

Introduction

Part I: 'They, if anything, can redeem our civilisation'¹

Knowledge of Russian culture in Britain grew slowly in the nineteenth century, then rapidly in the first decades of the twentieth; this period has, therefore, always been a popular topic of research, conducted largely from a chronological and historical perspective and with regard to its most prominent practitioners. So far little (if any) attention has been paid to the analysis of the deeper structural changes in the reception of Russian culture in Britain brought forth by this wave of Russophilia in the pre-World War I years. Still less effort has been made to reflect upon whether this quantitative growth of interest in and exposure to Russian literature and art facilitated a qualitative shift in the framework of perception, affecting the mode of thinking of the contemporary British cultural elite, as well as the emerging notion of modernist art.

This book moves into that underexplored territory of research, suggesting an interdisciplinary approach to the critical appraisal of the reception of Russia in Britain by examining it through the structural framework of modern socio-political theories of Edward Said and Pierre Bourdieu. The idea of Russia or the Russian myth projected by the British constitutes the main focus of our examination. It will be argued that all the way through to the turn of the twentieth century, the representation of Russia in Britain largely falls within the framework of Orientalism – the concept developed by Edward Said in his eponymous work of 1978, in which he exposes the depiction of non-Western cultures as politically charged fabrications of the

1 Edward Marsh, 'Memoir', in *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke: with a Memoir* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1918), pp. xi–clix (p. lxxvii).

European imagination, characterised by an essentially Eurocentric, imperialistic, or civilisatory (in the case of Russia) approach. Following Said's thesis on the significance of literary scholarship in the formation of the Orientalistic viewpoint, we shall look more closely at the post-1910 years with the objective of establishing whether the unprecedented burgeoning of translations from Russian literature in these decades, as well as the exceptional interest in this subject among the British cultural elite, had a crucial impact on and led to a radical change in the configuration of the paradigm of Russian reception. One of the potential effects of this change could be the major shift in the signifying function of the icon: from Russia as the Orientalistic epitome of 'barbaric splendour' towards an emblem deployed to connote British intellectual prestige, a valuable artistic commodity translated into the foreign context, or a fashionable contribution to cultural capital, understood in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the term.²

Some attempt should be made to specify our approach to interpreting this signifying function of the icon, which effectively sheds more light on the way in which the notion of the Russian myth is employed for the purposes of our examination. This approach is rooted in imagology, or representation studies, concerning structural analysis of discursive articulation of national stereotyping – the form of 'literary sociology' in the domain of image making.³ Recent advances in this area are focused on the so-called constructivist perspective, considering any image of national character as culturally constructed within the framework of the given socio-historical context. This ties in well with modern social studies of national identity that have moved away from the 'realness' of national character as explanatory model, and towards an increasingly pluralistic and culturally mediated projection – a state of mind rather than a deterministic expression

- 2 Pierre Bourdieu offers the concept of cultural capital to describe how, within a given socio-economic setting, the knowledge of certain literary texts (or art, music and so forth) can be used to assert and communicate one's social and cultural distinctions (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984)).
- 3 Manfred Beller and Joseph Theodoor Leerssen, Introduction to *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joseph Theodoor Leerssen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. xii–xvi (p. xiii).

of the given.⁴ The latter includes self-image, as well as the image of the other, which suggests yet another inference to be reviewed. In the light of this constructivist perspective, the representation of ‘the other’ should be effectively treated as a particular type of ‘intertext’ – a dynamic product of cultural interference between the ‘auto’ and ‘hetero’ image, shaped by the proclivities of a specific historical context. Considering this, as well as the fact that the impact of the context can never be discarded, the very notion of the discursive image turns out to be intrinsically linked to the semantics of a myth (see *Oxford Dictionary*’s definition of myth as a ‘widely held but false belief or idea’⁵) – hence, the use of this term adopted in the course of our discussion, which essentially concerns the projection of the myth of Russia constructed by the British.

