ISAIAH BERLIN ONLINE

The Russian Conception of the Artist

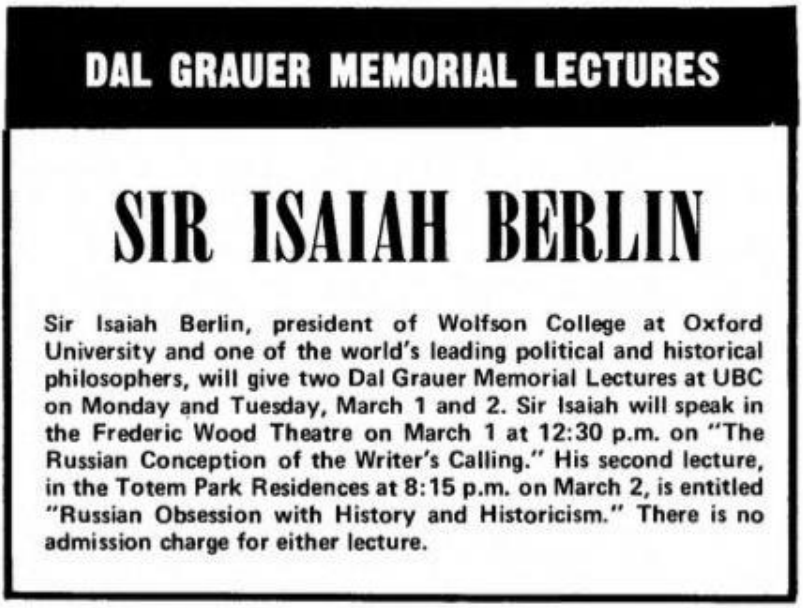
This PDF is one of a series designed to assist scholars in their research on Isaiah Berlin, and the subjects in which he was interested.

The series will make digitally available both selected published items and edited transcripts of unpublished material.

Transcripts of extempore talks (such as this one) have been edited by Henry Hardy to eliminate their most obvious linguistic and stylistic flaws, and some references are provided, but no systematic attempt has been made to bring these texts fully up to the standard required for conventional publication. The aim is only to make them available in a reader-friendly form.

The PDF is posted by the Isaiah Berlin Legacy Fellow at Wolfson College, with the support of the Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust.

This transcript is in the process of being constructed. The recording is of very poor quality, and any input from readers who are adept at audio editing would be welcomed by Henry Hardy. The base transcript was created by AI, and becomes increasingly nonsensical towards the end as the quality of the recording declines. The earlier part of the lecture has been edited as far as the recording allows.

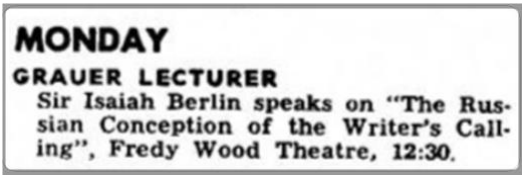


DAL GRAUER MEMORIAL LECTURES

SIR ISAIAH BERLIN

Sir Isaiah Berlin, president of Wolfson College at Oxford University and one of the world's leading political and historical philosophers, will give two Dal Grauer Memorial Lectures at UBC on Monday and Tuesday, March 1 and 2. Sir Isaiah will speak in the Frederic Wood Theatre on March 1 at 12:30 p.m. on "The Russian Conception of the Writer's Calling." His second lecture, in the Totem Park Residences at 8:15 p.m. on March 2, is entitled "Russian Obsession with History and Historicism." There is no admission charge for either lecture.

The Ubyssey *50 No. 35, 26 February 1971, 5: UBC Library Open Collections*



MONDAY

GRAUER LECTURER

Sir Isaiah Berlin speaks on "The Russian Conception of the Writer's Calling", Fredy Wood Theatre, 12:30.

ibid., 18

ISAIAH BERLIN TO LECTURE TWICE AT UBC

Sir Isaiah Berlin, one of the world's leading political and historical philosophers, will give two Dal Grauer Memorial Lectures at the University of B.C. March 1 and 2.

Described as having "one of the liveliest and most stimulating minds among contemporary philosophers," Sir Isaiah is president of Wolfson College at Oxford University in England and formerly held one of the academic world's most prestigious posts — Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford.

Sir Isaiah is particularly well-known for his studies of Russian political and intellectual history and both his lectures at UBC will deal with topics in this field.

On March 1 he will speak in the Frederic Wood Theatre at 12:30 p.m. on "The Russian Conception of the Writer's Calling." His March 2 lecture at the Totem Park Residences at 8:15 p.m. is entitled "Russian Obsession with History and Historicism."

Born in 1909 in Riga, Latvia, then a part of the Russian Empire, Sir Isaiah emigrated with his parents to England in 1920. In 1932, the year after he graduated from Oxford with a brilliant degree, he began lecturing at Oxford and has been associated with that institution ever since, except for service during the Second World War in New York and Washington, D.C.

Sir Isaiah is perhaps best known to the public for a number of outstanding books, including *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment; The Hedgehog and the Fox*, which examined the character of Leo Tolstoy, the famed Russian writer and philosopher; *Historical Inevitability*, a major contribution to the philosophy of history; and *Two Concepts of Liberty*, a plea for independence and human variety which has been compared to John Stuart Mill's famed essay *On Liberty*.

He has lectured widely in North America and made several appearances on American television. His radio talks in England have been described as "rapid, vivid, torrential cascades of rich, spontaneous, tumbling ideas and images."

