

**We are not Barbarians:
Literature and the Russian Émigré Press in England, 1890–1905
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I

If any single factor militated against late Victorian support for a Russian revolution, it was the entrenched belief that Russians were barbarians, incapable of governing themselves, a race of ‘besotted savages utterly unfit for civilisation’.¹ Marquis de Custine’s famous travelogue, printed many times in England after 1843, described Russian culture as ‘masked barbarism, nothing more’.² Another commentator pointed out that for two hundred years, German-blooded Tsars had whipped the shuffling and reluctant Russians along the road to civilisation to no avail: ‘The Russian is captivated with the thought of ceasing to pretend to be civilised. His is the longing of the young Indian brave at the missionary-school ... to exchange the school-desk and books for forest glades and the chase.’³ The well-known journalist William Stead, meanwhile, played the ‘barbarian’ card to counter Russian reformers’ calls for a constitution and the democratic freedoms enjoyed by the west. ‘[Not] one man in a hundred can read’, Stead cautioned, ‘and not one man in a hundred would have the remotest idea what to do with his vote if he had one.’⁴

Admittedly, such Russophobia was just as often leveled against the nation’s government and its autocratic head. Since the Crimean war, Russia had been viewed as a traditional enemy, engaged in global imperial rivalry and interfering with England’s valuable trade relations with China.⁵ Some believed (with reason) that Russia had a greedy eye on the territories of India, Afghanistan and the Middle East.⁶ Anti-Russian sentiment climaxed in 1878, when Russia began fighting the Turks over purported Turkish atrocities against Bulgarian Christians. At one end of the social spectrum, Queen Victoria declared she could not remain ‘the sovereign of a country that was letting itself down to kiss the feet of the great barbarians’.⁷ At the other end, Britons voiced their patriotic contempt by singing the popular music hall hit, MacDermott’s War Song: ‘The ‘Dogs of War’ are loose and the rugged Russian Bear, /Full bent on blood and robbery, has crawled out of his lair’.⁸ Following the advice of his monarch and the will of her subjects, Lord Beaconsfield sent a cautionary fleet to

Constantinople, and the Russians backed down. But jingoistic attitudes prevailed. Russians were seen as a savage, cruel, and war-loving race, a threat to the security of the civilised world.

In the 1890s, russophobia applied to noble, rebel, and peasant alike and reflected England's post-Darwinian pre-occupations. The 1891 novel *Mademoiselle Ixe* satirised English attitudes. At a party, a pretty socialite expresses amazement at a Russian she has just met – a man with 'long Eastern eyes and a protruding animal jaw':

Oh he is such a darling, and so hideous. Frightful! Do you know, the first time I saw him ... I thought he was the missing link. It was at a dance at Lady Dunmere's ... I said, 'Why Lady Dunmere, it is a gorilla, isn't it?' and she said, quite gravely, 'On no, dear; he is a Russian Count.'⁹

Worse stereotypes surrounded the Nihilists, Russia's so-called reformers and revolutionaries. Still fresh in Britons' memories was the spate of terrorist attacks spanning from 1878 – when the female Nihilist, Vera Zasulich shot the Governor General of St. Petersburg – to the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II. De Vogüé, whose study *Le Roman Russe* (1886) was required reading throughout the fin de siècle, depicted the Russian Nihilist as a 'savage' and a 'wolf' suffering a 'want of *human* feeling'. '[Western] revolutionaries are but as infuriated dogs', he writes, 'the Russian Nihilist is a wolf, and we know to-day that the enraged wolf is the more dangerous of the two'.¹⁰ English commentators matched his vehemence. The fact that the Nihilists opposed Russia's bellicose government did little to ameliorate their atavistic profile. On the contrary, the two sides were seen as twin heads of the same monster. Journal articles paired Nihilism with state-sponsored pan-Slavonic expansionism as just another ugly aspect of Eastern barbarism, known as the 'Slavonic Menace', oozing forth from Russia.¹¹

Yet England was about to face challenges to her picture of Russia's disaffected hordes. Between 1881 and 1901, the Russian population of England and Wales climbed from 3,789 to 61,789.¹² Russian Jews fleeing pogroms filled up the sweat and tailor shops of east London; intellectuals thwarted by Russia's draconian censorship laws moved to areas like Belsize Park and St. John's Wood where they intersected with England's literary and socialist circles; and escapees from Siberia or fortress prisons breathed relief at having found asylum in what one émigré described as 'The land of the just and the free!'.¹³ Both as refugees relying on the at times tenuous hospitality of a foreign country, and as propagandists working, as the Nihilist Stepniak stated 'To conquer the world for the Russian revolution', Russian

émigrés had a vested interest in manipulating Britons' preconceptions of Russia and her people.¹⁴

In the 1890s, a handful of English-language émigré journals duly appeared for the purpose of facilitating this process of manipulation. This paper deals with the two most influential among these – the revolutionary *Free Russia* (1890–1914) and its less radical rival, *The Anglo-Russian* (1897–1914) – until the first Russian revolution in 1905. Specifically, it explores how they used fiction, commentaries on Russian literature, and descriptions of Russian literary culture to cut across the negative stereotypes of Russians so predominant in late Victorian England. To date, scholarship on these journals has been confined to socialist, Russian and émigré studies, and has been largely descriptive. Barry Hollingsworth's meticulous account of *Free Russia* in 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890–1917', chronicles the journal's political campaigns and credits it with preparing the ground for the non-party Parliamentary Russian Committee, founded in 1908 'to cultivate friendly relations with all Russians who are working for the social and political amelioration of their country'.¹⁵ The journal's ambassadorial use of fiction, however, is outside the article's gamut. John Slatter's 'Jaakoff Prelooker and *The Anglo-Russian*' in *From the Other Shore, Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880–1917*, reflects momentarily on *The Anglo-Russian*'s 'great play of local colour' as evidence of its editor's ability 'to adapt his 'pitch' to the demands of his audience', and provides an insight into the historical origins of his serialised fiction.¹⁶ Beyond this, scant mention is made of *The Anglo-Russian*'s coverage of literary topics. Biographical sketches of the journals' Russian editors likewise focus on their more overtly political propaganda, commenting only passingly on their presentation of Russia's literary culture as an important corollary to this propaganda.¹⁷ In contrast, this paper suggests that the cultural material appearing in *Free Russia* and *The Anglo-Russian* was a central feature in the émigré campaign to redress late Victorian russophobia. In so doing, it also gestures at the neglected significance of these journals as English publishing phenomena, accruing meaning and taking cues from the English social system in which they operated.

