

## ***Standing in St. Petersburg Looking West,*** **OR, IS BACKWARDNESS ALL THERE IS?**

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*In the beginning there was backwardness. Before Orientalism and subaltern studies there was backwardness. Before Homi Baba and hybridity, there was backwardness. Before post-coloniality, naturalization, theatricality, modernization theory, imbrication, hydraulic societies, Dependistas, the IMF, or the Asiatic mode of production, there was backwardness. And that backwardness had a name; it was called "Russia."*

WHAT I MEAN BY THIS MINOR RIFF ON GENESIS is something quite simple. Ever since its articulation from within or its "discovery" by other Europeans, "Russia" ("Rossiia" in modern Russian) has existed in a complex, symbiotic, and unreconciled tension with "Europe." Irrespective of whether the frame of reference is national, ethnic, cultural, or geopolitical, "Europe" did not (and does not) unthinkingly imply "Russia" and "Russian", unlike French, English, German, Italian, Swedish, Polish, etc., was not axiomatically European. And let us not even mention that ever-elusive object of nationalist desire and dismay, "the West!" This strange symbiosis of Russia and Europe, at least from the sixteenth century onward, has been conveyed primarily through metaphors of teleology: primitive (or not), uncivil (or not); ignorant, crude, superstitious, uneducated, undeveloped. In short, backward. For European (and many Russian) literati "backward" and "Russian" were virtually interchangeable in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and as such they resided in a state of misfortune needing to be overcome.

Let me offer an example of this very special lens. The organizers of this very conference on the Republic of Letters, to its greater and eternal glory, chose to include Russia in its proceedings. And, true to the communicative virtues of the Republic of Letters, they produced a very



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useful and informative website to express their principle of inclusiveness. In its initial version (before an impertinent unnamed pedant pointed it out) the Conference webpage explained itself thus:

Traditional challenges confronting the study of the Republic of Letters are periodization and a narrow geographical focus. To overcome this first difficulty, we have invited scholars whose research concerns the 17th- and/or 18th-century to consult and debate with specialists of the Renaissance, the period when the Republic of Letters was first formed.

We hope to uncover in this manner, possibly for the first time, some of the later avatars of this Republic. In response to the second challenge, we are assembling a diverse group of scholars, whose combined expertise encompasses a vast international breadth (including the Americas, Austria, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain).<sup>1</sup>

Russianists (and Russians), not surprisingly, are perpetually and painfully aware of this invisible presence, which by its very omission reproduces the Russia-and-Europe antinomy. The issue comes up constantly in our writings and conversations, it pervades our historiography, and generation after generation reexamines and reformulates the comparative Russia-and-the West conundrum. Never, however, do we manage to transcend it. It is always question number one, more defining than, say, Germany's *Sonderweg*, American Manifest Destiny, or Britain's Island Races. In his essay, "First Step", the early twentieth-century writer, Leonid Andreev, gave this unrequited longing particular pathos by comparing it to what he imagined was the outlook of Russia's Jews. "The tragic Jewish love for Russia corresponds to *our* [italics added] equally tragic love for Europe. After all, we ourselves are the Jews of Europe, our borders mark the same Pale of Settlement."<sup>2</sup> Andreev was cognizant of the irony of this turn of phrase, the mental and psychological dislocation inherent in deeming Russia the Jews of Europe. Jews for him embodied the desperate longing of the shunned and stigmatized outsider, or "other." Alterity *avant la lettre*. Thus, identity and the measure of success are based upon a model of Sisyphean struggle and mythical inclusion, that is, was Russia at various moments in its past becoming more or less European.

Those who employ such a yardstick tend to embrace the eighteenth century, Russia's golden age of empire and Enlightenment as a special moment of Europeanization. For a recent multi-authored volume entitled *Russia Engages the World*, to offer an example, Marc Raeff, the dean of eighteenth-century Russian studies, contributed an article on the eighteenth century entitled "The Emergence of the Russian European: Russia as a Full Partner of Europe." This title, of course, echoes Voltaire's judgment in his *History of Russia during Peter the Great*, which endeavored to plead Russia's case to his fellow Europeans during the early 1760s against the invectives of Rousseau, who had insisted that Russia dwelled in a perpetual state of barbarism and stood at the precipice of disintegration.<sup>3</sup> And yet other equally luminous scholars have argued

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/fren-ital/rofl/>. In the spirit of truth in advertising, let me note that the webmaster has subsequently revised the text and given Russia a place of prominence, listing it first among the regions under discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Leonid Andreev, *Pervaia stupen'. O evreiskom voprose* (Moscow, 1915).