UBC Reports *17 No. 5, 25 February 1971, 11*

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The family emigrated to England in 1921, not 1920 as stated in this announcement; in 1920 they had returned from Petrograd (modern St Petersburg) to Riga, capital since 1918 of an independent Latvia

The Russian Conception of the Artist

A Dal Grauer[1] *Memorial Lecture*

(Frederic Wood Theatre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, Monday 1 March 1971, 12:30 p.m.)

The Frederic Wood Theatre (1963)

CHAIRMAN [*the recording misses the beginning of the chairman's remarks*] Sir Isaiah is presently continuing his long and distinguished career at Oxford, where he's President of one of the newer colleges, Wolfson; and he is also professor at City University of New York, where he conducts graduate seminars. Ever since the appearance of his book on Karl Marx, which was published a few months only before the outbreak of the last war, Sir Isaiah has impressed readers, and those who heard him, with the powers of his mind and unique literary gifts. These are instantly recognisable, whether the subjects dealt with are Tolstoy, John Stuart Mill, Alexander Herzen or Herder.

He is, as one quickly discerns from his books, unafraid to state his preferences, which, I should interpret, are those of a liberal humanist,

[1] A. E. 'Dal' Grauer (1906–61), President and Chairman, British Columbia Power Corporation and BC Electric Company, Chancellor and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the University of British Columbia. On his death his widow and friends endowed a memorial lectureship at UBC.

suspicious of metaphysical systems, openly accepting the difficulties which men in society must face in making choices. At the same time that he's attracted to the liberal thinkers of the last century, he feels drawn to the great system-makers of the past, who saw no need to deny the notion of final harmony.

This afternoon, Sir Isaiah will be lecturing on the subject of the Russian conception of the writer's calling. Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to present to you Sir Isaiah Berlin.

ISAIAH BERLIN Ladies and gentlemen, first I would thank the chairman for his very kind introduction of me, and then proceed to say what I am always getting into trouble for, which is namely this: that I tend to talk very fast in a low voice, and people at the back, and sometimes people at the front, aren't able to hear what I say. May I ask people at the back, if they can't hear, and on the assumption that they wish to hear, to signify this by some mild eccentricity of behaviour, by either raising their hands or shuffling their feet, or doing something to attract my attention. If they succeed in doing this, I'll do my best to go more slowly and talk more loudly, though I can't promise that this will be a success, but I'll do my best. I assume that what I am saying now *can* be heard at the back, otherwise my remarks are somewhat self-stultifying. Can you hear me? Is it all right? Oh no, thank you very much. Now, let me come to the subject of this talk.

I WANT TO TALK about the Russian conception of the artist, which seems to me to have had a very powerful effect upon the West, not only Russia itself, but the West – upon us all, even at this moment, because it's a highly relevant subject in many ways, as you'll see.

There is something paradoxical about Russia and ideas. After all, nobody will deny that the largest single event or phenomenon of the twentieth century is the great Russian Revolution, which, in one way or another, has affected everyone for good. At the same time, it's difficult to say that, however much or however little you believed in the role of ideas in history, or the interrelationship of ideas and facts, it's difficult to see which particular ideas born on Russian soil precipitated this effect. And indeed further reflection leads one to think – and I'm about to utter a fairly sweeping

generalisation, and if it is untrue, I hope someone will point this out to us afterwards – that outside the realm of the sciences, where the Russians have, of course, produced men of genius as much as any other great nation, in the realm of humanities or general ideas, no powerful idea which affected mankind was born on Russian soil. Not any.

What has happened is this. There was a great impact on the West, upon Russia. These ideas came filtering in, in a manner which I shall try to describe. But something does happen to them on Russian soil. Namely, the Russians do tend, or have tended in the past, to take these ideas extremely seriously. To take an idea seriously makes a very great [difference to the] idea. In the course of this they become transformed. And in their transformed condition, they come hitting back at the countries where they were conceived, and other countries as well. It's what I should like to call a kind of boomerang effect. When the boomerang comes winging back, it sometimes carries an appearance very different from that with which it began. In this sense, they do transform ideas, and transform them very powerfully.

This, for example, happened to Russia with, say, the ideas of Darwin, which were simply scientific ideas of the West, but became an object of almost religious worship in Russia. It's what happened to the idea of the Party, the Communist Party. The conception, outlined by Marx and even by Engels, because it was taken with utter seriousness [?] by Lenin and by his colleagues, transformed itself, in effect at any rate, into an institution which its founders could scarcely have [envisaged], and in this form came back to Europe and to the rest of the world, and has made a very great deal of difference to our lives, [and of course, to that] of the West.

The idea of which I intend to speak, which is the idea of commitment in literature, [?] engagement or commitment, seems to me to be the product of the raining in of such ideas of the West, and their transformation upon Russian soil, and their re-emergence as a kind of Russian idea sometime in the nineteenth century. This idea came back to the West, and the impact of it has made a very

great deal of difference both to literature and to writing, and to the general outlook on life [?].

If you ask why there is this poverty of ideas on Russian soil, there are a good many reasons. Not of course that these are the kind of reasons which the scientists would give. It seems to me that in this kind of historical explanation, even if you do give reasons, it's idle to maintain that if you had known these reasons beforehand, you could have predicted the consequences. History is not a science, at any rate yet. The history of ideas still less. Nevertheless, I think it says something illuminating about this.

