

# HISTORY, INERTIA, AND THE UNEXPECTED

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Recycling Russia's Despots

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Sergei F. Platonov, *Ivan Groznyi, 1530–1584* [Ivan the Terrible, 1530–1584] (1923), Robert Iu. Vipper, *Ivan Groznyi* [Ivan the Terrible] (1922), both reissued in one volume, edited by Dmitrii M. Volodikhin (Moscow: Universitet Rossiiskoi akademii obrazovaniia, 1998), 221 pp.

Aleksei N. Tolstoi, *Petr I* [Peter I] (Moscow: EKSMO-Press, 2000), 656 pp.

In *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*, José Saramago remarks that the norms of historical truth are “founded on consensus and authority, although it is obvious that any change in authority is reflected in a corresponding change in consensus.”<sup>1</sup> Of

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1. José Saramago, *The History of the Siege of Lisbon*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 267.

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course, the tricky bit here is the relationship—“reflection,” Saramago calls it—that ties together authority and historiographical consensus, and the further linkage of this dyad to the constitution of historical truth. There is perhaps no better “natural laboratory” for work on this problem than contemporary Russia. Since the late eighties, when Gorbachev’s policy of *glasnost* unleashed a flood of new revelations concerning the Stalinist and revolutionary past, management of the uneasy equilibrium between representations of history and rapidly changing political exigencies has been at the top of the political and intellectual agenda. The process has been driven by the comprehensible urge of (former) Soviets to align themselves with the new by means of a public repudiation of the old—that is, of the repressions, terrors, man-made famines, and other horrors of the seventy years of Soviet rule. Symmetrically, this wave of reevaluation and “repentance” for Bolshevik crimes has been accompanied by a rush to reclaim the heritage of the tsarist past: demolished cathedrals have been rebuilt, executed tsars reburied, and Peter the Great’s state seal has been adopted by the new Russian Federation.

From a broad angle of vision, the recent recalibration of Russian history is as intuitively comprehensible as Newton’s third law of motion: down with revolutionaries, up with the tsars. Visions of history, it seems, are carried along by something like physical inertia, which ensures that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Yet the apparent symmetry and grace of this process is misleading. Certainly, the momentum of well-worn historical paradigms can propel them predictably through revolutions and counterrevolutions, so that the monuments that were torn down in the 1920s and 1930s can be set back on their pedestals in the 1990s. Yet upon close inspection, matters are not really so neat: the reconstructed Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow is not “the same” as the one that was demolished in the early 1930s—I am referring not only to the reinforced concrete of the new version but also to its signification. Under review here are two recent reprints that illustrate the complexities and uncertainties that beset the transmission of historical inertia. But before turning to them, a consideration of one more concrete example will show just how messy the process of recycling national history can be in contemporary Russia.

Just across the Moscow River from the new/old cathedral, within sight of the Kremlin, one finds one of the most remarkable additions to the landscape of Moscow since the collapse of the Soviet Union: a monument to Peter the Great constructed in the middle 1990s, rising to a height of ninety meters—approaching the size of the Statue of Liberty. The monument depicts Peter standing at the helm of a ship heading west. Relative to the autocrat, the ship looks to be roughly the size of a bathtub. Adding to the confusion of scale, Peter is actually balanced on a miniature depiction of St. Petersburg which rests in the boat (the tower of the admiralty building forms a supporting pillar for the ship’s

wheel). A double-headed eagle, symbol both of Imperial Russia and of the new Russian Federation, perches like a vulture on the prow of the ship. The entire improbable assemblage rests high in the air, perched on a rostrum column that echoes famous naval monuments at the tip of Basil Island in St. Petersburg.

All in all, the work recalls nothing so much as the grotesque architectural animation sequences of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. And an overload of interpretive implications matches this cartoon aesthetic. It is well known in Moscow that Zurab Tsereteli, the monument's author and the president of the Russian Academy of Arts, originally intended the work as a representation of Christopher Columbus, to be erected in New York for the quincentenary of the "discovery" of the Americas. Turned down by a skeptical New York City, Tsereteli also tried to sell it to Columbus, Ohio, and to the Atlanta Olympic Committee before he redesigned his work as a monument to Peter (Muscovites like to point out that Peter's outfit looks suspiciously Mediterranean) and hawked it to his close associate Yury Luzhkov, mayor of Moscow.<sup>2</sup> Now, as senseless as this all might seem, the sculpture's comical back story does resonate with a timeworn version of the historical myth of Peter the Great—a version in which Peter figures as the "discoverer" of the dark continent of Western civilization on behalf of Russia, the tsar who built St. Petersburg as a "window into Europe" and who fostered commercial and cultural contacts with the West. (In fact, Peter was thought by some religious groups to be a changeling or a German impostor, although no one ever suggested he was an Italian.) It is in reflection of this vision of Peter, one imagines, that Tsereteli's monument depicts him holding aloft a sort of rolled-up treaty and steering a ship, freighted with Russian civilization, toward Europe. In short, the monument shows the tsar as a great Westernizer and modernizer, a view of him that traces its roots to nineteenth-century liberal reformers and ultimately to Enlightenment conceptions of the eighteenth century.

Yet other features of Tsereteli's composition reactivate a less benign vision of the first Russian emperor. The monument was dedicated in 1996 on the 300th anniversary of Peter's founding of the Russian navy—hence its maritime elements (so awkward in landlocked Moscow). This military symbolism recalls a rather different commonplace image of Peter—as a general on the throne, as the first Russian monarch to make Russian arms significant in European politics, the conqueror of Eastern European territories (including the Baltic states), and the architect of the demolition of the Swedish empire. This weaponized strain of

2. Never one to miss a deal out of concerns about self-plagiarism, Tsereteli later redesigned the monument once again as a representation of Columbus and sold it to the city of Cataño on Puerto Rico, the mayor of which hopes to derive a tourist attraction from the sculpture. This lat-

ter project has called forth a considerable public outcry and has been beset by lengthy delays relating to (among other things) air traffic clearances.

