

John Galsworthy: Is It Possible to ‘De-Anglicise the Englishman’?

It is still for us to borrow from Russian literary art, and learn, if we can, to sink ourselves in life and reproduce it without obtrusion of our points of view.¹

Galsworthy’s contribution to shaping the image of Russia in British culture is difficult to overrate. In his 1927 essay ‘Twelve Books – and Why?’, he named *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* among the best pieces in the world’s fiction and quoted the observation of Arnold Bennett, who was convinced that ‘the twelve best novels of the world were all written by Russians.’² Given Galsworthy’s unrivalled influence and fame at the time, such a statement was of certain significance for the British public, who for more than two decades were willing to absorb almost everything that Galsworthy published and said. By the time of Galsworthy’s death in 1933, general opinion had accorded him first place among British novelists, and his most memorable creations, the Forsytes, were as warmly considered and discussed as if they had been people of flesh and blood.³ In 1929, the readers of the *Manchester Guardian* were asked to opine on the ‘Novelists Who May Be Read in A. D. 2029.’ Sitting at the top of this century-hence

- 1 John Galsworthy, ‘Englishman and Russian’, in John Galsworthy, *Another Sheaf* (London: Heinemann, 1919), pp. 64–8 (p. 67).
- 2 John Galsworthy, ‘Twelve Books – and Why?’, *The Saturday Review of Literature* 6 (1927), 363–4 (p. 364).
- 3 When in 1922 the hard copy of the Forsyte trilogy was released in London and New York, the sales on both side of the Atlantic ‘rapidly topped the million mark’ (Catherine Dupré, *John Galsworthy. A Biography* (London: Collins, 1976), p. 246).

summit of popularity was John Galsworthy (defeating Wells, Bennett and Kipling by a large margin).⁴

After the resounding success of *The Man of Property* in 1906, followed by the even higher acclaim given to the premiere of *The Silver Box* (at the Court Theatre in September 1906) Galsworthy was regarded as an embodiment of the wintry conscience of the Edwardian age and 'there was a ready market for anything he wrote.'⁵ Numerous public lectures that he gave struck exactly the right chord and were delivered to large and enthusiastic audiences in England and abroad: as Ada Galsworthy described their trip to the USA in 1919, 'there was, nineteen times in twenty, an immense overflow audience to whatever sized hall had been taken for him.'⁶ As his fame and popularity grew, he became an eminent and highly influential man of letters. He declined a knighthood, but accepted the highest British honour, the Order of Merit, in 1929, as well as honorary doctorates from many universities. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932, and characteristically he donated the award money to the P. E. N. Club, the international fellowship of writers of which he was the first President (and one of the founders in 1921), remaining in post for more than a decade. Apart from fiction, Galsworthy wrote twenty full-length plays and a number of short ones, and published numerous volumes of verse, essays and lectures. His narrative art, according to the Presentation Speech of the Nobel Committee, 'has always gently influenced contemporary notions of life and habits of thought', while his dramas showed 'an unusual richness of ideas combined with great ingenuity and technical skill in the working out of scenic effect.'⁷

This mention of gentle influence was, perhaps, a bit of an understatement, particularly with regard to the British reception of Russian authors. Due to his considerable influence on the reading public of the

4 'Novelists Who May Be Read in A. D. 2029', p. 16.

5 Dupré, p. 134.

6 Quoted in 'Galsworthy's Memories', *The Age*, 29 January 1938, p. 27; Dupré, p. 242.

7 Presentation Speech by Anders Österling, Member of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, on 10 December 1932 <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1932/press.html> [accessed 2 September 2016].

time, Galsworthy played a key role in the formation of the contemporary literary canon, in opening and expanding it to include the best examples of Russian writing and, thus, shaping the attitude to and the contours of what was widely looked upon as the Russian myth.

His contribution to this task can be best described as two-fold. In his extensive commentaries on the works of Turgenev and Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Kuprin and Chekhov, he not only praised the merits of the Russian authors, but emphasised their specific impact on the evolution of Western fiction, thus creating a wave of close interest in and scrutiny of the Russian approach and according it the notion of an artistic *cachet* for those who aspired to excel in the field. 'Just as one cannot see or paint like Whistler by merely wishing to', he argued,

so one cannot feel or write like Tchekov, because one thinks his is a nice new way [...] Tchekov appeared to be that desirable thing, the 'short cut,' and it is hardly too much to say that most of those who have taken him have never arrived [...] Writers may think they have just to put down faithfully the daily run of feeling and event and they will have a story as marvellous as those of Tchekov. Alas! Things are not made 'marvellous' by being called so, or there would be a good many 'marvellous' things to-day.⁸

Concerning his own writing, Galsworthy found inspiration in the Russian mode of literary expression; and as he had always been very open about his creative process and his narrative techniques, the Russian method gained a firm reputation on the strength of the popularity of Galsworthy's writings. Moreover, by merging the Russian aesthetics with the British literary canon, he thereby solicited certain shifts in the culturally embedded patterns of perception, preparing grounds for better understanding and aesthetic reciprocity, and paving the way for more elaborate and wider cultural interactions.

Galsworthy's attraction to Russian literature and culture predated, and was much deeper than that of many, who, as Maugham famously remarked, were 'infected' by the Russomania virus, 'hung an icon on the wall, read

8 John Galsworthy, 'Four Novelists in Profile', *English Review* 4 (1932), 485–500 (pp. 488–9).

Chekhov and went to the ballet.’⁹ Ironically, a fair example of this type of ‘infected fiction’ can be found in Maugham’s own writings of the time. Following his trip to St Petersburg in the summer of 1917, where he was introduced to political circles through Princess Alexandra (Sasha) Kropotkin, a sequence of mystically enthralling Russian duchesses proliferated in his *Ashenden* papers: ‘that illusive spirit of romance ... fine eyes and a good ... voluptuous figure, high cheek bones and a snub nose ... In her dark melancholy eyes Ashenden saw the boundless steppes of Russia.’¹⁰ Galsworthy’s response to the Russian theme was in all respects different from this sentimentalised compliment to the exotic.

Galsworthy also made a trip to Russia in his mid-twenties, arranged by his father to exert a settling influence on his son’s failing legal career.¹¹ In 1917, he produced a rather unremarkable poem, *Russia-America*, infused by the war-time patriotic spirit:

A wind in the world! O Company
Of darkened Russia, watching long in vain,
Now shall you see the cloud of Russia’s pain
Go shrinking out across a summer sky.

A wind in the world! And we have come
Together, sea by sea; in all the lands
Vision doth move at last, and Freedom stands
With brightened wings, and smiles and beckons home!¹²

9 Maugham, p. 273.

10 Ibid. p. 274.

Maugham met Sasha in London prior to 1914. She made a striking impression on the writer; the two even had a brief affair, and Sir Gerald Kelly, a friend of Maugham, painted Sasha’s portrait. Apart from appearing as Anastasia Aleksandrovna Leonidov, in *Mr Harrington’s Washing* (1928), some other instances include: the Grand Duchess Anna Aleksandrovna in the unpublished play *The Road Uphill* (1924); the Archduchess Anastasia in *Jack Straw* (1912); and another Archduchess Anastasia in *Penelope* (1912).

11 Dupré, p. 47.

12 *A Treasury of War Poetry: British and American poems of the world war, 1914–1917*, ed. George Herbert Clarke (Boston, MA and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), p. 53.

Apart from that, neither Russia nor the Russians as such ever featured in his writings. Russian fiction was a different matter altogether. Galsworthy's engagement with it spans more than three decades; and the Russian cultural perspective, seen through the prism of the works of the Russian authors, became a persistent subject of his critical essays and reviews: 'Vague Thoughts on Art' (1911), 'A Note on Edward Garnett' (1914), 'Englishman and Russian' (1919), 'Six Novelists in Profile' (1924), and quite a few others. Offering his incisive judgement of style, narrative techniques and literary methods, he frequently invoked and interpreted the works of the Russian authors in a broader cosmopolitan cultural context, thereby highlighting the links with the European tradition and assisting in translating the Russian idiom into Western literary art. When analysing the impact of the Russian narrative on the British discourse, Galsworthy saw its contribution primarily in terms of bringing in 'the fullness of sensation' and 'intellectual honesty'¹³ characteristic of the Russian approach: 'those great Russian novelists in whom I have delighted', he wrote,

possess, before all other gifts, so deep a talent for the revelation of truth [...] The Englishman has what I would call a passion for the forms of truth [...] but has little or no regard for the spirit of truth. Quite unconsciously he [the Englishman] revels in self-deception and flies from knowledge of anything which will injure his intention to 'make good', as Americans say.¹⁴

