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The east wind of Russianness

Book section

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The East Wind of Russianness

There is an east wind coming, Watson [...] such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared.¹

By the time the creator of Sherlock Holmes was writing these words (1917), the East wind had already been tormenting Europe for several years. It was not new, but this time it was indeed much stronger; as Somerset Maugham famously claimed, the Russian virus spread through Europe like a disease:

Everyone was reading the Russian novelists, the Russian dancers captivated the civilised world, and the Russian composers set shivering the sensibility of persons who were beginning to want a change from Wagner. Russian art seized upon Europe with the virulence of an epidemic of influenza. New phrases became the fashion, new colours, new emotions, and the highbrows described themselves without a moment's hesitation as members of the intelligentsia.²

The big stores (Heal's and Harvey Nichols) changed their shop window styles in imitation of Bakst's designs for Diaghilev seasons. Fashionable middle-class ladies acquired fur-trimmed outfit and learned to glide like Russian peasants; while the wife of the British Ambassador sent dresses over from St Petersburg, for the dignitaries to shine at the opulent Slavic theme parties that were spawning all over London.³

- 1 Arthur Conan Doyle, *His Last Bow* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917), p. 308.
- 2 Somerset Maugham, *Ashenden* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, Incorporated, 1928), p. 279.
- 3 Martin Green and John Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), p. 65; Garafola, p. 303.

Much has been written recently about the British response to Russian culture during these pre-World War I years, covering a variety of angles and a wide range of areas, including literature, music, craft industries, visual arts and religion. It is difficult to overestimate the degree of insight and the critical value of these thematically orientated studies, which, nonetheless, rarely channel the debate into the field of social theories of cultural reception, aimed at analysing the paradigms of intercultural representation and their re-contextualising and re-shaping in the process of cultural reproduction and transmission. Such an approach seems to be most promising when applied to the analysis of the Russian ‘craze’ in early twentieth-century Britain, which apart from offering an inexhaustible source of taxonomy and thematic surveys can be equally discussed in terms of the critical mass perspective. The latter draws upon the cumulative effect generated by the almost unprecedented tide of interest in the Russian subject and, consequently, on the potentiality of the so-called ‘quantity-to-quality’ transition. In other words, the question to ask here is whether a radical shift occurred in the paradigm of stereotyping and representation or, more specifically, in the configuration of the myth of Russia projected by the British. As regards our understanding of this process, the objective is to focus primarily on the issue of the repositioning of the Russian idiom within the British cultural landscape, assuming that, when affected by the dual process of accumulation and recognition, it may acquire a stronger status with a specific differential function, analogous to that of a symbolic artistic cachet or cultural capital, to use the term coined in the social theories of Pierre Bourdieu.⁴

The notion of the Russian myth here constitutes the focal point of our discussion. As explained in the *Introduction*, it is viewed in the light of the constructivist perspective offered by contemporary theories of representation – the science of ‘imagology’ or image studies.⁵ There is a

4 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 13–14; Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées’, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 145,1 (2002), 3–8 (p. 10).

5 Manfred Beller, ‘Perception, Image, Imagology’, in Manfred Beller and Joseph Theodoor, eds, *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 3–16 (p. 13).

distinctive emphasis on the input of pragmatics in the modern imagological approach, which increasingly sees the dynamics of cultural representation in terms of its audience function. Based on the awareness that the cultural sources used in this domain of scholarly research are not merely a record of representation, but rather an artefact of a certain cultural praxis, articulating and even constructing the very notion of the record itself, such an approach aims at problematising the subjectivity of the source-material or historiographic record, and addressing the ways in which the foreign culture is manipulated or distorted in the course of cultural mimesis. It follows that there is always an element of subjective falseness in the very process of cultural representation, which lends a certain mythological quality to the notion of any discursive image.

Within the framework of this modern constructivist perspective, which allows one to move from thematising the constituent elements of representational paradigms to the analysis of their structural makeup, Edward Said's socio-cultural theory of Orientalism (1978), essentially based on the idea of the constructed image of the East, provides an appropriate starting platform for conceptualising various manifestations of the Russian myth projected by the British. The relationship between these two once great colonial Empires has never been perfectly straightforward whether one looks at its political, economic or socio-cultural dimensions. Their opposition has always been predominantly indirect and their geo-political expansion was so widely divergent that such a consummate politician as Bismarck deftly remarked that the confrontation between Russia and England would be impossible in the same way as it was impossible to imagine a war between 'elephants and whales'.⁶ Russia has never been treated by Britain as an object of potential colonisation; at the same time neither was it regarded as an equal.

In his seminal work of 1978, Edward Said proposed that the Orient was constructed by the Occident 'as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience'.⁷ It was an image of otherness, which served as 'a Western style

6 Winston Churchill, *A History of the English Speaking Peoples* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), IV, 178.

7 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 2.

for dominating, structuring, and having authority over the Orient'.⁸ And although Russia did not feature in Said's work as one of the major contextual case studies, its image in the European consciousness has been for a long while entangled with the evolving notion of 'the Oriental'. As Larry Wolff points out in his discussion of the emerging idea of 'the European', even in the eighteenth century, 'the geographical border between Europe and Asia was not unanimously fixed, [...] located sometimes at the Don, sometimes further East at the Volga, and sometimes, as today, at the Urals'.⁹ Such uncertainty encouraged the construction of the image of Russia as 'a paradox of simultaneously inclusion and exclusion, Europe but not Europe',¹⁰ to the extent that as late as the eve of World War I the Russian territory was still associated (in French scholarship) with what was alternatively termed *l'Europe orientale* and *l'Orient européen*.¹¹

Our analysis, therefore, will proceed in a two-fold fashion. Having discussed the British outlook on Russia in view of the Orientalistic perspective, characterised by the West's politically charged, Eurocentric or, in the case of Russia, civilisatory (implicitly condescending) approach, we shall then reflect on the proliferation of Russomania in early twentieth-century Britain to see whether the unparalleled interest in all things Russian among the British cultural milieu resulted in its transformation into a major resource and an essential means for middle class intellectuals in asserting and communicating their cultural distinction.

According to Said's analysis, the backbone of the Orientalistic perspective can be summarised briefly in terms of three quintessential key points, each of which, as will be shown, has a noticeable presence in the British outlook on the Russian image: (1) the tendency towards generalised, non-specific, representation, when the nuanced richness of empirical reality is replaced by a simplified and reductive model; (2) the absence of any

8 Ibid. p. 3.

9 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 7.

10 Ibid. p. 7.

11 Abel Mansuy, *Le Monde slave et les classiques français aux XVIe–XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1912), pp. 8, 10.

temporal dynamics in these schematic representations; and (3) the politically coloured or politically dependent nature of the discourse. Below we attempt to look at the myth of Russia through the prism of these main characteristics, proceeding from the standpoint of analysis of content and its 'grammar', that is, looking at tendencies and defining patterns rather than performing a qualitative survey of the 'vocabulary', or the full body of literary examples which, when taken in their individual manifestations, may present a counter-case to the dominant trend.

In its very essence, Orientalism is a way of seeing that imagines, underscores, exaggerates and distorts the differences of non-Western cultures as compared to those found in the European tradition. One of the main features of the Orientalistic discourse is the tendency towards generalisations and the use of all-purpose descriptors of 'the other' as an effective means of self-definition (by contrast with the apparently inferior model): there is 'the culturally sanctioned habit', Said claims,

of deploying large generalisations by which reality is divided into various collectives: languages, races, types, colours, mentalities, each category being not so much a neutral designation as an evaluative interpretation. Underlying these categories is the rigidly binomial opposition of 'ours' and 'theirs', with the former always encroaching upon the latter (even to the point of making 'theirs' exclusively a function of 'ours').¹²

As a result of this long-term opposition and distortion, some stereotypical generic attributes became firmly associated with the notion of the East, and whatever the Occidentals were not, the Orientals infallibly were. This set of attributes can be formulated in terms variously historical (barbarism, primitivism, backwardness), psychological (Asiatic cunningness, cruelty), political (Oriental despotism, servitude, inability of self-governing), and involving gender (femininity, submissiveness) – the entire spectrum of which is traceable in the representation of Russia in English culture from the early accounts of the Elizabethan travellers to the late nineteenth-century writings.

The fact that the first end-of-the-sixteenth-century reports of English visitors from Russia (those of George Turberville, Giles Fletcher, and Sir

12 Said, *Orientalism*, p. 227.

Jerome Horsey) were skewed towards hyperbole and generalisation is, perhaps, not entirely surprising. Considering the long distance and the relatively restricted travelling at the time, the visitors were inevitably struck by the contrast between Muscovites and Europeans; and the image of Russia projected through their impressions was configured almost entirely along the lines of accumulated superlatives and extremes. The country is not just big, but enormous, its wealth is uncountable, the people are gigantic with their bellies so huge ‘that [they] overhang the waist’;¹³ poverty – unspeakable; slavery – all-embracing; and the cruelty of the rulers’ ‘heavy hand of displeasure’ is so unthinkable that one forbears ‘to trouble the modest ears and Christian patience of such as shall read it.’¹⁴ The grotesqueness of the portrait was so striking that the first publication of Giles Fletcher’s account (1591) was suppressed upon the intervention of Muscovite negotiators, ‘fearful of possible Russian reaction and reduction of trade’:¹⁵

- 13 ‘The Account of George Turberville’, in Lloyd E. Berry and Robert O. Crummey, eds, *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), pp. 71–86 (p. 81); first published in *Tragicall Tales* (1587), and then in Richard Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations* (1589). For the account of the first cultural contacts between English traveller and Russia see Anthony Cross, ‘By Way of Introduction: British Perception, Reception and Recognition of Russian Culture’, in Anthony Cross, ed., *A People Passing Rude* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), pp. 1–36 (pp. 1–3); Daryl W. Palmer, *Writing Russia in the Age of Shakespeare* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Anthony Cross, *Peter the Great through British Eyes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–4; M. P. Alekseev, ‘Shekspir i russkoe gosudarstvo XVI–XVII vv’, in M. P. Alekseev, ed., *Shekspir i russkaia kul’tura* (Moscow-Leningrad: Akademia nauk, 1965), pp. 784–805; Felicity Stout, *Exploring Russia in the Elizabethan Commonwealth* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).
- 14 Sir Jerome Horsey, ‘Travels’, in *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom*, pp. 262–72 (p. 279); first published in *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Edward A. Bond (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1856).
- 15 Cross, *Peter the Great through British Eyes*, p. 2.

And it may be said truly [...] that from the great to the small (except some few that will scarcely be found) the Russe neither believeth anything that an other man speaketh, nor speaketh anything himself worthie to be believed.¹⁶

In Turberville's report the mythological series of rudeness, wildness and godless idolatry ('The house that hath no god or painted Saint within / Is not to be resorted to, that roof is full of sin') culminated with the portrayal of the most overwhelming drunkenness, which for years to come would become a canonical stereotype, associated with the image of Russia in Western discourse.

A people passing rude, to vices vile inclin'd,
Folk fit to be of Bacchus' train, so quaffing in their kind.
Drinke is their whole desire, the pot is all their pride,
The sob'rest head doth once a day stand needful of a guide.¹⁷

As a semantic element of maximal intensity, superlatives or hyperbole correspond to a clear form of cognitive abstraction, offering a distorted (exaggerating certain parts, while blurring the rest) and, therefore, simplified and reductive modality of representation.¹⁸ Such a framework, characteristic of the projected outlook on Russia at the time, ties in well with Said's definition of the Orientalistic perspective, which, according to the scholar, tends to replace 'empiricity' with a set of generalised and schematic constructs.