Petrine mythology was evident in other venues in the middle 1990s. In October 1997, Victor Chernomyrdin, then Russia's prime minister, addressed the parliament of the Netherlands in commemoration of the tercentenary of Peter I's diplomatic mission of 1697, informing them that Peter's reforms were a success because they allowed Russia not only to "overcome autarky" but also "to establish her geopolitical priorities from the Baltic to the Black Sea, to engage as an active and equal participant in all the affairs of Europe."<sup>3</sup> Chernomyrdin declared in conclusion that he aspired to "learn from Peter," who represents the "political, administrative will" that is so necessary when the country stands before the eternal questions: "What is to be done? Where are we to go? In which direction shall we move?" (Unfortunately, I have no information as to what the Dutch parliamentarians thought of this address.) Seen in this context, the monument in Moscow could be thought of as a statement of Russia's claim to the status of a European great power. Of course, this martial image of Peter has its own, peculiar provenance. Although it can be traced back to nineteenth-century nationalist ideologies and to eighteenth-century legitimations of empire, its most recent vogue was during the 1930s and 1940s, when the Stalinist regime dusted off the mythology of tsarist military heroes in search of tools for mobilizing the populace. As Russian audiences learned in wartime movie theaters and playhouses, Peter's heroic struggle with implacable European foes should rightly be seen as a prefiguration of Generalissimus Stalin's leadership of Russia in the conflict with "Hitlerite aggressors."<sup>4</sup>

It should surprise no one that the twin interpretive potential of Tsereteli's Peter corresponds well to the political agenda of the politician who sponsored the monument. Yury Luzhkov, the current mayor of Moscow, nursed presidential ambitions until the surprise lightning ascent of Vladimir Putin to the presidency. Luzhkov's political profile is that of an economic reformer working to reestablish law and order while also reasserting Russia's global priorities. His "Fatherland" party grinds out a fine mix of nationalist rhetoric, with appeal to

3. My citations from Chernomyrdin's speech are derived from material cited in Vladimir Abarinov's account of the address in "Sud'by zapadnichestva v Rossii skladyvaiutsia neprosto" [The complicated fate of Westernism in Russia], *Russkii Telegraf* [Russian Telegraph] 15, October 4, 1997, 3. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

4. Among the many publications regarding this topic, see Bernd Uhlenbruch, "The Annexation of History: Eisenstein and the Ivan Groznyi Cult of the 1940s," in *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, ed. Hans Gunther (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 266–87; Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union:*

*From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society*, trans. Karen and Oswald Forster (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), 181; Grigori Davydovich Burdei, *Istoriik i voina, 1941–1945* [The historian and the war, 1941–1945] (Saratov: Saratov University Press, 1991), 144–204; D. L. Brandenberger and A. M. Dubrovskii, "The People Need a Tsar: The Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931–1941," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50.5 (1998): 871–90; Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture, Russocentrism, and the Formation of Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

veterans and pensioners nostalgic for the lost great-power status of the Soviet Union, and promarket boilerplate, reassuring to the “New Russian” class of wealthy businesspeople and oligarchs. Tsereteli’s monument to Peter appears precisely calibrated to appeal to these two groups: on the one hand, to older folks educated with Stalinist history textbooks as to the significance of Peter as a military leader, and, on the other hand, to a younger class of “democrats” whose schoolbooks reflected a late- and post-Soviet return to nineteenth-century liberal views of the tsar. So the instrumental purpose of the monument is clear enough. Yet it also raises a bevy of questions about recycling representations of history. First and foremost: whose Peter has washed up from the dross of history? Does the Peter monument signify, somehow, a resurgence of Stalinism, disguised as a recovery of the pre-Soviet past? Is there a need to account for the history of images of history, or can they be wiped clean and reused without fear of ironic interpretational side effects? And is Tsereteli’s strategy of syncretically combining diverse interpretative traditions a recent innovation, or does it have its own prehistory?

Interpretations of history do have a history unto themselves, and every attempt to reuse a given vision of the past must contend with the provenance of that vision in a struggle that is fraught with ironic twists. The central myths of Russian nationalist history, as they have been written and rewritten over the last two centuries, have accumulated layer upon layer of historically conditioned significance.<sup>5</sup> And as each successive political generation and each distinct institutional and ideological grouping has reformulated these standard-issue heroes and stories in line with its own discrete purposes, the task of managing the historical inertia of past political implications and contexts has become ever more complex and has demanded ever more intricate strategies. The unseemly implication of the interpretation of history in the history of the interpretation of his-

5. Like many other scholars in recent years, I use the term *myth*—in a metaphorical extension—to refer to public discourse produced in and circulating among a number of institutional contexts while belonging to none of them. In this use, *myth* is intended not to imply a deep structure, but rather a wandering motif that therefore stands in a complex relationship to institutional authority. Similarly, I refer to historical myths as nationalist not because they are deployed exclusively by some nationalist movement or regime (clearly, Stalin’s politics were never nationalist at base). Rather, the vision of history that interests me is situated in a discursive tradition concerning national identity that has been instrumental for such movements and regimes in Russia since the start of the nineteenth century, but which has also been available to serve other political ends. As the Soviet case demonstrates, the idea of the nation does not simply go away when nationalism is eclipsed

by internationalism or socialism. Instead, “the nation” comes to occupy a different, and more problematic, position in public discourse, where it requires extensive and careful political management. For recent considerations of the management of nations and nationalist thought in the Soviet era, see Ronald Gregor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); Terry D. Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire: Ethnicity and the Soviet State, 1923–1938” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1996); Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953–1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Douglas Taylor Northrop, “Uzbek Women and the Veil: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1999).

tory engenders no clean, Newtonian mechanism of relative masses and inertias, but rather an unpredictably dialectical *perpetuum mobilis*.<sup>6</sup> The aim of this review is to begin weighing the proportions of historical inertia and the unexpected with respect to two interestingly malleable tsars.

*Ivan the Terrible*, by the Russian historian Robert Iur'evich Vipper (1859–1954), was first published in 1922. The history of this short monograph, leading up to its recent republication, presents a parable regarding the relationships that link the project of imagining the national past with the realities of political life. Vipper first published his study of the life and reign of Ivan IV in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and the bloody years of the Russian Civil War.<sup>7</sup> His book derives from a tradition of historical interpretation that began in the first half of the nineteenth century, in the works of Russian Hegelians such as the historians Konstantin Kavelin and Sergei Solov'ev, or the influential critic Vissarion Belinsky.<sup>8</sup> These thinkers exonerated the terrible tsar for his bloody excesses, which they viewed as justified by his world-historical task of constructing a great Russian state. True to this interpretive inheritance, Vipper's book presents Ivan as a figure of enormous, heroic proportions—a visionary leader, a consummate diplomat and brilliant thinker who applied ruthless means to accomplish the ends of state building and national defense. Although Ivan mercilessly repressed the Boyar aristocracy, his reign of terror should be viewed, according to Vipper, as an expression of the tsar's populist and even “democratic” identification with the ideals and interests of the lower orders of Muscovite society. Vipper's contemporaries in the 1920s comprehended this work as a nostalgic and enraged apology for the unlimited power of the tsar, which alone might have saved Russia from the ruin of revolution, had it not been undermined by misguided liberal reforms.<sup>9</sup>

6. I use the term *dialectical*, in a strictly metaphorical sense, to denote a relationship between categories that only seem to be coming into synthesis; the synthesis is actually deferred with each new turn of the conceptual wheel. Although Soviet “historical science” may have attempted to stand outside of history, its project was doomed to failure by precisely those undesirable and unmanageable contingencies that form the subject of this essay review.

7. Regarding Vipper's career and works, see Boris Grigorevich Safronov, *Istoricheskoe mirovozzrenie R. Iu. Vippera i ego vremia* [The historical worldview of R. Iu. Vipper and his time] (Moscow: Moscow University Press, 1976); Hugh Graham, “R. Iu. Vipper: A Russian Historian in Three Worlds,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 28.1 (1986): 22–35. My understanding of Vipper has also benefited from

exchanges with Maureen Perrie, who has shared with me an unpublished manuscript that relates to her forthcoming book on the cult of Ivan the Terrible under Stalin.

