

The House in the Garden

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THE BAKUNIN FAMILY AND THE ROMANCE  
OF RUSSIAN IDEALISM



*John Randolph*

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## **The Bakunin Family and the Romance of Russian Idealism**

*John Randolph*

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*To Larisa Ivanova,  
in gratitude and memory*



## CONTENTS

|                                                                |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Acknowledgments                                                | ix  |
| Note on Sources                                                | xi  |
| Introduction                                                   | 1   |
| <i>Idyll</i>                                                   |     |
| Chapter One. A Prologue for the New Year 1790                  | 19  |
| Chapter Two. Aleksandr's Idyll                                 | 48  |
| Chapter Three. <i>La Vie Intérieure</i>                        | 82  |
| Chapter Four. Keeping Time                                     | 107 |
| <i>Romance</i>                                                 |     |
| A Prologue for the New Year 1830                               | 141 |
| Chapter Five. Charades and Devotions                           | 146 |
| Chapter Six. A Few Moments from the Life of Nikolai Stankevich | 174 |
| Chapter Seven. Mikhail and the Invisible Church                | 197 |
| Chapter Eight. Varvara's Liberation                            | 226 |
| Chapter Nine. Belinsky                                         | 251 |
| Epilogue                                                       | 272 |
| Index                                                          | 281 |





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## NOTE ON SOURCES

### *Archival Sources*

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f. 16 (Bakunins)

Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (RGADA). Moscow  
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f. 103 (Tver Archive Commission)

f. 1407 (Bakunin family papers)

Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF). Moscow  
f. 825 (Bakunin family papers)

In my notes, I have followed the Russian convention of identifying documents by their *fond* (holding), *opis'* (register), *delo* (file), and *list* (page). These are abbreviated f., op., d., and l. (or ll. for pages), respectively. *Oborot* or ob. indicates the reverse side of the page. Note that at the Institute of Russian Literature files (*dela*) are titled by numbers, abbreviated as no. here.

Much of this book is based on previously unpublished material and in particular correspondence. Quite often, these manuscripts are either undated or bear only partial dates. Accordingly, dates that are my attribution occur in

square brackets and are followed by a question mark. Dates indicated on the manuscript itself are given without brackets. Thus, the note "L. A. Bakunina to N. A. Beyer, letter of 24 January [1831?]" means that the original letter bears the date of 24 January, while I have attributed it to the year 1831. The notation "24 January 1831" means the entire date is on the original, whereas "24 [January 1831?]" means both the month and the year are my assumption. In those rare cases where my argument depends on precise dating, I will explain my attributions, though it has not proven practicable to do so throughout.

Except as noted, all dates are given according to the Julian, or "Old Style" (OS), calendar in use in Russia until 1917.

Last, in the main text I have simplified my spellings of Russian names, substituting *-sky* for *-skii* and eliminating hard and soft signs. In bibliographic citations, I retain the full spellings, according to the Library of Congress transliteration system.

### *Published Primary Sources*

For multivolume works, I indicate volume number using a Roman numeral, followed by page number (e.g., Bakunin, *Sobranie*, I:24, means volume 1, page 24).

Bakunin, *Oeuvres [CD-ROM]*: International Institute of Social History. *Bakounine. Oeuvres complètes*. Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2000. CD-ROM.

Bakunin, *Sobranie*: Bakunin, M. A. *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem, 1828–1876*. Edited by Iu. M. Steklov. 4 vols. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, 1934–1935.

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Stankevich, *Perepiska*: Stankevich, N. V. *Perepiska Nikolaia Vladimirovicha Stankevicha*. Edited by A. Stankevich. Moscow: Tipografiia A. I. Mamontova, 1914.

Despite more than a century of editorial attention, there exists no fully satisfactory scholarly edition of Mikhail Bakunin's works. In 2000, the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam) released the most complete edition yet on CD-ROM. Among its many virtues, this edition is the first to publish Bakunin's writings in their original languages. I have consulted this edition heavily in interpreting Mikhail's early education and development, documented (for the most part) in a fascinating mix of French, Russian, and German. Unfortunately, this electronic edition is beginning to malfunction on the latest versions of Microsoft Windows, and I worry that it may soon be inaccessible. For this reason, in my notes I provide primary reference to paper editions where possible. When necessary—for example, when there are significant differences between Steklov's translation and the original—I will also provide a parallel reference to the *Oeuvres [CD-ROM]*. Please note that since the CD-ROM is organized by work and has no running pagination, my references are by title, date, and the internal pagination of each document. Thus, "*Oeuvres [CD-ROM]*, 2" indicates page 2 of the document in question.