<sup>3</sup> "But a more openly avowed visionary is the writer who predicted in 1762 in some *Social*—or anti-social—*Contract* or other that the Russian empire was about to collapse. He says so in so many words: 'The Tartars, his subjects or neighbors, will become his masters and ours too; this strikes me as a certainty.' It is a curious sort of derangement when a rascal speaks with authority to monarchs and unerringly prophesies the impending fall of empires from the interior of the tub in which he preaches..." Voltaire, *Russia Under Peter the Great*, trans. M. F. O. Jenkins (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 23.

that the act of becoming fully European was not a partnership at all. Quite the contrary, to become a Russian European, in the interpretations of Iurii Lotman and the Moscow/Tartu school of semiotics, meant to become an outsider, a veritable stranger in one's own country.<sup>4</sup> The boundaries of language and mores were so utterly defining, as Lotman saw it, that the dialogics of Russia's binarist culture seemingly precluded their transcendence.

So, is it Europe, or isn't it? This hopelessly unanswerable question brings us to the Republic of Letters. Does Russia really belong in the conversation? Is it a full partner, as Raeff suggests, or simply an echo (or latter-day avatar), a belated addendum to a story whose central locus lay well to its West? If Russia does belong, does its presence in any way inform general understandings of the profession of letters outside of the geographic parameters of the Russian Empire? Or, as the title of the paper asks, is backwardness all there is?

This essay does not pretend to offer definitive answers to these questions (especially since my own research has veered away from this area in recent years). But I do want to explore them a bit and put forward one possible approach that might make Russia's inclusion utile for the wider topic.

For Russia, of course, the initial site of scientific inquiry, the Imperial Academy of Sciences came late. First imagined by Peter the Great during his Great Embassy in the late 1690s (and later during his second Great Embassy of 1717), and encouraged through an extensive correspondence with Leibnitz,<sup>5</sup> it became a reality only in the mid-1720s, on the very eve of Peter's death in January 1725, and it had to wait until 1747 to receive its first formal charter.<sup>6</sup> Peter's enabling decree made it clear what he had in mind:

An Academy is an assembly of scholars and talented individuals who are not only well versed in the areas of knowledge that they occupy, but also through new work endeavor to perfect and broaden the field of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

The Academy is nothing other than a society (an assemblage)<sup>8</sup> of persons who, on behalf of creating science will provide assistance to one another. Toward that end it is essential that they spend several hours each week in an assembly at which everyone may express an opinion, and take advantage of the counsel and views of the others and especially the results of their experiments.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the Academy would not be a university according to Peter (none existed in Russia at the time), and, more relevantly, it was not an ecclesiastical academy, of which there were then two, one in Kyiv and a newer one in Moscow. Instead, it was to be a locus of frank and unfettered

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<sup>4</sup> See two of Lotman's most famous statements to this effect, both translated and reprinted in Alexander D. Nakhimovsky and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, eds., *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History: Essays by Iurii M. Lotman, Lidia Ia. Ginsburg, Boris A. Uspenskii* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985): "The Poetics of Everyday Behaviour in Eighteenth-Century Russian Culture," 67-94; "The Decembrist in Daily Life (Everyday Behavior as a Historical-Psychological Category)," 95-149.

<sup>5</sup> On Leibnitz' correspondence with Peter I, see Vladimir Ger'e (Guerrier), *Leibniz in seinen Beziehungen zu Russland und Peter dem Grossen* (St. Petersburg: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1873).

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture: A History to 1860* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 82-92.

<sup>7</sup> "Proekt polozheniia ob uchrezhdenii Akademii nauk i khudozhestv, utverzhdennyi Petrom I," January 22, 1724, in *Istoriia Akademii nauk SSSR*, ed. K. V. Ostrovitianov et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1958), 1:429.

<sup>8</sup> The Russian text is "*sotsiia* (*sobranie*)..." indicating that the newly borrowed word "society" was unfamiliar.

<sup>9</sup> "Proekt polozheniia," 431.

inquiry, sheltered from the strictures of the larger society and defined by the intercourse of the mind. Needless to say, this was brand new.

Peter had observed several scientific societies in his European sojourn, and tales abounded in his wake of his impatient zeal to embrace science and technology, both as a fascinated observer, and occasionally as a hands-on participant. In his initial ruminations he opined that a Russian Academy would look something like the Royal Society in London. By the time the germ had evolved from an idea to a decree, however, it became evident that St. Petersburg's academy would be a creation of, by, and for the state. Reliant almost entirely on the largesse of the annual state budget for its finances, buildings, and material infrastructure, it came to resemble more closely the French Academy, whose ties to King and the state were unmistakable. The enabling legislation made this connection explicit, "And considering that establishing such an Academy similar to what exists in Paris (except for the difference and advantage that the Academy which is being established here will include a university or college) ..."<sup>10</sup> Just like France, only better.

In the absence of any home-grown men<sup>11</sup> of science, the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences relied at first almost entirely on the importation of foreign scientists, all drawn to St. Petersburg by the generous coffers of the emperor and the opportunity to put a personal stamp on a new academy. Many of those who journeyed east from Switzerland, Italy, Holland, and various Germanic states during the next half century had established significant, occasionally luminous, reputations prior to their *Wanderjahre*. These included Daniel and Nicolaus Bernouli, Leonhard Euler, Christian Wolff, Joseph Delisle, Franz Aepinus, and several others. A few, such as the Bernoulis, became a part of a common cosmopolitan scientific heritage, and they are referred to within their disciplines still today.

