

## ‘Not a Story of Detection, of Crime and Punishment, but of Sin and Expiation’: T. S. Eliot’s Debt to Russia, Dostoevsky and Turgenev

T. S. Eliot’s case, as an example of engagement with Russian culture, differs in a number of respects from some of the other writers covered in this book. Eliot is the only writer considered here who came from outside Europe. He is the only writer who, strictly speaking, lived in Britain as an émigré. Like his great predecessor in American literature Henry James, Eliot made a definitive move to Europe near the outset of his literary career. Indeed, Eliot took the step of becoming a British subject considerably earlier in his life than James did. Eliot is also the only writer of the six discussed who underwent a significant religious conversion, and this reconversion to Christianity took place during the period when he was perhaps most intensely under the influence of Russian literature.

There is nothing particularly novel about pointing out that T. S. Eliot’s work owes a debt to Russian literature.<sup>1</sup> Yet, on the face of it, the Russian influence upon Eliot’s work is largely confined to the earliest part of his output, and appears at first glance, in many respects, to diminish as his career progressed. Such a trend would be very much in line with the pattern observable with other writers covered in this study. However, it is vital to differentiate between overt, explicit references to and quotations from Russian literature (and evocations of Russian culture more generally) found

1 See especially Olga Ushakova, ‘Russia and Russian Culture in *The Criterion* 1922–1939’, in *A People Passing Rude*, ed. Anthony Cross (Cambridge: Open Book, 2012) pp. 231–40; and Ben Richardson, unpublished MA Thesis ‘Unwrapping the Enigma: Russia in the Works of Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence, 1912–1939’ (University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 2012).

in his creative work, and allusions which are far less obvious and, as it were, encrypted, yet frequently more significant in their implications for Eliot's literary standing, and as such constitute examples of the use of Russian literature as a form of cultural capital. It is also necessary to distinguish between the published texts of Eliot's poetic canon and the very different picture which emerges when the drafts of his work are examined in close detail. Furthermore, a distinction must be drawn between Eliot as poet and Eliot as playwright (a role he embraced increasingly in the inter-war years), and in addition between both of these creative aspects and Eliot in his capacity as editor, critic and essayist. When this wider field is considered the story of Eliot's engagement with Russian literature and culture is shown to be significantly more nuanced, and by no means a sequence which necessarily ends by the beginning of the 1930s, as is perhaps more commonly the case among the other writers reviewed here.

Eliot does not quote directly from anything in Russian in the published text of his most celebrated poem *The Waste Land* (1922), and this has arguably had the effect of focussing attention elsewhere in his work, and ample evidence has indeed been adduced of considerable influence from Dostoevsky on the work with which Eliot established himself, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, published in 1917. Scholarly assertions of the links between *Crime and Punishment* and the poem go back to 1945, although the value of the first such article, by John Pope, was subsequently qualified, because it misattributed the English translation of Dostoevsky involved. In fact Eliot himself said that he had begun the drafting of the poem at a date some four years earlier than Pope supposed. Eliot did nonetheless unequivocally confirm the importance of Dostoevsky's novels, including *Crime and Punishment* for his first major poem:

During the period of my stay in Paris, Dostoevsky was very much a subject of interest amongst literary people and it was my friend and tutor, Alain-Fournier, who introduced me to this author. Under his instigation, I read *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* in the French translation during the course

of that winter. These three novels made a very profound impression on me and I had read them all before *Prufrock* was completed.<sup>2</sup>

Both the central idea of the fundamentally divided psyche of the hero of a poem which begins 'Let us go then you and I'<sup>3</sup> and Prufrock's more general failure to fit into contemporary urban society, almost a *locus classicus* of 'anomie' à la Emile Durkheim, and more specifically the importance of encountering female others on staircases, follow on from those moments which feature especially towards the beginning of *Crime and Punishment*. Eliot's actual, geographical setting for the poem – if it is anywhere specific – is most likely Paris or Boston – just possibly London – almost certainly *not* St Petersburg. But in literary terms the Russian, Dostoevskian parallel is hard to ignore. Compare the following passages from the novel:

Raskolnikov went out in complete confusion. This confusion became more and more intense. As he went down the stairs, he even stopped short, two or three times, as though suddenly struck by some thought. When he was in the street he cried out, 'Oh, God, how loathsome it all is! and can I, can I possibly ... No, it's nonsense, it's rubbish!' he added resolutely. 'And how could such an atrocious thing come into my head? What filthy things my heart is capable of. Yes, filthy above all, disgusting, loathsome, loathsome! – and for a whole month I've been ...'<sup>4</sup>

while in Chapter II:

Raskolnikov was not used to crowds, and, as we said before, he avoided society of every sort, more especially of late. But now all at once he felt a desire to be with other people. Something new seemed to be taking place within him, and with it he felt a sort of thirst for company.<sup>5</sup>

- 2 John Pope, 'Prufrock and Raskolnikov Again', *American Literature* 18.4 (1947), pp. 319–21. (p. 319).
- 3 T. S. Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), I, p. 5.
- 4 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corp., 1917), p. 8.
- 5 *Ibid.* p. 10.

Again, in Chapter VI: 'He rushed to the door, listened, caught up his hat and began to descend his thirteen steps cautiously, noiselessly, like a cat.'<sup>6</sup> And Prufrock's Hamlet-like indecisiveness tallies closely with Raskolnikov's disturbed state of mind:

We may note in passing, one peculiarity in regard to all the final resolutions taken by him in the matter; they had one strange characteristic: the more final they were, the more hideous and the more absurd they at once became in his eyes. In spite of all his agonising inward struggle, he never for a single instant all that time could believe in the carrying out of his plans.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, in Eliot's poem:

There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, in Dostoevsky's novel the prominent theme of indecisiveness is arguably a clear and close precursor of Prufrock's procrastination:

The question whether the disease gives rise to the crime, or whether the crime from its own peculiar nature is always accompanied by something of the nature of disease, he did not yet feel able to decide.

When he reached these conclusions, he decided that in his own case there could not be such a morbid reaction, that his reason and will would remain unimpaired at the time of carrying out his design, for the simple reason that his design was 'not a crime ...' We will omit all the process by means of which he arrived at this last conclusion; we have run too far ahead already [...] We may add only that the practical, purely material difficulties of the affair occupied a secondary position in his mind.

6 Ibid. p. 70.

7 Ibid. p. 70

8 Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, p. 6.

'One has but to keep all one's will-power and reason to deal with them, and they will all be overcome at the time when once one has familiarised oneself with the minutest details of the business' [...] But this preparation had never been begun. His final decisions were what he came to trust least, and when the hour struck, it all came to pass quite differently, as it were accidentally and unexpectedly. One trifling circumstance upset his calculations, before he had even left the staircase.<sup>9</sup>

Having established the sources of Eliot's poem in *Crime and Punishment*, crucial distinctions must also be made. Although Prufrock talks of having 'time to murder and create', as Peter Lowe observes,<sup>10</sup> it is only Raskolnikov who in reality dares to take this action, whereas Prufrock asks 'do I dare disturb the universe?', and although the biblical allusion to the raising of Lazarus as an example of spiritual rebirth is found in both the earlier<sup>11</sup> and later works, it is only in Dostoevsky's novel, through the agency of Sonia Marmeladov, the erstwhile prostitute, that this can be achieved. It is almost as if Prufrock, having never dared to sin in the first place, is denied Raskolnikov's prospect of redemption and rebirth. Emphasising the contrasting sense of incompleteness in Eliot, by comparison with the Russian novel, the female figures in Eliot's poem are characterised by fragmentation, dismembered, as it were, into their arms in isolation (and certainly not their legs):

And I have known the arms already, known them all, –  
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare [...] –  
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl<sup>12</sup>

By contrast with Dostoevsky's prostitute, Eliot's female figures – if more than isolated arms – are mermaids, devoid of legs and as such of full female sexual identity: 'I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.'<sup>13</sup>

9 Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 71–2.

10 Peter Lowe, 'Prufrock in St Petersburg', *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.3 (2005), pp. 1–24 (p. 10).

11 Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 265.

12 Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, p. 7.

13 *Ibid.* p. 9.

Stylistically, it can be said that Eliot is strongly influenced by a key expressive device in Dostoevsky (as indeed in Russian fiction more generally), the ellipse. While critics have argued about which geographical real life city may have inspired Eliot's poems, and while it is granted that Eliot had not visited Russia at this date (nor was indeed ever to do so), the observation that the street layout, wherever it may be geographically, is first and foremost simply a representation of Prufrock's mind should nonetheless take into account the fact that the street plan peters out into an ellipsis:

Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...

And here it is surely relevant to quote from Eliot's fellow modernist, future publisher, and fellow Russophile Virginia Woolf, writing a decade later in *Orlando*,

'All ends in death', Orlando would say, sitting upright on the ice. But Sasha who after all had no English blood in her but was from Russia where the sunsets are longer, the dawns less sudden, and sentences often left unfinished from doubt as to how best to end them – Sasha stared at him, perhaps sneered at him, for he must have seemed a child to her, and said nothing.<sup>14</sup>

Dostoevsky is surely the most obvious candidate for Russian influence exerted upon Eliot and this has been discussed in the critical literature for almost seventy years, since the American critic John C. Pope produced his article *Prufrock and Raskolnikov* (1945). Yet Eliot himself was able to demonstrate that assumed references in the text to 1914 were in fact coincidental, since his poem had actually been written in France as early as 1911. And the supposed verbal allusions to the text of Garnett's English translation were also shown to be chance coincidences, Eliot having originally read *Crime*

14 Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 22; although, ironically, here Woolf employs the hyphen or dash rather than three dots of the ellipse so characteristic of Dostoevsky and Turgenev. (It is worth noting, also, that *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913), by Eliot's tutor Alain-Fournier, whom Eliot credits for introducing him to Dostoevsky, is another novel famed for this stylistic device.)

