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## INHERITED WORDS: THE LEGACY OF DANGEROUS TEXTS AND BOLD SPEECHES IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

Russia faces the challenge of understanding – and, where desirable, promoting – connections between the pre-revolutionary, Communist, and post-Communist eras, so that their history does not read and feel like a series of abrupt shifts, the dramatic *vzryvy* which Lotman and other scholars have analysed. Some of the ongoing initiatives for re-connection are institutional, with the Orthodox Church reaching out to the Church Abroad; material, as entrepreneur Viktor Vekselberg's Links in Time (*Sviiaz' vremeni*) Foundation returns a collection of Fabergé eggs and the Danilov Monastery's bells to their homeland; and academic, as scholars centered in Moscow pursue a line of historical inquiry they call "succession" or "continuity" studies (*shkola preemstva*).<sup>1</sup>

For Russia in the twentieth-first century, the large body of bold texts and speeches from previous eras are certainly worthy of examination. The "dangerous texts" paradigm, involving intense interaction between literature and State power, was a distinctive feature of nineteenth and twentieth-century Russia.<sup>2</sup> Provocative texts became national events with the emergence of "something like an artistic civil society."<sup>3</sup> But without the development of other institutions of mature civil society, the result was a nation with a hypertrophied cultural politics and an underdeveloped culture of politics. What has contemporary Russia inherited from this treasure house of dangerous texts? Not a working paradigm: the last serious literary challenge to State power was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, and that was finally published in *Novy mir* in August 1989, a few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Not a coherent political program, either: the most artistically powerful and politically-aware of these texts – whether published or circulated underground – of-

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1. The proceedings of a 1999 conference by this group have been published in M. Iu. Vorenkov, ed., *Preemstvo: Chto budet s rodinoi I s nami* (Moscow: "Bumazhnaia galereia," 2000). One of the organizers, philosopher Igor' Chubais, discusses the "path of continuity" in the proceedings of another 1999 conference run by the Library of Congress in Moscow; see Part 3 of James Billington and Kathleen Parthé, eds., *The Search for a New Russian National Identity: Russian Perspectives* (Washington, DC: LOC, 2003), available on-line at: [www.loc.gov/about/welcome/speeches/russianperspectives/index.html](http://www.loc.gov/about/welcome/speeches/russianperspectives/index.html)

2. For more on this subject, see Kathleen Parthé, *Russia's Dangerous Texts: Politics between the Lines* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2004).

3. John Lloyd, *Rebirth of a Nation: An Anatomy of Russia* (London: Michael Joseph, 1998), p. 395.

ferred little in the way of a convincing justification for the status quo or a viable alternative politics.

It would be difficult to name a politically controversial work of artistic prose that has not been issued or re-issued during the past two decades in sufficient quantities to meet the demands of the reading public. Post-Communist Russia has generated its own dangerous texts, but they are no longer literary, despite the efforts of the ultra-nationalist and Communist press during the Yeltsin years to fight today's political battles with yesterday's cultural weapons. Vladimir Putin has warmly embraced aspects of the Soviet experience, but he has also shown great respect for Solzhenitsyn, visiting the writer at his home outside Moscow. Putin has brought back into the Russian pantheon anti-Bolshevik cultural heroes, going to Ivan Bunin's grave in Paris early in his presidency, and supporting the repatriation of the remains of writer Ivan Shmelev and the philosopher and literary essayist Ivan Il'in (along with those of major White Army figures). What *has* survived from the now-extinguished literary-political fire is a resilient, culturally-based national identity and an impressive record of moral and intellectual survival under the worst possible conditions. Today's citizens can take genuine pride in the risks their predecessors were willing to take for truthful artistic expression. Literature mattered in Russia to an extent that would be hard to match elsewhere.

