

“To Fortify our Fatherland”:

Russian National Identity Between East and West, 1825-1855

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## Introduction

In a *New York Times* article from March 21, 2015, European culture correspondent Rachel Donadio describes the way in which Leo Tolstoy's great-great-grandson and one of Vladimir Putin's two advisers on cultural affairs, Vladimir Tolstoy, contends with a culturally-splintered Russia. Tolstoy's cultural policy is described as Western-friendly, differing starkly from the policies of another adviser, Vladimir Medinsky. Medinsky's policies, by contrast, are conservative-leaning, adamant in asserting Russian superiority and distinctly Russian cultural values.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that the two advisors work together, they represent two vastly different ideals, a Europeanized Russia and a distinctively Russian nation. Yet, even though his cultural policies are more Western-leaning, Tolstoy has been quoted in a ministry draft as saying: "Russia is not Europe."<sup>2</sup> These contrasts and contradictions pose the following question: What is Russia and who are Russians?

Although this question of national identity is pertinent to twenty-first-century Russia, the origins of this question are rooted in a long history of Russian marginalization from Western Europe. When Peter the Great, Czar of the Romanov Dynasty from 1689-1725, came to power he instituted a series of reforms in Russia to match the political, cultural, and social trends of Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> Peter transformed Russia into an empire whose national identity was based on the way it viewed itself in relation to the West.<sup>4</sup>

Not only did Peter thrust Russia into a European world, but he also brought a new understanding of the distinction between the East and the West to the Russian elite. Because it

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Donadio, "In Culturally Fractious Russia, a Tolstoy Is a Friendly Kremlin Face," *New York Times*, March 20, 2015, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Donadio, "In Culturally Fractious Russia," 2.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Valentine Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 76.

<sup>4</sup> Vera Tolz, *Russia: Inventing the Nation*, (London: Arnold, 2001), 33.

was generally believed that Russia was geographically located in both the East and the West, Asia and Europe, Russia came to be seen as being divided into two spheres: a Russian homeland that belonged to a putatively superior Western world and a foreign periphery linked to what was thought of as the despotic East, beyond the realms of European civilization.<sup>5</sup> An association with the East created a sense of inferiority to the West among Russian intellectuals. This feeling of subordination was only intensified by the wave of industrialization that spread across Western Europe in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

This project addresses how Peter's legacy and that of Russia's sense of inferiority to the West informed the way in which Russian political figures and intellectuals grappled with the definition of the Russian nation during the reign of Nicholas I, 1825-1855. As the eighteenth-century image of Peter as a praiseworthy reformer shattered by the turn of the century, new notions of nationhood began to develop in Europe, causing some intellectuals to question Peter's reforms and Russia's identity. Romantic cultural nationalism, born in the German lands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, taught that nations were culturally and linguistically unique entities and that all natural cultures were a result of the spirit of the common people.<sup>7</sup> It was through this Western framework that political, intellectual, and literary figures came to reconsider Russia's relationship to the West.

The changing European intellectual climate and the questioning of Russian identity that followed was informed by the political aftermath of the French revolution and the Napoleonic takeover of Europe. After the fall of Napoleon, Russia was considered to be on par with the great

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space" (*Slavic Review*, 1991), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Lukin, *Russia between East and West* (Medjunarodni Problemi 55 no.2, 2003), 48-49.

<sup>7</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 81.

powers of Western Europe: Britain, Austria, and Prussia.<sup>8</sup> Russia was included in the discussion of the new European balance of power, discussed at the Congress of Vienna in 1814. The fact that Russia was considered to be a strong nation, responsible for safeguarding Europe against pervasive revolutionary ideals, instilled a certain sense of patriotism in the Russian elite. It was during this moment of confidence in the Russian empire, combined with changing notions of nationhood, that Russian intellectuals began to examine the question of national identity.<sup>9</sup> This is not to imply a causal relationship between the political framework of Europe and this debate of national identity, but rather to suggest that this framework served as the context within which discussions of Russianness occurred.

Accompanying this feeling of confidence and patriotism, however, was also a feeling of further subordination to the West. Even though the other great European powers acknowledged Russia's military strength, a move towards liberalism among Western European nations created the sense of a rift between them and Russia.<sup>10</sup> Russia under Nicholas I strongly resisted this wave of liberalism, which began as a reaction against the preservation of the old order discussed at the Congress of Vienna.<sup>11</sup> Some European nations thought Russia's resistance to liberalism was evidence for Russia's repressiveness. This paradoxical view of Russia--both militarily competent and politically and socially backward--is parallel to the way in which the Russian elite viewed themselves in relation to Russia. While some intellectuals viewed Russia as superior to the West, others viewed Russia as needing further westernizing reforms. In both cases, the debate about Russian identity revealed Russia's confused relationship to the West. Indeed, even in asserting its independence and difference from Europe, Russia used the West as a necessary benchmark.

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Chapman, *The Congress of Vienna: Origins, Processes, and Results* (London: Routledge, 1998), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Thaden, "The Beginnings of Romantic Nationalism in Russia," 514.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Malia, *Russian Under Western Eyes From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press of Harvard University, 1999), 91.

<sup>11</sup> Malia, *Russian Under Western Eyes*, 94.

This thesis traces the way in which this discussion of Russia national identity, a discussion limited to the upper echelons of society, permeated Russian political, intellectual, and literary spheres. In Chapter One, I explore the ways in which the debate about Russianness originated from the reforms of Peter the Great. Chapter Two examines the way in which the political policy of Official Nationality, sanctioned by Nicholas I, attempted to settle the question of Russian national identity by asserting Russia's unique characteristics through engagement with Western ideas and standards. This same theme of a seemingly contradictory relationship to the West is also detectable in the Slavophile-versus-Westernizer intellectual debate of the 1830s and 1840s, which is analyzed in Chapter Three. In this intellectual discussion, both groups attempted to define themselves in terms of how they viewed the West. The final chapter takes as its topic the literary discourse of this time. This too followed a similar trend, presenting portraits of both a Europeanized Russia and an authentically Russian fatherland, and in doing so commenting implicitly on Russia's dichotomous identity.

### ***Historiography***

A vast scholarly literature exists on the formation of Russian national identity. This thesis takes Peter the Great's legacy as a starting point for the development of a dichotomous Russian identity in the nineteenth century. James Cracraft's *The Revolution of Peter the Great* has been instrumental in my use of Peter the Great as a starting point for this debate. Cracraft argues that although Peter's revolution permeated all facets of society, it can be primarily considered a cultural revolution. According to Cracraft, establishing St. Petersburg as the new capital of Russia epitomized this cultural revolution. Throughout my thesis, and especially in Chapter Four, I make note of the way in which St. Petersburg represents a Europeanized Russia in contrast to the distinctly Russian city of Moscow. Cracraft further asserts that reforms in

Russia's architecture, imagery, and verbal tradition established eighteenth-century Russia as a Europeanized nation that was laid upon traditional Russian foundations. It was this incompatibility, I argue, between a traditional Russian identity and a Europeanized identity that led to some of the challenges in defining Russianness in the nineteenth century.

Nicholas Riasanovsky's extensive survey on Russian national identity, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey*, cites an earlier point in history as the beginning of a contradictory Russian identity. Riasanovsky argues that Grand Prince Vladimir's decision to adopt Christianity in the year 988 was a critical moment in Russian history as it was an assertion of a Europeanized Russia. Although this thesis does not treat this earlier period, it is influenced by his claim that many Russian leaders' decisions were informed by Russia's perception of itself, which he elucidates through an examination of intellectual, political, and cultural history.

Vera Tolz, however, offers a different perspective on the formation of Russian identity. In her book *Russia: Inventing the Nation*, Tolz places great emphasis on the role of Russian intellectuals in first defining Russia in modern terms. Intellectuals' varied definitions of Russia, she argues, were constructed with the purpose of a comparison to the West. Particularly important to this thesis is her stress on the importance of German romantic nationalism to the formation of nineteenth-century Russian identity. Furthermore, Tolz believes that this intellectual discourse only came to Russia from the West, where ideas about national identity had been circulating. Tolz's point about the influence of the West on Russian intellectuals helped me understand how the Russian elite relied on a Western discourse as a way to define themselves.

This essay also makes considerable use of the scholarly literature on Nicholas I's policy of Official Nationality. Of particular importance is Nicholas Riasanovsky's book *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855*. He argues that Nicholas's policies, both internal and

external, were centered on the three tenets of the governmental policy of Official Nationality: Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality. Additionally, he argues that defenders of Nicholas's regime used the ideas presented in Official Nationality as an ideological justification for many of Nicholas's decisions. This thesis, although recognizing the importance of the way in which this policy came to define Nicholas's reign, primarily argues that Official Nationality was only created through an engagement with the West. In addition to Riasanovsky's work, Martin Malia's *Russia Under Western Eyes: From The Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* gave me a better understanding of the larger European context in which the policy of Official Nationality existed. Malia points to the fact that although Russia was considered to be on par with the West immediately following Napoleon's downfall, it began to view Russia as socially and politically repressive as a wave of liberalism spread throughout Europe in the 1830's.

This thesis relies on a wide range of primary sources. An article from the *London Times* and a travel account of the French aristocrat Marquis de Custine, for example, were instrumental in revealing Europe's conflicted view of Russia, which I argue is similar to the way in which many Russian intellectuals viewed themselves. The essays of leading Slavophiles Ivan Kireevskii and Aleksei Khomiakov were critical to my understanding of the relationship between the Slavophiles and Westernizers. These primary works led me to argue that the Slavophiles and the Westernizers are actually quite similar, originating from the same European framework and both using the West as a touchstone in their respective ideologies. Lastly, the literary works of Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, and Mikhail Lermontov were critical to my comprehension of the way in which much of the literature of this period played a significant role in this nineteenth-century discussion on Russianness.

## Chapter 1: Origins of a Muddled Identity: Peter the Great and Westernizing Reforms

As the first Russian westernizer, Peter the Great of Russia was a key reference point for discussions of Russian national identity in the nineteenth century. Peter I, Czar of the Romanov Dynasty from 1689-1725, attempted to lessen the widening gap between Western Europe and Russia. Peter viewed Western Europe as having reason and knowledge that he believed was missing in Russia. In order to bridge this gap, he implemented a series of modernizing reforms to match the cultural, social, and political climate of Western Europe.<sup>12</sup> In doing so, Peter began a deliberate campaign of westernization or modernization, which can be understood as a process of adjusting the Russian military, government, culture, and customs to match those of Western Europe.<sup>13</sup>

The initial impetus behind Peter's attempt to westernize Russia can be directly attributed to Russia's humiliating military defeat by Sweden. It was the defeat at Narva in 1700 that made Peter realize the need to modernize the Russian army. Although the reforms, which came to be known as the "Petrine Revolution," began as a military and naval revolution, the process of modernization infiltrated all facets of Russian life. In his vision of the modern, Peter was deeply influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment, which were taking root among the elite of Western Europe during this time. In implementing modernizing reforms, Peter launched the Russia of old into a new era in which Russian identity would forever more be constructed in relation to the West.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Valentine Riasanovsky, *The image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 33.

### *The Military Reforms of Peter the Great*

Peter undertook military and naval reforms during a period when the Western European powers were beginning to modernize their own armies and navies.<sup>15</sup> The military revolution in early modern Europe included such developments as innovative military strategies, new technologically-advanced weaponry, and an increase in the size of both army and navy.<sup>16</sup> While Western Europe was advancing its armed forces, Peter was involved in a war with Sweden over control of Baltic lands and Northeastern European dominance. Russia's loss to Sweden at Narva awakened Peter to the fact that if Russia was going to be militarily competent, it would require improvements that would bring the Russian army in line with new European standards.<sup>17</sup> Peter began the process of reform by establishing permanent, centrally-managed administrative offices charged with supporting Russia's military forces. Military change required the creation of more efficient training, recruitment, and taxation systems. In implementing these changes, Peter made old forms of military tactics and organization obsolete, eliminating groups of royal musketeers and noble cavalry in favor of trained and drilled infantry and cavalry regiments.<sup>18</sup> In order to institutionalize these changes, Peter established artillery and engineering schools in both Moscow and St. Petersburg.<sup>19</sup>

Another important institution responsible for maintaining military and naval reforms was the St. Petersburg Naval Academy, the first Russian center of higher technical education

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<sup>15</sup> James Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 29.

<sup>16</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 33.