II Free Russia

The anti-Tsarist journal *Free Russia* was founded in 1890, and at first edited by the notorious Nihilist Sergei Kravchinskii, popularly known as Stepniak, meaning ‘man of the steppe’. In late Victorian London, Stepniak cut a romantic figure. In the 1870s, he had been part of the populist movement in Russia, taking socialist propaganda to the peasants while disguised as a woodcutter. In 1878 he had become a political assassin, murdering General Mezentseff, the St. Petersburg Chief of Police who had been responsible for ordering the flogging of political prisoners. Stepniak subsequently fled to the continent, where he reinvented himself as a revolutionary troubadour, writing his best-selling collection of idealised revolutionary sketches, *Underground Russia* (1883).¹⁸ He arrived in England in 1884 and, with *Underground Russia* as his calling card, rapidly made friends with London’s intellectual and radical elite; his inner circle included Bernard Shaw, William Morris and Constance Garnett, whom he tutored and assisted as a translator of Russian literature.¹⁹ Officially, *Free Russia* was the organ of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom (SFRF), which Stepniak co-founded in 1889 with Robert Spence Watson, president of the National Liberal Association. In order to avert scandal, Stepniak edited the journal anonymously; this gave the impression that it principally represented the efforts of the eminent English men and women (including nine members of parliament and ministers of all denominations) on the SFRF’s committee. In 1894, Stepniak passed editorship to his comrade-in-arms, Felix Volkhovsky, a revolutionary whose reception in England was assured by George Kennan’s sympathetic accounts of his trials in *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891).²⁰ Even in England, Volkhovsky was very much the active revolutionary. Besides editing *Free Russia*, he occupied himself by smuggling into Russia banned books and English passports for the use of escaping prisoners.²¹ As a propagandist, he acquired a reputation for his lectures about his escape from Russia, which he delivered wearing convicts’ garb and manacles. His friend, George Herbert Perris, a leading light in the International Arbitration and Peace Association, described him as ‘a second Herzen, an unpaid ambassador who, at a difficult juncture, not unworthily represented to the outer world the great soul of his people’.²²

In *Free Russia*, Stepniak and Volkhovsky exploited the late Victorian taste for sensation and righteous indignation. The journal's pages were filled with tales of the massacre of dissidents, public floggings, deplorable prisons, the persecution of religious minorities, and the starvation of peasants deprived even of soup kitchens by officialdom. It also riveted adventure-seeking western audiences with real-life accounts of prison escapes, captures and Nihilist intrigue. Yet it is also true that much of its news was presented in a sober, authoritative tone, with writers relying upon a strategic selection of facts to make their argument and avoiding hyperbole and incendiary language. In early issues, token gestures were made to appear to be accommodating divergent views: a Bibliography 'On the Russian Question', for example, even listed a book by the Tsarist agent, Madame Novikoff. Maintaining a balanced voice was essential if the journal was to succeed in its objective '[of influencing] public opinion by revealing the truth about Russia, by challenging the views and statements of apologists for the Tsarist régime, and by holding up the atrocities of the Russian Government to the judgement of the civilized world'.²³ Within months of its inception *Free Russia* claimed a readership of 5,000 – but it also became a weapon for continual influence on newspapers which were read, as Stepniak alleged, 'not by thousands, but by millions'.²⁴ For the next two decades *Free Russia* and the SFRF would be the principal agents through which Russian émigrés communicated their message to the rest of the Western world.

Free Russia published translations of Russian fiction alongside its political jeremiads, because stories about Siberian exile, oppression, and peasant famines breathed life and meaning into otherwise dry statistics. Take the story of the serf-boy, Misha 'a delicate, nervous child, with fair skin, yellow hair, and great blue eyes', who drew a knife across his throat to escape his mistress's flogging.²⁵ Notwithstanding the fact that serfdom had been abolished in 1853, it was easier for readers to experience the sensation of horror when engaging in the fate of this sweet, if fictional, serf-boy than when reading the estimated number of people dead in a more recent bureaucracy-induced famine. Fiction established a basis for a direct emotional congruence between propagandist and audience in a way that logical arguments could not. There are plenty of indications that Stepniak and Volkhovsky were aware of this effect. In *Free Russia*, fiction was described as 'a single shining spark' providing 'spiritual communion with the reader'.²⁶ Stepniak's friend, the English novelist Olive Garnett, would one day model one of her heroes after him: a Russian Nihilist who

turned ‘creative art ... to the service of his cause, as one might wish to harness a leaping cataract to a dynamo’.²⁷ It is evident that in *Free Russia*’s programme of re-forging English conceptions of the Russian national character, fiction, with its power to generate sympathy, build myths and shatter stereotypes, played a particularly crucial role.