This work builds on a rich field of previous (albeit in some cases now dated) research which was effective in highlighting a historiographic approach to Anglo-Russian cultural interaction; the reception of canonical Russian authors in Britain; and the distinctive body of relatively recent scholarship which has expanded the study of literary influence on specific modernist authors.⁶ It also draws on two newly published interdisciplinary

- 4 Joep Leerssen, ‘Imagology: History and method’, in Manfred Beller and Joseph Theodor Leerssen, eds, *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 17–32 (p. 25); Hans Manfred Bock, ‘Nation als vorgegebene oder vorgestellte Wirklichkeit? Anmerkungen zur Analyse fremdnationaler Identitätszuschreibung’, in Ruth Florack, ed., *Nation als Stereotyp: Fremdwahrnehmung und Identität in deutscher und französischer Literatur* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001), pp. 11–36 (p. 34).
- 5 *Oxford Dictionary of English* <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/myth> [accessed 2 September 2016].
- 6 Among others, the first category includes Dorothy Brewer, *East West Passage: A Study in Literary Relationship* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954); Gilbert Phelps, *The Russian Novel in English Fiction* (London: Hutchinson’s University Library, 1956); Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev, Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); the second – Royal Gettmann, *Turgenev in England and America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1941); Glyn Turton, *Turgenev and the Context of English Literature 1850–1900* (London: Routledge, 1992); Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky and English Modernism, 1900–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); John Burt Foster (Jr), *Transnational Tolstoy: Between the West and the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013);

volumes, *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture*, edited by Anthony Cross (Open Book Publishers, 2012) and *Russia in Britain, 1880–1940: From Melodrama to Modernism*, edited by Rebecca Beasley and Philip Ross Bullock (Oxford University Press, 2013), which shifted attention to the contribution of institutions (libraries, publishing houses, theatre) in the promoting and disseminating of Russian literature and art.

This book aims at taking the discussion a step further. Given that the process of cultural representation is determined not by empirical reality (how people ‘really are’), but rather by the way in which the discourse regarding it is constructed – on the basis of *vraisemblance* rather than *vérité*, to evoke the neo-Aristotelian juxtaposition, then the ease with which the audience can reciprocate the purport of the projected image should be called into play. In other words, the audience’s acceptance of representation as valid plays a cardinal role in the process of image formation; and in this sense, the reputation of the so-called promoters of the image must not be overlooked. This aspect constitutes one of the key points of our study, which focuses attention on those representatives of the British cultural elite whose talent, though not explicitly and consistently devoted to the complex task of doctrinal formulation, nonetheless gained a significant mastery over the minds of their readers, and attained such a degree of public recognition as to turn institutional practices into effective mediators of their personal aesthetics, their cultural theories and artistic points of view.

The reputational currents of the 1920s – the leanings and opinions of contemporary readers were central for the rationale of our literary selection. In 1929, the readers of the *Manchester Guardian* were asked to opine on the ‘Novelists Who May Be Read in A. D. 2029’ (see Figure 1).⁷ Coming out on top in this century hence popularity contest was John Galsworthy, who defeated H. G. Wells (the runner up), Arnold Bennett and Rudyard

and the third – George J. Zytaruk, *D. H. Lawrence’s response to Russian Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971); Joanna Woods, *Katerina: The Russian World of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Penguin, 2001); Roberta Rubenstein, *Virginia Woolf and the Russian Point of View* (London: Palgrave, 2009).

7 ‘Novelists Who May Be Read in A. D. 2029’, *Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1929, p. 16.

Kipling by a large margin. J. M. Barrie was in fifth position, followed by a curious for the modern eye medley of authors, which included G. B. Shaw (in eighth place), D. H. Lawrence (twelfth) and Virginia Woolf just about managing to get in 'the first thirty'.

their fame or their significance. Working on a simple scheme of P.R. arrived at the following list of which represents the popular choice (the votes are added in each case).

Galsworthy	1,180
Wells	933
Bennett	654
Kipling	455
Barrie	286
Walpole	233

which the only thing worth marking the high position obtained by

After these followed a curious medley of authors:

Kaye-Smith	198	Brett Young	25
George Moore	165	"Q"	24
Bernard Shaw	110	Edgar Wallace ..	21
Conan Doyle	101	Virginia Woolf .	21
R. H. Mottram ...	79	Margaret Kennedy	18
John Buchan	63	Compton	
D. H. Lawrence .	61	McKenzie	16
Chesterton	60	Ian Hay	16
Aldous Huxley ..	50	Clemence Dane ...	15
Hall Caine	48	Belloc	14
Masefield	46	Stephen McKenna	13
Locke	46	Rebecca West ...	13
Rose Macaulay . .	41	Baroness Orczy ...	13
Phillipotts ... * ..	38	Jeffrey Farnol . .	12
E. M. Forster ...	37	H. M. Tomlinson .	10
Philips Gibbs . .	26	A. E. W. Mason	10
Warwick Deeping	25		

Figure 1. 'Novelists Who May Be Read in A. D. 2029', *Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1929.