It is in this deep-seated spirituality, and in this fearless sincerity that he saw the main distinction between the English and the Russian realist modes ('to the Russian it is vital to realise at all costs the fullness of sensation and reach the limits of comprehension'¹⁵), The latter, in his view, was more powerful in terms of its engagement with the real, revealing a broader panorama of the human condition:

13 Galsworthy, 'Englishman and Russian', p. 65, 67.

14 Ibid. pp. 64–5.

15 Ibid. p. 65.

It is still for us to borrow from Russian literary art, and learn, if we can, to sink ourselves in life and reproduce it without obtrusion of our points of view, except in that subtle way which gives to each creative work its essential individuality. Our boisterousness in art is too self-conscious to be real, and our restraint is only a superficial legacy from Puritanism.¹⁶

Galsworthy himself was a keen reader of the Russian authors and helped to shape his contemporaries' taste and responses to their oeuvre. For some reason, he was of the belief that Chekhov's plays were 'never adequately performed on the English stage, and their inimitable atmosphere ('which makes the work of Tchekhov memorable') could never be appropriately rendered.¹⁷ With regard to Chekhov's prose, however, he referred to him as 'the most potent magnet to young writers' characterised by 'intense and melancholy emotionalism, and a lucid understanding of human nature.'¹⁸ Over the years Galsworthy changed his vision of Dostoevsky. In 1911, in his 'Vague Thoughts on Art', he praised his works by saying: 'no more deeply fantastic writer can I conceive than Dostoevsky.'¹⁹ However, three years later in 'A Note on Edward Garnett', he already rated him lower than Tolstoy,²⁰ affirming the change of opinion in his private correspondence with Garnett (5 April 1914):

16 Ibid. pp. 67–8.

17 Galsworthy, 'Four Novelists in Profile', pp. 490–1.

18 Ibid. p. 488.

19 John Galsworthy, 'Vague Thoughts on Art', in John Galsworthy, *The Inn of Tranquillity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), pp. 254–76 (p. 272).

The same opinion is conveyed in Galsworthy's letters at that time. He expressed a wish (24 April 1910) to read Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* (which he read in French the same year – a present from Constance Garnett (12 May 1910)) and agreed 'that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky reach places which Turgenev doesn't even attempt.' He also praised *The Dead House* as 'splendid' (1 May 1910) (John Galsworthy, *Letters from John Galsworthy 1900–1932*, ed. Edward Garnett (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), pp. 177–9). For a more detailed account of Galsworthy's perception of Dostoevsky, see Kaye, pp. 169–74.

20 John Galsworthy, 'A Note on Edward Garnett', in *Forsytes, Pencyces and Others* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), pp. 185–7 (p. 186).

I am reading *The Brothers Karamazov* a second time; and [...] I'm bound to say it doesn't wash. Amazing in places, of course; but my God! – what incoherence and what verbiage, and what starting of monsters to make you shudder.²¹

In 1932, shortly before his death, there came another cold note on the Russian author. Galsworthy remarked that he kept reading Dostoevsky, finding him 'an interesting (and in some sort irritating) writer', inferior to Tolstoy both as a philosopher and an artist. He doubted Dostoevsky's universality and importance, but acknowledged his overall contribution to the development of literary endeavour: 'His insight was deep and his fecundity remarkable. I think he will live.'²²

Among the group of Russian realists, to whom Galsworthy lent particular significance, Tolstoy and Turgenev stood out: the former as a major subject of Galsworthy's critical commentaries; the latter – as a prime inspiration of his own artistic method.

The first reference to Tolstoy is in Galsworthy's debut novel *Jocelyn* (1898). When the main character, Giles Legard, enters his wife's bedroom, his sight falls on 'the little table by the couch': there 'were the books she had been reading – Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* – three roses, a medicine glass and a bottle.'²³ Galsworthy must have read *The Kingdom of God* before 1898, in French translation, or probably in Constance Garnett's version from 1893. His knowledge of and esteem for the Russian author are apparent from his letters. To give but a few examples, it is worth noting the letter to Constance Garnett (10 May 1902) concerning her translation of *Anna Karenina* (Heinemann 1901), in which he remarks: 'I'm inclined to think that Tolstoy will go down to posterity on the same mark

21 Galsworthy, Letter to Edward Garnett, 5 April 1914, *Letters from John Galsworthy 1900–1932*, p. 217.

In another letter to Garnett, criticising the young D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, he remarks 'PS – Confound all those young fellows; how they have gloated over Dostoevsky' (Galsworthy, Letter to Edward Garnett, 13 April 1914, *Letters from John Galsworthy*, p. 219).

22 Harold V. Marrot, *The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy* (London: Heinemann, 1935), p. 804.

23 John Galsworthy, *Jocelyn* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p. 79.

as Shakespeare', and quotes Edward Garnett as saying that Tolstoy's art 'touches a new and deeper degree of self-consciousness and therefore of analysis.'²⁴ In the same letter, as well as in his subsequent correspondence (6 April 1903, 18 July 1908, 3 April 1914), he conveys his keen interest in Tolstoy's works (*The Cossacks*, *War and Peace*, the open 'Letter on Executions'), emphasising the depth of Russian spirituality, especially as compared to the Naturalist mode: 'The body's never worthwhile [...] the men we swear by, Tolstoy, Turgenyev, Chekhov [...] knew that great truth; they only use the body, and that sparingly, to reveal the soul.'²⁵

As regards his critical essays, Tolstoy is often presented as the utmost embodiment of the Russian tradition – 'the greatest of the Russians.'²⁶ Galsworthy saw in him a unique mixture of a philosopher and an artist – a fascinating (and even puzzling) amalgamation of a strictly defined ideological platform and intense sincerity unequalled in the British canon:

Tolstoy is a fascinating puzzle. So singular an instance of artist and reformer rolled into one frame is not, I think, elsewhere to be found [...] About his work, in fact, is an ever present sense of spiritual duality. It is a battlefield on which we watch the ebb and flow of unending conflict, the throb and stress of a gigantic disharmony.²⁷

This combination resulted in the striking breadth and depth of social analysis, on the one hand, and in the unparalleled intimacy and freshness of expression – on the other:

24 Galsworthy, Letter to Constance Garnett, 10 May 1902, *Letters from John Galsworthy*, p. 36.

25 Galsworthy, Letters to Edward Garnett, 6 April 1903, 18 July 1908, 3 April 1914, *Letters from John Galsworthy*, p. 48, 166, 218. This letter (3 April 1914) concerns specifically D. H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*.

26 Galsworthy, 'A Note on Edward Garnett', p. 186. In his letter to Edward Garnett, he places Tolstoy much higher than Dostoevsky, whose fame at the time was on the rise (Galsworthy, Letter to Edward Garnett, 5 April 1914, *Letters from John Galsworthy*, p. 217).

27 John Galsworthy, 'Six Novelists in Profile', in *Castles in Spain and other Screeds* (London: Heinemann, 1927), pp. 145–71 (p. 157).

Tolstoy a stylist; for no author, in his story-telling, produces a more intimate feeling of actual life. He is free, in fact, from the literary self-consciousness which so often spoils the work of polished writers. Tolstoy was carried away by his impulses, whether creative or reformative.²⁸

This is not to say that Galsworthy always agreed with Tolstoy's track of thinking and ideas. He was very dismissive of Tolstoy's interpretation of the value and *raison d'être* of art ('What is Art?', 1898) as something drawn exclusively from popular appreciation, 'raising up the masses of mankind', as Galsworthy put it, 'to be a definite new Judge'. 'This, at all events', he argued, 'is as far as I dare go in defining what Art is.'²⁹ He also failed to relate to Tolstoy's later works, impregnated with 'religious fanaticism' and moral preaching,³⁰ observing regretfully that 'the preacher in him [Tolstoy], who took such charge of his later years, was already casting a shadow over the artist-writer of *Anna Karenina*'.³¹

Despite these differences, however, Tolstoy's works always featured in Galsworthy's critique as the best examples of realist writing, which, he believed, were particularly close to the sensibility of British readers, due to their similarities with the novels of Dickens. Among others, Galsworthy clearly viewed Tolstoy as the most 'English' of the Russian authors, and the parallels with Dickens, regarding captivating plotlines, psychological insights and the depth of social analysis, were persistently underscored in his reviews. Thus, in the 1912 'Introduction to *Bleak House*', Galsworthy remarked that 'the sort of passion that Dickens inspired in him was matched by only seven other novelists', among whom Tolstoy was listed;³² and later, in 'Six Novelists in Profile', he claimed that Tolstoy's

28 Galsworthy, 'Six Novelists in Profile', p. 158.

29 Galsworthy, 'Vague Thoughts on Art', p. 256.

30 Galsworthy, 'A Note on Edward Garnett', p. 186.

31 Galsworthy, 'Six Novelists in Profile', p. 157.

32 John Galsworthy, 'Introduction to "Bleak House"', in *Forsytes, Pendycyes and Others* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), pp. 199–201 (p. 199).