*and Punishment* not in English but in French. In 1910 to 1911, in Paris, Eliot had met both Alain-Fournier, soon to be the author of *Le Grand Meaulnes*, and Jean Verdenal, later the posthumous dedicatee, 'mort aux Dardanelles', of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, and he was introduced to Dostoevsky's work by them.<sup>15</sup> This factor is of interest because it put Eliot to some extent in a different position from many other writers in England in the period, who were dependent to a greater extent upon the Constance Garnett translations, which were later criticised by Russian native speakers such as Vladimir Nabokov as 'dry and flat and always unbearably demure'<sup>16</sup> In the context of the present study, in the period leading up to and through the 1920s, Eliot may thus be distinguished from many literary acquaintances in London with whom he was on close terms, who do appear to have been more heavily reliant on the Garnett translation into English.

Eliot's correspondence certainly confirms the deep effect exerted upon him by his reading of Dostoevsky, which would have been reinforced by a dramatised version of *The Brothers Karamazov* then playing on the Paris stage, at the Théâtre des Arts in April 1911, directed by Copeau, which he is known to have witnessed. In the period around the end of World War I, after his removal to Britain, when he was working in a bank in London and had been married for more than a year to Vivien Haigh Wood, Dostoevsky is again mentioned by Eliot in his letters. His marriage was already beginning to unravel, at least in part thanks to Vivien's mental instability. Eliot himself was far from stable during this period, a little later undergoing a nervous breakdown from which he famously sought relief on Lake Geneva: 'By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept'<sup>17</sup> and then at a resort on the Kent coast:

on Margate Sands.  
I can connect  
Nothing with nothing.<sup>18</sup>

15 David Chinitz, ed., *A Companion to T. S. Eliot* (London: Blackwell, 2009), p. 5.

16 Quoted in May, p. 38.

17 Eliot, *The Collected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, p. 62.

18 *Ibid.* p. 66.

Against such a backdrop Eliot wrote to his cousin Eleanor Hinkley on 21 July 1917:

Life runs so rapidly over here that we never hear twice of the same person as being in the same place or doing quite the same thing. It is either killed or wounded, or fever, or going to gaol, or being let out of gaol, or being tried, or summoned before a tribunal of some kind. I have been living in one of Dostoevsky's novels, you see, not in one of Jane Austen's. If I have not seen the battle field, I have seen other strange things, and I have signed a cheque for two hundred thousand pounds while bombs fell about me. I have dined with a princess and with a man who expected two years hard labour, and it all seems like a dream. The most real thing was a little dance we went to a few days ago, something like yours used to be in a studio with a gramophone; I am sure you would have liked it and the people there.<sup>19</sup>

At this early point in his career Eliot sets up a binary opposition between the quintessentially English Austen (presumably deemed placid and domestic) and, as a Russian, Dostoevsky, visionary, but also possessed by visions. This same opposition occurred just two years later to Virginia Woolf. She produced her review of Dostoevsky's *An Uncle's Dream* entitled 'Dostoevsky in Cranford' published in the TLS in 1919. Focussing on Dostoevsky's violence and lack of restraint, Woolf quotes a speech from Constance Garnett's translation of Dostoevsky's novella 'The Uncle's Dream', originally published in Russia in 1859, which she cites as an example of the author in comic vein:

But Dostoevsky cannot keep to that tripping measure for long. The language becomes abusive and the temper violent. This comedy has far more in common with the comedy of Wycherly than with the comedy of Jane Austen. It rapidly runs to seed, and becomes a helter-skelter, extravagant farce. The restraint and aloofness of the great comic writers are impossible to him [...] Because of his sympathy his laughter passes beyond merriment into a strange violent amusement which is not merry at all [...] Still we need not underrate the value of comedy because Dostoevsky makes the perfection of the English product appear to be the result of leaving out all the most important things. It is the old, unnecessary quarrel between the inch of smooth ivory and the six feet of canvas with its strong coarse grains.<sup>20</sup>

19 T. S. Eliot, *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton, 5 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009–2014), I (2009), p. 189.

20 Virginia Woolf, *Books and Portraits* (London: Hogarth, 1977), pp. 121–2.

Beyond the 'strange violent amusement which is not merriment at all' Woolf identifies Dostoevsky's tendency to be insufficiently selective in his approach to narrative technique. That distinction between being selective and attempting to describe every detail, is what Woolf identifies as Dostoevsky's weakness, although also, she argues, his essential quality and therefore what makes him the figure he has become. Woolf says Dostoevsky 'because of his sympathy [...] is incapable, even when his story is hampered by the digression, of passing by anything so important and lovable as a man or a woman without stopping to consider their case and explain it'.<sup>21</sup>

This idea of the unselective is signally relevant to Eliot's most extended poem after *Prufrock*, *The Waste Land* of 1922. For here, thanks to the intervention as editor of a second poet, Eliot's fellow American émigré in Europe Ezra Pound, the question of selection comes very much to the fore. On the strength of the published text of the poem, which appeared in pamphlet form by way of the Hogarth Press in London that year, there appears to be far less of a Russian character to Eliot's work here than had been the case five years earlier.

In the trajectory of Eliot's early poetic career, a poem written between *Prufrock* and *The Waste Land*, the short, metrically regular and highly focussed 32 line *Whispers of Immortality* might initially be interpreted as the last petering out of an initial interest in Russian culture (representing a 'falling off' indeed from a Russian classic, Dostoevsky's most famous work *Crime and Punishment*, which had permeated *Prufrock*.) The bulk of Eliot's poem of May/June 1918 appears at first reading to be exclusively associated with English literature. (Though fresh from studying philosophy at Harvard, Eliot here limits himself to 'our metaphysics', by contrast with the near contemporary *Sweeney Erect*, where he mentions the philosopher Emerson by name.) The title *Whispers of Immortality* is an ironic allusion to Wordsworth's *Ode. Intimations of Immortality* (1815), and this almost seems to go against the grain of Eliot's pronouncements as critic in *The Sacred Wood* collection of essays of 1919, which amount to a rejection of romanticism and its cult of personality and feeling. By contrast, in 'Tradition

21 Ibid. p. 121.

and the Individual Talent' Eliot proclaims the primacy of 'impersonality'. Beyond the expectations set up by the title, the opening half of *Intimations of Immortality* – the first four quatrains – appears to assert Englishness, admittedly of an older vintage than that of the Romantics. Eliot alludes first to the Jacobean playwright Webster, author of *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*, and brings in images of death and decay – 'the skull beneath the skin,' and even subverts Wordsworth's romanticism by comparing dead eyeballs to 'daffodils,' evoking Wordsworth's 'I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud' lyric of 1807. From Webster Eliot proceeds to John Donne, preeminent among the metaphysical poets, who is also associated with death and decay:

He knew the anguish of the marrow  
The ague of the skeleton.<sup>22</sup>

However, from the middle of the poem, the fifth quatrain, there is a significant change of gear. From classic figures of the tradition of English literature (as chosen by an American), – a full century old in Wordsworth's case, over 300 years in the case of Donne and Webster – the poem comes emphatically into the London of the early twentieth century. Yet the London Eliot offers the reader is (appropriately, given that the author is himself an American émigré, still the best part of eight years away from taking British citizenship) distinctly cosmopolitan. For the figure from contemporary London is a Russian woman 'Grishkin' who is not primarily a literary but a real life personality. Moreover, Eliot compares her to a 'sleek Brazilian jaguar'.<sup>23</sup> Grishkin is in fact depicted as being more 'feline' than the Brazilian tiger, and sexually alluring, 'uncorseted,' 'friendly,' with her 'bust' giving 'promise' of 'pneumatic bliss,' although it may be observed that Grishkin promises but may perhaps not deliver 'pneumatic bliss.' Of interest is that the representative of Russia here, Grishkin is not first and foremost taken from Russian literature but very much from real life. Grishkin is merely an invented

22 Eliot, *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, I, p. 78.

23 Ibid. p. 48.

pseudonym,<sup>24</sup> and the real life figure who inspired her was identified in Ezra Pound's memoirs *Pavannes and Divagations* as the Russian prima ballerina, trained at the Mariinsky Theatre and subsequently a star of the Ballets Russes, Serafima Astafieva (1876–1934), who had danced in the west with the Ballets Russes and then settled there, founding a ballet school in London in 1914. She was a friend of Ezra Pound, and he calculatedly (by his own admission) took Eliot to meet her in 1918, in the hope that a poem would result from the encounter between the sensual prima ballerina and poet: 'I took Parson Elyot to see the Prima Ballerina and it evoked "Grushkin"'.<sup>25</sup> It duly did, although the poem seems perversely to have been born of the intense repulsion which Eliot evidently experienced towards the dancer. His reaction does not really tally with that of others who met Astafieva. Pound himself felt that Eliot had dealt harshly with her, when he recalled this meeting (long after Eliot's reconversion to Christianity, and indeed after the publication of the explicitly Christian *Four Quartets*.) What is of interest here is that the Russian figure is equated with the animal. Just as the first half of the poem balances Webster and Donne, so here a Russian female human figure is partnered, as it were, with a Brazilian panther, a supremely predatory creature. Henry James's metaphor for fear of sexual intimacy 'The Beast in the Jungle' in his 1903 short story of that name is called to mind. The character is introduced beguilingly into the poem: 'Grishkin is nice'. However, even that word may be undercut. Eliot has already put the reader in mind of the Jacobean tragedian Webster and the metaphysical poet *par excellence* John Donne, and in the English of that period 'nice' can carry the connotation 'wanton'<sup>26</sup> The Russian is in one sense equated with the subhuman and the bestial, yet at the same time

24 Jeffrey Perl says that the name of the heroine, a 'louche cosmopolitan' is 'grishkin with a Russian accent' and 'means the lean part of the loin of a bacon pig' (Jeffrey Perl, *A Dictatorship of Relativism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 353).