History does not seem to have been on the side of many of these writers, and certain nominations may now be largely regarded as a sheer whim of

literary fashion. This opinion poll, however, did give us a clearer idea for comprising a quintessential (though by no means comprehensive) list of trend-makers in Russian reception. Bearing in mind the evolution of the canon, as well as the authors' impact on the modern cultural perspective, we tried to highlight the individuals who were instrumental for the issues of institutional transmission of Russian culture, who, having secured their position as major socio-cultural opinion-makers, became pivotal for configuring a particular type of the Russian image, shifting attitudes and paving new ways towards canon formation.

The selection includes John Galsworthy and H. G. Wells – two consecutive presidents of the British P. E. N. Club, the oldest human rights and literary organisation, known for its active agitation for freedom of expression; J. M. Barrie, a leading dramatist at the time, whose contribution to the configuration of the institution of the contemporary British theatre of the early twentieth century is difficult to overestimate (today known exclusively for *Peter Pan*, but at the time equally famous for plays addressing class – *The Admirable Crichton*, or gender – *The Twelve-Pound Look*); D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf (one of the key-members of the Bloomsbury group) and T. S. Eliot (in this period editor of *The Criterion*) – pioneers of British modernism, who, being united by an abiding belief in the enlightening mission of arts and culture, exerted a seminal influence on literature and aesthetics, as well as on modern attitudes towards pacifism, sexuality and women's rights. This, of course, is not to say that these writers have ever had a direct impact on or brought about social and political transformation; but it was not uncommon for their contemporaries to see them as the consciousness and spirit of the age: 'The England of today is in part a Shaw-made and a Wells-made democracy', as Lady Rhondda put it in 1930.⁸

Further to the point, the use of the term cultural capital in the title is of considerable significance for the objectives and outcomes of our examination. We aspire to evoke explicitly Pierre Bourdieu's concept, as it provides a crucial mode of understanding not only the general mechanisms of cultural

8 Margaret Rhondda, 'Shaw's Women', *Time and Tide*, 7 March 1930, pp. 300–1.

reception, but also the differential, and in certain respects modernising, function of the Russian paradigm in the cultural space of early twentieth-century Britain. When analysing the configuration of this paradigm within the framework of the British cultural context, we try to go deeper than the simple binaries of the literary and artistic impact, and focus on the conceptual avenues through which the idea of 'the exotic other' was appropriated and internalised in the artistic world of the British authors. The intention is to go into such areas of fictional and poetic creation that may generate other configurations of and perspectives on the notion of 'the real', and to expand the boundaries of one's own familiar self. By taking such a multifaceted analytical approach to the study of Russian reception in Britain, the book aims not only at placing it in line with the current state of pan-European debate on early twentieth-century culture, but also at casting new light on the British perceptions of modernism, as a transcultural artistic movement, and the ways in which the literary interaction with the myth of Russia shaped and deepened these cultural views.

Olga Soboleva

Part II: 'Prose and verse have been regulated by the same caprice that cuts our coats and cocks our hats'⁹

This study began with reference to Edward Said's seminal work of 1978, *Orientalism*, and it is perhaps appropriate, therefore, to make further reference to this writer, as much in his capacity as editor and literary scholar as cultural theorist. It is fitting that Said, so much associated with the concept of Orientalism, made his name with research on a Slav writer exiled to the West, Joseph Conrad, who then went on to write memorably of the Far East, and especially with the work of Rudyard Kipling. For, although he does not examine the novel in depth in *Orientalism*, Kipling's novel *Kim* (1901) features at length and crucially in Said's later work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), and in between Said wrote a preface to and edited the same novel in 1987. This work, from the beginning of the twentieth century, conveniently foregrounds a number of the themes covered in the present study. For of course *Kim* not only deals with the coming of age of a white Briton in the Raj, but also culminates in the young hero's involvement in the so-called Great Game, outwitting the agents of Tsarist Russia in their attempts to undermine the British presence in the Indian subcontinent, and in consequence the image of Russia entertained by the West at the turn of the twentieth century comes into play. Moreover, although a Briton, the novel's hero is not English. Christened Kimball O'Hara he is in fact of Irish descent, and furthermore not just Irish but Irish Catholic. As such, just as Conrad was both a victim of Tsarist Russian expansionism in Poland (the reason for his exile in Western Europe) and yet an exponent of British colonialism in Africa and the Far East, Kim likewise has a double identity, as both an instrument of triumphal British imperialism and yet equally a member of the Celtic diaspora, those Irish who were marginalised in Britain after the putting down of the 1798 attempted rebellion led to the

9 Isaac Disraeli, 'Literary Fashions' (1791), in Isaac Disraeli, ed., *Curiosities of Literature* (Boston, MA: Lilly, Wait, Colman and Holden, 1833), III, 35–8 (p. 35).