native force is proved by the simple fact that, taking up again one of his stories after the lapse of many years, one will remember almost every paragraph. Dickens and Dumas are perhaps the only other writers who compare with him in this respect.³³

Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was described by Galsworthy as the 'greatest novel ever written':

The secret of his triumph lies in the sheer interest with which his creative energy has invested every passage. The book is six times as long as an ordinary novel, but it never flags, never wearies the reader, and the ground – of human interest, and historical event, of social life and national life – covered in it, is prodigious.³⁴

Such a choice, as well as such an accolade are, perhaps, not entirely surprising, for there are major typological and thematic parallels between Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* and Tolstoy's epic novel. Both works are largely conceived as tantamount to an '*Iliad*' of their time, exploring the questions of national and personal identity, as well as those related to the deeper insights in human nature put to the test in trying circumstances of man's own making: war-torn Russia in *War and Peace*, and the pragmatic world of property in *The Forsyte Saga*. As Galsworthy put it in his preface to the first complete edition of the novel, 'the Forsytean tenacity' with possessive instincts and the sense of property 'is still in all of us'.³⁵ Moreover, curious as it may seem, both works, commonly attributed to realist prose, essentially put forward the notion of the irrational as the only way to withstand the dehumanising pressure of the practical and the collective (through such characters as Pierre Bezukhov and Natasha in Tolstoy; and Irene and young Jolyon Forsyte in Galsworthy). Could this, to a certain extent, be seen as an attempt to conduct a dialogue with the Russian author? This is hard to answer without indulging in speculation, but one can certainly refer to Galsworthy's keen interest in and affiliation with the Russian cultural tradition of privileging the security of subconscious knowledge and the

33 Galsworthy, 'Six Novelists in Profile,' pp. 160–1.

34 Ibid. p. 157.

35 John Galsworthy, Preface to *The Forsyte Saga* (London: Heinemann, 1922), pp. ix–x (p. ix).

comfort of intuitive perception (a cornerstone in the philosophical writings of Tolstoy).

A number of other typological similarities that spring to mind when comparing Tolstoy's and Galsworthy's writings include an attempt to depict the panoramic socio-historical layers through the microcosm of a family saga (such as the Rostovs and the Bolkonskies in *War and Peace*), and to show social degradation and corruption by means of generational juxtapositions. The latter can be best exemplified by Tolstoy's story *Two Hussars* (1856), portraying the old Count Turbin and his son. Twenty years apart, they enact the same sequence of card playing, drinking, and philandering in the same small town. Their characters, however, differ drastically: the father is gallant, generous, honourable and charming; the son is mean, cold, cowardly and scheming. The father's temperament is natural and open (giving his last pennies to the coachman, saving the life of the young cornet Il'in); the son's is devious and pragmatic ('You must look on life in a practical way, or else you will always be a fool'³⁶). In Galsworthy's saga, the same juxtaposition is reflected in the figures of old Jolyon and Soames Forsyte; and in the same vein, the author's allegiance lies with the hopelessly generous and the awkwardly authentic.

From a thematic angle, it is worth highlighting such intertextual echoes as the failed marriage of Irene to Soames Forsyte, and her difficulties in obtaining a divorce, which refer to the circumstances of Anna and Karenin.³⁷ Shelton's 'moral conversion' in *The Island Pharisees* invites a comparison with Nekhludov's epiphany after Katiusha's trial in *Resurrection*: in both cases a powerful inner protest against the falseness of the middle-class world is triggered by a seemingly incidental, but extremely high-pitched emotive encounter. Finally, one ought to mention the big oak tree at the Robin Hill house – a spiritual compass for its inhabitants:

36 Lyof Tolstói, 'Two Hussars', in *The Russian Proprietor and Other Stories*, trans. Nathan Haskell Dole (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1887), pp. 190–286 (p. 274).

37 These circumstances also resonated in Galsworthy's personal situation: his wife, Ada, had difficulties in obtaining a divorce from her first husband.

Trees take little account of Time, and the old oak on the upper lawn at Robin Hill looked no day older than when Bosinney sprawled under it and said to Soames: 'Forsyte, I've found the very place for your house',³⁸

bringing to mind the iconic oak tree of the Bolkonskies' family estate – a symbolic mouthpiece for Prince Andrei's inner commotions:

As he passed through the forest Prince Andrew turned several times to look at that oak, as if expecting something from it [...] 'Yes, the oak is right, a thousand times right', thought Prince Andrew. 'Let others – the young – yield afresh to that fraud, but we know life, our life is finished!'³⁹

Given all these parallels and thematic echoes, Galsworthy's later attempt to distance himself from the influence of the Russian author sounds somewhat disingenuous, not to say odd. 'I still do read Tolstoy', he wrote not long before his death in 1932, 'and I wish I had more time to do so. But I read him as a master novelist, not as a preacher. I do not think his art or his ethics have ever influenced me.'⁴⁰ Such a remark grates on the ear as a blatant understatement, some sort of self-deception or even a pose; and yet there was a lot of penetrating truth in Galsworthy's confession. As much as he admired Tolstoy's achievement and guided British readers to absorb this new type of fiction into their reading experience and their literary world, Tolstoy's artistry *per se* hardly produced any formative effect on Galsworthy's aesthetics, either on his creative pursuits or on his mode of expression. Tolstoy's method, as Galsworthy described it,

is cumulative – the method of an infinity of facts and pictorial detail: the opposite to Turgenev's, who relied on selection and concentration on atmosphere and poetic balance. Tolstoy fills in all the space and leaves little to the imagination; but with such vigour; such freshness, that it is all interesting.⁴¹

38 John Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga* (London: Heinemann, 1922), p. 458.

39 Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude (Chicago and London: William Benton, 1952), p. 236.

40 Marrot, p. 803.

41 Galsworthy, 'Six Novelists in Profile', p. 159.

This method, largely based on intimacy and directness, and on breaking the barriers of self-consciousness in the flow of the writer's thought, had, in Galsworthy's opinion, a revitalising impact on the development of Western prose. However, being an example of work that 'bears the impress of a mind more concerned with the thing said than with the way to say it',⁴² it did not offer much in terms of new narrative paradigms and aesthetic innovation, and in this sense did not present a radical enough departure from the established realist literature of fact. In his formative years as an emerging literary figure, Galsworthy was looking for a more suggestive and intuitive approach.

The author who did become the major building stone of Galsworthy's own development as a writer was Ivan Turgenev, whose artistic viewpoint, style and poetics found their deepest reflection in Galsworthy's creativity and literary explorations. To describe this as mapping the Russian paradigm onto British writing would be, perhaps, too plain an expression, for it was a truly appropriated and internalised concept of Turgenev's aesthetics that was transmitted to the British readership through Galsworthy's work.

In order to look into this in more detail, it is worth going back to Galsworthy's early years – to the time when no-one could possibly have seen in him a world-famous writer or indeed any kind of writer at all.

Late nineteenth-century Britain was a culture transformed by mass production, sweeping waves of immigration and scientific theories that rent asunder the stasis and security of older beliefs.⁴³ The phenomenal rise in England's national income, expansion of its trade, emergence of a capital class, and a widespread growth of the towns – were some of the visible effects of the industrial revolution. At the same time simmering anger and resent-

42 Ibid. p. 159.

43 By the end of the 1880s such works as Nietzsche's *Gay Science* (1882–7) with his contention that God is dead, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing's revolutionary texts on sexuality (1886) had already been published. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* appeared in 1859 and *Essays and Reviews* (edited by J. W. Parker), which questioned the Bible as revealed history, in 1860. In the period from 1865 to 1870, Karl Marx began publishing *Das Kapital*, Alfred Nobel invented dynamite, the foundations of quantum physics were laid in the works of Michael Faraday and Heinrich Herz – all challenging the absolutist theories of truth.

ment stirred up gradually in people's minds concerned with the pragmatic rationalism and dehumanisation of the age. With the loss of monolithic certainty formerly derived from such sources as the myth of national unity, religion and art, the expansion of historical and progressive knowledge (the so-called march of the mind) led to the crisis in faith.⁴⁴ As William James observed in 1909, looking back at these turn-of-the-century years:

‘The same returns not, save to bring the different.’ Time keeps budding into new moments, every one of which presents a content which in its individuality never was before and will never be again. Of no concrete bit of experience was an exact duplicate ever framed.⁴⁵

The emerging conflict between humanistic aesthetics and the force of an ascendant materialism in ideology and science brought to light the crisis of the traditional realist literature of fact and the morality of action, which could no longer reflect the developments in contemporary thinking, the changing ethos and the shifts in the socio-cultural field. The realist approach found its most defiant opponents in the aesthetic decadence of Oscar Wilde. As keen explorers of the human spirit, the Aesthetes, grouping around the Rhymers' Club (1890–5)⁴⁶ and *The Yellow Book* journal (1894–7), saw nineteenth-century progress, pragmatism and prosperity as forces destructive to humanism and imagination; and even indulgence in the abominable and the forbidden became a proof of man's superiority to the natural condition. In the words of Karl Beckson, who traced the history of the movement: ‘The courage to do this was considerable [...] and the danger of failure made life a perilous, though extraordinary, adventure.’⁴⁷

44 Frank M. Turner, ‘The Victorian Crisis of Faith and the Faith that Was Lost’, in Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman, eds, *Victorian Faith in Crisis* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 9–38 (p. 10).

