

Virginia Woolf's  
Portraits of Russian  
Writers



# Virginia Woolf's Portraits of Russian Writers:

*Creating the Literary Other*

By

Darya Protopopova

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-2753-0

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-2753-9

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## NOTE ON THE TEXT

In spelling Slavic names, this book follows, with some exceptions, the transliteration used by the British Library. Names and titles in bibliographical references are given in the form in which they appear in the originals. Where quoted authors use different spellings of Slavic names, these have been preserved for historical accuracy. Outside the quotations, the spelling of the names of Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev has been standardized to these forms. The names of Tolstoy's family members are spelt as Sophia Tolstoy, Tatiana Tolstoy, and Ilya Tolstoy, according to how they themselves transliterated their names in English.

For the convenience of the reader, I give a list of Slavic names mentioned in the book (names of contemporary critics have been omitted): Sergei Aksakov, Leonid Andreev, Boris Anrep, Valeria Arsenev (spelt according to the edition of Tolstoy's letters mentioned here), Léon Bakst, Andrey Bely, Alexandre Benois, Pavel Biryukov, Aleksandr Blok, Valery Bryusov, Ivan Bunin, Vladimir Chertkov, Sergei Diaghilev, Aleksandr Goldenveizer, Natalia Goncharova, Maksim Gorky, Alexander Herzen, Nadine Jarintzov (or Jarintzoff, a.k.a. Nadezhda Zharintseva), Theodore Komisarjevsky, Samuel Koteliansky, Sergei Kravchinskii, Petr Kropotkin, Mikhail Larionov, Lydia Lopokova, Elizaveta Militsina, D.S. Mirsky (a.k.a. Prince Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirsky), Vaslav Nijinsky, Olga Novikova (a.k.a. Novikoff), Iurii Olesha, Aleksandr Pushkin, Nicholas Roerich, Mikhail Saltikov (Shchedrin), Petr Sergeenko, Lev Shestov, Dimitrii Stelletzky (a.k.a. Dimitri Stelletski), Nikolai Strakhov, Igor Stravinsky, Alexey (Nikolayevich) Tolstoy, Zinaida Vengerova.

### Abbreviations

*TLS* – *Times Literary Supplement*

UP – University Press

## PREFACE

Everyone who has read Virginia Woolf from the Russian point of view knows how much she takes from her reading of Russian literature. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel Vinrace plunges into a Dostoevskian abyss of the unconscious. In *Night and Day*, a passage from *The Idiot* helps Katherine Hilbery to sum up her ‘fatalistic mood’.<sup>1</sup> *Jacob’s Room* is marked by Chekhovian sadness and inconclusiveness. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf wanted ‘to give the slipperiness of the soul’ – the subject matter that she simultaneously described as a favourite with Russian novelists.<sup>2</sup> *To the Lighthouse* deals with the Tolstoyan theme of a marital relationship. In *The Waves*, Bernard identifies himself with ‘that hero in a book by Dostoevsky’.<sup>3</sup> *The Years* reproduces the serenity of Turgenev’s novels. *Orlando* and *Between the Acts* feature Russian, or Russian-looking, heroines.

This book, however, focuses on something more definite than textual echoes, namely, on Woolf’s work as a literary critic and a maker or breaker of literary reputations in her sharp, witty, highly perceptive, and often prophetic essays. The main material of this study is the collection of her portraits of Russian writers – the collection she had begun with her first review of Tolstoy’s *The Cossacks* in 1917.<sup>4</sup> I use the word ‘review’ intentionally here, in its meaning of a critical evaluation of a freshly written literary text, as Woolf was reviewing a new translation of Tolstoy’s novella by Louise and Aylmer Maude. The first English translation of *The Cossacks* (by a famous American diplomat Eugene Schuyler) appeared simultaneously in London and New York in 1878, but did not convey the poetic quality of Tolstoy’s early prose as well as the Maudes’ version: naturally, when reading the latter, Woolf and her contemporaries were seeing *The Cossacks* in a new light, or, to quote Woolf’s review, ‘as if it had been written a month

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day*, ed. by Suzanne Raitt (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 138. Details of the first editions of Woolf’s novels are provided in the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1977-84), II, 244. Hereafter referred to as *Diary*.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, ed. by Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. 227.

<sup>4</sup> For the chronology of Woolf’s essays on the Russians see Appendix 1.

or two ago'.<sup>5</sup> To explain this chronological paradox of how Russian nineteenth-century fiction became crucial to Woolf's version of modernism is one of the main objectives of this study.

Other modernists' interest in Russian literature has already been examined quite extensively. There are publications on Katherine Mansfield's 'Russian obsession',<sup>6</sup> D.H. Lawrence's response to Russian writers,<sup>7</sup> T.S. Eliot's interest in Dostoevsky and the Ballets Russes,<sup>8</sup> James Joyce's knowledge of Russian literature,<sup>9</sup> and Ford Madox Ford's dangerous Russian liaisons.<sup>10</sup> Peter Kaye has explored the place of Dostoevsky in English modernism.<sup>11</sup> Mikhail Feklin analysed Turgenev's influence on Ford and Conrad.<sup>12</sup> Russian elements in European modernist

<sup>5</sup> 'Tolstoy's "The Cossacks"' [review of Leo Tolstoy, *The Cossacks and Other Tales of the Caucasus*, trans. by Louise and Aylmer Maude (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1916)], in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie and Stuart N. Clarke, 5 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1986-), II, 76-9. Hereafter referred to as *Essays*.

<sup>6</sup> The title of Dr Gerri Kimber's paper, presented at the conference *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: Reception, Translation and the Modernist Cultural Agenda* (25-26 June 2009, Institute of English Studies, University of London). See also Joanna Woods, *Katerina: The Russian World of Katherine Mansfield* (Auckland: Penguin, NZ, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> George J. Zytaruk, *D.H. Lawrence's Response to Russian Literature* (Hague: Mouton, 1971). See also Dorte G.A. Engelhardt, *L.N. Tolstoy and D.H. Lawrence: Cross-currents and Influence* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996); Catherine Brown, 'Anna Karenina, Daniel Deronda and Women in Love: Comparison as Methodology', unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> John C. Pope, 'Prufrock and Raskolnikov', *American Literature*, 17 (1945/1946), 213-30; 18, 319-21; Temira Pachmuss, 'Dostoevsky and T.S. Eliot: A Point of View', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 12 (1976), 82-9; G.M. Hyde, 'T.S. Eliot's Crime and Punishment', in *F.M. Dostoevsky (1821 - 1881): A Centenary Collection*, ed. by Leon Burnett (Oxford: Holdan Books, 1981), pp. 87-96. See also Olga M. Ushakova, 'T.S. Eliot and Russian Culture', *Modern Studies in English Language and Literature. Earth, Man and, Culture* (The Modern English Society of Korea), 51 (2007), 423-36.