*The House in the Garden*





## INTRODUCTION

Ivan Ivanovich Lazhechnikov (1792–1869) was an Imperial Russian censor and educational official, but he was best known to his contemporaries as the “Russian Walter Scott.” In the 1830s he published a series of wildly popular historical novels that mimicked Scott’s technique of imagining the past through carefully chosen scenes from private life. Under his guidance, the Russian reading public traveled to the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries and overheard the personal conversations of Russia’s rulers. In 1859, Lazhechnikov published a memoir that applied this technique to contemporary Russian history, with enduring if somewhat puzzling results.<sup>1</sup>

The subject of Lazhechnikov’s memoir was the literary critic Vissarion Belinsky. Born in 1811, dead by 1848, Belinsky had a reputation as a brash outsider: a son of the provinces who broke into Russia’s literary establishment and denounced it for ignoring social questions.<sup>2</sup> Yet Lazhechnikov sought to

<sup>1</sup> See I. I. Lazhechnikov, “Zametki dlia biografii Belinskogo,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 12 (St. Petersburg: Tovariščestvo M. O. Vol’f, 1900), 228–60; V. A. Viktorovich, “Ivan Ivanovich Lazhechnikov,” in *Russkie pisateli: Biograficheskii slovar’*, ed. P. A. Nikolaev, vol. 3 (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1989), 273–77. On the role of Scott’s work in establishing private life as a prism on the past in nineteenth-century culture, see James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 127–35, 147–50.

<sup>2</sup> On Belinsky’s legend, see Isaiah Berlin, “A Remarkable Decade,” in *Russian Thinkers*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Penguin, 1994), 181–85; on his social style of criticism, see Victor Terras, *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism: The Heritage of Organic Aesthetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 77–127.

offer his readers a fuller understanding of Belinsky's intellectual development by describing its private circumstances in more detail. (Lazhechnikov first met Belinsky in the early 1820s, while traveling as a school inspector.) He recalled Belinsky's birth to an impoverished rural family; his grinding education at the hands of old-school pedagogues; his move to Moscow, where Belinsky won admission to university but ran afoul of his superiors. Expelled in 1832, Belinsky quickly made a name for himself as a journalist but no money. When Lazhechnikov dropped by Belinsky's apartment in the mid-1830s, he was stunned to find the critic's room wedged underground between a laundry and a smithy. (From one side came a foul-smelling steam, from the other, the "hammers of Russian cyclopes.") Friends got Belinsky a job as personal secretary to a Russian aristocrat who had a beautiful house, an open table, and a musically inclined daughter. But Belinsky lasted only a short while in this heaven, deciding it was preferable to return to poverty than to pander to the vanity of a man he despised. He left, Lazhechnikov concludes with pride, "because he felt it was his *duty*."<sup>3</sup>

Suddenly and without explanation, Lazhechnikov shifts scenes to a distant provincial home. "There is a corner of a district in Tver Province," he continues,

on which nature has focused all her loving care, adorning it with the greatest gifts she could collect in a land of seven-month snows. The river in this picturesque locale seems to flow more playfully, flowers and trees grow more luxuriously, and there is more warmth there than in other places.

Here in this idyll there lived a large family that was "particularly awarded with spiritual gifts" and renowned for its unusual contentment. ("Never has a family lived more harmoniously," Lazhechnikov remarks.) "The spirit of the home" was its patriarch, a seventy-year-old man with "blue, unseeing eyes like Homer's" who had been educated at Italian universities and who loved to be surrounded by young people. He sponsored an unusually liberal atmosphere in his home, and as a result it was always crowded with guests. "Visitors streamed from all ends of Russia!" Lazhechnikov exclaims, adding, as if it were inevitable, that "Belinsky could not fail to come there as well."<sup>4</sup>

And when he did, Lazhechnikov finally concludes, the benighted critic en-

<sup>3</sup> Lazhechnikov, "Zametki," 255–56. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 256–57.