The short fiction which appeared in *Free Russia* humanised Slavic ‘barbarians’, showcasing their better qualities. Several stories countered the notion – still lingering from the Crimean War – that Russians were a war-mongering race, bent on invading the civilised world. The tale ‘Mahmoudka’s Children’ is set during the heady days of the Russo-Turkish war, and tells of a kindly Cossack Major and a captured Turk. The Turk is frantic with worry about fate of his dispossessed wife and children. Sympathetic to his prisoner’s plight, the Cossack engineers his escape. The story showed Russians to be compassionate and peaceable – fighting on behalf of their bellicose government only because, as the Major says, ‘I have no other means but my salary’.²⁸ Another example of Russian sympathy was given in the tale ‘The Famine Year’, a sketch about peasant generosity in the face of starvation.²⁹

It was perhaps the Russian peasant who fared best in *Free Russia*’s fiction pages. Commonly described in the British press as lazy, unteachable, retrograde and superstitious, the Russian peasant was seen as an evolutionary throwback; certainly not equal to self-government or a constitution. A story entitled ‘How a Peasant Fed Two Generals’ by the satirist Saltykov-Shchedrin, countered ingrained stereotypes of peasant sloth. The fable pictures two Russian bureaucrats stranded on an uninhabited island. Unable to make a fire, catch a fish, or pick fruit from a tree, they almost die of hunger until they are rescued by a peasant who feeds and shelters them. As they grow fat and merry on his labour, they upbraid their deliverer for his laziness and stupidity. Finally the peasant builds a boat and sails them to St. Petersburg, whereupon the generals send him a glass of vodka and 6d. along with the words, ‘Enjoy yourself, my good man!’³⁰

Another short sketch gainsaid the English belief that the Russian masses were unreceptive to education and self-betterment, or as William Stead declared, incapable of doing anything but ‘jogging along in their ancient ruts’.³¹ ‘On Easter Day’, shows peasant schoolboys reading out Tolstoy’s didactic short stories to circles of illiterate family members: ‘The good words, the ideas of truth and justice, find their way into the hearts and minds of the listeners. Those miseries which originate in their own faults, stand before them in striking

pictures. They might live better. Their intelligence is awakened. A tear is seen creeping down a wrinkled, weather beaten face.’³²

Stepniak enhanced the effect of such stories with an article on the phenomenal growth in mass literacy and the emergence of a new popular literature in Russia – something he attributed to the educational efforts of reformers and revolutionaries. After one short generation, he explains, the tillers of the soil themselves are now ‘founders of libraries, public readers, authors of books for the peasants, and even popular lecturers upon scientific subjects’. A new breed of peasant authors testify to the race’s potential. Samuel Xenofontov, for example, works the land in the summer and makes wooden spades in the winter. His spare time he devotes to reading and to writing short plain stories from life. ‘What Samuel Xenofontov wishes books to do is to bring about more union, more fraternal feeling as a remedy for the dissevering effect of modern industrialism.’³³ Far from rising as a half-enlightened spectre of ‘yellow’ degeneration, the educated peasant offers to a Europe undergoing its own social convulsions the hope of cultural and social renewal.

Stepniak and Volkhovsky did not only draw upon the rural classes in arguing their case for a free, democratic Russia. They also printed articles portraying Russia’s sophisticated, cosmopolitan city dwellers. In contrast to Stead’s barbarians, Russian society could boast 10,000 university students, who received ‘an education as good as Oxford or Cambridge’; and a publishing industry in which ‘more books are published yearly, irrespective of the population ... than in Great Britain’.³⁴ Supplementing such statistics were numerous idealised sketches of Russia’s poets and writers: men and women who belonged to the highest ranks of literary genius. The only thing restricting the full flowering of Russia’s culture was the Russian Imperial government, which, it was reported, militated against the opening of new schools, imprisoned youths for reading, and spread the plague of censorship.³⁵

It was with the intention of mythologising Russia’s creative potential – a potential quashed only by Tsarist repression – that in 1899 Volkhovsky stepped up *Free Russia’s* then-flagging coverage of art and literature. ‘[*Free Russia*] has... become more varied in its contents’, he announced:

More stress has been laid on showing the capabilities and genius of the Russian race, thus bringing home this truth, that if the Russians enjoyed political liberty and personal security, their social, literary, artistic and scientific development would be an enormous spiritual gain to mankind. With this view, translations of some of the best

specimens of Russian fiction and poetry, as well as articles dealing with Russian music, art industries, social work, etc., have been introduced. The move was accompanied by an increase in the number of illustrations and a new masthead drawn by Walter Crane. In his Annual Report, Volkhovsky claimed that the masthead was designed to lend an 'artistic appearance to our paper'.³⁶ But it also functioned as a 'cartoon for the cause'. From the left – the west, as it were – an angel of mercy reaches out a hand holding a heart. From the east, a bearded Russian mujik stretches his arm to receive the angel's offering. The Russian is bound tightly with rope, his torso pierced by the claws of an enormous double-headed eagle (representing the autocracy and the Orthodox Church) wearing two crowns. Crane's drawing reiterated Volkhovsky's message of Tsar/Church oppression arresting the development of Russia's national genius and the hope engendered by the sympathy and enlightened views of the west.

