

Brian Horowitz

**FROM THE ANNALS OF THE LITERARY LIFE OF RUSSIA'S  
SILVER AGE: THE TEMPESTUOUS RELATIONSHIP OF  
S.A. VENGEROV AND M.O. GERSHENZON<sup>1</sup>**

Within Russia's Silver Age it is difficult to find two scholar intellectuals seemingly more alike than Mikhail Osipovich Gershenzon and Semen Afanas'evich Vengerov. By background, education and intellectual interests they were extremely similar. Both were born to Jewish families and educated at Russian universities. Both became major scholars of the work of Alexander Pushkin and historians of Russian culture of the first half of the nineteenth century. Politically, both shared a desire to transform Russian society. Despite these parallels, however, Gershenzon and Vengerov belonged to different generations and held divergent views about the purpose of art, Russian history, the role of the Russian intelligentsia and the meaning of the Russian revolution of October 1917. This article is an investigation of these differences, based on their correspondence from 1903–1920.<sup>2</sup>

Mikhail Osipovich Gershenzon (1869–1925), born in a Jewish family in Kishinev, the center of the Jewish Pale of Settlement, became one of Russia's greatest historians. Although his parents were not rich or especially educated – his father was an unsuccessful businessman and his mother did not work – Gershenzon graduated from Moscow University with a gold medal. Despite his high grades and the support of his mentor, Professor Pavel Vinogradov (later Sir Paul Vinogradoff, Professor of History at Oxford) Gershenzon was prevented from pursuing an academic career due to his official status as a Jew. Taking the road open to him, Gershenzon became an independent writer, and he achieved fame with his "novel-like" monographs about Russia's spiritual seekers and his insightful essays on the work of Alexander Pushkin. Hailed by admirers as the "Russian Carlyle", Gershenzon devoted over 250 items to the study of Russian intellectual and literary history. Among his most famous works are, *Istoriia molodoi Rossii* (1907), *P. Ia. Chaadaev: zhizn' i myshlenie* (1908), *Istoriicheskie zapiski* (1910), *Obrazy proshlogo* (1912), *Griboedovskaia Moskva* (1914) and *Mudrost' Pushkina* (1919). He was also active as a political observer. Gershenzon edited and contributed to *Vekhi*, the sensational collection of essays criticizing the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia (1909), and coauthored the famous

*Perepiska iz dvukh uglov* (1921) with the poet Viacheslav Ivanov. After the Bolshevik revolution, Gershenzon held important offices in the literary bureaucracy. He was the first President of the Moscow Union of Writers and head of the Literary Division of the Academy of Sciences from 1922–1925.

Semen Vengerov (1855–1920), critic, literary historian, bibliographer and Professor of Petersburg University, was born near Poltava in Lubny to educated parents; his father was a banker and his mother a German writer.<sup>3</sup> First certified as a lawyer, Vengerov studied literature at Iuriev University (Tartu), later doing graduate work at Petersburg University, although he never received a degree. By the mid 1870s Vengerov already started publishing articles and reviews which revealed his strong commitment to the populist ideology. His first serious work of literary study, *Russkaia literatura v ee sovremennykh predstavleniakh. Kritiko-biograficheskie etiudy*, about I. S. Turgenev appeared in 1875. In concert with his populist perspective, Vengerov devoted his major books to the heroes of the Russian intelligentsia. Among them, the most important are: *Istoriia noveishei russkoi literatury. Ot smerti Belinskogo do nashikh dnei* (1885) and *Geroicheskii kharakter russkoi literatury* (1911).

In addition to his scholarly oeuvre, Vengerov received acclaim for his bibliographical work. Vengerov was Russia's first serious bibliographer and under his direction many volumes of reliable bibliographical information about Russian culture were published. He also created the first organization committed to the compilation and publication of bibliography, the Book Chamber. His bibliographical labors are embodied in four works: *Kritiko-biograficheskii slovar' russkikh pisatelei i uchenykh*, 6 vols. (1886–1904); *Russkie knigi. S biograficheskimi dannymi ob avtorakh i perevodchikakh (1708–1893)*, 3 vols. (1895–1899); *Istochniki slovaria russkikh pisatelei*, 4 vols. (1900–1917); *Predvaritel'nyi spisok russkikh pisatelei i uchenykh i pervye o nikh spravki* (1915–1918). (Only 2 volumes appeared, although there are 33 thousand unpublished entries in Vengerov's archive in Pushkin House.) Vengerov also organized the first Pushkin seminars at Petersburg University (from 1906) which served as a center for the development of formalist literary scholarship.

Although individual literary critics in Russia from 1890–1920 were eclectic in method, nevertheless distinct critical schools were identifiable. The main criterion, which permits a rough classification of literary critics, is a critic's didacticism: does the critic interpret literature to further a political or religious program? Literary critics such as N. Nevedomskii, A. Volynskii and G. Plekhanov, who would be difficult to classify in terms of their method, can easily be identified according to their goal. Plekhanov was politically engagé, A. Volynskii was a proselytizer of spiritual values, while Nevedomskii was neutral to both. Nevedomskii preferred a criticism that treated the author's psychology or intention. Looking at the goal of a critic helps to clarify the differences between

the main tendencies in Russian criticism of the time: political, religious or psychological. The tempestuous relationship of Vengerov and Gershenzon exemplifies the conflict between politically committed critics and those inspired by spiritual convictions. Vengerov, a resolute populist, confronted Gershenzon, a religious thinker, in the prosaic business of literary criticism and historical studies.

