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A Champion for the Bourgeoisie Reinventing Virtue and Citizenship in Boris Akunin's Novels

By Leon Aron

With this summer's publication by Random House of *The Winter Queen*, the American reader will finally have a chance to savor what is without doubt the most interesting phenomenon in Russia's contemporary literary marketplace. Published in 1998 as *Azazel*, it was the first detective novel by the then 42-year-old Grigory Chkhartishvili, a professional philologist, literary critic, editor and translator of classic Japanese literature who writes under the pseudonym Boris Akunin.

Today, Chkhartishvili is Russia's most popular writer, having sold over 8 million copies since 1998 despite their unusually high--for Russian books--price of a ruble equivalent of almost \$3 each (his latest book, *Almaznaya Kolesnitsa*, or "The Diamond Chariot", sold its first printing of 200,000 in a week's time). His success in Russia is particularly startling, since none of his books contains the ingredients said to be the sine qua non of popularity in a post-authoritarian, post-censorship literary market: There is little sex (and its brief descriptions are positively Victorian); fights, while brutal and explicitly portrayed, are infrequent; the language is not just clean but pristinely old-fashioned. The texts are crafted carefully and tastefully after the classic 19th-century Russian prose of Nikolai Leskov, Ivan Goncharov and Sergei Aksakov, with echoes of Nikolai Gogol and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Indeed, every novel in the Fandorin series is dedicated:

"To the Nineteenth Century, when literature was great, the belief in progress boundless, and crimes were committed and solved with elegance and taste."

In keeping with the genre, the Akunin books owe much of their appeal to the hero, the master sleuth. Orphaned at 19 when his father, a bankrupt noble man, died, Fandorin is a descendant of German knights, crusaders and soldiers of fortune, one of whom, by the name of Von Dorn, came to Russia in the 17th century and became the captain of Czar Alexei Mikhailovich's palace guards. (Every one of those details is important, for sooner or later all are put to work by the author.) Fandorin is intelligent, hardworking and fearless. A fitness enthusiast, he practices Japanese martial arts daily, which get him out of many tight corners. (Mirroring the lifelong judo hobby of the country's widely popular and youthful president apparently does not hurt sales.)

A tall, broad-shouldered, trim brunette with bright blue eyes and a neat moustache, Fandorin dresses impeccably and looks like "a model in the latest Paris fashion magazine," with his perfectly tailored coats and snow-white collars and cuffs. Unless

working undercover, he is never without gloves, top hat and elegant walking stick, which, naturally, conceals a razor-sharp blade. The finishing touch is his gray temples, incongruous because of the youth and vigor that the rest of his body signals, even as we see him approach and pass the forty-year mark. They invariably pique women's curiosity and pity--a combination that proves fatal to many a female heart. The grayness is the result of a personal tragedy at the end of the first book. Losing his bride to a terrorist bombing makes Fandorin a confirmed bachelor and thus opens the narratives to all manner of sidelines and subplots to enliven the mysteries with the hero's intense but almost always chaste relationships with willful, independent, strong, intelligent, feminist-minded and beautiful young women.

In the sleuthing pantheon, Fandorin most closely resembles Lord Peter Wimsey, Dorothy Sayers's athletic, smart and charming aristocratic playboy (like Fandorin, a car enthusiast)--at least until he renounces bachelorhood by marrying Harriet Vane. Chkhartishvili would want Hugh Grant to play his hero. Yet there is far more to Fandorin's appeal than his smarts, courage and good looks. In Chkhartishvili's intricate narratives, multi-layered and chock-full of allusions, the hero's attractiveness to the Russian reader is likely to be magnified by the era in which the author placed him.

The Mirror of History

Born on January 8, 1856, Fandorin, in *The Winter Queen*, investigates his first case in 1876. The most recent book of the Fandorin cycle, *Almaznaya Kolesnitsa*, is set in 1905. If today's Russia can be found in a "distant mirror" (that is, following Barbara Tuchman, a moment in history that in some key respects is remarkably similar to the way a country lives now), such a mirror is almost certainly located in the last three decades of the 19th century.