Peter envisioned a full-service Academy, one that made his new capital a sight of science and learning, both as an eastern outpost and as a generative body that would cultivate practical knowledge and curiosity in the realm. Scientists were encouraged to establish laboratories (although resources at first were limited, owing to the vast sums spent on the Northern War), observe, build collections, and correspond both privately and in print with their brethren (this was indeed a fraternity) abroad, in Latin, the international language of science, or if necessary, German. This epistolary tradition of erudite letter writing, so fundamental to the exchange of scientific ideas, gained acceptance in St. Petersburg, irrespective of who populated the Academy through the rest of the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The Imperial Academy established a journal, pub-

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 430.

<sup>11</sup> I employ "men" here deliberately. Peter was in fact mindful of gender, and in other areas of public life he addresses the presence and interests of women (or what he decided were their interests) explicitly. A decree on marriage, for example, commanded—to little effect—that young women not be forced to marry against their will and without affection. Another decree on court sociability called for the institution of public assemblies (*asamblei*): social gatherings, balls, and masquerades which the wives and daughters of prominent courtiers were commanded to attend. No one should imagine that Peter was a proto-feminist, but these initiatives represented significant departures from inherited practice. Still, in his rendering, the Academy of Science, much like the realm of state service, was a man's world. Later in the century, during the reign of Catherine the Great, a woman, Ekaterina Dashkova, would become President of the Academy of Sciences (as well as of the Academy of Arts). Even then, the cadre of scientists, technicians, clerks, and scribes remained entirely male.

<sup>12</sup> Most of this correspondence has now been inventoried, and a good deal of it was published in the last two decades of the twentieth century. See V. I. Osipov, *Peterburgskaia Akademiia nauk i rusko-nemetskie nauchnye sviazi v poslednei treti XVIII veka* (St. Petersburg: RAN, 1995); Iu. Kh. Kopelevich et al., eds., *Uchenaia korrespondentsiia Akademii nauk XVIII veka. Nauchnoe opisanie 1783-1800* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1987); P. Hoffmann, ed., *Die Berliner und die Peterburger Akademie de Wissenschaften im Briefwechsel LeonhardEulers, Gerhard Friedrich Müller, Adolf Juskevici* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1959). An early effort to map this correspondence is I. I. Liubimenko, ed., "Uchenaia

lished its proceedings, and sponsored a monograph series, all of which continued unabated until 1917, after which its work would eventually be recast by the post-revolutionary Soviet Academy of Sciences, and then once again by the post-Soviet Russian Academy of Sciences. Plus ça change ... Foreign scholars also were encouraged to translate and publish digests of their work in Russian, which they did, and to conduct lectures and classes in Russian, so that their endeavors might find traction within the nascent reading public. In other words, the initial foundation looked something very much like our picture of a Republic of Letters as various scientists imagined it during the late Renaissance.

So far, all of this sounds a lot like backwardness, i.e., borrowing from intellectually more developed states so as to cultivate native-born scholars, just like in Europe. As Russians begin to enter the institution during the 1730s and 1740s, such as the gifted if narrow-focused mechanic Andrei Nartov<sup>13</sup>, their nativist backlash seemed to confirm the Russia-vs.-Europe model and discourse of backwardness. Insisting upon the incompatibility pro tempore between European and Russian institutions, they reshaped the Academy into something decidedly less cosmopolitan and less scientific. They emphasized material practicality over scientific discovery, machine building and handicrafts at the direct expense of the laboratory and observation post. In response, many of the foreign scientists who had constituted the first wave of ex-patriot savants (including Delisle and Euler) had departed, and by the early 1740s the Academy had become a much different place. True, foreign scholars never completely abandoned the Neva. Some stayed on for the rest of their careers, and scientific intercourse between St. Petersburg and other scientific centers in Germany, France, and elsewhere carried on throughout this period. But the Academy was a much different place than it had been a decade or two earlier.

At this point, however, a savior of sorts comes to the fore, or so goes the modernist master narrative, a son of the common people, Mikhail Vasil'evich Lomonosov, Russia's first Renaissance man, or "the Russian Benjamin Franklin" as some scholars both within and outside the Soviet Union liked to call him.<sup>14</sup> Lomonosov's life has been told and retold endlessly (although only infrequently outside of Russian scholarship), and even in our age of presentism every Rus-

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korrespondentsiia Akademii nauk XVIII veka. Nauchnoe opisanie, 1766-1782," *Trudy arkhiva Akademii nauk SSSR*, no. 2 (1937).

<sup>13</sup> For a biography of Nartov see F. N. Zagorskii, *Andrei Konstantinovich Nartov* (Leningrad: Akademiia nauk, 1969).

