew, as a political prisoner, but I believe that this would be of little use and only serve to stir up passions, and thus it is safer to imprison him in the fortress, forever [*i potomu ostorozhnee zakliuchit' ego navsegda v krepost'*].<sup>574</sup>

It is worth pausing here to reflect on this action as a reflection of tsarist legality. Even as the framework of a modern judiciary system began to be erected in imperial Russia, crime and punishment was still shot through with capricious improvisation. In the trial and sentencing of Nechaev, laid bare are the structural contradictions that underlay all of Tsar Alexander II's judicial reforms. In the decades after Nechaev, the autocratic state and its political discontents would face one another many times across the stage of the modern courtroom – a terrain that, as we see here, neither party truly recognized as legitimate. Nechaev's sentencing and its suspension should be read as an expression of the failures of pre-revolutionary Russian liberalism. In this story, the Peter and Paul Fortress is the spatial concretization of the moment of sovereign decision upon which, in the last instance, the power of Romanov absolutism resided.<sup>575</sup> In condemning

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was wholly indisposed to his words: “The people [*narod*]... expressed strong indignation and anger towards him: some said that “the criminal must be mad”, and others – “he must be immediately hung for this.” See *ibid.*, ll. 130-130ob.

<sup>574</sup> Quoted in P.E. Shchegolev, “S.G. Nechaev v raveline (1873-1882),” in *Alekseevskii ravelin: Sekretnaia gosudarstvennaia tiur'ma Rossii v XIX veke* (Leningrad: 1990), 2:147.

<sup>575</sup> For an excellent conceptual overview of the Russian legal tradition – as well as of the fundamental, contradictory position of the sovereign therein – see Tatiana Borisova and Jane Burbank, “Russia's Legal Trajectories,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 19 (2018): 469-508.

Nechaev to eternal imprisonment within the Fortress, the Tsar placed this revolutionary both completely outside the law and yet fully under its weight – in the St. Petersburg citadel that was both beyond all tsarist legality and yet remained its secret heart.

Thus, at the end of January, Nechaev was transported with absolute secrecy back to St. Petersburg. Accompanied by six gendarmes, his itinerary was routed through Smolensk and the Baltic provinces to avoid any intimations of the fate that awaited him.<sup>576</sup> At 9:15 pm on the evening of January 28, 1873, Nechaev was taken through the Nevskie Gates of the Peter and Paul Fortress under the cover of darkness and brought to cell no. 5 of the Alekseevskii Ravelin secret prison – remarkably, the same cell inhabited by Bakunin twenty years earlier. However, unlike this originator of revolutionary Russian prison narrations and one-time friend, Nechaev would never leave the walls of the Fortress alive.

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<sup>576</sup> Indeed, it appears that only the head of the tsarist secret police and the commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress were told of the Emperor's plan for Nechaev. Indicative of this is a letter to the Third Section from the General-Governor of Vilna, Kovno, and Grodno (in modern-day Lithuania) from February 5, 1873. The high official writes that he has heard rumors that Nechaev's was to be immanently incarcerated in one of his district's prisons, and seeks clarification. In fact, at this point the revolutionary had already been imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress. In a similar vein, when the Peter and Paul Fortress commandant was given notice of Nechaev's impending arrival, the Third Section letter – marked "completely secret [*sovershenno sekretno*]" – noted in French at the bottom of the page: "*P.S. L'officier qui remittra à Votre Excellence cette lettre, n'est pas dans le secret.*" See GARF f. 109, op. 154 (3-ia ekspeditsiia), d. 115, ch. 23, l. 149; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, l. 1.

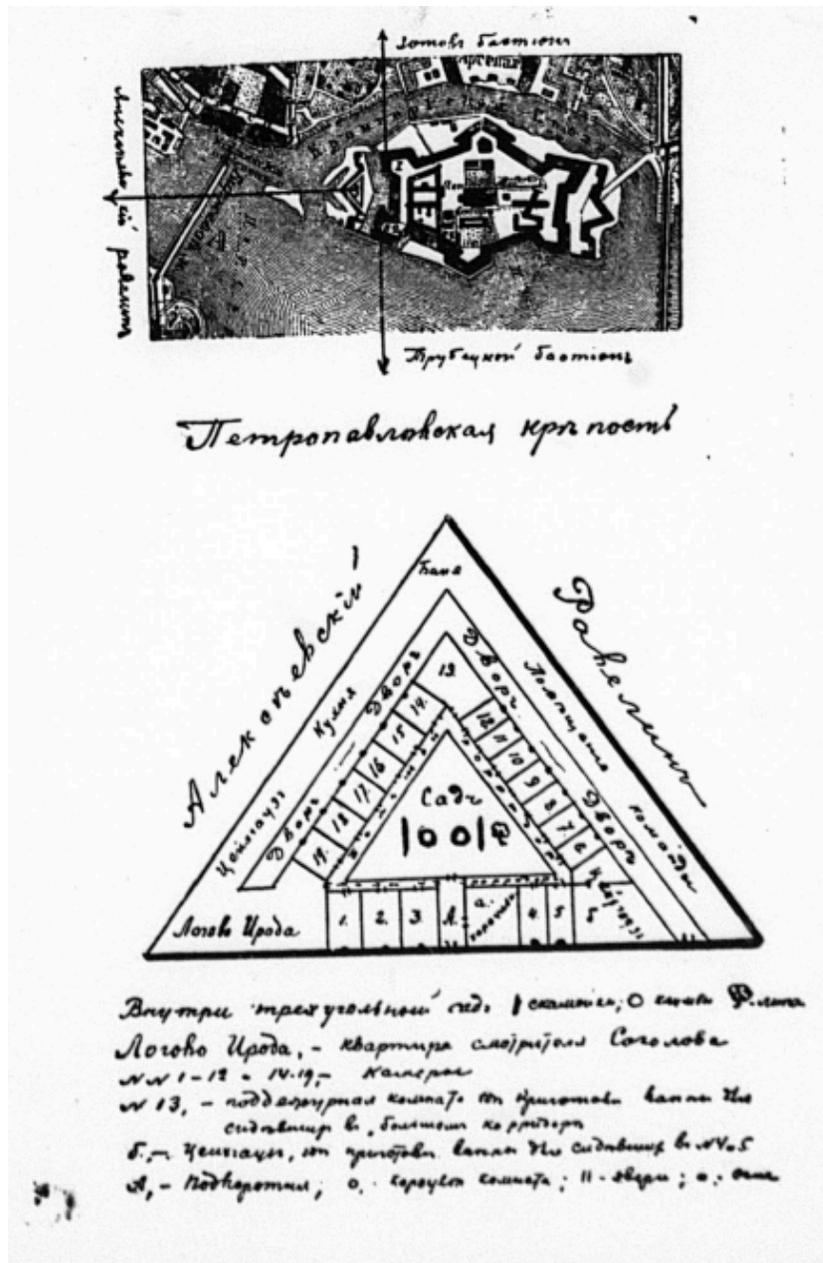


Figure 20: A plan of the Alekseevskii Ravelin secret prison alongside its position within the Peter and Paul Fortress, most likely created by émigré Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) at the beginning of the twentieth century from information obtained during the 1870s and 80s (the period of Nechaev's imprisonment). [IISG Partija Socialistov-Revolutionerov (Rossija) Archives; ARCH01038, 750].

## V. The Concrete Space of the Peter and Paul Fortress

Thus, a revolutionary career initially constructed with the discursive materials of the Peter and Paul Fortress prison myth would conclude within its actual architecture.

Let us now turn to the Fortress archives for information regarding Nechaev's prison conditions.<sup>577</sup> The means – once put to such sophisticated use – of crafting his own life narrative had been taken from Nechaev; now, his story would continue in warden reports and bureaucratic correspondences.

What is immediately clear upon examination of the documentary record is that the highest level of precautions were taken with Nechaev from the earliest moments of his imprisonment. When he entered the Alekseevskii Ravelin secret prison in January 1873, there was only one other prisoner in the entire complex – a certain Mikhail Beidemann, who had been driven to insanity by over a decade of solitary confinement, and to whom we shall return by the end of the present chapter. This did not, however, prevent the state from instituting extreme measures to guard against any possibility of Nechaev reaching out past the confines of his cell.

On January 29, 1873, the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant sent out a detailed set of instructions – marked “completely secret [*sovershenno sekretno*]” – to the warden of the Alekseevskii Ravelin regarding this new prisoner:

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<sup>577</sup> The documentation relating to Nechaev's long period of Peter and Paul Fortress incarceration is spread out over many *dela* in the papers of the Alekseevskii Ravelin – notably RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158; 161; 162; 176; 179; 199; 210; 213; 217; 222; etc. Further context can also be sought in the studies of several pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and Russian historians, including P.E. Shchegolev's exposés from just before and after 1917 as well as the later study of Lur'e. See Anonymous [P.E. Shchegolev], “S.G. Nechaev v Alekseevskom raveline v 1873-1883,” *Byloe* 7 (1906): 151-82; P.E. Shchegolev, *Alekseevskii ravelin: kniga o padenii i velichii cheloveka* (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1929 [reprinted in 1989]); Lur'e, *Sozidatel' razrusheniia*, esp. 266-91.

Imprisoned yesterday at the HIGHEST behest in the Alekseevskii Ravelin... I order you to maintain [Nechaev] alone in cell number five, keeping him under the most vigilant observation and the strictest secrecy, [and] by no means referring to him by his last name, but simply by the number of the cell in which he is held.<sup>578</sup>

The warden is further instructed to make sure that the prisoner in cell number five is kept under constant observation: regularly watched through the door's glass 'judas', and prevented from directing undue attention to his cell window bars or lock. To this effect, an extra post was established at Nechaev's door, and each night a guard was to be stationed directly outside of his window. Furthermore, the Gendarme Corps supplied a contingent of four officers to bolster the guards of the Alekseevskii Ravelin, of which there were already thirty-two by the mid-1870s: a massive amount for just two prisoners.<sup>579</sup>

Yet even with this large force, direct access to the newly-imprisoned Nechaev was explicitly curtailed. The warden was the only individual allowed to keep the key to cell number five, necessitating his presence each time the door was opened.<sup>580</sup> The only other persons permitted to see Nechaev were the Commandant, the Fortress doctor, a priest from the Peter and Paul Cathedral, or the Head of the Gendarme Corps; walks, baths, and haircuts could only be undertaken with the Commandant's personal order.<sup>581</sup> Even with these precautions in place, the warden was instructed to

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<sup>578</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, ll. 8-9ob. It appears that the Commandant directly collaborated with the tsarist secret police in formulating these regulations: see *ibid.*, l. 13.

<sup>579</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 179, ll. 24-24ob. Note that the Gendarme officers – for whom 240 rubles were set aside each year – were placed under the direct command of the Alekseevskii Ravelin warden. In a separate set of regulations circulated in March 1873, they were given strict instructions to never speak or converse with Nechaev, and were forbidden from mentioning his name either within or outside of the Peter and Paul Fortress. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 162, ll. 9-12.

<sup>580</sup> RGIA F. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, ll. 8-9ob.

<sup>581</sup> RGIA F. 1280, op. 5, d. 162, ll. 9-12; d. 158, ll. 8-9ob.

“pay strict attention to the morality” of the guards under his command: Nechaev’s prison regime, ordered and sanctioned from the highest ranks, was to be protected from disorders both from without and from within. The captive in cell number five was to be a secret prisoner in the highest sense of the word, with no one outside of a small circle to know of his location or true identity.

And so it went, for nearly ten years, until Nechaev’s death.

As we have seen in the present study, there is something about the lived experience of solitary confinement that escapes narrative possibility: individuals sink into duration without event. Having left us no memoir whereby the space of the cell could be integrated into a larger story – and having no post-imprisonment career which could have ‘placed’ this confinement as one of several stages of development – all stories seem to disappear into one slow, silent leavetaking from the stage of life: a decade truly ‘without rhetoric.’

Such would be the case, if Nechaev had not facilitated an eruption of the political into the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress during the very last years of his incarceration: an account of these events will appear at the end of the present chapter. Such would also have been the case if it had not been for a last innovation in Nechaev’s carceral regime.

This final practice was the production of weekly reports on the status of the prisoner. Prepared by the Alekseevskii Ravelin warden, these were submitted to the Fortress Commandant, and appear to have been forwarded to the head of the Third Section.<sup>582</sup> While most of these reports have not survived, those that do – preserved in

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<sup>582</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, l. 38; and Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 275-76.

the archive of the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant – provide tantalizing insight into Nechaev’s experience of Fortress captivity. These documents, alongside other fragmented traces from the tsarist archives, give us short flashes and illuminations rather than a sustained picture. However, despite their limitations, these textual echolocations through the murk of time – the blind historian’s boggy abode – can reveal something of the contours of these long years of imprisonment.

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The documentary record is best preserved for the beginning of Nechaev’s confinement in the Fortress. In these first months, it appears that his behavior towards his captors swung from ingratiating to garrulous. Early documents paint a picture of docility:

The arrestee in cell number five of the Alekseevskii Ravelin house, from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of February [1873], behaved with calm and general politeness.

Regularly, in the evening he goes to sleep at ten o’clock and in the morning gets up at seven, at night he sleeps well and with good health.

Cell cleanings take place without change from the earlier order at half past eight with tea, – lunch is at twelve thirty and evening tea at six, - his appetite is always especially good.<sup>583</sup>

However, this calm was not to last. Towards the end of February, 1873, Nechaev flew into a rage when offered a curtailed meal to mark the first day of the Lenten fasts.

“With the look of a predatory beast,” the warden reports,

he responded with an impudent, high voice and a contemptuous smile, - what is this, they want to accustom me to fasts...? I recognize no Divinities and no fasts, - I have my own religion, and I ask you to give me a bowl of soup, a piece of meat and I will be satisfied.<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> See the weekly report from February 16, 1873, at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, l. 19.

<sup>584</sup> See *ibid.*, l. 24-24ob.

Given a stern warning by the warden for his bold response, the conflict over food escalated. When lunch was being served on April 1, Nechaev shouted words of abuse against the emperor, hurled his chair at the Warden and an accompanying gendarme officer, and declared himself on hunger strike: “he addressed himself to [the Warden] with abuse, saying that they had put him in captivity with the goal of killing him through hunger, but that they would fail in this, as he would finish himself off even faster.”<sup>585</sup> From a further report by the Fortress doctor, it is evident that he began a hunger strike that lasted at least five further days.

But here, unfortunately, the documentary record begins to unravel. It is clear that Nechaev survived this period of self-starvation, but there is no evidence to whether the cessation of his fast was voluntary, or what sort of punishment his behavior may have received. Conjectures can be drawn from the next surviving archival text: leaping ahead a year-and-a-half, we find a note from the head of the Third Section to the Fortress Commandant from December 14, 1874. In this brief message, it is reported that the emperor himself has agreed that chains can be removed from Nechaev’s hands. What exactly had occurred here? Had the prisoner been put in manacles after his food-related outburst? The evidence is too sparse to venture a guess on this matter (although the fact that Nechaev spent an extended period in the Alekseevskii Ravelin in arm and leg fetters is corroborated elsewhere).<sup>586</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> See the warden document held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, l. 28 and a report from the fortress doctor at *ibid.*, 29-29ob.

<sup>586</sup> The history of the use of manacles in the Peter and Paul Fortress is difficult to glean from archival documents, although it is clear that prisoners were chained at several points during the citadel’s history. See, for example, surviving regulations on the use of fetters on inmates destined for Siberian exile, preserved at RGIA f. 1280, op. 2 [*dopolnitel’naia opis’*], ll. 81, 81ob. We can also note that a general inventory of the Alekseevskii Ravelin taken in 1864 lists

Unfortunately, such is the state of Nechaev's Peter and Paul Fortress archive: textual themes flash upwards and collapse, leaving impressions yet allowing us no larger picture.

One element of his incarceration about which we can venture more concrete information, however, is how Nechaev occupied himself daily in his solitary cell. A secret prisoner in the most secret cell of the Peter and Paul Fortress, forbidden from writing letters or receiving visitors – how did he fill these long years of solitary confinement?

With books. As we have explored in previous chapters (notably in our discussions of M.A. Bakunin and N.G. Chernyshevsky), the Alekseevskii Ravelin possessed its own library. By the 1870s, it held several thousand volumes, of primarily religious, historical, and scientific content.<sup>587</sup> From the very first days of his confinement, Nechaev gravitated towards this sole source of solace in his tsarist cell.

In one of the earliest Warden documents, we see that Nechaev sought to continue a textual life in the Peter and Paul Fortress:

As I [the Warden reports, in Nechaev's words] worked earlier with many publishers and am accustomed to intellectual labor, I ask you for the permission to be provided with necessary books and a French-German-Russian dictionary, as well as papers, ink, and feather for literary activities: I very well understand my current position, that maybe I am here until life's end, but

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eight leg shackles, five wrist shackles, and one "neck shackle with chain [*kandaly nasheinye s tsep'iu*]." See RGIA f. 1280, op. 8, d. 752, ll. 4-9 (obs).

<sup>587</sup> The best inventory of the Alekseevskii Ravelin library for the period of Nechaev's imprisonment is found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 179, ll. 33-36(obs). Besides the usual religious texts and popular histories, this list from 1876 shows several volumes by Dostoevsky (including *Notes from the House of the Dead* – the same volume, perhaps, reviewed by Pisarev a decade previously), twelve issues of *Russkoe slovo* from 1863 to 1864 (containing several essays written by Pisarev and Shelgunov during their own Fortress imprisonment), and hundreds of French and German volumes whose titles, unfortunately, are not given. An updated – but largely similar – inventory of the Ravelin library made in January 1882 can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 219, ll. 160-167ob.

nonetheless I do not want to give up all my affairs... I do not wish to write anything liberal, but desire to busy myself here with some sort of historical work.<sup>588</sup>

It appears that Nechaev was, at certain moments during his decade of imprisonment, given writing materials.<sup>589</sup> This permission, however, ebbed and flowed with the movements of his prison regime; more often than not, ink and paper were forbidden him.

The same is not true, however, of access to the prison library. With little else to do, Nechaev read voraciously. The breadth of his textual consumption is evidenced by a series of official exchanges from the end of 1878 to the beginning of 1880. It is in this timeframe – after five years spent in the Fortress – that the Commandant had cause to write the Third Section informing them that Nechaev had read *all* of the books in the Alekseevskii Ravelin library.<sup>590</sup> For a time, volumes from the general Fortress collection were made available to Nechaev – however, cognizant of the possibilities of inter-cellular communication that this could allow, this practice was quickly stopped.<sup>591</sup> Left without reading materials, on the morning of April 13, 1880,

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<sup>588</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, ll. 16, 16ob, 17.

<sup>589</sup> Indeed, there seems to have been an extended period of time between 1875 and 1876 when Nechaev was granted open access to ink and paper, and composed a series of curious texts. These were eventually confiscated by the Third Section after another tightening of the Fortress regime: in their report, we find that Nechaev had produced “a massive [*ogromnoe*] quantity of manuscripts... plans of appeals to the monarch, publicistic essays, belletristic pieces, scattered drafts, excerpts, reading notes, sketches, fragments, etc.” Unfortunately, all of Nechaev’s prison writings were destroyed after their seizure. See Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 284-85. We can also mention that in 1880, towards the end of Nechaev’s decade of confinement, the administration provided him with a writing slate [*aspidnaia doska*]. Nechaev immediately returned the board with a rather haughty message pressed into its surface, claiming that slate was wholly inadequate for his plan “to seriously study and systematically read essays in philosophy, history, and politics.” See RGIA, f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, ll. 51, 51ob, 53, 53ob, 54, 55, 55ob.

<sup>590</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, ll. 39, 39ob, 40.

<sup>591</sup> See *ibid.*; and *ibid.*, ll. 42-42ob. Indeed, during this brief moment – from November 1878 to January 1879 – Nechaev managed to inscribe at least several volumes with illicit messages

the warden arrived for the daily cleaning to find that Nechaev had carved a petition to the emperor into the walls of his cell with a silver spoon.<sup>592</sup> For its peculiar conditions of production and its insight into the experience of imprisonment, this wall-letter – Nechaev’s dissatisfaction etched into Fortress stone, copied out and preserved by a scribe – is worth quoting at length:

His Imperial Highness Lord Emperor Aleksandr Nikolaevich.

Lord

At the end of eight years of solitary confinement, the Third Section, without any reason, has stripped me of my final, singular activity – the reading of new books and journals.

This pastime was not taken from me even by General Mezentsev, my person enemy, when he threw me in chains for two years. In this fashion the Third Section condemns me to a weakening idleness, to an inactivity which murders the intellect. Taking advantage of the decline in my strength after my many-yearred prison suffering, they are pushing me directly down the frightening road to madness or to suicide.

Not wishing to take part in the terrible fate of my unhappy neighbor in imprisonment, whose insane cries prevent me from sleeping at night, I inform you, Lord, that the Third Section of Your Highness’ Chancellory can deprive me of my reason only along with my life, and not otherwise.

*S. Nechaev.*<sup>593</sup>

This document is rather extraordinary for several reasons. First, it gives us a tantalizing glimpse into the conditions of Nechaev’s imprisonment – a seemingly personal antagonism from General N.V. Mezentsov,<sup>594</sup> a long period of lying in chains, and a nightmarish reflection on the insanity of Mikhail Beidemann in a

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using a system of nearly-imperceptible word underlining. A more in-depth discussion of this type of encryption can be found in Chapter Five of the present dissertation, as well as Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ Razrusheniia*, 278.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid., ll. 46, 46ob, 47.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>594</sup> Mezentsov was head of the Third Section from 1876 to 1878, until his assassination by Russian revolutionary S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinsky. This latter individual would later play his own role in the mythology of radical political imprisonment in tsarist Russia: a development discussed in further detail in Chapter Seven of the present dissertation.

neighboring cell. This petition is also, however, significant for the fact that it seems to have worked.<sup>595</sup> By the summer of 1880, Nechaev began to receive regular orders of books from the Department of State Police. Lists of these new volumes are preserved in a separate file in the Commandant's archives.<sup>596</sup> While mostly composed of belletristic works and literary criticism, quite a few surprises were hidden in these shipments. Thus, we know that in 1880 Nechaev was reading critical thinkers such as Dobroliubov (collected essays in four volumes), Belinsky (complete works in twelve volumes), and Zola in the Alekseevskii Ravelin.<sup>597</sup> Even more fascinatingly – on July 29, 1880, Nechaev was given a three-volume edition of Dostoevsky's *Besy*. With the evidence we have of his voracious appetite for the printed word, there is no doubt that Nechaev thus read *Demons* in his prison cell. Sadly, we have no knowledge of

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<sup>595</sup> There is also evidence that Nechaev coupled this wall-letter with a fresh hunger strike, which may have been the defining factor in securing him more reading material. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, ll. 49, 49ob, 50.

<sup>596</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 213, esp. ll. 5, 6-9(obs). Note the change in the official department responsible for political prisoners: the Third Section as an institution was dissolved in 1880, with its responsibilities divided among several new and preexisting departments. This administrative shift may, in fact, have been the cause for the delay in new books to the Alekseevskii Ravelin (as this was supposedly agreed to by the Third Section back in 1879), as well as the confused nature of archival documents from this period. See, for example, RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, ll. 42-42ob; 41; 43; 44; 45; etc.

<sup>597</sup> While we have seen in previous chapters how progressive texts found their way into the Peter and Paul Fortress on several occasions during its history (especially noteworthy is the period between 1861 and 1866), it still seems quite strange to find the tsarist secret police in this period supplying the empire's most dangerous political prisoner with the fundamental texts of Russian social criticism. Strange, that is, until we realize that the Third Section agent responsible for procuring and delivering books to Nechaev was none other than N.V. Kletochnikov, an undercover agent of the Executive Committee of The People's Will who had infiltrated the tsarist security apparatus. Instrumental in safeguarding revolutionaries from police interference for several years, he was arrested after the successful assassination of Tsar Alexander II and imprisoned himself in the Peter and Paul Fortress in February 1881. Here, the consumptive Kletochnikov died on July 13, 1883 in cell number four of the Alekseevskii Ravelin – the room directly adjacent to the one that had once held Nechaev. See S.N. Valka, *Arkhiv 'Zemli i Voli' i 'Narodnoi Voli'* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznogo Obshchestva Politkatorzhan i Ssyl'no-poselentsev, 1930), 20-29; Vera Figner, *Zapechatel'nyi trud* (Moscow: Zadruga, 1921), 1:200-202; RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 478, ll. 96, 96ob, 97; op. 5, d. 228, ll. 1, 1ob, 5, 5ob, 6; and op. 5, d. 232, ll. 7, 7ob.

Nechaev's reaction to this famous novelistic depiction of his own selfhood and revolutionary career.

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Thus does the archival record reflect the spatial and existential horizons of the last ten years of Nechaev's life. During what was nearly a decade of solitary confinement, Nechaev saw three separate Commandants of the Peter and Paul Fortress, five Alekseevskii Ravelin Wardens, five heads of the Third Section (and its administrative dissolution), two emperors, and countless guards. For nearly six years, the only other prisoner in the Alekseevskii Ravelin was the insane Mikhail Beideman. Revolutionary Leon Mirskii became the third arrestee at the end of 1879, and during the stormy years after the assassination of Alexander II, a steady influx of populist terrorists began to fill the cells of the tsarist regime's most secret political prison.<sup>598</sup>

By this point, however, long years of solitary confinement, poor diet, and physical inactivity had taken a severe toll on Nechaev's health. On November 8, 1882, the Fortress doctor reported that Nechaev had begun to show signs of acute scurvy, manifested in severe swelling of the extremities.<sup>599</sup> And while the Commandant authorized time in the prison yard and a half-bottle of milk daily, this appears to have had no effect. On November 21, 1882, Nechaev died from edematous complications of scurvy. He was 35 years old.<sup>600</sup>

Thus ends the story that bureaucratic documents tell us of the prisoner in cell number five of the Alekseevskii Ravelin. Nechaev's experience of imprisonment

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<sup>598</sup> See yearly lists at RGIA, f. 1280, op. 5, d. 199, 210, 217, 228, 232, 243, etc.

<sup>599</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, l. 67.

<sup>600</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 338; RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, l. 68.

would thus seem to be just the sort of crushing, vicious ordeal upon which his earlier self-aggrandizements had been built. The sly-slow passage of time; impotent rage; resigned silence; and final years echoing murkily through the papers of the tsarist archives – the concrete fate of many who entered the Peter and Paul Fortress during the ‘age of high prison mythology.’

And so it would have been, if not for one last series of implausible events. For in a final campaign of his revolutionary career – almost successful in eliding the scope of official tsarist documentation – Nechaev found the means to shape the concrete possibilities of political incarceration from within his cell in the Alekseevskii Ravelin, just as he had once sculpted the discursive possibilities of the Fortress’ myths and put them to his own use.

## **VI. Disordering the Tsarist Prison Regime**

Pulling our lens back from the Peter and Paul Fortress for a brief moment, let us pan out once more over the wider city of St. Petersburg. The new year of 1881 has just been welcomed in, and the political dynamics of the imperial capital have greatly changed since Nechaev’s radical career first began at the end of the 1860s. In the intervening decade, much has occurred.

The intensive mid-century populist commitments that had dominated progressive politics for many years have lately run their course: blossoming in the mass idealism of the ‘going to the people [*khozhdenie v narod*],’ student campaign in the summer of 1874; withering in the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress after the arrests of hundreds of village agitators. Diffuse propaganda work and loose

horizontalism have collapsed in the face of tsarist repression; in their place, small conspiratorial networks such as *Narodnaia volia* [*The People's Will*] have split off from the larger movement to pursue militant 'propaganda of the deed'. Revolutionary politics no longer occurs in university corridors and open student apartments. Instead, illegal printing presses are run and terroristic actions planned in a clandestine archipelago of underground residences.<sup>601</sup>

It is in one of these radical safehouses that the next scene of our history takes place. In the first months of 1881, *Narodnaia volia* kept an apartment at 25/76 Voznesenskii Prospekt.<sup>602</sup> Here the Executive Committee – its highest circle – frequently gathered to pursue organizational matters, including assembling explosives and discussing ongoing attempts to assassinate Tsar Alexander II.

It was in this unlikely spot where one of the strangest correspondences in the history of modern radicalism was first kindled. In her recollections, Vera Figner remembers a bitterly cold January evening in the apartment on Voznesenskii Prospekt. At around 10 pm, her comrade G.P. Isaev came in through the front door. Removing his hat and coat, he nonchalantly presented a small piece of rolled paper to those assembled: "Nechaev – from the Ravelin."<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> For an illuminating recent study of the spatial dimensions of revolutionary practice in the capital, see Christopher Ely, *Underground Petersburg: Radical Populism, Urban Space, and the Tactics of Subversion in Reform-Era Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016).

<sup>602</sup> For those interested in concrete urban constellations, we can note that the apartment on Voznesenskii Prospekt [Ascension Boulevard] was located roughly two kilometers away from the Winter Palace and, curiously, merely a block away from the building said to have been inhabited by the character Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Vera Figner recalls that this apartment – with its three "cold, uncomfortable bedrooms" – was chosen for its outlets onto two separate streets and the fact that its courtyard bathhouse masked the frequent comings and goings of radicals. See Vera Figner, *Zapechatlennyi trud*, 1:190-91.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:191.

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*A message from the most notorious radical of the past generation to the most militant members of the present: what did such a letter contain?*

The first reaction to this unanticipated note was shock. The widely-publicized trial of the *Nechaevtsy* at the beginning of the 1870s, the ringleader's later arrest and sentencing – Vera Figner recalls how these events had left deep impressions upon her youth. However, after 1873, Nechaev had “disappeared without a trace [*ischez bessledno*]”: for nearly eight years, “no one had known what had happened to him; neither where he was, nor whether he was alive or dead.”<sup>604</sup> Now, suddenly, his voice reached out to *Narodnaia volia* from the space of the Alekseevskii Ravelin.

In contrast with the dramatic formal nature of this missive from the dead, Figner was struck by the “strictly businesslike” contents of his communiqué. To these militant radicals, Nechaev had one request: help him escape from the Peter and Paul Fortress.

How was *Narodnaia volia* to respond? Even though Nechaev had vanished from the earth eight years previously, an aura of menace still attached itself to his legacy. Thus, coupled with shock and surprise, his request for aid was met by more than a hint of ambivalence. Figner describes a “black mark” around Nechaev's person: the blood of an innocent comrade, his willingness to pursue any means, “all the lies that enshrouded the revolutionary image of Nechaev.”<sup>605</sup>

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 1:193.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 1:194.

However, in this high age of prison mythology, it seems that the pathos of Nechaev's word rising up from the prison depths – a true Romantic carceral missive, with whose falsified form he had once begun a revolutionary career – overrode all objections:

He had kept his reason, unfaded by the many years of solitude in a torture chamber; he had kept his will, unbent by the full weight of the punishment visited upon him; [he had kept] his energy, unbroken by all the misfortunes of life; when the appeal from Nechaev was read at the meeting of the Committee, with an unusually heartfelt upsurge we all spoke: 'he must be freed'!<sup>606</sup>

Thus did the Executive Committee of *Nardonia volia* respond to Nechaev. Over the next two months, they entered into frequent communication with the political prisoner. While we know little about the internal discussions surrounding the proposed prison break, the memoirs of Vera Figner give us some insight into this daring dialogue.<sup>607</sup>

Upon being informed of their willingness to help, it appears that Nechaev proposed a highly theatrical plan: “an atmosphere of complex mystifications,” writes Figner, “true to his old traditions.”<sup>608</sup> He dreamed of a group of revolutionaries

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> The other major account of these discussions comes from L.A. Tikhomirov, a former member of the *Narodnaia volia* Executive Committee. Fleeing Russia to avoid arrest after the dissolution of the organization, he started the émigré journal *Vestnik 'Narodnoi voli'* with Peter Lavrov in 1883: in its pages, he was the first to publically announce Nechaev's Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment and the attempt to free him. However, both contemporary actors (Vera Figner) and modern historians (F.M. Lur'e) have cast doubt on the veracity of Tikhomirov's account of this moment in Russian revolutionary history, especially for some of its more dramatic claims (e.g. that A.I. Zheliabov snuck into the Peter and Paul Fortress and communicated with Nechaev through his cell window; or that Nechaev eventually played a role in the decision-making process of the Executive Committee). These challenges – alongside the foreknowledge that Tikhomirov would become a full-throated monarchist soon after these events – have led me to avoid using his words as a primary source. See *Vestnik 'Narodnoi voli'* 1 (1883). For more on Tikhomirov (as a member of the *Chaikovtsy* circle, he had spent two years himself in the Peter and Paul Fortress in the first half of the 1870s), see L.V. Tikhomirov, *Vospominaniia L'va Tikhomirova* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1927); and prison documents held at RGIA, f. 1280, op. 1, d. 383, 399, 436, 437 and 439.

<sup>608</sup> Figner, *Zapechatlennyi trud*, 1:195.

dressed in military uniforms and bedecked in medals entering the Peter and Paul Fortress. They were to arrive in the Ravelin and announce to the wardens that there had been a coup: the Tsar had been deposed, his son had taken the throne, and his first official act had been to set Nechaev free.<sup>609</sup> This plan – with its Nechaevian propensity for dramatism – was immediately rejected. However, it appears that the Executive Committee of *Narodnaia volia* did spend time in January and February of 1881 sounding out possible methods of cracking the Peter and Paul Fortress prison regime.

Their initial conclusions led them to temporarily defer any concrete action. It became immediately clear that a successful escape attempt could not be routed through the heavily-guarded gates and bastions of the Fortress itself – it would have to come from the Neva, by boat. Thus, any plan would have to wait until the river ice had broken up in the spring.<sup>610</sup>

More urgently, in the first months of 1881 *Narodnaia volia* was fully immersed in their latest plot to assassinate Tsar Alexander II. The radicals soon realized that they only possessed the organizational means to pursue one of these goals at a time: and that a daring prison break from the Alekseevskii Ravelin could potentially capsize their long-planned regicide. It was thus decided that an escape attempt would have to wait until after the tsar's death. Astoundingly, it seems that the

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<sup>609</sup> Tikhomirov recounts, unreliably, an even more dramatic plan – that Nechaev wished to stage this pageantry on a day when the royal family were themselves visiting the Fortress cathedral, and that after the guards had freed the political prisoner they were to imprison the Romanovs themselves in the cells of the Ravelin (!). Quoted in Lur'e, *Sozidatel' razrusheniia*, 317.

<sup>610</sup> In the nineteenth century, the Neva River usually thawed in mid-April. However, the spring of 1881 was unusually unseasonable in the imperial capital: the ice would not break until the second of May. See *Leningrad. Putevoditel'* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1931), 18.

Executive Committee actually communicated this reasoning to Nechaev, who fully agreed that assassination should be the organization's first priority.<sup>611</sup> Thus did the plot to kill Tsar Alexander II run through the most heavily-guarded prison cells of the Russian autocracy.

And, as we know, this plan was ultimately successful. The Romanov emperor was torn to pieces by a *Narodnaia volia* bomb on March 1, 1881. However, in the ensuing events – the police manhunt, the widespread arrests, the execution of the organization's leaders – it proved impossible to pivot towards freeing a notorious political prisoner.

Indeed, quite the opposite occurred: most members of *Narodnaia volia* soon found *themselves* incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress. M.N. Trigoni and A.I. Zheliabov – key figures who had been arrested at the end of February – were moved to cells in the Trubetskoi Bastion in the first days of March.<sup>612</sup> Bomb-thrower N.I. Rysakov was placed in the Fortress on the fourth of March, as were Gesse Gel'fman and T.M. Mikhailov; each of them would be sentenced to die for their involvement.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Figner, *Zapechatlennyi trud*, 1:196.

<sup>612</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 523, ll. 1, 1ob, 2. Interestingly enough, it appears that when Zheliabov – perhaps the chief architect of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II – was arrested, he had on his person a note from Nechaev. Written in baroque code, the authorities were unable to discover its origins until almost a year later. See Lur'e, *Sozidatel' razrusheniia*, 322.

<sup>613</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1139, l. 24ob, 25, 25ob, 26. The sad case of Gesse Gel'fman (also rendered as Hesia Helfman) deserves to be noted. Sentenced to death by hanging for her involvement in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, her sentence was deferred due to the fact that she was pregnant. Gel'fman was instead imprisoned for a period in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress, before being moved to the House of Preliminary Detention, where she gave birth on October 12, 1881. The prison conditions took a terrible toll on both mother and infant. Gel'fman was allowed to nurse her child for several months, but her health was dangerously imperiled by a complicated labor. Gel'fman's newborn daughter was taken from her by the prison authorities and sent to an orphanage, anonymously, on January 25, 1882. Gel'fman died six days later, and her daughter too soon sickened and passed away. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 534; and Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 3:156-58. For a

*Narodnaia volia* was brutally dissolved. Five ringleaders were executed in April 1881, and ten members were given punitive imprisonment in the Alekseevskii Ravelin, entering the cells around Nechaev in March 1882.<sup>614</sup> Vera Figner would successfully avoid the tsarist gendarmes for a bit longer, before herself being arrested and imprisoned in the Fortress in February 1883.<sup>615</sup>

Thus, with the swift decapitation of the Executive Committee, any attempt to free political prisoners was simply unfeasible. And on April 1, 1881, G.P. Isaev – he who had brought the first message from Nechaev, and remained the point of contact between him and *Narodnaia volia* – was arrested.<sup>616</sup> All communications between the Fortress and the wider world ceased; never again would Nechaev’s voice reach beyond his prison cell.

However, a crucial question still remains – one of great interest for our study of the concrete space and discursive life of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the age of high prison mythology –: how did Nechaev manage to forge a line of communication with the Executive Committee of *Narodnaia volia* in the first months of 1881 from the Alekseevskii Ravelin?

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moving contemporary tribute to Gel’fman – one that gives a sense of the trans-European outrage sparked by the autocracy’s treatment – see S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *Underground Russia*, 101-105.

<sup>614</sup> For the Ravelin imprisonment of these *Narodnaia volia* members – sentenced in what has become known as the ‘Trial of the Twenty’ – see documents held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 228, ll. 1, 1ob, 2, 3, 3ob, 5, 5ob, 6, and M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur’mi* 3:186-89, 201-15.

<sup>615</sup> See documents related to her Trubetskoi Bastion imprisonment at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 566, ll. 154, 155; D. 568.

<sup>616</sup> Isaev would also be placed in a cell of the Trubetskoi Bastion at the end of April, before being moved to the Alekseevskii Ravelin on March 26, 1882. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1139, l. 27; op. 5, d. 228, ll. 1, 1ob, 2, 3, 3ob, 5, 5ob, 6.

*A message from the most secret political prison of the tsarist regime to the most secret safehouse of its radical opponents: how had such a letter arrived?*

The only reason we know what little we do about Nechaev's undermining of the Alekseevskii Ravelin prison regime is because, ultimately, he was caught.

In the archives of the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant is preserved a massive, near-nine-hundred page file titled "On the disorders in the Alekseevskii Ravelin [*O bezporiadkakh v Alekseevskom Raveline*]." <sup>617</sup> Through these documents – combined with a further collection of materials from the eventual trial – we can discover not only how Nechaev was able to pursue communications with outside revolutionaries from the space of his cell. <sup>618</sup> We also receive a picture of perhaps the most successful subversion of a political prison regime in the history of imperial Russia – the concrete space of the Peter and Paul Fortress bent to Nechaev's own

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<sup>617</sup> Found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 219.

<sup>618</sup> The other crucial file in the Commandant's archive is RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227 – "On the bringing of Alekseevskii Ravelin soldiers to Military District Court for complicity in the disorders [*O predanii Voенno-Okružhnomu Sudu chinov Alekseevskogo ravelina za dopushchennye bezporiadki*]." These 'disorders' have, surprisingly, received little serious scholarly attention. The exception to this is a brief description in Gernet's classic study of tsarist prisons, and an excellent chapter devoted to the subject in Lur'e's more-recent Nechaev biography. See Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 3:158-9; Lur'e, *Sozidatel' razrusheniia*, 314-36. These accounts, however, suffer from slight inaccuracies. Specifically, both Gernet and Lur'e (strangely enough) misidentify the secondary file of archival material: the former locates it at d. 277, while the latter cites it at d. 228. The correct numeration in the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) – *delo 227* of the Alekseevskii Ravelin documents (*opis' 5*) in the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant's archive (*fond 1280*) – is used here. The final foundational scholarship on Nechaev's time in the Fortress is from P.E. Shchegolev, especially the anonymously published "S.G. Nechaev v Alekseevskom raveline v 1873-1883 gg.," 151-82. The vicissitudes of this pre-revolutionary scholarship will be discussed in Chapter Eight of the present dissertation (the journal *Byloe* was closed and Shchegolev imprisoned for the publication of this article). Its material was reworked by the author for many years and has been recently republished as P.E. Shchegolev, "S.G. Nechaev v raveline (1873-1882)," in *Alekseevskii ravelin: Sekretnaia gosudarstvennaia tiur'ma Rossii v XIX veke* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990 [1929]), 128-304. And while this remains a worthwhile text for historians of Nechaev, its lack of a modern citational apparatus limits its usefulness.

purposes, just as he had once wielded the prison's symbolic life for revolutionary ends.

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The 'disorder' documents begin in the autumn of 1881. The Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress during this period was one Adjutant-General I.S. Ganetskii, a decorated veteran of the Polish Uprising of 1863 and the Russo-Turkish War. He had only assumed this position six months previously (upon the death of the former Commandant), and had thus far been diligent in his cooperation with the State Police in the apprehension and imprisonment of anti-tsarist revolutionaries in the aftermath of Tsar Alexander II's assassination.

On the evening of November 16, 1881, Ganetskii received word from an insider source that the disciplinary regime of the Alekseevskii Ravelin had somehow been compromised.<sup>619</sup> He immediately sprang into action. Guards from reliable sections of the Fortress were put "...on strict orders to listen for noises and cries from the direction of the Alekseevskii Ravelin," especially possible gunfire. Placed on highest alert, gendarmes were instructed to be ready "at a moment's notice" to run to the Ravelin "with weapons loaded" and defend the structure from possible intruders seeking to free its prisoners.<sup>620</sup>

There was no invasion that night, and no armed intervention took place. However, over the next few weeks, Commandant Ganetsky took several steps to remove possibly unreliable elements from the Alekseevskii Ravelin guard and reassert

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<sup>619</sup> The source of Ganetskii's providential tip will be discussed at the end of the present section.

<sup>620</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 219, ll. 1*b*, 1*bob*, 4; 2, 2*ob*, 3. Note the unorthodox numbering of these initial documents – the disorder of the moment seems to have spilled over into the archive itself.

control over the prison: special sentinels stood watch under Nechaev's cell window at all times, guards with revolvers were stationed on the Ravelin battlements each night, and all entrances to the structure were carefully monitored.<sup>621</sup> Finally, after conferring with the Minister of Internal Affairs and head of the Gendarme Corps personally, a larger plan was put into action. On December 29, 1881, forty-two members of the Alekseevskii Ravelin guard were quietly arrested and placed in individual cells in the Fortress' Trubetskoi Bastion prison.<sup>622</sup> The prison warden was also relieved of his duties and replaced by a Gendarme officer. The stated reason for this mass arrest – as Commandant Ganetsky related in a letter sent that same day to Tsar Alexander III – was “the discovery of disorders in the Alekseevskii Ravelin, consisting of criminal dealings by the lower ranks with imprisoned state criminals.”<sup>623</sup>

The Petersburg Military District Court swiftly opened a case against these prison guards and officials. Inquiries were made, interrogations held, and the list of suspects continued to grow. More and more Ravelin guards once tasked with maintaining the most secret political prison in tsarist Russia found themselves incarcerated in the very same Fortress.<sup>624</sup> By April 6, 1882, charges were officially

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<sup>621</sup> Ibid., ll. 5-6ob; 7, 7ob. More on the exceptional precautions put into place in these weeks can also be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 546, ll. 26; 35, 35ob; 46; 52, 52ob; 54, 54ob.

<sup>622</sup> See the correspondences related to this arrest at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 219, ll. 26-27ob; 28-29ob; 30, 30ob, 31; as well as the prisoner list for the month of December at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 513, l. 57-58ob. Essentially the entire Alekseevskii Ravelin garrison – four Gendarme NCOs, a Fortress scribe, and thirty-six privates and one NCO from the Petersburg Local Command – was seized. As planned in advance, these guards were immediately replaced in their duties by a team of twenty-eight gendarmes from Moscow and St. Petersburg. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 219, ll. 23, 23ob; 24; 25, 25ob; 28-29ob.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., ll. 26-27ob.

<sup>624</sup> At the height of the inquest – in mid-February, 1882 – sixty-one individuals with ties to the Alekseevskii Ravelin were imprisoned in the Fortress as part of the initial investigation. As to be expected, this mass incarceration sorely taxed the space, budget, and provisions of a political prison already straining under the new tsar's repressive campaign against anti-

brought to bear against the forty primary actors in this ‘disorder’: thirty-four soldiers, four gendarme officers, the Ravelin warden, and his aide.

What exactly had occurred within the walls of the Alekseevskii Ravelin? The inquest brought to life an extraordinary situation. It appears that for nearly five years – from 1877 to the end of 1881 – Sergei Nechaev had essentially controlled the secret prison from within his cell. The sentencing documents eventually brought against the Ravelin guards give a concise picture of this coopted space:

[The guards] took part in criminal dealings with the imprisoned, dealings consisting of them carrying on conversations of a criminal nature [*razgovory prestupnogo soderzhaniia*] with the prisoner in cell no. 5, passed notes from one cell to another, took letters to be sent to other comrades and sent them in the city, gave prisoners periodicals as well as letters in reply from the city...[and] guards, assigned to the cells, received money for all of these criminal activities...<sup>625</sup>

Thus, after nearly a decade of solitary confinement in the Alekseevskii Ravelin, Nechaev had succeeded in placing a large contingent of the prison guards under his command. How had he achieved this? The sentencing hints at bribery: that the Ravelin command had been turned by the promise of money. However, the truth is far more interesting.

Extraordinarily, the documents of the case make clear that Nechaev had taken control of the secret Alekseevskii Ravelin prison by successfully radicalizing a majority of the guards.

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government actors. The ‘disorder’ documents are filled with written requests to various departments for further money, personnel, and food; and during the inquiry many of the arrested suspects were placed two to a cell in the Trubetskoi Bastion, or relocated to the casemates of the Fortress’ Ekaterininskaia Curtain Wall or to St. Petersburg’s House of Preliminary Detention. See, for example, *ibid.*, ll. 58, 58ob; 66; 80, 80ob; 82; 404, 404ob, 405; 406, 406ob, 407; 411, 411ob; etc.

<sup>625</sup> See the sentencing documents, preserved at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227, ll. 114-121ob [esp. ll. 116ob and 117]. Extracts from this text are also published in Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 331.

Held in the strictest solitary confinement – indeed, placed in chains for large swathes of his imprisonment – it appears that Nechaev first began reaching out to the watchmen as they passed by his cell. Soon outright conversations began to develop: greetings and pleasantries, then politics.

It is worth recording that in this period, besides the prison warden and a handful of officers, the majority of the (heavily staffed) prison team was composed of privates from the Petersburg Local Command [*Peterburgskaia Mestnaia Kommanda*]. These individuals all fit a certain social profile: young men (in their early-to-mid-twenties) from the provinces, of peasant background, serving in their first official capacity.<sup>626</sup> That is to say: youths who had almost certainly all been born into families of serfs before the 1861 Emancipation; disconnected from village kinship networks and finding themselves in the imperial capital for the first time; individuals ‘from the people’ who truly faced the social dissolution and material precarity of nascent nineteenth-century Russian urbanization.<sup>627</sup> Indeed, these were just the sort of disaffected persons whom radical student populists had long seen as natural (albeit ‘unconscious’) allies in their struggle against the autocracy. If Nechaev’s former comrades were going village-to-village to sway such individuals to their cause at this time, then Nechaev was given the unlikely opportunity to conduct propagandist work of his own in the very center of St. Petersburg, in the dark heart of the autocratic disciplinary system itself.

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<sup>626</sup> Information on the backgrounds of each defendant is contained in the sentencing documents, especially RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227, ll. 114ob-116ob.

<sup>627</sup> A sense of the relative poverty of the Alekseevskii Ravelin guards can be gleaned from the scanty lists of possessions given in their post-sentencing inventories: see RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227, ll. 143-150 (obs).

And agitate he did. The ‘disorder’ documents show us that by 1881, the Alekseevskii Ravelin guards had not just learned to tolerate illicit discussions from Nechaev – they held outright solidarity with their political prisoner, and were eager to aid him in any way they could. The military prosecutor for the case describes how this came to pass in a letter to the head of the St. Petersburg Gendarmes:

The state criminal [Nechaev], held in cell no. 5 of the above-mentioned ravelin, sought to turn the lower ranks of the ravelin command to his side, holding continuous conversations with them when they were at their posts...

The prisoner would say, ‘that they (that is, the lower ranks) were simple people,<sup>628</sup> knowing nothing, but that the time was approaching when everyone would learn why he and his comrades were suffering. He was suffering without guilt, in the name of the truth, for them [the guards] and their fathers. Today the soldier and the *muzhik* were wronged; but soon a new day would come. The same sorts of people as himself [Nechaev] were preparing revolution, revolt, they will kill the tsar and slaughter the bosses. Then the tsar will not control us like he does now. Tsars will be elected, by the people, like in other states such as France, they will be accountable, and not autocrats. And if the tsar manages things well, then he will rule, and if he does not, then another will be elected. Besides this, he and his comrades will take away the land from the landowners and divide it equally among the peasants, and the factories and plants will be owned by the workers...’ Furthermore, trying to convince the lower ranks that he was suffering for them, the criminal would say ‘that they must also fight for him, that they must stick with him and his comrades’ and so on.<sup>629</sup>

Even taking into consideration the particular tone given to this account from a military prosecutor, it is clear that Nechaev was able to persuasively present the case for regicide, representative government, the abolishment of private property, the radical redistribution of land, and solidarity amongst the disenfranchised. In the documents of the case we find soldiers unabashedly taking Nechaev’s side under interrogation: “You

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<sup>628</sup> Literally “*temnye liudi*”, that is, “dark people” – a colloquial expression often used in nineteenth-century Russia to refer to the serfs as a slumbering, ignorant mass. Note that this was not a patronizing term from the upper classes, but a self-descriptor used by peasants themselves. Take, for example, the folk expression: “*liudi temnye: ne znaem, v chem grekh, v chem spasen’e* ([We are] simple people: we do not know in what lies sin and in what lies salvation),” recorded in V.I. Dal’, *Poslovitsy russkogo naroda*, 1st ed. (Moscow, 1862), 11.

<sup>629</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227, ll. 48-51ob.

know, this prisoner isn't some sort of bandit [*razboinik*], he's imprisoned for the truth, because he's fighting for Russia and the *muzhiki*;" "he's imprisoned unjustly, for the cause of truth;" "the prisoner suffers for the truth, for [our] fathers, he fights for [our] freedom."<sup>630</sup> Furthermore, not only did these guards end up eagerly entering into political conversations with their prisoner; they also began to hold discussions amongst themselves in attempts to convince their fellow soldiers.

Let us also note that it appears that this exchange of ideas was not halted after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. In fact, having previously spoken of a coming revolution, it appears that the guards took the emperor's death in March 1881 as a sign of the power and truth of Nechaev's words. "The following [sentiment] was characteristic," records the horrified prosecutor "of many of these individuals: they consider the tsar the source of all evil, and await the revolution."<sup>631</sup> Nechaev had managed to thoroughly radicalize the prison guards of the Alekseevskii Ravelin.

We can thus say that the optics supplied by the tsarist bureaucracy fail to do justice to this perhaps unprecedented event in the history of modern political imprisonment. What we see here is not a 'disorder.' Rather, from 1877 to 1881, Sergei Nechaev succeeded in *re-ordering* the Alekseevskii Ravelin prison regime: forging lines of political solidarity amongst its soldiers, opening up spaces for the flow of ideas, texts, and writing materials among its halls. Thus did the tsarist regime's most secret political prisoner – so secret that *not a single one* of the 'disorder' documents

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<sup>630</sup> Ibid., esp. ll. 49, 49ob.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid., l. 50.

even bears his actual name<sup>632</sup> – seize control of the autocracy’s most secure political prison and its forty soldiers.

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What could realistically be achieved by Nechaev and a newly-politicized contingent of Fortress guards? For many years, not much at all: when the sole Ravelin prisoners were Nechaev and the mentally disturbed Beideman, cooperation between the former and his wardens was limited to holding political conversations, smuggling in newspapers, and supplying writing materials.

However, with the introduction of new prisoners into this radicalized ecosystem, novel pathways of action opened. L.F. Mirskii was placed in cell no. 1 of the Alekseevskii Ravelin on November 28, 1879, and S.G. Shiriaev in cell no. 13 on November 10, 1880.<sup>633</sup> Contact was quickly established with these two revolutionaries – one can only imagine the shock of entering the Peter and Paul Fortress and having one’s prison guards promptly deliver a message from the notorious, long-vanished Nechaev.

The latter fellow-prisoner, in particular, brought with him unique opportunities. S.G. Shiriaev was one of the founders of *Narodnaia volia* and a member of its Executive Committee. Significantly, he was responsible for the organization’s production of dynamite, and had played a leading role in the unsuccessful attempt to

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<sup>632</sup> Indeed, at one point during the inquiry the Military Prosecutor wrote to Commandant Ganetskii asking after the identity of the “prisoner in cell no. 5.” Ganetsky responded: “I do not consider myself to possess the right [to answer this question], as, by the highest command, all prisoners in the ravelin, kept in secrecy, are only accessible through the Minister of Internal Affairs (the Chief Gendarme).” See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227, ll. 24-27ob; 34-38 (obs).

<sup>633</sup> An excellent timeline of events in these years can be found in the case files: see RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 219, ll. 129-130ob. For more information on Shiriaev’s imprisonment, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 334.

detonate the emperor's railway carriage at the end of 1879. Betrayed by a comrade-turned-informer and imprisoned in the Alekseevskii Ravelin, for Nechaev he represented a living link with Russia's most militant revolutionary organization at the height of its power.

It was thus Shiriaev who was able to give Nechaev the means to contact members of *Narodnaia volia* in the capital: the latter composed letters in a "peculiar hieroglyphics" and entrust them to one of his loyal gendarmes, who passed them to Isaev on the streets of St. Petersburg.<sup>634</sup> Thus came to be the shocking apparition of Nechaev's word in a *Narodnaia volia* safehouse in the first months of 1881 as described earlier in this chapter: a remarkable event made possible by the even more remarkable subversion of an entire prison staff.

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All of this came to light during the case brought against the Alekseevskii Ravelin guards in 1882: the open discussions, the political transformations, and the outside communications with *Narodnaia volia*.<sup>635</sup> Understandably, such findings greatly escalated the stakes of the Military District trial. Initially, the defendants had merely been charged with a non-political crime: "the violation of the particular duties of guard service."<sup>636</sup> And while about half of the accused were still investigated on this first account, a *new* session of the Petersburg Military District Court was arranged for nineteen individuals now prosecuted for "close communication with a criminal society

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<sup>634</sup> Figner, *Zapechatlennyi trud* 1:197.

<sup>635</sup> And not only through the open testimony of the guards: during one of several searches of the Ravelin, a leaflet titled *Narodnaia volia*, no. 6 (23 October 1881) was found hidden in a guards' mattress: reading material which further supports an understanding of the prison soldiers' progressive radicalization. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 219, l. 413, 413ob, 414.

<sup>636</sup> See Commandant Ganetsky's letter to the emperor describing arrangement at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227, ll. 15, 15ob.

and actively contributing to its members' communications with state prisoners" – a serious political offense.<sup>637</sup>

On May 25, 1882, the first group was sentenced. Nineteen privates and three gendarme officers were found guilty of the dereliction of duty, and sentenced to between two-and-a-half and three years of service in the empire's disciplinary battalions. The Alekseevskii Ravelin warden and his aide were exiled to Arkhangelsk Governorate for two years, with the latter being stripped of all ranks, privileges, and medals, and the former first imprisoned for a period of six months in the Ekaterininskaia Curtain Wall of the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>638</sup>

The Petersburg Military District Court gave the second group their punishments on December 3, 1882. Found guilty of political crimes, these guards were sentenced to Siberian exile for life, with their convicted ringleader additionally given an additional four years of hard labor in the gold mines of Kara.<sup>639</sup>

It is unknown what repercussions, if any, these prosecutions would eventually have had for Nechaev himself.<sup>640</sup> Certainly he was no longer allowed to enjoy the

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<sup>637</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227, ll. 41-42ob.

<sup>638</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227, ll. 114-121ob; 151, 151ob, 152. Note that the full punishment for both the warden and his aide was exile for life to Siberia – however, this was lessened due to the former's long years of exemplary service (forty) and large amount of children (eleven), and the latter's youth and inexperience.

<sup>639</sup> The Military District Court documents related to these cases – containing, in particular, the majority of the files related to those soldiers accused of political offenses – is held at the Russian State Military-Historical Archive in Moscow [specifically, at RGVA f. 1351, op. 1, d. 4964]. Unfortunately, due to their poor condition, these documents were unavailable to researchers when I visited this institution in the autumn of 2016. Helpfully, large sections of the official sentencing documents are reproduced in Lur'e, *Sozidatel' razrusheniia*, esp. 332-35; my account above is based upon these selections.

<sup>640</sup> One interesting hint at this can be found in the files of the Commandant archive. As the trial against the Ravelin guards progressed, it grew clear that Nechaev's charisma was in part derived from the extraordinary precautions taken around his person: his special status gave him a particular aura. Thus, we find Commandant Ganetsky in May 1882 stipulating that

relative freedoms he had held with the prison guards swayed to his side – however, barring execution, there was no worse punishment in the tsarist disciplinary cosmology than solitary confinement for life in the Alekseevskii Ravelin.<sup>641</sup> More to the point: by the time the second group of politically-dedicated guards were sentenced, Nechaev had been dead for several weeks. His imprisoned co-conspirator, Shiriaev, had perished much sooner: dying of tuberculosis (or, as was rumored, having hung himself) on August 18, 1881, before the trials even began.<sup>642</sup> Thus did rise and fall the most successful concrete subversion of a political prison regime in the history of tsarist Russia.

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Nechaev should be placed in ordinary convict clothing and be allowed only the Bible as reading material. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, ll. 81, 81ob.

<sup>641</sup> We can note here that Vera Figner recalls how a rumor circulated in the capital after the ‘disorder’ in the Alekseevskii Ravelin came to light: that Nechaev had been summarily shot after the trials. See Figner, *Zapechatlennyi trud*, 1:198. His true fate only came to light after the opening of the tsarist prison archives in 1917.

<sup>642</sup> See RGIA, f. 1280, op. 5, d. 217, ll. 8, 8ob.

### Betraying Nechaev: A Speculative Intermezzo

*One final question regarding the ‘disorders’ in the Alekseevskii Ravelin still remains – how had the radicalization of the guards been discovered? Who had tipped off the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant in November 1881? In the case documents themselves, there is no mention of this initial cause – indeed, the Commandant rebukes the Military Prosecutor’s inquiry into this matter, saying that it is a state secret [see RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 227, ll. 24-27ob; 34-38(obs)].*

*Recall the first new revolutionary to be placed in an Alekseevskii Ravelin cell in the autumn of 1879: one L.F. Mirskii. Of Polish gentry origins, the young man – only twenty years old at the time of his arrest – found himself in the Fortress for a failed attempt to assassinate the head of the Third Section.*

*While the exact circumstances remain unclear, historians after 1917 have come to the conclusion that Mirskii betrayed Nechaev and the guards to the Fortress commandant, most likely as a means of alleviating his sentence [see, in particular, P.E. Shchegolev, “S.G. Nechaev v raveline (1873-1882),” in Alekseevskii Ravelin, 2:230-39]. The most damning pieces of evidence supporting this are (1) Ganetskii’s supposed admittance of this fact, as recorded in the memoirs of a contemporary [see E.M. Feoktistov, Vospominaniia (Leningrad: ‘Priboi’, 1929), 390-92], and (2) a peculiar document in Mirskii’s imprisonment files. While the latter holds no direct evidence of betrayal, a letter from Mirskii to Commandant Ganetskii from January 7, 1882, contains rather damning content. In his appeal – a few months after the exposure of the Ravelin ‘disorder’ – Mirskii thanks Ganetskii (“from the bottom of my heart”) for the recent steps that have been taken to improve his quality of life. Specifically, it appears that Mirskii was being given special reading materials, a supply of tobacco, and weekly dessert (“a pair of oranges, or a bunch of grapes, or some sorts of berries”) – unheard-of luxuries in the Peter and Paul Fortress, especially during a period when Nechaev was slowly dying of scurvy in a neighboring cell [see RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 202, l. 7, 7ob][Let us note that this hypothesis means that Mirskii’s personal memoirs – unpublished, yet preserved at RGIA f. 1093, op. 1, d. 135 – cannot be considered a trustworthy source. As such, I have refrained from using them in the present dissertation.]*

*While we can condemn Mirskii’s likely treachery, its existence also highlights the strength of Nechaev’s ‘re-ordered’ Ravelin regime. For nearly five years, all manner of clandestine political activity was carried out amongst a web of forty individuals under the very nose of the tsarist disciplinary apparatus: and this was never betrayed by the guards themselves. We can only guess what this radical circle in the Peter and Paul Fortress could have achieved if not for Mirskii.*

## **VII. Conclusion: Leaving the Peter and Paul Fortress**

We thus take our leave of Sergei Gennadievich Nechaev. Holding steady orbit around the site of the Peter and Paul Fortress, his peculiar revolutionary career crystallized within itself so many of the narratives and practices of revolutionary Russia's Age of High Prison Mythology. Nechaev was both subject and object of this politico-cultural moment. In freedom, he deftly manipulated the dark prestige and narrative tropes of political imprisonment in order to craft a compelling radical identity. In captivity, he concretely subverted the disciplinary regime of the autocracy's most secret political prison in order to radicalize his jailors, communicate with comrades, and plan a daring escape.

In the context of the present dissertation's theoretical commitments, Nechaev thus appears as an exemplary figure. The discipline of carceral studies has for too long been primarily the domain of social sciences and structuralist analyses. Against top-down accounts of penal institutions and disciplinary regimes, Nechaev's peculiar revolutionary career clearly demands a different approach to the modern history of political imprisonment. The Peter and Paul Fortress vividly appears here not as a streamlined mechanism of raw state power, but as a baroque stage, a self-narrative chronotope, a space semiotically encrusted to a tremendous degree by generations of radical political actors.

Even those revolutionaries possessing less virtuosity than Nechaev wrote their lives within the cultural imaginary of political imprisonment: radical dreams and radical anxieties took form in the shadow of the Fortress. And Nechaev himself achieved an absolutely unprecedented accomplishment. Not only did he utilize

revolutionary Russia's carceral mythos for his own ends as a young Petersburg student and itinerant émigré. His ability to subvert the prison regime of the Alekseevskii Ravelin from within was, as we have seen, in fact predicated upon his ability to persuasively tutor his jailors in the cultural logic of revolutionary incarceration. By eliciting sympathy and building solidarity through a self-narrative of heroic martyrdom in solitary confinement, the radical script of political imprisonment was itself smuggled into the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress itself. Nechaev's revolutionary career in the orbit of the Fortress clearly shows us that modernity's political prisons were built from far more than bricks and mortar, were composed of far more than unidirectional state power.

However, a difficult question still remains.

Read through the last pages of Nechaev's file in the archive of the Fortress Commandant, and you will find nothing of this intellectual and cultural history. Instead, what appears is a story of mute victimhood. After nearly ten years of solitary confinement, Nechaev died in his cell. His possessions were burned. His body was taken from the Ravelin in the dead of night and secretly buried in an unmarked grave.<sup>643</sup>

This was the prodigal son of revolutionary Russia's age of high prison mythology, an individual who sculpted carceral discourses with unparalleled skill and nearly escaped from the Peter and Paul Fortress.

But he didn't.

*No one* escaped from the Peter and Paul Fortress in its modern history.

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<sup>643</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 158, ll. 70, 70ob; 72; 73, 73ob; 74, 74ob; 75, 75ob; 76, 76ob; 79, 79ob; 80.

We must thus ask a truly difficult question. All of the artful self-aggrandizements and narrative contestations that we have traced in the present chapter: did any of it truly matter? Could all this mythmaking, these self-narrations, this strange pull of loathing and desire towards the fate of political imprisonment simply be read as morbid, ephemeral ornamentation for a generation crushed by state oppression? In the very last instance, was there really any difference between Nechaev and M.S. Beideman – the latter being the radical nobleman who had lost all voice and reason during two decades of solitary confinement, whose deranged screams were Nechaev’s only company in the Alekseevskii Ravelin until the ‘re-ordering’ of the guards and the arrival of Mirskii and Shiriaev?<sup>644</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> The fate of Beideman is a tragic story of a radical truly ‘without rhetoric.’ A young cavalry lieutenant of quixotic composure, Beideman fled his regiment in 1860 and attempted to travel to Italy in order to pledge his services to Giuseppe Garibaldi. Abandoning the voyage in Northern Europe due to a lack of funds, on his return to Russia he was arrested at the border: not only did this military deserter lack a passport, but he was also carrying revolutionary texts, several knives, and a double-barreled pistol. Beideman was swiftly brought to St. Petersburg and imprisoned in the Alekseevskii Ravelin on August 29, 1861. From the earliest days of his incarceration, he was extremely belligerent towards his captors - and officials decided to defer the prosecution of his case until a more convenient moment (we can also recall that this was the same period when the Peter and Paul Fortress was struggling to function due to the influx of student arrestees; see Chapter Three of the present dissertation).

That moment never came: seemingly forgotten by the tsarist state, Beideman spent twenty years in solitary confinement without a single charge being brought against him, let alone a trial. For most of the 1860s, he was the sole prisoner in the Alekseevskii Ravelin. Under these conditions, he lost his mind. Accounts of constant screams and sobs appear in both the Commandant’s archive and Nechaev’s petitions to his jailors. Finally released from his cell in the summer of 1881, Beideman spent the last six years of his life in a psychiatric hospital in Kazan.

Despite – or perhaps because of – his voicelessness, the tragic figure of Beideman entered into the mythology of political incarceration in revolutionary Russia: rumors of this prisoner appear often in memoirs, as a tsarist ‘Man in an Iron Mask’ held in the ‘Russian Bastille.’

After 1917, Beideman’s fate was first fully excavated by historian P.E. Shchegolev: an early essay published in the resurrected journal *Byloe* in 1919 was then expanded in 1929. See P.E. Shchegolev, “Tainstvennyi uznik. (M.S. Beideman),” in *Alekseevskii ravelin*, 2:42-127. Shchegolev’s work on Beideman and Nechaev inspired a set of novels and films that were central elements of the early-Soviet understanding of the Peter and Paul Fortress (and the

Both stories end with solitary death in a tsarist cell. Is there really any qualitative difference between these two individuals? Can ultimately unsuccessful subversive practices and politico-cultural mythmaking – no matter how rich – really be said to hold historical significance or causal power?

I would like to conclude the present chapter by defending their importance. The myths and practices that coalesced around the tsarist prison cell were not superstructural effusions, but truly affected the course of Russia's political history. That is, Nechaev's revolutionary career was not only a particularly illuminating expression of late-nineteenth-century radical political cultures: even in death, this career continued to erode the concrete and discursive foundations of the tsarist disciplinary apparatus.

*A. Concrete Contestations: Paranoia and Closure*

Since the cell first became legible to growing radical militancies and their prison mythos, the narrative malleability of political imprisonment increasingly began to become a source of fear for the autocratic state.

Paranoia amongst tsarist bureaucrats around the strength of their grip on the Peter and Paul Fortress can be seen as early as the 1860s, when the mass arrests of university students and the incarceration of popular radical publicists raised subversive sympathies among the public. As militant activities increased dramatically into the 1870s and 80s, officials only grew more anxious about whether they truly held the

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history of tsarist political incarceration as a whole). For further information on this latter moment, see Chapter Nine of the present dissertation.

keys to contemporary political narratives – especially those surrounding sites of tsarist discipline.

For example, we can touch briefly upon the fate of one V.D. Dubrovin. A Second Lieutenant in the imperial army who sought to radicalize his fellow soldiers, he was executed by hanging at the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress' Ioannovskii Ravelin on April 20, 1879.<sup>645</sup> The date of this death sentence was most inopportune. Mid-Pentecost took place just a few days later: the annual state and religious holiday where thousands of the capital's inhabitants flocked to the Peter and Paul Fortress to witness the blessing of the Neva waters.<sup>646</sup> The Commandant archives preserve the particular fears that this coincidence induced. Specifically, it appears that during the open Fortress holiday, "people walking around the Ivanovskii Bastion paid particular attention to the site of Dubrovin's execution and to his grave," holding long conversations with Fortress soldiers about the revolutionary's fate and last moments. The volume of interest and tenor of conversation was anxiety-producing enough for the commandant to write directly to the head of the Third Section on this matter, bringing these hints of radical sympathy to the secret police's attention and musing on the symbolic dissonance of staging revolutionary deaths in such close proximity to the resting place of the Romanov family in the Peter and Paul Cathedral.<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> For more on this execution, see A. Shakol, "Kazn' Dubrovina," *Katorga i ssylka* 54 (1929): 69-80. It may be worthwhile to note that death sentences were extremely rare at the Fortress for the majority of the nineteenth century: Dubrovin was the first individual to be executed on its grounds in over fifty years (since the five Decembrists ringleaders were hung at the citadel's crownwork in 1826). However, Dubrovin's death ushered in a new period of this practice. Indeed, just a year and a half later, two further revolutionaries (Kviatkovskii and Presniakov) would be hung at the same location. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 486.

<sup>646</sup> For a sustained exploration of this ritual practice, see Chapter 1 of the present dissertation.

<sup>647</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 416, ll. 51; 52, 52ob, 53. We can note that this was not the only time when the Fortress Mid-Pentecost ceremonies brought the public into contact with

If worries about the Fortress' concrete and symbolic unassailability had existed in the background for several decades, it was in 1881 – with the assassination of the emperor in March and the discovery of the Ravelin disorder in November – that these blossomed into full-fledged paranoia. As participants from around the world convened on the Fortress for the late-tsar's funeral rites, and as the imperial family frequently visited the Peter and Paul Cathedral for private memorial services, the Fortress had never felt less secure. A series of communications between the Fortress Commandant, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Gendarmes, and the City Police overflow with dark presentments and new security proposals: gate closures and police booths at the Fortress entrances; river police and gendarmes patrolling the shores of the island; the dangers of the imperial family passing so close to the Alekseevskii Ravelin; and the

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revolutionary history. In his prison memoirs, *Petrashevets* D.D. Akhsharumov recounts that during the festivities citizens threw coins to him and other political prisoners as the people walked along the fortress ramparts. See D.D. Akhsharumov, *Iz moikh vospominaniia* (St. Petersburg: Izd. 'Obshchestvennaia pol'za,' 1905). Indeed, this strange practice is attested in several sources. In Novoselov's depiction of Mid-Pentecost celebrations, he offhandedly mentions that "the people use this as a time for charity, and toss into the broad courtyard bread and money for the prisoners – gifts of Christian compassion (*dan' khristianskogo sostradaniia*).” See Novoselov, 156. This latter source is extremely interesting, as it is one of the only instances from this period where imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress is mentioned in a published source in a non-official capacity. In general, I was not quite sure what to make of this phenomenon – Akhsharumov's prison memoir could be guilty of exaggerating this action to show the inherent sympathy of the Russian people for his early liberal-socialist beliefs, while Novoselov's monarchist perspective could also be guilty of exaggerating this event to stress the inherent Christian charity of the Russian people. Finding myself in an impasse, I was thrilled to stumble upon a short note preserved in the archives, written by the fortress Platz Major to the Commandant on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1849:

Report.