8. For a more complete description of the nineteenth-century interpretive traditions concerning Ivan, see my “History and Despotism, or: Hayden White vs. Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great,” *Rethinking History* 3 (1999): 247–69.

9. For reviews of the first edition of Vipper's *Ivan the Terrible*, see Sergei Fedorovich Platonov, *Ivan Groznyi, 1530–1584* [Ivan the Terrible, 1530–1584] (St. Petersburg: Brokgauz-Efron, 1923), 24; Iu. V. Got'e, review of *Ivan the Terrible* by R. Iu. Vipper, *Russkii istoricheskii zhurnal* [Russian historical journal] 8 (1922): 295–97; Georgii Petrovich Fedotov, *Sviatoi Filipp Mitropolit Moskovskii* [St. Philip, metropolitan of Moscow] (Paris: YMCA Press, 1928),

In 1924 Vipper emigrated to Riga in independent Latvia. In the course of the 1920s and 1930s, his political views evolved and he came to see the now quite stable and increasingly dictatorial Soviet state as a legitimate successor to the tsarist empire—a position that was common among émigré Russian intellectuals of the “Change-of-Landmarks” and “Eurasianism” movements of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, Soviet public life under Stalin had made a peculiar volte-face with regard to tsarist history. Soviet historiography of the 1920s had viewed the tsarist past as a history of class oppression and had seen history as a largely impersonal process where economic and social forces reigned supreme—a view thought to be consistent with Marxism. Yet by the late 1930s, Soviet historiography and public culture had in many ways returned to a “great men” view of history in which a reconstituted tsarist pantheon—including Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, and other traditional heroes of imperial historical mythology—were established as exemplary and inspiring predecessors of Soviet men and women. Some scholars have comprehended this revision of tsarist history as evidence of the “archaic” autocracy of Stalin’s regime. Others have proposed that this trend reflected the establishment’s turn toward “Soviet patriotism” in an effort to create a viable rhetoric for mass mobilization in the face of war.<sup>11</sup>

In 1941, after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was arranged and the Soviet Union annexed Latvia, Vipper (age eighty-two) was brought to Moscow and made a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.<sup>12</sup> During the war with Germany, Vipper’s book about Ivan was reissued in two new editions, each including an additional chapter in which the contemporary state and Joseph Stalin were

106–7. The extent to which this first edition was intended to be read through the lens of analogies with early Soviet Russia is open to debate. Some contemporary readers seem to have seen Vipper’s book as offering a favorable assessment of the Bolshevik regime by means of a positive comparison with an idealized Muscovy under Ivan. See I. I. Polosin, introductory note in Genrikh Staden (Heinrich von Staden), *O Moskve Ivana Groznogo: Zapiski nemtsa oprichnika* [Concerning Ivan the Terrible’s Moscow: The notes of a German oprichnik] (Leningrad: Izdanie M. i S. Sabashnikovykh, 1925). (I thank Maureen Perrie for bringing this last source to my attention.) In his introduction to the edition under review, Dmitrii Volodikhin has suggested that the monograph was clearly a rejection of the Bolshevik regime. Furthermore, he has proposed that it was no simple apologia for tsarism, but rather a more complicated philosophical statement of Vipper’s “new idealist” conception of the role of great men and key events in history. I deal with Volodikhin and his views later in this article.

10. On the “Eurasianism” and “Change-of-Landmarks” movements, see Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural His-*

*tory of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 84–85; Hilde Hardeman, *Coming to Terms with the Soviet Regime: The “Changing Signposts” Movement among Russian Emigrés in the Early 1920s* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994).

11. For the former view, see Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York: Norton, 1990), 60–65; for the latter, see Brandenberger and Dubrovskii, “The People Need a Tsar,” 871–90.

12. Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 276–77. Documents in the archive of the Central Committee reveal that the Party Central Committee’s Directorate of Agitation and Propaganda was involved in Vipper’s induction into the Academy of Sciences and that he was nominated for academy membership even before he departed from Riga (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’noi politicheskoi istorii* [Russian state archive of social and political history; hereafter *RGASPI*], f. 17, op. 125, d. 25, 95–111).

allegorically linked to their predecessor Ivan and his realm. Vipper proclaims, for instance, that the plan for conquest of Ivan's Russia presented by Heinrich Staden to the Habsburg Emperor Rudolph II in 1578 was a "prophecy and a plan for the future" that, centuries later, inspired Nazi Germany to conquer and enslave the Slavs.<sup>13</sup> The expanded book on Ivan was translated into various European languages, and Vipper further disseminated his view of the terrible tsar in lectures, articles, and brochures for the mass press, emphasizing the progressive significance of terror and despotism. Of course, the original anti-Bolshevik resonance of Vipper's history of Ivan was in general overlooked or effaced in this rehabilitation of his work, for the common claim of all Stalinist admirers of Ivan was that the tsar's progressive role in history was a "discovery" of Soviet historical science.<sup>14</sup>

However, the official success of Vipper and his book on Ivan was not to last. Following Stalin's death and Khrushchev's campaign for de-Stalinization—during which Soviet historians cast Ivan down from his pedestal—Vipper and his book were largely abandoned by the historical and political establishment of the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> In dissident circles and in the West, Vipper's book was referred to from time to time as an example of the distortions of historical truth resulting from Stalin's personality cult.<sup>16</sup> For fifty years no one took Vipper's analysis of Ivan seriously. Which brings us, finally, to the proper object of this review, for this second fall from grace did not end the saga of Vipper's study of Ivan. There has been a wave of post-Soviet republications of his works: large publishing houses have reissued Vipper's books on classical antiquity and the history of Western religion, which were his true areas of academic specialization, quite apart from his career as spokesperson for Russia's medieval political legacy. However, a curious new edition of *Ivan the Terrible* has rolled off the presses of

13. Robert Iurevich Vipper, *Ivan Groznyi* [Ivan the Terrible], 3d ed. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk, 1944), 159. See also the separate article by the same author, in which he repeats much the same claim in similar language, yet recast for a general audience: "Ivan Groznyi" [Ivan the Terrible], *Prepodavanie istorii v sbkole* [The teaching of history in school], no. 1 (1946): 19–29.

14. Soviet ideology chief A. S. Shcherbakov, in a memorandum to Joseph Stalin of 1943, wrote that "aristocratic and bourgeois historians were unable correctly to comprehend the energetic and multifaceted activity of Ivan the Terrible in the creation and strengthening of the centralized Russian state, in overcoming the outworn past and in raising the international prestige of Russia." A. S. Shcherbakov, "Tovarishchu Stalinu I. V. o p'ese A. N. Tolstogo 'Ivan Groznyi'" [To Comrade Stalin concerning A. N. Tolstoi's play "Ivan the Terrible"], *RGASPI*, f. 17, op. 125, d. 297, ll. 130–40. For more extensive citation

and analysis of this document, see Kevin M. F. Platt and Brandenberger, "Terribly Romantic, Terribly Progressive, or Terribly Tragic: Rehabilitating Ivan IV under I. V. Stalin," *Russian Review* 58.4 (1999): 635–54.