The short fiction Volkhovsky printed to encourage Western confidence in Russia's potential revealed a catholic taste – ranging from the comic to the tragic, taking forms as diverse as allegory, fairy-tales and realist sketches. The editor's abridged version of Gogol's now well-known vignette, 'On Christmas Eve', with its witches, devils and rustic colouring, added touches of the surreal and comic to the English conception of the nation. *Free Russia* also published a fairy tale by Garshin, 'to give to the English reader a full idea of this subtle, poetic, merciless, yet irresistibly sympathetic author.'³⁷ In May 1900, the journal claimed, with only slight exaggeration, to be publishing the first English translation of any story by Chekhov.³⁸ '[M]y conviction' Volkhovsky wrote in an aside on the fiction of Tolstoy, '[is] that the more nations learn to know one another the stronger grows their mutual affection'.³⁹

As a corollary to his efforts to turn *Free Russia* into a literary as well as a political concern, Volkhovsky employed the services of Vasily Zhook, a spry-looking, erudite young exile who spent a great deal of time at the British Library reading about Russian history. Zhook had a scholar's interest in literary biography, Russian literature and the art of translation. In *Free Russia* his province was a column called 'Bibliography' or, sometimes, 'Rossica': a compilation of notices of translations and books about Russia, fleshed out with lengthier reviews. The latter were generally more occupied with minutiae than politics. With an armoury of encyclopaedic knowledge and a copy-editor's eye, he criticised anthologies for their oversights, literary biographies for wrongly cited dates and place names, and recent translations for inaccuracies and clumsy prose. Beautifully rendered works of scholarship, on

the other hand, drew melodious praise from his pen. In their small way, Zhook's reviews enhanced Russians' reputation for high culture and civilised values.

III

The Anglo-Russian

In the summer of 1897, Jaakoff Prelooker, a Russian-Jewish convert to protestant Christianity, established a competing anti-Tsarist organ, *The Anglo-Russian*, with the similar aim of building mutual affection between England and the Russian people. Prelooker had an unusual background. Born into a strictly orthodox Jewish household where only Yiddish and Hebrew were used, he learnt Russian from Jewish boys who had been forced into the Russian schools set up by Alexander II to force Jewish assimilation into Russian society.⁴⁰ His encounter with the New Testament and Russian literature persuaded him to try to effect a rapprochement between the two religions, to which end he founded the sect, New Israel. His harassment by Russian authorities commenced when New Israel started attracting members of Christian sects. In 1891, he chose to exile himself to Britain. Casting himself as something of a Christian martyr, he soon established himself as a popular speaker and writer on the persecution of what he sagely described as Russia's 'protestant' sects. He also organised Russian fairs, pageants, bazaars, recitals and tableaux in provincial towns and villages. Following the lead of Stepniak and Volkhovsky, who appealed to England's Nonconformist conscience, Prelooker drummed up support at 'The Established, Free, and United Presbyterian Churches all over Scotland; Congregational and Baptist Churches, Wesleyan Chapels, Meeting Houses of the Friends, Salvation Army Halls, Unitarian Churches, Secular Societies, Philosophical and Literary Societies, Y.M. and Y.W.C.A., Temperance Societies, Peace and Arbitration meetings, ...'.⁴¹

The stated position of Prelooker's journal, *The Anglo-Russian*, resembled that of *Free Russia*: it set out 'to advocate freedom of conscience and a representative form of government in Russia, ... and generally stimulate a better understanding and greater harmony between the two nations'.⁴² In contrast to the editors of *Free Russia*, however, Prelooker dissociated himself from socialism. He also wrapped around himself the halo of Christianity, while accusing the émigrés behind *Free Russia* of being avowedly antagonistic to any religious

creed. Finally, he posed as a pacifist reformer, decrying the ‘Foolish Schemes of Russian Revolutionists’,⁴³ while simultaneously publishing the sort of exposés of Tsarist despotism that would make any Briton’s blood boil. Prelooker sent free copies of his monthly to leading newspapers and magazines across Europe and to countries as far afield as India, New Zealand, and Japan, as well as to libraries in Britain, and members of Parliament.⁴⁴ The second issue was sent to 3000 writers and journalists in the UK. With its emphasis on Christianity, capitalism and conservatism, the journal was targeted at readers from communities normally deeply suspicious of Russia’s liberal elements.

Prelooker was well aware of prejudices against Russians. His acquaintance Edna Lyall’s *Autobiography of a Slander* (1887) had given witness to English racial snobbery in exactly the realms in which Prelooker himself circulated. The novel tells of how a kind, well-meaning Russian émigré who speaks about his country’s government in terms of disgust is gossiped about as a Nihilist in parsonage and village green. Eventually slanderous rumours linking him with the assassination of the Tsar reach Russia. The hero, called back to St. Petersburg on business, is incarcerated and dies in prison. Underlying the loose talk which brings him to this grisly fate, however, is a fear that the English race might itself become contaminated: the Russian, with his foreign visage and slightly ‘off’ mannerisms is rumoured to be engaged to an English rose.⁴⁵

Prelooker believed that the best way to overcome English hostility towards the Russian race was present it in familiar trappings. When he founded *The Anglo-Russian*, the idea of perpetuating the image of a cultivated, none-too-foreign Russia was thus central to his design. *The Anglo-Russian* took the form of a hybrid English magazine, and appealed to middle-class values and tastes. Interspersed with the requisite stories about Russia’s religious persecution, famines, and bureaucratic horrors, were articles on Russian composers, book reviews, translations of the poetry of Lermontov and Pushkin, articles on such topics as ‘Russian Tea and Tea à L’anglaise’, and the editor’s own allegories and lightweight serialised novels. Taking its cue from magazines like *Tid-bits*, a ‘Russian Wit and Humour’ column quoted amusing lines from unacknowledged Russian magazines, and there was an abundance of excerpts on the Russian question from the English press. Prelooker also appealed to the women’s market with a series titled, ‘Heroines of Russia’. In 1897, he capitalised on the fashion for interviews, publishing an account of ‘A Visit to George Meredith’.⁴⁶ Drawing a

course between the *Free Russia*'s earnest denunciation of Tsarist despotism and the chatty language of popular English magazines, *The Anglo-Russian* proved Prelooker's boast that he could adapt 'to the ways of an orthodox English audience, which will not exert itself to strain their nerves in listening to foreign half-Dutch English, unless some special attractions were offered to them'.⁴⁷ English regional newspapers, which received the journal *gratis*, warmed to its kaleidoscopic format. '*The Anglo-Russian* has made a bold bid for sympathy,' reflected the *Durham Chronicle*, '...few people...will quarrel with the aim it has set before it. We wish the new paper well. It chats about many interesting things – Russian wit and humour, art, literature, &c.'⁴⁸