The 27<sup>th</sup> day of this month, on Mid-Pentecost, passersby threw various moneys into the courtyards of the Trubetskoi and Zotov Bastions, to a total of sixty three rubles and ten kopecks silver.” [RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 154, l. 22.]

The commandant responded the next day (*ibid.*, l. 22ob), authorizing the sum to be put into the cathedral coffers – not given to the prisoners. Thus, we have a documentary confirmation of this curious practice that saw lines of sympathy erupt between public and imprisoned during Fortress religious ceremonies.

fear that the Fortress' firewood supplies would somehow be set alight by revolutionaries as part of a terroristic attack.<sup>648</sup>

It was in this atmosphere of paranoia that the very heart of St. Petersburg began to no longer appear as a fitting place for the empire's most secret political prison. In the summer of 1884, the Alekseevskii Ravelin was officially closed. Its inmates, inventory, books, and guard command were transported to newly-built facilities in the Fortress of Shlissel'burg at the confluence of the Neva River and Lake Ladoga, fifty or so kilometers outside of the capital.<sup>649</sup> The last prisoner was taken out of the Ravelin on the night of August 3, 1884; it would never again be used as a carceral space.

We can recall here that the movement of secret state prisoners from the Peter and Paul to the Shlissel'burg Fortress had occurred once previously, when M.A. Bakunin was transported out of the capital in 1854. Then, the state had feared foreign military threats during the height of the Crimean War. Now, the dangers to the tsarist regime resided within. While there was no single reason behind the closure of the Alekseevskii Ravelin prison and the removal of its prisoners to the more distant Shlissel'burg Fortress, Nechaev's politicization of the Ravelin guard and 're-ordering'

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<sup>648</sup> A wealth of communications regarding Fortress security in this period can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 546 and 608.

<sup>649</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 340. At this point in time, there were fifteen convicted political prisoners being held in the Ravelin – notably N.A. Morozov, M.F. Frolenko, and other members of *Narodnaia volia* who had been apprehended in the years after the tsar's assassination and sentenced in the 'Trial of the 20.' Note that not only prisoners, but the very materials of the Alekseevskii Ravelin prison regime were dutifully inventoried and shipped out to Shlissel'burg: including tableware, bedding, furniture, and the Ravelin's library. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 2 (*d.o.*), d. 289; op. 5, d. 243, ll. 9-10; d. 247, ll. 2-2ob, 8-11, 17, 18-24; and d. 340, ll. 1-2, 6-6ob, 14, 15, 17-17ob, 18. The building of secret prison facilities at Shlissel'burg had begun the previous year, in 1883. See Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my* 3:214-26.

of its regime from 1877 to 1881 must be seen as a primary cause. Thus, while Nechaev's plans to escape from the Peter and Paul Fortress were ultimately unsuccessful, one could say that his revolutionary career succeeded in bringing a concrete end to the Alekseevskii Ravelin.

*B. Discursive Resonance: Keeping Faith with Nechaev*

There is a tragic yet satisfying narrative symmetry to the discursive ties that bound Nechaev's life to the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress. If the first half of his revolutionary career had seen him prodigiously mine revolutionary Russia's prison mythologies to be used for his own ends, the concrete incarceration of his life's last decade went on to become an integral part of future stories radicals told about the Fortress.

Recall the ambiguous emotions evoked in Vera Figner by the prison letter from Nechaev in the winter of 1881: even while condemning his manipulative methods and devaluation of human life, one could still read heroism in his last years of solitary confinement. Figner was not the only individual to approach him in this way – after his long years of suffering, secret correspondences, and prison regime subversion came to light, Nechaev was welcomed back into the organic hagiography of the Russian revolutionary movement. Imbued with the vaguely Christological energies that always lay beneath the surface of the narratives Russian radicals told about themselves, Nechaev's near-decade of solitary confinement could be read as a martyrdom: noble suffering that cleansed him of his previous sins. As such does he make appearances in many of the prison memoirs written from the mid-1880s

onwards; thus was one facet of his reception in the first decade of the Soviet experiment.<sup>650</sup> Nechaev truly did not escape the Peter and Paul Fortress, but rather became part of its stones – an integral character in revolutionary counter-narratives of the tsarist disciplinary apparatus; counter-narratives that would prove instrumental in the revolutionary ‘re-ordering’ of the entire state of things that was just a few decades away.

But we do not need to look past 1917 to find examples of Nechaev’s carceral experience persisting as a powerful story in revolutionary Russia’s narrative fund. One of the truly remarkable elements of his ‘re-ordering’ of the Alekseevskii Ravelin prison regime is that this had been the first time that the working class – soldiers and *muzhiki*, uneducated sons of serfs – had been invited to share not only in the concrete dismantlement of tsarist justice, but also tutored in the intelligentsia narrative of heroic political imprisonment. Fascinatingly, it seems that Nechaev’s death did not bring an end to this state of affairs.

Near the end of the century, Iu.M. Steklov spent nearly two years as an exile in Yakutskaiia Oblast’ for his participation in a revolutionary circle in Odessa.<sup>651</sup> In a brief passage in his memoirs, Steklov recalls the various revolutionary personages whose paths he crossed during this time. Of these individuals, he highlights in particular the non-aristocratic comrades he met in exile: “those who did not burn

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<sup>650</sup> For more on the role of Nechaev in the Bolshevik mythos of Fortress imprisonment, see Chapter Nine of the present dissertation.

<sup>651</sup> The reader may recall Steklov from Chapter Two of the present dissertation. After 1917, he achieved a successful career as an author, editor, and historian – this is the same Steklov responsible for the (ultimately unfinished) publication of M.A. Bakunin’s collected works.

themselves into history, who walked their path of the cross relatively imperceptibly.”<sup>652</sup> In this category, he places what he calls the “soldier-‘*Nechaevtsy*’.”

It appears that Steklov met several of Nechaev’s former Ravelin guards in Yakutsk from 1897 to 1899. These would have been the most committed of his co-conspirators – those soldiers convicted as political criminals and exiled to far Eastern Siberia. Still, even keeping this previous dedication in mind, it is remarkable to find that the passage of fifteen years or more had not dulled their esteem:

Despite the vicissitudes of life in exile... all of them maintained a revolutionary spirit and, especially, a burning devotion to Nechaev. One can hold opinions on the methods used during the course of Nechaev’s revolutionary activities, one might even have a particular relationship to [Nechaev’s] own person, but his life in the Fortress and, in particular, the fact that this prisoner stripped of all rights had managed to gain such a striking influence on his soldiers shows that he was an extraordinary individual and an extremely powerful revolutionary force.<sup>653</sup>

Nechaev inhabited the role of martyred political prisoner to such a successful degree that it not only swayed the guards of his prison itself – it continued its persuasive power far beyond the prison, beyond the intelligentsia, beyond St. Petersburg, beyond his death.

And, we can add: beyond Russia itself. With the closure of the Alekseevskii Ravelin in 1884, the Peter and Paul Fortress lost its mantle of being the most brutal political prison in the Romanov Empire. However, the symbolic life of the Alekseevskii Ravelin – the hagiographies and self-narrations, the tales of heroism and

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<sup>652</sup> Iu. Steklov, “Vospominaniia o Iakutskoi ssylke,” *Katorga i ssylka* no. 6 (1923): 85.

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. We can also note that Steklov was not the only revolutionary to record meetings with members of Nechaev’s former Ravelin guard in Siberian exile. In particular, we can note the reminiscences of O.K. Bulanova-Trubnikova, who remarked that “none of them [Nechaev’s soldiers] were embittered by their participation, on the contrary, they said that even now they were prepared to go through fire and water for him.” Quoted in Lur’e, *Sozidatel’ razrusheniia*, 335. Also, see a similar encounter recorded in M. Chernavskii, “A.K. Kuznetsov,” *Katorga i ssylka* 51 (1929): 145.

horror built by and through individuals such as Nechaev in the high age of prison mythology – far outlived its concrete existence.

From the 1880s onwards, this revolutionary prison imaginary began to reach an international audience. This peculiar development – how a radical image of the Peter and Paul Fortress first entered the Anglo-American public sphere only after the Alekseevskii Ravelin's closure; how narratives of heroic political incarceration were shaped by new genre conventions and civilizational indexes; how both Russian revolutionaries and Western audiences sought to harness a particular image of the tsarist prison for their own political ends – is the subject of our next chapter.



## 7. The International Construction of a ‘Russian Bastille,’ 1881-1895

“But,” I hear my readers exclaim, “Can these things be? Is it possible that at the end of the nineteenth century, in a great capital which wears at least the outward semblance of civilization, deeds so monstrous and cruel can be perpetrated?”

- S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *Russia Under the Tsars*

### I. Introduction

On November 11, 1894, the headline of the *New York Times* beckoned readers with a gothic tale of extravagance and repression from the lands of the Russian Empire:

CHAPTERS OUT OF FROISSART

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DEAD CZARS BURIED ABOVE AND LIVING PATRIOTS BELOW.

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MEDIEVAL SPLENDOR AND SAVEGERY.<sup>654</sup>

The occasion was the funeral ceremony of Tsar Alexander III, who had died the previous week at a royal residence in Crimea. In the days since, the international media had breathlessly followed “that strange and barbarously splendid funeral procession” with which his body was transported back to the imperial capital of St. Petersburg. Eleven British correspondents alone were covering the events, and almost

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<sup>654</sup> H.F. [Harold Frederic?], “Chapters out of Froissart,” *The New York Times*, Nov. 11, 1894.

daily stories in the *New York Times* presented readers with details of the “most sumptuous of Funeral Ceremonies Russia Has Known.”<sup>655</sup>

Now, as the deceased emperor was being brought to rest in the royal tombs of the Peter and Paul Fortress, the American coverage fixated on this site’s strange role as both imperial mausoleum and notorious political prison:

[In St. Petersburg] the final tomb is being prepared for him in the fortress Church of St. Peter and St. Paul... Burrowed [here] in the ground, far beneath the stratum holding all this proud imperial clay, are terrible subterranean dungeons, in which, to this day, are immured educated men, guilty only of aspirations for the better government of their country, who were there when the bells above tolled thirteen years ago for the last home-coming of Alexander II., and knew no more what it meant than they will comprehend next week that still another Czar has been brought to rest among his fathers.

This awful contrast which forces itself upon every Russian mind whenever the Fortress Petropavlovsk, with its Czars buried dead above and patriots buried alive below, is mentioned, is not forgotten now.<sup>656</sup>

In international accounts of the funeral ceremonies of Tsar Alexander III such as this, western readers were invited to wonder at the exotic, barbaric splendors of tsarist rule – and invited to condemn absolutism’s substrata of political hypocrisy and human suffering. The real story here was not a distant world from Froissart’s popular medieval *Chronicles*,<sup>657</sup> but rather a pressing tale of political resistance and autocratic

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<sup>655</sup> The sub-headline of “Alexander’s Death Mass,” *The New York Times* (New York), Nov. 20, 1894. Regarding the journalist passes for eleven London correspondents from nine separate newspapers, see RGIA f. 473, op. 2, d. 429, l. 253. For an analysis of these funerary events as a process of the autocratic sacralization of political space in tsarist Russia, see Chapter 1 of the present dissertation.

<sup>656</sup> “Chapters out of Froissart,” *The New York Times*.

<sup>657</sup> It seems that there was a glut of translations of Froissart’s famous text into English from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, including publications through: W. Smith (London, 1839); Leavit & Allen (New York, 1853, 1860); the American Book Exchange (New York, 1880); Macmillan and co. (London, 1895); as well as even *The Boys’ Froissart; being Sir John Froissart’s Chronicles of Adventure, Battle and Custom in England France Spain etc.; Edited for Boys With an Introduction by Sidney Lanier* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879) which ran through several editions.

repression embodied in the doubly-entombed space of the Peter and Paul Fortress. A sordid and interesting tale for Western eyes, indeed.

If only it were true.

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While vaguely accurate in its broad swathes, our correspondent's story is almost entirely incorrect in its details. Yes, throughout most of the nineteenth century the Peter and Paul Fortress had held both the royal tombs of the Romanov family as well as the autocracy's most notorious political prison. However, radicals had always been held in makeshift casemate cells in the citadel walls or within special prison buildings – the marshy St. Petersburg soil was in no way conducive to underground constructions, let alone “terrible subterranean dungeons.” Furthermore, by 1894, the high age of Fortress imprisonment had passed. In August 1884 the Fortress' most dangerous political prisoners had been removed to the island fortress of Shlissel'burg in Lake Ladoga. While some sections of the citadel were still used for pre-trial detention, by the time of this article the Peter and Paul Fortress' most notorious prison building – ‘the secret house’ of the Alekseevskii Ravelin – had stood empty for a decade. It would be demolished just the following year, in 1895.<sup>658</sup>

This titillating coverage from the *New York Times* is of little use as an empirical document. However, as an expression of a particular idea of Russian political imprisonment, it holds great interest. Here we see the ways in which the radical struggle against the tsarist state had begun to be imagined and invested on an international stage – despite, indeed perhaps even *because of*, its inaccuracies.

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<sup>658</sup> For further information on the closure of the Alekseevskii Ravelin, see Chapter Six of the present dissertation.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Peter and Paul Fortress had captured the imaginations of many foreigners who had contemplated its vast walls: appearing with some frequency in Western travelogues and essays. However, it was only in the late-imperial period – from 1881 until the end of the century – that the Fortress and its prisons took on a prominent role in Western understandings of Russia. The peculiar nature and empirical contradictions of this development are the subject of this chapter. How was a ‘Russian Bastille’ constructed in the mind of the West? Why did the Peter and Paul Fortress paradoxically take on such international significance in precisely that period when its use as a political prison was in sharp decline?

The present chapter tells this story, cataloguing the varied texts and controversies through which the Peter and Paul Fortress first entered the Western political imagination. In doing so, we will encounter a diverse cast of radical émigrés and foreign journalists – Prince Petr Kropotkin, S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, George Kennan – whose labors were central to trans-national debates on the nature of Russian absolutism and its carceral regimes in the late-nineteenth century. In these discussions, we will find that the Peter and Paul Fortress was second perhaps only to Siberia as a spatial locus for imagining the contradictions of Russian modernity.<sup>659</sup>

As an image of the Fortress achieved international circulation in a nascent age of mass media, a discourse arose that was in many ways an organic continuation of revolutionary Russia’s mythology of political imprisonment, and in many ways unique

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<sup>659</sup> Only recently has a (fascinating) wave of scholarship begun to explore the idea of Siberian exile in the cultural imaginary of Russia and the West. However, to the best of my knowledge, the present dissertation is the first such treatment of political incarceration. See Daniel Beer, *The House of the Dead: Siberian Exile Under the Tsars* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016); and Ben Phillips, “Political Exile and the Image of Siberia in Anglo-Russian Contacts Prior to 1917,” PhD diss., (University College London, 2016).

to the global stage. Pulling at these threads – part of this dissertation’s continuing commitment to exploring how political spaces are invested with meaning not only through concrete practices but also as sites of fantasy, anxiety, and representation – roots our present study of Russian carceral cultures in the recent historiographies of traveling ideas and Russia’s global modernities.<sup>660</sup>

Furthermore, beyond the formal pathways through which the Peter and Paul Fortress debuted before an international audience in this period, this chapter will also explore the precise stories this citadel was made to contain. We will find that tsarist incarceration was given foreign legibility within a political aesthetics of gothic romanticism. This is a fact not only of literary interest – by utilizing the symbolic imaginary and civilizational index at this genre’s core, Russian revolutionaries sought to strategically channel an Anglo-American Orientalizing discourse in the service of their political goals.

It is with these avenues in mind that the present chapter takes up the peculiar international dialogue in which the Peter and Paul Fortress of the late-imperial period was produced – that site of “awful contrasts,” at once medieval and modern, Russian and European, reassuringly distant yet oppressively near.

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<sup>660</sup> Thus, the present chapter is intended as a corollary to our discussion of ‘spaces of representation’ in the first chapter of the present dissertation. It also seeks to join recent discussions regarding the global, interconnected pathways of Russian modernity. This second aim is particularly important to stress in our overall history of radical carceral cultures. Too often have existing accounts of the Peter and Paul Fortress treated this site as a bounded, national phenomenon: at best paying mere lip service to its international resonance, at worst inscribing its use into *Sonderweg* framework, as a crucible of radical struggle and state discipline somehow essentially ‘Russian’ in nature. For excellent recent works that seek to break down the narrow national borders of our histories of the Russian revolutionary tradition, see the scholarship of Choi Chatterjee and Richard Stites, “Decembrists with a Spanish Accent”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12 (2011): 5-23.

## II. ‘Under Western Eyes’: Early Images of the Peter and Paul Fortress

The Peter and Paul Fortress had been known to Western observers from the first days of its construction, as travelers brought back narrative reports of Peter the Great’s new capital on the Neva.<sup>661</sup> While fascinating in their own right, early-modern travelogues as a rule treated the Fortress architecturally, not politically. A trans-national reception of the Peter and Paul Fortress as a properly political space only began in the nineteenth century.

The first influential European account to delve into the problematic nature of this site was that of Astolphe-Louis-Léonor, Marquis de Custine. Taking inspiration from de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, at the start of the 1840s de Custine published a political meditation on his recent travels in Russia, titled *La Russie en 1839*.<sup>662</sup> In this widely-translated (and heavily critical) work, the Peter and Paul Fortress briefly looms over the author’s initial tour of St. Petersburg:

In this funereal citadel, the dead appeared to me more free than the living. If it had been a philosophical idea which suggested the inclosing in the same tomb the prisoners of the emperor and the prisoners of death – the conspirators and the monarchs against whom they conspired – I should respect it; but I see in it nothing more than the cynicism of absolute power – the brutal security of a despotism which feels itself safe... Oh, how I pity the prisoners of this

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<sup>661</sup> Some of these early accounts are discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation. For more information on the widely-researched topic of Western European travelogues in Russia, see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Marshall T. Poe, *A People Born to Slavery: Russia in Early Modern European Ethnography, 1476-1748* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); and Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999).

<sup>662</sup> Predictably, the work was banned in Russia. See *The Empire of the Czar; or, Observations on the Social, Political, and Religious State and Prospects of Russia: made during a journey through that empire* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1843). For an analysis of the reception of this text, see Irena Grudzinka Gross, *The Scar of Revolution: Custine, Tocqueville, and the Romantic Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

fortress! If the existence of the Russians confined under the earth, is to be judged of by inferences drawn from the existence of the Russians who live above, there is, indeed, cause to shudder!<sup>663</sup>

Undoubtedly thinking back to the Decembrist revolt, de Custine presents the central Fortress of St. Petersburg as a cipher for the senseless brutality of Nicolaevan Russia. In the architectonics of this early image, both the bodies of the tsars and the bodies of the condemned are said to be held underground – it appears that *La Russie en 1839* is the source for all later misconceptions regarding the existence of subterranean prisons.

Two decades later, another French travelogue would also highlight the uncanny nature of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Upon visiting Russia in 1858, Alexandre Dumas, *père* – dubbing the Fortress “the Bastille of St. Petersburg” – claimed that “if ever its secret records are revealed; if the time comes when its dark, foul, icy dungeons are flung open to the light of day like those of our Château d’If, then Russia will begin to learn her true history. All she has now is legend.”<sup>664</sup> Here, Dumas – widely read at this time in Russia – charts the Peter and Paul Fortress alongside the most famous carceral sites of French history and his own *oeuvre*.<sup>665</sup> The Fortress is located within a larger European aesthetic constellation: readers are invited to place St. Petersburg’s fortress in a pedigree stretching from Piranesi’s *Le Carceri d’Invenzione* and the French Bastille to the author’s own *Count of Monte Cristo*.

Thus, between de Custine and Dumas we see the contours of the early reception of the Peter and Paul Fortress in Western Europe. A space of dread mystery

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<sup>663</sup> Custine, *The Empire of the Czar*, 160.

<sup>664</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Adventures in Czarist Russia*, 78-79.

<sup>665</sup> Before his personal travels in Russia, Dumas had treated Russia once before in his (bewildering, exaggerated, anti-democratic) historical novel *Le Maître d’armes* (1840) – see Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, “Dumas’s Decembrists: *Le Maître d’armes* and the Memoirs of Pauline Annenkova,” *The Russian Review* 59 (2000): 38-51.

and fascination, its ‘dungeon’ was envisioned as a space of both revulsion and fascination – a dark, unknowable heart of the Russian past and present.

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The earliest depictions of the Fortress did not solely come from Western European authors. During the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, a trickle of Russian sources on the prison reached European audiences. As early as 1861 we find memoirs and journalistic works making their way to publishing houses in Paris, London and Geneva.<sup>666</sup> However, the wider reception of these texts was hampered by linguistic barriers, small print runs, and the insular world of Russian émigré communities – the last aspect famously depicted in Joseph Conrad’s late novel *Under Western Eyes*.<sup>667</sup>

At times certain works dealing with political incarceration were translated into European languages, and drew foreign readers into closer engagement with the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress. The most significant of these is one of the few non-Russian language prison memoirs – a brief sketch by populist I.Ia. Pavlovskii of his four-year imprisonment during the Trial of the 193, published as “En Cellule. Impressions d’un nihiliste” in *Le Temps* in November 1879.<sup>668</sup> However, while this memoir’s publication in France is noteworthy, its content is not: the short piece is limited to a rather apolitical depiction of the physical and psychological toll of solitary confinement. And while Pavlovskii went on to achieve moderate success as a journalist and author, “En Cellule” seems to have left little impression on European reading publics. Indeed, this article became most well known for the fact that I.S.

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<sup>666</sup> See discussions of these early Decembrist fragments and Alexander Herzen’s Free Russian Press in Chapters Three and Four.

<sup>667</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (London: Methuen & co., 1911).

<sup>668</sup> I.Ia. Pavlovskii, “En Cellule. Impressions d’un nihiliste.” *Le Temps*, Nov. 19, 1879.

Turgenev agreed to write a brief forward. Here, in his classic quixotic fashion, Turgenev attempted to give patronage to the text yet not its politics, recommending it to readers “without endorsing [its] views.”<sup>669</sup> This provoked the scorn of progressive Russians: including writer M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, who exclaimed that he had “completely lost respect for the old man” after his “absolutely incomprehensible” forward.<sup>670</sup> As we see, even when opportunities for greater European-wide reflection on tsarist political imprisonment arose in the foreign press, in this early period they still resonated almost solely within Russian circles. The burgeoning mythology of political confinement that this dissertation has traced did not easily circulate among European audiences.

If we can speak of a turning point in this state of affairs, it was surely the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in March 1881. As the question of Russian radicalism burst with new urgency upon the international scene – and the Peter and Paul Fortress took central stage as the site of both assassins’ confinement and tsar’s burial alike – European audiences had a relatively impoverished set of sources through which to understand tsardom’s most overdetermined political space.

This was a lack that was soon to be addressed. After 1881, a series of public controversies and publication events soon drew the Peter and Paul Fortress in bold colors before Western European publics. The following sections trace the development of this new discourse in the 1880s and 1890s through readings of its three primary encounters – the P.A. Kropotkin and Henry Lansdell polemics, S.M. Stepniak-

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<sup>669</sup> Ibid.

<sup>670</sup> He ends his biting condemnation of the elderly Turgenev with the line “the longer his nose hairs grow, the greater his cowardice.” See: M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh* (Moscow: ‘Khudozhestvennaia literatura,’ 1965-1977), 19:119-21.

Kravchinskii's lurid prose, and George Kennan's journalistic crusade. In doing so, we can follow the pathways through which a certain mythology of Russian political imprisonment rose to prominence in the West, and approach the particular modalities through which a 'Russian Bastille' was invested with meaning 'from the other shore'. As foreign readers affixed their attention to the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress in these decades, Russian absolutism began to be increasingly located within a political aesthetic of gothic romanticism. This was a genre able to both express scintillating tales of luxury, oppression, and madness to captivated observers as well as grasp Russian existence as a set of binary contradictions – confinement versus freedom, East versus West, barbarism versus modernity. As we shall see, the Peter and Paul Fortress and its political gothic became a central stage for foreign representations of the Russian present, as well as for Russian dissidents themselves to characterize their own struggle and invite emotional identification (and even political commitment) from international audiences.

### **III. Prince P.A. Kropotkin and Rev. Henry Lansdell**

Out of all the individuals responsible for spreading a mythology of the Peter and Paul Fortress to Western audiences in the 1880s – for constructing a 'Russian Bastille' – no figure could boast more familiarity with its cells than Prince P.A. Kropotkin [1842-1921]. Born in Moscow of an ancient Rurikid line, Kropotkin spent his youth in living proximity to the tsarist court – enrolled in the Corps of Pages, he met Tsar Nicholas I several times in his youth, and as part of his duties had even kept watch over the Dowager Empress' body in the Peter and Paul Cathedral before her burial in 1860.

Setting off for an illustrious official career in Siberia after coming of age, his exposure to the physical landscapes of the East soon sparked a lifelong interest in the study of geography and geology. Concurrently, his exposure to the human landscapes of Siberia and its exiles – supplemented by his discovery of Proudhon – sparked a lifelong commitment to anarchist critiques of the tsarist state.<sup>671</sup>

In March 1874, Kropotkin was arrested in St. Petersburg for illegal propaganda work and participation in the radical Chaikovskii Circle.<sup>672</sup> After nearly two years of pre-trial detention in a solitary Trubetskoi bastion cell of the Peter and Paul Fortress, his health rapidly deteriorated and in December 1875 he was transferred in quick succession to the St. Petersburg House of Preliminary Detention and then to one of the city's military hospitals.<sup>673</sup> The more lax security of this last site allowed Kropotkin to begin communicating with fellow revolutionaries, and in June 1876 he was freed in a

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<sup>671</sup> The best source for the general contours of Kropotkin's life is still his autobiography, serialized in English from 1898 to 1899. See P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*.

<sup>672</sup> Kropotkin arrived at the Peter and Paul Fortress on March 27, 1874, where it appears that he was held primarily within cell number 39 of the Trubetskoi bastion – see internal documents and a letter to the Emperor confirming his imprisonment, held at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 383, ll. 187, 188, 188ob, 189, 190; D. 399, ll. 136b, 136b ob, 136v. Kropotkin's time in the Peter and Paul Fortress is especially remarkable for the breadth of textual labor he was allowed to undertake in his cell – given permission to receive maps and books, and continue his scientific labors, through the direct intervention of the Imperial Geographical Society. See documents related to this patronage at NA RGO f. 1-1871, op. 1, d. 14 and 27.

<sup>673</sup> The exact date of Kropotkin's transfer out of the Peter and Paul Fortress was December 20, 1875 – *not* “in March or April, 1876” as he would claim in his later memoir. Compare the account in P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 2:163 with the prison documents and letter to the Emperor attesting to an earlier date in RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 436, ll. 473; 474, 474ob; 475, 475ob. The date of December 20 is also independently confirmed in Kropotkin's own reading journals for the years 1875 and 1876, held in OR RGB f. 410, karton 16, ed. khr. 13. One could speculate that Kropotkin's memoirs overstate the time spent in the Peter and Paul Fortress to assume an even greater authority to speak on matters relating to its prisons – or, more benignly, that our memoirist made an honest mistake regarding the exact dates of events that had taken place, at that point, over two decades previously.

daring escape.<sup>674</sup> After crossing the border, Kropotkin made his way to Switzerland. He lived there amongst the Russian émigré community until the assassination of Alexander II, when he was swiftly expelled from the country. Thus doubly exiled, Kropotkin and his wife traveled to London, where they would live for the better part of 1881 and 1882.

Kropotkin was a prolific writer, constantly navigating between scientific treatises and anarchist theory. Upon arriving in London, he aimed to tackle a third genre – popular political commentary. Thus, in January 1883, the monthly London literary journal *The Nineteenth Century* printed a brief article by Kropotkin. Titled “Russian Prisons,” it was the author’s first foray into popular literature on the state of contemporary Russia, as well as his first text to be printed in English.<sup>675</sup> It was also to become, crucially, the spark of a bitter literary feud that would be instrumental in exposing Anglophone publics to the political and narrative spaces of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

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Kropotkin’s first article for *The Nineteenth Century* is an attempt at an exposé of the Russian prison system for Western audiences. The essay is filled with statistics and vignettes, as Kropotkin traces a picture which runs from the central prisons of European Russia to Siberia, from the high hopes of Alexandrine reform (1857-1862) to the dismal conditions of his successor’s early reign. While the Peter and Paul Fortress briefly appears in his analysis – as “a true grave where the prisoner for two,

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<sup>674</sup> See Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, 2:163-80. On the night of his prison escape, Kropotkin famously spent the evening dining in the fashionable St. Petersburg restaurant Donon, which he and his comrades correctly surmised would be the last place that the tsarist secret police would search for a runaway political prisoner.

<sup>675</sup> Prince Krapotkine, “Russian Prisons,” *The Nineteenth Century* 13, (Jan. 1883).

three, five, ten years hears no human voice and sees no human being” – Kropotkin’s larger purpose is to give a bird’s eye survey of Russia’s prisons.<sup>676</sup>

While personally and politically invested in analyzing a ruinous carceral system (which he believed was incapable of reform, concluding the article with the assertion that “our prisons are the reflection of the whole of our life under the present *régime*”<sup>677</sup>), his report also derived its urgency from the present journalistic moment. For, in fact, Kropotkin’s exposé was not the only depiction of Russian prisons in the Anglo-American press at the start of the 1880s. Kropotkin’s first foray into prison writing was intended both as a descriptive report and a political polemic, aimed at what he saw as an offensively positive depiction of the tsarist disciplinary regime in the writings of a certain “Reverend Mr. Lansdell in England.”<sup>678</sup>

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The figure in question is Rev. Henry Lansdell, the author of one of the more famous post-1881 foreign travelogues on Russia. A British priest and explorer, Lansdell had traveled several times through European and Asian Russia during the 1870s and 1880s in order to gather material for his popular non-fiction as well as distribute Christian philanthropic aid amongst criminals and the poor.<sup>679</sup> This latter role had seen Lansdell

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<sup>676</sup> Other than a quick reference to the ghastly silence of the Peter and Paul Fortress, in a discussion of capital punishment Kropotkin also repeats the current rumor that N.I. Rysakov – a *Narodnaia volia* member executed for his role in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 – had been tortured with electricity in the citadel before his hanging. See *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>677</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>679</sup> It appears that this same Lansdell was the model for the English philanthropist that appears in L.N. Tolstoy’s 1899 novel *Resurrection*. See especially the acidic depiction of this individual in a Siberian prison, from Chapter 26: “Everywhere men – cold, hungry, idle, diseased, degraded, and confined – were shown off like wild beasts. The Englishman having given away the appointed number of Testaments stopped giving any more, and made no more speeches... he went from cell to cell saying nothing but ‘All right’ to the inspector’s report of

visit many Siberian prisons in his journeys, and in his latest book – *Through Siberia*, published in 1882 in two volumes – he had taken on the mantle of an expert in the tsarist carceral system before the British public.<sup>680</sup> Led through several prisons at the behest – and with the accompaniment – of tsarist officials, Lansdell’s *Through Siberia* treats them as exemplary spaces of a model penitentiary network.

As a revolutionary anarchist and former political prisoner, Kropotkin designed his first English article as a rebuttal to Lansdell’s popular account of tsarist incarceration. Picking apart the priest’s scanty source base and casting aspersions upon his close ties to Russian officials, Kropotkin derides the “false ideas” of a foreign traveler who believes he can pass positive judgment on the nature of tsarist justice.<sup>681</sup>

It is unclear whether Kropotkin solely wished to clear the field of misconceptions before writing his own analysis of Russia’s prisons for a Western audience, or in fact intended to start a journalistic war with Lansdell. Unsurprisingly, Kropotkin’s article accomplished the latter.

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Just one month later, Henry Lansdell personally responded to “Russian Prisons” with a biting article of his own in *The Contemporary Review* out of London. Titled “A Russian Prison,” this explicit rebuke of Kropotkin is of interest not only as an artifact of a continuing British interest in the tsarist penitentiary at the beginning of the 1880s. For this first broadside in a lasting journalistic polemic is also, pivotally, the beginning

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the prisoners in each ward.” Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, trans. Louise Maude (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 473-75.

<sup>680</sup> Indeed, the preface boasts: “Comparatively few travellers cross Northern Asia to the Amur. I doubt if any *English* author has preceded me. Probably also I was the first foreigner ever allowed to go through the Siberian prisons and mines.” See Henry Lansdell, *Through Siberia*, 2 vols. (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882), vi.

<sup>681</sup> Kropotkin, “Russian Prisons,” 28.

of the first prolonged discussion of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the Anglo-American press. “A Russian Prison” begins by briefly addressing several of Kropotkin’s criticisms point-by-point, before Lansdell decides to give battle on a field only briefly mentioned by his adversary – the Peter and Paul Fortress.

The Fortress appears as a challenge to those readers who might hint that Lansdell had only seen the best aspects of Russia’s disciplinary system. Because “the enemies of Russia, and those who would rather not hear any good of her, had said that in my inspection of Siberian prisons the worst had not been shown me,” Lansdell reveals that he had also been granted the rare chance of touring Russia’s most notorious carceral site itself.<sup>682</sup> Lansdell uses this new article to narrate his trip into “the political prisons in the Fortress of SS. Peter and Paul” – “the supposed horrors and tortures of which have been... dressed up for the sympathies of a pitiful public” – in order to bolster his credentials as a commentator on the nature of the tsarist prison system and demolish Kropotkin’s claims to the same.<sup>683</sup>

Thus does Lansdell guide his English readers for the first time into the supposed “torture chamber” of the Fortress – only to smugly enumerate the torture-less, indeed comfortable conditions that he finds there. Thus, he is led to the “Troubetzkoy Bastoin” and shown an empty prison cell, where he is astounded by the “good oil lamp” and “two *feather* pillows, such as I do not remember to have seen provided in any other prison in the world.”<sup>684</sup> Further astonishment is displayed at the superb state of the prison bathhouses and Fortress gardens, where he claims to find “an

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<sup>682</sup> Henry Lansdell, D.D. “A Russian Prison,” *The Contemporary Review*, 43 (Feb. 1883): 279.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, 280

abundance of shady trees, between two of which a hammock was swung,” “a pair of gymnastic bars,” and “two playful puppies[!]”<sup>685</sup> Finally, he is invited to peer through a viewing slot into a cell occupied by a revolutionary terrorist:

Of course I peeped breathlessly in, and duly prepared my nerves to see how this arch offender was being treated, how he bore the weight of his irons, and what likelihood there seemed of his losing his health, or reason, or of sinking into the ghastly condition of political prisoners as described in the *Nineteenth Century* [by Kropotkin]. But the man appeared to be bearing his fate better than was to be expected. He was not in irons, he appeared to be in good health, and showed not the least tendency to insanity. In fact, he was lying at full length on his bed, with his toes in the air, reading a book, and smoking a cigar!<sup>686</sup>

Lansdell’s brief tour of the Peter and Paul Fortress invites the British reading public to walk alongside him down its corridors and make up their own minds as to the material conditions and personal leisure afforded in this supposedly dread space. This, of course, is to ask the reader to join him in an implicit and explicit critique of the gloomy air of torture and horror hinted at in Kropotkin’s article for *Nineteenth Century*. While at the end of his article Lansdell claims that he has “never maintained that the Russian prisons are what they ought to be,” he counters that “this does not justify the representation of them to be what they are not” – a last dig at Kropotkin.<sup>687</sup>

The response was swift and furious. Kropotkin published a second article that June in *The Nineteenth Century*, titled “The Fortress Prison of St. Petersburg.” The article begins with a denial that he wants to be dragged down into “useless polemics

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<sup>685</sup> Ibid., 283. As Kropotkin would correctly note in his later rebuttal, these well-kept grounds were tied to the casemates of the Ekaterininskaia curtain – a site used to hold military officers, and in no way tied to the political prisons of the Trubetskoi bastion or the Alekseevskii ravelin.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid., 280. While Lansdell does not discount the possibility of sickness or madness in a modern prison, he remarks that according to a former prisoner of his acquaintance, “during his three years’ confinement two prisoners died, but not from bad treatment, and two went mad – the latter by their own fault [!]” See *ibid.*, 287.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid., 288.

with Mr. Lansdell” but states that he is forced to reply to an account that is both “too incomplete to convey a correct idea about the real conditions of prison life in the Russian fortress” as well as “intended, moreover, to cast doubt upon other trustworthy information.” As such, he feels forced to respond to the charges brought against him as well as Lansdell’s perversely positive account of the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>688</sup>

For what did it matter if Lansdell could provide his readers with a simulated tour of the Trubetskoi bastion? Not only did the non-Russophone Lansdell lack all knowledge of the written sources on the tsarist disciplinary regime: Kropotkin had himself spent nearly two years imprisoned in the cells that Lansdell had only briefly toured.<sup>689</sup> Thus, with the authority of a true insider, Kropotkin sets about to demolish Lansdell’s account through a counter-narrative rooted in his own familiarity with St. Petersburg’s citadel.

Kropotkin’s description is measured and calm. While admitting that he himself never experienced physical torture in his Trubetskoi bastion cell, he coolly enumerates the various forms of psychological torment that prisoners in the fortress endure. The choking smoke of each cell’s stove, the terrible solitude of pre-trial isolation for years at a time, and a horrifying silence which “is that of a grave” all contribute to the slow mental and physical disintegration of the citadel’s prisoners. The facts of Kropotkin’s own illness and eventual removal from the fortress add another layer of legitimacy to

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<sup>688</sup> Prince Krapotkine, “The Fortress Prison of St. Petersburg,” *The Nineteenth Century*, 13 (June 1883): 928-29. Note that his response would surely have come even faster if not for slight extenuating circumstances. Kropotkin’s year in London had not been a happy one – in his memoirs he recalls how he and his wife “often said to each other, ‘Better a French prison than this grave.’” And this, for better or worse, was exactly what had occurred – upon leaving London for France in late 1882, this wanted anarchist was quickly seized by the authorities and held in the Prison Saint-Paul at Lyon, from which this last rebuttal was written and smuggled out to the English press. See *Memoirs* 2:254, 262-85.

<sup>689</sup> See Krapotkine, “The Fortress Prison,” 948-49.

his account. Thus, the Peter and Paul Fortress is something that Kropotkin has “stigmatized as it deserves,” and which he is proud to “have brought to the knowledge of public opinion in England, in order to show the hypocrisy of our Government.”<sup>690</sup>

Thus, the article ends by portraying Lansdell’s carceral revisionism as veering from shallow tourism into the realm of political perversity. But while Kropotkin “still cherish[es] the hope that this kind of polemics is rather due to the malice of his official informants than to his own taste for it,” he concludes by warning his reading public that “every attempt to extenuate the dark features of our prisons will be a stone brought to consolidate the abominable *régime* we have now.”<sup>691</sup> Thus, Lansdell’s careless (or malicious) polemics are construed as themselves further stones in the grim bastion of Russia’s autocratic government.

The polemics between Kropotkin and Lansdell slowly died away, but the enmity between them would be long lasting. In letters almost a decade later, Kropotkin would only refer to his critic as “the scoundrel Lansdell” (*eta shel’ma Lansdell*).<sup>692</sup> Furthermore, when Kropotkin gathered his *Nineteenth Century Articles* for republication in book form – appearing as *In Russian and French Prisons* in London in 1887 – he devoted an entire chapter to restating his criticism of this British priest.<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>690</sup> Ibid., 943.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid., 949.

<sup>692</sup> See the vitriol with which Kropotkin still refers to Lansdell in his correspondence with S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii in 1893, especially RGALI f. 1158, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 3, 3ob, 4; 12, 12ob.

<sup>693</sup> “Chapter Seven: A Foreigner on Russian Prisons,” in *In Russian and French Prisons*. Note that in the introduction written for the Russian edition of *In Russian and French Prisons* (published in 1906), Kropotkin takes his critique even further – hypothesizing that Lansdell had perhaps never even seen the inside of the Peter and Paul Fortress, but had only repeated information fed to him by the Russian secret police. No matter what antipathy we may hold for this British lackey of tsarist discipline, we can clear him of these charges of outright falsification. In the archives of the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant, I found a letter

Tellingly as well, Kropotkin also committed an entire chapter in this 1887 volume to an expanded account of the Peter and Paul Fortress. “No autocracy can be imagined without its Tower or its Bastille,” it begins, and this “last stronghold of Autocracy” will remain “until a Russian Fourteenth of July comes to seep away all the rottenness of a decaying institution.”<sup>694</sup> It was not only the enmity of the Kropotkin-Lansdell exchange that was long lasting – the effects of their literary controversy had a prolonged effect on the Anglo-American reception of the idea of Russian political imprisonment.<sup>695</sup>

We have presented these polemics between *Nineteenth Century* and *Contemporary Review* in such detail in order to highlight three elements of this early reception. First – while dissident narratives of radical imprisonment had long been limited to the Russian language press (mostly in illicit circulations through the mid-nineteenth century ‘underground republic of letters’), post-1881 European audiences were eager for information about this ‘Russian Bastille.’ Especially valued was actual proximity to the prison cells themselves – visible in the rhetorical escalation where each writer sought to buttress their account with a more authoritative experience of life in the Trubetskoi bastion. Second – this eagerness revolved not solely around dates and statistics, but also in the sometimes-gruesome vignettes that arose from the Romanov’s most notorious political prison. While both Kropotkin and Lansdell in their separate analyses sought to shine an objective light upon Russia’s prison fortress,

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recording how a “pastor of the Anglican Church Lansdel” was given permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to tour the Trubetskoi Bastion and Ekaterininskaia Curtain in 1882. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 518, l. 10.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., 84, 123.

<sup>695</sup> For a look at the overall circulation of Kropotkin’s thought (on carceral matters and more broadly) in Britain, see Haia Shpayer-Makov, “The Reception of Peter Kropotkin in Britain, 1886-1917,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 19 (1987): 373-90.

both are also keen to include the most picturesque and gothic stories that emanate from its walls (even if only to negate them). This first prison controversy has already begun to orbit the space of the political gothic. Third and finally – it is telling how the Peter and Paul Fortress was so quickly understood as the ‘heart’ of the Russian carceral question. The initial works of both Lansdell and Kropotkin (*Through Siberia* and “Russian Prisons”) only tangentially touch upon the Fortress and its political prisons, if at all. However, as their polemics developed, they both very quickly grasped the Peter and Paul Fortress as the most vital point of contention between pro- and anti-tsarist prison writings – as a spatial synecdoche through which Western audiences could grasp the essence of the struggle between the Romanov regime and revolutionary Russia.

Kropotkin’s heated responses to Lansdell’s tsarist apologism was the first time that a former Peter and Paul Fortress prisoner directly addressed Anglophone publics with stories of St. Petersburg’s dread citadel – but it would not be the last. A series of texts would swiftly follow the Kropotkin-Lansdell exchange, and guide foreign audiences even further into the dread cells of the ‘Russian Bastille.’ In doing so, they would cement the Peter and Paul Fortress as a pivotal site for casting judgment upon the Romanov regime and Russian modernity at large, modifying and expanding upon many of the ideas touched upon in this first public controversy.

#### IV. *The Times*

Just six months after Kropotkin's "The Fortress Prison of St. Petersburg," *The Times* of London published a short article titled "Russian Political Prisoners."<sup>696</sup> Written by an anonymous correspondent based in Paris, the dispatch conveys to English audiences the content of two letters purportedly written by prisoners within "the fort and prison of Peter and Paul at St. Petersburg," smuggled outwards to Western Europe before then "[being] communicated to us by one of the most prominent and influential Nihilist leaders."<sup>697</sup> By this rather torturous pathway, the English reading public of 1883 had another major encounter with the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress – as effective recipients of a desperate message from within its very walls.

And the message is indeed bleak: the correspondent begins his article by stating that he will focus primarily on the second letter, which is "of great length, though written throughout with the prisoner's blood."<sup>698</sup> The form of this text is wholly appropriate to its content – the author paints a lurid picture of emaciated, diseased dissidents fighting off rats and madness in the dark cells of the Trubetskoi bastion. Special weight is given to gendered victimhood within these walls – the *Times*' correspondent relates how the anonymous author "makes a special appeal to the civilized world on behalf of the women, whose situation is far worse than that of the men." Shocking hints of sexual violence trail off into the writer's last, "very

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<sup>696</sup> "Russian Political Prisoners," *The Times* (London), Dec. 7, 1883.

<sup>697</sup> While not mentioned in the *Times* article, one of these letters appears to have been originally published by the Narodnaia Volia press in 1883. See "Ot mertvykh k zhivym. Pis'mo iz Petropavlovskoi kreposti" (Sept. 1883), held in GMPiR f. II-12747. There is good reason to believe that both of these letters are fake. However, this does not diminish their importance as sources for understanding foreign imaginaries of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*

pathetic” plea: that “the penalty of solitary confinement, like the tortures of the Middle Ages, shall for ever be abolished.”<sup>699</sup>

While assuming the trappings of source-based objectivity, this anonymous article is far different in tone from the relatively measured prose of the Kropotkin-Lansdell controversy. Indeed, in form and theme it is clearly a product of the rhetoric and effects of gothic fiction. Even its framing gestures towards authenticity – the focus placed on the provenance of the correspondent’s evidence – are steeped in blood and secrecy.

While surely intending to titillate and shock, the convergence of the aesthetic and the political here can be seen as producing three major outcomes. The blood-letter reaches out over a vast distance to its English audience – a distance that is, primarily, civilizational. The conditions of the Peter and Paul Fortress lie outside of the self-imagined practices of Western Europe; the author’s pointed appeal to the reader’s sense of civility further defines this gulf as ‘Oriental’. It is also, of course, a chasm of time – the penal practices of the tsarist regime are not simply ‘backwards’ to the extent that they are non-Western, but are explicitly meant to call to mind a certain sense of ‘medievalism’ for the modern reader. And, finally, lest readers think these punishments all a terrible mistake or form of criminal neglect, at a key juncture the correspondent states that “the prisoner [the author of the blood-letter] maintains that no one is sent to this bastion except at the express command of the Czar; and that the condition of its inmates is well known at Court. The ill-treatment which he proceeds to

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<sup>699</sup> Ibid.

describe he attributes to feelings of personal hatred against the Nihilist chiefs.”<sup>700</sup> The conditions of the Peter and Paul Fortress – in all their barbarism and antiquity – are not accidental expressions, but key products of an equally barbaric and antiquated tsarist regime. Blood stains the hands of both prisoner and Tsar alike.

Thus, in the same year of the Lansdell-Kropotkin polemics, Anglophone readers were exposed to another post-1881 expression of the Peter and Paul Fortress mythos. This one, however, came in the form of a twice-related blood-letter, a desperate trace from a gothic novel, somehow having made its way from a space of oriental, medieval horror into the civilized drawing rooms of the nineteenth century.

A response would not be long coming. The February 15, 1884 issue of *The Pall Mall Gazette* printed a long rebuttal of the *Times*' piece, titled “How Nihilists are Treated in Russian Dungeons. (By a Recent Visitor.)” Another anonymous text, the article presents a “graphic narrative from the pen of an Englishman resident in St. Petersburg, who inspected a few weeks ago the Troubetskoi fortress [sic] in St. Petersburg, where many Nihilists are imprisoned.”<sup>701</sup>

The article begins by repeating, with skepticism, the litany of horrors that had recently appeared in the times. There is perhaps only one point where the anonymous author of the *Pall Mall* letter is in agreement with the *Times* correspondent: “It is true that his Majesty knows what goes on at the fortress; hence the order and cleanliness which reign there.”<sup>702</sup>

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<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> “How Nihilists are Treated in Russian Dungeons (By a Recent Visitor.)” *Pall Mall Gazette* (London), Feb. 15, 1884.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

For if the sensational piece in the *Times* had made its Anglophone audiences recipients of a secret, blood-written letter from the blood-soaked halls of the Peter and Paul Fortress, this rebuttal in the *Pall Mall* opens the doors of this prison and takes its curious readership inside – thus repeating the rhetorical move of authority-gained-through-access that had been performed by both Lansdell and Kropotkin the previous year. With stolid English curiosity and clear-mindedness, the author tours the Trubetskoi bastion. As he visits various points in the prison, he casts doubts upon every supposed horror of St. Petersburg citadel: torture is not permitted, the library and doctors’ quarters are well-supplied, the food is more than adequate (judged after a personal sampling), and any reported cases of madness are surely due to the fact that the radical “was already a crazed fanatic before his arrest.”<sup>703</sup> The author even relates peering through many of the small ‘Judas’ latches of the cells themselves, spying on individual prisoners with a moderate, dispassionate eye.

The correspondent’s words are meant to soothe and dispel – however, even in this overwhelmingly positive account of tsarist penal practices, notes of sensationalism subtly appear. There is still tyranny and horror within the Peter and Paul Fortress: however, it lies not with the autocratic regime, but with the dangerous criminals deserving their solitary confinement. These are the greatest enemies of modernity, “vanity-mad, cowardly misleaders” and “brain-diseased but still dangerous maniacs.” It is implied that every thinking person can see the evil lurking behind each revolutionist’s words, and the author reassures his readers with an edifying image of popular dismemberment: “in Russia their very name is hated, and the populace for

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<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

whom they pretend to act would tear them limb from limb had they the chance.” Furthermore, the horrors of the Peter and Paul Fortress are once again conspicuously gendered: the English émigré’s correspondence reserves its highest pathos for the beautiful young women held in its cells, who are said to be darkly manipulated by “cowardly assassins” who ensnare them to commit horrific deeds or risk “sudden and secret death.”<sup>704</sup>

Even though this *Pall Mall* account is an explicit rebuttal of the *Times*’ sensationalist exposé of the Peter and Paul Fortress, the former operates within the same genre-space as the latter. Even in its critique, we see preserved the same rhetorical mechanisms of the earlier condemnation – only here the mantle of despotic, oriental otherness lies not with the tsarist regime but with the radicals who wage war upon it and are justly imprisoned. Both sides of this controversy worked, in their own ways, to inscribe the Peter and Paul Fortress into a landscape of gothic terror and titillation for popular Anglophone audiences. Clearly, while literary journals published more respectable debates on the nature of Russian penitentiaries, the ‘otherness’ of the fortress prison held deep fascination. English publics would only have to wait until the following year for tsarist despotism, orientalism, and anachronism to be further developed in the most lurid and popular presentation of the Peter and Paul Fortress to date.

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<sup>704</sup> Ibid.

## V. S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii

In May 1885, the book *Russia Under the Tzars* was issued in London by the publishers Ward and Downey. Quickly translated into French and Swedish – with a second American edition and a third British reprint appearing in less than a year – the title page listed the author as a certain ‘Stepniak.’<sup>705</sup>

This was the pseudonym for none other than the populist revolutionary and terrorist S.M. Kravchinskii [1851(?)–1895], who had fled Russia in 1878 after stabbing the head of the tsarist secret police to death in broad daylight in the center of St. Petersburg.<sup>706</sup> Following a brief sojourn amongst the émigré communities of Switzerland, Stepniak-Kravchinskii made his way to Italy, where he began to try his hand as a popular author. The result – *Underground Russia; Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life* – was published in Milan in 1882 to European-wide interest. This patchwork book presented foreign readers with a captivating, romantic vignettes of Russian radicalism: filled with bold martyrs and tragic heroines; camaraderie forged through risk and danger; and the resolute political terrorist stepping onto the historical landscape with firm, measured gait. The widespread interest (and controversy) of Stepniak’s first volume can be productively traced through the author’s own collection of press clippings: as the Italian publication was quickly followed with English and French translations, reviewers variously condemned it for its “almost bloodthirsty

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<sup>705</sup> Stepniak [S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii], *Russia Under the Tzars*.

<sup>706</sup> The following information on the life and labors of S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii is taken primarily from Evgeniia Taratuta, *Istoriia dvukh knig ('Podpol'naia rossiiia' S.M. Stepniaka-Kravchinskogo i 'Ovod' Etel' Lilian Voinich* (Moscow: ‘Khudozhestvennaia literatura,’ 1987); Evgeniia Taratuta, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii – revolitsioner i pisatel'* (Moscow: ‘Khudozhestvennaia literatura,’ 1973); and Charles A. Moser, “A Nihilist’s Career: S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii,” *The American Slavic and East European Review* 20 (1961): 55-71. Note, as well, that it is uncertain whether Kravchinskii was born in 1851 or 1852.

sympathy for the poor,” or lauded it for “[sounding] in ringing tones the cry of the people to be freed from tyranny and oppression, a cry which will find an ardent and quick response in the minds and hearts of thousands.”<sup>707</sup> With *Underground Russia*, the exile Stepniak had become the most sensational and controversial spokesman for Russian radicalism in the Western European press of the 1880s.

Apropos of this new mantle, upon moving to London in the summer of 1884 Stepniak decided to publish a second work on the same topic. If *Underground Russia* had approached the question of modern Russia in the form of a medley – a series of vignettes, sketches, and politico-psychological portraits – then this new volume was to treat the same material on a more systematic basis. “Except a few anonymous articles of slight importance,” he writes in the introduction, “our best writers have, as yet, said nothing on the politics of Russia in the languages of Europe.”<sup>708</sup> Accordingly, this new text was to present the question of Russian political modernity to European readers through a measured, two-pronged approach. The first section of the book aims to give a thorough outline of Russian history, stressing (in good populist fashion) the freedom-loving nature of the Russian *narod* through the institutions of the peasant *mir* and the Novgorodian *veche*, arcing forward to modern radical activity cast as the organic expression of this same national spirit. The second half of the book, conversely, deals with the historical development of “Russian Despotism,” envisioned as a tyrannical, artificial yoke.

These two narrative threads meet in the middle of the volume. Here, descriptions of the dreadful clash between state and people are located under a section

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<sup>707</sup> Quotes taken from *The Daily News*, April 2, 1883; and *The Bradford Observer*, April 12, 1883. This collection of clippings can be found at RGALI f. 1158, op. 1, d. 566.

<sup>708</sup> Stepniak, *Russia Under the Tzars*, xii.

headed “Dark Places.” The central chapter of this section – the darkest of Stepniak’s places, the foremost stage for the Russian struggle between essential freedom and historic oppression – is the Peter and Paul Fortress. In a chapter titled “The Troubetzkoi Ravelin [sic],”<sup>709</sup> St. Petersburg’s citadel is purposed as the central site for foreign audiences to witness the horrors of the tsarist government.

The pride of place Stepniak gives the Peter and Paul Fortress in his *Russia Under the Tzars* is significant not only for the vast readership his book commanded. It is also, certainly, the most sensational depiction of St. Petersburg’s citadel to reach foreign audiences to date. As his chapter begins, the reader is placed on the banks of the Neva as twilight falls and is invited to gaze out at the “Russian Bastile [sic]”:

When the night broods over the capital, and thousands of lights illumine the quays of the swift-flowing Neva, the fortress alone remains in darkness, like a huge black maw ever open to swallow up all that is noblest and best in the unhappy city and country which it curses with its presence. No living sound comes to break the grim silence that hangs over this place of desolation... Here, indeed, is the altar of despotism.<sup>710</sup>

If a year-and-a-half previously *The Times* had held out a blood-written note to a horrified (and titillated) Anglophone audience, Stepniak is intent on bringing his

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<sup>709</sup> A brief note regarding names – Peter and Paul Fortress political prisoners were, as a rule, not told the name of the exact location where they were being incarcerated. Thus, in popular and memoir literature we find a continual confusion regarding the exact toponyms of the citadel, such as Stepniak’s discussion of a non-existent “Troubetzkoi ravelin.” Similar inaccuracies are also found in Kropotkin’s work – the first edition of his 1887 *In Russian and French Prisons* explicitly advertised itself as containing “a plan of the St. Petersburg Fortress” which also incorrectly labels the fortress’ two ravelins (switching the Alekseevskii and Ioannovskii ravelins, and calling the proper space of the former the “Trubetskoi Ravelin”). Note as well that Kropotkin’s personal copy of this volume contains hesitant pencil markings on this very map – see OR RGB f. 410, no. 9, ed. khr. 4, l. 46 (pg. 87). This confusion is also evident in the correspondence between Kropotkin and Stepniak, with the former inquiring in a letter from the beginning of the 1890s: “In your lectures, what did you call the place with pre-trial detainees? Trubets. Bastion or Ravelin?” See RGALI f. 1158, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 3, 3ob, 4.

<sup>710</sup> Stepniak, *Russia Under the Tzars*, 141.

readers to the center of St. Petersburg to view for themselves the gloomy outlines of this dread prison.

Although this it not to say that he is adverse to blood – indeed, as the chapter recites a litany of terrors in this Russian “Golgotha,” the earlier article from *The Times* appears as one of Stepniak’s main sources. He goes even further, seriously speaking of the author as “compelled to write with his own blood, which (in the absence of a knife) he obtained by biting his flesh. This is a common device in Russian prisons, and we often receive letters written not alone metaphorically, but literally, with their author’s blood.”<sup>711</sup>

It is with his own red pen that Stepniak traces a horrifying history of tsarist repression – images of prisoners rotted alive with scurvy, noble intellectuals battling creeping threat of madness, a young woman desperately struggling to prevent hordes of rats from devouring the child she was left to birth alone in her prison cell. In these gory details of what he terms a “human slaughter-house”, Stepniak not only achieves the highest expression of a Peter and Paul Fortress political gothic.<sup>712</sup> He also

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<sup>711</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid., 146. One curious aspect of Stepniak’s *Russia Under the Tsars* to note is the spatial dimension of his narrative. While all of the anti-tsarist presentations of the Peter and Paul Fortress at this time stress the horror of (non-existent) underground cells or dungeons, this trend reaches its apogee here. Stepniak’s account takes the reader through three levels (or circles, if you will) of the fortress complex: first he describes the cells of the bastions, then descends to the “dungeon-house... the horrors of which surpass anything that Englishmen can imagine” of the “Troubetzkoi ravelin,” before finally concluding with a dark mention that “under the first floor, and below the level of the Neva, are other cells far worse than those I have described.” As he remarks, “there is always a lowest depth,” and no information can possibly reach his audience from this final space of the obscene. In Stepniak’s most vivid and schematic elaboration of the ‘subterranean’ aspect of the Peter and Paul Fortress, we realize that this stress on descent should not be taken as literal fact, but rather as a spatial dynamic native to the nineteenth century chronotope of the political prison (calling to mind, in particular, the logics of Dante). That is, the ‘dungeons’ of the Peter and Paul Fortress were less a concrete space than a metaphysical topography – the citadel complex, in its political horror, was both the tallest building in St. Petersburg *and* the deepest. See *ibid.*, 146, 154.

assuredly locates Russian absolutism – through the space of the citadel - within a particular discourse of political modernity.

Throughout this disturbing chapter, Stepniak refers to the Peter and Paul Fortress by a series of titles. The first of these is a rather curious appellation – repeatedly, St. Petersburg’s citadel is termed “a sort of bagnio.”<sup>713</sup> The word deserves some explanation: while originally used to refer to bathhouses (from the Italian *bagno*), by the nineteenth century it specifically connotated an Ottoman prison house or harem.<sup>714</sup> The choice of this term is not accidental – throughout *Russia Under the Tzars*, Stepniak repeatedly makes reference to the ‘Oriental’ nature of Russia’s most notorious political prison. Thus, European readers are faced with a fortress guarded by “an incomparable staff of warders, as well fitted for their duties as the mutes of some Grand Signior’s seraglio.”<sup>715</sup> The most oppressed prisoners are described as being deprived of combs, books, and all other common items “generally considered indispensable for all men above the level of savages.”<sup>716</sup> And, most shockingly, Stepniak claims at one point to have in his possession a legitimate copy of the tsarist government’s ‘Troubetzkoi regulations’ themselves, which he quotes at length – the first line ostensibly reads: “Prisoners of the Troubetzkoi, as bagnio slaves, are placed under the administration of the fortress,” before enumerating the acceptable use of the

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<sup>713</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>714</sup> The literature on the Ottoman harem as a charged space in the nineteenth-century European cultural imaginary is enormous. For a worthy overview of the topic, see Joan DelPlato, *Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800-1875* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).

<sup>715</sup> Stepniak, *Russia Under the Tzars*, 143.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid., 148.

knout and the whip against those who defy the regime.<sup>717</sup> Thus is the language of ‘Oriental Despotism’ not only affixed to the Romanov autocracy’s most notorious political prison from without – Stepniak places it within the very mouth of its Commandant. As a ‘bagnio’, the Peter and Paul Fortress was to be read as something culturally incomparable to the prisons of Western Europe. The distance over which Stepniak invited foreign publics to gaze onto St. Petersburg’s citadel was not to be measured solely in miles or *arshins* – it was also an unbridgeable civilizational chasm.

The second name with which Stepniak refers to the Peter and Paul Fortress is the term “the Russian Bastile[sic],” which we have already seen in the writings of P.A. Kropotkin. The immediate connotations of this name are clear – surely the central prison of the Romanov Empire struck contemporaries with its affinity towards that most famous European political prison, especially as the centenary of the French Revolution drew nigh. We have also seen how this term appears to have originated amongst French travelers to the imperial capital, including Dumas – contained within this title is not only a historico-political resonance, but also a reference to the prison romance of nineteenth-century European belletrism.<sup>718</sup>

But the Bastille was not solely envisioned as a space of radical history or a landmark in prose – it was also very much a site belonging to an earlier time. A

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<sup>717</sup> Ibid., 152. The more sensational claims of *Russia Under the Tzars* (such as this), necessarily raise the question of authorial intent for modern readers – did Stepniak necessarily believe everything he wrote about the Peter and Paul Fortress? It is interesting to note that after the publication of *Underground Russia*, Stepniak candidly discussed the limits of this popular-political book in his correspondence: “In general, I don’t like this genre and it’s difficult for me. I undertook it by necessity: If I hadn’t written it – no one would. Look, I’ll write still a second book in this style [i.e. what would become *Russia Under the Tzars*] and then toss it away...” Letter quoted in Taratuta, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, 331.

<sup>718</sup> See Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom*, trans. Norbert Schürer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

Bastille in the eighteenth century had reached the end of its historical life and deserved to be destroyed; a Bastille in the *nineteenth* century was something temporally out-of-joint: a grotesque anachronism. Fittingly, then, Stepniak's long recitation of Fortress terrors constantly returns to the uncanny untimeliness of this tsarist space. This is a site of a vengeful past, full of "horrors to match which in Western Europe we must go back centuries."<sup>719</sup> Not only does he himself condemn this piece of dead history, where we find "virtually a reproduction of the judicial tortures of the Middle Ages... in the black holes of the Troubetzkoi."<sup>720</sup> He also places this chronological outrage into the mouths of his foreign audience:

"But," I hear my readers exclaim, "can these things be? Is it possible that at the end of the nineteenth century, in a capital which wears at least the outward semblance of civilization, deeds so monstrous and cruel can be perpetrated?"<sup>721</sup>

The inmates of Russia, held in the center of St. Petersburg, are not merely entrapped within a cruel *space* of tsarist oppression – at the heart of the Romanov regimes exists a cruel extrusion of *time*, where the forms of a distant history unlawfully trespass onto the nineteenth century, entrapping both the bodies of Russia's radical youth and the horrified attention of Europe's reading public.

Stepniak's presentation of the Peter and Paul Fortress is thus not only a gruesome list of gothic vignettes – it is also founded on the revelation of a civilizational and temporal gap existing between his wide European audience and the practices of the Russian state. We will return to these key functions at the end of the present chapter. For now, it suffices to say that although just one vignette among

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<sup>719</sup> Stepniak, *Russia Under the Tzars*, 147.

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

many, it was Stepniak's description Peter and Paul Fortress in *Russia Under the Tsars* – and its questions of civilizational and temporal affinity in particular – that most captured its readers. This is clearly seen in the public reviews of this volume, where both supporters and detractors quickly latched onto this section as the central section of the work.

For example: the October 23, 1885 edition of the weekly American journal *Science* specifically recommended Stepniak's *Russia Under the Tzars* to readers “familiar with the great fortress of Peter and Paul, famous as the place from which Krapotkine made his memorable escape” who wish to learn more about “the cruelties perpetrated in this place.”<sup>722</sup>

Just that next month, a certain “A. Woeikof” from St. Petersburg submitted a letter to the editor of the same journal in which he criticizes the tone of the review, claiming: “as to cruelties perpetrated in the fortress, nobody who is not blinded by party spirit believes in them here...”<sup>723</sup> This, in turn, occasioned *another* rebuttal. In January 1886, a certain C.M. Wilson in London wrote a further letter to the editor of *Science* to support the essential facts of Stepniak's work: “If true, they place the Russian government outside the pale of civilization, and deprive it of all right to appeal to civilized Europe against any act in which the wrath and despair of its subjects may

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<sup>722</sup> “Russia Under the Tzars,” *Science: An Illustrated Journal*, 142 (Oct. 23, 1885): 355-356. The anonymous reviewer also notes that Stepniak has “a talent for describing scenes of suffering and woe” – however, a talent that at points leads the reader to doubt the veracity of his political claims.

<sup>723</sup> The (certainly pseudonymous) review-writer also seeks to reveal the nature of *Russia Under the Tzars*' pseudonymous author for English audiences: “I wonder that the author's real name is not known to you. It is Krawtschinsky, the murderer of Mesentzof (1878). A person of that sort has, I think, no right to complain that his friends are kept in confinement...” A. Woeikof, “Letter to the Editor: Stepniak's ‘Russia under the czars’,” *Science: An Illustrated Journal*, 147 (27 Nov., 1885): 478.

find vent.”<sup>724</sup> In Stepniak’s *Russia Under the Tzars*, and in the critical debate it engendered in the Anglo-American press, the Peter and Paul Fortress became the most crucial single space for measuring the relative ‘civilization’ or ‘barbarism’ of the tsarist regime. It is within this structure of political distancing that we must understand the final process in the Western construction of a ‘Russian Bastille.’

## VI. George Kennan

Perhaps no single non-Russian individual did more to crystalize Anglo-American perceptions of the abuses of the Romanov regime – and the nature of the Peter and Paul Fortress – than George Kennan [1845-1924]. An American explorer, journalist, and author (and cousin twice removed of the future diplomat who shared his name), Kennan was an unlikely figure to become the most famous foreign observer of the tsarist carceral system. In the 1860s he had first traveled in eastern Siberia as part of the Russian-American Telegraph Expedition. As his journalistic career ascended upon his return, Kennan assumed the reputation of an American expert in Russian affairs, of a conservative bent, cemented by a traveling series of lectures defending the tsarist regime given in the early 1880s.<sup>725</sup> It was in this capacity that the New York-based *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* approached Kennan in 1885 with the idea of funding an investigative trip across Eurasia, based upon which Kennan would write

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<sup>724</sup> C.M. Wilson, “Letter to the Editor: Stepniak’s ‘Russia under the tzars’,” *Science: An Illustrated Journal* 154 (Jan. 15, 1886), 56-57. Also apropos of *Russia Under the Tzars*, Kropotkin himself recalled the effect that it had on English audiences, witnessing how a large body of the educated populace avowed “If I were in Russia, I would also be a ‘nihilist’.” Quoted in Evgeniia Taratuta, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii – revoliutsioner i pisatel’*, 330.

<sup>725</sup> Phillips, “Political Exile and the Image of Siberia”, 134-35; Frederick F. Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865-1924* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990), 73.

a series of articles on Siberia and the Russian exile system.<sup>726</sup> When Kennan accepted and set off in the summer of that year, it was assumed that he would produce a series of neutral articles: more picturesque and ethnographical than political in nature.

However, Kennan's long travels through Siberia – including visits to prisons and penal mines, as well as interviews with political offenders – converted him into a staunch opponent of the tsarist regime. He returned to the United States in 1886 bearing a wealth of documents – imperial criminal codes, prisoner testimonies, social and juridical statistics, and more<sup>727</sup> – with which he set out to expose Anglophone reading publics to the true nature of the Russian carceral system as “one of the darkest blots upon the civilization of the nineteenth century.”<sup>728</sup> To this end, Kennan immediately began drafting a series of articles for *The Century*. Wildly popular, these essays ran from 1887 to 1891 at a time when the journal boasted a subscription of over 200,000.<sup>729</sup> The culmination of this print endeavor was the serialized publication of his famous two-volume *Siberia and the Exile System* in 1891.

With these texts, George Kennan introduced Anglo-American publics to the Russian empire as a civilizational question. This story is not new: while overlooked by Soviet historians and American sovietologists during the Cold War period, Kennan's remarkable anti-carceral campaign in the 1880s and 1890s has received valuable new

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<sup>726</sup> Travis, *George Kennan*, 92-97. For more information on the history of *The Century* as a political voice in late-nineteenth-century America, see Mark J. Noonan, *Reading The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine: American Literature and Culture, 1870-1893* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2010).

<sup>727</sup> Kennan's Siberian papers are currently held at the Library of Congress [MSS28456] and the New York Public Library [MssCol 1630].

<sup>728</sup> George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* (New York: The Century Co., 1891) 2:471.

<sup>729</sup> Travis, *George Kennan*, 172. Note that subscription numbers are said to have increased considerably after the first of Kennan's articles on political imprisonment.

attention from several recent scholarly positions.<sup>730</sup> However, studies of Kennan almost invariably bind him within the space of Siberia. This is naturally understandable – he was the first Western observer to rigorously study Russian penal exile, and his major text on the excesses of the Romanov regime is framed by the concept of exile. Nonetheless, to view Kennan as solely a Siberian investigator – to circumscribe his labors within a sort-of *katorga* archipelago – is to elide the further landscapes of his work and the reach of its impact. A close reading of his texts produced for *Century Illustrated* reveals, looming above the vast Siberian steppes, the dark spire of the Peter and Paul Fortress. A certain image of political imprisonment within the Peter and Paul Fortress is just as pivotal to Kennan’s project as the mines and camps of Eurasia. In heart of St. Petersburg, American audiences found a cipher for autocratic abuse just as powerful as the suffering spaces of the periphery.

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<sup>730</sup> Notable recent works – while still constrained largely to his Siberian texts – have reached out to explore topics such as Kennan’s importance in constructing a modern culturo-political image of Siberia in the mind of the West, as well as his role in producing Russia as a Eurasian illiberal ‘other’ against which the United States learned to define itself and develop forms of liberal-imperial practice in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. See Daniel Beer, *The House of the Dead*, esp. 287-319; Phillips, “Political Exile and the Image of Siberia,” esp. 150-206; and David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire”: The Crusade for a “Free Russia” since 1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

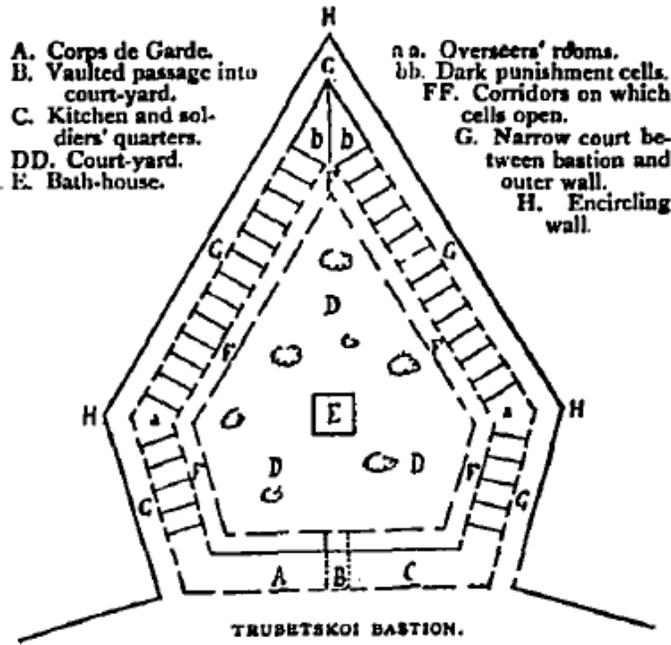
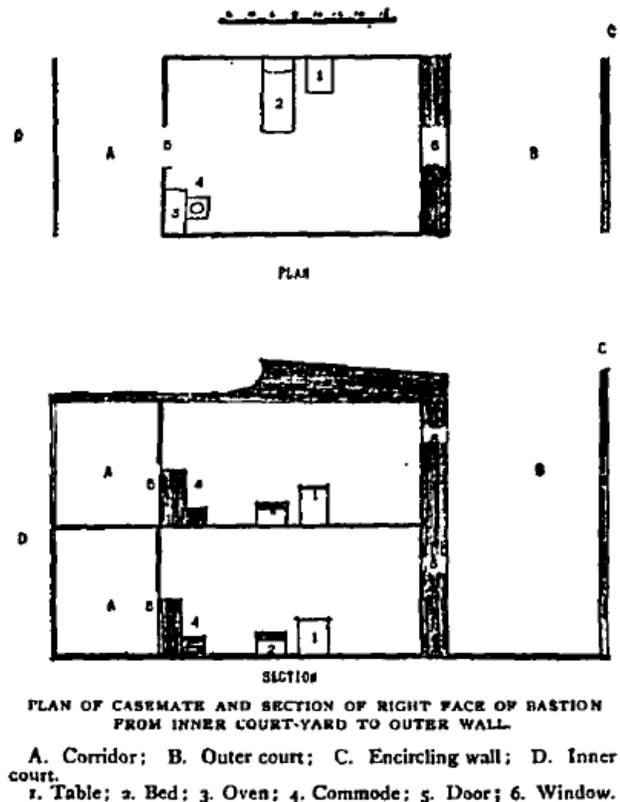


Figure 21: A plan of the fortress' Trubetskoi Bastion as drawn by a former prisoner. Kennan, "A Russian Political Prison. The Fortress of Petropavlovsk," *The Century Illustrated Magazine*, 35 (1887): 521.