What of the tradition of bold speeches? Inspired by messages they had read between the lines of prose, poetry, and literary criticism, Russians in the emerging professional community of academics, physicians, lawyers, scientists, and enlightened officials began in the 1840s to literally speak to Russian society's need to reform itself. We can see the first signs of this phenomenon a few decades earlier in circles, salons, bookstores, clubs, and noble assemblies; as the century advanced, additional venues emerged such as university lectures and the public defense of advanced degrees, and public banquets on civic themes. The reform period itself began with a frank speech by Alexander II to representatives of the Moscow nobility in 1856, and included numerous official and unofficial discussions of how emancipation could be successfully carried out. Reforms in local government and the judiciary brought many Russians out of private life and into the expanding public sphere, with numerous occasions for the relatively frank expression and exchange of views. As these new institutions took root, there was a burst of activity in other areas as the growing number of Russians with technical expertise or business interests organized societies whose periodic regional and national gatherings saw the discussion of profession-specific questions inevitably lead to a critique of the state of the nation. While the legal profession generated the greatest number of gifted speakers after the modern courts were established in 1864, impressive oratorical skills could be found in other fields as well. Prince Sergei Trubetskoi, a professor of philosophy at Moscow University and political activist, was chosen to represent the *zemstvo* movement in a speech to the tsar on June 6, 1905, where his comments eloquently summed up the decades-long efforts

towards constructive political reform for which the monarch's support was urgently needed.<sup>4</sup>

How did the two spheres – civic speech and literary text – interact? Turgenev and Dostoevsky are two writers who enjoyed speaking or reading from their works in public; the latter's June 1880 comments at the dedication of the Pushkin monument is arguably one of the two most famous speeches in Russian history (the other being Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956). There are cases of strong friendships between major public speakers and Russia's literary giants (the prosecutor Anatoly Koni knew Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Nekrasov, Chekhov, and many others), but in general, the same pre-revolutionary writers who figure so prominently in the literary-political nexus failed to welcome – even between the lines – the substantial civic initiatives undertaken outside the world of art. The courts took the worst beating, but circles, zemstvos, and eloquent liberal intellectuals also failed to impress, and university and public lectures – central to many memoirs – are absent from fiction. If anything, writers across the political spectrum did their best to undermine what they saw as their rivals for the role of the people's advocate and tribune: Russia could have only one "second" government.

After 1917, the civic speech traditions carried on for a few years. Alexander Blok's poignant talk "On the Poet's Calling" (*O naznachanii poeta*) used a meeting devoted to commemorating Pushkin's death to state that in 1920, as in 1837, there was no air for a true poet to breathe. Blok's own death later that year confirmed his statement as nothing else could. The severe constraints on public and private expression under Communism, and the parallel creation of "virtual" civic speech, had the effect of profoundly weakening – but not eliminating – the civic conversation. There was a revival of bold political speech under glasnost, particularly in 1988 (at the unscripted All-Union Party Congress, televised, but pre-recorded) and 1989 (at the Congress of People's Deputies, broadcast live to a public that was riveted to their television sets). While there are many civic conversations taking place every day in Russia, at the level of national politics and its importance to the broader population, the intensity of this revival has not been maintained.

The post-Communist years have brought the publication of long-unavailable memoirs that give the civic speech tradition a rich historical context, as well as many of the speeches themselves, along with analyses of these "inherited words." Several different editions of Koni's works give a good indication of the different ways in which such a past can be used. One collection of his speeches from the courtroom and other venues was published in 2001 by the Interior Ministry's own university in St. Petersburg.<sup>5</sup> The introduction emphasises the contribution Koni made to law-enforcement both in Tsarist Russia, where he worked first as a leading prosecutor and then for the Senate's ap-

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4. See chapter 6 of Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Sergei N. Trubetskoi. An Intellectual among the Intelligentsia in Prerevolutionary Russia* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1976).

5. Anatolii Fedorovich Koni, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (St. Petersburg: "Leksikon," 2001). The preface was written by V. P. Sal'nikov and V. A. Ivanov.

peals court, and in Soviet Russia, where he taught legal culture until he was well into his eighties. He is praised as a consummate professional and a tireless public servant, and an exemplary figure in 2002 as the country celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the MVD.

