Monet, Tchaikovsky, Zola, and the World They Made

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By

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To all lovers of art, music, and literature
and especially to Professor Victor Brombert

“Neither music nor literature nor any other kind of art,
in the true sense of the word, exists solely for entertainment;
they all answer to far deeper needs of the human spirit.”
- Tchaikovsky

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Preface

Why Monet, Tchaikovsky, and Zola? I was asked that repeatedly while I was writing this book. I always answered: Because they're my favorite painter, my favorite composer, and my favorite writer, and they were all born the same year. But is there anything more significant than my own personal preferences and a coincidence of dates to unite them, any serious link or parallel? I think there is. If people say I chose my subjects for trivial reasons and made up the justification later, they may be right–but let me try to justify the choice.

For Monet and Zola the answer is easy. They knew each other: Zola wrote about Monet in his art criticism; Monet was among the guests at Zola's weekly soirées. As young men at the cutting edge of new developments in painting and literature, they were part of the same environment and worked in the same intellectual milieu; they even appear together in Henri Fantin-Latour's famous painting *A Studio in the Batignolles* (*Un Atelier aux Batignolles*) and Frédérick Bazille's view of his own studio. In that environment they both faced the restraints of France's Second Empire, the tragedy of the Commune, the launching of the Third Republic, and all the currents of thought and creativity that were undermining the Romantic ideal that had swept Europe a generation before them. Naturalism and Impressionism both emerged from the same Parisian pressure cooker, at the same time, and despite their obvious differences, they were both responses to the same artistic vision that they sought to replace with something new. And when they did, more as loose associations of only somewhat like-minded young men (and occasionally women: Berthe Morisot!) than as official, united movements, each had one key figure who was seen, by his colleagues and by the wider world, as their leader, not necessarily a master surrounded by disciples but first among equals in his domain: for Naturalism, Emile Zola; for Impressionism, Claude Monet.

This common role in bringing in change points to another similarity between them: they were both fighters. And they had to be, for they were outsiders. Zola, son of a foreigner father, not a French citizen himself until he was twenty-one, too Parisian for his provincial classmates and too provincial for those in Paris, was always on the wrong side of one divide or another, and forced to fight simply to survive. When he took up

his pen, it was often to weigh in on the controversial issues of his time. Much later, he fought in the Dreyfus Affair, for which he is best known in the English-speaking world, but he had been waging battles–over literature, over art, over politics–for decades before that. Monet's family, while hardly rich, was more comfortably middle class–they could afford to buy him out of military service when they wanted–but their very outlook on life was middle class (to avoid the tired cliché *bourgeois*), with little place for something so frivolous as art. And he, too, had to make his way in the mythical Big City of Paris, arriving as an inexperienced provincial. Like Balzac's Rastignac, Zola and Monet both went to Paris with great ambitions–like untold thousands of nameless others, of course–but they succeeded in carving out a place for themselves, in their biggest fight of all, against an establishment that considered them noisy rebels.

Tchaikovsky's case is somewhat different. In a Russian society that was still emerging from feudalism, he came from an established family that could provide for him and his many siblings. But he too had to make his way in strange places: first St. Petersburg, where he arrived as a child, then Moscow, where he began his academic career. And if Russia did not have the hoary traditions of the French Academy and the Salon, it was developing its own native school of music for the first time precisely when Tchaikovsky began composing in a markedly different way. Although too much has been made of the contrast between him and the "Mighty Handful" of nationalistic Russian composers, it is true that he looked to Western examples more than they did, and to the extent that they made up the musical establishment in Russia, he too, like Monet and Zola, had to struggle against that establishment for acceptance. And yet, if he was too cosmopolitan for Russian nationalists, he was still Russian, which was at that time an obstacle to any composer, regardless of ability or style, who wanted his music to be played outside his home country. Furthermore, on a more fundamental, personal level, Tchaikovsky was doomed to be an outsider: in a time and place where homosexuality could be punished by death, he had to hide, or at least control, his feelings in order to be accepted in society. It may have been an open secret among people who knew him, but a secret nonetheless, and one that may have led directly to his demise.

If Monet, Tchaikovsky, and Zola were all rebels in their chosen art, they also all faced similar hardships in other aspects of their lives. All three lost a parent when young; all three had to fight against poverty for years, once so extreme in Zola's case that he could only eat by selling his pants and staying at home, while Monet had to escape unpaid hotel bills by fleeing naked in the middle of the night and Tchaikovsky nearly froze

on an overnight boat trip for which he had spent almost his last cent. And somehow, all three came through the struggle, against daily life and, more important, against the artistic powers of the age, who often denounced their works and even their worth as human beings. From these battles they emerged as the dominant figures of the time in their field, arguably towering above their contemporaries. Look up *Impressionism* in a dictionary or an encyclopedia, and the first painting you will find will be a Monet; one hostile reviewer of the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874 wrote that Monet "makes more noise by himself than all the others combined" (*"fait à lui seul plus de bruit que tous les autres réunis"*)[1], and even today, despite the markedly different tone of that "noise," the claim is not too far from the truth. Ask someone to name a nineteenth-century Russian composer, or *any* Russian composer, and Tchaikovsky will be named more often than all others combined; and French Naturalism, of course, is inextricably wound up with Zola. How did things end up that way? I wanted to find out.

The study of these three men is inevitably a study of their countries and the artistic worlds in which they moved. And to a surprising extent, in the nineteenth century, France and Russia were each in many ways *the* foreign country, the key one, the most important, for each other. French influence on Russia is well known: the opening paragraph of *War and Peace* is in French, the language upper class Russians spoke to each other at the time, a situation that continued for much of the century despite political concerns that at times made the two countries enemies for a while; as the unchallenged capital of European culture, Paris was host to numerous Russians, and Tchaikovsky visited it many times. Less clear, however, is the importance of Russia for France, not only as a political and military ally (or rival) but as a place where Frenchmen traveled and lived. Composers like Berlioz, writers like Alexandre Dumas and Théophile Gautier made extended visits there, where they were at times more honored than in their home country; Gautier even commented that some French writers were better known in Russia than in their homeland. So when Zola published some of his most important essays in a St. Petersburg journal, it was not a strange idea but a natural thing to do. Perhaps by their very differences as the most liberal and the most reactionary state in Europe, France and Russia held a fascination for each other, and the culture of one was reflected, assimilated, modified, and renewed by the other. The two countries go together as the three artists do.