Act of Union and the imposition of direct rule from Westminster. Said is notable among commentators in emphasising the precise origins of his colonialist: 'Kim, after all, is both Irish and of an inferior social caste; in Kipling's eyes this enhances his candidacy for service.'¹⁰ In Said's work the British Empire is not simply the 'English Empire'. As Said says,

That Kim himself is both an Irish outcast boy and later an essential player in the British Secret Service Great Game suggests Kipling's uncanny understanding of the workings and managing control of societies. According to Turner [...] societies can be neither rigidly run by 'structures' nor completely overrun by marginal, prophetic, and alienated figures, hippies or millenarians; there has to be an alternation, so that the sway of one is enhanced or tempered by the inspiration of the other. The liminal figure helps to maintain societies, and it is this procedure that Kipling enacts in the climactic moment of the plot and the transformation of Kim's character.¹¹

The situation which evolves in *Kim* does not simply involve a distinction between white British colonialists and the 'Oriental' Indians they are ruling. The British themselves are motley, recalling Defoe's reference to a 'mongrel race'.¹² And a fourth force enters the equation. As Said observes,

The French-speaking Russian agents admit that in India 'we have nowhere left our mark yet', but the British know they have, so much so that Hurree, that self-confessed 'Oriental' is agitated by the Russians' conspiracy on behalf of the Raj, not his own people. When the Russians attack the lama and rip apart his map, the defilement is metaphorically of India itself, and Kim corrects this defilement later.¹³

In terms of the Orientalist categorisation which Said was to bring to such prominence in literary scholarship, here, at the very beginning of the twentieth century Russia is still being depicted as bogeyman, and it is still possible to talk of Russophobia. It is a measure of how prevalent the Russophilia vogue was to become later during the same decade that in a bestseller from 1901 such a depiction could still be offered.

10 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 166.

11 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 170.

12 Daniel Defoe, *The True Born Englishman* (London: A. Cleugh, 1810), p. 1.

13 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 193.

The Irish were, of course, not the only participants in the Celtic diaspora under way during the great age of Empire. The Welsh were dispersed by economic forces during the Industrial Revolution (those in the former British Empire today claiming Welsh descent exceed the population of present day Wales.) Scots too were marginalised and dispersed after the Act of Proscription of 1746. In 1745 the Scotch military uprising under Bonnie Prince Charlie against English rule not only rallied the clans against the English presence in Scotland but resulted in an invasion of England itself, repulsed only as far south as Derby before eventual defeat at Culloden the following year. The Scotch threat had been taken so seriously that many of the leaders were executed or sent to the penal colonies overseas, and the wearing of tartan, and even the playing of bagpipes was banned by law. The local Gaelic language used by the clans was marginalised, sent into a decline from which it never recovered. Settlements were given English names, such as Fort Augustus and Fort William. Scotland was even widely referred to in England (and by some Scots) as 'North Britain'. Yet, having been anathematised as a threat within living memory, by the late eighteenth century features of Celtic identity were allowed to reappear, and even became fashionable. The Prince Regent wore tartan at an official visit to Scotland in 1822 stage managed by Sir Walter Scott, whose Waverley novels such as *Rob Roy* (1817) had been sentimentalising and glamourising Scotch identity. By the end of the 1820s Felix Mendelssohn, to become Queen Victoria's favourite among composers of the day, was at work on his *Scottish Symphony*, similarly inspired by a romantic vision of Scotland, and by 1852 Balmoral Castle had been built and become the British Royal Family's preferred holiday residence, though they were arguably just as German as Mendelssohn. In the 1850s one of the first tea plantations to be established in India by the British was the Darjeeling Bannockburn Estate. That it should be named after the most famous battle where the Scots defeated the English, in 1314, and not Culloden, is a measure of the degree to which Scottishness had become something which could be flirted with safely in the realm of image-making, a threat long since neutralised in the real world.