25 Ezra Pound, *Pavannes and Divagations* (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 161.

26 William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, in *The Plays of Shakespeare*, 9 vols (London: William Pickering, 1825), II, p. 166. 'These are complements, these are humours, these betray nice wenches that would be betrayed without these' (Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, II, p. 162).

denied even the authenticity of the animal. For Grishkin's bust only promises 'pneumatic bliss' and her appearance is a masterpiece of artifice 'her Russian eye ... underlined for emphasis.' The London setting is invaded by creatures from the tropical jungle – the 'marmoset' and 'Brazilian jaguar' and the equally exotic but also equally 'rank' smelling and feline Russian femme fatale. Russia may be said to feature prominently in the poem, but scarcely to its credit.

Where *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* had taken its setting (the staircase) and the idea of the split personality and the indecisions from a classic narrative of Russian literature much admired by Eliot, here the Russian element appears to be much slighter, albeit sinister, and the animus experienced by the poet towards the female Russian figure is hard to account for. Where *Prufrock* had alluded to *Crime and Punishment*, a novel in which a prostitute (Sonia Marmeladova) is a redemptive figure and associated with religious conversion, here the Russian element seems to be confined to a single real life Russian, a friend of his closest literary associate, whose character Eliot is bent upon assassinating. Astafieva [Grishkin] is all but labelled a prostitute, and associated with 'effluence of cat.'<sup>27</sup> Ezra Pound himself later had regrets, though responsible for the encounter in the first place, for having deliberately pitted the intellectual and diffident Eliot against a star of the ballet who, now ageing, appears to depend upon artifice for the impression she creates, and perhaps can only promise and allure rather than actually satisfy lusts. By the date of this poem Astafieva would already have been reaching retirement as a dancer and moving into a career as a teacher. (Born in 1876, she was a full dozen years Eliot's senior.)

Perhaps Pound cannot be blamed for having entertained greater hopes of the meeting between the American and Russian. Eliot certainly did not react negatively to the ballet and ballet dancers in general. He first developed an enthusiasm specifically for Russian ballet during his stay in Paris between 1909 and 1911 – when the writer Jacques Rivière, Verdenal and Alain-Fournier shared his enthusiasm. But in Paris he was viewing the dancers at a distance, on stage, whereas the encounter in real life and in

27 Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, p. 47.

London provokes a quite different response, half a dozen years later, characterised by distrust and a charge of artifice. It is ambiguous whether Eliot is accusing Grishkin of in some way passing herself off as Russian by means of make-up, when in reality she is something else; or whether he is saying that Russia is synonymous with artifice and seduction achieved by means of cosmetics. There might even be at least some likelihood that the former is the case, if Eliot thought that Astafieva was of Russian–Jewish descent. This is not clear from the poem, but Eliot suggests Russian Jewish descent in another poem from the same period 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales', where the prostitute is called 'Rachel *née* Rabinovitch'<sup>28</sup> and in similarly animal fashion 'Tears at the grapes with murderous paws'. Alternatively, the implication is that all Russians, whether gentile or Jewish, are inclined to create a false persona by artificial means such as the use of make-up. The further irony here is that, according to Virginia Woolf (and others), Eliot was himself not averse to wearing make-up.<sup>29</sup> Not only is Eliot's personal animus towards Astafieva surprising – her celebrated pupils Anton Dolin and Anna Markova spoke warmly and admiringly of her – but the suggestion of artifice conveyed by 'Whispers of Immortality', when her biography is considered, appears perverse in the extreme. For Astafieva in fact came from a distinguished aristocratic family<sup>30</sup> and was related to Leo Tolstoy, who was her great uncle. Indeed one of her forebears is mentioned in *Anna Karenina*:

As is invariably the case, after they had been asked at what price they wanted rooms, it appeared that there was not one decent room for them; one decent room had been taken by the inspector of railroads, another by a lawyer from Moscow, a third by Princess Astafieva from the country.<sup>31</sup>

28 Ibid. p. 51.

29 12 March 1922, Woolf reports that Mary [Hutchison] says Eliot 'uses violet powder to make him look cadaverous' (Woolf, *Diary*, II, p. 171); and again 27 September 1922: 'I am not sure that he does not paint his lips' (Woolf, *Diary*, II, p. 204); quoted in Lee, p. 443.

30 At her death, in London in 1934, she was styled Princess Astafieva.

31 Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Nathan Dole (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1899), p. 329.

On this occasion at least, it appears that Eliot, normally so keenly aware of literary allusions, was obstinately blind to Astafieva's true social status. In terms of the overall development of Eliot's career, viewed after *Prufrock*, *Whispers of Immortality* definitely appears to suggest a decline in the importance of Russia and Russian culture for the American poet. While *Prufrock* depends crucially upon a knowledge of a classic novel, one of the cornerstones of Russian culture for which Eliot himself expressed great reverence, here the immortal literary works of Wordsworth, Webster and Donne are contrasted with a Russian figure who, as a dancer, was not strictly creative in the first place, and whose art form, ballet, as a performance art is highly ephemeral. The ageing prima ballerina is now labelled as a high class (but also highly artificial) prostitute. This represents a marked progression from *Crime and Punishment*, the Russian influence upon *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, whose heroine Sonia is both prostitute and a figure of redemption for Raskolnikov.

On the strength of this seeming decline in the prominence of Russian culture in Eliot's poetry it should come as no surprise to discover that his most celebrated, and at that date most extended poem *The Waste Land*, of 1922, makes no obvious and inescapable references to Russia, Russians or Russian culture. Although it slips at will into French, German and the Italian of Dante, has an epigraph in Latin and Ancient Greek, and ends in the Sanskrit of the Upanishads, the poem does not quote anything in Russian, a language which, unlike his contemporaries Lawrence, Mansfield, and Woolf, Eliot does not appear to have known at all. Near the beginning of the poem's first section 'The Burial of the Dead' the voice of Marie Laritsch, the fin-de-siècle Bavarian courtier and sometime intermediary in the Mayerling scandal, says

'Bin gar keine Russin., stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch'<sup>32</sup>  
 ['I am no Russian but a Lithuanian, a true German']

And this seems to be as close as Eliot comes to evoking Russia directly in his lament for the decline of Western civilisation catalysed by World War

32 Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot.*, I, p. 55.

I. Annexed to Russia since 1795, in the era of Catherine the Great (ironically herself of German descent), Lithuania enjoyed de facto independence from Tsarist Russia from 1915, when it was occupied by Germany's forces under Kaiser Wilhelm III, and declared its independence at the end of World War I, but was invaded by the fledgling Bolshevik regime in 1919, then reoccupied by the Poles in 1920. At the time when Eliot was composing *The Waste Land*, in Switzerland, Lithuania was joining the League of Nations, whose headquarters were adjacent at Geneva. Eliot's poem reflects European political events which were unfolding even as he drafted it, but the speaker overheard at this point is at pains to deny Russian nationality and to assert that she is a Lithuanian of pure German, and not Slav pedigree.

Yet though on the surface the published version of *The Waste Land* may make little obvious reference to Russia, perusal of the poet's widow's 1971 facsimile edition of the preliminary drafts of the poem, so drastically edited by Pound, reveals a quite different picture. On p. 127, for example, in her notes for 'The Fire Sermon' Valerie Eliot mentions that Eliot drafted 'the two paragraphs that follow, ending with a parody of *Prufrock*:

If one had said, yawning and settling a shawl  
Oh no, I did not like the *Sacre* at all, not at all.<sup>33</sup>

And Pound's marginalia at this point spell out the name of Grishkin (he uses the spelling 'Grushkin') once again. In fact, recently published research by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue reveals that these lines were actually a 'part-reconstruction and "part-reimagining" of the opening of Part III' and were published in an article in *The Criterion* for April 1924. In *Letters of the Moment* by 'F. M.' in *The Criterion*, April 1924, the couplets were 'flung' as 'obsequies' for the 'Caroline renovations' by the Phoenix Society, such as the production of Wycherly's *The Country Wife* in February that year.<sup>34</sup> Thus, far from Eliot's interest in Russia having faded since 1918, with *Prufrock* and *Whispers of Immortality* lying definitely in the past, the Russian

33 T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: a facsimile & transcript*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p. 127.

