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Note on Transliteration and Translation

All Russian names and titles in the text have been transliterated in accordance with the Library of Congress system. Use of existing translations of primary and secondary sources is indicated throughout the text, as is the authors' use of personal translations.

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Introduction: Goncharov in the Twenty-First Century

Perhaps more than any of his fellow writers, Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov (1812–1891) embodies the central contradictions and challenges of nineteenth-century Russian life—contradictions and challenges that continue to be felt in Russian society today. From a provincial merchant family positioned in Russia's uncertain "middle class," Goncharov was raised by an aristocratic godfather who introduced him to the cultural values of the nobility from a young age. Despite this upbringing, Goncharov, unlike many of his literary contemporaries, had to work for a living, which he did as a civil servant for over thirty years. In his writing he expressed the stagnation felt by many about the "old" way of life that included serfdom, but he also posed sharp questions about the uncertain and potentially destructive nature of the "new," in this case a modernity incarnated in industrialization, technology, and capitalism. Mental illness, from, presumably, depression to paranoia, was a thread in his life and prematurely ended his literary career. Other writers like Lermontov or Tolstoy took part in Russian imperial military campaigns; Goncharov, in contrast, served as an agent of the less visible, but equally powerful economic and bureaucratic practices of Russian empire-building, particularly in his capacity as secretary to Admiral Evfimii Putiatin's mission to open trade relations with Japan in the mid-1850s. Most sensitive of all, Goncharov worked as a literary censor between 1855 and 1867, enforcing restrictions on creativity and expression, yet all the while writing his own uniquely expressive novels and working to foster Russian literary culture through official channels in an attempt to broaden its accessibility.

Given the sensitive social and political zones with which his life and work intersect, it is perhaps not surprising that Goncharov remains

something of a "sleeper" in the world of Russian letters, much like, in more literal fashion, the hero of his eponymous novel, Ilya Ilich Oblomov. Goncharov has never received the attention, scholarly or otherwise, that his peers have, an illustrious group that includes such figures as Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. Indeed, to the Western reading public, it is still necessary to explain who Goncharov is, a surprising state of affairs in light of the relevance of his work to twenty-first-century concerns. Issues of gender, sexuality, consumerism, class, political extremism, mental health, economy, imperialism, globalization, and the public sphere in Russia centrally inform his work and his life.

Despite this topicality, Slavists have devoted comparatively little attention to the points of convergence between Goncharov's life and the corpus of his work. Rather, the overwhelming focus has been on his individual novels, primarily *Oblomov*, and to a lesser extent *A Common Story* (*Obyknovennaia istoriia*, 1847) and *The Precipice* (*Obryv*, 1869), with even less attention to his short stories, critical essays, and 1858 travel text, *Frigate Pallada* (*Fregat "Pallada"*). Moreover, a seminal part of Goncharov's biography has been carefully, even scrupulously, avoided in critical study: his long career of government service from 1834 to 1867 and particularly his work as a censor. His civil service career coincided with his development as a writer, however, and it is perhaps this paradox—the uncomfortable fusion of bureaucrat and author, loyal state servant and trenchant social critic—that has made Goncharov challenging to understand and contextualize. It is precisely this dilemma, however, that makes Goncharov an especially interesting figure for contemporary readers and scholars. How did he navigate the often-conflicting worlds of nineteenth-century imperial bureaucracy and a national literature that defined itself in separation from the state? How did his position at the nexus of various spheres—aristocratic, middle class, bureaucratic, urban, provincial, feudal—shape his vision of Russian modernity? What was the nature of Goncharov's complex engagement with Realism? This volume aims to address these questions by subjecting Goncharov's work to innovative and broad-ranging interpretation.

Goncharov in the Twenty-First Century brings together a range of international scholars and invites them to view Goncharov's texts anew through the lenses of contemporary literary and cultural theory. The readings included here move beyond the conventional psychological, Freudian approach to Goncharov's novels, as well as the unquestioned dominance of *Oblomov*, in order to situate Goncharov more clearly as a writer contending

with a range of topical issues stemming from modernization, globalization, and significant social and economic change. In so doing, *Goncharov in the Twenty-First Century* offers a fresh and long overdue look at Goncharov's work that highlights its engagement with capitalism and consumerism, anxiety, gender, new technologies, and genre and narrative.[1] The chapters in this volume represent a variety of novel approaches to Goncharov's work that draw from fields such as queer studies, genre studies, and postcolonialism. These readings bring Goncharov's work to the forefront of current discussions in cultural and literary studies and they illuminate its unique perspective on Russia's engagement with pressing questions of identity, representation, and global and economic forces – the very questions that constitute modernity.