Sir Walter Scott to a large extent was instrumental in bringing to the fore the idea of Scottishness in fiction written in English, and this persisted

at a later date in much of the work of Robert Louis Stevenson. In his *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), the elder of two sons of the laird, a Jacobite, is forced to flee after Culloden, yet subsequently becomes active in India as part of the British Empire. One of the authors in this survey, J. M. Barrie, was writing in the same vein as Stevenson (who reacted to his work), when he produced his novel *The Little Minister* in 1891, and still harking back to it in 1931 with *Farewell Miss Julie Logan*. For that matter, Lydia Lopokova, inspiration for Barrie's *The Truth about the Russian Dancers*, was descended on her maternal side from a Scotch engineer who had several generations before emigrated to St Petersburg.

This trajectory from genuine sense of threat and wild, uncultured otherness in Celtic identity, in the mid-eighteenth century, to 'safe' and 'tamed' yet still thrilling glamour in the early nineteenth century in many ways parallels the transformation of the image enjoyed by Russia in the West in the period from the Crimean War through to the early decades of the twentieth century. Within just a few decades Russia went from being a military enemy of Britain (whether in 1854 in the Crimea, or at the turn of the twentieth century in north-west India) to a country whose literature, music, folk dress and above all ballet caught the British imagination, and became a distinct style, perhaps even *the* national style to be affected in fashionable British society. Tennyson, in *The Charge of the Heavy Brigade*, inspired by Balaklava, referred to the Russian army as 'the dark-muffled Russian crowd', which 'Folded its wings from the left and the right, / And roll'd them around like a cloud' and is described, using a tellingly Oriental word, redolent of the Mongol legacy, as the 'Russian hordes'. Yet even at this date in the Epilogue to the same poem Tennyson anticipated the later change in attitude towards Russia:

Slav, Teuton, Kelt, I count them all
 My friends and brother souls,
 With all the peoples, great and small,
 That wheel between the poles.¹⁴

14 Alfred Tennyson, *Poems and Plays* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 529.

That transformation was subsequently helped (but not enabled in the first instance) by political rapprochement. In 1874 Tennyson could make the following declaration, celebrating the marriage of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh to the Tsar's daughter Maria Alexandrovna:

The son of him with whom we strove for power
 Whose will is lord thro' all his world-domain –
 Who made the serf a man, and burst his chain –
 Has given our Prince his own imperial Flower,
Alexandrovna,
 And welcome, Russian flower, a people's pride,
 To Britain, when her flowers begin to blow!¹⁵

Russian culture was in vogue in Britain and in Western Europe considerably before the signing of the Triple Entente in 1908 made the enemies of the Crimean War, Russia, France and Britain allies against contemporary German expansionism. Indeed, this political *rapprochement* with the absolutist Tsarist regime caused difficulties for many on the radical end of the political spectrum (strongly represented in British artistic circles). Russophobia persisted, and surfaced in episodes such as the Dogger Bank Incident of 1904, when the Russian Baltic fleet, en route for Vladivostok, fired on and killed British trawler men, having mistaken them for the Japanese navy. A diplomatic crisis occurred, which briefly threatened to escalate, before being successfully averted.

At times Russophilia could become superficial and lend itself to parody. In Woolf's *Night And Day* Mary is 'dressed more or less like a Russian peasant girl'.¹⁶ And Evelyn Murgatroyd allows her enthusiasm for Garibaldi and the Risorgimento to be transposed onto contemporary Russia in the last years of Tsarism after the 1905 failed revolution (of which she knows next to nothing).¹⁷ In terms of Pierre Bourdieu's analysis, Russian culture, just as had happened with Celtic culture in the previous century, nonetheless became a synecdoche of cultural prestige within literary and other artistic

15 Tennyson, p. 529

16 Virginia Woolf, *Night And Day* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 302.

17 Woolf, *Night And Day*, p. 132.

circles, and a component of cultural capital. As demonstrated by the ironic reference in Woolf's *Jacob's Room* to the need to come up with an opinion on Chekhov purely for the purposes of polite English society conversation, Russophilia could also become a cliché and an onerous imposition by this period (see Chapter 6).