To begin with, you must remember that the great Church schism divided Russia as a section of South-Eastern Europe from the West, with the result that the great intellectual tradition in Europe, which was connected with the Roman Church [?] movement, never really touched Russia. The Russian Church produced its quota of holy living, of martyrs, of saintly lives, but it has no serious intellectual tradition. The Poles who lived next door had it, and so far as Russians had it at all, they caught it from the Poles fairly in the history. But the fundamental tradition of the Russian Church is non-intellectual in character. It doesn't breed ideas.

More than this, you could say that, as a result of this, you have a comparatively uneducated population with a small upper class, a tiny ruling class, totally incapable of coping with the enormous problems which began to occur when Russia first made its contacts both with East and West and began to [?], particularly during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. Everyone knows that what occurred was the great forward step made by Peter the Great, who was the greatest, in some ways the most brutal moderniser in the whole of history, who decided to transform Russia and make her capable of withstanding the impact of East and West. He sent his young men into foreign countries, he sent his young men to Germany, to Holland, to England, to France. They came back with skills, with art, with new languages. They became a nucleus of bureaucrats. The more they learnt, the more Europeanised they became, the greater grew the chasm between them and the vast mass of Russian

peasantry below, which remained in its old, dark and evil, superstitious, poverty-ridden squalor. This chasm, if anything, eventually widened as a result of Peter, and widened still further in the eighteenth century.

These Russian bureaucrats, who were sent to be educated in the West, and who [?] in the middle and towards the end of the eighteenth century, some of them really went through a traumatic and [?] experience. They read Voltaire. They read Rousseau. They read Montesquieu. They read these people. They came into contact with the ideas of the Enlightenment, the ideas of liberty, the ideas of light, science, which would put an end to superstition and prejudice, suspicion, the dark heritage of the Middle Ages weighing upon them. At the same time, the notion of trying to transform this vast and ill-governed empire in accordance with the new sciences, the new moral and political principles gained in the West was too heavy a task. The thing was too much. The average Russian landowner of the 1770s with one hand read Voltaire and believed in all kinds of enlightened ideas, and with the other hand still whipped his serfs just as merrily as before into the kind of divided life – and not very good, perhaps, for their children.

Some of them attempted to reform, but the weight was so heavy – even the Empress Catherine was not entirely clear, perhaps, when she tried to – [?] – to adapt the constitution to some kind of principle enunciated by Montesquieu, when she invited Diderot to Petersburg, and various German and Swiss scientists as well. Nevertheless, when it came to the point that the danger was too great – winds of change began to blow in Western Europe, the French Revolution was beginning to ripen, the probability of destruction of law and order was too high – and as soon as this began to happen, a straitjacket was immediately clamped on the great Empire. The bureaucrats tightened their control, if anything, and you have a picture of a small number of rather desperate men trying to govern a huge, unruly empire with a vast, ignorant, barbarous or semi-barbarous population of peasants and ignorant serfs, without very much aid from outside – the kind of situation about which the French reactionary Joseph de Maistre in the

beginning of the nineteenth century said that the worst thing which could happen was the liberation of the serfs.

He explained to Alexander I that in Europe, at least in the West, there were two great principles. One was the Church, the other was slavery. When the Church acquired enough authority, they could, of their Christian charity, abolish slavery; but in Russia the Church was ignorant, in Russia the Church was not respected, it was despised by everyone, it was chaotic, it was drunken, in the villages no one owned profound respect for the local priests, and therefore the liberation of the serfs would simply be the end. The whole empire would collapse, and they would leave a period of barbarism only in order to enter a period of violent and new barbarism, [?] civilisation altogether. This was the kind of impression which intelligent foreigners obtained about Russia towards the end of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth. [?]

Nevertheless, what happened, of course, we all know: Russia kept out of the West as long as it possibly could, at least. [?] young men were allowed to go, but in small quantities. They weren't allowed to go to France much, because it was regarded as rather too advanced in liberal ideas. They went to Germany, which was regarded as safer. But even there they obtained a certain number of ideas which fermented inside them and didn't really [?] morally [?] – certainly didn't allow very much [?] moral rest.

Then there was a great Napoleonic invasion, and the great Russian Army marched through Europe in a big way, for the first time in 1814, from Russia to Paris. This was an event of the first order, because the children of the troubled [?]. For the first time, they made direct contact with the masses in the form of the [?], who no doubt were [?] by their own [?], but the contact wasn't very [?]. In an army, particularly fighting great [?].

[*65 inaudible seconds*]

[?] well, soon after, is of course the fact that the Russians emerged from Europe […] achieved contact with European culture at the very moment of the rise of the Romantic movement. Don't let me

try to summarize the Romantic movement in three-and-a-half minutes, which is presumably what I ought to be doing now. Let me just say this, so far as it's relevant to this particular theme, that one of the central themes of the Romantic movement was the notion of vocation, vocation of purpose or function: that every group of human beings – nations, Churches, cultures, indeed every individual human being – was not born [?]. They each had some part to play in the great world drama. Various countries of course interpreted their various role differently, but part of the Romantic doctrine was that there was a built-in purpose, the realisation of which would [?] the potential of a human group, say the Germans, say the French, or of some organised entity, say the Enlightenment, or of some Church, say the new Protestant Churches, which developed them in some sort of way in which they would release all the potential forces in an appropriate, harmonious manner.

