# Microhistory and Cultural Memory: The Afterlife of J.A. Rosenstrauch's *An Evangelical Pastor's Experiences at Deathbeds*

Alexander M. Martin

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In 1834, Edward Bulwer-Lytton published *The Last Days of Pompeii*, a novel of love, intrigue, and religious ferment in a doomed Roman city. The book had a remarkable afterlife. Its occultist themes influenced the Russian mystic Elena Blavatskaia (Madame Blavatsky) when she attempted to create a modern religion for the 19th century. In the mid-20th century, the book's theme of a civilization in decay influenced the cinema: an American adaptation in 1935 created the decades-long Hollywood tradition of depicting imperial Rome as quasi-fascist, and an Italian adaptation in 1959 gave co-director Sergio Leone a chance to explore the themes that later characterized his famous westerns[1].

These reverberations of *The Last Days of Pompeii* exemplify what Aleida Assmann, a theorist of collective memory, calls "cultural memory". According to Assmann, societies "stor[e] extensive information in libraries, museums, and archives", creating an "archival" cultural memory consisting of artifacts that have a "complex structure" and lend themselves to "continuous reassessments". These artifacts mostly lie dormant in the archive, but from time to time, intellectuals find one of them relevant to their present concerns and restore it to public awareness, thereby bringing it into "active" cultural memory[2]. Thus, Bulwer-Lytton's novel was returned from archival to active memory and reinterpreted for contexts as disparate as Theosophy, fascism, and the "spaghetti western".

The study of cultural memory has a needle-in-the-haystack quality because one has to comb through large numbers of sources for scattered references to a particular artifact. In the present century, however, technology has revolutionized our ability to conduct such research. Just as powerful telescopes have expanded our known universe by revealing previously invisible galaxies, the creation of databases of electronically searchable historical sources has brought a vastly expanded range of artifacts into our field of vision.

One such artifact is a small book, "An Evangelical Pastor's Experiences at Deathbeds", in which a Lutheran clergyman from Khar'kov (present-day Kharkiv) named Johannes Ambrosius Rosenstrauch describes his efforts to save the people's souls in their final hours. From the late 1830s until the early 20th century, and again after the fall of the Soviet Union, we find references to this book and its author in Russian, German, and other European texts. Rosenstrauch was cited in Germany as an exemplary pastor, but also as evidence that Russia was despotic and that Europe was menaced by an international Jewish conspiracy. In Russia, Orthodox priests cited him as a role model for their church during the Great Reforms and after the 1905 Revolution. His book helped the poet Vasilii Zhukovskii to think about the meaning of death, and the critic Nikolai Leskov, to weigh the literary merits of Tolstoi and Dostoevskii. Similar to *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Rosenstrauch's memory reverberated across

[1] M. M. Winkler, *The Roman Empire in American Cinema after 1945*, in *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture*, ed. by S. R. Joshel – M. Malamud – D. T. McGuire, Jr., Baltimore 2001, p. 58; D. Huckvale, *A Dark and Stormy Oeuvre: Crime, Magic and Power in the Novels of Edward Bulwer-Lytton*, Jefferson, N.C. 2016, pp. 80-82, 87, 94.

[2] A. Assmann, *Memory, Individual and Collective*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. by R. E. Goodin – C. Tilly, Oxford 2006, pp. 220-221.

national and disciplinary borders, allowing us to observe how a single artifact could be reinterpreted in multiple countries from the viewpoints of poetry, literary criticism, theology, and political commentary[3].

The case of Rosenstrauch's book shows the usefulness of microhistory for the study of cultural memory. Rosenstrauch's life was an odyssey from the social margins of the Holy Roman Empire to the geographic margins of imperial Russia. He poured the accumulated experiences and feelings of this odyssey into his book, which was later read by mainstream Germans and Russians and influenced their ideas about the challenges of 19th century modernization. Rosenstrauch feared that readers would reject him if they knew his past, so he wrote nothing about his personal history, leaving readers to fill the void with their own idiosyncratic imaginings. The story of his book and its afterlife thus engages with three of the principal themes of microhistory: the role of non-elite individuals as intermediaries between centers and peripheries and between different societies and cultures[4]; the unreliability of texts, which can hide as much as they reveal[5]; and the dialectical relationship between texts and life – how people construct the meaning of their lives through the texts they read[6] and through those they write[7].

I will begin by describing Rosenstrauch's biography and showing how it influenced his book "An Evangelical Pastor's Experiences at Deathbeds". Then I will discuss the book's persistence in cultural memory, first in Germany and then in Russia.

## Rosenstrauch's Life

The book for which Rosenstrauch was remembered by posterity was informed by the experiences of his entire life. To understand his place in cultural memory, we therefore have to start by knowing who he was in reality.

Rosenstrauch's biography has elements of a picaresque novel. All we know of his origins is that he later said he was born in 1768 to a Catholic burgher family in Breslau in Prussian Silesia. Otherwise, he kept silent about his family, childhood, and upbringing; there must have been something compromising that he wanted to keep secret, but I have no idea what it was. Old Regime society prized respectability and rootedness in one's community, trade, and religion, but Rosenstrauch, as a young man, moved farther and farther away from that ideal. He traveled across Germany as a journeyman barber-surgeon, but then abandoned that trade and never returned home. In 1788, he married a young Protestant woman who was apparently pregnant and had run away from home. In the 1790s, he and his wife were actors, widely regarded as a dishonorable profession. He also became a Freemason. In 1798, his wife abandoned him and their four children. In 1804, he tried unsuccessfully to obtain a divorce; to make himself legally eligible for a divorce, he converted to Lutheranism.

Rosenstrauch was clearly a figure at the margins of Old Regime society, but he was also a recognizable European type of the Age of Revolution. That he was an individualist and a rebel is apparent from the fact that he left his family, hometown, and trade, and also from his geographic mobility and the cir-

[3] I discuss Rosenstrauch's life in detail in my monograph *From the Holy Roman Empire to the Land of the Tsars: One Family's Odyssey, 1768-1870*, Oxford 2022. This article is adapted from chapter 15 of that book.

[4] D. L. Ransel, *A Russian Merchant's Tale: The Life and Adventures of Ivan Alekseevich Tolchënov, Based on His Diary*, Bloomington 2009, p. 254; A. S. Fogleman, *Two Troubled Souls: An Eighteenth-Century Couple's Spiritual Journey in the Atlantic World*, Chapel Hill 2013, p. 10; N. Z. Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds*, New York 2006, p. 11; M. García-Arenal – G. Wiegers, *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe*, tr. M. Beagles, Baltimore 2003, p. viii.

[5] N. Z. Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Cambridge, Mass. 1983, pp. 108-111; Idem, *Trickster Travels*, op. cit., p. 13; J. Piker, *The Four Deaths of Acorn Whistler: Telling Stories in Colonial America*, Cambridge, Mass. 2013, pp. 11-15. On "silences" as a pervasive feature of historical sources, see M.-R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston 1995, pp. 49-69.

[6] C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, tr. J. and A. C. Tedeschi, Baltimore 1992, pp. 28-31.

[7] D. L. Ransel, *A Russian Merchant's Tale*, op. cit., pp. xx-xxiii; J. Piker, *The Four Deaths of Acorn Whistler*, op. cit., pp. 53, 105-106, 161-163, 222; N. Z. Davis, *Trickster Travels*, op. cit., pp. 227-232; J. F. Harrington, *The Faithful Executioner: Life and Death, Honor and Shame in the Turbulent Sixteenth Century*, New York 2013, pp. xxv-xxvi; L. Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History*, New York 2007, pp. 138, 187, 291-292.

cumstances of his marriage. His commitment to the Enlightenment is clear from his embrace of the theater and Freemasonry and his indifference to confessional differences. He did not support the French Revolution, but he experienced its effects at first hand on several occasions when his theater work took him to the front lines of the War of the First Coalition.

In 1804, after his unsuccessful attempt to divorce his wife, he went to Russia to join the German theater of St. Petersburg. Here, he gradually transformed himself into a characteristically 19th century figure. In 1806, after the murder of his older son, he had a spiritual crisis that triggered a religious awakening and led him to deepen his involvement with Freemasonry and leave the theater. In 1810, he started a new career as a merchant selling imported luxury goods, a role in which he contributed to Russia's ongoing cultural Westernization. In 1811 he moved his business from St. Petersburg to Moscow, where he witnessed the city's occupation by Napoleon. After the war, he became a wealthy merchant, leading Freemason, and prominent member of Moscow's Lutheran community, and two of his children married into immigrant merchant families – in other words, he remade himself into a respectable bourgeois.