First came the abolition of serfdom in 1861--an event in its impact on the national economy and psyche not unlike the elimination of price controls and privatization in 1992-1993. There followed Russia's first and, until Gorbachev, only liberal revolution from above. In addition to the manumission of the serfs, Alexander II's reforms brought radical decentralization and local self-government by elected representatives; abolition or curtailment of nobility privileges; courts "in which all the subjects were equal" before the law; trial by jury in capital cases and a competitive judicial process, in which the defense (*advokaty*) freely vied with state prosecutors for juries' votes (which, among other marvels, resulted in the verdict of not guilty for the female assassin of the head of the Russian secret police); huge increases in the number of primary schools, funded and run by local authorities and open to children of all social and ethnic origins; access to higher education for women and Jews; and growing autonomy and self-government for universities.[1]

Enormous gains in personal freedom included the ability to leave the country and to return. Newspaper, magazine and book publishers were freed from prepublication censorship, placing late-19th-century Russian periodicals and books among the most raucously polemical in the world. The number of books printed and sold skyrocketed.

Russian culture reached its apogee in the music of Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky; the books by Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev; and the theater of Stanislavsky.

After the assassination of the czar-liberator Alexander II in 1881, the boundaries of self-government were tightened and liberties cut back, again, very much like the change that followed the transfer of power from Yeltsin to Putin. Still, major newspapers continued to be exempt from pre-publication censorship, intense political and social debates went on, and civil society would never again be terrorized by the state into complete subjugation.[2]

Meanwhile, Russian capitalism grew by leaps and bounds. Banks and saving-and-loan associations mushroomed. Foreign investments poured in. The economy expanded rapidly and became one of the world's fastest-growing. Cities burgeoned as former serfs became workers. Thousands of miles of railroads were laid, including the Trans-Siberian railroad, which for the first time connected European Russia to the Far East. Large capitalist farms made Russia Europe's main producer of grain.

The vulgar displays of wealth by the nouveau riches all but replaced the discreet enjoyment of power and privilege of the old nobility--just like the outrageously expensive boutiques, restaurants and gyms for the "new Russians" supplanted the secret food and clothing depots, drug stores and "cafeterias" savored by the Soviet nomenklatura amid the squalor and poverty of the USSR. Almost every day, thousands became the victims of crooked banking and stock schemes. Part and parcel of the Russian state for centuries, corruption (which everywhere attends a transition from a state-dominated economy to an early capitalist system) became brazen.

As is always the case after a revolution, exhaustion and disillusion set in. The liberals were bitterly disappointed in freedom's inability to deliver wealth quickly and equitably. Liberal ideals were badly damaged, and everyone doubted that Russia could ever become part of what the Russians then called "Europe" (what the Russians now call the "civilized world"). The old ethical canon, enforced by state repression, was gone; the new mores were shocking. There commenced a desperate search for something to replace them both. As Chekhov observed, "It is as though we were all in love, fell out of love and now are looking for something new to enchant us."

It is in relation to this search for "something new", as fateful in the Fandorin-Chekhov time as it is today, that the stunning popularity of Grigoriy Chkhartishvili's hero acquires an importance that extends far beyond the literary realm.

Intelligentsia Contra Individualism

Then, as now, the national tradition assigned the role of the seeker after the "new" to a class that has monopolized such endeavors since the 1830's, a class central to both the best and the worst chapters of Russian history. That class, of course, is the intelligentsia,

and the singular significance of the Fandorin series is that it offers an alternative to both the means and, more important still, the ends of the intelligentsia political culture.

Much in that culture can be explained by the intelligentsia's origins. The emergence of secular education in Russia coincided with (indeed, was caused by) the expansion of the Russian state under Peter the Great to nearly totalitarian proportions. (Every nobleman was, at least pro forma, the czar's soldier.) Unlike western Europe, the spawning ground of the intelligentsia--the Russian university--was never independent and private. It was set up not by church or city but state. The professors were salaried state employees. Educated by the state, the intelligentsia were overwhelmingly in the state's employ: in innumerable "committees", "commissions", "archives" or ministries. (Three of Russia's greatest poets--Griboedov, Pushkin and Tyutchev--served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In Soviet times, one had state-owned "research institutes," as well the official "creative unions" of writers, composers, architects, artists and journalists. What Nabokov wrote of Nicholas I, who volunteered to be Pushkin's personal censor, held true for the general relationship between the Russian (and Soviet) state and the intelligentsia: "With striking perseverance he tried to be everything in relation to Russian writers of the time--a father, a godfather, a nurse, a wet nurse, a prison warden and a literary critic all rolled up in one." [3]