Moreover, very much in line with Said's analysis of the Orientalistic approach, the established pattern of national stereotyping proved to be remarkably persistent in terms of its temporal and historical manifestations; and for almost three hundred years Russia was inscribed into the construct of Western knowledge as dangerously uncontrolled or weak and

16 Giles Fletcher, 'Of the Russe Commonwealth', in *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom*, pp. 109–248 (p. 245); first published (an abridged version) in Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1599).

17 'The Account of George Turberville', p. 75.

18 Mikhalskaia points out that such a modality corresponds to the early stages of cognitive representation, closely associated with folklore and mythological thinking (N. P. Mikhalskaia, *Obraz Rossii v angliiskoi khudozhestvennoi literature IX–IXX vv* (Moscow: Moskovskii Gosudarstvennyi, Pedagogicheskii universitet, 1995), p. 147).

exotic, cunningly malicious or uncivilised and backward, overwhelmingly rich or dreadfully poor. This could be considered exactly what Said had in mind when he defined Orientalism as a static system of ‘synchronic essentialism’,¹⁹ implying that the Orient as a place and its reception in the discourse of Orientalism becomes an invariably fixed object – the eternal unchanging reality that remains chiefly the same in any moment of its history and cultural progression.

Here are but a few illustrative examples. The idea of Russia as an embodiment of rough extremes, introduced in the early sixteenth-century accounts,²⁰ became a formative matrix for all further modifications of its literary portrait, from which the crudeness and savageness of the national character were typically derived – hence the image of the Russian bear as a codifying icon of the country, featuring in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *King Henry V*, or in James Thomson’s later poem *The Seasons* (1726–30).²¹

19 Said, *Orientalism*, p. 241.

20 ‘Thus remaining in this haven the space of a weeke, seeing the yeare farre spent, & also very evill wether, as frost, snow, and haile, as though it had beene the deepe of winter, we thought best to winter there’, from Richard Chancellor’s account of 1553; quoted in Daryl Palmer, ‘Jacobean Muscovites: Winter, Tyranny, and Knowledge in *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46.3 (1995), 323–39 (p. 323).

21 ‘Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear’ (William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in *The Plays of Shakespeare*, 9 vols (London: William Pickering, 1825), IV, 83); and ‘Foolish curs, that run winking into the mouth of a Russian bear and have their heads crushed like rotten apples’ (William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, in *The Plays of Shakespeare*, V, 129).

In James Thomson’s four-part poem, *The Seasons*, ‘Winter’ (1726) is emblematised by the Russian landscape:

Hard by these shores, where scarce his freezing stream
Rolls the wild Oby, live the last of Men;
And half enlivened by the distant sun,
That rears and ripens Man, as well as plants,
Here human Nature wears its rudest form.

Deep from the piercing season sunk in caves,
Here by dull fires, and with unjoyous cheer,
They waste the tedious gloom. Immers’d in furs,
Doze the gross race. Nor sprightly jest, nor song,

Another stock trope firmly associated with the idea of extreme Russian roughness was that of mortifying cold and life-threatening frost. One can find it in Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), where the notion of 'cold Muscovy'²² is employed as a metaphor for the enslaving and tyrannous love ignited in *Astrophel by Stella*:

Now even that foot-steppe of lost libertie
Is gone, and now like slave borne Muscovite:
I call it praise to suffer tyrannie;²³

or in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, which, according to the insightful analysis of Daryl Palmer,²⁴ sends the minds of the audience to Russia more often than through Hermione's famous reference to her Russian extraction ('The Emperor of Russia was my father'²⁵). Shakespeare, Palmer argues, modified Greene's *Pandosto* – his original source – to increase the Russian elements in his tale. Following the fashion of the time, it is the whole kingdom of Sicilia that recalls the Northern Empire of Snow, and Leontes appears as an emblem of its ruler, Ivan the Terrible, carrying symbolic cultural associations of 'winter and tyranny'.²⁶

Under the reign of Peter the Great (1682–1725) an ambitious programme of Westernisation was embarked upon. Despite that, English literary portrayals of the country still conjured the picture of a backward, sparsely populated territory of nobles and serfs;²⁷ and the binary of extreme

Nor tenderness they know; nor aught of life,
Beyond the kindred bears that stalk without.
(James Thomson, *The Seasons* (London: A. Hamilton, 1793), p. 210).

22 Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophel and Stella*, in Sir Philip Sidney, *The Last Part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia: Astrophel & Stella and Other Poems*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 241–300 (p. 254); quoted in Stout, p. 3.

23 Sidney, p. 243.

24 Palmer, pp. 323–39.

25 William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, in *The Plays of Shakespeare*, III, 244.

26 Palmer, p. 324, 332.

27 It is worth highlighting that we are talking about the configuration of Russia's image within the framework of literary sources, which was a much slower process

despotism versus mindless submission to power was retained all the way through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Russian discourse (as set in George Turberville's story: 'In such a savage soil, where laws do bear no sway / But all is at the king his will to save or else to slay'²⁸). Most of the literary sources were centred, unsurprisingly, on the extraordinary figure of Peter the Great. The accounts to mention include Aaron Hill's long narrative poem of 1718 *The Northern Star* (typically based on the rhetoric of eternal winter: 'Eternal Hills of Frost', bounding 'Ambition up in freezing Blood'²⁹), Richard Steele's *Letters to The Spectator* (19 April and 9 August 1711³⁰), or Daniel Defoe's *An Impartial History of the Life and Actions of Peter Alexowitz, Czar of Muscovy* (1723). Defoe's work was presented as a report by a British officer in the service of the Czar, describing among other deeds Peter's visit to England. The report ends with Peter's Swedish campaign, leaving it to others to continue the story of this Emperor, characterised as the most distinguished of rulers, provided one looks at the Eastern part of the world:

May some other Pen be honoured with the Narration that the Glories of our August Emperor of Russia may be handed to Posterity in a manner suitable to his Fame and to the Merit of the greatest Prince in all the Eastern Part of the World.³¹

as compared to that presented in the first-hand English travellers' stories; the latter, according to Anthony Cross, had been offering a more varied picture of the country by 1725 (Cross, *Peter the Great Through British Eyes*, p. 40). For more detailed accounts see Cross, 'British Awareness of Russian Culture (1698–1801)', pp. 212–35; Anderson, *British Discovery of Russia*.

In this context, one should also mention that the Russian grammar of Henry William Ludolf was published (Oxford University Press) just two years before Peter the Great visited Oxford in 1698, thus marking the start of learning about the country through its literature and language.

- 28 'The Account of George Turberville', p. 83.
 29 Aaron Hill, *The Northern-star: A poem* (London: E. Berington, and J. Morphew, 1718), p. 14.
 30 For more detail see Cross, *Peter the Great through British Eyes*, pp. 45–6.
 31 Daniel Defoe, *An Impartial History of the Life and Actions of Peter Alexowitz, Czar of Muscovy* (London: W. Chetwood, 1723), p. 420.

As regards the ‘bottom’ part of the spectrum (the people), in the second part of Defoe’s *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1717), the famous traveller ventures through Siberia, reporting that the degree of savagery in this land exceeds the wildest expectations of a hard-bitten viewer:

the inhabitants were mere pagans; sacrificing to idols, and worshipping the sun, moon, and stars, or all the host of heaven; and not only so, but were, of all the heathens and pagans that ever I met with, the most barbarous, except only that they did not eat men’s flesh, as our savages of America did.³²

This, of course, is combined with the slavish devotion to the authority of the Czar, irrefutable even among the ‘criminals’ in exile, who, despite their misfortune of being banished from the Court, were still ‘telling me abundance of fine things of the greatness, the magnificence, the dominions, and the absolute power of the Emperor of the Russians.’³³ In the same vein, the portrayal of Siberia was covered in Oliver Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* (1762), in which his fictional Chinese correspondents exchanged views on the Russians, highlighting their unchangeable savageness, darkness and ‘brutal excess’:

From your accounts of Russia I learn that this nation is again relaxing into pristine barbarity; that its great emperor wanted a life of an hundred years more to bring about his vast design. A savage people may be resembled to their own forests; a few years are sufficient to clear away the obstructions to agriculture; but it requires many, ere the ground acquires a proper degree of fertility: the Russians, attached to their ancient prejudices, again renew their hatred to strangers, and indulge every former brutal excess.³⁴

As Macaulay suggested in his *History of England*, Peter’s ‘singular character, and what was rumoured of his threat designs, excited much curiosity here, but nothing more than curiosity. England had as yet nothing to hope or fear from his vast empire’ (Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, in *The Works of Lord Macaulay*, ed. Lady Trevelyan, 8 vols (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1897), IV, 388).

32 Daniel Defoe, *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1908), p. 130.

33 Ibid. p. 153.

34 Oliver Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World*, in *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Peter Cunningham, 4 vols (London: John Murray, 1854), II, 75–487 (pp. 273–74).

The latter, according Goldsmith, had a particularly dreadful effect on those who tried to bring a civilising touch to this country of the savage, but instead only found themselves drowned in the barbarous swamp:

The great law-giver of Russia attempted to improve the desolate inhabitants of Siberia, by sending among them some of the politest men of Europe. The consequence has shown, that the country was as yet unfit to receive them; they languished for a time with a sort of exotic malady; every day degenerated from themselves, and at last, instead of rendering the country more polite, they conformed to the soil, and put on barbarity.³⁵

The ascent to power of Catherine the Great (1762–96) played into the current European ideal of enlightened despotism. This raised some doubts among European onlookers considering whether Russia was ruled by the Oriental despotism of a dictatorial autocrat, or by the progressive regime of a civilised monarch. Russian modernisation was regarded with a mixture of approval and (predominantly) apprehension, and projected the greatly hyped-up prospect of a Russian invasion, as, for instance, in Goldsmith's 'Letters':

The Russians are now at that period between refinement and barbarity, which seems most adapted to military achievement; and if once they happen to get footing in the western parts of Europe, it is not the feeble efforts of the sons of effeminacy and dissension that can serve to remove them. The fertile valley and soft climate will ever be sufficient inducements to draw whole myriads from their native deserts, the trackless wild, or snowy mountain.³⁶

As the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe left Russia behind, the country's backwardness was turned into a prevalent trope. Considering nineteenth-century literary sources, it is sufficient to look at Edward Bulwer Lytton's novel *Devereux* (1829), which contains every single core element of the earlier sixteenth-century model. In this work, Russia, and more precisely its capital St Petersburg, is presented as a land of 'the most terrible climate

35 Ibid. p. 363.

36 Ibid. p. 378.

in which a civilised creature was ever frozen to death,³⁷ inhabited by the most savage people, who are colossal in size, filthy, and inhumanly ferocious:

But never, I believe, was there a place which there was so much trouble in arriving at: such winds – such climate – such police arrangements – arranged, too, by such fellows! six feet high, with nothing human about them, but their uncleanness and ferocity! [...] ‘It is just the city a nation of bears would build, if bears ever became architects’, said I to myself.³⁸

Later in the novel, this scheme is complemented by the notion of barbaric subservience in relation to the rulers, which, typically, identifies the Russians as a weak and biddable nation of slaves: ‘A Russian [...] bore it [the fearful punishment of the battag] patiently, and in silence; he only spoke once, and it was to say, “God bless the czar!”’³⁹

Six years earlier Byron used a similar axis of mythopoetic superlatives, and employed the metaphor of ‘ice’ and ‘fire’ (extreme cold – extreme heat), to contrast Russia with Western civilisation. His poem *The Age of Bronze* (1823) offers a romanticised projection of this binary juxtaposition: the ‘ice’ of Russian savageness and despotic darkness (evoking such a connotational array as ‘stern’, ‘frozen’, ‘dense’ and ‘hard’) is seen to be melted by the ‘fire’ of freedom brought by the advances of the French troops:

The half barbaric Moscow’s minarets
Gleam in the sun, but ’tis a sun that sets!
[...] and Moscow was no more!
Sublimest of volcanos! Etna’s flame
Pales before thine, and quenchless Hecla’s tame.⁴⁰

Not much changed in the late Victorian era. *Ivan Ivanovich* (1879), a narrative dramatic idyll of Robert Browning, who had first-hand experience of Russia (where he spent a year of 1834 as a nominal secretary of the Russian

37 Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Devereux A Tale* (Chicago and New York: Belford Clarke & Company, 1887), p. 300.