45 William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (Longmans: Green and Co, New York, 1911), pp. 147–8.

46 The members of the Club included Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symons, Richard Le Gallienne, and Yeats, who had helped to found it.

47 Karl Beckson, Introduction, in *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890s: An Anthology of British Poetry and Prose*, ed. Karl Beckson (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1981), pp. xxi–xliv (p. xliv).

And although the turn of the century saw the movement fading away, its attempt 'to resist a civilisation intent on debasing the imagination' made a strong impact on the new emerging cohort of literary authors.⁴⁸

By the time Galsworthy's generation made their entrance on the literary scene (the end of the 1890s), Wilde's interest in the mysterious uncertainty of the visible, the phenomenal and the real was considerably heightened by the progress of theoretical and quantum physics which questioned the causal model of the world. Developments in medical and social psychology, especially the work of Freud, and Jung and Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), stressed the active role of the unconscious, turning it into thematic material for literature and art.

The framework of the traditional realist novel appeared to be considerably disrupted. The relationship between the internal and external gained in complexity, blurring the ways in which realist literature used to project its general idea of the moral. The notion of morality as related to and expressed through one's actions – in its straightforward Aristotelian sense:⁴⁹ the person is defined by what he does – had lost its clarity, as well as its relevance to the late nineteenth-century ethos. As one of Thomas Hardy's characters claimed (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 1891): 'The beauty or

48 Ibid. p. xlv.

According to Beckson, 'the Imagist Movement (launched before World War I by T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, and others), the work of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, and the development of the New Criticism have all felt the influence of late nineteenth-century Aestheticism' (p. xlv).

49 In *Nicomachean Ethics* it is made particularly clear that morality cannot be achieved without action: 'the things we have to learn before we can do, we learn by doing, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts' (Aristotle, 'Nicomachean Ethics', in *Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), II, 1729–867 (p. 1743)). In this context, one can also recollect Yeats' definition of the 'character isolated by a deed' (W. B. Yeats, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', in Richard J. Finneran, ed., *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1997), I, 356). For a more detailed study of this subject see Stefanie Markovits, *The Crisis of Action in Nineteenth-century English Literature* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006).

ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed.⁵⁰

Inaction – both frustrated external action (with its considerable potential for character building), and heightened mental aspiration – fascinated the new generation of realist authors, who, being more interested in the internal psychological experience rather than in the outward surrounding reality, were trying to find their way in exploring the notion and the mechanisms of consciousness as the morality of thought. What exactly constitutes the sense of self, if action has lost its ability to be the prime signifier of one's ethos? Does a literary work have the means to articulate and to connect to this inner thinking; and what indeed would a narrative shaped by such concerns look like?

This increased emphasis on the human psyche, on the importance of the irrational and the subconscious, drew attention to the avenues of the Russian realist tradition, which was characteristically embedded in the idea of the so-called emotional 'inner knowledge', in the juxtaposition of desire and ethos, and in the analysis of internalisation, sensation, and repression (prominent in the works of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy). As Lev Shestov, an eminent Russian philosopher of the time, argued in his essay on Dostoevsky (1903), 'knowledge and reason had not brought man to freedom, but had only succeeded in delivering man to his fate; after all, 'hope had not been supported by doctrine, but vice versa, doctrine, by hope.'⁵¹

No single case in the 1890s represents a stronger predilection for this Russian viewpoint than that of Galsworthy. In his attempt to go deeper beyond the visible and the external, to develop a more suggestive and

50 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (Peterborough and London: Broadview Press, 1985), p. 343.

51 Lev Shestov, 'Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy', in Lev Shestov, *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, ed. Bernard Martin (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), pp. 141–322 (p. 174). Shestov viewed Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* as a bona fide critique of pure reason, which established that man's freedom lay not in the kingdom of reason but in its abdication: 'there ends for man the thousand-year reign of "reason and consciousness"; a new era begins – that of "psychology"' (Shestov, p. 174).

evocative approach, Galsworthy saw the examples of the Russian authors as a catalysing stimulus for the evolution of Western prose. 'Under Jane Austen, Dickens, Balzac, Stendhal, Scott, Dumas, Thackeray and Hugo,' he wrote,

the novel attained a certain relation of part to whole; but it was left for one of more poetic feeling and greater sensibility than any of these to perfect its proportions, and introduce the principle of selection, until there was that complete relation of part to whole which goes to the making of what we call a work of art. This writer was Turgenev, as supreme in the art of the novel as Dickens was artless.⁵²

Not unlike Henry James, who called Turgenev 'the novelists' novelist,'⁵³ Galsworthy found his true inspiration in Turgenev's writings, which were instrumental for his formation as a writer and remained central for his lifelong literary pursuits. As Ford Madox Ford colourfully described it,

I must have asked myself a hundred times in my life, if there had been no Turgenev, what would have become of Galsworthy? [...] Or, though that is the way the question was always put to me, it might be truer to the thought I want to express to say: What would Galsworthy have become?⁵⁴

According to Galsworthy's own account, he began reading Turgenev (in English) at the very outset of his literary career, at the time when his first attempts at fiction (a collection of stories *From the Four Winds* and the novel *Jocelyn* published under the pseudonym of John Sinjohn) caused him great dissatisfaction, and were met only with a lukewarm polite reception from Edward Garnett – a renowned contemporary critic, who as a publisher's reader (Fisher Unwin, Gerald Duckworth and Jonathan Cape), exercised over literature a far greater influence than might be surmised from his own

52 Galsworthy, 'Six Novelists in Profile', p. 150.

53 Henry James, *The House of Fiction. Essays on the Novel*, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), p. 170.

54 Ford Madox Ford, *Portraits from Life* (London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), p. 124.

fiction and critical publications.⁵⁵ Garnett's reader reports on Galsworthy at the time drew attention to the lack of artistry, awkwardness of style and ineptitude of literary form.⁵⁶ In this sense of deficiency, Galsworthy recalls in *Glimpses and Reflections*, he turned to the works of Maupassant and Turgenev, which led to a major breakthrough in his command of narrative techniques:

I had been writing four years, and had spent about a hundred pounds on it. About that time I began to read the Russian Turgenev (in English) and the Frenchman Maupassant in French. They were the first writers who gave me at once real aesthetic excitement, and an insight into proportion of theme and economy of words. Stimulated by them I began a second novel *Villa Rubein*.⁵⁷

It is worth pointing out that Galsworthy's acceptance of Edward Garnett as his first critic and literary mentor owed much to their shared appreciation of Turgenev's writing as an example of mastery and a standard by which one might judge his own literary work.⁵⁸ The effect was one of succinctness, temperance and harmony – the qualities that Garnett valued above all in Turgenev's style and highlighted in Galsworthy's *Villa Rubein* by saying that the novel showed 'the disciple's devotion to the master on every page.'⁵⁹ Galsworthy's *Villa Rubein* does indeed refer most strikingly to this particular source of inspiration, noted repeatedly by a number of scholars specialising in Turgenev's impact on the European literary world. Thus, Glyn Turton observed that in its plot structure, characterisation and narrative tone, the novel's similarities with *On the Eve* were difficult to overlook:

55 Through extensive reading, Garnett developed a nearly unerring ability to recognise genuine and original literary talent. Among the authors he discovered or befriended were Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, John Galsworthy, Ford Madox Ford, and W. H. Hudson (Cedric Watts, 'Edward Garnett's Influence on Conrad', *The Conradian* 21.1 (1996), 79–91).

56 George Jefferson, *Edward Garnett. A Life in Literature* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), pp. 109–10.