34 Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, p. 648.

frame of reference still meant enough to the poet in 1924 for him to rewrite a part of *The Waste Land* emphasising the Slav dimension, restoring aspects which had been toned down by Pound's editing in 1922. And elsewhere in the original drafts of the poem Eliot had also said (in the deleted 'Fresca' stanzas which initially formed the first seventy-two lines, all in rhyming couplets à la Pope,) that the female figure here is an example, along with Scandinavian literature (presumably Ibsen, possibly Strindberg) and the nineteenth-century aesthetes, of the Russian craze:

Women grown intellectual grow dull,  
 [who] ... lose the mother wit of natural trull.  
 Fresca was baptized in a soapy sea  
 Of Symonds – Walter Pater – Vernon Lee.  
 The Scandinavians bemused her wits,  
 The Russians thrilled her to hysteric fits.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, Pound's manuscript marginalia annotating 'The Fire Sermon' lines 138–9 reveal that Pound at least thought Grishkin was still being evoked here, when Eliot presents the figure of the 'typist home at teatime' who is involved in a crude and perfunctory sexual encounter with the 'young man carbuncular':

A bright kimono wraps her as she sprawls  
 In nerveless torpor on the window seat;  
 A touch of art is given by the false  
 Japanese print, purchased in Oxford Street.<sup>36</sup>

Against these lines in the early draft Pound scribbles 'mix up of the couplet & grishkin not good'.<sup>37</sup>

The spelling of Grishkin's name is, in itself, in some ways akin to Woolf's 'Lapinova' in her short story (see Chapter 6), a contradictory curiosity. For no Russian name for a woman would end in '-in' but rather would normally take the form 'Grishkina'. Pound, both in his marginalia for *The Waste Land*

35 Eliot, *The Waste Land: a facsimile and manuscript*, p. 41.

36 Ibid. p. 45.

37 Ibid. p. 45.

and in his later references to Astafieva in the *Pisan Cantos*, often uses the variant spelling 'Grushkin'. This is certainly a common Russian surname, and Grusha can be an abbreviated form of the male name 'Gavril'. The name may even conceivably be intended to recall 'Grushenka'. If this is the case a possible Russian literary allusion to the femme fatale in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* may be involved. Eliot had certainly read this novel in French translation, as well as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* on the recommendation of Alain-Fournier in 1910. In Dostoevsky's novel Agrafena Alexandrovna Svetlova (also known as Grushenka, Grusha, or Grushka) is a kept woman and moreover a temptress, who plays off Dmitrii Karamazov against his father Fyodor, both rivals for her affections. If Pound coined the nickname (Astafieva was his friend rather than Eliot's in the first instance) this literary allusion is possible, and, having read *The Brothers Karamazov*, Eliot might equally have come up with this formulation. Whatever the exact spelling and origin of the heroine's name, this poem serves as an interesting marker in the developing story of Eliot's engagement with Russia. Where in *Prufrock* he had been drawing upon literary sources here he was, in the first instance, responding to a real-life Russian whom he was encountering socially. Eliot's poem seems to betray very little of Astafieva's actual history, for as already mentioned in relation to *Whispers of Immortality*, Astafieva came from a well-connected family. This, however, appears to have been lost on Eliot, who simply prefers to suggest that she is morally louche and moreover superficial and almost a fake. But then, it has been observed that Eliot was actually drawn to the Ballets Russes less by the ballerinas than by the male principals. Susan Jones in *Literature, Modernism and Dance* has remarked on how Eliot praised Leonid Massine for achieving in dance the 'impersonality', which he exalted in his critical essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' of 1919, and describes him as 'unhuman, impersonal and abstract'.<sup>38</sup> These characteristics are, ironically, closer to the metaphysical forms and pure ideas with which Eliot, in 'Whispers of Immortality' contrasts the sensual and carnal Astafieva (Grishkin) with the 'Abstract Entities'. For once Eliot, the author on whom no literary allusion seems to

38 Jones, p. 234.

have been lost, seems fundamentally to have misjudged a literary allusion as it were brought to life in his own time.

If Eliot failed to respond to Astafieva, in this he was much at odds with at least one of his heroes from the Ballets Russes, Anton Dolin, who, with Alicia Markova, was to organise a fitting tribute to Astafieva, when she died in the mid-1930s, not yet seventy years old. Eliot's enthusiasm for Dolin and Massine, as well as above all for Nijinsky is in marked contrast with the attack on Astafieva. He reports of Leonid Massine 'I quite fell in love' with him' and a whole section 'The Death of Saint Narcissus' (ultimately deleted thanks to Pound) formed part of the early drafts of *The Waste Land*. It seems ironically apt (given his diffidence towards Astafieva) that Eliot should base a whole (subsequently deleted) section of *The Waste Land* on the male figure from Greek mythology who was most oblivious to the charms of the female. This section was inspired by the ballet *Narcisse*, set to music by and choreographed and danced by Vaslav Nijinsky. Eliot had the opportunity to watch it in Paris. According to Nancy Hargrove, 'Eliot's knowledge of the dance, which seems to have begun in Paris in 1911, influenced his poetry, drama, and critical ideas far more heavily than has been generally realised'<sup>39</sup> and the figure of the completely self-absorbed male dancer is at the far end of the spectrum from Astafieva with her 'coquetry'. By contrast St Narcissus is described as 'a dancer to God', forswearing the lusts of the flesh, and dedicating himself to God some years before Eliot's reconversion to Christianity, in 1926.

Thus, thanks to the Diaghilev Ballets Russes, the Russian influence appears to have persisted with Eliot into the mid-1920s, indeed he even went to the lengths in *The Criterion*, the quarterly literary journal which he had been editing since October 1922, of reasserting Russian references in *The Waste Land* which Pound had edited out prior to its first publication. Further evidence of the continuing importance of both Dostoevsky and a view of the Russian sphere in general is to be found, not in either lines deleted or added, but in the notes which Eliot appended to the poem from its first appearance. There may be no point in the poem where it is suggested

39 Nancy Hargrove, 'T. S. Eliot and the Dance', *Journal of Modern Literature* 21.1 (1997), 61–88 (p. 62).

that the 'unreal city' (variously Athens, Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria,/ Vienna, London) is identified as either Moscow or St Petersburg, yet Eliot's notes to lines 366 of the poem's concluding section 'What the Thunder Said' 'what is that sound high in the air' are the occasion for Eliot to quote, in the original German, from Hermann Hesse's then very recent essay 'Blick ins Chaos' (1920). In the English translation, by Eliot's friend and fellow contributor to *The Criterion*, Stephen Schiff (under the pseudonym Stephen Hudson), this reads:

Already half Europe, at all events half Eastern Europe, is on the road to Chaos. In a state of drunken illusion she is reeling into the abyss and, as she reels, she sings a drunken hymn such as Dmitri Karamazov sang. The insulted citizen laughs that song to scorn, the saint and seer hear it with tears.<sup>40</sup>

Earlier in the essay Hesse had said:

The ideal of the Karamazov, primeval, Asiatic, and occult, is already beginning to consume the European soul. That is what I mean by the downfall of Europe. This downfall is a return home to the mother, a turning back to Asia, to the source, to the *Faüstischen Mutter* and will necessarily lead, like every death on earth, to a new birth.<sup>41</sup>

And having identified this essence as coming from a source outside Europe, which is Oriental: 'What is that Asiatic Ideal that I find in Dostoevsky, the effect of which will be, as I see it, to overwhelm Europe?'<sup>42</sup> Hesse says that this 'Asiatic Ideal' will amount to

'the rejection of every strongly-held Ethic and Moral in favour of a comprehensive *laissez-faire*.' ... The saintly Alyosha becomes ever more worldly, the worldly brothers more saintly; and similarly the most unprincipled and unbridled of them becomes

40 Hermann Hesse, *In Sight of Chaos*, trans. Sydney Schiff (Zurich-Seldwyla-London: A Zwemmer, 1923), p. 13.

41 Ibid. p. 14.

42 Ibid. p. 14

the saintliest, the most sensitive, the most spiritual prophet of a new holiness, of a new morality, of a new mankind.<sup>43</sup>

Hesse's is a pessimistic view, albeit the process of the interaction of a decadent Europe and an invasive Russia is dynamic:

It seems, then, that the 'New Ideal' by which the roots of the European spirit is being sapped, is an entirely amoral concept, a faculty to feel the Godlike, the significant, the fatalistic, in the wickedest and in the ugliest, and even to accord them veneration and worship [...] Dangerous, emotional, irresponsible, yet conscience-haunted; soft, dreamy, cruel, yet fundamentally childish. As such one still likes to regard the 'Russian man' to-day, although, I believe, he has for a long time been on the road to becoming the European man. And this is the Downfall of Europe.<sup>44</sup>

Hesse asserts that the idea of the 'Russian' man archetype was not born with Dostoevsky, but has merely been demonstrated most effectively by this author:

Let us look at this 'Russian man' a moment. He is far older than Dostoevsky, but Dostoevsky has finally shown him to the world in all his fearful significance. The 'Russian man' is Karamazov, he is Fyodor Pavlovitch, he is Dmitri, he is Ivan, he is Alyosha. These four, different as they may appear, belong inseparably together. Together they are Karamazov, together they are the 'Russian man', together they are the approaching, the proximate man of the European crisis.<sup>45</sup>

Hesse then specifies the dichotomy between 'civilised' and 'European' on the one hand and 'Russian' and 'hysterical' on the other:

Next notice something very remarkable. Ivan in the course of the story turns from a civilised man into a Karamazov, from a European into a Russian, out of a definitely formed historical type into the unformed raw material of Destiny.<sup>46</sup>

43 Ibid. pp. 14–16.

44 Ibid. pp. 16–17.

45 Ibid. pp. 17–18.

46 Ibid. p. 18.

Hesse also identifies the phantasmagorical or delirious quality in Dostoevsky which is perhaps akin to the qualities in the first half of *Crime and Punishment* which Eliot had exploited in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*:

There is a fairy-like dream-reality about the way in which Ivan slides out of his original psychology: out of his understanding, coolness, knowledge. There is mystical truth in this sliding of the apparently solid brother into the hysterical, into the Russian, into the Karamazov-like. It is just he, the doubter, who at the end holds speech with the devil! We will come to that later on;<sup>47</sup>

but then complicates his analysis by saying that the Russian psyche in fact embraces all the extremes which can never be appreciated from the rational and moral, yet also imaginatively limited European standpoint:

So the 'Russian man' is drawn neither as the hysterical, the drunkard, the felon, the poet, the Saint, but as one with them all, as possessing all these characteristics simultaneously. The 'Russian man', Karamazov, is assassin and judge, ruffian and tenderest soul, the completest egotist and the most self-sacrificing hero. We shall not get a grasp of him from a European, from a hard and fast moral, ethical, dogmatic standpoint. In this man the outward and the inward, Good and Evil, God and Satan are united.<sup>48</sup>