Transitions, Divides, Intersections: A Life in the Precarious Middle

The features of Goncharov's biography shed some light on the way he came to occupy such a complex and curiously "middle" place in Russian life and letters. Of the major nineteenth-century Russian writers, Goncharov had the more or less unique fortune to live the span of the century with its massive shifts almost exactly. A student at Moscow University in the 1830s when Russian culture was still under the sway of Romantic and German idealist thought, Goncharov had become, by the time of his retirement from government service, an established Realist writer contending with the nature of Realism and the questions it gave rise to as well as with the new materialist and positivist ideologies that emerged in Russian intellectual circles in the 1850s and 60s. Old enough to remember the Decembrist Revolt in 1825, Goncharov came of age and launched his career during Nicholas I's long, reactionary, autocratic reign (1825–1855), yet developed his mature work during the more reform-minded rule of Alexander II (1855–1881). By the time of Goncharov's death in 1891, he had witnessed seismic changes in Russian life, from the end of serfdom in 1861 and the increasing shift to an

1 Relatively recent significant monographs on Goncharov include Edyta Bojanowska's study of Goncharov's travel text, *A World of Empires: The Russian Voyage of the Frigate Pallada* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018); the edited volume *Goncharov's Oblomov: A Critical Companion*, ed. Galya Diment (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998); Elena Krasnoshchekova's *Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov: Mir tvorchestva* (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskii fond, 1997); and Milton Ehre's biographical study *Oblomov and His Creator: The Life and Art of Ivan Goncharov* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

industrialized, market-driven economy to the stirrings of large-scale political unrest, as marked by the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. These are broad contrasts and shifts, but they give outline to the context of his life.

These contrasts dovetail with the way in which Goncharov so firmly occupies a kind of "middle space" in the world of Russian letters—a space ironically rather sparsely populated in terms of scholarly attention.[2] A Realist with Romantic origins, an author who was also a civil servant, a cautious voice for economic and social progress who yet expressed nostalgia for a premodern past as he imagined it in the world of Oblomovka, Goncharov was a man who balanced many contradictions and who was not easily categorized politically or socially, though he tended to be more conservative than many of his literary peers. In his classic biographical study, Milton Ehre identifies Goncharov as a "bourgeois" and "conventionally nineteenth-century" figure.[3] In another context, these labels would be derogatory, but in this case they are at the heart of what makes Goncharov fascinating. In an era of such distinctly *non-bourgeois* writers as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, or, for contrast, the materialist Nikolai Chernyshevskii, Goncharov's affinity with what might best be described as a Victorian worldview makes him stand out.

The path to Goncharov's curiously "bourgeois" status is an intriguing one. He was born into a merchant family in Simbirsk, a provincial capital that achieved literary renown through its connection to the writers Nikolai Karamzin and Sergei Aksakov yet was still considered by Goncharov and others to be a sleepy place. Goncharov's father, Alexander Ivanovich Goncharov, died in 1819 when he was seven years old. After his father's death, his mother joined the family household with that of a local aristocrat and friend to the Goncharov family, Nikolai Tregubov. Goncharov's mother, Avdotia Matveevna Goncharova, and Tregubov did not marry and the nature of their relationship remained ambiguous; their household provided an unusual setting for the young Goncharov with its combination of the material status of an old merchant family with the cultural cache

2 Little of Russia's cultural middle entered the canon. As Julie Buckler describes, narratives about Russian literature and culture have tended to ignore "the sociocultural middle" in everything from art to demographics, despite this middle's important role in moving nineteenth-century Russian society toward a more capitalist system. As she notes, the middle "represents a kind of conceptual outpost" in Russian historiography (*Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityshape* [Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2005], 3–8).