The final chapter of his life began in 1820, when he was 52 years old. His religiosity had deepened, his interest in Freemasonry was fading, and his surviving son was old enough to manage the family business. A near-fatal illness finally persuaded him to accept an opportunity to become a pastor in Odessa. Normally, a man of his background – a former actor and Freemason, not-quite-divorced, without a university education – had no chance of being accepted into the clergy, but exceptions were made in New Russia because of the difficulty of recruiting pastors to serve among the German settlers whom Russia invited to colonize this frontier region. Rosenstrauch served as Lutheran pastor in Odessa until 1823, and then in Khar'kov until his death in 1835.

As a pastor, he was, by all accounts, widely liked and respected, but he had his detractors. In his own eyes and the eyes of his friends, the unorthodox path that had led him to the pulpit was a source of spiritual authority: the travel writer Johann Georg Kohl heard after Rosenstrauch's death that, "because it was not his study, but his life and inner urge that had made him a preacher, and because he knew all life circumstances from personal observation and experience", he could connect with people of "every status, every age, and every educational level"[8]. To his critics, however, his personal history made him a fraud. Compared with a conventional Lutheran pastor, who studied theology at a university and then spent his entire career in the clergy, he seemed, to some people, a dilettante and naïve religious enthusiast. There were rumors that he was a baptized Jew, and while he was able to keep his marital history secret, the fact that he was a former actor was seen by some as a stain on his character. Embittered by such criticisms, he lashed out at pastors who had a sophisticated education but lacked true faith. He also kept silent about his past: his writings revealed nothing about his history, and all that his friends could say about him was that he was a devout, kindly man who suffered long years of unspecified hardship before becoming a pastor.

## Experiences at Deathbeds

Rosenstrauch was convinced that our fate in eternity depends on whether we die reconciled with God, and thus a pastor has no higher duty than to attend to his congregants in their final hours. To guide his fellow clergymen, he wrote "An Evangelical Pastor's Experiences at Deathbeds", an account of his own efforts to save the souls of dying men and women. It is principally this text, to which we now turn, that secured for him a posthumous place in German and Russian culture.

"An Evangelical Pastor's Experiences at Deathbeds" appeared in installments in late summer 1833 in the *Evangelical Papers*, a Pietist weekly edited by Friedrich Busch, a professor of theology at the University of Dorpat in Russian Estonia[9]. The intermediary connecting Rosenstrauch with Busch

[8] J. G. Kohl, *Reisen im Inneren von Rußland und Polen*, 3 vols., Dresden 1841, 2, p. 171.

[9] *Erfahrungen eines evangelischen Seelsorgers an Sterbebetten*,

was apparently their mutual friend, the Pietist physician Heinrich Blumenthal in Khar'kov. Literature on the deaths of pious Christians was a long-standing Protestant tradition. The Pietist version of this genre, to which Rosenstrauch's text belongs, was distinguished by close attention to the medical aspects of the final illness, and to the conduct not only of the people dying, but also of those around them. Perhaps Pastor Rosenstrauch and Dr. Blumenthal saw the same patients, and then collaborated in publishing his observations[10].

Rosenstrauch opens his "Experiences at Deathbeds" by conceding that prejudice and philosophical rationalism might cause readers to doubt his account. Even the observations of respected pastors are often dismissed as delusional, he writes, and he personally will be disbelieved all the more because of what he vaguely termed "my previous life and the unusual manner in which I entered the office of preacher". However,

> in these very circumstances lies also a great challenge for me... to make known what His mercy did for me after a rare confluence of unusual events had brought me into His vineyard. I required powerful supports for my faith, and first had to be persuaded myself of the certainty of all divine promises, before I could instruct and console others and encourage them to believe[11].

The keys to wisdom, he argued, were faith and experience – the education that comes from life, not book learning. This was a theory that validated his own unorthodox path to the pulpit. His purpose in "Experiences at Deathbeds" was to give an account of his education about death and salvation, and to persuade other clergymen to follow his example by coming down from their pulpits and going out into the world.

He describes the deaths of seventeen people. Fourteen are men; only three are women. He does not explain the imbalance, but it seems that he thought men more susceptible to irreligion. Historians sometimes speak of a "feminization of religion" in the nineteenth century. As Western culture divided gender roles in an increasingly binary way, assigning women to the family hearth and men to the world of business, popular piety acquired features that were coded as feminine: it grew sentimental and anti-intellectual, and worshipped a God of love, not wrathful justice. Women's participation in church life grew, while men began to drop out. Rosenstrauch's own beliefs fit the new "feminine" sensibility, and he may also have seen men withdraw from church life. I have found no figures from his time, but in 1875, 50 percent of the Lutheran females in Khar'kov took communion, versus only 33 percent of the males[12]. In his memoir, all three women, but only a few of the men, are pious and embedded in families. The remaining men are estranged from God because they are loners, rationalists, or motivated by worldly ambition – all attitudes that nineteenth-century culture considered masculine.

We have to read between the lines to detect a concern with gender. Rosenstrauch is explicit, on the other hand, in making a claim about class. Privilege, he argues, is inimical to faith. The common people know how to die peacefully in Christ; the higher classes do not.

He starts with death's brute physicality: it turns a living person into a disgusting corpse. The poor face this honestly, because, unlike the wealthy, they are not squeamish. His first funeral was a nine-year-old boy, the only child of elderly parents. At the time, he

"Evangelische Blätter", 26.08 and 3, 10, and 17.09.1833, 35-38, cols. 331-334, 337-375, reprinted in [J. A. Rosenstrauch], *Mittheilungen aus dem Nachlasse von Johannes Ambrosius Rosenstrauch, früherem Consistorialrath und Prediger in Charkow*, Leipzig 1845, pp. 1-55; H. Seesemann, *Theologische und literarische Bildungsinteressen in Dorpat und Estland zwischen 1815 und 1835*, "Zeitschrift für Ostforschung", 1979 (XXVIII), 4, pp. 577-587, here: 578; *Rückblick auf die Wirksamkeit der Universität Dorpat: Zur Erinnerung an die Jahre von 1802-1865*, Dorpat 1866, p. 158.

[10] U. Gleixner, *Pietismus und Bürgertum: Eine historische Anthropologie der Frömmigkeit*, Göttingen 2005, p. 195. See also: H. Zgurs'kyi, *Liuterans'kyi pastor Yohann Ambrozyi Rozenshtraukh (1768-1835) yak odin iz zasnovnikiv naukovoi tanatolohii*, in *Spadok Reformatsii: Do 500-richchia 95 tez Martina Liutera ta pamiati Yu. O. Holubkina (1941-2010)*, ed. by S. B. Sorochan – A. M. Domanovs'kyi, Kharkiv 2019, pp. 198-207; for similarities with English evangelical literature, see M. Riso, *The Narrative of the Good Death: The Evangelical Deathbed in Victorian England*, Farnham 2015, pp. 165-170.

[11] [J. A. Rosenstrauch], *Mittheilungen*, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

[12] P. Pasture, *Beyond the Feminization Thesis: Gendering the History of Christianity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, in *Beyond the Feminization Thesis: Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe*, ed. by Patrick Pasture et al., Leuven 2012, pp. 8-10; A. Döllen, *Kurze Geschichte der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche und Gemeinde zu Charkow*, Khar'kov 1880, pp. 145, 150.

was unprepared to comfort mourners, owing to his "great, seemingly insurmountable aversion to the smell of corpses and the sight of dead bodies". He knew the boy's body would already be decaying in the summer heat, so he discreetly carried a sponge soaked in vinegar to hold to his nose. When he arrived, he found everyone attentive only to the boy's parents, not the body:

> I entered the room and saw the father and mother bent over their dead son's husk, which had already become unrecognizable, with the flesh beginning to separate from the bones. They took turns kissing the deceased, each time causing a swarm of flies to rise up, only to settle at once back onto the rotting body. I was deeply ashamed inside at my weakness, and, like a thief caught in the act, I put the sponge box into my pocket without ever having used it[13].

Later, he describes a pious glovemaker, who, on his sickbed, emits a smell so awful that it drives away the hospital staff, but who is lovingly attended by a cobbler who is a fellow patient. For Rosenstrauch, these experiences are transformative. The encounter with the boy cures him of his squeamishness, and he later describes matter-of-factly the glovemaker's stench and the disfiguring illness of a dying tailor[14].