<sup>9</sup> Neil Cornwell, *James Joyce and the Russians* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Max Saunders, 'Ford and Turgenev'; Anat Vernitski, 'The Complexity of Truth: Ford and the Russians', both in *Ford Madox Ford's Literary Contacts*, ed. by Paul Skinner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 63-78; 101-11.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism, 1900 - 1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> M.B. Feklin, *The Beautiful Genius: Turgenev v Anglii: vertye polveka* [Turgenev in England: The First Fifty Years] (Oxford: Perspective Publications, 2005).



literature have been discussed.<sup>13</sup> It is clear from such publications that the popularity of Russian literature in early-twentieth-century Europe has a bearing on modernist studies.<sup>14</sup> As Rebecca Beasley's recent study suggests, reading and analysing newly translated Russian literature became a kind of initiation test for European modernists. Even in translation, those Russian novels were famously hard to access due to complex plot structures and an unfamiliar cultural context: if you were able to conquer those challenges and retrieve the pearl of Russian literary wisdom, you rightfully joined the club of forward-thinking, broad-minded intellectuals. Woolf took this modernist vogue for exotic literatures even further, when she started learning the language of the source (in her case Russian) herself and eventually participated, alongside Leonard Woolf and Samuel Kotliansky, in co-translating the Hogarth Press's publications of Russian literature.<sup>15</sup>

Woolf's preoccupation with Russian literature has been explored comparatively,<sup>16</sup> through the history of the Hogarth Press Russia-related publications,<sup>17</sup> and in the light of her response to individual Russian authors, such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.<sup>18</sup> Natalya Reinhold has very succinctly

<sup>13</sup> Debra Prager, 'Clavdia Chauchat: Hans Castorp's Significant Other in Thomas Mann's "Der Zauberberg"', in *Vampirettes, Wretches, and Amazons: Western Representations of East European Women*, ed. by Valentina Glajar and Domnica Radulescu (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), pp. 131-59.

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Beasley, *Russomania: Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881-1922* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> See also Claire Davison, *Translation as Collaboration: Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and S.S. Kotliansky* (Edinburgh UP, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> N. Takei DaSilva, *Modernism and Virginia Woolf* (Windsor: Windsor Publications, 1990), pp. 206-7; Skrbic, Nena, "'Excursions into the Literature of a Foreign Country': Crossing Cultural Boundaries in the Short Fiction', in *Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction*, ed. by Kathryn N. Benzel and Ruth Hoberman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 25-38.

<sup>17</sup> John H. Willis, *Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers: The Hogarth Press, 1917 – 1941* (London; Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 1992), pp. 80-101; Laura Marcus, 'European Dimensions of the Hogarth Press', in *The Reception of Virginia Woolf in Europe*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws and Nicola Luckhurst (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 328-56; Andrei Rogachevskii, 'I.A. Bunin i "Khogart Press"' ['I.A. Bunin and the Hogarth Press'], in *I.A. Bunin: Novye materialy*, Issue I (Moscow: Russkii put, 2004), pp. 333-53; Claire Battershill, *Biography and Autobiography at Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Temira Pachmuss, 'Dostoevsky, Werfel, and Virginia Woolf: Influences and Confluences', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 9 (1972), 416-28; Bill Handley, 'Virginia Woolf and Fyodor Dostoevsky: Can Modernism Have "Soul"?', *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 31 (1988), 3-4; Penny Colburn-McGuire, 'Interiors: Woolf and Dostoevsky', in *Virginia Woolf Miscellanies: Proceedings of the First Annual*

pointed out that Woolf's 'life-long engagement with Russian literature [...] turned out to be a field of search for "the Other" and the discourse of modernity'.<sup>19</sup> However, the scholars still need to define exactly which qualities in Russian literature Woolf regarded as "paving the way" for a new kind of realism. To resolve this uncertainty, the current study explores several ways in which writing about the so-called 'non-photographic' prose of the Russians (the term coined by Vita Sackville-West)<sup>20</sup> helped Woolf develop her views on aesthetic liberation and modernity in fiction.

Roberta Rubenstein's doctoral thesis on 'Virginia Woolf's Response to Russian Literature' (University of London, 1969) came out in book form in October 2009.<sup>21</sup> This study is indebted to Rubenstein's research into Woolf's unpublished comments on the Russian writers. However, unlike Rubenstein, who uses a comparative approach and focuses on echoes of Russian literature in Woolf's novels, I focus primarily on Woolf's essays. In particular, I am interested in how Woolf used Russian literature as a counterpart, or a worthy adversary, of the Victorian novel. Essays on Russian literature became, essentially, one of her favourite platforms for ridiculing Victorian and (in the case of writers such as Arnold Bennett) Edwardian literary conventions. In this "practical" preoccupation with the Russians, in which she pursued her own literary agenda, Woolf differed from other British admirers of Russian literature, such as Lytton Strachey, Katherine Mansfield, John Middleton Murry, and William Gerhardt: their writings on the Russians were of a more passive, explanatory, and slightly dismissive nature. In her desire to champion Russian writers as uninhibited and avant-garde, Woolf found an unexpected ally in Roger Fry, whose

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*Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow-Turk (New York: Pace University, 1992), pp. 121-3; Emily Dalgarno, 'A British *War and Peace*? Virginia Woolf Reads Tolstoy', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 50 (2004), 129-50; Claire Davison-Pégon, 'Tangents in A Telescope: Virginia Woolf's Georgian Tolstoy', *The Critical Writings of Twentieth-Century British Novelists, Etudes britanniques contemporaines*, 33 (2007), 17-31. For more bibliographical details on Woolf and Tolstoy see Chapter 4.

<sup>19</sup> Natalya Reinhold, 'Virginia Woolf's Russian Voyage Out', *Woolf Studies Annual*, 9 (2003), 1-27 (p. 3).

<sup>20</sup> Vita Sackville-West, 'Tolstoy', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 8 September 1928, pp. 729-30.

<sup>21</sup> Roberta Rubenstein, *Virginia Woolf and the Russian Point of View* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See my review of this book in the *TLS*, 11 December 2009, p. 31.

articles on Russian and other European Post-Impressionists closely echo Woolf's essays.<sup>22</sup>

In order to outline the context in which Woolf was reading Russian literature, the Introduction summarizes the British ideas of Russia before and during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The purpose of the Introduction is purely contextual, so it contains very few references to Woolf. Nevertheless, its contents are crucial for understanding the intellectual atmosphere that shaped Woolf's idea of the Russians. The Introduction is particularly relevant to the current political and cultural relations between Britain and Russia, as it illustrates the cyclical nature of hostilities and rapprochement between the two countries. The Introduction partly deals with arts, such as ballet and painting: the connection between Woolf's novels and her interest in visual arts has long been established. Lynn Garafola has examined the popularity of the Ballets Russes among members of the Bloomsbury Group.<sup>23</sup> Sue Roe and Jane Goldman have explored the links between Woolf and Post-Impressionism.<sup>24</sup> Woolf's knowledge of the Ballets Russes and Russian Post-Impressionist paintings inevitably conditioned her response to Russian literature.

Chapter 1 examines the concept of 'Russia' in Woolf's novels, diaries, and letters. Woolf, unlike some British critics of the time, attempted to question the reputation of Russian literature as an exotic product of a foreign and incomprehensible country, a product irrelevant to the artistic struggles of British novelists. The leitmotif of her pronouncements on the Russians was that the British 'moderns' should learn from Russian examples how to treat fiction as an art. Russian literature provided Woolf with illustrations of what she considered some of the most important qualities in literature, namely, the writer's artistic self-awareness, and beauty of execution. It is important to remember, however, that Woolf did not regard those qualities

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<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Woolf and Fry's parallel championing of sincerity and vitality as the most desirable qualities of modern art see my previous publication: Darya Protopopova, 'Virginia Woolf and Russian Literature', in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, ed. by Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), pp. 386-97.

<sup>23</sup> Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), pp. 301-29. See also Evelyn Haller, 'Her Quill Drawn from the Firebird: Virginia Woolf and the Russian Dancers', in *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Diane F. Gillespie (Columbia: Missouri UP, 1993), pp. 180-226.

<sup>24</sup> Sue Roe, 'The Impact of Post-Impressionism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, pp. 164-90; Jane Goldman, 'Modernist Studies', in *Virginia Woolf Studies*, ed. by Anna Snaith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 35-59.

as exclusive to Russian prose: she found them in works of other ‘moderns’ as well, for example, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce.