38 Ibid. p. 300.

39 Ibid. p. 311.

40 George Gordon Byron, *The Works* (London: John Murray, 1837), p. 528.

Consul General, Mr Benckhausen⁴¹), tells a terrifying story of a peasant woman. On her long sledge-ride through the winter forest she was chased by a pack of wolves. Frantic with despair, she threw her children one-by-one to the hungry beasts, trusting to gain a little time by which those remaining on the sledge might be saved. And although the poet devotes much attention to creating a strong sense of character and historic detail, his narrative largely falls into the same generalised mixture of stereotypes and stock popular clichés. The main female protagonist infallibly manifests all the characteristic traits of a barbaric slave woman, submissive to the absolutism of authority (being brutally executed in the name of God), accustomed to shamanism (performing sacrifices to wolves), and familiar with witchcraft:

Who knows but old bad Mārpha – she always owed me spite
And envied me my births – skulks out of doors at night
And turns into a wolf, and joins the sisterhood.⁴²

As regards the narrative and its culturally specific aspects, the action is framed within the outlandishly brutal and hostile setting, concerning both, natural environment (freezing and wild forest) and the barbarism of social habits: as, for instance, the graphic scene of the character's public lynching (by a 'lightning-swift thunder-strong one blow' of an axe⁴³), and the crowd's contemplation of her 'dripping' with blood headless body.

Written a decade later, Swinburne's poem *Russia: An Ode* (1890) uses an even darker palette of imagery and tones, comparing the country to an unspeakable hell on Earth that would eclipse the horrors of Dante's infernal journey:

- 41 Unfortunately, Browning's letters from Russia to his sister were destroyed, and there are only a few sparse reminiscences of this experience. He was 'strangely' impressed by the endless monotony of snow covered pine forests through which they drove for days and nights, and his ear was so good that fifty years later he was still able to hum the Russian tunes to the old prince Gagarin, whom he met in Venice (quoted in Brewster, p. 35).
- 42 Robert Browning, 'Ivan Ivanovich', in *The Poems of Robert Browning* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1994), pp. 590–5 (p. 593).
- 43 Ibid. p. 594.

Out of hell a word comes hissing, dark as doom,
Fierce as fire, and foul as plague-polluted gloom;
Ears have heard not, tongues have told not things like these.
Dante, led by love's and hate's accordant spell
Down the deepest and the loathliest ways of hell.⁴⁴

It is, of course, worth bearing in mind that all these rhapsodic artistic sketches came to refer to the image of Russia not as mimetic empirical records, but as shorthand markers for collective literary characterisation, or, to use Foucault's terminology, as the mere *objets discursifs*.⁴⁵ And yet, these largely generalised, but colourful and snappy pictures happen to be remarkably effective in projecting the stock of cliché-tropes and associations, which became a synecdoche of the accepted portrait of the nation, configured along the lines of barbarism, despotism and extreme cold.

One must admit that this was not without a certain sense of ambiguity attached to Russia's liminal position. Situated (geographically, as well as in terms of its cultural affiliation) between civilised Europe and the vast stagnation of Asian states, it did baffle the majority of Western observers, whose track of thinking was traditionally streamlined according to the so-called 'cultured West – barbaric East' juxtaposition. The problem was that throughout many decades the idea of Russia was consistently skewed in the direction of the latter; as Rudyard Kipling put it in one of his tales, the biggest British mistake was to treat the Russians as the most Eastern of the European peoples instead of seeing them as the most Western of the Orientals:

Let it be clearly understood that the Russian is a delightful person till he tucks his shirt in. As an Oriental he is charming. It is only when he insists upon being treated as the most easterly of Western peoples, instead of the most westerly of Easterns,

44 Algernon Charles Swinburne, *The Poems*, 6 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1911), VI, 366.

45 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 34.

that he becomes a racial anomaly extremely difficult to handle. The host never knows which side of his nature is going to turn up next.⁴⁶

The great English writer was certainly not alone with regard to this type of interpretative viewpoint. Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, one of the major Russian specialists of the 1890s, made a similar remark by saying that the character of the Russians ‘corresponds to their geographical position: they stand midway between the laborious, painstaking, industrious population of Western Europe and the indolent, undisciplined, spasmodically energetic populations of Central Asia.’ As a result, everything depends on the angle of observation, and to the traveller who comes from the Western side of the globe, the Russians would indeed seem as ‘an indolent and apathetic race’ akin to the Asian peoples.⁴⁷ A much more radical statement was put forward by Emile Dillon, who expressed his views in a series of journalistic essays called ‘The Russian Characteristics’ and published by the *Fortnightly Review* in 1889 (reprinted as a separate edition later in 1891). A standard set of stereotypical attributes associated with the country was distilled and highlighted in the titles, defining the national character along the lines of ‘lying’, ‘fatalism’, ‘dishonesty’, and ‘sloth’. Dillon emphasised a deep rift between Russia and European civilisation, pointing out that its political, social and religious conditions were so barbarically undeveloped that they

render their possessors as impersonal as the Egyptians that raised Cheops, or the coral-reef builders of the Pacific. In result we have a good-natured, lying, thievish, shiftless, ignorant mass whom one is at times tempted to connect in the same isocultural line with the Weddas of India or the Bangala of the Upper Congo, and who differ from West European nations much as Sir Thomas Browne’s vegetating ‘creatures of mere existence’ differ from ‘things of life.’⁴⁸

46 Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Man Who Was’, in *Life’s Handicap* (London: MacMillan and Co, 1891), pp. 84–101 (p. 84). The story first appeared in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in April of 1890, and in *Harper’s Weekly* in April of 1891.

47 Donald Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia*, 2 vols (London and New York: Cassell and Co, 1905), II, 210.

48 Emile J. Dillon (E. B. Lanin), *Russian Traits and Terrors* (Boston, MA: Benj. R. Tucker, 1891), p. 3; first published in *Fortnightly Review* 52 (1889), pp. 410–32; 573–88; 722–36; 854–68.

The author's radicalised attitude towards the Russians becomes, perhaps, more explicable considering the circumstances of this publication. The political atmosphere of the late 1880s was aggravated by the Great Eastern Crisis, which concerned the Anglo–Russian dispute over territories in Afghanistan. Both countries were on the verge of military conflict; and in such an unsettling situation one could hardly be expected to conjure up a laudatory image of a potential foe. Two decades later, however, this condescending attitude was still widespread all over Britain, to the extent that in 1914 Maurice Baring drew attention to the fact that if one set a question about the Russians to English undergraduates and schoolchildren, the most prevalent answer would be:

that the Russian was a man got up like a European except in winter, but that if you scratched him you would find a Tartar, and that a Tartar was a man with a yellow skin and a snub nose. I think you might also often get the answer that Russians were Slavs; but that if you asked what a Slav is, you would be told he was a kind of Tartar.⁴⁹

To sum up, just like the idea of the Great Orient, configured within much the same temporal bounds, the image of Russia was contained within and represented by a set of descriptors, typically attached to extra-European peripheral nations, viewed as 'timeless', 'backward', bypassed by progress

49 Maurice Baring, *The Mainsprings of Russia* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1914), p. 17.

Such a perception can be associated with the saying, popular at the time, attributed either to Napoleon or Mme de Staël: 'Grattez le Russe, vous trouverez un Tartare', also quoted in *Dictionnaire de la langue verte* of 1907, where in the article on the Russians one finds the following citation: 'Grattez le Russe, vous trouverez un Cosaque, grattez le Cosaque, vous trouverez l'ours' with a comment from the author 'fait allusion au vernis de civilisation des Russes, relativement sortie de l'état barbare, s'applique aux gens dont de beaux dehors masquent les vices' (Hector France, *Dictionnaire de la langue verte* (Etoile-sur-Rhône: N. Gauvin, 1990, reprint of the original edn, Paris: Librairie du progrès, 1907), p. 384); quoted in Galina Kabakova, 'Mangeur de Chandelles. L'image du cosaque au XIX siècle', in Katia Dmitrieva and Michel Espagne, eds, *Transferts culturels triangulaires: France-Allemagne-Russie* (Paris: Editions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 1996), pp. 207–31 (p. 208).

and historical transformation.⁵⁰ This view took Europe as a norm and a referential landmark, from which 'exotic' Russia (the term applied condescendingly) deviated. Within the limits of this top-down approach, rooted in a position of Western cultural strength and aimed at affirming a certain distance from the object, nothing but a general panoptical picture of the country was usually required. But to obtain a panoramic view of such a colossal country as Russia, the distance to the vantage point should be sufficiently large. The resulting image turned out to be appropriately reductive. Its topical spectrum was based effectively on a binary two-point model, contrasting 'the power and the people', which corresponded to a qualitative dichotomy involving Oriental ferocity, despotism and violence (also applied to other Eastern empires from Turkey to China, and often coloured by the dazzling luxury of the Imperial court-life) versus submissiveness, massive endurance and compassion.⁵¹ The question of when and in what circumstances each of the binaries was activated and highlighted requires further, more in-depth consideration, for it is linked to the third of the defining features associated with Said's concept of the Orientalistic discourse.

This third important issue, which Said outlines in his study, and which is fully applicable to the British projection of the Russian image, draws a distinction between pure and political interest in, and knowledge of, the subject-matter of the literary discourse.⁵² It is important to point out that the term 'political', in Said's work,

is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative

50 Leerksen, p. 29.

51 Among other literary works that bear witness to this type of dual perception one can mention M. Ropes, *Prince and Page: A Story of Russia*, 1884; F. Barrett, *The Sin of Olga Zassoulich*, 1891; A. E. Barr, *Michael and Theodora. A Russian Story*, 1892; George Gissing's novel *The Crown of Life* (1899); or *Michel Strogoff*, a novel by Jules Verne (1875), widely popular at the time.

52 Said, *Orientalism*, p. 9.

linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do or understand as 'we' do).⁵³

In other words, what one means here is that the so-called politically coloured discourse is not something related overtly to the ideologically charged politically orientated writing, but rather 'a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts',⁵⁴ streamed along certain distinct and intellectually predictable lines. Below we shall show that it was this type of politically coloured discourse that effectively shaped the myth of Russia in its British representation.

The graph in Figure 2 presents the number of literary texts related to Russian subject-matter based on the extremely valuable and detailed bibliography compiled by Anthony Cross in his survey of *The Russian Theme in English Literature* (1985).⁵⁵

The temporal boundaries (1820–1920) comprise the period of over a hundred years, leading up to the decade that will constitute the further focus of our examination – the 1920s. In line with Said's thesis, the graph shows a strong correlation between the number of works published on the Russian theme during these years and the changes in the Anglo–Russian political

53 Ibid. p. 12.

54 Ibid. p. 12.

55 Anthony Cross, *The Russian Theme in English Literature from the Sixteenth Century to 1980: An introductory survey and bibliography* (Oxford: W. A. Meeuws, 1985), pp. 84–159.