tered an intimate world of intellectual activity that greatly stimulated his spiritual development and fostered the formation of his mature worldview. At this remote provincial home Belinsky found a society of philosophical young people—many of them students and ex-students of Moscow University—who were passionately committed to the study of German Idealist philosophy. “This was during the time,” Lazhechnikov explains romantically, “when Hegel’s teaching caught fire among us, when his adepts walked about in such an ecstatic rapture that they tried to recruit even old men, youths, and maidens into his school.” One young man even used Hegelian aesthetics to write love letters “to a certain beautiful young lady, to whom he was not indifferent.” And while the young man “laughed about this much later,” Lazhechnikov believed that there was something profoundly progressive about this unusual combination of philosophy and private life. “It promoted the development of the younger generation’s intellectual ability,” he claimed. In Belinsky’s case, it prepared him to write his provocative essays of the 1840s—“steeped in Hegelian philosophy,” Lazhechnikov observes—that won him a place in history as modern Russia’s boldest, most socially minded critic.<sup>5</sup>

Imperial Russian readers of the nineteenth century were renowned for their ability to read between the lines, yet there is much about Lazhechnikov’s story that must have baffled them. Who was this unnamed provincial family, and what explained their unusual domestic distinction? What sort of support did their home life offer for intellectual activity in early-nineteenth-century Russia? Why, in particular, did it foster the unusual merger of intimacy and Idealist philosophy Lazhechnikov describes—and with what results? In the mid-nineteenth century, some readers would have been better equipped than others to answer these questions, but to this day no one has answered them all. That, in short, is the aim of this book.

*The House in the Garden* is a case study of the role played by home life in the making of Imperial Russian social thought. My aim has been to examine home life’s function as a theater of intellectual activity in early-nineteenth-century Russia by reconstructing the history of one particularly distinguished and important home. My book tells the story of Priamukhino, the provincial manor house that stands at the center of Lazhechnikov’s memoirs. It is based on the archive of Priamukhino’s former owners, a Russian noble family named the Bakunins, and it is divided into two parts. Part I, “Idyll,” describes how the Bakunins first came to Priamukhino in the late eighteenth century and seeks to understand the distinguished, experimental character their family life ac-

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 257–58.

quired when placed into this new domestic frame. Part 2, "Romance," explores the role this home played in the making of a charismatic tradition in Imperial Russian social thought that I call the romance of Russian Idealism. In particular, I examine how the Bakunin home supported the ambitions and reputations of three particularly influential young men: the radical critic Belinsky, the student icon Nikolai Stankevich (1813–1840), and the young Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876).

Such an approach, I believe, opens a fundamentally new perspective on the making of Imperial Russian intellectual traditions. Most works of Russian intellectual history take the form of philosophical romances: tales of development that seek to explain how this or that thinker was transformed by an encounter with some idea, most commonly of European origin.<sup>6</sup> There can be a certain exclusive, incantatory quality to these narratives, however, as if ideas themselves were magical formulas that gave their possessors a special distinction and agency as "thinkers" in imperial society. "I even think that a man who has not *lived through* Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Proudhon's *Contradictions of Political Economy*, who has not passed through that furnace and been tempered by it, is not complete, not modern," the socialist Aleksandr Herzen (1812–1870) writes, evidently quite serious, in his memoir *Past and Thoughts*.<sup>7</sup>

Yet aspiring thinkers, like any other actors, require a stage for their performance and an audience to help give their actions distinction and meaning. To be made durable and influential, their charismatic stories have to be framed by supporting ideals, practices, and institutions. And if today—thanks to generations of scholarship based on nationalized private archives—the biographies of the Empire's most famous thinkers have a comfortable platform in modern Russia's printed record, scholars have yet to explore fully the intimate context surrounding their activities in the early nineteenth century. There is, as a result, a certain homeless quality to our understandings of Imperial Russian culture which I hope this history of one extremely productive home will help us correct. I seek to recontextualize the Russian intellectual history of this period—heretofore dominated by psychological approaches centered on alienation—within a cultural history that focuses on the domes-

<sup>6</sup> On the predominance of biography in Russian intellectual history and the relative neglect of the subject recently see Terence Emmons, "Russia Then and Now in the Pages of the American Historical Review and Elsewhere: A Few Centennial Notes," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (1995): 1144, 1149.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, ed. Dwight Macdonald, trans. Constance Garnett, introduction by Isaiah Berlin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 236; cf. Gertsen, *Sobranie*, IX:23.

tic realm's positive development as a sphere of distinction, agency, and memory in imperial society.