15. Key publications in the dual unthroning of Ivan and Stalin were S. M. Dubrovskii, "Protiv idealizatsii deiatelnosti Ivana IV" [Against the idealization of Ivan IV], *Voprosy istorii* [Problems of history], no. 8 (1956): 121–29; M. D. Kurmacheva, "Ob otsenke deiatelnosti Ivana Groznogo" [Concerning the evaluation of Ivan the Terrible], *Voprosy istorii* [Problems of history], no. 9 (1956): 195–203.

16. See, for instance, the dissident émigré journalist Alexander Yanov's remarks on Vipper in *The Origins of Autocracy: Ivan the Terrible in Russian History*, trans. Stephen Dunn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 291–98.

one of Russia's new private institutions of higher education, the University of the Russian Academy of Education. An unassuming little softback contains not only Vipper's monograph, but also that of his almost exact contemporary, the historian Sergei F. Platonov, on the same topic, bearing the same title, also written during the 1920s. In distinction from Vipper, Platonov represents Ivan as a despotic, power-hungry ruler whose policies were responsible for a great deal of pointless suffering and mayhem, and who by weakening the Muscovite state established the preconditions for the military defeats and social upheavals of the subsequent "time of troubles." In his introduction, the Moscow historian Dmitrii Volodikhin presents the works of the two historians as diametrically opposed yet equally valid interpretations of the reign of Ivan IV. In the opinion of the publishers, the joint reprint edition of these two studies is suitable "for undergraduates and advanced elementary-school students, as well as for all those interested in the history of the fatherland."<sup>17</sup>

Most professional historians (Russian or Western) of early modern Russia would likely consider the idea that the two monographs are of equivalent authority preposterous. Platonov was a leading specialist in this epoch of Russian history, and although his works were not widely republished in the Soviet Union, his views have been broadly respected both in Russia and abroad up until the present day. His interpretation of Ivan IV is a judicious study, founded on a long career of research. Although some specialists dispute his fundamental presupposition that Ivan should be seen as a rational (albeit cruel) political actor, Platonov's views certainly participate in the consensus of recent historiography on Ivan.<sup>18</sup> In marked contrast, Vipper was writing outside his area of specialization, and the tradition of historical interpretation that he continued has been almost completely discredited since his monograph was last published. In short, it is surprising, even jarring, that these two should find their way into a single, shared volume.<sup>19</sup>

17. Volodikhin, introduction to reissued volume of Platonov and Vipper, 2.

18. For an assessment of the scholarly authority of Platonov's work on Ivan the Terrible, see Richard Hellie, "In Search of Ivan the Terrible," in Platonov, *Ivan the Terrible*, ed. and trans. Joseph L. Wiczyński (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1974), ix–xxiv.

19. The peculiarity of the joint publication of Platonov's and Vipper's books is most obvious in light of Platonov's own dismissive opinion of Vipper's book. As the former commented in 1928: "My characterization [of Ivan the Terrible] may be compared to Prof. R. Iu. Vipper's remarkable sketch *Ivan the Terrible*, which was published a year before my own work. Prof. Vipper evaluates the activity of the Terrible tsar in connection with the progress of world his-

tory at a moment of tense conflict between Christian Europe and the Muslim East, giving high marks to the role of Moscow in general and of Ivan in particular in this conflict. Vipper's book is not only an apology for the Terrible tsar, but his apotheosis. In contrast, I take Ivan in his local, national significance and strive to establish the true and actual features of his personality and activity, in as much as they are revealed by the sum of reliable sources." Platonov, one imagines, would hardly consent to a joint publication of the two works. Platonov, "Aftobiograficheskaia zapiska" [Autobiographical note], in vol. 1 of *Akademicheskoe delo 1929–31 gg.* [The case of the academicians, 1929–31], ed. V. P. Zakharov, M. P. Lepekhin, and E. A. Fomina (St. Petersburg: Biblioteka Rossiiskoi akademii nauk, 1993), 256–88, esp. 285–86.

Yet Volodikhin's account of the biographies of the two historians is even more interesting than his seeming disdain for a "normal" professional assessment of the comparative worth of their monographs. Vipper's book is reprinted from its first edition, and the introduction gives almost no hint of the later, Stalinist history of the book or of its author. As Volodikhin informs his readers, both Vipper and Platonov were Russian patriots opposed to the Soviet regime. Vipper was forced to flee the country in 1924 and Platonov perished after his arrest and exile to Samara at the end of the 1920s.<sup>20</sup> Volodikhin mentions Vipper's subsequent triumphal return to Moscow on the eve of the World War II only in a footnote that reports that the monograph "was reprinted in 1942 and 1944 with substantial revisions in the spirit of the analogy of the two cults of personality—of Ivan the Terrible and I. V. Stalin": a statement that suggests that Vipper himself had nothing to do with the republication of his book and thus might lead an uninformed reader (such as the high-school students for whom the book is intended) to conclude that its second and third editions articulated a *critique* of Stalin, rather than a eulogy of him. This liberal revision of Vipper's biography reflects a general trend in republications of his works. For instance, the preface to a 1997 edition of his textbook *Modern History* proclaims triumphantly that the volume is the first reprinting for "more than seventy years" and that Vipper's name has, "unfortunately, been unknown for many years to a wider audience."<sup>21</sup> No mention is made of the mass audience that Vipper enjoyed in the 1940s. The reader is left to infer that Vipper's work is simply part of the rediscovered riches of pre-revolutionary culture.<sup>22</sup> As is evident from the story of Vipper and his scholarly work, sometimes one political rehabilitation demands another.

Now, how may one interpret this metahistorical episode—the history of Vipper's history of Ivan? Volodikhin and the editors of the most recent reprint of Vipper's monograph most likely comprehend their undertaking as an effort to correct Stalinist abuses. They are dealing with a significant work of historical inquiry that cannot be accused of complicity in the evils of the Bolshevik regime—how could it be when Vipper was writing against the regime and was only co-opted by it

20. See Zakharov, Lepekhin, and Fomina, *Akademicheskoe delo*.

21. "Ot redaktsii" [From the editors], in *Istoriia Novogo vremeni: Uchebnoe posobie* [A textbook on modern history], ed. Vipper (Kiev: Nika-tsentr, 1997), 3.