The trend ties in well with the combined publication statistics (see Figure 3) concerning fiction and first-hand Russia-related travel accounts (1856–1916); the latter is based on a compilation of three sources: Anthony Cross, *In the Land of the Romanovs: An Annotated Bibliography of First-hand English-language Accounts of the Russian Empire (1613–1917)* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2014); Andrei N. Zashikhin, *Britanskaia rossika vtoroi poloviny XIX-nachala XX veka* (Archangel: Pomorskii pedagogicheskii universitet, 1995) p. 13; and Harry W. Nerhood, *To Russia and Return: An Annotated Bibliography of Travellers' English-Language Accounts of Russia from the Ninth Century to the Present* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1968).

rapport. The first peak coincided with the Crimean War of 1853 to 1856; the second – with the Great Eastern Crisis related to the Anglo–Russian dispute in Central Asia; and the third – with the pre-World War I years and the formation of the Triple Entente, which in 1907 asserted an alliance between Great Britain, the Russian Empire and France. Unsurprisingly, the interest in the Russian theme started to peak after the October Revolution and the Bolsheviks’ signing of the separatist Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany in 1918.

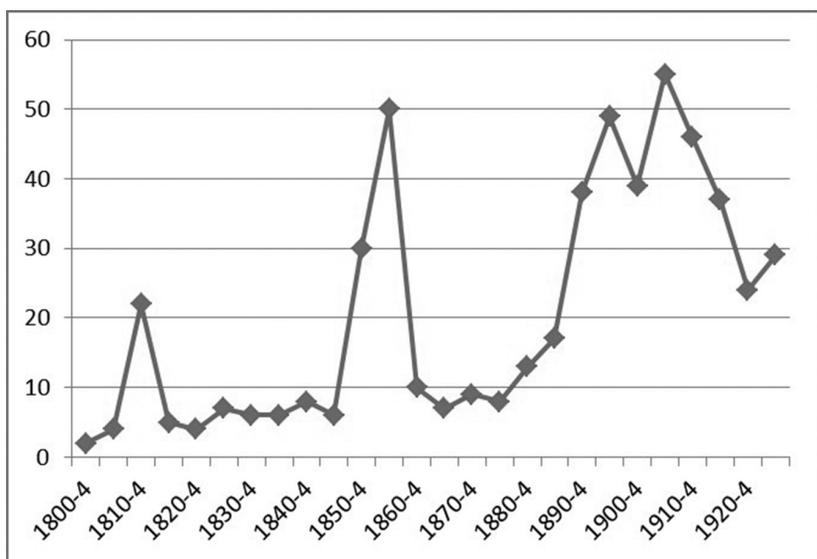


Figure 2. The number of texts (fiction) related to Russian subject-matter based on the bibliography in Anthony Cross, *The Russian Theme in English Literature from the Sixteenth Century to 1980: An introductory survey and bibliography* (1985).

Given that the peak affiliated with the Crimean War was relatively brief, and the reasons for the influx of interest in Russia were fairly uncomplicated and straightforward, we shall move straight on to the discussion of

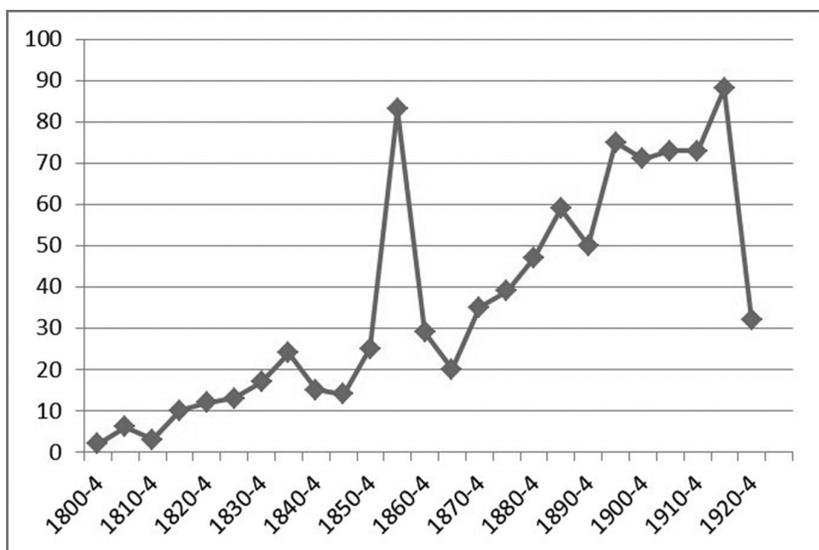


Figure 3. The number of texts (fiction and first-hand travel accounts) related to Russian subject-matter based on collated sources (see List of Figures, p. vii).

the context of the late 1880s. The second peak of interest in the Russian subject came in the wave of the Great Eastern Crisis and in the aftermath of the Russo–Turkish war (1877–8). The conflict brought to a head the rivalry between England and Russia for dominance in Central Asia. By spring 1885 it was descending into a serious threat of Anglo–Russian war, when after the clash of interests on the Afghanistan borders, the British press raised a cry of danger to India. By July 1887 the Boundary Commission was still negotiating the frontiers, the Russians were still advancing into Asian lands; and the closer they came to British India the more attention was given to the study of the threatening northern opponent. A rapid and appreciable interest in Russian culture spread across British society, and people avidly seized at any book that could throw light on the life and customs of the country. Written and published within a week, Charles Marvin’s *The Russians at the Gate of Herat* (1885) had sales of 65,000 copies; Smith, Elder, & Co

(London) reprinted Armin Vámbéry's *Central Asia and the Anglo-Russian Frontier Question* (1874), as well as his *Travels in Central Asia* (1864); and other titles during this period included *All the Russians* (1885) by E. C. Phillips, *History of Russia* (1885) by W. K. Kelly, and *The Russian Storm-cloud or Russia in Her Relations to Neighbouring Countries* (1886) written by Sergei ('Sergius') Stepniak, one of the leaders of the Russian anarchist movement.

The title of Stepniak's monograph was most telling and revealing with regard to the general vector of contemporary rhetoric on the Russian subject. Russia was seen as a potential threat; consequently, the discourse was focused on the narrative associated with power (emblematised as a 'storm-cloud' in Stepniak's title), ruthlessness and uncontrollable passions, while the opposite polarity, related to compliance and some sort of sympathetic nonchalance, appeared to be blurred. The trend can be further exemplified by the spectrum of proliferating literary translations, including, curiously in such circumstances, the rise to prominence of Lev Tolstoy.

It was only natural that at a time when interest in Russian affairs ran at a very high pitch, the editors started looking for suitable translations from Russian authors. In 1887 the *Fortnightly Review* announced the vogue of 'the Russian novel', which, in the words of the critic, was fully justified and 'well deserved'.⁵⁶ Though the new interest embraced Russian literature as a whole, Tolstoy was one of the main attractions. Up until 1885 his name was barely known to the British readership (familiar mainly with the writings of Turgenev) to the extent that *The Contemporary Review* could refer freely to Dmitrii Tolstoy, the Russian Minister of Home Affairs, simply as Count Tolstoy, without any fear that his identity might be mistaken.⁵⁷ Henry James' notable essay on Turgenev's literary legacy as well as his *Art of Fiction* of

56 Matthew Arnold, 'Count Leo Tolstoi', *Fortnightly Review* 42 (1887), pp. 783–99 (p. 783).

57 'Contemporary Life and Thought in Russia', *The Contemporary Review* 47 (1885), pp. 727–36. At the end of the 70s there appeared a couple of publications that tried to attract attention to Tolstoy's writings, but they were very sparse: see, for instance, W. E. Henley, 'New Novels', *The Academy* 329 (1878), 186–7; W. R. S. Ralston, 'Novels of Count Leo Tolstoy', *Nineteenth Century* 5 (1879), 650–69; or C. E. Turner, *Studies in Russian Literature* (London: Kessinger Publishing Company, 1882).

1884,⁵⁸ also make no mention of Tolstoy's writings, but by 1887 his books were everywhere in the British book-stores: six translations of his works were published between 1885 and 1888, not to mention nineteen American editions which were on sale in Britain. In a short period in the mid-80s, practically everything Tolstoy had written in the preceding thirty-five years was translated and published in English (including W. S. Gottesberger's edition of *War and Peace*, translated from French by Clara Bell in 1886).⁵⁹ He was hailed as incomparably the greatest writer who had ever existed, occupying in fiction the same position that Shakespeare occupied with all drama⁶⁰ (a highly ironic statement, as some ten years later Tolstoy would become known for his vociferous hatred of Shakespeare).

When viewed in the light of the reception accorded to Tolstoy's writings during the preceding three decades, this sudden tide of interest and fascination appears as an unpredictable, almost capricious whim of literary fashion. And yet, considering the change of the context in the late eighties, one can chart out clearly the undercurrents of this radical turn. From 1860 to 1880, only two of Tolstoy's stories (*Childhood and Youth* in England and *Cossacks* in America⁶¹) were translated; and only a couple of critical essays (apart from reviews) presented the novelist to the reading public. The critics found Tolstoy's writings 'crudely joined'; the events and settings were

58 Henry James, 'Ivan Turgéniéff', *Atlantic Monthly* 53 (1884), pp. 42–55; Walter Besant and Henry James, 'Art of Fiction', *Longman's Magazine* 4 (1884), pp. 502–21.

59 The influx of Tolstoy translations was partly facilitated by the availability of the general body of his works unprotected by intellectual copyright. In 1884 Tolstoy assigned the rights to all of works published before 1881 to his wife, being very generous with the remaining part of his intellectual property, and in 1891 he publicly renounced the copyrights of all he had written after 1881. Free of copyright restriction and royalties, publishing houses around the world issued impressive runs of Tolstoy's works almost immediately upon their official publication in Russia.

60 W. Sharp, 'New Novels', *The Academy* 871 (1889), p. 22. Among the major articles on Tolstoy at the time one should also mention Matthew Arnold's publication 'Count Leo Tolstoy'; W. E. Henley, 'Count Tolstoy's Novels', *Saturday Review*, 1 January 1887; 'Count Tolstoy's Life and Works', *Westminster Review* 130 (1888), pp. 278–93.

61 Leo Tolstoy, *Childhood and Youth* (London: Bell and Dalby, 1862); Leo Tolstoy, *Cossacks*, trans. Eugene Schuyler (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1878 and London: Sampson Low and Co, 1878).

'tolerably life-like', but 'how wild, how primitive and lawless, how ante [...] human', though not 'wholly unpleasant or unclean'.⁶² As compared with Turgenev, Tolstoy had more of 'original force', but was not so subtle an artist; he was seen as possessing 'fiercer and freer poetry' than the elder author, but less of the 'contemptuous ennui and arid sophistication'.⁶³ As a writer, he was certainly out of tune with the mellow, well-tempered aesthetics of these years; so that his stories were met only with indifference, not to say neglect, by readers.⁶⁴ Everything changed in less than a decade, and Tolstoy's 'fiercer and freer' tones resonated with the context of the late eighties when the notes of the formidable and wild were foregrounded in the Russian image.

Some sort of comparable context-dependent dynamics can also be traced in the level of activity of the Russian anarchist circle in England. Led by such eminent revolutionaries as Prince Peter Kropotkin, Nikolai Chaikovsky, Felix Volkhovsky and Sergei Stepniak, the initiatives of this circle played a major role in shaping the image of Russia in the eyes of the Western viewers. By the beginning of the 1880s Prince Kropotkin had already become regarded as highly influential in the international political and cultural arena: he worked for the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, *L'Avant-Garde*, *La Justice*, and started his own paper *Le Revolte*. The topics of his articles

62 'Colonel Dunwoddie, and Other Novels', *Atlantic Monthly* 42 (1878), pp. 697–706 (p. 702).