3 Ehre, *Oblomov and His Creator*, 151; see also ibid., 51.

and liberal sentiments of a nobleman like Tregubov. It is a hallmark of Goncharov studies to note that his childhood was marked by a combination of "bourgeois practicality" and aristocratic idealism; in other words, he navigated contrasting, even oppositional, worlds from a young age.[4] A de facto stepfather, Tregubov was responsible for Goncharov's education and exposed him to the world of literature and ideas early on. His mother, in contrast, dedicated her energies to maintaining the household, though she suffered notably from suspiciousness and what today we would likely call depression. Her paranoia was part of a strain of mental illness in the Goncharov family that included lack of trust, melancholy, and apathy, to use the terms of the day. Goncharov was himself to suffer from these traits in adulthood, as did two of his three siblings.

At the age of ten, Goncharov was sent to the Moscow Commercial School to be prepared for a career in the merchant class. The school environment was harsh, even by the standards of the day, and his mother eventually agreed to remove him. He was then enrolled at Moscow University. The leading educational institution for the aristocracy and *raznochintsy* alike, the university was a rare space of some class diversity in Russian society. In the course of his studies from 1831 to 1834, Goncharov prepared for a career in the civil service. His student days coincided with a period of remarkable intellectual intensity at the university; Goncharov's classmates included such notable personalities as Mikhail Lermontov, Vissarion Belinskii, and Alexander Herzen. Liberal student circles were in full sway, though Goncharov did not join the more radical groups. He did, however, engage with the philosophical and social ferment of his time and in much deeper ways than previously supposed, as chapters in this volume by Vladimir Ivantsov, Victoria Juharyan, and Sonja Koroliov reveal with their explorations of the place of Platonic, Hegelian, and Schopenhauerian thought in Goncharov's oeuvre. Goncharov and his peers would become the famous "men of the 1840s," the generation that moved Russian culture away from Romantic idealism to naturalism and Realism, but remained generally opposed to the radical utilitarian thought of the next generation articulated by figures such as Chernyshevskii and Dmitrii Pisarev in the 1850s and 60s.

On concluding his studies in 1834, Goncharov embarked on what was to be a more than thirty-year civil service career during which time

4 For example, see Diment, *Goncharov's Oblomov*, 7; Ehre, *Oblomov and His Creator*, 14.

he occupied different positions, including serving as a translator in the Department of Trade in the Ministry of Finance. Later he worked in the capacity of a state censor from 1855 to 1867 in the Ministry of Public Education and, when responsibility for censorship was transferred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, for this government body as well. Eventually, Goncharov became a member of the supreme board of oversight for all state censorship organs. He faced hostility from both friends and fellow writers for his censorship work; not coincidentally, it was during this period (1855–1867) that he began a gradual retreat from society. Typically, critics have viewed Goncharov's civil service career as in conflict with his path as a writer and as a hindrance to his literary productivity; Goncharov himself complained of this. One of the things this volume uncovers in readings by Sergei Guskov and Kirill Zubkov, however, is how this narrative of opposition proves to be inaccurate. In reality, there was significant creative interplay between Goncharov's work as a civil servant and his work as a writer, something that has important implications for our understanding of the Russian public sphere in the mid-nineteenth century.

Goncharov's interest in writing began in the mid-1830s at the tail end of the Romantic period and his work from the time bears the imprint of late Romanticism. His early efforts included a handful of short stories, the most notable of which is "Ivan Savich Podzhabrin" (1842). In the 1840s, Goncharov conceived of his three novels, although he only completed one in this decade. As Victoria Juharyan explores in her chapter on Hegelian dynamics in Goncharov's work, there is reason to understand his novels as a trilogy, though they have not typically been received this way. The first novel *A Common Story* was published in 1847 to critical and popular acclaim. The novel portrays the ideological clash between the Romantically inclined, aspiring young writer Alexander Aduev and his pragmatic, businessman uncle, Petr Aduev, an encounter that ultimately leads to Alexander's disillusionment and recreation in his uncle's practical image. In 1849, the fragment "Oblomov's Dream" was published with its depiction of the static, feudal world of the provincial petty nobility; the full novel *Oblomov* was published a decade later, on the eve of Emancipation, also to great success. The novel's melancholic, apathetic, "left-over" protagonist struck a chord with the Russian readership with his psychological failure to move from the feudal world of his childhood into the urban modernity of mid-nineteenth-century St. Petersburg that he tenuously inhabits as an adult. Goncharov's final novel *The Precipice*, was published in 1869, more