<sup>14</sup> The comparison between Franklin and Lomonosov occurs so often that it might even be termed a topos of the Lomonosov literature. Its initiator was none other than Lomonosov himself, who was keenly aware of Franklin's experiments with electricity. In correspondence with various colleagues abroad in the late 1740s and early 1750s he acknowledged Franklin's work, but insisted that his own studies of electricity in the air owed nothing to his American counterpart. Thus began the myth of the Russian Franklin, and it continues unabated. See G. E. Pavlova et al., eds., *Mikhailo Lomonosov Zhizneopisanie. Izbrannye trudy. Vospominaniia sovremennikov. Stikhi i proza o nem.* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1989), 134.

One article, published in an American scholarly journal in 1959, begins with the following question: "What universal genius of the eighteenth century was a self made man who was born in poverty and obscurity ... discovered the identity of electricity and lightening?..." The author then provides his own answer: "The most probable answer to this question would be, of course, the American genius, Benjamin Franklin. Another would be the Russian genius Michael Lomonosov. And both would be right." W. Chapin Huntington, "Michael Lomonosov and Benjamin Franklin: Two Self-Made Men of the Eighteenth Century," *Russian Review* 18 (October 1959): 294. No less a figure than the great Cambridge/Soviet physicist Peter Kapitsa insisted upon a similar set of affinities. His book entitled *A Life for Science* bore the subtitle *Lomonosov, Franklin, Rutherford, Langevin*. P. L. Kapitsa, *Zhizn' dlia nauki" Lomonosov, Franklin, Rezerford, Lanzheven* (Moscow: Znanie, 1965). Lest we dismiss this type of narrative as anachronistic, let us note that the most recent biography of Lomonosov is entitled (in Russian) *Lomonosov: The Genius of Russian History*. V. V. Fomin, *Lomonosov: genii russkoi istorii* (Moscow: Russkaia panorama, 2006).

sian school child can recite his glorious accomplishments.<sup>15</sup> The son of a humble White Sea whaler and fisherman, a peasant, he trekked on foot from Archangel to Moscow and began his ascent to the pinnacle of letters (first in the seminary in Moscow and then the Academy, with a detour of several years in Marburg) on the strength of his indomitable genius, fiery—often insufferable—will, and passionate patriotism. He published monographs on physics, geology, chemistry, optics, classics, language, and history. He was a commanding figure in the debates over what should constitute the more-or-less vernacular Russian literary language and poetic meter, for which he authored a much-celebrated grammar as well as a book of Russian rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> Because of his seminary training, he was equally comfortable in Russian/Slavonic and in Latin. His years studying with Christian Wolff in Marburg gave him fluency in German and French (he published in both languages), and even Scandinavian languages. He was a fierce polemicist on behalf of the Russian origins of the Kievan state, the originator of so-called anti-Normanism.<sup>17</sup>

Lomonosov's interlocutor in this latter debate was a fellow academician, the German Gerhard Friedrich Müller. A life-long member of the Imperial Academy (his career there lasted nearly half a century), Müller was in many ways Lomonosov's alter ego and equal, if not as a scientist then most certainly in their separate endeavors to embed the work of the Academy in the larger world of Russian letters. Müller had spent years mapping Siberia and Kamchatka on behalf of the Russian state, in search of a northern link between Europe and Asia. He was the first scholar to assemble and publish volumes of documents, chronicles, and miscellany of the Russian past, and his prodigious output stood as a basis for some of the earliest histories of Russia authored by eighteenth-century Russian literati, such as Vasili Tatishchev and Mikhail Shcherbatov. All of this met with the warm endorsement of Lomonosov, no small feat given the titanic egos involved.

The work that drew Lomonosov's ire began as a public presentation within the Academy of Müller's researches on early Russian history, a treatise endeavoring to provide scientific underpinnings for the idea that the term *Rus'* and the first *Rus'* nation, nominally begun in mid-ninth-century Kyiv, had been established by Scandinavians invading from the north: Varangians, or Norsemen. Although the idea of the Scandinavian origins of the Russian polity was not new—it had in fact originated in the Russian Primary Chronicle penned many centuries earlier, Müller's

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<sup>15</sup> A brief personal anecdote underscores the endurance of the Lomonosov persona in modern Russia. During the summer of 2007, I taught a brief course in an institute at St. Petersburg State University to a group of undergraduates, a majority of whom were from the Russian Federation. One class session was devoted to Lomonosov (in fact, to the very ode that is the focus of much of this essay). Up to that time, I had been struck by the relative absence of awe or reverence that the students expressed for their own past. In this sense they reminded me of American university students. This seemed vastly different from previous generations, for whom personal identity and the mythic legacies of the past were completely intertwined. When we came to Lomonosov, however, all of them were able to recite, almost catechistically, his life and exploits.

<sup>16</sup> M. V. Lomonosov, *Rossiiskaia gramatika* (St. Petersburg: Akademiia nauk, 1755); *Kratkoe rukovodstvo k krasnorechiiu* (St. Petersburg: Akademiia nauk, 1748).