Figure 22: A plan of a Trubetskoi bastion casemate cell and cross-section of its prison building. Kennan, "A Russian Political Prison. The Fortress of Petropavlovsk," *The Century Illustrated Magazine*, 35 (1887): 522.



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From the very beginning of his post-1886 Russian writings, the Peter and Paul Fortress hangs heavy over Kennan's head – as both a site demanding rigorous inquiry and a closed, dread word. Upon returning to the United States, Kennan did not immediately start serializing *Siberia and the Exile System*. Rather, he began his publishing project with a short set of six preliminary articles. These are rarely discussed today – symptomatic of the Siberia-centric scholarship surrounding Kennan, his major historian glides over these texts with barely a word, simply noting that these “prolegomena” constituted “a prelude to his study of Siberian exile,” in which “Kennan wished to explain why an opposition party existed in Russia and why the actions of the government against the opposition only intensified the latter's activities.”<sup>731</sup> What historians have failed to investigate is that Kennan found the answers to these preliminary questions not in Siberia, but in the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

Four out of Kennan's first six articles for *Century Illustrated* revolve around the question of political imprisonment.<sup>732</sup> The article that heralded his new shift in political commitment is “Prison Life of the Russian Revolutionists. I,” which appeared in *Century Illustrated* in its December 1887 number.<sup>733</sup> On the very first page of this article, Kennan announces his intention to try and understand – both for and as an

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<sup>731</sup> Travis, *George Kennan*, 156.

<sup>732</sup> The other two were (1) a traditional ‘visit to a great man’ travelogue vignette and (2) a catalogue of existing liberal institutions (or, more accurately, their lack) in modern Russia. See George Kennan, “A Visit to Count Tolstoi,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 34 (Jun. 1887): 252-64; and George Kennan, “The Last Appeal of the Russian Liberals,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 35 (Nov. 1887): 50-63.

<sup>733</sup> George Kennan, “Prison Life of the Russian Revolutionists. I.,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 35 (Dec. 1887): 285-97.

“American reader” – the turn of so many young Russians to leftist politics. Rejecting the notion that Russians are so culturally or racially ‘other’ as to make judging their motives by Western conduct impossible, Kennan asserts that Russian radicalism “is largely the result of what revolutionists regard as the cruel and inhuman treatment of ‘politicals’ in the fortress of Petropavlovsk...” and further prisons of the tsarist regime. Before any mention of Siberia, Kennan urges his readers that to understand modern Russia, “it is absolutely necessary to have a clear conception of the life of the Russian revolutionists in prison.”<sup>734</sup>

In this article – and three further major texts over the course of 1887 and 1888 – Kennan strives to impart this ‘clear conception’ to his reading public. The stage for this understanding, from the very beginning, is the Peter and Paul Fortress.

Speaking to the interest that the Fortress had acquired over the last few years, Kennan immediately assumes that his readership had some familiarity with previous discussions of St. Petersburg’s central citadel. He seeks to add his own voice to the growing conversation – on the first page of his first article on Russian revolutionary life, Kennan states his intention to intervene in the “discussion in the English periodicals two or three years ago, between Prince Krapotkine and Mr. C.M. Wilson on one side, and the Rev. Henry Lansdell and an anonymous correspondent of the “Pall Mall Gazette” on the other, with regard to the conditions of life and treatment of politicals in the fortress of Petropavlovsk.”<sup>735</sup> Unfortunately, Kennan writes, he was denied permission to visit St. Petersburg’s central citadel (and thus verify or deny

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<sup>734</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>735</sup> Kennan, “Prison Life,” 285.

either side of the 1883/1884 press debate through concrete observation). However, he is quick to assert his credentials to speak of the Peter and Paul Fortress:

“[Despite this denied permission] my opportunities for obtaining information with regard to the conditions of life therein have been of an exceptional character. I made the acquaintance in Siberia of perhaps fifty exiles who had been shut up in the fortress, and whose overlapping terms of imprisonment covered the whole period between the years 1874 and 1884.”<sup>736</sup>

While admitting that this evidence could be accused of incompleteness or *ex-parte* partisanship, Kennan defends his sources by stressing their geographical and temporal isolation – the picture he intends to paint of the fortress has been constructed from fifty separate figures unknown to one another, imprisoned at different periods and inhabiting stretches of Siberia thousands of miles apart. This – combined with the upstanding moral fabric of his interlocutors – guarantees that the conclusions drawn are not a fabricated narrative, but rather Kennan’s own.

Indeed, Kennan quickly moves on to make an opposing argument. This lack of a systematic source base is not a weakness for investigations of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Rather, it is a necessary condition of attempts to understand St. Petersburg’s most notorious political prison and the life of Russian radicals in general. For Russia’s carceral spaces are unlike those of Western Europe: “in order to understand much that I shall have to say, the reader must divest himself entirely of the idea that Russian prisons are managed upon any definite, well-ordered system.”<sup>737</sup> Within convoluted webs of overlapping authorities and egos in the high Russian officialdom – expressed through the even more convoluted machinery of the state bureaucracy – Kennan informs the reader that the treatment of political prisoners in St. Petersburg has always

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<sup>736</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid.

been inconsistent and improvisatory. His audience should look not for laws and regulations, but for the changing whims of court and tsar. In a fortress-grave where legal strictures have become “dead letters,” “the natural result of this usurpation of the functions of law by official caprice or license is the complete overthrow of all systematic and consistent prison government.”<sup>738</sup>

Thus, in this climate of carceral confusion, the reader should not see Kennan’s witness-based investigation as a disordered approach to a particular state order. Rather, the very disordered nature of the Russian carceral system itself makes any systematic approach impossible. In a prison regime rooted in individual caprice and whim, the personal experiences of this space is the only entry point into understanding its contours over time. The individual narrative is not a necessary evil, but rather a worthy staging ground of analysis. Accordingly, Kennan’s Peter and Paul Fortress writings present the Anglophone reader with a vision of the fortress from the individual outwards. Kennan had to go to Siberia to understand the heart of imperial St. Petersburg.

What do Kennan’s “fifty exiles” relate regarding the Peter and Paul Fortress? In perhaps another attempt to justify his unorthodox source base, Kennan makes a point to reject some of the wilder rumors surrounding the citadel. Not only should the reader be wary of “the famous letter written by Nechaief [sic] in his own blood” and “dungeons infested by rats,” but Kennan even admits that “Stepniak and Prince Krapotkin have painted the life of condemned politicals in somewhat darker colors

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<sup>738</sup> Ibid., 287. Strikingly, Kennan’s sketch of a caprice-based carceral system does not compare poorly with the state of ‘improvisatory’ incarceration revealed by the Peter and Paul Fortress prison archives and discussed in greater length in Chapters Three and Four.

than my information would justify me in using.”<sup>739</sup> Accordingly, Kennan denies the practice of physical torture in the cells of the fortress. However, the picture his sources paint is, if more subtle, than just as horrifying. Kennan’s fortress is not a space of physical violence – but neither is his prolonged critique of solitary confinement restrained to the scientific lexicon of nascent European penal studies. Rather, Kennan presents the reader with a site of prolonged mental and spiritual torture: a stage of psychological horror.

For this is no normal prison – the reader must understand that “the great state prison of Russia” resembles more a mortuary than a carcereal space. The central *Century Illustrated* article on the Peter and Paul Fortress – “A Russian Political Prison. The Fortress of Petropavlovsk.” – is an attempt to introduce another house of the dead. Not only does Kennan repeat the old juxtaposition of Romanovs and radicals – here “lie buried the bones of Russia’s Tsars” and “lie buried almost as effectually the enemies of the Tsars’ government” – but he consistently evokes the tomb-like silence and isolation of the fortress’ casemates.<sup>740</sup> Across his articles we find almost a dozen comparisons of the Peter and Paul Fortress to a tomb: “the damp prison sepulchers of the Trubetskoi bastion”; “the stillness is that of the grave”; “although not dead, you are buried”; “death-like stillness”; “the stillness of a sepulcher”; “the first idea suggested to the mind by the massive walls, the vaulted ceiling, the iron window, the damp lifeless air, and profound stillness is the idea of a burial vault or crypt”; etc.<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>739</sup> Kennan, “Russian State Prisons. Further Details of the Prison Life of the Revolutionists.” *The Century Illustrated Magazine*, 35 (1887): 758.

<sup>740</sup> Kennan, “A Russian Political Prison. The Fortress of Petropavlovsk.” *The Century Illustrated Magazine*, 35 (1887): 521.

<sup>741</sup> Found especially in *ibid.* and “Russian State Prisoners.”

Accordingly, the moments of highest drama and pathos in Kennan's four fortress articles lie in stories of individuals attempting to psychologically cope with years of solitary confinement – a fate constantly compared to living death. Kennan plumbs his interlocutors for the most lurid accounts of mental illness in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Thus, American readers learn of a prisoner who, forbidden to speak, takes to feigning hiccupping fits solely to exercise his voice – and upon gaining release is unable to end this reaction, which is a now-unconscious pathological souvenir of his years spent in the Trubetskoi bastion.<sup>742</sup> Further on, we hear of a mother finally reunited with her son after eight years of solitary confinement, only to find “a broken, insane, emaciated man” clothed in rags.<sup>743</sup> Perhaps grimmer still is the tale of a man who, after “four or five years of solitary confinement in the fortress of Petropavlovsk,” does nothing but rave about the imminent arrival of his (fictitious wife). At some point in his prison sentence this man had obtained a small, souvenir-card photograph of the Empress, which he is convinced is a picture of his beloved. “Could anything be more touching and pathetic,” Kennan writes, “than to find a political convict in chains and leg-fetters cherishing as his dearest possession a photograph of her Majesty the Empress – to see a revolutionist insane from ill-treatment at the hands of the Government and in love with the wife of the Tsar!”<sup>744</sup>

Thus does Kennan craft the Peter and Paul Fortress as a site of institutional neglect and individual madness. “For the ‘condemned’ [in the fortress],” he writes,

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<sup>742</sup> Kennan, “A Russian Political Prison,” 528.

<sup>743</sup> Kennan, “Russian State Prisoners,” 762-63.

<sup>744</sup> *Ibid.*, 761-62.

“there is only the prospect of slow mental and physical decay in the solitude and gloom of a bomb-proof casemate.”<sup>745</sup>

If Kennan’s most heartrending victims are those that succumb to burial within the Peter and Paul Fortress, the heroes of his accounts are those that struggle against its silent, deadening grasp. Appropriately, his *Century Illustrated* articles spend a great portion of their lines describing the history of subversive communication techniques developed within the fortress. Kennan does not limit himself to a detailed description of the well-known prisoner “knock alphabet” for communicating between cells (widely in use in the Peter and Paul Fortress by the 1870s, as discussed in Chapter Five of the present dissertation); he also goes on to describe several other methods for illicit communication, to the point where the historian begins to wonder whether Kennan’s detailed descriptions endangered their use within the fortress. Thus, in the February 1888 article “A Russian Political Prison. The Fortress of Petropavlovsk,” the reader learns of: shallow indentations made under letters in library books with a splinter or pin; lengths of yarn or thread tied into knots whose placement corresponded to the number-letter arrangement of a cipher-square; and rows of dots marked onto paper scraps with burnt matches according to a similar code, embedded in a small ball of moistened rye-bread, and then dropped in the prison courtyard where (blending into the surrounding earth) it would await the careful eye of a fellow prisoner who would surreptitiously pick up the piece of bread while feigning to tie his shoe.<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>745</sup> Ibid., 757.

<sup>746</sup> Kennan, “A Russian Political Prison,” 528-530. Remarkably, all of these methods of communication between prisoners held in the Peter and Paul Fortress are independently attested to in contemporary prison memoirs. See Chapter Five of the present dissertation.

Most fantastic of them all – and the only communication most likely to be a pure invention – is the vignette with which Kennan ends his section on prison messages (as well as his entire “A Russian Political Prison” article). “ ‘One afternoon in the summer of 1881,’ says a certain “Doctor Melnikoff” as related by Kennan:

I was lying on the bed in my casemate, wondering how I should get through the rest of the day, when there flew into the cell through the open port-hole in the door a large blue-bottle fly. In the stillness and loneliness of one of those casemates any trifle is enough to attract a man’s attention, and the occasional visit of a fly is an important event in one’s life. I listened with pleasure to the buzz of his wings, and followed him with my eyes as he flew back and forth across the cell until I suddenly noticed that there was something unnatural in the appearance of his body. He seemed to have something attached to him. I arose from the bed in order to get nearer to him, and soon satisfied myself that there was a bit of paper fastened to his body.<sup>747</sup>

Upon catching the fly, the entombed prisoner discovers a small scrap of cigarette paper tied to the fly with a thin human hair. Written upon this paper in almost unreadable code was a man’s name, unfortunately unknown to Kennan’s Doctor Melnikoff. Hoping that this unlikely messenger might reach yet more fortress readers, he re-fastens the note to the body of the fly and releases it back into the corridor with an emotional “*S Bogom* [Go with God]”. Thus does Kennan relate the most fragile voice in the silent tomb of the tsars.

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The Peter and Paul Fortress of Kennan’s earliest *Century Illustrated* articles is not Stepniak’s site of bloodthirsty torture and physical oppression. Rather, this is a journalism focused upon personal tales of individuals caught in a perverse, unmodern psychological space. While Kennan himself was personally concerned with the thought that some might question the accuracy of his articles, veracity is not the most

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<sup>747</sup> Ibid., 530.

significant criteria for our present history of the international production of a ‘Russian Bastille.’ What is important here are what the narrative sensibilities and political terrains of Kennan’s influential reporting tell us about Anglo-American conceptions of the Peter and Paul Fortress, and how these elements impacted further depictions of political imprisonment on a newly-internationalized scale.

The key aspect of Kennan’s essays is thus the reoccurring dynamic of speech and silence within the depths of Russia’s most notorious political prison. In his constant referrals to voice – its dark occlusion and heroic perseverance – Kennan was not only imparting a gothic atmosphere to his investigative journalism. He was also locating the struggle of imprisoned Russian radicals within a very particular late-nineteenth century American political sensorium.

In the Anglo-American cultural imagination of this period, political practice was tied most strongly to the sense of sound. It was through the exercise of one’s voice that the citizen articulated themselves within liberalism’s participatory civic and state structures; living within a democratic society manifested itself through ‘letting one’s voice be heard.’<sup>748</sup>

Hence the true horror of the Russian carceral system for an American audience. This was a place where, as one of Kennan’s revolutionaries relates, “It seemed sometimes as if my own language were a strange one to me, or one which, from long disuse, I had forgotten.”<sup>749</sup> The deathlike stillness of fortress casemates represented the slow death of both psychological and political subject; autocratic repression was directly equated with the silencing of its peoples’ voices. The greatest

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<sup>748</sup> See discussions of this era’s political subjectivity in Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>749</sup> Kennan, “Russian State Prisoners,” 757.

horrors of Kennan's articles lay in vignettes where madness destroyed prisoners' capacity for speech; the greatest heroisms, in ones championing illicit struggles for communication. In this way, the Peter and Paul Fortress was envisioned for American audiences as a stage (or battleground) where a politics of modern voice confronted a regime of medieval silence.

Kennan's *Century Illustrated* articles thus mapped the prison experience of Russian revolutionaries onto a sensory rhetoric which was certain to politically resonate with the American reading public. One can only speculate at the deeper effects of his dialectic of speech and silence. One could perhaps see in Kennan's concern with Russian sound the surfacing of antebellum American anxieties over enfranchisement, citizenship, and political voice in the U.S. More likely is idea that this language functioned in a largely self-congratulatory way – in comparison to the silent sepulchers of St. Petersburg, the contemporary United States appears in implicit contrast as a land of harmonious polyphony. Either way, Kennan's ear tells us as much, if not more, about the political discourse of ascendant American liberalism in the late-nineteenth century than it does about existing conditions within Russia's Peter and Paul Fortress.

Kennan colored the conditions of modern Russia with questions of speech and silence not solely through the rhetoric and vignettes contained within his prose – it should also be noted that the very forms his advocacy took exist within a similar imaginary. The *Century Illustrated* as a journalistic enterprise was intended as one of many late-nineteenth-century American papers to give 'progressive voice' to the great

reformist causes of the day.<sup>750</sup> In several places, Kennan describes his work as an attempt to give speech to the voiceless. And, most significantly, after completing his preliminary *Century Illustrated* articles, he began one of the most immense lecture tours in American history.

Starting in 1889, Kennan began to give sold-out appearances in public and private venues for audiences often numbering in the thousands. Theatrically garbed in the prison clothes and leg shackles of an exile, Kennan spread word of the horrors of the Russian carceral system to the American public. His gifts as a passionate yet rational speaker are well-documented; famously, at a talk given to the Washington Literary Society in March 1888, Mark Twain rose to his feet and tearfully avowed: “If dynamite is the only remedy for such conditions, then thank God for dynamite!”<sup>751</sup> From 1889 to 1898, Kennan gave at least 800 lectures to a cumulative audience of over one million people.<sup>752</sup>

Of course, Kennan’s depiction of imprisoned Russian radicals as individuals deprived of voice and subject to psychological torture could only work to the extent that his radicals were modern political and psychological subjects. *This* was one of the largest arguments upon which his advocacy work hinged. For, as he muses in “Prison Life of the Russian Revolutionists. I.,” if there is “in the Russian blood a strain of homicidal insanity which renders it impossible to judge a man of that race by the same rules of conduct which govern other races,” then perhaps the psychological brutality of the Peter and Paul Fortress was a necessary structure of tsarist governance. However,

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<sup>750</sup> See Noonan, *Reading the Century*.

<sup>751</sup> Phillips, “Political Exile and the Image of Siberia”, 157; Travis, *George Kennan*, 178.

<sup>752</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-180.

what if the ‘nihilists’ of popular imagination were instead mature political subjects – possessing ‘Western’ voices and interior lives? Presenting them as such to American audiences was the last great cause of his *Century Illustrated* writings.

Recall the depiction of Peter and Paul Fortress prisoners by the anonymous *Pall Mall Gazette* correspondent from earlier in the decade – Russian radicals were cruel spiders, “babbling nonsense” as they ensnared naïve young idealists.<sup>753</sup> As Kennan admits in his *Century Illustrated* articles, his earlier idea of Russian revolutionaries was not far from this picture. “I find it extremely difficult now, after a whole year of intimate association with political exiles” he relates in his August 1888 article “My Meeting with the Political Exiles,”

To recall the impressions that I had of them before I made the acquaintance of the exile colony in Semipalatinsk. I know that I was prejudiced against them, and that I expected them to be wholly unlike the rational, cultivated men and women whom one meets in civilized society... I half expected to find [in my first exile] a long-haired, wild-eyed being, who would pour forth an incoherent recital of wrongs and outrages, denounce all governmental restraint as brutal tyranny, and expect me to approve of the assassination of Alexander II.<sup>754</sup>

Kennan then relates his shock upon finding not a crazed murderer, but rather a wholly sympathetic, “coherent,” modern subject. Over the course of several pages, Kennan relates with shock and pleasure how he found genuine accretions of civilization – graceful physiognomies, tasteful dress, foreign literature, rational conversation – in the modest yet clean cabins of Siberian exiles.

After many such meetings, Kennan feels sufficiently convinced to address the public directly on the topic of the radical Russian subject:

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<sup>753</sup> “How Nihilists are Treated in Russian Dungeons (By a Recent Visitor.),” *Pall Mall Gazette* (London), Feb. 15, 1884.

<sup>754</sup> George Kennan, “My Meeting with the Political Exiles,” *Century Illustrated Magazine* 36: 4 (Aug. 1888), 510.

If I may judge others by myself, American readers have had an idea that the people who are called nihilists stand apart from the rest of mankind in a class by themselves, and that there is in their character something fierce, gloomy, abnormal, and, to a sane mind, incomprehensible, which alienates from them, and which should alienate from them, the sympathies of the civilized world. If the political exiles in Semipalatinsk be taken as fair representatives of the class thus judged, the idea seems to me to be a wholly mistaken one. I found them to be bright, intelligent, well-informed men and women, with warm affections, quick sympathies, generous impulses, and high standards of honor and duty... If, instead of [serving] their country, they are living in exile, it is not because they are lacking in the virtue and the patriotism which are essential to good citizenship, but because the Government, which assumes the right to think and act for the Russian people, is out of harmony with the spirit of the time.<sup>755</sup>

This is perhaps the key narrative mechanism of Kennan's *Century Illustrated* writings.

Not only does he rehabilitate the image of the Russian political radical, reintegrating them into the catalogue of 'Western Civilization'. Not only does this reintegration serve to alienate the Russian government, ejecting it from outside the pale of both the 'West' and its modernity. Furthermore, Kennan argues this through the inclusion of *his own* conversion story as a prominent part of the tale. By modeling his own transformation from ignorant prejudice to personal and political empathy, he invites his (extremely wide) American audience to perform their own recognition of the Russian radical's place within the landscape of modern subjecthood – and the necessarily concomitant condemnation of the existing Russian state.

By presenting the radicals as such, by channeling identification with them as wholly modern subjects, Kennan brought the figure of the Russian revolutionary out of the alleyways of the American political imagination and into its lecture halls and drawing rooms – where, as his writings attest, he was convinced the exile would cut not a half-bad figure.

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<sup>755</sup> Ibid., 516.

Indeed, this rhetorical move conditioned Kennan's next step – to bring an *actual* revolutionary into America's drawing rooms.

A step that Kennan shortly took – leading to the last stage in the American reception of a radical Russian carceral culture. As a Russian revolutionary traveled across the Atlantic, so too traveled with him further support for Kennan's new revisionist account of the anti-tsarist rebel – one likewise based on a particular reading of West and East, modernity and barbarity, which was crystallized in a familiar image of the suffering political prisoner in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

## VII. “The First Time that the Russian Revolution Addressed the World”

This traveling Russian revolutionary – Kennan's invited guest – was none other than S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii. The two had met in London after Kennan's return from Russia in 1886, and Stepniak had been immediately struck by the former's genuine political commitment to alleviating the suffering of Russia's political prisoners, later calling him a “true champion of the Russian people [who] has been recognized as such by the whole Russian opposition.”<sup>756</sup> After the success of his *Russia Under the Tsars*, Stepniak was eager to address larger audiences on the horrors and contradictions of the tsarist regime. Thus, when Kennan – reveling in the success of his lecture circuit –

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<sup>756</sup> S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, “Kennan and ‘Free Russia,’” RGALI f. 1158, op. 1, d. 76, ll. 19-21. In the same manuscript, Stepniak would call Kennan “one of the most brilliant and adventurous and I may say romantic of these knights errant of the pen, who are rambling the wide world making their own the cause of the oppressed.” Kennan himself would say later of Stepniak: “During my stay in London I saw him frequently, and came to regard him not only with respect, but with sincere liking. He had not, perhaps, the boyish impulsiveness and loveliness of Kropotkin; but he seemed to me stronger than the latter, and less of a philosophical theorist...” See George Kennan, “STEPNIAK,” in RGALI f. 1158, op. 1, d. 542, l. 1ob. Also of interest is the photograph portrait sent from Kennan to Stepniak (“with regard and esteem”) held in RGALI f. 1158, op. 1, d. 610.

invited Stepniak at the end of 1890 to give a series of public talks on the subject in the United States, the latter readily agreed.

Stepniak arrived in New York City on December 30, 1890, and for nearly the next six months traveled around America holding lectures on contemporary Russia. Based mostly in Boston and New York, he traveled as far afield as Pittsburg, Cincinnati, and Minneapolis.<sup>757</sup> While the texts of his talks are for the most part not preserved, his major topics were publicized in the press as “1 – Nihilism – its Past History and Prospects. 2 – Siberian Exile. 3 – Count Tolstoi as Novelist and Social Reformer.”<sup>758</sup> It is also recorded that he gave several specialty lectures throughout his travels – including one on the imprisonment of A.I. Zheliabov and S.G. Nechaev in the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>759</sup>

His lectures – while not as remarkably theatrical as those of George Kennan – were still seen as successful by the standard of the time. Stepniak writes of regularly speaking before crowds of hundreds, presenting information about the Russian situation and answering hours worth of questions from curious audience members. While write-ups in local newspapers were mixed – journalistic judgments seem to have hinged upon the reviewer’s personal politics – no one denied that Stepniak was a strange, enthralling speaker to visit the United States.<sup>760</sup>

Indeed, perhaps even more interesting than the content of Stepniak’s talks is the very fact of his appearance in America. By giving his series of public lectures in the early months of 1891, Stepniak essentially *enacted* the narrative pathway that

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<sup>757</sup> Taratuta, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, 451.

<sup>758</sup> RGALI f. 1158, op. 1, d. 542, l. 1

<sup>759</sup> Taratuta, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, 451.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.*, 452-54.

Kennan and others had produced around the ‘Russian Bastille’ through the developing trans-national discourse of the 1880s. Stepniak intuitively grasped that the question of how Western audiences were to view imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress hinged, in many ways, around the possibility of assembling empathetic and civilizational ties with distrusted Russian ‘nihilists.’ Thus, even as he talked about the horrors of the Russian carceral system and the autocracy that it buttressed, he sought to purposefully perform the role of the modern, educated subject. This task was clearly announced from the beginning of his American tour. The advertisement for Stepniak’s very first public appearance stresses that “Sergius Stepniak,” while being “the celebrated leader of the Russian Revolutionary Party,” is not an unvoiced barbarian or babbling brute – “those who have seen the great Russian Leader report him to be a man of striking personal appearance, great dignity, self-control, and moderation.”<sup>761</sup> This is the same sort of catalogue of civilizational markers that was wielded so effectively by Kennan in his *Century Illustrated* articles – now traveling overseas to be inspected in person by sensationalized yet sympathetic American audiences.

This foreign protagonist brought to life – a modern subject locked in battle with an unmodern regime – appears to have had quite a stirring effect on those he met. So much so, in fact, that after only a few months in America Stepniak’s attentions turned towards the possibility of organizational activity amongst a sympathetic public. “[My] dream,” he would write in an address to concerned Americans,

Is to see one day a new crusade started in the West against the great sinner of the East, the Russian Tzardom; to see an army spring into existence – not a host, but a well-selected army like that of Gideon – composed of the best men

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<sup>761</sup> The advertisement also stresses that “Stepniak speaks and writes the English language with great felicity, and is strongly endorsed by George Kennan and many other distinguished men who are his ardent admirers.” See RGALI f. 1158, op. 1, d. 542, l. 1.

of all nations, with unlimited means at their command, making common cause with the Russian patriots, fighting side by side with them, each with their appropriate weapons, until that nightmare of modern times, the Russian autocracy, is conquered, and compelled to accept the supremacy of the triumphant democracy.<sup>762</sup>

To this end, Stepniak lay the foundations for several possible America-based organizations – including the Siberian Exile Petition Association and the American Society for the Friends of Russian Freedom. As with much of the discussion surrounding the international production of a “Russian Bastille” – and as with much of reception history in general – it is difficult to measure the exact impact that Stepniak’s new publicization of Russian political imprisonment mythologies had on his American audiences. However, we can get a sense of its scope through the fledgling activities of the above two organizations: the latter was endorsed by none other than Marx Twain (who signed its first publication, “To the American People,” along with all of his family members),<sup>763</sup> and the former’s petition to the tsar in hopes of ameliorating the plight of political prisoners received over 300,000 signatures.<sup>764</sup> As Stepniak would write that year in an article titled “What Americans Can Do For Russia,” he was truly the figure through which “[for] the first time the Russian revolution addressed the world at large.”<sup>765</sup>

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<sup>762</sup> Sergius Stepniak, “What Americans Can Do For Russia,” *The North American Review* 153 (Nov. 1891), 596-97.

<sup>763</sup> See a copy of this petition – signed by “S.L. Clemens,” Olivia L. Clemens, Olivia S. Clemens, and Clara L. Clemens – as well as a portrait sent from Mark Twain to Stepniak, in RGALI f. 1158, op. 2, d. 7; and op. 1, d. 625. For more on Mark Twain’s anti-imperialist political commitments – an aspect of his work oft-neglected in contemporary portraits – see Hunt Hawkins, “Mark Twain’s Anti-Imperialism,” *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 25, no. 2 (1993): 31-45.

<sup>764</sup> The petition was never sent. See Travis, *George Kennan*, 197-98.

<sup>765</sup> Sergius Stepniak, “What Americans Can Do For Russia,” 599.

Stepniak would return to England that May energized by his travels in America, and immediately set off in a flurry of organizational activity. Some of these projects bore brief fruit, including British and American branches of a Society for the Friends of Russian Freedom as well as a journalistic endeavor titled *Free Russia*. These short-lived forms have been investigated in greater depth by historians elsewhere.<sup>766</sup> More important to our current study has been the ways in which a particular image of modern Russia and its contradictions was crystallized through a trans-national discourse of political imprisonment centered around the forbidding space of the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>767</sup>

Our discussion also ends here for the simple reason that over the Anglo-American fascination with the fortress started to quietly lose steam. There were several reasons for this. First was the simple lack of stories surrounding St. Petersburg's citadel – with its reduction in use over the 1880s and 90s, very few tales emerged from its walls of the type that Kropotkin and Stepniak had used to spark

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<sup>766</sup> See, for example, Phillips, "Political Exile and the Image of Siberia," 150-206; Travis, 195-248; Jane E. Good, "America and the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1888-1905," *The Russian Review* 41, no. 3 (1982): 273-87; and Barry Hollingsworth, "The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890-1917," *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 3 (1970): 45-64.

<sup>767</sup> One last thing of import to mention: while the works that make up this trans-national tradition were banned in Russia itself, it seems that illicit copies of these texts circled widely amongst the revolutionary underground – to the extent that Stepniak would write in 1891 "no work has been so strictly tabooed by the Russian censorship as Mr. George Kennan's articles in *The Century*, and nevertheless there is hardly a man or woman interested in politics who has not read them." Sergius Stepniak, "What Americans Can Do For Russia," 604. Indeed, there are even records of Kennan's texts being read in Siberia by the very exiles whom he describes: see Phillips, "Political Exile and the Image of Siberia," 193-205. Most of these works would be published in book form during the brief thaw in censorship after the 1905 revolutions, including P.A. Kropotkin, *V russkikh i frantsuzskikh tiur'makh* (St. Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo 'znanie,' 1906); and Dzhordzh Kennan, *Sibir' i ssylka* (St. Petersburg: Izd. V. Vrublevskogo, 1906).

political outrage in the West.<sup>768</sup> Rising interest in the Caribbean and the Pacific in the years leading up to the Philippine-American and Spanish-American Wars also redirected public attention away from the distant ‘dark places’ of Eurasia. Second were mundane questions of money – despite the popularity of their reportage, neither Stepniak nor Kennan were able to create organizations capable of reaching financial solvency. Finally, Stepniak’s sudden death in 1895 rang the death knell for his struggling attempts to muster real political commitment in America and England.<sup>769</sup> This is not to say that the gloomy image of a tsarist prison fortress disappeared entirely from the public eye – one can think to the sensational *New York Times* article that begins the present chapter, or look to the budding popular fiction market’s fascination with mischevious tsarist spies, beautiful ‘nihilist’ women, and dread autocratic dungeons from the 1890s onwards.<sup>770</sup> However, the years of the purposeful

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<sup>768</sup> Of course, over the next two decades there are a few famous exceptions to this rule. The most well-publicized of these was the suicide of a political prisoner in the Trubetskoi bastion: on February 8, 1897 the twenty-six-year-old revolutionary Mariia Vetrova set herself on fire in her cell as an act of protest. Official documents relating to this dreadful event (including doctors reports and letters sent to the emperor) can be found in RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 795, ll. 17/17ob, 18, 19, 20, 20ob, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 25ob; 30-31ob; 32, 32ob; 33-34ob; 37-38ob. This self immolation is also discussed in M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 3:174-78. While the prison administration tried to keep this occurrence from reaching the general public, it was soon discovered and publicized through the revolutionary ‘underground republic of letters’ – see a rough contemporary mimeograph spreading word of Vetrova’s suicide (and hinting that such a drastic action by a young woman could only be taken as “the finale of some sort of awful tragedy” in the Fortress) preserved in GMPiR f. II-18578. However, without trans-national popularizers such as Kropotkin, Stepniak, and Kennan, the influence of these gruesome stories was mostly limited to underground networks and Russophone émigré communities.

<sup>769</sup> Stepniak died in England on December 23, 1895, after being struck by a train. See Taratuta, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, 528-29.

<sup>770</sup> For a discussion of popular Anglo-American fiction set in Russia – “the bulk [of which] emerged in the 1890s and into the early 1910s” – see Choi Chatterjee, “Transnational Romance, Terror, and Heroism: Russia in American Popular Fiction, 1860-1917,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50 (2008): 753-77; as well as John Slatter, “Bears in the Lion’s Den: The Figure of the Russian Revolutionary Emigrant in English Fiction, 1880-1914,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 77 (1999): 30-55.

construction of a ‘Russian Bastille’ on an international stage had come to an end; such widespread engagement in the West with Russia’s carceral networks would not occur again until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>771</sup>

### **VIII. Conclusion: The Politics of Anachronism**

What, then, are we left with from the short-lived international fascination with the idea of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the years of its concrete decline? Another historian might have arranged the elements of this story in a different fashion – stressing more strongly, perhaps, the concrete organizational ties and émigré communities of this period, or the individual activities of its actors. However, what is undoubtedly most striking in this period – and what has been highlighted in the present chapter – are the narrative forms through which a traveling discourse of Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment arose between East and West.

As this chapter has continually asserted, international images of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the 1880s and 1890s were filtered through a lens of Gothic Romanticism. However, we have not yet fully touched upon the nature of this genre form, nor examined why a ‘gothic’ Fortress received its greatest elaboration in the 1880s and 90s – why this idiom was asked to perform its greatest work precisely in this moment of encounter between Russian radicalism and the West.

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<sup>771</sup> While a topic for the present dissertation’s conclusion, we can mention that the pivotal figure for this second wave of western interest in the Russian carceral system is, of course, A.I. Solzhenitsyn. For two recent, compelling examinations of the influence of Solzhenitsyn on post-war Western European intellectual life, see Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Bergahn Monographs in French Studies, 2004), esp. 89-112; and Jan Plamper, “Foucault’s Gulag,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3 (2002): 255-80.

Although rarely given this precise title, gothic fiction was not alien to the Russian literary world of the nineteenth century. Recent scholars have convincingly traced how this period saw genre archetypes of madness, monstrosity, and murder arise in Russian literature both through artistic dialogues with the West (as seen in the works of, e.g., A.S. Pushkin, M.Iu. Lermontov, and the “Russian Hoffmann” Prince V.F. Odoevsky) as well as take shape through national antecedents and Slavic folklore (in the work of, especially, N.V. Gogol’).<sup>772</sup>

On a trans-European level, since the genre’s very origins in Horace Walpole’s 1764 *The Castle of Otranto*, the gothic cultural imagination had always possessed a fascination with forbidden geographies – castles, ruins, and dungeons are its favorite chronotopes. As a fortress-prison-tomb, it is no wonder that the Peter and Paul Fortress so easily lent itself to what one scholar calls the genre’s “pan-European literary images... of tyranny or incarceration.”<sup>773</sup> Thus, one reason for the fittingness of the gothic idiom for international discussions of Russian political imprisonment is clear – the nineteenth century already possessed a robust tradition whereby spaces of confinement were envisioned as romanticized sites of dark enclosure.

Another answer to this question is also relatively straightforward – gothic romanticism was, above all, a sensational genre. By stressing precisely those aspects of the Romanov regime that were most sordid, frightening, and titillating, the authors

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<sup>772</sup> See Kevin M.F. Platt and Dina Khapaeva, eds., “Russian Gothic”, Special Issue, *Russian Literature* 106 (2019): 1-138; Neil Cornwell, “European Gothic and Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature,” in *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange, 1760-1960*, ed. Avril Horner (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 115; and Neil Cornwell, ed. *The Gothic-Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999). We could also productively speak of a certain “St. Petersburg Gothic,” where the entire city functions as an uncanny chronotope in the work of, especially, Gogol and F.M. Dostoevsky.

<sup>773</sup> Cornwell, “European Gothic and Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature,” 107.

of our period could assure a much wider popular audience than one gained through a dry discussion of facts. One only has to compare the response provoked by the relatively subdued Kropotkin-Lansdell debate versus that of Kennan's chain-rattling lectures or Stepniak's lurid prose to understand the pull that St. Petersburg's citadel at its most horrifying could have for foreign audiences.

However, even if we can discuss a 'trans-European' gothic imagination in the nineteenth century, we must be careful to recognize the boundaries and divisions enacted by this literature itself. It must be remarked that the scintillating effect of gothic fiction is always rooted in a traumatic encounter with the Other. Quite often, this 'other' is something geographically and civilizationally distant – Gothicism is very much a sibling of Orientalism, and has always been obsessed with "west-east and east-west movements (with an original pre-history in the east)."<sup>774</sup> Furthermore, this is an 'othering' that is not solely geographical. While the dread monsters of gothic fiction may hail from faraway places, just as frequently is the 'other' something temporally distant – the revenge of an undead feudalism upon the subjects of the nineteenth century. In this way, the "gothic idiom" can be productively viewed as a way in which historical subjects grasped the great politico-existential rifts of nineteenth-century Europe, where "traditional dynastic requirements opposed new value systems, as the past met the present and the autocratic status quo was challenged by rebellion, legitimacy by usurpation."<sup>775</sup> In the present chapter, we have seen time

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<sup>774</sup> Cornwell, "European Gothic and Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature," 106. See also Michael Franklin, "Orientalism," in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 168-71.

<sup>775</sup> Cornwell, "European Gothic and Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature," 107-108.

and time again how Gothic Romanticism's structuring principles of Orientalism and Anachronism were used to grasp the nature of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

Thus: on the one hand, the gothic immediately suggested itself as the most fitting idiom for transnational accounts of the Peter and Paul Fortress due to the nature of this prison citadel, and this genre precedent aided in the sensational circulation of the 'Russian Bastille' amongst foreign reading publics. On the other hand, nineteenth-century gothic imagery cannot be taken solely as literary ornamentation: in this aesthetic was reflected the very real turmoil of a period of 'crisis and critique.' The international construction of the Fortress was the production of the struggle against Russian absolutism as a gothic romance for foreign consumption, rotating around the binaries of oppression and freedom, East and West, barbarism and modernity. The Peter and Paul Fortress as both political stage and genre chronotope was the space that most completely and most immediately manifested the terms of these violent binaries – both in narrative and in life. That is to say: the gothic romanticism of the Peter and Paul Fortress which we have encountered in the present chapter should be viewed above all as a *political aesthetic*, created through a dialectic of text and context.

Why might this insight be of interest to studies of revolutionary Russia? Understanding how the international invention of a 'Russian Bastille' was built upon an Orientalizing, anachronizing political aesthetic raises productive questions regarding how Eastern European 'othernesses' were envisioned in the nineteenth century.

The last two decades have seen the rise in prominence of a historiography of 'Russian Orientalism' – the utilization of Saidian thought to understand the complex

social, cultural, and political production of Europe's eastern peripheries. At its best, this transplantation of post-colonial theory onto Eastern European soil has challenged some of the more schematic angles of the original optics – through, for example, investigations into Russia's uneasy position as both subject and object of Orientalizing processes, or how 'nesting orientalisms' arise in local contexts through scalar systems of cultural othering.<sup>776</sup> However, in the study of Russian Orientalism – and in the use of Saidian thought in general – there remains a sort of monological conceit. An oriental gaze arcs out from one national imaginary (or scientific community, or state institution) to commit epistemological violence upon the passive, inert recipients of that gaze. Agency flows in one direction.<sup>777</sup>

However, our study of the international construction of a 'Russian Bastille' paints a far more complex picture. All of the texts encountered in this chapter assert, to a greater or lesser extent, a fundamental civilizational gap between the carceral regime of tsarist Russia and a modern observer. Strikingly, it must be noted that the most intensely orientalist discourse originates *not* with foreign observers, but rather with Russian radicals speaking to trans-national audiences –Kropotkin and, especially, Stepniak. In their Peter and Paul Fortress texts, they are not passive objects of a

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<sup>776</sup> Classic texts that have brought Saidian theory into the landscape of Eastern Europe while also critically engaging its weaknesses include Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54 (1995): 917-31. In general, the recent literature on Russian Orientalism is quite large. Influential texts include Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); and the discussion between Nathaniel Knight, Adeeb Khalid, and Maria Todorova in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1 (2000).

<sup>777</sup> Note how this intervention compliments the present dissertation's critique of the elision of agency in Foucauldian thought.

Western gaze, but rather adapt and wield the Orientalizing edge of gothic romanticism in order to suit their political ends in a most sophisticated fashion.

The political terrain of tsarist Russia is depicted as a landscape of horrors. However, there is a spark of hope – casting themselves and their radical compatriots as protagonists in this gothic scene, Kropotkin and Stepniak (with the help of Kennan) announce the Russian ‘nihilist’ as a modern subject. Thus, as they guide a particular Anglo-American gaze towards the East, it is not the case that the *entirety* of Eurasia is to be understood as an Oriental, barbaric landscape. Rather, civilizational rifts are present *within* Russia – tsarism is itself a gothic dungeon which keeps imprisoned truly modern Russian subjects and their essentially western political energies.<sup>778</sup> Thus, Stepniak and Kropotkin’s idiom of otherness is carefully exercised to expose the widening gaps within Russian modernity itself – and the radical prisoner trapped within this gothic romance becomes a site for horrified Western audiences to direct personal sympathies and potential political commitments.<sup>779</sup>

It is this process – an inwardly-directed, or ‘strategic orientalism’ – that I find to be the most interesting element of the international reception of the Peter and Paul Fortress: a moment when a Russian political culture of radical incarceration was

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<sup>778</sup> Note as well that despite sophisticated ongoing research in the realm of Russian orientalism, there has been little work into how mechanisms of ‘othering’ coalesced around particular spaces (with the exception of larger geographical units, such as Siberia or Crimea). To the best of my knowledge, the idea of the tsarist political prison as an orientalist object has not yet been discussed.

<sup>779</sup> Choi Chatterjee has recently made a similar argument for the need to not only study how Russia was a passive receptacle for an orientalist discourse in the nineteenth century, but also to investigate how “a sophisticated intelligentsia” can “produce authoritative forms of self-presentations that find purchase in transnational intellectual circuits, this can contaminate the original nature of Western Knowledge and influence the tropes of representation.” My investigation of the polyphonic, hybrid discourse surrounding the Peter and Paul Fortress aligns with this theoretical commitment. See Chatterjee, “Transnational Romance, Terror, and Heroism”, 757-58.

brought into dialogue with wider Anglo-American discourses on Russian modernity and a global history of political-aesthetic alterity. In producing a trans-European vision of a 'Russian Bastille' from 1881 to 1895, the radicals in this chapter found a tool to crack open a politically-effective orientalist gap between the Romanov regime and its radical opponents – with the Peter and Paul Fortress serving as shatterpoint.



## 8. Uneven and Combined Development in Intellectual History: L.D. Trotsky and the Russian Revolutions in the Peter and Paul Fortress, 1905-1917

Prince Hamlet would have repeated on this spot: 'The time is out of joint; - O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!' But there was nothing Hamletish about us.

- L.D. Trotsky, *My Life*

Everything melts. Even Goethe melts.

- Osip Mandelstam, *The Egyptian Stamp*

### I. Introduction

And the years moved forward, and the old mole grubbed. As the Russian Empire stumbled through its last decades, much about the history of political incarceration changed, and much stayed the same.

The Alekseevskii Ravelin prison was closed for good in 1884. With the increased use of the House of Preliminary Detention, the rising prominence of Shlissel'burg Fortress, and the renovation of the capital's 'Kresty' prison in 1892, the Peter and Paul Fortress would no longer hold the same unrivaled position it had possessed during the 'Age of High Prison Mythology.'<sup>780</sup>

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<sup>780</sup> On the inauguration of the Kresty – reworked in this period to hold both political and criminal detainees in solitary confinement – see Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 3:377-82.

This does not mean, however, that the importance of the Fortress would fade in significance at the beginning of the twentieth century. Quite the contrary: the Peter and Paul Fortress persisted as a revolutionary space through 1917. And while we shall see that these years brought the late maturity of the radical Russian prison mythos, this was no sleepy decline. On the cusp of revolutionary rupture, the concrete and discursive experience of incarceration continued to be wrestled with in dissident imaginaries – imbued with new meanings and adapted to the changing political commitments and conceptual landscapes of these final years of tension.

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The present chapter follows the intellectual and political history of the Peter and Paul Fortress from 1905 to 1917. If much of this dissertation has focused on the birth and growth of radical carceral cultures, then the current section strikes a different tone. For in the years leading up to the October Revolution, I argue that we see not only the rotting away of the Romanov autocracy, but also the last colors of a revolutionary prison tradition that had grown to contest it.

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I compose this autumnal picture through three distinct yet intertwined perspectives.

First, this juncture gives us the opportunity to examine the general publication history of the Russian prison memoir (Section II). Tracing this process allows us to identify the exact contours of this genre's rise and decline, and poses a set of questions regarding radical political cultures in the last years of tsardom. Centrally: what explains the decline in *Bildungs*-memoir writing after 1884? Why did Russian Marxists move away from the codified genre of the political prisoner autobiography?

These inquiries take us to the heart of this chapter: an exploration of the political imprisonment of L.D. Trotsky (Sections III-VI). Arrested during the Revolution of 1905, Trotsky was placed in solitary confinement in the Peter and Paul Fortress (as well as two other prisons in the imperial capital). Here he composed the essay “Results and Prospects,” in which he announced his famous theory of Permanent Revolution. At first glance, this text might seem to have little to say about questions of revolutionary self-writing and the experience of political incarceration. However, by reading this classic work against the grain – and locating it within the larger intellectual constellations of Russian Marxism and Trotsky’s idiosyncratic thought – we quickly discover ourselves in the midst of a series of debates on the role of the individual in history, the nature of political aesthetics, and the future of radical subjectivity. We find Trotsky to not only be centrally located in an ambiguous conceptual interregnum between different narrative regimes and epistemological terrains of revolutionary selfhood – in fact, his reflections and writings themselves shine light on this very process, which I call *uneven and combined development in intellectual history*.

Finally, this chapter ends with both a bang and whimper. The final arc (Section VII) relents to the historical discipline’s more empirical and chronological demands, and follows the year 1917 as it flowed through the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress. This was not a dull time. Far from it: as the tsarist autocracy collapsed, its most notorious political prison played a series of startling roles. However, as this chapter argues, this ascension of the Peter and Paul Fortress at the moment of revolution also marked the end of a political culture of imprisonment that had done so much to

prepare its terrain. Thus taken together, this chapter seeks to produce a picture of the last decades of a Russian carceral cosmology – the final years of a politics of imprisonment that had begun under the harsh autocratic discipline of the mid-nineteenth century, and ended now with the final contestation and collapse of the tsarist state.

## **II. The Rise and Fall of the Russian Political Prisoner Memoir**

What happened to the Russian prison memoir?

In excavating the cultural and intellectual history of the Peter and Paul Fortress, the present dissertation has ventured many arguments on the nature and development of carceral self-writing in tsarist Russia: from its conceptual conditions of possibility, to the tropes and metanarratives that sustained it, to the ways in which its discursive forms shaped experiences of confinement in the ‘Age of High Prison Mythology.’ Of course, these cultural, intellectual, and social developments possess material dimensions as well – the actual spaces of confinement that lay at their core, as well as the periodicals and pathways of transmission through which these ideas circulated. As we seek to understand the fate of this genre in the last years of the autocracy, it is important to give space to a concrete discussion of how memoirs of incarceration were published and distributed.

To this end, I have attempted to collect information on every autobiographical account of Peter and Paul Fortress political imprisonment. An annotated catalogue of these memoirs – coupling bibliographical information with notes on the time periods and particularities of each author’s incarceration – comprises Appendix I of the

present dissertation. While conscious of the limits to such an accumulative model (the historical life of an epistemology and a political aesthetics is always far greater than the sum of its textual expressions), I do believe that it allows us to pose some generative new questions to the intellectual history of political imprisonment in tsarist Russia. Primarily, this exercise gives us a broad picture of the genre's publication history. By collecting information on these accounts in one place, we can clearly identify a few major trends in the textual production of Peter and Paul Fortress memoirs.

While outliers and exceptions do exist, it becomes clear that the vast majority of Russian carceral autobiographies were published in one of two periods: from 1906 to 1908, and from 1921 to 1935. What accounts for the widespread circulation of the genre in precisely these moments?

The first is quite easy to explain. Non-state publishing endeavors had always been a fraught enterprise in autocratic Russia. Over the long nineteenth century, critical journalism existed with one foot in the public and the other in the prison. What was capable of appearing in print always followed the ebb and flow of the changing tsarist censorship regime: progressive ventures receded during moments of high reaction, and expanded to fill the cracks of relatively permissive periods.<sup>781</sup> This dynamic accounts in large part for the very first legal publications of prison memoirs in tsarist Russia: the appearance, in the early 1870s, of a few Decembrist descriptions of the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>782</sup> It also allows us to understand the paucity of carceral

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<sup>781</sup> For a detailed picture of how this dynamic worked in practice in the 1860s, see CHAPTER Four.

<sup>782</sup> See, for example, M.A. Bestuzhev, "Zapiski M.A. Bestuzheva," 253-74; or N.V. Basargin, "Zapiski," *Deviatnadsatii vek. Istoricheskii sbornik* 1 (1872): 65-200. Besides the history of

autobiographies in the reactionary reigns of Tsars Alexander III and Nicholas II, leading up to their first explosive proliferation at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Revolution of 1905 was pivotal to the history of European political imprisonment in more ways than one. Mass labor actions, peasant unrest, and concerted intelligentsia campaigns nearly toppled an autocracy that – as we saw in Chapter Seven – had become more and more associated on an international scale with its brutal disciplinary spaces. It is no surprise then that the struggle against tsarism in these years gravitated around the question of incarceration. A full amnesty for political prisoners was one of the major rallying calls of the opposition, and a chief issue for both the Petersburg Soviet and the First Duma.<sup>783</sup> Symmetrically, in the midst of this upheaval, the Romanov regime made heavy use of its jails and prisons.

As the autocracy began to yield in the face of mass upheaval, the system of preliminary censorship was formally abolished in the last days of 1905 (in practice, the inability of the state to enforce order in revolutionary St. Petersburg meant that

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tsarist censorship, we could identify two further factors that allowed these texts to see legal publication in these years: the widespread growth of popular historicism in the 1870s, which led to a boom in journals featuring primary sources from the Russian past; and the essentially pre-political experience of Fortress confinement narrated in these Decembrist texts. For more on this moment, see the discussion of *Russkaia starina* and the unintended political reception of M.A. Bestuzhev's reminisces in Chapter Five of the present dissertation.

<sup>783</sup> See Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988-1992), 1:247-48; 2:86-7. While a limited amnesty was granted by the state after the proclamation of the October Manifesto in 1905, the failure to completely open the regime's prisons was a continual rallying cry for the Left: "Look around, citizens" remarked one speaker in the Petersburg Soviet after the circulation of the tsar's manifesto, "has anything changed since yesterday? Have the gates of our prisons been opened? The Peter and Paul Fortress still dominates the city, doesn't it? Don't you still hear groans and the gnashing of teeth from behind its accursed walls?" See Leon Trotsky, *1905*, trans. Anya Bostock (New York: Random House, 1971), 116; as well as 124-26.

ensorship had already been overthrown from below several months previously).<sup>784</sup>

With tsarist publication restrictions briefly toppled, a veritable flood of new publications swept through the Russian public sphere between 1906 and 1908.<sup>785</sup>

Among these periodicals is one of prime importance for the study of radical Russian carceral cultures. The first number of the journal *Byloe* was issued in St. Petersburg in January 1906. Subtitled “A Journal Dedicated to the History of the Liberation Movement”, it was an immediate success: its initial print run of 10,000 copies had to be immediately tripled to keep up with demand.<sup>786</sup>

As its subtitle indicates, *Byloe* was a journal of revolutionary history – the very first to be legally published in the Russian empire. The tenor of this periodical is evident from the contents of its initial issue, which held a range of articles on topics that had never before appeared openly in the public sphere: material on the arrest of N.G. Chernyshevsky, the activist work of George Kennan, and the incarceration of M.I. Mikhailov in 1861.<sup>787</sup> Over the course of its two years of existence, *Byloe* (and its successor journal, *Minuvshie gody*) published a host of texts on Peter and Paul Fortress incarceration, including both historical studies and a wealth prison memoirs.

It is important to note that these texts on the radical past were not mediated through any ‘dispassionate’ historicist gaze. Many of the journalists and

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<sup>784</sup> See Charles A. Ruud, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982), 207-226; Ascher, 1:276-77; and Trotsky, “Storming the Censorship Bastille,” in *1905*, 140-56.

<sup>785</sup> For example – from November 24, 1905 to February 1, 1906, in St. Petersburg alone there were nearly 250 official requests for permission to print new periodicals. See F.M. Lur’e, *Khraniteli proshlogo. Zhurnal ‘Byloe’: istoriia, redaktory, izdateli* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990), 38.

<sup>786</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 48-67.

<sup>787</sup> See M.K. Lemke, “Delo M.I. Mikhailova, 1861 g. (Po neizdannym materialam)”; “Za shto arestovali N.G. Chernyshevskogo?”; and Nik. Ash., “Tiur’mi v Rossii. Ocherk D. Kenana”; *Byloe* 1 (1906): 96-128; 224-26; 311-12.

autobiographers who wrote for *Byloe* were still active in the revolutionary events of their moment. The chief editor, P.E. Shchegolev – who shall appear again in the events of 1917 – had himself only recently returned from incarceration in the House of Preliminary Detention and Siberian exile.<sup>788</sup> As one police official exclaimed at the time, “if you read a few numbers of *Byloe*, you very well might reach the conclusion that it isn’t the history of a movement, but that of saints and the lives of holy martyrs and apostles.”<sup>789</sup>

This public circulation of revolutionary historical texts – and their core myths of noble political incarceration – did not escape the attention of the state. As revolution waned and the autocracy restored itself, censorship returned: *Byloe* was shuttered forever in 1908, and the editor Shchegolev imprisoned for nearly three years in St. Petersburg’s Kresty prison.<sup>790</sup> However, despite its short tenure, *Byloe* was of extreme importance in the publication history of the Russian prison memoir. This journal must be seen as the first vehicle for truly political accounts of Peter and Paul

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<sup>788</sup> Shchegolev had been convicted of participating in student unrests and factory agitation at the turn of the century. See Lur’e, *Khraniteli proshlogo*, 35; Iu.N. Emel’ianov, *P.E. Shchegolev: Istorik russkogo revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 13-17. Note that with his long career as a radical historian, the personal papers of Shchegolev – preserved in the Russian State Historical Archive and the Manuscript Division of the Institute of Russian Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences – hold a rich trove of documents related to revolutionary movements in the nineteenth century. See RGIA f. 1093 and IRLI RAN (*Pushkinskii dom*) OR f. 627.

<sup>789</sup> Quoted in Lur’e, *Khraniteli proshlogo*, 53.

<sup>790</sup> See Lur’e, *Khraniteli proshlogo*, 73-79, 101-11; P.E. Shchegolev, “Avtobiografiia,” in *Byloe: neizdannye nomera zhurnala*, ed. F.M. Lur’e (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1991 [1926]), 1:112-18; and Emel’ianov, *P.E. Shchegolev*, 22-23. As an interesting aside on the centrality of the Peter and Paul Fortress to the rise and fall of *Byloe*, we can note that one of the reasons for its closure was the publication of material on Nechaev’s incarceration. In the State Archive of the Russian Federation, in a collection that contains evidence seized during gendarme searches of journals, we find a detailed plan of the Alekseevskii Ravelin, taken from the editorial offices of *Byloe* during this period. This is reproduced as Figure Eight in Chapter Two of the present dissertation.

Fortress incarceration to legally appear in the Russian empire, and its work accounts for the first spike in published carceral autobiographics from 1906 to 1908.

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The second peak for publications in this genre, as evidenced by my catalogue, was from 1921 to 1935. Here, the political shift that made this possible is even more self-evident – the success of the October Revolution. It is worth spending a few words on the institutional arrangements and textual pathways behind the circulation of tsarist imprisonment memoirs in the first years of the Soviet Union.

Speaking at once to both the future and the past, every successful revolution has an immediate interest in revealing and cultivating its own history. The Russian Revolution drew stark, indelible lines between what belonged to the new world and what would now be consigned to the old. As early as 1917, as tsarist officials were incarcerated across the former empire, their files were flung open to researchers – the first ‘archival revolution,’ as it were.<sup>791</sup> One of the chief areas of interest in this historiographical wave was the unwritten story of tsarist discipline: its structures and systems, as well as the now-publishable accounts of leftists who had lived through prison and exile. Once the risk and chaos of the civil war had begun to settle, a formal organization quickly arose to engage in precisely this sphere of revolutionary history.

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<sup>791</sup> Indeed, as early as March 1917, P.E. Shchegolev was asked by A.F. Kerenskii to collect and organize the papers of the tsarist secret police into a usable archive. See the final paragraphs of the former’s unfinished memoir: Shchegolev, “Avtobiografiia,” 119. It is very curious to note how the exultation in the Anglo-American historical profession over the collapse of the Soviet Union and the possibilities of an ‘archival revolution’ in 1991 involved very little reflection on the parallel process that had occurred after the fall of the tsarist regime. For a post-mortem of this moment, see Jan Plamper, “Archival Revolution or Illusion? Historicizing the Russian Archives and Our Work in Them,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51 (2003): 57-69.

The Society for Former Political Prisoners and Exiles [*Obshchestvo byvshikh politkatorzhan i ssyl'noposelentsev*] was founded in Moscow on March 21, 1921. Combining the functions of a historical association and a mutual aid society, this organization proved remarkably active in the early years of the Soviet Union.<sup>792</sup> Spreading outside the capital and boasting nearly three thousand participants by the end of the decade (including such luminaries as V.F. Figner and N.A. Morozov), the society grew to sponsor lectures, libraries, and subsidized housing for its members.<sup>793</sup> Alongside these social functions, it set itself the task of collecting and publishing works related to the history of tsarist imprisonment. This initiative crystallized around an in-house journal, *Katorga i ssylka*, whose first issue also appeared in 1921.

In the foreword to this periodical's initial number, the society presented the preservation of revolutionary history as something holding a deeply moral, almost theological dimension. Thousands had suffered and died in tsarist cells "with faith in their resurrection," yet their stories were in danger of being lost; many other former prisoners still lived, yet were impoverished and forgotten. The journal thus announced its aim "to remember the scattered links of political imprisonment, to find them, to

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<sup>792</sup> See Marc Junge, *Die Gesellschaft ehemaliger politischer Zwangsarbeiter und Verbannter in der Sowjetunion. Gründung, Entwicklung und Liquidierung (1921-1935)* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009); and the conference proceedings Ia. Leont'ev and M. Iunge, eds., *Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo politkatorzhan i ssyl'noposelentsev: Obrazovanie, razvitie, likvidatsia 1921-1935; Byvshie chleny obshchestva vo vremia Bol'shogo terrora: Materialy mezhdunar. nauch. konf. (26-28 okt. 2001 g.)* (Moscow: Zven'ia, 2004).

<sup>793</sup> An excellent source of information on the organization's activities is the archive of the Leningrad Division of the Society for Former Political Prisoners and Exiles, held at TsGA SPb f. 506. Also of interest is S.A. Papkov, "Obshchestvo byvshikh politkatorzhan i ssyl'noposelentsev v Sibiri (1924-1935 gg.)," in *Instituty grazhdanskogo obshchestva v Sibiri (XX-nachalo XXI v.)*, 94-107 (Novosibirsk: Institut istorii SO RAN, 2009).

come to their aid if necessary, and encourage everyone... to give their notes, diaries, memoirs, to honor the blessed memory of the dead.”<sup>794</sup>

*Katorga i ssyl'ka*'s heady mixture of history and martyrology – an organic continuation, in many ways, of the culture of political imprisonment in the pre-revolutionary period – proved quite successful. Its initial print run of 500 copies grew to 10,000 by 1925.<sup>795</sup> Over the course of fifteen years, the journal published 116 issues, with each featuring a combination of autobiographical accounts and scholarly articles on tsarist imprisonment, exile, and hard labor. To this day, the era of *Katorga i ssylka* – which includes related initiatives, such as a parallel publishing house established by the Society, and the compilation of revolutionary autobiographies prepared for the fortieth volume of the Granat Encyclopedia in 1926 – remains the single richest source for Russian carceral autobiographies of the tsarist period. This is clearly reflected in our catalogue of Peter and Paul Fortress prison memoirs: the majority appeared between the years 1921 and 1935.

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Thus, our digest of autobiographies held in Appendix I allows us to get a wide overview of the genre's publication history, with its two peaks occurring in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

However – at this juncture, a wave of discomfort begins to descend upon the historian of political incarceration in tsarist Russia. Something is off about this picture.

In terms of chronology, all of the evidence previously gathered in the present dissertation has pointed to the political culture of radical imprisonment as having

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<sup>794</sup> “Predislovie k pervomu sborniku”, *Katorga i ssylka* 2 (1921): 3-4.

<sup>795</sup> See the publication information of, e.g., *Katorga i ssylka* 14 (1925): 4.

nineteenth-century roots: from Bakunin's first articulation of the 'memoir in prison' in 1851, to the rise of Fortress martyrs and the prison-as-writing-desk in the first half of the 1860s, to the flourishing of concrete subversion and discursive investment from 1866 to 1884. However, we now see that the vast majority of Peter and Paul Fortress prison memoirs – the form of life-writing that I have argued was essential for radical political cultures to make the experience of state confinement politically legible – appeared at a much later date. Does this fact thus ask us to revise our conceptual chronology? What accounts for this temporal discrepancy?

To unravel this knot, we need to take account of a central structural element of autobiographical writing.

What is the essential feature of the *Bildungsroman*? While many literary historians have identified it as 'compromise' or 'resignation,' in the present work I have shown this to be only true for Right Hegelian examples of the genre. Far more central, I believe, to this form of life writing – this technology of self-narration that arose at the juncture of Goethe and Hegel, capable of serving both conservative acquiescence and radical struggle – is the principle of *mediation*.

Mediation lies at the core of each the *Bildungs*-memoir's movements. In writing the self as a narrative of development, the human subject is situated at a point of ceaseless dialogue: between the personal and the world historical, fetters and freedom, activity and consciousness, poetry and truth. And – of most significance for our current discussion of prison memoir chronology – the act of penning an autobiography itself involves a series of crucial temporal bifurcations: mediations

between the present and the past, between the individual as memoir-subject and the individual as memoir-object, between the writing self and the written self.

This is why Appendix I carefully includes the actual period of incarceration for each Peter and Paul Fortress prison memoirist. Taking these dates into account – the gap between the lived experience of the cell and the moment it was put to paper – further nuances our picture. For while the *publication* of prison memoirs peaked in the immediate pre-revolutionary period and in the first years of the Soviet Union, these are mediated accounts of carceral experiences that, on the whole, occurred much earlier. Interestingly enough, we find that the vast majority of Fortress autobiographies come from revolutionaries who had been arrested during the reign of Tsar Alexander II: the *Nechaevtsy* and pamphlet-writers of the 1860s; the *Chaikovtsy* and those arranged in the ‘Trial of the 193’ in the 1870s; and the *Narodovoltsy* and other articulators of militant populism in the 1880s.<sup>796</sup> Memoirs of political imprisonment were overwhelmingly written by radicals whose actual periods of Fortress incarceration fell between 1861 and 1884 – that is, the ‘Age of High Prison Mythology.’ The conceptual chronology of the present dissertation thus still stands. Even if the majority of imprisonment *Bildungs*-memoirs would not see legal publication until the first third of the twentieth century, these were narratives that had developed and flourished in the concrete soil of a different time.

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<sup>796</sup> We can note that many members of this last grouping were transferred to cells of the Shlissel’burg Fortress after the closure of the Alekseevskii Raveline – and carried with them into this new site the *Bildungs*-memoir technology of the self. Out of this movement would develop a fairly robust tradition of Shlissel’burg autobiographics, which would also see publication during the Revolution of 1905 and after 1917. This phenomenon – which I believe to be a satellite to the cultural mythology and traditional life-writing of the Peter and Paul Fortress, but one with its own distinct history and contours – demands further scholarship.

In fact, this is more than just a slight trend. There is a clear dividing line between prison experiences in this earlier period and those that occurred after 1884: the former are subject to vast amounts of autobiographical activity (even if published at later dates), while the latter are simply not. It appears, strangely enough, that tsarist incarceration became *de-narrativized* at a dramatic rate after 1884. This pattern provokes a new line of inquiry: why did political incarceration in tsarist Russia begin to be no longer filtered through this genre of the self?

The closure of the Alekseevskii Ravelin in 1884 does not itself explain this precipitous decline. As we saw in the previous chapter, the mythos of Russian political imprisonment was able to grow on a vast international scale at the end of the century. And indeed, this disappearance of prison narration does not correspond with a parallel fall in rates of incarceration. In the last decades of tsardom, close to a thousand individuals were imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress (especially in the Trubetskoi Bastion) – but only the tiniest fraction of them left autobiographical accounts in the traditional *Bildungs*-memoir genre.<sup>797</sup>

What other factors might account for the falling away of this form of self-narration? The Russian *fin de siècle* was characterized by a range of tectonic social, political, and economic shifts – vast changes that were reflected in the nature of its revolutionary political cultures. Specifically, the 1880s was a period when alternative heirs to the radical tradition began to develop: when a cleavage occurred between

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<sup>797</sup> In the archives of the Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress, one can find an alphabetical catalogue listing each arrestee held in the citadel from 1900 to 1917. I have every reason to believe that this document is reliable, and it contains over one hundred pages with nearly 800 entries from this period. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1134.

older populist [*narodnik*] dissidents and the novel strategies and political epistemologies of Russian Marxism.

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Significantly, one of the key conceptual shatter points between Russian populism and Russian Marxism was in their conception of the human self in history – a theoretical break that I believe had real consequences for the practice of self-narration.

Much has been written about the complex idea of the individual in Marxist thought.<sup>798</sup> Throughout this chapter, we will be careful to avoid the reductionism of either its vulgar adherents or its reactionary critics. At this point, it is enough to note that – from the more vigorous subjectivity of the *1844 Manuscripts* to the greater determinism of the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* – the role of the self in history was left an unfinished question in Marx. However, his innovations in political sociology and political economy, when translated into a Russian context, presented key challenges to earlier intelligentsia understandings of radical individuality.

The fact that a fracture existed between populist and Marxist theories of the subject was widely grasped by revolutionary political cultures from the 1880s onwards, and became a central point of contention between the two. The exact

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<sup>798</sup> Indeed, debates on this concept possess themselves a rich history that is far too extensive to include here. Let it suffice to say that changing understandings of the human subject in Marxism have often tracked directly onto shifts in this larger theory itself: from the high structuralism of the late nineteenth century, to the rediscovery of Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* and the changing attitudes towards subjectivity in Gramsci and Western Marxism, to the post-war erasure of the human in Althusser's reading of a 'Late Marx.' Complex too has been the ways in which Marxism's opponents have weaponized this theory's supposed devaluation of individualism: starting at least from Hayek, we see the paradox whereby enslaving humans to the metaphysics of the market was sold as a respect for 'individualism' against the collectivist tendencies of anti-capitalist thought.

relationship between the individual and history (with ‘the mass’ as the third term) was furiously debated in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. Was subjective consciousness simply a reflection of the existing material forces and social relations of production? What position did the individual hold within larger class formations and the progress of history? From the ‘harmonious personality’ of populist theoretician N.K. Mikhailovsky and his attempt to recover the ‘hero’ in the ‘crowd,’ to the G.V. Plekhanov’s more structural qualification in his writings “On the Question of the Role of the Individual in History”: battle lines were drawn according to political affiliation.<sup>799</sup> Indeed, outside of theoretical polemics, the conflict between a populist valorization of the individual and the more-ambiguous stance of the Russian Marxists played itself out in discussions of political strategy as well. To take one example: the Bolshevik critique of SR terrorism in favor of mass

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<sup>799</sup> See N.K. Mikhailovskii, “Geroi i tolpa,” in *Sochineniia N.K. Mikhailovskogo* (St. Petersburg: Izd. El. Zauer, 1884) 6:280-394; “Bor’ba za individual’nost’,” in *Sochineniia N.K. Mikhailovskogo* (St. Petersburg: Izd. redaktsii zhurnala ‘Russkoe Bogatstvo,’ 1896) I:421-594; and G.V. Plekhanov, “K voprosu o roli lichnosti v istorii,” in *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1956) II:300-34. The constant conversations around this topic in these years are mocked in Osip Mandelstam’s semi-autobiographical writings: “The circle of their intellectual interests was, however, extremely limited, their field of vision was narrow, and the fact is that their avid minds had to gnaw on scanty nourishment: the eternal quarrels of the SR’s and SD’s, the role of personality in history, the notorious harmonious personality of Mikhaylovsky... - that was the poor extent of it.” Osip Mandelstam, “The Sinani Family,” in *The Noise of Time: Selected Prose*, trans. Clarence Brown (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 105. For an interesting discussion of how the nascent discipline of social psychology contributed to the debates of this period, see Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 146-51. For an excellent perspective on how class influenced different approaches to individualism in the immediate pre-revolutionary years and the first decade of Soviet power, see Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 62-146.

agitation was never a rejection of political violence *per se*, but rather an attack on the cult of heroism and individualistic ‘adventurism’ which was seen to be at its core.<sup>800</sup>

Strikingly, this conflict also seems to have affected the practice of revolutionary autobiographics. Just as the Russian Marxists sought a new understanding of the role of the individual in history, so too did they break from the narrative activity of their forebears.