But what should a history of home life entail? Why have historians been fascinated by the Idealist tradition Lazhechnikov portrays, and what can Priamukhino's story help us understand about it? Before beginning my inquiry, a few more comments on its methods and historiographical context are in order.



Both the English word "home" and the Russian word *dom* can mean any space of residence, but it is their more specific designation of a familial residence that I have in mind here. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe saw an intensive elaboration of the social, political, and cultural space occupied by family life; and historians have analyzed this phenomenon in several different ways. First, they have seen the home as a social institution, as the bearer and producer of certain practices and ideals. A large body of literature, for example, speaks of the urban townhouse as the cradle of middle-class sociability and values.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, historians speak of domesticity as an ideal produced in public discourse. In particular, some scholars have seen the robust interest in home life that characterized the early part of the nineteenth century as an attempt to contain the realm of politics and reestablish paternal authority after the French Revolution.<sup>9</sup> Last but not least, historians have described the home as a capacious stage for modern self-creation and performance. Above all, write Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, "the home was imagined, in nineteenth-century domestic discourse, to provide a powerfully influential space for the development of character and identity."<sup>10</sup> Increasingly, historians are interested in domesticity's archival role in society as well and seek to understand how the home has both framed our understandings of the recent past and documented it.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> On homes as producers of values, see, e.g., Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Michelle Perrot, "The Family Triumphant," in *From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. Michelle Perrot, vol. 4 of *A History of Private Life*, ed. Phillipe Ariès and Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1990), 99–129, esp. 99–100; see also Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd, introduction to *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, ed. Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and*

It would be wrong to say that Russian history has no tradition of writing about the phenomenon of private life. Relatively early in the nineteenth century—because they feared that Russia's officious public record had ignored and suppressed important historical phenomena—Imperial Russian historians began to exploit personal archives. They created pioneering biographical studies of Russian thinkers, revealing an entire world of intimate intellectual activity that had heretofore escaped the public's attention. Yet historical interest in this intimate world was constrained by both political and polite pressures. Informants asked them to be discreet; censors blocked the discussion of certain names; and scholars themselves sometimes worried that their "excessive familiarity" with the personal lives of Russian thinkers was degrading the rights of privacy in Russia and the gender conventions built around them. Scholars were particularly careful to avoid injuring the domestic sensibilities of their era and used a variety of contortions to keep the names and reputations of women in particular out of the public eye.<sup>12</sup> In the end, the function of the histories of private life written in the nineteenth century was to justify and support the reputations of famous men, rather than to understand the genesis and function of the intimate theater of intellectual activity in Imperial Russia.

One effect of this historical reticence was to yield a bit too easily to a rapidly developing belief in modern Russia's homelessness. Russian literature throughout the imperial period expressed anxiety about Russian home life. To begin with, there was a tendency—very strongly expressed in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century memoir—to present the home as a bastion of patriarchy and backwardness in Russian life.<sup>13</sup> By the middle of the

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*History in Late Colonial India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 81–109.

<sup>12</sup> For leading examples of nineteenth-century intellectual biography, see P. V. Annenkov, *Nikolai Vladimirovich Stankevich: Perepiska ego i biografiia* (Moscow: Tipografiia Kat'kova, 1857); A. N. Pypin, *Belinskii, ego zhizn' i deiatel'nost', 1814–1876*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1876); P. Miliukov, "Liubov' u 'idealistov tridtsatykh godov,'" in *Iz istorii russkoi intelligentsii: Sbornik statei* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. E. Kolpinskogo, 1902), 73–168; A. Kornilov, *Molodye gody Mikhaïla Bakunina: Iz istorii russkogo romantizma* (Moscow: M. and S. Sabashnikov, 1915). With the exception of Kornilov, all of these authors avoid identifying the female protagonists of their story directly. I discuss this literature in John Randolph, "'That Historical Family': The Bakunin Archive and the Intimate Theater of History in Imperial Russia, 1780–1925," *Russian Review* 63 (October 2004): 583–91. Miliukov expresses his concerns about his contemporaries' "excessive familiarity" in "Liubov' u 'idealistov,'" 73–74. M. Gershenzon notes his contemporaries' "complete neglect" of women's history during the Idealist period in "Russkaia zhenshchina 30-x godov," *Russkaia mysl'* 12 (1911): 54–73, esp. 54–56.