<sup>17</sup> Originally published in German in St. Petersburg, Müller's writings on history were translated into Russian, including his thesis on the origins of *Rus'*, (*Proizkhozhdenie naroda i imeni rossiiskogo*, as well as into other European languages. G. F. Miller (Müller), *Sochineniia po istorii Rossii. Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Nauka, 1996). His collections of sources were published over several decades; *Sammlung russischer Geschichte* (St. Petersburg: Akademiia nauk, 1735-65). Lomonosov's book-length response, *Drevniaia rossiiskaia istoriia ot nachala rossiiskogo naroda do konchiny velikogo kniazia Iaroslava Pervogo*, written in the mid-1750s and published in St. Petersburg in 1766, is reprinted in several editions of his collected and selected works. It was translated into French almost immediately and went through several editions in St. Petersburg and Paris, e.g., *Histoire de la Russie depuis l'origine de la nation russe jusqu'à la mort du Grand-Duc Jaroslaws* (Paris: Guillyn, 1769).

attempt to give it a scholarly imprimatur provoked a furious backlash from Lomonosov, who insisted that Normanism had it wrong (hence “anti-Normanism”). The East Slavs were themselves the *Rus'*, he intoned, and they formulated the political system independently of the marauding Varangians, who, in any case, had little long-term effect on the people of *Rus'*.

The controversy between Normanism and anti-Normanism continues to this day, although in more muted tones and with the lines of separation significantly narrowed compared to Lomonosov's time eras. I do not propose to pursue it here, nor need we review Lomonosov's life's labors any further. But I do wish to devote the rest of this paper to him in order to juxtapose two alternative—and possibly complementary—approaches to bringing Russia into the Republic-of-Letters conversation. The first, and most familiar, interpretation is the local-boy-makes-good trope, or Lomonosov as Renaissance man. In other words, backwardness. The second casts Lomonosov as an Imperial subject, one who worked simultaneously and seamlessly within the cosmopolitan world of letters and as an enthusiast for the Russian state project. This second approach dispenses with chronology and teleology altogether in favor of a different notion of inclusion: an inquiry into the interconnectedness between scientific or literary inquiry, on the one hand, and statism, on the other. This approach asks a question similar to one raised by several other participants in this symposium regarding whether the Republic of Letters was inherently antithetical to absolutism and state projects, which, in the Russian context, means empire.

This sounds like a “big theory” question, and perhaps ultimately it is. For now, though, let me start small, by examining a single piece of Lomonosov's immense opus, an ode, a very famous one, that he composed and recited in 1747 celebrating the anniversary of Empress Elizabeth's accession to the throne in November 1741. For background, Lomonosov began drafting the ode in late July, shortly after hearing that the empress had increased the Academy's annual budget by almost two thirds. Lomonosov openly admired Elizabeth, and he understood how patronage at court worked. This is just one of several panegyrics to Elizabeth that Lomonosov penned, including previous celebrations of the anniversary of her accession,<sup>18</sup> and it lends itself to many different kinds of readings. For our purposes, though, the 1747 ode to Elizabeth instantiates his understanding of science as a cosmopolitan brotherhood, co-joined with the celebration of imperial grandeur. Thus, it seems to explicate what Lomonosov imagined the proper relationship to be between the scientist and the state to be.

Written in twenty-four stanzas<sup>19</sup>, the ode begins by praising God, nature, the vast bounty of Russia and—most extensively—the progenitor of its empire, Peter the Great.

With treasure laden ships set out  
And dare the oceans with your favor  
With hands so bountiful you scatter  
Your riches all about the earth.

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<sup>18</sup> The definitive Union Catalogue of eighteenth-century Russian books lists ten odes to Elizabeth written by Lomonosov. See *Svodnyi katalog russkoi knigi grazhdanskoi pečati XVIII veka, 1725-1800*, vol. 2, nos. 3751-60 (Moscow: BAN, 1964).

<sup>19</sup> “Oda na den' vosshestviia na Vserossiiskii prestol Eio Velichestva Gosudaryni Imperatritsy Elizavety Petrovny,” originally published in 1748 and included in virtually every subsequent edition of Lomonosov's works. See M. V. Lomonosov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1959), 8:196-207. The English translation, “Ode on the Day of the Ascension to the All-Russian Throne of Her Majesty the Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, the Year 1747,” is published in Harold B. Segel, *The Literature of Eighteenth-Century Russia: A History and Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1967), 1:193-201.

Then, in the next several stanzas he addresses Elizabeth directly.

But we cannot restrain ourselves from  
The joyous singing of your praise.  
Your grace our spirit does embolden  
And sets it on its course, as fair winds  
Drive forward through the fiercest waves  
The sailor traveling the ocean.