Namely – they no longer wrote themselves in the cell. From 1884 to 1917, as the tsarist state incarcerated both Marxists and non-Marxists alike, traditional prison memoirs were nearly all penned solely by the latter. From the last years of tsarism, we find works such as the classic carceral autobiography of SR founder G.A. Gershuni, or the rich literature penned by the *Narodovoltsy* on the decades they spent in the Peter and Paul Fortress and Shlissel’burg – compositions by populist, not Marxist authors.<sup>801</sup>

This division is also seen in the genre’s publication history after the October Revolution. If the Society for Former Political Prisoners and Exiles was the most prominent circulator of carceral autobiographies in the traditional mold after 1917, then it should be noted that this organization mainly attracted older revolutionaries of a populist temperament. Bolshevik life-writers – including those who had recently suffered tsarist imprisonment – were drawn to more experimental (and ‘objective’)

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<sup>800</sup> See, for example: V.I. Lenin, “Revoliutsionnyi avantiurizm,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963) 6: 377-98; and N. Trotzky [L.D. Trotsky], “Terrorismus,” in *Der Kampf. Sozialdemokratische Monatsschrift* (Vienna: Georg Emmerling, 1912) 5:75-78.

<sup>801</sup> For the former, see G.A. Gershuni, *Iz nedavnego proshlogo*. For the latter, see (for example) N.A. Morozov, *Povesti moei zhizni*; M.F. Frolenko, *Zapiski semidesiatnika* (Moscow: Istoriko-revoliutsionnaia biblioteka zhurnala ‘Katorga i ssylka,’ 1927); and V.F. Figner, *Zapechatel’nyi trud*.

initiatives such as the Istprof and Istpart historical commissions.<sup>802</sup> This divide reflected itself in the membership of the Society for Former Political Prisoners: at its inception, the group was primarily comprised of former populists, with most claiming past affiliation with the SR party.<sup>803</sup> This gap – both political and generational – explains why one of the primary activities of the organization was the distribution of pensions to its elderly members. It also explains the persistent suspicion of the Soviet authorities towards the Society: they considered shuttering it as early as 1922, finding its historical work to be “extremely weak” and believing it to be the domain of “anti-Soviet elements.”<sup>804</sup> This elderly cohort of autobiographers and *Bildungs*-historians was never truly integrated into the Soviet project, and both the Society and its periodical *Katorga i ssylka* were repressed in 1935.<sup>805</sup>

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Thus is the peculiar history that comes to light through a catalogue of Peter and Paul Fortress prison memoirs. The fate of the genre in its final years is characterized by a certain chronological dissonance between its conceptual life and its publication history. The former peaked between 1861 and 1884: an era when the experience of tsarist incarceration was overwhelmingly filtered through the genre of the *Bildungs*-memoir. However, the concrete products of this moment only began to enter into wide

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<sup>802</sup> For more on the debates and organizations surrounding the early years of Bolshevik history writing, see Roman Gilmintinov, “‘We Can and We Must’: The Scientificity of Trade-Union History-Writing in the Soviet Union in the 1920s,” *Studia Historiae Scientiarum* 18 (2019): 219-54.

<sup>803</sup> Junge, *Die Gesellschaft ehemaliger politischer Zwangsarbeiter*, 83-4.

<sup>804</sup> As stated in a report by Bolsheviks M.P. Tomskii and Ia.E. Rudzutaks on the Society, made in August 1922. The original document is reproduced in facsimile and transcribed in German translation (“Erklärung M.P. Tomskijs und Ja.E. Rudzutaks zur Schließung der OPK vom 31.8.1922”) in *ibid.*, 458-60.

<sup>805</sup> See *ibid.*, 387-426.

circulation several decades later: in a period when its political aesthetics and epistemological terrain were already in steep decline.

This is our chronology – how are we to understand its peculiar vicissitudes?

In the broadest strokes, it appears that the Russian memoir of political imprisonment could be labeled a *populist genre*. In this assertion, we find a satisfying formula for its decay. The type of self-narration first inaugurated in the Peter and Paul Fortress by Bakunin – as well as the entire political culture of confinement that this genre grew to encompass – was part of an earlier Russian revolutionary *Lebenswelt*, and the displacement of populist movements by Marxist struggle at the turn of the century also led to the gradual extinction of this older tradition of life writing.

This formulation is, I believe, correct in its broadest outlines. However, we cannot be fully satisfied with such a general statement: it gives far too tidy a picture of this moment in intellectual history. We must be wary of repeating in the history of culture and ideas the old sins of political history – giving reified life and drawing clean lines between abstract political categories. So too did Soviet historiography once cast the transition from late populism to early Marxism as a parable of two brothers, Sasha and Volodia.<sup>806</sup> We must push beyond such easy terms when approaching ambiguous moments of historical transition, especially if we seek to understand how they played out in the complex realms of political aesthetics and historical subjectivity.

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<sup>806</sup> That is: the fate of V.I. Lenin's older brother, Alexander Ulianov – executed in 1887 for his part in a populist terroristic attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander III – was often read as a moment that, if not having a direct causal effect on the younger sibling's rejection of populism for Marxist strategy, could at least provide a picturesque family allegory for this shift. It is worth noting here that Alexander Ulianov was imprisoned in both the Peter and Paul Fortress and Shlissel'burg before his execution, while his younger Marxist brother never spent time in either site.

For equating the Russian prison memoir with pre-Marxist radicalism may give us a picture of *what* happened, but no idea as to the *how* or *why*: it lacks any explanatory power. There indeed appears to have been some sort of structural shift in the concept of the individual that divided the Russian populists from the Russian Marxists. The Bolsheviks, for the most part, no longer wrote their experiences of confinement in the traditional metanarrative of their revolutionary forebears. Even if published prison memoirs proliferated at the start of the twentieth century, this was the uncanny persistence of a dying form: the genre no longer possessed a living core. Understanding why this was the case and how it occurred is crucially important for our study of revolutionary Russian political imprisonment and carceral selfhood.

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Let us now attempt to excavate the historical logic of this complex moment. The best way to do so is to return to the ‘thing itself’: to reenter, one last time, the solitary cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress. For the intellectual-historical interregnum we have identified here – between traditional populism and Russian Marxism, between different understandings of both the self in history and the self in the cell – did not occur in a vacuum. The autocracy still keenly incarcerated its opponents in the last years of its existence, and the concrete experiences of these arrestees were indelibly marked by the structural changes occurring in revolutionary prison cultures.

In this journey into the Fortress, our best guide proves to be the most famous (and most idiosyncratic) Marxist to enter its walls: L.D. Trotsky. Imprisoned here by the autocracy in 1906, he occupies a crucial position as both object and subject of the shifting intellectual history of incarceration. For not only did Trotsky experience

confinement in this period – he was also one of very few Russian Marxist prison writers. He gains this title in two senses: he both found the opportunity to produce texts in the tsarist cell, as well as later penned an autobiographical account of his incarceration. In the Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment of Trotsky, not only do we see a symptomatic reflection of the discursive transformations occurring at this moment in Russian cultures of confinement. We also find a thinker acutely sensitive to this shift, one who analyzed the very changes in regimes of political aesthetics and historical subjectivity to which he himself was subjected, as well as their underlying causal mechanisms. In turning now to the ‘past and thoughts’ of Trotsky, we turn to the ways in which he both embodied and understood the final act of revolutionary Russia’s political culture of incarceration.

### **III. The Imprisonment of L.D. Trotsky**

During the stormy events of the 1905 Revolution, L.D. Trotsky (born Lev Davidovich Bronstein<sup>807</sup>) was incarcerated in three separate institutions in St. Petersburg: the Kresty prison, the Peter and Paul Fortress, and the House of Preliminary Detention. This time of imprisonment is most widely known as the period when he wrote his essay “Results and Prospects [*Itogi i perspektivy*],” which famously contains his first articulation of the theory of Permanent Revolution.

This chapter too will discuss this renowned prison text: reading it against the grain in order to crack open the question of Trotsky’s place in the history of radical

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<sup>807</sup> In a moment where anti-Semitism still lurks around the figure of Trotsky (see, e.g. the grotesque recent Russian miniseries on his life), I would like to stress that his birth name is included here solely to help readers orient themselves towards the archival material cited in this chapter.

prison cultures and revolutionary self-narration. However, before turning to the deeper intellectual history at play in 1906 in the Peter and Paul Fortress, it is worth walking through the concrete circumstances of his carceral moment.

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Trotsky scholarship is as vast as it is unruly.<sup>808</sup> A massive corpus is riven with irreconcilable political antagonisms, often clustering around the same conflicts that irrupted during his stormy life. From the self-cannibalization of Soviet leadership in the 1920s and 30s, to the splits and schisms of the Fourth International, and even battles waged today in academic presses: the literature on Trotsky has always been politically expressive and polemically fierce.<sup>809</sup>

Trotsky lived, Trotsky lives, Trotsky will live: the same political vitality that has contributed so much to scholarship has, unfortunately, left several blind spots regarding his life and work. While the literature on Trotsky possesses some truly monumental texts – especially noteworthy being Isaac Deutscher’s majestic biography – the historiography as a whole is surprisingly erratic. Lacking the exhaustive empirical labor that Soviet scholarship devoted to other revolutionaries, and

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<sup>808</sup> For example: the printed edition of the most authoritative Trotsky bibliography sprawls across two volumes and 840 pages. Its most recent online iteration catalogues over 17,000 secondary sources on Trotsky and Trotskyism. See Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz, eds., *Trotsky Bibliography: An International Classified List of Publications about Leon Trotsky and Trotskyism, 1905-1998*, 2 vols. (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1999); and Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz, *Leon Trotsky Bibliography: International Systematic Guide to Works about Trotsky and Trotskyism*, 2019, [http://www.trotskyana.net/LubitzBibliographies/Trotsky\\_Bibliography/Leon\\_Trotsky\\_Bibliography.html](http://www.trotskyana.net/LubitzBibliographies/Trotsky_Bibliography/Leon_Trotsky_Bibliography.html).

<sup>809</sup> See, for instance, the academic brutality of Bertrand M. Patenaude, Review of *Trotsky: A Biography*, by Robert Service, and *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, by David North, *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 900-902.

instrumentalized by warring camps even today – I believe that there is still much to be said about Trotsky, and still much for him to speak.<sup>810</sup>

In particular, there has been no rigorous engagement with questions of political incarceration, radical self-narration, and the theory of the subject in his corpus. This is not only a conceptual absence, but also a cause of empirical inaccuracies. Much of the literature around “Results and Prospects” mischaracterizes Trotsky’s period of imprisonment: confusing dates, locations, and conditions of textual production. Thus, as we now enter the cells of St. Petersburg from 1905 to 1907, the present chapter seeks to not only determine what Trotsky’s experience of the Peter and Paul Fortress has to teach us about the intellectual history of political incarceration in tsarist Russia: I also believe that viewing Trotsky through prison bars holds the potential to shed new light on elements of his life and thought. By locating Trotsky’s confinement within the prison archives for the very first time – and by locating his experience within the larger developments in radical subjectivity that had long revolved around the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress – this section attempts to raise a series of new questions from what at first glance could seem like well-trod soil.<sup>811</sup>

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<sup>810</sup> L.D. Trotsky was one of the few Old Bolsheviks not to be rehabilitated after the death of Stalin, or indeed at any point by the Soviet Union.

<sup>811</sup> Note, of course, that this brief missive on Trotsky scholarship does not mean to assert any sort of binary between political engagement and ‘proper’ history writing. This chapter – and every chapter of the present dissertation – categorically rejects the possibility of such a division. The archive is not a value-free empiricist hermitage in which scholars can safely (and often smugly) weather the storms of the political. The past is only ever preserved through the exercise of power; and the collected materials of these pasts are not dead objects. To travel through the archive is wander through a site of dialectical images: concrete moments that, when cracked open, reveal the dormant political energies of past epistemological formations, political aesthetics, and revolutionary commitments.

The immediate context for Trotsky's imprisonment was the Russian Revolution of 1905. This was a sprawling, complex occurrence – heterogeneous in its actors, aims, and outcomes. Its very title does not withstand much scrutiny: the historian cannot truly speak of a single 'Revolution of 1905.' This was an amalgam of dozens of distinct upheavals possessing their own logics and trajectories – from armed mutinies to labor strikes, from liberal campaigns to peasant wars – that shook the foundations of the Romanov state between the years 1904 and 1906.<sup>812</sup> If we want to see these events as a 'dress rehearsal' for 1917, then their chaos and contingency prevents us from taking this phrase teleologically. If there is any way in which we can see later revolutionary 'stages' in the Revolution of 1905, it can only be in the sense that the unraveling of autocratic legitimacy in this period revealed the theatre of power that would host the decisive conflicts of 1917.

In particular, 1905 saw the debut and brief run of the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies. This was a short-lived labor council that arose during the October strike of 1905. Beginning as a small gathering of forty to fifty delegates, by the time of its dissolution it consisted of hundreds of deputies representing thousands of workers from industrial sites across the city, meeting daily in the capital's Technological Institute. Here, strong collaboration between the working class and the revolutionary intelligentsia gave the activities of the Soviet a radical leftist direction. Not only were

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<sup>812</sup> See Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); and Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Authority Restored* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). Ascher's excellent histories are chiefly devoted to untangling the composite parts of these events and detailing the complex, shifting balance of power between them. Indeed, he argues that the autocracy was able to survive these years chiefly due to the inability of disparate anti-tsarist actors to find a common ground of struggle (although, filtered through his own political commitments, Ascher believes embryonic Russian liberalism to have been the natural leadership of this missed coalition – a debatable point indeed).

practical labor issues debated in this hall: the Soviet also sought to shape the path of revolutionary events, adopt measures towards arming the industrial proletariat, and act itself as a sovereign center for a city in the midst of upheaval (prefiguring, in many ways, the ‘dual-power’ arrangement between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet that would exist between February and October 1917).<sup>813</sup>

The life of this first Soviet was brief. Its initial chairman – G.S. Khurstalev-Nosar’ – was arrested by the tsarist authorities and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress on November 26, 1905.<sup>814</sup> A new presidium was quickly elected, with pride of place given to a certain non-factional Social Democrat who had developed a reputation over the previous months for energy and clarity: a twenty-six-year-old Leon Trotsky.

This new iteration of the Petersburg Soviet was to measure its lifespan not in months, but days. Even as the council formulated new approaches to the question of an economic boycott and the struggle for an eight-hour working day, the autocracy closed in around them. On the afternoon of December 3, 1905, soldiers surrounded the Technological Institute. The delegates refused to offer resistance: only destroying their

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<sup>813</sup> Besides works of contemporary scholarship, among the most interesting sources for the history of the Petersburg Soviet is *Istoriia Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov* (St. Petersburg: Knigoizdatel’stvo N. Glagoleva, 1906). This collection of essays is a posthumous account of the workings of the council, with many of the texts written by former deputies themselves from within their tsarist prison cells in 1906 and smuggled out for publication.

<sup>814</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 930, l. 40, 40ob. Krustalev-Nosar’ had in fact only just been released from the Peter and Paul Fortress just prior to his tenure at the Petersburg Soviet, having spent August in confinement for prior agitation work (RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 930, esp. ll. 25, 25ob, 31, 31ob). His second stint in the Trubetskoi Bastion would last until the summer of 1906, when he would be briefly transferred over to the House of Preliminary Detention and then exiled to Siberia. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 936; 942; 949, esp. ll. 40, 40ob; 952; 959; and 1134. For more on Krustalev-Nosar’s crucial role in the foundation of the ‘first Soviet’, see Voline, *The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921*, translated by Holley Cantine and Fredy Perlman (Oakland: PM Press, 2007), 89-101.

documents and revolvers before being arrested *en masse*.<sup>815</sup> Thus did Trotsky (among hundreds of others) fall into the grasp of the tsarist disciplinary apparatus at the height of the 1905 Revolution. He would spend thirteen months in the political prisons of the capital: an experience shot through with the idiosyncracies of his own intellectual trajectory as well as the ambiguities of a revolutionary Russian carceral mythos undergoing deep structural transformations.

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<sup>815</sup> A detailed account of the final hours of the Petersburg Soviet is found in Trotsky, *1905*, 231-33.



Figure 23: A photograph of L.D. Trotsky in his tsarist cell, 1906 [GMPiR f. III BC-20855]. Note that this image – which, while rare, has seen some publication – is usually misidentified as showing the Trubetskoi Bastion. Based on the architecture of the interior and Trotsky’s lack of prison dress, I am certain that this image was taken not in the Peter and Paul Fortress, but rather in the House of Preliminary Detention.

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In 1905, Trotsky was no stranger to the tsarist cell. He had been arrested as a teenager in 1898 while taking his first steps in the agitational circles of southern Ukraine, and had spent two years in the prisons of Mykolaiv, Kherson, Odessa, and Moscow.<sup>816</sup> Escaping from exile and fleeing abroad, it was only after his return to St. Petersburg in 1905 that he would become acquainted with the most notorious political prison of the Romanov autocracy.

Let us present a clear timeline for this period of incarceration. Upon the dissolution of the Soviet on December 3, 1905, Trotsky was first taken to the Kresty prison. After several months spent in its cells, he was held in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress from April 4 to June 3, 1906. From here he was sent to the House of Preliminary Detention, where he would remain until being deported to Siberia by way of a small transit prison in the first days of 1907. With this chronology firmly established, we can now turn to the archives of the Peter and Paul Fortress to learn more about the concrete conditions of Trotsky's incarceration.

On March 31, 1906, the Peter and Paul Fortress commandant received a letter from the Director of the Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – marked “secret [*sekretno*]” – informing him that “political arrestees by the names of Karl Karlov V a v e r k and Lev B r o n s h t e i n” would shortly arrive from the Kresty for imprisonment in the Fortress.<sup>817</sup> On April 4, the commandant would write

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<sup>816</sup> Here, Trotsky studied knocking language, the works of Antonio Labriola, and the history of European freemasonry (we will have cause to speak more on this last point further on in the present chapter). See Leon Trotsky, *My Life. An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 184-95.

<sup>817</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 949, ll. 7, 8.

letters to both the security apparatus and the emperor himself confirming that these two prisoners had been received and placed in the Trubetskoi Bastion.<sup>818</sup>

We know that at this time there were 27 other individuals incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress: including the former head of the Petersburg Soviet G.S. Krustalev-Nosar' and fellow Marxist Leo Deutsch.<sup>819</sup> In fact, another comrade accompanied Trotsky to the citadel: the above-mentioned 'Karl Karlov Vaverk' was none other than I.L. Gel'fand (better known by his pseudonym Parvus), who shared a carriage with Trotsky from the Kresty to the Fortress and had had the chance to speak with him on revolutionary matters.<sup>820</sup>

We also know that the Trubetskoi Bastion prison house was in quite poor condition at this time. Just one week prior to Trotsky's arrival, the authorities were anxiously asking the Fortress doctor to write a report on structure's lower floor: there were fears that the "lack of light and, chiefly, the emerging dampness" could be harmful to inmates' well-being.<sup>821</sup> Indeed, the archives hold an indignant letter penned by a political prisoner to the commandant from this same period, who – put in isolation in a lower cell to prevent him from using knocking language – bitterly

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<sup>818</sup> Ibid., ll. 9, 9ob; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 959, l. 17, 17ob.

<sup>819</sup> L.G. Deutsch [the common formulation of his last name – 'Deich' in Russian] was brought to the Trubetskoi Bastion on February 7, 1906 and sent to the House of Preliminary Detention on June 10 of that same year. This was, in fact, not the first time that Deutsch had entered the Peter and Paul Fortress – this elderly revolutionary had spent much of 1884 within its walls. Curiously enough for the conceptual chronology of the present chapter, we can note that Deutsch would leave a narrative account of only this first period of Fortress imprisonment. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 949, ll. 50, 50ob, 52, 52ob; d. 959, ll. 8, 8ob, 11ob; and L.D. Deutsch, *Sixteen Years in Siberia. Some Experiences of a Russian Revolutionist* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1903).

<sup>820</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 949, ll. 7, 8, 9, 9ob; d. 959, l. 17, 17ob. This episode is described in Parvus, *In der russischen Bastille während der Revolution. Eindrücke, Stimmungen und Betrachtungen...* (Dresden: Kaden & Comp., 1907), 47-49 – a curious text, about which we shall speak shortly.

<sup>821</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 942, l. 166, 166ob.

describes an extremely unhealthy environment, conducive “to typhus or, in the best case, rheumatism.”<sup>822</sup>

Trotsky was placed in an upper cell of the Trubetskoi Bastion prison, and spent two months there in solitary confinement. On the first of June, the chairman of the St. Petersburg Court personally visited the Peter and Paul Fortress to present indictments against the heads of the Soviet, Trotsky and Khrustalev-Nosar’.<sup>823</sup> As the Peter and Paul Fortress “lack[ed] spaces for meetings between arrestees and their lawyers,” on the night of June 3 both Trotsky and Khrustalev-Nosar’ were transported to the House of Preliminary Detention.<sup>824</sup> Both Deutsch and Parvus would also be indicted and sent to the same institution a week later.<sup>825</sup> Thus, we see in broad outlines the history of these Marxists’ time in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

This material from the imperial archives can also be supplemented with existing autobiographical accounts. Although the model of the revolutionary memoir was in the midst of a conceptual crisis, two figures from the Petersburg Soviet did in fact record their impressions. Trotsky devoted a small section of his highly-curious autobiography to the experience of Fortress incarceration, and in 1907 Parvus published a sensationalized account of his time in the ‘Russian Bastille’ for eager European audiences.<sup>826</sup> The peculiarities of the genre’s decline shall be discussed

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<sup>822</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 942, l. 98, 98ob. While the signature is nearly illegible, this appeal appears to have been most likely written by none other than Leo Deutsch, who was going by the pseudonym of N.A. Menshikov at this time. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 959, l. 11ob.

<sup>823</sup> See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 952, ll. 248, 249, 250, 251. The state’s case revolved primarily around the Soviet’s willingness to foment armed insurrection.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid., l. 255; and RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 949, ll. 38, 38ob, 39, 40, 40ob.

<sup>825</sup> Ibid., ll. 50, 50ob, 52, 52ob.

<sup>826</sup> See Leon Trotsky, “15. Trial, exile, escape,” in *My Life* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 271-88; and Parvus, *In der russischen Bastille während der Revolution*. In the context of the present dissertation, we should note that Parvus’ prison memoir should be placed

further on in the present chapter – for now, let us simply use these two texts as narrative accompaniments to the existing archival documentation.

From these sources, it appears that the experience of Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment in this period was primarily one of isolation. The contrast between the frantic social labor of the Petersburg Soviet and the silence of the Trubetskoi Bastion was deeply felt by both Parvus and Trotsky. For the former, it was absolutely unbearable. His *In der russischen Bastille während der Revolution* gives a picture of a highly energetic individual, tortured by this period of forced solitude and inactivity. Parvus recalls pacing his cell for hours each day, feeling “like an insect in a jar.” “We humans are born to work among people and with people,” he anguishes; “If we are separated from people, then life remains mute.”<sup>827</sup>

Trotsky was also struck by the seclusion of his Trubetskoi Bastion cell – and, conversely, relished the experience. At this time, prisoners had access to the large Fortress library and could receive correspondence from the outside world – which could mean letters, but also books and journals.<sup>828</sup> Given a respite from practical

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carefully in the corpus of Russian carceral autobiographies. Published in Dresden in 1907, it is not a classic *Bildungs* account of a revolutionary life, in which the experience of incarceration is a certain stage in a larger personal and political trajectory. Rather, it is a highly psychologized and deeply sensational account of the ‘Russian Bastille.’ As such, it was clearly written for the popular, international audience that had arose for such tales from the 1880s onwards (see Chapter Seven of the present dissertation), rather than as a moment of holistic self-crafting. Thus, Parvus’ prison memoir should be placed within a particular sub-tradition of Russian prison writing, and (unlike Trotsky’s autobiography) does not speak to the great shifts occurring in regimes of self-narration during this period.

<sup>827</sup> Parvus, *In der russischen Bastille*, 52, 61.

<sup>828</sup> Indeed, Trotsky received dozens of epistles throughout his stay in the Peter and Paul Fortress. See, e.g., RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 942, ll. 180, 186, etc.; RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 952, ll. 208, 213, 218, 221, 225, 236, etc. etc. While it is unrecorded whether Trotsky received any books from friends or family, we do know that other prisoners were being sent the latest copies of the revolutionary journal *Byloe* in the Peter and Paul Fortress, which were then donated to the prison library. Archived correspondence also shows incarcerated SR radicals

politics, Trotsky eagerly “entered on a period of systematic scientific and literary work.”<sup>829</sup> Alongside a study of the theory of rent and a history of social relations in Russia, Trotsky also immersed himself in classic European novels. “These were my best hours,” he later recalled: “As I lay in my prison bunk I absorbed them with the same sense of physical delight that the gourmet has in sipping choice wines or in inhaling the fragrant smoke of a fine cigar.”<sup>830</sup> How many crucial moments in Russian political history were first sparked by reading novels in the solitary cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress!

Thus, unlike the frenetic loneliness of Parvus, Trotsky remembered his Fortress imprisonment as a time of monastic study and self-reflection: “I can hardly complain about my life in prison. It was a good school for me. I left the hermetically sealed cell of solitary confinement in the Peter-Paul fortress with a tinge of regret; it was so quiet there, so eventless, so perfect for intellectual work.”<sup>831</sup>

He quickly had occasion to miss these peaceful conditions. For, on transfer over to the House of Preliminary Detention in June, he found an entirely different atmosphere. In a scene reminiscent of the 1861 student takeover of the Peter and Paul Fortress, this newer prison had been completely subverted by incarcerated radicals.<sup>832</sup> Self-organizing into small groups based on floor, political arrestees had successfully negotiated with the warden for unlimited access to the prison courtyard and library. In

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receiving volumes by V.M. Chernov (*Monisticheskaia tochka zreniia v psikhologii*) and P. Lavrov (*Znanie i revoliutsiia*). See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 952, ll. 36, 115, 120, 165.

<sup>829</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, 271.

<sup>830</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>832</sup> For a discussion of this earlier period, see Chapter Three of the present dissertation.

practice, this meant that cell doors were left unlocked, and prisoners could come and go throughout the institution as they pleased.

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Parvus      Trotsky      Leo Deutsch

Figure 24: A photograph of Parvus L.D. Trotsky, and L.G. Deutsch during their time of imprisonment in the House of Preliminary Detention. Reproduced from Parvus, *In der russischen Bastille während der Revolution. Eindrücke, Stimmungen und Betrachtungen...* (Dresden: Kaden & Comp., 1907).

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It is clear that this new arrangement suited Parvus quite well. He was able to dive back into the social activities of revolutionary St. Petersburg: a picture, reproduced in his memoirs, shows him, Deutsch, and Trotsky arm-in-arm in the House of Preliminary Detention kitchen [Figure 24]. They were even visited by Rosa Luxemburg, who had herself just been released from a Warsaw prison.<sup>833</sup>

It appears, however, that Trotsky felt more ambivalent. While enjoying the company of his comrades, he did what he could to avoid the “people and bustle” of this new arrangement. A fellow prisoner in the House of Preliminary Detention describes Trotsky as in good humor, but sequestering himself in his cell in order to continue his intellectual labors:

Trotsky’s prison cell was soon transformed into a sort of library. He was given literally any new book that deserved attention; he read them and busied himself with literary work every day from morning to late at night.  
– I feel magnificent, – he would tell us. – I sit, work, and know with certainty that I cannot be arrested... You must agree, that in tsarist Russia this is a truly unusual situation.<sup>834</sup>

Thus was imprisonment a period of great intellectual ferment for L.D. Trotsky – first in the cloistered isolation of the Peter and Paul Fortress, then in the occupied space of the House of Preliminary Detention.

What were the concrete products of this period of study? Trotsky used his time in these two institutions to write a series of political essays, including “Results and Prospects.” While the scholarship has been remarkably imprecise on their exact

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<sup>833</sup> See Rosa Luxemburg to Karl Kautsky, August 13, 1906, quoted in Z.A.B. Zeman and W.B. Scharlau, *The Merchant of Revolution: The Life of Alexander Israel Helphand (Parvus), 1867-1924* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 98; as well as J.P. Nettle, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Verso, 2019), 356.

<sup>834</sup> D. Sverchkov, *Na zare revoliutsii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1921-1922), 182.

conditions of production, we can reasonably say that these prison texts were most likely begun by Trotsky in the Trubetskoi Bastion, before being completed in the House of Preliminary Detention and smuggled out for publication.

For Trotsky recalls working on “the history of social relations in Russia” while still in the Peter and Paul Fortress, and Trubetskoi Bastion prisoners were allowed limited access to pen, ink, and paper within their cells at this time. Parvus, for example, filled a notebook with “extracts from books, historico-*[illegible]* outlines, and bibliographic information” during his solitary Fortress confinement.<sup>835</sup> The hypothesis that Trotsky had at least outlined (if not partially drafted) his “Results and Prospects” in the Fortress is further supported in the memoir of his comrade Sverchkov: he recalls Trotsky penning the piece “in one go” upon arriving at the House of Preliminary Detention.<sup>836</sup> From here, Trotsky was able to pass manuscripts to the outside world both in the briefcases of the defendant’s lawyers and during his wife’s visitations.<sup>837</sup> “Results and Prospects” was first published under the pseudonym ‘N. Trotsky’ as part of a collection of essays titled *Nasha revoliutsiia* – which appeared in St. Petersburg in 1906, when Trotsky was still incarcerated.<sup>838</sup>

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<sup>835</sup> See the correspondence between Parvus, the Prosecutor of the St. Petersburg Court, and the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant from the end of June, 1906. After being transferred to the House of Preliminary Detention, Parvus wrote to the Fortress administration asking that the notebooks he had used in the Trubetskoi Bastion be forwarded to him in his new prison. The original petition and surrounding correspondence – including a description of the notebook’s contents – are preserved at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 952, ll. 28, 29, 30, 31.

<sup>836</sup> Sverchkov, 181.

<sup>837</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, 271-72.

<sup>838</sup> See N. Trotskii, “Itogi i perspektivy,” in *Nasha revoliutsiia* (St. Petersburg: Knigoizdatel’stvo N. Glagoleva, 1906), 224-86.

Thus, like generations of past revolutionaries, the leader of the first Petersburg Soviet found the tsarist prison cell to be a site infused with politics: a stage for continuing practices of radical struggle, a worthy writing desk of the revolution.

However, unlike earlier Fortress prison writers such as Bakunin or Chernyshevsky, Trotsky's conceptual labors were not bound up with the traditional political aesthetics of Russian revolt – where the experience of incarceration had once been productively grasped as a stage within the development of revolutionary individuality at the juncture of the personal and the historical. Trotsky's prison texts were of a different nature, they possessed different concerns: in them we can begin to see how Russian Marxism had begun to erode older regimes of revolutionary selfhood.

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Н. ТРОЦКІЙ.

Л. Троцкий, Лев

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Итоги и перспективы, 1906

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# НАША РЕВОЛЮЦІЯ.

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СКЛАДЪ ИЗДАНІЯ:

КНИГОИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО Н. ГЛАГОЛЕВА.

С.-ПЕТЕРБУРГЪ, НЕВСКІЙ ПР., 92.

Figure 25: The title page for the 1906 collection of essays *Nasha revoliutsiia* [*Our Revolution*] by L.D. Trotsky, in which the pivotal text “Itogi i perspektivy [Results and Prospects]” first appeared.

#### IV. Results and Prospects

L.D. Trotsky's "Results and Prospects" must be recognized – alongside N.G. Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* and the critical essays of D.I. Pisarev – as one of the most significant prison texts of prerevolutionary Russian history. At first glance, however, this extraordinarily influential work seems to have little in common with earlier generations of radical carceral writing.

If past prison luminaries had primarily composed with a strong sense of their own subject positions – modeling new visions of selfhood-in-revolt through didactic texts and by incarcerated example – then what strikes us about Trotsky's major essay from 1906 is its relatively impersonal nature. Indeed, placed within the larger corpus of revolutionary Russian prison writing, "Results and Prospects" cannot help but strike us as rather, well, *dry*.

This essay is a story of structures, not of selves. Over the course of sixty-odd pages, Trotsky explores the social, economic, and political processes that had led to the Revolution of 1905. From the onset, the question of method is foregrounded. A true understanding of past events and future perspectives can only be gained through Marxist analysis: whereby a social-historical totality is grasped through the ways in which it grows out of the forces of production. Thus, Trotsky possesses nothing but scorn for the practice of historical analogy ("on which liberalism feeds and lives") or the loose idealism and naïve utopianism of the revolutionary populists ("[who] lived on phantasmagoria and a belief in miracles").<sup>839</sup>

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<sup>839</sup> Trotsky, "Itogi i perspektivy", 224, 231. Note that with each of Trotsky's texts, this chapter has worked with both the Russian original and the latest English translations (when available): in this case, Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects* (London: Socialist Resistance, 2007).

Confident in its theoretical toolkit, “Results and Prospects” seeks to answer what it sees as the most pressing question of the moment. In the Revolution of 1905, Europe’s most militant proletariat had paradoxically arisen in its most ‘backward’ country: how had this occurred?

The majority of the piece is devoted to an analysis of the play of historical forces behind the contemporary Russian situation. While building upon a recent wave of Marxist economic studies – notably Lenin’s *Development of Capitalism in Russia* – this work also stages several original interventions. Specifically, Trotsky’s eye is not bound by the borders of the Russian Empire: his attempts to understand the socio-economic history of his own country are always rooted in the context of global capitalism. With this innovation – what Michael Löwy has called an original “*viewpoint of totality*, visualizing capitalism and the class struggle as a world process” – Trotsky is able to make the surprising claim that the Russian working class achieved such an advanced political standing *precisely because of its backwardness*.<sup>840</sup>

Trotsky argues that, throughout its history, Russia had been shaped by pressures from the markets and militaries of its more ‘developed’ European neighbors. By the beginning of the twentieth century, this had led to a state of affairs where the empire possessed advanced repressive state apparatuses and means of industrial production, but grafted onto an ‘underdeveloped’ social and economic terrain. This essentially *inorganic* element of Russian history is, in Trotsky’s analysis, the key to its political potential: the empire was home to a centralized, heavily disenfranchised

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<sup>840</sup> Löwy goes on to see Trotsky’s sensitivity to the totalizing nature of capitalism as having arisen from his earlier readings of Labriola – and argues that “Results and Prospects” should, in this way, be seen as prefiguring certain elements of the thought of Lukács. See Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1981), 46-49.

working class without the trade-union consciousness, liberal parliamentarianism, or powerful bourgeoisie that in other countries held proletarian power in check.

This innovative, trans-European history led Trotsky to innovative, trans-European conclusions. The dogma at that time in the Second International and amongst Russian Marxists – both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks alike – was that only the advanced capitalist states of Western Europe were ready for a socialist revolution. In Russia, it was said, a strong bourgeoisie still needed to develop and overthrow the autocracy before the proletariat could topple them in turn.<sup>841</sup> In “Results and Prospects,” Trotsky explicitly challenges this orthodoxy. “History does not repeat itself [*istoriia ne povtoriaetsia*],” he argues, and the worker’s movement in Russia should not halt and wait for a recurrence of the French Revolution before continuing its struggle.<sup>842</sup> The events of 1905 had proven that it was ready to seize power. In isolation, of course, a proletariat uprising in ‘underdeveloped’ Russia would be quickly destroyed. However, if a socialist revolution did break out, then a spark from Eurasia promised to spread to Germany and the West: the international stage of history welded together by capitalist markets would also serve the global circulation of liberation.

This is, in fact, the theory-strategy of Permanent Revolution – first given mature formulation by Trotsky in the pages of “Results and Prospects.”<sup>843</sup> An analysis

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<sup>841</sup> Of course, the exact contours of the ‘Russian question’ in nineteenth-century Marxism are far more complex than this brief characterization can capture. A starting point for interested readers would be Marx’s famous letter to Vera Zasulich from 1881, as well as Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), esp. its second chapter.

<sup>842</sup> Trotsky, “Itogi i perspektivy”, 236.

<sup>843</sup> We should note here that Permanent Revolution was not invented whole-cloth by Trotsky in 1906. Löwy has done an excellent job of excavating its roots in the writings of Kautsky,

of Russia's social, political, and economic development led to its birth in the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention.

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However, as we can see – this is an analysis that has little use for revolutionary selfhood.

Unique in the canon of Peter and Paul Fortress prison writings is the effacement of Trotsky's subject position in "Results and Prospects." The protagonists of his history of Russia are not individual radicals, but rather impersonal class formations and productive forces. Fellow revolutionaries are only mentioned by name when they represent particular tendencies in the debates of the time; the pronoun "I" does not appear once in the entire text.

Trotsky clearly had no interest in crafting a carceral mythology around his own person. The Peter and Paul Fortress functioned well as a monastic writing desk of the revolution, but nothing more: no longer is the prison made to serve as a stage for the production of radical identity.

Taken by itself, this is enough for the historian to read "Results and Prospects" as symptomatic of larger shifts occurring in this period's conceptions of revolutionary selfhood. However, there is something even more indicative to be found in this prison text. For in fact, the question of radical subjectivity is not entirely absent from its

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Mehring, and Parvus. Furthermore, Trotsky himself wields Marx in support of his heterodox Marxism – arguing that "Marxism is first of all a method of analysis, - not the analysis of texts, but the analysis of social relations," in a warning against rigid formalism. The notion that Russia could 'skip' the stage of bourgeois revolution only became widely embraced by the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1917, with the publication of Lenin's "April Theses." See Michael Löwy, "The Marxism of *Results and Prospects*" in *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, eds. Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 27-43; Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*, 30-69; and Trotsky, "Itogi i perspektivy," 246.

pages. Touching upon its brief and peculiar appearance will allow us to move from Trotsky in 1906 to a wider consideration of the changing regimes of self-narration and the decline of the Russian prison memoir in the last decades of tsardom.

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“Results and Prospects” is a very tightly-written work. Its nine parts are taunt and lucid. Thus, even in a strictly formal sense, the curiosity of the contemporary reader is provoked by the only real digression in the piece: a strange moment at the very end of its seventh section: “The Pre-Requisites of Socialism”.

The purpose of this section is to address arguments that Russia might not be socially or economically prepared for the advent of socialism. Abruptly, at its conclusion, the question of the individual also raises its head: are we *internally* ready for the revolution? Are our human selves enough? With a sudden shift from economic statistics to the realm of the subjective, “Results and Prospects” turns into a brief meditation on the future of the individual.

Trotsky starts by stating that the modern subject has been thoroughly debased by capitalism: “the individual struggle for existence, the ever-yawning abyss of poverty, the differentiation in the ranks of the workers themselves...”<sup>844</sup> All, however, is not lost. While we cannot wait for humans to become “morally regenerated” under capitalism (as this is an impossibility), political struggle has already brought forth the “sprouts” of a new subjectivity – and that, *for now*, is enough. These new values must be cultivated – but, just the same, should not be taken as final products. Just as the revolution will radically break with obsolete social and economic forms, so too will it

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<sup>844</sup> See Trotsky, “Itogi i perspektivy,” 273; Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects*, 79.

bring about unimaginable transformations in our inner lives. Thus, even the most ‘advanced’ revolutionaries or classes of the present in no way resemble the types of individuals who will one day live under socialism:

One must not confuse here the conscious striving towards socialism with socialist psychology... However many points of contact there may be between the class psychology of the proletariat and a classless socialist psychology, between them lies an entire chasm [*mezhdu nimi eshche tselaia propast*’].<sup>845</sup>

And with this, Trotsky moves to the next section of “Results and Prospects.”

What are we to make of this strange digression? At first glance, it may seem more noteworthy for its silences than for what it speaks. Trotsky raises the question of the future individual, only to steer the reader away from speculation on this theme. New people will one day be born, but such developments will have to wait until after the revolution. Thus does the concept of the subject arise for a single time in Trotsky’s prison writings – only to be deferred, to be affixed with a question mark.

However, the approach to the subject evidenced by even this brief discussion is radically different than that taken by earlier generations of incarcerated activists. Where once the very experience of tsarist imprisonment was understood – and narrated through – a rich conception of the individual life in history, here is a call to cast one’s gaze away from this terrain.

The subject has been structurally decentered. And this move speaks volumes for intellectual histories of revolutionary Russian theories of the self. In fact, we find that if we take the time to crack open this curious passage, it is deeply expressive of a larger approach to the individual developed in Trotsky’s Marxist thought. In the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1906 – between reflections on history and readings of classic

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<sup>845</sup> Trotsky, “Itogi i perspektivy,” 272.

European novels – Trotsky radically broke with the traditional subjectivity that this space had once fostered.

To fully grasp this challenge, let us turn now to a close reading of the question of the individual throughout Trotsky's larger oeuvre. We will find a landscape of many 'chasms': not only between the revolutionary personality of the present and the future, but also separating this particular understanding of the human subject from that of the pre-Marxist Russian intelligentsia. Mapping the exact contours of this rift will provide us with insight not only into the work of Trotsky and the development of a critical concept in Russian Marxism – it will also shed light onto structural transformations in the history of revolutionary subjectivity, and the decline of a genre of self-narration that had once been central to the radical experience of political incarceration.

## **V. Russian Marxist Subjectivity**

Unfortunately, Trotsky never produced a full-length study on the concept of the human individual. However, his immersion in the debates on this topic – discussions that pitted Marxists against populists in the last decades of tsarism – is evidenced by the frequency with which this theme appears in his texts. These are not sustained treatments: rather, flashes and fragments. Surely this is the reason why Trotsky is very rarely read as a theorist of subjectivity. However, if we take the time to pull out this thread from the body of his writings, we find a persistent engagement with the concept of the individual in history: one expressive of larger intellectual-historical shifts brought about by the rise of Marxist analysis in the Russian 1880s; one with explicit

ramifications for the practice of radical self-narration; and one which first appeared in “Results and Prospects”.

Indeed, this early work serves as a fitting trailhead for our exploration of subjecthood in the work of Trotsky. From here, we can travel ably across his historic, autobiographical, and aesthetic texts, piecing together a compelling composite along the way.

In doing so, we will find that if there truly is a ‘Trotskyist Theory of the Self,’ then it possesses four central characteristics:

- A. The self must be understood in a recalibrated relationship with history;*
- B. The self is a historic phenomenon – not only for the particular ways in which individuals navigate the world, but also in the shifting construction of ‘individuality’ itself;*
- C. The self demands new genres of representation for each of its historic formulations;*
- D. The self of the present is destined to wither away.*

Let us turn now to an investigation of each of these elements in Trotsky’s Marxist thought. Doing so will allow us to understand the rupture in the intellectual history of the subject that occurred in revolutionary Russian political cultures of this period – a rupture that would be responsible for the end of a venerable carceral mythos, along with the narrative forms that it had developed and had in turn sustained it.

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A. *Trotsky's Theory of the Self: The Role of the Individual in History*

I would argue that at the heart of the quarrel between Russian Marxists and populists over the nature of the subject was a disagreement regarding the exact relationship between the individual and history. Hints of this dispute are to be found in “Results and Prospects” – the very fact that Trotsky could speak of a “class psychology” already reveals the major fault line. But let us not get ahead of ourselves: the exact difference that arose at this moment is best approached through Trotsky’s own writings on history.

Few other Bolsheviks produced as many historical studies as L.D. Trotsky – which include a series of texts on the Revolution of 1905, his magisterial *History of the Russian Revolution*, and even a memoir narrative of his own life.<sup>846</sup> This final fact might appear to contradict the claim for this revolutionary’s central place within the dissolution of older intelligentsia narratives of the self. Does not the production of a popular autobiography indicate continuity, and not change, in the history of radical representation?

Not quite. For these (self-)histories do not evidence a persistence of older genres of life writing across the populist-Marxist divide. Rather, they are products of a persistent *wrestling* with the problem of the individual: symptoms of Trotsky’s continued attempts to work through the proper location and narrative forms for a

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<sup>846</sup> See Leon Trotsky, *1905; History of the Russian Revolution*, translated by Max Eastman (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1980); and *My Life. History of the Russian Revolution* was originally written in Russian, and first appeared in Berlin in 1930; an English translation quickly followed. Trotsky’s 1905 essays were issued in German from 1908 to 1909, before being republished in Russia as *Nasha pervaiia revoliutsiia* in the first half of the 1920s. Finally, his autobiography was produced during his first year of exile in Turkey, also appearing in print in 1930.

modern subjectivity whose relationship with history had been starkly drawn into question.

This becomes clear even if we approach these works from the perspective of form.

Trotsky possesses a remarkably powerful voice in his historical prose. Extended analyses of economic, social, and political forces never descend into dry pedanticism: the pacing is always sharp, as empirical inquiry crescendos into large conceptual vistas, marked by an intuitive use of incisive turns of phrase. Trotsky does not hesitate to be vicious at times – acidic political metaphors and bilious disdain are reserved, especially, for Russia’s liberals – yet his histories can also be surprisingly playful, or even delicate in their language. All in all, there is a great amount of *personality* in Trotsky’s prose.

Except - in the last instance, there isn’t. In all of his studies of the past, Trotsky writes himself out of his own history. Famously, in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, he only speaks of himself in the third person.<sup>847</sup> The same is true of his 1905 writings, where he goes so far as to refer to himself abstractly, under a past pseudonym, in his crucial account of the dissolution of the first Petersburg Soviet.<sup>848</sup> There is clearly a struggle here: a conscious will to write history from a vantage point other than that of the self.

This ambiguous relationship with the “I” of historical narration reaches its highest point of tension in Trotsky’s memoir, *My Life: An Attempt at an*

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<sup>847</sup> See the preface to this work: “The author speaks of himself, in so far as that is demanded by the course of events, in the third person. And that is not a mere literary form: the subjective tone, inevitable in autobiographies or memoirs, is not permissible in a work of history.” Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 22-23.

<sup>848</sup> See Trotsky, *1905*, 220-33.

*Autobiography*. Unlike the revolutionary Russian ego documents of past generations, there is a constant hesitation in this text regarding the relationship between the individual and history. Even as this strange document adopts the staid quality of the earlier *Bildungs*-memoir – tracing the author’s personal and political development (including his times of imprisonment) as they reflect within the larger arc of history – Trotsky clearly finds something deeply uncomfortable about this act of self-narration. In order to ‘attempt’ a memoir, he states in the forward: “The watershed [*vodorazdel*] between autobiography and the history of the revolution had to be fumbled for, empirically.”<sup>849</sup> The very fact that Trotsky found this task to be so awkward shows the qualitative difference between *My Life* and the existing Russian autobiographical canon. For, the hundreds of revolutionary intellectuals who penned *Bildungs*-memoirs across the second half of the nineteenth century had seen no need to root around for this dividing line between self and history. These terms had been, structurally speaking, unproblematic – from Bakunin and Herzen onward, autobiography *was* the history of the revolution; the universal was lived, narrated, and read through the particular.

But for Trotsky, this was not the case. In the 1920s, Trotsky’s comrade and English translator Max Eastman asked for permission to write his biography. Trotsky initially refused, but then relented, stating: “Many people find their way to the *general* through the *personal*. In that sense biographies have their right.”<sup>850</sup> With this lukewarm reply, it is clear that Trotsky does not include himself or other proper

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<sup>849</sup> L.D. Trotskii, *Moia zhizn’: Opyt avtobiografii* (Moscow: Panorama, 1991), 20. Note that this is my own translation here – the English rendering at times differs widely from the original text.

<sup>850</sup> Quoted in Gary Kern, “Trotsky’s Autobiography,” *Russian Review* 36, no. 3 (1977): 297-319.

Marxists among these ‘many people’. Indeed, each moment of self-writing in Trotsky’s oeuvre is accompanied with just this sort of embarrassment – the awkwardness of a young man who finds it necessary to appear, in public, wearing his grandfather’s clothes.

There is clearly a clash here with older genres of narrating the self and history. Trotsky’s Marxism entailed something new about the relationship between the “*general*” and the “*personal*”: between history and the self.

The exact nature of this tension – which troubled his ‘attempt’ at an autobiography; which undermined the subject position within his own histories – comes through most clearly in a striking passage from his *History of the Revolution*.

In Chapter Four – “The Tsar and the Tsarina” – Trotsky analyses the role of the last Romanovs in the history of the revolution. Before diving into the lives of the imperial family, however, an initial paragraph plays devil’s advocate. Should such a chapter even appear in this book?

For what use is there, really, of an account of Nicholas II in the pages of an economic and social analysis of revolutionary change? Aren’t such topics better left to frivolous historicisms and popular psychological biographies? Perhaps. Trotsky announces that histories of revolution *are not* the histories of ‘great men’: “foremost in our field of vision will stand the great, moving forces of history, which are super-personal [*sverkhlichnyi*] in character.” However:

[A]ll these forces operate through people. And monarchy is by its very principle bound up with the personal. This in itself justifies an interest in the personality of that monarch whom the process of social development brought face to face with revolution. Moreover, we hope to show in what follows, partially at least, just where in a personality the strictly personal ends [*gde v lichnosti konchaetsia lichnoe*] – often much sooner than we think – and how

frequently the ‘distinguishing traits’ of a person are merely individual scratches made by a higher law of development.<sup>851</sup>

In these extraordinary lines, we see clearly emblazoned the first characteristic of Trotsky’s theory of the self – as well as the ways in which it differs from earlier conceptions of the subject in revolutionary Russia.

The first thing to mark is that this is a dialectical theory of the individual.

In this dissertation I have argued that the nineteenth century revolutionary intelligentsia was first invented – first found lived and narrative expression – through a particular vision of self and history. It was in a novel assemblage of Hegelian metaphysics and Goethean prose that Russian radicals learned to view the world and the individual as an organic totality, with both acting upon one another in tandem. The political development of the revolutionary self was thus a legible moment in the political development of world history – and concrete activity in the first sphere held the promise of effecting change in the second.

It is crucial here, however, to note that even if the pre-Marxist Russian intelligentsia was founded upon a dialectical unity of self and history, these two terms were not given equal weight. From the self-conscious crafting of a life path by A. Herzen, to the radical social ethics of N.G. Chernyshevskii, as well as the heroic political cultures of the populists: this binary *always tilted towards the individual*. There are many reasons why this may have been the case – a perspective inherited perhaps from the political aesthetics of the novel, or echoes of Schelling and Fichte in

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<sup>851</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 86.

the reception of Hegel – but it is clear that the intelligentsia nearly always approached the unity of self and history through a doorway set in the former.<sup>852</sup>

Like the radical intelligentsia that came before him, the picture given here by Trotsky of the individual personality also occurs at the juncture of the personal and the world-historical (we find no vulgar determinism here: Marx too was a Hegelian, after all).<sup>853</sup> However, there is a crucial innovation in this binary. For Trotsky, the primary terms have been swapped. While ‘many people’ still might find it comfortable to approach the general through the personal, Trotsky clearly gives the former precedent over the latter. If radicals at the start of the twentieth century were debating ‘the role of the individual in history,’ then Trotsky’s Marxist analysis is far more interested in ‘the role of history in the individual.’ In the dialectic of self and world, the personal comes to an end “often much sooner than we think.”

We could also characterize this shift as a tale of two ‘developments’. If an earlier Russian intelligentsia had once valorized the subject-centric term for ‘development’ [*Bildung/obrazovanie*] to understand how individual lives and the embedded world were cultivated in tandem, then it is important to note that Trotsky

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<sup>852</sup> Even the limit cases of the nineteenth-century Russian *Bildungsroman*, where authors attempted to truly show how the human personality is itself an expression of historical forces – Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* being the most famous example – are still only able to work their way to this philosophical and narrative problem through the viewpoint of the subject.

<sup>853</sup> In this same vein, see the discussion of Tsar Alexander III and Louis XVI that occurs just a few chapters later: “We do not at all pretend to deny the significance of the personal in the mechanics of the historic process, nor the significance in the personal of the accidental. We only demand that a historic personality, with all its peculiarities, should not be taken as a bare list of psychological traits, but as a living reality grown out of the definite social conditions and reacting upon them.” See Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 135. Within the larger Marxist tradition, we can see definite echoes of Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* in these lines.

carefully prefers the far more structural word for ‘development’ – *razvitie* – in order to stress the shift in causal power he is attempting to accomplish.<sup>854</sup>

Thus we see the first characteristic of Trotsky’s theory of the self. In his Marxist analysis, the Hegelian dialectic of subject and world that had epistemologically undergirded the early intelligentsia is still present. However – to crib Marx’s rhetorical fondness for upending people and concepts – something has been flipped on its head. The personal is no longer the privileged analytical or narrative entry point into the general – rather, it is best to begin from considerations of the universal, and then to travel from there to the terrain of the particular. A crucial binary had been reweighed.

#### *B. Trotsky’s Theory of the Self: The Historical Formation of Selfhood*

This radical decentering of the human subject in Trotsky’s Marxist analysis not only draped his memoirs in discomfort, expelled the “I” from his history writing, and portrayed Tsar Nicholas II as the “scratches” of history – it also engendered the second characteristic of a distinct understanding of the subject.

By placing the Hegelian dialectic between self and history at a new angle, we see in Trotsky’s writings how Marxism was able to push the boundaries of what was to be taken as ‘historical.’ The second crucial innovation of Trotsky’s theory of the

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<sup>854</sup> We can speak more on this matter. If the Russian term *obrazovanie* was coined at the end of the eighteenth century as a calque for the German *Bildung* (see Chapter Two of the present dissertation), then we can note that the word for large-scale social, economic, and historical development – *razvitie* – appeared in the same period from a very different source. A neologism derived from the French *développer*, the Russian term had earlier been used in a strictly material sense – to unfurl, unwind, untangle (e.g. a rope or braid). Can we not see a peculiar, tactile echo of the dialectic here – the ceaseless braiding, entwining, and unraveling of the threads of history?

subject is that it allows for the historicization of the very concept of the individual itself.

To repeat: the pre-Marxist Russian intelligentsia first arose when a conceptual constellation between Hegel and Goethe had firmly rooted the human subject in the life of history for the very first time. However, as we have seen, this new epistemological terrain possessed a fundamental weakness. Yes, the individual was now historical – seen as acting and acted upon by the greater world. However, by taking the individual as the starting point in this dialectic – as well as the starting point of the self-narratives it produced – the intelligentsia was unable to make the next step: to see not only individual lives, but also the *very concept of the individual*, as historical.

By rewiring the Hegelian dialectic of self and world so that it could be approached through the second term, Russian Marxism effected a Copernican decentering that allowed such an analysis to be undertaken. And this critical imperative to historicize the idea of the subject itself is present – in fragments, in fits and starts – throughout Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*.

For, in his analysis, revolutionary upheaval is not simply witnessed by static subject positions. Rather, a key – and hitherto unrecognized – element in Trotsky's thought is that individuality itself is shaped and molded by historical change.

Selves were dissolved during the Russian Revolution, he argues at one point: “As a steam-hammer converts a sphere and a cube alike into sheet metal, so under the blow of too great and inexorable events resistances are smashed and the boundaries of

‘individuality’ lost.”<sup>855</sup> In another instance, he describes the February Revolution as sparking a wave of self-formation amongst the soldiers: “the fundamental psychological process taking place in the army was the awakening of the personality... [a] volcanic eruption of individualism, which often took anarchistic forms.”<sup>856</sup> In the introduction to the second and third volumes, he firmly calls the Russian Revolution “a series of collective dramas which lifted millions of human beings out of non-existence” – that is, a revolution in the history of the subject.<sup>857</sup>

We could gather many more examples on this point.<sup>858</sup> Despite the fact that these brief asides never congealed into a larger treatise on the subject, I argue that Trotsky should be seen as one of the first Marxists to attempt to historicize the concept of the individual. And this preoccupation, of course, is what stands at the core of the brief digression in “Results and Prospects,” penned in tsarist prisons and discussed earlier in the present chapter. If the nature of the human subject is shaped by historical forces, then it logically follows that revolutionary social change will have transformative effects not only upon people’s lives, but also upon the very category of the individual. Truly, revolutions create chasms in the history of the self.

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<sup>855</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 133.

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid.*, 575.

<sup>858</sup> It is also worth mentioning Trotsky’s defense of Red Terror during the Russian Civil War. As individuals such as Kautsky criticized the Bolsheviks for violating the principle of the ‘sanctity of human life’, Trotsky found nothing but hypocrisy in a bourgeois society that wielded such phrases in its defense yet whose very existence strangled the development of working class individualities: “To make the individual sacred we must destroy the social order which crucifies them.” See Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (London: Verso, 2007), 62-63.

C. *Trotsky's Theory of the Self: Historicizing Representation*

To go further: this approach allows a genealogy not only of human subjectivity, but also of the ways in which it speaks.

If we continue pulling at this thread of a Marxist theory of the self in the works of Trotsky, then we soon find that he possessed a keen interest not only in historicizing human subjectivity, but also in tracing each contingent individuality's forms of representation.

We label this as the third characteristic of Trotsky's understanding of the individual: each new regime of the self, developing in history, also possesses its own regimes of self-narration.

Where do we see this function in Trotsky's work? Unfortunately, not in his prose itself. Even though Trotsky comprehended his revolutionary moment as pulling away from an earlier historical articulation of subjectivity, he displayed far less bravery as a writer of narrative than he did as a political activist, and never tried to give aesthetic expression himself to these changes. Of course, his understanding of a shift in the means of representation does account for the discomfort he displays when dressed in the clothing of the memoirist and the historian. However, in *My Life* he still grudgingly borrows the genre-forms of what he elsewhere calls the "moldy *narodnik* intelligentsia."<sup>859</sup> In his own writings, he never really followed through with the implications of his theory of the subject – Trotsky's most experimental moments are his refusal to use first-person pronouns in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, as

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<sup>859</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 277.

well as a few strange attempts to narrate the mass as an organic agent in his history of 1905.<sup>860</sup>

Indeed, Trotsky was a revolutionary theorist and actor, not a modernist author. And while the representational implications of his Marxist historicization of the individual never did find full expression in his own narrative works, he did wrestle with these ideas in a study of aesthetics.

*Literature and Revolution* is undoubtedly Trotsky's most peculiar text. It is also, alas, one that receives far too little attention today. Upon its appearance in 1924 – and up until the present day – it seems that readers did not know what to make of a theoretical text on literary affairs published by the leader of the Red Army.<sup>861</sup>

However, if we take up this volume within the context of our current study, we find an idiosyncratic, deeply-considered discussion of the place of art in revolutionary change – an almost avant-garde piece, which wrestles with the intersections between representation and human subjectivity.

Indeed, our third characteristic of Trotsky's theory of the self is expressed in the very standpoint from which he approaches modern literature. Trotsky admits on the first page that the reader might be surprised by a discussion of aesthetics and the Russian Revolution – one would think that military defense, food supply, and

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<sup>860</sup> In a description of the October 1905 general strike, the narrative descends to the level of the street and depicts the strike itself as a living, breathing creature. Possessing its own agency, it glanced at the reactionary storefronts and hurled stones through its windows; it “erected barricades, seized gun shops, armed itself and offered a heroic if not victorious resistance.” This rather cryptozoological account of the revolutionary crowd – “a collective entity with numberless eyes, ears and antennae” – should be seen as a moment where Trotsky attempted to place his theories of the individual into narrative practice. See Trotsky, *1905*, 93-94, 161.

<sup>861</sup> Out of the few interesting exceptions, it is worth mentioning Ernest Mandel, *Trotsky as Alternative*, translated by Gus Fagen (London: Verso, 1995), 157-64; and Italo Calvino, “Etica ed estetica di Trotskij,” *Passato e presente* 2 (1959): 970-74.

industrial production in the first worker's state are more pressing topics. And, indeed, all these elements are vital in the construction of a new historical moment – but so too is literature.

For the key premise of *Literature and Revolution* is that radical upheavals do not only change the relations of production – they also change *people*, and the ways in which they tell their stories: “It is silly, absurd, stupid to the highest degree,” Trotsky states in the introduction,

To pretend that art will remain indifferent to the convulsions of our epoch. Events are prepared by people, they are made by people, they fall upon people and change these people. Art, directly or indirectly, affects the lives of the people who make or experience the events. This refers to all art, to the grandest, as well as to the most intimate... A profound break in history, that is, a rearrangement of classes in society, shakes up individuality [*vstriakhivaet individual'nost'*].<sup>862</sup>

We thus see here how Trotsky's theory of the individual was bound up with the question of its modes of representation. Just as historical social formations possess their own forms of subjectivity – their own ‘psychologies,’ to use the language of “Results and Prospects” – so too do they possess their own forms of expression. Art is not a dead thing carried unchanged from one epoch and regime of the self to the next – each moment that ‘shakes up’ individuality also creates the demand for new types of narration, which then dialectically act back upon the individuals that produce and consume them. Thus, in 1924, Trotsky saw the deep need to understand how the daughters and sons of the Russian Revolution would learn to tell themselves: a task only imaginable within his theory of the historically-contingent individual, in possession of a historically-contingent aesthetics. “The Revolution overthrew the

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<sup>862</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), 12; L. Trotsky, *Literatura i revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991), 25.

bourgeoisie, and this decisive fact burst into literature” – and now a new world, a new class, a new historical subject must learn to represent itself.<sup>863</sup>

*D. Trotsky's Theory of the Self: The Death of the Subject*

These considerations in *Literature and Revolution* take us to the final characteristic of Trotsky's theory of the self.

What is the last, crucial element of this Marxist analysis of subjectivity – individuality worked upon by history, developing new forms of self-narration between populists and Bolsheviks, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat?

From the dialectical link between self and narration drawn in the introduction to *Literature and Revolution*, Trotsky goes on to incisively survey the state of poetry and prose in the seventh year of Soviet power. From Bely to Blok, from Futurism to Formalism – the constant question at hand is whether any aesthetic now in existence can truly give representation to a revolutionary new society and its revolutionary new selves.

With an optic such as this, the reader would be forgiven for assuming that Trotsky seeks to consolidate a true proletarian art – to solidify, or perhaps even canonize, a stable literary form for the victorious working class.

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<sup>863</sup> Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, 10. It appears that Trotsky had begun to reflect on the historical nature of consciousness and aesthetics well before the October Revolution. In an essay written apropos of the Viennese Secession in 1913, he meditates on how “the ‘I’ of impressionism was a new individuality, in new circumstances, with a new nervous system, with a new eye...” It is clear that a deeper study of the more idiosyncratic elements in Trotsky's Marxism needs to return to his émigré essays – most of which still await their English translator. See Trotsky, “Secession 1913 g.,” in *Literatura i revoliutsiia*, 390.

Any hypothesis towards this effect is thoroughly discarded by the book's final pages. Trotsky does not wish eternal life for the art of his revolutionary present – in fact, he hopes for its timely death.

For Trotsky argues that at this moment – the first decade of the Soviet experiment – every thing and every person is in a state of transition: a bounded moment of historical flux. Yes, power had been seized: but the movement from socialism to communism (and here he quotes, indicatively, Engels' "leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom") had only just begun.<sup>864</sup> Workers, peasants, soldiers, and revolutionaries had exited the wilderness of tsarist servitude – only to find a great abyss in their path that still needed to be overcome. I was not surprised when I discovered that the word for 'chasm' that Trotsky used all the way back in "Results and Prospects" – *propast'* – is the same that appears in *fin de siècle* Russian translations of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: for in the last lines of *Literature and Revolution* we see the latent Nietzscheanism of Trotsky's theory of the self finally rise to the surface. The individuals who accomplished the revolutions of 1917 – and their regimes of self-narration – are a bridge, and not an end. The very personalities and aesthetics of a future communist society will take radically new forms:

The individual will make it their purpose to master their own feelings, to raise their instincts to the heights of consciousness, make them transparent, to extend the wires of their will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise themselves to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman [*sverkhchelovek*].

...[T]he shell in which the cultural construction and self-education of the Communist person will be enclosed, will develop all the vital elements of contemporary art to the highest point. The individual will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler. Their body will become more harmonized, their movements more rhythmic, their voice more musical. The

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<sup>864</sup> Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, 229.

forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise.<sup>865</sup>

The path towards communism leaves at the wayside not only old economic and social forms, but also obsolete aesthetics and human selves. The revolutionary future is being built for a human community who will inhabit and narrate the world around them in startling, beautiful ways.

And thus, in the Bolshevik eschatology that concludes *Literature and Revolution*, we see boldly proclaimed the final element of a particular Marxist theory of the self. The idea of the human individual that threads its way through Trotsky's work is not only concerned with how regimes of subjectivity and self-narration have arisen in the past – it is also deeply interested in the historical process by which each one passes away and gives birth to the next. This is a Marxist theory of the subject that is not only deeply Nietzschean in the way in which it wields historical genealogy – it also reveals these colors in its will towards a final, utopian transvaluation of the self.<sup>866</sup> Back in 1906, when Trotsky first touched upon historically contingent class 'psychologies' and regimes of individuation separated by 'chasms,' he was really outlining a Marxist 'results and prospects' of the human subject in his Peter and Paul Fortress cell.

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<sup>865</sup> Ibid., 256; Trotsky, *Literatura i revoliutsiia*, 197.

<sup>866</sup> We still lack sustained scholarship regarding the influence of Nietzsche on Russian (and European) Marxism – a state of affairs surely due to the ways these intellectual traditions were drafted into the geopolitical conflicts of the twentieth century. For a broad overview of the reception of Nietzschean thought in Russia, see Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *Nietzsche in Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

With this chapter's archaeological reconstruction of Trotsky's theory of the self firmly in view, we can return to the uncertain space of revolutionary self-narration in the last decades of tsarism, and understand exactly how the rise of Russian Marxism brought about the end of the classic intelligentsia memoir of political imprisonment.

From its initial formulation during the Peter and Paul Fortress incarceration of Bakunin, through the 'High Age of Russian Prison Mythology' of the 1860s, 70s, and 80s, the revolutionary Russian intelligentsia held a highly productive relationship with the act of memoir-writing. The subjective modality of the *Bildungs*-memoir was deeply baked into the political cultures of Russian radicalism. This representational form allowed revolutionaries to locate their lives within the larger arc of a world history: to see their own personal paths as part of a universal development towards a liberated future. To join the ranks of the radical intelligentsia was to write oneself into a particular narrative community. In this way, the life of the revolution was a collection of the individual stories which it composed and which composed it in turn. Possessing a distinct epistemology of self and history, and a rich political aesthetics with which to narrate oneself within it, this 'memoir moment' in Russian radicalism gave weight and meaning to even the darkest aspects of political struggle. As this dissertation has argued, it was through the *Bildungs*-memoir that the space of tsarist imprisonment was first made politically legible: the movement of history was refracted through experiences of individual suffering; the prison cell became a stage for the performance of radical selfhood.

But what happens to this political aesthetics when its underlying epistemology is altered? Russian Marxism's re-balancing of the dialectic between self and history

deeply problematized the terms of the revolutionary prison memoir. Radicals began to no longer approach the historical through the self, but rather approach the self through the historical. If the present was now to be understood primarily through the economic and social forces through which it was structured – most firmly expressed in the human element of the ‘class’ – then the stories individuals told about themselves no longer possessed a privileged position. The tsarist prison cell was no longer the grand theatre of subjectivity for Russia’s radical political cultures.

Furthermore, as we see in the work of Trotsky, this rewiring of the dialectic allowed Marxists to historicize these earlier revolutionary generations *themselves*, to understand historically the passing away of an older form of self-narration. Just as populist politics could be read as an obsolete moment in the history of the Russian revolution – destined to be displaced by Marxist struggle – so too were their experiences of individuality and the ways in which they narrated it destined to wither away. In pursuing a new form of radical activity, Trotsky and his cohort were to develop their own historically-contingent notions of the self and self-writing: which themselves were fated to disappear before the future arrival of truly communist subjectivities.

In this way did Russian Marxism announce that earlier intelligentsia narrative communities had outlived their time. Trotsky’s theory of the self presented a terminal diagnosis to the revolutionary memoir genre. Trotsky, in effect, killed Bakunin and Herzen.

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But let us pause here, at the funeral. Can it be all so simple? Do epistemological-aesthetic formations simply arise from the congealment of their conditions of possibility, grow to maturity, and peacefully pass away once displaced by new regimes of the self? Did the Russian revolutionary memoir humbly pass its mantle to new Marxist configurations of the individual, and then lay itself down in the grave?

Has this chapter not strayed, in fact, into an uncomfortably idealist model of intellectual history?

We must reject any analysis that confines itself to a landscape of abstract idea-spaces, where the complex processes by which cultural forms and regimes of consciousness change over time are cast in a sterile conceptual geometry.

For the movement of ideas through history is incredibly anarchic. Amidst larger sea changes, storms rage. Old vessels are cannibalized in uncanny ways to express new content; obsolete forms persist as ghost ships long after their moment of historical vitality has ended. The new swells in the old, the old drifts on alongside the new.

These complex eddies must be understood for our history of the revolutionary Russian prison memoir. The catalogue in Appendix I shows that even if the genre's animating epistemology began fading in the 1880s – even if a new regime of subjectivity, which we have excavated in the work of L.D. Trotsky, signaled its obsolescence – it still lingered uncomfortably on the stage of history well into the 1930s. How can we account for this 'persistence of form' in intellectual history?<sup>867</sup>

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<sup>867</sup> See the excellent discussion of this problematic in Claudia Verhoeven, "Rethinking Revolution: Radicalism at the End of the Long Nineteenth Century," *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, eds. Warren Breckman and Peter E. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1:470-92.

To address this question, this chapter turns one final time to the figure of Trotsky. Not only did his 1906 “Results and Prospects” announce the end of the Russian autobiographical tradition in the Peter and Paul Fortress cells it had once called home; not only does his thought contain a persistent engagement with the structural transformations that occurred in the ways radicals lived, understood, and wrote the self. Furthermore, I argue that his writings actually provide a crucial insight into the very question of how ideas change over time – an insight that not only allows us to complete this chapter’s picture of the passing away of the Russian prison memoir, but whose recovery, I believe, can be of importance to the contemporary discipline of intellectual history as a whole.

## **VI. Uneven and Combined Development in Intellectual History**

As a Marxist analyst, Trotsky is most famous for two concepts: his theory of Permanent Revolution, and his theory of Uneven and Combined Development.

The first of these, as this chapter has described, was worked out in the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention, and found its original articulation in the essay “Results and Prospects.” Permanent Revolution is both a theory and a strategy: a way to understand how revolutionary situations transcend the borders of nation-states and empires, as well as a call to pursue radical struggle on this global scale.

However, as we have seen, Trotsky was only able to make this argument by challenging the ways in which his contemporaries understood historical progress. The Second International orthodoxy at the time believed in a stadial model of historical

change – whereby ‘less developed’ states would need to pass through the life stages of countries such as France or Germany before they could become ripe for socialism. On the contrary, “Results and Prospects” stressed the composite, transnational nature of development: whereby internal and external logics meet and clash in surprising ways. In the context of the Revolution of 1905, a policy of Permanent (i.e. ‘untimely’ socialist) Revolution could be pursued because the very contradictions between Russia’s “primitiveness and slowness” on the one hand, and its advanced socio-economic forms translated from Western European contexts on the other, had created a situation whereby the industrial proletariat of St. Petersburg could ‘leap’ over the historical stage of bourgeois revolution.<sup>868</sup>

Thus, we see how the theory of Permanent Revolution was founded upon an unorthodox understanding of change over time. This underlying historiography was, in fact, Trotsky’s famous theory of Uneven and Combined Development – first formulated, in embryo, in the tsarist prison cell.

When we look at the ‘development’ of this theory of development through Trotsky’s writings, we can see that it had a long and painful gestation. The architecture of “Results and Prospects” – whereby contemporary theoretical questions were rooted in a *longue durée* understanding of the peculiarities of Russian history – is repeated, compulsively, throughout his oeuvre. In 1906 prison texts, in later reflections on the 1905 Revolution written from exile, in his *History of the Russian Revolution*: Trotsky returns again and again to the question of development, trying to grasp how history is characterized by a comingling of ‘advanced’ and ‘backwards’ structures –

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<sup>868</sup> Trotsky, “Itogi i perspektivy”, 224.

and how these unexpected, transnational mixtures give rise to revolutionary situations.<sup>869</sup>

It was only in 1930, during his exile in Prinkipo, that Trotsky was able to give a name to this process that had obsessed him for decades. Like so many of his previous works, the very first chapter of the *History of the Russian Revolution* is devoted to the peculiarities of Russian history. Yet here, for the first time, he announces a formal title: the law of Uneven and Combined Development.