One regular feature of the magazine was the column, 'Literature and Art', made up of news snippets about 'cultivated' Russia. Here, English readers learned of events like Tolstoy's literary Jubilee; Pushkin's Hundreth Anniversary; the translation into Russian of Kipling, the Talmud, or John Stuart Mill; and the opening in Moscow of yet another literary and philosophical society. In March 1900, a half page was devoted to The New Russian Academy of Belle-Lettres whose 'Honorary Academicians' were to include writers with radical tendencies like Tolstoy and Korolenko.⁴⁹ Another issue reported how the Tsar had given his consent to open up a subscription list for a monument to Turgenev.⁵⁰ An article celebrating the brilliant literary career of Nikolai Konstantinovich Mikhailovsky, meanwhile, showed Russia to be the home of advanced and measured theoretical debate.⁵¹ In the pages of Prelooker's journal, Russian society appeared as rich as its English or European counterparts: a familiar tapestry of publishing ventures, scholarly projects, literary clubs, museums, and institutions capable of legitimising and acknowledging the nation's artists and writers. Certainly, it was not a culture which could be described as 'masked barbarism ... nothing more.'

Yet promoting such a positive picture of Russia's cultural scene carried with it the risk of undermining the magazine's anti-Tsarist message. After all, if culture could flourish, perhaps claims of Tsarist despotism were exaggerated. Prelooker thus tempered his portrait with manifold references to the 'real madness' of the Russian Censorship,⁵² a blood-curdling account of Dostoevsky's mock-execution,⁵³ and eulogistic reminiscences of poets and pressmen who were, invariably, staunch defenders of 'the noble causes of progress and reform'.⁵⁴ Further tipping the balance against any beneficent view of the Russian government

were pieces on populist authors – Korolenko, Gorky, Nekrassof, and Grigorovitch – and their extraordinary revelations about peasant suffering and brutal officialdom: '[Korolenko's story] presents a picture of the humiliated and outraged of even greater precision and vividness than that of Dostoievsky. A nobody, a species of a Government worm, a sort of policeman, a brute, officially invested with a fraction of power, in a word simply a scoundrel can dare to cruelly insult and outrage a fellow man without himself running the slightest risk of any punishment. Here is the question in full light ...'⁵⁵ In 1898, Prelooker published articles by *Free Russia's* Vasily Zhook describing the 'Martyrology of the Press in Russia'.⁵⁶ The message conveyed was that Russia was home to a mature, civilised and moral race where marvellous indigenous talent and industry were constantly thwarted by a childishly despotic bureaucracy. The British conception of Russia as a nation of unruly savages kept in line by a necessarily brutal Tsar was turned on its head. Russia's oppressed were 'cultivated'. The Tsar, to quote Prelooker: was 'an eternal foe of human progress'.⁵⁷

Interestingly, Prelooker's commentary on literary subjects was often used as a starting point from which to address English prejudice head-on. An example is his defence of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, which had offended some English readers with its references to undergarments and the 'the lively naturalism of [his] description of vice' which they felt 'would do more mischief than all the preaching of virtue would do good'.⁵⁸ John Bellows, the clerk of the Quaker Society of Friends had even declared it to be 'a smutty book'.⁵⁹ To Prelooker's dismay, England's preoccupation with the novel's prurient aspects had siphoned attention away from its graphic exposé of the Siberian penal system. Prelooker responded by drawing a comparison of Russia and England in which Russia became both the more honest and the more puritanical of the two nations:

We know that certain words to be found in all English dictionaries and frequently conspicuously exposed at tailor's shop-windows ... are no longer used in good English society ... [But] we could never reconcile [this] with the fact that crowds of Britons of both sexes flock to public bathing places to gaze for hours at those who are altogether stripped of their 'unmentionables.' In Russian society 'briuki,' the English 'unmentionables,' *are* mentioned without any remorse of conscience, but at the same time Russians would consider it an immodest proceeding to watch and behold their absence in public places.⁶⁰

The theme of the 'pure and sincere Russian spirit' was a recurring one. In an essay on 'Anton Tchekhoff & His "Mouzhiks"', Chekhov is described as 'a humble and sweet-smelling violet'

from which emanates ‘a penetrating perfume ... [that] softens and goes right through the soul’.⁶¹

On the whole, Prelooker’s measured coverage of Russia’s cultural scene checked any ill effects of his occasionally flagrant use of revolutionary language. His examples of Russian modesty, and his references to the benevolent cultural institutions which, despite the horrors of tyranny, still had some pre-eminence in Russian society – these positioned his magazine as an organ not altogether antithetical to the values of Britain’s establishment and conservative elements. Framed in this way, Prelooker’s version of Russian society seemed a familiar entity, far removed from the hotheaded Nihilists who daily caused the Russian throne to tremble in trepidation. Reflecting on the achievements of *The Anglo-Russian* in 1904, Prelooker noted a decrease in russophobia. Russia was no longer ‘a country where tallow candles and lamp-oil were still eaten and drunk in quantities, ... where peasants hibernated eating and doing nothing during five months in the year, where...girls were taken as wives by lot or public auction ...’. England now had ‘a fuller appreciation of the true inwardness of things Russian’, and ‘newspapers notorious hitherto for their strong anti-Russian sentiments now begin to explain that for the Russian people they cherish but the kindest feelings and best wishes, and that their russophobia is directed exclusively against the iniquitous system of Russian autocratic and bureaucratic Government’.⁶²