After almost constant—and mostly victorious—warfare since the beginning of the century, Elizabeth had brought peace to the empire (this is written before the Seven Years' War), and returned to it the civilizing vision of her father, Peter, who had raised Russia to untold glory. Having proven victorious in battle against the Swedes, Ottomans, and Persians, having created the empire, Peter established the Academy, only to die an early death just as it came into being.

And then the blessed fields of learning  
To Russia did extend their hands  
Across the mountains seas and rivers,  
And to this monarch they declared:  
We are prepared with deepest fervor  
To give unto the Russian people  
The new fruits of the purest mind.

Having passed through the baptism of fire, Russia, young and bursting with possibilities, was ready to embrace the Muses, who now deemed Russia ready for their bounty of knowledge. Yes, learning flourished best in peace, but blood and conquest predated learning and, more to the point, prepared the way for it. Only by defeating the enemies and thereby securing Russia's borders and greatness was the pursuit of science possible. Civilization, the contemplative state necessary for scientific inquiry, rested on the shoulders of warriors, to whom it owed its very existence. The autonomy of science did not stand outside of or in opposition to the martial state, it was integral to it. Lest there be any doubt about the unity of learning and imperial greatness on a global scale, Lomonosov added a stanza in praise of Peter's widow (and Elizabeth's mother), the Empress Catherine I, along with a lament at her early death:

But soon indeed the humble Catherine,  
The only joy left after Peter,  
Accepted them [the Muses] with bounteous hand.  
Oh, if her life had but continued  
The Seine together with its learning  
Would have been shamed by our Neva.

Clearly, Paris had dodged a major bullet on that day, at least in Lomonosov's telling. Implicit here is a criticism of Catherine's immediate successors, Peter II (1727-30), Anna (1730-40)—for whom he had written a number of earlier panegyrics, and the briefly reigning infant Ivan VI (1741), who, one is left to deduce, collectively failed to offer the court's patronage and moral support to the Academic enterprise with sufficient generosity to satisfy our hero. He goes on to explain in concrete terms precisely why science would be useful not just to the scientists themselves but to the Empire.

Behold the highest mountain ranges;



Behold your fields' broad expanses,  
 Where Volga, Ob, and Dniepr flow.  
 The Riches that are hidden in them  
 Will be uncovered by the science  
 That blossoms by your benefaction.

Here and in the following stanzas Lomonosov intertwines discovery, practicality, and wealth as fruits of unhindered scientific inquiry. By committing itself to this international fraternity, Russia itself would benefit, not just the scholars who, according to the grumblers at court, pursued their researches selfishly, shut off from the land that provided them shelter. Indeed, it was the land, the boundless, wondrous land stretching from the Baltic to the Pacific that would offer itself as a partner to science, to the mutual benefit of each and redounding to the glory of empire. This rapture can appropriately be given a gendered reading without doing damage to Lomonosov's meaning. Scientists, marked as masculine, conquered the land (marked as female throughout the ode) and consummated their knowledge of it. Together they produced their offspring, a new lineage: native-born scientists. In the end, Lomonosov insisted, Russia will cultivate its own men of learning, "not to be inferior to those it calls from foreign lands ... Show by your ardent zeal that *Mother Russia can give birth* [*italics added*] to its own philosophers like Plato and Newtons of brisk intellect."

On display in these lines is what might be termed Lomonosov's delight, or his celebration of the pleasure of empire. Pleasure here expresses itself by exalting of the unfolding possibilities of possession. All of these riches—the land, the sky, and the peoples who dwell therein—now belong to us, he seems to say, to conquer, study, domesticate and absorb! Lomonosov reveals no sense of tension, no inflection of paradox at the unity of physical domination and free inquiry. And although this is a panegyric to his empress and patron, and should be read as such, the sentiments expressed are consistent with his life's work and many of his writings.<sup>20</sup> They also convey the acquisitive spirit of the Academy, a spirit that is far from unique to Russia. Once again, Peter I encouraged this covetousness, epitomized by his *Kunstkamera*, or chamber of oddities and rarities of nature that the Academy soon inherited and that still stands next door to the Academy's administrative offices on Vasilevskii Ostrov (Basil's Island) by the banks of the Neva in St. Petersburg. Through the rest of the century the Academy joined with the court in collecting artifacts, relics, manuscripts, parchments, runes, whatever it could lay its hands on, and from any part of the world to which its scholarly connections and imperial reach gained it access.

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<sup>20</sup> Here I am arguing against the old Soviet (and to some extent pre-Soviet progressive) view, once dominant, that sketched Lomonosov as both a son and a champion of the common people, a defender of freedom against the brutalities and incivilities of the post-Petrine absolutist state. For an example of a high Stalinist, albeit well-researched, biography in this vein, see Aleksandr Morozov, *Mikhail Vasil'evich Lomonosov, 1711-1765* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1952). This very long study (850 pages!) contains an approving preface by the Soviet physicist Sergei Vavilov, and Morozov's own introduction includes an appropriate quote from Stalin that summarizes the perspective nicely: "[Lomonosov] knew how to smash the old and build the new, notwithstanding all the impediments, and in spite of everything" (ibid., 6). Interestingly the Stalinist Lomonosov was also an icon of Russian civilization, both in the sense that he conquered backwardness and in his very Russianness. "In the character of Lomonosov the Russian nation has demonstrated not only that it can supersede the greatest geniuses known to humanity, but also that it reveals the finest, historically evolved features of its national character" (ibid., 5) This hyper-nationalist hagiography is what remains of the Soviet persona, now re-imagined as the current political leadership pines for the old days of being a great power (*derzhava*).