The poor are not alone in the face of death. The parents of the boy are surrounded by loved ones; the glovemaker has the cobbler; a dying mother is with her family. They accept their fate and look forward to eternity. Two young women, one of them the young mother, die with ecstatic joy. More typical is the tailor, who was once led astray by irreligious books but later returned to Christ. As Rosenstrauch prayed at his bedside, "the sick man's breathing grew ever quieter, gentler, and more intermittent, until at last it ceased entirely. And so he drifted away, like an infant at his mother's breast! [...] His face looked not only peaceful, but beautiful"[15]. Death is often preceded by celestial visions. The glovemaker's last words are, "silver vines, golden grapes – and the most beautiful gardener extends his arms to greet me! Oh, if only you could see all this!" Rosenstrauch claims to be agnostic about the reality of such visions, but says they are a blessing because they take away the fear of death[16].

The well-to-do, on the other hand, are at risk for a hard death. Their minds are poisoned by rationalist "philosophy": Collegiate Councilor M., for example, wants him to preach about "philosophy" instead of the Bible, and Major K. had been pious until atheistic professors at his university made him into a "philosopher". They also tend to face death alone. They, their physician, and their family sometimes form a conspiracy of silence about their impending death, and if they do pray, they are embarrassed if others see them doing so. The very fact of their privileged position impedes an easy death and salvation. These are "people who do not want to leave a world where life is good to them, who always think they need not hurry to be saved, and so keep putting off their preparation for death until they have no more time". If the deceased was "a so-called good person", people falsely imagine that his good works entitle him to salvation, as though faith in Christ were unnecessary[17].

Sometimes, Rosenstrauch prevails over such men's obstinacy, but other cases end woefully. A man named M. was everything Rosenstrauch despised in the clergy: a highly educated theologian who wrote pious sermons but "lived a very worldly life and said much to lead unsteady Christians astray". On his deathbed, he "screamed, sighed, and groaned so pitiably, that one could not listen without horror and deep sympathy". Rosenstrauch prayed for him, but to no avail: "Even after his death, his face was noticeably twisted"[18].

His repeated encounter with death confirmed to him the truth of Lutheranism's core teaching – that salvation depends on faith, not good works – but it also created a bond with Christians of other denominations. Some of the sick had Orthodox wives and children, who became his allies in the fight for the dying man's soul. At the hospital, Orthodox patients doffed their caps when he prayed with the dying glovemaker. His first encounter with the sick cobbler was less friendly: seeing Rosenstrauch ap-

[13] [J. A. Rosenstrauch], *Mittheilungen*, op. cit., pp. 3-5.
[14] Ivi, pp. 10-13.
[15] Ivi, p. 43.
[16] Ivi, pp. 9-10, quotation on 13.
[17] Ivi, pp. 13, 27-28, 30-31, 35-37.
[18] Ivi, pp. 21-23.

proach, "he called out harshly to me: 'I am Catholic, and no concern of yours'", to which "I gave the friendly answer that I meant by no means to make him my Evangelical coreligionist, only to show him my concern as a patient, and, where I could, to offer my services". They became friends, and the cobbler nursed the dying glovemaker when no one else would[19].

Rosenstrauch's account of his work in "An Evangelical Pastor's Experiences at Deathbeds" is informed by the difficulties of his own position. He resented being viewed as an ignorant upstart by university-educated pastors who commonly embraced either Lutheran Orthodoxy (which emphasized the importance of dogma and respect for the church hierarchy) or Rationalism (which treated the Bible as an object of critical scholarly analysis). His text therefore rejects both of these positions and instead inclines toward Pietism, which was suspicious of hierarchy and intellectualism and emphasized faith in the literal truth of the Bible, service to the poor, and inner spiritual experience. Pietists considered it important to narrate their own lives as a story of sin and redemption, but this is something Rosenstrauch refused to do: stung by criticisms of his own history, he told readers nothing about his past. "An Evangelical Pastor's Experiences at Deathbeds", with its Pietist understanding of death and salvation but un-Pietist silence about the author himself, is thus a product of Rosenstrauch's own personal history.

## Faith, Politics, and German Cultural Memory

After his death in December 1835, Rosenstrauch became the object of public curiosity, but the people around him made sure he did not become known as the complex individual he had been in life. Instead, out of a combination of Pietist religiosity and familial secretiveness, they turned him into an icon. This process began in the German-language press a few months after his death, and spread to the Russian press several years later.

The principal role in his canonization was played by Professor Busch's *Evangelical Papers*. No other contemporary figure received comparable attention in its pages. For Pietists, whose movement lacked formal institutions, narratives of exemplary lives were a means to create a sense of shared tradition. Accordingly, in March 1836, the *Evangelical Papers* published an account of Rosenstrauch's death by his friend Dr. Blumenthal, along with a request from Busch asking Blumenthal for a biography of Rosenstrauch and more of his writings. Busch also published letters Rosenstrauch had written, and sermons by him that Blumenthal had written down from memory[20].

In these writings, readers heard Rosenstrauch's voice but learned little of the man himself. Blumenthal provided a character sketch, but demurred that a biography such as Busch had requested would "not be possible without indiscreetly revealing many situations and circumstances [about people still living] that must remain undisclosed at this time". Besides, he wrote, it was not practically feasible, for Rosenstrauch had been evasive about his past, and "[he] left, to my knowledge, no writings from which a faithful and coherent story of his life could be drawn". "All the more desirable", he added, "would be the speedy publication of the written essays left by the blessed departed" — now in his daughter Mina's custody — "some of which I read when he was alive, and which contain much that is splendid and instructive"[21]. No such publication was forthcoming, however. Mina and her brother Wilhelm, who was by then a prominent Moscow merchant, evidently had no wish for the world to know their family's history and were content for their father to be remembered simply as the saintly pastor of Khar'kov.

The country where Rosenstrauch's legacy first reached a wider audience was Germany. This transfer of ideas was facilitated by the linguistic and

[19] Ivi, pp. 11, 15, 18, 30, 33.

[20] U. Gleixner, *Pietismus und Bürgertum*, op. cit., pp. 166-167; H. Blumenthal, *Consistorialrath Rosenstrauch's in Charkow seliger Heimgang*, "Evangelische Blätter", 08.03.1836, 10, cols. 84-87; the sermons and letters appeared in "Evangelische Blätter", 1836, 19, 22, 51, 52; 1837, 31-35 and 49; 1838, 9-12, 37, 38, 40-44; and 1839, 5.

[21] H. Blumenthal, *Johannes Ambrosius Rosenstrauch*, "Evangelische Blätter," 19.07.1836, 29, cols. 253-260, here: 253-254.

cultural connections between the Baltic Provinces (where the *Evangelical Papers* were published) and the German states, but Rosenstrauch also spoke to pressing concerns that Germans faced at that time. The Old Regime in the German states was tottering as a consequence of the Napoleonic Wars, the spread of capitalism and mass poverty, and growing religious skepticism and political radicalism. Lutherans disagreed about how to respond to these developments. Rationalists wanted to reconcile Christianity with modernity, so they sought natural explanations for miracles and applied critical analysis to the Bible. Orthodox Lutherans and Pietists, on the other hand, wanted to reinvigorate traditional Christianity, so they affirmed the belief in the divinity of the Bible and organized the "inner mission", a movement of social outreach that included charities, schools, and other initiatives to bring welfare and the Gospel to the poor[22].

Rosenstrauch's memory became a part of these debates when some of his writings were republished in 1838 by J. C. F. Burk, a Pietist writer in Württemberg. Burk was putting together an anthology of readings to guide clergymen in diverse aspects of their pastoral work. His book had a section on ministering to the sick that included texts by thirty-four authors; Rosenstrauch's "Experiences at Deathbeds", slightly abridged, formed more than one-third of this section. He also included a short biography of Rosenstrauch in his section on men who became pastors at an advanced age. According to Burk, Rosenstrauch had been a pious merchant in Moscow. One day, he felt a desire to spread God's light in the world, so he agreed to direct a theater, and started enforcing morality among the actors and removing offensive passages from plays. However, the audience wanted only frivolity, not virtue, so he had to resign. Not wanting to return to his business, he entered the ministry. This account, which resembles tales that Rosenstrauch had told about himself in Khar'kov[23], made him into an exemplar of Pietist rectitude and a role model for participants in the inner mission[24].

Rationalists would have none of this. An author named G. A. P. Lorberg took Burk's book to task for its naïve emotionalism. To prove his point, Lorberg singled out Rosenstrauch's "Experiences at Deathbeds". It contained, he wrote, "conversion stories of the most striking, but also the most unsatisfying sort". Rosenstrauch seemed to think that a hardened sinner need only accept Christ on his deathbed, and voilà, salvation! "Much in these stories", Lorberg complained, "brushes very close to the border of mystical zealotry [*Schwärmerei*]"[25].