Yet where the state is concerned, the intelligentsia's roots manifested themselves in bonds far stronger and deeper than education and employment. Although the alienation from and opposition to the state have been that class's defining features (the very term "intelligentsia" itself came into use in the reign of Alexander II amidst the withering criticism of the autocracy by the liberal press and the world's first sustained and ideologically motivated suicide bombing campaign by People's Will), the intelligentsia's ire and resistance were directed at a particular political regime, rather than at the state as the instrument of change and as the key tool of social, political and economic engineering. For most of the intelligently most of the time, solutions to Russia's ills were state solutions: a total, systemic change directed from above. No national betterment was possible without the state's first becoming--at most in a few years and by the decrees of an enlightened ruler who listens to his intelligentsia advisers--entirely "European" or "civilized."

The appearance and appeal of such a perspective was aided and much enhanced by the absence of a Russian version of the Reformation, which in the West tied daily personal behavior--or, in the case of Calvinists and other Protestant fundamentalists, even business success or failure--directly to salvation. An unsurpassed record of the intelligentsia's beliefs and *modi operandi* was produced by leading intellectuals--and Fandorin's contemporaries--in the 1909 collection of essays on the Russian intelligentsia titled *Vekhi* (Landmarks). Profound and beautifully written from the first page to the last, *Vekhi's* philosophical, historical and political discourses are by far the most insightful, comprehensive and detailed portrait of the radical Russian intelligentsia's Weltanschauung ever compiled.

The *Vekhi* prescription was unambiguous and unsparing. The intelligentsia could reclaim moral leadership and guide Russia to "European" ("civilized") laws, liberty and prosperity only by recognizing the "individual's inner life as the sole creative force" and renouncing the ideology of "unconditional primacy of social forms." The authors beseeched their former comrades to "shift . . . the center of attention to oneself and one's own obligations", and free themselves from "the false state of mind of [being] the unsummoned savior of the world and the inevitable pride associated with it." The intelligentsia must undertake "inner work" for the sake of "renewal"; it must "embrace the absolute value of individual self-improvement." Only such a thorough and painful re-examination of received dogmas would allow the intelligentsia to rid itself of the "desire to be assuaged in all instances with the cheap thought that 'it's the authorities' fault.'"

Only if this "inner slavery" is expunged first and the intelligentsia learns to "take the responsibility [for our life] and stop blaming external forces for everything", only then "we shall be free of external repression": "It is not worthy of thinking people to say: we are corrupted and will continue to be corrupted until the cause of our corruption is eliminated. Every man is obliged to say: I must not be corrupted any longer." [4] If the intelligentsia continued to spurn self-examination and reject personal and quotidian responsibility for themselves, their families, their neighborhood and their country, *Vekhi* predicted a disaster. Eight years before the Bolshevik revolution; more than two decades before Hitler and Stalin consolidated power; four decades before the publication of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; ninety years before a new global totalitarian religion came of age on 9/11, Semyon Frank's *Vekhi* essay, "Etika nigilizma" ("The Ethics of Nihilism") must rank among most prophetic and piercing Jeremiads ever uttered:

"The great love for mankind of the future gives birth to a great hatred for people; the passion for organizing an earthly paradise becomes a passion for destruction; and the faithful populist-socialist becomes the revolutionary. . . . [The intelligentsia's] political activity has a goal not so much of bringing about some kind of objectively useful, in the worldly sense, reform, as of liquidating the enemies of the faith and forcibly converting the world. . . . Secular affairs and needs are . . . subject to execution according to a universal plan determined by metaphysical dogmas."

An Existential Refutation

Chkhartishvili's Fandorin is an existential refutation of the intelligentsia tradition of thought and action as described by *Vekhi*. Furthermore, his learned creator has placed the hero within a philosophical framework--existentialism--that is antithetical to the intelligentsia tradition and that *Vekhi*, yet again, has adumbrated so strikingly, both in the description of symptoms and of prescribed cures. In the *Koronatsiya* (Coronation) novel of the Fandorin cycle, the hero's credo, as told to another character, could have come from Sartre or Camus:

"Do you know, Afanasiy Stepanovich, what your mistake is? You believe that the world rests on some rules, that it contains meaning and order. And I have long understood: life is nothing more than chaos. It has no order at all, and no rules. Yes, I do have rules. But

those are my own rules, which I made for myself, and not for the world. So let the world be on its own, and I will be on my own. To the extent that I can. Personal rules, Afanasiy Stepanovich, are not a desire to rearrange the universe, but an attempt to organize, the best one can, the space closest to you. Not beyond that."