The contributions made by *Free Russia* and *The Anglo-Russian* to England’s understanding of Russian culture can be viewed in the larger context of the great wave of Russian art and literature entering the country around the fin de siècle: Constance Garnett’s seminal translations of Turgenev in the 1890s and later, of Chekhov, Gorky, Herten and Dostoevsky; the manifold translations of lesser-known Russian populist writers which filled bookshops and libraries; the mass-dissemination of Tolstoy’s tracts and novels. The use of fiction in *Free Russia* and *The Anglo-Russian* gestures at a phenomenon which has hitherto been ignored: the role of émigrés in expediting the progress of Russian literature into England and in mediating the ways in which it was read. Stepniak assisted Constance Garnett with her translations and wrote prefaces to two of them. He also tutored Ethel Lillian Voynich, who produced several books of Russian stories, bringing writers like Garshin and Saltykov to England’s attention. For his part, Jaakoff Prelooker encouraged what was a growing vogue for Russian study by

setting up a Russian language institute and a Russian reading circle. Other émigrés also took part. The famous anarchist Peter Kropotkin published his voluminous *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature* in 1905. And Tolstoy's exiled literary agent, Vladimir Chertkov, published Tolstoy's tracts, stories and the novel *Resurrection* in such quantities that '424 million pages of Tolstoy's writings' were put by his Free Age Press before the English-speaking world.⁶³ Less remembered are the lectures on Russian literature delivered by émigrés in Church halls, clubs, societies and packed drawing rooms up and down England. To date, neither reception studies nor émigré studies have acknowledged this tremendous industry or examined its collateral effects.

The translations and commentary about Russian literature published in *Free Russian* and *The Anglo-Russian* are of interest, then, because they are representative of a much wider project to displace Russia's fetid stench of barbarism with a fine aroma of her best cultural products; to sell the Russian revolution to the English by imbuing it with the values of the bourgeoisie. The way these journals advertised Russia's literary and cultural output, relied on fiction to add an illustrative and emotional dimension to their propaganda, and appropriated the country's best writers to the radical cause – all these were typical of the methods by which émigrés turned Russian literature into one of the most potent forms of propaganda at their disposal.

To a great extent, the émigré project was successful. England's newfound sense of cultural affinity with Russia helped prime the population to respond to the news of the 1905 Russian revolution with widespread, though not universal, support. Winston Churchill compared it 'to the struggle for British liberty'. J. Bruce Glasier, a leading member of the Independent Labour Party, wrote a poem 'To the Russian Revolutionary Martyrs' for the *Labour Leader*.⁶⁴ George Meredith set up a subscription to raise funds for the revolution. It is notable that Meredith's optimistic view of the Russian race was based on 'the sublime and self-sacrificing types of Russian womanhood as presented both in works of fiction and produced by real life'.⁶⁵ Support was strongest in avowedly liberal and socialist circles, but newspapers such as *The Times* and the conservative organ, *The Morning Post* also evinced pro-Cadet (Constitutional Democrat) tendencies. Public opinion would fluctuate after the Tsar's dissolution of the first Duma and the surprising failure of Russians to rise *en masse* to avenge it.⁶⁶ Moreover, admiration for Russian literature did not prepare the English for the

shocking resumption of terrorist activity in 1906. But at the outset, at least, the English were mostly on the side of the uprising, and if accusations of barbarism were hurled, they were aimed at the autocracy and not the Russian people.⁶⁷ As Sir Arthur Nicolson, British Ambassador to St. Petersburg, recalled, ‘Russia was regarded as a ruthless and barbarous autocratic state, denying all liberties to her subjects and employing the most cruel methods of suppression of freedom of speech and indeed of thought.’⁶⁸ As for the Russian race, *The Manchester Guardian* opined that it was ‘their literature, their music, and their prophetic writings [that] entitle[d] them to a place among the original forces of European civilization.’⁶⁹ A singular example of the new mood can be seen in a speech given in Croydon by Britain’s Secretary of War, Arnold Forster, announcing the government’s position with respect to the 1905 revolution. Forster’s confidence in Russia’s new government was predicated on the country’s artistic sensibilities:

The works of the great Russian [authors] showed that art was powerful in the Russian mind; ... ‘The best message we could send them was a message of sympathy and hope that their aspirations might develop in such a manner that their institutions might bring to them the same good that our institutions had brought to us’.

In stark contrast to 1878, when Queen Victoria’s jingoistic call to arms against the ‘great barbarians’ was echoed in Music Halls throughout England, the Russian emperor and his downtrodden subjects were now seen as separate entities. Forster’s appeal for sympathy was greeted with cheers.⁷⁰

¹ S. Stepniak, ‘The Russian Peasants and their Detractors & Panegyrists’, *Free Russia*, 1 December 1892, p. 9.

² *Journey for Our Time: The Journals of the Marquis de Custine*, ed. and trans. by Phyllis Penn Kohler, intro. by Simon Sebag Montefiore (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), p. 124. First published as *La Russie en 1839*, it was published in English as *The Empire of the Czar* in 1843; subsequent editions were titled *Russia*. It has been published under the title, *Journey for Our Time* since 1951.

³ Harold Frederic, *The New Exodus: A Study of Israel in Russia* (London: Heinemann, 1892), p. 6.