The classic nationalist biography, written before 1917 but embraced throughout the twentieth century, was written by Boris Menshutkin. An English translation is Boris N. Menshutkin, *Russia's Lomonosov: Chemist, Courtier, Physicist, Poet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952).

Like the rest of his cohort, Lomonosov saw these spoils as desirable acquisitions, and he celebrated their arrival. As the head of the Academy's Geography Department (beginning in 1757), he oversaw the Academy's mapping of the outer reaches of the empire, and in describing whom and what they saw. The ethnographic project merged seamlessly with the topographical and astronomic (again, a tendency that was hardly unique to Russia.). Consistent with the ode, his astronomic observations brought together the scientific with imperial interest. Ever since the vaunted expeditions of Vitas Bering, the state had been deeply interested in determining whether there existed a land route between the Russian north and America. The implications for expanding the empire still further were obvious. As the subsequent colonization of Alaska and settlements all the way down to California made abundantly clear, Russia had an ambitious American project, and the Geographic Department of the Academy stood at its center. Prior to Lomonosov's tenure, the charting of Siberia and the north had been the bailiwick of two German scientists in the Academy's employ, Johann Georg Gmelin and Georg Wilhelm Steller, both of whom spent years in Siberia. Steller wrote an important natural history of Bering Island, entitled *De bestiis marinis* and Gmelin authored a botanical taxonomy entitled *Flora sibirica*. Lomonosov acknowledged their work and embraced the enterprise with enthusiasm, even though he traveled a good deal less than his two predecessors. Charting the waterways, determining paths to and through the arctic, searching in vain for hitherto unknown routes to India, mastering the northern skies, all served science and empire simultaneously. This outlook endured within the Academy almost to the revolution, and it generated numerous exploratory expeditions throughout the rest of the eighteenth century. Whatever else may have divided them, this enterprise bridged the gaps within the Academy and between the Academy and the world of politics.<sup>21</sup> As in the new world, the fruits of empire proved irresistible.

Empire aside, there can be little doubt that Lomonosov's devotion to science unfettered was genuine. The wonderment that he expressed elsewhere when observing natural phenomena (as in his lengthy meditation on the northern lights, to which he devoted several essays and a sketch book showing what he observed), his enthusiastic tone in discussing the results of experiments, his public orations in praise of chemistry, on the origins of metals, and in putting forth his theory of optics stand as celebrations of scientific discourse and the application of intellect to the understanding of nature. As everyone who has ever studied him recognizes, he was a passionate advocate of spirited debate, if not in print then in public speech in the company of his peers. He argued with everyone—often furiously, and about almost everything: his debates over language with Vasilii Trediakovskii and Alexander Sumarokov were legendary,<sup>22</sup> as were his po-

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<sup>21</sup> A useful survey of the Academy's northern expeditions and the documentary material they collected is D. A. Shirina, *Peterburgskaia Akademiia nauk i Severo-Vostok* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Like other parts of this essay, the controversies over literary language are perhaps less familiar outside of Russian studies than they are within. The parameters, though, should be familiar as they resonate with many of the same issues found elsewhere in the world when languages became secularized or nationalized in the centuries between Petrarch and modern nationalism. Briefly stated, prior to the eighteenth century, the written literary language was Church Slavonic, the language of liturgy, prayer, saints' lives, etc. Although its style and vocabulary could vary substantially from one region to another within the East Slavic Orthodox world, local patois did not prevent the written texts from being comprehensible everywhere within this part of the world. In the wake of Peter the Great's reforms, which included the creation of a new, more simplified "civil alphabet" (*grazhdanskii shrift*), adoption of the Julian calendar, and the switch to Arabic numerals, several writers began to explore the possibility of creating a literary Russian as a complement to the new alphabet and as a replacement for High Church Slavonic.

None of the contestants endorsed the vernacular, that is, transforming the spoken language into the written one, but they all recognized that the language of everyday life and of officialdom had evolved away from the language of faith.

lemics against Müller. One simply cannot imagine such a persona outside the realm of print, scholarly correspondence, and the clash of ideas. Although he never employed the term “Republic of Letters” as far as I am aware (others would later in the century), that was the world in which he worked.