The period in which Vengerov and Gershenzon worked was characterized by a general reevaluation of values. The values of didacticism and civic utility, which had exclusively guided the role and significance of literature since the 1850s, had finally come to an end and in their wake new religious and spiritual values were vying for ideological dominance. All of literature was up for grabs; not only the present and future, but also the past. Gershenzon and Vengerov participated in the boisterous struggle to control the interpretation of history. Vengerov zealously asserted the superiority of the populist school of criticism, which claimed that Russian literature was aesthetically beautiful because of its morally laudable political goals. Gershenzon attached himself to the Symbolist movement, promulgating the importance of literature primarily as a means of understanding the mystical and spiritual truths of the universe. These debates took place in the unlikely context of the investigation of the biographies of Russia's past literary and intellectual heroes: A. Pushkin, P. Chaadaev, I. Kireevsky, A. Herzen and V. Belinsky.

The dispute between these two figures was as much emotional as intellectual in nature. Besides their ideological orientations, each had an individual temperament which conditioned how they faced and reacted to various issues. Vengerov revealed a marked need to belong to a collective and was sympathetic to arguments of a moral bent. He attached himself to the populists early in his career and never deviated from their ideological boundaries. In populism Vengerov found the moral justification for his life and the collective support of the entire Russian intelligentsia. In exchange, however, Vengerov had to sacrifice those aspects of his personality which he could not share with the collective, i.e. his Jewish identity; Vengerov voluntarily converted to Russian Orthodoxy.

In contrast, Gershenzon was an individualist. He believed in a personal mystical religion of the cosmos which declared that every person was united through will with the destiny of the cosmos. To live correctly, Gershenzon claimed, is to follow personal feeling which originates in will. Thus, to be at one with the universe means to be an individual, single, inimitable and unique. Gershenzon himself was such an individual, and his personal transformation from *stetl* Jew to independent Russian intellectual reflects a conscious choice of identity. In addition, in his relation to his Jewish roots Gershenzon too was an individual. Although he did not practice Judaism, neither did he convert to

Russian Orthodoxy. Rather, he tried to fashion a personal religion of the cosmos which could substitute for his loss of Judaism and supplant any need to convert.

The relationship between Vengerov and Gershenzon started in earnest in 1905. Far from the spontaneous fury of the revolution, Vengerov was intensely organizing his six-volume *Sobranie sochinenii A.S. Pushkina*, which appeared from 1907–1914. Vengerov intended the project to be "a collection of Pushkin's works and an investigation of his life and art". To complete the scholarship promised by these goals, Vengerov amassed the leading experts on Pushkin of the time, in particular calling on Gershenzon to contribute articles about Pushkin and his contemporaries. In requesting an article on Pushkin's relationship to Chaadaev, Vengerov wrote Gershenzon, specifying his needs this way:

Über Чаадаев erwarte ich aus Ihrer geschätzten Feder ein anführliches Essay. Es muß das eine vollständige Monografie Чаадаев's sein, in welchem jedoch ganz besonders seine Beziehungen zu Pushkin hervorgehoben sein müssen.<sup>4</sup>

The reasons why Vengerov called upon Gershenzon are clear. Vengerov needed a scholar to treat Chaadaev and Pushkin's Decembrist friends and Gershenzon had just published essays about these figures; moreover, his historical approach was not unfamiliar to Vengerov.<sup>5</sup> Just as Vengerov, Gershenzon investigated writers of primary and secondary importance in order to capture the general worldview of an entire epoch. To focus on Pushkin did not entail a drastic shift in approach; Gershenzon could still adhere to his preferred biographical-sociological method. All that his work with Vengerov involved was a change of emphasis toward the poet.

During the period of his cooperation with Vengerov (1905–1910), Gershenzon's attitude toward Pushkin and especially toward scholarship on poetry radically evolved. Having written one article on Pushkin's relationship with Chaadaev and another on the poet's friendship with Pavel Nashchokin for Vengerov, Gershenzon requested a change of roles.<sup>6</sup> Instead of investigating Pushkin's biography, Gershenzon craved a chance to analyze the literature directly. In a letter from May 5, 1906 Gershenzon writes,

...Но что мне было бы особенно по сердцу, это написать большую вступительную статью к Евг[ению] Онегину историко-эстетического свойства, – дать широкий анализ истории, концепции, содежания и формы поэмы.<sup>7</sup>

Although *Evgenii Onegin* had already been portioned out to another scholar, Gershenzon got his chance with "The Queen of Spades". In his article accompanying the publication of the story in volume four of *The Collected Works*, Ger-

shenson demonstrated his new metaphysical approach to the study of literature. Analyzing the psychology of the protagonist Hermann, Gershenson held that through Hermann, Pushkin presents his elemental, vitalistic philosophy of existence. Gershenson explains:

Пушкин как бы хочет сказать; мы все ходим ежеминутно готовые для драмы; наша насыщенная страстью душа жадно ищет в мире пищи для своей страсти – так жадно, что даже тень вещи способна соблазнить ее, и тогда она мгновенно вспыхивает вся и сгорает в мучительном счастье, одна медленнее, другая сразу, как этот Германн.<sup>8</sup>

Pushkin, Gershenson claimed, was the real-life prototype for Hermann. As a poet, he appeared calm and rational, but he too was vulnerable to losing his rationality through an explosion of passion or artistic inspiration. In addition, Gershenson drew wide-sweeping metaphysical conclusions: Pushkin and Hermann represented man's fate, man was either hot – blessed with inspiration and thus vulnerable to insanity – or cold and stolid, as were most people. In Gershenson's view, Pushkin, like all poets, professed a philosophy of unlimited, anarchistic freedom for humanity.