<sup>13</sup> Studies based on gentry memoir tend to draw the home in dark, traditional terms: see Jes-

nineteenth century, this tradition was counterbalanced in Russian belles lettres by what Andrew Baruch Wachtel has called the “myth” of the happy noble home (whose function, he contends, was to shore up noble distinction in an era when that class’s primacy in Russian life was being threatened). At least partly in reply to this noble myth, however, harsher, more critical visions continued to thrive. Many of Russia’s most famous novels thematize familial conflict, for example, Ivan Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* (1862).<sup>14</sup> “We do not even have homes,” Petr Chaadaev announced dismally in his famous “First Philosophical Letter” of 1829, arguing that Russia’s cruel history had rendered it a nomad nation.<sup>15</sup>

One should be cautious, however, about taking such anxieties too literally. It is important to draw a distinction between the intensity of domestic conflict—real or imagined—and the absence of domestic values in a culture. To critique a home for falling short of the ideal, after all, is to pay indirect homage to some other, dearly held domestic norm. Increasingly, scholars are turning their attention to the familial, domestic frame surrounding much of Imperial Russian social thought.<sup>16</sup> From the moment Russian noblemen were given their liberty from obligatory service in 1762, the production of fancy homes became a distinguishing hallmark of noble culture.<sup>17</sup> Through advice manu-

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sica Tovrov, *The Russian Noble Family: Structure and Change* (New York: Garland, 1987); Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 122–47.

<sup>14</sup> On the powerful myth of the unhappy, as well as happy, family in Imperial Russian literature, see Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> See also Petr Iakovlevich Chaadaev, “Letters on the Philosophy of History: First Letter,” in *Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology*, ed. and trans. Marc Raeff (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1986), 162.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood*; Priscilla Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate: A Social and Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Mary Wells Caverder, “‘Kind Angel of the Soul and Heart’: Domesticity and Family Correspondence Among the Pre-Emancipation Russian Gentry,” *The Russian Review* 61 (July 2002): 391–408; Rebecca Friedman, *Masculinity, Autocracy, and the Russian University, 1804–1863* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), esp. chapter 5; Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *The Play of Ideas in Russian Enlightenment Theater* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 53–83; and Irina Paperno, ed., “Intimacy and History: The Herzen Family Drama Reconsidered,” forthcoming in 2007 as a special issue of *Russian Literature*. I review the wave of interest in estate life in post-Soviet Russia in John Randolph, “The Old Mansion: Revisiting the History of the Russian Country Estate,” *Kritika* 1, no. 4 (2000): 729–49.

<sup>17</sup> On this theme, discussed in more detail in chapter 1, see Priscilla Roosevelt, “Russian Estate Architecture and Noble Identity,” in *Architectures of Russian Identity 1500 to the Present*, ed. James Cracraft and Daniel Rowland (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 66–79; Roosevelt, *Russian Country Estate*.



als, law codes, and sentimental novels imported from abroad, belief in the “natural” virtues of domesticity—and their normative role as guides for the lives of modern men and women—began to be a commonplace of imperial culture in the early nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Political writers advanced the notion that the family was the basis of the imperial order, a point of view that both had some root in reality and was supported by the crown at the time.<sup>19</sup> Family chronicles, correspondences, and diaries began to accumulate in the spaces of home life, creating the materials from which later scholars would try to imagine the history of modern Russian society, independent of the records preserved by the state.<sup>20</sup>

After its purchase by the Bakunin family in 1779, Priamukhino became a particularly productive participant in this imperial domestic culture. Though the Bakunins had spent most of the eighteenth century living in the imperial capital of St. Petersburg, Mikhail Bakunin’s grandfather and grandmother decided to take their chances on country life. At first it does not seem to have gone particularly well. The family’s fortunes nearly collapsed under a combination of illness and debt. But in the 1790s the Bakunins recalled their youngest son, Aleksandr Mikhailovich Bakunin (1768?–1854), from imperial service; and thereafter Priamukhino became one of the most elaborately enlightened visions of home life the empire had yet seen.

Part I of my book explores the blossoming of this new domestic existence. Heretofore, scholars have relied on Aleksandr Kornilov’s *Young Years of Mikhail Bakunin* (1915)—a monumental work of prerevolutionary scholarship—for their understandings of the early years of Bakunin family life. Kornilov worked closely with the Bakunins themselves as he wrote his book, the first of a planned trilogy on the Bakunin family’s life. His explicit intention was to explore Priamukhino’s history as an “embryo of culture and society.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 8–42; and Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Alexander M. Martin, “The Family Model of Society and Russian National Identity in Sergei N. Glinka’s Russian Messenger (1808–1812),” *Slavic Review* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 28–49; Richard Wortman, “The Russian Imperial Family as Symbol,” in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, ed. Jane Burbank and David Ransel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 60–86.