63 *Ibid.* p. 702.

64 See, for instance, 'Colonel Dunwoddie, and Other Novels', p. 702; 'The Cossacks', *The Observer*, 15 September 1878. *The Times* had literally two lines advertising *Childhood and Youth*, as 'fresh and faithful to a degree that has never been surpassed' ('Count Tolstoy's Childhood and Youth', *The Times*, 20 June 1862, p. 12). *The Saturday Review* found Tolstoy's writing morally corrupt: 'It makes no difference whether a writer is a Russian, or a German, or an Englishman – whether he is or is not like a spring morning, or what may be his noble tendencies. He is not, we think, justified in telling his family history in this way, and in probing the failings of parents in order that he may have the satisfaction of sketching his own childhood' ('Childhood and Youth', *The Saturday Review*, 29 March 1862, pp. 361–2 (p. 362)). Unsigned reviews were published in *The Athenaeum* ('Childhood and Youth: A Tale', 16 August 1862, p. 209), *The Critic* ('The Education of a Russian Noble', 8 March 1862, p. 240) and *The Spectator* ('Childhood and Youth', 8 February 1862, p. 160).

ranged from ideological positions on economics to the debate over the propaganda of the deed.⁶⁵ Kropotkin's first attempt to bring about some basic awareness of Russian affairs in London was a dramatic and painful fiasco, forcing him to leave England in October 1882. As he put it in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*: 'Better a French prison than this grave.'⁶⁶ Not unlike the case of Tolstoy's translations, the context of the late 1880s worked in favour of the anarchists' undertakings. When Kropotkin arrived in London for a second time in March 1886, he was astonished by the complete change of scene: the 'life in London was no longer the dull, vegetating existence that it had been for me four years before,' he wrote.⁶⁷ Promoted by the tide of political tension and the growing interest in the Russian subject, the anarchists managed to form a pressure group the 'Friends of Russian Freedom' (in 1890 it was turned into the 'Society of Friends of Russian Freedom'), and started publishing *Free Russia* – a monthly newspaper, edited initially by Stepniak and later on by Felix Volkhovsky (till his death in 1914).

Both Volkhovsky and Stepniak paid serious attention to the popularisation and interpretation of Russian literature, which they saw as the most effective way of acquainting foreign audiences with the problems of Russian society. Thomas Hardy attended one of Stepniak's lectures in 1893 and had some vivid recollections of the meeting.⁶⁸ It is also worth noting that Constance Garnett, one of the most eminent translators of the Russian classics (seventy-one volumes of the literary works, including Gogol, Turgenev, Goncharov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov), gained her command of the Russian language in the Russian anarchist circle. She started her lessons under the guidance of Volkhovsky, who was often reproached by his peers (particularly by Nikolai Chaikovsky) for this kind of excessive

65 Later on Kropotkin became highly acclaimed for his major social studies: a comparative analysis of Russian and French prisons (1887), *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1899) and *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1793* (1909).

66 Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1899), II, 254.

67 Ibid. p. 306.

68 F. E. Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892–1928* (London: Macmillan, 1930), p. 22.

overtures made towards the members of the English literary 'elite' (as they were known among the Russian revolutionary activists in exile). Generally speaking, Volkhovskiy, as well as Kropotkin and Stepniak, were very keen on such links with the educated and cultural circles. Through their extensive activities in Britain – numerous press articles and public lectures – they aspired to spread information about Russia, its culture and its problems;⁶⁹ and their efforts, carried all the way through the pre-World War I years, made a strong impact on the new wave of interest in Russian affairs.

The pre-World War I decade was marked by widespread and relatively long-lasting attraction to the Russian subject, which yet again was not devoid of the underlying political implications. Following a radical 'u-turn' in Anglo–Russian relations, it resonated with the national propaganda campaign, which now had to justify the alliance of democratic England with autocratic Russia in World War I. The task was uneasy, but not impossible; John Mackail summarised it in one sentence: 'The Russians are different from us, but they are like us, and we have a great deal in common.'⁷⁰

The brief period of Russophobia engendered by the Russo–Japanese War gave way to a new tide of affection for the Russians (especially after the abortive 1905 revolution). The old vision of the country as a 'shapeless mass of barbarism, tyrannised over by a small governing class which itself is half barbarous',⁷¹ was replaced by an encouragingly positive attitude to the newly acquired ally. Far from a clog on or menace to general progress, Russia was now seen as working actively with others towards the needs and ideals of human civilisation. Several factors that contributed to this noticeable reshaping of the Russian image should be outlined.

69 Kropotkin was known for his persuasive and scholarly essays on Russian fiction, collected in the 1915 edition of *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*. He also wrote of Tolstoy in the article on anarchism in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, naming him one of the prominent representatives of the movement, who based his position on 'the teachings of Jesus and [...] the necessary dictates of reason' (Peter Kropotkin, 'Anarchism', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 918).

70 John William Mackail, *Russia's Gift to the World* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), p. 7.

71 *Ibid.* p. 6.

The first is related to the extensive imports of Russian culture that marked the turn-of-the-century decades. These years are most often associated with the Diaghilev seasons (1911–14). Leonard Woolf recalls in his autobiography that the British audience was completely enthralled by the performance: ‘Night after night we flocked to Covent Garden,’ he maintains, ‘entranced by a new art, a revelation to us benighted British, the Russian Ballet in the greater days of Diaghilev and Nijinsky.’⁷² The newspapers and fashionable magazines were full of superlatives and praising comments; and the fact that Diaghilev’s premiere in London was scheduled during George V’s coronation festivities speaks for itself.

In 1912 the second post-impressionist exhibition, ‘British French and Russian Painters’ (curated by Roger Fry and Clive Bell⁷³), featured two highly successful contemporary artists, Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova. The latter was to make an unforgettable impression on an even wider audience with her designs for *Le Coq d’or* – Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera performed by Diaghilev’s company in 1914 (Theatre Royal, Drury Lane). These magnificent productions of Russian opera during the 1913 and 1914 seasons, which appeared as a real celebration of performance art, captured the imagination of the most refined viewers. According to Sir Osbert Sitwell, they raised the standard of music drama to an unprecedented level:

the Russian operas never before performed in London until these years relieved one suddenly from the Viking world of bearded warriors drinking blood out of skulls, that had been for so long imposed by Germany. They pleased the eye at last, as well as the ear;⁷⁴

while in the words of Rosa Newmarch, these spectacles simply ‘rescued’ the city’s social life in the days just before the assassination of the Archduke:

72 Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911 to 1918* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 37.

73 Christopher Reed, *A Roger Fry Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 290–6.

74 Osbert Sitwell, *Great Morning* (London: Little and Brown, 1947), p. 263.

Russian opera, perhaps is the only topic of the hour on which educated people can meet on a common ground of admiration. Ulster, the suffrage, Lloyd-Georgian finance, Mr Winston Churchill, are all dangerous subjects which divide house against house and estrange life-long friends.⁷⁵

In 1916 Macmillan published a very handsome book with an impressive list of British and Russian contributors, entitled precisely *The Soul of Russia*. 'The Soul' was presented in a variety of aspects, covering a wide range of subjects from early icons, peasant crafts and popular folk-songs to the music of Stravinsky and the paintings of Goncharova. There were poems by Briusov and Balmont, and some prose pieces by Sologub, Chekhov and Kuprin – all in an attempt, according to the editor Winifred Stephens, to embrace Russia's 'noble but sometimes unfathomable soul'.⁷⁶

A decade into the twentieth century Britain once again experienced an influx of Russian literary translations; and the general influence of Russian literature during these years can hardly be taken too seriously. Constance Garnett's version of *The Brothers Karamazov*, which appeared in 1912, caused an enormous sensation. John Middleton Murry referred to it as the 'most epoch-making translation of the past', comparable only with Sir Thomas North's *Plutarch*.⁷⁷ In the next eight years Garnett followed this work with eleven more volumes of Dostoevsky, triggering a real cult of the author in Britain.⁷⁸ First translations of Dostoevsky's novels had been available since the early 1880s, but he was not particularly in favour with the intellectuals during the nineteenth-century decades; and in 1903 the publishers still felt

75 'The Russian Invasion' (a review of Rosa Newmarch's book *The Russian Opera*), *Spectator*, 27 June 1914, p. 1089.

76 Winifred Stephens, preface to *The Soul of Russia* (London: Macmillan, 1916), pp. v–viii (p. vi).

77 Charles A. Moser, 'The Achievement of Constance Garnett', *American Scholar* 57 (1988), 431–8 (p. 435).

78 Harold Orel, 'English Critics and the Russian Novel 1860–1917', *Slavonic and East European Review* 33 (1954), 457–69 (p. 469). 'Constance Garnett's translation of Dostoevsky's major works', her biographer wrote, 'was at least in its immediate effects, one of the most important literary events in modern English literature' (Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *The Garnett Family* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), p. 188).

that 'there was no real market for Dostoevsky in England'.⁷⁹ Arnold Bennett found *The Brothers Karamazov* very impressive when he read it for the first time in French in 1909, as well as D. H. Lawrence, who was impressed by the French version of *Crime and Punishment* around the same time.⁸⁰ In 1910 *Crime and Punishment* (an old translation) was adapted for the stage by Lawrence Irving as *The Unwritten Law*. And although the text underwent some most peculiar alterations (the pawnbroker was replaced by an evil landlord who makes unwelcome advances to Sonia, an innocent maiden; Raskolnikov, a revolutionary student, kills the landlord to protect Sonia's honour⁸¹), this production, together with a new Everyman edition of the same translation, increased the public recognition of Dostoevsky's name and paved the way for further translations.

The overwhelming interest in reading 'the Russians' was not limited to Dostoevsky's novels. Publishers were quick to reissue old works of the established writers and commissioned new ones. Tolstoy and Turgenev continued to be reprinted (in Constance Garnett's and Louise and Aylmer Maude's translations). Two new versions of Gogol's *Dead Souls* (by Stephen Graham and Charles J. Hogarth), which had long been out of print in English, were relaunched in 1915, followed a year later by the new translation of Aksakov's memoirs.⁸² An increasing number of Chekhov's stories had been appearing in the press since 1897. In July 1902 they were thoroughly reviewed by R. E. C. Long for the *Fortnightly Review*;⁸³ and as soon as the

79 Phelps, p. 156. The first English translation of Dostoevsky's major novels (*Notes from The House of the Dead*) was published in 1881; followed in a couple of years by *Crime and Punishment* and *The Insulted and Injured* (Moser, p. 435).

80 For more detail see Chapter 5 in this book.

81 Walter Neuschäffer, *Dostojewskijs Einfluss auf englischen Roman Anglistische Forschungen* (Heidelberg: Carl Withers Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1935), p. 6.

82 For a detailed account of Russian literary translations see Rachel May, *The Translator in the Text: On Reading Russian Literature in English* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), pp. 27–36.

83 R. E. C. Long, 'Anton Tchekhoff', *Fortnightly Review* 72 (1902), 103–18. For the review of the first English translations of Chekhov see also Victor Emeljanow, Introduction to *Chekhov: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Victor Emeljanow (London: Routledge and Paul Kegan, 1981), pp. 1–56 (pp. 1–4).