<sup>19</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 33.

responsible for training officers for the Imperial Russian Navy.<sup>20</sup> This institution employed British instructors who were trained in the tradition of British naval techniques. Peter also facilitated the development of an Anglo-Russian naval connection that allowed for Anglo-Russian trade, which was managed by the Russian Company, headquartered in London.<sup>21</sup> These reforms allowed for greater exposure to Western Europe, thus making clear how Russia began to compare itself to Western Europe in response to Peter's changes.

### *The Influence of the Enlightenment and the Beginnings of a Split Identity*

Although the direct cause of Peter's reforms can be attributed to a military defeat, the Enlightenment culture of Western Europe also played an important role in shaping Peter's modernization campaign. Peter was attracted to the Enlightenment belief in reason and in the potential of applied reason to solve human problems. For Peter, the emphasis on reason called for the suppression of Russia's backward culture in favor of a new modern one.<sup>22</sup> In an effort to promote Enlightenment ideals, Peter facilitated the publication of Russian books by a Dutch Press and reformed the alphabet to a simplified version of the old Slavonic alphabet. Furthermore, Peter promoted education and contact with Western Europe by sending Russian students abroad.<sup>23</sup>

By requiring Russians to adopt a culture that was not distinctly their own, Peter's eighteenth-century modernizing reforms laid the foundation for an embattled sense of self in the nineteenth century. The historian Richard Wortman argues that Peter's attempt to make Russia a part of Western culture encouraged Russians to behave like Europeans. According to Wortman, Russians thus acted like foreigners, adopting the customs, language, modes of dress, and culture

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<sup>20</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 49.

<sup>21</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 47.

<sup>22</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 79.

of Europeans, while at the same time still maintaining a Russian identity.<sup>24</sup> The effort to balance two distinct identities in the eighteenth century can be understood as the basis for the formation of a contradictory and divided Russian national identity in the nineteenth century.

### *Peter's Governmental and Cultural Reforms*

To rectify what Peter saw as Russia's political backwardness, he sought to modernize the Russian state bureaucracy along the lines of absolutist regimes such as Prussia and Sweden.<sup>25</sup> Peter introduced Russia to a new ideology of state patriotism through which he hoped to enlist all of his subjects into service to the state.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, he instituted decrees that described the state as an impersonal fatherland, as opposed to its traditional definition as the personal domain of the czar alone.<sup>27</sup> Peter reformed Russia's bureaucracy by developing a state-service ranking system based on seniority and merit. Additionally, he created a new state administrative system, including new executive agencies, which were presided over by a board of officials.<sup>28</sup>

Peter's reconfigured empire can be accurately described as a police state that conformed to the standards of states developing in German lands in this period.<sup>29</sup> Peter's government published a political treatise, known as the *Pravda* to justify this newly reformed empire. The *Pravda*, included sixteen arguments in favor of an absolute monarchy and employed reasoning that natural law theorists of contemporary Europe used to justify new absolutist states in the West.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, several embassies were established in European capitals staffed by Russians who dressed according to Western European standards and who were able to negotiate in French,

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 61.

<sup>26</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 61.

<sup>29</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 68.

German, and Italian.<sup>31</sup> By the time Peter died, Russia, for the first time was considered a full member of the European system of sovereign states.

Peter's military and governmental reforms required the adoption of new European cultural practices and customs.<sup>32</sup> The newly-established capital of St. Petersburg, which represented a major innovation in architectural practices, was built by foreign architects and based on architectural models that existed in Amsterdam and Venice. The new capital was designed to look drastically different from traditional Russian architecture, modeled instead on European architectural forms. The new capital of St. Petersburg would replace Moscow, which Peter associated with the backward Russia that he strove to leave behind. Indeed, St. Petersburg became a symbol of a new modernized nation that was open to European influences.<sup>33</sup>

Peter the Great is also responsible for mapping the Russian landmass for the first time in accordance with European standards, thus bringing to the fore the issue of how to geographically define Russia. In 1765, the Geography Department of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences produced three hundred maps of previously uncharted areas of Russia. The Academy mapped Russia by drawing the continental line, the line between Europe and Asia, at the Ural Mountains. This split the Russian Empire into distinct European and Asian regions.<sup>34</sup> This geographic placement of Russia into two continents further complicated Russia's conception of itself in relation to the West. Russia literally had one foot in Europe and one outside, its geographic split mirroring its psychic and cultural division between East and West. Peter's attempts to westernize Russia, from mapping its terrain to reconfiguring the Russian state, made it incumbent on Russian intellectuals and Russian nobility to grapple with their relationship with Western

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<sup>31</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 40.

<sup>34</sup> Cracraft, *The Revolution of Peter the Great*, 96.

Europe. More specifically, they had to address the issue of whether or not a Russian identity could exist independently from a Western identity.

### *The Legacies of Peter the Great: A Hybrid Russian*

Comparing Russia to the West in many ways can be understood as a consequence of the Petrine Revolution. Although Peter sought to westernize Russia, the reforms he put into place to achieve this goal were laid upon traditional Russian foundations, thereby merging two heretofore disparate identities.<sup>35</sup> Peter's reforms triggered the question of Russian identity as intellectuals and statesmen now had to decide whether or not to accept a Western identification.<sup>36</sup>

During Peter's reign and the years immediately following his death, eighteenth-century intellectuals viewed Peter as the direct link between Russia and the modern world. For the most part, the Russian elite in the immediate post-Petrine state admired Peter's modernizing reforms.<sup>37</sup> Russian Intellectual support for Peter's political accomplishments gained strength as Elizabeth I ascended the English throne.<sup>38</sup> By the turn of the century, however, the changing political climate of Western Europe, created by the events of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic conquests caused a new romantic conception of the nation to take root in the West.<sup>39</sup> Deeply influenced by romantic nationalism, Russian intellectuals were forced to re-evaluate Peter's reforms as they pertained to Russia's own identity. Romantic nationalism stressed the importance of the authentic nation uncorrupted by the rationalism of modern civilization. The German philosopher Johann Herder can be cited as the father of romantic cultural nationalism,

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander Polunov, "Russia in the Nineteenth Century: Autocracy, Reform, and Social Change 1818-1914" (The New Russian History Ser. 2005), 10-21.

<sup>36</sup> S. G. Pushkarev, Robert McNeal, and Tova Yedlin, *The Emergence of Modern Russia, 1801-1917*(New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), XXI.

<sup>37</sup> Pushkarev, McNeal, and Yedlin, *The Emergence of Modern Russia*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Pushkarev, McNeal, and Yedlin, *The Emergence of Modern Russia*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Edward C. Thaden, "The Beginnings of Romantic Nationalism in Russia" (*American Slavic and East European Review*, 1954), 500-521, 502.

which turned on the idea that each nation was a culturally and linguistically unique entity.<sup>40</sup> Herder, along with other prominent Western scholars, influenced nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals' views about their own Russian identification.

Russian historian and writer Nicholas Karamzin (1766-1826) is an example of an intellectual who was deeply influenced by new ideas of nationalism that were unleashed in Europe as a result of the French Revolution.<sup>41</sup> Karamzin was the first noteworthy Russian critic of Peter the Great to bring to the fore new conceptions of Russian national identity. Until the nineteenth century, Karamzin was a champion of the widely-accepted Enlightenment image of Peter the Great as praiseworthy reformer.<sup>42</sup> After the rise of Napoleon in France and a shift in the European balance of power, however, Karamzin spoke out against a Russia modeled on the West.<sup>43</sup> He criticized Peter the Great and his supporters for imitating the West instead of developing a uniquely Russian national identity. It troubled Karamzin that as a result of Peter's reforms many Russians considered themselves to be citizens of the world, as opposed to citizens of an authentic Russian state. This, according to Karamzin, was a major obstacle to the development of a uniquely Russian national identification that was to be based on the ideals of Herder.<sup>44</sup> By the early nineteenth century, then, the unified Enlightenment image of Peter the Great was shattered as Russian intellectuals began to question how to define themselves in relation to the West.<sup>45</sup>

After Karamzin published his ideas, Peter Chaadaev, another influential nineteenth-century Russian thinker, published a series of letters to Russian intellectuals, sparking a debate

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<sup>40</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 81.

<sup>41</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 75.

<sup>42</sup> Riasanovsky, *The image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*, 69.

<sup>43</sup> Riasanovsky, *The image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Thaden, "Romantic Nationalism in Russia," 503.

<sup>45</sup> Riasanovsky, *The image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*, 87.

about Russian national identity that centered on its juxtaposition to the West. For Chaadaev, Russia did not belong to either the East or the West.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, he made the point that Russia had neither the traditions of the West nor the East, leaving it in a state of cultural isolation.<sup>47</sup> In response to Chaadaev's provocative letters, Russian intellectuals divided into two groups: the Slavophiles and the Westernizers.<sup>48</sup> The Slavophiles were a group of Romantic intellectuals who believed in the superiority of the Russian people and Eastern Orthodoxy. Furthermore, they thought that Peter's reforms had hindered Russia's development.<sup>49</sup> In making these claims, the Slavophiles followed in the footsteps of German Romantic nationalists who developed similar notions of the authentic and uncorrupted nation in the 1820's and the 1830's. Westernizers, in contrast to Slavophiles, claimed that the reforms of Peter the Great marked the beginning of a modern Russia. Proponents of westernization argued that the path to Russian salvation was through adherence to a Western model of development.<sup>50</sup>

Although the formation of both these intellectual groups were direct responses to the ideas of Peter Chaadaev, in a more general sense, both the Slavophiles and the Westernizers were responding to the reforms of Peter the Great. Chaadaev, following in the tradition of Karamzin, spoke out against the idea that Russia's identity could be developed through an imitation of the West. The Slavophiles and the Westernizers, in trying to come to terms with Chaadaev's ideas, grappled with the question of whether or not to identify as Western or as distinctly Russian.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Robin Aizlewood, "Revisiting Russian Identity in Russian Thought: From Chaadaev to the Early Twentieth Century" (*The Slavonic and East European Review*, 2000), 20-43.

<sup>48</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 81.

<sup>49</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 153.

<sup>50</sup> Anatole G. Mazour, "Modern Russian Historiography," (*The Journal of Modern History* 9, no. 2, 1937), 169-202, 184-185.

<sup>51</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 156.

Peter's westernization campaign in the eighteenth century informed the struggle to define a national identity in the nineteenth century. Peter was deeply influenced by military defeat at the hands of Sweden, which shaped his desire to participate in the reforms of Western Europe. The Enlightenment movement, which emphasized the ability to use reason to solve human problems, also informed Peter's policies of modernization. By reforming all facets of Russian life, Peter began a process of deliberate change for Russians. The assimilation of European culture into Russian culture, however, came into conflict with a traditional Russian way of life. With the rise of romantic nationalism and the emergence of a new political landscape in Europe in the aftermath of Napoleon, Russian elites were forced to confront the question of Russian identity head on.

## Chapter 2: Forging a Russian Identity through Western Means: National Identity in the Policies of Nicholas I

The reign of Nicholas I (1825-1855) can be characterized by his attempt to uphold the political policy of Official Nationality, devised by his Minister of Education, Sergei Uvarov, on April 2, 1833.<sup>52</sup> This governmental policy explicitly defined Russian national identity, giving Russians, a people tentative about how to define themselves in relation to the West, a way to unite around a common policy. Official Nationality, a policy that attempted to forge a uniquely Russian identity through the principles of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality was instituted during a period that witnessed the emergence of German cultural nationalism, which taught that nations should be conceived of as culturally and linguistically unique entities.<sup>53</sup> Expressions of Russian nationalism, influenced by the rise of Western cultural nationalism, were increasingly more popular as intellectuals endeavored to establish national ideals that would bind together the Russian masses and elite as a way to combat liberal Western influences.<sup>54</sup> In the wake of Napoleon's downfall, Russia was considered on par with Austria, Prussia, and Britain, giving the upper strata of Russian society a sense of pride and confidence in their ability to assert their own identity either as distinct from the West or as part of the West. This confidence, however, was combined with a deep-rooted sense of inferiority to Europe, exacerbating Russia's fraught relationship to the West.

Nicholas's reign can be characterized as being devoted to both rooting out certain Western influences while simultaneously using a Western standard to politically define Russia. Russia acknowledged its role in Europe as one of the preservers of the Ancien Régime, while also distancing itself from Europe by establishing a distinctly Russian identity. This

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<sup>52</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 132.