<sup>20</sup> For examples of this, see Thomas Newlin, *The Voice in the Garden: Andrei Bolotov and the Anxieties of Russian Pastoral, 1758–1833* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 168–78; Randolph, “That Historical Family,” as well as chapter 4.

<sup>21</sup> Kornilov, *Molodye gody*, 29.

Even so, he devoted only a short amount of space—a few pages—to the earliest years of the Bakunins' existence at Priamukhino in the late eighteenth century. (Most of his portrait of family life before 1820 is based on poetry written later.)<sup>22</sup>

Fortunately, enough materials survive from these years to sketch the public ideals and private practices behind Priamukhino's initial development. Sometimes noble interest in estate life in the late eighteenth century is seen as a demonstrative withdrawal from imperial society—or even a theatrical display of alienation. Based on the materials in the Bakunin archive, I argue that this phenomenon is better understood as a state-sponsored theater of distinction: a privatization of the power and charisma heretofore associated with the imperial court.<sup>23</sup> Some of the earliest papers produced at Priamukhino document the Bakunins' desire to be seen as an exemplary family. In particular, as his numerous poems and projects show, young Aleksandr Bakunin sought to fashion his home as a laboratory for the production of useful social truths. Though far from unopposed within his own family, Aleksandr's idyllic, and ideological, vision of Priamukhino's role in society stimulated the family's development as a theater for intellectual activity and helped win the Bakunins a wide-ranging reputation as an ideal family.<sup>24</sup> When his children forged ties with an ambitious group of Moscow youths in the early 1830s, this studiously enlightened home soon participated in the creation of a new and radical tradition in Russian social thought: the romance of Russian Idealism.



Until the early nineteenth century, as Richard Wortman has shown, Imperial Russian notions of history and historical agency were dominated by epic “scenarios of power” produced by the imperial court. According to these narratives, the pace and direction of Russia's development were set by Russia's

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*, 1–81, of which the first ten pages are devoted to the late eighteenth century proper. The second volume of Kornilov's trilogy is A. Kornilov, *Godы stranstvii Mikhaïla Bakunina* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1925), while he died before he could complete the third. On Kornilov's life and interest in the Bakunins, see especially A. A. Levandovskii, *Iz istorii krizisa russkoi burzhuazno-liberal'noi istoriografii*: A. A. Kornilov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> See chapters 1–2, below. This interpretation builds off of the insights of Richard Wortman's study of imperial political culture, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995–2000), and trenchant observations about estate culture made by Priscilla Roosevelt in “Russian Estate Architecture and Noble Identity,” 66–67.

<sup>24</sup> See chapters 1–4, below.

emperors and empresses, who presented themselves as transcendent forces standing outside society.<sup>25</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, a new kind of modern history began to emerge in Russian literature. It took the form of a philosophical romance and surrounded a group of students and ex-students of Moscow University, sometimes called the "Idealists of the 1830s."<sup>26</sup> If the epic narratives surrounding the Romanov dynasty presented Russia's rulers as transcendent forces, the romance surrounding the Idealists emphasized their emergence from — and influence on — Russia's evolving social consciousness. These Idealists included in their number such radical celebrities as Aleksandr Herzen, Vissarion Belinsky, Mikhail Bakunin, and an independent-minded group of friends known loosely in Russian history as the "Stankevich circle," named after their charismatic leader, Nikolai Stankevich, who died in 1840.<sup>27</sup>

Where had this bold new group of men come from, and how had they become so distinguished and self-possessed? Why had they rejected imperial authority and tradition, in the name of their own social convictions? Almost none of these Idealists participated in the army or the court, Russia's traditional loci of power and distinction. Rather, they claimed to have been transformed and matured by philosophical studies they conducted first as students at Moscow University and then on their own private time. Central to this process was the startling practice of conducting their intimate affairs according to principles derived from German Idealist philosophy.

German Idealism was a philosophical movement that claimed to continue

<sup>25</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 1:1–10.