22. One may note as well that Volodikhin is the prime mover in a veritable cottage industry of publications concerning Vipper—including not only the reprint edition of his *Ivan the Terrible*, but also an article in the leading Russian historical journal and a monograph—all of which appear to take as their goal the task of transforming Vip-

per back into a "Great Russian" historian and of exalting his work on Ivan as the culmination of his profound historical thought. See Dmitrii Mikhailovich Volodikhin, "Ochen' staryi akademik": *Original'naiia filosofii istorii R. Iu. Vipper* ["A very old academician": The original philosophy of history of R. Iu Vipper] (Moscow: Universitet Rossiiskoi akademii obrazovaniia, 1997); "Kritika teorii progressa v trudakh R. Iu. Vipper" [Critique of the theory of progress in the works of R. Iu Vipper], *Voprosy istorii* [Problems of history], no. 2 (1999): 153–62.

twenty years later? The transformation by Stalinists of a defenseless and aged academic into a spokesman for their ideology cannot compromise the original value of his works. Here, the situation regarding Vipper's messy entanglement in Stalinism mirrors the perhaps more familiar cases of many other nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural figures who were either adopted or co-opted by the Stalinist and Nazi regimes: Nietzsche, Wagner, Heidegger, Maksim Gorky, Paul De Man—the list is not short.

Yet one must feel distinctly uncomfortable when the effort to promulgate a purportedly valid representation of history is itself predicated on a nontrivial falsification of history. In fact, the contemporary refashioning of Vipper from a Stalinist historian into an imperial Russian one in many ways retraces the path marked out by his first, Stalinist retrofitting. Both episodes are in essence attempts to redeploy a vision of Russian history while effacing the history of that very historical vision. In the case of Vipper's latest rehabilitation, the basic irony of this dependence of memory on forgetting is doubled, for Vipper's contemporary editors and admirers must not only erase a given portion of the historian's biography but must also erase previous and different episodes of erasure. And ultimately, one must not forget that this ironic double erasure of history is in the service of the multiple rehabilitations of another figure, Ivan the Terrible—a process that is pulled out into a sea of irony by a parallel undertow of “lies” in the service of “truth.” One recalls Benedict Anderson's favorite remark of Renan's: “For the essence of the nation is that all its members hold many things in common, but also that they have all forgotten many things.”<sup>23</sup> In the Russian case, one may add: several times over.

The history of Vipper's monograph reveals much about the process by which elements of Russian historical mythology are recycled through successive political generations, and, perhaps, about the workings of historical myth in Western political and cultural traditions more generally. Historical “truths” are often, as Saramago points out, predicated upon social and political authority. But political authority is also predicated upon historical “truths”—and this is especially so when politics operates in a nationalist frame of reference, as Russian (and Soviet) politics often has done in the course of the last two centuries. If one could always simply invent history anew to suit one's needs for political legitimacy, one would always have a neatly symmetrical situation, though also a circular one: when a regime creates a mythology for a historical predecessor, the political legitimacy thus granted serves not only to justify the present configura-

23. Ernest Renan, “Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?” in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 10 vols. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947–61), 1:887–906, 892, cited in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2d ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6, 199.

tion of power, but also to authorize the writing of history. And clearly, when historians legitimate the political positions for which they write, they also secondarily legitimate themselves as representatives of those political positions. Here, historical consensus and political authority truly *reflect* one another.

This sort of tidy situation pertained in the early nineteenth century, when official nationalist politics and Romantic philosophies of history first rendered the national past politically significant as a source of mythological precedent and national identity in Europe.<sup>24</sup> In Russia, early-nineteenth-century historiography elected Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible as foundational figures for present experience, representing them as architects of the demise of old Russia—*Rus'*—and of the birth of modern Russia—*Rossia*. In the course of the nineteenth century, rival political camps worked out a range of competing interpretations of these two figures. Official nationalists celebrated Peter as the originator of a perfected present. Ultraconservative Romantic thinkers critiqued Peter for his iconoclastic destruction of national culture. Hegelians praised both Ivan and Peter as progressive state-builders. And finally, liberals represented Peter as an illustration of the irony of autocratic violence in the service of Enlightenment ideals. Each of these interpretations reflects in straightforward manner the political position of the interpreter, ranging from official nationalist triumphalism, to reactionary opposition, to liberal critique.<sup>25</sup> A similarly clear relationship between the generation of historical knowledge and of political authority pertains in the 1920s and 1930s with regard to those novel historical myths that Soviet public discourse created for itself: the new pantheon of heroes of the revolution and the civil war such as the peasant general Chapaev or the prescient leader Lenin, who by the end of the 1920s had been transformed into fresh new symbols of Soviet social identity and Bolshevik legitimacy.

But the relationship between historical “truth” and political authority becomes more complex when politically engaged historiography takes on some historical mythology that itself has a significant history. It is this process that has taken place in the Soviet and post-Soviet rehabilitations of tsarist heroes, and what accounts for the spectacular ironic reversals of fortune of Vipper’s book about Ivan. In order for political discourse in the twentieth century to render the history of Ivan or Peter politically useful, it has also been necessary to make the

24. I am not saying that figures such as Peter the Great were not politically significant in Russian political discourse of the eighteenth century, but rather that they were significant in a different way. Eighteenth-century figures such as M. V. Lomonosov conceived of Peter as a part of present experience, as a precedent for consistent policy, rather than a mythical historical prototype. In this pre-nationalist period in Russia, the common source for mythical precedent was, of course, classical antiquity. Further-

more, eighteenth-century Russians saw Peter primarily not as an inspiring figure for Russian *national* identity, but as the founder of a common *European* identity and sensibility in Russia.

25. See my “History and Despotism” for a more complete description of this process of articulating variant interpretations of Peter and Ivan.

*history* of the history of these figures politically useful—to forget where and by whom the story of Ivan or Peter was first written, and where and how the stories were subsequently applied in politics. Repeated interventions of political exigency into the realm of historical representation multiply the political significances attached to particular stories and make the reuse of these stories more problematic at each new application to political life. Whereas in the nineteenth century, historiographical and political authority could be lined up as allies (*reflecting* one another, in Saramago’s terms), by the twentieth century an already extant historical consensus worked at cross purposes to the Soviet effort to mobilize Ivan and Peter as predecessors of Soviet political experience. If the Soviet public was to be convinced that Ivan’s Russia was, as Vipper put it in his wartime oratory, “the prototype of the great multinational state of the USSR,” then it also had to forget that Vipper himself had twenty years earlier claimed Ivan as a visionary representative of the great multinational state of the Russian empire.<sup>26</sup>

As Soviet and post-Soviet experience shows, while history can be made to grant legitimacy to political experience, the interpretation of history is itself embedded in history, and this metahistory must also be managed if one is to support the legitimacy of regimes and their official historians. One might well wonder why Soviet public life bothered with the rehabilitation of such problematic figures in the 1930s and 1940s, or why contemporary Russian political life is fixated on similarly compromised symbols of national identity. Yet I would argue that it is precisely the overdetermination of political mythologies such as those surrounding Ivan or Peter that render them perpetual touchstones of nationalist political imagination. Nationalist public discourse is in general conservative, driven to imagine primordial roots where there are none. Once Soviet public life had made a turn toward patriotism, it naturally followed to pick up the well-worn tools of Imperial Russian nationalist ideology, including its historical myths. Although Soviet public life did create a number of new historical heroes, by the twentieth century it was already too late to invent an entirely new pantheon of national heroes with no preexisting political baggage: the nation had a genealogy, and political discourse was stuck with it. Each generation of nationalists must therefore struggle with the inertia of historical consciousness in order to retrieve a politically useful past from the clutches of history. In order to attain an impossible, pure contact with the imagined primordial roots of national history, each political dialogue with the past may seek an erasure of more recent history.