As in today's Russia--warily enjoying a fragile economic and political stabilization after almost a decade of revolutionary turmoil--in Fandorin's times the old rules had been swept away.

Opposition to the regime could no longer serve as the sole moral compass, and millions of men and women were attempting to devise and adhere to their own guides to worthy living. Like a true existentialist (and like millions of his compatriots today) Fandorin could count only on himself in deciding how to live an honorable and virtuous life.

Both in the privacy of his objectives ("organizing the space closest to you") and, even more, in the solitude of daily compliance with the self-invented and self-enforced rules of dignified existence, Fandorin's credo is the opposite of the intelligentsia's. As if heeding *Vekhi's* call, Fandorin's first priority is not to change Russia, but to change himself--or rather to change Russia by changing himself and helping others around him to change as well. He is not defined--and does not define himself--by his attitude toward the state, but by his attitude toward his countrymen, many of whom he guides and some of whom he saves. He does not look to the state either with hatred or hope. Fandorin's virtues are private, not only because they are not advertised, in the intelligentsia's fashion, to all and sundry, but more importantly because their worth is not measured by the currently fashionable short-term objectives of the Russian state but by the long-term goals of Russia.

Fandorin's occupation is an ideal venue for a man of his convictions. In the tradition of Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot and Lord Peter Wimsey, Fandorin is an individualist, fiercely guarding his independence.

This being Russia, he is not quite a "private" eye: employed by the Moscow police and later, as an "official for special assignments" (*chinovnik po osobym porucheniyam*), by the Moscow governor general, he is more like Simenon's Commissaire Maigret.

Fandorin attempts to put into practice a radical--for Russia--idea first articulated by Chatskiy, the hero of Alexander Griboedov's classic 1820s play *Gore ot Uma* (translated as "Woe from Intelligence"): "To serve the cause, not the individuals" (*sluzhit delu, a ne litsam*) and to "serve" (*sluzhit'*) but not be "subservient" (*prisluzhivat'*). Often risking his life in carrying out his duties, Fandorin lets everyone know that he has assumed these tasks voluntarily. Occasionally, he threatens to resign and eventually does, walking away from a promotion to the head of the Moscow police. Disliked by a new Moscow governor-general appointed by the increasingly insular and incompetent court in St. Petersburg, Fandorin leaves Russia, works as a detective for hire in Europe and the United States, and returns to his country only to help solve crimes that pique his curiosity or to pursue criminals who had escaped him.

Seizing the opportunities offered by a new, freer Russia, Chkhartishvili's hero thus devises nothing short of an existential breakthrough--an alternative to the silent opposition to the regime and alienation from state-produced resignation, dour cynicism, sullen submission and shoddy work characteristic of the intelligentsia's way of life. By contrast, Fandorin acts as an honorable and free man: He offers the state his conscientious service until and unless his job contradicts his private moral code.

Chkhartishvili seems to have constructed his hero as a living antithesis to every negative stereotype of the Russian intelligenty. He is practical, pragmatic, attentive to detail, energetic, competent, physically fit and disciplined. (His hobby is constructing and testing a new means of transportation, the automobile, and he sets several distance records, including one from Moscow to Paris.)

Fandorin makes clear that he serves neither the chief of the Moscow police nor Moscow's mayor nor even, as the reader discovers in *Koronatsiya* ("Coronation"), the Czar himself. He serves his country. "I serve not you but Russia", Fandorin tells the head of the Russian police in *Turetskiy Gambit* ("The Turkish Gambit"). "And I will not participate in a war which is useless and even harmful to Russia."