In a sense it was inevitable that I would write this book. My grandmother painted–as an amateur, pursuing a hobby she only took up in retirement, but a gifted amateur. Once when I was a child, after seeing the

six- and seven-figure prices of the paintings in the "Masterpiece" board game, I asked her what determines the value of a painting. "Because," I explained with youthful naivete, "if those paintings are worth that much, we must have millions hanging on the walls here." Of course, she told me that a painting is worth whatever anyone is willing to pay for it, and there's no more logic to it than that, but to this day I still tell people that the three greatest painters I know are Monet, Renoir, and my grandmother. It's not family pride that motivates me: my grandmother could be the quintessential crabby old lady and rarely had anything good to say to me, or *about* me; if my personal feelings play any role, my admiration for her painting is almost a reluctant concession. But thanks to her, I grew up with the walls always covered with art (and more canvases that couldn't find a place on the walls, waiting in closets), mostly landscapes, and if you were to attach a label to them, it would be Impressionism. She said once that she considered Cubism "superior," but it wasn't what she did herself, and I always heard mention of the French Impressionists as the very summit of art. It was a label I knew long before I knew what it meant or could even vaguely identify the style that went with it, but when I had learned what Impressionism was, I agreed. My mother always loved Renoir, and I do too, but when I had seen enough of their works during our visits to the Art Institute of Chicago, Monet was supreme for me.

Tchaikovsky came a little later. Along with the paintings on the walls, our house always had classical music playing on the radio. Most of the composers, like the term *Impressionist*, were for me just words I heard without understanding them, empty terms, but slowly I came to know some of the great works of classical music and their composers, naturally including Tchaikovsky. Besides being *Nutcracker*ed to death, as someone in the family put it, every Christmas season, I took a liking to the 1812 Overture. Maybe it was the result of the war games I played in high school, in which friends and I could recreate all of Napoleon's campaigns, and Tchaikovsky conveniently provided the theme music for us. I was always on the side of the French, and wanted to play them in the games–except when they invaded Russia: then my sympathies were with their enemies. But besides the historical connection, the music itself charmed me: how it could be soft, soothing, reassuring, then ominous, alarming, and finally gloriously triumphant, all flowing together with no breaks in between. I also loved the intensity of how his First Piano Concerto begins, and from there went on to learn about more of his works. The spell was never broken.

As for Zola: everyone in my family knew at least a little French. My paternal grandfather, who unfortunately died before I was born, came from Colorado but from a family of French background, and was raised

speaking both French and English at home. A newspaper man, among other things, he later worked on the French edition of the *Paris Herald*, and when my grandmother, herself from Nebraska farm folk, went to join him in Paris, not knowing a word of French, she learned it well enough that after another fifteen years, mostly spent in America, when a traveling mishap in France forced her and my then teenage mother to hitchhike–for the first and last time in either of their lives–she still spoke French so well that the people who picked them up asked if she was Belgian. (When the same thing happened to me another half century later, it was one of the proudest moments of my life, and I was so happy that my mother was there to witness that incident too.) I heard my older brother and sister learning French in school, and then when my turn came I learned it too. In our school everyone had to take it in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades; when we began high school most of them jumped ship to German–it was the Milwaukee area, where the name *Schultz* filled six pages of the phone book–but I stayed with French all the way through, and long before I graduated, I already knew it was what I would major in when I got to college. So I did, along with a second major in classical languages; but the key event came my sophomore year at Haverford, or actually at Bryn Mawr, where I took most of my French classes. Among the works we read in a survey of nineteenth-century French literature was Zola's *Germinal*, and I was thunderstruck. I said it was the best book I had ever read, and more than thirty years later, I still say so. When people ask that dinner party question about what three books you would want to have with you if you were shipwrecked on a desert island, it's always the first one I name (along with Montaigne's essays and the *Iliad*). When I decided to get a higher degree and go into teaching, I considered several areas of French literature, but it was the nineteenth century, and Zola in particular, that won out.

So there they were: Monet, Tchaikovsky, Zola. I already had them as my triad when I suddenly realized that they were all three born the same year. I already knew it about Monet and Zola; it was when I saw a broadcast concert for Tchaikovsky's 150th birthday in 1990 that I learned he too was a son of 1840. Right then, I thought to myself that someone should write a triple biography of them. I only regret I waited so long before I started doing so.

If my interests and experiences prepared me for writing about Monet, Tchaikovsky, and Zola, my academic qualifications did not always. I had my degree in French literature, but no hands-on experience with art or music. I am still terrible at drawing, painting, any kind of plastic art like that; with my sarcasm and occasional disdain for some of

what is considered modern art, I tell people that to find anything as bad as my attempts at drawing you would have to go to a modern art museum and see something they spent millions for (once again, it's worth whatever anyone is willing to pay for it). Nor do I have the historical background: I would have liked to study art history in college, and I did sit in on a few archaeology classes about ancient Greek vases and *kouroi*, but with a double major filling my schedule, art history was one more thing that couldn't fit. Only when I began research for this book did I take up serious, methodical study, reading the old Janson I had seen my sister use when she majored in art history in college (before she switched to computer science) and a lot of other works. I still can't paint or draw to save my life, but I managed to learn enough to be familiar with the subject and write intelligently (I hope) about Monet.