<sup>53</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 85.

<sup>54</sup> Thaden, *Conservative Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, VII.

contradictory relationship parallels the way in which Europe viewed Russia: both militarily competent and politically and socially regressive. In addition to outlining the larger European political context during this time period, this chapter will analyze the reasons why Russia felt subordinated to Western Europe. It will argue that Nicholas used the West as a touchstone for Russian identity through his policy of Official Nationality. While Nicholas never denied the influence of Ancien Régime Western Europe on Russia, he did try to defend Russia against a new current of liberalism in Europe that surfaced in the 1830's.

### *Discussing Russian National Identity in Political Context*

After Napoleon abdicated in 1814, Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia came together at a conference known as The Congress of Vienna to discuss the balance of power in Europe in the aftermath of Napoleon.<sup>55</sup> Because it was only during a campaign against Russia that Napoleon was defeated, Russia was in a strong position at the Congress of Vienna.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, in 1815, Russia joined the Holy Alliance with Austria and Prussia. The alliance was another Western coalition devoted to the repression of revolutionary influences, and based on Alexander I's desire to create a union of Christian monarchs responsible for the maintenance of order and peace between European states.<sup>57</sup> Russia's participation in both the Congress of Vienna and the Holy Alliance serves to emphasize the fact that Russia, during Alexander I's reign and later during Nicholas I's reign as well, was considered to be a powerful empire in some ways equal to the great states of Europe. Russia's status provided the Russian elite with a sense of pride in the Russian empire, motivating some Russian intellectuals to conceive of a purely Russian identity.

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<sup>55</sup> Chapman, *The Congress of Vienna*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Chapman, *The Congress of Vienna*, 23.

<sup>57</sup> Chapman, *The Congress of Vienna*, 60.

Despite the Western powers' recognition of Russia's military strength, the West continued to view Russia as alien to Europe, in large part because of Nicholas I's deep enmity to liberalism.<sup>58</sup> Because he did not embrace the post-Congress of Vienna shift toward liberalism in the West, Nicholas further distanced Russia from Western Europe. Although there was a period of restoration and repression of liberalism immediately following the Congress of Vienna, a new generation of liberals emerged in the 1830's that began to dismantle the values of the Ancien Régime. This liberal current, which reflected the values of the rising bourgeoisie, culminated in the 1830 July Revolution in France and the Reform Bill of 1832 in England.<sup>59</sup> Nicholas's staunch anti-liberal attitude is evident through his repression of both the Decembrist Revolt of 1825 and the Polish insurrection of 1830. In the eyes of the West, the repression of the liberal Polish revolt became a symbol of a backwards Russia, unwilling to welcome European liberalism.<sup>60</sup> Russia was thus viewed as a powerful threat to these newly emerging ideals of liberalism and progress.<sup>61</sup> This Western attitude towards Russia is apparent in the travel account of the French aristocrat Marquis de Custine, in his *La Russie en 1839*:

That nation, essentially aggressive, greedy under the influence of privation...the design of exercising tyranny over other nations...To purify himself from the foul and impious sacrifice of all public and personal liberty...dreams of the conquest of the world.<sup>62</sup>

Nicholas's empire, although characterized as tyrannical and repressive, is also described as being exceedingly powerful as Marquis de Custine describes Russia has having aspirations to conquer the world. The fact that Russia was both recognized for its military competence and for its allegedly regressive values accounts for the varied responses from the Russian elite regarding

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<sup>58</sup> Malia, *Russian Under Western Eyes*, 91.

<sup>59</sup> Malia, *Russian Under Western Eyes*, 94.

<sup>60</sup> Malia, *Russian Under Western Eyes*, 93.

<sup>61</sup> Malia, *Russian Under Western Eyes*, 97.

<sup>62</sup> The Marquis de Custine in his *La Russie en 1839* in Martin Malia, *Russian Under Western Eyes*, 99.

Russia's relationship to the West. In the same way that Europe was conflicted about how to view a both powerful and backwards Russia, Russians themselves were conflicted about how to view themselves in relation to the West. Although there were mixed views of the West, in all cases Europe was a necessary point of contrast in the development of Russia's own identification.

### *Russia's Marginalization From the West*

Recognition from Europe was important to Russian intellectuals who felt marginalized from the West. Western countries either neighbored other European countries or they were marked with natural borders, such as bodies of water that further connected states with one another. Russia, by contrast, was situated between two drastically different political and cultural entities, with Europe to the west and China to the east.<sup>63</sup> Russia's association with the East, which was viewed as despotic and barbaric, created a sense of inferiority among Russian intellectuals.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, this separation from the West was exacerbated by the industrial revolution that began in England and spread across Western Europe, facilitating the development of an urban working class and a constitutional form of government. Russia, however, did not participate in these modernizing and liberalizing trends due to its geographic and cultural distance from the West.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, Russia was a multiethnic empire, making it difficult to develop a homogenous Russian identity. Estonians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Armenians, and Tartars began to develop distinct political cultures in Russia during the nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup> As the creation of a uniform national identity became more relevant during Nicholas's reign, oppression towards ethnic groups

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<sup>63</sup> Dmitry Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life, 1865-1905* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 7.

<sup>64</sup> Lukin, "Russia between East and West," 48-49.

<sup>65</sup> Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life*, 8.

<sup>66</sup> Andreas Klapper, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), 2.

increased.<sup>67</sup> Although this thesis will not address Russia's multiethnic empire in detail, it is important to note that Russia's ethnic diversity was a hindrance to its ability to answer the question of what it meant to be Russian.

### *The Legacy of the Decembrist Revolt*

The period of restoration that accompanied the post-Napoleonic era motivated Nicholas to suppress the Decembrist Revolt of 1825. Nicholas sought to curb any subsequent revolutionary activity by creating a distinctly Russian spirit through an engagement in a larger western discourse of romantic nationalism and a post-Napoleonic Europe. The Decembrist uprising, which culminated on December 14, 1825 in Senate Square in Saint Petersburg, began when the legal heir to the Russian throne, Constantine I, removed himself from the line of succession in place of his younger brother, Nicholas I.<sup>68</sup> Alexander I sanctioned this act by using an eighteenth-century principle of designation, allowing him to select a successor. However, because the law was never promulgated, a group of revolutionaries, comprised primarily of army officials, claimed that Nicholas was not the rightful heir. The Decembrists, as they became known, staged a revolt inspired by French revolutionary ideals against Nicholas's assumption of the throne.<sup>69</sup> More generally, they opposed their belief that the emperor was the embodiment of the Russian state, demanding instead a new more liberal constitutional form of government.<sup>70</sup>

For Nicholas I, the failed uprising represented a liberal Western contagion's infiltration of an allegedly pure Russian fatherland.<sup>71</sup> He viewed the successful suppression of the revolt as a

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<sup>67</sup> Klapper, *The Russian Empire*, 273.

<sup>68</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 128.

<sup>69</sup> Olivia, *Russia and the West*, 89.

<sup>70</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 128.

<sup>71</sup> Kov, A. E. Kov., and Nicholas V. Riasanovsky. *Emperor Nicholas I of Russia, the Apogee of Autocracy, 1825-1855* (Gulf Breeze, Fla.: Academic International Press, 1974), 17.

triumph of the Russian national spirit over detrimental revolutionary influences.<sup>72</sup> As a result of the Decembrist Revolt, Nicholas relied on the nobility to aid him in maintaining the existing system of governance in order to weed out dangerous revolutionary influences.<sup>73</sup> When Nicholas ascended the throne, Europe was divided between those supportive of Napoleonic France and those in favor of suppressing revolutionary activity and maintaining the old order of the Ancien Régime.<sup>74</sup> The suppression of the Decembrist uprising and of any revolutionary activity thereafter, served as Nicholas's way of entering Russia into a European-wide discourse and firmly positioning the empire in favor of maintaining the old order.<sup>75</sup>

#### *Official Nationality as Part of a Larger Western Intellectual Discourse*

The implementation of the doctrine of Official Nationality was a way for Nicholas to defend the established order against the ideals of the French Revolution, making Official Nationality into a uniquely Russian version of a larger right-wing European ideology.<sup>76</sup> The Russian political climate under Nicholas, then, was deeply influenced by events in Europe, just as the intellectual and literary climate at this time was also shaped by Western developments. Minister of education Sergei Uvarov developed Official Nationality as a way to both bind together and highlight the strength of the Russian nation.<sup>77</sup> During his sixteen years as the head of public instruction in Russia, Uvarov promoted the three tenets of Official Nationality as a way to uphold what he believed to be the foundation of the Russia nation.<sup>78</sup> Uvarov wrote most commonly in French or German and was well versed in both French and German Literature, further highlighting his Western influences. Moreover, he believed that Official Nationality

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<sup>72</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 129.

<sup>73</sup> Kov, A. E. Kov., and Riasanovsky, *Emperor Nicholas I of Russia*, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Kov, A. E. Kov., and Riasanovsky, *Emperor Nicholas I of Russia*, vii.

<sup>75</sup> Kov, A. E. Kov., and Riasanovsky, *Emperor Nicholas I of Russia*, vii.

<sup>76</sup> Kov, A. E. Kov., and Riasanovsky, *Emperor Nicholas I of Russia*, vii.

<sup>77</sup> Thaden, *Conservative Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, 19.

<sup>78</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 132.

would facilitate Russia becoming a strong nation, capable of borrowing from the West while simultaneously developing independently of the West.<sup>79</sup> His policy was influenced by the romantic nationalist teachings of Herder, as evidenced by Uvarov's emphasis on Russia's particular traits, history, and customs.<sup>80</sup>

In a memorandum to Nicholas I written in 1834, Uvarov expressed the importance of persevering a pure Russian nation in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. Uvarov wrote:

Amid the rapid decay of religious and civilian institutions in Europe and the universal spread of destructive notions...it was necessary to fortify our Fatherland on the firm foundation which are the basis for the prosperity, the strength, and the life of the people; to find the principles that constitute the distinguishing character of Russia and belong to her exclusively...<sup>81</sup>

Uvarov explained the need to protect a distinctive Russian identity from destructive Western influences. The way Uvarov spoke about an authentic Russian Fatherland as a contrast to the West is similar to the way in which the Slavophiles conceived of Russian identity in juxtaposition to the West.

### *The Three Pillars of Official Nationality*

Uvarov's Official Nationality declared the three pillars of the Russian nation to be orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.<sup>82</sup> The pillar of Orthodoxy, under Official Nationality, proclaimed that an adherence to the teachings of the Orthodox Church, God, Christ, and the Divine Will, would bring about salvation for the Russian empire.<sup>83</sup> The entire Russian nation was in need of salvation, Uvarov argued, because it was immersed in a world of destruction and

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<sup>79</sup> A. I. Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research*. English ed. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008, 146-148.

<sup>80</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 133.

<sup>81</sup> Sergei Uvarov, "Memorandum 1834," in Jay L. Olivia, ed. *Russia and the West*, 90.

<sup>82</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 169.

<sup>83</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, 80.

sorrow, as evidenced by rampant revolutionary activity in the West.<sup>84</sup> According to this policy, Russians were to look to the Orthodox Church for moral guidance and meaning in their lives.<sup>85</sup> In his memorandum to Nicholas I, Uvarov stressed the importance of Orthodoxy to the Russian people: “Sincerely and deeply attached to the Church of his fathers, the Russians has, from the earliest times, looked upon it as the pledge of social and family happiness.”<sup>86</sup> Uvarov argued that Russia could only be comprehended through a framework of Orthodoxy, which was thought of as the truest manifestation of Christianity. Nicholas I concurred with this assertion as he himself believed that he was a messenger of God and of the Orthodox Church.<sup>87</sup> The tenet of Orthodoxy in this larger policy of Official Nationality highlighted the notion that a Christian family provided a secure foundation for Russian development.<sup>88</sup> Not only was Orthodoxy viewed as a tool with which to politically define a uniquely Russian nation, but also as a way to prove to the West that Russians were impervious to the religious skepticism of the European Enlightenment.<sup>89</sup>

Tied to Uvarov’s belief in autocracy was also a belief in the inherent weakness of man, who was in need of a strong ruler to prevent him from going astray. Uvarov argued that autocracy was an integral part of Russian life: “The saving conviction that Russia lives and is preserved by the spirit of a strong, humane, enlightened autocracy must permeate public education...”<sup>90</sup> Official Nationality was a pessimistic doctrine consistent with other right-wing European doctrines that highlighted the importance of strong authoritarian leadership to maintain

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<sup>84</sup> Kov, A. E. Kov, and Riasanovsky, *Emperor Nicholas I of Russia*, XIII.