A comparison of this state of affairs with the operation of cultural distinction described by Pierre Bourdieu in his work on taste may prove instructive. The

26. Vipper, *Stenogramma publichnoi leksii akademika Vipper R. Iu., pročitannoi 17 sentiabria 1943 goda v Kolonnom zale Doma Soiuzov v Moskve* [Stenogram of the public lecture of academician R. Iu Vipper, delivered 17 September

1943 in the Hall of Columns of the House of Soviets in Moscow] (Moscow: Leksionnoe biuro pri kom. po delam vys. shkoly pri SNK SSSR, 1943), 18–19.

dynamics of taste and social prestige depend on the portability of cultural value: one can acquire the cultural knowledge that undergirds social status through upbringing, education, acculturation, or even through commerce. The favored metaphor by which Bourdieu describes this process is economic: the movement of cultural capital.<sup>27</sup> The circulation of national historical mythology in the generation of political value is comparable to the more general case of cultural value that Bourdieu analyzes, yet the economic metaphor must be applied more carefully. Money does not commonly remember where it comes from, but cultural knowledge generally does. And the previous uses of a historical myth bear directly on its continuing political value. On the one hand, the power of national heroes as political symbols is undoubtedly magnified by their familiarity and persistence in the political imagination—the sense of the musty antiquity of the national fixation on figures such as Peter the Great which radiates from worn monuments and toponyms, “classic” literary treatments, and portraits in national galleries. Yet on the other hand, the political implications of past uses of Peter as a national symbol can directly undermine later efforts to dress him up in a new uniform. The tricky process of preserving the former historical dimension and effacing the latter might be thought of in terms of money laundering: blood money is transformed back into usable currency, wiping off the stains and obliterating the paper trail but leaving the marks of economic authenticity intact.

The second book (or phenomenon) under review may offer additional insight, not only into the imbrication of memory and oblivion in the construction of national mythology, but into the textual strategies that this complex dynamic engenders. The life of Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi is comparable in many ways to that of Vipper. Tolstoi, by birth a nobleman, began his career as a writer before the October Revolution, and in the twenties he occupied the uncertain position in Soviet public life demarcated by the term “fellow traveler,” which Trotsky popularized as a label for writers who were not opposed to the Bolshevik regime but who, for reasons of ideological deviation or class origins, were deemed to be not fully Soviet. In the 1930s many similarly positioned authors vanished from the cultural scene (through state repression or self-preservation), yet Tolstoi, who acquired the nickname the “red count,” prospered—so much so that by the end of his life in 1946 he had become one of the undisputed deans of the Soviet writing establishment. Arguably, Tolstoi’s success derived from his contributions to the Soviet project of historical rehabilitation. In 1939 he was elected to the Soviet Academy of Sciences for his work in historical fiction and for other historiographic projects relating to the publication of Russian folklore,

27. The locus classicus for Pierre Bourdieu’s discussion of taste as cultural capital is his seminal study, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

literary histories, and histories of non-Russian Soviet nationalities. In 1941 he received a Stalin Prize for the first two volumes of his monumental historical novel *Peter I*—but this was not Tolstoi’s only work on Peter the Great. Beginning in 1918 and continuing until his death, Tolstoi penned an impressive number of works devoted to Peter: several short stories, three versions of a play, two and a half volumes of the historical novel (which he never completed), an abridged version of the historical novel for children, the screenplay for a two-part feature film, and a large quantity of public-relations prose.

The story of the evolution of Tolstoi’s image of Peter over the course of his career is as dramatic as the story of the reception of Vipper’s book on Ivan. Tolstoi’s narration of 1918 “Peter’s Day” presents a revolting caricature of the emperor as a barbaric, drunken brawler whose efforts to transform Russia into a modern European state are motivated by petty vanity and a simple hunger for power. This story condemns Peter for a lack of historical realism—for the hubristic assumption that history might move according to the political power and will of a single individual: “What happened was never what proud Peter had intended; Russia did not appear, strong and elegant, at the feast of the great powers. Rather, dragged along by him by the hair, bloody and half-mad from terror and despair, she appeared before her new relatives in a pitiful and unequal state—as a slave.”<sup>28</sup> Tolstoi’s tale ends with the pathetic summary statement: “And the burden of this day, and of all the days past and future, lay like a leaden weight on the shoulders of him who had taken up a burden beyond any man: one for all.”<sup>29</sup> In this work, published just months after the Bolshevik coup, Peter serves as a transparent allegory not only for the recently overthrown Russian autocracy, propped up by violence and partial to an overestimation of its historical mission, but also for Russia’s contemporary radical rulers, bent on social transformation at any cost.

One may compare to this image of Peter the one presented in the final, unfinished volume of Tolstoi’s historical novel, which appeared in serial form during the final years of World War II. Here Peter is seen as the heroic transformer of Russia, the architect of her grand future. When visiting the newly founded capital of St. Petersburg: “Peter Alekseevich was feeling satisfied . . . that here, where all his distant thoughts and difficult undertakings came together, everything that he noted down randomly for memory in the fat little writing book that lay in his pocket with the gnawed end of a pencil, his pipe and his tobacco pouch,—all of this had been realized in fact.”<sup>30</sup> This prescient Peter

28. Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi, “Den’ Petra” [Peter’s day], in *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* [Collected works in ten volumes] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958–61), 3:77–103, cited on 84.

29. Tolstoi, “Den’ Petra,” 3:103.

30. Tolstoi, “Petr I: Kniga tret’ia” [Peter I: Book three] in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 7:668–833, cited on 702.

appears as a clear allegorical double and historical forebear of another pipe-smoking social engineer: Joseph Stalin. Thus, Tolstoi's work on Peter I, like the work of Vipper (a fellow academician) on Ivan IV, represents the period of most rapid and severe change in Soviet tendentious interpretations of tsarist history. Unlike Vipper, however, whose public presence in Soviet academic discourse divides into an early prehistory and a late afterlife, Tolstoi's accommodation to his changing political environment took place in plain view—at center stage of Soviet public life. Tolstoi's many works on Peter present a complete range of variant interpretations as the writer's vision evolved in step with (or perhaps slightly ahead of) politically dominant views of Russian history.