The Introduction and Chapter 1 deal with national stereotypes in literature, a controversial subject on which critics disagree. Peter Firchow, for example, in his book on British stereotypes about Germany, presents national stereotypes in literature as a worthy subject for literary studies.<sup>25</sup> Eduard Bagramov, by contrast, believes that researchers use the notion of national character axiomatically, without a proper definition, and that ‘the cognitive value of such studies [...] is usually very low’.<sup>26</sup> British ideas of Russia are not the main concern of this study, but it is important to remember that Russia and the Russians as ethnographical entities do feature in Woolf’s writings. A brief overview of those images in Chapter 1 allows the reader to see where she drew a line between reality and fiction.

The study largely avoids using the term ‘stereotype’. Although scholars have pointed out that national stereotypes are not ‘inevitably irrational, harmful, or pejorative’, the word still often implies a set of false impressions.<sup>27</sup> When this study looks at British ideas of Russia, including Woolf’s views on Russian literature, it does not aim to establish whether those ideas were true or false, since there are no objective criteria for measuring what Russia, or, indeed, any other country is ‘really’ like. The book examines Woolf’s pronouncements on Russian literature as part of her

<sup>25</sup> Peter E. Firchow, *The Death of the German Cousin: Variations on a Literary Stereotype, 1890 – 1920* (London; Toronto: Associated UPs; Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> ‘Poznavatel'naya tsennost' podobnykh sochinenii [...] kak pravilo, vesma nevysoka’. Quoted from E.A. Bagramov, ‘Etnicheskie problemy’ [‘Ethnic Problems’], in *Obraz Rossii: Russkaya kultura v mirovom kontekste* [The Image of Russia: Russian Culture in the World Context], ed. by E.P. Chelyshev (Moscow: Azbukovnik, 1998), p. 66. Throughout the book, when the translator’s name is not indicated, translations from the Russian are my own.

<sup>27</sup> Marco Cinnirella, ‘Ethnic and National Stereotypes: a Social Identity Perspective’, in *Pug’s Tour: National and Ethnic Stereotyping in Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. by Cedric C. Barfoot (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 37-51 (p. 37). See also Carol Avins, ‘Introduction’, in *Idem.*, *Border Crossings: The West and Russian Identity in Soviet Literature, 1917 – 1934* (Berkeley: California UP, 1983), pp. 1-8; Helen Szamuely, ‘British Attitudes to Russia 1880-1918’, unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Oxford, 1983); Anthony G. Cross, *The Russian Theme in English Literature from the Sixteenth Century to 1980: An Introductory Survey and a Bibliography* (Oxford: Meeuws, 1985); Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: ‘The East’ in European Identity Formation* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999), pp. 65-111; Stephen G. Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World: From Art to Anti-Semitism, Ballet to Bolshevism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003).

self-image as a novelist. Uniquely cosmopolitan in her literary tastes, Woolf did not judge writers according to their nationality: what mattered to her was their ability to capture universal emotions.

The chapter sequence of the book reflects the chronology of Woolf's engagement with the Russians. It is crucial to my argument about Woolf's search for modernity in Russian literature to start with Dostoevsky (Chapter 2) and Chekhov (Chapter 3): she reviewed their writings in the late 1910s, and their literary experiments served her as examples of outlandish literature that could provoke the British literary establishment. I start with Dostoevsky, because his works became famous in Britain much earlier than the writings of Chekhov. Chapter 4 opens a new part, a discussion of biographies. Closer to the end of her life Woolf became increasingly preoccupied with biographies, rather than novels, of Tolstoy and Turgenev, pondering a question of what it means to be a writer on a personal, fleshly level and how it affects one's relationship with friends and family. In the 1930s she read the diaries of Leo and Sophie Tolstoy, became fascinated with the latter's suicide attempts, and, finally, re-read several biographies of Turgenev. Woolf knew a great deal of biographical detail about all four major Russian writers discussed in this book: her intimate knowledge of their lives can be epitomised by her acquaintance with their physical looks, from portraits and photographs of the time. She was familiar with portraits of Dostoevsky and Turgenev by Vasilii Perov, included in the biography of Dostoevsky by Avrahm Yarmolinsky that she reviewed in 1927. Also in Woolf's library, there was *The Life of Tolstoy* by Paul Birukoff (Pavel Biryukov), published in London in 1911: apart from a portrait of Tolstoy by Ilya Repin (1901), Biryukov's book featured photographs of Tolstoy's house at Yasnaya Polyana and of Sophia Tolstoy, arm in arm with her husband, lovingly gazing at him while he is glaring straight into the camera – the image that may have inspired Woolf's reference to 'an untouched amateur photograph' in her 1920 review of Maxim Gorky's *Reminiscences* of Tolstoy.

Woolf's treatment of the Russians has to be set in context. Her definition of the soul as 'the chief character in Russian fiction', her comparison of Dostoevsky's novels to 'seething whirlpools', and her discussion of Russian melancholy and emotional extremes – such features in her writings on Russian literature closely echo other pronouncements on Russia in the British press of the time.<sup>28</sup> Do these echoes signal that Woolf lazily subscribed to a commonplace view of Russian literature? Or was she unaware of echoing her contemporaries? This study demonstrates that she

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<sup>28</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'The Russian Point of View', in *Essays*, IV, 185-6.

was aware of other critics' pronouncements on Russia and purposefully played with these stereotypes in her essays on Russian writers, just as she played with narrative conventions in her novels.

Woolf's interpretations of Russian literature remain topical today. Firstly, the centenaries of some major British-Russian cultural encounters witnessed by Woolf have been commemorated, such as the centenary of the first London performance of the Ballets Russes in 2011, the centenary of Constance Garnett's translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* in 2012, as well as a centenary of the 1917 Club, founded in December 1917 by Leonard Woolf and some of his friends in response to the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>29</sup> These centenaries make the reader of Woolf's essays wonder whether her ideas on the Russians have stood the test of time. An overview of modern British pronouncements on Russia and Russian literature shows that Woolf's ideas have largely shaped the international perception of Russian literary classics. For instance, at the seminar on the Russian novel, as part of the 2009 London Book Fair, a Russian novelist and literary critic Dmitrii Bykov observed:

Russian literature is like a pharmacy. Its solutions are bitter, unpleasant, but they will cure your soul. Russian life is undecorated with civilization. It is a wild jungle, but populated by kind people. Russian life is life in its essence.<sup>30</sup>

Bykov's remarks are, of course, ironic, but, like any stereotype, they reflect how Russian literature is perceived both in Russia and abroad. Bykov's words echo Woolf's image of the medicinal 'soul' in 'The Russian Point of View'. The echo may be unconscious, but it demonstrates how Western stereotypes continue to shape the Russians' self-image, and how the Russians, in turn, propagate these stereotypes in their self-definitions.<sup>31</sup>

Another striking echo of the early twentieth century in the present-day British media is Jonathan Dimbleby's 2008 book and TV series *Russia: A Journey to the Heart of a Land and Its People*, where he observes: 'The story of this country and of its people is one of extremes. Nothing is ordinary

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, the exhibition 'Russian Revolution: Hope, Tragedy, Myths', held at the British Library in 2017.

<sup>30</sup> My transcription of Bykov's English words.