So what was Lomonosov trying to say in this ode, and how, if at all, does its message inform our own understandings of the cosmopolitan world of early-modern science? It should by now be clear that for him the celebration of science and the glorification of empire were more than simply compatible, they were mutually dependent and reciprocally re-creative. Science in the fullest sense (*nauka* in Russian carries the same meaning as *science* in French or *Wissenschaft* in German) augmented and enriched empire, and empire, as sponsor, protector, patron, and gateway to the land, gave life to *nauka* and to the culture within which it thrived. Into this happy symbiosis Lomonosov most assuredly would have added nature and God. Much like Europe’s overseas explorers (here Columbus’ travel diary comes immediately to mind, as discussed in Stephen Greenblatt’s *Marvelous Possessions*<sup>23</sup>), the awe he expressed at the varieties of nature reinforced his belief in imperial pleasure, just as his unbounded curiosity about the natural world and determination to unlock its secrets reinforced his certainty of God’s greatness and the majesty of heavenly presence as his Jesuitical education in the seminary had taught him in his younger days, a faith that he seems never to have questioned thereafter. For Lomonosov, the dualism of “exploration,” as both physical and mental conquest, were inseparable.

This seamless unity of the natural and the divine comes through time and again in his writings, both scientific and literary. His poetic Psalter, for example, is suffused with the interwoven themes of God, Mystery, nature, and wonder. Similarly, his versified “Evening Meditation on the Greatness of God on the Occasion of the Great Northern Lights” (1743)<sup>24</sup> radiates with awe at the power and variety of the observable universe. Addressed to God and Nature, it yearns for the laws that underlie what he is witnessing (“But where, then, O nature, is your law?... What makes this bright ray shine in the night?...How can it be that frozen steam gave birth to fire in the midst of winter?”).<sup>25</sup> Nature’s laws, he concludes, are the work of God: “Tell us, then, how great is the Creator?”<sup>26</sup> But they are, nevertheless, laws, searchable and knowable. To unlock nature’s mysteries was an act of worship, his meditation implies, science and faith were one, not in a deistic sense of belief in God as the originator, but as transcendence, the complement to the doctrine

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Not so far as Romance vernaculars from Latin, perhaps, but rather far nevertheless. Instead they focused on issues of versification and old slavisms. Since all of them knew classical and contemporary poetry, they endeavored to transpose those verse forms into a secularized Russian literary language that they hoped to invent. In the end, no consensus emerged, and, in the opinions of most specialists, none of their inventions survived for very long. But in mid-eighteenth-century Russia, the very soul of the national heritage seemed to be at stake.

By far the most important study of the politics of language is V. M. Zhivov, *Iazyk i kul'tura v Rossii XVIII veka* (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi literatury, 1996), esp. pt. 2, “Nachalo normalizatsii novogo literaturnogo iazyka,” 155-264. See also Irina Reyfman, *Vasilii Trediakovskiy, The Fool of the “New” Russian Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), and Rimvydas Silbajoris, *Russian Versification: The Theories of Trediakovskij, Lomonosov, and Kantemir* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Marvelous Possessions,” in *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 52-85.

<sup>24</sup> The title in Russian is *Vechnnee razmyshlenie o bozhiem velichestve pri sluchae velikogo severnogo siianiia*. It, too, is a very famous and widely cited work. See Pavlova, *Mikhailo Lomonosov*, 308-10.

<sup>25</sup> “Chto zyblet iasnyi noch'iu luch?...Kak mozhet byt', chtob merzlii par sredi zimy rozhdal pozhar?” (from stanza 6).

<sup>26</sup> “Skazhite zh, kol' velik tvorets?”

of mysteries of faith, which, in Lomonosov's eyes (and those of the Orthodox Church), lay forever beyond human reason.

In no way, then, was Lomonosov a religious skeptic. Unlike Galileo or Darwin, observation and rationalism never led to doubt, or if they did he never recorded his reservations. He shared his Church's horrors at the likes of Spinoza, and throughout his scientific career devoted himself to spiritual verse (*dukhovnye stikhi* in Russian). It is for others, better schooled in the history of early-modern science, to assess whether his was an anomalous stance. I suspect, however, that as we learn more about the mystical and alchemical explorations of such seminal figures as Isaac Newton, the more we can appreciate the capacity of some Republicans of Letters to embrace both the mystical and rational without seeing any contradiction between the two.

Is all this a vestige or product of backwardness, of being a latecomer to the world of letters? In one sense, surely yes. Everything that Lomonosov said and did betrayed his acute awareness of starting late, and the need to catch up and surpass. Not for himself, but for Russia. But, against the backdrop of his example, it is worth inquiring whether this conflation of learning and imperial (or national) interest was exceptional, found only among those who looked upon Europe as an object of envy. Or, as I suspect, does Russia's cross fertilization of science and empire resonate more broadly within the general field. If so then we may decide that there must be more to Russia's inclusion in the conversation than backwardness alone. Perhaps by placing these outliers side-by-side the traditional centerpieces of the Republic of Letters, we can gain a better appreciation of its contingencies, the paradoxical unities that seem improbable in our minds but are nevertheless there in plain sight if we dare to look. A