<sup>85</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 134.

<sup>86</sup> Uvarov, “Memorandum 1834,” 90.

<sup>87</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, 85.

<sup>88</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, 91.

<sup>89</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 78.

<sup>90</sup> Uvarov, “Memorandum 1834,” 90.

the established order.<sup>91</sup> Nicholas I used the ideology of autocracy as a way to legitimate his role as the defender of the international order against opposition.<sup>92</sup> The principle of autocracy further held that even though the czar was the undisputed absolute ruler, he still required guidance from god, the absolute ruler of the universe. Orthodoxy and autocracy were intertwined with one another as the czar represented the Christian conscience of the entire nation.<sup>93</sup>

Although Nationality, the final component of Uvarov's doctrine, was supposed to set Russia apart from the West by highlighting its unique traits, it was heavily influenced by the Western ideology of romantic nationalism.<sup>94</sup> Nationality in the context of Official Nationality emphasized the notion that a successful future awaited Russia, a concept that would later be used by Slavophiles as well.<sup>95</sup> The tenet of Nationality asserted the uniqueness of Russians by highlighting their distinct characteristics: fear of God, devotion to Orthodoxy, and affection for rulers, setting Russia apart from the West.<sup>96</sup> Uvarov also stressed the virtues of a particular Russian history and language, consistent with a Western romantic nationalist emphasis on the significance of the particularities of a specific nation.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, Uvarov highlighted that Russians had a narrowly defined role: to be subservient to the autocratic czar and to be supportive of the autocratic regime.<sup>98</sup> In his memorandum to Nicholas I, Uvarov stated that Nationality was not a call for Russia to renege on new developments and ideas, implying that new intellectual and cultural developments from the West were an undeniable part of Russia's future: "Nationality does not compel us to go back or stand still; it does not require immobility in

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<sup>91</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 137.

<sup>92</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, 123.

<sup>93</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 78.

<sup>94</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 134.

<sup>95</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 134.

<sup>96</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, 125.

<sup>97</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, 130.

<sup>98</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, 139.

ideas.”<sup>99</sup> Supporters of Official Nationality believed that Russia, unlike the West, was impervious to class struggle and revolution, again creating a distinct Russia only through an examination of the ways in which Russia diverged from the West.<sup>100</sup>

### *Europe’s View of Nicholas’s Russia*

Nicholas’s paradoxical image of his empire was not a purely Russian notion. Indeed, it was an accepted European notion as well. Europe’s view of nineteenth-century Russia mirrored the way in which Russia viewed itself: both separate from the West and a part of it. The West acknowledged that Russia should, in some part, be held responsible for safeguarding the old order from revolutionary influences. However, it also considered Russia to be an uncivilized nation, incapable of its own cultural and political development. A close examination of an article written for the London newspaper *The Times* reveals the way the West, or more specifically, Prussia, viewed Russia as distinct from Europe. The way Europe saw Russia further proves that Nicholas’s reign was indeed a moment in which Russian identity was conflicted. In the 1845 article entitled “Commercial Politics of Germany,” the unknown author reports on the changing political climate of Prussia as it endeavors to veer away from Russia’s influence:

The external policy of Prussia has recently undergone a transformation not to be misunderstood. She is gradually endeavoring to estrange herself from the influence exercised over her, by Russia, to take a more independent course, and to draw nearer to England.<sup>101</sup>

This excerpt clearly highlights the author’s view that Prussia, a German kingdom, and Russia were connected to one another. As previously mentioned, both Nicholas I and Russian intellectuals applied Herder’s concept of cultural nationalism to a distinctly Russian form of

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<sup>99</sup> Uvarov, “Memorandum 1834,” 91.

<sup>100</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, 137.

<sup>101</sup> Anon., “Commercial Politics Of Germany” (*Times*, London, England, 20 Aug. 1845), 6. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 16 Feb. 2015.

national identity. This passage, however, also makes note of a different relationship with Germany. The journalist writes that Prussia is attempting to remove itself from Russia's influence, implying that Russia had some sort of authority over Germany, which further complicates Russia's perceived relationship to the West. It would appear that Russia was not necessarily inferior to the West, even though Russia's intellectual and political discourse was determined by Western developments.

Although the author asserts that Russia influenced Prussia, in the following paragraph, he also speaks about how Prussia has served as Russia's source for new ideas and developments: "For a long period Prussia has been, so to speak, the vanguard of Russia in Europe."<sup>102</sup> This statement is consistent with the fact that Russia adopted the concept of German cultural nationalism. However, the claim challenges the idea that Russia exerted influence on Prussia as well. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Prussia is referred to as the "vanguard of Russia in Europe," as it directly characterizes Russia as being completely distinct from the West.<sup>103</sup> Even though Russia was acknowledged for its military strength, it was still considered to be separate from Europe. By 1845 the political climate in Europe was shifting away from the paternalistic absolutism that Nicholas sought to defend abroad and demonstrate within the Russian empire, creating distance between Russia and the West.<sup>104</sup> The West viewed Russia as backwards, but also as possessing enough power to potentially threaten the liberal political culture in Europe.

The article further speaks about how an alliance between Prussia and Russia was formed in a joint effort to root out French revolutionary ideals: "The fear of an incursion of the ideas of liberty and emancipation of which France was considered at the focus... were sufficient motives

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<sup>102</sup> Anon., "Commercial Politics Of Germany."

<sup>103</sup> Anon., "Commercial Politics Of Germany."

<sup>104</sup> Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 140.

for a union....”<sup>105</sup> An acknowledgement of the union between Prussia and Russia further questions the notion that Russia was completely distinct from Europe, as the two seem to be in concert with one another, reacting to the very same problem of revolutionary France, which was threatening each country equally. It is also important to note that Nicholas’ wife was from Prussia, further connecting Russia and Prussia. Nicholas admired the aristocratic manners, strict military, and familial relationships that existed within the Prussian court.<sup>106</sup> For Nicholas, Prussia represented the Europe of old that he sought to preserve from liberal influence.

The journalist further argues that Germany’s enmity towards the Russian empire stems from the fact that Russians were a “semi savage” people.<sup>107</sup>

The German people experienced antipathy towards Russia. The czar was always to them the Autocrat of a semi-savage people, who had wandered from their steppes to sully European civilization with their presence....<sup>108</sup>

Even though Prussia and Russia worked together to combat revolutionary France, Prussia, and the West more generally viewed Russia as a distinct nation comprised of uncivilized people. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the West viewed Nicholas’s political policies in his effort to uphold the old order as excessively repressive, even backwards.<sup>109</sup> This journalistic excerpt serves to validate Russia’s conception of Western superiority and their own inferiority. In this view, Western Europe’s “civilized” identity becomes the standard against which to compare one’s self. Although Russians did not think of themselves as savages, there is some resemblance of this line of thinking in Nicholas’s policy of Official Nationality, as the tenet of autocracy asserts the need for a strong autocratic leader to guide the nation, implying a low estimation of the Russian people.

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<sup>105</sup> Anon., "Commercial Politics Of Germany."

<sup>106</sup> Sidney Monas, "Nicholas’ View of Europe," in Jay Olivia, ed., *Russia and the West*, 115.

<sup>107</sup> Anon., "Commercial Politics Of Germany."

<sup>108</sup> Anon., "Commercial Politics Of Germany."

<sup>109</sup> Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 100.

This article not only serves to highlight how Nicholas's Russia and, less directly, his policy of Official Nationality was viewed by the West, but also more generally serves to emphasize Western Europe's paradoxical relationship with Russia. Throughout the article there is an acknowledgement that Russia is committed to rooting out revolutionary ideals in the same way that the Germany is, but there is also an assertion that Russia is comprised of a savage people, in need of a forceful autocratic ruler. In this way, Russia was both a part of Europe as it was reacting to the same political events as the West, but it was also an outsider, subject to the scrutiny of a putatively more civilized Western Europe.

In conclusion, Official Nationality developed by Uvarov and sanctioned by Nicholas I was established as a reaction against the ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The policy was also developed in response to the failed Decembrist uprisings, which set the tone for Nicholas's reign. The Decembrist uprising created a legacy of suppression of Western revolutionary ideals and an urgency to establish a national identity that would allow for the maintenance of a cohesive nation with strictly Russian features. Nicholas's reign was also devoted to rallying the nation around one central identity, which would create a cohesive nation, while also attempting to curb a liberal Western influence. Official Nationality outlined the three pillars of the Russian empire: Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality. Although this policy attempted to differentiate Russia from the West by highlighting what Uvarov and Nicholas believed to be the foundation of the entire Russian nation, the policy only defined Russia in terms of how it diverged from the West and as a response to Western developments. Indeed, proving that the West was a necessary component in the development of an authentically Russian identity. This same theme of establishing a Russian identity through juxtaposing it with the West is also apparent in Russia's intellectual developments.

### Chapter 3: Nineteenth-Century Intellectuals Debate Russian National Identity

Nineteenth-century Western romantic nationalist teachings on nationhood, combined with political events in Western Europe, sparked an intellectual debate beginning in the 1820s, about what it meant to be Russian. More directly, this questioning of identity may in part be attributed to the Russian intellectual Peter Chaadaev, who was influenced by this broader Western framework. It was in Chaadaev's letters, published in a liberal journal in 1837, that he first set forth his groundbreaking ideas on what constitutes Russian identity. In response to the ideas presented in these letters, two opposing intellectual groups, Slavophiles and Westernizers, attempted to grapple with the question of Russian national identity.

Even though the Slavophiles and Westernizers pitted themselves against each other in terms of how they thought about Russian identity, both groups originated from the same Western romantic framework. The Slavophiles mobilized a Western language of cultural nationalism to expel Western elements from what they believed to be a uniquely Russian identity. The Westernizers used this same language to conceive of a Russian identity rooted in European influences and reforms. Both intellectual divisions, then, attempted to achieve the same goal-- using Western language and framework to conceive of a Russian identity that was both distinct from the West and intertwined with the West. This chapter will explain how the intellectual discourse on what it meant to be Russia was rooted in a Western legacy. More specifically, this chapter will debunk the idea that the Slavophiles and Westernizers were antithetical developments, instead emphasizing how both groups relied on the West in the creation of Russian identity.

## *Romantic Nationalism in Russia*

After the Napoleonic wars, Western Europe witnessed the spread of German romantic nationalism, which stressed passion and spontaneity and praised the nation that was uncorrupted by civilization.<sup>110</sup> The popularity of this form of nationalism in the nineteenth century is akin to the prevalence of French secular rationalism during the period of the French Revolution.<sup>111</sup> The French Revolution was evidence of the failure of the Enlightenment in its goal of remaking mankind through reason and knowledge.<sup>112</sup> The German romantic teachings, however, shattered the French Enlightenment notion that Europe existed as a single civilization, a concept associated with the soulless civilization of revolutionary France that Europe sought to avoid in the wake of the Revolution.<sup>113</sup>

According to the philosophy of German romantic nationalism, the uncorrupted nation relied on simple expressions of national cultural identification, manifested through spontaneous art and folklore.<sup>114</sup> German romantic nationalists believed that nations could be defined as culturally and linguistically unique entities.<sup>115</sup> The German philosopher Herder developed these romantic nationalist notions in his treatise on the development of German civilization, in which he argued that all natural cultures were a result of a spirit of the common people. For Herder, the remedy for German fragmentation was identifying with a larger group.<sup>116</sup> Peter Chaadaev used Herder's ideas and the philosophy of romantic nationalism more generally to examine the issues surrounding Russia's own national identity.

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<sup>110</sup> Thaden, "The Beginnings of Romantic Nationalism in Russia," 500.

<sup>111</sup> Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 103.

<sup>112</sup> Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 113.

<sup>113</sup> Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, 107.

<sup>114</sup> Thaden, *Conservative Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, 31.

<sup>115</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 85.

<sup>116</sup> Andreas Wimmer, "Herder's Heritage and the Boundary-Making Approach: Studying Ethnicity in Immigrant Societies" (*Sociological Theory* 27, no. 3, 2009), 244-270, 246.