<sup>31</sup> This cyclical process has been described in Robert C. Williams, 'The Russian Soul: Western Thought and Non-Western Nationalism', in Idem., *Russia Imagined: Art, Culture, and National Identity, 1840-1995* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 3-18.

here'.<sup>32</sup> This observation parallels the title and sentiment of a 1914 book *Russia: The Country of Extremes*, by Nadine Jarintzov, a.k.a. Nadezhda Zharintseva, a Russian émigré who settled in England and published several books on Russia and Russian literature. Of course, since the 1910s, Russia has acquired new associations in British eyes. The *OED* identifies Russia with 'oligarchs', 'very rich business leader[s] with a great deal of political influence'. In 2018 Russia is known in Britain mostly for its deadly spies and for hosting the 21st FIFA World Cup. Yet, some political associations have survived, such as Siberian imprisonment and tsardom.<sup>33</sup> Violence, lack of respect for law and order, extravagance,<sup>34</sup> ballet,<sup>35</sup> the 'great Russian novel' – these are Russia's attributes in the modern British press and fiction. Some of them have persisted for centuries, some date back to Woolf's time. What Woolf wrote about Russia and the Russians is now more relevant than ever.

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<sup>32</sup> *Russia: A Journey with Jonathan Dimbleby* (Complete BBC Series, 2008) [on DVD]. In the book version of his film, Dimbleby observes, in another echo of early twentieth-century British pronouncements on Russia, that 'Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* are essential reading if you want to understand the "soul" of Russia in the nineteenth century and today'. Jonathan Dimbleby, *Russia: A Journey to the Heart of a Land and Its People* (London: BBC Books, 2008; repr. 2009), p. 547.

<sup>33</sup> Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2015). The old tsars are also regularly commemorated: see 'Russia, Royalty & the Romanovs' exhibition at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace (November 2018 – April 2019); 'The Last Tsar: Blood and Revolution' exhibition at the Science Museum (September 2018 – March 2019).

<sup>34</sup> See my review of Tom Rob Smith's *Child 44*, a novel about a Russian serial killer: *TLS*, 7 March 2008, p. 21. See also an article on a London exhibition of Andrei Molodkin, an artist who used images of blood and body parts: Nick Curtis, 'The Man Who Wants Your Body', *Evening Standard*, 7 April 2009, pp. 38-9.

<sup>35</sup> In 2009 Britain celebrated the centenary of the founding of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, the troupe whose members participated in the creation of the English National Ballet. On 16-20 June 2009, at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London, the ENB performed a series of revivals of the Ballets Russes iconic productions, including *Scheherazade* and *The Rite of Spring*.





## INTRODUCTION

### RUSSIA AND THE BRITISH SEARCH FOR THE CULTURAL ‘OTHER’

By 1904, the time when Virginia Woolf first read a translation of a Russian novel, Russia had acquired a number of recurrent associations in the British press.<sup>1</sup> By 1917, the time when she wrote her first review of a Russian novelist, some of those associations had changed and some had been reinterpreted. If in the nineteenth century British intellectuals paid attention to Russia mainly on political grounds, exacerbated during periods of hostility between the two countries such as the Crimean War of 1853 – 1856, the early twentieth century saw the rise of British interest in Russian art and literature. As Lea Honigwachs observes, ‘[t]hrough the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907, Russia and Britain eliminated the major points of imperial friction between themselves’.<sup>2</sup> The years between 1910 and 1925 were, roughly, the period when British attitudes towards Russia changed dramatically from condescension and mistrust towards an ‘uncivilized’ political enemy, to admiration of Russian art and laudatory fantasies about the ‘soul’ of the Russian people. Dorothy Brewster discusses ‘the gradual development of rhapsodic attitudes towards the Russian Soul’ in Britain in 1905 – 1917.<sup>3</sup> Rachel May goes further and terms the period of 1910 – 1925 the years of the ‘Russian craze’ in Britain.<sup>4</sup>

This introduction provides a context for Woolf’s thoughts about Russian writers. Between 1910 – 1925 many Russian novels were translated into

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<sup>1</sup> The Woolf library contained a 1904 edition of Tolstoy’s works, signed ‘V. Stephen’: Leo Tolstoy, *A Landed Proprietor; The Cossacks; Sevastopol*, trans. and ed. by Leo Wiener, Vol. II of the Complete Works of Count Tolstoy (London: Dent, 1904). The 2006 Paperback Catalogue of Paul Evans Rare Books.

<sup>2</sup> Lea H. Honigwachs, ‘Edwardian Discovery of Russia, 1900 – 1917’, unpublished doctoral dissertation (University of Columbia, 1977), pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Brewster, *East-West Passage: A Study in Literary Relationships* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), pp. 161-75.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel May, *The Translator in the Text: On Reading Russian Literature in English* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1994), pp. 30-1.

English for the first time, and London theatres hosted numerous productions of the Russian ballet and Russian drama. Here we examine the reception of Russian art and literature in Britain in the context of the modernists' revolt against Victorianism and their search for new expressiveness.<sup>5</sup> It describes how the association of Russia with the primitive and the Orient first appeared in Britain in the early modern period and evolved into a conscious, avant-garde *vogue* in the twentieth century. Closing in on Woolf's period, the Introduction examines Roger Fry's attraction to Oriental motifs of the Russian Ballet and icon painting and his praise of primitive elements in works of the Russian artists who contributed to the second Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1912. Fry's interest in Russian visual arts provides a revealing parallel to Woolf's search for new methods of artistic expression in Russian literature.

### Pre-twentieth-century British ideas of Russia

Some of the stereotypes about Russia held by the British now, as well as in Woolf's time, date back to the Renaissance, when British travellers reached the expanses of the Tsardom of Russia, known in English at the time as Muscovy, in 1553. Nina Mikhalskaia dates the origin of those ideas even earlier, arguing that the image of Russia in British literature from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries possesses 'stable unity': its 'structure and components changed very little' throughout that time.<sup>6</sup> Mikhalskaia's study covers a wide period of British literary history, concluding with Oscar Wilde's fantasy of the Russian political underground in his play *Vera, or The Nihilists* (1880). Mikhalskaia shows that over many centuries, British authors endowed Russia with a set of characteristics traditionally ascribed in Western mythologies to distant and culturally different lands. She demonstrates the mythological nature of the British image of Russia by comparing it to the description of Scythia in Herodotus's *Histories*. Like Herodotus's vision of Scythia, the main association of Russia in British literature over centuries was winter and its attributes – snow, ice and cold.

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<sup>5</sup> See Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911 to 1918* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 34; Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1940), p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> N.P. Mikhalskaia, *Obraz Rossii v angliiskoi khudozhestvennoi literature IX-XIX vv.* [The Image of Russia in English Literature of the Ninth to Nineteenth Century] (Moscow: MPGU, 1995), p. 145. On 'how little [...] the Englishman's picture of Russia changed between the age of the Elizabethans and the second half of the nineteenth century' see also Matthew Smith Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia: 1553 – 1815* (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. 235.

The severity of the Russian winter and the Russians' ability to cope with it both fascinated and repelled sixteenth-century British travellers. Elizabethan accounts of Russia are relevant here, for Woolf read them in Richard Hakluyt's collection of *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1598 – 1600). She used the descriptions of Russia from Hakluyt's collection when creating the grotesque image of Russia in *Orlando*.<sup>7</sup> The collections included the accounts of Richard Chancellor, whose expedition to Russia took place in 1553 and who wondered at the endurance of Russian soldiers 'in extremetie of cold'.<sup>8</sup> It also included the impressions recorded by George Turberville, who visited Russia as a secretary to the British ambassador in 1568 and judged that the severity of climate was the cause of the Russians' 'rude' habits.<sup>9</sup> The travellers focused on the Russian winter to prove the barbarity of the country: according to their logic, only 'ignorant' (Chancellor), 'bestly' (Turberville) people, whose neglect of physical comforts made them akin to animals, could survive in such conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect that featured prominently in Elizabethan accounts of Russia was the Muscovite 'slavery'. Both Chancellor and Turberville wrote about the infinite power the Russian 'Emperour' had over his subjects, and about the Muscovites' readiness 'to make themselues, their wiues, and children, bondslaues vnto rich men [...] so little accompt doe they make of libertie'.<sup>11</sup> As Mikhalskaia observes, the Elizabethans often linked images of the Russian winter and slavery in poetic metaphors describing a freezing political climate.<sup>12</sup> Philip Sidney referred to 'cold *Muscovy*' in *Astrophel and Stella*, first published in 1591. Daryl Palmer shows how Shakespeare fused winter images with references to Russia in order to create an atmosphere of political tyranny in *Measure for Measure* (1604).<sup>13</sup> From the

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<sup>7</sup> See *Diary*, I, p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> *Hakluyt's Collection of the Early Voyages, Travels, and Discoveries, of the English Nation*, 5 vols (London: Printed for R.H. Evans et al., 1809-1812), I, p. 278.