57 John Galsworthy, *Glimpses and Reflections* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1937), p. 154.

58 Dupré, *John Galsworthy*, p. 80.

59 Edward Garnett, Introduction, *Letters from John Galsworthy 1900–1932*, ed. Edward Garnett (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), pp. 5–16 (p. 8).

the love of Christian, the heroine, for the artist-anarchist, Harz, maintained in the face of her family's opposition resembles that of Elena for Insarov: Harz himself and the thinly characterised Dawney resemble, in the contrasting types which they represent, the much more substantially realised Shubin and Bersenev.⁶⁰

Along the same lines, Gilbert Phelps⁶¹ drew attention to the thematic framework of Galsworthy's stories, largely borrowed, in his view, from Turgenev's *Torrents of Spring* (1871) and *The First Love* (1860): an elderly man recalls the most memorable emotional experience of his past, and the use of 'flash-back' technique in each case heightens the aching sense of the irrevocable loss. Not unlike Sanin (*The Torrents of Spring*), the conditioning of his class causes Swithin (*The Salvation of Swithin Forsyte*, 1900) to abandon his beloved Rozsi, realising at the end that he had turned his back on what, perhaps, mattered most in his existence ('aloud in his sleep, Swithin muttered: "I've missed something"⁶²). Swithin's fascination with Rozsi evokes Sanin's chivalrous courtship of Gemma, and Count Kasteliz's jealousy of Swithin brings to mind that of Herr Klüber. The same matrix is reiterated in 'The Apple Tree' of 1916 – the story of an upper-class undergraduate Frank Ashurst and a simple girl Megan, where Galsworthy yet again drew chiefly on the pattern of Turgenev's novellas:

he had stumbled on a buried memory, a wild sweet time, swiftly choked and ended. And, turning on his face, he rested his chin on his hands, and stared at the short grass where the little blue milkwort was growing [...] And this is what he remembered.⁶³

The description of Frank Ashurst's emotional climax after his first rendezvous with Megan clearly reproduces the experience of the young narrator of Turgenev's *First Love*; and, in the same way as Sanin, he feels 'to the full the sensations of chivalry and passion. Because she was not of his world, because she was so simple and young and headlong, adoring and defenceless,

60 Turton, p. 170.

61 Phelps, p. 116.

62 John Sinjohn, 'The Salvation of a Forsyte', in John Sinjohn, *A Man of Devon* (Edinburgh and London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1901), pp. 109–86 (p. 184).

63 John Galsworthy, 'The Apple Tree', in *Five Tales* (London: William Heinemann, 1918), pp. 187–260 (p. 190).

how could he be other than her protector.’⁶⁴ Ashurst too leaves his beloved on what is intended to be a temporary absence in order to make necessary arrangements for the marriage, during which, yet again in a fashion similar to Sanin, he meets an old friend belonging to ‘his world’, which marks the turning point leading to the betrayal.⁶⁵

The parallels are numerous, wide-ranging and extensive; it is not unlikely after all that Irene Forsyte gets her name from one of the main characters in Turgenev’s *Smoke*, Irina Osinin. Galsworthy’s long-term admiration for Turgenev was discussed by many of his contemporaries and scholars, mainly in terms of point-for-point comparison of plot, theme and characterisation.⁶⁶ What remains largely outside these keen and thoroughly conducted studies are the reasons for and the deeper implications of these intertextual associations, as well as those of Galsworthy’s profound interest in engaging with and drawing from the aesthetics of Turgenev’s works. This interest evidently exceeded the loyalty of an impressionable disciple. As Gilbert Phelps insightfully observed, Turgenev’s influence goes far beyond the patterns of Galsworthy’s early stories: it is equally traceable all the way through his mature writings when the literary fashion was largely dominated by the newly burgeoning fever for the works of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.⁶⁷ Ada Galsworthy also substantiated the claim of Turgenev’s authority over her husband’s fiction, remarking (in a letter to Scribner’s in 1936) that Galsworthy was ‘unconscious of any other influence on his style of work, apart from *Turgenev* and *Maupassant*, his only schoolmasters.’⁶⁸

64 Galsworthy, ‘The Apple Tree’, pp. 221–2.

65 Boleskey, the Hungarian nationalist (and Rozsi’s father in *The Salvation of Swibin Forsyte*), recalls the Bulgarian revolutionary Insarov; while Rozsi’s devotion to her father’s cause has something in common with the selfless dedication of Elena. Boleskey’s quarrel with the Austrian officer in the café suggests Insarov’s argument with the Germans during the excursion to Tsaritsino; and the exact mood and atmosphere of his fist encounter with Elena is echoed in Ashurst’s and Megan’s rendezvous in the moonlit orchard (Phelps, p. 116).

66 Gettmann, pp. 112–25; Turton, pp. 170–3; Kaye, p. 169.

67 Phelps, p. 123.

68 James Gindin, *John Galsworthy’s Life and Art* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 98.

In his pioneering work on Turgenev's reception in America and England, Royal Gettmann attempted to link Galsworthy's fascination with Turgenev to the likeness of their social affiliations. He noted that both were

cultivated gentlemen, formally educated, fond of sports, and possessed of an inheritance. But neither were in spiritual accord with the class whence he came, for Turgenev shunned the government service and Galsworthy gave up the legal profession. At the same time they could not throw themselves into a cause, though they were extremely sensitive to the plight of the oppressed, and fearful of the future.⁶⁹

Although largely true in biographical details, this explanation is not entirely convincing. Firstly, because Galsworthy's reverence for Turgenev had come to prominence before he inherited his father's fortune, thereby acquiring financial freedom comparable to that of the Russian author. It was not until *The Island Pharisees* (1904) that, owing to the death of his father, Galsworthy began publishing under his own name. Secondly, as regards their common sensitivity to the plight of the oppressed, Gettmann himself affirms further in his study that this sentiment was not one of the undisputed strengths of Galsworthy's novels. In distinction to Turgenev's sense of utmost desperation, masterfully conjured in *Mumu* or *A Sportsman's Sketches*, it has an element of false pretence in Galsworthy's setting, where pity is squandered on much better off middle-class subjects, such as, for instance, Bossiney and Irene Forsyte. 'Often his subject was out of proportion to the volume and pitch of the emotion,' which, in Gettmann's view, 'is sentimentality.'⁷⁰ To enhance the point he grounds his observation in Frank Swinnerton's claim that 'Turgenev was at bottom a poet [whereas] Galsworthy was at heart a gentleman.'⁷¹

69 Gettmann, pp. 178–9.

70 Ibid. p. 179.

This must also have been Conrad's impression when, in writing to Galsworthy about *Fraternity*, he compared Turgenev's misfits Rudin and Nezhdanov, to Hilary, and found the latter essentially contrived: 'One asks oneself what that unfortunate creature was afraid of losing' (Marrot, p. 233).

71 Frank Swinnerton, *The Georgian Scene* (London: Farrar & Rinehart, 1934), p. 194.

Swinnerton, in fact, was one of the first to point out back in the 1930s that Galsworthy turned to Russia, and specifically to Turgenev, for his literary inspiration; and described their kinship as ‘a kind of trembling emotion’ permeating the works of both authors.⁷² It is, perhaps, worth dwelling on this comment a while longer, for it was indeed this element of spiritual, almost irrational affinity that Galsworthy persistently put forward when describing his intimacy with Turgenev’s writings. In *The Inn of Tranquillity* he claimed that ‘no greater poet [Turgenev] ever wrote in prose;⁷³’ and in *Castles in Spain and other Screeds* he went on to say that he owed a great debt to Turgenev for his ‘spiritual and technical apprenticeship [...] and the deep kinship in spirit.’⁷⁴ What Swinnerton, arguably, termed as a commonality of the ‘trembling emotion’ was a holistic unison of aesthetics, and a shared understanding of the literary craft as an exploration of human psychology and ‘spirit’, to coin the term favoured later by British modernist authors.⁷⁵

As a man of letters, Galsworthy developed his career in an era of cultural transition. In an attempt to find his own path within the network of competing trends of the 1890s, he was ready to adopt (more likely intuitively than through rational considerations) the Russian author’s viewpoint, his method and his mode of expression, because he saw in it a framework of viable responses – for him, the only meaningful responses to the shifting values of realist art. To discuss this framework in greater detail, the main features of Turgenev’s (and, as will be shown, Galsworthy’s) writing should be considered from a closer perspective. They include: the absence of an action-driven plotline; the representativeness and typicality of characters;

72 Swinnerton, p. 194. Swinnerton remarked perceptively that Galsworthy’s early works were written ‘directly in imitation of the novels of Turgenev’ (Swinnerton, p. 192; see also Gettmann, p. 178).