Although Vengerov accepted the article for his collection, he objected to Gershenson's exclusive focus on Hermann to the exclusion of the other characters. In a letter from December 21, 1909 Vengerov tried to correct Gershenson's exclusive preoccupation with Hermann, writing,

Предисловие к 'Пиковой Даме', конечно, пришлю Вам. Оно – очень интересно, но Вы ничего не сказали о старухе как о психологическом типе. По моему, 'Пиковая Дама' – самое гениальное в всемирной литературе изображение старческого эгоизма.<sup>9</sup>

It is not surprising that Gershenson and Vengerov focused on different aspects of the story. In fact, their approaches clashed head-on. For Vengerov, literature presented moral instruction; it commanded readers to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of others less fortunate. For Gershenson, Pushkin's works were philosophical expositions in which the poet unconsciously related eternal truths of human existence, truths about passion, the spirit and the cosmic forces guiding all the universe.

Vengerov and Gershenson's opposing image of Pushkin can be clearly seen in their two interpretations of Pushkin's poem, "Я памятник себе воздвиг нерукотворный..." Agreeing that the poem represents Pushkin's "last will and testament", both critics share the view that in it Pushkin expresses his ideological credo. According to Vengerov, in this, his last statement on the value of

literature, Pushkin reveals his mature opinion that poetry should serve the people.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Pushkin repudiates his earlier views of art for art's sake and at the end of his life willy-nilly attaches himself to the great course of Russian literature.

In contrast, Gershenzon considers the poem as Pushkin's "sign" of resignation before those who interpret his poetry as having a didactic function. According to Gershenzon, the poet uses irony, which undercuts the poem's apparent meaning, and therefore, Pushkin's real credo – art for art's sake – is directly opposed to the literal message of the work. If Pushkin had been serious about serving the people, Gershenzon claims, then,

...поэт стал на точку зрения 'черни': он гордится пользой своего искусства, а не им самим; он видит в нем средство, а не цель. Такая метаморфоза, как завершение художественной деятельности, если она сознательна, была бы равносильна самоубийству.<sup>11</sup>

Following this line of reasoning, Gershenzon proposes that the poem contains two views of glory, one of glory deserved, and the other a vulgar glory. Pushkin accepts the glory he deserves for writing wonderful poetry, but rejects any glory for having served the people.

The differences between these two interpretations of Pushkin paralleled those between Vengerov and Gershenzon themselves, for each found in Pushkin an image corresponding to his own personal and intellectual viewpoint. For his part, Vengerov discovered in Pushkin a civic poet who saw his primary role in being useful to society and furthering the goals of justice, equality and freedom. Gershenzon, on the contrary, fashioned an anti-positivist philosopher. His Pushkin strongly defended the idea of art for art's sake.<sup>12</sup>

Gershenzon arrived at his conclusions by applying his method of analyzing literature, entitled *Slow Reading* (медленное чтение). Gershenzon had first employed *Slow Reading* as a method for retrieving new biographical facts about Pushkin through a close reading of his lyrics in essays such as *Severnaia liubov' Pushkina* (1907) and *Pushkin i Princess E.K. Vorontsova* (1909). By 1910, though, he began to use it as a method for extrapolating Pushkin's religious worldview. In Gershenzon's opinion *Slow Reading* offered the critic the chance to read into the poet's work, to derive the ideal vision lying beneath the text's exterior form. In his 1919 programmatic essay, *Videnie poeta*, Gershenzon explains the role of the critic in reading literature, arguing that

художественная критика – не что иное, как искусство медленного чтения, т.е. искусство видеть сквозь пленительность формы видение художника. Толпа быстро скользит по льду, критик идет медленно и видит глубоководную жизнь. Зада-

ча критика – не оценивать произведение, а, узрев сам, учить и других видеть видение поэта, вернее, учить всех читать медленно, так чтобы каждый мог увидеть, потому что каждый воспримет это по-своему.<sup>13</sup>

Gershenzon's approach focused on the critic's subjective reading of the poet. Central to his technique was the ahistorical extraction of ideas and leitmotifs which supposedly revealed Pushkin's actual intention. By reading extra-carefully, the reader was supposed to enter into Pushkin's psychology and grasp those ideas Pushkin would not, or could not express directly for "fear of being branded as insane". Thus, Gershenzon, using a subjective and intuitive method, thought the practitioner of Slow Reading had exclusive access to Pushkin's ideal, transcendent worldview.

Vengerov's method of studying literature was quite different. Educated in an age dominated by populism and positivism, Vengerov clung to the idea that literature had a didactic function, to improve the moral climate of society. In contrast to his teachers, however, Vengerov did not subordinate aesthetics to ethics, but considered aesthetics and the pleasure received from art as proof of a work's genius. The best works, he claimed, were those in which aesthetics and ethics were perfectly joined. In his 1911 lecture, "V chem ocharovanie russkoi literatury XIX veka", he clearly articulates his theory: "И мне представляется, что основная задача всякой истории новой русской литературы к тому и сводится, чтобы выявить эту нравственную красоту, чтобы показать, как в новой русской литературе высоко-гармонично сочетались эстетика с этикой, художественное совершенство с нравственной силой".<sup>14</sup>

Vengerov thought he found the synthesis of artistic merit and moral virtue in writers to whom he devoted full monographs: Ivan Turgenev, Vissarion Belinsky, Nikolai Gogol and Konstantin Aksakov. These writers were able to put forth their views in such a way that they were able to galvanize and influence society as a whole. The aesthetic beauty of their creations was indisputably equal to the moral message Vengerov found.

Since he believed in the potentially transformative power of the idea, Vengerov held that he was an "idealist". But, he added, an idealist of a particular type – an "idealist-realist". Antithetical both to the Marxist view that class membership defines the historian's perspective and the view that ideas exist for their own sake, independent of historical circumstances, Vengerov claimed that an idea's significance depended on its useful effect on society. For Vengerov, individuals are important not for the originality of their thought, but for their ability to embody ideas important to a whole generation. In his evaluation of Belinsky, for example, Vengerov writes: "Никакое преклонение пред Белинским не должно заглушать того факта, что мысли, которые он высказывал с таким огромным талантом и силою, были мыслями целого круга людей,

его вдохновляющих. И этот факт не только "потому" не нужно затупевывать, что он есть правда, а еще и потому, что в нем решительно нет ничего такого, что бы умаляло значение Белинского. Ведь самые-то настоящие великие люди те, которые не сами по себе, а отражают великие эпохи".<sup>15</sup> Vengerov's view of literature as reflecting great epochs and only secondarily as products of individuals was the legacy of the positivist school of Alexandr Pypin. The positivist approach, which was associated with ethnography, tended to see literature as merely source material for studying the history of social ideas in Russian culture.