<sup>9</sup> *Hakluyt's Collection*, I, pp. 432-3.

<sup>10</sup> *Hakluyt's Collection*, I, pp. 283, 435. During the period of political rapprochement between Britain and Russia in the early twentieth century, British and Russian historians revived their interest in the early contacts between their countries. The following paper was presented on 4 April 1913 at the International Congress of Historical Studies in London: Inna Lubimenko, 'The Correspondence of Queen Elizabeth with the Russian Czars', *The American Historical Review*, 19 (1914), pp. 525-542.

<sup>11</sup> *Hakluyt's Collection*, I, p. 281.

<sup>12</sup> Mikhalskaia, p. 147.

<sup>13</sup> Daryl W. Palmer, *Writing Russia in the Age of Shakespeare* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 155-78.

sixteenth century onwards, references to Russia have served British writers' rhetorical purposes. The image of Russia was also a convenient tool of self-definition. As Palmer puts it, 'Russia mattered to England as a kind of complex prism, reflecting and refracting a whole spectrum of often contradictory images, conceits, and allegories'.<sup>14</sup>

Russia was also associated with Asia, and this view vaguely derived from the 'big division' between the Occident and Orient that Western thinkers had inherited from the ancient Greeks.<sup>15</sup> Elizabethan travellers often noted Russia's intermediate position between Asia and Europe. Being sceptical about the depth of the Russian religiosity, they still could not deny that Russia was a Christian country, 'maintain[ing] the opinions of the Greeke Church'.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, Giles Fletcher, who travelled to Russia in 1588, observed close economic and cultural links between Russia and its Eastern neighbours, or, to use Fletcher's umbrella term, the Tartars. Fletcher noted Turkish fashion in Russian weaponry and Persian elements in Russian clothes.<sup>17</sup> Later British accounts of Russia emphasised the country's Asian features when trying to present Russia as a threat to the West.<sup>18</sup> These pre-twentieth-century associations of Russia with the Orient explain why in the 1910s, the British audiences perceived the 'Arabian Nights' designs of the Ballets Russes as an organic part of Diaghilev's general penchant for Russian folk motifs.

As Anthony Cross observes, '[b]y the end of the seventeenth century a new era in British consciousness of Russia was at hand, symbolized and initiated by the momentous visit to England of Peter I's "Great Embassy" in 1698'.<sup>19</sup> Peter I's socio-economic and cultural reforms facilitated the West's recognition of Russia as a European country. However, the initial image of Russia as a barbarous land continued to prevail. In Daniel Defoe's portrayal of Russia in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), partly set in Siberia, Russia retains its semi-Asian, semi-European status. Although Crusoe notes that 'the garrisons and governor were *Russians* and

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<sup>14</sup> Palmer, p. viii.

<sup>15</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, new edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Hakluyt's Collection*, I, p. 281. For an overview of the complicated attitude of early British travellers towards Russian religion see Will F. Ryan, *Russian Magic in the British Library: Books, Manuscripts, Scholars, Travellers* (London: The British Library, 2006), pp. 80-81.

<sup>17</sup> *Hakluyt's Collection*, I, pp. 540, 561.

<sup>18</sup> See John William Mackail, *Russia's Gift to the World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915), p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> Cross, *The Russian Theme in English Literature*, pp. 7-8.

profess'd Christians', the rest of Russia's Eastern inhabitants 'were, of all the *heathens* and *pagans* that [he] ever [...] met with, the most barbarous'.<sup>20</sup>

In the nineteenth century dozens of new books on Russia appeared in Britain.<sup>21</sup> Documentary accounts of Russia continued to inspire British novelists and poets. Byron painted Russia as an extremely cold country, populated by wild, almost bestial people, in Cantos IX and X of *Don Juan* (1823). Juan's relatives prepare themselves for 'emigrations' to Russia by 'eating ices', and his mother, Donna Inez, expresses no concern about Catherine II's kindness towards Juan, for:

'[...] At home it might have given her some vexation;  
But where thermometers sunk down to ten,  
Or five, or one, or zero, she could never  
Believe that virtue thawed before the river.'<sup>22</sup>

According to Byron's narrator, life at the Russian court is excessively and chaotically luxurious, 'a hurry/ Of waste, and haste, and glare, and gloss, and glitter'. At the same time, he argues that European dresses and ceremonies of the Russian nobility are only a surface, and that in an amorous 'flurry' one could see 'bear-skins black and furry [...] [p]eep[ing] out sometimes [...] [t]hrough all the "purple and fine linen"' worn by the Russian empress.<sup>23</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the British public opinion was influenced by French publications on Russia, which were widely discussed in the British press and sometimes translated into English. When the Marquis de Custine's *La Russie en 1839* appeared in English in 1843, *A Russian Reply* to it was published a year later.<sup>24</sup> Custine's book sustained the idea that Russia was a pre-civilized nation, and that Europe was threatened by the 'eternal tyranny of the East'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> [Daniel Defoe,] *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe; Being the Second and Last Part of His Life, and of the Strange Surprising Accounts of His Travels Round Three Parts of the Globe. Written by Himself* (London: Taylor, 1719), p. 306. Capitalization modernized, italics in original.

<sup>21</sup> They are surveyed, for example, in Francesca Wilson, *Muscovy: Russia through Foreign Eyes, 1553 – 1900* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), pp. 155-314.

<sup>22</sup> George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan*, in Idem., *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-1993), V, pp. 446-7.

<sup>23</sup> Byron, *Don Juan*, p. 444.

<sup>24</sup> *A Russian's Reply to the Marquis de Custine's 'Russia in 1839'*, trans. from the French, ed. by Henry J. Bradfield (London: Newby, 1844).

<sup>25</sup> The Marquis de Custine, *Russia*, abridged from the French (London: Longman, 1855), pp. 221.

The British public opinion on Russia fluctuated throughout the nineteenth century, sliding to its lowest during the Crimean War and in the 1870s, when Britain and Russia came into conflict over the Balkans. However, as Western travellers acquired a more nuanced knowledge of Russia, even those aspects of Russian life that used to be perceived negatively were re-evaluated from a positive perspective. For example, Baron von Haxthausen gave a positive portrait of Russian peasantry in his book *The Russian Empire, Its People, Institutions and Resources*, translated into English in 1856.<sup>26</sup> Haxthausen tried to refute the image of Russian peasants as a rude crowd doomed to live in constant misery.<sup>27</sup> He praised their religiosity and communal spirit. Haxthausen's book 'contributed richly to the myth of the "Russian soul"', the myth that was to preoccupy British Russophiles in the early twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> It is interesting to see that what started as a series of observations by European economists would later evolve into an image of the Russian soul as a literary phenomenon, developed by Woolf in her essays on Russian writers.