73 John Galsworthy, *The Inn of Tranquillity* (London: Heinemann, 1927), p. 272.

74 Galsworthy, ‘Six Novelists in Profile’, pp. 152–3.

75 The term was introduced by Virginia Woolf in her essay of 1923 *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, where she condemned writers of the previous generation (including Galsworthy, H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett) for being profoundly materialistic – concerned ‘not with the spirit, but with the body’, spending ‘immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring’ (Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, p. 22).

impersonal narrative, lacking a clearly defined moral message, and the unity of background with characters' emotional state and theme.⁷⁶

Firstly, it is worth pointing out that Turgenev's novels are not based on a strongly defined plotline. In an attempt to render the content of *Smoke* (1867), *Virgin Soil* (1877), *A Nest of Gentlefolk* (1859), or even *Fathers and Sons* (1862), the reader is struck by the complete absence of chains of causality that in any realist novel are traditionally regarded as the main means of binding the plot. One realises, paradoxically, that in Turgenev all elements that constitute the plotline are cemented not by the governing principle of formal logic, but by a series of chances, some kind of fortuitous coincidence and, in some cases, even the irony of fate. This is, partly, why Yuri Lotman, a major Russian structuralist scholar, argued that the works of Turgenev brought in a strong demythologising trend in the old realist novelistic schemes available at the time; they operated contrary to the commonly adopted myth structure, for the function of myth consists in rising above 'the chaotic accidentality of empirical life, sublimating it to a logically thought-through model'.⁷⁷

In this sense, Turgenev's novels present vivid examples of a viable alternative to what Stephanie Markovitz calls a traditional 'myth-type' or 'action based' novel (typical, for instance, of Dickens), which, according to her study, was developed in response to the 'crisis of action' in realist end-of-the-nineteenth-century prose.⁷⁸ The decade of the 1890s, she points out, was the period when the outward actions stopped being the ultimate

76 Turgenev's writing made a strong impact on the development of the European novel of the 1890s; and the main features of his prose are also traceable in the works of Flaubert, Zola and Henry James.

77 Yuri M. Lotman, 'Siuzhetnoe prostranstvo russkogo romana XIX stoletii', in Yuri M. Lotman, *Izbrannyye stat'i* (Tallinn: Aleksandra, 1993), III, 91–106 (p. 105).

78 Markovits, pp. 1–2. As Markovitz puts it, the writers were responding to, and frequently reversing the familiar dictum set out by Aristotle in his *Poetics*: 'All human happiness or misery takes the form of action, the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions – what we do – that we are happy or the reverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the Characters; they include the Characters for the sake of the action' (Ibid.).

indicator of the moral, focusing attention on the interplay of consciousness and ethos, the inner desires and the morality of life. This is how Henry James (a great admirer, not to say a follower, of Turgenev's method) explains his idea of *The Portrait of the Lady* (1881), which, according to the author's Preface of 1908, was prompted by his decision to replace external action with 'an exciting' inward life, marking an 'ado' out of fairly little to do, and producing 'the maximum of intensity with the minimum of strain'.⁷⁹

Morality and ethos in Turgenev's novels are in no way related to the action; on the contrary, the meaningful lives and laudable deeds of his characters are most commonly crowned by their inconsequential and useless deaths.⁸⁰ Turgenev shifts the emphasis to the story of inaction – the story of character, built on the assumption that a frustrated action, or inaction, has a stronger connection with human consciousness; and that the growth of imagination is likely to be stimulated when the chances for outward action are curbed. As Markovitz points out, 'on some level, in literature at least, if not in life, we are who we are, not by virtue of what we do, but by what we have failed to do'.⁸¹

That is, partly, the reason why Turgenev's novels feature a recurrent juxtaposition of a strong-minded man of action and the one inherently prone

79 Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, in Henry James, *The Art of the Novel. Critical Prefaces* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 40–59 (p. 42, 48, 56).

80 As Lotman observes: 'As soon as Kister's life [in 'Bretter'] acquires some kind of meaning though his love for Masha, he is immediately sacrificed to Luchkov's whim [...] Not to mention Bazarov's death, but that of Rudin on the barricades, it too looks utterly senseless for it is not derived from his flow of life, but emphasises its failure' (Lotman, p. 105).

81 Markovitz, p. 6. Markovitz argues that excess of action can, in a way, endanger the input of consciousness in characterisation. Taking Dickens' novels as an example (apart from his later novels which are not representative in this regard), she observes that 'his highly engaged and active plots can be seen to result in his famously flat characters'. The 'round exceptions, such as Arthur Clennam in *Little Dorrit* (1857) or Pip in *Great Expectations* (1861), tend to be marked by their passive, will-less natures' (Markovitz, p. 6; the notion of 'flat' and 'round' characters was introduced by E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt, 1985), p. 67).

to inaction and reflection – the one who is sensitive to social injustice, but completely incapable of throwing himself wholeheartedly into its cause. All authorial sympathies (perhaps not without some auto-referential perspective) tend to go to the latter. Thus in Turgenev's seminal article *Hamlet and Don Quixote* of 1860, it is Don Quixote who wins the accolade of rational appreciation, but the author clearly sides with Hamlet, with his passivity, his emotional turmoil, and the complexity of his thoughts. Similarly, in *On the Eve*, the authorial sympathies are evidently on the side of socially inept and timid Shubin, while the gratifying lot – the moral pathos, the loyalty of the beloved – is bestowed on the revolutionary Insarov, who, in fact, is a fairly flat and unexciting figure, evoking nothing but bemusement among present-day readers of the work.

Largely in the same vein, Galsworthy's discourse rarely falls into the category of the action-based story; and the character's proactive life strategy is rarely shown as an incontestable manifestation of the good. Not unlike Bazarov, Ferrand in *The Island Pharisees* (1904) has the power of disturbing other people's peace of mind, and his presence in the Denmant household (modelled on Bazarov's visit to Mar'ino) has much the same disruptive effect. The novel (dedicated to Constance Garnett in gratitude for her translations of Turgenev⁸²), however, is far from being a typical Edwardian saga. In many ways it is not a novel at all, but a series of episodes or literary sketches, each of which demonstrates some particular aspect of social hypocrisy and the corruption of the middle-class world – the Country House, the University, the Army, the Indian Civil Service. Concerning an overarching plotline, similarly to *Fathers and Sons*, *The Island Pharisees* does not offer much of an action. Bazarov's traits are also quite noticeable in Lord Miltoun from Galsworthy's *The Patrician* of 1911. Although repositioned in a different social setting, the stubbornness, the pride, and the force of personality are apparently in place. As regards the series of events propelling the story, yet again, nothing much happens in this novel,

82 Phelps, p. 117.

in which the characters 'seem not so much [to] act and react upon each other, as jostle each other', as Joseph Conrad once insightfully observed.⁸³

The absence of a strong, well-constructed plotline consequently leads to three other characteristics of Turgenev's, and Galsworthy's, novels. The first is the social representativeness of their literary figures, supported by the high-pitched actuality of the content, which is typically centred on the most pressing up-to-date questions and contemporary concerns. Partly, one can see it as a kind of compensatory discursive mechanism, employed by the authors. As Robert Caserio argues in his study *Plot, Story, and the Novel*, 'when writers and readers of novels lose interest in plot and story, they appear to lose faith in the meaning and the moral value of acts.'⁸⁴ The only way to win back the faith and interest of such a reader, brought up on the captivating well-defined plots of Dickensian tales, is to present him with a story of himself – to anchor it in the actuality of the current moment and to articulate the subject-matter that would be most relevant to the present-day anxieties and debates. Looking at the spectrum of Turgenev's novels, one can see that all of them are characteristically tied in with the major Russian socio-political issues: *Rudin* (1857) draws upon the emerging generation of revolutionary democrats; the dying class of the landed-gentry is portrayed in *A Nest of Gentlefolk* (1859); Russia on the eve of liberal reforms (the 1861 Emancipation of the Serfs) is conjured in *On the Eve* (1860); social manifestation of the growing ideological schism among the liberals – in *Fathers and Sons* (1862); disillusionment and ideological stagnation is traced in *Smoke* (1867); and the first ever depiction of the populist revolutionaries is in *Virgin Soil* (1877).

In other words, speaking of Hamlet's mirror, which art is supposed to hold up faithfully to nature, this 'mirror' operates with great efficiency in Turgenev's novels; but to describe Turgenev and Galsworthy as keen social reformers, who aimed at exposing injustice and devising ways of helping

83 Joseph Conrad, Letter to John Galsworthy, March 1911, in Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, eds, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), IV, p. 425.

84 Robert Caserio, *Plot, Story, and the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. xiii.

the deprived, is to miss the point of their oeuvre. Social controversy and the actuality of settings hardly constitute the *raison d'être* of their novels. They are chiefly explored, or exploited, as effective discursive and structural devices, which made contemporary readers devour each and every one of Turgenev's plotless tales, including examples of his later prose (*Smoke* and *Virgin Soil*), where action *per se* plays an extremely peripheral role. This also explains both the vast popularity of Galsworthy's fiction, when the Forsytes were discussed by his contemporaries as real flesh and blood people, and the subsequent decline of his fame, when the social immediacy of his writing was no longer in tune with the changed cultural references of the post-World War II generation.