⁴ ‘Alexander III, Tsar of all the Russias’, *The Review of Reviews* 5 (15 January 1892), 15–27 (p. 15).

⁵ Pascal Venier, ‘The diplomatic context: Britain and International Relations around 1904’ in *Global Geostrategy, Mackinder and the Defence of the West*, ed. by Brian W. Blouet (London: Frank Cass, 2004), pp. 55–63 (p. 57).

⁶ See, for example, An Indian Officer, *Russia’s March Towards India*, 2 vols (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1894). For more on English suspicion over Russia’s designs in Afghanistan, see J.A.R. Marriott, *Anglo-Russian Relations 1689–1943* (London: Methuen, 1944), pp. 130–9.

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- ⁷ Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1921), pp. 264, 266.
- ⁸ The words and music of the Jingo song were by G.W. Hunt. Maurice Willson Disher, *Victorian Song: From Dive to Drawing Room* (London: Phoenix House, 1955), p. 165.
- ⁹ Lanoe Falconer, *Mademoiselle Ixe* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1924), pp. 51–2.
- ¹⁰ Le Vicomte E.-M. de Vogüé, *The Russian Novel*, trans. from 11th French edition by H.A. Sawyer (London: Chapman and Hall, 1913), pp. 180–1.
- ¹¹ ‘The Slavonic Menace to Europe’, *Quarterly Review*, 149 (April 1880), 518–48 (p. 518).
- ¹² Census Returns of Aliens in England and Wales between 1871 and 1911 can be found in Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England: 1870–1914* (London, Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001), p. 283.
- ¹³ Jaakoff Prelooker, *Under the Czar and Queen Victoria: The Experiences of a Russian Reformer* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1895), p. 45.
- ¹⁴ Stepniak, ‘What Americans Can Do for Russia’, *The North American Review* 153 (November 1891), 596–610 (p. 600).
- ¹⁵ Barry Hollingsworth, ‘The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890–1917’, *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, n.s. 3 (1970), 45–64 (p. 64).
- ¹⁶ ‘Jaakoff Prelooker and *The Anglo-Russian*’ in *From the Other Shore, Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880–1917*, edited by John Slatter (London: Frank Cass, 1984), pp. 49–66 (pp. 59, 61).
- ¹⁷ See James W. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London: A Study of Five Unorthodox Socialists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); John Elliot Bachman, ‘Serge Mikhailovich Stepniak-Kravchinskii: A Biography from the Russian Revolutionary Movement on Native and Foreign Soil’. (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, American University, Washington, D.C, 1971); Donald Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii: The London Years* (Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1987); Evgeniia Taratuta, *S.M. Stepniak-Kravshinskii V Londonskoi Emigratsii* (Moskva: Naiuka, 1968); Helena Frank, ‘Jaakoff Prelooker’, in Jaakoff Prelooker, *Russian Flashlights* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1911), pp. 1–53.
- ¹⁸ Sergei Stepniak, *Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1883).
- ¹⁹ See letter from Constance Garnett to Stepniak, RGALI archive, f 1158, op 1, ed khr 238, no. 3.
- ²⁰ George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System* (Chicago: Double-Page Reprint Series, 1958), pp. 100–110.
- ²¹ S.G. Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1938), pp. 126–7.
- ²² George Herbert Perris, *Russia in Revolution* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1905), p. 226.
- ²³ Hollingsworth, ‘The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom’, p. 51.
- ²⁴ Readership statistics can be found in *Free Russia* (1 December 1891), p. 3; and in Stepniak, *Nihilism As It Is*, trans. by E.L. Voynich (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), p. 71.
- ²⁵ Saltykov-Shchedrin, ‘Misha and Vania: A Forgotten Story’, *Free Russia*, 1 January 1893, pp. 13–15; and 1 February 1893, pp. 28–31.
- ²⁶ ‘Saltykov (Shchedrin), From a Biography by S.N. Krivenko’, *Free Russia*, 1 May 1893, p. 73.