Another volume of Koni's works came out as the first book in a series called "Judicial Traditions" (*Iuridicheskoe nasledie*), and was followed by the works of other stars of the reform-era courtroom like F. N. Plevako, V. D. Spasovich, S. A. Andreevskii, K. K. Arsen'ev, A. I. Urusov, and P. A. Aleksandrov. The goal of this series is to acquaint readers with "the very rich literary and journalistic material" created by Russia's lawyers, people who "are in the same ranks as Russia's great writers, scientists, and statesmen."<sup>6</sup> Although they are all but forgotten today, they are leaders in the spiritual and civic development of society. Much is made in these contemporary editions of the erudition, culture (*kulturnost'*), principled behaviour (*printsipialnost'*), fearlessness (*besstrashie*), and the energy these public figures brought to establishing and protecting the rule of law in tsarist Russia. This line of thought appears to be the impetus behind a two-volume series devoted to biographies and speeches of the great Duma orators (from 1906-1917) whose ranks include: A. A. Kizevetter, V. A. Maklakov, V. D. Nabokov, A. F. Kerenskii, P. N. Milukov, and at least one government minister, P. A. Stolypin.<sup>7</sup> A British writer, fluent in Russian, who was present at the meetings of the first Duma left very positive impressions of the manner in which discussions were conducted: "they all speak as if they had spoken in Parliament all their lives, without the slightest evidence of nervousness or shyness. The sittings of the Duma are like a meeting of acquaintances in a club or *café*. There is nothing formal about them." Elsewhere he said that meetings of the Duma's Cadet party faction were at the level of the best-run party meetings in other countries.<sup>8</sup>

The culmination of pre-revolutionary Russia's civic development, the 1906-1917 dumas, turn out to have left a problematic legacy. This was evident in the run-up to the April 2006 centenary of the first Duma. A year earlier, the Russian news broadcast *Vesti* had announced the forthcoming anniversary with great fanfare, but twelve months later the day was marked in a decidedly subdued fashion, with relatives of the original representatives brought into the empty hall of the Tauride Palace and invited to stand briefly at the podium. One explanation is that Putin wanted nothing to interfere with the exhaustive preparations for the July 2006 G-8 summit in St. Petersburg.<sup>9</sup> A second factor in this down-grade is that a focus on events of 1906 could raise awkward comparisons, especially abroad, between Putin's well-tamed representatives (*dum-*

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6. I. V. Potapchuk, "Slovo k chitateliu," in A. F. Koni, *Izbrannye trudy i rechi* (Tula: Avtograf, 2000), pp. 7-8.

7. *Oratory Rossii v Gosudarstvennom Dume*, M. A. Bulanakova, ed., 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: "Obrazovanie-Kul'tura," 2004).

8. Maurice Baring, *A Year in Russia*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1907), p. 203; p. 195.

9. This was suggested by Nikita Lomagin (St. Petersburg University) during the 2006 AAASS meeting in Washington, DC, in response to questions posed after his presentation at the panel devoted to the 1906 Duma.

*tsy*) and the lively and irreverent members of the first duma. There is historical precedent for slighting history: in 1904, Nikolai II deliberately ignored the fortieth anniversary of the judicial reforms, and in 1911 the government almost failed to acknowledge the Emancipation of 1861 and even banned two films on the subject.<sup>10</sup>