Another feature relevant to Turgenev's novel of 'inaction' is the absence of a prevalent didactic message, tied in traditionally with the development of the storyline or the main character of the realist plot. In a way it was a definitive step forward towards a modernist understanding of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, which denies any ever-present objective order and, in turn, any prevalent style of artistic perception and expression. Very much in line with this tenet, the ideological platform in Turgenev's novels is characteristically undefined or left deliberately vague. This, in turn, is reflected in the highly impersonal or inter-subjective mode of narration, when the authorial voice is hardly an imposition and is dissolved in the polyphony of his fictional selves. To give but a few examples, Insarov (*On the Eve*) is strongly committed to his revolutionary ideals, but the author never comes to back up his righteous aspirations, and, more importantly, to tell the reader what exactly constitutes his worthwhile and laudable cause. The same concerns would be applicable to Bazarov. The information about his motives and persuasions is astonishingly sparse: he considers experimenting with frogs useful, and has an aversion to reading Pushkin; but, with all respect, these interests and habits can hardly make up a coherent ideological stance.

In Galsworthy, Harz (*Villa Rubein*) is a defiant libertarian. In many ways he displays the same qualities as Insarov. Not unlike Elena, Christian shows her selfless loyalty to his supposedly worthy cause and aspirations, which, nonetheless, cannot be described with more clarity than as a hazy pursuit of the bohemian lifestyle. Similarly, in both *The Island Pharisees*

and *The Patrician*, we are presented with Bazarov-type figures, whose views are made invariably even less explicable and less defined. Ferrand scornfully resists conformity, and he too, Galsworthy highlights, 'signified rebellion, the subversion of law and order' and his whole figure 'stood for discontent with the accepted'.⁸⁵ He seems to be slightly softer than Bazarov, but as regards his social position, he emerges as a simple vagabond without convictions – an anarchist, which means a Nihilist (Bazarov) without a purpose. In *The Patrician*, Lord Miltoun's capacity for shocking the conventional is in evidence whether it concerns friends or foes, but the exact reason why he turns so violently against his own kind, completely escapes even the most attentive reader. As Conrad described him, writing just after the publication of the novel: 'He is to my mind more sombre than Bazarov, and almost as plebeian, with his temperamental asceticism, his nonconformist conscience, and his passion [...] He is a strange bird to come out of that nest.'⁸⁶

This paves the way to the third notable feature that unites Turgenev's and Galsworthy's viewpoint – the rejection of moral pragmatism and an acute sense of uncertainty, inherent to and indivisible from the human condition. Such an approach, yet again, can be largely interpreted along the lines of modernist aesthetics, centred on subjectivity as a necessary and sufficient condition of artistic reflection. It occurs that the only conclusion that one can draw from Galsworthy's and Turgenev's stories consists in an uncanny realisation that human happiness is linked to some entirely subjective and impractically quixotic choices, unsupported by moral credibility or a well-defined ethical appeal. Thus in Turgenev the worthiness of his so-called 'strong' protagonists, like Bazarov or Insarov, is implicitly put into question through the accidental and essentially pointless death

85 John Galsworthy, *The Island Pharisees* (London: William Heinemann, 1904), p. 85.

86 Conrad, Letter to John Galsworthy, March 1911, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, IV, p. 425.

The fact that Lord Miltoun's character is contrived was highlighted by Joseph Conrad, who pointed out in his letter to Galsworthy: 'You mean him to be typical. He's a bigger creation than the others, but I should not say a greater. He is above right enough but the reader (this reader) somehow feels that he is what he is because you *will him* to be so' (Conrad, Letter to John Galsworthy, March 1911, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, IV, p. 426).

that brings to culmination the lives of these super-heroes. The lucky lot, on the other hand, is bestowed on charismatically inept Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov, who whatever happens, keeps playing the cello in the middle of his utterly chaotic and badly managed manor, surrounded by his beloved Fenechka and a beautiful child. In like fashion, it is 'hopeless' young Jolyon and impractical Irene who, in contrast to the rest of the Forsytes, manage to find happiness with each other. And as regards the reason and justification, the answer most probably rests in the symbolic gesture of Turgenev's Uvar Ivanovich (*On the Eve*), who, when probed further with these questions, invariably flourishes his fingers and fixes 'his enigmatical stare into the far distance.'⁸⁷

Given that action was no longer considered as the main means of discursive progression, Turgenev's aesthetics also offered some new avenues in the area of character delineation, drawing largely upon merging it with the setting and turning the latter into a so-called emotional compass of the theme. Galsworthy perceptively remarked that Turgenev 'had a perfect sense of line moulding and rounding his themes within himself before working them out in written words; and, though he never neglected the objective, he thought in terms of atmosphere rather than in terms of fact.'⁸⁸ Heightened by the writer's refined sensibility and his inner predilection for the intuitive and the suggestive, Turgenev's unprecedented mastery in portraying literary landscapes was a point of admiration, not to say envy, among many of his fellow authors. As Tolstoy once claimed: 'after him [Turgenev] one simply feels like giving up rendering the beauties of nature altogether – just two or three odd words, and it really "smells".'⁸⁹ Turgenev reached an exceptional degree of impressionistic vividness in merging his narrative descriptions with the characters' emotional gradations (often employed as a device for characterisation in his writings). To give but a few

87 Ivan Turgenev, *On the Eve*, trans. Constance Garnett (London: William Heinemann, 1920), p. 290.

88 Galsworthy, 'Six Novelists in Profile,' p. 150.

89 Lev Tolstoy, Letter to A. Fet, 11–12 March 1877, in Lev Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. V. G. Chertkov, 90 vols (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1928–1958), LXII (1956), p. 312 (translated by the authors).

examples, one can mention Elena's tormenting feeling for Insarov, tuned into a cloudy and windy evening:

She went on, not noticing that the sun had long ago disappeared behind heavy black clouds, that the wind was roaring by gusts in the trees and blowing her dress about her, that the dust had suddenly risen and was flying in a cloud along the road . . . Large drops of rain were falling, she did not even notice it; but it fell faster and heavier, there were flashes of lightning and peals of thunder.⁹⁰

or a little sketch of a mellow hot summer weather resonating with Bersenev's leaning towards reveries and philosophical musings:

Beyond the river in the distance, right up to the horizon, all was bright and glowing. At times a slight breeze passed over, breaking up the landscape and intensifying the brightness; a sunlit vapour hung over the fields. No sound came from the birds; they do not sing in the heat of noonday; but the grasshoppers were chirping everywhere, and it was pleasant as they sat in the cool and quietness, to hear that hot, eager sound of life; it disposed to slumber and inclined the heart to reveries.⁹¹

Being fascinated by Turgenev's artistic plasticity, combined with his insights into human nature, Galsworthy followed in his steps, exploring the illustrative power of portraying 'through atmosphere' rather than through 'fact'.⁹² Perhaps one of the most vivid examples presents itself in the closing sequence of the *Indian Summer of a Forsyte* (1918), depicting old Jolyon in the Robin Hill garden, surrounded by his grandchildren playing somewhere at a distance. Impregnated with the aura of Bossiney and Irene's love, the garden is charged with the poignancy of loss, resonating in old Jolyon's reminiscences and reflections. He is overwhelmed with quiet resignation, his mind faint with regrets, his heart scarred with the moments of unrealised happiness and expectations. There is no melodramatic quality in the flow of his emotions, save for the feeling of acceptance – this almost irrational sense of appeasement of the coming end.

90 Turgenev, *On the Eve*, p. 151.

91 *Ibid.* pp. 8–9.

92 Galsworthy, 'Six Novelists in Profile', p. 150.

He was waiting for the midges to bite him, before abandoning the glory of the afternoon. [...] This weather was like the music of 'Orfeo', which he had recently heard at Covent Garden. A beautiful opera [...] 'almost worthy of the old days' – highest praise he could bestow. The yearning of Orpheus for the beauty he was losing, for his love going down to Hades, as in life love and beauty did go – the yearning which sang and throbbed through the golden music, stirred also in the lingering beauty of the world that evening.⁹³

Galsworthy was one of the first to appreciate that Turgenev's unison of psychology and setting (especially with regard to nature) had some deeper implications than those concerning the framework of narrative and stylistic innovations. Considering that one's emotional response to nature is irrational *per se*, Turgenev's use of it as a mediator of the human psyche, essentially exposed and explored the irrational dimension of the latter. In Galsworthy's works the same type of experience is often rendered through the medium of music. It is hardly a coincidence, for instance, that in *The Forsyte Saga* the characters who are above all alien to pragmatism and possessive instincts (Irene, old and young Jolyon Forsyte) happen to be most sensitive to music. Moreover, with regard to Irene's piano playing, it not only serves as an outlet for her sensations, but constitutes a key element of her inner portrait. She is not metaphorically compared to music, she is perceived as its embodiment and its manifestation:

She began to play again. This time the resemblance between her and 'Chopin' struck him [old Jolyon]. The swaying he had noticed in her walk was in her playing too, and the Nocturne she had chosen and the soft darkness of her eyes, the light on her hair, as of moonlight from a golden moon.⁹⁴

93 Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga*, pp. 379–82.