Hesse goes on to account for the European-Russian (Asiatic) dichotomy in terms which take in World War I:

The 'Russian man' has long existed, he exists far outside Russia, he rules half Europe, and part of the dreaded explosion has indeed in these last years been audibly evident. It shows itself in that Europe is tired, it shows itself in that Europe wants to turn homeward, in that Europe wants rest, in that Europe wants to be recreated, reborn.<sup>49</sup>

And while highly critical of the limitations of Kaiser Wilhelm III, Hesse thinks that, though neither wise nor profound, the German autocrat nevertheless identified accurately the threat to Europe from Russia and the Orient:

47 Ibid. pp. 18–19.

48 Ibid. pp. 18–19.

49 Ibid. p. 21.

I allude to the Kaiser Wilhelm [...] he warned the European nations to guard their 'holiest possessions' against the approaching peril from the East [...] The Kaiser knew but partially the import of his words and how uncommonly right he was. He certainly did not know the Karamazovs, he had a horror of profound thought, but he had an uncannily right foreboding. The danger was coming nearer every day. That danger was the Karamazovs, the contagion from the East. What he unconsciously but rightly feared was the staggering back of the tired European spirit to the Asiatic mother.<sup>50</sup>

The quotation by Eliot in the notes to the poem, of merely the last four lines of Hesse's essay, with the image evoked of half of the European continent coming under the sway of Russia, perceived here as the 'staggering back of the tired European spirit to the Asiatic mother' casts Russia as a kind of primordial earth-mother figure, from which sophisticated Europe has distanced itself hitherto, and to which it must now, in its decadence, inevitably return. Detailed scrutiny, as above, of the Hesse essay reveals that the idea of Russia as fundamentally and inevitably Oriental and Asiatic is here expressed with unqualified force.

In 1925, Eliot's next extended poem after *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* begins with the following lines:

We are the hollow men  
 We are the stuffed men  
 Leaning together  
 Headpiece filled with straw, Alas!<sup>51</sup>

This has been interpreted in many different ways: by reference to the English tradition of burning straw effigies of the 1604 Gunpowder Plotter and would-be regicide Guy Fawkes each 5 November; to Ancient Roman rituals; and by reference to Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which Eliot had already made extensive use of in *The Waste Land*. Perhaps Eliot left the image deliberately un glossed – though the epigraph he gives *The Hollow Men* is borrowed from Conrad's 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*, which might suggest some kinship with the skulls on poles around Kurtz's hut in that tale. Claiming the authority of Eliot himself, Valerie Eliot says that he told her

50 Ibid. pp. 22–3.

51 Eliot, *Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, p. 81.

they were inspired by the figure of the puppet of that name in Stravinsky's 1909 ballet *Petrushka*. Certainly Eliot maintained a pronounced enthusiasm over two decades for Diaghilev's company, and perhaps especially for the pioneering works of Stravinsky which they performed, so such an attribution is perfectly reasonable, and on numerous occasions editorial articles in *The Criterion* praised Diaghilev's troupe. It might even be possible that this image in Eliot's poem inspired the image of the straw doll of the Moor with which Woolf, who saw Eliot regularly during this period, opens *Orlando* (although that might equally be associated with Shakespeare's *Othello*):

He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it – was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters. It was the colour of an old football, and more or less the shape of one, save for the sunken cheeks and a strand or two of coarse, dry hair, like the hair on a cocoanut. Orlando's father, or perhaps his grandfather, had struck it from the shoulders of a vast Pagan who had started up under the moon in the barbarian fields of Africa; and now it swung, gently, perpetually, in the breeze which never ceased blowing through the attic rooms of the gigantic house of the lord who had slain him.<sup>52</sup>

And when Orlando, in the company of Sasha, comes upon a performance of *Othello* it is, aptly, almost mistaken for a Punch and Judy show:

The main press of people, it appeared, stood opposite a booth or stage something like our Punch and Judy show upon which some kind of theatrical performance was going forward. A black man was waving his arms and vociferating. There was a woman in white laid upon a bed. Rough though the staging was, the actors running up and down a pair of steps and sometimes tripping, and the crowd stamping their feet and whistling, or when they were bored, tossing a piece of orange peel on to the ice which a dog would scramble for, still the astonishing, sinuous melody of the words stirred Orlando like music.<sup>53</sup>

By the mid-1920s the Diaghilev element of Russophilia was arguably on the wane, even before the early death of the impresario, and there appears also to be a move away from the emphasis upon Dostoevsky which had so dominated both Woolf and Eliot in the second and early third decades

52 Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 13.

53 *Ibid.* p. 54.

of the century. Turning to Eliot in his capacity as editor of *The Criterion*, rather than as poet, in the mid-1920s Turgenev recurs in his relationship with Russian literature. Back in the second decade Eliot had likened his own early married life to a Dostoevsky novel, but now it is Turgenev whom he alludes to in a prose piece about contemporary Britain published in February 1925. For this piece borrowed its title from one of the most canonical of Russian nineteenth-century novels, Turgenev's *On the Eve* of 1860. This novel dealt very much with the concept of creating a 'typical Russian' character in fiction, as observed by Edward Garnett, when Constance Garnett's English translation appeared 35 years later. In the introduction to the English translation of *On the Eve* (1895) Edward Garnett says:

This creation of an universal national type, out of the flesh and blood of a fat taciturn country gentleman, brings us to see that Turgenev was not merely an artist, but that he was a poet using fiction as his medium. To this end it is instructive to compare Jane Austen, perhaps the greatest English exponent of the domestic novel, with the Russian master, and to note that, while as a novelist she emerges favourably from the comparison, she is absolutely wanting in his poetic insight. How petty and parochial appears her outlook in *Emma*, compared to the wide and unflinching gaze of Turgenev. She painted most admirably the English types she knew, and how well she knew them! but she failed to correlate them with the national life; and yet, while her men and women were acting and thinking, Trafalgar and Waterloo were being fought and won. But each of Turgenev's novels in some subtle way suggests that the people he introduces are playing their little part in a great national drama everywhere around us, invisible, yet audible through the clamour of voices near us.<sup>54</sup>

This is certainly at odds with Hesse's notion of the Russian character, by reference to *The Brothers Karamazov* in 'Blick ins Chaos', or Eliot's description of his own high-pressure, almost dream-like life during wartime, which he likened to 'living in one of Dostoevsky's novels, you see, not in one of Jane Austen's.' Yet clearly, for all his use of Dostoevsky, Eliot also demonstrated the profound and lasting influence upon him of his polar opposite within Russian literature, Ivan Turgenev. Looking at Eliot's correspondence with Eleanor Hinkley on 31 December 1917, we find him recommending

54 Edward Garnett, Introduction to Ivan Turgenev, *On the Eve*, trans. Constance Garnett (London: Macmillan Company, 1920), pp. i–xvi (pp. xiii–xiv).

Turgenev to her, in company with Henry James and Stendhal: 'I have been reading Turgenev with great delight – he is one of the very greatest.'<sup>55</sup> And again on 1 April 1918:

I think you might like Turgenev. I admire him as much as any novelist, but especially in the *Sportsman's Sketches*. His method looks simple and slight, but he is a consummate master with it. A *House of Gentlefolk* is good. I come more and more to demand that novels should be well written, and perceive more clearly the virtues and defects of the Victorians.<sup>56</sup>

Here Eliot's praise 'I admire him as much as any novelist' is arguably ambiguous, since elsewhere the poet, as editor of *The Criterion*, is known to claim that prose fiction, presumably by contrast with poetry or drama – which for Eliot always had to be poetic drama – was something whose value he could only dimly appreciate, something he considered perhaps irredeemably banal: 'When prose-fiction, after its strange and millennial birth struggles, got itself born at last Dullness saw her chance and took it.'<sup>57</sup>

One of Eliot's abiding ideas, both implicitly in an essay such as 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', and explicitly in his *Criterion* editorials, is the notion of a European culture, and a common European tradition: 'The general idea is found in the continuity of the impulse of Rome to the present day. It suggests Authority and Tradition [...] It is in fact the European idea – the idea of a common culture of Western Europe.'<sup>58</sup>

When assessing the importance for Eliot of Russian culture, and in particular Russian literature, the question which inevitably arises is whether Eliot actually considered Russia to be part of Europe. The answer is ambiguous. Sometimes Eliot appears to conform with the widely held view that Russian culture is under-developed and, overall, insubstantial, at least by

55 T. S. Eliot, letter to Eleanor Hinkley, 31 December 1917, Eliot, *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, I, p. 217.

56 Eliot, letter to Eleanor Hinkley, 1 April 1918, *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, I, p. 227.

57 *The Criterion 1922–1939* (London: Faber, 1967), I.1 (1922), p. 13; quoted in D. Chinitz, *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) p. 54.