The concept of establishing a uniquely Russian identity came to the fore after hostilities with Napoleonic France. The Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812 triggered an efflorescence of patriotism among Russians. After defeating Napoleon's army, Russians believed that they had saved all of Western Europe from a Napoleonic takeover, motivating them to take great pride in their own history. It was this political framework, combined with the rise of nationalism in the West that led the Russian intellectual Karamzin to write about Russia's imitation of the West.<sup>117</sup> Russian patriotism was manifested through a glorification of Russian history, customs, and traditions. This brand of Russian nationalism converged with the newly-developed romantic nationalism of the West.<sup>118</sup>

A group of Russian intellectuals popularized the teachings of romantic nationalism in Russia during the 1820's and 1830's.<sup>119</sup> The German philosopher Friedrich Schelling was particularly important in the development of a philosophical Russian nationalism in the first two decades following the Congress of Vienna. Schelling believed that creativity manifested itself through art and mythology. Russian intellectuals thought that they could use Schelling's teachings as the basis for Russian nationality.<sup>120</sup> The Russian writer Pogodin is one such intellectual who promoted romantic nationalism in Russia. In an article written in 1845, Pogodin emphasized the uniqueness of the Russian state in contrast to the states of Western Europe. He explained that unlike Russia, Western Europe had been established through forceful conquest. By highlighting a flaw in the West, Russia's main point of comparison, Pogodin appealed to a sense of patriotism in Russians.<sup>121</sup> Pogodin was only able to emphasize the superiority of the Russian empire, however, by arguing for the ways in which it differed from the West. This sense

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<sup>117</sup> Thaden, "The Beginnings of Romantic Nationalism in Russia," 514.

<sup>118</sup> Thaden, "The Beginnings of Romantic Nationalism in Russia," 513.

<sup>119</sup> Thaden, *Conservative Nationalism in Nineteenth-century Russia*, 28.

<sup>120</sup> Thaden, "The Beginnings of Romantic Nationalism in Russia," 515.

<sup>121</sup> Thaden, *Conservative Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, 31.

of pride in the uniqueness of the Russian state, then, existed as a reaction to developments in the West and through a comparison of Russia to the West. Pogodin, like contemporary Russian intellectuals employed a Western language of romantic nationalism to assert the ways in which Russia differed from the West.

### *Chaadaev's Intellectual Contribution to the Discussion of Russian National Identity*

Between 1828 and 1831 Chaadaev wrote a series of eight “Philosophical Letters,” two of which were devoted to the question of Russian national identity. In his attempt to grapple with how Russia should define itself independent of the West, Chaadaev worked within a Western romantic nationalist framework. His “Philosophical Letters,” which were published in 1837 in the liberal periodical *Teleskop*, were critical of Peter’s eighteenth-century modernization campaign. Furthermore, they rejected the belief that Russia was part of Europe, arguing instead that Russia belonged neither to the East nor the West.<sup>122</sup>

According to Chaadaev, Russia lacked both history and tradition because it did not have a national goal or ideal, which lead to intellectual stagnation and spiritual passivity.<sup>123</sup> Chaadaev asserts these points in his first letter, *Philosophical Letters Addressed to a Lady*:

We have never moved in concert with the other peoples. We are not part of any of the great families of the human race; we are neither of the West nor of the East, and we have not the traditions of either. We stand, as it were, outside of time, the universal education of mankind has not touched us.<sup>124</sup>

Although Chaadaev argues that Russia is a unique entity, he claims that its intellectual and cultural developments are derived from other nations:

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<sup>122</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 80.

<sup>123</sup> Anatole Gregory Mazour, *Russia, Past and Present* (Van Nostrand, 1951), 316.

<sup>124</sup> Petr Chaadaev, *Philosophical Letter Addressed to a Lady*, Documents in Russian History, [http://academic.shu.edu/russianhistory/index.php/Petr\\_Chaadaev%2C\\_First\\_Philosophical\\_Letter](http://academic.shu.edu/russianhistory/index.php/Petr_Chaadaev%2C_First_Philosophical_Letter) (November 10, 2014) resources.library.lemoyne.edu. [Original source: *Philosophical Letters Addressed to a Lady*, (1829)],1.

Among us there is no internal development, no natural progress; new ideas sweep out the old, because they are not derived from the old but tumble down upon us from who knows where. We absorb all our ideas ready-made...<sup>125</sup>

For Chaadaev, contemporary Russian culture is imported from the West and lacks organic cultural development.<sup>126</sup> He makes two seemingly contradictory claims in his letter, asserting that Russia is both independent from the West, but also dependent on it for new cultural and political developments. Chaadaev continues his letter by detailing Russia's isolation:

No one has a fixed sphere of existence; there are no proper habits, no rules to govern anything. We do not even have homes; there is nothing to tie us down...nothing enduring, nothing lasting. Everything passes, flows always, leaving no trace either outside of within us.<sup>127</sup>

According to Chaadaev, Russians are rootless people, making it difficult for anything to have a lasting effect on them. This argument, however, is challenged by the fact that Russian intellectuals were deeply influenced by newly surfacing Western ideas on national identity. He concludes with the following statement:

We are one of those nations, which do not seem to be an integral part of the human race, but exist only in order to teach some great lesson to the world.<sup>128</sup>

Chaadaev's conclusion is a pessimistic one, offering no hope for Russia's future. He argues that Russia will not contribute anything to the world because Russia lacks both a history and an ability to develop ideas and culture on its own. This criticism of Russia, however, is only made clear through juxtaposing Russia with the West.

Chaadaev's letter triggered a slew of negative reactions from conservative and nationalistic Russian intellectuals.<sup>129</sup> After being proclaimed deranged and sent into exile, he was

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<sup>125</sup> Chaadaev, *Philosophical Letter*, 2.

<sup>126</sup> McNally, Raymond T. McNally, "Chaadaev's Evaluation of Peter the Great," (*Slavic Review* 23, no. 1, 1964), 31-44, 32.

<sup>127</sup> Chaadaev, *Philosophical Letter*, 1.

<sup>128</sup> Chaadaev, *Philosophical Letter*, 1.

<sup>129</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 81.

forced to modify his thesis to make his views more optimistic for Russian patriots.<sup>130</sup> In his amended letter, “Apology of a Madman,” Chaadaev argued that if Russia recognized its failed attempts at following a unique path and instead followed in the footsteps of the West, it could have a successful future.<sup>131</sup> He also made the point that Russia had been able to progress since the time of Peter the Great because it was not bound to a particular historical trajectory.<sup>132</sup> Russia, he asserted, could create a future through an immersion in the culture of Christendom.<sup>133</sup> These modified views were well received by intellectual figures who would later become revolutionaries, like the intellectual Alexander Herzen.<sup>134</sup> Although Chaadaev’s letters were not the sole cause of the larger intellectual debate that ensued after he published his work, Chaadaev’s arguments certainly served as an immediate spark for a larger discussion on national identity.

### *The Slavophiles*

Russian intellectuals divided into two groups as a way to respond to Chaadaev’s arguments on how Russia should define itself in relation to the West. These two opposing intellectual groups, the Slavophiles and Westernizers, presented contrasting ideas on national identity, while both still working within a German romantic framework.<sup>135</sup> Both groups attempted to create a Russian identity through a Western means.<sup>136</sup> The Slavophiles, a group of intellectuals who shared common beliefs about Russia’s relationship to the West, developed their ideology as a direct response to Chaadaev’s pessimistic outlook on Russia’s future.<sup>137</sup> The

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<sup>130</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 151.

<sup>131</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 81.

<sup>132</sup> McNally, “Chaadaev’s Evaluation of Peter the Great,” 36.

<sup>133</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 151.

<sup>134</sup> Walicki, “Russian Social Thought: an Introduction to the Intellectual History of Nineteenth-Century Russia,” 7.

<sup>135</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 152.

<sup>136</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 70.

<sup>137</sup> Nicholas Valentine Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles: A Study of Romantic*

Slavophiles acknowledged Chaadaev's assertion that Russians were a rootless people, but believed that Russia could recover from this isolation and rootlessness by returning to Slavic ideals of community life and Orthodoxy.<sup>138</sup> They further claimed that Russian principles would triumph over artificial Western principles, allowing intellectuals to reconstruct human society on entirely new foundations. Furthermore, as Orthodox Christians, Slavophiles viewed themselves as being representative of good in the world, making it their task to root out evil and artificial principles and replace them with what they believed to be noble and true principles.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, they believed that Peter the Great introduced Russia to rationalism, legalism, and compulsion, which hindered Russia's development. Russians would only be able to overcome the obstacles introduced by Peter if they returned to native Russian principles and veered away from Western influences.<sup>140</sup> The Slavophiles asserted Russian superiority over the West, while at the same time seeking recognition from the West, revealing a paradoxical relationship.<sup>141</sup>

Although the Slavophiles sought to root out Western principles, their conception of Russian nationality adhered to a Western romantic nationalist ideology.<sup>142</sup> Slavophiles were deeply influenced by the philosophies of the German philosophers, Schelling and Hegel. The importance of Hegel's philosophy in Slavophilism can be seen in the fact that a leader of the Slavophile movement, Konstantin Aksakov, was also a member of the Russian Hegelian circle in Moscow. It is important to note that a leader of the Westernizer movement, Vissarion Belinsky was also present in this Russian Hegelian circle, emphasizing the fact that although these groups held differing opinions on Russian identity, both originated from the same Western source.<sup>143</sup>

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*Ideology* (Vol. 61. P. Smith, 1965), 28.

<sup>138</sup> Walicki, "Russian Social Thought," 8.

<sup>139</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, 67.

<sup>140</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 130.

<sup>141</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, 62.

<sup>142</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, 3.

<sup>143</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, 31.

Russian Hegelians were interested in how Hegel's philosophy could reveal the true nature of the world.<sup>144</sup> Slavophiles attempted to model themselves on a romanticized image of the peasant figure, which they thought was pure and incorruptible.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, Slavophiles posited that the Russian future lay in a reversion to traditional customs that would overcome the detrimental influence of the West. This, again, can be understood as using a western language of western cultural nationalism to reveal a uniquely Russian identity, lessening the gap between the Slavophile ideology and the Westernizer ideology.

*The Slavophile Philosophies of Ivan Kireevskii and Aleksei Khomiakov*

Even though leading Slavophiles Ivan Kireevskii and Aleksei Khomiakov argued in their respective essays that Russia was superior to the West, they were only able to reach this conclusion by using Europe as a benchmark for Russia. Furthermore, the Slavophile ideology, which sought to dispel Western influences from Russian identity, originated from a Western discourse on romantic nationalism. The Westernizer philosophy, which is seemingly antithetical to the Slavophile ideology, developed out of this very same Western ideology, highlighting how these intellectual developments were derived from the same source and addressed the same issue: how to define Russia in relation to the West.

Ivan Kireevskii, a leading philosopher of Slavophilism argued that the West was afflicted with the scourge of rationalism, leading to the breakdown of society and the destruction of its primitive wholeness. The result was a fragmented and isolated society.<sup>146</sup> In a letter addressed to a Russian nobleman written in 1852 and entitled, "On the Nature of European Culture and Its Relation to the Culture of Russia," Kireevskii explains the flaws of Western culture in contrast to

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<sup>144</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, 32.

<sup>145</sup> Howard F. Stein, "Russian Nationalism and the Divided Soul of the Westernizers and Slavophiles" (*Ethos* 4, no.4, 1976), 403-438, 410-411.

<sup>146</sup> Andrzej, "Russian Social Thought," 8.

Russian culture.<sup>147</sup> Kireevskii begins the letter by asserting what he believes to be an undeniable juxtaposition between Russia and the West:

Certainly few questions nowadays are more important than the question of the relation of Russian to Western culture. How we pose and resolve it in our minds may determine not only the dominant trend of our literature but the entire orientation of our intellectual activity, the meaning of our private lives, and the nature of our social relationships.<sup>148</sup>

Despite arguing that Western culture determines much of the components that create a Russian national identity, Kireevskii claims that Russian culture is superior to that of Europe in several ways. This argument, creates a paradox, however, as readers must contend with the fact that the very culture that informs Russia's identity is also vastly inferior to it.

Before declaring the triumph of Russian culture, Kireevskii writes that the West suffers from rationalism: "Cold analysis, practiced over many centuries, has destroyed the very foundations of European culture, so that the principles in which that culture was rooted..."<sup>149</sup> Kireevskii argues that the core of Western culture, rationalism, was the very thing that ultimately destroyed it, leaving the Western man aware of his own shortcomings.<sup>150</sup> Kireevskii concludes his work by elaborating on how Russia diverges from the West, despite asserting the fact that the two are inextricably linked.