The intense lyricism of tone and the highly charged description of the scene bring to mind Turgenev's portrayal of Lavretsky, resting on a bench upon his return to Lisa's old house, with a group of young people running merrily in the background (Ivan Turgenev, *A House of Gentlefolk*, trans. by Constance Garnett (London: William Heinemann, 1922), pp. 390–91).

94 Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga*, p. 395.

Galsworthy's attraction to the uncharted avenues of the human psyche, to its allusive elasticity and its ultimate inconclusiveness was a prominent feature of his artistic viewpoint and expression. As he claimed in one of his essays,

the finality that is requisite to Art [...] is not the finality of dogma, nor the finality of fact, it is ever the finality of feeling – of a spiritual light, subtly gleaned by the spectator out of that queer luminous haze which one man's nature must ever be to others.⁹⁵

And it was precisely in 'that queer luminous haze' of the irrational that he saw the true expression of the real. In like fashion to Turgenev, he displayed an outstanding mastery in the field of what one can term the art of literary impressionism: merging his *object discoursif* with the experience of its perception, and aspiring to capture and portray the texture and the very process of emotional and aesthetic interaction. This may also explain why many of Galsworthy's admirers saw him not so much as a realist prose writer, but as a philosopher and a mystic poet, concerned with 'the deeper spiritual reality' concealed from the eyes of an idle viewer:

He [Mr Galsworthy] is a philosopher and a poet, a mystic poet, yet the most precise and systematic of realists. I write this last word without any idea of labelling him as belonging to a school; I am not thinking of his manner, but of the object of his art, determined by his point of view. It is that of all great artists possessed by the desire to seize and express complete reality, not only that which ordinary eyes perceive, but the deeper spiritual reality, the mystery of which haunts them, the power or the idea they divine beneath the appearance of a being or a thing, and try to reveal to us by their interpretation of that appearance.⁹⁶

It was somewhat surprising that such a refined, and in many ways modernist understanding of the art of prose remained unappreciated by the younger generation of British authors, and more specifically by Virginia Woolf, who notoriously claimed that Galsworthy's manner of writing (similar to that of Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells) had 'laid an enormous stress

95 John Galsworthy, 'Meditations on Finality', in John Galsworthy, *The Complete Essays of John Galsworthy* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2006), pp. 129–33 (p. 129).

96 André Chevillon, *Three Studies in English Literature: Kipling, Galsworthy, Shakespeare* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1922), p. 155.

upon the fabric of things,'⁹⁷ but failed to reveal 'the perplexed liquid, this cloudy, yeasty, precious stuff, the soul.'⁹⁸ 'No prophet is accepted in his hometown,' and indeed, Woolf somehow missed in Galsworthy everything that she found so refreshingly appealing in Turgenev's novels. She praised the Russian author's use of detail, his ability to construct a scene from meticulous observations, as well as his success in achieving an impersonal inter-subjective vision: 'He [Turgenev] used the other self, the self which has been so rid of superfluities that it is almost impersonal in its intense individuality.'⁹⁹ The only thing that one, perhaps, should note in an attempt to explain Woolf's position, is that the writings of Turgenev came under her close scrutiny at a later stage in her career; and it is about a decade that separates her detailed essay on Turgenev (1933)¹⁰⁰ from her criticism of the Edwardians in the early 1920s – the time when she was infatuated with the works of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. As Royal Gettmann perceptively remarked, Turgenev's (and Galsworthy's) 'net was, perhaps,

97 Virginia Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, p. 18. For Woolf's criticism of the Edwardian authors, see also her essay 'Modern Fiction' (1925)

98 Virginia Woolf, 'The Russian Point of View', in Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: Vintage Classics, 2003), I, pp. 173–82 (p. 180).

99 Virginia Woolf, 'The Novels of Turgenev', in Virginia Woolf, *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), pp. 53–61 (p. 61). The essay was first published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 14 December 1933.

100 Woolf's brief review of Turgenev's fiction appeared in 1921 ('A Glance at Turgenev'), followed by her commentaries on the new biography of the writer in 1927. Woolf's deeper interest in the writings of Turgenev in the early 1930s is mentioned in her diary entries and her letters. Thus in August 1933 she puts in the diary that 'T [Turgenev] wrote and rewrote to clear the truth of the unessential [...] T's idea that you the writer states the essential & lets the reader do the rest'. (Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1977–84), IV, pp. 172–3); in the letter to Helen McAfee (November 1933), she remarks that she 'was greatly impressed by Turgenev, reading him again after many years', and expresses a hope that she 'may lead some of the younger generation to look at him again' (Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson, 6 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1975–80), V, p. 246).

too neatly arranged' to display the grip of the subconscious;¹⁰¹ the latter led modernist sensibility directly to the works of Dostoevsky, in which Russian psychological turmoil and irrationality acquired far more definitive and striking tones.

As regards the apparent controversy involving Galsworthy's interest in the ineffable mystery of feeling and the realist framework of artistic expression, these, in fact, are not as incompatible as they may seem at first glance. There may exist some revealing connections between the former and the latter, for as John Stokes observed in his study of the writings of Oscar Wilde, the reason why the defiant aesthete loved mystery so much was, paradoxically, 'that he was at heart a rationalist', willing to accept that science could offer an increasingly adequate account of the visible world; 'religions die when they are proved to be true', he wrote, 'science is the record of dead religions.'¹⁰² For Galsworthy, this connection between the inner world of the 'spirit' and the manifestation of the real was rooted first and foremost in Russian aesthetics. In an attempt to respond to the clash of humanistic values with the pragmatism of the age, and to chart his median path between Wilde's aestheticism and the extreme realism of Zola and Gissing, he adopted and became a great proponent of the Russian viewpoint (in particular that of Turgenev), centred on the analysis of 'inner action' (or most frequently inaction) and the exploration of the link between the irrational and the humane.

Galsworthy's engagement with the Russian aesthetics was profound and intense, leaving indelible traces in his literary sensibility and his expression. One can say that it is largely owing to the Russian method that he turned his social archetypes into three-dimensional living people, softening the outlines by a penumbra of the atmospheric, and giving them depth by setting them against the backdrop of the mysterious and the suggestive. Considering more general principles of the art of fiction, on the one hand, this type of aesthetic experimentation allowed him to present differently and afresh the structure, the connections and the experience of life,

101 Gettmann, p. 180.

102 John Stokes, *Oscar Wilde: Myths, Miracles and Imitations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

projected onto the inner reality of human consciousness. On the other, given that these formal innovations could be seen as both the consequence and the cause of the need for greater psychological realism in *belles lettres*, they exposed generic doubts about the philosophical basis of the realist doctrine, or, more specifically, led to an expansion of one's understanding of what was meant by realism *per se*.

Further to the point, a significant socio-cultural aspect of Galsworthy's outlook on the myth of Russia is germane to the discussion. Galsworthy keenly observed that human consciousness (one's spiritual inner self – to use the modernist wording) was evidently bounded by a particular idea of culture as an autonomous activity, with its own self-generated system of determinants and values; so that, as he wittily remarked, it was 'almost impossible to de-Anglicise an Englishman.'¹⁰³ One, nonetheless, can hardly overestimate his own contribution to this task. While the Russians undoubtedly influenced his aesthetics, he in turn affected British sensibilities and the framework of cultural perception. It was, of course, a different influence from that exerted through the astute judgement of a critic, as well as from that instilled by an enthusiast of the exotic. It is no exaggeration to say that Galsworthy's contribution to configuring the Russian myth is invaluable in terms of transplanting the Russian paradigm into British aesthetics; and that through this type of internal mediation a significant step was made towards a new, essentially modernist, perspective of cognition – one that exceeds the limitations of cultural rationality and the barriers of self-conscious cultural tradition. As Galsworthy put it in his essay,

When one says that the Russian novel has already profoundly modified our literature, one does not mean that we have now nearly triumphed over the need for ink, or that our temperaments have become Russian; but that some of us have become infected with the wish to see and record the truth and obliterate that competitive moralising which from time immemorial has been the characteristic bane of English art.¹⁰⁴

103 Ibid. p. 68.

104 Ibid. p. 67.