Like “Results and Prospects,” Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* begins with a consideration of the contradictory Russian past – the encounters between Novgorod and the Mongols, Europe and Asia that had determined its particular historical path. In this text, however, we find a set of general principles describing how internal logic and external necessity leads states of ‘mixed’ development.

“A backward country assimilates the material and intellectual conquests of the advanced countries,” Trotsky explains, “[b]ut this does not mean that it follows them slavishly, reproduces all the stages of their past.”<sup>870</sup> Against a dry, mechanistic historicism – which would track historical change along an empty, homogenous timeline – Trotsky argues for a lumpy, uneven theory of historical change. ‘Backwards’ countries manifest within themselves “a peculiar combination of different stages in the historical process... a planless, complex, combined character.”<sup>871</sup>

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<sup>869</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 224-31; Trotsky, *1905*, 3-11; etc. etc.

<sup>870</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 31.

<sup>871</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

And here, in perhaps the most famous section of the *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky raises this concept of uneven, combined development from the level of an observation to that of a generalizable rule:

The laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism. Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness [*universal'nyi zakon neravnovernosti*] thus derives another law which, for the lack of a better name, we may call the law of *combined development* [*zakon kombinirovannogo razvitiia*] – by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms.<sup>872</sup>

Thus, we see for Trotsky that no historical moment is truly self-identical. Social, cultural, and economic developments occur *unevenly* on a global scale. However, this does not simply mean that a static ordering can still be made of individual nations on a staggered timeline. Historical formulations in all their unevenness refuse to stand still – leaping and running both behind and ahead of their time, *combining* elements of both the old and the new in a play of anachronisms heavy with latent revolutionary tension.

The language of the ‘leap’ here – of which Trotsky was so fond – is not accidental. For understanding the anachronistic, composite nature of each ‘present’ moment is also to identify its major sites of contradiction: uneven, uncanny combinations of forces, structures, and things that so often prove to be the springboard of historical change.<sup>873</sup>

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<sup>872</sup> Ibid., 32. Note that the emphasis is Trotsky’s own.

<sup>873</sup> It is in this context that Trotsky speaks of the “privilege of historical backwardness” – the sense in which the tensions of the present so often come into starkest relief in the most uncomfortable mixtures of old and new, allowing ‘underdeveloped’ countries to reach farsighted conclusions and make great political leaps that would be unthinkable in less stormy historical configurations. Note that Trotsky’s argument for the radical potential of

Thus, to grasp the kernel of the contemporary does not mean to measure a situation with a universally-applicable yardstick of historical progress. Rather, it is to untangle strange mixtures of past and present as they dialectically operate upon one another and give birth to powerful contradictions. Every time is out of joint.

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Trotsky's theory of Uneven and Combined Development, while holding a place in the canon of twentieth century political theory, has traditionally received far less attention than the concept-strategy of Permanent Revolution for which it formed the basis. This lapse is surely due to the fate of Trotsky's life and work in the decades to come. The latter theory of global revolt became the negative twin of Stalinism's 'socialism in one country' and gained new life in the decolonial struggles after the Second World War; while the novel historiography that lay at its core faded from the political stage.<sup>874</sup>

Interestingly enough, it seems that this state of affairs may be on the verge of changing. In the last few decades, Trotsky's theory of Uneven and Combined Development has begun to be rediscovered: taken up as a political concept in the post-Wallerstein field of International Relations, as well as playing a central role in the rise of Critical Geography and its analyses of the spatial logic of capital.<sup>875</sup>

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'backwardness' should be held as quite distinct from any idealization of non-Western lifeworlds (by nineteenth-century Russian Slavophilism and others), which Trotsky disdainfully labels the "messianism of backwardness". See *ibid.*, 33. While the current section will develop this point further, already we can see a critique of a particular vein of post-colonial scholarship – one which moves from a sophisticated, welcome dismantling of Marxism's epistemological eurocentricism to an unfortunate, naïve embrace of Heideggerian 'authenticity.' See, for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>874</sup> For an overview of this relative neglect, see Neil Davidson, "From Uneven to Combined Development," in *100 Years of Permanent Revolution*, 10-26.

<sup>875</sup> The central text in Trotsky's reemergence in International Relations is Justin Rosenberg, "Isaac Deutscher and the Lost History of International Relations," *New Left Review* 1/215

These newly emergent trends offer much, but do not exhaust the critical potential that Trotsky's theory holds for the humanities and the social sciences today. In particular, I believe that the present dissertation asks us to consider its possible value in the history of ideas. That is: can we speak of Uneven and Combined Development in intellectual history?

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At first glance, Trotsky's original theory of development might seem most striking as an anti-historicist model of change over time – one of several sophisticated attempts from the first decades of the twentieth century to achieve a historical materialism that moves beyond linear accounts of progress. At its heart, the theory of Uneven and Combined Development is an explicit criticism of “pseudo-Marxism, which confines itself to historical mechanisms, formal analogies, converting historic epochs into a logical succession of inflexible social categories.” Trotsky seeks to banish the “pedantic schematization of the course of development; a chopping up of the living and combined process into dead stages.”<sup>876</sup> This, in itself, is worth recognizing today – as the turn from Second Internationalist visions of normative development to more

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(1996): 1-15; one can also consult Alexander Anievas and Kamran Matin, eds., *Historical Sociology and World History: Uneven and Combined Development over the Longue Durée* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016). In critical spatial theory, the crucial starting point is the classic Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1984).

<sup>876</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1056. Static timelines are foreign to Trotsky's thought: “The historical dialectic knows neither naked backwardness nor chemically pure progressiveness.” Each moment must be grasped in its combined, uneven constellation of the new and the old. See *Ibid.*, 1439.

compelling accounts of historical heterogeneity is usually presented as an innovation of Western Marxism alone.<sup>877</sup>

However, there is even more at play here. Trotsky's Uneven and Combined Development is many things – an anti-historicism, yes, but also a theory of anachronism, a philosophy of time, a particular articulation of the historical-materialist dialectic. It is through each of these valences that this concept seems to promise much to the study of ideas.

Trotsky himself was no vulgar materialist. As we have seen, his work holds a dynamic dialectical edge that resists any reductive accounts of culture, representation, or subjectivity. Indeed – flashes of a history of ideas, of sorts, appear in his elaboration of Uneven and Combined Development. “A backward country,” we learn in his *History of the Revolution*, “assimilates the material and intellectual conquests of the advanced countries.”<sup>878</sup> In this sense, the uneven development of state formations as they struggle within the global totality of capitalism leads to strange, ‘combined’ clusters of concepts: the Russian empire “imported ideas as well as machines.”<sup>879</sup>

It appears, in fact, that Trotsky did at one point craft a study in which central place was given to the combined and uneven development of concepts through history. Unfortunately, this work – an early analysis of Freemasonry, begun during his first period of imprisonment in Odessa – was lost during the upheaval of his revolutionary

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<sup>877</sup> For example: the two pivotal studies that announced ‘Western Marxism’ as a distinct object of theoretical interest for the New Left – Martin Jay’s *The Dialectical Imagination* and Perry Anderson’s *Considerations on Western Marxism* – contain between them only two brief, superficial references to Trotsky.

<sup>878</sup> Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, 31.

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

career.<sup>880</sup> The only surviving element of this thousand-page study is a quick synopsis given in his memoirs. Even from this short gloss, we can firmly conclude that Trotsky envisioned the process of Uneven and Combined Development as functioning dialectically not solely through socio-economic structures, but also through culture and ideas:

Where had this strange movement [freemasonry] come from? I asked myself. How would Marxism explain it?...

Why had the merchants, artists, bankers, officials, and lawyers, from the first quarter of the seventeenth century on, begun to call themselves masons and tried to recreate the ritual of the mediaeval guilds? What was all this strange masquerade about? Gradually the picture grew clearer. The old guild was more than an organization of production; it regulated the ethics and mode of life [*moral'no-bytovoï*] of its members as well... The break-up of the guild system brought a moral crisis in a society that had barely emerged from medievalism. The new morality was taking shape much more slowly than the old was being cut down. Hence, the attempt, so common in history, to preserve a form of moral discipline when its social foundations, which in this instance were those of the industrial guilds, had long since been undermined by the processes of history...

Although in our day of cheap and ready-made clothing hardly anybody is still wearing his grandfather's riding coat, in the world of ideas the riding coat and the crinoline are still in fashion. The inventory of ideas is handed down from generation to generation, despite the fact that grandmother's pillows and blankets have given them a sour smell. Even those who are obliged to change the substance of their opinions force them into old forms...<sup>881</sup>

Thus, we see how Trotsky clearly included intellectual history within the framework of Uneven and Combined Development. This was not an innovation he limited to social or economic categories – life worlds, moral systems, and concepts themselves develop in a halting, staggered fashion. Old ideas persist in their obsolescence; new contents debut in outmoded clothes; the concepts through which a present moment articulates itself are often in varying states of decomposition.

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<sup>880</sup> “To me, this was a most tragic loss.” See Trotsky, *My Life*, 193-94, 271.

<sup>881</sup> Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, 127-28. Note that the above citations are my own translations from the original Russian, and differ in key ways from Eastman's (looser) translation.

There is much here, indeed, that reminds us of the historical materialism of the Frankfurt School. This group of European philosophers from the 1920s and 30s sought to revitalize Marxism through – among other things – a reconsideration of the relationship between ideas and structure, between social consciousness and its material basis. I believe it is time to also include L.D. Trotsky among the individuals of this period who challenged linear notions of history, flat theories of class-consciousness, and vulgar base-superstructure models. When we consider the concept of Uneven and Combined Development as it unspools on the plane of ideas, strong lines of affinity appear with thinkers such as, in particular, Walter Benjamin. For what was Benjamin’s characterization of modernity – a period “incapable of responding to new technological possibilities with a new social order” – if not a diagnosis of a fatal *unevenness* at the heart of the nineteenth century?<sup>882</sup> And what was his *Arcades Project* – with its travels through a modern world whose phantasmagoric nature revealed itself in the anachronistic bric-a-brac of department store windows and collectors’ shelves, bourgeois interiors and revolutionary barricades – if not a vast, unfinished catalogue of the *combinatory* intellectual-material history of the bourgeois century, taken in this Trotskyist sense?<sup>883</sup>

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<sup>882</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 26. Crucial here as well is a brief line from Benjamin’s “Exposé of 1935”: “Corresponding to the form of the new means of production, which in the beginning is still ruled by the form of the old (Marx), are images in the collective consciousness in which the new is permeated by the old.” See *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>883</sup> An intellectual history of the peculiar relationship between the thought of L.D. Trotsky and Walter Benjamin demands much more space than we possess here. However, we do know that Benjamin avidly read both *My Life* and *History of the Russian Revolution*. Further affinities are briefly mentioned in Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin: Or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (Verso: London, 2009), 173-79. We can also note that, curiously enough, Benjamin’s rise in theoretical prominence over the past several decades has in many instances been spearheaded by Trotskyists (including Daniel Bensaïd, Michael Löwy, and Enzo Traverso).

We raise this point not only to highlight a missed encounter in present-day Marxist theory, but also to stress one aspect of Trotsky's relevance to contemporary intellectual history. For the Frankfurt School is in the midst of a resurgence in the historiography of ideas, especially due to its ability to help work through some of the more intractable problems in the discipline. Namely: intellectual history is founded upon the study of 'situated ideas' – interrelated clusters of texts and contexts – yet post-Skinnerian scholarship possesses no consensus on the exact relationship between these two terms. Too-close a fixation on the novelty of conceptual forms in the moment of their appearance risks neglecting histories of continuity; while studies overly preoccupied with the long-term material horizons and social blocs in which ideas are embedded are themselves in danger of missing the historical play of chance, contingency, and rupture. The thought of Western Marxists such as Benjamin and Adorno – with their sensitivity to the lags and the leaps of a modernity whose socio-material basis and epistemological terrain are haunted by ghosts, beasts, and ruins<sup>884</sup> – has been recently called upon to solve this problem of what Peter E. Gordon calls “a stark choice between social immanence and intellectual transcendence.”<sup>885</sup> But does not the thought of Trotsky also cut through this ‘Gordon’s knot’?

For bringing the theory of Uneven and Combined Development into intellectual history allows us to understand socio-material blocs, epistemological terrains, and the concepts they cultivate not as a series of stages arranged in a flat

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<sup>884</sup> In discussions of the Marxist bestiary, it is worth mentioning that Benjamin's famous image of history's tiger finds its echoes in Trotsky, who speaks of the Russian Revolution as a “lion's leap [*l'vinyi skachok*]” into the future. See Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1356.

<sup>885</sup> See Peter E. Gordon, “Contextualism and Criticism in the History of Ideas,” in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, eds. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 50.

homogeneity – but rather a mixed, dynamic flow. Old forms persist and comingle with new intelligibilities; novel constellations flare up and burn away in *Ursprung* moments, presaging the arrival of new conceptual horizons; obsolete ideas are re-invested with new significance and traditions are ‘invented’ in the past-ward gaze. Here, text and context are never static – both terms simultaneously cling to, outgrow, repurpose the old and the new. Trotsky gives us a fragmented, uncanny vision of intellectual history – a history that is always broken, untimely, anachronistic, a hive of contradictions, an uneven and combined landscape.

This is a picture of change over time that is strange, complex, and eminently *dialectical* – and on several stages, at that. Social, economic, and material formations (the ‘base’) develop in combined and uneven ways – the forces of production outgrow the social forms that once nurtured them; slow-downs and short circuits separate individual classes from one another, not to speak of the jagged edges between particular socio-material blocs within the global totality of capitalism. Ideas, aesthetics, and politics (what was once called ‘superstructure’) also possess their own relative ‘contemporaneity’ as they relate to each other in fits and starts across temporal gaps, shedding sparks as they enter into uneven dialogues. And, finally, both the sphere of text and the sphere of context – each possessing an internal combined-unevenness in their products and in their logic – enter into a host of constitutive dialectical relationships *between themselves*, breeding further amalgamations and contradictions.

Thus does Trotsky’s theory of Uneven and Combined Development provide a more unsettled, fragmented, and dialectical relationship between text and context for

post-Cambridge School intellectual histories – in a vein quite reminiscent of the thought of Walter Benjamin.

But the value of this theory does not end here, as a sort of Russian Marxist proxy for the Frankfurt School. We can stress, too, its well-developed materialist conception of history. This fundamental integration of the ideational and the material accords well with the recent projects of scholars such as Andrew Sartori, who call on us to grasp “the historical constitution of the conditions of possibility for the power of specific discursive repertoires in specific historical contexts.”<sup>886</sup> The ‘context’ of the dialectic of text and context cannot be seen as just more text, just more ideas – class structure and socioeconomic formations always underlie what is thinkable, what is intelligible.

Also important is that this is a theory with a fundamentally trans-national dimension. If we strip away the slightly-normative language of ‘backwardness [*otstalost’*]’ from Trotsky’s original articulation, we can see in combined unevenness a picture of the global diffusion of concepts that resists one-way models of (European) production and (non-European) reception, and which instead can account for the ways in which traveling ideas find novel legibilities in novel contexts, where they grow out of and themselves act upon particular socio-conceptual blocs and therein breed new contradictions and new political possibilities.<sup>887</sup>

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<sup>886</sup> Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 16.

<sup>887</sup> This could speak to several important argument in both Critical Geography and Postcolonial Studies. In the former, it accords with Massey’s account of every emplacement as a congealed “simultaneity of stories-so-far” – an idea that dispels all reified binaries of rooted, local ‘place’ and abstract, international ‘space.’ In the latter, Trotsky seems to give support to accounts of global alterity that stress the hybrid (i.e. ‘combined’) polyphony of postcolonial identities, cultures, and timescapes. In this way, Trotsky appears to be one of the figures capable of amending the regrettable ‘missed encounter’ between Western, Soviet, and

However – to further explore the uses of this concept – perhaps we should not even be so quick to discard the rhetoric of ‘backwardness.’ For one of the peculiarities of Uneven and Combined Development is that it is both a product of, and a way of understanding, a modern moment in which ‘anachronism’ could first be thought as a characteristic of the historical process. In this sense, what is Trotsky’s understanding of the uneven and the combined if not another way of grasping Reinhart Koselleck’s explication of the theory of the Contemporaneity of the Noncontemporaneous [*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*] – the idea that modernity’s time-consciousness possesses a peculiarly mixed tempo, registering in both our socio-political forms and reigning concepts?<sup>888</sup> In this way, welcoming Trotsky into the intellectual-historiographical workshop promises to add further sensitivity in the discipline to the ways in which the history of ideas is also a history of time: a way to grasp and situate

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Decolonial Marxisms in the twentieth century – or indeed, even complicate some elements of this traditional historiographical narrative of a gap between the three. See the crucial intervention of Doreen Massey, *For Space*; as well as the account of postcolonial nonsynchronicity (utilizing, but moving beyond, the work of Jameson) in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). My thanks to Enzo Traverso for guiding me towards this latter line of inquiry.

<sup>888</sup> This term originally derives from the work of Ernst Bloch, whose calls in the 1930s for a sensitivity to ‘nonsynchronicity’ and a ‘polyphonous dialectics’ surely evoke the earlier work of Trotsky (although more work needs to be done in order to determine whether any concrete filiation was present here). See Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), esp. 37-186. My sincerest thanks to Enzo Traverso for pointing out this genealogy. For the appearance of this term in Koselleck’s theory of historical temporality, see Reinhart Koselleck, “History, Histories, and Formal Time Structures”, and “‘Neuzeit’: Remarks on the Semantics of Modern Concepts of Movement,” in *Futures Past: The Semantics of Historical Time*, 93-104 and 222-54. Bringing Koselleck into the picture also allows us to venture a hypothesis regarding the ‘timeliness’ of Trotsky’s theory of Uneven and Combined Development itself: namely, is this a universally-applicable ‘law,’ or itself a historically contingent mechanism? Following Koselleck, I am inclined to favor the latter. Ideas and epistemological models could only begin to clash temporally – could only begin to be registered as relatively ‘modern’ or ‘archaic’ – in a present that is understood to be in a state of unified yet fragmented movement. Intellectual history only truly became a landscape of the combined and the uneven with the global economic consolidation of capitalism and the political rupture of the French Revolution. Of course, I may simply favor this position due to the chronological chauvinism that comes with being a modern historian.

how, “like the historical circumstances they are to register, concepts themselves have an internal temporal structure.”<sup>889</sup>

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But – let us not move too far afield. To fully excavate the potential of Trotsky’s theory of Uneven and Combined Development for modern scholarship demands more space than the present dissertation allows. It is sufficient to say that this concept promises much to the discipline of intellectual history, particularly in the ways in which it accords with – and builds upon – Frankfurt School approaches to text and context in the historical process. In the future, further attention will need to be paid to several other avenues of elaboration. Possibly noteworthy is the relationship between this concept of Trotsky’s and the thought of Antonio Gramsci.<sup>890</sup> And lurking beneath all

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<sup>889</sup> Koselleck, “‘Neuzeit,’” 251. It is important to note here that, despite their productive cross-pollination, a crucial political difference exists between Trotsky’s Uneven and Combined Development and Koselleck’s Contemporaneity of the Noncontemporaneous. For the latter student of Carl Schmitt, the temporally heterogenous nature of the present was part of a larger pendulum-motion of contemporary political existence – a ceaseless swing between revolution and reaction – that he sought to condemn. For Trotsky, as we have seen, nothing could be further from the case: combined unevenness acts as a dialectical motor on the path to emancipation, both in socio-economic realms and (I argue) the landscape of ideas. Gazing at this difference can perhaps reveal a particular blind spot in modern scholarship. For what would it mean for contemporary intellectual history to recover the will to ascribe ‘backwardness’ and ‘obsolescence’ within the dialectical movement of texts and contexts, to once more sort categories and concepts into dustbins? Such an activity could only be pursued if we once more claimed a gaze towards the future – a future of emancipation, of abolitionism – that would allow us to pass definitive judgment on the present. Recovering the future might be one of the first steps in helping our discipline regain a role in political struggle. Let us reject Koselleck’s reactionary politics here: the true ‘evil endlessness’ of our present moment lies in the erasure of any horizons of expectation under a late capitalism whose fondest wish is to end history. A call for more rigorous futurity in the discipline is thus a call for a more open politics in our histories of ideas. And here, Trotsky may be able to rescue Benjamin from the recent trend in intellectual history – symptomatic of our neoliberal temporal horizons – that espouses a Western ‘Marxianism’ without Marx.

<sup>890</sup> For was not Gramsci – that pioneer of another type of idiosyncratic Marxism sensitive to the force of culture in history, conceived in his own prison cell – also fascinated with lags and leaps? Between state and civil society, between wars of maneuver and wars of position, between Italy’s industrialized North and ‘underdeveloped’ South?

of this is the understudied question of Trotsky's readings of psychoanalysis. For was not one of Freud's innovations a certain theory of combined unevenness in human consciousness, best expressed in his famous analogy with the city of Rome?: "an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one."<sup>891</sup>

For now, we can simply state that an approach to intellectual history that integrates the sensibility of Trotsky's Uneven and Combined Development has animated many of the stages of the present dissertation. For what was the imperial existence of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the second half of the nineteenth century (Chapter One) if not an attempt by the tsarist autocracy to cloak an uncertain present in archaic forms – to reground a faltering imperial legitimacy in the invented traditions of grandiose royal funerals, so as to decelerate the political temporality of a moment in flux? Do we not also see a peculiar mixture of the new and the old in Bakunin's originary prison *Bildungs*-memoir (Chapter Two), with a novel epistemological terrain of self and history first breaking out through a traditional confessional vehicle? And can we not locate combined unevenness in the way in which this political-aesthetic genre – arriving out of the more 'advanced' intellectual labors of Germany – took on its own shape and significance in the Russian Empire's material-epistemological landscape? And finally, what better way to describe the peculiar construction of an

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<sup>891</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1962), 17. We can note here that Trotsky was one of the few Bolsheviks to not only have read Freud, but also to have expressed a deep intellectual interest in his thought. See, for example, L.D. Trotsky, *Trotsky's Notebooks, 1933-1935: Writings on Lenin, Dialectics, and Evolutionism*, trans. and ed. Philip Pomper (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), esp. 65-73.

‘International Bastille’ (Chapter Seven) if not as a traveling idea, mediated – sometimes consciously – through particular conceptions of ‘backwardness’ in an uneven and combined stage of global political discourse?

Even more significant for the present chapter, however, is the way in which Trotsky’s theory of Uneven and Combined Development helps us understand the particular moment in revolutionary Russian intellectual history of which he himself was a part.

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Through the second half of the nineteenth century, the Russian intelligentsia learned to narrate the revolutionary process in the model of the prose memoir – tales of political development occurring at the juncture of the personal and the world-historical. In this landscape, Marxism appeared at the end of the nineteenth century not only as a new formulation of revolutionary strategy or radical community – it also possessed a new epistemology, whose decentering of the dialectic between the individual and history eroded earlier populist regimes of self-narration. This accounts for the decline of the memoir genre after 1884: its decreasing ability to find universal meaning in the personal experience of political imprisonment.

The texts of Trotsky should be viewed as both products of and sustained reflections upon this rupture. This was a break with roots as deep as Bolshevism itself, linked to the changing conditions of conceptual possibility of this moment’s socio-material circumstances. For the decentering of the human self in the spheres of political strategy and political aesthetics went hand-in-hand with the erosion of the individual in the functioning of the global economy. How small one’s personal subject

position had begun to appear within the rise of mass production and mass consumption, mass media and mass politics: that great socio-culturo-material shift that Kotkin has termed “The Age of the Mass.”<sup>892</sup>

In this way, we should identify a secret kinship between Bolshevism and literary modernism. Both movements, in their own ways, responded to the declining surety of the bourgeois self. The European avant-garde grappled with the dissolution of the individual in an aesthetic sphere sprung from the same soil as Trotsky’s Marxist hermeneutics. We can see the broken memoirs of Mandelstam and Shklovsky from this period – ruined attempts to narrate history through a self that has fallen from epistemological grace – as registering the same shift in literary realms that Trotsky explored in the spheres of political and historical analysis. “Everything melts,” lamented Mandelstam in these years, as the old intelligentsia memoir-form dissolved in his hands: “Even Goethe melts.”<sup>893</sup>

Thus did a period of great developmental shifts – in production, in the social, in aesthetics, in the self – bring about an end to the *Bildung*-subjectivity of the nineteenth century. However, this transition must be understood as eminently combined and uneven. The prose of the nineteenth century did not simply vanish at the moment when its political, material, and epistemological vitality was sapped. This older form of self-narration persisted for decades in its obsolescence.

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<sup>892</sup> Stephen Kotkin, “Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 1 (2001): 111-64. What we are describing here is the same corrosive effect of modernity classically analyzed in works such as Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); and Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

<sup>893</sup> Osip Mandelstam, “The Egyptian Stamp,” in *The Noise of Time: Selected Prose*, trans. Clarence Brown (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 156.

By bringing the theory of Uneven and Combined Development into the sphere of ideas, the present chapter has attempted to put a name on this element of the historical process. The last decades of tsarism hosted a bewildering amalgamation of old and new forms, which coexisted and bred contradictions in the production process, in social formations, in the very ways in which individuals told the stories of themselves in the world. Aesthetic traditions have a habit of enduring in the present long after the conditions that once elevated them no longer exist: and from the 1880s to the Revolution of 1917, the Russian revolutionary memoir form lingered on the stage of history.

We can note that this dialectic of combined unevenness in the sphere of Russian revolutionary ideas cannot be reductively mapped onto political lines. Even if in one sense the major epistemological rupture in radical Russian cultures during this period was between the populists and the Marxists, the old intelligentsia memoir genre continued to haunt both. SRs and old *Narodovoltsy* continued to pen their lives as *Bildungs*-tales of political development long into the twentieth century; Marxists, even while recognizing the problematic nature of this political aesthetics, still fell back into its comfortable mold. We even see the particular, combinatory, contradictory event of Trotsky himself penning a memoir while explicitly recognizing its inadequacy. A truly unambiguous aesthetics – an end to combination and unevenness in the realms not only of global production and social class, but also of human narrative and human consciousness – would have to wait until the crossing of the ‘chasm’ and the arrival of Communism. For now, revolutionaries found themselves in the type of contradictory shatterland described so well by Gramsci during his own imprisonment a few decades

later: a time when “the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”<sup>894</sup>

And as we evidence in Appendix I, this ‘morbid’ state of an infant revolutionary present clothed in dead stories continued into Soviet Russia. Even as new developments in the plane of representation – radical formalism, suprematist painting, and explosive innovations in cinematic technique – attempted to give aesthetic reflection to the socio-material-psychological *Jetztzeit* of the 1920s and 30s, individuals continued to read memoirs and *Bildungsromane*. Even as a Soviet political formation rose with the same tide that had eroded an earlier tradition of revolutionary autobiographics, this regime failed to truly cement its own compelling forms of subjectivity and self-narration – neither those of a realized communist future, nor even those proper to a moment of socialist transition.<sup>895</sup> New types of ‘Soviet Subjectivity’ did appear, but in a garden choked with dead forms that could not be cleared.<sup>896</sup> Thus

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<sup>894</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 276.

<sup>895</sup> Thus, even though the recent historiographical wave of ‘Soviet Subjectivity Studies’ has contributed much to our intellectual histories of this period – we are especially indebted to the ways in which it has decolonized the discipline of the old sureties of the naturalized liberal subject – this turn has had difficulty in confronting the historical genealogy and ‘durability’ (or lack thereof) of new Bolshevik regimes of the self.

<sup>896</sup> In this way, the modern political prison did not forever relinquish its earlier narrative forms. With the rise of Stalinist incarceration in the 1930s, imprisoned Soviet citizens turned back to the prison memoir genre of the tsarist period in order to give voice to their ordeals. I believe that this dissertation’s nineteenth-century history of prison writing – and the combined unevenness of ideas and subjectivities described in the present chapter – must be taken into account in the study of Gulag literatures. And not only for these direct experiences of Stalinist incarceration, but furthermore in the self-representational practices of Soviet history as a whole. In his magisterial *House of Government*, Yuri Slezkine makes a brief yet striking reference to the peculiar persistence of nineteenth-century novels in the reading rooms and diaries of the Stalinist period. At stake is a strange claim – that the Soviet project failed, in some ways, because the children of the old Bolsheviks continued to read Tolstoy and Goethe. The thought of Trotsky allows us to approach this same point from a more rigorous angle: I would argue that the inability of the Bolsheviks to find expressive narrative form for the changing epistemological terrain of the twentieth century led to their attempts at a new

was real existing socialism unable to build a new center of narrative gravity in the phantasmagoria of the twentieth century, let alone succeed in forever dispelling the ghost-forms and ghoulish remnants that haunt our modern dreamworld of uneven, combined ideas.

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It may seem, at this juncture, that we have wandered far from the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the last years of the tsarist autocracy.

And we have.

But so too did the Russian revolutionary political cultures of this period.

Tsarism's spaces of political imprisonment served as privileged sites of subjectivity-in-revolt for much of the latter half of the nineteenth century. One of the primary goals of the present chapter is to try and grasp exactly why and how this changed: what happened to the rich tradition of Russian political aesthetics whereby both the self and history gained such legibility in the cells of the Romanov regime?

As we have seen, a seismic epistemological shift threw into question this earlier genre of self-narration: both in its modes of 'self,' and in its modes of 'narration.' With this unsettling – which we have approached through the thought of

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aesthetics being strangled by the creeping remnants of nineteenth-century self-narratives. This ideational asphyxiation had deleterious effects within this moment's larger dialectic of text and context – new socialist ways of living the world were unable to find reinforcement from new socialist ways of narrating the world. Can we not see the result of this persistent unevenness after Stalin as well? For what was the rise of 'dissident' subjectivities in the postwar Soviet Union if not the resurrection of older subject-centric epistemologies and political aesthetics (now no longer animated by the utopian commitments of the nineteenth-century radical intelligentsia, but rather by a 'post-political' metaphysics of human rights)? See Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government*. Also pertinent to this speculative footnote are Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); and Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

L.D. Trotsky and his own particular incarceration – the Peter and Paul Fortress could no longer function as a privileged chronotope of radical political cultures. This did not mean that older carceral traditions were simply displaced by new theories of the political subject – rather, the new and the old coexisted in an uneven and combined conceptual landscape as Russia lurched towards revolution.

Thus, in the waning years of tsardom, even as repressive state incarceration continued in force, the prison cell was no longer a primary platform from which to narrate the revolution. The Peter and Paul Fortress played a series of extraordinary roles in the revolutionary events of 1917, but not as a space of narration: rather as a stage of revolutionary practice. Let us turn now to recount the space of the Fortress in the Russian Revolution, keeping in mind that this was a period when carceral discourses had reached a low tide, lapping only feebly (indeed, ‘unevenly’) at the citadel’s walls.

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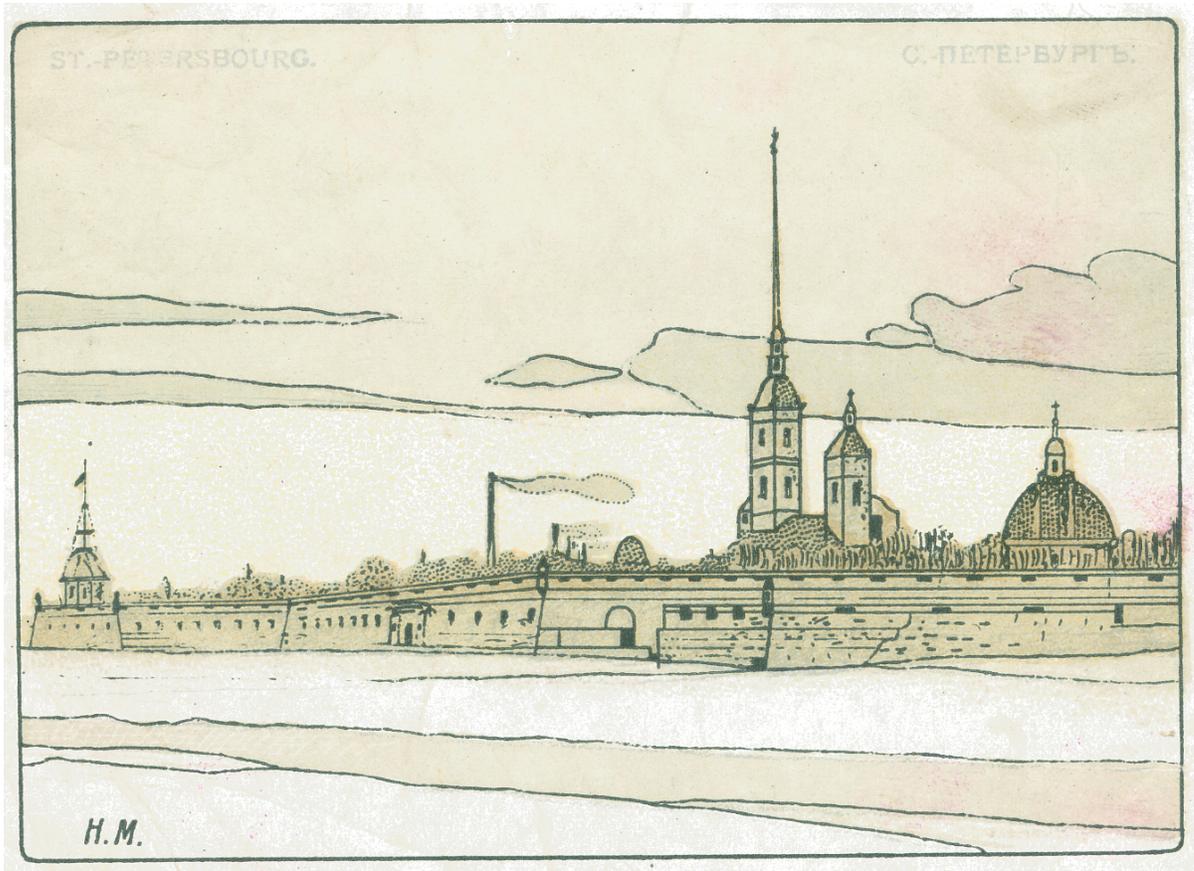


Figure 26: A *fin de siècle* postcard image of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the Art Nouveau style [GMPIR f. V-6698].

## VII. The Peter and Paul Fortress in 1917

While an enormous wealth of texts exists on the subject, there is a curious poverty to the language we use when we speak about revolution.

Nearly a century ago, Trotsky remarked that this field was already filled with “worn-out metaphors”: particularly, the compulsive repetition of “natural-historical analogies” – “‘volcanic eruption,’ ‘birth of a new society,’ ‘boiling point’...” and so on.<sup>897</sup>

The same lexical paucity is true today. Perhaps this is due to an epistemological aporia. Maybe language – which is always-already grounded in history – is structurally unable to grasp a break in history itself, just as human rhetoric has always collapsed in its attempts to approach the sacred.<sup>898</sup>

I lack the talent to attempt to speak historical change in a new key. Thus, as this final section turns to the Russian Revolution, I too will resort to a language derived from the natural sciences. However, let us at least be careful with the sorts of conceptual geology we employ.

As we shall see, the breaks that occurred in February and October of 1917 – and the ways in which they reflect in the history of the Peter and Paul Fortress – are ill-served by dramatic images of earthquakes, volcanoes or other environmental

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<sup>897</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1314. Note that I have modified this translation based upon the original Russian. Alongside these reflections we can place a remark that Trotsky makes elsewhere in the same volume: “At times it seems as though it was easier to capture Petrograd in the autumn of 1917 than to recount the process.” See *ibid.*, 1254.

<sup>898</sup> This reflection on the nature of ineffability is wholly indebted to conversations with Valeria Dani, as well as readings of her brilliant “*Anadiplosis/Climax: Ascensions and Downfalls in Italian Poetry*,” PhD diss., (Cornell University, 2019).

disasters. Rather, we will move through these events with a far less grandiose (but just as efficient) rhetorical companion: the old mole of history.<sup>899</sup>

For the Romanov regime was not destroyed in an eruption of fire and blood. Rather, due to its historical contradictions and the painstaking work of generations of radical actors, its strength was slowly sapped. This is not a story of cataclysmic explosions, but of subterranean shifts. There had been a patient erosion of the regime's political, cultural, and epistemological legitimacy that – as the preceding chapters of the present dissertation have argued – took place with special force in tsarism's most notorious political prison.

Thus did the imperial state fall so easily – its roots had been gnawed away.

Yet this does not mean that the revolutions occurred without difficulties. Radicals did not awake on the morning after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II with an open horizon of historical possibility, ready to host a future of whatever type they chose. Rather, in the events of 1917 we see a tumultuous field of opposed actors, interests, and ideas: crowded with competing images of the new world amidst the ruined forms of the old. In this combined and uneven landscape, post-autocratic Russian society was not designed with the steady grip of a demiurgic draftsman, but

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<sup>899</sup> Hegel first uses the figure of the Old Mole in the conclusion to his lectures on the history of philosophy to describe the movement of the dialectic, by which “Spirit often seems to have forgotten and lost itself, but inwardly opposed to itself, it is inwardly working ever forward... until grown strong in itself it bursts asunder the crust of the earth which divided it from the sun.” This image was then taken up by Marx to explicitly refer to the revolutionary process in his *Eighteenth Brumaire*, and later used to great effect by Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1955), 3: 547; Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*; Rosa Luxemburg, “The Old Mole,” *Spartacus* no. 5 (1917); etc. etc.

was rather cobbled together from what was at hand: as historical conditions, individual wills, and political exigencies allowed.

One of these old shapes was the Peter and Paul Fortress. Its granite walls had survived the regime that had once carved out a capital around it. Now standing at the center of Red Petrograd, in the chaotic days of 1917 the citadel was made to house a host of improvisatory functions: a revolutionary prison, a military headquarters, and above all else a reflection of the rapid changes that occurred in Russia's radical political cultures in this year of three regimes.

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The old mole was long busy in the lands of the Russian Empire. At the end of February 1917, food riots in the war-weary capital spun into a military revolt. Tsar Nicholas II abdicated; a Provisional Government was formed. The thin crust of the old regime broke with far less resistance than anyone had anticipated. For most, the permanence of the Romanov regime had been implicitly assumed – yet, at the same time, its collapse took no one by surprise. To shamelessly borrow a phrase first employed for a very different moment of historical change: the Russian autocracy was forever, until it was no more.<sup>900</sup>

A hollow form without content, the old regime put up very little resistance to its euthanasia. While not 'bloodless' (as some historiographical currents will argue), this lack of concentrated opposition meant that the February Revolution did not possess the striking theatrical moments – the grand revolutionary set pieces – that,

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<sup>900</sup> See Alexey Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until It Was No More*.

since the French Revolution, had become part of the symbolic repertoire of European uprisings.

However, when great desires arise and are not met by historical circumstances, sometimes these circumstances must be invented. Even with the clear dissolution of the Romanov regime, the first weeks after the February Revolution saw a host of actions against the symbolic sites of the dead empire: dictated not by necessity, but perhaps by a need to spatially, materially, and existentially concretize the present's break with the past: to perform revolution.<sup>901</sup>

And some of the chief stages for these discursive enactments were the former disciplinary sites of the tsarist state. In the last days of February and first days of March, carceral spaces were captured and destroyed in major towns throughout the Russian Empire. Thus did the inmates of Shlissel'burg Fortress – released by a general amnesty for political prisoners – take the added step of destroying this citadel's prison blocks. And thus did an angry crowd gather outside the Peter and Paul Fortress on February 27, 1917.<sup>902</sup> While the citadel's garrison tried to convince the masses that its walls held only a few military detainees, there was a brief moment when it seemed the crowd was ready to raze the structure: hostilities only ended when a red flag was raised over the Fortress bastions.<sup>903</sup>

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<sup>901</sup> For recent literature on the role of theatre and symbols in the Russian Revolution See Frederick Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>902</sup> Note that in this period the Julian calendar was still in use; these dates are thus thirteen days behind the Gregorian. This would only be changed with the Bolshevik calendar reform of February 1918.

<sup>903</sup> These descriptions of the symbolic role of tsarism's prison spaces in the February Days are taken from Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 55-57.

Thus, as tsarism collapsed, the Peter and Paul Fortress was briefly challenged but ultimately remained in relative tranquility at the center of Petrograd. From 1703 to 1917, this bulwark of empire had never once fired a single shot in defense of the autocracy. The heart of the regime gave out, suddenly: there was no need to storm the ‘Russian Bastille.’ The Fortress lay like a granite shell in the midst of the Neva’s flow – silent and deactivated in the absence of the political formation that had once imprisoned its enemies and performed its own sacredness within these walls.

And yet – the citadel did not remain empty for long. The old regime dissolved, and a new regime quickly attempted to bring form to the void. Whether out of a deep sense (conscious or latent) of poetic justice, or out of the concrete demands of a moment of change and improvisation, the Peter and Paul Fortress soon became a site of incarceration for arrested functionaries of the toppled autocracy.

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What does it mean to ‘arrest’ someone? At a fundamental level, the perceived right to forcibly detain another is a (central) function of the modern state’s monopoly on violence. We raise this point to note that in moments of revolutionary upheaval, when sovereignty is uncertain and heterogeneous actors make tentative claims to the mantle of force, the practice of ‘arresting’ likewise takes on a diffuse and improvisatory character. From village constables to military officers, to provincial officials and the

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We can also add that, like the French Bastille, the Peter and Paul Fortress was close to empty at the time of this first revolution: commandant reports from the beginning of February 1917 list only nine prisoners in the citadel, mainly low-ranking military offenders (e.g. deserters). See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1369, ll. 4, 4ob, 5, 5ob, 6.

highest tsarist functionaries – the February Days saw a confused whirlwind of arrests and counter-arrests under various signs of authority across the empire.<sup>904</sup>

This happened with special force in revolutionary Petrograd – where the open cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress stood as logical sites to be used by provisional authorities still testing their hands at incarceration. In the chaotic first days of the February Revolution, many deposed officials were arrested, brought to the citadel, shortly released, and sometimes arrested again.

It was only at the beginning of March – when the Provisional Government began to take shape and gain faith in its own legitimacy – that formal procedures for apprehending former tsarist officials began to appear. For our history of the Peter and Paul Fortress, the most significant development was the formation of what became known as the Extraordinary Investigatory Commission of the Provisional Government [*Chresvychainaia sledstvennaia komissia Vremennogo pravitel'stva*].

On March 5, 1917, the very first issue of the newspaper *Vestnik Vremennogo Pravitel'stva* – the official organ of the newly-formed Provisional Government – was circulated in Petrograd. Alongside presentations of the new state ministers and visions of a future constituent assembly, the periodical also carried a decree from the nascent legal authorities. The Provisional Government had empowered them, so the paper read, to “establish an extraordinary commission of inquiry to investigate the illegal official actions of former ministers, chief executives, and other senior officials.”<sup>905</sup>

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<sup>904</sup> For a window into this, see (e.g.) Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 232-34.

<sup>905</sup> See “Ukazy Vremennago Pravitel'stva pravitel'stvuiushchemu senatu,” *Vestnik Vremennago Pravitel'stva*, March 5, 1917. The decree was cosigned by Prince G.E. Lvov (Minister-Chairman of the Provisional Government) and A.F. Kerenskii (at this time the Minister of Justice; and later Minister-Chairman himself from July 1917 to the October Revolution).

The scope and composition of this body was formalized in the coming week. N.K. Murav'ev – a prominent lawyer who had defended dissidents against the state in several pre-revolutionary trials – was named chairman of the commission. Notable figures also included radical journalist and historian P.E. Shchegolev (given the responsibility of heading investigations into the actions of the tsarist police), as well as poet A.A. Blok (employed as a stenographer and editor of the proceedings). The commission set itself up in a stateroom of the Winter Palace, and all those under investigation were to be held in solitary cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Thus did the Political Government claim the most notorious political prison of the old regime as a site through which to bring that regime to justice.

The archives of the Fortress for this interrevolutionary period are fragmented, disorganized, and incomplete.<sup>906</sup> However, from the surviving documents, we can glean a picture of how its cells were used to hold a new type of state arrestee.

By March 12, 1917, the last imperial Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress – an elderly veteran of both the Russo-Turkish and Russo-Japanese wars, General V.N. Nikitin – had been dismissed, and a temporary prison staff began to receive arrestees by order of the Extraordinary Investigatory Commission and A.F. Kerenskii's Justice Ministry.<sup>907</sup> By March 18, 1917, the first surviving prisoner list shows twenty-eight individuals newly placed in the Fortress.<sup>908</sup>

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<sup>906</sup> Of course, this disordered state is itself historically intriguing – we can see in this shattered graphosphere the same uneven play of new and old that affected most societal forms at this time. Thus did provisional officials in the Fortress use the same archival folders and bureaucratic formats as their predecessor – only to have their stationary and filing system cannibalized once more by a new regime after the October Revolution. See, e.g. the trappings of RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1369 and 1377.

<sup>907</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1369, ll. 7, 8.

<sup>908</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 8, 9, 9ob, 10.

While the state had changed over into a liberal-democratic Provisional Government, it appears that the citadel kept many of its routines. The series of new commandants (turnover was high) continued to send monthly reports to the highest authorities regarding the prisoners under their control.<sup>909</sup> These lists themselves maintained the earlier tsarist practice of giving the class and professional rank of each arrestee. The differences here appear in content rather than form. If past generations of *raznochintsy* radicalism had seen a certain class predominate in the prison rolls (sons of priests, minor officials, students), then after the February Revolution the lists take on an entirely new social vocabulary: generals, princes, and high cabinet members. In the first report from mid-March – the most detailed surviving document – we see the former tsarist War Minister, the former Minister of Internal Affairs, and the former Minister of Justice all placed in cells in the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>910</sup>

These highest officials were held, as a rule, in solitary confinement in the Trubetskoi Bastion. Here many of them were kept up until the last days of the Provisional Government. The Extraordinary Investigatory Commission would either transport them to the Winter Palace for hearings, or hold interrogations in the chancellery of the Bastion itself. Thus were the functionaries of the defunct tsarist state placed in the political prison that they had once maintained against their enemies.

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<sup>909</sup> It appears that the Fortress garrison and prisons were led by a certain Staff-Captain Kravtsov until at least May 1917, before a Captain Apukhtin was pronounced Commandant. This role changed hands at least once more, for on the eve of the October Revolution the Commandant was a certain Vasil'ev. See, e.g., *ibid.*, ll. 18, 19; and G. Blagonravov, "Oktiabr'skie dni v Petropavlovskoi kreposti," in *Oktiabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde. Vospominaniia aktivnykh uchastnikov revoliutsii*, ed. A.G. Savraskam (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1956), 108-39.

<sup>910</sup> RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1369, ll. 9, 9ob, 10.

As we near the chronological conclusion of our history of the Peter and Paul Fortress, this moment cannot but evoke a sense of satisfaction for the historian. There is a pleasing symmetry to these events in the course of our larger narrative: the last have become first; the jailors, the jailed. However, what gratifies the reader of history may not always find life in the sources. And, interestingly enough, it appears that few who lived through 1917 paused to reflect upon this moment of poetic justice in the life of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Despite the key role played in the Extraordinary Investigatory Commission by Shchegolev – a figure who had done much to circulate the mythos of radical political imprisonment through his earlier leadership of the journal *Byloe* – we find no sustained reflections on the matter of incarcerating tsarist officials in such an important site in Russian revolutionary history. Despite the curious participation of A.A. Blok in the affairs of the commission, we find no lines of poetry on its notorious past or conquered present.

For the time had not yet come for symbolic encounters with the past: it was not yet the moment to go traveling out in realms of memory. For those constructing the future, all energies were needed for the concrete tasks of the moment.

And it must be said:

The Extraordinary Investigatory Commission was not up to its tasks.

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Little rigorous scholarship exists on the Extraordinary Investigatory Commission – surely because of its failure.<sup>911</sup> This body of inquiry never came close to completing

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<sup>911</sup> In fact, it appears that there are no contemporary studies of this institution.

its work, and stopped functioning in the autumn of 1917: dissolved in the October Revolution along with the Provisional Government that had sponsored it.

Indeed, we can identify a deep affinity between the Commission and Kerensky's administration. When we begin to look at the work of the Extraordinary Investigatory Commission, we are struck by its peculiar adherence to legal formalism in a time without form. From the very beginnings of its activities, it was decided that this would not be a revolutionary tribunal. Instead, the starting point would be the former legal code of the Russian Empire: through Peter and Paul Fortress questionings and long scourings of the archive, the Commission would try to find instances when the tsarist state had overstepped its own rule of law.

This definition of the task defanged the proceedings from the beginning. There is a certain liberal logic to this framework, but one structurally inappropriate for a moment of revolutionary change. What we see is a hesitant submission to a notion of formal legalism by a body that could not understand that it itself was in the very act of producing a new legality. And while the interrogations it held and documents it discovered are not completely without worth – especially interesting is the material it produced on the autocracy's complicity in the notorious Beilis blood libel case – the Commission, like the Provisional Government as a whole, proved fundamentally incapable of understanding how power functions in a revolutionary situation.<sup>912</sup>

This, at least, would be the argument later advanced by P.E. Shchegolev. After the October Revolution, he would publish a collection of the Commission's work

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<sup>912</sup> See Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

under the title *The Fall of the Tsarist Regime*.<sup>913</sup> The stenographic reports reproduced in these seven volumes are still the best existing sources for understanding this body's activities. Shchegolev accompanies them with a blistering insider's introduction: one that is just as much a postmortem of the Russian autocracy as it is of the Extraordinary Investigative Committee and the Provisional Government as a whole. "The Extraordinary Investigatory Commission," Shchegolev characterizes,

Shared the same fate of all the undertakings by the Provisional Government. In the statutes of the commission and all its activities it had the Provisional Government's usual lack of cohesion, half-heartedness, dualism. Founded by the revolution, the commission neither possessed the strength nor felt the need to rise to a revolutionary attitude towards the objects of its investigations.<sup>914</sup>

Thus do we see the use of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the months between the February and October Revolutions – as the site of a lukewarm, elite-led legal encounter with the past, not as a stage of radical justice. This hesitant 'de-tsarification' was doomed to incoherence from the start – just as is every *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* instituted by any revolution that cannot decide whether it is social or merely political.

Thus runs Shchegolev's critique. What might a proper 'revolutionary attitude' on behalf of the commission have entailed – one appropriate to the great and terrible prison site that housed it?

The immediate historical analogy is, of course, to the French Revolution. The work of the Commission is surely a far cry from the legal actions of the National Convention in 1792, which led to the trial and execution of Louis XVI. Indeed, in the

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<sup>913</sup> P.E. Shchegolev, ed., *Padenie tsarskogo rezhima: Stenograficheskie otchety doprosov i pokazanii, dannyykh v 1917 g. v Chrezvychainoi Sledstvennoi Komissii Vremennogo Pravitel'stva*, 7 vols. (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924-1927).

<sup>914</sup> Shchegolev, ed., *Padenie tsarskogo rezhima*, 1:22.

Peter and Paul Fortress prison lists after the February Days, there is a striking absence: the former sovereign. Tsar Nicholas II was never placed in the Trubetskoi Bastion. Rather, the deposed emperor and his family were held in relative comfort at their estates outside the capital in Tsarskoe Selo. The Extraordinary Investigatory Commission not only refrained from incarcerating the tsar, but also pointedly abstained from even arraigning him as part of its proceedings.<sup>915</sup>

This refusal was not lost on contemporaries. For many, this lenience towards the former emperor was the most telling sign that the ends of revolutionary justice could not be served within the narrow horizons set by the Provisional Government.

In the broken and confused documentation of this period, I have located a curious photograph [Figures 27 and 28]. Dated from the spring or summer of 1917, it shows a group of soldiers marching in protest – weary, tense, with bold stares at the camera. Held aloft at the front of the procession is large placard, reading “[Send] Nicholas the Bloody to the Peter and Paul Fortress!” It appears that this slogan was not an isolated occurrence, but rather a particular manifestation of a larger trend. In his *History of the Revolution*, Trotsky notes a constant call amongst the soldierly for the more rigorous application of revolutionary justice against the tsarist family: “from the front the demand became more and more insistent: transfer the former tzar to the Peter and Paul Fortress.”<sup>916</sup>

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<sup>915</sup> For more information on this decision, see Nik. Sukhanov, *Zapiski o revoliutsii* (Berlin: Izdatel'stvo Z.I. Grzhebina, 1922) 2:131-37. We can speculate that the Provisional Government's leniency towards the deposed emperor was intended for an international audience: specifically, to assuage the countries of the Entente, on whom Russia still relied for loans and military aid during this period.

<sup>916</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 293. Contemporaries also recalled the left “demanding the Peter and Paul Fortress for the entire [royal] family.” See Sukhanov, *Zapiski o revoliutsii*, 2:134; and 3:90-91. Note, as well, that there were also calls to imprison General

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Kornilov in the Peter and Paul Fortress after his attempted coup – see a pamphlet urging for such action at GMPIR f. II-819/1.

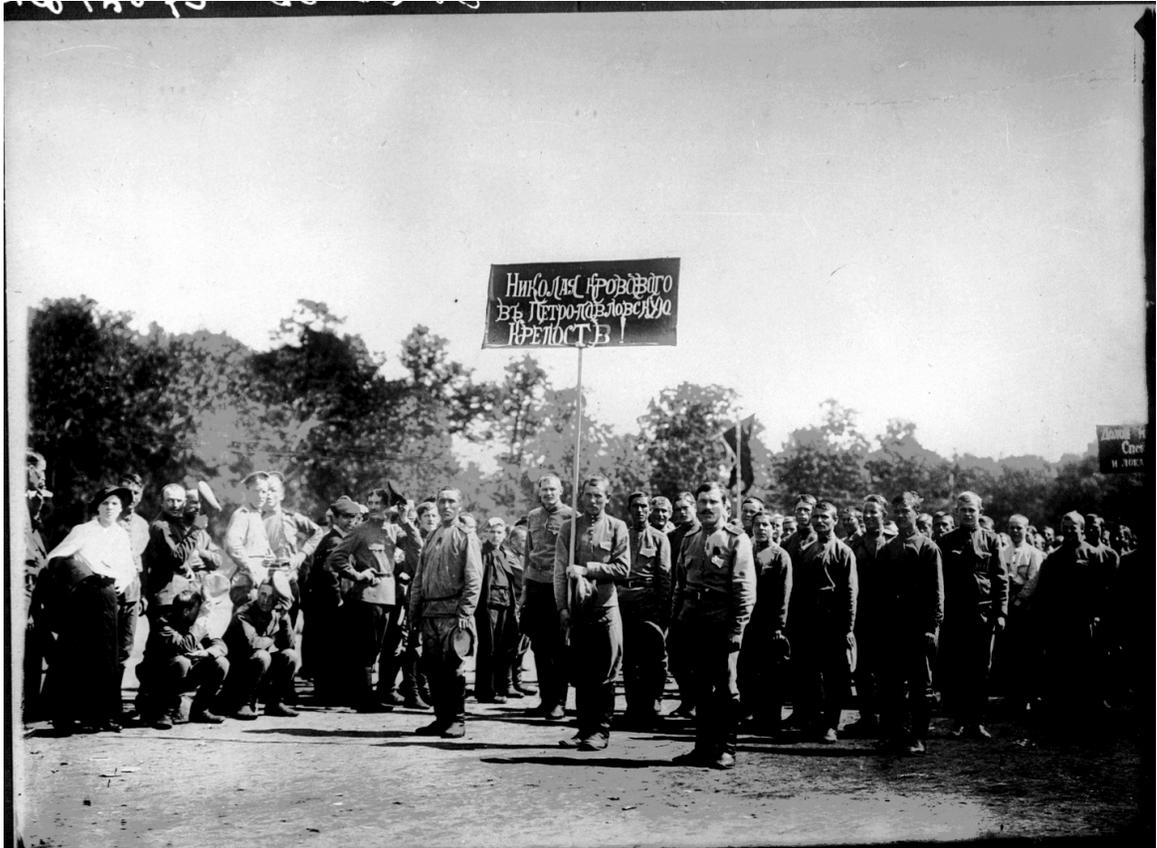


Figure 27: “Negative. A manifestation of soldiers demanding that Nicholas II be sent to the Peter and Paul Fortress. June-August 1917.” From GMPiR f. IX BC-30086. Note that this institution holds another copy of this same photograph (in poorer condition – GMPiR f. IX BC-13272) where the date is listed as “April-May 1917.”

Figure 28: A detail from the above photograph – the soldiers’ sign, reading “[Send] Nicholas the Bloody to the Peter and Paul Fortress! [Nikolaia krovovago v Petropavlovskuiu Krepost’!].”



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This photograph demonstrates not only the persistence of the Fortress in the popular imagination as a site of harsh imprisonment, but also the presence of widespread discontent with the way in which the Provisional Government was seeking to come to terms with the old regime. Just as Kerensky's administration held only a tenuous legitimacy during the eight months of its existence, so too did its Commission not possess a monopoly on radical justice – or, indeed, on the cultural imaginary and possible uses of the Peter and Paul Fortress after the fall of tsarism.

It is with this image that we move away from the Extraordinary Investigatory Commission and its work in the Peter and Paul Fortress during the revolutionary events of 1917. In the end, the energies crystallized in the bold stares of these protesting soldiers proved far more historically durable than the dead formalism of the Provisional Government's legal labors – and, over the course of this year, these two principles would have cause to face one another in open battle.

For the February Days did not bring an end to history's dialectics; the molecular processes and subterranean tunneling that had led to the collapse of the tsarist regime continued apace after the 'bourgeois revolution.' Discontent over the prosecution of the old regime in the Peter and Paul Fortress reflects some of the fault lines that would coalesce in the October Revolution. This uprising against the Provisional Government would be led by a Bolshevik party with quite a different sense of radical justice, state sovereignty, and historical mission – an alternate conception of political power that would also find its uses for the Peter and Paul Fortress in the great and terrible year of 1917.

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The months moved forward, and the luster began to fade from the Provisional Government. As the soldiery and working masses began voicing discontent over the ineffectual ends towards which the carceral spaces of the Peter and Paul Fortress were being put to use, the more immediate concern of the Bolsheviks was how to avoid prison cells themselves.

One contemporary recalls that when Lenin returned to Petrograd on April 3, 1917 (and famously called for the overthrow of the February regime in his “April Theses”), he remarked: “I thought that they would take us directly from the train station to Peter and Paul.”<sup>917</sup> And while Lenin himself would avoid incarceration by fleeing underground, many of his comrades would be arrested by the Provisional Government during this period.<sup>918</sup> For those who wished to accelerate the historical process towards a socialist revolution, the political prisons of the deposed tsarist regime were not stages for ineffectual encounters with the past, but still operational elements of the present. As such, the Peter and Paul Fortress still had a very real role to play in the concrete political struggles of 1917.

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The revolutionary Petrograd to which Lenin returned in the spring of 1917 was still a site of contention. While tsarism had been overthrown, the competing political visions of the victorious left and center still split the city. We see this clearly in the famous state of ‘dual power’ that lasted from February to October – the existence in the post-

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<sup>917</sup> Sukhanov, *Zapiski o revoliutsii*, 3:30.

<sup>918</sup> Trotsky, for example, was thrown (once more) into the Kresty prison at the end of July and only freed at the beginning of September.

revolutionary capital of two rival sites of sovereignty: the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

This bifurcation not only made itself felt in formal political matters and the daily lives of the city's inhabitants, but was also inscribed into its urban geography. While the Provisional Government worked from a series of aristocratic sites – the Tauride, Mariinskii, and later the Winter Palace – in the spring of 1917 the Bolsheviks were headquartered in the House of Kshesinskaia.

This peculiar villa – the fanciful art nouveau home of a former imperial ballerina – was chosen for its defensible grounds, central location, and large garage for armored cars.<sup>919</sup> Situated at the southern tip of the Petrograd District, it was a stone's throw from both the Troitskii Bridge (leading to the Winter Palace) and the Peter and Paul Fortress: Lenin could see the citadel's cathedral spire from his window.

It soon became clear to the Bolsheviks that this Fortress was to lead not solely an ornamental or symbolic existence. During the July Days – a premature uprising by disaffected soldiers and workers, aided by the Bolsheviks and quickly routed by the Provisional Government – the garrison of the Kshesinskaia House were able to avoid arrest by dashing over to the Peter and Paul Fortress and fortifying its walls.<sup>920</sup> While this impromptu movement quickly ended in surrender, a point had been made: any attempts at a socialist revolution in Petrograd would need to understand the Fortress as a central space in the geography of insurrection. And with this lesson learned, October approached.

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<sup>919</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 649-51. The structure has survived to this day, and now houses St. Petersburg's State Museum of Political History of Russia (GMPiR).

<sup>920</sup> *Ibid.*, 652-53. Note that the individuals who took part in this brief sortie were mostly sailors from Kronstadt (loyal to the Bolsheviks) – Lenin had already fled underground at this time to avoid arrest.

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Let us note that, interestingly enough, the Peter and Paul Fortress is rarely mentioned in popular overviews of the October Revolution. We can hazard that this is due to a hesitation before its narrative incongruity – the peculiar use of Peter the Great’s old citadel, with its baroque cathedral and tombs of the tsars, by a revolutionary movement that understood itself in a language of temporal acceleration and vanguardism. A far more central place in the historical imagination is held by the artillery fire from the Cruiser ‘Aurora,’ or the storming of the Winter Palace – images much more resonant with a moment in which “the past and the future were exchanging shots.”<sup>921</sup> Indeed, there is something a bit too uneven, a bit too combined, about Soviet power emanating from the Peter and Paul Fortress – that “medieval toy [*srednevekovaia igrushka*],” in the words of one Bolshevik officer.<sup>922</sup>

But as October 1917 arrived, and revolution loomed, it was clear that the capital’s central citadel would play a crucial role in the events to come.

In the first weeks of October, Lenin and the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee took up the task of concretely organizing the overthrow of the Provisional Government and seizing power. As maps were marked, plans drawn up, and commissars fanned across the city, the Peter and Paul Fortress loomed large in everyone’s calculations. “The decisive moment in our struggle,” recalls a leading

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<sup>921</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>922</sup> A. Tarasov-Rodionov, “Pervaia operatsiia,” in *Oktiabr’skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1956), 305. Note that Bolshevik accounts from this period almost all refer to the Peter and Paul Fortress by its diminutive nickname – the ‘Petropavlovka.’ This in itself marks a shift in perception: the term is never used in the graver narratives of former political prisoners.

member of the Military Revolutionary Committee, “was when we discussed the question of what was to be done with the Peter and Paul Fortress.”<sup>923</sup>

For the significance of the Fortress for the planned October insurrection was four-fold. Not only could its granite walls serve as a fortified redoubt, not only did it occupy a key pathway between the Petrograd District and the new Bolshevik headquarters at the Smolny Institute, not only could it serve as a firing point upon the Winter Palace: furthermore, its crownwork fortifications on the banks of the Neva contained a massive arsenal – machine guns, pistols, and one hundred thousand rifles.<sup>924</sup> It was clear, as one participant remarked, that “the Peter and Paul Fortress was the key to Petrograd.”<sup>925</sup>

However, when the Bolsheviks had been driven underground after the July Days, the Provisional Government had garrisoned the Fortress with military units from the front of assured loyalty – including a particularly conservative bicycle division.<sup>926</sup> Now, as the moment of risk approached and soldiers across the city were beginning to join with the Bolsheviks, the citadel was still firmly in the hands of Kerensky. And this could not be ignored.

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<sup>923</sup> V.A. Antonov-Ovseenko, “Baltflot v dni kerenshchiny i Krasnogo Oktiabria,” in *Velikaia Oktiabr’skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia. Sbornik vospominanii uchastnikov revoliutsii v Petrograde i Moskve* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1957), 198.

<sup>924</sup> These four strategic considerations regarding the Peter and Paul Fortress appear in many Bolshevik accounts of this period, and receive their firmest elaboration in the writings of the former Bolshevik Fortress Commissar: see G. Blagonravov, “Oktiabr’skie dni v Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” in *Oktiabr’skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde*, 110.

<sup>925</sup> V.A. Antonov-Ovseenko, “Oktiabr’skaia buria,” in *Oktiabr’skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde*, 102.

<sup>926</sup> G. Blagonravov, “Oktiabr’skie dni v Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” in *Oktiabr’skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde*, 111. This situation also inspired a biting comment from Trotsky: “A theme for idealistic psychologists: Let a man find himself, in distinction from others, on top of two wheels with a chain – at least in a poor country like Russia – and his vanity begins to swell out like his tires.” Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1241-42.

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October 23, 1917. Two days before the revolution. The Bolshevik Military Revolutionary Committee sends a pair of commissars to the Peter and Paul Fortress to ascertain the political situation with the garrison and, if possible, seize the arsenal. Rebuffed by the officers and threatened with arrest, they decide to call an agitational meeting for the sympathies of the citadel's soldiery.

And here – we must make a brief comment on our source base. If this entire interrevolutionary period produced only scattered, fragmented documentation, then it is the immediate events of the October Revolution that left the least to the archives, that are the most difficult to firmly grasp. Lacking rigorous records for ephemeral processes such as moments of agitation and political crystallization, the only true windows we possess come from later accounts of these events, written by their participants. For while the Bolsheviks held little stock in old intelligentsia memoiristics of heroic suffering, martyred imprisonment, and noble defeat, they did develop a taste for terse, muscular recountings of the October victory.

These many short accounts, however, are not without their problems for the historian. While some appeared fairly soon after 1917, most were penned and published for anniversary commemorations decades after the revolution. Thus, like all autobiographical writing, the passage of time between the events they hold and the moment of their production erodes their empirical reliability.

And, with these documents in particular, the political history of the Soviet Union introduces an even more pressing difficulty for those who want to peer through their dark glass at the year 1917.

This is best illustrated through the events at hand – the situation in the Peter and Paul Fortress on the eve of the October Revolution. Let us look, for example, to the account of V.A. Antonov-Ovseenko: one of the leading figures in the Military Revolutionary Committee. In a collection of memoirs published through the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in 1957 – lavishly decorated for the fortieth anniversary of the revolution, with a print run of 50,000 – Antonov-Ovseenko’s contribution contains a very brief account of the pivotal political agitation in the Peter and Paul Fortress: on October 23, 1917, “representatives of the Central Committee set off for a meeting in the Fortress and carried a definite resolution in favor of Soviet power.”<sup>927</sup>

However, is there something missing in these lines? Antonov-Ovseenko’s memoir of October had actually first appeared in 1922 in the journal *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*. When I consulted this earlier version, I found that an entire paragraph has been excised:

Comrade Trotsky here played the decisive role; he caught the situation with his revolutionary instinct and advised us: capture the Fortress from within. “It isn’t possible that the soldiers there are not sympathetic to us,” he said. And he was right. Comrades Trotsky and Lashevich were sent to a meeting at the Fortress and carried a definite resolution in favor of Soviet power.<sup>928</sup>

Thus we see the other major difficulty in determining the history of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the October Revolution – the role played in these events by L.D. Trotsky. According to a scattering of early memoirs and his own *History of the Russian Revolution*, it appears that Trotsky made several trips to the citadel in order to stem the political waverings of the garrison – even spending the very eve of the October

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<sup>927</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko, “Baltflot v dni kerenshchiny i Krasnogo Oktiabria,” in *Velikaia Oktiabr’skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia*, 198.

<sup>928</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko, “Baltflot v dni kerenshiny i Krasnogo Oktiabria. (Begliye vospominaniia.),” *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* no. 10 (1922): 126.

Revolution engaged in one last “oratorical battle for the Peter and Paul Fortress.”<sup>929</sup>

However, the later expulsion of Trotsky from official Soviet histories makes it very difficult to grasp the events around this poignant Fortress homecoming of a revolutionary who just eleven years earlier had been imprisoned in its walls.<sup>930</sup>

What we can say for certain is that the Peter and Paul Fortress was swayed to the side of the Bolsheviks in the last days before the planned uprising. We have no reason to doubt Trotsky’s characterization of this moment as further old-mole work:

It had been well prepared in the past. The soldiers turned out to be far to the left of their committees. It was only the cracked shell of the old discipline that held out a little longer behind the fortress walls than in the city barracks. One tap was enough to shatter it.<sup>931</sup>

This is the result attested to in all further memoirs, pre-Stalinist and Stalinist alike.

The soldiers declared themselves for the Bolsheviks, and imprisoned both the head of the arsenal and the Fortress Commandant in their quarters (when it turned out that the latter was communicating with the Provisional Government through a private telephone connection, the lines were cut).<sup>932</sup> The garrison was put on high alert, readying arms and setting patrols in preparation of the coming insurrection. And, crucially, the crownwork weapon stores were opened up to the Bolsheviks. For two days and two nights the citadel “teemed like an anthill,” as the Peter and Paul Fortress

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<sup>929</sup> See Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1119-22, 1132-34, 1241-43.

<sup>930</sup> Indeed, Antonov-Ovseenko – a leading figure of the October Revolution – was himself executed during the Stalinist purges for his association with Trotsky.

<sup>931</sup> *Ibid.*, 1133.

<sup>932</sup> See M.K. Ter-Arutiunians, “Petropavlovskaiia krepost’ v Oktiabre,” in *Velikaia Oktiabr’skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia*, 179; and G. Blagonravov, “Oktiabr’skie dni v Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” in *Oktiabr’skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde*, 113-16.

– the “key to Petrograd,” captured by the Bolsheviks from within – armed the October Revolution.<sup>933</sup>

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And now – October 25, 1917. The capital awoke as normal: officials of the Provisional Government went to work; trams, carriages, and automobiles circulated the streets of the capital; the noonday cannonfire from the Peter and Paul Fortress “thundered out neither louder nor more gently than usual.”<sup>934</sup>

There was little indication that the political situation in Petrograd was in the midst of a fundamental shift. Yet overnight, armed Bolshevik companies had bloodlessly seized crucial sites throughout the city: the telephone exchange, the railway stations, the banks – chokepoints in the circulation of information, soldiers, and capital.

All of this was in preparation for a climactic dissolution of the Provisional Government, seated at this moment in the Winter Palace. The former residence of the tsars was to be seized by that evening, timed with the opening of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. And, as is rarely remarked, the headquarters of this operation was the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>935</sup>

History had moved in such strange ways since the Fortress had stood as a site of Romanov scenarios of power, as a central political prison.

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<sup>933</sup> V.A. Antonov-Ovseenko, “Oktiabr’skaia buria,” in *Oktiabr’skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde*, 102; and M.K. Ter-Arutiunians, “Petropavlovskaiia krepost’ v Oktiabre,” in *Velikaia Oktiabr’skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia*, 179-80.

<sup>934</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1268.

<sup>935</sup> Hence Trotsky’s later remark – perhaps hyperbolic, but indicative nonetheless – that by the eve of October it would not have mattered if Smolny had been seized by the Provisional Government, as “there was a second headquarters in the Peter and Paul Fortress.” *Ibid.*, 1339.

In its days of myth, it had been called “a hideous monument to absolutism, [facing] the imperial palace like a fatal warning that one cannot exist without the other.”<sup>936</sup> Yet were not these lines – originally penned against the brutality of the autocracy – now coming true, in a most peculiar sense? On October 25, 1917, the Peter and Paul Fortress placed itself on a military footing. Artillery and machine guns were emplaced on its walls, telephone lines were established with the Cruiser ‘Aurora,’ and commissars designed the overthrow of the Provisional Government. The regime that had arisen after the collapse of the autocracy had lost the Peter and Paul Fortress – and the revolutionaries within its walls were armed, not imprisoned, and preparing to take the Winter Palace.

Amidst the tombs of dead emperors, the old mole was raising its head.

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The climax of the October Revolution – like so many world-historical events – is both sharp and blurred. A certain cinematic image stands clearly in the popular historic imagination: but as soon as we attempt to peel back its veneer, it immediately feels confused, tangled, almost impressionistic.