Dostoevsky craze started to abate (by 1920), a passion for Chekhov steadily took over, inspired yet again by a stream of Garnett's publications (sixteen volumes between 1916 and 1923). Literary journals in England (and in the United States) clamoured for translations and critical articles on Russian literary masters; and the book reviews of the pre-War decades spoke with an informed air of Goncharov, Chekhov, Gogol and Turgenev, presenting it as a matter of particular 'importance that Englishmen should understand the Russian mind'.⁸⁴ Russia had become to the young intellectuals 'of today', wrote Rebecca West in 1915, what Italy was to the Victorians:

as their imaginations, directed by Turner and the Brownings, dreamed of the crumbling richness of Rome and Venice, so we to-day think of that plain of brown earth patterned with delicate spring grass and steel-grey patches of half-melted snow and cupped in a round unbroken sky-line, which is Russia. We are deeply and affectionately familiar with Russian life.⁸⁵

The assertiveness of this and similar statements, which came to be regarded as something tantamount to '*bon ton*' among the socialites of the middle-class milieu, was, in fact, profoundly ironic, given that contemporary Russian literature, with the exception of Gorky and, to a certain extent, Leonid Andreev,⁸⁶ remained far less known to English readers than the nineteenth-century classics of the past.

84 'An Impertinent Substitution', *New Statesman* 5 (1915), 628–9 (p. 629).

According to certain observers, the proliferation of Russian translations owed much to a completely different factor. Julius West linked it to the sheer pragmatism of the publishing industry and its economic considerations – a typical 'catch-as-catch-can' process: 'International copyright does not apply to Russia', he claimed, 'therefore it is unnecessary either to obtain permission to translate or to pay the Russian author a royalty' (Julius West, 'Translated from the Russian', *New Statesman* 5 (1915), 447–8 (p. 447)).

85 Harold Orel, 'The Victorian View of Russian Literature', *Victorian Newsletter* 51 (1977), 1–5 (p. 5).

86 By 1910 Gorky was much better known among the English public than Chekhov (the situation has since been reversed), and surveys of British (and French) magazines put him first in their list of Tolstoy's younger successors, followed by Korolenko, Potapenko and only then, in fourth position, by Chekhov (*Anton Chekhov's Life*

A somewhat more up-to-date outlook on Russia was offered by a different set of writings, which should not be overlooked when discussing the pre-War configuration of the Russian image. This is the endeavour of the young British ‘intermediaries’ – journalists and literary scholars, whose active enthusiasm for the Russian subject-matter was buoyed up by the Anglo–Russian political tide. In their numerous articles and analytical surveys, Bernard Pares, Maurice Baring, Harold Williams, Stephen Graham and others, who were all fascinated with Russia in their own special way, tried to create a positive image of the country in the eyes of their readers, and to facilitate the study of Russia in England. One of the platforms for their aspirations was the *Russian Review* journal, founded in 1912 under the initiative of Bernard Pares and intended as ‘a centre for the growing movement towards a better understanding between Britain and Russia.’⁸⁷ Bernard Pares was one of the founding fathers of Russian studies in Britain, being associated with both the first School of Russian Studies at Liverpool University inaugurated in 1907, and the School of Slavonic Studies, set up in 1915 at King’s College London. He also made a considerable contribution to raising the profile of Anglo–Russian political relations by organising the 1909 visit to Britain of a Duma delegation, as well as the reciprocal visit to Russia of British politicians in 1912.⁸⁸

Along with Pares, Maurice Baring was one of several ‘ambassadors’ for Russia, who were highly acclaimed by the British public. Baring covered the Russo–Japanese War as a correspondent for the *Morning Post*, and had several long stays in the country between 1900 and 1917. Three of his books on the Russian subject, *Landmarks in Russian Literature* (1910), *The Russian People* (1911) and *The Mainsprings of Russia* (1914),

and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary, ed. Simon Karlinsky, trans. Michael Henry Heim (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 334).

Leonid Andreev’s plays were quite popular at this time: fourteen of his plays came out in translation between 1907 and 1923; and Bunin’s stories also went through several printings.

87 Charlotte Alston, *Russia’s Greatest Enemy?: Harold Williams and the Russian Revolutions* (New York: Tauris, 2007), p. 80.

88 *Ibid.* p. 80.

were very popular among contemporary readers for their picturesque and colourful descriptions, their vivid examples drawn from the life of ordinary people; for the author's gripping enthusiasm concerning the cause of Anglo-Russian understanding, and his astonishing ability to subvert the stereotyped patterns of thinking, so that, for instance, most clichéd Russian vices looked almost like incontestable national virtues. 'The charm of Russian life', wrote Baring,

lies in its essential goodness of heart, and in its absence of hypocrisy, and it is owing to this absence of hypocrisy that the faults of the Russian character are so easy to detect. It is for this reason that in Gogol's realistic and satirical work, as in *The Inspector* and *Dead Souls*, the characters startle the foreign observer by their frank and almost universal dishonesty. The truth is that they do not take the trouble to conceal their shortcomings; they are indulgent to the failings of others, and not only expect but know that they will find their own faults treated with similar indulgence. Faults, failings, and vices which in Western Europe would be regarded with uncompromising censure and merciless blame, meet in Russia either with pity or good-humoured indulgence.⁸⁹

In this context, some words should also be said about the works of Stephen Graham, whose main interest lay in the domain of pilgrimages and peasants. For Graham, as for Baring and Pares, Russia was a life-long commitment; and he tried to bring it closer to the English-speaking readers through the framework of John Ruskin's ideals (a strong sense of community and the dignity of labour). 'The Russians are an agricultural nation, bred to the soil'; it is not the land of 'bomb-throwers'⁹⁰ and 'intolerable

89 Maurice Baring, *Landmarks in Russian Literature* (London: Methuen and Co, 1910), pp. 70–1.

90 Such an attitude was widespread after the Greenwich Observatory bombing in 1894. The Greenwich Observatory was the target of an attempted bombing on 15 February 1894. This was possibly the first international terrorist incident in Britain. The bomb was accidentally detonated while being held by twenty-six-year-old French anarchist Martial Bourdin in Greenwich Park, near the Observatory building. Joseph Conrad used the incident in his novel *The Secret Agent* (1907): the plot line turns around an agent-provocateur, who acts within an anarchist cell in London on behalf of a foreign embassy, the latter evidently meant to be Russia, though it is never actually named.

unhappiness', he argued. The Russians 'are strong as giants, simple as children, mystically superstitious by reason of their unexplained mystery. They live as Ruskin wished the English to live.'⁹¹ Through a series of books, produced before and during World War I (*Undiscovered Russia, Changing Russia, The Way of Marpha and the Way of Mary, With the Russian Pilgrims to Jerusalem*), Graham affirmed his reputation as a knowledgeable and thorough researcher, who, in the words of *Russian Review*,

understands Russia and the Russian people. He writes from the standpoint of modest sympathy, and not from that of patronising superiority. He understands the soul of the Russian. He understands how deeply the Russian is rooted in reality.⁹²

Speaking about the vast volume of Russia-related literature circulated in England during these pre-War years, one cannot possibly miss the aura of affectionate sympathy which was prevalent in the majority of these editions. Neither can one characterise the tone of these works as exploitive or authoritatively imperialistic. Moreover, due to the positive vector of the socio-political context, the expression of sympathy projected by the authors sometimes took the form of the most obvious overstatement. The examples were manifold and could be drawn from various domains, including national character, history, psychology, culture and even language. Thus, for instance, Charles Sarolea, a reputable specialist on the Russian subject and the author of a sound study *Europe's Debt to Russia* that was published in 1916, put forward an idea of Russian racial superiority, deduced on the basis of Darwin's teachings. According to Sarolea's thesis, the Russians should occupy the top position on the survival of the fittest scale, because, as a nation, they have been thoroughly tempered by the ruthless severity of the country's geographic and social conditions:

They have survived a struggle for life of ruthless severity. They have resisted the continued pressure of hunger, war, plague, of a cruel climate, and a more cruel Government.

91 Stephen Graham, *Undiscovered Russia* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1912), p. ix.

92 'Notes on Current Books: *Undiscovered Russia* by Stephen Graham', *Russian Review* 1.1 (1912), 98.

The Russians have got a splendid physique, they have a capacity of endurance which is surpassed by no other race.⁹³

The distinguishing grandeur, spirituality and superiority of the Russian soul was highlighted by several English scholars. William Phelps related it to the extreme vastness of the Russian spaces:

The immense size of the country produces an element of largeness in the Russian character that one feels not only in their novels, but almost invariably in personal contact and conversation with a more or less educated Russian [...] Bigness in early environment often produces a certain comfortable largeness of mental vision.⁹⁴

In the same vein, Maurice Baring, who took it upon himself to examine the main traits of the national character, opined, apparently without irony, that the Russians were the most naturally humane, as compared to all other inferior, in this sense, European peoples:

the Russians are more broadly and widely human than the people of other European or Eastern countries, and being more human their capacity of understanding is greater, for their extraordinary quickness of apprehension comes from the heart rather than the head. They are the most humane and the most naturally kind of all the peoples of Europe.⁹⁵

Amusingly, some pages later in the same book Baring cautions against the risk of rushing into 'broad generalisations', which, he affirms, 'bring with them a certain element of exaggeration' to be discounted in a serious analytical survey.⁹⁶ It seems, perhaps unsurprisingly, that these exceedingly bold postulations, though born out of sheer enthusiasm, interest and even affection, were characteristic of those who happened to be most closely involved in the area of Russian Studies. Thus, Edward Garnett, husband of the translator Constance Garnett and himself the author of several

93 Charles Sarolea, *Europe's Debt to Russia* (London: Heinemann, 1916), p. 7.

94 William Lyon Phelps, *Essay on Russian Novelists* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1911, reprinted New York: Snova Books, 2004), p. 5.

95 Baring, p. 2.

96 *Ibid.* p. 51.

books on Russian subjects, also argued for the exclusive pre-eminence of the Russian mind. 'Every reader of Russian literature, from Gogol to our day', he maintained,

cannot fail to recognise that the Russian mind is superior to the English in its emotional breadth and flexibility, its eager responsiveness to new ideas, its spontaneous warmth of nature. With all their faults the Russian people are more permeated with humane love and living tenderness, in their social practice, than those of other nations.⁹⁷

It is worth giving credit to the vivid expressiveness of Garnett's explorations, which, flattering as they were, suggested yet another example of a supererogatory motion. The pendulum swung to the opposite side of the spectrum: one extremity was replaced by another; and the array of pejorative epithets, associated with all things Russian in the 1890s, was eclipsed by another set of superlatives with a markedly positive slant. This did not mean that the old descriptors were immediately abrogated and forgotten, but rather 'relieved' from their operational function *pro tem*. They remained subliminally present in the 'vocabulary range' connected to the Russian discourse, to be reactivated later, should the chance or opportunity arise. This, in fact, was the case when in 1918 the Bolsheviks signed the separate Brest-Litovsk treaty with the Germans, thus deserting the Allied Forces on the World War I Eastern Front. After two decades of centring the Russian imagery on the spiritual and the refined, the rhetoric of 1917 to 1918 (after the Bolshevik Revolution) effortlessly reactivated the notion of the 'cruel barbarians' of the eighteenth-century vintage. The latter was exemplified by Emile Dillon's new publication, which was released in 1918. One of the leading figures of the earlier anti-Russian campaign (all the way through the 1890s), he came up with another monograph on the subject, asserting (straight in the opening statement) the profound ethnic incompatibility between Saxons and Slavs:

97 Edward Garnett, *Turgenev. A Study* (London: W. Collins Sons and Co, 1917), p. 157.

Between Slav and Saxon, in particular, there yawns a psychological abyss wide enough in places to sunder two different species of beings, not merely two separate races. And of all Slav peoples the Russian is by far the most complex and puzzling.⁹⁸

Having gone through the full variety of these stages of hostility, sympathy, and benevolent condescension, the lexical spectrum of the Russian discourse became noticeably wider by the early 1920s. It was certainly more nuanced and less schematic. The question of whether the years of extensive Russophilia resulted in dismantling the Orientalistic dichotomy of ‘the civilised’ and the ‘savage’ – ‘us’ and ‘them’ – is a slightly different matter, which requires further scrutiny and examination. True, the crude image of ‘the barbarians’ was no longer dominating the palette; however, it gave way to the myth of an ‘admirably exotic other’, which, when analysed within the framework of the Orientalistic perspective, may prove to be nothing but a somewhat subtler variation on the old tune (a subtle form of condescension); as D. H. Lawrence put it in one of his letters: ‘It amazes me that we have bowed down and worshipped these foreigners as we have [...] But it is characteristic of a highly developed nation to bow down to that which is more gross and raw and affected.’⁹⁹

In representing exotic others, Orientalism works as a conceptual and metaphoric ‘grid’ of interpretation, which helps the mind to intensify its own sense of self, and guarantees a ‘positional superiority’ for the European (not necessarily political and imperialistic).¹⁰⁰ Even if this grid is flexible, Said argues, the encounter with an exotic other cannot but affirm the

sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.¹⁰¹

98 Emile J. Dillon, *The Eclipse of Russia* (New York, George B. Doran, 1918), p. 1.

99 D. H. Lawrence, Letter to Catherine Carswell, 27 November 1916, in James T. Boulton et al., eds, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979–2001), III (1984), 41.