Chkhartishvili sees his hero as an embodiment of something that "a national Russian character--for different political and historic reasons--has always lacked: honorable self-restraint, privacy and dignity." In *Smert' Akhillesa* ("The Death of Achilles"), a beloved general, a hero of the victorious campaign against the Ottoman Turks and a symbol of Russian military valor, is found murdered in highly compromising circumstances. The general's aide-de-camp implores Fandorin:

"Promise that you will not use your detective talent to harm the motherland. Russia's honor is at stake!" Fandorin answers, "I promise that I will not do anything against my honor, and, I think, this should be enough."

Not that Russia's honor did not matter to Fandorin, but to him the honor of the motherland equaled, and could not be more than, the sum total of its citizens' individual honors.

In assessing Fandorin's challenge to the intelligentsia tradition of political and social change, one cannot wish for a better witness than the writer whose name became an adjective virtually inseparable from the Russian intelligentsia. By coincidence or design, Fandorin's life and career unfolded alongside that of Chekhov.

The heart of Chekhov's discord with the intelligentsia was the same as that which animated Vekhi: he seemed to believe that the path to a happier life ran not so much (or even primarily) through external change but through the fashioning of one's own way of honorable living in the world and following it daily. "When you turn around your life, everything will change", Sasha tells Nadia Shumina in the novella *Nevesta* ("Bride"). "The most important thing is to turn around one's life, everything else is not important."

Chekhov considered decent and productive life by individual men and women immeasurably more important for Russia's progress than the future idyll brought about by state reforms. In a letter, he wrote "I believe in individuals. I see [Russia's] salvation in individual persons."

With modernist self-consciousness suffusing Chkhartishvili's texts, it is hardly a coincidence that Fandorin's history, his habits and even his appearance seem to be modeled on Chekhov. Fandorin, like Chekhov, is sent into the world with no connections and no money and makes himself by an intense and successful deployment of willpower at the daily bettering of oneself. A son of a bankrupt shopkeeper from Taganrog who supported his family by writing stories between studying for medical school exams and attending hospital rounds, Chekhov knew firsthand the price of such effort: "incessant daily and nightly labor, constant reading . . . [and] willpower." In this work, Chekhov wrote, "every hour was precious" and was not to be wasted.

Fandorin's temperament, too, is unmistakably that of an Anton Chekhov: neither optimist nor pessimist, but a pragmatic skeptic wary of grandiose social projects and believing in a few self-made and self-policed rules of honorable living. Chkhartishvili's hero daily practices the four virtues that Chekhov seemed to consider Russia's only hope: decency, dignity, competence and hard work.

Fandorin loves his work, performs it brilliantly; he treats others according to their abilities and effort, not rank. Amid corruption, Fandorin repeatedly refuses bribes. Where rulers and ruled alike disregard laws, he is scrupulously law-abiding. Surrounded by vulgarity, he shows a refined taste. Above all Fandorin valued individual liberty as much as did Chekhov. "There is nothing I love so much as personal freedom", Chekhov told his close friend and publisher Alexei Suvorin.

In an 1889 letter, which thus anticipated *Vekhi* by two decades, Chekhov makes clear (by his own and his father's life stories) that the freedom he so treasured was the product of a backbreaking and sustained personal effort to rid himself of qualities incompatible with those of the free man. His was a story of "a young man, the son of a serf, a former shopkeeper, a chorister, a schoolboy and a university student, brought up on reverence for rank, on kissing priests' hands, on veneration of other people's thoughts, thankful for every crust of bread, flogged many times . . . who lied to God and people, lied without need, simply out of the realization of being a nobody . . . this young man is squeezing drop by drop the slave out of himself, and wakes up one fine morning and feels that it was real human blood flowing in his veins, not a slave's." [5]

A Hero for Contemporary Russia

For almost two centuries Russian literature has anticipated and powerfully illuminated discontinuities and transformations in the nation's values and aspirations well ahead of its rulers, officials, social scientists and even its secret policemen. There are tantalizing hints in the phenomenal success of the Fandorin cycle as well.

Could millions of Russians have spent their hard-earned rubles to buy more than a clever plot, elegant style and engaging hero? Might not have they also found in the book's existential credo a usable guide to forging their way through the onrush of modernity and freedom of choice, to charting their lives amid the ruins of erstwhile moral, economic and political certainties?

Fandorin's ideals may be precisely what is required in Russia today, where personal efforts (what used to be called the "small deeds" in Chekhov's days) by millions are far more important than the feats of a few: work hard, be honest, do not take bribes, pay taxes, be creative, take risks, abide by laws and force others to do so. Most important, Fandorin's insistence on serving and assuming personal responsibility for his country is key to the emergence of a civil society, without which Russia will never become a liberal capitalist democracy.