than twenty years after it was first conceived. In many ways his most complex and intriguing work, it revolves around the intersection of a number of different worldviews, including the urban/provincial divide, perspectives on gender roles, and clashes between radical, artistic, and conventional moralities. Despite its richness and popularity with readers, the novel was negatively received by critics. In part, this was due to Goncharov's alienation of his peers, but it was also provoked by what contemporaries saw as the novel's datedness or "untimeliness" with its earlier setting (1830s and 40s) and its seeming condemnation of the radical nihilist character Mark Volokhov. As readings in this volume by Valeria Sobol and Ani Kokobobo and Devin McFadden attest, however, this critical reception widely missed the narrative innovation and challenge to Realism that *The Precipice* posed, as well as its interrogation of the institutions of family and marriage.

In addition to his three novels and short stories, Goncharov published critical essays and the 1858 travel narrative, *The Frigate Pallada*. The latter recounts Goncharov's participation in the 1852–1855 Russian state-sponsored mission to open trade relations with Japan. Chapters by Aleksei Balakin, Ingrid Kleespies, and Lyudmila Parts investigate how *Frigate Pallada*, like *Oblomov*, confronts the issue of Russia's relationship to the wider world and its engagement with modernity, market forces, and imperialism. Their work also teases out the complexities of representation in the narrative, an unusual compilation of documentary, literary, and meta-literary features. *Frigate Pallada* was Goncharov's most popular work—and the only one he did not feel conflicted about.

Despite his authorial and civil service successes, Goncharov struggled to find happiness in his personal life. In letters, he frequently described himself as "apathetic" and cold, to the degree that today we imagine that he suffered from depression. As scholars have noted, Goncharov never found an easy place within the circles of his contemporary writers, most of whom were of aristocratic origin—and far wealthier and more liberal than him. While many of his peers admired his talent, writers such as Turgenev and Dostoevsky were critical of Goncharov's bureaucratic side and what they saw as his awkward manner. He was, after all, of provincial, merchant origin and he was an outsider to the circles that defined life in St. Petersburg: civil service, aristocratic, and artistic. Romantic relationships were likewise complicated for Goncharov, despite the insight and complexity he ascribed to his female protagonists. He never married and the surviving letters from his one serious love affair afford an unnerving

glimpse of a man struggling with his feelings. In one letter he addresses his prospective fiancée in two voices: that of a "he" who is passionately in love with her and an "I" who cynically criticizes the besotted "he" for his overblown emotion. Perhaps not surprisingly, this expression of ambivalence failed to win over the young woman in question and she married someone else. The high level of anxiety as well as more serious strains of mental illness these letters suggest came to have its most public exposure in the 1850s and 60s. In an infamous affair, Goncharov leveled accusations of plagiarism against his friend and fellow novelist Turgenev in 1859; strikingly, this transpired at the same time that *Oblomov* was being published serially to popular success. Ultimately, Goncharov would imply that Turgenev, whom he both admired and envied, had not only plagiarized his ideas in *A Nest of the Gentry* (*Dvorianskoe gnezdo*, 1859), but that he had also passed on Goncharov's ideas to a number of important French writers, including Flaubert and George Sand, who made use of them in their own work. Peers who were concerned enough to investigate Goncharov's charges found the accusations to be unfounded. In the end, the affair exposed Goncharov's paranoia, woefully damaged his reputation, and hurt many of his personal relationships. Whether intentionally or no, Goncharov succeeded in placing himself *outside* the social and literary circles of his time. As his novels reveal, he tended to look at matters in a binary way—old versus new, practical versus ideal—and he struggled to resolve these tensions in his work and in life.

In later years, Goncharov attained a degree of peace in his personal life, albeit in a particularly Goncharovian way. After the death of his long-time manservant, Goncharov began to live with his servant's widow, Aleksandra Ivanovna Treigut; she maintained his household and he took on responsibility for her three children. There is a rather wonderful irony here in which Goncharov, in so doing, not only recapitulated his mother and godfather's unconventional relationship, but also recreated the marriage he devised for Oblomov in his novel, where the aristocratic Oblomov by default joins the household of the humble and devoted Agafia Matveevna Pshenitsyna, widow of a relatively low ranking Collegiate Secretary. On the surface, Oblomov's marriage to Agafia Matveevna seems like a terrible comedown for the sensitive, educated, potentially productive Ilia Ilich, but, as several of the chapters in this volume discuss, the ending may be less of a tragedy than we think. This certainly seems to have been the case in Goncharov's own life, where his accidental family provided him with a degree of comfort

and stability, despite—or perhaps precisely because of—its "unsuitable" joining of worlds.