100 Said, *Orientalism*, p. 7.

101 *Ibid.* p. 8.

It follows that the representation of non-Western ‘others’ has necessarily made an implicit contribution to their ‘exploitation’, defined in terms of complicit affirmation of the desired perspective on the constructed identity of this group:

The construction of identity [...] involves establishing opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from ‘us’. Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of other is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process [...] What makes [this] difficult to accept is that most people resist the underlying notion: that human identity is not only natural and stable, but constructed, and occasionally even invented outright.¹⁰²

One may still argue that representation as such is always exterior. The author always takes up a position of control vis-à-vis his *objet discoursif*, and therefore is immune to any kind of dialogical influence from this object. In the Orientalist mode of reproduction, however, this exteriority acquires a very specific nuance of gradation, for it concerns precisely the degree to which the referent is eclipsed or even obliterated by the productive power of the discourse. In other words, the question is to what extent the autonomous reality is replaced by a purposeful abstraction, by a construct of the Western imagination – a generalised and virtual scheme.

To give an example of this Western aberration with regard to the myth of Russia configured over the pre-War years, one can look at the practices and trends in literary translations that continued to shape the viewpoint of British readers. As already mentioned, Constance Garnett acquired her knowledge of Russian in the anarchist revolutionary circles. Volkhovsky was her first Russian tutor and later on she took up translating Russian literature under the direction of Stepniak. This explains Garnett’s noticeable emphasis on social and political undertones that coloured her interpretations of the Russian classics.¹⁰³ Similarly, one has to bear in mind that it was not just a cult of Dostoevsky that seized Britain after the launch of *The Brothers Karamazov* (1912) translation, but the cult of Dostoevsky in Garnett’s

102 Ibid. p. 332.

103 Edward Garnett, *The Golden Echo* (London: Chatto & Windus 1953), p. 10.

rendition. As pointed out by Rachel May in her analysis of contemporary tendencies in translation, Garnett, undoubtedly, was a highly competent and talented translator: her works were not only by far the best available at the time, but also able to stand comparison with a number of modern translations. Without disregarding the remarkable value of her work, May, nonetheless, draws attention to the fact that Garnett's success lay partly in domesticating the originals and adapting them to the receptive consciousness of the English reader.¹⁰⁴ 'Dostoevsky is so obscure', she wrote, 'and so careless a writer that one can scarcely help clarifying him—sometimes it needs some penetration to see what he is trying to say.'¹⁰⁵

Such clarification was, perhaps, not unwelcome at the time, and according to *The Times Literary Supplement*: 'English readers, embarking on the huge tract of Dostoevsky's fiction', needed all the help they could get 'in the way of clarity and comfort'.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, one main result of Garnett's 'clarification' was smoothing the narrative voice of the author, which in this way happened to be passed through the filter of the translator's perception. Often abrupt, subjectively uncertain, with a number of formal imperfections these 'deliberate prevarications and mutterings on the part of the narrator' were, nonetheless, characteristic of Dostoevsky's style; they gave an air of intrigue and rumour and were organic to the contextual aspects of the work.¹⁰⁷ The difference from the original was highlighted by some notorious bilingual experts, including Vladimir Nabokov or Josef Brodsky; both were quite critical of Garnett's translations for her inattentive and even reductive approach to the refined qualities of the authors' narration: 'The reason English-speaking readers can barely tell the difference between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is that they aren't reading the prose of either one. They're reading Constance Garnett.'¹⁰⁸

104 May, p. 32.

105 Constance Garnett, 'Russian Literature in English', *The Listener*, 30 January 1947, p. 195.

106 *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4 July 1912, p. 269; quoted in May, p. 32.

107 May, p. 32.

108 David Remnick, 'The Translation Wars', *The New Yorker*, 7 November 2005.

The selection of translations available at the time also made its mark on the 'constructed' image of the Russians. When making their choices, translators had to think about the marketable value of the editions. Group psychology and collective expectations were a significant consideration in these matters. On the one hand, the work should not grate on the eye in terms of the established canon of literary reception (the main reason for all Garnett's alterations). At the same time, it would be desirable for the piece of fiction to produce a stronger (or at least memorable) impact on its readers through, perhaps, arresting imagery, haunting characters and bewildering plot. All of this imposed a certain restriction on the process of filtering and selection, resulting in a tendentious, often grotesquely lopsided image of the Russians, configured largely in response to, and mediated by, the feedback from the marketing prescriptions. Gerald Gould, who published a considerable volume of literary criticism on the Russian subject, commented on this flagrant distortion in one of his articles written for the *New Statesman*. 'I am constantly puzzled by a discrepancy between Russian fiction and what little I know of Russian fact', he maintained,

I do not like the personal note in criticism, which, like any other art should be objective; but I am bound to use it here to illustrate my objective point. My Russian friends are, if they will allow me to say so, without exception perfectly sane; yet almost all the Russians that I read about in the books are as mad as hatters. Whence the discrepancy? Does Russian literature specialise in insanity, or is it merely that only the madder books are translated?¹⁰⁹

Gould's comment, apparently, had some wider implications than those related to the domain of literary reception. The impact of Russian fiction happened to be so manifestly pronounced at the time that the audience was inclined to perceive ordinary Russians as no different from those portrayed in Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's writings. Given that this generalised perception often remained on the surface level of the plot-line, the impression persisted that Russia was populated by Raskolnikov-type neurotic killers, emancipated Turgenev women and sinful, but enticingly charming, transgressors *à-la* Mme Karenin. Even those who happened to have first-hand

109 Gerald Gould, 'New Novels', *New Statesman* 7 (1916), 17–18 (p. 17).

knowledge of the field did not seem to be fully immune from this sort of ‘suspension of disbelief’ syndrome. On the one hand, Maurice Baring tried to warn his readers against falling into a trap of representational conventionalities and artistic distortions, pointing out that all these famous literary figures looked like ordinary Russians no more than Goethe’s Faust embodied a German, and a common Englishman could be equated with King Lear.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, he himself used these literary archetypes as landmark references for his socio-anthropological postulations. His ideal model of the Russian character, for instance, was presented as a basic combination of Peter the Great, Prince Myshkin (from Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*), and Khlestakov (from Gogol’s *Inspector General*):

What three Russian types, in history and fiction, would [...] sum up the Russian character? I for one would answer Peter the Great, Prince Myshkin, and Khlestakov. And I would add that in almost every Russian you will find an element of all these three types.¹¹¹

For the sake of poetic justice, it is worth pointing out that when stereotyping the English national character, Baring chose a similar politico-mythological combination, made up of John Milton, Mr Pickwick and Henry VIII.

Further to the point, one should say that alongside all the praiseworthy factors related to the import of Russian culture, which at the time overwhelmed the minds of the British educated and cultural circles, the side-effect of this rapid cultural propagation consisted in widening the gap between the referent and its imaginary construct. Russia was seen largely through the prism of its cultural achievements; and its ‘empiricity’ found a substitute in the generalised archetypes of literary models. The

110 Baring, *The Mainsprings of Russia*, pp. 157–8.

111 Maurice Baring, *The Russian People* (London: Methuen and Co, 1911), p. 55.

In his explorations of identity issues, Baring divided all Russians into two types: Lucifer and Ivan the Fool (Baring, *Landmarks in Russian Literature*, p. 80, 95); the latter, characteristically, was largely drawn from Dostoevsky’s novels and related to the prime ideal of Tolstoy’s teachings. (On the figure of a holy fool in Dostoevsky see Sarah Hudspith, *Dostoevsky and the Idea of Russianness* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 147).

outcome was similar to that produced by the Diaghilev Ballets' seasons when Bakst's artistic experiment with the sets for *Schéhérazade* became linked to what was widely regarded as a typical *à-la-Russe* style; and the Russian theme-parties in London appeared to be frequented by women in huri garb, turbans and ropes of massive pearls *à-la* Nijinsky.¹¹² (This offers a telling example of an inadvertent Orientalisation of the Russian image – profoundly ironic in the context of our examination.)

Considering the general atmosphere of critical, or more precisely uncritical overstatement in response to Russian literature and art during these culturally dynamic decades, one imagines that it must have exerted unavoidable pressure on the formation of the artistic world of British authors, whose literary careers were developing in this newly changed cultural context, when exaggerated praise for things Russian was the rule rather than the exception. The point of interest here is to see whether the cumulative effect of Russophilia resulted in an overall paradigmatic shift in the projection of the Russian image, moving away, if at all, from the deep-seated Orientalistic perspective. When proceeding with such an examination, however, it is worth taking into account that apart from the impact of the socio-political climate, the overall cultural landscape of the time was strongly affected by the changes in the metaphysical angle, which had a significant bearing on the *modus operandi* of creative minds, and which was explored and approached through the adoption of innovative, often termed modernist, aesthetic techniques.

As a movement, modernism was brought about by a widespread realisation that Western civilisation was entering an era of bewildering change. New modes of communication, new technologies, and new scientific discoveries combined to challenge perceptions of reality and to generate dramatic new forms of artistic expression. What once were perceived as astounding absolutes relating to the physical universe dissolved under the pressure of scientific advances; and the very solidity of the real vanished in a mist of doubt about the truth of the objective. This led to the deep crisis of consciousness, as Husserl defined it later in the thirties in his Vienna lecture

112 Green and Swan, p. 65.

on the crisis of European existence.¹¹³ Commonly linked to its radical aesthetic innovations, modernism, no doubt, subjected artistic competence to minute scrutiny and reflective examination. However, one misses the point of the modern by interpreting it only as a novel style and an avant-garde form. Behind the apparently formal strategies in the poetics of the movement, behind its proclamation of a historical licence for the new, lay a stimulating sense of existential crisis, which resulted in a new cultural phenomenology and revaluation of the projected image of the self. The former and the latter were, evidently, interconnected. But what is more important in this context is that both used the myth of Russia (at least partly) as one of their structural standpoints, thus endowing it with the dimension of a valuable resource or ‘cultural asset’, understood and employed in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense of the term.¹¹⁴

Regarding the first aspect, the crisis of consciousness, as mentioned, was intimately related to the collapse of Cartesian rationalism and the overall materialistic frame of causal thinking. Superimposed on this was the proliferation of interest in the Russian viewpoint, much of which was considered to reflect a temperamental disposition towards the anti-pragmatic, meditative and even mystical mode. This, in a way, filled in the expanding metaphysical void, providing a referential source and a model for self-reflexivity and artistic engagement; and in terms of Western interest in and appropriation of this new perspective it was certainly different from the time-honoured cult of the exotic.