Music was a bigger problem. Like millions of other children, I had some piano lessons from my mother when I was small, but I never went past that point to a formal teacher. I can't play any instrument, I can't read music (but then, neither can Paul McCartney, and he still got a knighthood for his tunes), and since the essence of it is sound, you can't really learn it from books alone the way you can study art. Many of the passages I read on the works of Tchaikovsky, or of any other composer, were full of terms like *quaver, chromaticism, diatonic, dominant chord, diminished seventh, harmonic coloring* and the like that were a foreign language to me. As one modern critic admitted after analyzing a piece by Musorgsky, "These technicalities are hard to describe in bearable language"[2]–and hard to understand in the first place, for some of us. I did my best to make sense of them, and got what explanations I could from people who knew much more than I did. But most of all, I decided that I didn't need to know, and I certainly didn't need to *use*, all the arcane vocabulary of music theory to write about Tchaikovsky. I wanted to write a book that was for both laymen and specialists, not one that could only be read by people steeped in the discipline. Just as my own field of literary criticism has its unique and often (deliberately?) incomprehensible jargon that I studiously avoid in my academic publications, even though they *are* intended for a specialized audience, so I could dispense with the arcana of music. I wish I could say I got the inspiration from Musorgsky, but the truth is that I had already reached this conclusion when I learned that he had made essentially the same argument:

> Why, *tell me,* when I hear a conversation of young artists–painters or sculptors... can I follow their train of thought, their ideas, aims, and seldom hear anything about technique–except when necessary? Why, *do not tell me,* when I listen to our musical brethren, do I seldom hear a

> living idea, but mostly stuff from the school-room–technique and musical vocab?[3]

Musorgsky, of course, was an untrained composer looking to justify himself–but *Pictures at an Exhibition* is justification enough. Music can be composed without a barrage of technical terms, and it can be studied and appreciated without them, too.

Then there was the question of language. French was my home turf, so reading Zola, Monet, or what anyone else said about them in that language was not a problem. But Russian? When unemployed–a plight I have faced more times than I care to remember–I put all that free time to good use by learning a new language. When I took a year of Arabic, I had no idea that beginning shortly afterward I would live ten years in an Arabic-speaking country; but when I did the same with Russian, no such serendipity advanced my apprenticeship beyond the classroom. I had no opportunity to learn more, or even to practice and retain what I had learned, so my Russian withered away, to my great regret. When I visited the country long after, I could decipher enough of the Cyrillic alphabet (it helps that it's so similar to the Greek of my classics major) to sound out the names on monuments, slowly, like a child first learning to read, and say, "Oh, it's Alexander" (or Pushkin, or Tolstoy, or whoever it was that time), but no more. If I was proud to be taken for a native speaker in France, the best I could do in Russia was speak a total of four words to the Moscow police to get directions to the Kremlin; that I was also proud of *that* meager achievement shows the level I was (and still am) on in Russian. So for my sources originally written in Russian, I have had to rely on translations. For that reason, I do not give the original in the text of the book. For French, on the other hand, I read the originals and the English translations are my own. Of course, many nineteenth-century Russians wrote in French, as I noted, and it was not always clear from sources what language was used in the original, so if a quotation in French was, or *might* be, the original, I included the French just as I did for unambiguously French sources.

I need to thank certain people who helped me with this project. In the early stages, I sent the first chapter to Professor Victor Brombert at Princeton University, my old mentor in graduate school, and to Professor Irwin Weil of Northwestern University, who taught the Teaching Company's video course on Russian literature and had graciously met with me in person earlier. Both were retired by then, but they gave helpful suggestions about my text. Years later, when the proposal was accepted by Cambridge Scholars Publications and I had to send them the final version

of the text, I found that some of my documents and notes had not kept up with me through multiple moves from the United States to Palestine and the Far East, and I could not find several of the works I referenced in the notes. It was at the height of the Covid pandemic, and I was trapped in China, either unable to leave or unable to return to my job there if I left, with no access to any library where I could track down my missing sources. Fortunately the Department of French and Italian at Princeton put me in touch with one of their graduate students, Grace Yan, who agreed to take on the task of finding them. With the skill of a detective and the tenacity of a bloodhound, she managed to find nearly everything I needed, so I could give credit where it was due to the authors I had read instead of having to drop them because I had no book to go with a mysterious name and page number I had noted down. She in turn was helped by a friend at the University of Toronto, Hannah Yu, to whom I am also grateful. Their help was invaluable to me.

I am also indebted to Martine Le Blond-Zola and the Maison Zola-Musée Dreyfus in Médan, France, for their generous permission to use the Zola family portrait, and to the Philadelphia Museum of Art for kindly pointing out that the painting in their collection that I wanted to reproduce was already in the public domain. I should also mention Sian Phillips of Bridgeman Images, Robbi Siegel of Art Resource, and Anne-Catherine Biedermann and Barbara Van Kets of the Réunion des Musées Nationaux in France, who helped me get the images I needed from the Metropolitan Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Musée d'Orsay, as well as a few other sources. They may answer dismissively that they were only doing their job, but they did so with care and courtesy.

I am also grateful to my very good friend Francis Mickus. Working at the Musée d'Orsay, he got me access to their library and played a role in obtaining the images I needed, and he and his wife Caroline gave me a place to stay in Paris more than once. But much more than that, he was a supporter, an adviser, and a friend throughout the entire process of researching and writing this book, as always.

Finally, I need to mention again someone I have already named. During my first years of graduate school, the older graduate students in my department at Princeton told us newcomers, quite rightly, that the most important thing isn't what you do your doctoral work on, it's *who* you do it with. They were right, and the choice I made, as Robert Frost put it, has made all the difference. Professor Victor Brombert became my mentor, my guide, my Virgil leading me through the underworld, and the fact that I ever completed a dissertation on Zola is thanks to him. That was thirty years ago, long before I even began researching this book–but that I ever

reached a position where I could even consider such a project, let alone complete it, is due to him. And as all his students will attest, in addition to his role as a learned adviser, Professor Brombert has always been the living embodiment of the principle that the humanities are supposed to make you *humane*, to contribute to your development as a human being, not just as a subject for academic study but as a source of interest, of fun, of happiness, of joy. With him–as with Rabelais, with Voltaire, with Stendhal, and many others who could be cited–learning is never a dry intellectual exercise but a fulfillment of what life ought to be.

So with help from all of these individuals, I boldly set out like an early navigator, well prepared and equipped in some areas, notably less so in others, but ready to learn. And this is the result. Whatever its merits or lack thereof, I hope readers will learn something interesting and appreciate the works of Monet, Tchaikovsky, and Zola as I do. These three sons of 1840 altered the world of art, music, and literature forever, and we are still living in the new world they made.

Kristof Haavik
2022

Notes

1. Gustave Geffroy, *Claude Monet, sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris: Macula 2011), 103.
2. Stephen Walsh, *Musorgsky & His Circle: A Russian Musical Adventure* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 303.
3. Walsh, *Musorgsky & His Circle*, 275.