Has Fandorin's goal of organizing the space closest to him been found consonant by the Russians responsible for the explosion of private charity, human rights groups, private funding for the arts, hundreds of new print and cyber media that spring up every year and thousands of voluntary associations? What might be called the privatization of Russian national goals is well underway. For the first time in Russian history, the very criteria of national greatness are concerned not with the glory and military might of the state but with the welfare of individual citizens. As Boris Yeltsin declared in a televised interview in mid-June 1997:

"A great power is not mountains of weapons and subjects with no rights. A great power is a self-reliant and talented people with initiative. In the foundation of our approach to the building of the Russian state . . . is the understanding that the country begins with each of us. And the sole measure of the greatness of our Motherland is the extent to which each citizen of Russia is free, healthy, educated and happy."

Might not, then, the success of Chkhartishvili's books signal the beginning of a tectonic and, for Russia, a most benign shift from the intelligentsia--which for over two centuries were bound to the state by employment and belief in statist approaches to social change--to a self-supporting middle class?

"Russia never had commercial literature for the middle classes--partly because it never had a middle class," Chkhartishvili told an interviewer. "We either had pulp fiction that intellectuals were embarrassed to read or high-brow literature."

Recalling Chekhov's squeezing-the-slave-out letter, Fandorin's inventor pointed out in a recent interview that ridding oneself of inner slavery was the most important result of the revolution. "We have squeezed out a lot," Chkhartishvili said. "In the past ten or 15 years, people living in this country have straightened their backs." For him, the "most precious product of this evolution" is dignity: a quality that had been "in a catastrophically short supply" throughout Russian history (he has identified its scarcity as Russia's "main problem") but is inbred in the post-Soviet generation. "These are people," Chkhartishvili

says of his readers, "with an absolutely new mentality, who are used to relying on themselves, not on the government. These are people thinking big of themselves."

Suddenly, Fandorins are everywhere in Russia. The nation that for ages has told itself that it was lazy and unlucky and incapable of getting anything done right has become, among many 25 to 45-year-olds, a country of perfectionist workaholics and seekers after quality in work and life: the accountant, the software developer, the lawyer, the shop owner, the doctors in private practice, the tailor, the political consultant, the journalist, the clothes designer, the real estate agent, the restaurateur, the owner of the local newspaper or television station.

According to public opinion polls, the "main interests" of the post-Soviet middle class are family and work, while income is third and is looked at not as a main goal but a "consequence" of good work performance. They are *trudogoliki*, literally "laborholics", and an overwhelming majority believe that the betterment of their life depends on them, not the boss and not the authorities of all levels. A few years ago a 38 year-old entrepreneur, a regional distributor of medical supplies in the city of Voronezh, told an American reporter:

"I don't know who will be leading Russia in a year's time. But in this little place of Russia, I know what we will do. We will improve services. We will hire new people, we will improve salaries. These are our plans, and most of them are realistic. We will do what we can in our own house." [6]

According to the polls conducted since 1990 every four years by the Center for the Study of Social and Cultural Changes of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, between 1990 and 2002 the share of Russian citizens who say that they rely on themselves and not the state has grown from 43 percent to 78 percent. The share of those who preferred work for privately owned businesses (and not in the state sector) has increased from 20 percent to 85 percent. Despite the hardships, disappointments and dislocation of the last twelve years, pluralities or majorities continued to support liberty, independence and private initiative. Liberty, in particular, has been among the most consistently supported values of the past ten years. When asked to choose between "democracy that guarantees freedom and strict state control that guarantees security," 50 percent opted for the former and 30 percent for the latter.

May we, years or decades from now, look back at the popularity of the Fandorin cycle as a signal that, in choosing between the "intelligentsia tradition"—of solemn dreams and sordid reality, of relentless statism, all-or-nothing politics, shoddy work and sterile castigation of all but themselves for everything that is wrong with the country—and the Chekhov-*Vekhi*-Fandorin liberal vision of progress founded on self-improvement, personal responsibility, gradualism, patience and quotidian hard work, post-Soviet Russia has given the latter at least a sporting chance?

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