With this view of art and history, Vengerov came into conflict with Gershenzon, who believed that the individual personality is always greater than the ideas expressed. Gershenzon claimed that an individual is always psychically "holistic", which means that his whole being – the intellectual, emotional, conscious and unconscious aspects of his personality – was reflected in everything he said and did. Ideas, therefore, are only one aspect of a person and thus, if studied in isolation, give a distorted picture of an individual. In order really to know an individual, Gershenzon asserted, the historian has to study all the spheres of his being, especially his personal life. Using personal documents, such as letters, diaries and miscellaneous jottings, Gershenzon perceived the internal struggles and religious propensities of Russia's most important nineteenth-century writers and thinkers.

In his 1908 biography of Petr Chaadaev, entitled *P. Ia. Chaadaev, zhizn' i myshlenie*, Gershenzon claimed to have rediscovered the entire man. What needed to be studied, Gershenzon wrote, was "...не эти частные его взгляды, а общий дух его учения".<sup>16</sup> Instead of the critic of tsarism, Gershenzon interpreted Chaadaev primarily as a religious philosopher. Chaadaev's real teaching, social mysticism, Gershenzon claimed, was the view that society, in its quest for social harmony, unconsciously served God's aims, and that history was the ever greater realization of God's religious purpose for mankind. Thus, although one aspect of Chaadaev might give the impression that he was a political thinker, his entire person revealed a seeker of God.

In his 1910 monograph on the Slavophiles, *Istoricheskie zapiski*, Gershenzon claimed to have recovered Ivan Kireevsky's "holistic teaching". According to the historian, Kireevsky's true contribution to Russian thought was not as a religious apologist of Orthodoxy, but primarily as a psychologist of the human spirit. He was the first to understand that "в человеке есть нечто компактное, первозданное, основное, – именно его нравственная личность, т.е. определенный состав чувств, пристрастий, склонностей, – что ею определяется весь человек и что только в ней его истина".<sup>17</sup> In developing his own worldview, Gershenzon borrowed selectively from Kireevsky. Paradoxically, in view of Gershenzon's promise to consider the "whole" person, Ger-

shenzon amputated from Kireevsky's oeuvre the philosopher's focus on Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian people, and he ignored Kireevsky's writings on Russian history. Gershenzon was interested only in those aspects of the Slavophile's teaching which he could apply synchronically to the spiritual development of individuals: his idea of dreams, personal holism and the emotional sources for thinking.

In addition to the essays on Ivan Kireevsky and Iurii Samarin, Gershenzon included in *Istoricheskie zapiski* an essay about Nikolai Gogol's *Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druž'iami*, claiming that civic critics, such as Vengerov, had distorted Gogol's message, which was actually an attempt to revive the spiritual character of Russian life. In Gershenzon's opinion, Gogol and Vissarion Belinsky were identical in their motivations – the desire to transform Russia – the only difference between them was their method of action. While Belinsky chose to effect changes on the exterior plane of life, i.e., in the realm of politics, Gogol, believed that "единственно реальная движущая сила истории – душа отдельного человека: весь быт общества, в свою очередь могущественно влияющий на индивидуальную психику, определяется нравственным уровнем, на котором стоят его отдельные члены; стало быть, все старания, имеющие целью усовершенствование общей жизни, должны быть устремлены на исправление отдельных душ".<sup>18</sup> In Gershenzon's view, Gogol believed that if every man occupies himself with the perfection of his own spirit, if every man lives as a true Christian, then society will raise its moral level automatically and organically reach the highest step of perfection.

Gershenzon's perspective was conditioned in part by the age in which he was writing. Closely aligned with the Symbolists, Gershenzon held that all men were religious by nature. In their every action or thought they unconsciously expressed the "spiritual holism" believed inherent to every individual. This holism, Gershenzon claimed, was based on a pantheistic unity of the cosmos, a unity which insured that everything was linked together. Thus, all thinkers, whatever their outlook might seem, were in fact a priori struggling for religious unity. Faithful to this premise, Gershenzon placed Gogol before Belinsky and Kireevsky before Herzen as more important thinkers, since the former supposedly internalized in their life and thought the truth that man is endowed with a need for religion and they founded a moral program which conformed to this truth.

Not surprisingly Vengerov responded negatively to Gershenzon's biographies, objecting not only to his images of Russia's heroes, but also to his scholarly methodology. In his review of Russian literature for the year 1909 Vengerov lashed out at Gershenzon, writing in the January 1 issue of *Russkie vedomosti*.