Pietists translated Rosenstrauch into all the major Protestant languages except English. Burk's anthology appeared in Swedish in 1845 and Dutch in 1855, and "Experiences at Deathbeds" was published in Danish as late as 1875. Busch (the editor of the *Evangelical Papers*), Burk, and the Dutch, Danish, and Swedish translators were all pastors or theologians, and they all found Rosenstrauch useful for advancing the cause of Pietism and the inner mission[26].

The Pietists' portrayal of him as a paragon of Christian virtue depended on a radically streamlined version of his biography. To some German contemporaries, however, it was precisely the ambiguity of his life that made him an instructive figure for the times. Three texts seem to have formed the source for these discussions. Christian von Nettelbladt, an old Masonic friend of Rosenstrauch's, included a

[22] D. Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918*, New York 1998, pp. 106-120, 193-4; T. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat*, Munich 1987, pp. 102-114, 241-246, 423-427; U. Gleixner, *Pietismus und Bürgertum*, op. cit., p. 189.

[23] J. G. Kohl, *Reisen*, op. cit., 2, pp. 168-170.

[24] Joh. Christ. Friedr. Burk, *Evangelische Pastoral-Theologie in Beispielen*, 2 vols., Stuttgart 1838-39, 1, pp. 20-1, 2, pp. 399-459; U. Gleixner, *Pietismus und Bürgertum*, op. cit., p. 182.

[25] [G. A. P.] Lorberg, review of Burk, *Evangelische Pastoral-Theologie in Beispielen*, in *Theologisches Literaturblatt zur Allgemeinen Kirchenzeitung*, 13 and 15.09.1841, 110-111, cols. 889-94, 897-903, here: 900. On the reviewer, see *Georg Albrecht Philipp Lorberg: Nekrolog*, ivi, 147, 09.12.1853, cols. 1168-1180.

[26] J. C. F. Burk, *Evangelisk Pastoral-Theologie i Exempel*, tr. C. A. F. [Carl Adolf Forssell], 2 vols., Gefle 1845-47; Idem, *Predikantenspiegel: Mededeelingen uit het ambtsleven van predikanten, volgens de Evangelische Pastoral Theologie in Beispielen*, tr. I. Busch Keiser, 2 vols., Groningen 1855; *Fra Dødslejet, en evangelisk Sjælesørgers Erfaringer*, tr. V. Heise, Middelfart 1875 (I don't know from which German edition this Danish translation was made).

biographical note about him in a history of Russian Freemasonry that he published in a Masonic journal in 1837. Johann Georg Kohl, an author of travelogues, found the stories he heard about Rosenstrauch in Khar'kov so interesting that he described him at length in 1841 in his book about travels in Russia. Lastly, in 1855, Rosenstrauch's friend Johann Philip Simon devoted a chapter to him in his book about life in Russia[27].

For some readers of these texts, Rosenstrauch was proof of the mysterious ways in which the Lord guides the fates of men[28]. His biography was also, however, grist for an altogether different conversation, this time about Russia's role in German society and politics. In the decades after the Napoleonic Wars, a radical modernization of the Old Regime in the German states was blocked by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. All three were repressive and autocratic, but Russia in particular aroused hostility because it was seen as a foreign power meddling in German affairs. This hostility was deepened by the increasingly widespread belief that Russia was not, historically and culturally, a real member of the European family of peoples, but a benighted "Oriental despotism" with dark designs to dominate Europe[29].

In 1845, one Eduard Kolbe, of whom we know only that he had lately returned to Germany after thirty-three years in Russia, published a book about Russia that was so inflammatory that it was banned in the German states. Kolbe denounced Russia as a despotic land where the absence of the rule of law allowed frauds and schemers to get ahead. As proof, he cited Rosenstrauch:

> Only abroad would one be surprised, for example, at someone like Rosenstrauch, who was an actor in Petersburg, left the stage, became a pomade trader in a store there, took his trade to Moscow, and then went to Saratov to be superintendent[30].

There is no evidence that Kolbe knew Rosenstrauch personally. The mistaken claim that he had been Lutheran superintendent (bishop) in Saratov on the Volga had appeared in the biographical note by Nettelbladt; maybe this was Kolbe's source.

Circumstances had changed profoundly by the time a Masonic journal reprinted Nettelbladt's note about Rosenstrauch in 1862[31]. After three decades of political stability following the Napoleonic Wars, the revolutions of 1848 opened a new period of European-wide upheaval. Amid the fear and excitement stirred by the events of these years, Nettelbladt's note about Rosenstrauch was taken up in 1864 by two German authors with opposite agendas.

The writer Ludwig Brunier used it for his biography of the eighteenth-century actor and Freemason Friedrich Ludwig Schröder. Brunier made the liberal argument that the former hostility to actors was just one more example of Old Regime ignorance. Mocking the clergymen who had condemned actors as sinners, he summarized Nettelbladt's note, and then wondered gleefully what those clerics might have said, "had they learned that a former actor and Freemason had become – a bishop![32]".

Karl Didler, a retired Berlin school official, took Nettelbladt's story in a totally different direction. Didler published dozens of lurid, proto-Nazi tracts in the 1860s to prove that Freemasonry, which he claimed was controlled by Jews, was from its inception a plot by revolutionaries who sought world domination. In 1864, one of his pamphlets had an entry on "Bishop Rosenstrauch". Next to Rosenstrauch's name, which may have sounded Jewish to him, Didler placed three crosses, his symbol for

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[27] Br[uder] v. Nettelbladt, *Geschichte der Freimaurerey in Rußland*, "Kalender für die Provinzial-Loge von Mecklenburg und die zu ihrem Sprengel gehörenden Logen", 1837, 13, pp. 40-70, here: 63-64; J. G. Kohl, *Reisen*, op. cit., 2, pp. 167-172; J. P. Simon, *Russisches Leben in geschichtlicher, kirchlicher, gesellschaftlicher und staatlicher Beziehung*, Düsseldorf 1855, pp. 306-324.

[28] See, for example: *Interesting Account of a Lutheran Pastor*, "The Church of England Magazine", 25.05.1844, 465, pp. 339-340; K. Heinrich [C. H. C. Keck], *Silberblicke: Eine Reihe hellleuchtender Beweise der Güte und Hülfe Gottes*, Leipzig 1862, pp. 31-33.

[29] M. Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*, Cambridge, Mass., 1999, pp. 87-111, 128-129, 146-159.

[30] E. Rudolphi [E. Kolbe], *Dreißig Jahre in Rußland*, 2 vols., Zurich 1845, 1, p. 136; *Index librorum prohibitorum: Katalog über die in den Jahren 1844 und 1845 in Deutschland verbotenen Bücher*, 2 vols., Jena 1845-46, 1, p. 12; *K. Sachsen*, "Allgemeine Zeitung" (Augsburg), 21.05.1845, 141, p. 1127.

[31] [C. von Nettelbladt,] *Johann Ambrosius Rosenstrauch*, "Die Bauhütte: Organ des Verein's deutscher Freimaurer", 21.06.1862, p. 198.

[32] L. Brunier, *Friedrich Ludwig Schröder: Ein Künstler- und Lebensbild*, Leipzig 1864, p. 350.

especially hardline advocates of "the spirit *now* prevailing in the league of Freemasons [...] *for the overthrow of throne and altar*". According to Didler, Rosenstrauch had been "one of the most important emissaries of the Illuminati, and established many secret Illuminati lodges in Russia". His "sons" had "carried on their father's work as emissaries for the secret conspiracies. Most recently it has been reported that his true name did not become known and that he was supposedly Catholic – not a Jew???"[33]

After the 1860s, German-language writers rarely mentioned Rosenstrauch anymore. It is always difficult to be certain why people *don't* do something, but in this case, the reason is probably that the unification of Germany in 1871 ushered in a new era in the country's history. The political system stabilized, the economy industrialized, mass poverty declined, and religion lost its earlier importance in German life. As society became modern, the issues with which Rosenstrauch's memory had been associated faded into the past.

## Russia in the Conservative 1840s

In Russia, even less was initially known about Rosenstrauch than in Germany. Almost nothing was published about him in Russian by people who had actually met him. The German accounts by Simon, Kohl, and Nettelbladt were never translated, and the reminiscences of his friend Felix Reinhardt appeared in Russian only in 1887. As for Russians who had known him or heard of him, they were not writing the sorts of books in the 1810s, 1820s and 1830s in which their German contemporaries talked about Rosenstrauch, such as Masonic memoirs, Pietist religious tracts, or chatty accounts of everyday life[34].