A third possibility is an ambivalent, even negative, perception in Russia of the pre-revolutionary parliament. A book commissioned for the centenary includes rare archival photos, a scholarly essay on the history of representative institutions in Russia, and comments by Duma speaker (and former MVD minister) Boris Gryzlov.<sup>11</sup> The book's publication date (2003) coincides with the tenth anniversary of the country's new constitution and the fifth Duma, developments which are evidence of "the efforts to reestablish the links between different historical epochs and to strengthen continuity (*preemstvennost'*) in the development of the Russian state system (*gosudartsvvennost'*)." While praising the early dumas for demonstrating how much could be accomplished in spite of serious constraints, Gryzlov cautions the reader not to idealize a body in which radicalized deputies moved from a focus on legislation to the goal of totally obstructing the government. One should remember what happened in the end, as "the revolutionary storms of 1917 swept away not only autocracy and the tsarist government, but the state duma as well."<sup>12</sup> To apply two of President Putin's favorite values, the 1906-1917 *dumtsy* behaved in a manner that was more *dostoino* (worthy of respect) than *effektivno* (effective).

This reading of the past as complex and not entirely positive (*neodnoznachno*) has backing outside official circles. An August 2006 article in the journal *Rodina* asks whether the first two dumas, along with the parliaments of 1989-1999, are examples to be emulated or avoided. The author concludes that while tsarist-era parliamentarians displayed great eloquence, what today's Duma needs are people who carry out their responsibilities in a disciplined manner.<sup>13</sup> Participants in the 1999 *Preemstvo* conference went even further, saying that the break in tsarist-era legality began with the formation of a Provisional Government by members of the Fourth Duma in spring 1917; the rejection of tsarism then, like the rejection of Communism in 1991, was followed by a rejection of liberalism.<sup>14</sup>

In April 2006 *Literaturnaia gazeta* presented an interview with historian Valentin Shelokhaev that features a quotation from writer Vasilii Rozanov,

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10. On 1904, see K. N. Tsimbaev, "Fenomen iubileemianii v rossiiskoi obshchestvennoi zhizni kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka," *Voprosy istorii*, 11 (2005), pp. 103, 106. On 1911, see Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 2: 422.

11. I. V. Lukianov, ed., *U istokov Rossiiskogo parlamentarizma: istoriko-dokumental'noe izdanie* (St. Petersburg: Liki Rossii, 2003).

12. Boris Gryzlov, "Predislovie," *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

13. Viktor Sergeev, "Reinkarnatsiia gosdumy, ili Imperiia I parlament: veshchi nesovmestimye?" *Rodina*, 8 (2006), pp. 11-13.

14. Vorenkov, ed., *Preemstvo*, comments by M. Krasnov (pp. 44-50), and A. M. Salmin (pp. 50-66).

who in 1918 blamed the parliamentarians for managing to squander everything that Russia had created over a millennium.<sup>15</sup> In the critical material appended to the volumes on duma oratory it is said that the first and second dumas suffered from the inability to get any work done (*nerabotosposobnost'*) and, even with the better balance of oratorical display and legislative activity of the third and fourth dumas, its members showed little awareness of the possible short- and long-term consequences of their words. On the eve of the February Revolution, the fourth duma's eloquence "undermined the prestige not only of the tsar and his government, but the foundations of the entire socio-political system of the Russian state."<sup>16</sup> Like the writers, Russia's first *dumtsy* seemed to be much better at art than at politics.

The dangerous texts paradigm – born when authoritarian tsarist and Soviet regimes felt threatened by artistic literature – has passed into history. The tradition of bold public speech could evolve further, but it is not clear whether the critical attitude towards past civic speech means that Russians are weary with politics and cynical about its practitioners, or that the nation has decided that getting down to the business of building a new Russia is much more important than arguing about it in the halls of congress.

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15. "Sobrat'sia I dumat'! Na voprosy *LG* otvechaet akademik RAEN, doctor istoricheskikh nauk Valentin Shelokhaev," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 17 (2006), pp. 1, 3. Rozanov's comments are covered more fully in M. M. Spasovskii, *V. V. Rozanov v poslednie gody svoei zhizni* (New York: All-Slavic Publishing House, 1968).

16. S. V. Kulikov, introductory comments to *Oratory Rossii* (v. 2), pp. 5, 22.