We know that the siege of the Winter Palace began late. Petrograd as a whole was conquered with almost no resistance – and, in fact, this ease took the Bolsheviks by surprise, and delayed the plan to surround the last redoubt of the Provisional Government. Given time to assemble a motley defense, the February Regime refused to submit – gunfire was traded between opposing sides on Palace Square. Under these circumstances, an ultimatum was sent from A.V. Antonov-Ovseenko in the Peter and

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<sup>936</sup> Quoted in M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 1:118.

Paul Fortress to the Winter Palace – surrender in twenty minutes, otherwise we will open fire with the guns of the Fortress and the Bolshevik warships docked in the Neva.<sup>937</sup>

The exact events that followed are impossible to parcel out. As we know, the Provisional Government – holding out hope for last-minute reinforcements – refused the Fortress’ ultimatum. The common story thus goes that the Cruiser ‘Aurora’ then fired a blank shot from her fore-castle gun, famously signaling the start of the assault on the Palace.

However, the truth is far more complex. It appears that the Aurora did not act alone. Earlier in the day, an over-complicated arrangement had been set up between this warship and the Peter and Paul Fortress in the event that the Provisional Government refused to leave the Winter Palace. First a visual signal was to be given from the walls of the Fortress – a “red lantern” to ready the sailors. Then, the Aurora was to have fired its guns, using either blank shots or purposefully aiming above the Palace itself. If surrender had not yet occurred, then the Fortress was to commence an actual bombardment with its smaller three-inch cannons – finally followed, if necessary, by the leveling of the structure with the larger weapons of the Aurora.<sup>938</sup>

In actual event, the plan collapsed almost immediately. Apparently the Bolshevik Fortress Commissar G. Blagonravov was unable to locate a suitable red lamp for quite some time, and having done so had further difficulty in affixing it in a

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<sup>937</sup> Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1293; and Antonov-Ovseenko, “Baltflot v dni kerenshiny i Krasnogo Oktiabria. (Begliye vospominaniia.)” 128.

<sup>938</sup> The most detailed description of this plan is recorded in G. Blagonravov, “Oktiabr’skie dni v Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” in *Oktiabr’skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde*, 121.

visible fashion.<sup>939</sup> Likewise, there were problems with the artillery – it seems the guns prepared on the Fortress walls were in no condition to be fired. Cursing and slipping in the darkness, Blagonravov and Antonov-Ovseenko made their way through the mud-filled courtyard of the Fortress to its Neva-facing bastions and confronted the garrison soldiers stationed there.<sup>940</sup> It was unclear if the guns were truly in a bad way, if the suspiciously-sullen artillerymen were quietly sabotaging the affair, or both – in any case, reliable sailors were slowly brought to the Fortress to take command of the cannonry.<sup>941</sup>

Finally – it had been hours since the ultimatum at this point – the bombardment was ready. And here, the exact nature of events completely breaks down. Very few accounts mention the presence of a red lantern. Sources disagree on the origins of the artillery fire – some recall three salvos from the Peter and Paul Fortress; some four; some believe that the Fortress used live ammunition while the warships used blanks, and others state this in reverse; some recount that no shots touched the Winter Palace, while others swear that they saw the damage and shell fragments with their own eyes: etc., etc., etc.<sup>942</sup> Each memoir contradicts the others,

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<sup>939</sup> See *ibid.*, 121-22. Blagonravov remarks here that these difficulties were compounded by the extreme physical nervousness of him and his comrades – a poignant element of the revolutionary experience rarely included in heroic historical narratives.

<sup>940</sup> *Ibid.*, 123. Clearly based on Blagonravov's account, the full bathos of this moment is also captured in Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1298-99.

<sup>941</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko, "Baltflot v dni kerenshiny i Krasnogo Oktiabria. (Begliye vospominaniia.)," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* no. 10 (1922): 128.

<sup>942</sup> Here we could mention N.I. Podvoiskii, "Lenin v oktiabre," in *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia*, 293; I. Flerovskii, "Kronshtadt v Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii," in *Oktiabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde*, 62-63; A. Belyshev, "Vystrel 'Avrory'," in *ibid.*, 245; A. Tarasov-Rodionov, "Pervaia operatsiia," in *ibid.*, 306; V. Khaustov, "V Oktiabre," in *ibid.*, 338-39; and Antonov-Ovseenko, "Baltflot v dni kerenshiny i Krasnogo Oktiabria. (Begliye vospominaniia.)," 128. Even Trotsky – usually very exact with empirical

and there is none which we could cite as authoritative. What is clear, however, is that a double bombardment of the Palace took place from across the Neva, almost certainly begun with either a signal or actual shots from the Peter and Paul Fortress. With this commenced the final push of the Bolshevik forces in the Palace Square against the scanty defenses of the Provisional Government, which quickly dissolved.

While the exact events are impossible to determine, we can definitively say that Petrograd's central citadel did not sit passively through the climax of the October Revolution. The Fortress played a role just as crucial – if not more so – than the more famous Aurora. In the phrase which one participant found for his reminiscences of the storming of the Winter Palace – on this night, “Peter and Paul spoke.”<sup>943</sup>

At 2 o'clock on the morning of October 26, Antonov-Ovseenko left the Fortress for the Winter Palace and victoriously arrested the ministers of the February Regime. He returned to the citadel on foot with these deposed politicians under convoy; each was securely placed in solitary confinement in the Trubetskoi Bastion.<sup>944</sup>

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details – presents this moment in an impressionistic blur. See Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1302.

<sup>943</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko, “Baltflot v dni kerenshiny i Krasnogo Oktiabria. (Begliye vospominaniia.)” 128. It is also worth citing Trotsky's experience of this event from within the hall of the Second Congress of Soviets, which had commenced just before the taking of the Winter Palace: “An unusual, dull, alarming rumble breaks into the noise of the meeting from outside. This is the Peter and Paul Fortress ratifying the order of the day [i.e. the seizure of power] with artillery fire.” See Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, 1350.

<sup>944</sup> For descriptions of this peculiar procession and imprisonment, see Antonov-Ovseenko, “Baltflot v dni kerenshiny i Krasnogo Oktiabria. (Begliye vospominaniia.)” 129; O.P. Dzenis, “Pod zimmim dvortsom (Oktiabr' 1917 g.),” in *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia*, 272-73; N.I. Podvoiskii, “Lenin v Oktiabre,” in *ibid.*, 294-95; G. Blagonravov, “Oktiabr'skie dni v Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” in *Oktiabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde*, 125-26; I. Kolbin, “Shturm Zimmego,” in *ibid.*, 275-76; and V. Khaustov, “V Oktiabre,” in *ibid.*, 339.

And thus – after acting as the staging ground for the seizure of the Winter Palace – the Peter and Paul Fortress gracefully exits from the scene of political history. This last act had been one of its strangest and most powerful. The events of October 25, 1917 were the most sustained military operation in the Fortress’ entire existence. The burial ground and most notorious prison of the old regime had served as the victorious military headquarters of its successor’s attackers.

If we can say that the Fortress took its leave after this climactic event, this is not to say that the citadel was suddenly ‘deactivated’ after the Bolshevik victory. In the early days of Soviet power it served as a site of incarceration for members of the former government and other opponents.<sup>945</sup> It performed a non-inconsequential role in the suppression of the Junker Revolt at the very end of October.<sup>946</sup> And, when the furies of civil war spread their wings, the citadel played its part in the Red Terror: four Romanov Grand Dukes were quietly executed in the Fortress courtyard in the winter of 1919, just a stone’s throw away from the sumptuous burial vault of their fathers.<sup>947</sup>

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<sup>945</sup> At the very end of the immense archives of the Peter and Paul Fortress Commandant, we find a few scattered documents from October 1917 to March 1918. From these, we can see that there was a rather constant correspondence between the Commissar (sometimes still titled ‘Commandant’) of the Peter and Paul Fortress and both the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (the newly founded Cheka) and the city’s revolutionary tribunal. Despite the “distressing conditions” of the citadel cells noted in a report to the Commissar of Justice [F. 1280, op. 1, d. 1369, l. 67], by December 1917 there were over fifty individuals imprisoned in the Trubetskoi Bastion – including many former ministers of the Provisional Government. See the documents held in RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1377; as well as RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1369, l. 29, 29ob.

<sup>946</sup> See G. Blagonravov, “Oktiabr’skie dni v Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” in *Oktiabr’skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde*, 126-30.

<sup>947</sup> Jamie H. Cockfield, *White Crow: The Life and Times of the Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovich Romanov, 1859-1919* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 242-46. While a more detailed depiction of this event would take us too deeply into an unsavory historiography of autocratic apologists, we can note that the execution of these four Grand Dukes – close relatives of the former Tsar – was most likely an act of retribution for the murder of Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht two weeks previously. We can also note that further killings appear to have taken place in the grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress as well – in 2010, a

However, despite these last intrusions of history, the success of the revolution spelled the end of the immense position held by the Peter and Paul Fortress in the development of modern Russian political cultures.<sup>948</sup> From a birthplace of radical subjectivity to a site for the staging of the seizure of power, the discursive and concrete energies of this peculiar structure had been well spent. With the revolution now sovereign, it remained to be seen what purpose the future might give to the spaces of its past.

### **VIII. Conclusion: Worthy Pioneers**

Thus ends our story of the Peter and Paul Fortress through the gathering storm of the 1900s and the tumultuous events of 1917. If our previous chapters have been primarily stories of growth – the elaboration and spread of a revolutionary carceral culture – this chapter has held a softer, twilight mood. Bolsheviks such as L.D. Trotsky had little need for the discursive energies once crystallized in the political prisons of the old regime – their tasks required new concepts of the self, new positions within history, new forms of narration (even if an older culture still persisted alongside the new in a combined, uneven present). This becomes most evident in this chapter’s story of the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1917. The citadel’s use as a space of direct struggle is truly striking – but where was the nineteenth century’s radical mythology of political imprisonment?

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limited archaeological dig discovered over 80 sets of remains on the island, dating from the years 1918-1921.

<sup>948</sup> Further details on the fate of the Peter and Paul Fortress immediately after the October Revolution can be found in L.V. Andrianova, “Petropavlovskaiia krepost’ v 1917-1945 godakh,” in *Petropavlovskaiia krepost’. Stranitsy istorii*, esp. 397-403.

Let us distill this question down into a single scene. In the months between the two revolutions, poet A.A. Blok kept a diary. It is a largely quotidian document – chronicling daily aches and pains, conversations with friends, and long hours of work in the Peter and Paul Fortress for the Extraordinary Investigatory Commission of the Provisional Government. However, there is one moment in its pages that resonates strangely with our present study: the briefest appearance of a peculiar ghost from the annals of tsarism’s most notorious political prison.

This occurs in Blok’s diary on June 10, 1917. While describing a normal day of work for the Commission, the poet makes a brief, offhanded comment: “arriving at the fortress, I ran into N.A. Morozov (he was looking for the traces of the Alekseevskii Ravelin, where he had been held)...”<sup>949</sup>

What a strange apparition. Morozov – that elderly populist revolutionary – wandering in reflection through the grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Morozov – that author of a classic intelligentsia prison memoir – fruitlessly searching for traces of the Alekseevskii Ravelin in the whirlwind of 1917...

In trying to understand the last years of tsarism, the historian of the Peter and Paul Fortress feels a certain kinship with this melancholy Morozov. Both search in vain for the old myths and discourses of radical imprisonment in an age that seemed to have little use for them.

For deep social, political, and epistemological changes had brought about the end of the ‘Age of High Prison Mythology,’ Shifts in the way radical struggle was

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<sup>949</sup> A.A. Blok, *Dnevnik Al. Blok*, ed. P.N. Medvedeva (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1928), 17. Those with further interest in Blok’s perspective on the Russian Revolution can also consult A.A. Blok, *Poslednie dni Imperatorskoi vlasti: po neizdannym dokumentam* (Petersburg: Alkonost, 1921).

lived, thought, and narrated had dethroned the *Bildungs*-politics of the earlier generations of revolutionary subjects. No longer would the movement from the present to the future be written through tales of personal and world-historical development – rather, this was a ‘narrow gate’ to be seized through Marxist analysis and at the end of a rifle.

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Of course, even in 1917, we have seen that there was still something quite eerie at play here. Throughout its long years at the center of Russian political history, the Peter and Paul Fortress had always been marked as an uncanny space – of anachronism, of a combined and uneven conceptual present. From the Decembrists onwards, life-struggles for a revolutionary future seemed inexorably routed through the oldest structure of the imperial capital; new visions of the political were born amidst the stones and ghosts of the past.

But even for such an anachronistic space, the events of 1917 seemed to play out in an extremely high key of temporal contradiction. In a moment where prisons were no longer stages of subjectivity but the dead disciplinary remnants of a deposed regime, this “medieval toy” at the heart of St. Petersburg served as an unlikely headquarters for the October Revolution. In their political discourse, the Bolsheviks had always narrated themselves as possessing a privileged relationship with time – they were the truly ‘advanced,’ the ones who rigorously grasped the ‘new’ and possessed the proper means of its acceleration. How strange, then, that on the night of October 25, 1917, they staged their bold political leap into the future from the hoary grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

Of course, one of the arguments of the present section is that the actors in this acute moment of political struggle gave little thought to the ways in which the past was birthing the future. While the historian today can point out an uneven, combined, ‘Bolshevik Gothic’ in the spaces of the October Revolution, this was not an understanding embraced by its participants, who were outwardly focused on the concrete achievement of revolutionary change. As Trotsky writes in his memoirs – apropos of another tsarist fortress, a few months after October, but serving just as well here – “Prince Hamlet would have repeated on this spot: ‘The time is out of joint; - O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!’ But there was nothing Hamletish about us [*No v nas ne bylo nichego gamleticheskogo*].”<sup>950</sup>

But – wasn’t there?

Despite their rhetoric, the Bolsheviks were not historical orphans. The political shifts of 1917 were only possible after the terrain had been readied by generations of old mole’s work. The Peter and Paul Fortress could only become a red citadel once the autocracy that had formerly sacralized it had been fully stripped of its legitimacy – a long process that had taken place with special force in the prison cells of the old regime. The concrete breakthrough of October was only made feasible after the long discursive labors of past revolutionaries, of the Bolsheviks’ radical foremothers and forefathers.

In this way, what if in the preparatory days of 1917 it had been Trotsky, not Blok, who had happened upon the melancholy old Morozov on the ramparts of the Peter and Paul Fortress? Might not this Bolshevik son of the future have struck a

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<sup>950</sup> Trotsky, *My Life*, 472 [Russian: 339].

similar attitude as that taken by Hamlet towards the ghost of his father? For Trotsky – a lover of Shakespeare – surely knew that the conceptual bestiary of Marx and Hegel had earlier roots: that the dialectic not only dug, but spoke. “Well said, old mole!” he may have greeted this shade from the past; “A worthy pioner!”<sup>951</sup>

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This is all to say – Bolshevik futurity was not the negation of history. October interacted in complex and uncanny ways with the spaces and narratives of the past – the Peter and Paul Fortress among them.

And if this is true in the strange temporal anachronisms of 1917, then it reached even more explicit self-consciousness in the years that followed. For after power had been seized and solidified, after the Civil War had come to a close, a time arose for the fledgling Soviet state to reflect upon its own history. By the mid-1920s a purposeful gaze towards the past was claimed once again – and with it appeared the question of what was to be done with the most notorious political prison of the old regime, occupying the heart of revolutionary Leningrad.

This question – which richly reflects many of the complexities of the Soviet approach to the past and, indeed, the tensions latent within the very idea of a revolutionary history – is the subject of our final chapter.

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<sup>951</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.5.162-63.



## 9. Curating Dialectics: Russia's Peter and Paul Fortress as Museum of the Revolution

What are phenomena rescued from? Not only, and not in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination, their 'enshrinement as heritage' – They are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them.

- Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

Only a cemetery can be transformed into a complete museum.

- N.F. Fedorov, *Filosofia obshego dela*

### I. Introduction

What is to be done with the most notorious political prison of the old regime?

In 1924, Russia's Peter and Paul Fortress – that founding site of St. Petersburg, sacred burial ground of the imperial family, and dread prison of the Tsarist autocracy – was proclaimed a 'Museum of the Revolution.'

Seven years had passed since the revolutions of 1917, and this deactivated space at the center of St. Petersburg had slowly begun to be treated as a revolutionary realm of memory. Irregular tours of the Peter and Paul Cathedral began as early as 1918 – but these took place only on special holidays, and independent visits were

strictly forbidden.<sup>952</sup> The first official excursion of the fortress complex as a whole was held in 1920, given to delegates of the Second Congress of the Comintern.<sup>953</sup>

On February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1924 the Trubetskoi Bastion prison of the Peter and Paul Fortress was transferred from the Red Army to *Glavnauka* (“Central Department of Scientific, Scientific-Artistic, and Museum Institutions”), and made an affiliate of the Museum of the Revolution.<sup>954</sup> After over a year of discussion, the cathedral, tombs, and grounds of the fortress were incorporated into this same institution in 1926.<sup>955</sup>

What did it mean to turn the Peter and Paul Fortress into a museum of the revolution? At first glance, such an act seems profoundly counterintuitive. The complex combined within its grounds three types of sites – old regime religious structure, royal tomb, and political prison – that were all often the first victims of revolutionary political cultures and symbolic orders. The preservation of the prison is especially unprecedented: the French First Republic was founded upon the ruins of the Bastille;<sup>956</sup> large crowds destroyed political prisons across Russian in the aftermath of the February Revolution (including the prison blocks of the Shlisselburg fortress,

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<sup>952</sup> L.V. Andrianova, “Iz istorii Petropavlovskogo sobora i Velikokniazheskoi usypal’nitsa 1920-1940-kh godov,” *Kraevedcheskie zapiski* 2 (1994): 316. Emma Goldman – working at that time in the museum of the former imperial palace – was given a tour by a former political prisoner in the spring of 1920. Her brief impressions of the Fortress, which “was still to [her] a haunted house, causing [her] heart to palpitate with fear whenever [she] had to pass it,” can be found in Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1923), 126-29.

<sup>953</sup> K.I. Logachev, *Petro-pavlovskaiia (Sankt-Peterburgskaia) Krepost’. Istorkio-kul’turnyi putevoditel’* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo ‘Avrora,’ 1988), 56.

<sup>954</sup> TsGA, SPB f. 2555, op. 1, d. 1277, l. 24.

<sup>955</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 21. See also Andrianova, “Iz istorii Petropavlovskogo sobora i Velikokniazheskoi usypal’nitsa 1920-1940-x godov,” 317; and Iu. V. Trubinov, *Velikokniazheskaia Usypal’nitsa* (St. Petersburg: Beloe i Chernoe, 1997). It should be noted that as early as 1920 (during the depths of the civil war) there were discussions of converting the fortress complex into a museum. See TsGA SPB f. 1000, op.4, d.57, l.141.

<sup>956</sup> For a study of the Bastille in revolutionary culture, see Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom*.

perhaps the second-most infamous Tsarist prison);<sup>957</sup> and during the Russian Civil War, Nestor Makhno's anarchist army notoriously destroyed the prisons in every city they captured.<sup>958</sup>

But the Bolsheviks *did* preserve the former regime's most infamous prison – how and why they did so is the topic of the current chapter. This moment is not only one final story in the combined, uneven history of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the Russian revolutionary imagination. As we trace the early history of what is one of the world's first prison museums, we will come across a rather peculiar set of objects and actors that together make this strange transformation speak to far wider historiographical debates. As we shall see, when the early-Soviet curation of history is discussed at all in contemporary scholarship, it is usually presented as an empty cipher of nascent Stalinist conservatism: an ossifying impulse placed in opposition to purportedly more emancipatory forms of radical memorialization. However, a closer examination of our Museum of the Revolution reveals something wholly new: a site of anti-historicist curation, messianic memorial politics, and what I call 'resurrectionary radicalism,' arising at the juncture of museum dialectics and early-Soviet avant-garde film. As such, studying the translation of the Peter and Paul Fortress into a museum promises insight not only into the history of this contested citadel in the modern Russian political imagination – the final act of this dissertation – it also asks us to reconsider received notions of the history of curation, radical temporal regimes, and the politico-aesthetic relationship between the modern museum, the cinema, and the penitentiary.

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<sup>957</sup> Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 56.

<sup>958</sup> V. Danilov and T. Shanin, eds., *Nestor Makhno: Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine, 1918-1921. Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006), 384-85, 388, 391, etc.

## II. Bolshevik Histories and the Soviet Museum

Converting the Peter and Paul Fortress into a public museum can be seen as a ritualized ‘opening up’ of the closed spaces of the old regime, as well as a chance to construct a new past. For if all revolutions involve “[recastings] of space and time,” then the modern museum must be seen as a primary space for this re-organization and re-presentation of history.<sup>959</sup> These curated sites are peculiar places of memorialization, enshrinement, and canonization – historiographical practices whose potential to legitimize political regimes and re-digest the past are especially valued in times of uncertainty and transition. Museum spaces not only hold particular historical narratives, but also evidence the ways in which a society engages in, appropriates, and views itself through its past. Thus, to examine how a particular historical moment constructs its museums is to also examine that moment’s orientation towards the past: its temporal regime and memorial politics. What political and historiographical positions are at play (and at stake) in constructing a museum of the revolution? What can this institution tell us about an early-Soviet memory politics?

Let us begin by noting that the very idea of “radical memory politics” is an uneasy concept, shot through with structural contradictions. Marxism has always possessed a complex relationship with historical memorialization. Since at least the time when Marx called for “the dead to bury their dead,” there has been both a persistent sense that revolutionary activity must possess an unwavering orientation

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<sup>959</sup> Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 32.

towards the future – and an accompanying suspicion towards activities that linger in the spaces of the past.<sup>960</sup>

We saw this anti-historicist consciousness raise its head in the previous chapter – when the “medieval toy” of the Peter and Paul Fortress was grasped as a site of military preparations, not meditation and memory. In the Russian revolutionary moment, this suspicion towards the past was further expressed in an the open hostility towards the idea of the museum by much of the political and aesthetic avant-garde. The Futurists, among others, sought to jettison not only the historical canon from the steamship of modernity, but also the very memorial practices that had produced this history. In his 1918 poem “It’s Too Early to Rejoice [*radovat’sia rano*],” V.V. Mayakovsky exclaimed that “it’s time for bullets to shadow the walls of museums... and [the statue of] Tsar Alexander still stands on the Square of the Uprising? Send Dynamite!”<sup>961</sup> K.S. Malevich’s Suprematist project necessitated a similar time of rupture. In his 1919 essay “On the Museum,” he claimed that “our job is to always move towards what is new, not to live in museums. Our path lies in space, and not in the suitcase of what has been outlived.”<sup>962</sup> For the prophets of a radical new

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<sup>960</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, ed. C.P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1926), 16, 13. The relevant quote reads: “The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content.”

<sup>961</sup> Vladimir Mayakovsky, “It’s Too Early to Rejoice,” in *Selected Poems*, trans. James H. McGavran III (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 74-75.

<sup>962</sup> K.S. Malevich, “On the Museum,” in *Essays on Art: 1915-1928*, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin, ed. Troels Andersen (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1968), 1:68-72. Even when the avant-garde did organize exhibition spaces in the first decade of Soviet power (such as the Vitebsk Museum of Contemporary Art [1918], or the Petrograd Museum of Artistic Culture [1919]), their loudly proclaimed purpose was to “not reorganize an old museum, but create a new one, where nothing old would be represented.” See Natalia Murray, *The Unsung Hero of the Russian Avant-Garde: The Life and Times of Nikolay Punin* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 149. For the experimental Vitebsk museum headed by Marc Chagall, see Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Vitebsk: The Life of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 225-30.

temporality, the inherited museum form – its very epistemology – was to be left behind amongst the rest of the debris of the old regime.

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Modern historians have treated official Bolshevik historiographical cultures with similar suspicion. The recent turn to memory studies in early-Soviet historiography has overwhelmingly focused on the celebrations and mass theatrics of the immediate post-revolutionary period (i.e. from 1917 to around 1923).<sup>963</sup> Historians have valorized the liberating, carnivalesque energies of these early festivals – and in doing so have implicitly and explicitly criticized the more institutionalized forms of Soviet memorial politics (e.g. official museums and holidays) that rose in prominence in the latter half of the decade.<sup>964</sup> Katerina Clark's classic *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* is an example of this – it concludes with a lament for 1924, the year in which she sees the spirit of exuberant, mass historical theatrics become politically sterilized and “taken inside to museums.”<sup>965</sup> For Susan Buck-Morrs, behind this shift to official memorialization lay a will to consolidate “a monopoly over time's meaning” – a monopoly that actively mummified the political, that willfully constructed a heroic yet dead history in which “time's indeterminacy and openness [the hallmarks of earlier,

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<sup>963</sup> For example, see Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution*; and James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>964</sup> One could maybe make a larger point here regarding histories of European radicalism in general: the reception of the thought of M.M. Bakhtin in the historical discipline may have led, for all its innovative points, to an *overstatement* of the liberatory energies found in carnivals and humor. This may be due to a larger critique of *logos* that we can associate with the work of the cultural turn in the American academy (which syncs up chronologically and conceptually with the reception of Bakhtin). For all the importance of Rabelais, it is also crucial to remember that radicals can often be self-serious and dour: that the state can laugh, and repression can be carnivalesque.

<sup>965</sup> Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 184-87.

truly revolutionary approaches to the past] is colonized.”<sup>966</sup> For many modern historians, the very idea of an institutionalized Soviet memory politics is thus framed as a betrayal of the utopian political commitments of 1917. The appearance of a Bolshevik museum culture is made to signify the birth of a Thermidorian politics of memory.

Nowhere is this argument for the essentially conservative, even authoritarian nature of the modern (Bolshevik) museum more forcibly made than in cultural historian Evgeny Dobrenko’s *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution*. In its introduction, Dobrenko explicitly equates the emergence of Stalinist temporality with the ‘museumification of history.’ He claims that Stalinist culture “turned everything into a museum” – and in this, he evokes the idea of Boris Groys that a sterile memorial culture arising in the 1920s and 30s functioned to “completely [erase] the border between the space of the museum and the space beyond it.”<sup>967</sup> For Dobrenko and Groys, the appearance of the museum-form in Bolshevik politics is an essential moment in a Soviet ossification of history.

And not only ossification, but even incarceration. Provocatively (especially for our study of a former political prison), Dobrenko sees a fundamental theoretical unity between the Soviet museum and the penitentiary complex. For Dobrenko, the museum

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<sup>966</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 60, 67.

<sup>967</sup> Although the main concern of Dobrenko’s text is the Stalinist 1930s, his pronouncements on memorial politics are directed towards the very concept of a Soviet museum and thus are brought to bear on the 1920s as well. Evgeny Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008) 9; and Boris Groys, “Bor’ba protiv muzeia, ili Demonstratsiia iskusstva v totalitarnom prostranstve,” quoted in Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History*, 9. Also, see Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (London: Verso, 2011).

is “a space of discipline,” where state power transforms the living past into a monological “ideologically coherent narrative.”<sup>968</sup> While not as rigidly Foucauldian in his analysis as museum theorist Tony Bennett – who, in his *The Birth of the Museum*, asserts that “the museum and the penitentiary represented the Janus face of power” – Dobrenko believes the Soviet museum to above all serve the “legitimization of the institutionalized past” through the specific knowledge orderings of a disciplinary regime.<sup>969</sup> While Lenin famously referred to Imperial Russia as ‘the prison house of nations,’ Dobrenko presents the Soviet museum (and Soviet reality itself) as a sort of ‘prison house of history.’ In sterile Soviet exhibition halls, the public is presented with an alienated, deactivated, ‘dead’ past. He concludes his argument with the image of curator-become-gravedigger: “the Stalinist museum is the true cemetery of the Revolution.”<sup>970</sup>

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From 1825 to 1917, Russian revolutionary movements had slowly contested the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress, transforming it from a political prison and sacred center of tsarist autocracy into a radical ‘realm of memory.’ However, after the revolution, was it destined to become once more a prison-house and graveyard – no longer for actual revolutionaries, but for the historical narrative of their struggle? Buck-Morrs, Clark, Dobrenko and Groys would undoubtedly read the Fortress along this narrative arc – the death of the avant-garde, the ideological colonization of temporality, the authoritarian petrification of history. In their analysis, any museum of the revolution

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<sup>968</sup> Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History*, 12.

<sup>969</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 87; and Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History*, 12.

<sup>970</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

implies the relegation of an ossified past to a ‘dead’ memorial space; i.e. the *museumification of the revolution*.

However, we have yet to explore *our* Museum of the Revolution. Tellingly, none of the above authors base their argument upon close critical examinations of actual Soviet museums in the 1920s – the ‘museum’ they discuss is less an actual site and more a synecdoche for a certain sort of rigid politico-memorial epistemology. While, indeed, the cultural politics of Stalinism *did* entail a certain re-nationalized historiographical ossification in the 1930s (although the exact nature of this ‘retreat’ is still open to much debate),<sup>971</sup> we cannot begin our analysis with an underlying assumption that the museum-form is somehow structurally conservative in its memorial politics.

The prevalence of this assumption may in fact have more to do with our present historical moment than the past, reflecting the links tying political conservatism to memory studies and museum forms today.<sup>972</sup> Also obstructing alternate political visions of the museum has been a curious chronological lacunae in current scholarship. Although several recent studies have explored how prison museums order the past, these invariably treat this curational genre as something

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<sup>971</sup> For recent debates on a Stalinist conservative turn (which unfortunately lies outside the thematic and temporal boundaries of the present chapter) see, for example, David L. Hoffman, “Was There a ‘Great Retreat’ from Soviet Socialism? Stalinist Culture Reconsidered,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 4 (2004): 651-74; Matthew E. Lenoe, “In Defense of Timasheff’s *Great Retreat*,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 4 (2004): 721-30.

<sup>972</sup> Some of the most influential recent studies of historical memory are devoted to the nostalgic enshrinement and celebration of a nationalized patrimony. I am thinking in particular of Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de mémoire*.

specifically *post-Soviet*.<sup>973</sup> While the post-1991 prison museum is an important subject in its own right, focusing solely on contemporary institutions in the former Eastern Bloc and ignoring the roots of the prison museum form in *early-Soviet* history can lead to too easy generalizations regarding the nature of the museum-form itself.

As we turn now to examine the Peter and Paul Fortress as prison museum, we must avoid surface assumptions and hold open the possibility that it evidences quite a different conception of historical memorialization. What does resuscitating the story of the early-Soviet museum-form tell us? What if in this museum's orientation towards the past we see not a process of compartmentalization, imprisonment, and alienation, but rather an egalitarian will to re-actualize the past? Instead of a dead space, a space resurrected; instead of a museumification of the revolution, a *revolutionized museum*? We may find that if the Peter and Paul Fortress of the 1920s truly is a 'house of the dead,' perhaps it resembles less the historiographical necropolis of Dobrenko than the museum-cemetery of nineteenth century Russian philosopher Nikolai Fedorov – who envisioned a space of historical redemption, a site whose “work consists not in the accumulation of dead things, but in the resurrection to life of the remains of those who have died, in the restoration of the dead.”<sup>974</sup>

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<sup>973</sup> See, for example, Gavin Slade, “Remembering and Forgetting the Gulag: Prison Tourism Across the Post-Soviet Region,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Tourism*, ed. Jacqueline Z. Wilson et. al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 37-54; and James Mark, “What Remains? Anti-Communism, Forensic Archaeology, and the Retelling of the National Past in Lithuania and Romania,” *Past & Present* 206, no. 5 (2010): 276-300. I consider the contemporary Central-/Eastern-European prison museum to be an important technology of post-Soviet national psychology: functioning to (charitably) work through the traumas of the twentieth century and exorcize its demons and to (less charitably) shore up conservative national identity through a recasting of history as metaphysics and the occlusion of any non-neoliberal political horizons.

<sup>974</sup> Nikolai Fedorov, *Sochineniia*, quoted in Dobrenko, 14.

As we turn now to sift the uneven, combined narratives surrounding the Peter and Paul Fortress of the 1920s, this strange site – at once prison, graveyard, and museum – seems the ideal space for reopening questions on the curatorial-historiographical practices of early Soviet institutions, the nature of Bolshevism’s relationship with temporality and history, and the space of the museum in political modernity.

### **III. The Prison-Museum Excursion**

A history of the Peter and Paul Fortress as a museum space must be located within a larger ‘memorial moment’ of the Soviet 1920s. The fall of the tsarist regime had been accompanied by the opening of the former governments archives, which instigated a furious wave of historical activity (analogous to the much lauded ‘archival revolution’ after the fall of the Soviet Union). A mania for local history (*kraevedenie*) swept the fledgling Soviet State; indeed, within the discipline the 1920s are known as “the golden age of *kraevedenie*.”<sup>975</sup>

This wave of local history was also accompanied by a rapid proliferation of museums. From the founding of Peter the Great’s *Kunstkamera* as Russia’s first public museum in 1714 to the October Revolution, the state had seen a modest increase in sites of historical and scientific curation: by 1917, the Russian Empire possessed an estimated 180 museums. However, the collapse of the Tsarist regime led to a veritable explosion of new institutions – in the first five years after the revolution, more than 250 new museums were founded. This growth in curatorial activity continued well

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<sup>975</sup> See Emily D. Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); and N.P. Milonov, et. al. *Istoricheskoe Kraevedenie* (Moscow: Izd. ‘Prosveshchenie,’ 1969), 8.

into the next decade. By the end of the 1930's, there were over 740 museums in the Soviet Union.<sup>976</sup>

It is within this general turn towards local history, archival research, and curatorial work that, in 1924, the Peter and Paul Fortress became an official Museum of the Revolution – and, in fact, once of the most popular historical sites in Leningrad. In the thirteen months from June 1924 to July 1925, the museum admitted 86,627 visitors. Over 70,000 of these were part of official tours of the fortress.<sup>977</sup> Organizational requests for discounted admission preserved in the *Glavnauka* archives gives us a picture of the wide range of visitors who visited the Peter and Paul Fortress and were lead for excursions through its grounds – activists and workers, schoolchildren and foreign visitors.<sup>978</sup>

The nature of these guided tours (*ekskursiia*) is crucial for an understanding of the memorialization of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Any museum can be viewed as a particular historical narrative given spatial and material form. As with scholarly texts, at its most basic level the museum is an assemblage of raw, untreated objects. To

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<sup>976</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>977</sup> TsGA, SPB f. 2555, op. 1, d. 1277, l. 60. See also A.I. Barabanova and G.A. Popova, “Petropavlovskaiia Krepost’-Muzei,” in *Petropavlovskaiia Krepost’: Stranitsy Istorii*, 407-17.

<sup>978</sup> These requests for discounted or free admission – passed on, when approved, from *Glavnauka* to the Museum of the Revolution – range from the anticipated to the unexpected. Besides the ordinary excursion audience of the early-Soviet period (pupils, activists, and factory workers), one finds quite a few groups of international origin (e.g. thirty visiting German communists in April 1925, nine Moldovan educators in July 1926 – tours demonstrating the continued resonance of the Peter and Paul Fortress space among the international left); individuals working in medicine and the hard sciences (e.g. thirty scientists from the State Reflexiological Institute for the Study of the Brain in February 1926); and, at times, scenarios that must have sorely taxed the technical skill and organizational capacity of the museum (e.g. during the International Congress of Esperantists in August, 1926, *Glanuaka* approved a request for 160 delegates to receive a free Sunday tour of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Unfortunately, it remains unrecorded how the museum handled such a large group [and whether or not the tour was held in Esperanto]). See TsGA, SPB f. 2555, op. 1, d. 1277, l. 34; d. 1330 l. 10, 74, 86.

select and organize these facts is to embed them in a particular web of meaning, itself given conceptual significance. As such, curatorial activity is a close relative of historiography. Deciding upon the images to display and the principles behind their organization is to assert the meanings of each object, the greater narrative that they evidence, and the very regime of temporality in which such a museum-narrative is possible. In the Russian case, this is very clearly seen in the vast difference between, say, the narrative principles and implied temporalities of Peter the Great's *Kunstkamera* against those of the State Historical Museum in Moscow – one evidencing the early modern historical time that Reinhart Koselleck calls '*historia magistra vitae*,' while the other arranging its exhibits along the principles of nineteenth-century historicism.<sup>979</sup>

However, the prison-museum of the Peter and Paul Fortress fundamentally differs from exhibitions of historical objects or artworks in its immobility – buildings cannot be traditionally curated. The museum organizers of 1924 could as little select and organize a complete exhibition as shift the very stones of this architectural complex.<sup>980</sup> The first true 'exhibit' in the museum-prison was only opened in 1927. Even then, it consisted solely of three period-dressed mannequins (two representing prisoners, and one a prison guard) within a newly renovated cell of the Trubetskoi Bastion prison – hardly an ambitious structuring of the prison-museum space.<sup>981</sup>

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<sup>979</sup> See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe, 26-42.

<sup>980</sup> Although, strangely enough, this practice did become possible in the postwar period. In the 1950s and 60s architectural monuments were 'collected' from villages around the Soviet Union to create uncanny, vaguely dehistoricized spaces such as the Museums of Folk Architecture at Kizhi in Karelia and Pyrohiv near Kyiv.

<sup>981</sup> Barabanova and Popova, "Petropavlovskaiia Krepost'-Muzei," 408. The mannequins were removed in the early 1950s on account of their "primitiveness and deterioration."

To completely reorganize the buildings and sites of the Peter and Paul Fortress was impossible.<sup>982</sup> However, the museum organizers could hardly allow the public to simply wander through the architectural complex without mediation or structuring narrative. Facing this curatorial dilemma, it was the guided tour that took the place of traditional principles of selection and organization. As mentioned above, guides conducted over eighty percent of the visitors of the Museum of the Revolution. Their excursions selected the objects and views worthy of contemplation, organized the scattered buildings into a unified space, and bound the grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress into a coherent political narrative. The tour guide functioned, in effect, as curator-historiographer of the prison-museum. Thus, to understand the ‘museumification’ of the Peter and Paul Fortress, its recasting within a radically new historical imaginary of post-1917 Russia, and its underlying temporal sensibility, we must examine the post-revolutionary Soviet excursion – and its guide.

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<sup>982</sup> We can speak briefly here of one other early-Soviet approach to former sites of the old regime: revolutionary rechristenings. Curiously, while this was a common technique of Bolshevik memory politics, the Museum of the Revolution did not rename the various gates and bastions of the complex. In 1922, the *Politotdel Petrogradskogo Ukreplennogo Raiona* wrote to the Petrograd Regional Soviet (*Petrogradskii gubernskii sovet*) with a detailed list of proposed Peter and Paul Fortress renamings to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the revolution. Most of the new names commemorated revolutionary events or Civil War heroes (e.g. the Ioannovsky Ravelin was to become the Sverdlov Ravelin; the Neva Curtain, the Red Army Curtin; the Ioannovskii Gates, the Comrade Trotskii Gates). It is unrecorded why this proposal was never enacted – but it likely was related to the beginning of the interparty power struggle that would soon make such a celebration of Trotskii’s role in the Russian Civil War untenable. See TsGA SPB F. 1000, op. 6, d. 223, L. 292.

#### IV. P.N. Stolpianskii – Historian, Guide, Curator

Perhaps the most significant curator-historiographer of the first years of the Museum of the Revolution was the historian Petr Nikolaevich Stolpianskii (1872-1938).<sup>983</sup> The son of a renowned *popovich* educator from St. Petersburg, Stolpianskii was raised to value scholarly fastidiousness, cherish the enlightening potential of education for the masses, and hold a fierce populist hatred of the Tsarist autocracy. After a Gorky-esque youth spent wandering the Empire – picking up various odd-jobs and dabbling in radical journalism (for which he spent nine months imprisoned in the Orenburg Fortress from 1906 to 1907) – he returned to the city of his birth.<sup>984</sup> Here, he became an archivist in the Russian Museum of His Imperial Majesty Alexander III (the modern day State Russian Museum) as well as an increasingly respected historian of St. Petersburg (*peterburgovedenie*).<sup>985</sup>

At the outbreak of the October Revolution, Stolpianskii was already in his mid-40s. However, he threw himself into the field of cultural politics with tremendous zeal.<sup>986</sup> In the decade after the revolution he gave countless lectures on revolutionary history in factories across the Soviet Union (in 1929, he would write: “There is not a single significant factory in Leningrad, in which I would not give at least one

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<sup>983</sup> This biographical sketch is indebted to I.A. Golubeva, *Petr Nikolaevich Stolpianskii – Istorik Sankt-Peterburga* (St. Petersburg: Izd. ‘Dmitrii Bulanin,’ 2007), as well as Stolpianskii’s papers held in the Manuscript Division of the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg (OR RNB f. 741).

<sup>984</sup> Golubeva, 28.

<sup>985</sup> The popularity of *peterburgovedenie* in this period must be tied to the previously-discussed interest in local history and museum work that swept through Russia in the first decades of the twentieth century. See Clark, *Petersburg*, 54-73; and Milonov, *Istoricheskoe Kraevedenie*.

<sup>986</sup> It is interesting to notice just how easily Stolpianskii’s populist-era attitude towards the necessary ‘enlightenment’ of the masses translated itself into the Bolshevik ‘mass education’ drive of the immediate post-revolutionary period. For more information on the latter, see Clark, *Petersburg*, 110.

lecture... The overall number of my readings over the past 10 years comes to several thousand”),<sup>987</sup> published dozens of monographs and articles on St. Petersburg (although he was never able to complete his *magnum opus*, a proposed five-volume work covering the entire history of the city) – and, most significantly in light of our current study, conducted hundreds of popular tours around St. Petersburg and its environs: including within the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>988</sup>

Indeed, Stolpianskii was a leading tour guide of the Peter and Paul Fortress during its first years as a museum, and has left us a curious text on his practice. In 1926, Stolpianskii published *The Peter and Paul Fortress – Cradle of Petersburg and Torture Chamber of the Autocracy. A Guidebook*.<sup>989</sup> In the preface, Stolpianskii explained that because his 1923 historical work, *The Peter and Paul Fortress*,<sup>990</sup> was so popular as to now have become a “bibliographical rarity,” and due to the fact that he lacked the necessary means to publish a second edition with the desired additions and illustrations, he had “decided to resort to the palliative” of releasing a slimmer text for interested tourists of Leningrad.<sup>991</sup> Stolpianskii had been a leading tour guide of

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<sup>987</sup> Golubeva, *Petr Nikolaevich Stolpianskii*, 49. Evidence for his remarkable cultural activity in the immediate post-revolutionary period can be found in a personal ledger detailing the years 1924 and 1927-1930. For example, in 1927 he gave 323 private and public lectures and 43 excursions – educating what he estimates to be around 40,000 Leningrad citizens. The ledger is held in OR RNB f. 741, op. 2, d. 417.

<sup>988</sup> Receipts, reviews, and invitations for many of his tours and lectures can be found in OR RNB f. 741, op. 1, d. 404, 408, 411-414.

<sup>989</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Petropavlovskaiia Krepost’: Kolybel’ Peterburga i zastenok Samoderzhaviiia –Putevoditel’*. Curiously, the title page replaces the word ‘torture chamber’ (*zastenok*) from the cover with ‘defense’ (*zashchita*). I.A. Golubeva’s outstanding bibliography uses the second version.

<sup>990</sup> A short history of the site written for a popular audience: P.N. Stolpianskii, *Petropavlovskaiia Krepost’* (Moscow: Gos. Izd., 1923).

<sup>991</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel’*, 3. His earlier work was finally republished in 2011. The texts of Stolpianskii – like those of many of the early twentieth-century practitioners of *peterburgovedenie* – have seen a spike in popularity since the fall of the Soviet Union. This

the prison-museum since its founding – early manuscripts show that he had been readying his *Guidebook* for publication since 1924, a year in which he had given at least 46 separate tours of the Peter and Paul Fortress.<sup>992</sup> His published excursion is an extremely significant document of how the prison-museum was experienced in the first years of its operation – and there are two facts that further increase the importance of this small guidebook.

First, it must be mentioned that Stolpianskii was not only a principle tour guide for the Museum of the Revolution during the 1920s – he also led courses in St. Petersburg during this period on proper excursion practices. As a board member of the official Petrograd Excursion Institute (*Petrogradskii Ekskursionnyi Istitut*) from 1920 to 1923, as well as a participant in the Central Bureau of Local History (*Tsentral'noe Biuro Kraevedeniia*) and head of the volunteer historical society “Old Petersburg – New Leningrad” from 1924 until the end of the decade, he developed a rigorous training program for historical tour guides.<sup>993</sup> He was so confident in his pedagogical abilities that he believed those students who had passed through his excursion seminars to be *themselves* capable of training new cohorts of guides among the working masses.<sup>994</sup> Thus, Stolpianskii’s 1926 *Guidebook* is not merely a respected historian’s vision of a tour through the Museum of the Revolution – it displays the

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growing engagement in pre-revolutionary urban history has been buttressed by both the renaming of St. Petersburg in 1991 and the celebration of its tricentennial in 2003.

<sup>992</sup> See OR RNB f. 741 op. 2 d. 154, 156; d. 417 l. 5-9.

<sup>993</sup> For more on Stolpianskii’s public work in the 1920s, see Golubeva, *Petr Nikolaevich Stolpianskii*, 45-7, and Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself*, 89-93. He also participated in the more informal “Pavlovsk Tour Guide Seminars” (*Pavlovsk Seminarii Ekskursovodov*)” summer courses held from 1921 to 1923 in the Pavlovsk Palace outside of Petrograd. The archives of “Old Petersburg – New Leningrad” can be found at RGIALI f. 32.

<sup>994</sup> Golubeva, *Petr Nikolaevich Stolpianskii*, 58. Interestingly enough, Stolpianskii preferred to train guides from the lower classes, intending his tours to be led by workers *for* workers.

excursion practices and historical vision of an entire school of tour guides that functioned during the first years of the museum's operation.

Second, Stolpianskii's *Guidebook* text is not composed as a self-contained tour to be read by the prospective visitor – that is, the narrator/reader relationship is not equivalent to that of guide/excursionist. Rather, the book contains a tour of the prison-museum *as well as* instructions on how to lead such a tour. While it undoubtedly could be used as a standalone guide to the Peter and Paul Fortress, it also contains explicit directives on methods of organization, ways to keep the attention of disinterested tourists, and even the intended emotional and intellectual effects of certain stops on the tour. Thus, this *Guidebook* reads like the X-ray of a traditional guided excursion. While the experienced exterior of the tour is clearly visible, the structuring principles lying beneath are openly articulated in striking fashion.

Let us now turn to a close reading of Stolpianskii's guided tour. It is undertaken with the argument that revealing the excursion practices of the Museum of the Revolution—practices essentially curatorial-historiographical in nature – can give us privileged insight into how radical intellectuals ordered and negotiated revolutionary sites of memory in the first years of the Bolshevik project. Through this, we can reveal the political commitments, epistemological conceits, and genre innovations embedded in the early-Soviet prison museum, as well as understand the curious afterlife of the Peter and Paul Fortress and its revolutionary carceral culture.

## V. The Fortress Tour

Stolpianskii's tour begins across from the fortress on the opposite bank of the Neva, where he recommends guides to use the prominent statue of A.V. Suvorov as a meeting point, adjacent to the Field of Mars (which in 1918 had been renamed the Square of the Victims of the Revolution).<sup>995</sup> The early pages of his guide are devoted to structural matters, stressing the need to explain to the excursionists both the organizational requirements and overall goals of the tour. The first matter ranges from the mundane ("no one [should] stand behind the leader," "excursionists [should] stand at an approximate distance of 2-2½ *arshin* [approx. 1.5 m] from the leader," etc.) to the rather stern ("During the movement between stops, excursionists should not ask questions").<sup>996</sup> However, the second matter – that of the overall purpose of the tour – is the first appearance of Stolpianskii's historiographico-curatorial vision of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Of the four points he calls upon the tour guide to communicate to his group, it is the last two that are the most striking:

- ...
- 3) The city excursion must teach us "to read" a book, as the city was called by the historian-archaeologist Pogodin; the city tour must force "the stones to speak (*zastavit' "govorit' kamni"*)";
  - 4) The excursion must take note of the "holy sites" of the revolution in the city.<sup>997</sup>

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<sup>995</sup> This was not a neutral gathering place - the 'Square of the Victims of the Revolution' was in fact the burial site for those revolutionaries who had perished during the February Revolution, and in the early 1920s was a site for radical pilgrimage. See Figes and Kolonitsky, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 47, 75. In fact, Stolpianskii had planned a small work on the history of this square as part of his unfinished multi-volume history of St. Petersburg. See OR RNB f. 741 op. 2 d. 409 ll. 69-72.

<sup>996</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel'*, 5.

<sup>997</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

What does it mean to ‘force the stones to speak’? While this imperative may strike one at first as merely a rhetorical flourish, elsewhere Stolpianskii gives it special significance. In an unpublished manuscript titled “City Excursions” from the same period, he muses further on the assertion of historian M.P. Pogodin that “the city is a book, in which each street is a page.”<sup>998</sup> While agreeing with Pogodin’s essentially aesthetic dictum (one should approach city streets with an eye for harmony, unity of form, etc.), Stolpianskii writes that this practice should also have a social and political function, pursued through “[letting] the stones cry out (*pust’ kamni vopiiot*).”<sup>999</sup> While the beauty of St. Petersburg cannot be denied, its Tsarist buildings and landscapes retain within them memories “of that inefficiency, that lack of principle that reigned over Russian reality.” And even more urgently, in the spaces of revolutionary struggle, “the stones will ‘cry out’ for the unavenged (*kamni budut “vopiiat’” ob otomshchenii*).”<sup>1000</sup>

Thus, while the artistic panoramas of St. Petersburg may be visually arranged as pleasing historical texts, the excursionist must hear the ‘victims of the revolution’ as their histories leap out from the very stones themselves. The curatorial hermeneutics and concept of historical time underlying Stolpianskii’s notion of ‘the stones crying out’ in the revolution’s ‘sacred spaces’ is immediately striking; let us continue along our tour to see how these historiographical goals might be achieved in practice.

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<sup>998</sup> OR RNB f. 741, op. 2, d. 188, l. 1. This manuscript is also briefly discussed in Golubeva, *Petr Nikolaevich Stolpianskii*, 60.

<sup>999</sup> OR RNB f. 741, op. 2, d. 188, l. 9. The last phrase is heavily underlined in the original manuscript.

<sup>1000</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 12.

After collecting the excursionists at the statue of Suvorov and explaining the basic principles of the tour, Stolpianskii's guide takes them to the first of the 25 stops that will lead them through the prison-museum. The first several stopping points – directing the group over the Trinity Bridge and up to the Ioannovskie Gate of the fortress – are characterized by their rather light mood. Indulging in his fascination with histories of St. Peterburg's architecture and everyday life (*byt*), Stolpianskii seems to delight in pointing out historical details relating to the houses of the Neva embankments, theories of bridge construction, and the cultural significance of the columns on Vasileevskii Island.

As the tour reaches its fourth stop on the small bridge leading directly to the Ioannovskie gate, the guide's commentary abruptly shifts from a neutral description of the Peter and Paul Fortress' construction to a far darker tone – a shift that demands to be quoted at length. Explaining that the tour leader can use this opportunity “to graphically show the third and fourth goals of the city excursion” (i.e. “letting the stones speak” and bearing witness to “sacred sites”), he directs the guide:

Having turned the faces of the excursionists to the Ioannovskie Gate, [one must] emphasize that on the brick wall to the right of this gate on an early November morning in 1879 rose two gallows with hanged members of the People's Will (*narodovol'tsy*): Kviatkovskii and Presniakovym. *We are entering the Peter and Paul Fortress under the gallows, and this gallows mood (if we can thus phrase it) will grow the entire time we move through the fortress, and it will reach its highest tension, its apogee, when we ascend to the Trubetskoi Bastion.*<sup>1001</sup>

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<sup>1001</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel'*, 15. Emphasis in the original. Note that Stolpianskii is slightly mistaken with his dates here – the *narodovol'tsy* A.A. Kviatkovskii and A.K. Presniakov were hung on November 4, 1880, not 1879. See RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 486 [*O privedenii v ispolnenie smertnogo prigovora nad gosudarstvennym prestupnikam Kviatkovskim i Presniakovym*].

Three points should be noted in the abrupt, almost morbid shock of this moment. First is the importance placed upon the space of the ‘threshold’ as the tour enters the Peter and Paul Fortress. Stolpianskii uses these sites as both topographical and narrative structuring devices throughout the tour. Second, in this moment of entrance the guide is directed to radically alter the spatial dimensions of the excursion. While up to this fourth stop the tour had followed a linear path across both the Neva and historical facts, this dramatic rupture introduces an accelerating vertical element to the tour’s movement. From this point onward, the horizontal passage through the fortress will be accompanied by an ascending political consciousness and sense of horror, which Stolpianskii promises will reach almost unbearable heights upon entering the prison building itself. Finally, we should be careful to notice how the goals of the tour are conceptualized at this juncture. Clearly, for Stolpianskii, the brick walls that saw the deaths of two revolutionaries are a “sacred place” of the Peter and Paul Fortress. The “crying out” of these bricks manifests itself for the excursionists in the form of an abrupt, historical *image* as well as a dramatic, oppressive *mood* – both of which are to linger in the minds of the tourists as they begin their forward/upward movement into the topographical/historico-political space of the prison-museum, a movement promising even further shocking encounters. The importance of the emotion and the image will become clear as we follow Stolpianskii into the grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

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After this passage into the fortress itself, the dramatic tempo of the tour decelerates. The next seven stops pass rather uneventfully. The guide is instructed to give a brief,

introductory history of the fortress-prison (from a “state prison” to a “prison-museum”), before entering the Peter and Paul Cathedral with its tombs of the Tsars.<sup>1002</sup>

Before the revolutions of 1917, the Peter and Paul Cathedral had been one of the most sacred political sites in Imperial Russia.<sup>1003</sup> During Tsarist times, visitors had been allowed entrance onto the fortress ground only during a handful of religious holidays – especially on Mid-Pentecost [*Den’ Prepoloveniia*] and for funerals of members of the imperial family. In each of these instances, the Peter and Paul Cathedral – as major cathedral and Romanov burial ground – served as the sacred pivot around which crowds gravitated. In the words of the nineteenth-century observer S. Novoselov, “every Russian considers it his sacred duty to visit the burial site of our Royal House [*usypal’ nitsu nashego Tsarskogo Doma*].”<sup>1004</sup>

In contrast, the attitude of Stolpianskii’s tour is anything but reverent. First, the very brevity with which the tour covers the ‘sacred’ burial site of the Tsars – a place once the focal point of any trip to the Peter and Paul Fortress – must have been shocking to the excursionists. Indeed, the tour devotes to the Romanovs a mere fraction of the time that, as we shall see, is later given to the prison of the Trubetskoi Bastion. In choosing not to linger within the cathedral, Stolpianskii elects to examine only three graves – those of Peter the Great, Pavel I, and Alexander II.

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<sup>1002</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel’*, 18.

<sup>1003</sup> The nature of this space – as well as the concepts and practices that produced this very idea of ‘sacrality’ – is discussed in Chapter One of the present dissertation.

<sup>1004</sup> V.B. Gendrikov and D.L. Piratinskaia, “Prazdniki i tseremonii v Petropavlovskoi Kreposti” in *Petropavlovskaiia Krepost’: Stranitsy Istorii* (Saint Petersburg: Art-Palaz, 2001), 393.

Pausing before their ornate tombs, the guide is directed to highlight the contradictions of their reigns and their posthumous memorialization. Thus, the embalmed body of Peter the Great in the center of his self-willed city is juxtaposed with the “60 thousand human lives” of those workers who, “according to the inexact statistical information of that time,” died in the construction of St. Petersburg.<sup>1005</sup> The panorama of ‘Peter’s city’ is contrasted with the bones upon which it rests. Moving on to the grave of Pavel I, Stolpianskii recommends that one “give the characteristics of this emperor, revealing in detail his abnormality, his madness.” The guide is then to relate how, despite this insanity, Pavel’s death in a palace coup was recently claimed to be a martyr’s death, and before the revolution a state-led campaign had been underway to have him canonized.<sup>1006</sup> This juxtaposition – mad emperor and Orthodox saint – is meant to reveal the truth of Orthodoxy’s bankruptcy: that “the church was supposed to serve, and it served the idea of Tsarism.”<sup>1007</sup> Finally, the tour examines the memory of Alexander II. Here, the contradictions lie not in the celebration of a Tsar’s city built on the working dead, nor in the incompatibility of madness and sainthood, but rather in the grave of the Tsar itself. Pointing out the exquisite craftsmanship of Alexander II and his wife’s sarcophagi (carved from *orlits* [a rare form of Siberian rhodonite] and jasper, respectively), the guide is meant to debunk the widely-held myth that these two tombs were made through the donations of grateful

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<sup>1005</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel’*, 22, 12.

<sup>1006</sup> This canonization campaign is discussed in Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 6.

<sup>1007</sup> The dual meaning of ‘serve’ in this sentence – evoking both obedience (*sluzhit’*) and church service (*sluzhba*) – is present in both English and Russian.

peasants to the memory of the ‘Tsar-Liberator.’<sup>1008</sup> To debunk the ‘grateful peasant’ myth of the Tsar-Liberator’s tomb is also to debunk the myth of the Tsar-Liberator itself – for, as the guide is to assert, it is impossible to imagine a peasantry grateful for a liberation that “allotted the peasants an amount of land with which the peasant himself could not exist and fell into economic slavery.”<sup>1009</sup> With this being said, the tour leaves the cathedral.

Thus, this former ‘sacred site’ of the tsarist-era fortress is preserved in the Soviet-era prison-museum as a site of myth and inconsistency. Crucial imperial narratives (the city’s miraculous founding, the sublimity of Orthodox sainthood, and the benevolence of the ‘Tsar-Liberator’) are neither removed nor destroyed – rather, these obsolete histories, materialized in each Tsarist sarcophagus, are maintained within the fortress so that each tour group can bear witness to their internal contradictions. Navigating through these deactivated ‘scenarios of power’ not only desacralizes the Peter and Paul Cathedral, but also – in the image of the mad emperor/saint – delegitimizes the very process of Imperial-Orthodox sacralization itself.<sup>1010</sup>

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<sup>1008</sup> Intimately familiar with the histories of local factories, Stolpianskii traces their construction to the Peterhof Lapidary Factory. For more on this myth, see V.G. Dolbnin, “Istoriia sozdaniia nadgrobiia Tsariu-Osvoboditeliu,” in *Peterburgskie chteniia 96* (St. Petersburg: Izd. ‘Russko-Baltiiskii Informatsionnyi BLITs,’ 1996), 99-101. We can grant that the sarcophagi themselves are exquisite – even Stolpianskii cannot help himself from admitting: “apart from ‘political’ goals, these tombs are interesting from a purely aesthetic point of view...”

<sup>1009</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel’*, 25.

<sup>1010</sup> In this way, we can see the similarities between the exhibition of Romanov tombs in the Peter and Paul Cathedral and the proliferation of ‘Museums of Atheism’ in the early 1920’s – not only in their will to secularize and delegitimize spiritual-imperial narratives of power, but also in the tactic of excavating conflicts within and between images.

After leaving the cathedral, Stolpianskii suggests that the tour guide ask whether the excursionists have any questions and whether anything up to this point has been unclear; for the first half of the tour, which has been “purely historical,” is now finished, and the remainder of the Peter and Paul Fortress excursion will be “purely political.”<sup>1011</sup>

On this note, the guide is to direct their excursionists’ attention to the front porch of the nearby Commandant’s House, and “imprint this porch into their memory.” At this pivotal juncture in the tour, Stolpianskii instructs the guide to indulge in a bit of showmanship:

[Standing] amongst the majority of the excursionists, appear to be perplexed as to the reason for viewing this porch, as it is the most common, the most everyday sort of porch. When this sort of impression has been created, ask that the excursionists turn towards the leader... and try to ‘reconstruct,’ to recover (*vosstanovit’*) a picture of a political prisoner being brought to this place.<sup>1012</sup>

Far from being “the most common, the most everyday sort of porch,” this is the site where prison coaches carrying apprehended revolutionaries would first halt within the fortress walls. Stolpianskii instructs the guide to describe how a gendarme officer would descend from the vehicle, present documents to the Ober-Commandant on the porch, and then:

The coach, carrying [the prisoner] and two gendarmes traveled onwards to the prison, *by the very same path which we will now take as an excursion*. This final allusion is very important: it prepares the establishing of a certain mood for the excursionists, the sort of mood that they must receive from the second part of the excursion.<sup>1013</sup>

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<sup>1011</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel’*, 26.

<sup>1012</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>1013</sup> *Ibid.*

What is noteworthy here are the reoccurrences of the tour's primary structuring devices. Stolpianskii's proclivity for spatio-conceptual thresholds is clearly visible. The excursion's structural shift from 'pure history' to 'pure politics' is a turn from contraction-laden Tsarist narratives to the lived experiences of Russian revolutionaries. These were revolutionaries who crossed their own Rubicon from civil society to the radical underground, and for doing so were led through the several thresholds of the Peter and Paul Fortress towards a place of imprisonment – a passage about to be reenacted by the tour group itself.

The theatricality of this scene is also abundantly clear – and we could see this dramatism as a key strategy in Stolpianskii's entwinement of *image* and *mood*. One of the first stops of the tour had seen a brick wall outside of the Ioannovskie Gate transformed into a 'sacred site' of the revolution. A similar move is enacted here - through the guide's hermeneutics, an 'everyday porch' reveals itself as a relic of revolutionary struggle, as a site which speaks of 'the unavenged' and, through the help of a bit of dramatic flair, is experienced *both intellectually and emotionally*. While Stolpianskii asserts that this unveiling announces the second half of the tour as 'purely political,' the desired affect of 'reconstructing' and 'recovering' the path of the revolutionary is felt to be far more historical than the earlier assemblage of Tsarist contradictions, and in fact seems to gain its immediacy in its very juxtaposition with the delegitimized narratives of the Peter and Paul Cathedral.

It is thus, with the 'gallows mood' reactivated and the path of the condemned before them, that the excursion begins its topographical, political, and emotional ascent towards the prison itself.

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And ascend the tour does – after a brief history of the Trubetskoi Bastion as tsarist prison is given, the guide leads the excursionists into its halls while recounting the experiences of those who had once suffered there. As it progresses, each viewpoint has witnessed a dark history, each object holds within it traces of that titanic battle between revolution and reaction. Thus, the gates of the prison speak of the awful contrast between radical liberty and hellish immobilization. These gates, and the hopelessness of the prisoner, are painted in a more-than-sinister light: “...at this point, the imprisoned must have remembered the inscription which Dante saw on the gates of hell: ‘abandon all hope of returning, ye who enter here’.”<sup>1014</sup> After walking the excursionists through the standard prison reception ritual, with its dehumanizing tone and humiliating medical examination, the excursionists are led to a cell on the second floor of the prison. Here, besides giving an extremely detailed account of the agonizing tedium of imprisonment – which forced the revolutionary “to feel themselves no longer human, but as some sort of small beast trapped in a cage”<sup>1015</sup> – the guide is to direct their excursionists’ attention to the pitted face of a cell wall. These walls remember both the prisoners who attempted to communicate with each other through their illicit knocking language and those gendarmes assigned to drown out their dialogue through “unceasing knocking.” After describing this rather sadistic practice

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<sup>1014</sup> Ibid., 33. Indeed they must have – the Decembrist I.D. Iakushkin described in his memoirs how these lines had come to his mind when crossing this exact threshold, and Stolpianskii himself had quoted this passage in his earlier work on the Fortress. See *Zapiski I.V. Iakushkina*, quoted in P.N. Stolpianskii, *Petropavlovskaiia Krepost’*, 256.

<sup>1015</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel’*, 41. Note that I have found no archival evidence for this.

of the guards, Stolpianskii tells the guide that if the excursion meets this information with expressions of horror, this is “just the mood which the guide has to establish.”<sup>1016</sup>

And finally, as the tour is faced with the isolation chamber of the prison-museum, this unbearable tension – between the utmost humanity of the imprisoned revolutionaries and the humiliation, deprivation and madness to which they were subjected – reaches its highest apogee and is radically overcome:

The battle [against the regime] began in the Peter and Paul Fortress, ended in Shlisselburg, and ended, as cannot but seem strange at first glance, with the victory of the prisoners. What they achieved is that Nikolai Aleksandrovich Morozov, having entered the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1881, left Shlisselburg in 1905, having been in prison for 25 years; Vera Nikolaevna Figner was imprisoned for 22 years; Mikhail Vasil’evich Novorusskii – 19 years, and these people left not sick, weakened, but full of strength, full of energy, and left so that they could now throw themselves into the very thick of life and continue their work!

...

After this [Stolpianskii instructs the guide] it is highly natural to transition to the conclusion: in the beginning, this prison seemed to us a place of horror, it aroused in us a feeling of revulsion, a feeling of revenge against the former regime; this feeling must remain, but our relationship towards the prison must change – this prison must become for us the ‘holy of holies,’ our church, for here our predecessors agonized and suffered, those who laid the beginnings of the struggle for liberation, the first bricks of the great building of freedom, who with their own individual lives showed that there is no force that can kill human thought, human energy, human will.<sup>1017</sup>

With this radical act of sacralization – with this transformation of the Peter and Paul Fortress from a ‘place of horror’ to ‘our holy of holies’ – the tour winds down. As the excursionists are led outside the prison, they are asked to reflect one last time on “that prison, fully deserving of the name: ‘the kingdom of the dead’ (*tsarstvo mertvykh*).”

Brought to the Fortress pier with its Petersburg panorama as a final stop, the guide is instructed to “ask them to recall the rooms of the Trubetskoi Bastion, which they have

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<sup>1016</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>1017</sup> Ibid., 47-8. Early manuscript drafts assert that Morozov and Figner “could now... continue (and do continue) their work!” See OR RNB f. 741 op. 2 d. 154 l. 34.

just left – the contrast between that which spreads out from the pier and the Trubetskoi Bastion will emerge with incredible harshness.”<sup>1018</sup> Stolpianskii heightens this dissonance between imperial embankment and prison cell by stressing that *the Tsars thoroughly knew* the prison conditions of the Peter and Paul Fortress. To return to the title of the tour –the Peter and Paul Fortress is both “the cradle of St. Petersburg and the torture-chamber of the autocracy,” and the beauty of the Tsarist capital is inseparable from the inhuman horrors that lay at its core.

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With this final contradiction, the group exits the Nevskie Gate and Stolpianskii’s tour comes to an end. While our account of his text is necessarily abridged, it should give a faithful record of how excursionists were meant to experience the Peter and Paul Fortress – and allow us to interrogate the particular understanding of revolutionary history and its spaces which functioned within this early-Soviet museum of the revolution.

The most striking aspects of this tour are its use of binary conflicts (with their “incredible harshness”) and its extremely dramatic nature. The importance that Stolpianskii places on establishing a certain theatrical ‘mood’ amongst the excursionists has already been clearly visible – but a particular passage draws out its functioning to an even higher degree. Approximately halfway through the tour – as the group enters the Trubetskoi Bastion as well as the realm of the “purely political” – Stolpianskii instructs his potential guide on the significance of emotions:

It seems to me, that the leader of an excursion in the Trubetskoi Bastion must avoid two things: 1) He must not make citations from books, or read extracts;

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<sup>1018</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel’*, 53.

this reading dampens the enthusiasm of the public terribly, the excursionists very quickly tire and inattentively listen, and 2) he must remember that in the Trubetskoi Bastion it is important to create a certain mood, it is important to produce the sort of impression that, on leaving, the excursionist carries within his heart a burning hatred for the deposed regime, so that shattered Tsarism becomes the most evil enemy – and in general, don't teach the excursionist the history of the Russian Revolution. Therefore, it's unnecessary to overburden your explanations with an abundance of names, indications of parties, of processes, underlining that in such-and-such a cell sat so-and-so, and so forth. All of these details, in my view, are not only useless but even harmful. Excursions through the bastion must act on feeling. Thus one must use the available material very carefully, one must not overburden and instead must choose that, which can be called 'dramatism' (*vyburat' to, chto imet' znachenie 'dramatisma'*).

...  
Of course, what is important here is the spirit, and not the letter.<sup>1019</sup>

As we have already seen, Stolpianskii sees this “spirit,” these “moods”, dramatically emerging out of the clash of contradictory images – be they the juxtaposition of the horrors of the fortress with the beauty of the imperial capital, the irreconcilable conflicts within the Romanov tombs themselves, or the nobility of the revolutionary-martyrs with the terror of their fates.

What are we to make of this? At first glance, this focus on “dramatism” may seem to signify cheap theatricality – perhaps the manipulating function of surprise which Buck-Morss, following Walter Benjamin, sees as a fundamental characteristic of an early-twentieth century where “perceptions that once occasioned conscious reflection were now the source of shock impulses,” and a shift from ‘aesthetics’ to ‘anaesthetics’ brought about “a numbing of the senses’ cognitive capacity... [destroying] the human organism’s power to respond politically.”<sup>1020</sup> Or perhaps this focus on the dramatic and emotional evidences the pervasive love of increasingly

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<sup>1019</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

<sup>1020</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 104.

artificial spectacles that Clark diagnoses in the Soviet 1920s – a love threatening to replace political engagement with passive spectatorship.<sup>1021</sup> However, before jumping to such conclusions, it is productive to view the dramatism of Stolpianskii’s tour of the Peter and Paul Fortress alongside another medium: *not theatre, but film*. Doing so uncovers that the excursion’s two hermeneutic modes – uncovering the tension-filled *image* and imparting the abrupt *emotion* – are fundamentally related to the technique of *montage*. This is the key mechanism of the tour, and reveals its underlying historical principles.

## **VI. Film Form, Museum Form**

Before pursuing this argument, let us briefly examine the intersections between the Museum of the Revolution and early-Soviet film. Solpianskii published his tour guide in 1926, in the midst of what scholars widely call ‘the golden age of Soviet Cinema.’ Indeed, in the mid-1920s the Bolshevik party spoke of a ‘cinefication’ (*kienefikatsiia*) campaign running parallel with the ‘electrification’ (*elektrifikatsiia*) of the countryside and provinces.<sup>1022</sup> In the political culture of the day, radical cinema – as a tool of

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<sup>1021</sup> Clark, *Petersburg*, 122-42.

<sup>1022</sup> Before his death, Lenin had claimed that “cinema is the most important of the arts” – and while the Bolshevik use of film for the purposes of propaganda and entertainment date from the agitprop-trains of the Civil War, it was only from the mid-1920s onward that the revolutionary political potential of this medium began to be truly explored with new cinematic techniques. See Peter Kenez, *Cinema & Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 50-98; A.S. Smirnova, ed., *Samoe vazhnoe iz vsekh iskusstv: Lenin o kino* (Moscow: Izd. ‘Iskusstvo,’ 1973); and Robert Argenbright, “Soviet Agitational Vehicles: Bolsheviks in Strange Places,” in *Space, Place, and Power in Modern Russia: Essays in the New Spatial History*, 142-63.

political enlightenment and pedagogical power – was placed alongside the didactic forms of the factory lecture, popular theatre, and public museum tour.<sup>1023</sup>

However, the links tying early Soviet cinematic culture to the Peter and Paul Fortress prison-museum are not merely chronological contemporaneity. February 5, 1924 – just weeks before the fortress was converted into a ‘Museum of the Revolution’ – saw the Soviet premiere of the film *Palace and Fortress* [*Dvoretz i Krepost’*].<sup>1024</sup> Directed by A.V. Ivanovskii, it is the tale of the twenty-year imprisonment of the radical Mikhail Beideman, with a script collaboratively written by historian P.E. Shchegolev and popular novelist O. Forsch.<sup>1025</sup> The eponymous sites are, naturally, the Winter Palace and the Peter and Paul Fortress – the entire film pivots around the shocking juxtaposition of these dual tsarist spaces in their opulence and oppression.