As three of the chapters in this volume are dedicated to the travel text *Fregat Pallada*, a brief note on Goncharov's round-the-world travels is in order. Due to his success as a writer as well as his status as a civil servant in the Department of Trade, Goncharov was invited to serve as secretary to the 1852 government-sponsored mission officially tasked with visiting the Russian colonies in North America. The unofficial, but far more important, purpose of the trip, however, was to negotiate trade relations with Japan. The Russian government's intent was not so much to pre-empt the Americans in this aim, but to make use of the headway gained by Commodore Matthew Perry in his simultaneous venture of 1852–1854.[5] Goncharov's travels afforded him the opportunity to witness first-hand the global empire-building contest of the European and American powers—and to participate in Russia's own version of this process, a history generally less accounted for than that of the other imperial powers. Goncharov's literary account of the expedition is named for the mission's twenty-year-old ship, the *Pallada* (Pallas). The *Pallada* left St. Petersburg in October 1852 bound for the Pacific Northwest on a western route around Cape Horn. The need for extensive repairs to the ship necessitated an unplanned and lengthy stop in England, however, which meant that the crew had to change course and sail east around Africa and Asia toward North America. The expansive voyage included stops in England, Madeira, the Cape Verde Islands, the Cape Colony (South Africa), Java, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Japan, the Bonin and Ryukyu (Okinawa) Islands, Manila, Korea, and Siberia. The Russian mission was cut short by the outbreak of the Crimean War (1853–1856) when the *Pallada* was called into military service. Once Britain and France joined the war in 1854, the ship could no longer safely return to European Russia, so Goncharov and other members of the mission were brought to the port of Ayan on the Sea of Okhotsk, from where they made their way across Siberia back to St. Petersburg over the course of several months in the winter of 1854–1855.

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5 Bojanowska, *A World of Empires*, 15.

The chapters included in this volume are organized around three broad thematic categories that invite an innovative, twenty-first century approach to Goncharov's work. The first is his civil service career and official engagement with Russian literature as both a censor and promoter of government-sponsored literary culture. The second is the complex and as-yet understudied manifestation of Realism in his work and its highly sensitive and nuanced portrayal of Russia's modernization in the mid-nineteenth century. The third centers on the 1858 travel text *Frigate Pallada* as a narrative in which the seemingly contradictory contexts of writer and imperial bureaucrat collide in revealing, if not always comfortable or straightforward, ways.

Like some of his fellow writers, Goncharov had to earn a living: he could rely neither on independent income nor on the earnings from his published work. He therefore held a job as a public official for most of his life. The work in the Ministry of Finance, where he spent seventeen years, was not especially taxing, and allowed the aspiring writer opportunities to meet like-minded people and start his literary career. This kind of employment was nothing unusual. When Goncharov accepted a position with the Petersburg Censorship Committee in 1856, however, the reaction among his fellow writers was strikingly negative, as prevailing opinion held the roles of writer and censor to be in opposition; one could not combine the two roles without letting one of them suffer. The two chapters that form the first part of the volume, *The Life of Service*, offer unique insights into Goncharov's own views of his government career and his ways of reconciling the roles of censor and writer.

Sergei Guskov and Kirill Zubkov trace Goncharov's experience of officialdom to show that the conventional understanding of Goncharov as having been a writer *despite* being a government official greatly oversimplifies the more complex reality in which the two spheres were not mutually exclusive. In "Writer and *Chinovnik*: The Case of I. A. Goncharov," Guskov offers a new interpretation of the relationship between the author's writing path and service career. As Guskov argues, the usual critical view in which Goncharov's service is understood as "an eternal ulcer" corroding his existence is not confirmed by Goncharov's biography. A closer look at his thirty-year career shows that the two sides of his personality—the writer and the civil servant—coexisted harmoniously and even beneficially. Goncharov's status as a well-known writer promoted his career growth, while his service background provided plots and character prototypes