When reflecting on the European crisis of consciousness, Husserl saw ‘the reason for the failure of a rational culture’ not so much in the essence of rationalism itself, but in its schematic exteriorisation, and its entanglement with ‘naturalism’ and ‘objectivism’.¹¹⁵ According to the philosopher, the latter should be understood only as a primitive modality of intellectual endeavour – a ‘naive external orientation [of the mind]’, which, he asserts, lacks

113 Edmund Husserl, ‘The Vienna Lecture. Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity’ (10 May 1935), in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 269–300.

114 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 13–14.

115 Husserl, p. 299.

‘the ultimate, true rationality made possible by the spiritual world-view.’¹¹⁶ Genuine rationality, in contrast, can be achieved only through inward-orientated self-reflexive thinking, capable of resolving ‘man’s now unbearable lack of clarity about his own existence and his infinite tasks.’¹¹⁷ Given that, as Husserl put it,

there are only two escapes from the crisis of European existence: the downfall of Europe in its estrangement from its own rational sense of life, its fall into hostility towards the spirit and into barbarity; or the rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy [...] that overcomes naturalism once and for all.¹¹⁸

A ready-made platform for this spiritual rebirth was provided by the Russian tradition, which promoted (through its cultural legacy, for instance) a distinctly anti-naturalistic, intuitive and inward-orientated epistemological path. For many in the West, cognition was commonly associated with knowledge in the intellectual or Cartesian sense of the term. Russian culture offered a somewhat different projection of the concept, within which knowledge had an extra dimension of spiritual connection, something akin to the familiarity with a person, rather than with a series of empirical facts. One might say that the Russians had not so much a specific perception of aesthetics as an aesthetic perception of the reality of life – a perception with several important inferences for the Russian mode of cognition. As Leonid Uspensky, an eminent Orthodox philosopher, put it, ‘beauty, as it is understood by the Orthodox church [...] is a part of the life to come, when God will be all in all’, and this beauty ‘can be a path or a means of bringing us closer to God.’¹¹⁹ Charting a diagram of such a path, dissecting it in parts and analysing its progress through the mysteries of life would be, in the Russian cultural tradition, not merely futile, but potentially detrimental. The end does not justify the means in such a process, for when insisting

116 Ibid. p. 297.

117 Ibid. p. 297.

118 Ibid. p. 299.

119 Leonid Uspensky, ‘The Meaning and Content of the Icon’, in Daniel B. Clendenin, ed., *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), pp. 33–63 (p. 42).

on the analytical examination of an object one does not come to a greater knowledge of its essence, but rather loses sight of this deeper essence altogether. In other words, the chief intention of the Russian approach was not to plunge into the complex analysis of the objective, not to explain or to theorise, but rather to render it more accessible, more immediate, and thereby more real.

Unsurprisingly, in their attempt to respond to the changing metaphysical matrix, to move away from the rational and the objective, and to escape the confinement of the mimetic, the new generation of British authors was keen on translating this Russian idiom into their artistic approach. Accordingly, one can read the key strategy of their aesthetics in transferring the emphasis onto the intuitive and the suggestive, and in regarding self-reflexivity as the main attribute of creative engagement, or, to coin Husserl's expression, as 'the phoenix of a new life-inwardness and spiritualisation'.¹²⁰ Examples are manifold;¹²¹ the best one, perhaps, refers to Virginia Woolf's well-known statement in 'Modern Fiction' (written in 1919, published in 1921), in which the Russian cultural oeuvre was presented as a signifier of the new literary aesthetics, as well as the best means of grasping its conceptual

120 Husserl, p. 299.

121 The scope of this book does not allow us to present the large volume of contemporary polemics regarding the mystery of the Russian soul (see Catherine Brown, 'The Russian Soul Englished', *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.1 (2012), 132–49). It is worth, however, saying some words about the original theories of Ellen Jane Harrison, whose contribution to the psychology of the Russian people caused a real sensation at the time. The scholar saw the origin of Russian spirituality in the dominance of imperfective structures in the Russian language, arguing that this implies the psychological emphasis on *how* (the quality of action) rather than on *when* (the temporal limits): 'Time is order; the Latin languages love order and are precise as to time. To the Russian quality of action is of higher importance, so he specialises in aspects' (Jane Ellen Harrison, *Russia and the Russian Verbs: A Contribution to the Psychology of the Russian People* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1915), p. 10). For a more detailed account see Alexandra Smith, 'Jane Harrison as an Interpreter of Russian Culture in the 1910s–1920s', in Anthony Cross, ed., *A People Passing Rude* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), pp. 175–88.

difference from the established canonical mode (as Woolf puts it: the contrast between 'spiritual' and 'materialistic' fiction¹²²):

Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide [...] The most elementary remarks upon modern English fiction can hardly avoid some mention of the Russian influence, and if the Russians are mentioned one runs the risk of feeling that to write of any fiction save theirs is waste of time. If we want understanding of the soul and heart where else shall we find it of comparable profundity? If we are sick of our own materialism the least considerable of their novelists has by right of birth a natural reverence for the human spirit.¹²³

By suggesting the Russian as an exponent of the modern (in Woolf's words: 'no one but a modern, no one perhaps but a Russian, could have written a story like "Gusev"'¹²⁴), the Russian ideal was lodged, or translated, at the very centre of the English tradition as both a symbolic and phenomenological asset – a sort of *cachet* that expedites a meaningful artistic progression. Moreover, an implied added value to this asset consisted in triggering the cultural process of auto-reflection, for the very course of this aesthetic transposition exposed the struggle to make the English idiom fit the patterns of the Russian ideal. One can say that this Russian paradigm was yet again employed mainly as an effective means of self-definition by contrast, for everything that the Russian irrationality was the Western analytical mentality was not. However, this was no longer a merely Orientalistic binary of 'us' and 'them', and a juxtaposition with the apparently inferior model, but a privileged point of reference and reflection, and a means of configuring a new artistic and phenomenological stance:

It is the saint in them [Russian writers] which confounds us with a feeling of our own irreligious triviality, and turns so many of our famous novels to tinsel and trickery

122 Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: Vintage Classics, 2003), I, 146–54 (p. 149, 151).

123 Ibid. pp. 149–53.

124 Ibid. p. 152.

[..] They are right perhaps; unquestionably they see further than we do and without our gross impediments of vision.¹²⁵

The revaluation of self-image was also an integral part of the process. In this context it is worth recalling that the modernist self was an entity constructed with an inscribed will to differ in itself. Strictly speaking, the modernist revolt against the burden of convention was largely based on the rejection of the notion of Englishness, shaped and solidified in the Victorian era. It can be best illustrated by Virginia Woolf's drawing the line between the 'Georgian' and 'Edwardian' authors,¹²⁶ and thus describing the incipient shift in fiction by invoking specifically English dynastic-historical terms. Consequently, there was nothing the English modernists were more anxious about than the insufficient sense of and aptitude for the modern, which, in their view, was fully missing in the aesthetics of the established national tradition. It is not incidental, therefore, that through its conceptual engagement with the idea of the modern, the English literary branch often seemed to question the very notion of 'Englishness', and vice versa.

A process of image making rarely takes place without a reference to the external marker. This also includes the representation of the self; and the process of national auto-characterisation commonly draws on the juxtaposition with the 'other' – on the dynamic tension that the 'auto-image' and 'hetero-image' tend to put on display in the course of this reflective process.¹²⁷ Similarly, the tension between modernity and national traditionalism is rarely resolved without a third element – a conduit that serves to channel much of the anxiety onto the third external 'other', through which contemporary cultural unease can be more easily expressed. In the early decades of the twentieth century, that third term, arguably, was provided by the Russian discourse, which happened to perform a dual function of problematising the validity of the self-image, as well as serving as an

125 Ibid. p. 153.

126 Virginia Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924).

127 Leerssen, p. 27.

'objective correlative' (to use T. S. Eliot's term¹²⁸) for the new artistic and socio-philosophical concerns.

Some mention in this regard should be made concerning terminology and periodisation. Although modernism continues to be used as a descriptive label defining a specific historical period of literary innovation, between the 1890s and 1930s (with high modernism being associated mainly with the early inter-War years), this period, as already mentioned, was intrinsically connected with the authors' existential involvement – their often disregarded artistic commitment to respond to the major crisis of consciousness rooted in rationality and the logic of causal thinking. This response had a much broader cultural scope than the high modernist avant-garde aesthetics, and concerned a wider spectrum of authors, who were sensitive enough to feel the phenomenological impasse of the realist canonical mode and to look for the new resources, or certain new cultural assets, to effectuate this artistic and cultural change.

For many, this response was successfully negotiated through the impact of the proliferating Russian tradition. The examples include John Galsworthy internalising Turgenev's method for his own modality of artistic expression, or D. H. Lawrence rooting his socio-cultural concepts in the theories of Lev Shestov, or J. M. Barrie problematising the notion of Englishness by refracting it through the aesthetics of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. In all these cases, discussed in the following chapters, Russian literature and art performed a modernising function within the framework of the English artistic canon, and were put on display as a form of cultural capital for those engaged in the area of aesthetic production.

The fact that not all authors in question are commonly affiliated with the high modernist avant-garde culture is, arguably, not of great significance in this context. Within the framework of Bourdieu's theories (of cultural capital and canon formation), their contribution to raising the profile of the Russian paradigm should be connected to their status as the major opinion makers of the day. Bourdieu underlines that the formation of cultural capital is inseparable from the issues of its circulation and transmission, which

128 T. S. Eliot, 'Hamlet and His Problems', in T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), pp. 87–94 (p. 92).

makes the reception of the new idiom highly dependent on the reputation of the authors, who turn out to be the agents and the promulgators of these emerging cultural views. As John Guillory (who based his study of canonicity on the theories of Bourdieu) points out: ‘canonicity is not a property of the work itself, but of its transmission, its relation to other works in a collocation of works;’¹²⁹ and a failure to recognise the narrative of reputations as a major factor in image formation would be a lapse in any examination of this cultural process.

We are therefore reluctant to make a definitive link between the reconfiguration of the Russian myth (from Orientalism to cultural capital) and the modernist formal innovations. The process, as will be shown, started quite a bit earlier and was refracted through the prism of the whole variety of artistic modes of expression. The heterogeneity of the latter is yet another factor that complicates the projection of the Russian image; for as Bourdieu put it, ‘the ways in which symbolic capital circulates are rarely the same;’ but ‘thereby the imported text acquires its new mark;’ and ‘often the importance lies not in what foreign authors are saying, but in what one actually urges them to say.’¹³⁰ An attempt to account for the configuration of the image of Russia in the hands of multiple and artistically diverse literary agents is evidently a more challenging, but also a more rewarding undertaking, for it lends a surplus value of multifacetedness and depth to the projection, thus getting closer to a hologram rather than a flat imprint of the myth of Russia constructed by the British.

129 John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 54.

130 Bourdieu, ‘Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées,’ pp. 3–8 (p. 6, 5) (translated by the authors).