This is the kind of doctrine which is liable to be born, not among advanced, but rather more among backward, nations. These backward nations feel a certain shame and embarrassment about their [?]. They are despised, they are bullied, and they are dominated by the advanced. This is what happened with the Germans, even with the French. There were the French who were both materially and militarily, artistically and in every other respect the great dominant civilised nation of the world. The English, perhaps, only came [?]. Here were the Germans in the late sixteenth century, and certainly – [?] for whatever reason – has been looked upon by these Westerners as a simple-hearted collection of half peasant populations, peasants, schoolmasters, grammarians, persons who hadn't done very much for human civilisation, amiable but poor, and certainly not participants in the great Renaissance, in which the Italians, the French, the Dutch, even the Swedes, had taken a much more prominent part. For example, if you take the late sixteenth or the seventeenth century. This kind of humiliation always produces a reaction by which people say, can we build[?] that? Surely we have something which these others have not got. And the Germans came to the conclusion that the French were superficial, that the French didn't understand the

inner pulse of life, that the French were not dutiful, and many things of that sort.

Exactly this dominated Russia. Surely we must play some part in this world. They look upon us as great clodhopping barbarians, mere brutal repressors of European liberty, a mere army [?] coming crashing across Germany in order to restore [?] France. But surely there must be something more to us than what these persons suppose us to be.

The first person who really articulated these doubts and these thoughts was a Russian guards officer called Chaadaev, between 1829 and 1835, and he came [?] group. He said, if other nations have a glorious past, what have we? We have nothing – wandering tribes, after that, Byzantium, decayed Byzantium, after that [?], after the [?], after that disorder, nothing, darkness, ignorance, brutality, the knout, that's our past. Why are we here at all? What part are we called upon to play in this great world? Perhaps God created us simply as a caution to other nations, to show them how not to be, to show them what not to do.

Well, you can imagine this kind of writing, this kind of breast-beating, which then becomes an absolutely leading[?] thing among Russian intellectuals, this kind of almost exultant self-depreciation, and this painful enquiry about why are we here, where are we going, what is to be our future, whither is this enormous country with its vast wealth, its enormous strength, its huge geographical extent, what is it, what is to become of it? This kind of problem then becomes a regular thing [?]; almost every [?]. Chaadaev, having uttered these sentiments, was promptly declared mad, and a doctor [?] not allowed to leave the country: a regular act on the part of governments of this type when faced with this kind of declaration [?]. Now, no. But he did start all the [?]. And as a result of this the young, it seems, to some extent [?] contact with the West, filled with shame and agony about both the intellectual and above all the moral and social [?] of their poor brothers, [?] 95 per cent of the population, began to look for some way of remedy [?]. You must realise that [?] the dangerous ideas of the West were not really allowed to get in, and this also created its own [?].

Take, for example, Paris, where many ideas [?]. Paris in the 1830s and 1840s was filled with ideas largely born of the failure of the [?] of the French Revolution; an explanation of why it failed and what you should do in order to obtain those ends for which it was thought the Revolution was fought. Or, on the other hand, of those who thought the French Revolution was a disaster, and how must we stop its dreadful radical effects.

There were a great many conservative, liberal, socialist ideas steaming in Paris at that moment: a great many ideas by Saint-Simon, by [?], by the young Proudhon, this kind of atmosphere to which Marx came comparatively early in his life, in the early 1840s. Where you have an atmosphere where a great many ideas struggle for expression, no one of them, usually, acquires an absolutely blinding domination. They form a kind of field of thought in which they knock against each other, and [?] inoculate each other. So you have a general field of thought, but no domination.

Russia was exactly the opposite. From a young nation, fresh, eager, a new generation of young men being educated at the now expanded universities, even the Russians realised [?] coping, even technologically, with the West, a higher level of education was needed. And so the universities expanded. Persons not of noble birth began to be admitted. These persons, both these young noblemen and others, lived in an atmosphere comparative intellectual vacuum.

When you have this situation of a fresh nation, with immense agonised [?] after knowledge, hunger after knowledge [?], nostalgic yearning after truth, which somehow or other the churches had failed to provide, certainly their traditions had failed to provide – if you have that, *any* idea which comes wafting across, God knows how, in the false bottom of somebody's suitcase which the censors haven't been able to find, through the oral repetition by some young Russian who'd been to Paris or been to Brussels or been to some centre of Western culture, who then reported what he had read and what he had heard – these ideas acquire an enormous vitality and grow out of all recognition, because they haven't very much to compete with. And if you have a censorship as well, which

[?], they acquire the force of forbidden fruit, which, of course, makes them seem more attractive; with the result that these ideas, in wafting across from the West, grew to enormous size and power among the Russians. Moreover, because political and social thought was in effect forbidden under the repressive government of Nicholas I, they found their way into what were regarded as the safer channels of literature and art; with the result that literature became automatically [?]. That is to say, people who would normally have become social or political pamphleteers wrote novels or poems. And people who would normally write novels or poems became social or political pamphleteers. [?] huge pent-up indignity, exasperated desire to find some solution to a problem, to discover what to do, how one should [?], and so forth.

The voice which really articulated all this was that of the critic Belinsky in the 1840s – the late 1830s, early 1940s. He was a man of humble birth, and therefore [?] which [?] a public matter of social and political discussion [?] of the more advanced persons. He was a man of such sincerity and passion, such immense integrity and purity of life, that he had a very dominant effect upon [?]. And it was really he who created this particular movement. Now, let me explain what he believed and what people [?].