58 T. S. Eliot, 'Commentary', *The Criterion* 4. 2 (1926), 221–2 (p. 222).

comparison with ('other') European examples, such as presumably France and Germany, perhaps Italy. Here is what Eliot dogmatically asserts in a 'Commentary' (editorial) for the October 1923 edition of *The Criterion*: 'Three or four great novelists do not make a literature, though *War and Peace* is a very great novel indeed.'<sup>59</sup> However, at other points Eliot appears to be more inclined to regard Russians as belonging to the same cultural world as his own. When talking of the genetic and ethnic roots of later European culture, Eliot seems to have no problem about including Russia. For example, in the same Commentary, Eliot repeats the idea that Europeans had their racial origins in Scythia, the suggestion being that the Greek and Latin traditions share a common ancestry with the Slavs. It is possible that Eliot might have been influenced in this assertion by ideas to be found in Garnett's preface to her translation of Turgenev:

How doubly welcome that art should be which can lead us, the foreigners, thus straight to the heart of the national secrets of a great people, secrets which our own critics and diplomatists must necessarily misrepresent. Each of Turgenev's novels may be said to contain a light-bringing rejoinder to the old-fashioned criticism of the Muscovite, current up to the rise of the Russian novel, and still, unfortunately, lingering among us; but *On the Eve*, of all the novels, contains perhaps the most instructive political lesson England can learn. Europe has always had, and most assuredly England has been over-rich in those alarm-monger critics, watchdogs for ever baying at Slav cupidity, treachery, intrigue, and so on and so on. It is useful to have these well-meaning animals on the political premises, giving noisy tongue whenever the Slav stretches out his long arm and opens his drowsy eyes, but how rare it is to find a man who can teach us to interpret a nation's aspirations, to gauge its inner force, its aim, its inevitability. Turgenev gives us such clues.<sup>60</sup>

and equally in the text itself of Turgenev's novel *On the Eve*, where Shubin declares in Chapter II,

'I would have another bathe, said Shubin, 'only I'm afraid of being late. Look at the river; it seems to beckon us. The ancient Greeks would have beheld a nymph in it. But we are not Greeks, O nymph! we are thick-skinned Scythians.'  
'We have *roussalkas*', observed Bersenyev.

59 T. S. Eliot, 'Notes', *The Criterion* 2. 5 (1923), 104–5 (p. 104).

60 Edward Garnett, Introduction to *On the Eve*, p. xvi.

'Get along with your *roussalkas!* What's the use to me – a sculptor – of those children of a cold, terror-stricken fancy, those shapes begotten in the stifling hut, in the dark of winter nights? I want light, space ... Good God, when shall I go to Italy? When –'<sup>61</sup>

All of which raises the question of 'On the Eve', a title referring here not to Turgenev's canonical novel but to an original, although little known, prose work published under T. S. Eliot's name in January 1925. The T. S. Eliot Society website refers to the 1917 piece 'Eeldrop and Appleplex', published in *The Little Review*, as Eliot's only piece of prose fiction.<sup>62</sup> Yet that narrative is not in fact entirely unique in his oeuvre, for in 1925 Eliot published in *The Criterion* a short piece of prose fiction – just five or six pages – which goes under the title 'On the Eve'. Whether the piece can be considered authentic Eliot has been disputed by scholars. Behr says that it was 'written by Vivienne Eliot; Extensively revised by T. S. Eliot'<sup>63</sup> Vivien Eliot's biographer, Carole Seymour-Smith, says the piece 'appeared in the *Criterion* under T. S. Eliot's name ... but has all the marks of his wife's writing, and his editing'<sup>64</sup> Whether or not the text originated with T. S. Eliot or his wife, may be a matter of debate. Vivien made other contributions to *The Criterion* on numerous occasions, using pseudonyms (most commonly as Feiron Morris, Fanny Marlow and Felix Morrison) which surely begs the question of why she did not use a comparable *nom-de-plume* in this particular instance. Seymour-Smith takes the view 'By January 1925 Tom and Viv were writing so closely together that it was sometimes hard to tell who was the author of a piece: the January issue of *The Criterion* carried 'On The Eve: A Dialogue', whose style is characteristically Vivien's but was extensively edited by her husband [and] was published under his name.'<sup>65</sup>

61 Ivan Turgenev, *On the Eve*, trans. Constance Garnett (London: Macmillan Company, 1920), p. 16.

62 'The only piece of fiction by the adult Eliot', *Works by T. S. Eliot* <<http://www.eliotsociety.org.uk/works-by-tseliot/>> [accessed 20 September 2016].

63 Caroline Behr, *T. S. Eliot: A Chronology of His Life and Works* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 102.

64 Carole Seymour-Smith, *Painted Shadow: a Life of Vivienne Eliot* (London: Constable, 2001), p. 652.

65 Seymour-Smith, pp. 391–2.

The sketch's subheading is 'A Dialogue', but it is nonetheless given a setting and some props, which qualify it for categorisation as prose fiction rather than drama. Present are 'Horace' and 'Rose' as well as 'Alexander' and 'Agatha', who seem to be acquaintances – perhaps relatives of some sort. The reader is never told precisely. What is of importance is that they all belong to the echelons of the polite upper middle class, those who make up the guests at country house parties. So they themselves are typically British, or English, as observed by the cosmopolitan American Eliot. Although by this date married for some eight years to Vivien (who was English and may also have had a hand in this piece, as she earlier had a hand in section II 'A Game of Chess' from *The Waste Land*), Eliot had not yet either assumed British nationality or reconverted to Christianity in its Anglo-Catholic form.

But having established that the protagonists are British, there is nevertheless an emphatically Russian frame of reference to this curious little piece. First we are told that the country house guests are eating pancakes, which are of course, in the form of blinis, a traditional Russian dish. And furthermore Russia keeps obtruding into the conversation:

'But Alexander', said Agatha, continuing a discussion arising out of her country-house visit, which had begun before the arrival of the pancakes, 'What I want to know is where they keep their money. It can't be in this country or they wouldn't be trying to work up a revolution.' [...] My few bits of stuff which pay me about twopence a year are all *absolutely* unsaleable – and we all know, don't we, Alexander? that we shall be completely and utterly ruined if there is an extreme socialist government. *We* shall be destitute. But *they* won't suffer. That's obvious. They go on spending just as much, living in the lap, and yet their one interest and amusement is to pull down and shatter England.'<sup>66</sup>

And Agatha later continues,

'But I must just tell you', interrupted Agatha. 'Tilly said, the other night, "after all the Russia Loan would not have cost so much as a General Election!"' and she imitated Tilly's drawl.

'Pooh – bosh', said Horace, 'but talking of Russia, I'll tell you what old Sir Charles Allwell actually did say to me only the other night at the club' he went on eagerly,

66 T. S. Eliot, 'On the Eve', *The Criterion* 3.10 (1925), 278–81 (p. 278).

'and this'll show you, because, mind you he is an absolute Whig and they always have been for centuries – well, he said that in *his* opinion the two great menaces to civilisation were *England* and Russia.'<sup>67</sup>

Here we see the idea that conventional (European) civilisation is besieged, perhaps predictably, by Russia, depicted as a strange, wild, exotic, as it were primitive culture complicated by the development of Bolshevism since the end of World War I, but also, more insidiously, Europe is besieged from within. It is the spoiled and detached ruling class of what was still the most extensive political unit in the world at this date, the British Empire, who are also to be feared in equal measure. 'They go on spending just as much, living in the lap, and yet their one interest and amusement is to pull down and shatter England.'<sup>68</sup>

This airs the view that Russia in its present political form constitutes a threat to the European order, presumably implying that it is itself somehow non-European in nature. Through the title he has chosen Eliot is alluding to a Russian literary source, and at the same time reflecting contemporary political anxieties in Britain. This was the period of the Zinoviev Letter, now known to have been a propaganda ploy devised by the British intelligence services with the successful aim of unseating the country's first Labour government. The Letter (purporting to come from the leading Bolshevik politician Grigori Zinoviev), suggested that Labour politicians were in league with a Bolshevik Russia still, at this date, before the expulsion of Trotsky, formally dedicated to world communism and perpetual revolution. The Macdonald government lost a vote of no confidence in Parliament precipitated by its refusal to prosecute the editor of *Workers Weekly* for exhorting British soldiers never to take up arms against British workers. Just a matter of months later the General Strike was to take place. Eliot's prose piece reflects that context. It is often thought that Eliot used *The Criterion* as a mouthpiece for his own reactionary views as a

67 Eliot, 'On the Eve', p. 279.

68 Ibid. 281.

‘classicist in literature, Royalist in politics and anglo-catholic in religion,’<sup>69</sup> but that is an over-simplification and also unfair to Eliot’s record as an editor. During its seventeen years, all of them under Eliot’s editorship, *The Criterion* published authors whose work Eliot did not greatly care for, such as Aldous Huxley, E. M. Forster and Edith Sitwell, and he frequently engaged Herbert Read, even though he was a self-proclaimed anarchist (albeit not above accepting a knighthood), who had a scant regard for the term ‘culture’. Thus it cannot be said that authors who did not share Eliot’s reactionary political opinions were excluded. In fact, while, as Terry Eagleton and others have pointed out, *The Criterion*’s stance over the Spanish Civil War was ‘disinterested’ and ‘extravagantly Olympian’<sup>70</sup> and noncommittal, there are plenty of instances where fascism comes in for criticism to the same degree as communism. Eliot expresses the view that both fascism and communism in practice, whatever their virtues in theory, are failures: ‘Both Russian communism and Italian fascism seem to me to have died as political ideas, in becoming political facts.’<sup>71</sup> But the remaining question is whether Eliot regards communism, as a reality in his own time, as flawed in essence or merely vitiated by virtue of having become more Russian than Marxist-internationalist in character, which would lead back to the conclusion that a philosophy born out of the European Enlightenment – Eliot says he does not necessarily disapprove of Marx’s materialism – has been as it were de-Europeanised by Leninist Bolshevism as practised beyond what many in Europe regarded as the continent’s eastern borders, in suspiciously backward and irrational Russia. Here, within the framework of prose fiction, Eliot, for all his supposedly unbending reactionary political views, attacks both the communist elements in society and the parasitic ‘rentier’ class represented in the sketch – British society is under attack from both without and within. Gareth Reeves, in *T. S. Eliot: A Virgilian Poet* (1989), sees Eliot here attacking contemporary British political progressives, and