1
A Tale of Two Countries

...the great masters, poets or painters, are always several years ahead of their timid admirers. The public is, in relation to genius, a clock that runs slow. (*...les grands maîtres, poètes ou peintres, sont toujours en avance de plusieurs années sur leurs timides admirateurs. Le public est, relativement au génie, une horloge qui retarde.*)
- Baudelaire

At the end of troubled societies, when there are no more doctrines, schools, and art is between a lost tradition and a tradition that is beginning, there are unusual decadents, prodigious, free, charming, adventurers of line and color, who mix everything, risk everything and mark things with a unique stamp, corrupt, rare... (*A la fin des sociétés troublées, quand il n'y a plus de doctrines, d'écoles, que l'art est entre une tradition perdue et une tradition qui s'inaugure, il se trouve des décadents singuliers, prodigieux, libres, charmants, des aventuriers de la ligne et de la couleur, qui mêlent tout, risquent tout et marquent toutes choses d'un cachet singulier, corrompu, rare...*)
- Edmond and Jules de Goncourt

1801: Chateaubriand's *Atala* - assassination of Tsar Paul I and accession of Alexander I
1802: Chateaubriand's *René* - founding of Karamzin's journal *The Messenger of Europe*
1804: France becomes Empire under Napoleon I
1807: France and Russia make peace at Tilsit - David's *Coronation of Napoleon*
1812: Napoleon invades Russia
1814: Napoleon abdicates and is sent to Elba - Louis XVIII takes throne in Restoration
1815: Hundred Days, Waterloo - Napoleon is sent to Saint Helena - Louis XVIII returns in Second Restoration
1817: Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*
1820: Lamartine's *Poetic Meditations*

1822: Delacroix's *The Barque of Dante*
1824: accession of Charles X - Delacroix's *Scenes of the Massacres of Scio*
1825: Death of Alexander I - Decembrist revolt - accession of Nicholas I
1827: Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell*
1829: completion of Karamzin's *History of the Russian State*
1830: performance of Hugo's *Hernani* - Charles X overthrown in July Revolution - accession of Louis-Philippe - Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* - Delacroix's *28 July: Liberty Leading the People*
1832: completion of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* - death of Napoleon's son
1833: Briullov's *Last Day of Pompeii*
1835: Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*
1836: Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* - Chaadayev's *Philosophical Letter*
1839: Daguerre's first public exhibition of photography

You never had to wait long for the next revolution in nineteenth-century France, but in early 1840 things seemed tranquil. Louis-Philippe, the citizen king brought to the throne by the 1830 revolution, had kept his crown for all of ten years–a blink of an eye in comparison with the 805 years the various branches of the Capet family had ruled France following the accession of their illustrious ancestor in 987, but still as long as or longer than any other person and regime had stayed in power since the great French Revolution that began in 1789. After the rapid succession of revolutionary regimes that followed the overthrow of the monarchy, Napoleon had managed to keep his position for fifteen years, but under two different systems, originally as the First Consul of the Consulate he created in his coup d'état of 18 Brumaire in 1799, then as Emperor from 1804 to 1814. The ensuing Restoration of the Bourbons had lasted sixteen years, or fifteen if counted from the Second Restoration after Napoleon's lightning return and defeat at Waterloo in 1815, but under two kings, both brothers of old Louis XVI who had been guillotined in the Revolution: Louis XVIII, who survived until 1824, and Charles X, whose fall brought the ancient line to an end six years later. By 1840, Louis-Philippe's ten years as ruler presiding over the same system of government was actually starting to feel like a long time. The great Romantic poet and parliamentary leader Alphonse de Lamartine had even declared two years earlier that "France is bored"–a rare complaint in a period of upheaval, but

the July Monarchy appeared stable.[1]

Appearances were deceiving. When Napoleon was forced from power in 1814, and again the following year, the overwhelming majority of Frenchmen agreed on the need for peace and calm after the fighting, both external and internal, that had racked the country for nearly a quarter of a century, but they agreed on precious little else. For many of them–indeed, perhaps the majority–the Restoration of the Bourbons was welcomed less out of any enthusiasm for Louis XVIII, who had sat out the hard years in England and grown so fat that people called him "the pig," than from acceptance of anyone who could bring stability. The very terms of the Restoration, which was brought about by foreign armies entering Paris and installing Louis, were very much open to debate. There were those who sought a complete return to the *ancien régime*, wishing to turn back the clock to before 1789 and erase everything that had happened since. Louis himself was one of them at heart, as he showed by rejecting the tricolor flag and calling the year of his accession the nineteenth of his reign, thus declaring that he had been monarch all through the later Revolution and Napoleonic Empire and reducing those who had actually exercised power then to the status of usurpers. Rather than accepting the constitution drawn up by the very parliamentary body that had officially called for his restoration, he haughtily announced that he was "granting" a Charter, making it a personal act of generosity rather than a recognition of anyone's rights but his own. But the very existence of the Charter, which set up a constitutional monarchy with an elected assembly, a system similar to–in fact, copied from–Britain's, showed that times had changed. Gone were the days of absolutism; the gains of the revolution in equality before the law, eligibility to career paths, and most of all property ownership remained in place. Those who had acquired lands seized from the nobles or the Catholic Church were left largely unmolested in their possession despite the tide of aristocrats returning from exile on Louis's coattails; voting rights were severely restricted by property requirements, but such was equally the case in Britain, and eligibility was contingent on wealth, not birth, making it possible at least theoretically for any male citizen to join the elite club that enjoyed the franchise. Louis and those around him understood that times had changed and they would have to compromise with a changing world despite their nostalgic longings for the good old days. Tellingly, the king considered destroying Paris's unfinished Arc de Triomphe, a symbol of Napoleonic glory, but decided in 1823 to complete the monument instead. France, like the arch, was a work in progress, with many competing builders involved.[2]