As I say, the natural field for this was art and literature. Now, [?]. The normal view, I'll call it the French view, but [?]. The ordinary Western or French view was that art was simply a product which you possessed. You were an artist. The public expected you to produce something. You were a carpenter: you made the best table you could. You were a composer: you produced the most beautiful work of music you could produce. You were a writer: you wrote in the most beautiful words, placed in the best order, about the most, to you, interesting subject. And you hoped that the [?] your composition [?].

This is not, of course, the view of the Romantics, who saw the artist as a kind of sacred instrument for the purpose of spreading the inner soul of the world, some kind of inner reality, which the gross eye of the ordinary critical observer could hardly express. But in Russia, simply because the number of the Enlightened [?], these

people felt that they were the only people who could talk to each other freely. Whenever you have a situation where you have political repression, and there's oppression [?], you always have a certain solidarity among the liberated, a solidarity among the Enlightened, a solidarity among those who *can* read and write, a solidarity among those who [?]. These people began to feel that they had a certain responsibility to their weaker brethren, the responsibility of any man in public to tell the truth. On the French view, you simply purveyed the object and you made it as attractive to the people, to the audience, to the public as you could. But in Russia the idea that art is an object would be regarded as [?] because that meant that in some way you were compartmentalising [?]. You said: As a writer, I write; as a composer, I compose; and as a man – what do I do as a man? [?] As a writer, like Goethe, for example, I may pity poor Gretchen in *Faust* and represent her as an innocent victim of Faust, wrongly condemned to death. But as the advisor to the Grand Duke of Weimar I may sign a great many death warrants of girls who performed exactly the same crimes as Gretchen did, without any qualms. It won't do. Man is one, and what he says, he says with the whole of his personality. You cannot divide human beings inside and say: As a father I feel this, and as a writer I feel that. As a citizen I feel this, and as a painter or as a composer I feel that.

This is a view which is genuinely different from that of the average Western writer. If you said to, I don't know, to Stendhal, that you had discovered that he was a spy for the German government, you wouldn't have regarded that as relevant to the excellence or otherwise of his novels. Even if you had discovered, I think, that Dickens took [?] rent from the poor at the time of writing his most moving novels, perhaps it would have done something to weaken his reputation. But the merit of his novels would still have been regarded as undiminished by this. This wasn't so in Russia.

When Herzen, the famous Russian revolutionary of the nineteenth century, said, 'Russian literature is one enormous

indictment of Russian life';[2] when the writer Korolenko [?] said, 'My home is not Russia, my home is Russian literature',[3] this meant something [?]. It meant that Russian literature, which is the literature ultimately of [?] – a literature which tries to defend human rights, a literature which in some way expressed those ideals which were largely not [?]. That was the true home of a writer who thought that to speak the truth without censorship [?].

It wouldn't have made any sense – you can't imagine Jane Austen saying, 'England is not my country, English literature is my country.' It wouldn't have made any sense even for Henry James to say, 'America is not my country, American literature is.' Nobody would have known what he meant and indeed he wouldn't have said it. But, in the case of Russia, it's very plain what this means. Because literature did become the only escape route, the only fence through which the exasperated wound could be [?: *long garbled passage*]. Despite the constant breach of the social obligations of the writer, he kept on emphasising the fact that it was no good merely reading ideas in books [?]. That wouldn't make them live.

The argument was that if you lived in a society and didn't want to run away from its reality, then what you said inevitably reflected those realities, whether you meant them to do so or not. [?] all great writers [?]. [?] inspired all these writers, and even the cold-hearted [?], try as he might, nevertheless conveyed the whole picture of contemporary German life, which is why philosophers and other writers had so many quotations [?] their works [?] in this kind of encyclopedia of [?]. Above all, [?] on the one hand non-detachment [?] those who ran away [?]. All those on the contrary who admitted [?] life is terrible, but we haven't made it that way [?] you might as well accommodate us. [?] never produce work [?].

[2] More literally, Herzen writes of 'The great indictment drawn up by Russian literature against Russian life': 'Du développement des ideés révolutionnaires en Russie' (1851), A. I. Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Moscow, 1954–66), vol. 7, 117.

[3] His exact remark is 'I found my homeland, and this homeland became, first of all, Russian literature.' V. G. Korolenko, *Istoriya moego sovremennika* (1905), chapter 27: *Sobranie sochinenii v pyati tomakh* (Leningrad, 1989–91), vol. 4, 270.

The people he admired were those who he said were sons of their time, sons of their country, knew where they were, understood the social situation in which they lived, suffered it in their instincts, in their feelings, in the innermost [?] of their heart and mind [?] works of art because they have a talent for imagery, because they have a talent for writing: without talent, without images nothing would happen. To say of literature [?] interesting, true, important [?].

This is the sermon of this preacher, whose own tormented life [?] to his sincerity. He started off by preaching the philosophy of Fichte, which in his case [?] imply the attempt to rise above the darkness of everyday life [?]. He then abandoned this for the philosophy of Schiller, which preached the necessity of resisting tyranny, resisting oppression, and in some way making [?] a vehicle of [?]. He left that. His life was one long series of zigzags, painfully borne, because every time he changed his view he did so in an agonised way and tried to live it [?] Hegel, who in some way, for him at any rate, preached reconciliation with reality, because once you understood why there was [?], once you understood why Philip II was [?], once you understood why Peter the Great was shaping the people with his own hands, once you understood why Nicholas I had to keep Russia in its straitjacket, because the common people, if they were allowed anywhere near ideas, would become intoxicated by them and go and smash everything up; once you understood this, you were reconciled to it; to understand reality is to understand the great [?] of the universe, to kick against which is a form of childishness and immaturity.