By affirming the three elements present in Western culture that are absent in Russia, Kireevskii highlights how Russia and Europe are antithetical to each other: "These three elements peculiar to the West—the Roman Catholic Church, the civilization of ancient Rome, and polity arising out of the violence of conquest—were entirely alien to old Russia."<sup>151</sup> It is

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<sup>147</sup> Ivan Kireevski, "On the Nature of European Culture and its Relation to the Culture of Russia: Letter to Count E. E. Komarovskii," in *Russian Intellectual History*, by Marc Raeff (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 177.

<sup>148</sup> Kireevski, "On the Nature of European Culture," 175.

<sup>149</sup> Kireevski, "On the Nature of European Culture," 177.

<sup>150</sup> Kireevski, "On the Nature of European Culture," 177.

<sup>151</sup> Kireevski, "On the Nature of European Culture", 182.

only through an analysis of the ways in which the West and Russia are juxtaposed to one another, however, that Kireevskii is able to assert the superiority of Russia. Kireevskii distinguishes Russia from the West by emphasizing the importance of Orthodoxy:

I believe that Russia's distinguishing feature was the very fullness and purity of expression of the Christian doctrine throughout its social and family life. This was great strength of its civilization...<sup>152</sup>

This point is in accordance with the paramount belief of the Slavophile ideology, the importance of the pureness of Orthodoxy. The significance of Orthodoxy and the superiority of the native Russian tradition are only made apparent to readers by setting Russia up against the West.

Kireevskii's ideas were further developed by another important Slavophile figure, Aleksei Khomiakov, who argues in his treatise "The Church is One," that Orthodoxy is the only true form of Christianity.<sup>153</sup> In his words:

When false doctrines shall have disappeared, there will be no further need for the name Orthodox, for then there will be no erroneous Christianity.<sup>154</sup>

This excerpt highlights an important axiom of Slavophilism, which is the superiority of Orthodoxy over all other brands of Christianity. Khomiakov argues, however, that Orthodoxy is not linked to a particular nation or a particular identity, even though adherence to it is a defining element of Slavophilism.

For the Church is not bound up with any locality; she neither boasts herself of any particular see or territory...knowing that the whole world belongs to her, and that no locality therein possesses any special significance...<sup>155</sup>

Khomiakov declares that once illegitimate Western Christianity ceases to exist, Orthodoxy will no longer be tied to one particular group. The belief in the triumph of Orthodoxy was the main

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<sup>152</sup> Kireevski, "On the Nature of European," 205-206.

<sup>153</sup> Andrzej, "Russian Social Thought," 9.

<sup>154</sup> Alexei Stepanovich Khomiakov, "The Church is One," Burke Library Collection, Union Theological Seminary 33-34.

<sup>155</sup> Khomiakov, "The Church is One," 33-34.

tenet of Slavophilism, indeed linking it to a specific group of people, challenging his argument that Orthodoxy is universal.

### *The Westernizers*

Like the Slavophiles, the Westernizers developed their ideas in response to lingering questions from Chaadaev's letters and through the influence of German romantic philosophers. The West, according to this group, followed the Hegelian belief that nations develop along a single path, and that Russia must not seek to avoid change that was in any case inevitable, but, rather, embrace change and assimilate Western practices into Russian culture.<sup>156</sup> Russia could only achieve a successful civilization in the context of Western civilization, and while they respected the changes of Peter the Great, they sought further westernizing reforms.<sup>157 158</sup>

Boris Chicherin, a historian who epitomized the Westernizer position, argued that by the end of the nineteenth century Russia would be ready to follow in the footsteps of Western Europe.<sup>159</sup> During his time studying at Moscow University, Chicherin was influenced by his history professor Timofei Granovskii, who argued that Russian institutions such as serfdom and absolutism were a hindrance to Russia. Granovskii further asserted that Russia had no special path and that a constitutional form of government was necessary.<sup>160</sup> Chicherin's own philosophy, shaped by his studies at Moscow University, was based on Hegel's vision for Germany, which sought to protect common interests and civil liberties.

Unlike the Slavophiles, who stressed the importance of Orthodoxy, the Westernizers did not view religion as a fundamental component to Russian identity. Although the Westernizers

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<sup>156</sup> Alexander Polunov, "Russia in the Nineteenth Century: Autocracy, Reform, and Social Change 1818-1914," (The New Russian History Ser. 2005), 10-21, 60.

<sup>157</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, " 157.

<sup>158</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, " 157.

<sup>159</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 93.

<sup>160</sup> Tolz, *Russia*, 93.

did not emphasize religion, some moderate Westernizers still embraced their religious faith. The radical Westernizers, however, challenged the importance of Orthodoxy through Hegel's philosophy.<sup>161</sup> The literary critic and editor Vissarion Belinsky was one such figure.<sup>162</sup> Belinsky encouraged the development of a national character in Russian literature, but he did not approve of limiting literature to only including folklore and themes from Russian history. Instead, Belinsky believed that literature was an important tool in furthering progressive thought.<sup>163</sup>

Slavophilism and Westernism began to transform into different variations of the original movements at various points. It was not until after the golden age of Slavophilism, which lasted from 1845 until 1860, that the movement began to change.<sup>164</sup> During the reign of Alexander II, Slavophilism transformed into a more right-wing movement that had realistic political aims as opposed to just theoretical ideas. This modified version of Slavophilism accepted the modernized Russian state.<sup>165</sup> Westernism too began to transform as a movement in response to the revolutions of 1848 in Europe. Progressive Russians began to understand that Europe was not a unified whole and they were therefore forced to conclude that the ideology of Westernism was too broad to truly be effective.<sup>166</sup>

In sum, the intellectual debate that emerged in Russia beginning most strongly in the 1830's was sparked by the popularization of Western romantic nationalism in Russia. As a way to come to terms with the ideas posited by Peter Chaadaev, the intellectual who engaged in the nineteenth-century debate on the topic, Slavophiles and Westernizers conceived of divergent ways in which to define Russian identity. Although neither the Slavophiles nor the Westernizers

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<sup>161</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 157.

<sup>162</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 157.

<sup>163</sup> Andrzej, "Russian Social Thought," 12.

<sup>164</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, 28.

<sup>165</sup> Walicki, "Russian Social Thought," 10.

<sup>166</sup> Walicki, "Russian Social Thought," 15.

were ideologically homogenous, for the most part, Slavophiles preached a uniquely Russian identity that adhered to Orthodoxy and Russian principles, while Westernizers sought further westernizing reforms for Russia. Despite the fact that Slavophiles and Westernizers attempted to define Russia in vastly different ways, both groups charged themselves with the same task of figuring out how to define Russia in terms of the West. Slavophiles conceived of Russian identity in terms of how different they were from the West, while the Westernizers thought of Russian identity in terms of how Westernized they had the potential of being. This same theme of understanding Russia through juxtaposition with the West is not only detectable in Russian political and intellectual history, but also in Russian literary history.

#### Chapter 4: Discussions of National Identity in Russian Literature

The Russian literary world during Nicholas I's reign, 1825-1855, witnessed the emergence of a very particular form of literature that sometimes subtly and sometimes more explicitly imagined Russia stuck between two worlds: a distinctly Russian world and a Westernized World. This conflicted identity forced the upper echelons of Russian society to answer a seemingly simple question that politicians and philosophers had been asking in varying ways: what is Russianness?

According to writer Stefan Zweig, nothing in nineteenth-century Russia was fixed, including how Russians defined themselves. They had to think about whether they wanted to move towards the West, represented by St. Petersburg, or towards a more traditional and uniquely Russian way of life, represented by Moscow and the countryside. Zweig's book, published in 1930, *Three Masters: Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevsky* encapsulates the issue of a fraught identity that nineteenth-century Russian literary figures contended with. In Zweig's words:

They are Russian, the children of a nation abruptly thrust into our European culture from a millennial and barbaric unconsciousness...they stand hesitant, at the crossways not knowing which road to choose; the indecision of each is the indecision of an entire people. The Russia of the mid-nineteenth century did not know whither it was going, whether towards St. Petersburg...or back to the peasant smallholding in the boundless steppe.<sup>167</sup>

Zweig believes Russia's identity crisis stems from the fact that it was abruptly introduced to a European culture. Although Zweig speaks about how this indecisive Russian figure was a character present in Fyodor Dostoevsky's work in particular, this same figure was present in works of other Russian writers as well.

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<sup>167</sup> Stefan Zweig, *Three Masters: Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevsky*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York, 1930), 147-148.

This chapter will examine the literary struggle to define a Russian national identity through an analysis of Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and "The Bronze Horseman," Mikhail Lermontov's, "My Native Land," and Nikolai Gogol's *Selected Passages From a Correspondence with Friends*. These works, which fit into the literary discussion of defining Russianness, also fit into broader political and intellectual discourses that addressed parallel issues albeit in different ways. These nineteenth-century authors all contended with the same challenge of identifying Russianness in relation to Europe. For some authors Russian identity was described as distinctly and purely Russian, while others classified Russia as a combination of Russian and European influences.

#### *The Political and Intellectual Context of Pushkin's Texts*

The Decembrist revolt of 1825 and Nicholas's rise to power thereafter was of great importance to Pushkin's literary works. Although Pushkin did not participate in the Decembrist uprising himself, he was initially both a supporter of the revolt and was well acquainted with one of the five leading Decembrists, the poet Ryleev.<sup>168</sup> After avoiding arrest for association with the uprising, Pushkin began to support Nicholas' regime, finding himself particularly attracted to his personality.<sup>169</sup> Pushkin, who in his youth was characterized as both a liberal and progressive, was supportive of Nicholas despite the fact that Nicholas's political aim was the suppression of reactionary influences and activity.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, during the post-Decembrist period, Pushkin, like Nicholas, admired Peter the Great's legacy as evidenced by certain moments in both *Eugene Onegin* and *The Bronze Horseman*.

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<sup>168</sup> John Bayley, *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1971, 24.

<sup>169</sup> Bayley, *Pushkin*, 25.

<sup>170</sup> Bayley, *Pushkin*, 25.

*Eugene Onegin* and “The Bronze Horseman” were written around the same time that Chaadaev published his letters, which triggered an intellectual discourse on the nature of Russian national identity. Although he did not explicitly address the same intellectual discourse as Chaadaev and the Slavophiles and Westernizers, Pushkin implicitly referred to this intellectual discussion in his work. The influence of this intellectual debate on Pushkin’s work is also suggested by the fact that Chaadaev and Pushkin were close acquaintances in St. Petersburg. Pushkin was first introduced to Chaadaev in 1816 at the house of the historian Karamzin. After their initial meeting, Pushkin and Chaadaev exchanged ideas on the French language, logic, and the philosophy of John Locke.<sup>171</sup> The fact that Pushkin, Karamzin, and Chaadaev were all acquaintances highlights the point that an overlap in intellectual discourse and literary discourse was conceivable as the elite of Russian society were closely connected with one another.

### *Eugene Onegin*

Pushkin’s novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin*, published in its complete form in 1833, can be read as a commentary on Russia’s struggle to define a national identity. According to the literary scholar William M. Todd, Pushkin’s were some of the first texts to come to terms with the questions and challenges brought about by eighteenth-century westernization.<sup>172</sup> One of the ways Pushkin evokes the theme of westernization is through a constantly changing setting. Throughout the novel, Pushkin sets St. Petersburg, where Onegin is from, against the countryside, where Onegin travels to as the novel progresses. St. Petersburg is representative of the Western reformer, Peter the Great, since he moved Russia’s capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg during his process of modernization. Onegin, the protagonist of the novel, is a dandy immersed in the

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<sup>171</sup> T.J. Binyon, *Pushkin: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 61.

<sup>172</sup> George Gibian, *The Portable Nineteenth-century Russian Reader* (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin Books, 1993), 2.