The intransigent old school got their chance in 1824 when Louis XVIII died and his brother acceded to the throne as Charles X. Already the head of a reactionary clique during Louis's reign, Charles was 66 years old at the beginning of his own and was crowned in a lavish medieval-type spectacle that even the royalist minister Chateaubriand thought tasteless. Perhaps reflective of his name, which had last belonged to a French king more than two hundred years before, Charles had all of his brother's desire for the old ways and none of his willingness to compromise with the new. In a few years he managed to alienate almost everyone who mattered in French politics: the liberals, by his championing of the power of the Catholic Church; the rich middle class, by a primogeniture act that shifted power from them to landed nobility; the young in general, who chafed at control of virtually everything in France by old men of Charles's generation, as roundly condemned in an 1828 pamphlet called *De la Gérontocratie*; and most of all, public opinion, shaped and prodded by a relatively free press, both which were new quantities in politics with which he was not prepared to deal. Seeing the rising tide of opposition, in February 1830 the Russian ambassador wrote to Tsar Nicholas I: "the position in which the King has placed himself is not the result of one error but of the error of his entire life." With bad harvests and rising prices adding to the discontent, the government was soundly defeated in the summer elections of 1830. When Charles reacted by attempting a coup against the Charter and declaring that he would henceforth rule by decree, the uprising that erupted in late July took only three days to drive him from power. But once again, as at the fall of Napoleon, the question was: who or what would replace the deposed ruler? Support could be found for many options: Charles's ten-year-old grandson the Duke of Bordeaux, the legal heir since his father's death in 1820, who could accede as Henri V; a regency by the Duke of Orleans during Bordeaux's youth, thus preserving the dynasty; Orleans, head of a collateral line related to the Bourbons, ascending the throne himself; a return to a republic under the aging Lafayette, called the Hero of the Two Worlds for his role in the American and French Revolutions of the eighteenth century. Various centers of power each supported their own candidate; as Chateaubriand summarized the situation: "monarchy was at the House of Representatives, usurpation at the Palais-Royal, the Republic at City Hall" (*"la monarchie était à la Chambre des députés, l'usurpation au Palais-Royal, la République à l'Hôtel de Ville"*). Even Bonapartism found some advocates, for although Napoleon himself had died in 1821, his son and supposed heir, styled Napoleon II by the family's clique, lived on in Austria, thanks to his mother's status as daughter of the Austrian emperor, and could be called back to France.[3]

The Orleanist party, headquartered at the Palais Royal, soon emerged as the winner, less by the Duke's volition than by the power brokers in Paris drafting him as the least bad alternative. After swearing he would let himself be cut into pieces before usurping Charles X's position, Louis-Philippe of Orleans accepted the crown as king of the French and was embraced by Lafayette on the balcony of Paris's City Hall as thousands watched. He swore to defend the Charter that Charles had violated, accepting his role as a constitutional monarch with limited powers, and even continued to live in his home in the Palais Royal for more than a year, going to the royal residence of the Tuileries Palace only for official events. Victor Hugo said of him, "His manners were of the old regime and his habits of the new, a mix of the noble and the bourgeois that was fitting for 1830; Louis-Philippe was transition ruling" (*"Ses manières étaient du vieux régime et ses habitudes du nouveau, mélange du noble et du bourgeois qui convenait à 1830; Louis-Philippe était la transition régnante*"). His appearance reflected, undoubtedly by conscious choice, his modest role as one of the people: he was the first French king to appear in court wearing trousers, and Heinrich Heine, living in Paris like many young Germans of the time, later to include Karl Marx, noted approvingly his showing himself in public with hat and umbrella instead of scepter and crown. But others, having accepted him only "for lack of something better, for fear of something worse" (*"faute de mieux, crainte de pis"*) as power broker Talleyrand put it when telling the Duke of Wellington that foreign powers should accept the change of regime, were less approving. Balzac, a traditional royalist, lamented the very simplicity that was intended to garner support: "What a dismal contrast with the court of Charles X is the present court, if indeed it is a court!" Republicans, on the other hand, disliked the limits on voting, which were somewhat broader than in the past but still gave the franchise to only some 240,00 propertied men out of France's population of 33 million. And Louis-Philippe's encouraging of a bourgeois mindset devoted to getting rich was unappealing to die-hard Bonapartists who still dreamed of imperial glory.[4]

Yet when 1832 saw his regime tested on many fronts, it successfully met all the challenges. The Duchess of Berry, widow of Charles X's son, returned from exile and tried to raise a rebellion that would place her son Bordeaux, shunted aside two years earlier, on a restored Bourbon throne. But even the traditionally royalist Vendée region had little sympathy for the plan, and less still for the duchess herself after her arrest, when she gave birth to a child out of wedlock, apparently born of her secret liaison with an Italian nobleman. Discredited twice over, she posed so little danger to the government that she was released and allow to

retire to Venice. A brief insurrection by Parisian workers and students, though lionized in *Les Misérables*, also found little popular support and was put down on June 6 after only 24 hours of fierce resistance. Harder to overcome was an outbreak of cholera. The disease first appeared in April and spread so quickly that Paris's Pont Neuf was covered with the dead and dying. Among the victims were Baron Cuvier, one of the founders of modern science; the prime minister, Casimir Périer; and the popular orator general Lamarque, whose funeral sparked the Parisian uprising in June. But Louis-Philippe himself escaped unscathed, as did the regime. The best news for them may have been unexpected death in Vienna of Napoleon's son, who contracted tuberculosis and died at the age of 21. Not much younger than his illustrious father had been when he began his rise to power, Napoleon II might have given impetus to a more successful power grab than the duchess's abortive attempt; with his demise, gone was the threat of another imperial takeover. The following year, with the Bonapartist threat defanged, Louis-Philippe felt secure enough to replace the fleur-de-lis on top of the Vendôme column in Paris with a statue of Napoleon.[5]