This is the reaction [?] Belinsky didn't linger in it very long, because, being a morally very sensitive individual, in the [?], in the end, he said, whatever Hegel might say, he was not prepared to put up with every cruelty and abomination [?], simply because some higher harmony demanded it. It's all very well for the higher harmony. But for us who live below, this is less convenient. It may be that discords are necessary for some higher harmony. Those who are doomed to instantiating discord in their personal lives, cannot be expected to appreciate this point of view. And so he

ended up, it doesn't quite matter how he ended up, he ended up as a fairly bourgeois liberal, in fact. But this, I think, is relatively unimportant. The point is, each time he tried to live his philosophy, [?], however many friends or enemies it might have made him, [?]. But this created a moral image for other Russian writers of what criticism is to do. Let me try to explain this. It's really the birth of the theory of criticism.

There were social criticisms in earlier [?]. For someone like Sainte-Beuve, for example, in the eighteenth century, social criticism means knowing about the milieu of the writer, who his parents were, where he went to school, what the social situation was in which he was brought up, what the religious and social or political views were of his time [?].

For someone like Schlegel, social criticism means the perception, in great works of art, of the most typical figures of their time. You looked in Shakespeare for the most rich and full-blooded representatives of the sixteenth century. You looked in Cervantes for the richest and most developed kind of humanity in the Spain of his time. You looked in Dante for something similar. And therefore social criticism is simply the ability to pick out a kind of idealised image of the most typical, the most characteristic, the most important, the most interesting being – [?] – of any age and any time [?] in what way it expresses itself culturally? In what way it expresses itself socially? In what way it expresses itself morally and of course [?]? [?] Belinsky is the father of criticism [?]. The sense in which [?]. He really believed in the identity [?]. When, for example, he reviewed *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Goldsmith,[4] which he must have read in the seventeen[?] French translation, seventeen of the miserable French translations. [?] He says, 'All

[4] When this lecture was given it was generally assumed by Belinsky scholars that the (unsigned) review of Goldsmith's novel published in *Sovremennik* in November 1847 (1847 vi no. 1, part 3 ['Russkaya literatura'], 77–86) was by Belinsky. It has since emerged, however, that it was in fact written by A. D. Galakhov, who mentions it in 'Moe sotrudnichestvo v zhurnalakh', *Istoricheskii vestnik* 26 (1886), 312–35, at 323. But Galakhov's attitude echoes Belinsky's closely, and may indeed have been influenced by it.

very well about the Vicar of Wakefield, but he's represented by Goldsmith as a sort of saintly character on the edges of life, who takes no part in the action at all. The wicked people are people who act. The virtuous people are people who don't do anything, are simply buffeted about by life: victims, innocent, unworldly, rather sweet, but potentially rather impractical victims of the morality of [?]. We can't accept it. This is [?] as philosophy. The morality of this implies non-action. In some way it is only a reaction. It implies that confrontation, or some kind of Christian resignation, is more important than active appearance [?] the full exfoliation of all my talents in the service of whatever I regard as [?] an ideal of my life. I'd rather condemn the poor Vicar of Wakefield. And this was a tremendous piece of moral propaganda of the wrong kind.

This, of course, is an exaggerated attitude, and doesn't tell us much about the Vicar Wakefield. But it indicates the kind of criticism – when he reviews fifteenth-rate novels, he takes them utterly seriously. He says, 'Maria Nikolaevna in Chapter 1 says this and this and this, but in Chapter 14 she no longer says that [?]. The kind of character that Maria Nikolaevna is, as we all know, must be such and such, therefore the author is doing something immoral here. He's trying to attract the reader's sympathy. He's trying to play with the reader. He's trying to affect the reader's nervous system. He's trying to simply excite the reader. He's trying to sell something to the reader. He's not interested in the truth. He's not [?] into the subject. This is a form of using art simply as a form of amusement, or using art where it still [?]. This is [?] remarkable. This is the worst form of [?] betrayal, which a man attempting to tell the truth [?]. This was roughly speaking the kind of [?] which he [?]. And it enters very deeply into the heart of even the most [?], and even the most [?].

Let me tell you [?] that this is a real case of [?]. The problem of what is the subject of art, if you [?] the social function or on the contrary art for art's sake, was something which was raging in Paris in the [?]. Various persons, Saint-Simonians for example, [?], maintained that the purpose of art was [?]. Art for art's sake as a movement was born as a protest against pressure on the artist by

outside forces, by the Church, by the state, by the bourgeoisie, by the market. Saint-Simon [?] maintained that whatever you said already conveyed your personality, and was, whether you knew it or not, [?]. Therefore artists might as well realise that their work [?]. They might as well become conscious that everything [?] has a certain effect on others, is in a certain sense propaganda. And if it is propaganda, you might as well be aware of what it is, and direct it towards [?] namely, the realisation of Saint-Simonian ideals.

Against this there arose someone like Théophile Gauthier, a well-known Romantic poet, [?], who said that it is [?] to try to make of art something useful [?].

> A poem is not a syringe. An epic is not a railway station. A novel is not a pair of shoes. A metonymy will not keep the rain off when you walk: it's not an umbrella. No, no, a thousand times no [he says], by the bowels of all the Popes, dead, living, in the future, let me tell you that what you are saying is absolute nonsense and rubbish. Cretins, fools, ten thousand times no. [5]

This was a very famous instruction by Mademoiselle de Maupin, and it was seen as the greatest manifesto of pure art. This argument between people who believed in art as a social tendency, people like the writer George Sand, and people of her circle, and the art for art's sake Romantics, like Gautier and his friends, this rage, at its greatest in the 1830s and the early 1840s, had ultimately fizzled out. By the 1860s, not very much was heard of it [?].