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- ²⁷ Olivia Rayne Garnett, *In Russia's Night* (London: W. Collins, 1918), p. 189.
- ²⁸ V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, 'Mahmoudka's Children', trans. by A. Val. Finkenstein, *Free Russia*, January 1900, p. 8.
- ²⁹ 'The Famine Year', *Free Russia*, 1 September 1892, pp. 13–15.
- ³⁰ Shchedrin, 'Story of How One Peasant Saved Two Generals', *Free Russia*, 1 January 1892, p. 15.
- ³¹ William Stead, 'Alexander III, Tsar of all the Russias', *The Review of Reviews*, 15 January 1892, p. 16.
- ³² Mikhaylov [A teacher in a Russian peasant school], 'On Easter Day', *Free Russia*, 1 April 1894, p. 35.
- ³³ S. Stepniak, 'The Russian Peasants as Readers and Writers', *Free Russia*, 1 July 1892, p. 10.
- ³⁴ S. Stepniak, 'Mr. W.T. Stead upon Russia', *Free Russia*, 1 February 1892, p. 6. Russia is known to have had a surprisingly high university population in the early 1900s, however, I have been unable to locate statistics for the early 1890s. When quoting statistics on publishing, Stepniak was probably thinking of the popular chap-book industry and the recently-established publishing house, the *Intermediary*, which printed morally edifying tales by Tolstoy (and other popular writers such as Garshin, Korolenko, and Leskov) for mass distribution in the provinces. Within four years of its inception, the *Intermediary* had sold 12 million copies. Thais S. Lindstrom, 'From Chapbooks to Classics: The Story of the Intermediary', *American Slavic and East European Review* 16, issue 2 (April 1957), p. 194.
- ³⁵ See, for example, 'Too Many Schools!', *Free Russia*, 1 April 1894, p. 34.
- ³⁶ The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, 'Eighth Annual Report of the Executive Committee (1898–99)', pp. 7–8, Archive of British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics, COLL MISC 1028.
- ³⁷ Volkhovsky, commentary to 'The Story of the Toad and the Rose', by Vsevolod Garshin, trans. by Mrs. Dora Zhook, *Free Russia*, June 1900, p. 68.
- ³⁸ Anton Chekhov, 'Sharp Beyond My Years', translated by Vera Volkhovsky, *Free Russia*, May 1900, p. 55–7. This was not, in fact, the earliest translation of Chekhov in English. An earlier one was 'Two Tales from the Russian of Anton Tschechow: The Biter Bit and Sorrow', translated by Elaine A. Swire [Mrs. Henry Swire], *Temple Bar*, May 1897, pp. 104–13.
- ³⁹ 'A Russian View of Tolstoi', *Free Russia*, November 1898, p. 64.
- ⁴⁰ Jaakoff Prelooker, *Under the Czar and Queen Victoria*, p. 5.
- ⁴¹ Jaakoff Prelooker, *Under the Czar and Queen Victoria*, p. 164n.
- ⁴² This journal was anticipated in Prelooker, *Under the Czar and Queen Victoria*, p. 176.
- ⁴³ Jaakoff Prelooker, 'Foolish Schemes of Russian Revolutionists', *Anglo-Russian*, January 1897, p. 79.
- ⁴⁴ Helena Frank, 'Jaakoff Prelooker', in Jaakoff Prelooker, *Russian Flashlights* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1911), pp. 1–53 (p. 31).
- ⁴⁵ Edna Lyall, *The Autobiography of a Slander* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887).
- ⁴⁶ Jaakoff Prelooker, 'A Visit to George Meredith', *Anglo-Russian*, October 1897, p. 37–9.
- ⁴⁷ Jaakoff Prelooker, 'Our Seventh Anniversary', *Anglo-Russian*, June – July 1904, p. 844.

- ⁴⁸ Quoted in ‘Opinions on the Anglo-Russian’, *Anglo-Russian*, August 1897, p. 20.
- ⁴⁹ ‘The New Russian Academicians’, *Anglo-Russian*, March 1900, p. 347.
- ⁵⁰ ‘Monument to Tourgeneff’, *Anglo-Russian*, July 1897, p. 10.
- ⁵¹ ‘Nikolai Konstantinovich Mikhailovsky’, *Anglo-Russian*, January 1901, p.37–8.
- ⁵² See for example, the ‘Literature and Art’ columns in *Anglo-Russian*, February 1898, p. 92; and June 1898, p. 140.
- ⁵³ Prelooker’s commentary to John M. Robertson, ‘Feodore Michaelovich Dostoevsky’, *Anglo-Russian*, January 1899, p. 207.
- ⁵⁴ ‘Literature and Art’, *Anglo-Russian*, September 1897, p. 31.
- ⁵⁵ G. Savitch, ‘Vladimir Korolenko’, *Anglo-Russian*, September and October 1903, p. 740.
- ⁵⁶ Vasili Zhook, ‘Martyrology of the Press in Russia’, *Anglo-Russian*, July 1898, pp. 145–6; August 1898, pp. 154–5.
- ⁵⁷ Prelooker, ‘Introduction’ in *Count Tolstoy, On Flogged and Floggers*, Russian Reformation Society, 1 (January 1899), p. 1.
- ⁵⁸ *Newcastle Chronicle*, quoted in Prelooker, ‘Russia in Tolstoy’s Latest, Reflections on “Resurrection”’, *Anglo-Russian*, June 1900, p. 377.
- ⁵⁹ Richenda Scott, *The Quakers in Russia* (London: Michael Joseph, 1964), pp. 137–9. See also, [Bellows, Mr. John, and Tolstoy’s Resurrection], *Academy and “Literature”*, 18 January 1902, p. 44.
- ⁶⁰ ‘Russia in Tolstoy’s Latest’, *Anglo-Russian*, June 1900, pp. 377–379 (p. 378).
- ⁶¹ ‘Anton Tchekhoff & His “Mouzhiks”, A Study’, *Anglo-Russian*, January 1904, 785.
- ⁶² Jaakoff Prelooker, ‘Our Seventh Anniversary’, *Anglo-Russian*, June – July 1904, pp. 844–5.
- ⁶³ Arnold, C. Fifield, *The Free Age Press (English Branch), A Brief Statement of its Work*, unpublished manuscript, Leeds Russian Archive, University of Leeds, MS. 1381/1238a, p. 23.
- ⁶⁴ These examples were cited in W.S. Adams, ‘British Reactions to the 1905 Russian Revolution’, *Marxist Quarterly* 2, 3 (July 1955), p. 174.
- ⁶⁵ Prelooker, ‘A Visit to George Meredith’, p. 37.
- ⁶⁶ W. Harrison, ‘The British Press and the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907’, *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, n.s. 7 (1974), p. 86–87.
- ⁶⁷ W. Harrison, ‘Mackenzie Wallace’s View of the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907’, *Oxford Slavonic Papers* n.s. 4 (1971), pp. 73–82 (p. 78); and Harrison, ‘The British Press’, pp. 86–7.
- ⁶⁸ Quoted in Harrison, ‘The British Press’, p. 82.
- ⁶⁹ Quoted in W.S. Adams, ‘British Reactions to 1905’, p. 175.
- ⁷⁰ ‘British Opinion on the Russian Revolt, a Minister’s Good Wishes’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 January 1905, p. 8.