Western culture of St. Petersburg, where French language and culture dominate. In describing Onegin's fashion, Pushkin explicitly comments on the fact that his way of dressing is French:

His current fashions of *toilette*,  
I might describe in terms more knowing  
His clothing from the learned set...  
But *pantaloons, gilet, and, frock*—  
These words are hardly Russian stock;  
That as it is my diction groans  
With far too many foreign loans....<sup>173</sup>

In pointing out Onegin's French influences, Pushkin makes note of the fact that St. Petersburg is a city that is not authentically Russian as the language and cultural standards are borrowed from the West. The use of French language and clothing were not only typical, but an indication of sophisticated taste. Onegin is further characterized as epitomizing the alluring St. Petersburg life as he frequently travels to operas and balls:

But what of my Eugene? Half drowsing,  
He drives to bed from last night's ball,  
While Petersburg, already rousing,  
Answers the drumbeat's duty call...  
But wearied by the ballroom's clamour,  
He sleeps in blissful, sheer delight –  
This child of comfort and of glamour.<sup>174</sup>

These excerpts serve to initially establish St. Petersburg as an artificial city that houses the fashion and customs of the West. Moreover, Pushkin subtly asks how a Russian city that relies on Western culture can create its own original identity.

St. Petersburg is contrasted to the countryside, where Onegin travels to collect an inheritance from his recently deceased uncle. Upon arriving in the countryside, Onegin finds himself in a new peaceful and pastoral environment:

For two full days he was enchanted  
By lonely fields and burbling brook,

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<sup>173</sup> Pushkin and Falen, *Eugene Onegin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009),16.

<sup>174</sup> Pushkin and Falen, *Eugene Onegin*, 20-21.

By sylvan shade that lay implanted  
Within a cool and leafy nook...  
With not great palaces, no streets,  
No cards, no balls, no poet's feats....<sup>175</sup>

The countryside is portrayed in a way that makes it seem like it is the only place compatible with a genuine Russia, one free of Western conventions and frivolities. In contrast to the city where people try to uphold European culture in a way that disregards a traditional Russian one, the country does not demand this same appropriation of Western culture from its inhabitants. The authenticity of the countryside is further emphasized by an epigraph that precedes a thorough description of country life: "O rus! Horace, O Rus!"<sup>176</sup> This epigraph refers to the old lyrical name for Russia, Rus, invoking a sense of nostalgia for a Russia of old: a Russia untainted by the West.

As the novel progresses, however, Pushkin makes the point that an authentic Russia does not exist in either St. Petersburg or the countryside. In both settings, Western convention and custom are upheld, forcing him to conclude that Western influence is an integral part of Russian national identity. Thus, Pushkin establishes the countryside as a site of Russian authenticity in contrast to the artificial and Europeanized city, only to debunk this myth by introducing the reader to the country dweller, Tatiana.

Upon first encountering Tatiana, readers are meant to understand her as being impervious to Western fashions:

So she was called Tatyana, reader  
She lacked the fresh and rosy tone  
that made her sister's beauty sweeter...  
Adorned the course of rural leisure...  
when she was small she didn't choose  
To talk to them of clothes or fashion

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<sup>175</sup> Pushkin and Falen, *Eugene Onegin*, 28.

<sup>176</sup> Pushkin and Falen, *Eugene Onegin*, 33.

Or tell them of they city news.<sup>177</sup>

Although Pushkin first represents Tatiana as truly Russian, he soon reveals that she too is simply an amalgam of various Western conventions, susceptible to the influence of Westernism in the same way that Onegin is. Tatiana is no more authentic than any urban person because she too defines herself in terms of various Western literary figures:

And then her warm imagination  
Perceives herself as *heroine*—  
Some favorites author's fond creation:  
Clarissa, Julia, or Delphine.<sup>178</sup>

Tatiana is only able to conceive of herself in terms of the larger Western literary Canon. She imagines herself as a heroine of a European literary work in the same way that the characters of Clarissa, Julia, and Delphine are Western creations. Pushkin seems to be saying that Russians, regardless of where they come from, are creations as opposed to authentic people. They struggle with an identity because there is a constant tension between that which is thought of as authentic and distinctly Russian and that which is Europeanized. Pushkin reaches the conclusion that Russians must contend with unavoidable Western influences.

A description of Tatiana arriving in St. Petersburg from the countryside allows Pushkin to meditate on the hybridization of Russian and Western culture. Pushkin uses the following language to describe Tatiana going to St. Petersburg: "To dazzle, conquer...and to fly."<sup>179</sup> By entering St. Petersburg, Tatiana is imbuing a city full of Western convention with something seemingly more pure. This is not to say, however, that the countryside is a genuine Russia, but rather that a true Russian has both distinctly Russian and Western sensibilities. Even though she lives in the countryside, Tatiana still accepts the influence of Western convention;

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<sup>177</sup> Pushkin and Falen, *Eugene Onegin*, 47-48.

<sup>178</sup> Pushkin and Falen, *Eugene Onegin*, 61.

<sup>179</sup> Pushkin and Falen, *Eugene Onegin*, 81.

thus representing a hybrid Russia that neither denies Russian authenticity nor denies the influence of the West, but rather is a mix of both. This hybridity is the true Russian character according to Pushkin. Pushkin's novel in verse was a foundational text for nineteenth-century Russia as it came to terms with some of the inherited stereotypes and cultural markers that were set into motion by Peter's legacy.

*"The Bronze Horseman"*

Pushkin's literary work not only commented on Russian national identity, but also more specifically on Nicholas' policy of Official Nationality and its relationship to Peter the Great. Proponents of Official Nationality believed that Peter's westernizing reforms were essential to securing Russia's place in the world. Nicholas I, despite his assertion that Russia needed a distinct identity to combat liberal Western influences, admired Peter's work.<sup>180</sup> Not only was Pushkin motivated to write his 1833 poem, "The Bronze Horseman," as a show of support for the principle of autocracy described in Official Nationality, but he also wrote it in response to a slew of negative assessments of Russia's future, including that of Chaadaev's in his 1837 *Philosophical Letter*.<sup>181</sup> An examination of the "The Bronze Horseman" affirms both Pushkin's admiration for Peter the Great and for the principles of Official Nationality, revealing not only the relationship between Uvarov's doctrine and Peter's legacy, but also an overlap in political and intellectual discourse.

Pushkin presents readers with the achievements of Peter the Great and the might of autocracy, while simultaneously describing the harshness of the autocratic regime felt by the

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<sup>180</sup> Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, 113.

<sup>181</sup> Waclaw Lednicki, *Pushkin's Bronze Horseman: The Story of a Masterpiece. With an Appendix Including, in English, Mickiewicz's "Digression," Pushkin's "Bronze Horseman," and Other Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955).

individual man.<sup>182</sup> Pushkin begins the poem by giving a brief history of St. Petersburg, describing how Peter acquired the land from the Swedes:

Here, Swede, beware---soon by our labor  
Here a new city should be wrought,  
Defiance to the haughty neighbor.  
Here we at Nature's own behest  
Shall break a window to the West...  
And unencumbered we shall revel.<sup>183</sup>

He writes as if Peter is seeing the new territory for the first time, imagining the potential the land has for the future of Russia. Peter warns the Swedes that soon Russia will be a powerful nation, making St. Petersburg a channel through which Russia will infiltrate the West. From the start of the poem, Pushkin stresses the fact that Peter established the West as an important point of reference for Russia. Indeed, the next section of his poem is an ode to St. Petersburg, highlighting his support for Peter's legacy. In Pushkin's words: "I love thee, Peter's own creation... Thrive, Peter's city, flaunt thy beauty..."<sup>184</sup>

In the second half of the poem, Pushkin introduces Yevgeny, who contends with a violent flood that ravishes parts of St. Petersburg. In the midst of the chaos, Yevgeny is surrounded by a fully intact statue of Peter the Great in the form of the Bronze Horseman. It is significant that during the flood the only thing that remains intact is a towering statue of Peter the Great, symbolizing not only the strength of Peter as a ruler, but also the indelible impression of Peter's reforms on Russia. Yevgeny, in describing his view of the unscathed statue in the midst of the flood, comments on the fact that Peter was responsible for bringing Russia into its current state:

Who, bronzen countenance upslanted  
Into the dusk aloft, sat still...  
His form with what dark strength endowed!  
Was it not thus, a towering idol

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<sup>182</sup> Gibian, *The Portable Nineteenth-century Russian Reader*, 3.

<sup>183</sup> Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman," in Gibian, ed., *The Portable Nineteenth-century Russian Reader*, 9.

<sup>184</sup> Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman," 10-11.

Hard by the chasm, with iron birdle  
You reared up Russia to her fate?<sup>185</sup>

This passage acknowledges the fact that Peter implemented the necessary reforms to bring Russia to its current state, while also using the description of the statue as a symbol of the power and stability of the autocratic state.

In the final section of the poem, Yevgeny, in a fit of madness, curses the Bronze Horseman, causing the statue to come to life and chase Yevgeny until his death.<sup>186</sup> Pushkin describes this scene as follows:

The dead czar's face,  
With instantaneous fury burning,  
It seemed to him, was slowly turning...  
One hand stretched out, 'mid echoing clamor  
The Bronze Horseman in pursuit.<sup>187</sup>

Here Pushkin reiterates the point that the autocratic Russian state remains intact, despite the destructive natural disaster. Yevgeny, by contrast, an individual who performs a small act of defiance against the autocratic state by cursing the statue, fails miserably.<sup>188</sup> This is to say, then, that Pushkin believes the autocratic state to be impervious to acts of rebellion by the common man. Because the poem is a post-Decembrist work, Pushkin seems to be commenting on the strength of the autocratic state in the face of the failed Decembrist uprising. In sum, Pushkin's work reveals that proponents of Official Nationality were both in favor of a distinctly Russia identity, but were also supporters of Peter the Great's westernizing reforms. Pushkin displays his backing for Official Nationality by portraying Russia's unshakeable autocratic state.

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<sup>185</sup> Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman," 20.

<sup>186</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 140.

<sup>187</sup> Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman," 20.

<sup>188</sup> Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*, 141.

*Mikhail Lermontov's "My Native Land"*

Lermontov wrote during a period in which the discourse of Slavophiles and Westernizers was becoming increasingly more pertinent to the upper strata of Russian society. Although Lermontov does not refer to this intellectual discussion explicitly, its influence can be traced in his poem, which speaks about a Russian fatherland. Lermontov's 1841 poem "My Native Land" is an ode to a distinctly Russian nation. This work contributed to a larger nineteenth-century literary debate on what constitutes Russian national identity. Unlike Pushkin's works, Lermontov's poem does not focus on a dichotomy between Russia and the West, but rather on constructing a vivid image of an authentically Russian fatherland.<sup>189</sup> Lermontov begins his poem by declaring that he loves Russia beyond reason:

If I do love my land, strangely, I love it:  
Tis something reason cannot cure...  
Still I love thee—why I hardly know....<sup>190</sup>

Through his choice of language, Lermontov implies that Russia is an unreasonable place, demanding his love for purely emotional reasons. In the succeeding stanzas Lermontov meditates on Russia's natural beauty, depicting Russia in a way that makes it seem as if it is impervious to trends of modernization and political reform:

I love thy fields so coldly meditative,  
native dark swaying woods and native  
rivers that sea-like foam and flow.<sup>191</sup>

The poem's focus on Russia's natural beauty as opposed to its political or social climate suggests that Russia is either unable or unwilling to participate in the larger political and cultural discourses of Western Europe.

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<sup>189</sup> Gibian, *The Portable Nineteenth-century Russian Reader*, 129.

<sup>190</sup> Lermontov, "My Native Land," in Gibian, ed., *The Portable Nineteenth-century Russian Reader*, 131.

<sup>191</sup> Lermontov, "My Native Land," 131.

Lermontov's poem conjures an image of Russia similar to that of the Slavophile belief in a pure Russian nation, one unaffected by the West. However, unlike the Slavophiles who claimed that a pure Russian identity was both attainable and necessary for the future Russian empire, Lermontov's poem is nostalgic for a Russian empire of the past. Lermontov is not suggesting, as the Slavophiles were, that Russian national identity should be based on the notion of a pure Russian fatherland that avoids the influences of the changing Western world. Instead, he simply provides readers with an idealized image of a Russia from the past, without explicitly answering the question of the future of Russian national identity.

Lermontov writes about his native land with distance, as if he believes that a pure Russian fatherland no longer exists. He observes Russia from the perspective of a traveler riding in a cart on a country road:

In a clattering cart I love to travel  
On country roads: watching the rising star,  
Yearning for sheltered sleep, my eyes unravel...