Was there a significant distinction between the Celtic and the Russian cases? And can the latter be seen as something more than a whim of cultural fashion? On reflection the Celtic vogue concerned fashions in dress and in prose and poetry (Walter Scott and Burns), to a lesser extent music (Beethoven's settings of Burns, Berlioz's works inspired by Scott; Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*; Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*) or the admittedly synthetic works of the spurious Gaelic bard Ossian. Russophilia in this survey's period, by contrast, involved mainly the novel (Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy) and ballet (Diaghilev's company above all), as well as drama (Gorky and Chekhov). Russian poetry was largely absent (Pushkin's influence in Britain is separate and earlier, as well as being on a smaller scale). Neither Scotch nor Russian painters (apart from those who designed for the Ballets Russes) can be said to have played a major part in the vogue abroad for either culture, and there was never really any movement in Scotch drama which was emulated abroad. Nonetheless, as the following chapters will demonstrate, the myth of Russia did prompt sustained and fundamental changes in the type and range of literary work produced by the British writers studied here. But the chief distinction between the Celtic and Russian cases, and of great relevance to the authors considered in this study, is the role played by political ideology.

During the last decades of Tsarism, while the Russophilia vogue was at its height, many authors in Britain were associated with the Friends of Russian Freedom (which expressed solidarity with Russian dissident radicals resident in Britain as well as criticising the perceived excesses of the Tsarist regime at the time of the pogroms), or subsequently with the 1917 Club, set up in London that year by Virginia Woolf's husband Leonard, Ramsay MacDonald and others, to express hopes for a democratic Russian future following Nicholas II's abdication and the coming to power of Kerensky's Provisional Government. The very existence of this institution both confirms the intensity of feelings among British artistic circles and

perhaps also indicates an element of what Tom Wolfe was to christen (at the height of the Permissive Sixties later in the twentieth century) ‘radical chic’.¹⁸ Yet ultimately the second, Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in October 1917 proved one of the important checks upon the vogue for Russophilia. The 1917 Club continued throughout the 1920s, but the establishment of the Bolshevik regime subsequently formalised as the Soviet Union complicated matters for those otherwise enamoured of Russia. T. S. Eliot did not frequent the 1917 Club, and his right-wing-leaning politics and increasing espousal of Anglo-Catholicism (which dismayed Woolf and others within Bloomsbury) shifted the emphasis as regards his alignment with things Russian. D. H. Lawrence unequivocally rejected the Bolshevik Revolution (after some short-lived flirtation), and so his interest in Russian literature and culture became divorced from contemporary Russia. From the 1920s onwards Virginia Woolf was associated with the Society for Cultural Relations between Peoples of the British Commonwealth and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (SCR)¹⁹ chaired by her relative Margaret Llewelyn-Davies (who would also have known J. M. Barrie). Woolf, however, declined the opportunity offered by the Bolshevik authorities in 1927, with Leonard Woolf to visit the USSR as guests of the regime in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, even while she was inspired to bring Russia into her novel *Orlando*. This would indicate that by this period Russia was becoming something of a conventionalised reference and allusion, in effect a purely literary exercise, a Russia of the mind, which might be made by a contemporary novelist, rather than arising from

- 18 Tom Wolfe’s ‘Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny’s’ (1970) describes ‘how culture’s patrician classes – the wealthy, fashionable intimates of high society – have sought to luxuriate in both a vicarious glamour and a monopoly on virtue through their public espousal of street politics: a politics, moreover, of minorities so removed from their sphere of experience and so absurdly, diametrically, opposed to the islands of privilege on which the cultural aristocracy maintain their isolation, that the whole basis of their relationship is wildly out of kilter from the start’ (Michael Bracewell, ‘Molotov Cocktails’, *Frieze Magazine*, November–December 2004 <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/molotov_cocktails> [accessed 20 September 2016]).
- 19 Maggie Humm, *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 276–7.

a genuine connexion with Russia in real life. Woolf's diary reveals that she was under no illusions about the repressive realities of Stalin's Russia (at a time when Shaw and the Webbs were busy making light of them) in her remarks when Prince Dmitrii Mirsky, the exiled aristocrat and critic, elected to return to Soviet Russia: 'Has been in England, in boardinghouses, "forever". I thought, as I watched his eye brighten and fade – soon there'll be a bullet through your head.'²⁰

In such circumstances, continued allusion to the myth of Russia became just that – allusion to a lingering myth very much at odds with the realities of a Stalinist regime of anti-formalism, anti-cosmopolitanism, and enforced conformity with the reactionary tenets of socialist realism now the norm in the Russia of the day. The process by which the Russia craze in the arts ensued upon a period of distrust of and outright enmity towards Russia in Britain, flourished during the first three decades of the twentieth century and then became anachronistic, in the very different conditions which came to apply after 1917, will be outlined in the following chapters.

Angus Wrenn

20 Quoted in *Virginia Woolf*, ed. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (London: Routledge 2003), p. 346.