This would prove to be only one of many miscalculations that would eventually send him the way of Charles X. He underestimated the continuing attraction the emperor exerted for much of France. Heine, perhaps more detached from the issue than most Frenchmen, observed the outpouring of grief Napoleon II's death caused among the working people of Paris, and noted that, contrary to what one might have expected, it was stronger among the young than the old. The presumed heir might be dead, but the cause had not died with him, and was alive and kicking. Simple folk in the country shared this enthusiasm, and images of Napoleon–Napoleon I, that is, the glorious emperor–could be found in nearly every cottage. The most popular depictions showed him either visiting plague victims in Jaffa or dying on Saint Helena, the two episodes calculated to make him into a saint or even a modern-day Christ. Many artists shared this fascination: Delacroix declared "The life of Napoleon is the event of the century for all the arts," while Romantic writers like Stendhal and Hugo contributed to the cult. The royalist Chateaubriand, even while subtly slipping the word *usurp* into his judgment, recognized the emperor's popularity in death: "The world belongs to Bonaparte; what the ravager was unable to conquer completely, his reputation usurps; living, he failed to obtain the world; dead he owns it" (*"Le monde appartient à Bonaparte; ce que le ravageur n'avait pu achever de conquérir, sa renommée l'usurpe; vivant il a manqué le monde, mort il le possède"*). This near-religious status bestowed on what was essentially a political movement gave it staying power through

much of the century, and made Bonapartism one of the major contenders, along with legitimism–support for the Bourbon dynasty–, Orleanism, and republicanism, for control of France in the decades to come. Opposing leaders would discover, as Napoleon himself had, that his great extended family could be a source of nearly endless problems and complications; the clan was a many-headed hydra that could pop up again just when it seemed to be vanquished, as if replaying the Hundred Days, but more successfully. In England, another young member of the exiled family, not much older than his now deceased cousin, saw the youth's disappearance as a chance for himself to assume the imperial mantle. Bonapartism would raise its head again.[6]

But for the time being, in the space of a single year the regime had won out against legitimacy, republicanism, the ghost of the Empire, and even nature. The king himself was already facing unpopularity, which would grow over the rest of his reign, but his success on so many fronts gave an illusion of stability. In 1839 an uprising by extreme left wing leaders who advocated the abolition of private property briefly took control of the Hôtel de Ville, but the people failed to respond and the would-be revolution fizzled. When a general strike was called the following year, it succeeded in building a total of exactly one barricade, which was easily dismantled by soldiers. That same year, Louis-Philippe felt secure enough on his throne to seek to co-opt Napoleonic glory for himself by bringing the Emperor's remains back from exile and having them interred in Paris's Hôtel des Invalides. Parisians turned out en masse to see "the celebration of an exiled coffin that is returning in triumph" (*"la fête d'un cercueil exilé qui revient en triomphe"*), as Victor Hugo, an eyewitness to the vent, put it, and many shouted "Long live the emperor!" (*"Vive l'empereur!"*) as the cortege passed, but the national pride led to no subversive action that threatened the existing regime. People were generally busying themselves with other matters than politics in a rapidly modernizing capital. The city was growing quickly, despite the falling birth rate, from about 700,000 at the time of the Restoration to nearly a million in 1840, caused in part by the budding Industrial Revolution, which was about to blossom in France, much later than it had in Britain. Gas lighting and horse-drawn omnibuses that could carry up to thirty passengers, both introduced in the late 1820's, were spreading widely and changing the city's appearance, and indeed how its citizens lived their daily lives. Two other recent inventions, the bicycle and a new kind of light taxi carriage called a *fiacre*, offered alternative ways of crossing the city. But a much more revolutionary advance in transportation came with the opening of the country's first major railroad line in 1837. When

Louis-Philippe's queen took the train, it suggested that the regime was as modern and reliable as the technology that carried her. France, it seemed, could if not match Britain both in modern machinery and in stable government, at least follow her on the same path.[7]

Russia was different. Russia was always different, despite nearly a hundred and fifty years of trying to be the same: the same as Western Europe in general, and often France in particular. The double-headed eagle looking in two opposing directions at the same time was an apt symbol for a country of which no one seemed to know whether it was, or indeed wanted to be, a carbon copy of the West or its diametrical opposite. The tsarist realm had been oscillating between imitation and rejection of the West for a century and a half, sometimes emphasizing one, sometimes the other, often both at once, and the ambiguity would outlive the Romanov dynasty without being resolved. In politics, however, the answer was supposed to be very clear under Tsar Nicholas I: the first article of the 1832 Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire stated "The Emperor of all the Russians is a sovereign with autocratic and unlimited powers." There would be no dalliance with liberal ideas of rights, constitutions, or popular sovereignty as seen in Western Europe, above all France. One man held all the power and everyone else simply obeyed without question. It was that simple.[8]

But things were never that simple in Russia. The previous tsar, Alexander I, had done much to confuse the issue earlier in the nineteenth century, yet the question was much older, dating at least from the reign of Peter the Great. The original instigator of Russia's push to imitate the West, Peter encouraged his countrymen to learn useful knowledge like shipbuilding, military science, and metalworking that had practical applications to strengthen the state; much like Atatürk two hundred years later, he also wanted his people–the nobles, that is, certainly not the serfs–to cast off eastern traditions in matters like clothing, interior decoration, and social graces, and raised Saint Petersburg out of the Neva marshes as both a way to let Russia communicate with Western countries and a showcase to display how well she was learning their refinements. But Peter had no use for the ideas of limits on the monarch's power or–worse yet–rights of the people that were already circulating in the West thanks to writers like John Locke and Montesquieu. Russia was to take from the West what she needed to preserve and expand her power, but was to remain true to her national traditions in matters such as religion and government; indeed, far from accepting Enlightenment concepts of

personal freedom, Peter actually worsened the plight of the serfs. Yet accepting *any* aspect of Western culture as an example for Russia to follow was opening Pandora's box, and everyone knew it. After Peter's death in 1725, subsequent rulers would try to continue his work and end up deepening its inherent contradictions. Upon the accession of Empress Anna in 1730, some courtiers presented her with a list of conditions for accepting her rule, terms that would have in effect made the country into a constitutional monarchy. Guard regiments cheered when she tore the document to pieces. Catherine the Great, during her long reign from 1762 to 1796, consciously played the role of the ideal enlightened monarch sought by French *philosophes*; she corresponded with Voltaire, helped Diderot financially by buying his library–with posthumous effect, so he could continue to enjoy it during his lifetime, even receiving a state salary as its librarian–and offered to have the Encyclopedia printed in Riga when it was banned in France. Her *Nakaz* or *Instruction*, composed as a guide for codifying Russia's laws, drew on Montesquieu, Beccaria, and Baron J. F. Bielefeldt. But power remained in her hands–Article 19 declared "the sovereign is the source of all political and civil power," while Article 38 defined liberty as "the right to do everything which the laws permit." Despite her encouraging of the Encyclopedia, she forbade its sale in Russia because of its French ideas of rights and limited government. Yet she and her court continued to use French as their medium of daily conversation, to dress in French styles as the height of fashion, and to live in palaces copied from Versailles. Western ideas and practices were good–in some things, but not in others. It was a massive social experiment in compartmentalization of thought, and it could never work completely.[9]