В 1909 году к ним (Веховцам, В.Н.) присоединился М.О. Гершензон и завел несколько запоздавшую тяжбу по поводу «Переписки» Гоголя с Белинским и Пыпиным. Этот даровитый писатель стал вообще в последнее время на опаснейший путь «нового освещения» явлений, только и интересных в своей исторической перспективе. Чаадаева он нам рисует не того, статья которого, по единственно верному определению Герцена, была «выстрелом в глухую ночь», а какого-то совершенно чужого общественности мистика, каким его никто не знал. Киреевского он нам дает не того, который основал реальное славянофильство, а того, образ которого приходится заново создавать по обрывкам неизвестных дотоле писем.<sup>19</sup>

Vengerov found Gershenzon's de-politicized, religious interpretations of Russia's heroes odious because they completely contradicted the traditional, intensely political conception of Russian intellectuals. Vengerov's Belinsky, following Chernyshevsky's work, is depicted as the father of Russian liberalism; his idea of Chaadaev, following Herzen, is as a political opponent to tsarist absolutism, and even his conception of Gogol follows the traditional interpretation set down by Belinsky. In his book on Gogol, *Pisatel'-Grazhdanin (N.V. Gogol')*, Vengerov, in interpreting the *Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druž'iami*, resolutely sides with Belinsky and his famous "Pis'mo k Gogoliu". In one place Vengerov even quotes it, writing, "...можно только всецельно слиться в одном чувстве с Белинским, когда он, задыхаясь от страшного негодования, исторически крикнул Гоголю в своем письме: Проповедник кнута, апостол невежества, поборник обскурантизма и мракобесия, панегирист татарских нравов, — что вы делаете!"<sup>20</sup>

Vengerov, however, wanting to soften the personal impact of his negative review (he and Gershenzon were still friends and the latter was working for Vengerov as his Moscow representative for the Pushkin volume), wrote a personal apology to Gershenzon a week later, on January 7, 1910: "Надеюсь, что Вы не обиделись на меня за статью в «Русск[их] вед[омостях]». Назвавши Вас 'даровитым' писателем (я очень скуп на подобного рода эпитеты) и отметивши Ваш уход из «Вестн[ика] Европы», я, думается, сделал все, чтобы указать, что разница общественных взглядов не мешает мне ценить и любить Вас".<sup>21</sup>

Their conflict over the study of Russian history was conditioned by their divergent views of the role of the Russian intelligentsia. The 1909 publication of *Vekhi* brought these differences out into the open.<sup>22</sup> In sending a copy to Vengerov, Gershenzon did not anticipate the strong reaction which the volume would elicit. In a letter of March 25, 1909 Gershenzon enthusiastically informs Vengerov about the volume's popularity: "'Вехи' шумят и идут — как Леонид Андреев. Воображаю, что говорят в кругах Рус[ского] бог[атства]. Вооб-

ще, бранить будут много. Сегодня Игнатов в Рус[ских] вед[омостях] на двух страницах исповедует свою тупость по поводу 'Вех'".<sup>23</sup>

In his reply Vengerov describes his initial feelings based, however, only on hearsay:

'Вехи' еще не читал серьезно, а так только проглядел. Рад за Вас лично, если они шумят, и т[аким] обр[азом] дают возможность появиться второму тому<sup>24</sup>. Но в качестве неискоренимого 'общественника' не радуюсь: к русской интеллигенции у меня только одно отношение – я бесконечно пред ней преклоняюсь и не знаю, за что ее нужно так дьявольски бранить. Не люблю я также ладану, а его в 'Вехах', кажется, достаточно. Говорю все это, однако, без сколько-нибудь детального ознакомления с сборником: я не больше как разрезал книжку, да еще читал вчерашнюю статью Левина.<sup>25</sup> До поездки в Москву прочитаю книгу основательно и буду с Вами драться персонально.<sup>26</sup>

In his next letter to Gershenzon, following a close reading of *Vekhi*, Vengerov had harsher words:

Если хватит настроения, буду с Вами драться до крови из-за 'Вех'. Все теперь на самом опасном из всех литературных путей – на пути Акима Волынского. К счастью, Вы свободны от того, что делает Волынского гадким – Вы пишете не под влиянием личных и мелких побуждений. Но все равно, – бесплодно и губительно ругать то, что русской литературе сообщает ее осиянность. Вся красота русской литературы в призыве к подвигу, а вы и на подвиг и на призыв к нему плюете. Впрочем, довольно – до устной схватки.<sup>27</sup>

In his reply Gershenzon revealed amazement at Vengerov's hostility, demonstrating that he felt he had been misunderstood. "Мне очень жаль, что и Вы так превратно судите обо мне, но объясняться я мог бы только устно; а тут жена не пускает меня в Петербург из-за холеры. Когда-нибудь и эта вещь станет на свое место, как все вещи. Я совершенно равнодушно читаю газетную брань, но лично такие ошибочные обвинения меня волнуют, т.е., со стороны близких людей, которые, как я думаю, непременно бы сочувствовали, если бы поняли. Видно, сделать себя понятным, не так легко".<sup>28</sup>

In his reply Vengerov jokingly continues the dialog, challenging Gershenzon to be as confident in life as he is in print: "Напрасно Вы боитесь холеры: мрут от нее только те мужики, от которых 'Вехи' спасают интеллигенцию, и потому что они этой самой интеллигенции не слушаются. А

которые ежели интеллигенты и сырой воды не пьют, так тех холера совсем и не берет. А по сему хорошо, если бы Вы съездили в Петербург на денек. Подрались бы с Вами основательно. Для успокоения страхов Вашей супруги можно было бы даже эту драку производить в Сестроречке, где я пребываю на даче и где холеры пока нет."<sup>29</sup>

Although the exchange of letters is entertaining and gives us an insiders's view of the frisky interaction of these two men, there are some points which need clarification. Why exactly did Gershenzon think he was misunderstood and why did Vengerov find nothing redeemable in Gershenzon's *Vekhi* article, "Tvorcheskoe samosoznanie?" On Gershenzon's side, it seems that he naively believed his article was not, as so many thought, predominantly a criticism of the intelligentsia, but actually consisted of well-intended advice for its revival. The message he was propagating was that, by embracing the impersonal ideals of "equality and justice and sacrifice for the people", the intellectual had forsaken his egoism, which is the motivating force of all things. Unfortunately this selflessness had fragmented the intellectual's personality, severing the unity between will and consciousness and creating psychological cripples. In *Vekhi* Gershenzon explains the result of an impersonal ideology:

Что делала наша интеллигентская мысль последние полвека? – Я говорю, разумеется, об интеллигентской массе. – Куча революционеров ходила из дома в дом и стучала в каждую дверь: 'Все на улицу! Стыдно сидеть дома!' – и все создания высыпали на площадь, хромые, слепые, безрукие: ни одно осталось дома. Полвека толкутся они на площади, голоса и перебраниваясь. Дома – грязь, нищета, беспорядок, но хозяину не до этого. Он на людях, он спасает народ – да оно и легче и занятнее, нежели черная работа дома.<sup>30</sup>

Not all intellectuals were crippled, however, and Gershenzon distinguished between healthy individuals and diseased ones, between those who followed their personal feeling and those who aped the ideas of others. The well-being of society, Gershenzon warned, depended on the individual strength of each of its members. Only the moral improvement of every single individual would correct the flaws in society as a whole. Gershenzon's political thinking reveals the influence of Lev Tolstoy, whose effect on Gershenzon's entire worldview was greater than one supposes. Gershenzon not only accepted Tolstoy's idea of personal morality, but he also absorbed his rational approach to religion and even his idealization of the peasants.<sup>31</sup>

As his review and personal letters show, Vengerov was personally stung by the venom of *Vekhi's* criticism which he felt was "black ingratitude" toward the intelligentsia. In his review he exclaimed, "...с небывалым озлоблением, с какой-то, прямо можно сказать, яростью напустились на русскую интел-

лигенцию и ее представительницу – литературу".<sup>32</sup> Vengerov's reaction was predicated on his image of the intelligentsia as the sole element responsible for all the social and spiritual improvement of Russian life and thus undeserving of such scathing criticism. Lauding the intelligentsia for its unassailable "striving for an ideal", Vengerov claimed that the intelligentsia was motivated by self-sacrifice and the denial of personal happiness in the name of higher moral values. In his 1911 book, *Geroicheskiĭ kharakter russkoi literatury*, Vengerov thwarts the *Vekhi* notion of individualism, praising the intelligentsia's traditional imperative of serving the collective:

Существенным элементом этой тоски является глубокое сознание, что на каждом человеке лежит обязанность так или иначе искоренять зло мира. Отсюда прямой вывод – личное счастье или преступно, или, в лучшем случае, пошло, ибо всякий должен быть борцом за правду.<sup>33</sup>

Vengerov's conflict with Gershenzon was clearly a microcosm of the heated debates elicited by *Vekhi* between the religious-inclined thinkers and the politically left-leaning members of the intelligentsia. Gershenzon, nodding to his colleagues, the Silver-Age religious philosophers, claimed that social improvement had to begin with individual growth and moral regeneration, while Vengerov offered the traditional populist idea that the intelligentsia's opposition to the government and self-sacrifice for the people would bring about political reform.

Interestingly, Vengerov's rejection of *Vekhi* reveals how fixed his goals had remained over time, since ideologically his position closely resembled his debate with the decadents a decade earlier. Criticizing decadent poetry in 1897 for its "apotheosis of egoism" and its solipsistic admiration for the "spiritless principle of beauty", Vengerov denounced its detachment from the social needs of Russian life. In the same way, in 1910 Vengerov faulted *Vekhi* for its emphasis on individual self-actualization and neglect for the social struggle.

Once his initial anger over *Vekhi* had calmed, however, Vengerov found a way to defuse these two threatening movements and attach them to the mainstream of Russian culture. According to Vengerov, by 1910 the former decadents had become religious seekers, aiming to transform Russia's political and social landscape<sup>34</sup> and the writers of *Vekhi*, although appearing apolitical, were actually trying to revive the intelligentsia's spiritual legacy:

И удивительная вещь: как только вы, анализируя историко-литературное значение 'Вех', становитесь на такую единственнонаучную, генетическую точку зрения, – совершается своего рода чудо: 'Вехи' не только не являются тогда режущим ухо диссонансом, а напротив того – входят, как органическое звено, в общий призыв русской интеллигенции и

русской литературы к подвижничеству. Углубить свое самосознание, работать над своею личностью – позвольте господа, да ведь это страшно-знакомые звуки, ведь мы тут встретились со старою, старою знакомою – с критически-мыслящей личностью Лаврова, которая в свою очередь только в научной форме повторила то, к чему призывал Белинский. И Лавров, и 'Вехи' совершенно одинаково все сводят к самосознанию личности, одинаково взваливают на личность всю тяжесть всемирно-исторического процесса!<sup>35</sup>

Vengerov's acceptance of *Vekhi* seemingly reverses his initial hostility. Thus, Gershenzon had been right all along in saying that had Vengerov understood, he would have agreed with *Vekhi*. If, however, Gershenzon meant by agreement that he was merely repeating Lavrov and calling attention to the intelligentsia's small flaws and was not repudiating the revolutionary struggle, then why did he so vehemently rail against the intelligentsia and its goal of uniting with the people to overthrow the tsar? Why, for example, did Gershenzon write that inflammatory anti-revolutionary phrase:

Каковы мы есть, нам не только нельзя мечтать о слиянии с народом, – бояться его мы должны пуще всех казней власти и благословлять эту власть, которая одна своими штыками и тюрьмами еще ограждает нас от ярости народной.<sup>36</sup>

The points of agreement and disagreement over *Vekhi* were in fact simplified by both Vengerov and Gershenzon and could never have been so easily resolved if treated in all their true complexity.