69 T. S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928), p. ix.

70 Terry Eagleton, ‘Nudge-Winking’, *London Review of Books*, 19 September 2002, p. 7.

71 T. S. Eliot, ‘The Literature of Fascism’, *The Criterion* 8.31 (1928), 280–90 (p. 290).

suggesting that their progressivism has merely served to undermine them. He quotes 'Alexander' in the sketch:

"They have always stood for "progress" – and the progress which they set in motion is on the point of obliterating them for ever' [...] 'They have stood for the extension of democracy – and now democracy is on the point of deposing them in favour of a new oligarchy stronger and more terrible than their own' [...] 'Constitutional government [...] is no longer possible. It does not matter how this election turns out. No election matters now. The best we can hope for, the only thing that can save us, is a dictator.'<sup>72</sup>

The dictator suggested as saviour is the first of the fascist leaders, of the Italian variety: "Good old Mussolini!" shouted Agatha.<sup>73</sup>

It is Italian fascism which is Reeves's primary interest at this date in Eliot's career. Eliot was not alone among intellectuals in Britain in turning enthusiastically to Mussolini. George Bernard Shaw, whose professed politics were as much of the Left as Eliot's were of the Right, was also enthusiastic at this date. And Reeves does not pursue the Russian literary resonances of the title given to the *Criterion* sketch. Yet in Turgenev's novel of the same name *Insarov* anticipates the idea of revolutionary politics in the context of Russia on the brink of the Crimean War. This in turn provides a model for the domestic turmoil – involving a declining Liberal party, a rising Labour party, and exploitation by the Intelligence Services of paranoia about the latter's alleged links to revolutionary Bolshevik Russia – which Eliot (who was to take British nationality the year after next) observed in his soon-to-be adoptive country.

Finally, to return to the context of the January 1925 number of *The Criterion* in which 'On the Eve' appears, it is worth noting that Russia also appears elsewhere in its pages. Samuel Koteliansky's translations of four letters by Tolstoy feature and the editorial 'Commentary' for that number, among three themes, covers two topics in which Russia and Europe are involved. The first part of the editorial is a positive welcome for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, and an expression of the wish that London may have the opportunity

72 Eliot, 'On The Eve', p. 279.

73 Ibid. p. 279.

to witness the *Sacre du printemps*; the middle section is a piece on Matthew Arnold, and especially the idea of European culture in *Culture and Anarchy*, while the third is a negative review by Eliot of Trotsky's *Problems of Life*, recently translated into English. After considering Arnold, with his central distinction between culture and anarchy, Eliot proceeds to critique the Bolshevik project, as described in Trotsky's terms:

Against Arnold and his party has arisen in the east a new prophet of culture. To the point of view of a periodical like THE CRITERION much of what has been said and written in impeachment and in defence of Soviet Russia is of minor interest. Not that it is possible, or even right for any individual to regard such matters from the point of view of pure intelligence alone; but it is well that we should all regard them from that point of view now and then. Any person, therefore, who is aware of 'culture' at all, will be aware that there are and have been various cultures, and that the difference between our own culture and alien culture is different from the difference between culture and anarchy, or culture and pseudo-culture. We may not like the notion of cannibalism or head-hunting, but that it formed part of a distinct and tenable form of culture in Melanesia is indisputable. Consequently, I was prepared to find in Trotsky's book an exposition of a culture repellent to my own disposition; but I hoped that it would be distinct and interesting. A revolution staged on such a vast scale, amongst a picturesque, violent, and romantic people; involving such disorder, rapine, assassination, starvation, and plague should have something to show for the expense: a new culture horrible at the worst, but in any event fascinating. Such a cataclysm is justified if it produces something really new: *Un [sic] oasis d'horreur dans un désert d'ennui*.<sup>74</sup>

Having conceded that the Russian Revolution might in some degree have been conceivably justified, for all its excesses, if it had represented something culturally new, Eliot goes on to say that it has in practice proved nothing of the sort:

It is not justified by the dreary picture of Montessori schools, crèches, abstinence from swearing and alcohol, a population warmly clad (or soon to be warmly clad) and with its mind filled (or in process of being filled) with nineteenth century superstitions about Nature and her forces. Yet such phenomena as this are what Mr Trotsky proudly presents as the outcome of his revolution; these form his 'culture'. Here is the

74 T. S. Eliot, 'Light from the East', *The Criterion* 3.10 (1925), 160–4 (p. 163).

Eastern prophet of the new age speaking in the smuggest tones of the Bourgeoisie: 'The cinema amuses, educates, strikes the imagination with images, and liberates you from the need of crossing the Church door.' It remains only to observe that there is no mention of Mr Trotsky's Enchiridion of Culture or such an institution as the ballet; and that his portrait shows a slight resemblance to the face of Mr Sidney Webb.<sup>75</sup>

Leaving aside Eliot's dismissal of the reality of Bolshevism in practice as being worthy of the 'smuggest ... Bourgeoisie', what is telling here are the traditional characteristics still ascribed to the Russian people, 'picturesque, violent, and romantic', which suggests that Eliot conforms to the traditional stereotype favoured in Britain in previous centuries. While he may enthuse about Diaghilev's Ballets Russes as a manifestation of Russian high culture, that is an émigré institution, and Eliot clearly considers that Russians *en masse* in Russia itself remain benighted and backward.

Coming after the youthful interest in Dostoevsky as one of the influences upon *Prufrock* as early as 1911, this brief and obscure piece of prose fiction by Eliot, 'On the Eve', represents an interesting nod in the direction of Turgenev. The allusion intended by the appropriation of Turgenev's title is presumably to suggest a doomed social class on the brink of a cataclysm. Turgenev's flawed characters, the pampered serf-owners whose days are numbered – Elena's egotistical and adulterous father, for example – teeter on the brink of the Crimean War, which would bring about the Emancipation. Eliot in the same vein gives us Agatha and Alexander, living off their dividends, fearing that the reforming Liberals, still at this date given their old label of Whigs, are fatally disabling the established social order, while an additional, external threat comes from Russian Bolshevism. This is quite closely tied to the political and economic circumstances of the first half of the 1920s as regards Russo–British relations. Lloyd George, as leader of a coalition after World War I, had been more conciliatory towards the fledgling Bolshevik regime than was Churchill, very much the instigator of attempts to keep Britain involved in the Russian Civil War on the side of the Whites. It might have been possible to reach some form of rapprochement with the Bolsheviks at the Treaty of Genoa, if the Germans

75 Ibid. p. 163.

and Bolsheviks, repeating their form in 1918 with the Brest-Litovsk treaty, had not agreed the terms of the Treaty of Rapallo on their own independent initiative. In 1924, however, following huge electoral gains the Labour Party, aided by full male and, by the end of the decade, full female suffrage, was in the process of displacing the Liberals as the radical alternative to the Conservatives. It was the socialist Ramsay MacDonald, admittedly as the leader of a coalition rather than an out-and-out Labour government, who gave diplomatic recognition to the newly declared Soviet Union, and agreed to lend the Soviets £30 million on condition that outstanding debts to British creditors from during and before World War I were acknowledged. This is the 'Russia loan' to which the chattering middle-class denizens of Eliot's prose piece refer. There is a blurring of the enemy without (Russia) and the enemy within (the decadent and fatally weakened English ruling class, their days at the helm of a world empire surely numbered) which is very close to Hesse's analysis of Europe's malaise after World War I in the light of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. At the same time Turgenev is perhaps a more apt Russian author as a role model. After all, Dostoevsky had been a diehard Slavophile, who asserted Russia's cultural (and almost theological) exceptionalism. While Dostoevsky's emphasis on sin and expiation might come to suit the later Eliot of the 1930s and 1940s, by which time he was producing explicitly Christian poetry (*Four Quartets*) and drama which became ever more neo-classical in a certain sense, in another way he and the Russian novelist are diametrically opposite. It is hard to imagine that Dostoevsky, who was deeply suspicious of the Poles as a Roman Catholic people, undermining the orthodoxy of pan-Slavism, would have been happy to accept Eliot's adoptive Anglo-Catholicism. By contrast 'On the Eve', with its allusion to Turgenev, makes much more sense, as an aspect of Russian culture to be embraced by Eliot. For in many ways Turgenev ought to have been the Russian writer *par excellence* Eliot might have been expected to emulate. Both were cosmopolitans and expatriates, and both were committed to an ideal of universal sophisticated culture rather than any crude nationalism. Yet, as will be seen below, in the longer term it was still Dostoevsky to whom Eliot was to return as his preeminent Russian influence.