The contradiction became more acute as France, Russia's foremost model of proper civilized living, descended into revolution. Catherine the Great could hardly approve the Declaration of the Rights of Man, whose third article, "The principle of all Sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation. No body, no individual can exercise authority that does not emanate directly from it" (*"Le principe de toute souveraineté réside essentiellement dans la Nation. Nul corps, nul individu ne peut exercer d'autorité qui n'en émane expressément*") was a thundering contradiction of the *Nakaz*. But worse was to come. When France first limited the power of the king, then deposed him outright, and finally cut his head off, Catherine blamed the very free-thinking philosophers she had formerly befriended and made Russia part of the counterrevolutionary alliance that used armed force to oppose the changes in Paris. Her son Paul, whom many considered insane, managed to confuse matters further with his rapid changes of policy both at home and abroad as soon as he succeeded her.

He instituted strict policies to quarantine Russia from revolutionary infection, not only banning importation of all foreign books but also forbidding his subjects to leave the country. But he took Russia out of the anti-French coalition, only to rejoin it later and send troops to fight against the French in Italy, where a young general named Napoleon Bonaparte was making a name for himself. Yet Paul seemed to admire the Corsican upstart, even when–perhaps because–he seized power for himself in 1799, and the following year Russia once again abandoned its allies to seek an accommodation with Napoleon. That the leader of a supposedly revolutionary regime would consider an alliance with Europe's most autocratic state was not the surprise, for Bonaparte had already carved out such a position for himself in the French government that becoming emperor three years later would only make official his existing status. Moreover, France had for centuries sought out allies to the east and north who could attack her German enemies from the rear; Francis I had courted Ottoman help against the Habsburgs in the early sixteenth century, and a hundred years later Catholic Cardinal Richelieu had maneuvered to bring Protestant Sweden into the Thirty Years' War against Catholic Austria in what was theoretically a struggle about religion, to counter Austrian power in central Europe. The surprise, rather, was that the Tsar of all the Russians would even consider allying himself with a government that had come to power–after several other changes of regime, it was true–as a result of Louis XVI's beheading. But the erratic Paul thought the French leader was the best person to control the revolutionary wave in Europe, and an alliance of France and Russia might have resulted, had Paul not been assassinated in a palace coup. Napoleon was back to square one and would have start over with the new tsar, Paul's twenty-three-year-old son Alexander.[10]

One of the oddest characters of the age, Alexander was a living paradox, perhaps Russia's internal contradictions made flesh: he was both magnanimous and vindictive, naive and devious, given to liberal beliefs and oppressive practices, speaking of freedom while crushing any hint of opposition, less from hypocrisy than from his inability to decide who he was or wanted to be. His grandmother Catherine the Great, who played a dominant role in his upbringing, called him "a knot of contradictions," and many people, both then and later, agreed: Napoleon named him "the sphinx," "the Talma of the north," "the cunning Byzantine," and modern historians have labeled him the Crowned Hamlet. Early influences on him bore at least part of the blame. Catherine had him educated by a Swiss tutor, Frédéric César de la Harpe, who taught him to admire the ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, while his father Paul, to busy himself until Catherine died and left him the throne, lived in a world

of military drills and parades, which also surrounded the young Alexander. If that background had not created enough turmoil in his mind, he came to power through a palace coup against his father, and although he was a participant in the plot, he apparently had believed that the transfer of power could be made without violence against the reigning tsar. When things rather predictably turned out otherwise, Alexander claimed–honestly or falsely, no one could say, perhaps not even Alexander himself–to be shocked that the plotters did not simply exile, or at worst imprison, the deposed tsar, as Catherine the Great had done when she grabbed the throne from her husband, preserving the fiction that his death a few days later was an accident. In contrast to this, the plotters against Paul killed him during the coup, whether or not it was the original plan; exactly who did what remains murky to this day, but a corpse lying on the floor graphically testified to the result. The stunned Alexander emotionally refused to accept a throne he had come that way, but was told by the conspiracy leader: "Stop behaving like a child! The fate of millions now depends on your firmness. Go and reign." The new tsar managed to pull himself together and do so, but nervously asked his wife, "How shall I have the strength to rule with the constant memory that my father has been assassinated?"–and with the knowledge, perhaps too painful to express openly, that he himself was deeply involved in the death. For the rest of his life, Alexander would wrestle with guilt over the part he had played in his father's assassination.[11]

Whatever his initial doubts, Alexander became tsar, and started his reign by reversing several of his father's most oppressive policies: Paul's secret police was abolished, and torture with it; twelve thousand prisoners who had been condemned without trial were released; those who had fled the country were given amnesty, and people could freely leave Russia if they wished. Rulings on more artistic or intellectual pursuits followed the pattern: censorship was relaxed, private presses were once again allowed, and foreign books and musical scores could be imported. It seemed the young emperor's liberal, idealistic side was in command. Indeed, he was advised by an inner circle of young men who shared his Enlightenment ideas, one of whom had even been close to the Jacobins in Paris during the early days of the French Revolution, and some of his policies were deliberately copied from that hotbed of revolution, France. A law code similar to Napoleon's was drawn up and new ministries along French lines were created; army uniforms were even designed to imitate those of Bonaparte's troops. Perhaps most important, Alexander spoke to his friends of giving Russia a constitution, just as the newly independent United States and then France had received one–actually, several in

succession in the case of France–in recent years. He showed the same liberal tendencies when considering Russia's unique problems, especially serfdom, regretting the existence of slavery in his lands and declaring it a personal principle not to give serfs as property. Yet there was a contradiction in his vision of the new Russia he wanted to create. Many of his planned measures, especially those meant to improve the lot of the serfs, would inevitably collide with the traditions of the nobles; indeed, his 1803 Decree on Free Cultivators, which made no attempt to liberate the serfs but only set conditions under which an owner *could* free his peasants if he so wished–a far cry from what he and his inner circle had discussed in private–already looked dangerously subversive to nobles. This meant that it, and any other, more elaborate plans Alexander might have for sweeping changes, could be implemented only by diktat from above, which required a ruler with unfettered powers who could impose his will on the recalcitrant. The idea, in short, was reform enforced by despotism. As one of the tsar's close friends put it, "He would willingly have consented to make everyone free, as long as everyone willingly did what he wanted"; since not everyone would–perhaps *no one* would–the only solution was authoritarian rule. Alexander's conflicting ideas had given both himself and his country yet another paradox, and the young tsar whom one of his own ministers called "too weak to rule and too strong to be ruled" was not the man to resolve it.[12]