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<sup>1023</sup> See Denise J. Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35-49.

<sup>1024</sup> See discussions of the film in Dunja Dogo, *Eroi, tiranni e congiure. Storia e invenzione nel cinema russo e sovietico (1917-1937)* (Turin: Kaplan, 2016), esp. 64-79; and Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 428. To note a curious intersection: in his memoirs, director A.V. Ivanovskii recalls how after the film’s production, he had secured a personal screening for V.I. Lenin in his convalescence at Gorkii. To his shock, the day of the planned viewing was the day of Lenin’s death. See A.V. Ivanovskii, *Vospominaniia kinorezhissera* (Moscow: ‘Iskusstvo,’ 1967), 175, 186; as well as Emel’ianov, *P.E. Shchegolev – istorik russkogo revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia* (Moscow: ‘Nauka’, 1990), 59n205, 60n209.

<sup>1025</sup> Shchegolev is a fascinating figure in his own right – having served time in prison for radical journalism in his youth, after February 1917 he took part in the Extraordinary Commission responsible for prosecuting officials of the former regime (held in the Peter and Paul Fortress), and by the 1920s had become perhaps the most respected historian of the Alekseevskii Ravelin and Trubetskoi Bastion (as well as a noted Pushkinist), serving on the presidium of the Museum of the Revolution as its primary scientific advisor (*uchenyi konsul’tant*). See TsGA SPB F. 2555, op. 1, d. 1330, l. 35; Iu. N. Emel’ianov, *P.E. Shchegolev*, 21-3, 58-60; as well as a discussion of his place in the history of revolutionary Russian carceral cultures in Chapter Eight of the present dissertation. For the most recent republication of his works on the Alekseevskii Ravelin, see A.A. Matyshev, ed. *Alekseevskii Ravelin: Sekretnaia gosudarstvennaia tiurma Rossii v XIX veke*. For more on the incarceration of Mikhail Beideman, see Chapter Six.

The film was a huge domestic and international success by the standards of the time.<sup>1026</sup> Considered “the first harbinger of Soviet historico-revolutionary cinematography,” the commercial triumph of the film sparked off what Denise Youngblood calls a wave of “Soviet costume dramas.”<sup>1027</sup> This genre peaked in 1926-27, a time when one-third of the films produced in the Soviet Union dealt with historical and revolutionary subjects.<sup>1028</sup> It was *Palace and Fortress* that established the financial viability and popular appeal of these ‘costume dramas,’ setting the tone for the entire genre. Thus, at the same historical moment when the Peter and Paul Fortress’ prison doors were being physically flung open for Soviet excursionists, cinemas across the USSR and Europe were also revealing the secrets of the “torture chamber of the autocracy” to eager audiences.

Undoubtedly, the silver-screen image of the Fortress was in the forefront of many viewers’ minds as they toured the newly established prison-museum. But not

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<sup>1026</sup> In 1925, a popular poll saw *Palace and Fortress* as urban moviegoers’ second favorite film (behind *Little Red Devils*, I. Perestiantii’s famous Civil War adventure picture). Furthermore, *Palace and Fortress* was one of the most asked-for films among the peasantry during the ‘cinefication’ campaigns of the mid-1920s, and was also exported for mass viewings in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany (including a lavish premiere in Berlin, attended by the director). See Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 44, 77, 165; Leyda, *Kino*, 218; Yuri Tsivian, “The Wise and Wicked Game: Re-Editing and Soviet Film Culture of the 1920s,” *Film History* 8 (1996): 330-31; Ivanovskii, *Vospominaniia*, 186-189.

<sup>1027</sup> Emel’ianov, *P.E. Shchegolev*, 60; Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 80-83.

<sup>1028</sup> *Ibid.*, 33; Emel’ianov, *P.E. Shchegolev*, 58-59. Shchegolev would go on to work with Ivanovskii for two more films – completing the trilogy are the grandiose *Stepan Khalturin* (1925) and *The Decembrists* (1927). Costing an estimated 340,000 rubles, the latter was likely the expensive silent film ever made in the USSR, and is rumored to have led to the bankruptcy of the studio Sevzapkino – see Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 80-81. After the failure of this film, Ivanovskii turned to musical comedies and cinema adaptations of classic literature. Interestingly, I have found evidence that he returned at least once more to the topic of political imprisonment – at the beginning of the 1930s, the Leningrad branch of the “Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles” (*Obshchestvo byvshikh politkatorzhan i ssyl’noposelentsev*) commissioned him to direct a sound film on the Shlisselburg fortress-prison. While a (very melodramatic, and very Stalinist) script titled *Government Prison (Gosudareva tiur’ma)* was produced in collaboration with former prisoner D.A. Trilisser, it appears that the film was never made. Two ‘librettos’ for this film are preserved at TsGA SPB F. 506, op. 1, d. 318-19.

just the excursionists – perhaps influenced by the success of Shchegolev’s adaption of *peterburgovedenie* to Soviet cinemas, I have discovered that in 1924 our tour guide Stolpianskii was himself commissioned by the studio Kino-Sever to write scripts on historical subjects.<sup>1029</sup> Although his efforts never translated into any actual films, preserved in his archives are multiple fragments and the completed script for an unfinished silent picture on revolutionary history titled “614 Days.”<sup>1030</sup>

Thus, guided by an initiate in the Soviet film industry through a site already thoroughly ‘cinematized’ in popular culture, it does not seem rash to claim that the tour of the Peter and Paul Fortress as prison-museum in the 1920s was heavily influenced by cinema. But how, exactly, did this influence manifest itself? The pivotal concept here – for *Palace and Fortress*, the cinematic nature of Stolpianskii’s tour, and the historiographical curation of the Peter and Paul Fortress as an early-Soviet prison-museum – is *the principle of montage*.

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<sup>1029</sup> OR RNB f. 741, op.1, d. 404, l. 64.

<sup>1030</sup> The title refers to the period between the decision of the *ispolnitel’nyi komitet* of the People’s Will terrorist organization to sentence Tsar Alexander II to death (August 1879) to the group’s trial and execution for successfully carrying out this assassination (April 1881). Fascinatingly, the film (like the tour) was meant to have a primarily emotional effect on its viewers – in his opening remarks, Stolpianskii stresses that “the film must raise a [revolutionary] mood and keep it elevated.” Accordingly, the titular 614 days of the film’s subject are introduced by a grim prologue depicting the hanging of People’s Will members Kviatkovskii and Presniakovym at the Ioannovskie Gate of the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1880 – the same scene that introduces the “gallows mood” of Stolpianskii’s prison-museum excursion. For various working manuscripts of this screenplay (many of which include introductory remarks from Stolpianskii) see OR RNB f. 741 op. 1 d. 8; op. 2 d. 177-180, 182. In Stolpianskii’s archive I have also found a screenplay for a film titled *Vera Zasulich’s Shot* (*Vystrel Veri Zasulich*). While undated and in a far more fragmented state than *614 Days*, it is worth noting that this script also features a prologue in the Peter and Paul Fortress – an extended depiction of D.I. Pisarev writing literary criticism in his cell provides both the moral outrage and the intellectual coordinates to underpin a tale of Vera Zasulich’s political development. See OR RNB f. 741, op. 2, d. 29.

For besides founding the ‘costume drama’ genre in Soviet cinematography, A. Ivanovskii’s work in *Palace and Fortress* (although largely forgotten now) was at the cutting edge of Soviet editing theory. In the words of one Soviet film critic:

Ivanovskii’s application of contrast montage [in *Palace and Fortress*] is also successful. Scenes filmed in the palace are interwoven with scenes in the fortress, to underline the irreconcilability of two worlds: that of the Tsarist autocracy and that of the revolutionaries. In the palace – an opulent celebration, a ball, dancing of the polonaise, and in the fortress the prisoner Beideman is garbed in a straightjacket. In the palace – a ballet spectacle, with fluttering close-up shots of elegant ballerina feet, and in the fortress the prisoner Nechaev is fettered in heavy leg shackles...<sup>1031</sup>

The titular juxtaposition of the Winter Palace with the Peter and Paul Fortress was the first time a Soviet film combined parallel (or contrast) montage and intellectual montage together in order to both represent simultaneous events in two different locations *and* draw conceptual conclusions from the uneasy clash between these two images – the intellectual ‘harsh contrast’ between prison cell and ongoing imperial ball in the film’s first scenes painted a sharp picture of societal injustice.

Although after its initial, striking montages *Palace and Fortress* meanders off into what one critic called ‘bourgeois melodrama,’ this early emotional-intellectual conflict of images undoubtedly drew the attention of S. Eisenstein. At this time he had already begun to formulate his famous theory of montage, which would first be put into effect in his 1925 films *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin*.<sup>1032</sup>

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<sup>1031</sup> N.A. Lebedev, *Ocherk istorii kino SSSR: Nemo kino (1918-1934)* (Moscow: Izd. ‘Iskusstvo,’ 1965), 180.

<sup>1032</sup> The beginnings of Eisenstein’s thoughts on montage are usually traced to his 1923 text “Montage of Attractions, An Essay.” He would develop this principle more explicitly in his “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram” and “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form” (1929). See Sergei Eisenstein, “Montage of Attractions, An Essay,” in *The Film Sense*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1947) 230-33; and Sergei Eisenstein, “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram” and “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” in *Film Form*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace and

In the thought of Eisenstein and other Soviet film theorists of the 1920s, “montage is conflict.”<sup>1033</sup> This fundamental editing technique served to create a “conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other,” out of which “*arises* a concept.”<sup>1034</sup> That is, proper revolutionary montage is not an additive technique, where a series of shots ‘unroll’ an idea (an older theory that Eisenstein calls “the epic principle”) – rather, it is a “dramatic principle,” whereby the collision of two images *dialectically* produces a third emotional-conceptual form.<sup>1035</sup> Cinematic montage allows the film form to render history as it is shaped by dialectical materialism.

In *Palace and Fortress*, Ivanovskii juxtaposed the Winter Palace and Peter and Paul Fortress in order to create a sense of injustice and oppression. Stolpianskii’s tour goes further, entering the prison-museum grounds to explore the dialectical conflicts present within the fortress’ very walls. Crafted by a scriptwriter in the golden age of Soviet cinema, the prison-museum tour evidences a cinematic structure and cinematographic instinct even more sophisticated than that of Ivanovskii. Far from being mere vulgar theatricality, I would argue that Stolpianskii’s dramatic *moods* evoked through particular conflicts of *images* are actually the functioning of montage as the prison-museum tour’s structuring formal principle.

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Company, 1949) 28-63. For a recent study of Soviet montage – one that fascinatingly traces its shift from official utopianism to dissident post-utopianism in the mid-twentieth century – see Il’ia Kukul’in, *Mashiny zashumevshogo vremeni: Kak sovetskii montazh stal metodom neofitsial’noi kul’tury* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015).

<sup>1033</sup> Eisenstein, “The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram,” 38.

<sup>1034</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>1035</sup> Eisenstein, “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” 49.

As we have seen, the prison-museum excursion makes constant use of colliding images.<sup>1036</sup> The dialectical nature of these montages is quite visible in his treatment of the Romanov tombs. By juxtaposing the popular, pre-revolutionary image of each Tsar with its oppressive, conflicting image (i.e. founder of St. Petersburg vs. murderer of thousands; saintly martyr vs. mad Tsar; ‘Tsar-liberator’ vs. ‘Tsar-enslaver’), a qualitatively new idea arises – in this case, the emotional-intellectual realization of the absurdity of Tsardom. To use Eisenstein’s theoretical vocabulary, these scenes from the grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress are ‘ideograms’ – the conceptual products, not the sums, of two images in conflict. The same technique can be easily espied in Stolpianskii’s treatment of images throughout the tour. By abruptly colliding material sites (the fortress bricks, the ‘most ordinary porch,’ the cell walls) with ‘dramatic’ images of the past (the gallows, the prisoner’s entrance, the desperation of captivity), ideograms are created where the correct mood and political understanding, as Eisenstein dramatically phrases it, “*explodes* with increasing intensity in montage-conflict.”<sup>1037</sup>

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<sup>1036</sup> It is worth noting that Stolpianskii, as pedagogue and public historian, did not use images solely in his excursions. Existing outlines and notes from his public lectures show that during most of his speaking events he relied heavily upon lantern slides (*diapozitivny*). For his two-hour talks, it seems he would use an average of 100-150 images. See OR RNB f. 741 op. 2 d. 409.

<sup>1037</sup> Eisenstein, “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” 53. It should be noted that the historical screenplay Stolpianskii wrote during this period, *614 Days*, also makes extensive use of montage. The period leading up to the assassination of Alexander II accelerates in an absolute flurry of images – bombs being prepared in a radical’s apartment, the Tsar resting peacefully in his palace, the hurried preparations of the terrorist attack, a long imperial breakfast with a grand duchess, revolutionaries adopting their positions on the street, the gilded finery of a tsarist carriage, etc. While the simultaneous depiction of events occurring at the same time yet at different locations is an example of parallel montage (pioneered by D.W. Griffith a decade previously), the ideational content of this cross-cutting (juxtaposing the luxury and indolence of the royal family with the purposeful political activity of the People’s Will) is an example of the dynamic, intellectual montage being theorized at that time in the Soviet Union. See OR RNB f. 741 op. 1 d. 8.

Uncovering the principle of montage at work in the prison-museum also explains the dual spatialities of the tour –the horizontal passage through the architectural complex accompanied by a ‘vertical’ ascension. For Eisenstein, filmic montage both acts as an accelerating “combustion engine” – driving the tempo of the narrative through its tensions – *and* possesses an essentially ‘vertical’ nature, creating an upward “*emotional dynamization*.”<sup>1038</sup> In dramatic montage, “each sequential element is perceived not *next* to the other, but on *top* of the other. For the idea (or sensation) of movement arises from the process of superimposing on the retained impression of the object’s first position, a newly visible further position of the object.”<sup>1039</sup> This crescendo of dialectical collisions is what propels the tour ever upward, until, in the darkest corner of the Trubetskoi Bastion, it reaches the final struggle between revolutionary activity and “the torture-chamber of the autocracy” – and finally overcomes it, laying “the first bricks of the great building of freedom.”<sup>1040</sup> This is a temporality spatially modeled less on the fortress’ low walls than on the majestic cathedral spire ascending over revolutionary Leningrad.

Thus, it is by uncovering the hidden influence of film that we see the historiographical principle at work in Stolpianskii’s curation of the prison-museum. The tour-narrative unfolds not as a historicist progression of events along a linear timeline, but rather as an assemblage of images, spaces, and ‘scenes.’ This assemblage is not, however, Peter the Great’s *Kunstkamera*, with an idiosyncratic collection of atomized events evidencing an episodic, early-modern temporality. Rather, it is an

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<sup>1038</sup> Eisenstein, “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” 57.

<sup>1039</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>1040</sup> P. N. Stolpianskii, *Putevoditel*, 48.

assemblage of ideograms, montage-conflicts that ascend dialectically through their collision to the historical truth of human freedom.

Far from the image of the dust-covered museum hall, Stolpianskii's tour curates the Peter and Paul Fortress as a site of conflict-driven dialectical history. This is a 'museum of the revolution' that displays a revolutionary past along properly Marxist historiographical lines. Impelled ever forward and upward by the innovative cinematic-narrative principle of montage, the dialectical overcoming of tsardom reveals itself from within the stones of the prison-museum. Not only does Stolpianskii's tour *record* a dialectical history – through montage, its curatorial-historiographical passage itself *functions* dialectically. As the excursionists travel within the fortress walls, the collision of images and ideas is activated through their own participation, forming political emotions and historical concepts through their active mediation.<sup>1041</sup> This dialectical history is not a taxidermic specimen displayed behind glass, but rather a vital beast capable of – and indeed incited into – making a 'tiger's leap' from a revolutionary past into a lived present.

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<sup>1041</sup> Stolpianskii's dialectical montage depends upon the mediation of the tour-audience, which I believe give the tour a popular, participatory character. However, one could object to this point: is not the excursion form perhaps necessarily undemocratic? The tour needs the guide, the figure able to reveal the historico-philosophical meanings lying latent in mute stones. Does it function to construct a mass as tour-group, which out of necessity must be *led* through the ruins of the past? Is there a crucial difference between inviting the excursion to participate in historical memory through a particular pathway, and an ideal, unmediated, spontaneous approach towards this past? These questions intersect with current debates over the egalitarian nature of early-Soviet film – was it a mass-participatory medium, or did the director's use of montage "numb the hermeneutic activity of the viewer"? See Lutz Koepnick, *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 134. I am more inclined to favor the former view – that a (not unproblematic) will to an emancipatory and egalitarian aesthetic was central to the revolutionary cinematography of the 1920s. In this I follow Rancière, who sees in Dziga Vertov's montage "a new form of sensible, communal experience." Jacques Rancière, "Rethinking Modernity," Third Annual Distinguished Lecture in Romance Studies at Cornell University (Ithaca, NY, April 8, 2014).

This idea of a recoverable past is the key to Stolpianskii's primary goals for his prison-museum tour: encountering "sacred sites" and "letting the stones speak / cry out" in vengeance. As we have seen, the stones in the Peter and Paul Fortress are restless. Brick ramparts, marble tombs and cell walls contain within themselves the terror-filled conflicts of the past. Stolpianskii wields dialectical montage as a cinematic-narrative form, historiographical principle, and hermeneutic weapon, capable of freeing the historical struggle and "cries of the unavenged" from fortress stones. The Trubetskoi Bastion is sacralized through the use of the reactivated past as foundation for the present political struggle towards a redemptive future – the space is transformed from a site of horrors to the "holy of holies, our church."

It is quite telling that Eisenstein likened his 'ideogram' to Goethe's famous assertion that "architecture is frozen music."<sup>1042</sup> In this regard, does not Stolpianskii imagine the Peter and Paul Fortress as 'frozen history' – the past's clashing, conflict-driven movement lying latent in solid stone? One is reminded of Walter Benjamin's historical materialism, which saw in the image "dialectics at a standstill."<sup>1043</sup> Like Benjamin, Stolpianskii's main task is to 'unfreeze' this dialectic. Perhaps this is why the Peter and Paul Fortress was not destroyed, its gates not torn down, its foundations not sown with salt. By preserving the architectural complex as prison-museum, the Bolsheviks preserved a spatialized and materialized history of tsarism's dialectical overcoming. Far from an imprisoned, sterilized past, this complex invited the entire population to reactivate a past of radical struggle in the present, through their own

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<sup>1042</sup> Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," 48.

<sup>1043</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 462. Benjamin (who notably called his critical method 'literary montage') also asserted that "history decays into images, not into stories" – it is not too difficult to see Stolpianskii agreeing with this sentiment.

lived, emotional resurrection of history. This would surely constitute not a sterile ‘museumification of the revolution,’ but rather a political ‘revolutionizing of the museum.’ In the transformation of the Peter and Paul Fortress into a prison-museum, its radical histories are saved from sterile “enshrinement as heritage... through the exhibition of the fissure within them.”<sup>1044</sup> The workers need not demolish the fortress – the tour of the prison-museum is its own form of montage-dynamite, blasting open the Tsarist historical narrative and rescuing those voices formerly imprisoned within its walls.<sup>1045</sup>

## VII. Conclusion: Resurrectionary Radicalism

In excavating the curation practices surrounding the transformation of the Peter and Paul Fortress into a Museum of the Revolution, this final chapter has sought to give a sense of some of the ways in which revolutionary Russia’s long prison history persisted in the first years of the Soviet experiment.

Tsarism had been toppled: its prisons, thrown open. The intelligentsia carceral cultures of the long nineteenth century – and the *Bildungs*-narratives at their core – had done their part, and had already begun to fade away in the last decades before the revolution.

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<sup>1044</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 473.

<sup>1045</sup> Let us also recall Walter Benjamin’s likening of the explosive hermeneutic power of the montage to narrative dynamite: “Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling.” Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 236.

Curiously enough, however, the Bolshevik regime did not jettison the spaces of the revolutionary past as it ascended on its new temporal trajectory. In Stolpianskii's Fortress tour, we see a will to recognize the revolutionary struggles of past actors – but not on their own terms. Rather, a contingent moment of radicalism and risk demanded new historical technologies. The dead form of the individualized prison memoir was not to persist in a blind inertia. Rather, through the historiographical technique of montage, a revolutionary past was carried into the dialectical laboratory of the present – to be cracked open with the hermeneutic tools seized by a victorious revolution, and spill out the emancipatory energies that promised a new future.

In this way, we could say that there was something immensely 'Trotskyist' about early-Soviet approaches to the surviving space of the Peter and Paul Fortress. If previous stages of Russian revolutionary history had possessed their own reigning political aesthetics – which had received powerful articulation in the prison cells of the tsarist regime – now the novel landscape of Soviet power was developing new optics, new technologies, new genres of representation: befitting a transitional wave of novel radical subjects and their rewired approach to the spaces and narratives of the past. The persistent grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress may have continued an uneven, combined, uncanny existence – but the montage-tour was able to grasp these uncanny faultlines themselves in the radical history of this space, and sought to portray them as the dialectical motors they had always been.

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Beyond this story of how the Peter and Paul Fortress was approached in the first decade of the Soviet project, this chapter has also been a tale of the year 1924: presenting a picture of the historical, aesthetic, and political impulses of this moment, and asking what they can tell us about the early-Soviet project. In other recent histories of the period, this is a year that has been read quite differently. In her *Petersburg*, Katerina Clark depicts 1924 as the chronological pivot upon which Russia's cultural forms and temporal regime swung from avant-garde potentialities to proto-Stalinist ossification. For her, this shift is represented by the "ominous resonances" of two events – the great flood of Leningrad, which symbolizes the submergence of the revolutionary intelligentsia in an increasingly reactionary politico-aesthetic reality; and the death and entombment of V.I. Lenin, which signifies the beginning of a search for "an enduring iconography," a shift towards conservative, historicist narratives of the past.<sup>1046</sup>

This, of course, was also the year in which the Peter and Paul Fortress was transformed into a Museum of the Revolution, and the year Stolpianskii began formulating his excursion guide. And just as the walls of the Fortress provided official measurements of the rising waters of the flooded Neva and the cannons on its battlements rang out warnings to the inhabitants of Leningrad, one would imagine that the Peter and Paul Fortress as prison-museum could similarly act for historians as a weathervane for attendant changes in Soviet culture and temporality.<sup>1047</sup>

Thus, after our investigation into the messianic memorial politics of the prison-museum, let us briefly follow Clark into the 'resonances' of 1924. It would be easy to

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<sup>1046</sup> Clark, *Petersburg*, 160, 184-92.

<sup>1047</sup> For a history of these flood markers, see K.S. Pomeranets, "O znakakh navodenii v Petropavlovskoi Kreposti," *Kraevedcheskie zapiski*. 3 (1995), 26-30.

read Lenin's contemporaneous entombment as the almost too-literal betrayal of Marx's call to "let the dead bury their dead." However, by establishing our own conceptual montage of Lenin's burial with the 'museumification' of the Peter and Paul Fortress, by suggesting a new constellation within the year 1924, let us conclude by unveiling an alternative reading of these events.

In investigating Lenin's tomb, that 'holy of holies' on Red Square, it should be recalled that the figure who led the project of Lenin's embalment – L.B. Krasin – was a reader of the nineteenth-century philosopher N.F. Fedorov. Fedorov had developed a futurist 'cosmism,' which foresaw the scientific abolition of death and the eventual power of man to resurrect *all* of fallen humanity.<sup>1048</sup> In a speech given in 1921 at the funeral of old Bolshevik L. Ia. Karpov, Krasin asserted his belief that in the near future, man would be able "to use the elements of a person's life to recreate the physical person," and thus "will be able to resurrect great historical figures."<sup>1049</sup> Three years later, he oversaw the preservation of Lenin's body.

This focus on messianic resurrection does not support the idea that the burial of Lenin was conceived of as the final entombment of his body, his legacy, and the Soviet experiment – what Vladislav Todorov calls the transformation of the USSR into a "totalitarian mummified communism."<sup>1050</sup> Rather, it seems to speak of a redemptive, future-oriented temporality. It should be noted that Krasin was not an outlying figure: Fedorov's 'cosmism' was quite widespread within the ranks of the Bolshevik party in the 1920s, especially among those previously connected with the

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<sup>1048</sup> See N.F. Fedorov, *Filosofia obshchago dela*, 3 vols (Moscow: Vernyi, 1906-1913).

<sup>1049</sup> Quoted in Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 181.

<sup>1050</sup> Quoted in Buck-Morrs, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 78.

‘god-building [*bogostroitel'stvo*]’ movement.<sup>1051</sup> Furthermore, this philosophy of universal redemption seems to resonate with a series of trends during this period: from the popular and elite Promethean dreams of the Bolshevik 1920s, to the general ‘Easter mood’ that resonated throughout the Revolutions of 1917, as well as the future-oriented messianism that characterized the honoring of Lenin’s death and the celebration of his legacy.<sup>1052</sup> We can also recall *The Foundation Pit* by Andrei Platonov (the major messianic modernist of early-Soviet literature), where the protagonist spends his days collecting the debris of modernity – leaves, trash, discarded clothing – in the hopes that they will “be avenged by socialist vengeance” in a messianic future restoration of all lost meanings.<sup>1053</sup>

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<sup>1051</sup> See Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 180-81; Boris Groys, ed. *Russkii kosmizm. Antologiiia* (Moscow: Ad Marginem Press, 2015); and George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For my take on Groys’ critique of cosmism, see n. 1055 below.

<sup>1052</sup> See Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*; and Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 38, 42, 46, etc. Although we lack the space to examine in depth the rituals surrounding Lenin’s memorialization, one thing may be worth noting: immediately following his death, the members of the Leningrad branch of the “Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles” (*Obshchestvo byvshikh politkatorzhan i ssyl'noyselentsev*) were asked to help organize the music at Lenin’s funeral. The main hymn (which Lenin had requested) was not a paean to his greatness, but rather an old, resurrectionary revolutionary song – “*Zamuchen tiazheloi nevolei*.” The concluding two stanzas are worth quoting in full:

Like you, we, perhaps serve  
 Only as the soil for a new people,  
 Only as a grim prophecy  
 Of coming, valiant days.  
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 But we know, as you knew, our dear friend,  
 That soon from our bones  
 Will rise our stern avenger  
 Who will be even stronger than we!

Even at his funeral, the Lenin to be remembered was a bridge, not an end. See TsGA SPB, f. 506, op. 1, d. 20, l. 1-2.

<sup>1053</sup> It is worth noting that Platonov was also an avid reader of Fedorov. See Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit*, trans. Robert Chandler (New York: NYRB Classics, 2009), 123. Note that my take on the political temporality evoked by the above constellation differs from existing readings of Lenin’s mummification. The aforementioned book by Tumarkin, while a pioneering monograph on the ‘Cult of Lenin,’ finds its arguments collapse into a

At the very end of his excursion, Stolpianskii calls the Peter and Paul Fortress a “kingdom of the dead” – a museum-cemetery. For many of his avant-garde contemporaries, such a site could speak of nothing but a dead past deserving negation. In his “On the Museum,” written in 1921, Malevich had scorned the museum and cemetery alike: “Enough of crawling about the corridors of time past, enough squandering time in drawing up lists of its possessions, enough pawning the graveyards of Vagankovo, enough singing requiems – none of this will rise again.”<sup>1054</sup> However, we have seen how our historian-guide would radically disagree with Malevich’s words. For Stolpianskii, the prison-museum-cemetery was experienced not as a closed necropolis, but rather as a site of redemption and resurrection for the voices of the unavenged – a history which, in fact, *did* hold the promise of rising again. It seems that Lenin’s entombment in 1924 bears witness to a similar view of history – not the ossification of a dead historicism, but a past both capable of political reactivation in the present and oriented towards an eschatological future. In this light, Fedorov’s resurrection of mankind’s dead seems to evoke the messianic Marxism of Walter Benjamin’s *apocatastasis* – the ‘restoration of all things’ in the absolute

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traditional ‘unveiling’ of an essentially religious element within Bolshevism’s political cosmology. Benno Ennker has produced a rigorously empirical study of the events surrounding Lenin’s death, but his take on its significance is limited to a Weberian analysis of state legitimacy and charismatic authority. Finally, Alexei Yurchak has recently written a fascinating article on Lenin’s embalment. His argument that early-Bolshevism’s peculiar model of sovereignty found actual concretization in the constantly re-sculpted materiality of Lenin – a literal ‘body politic’ – is as original as it is convincing. However, I am not persuaded that Yurchak’s reading forbids us from also reading dead Lenin as a ‘cosmist’ object – one through which we get a glimpse of a messianic early-Bolshevik short-circuiting of past and future, where novel political epistemologies demanded novel temporal regimes. See Benno Ennker, *Die Anfänge des Leninkults in der Sowjetunion* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1997); and Alexei Yurchak, “Bodies of Lenin: The Hidden Science of Communist Sovereignty,” *Representations* 129, no. 1 (2015): 116-57.

<sup>1054</sup> Malevich, “On the Museum,” 70.

redemption of the past.<sup>1055</sup> The graveyards and museums of early Bolshevik memory politics were never final resting places, as the materials of the past laid heavy with the promise of dialectical resurrection.

It is *this* that appears to be the final intervention provided by our close reading of Stolpianskii's prison-museum tour. The current chapter has sought to uncover how the Peter and Paul Fortress became a revolutionary museum in the first decade of the Soviet Union, and in doing so contribute to our understanding of early Bolshevik memory politics, the importance of the political aesthetics of film to diverse cultural-historiographic activities during this period, and the ways in which the spaces of the old regime were preserved and coopted by the new. Against a contemporary historiography that sees in the institutionalization of Bolshevik memorial practices only an ossified cultural Thermidor, our examination has revealed instead a museum-space devoted to a fractured, future-oriented engagement with the radical past – a montage-driven engine of dialectical memory.

Our concluding constellation of Lenin's tomb and Leningrad's Fortress thus compels us to reconsider the importance of 'resurrectionary radicalism' and political messianism to the early Soviet project.<sup>1056</sup> To forget the dead past, or subject it to

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<sup>1055</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 459. In using Benjamin to read the temporality of Fedorov's 'cosmism,' I propose a far more positive picture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian philosopher than that evoked by Boris Groys – who, through the lens of Agamben, finds in his thought a terrifying picture of totalized biopolitics. See Boris Groys and Michael Hagemester, eds., *Die Neue Menschheit: Biopolitische Utopien in Russland zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005); and Groys, *Russkii kosmizm*.

<sup>1056</sup> The historiography of the Soviet 1920s largely either ignores the question of messianism, or raises it as 'proof' of the fundamental hypocrisy of an avowedly atheistic communist regime. The latter tact is especially prevalent in Anglo-American Cold War writings, whose authors most often use the work of Nikolai Berdiaev as a touchstone. The shallowness of their argument should be, by now, self-evident – however, it is also worth mentioning that Berdiaev himself had a far more subtle appreciation of the utopian-messianic thread running through the

sterile enshrinement: these were not the only curatorial possibilities of the Soviet 1920s. Conceived in the spirit of what I would like to call a ‘messianic memorial politics,’ neither the revolutionary mausoleum nor the revolutionary museum were dead memorializations – rather, they belong to a peculiar time when the past ceaselessly agitated, crying out to the laborers of the present to continue the struggle towards its absolute future redemption.

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Russian revolutionary tradition. See Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, trans. F.M. French (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), esp. 129-135. The one exception to generally flat treatments of Bolshevik messianism is Yuri Slezkine’s recent study of the ‘House on the Embankment.’ While I am sympathetic to the overall arc of this book, I am wary of the text’s motif-driven formalism and Arendtian elaboration of the ‘new generation’ as an unbridgeable ontological chasm. More to the point: I find that by favoring a *longue durée* conceptual typology in his analysis of ‘Bolshevik millenarianism’ – rather than staking out the discursive positions, political temporalities, and epistemological contingencies of the period – Slezkine presents the reader with an ultimately dehistoricized picture of Soviet messianism. See Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government*, esp. 73-118.



## Afterward

*No znaem, kak znal ty, rodimyi  
Shto skoro iz nashikh kostei  
Podymetsia mstitel' surovyyi  
I budet on nas posil'nei!*

- "Zamuchen tiazheloi nevolei"  
[Russian revolutionary hymn]



Figure 29: An interior view of the Peter and Paul Fortress, in disrepair, from the turn of the twentieth century [GMPIR f. III BC-6707/3].

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### I. Melancholy

To walk today through the grounds of the Peter and Paul Fortress is a melancholy experience. Little remains of the great emancipatory energies that once shook its stones.

This is not to say that the citadel has fallen into ruin or neglect: far from it. Placed under the auspices of the State Museum of the History of St. Petersburg in the 1950s, this new administration has served the site well.<sup>1057</sup> Its carefully-maintained grounds hold a host of excellent historical collections, rotating exhibitions, and scientific lectures. In 1990, the Fortress was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (as part of the “Historic Centre of Saint Petersburg and Related Groups of Monuments”), in the Soviet Union’s very first listing after its ratification of the Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The Fortress remains one of the most popular spaces in St. Petersburg for both tourists and citizens alike: its Neva-facing walls are famous for the sunbathers who gather there during all seasons.

However – as the present dissertation has constantly asserted – political spaces lead lives that far exceed their concrete bounds. Today, the Peter and Paul Fortress appears to be in good physical health: well-funded and well-preserved. However, the great symbolic force of this space has never been more diluted: confused, muddled, inert, slumbering, maybe even dead.

## **II. Heart of Dead Empire**

The Peter and Paul Fortress survived the fascist Siege of Leningrad intact.<sup>1058</sup> However, its experimental curatorial energies did not – in the decades to come, this site of revolutionary history was thoroughly gripped by the sclerotic inertia that seized

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<sup>1057</sup> For the post-war history of the Peter and Paul Fortress, see A.I. Barabanova and G.A. Popova, “Petropavlovskaiia krepost’-muzei,” in *Petropavlovskaiia krepost’: Stranitsy istorii*, 407-17.

<sup>1058</sup> See L.V. Andrianova, “Petropavlovskaiia krepost’ v 1917-1945 godakh,” in *Petropavlovskaiia krepost’: Stranitsy istorii*, 397-406.

so many aspects of late-Soviet life.<sup>1059</sup> Revolutionary history no longer shouted out from these walls. It had become formalized: a purely performative matter.

Then, in 1991, the world came to an end. The Soviet Union collapsed – an event that forever altered not only the horizons of the future, but also the stories we tell ourselves about the past. Too seldom have historians examined the ways in which the end of Real Socialism brought about profound structural changes to lived understandings of Eastern European history. The neoliberal shock therapy applied to the Russian Federation in the 1990s not only served the privatization of the former Soviet economy (and the destruction of its social safety net) – it also scrambled the circuits of the Russian past.

New currents flowed through rewired historical narratives, and new-old forms began to awaken and stalk the land. One of the most hideous creations of this process was the resurrected image of the Romanov Dynasty.

Why, and how, has the history of tsarism arisen to such renewed prominence over the last three decades? On the one hand, a wave of public curiosity and scholarly attention towards the old autocracy seems a comprehensible reaction – an overcorrected turn to topics that had been formerly forbidden during the soviet period. On the other hand, shifts in optics towards the past are never purely academic. They speak to changing political needs in the present. In the Russian case, a resurgence of interest in the Romanov family in the 1990s should be understood as part of a larger historical project – a return to old narratives and political formations in an attempt to cobble together a usable past that could add a measure of stability to a post-

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<sup>1059</sup> The most sophisticated account of the hollowing out of the late-Soviet lifeworld is Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More*.

apocalyptic present. This is not only the case for the small minority of figures who actively sought to reinstate an absolutist regime – even conservative and liberal reformist thought sought new narratives of the Russian past that could encompass both the Soviet experiment and the former autocracy in a legible whole. Finally, we cannot overlook the impact of the ways in which late capitalism commodifies history. The fall of the Soviet Union saw the emergence of a Western fascination with Imperial Russia whose intensity almost bordered on the pornographic – and many in Russia were eager to take advantage of this state of affairs, crafting romantic myths of Romanov rule for both domestic and international consumption.

The resuscitated tsar of the 1990s is thus a true Frankenstein monster, a cobbled product of several distinct present imperatives, a creature that could only make its home in the end of history. Naturally enough, each of these historiographical currents eventually gathered around the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress – and this former heart of empire was coaxed into beating once more.

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What is to be done with the body of an emperor?

On July 16 and 17, 1998, the remains of the last Romanovs were brought to St. Petersburg and interned in the Peter and Paul Cathedral: an act shot through with all of the contradictory energies of the post-Soviet historical consciousness.

In 1991, the bodies of Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra – as well as their children and several servants – had been exhumed from the Ural glade of birch and pine where they had been hastily hidden after their execution in 1918. Immediately, a host of clashing interests coalesced around these royal remains.

Various government departments laid claim to the corpses as items of political prestige; competing scientific teams fought to be the first to identify these historic bodies; fissures opened up in the Russian Orthodox Church between rival visions of how the tsarist past could fit into a religious present.<sup>1060</sup> In this fabricated interregnum, many morbid symptoms appeared: old myths of a surviving Alexei or a long-lost Anastasia raised their heads, as did certain contemptible Anti-Semitic narratives.

After seven long years of scientific, religious, and political debate, it was finally decided to stage a ceremonial (re)burial of the last Romanovs.

At first glance, this grand ritual cannot help but impress – cannot help but remind the reader of the great funerary rites detailed in the first chapter of the present dissertation, those rituals which once sacralized an autocracy’s political space and bound together the threads of an imperial landscape and dynastic tradition.

The encoffined bodies were flown to St. Petersburg from Ekaterinburg, and met with great fanfare at Pulkovo Airport. A great funeral procession – with military honor guard, representatives of the clergy, and close to sixty surviving relatives of the Romanov house – followed the bodies as they moved through the center of the city to the Peter and Paul Fortress. Here, on July 17, 1998 – exactly eighty years since the execution – the bodies of Russia’s last royal family were given funeral rites and laid to rest in a specially-purposed side chapel of the Peter and Paul Cathedral. With this act, it seemed indeed that the Fortress had once more been inscribed in the urban cityscape and Russian political memory as a renewed heart of empire.

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<sup>1060</sup> The best account in English of these warring impulses is found in Wendy Slater, *The Many Deaths of Tsar Nicholas II: Relics, Remains, and the Romanovs* (London: Routledge, 2007), esp. 106-27.

However, if one scratches the surface solemnity of this historical reenactment, elements of uncertainty – even farce – become immediately visible.<sup>1061</sup>

Due to internecine conflicts within its power structures, the Russian Orthodox Church nearly boycotted the entire proceedings. In the end, clergy were permitted to participate – however, the funeral rite was not led by a high representative of the Moscow Patriarchate, but rather officiated over by the relatively minor Archpriest of the Peter and Paul Cathedral. Likewise, there was confusion over the proper role of Russia’s secular authorities – only days before the funeral did President Boris Yeltsin confirm his attendance at the event. And as Yeltsin stood in the Peter and Paul Cathedral, that former heart of empire – before paste and plyboard coffins with fake marbling; amidst delegations of parasitic royal descendants, wealthy imperial nostalgics, and other creatures from the dustbin of history – even his carefully-crafted speech could not hide the fundamental incoherence of this moment. Symptomatic of the confused post-Soviet approach towards the imperial past, Yeltsin sought to cast this Romanov reburial as something apolitical – indeed, even *non-political, post-political*:

Laying to rest the remains of the innocent victims, we seek expiation for the sins of our ancestors...

We are obliged to end this century, which became for Russia a century of blood and lawlessness – with repentance and reconciliation. Irrespective of political views, religious beliefs, and ethnic divisions.<sup>1062</sup>

Thus were the needs of a new Russian state once more tied to the ceremonial internment of a royal body. Here, a Romanov funeral was intended not as a super-

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<sup>1061</sup> See *ibid.*, 114-16.

<sup>1062</sup> “Rech’ Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii B.N. El’tsina na traurnoi tseremonii v Sobore Sviatykh Apostolov Petra i Pavla Petropavlovskoi kreposti,” in V.B. Gendrikov, *Poslednii put’ (16-17 iulia 1998 goda)* (St. Petersburg: Liki Rossii, 1999).

temporal grounding of a city and an empire in dynastic transcendence. Rather, it was meant as an end of politics, an end of history: a talismanic warding away of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Thus we see one aspect of the melancholy that descends upon any visitor to the Peter and Paul Fortress today. Its Cathedral – as resting site for the last Romanovs – has once more become the heart of this structure. This citadel, once hosted the concrete and discursive conflict between an old regime and its radical opponents, before rising victorious as a sacred space of the revolution ascendant. Today, it lies as a flat site of commodified UNESCO ‘heritage’: a vessel for twenty-first-century Romanov fetishism, history imprisoned within the false politics of a non-politics.<sup>1063</sup>

### **III. Museum of the Lost Revolution**

In this discussion of the resurrected autocracy – as an act of perverse neoliberal necromancy – we can already see the contours of the second melancholy shade that haunts the modern visitor in the Peter and Paul Fortress. This next shadow, of course, comes from the erasure of the citadel’s prison history.

This is not an erasure that comes from destruction or suppression – the Trubetskoi Bastion prison still stands as a minor site in these museum grounds, informatively curated and open to the public. No, this is an erasure with deeper roots.

The state of the prison history of the Peter and Paul Fortress is best grasped by considering another space in the citadel. Just around the corner from the Trubetskoi Bastion – in an exhibition hall adjacent to the Ekaterininskaia Curtain – lies the

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<sup>1063</sup> For more on the historical politics of UNESCO, see Marco D’Eramo, “UNESCOCIDE,” *New Left Review* 88 (2014): 47-54.

Museum of Medieval Torture Instruments [*Orudiia pytok Srednevekov'ia*]. Here, for a small fee, visitors can view a motley collection of executioners' axes and iron maidens, arranged without any sort of historical context.

Far from a mere entertaining sideshow to the Trubetskoi Bastion museum, I would argue that this collection of gruesome kitsch reveals the secret fate of our prison narratives in the twenty-first century. We are a long ways away from vengeful stones bearing explosive energies that promise an emancipatory future. Here instead is a vision of history as a tawdry museum of torture – a senseless, dehistoricized fund of titillating violence.

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Let us be clear. The blame for this shift does not lie with the curatorial choices of the current guardians of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Rather, the turn from Stolpianskii's revolutionized museum of the 1920s to the inert horror of the present is due to a deeper historical logic – a wider shift in the ways in which we understand and narrate the experience of incarceration. What we see here, I would argue, is symptomatic of the temporal bankruptcy of the 'era of human rights.'

But this is a statement that demands to be unpacked.

As this dissertation has argued, a modern 'politics of the prison' – a set of subversive practices and discourses that enabled the perseverance of revolutionary energy in spaces of state confinement – arose at the moment when radical actors found a language to understand the dialectical entwinement of the personal and the world-historical. Dissident experiences of danger, risk, and incarceration were made legible within larger narratives of continuous struggle. Central to this arc – to these radical

communities – was a certain idea of futurity. Deprivation in the present was to be endured as a prologue to the coming revolution. The prison cell was made bearable when the next chapters in one’s autobiography promised stories of new political victories – and the next chapters in the history textbooks promised stories of a liberated humanity.

However, somewhere in the past century, the experience of political imprisonment became decoupled from any revolutionary future. To discover exactly where this occurred demands further scholarship – I believe that it undoubtedly happened somewhere in the GULAG system, when the revolutionary Russian genre of the prison memoir was forced to first understand the carceral archipelago of a regime that claimed a monopoly on futurity. However, no matter the exact origins, the shearing away of any teleological imagination from modern spaces of confinement is certainly achieved today within a hegemonic discourse of ‘human rights.’

It has only been quite recently that the historical discipline has begun to chart a genealogy of the idea of ‘human rights.’<sup>1064</sup> This lag is not incidental – for the very concept itself structurally resists its own historicization.

Arising out of a host of governing imperatives and institutional projects in the 1970s, the language of human rights slyly posits a terrain of moral existence prior to the workings of the political. Different ‘ideologies’ are said to matter little to the states and organizations that take up the mantle of human rights – the highest value must be the comfortable, ‘apolitical’ preservation of individual life and liberty.

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<sup>1064</sup> In particular, we can look to Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*; and Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

Several recent works of ‘human rights history’ take us up to the edge of a vigorous critique of its historical premises and contemporary utilization – but halt before this necessary step. In particular, Samuel Moyn has done an excellent job of showing how this discourse originated in an explicitly anti-communist, anti-Islam, anti-decolonial conjecture.<sup>1065</sup> However, it is up to the reader to piece together the overarching message of this history – that ‘human rights’ functions as a technology for the naturalization of the liberal subject, and as another one of the ‘human faces’ worn over American capitalist interests and imperialist violence. It is still worth heeding the words of Trotsky during the Russian Civil War: “As long as human labor-power, and, consequently, life itself, remain articles of sale and purchase, of exploitation and robbery, the principle of the ‘sacredness of human life’ remains a shameful life, uttered with the object of keeping the oppressed slaves in their chains.”<sup>1066</sup> But even beyond the political programs pursued under a hypocritical concern for ‘human rights,’ there is even more at stake in recognizing the hegemony of this discourse.

Specifically, the age of human rights developed out of – and itself reproduced – a particular type of temporality. In this worldview, politics is not to be concerned with the construction of a new political future. Instead the only ‘responsible’ politics is the conservative safeguarding of a moral metaphysics. ‘Human rights’ has no future. I do not believe that it is the ‘last utopia’ – rather, it is an explicitly anti-utopian framework. One only need look to the contemporary historical discipline’s open, reprehensible neo-*Historikerstreit* – from black books to bloodlands – in order to understand how a feigned concern for the sanctity of human life is used to bury any

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<sup>1065</sup> Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 127-28.

<sup>1066</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, 62.

emancipatory energies from the past and safeguard a naturalized and depoliticized image of our brutalizing neoliberal present. History is no longer a story of political struggle – of emancipation to be seized and worlds to be won. The human rights discourse of the present has replaced history with dead moralism. It is a language spoken at the end of history – a technology for the dismantling of any ‘horizons of expectation’ beyond the present, a paralyzing accomplice to late capitalism’s evil endlessness.

And beyond the great structural anti-futurity it has accomplished in all spheres of our lives, the language of human rights has gutted the possibility of any revolutionary ‘politics of the prison.’ Carceral narratives today seem confined to one of two forms. The first – personal, human stories – certainly has old roots in the prison memoirs of the nineteenth century. However, bereft of radical horizons, these stories are doomed to remain merely individualized tales of human rights abuses, atomized stories without political telos or political community. The second – wider analyses of modern mass incarceration – are rooted in a Foucauldian optics that, non-accidentally, permits no political agency, no exit, no future beyond a hideous forever-play of disciplinary power on subjected bodies. In the twenty-first century, it can feel impossible to begin to imagine the nature of a true ‘politics of the prison’ – let alone a future of full abolitionism.

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Figure 30: Former political prisoners of Shlissel'burg Fortress, posing outside of their cells after being freed during the February Revolution. Many of these individuals had been previously held in the Peter and Paul Fortress. The homemade sign above them reads: "Long live the People who have opened the doors of the prisons" [GMPiR f. III-21571].

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Thus we see the deep melancholy of a visit to the Trubetskoi Bastion prison today. Here, in these cells, generations of revolutionaries not only suffered and died, but created a political culture and vision of history that could imagine the experience of political imprisonment itself as a stage on the path to human emancipation. How impoverished, indeed, is the gaze of our century – which finds it easier to imagine the apocalyptic destruction of the entire earth than the slightest alteration to our social and economic lives; which can only find in the past a meaningless assemblage of torture instruments and blind violence. As Horkheimer and Adorno warned us in the wake of the second World War: “the mythical scientific respect of peoples for the given reality, which they themselves constantly create, finally becomes itself a positive fact, a *fortress* before which even the revolutionary imagination feels shamed as utopianism...”<sup>1067</sup>

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This brings us, at last, to what I believe to be the role that prison history can play today. Not only has the present dissertation attempted to intervene in academic debates – discussions regarding modern Russian history, the nature of radical subjectivity, the ways in which ideas change over time. Not only does it hope to gesture towards further areas of study – future scholarship on revolutionary cultures of confinement in other geographical contexts, the changing face of political incarceration in the twentieth century, a reevaluation of the political narration of the GULAG system, etc. etc.

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<sup>1067</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 33. Emphasis my own.

In our futureless present – in our incarcerated century – we cannot imagine a politics that could contest the cells of our age, let alone struggle towards a future that would open the doors of all prisons. It is my hope that this present work can maybe play the smallest part in beginning to give that future a past.



## Appendix I: Peter and Paul Fortress Memoir Catalogue

The following document is an attempt at a complete annotated catalogue of every memoir narrative of political imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Alongside bibliographical information, I have also included the years of each author's imprisonment, as well as a short discussion of both their biography and the particularities of their ego-document.

This catalogue began its life as a rough spreadsheet, intended solely as a personal research aid. However, as the idea of a Russian political imprisonment memoir tradition grew to hold more and more significance for the present study, I decided that an annotated bibliography might be of use to the reader. All of my discussions of carceral autobiographies as a historical 'technology of the self' (especially in Chapters Two, Five, and Six) are rooted in my readings of these collected sources, and Chapter Eight explicitly bases one of its arguments on the larger trends that this catalogue makes evident.

I am not a trained bibliographer. While I have aimed to create an exhaustive fund of Peter and Paul Fortress memoirs, I am sure that there are some texts that have escaped my gaze. In particular, many of the works published in the small journals that proliferated during the earliest years of the Soviet Union have become bibliographic rarities (or are even lost to researchers). Note as well that I have surely missed some gaps in the Decembrist literature – as I argue elsewhere, I believe that these writings are from a still pre-political moment in the history of state incarceration, and I almost refrained from including them here. A future study will need to more closely examine the exact moments when these Decembrist memoirs were written, so as to trace the absorption of new regimes of subjectivity in their pages. I should also state that I cannot be entirely confident regarding works published in languages other than Russian – the 'perverse cosmopolitanism' of Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment means that there are certainly further texts from Polish, Georgian, and other revolutionary traditions that have escaped my efforts. Finally, note that I have limited this bibliography to *published* accounts – the inclusion of unpublished manuscripts would vastly expand this catalogue.

While the mistakes and lapses in this document are all my own, any worth that this bibliography might hold is due to irreplaceable assistance from several directions. First, I am indebted to the stimulating conversations and textual assistance of Roman Gilmintinov at Duke University and Marina Popova at the State Museum of the History of St. Petersburg (GMI SPB). This catalogue would also not have been possible without the superb resources and colleagues of the Cornell University Library – amongst whom I would like to thank Virginia A. Cole and Robert H. Davis in particular. Finally, this attempt at a complete catalogue of Peter and Paul Fortress memoirs stands on the shoulders of earlier Soviet revolutionary bibliographies. Special mention must be made of two projects: F.Ia. Kona et al, eds. *Deiateli revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii: Bio-bibliograficheskii slovar': Ot predshestvennikov dekabristov do padeniia tsarizma*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politichskikh katorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, 1927-1934); and P.A. Zaionchkovskii, ed., *Istoriia dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii v denvnikakh i vospominaniakh*, 5 vols. (Moscow: 'Kniga', 1976-1989).

To conclude, the reader will see that I have tried when possible to end each entry (excluding Decembrists) by noting where further prison archive information regarding the author can be found. These directions should in no way be considered exhaustive – rather, simply as starting points for future research within the vast archival archipelago of the tsarist prison administration.

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**Akhsharumov, D. D.**

- *Iz moikh vospominanii*. St. Petersburg: T-vo Obshchestv. pol'za, 1905.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1849***

*The memoirs of Petrashevets D.D. Akhsharumov were originally intended to be published in the journal Russkaia Starina in 1887, but were rejected by the censors – the original text from this period can be found in the Shil'der papers in the Manuscript Division of the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg [OR RNB 859 Shil'der K.3, N.10, II.4.1]. Documents pertaining to his Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 156. Note that large sections of this memoir are cited in P.N. Stolpianskii, Petropavlovskaiia krepost' (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2011 [1923]).*

**Aptekman, O.V.**

- “Iz vospominanii zemlevoit'sa (Petropavlovskaiia krepost').” *Minuvshie gody* 5 (1908): 297-327.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1880***

*Documents related to the Peter and Paul Fortress incarceration of Narodnik O.V. Aptekman – including his clashes with the guards and reprimands for using ‘knocking language’ – can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 482 and 503.*

**Basargin, N.V.**

- “Zapiski.” *Deviatnadsatii vek. Istoricheskii sbornik* 1 (1872): 65-200.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26***

*The autobiographical notes of the Decembrist N.V. Basargin first appeared in Deviatnadsatii vek [The Nineteenth Century], a digest published by historian P.I. Bartenev (founder of Russkii arkhiv). Original copies of the manuscript are located at GARF f. 279, op. 1, d. 167. See also N.V. Basargin, Vospominaniia, rasskazy, stat'i (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1988).*

**Baten'kov, G.S.**

- “Avtobiograficheskie rasskazy v pis'makh.” In *Vospominaniia i rasskazy deiatelei tainykh obshchestv 1820-kh godov*, 2:133-46. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'noposelentsev.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26; 1827-46***

*The fate of G.S. Baten'kov – nobleman, engineer, and amateur Egyptologist – is unique among the Decembrists. After an early period of imprisonment in the Nevskii Curtain after the failed uprising, Baten'kov was returned to the Alekseevskii Ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1827, where he would spend nearly twenty years in solitary confinement. While his better known “Dannye. Povest' sobstvennoi zhizni” is unfinished and does not touch upon his period of imprisonment, his time in the Fortress is discussed in a series of autobiographical letters written in the 1860s (first published in St. Petersburg in 1916). In these texts, his two decades of solitude are*

*both present and absent – too terrible, too sublime to be truly narrativized in the subject regime of this time. These notes are also filtered through Baten'kov's idiosyncratic religious and Masonic lenses.*

**Beliaev, A.P.**

- *Vospominaniia dekabrista o perezhitom i perechuvstvovannom, 1805-1850.* St. Petersburg, S.S. Suvorin, 1882.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-27***

*A.P. Beliaev's recollections– written long after his incarceration in the Peter and Paul Fortress – evidence all the contradictions of the Decembrist era's 'pre-political' political imprisonment. While able to represent moments of relative leniency – including a spell spent sharing a cell with several of his comrades, and a glass of New Year's champagne sent by his gentry parents – his narrative dissolves in the face of the hardships of solitary confinement.*

**Bestuzhev, M.A.**

- “Zapiski M.A. Bestuzheva.” *Russkaia starina* 1 (1870): 253-74.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26***

*Information on the Decembrist M.A. Bestuzhev and the importance of his memoir for the development of revolutionary Russian political cultures (especially in the field of 'knocking language') can be found in Chapter Five of the present dissertation. See also his scattered notes and reminisces of imprisonment as found in M.K. Azadovskii, ed., Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh (Moscow: Nauk, 1951), esp. 51-137.*

**Bestuzhev, N.A.**

- “Vospominanie o Ryleeve.” In *Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh*, 7-41. Moscow: Nauk, 1951.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26***

*The older brother of Mikhail, N.A. Bestuzhev preserved some reflections from his Alekseevskii Ravelin imprisonment in these brief notes on fellow Decembrist K.F. Ryleev.*

**Breshko-Breshkovskaia, E.K.**

- “II. Otets Mitrofan.” In *Iz moikh vospominanii*, 21-40. St. Petersburg: Izdanie VI. Raspopova, 1906.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1876-77; 1907-10***

*Widely known as the “Grandmother of the Russian Revolution”, E.K. Breshko-Breshkovskaia was a populist agitator and SR revolutionary who was incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress on two separate occasions. While only devoting a small autobiographical essay to the canon of Fortress memoirs, she exercised an enormous influence on the international image of the Russian political prisoner due to her*

*acquaintanceship with George Kennan and speaking tour of the United States in 1904. Interested readers should consult Chelsea C. Gibson, "Russia's Martyr-Heroines: Women, Violence, and the American Campaign for a Free Russia, 1878-1920" (PhD diss., Binghamton University, 2019); and Choi Chatterjee, "Imperial Incarcerations: Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, Vinayar Savarkar, and the Original Sins of Modernity," Slavic Review 74, no. 4 (2015): 850-72. Archival documents related to her incarceration in the Peter and Paul Fortress can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 402, 449, 454, 1014, 1134, etc.*

### **Bukh, N.K.**

- "Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. 'razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii')." In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, vol. 40 (6) 41-57. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo institute Granat, 1927.
- *Vospominaniia*. Moscow: Izd. Vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, 1928.
- "V Petropavlovskoi kreposti." *Katorga i ssylka* 68, no. 7 (1930): 113-125; 72, no. 11 (1930): 98-114.
- "Na katorznom polozhenii." *Katorga i ssylka* 84, no. 11 (1931): 193-209.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1880-1881***

*A member of the Executive Committee of Narodnaia volia, N.K. Bukh published several works after the revolution that evocatively touch upon his period of incarceration in the Peter and Paul Fortress and the culture of political imprisonment among Russian revolutionaries as a whole. Files related to his time in the Fortress can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 482 and 513. Original autobiographical manuscripts can also be found at RGALI f. 1744, op. 1, ed. khr. 9.*

### **Burtsev, V.L.**

- *Bor'ba za svobodnuiu Rossiiu. Moi vsopominaniia*. Berlin: 'Gamaiun,' 1923.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1885-6***

*V.L. Burtsev was no stranger to the political prison cell – besides nearly a year spent in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress for his involvement with Narodnaia volia, he was also incarcerated in sites around Russia (St. Petersburg's House of Preliminary Detention; Shlissel'burg Fortress) and Europe (Great Britain; Switzerland) for his revolutionary writings. Burtsev is also famous for exposing Yevno Azev, head of the Social Revolutionary Combat Organization, as a double agent.*

### **Charushin, N.A.**

- *O dalekom proshlom. Iz vospominanii o revoliutsionnom dvizheniia 1870-kh gg.* Moscow: Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo politicheskikh katorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, 1926.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1874-1878***

Chaikovets N.A. Charushin was arrested in 1874, and spent the next several years being shuffled between the capital's Peter and Paul Fortress, Litovskii Zamok, and the House of Preliminary Detention before being sentenced to Siberian exile in the Trial of the 193. Documents related to his time in the fortress are dispersed in the archives for this period, and can be found in RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 417, 436, 449, 450, 454, etc. His experience of imprisonment is also explored in the excellent Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova, *A Generation of Revolutionaries: Nikolai Charushin and Russian Populism from the Great Reforms to Perestroika* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 111-44.

**Chudnovskii, S.L.**

- *Iz davnikh let. Vospominaniia*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-poseselentsev, 1934.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1876-78***

After first being arrested in Odessa, populist S.L. Chudnovskii was transported to St. Petersburg and shuffled between the Peter and Paul Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention between 1876 and 1878, eventually being convicted in the Trial of the 193. Selections from his prison reminiscences first appeared in the journal *Minuvshie gody* in 1904 and *Byloe* in 1907; his complete memoirs were published posthumously in 1934. Documents related to his Fortress imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 402, 417, 449, 450, 454, etc.

**Deutsch, L.D.**

- *Sixteen Years in Siberia. Some Experiences of a Russian Revolutionist*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1903.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1884; 1906***

The autobiography of early Marxist L.D. Deutsch [Deich] describes characteristic elements of radical Russian prison cultures from his time in the Peter and Paul Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention. This memoir first saw publication in an English translation in 1903, riding the popularity of Russian prison narratives among Anglo-American audiences for which George Kennan was primarily responsible. This translation in turn was soon made available in French, German, Italian, Dutch, Polish, and Bulgarian; the original Russian appeared only in 1905 (printed by the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in Geneva). Documents related to this imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 620. Note that Deich would also be imprisoned once more in the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1906: see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 936, 942, 949, 959, and 1134; as well as Chapter Eight of the present dissertation.

**Dostoevskii, A.M.**

- *Vospominaniia Andreia Mikhailovicha Dostoevskogo*. Leningrad: Izd. pisatelei v Leningrade, 1930.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1849***

Novelist and Petrashevets F.M. Dostoevskii never put his experience of Peter and Paul Fortress incarceration into writing. However, one of his brothers – Andrei Mikhailovich, mistakenly arrested at the same time and held in the Fortress for two weeks – did leave a memoir describing both of their confinements. Documents related to this brief arrest can be found in RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 156.

**Doze, F.I.**

- “Dnevnik F.I. Doze.” *Istoricheskii vestnik* 18 (1884): 73-102.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1862***

Schoolteacher and folklorist F.I. Doze composed a highly curious document in confinement. Held in the Peter and Paul Fortress from 1862, Doze managed to keep a diary of his thoughts and moods, which found publication several years after his death. While Doze did not consider himself a ‘political prisoner,’ this text is still of great interest as one of the few direct narrations of the experience of Fortress incarceration. Documents related to his imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 246 and 1135.

**Dzhabadari, I.S.**

- “V nevole. Vospominaniia.” *Byloe* 5 (1906): 39-66; 6 (1906): 157-77.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1876-77***

Dzhabadari’s “V nevole” blurs the lines between ‘poetry’ and ‘truth.’ It is a story narrated in the third person about a young man – possessing the thinly-veiled pseudonym Il’ia Stepanovich/Semenovich – who is held in political confinement, clearly modeled after the author and his own imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention from 1876 to 1877. Indeed, even the title cannot decide whether the text is a piece of fiction or a memoir. Documents from I.S. Dzhabadari’s (very real) period of incarceration can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 402 and 454; a manuscript of this story is also located at RGIA f. 1093, op. 1, d. 72.

**Falenberg, P.I.**

- “Iz zapisok dekabrista.” In *Vospominaniia i rasskazy deiatelei tainykh obshchestv 1820-kh godov*, 1:247-72. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl’noposelentsev, 1931.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1826-27***

A Decembrist of the Southern Society, P.I. Falenberg was arrested in the Ukrainian town of Tul’chin in 1826 and transported to St. Petersburg and a Peter and Paul Fortress cell. His memoirs – curiously written in the third-person, as if he himself is the protagonist in a sentimental novel – were first published in the 1870-80s in the journals *Russkii arkhiv* and *Ruskaia starina*.

### **Faresov, A.I.**

- *V odinochnom zakliuchenii*. St. Petersburg: Tipografia M. Merkusheva, 1900.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1876-78***

*Radical populist A.I. Faresov spent nearly four years in various sites of solitary confinement across the Russian Empire, including two long stretches in the Peter and Paul Fortress. His memoir, which went through several editions at the start of the century, holds a wealth of information on subversive carceral practices and radical cultures of political imprisonment. Documents pertaining to his time in the Fortress can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 402, 449, 450, and 454.*

### **Figner, V.F.**

- *Zapechatel'nyi trud*. 2 vols. Moscow: Zadruga, 1921-22.
- “Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. ‘razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii’).” In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, vol. 40 (7-8) 458-81. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1883-84***

*Vera Figner must be counted as one of the most influential political prisoners in modern European history. Her memoirs – which recount the more than twenty years she spent in the Peter and Paul Fortress and (primarily) in the Fortress of Shlissel'burg – are considered the acme of the genre. Furthermore, her lifelong work with prisoner aid societies, and her post-revolutionary efforts to publicize other carceral autobiographies, make her a pivotal figure within the history of prison advocacy. Documents related to her Fortress incarceration can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 560, 566, 568, and 620; interested readers are also encouraged to see her Complete Collected Works in Seven Volumes (Moscow, 1932) as well as the English translation of her autobiography (Memoirs of a Revolutionist).*

### **Filippov, A.A.**

- “Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. ‘razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii’).” In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, vol. 40 (7-8), 481-98. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1882-83***

*Revolutionary A.A. Filippov was imprisoned in both the Peter and Paul Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention between 1882 and 1883. While never authoring a large-scale memoir, an autobiographical sketch – including an extended discussion of his time in the Fortress and his thoughts on Nechaev – were published in the 1920s as part of the Granat brothers' encyclopedia. Further documents can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 568.*

### **Fonvizin, M.A.**

- “Zametki M.A. Fon-Vizina v zakliuchenii v Petropavlovskoi kreposti v 1826 g.” *Russkaia starina* 48, no. 11 (1885): 305-308.

#### ***Period of Imprisonment: 1825-27***

*The notes of Decembrist M.A. Fonvizin from his period of Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment present excellent evidence for Lotman’s claim that there was a tragic lack of literary models for these early dissidents. Fonvizin’s ego document is a mixture of personal musings, religious dread, and romantic melancholia – it clearly lacks, however, any narrative coordinates by which the individual experience of confinement could be located within a larger political or historical landscape.*

### **Frolenko, M.F.**

- “Milost’. (Iz vospominanii ob Alekseevskom raveline).” *Byloe* 2 (1906): 5-20.
- *Zapiski semidesiatnika*. Moscow: Istoriko-revoliutsionnaia biblioteka zhurnala ‘Katorga i ssylka,’ 1927.
- “Biografiia Mikhaila Rodionovicha Popova.” In M.R. Popov, *Zapiski Zemlevol’tsa*, 7-17. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl’no-posedentsev, 1933.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1881-84; 1905***

*A member of the Executive Committee of Narodnaia volia (alongside Bukh, Figner, Morozov, and several other later memoirists), M.F. Frolenko was arrested in the weeks following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, convicted in the ‘Trial of the 20’, and imprisoned at both the Peter and Paul and Shlissel’burg Fortress for over twenty years. His recollections of the Alekseevskii Ravelin shed stark light on one of the cruelest periods of its prison regime. Also of note is his further description of the Ravelin in his reminiscences of fellow revolutionary M.R. Popov. After 1917, Frolenko was an active participant in both the Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles and the journal Katorga i ssylka. Archival documents related to his Fortress imprisonment (note that in some instances he appears under his pseudonym ‘Kapustin’) can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 512, 513, 523, 542, 928, and 930; op. 2 [DO], d. 289; and ibid., op. 5, d. 228, 249, and 340.*

### **Gangeblov, A.S.**

- *Vospominaniia dekabrista Aleksandra Semenovicha Gangeblova*. Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1888.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26***

*The memoirs of Decembrist A.S. Gangeblov narrate Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment in the general fashion of these ‘pre-political’ texts: a space of deep personal discomfort, everyday boredom, and moral dread.*

### **Gershuni, G.A.**

- *Iz nedavnego proshlogo*. Paris: Izdanie Tsentral’nogo Komiteta partii Sotsialistov-Revolutionerov, 1908.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1903-1904***

*A founding member and leader of the SR Combat Organization, G.A. Gershuni was arrested in 1903 and held in the Peter and Paul Fortress, Shlissel'burg, and a Transbaikalian labor camp from which he escaped in 1906. His memoirs focus primarily on his prison experiences, and hold a wealth of information regarding radical political cultures of incarceration at the turn of the twentieth century. His autobiography was posthumously republished in Russia after the October Revolution (Moscow-Leningrad, 1928); details regarding the dates of his Fortress imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1134.*

**Golovina, N.A.**

- "Moi vospominaniia (70 i 80 gody)." *Katorga i ssylka* 6 (1923): 23-38
- "Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. 'razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii')." In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, vol. 40 (6) 71-85. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1875-78***

*After her 1874 arrest in Samara, populist N.A. Golovina-Iurgenson spent nearly four years in the Petersburg prisons of the Peter and Paul Fortress, the House of Preliminary Detention, and the Kolomenskaia District before being sentenced at the Trial of the 193. After the revolution, she joined the Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles and served in its publishing branch. She was a guest of honor at the inauguration of the Museum of the Revolution in 1924. Her carceral experiences are detailed both in the journal *Katorga i ssylka* as well as a short 'revolutionary autobiography' commissioned by the Granat encyclopedia project. Documents related to her Fortress imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 402, 449, and 454.*

**Gorskii, O.V.**

- "Dokladnaia zapiska." In *Vospominaniia i rasskazy deiatelei tainykh obshchestv 1820-kh godov*, 2:213-48. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'noposelentsev, 1933.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-27***

*An officer who took part in the Decembrist uprising, O.V. Gorskii was held in the Alekseevskii Ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress for over a year. First published in Russia in 1872, his memoir text focuses primarily on the case brought against him and his compatriots while in the Fortress, and only briefly touches upon his experience of imprisonment itself (as a pre-political space of deprivation and social shame).*

**Govorukha-Otrok, Iu.N.**

- "Tiur'ma i krepost'." *Russkoe obozrenie* 1 (1894).

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1874-78***

*Swept up in the populist enthusiasm of his youth, Iu.N. Govorukha-Otrok spent several years incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention and was given a minor conviction at the Trial of the 193. He would later pursue a career as a writer and publicist, turning against revolutionary politics and becoming an outspoken monarchist. This perhaps explains the unusual pathway of his prison memoir, which was published legally in a conservative journal during a time of repressive censorship. Unfortunately, I have been unable to consult a physical copy of this rare text; documents related to his Fortress imprisonment itself can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 399, 436, 439, and 449.*

**Iakimova, A.V.**

- “Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. ‘razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii’).” In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, vol. 40 (7-8) 620-44. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1876-77; 1882-83***

*First arrested as a teenager for taking part in an illicit reading group in the provinces, A.V. Iakimova was brought to St. Petersburg and became radicalized during her imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress in the 1870s. Upon her release, she returned to the capital illegally and became a member of the Executive Committee of Narodnaia volia. Arrested once more after the assassination of Alexander II, she was again imprisoned in the House of Preliminary Detention as well as the Fortress: in the latter, she was purposefully placed in an isolated wing, as she was nursing her young infant to whom she gave birth while incarcerated. After the October Revolution, Iakimova held a leading role in the Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles, and actively participated in the publication of Katorga i ssylka. Documents related to her two periods of Fortress confinement can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 402, 449, 454, 568, etc.*

**Iakushkin, I.D.**

- “Zapiski.” In *Zapiski, stat’i, pis’mo dekabrista I.D. Iakushkina*, 1-140. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1951.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26***

*The autobiographical notes of Decembrist I.D. Iakushkin are perhaps the most significant record of Peter and Paul Fortress incarceration in the first third of the nineteenth century. While certainly ‘pre-political,’ they provide an excellent account of the Fortress regime from this era, including information on the Alekseevskii Ravelin. Also notable are the first appearance of many of the tropes of later Peter and Paul Fortress memoirs, including the obligatory citation from Dante (“Lasciate ogne speranza...”). Beyond their insight into the 1820s, we can note that selections from Iakushkin’s notes were first published abroad by A. Herzen in 1862 (with a complete version appearing in Russia only in 1905): making this document also a crucial*

*element in the invention of a Decembrist 'mythos' and the rise of a radical culture of political incarceration in the 1860s.*

**Ianovich, L.F.**

- "Iz vospominanii Ianovicha." In *Shlissel'burzhets L.F. Ianovich. Biografiia; iz vospominanii: o iunosti, o protsesse, o Shlissel'burge; pis'ma iz ssylki; prigovor*, 1-67. St. Petersburg: 'Obshchestvennaia pol'za', 1907.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1886***

*L.F. Ianovich was arrested and convicted in 1886 for his participation in the first incarnation of the Polish socialist party 'Proletariat' (a group allied, in the 1880s, with Narodnaia volia). After being held briefly in St. Petersburg, Ianovich would spend sixteen years imprisoned in Shlissel'burg Fortress. While his memoirs focus primarily on this latter experience, they do include an interesting account of his very short stay in the Trubetskoi Bastion.*

**Iastrzhemskii, I.F.**

- "Memuar Petrashevtsa (Neizdannyi)." *Minuvshie gody* 1 (1908): 20-37

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1849***

*Petrashevets Ivan Ferdinand Iastrzhemskii (sometimes rendered as 'Ivan L'vovich') composed an account of his arrest, imprisonment, and interrogation just before his death in 1883. While providing a fascinating depiction of his time in the Alekseevskii Raveline secret prison of the Peter and Paul Fortress, this text does not yet evidence the Bildungs-structure or metanarrative elements that would characterize the later revolutionary memoir tradition. Administrative documents related to his incarceration can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 156; and op. 5, d. 66.*

**Iuvachev, I.P.**

- *Shlissel'burgskaia krepost'*. Moscow: Posrednik, 1907.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1883-1884***

*I.P. Iuvachev was one of the members of Narodnaia volia convicted at the Trial of the 14, as well as the father of absurdist writer Daniel Kharms. While Iuvachev's prison memoirs primarily deal with his years in the fortress of Shlissel'burg, the opening section touches upon his earlier incarceration in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Besides its valuable takes on both experiences, this autobiography is also noteworthy for its idiosyncratic religious elements. Documents on his imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 560, 568, 620, and 622.*

**Ivanovskaia, P.S.**

- "Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. 'razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii')." In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkogo*

*bibliografich. instituta Granat*, vol. 40 (6) 151-63. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1883***

*During her early years as a member of Nardonaia volia, Ivanovskaia spent a brief spell in the walls of the Peter and Paul Fortress before be sentenced – at the Trial of the 17 – to Siberian hard labor. This experience is briefly touched upon in her autobiographical text for the Granat Encyclopedia. Ivanovskaia would go on to play a large role in the SR Combat Organization at the start of the twentieth-century, which is detailed in her memoir V boevoi organizatsii: Vospominaniia (Moscow, 1928). After the revolution, she would join The Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles. For documents related to her time in the Peter and Paul Fortress, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 560, 566, and 568.*

**Kashkin, N.S.**

- A. Pankratovom. “Poslednii petrashevets.” *Russkoe slovo* 302 (Dec. 31, 1910).
- “Sergei Nikolaevich Kashkin i ego potomstvo.” In N.N. Kashkin, *Rodoslovnnye razvedki*, 2: 546-81. St. Petersburg, 1913.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1849***

*The son of a Decembrist, N.S. Kashkin was swept up in the Petrashevskii affair in 1849 and spent eight months in the Trubetskoi Bastion. Kashkin told an account of this period – which includes quite interesting information on both his incarceration as well as the infamous mock execution of the Petrashevtsy – to his son, who included it in a two-volume family genealogy published posthumously in St. Petersburg. In both this text and in other sources exist hints that, before his death, N.S. Kashkin sat with a certain journalist A. Pankratov and narrated his experience of imprisonment in the Fortress, which was later published in the early-twentieth-century iteration of the journal Russkoe slovo. I have, however, been unable to locate an existent copy of this second text. Documents related to his time of Fortress imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 156.*

**Katin-Iartsev, V.N.**

- “V tiur'me i ssylke.” *Katorga i ssylka* 15, no. 2 (1925): 183-211; 16, no. 3 (1925): 134-57.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1897***

*As a member of the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, V.N. Katin-Iartsev was swept up in a wave of arrests in 1897 and spent nine months in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress. His memoirs are an important account of the Fortress conditions and revolutionary culture of imprisonment that operated at this time. For documents related to his incarceration, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 794 and 806.*

**Khudiakov, I.A.**

- *Zapiski karakozovtza*. Moscow-Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1930.