The revolutionary period upset the established roles of their friendship. In *Vekhi* Gershenzon had argued against political solutions to the problems of society, proposing instead slow improvement through the spiritual regeneration of individuals. Now, in 1917 Gershenzon supported the October revolution. This change astounded Vengerov who, in concluding a letter from January 22, 1918, confronted Gershenzon concerning the latest rumors, writing,

В заключение хочу спросить Вас: что Wahrheit и что Dichtung в нелепом, по-моему, слухе, однако очень упорном – что Вы и Шестов стали большевиками! Из презрения, что ли, к действительно обанкротившейся интеллигенции?<sup>37</sup>

Although Gershenzon never answered Vengerov directly, he was hurt by accusations that he supported the Bolsheviks. His point of view, he insisted, was more complex than the "for or against" attitude which many intellectuals of the time offered. Gershenzon was not a Bolshevik, although many conservative

intellectuals did portray him that way. Instead he was uncertain. Sympathizing with the individual "man suffering today", he also knew the importance of the abstract values of Russian statehood and might. Although in the end he threw in his lot with the Bolsheviks, such a decision was mainly motivated by the promise of bringing ultimate justice and redress to "crimes centuries old".<sup>38</sup> Gershenzon's support for the revolution can probably be explained by his experience under tsarism. As a Jew, he had faced persecution, and therefore he lent his sympathies to the party which would, he believed, truly transform the people and the state, ending once and for all Russia's intransigent religious discrimination.

Gershenzon's support for the revolution, however, signifies to a great extent a repudiation of his position in *Vekhi*. In this instance, Gershenzon had taken up Vengerov's position, proposing that political action be used to transform society. Vengerov, for his part, did not support the Bolsheviks for fear that a destruction of the old world would mean unimaginable suffering and desecration of culture. Unfortunately, their correspondence is silent about these political reversals.

During the Civil-War period, Vengerov and Gershenzon found themselves reunited emotionally. In the face of ensuing political, social, economic and cultural changes in the new Soviet state, these two individuals now had more in common than differences. They were both already intellectuals of the "old world", suffering from ill health, famine and cultural obsolescence. Their emotional distance from the state gave them the chance to sum up their relationship and put their differences in a new perspective. In addition, appreciations for the revolution had engendered in Gershenzon a new attitude toward literature. No longer was the study of literature itself important; of far more importance was his relationship with his friends, his feelings for the individual person and the spirit within. In a letter from July 23, 1919, Gershenzon shares his sympathy for Vengerov:

Благодарю Вас сердечно за Вашу книгу.<sup>39</sup> Вы знаете, я не могу быть согласен с нею; но вот, разрезал я ее и опять читал знакомые страницы: что до того, что мы разных мыслей! Главное то, что сердце у Вас на месте, болеет и любит как должно в этой серьезной жизни, — это главное. Мысли раздаются, борются, гибнут, — их судьба — судьба вещи: истинно-сущего в человеке только и есть, что целостный дух его, и особенно сердце. Вы хороший, добрый человек, и то доброе, что от Вас входит в Вашу мысль, есть ее правда, ее правота. Оттого я люблю не только Вас, но и Ваши книги, Ваши часто для моего разума неверные мысли. Так я всегда Вас читал, но никогда не чувствовал этого так ярко, как этот раз. Может быть, наученный опытом этих лет. Верные наблюдения, правильные мысли — как изделия: то, что сделал

и умеет делать человек на пользу и употребление. А я уже смотрю не на изделия его рук, – Бог с ними! Столько накоплено изделий, и с каждым днем множатся; столько напечатано верных и тонких наблюдений, остроумных сопоставлений, блистательных соображений! Смотрю на самого человека, на его лицо, слушаю его голос: каков он-то сам внутри себя? Это одно и важно. Оттого-то я Вас и люблю. И о себе самом так думаю, о своих изданиях и о самом себе. Умны ли мои мысли, заняты ли мои книги – не в них ли дух подлинной человечности, т.е. серьезности, искренности, доброты: в этом все дело.<sup>40</sup>

Gershenzon's view of the relation between literature and life had indeed changed. Perhaps due to the tragic experiences of the Bolshevik revolution and the Civil War, Gershenzon had become a sceptic. Ideas, he now understood, were merciless and impersonal. Only living, holistic individuals were capable of pursuing a politics of love which could transform human consciousness. In short, Gershenzon realized that to arrive at a better world, one had to take a different route than that offered by culture.

Vengerov also revealed his personal feelings in his final letter to Gershenzon, sharing all his woes with his friend.

Получил я своевременно Ваше письмо писанное по поводу присылки Вам моих книжек. Оно меня глубоко тронуло своею сердечностью, так тронуло, как Вы, может быть, и не ожидали. Ибо безмерно я теперь одинок. Остались, правда, у меня бесконечно дорогие существа – дети мои, и если я всегда их любил, то теперь вдвое. Но дети всегда остаются детьми и ничто не может заменить жены, да еще такой, как Роза Александровна – одна из самых возвышенных натур, которых я когда-либо встречал в своей жизни. В добавление дети мои, к моему великому огорчению, – столь хрупкие души, столь непривычны переносить невзгоды жизни, что я никогда себе не позволяю делиться с ними горестными ощущениями моими. Напротив того, всегда бодрюсь и не подаю виду. И горечь все копится и копится. Соберусь в Москву – может быть, поделюсь с Вами своими переживаниями. Ваше письмо дает мне основание думать, что Вы их выслушаете сочувственно. А пока еще раз спасибо.<sup>41</sup>

Although right before his death Vengerov had become emotionally close to Gershenzon, this reconciliation concealed new disagreements in their world-views. Facing the common difficulties of life in post-revolutionary Russia, they approached the prospect of Bolshevik rule with differing attitudes. Vengerov, an epigone of populism, ended his life disappointed with the revolution, holding

that the Bolsheviks had distorted his vision of social justice and moral beauty. Gershenzon was also disappointed, but not only because a social utopia had not been realized, but, more importantly, because he had come to the view that the individual's true needs were themselves antithetical to culture, whether tsarist or Bolshevik.