<sup>26</sup> Beginning in the 1840s, versions of this Idealist romance appeared in Russian fiction, criticism, memoir, and biography. For a sample from fiction, see the story "Andrei Kolosov" (1844) by Ivan Turgenev (I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 7–33; in criticism see N. G. Chernyshevskii, "Ocherki gogolevskogo perioda russkoi literatury," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. V. Ia. Kirpotin, vol. 3 (Moscow: OGIZ Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1947), 8–9 and 177–226, esp. 206–26. This essay was originally published in 1855–56. For memoir, see Herzen's *Past and Thoughts*, especially 229–53 (cf. Gertsen, *Sobranie*, IX:9–46); for biography see Annenkov, *N. V. Stankevich*. For examples of formal, scholarly use of the phrase "idealists of the 1830s" to describe this group, see, e.g., P. V. Annenkov, "Idealisty tridsat'kh godov," in *P. V. Annenkov i ego druž'ia* (St. Petersburg: A. S. Suvorin, 1892), 1–111 (this is about Herzen and Ogarev); Miliukov, "Liubov'."

<sup>27</sup> For stimulating portraits of the "men of the 1840s" as a group, see Berlin, "A Remarkable Decade"; Martin Malia, "What is the Intelligentsia?" *The Russian Intelligentsia*, ed. Richard Pipes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 448–53; Michael Confino, "On Intellectuals and Intellectual Traditions in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Russia," *Daedalus* (Spring 1972): 125–28. Berlin and Malia emphasize alienation as their founding feature, while Confino develops the interpretation advanced below: that their esprit de corps was rooted in social conventions of their time.

the work of the Königsberg philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Con- tending that previous philosophers had attempted things that exceeded the capacities of human reason, Kant sought to make the study of cognition, not the study of being, philosophy’s foundational concern. Though he acknowl- edged the power of empirical observation, he felt it needed to be undergirded by an understanding of reason’s formal limits and capabilities. “My question is,” he announced in his famous *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), “what we can hope to achieve with reason, when all the material and assistance of experi- ence is taken away.”<sup>28</sup> Though his language was notoriously technical and his methods abstract, Kant was profoundly interested in moral questions. He hoped to use his philosophy to establish firm principles that could guide hu- manity to the good life.

In particular, he believed that by determining the capabilities of human reason, he could help usher in a more mature era in human existence. Kant imagined a world populated by conscious, autonomous, and active people, united into a harmonious community by their reasoned willingness to follow the same moral law. Though Kant doubted that such an “ethical community” could ever be built on earth, given human frailty, he described it as a gov- erning norm toward which people should strive. As a model of what such a perfect society would look like, he picked the paternal household.<sup>29</sup>

Already in the 1790s, however, the authority of Kant’s methods was chal- lenged by a series of self-proclaimed successors. They felt it was possible to invent still clearer and more certain visions of reason’s life in the world, over- coming areas of uncertainty that Kant had left behind. They have been called Idealists, because they placed the study of mind, rather than matter, at the center of their philosophy and also because they believed—albeit for differ- ent reasons—that reality correlates to reason. The most illustrious authors within this post-Kantian tradition were Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), and Georg Wilhelm Fried- rich Hegel (1770–1831).<sup>30</sup> All of these men were prominent academicians,

<sup>28</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Preface [to the First Edition, 1781],” trans. F. Max Müller, *Basic Writings of Kant*, ed. Allen W. Wood (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 6.

<sup>29</sup> On Kant’s ideal of an “ethical community,” and his proposal of the paternal household as model, see Immanuel Kant, “Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,” *Religion and Ra- tional Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 135–36; Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy, 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 63–66; and Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany 1700–1815* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 301–14.

<sup>30</sup> On Kant and German Idealism in general, see Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lec- tures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,

in addition to being brilliant philosophers. In the early 1800s, their students began to establish a foothold in Russian universities and seminaries. Russian official tolerance of post-Kantian philosophy rested on the notion that its philosophical methods were less dangerous to religious orthodoxy and imperial authority than the rebellious, empirical reason championed by the French.<sup>31</sup>