But in Russia it took tremendous root, and [?] it has become the origin of the entire school of Russian fiction. [?] Take someone like Turgenev, who was regarded in the West as the most artistic, the most pure, the most lyrical and the least political of all the great Russian novelists. Turgenev was in love with art as art, and he adored the [?], and he was always saying how little he wished to be

[5] *Mademoiselle de Maupin: double amour* (Paris, 1835), 41–2 (the preface is dated May 1834). IB plays fast and loose with the text here: for a more accurate version see SR2 254–5; cf. RR2 15.

involved in the painful and tragic problems of the day, but he [?]. When he wrote *On the Eve*, for example, about the Bulgarian Revolution; still later, when he wrote his famous novel *Fathers and Sons*, the central character of which is the sinister nihilist Bazarov, who despises the whole of the accumulated aesthetic civilisation, who believes that only science matters, who dislikes genteel living as such, who shocks and horrifies both his friend, the student, and the student's father, and above all, the student's aesthetic uncle, [?] the violence, and the brute, and the undisguised hostility of his radical sentiments, which [?] that, more or less, detecting bombs is more useful than reading about the [?] the Russian people, because he wanted the truth, he wanted science, and not all this self-indulgent pretty poetry, aesthetic [?] of life, and so forth. When he wrote this, a storm broke over his head. It broke over his head because the young thought he had caricature them, and the old thought he had idealised them too much. This is what invariably happens on the part of anyone who seeks to tell the truth in careful terms with a certain degree of unbending integrity, which Turgenev certainly had.

He might have answered all these criticisms. The old criticised him for putting Bazarov on a pedestal, for suddenly producing this crude, violent, nihilistic revolutionary figure [?] hatred of liberal life itself, of glorifying him, of making him sinister but at the same time wildly attractive, the large, gigantic figure much bigger than anyone else. The novel puts everybody [?]. The young, of course, said that he was much too horrified [?] part of their intention to [?].

In a way [?] of the government, those who fix a new label on the students they didn't like, call them nihilists and punish them for every fire that broke out in Petersburg, for every accident that occurred in Moscow, by saying these were deliberate pieces of revolutionary activity. Turgenev didn't retire by saying, I am a novelist. I simply describe what I find. I am not tempted here. I am not preaching a sermon here. Why are you all against me? I am trying to tell the truth. I am not [?]. I am an honest man, describing the life of others. He did not do this. [?] eye upon him [?] he was dead by age, of course, before the novel was published, but he was

a great friend of Turgenev, and the moral influence which his image had was something indelible in his life. There was this severe stare which hauled them back to some sense of dignity and truth. And above all conveyed all forms of evasion. Evasion above all before coming to the social danger.

Turgenev tried to [?]. He said, [?] I adore the novel. I didn't share it with you enough. You may go a little too far. But in every other respect, of course, I am on his side. And he wrote endlessly, within the large number of pieces of text, how could this be taken? How could this? But, all I could have expected was a place to play once again. I am entirely against this idea. I am one of the people who borrowed most of the ideas. Most of the ideas. Mentally destroying the surface of Russia. Of course, I am on the side of liberty against serfdom. [?] On the other hand, there was other friends whom we were choosing rather than escape from a different life. Of course, what the very radicals were doing was essentially increasing the danger of it. One understood why they were doing it because, of course, the city had been harassed and Russia was in a terrible condition. Nevertheless, it was clear that our goals were utopian and our methods abominable.

I am not for a moment trying to defend Turgenev, who is a somewhat typical leftist who is trying to defend himself both ways. The only point I wish to make is he didn't wish to escape into saying art is art. What is it to do with politics? Why do? I am describing how dare you suggest that I am seems to be calling for taking sides? Of course one takes sides. One can't help it. In every sense. Right. Your business, as I said before, is not possible to neutralise oneself to such an extent which is so far above and therefore has merely produced a so-called objective description which doesn't for one single moment betray the right of the nation. Yes, I have an attitude, and, if you want to know what it is, I am against revolution, I am against reactionaries. But on the other hand I hate the reactionaries, I fear the radicals. I am very comfortable with mine.

This is roughly what it is. I believe in gradualism. I believe in anti-systems. I believe that if you hurry things you produce chaos,

you produce violence, I believe in socialisation, on the other hand, if this system goes on, then, of course, the revolutions will multiply, the danger of a collapse becomes imminent and this country, which is the most reactionary and political and abominable state in Europe, will deserve a collapse of its own wealth and security.

And that was the least, the least and the most subversive and deadly drain, first of all, as the purest, purest god of an ultimate system of law, the man about whom it is said that the man is more expedient than anyone in Europe. The man will be [?].

[*Here the quality of the recording declines still further, and the automatic transcript is not yet edited after this point*]

The man more interesting than anyone you've ever met. The man who is looked upon by his immigrant friends, Trump, by Flaubert, by Maupassant, by Zola, as well as tens of thousands of others. Certainly, the view of Prussians as a kind of harmless idiot, of such a weakly-hearted person of character, of the Russian countryside, of the Russian peasants, of the Russian squares, is the normal view of Turgenev propagated in the West.