The emancipation of the serfs in Russia in 1861 did not change the association of Russia with pre-civilized peasantry. Since peasants continued to live in the so-called *obshchina* (the rural commune), their lifestyle was still seen as different from that of European farmers. In 1877 Donald Mackenzie Wallace, author of the monumental study *Russia*, described the Russian *obshchina* as 'an institution which, in spite of its simplicity and incalculable utility, West-Europeans seemed utterly incapable of understanding and appreciating'.<sup>29</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century the image of Russia in the British eyes acquired two new ingredients: the association with governmental political prosecution and anti-government revolutionaries, and the rise of British interest in Russian literature. Late nineteenth-century Britain was a haven for Russian political refugees. Alexander Herzen, for instance, lived in England between 1852 and 1865. According to Patrick Waddington, '[i]n 1853 he published articles on Russian serfdom in *The Leader*; his letter to Michelet appeared as a separate pamphlet, *The Russian People and Their Socialism*, in 1855, and that same year an English

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<sup>26</sup> August von Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire, Its People, Institutions, and Resources*, trans. by Robert Farie, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856).

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, 'White Slavery in Russia', *The Times*, 3 June 1842, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, p. 242.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia*, 2 vols (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1877), I, p. 119.

translation entitled *My Exile in Siberia* provoked a critical stir'.<sup>30</sup> Another of Herzen's books, on the development of revolutionary ideas in Russia, appeared in London in a French translation in 1853.<sup>31</sup>

Herzen formed very few close friendships with the British. Among his scarce London contacts was Robert Harrison, Librarian of the London Library between 1857 and 1892.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Herzen, '[t]he next generation of Russian revolutionary exiles were no longer content with being on the margins of British society'.<sup>33</sup> In the late 1880s and early 1890s a number of revolutionaries fled Russia to escape police prosecution and settled in London. Among them were Sergei Kravchinskii (known by the pseudonym Stepniak), Petr Kropotkin, Felix Volkhovskii, and David Soskice.<sup>34</sup> In 1890 Volkhovskii and Stepniak set up the 'Foundation for Russian Free Press', 'in order to publish political writings in Russian'.<sup>35</sup> The spin-off from the Press, the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, attracted numerous British members, including MPs.<sup>36</sup> The Russian exiles formed 'strong personal ties' with British intellectuals, especially with the Garnett and Rossetti families.<sup>37</sup> It was Stepniak who advised Constance Garnett to learn Russian and translate Russian literature professionally.<sup>38</sup> Ford Madox Ford took part in meetings of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom. In 1902,

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<sup>30</sup> Patrick Waddington, 'Herzen, Alexander (1812–1870)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford UP, September 2004; online edn, October 2007 [accessed 3 December 2018].

<sup>31</sup> Alexandre Herzen, *Du développement des idées révolutionnaires en Russie* (London: Jeffs, 1853).

<sup>32</sup> Monica Partridge, 'Russians, Russian Literature, and the London Library', in *Rossiia, Zapad, Vostok: Vstrechnye techeniya* (St Petersburg: Nauka, 1996), pp. 340-51.

<sup>33</sup> Anat Vernitski, 'Russian Revolutionaries and English Sympathizers in 1890s London: The Case of Olive Garnett and Sergei Stepniak', *Journal of European Studies*, 35 (2005), pp. 299-314 (p. 303).

<sup>34</sup> See Carol L. Peaker, 'Reading Revolution: Russian Émigrés and the Reception of Russian Literature in England, c. 1890 – 1905', unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Oxford, 2006), with chapters on Stepniak, Volkhovskiy, and Kropotkin.

<sup>35</sup> Vernitski, 'Russian Revolutionaries and English Sympathizers', p. 302.

<sup>36</sup> Vernitski, 'Russian Revolutionaries and English Sympathizers', pp. 304-5.

<sup>37</sup> Vernitski, 'The Complexity of Truth: Ford and the Russians', pp. 102-3.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Garnett, *Constance Garnett: A Heroic Life* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1991), p. 86. See also G.V. Alekseeva, 'Konstantsiya Garnett – angliiskaya perevodchitsa L.N. Tolstogo' ['Constance Garnett, English Translator of L.N. Tolstoy'], in *Yasnopolianski Sbornik 1992* (Tula: Posrednik, 1992), pp. 140-47 (p. 141).

Soskice married Ford's sister, Juliet Hueffer.<sup>39</sup> By the time Woolf befriended a Ukranian émigré Samuel Koteliansky in 1917, it had become almost a tradition for self-respecting British literati to rub shoulders with dishevelled outcasts of the autocratic Russian regimes.

Revolutionary propaganda was not the only Russian voice represented in the British press at the time, but it was the most powerful. Friends of Russian Freedom found an ideological opponent in Olga Novikova (a.k.a. Novikoff, 1840 – 1925). As Vernitski points out, she was ‘the widow of a Russian civil servant in the Russian embassy in London, who had lived for many years in England and was on friendly terms with Gladstone and Carlyle, among others’. She was ‘a firm supporter of the Russian autocracy and believed that conservative Russian society was the most natural ally to Victorian Britain’.<sup>40</sup> In spite of Novikova's personal charm and an eloquent defence of the Russian monarchy in her correspondence, it was not in the interest of British politicians to seek a complete rapport with the Russian tsar.<sup>41</sup>

In the 1880s and 1890s, the Russian exiles, mainly Kropotkin and Stepniak, flooded the British book market with publications on Russian terrorists, inhuman conditions in Russian prisons, and sufferings of Russian peasants.<sup>42</sup> Stepniak's *Underground Russia* deeply affected the British socialist William Morris.<sup>43</sup> British audiences were inclined to empathize with these publications as coming from Russian and, therefore, ‘authentic’ sources. Some British writers, such as Maurice Baring (discussed later in the book), presented the Russian monarchy in a positive light. The *New Age*,

<sup>39</sup> Vernitski, “The Complexity of Truth: Ford and the Russians”, p. 106.

<sup>40</sup> Vernitski, ‘Russian Revolutionaries and English Sympathizers’, p. 304.

<sup>41</sup> See [Olga Novikoff], *The M.P. for Russia: Reminiscences and Correspondence of Madame Olga Novikoff*, ed. by William T. Stead, 2 vols (London: Melrose, 1909), I, 2.

<sup>42</sup> [Sergei] Stepniak, *Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life*, with a Preface by Peter Lavroff, trans. from the Italian (London: Smith, Elder, & Co, 1883); Idem., *The Russian Peasantry: Their Agrarian Condition, Social Life and Religion*, 2 vols (London: Sonnenschein, 1888); Idem., *The Career of a Nihilist: A Novel* (London: Scott, 1889); Petr Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons* (London: Ward and Downey, 1887); Idem., *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, with a preface by Georg Brandes, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, & Co, 1899); Felix Volkhovsky, ‘The Claims of the Russian Liberals’, in *Nihilism as It Is* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1895), pp. 103-22.