How did Tolstoi manage to achieve success in such a risky and unstable environment? One strategy was simply to rewrite—which was a fairly common strategy for Soviet authors. The degree to which Tolstoi engaged in this practice may be seen in the persistence with which he revised his play. At its first production in 1929, the play represented Peter as a tragic figure with grand yet unattainable plans for social progress, damned by the ironic impossibility of “enlightened autocracy.” This was a much more sympathetic vision of the autocrat than that of *Peter's Day* in 1918 (which brought it under fire from critics on the Left), yet it was still far from Tolstoi's final, triumphal take on Peter. In the course of the 1930s, as the Soviet rehabilitation of tsarist history took off, Tolstoi rewrote his play twice in conjunction with two new productions, each time turning up the heroic rhetoric a notch and muting the tragic resonance of the play, arriving ultimately at a romantic vision of grand social transformation.

Yet this is not the only strategy Tolstoi applied in the high-stakes game of writing history under Stalin. Curiously, after 1929 Tolstoi limited himself to a single title for all of his various works in various genres on Peter: *Peter the First*. This oddly insistent continuity, in the face of the radical changes that Tolstoi's historico-political vision underwent, is matched in other constant features of the works on Peter. Tolstoi returned in all the Petrine works and genres of the 1930s to a single set of fictional and heavily fictionalized characters: the members of a peasant family and a Boyar (aristocratic) family whose interactions with actual historical figures allowed Tolstoi, after the manner of Sir Walter Scott, to present a broad cross section of historical experience. Finally, as I have demonstrated elsewhere in greater detail, Tolstoi's artistic vision of the Petrine epoch was itself remarkably persistent. He returned again and again to a fixed set of scenes with invariant characteristics that recur not only in his various works, but even in subsequent volumes of the historical novel: the state banquet, the interrogation of traitors, the meeting of tsar and simple laborer, and so forth. Preserving imagery, architectonics, and language, Tolstoi *spun* the historical interpretation of these scenes in different directions as his views evolved: whereas in early works the

interrogation scene indicts Peter for his barbaric violence, in later works it reveals the operations of justice or Peter's capacity for noble self-sacrifice.<sup>31</sup>

The likely purpose of Tolstoi's strategy of intensive repetition was to save his earlier positions on Peter from political obsolescence, and therefore to revise his own political biography in the interests of self-preservation. Whereas it is feasible to rewrite a play, which in a way ceases to exist once its performance run is over, it is more difficult to rewrite a novel and make it stick when the first version was a major success and it is still in circulation. Tolstoi therefore revised his novel through the addition of new episodes that recast the interpretive implications of the old ones.<sup>32</sup> After all, his novel about Peter is at base a bildungsroman, a genre in which the story continues until the curtain falls. Thus, while the tsar's tendency to violent action and shifts in policy in the early volumes may have initially been read as a lack of control over the historical process, in light of the last volume it appears as an eruption of youthful impatience and energy that the tsar will eventually master and subordinate to the great national project. Additionally, I would argue that the release of works in other genres and media on the same topic, using the same characters, bearing the same title, worked to cast a new interpretive net over the material already in print. The films, in particular, by trumping the written word with moving images, must certainly have constrained their audience's reception of the novel they were based upon—and the first viewer of all important movies in the Soviet 1930s and 1940s was Stalin.<sup>33</sup> In terms of Tolstoi's political fate, it is clear that these compositional strategies were successful in legitimizing and updating his works in line with the changing political landscape. Commentators have observed that the first volume of the novel *Peter I* rather obviously reflects the tenets of early Soviet historiography, whose representatives were subject to vicious attacks in the campaign against "Pokrovskian" historiography of the middle to late 1930s.<sup>34</sup> Yet when the Soviet establishment granted Tolstoi a Stalin Prize in 1941 for the first two volumes of the novel, no one seemed to notice that the text reflected this politically unacceptable vision of tsarist history.

31. For a more thorough analysis of Tolstoi's works on Peter and their evolution, see my article "Rehabilitation and Afterimage: Aleksei Tolstoi's Many Returns to Peter the Great," in *Epic Revisionism: Tsarist History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda*, ed. Brandenberger and Platt (forthcoming).

32. At the end of his life, while working on the third volume of the historical novel, Tolstoi in fact began a revision of the first two volumes, managing to work over only the first five chapters of volume 1 before his death. Yet this revision is remarkable for the insignificance of its emendations, which concern for the most part correcting the period speech of characters rather than matters of ideo-

logical sensitivity. (Tolstoi prided himself on his ability to create a valid and convincing representation of historical speech habits.) One may compare this relatively minor revision with the wholesale transformations that classic Soviet novels such as Fedor Gladkov's *Cement* underwent in the interests of political conformity.

33. Grigorii Mar'iamov, *Kremlevskii tsenzor: Stalin smotrit kino* [The censor in the Kremlin: Stalin goes to the movies] (Moscow: Kinotsentr, 1992).

34. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 281.

This inconsistency points to a secondary effect of Tolstoi's many returns to Peter. Like the rehabilitators of Vipper and his book on Ivan, Tolstoi strove to manage the ironic effects deriving from the historical inertia of his subject matter. But rather than aim for a mere effacement of earlier versions of historical mythology, as Vipper's rehabilitators did in the 1940s and once again in the last decade, Tolstoi took as his object an increase in what might be termed interpretive maneuverability—a greater openness of the Petrine historical mythology to multiple interpretive options. Whereas the vision of Ivan offered in the Stalinist editions of Vipper's book *replaced* the historian's earlier conceptions, Tolstoi's later works *added on* to his earlier conception of Peter. By superimposing new images, Tolstoi rendered previous representations unfocused—not obliterating them, but in effect neutralizing them—and in this way created a syncretic myth of Peter. Various incommensurate visions of the past coexist in Tolstoi's work: Peter can be at once a figure of a transcended tsarist reality and a figure for the transcendent leadership of Stalin. Perhaps as an unintended side effect of this creation, Tolstoi leeched interpretive rationality out of the project of nationalist historical rehabilitation. What was left was a national symbol that no longer connected with the present in a logical manner but instead communicated a superhistorical and superrational identity.

Returning to Bourdieu's economic metaphor, one might say that Tolstoi effected a complete redemption of the currency of historical mythology, one that wore down the rhetorical sheath of determinate historical allegory entirely, leaving behind just the recognizable marker of political value. Katherine Verdery has recently observed that concrete individuals become effective symbols of national identity precisely because they are people and therefore constitute appropriate objects of affective attachment. It is patently easier to love a person than a flag or a state seal. As further explanation of the utility of historical figures as nationalist symbols, Verdery remarks on the sheer complexity of human biographies, which renders them susceptible to multiple interpretations corresponding to different political needs.<sup>35</sup> Tolstoi's many refashionings of Peter take advantage of this polyvalent quality of historical figures as symbols, but with the end result that interpretation itself falls away, leaving behind pure affective attachment—which is unquestionably the most essential feature of historical mythology with regard to its political utility.<sup>36</sup>

35. Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 27–33. Regarding the potential of human biographies for many different political uses, Viktor Zhivov has made a similar point in “Ivan Susanin i Petr Velikii: O konstantakh i peremennykh v sostave istoricheskikh personazhei” [Ivan Susanin and Peter the Great: About constants and variables in the makeup of his-

torical personalities], *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* [New literary review] 38 (1999): 51–65.