It's inaccurate, because, of course, every single one of his novels, the bigger novels, has a simple prediction. All we can learn from Russia, I suppose, is that in our state today, one of the characteristics of Russian literature, simply because Russia is so powerful, because they're so aware of their backward traditions, because they're so aware of how undeveloped the artistry is in Europe, and filled with embarrassment, shame, and, as I say, predictions of how it all turns out, because all we have to do is read. Whether the people are Russians, or Estonians, or Estonians, or whoever it may be, we have to read now.

For this reason, the whole of Russian literature is completely down-to-earth. The only literature of which is not comparable, is, as you say, with the Nazis. It's not quite so bad.

All Russian novels are about Russia, and about Russia as a whole. The question of 'Whither Russia?', the same as the question probably, what do we do about the Serb system, what do we do

about the Zari system, what do we do about corruption, what do we do about arbitrary punishment, what do we do about the whole horror, the horror of this reaction. For a reason.

It occupies more than one very novel, in its core interrogation, where they think it does. Wouldn't it be very odd if it said, with a reason, if, constructively, and with a purpose, they know simply to say, with a purpose, a will to do that. It is very typical of Russia, that will and a purpose.

It was like that. That's what it was. Well, it is typical of the Russians, and typical of the Soviet Union, and typical of these major novels.

The same thing is true of Tolstoy, in a very different way. If you take Tolstoy, for example, he is a man who is not objective in his life. He does not trust history.

He is a man who, on the whole, despite, oh, I'll keep going, first of all, we'll get to several problems, but it's important, but he is Tolstoy. He is deeply offended by the notion that the novel is, has to do with Tolstoy. And he entails, he entails the myth of the man, that there is no difference between the man and the novel.

You can't say that the novel is making one thing out of another. How dare you ask me what I do as a man? None of your business. You wouldn't put this on the website.

I produce novels for reasons. I produce very few reasons. What I do at home is my relationship with my king, my wife, my wife, my money, is my own affair.

This is their affair. This is not a political affair. This is a major Russian affair.

Tolstoy has four criteria for what makes a good novel. The first criteria is that you need to write well. Well-written.

For Tolstoy, this means writing fairly and truthfully. You must write of general human importance and not political. In terms of what men, in general, are, men are great.

The third criterion is that you must write and you must say, you must say what is the step I draw with you. You must say what you understand. You must say exactly what kind of stance, what kind of position you still have.

If you are an artist, it will be clear. You must say exactly, so you must ask the reader to try with you, tell them to try also. In other words, you must have the text.

It will all be done as your goal. You must be quite clear that everything you are writing is something for which you have some correspondence here. Either because you've lived through it or because you've imagined it.

In full concrete sense, you find that in the example of the Aryan film, where the images are always being made more and more concrete. Water supports your speech. At first, they think they'll remove that from the water with a blank screen card.

Then comes the governing inquiry. The final image is they remove that image from within the mud and bottom of the screen with a pound of a floppy of books. The fourth criteria is that you must understand where the moral centre of experience lies.

You don't understand that. You are behaving immorally. Now, in the sense of course, you must try to hit in the middle of the criteria what to do down to the most important references you've got on the day-to-day.

That must be right, and evidence denies the right to do so. Moreover, if you look at the stereotypical lifestyle of all those guys who had to hide into their car seats and all the nonsensical images that they had to create, and all these challenges they had to face, whose thoughts are these that they must not be heard back. There is no importance of trivial and political.

Who was to hear what the politicians had to say and what the politicians advocated for and advocated what was advocated for I would have been quite in that way. And this is it. This undermines confidence.

It is precise, it is at a much better score. It's not something very complicated. It's loose, it's in a simple manner.

It's all in simple words. It feels like a stuffed rabbit. There's nothing to do with it.

And it's not out of the box or it's pointing out what it ought to say. The final step, which is rightly so, is what matters. Which is, like I said, the outcome.

And, as an idea, it is unfortunate. After the first two hundred pages, all the characters are on the page, the whole thing is done, all the rest is obscene. But this is what it does.

The point I'm making is not this one at all. The point I wish to make is that the whole story, all the characters are on the page. The fact that the story sometimes is more obscene than other ways of looking at it.

If I told you constantly, I would look like I was always doing that. And it's not what's going to happen. Next thing is that it's done.

Right? This is the point I'm looking for. We have a little girl, and she's more of a prostitute, and a lot of men come to see her mother, and they get married, and they have kids, and they love their mom, and then there's another prostitute, but she's a girl, who is addicted to a lot of stuff, and another becomes a prostitute. Right? And that's the end of the story.

And what's going to happen is, apart from the narrative story of the story, apart from what's happening in the game, what's happening in the game, is going to happen in the game. The British consume some of their oil right now. The British don't have it.

They don't consume it. They don't have it. And if you could say, for example, today, that the Meetings are going to take even a half-decade to be scheduled, you could say, we're not going to be able to afford to be here for the rest of the year.

For example, where are we supposed to find the money? So there's rather a difference there between what the British are going to do and what the British are not going to do. Why is there nothing to be said, I guess, about the mechanical force? Why is there nothing to be said about the fact that we have no power now? Why is there nothing to be said about the refugees? Why is there nothing to be said about the Gulf War? And why is there nothing to be said about the military? What's the problem? It's one of the biggest pitfalls in Russia.

[*Applause*]

CHAIRMAN [*closing remarks*]

Dal Grauer Memorial Lecture, 1 March 1971; University of British Columbia Archives, ***LE3.B8k U54 :142 Tape***

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