The same differences that had characterized their relationship throughout their careers were felt here as well. In contrast to Vengerov, who placed all his hopes in reason and in culture, in the *Perepiska iz dvukh uglov* (1921) Gershenzon expressed his longstanding intuition that culture would never deliver on its promises; it would never bring the individual his happiness nor society a moral order. Only a world that superseded reason and culture, that overcame them, leading to a post-cultural, spiritual world would result in human perfection. Thus by the end of his life Gershenzon ceased writing, thereby repudiating culture, while Vengerov, emboldened by unshakable optimism about reason and culture's virtues, continued the enormous self-assigned task of collecting a bibliographical reference for every book and every writer who ever wrote in Russian.

### Notes

- 1 The author acknowledges the editorial aid and useful suggestions of Professor Stanley Rabinowitz.
- 2 S. Vengerov's letters to M. Gershenzon are located in Gershenzon's archive in the Russian National Library-fond: 746-30-7. Gershenzon's letters to Vengerov are located in Vengerov's archive in the Pushkin House-fond: 377.
- 3 Pauline Wengeroff wrote *Memoiren einer Grossmutter*, vols 1-2, 1908-1910.
- 4 S. Vengerov to M.O. Gershenzon, 13 April, 1906.
- 5 See Gershenzon's articles, "Molodost' P.Ia. Chaadaeva", *Nauchnoe slovo*, 6 (1905): 83-121, and "Sem'ia Dekabristov", *Byloe*, 10 (1906), 288-317.
- 6 Gershenzon's articles, "Chaadaev i Pushkin", appeared in volume 6 and "Pushkin i Nashchokin" appeared in volume 5 of *Sobranie sochinenii A.S. Pushkina*, 6 vols., (Peterburg: Brokgauz i Efron, 1907-1914).
- 7 M.O. Gershenzon to S. Vengerov, 5 May 1906.
- 8 M.O. Gershenzon, *Mudrost' Pushkina*, (Moscow, 1919), 99.
- 9 Vengerov to Gershenzon, 21 Dec. 1909.

- <sup>10</sup> S. Vengerov, "Poslednyi zavet Pushkina", *Sobranie sochinenii A.S. Pushkina*, ed. S. Vengerov, 6 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1907–1911), 4: 48.
- <sup>11</sup> M. Gershenzon, *Mudrost' Pushkina*, (Moscow, 1919), 66.
- <sup>12</sup> Although Gershenzon and Vengerov disagreed, their debate entered into the long history of views concerning the poem. For a summary of these debates, see. M. Alekseev, *Stikhotvorenie Pushkina, "Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig..."*, (Leningrad, 1967)
- <sup>13</sup> M. Gershenzon, *Videnie poeta*, (Moscow 1919), 18.
- <sup>14</sup> S. Vengerov, *V chem ocharovanie russkoi literatury XIX veka?*, (Peterburg, 1912), 8.
- <sup>15</sup> S. Vengerov, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi literatury*, (St. Petersburg, 1907), 248.
- <sup>16</sup> M.O. Gershenzon, *P.Ia. Chaadaev: zhizn' i myshlenie*, (Moscow, 1908), iv.M.
- <sup>17</sup> Gershenzon, *Istoricheskie zapiski*, (Moscow, 1923), 19.
- <sup>18</sup> Gershenzon, *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 137.
- <sup>19</sup> S. Vengerov. "Literaturnoe nastroyenie", *Russkie vedomosti*, 1, (1910), 14.
- <sup>20</sup> Vengerov, *Ocherki*, 226.
- <sup>21</sup> Vengerov to Gershenzon, 7 Jan. 1910. In mentioning Gershenzon's dismissal from *Vestnik Evropy*, Vengerov was underscoring that Gershenzon had been unfairly fired and that the real cause may even have been anti-Semitism. for more about this incident, see Arthur Levin's dissertation, *The Life and Work of Mikhail Osipovich Gershenzon (1869–1925): A Study in the History of the Russian Silver Age*. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1968, 114–116.
- <sup>22</sup> The writers of *Vekhi* were: N. Berdiaev, S. Bulgakov, S. Frank, M. Gershenzon, A. Izgoev, B. Kistiakovskii and P. Struve.
- <sup>23</sup> Gershenzon to Vengerov, 25 March 1909.
- <sup>24</sup> Following the appearance of *Vekhi* a second volume was conceived in which the contributors would express their positive ideals. The idea never came to fruition.
- <sup>25</sup> Vengerov here is referring to D. Levin's article in *Rech'*, 25 March, 1909.
- <sup>26</sup> Vengerov to Gershenzon, 26 March 1909.

- 27 Vengerov to Gershenzon, 15 June 1909.
- 28 Gershenzon to Vengerov, 19 June 1909.
- 29 Vengerov to Gershenzon, 1 July 1909.
- 30 M. Gershenzon, "Tvorcheskoe samosoznanie", *Vekhi*, 2nd. ed., (Moscow, 1909), 80.
- 31 Gershenzon, "Tvorcheskoe samosoznanie", 87.
- 32 S. Vengerov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols., (St. Petersburg, 1911), 1, 198.
- 33 S. Vengerov, *Geroicheskii kharakter russkoi literatury*, (St. Petersburg, 1911), 110–111.
- 34 Vengerov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1, 44.
- 35 Vengerov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1, 200–201.
- 36 Gershenzon, "Tvorcheskoe samosoznanie", 89.
- 37 Vengerov to Gershenzon, 22 Jan. 1918.
- 38 For more information about Gershenzon's attitude toward the revolution, see my dissertation, *M.O. Gershenzon and Intellectual Life of Russia's Silver Age*, University of California, Berkeley, 1993, 42–61.
- 39 Gershenzon probably received the second volume of Vengerov's *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, 1914–1917.
- 40 Gershenzon to Vengerov, 23 July 1919.
- 41 Vengerov to Gershenzon, 26 Sept. 1919.