Part of the answer–in the short term, at least–was decided for him by events. Perhaps to compensate for his inability to make the changes he wanted at home, Alexander became more involved in European affairs, and when Napoleon declared himself Emperor of France in 1804, it was too much for the Emperor of all the Russians, who joined the anti-French coalition with Britain and Austria the next year. The campaign was an unmitigated disaster for the allies. Napoleon, who had been busy along the channel coast preparing to invade England, caught the allies off guard by moving his forces into central Europe more quickly than anyone thought possible and captured an Austrian army at Ulm, then entered Vienna unopposed. When the next major battle came in early December, Austerlitz, called the Battle of the Three Emperors because of the presence of Alexander, Napoleon, and Austrian King Franz II, who also held the largely honorific title of Holy Roman Emperor, was Bonaparte's most brilliant victory in his entire career and a rout for Russian forces, 26,000 of whom were lost. Alexander was so demoralized that he hurried all the way back to St. Petersburg and entered the Winter Palace a week after the battle at four in the morning to avoid being seen by anyone. That Lord Nelson had just destroyed the French navy at Trafalgar and eliminated

forever the threat of invasion for Britain was small comfort to the allies on land, where the French remained dominant. After a brief pause the war went on the next year, with Prussia now replacing defeated Austria in the allies' ranks, but things went no better for them: the French crushed the Germans at Jena and Auerstadt in the summer of 1806. A glimmer of hope could be seen when the Russian army once again met the French and fought them more or less to a bloody draw in the snow at Eylau the next winter–a taste of things to come in the summer heat of 1812 at Borodino–but in June of 1807 Napoleon scored a decisive victory once again at Friedland. So dire was the Russian plight that one grand duke told Alexander that if he refused to sue for peace, he might as well give each of his soldiers a loaded pistol with orders to shoot himself, since the result would be the same. Reluctantly, the disillusioned tsar agreed to meet Napoleon on a barge in the river between Prussia and Russia at Tilsit.[13]

The ensuing pact established friendship and alliance between the two emperors, dividing Europe between them with each controlling a sphere of influence, which theoretically made them equal, and Alexander portrayed it as a victory in a letter to his sister. But France had gotten the lion's share of the gains: Napoleon, the upstart usurper, was recognized as a legitimate ruler, remained in control of all his gains in Germany and Italy, and occupied Prussia, thus keeping military forces right up to the Russian border. Poland, which had been wiped off the map thirteen years earlier when Russia, Prussia, and Austria divided it among themselves, was resurrected as the Grand Duchy of Warsaw; the state was composed only of German-controlled Polish lands, but what might come next? Moreover, the duchy's very existence gave heart to millions of Poles under Russian rule who longed for independence. For his part, Alexander did achieve some small territorial gains, but his main accomplishment was simply to escape with his original holdings intact and his crown still on his head. He was forced to participate in Napoleon's Continental System, which forbade trade with Britain. This would prove seriously harmful to the Russian economy over the coming years, and was one of many reasons why the Franco-Russian entente was bound to break down sooner or later. The problem was not so much the loss of British imports as the blockade of Russian ports by the Royal Navy in retaliation for Russia's acceptance of the Continental System; grain exports fell by 75 percent, ruining many landowners. Alexander may also have been displeased with the Corsican's continuing scorn for the principle of legitimate–that is, hereditary–rule when the king of Spain was replaced by Napoleon's own brother in 1808; perhaps of greater personal concern to the tsar, French troops occupied the lands of the Duke of Oldenburg, who was the husband of Alexander's

sister Catherine. When Alexander resumed trade with Britain in 1810, even slapping tariffs on French goods entering Russia, the marriage of convenience between the two empires was clearly breaking down. Alexander actually considered a surprise attack on French forces in central Europe that year while Napoleon was preoccupied with Spain; perhaps viewing their relationship more realistically than he had at Tilsit, he wrote to Catherine, "There is no room for the two of us in Europe, sooner or later, one of us will have to bow out." War might have been averted at the personal level when Napoleon, over forty and still childless, considered Alexander's younger sister Anna as a possible mate who could bear his child. Nothing came of it, however, due to both Alexander's unwillingness to commit himself to the union and Napoleon's concern that the girl was so young that years might pass before she produced an heir. The choice ultimately fell upon the daughter of the Austrian emperor, whom Bonaparte married after duly divorcing his first wife. But the divorce that would shake Europe was between Napoleon and Alexander. French troops entered the Grand Duchy of Warsaw in 1811, pointing a dagger at the heart of Russia.[14]

Hostilities broke out in the summer of 1812. Many of the facts remain disputed to this day, beginning with the number of troops Napoleon had under his command, but whether it was 600,000 or a mere 400,000, it was at least twice the size of the Russian army, and in all likelihood the biggest military force the world had ever seen. Equally uncertain is whether the Russians' long retreat was a wisely thought out policy to lure the enemy away from his supply bases and then encircle him or simply the result of the generals' refusal to work together and outright fear of facing Napoleon in battle. But whatever its causes, it led the French deep into the Russian hinterland without a decisive engagement. When the Russians finally did stand and fight, it was also unclear what to make of the results: they lost 20,000 men at Smolensk, and somewhere between 45,000 and 58,000–nearly half their army–at Borodino, and left the field to the French each time. But it was far from a rout: Napoleon himself later declared of the second battle: "The French showed themselves worthy of victory, and the Russians won the right to be considered invincible" (*"Les Français s'étaient montrés dignes d'être vainqueurs, et les Russes avaient conquis le droit d'être considérés comme invincibles"*). The invaders also suffered staggering losses, which they were in a poor position to sustain at the end of a long supply line that got stretched longer and thinner with every step forward. Furthermore, in both battles the Russians managed to make an orderly withdrawal and preserve an effective fighting force that enabled them to continue the war. It all seemed strange to Napoleon, who