These conditions changed by the 1840s. The Russian reading public had grown larger by then, and authors were writing in a wider variety of genres. Nicholas I's censorship stifled overt discussions of politics, but literary, religious, and cultural questions gave intellectuals the chance to debate (albeit in a veiled manner) the pros and cons of Russia's Old Regime. It is at this juncture that Russian readers first encountered Rosenstrauch. It was too late for his image to become fixed in memoirs or other firsthand testimonies. Instead, he was from the first an icon, a symbolic figure in cultural memory.

That his writings entered cultural memory at all, in either Germany or Russia, is testimony to the cosmopolitanism of the Russian Empire's upper class. Readers in Germany learned of him when his "Experiences at Deathbeds" were published in Dorpat, in Russia's Baltic Provinces, by two Germans in Russian service – Blumenthal, a Russian subject from the Baltic Provinces, and Professor Busch, an immigrant from Holstein. Rosenstrauch's writings began their reverse journey into Russian culture with a publication in Germany by a Westernized Russian noblewoman, Mariia Wagner (née Balabina), who was the daughter of a Russian general and his French wife and was married to a Baltic German doctor[35].

Mariia Wagner collected the Rosenstrauch texts from the now-defunct *Evangelical Papers*—his letters, his "Experiences at Deathbeds", Blumenthal's character sketch, and the sermons Blumenthal had written down – and assembled them into a book, which was published in German in Leipzig in 1845. (A second edition appeared in 1871.) She prefaced it with an introduction in which she reproduced the biography from Burk's Pietist anthology, and added the detail that Rosenstrauch had been a pas-

[33] On Rosenstrauch, see *Freimaurer-Denkschrift: Über die politische Wirksamkeit des Freimaurer-Bundes als der unter verschiedenen Namen und Formen unter uns im Finstern schleichenden Propaganda zum Sturz der legitimen Throne und des positiven Christenthums*, 9, Berlin 1864, p. 12; on the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy and the significance of the three crosses, see ivi, 1, Berlin 1864, pp. 5, 33-37.

[34] F. O. Reingardt, *Rozenshtraukh, Ioann-Ambrozii, pastor g. Khar'kova*, "Khar'kovskii sbornik: Literaturno-nauchnoe prilozhenie k 'Khar'kovskomu kalendariu' za 1887 god", 1887, 1, pp. 151-155; A. Konechnyi, *Bulgarin bytopisatel' i Peterburg v ego ocherkakh*, in *Peterburgskie ocherki F. V. Bulgarina*, ed. by A. Konechnyi, St. Petersburg 2010, pp. 7-10; K. Petrov, *Tsenzura v sisteme russko-nemetskikh knizhnykh sviazei XIX-nachala XX vv.*, Candidate's thesis, St. Petersburg State Institute of Culture (2017), p. 199; S. Dickinson, *Breaking Ground: Travel and National Culture in Russia From Peter I to the Era of Pushkin*, Amsterdam, 2006, pp. 22-23.

[35] *Sochineniia i perepiska P. A. Pletneva*, 3 vols., ed. by Ia. Grot, St. Petersburg 1885, 3, pp. 544, 569.

tor for "more than twenty years". Since Burk's book said (correctly) that Rosenstrauch had died in 1835, Wagner's chronology meant that he had become a pastor before 1815, when in reality he was only beginning his postwar business career. This suggests that she had no independent biographical information or contact with people who had known him[36].

The book's initial reception in Russia can be traced through the correspondence of one of Wagner's friends, the poet Petr Pletnev. Pletnev stood at the center of important networks in Russian intellectual life: he was the rector of St. Petersburg University; a former tutor to the imperial family; a friend and publisher of leading writers; and Pushkin's heir as editor of the literary journal *The Contemporary*[37]. His papers allow us to glimpse how Rosenstrauch was received in the 1840s by Russian intellectuals who were cosmopolitan Europeans but also conservative, patriotic supporters of the regime of Nicholas I.

In the winter of 1845-46, Pletnev sent Wagner's book to his old friend Vasilii Zhukovskii[38], one of Russia's greatest poets and a man close to the regime: he had been a tutor to the heir to the throne, and was the author of the imperial anthem *God Save the Tsar*. Now in his sixties, he was living in Germany, and continuing to write Romantic verse at a time when younger Russian authors had turned to Realist prose fiction. Pletnev's parcel reached Zhukovskii about when he was beginning what became his final work, an epic poem on the myth of the Wandering Jew. It tells of a Jew who spurned Jesus on his way to the cross and is condemned to walk the earth through the centuries. In time, he is redeemed, but until then, he can only watch longingly as death frees other men to return to God. The passages describing death as a release bear a resemblance to those by Rosenstrauch. Zhukovskii declared Wagner's book a "gem", and asked for three more copies[39].

It is no surprise that Zhukovskii liked the book, because death was equally a preoccupation of Romantics and Protestant revivalists (German Pietists and their counterparts in other countries). Both movements reacted against the emotional shallowness of much Enlightenment thought by placing evil, suffering, and the hereafter at the center of their worldview. Their ideas about death were not the same, though. The Romantics expressed a sensuous longing for death, and were hazy about what lay beyond the grave. Rosenstrauch, on the other hand, refused to sugarcoat the pain and ugliness of death, but he was also clear about the bliss in store on the other side. In this regard, his ideas, which were typical of the Protestant revival, had similarities with the Enlightenment culture of his younger years: both shared the same concern with the underlying physical realities of existence, and the same optimistic, rationalistic belief that the world is basically good and obeys laws that our minds can understand[40].

Another writer who asked Pletnev for Wagner's book was Pletnev's chief associate at *The Contemporary*, Iakov Grot, a Russian Lutheran of German descent who was then a professor of Russian literature in Helsingfors (present-day Helsinki). Grot shared the Rationalist opinion that Rosenstrauch's ideas were theologically naïve, but also the Pietist admiration for his dedication to his flock. In February 1846, he wrote to Pletnev that, at a dinner with Finnish friends, "[We] discussed Rosenstrauch, and decided that he was more remarkable for his zeal and character than for his opinions and ideas". Grot added that he intended to distribute the book among Finnish pastors, because "They will find in Rosenstrauch a pastor such as each of them ought to be, even if they don't entirely agree with his religious views, which find few adepts in today's Protestant

[36] [J. A. Rosenstrauch], *Mittheilungen*, op. cit., quotation on p. iii. The book was reissued in 1871 in Dresden.

[37] E. P. Gorbenko – N. P. Rozin, *Pletnev Petr Aleksandrovich*, in *Russkie pisateli 1800-1917: Biograficheskii slovar'*, ed. by P. A. Nikolaev et al., 6 vols., Moscow 1989-2019, 4, pp. 636-642.

[38] *Perepiska Ia. K. Grota s P. A. Pletnevym*, ed. by Ia. Grot, 3 vols., St. Petersburg 1896, 2, p. 671.

[39] Ivi, p. 772; *Sochineniia*, op. cit., 3, p. 572 (letter to Zhukovskii, 02.06.1846). On Zhukovskii's epic poem, see: V. Terras, *Freedom Through Suffering: Vasilii Zhukovskii and His Ahasuerus*, in *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, ed. by E. C. Allen – G. S. Morson, Evanston 1995, pp. 20-28; M. Ehrhard, *V. A. Joukovski et le préromantisme russe*, Paris 1938, p. 191. I thank Ilya Vinitsky for suggesting the connection between Rosenstrauch and *Ahasuerus*.

[40] M. Riso, *The Narrative*, op. cit., pp. 6, 9, 158-169.

world"[41].

Thus far, Rosenstrauch was accessible only to readers who knew German, but this changed thanks to Aleksandra Ishimova, a friend and literary collaborator of Grot and Pletnev. Like Pletnev, whose father was an Orthodox village priest and whose protégée she was, Ishimova had been trained in the school of hard knocks. She was the daughter of a struggling civil servant and spent much of her youth in poverty in remote Russian provinces. She later moved to St. Petersburg, tried to make ends meet by teaching, and finally found success as an author for young readers. She never married[42].

These experiences made Ishimova into both a conservative and something of a feminist: she accepted that it was a man's world, but also wanted women to be strong. Convinced that Russian nobles raised their daughters to be wallflowers, she made it her mission to teach young girls how to live a full life within the patriarchal order. A model she held out to them was the social activism of Western women. An article in her magazine *The Little Star* described the deaconesses' house in the German town of Kaiserswerth. The article explained that the deaconesses formed a tight community and looked after the sick and the poor, while the house's founder, Pastor Theodor Fliedner, provided leadership and taught that God loves all nations equally. Ishimova added that Russian Orthodox monasteries were abodes of idleness and ignorance, and would do well to emulate this Protestant model. Perhaps seeing Rosenstrauch as a figure similar to Pastor Fliedner, she translated most of Wagner's edition of Rosenstrauch's works into Russian soon after it came out, and published it in 1846 in *The Little Star*. A year later, it appeared as a separate book[43].