**Period of Imprisonment: 1866**

*I.A. Khudiakov was arrested in 1866 for his role in D.V. Karakozov's assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander II. Incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress for six months (first in the Nikol'skaia curtain wall, and then in the Alekseevskii Raveline), Khudiakov was sentenced to Siberian exile. Before his untimely death in a psychiatric hospital in Irkutsk, Khudiakov managed to write a memoir of his radical past – including his time in the Fortress – and have it smuggled abroad. It was first published in Geneva (Opyt avtobiografii [1882]) then translated into French (Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire: moeurs russes [Paris, 1889]), and finally published in Russia in unabridged form after the revolution. For more on his revolutionary career and incarceration, see The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011). For archival documents dealing with his Peter and Paul Fortress imprisonment, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 296, 298; op. 5, d. 124.*

**Kostomarov, N.I.**

- *Istoricheski proizvedeniia. Avtobiografiia. Kyiv: Lybid', 1990.*

**Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1847-48**

*A major figure in the Ukrainian national awakening, historian N.I. Kostomarov was arrested in 1847 for his political labors in the pan-Slavic movement and spent a year in the Peter and Paul Fortress. His role in these early (trans-)national circles, as well as close ties with individuals such as T.G. Shevchenko, make his memoirs a crucial document of the 'perverse cosmopolitanism' of St. Petersburg's central citadel. However, we can note that his experience of the cell itself is still 'apolitical' – although, interestingly, he pursued a rigorous study of Greek and Spanish, allowing him to read Don Quixote in the Fortress. A bibliographical note: while elements of Kostomarov's autobiography were first published as early as 1890, his account of incarceration (Chapter 4: "Arest, zakliuchenie, ssylka") first appeared in the journal Vestnik Evropy in 1910. A complete edition of his memoirs only saw publication after the revolution (Moscow: Zadruga, 1922).*

**Kovalik, S.F.**

- "Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. 'razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii')." In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, vol. 40 (6) 163-88. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.

**Period of Imprisonment: 1875-1878**

*Arrested after participating in the revolutionary 'going to the people' of 1874, Kovalik spent four years in the various prisons of St. Petersburg (including several stints in the Peter and Paul Fortress) before being convicted in the Trial of the 193. This autobiographical sketch is well-supplemented by Kovalik's earlier account of the populist movement as a whole, published under the pseudonym 'Starik' across three*

issues of the journal *Byloe* in 1906. Documents related to his period of Fortress imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 417, 439, 450, and 454.

### **Kriukov, N.P.**

- “Rasskaz N.P. Kriukova o zakliuchenii v Petropavoskoi kreposti v 1826 godu. Soobshch. B.L. Modzalevskii.” *Dela i dni* 3 (1922): 47-63.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1826***

*The young officer N.P. Kriukov was imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress soon after the failed Decembrist uprising. The investigation quickly discerned that he was only guilty of having had traveled in the same social circles as several members of the uprising, and he was freed after spending merely three weeks in the Trubetskoi Bastion. His brief first-person account of his incarceration, rediscovered and published in an early-Soviet historical journal in 1922, does shed some interesting light onto the Fortress conditions and apolitical experience of confinement during this period.*

### **Kropotkin, P.A.**

- *In Russian and French Prisons*. London: Ward and Downey, 1887.
- *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. 2 vols. London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1899.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1874-75***

*Anarchist Prince P.A. Kropotkin is certainly one of the most famous figures in European revolutionary history to have spent time in the cells of the Peter and Paul Fortress. First acquainted with the citadel during his privileged youth as a site of autocratic ritual, after his conversion to radical politics he would encounter the Fortress again under very different circumstances. Arrested in 1874 for illegal propagandizing and participation in the Chaikovskii circle, Kropotkin was held for nearly two years in a cell in the Trubetskoi Bastion. Through the personal intervention of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, Kropotkin was given unparalleled access to books, journals, maps, and writing materials in the Fortress. After falling ill, Kropotkin escaped from a St. Petersburg military hospital in 1876 and escaped abroad. Here, the English publication of his memoirs of political imprisonment was a natural extension of his trans-national agitation work. Note that Kropotkin’s *Memoir of a Revolutionist* was first serialized in the journal *The Atlantic Monthly* from 1898-99 before being published as an independent volume. A larger picture of Kropotkin’s relationship to political imprisonment can be found in the series of articles he wrote on the subject for *The Nineteenth Century* in 1883, as well as in Chapter Seven of the present dissertation. Prison administration documents related to Kropotkin’s Fortress incarceration are located at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 383, 399, 436, 437, 439, etc. A selection of critical documents (including drafts and galleys of his memoirs, and a reading journal from his years of imprisonment) can be found with the Kropotkin papers at OR RGB f. 410. Finally, I also discovered a series of documents related to the Imperial Russian Geographical Society’s intercession on the imprisoned Kropotkin’s behalf at NA RGO f. 1-1871, op. 1, d. 14 and 27.*

**Kuz'min, P.A.**

- "Iz zapisok P.A. Kuz'mina." *Russkaia starina* 82 (Feb. 1895): 154-73; 83 (March 1895): 75-91; 84 (April 1895): 71-86.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1849***

*Written by the elderly Petrashevets P.A. Kuz'min in the 1870s and only published in the historical journal Russkaia starina after his death, these memoirs shine a lucid light onto the experience of Peter and Paul Fortress incarceration in the 1840s as well as pre-reform interrogation proceedings. Documents related to the Fortress imprisonment of Kuz'min can be found in RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 156. Further prison documents, and the original text for this memoir, can be found at the Shil'der papers in the Manuscript Division of the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg [OR RNB 859 Shil'der k. 3, n. 10, II.4.1]. Notes that in this curious collection (General-Lieutenant N.K. Shil'der was a historian and editor for Russkaia starina) we learn that Kuz'min's memoirs were originally intended to be published in 1885, only to be blocked by the censors.*

**Lorer, N.I.**

- "Zapiski moego vremeni. Vospominanie o proshlom." In *Memuary dekabristov*, 313-545. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Pravda,' 1988.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-27***

*The autobiography of Decembrist N.I. Lorier give an excellent account of the year-long period he spent in the Alekseevskii Raveline, as well as the (apolitical) experience of the Peter and Paul Fortress as a whole during this period. The bulk of his reminiscences were written in the 1860s. While selections from this text were first published in the pre-revolutionary journals Russkii arkhiv (1874) and Russkoe Bogatstvo (1904), the manuscript in its entirety was only located by historians in the 1930s.*

**L'vov, F.N.**

- "Zapiska o dele petrashevtsy: Rukopis' F.N. L'vova s pometchkami M.V. Butashevicha-Petrashevskogo." *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 63 (1956): 165-90.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1849***

*The memoirs of Petrashevets F.N. L'vov are almost more interesting for their provenance than their contents. An account of his arrest, imprisonment, and sentencing written while in exile, these notes were smuggled out to London at the beginning of the 1860s, where they ended up in the archive of Aleksandr Herzen. Curiously, the original text holds extensive comments in the hand of M.V. Petrashevskii – and as this dissident personality of the 1840s left no autobiography of his own, this adds greatly to the value of L'vov's imprisonment memoir (even if does not yet belong to the larger 'metanarrative' of radical Russian incarceration). Noteworthy here too is the detailed account of the infamous 'mock execution' of the Petrashevtsy. For documents related to L'vov's period of imprisonment, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 156.*

### **Manucharova, I.L.**

- "Iz Shlissel'burga na Sakhalin." *Byloe* 8 (1907): 31-44.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1895-96***

*In 1885, Narodovolets I.L. Manucharova was tried in Odessa and sentenced to ten years of hard labor, which he spent in the fortress at Shlissel'burg (see I.L. Manucharova, "Moi protsess," Byloe 7 (1906): 48-54). After the end of this term Manucharova was transported into exile on the island of Sakhalin: in transit, he was held for two months in the Peter and Paul Fortress. His memoirs of this period are thus not only of interest for the light they shed on the Fortress regime during a period of relatively light use – they also represent a reversal of the journey normally undertaken at this time, which saw political prisoners moved from St. Petersburg to Shlissel'burg and not the other way around.*

### **Martynovskii, S.I.**

- "Na katorzhnom polozenii." *Katorga i ssylka* 12, no. 5 (1924): 181-211.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1880; 1880-81***

*Narodovolets S.I. Martynovskii spent both a period of pre-trial detention in the Peter and Paul Fortress and nearly a year in the Trubetskoi Bastion after his conviction in the Trial of the 16. His memoirs, which describe this second span of time, hold a wealth of detail on the experience of political imprisonment during this period: especially noteworthy are his thoughts on Nechaev as well as his account of being given journals and notes by a sympathetic gendarme. It appears that Martynovskii may have authored further autobiographical texts for several Odessa-based periodicals in the immediate post-revolutionary period, but I have not been able to confirm this with certainty. Materials related to his periods of imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 482, 487, 503, and 513.*

### **Mikhailov, A.F.**

- "Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. 'razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii')." In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, Vol. 40 (6) 259-79. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1878-81***

*Not to be confused with several other revolutionary contemporaries with the same surname (which include the famous Narodovolets A.D. Mikhailov and the poet M.I. Mikhailov), A.F. Mikhailov was a populist terrorist arrested in St. Petersburg at the end of the 1870s. Besides its account of his Trubetskoi Bastion imprisonment, his memoirs for the Granat Encyclopedia are noteworthy for their detailed depiction of Sergei Stepaniak-Kravchinskii's assassination of the head of the Third Section, in which Mikhailov personally participated. For documents on his incarceration in the Peter and Paul Fortress, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 417, 474, 478, 487, 497, and 513.*

### **Mikhailov, M.I.**

- “Zapiski.” In *N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova, M.L. Mikhailov. Vospominaniia*, ed. V.V. Grigorenko, et. al., 2:257-427. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Khudozhestvennaia literatura,' 1967.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1861***

*Mikhail Illarionovich (sometimes given as 'Larionovich') Mikhailov is a crucial figure in the early history of Russian political imprisonment. Held in solitary confinement for two months in a Nevskaiia Curtain Wall cell, his significance for radical carceral cultures as both an imprisoned subject and an object of veneration is explored in Chapter Three of the present dissertation. We can note here that his autobiography – which describes his imprisonment – was written in the immediate period between his release from the Peter and Paul Fortress and his untimely death in exile. Its fragmented nature is due to both the conditions of its production and fate of the text itself. The original manuscripts have been lost: what remains to us is a collection of excerpts published in various pre-revolutionary journals, which have been rigorously compiled and annotated in the above-cited edition. For documents related to his period of Fortress imprisonment, see the file dedicated to him at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 238.*

### **Morozov, N.A.**

- “Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. ‘razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii’).” In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, Vol. 40 (7-8) 305-16. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.
- *Povesti moei zhizni*. 2 vols. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1961.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1881-1884, 1905***

*Populist N.A. Morozov – involved in both the earliest ‘going to the people’ and the later turn to a ‘propaganda of the deed’ – spent over twenty-three years in the prison cells of the Shlissel'burg and Peter and Paul Fortresses (including time in the Trubetskoi Bastion and the Alekseevskii Ravelin). An original and wide-ranging thinker, Morozov's extensive memoirs are one of our most important accounts not only of the concrete experience of confinement in this period, but also of the revolutionary mythos of incarceration in the last third of the nineteenth century. Besides his extensive self-narrations, Morozov also published works in physics, astronomy, mathematics, and religion; a strange science-fiction (Puteshestvie v kosmicheskom prostranstve); and a collection of prison poems (Iz sten nevoli) from his time in the Fortresses. After the October Revolution, he played a leading role in the endeavors of the Society for Former Political Prisoners and Exiles (see, e.g., the documents held at TsGA SPB f. 506, op. 2, d. 297). The 1961 edition of his autobiography – published by the Soviet Academy of Sciences – also collects a host of autobiographical texts and speeches produced by Morozov between 1906 and 1933. Archival material related to his imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 512, 513, 542, 918, 928, 930, 1134; op. 2 [DO], d. 289; op. 5, d. 228, 232, 243, 249, 340.*

### **Murav'ev, A.M.**

- "Moi zhurnal." In *Vospominaniia i rasskazy deiatelei tainykh obshchestv 1820-kh godov*, 1:131-51. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'noposelentsev, 1931.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1826***

*Aleksandr Mikhailovich Murav'ev (younger brother of the more famous Decembrist thinker Nikita Mikhailovich) was imprisoned in both the Revel and Peter and Paul Fortresses for his participation in the failed uprising of 1825. His brief memoirs are personal, psychological, pre-political – yet do hold some interesting observations regarding the space of the Peter and Paul Fortress in the Russian capital.*

### **Nikiforov, L.P.**

- "Moi tiur'my." *Golos minuvshogo* 5 (1914): 168-201.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1869-1870***

*As a student, the young nobleman L.P. Nikiforov – an acquaintance of Nechaev before the latter's invented prison escape – spent half a year in the Peter and Paul Fortress for the active role he played in the university disturbances of 1869. Nikiforov's brief memoirs are noteworthy for their remarkable discussions of martyrdom, political suffering, and the ambiguous attraction held by the Fortress cell for young radicals during the 'Age of High Prison Mythology.' In later years, Nikiforov would find work as a literary translator – notably collaborating on several endeavors with L.N. Tolstoy. For archival documentation on his youthful imprisonment, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 330, 348.*

### **Novorusskii, M.V.**

- "Kak i za shto ia popal v Shlissel'burg." *Byloe* 4 (1906): 65-83.
- *Zapiski Shlissel'burzhtsa, 1887-1905*. Petrograd: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1920.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1887, 1905***

*Populist terrorist M.V. Novorusskii was apprehended by the tsarist authorities in 1887 for a planned attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander III. Briefly held in the Peter and Paul Fortress while awaiting sentencing (alongside his comrade Alexander Ulianov – Lenin's older brother), Novorusskii was soon transported to Shlissel'burg where he would spend nearly twenty years in confinement. While his memoirs are mainly concerned with this latter site of incarceration, they do discuss his time in the Peter and Paul Fortress, as well as provide valuable insight into the cultures of confinement in this period as a whole. Also noteworthy is another volume of reminiscences published after the October Revolution, titled Prison Robinsons [Tiuremnye robinzony] – a phrase which strikingly evokes the convergence of the novelistic imaginary and the prison imaginary in the revolutionary political cultures of this period.*

### **Obolenskii, E.P.**

- *Vospominaniia Kniazia Evgeniia Petrovicha Obolenskogo. (Souvenirs du Prince Eugène Obolenski.)*. Leipzig: A. Franck'sche Verlags-Buchhandlung. (Herold & Lindner), 1861.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26***

*A central figure in the Decembrist movement, Prince E.P. Obolenskii was arrested after the failed uprising and held in the Alekseevskii Ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress from the end of 1825 to the summer of 1826. While as the document of a chief participant his memoirs are not without their moments of interest – holding descriptions of Ryleev's last poetry and the use of chains during the Decembrist incarcerations – they also clearly evidence the lack of a 'politics in the prison' for dissidents at this time. In this sense, what is almost more noteworthy is the date of their publication: Obolenskii's autobiographical notes appeared illegally abroad in 1861, that crucial year for the development of revolutionary Russian prison discourses.*

### **Obruchev, V.A.**

- "Iz perezhitogo. I. Peterburg." *Vestnik Evropy* 42, no. 3 (1907): 122-55.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1861-62***

*Employed at the leftist St. Petersburg journal Sovremennik, Vladimir Aleksandrovich Obruchev (not to be confused with Vladimir Afanas'evich Obruchev, the famous Russian-Soviet geologist) was arrested at the end of 1861 for his involvement in the distribution of revolutionary pamphlets in the capital. Imprisoned in the Alekseevskii Ravelin for six months (at the same time as poet M.I. Mikhailov and the student dissidents of St. Petersburg University were held in the Fortress), Obruchev would eventually undergo a 'civic execution' and Siberian exile. His memoirs, published during the censorship thaw following the 1905 Revolution, are a remarkable account of an experience of imprisonment in a period when it was only just beginning to be understood as 'political.' Archival materials related to Obruchev's time in the Fortress are located at RGIA f. 1280, op. 5, d. 98, 100, and 102.*

### **Olizara, Gustawa**

- *Pamiętniki. 1798-1865*. Lwów: Gubrynowicza i Schmidta, 1892.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1826***

*An acquaintance of several Decembrists, Count Olizara was arrested in Kiev at the start of 1826 and briefly imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress before being released for lack of evidence. Olizara would later take part in the Polish Uprising of 1830-31. Like other ego-documents from this period, his memoiristic account of Fortress imprisonment is still pre-political. However, its particular pathway of production (this Polish-language autobiography was first published in modern-day Lviv, with a Russian translation soon following in the journal Russkii vestnik [1893]) speaks broadly to the 'perverse cosmopolitanism' of Peter and Paul Fortress incarceration in the long nineteenth century.*

**Olovennikova, E.N.**

- “Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. ‘razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii’).” In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, Vol. 40 (7-8) 317-35. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1881***

*An active Narodnovol’ka from a family of revolutionaries (two of her sisters were also radical populists), E.N. Olovennikova was arrested for her participation in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II and was incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Her memoir in the Entsiklopedia Granata vividly recounts the prison conditions at this time, as well as the adverse effect they had on her health – deemed unfit to appear in the Trial of the 20, Olovennikova was instead set to the Kazan Psychiatric Hospital for nine years (truly a parallel form of repressive confinement at this time). Archival documents related to her period of Fortress imprisonment (including medical reports) can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 512 and 513.*

**Panteleev, L.F.**

- *Vospominaniia*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1861***

*As a young leftist St. Petersburg University student, L.F. Panteleev was arrested in the autumn of 1861 and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress – alongside hundreds of his friends and colleagues – for the disorders of that year. Panteleev’s extensive personal-literary memoirs are undoubtedly our best first-hand account of this ‘student affair’. Not only was he a keen observer of his times (and the nascently-political experience of incarceration): he also recorded the most extensive description of the curious cultural activities (including the remarkable operatic work) undertaken in the Fortress during this chaotic period. Original manuscripts of this autobiography and further texts on his imprisonment can be found in IRLI RAN (Pushkinskii dom) OR f. 224.*

**Parvus (I.L. Gel’fand)**

- *In der russischen Bastille während der Revolution. Eindrücke, Stimmungen und Betrachtungen*. Dresden: Verlag von Kaden & Comp., 1907

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1906***

*The influential Russian Marxist I.L. Gel’fand (better known under his pseudonym Parvus) was arrested by the tsarist authorities during the events of the 1905 Revolution and held in several St. Petersburg prisons: including the ‘Kresty’, the House of Preliminary Detention, and the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress. He recorded this last experience in a volume of memoirs on the ‘Russian Bastille,’ published in Germany after his eventual escape from Siberian exile. This*

*text is interesting both for its deeply subjective/psychological perspective, as well as for being part of the small set of Fortress prison memoirs written directly for an international audience. Archival documents related to Parvus' period of imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 936, 942, 949, 952, and 959.*

### **Pavlovskii, I.Ia**

- "En cellule. Mémoires d'un nihiliste," *Le Temps* (Paris), Nov. 1979.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1875-76***

*The writer and translator I.Ia. Pavolvskii was arrested as a young man for his participation in the 'going to the people' movement, and held in both the Peter and Paul Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention during the 'Trial of the 193.' His narrative of solitary confinement was published in the Parisian newspaper Le Temps over the course of three numbers in November 1879. The text is marked more by a literary aspiration than any deep commitment to politics or mimesis: however, it is still notable as an expression of the aesthetics of prison narration during this period, for being a very early discussion of Fortress incarceration in the international press, and due to its curious introduction penned by I.S. Turgenev. For archival documents related to the imprisonment of Pavlovskii, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 439.*

### **Podzhio, A.V.**

- "Zapiski." In *Zapiski, pis'ma*, 65-146. Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1989.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26***

*The memoirs of Decembrist A.V. Podzhio [Poggio] – a Russian officer of Italian descent – were first posthumously published in the journal Golos minuvshago in 1913. As a text from the earliest days of modern Russian imprisonment, this work is marked by the same subjective, apolitical qualities that mark the rest of the Decembrist memoir canon. However, Podzhio's notes are still unique for their frank meditations on the nature of secret conspiracies and in that they are almost entirely devoted to his time of imprisonment.*

### **Polivanov, P.S.**

- "Aleksievskii ravelin." In *Aleksievskii ravelin*, ed. A.A. Matyshev, 2:305-428. Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1882-84***

*Populist revolutionary P.S. Polivanov was arrested for killing a prison guard during a failed attempt to free a fellow Narodovolets from confinement in 1881; he would spend the next two decades of his life in the Peter and Paul and Shlissel'burg Fortresses. It was regarding the former space of confinement that he actually penned two accounts. The first memoir of the Aleksievskii Ravelin, written while still in Shlissel'burg, was left with comrades for safekeeping upon his release; the second, re-written from memory and differing in several respects, was found amongst Polivanov's possessions after his suicide in Paris in 1903. Various editions of both*

versions appeared in print in the pre-revolutionary [1905-1906] and post-revolutionary [1926] period. Archival documents related to his time in the Fortress can be found in RGIA f. 1280 op. 2 [DO], d. 289; op. 5, d. 228, 232, 249.

### **Popov, M.R.**

- “K biografii Ippolita Nikiticha Myshkin.” In *Zapiski Zemlevol'tsa*, 307-32. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, 1933.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1882-84; 1905***

*Revolutionary populist M.R. Popov was a chief organizer for both Zemlia i volia and Chernyi peredel in the south of the Russian Empire. Arrested in Kiev in 1880, Popov would spend two years in the Alekseevskii Ravelin before being transferred to the prisons of Shlissel'burg. His extensive autobiographical writings spend little time on this spell in the Peter and Paul Fortress – however, his reminiscences of fellow radical I.N. Myshkin contain a valuable self-narrative of his time in the Ravelin. Archival material related to this incarceration can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 515; op. 5, d. 249.*

### **Pribylev, A.V.**

- “Protsess 17 lits v 1883 godu. (Otryvok iz vospominanii).” *Byloe* 11 (1906): 221-43.
- *Zapiski narodovol'tsa*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politkatorzhan, 1930.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1882-83***

*Populist revolutionary A.V. Pribylev was arrested for his involvement with Narodnaia volia in 1882 and spent almost a year in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress (eventually being exiled to the gold mines at Kara). While his memoirs of incarceration do not diverge much from the standard narrative tropes of this milieu, his account of the ‘Trial of the 17’ (published in the journal *Byloe*) does provide interesting insight into the different perspectives on the Fortress and the House of Preliminary Detention at this time. For archival documents related to his incarceration, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 517, 568.*

### **Pribyleva-Korba, A.R.**

- “Katorga i pytko v Peterburge v 1883 godu. (Pis'mo iz Petropavlovskoi kreposti).” In *‘Narodnaia Volia’: vospominaniia o 1870-1880-kh g.g.*, 19-29. Moscow: Istoriko-revoliutsionnaia biblioteka zhurnala ‘Katorga i ssylka,’ 1926.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1883***

*Revolutionary A.R. Pribyleva-Korba (born Meingardt – the above-mentioned A.V. Pribylev was her second husband) played a leading role in the operations of Narodnaia volia at the beginning of the 1880s, including serving as an editor for its underground publications. The text “Katorga i pytko” is not a traditional memoir per se, but rather a collective letter (headed by Pribyleva-Korba) which a group of*

*incarcerated radicals were able to smuggle out of the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1883. As a vivid, lived account of political imprisonment at this moment, it deserves to be considered within this larger catalogue of carceral life writing. After the revolution, Pribyleva-Korba was a member of the Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles as well as part of the editorial board of the journal Katorga i ssylka. For archival material on her period of Fortress imprisonment, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 568.*

**Pushchin, M.I.**

- "Zapiski Mikhaila Ivanovicha Pushchina." *Russkii arkhiv* 11-12 (1908): 410-64, 507-76.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26***

*M.I. Pushchin was the elder brother of the more famous I.I. Pushchin - both are perhaps best known today for the friendship (and nearly-homonymic last name) they shared with poet A.S. Pushkin. The older Decembrist also left a memoir of his participation in the uprising of 1825, which touches upon his period of imprisonment. This text (of which elements were first published in the journal Russkaia starina in 1884) possesses the same inability to historico-politically mediate the experience of incarceration that characterizes all of the prison accounts of this early period.*

**Raevskii, V.F.**

- "Vospominaniia V.F. Raevskogo." *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo* 60 (1956): 47-128.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1826***

*V.F. Raevskii – sometimes called “the first Decembrist” – was arrested in 1822 and spent four years in the fortress at Tiraspol before being transferred to the Peter and Paul Fortress. While his carceral memoirs are fragmented in form and pre-political in content, they are noteworthy for having been first partially published by Aleksandr Herzen (Poliarnaia zvezda 7 [1861]) – and are thus part of the post facto invention of a tradition of dissident political incarceration that occurred in this period.*

**Rants, A.G.**

- "V tiuremnom otdelenii psikhiatricheskoi bol'nitsy." *Katorga i ssylka* 54 (1929): 139-43.

***Period of Imprisonment: 1884-86***

*Arrested in 1884 for his ties to G. Lopatin, A.G. Rants was held in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress for a year and a half before being transferred to a psychiatric hospital. In this short article, Rants describes his time in the Fortress and the reasons for his removal – namely, a reoccurring hallucination that caused him to tear out his own beard.*

**Rozen A.E.**

- *Zapiski dekabristsa*. St. Petersburg: "Obshchestvennaia Pol'za," 1907.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-27***

*The extensive memoirs of Baron A.E. Rozen were first published in Leipzig in 1869 (Aus den Memoiren eines russischen Dekabristen), before being revised and edited for a definitive Russian-language edition by none other than P.E. Shchegolev during the censorship thaw of the 1905 Revolution. This artfully written set of reminiscences greatly influenced the invention of a 'Decembrist mythos' in the 1860s and 70s, but are still characterized by a disconnect between subjective psychology and political activity – it would only be in these latter decades that the texts of Rozen and his compatriots would be grounded in a living history of political revolt.*

**Savinkov, B.V.**

- *To, chego ne bylo.* Moscow: 'Zadruga,' 1918

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1901***

*A leading figure in the SR Combat Organization, B.V. Savinkov is one of the most famous revolutionary terrorists from the last years of the tsarist regime. He is also well-known as a writer, authoring a volume of memoirs and several semi-autobiographical novels. And while his Vospominaniia terrorista do not depict his several-month imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1901, the above novel holds a series of evocative descriptions of Fortress incarceration that (like all his belletristic works) clearly express his own experience. Thus, it does not seem inappropriate to include this piece within a catalogue of Russian carceral narratives of the self. Archival documents related to his imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 952, 1134, etc.*

**Shapovalov, A.S.**

- *V bor'be za sotsializm: vospominaniia starogo bol'shevika-podpol'shchika.* Moscow: Staryi bol'shevik, 1934.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1896-97***

*A member of the early-Marxist organization League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, A.S. Shapovalov's memoirs of his Trubetskoi Bastion imprisonment are noteworthy not only for being one of the sole accounts of the Peter and Paul Fortress from the 1890s, but also one of the very few traditional autobiographies of political imprisonment to have been written by a worker. As a bibliographical aside, we should note that Shapovalov's texts were frequently translated and republished in various editions under a variety of titles (Po doroge k marksizmu; Na puti k marksizmu; V tsarskikh tiur'makh i v ssylke; etc.) through the 1920s and 30s: the above-cited volume seems to be the most complete collection of his writings. For archival documents related to his period of Fortress imprisonment, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 806.*

**Shelgunov, N.V.**

- “Iz proshlogo i nastoiashchego.” In *N.V. Shelgunov, L.P. Shelgunova, M.L. Mikhailov. Vospominaniia*, 1:49-230. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1967.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1863-64***

*Publicist N.V. Shelgunov was one of the cohort of leftist publicists – including his friends and colleagues Mikhailov, Chernyshevsky, and Pisarev – to be arrested by the tsarist regime at the start of the 1860s. Held for over a year in the Alekseevskii Ravelin, Shelgunov continued to write and publish materials in the critical journal Russkoe slovo during this time. Unfortunately, his memoirs – first published in Russkaia mysl’ in 1885-86, and subject to the tsarist censorship regime – speak but little of his actual experience in the Fortress. For archival sources on Shelgunov’s incarceration, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 253a; op. 5, d. 104, 105, 108, 109, 111; and GARF f. 109, op. 37 (1862), d. 230, ch. 28.*

**Shebalin, M.P.**

- “Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. ‘razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii’).” In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, Vol. 40 (7-8) 613-20. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.
- *Klochki vospominanii*. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl’no-poselentsev, 1935.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1884, 1896***

*Revolutionary M.P. Shebalin was in charge of the underground printing press of Narodnaia volia during the dangerous period after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. Arrested in the spring of 1884, he would spend a few weeks in December of that year in the Peter and Paul Fortress before being transferred to Shlissel’burg. After twelve years in this latter prison, he would spend another few days in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1896 as he was being transported to Siberian exile. While neither of these brief spells are well-represented in the archival material, they receive fine, characteristic descriptions in Shebalin’s memoir fragments.*

**Shingarev, A.I.**

- *Kak eto bylo: dnevnik A.I. Shingareva, Petropavlovskaia krepost’ 27.XI.17-5.I.18*. Moscow: Komiteta po uvekovecheniiu pamiati F.F. Kokoshkina i A.I. Shingareva, 1918.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1917-18***

*The prison diary of A.I. Shingarev is certainly one of the strangest pieces of Peter and Paul Fortress prison writing to see publication. It is also, chronologically, the last. A prominent Kadet politician and Minister of Finance for the Provisional Government, Shingarev was arrested after the October Revolution and held for a little over a month in the Trubetskoi Bastion. His diary is thus a doubly unique piece of Fortress self-narration – the only account we have of the improvised Bolshevik prison regime in the*

earliest days of the Revolution, as well as the only Peter and Paul Fortress memoir written by a liberal held by the socialist state. While the text is thus in no ways a 'radical' memoir (indeed, Shingarev's explicit disgust towards the peasants and the working masses is hard to stomach), it partakes in its own strange way in the discursive space of the Russian prison that had been politically inaugurated in this very Fortress, and thus deserves admission into the present catalogue as a peculiar coda. For documents related to his period of imprisonment, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 1377.

### **Shteingel', V.I.**

- "Zapiski Barona V.I. Shteingelia." *Istoricheskii vestnik: istoriko-literaturnyi zhurnal* 80 (1900): 100-32, 430-48, 816-42.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1826-27***

*The memoirs of Decembrist V.I. Shteingel' are entirely symptomatic of the 'pre-political' experience of incarceration lived by these first modern dissidents. Like so many of his compatriots, Baron Shteingel' narrates the cell as a site of intense individual pathos and incomprehensible suffering – not yet as a space capable of being integrated into any larger personal-historical pathway.*

### **Sidorenko, E.M.**

- "Avtobiografii revoliutsionnykh deiatelei russkogo sotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia 70-kh i pervoi poloviny 80-kh gg. (Prilozhenie k st. 'razvitie sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii')." In *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkogo bibliografich. instituta Granat*, Vol. 40 (7-8) 414-22. Moscow: Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat, 1927.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1882-83***

*The young student-narodovolets E.M. Sidorenko was arrested in 1882 and held in the House of Preliminary Detention and the Peter and Paul Fortress before being sentenced to five years of administrative exile in 1883. His short memoirs for the Granat Encyclopedia briefly touch upon the conditions of his incarceration in the Trubetskoi Bastion.*

### **Sinegub, S.S.**

- "Vospiminaniia chaikovtza." *Byloe* 8-10(1906): 39-80, 90-128, 31-79.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1873-75***

*Populist revolutionary S.S. Sinegub was active as a young student in St. Petersburg's 'Chaikovskii circle' and its propagandist work in the countryside. Arrested in 1873, he would spend two years in the Peter and Paul Fortress and further time in the House of Preliminary Detention while awaiting the Trial of the 193. His memoirs of confinement are classic examples of carceral self-narration during the 'Age of High Prison Mythology' – discussing his psychological states and his political plans, describing his exposure to knocking language, detailing his intellectual labors in his cell (remarkably, it appears that he found a copy of Marx's Capital in the Trubetskoi*

*Bastion library!), and creating a holistic image of personal and historical development. Archival documents related to his period of Fortress imprisonment can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 383, 399, 436, 437, 439, 449, 450.*

**Spandoni-Basmandzhi, A.A.**

- “Stranitsa iz vospominanii.” *Byloe* 5 (1906): 14-38

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1883-1884***

*Populist revolutionary A.A. Basmandzhi – a member of the Executive Committee of Narodnaia volia – was held in the Peter and Paul Fortress for nearly two years during the Trial of the 14. His brief account of incarceration gives insight into the harsh conditions of the Trubetskoi Bastion in the years immediately following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II – particularly the lack of books and the planned isolation to prevent knocking language. Documents related to the imprisonment of Spandoni-Basmandzhi can be found at RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 560, 566, 568, 620, 622.*

**Trigoni, M.N.**

- “Iz vospominanii ob Alekseevskom raveline.” *Minuvshie gody* 4 (1908): 56-69.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1881-84***

*A member of the Executive Committee of Narodnaia volia, M.N. Trigoni was arrested in St. Petersburg just before the assassination of Tsar Alexander II and prosecuted in the Trial of the 20. He would be held in the Trubetskoi Bastion and the Alekseevskii Ravelin until 1884, when he was sent to Shlissel’burg Fortress and, eventually, exile on Sakhalin Island. His terse account of his time in the Peter and Paul Fortress sheds light on one of the harshest periods in the history of its regime. For archival documents related to his imprisonment, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 512, 513, 523, 542; op. 5, d. 228, 232, 243, 249, 340.*

**Trotsky, L.D.**

- *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1930.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1906***

*Trotsky’s political autobiography occupies a crucial place in the revolutionary Russian memoir canon – in many ways both its apotheosis and the herald of its decline. Trotsky was arrested in 1905 after the dissolution of the first St. Petersburg Soviet and held for several months in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress. The chapter in My Life that speaks of these events is evocative and illuminating – seemingly a quintessential expression of the long tradition of Russian carceral ego documents. However, his larger intellectual and political project (as discussed in great detail in Chapter Eight of the present dissertation) was premised on the overcoming of the epistemological terms that had sustained this earlier tradition. It is in this way that Trotsky’s prison narration should be read as a*

particularly 'combined and uneven' moment. For archival documents related to his time in the Fortress, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 930, 936, 942, 949, 959, and 1134.

### **Trubetskoi, S.P.**

- *Zapiski kniazia Trubetskogo*. Berlin: Izdanie Gugo Shteinitsa, 1903.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1825-26***

*Descended from a famous house of the Russian autocracy (it was from one of his ancestors that the 'Trubetskoi Bastion' had gained its name), Prince S.P. Trubetskoi played a leading role in the Decembrist movement and was arrested along with his comrades at the end of 1825. Held in the Alekseevskii Ravelin during the investigation, his death sentence was commuted to eternal exile and he was only pardoned upon the ascension of Tsar Alexander II to the throne. Trubetskoi's notes (with their personal ruminations and large swathes of French) follow the typical pattern of Decembrist prison memoirs – confinement has not yet become a site of the political here.*

### **Tsebrikov, N.R.**

- "Vospominaniia o Kronverkskoi kurtine. (Iz zapisok Dekabrista)." *Poliarnaia zvezda* 6 (1861): 61-71.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1826***

*N.R. Tsebrikov was an 'accidental Decembrist' – not a conspirator in the planned uprising, but rather an officer who found himself in St. Petersburg on the day of the event and decided to join his comrades on Senate Square. His memoirs of the resulting imprisonment in the Crownwork Curtain act as an interesting bridge between pre-political and heavily-politicized Russian cultures of incarceration. This autobiography was published (anonymously) in Herzen's *Poliarnaia zvezda* in 1861 – the moment and medium in which a larger lineage of radical confinement first began to be constructed – and the rather benign content of the text as a whole is wedded to opening remarks hailing "our five Martyrs" of the Fortress: expressions reflective of the 1860s, not the 1820s.*

### **Veinshtok, V.A.**

- *V mire bezumiia i otchaianiia (otryvok iz vospominanii)*. St. Petersburg: 'Sovet,' 1910.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1892 (?)***

*This short volume was published under the pseudonym 'V. Aleksandrov,' after originally appearing as "V bol'nitse Nikolaia Chudotvortsa" in the journal *Vestnik znaniia* in 1907. In it, the author apparently describes how he feigned violent insanity in the Peter and Paul Fortress to escape the fate of solitary confinement, only to find himself circulated through a series of equally-repressive mental health institutions in the capital. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate a copy of this extremely rare volume, and am thus incapable of commenting on its political content. Note that this*

may be the same 'V.A. Veinshtok' who worked on a series of pre-revolutionary translations of Nietzsche's work into Russian.

### **Volkenshtein, L.A.**

- *13 let v Shlissel'burgskoi kreposti*. St. Petersburg: Novyi mir, 1906.
- "Posle smertnogo prigovora", in *Iz tiuremnykh vospominanii*. Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1883-84, 1896-97***

Populist revolutionary L.A. Volkenshtein was arrested in 1883 as a member of Narodnaia volia and held in the Trubetskoi Bastion of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Sentenced in the Trial of the 14, in 1884 she was sent to Shlissel'burg where she would spend thirteen years. Released to Sakhalin Island exile in 1896 (by way of another spell in the Peter and Paul Fortress), Volkenshtein was finally able to live freely at the start of the twentieth century in Vladivostok. Here she would tragically perish during the upheaval of the 1905 Revolution, killed while in the process of storming the city's prison. Her major carceral memoir – published with a foreword by Vera Zasulich soon after her death – deals primarily with Volkenshtein's time in Shlissel'burg, but also narrativizes aspects of her imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress. A small essay published for the first time after the revolution speaks more to this period as well. For archival documents related to her Fortress incarceration, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 568, 622, 806.

### **Volkhovskii, F.V.**

- *Druz'ia sredi vragov. (Iz vospominanii starogo revoliutsionera)*. St. Petersburg: 'Budushchnost', 1906.
- *Tkach Petr Alekseevich Alekseev*. St. Petersburg: Narodnaia volia, 1906.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1869-71, 1875-78***

Populist revolutionary F.V. Volkhovskii spent two spells in the Peter and Paul Fortress – first in the Ekaterininskaia Curtain at the end of the 1860s during the repression of the Nechaevtsy, then in the Trubetskoi Bastion in the 1870s during the Trial of the 193. Volkhovskii eventually made his way to London, where he worked with S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii and others to agitate for the Russian revolutionary movement amongst a Western European public. Unfortunately, the length of his Peter and Paul Fortress experiences is not equaled by his prison memoir, which only holds a scanty thirty pages. However, this short text does include an evocative account in the common mold of his time in the Fortress walls. Also of interest is Volkhovskii's short biography of fellow revolutionary P.A. Alekseev, which also contains personal reflections on his time in the Peter and Paul Fortress. For related archival documents, see RGIA f. 1280, op. 1, d. 330, 343, 347, 402, 436, 439, 450, etc.

### **Zavalishin, D.I.**

- *Zapiski dekabrista*. 2 vols. Munich: Verlag Dr. J. Marchlewski & Co., 1904.

#### ***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1826***

*A young naval officer, D.I. Zavalishin was arrested for his role in the Decembrist uprising and spent much of 1826 in the Alekseevskii Ravelin. His memoirs – with a full account of his imprisonment, but with little to distinguish them from other Decembrist narratives – were later published in St. Petersburg in 1910.*

**Zubkov, V.P.**

- “Recit da ma detention a la forteresse de St.-Petersbourg.” *Pushkin i ego sovremenniki: Materialy i issledovaniia* 4 (1906): 117-61.

***Period of Fortress Imprisonment: 1826***

*A young official who traveled in the same circles (and mason lodges) as many of the Decembrists, Zubkov was arrested soon after the failed uprising in the capital. He would be released after only twelve days in solitary confinement. While this prison memoir is truly non-political (or, perhaps, political in a negative sense – he dedicates the text to his children, that they might beware of “false, exalted ideas”) it still deserves a place in the wider discursive experience of self and cell in the Peter and Paul Fortress during the Decembrist period.*



## Appendix II: Peter and Paul Fortress Texts, 1862-1866

*This appendix presents a chronological catalogue of the texts produced in the Peter and Paul Fortress from 1862 to 1866 – the extraordinary period when N.G. Chernyshevsky, D.I. Pisarev, N.A. Serno-Solov'evich, and N.V. Shelgunov found the means to craft and publish critical essays from their cells. See Chapter Four for a discussion of this pivotal moment in the history of modern political imprisonment. This timeline was assembled through materials from the Fortress Commandant archives, the Imperial Bureau of Censorship archives, and the personal papers of early-twentieth-century historian P.E. Shchegolev (RGIA F. 1280, Op. 1, D. 253a, 254, 265, 272, 296, 298; Op. 5, D. 104, 108, 109; as well as RGIA F. 777, Op. 2 [1865] D. 65, 76; and RGIA F. 1093, Op. 1, D. 411), an anonymous chronicle (perhaps compiled by early-Soviet literary scholar N.A. Alekseev) found in the Chernyshevsky files of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow (RGALI F. 1, Op. 5, D. 42, ll. 1-1ob), and the archives of the Third Section in the State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow (GARF F. 109, Op. 37 [1861], D. 230, ch. 26, 28, 44, 54). Also, see N.M. Chernyshevskaiia, *Letopis' zhizni i deiatel'nosti N.G. Chernyshevskogo* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1953).*

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### 1862

2 July: D.I. Pisarev imprisoned in the Nevskaia curtain wall

7 July: N.G. Chernyshevsky and N.A. Serno-Solov'evich imprisoned in the Alekseevskii Ravelin

4 October: A translation from the German of Friedrich Schlosser's "History of the Crusades" by Serno-Solov'evich in his prison cell is submitted by Commandant Sorokin to the Golytsin Commission.

16 November: A continuation of Serno-Solov'evich's translation of "History of the Crusades" is submitted by Commandant Sorokin, to be eventually sent to the prisoner's brother V.A. Serno-Solov'evich for publication.

7 December: A translation of Volume Fifteen of Schlosser's *World History* by Chernyshevsky is submitted.

20 December: Through the Third Section, Chernyshevsky requests permission to purchase and translate Volume Seventeen of Schlosser's *World History* as well as to "continue a belletristic story that he has initiated [*prodolzhat' nachatoi im bellitricheskii rasskaz*]" – the first mention of *What is to be Done?* [RGIA F.

1280, Op. 5, D. 104, ll.150-150ob].

*21 December:* Chernyshevsky begins translating Thomas Macaulay's *History of England*.

*28 December:* Chernyshevsky submits a translation of Volume 16 of Schlosser's *World History*.

## **1863**

*14 January:* Serno-Solov'evich submits a translation of Volume Ten of Schlosser's *World History*.

*8 March:* Chernyshevsky submits part of a translation of Georg Gottfried Gervinus' *History of the Nineteenth Century* from the German.

*17 March:* Chernyshevsky submits a continuation of the above.

*20 March:* Chernyshevsky submits a continuation of the above.

*25 March:* The fourth chapter of Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* is submitted by Commandant Sorokin to the Third Section.

*26 March:* Serno-Solov'evich submits a "Plan for Domestic Financial Reform" through Sorokin to the Third Section.

*27 March:* More from the fourth chapter of Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* is sent to the Third Section.

*30 March:* The end of the fourth chapter and the beginning of the fifth chapter of Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?*

*6 April:* The conclusion of Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* is submitted to the Third Section.

*8 April:* The Governing Senate writes to the Third Section that they have no objections with the contents of Serno-Solov'evich's writings – essentially condoning the continuation of his literary activity within the Alekseevskii Ravelin.

*11 April:* Serno-Solov'evich's essay "A Metaphysical View on Criminalistics."

*14 April:* Serno-Solov'evich attempts to send a series of poems to his brother Vladimir, including "Confession."

*15 April:* N.V. Shelgunov imprisoned in the Alekseevskii Ravelin.

- 26 April: Notes on Siberia by Shelgunov are sent by Sorokin to the Third Section.
- 7 May: Serno-Solov'evich's essay "A Statistical Sketch of Internal Trade;" A 'note' [*zapiska*] by Shelgunov.
- 23 May: Two essays by Shelgunov – "Conditions of Progress" and "Obsolete Words" – are forwarded to the Third Section.
- 25 May: The Third Section conditionally allows Shelgunov to engage in literary works and send them to the editors of the journal *Russkoe slovo*.
- 13 June: Serno-Solov'evich, "Surveying Pedagogy and Our Time."
- 25 June: St. Petersburg Military General-Governor Prince Suvorov informs Commandant Sorokin that D.I. Pisarev has permission to pursue literary works during his time of confinement in the Peter and Paul Fortress, as long as all texts pass through him, the senate, and the proper censorial channels.
- 28 June: Serno-Solov'evich, a translation from the German of Gervinus' *History of the Nineteenth Century*.
- 5 July: Serno-Solov'evich, "Does the Current State of Knowledge Require a New Science?"
- 9 July: Chernyshevsky's translation of Volumes Seven and Eight of Macaulay's *History of England*.
- 17 July: Pisarev, "Our University Science" is sent to Prince Suvorov.
- 23/24 July: Shelgunov's essay "New Fashions" (also referred to as "New People") is submitted, with the request to be sent to the journal *Russkoe slovo*.
- 24 July: Chernyshevsky's translation of the conclusion of Macaulay's *History of England*.
- 29 July: The first chapter of Chernyshevsky's "Alfer'iev" is submitted.
- 10 August: The submission of Shelgunov's translation of Volume Twelve of Schlosser's *World History*, with a request to be sent to the book store of the Serno-Solov'evich family.
- 17 August: Chernyshevsky submits a "rough sample of his literary work (*obrazets chernovoi literaturnoi raboty ego*)."
- 18 August: Shelgunov, "The Earth and Organic Life," to be sent to *Russkoe slovo*.

- 25 August: Pisarev, "Notes from the History of Labor."
- 31 August: Shelgunov submits the article "Old World and New World", on Schlosser's *World History*, to Commandant Sorokin, to be sent to the editorial board of *Russkoe slovo* by way of the St. Petersburg Military General-Governor Prince Suvorov.
- 6 September: Shelgunov submits "Literature and Human Education" to Sorokin.
- 8 September: Chernyshevsky, "A Tale of the Crimean War by way of Kinglake" is sent to the Third Section.
- 11 September: Prince Suvorov makes a final judgement allowing Shelgunov to write during his period of confinement in the Peter and Paul Fortress, citing the precedent of Chernyshevsky and Pisarev.
- 20 September: Shelgunov, "The Origins of Social Life," for *Russkoe slovo*.
- 3 October: Pisarev, "Thoughts on Russian Novels."
- 21 October: Chernyshevsky submits the first part of the novel *Povesti v povesti*.
- 30 October: Chernyshevsky, "On the Crimean War."
- 3 November: Shelgunov, "Russia to Peter the Great," for *Russkoe slovo*.
- 18 November: Shelgunov, a continuation of the above.
- 20 November: Chernyshevsky, the end of the first part of *Povesti v povesti*.
- 23 November: Pisarev, "Historical Excises."
- 2 December: Serno-Solov'evich submits a translation, from the French, of Jeremy Bentham's *Deontology, or the Science of Morality*, to be sent to his brother Vladimir.
- 3 December: Chernyshevsky, a translation of Georg Ludwig Kriegk's essay "Tribes and Peoples."
- 5 December: Nevskaiia curtain wall prisoner A. Levashov requests to undertake a translation of Ricardo.
- 6 December: Shelgunov, a translation of N.K. Neiman, *History of the United States of America*.

27 December: Shelgunov, "Causes of Poverty," to be sent to *Russkoe slovo*.

## 1864

22 January: Chernyshevsky, a translation of K.F Neumann, *History of the United States of America*.

26 January: Pisarev, "Flowers of an Innocent Humor."

1 February: Pisarev, "Motifs of Russian Drama."

5 February: Shelgunov, "Criminal Justice in Western Europe," for *Russkoe slovo*.

2 March: Pisarev, "Progress in the Animal and Vegetable World."

11 March: Shelgunov, "Notes on the History of the North American States" for *Russkoe slovo*.

23 March: Shelgunov, "On Scholarly One-Sidedness" for *Russkoe slovo*.

23 April: Serno-Solov'evich, a continuation of his "Plan for Financial and Domestic Reform," to be sent to his brother Vladimir.

26 April: Shelgunov, "Civilization of the Past and Future."

11 May: Shelgunov, "The Economic Significance of our Cities" for *Russkoe slovo*.

19 May: Chernyshevsky's civic execution on Mytninskii Square.

20 May: Chernyshevsky leaves the Peter and Paul Fortress for Tobolsk at 10 am.

28 May: Shelgunov, "The Starting Foundations of Physics."

8 June: Shelgunov, "Three Nationalities" is submitted to the Third Section to be sent to *Russkoe slovo*.

7 July: Shelgunov, a continuation of "The Starting Foundations of Physics."

10 July: Serno-Solov'evich, "On the Means of Increasing National Wealth and Improving the Conditions of the People's Labor in Russia."

16 July: Pisarev submits "A Puppet Tragedy with a Bouquet of Civic Grief," "Realists," and "Progress in the Animal and Vegetable World."

19 July: Shelgunov, "Ancient and Modern Types of Humans," to *Russkoe slovo*.

4 August: Pisarev, "Realists."

19 August: Shelgunov, "Statistics of Birth and Death," to *Russkoe slovo*.

30 August: Shelgunov, "Infant Development," to *Russkoe slovo*.

6 September: Shelgunov, "Diseases of the Nervous System," to *Russkoe slovo*.

11 September: Pisarev, "Cardboard Characters."

16 September: Serno-Solov'evich petitions the Third Section to be allowed to study and write on "the laws of the historical development of humanity."

30 September: Shelgunov, "Key Moments in European History," to *Russkoe slovo*.

27 October: Shelgunov, "Historical Notes" to *Russkoe slovo*.

29 October: Pisarev, "Blunders of Immature Thought."

8 November: Pisarev is sentenced to a further two years and eight months in the Peter and Paul Fortress for his role in producing subversive texts.

22 November: Pisarev, "Realists."

24 November: Shelgunov is removed from the Peter and Paul Fortress for the St. Petersburg *ordonansgauz* after sentencing.

14 December: Pisarev, "The Historical Development of European Thought."

27 December: Pisarev, a continuation of "The Historical Development of European Thought"

## 1865

17 January: Pisarev, "The Thinking Proletariat."

31 January: Pisarev, "A Rupture in Medieval European Thought."

10 February: Pisarev, "Irate Impotence."

28 March: Pisarev, "A Walk Through the Garden of Russian Literature."

26 April: Serno-Solov'evich submits four texts to be sent to his brother Vladimir: the dramas "Andronik" and "Who is Better?," the comedy "From White," and a translation of Byron's "Cain" from the English.

- 29 April: Pisarev, "Pushkin and Belinskii" and "Pulcheria Ivanova."
- 11 May: Pisarev, "The Thought of Firkhov on the Education of Women."
- 2 June: Serno-Solov'evich's civic execution; Pisarev, "The Destruction of Aesthetics."
- 5 June: Serno-Solov'evich is removed from the Peter and Paul Fortress for the St. Petersburg transit prison.
- 6 June: Pisarev, "Pedagogical Sophisms."
- 26 June: Pisarev, "The Destruction of Aesthetics."
- 10 July: Pisarev, "The Achievements of European Authorities."
- 6 August: Pisarev, "School and Life."
- 22 August: Pisarev, a continuation of "School and Life."
- 11 September: Pisarev, "The Historical Ideas of August Comte"; "Watch!"
- 18 September: Pisarev, a continuation of "Watch!"
- 19 November: Pisarev, a continuation of "The Historical Ideas of August Comte"
- 23 November: Pisarev, a continuation of "The Historical Ideas of August Comte"
- 20 December: Pisarev, "Hand (Physiological Notes)" [now lost]
- 23 December: Pisarev, "Growing Humaneness"
- 26 December: Pisarev writes to Prince Suvorov protesting the recent seizure of all of his writing utensils and books; his right to literary labor in the Fortress (momentarily halted by Commandant Sorokin) is quickly reinstated.

## 1866

- 20 January: Pisarev, "The Times of Metaphysical Argumentations."
- 28 January: Prince Suvorov approves weekly visits to Pisarev from G.E. Blagosvetlov, the chief editor of *Russkoe slovo*.
- 8 February: Pisarev, "The Dead and the Dying" [a review of F.M. Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead*].

*21 February:* Pisarev, a continuation of “The Dead and the Dying.”

*11 March:* Pisarev, “Popularizers of an Offensive Doctrine.”

*4 April:* D.V. Karakozov’s assassination attempt against Tsar Alexander II; all literary work in the Peter and Paul Fortress ceases.

*13 April:* G.E. Blagosvetlov, editor of *Russkoe slovo*, is arrested and placed in the Ekaterininskaia curtain wall of the Peter and Paul Fortress.

*May:* The journals *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe slovo* are closed by the government indefinitely for their “harmful direction.”

*2 June:* Blagosvetlov is freed without charges.

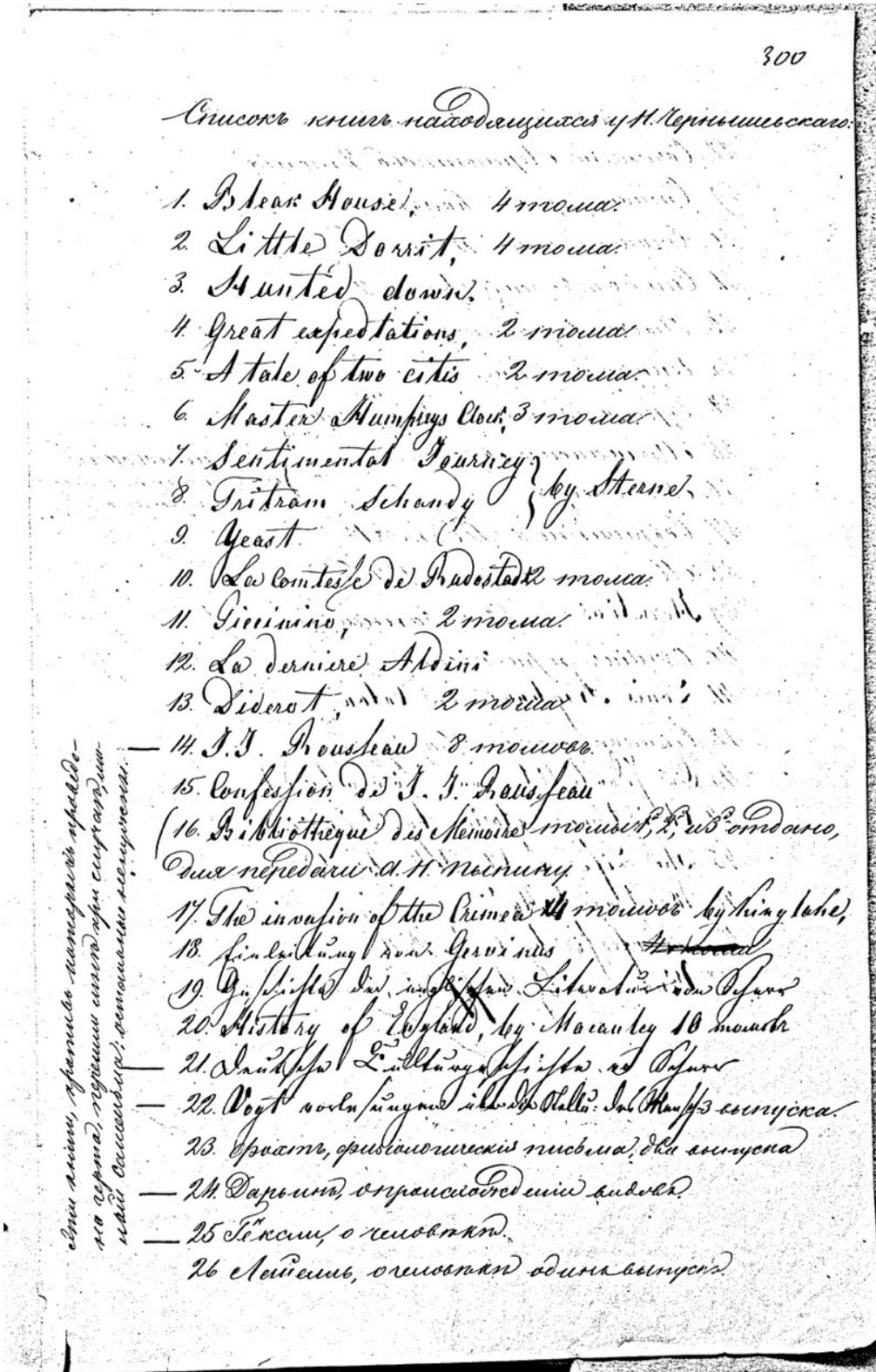
*18 November:* Pisarev is released early from the Peter and Paul Fortress due to an Imperial pardon of fortress prisoners.



### Appendix III: N.G. Chernyshevsky's Fortress Texts

*On the removal of N.G. Chernyshevsky from his cell (no. 12) in the Alekseevskii Ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress on May 20, 1864, prison officials inventoried all of the books and personal writings that he left behind. The resulting documentation is preserved in the archive of the Fortress Commandant in the Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg (RGIA F. 1280, Op. 5, D. 108, ll. 300-300ob and 301-301ob). These texts – alongside my translation – are reproduced below. Note that the original documents give the titles of Chernyshevsky's books in their original Russian, French, German, and English. Please note that these inventories have been published at least once before (although never in English): see P.E. Shchegolev, "Strast' pisatel'ia. (N.G. Chernyshevskii)," in Alekseevskii ravelin: Kniga o padenii i velichii cheloveka (Moscow: 'Kniga', 1989 [1924]), 33, 45-46.*

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Список книг, принадлежавших г-ну Чернышевскому.

1. Bear House, 4 mouca.
2. Little Dorrit, 4 mouca.
3. Hunted down.
4. Great expectations, 2 mouca.
5. A tale of two cities 2 mouca.
6. Master Humphrys Clock, 3 mouca.
7. Sentimental Journey, by Sterne.
8. Tristram Schandy } by Sterne.
9. Geost.
10. Le Comte de Pradeste mouca.
11. Giiinino, 2 mouca.
12. La derniere Abini
13. Lidersot, 2 mouca.
14. J. J. Proustean 8 mouca.
15. Confession de J. J. Proustean
16. La Bibliothique des Memoires mouca, 2, et 3 mouca, deux repedans d. H. Maccruy
17. The invasion of the Crimea 14 mouca by Kinglake,
18. Finlandia und Grönländ
19. Geschichte der englischen Literatur von Puffendorf
20. History of England, by Macaulay 10 mouca
21. Geschichte der englischen Literatur von Puffendorf
22. Voyt volninykh i kh. V. Dalko. Sol. Muff's voyevka.
23. Spain, gubstantovickis nuchua, dka voyevka
24. Daryum, organiovedeniia sudob.
25. Tekum, o reuobran.
26. Mavum, o reuobran adura voyevka.

Эти книги, вероятно, принадлежали Чернышевскому, так как они записаны в его списке книг, найденных в его комнате в Петропавловской крепости.

27. Coriacesius Tarou, 4 mauna
28. Coriacesius Lepuorunvooa, 2 mauna
29. Cnuuambopereius kausigola
30. Cnuuambopereius Miorneia
31. Cnuuambopereius opeua, 2 mauna
32. Macru Deparuce
33. Veirpua Teuce
34. Dypcaugis munda, 4 mauna
35. Mbarugucua, crocnie
36. Maudruer
37. Colpucurua MB. AP
38. Mbarugucua MB. AP
39. Moratus
40. Oredius mpa mauna
41. Louis Reybaud de Coton
42. Cnuuambopereius Heupacola
43. Din Jank. kat. non. Limer hardt
44. Christmas stories by Distina
45. The Life of Charles de Aroute 2 mauna
46. Westward Ho 2 mauna
47. Professor by Charles Dell
48. Vincenzo, by Druffini 2 mauna

Nouuunokouad.  
 euema, kapphasine  
 ugnreypruuaad

II. 300-300ob:

List of N.G. Chernyshevsky's books:

1. Bleak House. *4 volumes*.
2. Little Dorrit. *4 volumes*.
3. Hunted down.
4. Great expectations. *2 volumes*.
5. A Tale of two cities [sic]. *2 volumes*.
6. Master Humphreys Clock. *3 volumes*.
7. Sentimental Journey
8. Tristram Schandy } by Sterne
9. Yeast
10. Les Comtesse de Rudostadt. *2 volumes*.
11. Piccinino. *2 volumes*.
12. La derniere Aldini
13. Diderot. *2 volumes*.
14. J.J. Rousseau. *8 volumes*.
15. Confession de J.J. Rousseau.
16. Bibliotheque des Memoire *volumes 1, 2, and 3 given, for transmission to A.N. Pypin.*
17. The invasion of the Crimea *4 volumes by Kinglake.*
18. Einleitung von Gervinus.
19. Geschichte der englischen Literatur von Leher [?]
20. History of England, by Macaulay *10 volumes*
21. Deutsche Culturgeschichte von Leher
22. Vogt, Volesungen über die Stellung des Menschen *3 issues.*
23. Vogt, physiological letters. *Two issues. [Russian]*
24. Darwin, on the origin of species *[Russian]*
25. Huxley, on man *[Russian]*
26. Lyell, on man *one issue [Russian]*
27. Works of Gogol, *4 volumes [Russian]*
28. Works of Lermonotov, *2 volumes [Russian]*
29. Poetry of Kol'tsov. *[Russian]*
30. Poetry of Tiutchev. *[Russian]*
31. Poetry of Fet. *2 volumes. [Russian]*
32. Songs of Béranger. *[Russian]*
33. Heinrich Heine. *[Russian]*
34. Bursatskii types, *4 excerpts [Russian]*
35. Philistine happiness *[Russian]*
36. Molotov *[Russian]*
37. *The Contemporary* 1863, no. 1. *[Russian]*
38. Menologium for 1864. *[Russian]*
39. Horatius. *(torn book)*
40. Ovidius. *3 volumes*
41. Louis Reybaud de Coton

} Pomialovskii. pages cut from journals

42. Poetry of Nekrasov. [*Russian*]
43. Die Identität von Löwenhardt.
44. Christmas Stories, by Dickens [sic].
45. The Life of Charlotte Bronte 2 volumes.
46. Westward ho! 2 volumes.
47. Professor by Currer Bell
48. Vincenzo by Ruffini 2 volumes.

[*Note along the left margin, with marks next to books 14, 21, 22, 25: “These books, next to which a line is drawn, passed to me (on this occasion/by chance), dear Sashenka; the rest are not needed.”*]



Книжки башпау ацусар Н. Упринет канна дус  
непара А. М. Нарму.

1. Le sage, Gibe Istas
2. Le sage Diable Prosteau
3. Omen, Zmanua
4. Smottette, Humphrey, linker
5. Dickens, Pictures from Italy

Книжки башпау ацусар А. М. Нарму.

1. Das abendlandische Dingt: P. Anglistin Zmanua
2. Economie politique, par Libaric Zmanua
3. Elle et lui, par George Sand
4. Oeuvres de Prévost.

30. Decembris 1837.

Книжки башпау ацусар А. М. Нарму унор пар  
небуаца.

1. Monoproduction et Manufacture, Kocmanu apolva Zm.
2. L'empire pyrenais, rapado nfabemaa, Kocmanu apolva An
3. Esays de Montaigne
4. Gustave d'Antert et Madame Provasi Zmanua
5. Neue Bilder aus dem Leben des deutschen Volkes u: Straite

16. Decembris 1837.

Синодический список: Церковн. Журнал

II. 301-301ob:

List of N. Chernyshevsky's papers:

Drafts, in three envelopes: in the first, half-sheets 1-100, in the second 101-200, in the third 201-279; two hundred and seventy-nine half-sheets.

Some of these papers have a financial purpose; it [the list?] has all the papers held in a paper bag:

1. Excerpts from the novel *Povesti v povesti*: A, excerpt; marked with the inscription "a continuation of the story of Alfer'ev," numbered from 19 to 36, eighteen half-sheets; B, the beginning of the second part, half-sheets 1-53, fifty-three half-sheets.
2. An abridged translation of the second part of Rousseau, thirty half-sheets.
3. Light stories, thirty-two half-sheets.
4. The beginning of a scientific essay, with the inscription "Notes on the condition of science," sixty-seven half-sheets.
5. Extracts, from the works of Rousseau, with the inscription "Notes for a biography of Rousseau" forty-six (46) half-sheets and the continuation of these extracts, still not placed in Chernyshevsky's bag.

These papers, as well as the books of which a list is contained on another half-sheet, I ask you to convey to Mr. A.N. Pypin or to a person who can take them to him. Chernyshevsky.

Books returned to N. Chernyshevsky to be conveyed to A.N. Pypin.

1. Le sage, Gil Blas
2. Le sage, Diable boiteux
3. Owen, 2 volumes.
4. Smollette, Humprey clinker
5. Dickens. Pictures from Italy

Books to be returned to A.N. Pypin.

1. Der abenteuerliche Simpl. Simpliciss. 2 volumes
2. Economie politique, par Cibrario 2 volumes
3. Elle et lui, par George Sand
4. Oeuvres de Beranges.

30 December 1863

Books to be returned to A.N. Pypin from Chernyshevsky.

1. Historical monographs, Kostomarov 2 vols.
2. Rights of the Northern Russian People, Kostomarov 2 vols.
3. Essays de Montaigne
4. Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovari 2 volumes
5. Neue Bilder aus dem Leben des deutschen Volkes, v: Freitag.

16 December 1863.



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#### **RGIA – Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg**

- F. 472 – Chancellery of the Ministry of the Imperial Court
- F. 473 – Ceremonies Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs
- F. 777 – Petersburg Committee on Printing Matters
- F. 805 – Chancellery of the Head of the Court Clergy
- F. 816 – St. Petersburg Peter and Paul Cathedral
- F. 1093 – P.E. Shchegolev Papers
- F. 1280 – Administration of the Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress
  - Op. 1 – Prisoner Affairs
  - Op. 2 – Fortress Administration
  - Op. 5 – Alekseevskii Ravelin
  - Op. 8 – Alekseevskii Ravelin

#### **TsGA – Central State Archives, St. Petersburg**

- F. 506 – Leningrad Division of the All-Soviet Society of Political Prisoners and Exiles
- F. 1000 – Leningrad Province Soviet (1918-1927)
- F. 2555 – Leningrad Division of the Main Department of Scientific Institutions of the People's Commissariat of Education (1921-1930)

#### **OR RNB – Russian National Library Manuscript Division, St. Petersburg**

- F. 124 – P.L. Baksel
- F. 257 – V.A. Dolgorukov
- F. 727 – A.F. Sorokin
- F. 741 – P.N. Stolpianskii
- F. 831 – Censor Materials
- F. 833 – V.A. Tsee
- F. 859 – N.K. Shil'der Papers

#### **OR IRLI RAN – Institute for Russian Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences (*Pushkinskii dom*) Manuscript Division, St. Petersburg**

- F. 8 – I.A. Piotrovskii
- F. 97 – N.A. Dobroliubov
- F. 224 – L.F. Panteleev
- F. 547 – M.L. Mikhailov
- F. 627 – P.E. Shchegolev

#### **TsGALI – Central State Archive of Literature and Art, St. Petersburg**

- F. 32 – *Staryi Peterburg – Novyi Leningrad*
- F. 242 – *Kinosever*

**GMPIR – State Museum of the Political History of Russia, St. Petersburg**

F. 2 – Documentary Sources

F. 3 – Photographs

F. 9 – Negatives

**GMI SPB – State Museum of the History of St. Petersburg**

Tagrin Collection

Collection of Paintings and Graphics of the History of the City

Collection of Pre-Revolutionary Photographs

Collection of Post-Revolutionary Photographs

**NA RGO – Scientific Archive of the Russian Geographical Society, St. Petersburg**

F. 90 – P. Kropotkin

F. 1-1871 – Chancellery of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society

F. 1-1874 – Chancellery of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society

**IISG – International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam**

Partija Socialistov-Revoljucionerov (Rossija) Archives

**RGALI – Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow**

F. 1 – N.G. Chernyshevsky

F. 1027 – G.E. Blagosvetlov

F. 1158 – S.M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii

F. 1185 – V.N. Figner

**OR RGB – Russian State Library Manuscript Division, Moscow**

F. 410 – P. Kropotkin

**RGADA – Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, Moscow**

F. 7 – Secret Chancellery and Secret Expedition

**RGVIA – Russian State Military History Archive, Moscow**

F. 1351 – Petersburg Military District

**GARF – State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow**

F. 94 – Commission for State Order and Public Tranquility

F. 109 – The Third Section

F. 124 – First Department of the Ministry of Justice

F. 533 – All-Union Society of Political Prisoners and Exiles

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