<sup>43</sup> Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 470.



a left-wing British periodical, proclaimed British Russophiles to be less trustworthy than the Russian exiles.<sup>44</sup>

The Russian political émigrés achieved wide recognition in Britain through publishing in major British newspapers. Robert Henderson has recently pointed out that Russian revolutionaries also gave public lectures at the Free Russian Library in the East End of London.<sup>45</sup> Between 1884 and 1886 *The Times* published twenty one articles by Stepniak.<sup>46</sup> His death in a train accident in London in 1895 was followed by the commemoration of his life and writings in further newspaper articles.<sup>47</sup> In the 1890s, Kropotkin's articles on the poor state of Russian prisons appeared in *The Times* in 'Letters to the Editor' and 'News' sections.<sup>48</sup> In 1906 and 1908 *The Times* published another four of his letters reporting the brutal suppression of the 1905 insurrection in Moscow and the thousands of arrests that followed.<sup>49</sup> Kropotkin's aim was to bring 'to the knowledge of English readers the ghastly forms which political prosecution has taken lately in Russia':

A man or a woman, very often a mere boy or a girl, is arrested by the police – of course without any warrant from a magistrate. [...] At this very moment thousands of men and women [...] are arrested in this way every day. [...] The victim is locked up and often mercilessly beaten if he or she objects to the arrest.<sup>50</sup>

Kropotkin's propaganda climaxed when the Parliamentary Russian Committee published several editions of his pamphlet *The Terror in Russia: An Appeal to the British Nation*, in order to promote 'friendly relations with all Russians who are working for the social and political amelioration of their country'.<sup>51</sup> The pamphlet painted the social conditions in Russia of the

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<sup>44</sup> [Anon.], 'Our Friend the Tsar', *New Age*, 29 July 1909, p. 264.

<sup>45</sup> See Robert Henderson, *Vladimir Burtsev and the Struggle for a Free Russia* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> For instance, [Sergei] Stepniak, 'Student Life in Russian Universities', *The Times*, 18 April 1884, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> For instance, [Anon.], 'Death of M. Sergius Stepniak', *The Times*, 24 December 1895, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Petr Kropotkin, 'Russian Prisons in an Official Report', *The Times*, 6 June 1890, p. 4; Idem., 'The Siberian Atrocities', *The Times*, 24 March 1890, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Petr Kropotkin, "'Administrative Exile" in Russia', *The Times*, 19 October 1906, p. 5; Idem., 'Executions in Russia', *The Times*, 14 August 1908, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Kropotkin, "'Administrative Exile" in Russia', p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Petr Kropotkin, *The Terror in Russia: An Appeal to the British Nation, Issued by the Parliamentary Russian Committee* (London: Methuen, 1909), the fly-leaf.

time in the most repugnant terms possible. Kropotkin's argument appealed to those British readers who presented themselves as the 'lovers of liberty and progress'.<sup>52</sup> As Cross observes, secret societies and revolution were among 'the dominant themes in English imaginative writing on Russia' in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.<sup>53</sup> The most famous and powerful example of this theme is Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911). British critics compared Conrad's portrait of the Russian underground to what they knew about Friends of Russian Freedom.<sup>54</sup> To the *Westminster Gazette* reviewer, the title of Conrad's novel suggested that 'the Slav in not easily comprehensible to us, Teutons' – the idea that Woolf would later echo when discussing possible misinterpretation of Russian literature at the end of her essay 'The Russian Point of View'.<sup>55</sup>

Atrocious acts of the Russian penitentiary system and its terrorist counterparts had little in common with the image of barbarous Muscovites in pre-nineteenth century British accounts. However, publications on Russian revolutionaries in the British press continued to supply British readers with new evidence of Russia's wildness.<sup>56</sup> British Russophiles tried to persuade their fellow countrymen that 'acts of violence' during 'the turbulent revolutionary years 1906-8' were not normal for Russia. For instance, in 1913 Maurice Baring argued that 'to write of the years 1906-8 as being entirely typical of Russian life would be the same as writing of the years 1791-3 as being entirely typical of French life'.<sup>57</sup> But for most British observers, the Russian revolutions of 1917 gave the lie to Baring's statement.

Initial interest in Russian literature among British intellectuals was of ethnographic, or, to use May's term, 'informational' nature.<sup>58</sup> Between the 1850s and 1880s 'the translations [from the Russian] that did appear [in Britain] were designed to serve political rather than aesthetic ends, providing 'information' about Russian life that bolstered the prevailing

<sup>52</sup> Kropotkin, *The Terror in Russia*, p. v.

<sup>53</sup> Cross, *The Russian Theme in English Literature*, p. 53.

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, an unsigned review of 12 October 1911 in the *Morning Post*. Reproduced in *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Norman Sherry (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 231-3 (p. 232).

<sup>55</sup> An unsigned review of 14 October 1911. Reproduced in *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 233-5 (p. 234).

<sup>56</sup> See also images of revolutionary outbreaks in Russia on English postcards dating from 1905: *Postcards from the Russian Revolution*, Introduction by Andrew Roberts (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2008), pp. 12-5.

<sup>57</sup> [Maurice Baring], 'The Average Russian' [review of *My Russian Year*, by Rothay Reynolds], *TLS*, 23 January 1913, p. 30.

<sup>58</sup> May, p. 13.

stereotypes'.<sup>59</sup> The Russians themselves were partly responsible for this approach. Herzen promoted Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* as documentary evidence of the suffering of the serfs: 'Qui peut lire sans frémir d'indignation et de honte [...] le chef-d'œuvre de I. Tourgueneff *Récits du Chasseur*'.<sup>60</sup> In 1854 and 1855 stories from *Sportsman's Sketches* appeared in *Frazer's Magazine*, in Charles Dickens's *Household Words*, and in book form under the titles indicating 'informational' expectations of their readers: 'Photographs from Russian Life', 'The Children of the Czar', and *Russian Life in the Interior*.<sup>61</sup> The British tendency to read Russian novels as documents survived well into the 1910s. In 1899 Edward Garnett argued that 'the chief value' of 'A Strange Story' by Turgenev 'is that it gives the English mind a clue to the fundamental distinction that marks off the Russian people from the peoples of the West'. He ends his preface to the fourteenth volume of Turgenev's works in Constance Garnett's translation with the following conclusion:

[T]he Russian's lack of will comes in to deepen his soul. He surrenders himself thereby to the universe, and, as do the Asiatics, does not let the tiny shadow of his fate [...] shut out the universe so thoroughly from his consciousness, as does the aggressive struggling will-power of the Western man striving to let his individuality have full play.<sup>62</sup>

In his 1915 review of Chekhov's short stories, E.M. Forster objected to such stereotyping and insisted that 'Russian literature will scarcely come to its own until we cease to seek in it for the Russian spirit'.<sup>63</sup>

In 1893 a group of British businessmen and state officials with an interest in Russia formed the Anglo-Russian Literary Society. Its aims were practical, rather than scholarly and aesthetic. *The Times* advertised the following objects of the Society:

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<sup>59</sup> May, p. 14.

<sup>60</sup> Herzen, *Du développement des idées révolutionnaires en Russie*, p. 102-3.

<sup>61</sup> See Glyn Turton, *Turgenev and the Context of English Literature, 1850 – 1900* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 203.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Garnett, 'Preface', in Ivan Turgenev, *A Desperate Character and Other Stories*, trans. by Constance Garnett (London: Heinemann, 1899), pp. x, xii-xiii. For an overview of Edward Garnett's preoccupation with Russian literature see Helen Smith, *The Uncommon Reader: A Life of Edward Garnett* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017).

<sup>63</sup> E.M. Forster, 'Short Stories from Russia', *New Statesman*, 24 July 1915, pp. 373-4 (p. 373).