The philosophical romance surrounding Russia's Idealists of the 1830s, however, soon threw doubt on this proposition. Not only did these charismatic students show a dangerously independent streak, they also seemed oblivious to the conventional limits of philosophical activity. In its native Germany, post-Kantian Idealism was practiced in public institutions, such as university lecture halls and scientific publications.<sup>32</sup> Russian analogues to this institutionalized Idealism existed, inside of the Imperial Academy; yet the most famous and charismatic traditions surrounding Russian Idealism were produced more intimately, on the stage of private life. Comic stories such as Lazhechnikov's—of a young man who wrote love letters in the language of Hegel—laced the growing literature about Idealism's development in Russia, and contemporaries were not entirely sure what to make of this phenomenon. On the one hand, this private cult of philosophy seemed to violate what many regarded to be the proper limits of abstract thought by pulling it so deeply into the sphere of intimate relations.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, in Herzen's authoritative judgment, as in Lazhechnikov's, there was something progressive—if comical—about this idealistic habit of “living through” philosophy. It had allowed its practitioners to break their subservience to the Empire's

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2003); Pinkard, *German Philosophy*; Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); idem, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987). On the definition of “Idealism,” see especially Beiser, *German Idealism*, 5–6.

<sup>31</sup> On the arrival of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy in Russia, see especially V. V. Zen'kovskii, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii*, vol. 1 (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1948); Z. A. Kamenskii and V. A. Zhuchkov, *Kant i filosofiiia v Rossii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994); Z. A. Kamenskii, *Russkaia filosofiiia nachala XIX veka i Shelling* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980); V. F. Pustarnakov, ed. and comp., *Filosofiiia Fichte v Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Russkii Khristianskii gumanitarnyi institut, 2000); D. I. Chizhevsky, *Gegel' v Rossii* (Paris: Dom knigi i Sovremennye zapiski, 1939).

<sup>32</sup> Recent scholarship presents the Idealist movement as a phenomenon of public and civic institutions: see Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society*, 300–323; Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. 230–68.

<sup>33</sup> For an extended example of this critique, see chapter 9, below. See also the unsettling judgments of this phenomenon in the stories of Ivan Turgenev, as analyzed by Jane Costlow, *Worlds within Worlds: The Novels of Ivan Turgenev* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 11–29.

religious and political dogmas. In the process it made them independent, "complete," and fully "modern" men (to borrow Herzen's phrases) and prepared their subsequent, autonomous role in Russian life.<sup>34</sup>

Until the end of the imperial period, the comic but heroic romance surrounding the "Idealists of the 1830s" was broadly accepted by liberal and radical opinion. In the early twentieth century, Pavel Miliukov expressed a common sentiment among historians when he pictured the Idealists as the "best people of their time" and the "spiritual fathers and grandfathers of the best people of our own time."<sup>35</sup> After the October Revolution, however, scholarly opinion began to have doubts about how to evaluate the private practice of philosophical Idealism among this small group of educated Russians in the 1830s. Broadly speaking, one may say that scholarly opinion has been divided into two camps. The predominant current of scholarly thought holds that Russia's Idealists are best understood as psychological types, whose biographies illustrate the political and social processes at work in the formation of modern Russian social thought.<sup>36</sup> For others, however, the historical romance surrounding this small group of individuals is simply a charismatic myth, whose effect is to take the intimate activities of a few talented but exceptional men and present them as milestones in the development of educated Russia as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, 236; cf. Gertsen, *Sobranie*, IX:23. On the broad influence of Herzen's judgments of this tradition, see Irina Paperno, "Sovetskii opyt, avtobiograficheskoe pis'mo i istoricheskoe soznanie: Ginzburg, Gertsen, Gegel," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 68 (2004): 102–27.

<sup>35</sup> Miliukov, "Liubov'," 73.

<sup>36</sup> See Berlin, "Remarkable Decade," 114–17, 119–21, 136–49, esp. 119; Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1965); Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975); Aileen Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin: A Study in the Psychology and Politics of Utopianism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). On Idealism as a form of modern mysticism, see Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), 14–16; Berlin, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," in Hardy and Hausheer, *Proper Study of Mankind*, 560–61, 580. Written in this way, such interpretations accorded with postwar evaluations of the legacy of Idealism in German history, where Idealism was presented as a dangerous expression of social frustrations: see Henri Brunschwig, *La crise de l'état prussien à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et la genèse de la mentalité romantique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1947); J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: Praeger, 1960); Karl Raimund Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963). See also Frederick Copleston's description of Idealism as a "metaphysics of reality" in *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 7, pt. 1, *Fichte to Hegel* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1963), 22.

<sup>37</sup> See Confino, "On Intellectuals and Intellectual Traditions," 117–49; Jane Burbank and