At Ishimova's request, Pletnev sent the book to Nikolai Gogol'. Ishimova's letters to Gogol' generally have a fawning tone, and she expected him to be dismissive of her book, so she made sure to mention that Zhukovskii had called it a "gem". Gogol' was, in fact, usually condescending about her work[44]. Just then, though, he was facing a crisis. His earlier writings had earned him admiration as a sharp-eyed social critic. However, he had spent most of the last decade abroad, away from everyday Russian reality, and had grown more religious and conservative. In a new book in January 1847, *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, he argued, to the outrage of many of his acquaintances, that Russia's iniquities were not caused by autocracy or serfdom, but by a lack of Christian spirit in people's hearts. In the brouhaha that ensued, he probably took comfort in Ishimova's unstinting support, and maybe also in the confirmation of his ideas by Rosenstrauch. In June 1847, he ended a letter to Pletnev with this request: "Thank A. O. Ishimova for her booklet 'Rosenstrauch'. I found that it was very good. The letter about the lightness of Christ's yoke is a true pearl"[45].

A thread runs through all of these Russian responses to Rosenstrauch. Liberal intellectuals in the 1840s believed that Russia required systemic change, and thought literature should advance this agenda through Realist prose that exposed the raw ugliness of tyranny and injustice. Pletnev, Zhukovskii, Grot, Ishimova, and Gogol', on the other hand, retained the older view that the cause of suffering was spiritual alienation, and that literature should create works of beauty that encouraged human kindness and reconciled men and women with God and each other. They believed that Orthodoxy and the Russian soul were uniquely suited to such an effort, and thus Russia was destined for leadership among nations, but ultimately, redemption was

[41] *Perepiska*, op. cit., 2, p. 670 (letter from Grot to Pletnev, 09.02.1846). On Grot, see A. Ospovat, *Grot Iakov Karlovich*, in *Russkie pisateli*, op. cit., 2, pp. 48-49; Gorbenko – Rozin, *Pletnev*, op. cit., p. 640.

[42] E. Beznosov, *Ishimova Aleksandra Iosifovna (Osipovna)*, in *Russkie pisateli*, op. cit., 2, pp. 427-429; A. Ospovat, *Grot*, op. cit., p. 49; Gorbenko – Rozin, *Pletnev*, op. cit., pp. 636, 640.

[43] M. Kostiukhina, *U istokov feminizma v detskoi literature (spory i obidy)*, "Detskie chteniia", 2014 (VI), 2, pp. 339-348; *Diussel'dorf i Kaizersvert: Otryvok iz dnevnika*, "Zvezdochka", 1847, 21, pp. 1-26; *Iogann-Amvrosii Rozenshtraukh, Liuteranskii pastor v Khar'kove, perevod*

[44] *Pis'ma Ishimovoi i Izvedinovoi po povodu sochinenii Gogolia*, "Russkaia Starina", 07.1893 (78), pp. 551-567, here: 554; N. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 14 vols., Moscow 1937-52, 13, p. 211 (Letter of 11.02.1847 N.S.).

[45] N. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, op. cit., 13, p. 321 (letter to Pletnev, 10.06.1847); *Pis'ma*, op. cit., 552-555; N. Gogol, *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, tr. J. Zeldin, Nashville 1969, pp. vii-xxvii.

the mission of all humanity. Rosenstrauch's philosophy, with its emphasis on the spiritual struggle of the individual, lent support to this conservative outlook.

Ishimova gave her readers only a vague, distorted idea of who Rosenstrauch was. His own secretiveness was partly to blame for this, but no doubt she also wanted to avoid triggering the xenophobic reflexes of readers who thought foreigners enjoyed unfair prestige and privileges in Russia. In her preface, she tried to defuse such suspicions by embellishing the already misleading information that Wagner had taken from Burk. Like a hagiographer, she reduced Rosenstrauch's life to a simple story of unwavering religious devotion:

> [He was] a zealous Christian from childhood on, was first a wealthy merchant, then a theater director, and finally – at the age of 50 – a student of theology, and soon became a pastor, in which calling, over the course of more than twenty years, he instructed, enlightened, and comforted his flock like a tender father[46].

To read Rosenstrauch, according to Ishimova, was an act of Russian patriotism: "He was our countryman; he was born and lived in Russia, hence we have a greater right than others to make use of his wise counsel". She claimed that "his book is being translated not into Russian, but into English" (the language of Russia's geopolitical archrival), and that her edition was motivated by a desire to "preempt that translation, and quickly give Russians the opportunity to know this man who had such a beneficent effect on the souls of Christians in their fatherland"[47].

Two reviews in the Russian press show how the responses to Ishimova's book mapped onto both the political split between Left and Right and the literary divide between Realists and their critics. Realism held that people – fictional literary characters, but also people in real life – were products of their environment. If this was true, then the existence of evil and injustice in Russia was proof that society needed reform; if it was not true, and the human soul was independent of its environment, society's problems could only be remedied by a renovation of the spirit. Realists accordingly leaned politically to the Left, and their critics, to the Right. This division was reflected in the reviews of Ishimova's book. The liberal *Notes of the Fatherland* followed the Realist line, and criticized Ishimova for only giving an idealized image of Rosenstrauch's spirituality but not explaining how circumstances had formed him as a person. The conservative *Library for Reading* took the opposite approach, and praised her because she "introduced Russian readers to a simple and magnificent man whose entire life was devoted to the strict and humble fulfillment of the holiest and noblest obligations"[48].

Not all conservatives shared this favorable opinion of Rosenstrauch. Nicholas I's regime tried to maintain a balance between proclaiming the uniqueness of Russia's religion and nationality and affirming Russia's kinship with Christian Europe. The reviewer for the *Library for Reading* implicitly emphasized the latter. To others, however, the important point was Russia's uniqueness. Ishimova sent Gogol' letters she had received in 1847 from an elderly Muscovite named Mariia Izvedinova, who was, she said, widely regarded as a "most pious, intelligent, and kind" woman. Ishimova said the letters were filled with "ignorant ideas", but in fact they were articulate and steeped in Orthodox erudition. Izvedinova took offense at the Rosenstrauch book and also the article in Ishimova's *Little Star* that praised the German deaconesses' house and criticized Russian monasteries. Orthodoxy, Izvedinova wrote, was the only true faith, not just to Russians, as Ishimova seemed to think, but in the eyes of God, so why sing the praises of a Lutheran pastor? To single out a German for caring for the dying, but ignore the Russian priests who did the same, was to kowtow to foreigners. As for the article, it repeated Lutheran slanders against the contemplative spirituality of Russian monasticism, and was fodder for the prejudice of Europeanized Russians that "everything German is good and everything Russian is bad"[49].

[46] *Iogann-Amvrosii Rozenshtraukh*, op. cit., p. 7.
[47] Ivi, pp. 7-8.
[48] *Bibliograficheskaia Khronika*, "Otechestvennyia Zapiski", 1847 (20), section 6, pp. 31-32; *Literaturnaia letopis'*, "Biblioteka dlia chteniia", 02.1847 (81), p. 42.
[49] *Pis'ma*, op. cit., pp. 555, 566.

## Russia Between Reform and Revolution

After 1847, I find no further Russian references to Rosenstrauch for a decade and a half. The intervening years were, in Russia as in Germany, a time of rapid change. After Russia's disastrous defeat in the Crimean War, Alexander II launched the Great Reforms, beginning in 1861 with the abolition of serfdom. Many Russians wanted to go much farther. Liberals dreamed of a constitution; socialists, of giving all the land to the peasants. There was also growing unrest. In St. Petersburg in 1861 and 1862, students protested in the streets, unknown perpetrators set gigantic fires, and leaflets circulated calling for revolution. In 1863, Russia's Polish provinces rebelled, triggering a furious nationalist backlash in Russian public opinion. Against this backdrop, a new Russian translation of Mariia Wagner's original German edition of Rosenstrauch appeared in St. Petersburg in 1863[50].