[T]o promote the study of the Russian language and literature; to form a library of Russian books [...]; to take in Russian periodicals and newspapers; to hold monthly meetings for the reading and discussion of suitable papers [...]; and to promote friendly relations between Great Britain and Russia.<sup>64</sup>

As Dorothy Galton points out, '[b]y the end of 1897 there were more than 700 volumes in the library [...]. At this time too there were nearly 500 members, but of these about 250 were domiciled in Russia or in countries other than Great Britain, and only about 50 used to attend the monthly meetings'.<sup>65</sup> Despite the low attendance at monthly meetings, the Society had a number of prominent Russophiles, including Maurice Baring, William J. Birkbeck, authority on the Russian church, Viscount Melchior de Vogüé, once secretary to the French Embassy in St Petersburg and author of numerous works on Russian literature, Nevill Forbes, Professor of Russian at the University of Oxford, Stephen Graham, Aylmer Maude, Rosa Newmarch, authority on Russian and Czech music, Leo Tolstoy, Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, Sir Hugh Walpole, Dr Harold Williams, *Manchester Guardian* correspondent in Russia in 1904 and author of an influential study *Russia of the Russians*,<sup>66</sup> and Charles Hagberg Wright, Secretary and Librarian of London Library.<sup>67</sup>

Turgenev was among the first Russian novelists who gained wide recognition in Britain. The first English translations of Turgenev's prose were done from French versions, which resulted in their poor quality.<sup>68</sup> It was not until the 1890s, when Heinemann published fifteen volumes of Turgenev's writings in Constance Garnett's translation, that British readers could do justice to the aesthetic qualities of Turgenev's novels. Turgenev was important to many Victorian and post-Victorian novelists, including Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, George Moore and Henry James.<sup>69</sup> In 1879 he received an Oxford D.C.L.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *The Times*, 24 January 1893, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> Dorothy Galton, *The Anglo-Russian Literary Society* (London: Cambridge UP, 1970), p. 274.

<sup>66</sup> Harold W. Williams, *Russia of the Russians* (London: Pitman and Sons, 1914). On Williams see Ariadne Tyrkova-Williams, *Cheerful Giver – The Life of Harold Williams* (London: Davies, 1935); Charlotte Alston, *Russia's Greatest Enemy? Harold Williams and the Russian Revolutions* (London: Tauris, 2007).

<sup>67</sup> Galton, pp. 280-82.

<sup>68</sup> Turton, pp. 5-28.

<sup>69</sup> Turton, pp. 29-134. See also Patrick Waddington, *Turgenev and England* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>70</sup> Waddington, *Turgenev and England*, pp. 249-76.

The first British publication of Tolstoy's prose was the 1862 version of *Childhood and Youth* by Malwida von Meysenbug, German writer and tutor of Alexander Herzen's children. *The Cossacks* were published in London in 1878. English translations of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* appeared in the 1880s, but until Constance Garnett's versions of those novels were published in 1901 and 1904 respectively, British audiences preferred reading them in French translations, which started appearing in 1885.<sup>71</sup> Matthew Arnold based his 1887 laudatory review of *Anna Karenina* on a French translation of the novel. In 1888 R.M. Wenley of the *Westminster Review* contrasted Turgenev and Tolstoy as representatives, correspondingly, of Western and Russian approaches to Russian life:

[W]hile Russian civilisation is still for Western peoples a sealed book, an essential element in Tolstoy's greatness and the secret of his charm [...] to foreign readers is his determined concentration on Russian subjects as [...] treated from a Russian standpoint. Turgenev acted as interpreter between East and West, he painted his countrymen for Europe; Tolstoy [...] has painted them for themselves and, in the maturity of time, for humanity.<sup>72</sup>

Although Wenley claimed that by then, Tolstoy's novels had been read 'by all who read French', in 1890s Britain Tolstoy was mainly known for his religious and social writings.<sup>73</sup> As Robert Gomme observes in his biography of George Perris, the social activist and journalist interested in Tolstoy, by the 1890s it was Tolstoy the thinker, rather than Tolstoy the novelist, who 'had become a phenomenon'.<sup>74</sup> Half a dozen British journalists visited Tolstoy at his Russian estate in the 1890 – 1900s, which resulted in articles on him in leading British newspapers.<sup>75</sup> In 1895, *The Times* published

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<sup>71</sup> F.W.J. Hemmings, *The Russian Novel in France, 1884 -1914* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1950), pp. 240-41.

<sup>72</sup> R.M. Wenley, 'Count Tolstoy's Life and Works', *Westminster Review*, 130: 277-93. Reproduced in Turton, pp. 137-9 (p. 138).

<sup>73</sup> Count Lyof N. Tolstoy, *My Religion*, trans. from the French by Huntington Smith (London: Scott, 1889); Idem., *The Kingdom of God Is Within You: Or, Christianity not as a mystical doctrine, but as a new life-conception*. Authorized trans. from the original Russian MS. by A. Delano (London: Scott, 1894); Idem., *Christian Martyrdom in Russia: Persecution of the Spirit-Wrestlers (or Doukhoborts) in the Caucasus*, ed. by Vladimir Tchertkoff (London: The Brotherhood Publishing, 1897).

<sup>74</sup> Robert Gomme, *George Herbert Perris (1866 –1920): The Life and Times of a Radical* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 166.

<sup>75</sup> Ervin Zinner, *Tvorchestvo L.N. Tolstogo i angliiskaya realisticheskaya literatura kontsa 19 i nachala 20 stoletiya* [Works of L.N. Tolstoy and the Literature of English

Tolstoy's 'report of the persecutions suffered [...] by the Dukhobortsy sectarians of the Caucasus'.<sup>76</sup> The Dukhobor sect was founded in the eighteenth century; in 1887, after the sect's refusal to agree to military conscription, the Russian government started persecuting them. At that point, Tolstoy became interested in their cause and donated the profits from his novel *Resurrection* to enable the sectaries to emigrate. Aylmer Maude, Tolstoy's admirer and the future translator of his works, negotiated with the Canadian authorities on behalf of the Dukhobors; as a result, over 7,000 of the sectaries successfully moved to Canada in 1899.<sup>77</sup> The Dukhobor adventures were followed by British correspondents: nine articles on the subject appeared in *The Times* between 1902 and 1907. Religious minorities were, along with revolutionaries, another aspect of Russian life popular with turn-of-the-century British writers. Several novels published in Britain between the 1890s and the 1910s dealt with Russian sectarians, including Norman Douglas's *South Wind*, reviewed by Woolf in 1917. At the time, Woolf was only beginning her engagement with Russian literature as a critic, and so she refrained from commenting on the Russian elements of the novel.<sup>78</sup>

Barbarous peasants, terrorists, and religious fanatics – such were the recurrent associations that Russia had acquired in the British press by the 1900s. Yet, Russia remained an unknown land to general British audiences. Similarly to sixteenth-century accounts of Muscovy, British fin-de-siècle intellectuals often linked Russia to the primitive and the Orient, as the following quotations from Havelock Ellis's 1890 book show:

The art of Russia has three great sources, the Scythian, the Byzantine, and the Mongolian, but when these are analyzed it is found that each of them consists largely [...] of Oriental elements. [...] The Scythians [...] are the Russian *moojiks* of today; the features and the dress have scarcely changed.<sup>79</sup>

Ellis goes on to discuss '[t]he primitive matter-of-fact simplicity of the [Russian] people'. Over three hundred years after Chancellor's voyage to

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Realism from the End of the Nineteenth to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century] (Irkutsk: Irkutskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii institut, 1961), pp. 75-8.

<sup>76</sup> Leo Tolstoy, 'A Russian Religious Sect', *The Times*, 23 October 1895, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> For further information on the Dukhobors see my article on Aylmer Maude: 'Leo Tolstoy's Translator Aylmer Maude (1858 – 1938) and His Correspondence on Tolstoy: Holdings in the Bodleian Library and the Brotherton Library (University of Leeds)', *Bodleian Library Record*, 22 (2009), 49-73.

<sup>78</sup> See Cross, *The Russian Theme in English Literature*, pp. 53-4.

<sup>79</sup> Havelock Ellis, *The New Spirit* (London: Bell, 1890), pp. 175, 179.