The Discovery of Chance: The Life and Thought of Alexander Herzen. By Aileen M. Kelly. Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016. x, 592 pp. Notes. Index. Photographs. $39.95, hard bound.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2017.124

Alexander Herzen was a man of many parts: an accomplished philosopher, political thinker, essayist, and polemical journalist, a less accomplished novelist, the founder of a free Russian press in London, and editor of the émigré journal *The Bell*. The body of thought that he left cannot be easily classified. It may still be debated whether he leaned more towards the "Westernism" or the "Slavophilism" of his day and whether on balance he belonged politically in the revolutionary or the evolutionary camp. However, his thought had certain essential qualities that are not in question, and these are brought out with great clarity in Aileen Kelly's authoritative new study. Herzen believed that philosophical and political systems that claimed to have discovered fundamental laws governing human history and societies had despotic potential. He railed at historical determinism and grand narratives that sought to reveal pattern in history or to identify the existence of some goal toward which history was supposedly moving. He argued instead for a view of history that accommodated diversity, inconsistency, unpredictability, and the role of contingency, in spite of the fact that proud free spirits might find it difficult to accept the "terrible whirlpool" of chance (359). Not that the ubiquitous intrusion of contingency into human affairs precluded the possibility that human will and consciousness or the education of future generations would to some degree shape the course of individual destiny or peoples' histories. In any case, humans believe themselves to be free agents. Central to Herzen's writings, therefore, was the urge to explore personal freedom in the interstices between circumstances humans cannot control, using what Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, whom Herzen greatly admired, described as an "independent and mocking reason" (318).

These features of Herzen's thought were illuminated in Kelly's earlier books *Toward Another Shore* (1998) and *Views from the Other Shore* (1999), in which Herzen was also the central figure, and before that in several of the essays of Isaiah Berlin, who heroized Herzen and whose presence is strongly felt in this book too. What is particularly original about *The Discovery of Chance*, though, is Kelly's presentation of Herzen against the background of a revolution that was taking place just before and during his lifetime in the natural sciences. She outlines the development, from the late eighteenth century, of a historical approach to the study of the natural world that had previously been conceived as a static reality. This revolution culminated in Charles Darwin's work *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, which posed a challenge, Kelly argues, to the sort of teleological thinking against which Herzen had begun to rebel at least a decade earlier. Herzen thus anticipates Darwin, she contends, inasmuch as acceptance of the notion of natural selection entails a view of the natural world and mankind as products of chance rather than providential design. He was "in the avant-garde of the very few thinkers who anticipated the significance of the Darwinian revolution for our understanding of history" (525). Throughout her book, Kelly emphasizes Herzen's keen interest in evolutionary science, which, after all, he had chosen to study at Moscow University, in the years 1829–1833, in preference to history and philosophy. The speculation encouraged by philosophy—the guiding force of the poetic, almost mystical enquiry that characterized the Romantic movement to which Herzen was exposed by his youthful reading—had to be combined with the empiricism of the evolving natural sciences.

Although Kelly continues to portray Herzen as a genius who consistently expressed ideas that were too novel or too frightening for contemporaries to accept, she adopts a less overtly reverential tone toward him here than in her earlier writings, and her new

book is the better for that. She does not attempt, for example, to gloss over or condone Herzen's approval, at certain times, of Jacobin terror and political dictatorship, or the highly selective nature of his presentation of the outlook of the Russian intelligentsia to a western readership, or his colossal self-regard. She also appreciates the factual unreliability of his work *My Past and Thoughts*, which was due in part to its hybrid nature as both memoir and artistic creation in which Herzen himself played the role of tragic hero. (Curiously, there is no sustained discussion of this work in *The Discovery of Chance*, although it is commonly acknowledged as one of Herzen's masterpieces and indeed one of the great monuments of classical Russian literature, broadly understood.) Kelly's tone is less dispassionate, however, when it comes to Herzen's disputes with thinkers who in the early years of the reign of Alexander II feared that the strident expression of radical opinion might compromise an exceptional opportunity for far-reaching reform. She castigates "liberals" who saw dangers in Herzen's persistent vilification of the social, economic, and political order in western Europe, and also historians who have wondered whether Herzen's critique of the contemporary west helped to discredit moderate political opinion in mid-century Russia and thus to damage the prospects for the acquisition of new freedoms and the development of civil society there. At the same time, she acknowledges the good sense of Herzen's acceptance, by the mid-1860s, of precisely those points that the early Russian liberals to whom he had been close in the 1840s had been making: revolutionism posed risks, moderation and gradualism had certain merits, and the existence of a bourgeoisie could bring some benefits to a society.

The Discovery of Chance is a penetrating and highly readable account of Herzen's life and thought. It is set in a rich context, paying close attention at appropriate points to the numerous thinkers and scientists whose ideas most deeply affected Herzen at one time or another. Of the main studies of Herzen in English (the others are by Martin Malia and Edward Acton) this book is—and for a long time will no doubt continue to be—the most complete.

Derek Offord
University of Bristol, UK

Russia in the German Global Imagination: Imperial Visions and Utopian Desires, 1905–1941. By James E. Casteel. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016. Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies. xx, 251 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Maps. $28.95, paper.
doi: 10.1017/slr.2017.125

In his seminal study on the German "Russia complex" of the first half of the twentieth century, *Der Russland-Komplex: Die Deutschen und der Osten 1900–1945*, Gerd Koenen convincingly argued that Ernst Nolte's thesis of a "causal nexus" between Bolshevism and Nazism narrows the perspective in an objectionable way. Similarly to the majority of the German left, considerable segments of the political right, too, were not only traditionally mesmerized with "Russia" but also with the Soviet experiment. This goes even for the Nazi party and its leadership.

In the footsteps of Koenen, but based on a different corpus of travelogues, articles in newspapers and magazines, pamphlets, books, and archival sources by lesser-known German contemporaries, among them "intellectuals, nationalist activists, government officials, and other observers and commentators" (6), Caseels investigates "Germans' fear of and fascination with the Soviet Union" (172) in three fields: "the rhetoric of colonization inherent in German travelers' efforts to make sense of the Soviet project; the transformed German spatial imaginary, as evidenced by Germans' discussion of