The new interest in Rosenstrauch arose from the religious ferment in Russian society. The criticisms aimed at the Old Regime did not exempt the Orthodox Church. Priests as well as laypeople argued that the clergy often failed in its pastoral mission. One reform proposal was to open the priesthood, hitherto a hereditary social estate, to outsiders who felt a spiritual calling. Another was to complete the translation of the Bible into Russian, which Orthodox traditionalists had aborted in the 1820s. Still another was to publish more religious literature for lay readers[51]. These ideas shared a common sensibility with Pietism, and thus one conceives the appeal of Rosenstrauch's book for their advocates. It was an activist in these causes, the St. Petersburg history professor Nikolai Astaf'ev, who authored the new translation, and the Orthodox Church itself authorized its publication. By law, books on moral topics required approval from the office of general censorship, but religious books, if written in Russian, were subject to Orthodox Church censorship[52]. Perhaps because the church censors under Nicholas I were notoriously repressive, Ishimova had gone through the general censorship. By 1863, however, the church censorship was in such disarray that Astaf'ev was able to gain its approval for his new edition of Rosenstrauch[53].

Astaf'ev launched his book into a public sphere that had changed since Ishimova's day. Russian newspapers now argued openly about politics, and reached a larger, more diverse readership. Science, higher Biblical criticism (which studied the Bible's historical origins), and the writings of philosophical materialists (who argued that religion was a figment of human imagination) were making it conceivable for educated people to question the very existence of God. Cosmopolitanism lost ground, as more of the public embraced a Slavic, Orthodox sense of Russian nationality. In literature, Romanticism faded before the advance of Realism. The most influential spokesmen of Realism, the journalists Nikolai Chernyshevskii and Nikolai Dobroliubov, decreed that literature's mission was to denounce social injustice, not create beauty or stir the soul. They also argued that Russians must stop trusting passively in a monarch, deity, or other higher power, and take ownership of their country's future. Step one, they wrote, was to accept that there is no God[54].

Amid these tensions and debates, at least two St. Petersburg periodicals thought Astaf'ev's book would interest their readers. *The Northern Bee*, formerly Russia's premier daily and a supporter of Nicholas I's regime, now struggling to reinvent itself as a more liberal paper, published a review in March

[50] A. Gleason, *Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860s*, New York 1980, pp. 160-179; *U odra umiraiushchikh: Iz zapisok pokoinago I. A. Rozenshtraukha, evangelicheskago propovednika v Khar'kove*, tr. N. A. [N. Astaf'ev], St. Petersburg 1863. Astaf'ev's introduction follows Ishimova's, suggesting that he knew her book; why he decided to undertake a new translation is unclear.

[51] G. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Crisis, Reform, Counter-Reform*, Princeton 1983, pp. 208, 241.

[52] On Astaf'ev, see S. Vengerov, *Kritiko-biograficheskii slovar' russkikh pisatelei i uchenykh (ot nachala russkoi obrazovannosti do nashikh dnei)*, 6 vols., St. Petersburg 1889-1904, 1, p. 842. For the censorship law, see *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* (Second Series), 3, 1979 (22.04.1828), p. 462.

[53] G. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy*, op. cit., pp. 230-234. Which censor approved a book is indicated in the book itself.

[54] O. Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation Through Cultural Mythology, 1855-1870*, Madison 2010, pp. 7-12, 155-162; V. Frede, *Doubt, Atheism, and the Nineteenth-Century Russian Intelligentsia*, Madison 2011, pp. 135-143.

1863 that took up four full columns of newsprint. The reviewer, who went by the pseudonym "A Russian Lutheran", used Rosenstrauch's book to make the argument that the Lutheran faith was integral to Russian life and contributed to the country's progress. He wrote that "The quest known as enlightenment, progress, humanity, civilization, and so on" – all watchwords of the Left – actually had its origin in Christ. Then he gave long excerpts from Rosenstrauch's book, and finally, he circled back to the present. Catholicism in Spain and Poland, he wrote, was marked by hate and fanaticism; he did not need to add that Poland was currently in rebellion against Russia, and that Catholicism was the bugbear of Russian nationalists and of liberals throughout Europe. In Russia, however, under the uniquely tolerant aegis of the Orthodox Church, Christians of all denominations lived in harmony. With the wisdom of its monarch and the Christian spirit of its people to protect it against both revolutionary madness and destructive religious fanaticism, Russia's future progress was assured. On its face, this was a paean to Russia's greatness. Reading between the lines, it was also a plea for Russians actually to be the tolerant nation that the reviewer said they were, and to resist the temptations of chauvinism and xenophobia[55].

The other review appeared in *The Pilgrim*, a new monthly that was founded by a clergyman to connect Orthodoxy with the wider culture. The book review section of the July 1863 issue discussed only two books; one was Astaf'ev's Rosenstrauch edition. Sounding like Iakov Grot, the Russian literature professor in Finland, the reviewer, an Orthodox priest, found the book intellectually mediocre but spiritually inspiring, and expressed the hope that his colleagues in the Russian clergy would write similar accounts of their own pastoral work. Entirely absent from this review was the sort of outrage that Izvedinova had expressed at the thought of Orthodox Russians' taking lessons from a Lutheran pastor[56].

Two more decades passed, during which the Great Reforms left Russians divided and uncertain. After revolutionaries assassinated Alexander II in 1881, his successor, Alexander III, imposed a conservative, authoritarian regime. The path of liberal reform was at a dead end. Russian intellectuals now sought hope elsewhere: in socialism, nationalism, religion, or the wisdom of the common folk. Meanwhile, Rosenstrauch's book continued to circulate and reach readers, the official approval it enjoyed evident from its presence on the shelves of the libraries of institutions such as St. Petersburg University, the naval base at Kronstadt, and the Orthodox Church's Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy[57].

In June 1886, a liberal St. Petersburg daily, the *News and Stock-Market Gazette*, published an essay by Nikolai Leskov, an important writer and literary critic and a man of ecumenical Christian beliefs[58]. It told the following story. A few years earlier, Fedor Dostoevskii, who was a Russian nationalist and devoutly Orthodox, was angry at a Russian woman for converting (illegally) to Lutheranism. He berated her for betraying her people and her faith, but to no avail. What, she demanded to know, was so special about Russia and Orthodoxy? Exasperated, he finally told her to ask "the kitchen muzhik", that is, any lowly peasant who worked in her household. Dostoevskii's words made the rounds in society that season: go ask the kitchen muzhik! Educated people were appalled that he wanted them to seek instruction from a peasant, and, anyway, what was the muzhik supposed to teach them?

Now, Leskov wrote, Lev Tolstoy had given the answer. His recent novella, *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*, described a prominent man who lies dying, beset by despair and abandoned by his fashionable wife. Only his peasant servant stands by him. This, said Leskov, was the selfsame kitchen muzhik, and his message was simple: we all die, so love your neighbor. The

[55] *Bibliografiia*, "Severnaia Pchela", 30.03.1863, 85, pp. 338-339.
[56] *Bibliografiia*, "Strannik", 07.1863, 4, pp. 6-8 (review by P. Matveevskii).
[57] *Katalog russkikh knig biblioteki Imperatorskago S.-Peterburgskago Universiteta*, 2 vols., St. Petersburg 1897-1902, 1, p. 752; *Katalog russkikh knig flotskoi biblioteki v Kronshtadte 1851 goda*, St. Petersburg 1851, p. 29; I. Korsunskii, *Sistematicheskii katalog knig biblioteki Moskovskoi Dukhovnoi Akademii*, 5 vols., Moscow 1881-1910, 2, part 3, p. 410.
[58] *Translator's Preface*, in *On the Edge of the World* by N. Leskov, tr. Michael Prokurat, Crestwood 1992, pp. 9-12.

truth of the muzhik was not Dostoevskii's Russian chauvinism, but universal brotherhood. Treating death as a fact of life makes us kinder, and gives us strength when our own time comes. Peasants know this; only the elites don't, because the distractions of wealth prevent them from facing ultimate realities.

What is the evidence, Leskov asked, that Tolstoi is right? "There was once in Russia an outstanding master at observing the dying": Rosenstrauch, who had a "similarity with Count L. N. Tolstoi" in that both found religion "at a mature age". Not expecting readers to recognize the name, he described Rosenstrauch vaguely as German and Russian, but above all, as old, wise, and truthful. Following Ishimova and Astaf'ev, he said he was a pastor for twenty years; where they correctly stated that he became a pastor around 50, Leskov wrote 60; and he added his own invention that Rosenstrauch's writings were private notes not meant for publication. "The testimony of such a man", he wrote, "must inspire confidence". He declared it remarkable that, in the account of "the German" Rosenstrauch, the poor die in peace, just as they do in stories by Ivan Turgenev, whereas the deaths of the privileged are as hard as in *The Death of Ivan Il'ich*. Rosenstrauch had written for a Pietist journal about German Lutheran religious belief; now, a half-century later, he was cited in a Russian business daily to verify the ideas of Russia's greatest novelists about the worldview of the Russian folk[59].