36. It might seem that Tolstoi's transcendence of interpretive rationality in his Petrine project was in fact a subversion of the increasingly dogmatic Stalinist historical rhetoric of his era: an abuse of the rules of the game like those everyday subversive practices that, according to

This last point brings us, finally, to the second publication under review here: the reprint of Tolstói's *Petr I* by EKSMO-Press is only the most recent in a series of post-Stalinist, late-Soviet, and post-Soviet editions. Tolstói's novel never really went out of fashion, despite the collapse of the political context for which it was written. The novel's continuing popularity calls attention to the quite different post-Stalinist fates of the historical mythologies of Peter and Ivan. The Stalinist celebration of tsarist figures was intended as a final word on the national past—Marxist-Leninist thought in general pretended to speak from the vantage point of the end of history. Yet after Stalin's death, history quite obliviously packed up and moved on. As for the mythology of Peter after Stalin's demise: although Soviet historians took the rhetoric down a notch in stridency, no one saw the need for a full ritual dethroning. Though there had been quibbling about his brutal methods, Peter had always served as a positive national hero, and he retained his utility despite the fall from grace of his twentieth-century double. Anti-Stalinists in the Soviet Union and abroad might accuse the Stalinist establishment of misappropriating Peter's image, but that was hardly the worst excess of those years.

The situation with Ivan was radically different. Despite his nineteenth-century Hegelian fans and strange outliers like Vipper, Ivan the Terrible, both before and after Stalin's time, has tended to be demonized as a murderous despot (or simply ignored) in political rhetoric. Certainly, the reversal of tsarist visions of Ivan was a key attraction for his Stalinist rehabilitators: in this way, the Soviet vision of Ivan could prove the bankruptcy of the preceding society, which got its own history wrong (the tsar is dead!), and by the same token prove the greater mythic significance of that society (long live the tsar!). Yet this calculation failed to anticipate that such an audacious move would serve a quite different agenda in later decades, when it was to become a favorite site of interpretation among Stalin's critics and biographers. From the angle of retrospective critique, the Bolshevik leader's affinity for Ivan is a dream come true—a wonderful bit of evidence that the twentieth-century leader, by his own admission, was as monstrous as his fifteenth-century forebear.<sup>37</sup>

Yet the continuing popularity of Tolstói's novel in decade after tumultuous

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Michel de Certeau, offer a degree of freedom to consumers of cultural systems that aspire to total hegemony. Yet the result in Tolstói's case was in no way contrary to the overall project of the Soviet nationalist revival. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xi–xxiv.

37. Examples of this interpretation of the Stalinist revival of Ivan include: Klaus Mehnert, *Stalin versus Marx: The Stalinist Historical Doctrine* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1953), 76, 84–86; Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 17–20, 319, 328–29; Maureen Perrie, “The Tsar, the Emperor, the Leader: Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Anatolii Rybakov's Stalin,” in *Stalinism: Its Nature and Aftermath: Essays in Honor of Moshe Lewin*, ed. Nick Lampert and Gábor T. Rittersporn (London: Macmillan, 1992), 77–100.

decade also demonstrates the success of the author's strategy of making Peter into a man for all seasons—in contrast with Vipper's approach to the management of historical inertia. Vipper's book, written and rewritten in what appears to have been waves of real ideological commitment to successive regimes, has itself been subject to wild reversals of fortune in lockstep with the unanticipated turns of Russia's political life—whereas Tolstoi's syncretic image of Peter, which likely reflects a deep cynicism with regard to the Soviet politics of history, ensured his work a long afterlife, reaching forward into an age when similar strategies would become commonplace among political consultants and public intellectuals like Zurab Tsereteli. Unlike Vipper's book, which must rely on forgetfulness to fit into post-Soviet Russia, Tolstoi's novel is perfectly suited for an era that has revived both the imperial seal and the Soviet national anthem.<sup>38</sup>

By way of conclusion, I would like to recall for a last time the quotation from Saramago with which I began. In syncretic usages of national historical mythology, like Tolstoi's and Tsereteli's, one finds political authority “reflected” in historical “truth,” but Saramago's third term, “consensus,” appears to have no place in the equation. No one in present-day Moscow seems particularly concerned, for instance, to engineer the precise political significance of Peter the Great. Instead, there appears to be a degree of comfort with interpretive flux in the politics of national history. That comfort may have resulted from the radical innovations in mass media that transformed political communication in the late twentieth century. A hundred years ago, it may have appeared that the path to power was through total control of public discourse; but in more recent years, political success has come to depend on an informational context far more complex and extensive than Stalin's contemporaries could have imagined, and political operators must negotiate their way through it with no hope of ultimate control. In political and cultural life now, messages are targeted, like smart bombs, to hit specific audiences in specific ways, and no one much cares if these distinct “demographics” are getting comparable information. To freeze a historical figure such as Peter in a specific pose, supporting a single, coherent version of the nation's “usable past,” would be to lose many other dimensions of this figure's utility and profitability.

Yet the contemporary, more diffuse relationship between nationalist politics and historical mythology in Russia may itself be a legacy of the long history of Russian historical revisionism. To reshape history for political ends is not, I

38. Adding to the thoroughly syncretic strategy of President Putin's rehabilitation of a hodgepodge of historical symbols, the new version of the Stalinist era Soviet anthem is to feature lyrics written by the aged author of the original—Vipper redux.

hope I have shown, a complicated matter. Yet my readings also show, I think, that political appropriations of historical mythology face difficulty in their attempts to obliterate the traces of past political uses. Each time that Russians have told the same story in a new key, the background hum of ironic noise has grown more intense, eventually threatening to drown out the story itself. This process may finally render some historical myths politically useless, as has perhaps already occurred with the figure of Ivan the Terrible. Despite Volodikhin's efforts at reviving Vipper's version of Russian history, the Stalinist mobilization of Ivan remains so notorious that it is unlikely that any political movement will seek to press him into service again for many years. No one has yet proposed erecting a monument to Ivan the Terrible by the execution grounds on Red Square. It may well be that reminding the currency of historical myth too radically or frequently can render it worthless. (Although who knows? In the last year and a half a grass-roots movement to canonize Ivan as an Orthodox saint has sprung up in provincial Russia. As we have seen, historical revisionism is an unpredictable process.) On the other hand, the coin of the usable past may simply be rubbed smooth as it passes through many hands. This, I think, is what has happened to the figure of Peter the Great: the continuous retrofitting of Russia's first emperor with each passing decade has ultimately accomplished Tolstoi's textual project on a grand scale. Historians may still bicker about the "true" Peter, but every Russian is more or less familiar with all of Peter's political and rhetorical functions. The question of choosing one of them is thus rendered moot, leaving Peter as a pure signifier of mythic national identity, an object for emotional attachment and nothing more.