The nineteen thirties saw Eliot move away from a central focus upon poetry as he experimented with drama. In their commentary on Eliot's poems, Ricks and McCue indicate that Eliot professed a reverence for Chekhov:

Dostoevski's *Plan of the novel*, 'The Life of a Great Sinner' was published in the last issue of the *Criterion* in Oct 1922 along with *The Waste Land*. TSE to Enid Faber, 24 Feb 1938 of *The Family Reunion*: 'The tragedy, as with my Master, Tchechov, is as much for the people who have to go on living, as for those who die. And I may urge you ... to go and see St. Denis' superb production of *Three Sisters* ... the best production of a great play that I have seen for a long time.' *Hodin* reported TSE in conversation: 'what Russia has given to the West is a peculiar – peculiar, that is, to Russian – spiritual point of view, which is something one is very much aware of in the great Russian novelists', *Horizon* Aug 1945.<sup>76</sup>

But it has to be said that this reverence for Chekhov does not show prominently in Eliot's own plays. As regards dramatic form and dramatic technique Eliot cannot be said to be following a primarily Russian model here, for Eliot's verse dramas, boasting in at least two cases a chorus (*Murder In the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*) are far removed from the greatest Russian dramatist, whom Woolf had praised for eschewing formulaic structure and cultivating an inconclusive mood (see Chapter 7). In all cases after *Murder in the Cathedral* the plays are consciously modelled upon classical originals from the Ancient World – Aeschylus's *Choephoroi* (*Family Reunion*), Euripides's *Alcestis* (*The Cocktail Party*), Plautus and Terence in *The Confidential Clerk* and Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* (*The Elder Statesman*). Moreover, all Eliot's plays are written in verse rather than prose. But beyond these formal aspects, in terms of the spiritual experience of the central hero in each of the plays, there persists a clear parallel with Dostoevsky. By the time Eliot produced these plays he had reconverted to Christianity, and this idea of reconversion – so emphatically a part of *Crime and Punishment* and other works of Dostoevsky – is manifestly present in Eliot's plays. Harry (Lord Monchensey), in *The Family Reunion* (1939), returning to his ancestral home after a disastrous marriage which ends in

76 Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, I, p. 647.

the controversial death of his wife, makes his first entry complaining of the difficulty of believing that the world around him is real, and greeting his assembled uncles and aunts with dismay: 'Changed? Nothing changed? How can you say that nothing is changed? You all look so withered and young.'<sup>77</sup>

His uncles' and aunts' conversation at times closely mimics that of the earlier 'On the Eve' piece – for example, in response to a press report of a motor accident involving one of the younger sons, Arthur (who evokes the novels of P. G. Wodehouse) Harry's uncle Charles says; 'This is what the Communists make capital out of.'<sup>78</sup> However, Harry himself is the typically alienated hero of a Dostoevsky novel, and like Raskolnikov he suffers delusions which make him think the world unreal. When, having described the death by drowning of his wife on board ship, he is reassured by his uncle Charles 'Your conscience can be clear.' Harry responds,

It goes a good deal deeper  
Than what people call their conscience; it is just the cancer  
That eats away the self. I knew how you would take it.  
First of all, you isolate the single event  
As something so dreadful that it couldn't have happened,  
Because you could not bear it. So you must believe  
That I suffer from delusions. It is not my conscience,  
Not my mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in.<sup>79</sup>

Also like Raskolnikov, by the end of the play Harry has been reconverted to Christianity. He makes his exit: 'I must follow the bright angels',<sup>80</sup> forswearing the duties of his ancestral home Wishwood, determined to become some sort of Christian missionary, albeit accompanied on his evangelising work by his valet Downing. Celia Coplestone, the heroine of Eliot's next play, *The Cocktail Party*, does something not dissimilar, and we later hear

77 T. S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), p. 25.

78 Ibid. p. 89.

79 Ibid. p. 29.

80 Ibid. p. 107.

that she has been crucified by those she was seeking to convert.<sup>81</sup> This is all extreme and almost fundamentalist stuff in the manner of Dostoevsky, the scourge of a godless world. The debt to Dostoevsky is made patent in a speech delivered towards the end of *The Family Reunion*, in which Agatha, an Oxbridge academic and Harry's aunt, says,

What we have written is not a story of detection,  
Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.<sup>82</sup>

Agatha, having once had an affair with the hero Harry Monchensey's father, has spent

Thirty years of solitude,  
Alone among women in a woman's college,  
Trying no to dislike women.<sup>83</sup>

But although this might suggest that we are far removed from the wistful urbanity of Turgenev, while Eliot may have been inspired by Dostoevsky in theory, perhaps things worked out rather differently in practice. A 1949 review of Eliot's third play *The Cocktail Party* reads as follows: 'The play comes from a mind as acute as Sir Isaac Newton's, that wishes to write like Dostoevsky, and succeeds at its best but not its most ambitious in doing as well as Jane Austen.'<sup>84</sup> Perhaps in that early contrast between Dostoevsky and Austen in the 1917 letter to Eleanor Hinkley, Eliot was closer than he realised to the truth. This is of interest as regards both Eliot's motives for evoking Russian literature and the actual contemporary reception which his drama received in the English-speaking world (admittedly in America rather than Britain), and in consequence gives some indication of the degree which by this later, just post-World War II period, Russia did or did not

81 'From what we know of local practices, it would seem that she must have been crucified' (T. S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party* (London: Faber, 1950), p. 169).

82 Eliot, *The Family Reunion*, p. 97.

83 Ibid. p. 108.

84 *The Sunday Times* (7 May 1950); quoted in Mildred A. Martin, *A Half Century of Eliot Criticism; An Annotated Bibliography of Books and articles in English 1916-1965* (Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1973), p. 163.

continue to represent cultural capital. Back in 1895 Edward Garnett could claim Turgenev's superiority to Austen, because she lacked the Russian's 'poetic insight'; in 1919 Virginia Woolf reinforced the Dostoevsky–Austen polarity; now Eliot, though he had consciously endeavoured to fashion 'poetic' drama in the twentieth century, was judged by at least one contemporary reviewer to have tried to emulate Dostoevsky and succeeded only in calling Austen to mind.

The prose piece 'On the Eve' from 1925 shows Eliot at a critical juncture, balancing between the twin Russian influences of Turgenev and Dostoevsky. It is even possible that Eliot was put in mind of these two canonical Russian novelists by the translations which Koteliansky made for the same edition of *The Criterion* from four letters exchanged between Leo Tolstoy and the critic N. N. Strakhov in the 1880s, where the topic of conversation is Dostoevsky. In the first letter Tolstoy praises *The House of the Dead* in the highest terms, 'I do not know a better book in the whole new literature including Poushkin,'<sup>85</sup> but by the end, after Dostoevsky's death, Tolstoy reins in his enthusiasm, stating that he was, as a writer, vitiated by a fatal 'kink' by comparison with the more reliable Turgenev, speaking of Dostoevsky's 'exaggerated importance' and saying that by contrast Turgenev 'will outlive Dostoevsky, and not for his artistry, but because he is without a kink.'<sup>86</sup>

In his later work Eliot was to find common ground with Dostoevsky, chiefly for the element of redemption through religion which the latter's novels feature, notably in *Crime and Punishment* and in *The Brothers Karamazov*, but at this date, in the mid-1920s before his own religious reconversion to Christianity in its Anglo-Catholic rather than Unitarian form, he appears to have been equally under the influence of Turgenev, who was a cosmopolitan by contrast with the vision of 'Holy Russia' nationalism to which Dostoevsky was closer. And at this date, in the mid-1920s, it seems clear that Eliot still subscribed to the view, expounded earlier in this paper, that the Russians collectively were a 'picturesque, violent and

85 S. S. Koteliansky, 'A Few Extracts from Letters Exchanged Between Leo Nicolayevich Tolstoy and N. N. Strakhov', *The Criterion* 3.11 (1925), 164–9 (p. 164).

86 Ibid. 169.

romantic people'.<sup>87</sup> But when his career is viewed overall, the Russian influence upon Eliot appears to have fluctuated significantly between the poles represented by Turgenev and Dostoevsky.

As with Woolf and Lawrence (the two writers in this survey closest to him in age and also in terms of technical innovation), Eliot continued to write after coming through a period of intense interest in, and exploitation of, the Russian myth (in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*), and, as Woolf was to do a little later, in the 1930s, moved away from the great Russian novelist of alienation and crisis, avoiding Dostoevsky's didacticism, towards Turgenev. Perhaps Eliot might have gone on to make more of Turgenev in the mid-1920s, had he not embraced Christianity at this point. Certainly Turgenev as cosmopolitan émigré (not accidentally, perhaps, a friend of Eliot's precursor as adoptive European, Henry James) should logically have provided Eliot with a plausible model to follow. But in the event, after this brief flirtation, evoking Turgenev in 1925, it was the example of Dostoevsky which was to prove more lasting in his case, and to constitute a renewed source of cultural capital for the American poet. It would be wrong to over-represent the Russian component in Eliot – clearly the allure of writers from other traditions, such as the Classical Greek tragedians and Dante, can be argued to be more sustained. Nevertheless, Eliot definitely responded to the Russophilia movement which coincided with his emergence as a writer, and also returned to those same early themes and approaches found in Russian literature later in his career.

This set Eliot apart in some degree from the other writers covered in this book. For Eliot alone, Russian literature continued to function as cultural capital throughout the period when he was at his most influential as an opinion former (beyond his own creative work) at the helm of *The Criterion*. For Barrie, Wells and Woolf (Lawrence, of course, died in 1930) it is clear that after 1930 the myth of Russia was fading in its power, even as the Soviet State gained an identity wholly at odds with the myth, and the latter thus became an overworked seam. Nonetheless, at a deeper level the years of intense engagement had undoubtedly wrought a fundamental

87 Eliot, 'Light from the East', p. 163.

change in each of them, and this in turn, because of their standing, influenced public opinion in Britain. None of the writers here expresses this more revealingly than Galsworthy, who was acutely aware that the image of Russia projected from the literary classics was 'a Russia of the past', 'perhaps only the crust of that Russia of the past – now split and crumbled beyond repair'. Yet he thought that he, as well as the entire generation of British readers, were 'extremely fortunate to have such a supreme picture of the vanished fabric',<sup>88</sup> for above all it provided an indispensable initiation into the Russian mind-set and Russian aesthetics. By opening up new cultural avenues that surpassed the field of literary conventions, it assisted in introducing the Russian viewpoint to British understanding, and in shaping a new conception of the self, enriched by a different cultural perspective. 'The amazing direct and truthful revelations of the Russian masters', he wrote, have

let me, I think, into some secrets of the Russian soul, so that the Russians I have met seem rather clearer to me than men and women of other foreign countries. For their construing I have been given what schoolboys call a crib. Only a fool pretends to knowledge – the heart of another is surely a dark forest; but the heart of a Russian seems to me a forest less dark than many.<sup>89</sup>

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

89 Galsworthy, 'Englishman and Russian', p. 64.