The last reference to him that I have found dates from two decades later. Russia was by then in turmoil deeper than even during the Great Reforms. In the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, Russia seemed on its way to becoming a liberal monarchy in the European mold. In place of Old Regime religious toleration, which only gave specified rights to certain minority faiths, Russians were given freedom of conscience, the blanket right to practice any religion or none at all. This meant that the Orthodox Church would now have to compete for believers. One school of thought held that the Church could succeed in this competition only if it revitalized the relationship between its priests and their flock. To help achieve this goal, so a clergyman argued in 1907, priests should regularly visit sick parishioners, and not just wait to give last rites to people who were already near death. This thought had occurred to him, he wrote, when "I recently came across the booklet 'Notes by Pastor Rosenstrauch'"[60].

How Russians read Rosenstrauch evolved with the times. In the conservative 1840s, they saw his writings as evidence that progress required a change in men's hearts, or else as an attack on Russia's religious traditions. In the 1860s, they read his work as a commentary on the Great Reforms. In the 1880s, he gave insight into the soul of the Russian peasantry. At the dawn of the twentieth century, he showed how Orthodoxy might reinvigorate itself for the liberal age that seemed to lie ahead. The interest in him endured because he spoke to abiding Russian concerns. Russian culture in the 19th century was tormented by the so-called "accursed questions" – the great existential questions about God, life, the relationship between rich and poor, and the destiny of the nation[61]. Rosenstrauch offered answers to these questions. He said that God was real, and that one lived a meaningful life by rejecting privilege and serving the poor. He also spoke to Russia's national destiny. He was, of course, neither Orthodox nor Russian. However, he blurred the foreignness of his religion by presenting his ideas as universal truths. He also blurred the question of nationality, for he identified the people of whom he wrote by their (Russian) social status but substituted initials for their (German) names, and his silence about his own past let readers imagine him as a man who "was born and lived in Russia". Russian intellectuals, in turn, were willing to overlook the signs of his foreignness be-

[59] *O kufel'nom muzhike i proch.: Zametki po povodu nekotorykh otzyvov o L. N. Tolstom*, in N. Leskov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 11 vols., Moscow 1956-58, 11, pp. 134-156, quotations on 140-141; originally published in *Novosti i Birzhevaia Gazeta*, 151, 161 (4 and 14.06.1886).

[60] Chaadaevskii, *Zabytoe sredstvo pastyrskago dushespaseniia-pastyrstvo u posteli bol'nago*, "Izvestiia po S.-Peterburgskoi eparkhii", 22.06.1907, 12, pp. 20-23, quotation on 20; P. W. Werth, *The Emergence of 'Freedom of Conscience' in Imperial Russia*, "Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History", 2012 (XIII), 3, pp. 585-610, here: 585-586; V. Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, New York 2004, p. 36.

[61] V. Frede, *Doubt*, op. cit., p. 211.

cause they believed that their nation's greatness lay in its universality. They thought the Russian common folk embodied the goodness of the entire human race, and that Russia's educated elite emulated European ways because it had a unique ability to assimilate what was best in other cultures[62]. Nothing good or true could be alien to Russia, including Rosenstrauch's wisdom.

Rosenstrauch's memory resurfaced after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when religion revived, ties to the West were restored, and people sought ways to fill the spiritual void left by the end of communism. A Protestant publishing house in St. Petersburg reissued his "Experiences at Deathbeds" for a new generation of readers[63]. His congregation in Kharkiv, disbanded in 1938, was re-formed in 1989 in the basement of the parsonage he had built. The pastor later wrote a booklet to give his congregants a sense of their history; the pages on the community's beginnings are mostly about Rosenstrauch[64]. A legacy formed in the Holy Roman Empire and imperial Russia, driven underground by communism and two world wars, gained a new life for the 21st century.

## Conclusion

Rosenstrauch's afterlife in cultural memory sheds light on the spatial and temporal dimensions of history. It shows how his life as a migrant from Germany to the Ukrainian frontier inspired him with ideas that then circulated back to the centers of Russian and German society and influenced both cultures across a range of intellectual domains. It also shows how his personal experiences during the 1770s-1830s, encoded in a book from the last years of his life, influenced later generations' ideas about their own society down to the early 21st century.

In a more general way, Rosenstrauch's story shows the connection between a single individual and the macro-level forces of history. Much historical scholarship focuses on large-scale forces in politics, society, and culture. Such approaches run the risk of overstating the strength and cohesiveness of those forces and becoming deterministic and presentist. Stalinism, Perestroika, and the neo-imperialism of Vladimir Putin have all been interpreted in their time as the logical outcome of Russian history[65], leaving historians unprepared when the wheel turned once more. Microhistory provides a corrective by foregrounding individuals and contingency: this weakens deterministic generalizations and restores a healthy sense of history's unpredictability, but it also permits cautious new generalizations about generational experiences and the interactions between private and public life[66]. Rosenstrauch was a unique figure who bequeathed a unique corpus of memories, but his story and others like it help us understand the much larger pattern by which the private experiences of earlier generations become a part of the consciousness of later ones.

**www.esamizdat.it** ♢ A. Martin, *Microhistory and Cultural Memory: The Afterlife of J.A. Rosenstrauch's* An Evangelical Pastor's Experiences at Deathbeds ♢ eSamizdat 2023 (XVI), pp. 21-37.

[62] Dostoevskii gave this idea its classic articulation in his speech on Pushkin; see M. C. Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880*, Ithaca 1989, pp. 130-138.

[63] I. Rozenshtraukh, *U odra umiraiushchikh*, St. Petersburg 1998.

[64] I. Sergeev – V. Vardashko – O. Savchenko, *Nemetskaia evangelichesko-liuteranskaia obshchina g. Khar'kova*, Kharkiv 2003, pp. 41-44; on Rosenstrauch, see ivi, 6-10.

[65] For examples of these arguments, see: R. Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, New York 1974, p. xxi; T. Von Laue, *Why Lenin? Why Stalin? Why Gorbachev? The Rise and Fall of the Soviet System*, New York 1993, pp. 178-179; A. Lounsbery, *Introduction to the Forum: How Will Our Scholarship On Nineteenth-Century Russian Culture Change In Response To Russia's War On Ukraine?*, "Ab Imperio", 2022, 2, pp. 58-62, here: 59-60; V. Peppard, *Teaching Russian studies in the wake of the war in Ukraine*, "Canadian Slavonic Papers", 2023 (LXV), 2, pp. 220-231, here: 226-7.

[66] For examples of books that adopt this approach, see: B. Eklof – T. Saburova, *A Generation of Revolutionaries: Nikolai Charushin and Russian Populism from the Great Reforms to Perestroika*, Bloomington 2017; Y. Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution*, Princeton 2017.

# ♢ *Microhistory and Cultural Memory: The Afterlife of J.A. Rosenstrauch's* An Evangelical Pastor's Experiences at Deathbeds ♢

**Alexander M. Martin**


## *Abstract*

In 1833, a small Baltic German periodical published observations on death and dying by a Lutheran pastor in provincial Ukraine named J.A. Rosenstrauch. Over the next seven decades, this text was published in German, Russian, and other languages, and was cited in debates about social reform, conservative ideology, antisemitism, nationalism, and other preoccupations of 19th century culture. Rosenstrauch himself remained an obscure figure, however, allowing readers – including Vasilii Zhukovskii, Nikolai Gogol', and Nikolai Leskov – to imagine him as they saw fit. The afterlife of Rosenstrauch's text sheds light on three major themes of microhistory: the role of non-elite individuals as intermediaries between centers and peripheries and between different cultures; the unreliability of texts, which can hide as much as they reveal; and the dialectical relationship between texts and life – how people construct the meaning of their lives through the texts they read and through those they write.



## *Keywords*

Microhistory, Memory, Johannes Ambrosius Rosenstrauch, Germans in Russia, Literature on Death and Dying, Pietism, 19th-Century Russian Culture.



## *Author*

*Alexander M. Martin* is Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana, USA). He is the author of *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries: Russian Conservative Thought and Politics in the Reign of Alexander I*, DeKalb 1997; *Enlightened Metropolis: Constructing Imperial Moscow, 1762-1855*, Oxford 2013; and *From the Holy Roman Empire to the Land of the Tsars: One Family's Odyssey, 1768-1870*, Oxford 2022.




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