In this moment, Lermontov places himself in the position of an outsider, observing Russia from afar. The way he describes himself suggests that he enjoys viewing Russia merely as an observer, as a respite from a different life he lives – a Russian life that is not impervious to larger world trends. Twentieth-century Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov speaks to this point in an essay on Lermontov. He argues that Lermontov, like Pushkin and Gogol, had a tendency to view Russia in more positive way than was true to their reality: “The Russian poet talks of the view from his window as if he were an exile dreaming of his land more vividly than he ever saw it...”<sup>192</sup> Nabokov asserts that “My Native Land” exemplifies this larger trend among Russian writers.<sup>193</sup> Lermontov speaks fondly of his native Russia, suggesting that he believes that there

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<sup>192</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, "The Lermontov Mirage," (*Russian Review* 1, no. 1, 1941: 31-39), 34.

<sup>193</sup> Nabokov, "The Lermontov Mirage," 35.

once existed a pure Russian fatherland, a land distinct from any other part of the world. Although he does not explicitly address the issue of how to define Russia, he does contribute to this discourse by conjuring an image of an authentic Russia, separate from Western Europe. At the same time, however, Lermontov separates himself from this idealized image of Russia, suggesting that a pure Russian fatherland is unattainable.

According to the literary scholar David Powelstock, Lermontov's poem can be understood as Lermontov traveling out of St. Petersburg, into Russia's periphery. This is significant as St. Petersburg was the main center for the implementation of Nicholas's political policy of Official Nationality. In this way, then, Lermontov seems to be saying that the periphery of Russia, the part of Russia unaffected by Official Nationality is where the true Russia lies.<sup>194</sup> Lermontov rejects the notion that Official Nationality can create an authentically Russian spirit, instead looking towards a Russia untouched by political policies as an authentic fatherland. Not only was Lermontov participating in a literary debate about how to define Russian identity, he was also commenting on Nicholas's political policy that tried to address the very same question.

#### *Selected Passages From a Correspondence with Friends*

In his 1847 book, *Selected Passages From a Correspondence With Friends*, Gogol defends Slavophilism, using his literary works as a means of defending what he believes to be an authentic Russian spirit. In doing so, he adamantly defends both Orthodoxy and Russian autocracy. In a section of his book, entitled "Easter Sunday," Gogol argues that Russians experience Easter Sunday more intensely than Europeans:

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<sup>194</sup> David Powelstock, *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov: The Ironies of Romantic Individualism in Nicholas I's Russia* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 406.

In the Russia there is a special feeling for the feast of Easter Sunday. He feels this kinship more keenly if he happens to be in a foreign country...it seems to him that in Russia people somehow celebrate the day better.<sup>195</sup>

This excerpt not only highlights Gogol's affirmation of the Slavophile belief that Russians are inherently religious through their adherence to Orthodoxy, but it also highlights the point that Russia's religious fervor is only made apparent in contrast to the secularism of the West.

Gogol declares that Russia's distinctive history and culture is everlasting: "Not one grain of what is genuinely Russian in our ancestral past and of what Christ will die out."<sup>196</sup> This idea of a pure Russian spirit is echoed in the Slavophile ideology as well. Gogol, like contemporary Russian authors, acknowledges the fact that Russia is in a tentative position in its search for a national identity: "We are a metal that is still in a molten state, not yet cast in the form of national mold."<sup>197</sup> In this way Gogol explicitly positions his work in terms of a larger intellectual debate about the nature of Russian identification, specifically the Slavophile and Westernizer debate.

In a letter to Gogol, the literary critic and Westernizer Belinsky challenges Gogol's Slavophile views. Belinsky begins his letter by criticizing Orthodoxy: "One cannot keep silent when lies and immortality are preached as truth and virtue under the guise of religion and the protection of the knout."<sup>198</sup> He criticizes Gogol for disguising Russia's flaws with religion, specifically Orthodoxy, a fundamental tenet of Slavophilism. In this way, Belinsky seems to be denouncing the entire Slavophile position, which did not advocate for reforms in the way that the

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<sup>195</sup> Nikolai Gogol, *Selected Passages From a Correspondence With Friends*, in Gibian, ed., *The Portable Nineteenth-Century Russian Reader*, 232.

<sup>196</sup> Gogol, *Selected Passages From a Correspondence With Friends*, 235.

<sup>197</sup> Gogol, *Selected Passages From a Correspondence With Friends*, 235.

<sup>198</sup> Vissarion Belinsky, *Letter to Nikolai Gogol* (1847, Documents in Russian History) accessed November 10, 2014, resources.library.lemoyne.edu.

Westernizer position did. He continues his letter by accusing Gogol of ignoring the changes that Russia requires:

Therefore you failed to realize that Russia sees her salvation not in mysticism or asceticism or pietism, but in the successes of civilization, enlightenment, and humanity. What she needs is not sermons (she has heard enough of them!) or prayers (she has repeated them too often!), but the awakening in the people of a sense of their human dignity...<sup>199</sup>

Belinsky further asserts that instead of looking to orthodoxy and mysticism to solve Russia's woes, Russia should model itself on the successful Western civilization. Although Belinsky stresses the fact that Russia is in need of reform, he does acknowledge that Russia is capable of achieving success, despite its flaws. Towards the final section of his letter Belinsky writes: "Yes, the Russian has a deep, though still undeveloped, instinct for truth."<sup>200</sup> Belinsky, like his fellow Westernizers, believed that Russians had an inherent ability to succeed, despite the fact that they had been delayed through a backward mode of development. A new pattern of development, he explains, would allow Russians to succeed and access their instinct for truth. Belinsky's criticism of Gogol epitomizes the Westernizer ideology, stressing the importance of modeling a backwards Russia on the West. Belinsky's disapproval of Gogol's literary work placed Gogol's book in a larger intellectual context of Russian cultural nationalism and the ideologies of Slavophiles and Westernizers.

In conclusion, an examination of the nineteenth-century works of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol reveals the way in which these authors participated in a literary debate regarding the nature of Russian national identity. Pushkin's novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin*, and his poem, "The Bronze Horseman" provide a commentary on the undeniable influence of the West on Russia and on Russia's autocratic state. Mikhail Lermontov's poem *My Native Land* conjures a

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<sup>199</sup> Belinsky, *Letter to Nikolai Gogol*, 2.

<sup>200</sup> Belinsky, *Letter to Nikolai Gogol*, 5.

nostalgic picture of Russia as a pure fatherland, unaffected by outside influences. Lastly, Gogol's book *Selected Passages From a Correspondence With Friends* highlights the Slavophile ideology, positioning Gogol and his work in terms of a larger intellectual and cultural discourse. Taken together, these works point towards the argument that the time period in which this literature was written, the period of Nicholas I's reign, was a time in which national identity was particularly pertinent. This literary discourse on Russian national identity, like the political and part of Russia's identity.

## Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Western Europe was a necessary component in Russia's conception of its own identity in the nineteenth century. The issue of defining Russianness is rooted in the policies of eighteenth-century Czar Peter the Great. It was Peter who plunged Russia into a Western world- a world that some intellectuals believed was incompatible with a traditional and authentic Russia. The aftermath of the French Revolution and Napoleon's defeat brought this issue of a Western identity versus a Russian identity to the fore. After Napoleon's downfall, Russia was considered a militarily strong nation, instilling a sense of patriotism in Russian elites. Some Russians, however, also contended with the fact that Western Europe, although viewing Russia as militarily competent, also viewed Russia as politically and socially regressive. This conflicting view of the Russian empire was parallel to the way in which many Russian intellectuals viewed themselves.

I have endeavored to demonstrate how this issue of defining Russianness permeated political, intellectual, and literary developments. In all three of these areas the post-Napoleonic European political context and German Romantic nationalism played an integral role in the discussion of Russian identity. Although discussed in varying ways across political, intellectual, and literary realms, all three discourses relied on the West as a point of comparison for the way Russian elites thought about their own identity. Some Russian intellectuals viewed their nation as authentic and distinct from the West, while others viewed Russia as needing further westernizing reforms. In both cases, however, intellectuals relied on the West as a frame of reference for Russia.

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Rachel Donadio asserts in a *New York Times* article that Vladimir Tolstoy, one of Putin's advisers on cultural affairs, fully supports Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea.<sup>201</sup>

According to Tolstoy, Russia fought in the 1853 Crimean War against Britain, France, Sardinia, and the Ottoman Empire for control of a region he believes to have been rightfully Russia's all along.<sup>202</sup> The legacy of the Crimean War, although evidently a major source of contention in contemporary Russia, deeply affected the way nineteenth-century Russians thought about themselves in relation to the West.

Russia's relationship to Europe changed irrevocably in the wake of a humiliating military defeat in the Crimean War.<sup>203</sup> Its defeat destroyed the sense of Russian military superiority that emerged in the wake of Napoleon's fall. Although it was Alexander II, Czar from 1855 until 1881, who ultimately had to transform Russia's relationship to the West in the aftermath of the Crimean War, it was Nicholas I who was involved in the beginning of the outbreak of the war. In order to assert himself as protector of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire, Nicholas sent Prince Menshikov to Constantinople to serve as his ambassador.<sup>204</sup> After his demands were not met, however, Menshikov broke off diplomatic ties with the Ottoman government and ordered Russian troops into the Danubian principalities in May of 1853. In response to this threat from Russia, the Ottomans with the support of France and Britain entered the Black Sea and declared war on Russia, ultimately defeating Russia in 1855 and successfully capturing the region of Crimea known as Sevastopol.<sup>205</sup> The events of the Crimean War shattered the notion

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<sup>201</sup> Donadio, "In Culturally Fractious Russia," 2.

<sup>202</sup> Donadio, "In Culturally Fractious Russia," 2.

<sup>203</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 192.

<sup>204</sup> Pushkarev, McNeal, and Yedlin, *The Emergence of Modern Russia*, 119.

<sup>205</sup> Pushkarev, McNeal, and Yedlin, *The Emergence of Modern Russia*, 120.

that Russia was equal to the West, instead forcing Russian elites to reevaluate their status in relation to the putatively superior nations of Europe.

Alexander II was motivated to establish a modernized identity as a result of Russia's perceived status in the West. Unlike Nicholas, who advocated Russian distinctiveness through the policy of Official Nationality, Alexander asserted a Russian identity that promoted Russian progress and reform in order to create an empire that was comparable to the West. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War was the impetus behind Alexander's decision to abolish serfdom in Europe, a system he believed to be incompatible with a modernized empire. Although breaking with Nicholas's goal to create a distinctly Russian national identity, Alexander still seems to have touched upon the idea of an authentically Russian character, even while asserting Russia's Western status. In a manifesto from 1861, Alexander details the process and reasons behind the abolishment of serfdom by appealing to a sense of Russian national pride:

WE place OUR confidence above all in the graciousness of Divine Providence, which watches over Russia. WE also rely upon the zealous devotion of OUR nobility, to whom WE express OUR gratitude and that of the entire country as well... WE rely upon the common sense of OUR people.<sup>206</sup>

Even though Alexander acknowledges the need to reform Russia by emancipating the serfs, he still describes it as being its own nation. By repeatedly using the pronoun "our," Alexander tries to unify the empire around this one reform, just as Nicholas rallied the nation together around the policy of Official Nationality. He further uses "our" to describe the Russian people, as if they are one cohesive group capable of using their inherent levelheadedness to do away with an outdated system. In this way, Russia still had a paradoxical relationship to the West: it was both separate from the West, but also reforming itself to be a part of Europe.

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<sup>206</sup> Alexander II, "Emancipation Manifesto," 1861, Documents in Russian History, accessed March 29, 2015, academic.shu.edu.

If Vladimir Tolstoy is to be believed, nothing has changed for Russia for it still finds itself stuck in between two worlds—a distinctly Russian orbit and the world of the West. Despite his Western-leaning cultural policies, Tolstoy has been cited as describing Russia as more authentic than the West.<sup>207</sup> This Russian patriotism is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Slavophile ideology, an ideology devoted to the preservation of an authentically Russian spirit. This belief in a pure Russian soul, however, like the policies of Tolstoy, depended on the West. Indeed, Russia's embattled relationship to Western Europe reveals that the West was and continues to be an integral component in the creation of a Russian national identity. Although the search for an identity has been transformed again and again since the time of Peter the Great, one constant remains: Russians are still looking for a way to define themselves, grappling with living between two worlds.

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<sup>207</sup> Donadio, "In Culturally Fractious Russia," 2.

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